THE BOOK EATING MAGICIAN

BOOK 03

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The Book Eating Magician

(책 먹는 마법사)

by

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Synopsis

['Lightning Magic Primer' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[The 2nd Circle magic 'Lightning Bolt' has been acquired.]

The unprecedented magician who will eat all the magic books of the world has appeared

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Chapter 201 – Sand Dragon Desertio (1)

Unfortunately, that was the only knowledge which could be obtained from the encounter with Paracelsus. Despite Theodore having read the Fairy's Book, Paracelsus didn't recognize Theodore's qualifications. As Paracelsus was a famous alchemist from the Age of Mythology, a 7th Circle magician wasn't even present in his eyes.

However, Theodore ended his conversation with Paracelsus without any fuss. Anyway, his goal was to find out what was happening with Mitra. Knowledge from the Age of Mythology was like a pearl necklace worn around a pig's throat.

There would be another chance to talk to Paracelsus.

'... In the end, night is over. It is already morning.'

Sun was shining through the window, and Theodore flopped onto the bed with a weary expression. His reaction was natural. He had spent quite a lot of time reading the Fairy's Book, and his encounter with Paracelsus had also contributed to his fatigue.

Theodore wanted to fall asleep, but he needed to have breakfast with his party.

"Let's go."

Even if he was tired, Theodore had to move. He left the bed and grabbed the doorknob, and the door opened easily. It was made of an unknown material, just like everything else. As the door opened, Theodore stumbled across William, who was just leaving his room.

"Good morning, William."

"Oh, Captain! Good morning..." William's voice gradually decreased in volume as he looked at Theodore's complexion.

It was due to the dark circles under Theodore's eyes. He hadn't

had that face the previous night. William looked at him with concern. “Excuse me, was your bed okay?”

“It was fine. Why do you ask?”

“Somehow, it seems like you were unable to sleep.”

Theodore laughed bitterly at the words. Hearing such worried words as soon as he encountered someone, his condition seemed to be worse than he thought.

“I had to do something last night. It wasn’t a matter of not sleeping.”

“I see. I won’t say anything…”

The two men talked and arrived at the dining room, where the other party members were already seated. Veronica, who was chewing bread, raised one hand and greeted Theodore, “You woke up, Kid? You look tired. If you are lacking sleep, then you can go rest some more.”

“It’s okay. Besides, I’m very hungry.”

“Well, if you say so.”

The two men sat down and started eating.

「Activated the restaurant. Please mention the name of the dish you want, or select from the catalog.」

It was different from yesterday when they hadn’t been able to understand the words. Paragranum must’ve done something as the voice had switched to the language of the continent. The catalog also had the correct pronunciation kindly written.

Theodore had tried it once yesterday, but it was still strange. The party was surprised as they chose their dishes. There were many unfamiliar dishes, but they were up for the challenge.

“Fried chicken? Ah, this is fried chicken.”

“Curry rice. It is hard to guess what it is from the name, but the

rich flavor is quite good."

"Raw fish and... rice? It is a strange combination, but the taste is okay."

"Ack! Why is this noodle dish so spicy?"

However, some failed the challenge. William had to pour a few cups of water to cool his swollen lips.

Theodore picked a safe choice and ate pork cutlet. The dish of pork covered in breadcrumbs and then fried was something he had eaten during his childhood, but the taste was like the difference between heaven and earth.

'Even the expensive restaurants in the capital will taste bad compared to this. Is there a way to transfer this cooking facility to the magic tower?'

Theodore thought about it. Delicious food would pop out as soon as a person chose. This convenience couldn't be found, even in Meltor which was the center of magical civilization. No, if this cooking facility became popular, then the chefs of Meltor might lose their jobs.

Theodore thought so and cocked his head.

'If I look at it in this way, it might not be good to take it..?'

After all, he wouldn't want to increase the unemployment rate. Theodore smiled slightly as he set down an empty plate. A relic from the Age of Mythology was certainly excellent, but it could cause trouble if civilization wasn't ready for it.

Then at that moment...

Biiiik! Biiiik!

There was a sharp sound, and the lights in the restaurant started flashing. It was a red light which alarmed the people present, signaling that something wasn't good.

Unsurprisingly, the lab's urgent voice sounded in Theodore's

head,「Warning! Confirmed the approach of an existence which can threaten the current laboratory. Transferring the entire group, including the sub-master, to the situation control room. You will be guided from area D-8 to area S-1.」

Simultaneously, the investigation team disappeared from the dining room. They couldn't speculate about the existence that could threaten the lab, which even sword masters couldn't damage.

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As always, the space movement was instant.

"Eh? What, where has all my food gone?" William was hungry after only drinking water for breakfast, but he couldn't return to the dining room in this situation.

They were in the situation control room. This was the first time the six people had stepped foot in this place, so naturally they looked around. However, before they could say anything, Paragranum moved forward.

She shouted in an urgent voice, "「Identification code PRGRN3681214! Open the omnidirectional monitor!」"

Para's order was quick. Then suddenly, lights lit up on the black walls on all sides, and the exterior of the site was revealed. They didn't compare to windows. The view wasn't filtered with opaque glass, but the group couldn't help understanding the situation.

A tremendous sandstorm was swirling in front of them.

"Ack!" William took a few steps back with surprise, but the storm before him didn't scratch at his skin.

Perfect illusion magic was showing off its grandeur. Mujak saw the scale of the sandstorm and murmured with dry lips, "Khamsin...!"

As everyone gazed at him, he explained, "Sometimes in the

desert, a storm with unknown limits is born. Typical storms grow until they disappear after reaching their limit, but Khamsin doesn't have a limit. The nomads of the desert fear Khamshin as the wrath of god, and according to Austen's history, it once destroyed a castle."

"So?" Veronica didn't listen to him and stepped forward to ask Para, "This sandstorm can threaten the facility that even a sword master couldn't damage?"

It didn't make sense. Theodore remembered something Paragranum had said. The outer walls of the ruin wouldn't fall in one or two blows, even if it was hit by a dragon's breath. This was a fortress built by Paracelsus, the peak alchemist from the Age of Mythology.

However, Paragranum raised a finger instead of answering. Then she said, "That isn't a Khamsin. Take a look at beyond it."

The five pairs of eyes followed her index finger. Visibility was poor due to the storm. However, Mujak's eyes were accustomed to it, so he saw it without much difficulty. "... The Andras' excavation team?"

"Yes, watch closely. You will soon find out."

"What are you say-" Mujak suddenly closed his mouth. His remarkable vision had seen the 'phenomenon.' Soon after, the members of the investigation team could see it as well. The barracks left behind by the Andras excavation team were destroyed without a trace. The sight of solid metal scattering like sand obviously wasn't natural.

It was something more transcendent than mere destruction.

"The power of weathering." It was a hard and stiff voice. Paragranum murmured with a rarely serious expression, "Why did Desertio come to the outskirts of the desert? That old man should be staying at the center of the desert..."

“Yellow Tower Kid, don’t be serious alone and explain yourself.”

“Ah, that’s right. You don’t know yet,” Paragranum belatedly replied to Veronica. “The Meuse Desert isn’t a natural desert. It is a terrain made by a sand dragon.”

“Sand dragon?”

“Yes, his name is Desertio. He is a dragon who has lived for many years and whose death is close. Nobody in this age can afford to go against him… Ah, that reminds me.”

Paragranum might not be supposed to know it, but she could give as much information as possible, using her alter ego of the Yellow Tower Master as a shield. The Yellow Tower Master was, after all, the most mysterious person in Meltor.

However, Para added a few words that stirred Mujak up, “The disaster of the Central Continent, the cause of the drought.”

“What?!” Mujak shouted, while his thick mustache shook. “Young girl from Meltor, can you take responsibility for those words? Swear that it is true!”

The overpowering influence of a sword master… Mujak’s overwhelming momentum made the others step back, but Para just nodded calmly.

“Yes, I will swear by my name, as well as my master’s name.”

“… Dammit! For the great sun! The disaster Austen has been struggling with for centuries is due to a dragon lizard!’

Mujak’s anger was natural. The Janissaries valued patriotism and loyalty more than their own lives. How many people had died directly and indirectly from the drought until now? 100,000 people? 1,000,000 people? It had lasted for centuries, so the sum might exceed 10 million. He wouldn’t be angry if it was just the tyranny of Mother Nature, but now he learned it was because of a dragon.

Mujak's eyes filled with fury as he growled, "I swear to the Sultan and the Sun God, I will cut out his heart, even if I have to sacrifice my life!"

He didn't care about any injuries! The sword master's roar burst out with full sincerity. If the sand dragon were in front of him, he would've run forward without any hesitation. However, there was one person who put a stop to his courage. That was Veronica who had once fought a dragon.

"Stop. It will be a useless death," she said.

Unfortunately, the cold advice was counterproductive.

"How can you say that, Veronica?!"

"I am a dragon slayer, desert man. A dragon is a species that grows stronger over time. Not to mention one that is almost a million years old. The dragon might die if all the masters on the continent ally together... if we are lucky."

"T-That..." Mujak could tell that she was serious. They had never fought properly, but it was clear that Veronica was more powerful than other masters. She also had combat experience with a dragon, so there was no logical reason to dispute her words.

Veronica shut Mujak's mouth, then asked Para, "Does this ruin have any defense mechanisms?"

"It does, but it won't last long if the dragon attacks seriously."

"Tch, I thought so. He is an ancient dragon in this day and age. It looks like we are caught in a checkmate, but... what does that lizard want?"

Then at that moment...

[Aren't those some harsh words?] A majestic voice rang out through the ruins.

It was like an echo in a deep valley... Or thunder which burst from the far heavens. The voice caused Theodore's blood to boil.

[Oh, there you are.]

‘Who is he referring to?’ Theodore gulped involuntarily.

The atmosphere sharpened. This was an ancient dragon from the Age of Mythology, the source of the Meuse Desert. Then at the next moment, the sand dragon spoke to Theodore, [Magician with the blood of a sea dragon, I have found you.]

Chapter 202 – Sand Dragon Desertio (2)

Theodore was taken aback by the sand dragon's sudden words. "No way. You came because of me?"

[That's right.] The assertion of the sand dragon, Desertio, was surprising.

However, that was natural. This dragon was from the other side of history, since the beginning of the Age of Mythology. So, what did it want with Theodore? It was different from Aquilo, who had become interested in Theodore due to the circumstances. Living for millennia had created a manner of thinking which mortals couldn't understand.

Theodore's eyes trembled nervously. Maybe it was because of the danger the sand dragon's presence brought to the investigation team. So, Theodore couldn't help feeling guilty.

However, Desertio spoke in a gentle voice, [Don't be too nervous, young magician. I didn't come with the intention of harming you.]

As if to prove his sincerity, Theodore's senses were extremely calm. Regardless of whether Desertio was speaking the truth, Theodore was forced to put hope in that moderate atmosphere. This conversation was the last lifeline before a death penalty was passed on.

"...Can I ask what your business is?"

It was good to know that the conversation could go in both directions. So, Theodore raised his courage and carefully asked why.

[Hmmm, I have to explain it,] Desertio replied calmly. [I will ask you one thing before I explain. Have you heard anything about the reduction of dragons?]

"Reduction?"

[It is what happens when a dragon reaches their end or is near the end.]

Theodore finally realized the intent of Desertio's question. He recalled the conversation he had with Gluttony while crossing the wilderness.

–The sand dragon Desertio, who lives in the center of the Meuse Desert, is at the epicenter of the drought.

–Don't misunderstand. Desertio might not be causing the drought maliciously. The dragon, who has survived for nearly a million years, is already closer to a spirit than a creature. Therefore, he changes the environment around him.

A dragon's instincts were to return to nature. Gluttony asserted that due to this, Dracomachia had started and the dragon's decline had begun. All the strong people of the other species, including the human race, had joined forces to hunt the dragons.

In some ways, the phenomenon called 'Reduction' might be nothing to Desertio, who had suffered through Dracomachia. Theodore thought up to there and carefully replied, "Are you trying to tell me about the drought?"

[Oh, I suppose it isn't hard to guess. It is correct,] Desertio said. Then it added a few more words, [If you are already aware of this, the story will be quicker. The creation of the Meuse Desert and the drought was caused by the aging of this body. It is proof that this body is approaching death. I want to see you help with the post-processing.]

"My help…?"

[Uhh, to be precise, I would like you to deliver my message to the sea dragon that is linked to you.]

Theodore briefly recalled Aquilo's face. He hadn't seen her face for a while, but his impression of her was clear in his mind. Theodore couldn't help remembering her beauty, which was more

striking than many women. His relationship with Aquilo was one of the most powerful trump cards he had, so he would prefer not to use it. Additionally, he had no confidence to deal with her a second time.

'She isn't the type to be dragged around.'

It might be possible if Theodore was much stronger than Aquilo, but that possibility wasn't worth discussing when he was only at the 7th Circle. He couldn't help feeling worried.

As Theodore remained silent, Desertio continued speaking, [This is a request based on the discipline of the dragons. If you listen to my favor, this body will give you something that is equivalent to the favor.]

"Then please explain this to me."

[It is very simple. In the past, a dragon would use 'Reduction' in destroying the territory of other species. This discipline was made by the leaders when looking at the bitter past. It is the Ritual of Reduction.]

The Ritual of Reduction...

It didn't seem to be a secret, so Desertio continued talking in a voice that the others could hear.

It was a type of pledge. The storm of power which burst out when a dragon died couldn't be compared to the output before it. In Desertio's case, it would generate a hot wind which would sweep through the entire Central Continent.

Therefore, the dragon leaders created a reduction ceremony. It was a discipline which allowed a dragon with the opposite property to calm down the aftermath. For a dragon with the power of weathering, the dragon that controlled water was the right choice for the ritual.

[It is a ritual that has become unknown now, but this body wants to maintain the wishes of the leaders. Please let me finish my life

by using your link.]

“Um…”

Then all of a sudden, Mujak interrupted, “Wait! Desert dragon, I have something to say to you!”

[This body has nothing to say to you.]

“Damn, listen to me first!” Mujak called out.

Maybe it was due to Desertio’s modest attitude, or perhaps the anger simmering inside Mujak finally exploded…

However, Mujak forgot who his opponent was as he hollered with a red face, “Take some responsibility for being the cause of the drought! You should apologize to the people of our kingdom rather than ask that young man! Do you know how many people have died because of you?”

The dragons’ ‘Reduction’ was a sacred ceremony for them, but it was a national disaster for others. The fury of the Austen guardians, who had accumulated damage for hundreds of years, was reasonable in many ways.

However, unlike when Desertio conversed with Theodore, it replied in an emotionless voice, [That is human logic.]

Desertio had the gaze of a transcendent being who looked down on all things.

[Do you remember and mourn the number of ants you have stepped on during your life?]

Everyone froze for a moment. The attitude of comparing humans to ants, it clearly showed the gap between a human and dragon. Theodore tensed up again. Desertio wasn’t concerned about humans. He wanted to preserve the leader’s wishes, but he didn’t care about those who had already died.

‘Damn, I’m not in a situation to worry about whether I should accept it!’

Despite Desertio's modest attitude, Theodore had no other option. Realizing this, Theodore hurriedly opened his mouth. He had to finish this before Mujak made things worse.

"Desertio! I will accept that request."

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After that, they made swift progress. The catalysts needed for the summoning magic were stacked in a pile in the laboratory. Additionally, after receiving Satomer's knowledge, Theodore could be called the best summoner in modern times.

With Aquamarine, sapphire, a blue drake's heart, and a magic circle written for elementals, this was literally the best performance. Theodore finished his work and sighed, 'Sigh, I've roughly prepared it.'

A blue magic circle flashed under his feet, and the perfection was at a level which anyone who studied magic would admire. Right now, there were only a few researchers in the field of summoning magic.

"Wow, isn't this magic circle really amazing? It is on a different dimension from the basic principles shown in magic books. How can he do this?"

"Theo is amazing. This is new summoning magic..."

Unlike Sylvia and William, Veronica didn't look very impressed. It wasn't hard to guess why, so Theodore smiled bitterly and walked toward her. "Tower Master."

"I know it can't be helped, but I don't like it," Veronica grumbled angrily.

The red dragon blood flowing through her body refused to meet with a sea dragon. Veronica was irritated despite never meeting Aquilo before. It wouldn't be strange if they fought when meeting face-to-face.

“Well, I’ll look at your face and try to endure it.”

“Thank you.”

“But you should keep one thing in mind.” Veronica pointed an index finger and touched the tip of Theodore’s nose. “I will blow away all enemies in front of me.”

“… Please be lenient.” That was the only thing he could say.

Theodore stood inside the summoning circle again and took in a deep breath. “Then let’s get started.”

It was fairly difficult to summon a dragon, but Theodore didn’t have much trouble. The biggest problem with summoning was compromising with the invited being. However, Aquilo had already agreed to be summoned.

Moreover, she had said she would help him once unconditionally, so she wouldn’t refuse his summons. Theodore rotated his seven circles and recited a spell.

“Inform her.”

A large-scale ritual was normally required, but he just needed to look deeply in his connection with Aquilo.

“Ruler of the ocean, master of the waves. I use your name and blood to be reunited in this place.”

As the spell was chanted, the magic circle scattered a blue light. The blood flowing inside Theodore’s body slowly cooled as resonance.

Then as the blood of the Sea Dragon Aquilo strengthened, Theodore’s body temperature was lowered to a point which couldn’t be human. Theodore’s face was turning white when he finally heard the voice.

「What? You called me after a long time, Boy.」 The drowsy voice mixed with charm was truly strange.

Theodore was glad to hear the voice and replied, ‘Aquilo.’

「You didn’t call me just to speak my name, did you? Huh?」

‘Of course not. It is something more troublesome…’

「There is a lot of time, so explain it to me.」

As Aquilo stated, there was a lot of time. It was usually a significant burden to use summoning magic, but Aquilo and Theodore were able to hold a long conversation because of the connection with each other. After talking for 30 minutes, Aquilo readily accepted his summons.

「Okay, I understand that this is caused by my link with you.」

‘Then you will come when called?’

「No, it is annoying, so I’ll just come now.」

‘What? Wait…!’

Theodore stepped aside hurriedly as the magic circle flashed.

Pahat!

Her sapphire-like blue hair and her two fluorescent eyes which shone with playfulness soon appeared. As always, Aquilo was wearing an outfit which made it hard to look at her. It was a thin piece of cloth covering the important parts, just enough to shake a man’s heart. However, it was strange that it didn’t look crude on her.

“… Why are you always so naked?” Theodore said, turning his eyes away.

Meanwhile, Aquilo fluttered her clothing with a naughty smile. His eyes couldn’t help being drawn to her exposed flesh.

“Boy, aren’t you enjoying it? Men are all the same.”

“C-Cough.”

Aquilo teased Theodore as she stepped out of the magic circle. After looking around, she grumbled, “Ah, I don’t like the desert because the air is too dirty. I never would’ve come if this wasn’t

happening.”

Then she suddenly stopped and stepped toward Veronica. Clearly, it wasn’t a one-sided rivalry. The red dragon and blue dragon… The hostility engraved in their blood was the same. As the red and the blue stared at each other, it was Aquilo who opened her mouth first.

“Who is this, the red clan famous for their brutality?” She said with a bright smile which almost made Theodore misunderstand it as a greeting.

Veronica frowned and countered. Her bright smile was impressive as well. “Aren’t you the one famous for pirating?”

This time, it was Aquilo’s eyebrows which twitched. “You, a quarter dragon… Do you intend to go against a pureblood dragon?”

“I’m sorry, but I’ve already killed one. Aren’t sea dragons more incompetent when out of water?”

“…Ha, haha.”

“Ah, did I hit the bullseye? I’m sorry.”

Veronica made an expression that showed she wasn’t sorry at all, while Aquilo’s lips twitched. Killing intent rose between the two beauties. It was an atmosphere which seemed like a fight would occur at any moment.

The gazes of the group naturally rested on one man, Theodore.

‘Damn.’

Theodore had already thought it would be like this, so he eventually sighed and walked in between them.

Chapter 203 – Sand Dragon Desertio (3)

Fortunately, a bloody battle didn't start between Veronica and Aquilo. It was thanks to Theodore. They didn't stop exchanging barbs through words, but that was enough. Both were transcendent beings capable of destroying an army, so Theodore hoped that the tension between the two would end with just arguing. He couldn't think about laughing at all.

The problem was that he was at the center of the tug of war. In that sense, Aquilo was really cunning. Unlike her attitude, she knew she was at a disadvantage in the desert and had no intention of fighting. After all, she wasn't a beast made of pure violence but an intelligent being.

"By the way, hasn't it been a while? Boy." As such, Aquilo ignored Veronica and grabbed Theodore's right arm out of the blue. Her thin, slender arms wrapped tightly around him. "Even if you couldn't call me properly, couldn't you at least say hello? Isn't that too much?"

"S-Sorry…?"

"You are lacking sincerity. Don't you know it is showing on your face?"

It was as she said. This was the first time he had experienced something like this. Theodore had spent his youth reading books, and his past experience with women could be counted on one hand. He couldn't think logically because of the texture pressing against his right arm. His body and mind were simultaneously confused, so he didn't know how to answer and remained silent.

Aquilo smiled like she knew that. 'Kuk, what a cute response.'

She had experienced it in the cave, but men like Theodore shouldn't be openly seduced. Rather, she had to gradually narrow the distance until his vigilance broke down. Aquilo remembered

the pleasure of putting her teeth into ripe fruit for the first time and couldn't help licking her upper lip.

'It looks like there are a few competitors but...'

One of them was a silver-haired girl staring at her from behind Theodore. For a human, she didn't have a bad appearance. It was the same for the woman mixed with the savage blood of the red clan. There was also the high elf she hadn't met yet.

Aquilo had never failed in her seductions, so it was the first time she had rivals. However, this difficulty was what Aquilo wanted. She would beat all her competitors and completely take away his mind and body—

"...Hah..." A sweet sigh was let out.

Theodore flushed red due to his close proximity to her, but Aquilo was so excited that she didn't even realize it. Like most cool-blooded animals, a flush appeared on her pale face when she became excited.

Then as Theodore was about to lose his breath...

"Hey." Veronica finally reached the limit of her patience and grabbed Aquilo's shoulder. "Fish, don't stick to the kid."

An unpleasant sound was heard from her hand. Veronica's grip was enough to break a large rock. It was at a level that not even Aquilo could resist. Theodore was afraid there would be a fight...

However, Aquilo just dropped his arm coolly and said, "It is truly savage. Do you have the blood of an ogre inside you?"

"What are you saying?!"

"Well, I can feel relieved now. You can never beat me."

Veronica frowned at the unknown meaning of Aquilo's words. She didn't know why, but Aquilo seemed one step ahead in this quarrel. From then on, neither of them spoke. Aquilo gave a strange smirk, and Veronica seemed deeply troubled.

‘… The previous growls were scary, but I don’t like this silence.’ Theodore sighed as he felt the weight of the silence on his shoulders.

One person was a dragon, the strongest species in the material world, and the other was a magician who hunted dragons. This unnatural silence lasted until they met again with Desertio.

*

“It has been a while, Old Man,” Aquilo said after entering the situation control room.

It was a nickname which didn’t suit an ancient dragon like Desertio, who had lived for almost a million years. However, Desertio didn’t become angry as he replied in a rather shaky voice, [This voice, is it Aquilo?]

“Of course, it is. I knew this would happen, but I didn’t expect to be the one in charge.”

[Haha, me as well. I didn’t know that a tomboy would be my end… You didn’t return for more than a thousand years, so I thought you had already forgotten about this old man.]

Then Aquilo replied cheekily, “Who is the one that lives in the desert? Even now, it is hard to breathe in this place. If you weren’t dying, I wouldn’t have come to you.”

[Y-Yes. Thank you…]

Like a grandfather listening to his cute granddaughter, Desertio didn’t refute Aquilo’s ridiculous words. The majesty of the dragon, who treated a sword master as an ant, was indeed a mess.

Was he weak toward Aquilo or was it because they were the same species? The words between the two dragons were no different from the conversation between an ordinary father and daughter.

Then Aquilo asked, “But don’t you still have a few hundred years left? There is still some life force left.”

[Umm, there is perhaps 300 years left. But it is hard to imagine that this opportunity could come again. It will be difficult for you to be present when the time comes.]

“It makes sense, but…”

To humans, death was absolute oblivion and fear. However, it was a natural ending for dragons. Born from nature, they would go back to nature.

Their powerful teeth and claws, solid leather, and scales… All the blessings they received when they were born would be returned to the material world. Sand dragons became grains of sand, sea dragons became water, and fire dragons became lava. They were part of the world and would be reborn in a slightly different form.

The many years that Desertio had experienced were enough for him to understand this. Aquilo was still young, so she didn’t understand it yet.

[Don’t feel too much regret. I am satisfied with my life.]

He had lived for a long time. He had watched, fought, negotiated and killed many humans, elves, dwarves, and dragons. It would be a lie to say he felt no hesitation, but he had decided to end his life. This was the right time to do so while respecting the leader’s wishes.

Aquilo shook her head and muttered in a small voice, “Who feels regret, Old Man.”

[Hehehe, you feel regretful. You can’t put up a false pretense in front of this old man.]

“… Annoying.” The sly mask of a dragon was there, but she seemed more like a girl who wasn’t being honest. Desertio laughed at her and shifted his gaze. He looked at the human who had been chosen by this volatile child, the man who had brought him this joyful relationship today.

[Young magician, you are this body’s benefactor. What is your

name?]

Theodore was surprised by the sudden question, “Theodore Miller.”

[Yes, Theodore Miller. You are the benefactor who will bring a satisfying end to this body. As I said before, I would like to thank you and will give you a corresponding reward,] Desertio said. Then he continued talking, [I don’t have anything other than this body. Since a thousand years ago, my power has been out of control, and all the treasures I had gathered all turned to sand. If you are expecting treasures or gold, I have to apologize for not being able to meet those expectations.]

Theodore had already guessed this much. Treasures from the Age of Mythology had long turned into grains of sand from the power of weathering. In addition to that, Gluttony had said that sand dragons didn’t have much interest in goods. It was the opposite of water dragons who enjoyed stacking up treasures like mountains.

However, a dragon wouldn’t lie about giving a reward due to his high pride. After all, Desertio hadn’t said that he would repay Theodore in gold.

Then Desertio called out to Paragranum, [Ruins manager, are you listening?]

“… Yes, I’m listening.”

[Quickly open the entrance for a moment.]

Paragranum was troubled for a moment. However, the opponent was a dragon who could destroy the outer walls, so she unlocked the entrance. Although it couldn’t be seen from the control room, Desertio had a clear view of the entrance.

Then after a short silence, the sand dragon spoke again, [...Now, it is inside. You can close the door again and take it.]

As everything in the laboratory was under Paragranum’s control, she moved the item to the situation control room without much

difficulty. Then her eyes widened, and she uttered, “T-This…?”

The item resembled a topaz jewel. It had a mysterious golden orange color which was difficult to express. Its size was even more amazing. The gem was larger than the head of an adult male. This caused everyone to be shocked. Even Veronica and Sylvia, who had little interest in jewellery, stared blankly at the fascinating surface.

However, their surprise was enhanced by Paragranum’s words, “… Dragon Heart!”

“What? This?”

“This gem is a dragon’s heart?”

The group cried out in astonishment, while Aquilo nodded with a bitter expression. She had already guessed it would be this, but it was hard for her to describe her feelings at seeing a Dragon Heart this way.

“Yes, that is a heart.”

“B-But…”

Could any creature in the world survive without a heart?

Theodore looked out carefully.

Desertio had expected this reaction and calmly explained, [Don’t worry about it. This body is already closer to a spirit than a creature, so the concept of organs is rare for me. Anyway, I am going to die, so my heart will be taken out eventually.]

It was an unexpected gift. Even a dragon didn’t have an eternal body. Their hard bones and skin would become thinner as they aged. Their thick muscles would shrivel up, and even their claws would lose their sharpness.

The only exception to that was the heart, which overflowed with mana. The strength of a Dragon Heart increased in proportion to age. As Desertio was a dragon who had lived a long time, the inherent power in his heart would be indefinite.

Theodore regained his composure and stretched out his hand.

‘Appraisal.’

Now it was a habit to touch an item with his left hand.

[+?? Desertios’s Heart]

[-The heart of Desertio, a dragon who has lived for almost a million years. The power of weathering is preserved. If sacrificed, it is possible to call a god or demon. It can also function as a permanent increase in strength. If you absorb it, you can obtain the power of weathering. However, the user’s vessel won’t be able to endure it and will break.

* The rating of this heart is ‘Mythology.’

* When consumed, the present user will die.

* When consumed, ‘Power of Weathering’ will be learned. The present user won’t be able to control the power and will self-destruct.

* When consumed, a large amount of magic power will be absorbed. The present user won’t be able to suppress the magic and will self-destruct.

* When consumed, the amount of dragon blood will become thicker. The present user won’t be able to survive the change and will self-destruct.]

Theodore’s face stiffened. This was a mythological item! It was an object which surpassed Laevateinn and the complete Azoth Sword. Additionally, the explanation was even more fearsome. If he consumed it, he would be overwhelmed by the abilities and self-destruct.

Theodore was quite accustomed to the system, so he could determine it.

‘…Based on these comments, I probably won’t be able to absorb it even if I reach the 8th Circle. It is a truly ridiculous thing.’

If he were at the 8th Circle, it was possible to consume ‘Death’s Worship’, which lay forgotten in his inventory. However, this Dragon Heart was at the 9th circle. The heart of a dragon was given to a human…

‘Let’s put it in my inventory.’

–Understood.

Theodore pretended to put the Dragon Heart in his dimensional pocket, but he actually held it in his left hand and Gluttony swallowed Dragon Heart. He had a feeling that he could use it eventually.

It was literally an unexpected windfall. Theodore looked down at his left hand with a stunned face, then Desertio laughed with satisfaction.

[It seems like you like my reward. Yes, my heart is worth it. I hope this heart will be a great help to you, as you have been for me.]

“… I don’t deserve this gift, Desertio.”

[Huhu, don’t say that. Keep this in mind while taking care of Aquilo.]

“Yes?” Theodore was surprised by the words and turned to look at Aquilo.

Aquilo stared at him and said, “Boy, is there something you want to ask of me?”

“Ah, Desertio’s end…”

“No, that is his favor. You haven’t asked me for anything. You just called me.”

“Eh…?”

Her words weren’t wrong. Aquilo had freely agreed after listening to the situation, and Theodore hadn’t requested anything from her. Since she had accepted because of her relationship with

Desertio, this meant Theodore still had the right to ask for something from her. As a blue dragon, Aquilo disliked this type of vague ending.

Theodore was troubled for a moment as he thought about the unintentional bonus.

'What should I ask from Aquilo...?'

He could postpone it until later, but it wasn't common to have a chance to properly prepare summoning magic like today. Theodore had been fortunate that Paracelsus' laboratory was filled with luxurious materials. He couldn't guarantee that there would be another chance to call an adult dragon.

At that moment, someone entered Theodore's field of view.

"Ah." The twisted puzzle in his head was now completed. Theodore's eyes shone brightly, then he turned toward Aquilo.

Theodore arranged his mind and opened his mouth, "My request..."

Chapter 204 – Together with a Dragon (1)

The Magic Contest, which was Meltor's annual event, reached its end after being three times more prosperous than before.

It didn't mean that the magicians participating in the contest were more superior than usual. This was the same event, but it was three times more prosperous because more people had visited Meltor.

It was due to the symbol of Elvenheim, High Elf Ellenoa.

Since the founding of Elvenheim and the abolition of slavery, it had become difficult to see the elves, making some people even doubt their existence.

The unrealistic beauty and presence of the high elf, who had appeared at the opening ceremony, were enough to convince them of the truth. Major figures from all over the continent had come to Meltor without much meaning, but they were forced to sound the bugle call this time.

-A high elf from Elvenheim has come to Mana-vil!

–Buds sprout wherever she walks!

–It is a sign that the balance between the Northern powers will collapse!

–She has a deep relationship with Meltor's young hero!

Rumours spread, and ships and carriages in the Central Continent headed to Meltor in droves. If even one of the rumors was true, then this was a great event which could be called the turning point in history. They might not have any influence on it, but they couldn't just sit still.

Someone came with the purpose of trying to trade with Elvenheim…

While someone else steered their ship with the intention of

making a mark on Meltor.

There was also someone who took a carriage just to see the high elf's beauty...

And another who crossed the border to explore the situation of the North.

As the major powers moved for various reasons, the procession following them increased in number. One person grew to 10, 10 people to 100, and then to the thousands. Due to this, the guards at Meltor's checkpoints were busier than ever, and a lot of gold poured into the treasury.

The Magic Contest lasted for a fortnight, and various groups tangled together until the morning of the last day of the contest finally came.

However, the atmosphere of the palace was heavy.

"... Treasurer, please report the result of this Magic Contest."

"Yes, Your Majesty," the treasurer answered and walked forward after being called by Kurt. Then the Treasurer reported, "The number of visitors at this year's Magic Contest has tripled compared to last year, so the logistics have increased nearly fivefold. Even if we use only half of the budget, we will be able to complete most of our current national plans."

"What about the trade inquiries from other countries?"

"Three from Austen, two from Soldun, eight from Kargas. There are also four from the Lairon Religious Kingdom..."

Kurt's eyebrows twitched, and he shook his head when he heard the name 'Lairon.' Magicians and religious figures weren't a good match. The Lairon Kingdom would make the magicians try to worship their god, and diplomatic relations might worsen.

"Dismiss all requests from Lairon."

"I will follow Your Majesty's words."

The treasurer moved back after replying, and Kurt turned to the chairman of the Magic Society next.

The chairman of the Magic Society recognized the meaning of Kurt's gaze and quickly opened his mouth to speak. "The recruitment of magicians has gone smoothly. There are a total of 214 magicians who put their names on the conference list, and 117 magicians have been chosen to be naturalized. Among them, there are 45 people who have achieved higher than the 4th Circle. This is a little over twice that of last year."

"Not bad. What is the distribution to each magic tower?"

"It hasn't been decided yet. I don't think it can be determined until after the Red Tower Master has returned."

Of course, it was a natural report. After all, it was the privilege of a tower master to endorse the membership of a magician. Even if the elders dealt with a tower master's duties in the tower master's absence, they couldn't make a decision about personnel.

However, Kurt III couldn't help frowning at the report. "Yes, we don't have the Red Tower Master."

At this point, the people present understood Kurt's mind and acted carefully. This was because the investigation team had gone to claim the ruins and had yet to return.

Kurt had thought nothing would go wrong because Veronica was present, but he couldn't help being worried because the time they were taking was too long. He wasn't worried about Veronica. After all, since they were both pillars of the kingdom, he was one of the people who knew her best. There were few things which could threaten Red Tower Master Veronica.

If she were buried by an earthquake, she would break the ground and pop out. If she were swept away by a tsunami, she would evaporate the water. In the hearts of everyone present, the people from Andras had long since died.

The problem was with the four magicians, Quattro. If any of the prospects who were marked as successors to the tower masters died, Meltor couldn't avoid being damaged. Additionally, there was the hero, Theodore Miller!

"White Tower Master."

Kurt's voice subsided, and Orta replied, "Please say it, Your Majesty."

With a white robe and white mask... As always, the man who concealed his appearance revealed himself near the throne. Had he just entered? Or maybe he had been present in the first place.

The scary thing about the White Tower Master was that they couldn't know for sure. He had fierce mobility and had managed to defeat one of the Seven Swords. Orta was the key character behind a massive purge which had occurred when Kurt had just been crowned. Even now, Orta was still called a grim reaper by the nobles.

"Did you do what I instructed?"

"Of course," Orta replied in a cold voice and gave details of his actions, "I have completed the elimination of 20 shadows at the border of the Meuse Desert, as well as 76 operatives. I stayed around and watched the situation, but no more people showed up."

He was emotionless despite talking about killing almost 100 people. Even if the people had been experts of Andras, they hadn't even gotten a chance to use their Aura Ability. The results of Orta's guerrilla tactics were truly miserable.

According to the king's orders, Orta had cleared up the outskirts of the Meuse Desert. Kurt had been worried those on the outskirts would disrupt the return of the investigation team.

"... But why is there no news yet?" In the end, Kurt couldn't help expressing his impatience.

The king had made the selection. He had been the one who dispatched Veronica and Quattro. Kurt had the qualities of a king, and his choices were never bad. When the results weren't particularly good, they weren't terrible either. Meanwhile, the rest were good.

He hoped that his choice wasn't wrong this time.

"Your Majesty!" At that moment, the door opened, and Blundell hesitated to continue speaking.

"Blundell, what is going on? It isn't like you to hesitate."

It was as Kurt said. Blundell's white beard and hair were soaked with sweat, while his always relaxed face was filled with confusion. Kurt had asked that after seeing Blundell's expression, but Blundell then shouted in reply, "Your Majesty should come out and see it personally!"

Everyone in the room turned toward each other with confusion, while Kurt stared down at Blundell with a blank expression. He raised his body from the throne with a questioning appearance.

"-Guide me."

*

As a dragon flew in the sky above Mana-vil, blue scales shone among the white clouds.

It was a soldier at the watchtower who had seen the spectacular sight first. He couldn't believe what he had seen and pointed toward the sky. The guard, who was seeing a dragon for the first time in his life, didn't know what to do. He belatedly reported to the guard captain, who contacted the royal palace and the Magic Society.

However, Blundell moved faster than anyone else. 'To think that a dragon has appeared at this time! What the hell is this?'

Veronica's absence was truly great. Blundell touched his white

beard desperately, but an answer didn't come out. When one read Meltor's history from the beginning, they would find there were no recorded incidents wherein Meltor had angered a dragon.

'No, isn't there one...?'

Theodore had fought with a sea dragon in the Pirate Archipelago, so he might've made an enemy of the blue clan.

However, Aquilo's case was different. The blue dragons were a thoroughly individual clan. Moreover, even if they had a relationship with someone, they only communicated with that person and didn't show much interest in anyone else.

So, why had a dragon come to Mana-vil?

"... I still don't understand," Blundell muttered. Meanwhile, the king and other nobles were dismayed by the sight.

With sunlight reflecting off its blue scales and the flexible bends of its body, the dragon swimming in the sky was beautiful enough to make anyone lose their minds. It might be strange to fly with a wingless body, but flying itself wasn't impossible for a sea dragon.

In order for wings to carry a dragon body in the first place, the surface area of the dragon should be six times its current size while its weight should be reduced to one third. Fundamentally, a dragon's ability to fly was due to its own power.

Red dragons emitted hot air to fly at high speeds, whereas blue dragons controlled atmospheric measure to steer in the air. Although a blue dragon couldn't match a red dragon's flight speed, it was more beautiful while flying.

... Of course, there were people who didn't agree with this idea.

"It feels like an earthworm wriggling! Don't wriggle around and speed up more!"

Upon hearing Veronica's rant, Aquilo's tail twitched, and she countered, 「This is my fastest speed! Do you think that a sea

dragon can fly at high speeds?」

“Aren’t you a pureblood dragon? I can fly faster than you!”

「Then get off! If it wasn’t for the boy, I wouldn’t even let you ride!」

“If so, I will get off!”

Simultaneously, Veronica jumped down from Aquilo’s back without any fear.

They were hundreds of meters above sea level. It was a good height to turn humans into chunks of meat, but her robustness was greater than that of a human. Veronica didn’t even use any magic as she fell down.

Kwaang!

The marble was destroyed by the impact of falling, while the flying debris made people scramble around.

“Uwaaaaack!”

“It is the dragon’s preemptive strike!”

“W-What is it?”

“Blue Tower Master, what should we do?”

As she looked at them, Veronica sighed, “Phew, they are going nuts.”

So, she waited for the competent people to calm down. After hearing her voice, they belatedly realized the situation and calmed down.

“C-Cough! The Red Tower Master has returned!”

“You went through a lot of trouble. Did it go well?”

“I have no time to talk to you guys. Where are His Majesty and the tower masters?”

Veronica ignored the excited faces and found the nearby Kurt and

magic tower masters. Unlike their usual selves, the three people seemed stunned. After all, Veronica had just fallen from a dragon in the sky. It was understandable that they would ask for an explanation from her.

However, Veronica interrupted them, “Just a moment, Your Majesty. Everyone else is on the wriggling worm, so let’s wait until they are present to talk about it.”

“W-Wriggling…?” Kurt looked up at the sky with a strange expression after hearing the world’s strongest species being called a wriggling worm.

The dragon in the distant sky was getting closer.

Huuk!

Soon, the tail, which was shining with blue scales, landed before the party. Robes of four different colors flapped in the wind, and Quattro landed on the ground.

Then with perfect timing, Veronica and all of Quattro bent down on one knee before the king. The appearance of the blue dragon behind them was really spectacular. Five voices overlapped as they spoke simultaneously:

““We, Red Tower Master Veronica and the four members of Quattro, have fulfilled capturing the ruins in Your Majesty’s name and have now returned.””

Chapter 205 – Together with a Dragon (2)

Kurt couldn't properly grasp the situation, but his reaction was quick. He naturally accepted the greeting of the five people and soon noticed there was a person missing.

It was Austen's guardian, Mujak. The man, who had been arrested for authorized entry and kidnapping, was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Mujak?"

Theodore responded to Kurt's question, "Is it okay to explain that with the report?"

"Hmm, okay. Rather..." Kurt glanced toward Aquilo behind Theodore. Instead of Mujak, Kurt was much more worried about the dragon who had suddenly appeared. As though she felt his glance, there was a slight flash of light from where the dragon's body had been floating behind the party. It was enough to make people blink a few times.

"...Uh!"

People reflexively closed their eyes and opened them again. In the spot where the dragon had been, there was now an impressive-looking woman with sea-colored hair. Horns rose from her head, and her fluorescent eyes showed that she was different from humans. Despite her bewitching appearance, she gave off a feeling of oppression.

In this silence, Aquilo slightly bent her knees. "It is nice to meet you, king of Meltor. I am Aquilo of the blue clan, daughter of Surmidon and Asophos."

This was the moment when the historical tyrant, the sea dragon, met the ruler of the Meltor Kingdom. The people present realized the seriousness of this meeting and gulped while the air filled with tension. How would the king of Meltor respond to this greeting?

Unlike their expectations, Kurt's answer was quite ordinary. "The current king, Kurt Turai von Meltor, welcomes your visit. I heard a lot about you from Lord Theodore."

Aquilo gave a bewitching smile at his words. "Hrmm, is that so? Boy, you talked about me?"

"Yes, I was able to pass the crisis thanks to you."

"That is a common thing."

Theodore's answer seemed the right thing to say as the atmosphere loosened up. Then Kurt encouraged them to move into the palace, "Let's talk about the remaining story inside. It seems that there are many things to talk about."

"Then... I will follow Your Majesty's will."

Aquilo nodded, and Kurt led everyone into the royal palace. Their new location wasn't the meeting hall but the reception room used for occasional guests.

Kurt III sat down, while Blundell and Orta stood on both sides of his chair. Even if there was no chance of winning, their role as escort was to block the slightest possibility of Aquilo attacking Kurt.

Once both Aquilo and Veronica were seated, Kurt naturally turned toward Theodore. Veronica was the one in charge of the mission, but she was preoccupied having a staring war with Aquilo.

"Quattro's Captain, please report."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Theodore responded to the call.

'Where should I start?'

The memories of a few days ago were engraved in Theodore's head. Defeating Mercurius and entering the laboratory, receiving compensation from Paragranum...

Yes, he would start exactly from here.

*

–Before I ask my favor, I have to check something first.

–To check something?

–Yes, I have to check whether something is possible for you. I'm not trying to insult you, I'm just really curious.

Aquilo made a questioning expression upon hearing Theodore's words. He should know better than anyone else. After all, they had fought at each other's backs. So, Theodore's brilliant brain would've already understood her abilities.

If she wanted to, she could break down a city or two, or even cause floods and tsunamis. Yet there was something he wasn't certain whether Aquilo could do?

She cocked her head as Theodore spoke in a low voice, –Is it possible to revive a river on a national scale?

The blue dragon was famous for being cunning. Aquilo raised her eyebrows as she guessed his intentions.

-...Boy, are you trying to use me as a negotiation material?

It was as she said. Theodore shrugged and nodded without retreating. Desertio's death meant the desertification phenomenon would disappear, but it was another story to restore the water which had dried up over centuries.

The drought wouldn't happen anymore, but there was no future for a land which had been completely exhausted. Austen wouldn't have an opportunity to recover, and they would perish. However, what if Aquilo's power assisted in the recovery?

A high elf couldn't surpass a dragon when it came to their attributes. When it came to the supply of water, Aquilo was more effective than a high elf.

Aquilo thought about Theodore's question for a while before answering, –It is possible. Are you talking about the Pilar River? I

won’t be able to restore it to its original state, but I can turn it back around 10 years.

–T-That means…!

Mujak trembled as he listened to the conversation. It was natural. A miracle he had never expected was being considered right before him. They were discussing the restoration of the Pilar River, Austen’s lifeblood! Now that the drought was gone, there would be no further problems if the river was restored. Maybe this would become Austen’s golden age.

Mujak was thrilled, falling to both knees and bowing his head. -Sir Theodore! How should I repay this favor?! The Sultan will greatly repay you for your help!

–Thank you, but it isn’t certain yet.

–What…?

–Aquilo has to agree to this favor.

Mujak turned to Aquilo with a desperate expression. If the dragon refused to do Theodore’s favor, this golden opportunity in front of him would disappear without a trace.

However, Aquilo just laughed at Theodore’s uncertainty. –Well, I don’t care. I am in need of a new lair because of you. It is the middle of the desert, but it should be okay if it is the Pilar River.

–T-That means you agree? Mujak asked.

–Instead, I have several conditions. Aquilo smiled at the anxious Mujak and raised her fingers one by one. –First, a residence to my satisfaction must be built. Secondly, what happens after the recovery is irrelevant to me. Thirdly, publicize my name through the country and make me the guardian dragon.

–Cough! Well, if it is that much…

–There is one last thing.

The third condition for the Sultan fanatics of Austen was a little

annoying, but there was nothing wrong with treating her as a divine being. Mujak was prepared to nod, but Aquilo added a fourth condition.

–Apart from the boy's favor, I will charge a price every time you borrow my power. If the payment is ever overdue, I will cancel the agreement and leave.

–No, that is a little too much!

–If you think so, then don't pay. In my view, the desert isn't a very attractive place.

It was literally an unfair contract. Mujak protested, but Aquilo didn't budge. Generally speaking, this request was a favor to Theodore, and anything else was a bonus. It meant they needed to pay separately for anything else. Austen might owe Meltor, but they needed to make a separate deal with Aquilo.

After all, Austen was the only one with something to lose, not the dragon. In the end, Mujak had to grudgingly agree to deliver the proposal to the Sultan.

*

"Kuk." Kurt let out a small sound of laughter that he couldn't repress.

Mujak, the old fox of the desert, had suffered such a humiliation. The Sultan fanatics would face difficult circumstances in the future. The Janissaries never had any experience of Austen itself being held hostage.

Kurt tacitly acknowledged their plight and then praised the person in front of him, "As always, your achievements are beyond my expectations. Now, Meltor has completely taken the lead in an alliance with Austen..."

Austen wouldn't reject the offer. Kurt didn't know if the Sultan was foolish or naive, but he had heard that the Sultan of this era was quite smart. It was hard to imagine anything more significant

than the restoration of Pilar River.

'With this, we have taken one step ahead.'

The Austen Kingdom had long been a country which intersected with the Northern powers and was located a little bit south of the border. It was only after passing through the Sipoto wilderness that one would enter Austen territory. As such, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that it was a territory which could be taken if Andras or Meltor reached out.

However, for centuries, none of the Northern powers had invaded Austen. It wasn't because Austen was too strong or because the Northern powers couldn't afford it.

The drought, which had plagued Austen for centuries, was the enemy which had fended off the Northern powers. It wasn't easy to grow crops in Austen, and there were no roads or ports which could be used as trade routes. There was no profit in capturing such a territory.

The culture of worshipping the Sultan also played a part in fending off the Northern powers. A country which couldn't be colonized was impossible to manage and was on the verge of destruction. That was Austen.

'...But from now on, that will change.'

Andras didn't know about the removal of the drought, and the value of Austen had surged.

After restoring the river and removing the threat of desertification, Austen was no longer a helpless spectator. If a little time and support were added, Austen was a variable which could become a strong ally. Unlike the borders in the North which were all guarded, a strategic advantage could be obtained if Meltor marched through Austen.

All of this was due to one man, Theodore Miller. If it hadn't been for the sea dragon, Aquilo, it wouldn't have been possible to gain

leverage over Austen or end the drought.

Kurt scanned Theodore up and down with gratified eyes and called out, “Quattro’s Captain.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“If you wish for something, then tell me. You can even ask for a national treasure.”

Simultaneously, the eyes of the other people present widened.

The number of people who had been awarded a national treasure since Meltor’s founding barely reached the double digits. Additionally, the people who had received two or more were just two or three legends. Now, Theodore was being treated like those legends? It was unexpected, even for Kurt who always awarded achievements fairly.

However, Theodore’s answer was even more surprising. “Your Majesty is very generous, but can I save that wish for later?”

“Why? I am feeling very good today. Maybe I will change my mind, and you will miss your chance.”

It felt like a test, but Theodore just smiled. “Right now, I want to concentrate on myself. I was taught Sorcery by the Red Tower Master, and I feel like I got a clue on this journey.”

“I see.” A satisfied smile appeared on Kurt’s face. “I like your attitude. I will take care of the procedures so that your training isn’t hindered. Don’t hesitate to ask for anything you need.”

“Thank you for your consideration, Your Majesty.”

That wasn’t a lie. Theodore looked at his left hand as he bowed. It was true that he had received enlightenment from Veronica’s teachings and that he wanted to focus on something before receiving a national treasure.

Alchemist Paracelsus’s original book, the Fairy’s Book…

Eating it had finally unlocked Gluttony’s fifth seal. At stage 5,

Superbia had been able to overpower an adult dragon. It was inevitable that Theodore was looking forward to the result. In his mind, Gluttony's information window was counting the seconds down one by one.

[Unsealing of stage 5... (3 hours 35 minutes and 12 seconds remaining)]

Chapter 206 – Together with a Dragon (3)

A week had already passed by, and the 5th seal still had yet to be released. The feature must be great, or perhaps more time was needed to unseal the 5th seal. However, Theodore waited without feeling impatient. So far, Gluttony had never betrayed his expectations.

It wouldn't be in vain for him to wait for Kurt's reward.

'Anyway, I will know after three or four hours.'

Theodore was thinking about this when the door of the reception room suddenly opened.

"Theodore!"

It was a high elf whose green hair shone brightly without any illumination, while an energy of vitality emitted from her.

Ellenoa smiled brightly as she looked at Theodore first, then she belatedly realized that the people around him were looking at her. She had come after hearing that Theodore had returned, but she hadn't known he was with other people. Additionally, no one had restrained her because she was an unprecedented VIP guest.

When Ellenoa realized her position, she immediately flushed red. "I-I'm really sorry. I didn't know the situation…"

Even if she wasn't familiar with royal courtesies, she could tell that this wasn't proper procedure. It was the sight of the king sitting in a chair with a tower master on both sides, which gave it away. This wasn't a place for a foreigner to enter, even if she was a national guest.

However, the surprising thing was Kurt's reaction. He unexpectedly shook his head and forgave the intrusion. "No, it's okay. The talk was over anyway."

"Thank you for saying that."

“I guess you have a lot to say to Theodore. But first, Lady Ellenoa, I would like to introduce you to a new guest.”

Kurt gestured toward a direction, and Ellenoa’s gaze followed his hand. Then the high elf’s and the dragon’s eyes met for the first time. Bright jade and an intense fluorescent color…

The moment these similar yet different eyes met, the air in the reception room sunk. Ellenoa’s expression stiffened, and her sweet lips parted, “… Conductor of the waves, tyrant of the sea. The evil who controls the eastern waters to the north.”

There were hostile feelings coming from her which didn’t match her usual gentleness.

When Theo thought about it, he realized it was natural. Elves were basically a species with a good character, and they abhorred the act of oppressing or taking the possessions of others. By default, Aquilo was someone who treated everyone as below her. As such, Ellenoa wouldn’t like Aquilo, who protected pirates just so she could take their loot.

On the other hand, Aquilo replied with an effortless smile, “It is natural that you don’t like me, but don’t you think that your attitude is tougher than usual today?”

“It is your imagination.”

“Look at that cold attitude. Well, I can see one thing.”

Ellenoa made a questioning expression. Then Aquilo said with a laugh, “Woman who doesn’t know the world, there is a man in your eyes, right?”

“… No way, you!”

Ellenoa had recently come to Meltor from the Great Forest, so she didn’t know what type of relationship there was between Aquilo and Theodore. Therefore, she couldn’t stay calm at the taunt which aimed accurately at that blind spot.

The sea dragons were well-known as a clan that coveted the possessions of others. Moreover, Ellenoa was a high elf who could only pick her gender once in her life. So, to a high elf, a refusal was like a half-death. Ellenoa couldn't help reacting to that, even if the words were a bluff.

The high elf and the dragon...

The women of two species suddenly confronted each other, making it difficult for the people of Meltor who were stuck between them. An intervention was needed. At that moment, Veronica got out of her seat and moved between the two of them. "It is up to here. Both of you."

Ellenoa managed to collect herself, while Aquilo's lips curved into an innocent smile. Veronica stopped the quarrel between the two of them and looked directly at Kurt. "Your Majesty, please leave these two to me."

"Hoh, you are going to act?"

Veronica shrugged and nodded. "Well, something like that. I should rescue him. I don't like the worm, but it can't be helped."

"Wait, did you call me a worm just now?"

"Don't wriggle, and come here. Let the kid rest."

"Hey! Let me go! Hey! Why is a quarter hybrid so strong?"

Veronica dragged Aquilo away, while Ellenoa bowed and followed after them. It was a truly stormy exit.

Kurt laughed and said to the rest of the people in the room, "You should go back and rest. Veronica has already volunteered to take care of them."

"Yes, I will follow Your Majesty's will." Theodore was at a loss, but he retired from the reception room without delay according to Kurt's orders.

After that, they split up.

Paragranum had acquired good materials after a long time, so she returned to her tower happily. Meanwhile, William returned to his tower, stating that he needed to write a report for the White Tower Master. Then after sending Sylvia in the opposite direction, Theodore moved toward the red tower.

The steeple made of red bricks was always surrounded by a lukewarm heat.

'Master… He is researching. I shouldn't interrupt him.'

Theodore first checked Vince's current situation and decided not to interrupt his research. Vince would stop his research if he knew that Theodore had returned, but Theo didn't want to interrupt Vince's concentration.

Creak.

Instead, he returned to his room, which wasn't much different from when he left.

"Mitra."

A girl suddenly sprang up from a flowerpot on the windowsill at his words.

[Hoing!]

It was a relaxing voice that he hadn't heard lately. The cheerful and lively girl had a bud similar to a rosebud on her head. Was it due to eating the Fairy's Book, or had it taken a certain period of time for the flower to bloom? It wasn't a surprise that Mitra had become more formidable.

'This scent is quite similar to Ellenoa.'

It was a fragrance which boosted a person's vitality, making his body feel lighter. If he were attacked by Aquilo like in the past, he wouldn't be affected by her poison at all. Theodore touched the flower on Mitra's head.

[Hihihit, hohihihi…] Mitra laughed like a child being tickled. It

was as if the flower was connected to her senses. The flower was pretty, but it didn't seem possible to peel off a petal. The flower was fully assimilated with Mitra's body, so the pain of separation would be more than he imagined.

Moreover, for plants, flowers had another meaning. Roots took place first, then leaves, flowers, and fruits bloomed. Yes, fruit. It was unknown how much power remained in the sprout which had grown from eating the world tree's seed, but a fruit would grow from the flower.

"…Wait."

He felt something. Theodore felt an unknown sense of incongruity. It was very fleeting, but it left a clear trail. The Ring of Muspelheim, a sea dragon's blood, an ancient earth elemental… He was only lacking—

Then at that moment…

[Completing the unlocking process of the 5th seal… Accepted. This is a legitimate request. Gluttony's 5th seal has been released.]

[Gluttony's function has been opened normally. The user should check the information window of the corresponding function immediately.]

[Grimoire "Gluttony" / B Rank]

[Gluttony's 5th seal has been released through a normal path. From now on, the user will be able to access the wisdom that Gluttony accumulated from a long time ago. You can immediately learn the magic by paying a corresponding price. Previous owners have called the feature 'Library,' and you can change the name if you want.

* The ego, Gluttony, will explain how to use Library.]

Once the 5th seal was released, the information about its function appeared before Theodore. It was a sudden situation, but he had become familiar with this since a long time ago. He pushed down

his sudden inspiration and read the explanation.

No, to be precise, he tried to read it. However, his consciousness blurred. Then his body fell down on the bed.

[Deo? Deoo!]

Mitra noticed his condition was strange and hit his forehead, but his consciousness didn't return. Theodore tried to reach out to calm her down, but his body didn't move. It was as though it was crushed by heavy lead. He felt like he was sucked into an ocean.

The sudden fall of his consciousness sharpened his nerves.

'-Ah.'

Theodore fell unconscious shortly after that.

*

"Urghh!"

'My head hurts,' Theodore thought as soon as he woke up. He must've collapsed on the bed. However, he was soon forced to forget all his pain. As Theodore's blurred vision cleared up, an incredible landscape appeared before his eyes.

"Wow...!"

This was Gluttony's Library, a space too dazzling to be called a library. There were endless shelves densely filled with books, and the height of the bookshelves rose higher than that of the magic towers. The library of the Magic Society, the greatest on the continent, was nothing compared to this.

'There must be hundreds of thousands of books. Perhaps even millions...?'

It was impossible to estimate. Theodore recognized this fact after looking around a few times. There were mountains of books everywhere. This was a sea of books. Even if he read one book in one minute, Theodore was convinced that he wouldn't be able to get out of here until he was old and dying.

–You must like it. Theodore suddenly heard someone's voice from behind him.

Theodore responded without being alarmed by the call, "Gluttony."

–Hoh, you're not surprised.

"I was expecting it. It said you would explain how to use the Library... Heok!"

However, Theodore was astonished when he looked behind him. His reaction was natural.

"You... Why do you have the same appearance as me?"

It was because there was a person with the same appearance as him.

Gluttony looked exactly like Theodore, except that his eyes were black. They were like a bottomless swamp which would suck Theodore in if he looked. Gluttony's eyes were completely black with no whites, making them look horrifying.

Gluttony responded to the question, –It can't be helped. Since I don't have a separate appearance, I need to copy User's appearance. Otherwise, I will guide you with my voice like before.

"...No, it is okay. It isn't that offensive."

Superbia's chimera appearance was far more unpleasant. Right now, it was just like looking at a mirror.

"Then tell me about this Library."

–Okay, Gluttony said, nodding like he had been waiting. Then he explained, –To put it briefly, this place is my stomach. Since the distant past, I have devoured all types of magic stretching back to the Age of Mythology. Starting with the 5th stage, User has the right to look into the realm of the gods.

Chapter 207 – Library (1)

Compared to his calm expression, Gluttony's words were bold. However, Theodore agreed with him. It wouldn't be an exaggeration at all if this was the stomach of Gluttony, who had collected all types of mysterious since the Age of Mythology.

This wasn't just the 8th Circle but the realm of the 9th Circle. It was different from the days when more than 100 great magicians had wandered around and dragons often appeared.

The Dark Ages had come after the Age of Mythology.

After the gods disappeared, the demons lost their positions. The war between various species and dragons had then destroyed the material world. Historians estimated that over 5,600 years of history had been buried after the Age of Mythology.

'But not in this library...!'

Theodore could read the history which hadn't been recorded anywhere else. Not just that, it was possible for him to inherit the legacies left behind by magicians of the Age of Mythology. In that sense, it was literally the 'domain of the gods.'

Still, Theodore wasn't completely happy.

"Gluttony."

–What is it?

"I understand that I can learn magic from the Library. But what is the equivalent price I have to pay?"

–Hrmm, I was about to tell you.

Except for his black eyes, Gluttony looked exactly the same as Theodore while he touched his jaw.

–I will first explain the restrictions of the Library. It is impossible to learn from a book that is beyond User's level, just like the usual predation. It means there is no difference in the learning

conditions here or outside.

“I expected as much. And…?”

–As User mentioned, the knowledge in the Library isn’t free. It is bound by the law of equivalent exchange in order to maintain causality. So, my system has established the concept of ‘achievement points’ to circumvent causality.

‘Achievement points?’

However, before Theodore could ask the meaning of that, Gluttony continued speaking.

–To summarize briefly, it is a value based on everything User has provided me. Then you can acquire the knowledge in this library by consuming the achievement points.

“…Are you talking about all the books and artifacts I fed you?”

-That’s right.

The law of equivalent exchange… This was a system which matched that law. Theodore closed his eyes for a moment and recalled all the books and artifacts he had collected so far.

Perhaps common magic books were worthless, while the rare-rated ones were the real thing. Still, if he counted from Ballistics Magic, there were quite a number of them. However, he didn’t know what Gluttony’s standards were.

Then Theodore opened his eyes again.

“What are the standards for achievement points conversion? Also, tell me how many achievement points I currently have. It started from stage zero, not stage five, right?

–Of course. I will answer in the order that you asked.

Fortunately, Gluttony was pleased to receive the request.

–Basically, the achievement points depend on the rating. Normal rating is worth one digit of points, Rare rating is worth two digits

of points up to 100 points, Precious rating is worth three digits of points up to 1,000 points, and Treasure rating is worth four digits points up to 10,000 points. In the case of artifacts, it is half that.

“Huh? Then what about Legend or Myth ratings?”

Theodore noticed that these two ratings were missing, and Gluttony responded like he had been waiting for that.

-From legendary rating onward, there are no standards. For example, Laevateinn gained you 67,380 points.

“…What is the sum of my achievement points?”

-78,213 points.

In the end, close to 90% of Theodore’s achievement points were from Laevateinn. Wasn’t this distribution too biased, even if it was a Legend-rated grimoire? However, Theodore didn’t object to the calculation.

He didn’t dare go against Gluttony’s eyes. After all, there was no one better in assessing the value of a book.

‘Ah, that reminds me…’

Theodore belatedly recalled something that was in his inventory. If this artifact was converted to achievement points, how much would it be worth? Theodore was filled with anticipation as ‘it’ appeared in his hand.

It was a topaz bigger than an adult male’s head. At first glance, it looked like a large jewel, but it was actually the heart of the sand dragon, Desertio. The ancient dragon’s heart…

It was an inexhaustible source of power which could fuel a magic circle for thousands of years.

“What is the value of this dragon heart?”

However, Gluttony’s answer was unexpected.

–Zero points.

“…What?”

–I’m sorry, but duplicates aren’t allowed. I collected the heart of a sand dragon a long time ago.

“Wow,” a bewildered utter emerged from Theodore’s mouth.

The heart of an ancient dragon was a duplicate?

It was unlikely that someone would’ve obtained it in the same manner as Theodore, so it meant the person must’ve forcefully pulled out the heart of the dragon. Even a 9th Circle magician would find it hard to win against a dragon.

Theodore put the dragon heart away in confusion. He hadn’t been planning to change the dragon heart to achievement points, but he hadn’t expected this answer.

In any case, the depths of the book eating grimoire Gluttony were really unknown.

–Then I will explain. Do you have any more questions?

“No…”

–Let’s go to the search function.

As Gluttony spoke, he pointed to the overflowing books in the Library. The ocean of books might exceed 10 million books if he included the non-visible angles. Selecting a book was like picking a single grain of sand from a beach.

-The Library’s search can be divided into two categories. The magic you want and the ability you want.

“Ability?”

–Just like what User experienced with Introduction to Elemental Magic, sometimes the contents have an additional ability. An artifact’s skills also falls into that category.

“Ability, abilities…”

Put into context, it was like Theodore consuming Laevateinn and

obtaining the Ring of Muspelheim.

Theodore thought about it carefully.

There was an old saying about not jumping into the fire. It was only recently that he had overcome the time limit of his vessel being destroyed. He already had three types of power in him, so adding another force would break the balance.

At that moment, Theodore felt a strange discomfort again.

'What? I feel like I'm missing something…'

No matter how he looked back, he didn't forget anything. However, the feeling that one piece was missing from the puzzle didn't disappear. He'd gotten that feeling just before entering the Library, like he needed just one more piece to complete the puzzle.

As Theodore was thinking about this, Gluttony suddenly spoke, –User, if you don't mind, there is something I want to recommend.

"Eh? You?"

–From stage 5 onward, it is possible for me to directly advise User's choice. Until now, there were many things that I couldn't say. But it will be different from now onward.

"Then please talk."

The relationship between Theodore and Gluttony was that of adviser and student. At the very least, Gluttony couldn't force Theodore to make a choice. Gluttony received permission and opened his mouth, -Come out, Aiolos Pouch.

As Gluttony's gentle voice rang out, a strange leather pouch appeared on Gluttony's palm. The surface of the pouch didn't have a pattern, but it emitted an unknown energy. Theodore was convinced that he couldn't catch it even if it was only a few meters away.

However, Gluttony broke down that conviction by handing the Aiolos Pouch to Theodore.

–Appraise it.

“…Appraisal.”

As always, details of the artifact popped up.

[+21 Aiolos Pouch (Divine Artifact)]

[-This is a pouch given to a hero as a gift from the god of wind, Aiolos. The owner can trap any wind into this pouch, and it can also seal or distort a specific space. As something made by a god, it contains some of his divinity.

* The rating of this magic tool is ‘Legend.’

* When used, wind can be sealed selectively.

* When used, space can be controlled selectively.

* When consumed, a small amount of divinity will be absorbed.

* When consumed, your understanding of space will increase greatly.

* Required achievement points: 51,700 points.

* If you want to extract the artifact, it will immediately be returned to this library when it escapes the user’s possession.]

“D-Divine artifact? Furthermore, the artifact can leave?”

Theodore’s eyes widened at the unexpected information window. The fact that this shabby pouch had a Legend rating, as well as a divine object, was shocking. It wasn’t surprising that knowledge could be exchanged, but he hadn’t known it was possible to materialize something which was swallowed.

–It is possible. But in the case of artifacts, there is a limit as stated at the bottom. It isn’t possible to transfer ownership to another person, and if you lose the artifact, you must spend points to obtain it again.

“…How cruel.”

A huge 51,700 points… If he blew away his achievement points

because he lost the artifact for a moment, he would shed tears of blood. It was much safer and more beneficial to absorb it than to extract it.

‘Anyway, it is a divine artifact. I’ve never heard the name of the god, but I have to search the list.’

Perhaps all treasures of the gods remaining in this age belonged in Gluttony’s stomach. Then Theodore thought of how Mitra was a prototype of Dmitra. He suppressed his excitement and turned to Gluttony.

“So?”

–Um?

“Why did you recommend this artifact?”

Theodore honestly didn’t know why. The Aiolos Pouch was very good, but he didn’t know why Gluttony recommended it. It was a recommendation which required Theodore to spend over 50,000 points. He didn’t know if he could consume another legendary grimoire, so he couldn’t invest all his points into this pouch.

Gluttony stared at him and muttered, -...You truly don’t know. Magicians in this age seem to have forgotten the essence of the circles.

“The essence of the circles?”

–Keep calm, User. Think about how the Aiolos Pouch can fill up your shortcomings.

“My shortcomings...”

It was like a lightning bolt of enlightenment.

The fragment of Mother Earth...

The fires of Muspelheim...

The blood of the sea dragon, Aquilo...

As soon as he was able to recall the four basic elements, he was

able to find out the answer he was guided to.

“…Wind?”

Gluttony nodded like he had been waiting for it.

–Yes, the last piece needed is wind. When considering the fragment of the Mother Earth, the fire of Musphelheim, and the blood of a sea dragon, the Aiolos Pouch is most suitable for you.

“But that alone isn’t an answer. What meaning is there in having all four elements?”

It was an obvious question for magicians of this age but not for Gluttony. Gluttony sighed with the same face as Theodore and pulled out a book from somewhere.

–I didn’t think I would be teaching theory about circles.

It was the moment when the lecture, which couldn’t be known by any modern human magician, emerged from the mouth of the ancient grimoire, Gluttony.

Chapter 208 – Library (2)

–User, before that, I have a question. In this day and age, how do magicians define the concept of ‘circles?’

“The concept of circles?”

Theodore was silent for a while at the unexpected question. It wasn’t too difficult because this was basic knowledge.

Unlike ordinary people, a magician was said to have two hearts. However, the circles which controlled all circulation of magic power were the protagonist.

Theodore reviewed the contents of the textbooks and opened his mouth, “The origin of magic… Magic is generated in the ventricles near a magician’s heart and can only be created by humans. There is a saying that the origin was derived from the heart of a dragon, but there is no confirmation about this. From the 7th Circle onwards, the circles evolve into a personal form, and this is called Sorcery.”

–And?

“That’s it.”

Gluttony naturally grabbed at his head and said, –Hah, I expected it, but this is serious. I don’t know what happened, but more than half of circle theory has been lost.

“Am I wrong?”

-That’s right. As a 7th Circle, shouldn’t you know? Circles aren’t just responsible for the circulation of magic power.

“Um.” Theodore let out a sound of confusion.

He could see it after reaching the 7th Circle. It was different from the 6th Circle which had only increased the amount of magic power and the scale. This was more than applying formulas and theories.

Without waiting for Theodore's answer, Gluttony continued explaining while holding the book, –Magicians use circles to coordinate the existences in the world. Since time immemorial, 10 has been a number used to symbolize a divine being. A magician of the 10th Circle represents a person who has ascended to that realm. Do you think this number is a coincidence?

"…It isn't a coincidence?"

-Of course not. The magic of this world is a science that was born in the process of imitating transcendent beings.

The wise elves didn't try to follow others, while the dwarves sought a method in vain and gave up. The demons didn't need to follow others in the first place, and the dragons have been transcendent beings in this material system from the very beginning.

Only humans were born without any power. Their essence is that they are excellent at imitating others. Even so, magic was only completed after a few thousand years.

Gluttony preached about the greatness of magic with utmost respect in his voice.

–The circles theory was built from the heart of a dragon, the songs of the elves, the formulas of knowledge learned from dwarves, and the rituals of the demons. In a sense, it can be called the most comprehensive study in this world.

"It sounds badly patched together."

–I think it is brilliant. Man built a body, and this paved the way to enter the realm of the gods. The term, 'imitation is the mother of creation,' refers to this case.

Theodore looked at Gluttony with surprise. He couldn't help noticing that Gluttony admired the wisdom of humanity. Gluttony realized he had drifted from the topic and coughed a few times before talking again, –Then let's return to the topic.

From this point on, it was theory which Theodore didn't know at all.

–Up to the 6th Circle, it is no different from what User knows. The application of force is in accordance with the laws of matter, and there is some control over natural phenomena. However, a master, the 7th Circle and Aura Ability, is a step into the 'frame'.

"Frame?"

–Don't interrupt. Magicians of the 7th Circle start to interpret the structure of this material world as their own theory. Onmyōdō's Tai Chi, the Three Kingdom's Heaven and Earth, the four elements, the five ways of the East, the Kabbalah's sephirot... There are many paths that can be chosen.

Thousands of magicians will give rise to many forked paths. At the beginning, the magicians knew the truth and pursued an interpretation of the material world's structure in their own way.

There was one mentor for ten disciples. The ten disciples taught hundreds of students. A road was made because not everyone could be a pioneer, so people followed the paths made by pioneers. Thus, a magical faction was born.

There aren't many left in this era now, Gluttony muttered in a bitter tone. –It is important to make your own way, but it is also effective to follow existing viewpoints. However, User has been influenced by the four elements since childhood.

"It is too late to take an independent route."

–That's right. Additionally, User already owns three of the elements, so you don't have to change your route.

Gluttony's words were right. Theodore looked down at the Aiolos Pouch in his hand.

Other people might be reluctant to walk along the path who others had laid down first, but Theodore was different. Magic wasn't accomplished alone. Instead, it was accomplished by

inheriting the will of older magicians over generations. Rather, he was proud of the fact that he was continuing their path.

“Okay.” Theodore didn’t take long to make a decision. “I will absorb the Aiolos Pouch.”

He could continue with his world view of four elements by accepting the divine artifact that Gluttony recommended.

After all, Theodore lacked the foundation to learn Tai Chi, the five ways, and the other methods. Above all, he was a member of the magic towers. As a magician who had been born and raised in Meltor, this was the magic which Theodore Miller had inherited since the beginning.

Simultaneously, the Aiolos Pouch shone brightly.

[You have absorbed the Aiolos Pouch.]

[51,700 points will be deducted from your achievement points. Your remaining number of achievement points is 26,513.]

[The divinity of the wind (small) has been acquired. The flow of air will move in a direction favorable to the user. You can interfere with the wind direction and wind speed as your proficiency increases. Regardless of elemental affinity, you can contract with wind elementals.]

[Your understanding of space has greatly increased. You will be able to grasp space that can’t be seen with your senses. The recoil of space magic will reduce.]

The Aiolos Pouch was literally sucked into the palm of Theodore’s hand.

‘Ack…?’

As achievement points were consumed, there was no extra digestion time. This caused Theodore to feel dizzy and drop to one knee. Otherwise, he would’ve fallen.

An unprecedented power was boiling inside his body. It was the

most disparate type of force Theodore had ever encountered. It felt gentler than the wild rampage of ‘fire,’ and its movement was more delicate than that of ‘water.’

Rather than wind, this was Aiolos’ divinity. It was soft when calm, but it was scarier than a thunderstorm when raging wildly. The divine power flowing from the Aiolos Pouch shook like it was rejecting Theodore.

“Cough!”

Despite Theodore being in a spiritual world, blood flowed from his mouth. It wasn’t physical damage but damage to his soul. The divine power not allowed to mortals was pinching at Theodore’s sides.

Even if it was just a fragment, this force was very powerful. Confronted with the divinity of the god of wind who surpassed Zephyr, as well as the arrogance of Aiolos, Theodore reached his limit.

However, Aiolos’ rebellion was soon suppressed. It was because the three types of forces inside Theodore took action. The fires of Muspelheim, the blood of a sea dragon, and the divinity of Mother Earth…

No matter how powerful Aiolos’ divinity was, it would be hard to deal with the three of them. It struggled to the end but was eventually trampled down.

“Sigh… Dammit.”

Theodore calmed his breathing. It took less than five minutes, but the pain was more than he had imagined it would be. It was like a serpent wandering around his blood vessels. His heart, which was at the epicenter of the incident, was still throbbing.

Theodore glared at Gluttony, who should’ve warned him in advance. Then at that moment…

Clink. There was a noise which made a person feel fulfilled, like

the right gear was being inserted into an empty spot. In retrospect, it might've been a hallucination. However, Theodore clearly heard it with his two ears.

'...Completed, was it?'

Why? This phrase popped up in Theodore's head, without any context. It was a sense of fulfillment, like the empty space of a puzzle was finally filled.

Despite having already attained the 7th Circle, this was the moment when Theodore felt a clear conviction. This was the moment when he stepped beyond the walls of the world and became qualified to explore beyond the mortal borders.

He understood it from the perspective of a magician looking at the world. Then he wasn't satisfied with this achievement and took another step.

'Earth, wind, fire, and water. It starts from the ground, flows into water, burns in the fire, and returns to wind. Fire flickers, and water fluctuates. Unlike wind, earth doesn't flow. The world coexists with these conflicting forces.'

This was the original four elements theory. Each of the four elements made up the world by reacting to each other. From this perspective, Theodore was twice as strong as before. However, magicians were curious animals who couldn't be satisfied.

The imprint of Umbra on his right arm had led him to a new domain with the great magic, Abraxas.

'Fire and water don't mix, while wind and earth can't invade each other's territory. Are these absolutely true?'

Theodore was unaware of it, but this was similar to the theory behind 'Heaven and Earth Enmity.' It was absolutely imperative to restore the balance. When things were confusing, reaffirm the path. Yet Theodore rejected the path which countless other people followed.

However, it wasn’t because he had a dispute with it. He just thought it was a method that didn’t fit him. This was because the reason for that was right before him.

“...Eh?”

Gluttony’s eyes widened from amazement. Theodore had just woken up from his enlightened state, so he didn’t know the reason for Gluttony’s amazed expression. However, he soon realized it.

“W-What?”

On the palm of his hand, there was a small flickering flame. However, there was no reason to be surprised by just that. The color of the flame was a little unusual, but it wasn’t difficult for magicians to change the color.

The problem was the attributes tangled in this flame.

“Heat... and cold?”

Half of the flame was red and the other half was blue. Like hellfire, this was a phenomenon which couldn’t exist under the laws of the material world. Theodore couldn’t understand the magic which had unfolded, and he stared at Gluttony blankly.

Chapter 209 – Library (3)

Gluttony recovered his spirit first.

–…User, how did you create ‘it?’

Gluttony had the confidence that he would be able to determine its origin if he observed for a while, but the question which emerged from his mouth was pure. He couldn’t understand it. He couldn’t accept it. He couldn’t find it.

There was no magic like this ‘flame’ in his library, which had been accumulating for tens of thousands of years. It was something strange and unknown.

Of course, there were countless magics which tried to unite opposing attributes. The study of ‘extremes meeting’ was proven in magic. Some scholars had said that the definition of extremes was ‘repudiation,’ while some philosophers said that extremes were the reverse of each other.

At the first glance, it seemed that hot and cold would oppose each other. However, this was essentially a force which belonged to the natural world.

-However, this flame is beyond that, Gluttony said firmly.

This wasn’t repudiation or the reverse.

It might move and change, or it might not. Hot could become cold, and cold could become hot. Just like how a rock turned into sand would once again solidify to become a rock, everything would eventually circulate in a circle.

However, Theodore’s flame deviated from this circulation. The two forces, hot and cold, coexisted simultaneously like two sides of a coin. It was a contradiction. Something which couldn’t be found anywhere in the natural world was occurring due to the human wizard before Gluttony. As Gluttony saw this new magic, his black eyes shone.

–Answer me, User. Hurry!

“Uh… What do you mean?” Theodore scratched his head a few times. “I don’t know.”

Gluttony stared blankly at him. Then Theodore continued speaking, “I remember the process of absorbing the ‘Aiolos Pouch’ and coordinating its divinity, but I don’t know how I made it.”

–A magician doesn’t even know the magic he used?

“The reason why water and fire can’t mix and why wind and earth can’t cross each other… Do you know the reason why?”

–I don’t know! Gluttony finally burst out angrily.

If someone else achieved a magic which was far superior to other magic, they wouldn’t hesitate to ‘theorize’ it. Unlike aura which relied on senses and talent, magic had a clear theoretical system.

It was also the reason why the speed of magic development was faster than swordsmanship. Magicians handed down their heritage to the next generation, causing more outstanding magicians to appear in each new generation.

However, the words Theodore said didn’t sound like those of a magician.

–Why don’t you know? Why aren’t you sure? This is a huge achievement for a human magician, but you don’t know why? Try as hard as possible to remember. Leave no stone unturned! Or User won’t be able to leave here forever!

“What?! What farce is this?”

–This is my stomach, where I can do anything I want.

Theodore was blank from the absurdity. This was Gluttony’s body, so it was obvious he could control who could access it. Although Theodore didn’t know how long he might be stuck here, he decided to give in to the request.

‘It is rare for him to be so emotional.’

Wasn’t Gluttony a companion who had been with him for a long time? Sometimes it was fine to give in to his stubbornness.

Pushik.

Theodore first erased the flame in the palm of his hand. It was easier to understand the principles of magic if he reproduced it again, rather than observing what had already been done. Theodore ignored Gluttony and closed his eyes.

‘Let’s revisit it from the beginning.’

He looked at the cycle of wind, fire, water, and earth.

‘Fire and water don’t mix, and wind and earth can’t cross each other.’

Why did they refuse each other?

“Ah.”

At that moment, the misaligned teeth locked together again, and the ‘impossible’ became possible. Theodore didn’t miss this moment and used his magic power. Burning Hands and Chilling Touch…

The two opposing attributes mixed together again.

Wuuong…!

Suddenly, two hands appeared in the air. It was once again the union of heat and cold, which couldn’t coexist. Once might be a coincidence but not twice. Gluttony felt a thrill at the spectacular sight.

-Eureka!

However, Theodore didn’t know what Gluttony meant and cocked his head.

*

Once Gluttony had a sense of it, the next time was easier. He observed without blinking every time Theodore used magic. This

was an unknown principle, but in the end, it was still based on ‘magic,’ which was the very foundation of the Seven Sins grimoire.

It took Gluttony 10 minutes of observing the cause and effect to come up with the closest answer. Yet it probably would’ve taken at least 100 years if it had been the Magic Society that studied it.

–It is forced harmonization. How ridiculous, Gluttony said and then sat down with a delighted expression.

The process of discovering the answer had been rather difficult, but the feeling of taking the fruit after was rewarding. Theodore listened carefully to his explanation and asked, “So, it this my Sorcery?”

-That’s right.

The answer was ‘forced harmonization.’ It wasn’t just two opposing forces coexisting; it had the ability to harmonize forces which couldn’t coexist. Since it had never appeared since the creation of magic, the name was chosen by Gluttony.

–It isn’t just heat and cold. User can mix any desired spell together, regardless of the attributes. The larger the magic, the greater the risk. But such risks exist everywhere in the world.

Gluttony was talking casually, but he was actually full of excitement right now. Was this ‘fusion?’ It was Sorcery which covered all attributes, not just two opposing attributes.

For him, magic was a type of universal puzzle. The method of trial and error was needed to see which pieces of the puzzle would fit together to produce the desired magic. However, Theodore had a type of cheat key. He could insert it at will… and shuffle it at will.

This privilege was truly unique for a magician.

“…Why?” Theodore couldn’t help questioning it. “Why is this my Sorcery? The four elements are gathered in my body, but the other attributes…”

–I think it is probably due to my influence, Gluttony responded to his reasonable doubt without hesitation. –I'm sorry, but User isn't talented. You aren't superior in one attribute nor in sensitivity. If you hadn't met me, you would've never been able to surpass the 4th Circle.

"It is true, but I can't help feeling bad."

–I don't mean to diminish you. However, it's thanks to this that User has grown in a similar manner to me, creating an unprecedented Sorcery. Do you understand what it is?

There was only one way in which Theodore could share growth with Gluttony.

"-Predation."

–That's correct, Gluttony confirmed it in a pleasant voice. –Since User wasn't born with anything, you took my influence more than anything else. No, you had no choice but to accept it. There was no other way.

"The power to eat anything… Indeed, it is similar."

–If eating is my role, digesting nutrients is yours. After suffering from indigestion in the form of your deadline, this is the result of your body finally stabilizing.

It could be said that this was the synergy between Gluttony and Theodore. Theodore was convinced by the explanation, but he thought it was still lacking. This new ability shouldn't be possible if he had simply built his power around Gluttony's 'predation.'

Gluttony ate artifacts as well as magic books. Everything he ate was nourishment, and even his host, Theodore, grew because of it. The harmonization of magic… If he widened the horizons—

'There is something like this.'

Any bystander stuck in the 7th Circle would feel like it was unfair, yet Theodore crossed another wall without any fear.

Hwaruruk! A flame emerged.

Gluttony was at a loss for words and stared at it with bemused eyes. The flame wasn't red and blue. It was just red. This was Burning Hands, a common fire attack magic. For Gluttony, that magic had no value now.

Then Theodore's left hand started burning.

"...I didn't expect to succeed in one go."

This was a forced harmonization of body and magic. Theodore was amazed at what he had done as he waved his arm which had turned into a red flame. Until now, there had been a lot of secondary magic used on the body. However, magic which integrated with the body was treated as a fantasy.

Could Theodore apply magic to solid metals or the moisture in the sky, or even harmonize it with living creatures? It was like picking a star from the sky. Yet he had succeeded in something so ridiculous.

'Isn't the range of application for this magic very wide?'

Theodore had succeeded in several achievements today, but he was already thinking about the possible applications of his awakened Sorcery. He could integrate with lightning and roam around, or join with the waves and ride the ocean currents toward the East. Until now, this had only been a fantasy.

Theodore felt an unstoppable inspiration and released Burning Hands which had blended with his left arm. Then the silent Gluttony opened his mouth, -...User.

"Eh?"

Contrary to Theodore's expectation that Gluttony would be joyful, Gluttony's voice was actually deeply subdued as he said, – You should return for today. I know that you are excited but using any more magic can be dangerous.

“Dangerous? How come?”

–You haven’t realized. This would’ve been really dangerous if left alone.

Gluttony touched Theodore’s body.

Pajik.

Simultaneously, Theodore felt a fierce pang in his body.

“Kuk, uhhh, keeok…!” He could barely manage to breathe through the pain. Theodore fell to the ground as his limbs shook.

–You have absorbed Aiolos’ divinity and established the four elements in your body. Then as soon as you awakened your Sorcery, you hastily tried to use it too many times. If this place wasn’t my body, you would’ve died.

“C-Cou-gh!” Theodore tried to answer, but a groan was the only thing that emerged from his mouth.

–You won’t be able to move for a while. Go and sleep.

After Gluttony gave his advice to Theodore, Theodore’s body disappeared. Theodore had returned to reality from the library. By now, Theodore would be wriggling like a worm on his bed. Gluttony’s lips slightly twisted as he imagined it, then he turned back to the main point.

-…Kuk, a loud shout of laughter emerged, –Kuhahahahaha!

The sound was so awful it would cause anyone listening to get goosebumps. A path which hadn’t been seen for thousands of years was now clearly visible before him.

–I can reach it this time! The unprecedented field! 10th Circle magic! Kether, where the potential of humankind exists!

Gluttony laughed with a joy which resembled insanity.

–This time, I absolutely won’t fail!

Chapter 210 – Upcoming Battle (1)

A week after the investigation team had returned from the Meuse Desert, King Kurt III of Meltor was having lunch with someone. He usually enjoyed quiet meals, but he had to do this because of his busy schedule.

Even now, one hand was gracefully handling the tableware, while the other hand was busy processing paperwork.

“Ughh… It is making me feel pained just looking at you,” Veronica said from where she was sitting across from him. “Your Majesty, the Magic Contest is over, so do you still need to be so busy? You should take it easy a little more.”

“It’s okay. My body can handle this much.”

“Still, there is a reason why I brought it up.”

“Hrmm.” Kurt thought she had a point, so he put down the sheets of paper. He thought it was rude to work while eating with someone. So, he put down the quill in his left hand and the knife in his right hand at almost the same time.

“I see. I was too short-sighted. Then let’s hear your story.”

“Okay, it isn’t a long story.” Veronica ate her fifth bowl of steak and looked outside the palace. “Your Majesty, are you curious about the guests?”

“Well, of course.”

“Right. One is a high elf, a leader of Elvenheim, and the other is the infamous dragon of the eastern seas. If something goes wrong, it could be fatal.”

There were a few people who were treated as state guests, but back when the palace was built hundreds of years ago, they wouldn’t have known it would house a high elf and dragon. Kurt III was knowledgeable, but this was also unexpected for him.

So, he looked forward to what Veronica would say. After all, she knew both guests and had the status and power to be an arbitrator.

Unsurprisingly, Veronica responded to the vague expectation, “The bottom line is that there are no problems. Even if there is an unfortunate affinity between them, they won’t fight each other.”

“What about the atmosphere of the first day?”

“Oh, Kid was present at that time. Without him present, it isn’t worth it for them to fight against each other. We just have to separate Kid from the two of them.”

Her judgment was correct. Ellenoa was reluctant to face someone with Aquilo’s nature, while Aquilo kept away from elves who sought a calm life. It was just that their initial encounter involved Theodore Miller. The friction occurred because a high elf was threatened by a sea dragon who coveted other people’s possessions.

This problem was solved if Theodore wasn’t present.

“If you think about it, it is good that the Kid has been lying down since then. It is proper timing.”

“How is he? It must be due to the trip.”

“Uhh, well, that might not be completely the case…?” Veronica said with a strange expression. She had visited Theodore and noticed that it wasn’t due to illness or fatigue. This was a magician’s transitional period.

It was a symptom when a magician’s body was broken and underwent a process of regeneration. She didn’t know what was going to happen, but it was clear that Theodore had made further progress after visiting the ruins.

‘…Fast. It is too fast no matter how I think about it.’ Veronica felt a thrill as she recalled Theodore lying in his bed.

Among the dragons, the red clan had a strong fighting instinct.

Having inherited that bloodline, she the instinctive ability to grasp the strength of others. She had been able to see it. Despite his haggard expression, Theodore's inner strength was boiling over. Her blood spiked wildly at the memory of his strength.

Dugun, dugun.

By the time Veronica managed to calm her heart, the meal was already over. The servants took away the plates and utensils, then a map of the continent was laid out on the table.

Veronica frowned when she saw the map and asked, "Your Majesty, this map?"

"I prepared this to discuss it with you," Kurt III said. Then with sunken eyes, he looked down at the map of the continent he had prepared and stated, "The truce period isn't over yet, but Andras isn't going to wait for that to expire. I think that we won't be able to avoid an outbreak of local wars."

"Of course. They aren't the type of people to cower in their yards."

The opinions of the two people matched. The term 'local wars' had a dictionary meaning of 'a war that takes place in a limited region.' However, it had a different meaning in the north.

The truce between the northern powers, Andras and Meltor, had always been based on the fact that they wouldn't invade each other's territory. That didn't mean they couldn't step on the territories of others. In other words, it meant a battle could take place anywhere except in the north. Over the centuries, it had become a routine situation.

"Veronica, where do you think the issue is?"

""Well, this direction is possible." Veronica stretched out her index finger. "Isn't the neighboring Kargas too influential?"

"It is a jewel. It is also the area where the local wars are most frequent. But my thoughts are a little different."

“Then?”

“Here.” Kurt’s index finger was pointing toward the Soldun Kingdom. “According to the secret agents of the White Tower, it seems that the recent situation in Soldun is unstable. The royal family and nobles are gathering their soldiers, and the Lairon government seems to have reached out a hand as well. The newly appointed pope seems to be a fairly aggressive figure.”

“Even to the point of becoming involved in a civil war?”

“It seems that the prince has naturalized some Easterners. The Lairon Church doesn’t recognize people who don’t appear in their bible.”

“…Indeed, they are such people.”

Simultaneously, Veronica’s expression turned grim. The Lairon Kingdom didn’t get along with magicians, but they also discriminated against humans who didn’t fit their doctrines. Veronica might be a mixed dragon-human, but she had been treated as a human since joining the magic towers. It was natural for her to feel an aversion to Lairon, a religious kingdom which discriminated against other species.

However, her thoughts were complicated for another reason. “Damn, this will be annoying.”

“I agree. We need to convene a meeting to discuss it.”

“Eek?”

Kurt agreed with Veronica and pressed a bell on the table. Then he spoke to the servant waiting for him, “Deliver this message to the tower masters and ministers of state: I will be holding a meeting in one hour.”

*

Unlike Veronica who had suddenly gotten a lot of work, Theodore got up from his bed and immediately headed to the

training room. He had awakened his Sorcery, but after having used it several times inside Gluttony, it had taken Theodore a week to recover.

It had only been yesterday that Theodore managed to walk properly, and he was able to use magic without a problem today.

'Master told me to rest a few more days, but...'

It was torture for a magician to stop when they had a glimpse of the next step. Theodore couldn't repress his urge to use magic and entered a training room. This was Sorcery which astounded even Gluttony, a grimoire from the Age of Mythology. Then just how wonderful would it be to use?

Theodore first created a flame with two attributes.

Hwaruruk!

It was a combination of heat and cold which couldn't coexist in nature. However, Theodore calmly assessed the value of this flame.

"It is a waste of magic power."

The hot and cold coexisted due to his Sorcery, but they were reducing each other's strengths. This was a mediocre magic which couldn't even catch an ordinary deer.

It might be different when amplifying two opposing attributes like Abraxas but merely coexisting was meaningless. Forced Harmonization didn't necessarily mean creating a magic which was better than before.

In the end, the true value of Forced Harmonization was making combinations which 'couldn' exist.'

It prevented magic from causing a backlash or repelling each other, and could invalidate some parameters in magic equations. This made it possible to explore fields of magic which hadn't been possible until now.

This ‘Forced Harmonization’ was the true power of the Sorcery that Theodore possessed. It was like a lump of crude magic power mixed together. However, it wasn’t self-taught, since he applied Veronica’s teachings to it as well.

“...No, there are exceptions.”

The second time he applied his Sorcery in Gluttony’s stomach, it had been a forced fusion of body and magic. The power to transform his body into magic power...

The ability of Forced Harmonization wasn’t meaningful in itself, but the story was different when integrated with the body. It was magic which went beyond the frames of life. Taking a look at one example, wasn’t it possible to integrate lightning with his body and move at the speed of lightning? It was one thing to think of the idea, and another to practice it.

“Lightning Bolt.”

Theodore didn’t shoot it out immediately and instead held it in his hand. Then he focused on ‘Forced Harmonization’ while thinking about the lightning strike which moved in a straight line. He imagined his saliva, hair, and blood acting like they were dissolved by lightning.

Then he aimed precisely at a point in the training room. It was a place where he could stop away from the edge of the wall, even if he made a mistake.

Pajijik!

He felt like he had joined with the lightning as he took one step forward—

————————————Kwarurung!

Theodore’s consciousness was cut off. His head whitened for a moment before he woke up on the ground. A feeling of shock was spreading throughout his body. His bones and organs weren’t damaged, but Theodore’s mind was blank for a moment at the

unexpected impact.

“W-What… How— What’s happening…?”

The integration with lightning had been a success as the feeling of Forced Harmonization was clearly evident in his body. However, when he took one step forward earlier, his consciousness had stopped and his whole body had filled with pain. Theodore couldn’t understand the situation and looked up.

Then not long afterward…

“…Crazy.”

Theodore saw that ward over the training room was now cracked like it would collapse at any moment. It was similar to drought-affected rice paddies or spider webs. Perhaps it was because Theodore had turned into a lightning bolt and hit the wall.

It was difficult to break through 6th Circle wards. Yet this ward was overwhelmed by his charge.

‘The strength is sufficient. The problem is the recoil and side effects.’

Theodore rubbed his aching temples and left the training room. What more could he practice in a broken training room? He had to pay the cost of repairs and rest until the throbbing in his body was gone.

Vince would admonish Theodore if he knew about the situation. However, rather than being discouraged or regretful, Theodore was excited about his new discovery.

“It can’t be combined with Battle Song. After applying the formula to the human body, it becomes magic and is released automatically… This will overwrite any secondary magic…”

It was unusual to see people muttering to themselves when walking down a corridor, but it wasn’t so rare in the magic towers. Rather, it had the effect of people leaving Theodore alone.

However, a person appeared in front of Theodore right then.

“P-Prime Theodore?”

“Aren’t you a clerk from the Magic Society? Did something happen?”

After hearing Theodore’s question, the clerk shook like he was facing a celebrity and said, “There is a guest from the outside applying with Prime Theodore’s name as a guarantor…”

“Guarantor?”

“Yes, yes! It wasn’t strange, but I couldn’t just send him away without checking…”

Theodore contemplated about this for a moment. Who would apply with Theodore as a guarantor? The act of applying without any relationship with the guarantor was disrespectful, and every magician knew this. Furthermore, it was a person from the outside?

Theodore frowned. Then the clerk reflexively spewed out all the information, “A-A boy with an eastern appearance! He is young and hasn’t gone through his coming of age ceremony yet!”

“Eastern person? Ah!” Theodore finally figured out the person’s identity.

A boy from the East with a relationship with Theodore… There was only one person in the world who met these conditions. It was Baek Dongil of the Baek Family. The boy had come from the Soldun Kingdom to Meltor.

Chapter 211 – Upcoming Battle (2)

"Brother!"

Indeed, Theodore's prediction was right. Baek Dongil was waiting for him in the central tower of the Magic Society, which was responsible for all the administrative work.

Although Baek Dongil looked a little more mature than a few months ago, he still had the same black hair and sweet eyes. The shine in his eyes was no different from the one in Theodore's memories.

Theodore greeted Baek Dongil with a smile, "It has been a while, Dongil."

"Yes, Brother! Have you been well in the meantime?"

Baek Dongil seemed to have learned western etiquette as shown in the way he greeted Theodore. He was more mature than before. His head reached Theodore's shoulders, and there was some hair on his chin. It was evident that this boy was becoming a young man.

Their meeting in the Soldun Kingdom seemed like it had been just yesterday, but time was like a flying arrow which never looked back.

In addition to that, Theodore looked inside Baek Dongil. After discarding the three dan method, Baek Dongil had mastered three circles with the great magic system. It was remarkable progress, even if Baek Dongil's talent was excellent.

'This is a tremendous development in a short amount of time. It's not a level that can be achieved with just talent. Perhaps he only got the minimum of sleep every day.'

It would be better to learn as a blank slate. However, Baek Dongil had started off using the wrong method, so it was obvious that his studying would be twice as hard as that of others. He needed to

understand magic theory which was completely separate from shamanism.

A great maestro had said this, ‘It was easier to teach a beginner than a learned person.’

Despite such adverse conditions, Baek Dongil had gone beyond that difficulty. It had only been a short relationship, but it was a fulfilling achievement for Theodore who had once taught him.

“You have improved a lot. I thought it would take a year, but you have already mastered three circles?”

“I am still lacking, Brother.”

“There is no fault in your spoken common language except for pronunciation, and you have managed to come here in less than half a year. Well done.”

“B-Brother.” Baek Dongil flushed red at the direct praise. He had been born in a family of prestigious warriors, yet he had no talent and couldn’t learn aura. So, this was his first time being acknowledged and praised. Baek Dongil bowed his head to cover his burning eyes. Theodore understood his feelings and turned around first.

“You’ve just arrived, so you don’t know the way, do you? Let’s go to my room.”

“...Yes, Brother.”

“Let me hear your story on the way up. I am very curious if Master Baek is doing well.”

“Yes, I will do so,” Baek Dongil responded with a loud voice as he secretly wiped his tears with his sleeves and then followed Theodore. “Last month, Father was named a marquis by the Soldun royal family. He was going to start as an earl, but the crown prince helped my father a lot.”

“Indeed, he received the position of marquis after

naturalization.”

Nobles couldn’t exert great power in Meltor, even if they were a marquis. However, in other countries, a marquis would have a knights division, troops, and several territories, giving them power equivalent to the king of a small country. At most, an earl could only lead 1,000 soldiers. Yet a foreigner had managed to climb up to the position of marquis.

‘But there are few who will have the guts to confront a master. The complaints will keep accumulating until they explode…’

The prince who had naturalized Baek Jongmyung would be held responsible for all of this. Theodore recalled the prince he had once met. What was the reason for him to proceed with such a political burden so soon?

‘…Perhaps…’ A possible speculation entered Theodore’s mind.

Perhaps Crown Prince Elsid was in the middle of a civil war! If this was a civil war, using armed forces would be the correct judgment. The difference in military power between what an earl and a marquis could mobilize was enormous.

Political weakness? That was meaningless. Once a civil war began, politics would fall to the wayside, and the winner would decide the right and wrong.

‘So, the fact that Dongil was sent to Meltor at this time… It is probably to protect him until the end of the civil war. I don’t know if it was Master Baek or the prince’s idea, but they have a good head.’

Even if the entire Central Continent were at odds, the north wouldn’t be affected. There was no country whose blade could reach Baek Dongil here, at the center of Mana-vil. Any hostile acts toward Baek Dongil would be a declaration against Theodore Miller, who was regarded as a hero.

The promise of the past had become Baek Dongil’s shield.

‘Well, the party involved doesn’t seem to know.’

Theodore couldn’t find any signs of this on Baek Dongil’s face, who was still sniffling. Moreover, it wasn’t easy to deceive Theodore, whose senses had become sharper since Mitra’s flowering.

As they walked through the corridor, Theodore wondered how he should treat Baek Dongil. He came to a conclusion more easily than he’d thought he would.

“Dongil.”

“Yes, Brother.”

“You don’t have to give me a definite answer, but… do you want to become a fellow disciple of my master?”

“…Huh?” Baek Dongil looked surprised.

Meanwhile, Theodore thought about his decision.

He didn’t have time to teach, so that was directly dismissed. Additionally, he was now the captain of Quattro and didn’t have time to take charge of a disciple. Most of all, Theodore didn’t have the knack for teaching. It might be due to his habit of studying alone at the academy’s library, or maybe it was because his mind was too good.

‘I don’t know how to make other people understand.’

It was a story from before he’d met Gluttony. The professors had ignored him due to his low sensitivity, and the students had hated to even study with him. He had needed to think and realize things alone. Thus, Theodore’s thinking abilities had developed abnormally.

Theodore could find answers to his own questions, but he couldn’t sympathize with the questions that others had. Therefore, Theodore thought about asking his master, Vince Haidel, to play the role of mentor.

‘I remember a story Master told once.’

Vince had no idea what he would soon be asked, but he would enthusiastically accept. A student with Theodore’s talent and sincerity was something that any magician would desire. However, Baek Dongil’s eyes turned red as he replied, “I will be Brother’s junior disciple?”

“If you don’t want to, I can suggest other people-”

“N-No! Absolutely not! I will become your junior disciple no matter what!”

“Y-Yes. Then I will tell him.” Theodore took a step back at the enthusiastic reaction.

However, Baek Dongil just smiled at him. “I will become a magician who won’t shame our sect!”

“U-Umm… magicians don’t really have the concept of sect…”

“Ah, and Brother. Father told me to give this letter to you.”

“Letter?”

Baek Dongil nodded and pulled out an envelope. It was luxurious. The ‘Baek’ stamped on the envelope was probably a seal. Theodore received the envelope with a puzzled expression and carefully pulled out the letter.

After a while, Theodore’s face stiffened.

*

Elsewhere, the influential people in the palace were gathered for a meeting.

The theme of the meeting was ‘measures and justifications to intervene in Soldun’s civil war.’

It wasn’t the Kargas Kingdom but the Soldun Kingdom, which was closer to the south than the north. In order to dispatch troops from Meltor to Soldun, it would take a month by land. Even with

the support of the White Tower, it would take more than a fortnight.

However, it was an unauthorized intrusion.

“Secretly dispatch a messenger!” The person who insisted on this was Robert, the minister for the army. “Send an agent of the white tower—no, the Tower Master should move directly to secretly contact the prince. If the nobles have joined hands with Lairon, Prince Elsid will be willing to accept our support!”

“No, that conclusion is too hasty.” On the contrary, the minister of foreign affairs refuted this. “We know that the intelligence of the white tower is credible, but in Soldun’s case, there is a possibility of creating the misunderstanding of foreign interference. We have to wait for the Lairon Kingdom or Andras’ shadows to move.”

Robert pounded his chest and shouted like the minister of foreign affairs was being ridiculous, “Then it will be too late! You don’t know how dangerous it is to be late to a battlefield!”

“Minister! You can’t ignore the department of foreign affairs!”

“You are being ridiculous! We are talking about Soldun’s civil war!”

Kurt was just watching instead of participating in the debate. It was fatal to be late for a war, but the minister of foreign affairs was correct that they shouldn’t be too hasty. Both sides were reasonable, so it was difficult to choose one.

As he pressed a hand to his temple, Kurt continued to think, ‘It is tricky. The nobles of Soldun have already contacted the Lairon government and set up a dark road. The longer we delay contacted the crown prince, the more detrimental it becomes and our odds will fall under 2%.’

The prince might’ve brought a sword master from the East, but Lairon’s special forces wouldn’t be small. The situation couldn’t be

reversed with just one sword master.

Elsid would lose. Still, the prince was unaware of everything, and Andras would be keen to prevent Meltor from getting in touch with him. Their hands and feet would be tied up.

'Damn, this is a really irritating situation.'

It was possible to send the White Tower Master to infiltrate, but the Andras Empire would probably send the empire's Seven Swords to block the infiltration. There would inevitably be a large scale battle, and there would be larger vigilance against the northern powers.

Andras was a close friend of the Lairon Kingdom, so they had nothing to lose. However, Meltor would suffer a big loss for nothing. It was at this moment that...

"Quattro's Captain, Theodore Miller, has arrived!" The voices of the guards at the entrance suddenly rang out, causing everyone to fall silent. The value of Theodore's name was much greater now.

Veronica blinked from where she was guarding the throne and turned to the other tower masters.

Theodore's red robes flapped gently as he entered and said, "Your Majesty, I came because I need to urgently talk to you."

"Urgently?"

Theodore had the same authority as a tower master, so he could skip the formalities if there was an urgent situation. However, that right was just a ceremonial act, and Kurt hasn't expected Theodore to use it. What was so urgent that a model student would skip the formalities?

Yet the heated atmosphere of the room cooled immediately at Theodore's words, "Today, a guest came to see me, and I received a letter from him that I have to give to Your Majesty."

"A letter?"

“Yes, the sender is…” Theodore stopped for one beat before dropping a bomb on everyone. “It is Crown Prince Elsid of the Soldun Kingdom.”

Chapter 212 – Upcoming Battle (3)

Despite Theodore's clear voice, there was no reply. The people who had been expressing their opinions earlier fell silent, while Kurt's expression became momentarily dumbfounded. A letter from Prince Elsid? Moreover, the guest who came to visit Theodore was the courier? The meeting room in Meltor's royal palace was silent.

'No, a letter from Prince Elsid at this time…'

'It is certainly good if it is true, but is it good that the prince predicted the timing? It is strange.'

'I want to question Sir Theodore, but my position…'

The people had different reactions. There were some who were confused and couldn't accept the situation, and others who scratched their ears because they doubted what they heard. There were also people who turned red with excitement, and people who were worried about asking for the authenticity of the words…

The situation was too perfect to simply accept, but it didn't look good to question the kingdom's hero. So, it was natural for them to stay silent. Therefore, it was up to Kurt III to break this silence.

He reviewed Theodore's words several times before speaking, "Quattro's Captain."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"I don't mean to doubt you, but the timing is too perfect. How did you form a connection with Prince Elsid, and who brought this letter to you? Can you explain first?"

"I will follow Your Majesty's will."

They were valid doubts, so Theodore paused before picking what words to say.

Theodore had spent a while in the Soldun Kingdom, but he

needed to explain it so that people didn't misunderstand. He would talk about the time he'd bought the mansion after arriving in the Soldun Kingdom from the Pirate Archipelago.

Theodore arranged his thoughts and opened his mouth, "Starting from the Pirate Archipelago, I moved to the port city, Piris, in the Soldun Kingdom..."

He didn't mention Randolph, who had accompanied him. Randolph's heart didn't belong to Andras, but the fact that the sword master was from Andras could be interpreted as something else.

It would be natural to doubt Theodore's information if they found out Randolph had accompanied him for more than a year. He would be naturalized when he escaped from the empire, so there was no need to reveal Randolph's identity right now.

Theodore's life in Piris...

The arrival of the Baek Family and the spar with Baek Jongmyung...

The unexpected meeting with Crown Prince Elsid...

And Theodore's connection with the boy called Baek Dongil.

It was a long story, but it wasn't hard for people to understand. There were people who started sweating nervously when they heard about the spar with Baek Jongmyung, and others who showed pity toward Baek Dongil's circumstances.

However, one thing was the same. At the end of Theodore's story, the people exhaled at the same time, "Hoo..."

It was a ridiculous sight, but no one smiled. Kurt III understood the circumstances and spoke with a voice which carried an unknown weight, "It is a persuasive explanation. That's why he sent a letter to us through the boy called Baek Dongil."

"That's right, Your Majesty."

“This timing is so perfect that it can be said that the heavens are helping Meltor. If the boy had arrived three days later, he would’ve missed the timing,” Kurt was speaking to himself. However, he then glanced at Theodore with sunken eyes and held out a hand.

Kurt could listen to the letter, but he wanted to read it himself.

“Show me the letter sent by the crown prince.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Theodore used simple wind magic at Kurt’s request. There was a gentle breeze, and the letter jumped a few meters. The letter entered the king’s hands, and people watched silently. Kurt’s purple eyes scanned the letter slowly from the top to the bottom.

He read the contents with a strange expression in his eyes before muttering, “...How interesting. Crown Prince Elsid was a vulnerable boy when I last saw him. Now he wants to talk about a new monarch? It is a truly bold and reckless plot.”

The minister of foreign affairs asked carefully, “Your Majesty, do you mind if I ask about the contents?”

“Of course.” Kurt nodded with a smile and raised his head from the letter. “The fundamental content is a request for our support. He also wrote down the size of the troops that Lairon sent, a map of the area where a battle is expected to occur, and the route to use to enter secretly.”

“Ohh...! That means...!”

“It means the royal family is tolerating Meltor’s involvement in Soldun’s civil war. There is the royal seal stamped at the end of the letter, so there is no need to worry about any accusations of interference.”

It was as he said. Justification to interfere in international conflicts was an important matter, and it was more strictly applied to the stronger powers like Andras and Meltor. Without

justification, there was a chance the whole Central Continent would unite in a war against the northern powers.

However, the situation was reversed with this letter.

Unlike Andras, Meltor had received permission to move a large number of troops into the Soldun Kingdom. The Lairon Kingdom would only be able to send covert support, so the balance would tilt to the side of the royal party.

Kurt was excited by the contents of the letter and created an agenda. “Prince Elsid has presented two paths of entry. There is the overland route that goes through the Sipoto wilderness on the outskirts of Kargas and also sea route which goes through the eastern waters toward Piris. Let’s discuss which method will be more efficient.”

His words were spoken lightly, but there was a weight to them. Depending on their choice of entry, the timing of the troops’ arrival and their strategic efficiency would vary greatly. The best way was to get there as quickly and secretly as possible.

The path where they could move a larger number of troops would also be advantageous. The level of the soldiers was important, but the superiority of numbers wasn’t something that could be ignored in war.

However, there was one person who put a brake on Kurt’s thoughts.

“I’m sorry, Your Majesty. But perhaps we can’t use the sea route this year.”

“Blundell?”

The Blue Tower Master, Blundell said with a grim expression on his face, “The south wind is very intense at the eastern waters in this period. It is expected that it will take three times as long and more manpower than usual to get to Piris from the north.”

“Three times... White Tower Master, can the invention of the

white tower be used?”

“If we use the balloons, the time can be reduced to two times. However, further reduction isn’t possible.”

“Two or three times as long is too slow,” Kurt grumbled and shook his head when he realized it was pointless.

There was no point harassing his people about things which couldn’t be changed. Anyway, something bad would pop up when something good occurred. Elsid’s letter had arrived in time, but now the paths were causing trouble.

Then just when Kurt was about to give up on the sea route…

“Excuse me, Your Majesty. I have something to say.”

“Something? Go ahead, Quattro’s Captain.”

Theodore made a subtle expression as he glanced at Blundell before speaking, “I might have a way. Then we can arrive there more quickly than usual.”

“…What?”

“Is that true?”

The eyes of the people present widened with surprise. Meanwhile, Theodore continued speaking, “In the past, I received the ‘Sea Dragon’s Blessing’ from Aquilo. That blessing can be used to overcome the wind.”

“T-That’s right…!”

“Indeed, a sea dragon rules the water!”

“Then the reasons for not being able to use the sea route are gone!”

As their astonishment and excitement grew, one person spoke their mind without thinking, “Sir Theodore, what if you are accompanied by the sea dragon? Won’t her power be a great help?”

However, Theodore smiled bitterly and shook his head. “She

won’t go. She has no interest in being involved in anything else and is going to help Austen. If we want her help, we have to pay a corresponding price or give up the covenant with Austen.”

“T-That’s right… I’m sorry for bringing it up.”

It was too much attempting to use the power of the dragon. At first glance, they would be able to crush all the soldiers in the civil war, the Lairon Kingdom’s troops and Andras’ shadows, if they were accompanied by Aquilo.

However, it was a law that greed would cause disaster. The people abandoned their foolish thoughts and focused on the next agenda. Obviously, there was only one thing remaining.

“Then from now on, let’s discuss who will be dispatched to the Soldun Kingdom.”

The meeting continued for a long time.

*

Theodore had arrived at the meeting around noon and only left in the middle of the night when the stars and moon were shining.

He hadn’t even been able to have a proper meal. Simple sandwiches had been placed before everyone, but they had barely eaten. It was because most people couldn’t express their opinions properly while eating sandwiches. It had been the same for Theodore, who had made the meeting like this.

“…Hah, I’m tired.”

Still, even after the meeting ended, he didn’t return to his bedroom. Instead, he walked with a tired gait to find someone. It was around midnight, so the person could be asleep. However, he was convinced it wasn’t the case.

Unsurprisingly, his confidence was exactly right.

“…Theodore?”

It was the place where the delegation from Elvenheim was

staying. In the lush garden, she was walking like a fairy. The moonlight shone on Ellenoa's green hair. She was Mother Nature's beloved daughter, and buds sprouted under her feet, filling this place with vitality.

Theodore forgot his words as he looked at her. He was accustomed to seeing beauty, but Ellenoa was an exception to his common sense.

Ellenoa was worried about him standing still, so she hastily approached and placed a hand on his forehead. "Theodore, are you feeling well? Your complexion looks bad."

"N-No, I'm okay."

"I'm glad to see you, but... what is so urgent that you came so late at night?"

Theodore took a moment to think after listening to her words. He had forgotten his words due to unforeseen thoughts. The words he had thought up during his walk here were now scattered. Then Theodore somehow gathered them together and opened his mouth, "Ellenoa."

"Yes."

"I have to participate in important work starting from tomorrow. Perhaps I won't be able to see you again before you return to Elvenheim. So, it is late, but I came to see you today."

"Ah..." Ellenoa was dismayed that she wouldn't be able to see him anymore, then she blushed at his last words. It was because of the atmosphere and the fact that he had come to meet her late at night.

Theodore didn't confirm or deny that positive thought as he gazed at her with a serious expression. "I've thought a lot about it."

"...Yes." In contrast, Ellenoa lowered her face with a red expression.

“It is as Ellenoa said. I don’t know if my answer right now is due to sincerity or a sense of responsibility. I didn’t come to see you before because I couldn’t answer, but I thought it would be cowardly to leave without saying anything.”

Then Theodore hooked his little finger around Ellenoa’s little finger. Even elves who didn’t know the culture of humans were aware that this meant a promise. Ellenoa raised her head with wide eyes and Theodore responded to that gaze.

“Please wait for a little bit.”

“……”

“I have to go to the world tree again. It is for Mitra, Myrdal, and various other reasons. But I won’t use that as an excuse.”

“…Then?”

As he felt her trembling finger and heard her trembling voice, Theodore swore firmly to himself as well as to her, “On that day, I will give you an answer on the branch of the world tree that we walked together.”

With this, his preparations were finished.

Chapter 213 – Upcoming Battle (4)

Meltor was a kingdom which was always prepared for war, so the gathering of their troops was 10 times faster and more secretive than that of other countries.

There was also a major difference between the regular army and magicians. Meltor utilized the dimensional pockets, so they didn't require a separate supply unit. Additionally, the magicians themselves were the source of their combat power, so they weren't burdened with equipment. This was why they could show a mobility which went beyond common sense.

Exactly three days after the meeting...

All the troops were gathered at Port Ribenda, an eastern coastal city in the Meltor Kingdom.

On a night when civilian access to the coast was controlled, the expedition unit which totaled nearly 1,000 people were waiting for their commander. Among them, the unit which contained the most people was the Magic Corps.

"The kingdom's 1st Magic Corps' 800 people! Commander is Viscount Carter!" Blundell's loud voice cried out as 800 soldiers saluted. It was a perfect example of military discipline.

Meltor's Magic Corps...

They weren't magicians but magic soldiers. They achieved up to the 3rd Circle using magic reagents and learned a few attack magic spells and secondary magic. They were nothing compared to one aura user, but six or seven of them could defeat one aura user. The magic soldiers had haste magic and the firepower of Fireball, which was comparable to the firepower of archers. 800 magic soldiers were equal to 5,000 regular soldiers.

"I, Bors Carter, will honor the name of my family and the royal family." The commander was also excellent. As a veteran of the

last war and someone who was still active as a 6th Circle magician, Carter had been appointed as the commander of the Magic Corps. Carter guarded the monster area in the West Forest, so his commanding abilities were well-proven.

Blundell's voice called out for the next unit, "36-man White Tower Mobile Unit! Commander is White Tower Master Orta!"

Orta was standing before 36 white-robed magicians with his usual mask.

Perhaps it was because they were both tower masters, but Orta politely bowed and returned to his original position. Thanks to Theodore, they didn't need to travel in the balloons. However, the magic support of the white tower could shorten the schedule.

They were a unit which focused on mobility rather than combat power. It would be good if even one of them had the power of the White Tower Master. However, Meltor's true combat troops were somewhere else.

"63 war mages of the Red Tower! The commander will also be White Tower Master Orta! The deputy is Red Tower Prime, Vince Haidel!"

This was a formidable mass of power. There were fluctuations from the 64 war mages as they responded to the call. If they worked together, they could defeat a master. Just a simple fire from them could burn down a whole castle.

"I, Prime Vince Haidel, will do my best as a member of the red tower to support the White Tower Master."

Vince had the influence of the ancient language magic system, so the vibrations of magic power coming from his body were intense compared to those of the others. Additionally, the fact that he was appointed as the deputy not long after becoming a Prime was proof of his competency.

Up to this point, there were 800 magic soldiers, 100 senior

magicians, and a group of four people, including Theodore.

“Finally, the four members of Quattro! Their commander is Theodore Miller! In accordance with His Majesty’s edict, Theodore Miller is given the right to act alone!”

Individual combat rights... Even though Theodore had the right to lead 10,000 men, it was different when he was a master magician. He was literally a one-man army. So, in order to exert his full force, it was necessary for him to move separately.

Theodore knew this meaning and bowed respectfully. “I, Prime Theodore Miller, will do my job as captain of Quattro.”

“Yes!”

Blundell looked dissatisfied when he saw Sylvia near Theodore, but then he faced the soldiers who were lined up. They were truly the elites of Meltor. His voice was like a light in the darkness as he ordered them to depart, “All troops! Board the ships in accordance with the specified units!”

The first one to move was the commander of the Magic Corps, Bors Carter.

“We will move! Observe carefully and board the assigned ships by platoon!”

“1st Platoon, follow my flag!”

“2nd Platoon! Move behind the 1st Platoon!”

The sight of 800 soldiers moving in an organized manner was spectacular. The soldiers who had gathered on the white sand disappeared into the ships without any problems. It was like a group of people suddenly disappearing into the night.

Theodore watched the scene before looking back at his teammates. There were understandable nerves present on the faces of two people, while the remaining person...

“Para?”

“Huh?” As she responded to his call with a cranky expression, there was something suspicious about the look on Paragranum’s face.

“Did something good happen? Why are you so happy?”

“Oh, you can tell?”

“Yes. What is it?”

“Umm… I’ll tell you later.”

Para meant when they were alone, which led Sylvia to stare at her from behind Theodore. However, grimoires didn’t have a lot of interest in human relationships, so Paragranum hummed while ignoring Sylvia. Theodore looked between the two of them with a bitter smile and figured out the reason behind Para’s look.

‘It seems like her research has gone well.’

That was the only reason why Paragranum would express such emotions. Lloyd Pollan had been used as an experimental material, so he might not even be ‘human’ anymore.

Theodore cleared his head and looked at the person approaching him. It was the beauty with blue hair, Aquilo the sea dragon. The dragon had come to the port out of boredom. She naturally slipped her arm around Theodore’s and whispered into his ear, “Boy, do you remember what I taught you?

“Of course. I can’t forget it.”

He had accepted her blood, but Theodore had the senses of a human and didn’t instinctively know how to use the dragon’s power.

Therefore, he had learned the trick from Aquilo on the way from Mana-vil to Ribenda. There was a limit to the involuntary manifestation of power. He needed to consciously manipulate the power in order to counter the currents against the fleet.

Fortunately, Theodore was successful in his efforts. His

widespread dominance over the sea had reached a level where he could somehow control the flow of the currents. The fact that he was keeping the moisture around his body at a pleasant state was proof of this.

“Well, this is just the basics. There should be no problems if you don’t encounter a typhoon.”

“Is that so?”

Aquilo nodded before saying goodbye in a low voice, “Then Boy, have a good trip. We will meet again, so you better not die in a place that I can’t see.”

“…What a bloody goodbye.”

“It is an ordinary saying for dragons.”

He really had no idea if it was a joke or not as Aquilo left without a backward glance. How many people had a dragon said goodbye to after living for thousands of years? Perhaps this coldness was the result of that.

Theodore watched her leave for a while before acting.

Huuung…

He used Levitation. It was a basic magic which allowed him to float in the air, but when combined with directional wind magic, it became possible to fly at low speeds. His red robe flapped as he rose from the sand toward Quattro’s ship.

Theodore’s ship was at the head of the fleet. It was a position for a major figure in the fleet, but the situation was different this time.

This was a sea where the south wind blew extensively. If Theodore didn’t open up the sea before him, this fleet might be pushed back to the sand instead of moving forward. As the wind blew with enough force to break the sails, the people’s gazes naturally focused on Theodore.

‘Hoo… Let’s try it like I practiced.’

If he failed here, the disruption would be huge. It would take a week to change the route of entry from Port Ribenda to land. Then the Soldun Kingdom would fall into the hands of Lairon and Andras.

Theodore was carrying a heavy responsibility. His eyes flashed as he gazed at the horizon. The color of the horizon was similar to Aquilo's fluorescent color. As he faced the flow of water, Theodore dared to use the dragon language which wasn't originally allowed for humans.

「море, Откройте путь (Sea, open the way)!」

He could only use Dragon Words three times a day, but there was no better way to add power. Theodore's voice wasn't loud, but his words pierced through the wild winds. Dragon Words, a language which dominated nature, transcended the laws of physics.

Then it happened after that. Suddenly, the wind blowing from the south to the north subsided and started to move in the opposite direction. The rough sea currents calmed down, and the waves moved toward the south.

The soldiers knew magic, and they couldn't help letting out exclamations of surprise.

"T-This...? Is that Theodore's magic?"

"No, this is ridiculous... Even weather magic can't change the sea...!"

"T-The sea! The sea is reversing!"

It was just like the soldier shouted. The sea was reversing. The south wind changed into the north wind, and the waves were moving in the opposite direction.

The winds inflated the sails of the fleet with a force so strong it seemed like the anchors would be pulled out of the seabed. It was a miracle where the enemy became a friend, and the adverse conditions were reversed.

When they realized the opportunity, the commanders raised their voices.

“Depart! Raise the anchors!”

“Helmsman! Don’t miss this no matter what!”

The voices of White Tower Master Orta and Viscount Carter entered Theodore’s ears. Despite the feeling of defeating the impossible, he couldn’t help feeling anxious about the future. The cumulonimbus thunderstorm on the distant horizon seemed to add to this anxiety.

Kwarurung...!

His senses had become much sharper after Mitra’s flowering, so they didn’t let relax his guard.

‘Maybe this trip won’t go smoothly.’

The Lairon Kingdom and the Andras Empire, both were enemies of Meltor. If they prepared for war after the truce, the damage wouldn’t be small. It was obvious that their power would be aimed at Meltor. This civil war was a fight to see who could gain a better advantage in preparation for that war.

Theodore looked ahead and saw the future. The horizon before him was shrouded in dark clouds and lightning.

Chapter 214 – The Swirl of a Civil War (1)

After leaving Ribenda, the voyage of the expedition was very smooth. Thanks to Theodore, the fleet slid through the sea using the momentum of the wind. The waves which should have caught the hull were pushed back, and the wind greatly inflated the sails.

Furthermore, the ‘Sea Dragon’s Blessing’ changed the direction of the wind and waves. The manifestation of this imperfect power was because the user was Theodore.

[Sea Dragon’s Blessing]

[The power which comes from the blood of Aquilo, the sea dragon who dominates the sea, is given to the owner. As a sea dragon dominates the sea, a person with the Sea Dragon’s Blessing won’t die on the sea due to natural causes. If the power increases, you can even breathe in water.

* Your ship will be given additional acceleration.

* You can transcend the environmental disadvantages of the sea.

* The wind and wave directions applied to you will always be favorable.

* You are still unfamiliar with using this power. You can’t increase or decrease the wind and wave power.]

Theodore stood at the prow of the ship and looked at the information window again. He remembered the words he’d heard while learning from Aquilo.

‘If I accept more of Aquilo’s blood or continue to use it, this power will grow…?’

The former required a corresponding price, while the latter couldn’t be done in the short-term. However, he felt like he was becoming more familiar with manipulating the currents. Unlike at the beginning when he hadn’t been able to concentrate on

anything else, he now had room to think.

Theodore stood on the deck and watched the rough currents. After a long period of concentration, it felt like his whole body was exhausted. He might have fainted if he hadn't trained his mental power.

"Sir Theodore." At that moment, a man approached Theodore, who had barely calmed his wobbly body. The person wore a luxurious cloak, had several artifacts, and wore light armor mixed with mithril. It was practical yet stylish.

Theodore immediately noticed the identity of the person and greeted, "How are you doing, Viscount Carter?"

It was Bors Carter, the veteran magician who was the commander of the magic troops in this expedition. He was famous for his 'red flame.'

Carter responded to Theodore's question with a confused expression, "Please speak more informally. We have left home and are heading to the battlefield, so we must thoroughly keep the hierarchy."

"...I will accept your advice, Viscount."

"Thank you."

It was as Carter said. Theodore was an honorary marquis, so his status was higher than that of Viscount Bors. Additionally, Theodore was the commander of a unit and had the same authority as the White Tower Master.

'I never dreamed it would turn out like this.'

Aside from what was right and wrong, it felt strange as Theodore was younger and more immature. Carter was a prominent nobleman and veteran who had experienced war in the past, so Theodore must seem like an upstart.

Yet Carter's attitude was politer than expected, so Theodore

asked with a puzzled expression, “Apart from the advice, I will ask you once again… Why has the Viscount come to find me?”

“It is nothing big. We will be having a life and death experience together soon, so I thought we could become more familiar with each other.”

“……”

However, Theodore couldn’t accept the remark and looked at Carter. It was because Carter seemed like he had something else to say to Theodore. The two men looked at each other silently for a moment.

However, the silence didn’t last long. Carter gazed into Theodore’s eyes before letting out a heavy sigh, “Hoo, I understand. I came here to apologize for my rude actions toward Lord Theodore.”

“Viscount’s rude actions?”

“The incident that happened during the academy.”

‘The academy.’ Theodore hadn’t been able to understand what Carter was saying until he heard those words.

‘Garcia Carter.’

In the first battle magic class, Carter had fought with Theodore and tried to keep his pride by using an artifact. That naughty person was Viscount Carter’s son. Theodore understood the meaning of Viscount Carter’s apology and glanced up.

The viscount didn’t know how to interpret Theodore’s expression and continued speaking, “My child almost caused a disaster. I will be sure to pay you back according to the Carter family’s honor once this expedition ends.”

Bors was serious. There was no flickering in Bors’ deep eyes, so Theodore didn’t doubt the authenticity of his words. Unlike many nobles, Bors wasn’t arrogant. So, Theodore was impressed with

the excellence of Commander Bors. Bors wanted to eliminate any discord before the full-scale civil war began. His apology was good so Theodore acted accordingly.

“No, I have already forgotten about it. Do we need to make a fuss about the past when we have such great responsibilities toward the country?”

The viscount looked at him with admiration for a while before bowing politely. The younger the age, the more gripped with emotions a person was. However, Theodore’s answer was perfect. He’d read Bors’ intentions and accepted them in an instant.

“Then thank you, Lord Theodore!”

“Yes, please take care.”

The two men shook hands on the deck. It was a strong handshake which shed all the nasty things of the past.

*

A fortnight after the expedition departed from Meltor, they reached Piris, a port city in the Soldun Kingdom.

If the sailors at the port had heard that, they would’ve doubted their ears. Generally, even with the wind blowing in the right direction, it would take 20 days to travel between Ribenda and Piris. There was no need to mention about what would happen if the conditions were adverse.

At this point, Meltor was ahead of any other country.

‘I haven’t seen this scenery in a long time.’

He couldn’t help noticing the lights of the city of Piris shimmering in the darkness. Theodore admired the night view with a sense of nostalgia, then he turned reflexively as he felt magic in the area.

A white robe fluttered in the aftermath of the space movement.

“White Tower Master.”

“Umm,” Orta suddenly appeared and spoke in a low voice, “We’ve arrived five days earlier than expected. The sooner the better, but the prince’s side might not be ready.”

“Yes, that is true.”

They had arrived at a speed so fast it went beyond common sense. Prince Elsid and Marquis Piris couldn’t be expecting them yet. So, it was possible that even if they sent a signal, the response might be delayed or there might not even be one.

However, since it was impossible to wait in this ambiguous place, Theodore prepared the signal which had been written in the letter. It was a magic light which couldn’t be seen without special magic tools.

Piing.

Covert Glow, the magic for the signal, was used. The light leaving Theodore’s fingertip caused a faint explosion in the air, but no noise or light accompanied it. However, anyone who looked in this direction using a magic tool would be able to witness the enormous surge of light.

“Wait for a while. If a response doesn’t come back, I will go and meet with Marquis Piris.”

“That would be best.”

The two men discussed the future as they waited for a reply.

“……”

“……”

After waiting 30 minutes, there was no reaction from the direction of Piris. Had they arrived too early? This might reveal the existence of the expedition. Theodore sighed and raised his magic power. He was going to see Marquis Piris himself.

…Splash.

Then at that moment, a sound tickled his ears. It wasn’t just him.

The White Tower Master heard it as well.

“Tower Master, did you hear that just now?”

“Well, I heard it.”

The two people looked in the same direction, and something moved closer through the shadows. It was a small boat. The trim hull waving the flag of the Soldun Kingdom was coming through the water. The expedition had turned off all their lights, so it took some time before they could see who was on the boat.

Theodore was startled as soon as he saw the person on the boat. “Marquis Piris?”

Marquis Piris cleared his throat and greeted Theodore, “It has been a while, Sir Theodore.”

Orta stepped back without intruding once Theodore had identified the person. It indicated that he would let Theodore talk to Marquis Piris. Theodore asked Marquis Piris about the thing he was curious about, “This is a little bit different from what was written in the letter. Was there a hidden password or something?”

“Kuhuhum! No, that isn’t it…”

Marquis Piris’ description had been very concise. The tool to send a reply would only arrive tomorrow morning.

It would’ve been fine even if it were delayed three days, but Meltor’s fleet had arrived too quickly. So, Marquis Piris had been forced to move personally. He was accompanied by a few of his most trusted knights.

The marquis looked around carefully and whispered in a small voice, “Sir Theodore, all these people… Does this mean that Meltor is completely siding with Prince Elsid?”

“Of course. We were planning that from the beginning.”

“Oh, very good! If we finish this fight successfully, I will repay you for all your help!” Marquis Piris was so delighted by

Theodore's answer that his shoulders shook a few times. He was so excited that he seemed drunk. However, he didn't forget his job. Marquis Piris pointed his finger in one direction and showed the place where the expedition could hide.

"Go that way. Outside of Piris, there is a coastal cave that is invisible to the human eye. It is possible to secretly anchor the ships there."

"I understand. I will follow your words." Theodore nodded, and the soldiers pulled up the dropped anchors.

This time, there was no need to control the sea currents. As the ships got closer to their destination, Theodore questioned Marquis Piris about the situation in the Soldun Kingdom. "By the way, I'm curious about the situation. We came as soon as possible, but I've heard a lot of rumors..."

"What, you've heard it as far as Meltor?"

"Yes. There seems to be a lot of talk about Lairon."

This wasn't a lie. It wasn't a rumor among the general public, but the agents of the white tower had clearly investigated and seen that the Lairon Kingdom had shown some movements. Marquis Piris couldn't deny Theodore's words and made a serious expression.

Then he replied firmly to Theodore, "We still aren't sure about the information. Do you still want to hear it?"

"Yes, it is better to assume the worst than to not know anything."

"Then... it can't be helped," Marquis Piris said while shaking his head like he didn't want to think about it. Then he opened his mouth, "This is a recent message from a spy I attached to Duke Cornwall. He saw a man in silver full body armor and holy relics hanging from his waist."

Theodore and Orta stiffened at the same time.

“…It can’t be.”

“……”

He had never seen them before, but Theodore knew of the people who fit that description.

They were the strongest swords of the Lairon Kingdom, fanatics who shielded the famous cardinals. The cardinals were people who claimed to be the agent of god, and in the old days, a fragment of the divinity of ‘Lairon’ had been planted in their body. Then every cardinal after that had the power of the god.

“Crusader.” It was a name which magicians proclaimed with disgust, as if they were chewing on shit. “In the end, the nobles have drawn in Lairon’s mad dogs.”

Chapter 215 – The Swirl of a Civil War (2)

The Lairon Religious Kingdom…

As a religious kingdom, Lairon was a kingdom built upon the foundation of a religion. It was in the middle of the Central Continent, and there was one reason why Lairon could endure having borders with four countries.

They were strong. Lairon was one of the strongest kingdoms in the central region, even if they weren't comparable to the northern powers. The source of their power which managed to counter four kingdoms was a third force, which was neither magic nor swordsmanship.

It was the only Sacred Order on the continent. They were a group which resolved to recover all the remains left behind of the gods from the Age of Mythology.

The king, or to be precise, Pope Benedict I, had been the first to wield a god's power by absorbing the god's remains. He then brought abundance to dry land and gave a mysterious power to those who submitted to the name of Lairon.

In the Dark Ages after the Age of Mythology, there had been a resurgence of interest in 'gods' and 'paladins.'

"In ancient records, they were praised as holy ones who healed the wounded and fought against injustice. They were adults who directly embodied righteousness." As Marquis Piris spoke, a bit of contempt filled his voice while they walked through the corridor. "It is all nonsense."

The paladins were deceitful and more eager to exploit than help people. The cardinals toured the countries once a year asking for 'donations,' and the current pope was truly arrogant. In addition to those, the church had built a facility to brainwash children, and all those who rebelled against the regime were labeled as heretics.

At their essence, they were ruthless people who pretended to be merciful.

‘Their exterior appearance is duplicitous.’ There was no saying more appropriate to describe the Lairon Kingdom.

Piris looked back at the party following him, and his face darkened before he added, “That isn’t all. The letter was sent with Marquis Baek’s son because there is an ‘opportunity’ that will assure the Lairon Kingdom’s intervention.”

“What do you mean by opportunity…?”

“I will tell you about it in the room.”

After saying so, the marquis entered a secret passage as Meltor’s presence had to be hidden until the civil war began in earnest.

All of Meltor’s troops were concealed in the coastal caves, and the supplies which could last 1,000 people for a month were thoroughly camouflaged. They were convinced they had the advantage as long as they weren’t caught.

After a while, the marquis beckoned at the end of the secret passage, “Come on, everyone. Five people can talk leisurely in this room.”

It was as he said. After passing the threshold of a damp cave, the four guests were greeted by warm air and antique furniture. White Tower Master Orta, the general commander of the expedition army, sat down first. Beside Orta was Theodore, Viscount Carter, and then Vince.

A light filled the eyes of the marquis when he saw this. ‘Hoh?’

It was because he couldn’t find any dissatisfaction on the faces of the other two, despite the second-ranked person being less than 30 years old. In other words, it was a complete acknowledgment of Theodore’s status.

However, like any crafty noble, the marquis didn’t reveal his

inner thoughts. Instead, he boiled the tea in the kettle and thanked the party who had come this far. After that, he continued speaking about Lairon again, “Around two months ago, an emissary came from Lairon.”

The emissary from the Lairon Kingdom had been a cardinal who called himself Antonio, and he had entered Prince Elsid’s palace boldly. Despite the security of the knights, he had appeared before the prince.

[It is nice to meet you, Prince Elsid. I am a faithful servant of Lairon, Cardinal Antonio.]

The cardinals, along with the crusaders, were known as Lairon’s spear and shield. A crusader would wield the power of god with their swords and shields, while the cardinals would create miracles by reciting special chants like magic.

Surprised by the visit, Elsid had asked what Antonio wanted.

[Lairon told us that you will have to serve him if you want to be successful.]

[...What are you trying to say, Cardinal Antonio?]

[It isn’t a big deal, Your Highness. Just build a temple worshipping Lairon, then send 100 nobles who will learn our teachings and preach it directly to your kingdom. If you do that, Your Highness will have no problem obtaining the crown.]

Understandably, the prince had gotten furious.

[How ridiculous! How dare you make fun of me with that crafty tongue?! Lairon is your god, not the Soldun Kingdom’s god! If you are going to speak like that, go away!]

The cardinals were famous for their fanaticism which wouldn’t tolerate any insults, but Antion’s response had been calm. He had smiled nastily and disappeared from Elsid’s presence just as suddenly as he had appeared. His expression had shown that Elsid would regret that day’s decision.

The marquis explained up to there and sighed with a tired face. Anger boiled inside him as he thought about it again. Antonio had snuck into the palace and then threatened the prince. The Lairon Kingdom might be strong, but Soldun wasn't a weak kingdom. Antonio's words weren't a proposal or advice but an insult.

"Still," Orta muttered after listening to the story. "It is unprecedented. If we refuse the impossible conditions, they will go to the other side. We are heretics who rejected god's grace."

"...Is that a justification for war?" Theodore asked.

Orta nodded while sipping his tea. "It might not be normal, but this time there is a power in the kingdom that agrees with them. The nobles have probably accepted Antonio's proposal."

"Then won't it just end up being a tributary of the Lairon Kingdom?"

"They would rather be a snake's head than a dragon's tail. That is the case with Duke Cornwall."

Were Orta's words wrong? The marquis sighed heavily. "That is accurate. Duke Cornwall is from a family that has been doing independent work since the past. He is a person who wants to surpass the title of duke."

A nobleman who wanted to be king, even if it was only in name, and a kingdom that wanted a puppet who would follow their will...

The interests of these two forces added up.

Duke Cornwall was the head of the faction opposing Prince Elsid, so a direct or indirect purge couldn't be helped after obtaining the kingship. The duke thought this was a great opportunity for a revolution, even if it dragged the Lairon Kingdom into it.

However, Theodore had one more question. "That reminds me, where is Lord Baek? I heard he became a marquis..."

"Oh, he is—no, wait a minute." After that, Marquis Piris got up

and pulled down a map hanging on the back wall.

It was a strategic map detailing every estate and troop in the Soldun Kingdom. The map was spread wide open, as if all the details had already been completed.

Then he pointed to a part on the open map. “Marquis Baek has received the Atron Estate. It is necessary to have his force at the border of the area containing the nobles faction. His main family remains in Piris, but the main troops have moved to Atron with Marquis Baek.”

Orta was looking at the map when he suddenly reached out and pointed to a red part. “What is this estate in red on the map?”

“It is Marquis Fergana. Ah, do you know about Marquis Fergana?”

“Of course.”

Not just Orta but Theodore, Viscount Carter, and Vince had also heard the name. It was the name of one of the the Soldun Kingdom’s two masters—7th Circle magician, Marquis Fergana. Vince snapped out angrily, “Does this mean that a 7th Circle magician has gone against his country and joined the nobles? I can’t understand it.”

“Marquis Fergana’s only daughter has married Duke Cornwall.”

“Ah.”

It couldn’t be helped if it involved blood relationships. Vince was convinced by this and stepped back.

However, Carter came forward this time. “What about Earl Mersen? If Soldun’s other master has joined the nobles, then this fight will be difficult.”

“Ah, Earl Mersen has declared neutrality.”

“Neutrality?”

Did it make sense to stay neutral in a civil war which would

decide the future of the kingdom? The group of people gazed at Marquis Piris with confusion. However, he just shrugged. “He doesn’t have time to worry about the regime change. He can’t leave his territory because he is defending against raids from the southern barbarians.”

If this was true, it could be either luck or misfortune. With Marquis Fergana and the unknown crusader, the enemies had two masters. If Earl Mersen had joined them, there would be three. On the prince’s side, there was only one master available, so there would have been no hope of winning if reinforcements hadn’t come.

With the addition of Theodore and Orta, Prince Elsid’s side now had three masters, putting Duke Cornwall at a disadvantage. At that moment, Theodore felt Orta’s gaze on him.

‘...Hah, I see.’

Theodore immediately recognized the meaning of Orta’s gaze and paused his thoughts momentarily. Meltor had two masters present on their side... Should this information be disclosed to Marquis Piris?

Orta left it up to the person involved to decide if the information should be revealed. Theodore thought about it before shaking his head slightly. ‘I will hide it for now.’

No matter how thorough Marquis Piris was, there was no certainty that the enemy’s eyes couldn’t reach them.

Wasn’t there a saying that if we wanted to fool the enemy, we should first fool our friends? Therefore, Theodore decided to hide his combat power. Orta and Baek Jongmyung could equal the two masters on the other side, so it was more efficient for Theodore to move separately.

Orta nodded, then he turned back to Marquis Piris and said, “At this point, the explanation is enough.”

They had heard everything they needed to know. Orta then placed several models on the map. There were different models based on infantry, cavalry, and magicians. Each of them was of a different size which represented the number of troops, and Orta placed the models down based on the explanation he had just heard.

“From now on, let us discuss the movement of the troops.”

It was the start of the strategic meeting.

*

In conclusion, Theodore’s role was no different from what had been discussed before leaving Meltor. He would move separately from the regular troops. After consuming the Aiolos Pouch, Theodore had become better at using space magic. It might not be as fast as Orta, but Theodore could still move at an amazing speed.

He also had more firepower than Orta. As Theodore combined both firepower and mobility, he was closer to an army than an individual. When it came to war, he was many times stronger than other 7th Circle magicians or sword masters.

The problem was that he had to go ‘alone’ in order to exert his power.

“Theo,” Sylvia called out. She was the first person to understand this problem. “We can’t help you?”

“Sylvia.”

“I’m not making a fuss. Tell me honestly. At the moment, we will just be a burden to Theo if we move together, right?”

It was a cool reflection. Theodore looked into Sylvia’s blue eyes instead of denying her words.

After all, it was just as she had said. As a 7th Circle master who had awakened his Sorcery and pioneered a new territory, Theodore could tell that the rest of the unit would just be a burden

in a fight between masters. They would be even more of a burden when it came to a guerrilla war.

The amount of magic power consumed for space movement would increase, and the time needed for the hit and run would increase greatly as well.

"...I see." Sylvia looked down at the unspoken agreement. "But those people would be able to keep up with you."

'Those people?' Theodore tilted his head to one side, but Sylvia didn't explain it. No, she didn't want to explain it. She didn't want to show him her jealous self.

She realized she needed more power to be on par with her rivals who had red and blue hair. Ripples started to form inside the quiet Sylvia. She struggled with the emotions boiling inside her before barely managing to speak.

"It is just this time. Next time, I won't let you go alone."

Chapter 216 – The Swirl of a Civil War (3)

As Theodore watched Sylvia's eyes flash with determined resolve, he replied, "Yes, I'll be expecting it."

Nevertheless, it wouldn't be easy. Theodore supported Sylvia's determination, but he also looked at her with the sober eyes of a magician.

Considering her age, she was a genius for having reached the 6th Circle without a cheat like Gluttony. That talent was a blessing which made Blundell Adruncus welcome her as a daughter, and also made her treasured by the blue tower.

However, the wall of the 7th Circle was solid and thick.

Unlike the previous circles, the 7th Circle was the path to leave the realm of 'humanity.' As Gluttony had said before, it was building up dharma and throwing off the restraints of karma. A mortal who relied only on their innate talent would come to a standstill.

It was up to Sylvia's mind and luck to see if she could cross the wall.

"Ah, I truly don't have any face. I'm just listening to my juniors talk like this..." At first glance, William was speaking to Theodore, but he was actually blaming himself.

He had been a prodigy since childhood, and his confidence had grown greater as he showed his skills in the white tower. William wasn't a master yet, but it was very rare for someone to become a master in their early 30s. He thought that he could achieve it in the next 5~10 years and become the next White Tower Master.

Yet Theodore wasn't even 30, and he had already surpassed William.

'It is too unsightly,' William thought. He had been idle for too long. Although he spent 10 hours a day practicing magic, the

fierceness of his apprenticeship days had been forgotten. William needed to work hard from now on. His vision was no longer cloudy as he decided this.

Only Paragranum was consistent with her usual attitude.

Rattle.

She glanced over at William and Sylvia with a frown. Then once they left, she smiled brightly. Theodore felt the usual chill down his spine as she stepped closer. Para exclaimed, “You are finally alone!”

Theodore was surprised by her hasty approach and asked carefully, “Y-Yes, why?”

“I told you. I would explain once we were alone!”

“Ah.”

Was it when he asked if something good had happened? Theodore belatedly remembered and gazed carefully at Paragranum, who didn’t look like her usual self. Her outward appearance was a cute girl in her late teens, but her essence was something which transcended humanity.

‘Sigh, I need to be prepared.’

The relatively moderate Gluttony had no hesitation in recommending ‘human sacrifices.’ He couldn’t imagine what a grimoire who repeatedly did human experiments was like. Theodore sighed tiredly and kept his eyes warily on Paragranum. It was creepy just looking at her flushed face.

“You will definitely like this!” Paragranum cried out as she touched a bracelet on her right wrist. It was similar to the bracelet which was used to call the living armor. Unsurprisingly, a summoning spell was used, “Summon Automaton!”

Simultaneously, there was a flash from the bracelet. Normal people couldn’t see through the magic light, but Theodore

gradually perceived a moving shape.

‘A human?’ It wasn’t a coincidence that Theodore thought this.

The object Paragranum had summoned had an appearance no different from that of a human male. It had skin, physique, hair, and weight like that of a human. Dressed in gorgeous armor, the object was like a knight from a storybook.

Then Theodore flinched as the light faded away. “Lloyd Pollan?!”

The hair wasn’t the only thing which gave it a shallow resemblance. Lloyd Pollan was fully armed and looked just like when he had tried to invade Paracelsus’ laboratory. It was because Theodore didn’t feel any sensation coming from the body that he didn’t take knee-jerk actions.

Theodore grasped the identity of the uncomfortable feeling he had and muttered, “Corpse…?”

“No way!” Paragranum, however, denied it with a loud voice. “Have you already forgotten? There was the golem that you gave to me from the laboratory.”

“…Come to think of it.”

It was a model of a knight in full body armor. Theodore remembered the same and looked at Paragranum. That hadn’t just been an empty armor. It consisted of metal parts and artifacts. In that case, how could the model have recreated Lloyd Pollan’s appearance?

“Magicians of this era don’t know about automatons.” Paragranum noticed Theodore’s doubts and banged on the automaton’s face. It was a signal to appraise it. Theodore didn’t have any other way, so he complied.

‘Appraisal.’

The slippery tongue touched the automaton’s cheek. Theodore frowned at the sight of the tongue licking the cheek, but it didn’t

last long. That was natural.

[Automaton – Sword Master ‘Lloyd’]

[The apex of the automatons: the earliest form was the ‘android’ which the dwarves, who were familiar with mechanics and ancient civilizations, created. The Earl of Saint Germain, the late alchemist of the Age of Mythology, tried to make an artificial god in the final form of an automaton. However, it was said that he failed the experiment and lost his life. This automaton contains the soul and central nervous system of the sword master, Lloyd Pollan.

* This automaton is rated ‘Treasure.’

* It isn’t possible to use predation on this automaton.

* This automaton currently doesn’t have an owner.

* The automaton has limited autonomy in ‘battle’ and can’t make decisions on its own without the owner’s instructions.

* The Aura Ability, ‘Pathfinder,’ can be used in a limited manner.]

“Crazy!” Theodore cried out. “This is no different from a necromancer’s undead!”

Using the body as material, it was like creating undead from corpses. This was black magic which was taboo on the entire continent.

However, Paragranum smiled and shook her head in denial of Theodore’s words. “You fool! How can you compare the nasty undead to an automaton, when their compositions are completely different? Do you treat goblins and ogres as the same species because they both have two legs?”

“Please explain it properly. What is different?”

“The automaton isn’t vulnerable to divine power like the undead, and it can function semi-permanently as long as magic power is supplied. The later automaton models can fuse the egos.

But this is an early type, so it isn't possible."

Anyway, Para didn't care since it was an enemy, so she kicked the shin of the automaton. Was it due to her enmity toward Lloyd?

Theodore's thoughts were complicated. According to Paragranum, this automaton wasn't an undead. However, it was clearly an existence which was very similar to the undead. This was a combat weapon made from a body, and it was absolutely obedient to its master's will.

Theodore knew the cause of his reluctance. 'Isn't it outside humane standards?'

When it came to one's purpose of existence, grimoires and humans were different. In the past, Theodore had received a deadline, but he hadn't hesitated to refuse human sacrifices. It might be Paragranum's work, but wouldn't Theodore be complicit if he took advantage of her creation? This question troubled his conscience.

"So? Will you accept my gift?" Despite knowing Theodore's anguish, Paragranum pressed him for an answer with an innocent expression. To the grimoire who longed to create a human, the automaton was just a piece of data.

Theodore didn't take long to make a decision. "...I will accept."

"Hoh, is it okay? You look quite worried."

"Strength is power. The problem is how to utilize it. If I can use it in the right direction, I will have created a means."

"I've seen many hypocrites make up excuses. What about you?" Para's red eyes looked Theodore up and down with devilish interest. Theodore got a chill down his spine as she took the bracelet off her wrist and threw it at him.

"Pour in your magic power and state your name. Then give that guy a name. That will make the automaton move like a puppet according to your commands."

As such, Theodore injected magic power into the bracelet.

Wuuuong…

There was intense magic resonance, and Theodore could sense the automaton before him. It was similar to back when he made the contract with Mitra and Hugin.

‘Connecting the souls.’

The moment he was convinced the string of the contract was established, Theodore opened his mouth, “Theodore Miller.”

Then the automaton’s information window was updated.

[* The automaton is currently owned by ‘Theodore Miller.’]

A strong demand was passed down through the contract link. The automaton was like a doll which had lost all freedom, but it wanted a name. Theodore didn’t sympathize with Lloyd. Lloyd was an enemy and had lost his life. He had come to a one-sided end by messing with a grimoire.

So, Theodore would give the automaton a new name. After receiving the name, Lloyd would be Theodore’s puppet, losing his name and status.

“Gladio.”

It was just ‘sword.’

Kiiing—

The eyes of the automaton lit up in response to the word. A deep aura flowed from the still body, and it regained its vitality. The pressure filling the surroundings was the remnant of Lloyd Pollan, one of the empire’s Seven Swords.

However, Theodore watched it with an expressionless face.

‘The sword master called Lloyd Pollan no longer exists.’

It was a relationship where the soul was subjugated. Lloyd’s ego had already been scattered as dust, and now the automaton with a

mechanical will would execute Theodore's commands. This was the moment when Lloyd Pollan died and the battle weapon, automaton 'Gladio,' was born.

Kiik, kik, kkiiik.

Gladio was stiff in the beginning, but it eventually moved in front of Theodore. Then it naturally flowed into the proper etiquette, which was evidence of the great loyalty Lloyd had to the emperor of Andras during his life.

Then a voice came from their soul connection, [Gla—dio sees mas—ter.]

Theodore looked at the knight kneeling before him and eventually nodded. It was a power he had chosen and a responsibility he had to bear.

Chapter 217 – All-out War (1)

While the expedition was stowing away at Piris, there was a banquet in the mansion of Duke Cornwall, who was the head of the nobles faction.

Anyone else would shake their heads at this.

This was a time when a battle over the throne of Soldun was going to break out, yet he was holding a banquet? No matter how superior his side was, victory and defeat couldn't be known until the end. Duke Cornwall was smart enough to know that much.

However, the biggest issue was that it was the guest who had wanted the banquet. The crusader who came from Lairon had said his name was 'Ruben.' Then this paladin had gone on to demand luxurious treatment without regards for virtue. He directly demanded young noble beauties and the best wine from the warehouses. People naturally scattered in every direction to avoid the paladin.

Regardless of whether Ruben knew it, his excesses didn't stop.

"All this abundance is due to Lairon's blessing, and this fact shouldn't be forgotten! Hahaha!"

Ruben had baron's daughters in both of his arms, and he crossed his legs casually with a smirk. Who would think that a paladin could be so rude?

If it wasn't for his shining sword and armor, he would've been a bandit in the mountains. The daughters, who had been brought to this spot without knowing anything, couldn't budge when he touched their bodies. Meanwhile, the paladin's loud and vulgar laughter echoed throughout Cornwall's banquet hall.

In the midst of this, there was one person who felt the most uncomfortable.

"I'm glad you are liking the banquet, Crusader Ruben."

It was the number two of the Soldun Kingdom. The ambitious Duke Cornwall was the one who wielded the most power after the king, and he coveted the throne. Yet such a person was being humiliated like this? Even the current king of Soldun, Elmore IV, couldn't disparage Cornwall's name in public. There were fewer than five people who dared to not bow stiffly to him. Regrettably, one of those people was the crusader in front of him.

"Oh, Duke! I didn't know you would show such great hospitality to this Ruben!"

"...Thank you for saying that." Duke Cornwall didn't know where to look as he gritted his teeth and gripped the sides of his seat.

He was the one who would lose if he chased Ruben away. The duke had to be patient, just a little more patient. He would act after obtaining the Soldun crown. In the meantime, he had to put up with it, at least until he took care of Prince Elsid.

Still, Duke Cornwall had some pride left, so he couldn't help muttering with some dissatisfaction, "I don't doubt Sir Ruben's dignity, but it is okay to be drinking? You need to use that blade to cut the neck of the Eastern person."

"Cough." Ruben dropped his cup onto the table like he felt upset and then turned to Duke Cornwall. "Do you think that I can be defeated by those who come from the land of barbarians?"

"That is impossible. Crusader Ruben, Lairon's sword, will surely win. I just want the process to be smooth."

"Hrmm... Then I will forgive you. Duke, you have no idea."

What didn't he know? Duke Cornwall felt uncomfortable and looked at Ruben. However, Ruben just picked up his alcohol glass and didn't explain any further. Alas, the atmosphere was colder than it had been before.

The nobles' daughters almost screamed as Ruben's hands

squeezed, then the pressure of a master class pressed down on the minds and bodies of the people in the hall. Duke Cornwall's eyes widened as he felt his breathing clog up.

'This is crazy...?'

He had deluded himself with his authority. This pressure was ridiculous for Duke Cornwall, who had never learned magic or swordsmanship.

This year, the duke was 60 years old. Placing such pressure on an elderly body could be life-threatening. If it lasted for one minute—no, 30 seconds, he would be killed by a heart attack before he could even wear a crown. Duke Cornwall would've died if a third party hadn't intervened.

Paang!

The momentum of two masters resonated temporarily, causing the pressure to disappear. Ruben's eyes narrowed when he saw the phenomenon. Crusaders were masters, so the only one who could offset his pressure was another master.

Everyone's gazes turned to one place. A knight in full plate mail was leaning against the wall of the banquet hall. The knight's face was covered with a thick cloth, and he hadn't said anything from start to finish. He had stopped Ruben's actions, but the knight had no intention of coming forward.

"... What is this, imperial dog?"

The unidentified knight replied to Ruben, "Better than being a dog of the church. Did you grow up like a horny bastard?"

"Ha, ha, ha."

Wuuuong...

The momentum of the crusader and sword master tangled together in the air, producing a gust of wind. Duke Cornwall couldn't even think of mediating between them, while the two

beauties on both sides of Ruben turned pale.

If two masters collided in such a narrow place, there would naturally be casualties among them. Suddenly, the air of battle in Duke Cornwall's room stopped.

"....."

"....."

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the two masters lowered their momentum at the same time. It would be different if they could overwhelm each other, but their skills were about even. They realized that if they sincerely fought, one of them would surely die.

"You are lucky, imperial dog."

"....."

Unlike the angry Ruben, the imperial knight was calm, and he turned away without answering. He completely ignored Ruben.

Duke Cornwall felt a strange pleasure at seeing Ruben being treated like this, but on the other hand, this situation was very unpleasant. It was the duke who had laid out this whole situation, yet he could control neither the crusader nor the swordsman.

'No, this humiliation won't last long.'

Elmore IV was lying in bed, and he would die soon. Duke Cornwall had the support of the Lairon Kingdom and the Andras Empire, so the prince who had accepted the Eastern family would just become a stepping stone.

His ancestors had kneeled down to the royal family, and now Duke Cornwall was one step away from his wish. He would restructure the royal family in the name of Cornwall.

"It is starting now."

Darkness filled Duke Cornwall's eyes.

"It won't be long until the crown enters my hands..." Duke

Cornwall murmured in a quiet voice which no one else in the banquet hall could understand.

*

Exactly four days afterward...

Coincidentally, it was exactly three years after Elmore IV collapsed from a serious illness. So, this was truly perfect. It hadn't been because of a poison, nor had there been assassins involved. In addition, it hadn't been because of a magic spell.

Then Elmore IV died on the dawn of the third year. The crowd rushed over, and the doctor shook his head with a deep sigh. A black flag was flown from the top of the palace in honor of the king's death. Then everyone, from the nobles to the poor, began to panic.

The royal family and the noble faction... The small nobles who didn't belong to either faction noticed that a spark was being lit between them. Then the two forces moved at the same time.

"His Majesty has died! My contact in the royal palace has confirmed that he has died from his illness!"

"Earl Halsun and 12 other nobles have reportedly returned to their estates!"

"Duke Cornwall had left the castle!"

The dozens of spies in each estate and the cities took action.

Elmore IV had died.

So, the forces belonging to the nobles faction moved, while the prince's side joined Baek Jongmyung. Information shouldn't be exchanged, but it poured out like a flood. Toward which direction should they prepare and respond to?

In that part, the royal faction was one step ahead of the nobles. The royal faction, led by Marquis Piris, moved quickly according to the plan they'd devised at the strategy meeting a few days ago.

It was because Meltor's commanders had a lot of practical experience. Among them, one combat troop arrived at the border between the two forces at the fastest speed.

*

[Vince Haidel's unit, 332 troops. We have arrived at the border of Earl Halsun's estate.]

[Bors Carter's unit, 332 troops. We have arrived at the border of Viscount Kerun's estate.]

Orta, with 200 magic soldiers behind him, nodded at the reports of the two commanders which came in through the communication magic ball.

"Okay. Magic soldiers, charge your magic power," Orta said as he gazed at the horizon with cool eyes.

Earl Halsun was in the west.

Marquis Reista was in the middle.

Viscount Kerun was in the east.

Those areas were inevitably the fiercest battlegrounds where the royal and noble factions would face each other. Everyone would think so and tighten up their positions thoroughly. They had to build up their defense firmly before attacking the opponent. This was a law that was the essence of the Central Continent, which focused on retaining what they had rather than using a momentary explosive force.

'It has long been considered antiquated in the North.'

This was shown in the difference in the composition of troops. Unlike the Central area where general soldiers made up the majority, the North had a number of elite troops such as magicians and magic soldiers. Their explosive power couldn't be blocked by high walls or thick gates. So, the Northern tactic was that it was better to attack than defend.

It couldn’t be blamed on the incompetence of the nobles. Unlike the Andras Empire which had experienced this crazy mobility, the Soldun nobles were accustomed to the pace of normal armies. They couldn’t imagine that infantry would move faster than cavalry, or that a hundred troops could take down a castle.

The nobles tried their best, but the incomplete defensive line proved to be a gap.

“...The rest is finished.” Orta looked at the magic soldiers and raised his hand. “Follow behind me and use the circle formation. The top priority is killing the knights and commanders.”

Despite his low voice, there was no one who couldn’t hear the instructions. They pounded on their chest loudly before rotating their circles. They were one to three magic circle users. It was awkward to call them magicians since they had only learned a few secondary magic and attack magic spells, and were primarily warriors.

However, the momentary burst of magic power caused the earth to shake.

Kukukung...!

Dust, smoke, and fires rose from the forts. Their approach had been noticed, but at this point, it was already too late. With the desire for victory and the determination to not allow defeat... Meltor’s elites weren’t weak enough to be defeated by soldiers who had been drafted without any pride.

“Go,” the magician in the white robe said shortly before he flew.

Huuung.

His goal was Marquis Reista’s estate. The sight of a lone magician heading toward a fort seemed reckless, but the soldiers following him knew it wasn’t.

Supreme Orta of the white tower, before he became the tower master.

His career had already been legendary even before the reign of Kurt III. Orta had killed one of the empire's Seven Swords, and he was a secret agent and assassin who never failed in his operations. It wasn't uncommon for him to break a siege by himself.

"Elimination Sphere."

A huge amount of magic power boiled over, and a few black spheres appeared around Orta's body. The spheres were so ominous that anyone in the area could sense it, as they seemed to suck away at all light.

There were some magic soldiers who looked confused at what the spheres would do. However, the veterans who had participated in the last war were different.

"T-This is...!"

"No doubt! It is the Destruction Bead!"

Destruction Bead...? While the rest of the soldiers were confused, Orta fired the black spheres at the estate. Was it an explosive type magic? Or was it an attack magic that could penetrate steel?

Hundreds of eyes filled with anticipation as a total of eight spheres struck the estate's defenses. Then there was silence.

"...Eh?"

"What? Is it over?"

"Did he make a mistake?"

"No, you idiots! This...!"

Then at that moment...

"Spread." Orta looked at the spheres evenly spaced around the gate and then moved his fingers. It was a simple squeezing gesture.

————————————.

The gate disappeared.

No, to be precise, a certain range of the gates centered around the

spheres had been ‘deleted.’ The estate’s gates which were made of high quality cast iron and steel, and the walls which were made of solid rock, as well as the soldiers who were pulling bowstrings, had all vanished without a trace. A part of Reista Estate had been cut away unnaturally.

This was the power of the 7th Circle magic, ‘Clear Space.’

“A-Ahh… Ahhhhhh!”

“Uwaaaaack!”

“W-What is this?”

“D-Demon! This is clearly a demon’s work!”

It wasn’t unreasonable to think like this after witnessing such a sight. The commander and soldiers jumped from the walls or killed their allies in an attempt to escape. Orta’s magic was unrealistic and gave rise to fear which went beyond common sense.

This was literally hell.

Orta looked down at the frantic soldiers of Marquis Reista and declared, “Strike.”

Chapter 218 – All-out War (2)

This was a frontal breakthrough! It could be said that victory or defeat had already been decided by the magic attack which had destroyed common sense in a siege war.

Their opponent was a monster who had destroyed the gate and four walls of the estate simultaneously. Unless there was a sword master or great magician in Marquis Reista's estate, there was no one who could interfere with Orta's magic.

Additionally, 200 magic soldiers had come at the same time. The circle formation surrounded the front and rear sides of the estate perfectly, maintaining its form while still keeping its terrifying mobility. By smashing the soldiers and knights in the front, the magic soldiers entered Reista Estate without much difficulty.

"Report if you find the commander!"

"Kill instead of capturing the knights!"

"I have found a senior knight on the right side! The 2nd group will handle this!"

"The 3rd group is on the left side!"

There were clear voices in the midst of the confusion. The magic soldiers broke into groups of 20 with each having their own role. They rushed through the estate and destroyed the enemy soldiers.

The gap between the elite soldiers and the untrained farmers could be seen clearly.

'It is over.'

A short time after arriving at Reista Estate, the command system of the defending soldiers had long since collapsed. The commander hadn't been caught yet, but it was a meaningless survival if all the knights were killed.

A man in a white robe and mask floated in the sky like a ghost,

then he descended toward the ground. It was because he was convinced of their victory, but it was also because of another reason.

“You came?” A calm voice spoke from under the mask. As Meltor’s best space magician, Orta’s senses already transcended physical limits. He didn’t miss a single breath from behind the collapsed walls.

Unsurprisingly, a haggard-looking knight appeared.

“…You can’t win.”Orta declared.

It was Marquis Reista’s knight. The middle-aged man pulled out the sword at his waist with a detached expression. Then the other hidden knights raised their bodies from the wreckage. One, two, three, four… There were 14 altogether. It wasn’t much. Even so, Orta couldn’t underestimate the flames of resolution burning inside their eyes.

“Still, we will die as Reista’s knights.”

“Well, okay.” The white-robed magician raised his white-gloved hands. “Come.”

The knights fought with all their power.

Pababak!

They rushed forward with an unusually strong determination. The knights cut out any unnecessary movements, and their combined aura swelled to double that of Orta’s power. The proud knights of the Soldun Kingdom awakened with the crisis they were facing.

The 14 knights wielded their swords with a sense of unity, and the burning aura blades poured out like a shower.

“-Not bad.” Orta turned his head and lifted a finger.

Chwaaaak!

There was an eerie sound and then a fountain of blood. Human

body parts were scattered, and the surrounding debris was turned red. The dizzying smell of blood spread about, and one drop of blood fell on Orta's robe. With just one bloody drop on a pure white robe, all of the Reista knights were killed.

"Hrmm."

The bloodstain would be easy to get rid of with Clean magic, but Orta left it. It was a reflection on himself and a last honor for the knights. Orta looked around at the battlefield and the battle which was almost over.

Then he pulled out the communication ball and demanded, "Left and right wings, report your current situation."

Three estates had been attacked almost simultaneously. The Reista base lost, so now there were only Halsun and Kerun remaining.

The first answer came from the left wing, Vince Haidel. [Reporting. Currently, the army has completely wiped out the Halsun knights. We are using this momentum to enter the castle, capture the earl, and calm the general public.]

"This is much faster than expected. Did you provoke them?"

[That is correct. They ran out onto the plains several times and couldn't survive the fire arrows. It was simple."

In any case, Earl Halsun's knights seemed much worse than Reista's. It had been planned for Vince's side to act weak, but for the knights to fight a plains battle against fire magicians... It was obvious that they wouldn't be able to escape the 300 magic soldiers and 32 war mages.

Their aura defense wouldn't be able to endure the fire magic, and their armor would've melted. It was right to say that an incompetent commander was the worst.

As soon as Vince stopped talking, Bors replied, [Reporting. We have destroyed every watchtower and opened the gate. Now, we

are endeavoring to destroy the remaining troops. Additionally, Viscount Kerun has escaped using a teleport scroll. The destination is presumed to be the Cornwall Estate.]

Magicians had attacked the estate. A wall which didn't even have anti-magic defenses installed lost all meaning before a magician.

The magicians could create shields to defend against arrows and jump over the walls with Float magic, so there was no way to block them. In fact, they jumped like a flock of sheep. Viscount Kerun's soldiers wouldn't be able to hold on for long.

"It is straightforward. By the way, the rats are quite thorough to have prepared teleport scrolls."

[Isn't it an item given by Duke Cornwall? It isn't an object that a viscount would have.]

"I agree. It is just a guess, but the possibilities are close enough."

After organizing the report, Orta put the communication sphere away. Earl Halsun's estate was already taken over, Reista was almost finished, and Viscount Kerun had fled first before anyone else.

Orta flew into the sky as he thought about what to do now. It had been six and a half hours since Elmore IV died, and three key areas in the nobles faction had been taken down by the royal faction's surprise raids.

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The news obviously entered the ears of Duke Cornwall, who had prepared the teleport scrolls.

"...Halsun, Kerun, and Reista were taken at the same time?"

With an absurd expression, he looked down at the knight who brought him the report. Viscount Kerun might've escaped, but Earl Halsun and Marquis Reista hadn't been able to survive even half a day?

The estates had been thoroughly reinforced a few years ago just for today, but the reinforcements hadn't been effective at all. Duke Cornwall frowned for a moment before shifting his gaze elsewhere.

"The prince had that much firepower reserved? Or did he bring in reinforcements like I did...?"

Looking at it rationally, it had to be the latter option. There was no way that the number of troops needed to capture three estates at once could escape the duke's intelligence network. Just like how he had accepted support from Lairon, the crown prince must've called for support from elsewhere.

The duke wasn't stupid. Lairon and Andras were attached to him, so there was only one place left which would support Prince Elsid.

"Indeed, it is Meltor."

A master magician was a superpower who could be called an army. The duke had seen Marquis Fergana's power, so he was well aware of how terrible they could be. There had to be at least one, maybe two masters. The masters were the foundation of the Northern powers. Therefore, it would be difficult to dispatch three masters.

Duke Cornwall's guess was almost perfect. He had the capabilities to be king. However, although the duke accurately guessed the truth, he didn't feel fear. The three estates had been important, but there was something more important than those.

That was Marquis Atron's estate which the army was currently advancing toward. The army was a large one, with a total of 30,000 troops.

"It will be soon."

"Yes, My Lord. Our objective is Marquis Atron."

Shapes became clear on the horizon. It was Atron Estate, the land which had recently been given to the Eastern person. Originally, it should've gone to the duke's faithful subordinate, Brahms.

Duke Cornwall made a disgruntled expression as he stared at Marquis Atron's walls.

"It is a terrible place for a man who isn't from here."

Marquis Atron had died without any kin. It had been a rare chance to swallow up an empty piece of land, but the prince had taken it. However, the duke hadn't come to strike this place because of his personal feelings.

It was because Prince Elsid was inside! The nobles would win if the center of the royal party, the heir to the throne, were captured or killed. The loss of three estates was painful, but the duke could recover from that damage. It was more urgent to take care of the Eastern sword master with the prince.

Duke Cornwall turned toward a splendid carriage which didn't fit on the battlefield.

"Crusader Ruben." The duke's words were soft, but a master could still hear them.

"Duke, is it finally my turn?" The fully armed Ruben descended from the carriage. He couldn't hide the smell of alcohol and perfume.

Duke Cornwall didn't look at him as he nodded and pointed at Atron Estate. "That's right. The lord of that estate is the one who was born in the land of the barbarians."

"Oh, I won't show any mercy," Ruben spoke with fanaticism in his sharp eyes. "The heretics who rejected God's mercy, I will slice their necks."

According to the Lairon Church, people from the East were unclean existences. They were born heretics in the eyes of God and weren't part of God's providence. For them, Easterners were the number one targets to be killed.

For this reason, not a single Easterner lived in Lairon. They killed anyone who looked like they were from the East. Ruben suddenly

turned and asked, “You are quiet today, imperial dog. Are you scared?”

“……”

“Bah, how annoying.”

There was still no response. The sword master from Andras remained silent after the friction on the first day. He had no intention of being active.

Duke Cornwall thought about when he had first met the knight.

–I won’t step forward unless it is absolutely necessary.

Would it be enough with just Ruben? It was true that Lairon and Andras were different. If the Andras’ knights identity was revealed, it could cause a problem with the entire Central Continent. Furthermore, it wasn’t good to owe a debt to Andras. From Duke Cornwall’s standpoint, it was better for Ruben to solve all of this alone.

‘If possible, I would also like to have Marquis Fergana here…’

Unfortunately, Fergana had refused, saying that he couldn’t leave his estate. Marquis Fergana was a 7th Circle magician and considered family, but the duke couldn’t force him. It had only been possible to become allied with Marquis Fergana because the duke was an in-law.

Duke Cornwall shook his head and shouted, “Full force! From now on, we will prepare to siege Atron and enter the estate! Each unit should move quickly according to the commander’s orders!”

“As My Lord commands!”

Simultaneously, the nobles returned to their respective armies. The troops present weren’t conscripts but elite soldiers of each estate. In addition to their training, their performance was several times better than that of farmers.

At Duke Cornwall’s orders, the tens of thousands of soldiers

became one.

“Move quickly while being on guard against the marquis’ troops!”

“Set up the barricades!”

“The depth of the pits should be uniform!”

“Where are the anti-teleport artifacts?”

They set up barricades and dug trenches. In the meantime, the cavalry looked around in case of ambushes. During the next two or three hours, the preparations for the siege would be completed. The nobles, including Duke Cornwall, watched the process and smiled with satisfaction. It would be really ‘soon.’

However, the nobles didn’t know one thing. A crow was flying above them, and a magician shared its vision.

“...It looks like I’m not too late.” A young man dropped down behind Marquis Atron and the duke’s military camp. It was a feat possible for him because he had teleported over a long distance with lightning.

This was the emergence of Theodore Miller, who could be called the greatest variable in the Soldun civil war.

“Now, how should I turn this board upside down?”

A single Joker had dropped down behind the nobles faction.

Chapter 219 – All-out War (3)

‘The quickest way to end the civil war will be by assassinating Duke Cornwall.’

Just like how the center of the royal party was Prince Elsid, the center of the nobles faction was Duke Cornwall. He was also the person in charge of negotiations with Lairon and the one with a relationship with Fergana.

In other words, it was all over if Duke Cornwall died. Additionally, there was no other noble who could take the king’s seat as they would just be torn apart by infighting. The problem was whether it would be possible to assassinate Cornwall.

“It is hard. I have too many skills,” Theodore clicked his tongue and muttered.

There were around a hundred knights and 30 magicians of the 4th Circle in the vicinity of the elderly man who seemed to be the duke. Additionally, the man in the silver armor was probably a crusader.

In order to deal with this situation, he needed a magic spell like Abraxas. However, the process couldn’t go unnoticed due to the tremendous amount of magic power which would be generated.

Above all, the power of the crusader was unknown.

As a result of observing through Hugin’s eyes, Theodore found out that the crusader was called Ruben. There was a long sword at his waist and an impressive shield at his back. It was difficult for someone to find suitable weapons after reaching master level.

It was because a weapon couldn’t bear the destructive power of a master class unless they were legendary grade.

They would hit without being damaged…

And cut without being cut back.

For that, it was more useful for masters to move quickly and flexibly, rather than wear thick armor and wield a shield. Low-rated aura shields had long ceased to exist in Andras.

‘Maybe this is the difference between a crusader and a sword master…?’

The difference between the two jobs, a sword master who only used Aura Ability and the crusader who used divine power, might be larger than he had thought. Theodore didn’t know if his guess was correct and continued watching Ruben.

It was the first time he had seen a crusader, and the crusader’s presence was different from the fierceness of aura and the grandeur of magic. Was this called ‘faintness?’ The crusader seemed to be reachable yet unreachable, like he was both close and distant. In a sense, this might be the essence of a ‘god.’

Theodore felt a yearning from Dmitra and Aiolos inside of him.

“Um, the crusader…” Theodore muttered when he heard a voice.

–A crusader, what is this?! Gluttony woke up and exclaimed. –It isn’t possible for a new divinity to be born after the collapse of the Pantheon, so how does a crusader still exist?

“Pantheon? What is that?”

–The cradle of the gods. It is a fixed temple for gods who became too close to humans. I heard that it was destroyed at the end of the Age of Mythology… The frustrated Gluttony spoke incoherent words to Theodore.

The existence of a ‘crusader’ was unexpected in many ways, but Theodore could feel a connection to Gluttony’s consciousness. However, that unstable consciousness didn’t last long, and the reason soon became known.

-…What… User, are you saying that half-trash over there is a crusader?

If the party involved had heard it, he would be furious at the insult.

“Half-trash?”

–No, it is my mistake. I said too much. Gluttony relaxed and picked his words carefully. –That half-man is trash. If he saw a ‘real’ crusader, he would commit suicide from shame.

“Wait, then that man called Ruben is a fake?”

–Of course. A true crusader is an agent of the gods, a superhuman who is a demigod.

This time, it was Theodore who stopped breathing. A demigod was like Paracelsus, who had been a grand master during the Age of Mythology. Demigods were transcendents who could smash a mountain with one blow, tear the sky apart, and turn the sky upside down.

If Gluttony was right, not just Ruben but all the crusaders were fakes. If they possessed such a large number of transcendents, the entire continent would’ve already been unified by the Lairon Kingdom.

As Theodore thought about it, he realized, ‘No, the crusader’s authenticity doesn’t matter right now.’

It was certain that a crusader could exert the power of a master, regardless of whether they were genuine or fake. Right now, Theodore needed to think about how he could lead this battlefield in favor of the royal faction.

“Should I wait for the battle to begin before ambushing from behind?”

It wasn’t a bad tactic. A 7th Circle magician alone had the power to collapse an army. Needless to say, an army was unfamiliar with fighting a master magician. However, Theodore shook his head and rejected the idea. It was thanks to Alfred Bellontes’ experience which remained in his head.

“The military power is too great for me alone. It is hard to pursue an attack within the estate, and the duke will probably be surrounded even in the rear… It won’t work.”

Additionally, his senses were warning him that there was another danger besides the crusader. Theodore didn’t realize the reason yet, but his instincts unconsciously filtered it out. He went through the standard procedure, thinking of how to defeat as much people as possible and how to mitigate as much damage as possible…

Then at that moment…

“…Eh?” A short question emerged from Theodore’s mouth as he watched the two camps. A familiar person jumped down from the walls of Atron Estate just as a crusader walked forward from Duke Cornwall’s side.

“A one-on-one confrontation in this situation?”

Baek Jongmyung and Ruben, a sword master and crusader… The masters of the two camps met exactly at the midpoint. At first he couldn’t understand the situation, but Theodore soon realized the thoughts of the two commanders.

‘The prince is short on power, so he doesn’t want to waste his troops. Meanwhile, the duke doesn’t want to waste time.’

If the crusader won, Duke Cornwall wouldn’t have to fight anymore, and he would win the war. Moreover, there was a difference in the number of masters. Even if the crusader lost, Duke Cornwall had Marquis Fergana, so he would still be even with Prince Elsid.

“This might be a good chance for me.”

As the confrontation between the two masters became fiercer, Theodore moved from his spot. He needed to change his position in order to implement his envisioned method.

…How could he let the father of his fellow disciple die?

*

Baek Jongmyung, now Marquis Atron, looked a little bit different from before. He wore a chest piece of a mithril-like material as well as all types of artifacts to enhance his body. Baek Jongmyung didn't like it, but he knew it wasn't his place to fight 'unarmed.'

So, Baek Jongmyung pulled out his sword with a slight sigh.

"I don't like competing in a place like this... but I will duel according to the will of my master." Baek Jongmyung greeted his opponent first, "It is nice to meet you, foreign religious guardian. In my hometown, there were people like you who defended the doctrines of God."

"What?" Ruben uttered.

It had been spoken without any malice, but this stabbed at the Lairon fanaticism. They didn't admit the existence of any god other than Lairon. People who didn't serve the will of Lairon would be judged. It was blasphemy that a heretic from the East, a land of savages not recorded in the temple, would dare refer to a 'God.'

Ruben's expression hardened. "A heretic from the land of barbarians... You dare to mention the existence of God with that filthy mouth? An infidel dares speak such rubbish to me, Ruben? I will tear you apart a thousand times!"

Woong woong woong woong!

Due to his fury, power rose from his body like steam. The white power was different from aura or magic. It was the power of a god that had long since vanished from the material world. The power became a golden haze which dyed Ruben's silver armor, sword, and shield. It was truly a fantastic sight.

"First, I will cut off that tongue!" Ruben's eyes became bloodshot.

"...Um, he is insane." As he watched the rabid Ruben, Baek

Jongmyung clicked his tongue. He didn't know what mistake he'd made, but Ruben didn't look like he was in a normal state. This was close to the demonic state of madness which sometimes appeared in Eastern martial arts.

Kakiing. Baek Jongmyung started using his Soft Sword.

"Atone with your life, heretic!" Simultaneously, Ruben jumped forward.

Hwaaak!

The air currents exploded, and a shockwave occurred, causing the soil on the ground to scatter.

The principle behind it was unknown, but Ruben launched into a godly acceleration with just a single step. His speed was faster than that of a flying arrow and was closer to that of a lightning bolt, making the gold armor look like a comet.

His charge contained enough destructive power to smash a gate! In response, Baek Jongmyung stood still while raising his sword. He pointed the tip of his sword toward Ruben, as if responding to a frontal match. He closed his eyes and muttered, "Pierce the Moon Style."

A silver colored aura gathered like moonlight on one point and then...

Chaaeng! A metallic sound rang out.

"Ugh?"

"Cough."

Two people made a sound at almost the same time. Ruben, who had performed the mysterious acceleration, also received a corresponding shock from Baek Jongmyung's sword. It was probably a coincidence, but the two incidents coincided.

They weren't able to break through?

Ruben was someone who destroyed the fortified walls of a

fortress with a single dash, while Baek Jongmyung was someone who killed his enemies with a single blow. Both of them were in shock at having their attacks blocked because they were confident in their own strength.

Baek Jongmyung had fought against several masters in his hometown, so he recovered from the shock first.

'If he blocked my first blow, how about this?'

There was a rain of sword energies. As soon as the sword blurred, a silver showdown between the two masters began.

Pipipipiping!

There were horizontal and vertical slashes.

36 strikes stabbed with the accuracy of a needle stabbing through a hole. It was more powerful than what he had used while competing with Theodore in the past. Once he activated his Aura Ability, this stabbing was close to invincible.

It was faster and sharper than before. The terrifying sword technique contained the essence of the Baek Family. Ruben seemed like he would be turned into a beehive. However, instead of having a triumphant smile, Baek Jongmyung's expression was dark.

'...Why?'

Despite attacking relentlessly, he was the one pushed back.

It was as he said.

Ruben stepped forward one step at a time while facing the shower of death, while Baek Jongmyung had to step back. Due to the nature of his Soft Sword, it was necessary for him to secure a certain distance with Ruben.

Kaaang!

Once again, Baek Jongmyung's stab was blocked by Ruben's golden shield. It was a stab which contained the power of a master, yet it couldn't pierce through the metal. Baek Jongmyung's

eyebrows twitched as he was forced to go on the defense.

‘That shield is a problem!’ He could tell with his discerning eyes.

Baek Jongmyung was able to tell with one glance that all of Ruben’s equipment was unusual. The equipment must be part of Ruben’s body. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be able to defend against his Aura Ability.

“…!”

It might be a coincidence or a trap… but the shield which defended Ruben’s entire body was momentarily pushed outward by a few centimeters. The gap was only a few fingers wide and couldn’t really be called a gap, but it was good prey for Baek Jongmyung.

Baek Jongmyung was troubled for a moment. He wondered if he should take advantage of this gap, and if it would cause him to win or lose.

‘I can do it.’

He felt an instinctive anxiety and confidence that he had accumulated over the decades. In the end, the latter won. Baek Jongmyung breathed in and gathered the momentum for a deadly blow.

Piii-ik. The sound pierced through the air. At a speed not even visible by a master’s eyes, a single strand of silver struck the gap between Ruben’s golden shield and longsword. This was a blow he had trained for half a century.

Baek Jongmyung thought reflexively about his victory because his timing was too precise. Then Ruben’s sword shone gold half a beat later.

Flash!

Chapter 220 – All-out War (4)

The collision of the white flash and golden glow caused an explosion to occur.

However, it was a noise too complex to be grasped by a human. The sword master's aura and crusader's divine power poured out, and the struggle of the two powers caused the space to be disturbed.

The expression 'piercing the moon' was accurate in regards to Baek Jongmyung's sword technique. Meanwhile, divine power was known as 'God's Hammer' in the religious kingdom.

These two aimed at each other.

————————!

Blood splattered. There was a clashing sound, like the strike of a hammer, and armor was broken, causing blood to splatter from the gap. This was natural. As mentioned before, a master's attack power was much higher than their defense. So, even a master would suffer a serious injury when facing another master.

"Cough!" The middle-aged Baek Jongmyung was thrown back, and he grabbed at his left shoulder which was bleeding. It was an injury that he shouldn't have received initially. 'Speed' was an absolute strength when it came to a battle between masters since it could control the game. Baek Jongmyung was leading as he had pierced through Ruben's gap perfectly.

He looked at his opponent with a confused expression. 'Surely he didn't ignore defense in order to counterattack...!'

That's right. Lairon's crusader, Ruben, had revealed his upper body beyond the shield and received the stab.

Of course, he had managed to smash Baek Jongmyung's left shoulder, but it was definitely Ruben who received the more serious injury. Baek Jongmyung could still continue fighting

despite his left arm being neutralized, while he had clearly pierced Ruben's right rib and lungs.

As his wound bled moderately, Baek Jongmyung continued to think, 'That said, his swordsmanship doesn't make sense. The shape of his weapon is a sword, but he uses it more like a hammer or an axe.'

Ruben hit instead of cutting, so his swordsmanship was more like a bombardment, rather than slashing. It was a meteor-like swordsmanship which wielded the blade with an enormous amount of power, capable of blowing away the space where the target was located.

It couldn't be called excellent, but it was absolutely effective in terms of killing his opponents. After all, although the technique might be sloppy, it had managed to crush Baek Jongmyung's shoulder.

"...It seems as though the match is over."

However, Baek Jongmyung was sure of his victory. A master might be more resilient, but they were still human. Damage to areas like the lungs was fatal. If it wasn't treated in time, dying would be unavoidable.

"I don't think that you will respond, but you may be able to save your life if you surrender."

This wasn't Baek Jongmyung's own thought but what Prince Elsid had said to him. Lairon supported the nobles faction, but this relationship would collapse if Duke Cornwall failed. However, the situation would change if a crusader were killed. The Lairon Kingdom might use his death as a pretext to fight the winner of the civil war. If possible, Prince Elsid wanted to win with the best scenario.

"-Hah," a sound emerged from Ruben's mouth. "Ha, haha." It wasn't a moan. It wasn't even the sound of a human who had

difficulty breathing through his right lung. “Hahahahaha!” It was a burst of laughter. Ruben laughed like he was crazy.

As such, it wasn’t unreasonable for Baek Jongmyung to get an ominous feeling and step back. This was because the madness didn’t seem like the bluff of a seriously injured person. Ruben shouted with a distorted face like a laughing demon, “The battle is over? Surrender? Heretic! The barbarians seem to have a talent for joking!”

Once again, the golden energy emerged. It was a force which never compromised in its strength, as a vast halo of divine power wrapped around Ruben.

‘Dangerous.’ Baek Jongmyung gulped. He didn’t know why, but Ruben seemed fine. There were no signs that showed Ruben had consumed a lot of his stamina. In fact, he seemed even more formidable than before.

“I am Ruben, who has received Lairon’s grace! A mere savage like you… You think you can beat me?”

Ruben became a mass of light and raised his sword, causing the long blade to turn into a 10-meter-long pillar of light. The crusader was overtaken by fanaticism.

“I won’t leave a single piece of flesh remaining on your blasphemous body!”

*

Duke Cornwall declared with a satisfied face, “Victory.”

It wasn’t baseless confidence. The crusader was indeed overwhelming the Eastern sword master. It wasn’t unusual to feel worried at the sight of Ruben’s blood spurting out. However, the duke had been made aware of the crusader’s strength a few days ago.

Despite his injury, Ruben continued to attack.

“It seems it is true that Lairon’s crusaders won’t die unless their heads are destroyed.”

Unlike magic which changed a human body structurally, divine power greatly amplified the body’s inherent vitality. Ordinary people would die from a few cuts from a sword, but the owner of divine power was like a half-immortal.

Unless they were killed at once, the battle duration would be forcefully dragged out, especially when they were at the master level. If Baek Jongmyung had known this, he wouldn’t have chosen the attack he’d used. This was a disaster arising from his ignorance of the continent, as divine power and crusaders didn’t exist in the East.

As a result, Baek Jongmyung had made a mistake which was difficult to turn around, and he was being pushed closer and closer to the edge. If this continued, he wouldn’t be able to last for even an hour more.

“The rest of his troops aren’t great… It seems like I can clean up with the prince today. This is a truly silly fight.” As he spoke, Duke Cornwall’s face was beaming with joy.

This was a checkmate. If the forces who occupied the three estates continued to march, Marquis Fergana would block them. Then Meltor’s troops would lose their cause as soon as the prince was captured.

Duke Cornwall had prepared anti-teleport artifacts in preparation for this. So, Prince Elsid wouldn’t be able to escape and would die. A smile of joy emerged on the duke’s face.

‘Today is the best day of my life. The wind is cool, the shadows are just right— Wait, shadows?’ Duke Cornwall thought up to here and looked up at the sky with bewilderment.

When he thought about it again, the shadow shouldn’t be there. Due to the construction work, there were no trees around and the

sky had no clouds. Considering that it was just after noon, the sun shouldn't have declined yet. If so, where did this shadow come from?

The duke and the other nobles looked around curiously. However, they immediately regretted it at the next moment.

'Ah, I shouldn't have have looked back,' they thought.

"G-Giant...?" Someone's voice emerged.

However, Duke Cornwall didn't blame them. That reaction was natural, as before their eyes, there was an earth giant that was more than 50 meters tall. It was a situation which would freak anyone out. The whole army started to murmur at the appearance of the earth giant.

"C-Captain, how do we deal with that?"

"Should we shoot it with archers?"

"Stupid! What if that makes the giant attack us? Don't move until you receive a command!"

"B-But we can't do nothing..."

It was a mistake not to address the situation immediately. The airtight defense line became a mess, and the soldiers left their spots, causing the perfect formation to collapse. In the distant sky, a crow was watching the army which had become a mess. Naturally, the crow was Theodore's familiar, Hugin.

"Okay, the first stage worked better than I thought."

The giant was an improved version of the Earth Worm that he had made a long time ago while travelling with Sylvia. At that time, Theodore had gotten a headache from the attempt, but he was different now. Mitra's growth to a top-grade elemental also helped with that.

Now, she was able to control even a huge giant over 50 meters tall. The moving dirt which weighed thousands of tons was a mass

weapon in itself.

“Well, I don’t plan to attack with this guy.”

Theodore closed his eyes. He didn’t want Mitra to be covered in human blood, so he came up with a more effective method.

‘Mitra, can you hear me?’

As soon as he called, he heard a little voice respond, [Yes! Deo’s words clear!]

‘Yes, well done. Then shall we go to the next step?’

Since the flowering of the bud, Mitra developed another power. It was proof that she had thrown off the divinity of earth and was acquiring a new divinity, just like Paracelsus had said. Then Theodore ordered the use of the ‘technology’ that he had talked about with Mitra previously.

‘Let’s go, Mitra! Sow the seeds!’

[Hoing!]

This was the moment when Mitra gave up on the earth giant.

Hwaaaaack!

The earth giant collapsed, scattering hundreds of thousands of seeds in every direction.

“W-What are these grains?”

“Captain! It is impossible to avoid!”

“They don’t seem toxic…”

“Maintain your positions! Those who move will be punished!”

The soldiers were bewildered, while the knights swung their swords at the seeds several times before giving up. The curious magicians were busy analyzing the seeds. The commander’s voice echoed as he tried to control the camp, but it was clear that it was already too late.

Something happened as the seeds hit the ground.

Kukukung... kukung... kukukukung...

First, there was an unknown vibration. The soldiers heard the noise coming from the ground and looked at each other with uneasy expressions. The commanders were also struggling because they didn't know what was going on. The vibrations covered a range which couldn't be avoided just by moving.

Before the leaders of the troops could understand the situation, the event started.

Kukukung!

Beautiful trees began to grow. Roots sprouted from the tiny seeds, and the trees grew to a size which could be seen in a jungle. That wasn't all. Zelkova trees, oaks, camellias, willows, ginkgo trees... A huge number of trees grew from the ground, with no difference between softwood and hardwood trees.

One tree, ten trees, one hundred trees...

The plains where Duke Cornwall's army was camped became covered with thousands of trees.

The trees grew among the adult humans, breaking their bones. Some people got caught in the branches and were sent soaring into the sky, while other soldiers struggled against the mysterious phenomenon... The area had turned into a terrible mess.

Theodore watched the situation quietly and said with a smile, "Ah, Mitra. I'm sorry, but I have to make another request."

[Hooing!]

The seeds flew in the wind. Those seeds, blown along by the wind, soon reached their destination. It was the midway point in the battle between and Ruben.

Kukukung. Kukukung!

"What!?"

“No!? What is this?”

The trees grew as if to separate the two people. Ruben brandished his sword and cut down several trees, but there was no end to the growing trees.

Unlike Ruben who had missed a favourable situation, Baek Jongmyung realized that this was an opportunity for him. He didn’t cut down the trees like Ruben was doing. Instead, he quickly retreated toward the estate. It was imperative that he get away.

“This guy! You don’t know honour! Come back!”

Theodore watched the situation and couldn’t help laughing. He didn’t know that a crusader could behave so unsightly. This was proof that Lairon had rotted long ago, just like Marquis Piris had said.

However, Theodore’s laughing expression soon hardened. He had achieved everything he intended, but then he sensed something.

‘This presence… a sword master! Who is it?’ Theodore sensed the presence and prepared for battle.

He was several times stronger than when he’d fought against Hyde, but he couldn’t help worrying when had to fight another master. Moreover, the person was approaching him at a fearsome speed. This person wouldn’t be an easily dismissed opponent.

‘This is a very annoying situation.’

This area had anti-teleport artifacts in place, so space transfers weren’t allowed. In order to escape from this area, he would have to use lightning which burdened his body. While staring at the approaching sword master, Theodore decided to leave escaping as a last resort.

Soon, an uninvited guest in body armor dropped down before Theodore.

Duk.

The guest wore heavy armor, and the speed at which he dropped down was no greater than that of a flying arrow. It was proof that he had complete control over his own center of gravity and inertia. He was entirely covered in armor and seemed to have no intention of revealing his identity.

Theodore rotated his seven circles and muttered, “...Andras’ sword master... Is he one of the empire’s Seven Swords?”

Chapter 221 – All-out War (5)

The empire's Seven Swords were the only sword masters who would emerge at this stage.

The swords which represented the empire, Andras' Seven Swords... Hyde and Lloyd had died, so two seats were empty. However, considering the size of the empire, they could easily fill those seats. Additionally, there were five sword masters remaining, so it wouldn't be difficult for them to infiltrate the troops.

Theodore was taut with tension as he thought about it. 'Let's say the person is one of the empire's Seven Swords. Then... which one is he?'

It might seem like a trivial question, but it was the most serious problem. According to magicians, the Seven Swords possessed a power equivalent to their number. The 7th Sword Lloyd and the 6th Sword Hyde were considered the weakest among them if there were no errors in the order.

Theodore decided to start a process of elimination.

'It isn't the 4th place.'

Pan Helliones was so impressive that Theodore couldn't forget it. However, even compared to Pan Helliones, the 1st and 2nd Swords were much greater. In that case, this sword master could be everyone except for number 4, 6, and 7.

Theodore recalled Veronica's words about them, –Ah, Kid. It doesn't matter if it is No. 1 or No.2. The two of them might be the strongest in Andras, but they shouldn't affect you.

Theodore had questioned her, 'Why?'

–Both of them don't move outside Belfort, the capital of Andras. Even in the last war, they never crossed the borders unless the emperor ordered them.

‘If it happened in the past, they could act now…’

–No way. Well, if it does happen, you will be in big trouble. You won’t be able to survive an encounter with them.

Veronica’s advice was ruthless and decisive.

‘It was cold, but she makes a lot of sense.’

He would definitely die against an opponent who was on her or Blundell’s level. Theodore had only just awakened his Sorcery, so he wasn’t on a level to face them. They were monsters when it came to fighting. As such, the peak swordsmen of Andras were too powerful for the present Theodore to face.

Then this meant the only ones remaining were No. 3 and No. 5.

Either way, Theodore’s artificially raised senses could catch even a grain of dust. He would attack if the sword master took one step further. A strong power rattled around the body of the determined Theodore.

As his string of tension was pulled tightly, the unidentified sword master made an unexpected action.

‘Huh?’

The sword master placed his hands at the swords hanging from his waist.

Ching!

Then he didn’t hesitate to release the swords. The two swords fell to the ground, producing a heavy metal sound. His intent was unknown, but he had disarmed himself.

Even if he was a sword master, picking up dropped swords involved unnecessary movements. A magician with exceptional mobility like Theodore would be able to attack the sword master a few times before the swords would be picked up.

Theodore’s expression became one of dumbfoundedness. ‘Is this a trick?’

His opponent's strange actions didn't end here. The knight in black armor raised a hand to the faceguard wrapped around his face. Theodore didn't feel any hostility, so he watched while maintaining a certain distance.

Snap.

Finally, the faceguard was peeled away.

"Ah!" Theodore let out a cry of amazement when he saw the face of the sword master. The sword master had a patchy beard but his face was familiar.

"Randolph?"

"It has been a while, Young Master." Randolph shrugged with a familiar smile. "There are many things I want to share, but I can't afford to. Still, there is some time to explain. How about it?"

"...Please be as detailed as possible." Theodore didn't doubt Randolph and lessened his magic power. His extremely sensitive senses were telling him that Randolph was innocent. They had traveled together for a long time, so he could tell when Randolph was lying.

"Okay, where should I start...?" Randolph sat down at a nearby tree and frowned while picking up his words. Then he sighed and started talking, "I will start from when I separated from you in the wilderness."

Shortly after separating from Theodore in the Sipoto wilderness, Randolph had crossed Andras' border. The level of the empire's guards wasn't low, but mere soldiers couldn't detect a sword master's stealth.

As such, he had successfully passed into Andras and arrived at the capital, Belfort, where he had encountered an obstacle—the empire's 4th Sword, Pan Helliones.

"I was supposed to secretly sneak my sister out... but he is extremely sensitive. As his disciple, she was always near him, and

it seemed impossible to bring her out without a fight."

Randolph had been forced to choose. Should he cause friction and try to pull his sister out, or wait for a chance to appear in the long-term? He had secretly hidden on the roof of the knights' area and found a reason to make his decision.

"I saw the empire's 2nd Sword, Zest Speitem." Randolph's voice trembled involuntarily. He had only seen Zest from a distance. However, before Randolph had even been able to blink, Zest's sword had already arrived at his throat.

If Rebecca hadn't been there to prove his identity, Randolph would've died right there. There was a huge difference between their skills. They were in a metropolitan area, but he would've died no matter what he did.

"So, I decided to wait. I became Andras' knight and waited for an opportunity to escape with Rebecca. That was the only option I could make in that situation."

"...You have gone through a lot of trouble."

"Well, I didn't know that chance would come so soon!"

Hearing the depressed voice suddenly become cheerful, Theodore was confused. "Huh? Opportunity?"

"I met Young Master again! I wanted to, but I really didn't know we could meet," Randolph said. Then before Theodore could reply, Randolph continued speaking, "Listen to me, I'm not the only one sent here from Andras. I am accompanied by Pan Helliones, who is trying to test my loyalty, and Rebecca is accompanying him."

"Are you serious? Is it because she is his disciple?"

"I guess so. I can't do this alone. But the story is different if both of us work together."

The command from the Andras Empire was simple: intervene in the Soldun civil war to prevent Meltor from taking advantage, and

don’t allow them to take any further action. Randolph’s persistently passive attitude was also due to this order.

However, what if there was a variable which could force Pan Helliones to move? A crusader and Randolph should be sufficient, but what if the situation turned disadvantageous?

‘Pan will have to get off that heavy butt of his.’

The emperor’s orders were the highest priority, so Pan Helliones would place intervening in Soldun’s civil war above watching Rebecca. Meanwhile, Randolph could use that chance to free his sister from the empire.

Theodore looked at the premise of the operation and nodded. “It is possible. Do you have any means of communication?”

“No, that…”

“Take it.” Theodore threw over to Randolph an earring which was attached with communication magic. “You can just hold it in your palm without wearing it.”

“Oh, is that so? I will use it well.”

“Let’s talk longer next time.”

Randolph said goodbye before putting on his faceguard again. He picked up his swords and looked exactly like a knight once more. Then Randolph ran in the opposite direction. The black armor receded in an instant, and Theodore sighed.

The serious situation had happened so fast that his breath was taken away.

“Ah, my body is very exhausted.”

However, this wasn’t the end. Theodore now had to enter Atron estate and convey word to the prince. He sighed heavily and flew toward the estate. It was a complex and tiring day.

*

“Ohh, Sir Ted! No, now it is Sir Theodore!”

“Are those trees from you? Thank you in the name of the king.”

Theodore arrived at Atron Manor and received great hospitality from Baek Jongmyung and Prince Elsid. It wasn’t surprising since they had been contacted by Marquis Piris in advance. It seemed like they had more questions about the suddenly rising trees, rather than Theodore’s appearance.

In particular, Prince Elsid’s attitude was very different from before. Was it because Theodore’s identity was clear? Theodore was now approached with a friendly attitude, different from when he had been an uninvited guest.

“Sir Theodore, I would like to say one thing if it isn’t impolite.”

“Speak.”

“There are a lot of strategies that can be developed when looking at the forest that you created. What is the limit of that power?”

“It is difficult to say in detail but…” Theodore said and then worried for a second before replying with a half-truth, “Except for the trees that fit the ecosystem of the land, everything else will soon wither away. My elemental has also consumed too much power today, so I can’t use the same method for a while.”

It wasn’t a lie. Mitra had a limit in controlling the power of life, no matter her divinity. The forest, which was growing at present, was just a temporary measure and probably wouldn’t last for more than a few days. Additionally, Mitra had fallen asleep, and Theodore’s magic power was quite exhausted. It was too risky to use it again when he had to engage with the empire’s Seven Swords.

Elsid made a regretful expression when he heard the decisive answer. “Umm, it is too bad.”

“I’m sorry that I can’t meet your expectations, Your Majesty. Then what about your wound, Marquis Baek?”

Baek Jongmyung looked at his bandaged left arm with a grim expression and sighed. “It… Isn’t it obvious without needing to speak?”

“I understand.” Theodore understood the meaning from Baek Jongmyung’s heavy tone and entered the manor. It was difficult to speak about it in front of the troops. A sword master was a force which could control the morale of the entire army. If such a person were known to be seriously injured, morale would fall instantly.

Unsurprisingly, the wound underneath Baek Jongmyung’s bandage was terrible.

“…This is serious.”

The left arm had broken bones as well as torn ligaments and muscles, while the nervous system was just on the verge of necrosis. It was a wound which seemed to have been caused by the hammer of an ogre, rather than a human swordsman. Proper treatment from a magician would take more than a month, and there would still be aftereffects.

He wasn’t in a state where he couldn’t fight, but he wouldn’t be able to last 10 minutes against Ruben with this body. Theodore’s expression hardened at the sight. Meanwhile, Baek Jongmyung sighed. “This is my fault, Your Highness. I knew my opponent was an expert in the sword but…”

“Don’t blame yourself, Marquis. It was my decision that sent you there, so I must bear the burden.”

“Your Highness…!”

The two people were being melodramatic, but Theodore didn’t like this atmosphere and looked at the palm of his left hand. He saw that the two people weren’t paying attention to him, so he took something out.

‘Appraisal.’

[+16 New Advanced Recovery Potion (Medicine)]

[-This is a new potion made by the hands of the alchemist, Paracelsus. It is possible to rejoin cut areas or revive a nervous system which experienced necrosis. It will restore all injuries, except for brain damage and central nervous system defects. Currently, there is no way to produce it.

* The rating of this potion is ‘Treasure’.

* When consumed, the body will greatly recover from any damage.

* When applied, the damage at that site will heal rapidly.

* In order to create this potion, the ‘Alchemy (Best)’ skill and ‘Paracelsus’ Research Laboratory’ is needed.]

This was a potion Paracelsus had made. It had been common in the Age of Mythology, but it was impossible to determine its value in this age. The potion was rated Treasure and could be compared to an elixir.

Nevertheless, Theodore handed the potion to Baek Jongmyung without any hesitation and said, “Drink half and sprinkle the other half on your wounds. It will be effective in a minute.”

“...This is clearly not an ordinary potion!” As a sword master, Baek Jongmyung could tell the value of the liquid that Theodore handed him and wondered if he could drink this. However, Theodore had more in his inventory, so he just waved his hands like it was nothing.

Right now, a sword master was more important than a potion.

“You can pay me back later. Right now, Lord Baek’s power is needed.”

“Well, it will be awkward to keep refusing. I will receive Sir Theodore’s grace.”

Baek Jongmyung bowed his head and healed his left arm, while Prince Elsid and Theodore continued talking about the battlefield.

Before leaving Piris, Theodore had heard about how Orta would move in the future. Theodore's purpose was to pass this information to the Atron Estate and protect Prince Elsid.

Theodore delivered Orta's words, "The White Tower Master is planning to start at the three captured estates and will move to deal massive damage to Duke Cornwall's forces. Atron simply needs to hold out until then."

"Will the duke's forces before us really retreat?" Elsid was skeptical. He knew his value. As the King in a chess game, the civil war would be over if the prince was caught. So, the duke would try to catch him here, even if his forces took a lot of damage. Otherwise, there was no reason for him to have dragged a large army to Atron in the first place.

Theodore would've made the same judgment, but this time was different.

"The troops will definitely retreat."

"I'm curious. How are you so sure?"

"Wait a few more days. In any case, the duke's troops won't be able to approach until the trees disappear."

Theodore could understand Elsid's doubts, but he could answer with conviction because he realized something. After awakening his 'Sorcery,' Theodore realized that less than half of the competency of White Tower Master Orta, the leader of the white tower, had been revealed.

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Theodore's prediction came true after seven days. Duke Cornwall's forces were able to approach the estate when the forest disappeared. However, they retreated suddenly. Atron sighed with relief, but it was a huge loss for Duke Cornwall. The loss of troops was small, but there was an enormous cost associated with moving such a big army.

This battle shifted from checkmate to an ordinary check.

It took exactly six days. In that time, eleven estates, which were around the three estates on the border area, fell. Orta and the magic troops dug precisely at the estates' vulnerabilities and killed the knights at each estate.

Using his excellent mobility, Orta attacked the next goal before they could receive news of the attack. Then he left troops at the rear to build up defenses and kept advancing while repeating this.

It was Orta's unique military style.

In the end, the duke was furious and forced to retreat to Marquis Fergan's estate. From the position of the nobles, there were two mice, and one of them was stealing from their rice bowl.

Following this, both camps were quiet. The first full-scale battle of Soldun's civil war entered a short lull after a few surprises from the royal faction.

Chapter 222 – Babarino Plains (1)

The nobles who hurried away from the Atron Estate managed to recapture six out of the eleven occupied estates.

That was possible due to their 30,000 troops. There were also the elite knights and magicians of each estate. It wasn't at a level where their enemies could endure for long. After all, it was only because the elite troops had been missing that 11 estates had managed to be taken, so it meant that the royal faction's strength wasn't overwhelming.

However, Duke Cornwall soon ran into a problem.

"No... Those bastards took all the supplies?"

This was an act from Meltor's tactics manual, but it was a culture shock for the nobles who were experiencing it for the first time. It was due to the dimensional pockets!

The war mages who entered the battlefield kept their supplies in their dimensional pockets, and it was possible to use them differently according to the orders of the commander. Depending on the situation, there were cases when the pockets could be used for 'plunder.'

Orta had known it would be difficult to defend the estates from the nobles, so he chose to plunder rather than occupy. He took everything, including food from the warehouses, the military supplies, and the secret safes in the mansions.

The lords of each estate screamed at the cruel act of their enemies leaving no lumps of gold behind. Moreover, nobody was compensated for the damages due to the current situation. The nobles of the six estates would now be pushed to the corner of the political circles because of this sabotage.

Duke Cornwall knew this and cajoled them, "Don't worry. I will make sure you receive no damages from this once I rise to the

throne.”

“I-Is that right? We will only believe in My Lord.”

“You are really our only angel!”

These morons were destined to become consumables, but the duke had another problem. He needed to persuade Crusader Ruben, the madman of Lairon, who was furious after his duel with Baek Jongmyung was interrupted.

Ruben had missed a chance to decapitate a heretic. Therefore, he was furious and made the atmosphere uncomfortable in many ways. Ruben murmured to Duke Cornwall, “Duke, look. A fortnight has already passed since I missed the chance to kill him. Isn’t this an embarrassment to Lairon?”

“Hah, I’m also sorry about this.”

However, how could the duke have predicted this situation? All of a sudden, an earth giant had appeared and thousands of trees had grown out of nowhere.

The forest which had been built in 10 minutes was gone in a few days, but the chance to capture the Atron Estate had already disappeared. The crusader called it a pagan tradition, but the truth was still unknown.

“But Crusader Ruben, think about it.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is a chance to elevate Lairon. Isn’t that estate a terrible stage to mete out justice?”

“Hrmm-?” A sound emerged from Ruben’s mouth.

Then Duke Cornwall continued, “There will soon be a massive battle. The center of the battlefield where people are paying attention, isn’t that the stage to show Lairon’s judgment?”

“It doesn’t sound quite right.” Ruben’s eyes shone viciously. “Duke, this is the last time. I will stand by your side and exercise

the power of Lairon. But if I miss the infidel once again, I will have to tell the bad news to His Holiness."

"...I will keep that in mind."

"Then I'll be going. Don't disappoint me." Ruben didn't seek permission and exited one-sidedly.

The duke tried to look unconcerned. but he reached his limit when he couldn't hear Ruben's footsteps anymore. His stylish mustache shook, and a large number of blood vessels protruded on his flushed face. Unable to suppress his anger any longer, he kicked the table in front of him.

Crack! Kwatang!

A master's senses were extremely keen. The duke knew this and barely swallowed the ridicule he was subjected to.

He couldn't stand it. Until now, he hadn't had any thoughts in his mind about anything other than being king. Even if the other person was a crusader, did a future king have to behave like this?

Duke Cornwall kicked the table several times.

'I hate fanatics! I wonder if I should even borrow their hands again!'

He held hands with Lairon for a sure victory, but he might die of irritation before even getting his crown. The most rigid country in the Central Continent was Lairon, so he could surely find a better ally if he turned his gaze a little bit.

Yes, the Andras Empire could become a shield for him that Lairon couldn't deal with.

Duke Cornwall could barely breathe. It was at this moment that...

Knock knock knock. There came knocking sounds.

Then the duke spoke with a half-irritated, half-fatigued expression, "What? Didn't I say not to let anyone in?"

However, an answer wasn't given from outside the door. Instead, the answer was the doorknob turning. Was it another crusader?

Duke Cornwall was at a loss for words when the door finally opened. The duke had no energy left to be angry and just watched. He met the eyes of a man who was over 2 meters tall.

"...Y-You?"

"Nice to meet you, Duke Cornwall." The man with the eyes of a tiger, Pan Helliones, looked down at the duke with an expressionless face. "I am the Great Andras' 4th Sword, Pan Helliones. I will join your army in accordance with the emperor's orders."

"Ah, indeed! You are the 'super heavy sword'...?"

"I have been called by that name. Correct."

It was the empire's 4th Sword, Pan Helliones! His name was well-known in the north and central parts of the continent. The bloodshed he had caused was enough to make a river, and he had once knocked down a cliff. The reputation of the 4th Sword was far superior to the top ranks, whose abilities were unknown. The fact that the duke could recognize his identity just from his appearance alone was proof of his fame.

"I will speak bluntly. Our empire has confirmed that Meltor has added two masters to the royal faction."

"T-Two of them? Is this true?"

"Yes. However, you don't have to worry. We will handle Meltor's masters."

The duke involuntarily squinted at the word 'we.' Indeed, there was a knight in full body armor with a fearsome momentum standing behind Pan Helliones. With this, the dominance of the nobles faction was more certain.

It was because the nobles had two masters, the crusader and

Marquis Fergana, while the royal faction only had one master. The marquis hadn't been present last time, but he promised to fight in this battle.

Then if they made a deal with Andras...?

It would be more difficult for the crusader to act as he liked.

"It seems like this conversation will go for a bit longer, Sir Helliones."

Nevertheless, it was clear that the heavens were helping the nobles, and energy returned to Duke Cornwall's face. Andras was a nation famous for war, but it was better than insane fanatics. The smile of Duke Leonardo Cornwall thickened.

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At the time when Duke Cornwall was meeting with two sword masters, a strategic meeting was in full swing in the secret room of Marquis Reista's estate, which was in the hands of the royal faction.

Orta and the magic soldiers might've captured 11 estates, but only half of them were occupied by the royal faction. Duke Cornwall had the majority of troops, and even if they included the five newly acquired estates, the power of the royal faction was still weak.

The chances of victory had yet to tilt to one side. Theodore had helped the balance with the potion he gave to Baek Jongmyung, but the royal faction was still standing at the edge of the cliff...

Right now, the two factions were in the same situation. How should they move to win the war? The attendees were racking their brains while filled with such anxiety.

"The odds are lower if we enter a war of attrition."

"I agree."

Everyone nodded at the words.

A war of attrition should only be chosen when both sides were on an equal footing.

There was no reason to drag it out when the duke could overwhelm them with military power. It was even more so now that they had seen the fearsome mobility of Meltor's troops. This was a situation where guerrilla strikes would be the best.

"Why don't we try dispersing the troops for guerrilla warfare?"

"That won't work. Meltor has a lot of experience, but magicians are originally people whose power is fully exerted on the plains. There is no way to fill up the gap if the duke pushes forward."

Every person tried to persuade the others with their own logic and theory, but the other people weren't easily persuaded. The place where the leader of the Soldun Kingdom and the Meltor Kingdom were meeting became very heated from the debate.

"The only way to break this situation is to act safely..."

"Even if it is possible to gamble..."

"We are chasing after two rabbits..."

A few hours passed by, but a decision still couldn't be made. Their reactions were natural.

It was good to take a risk in order to move forward, but neither was it wrong that they should move carefully. As long as they didn't know the future, everyone wanted to take steps which they believed would be the best.

Unfortunately for them, Theodore was there.

"-A decisive battle."

The words popped out unintentionally. After Alfred's experience had been engraved into his body, Theodore's intuition was several times sharper than before. He was perplexed by his lips parting, but he could immediately see why he had spoken.

"Perhaps Duke Cornwall will try a decisive battle," Theodore said

with confidence and looked at the other men who were surprised by his remark.

However, the silence didn't last long and someone objected, "But Sir Theodore, why would he try a decisive battle while knowing that Meltor is on our side? I don't think the sneaky duke will do something so disadvantageous."

"That is certainly true."

However, Theodore shook his head. "Still, there is the master level magician called Marquis Fergana on the other side. Moreover, considering the anti-teleport devices... there is a strong possibility that he will have defense artifacts."

"Ummm..."

"That is certainly true, but..."

This wasn't enough. They still weren't convinced, so Theodore rolled his head a bit more. His brain was several times quicker than usual and soon came up with an answer. "We shouldn't forget the crusader either. The duke will push forward as long as Lairon is behind him."

The White Tower Master had spread spies throughout the recaptured estates, and they supplied information to the royal faction. One of the benefits of the estates returning to the nobles was that the amount of information increased.

"I heard that the priests of the Sacred Order have magic powers. If they help the duke, magic will no longer be an absolute advantage for us."

The other members belatedly had a fire lit under them.

"Will they smuggle the priests in...? That power?"

"Cornwall, that traitor really is no good!"

"If Sir Theodore's words are true, a decisive battle can't be avoided!"

The duke hadn't made a big move so far because he lacked measures to deal with the war mages on the plains. Clearly, information about the power of war mages who burned hundreds and thousands of people was famous enough to even cross the border between continents.

However, what if the duke obtained a means to counteract this destructive power? There was no reason for the duke to hesitate since he had 50,000 troops, much more than Prince Elsid's 30,000 troops.

The leaders instantly agreed and laid out a map. There was only one place where Prince Elsid and the duke could have a decisive battle. Someone pointed to it with their finger and shouted, "Babarino Plains!"

It was a land that was the largest area in the Soldun Kingdom, but it was left untouched due to its desolate soil.

Since crops almost never grew, there were no lord or residents living there. There were no underground resources either, so the barren land had no value. This wasteland was the only place where 80,000 people could collide.

"Attendant! Go and bring me a topographic map of the Babarino Plains!"

"Call the geographers—no, the meteorologists! Figure out the weather of this fickle land!"

Theodore wasn't interested in the rest of the conversation, so he took a few steps back. Alfred's fragment had been handed over to a magician, but that didn't mean Theodore was good at developing strategies. He had used his intuition to find loopholes, and now he would leave the rest to experts.

'Well, there is also the White Tower Master.'

Orta had a long career as a commander and practical experience, so he would be able to lead the meeting proficiently. Theodore

thought so and turned his gaze. Shortly after that, he met Orta's eyes.

"……"

"……"

There was an awkward silence for a moment. Orta spoke with magic so that no one else could hear. [As mentioned earlier, I will leave the work related to Andras to you. But is that person called Randolph reliable?]

[Yes, I guarantee it with my name.]

[If so, I will trust you. However, don't forget to report back.]

[I understand,] Theodore replied to Orta in a concise way and moved out of the room to an uninhabited place.

Then he pulled out a small bead. Looking closely, it was the earring which paired with the one he had given Randolph. Theodore infused it with magic, and the earring started to flash. It was proof that the communication magic on the earrings was working properly.

'Randolph, do you hear me?'

Once an answer returned after several trial and errors, a grin emerged on Theodore's face. It was finally time to hunt the bear.

Chapter 223 – Babarino Plains (2)

The Babarino Plains was one of the most spacious areas in the Soldun Kingdom as well as a useless wasteland covered with weeds. The Soldun Kingdom was famous for their lack of farmland, so they had tried to cleanse the barren land for centuries. However, there were no visible results yet.

Apart from a few small hills, there was no curvature in the topography. The Barbarino Plains was such a place.

However, today, there was a new record for the land. It was because there were more people entering the plains today than there had been in the past hundreds of years.

There were soldiers armed from head to toe with steel and leather, while flags flapped in the faint breeze. The procession of the royal army and nobles army which numbered 80,000 people in total stretched out under the horizon.

The crown prince's army which left Marquis Reista's estate was on the right side, while Duke Cornwall and Marquis Fergana were on the left side. They were several kilometers apart, and the commanders looked at the formation of the other side.

"That old raccoon, he seems to have decided. He didn't leave anything behind and will end it all here."

"It seems he has emptied out everything."

"That formation is... 'Sword and Buckler.' It is obvious he intends to push us step by step."

'Sword and Buckler' was originally an expression referring to a weapon which was a combination of the sword and the shield. However, its meaning was slightly different as a combat formation. It was a tactic of separating two units from each other, one to stop the enemy's vanguard and the other to pierce through the enemies who lost their momentum.

This was a classic but infrequently used method. However, Duke Cornwall pulled it out to use without hesitation. There was no need to explain his intentions.

‘Sword and Shield’ was a tactic which had been used since the ancient times on the premise of getting rid of the inefficient troops to stop the enemy’s vanguard.

Prince Elsid muttered with a frown, “A formation based on losing a significant number of troops… He really is only thinking about victory, that duke. He is already beyond obsession.”

A strategist could understand casting stones for victory. Dropping two stones in order to get three was a natural act for them. However, it was an unacceptable attitude as a ruler. The duke wasn’t planning to win efficiently. Instead, he wanted to throw away his followers?

“This is why we can’t lose this fight. Everyone, follow me until the end.”

Upon hearing Prince Elsid’s determined voice, Marquis Piris and the other subordinates in the area prostrated themselves on the ground.

“Your words are right, Your Highness!”

“We need to win for the people!”

“Until the end, Your Highness is Soldun’s king!”

Everyone here knew they were in a disadvantageous position. Even so, they didn’t hesitate to kneel. This was because they felt a sense of crisis and discomfort from Duke Cornwall. This unbearable person absolutely shouldn’t be king!

Each of them gathered under Elsid because they had similar thoughts. Duke Cornwall… If he were a better person, then today’s situation might be drastically different. Elsid was greatly happy with their replies and raised his right hand. However, it wasn’t just to secure visibility that he was on the hills.

“Good! Then we will surely get rid of those insurgents!”

It was because the people believed him. Setting aside strength and weakness, justice ought to win. After all this time, the people realized the ‘ruthless reality’, but embers of hope still burned within them. If a god really was watching them from the sky like the fanatics claimed, then Elsid couldn’t turn away from them.

“First Corps, raise the flag and march!” A loud voice echoed, and a rider moved. Then a sudden earthquake hit the Barbarino Plains as the soldiers saw the red flag fluttering and moved as well.

Kung! Kung! Kung! Kung!

They pounded the ground with their spears and crushed the reeds. Power seemed to overflow on the plains every time they took a step.

This was an army, and this was war.

As the saying went, the roar of tens of thousands of soldiers could overtake the sound of thunder. Perhaps due to the topography, it felt like even the thick clouds on the horizon were pushed back.

“From now on, we will quell the rebels!”

It was the beginning of the decisive battle, which would later be called the ‘Babarino Plains Great War’ or ‘Elsid’s Civil War.’

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However, unlike the grand declarations, the battlefield didn’t move. The army was just stepping forward before retreating again. Just like the calm before a storm, a silence fell on the plains where 80,000 people stood. Much like how a swan floating on the surface seemed calm, the unseen area was actually turbulent.

“Second Corps, retreat quickly to the left slope!”

“The military forces of Duke Cornwall’s group are approaching! Right?!”

“No, not yet! Fourth and Fifth Corps, keep advancing! Don’t

show a gap until the enemy rearguard is revealed!”

The strength of the individual was most important when engaging with a few elite troops, but it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the strategist or leader determined victory when it was a large army of thousands.

Elsid and his commanders were doing their best to try and open a gap in the duke’s army. The problem was that the difficulty was ridiculously high.

“Damn, the difference in troops is so absolute…!”

50,000 and 30,000… This numerical gap was huge. The duke was prepared to abandon 20,000 people. If they attacked carelessly, Prince Elsid’s army would suffer damage which would be difficult to recover from.

They couldn’t step forward or retreat.

The difference in options changed the movements of the two groups, as Duke Cornwall’s army gradually started to move forward. If the commanders of both sides were capable, the side with the superior numbers would have the advantage.

This meant the disadvantage on Elsid’s side would increase over time. He despaired as this disadvantage was increased by the topography.

‘Is this my limit?’

A one second delay would kill 10 people. Elsid knew this fact and made a decision quickly. Then with a heavy expression, he turned to the rider next to him and said, “Raise Meltor’s flags! Prepare for a barrage!”

This was the only card which could change the flow. The firepower of Meltor’s elites was a ‘shield’ which could sweep away the entire army before them. Elsid had wanted to annihilate the rearguards as much as possible, but he couldn’t afford to wait any longer.

...Flap. The four-color flag of Meltor blew in the wind.

Orta saw the signal and nodded. The Crown Prince's response was perfect. If the other side made a mistake, he would be able to dig into that gap. However, the duke was pressing too hard, and it would be impossible to change the flow.

"Concentrate your magic power. Prepare for a barrage."

The 64 war mages responded, then...

Kururung!

Magic power gathered, and the clouds overhead scattered. If enough 5th Circle magicians combined their strength, it would be enough firepower to reach the level of a master.

The magic circle laid out under the feet of the 64 war mages glowed, and the magic power distorting the atmosphere coalesced. The terrifying magic which had yet to dissolve started to melt the land.

"Manifestation."

Simultaneously, 'Cobalt Sun,' the tactical magic developed by the red tower, appeared in the sky. This was the cleansing fire magic which 64 war mages completed! Despite the fact that the heat was quite a distance away, the soldiers on the Babarino Plains looked up at the turquoise sun rising in the sky.

The moment the magic power reached its peak, Orta declared, "Fall."

Shortly after that, the Cobalt Sun fell. Naturally, it fell toward the heads of Duke Cornwall's 10,000 soldiers. Just looking at the magic power, it was at the same level of the 7th Circle 'Inferno' magic. If it exploded at the center of the troops, at least 3,000~4,000 people would turn to charcoal.

It was at this moment that...

♪ ♩ ♬ ♬ ♩ · · ·! ♩ ♬ ♬ ♪ ♪–!

The magnificent sound of music emerged from somewhere.

“This?” Orta knew what the music was, and his expression stiffened.

The music was the Sacred Order’s Hymn. Unlike the magicians who pursued different paths, ‘teamwork’ was required for the priests of the Sacred Order. It was possible for them to generate this power by harmonizing when singing the same song.

The power was huge, and it came from ‘religion,’ not rationality.

“Divine Protect...!”

Unsurprisingly, a golden shield appeared over Duke Cornwall’s group. It was a shield made by divine power which had the ability to negate magic. Unlike the Magic Society that tried to break all reason, divine power explored reason. Their logic was that everything was divine, and they just needed to worship and follow. That blind faith formed the shield.

“Annoying,” Orta murmured as the two powers collided.

Kurururung.

This time, the clouds were torn. The Cobalt Sun’s path was interrupted, and it exploded as soon as it hit the golden shield. A storm of light barraged the soldiers’ ears and eyes. Shattered pieces of armor and weapons scattered everywhere, while soldiers became masses of charcoal. The divine shield couldn’t stop the Cobalt Sun perfectly.

However, this much couldn’t change the flow of the battlefield. It wasn’t a great amount of damage as it was just a few thousand people out of the duke’s 50,000 troops. Moreover, Elsid’s purpose of removing Duke Cornwall’s vanguard failed.

“...No, it isn’t completely pointless,” Elsid muttered as he looked down at the epicenter. The effect of the barrage wasn’t small. The shield might’ve blocked most of the damage, but the soldiers shrank back and the forward momentum was significantly

reduced. Even if it didn't reverse the situation, it bought them some time.

Then while Elsid and the commanders were trying to think of another way to break through...

Dozens of strands of lightning struck the sides of Elsid's army.

Kwarururung!

Lightning magic truly contained a mighty destructive force. The armor that the soldiers wore was useless as the lightning bolts hit them.

"Kwaaaack!"

"M-My eyes, what is this?"

"Kieeek, kuk... Kuock."

It was a tremendous power. As a result, gazes naturally moved toward the source of the lightning. This was clearly the magic, Lightning Splash. Unlike Thunderbolt which focused on one point, this was a 6th Circle magic intended to spread out. It was a lightning spell famous for its difficulty to be controlled.

The magician who could use it would be truly powerful, and there was only one person on Duke Cornwall's side who could use it.

"This is a silly fight." Fergana touched his mustache with an uncomfortable feeling as he watched the soldiers in front of him. "If it wasn't for my daughter, I would've stayed still until the end."

As the two masters of the Soldun Kingdom, Earl Mersen and Marquis Fergana were loyal to it. So, if it wasn't for a certain person, he wouldn't be standing in the midst of this complicated situation. Even today, the old raccoon had mentioned his daughter while Fergana had been trying to enjoy his tea.

'Damn you, old and greedy...' Marquis Fergana made a tsk-ing sound before raising his magic power again. It couldn't be helped.

He needed to return home quickly.

He was the ‘Thunder Noble’ whom everyone was afraid of. The marquis used the lightning magic he had developed since young and had risen to prominence with. However, he had to cancel the magic he prepared.

Piing.

A chill ran down Marquis Fergana’s spine as a flash of light shot past his head, destroying a few strands of his hair. If he had been a little slower in dodging, he would’ve died. He might have been born and raised in the Central Continent, but he knew about the founder of this magic.

It was the war hero Alfred Bellontes’ Magic Bullet!

“Who?” Marquis Fergana’s relaxed expression disappeared as he glared in front of him.

His intuition warned him that this attack was dangerous. No, the figure who sent the flash was dangerous. It had been a long time since he had entered a battle, but his intuition hadn’t disappeared.

“It is nice to meet you, Marquis Fergana.” Theodore’s red robe flapped as he flew forward without hesitation. The four-color pattern with the ‘4’ in the center of his robe was a symbol that only belonged to Theodore.

It was his first time revealing his official position, so Theodore confronted Marquis Fergana while filled with half nervousness, half excitement.

“As the captain of Meltor’s magic division, Quattro, I—Theodore Miller—will deal with you.”

“Theodore Miller? That name…” Marquis Fergana was puzzled for a moment before nodding. “Indeed, Meltor’s young hero. Ascending to this position before the age of 30… It is a scary achievement.”

“You’re overpraising me.”

“It isn’t a compliment. I hope you realize that all your possibilities will be crushed today.”

The conversation between the two magicians ended there. As soon as Fergana finished talking, he went into combat mode. Fergana’s opponent was a genius who had become a master at a young age, so he couldn’t spare any power. Marquis Fergana used his Sorcery without hesitation.

Pajijik! Paijijik!

Strands of lightning emerged. The blue lightning sprung up on the surface of his luxurious robe, starting with weak static before becoming a lightning storm. This wasn’t made from electric magic. Marquis Fergana’s magic power was being replaced by actual lightning.

Theodore thought for a moment about the principles behind it but soon realized it was worthless. Sorcery was a result of magicians interpreting the world. No matter how much Theodore thought about it, he wouldn’t be able to receive the same answer as Marquis Fergana had gotten.

So, he stepped back instead of worrying about it. There was a swirl of lightning before him, so there was no reason to try a melee. The lightning was fast and powerful. In a magic battle, there were few attributes which exceeded lightning.

Then why…?

‘…Is it worth a try?’

All the forces inside Theodore were saying that…

He could overpower that lightning bolt.

Chapter 224 – Babarino Plains (3)

After the many struggles he had gone through, Theodore was convinced that the magician before him, Marquis Fergana, didn't feel as strong as his past opponents. However, the comparison wasn't that good.

Monsters at the apex of all species... They were from the Age of Mythology. Everybody would be ashamed when compared to the wicked dragon which dominated the seas.

'Okay, let's try it!'

Theodore didn't hesitate and moved accordingly.

Wuuuong...!

His seven circles rotated and pushed toward Marquis Fergana. In a magic battle, it was a basic principle to control the mana in the area. However, Theodore felt a strange feeling as he did this.

He had fought many times with strong people, including sword masters, but this was his first time fighting with a traditional magician. The space started to distort at the midpoint between the two magicians.

The power of the 7th Circle magicians, both of whom could be described as 'one-man armies,' collided together and created a storm that hit the soldiers several hundred meters away. The storm was inevitable.

One person called out a lightning bolt while the other produced a whirlwind. The battle between masters was enough to be called a natural disaster.

"Now then..." Soon after, Marquis Fergana stretched out his hands. "...Let's start!"

Theodore responded by stretching out both palms.

Kwarururung... Kwakwakwang!

As a blue lightning bolt shot forward, a wall of red flames blocked it, and there was a magnificent explosion. That was ‘Thunderbolt’ from the marquis and ‘Flare Burst’ from Theodore. Both of them had shot 6th Circle attack magic at each other. The sky momentarily brightened, and a roar echoed throughout the Babarino Plains.

Shortly after that, both magicians were confused.

‘That punk, he responded to my strike?’

‘What is that ridiculous casting speed?’

Theodore had confidence in his own casting speed as he had received special training from Sylvia and acquired affinities with the four elements. With a few exceptions, he could cast any 7th Circle magic as a weapon, but Marquis Fergana showed more than that.

Marquis Fergana had literally cast at lightning speed, and something went through Theodore’s mind as he thought this.

‘Like lightning…? Perhaps Marquis Fergana’s Sorcery…’

Unfortunately, there was no room for further thoughts.

Kwarururung!

Lightning bolts were poured out in succession and filled the air around Theodore. This time, the casting was so quick that Theodore couldn’t even see hand gestures or the mouth moving. Marquis Fergana was trying to win without allowing any counterattacks.

Theodore made a quick decision and devoted himself to avoiding the lightning. No matter how fast an attack was, he could easily avoid it. However, this was a first-time experience for Marquis Fergana. “How can he avoid lightning with a human body?”

Fergana’s magic was based on his special ‘Sorcery’, allowing him to have speed and power comparable to that of real lightning. It

was immeasurably quick when compared to flying arrows, and it was powerful enough to melt well-refined metals.

He had tested his magic out previously, and Earl Mersen hadn't even been able to defend. Yet the lightning he was so proud of couldn't reach a person who had just become a master? Marquis Fergana's magic power became increasingly rough.

Without knowing the marquis' inner thoughts, Theodore was internally admiring and trying to figure out the marquis' Sorcery. The marquis had managed to avoid Magic Bullet, and he also had high-speed casting. Based on such clues, perhaps Marquis Fergana's Sorcery was—

'Is it a control ability related to the lightning attribute? His reflexes are developed to a tremendous level... Maybe he can integrate with lightning like my [Forced Harmonization].'

If so, the opponent's combat ability was amazing. Unlike Theodore, who had awoken his Sorcery recently, Marquis Fergana's skill level was high and he wasn't easily shaken either. Theodore didn't know about Orta, but it would be extremely dangerous if Baek Jongmyung encountered the marquis.

'I have to put him down here.'

Marquis Fergana was a strong enemy. Theodore knew this fact, but he was still convinced of his victory. If Fergana's attacks were based on lightning, then there was a chance for Theodore.

Dduk.

Theodore stopped flying in the sky. Then Marquis Fergana finally found a gap in his prey and reflexively fired a lightning bolt. A blue lightning bolt emerged from his fingertip and crossed the space.

Kwarurung!

That didn't mean he'd stopped thinking. Marquis Fergana kept thinking after firing the lightning bolt. His instincts furiously

warned him that Theodore wouldn't fall prey to this type of attack.

Marquis Fergana's intuition was proven right. He had fired Lightning Vortex. However...

"-What?!"

It passed through Theodore's body!

'He got caught!'

Theodore didn't miss the gap revealed by Marquis Fergana. It was a trap which was possible due to Theodore's Sorcery. Theodore had temporarily turned into lightning due to Forced Harmonization, so electric magic had no effect on him.

Simultaneously, Theodore's body shot straight forward as fast as lightning. Due to his tremendous acceleration, Theodore seemed to distort for a moment before arriving at his destination. One of his knees was pointed forward like a spear and struck Marquis Fergana's abdomen.

Kwaduduk!

Marquis Fergana coughed up blood. "Kuheook!"

The marquis had no time to defend himself. His ribs broke and pierced his lungs. The shock from the attack spread, damaging his entire body. It was a destructive force which wasn't instantly lethal!

Theodore cocked his head as he heard a strange sound. Then he could see the cause of it.

Pajijijik!

Marquis Fergana had turned into lightning like Theodore and was running away. He wasn't running in a straight line but in a zigzag pattern.

Despite being badly injured, Fergana's movements were far beyond Theodore's proficiency. If he pursued with the same type of lightning movement, he would be surrounded by Duke

Cornwall's troops.

Theodore sighed and shrugged. "...Well, haven't I achieved my purpose?"

Even though Marquis Fergana had escaped, his injury was serious. He could be assured that the marquis couldn't appear on the battlefield again in this civil war.

The marquis might not have died on the spot, but he had received a fatal injury which could hinder his ability to maintain his life as well as his magic circulation system. He wouldn't be able to get out of bed for half a year unless he had a potion like Theodore. A sword master could borrow the strength of divine power, but that wasn't applicable for a magician.

Just as divine power resisted magic, magic resisted divine power. Even a cardinal couldn't do anything against the resistance of a master magician. Thus, Theodore had succeeded in his original purpose of getting rid of Marquis Fergana. He had done enough for one person and could stop here.

However, Theodore wasn't satisfied yet. The Babarino Plains were still filled with the soldiers' shouts and the sound of metal clashing, so it was too premature to decide that the royal faction had won.

'No, not yet. The battlefield is still boiling, even if I have defeated Marquis Fergana. I need to drive a wedge in firmly.'

This was Alfred's advice. It wasn't yet time to withdraw, and this was a moment that could decide victory or defeat in the war. Theodore looked around. There was a sense of sharpness due to looking down at the entire Babarino Plains through the eyes of Hugin, whom Theodore had summoned beforehand.

–5 kilometers to the east, Viscount Carter is fighting the priests.

–4 kilometers to the southwest, Teacher and 15 war mages are advancing.

–7 kilometers to the northeast…

Theodore's vision narrowed in on some unexpected movements. There were three people fighting, and one of them was a master who was really familiar to him.

'That… Is it Master Baek and Tower Master? And the crusader.'

Mana was swirling, and the two people were attacking Ruben.

No matter how good Ruben's recovery ability was, he would die before recovering if two masters attacked him properly. Unlike before, Baek Jongmyung was now thoroughly aiming for Ruben's head. There was no attempt to act like he had done previously the last time.

The crusader was shouting about cowardice, but this was the right method to win on the battlefield. He was suffering from the pincer attack.

Theodore turned his gaze toward other areas. No, it was more correct to say that he tried to. He was thinking that the prince's victory was clear when 'it' happened.

————————————!

Somewhere, a volcano exploded. That was the only explanation for the deafening sound. The sky and the earth were torn apart, and the soldiers couldn't even scream as dust covered the sky and the clouds turned red.

"That is…?"

A large amount of dust was riding in the northwest, opposite to the area where the three masters were confronting each other. Theodore might've thought a volcano really had exploded, but volcanic ash didn't fill the air. In other words, this wasn't a natural phenomenon.

This was a violence which damaged several hills and turned thousands of humans into a bloody mess. It meant there was a

presence who could artificially exercise this power.

Gulp. Theodore instinctively had an ominous feeling and gulped.

'The enemy…'

The duke might've received some hits, but it was nothing compared to the damage received by the prince's side. There was only one candidate who could be strong enough on Duke Cornwall's side and would appear as the prince's enemy.

'It is Pan Helliones!'

The empire's 4th Sword, Helliones of the Super Heavy Sword… It wasn't impossible for that monster to destroy a mountain with one blow. Normally, the reality didn't match the rumors, but he seemed like a greater monster than described in the rumors.

Pan Helliones was obviously stronger than Baek Jongmyung or Randolph. A sword master who had been at the peak for 30 years, the sword of Andras, had joined the battlefield.

Theodore looked in that direction and continued to think. He had a plan to confront Pan with Randolph, depending on whether he could get Orta or Baek Jongmyung's cooperation or whether he needed to take out the automaton.

However, before Theodore could make a decision, vibrations were transmitted from a communication tool. It was from his ally, Randolph Clovis.

[Theo, can you hear me?]

[… I hear you. What is the situation?]

The voice Theodore heard from the magic tool was very distressed. It meant Randolph was rattled and didn't know how to move.

[Damn, I don't know! Pan Helliones, that bastard just rushed into the middle of the battle! I don't know where you are, but do you see that dust cloud?]

[Yes, is that on your side?]

[I'm not there yet, but I will arrive soon. It is already different from what we planned, so what should we do?]

The two people had planned to sneak up on Pan Helliones for a pincer attack. He didn't know why Pan Helliones had changed his movements, but if they left that monster alone, the prince's side would be destroyed without a trace.

The battlefield might be overturned with just two or three more attacks.

Theodore gritted his teeth and declared, [...Let's go.]

Anyway, Helliones was an opponent who needed to be defeated. So, Theodore and Randolph would also both attack like planned. When Randolph heard Theodore's determination through the communication device, he responded in an excited voice, [It can't be helped. In the end, it's a frontal match? I'm trembling.]

[But he is still a better opponent than that monster from last time. Moreover, isn't it two against one?]

[Haha! It is exactly as you said. Let's stick together, Partner!]

Up to the present day, Theodore had gone through many crises. Therefore, he knew. There was no benefit in avoiding the fight here. The enemy he would have had to face one day had come to face him now. So, if he stepped back, he would be standing on the edge of a cliff.

Even so, victory wasn't certain, so Theodore couldn't help grumbling as he flew through the sky.

Pan Helliones, the worst hurdle on the battlefield, was waiting.

Chapter 225 – Great Battle (1)

Theodore didn't move in another direction and continued to fly toward the center of the dust cloud. The closer he got, the denser the dust was which interfered with his vision. However, that discomfort only lasted for a short while before a path opened up.

It was because Aiolos, the divinity of the god of wind, unconsciously obeyed Theodore's will. Theodore realized it and used the power consciously. "Fly away!"

'I know that,' replied the wind. This was different from magic which artificially controlled the flow. It was like the world itself followed Theodore's words as the wind turned naturally and the dust moved.

The crushed remains of humans were staining the ground. There were some soldiers who survived, but the majority were so injured they were on the verge of death. However, Theodore couldn't pay attention to them.

'...There.'

On the surface of where the dust cloud was coming from, one man was emitting a frightening presence. Theodore was still quite a distance away, but it was overwhelming.

The person held a greatsword which was as big as him, and he seemed like a magnificent mountain. A weak person's heart might stop from just looking at him. Pan Helliones, the 4th Sword of the empire, was a man like that.

Chill.

Theo's super sensitivity was telling him that this was an adversary who was on a different level. If he went ahead, he would be placing his life on the line.

Goosebumps ran down Theodore's neck and spine, making him shudder from the cold. Was this the difference between them

despite them both being masters? The intensity of the threat he felt from Pan Helliones was more than triple that of what he'd felt from Marquis Fergana.

This was Meltor's true enemy, the power of the empire's Seven Swords. Theodore shook off his instincts and stopped a few dozen meters from him. It would be difficult to respond to an attack if he got any closer. So, he chose a midpoint at a distance where he could respond to any situation.

"You're late," Pan Helliones greeted Theodore with a heavy voice. "If you didn't come soon, I was going to swing my sword."

There was no bluff in Helliones' voice. His tone was blasé despite having caused this disaster. Helliones' strength was enough to shake the ground. There were six or seven collapsed hills, and the number of soldiers blown away by the shockwave was estimated to be ~2,000–3,000. This destructive power was comparable to 7th Circle magic.

"...It is a big deal for you to wait when a promise to meet with you hadn't been made," Theodore responded calmly with a weak expression on his face. He was nervous because he was overwhelmed by the ridiculous destructive power. It was only a guess that Pan Helliones couldn't use this power as often as he wanted.

However, Pan Helliones' reaction was completely unexpected. "No promise... Is that so?" He had a ridiculing smile on his face. Theodore had an uneasy feeling when he saw Pan Helliones' expression and tried to calm down.

"Weren't you the ones who invited me into this battle?"

Hearing Helliones' unexpected words, Theodore's expression froze. Pan Helliones was already aware of the existence of an accomplice.

"Crawl out here, Sir Clovis. You should've come out sooner if you

were planning on the element of surprise. It is too late now."

"...Tch, you noticed quickly." Randolph had been caught and emerged belatedly. As always, he was wearing armor and held two swords. He appeared behind Helliones, who was confronting Theodore. It would've been better if they had a chance to choose a location which was more advantageous to them, but they couldn't pass up this opportunity to kill him.

Pan Helliones was calm despite being in a deadly situation. "You had this thought out from the beginning, Sir Clovis."

"Well, that's right. I don't know about the 2nd Sword, but it is different if the opponent is you."

"Certainly, your Aura Ability is bad for me. I don't know about one-on-one, but a fight against many opponents is hard for me," Helliones coolly admitted his weakness and then pulled something out.

It was a silver key with dim magic power shining around it. The key was around the size of two or three adult fingers? It was a size which couldn't be called small, but it looked small because it was in Pan Helliones' hand.

"So, I prepared something in case this situation happened. Sir Clovis, take it."

"What? ...Ah." Randolph caught the key that Pan Helliones threw at him. Theodore used Appraisal on it, but it was just a tool which didn't have any special function other than to resolve certain bindings. Theodore thought up to here and was intuitively aware of the move Pan Helliones had prepared.

'It can't be?!'

As if to confirm Theodore's speculation, Pan Helliones let out an eerie laugh. "Surely you didn't think there would be nothing on Rebecca's shackles? It will happen in one hour. No, perhaps 45 minutes from now. If you don't release her from the restraints,

there won't be a single piece of her flesh left."

"What?"

Unlike the astonished Theodore, Randolph's anger was quiet.

"...You dared do this, you damn bastard." Randolph gritted his teeth hard enough to break both molars. "Setting aside this situation, she was your disciple. No, she is still your disciple. Yet you dare to do this to her?"

"It is better than being regarded as a traitor. Isn't that right?" Pan Helliones relaxed stance didn't shake, despite facing an enemy who wanted to peel off his skin. He shrugged and made Randolph choose between two brutal choices. "Now, what will you do? Time is still passing."

Randolph gripped his swords as tightly as possible. He knew what the other person wanted, but if he left, Theodore would have to confront that monster one-on-one.

As mentioned before, it was different with the 2nd Sword. However, if he and Theodore fought together, Randolph was certain they would attain victory against Pan Helliones. If they scattered, the likelihood of defeat was much higher.

His family or ally... Randolph's mind was frozen because he couldn't make a choice. However, Theodore didn't hesitate even in this situation. "Randolph, go and rescue your sister."

"What?! But...!"

"You are just wasting time. I will try to do it alone somehow." As he urged Randolph to go quickly, Theodore stepped forward. With the time limit, Randolph would be distracted and incapable of fighting with his true abilities.

Randolph also knew it, so he closed his eyes and turned his back on Theodore.

"Kuk, I'm sorry! I'll be back as soon as possible!" Randolph

apologized before quickly disappearing, but Theodore didn't expect his return to be timely. Pan Helliones wasn't stupid enough to restrain Rebecca nearby. It would take at least 30 minutes, buying Pan Helliones time to fight with Theodore.

Theodore calmly assessed the situation and looked ahead again. The man was over two meters tall, and he was holding a greatsword as big as that. Helliones was obviously a knight who could destroy a rock with one blow.

No, it was obvious just by looking. There was a sense of weight to Pan Helliones' presence.

'By the way, that greatsword... Can he swing it properly?'

It was a greatsword was two meters long, and it was just a plain greatsword. There were no decorations on it, and its repulsive force was reinforced by the hilt. The average greatsword weighed around 2.5 kilograms, but this ridiculous size was out of the normal standards. Was it around 20 kilograms, no, 25 kilograms?

"It is exactly 34.2 kilograms," Pan Helliones said. Aware of Theodore's gaze, he explained coldly, "It is made by mixing meteorite and adamantium, and it's 20 times heavier than a typical longsword. It is impossible to swing, even if a group of men is holding it."

"So? Why are you kind enough to explain this?"

"It isn't a big deal. It is uncommon for me to be confronted in this way. I just wanted to brag about my sword."

Theodore looked at Pan Helliones with a dumbfounded expression, but he was actually measuring his opponent's power. From the helmet to the armor, to the boots and sword, Theodore didn't miss anything.

Theodore observed the greatsword as Pan Helliones held it in both hands. Then Theodore realized, 'That crude big sword is why he is called the Super Heavy Sword?'

Almost simultaneously…

“Then let’s begin,” Pan Helliones declared, lifting his greatsword.

Shiver.

At that moment, a tremendous trembling overwhelmed Theodore’s body.

It had been revealed that this greatsword weighed 34.2kg. The weapon which was closer to a siege weapon than a sword was lifted easily like it was a feather. There was an unnatural ‘lightness’ which seemed to escape from the confines of gravity.

‘Should I offset it now? No, it is a few beats late…!’

Theodore didn’t dare to even endure it. He rushed backward as his senses screamed at him. Then he reflexively activated Battle Song and Wind Blast to accelerate. His vision turned red for a moment, but he could withstand the backlash.

Nevertheless, he didn’t feel relieved.

“Good senses.” Pan Helliones nodded with praise and raised his sword above him. A red blood-like aura blazed around it. The force of the power bent the space around it, causing spider web-like cracks to form on the ground.

Kukukung. There was an explosion that shook the earth.

The Super Heavy Sword, Pan Helliones…

1st type, Earth Break.

It was like a meteor falling.

*

This was literally hell.

Kurururung.

The ground at Theodore’s feet collapsed, and the air evaporated from the tremendous heat, turning the environment into a place where no one could live. It covered an area of around 100 meters or

maybe more. The soldiers could barely see anything through the dust.

'Cra…zy!'

12 of the 13 shields Theodore had deployed hurriedly were broken, and the remaining one was tattered. Theodore threw away his torn robes and cursed loudly. If he had been too late to avoid it, or if he had been lacking one shield, it would've been his body, not his robe, which was ripped apart.

How could this destructive power come from one sword? However, it wasn't in vain to watch it from a close range, as Theodore managed to figure out the reason why.

'…Indeed, this is the ability to control weight!'

It was simple enough to know the secret to Pan Helliones' terrible power.

Helliones had changed the weight close to zero until the sword was fully accelerated, then he gave it a tremendous weight when maximum speed was reached. That was the source of this nonsensical destructive power.

It was a blow which was several times faster than the speed of sound due to the extraordinary weight of the sword. Regardless of whether it was a hundred tons or a thousand tons, even an adult dragon would die instantly if they were hit by that terrible impact.

Above all, Pan Hellions had a power which was different to that of any other sword master Theodore had ever seen.

There was the owner of the ability to find the 'path,' Lloyd Pollan…

The assassin who had the ability of 'concealment,' Hyde…

The one who had awakened the power of 'penetration,' Baek Jongmyung…

And the one who had the ability of 'speed,' Randolph.

Pan Helliones' ability was tremendously strong compared to those excellent powers. This was the first sword master Theodore had met who specialized in 'destructive power.'

'How do I deal with that monster?'

Theodore couldn't help gulping in front of such brute force.

That guy was waiting in the middle of the dust. With a range exceeding several hundred meters, Helliones' attack was a blow which would kill Theodore as soon as it hit.

Chapter 226 – Great Battle (2)

‘Even if I am a fellow master, I would be smashed by that blow.’

Theodore considered a few options he could use and excluded ‘Gladio.’ Gladio’s combat ability was considerable, but he was a rather bad matchup for Pan Helliones.

Lloyd Pollan’s Aura Ability, Pathfinder, was a possibility.

The ability to find the opponent’s weaknesses and loopholes was useful, but he would struggle to survive against even one hit from Helliones. Theodore could use Gladio as a shield, but it was too much of a pity to consume the automaton in that way.

However, there was something Theodore had learned just before the attack.

The destructive power of the heavy sword was obviously amazing, but it was difficult to strike precisely. Moreover, Pan Helliones needed time to gather the level of destructive power he had shown at the beginning.

A path for a clear breakthrough was yet to be seen, but that didn’t mean Theodore didn’t have the power to attack.

Huuk.

As the last of the dust was removed with the wind, the appearance of the giant sword was revealed. Helliones had switched from making a vertical blow to a horizontal blow. Based on Pan Helliones’ posture, Theodore’s senses warned him again. ‘It’s coming!’

Simultaneously, Pan Helliones’ sword caused a tsunami.

Kwaaaaaaah!

Unlike the first attack which had spread a shockwave by hitting the ground, this one broke the air. It was equivalent to a dragon’s roar. The shockwaves extended parallel to the surface of the earth

and crushed all objects in the path. The horizontal sword seemed to split the world in two.

This was the Super Heavy Sword, Pan Helliones...

2nd type, Over Horizon.

If Theodore tried to defend, he would be split in two.

“Kuok!” Theodore hurriedly jumped and looked down with a shocked expression.

However, the attacks continued without giving him any time to relax.

The blows were comparable to great magic, but the speed at which Helliones swung his sword again was unimaginable. Following the horizontal slash, there were two upper slashes which overlapped orbits.

To think that Pan Helliones was capable of continuous attacks with such power?! The destructive power of each strike was reduced, but it was still devastating. A slight graze would kill Theodore instantly.

Theodore desperately pulled himself out of its orbit. The storm-like shockwave was already a natural disaster.

‘Damn, a shockwave happens every time he swings his sword!’

A ridiculous sight was happening before him. Every time Pan Helliones’ sword moved through the air, the entire space was pushed to create a wall of shockwaves.

Consequently, the atmosphere distorted, and the rocks burst.

Several layers of shockwaves overlapped with each other and devastated the area. No swordsmanship was required. The blade didn’t even need to make contact. Just like a fly falling without being hit by the hand, the shockwaves were able to kill the opponent without the blade needing to strike directly.

‘Besides, the range is getting narrower... I can only manage to

avoid it four more times before reaching the influence of the low pressure. Before that, I need to change the situation somehow.'

It wasn't easy, but Theodore thought about it while raising his magic power. That damn shockwave was Pan Helliones' sword and shield. It was a means of attacking within a range of a few hundred meters, and it also acted as a barrier to prevent close range attacks. To break through it, Theodore needed magic of at least the 7th Circle.

"I will test it out."

His magic power was still sufficient, so Theodore aimed both his hands at Pan Helliones, who was still creating shockwaves. A magic of medium firepower wouldn't be able to cross that wall of pressure. Fire-based large-scale magic, the most powerful among the attributes, would be suitable.

'Inferno.'

Hellfire, another 7th Circle fire magic, was one of the choices available, but Inferno was stronger when it came to pure firepower. Theodore's seven circles rotated to create a vortex of flames.

Kuooooh!

Then the wind blew, and the fire of Inferno hit that wall of shockwaves.

The amazing air pressure caused by the sword shook from the aftermath. It wasn't enough to break the great magic before it. The atmosphere was being distorted by the heat, and it seemed like Pan Helliones would be turned into charcoal immediately.

'No, this won't work.'

However, Theodore shook his head. The power of Inferno would surely break down the barrier, but it slowed and weakened with every layer of shockwave it crossed. Once it crossed exactly six shockwaves, the flames faded away.

“The firepower is too slow to be sufficient. He will swing a dozen times before my attack is over.”

What was a great magic which combined firepower and speed?

“Ah.” Theodore recalled a recent memory. It was while he had been exploring the Aiolos divinity.

He thought of Lightning Wind Phase, from the ‘Eight Trigrams Theory’ in the East.

Since ancient times, wind and lightning had been forces which were closely related to each other. There was a theory which claimed both attributes were in a mutually beneficial relationship. Regardless of whether it was right or wrong, Theodore agreed on the basis of his Sorcery.

Wind and lightning converged as his worldview expanded.

Pajijik! Paijijik!

This was Lightning Vortex. The whirlwind of blue lightning struggled like a dragon above Theodore’s palm. The current was amplified on the outer wall of the whirlwind, and the lightning accelerated the wind. It was a cycle of power which surpassed the laws of nature. Marquis Fergana’s lightning was nothing compared to this.

“Go.” With Theodore’s permission, the lightning dragon descended toward the ground.

Kwarururung! A roar shook Helliones’ eardrums, and his face instantly hardened from the power of Theodore’s attack.

“...How interesting. I want to go against it once,” Helliones said.

However, he stuck his legs into the ground and took the Nebenhut posture. It meant he would receive the attack without retreating. He intended to receive the lightning from the front without any tricks! Immediately after that moment, the lightning dragon flashed toward Pan Helliones.

This was the Super Heavy Sword, Pan Helliones...

4th type, Mountain-Buster.

...And the ground soared.

“Crazy. Such a nonsensical thing...!” Hadn’t Theodore repeated these same words several times already? He didn’t see the process perfectly, but he knew the principle behind Helliones’ attack.

Pan Helliones was clearly wielding his sword. However, it wasn’t toward the lightning falling from the sky but toward the ground below him. He wielded his huge sword like a shovel digging into the ground.

The dirt was dug out so hard that it skyrocketed toward the sky as if to bury the sun. The earth blocked the advancing lightning vortex!

Some people might laugh at Helliones’ actions, but Theodore realized that this was the perfect countermeasure to lightning magic. The best way to offset the nature of lightning was to ground it. Half of the lightning was reduced by the dug-up earth, and the rest was erased with a few sword swings.

Paaaang!

Unsurprisingly, Pan Helliones’ big sword was able to break down the lightning vortex without much difficulty.

“Hrmm.” Before the astounded Theodore, Pan Helliones looked down at his hands with narrowed eyes. It was because the lightning’s impact on Helliones’ body wasn’t light, despite the fact that he had dealt with it perfectly. His right hand was numb from the intense lightning, while his left hand was in pain.

Then his heavy eyelids lowered as he muttered, “...How wonderful. My judgment was correct.”

“Judgment?”

“I didn’t have to come to this risky place. If Sir Clovis had given

priority to killing me instead of saving his sister, or if you called the White Tower Master here, I would've lost."

It was as he said. Pan Helliones had created this face-to-face confrontation in his own way, but this battle would've been his execution if one thing had turned out differently.

The distance between them was too far for Theodore to hear Pan's voice. So, he came down to the ground for a moment to listen. In fact, he was also curious about why Pan Helliones was in this situation.

Their eyes met, and Pan Helliones opened his mouth to say, "There is one reason why I let it be despite knowing Sir Randolph's treachery and then allowed myself to be placed in this risky position. Theodore Miller, I have to kill you here."

It was a pure bloodthirst.

Theodore's expression froze before he attempted to joke, "You... did I do something bad to you that I don't know about?"

"This isn't due to a personal grudge. Sir Clovis' betrayal and Rebecca, both of them are nothing compared to getting your head. In order to have this duel, I willingly took the risk."

Helliones hadn't killed Randolph despite knowing of his betrayal because he didn't want to waste power fighting him. Instead, Helliones had taken an unpredictable risk to create this situation because he felt like he had to kill Theodore now.

'Dangerous.' The chill running down Theodore's spine became colder as he read Pan Helliones' resolution. 'That bastard, he wants to kill me here.'

Relying on only his intuition, Pan Helliones had created this battlefield where he could fight Theodore alone. That intuition which was closer to that of a beast had allowed him to make it through countless battlefields.

However, that wasn't all. This sword master had experienced

war with Meltor several times, so he had accumulated a lot of information and tips about how to fight magicians. It was very likely that he would use methods which had been shown to work against magicians in the past.

Theodore would have to bring out all his wild cards in this fight.

If he didn't kill Helliones, then he would die. Theodore had understood this before, but this was the first time he truly realized it. Helliones was Andras' knight, one of the empire's Seven Swords and one of the top 10 magician killers on the continent.

Just like how Meltor's magicians had become adept at countering melee combat, Helliones was a killer who was used to dealing with magic.

'Keep thinking. What skills haven't been used yet? What other tactics do I have left?'

Several choices went through Theodore's mind.

Should he attack while trying to avoid getting damaged? Dismissed. He wouldn't be able to protect his body from the shockwaves. Pan Helliones would be able to hit him three times before he narrowed the distance.

Should he quickly approach using lightning? Pending. There was no guarantee that Theodore's speed wouldn't slow down while passing through the shockwaves. Moreover, he wasn't invincible in his lightning state, so there was a possibility of being damaged by the impact of the aura.

"Dammit, there isn't anything without weaknesses."

According to Lee Yoonsung's memories, the one hit method seemed to be the most effective...?

One effective technique was better than many ineffective tricks. It was like how Pan Helliones' heavy sword replaced all techniques once it reached a certain level.

‘…No, wait a minute.’

“Strength…?”

Theodore was reminded of something, a great magic with an overwhelming destructive power which his opponent wouldn’t be able to resist. It was a power which had already transcended the 7th Circle before he completed his Sorcery.

That power was Abraxas, the great magic which surpassed even the god sword by resonating two opposing attributes.

Hwaruruk.

The moment he thought this, Theodore’s hands started to burn with a red and blue color. The heat and cold were several times more intense than when he had fought Hyde. Muspelheim’s flames and Aquilo’s blood incited his fighting spirit as he joined them together.

‘Okay.’

This would determine Theodore’s victory or defeat.

Chapter 227 – Great Battle (3)

Both powers fluctuated intensely in Theodore's veins. His left hand became agitated like it was burning up, while his right hand was frozen cold.

Like Yin and Yang, they both responded and resisted each other. Indeed, the recoil of Abraxas, the magic which transcended circles, wasn't comparable to other magic. If Theodore lost concentration for even a moment, it would self-destruct with a repulsive force. Theodore's nerves were tense because he knew this fact.

'Still, I can do it.'

He was nervous, but he was not afraid. The magic had once succeeded in imperfect conditions, so he was confident that he could succeed now. Theodore kept his mind sharp. Rather than waves eroding away at rocks, his nerves were like a few raindrops falling onto rocks.

He refined his spirit and gathered it at one point like a drop of water. It was like inserting a thread into a tiny needle hole, but Theodore's highly trained concentration made it possible.

The two unstable forces circulated and started to reveal the shape of a sphere.

Wuuuuuu. It emitted a calm resonant sound. Unlike before, no strong magic storm occurred this time. There wasn't even the slightest fluctuation as he maintained the contradictory existences.

Theodore stood at the boundary of Yin and Yang and looked down at the laws of the world.

"Forced Harmonization."

There was no need to use Umbra's Dimensional Leave. Thanks to his awakened Sorcery, he had surpassed the limit of 'impossible phenomena.'

The chaos of heat and cold, set in the rules of thermodynamics which made up the world, didn't prevail any longer. The magician who had reached the peak deviated from the world. The great magic, Abraxas, was a clue to the 8th Circle.

Then at the next moment, the nucleus of Theodore's 'world' was born.

"...Umm." In contrast to the stable Theodore, Pan Helliones stiffened. He was a warrior who had gone through many battlefields and was one step away from the borders of this world. If he couldn't gauge the nature of the phenomenon happening in front of him, then he would be so ashamed that he would bite his tongue off and die.

"This will determine victory or defeat. Will you fight me with strength?" Anger, admiration, and rage boiled in Pan Helliones' voice.

A red aura sprang up as he expressed this sentiment. Helliones' greatsword burned as it soared up high into the sky. The ground couldn't withstand the increased weight of the aura, and Pan Helliones' legs sank down until his knees.

Theodore's instincts realized what Helliones' attitude meant. 'This is it.'

Immediately after Theodore fought Marquis Fergana, there had been a huge explosion reminiscent of a volcanic explosion.

That destructive power had been equivalent to 7th Circle magic, and it seemed like Pan Hellions was trying to recreate the attack again. The aura which swallowed up the greatsword then became visible to the naked eye.

This sword showed Pan Helliones' 'determined attitude.'

Who would win? That question had already long disappeared from the minds of the two people. Both masters were confident of their victory and threw away everything in order to suppress each

other.

The great magic, Abraxas (ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ): first water and fire phase…

And the Super Heavy Sword, Pan Helliones: Type ο, World Break.

Coincidentally, these two techniques were the opposite of each other. The one that wanted to create and the one that wanted to destroy… The ‘World’s Egg’ and the ‘Sword of Extinction.’

A bead which contained indescribable power was up against a sword which could wipe out a mountain.

————————————!!

Sound and light were broken, and an impact which overwhelmed human senses filled the area. Only the two masters were able to defend themselves in this space.

The floor melted like butter, while the atmosphere turned into a vacuum which denied life. Pan Helliones overcame this environment and watched the two powers struggling against each other in the center.

‘Indeed… It isn’t ordinary. I didn’t think I would be pushed into a power showdown.’

His World Break was hard for an enemy to deal with, although it took too long to use. It had even once stopped a flooded river. An orc village hiding in a mountain had been completely wiped out.

Nevertheless, the unknown magic used by Theodore Miller had more power than that. However, Pan Hellions grasped his greatsword firmly. ‘I am surprised, but it isn’t enough to knock me down.’

He might be the loser, but that didn’t mean he lacked power. His special move couldn’t be blocked so easily. It was a destructive power which had its own durability. If he could just survive this attack—

…However, at the very moment that he thought this…

[No.] There was a voice which couldn’t be heard by his ears. [It is up to here.]

Beyond the light and noise that couldn’t be penetrated, Theodore Miller was declaring his own victory. In the end, Pan Hellions wouldn’t know it until the end. Theodore was hiding his ‘second attack.’

It was the great magic, Abraxas (ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ): second wind and earth collapse.

This technique wasn’t just limited to fire and water. Earth and wind were also opposing attributes. This form which utilized all four attributes was the true perfection of Abraxas.

‘Let’s name it Elemental Burst!’

The storm swallowed Pan Helliones.

*

Chaaeng!

The paladin with the golden shield was pushed and rolled across the ground. It wasn’t difficult to shield from the sword master’s attack, but a shock in the right place was enough to break his balance.

As soon as his defense crumbled, he received a shower of attacks. One blow accurately pierced through this gap, aiming exactly at the paladin’s head. If this blow hit, his brain matter would be scattered instantly.

“D-Dammit!” The crusader Ruben was cornered and forced to use a move he’d been saving.

Unlike magic which was a source of power that existed in the body, divine power was separate and needed to be recharged. A huge amount could be accumulated in the body, and it was possible to increase the limit using a tool.

In Ruben's case, his sword and shield were relics. They were treasures which contained divine power and could be used to save his life if he was in trouble. The surface of the round shield flashed brightly. and a wave of divine power was emitted from it, pushing the two masters away.

"Umm, this is annoying in many ways."

"Don't be in a hurry. It is almost over."

They had just missed an opportunity to win, but Baek Jongmyung and Orta were still calm. It was because this situation had repeated many times already.

Unlike the last time, Baek Jongmyung and Orta were now fighting together, so they could attack as well as defend. Once the divine power stored in the relics were exhausted, Ruben would be suppressed one-sidedly by the two masters.

However, this didn't mean there were no variables.

"Sun God Lairon! Hopefully your servant-"

"I don't want to hear it." Orta moved his fingers before divine power could be generated by the prayer.

Then the light stretched out from Ruben was broken, and the flow of divine power was lost. Feelings of fear and horror, phenomena he had never experienced before, filled the eyes of the confused crusader.

"N-No? How did my technique...?"

"You don't need to know." There was no reason to teach Ruben, so Orta gave a cold answer and cut the space.

"Kuack!" Ruben barely avoided it, but a line of blood was drawn down his face. If he was even a little bit later, it would've carved down to his bones.

As a shadow who ran around the continent performing missions for Meltor, Orta already knew how to deal with paladins and

priests. The tactics to consume the power of the relics and the tricks to hinder prayers, all of them had been identified by him.

Knowing the opponent was the key to winning wars. This was a true saying. As such, Ruben's weaknesses were exposed because Orta knew all about them. Due to being pushed into this situation, Ruben was too slow to react to attacks.

It meant he wasn't a threat anymore. Orta pretended to make a mistake by stepping closer to Ruben, who glared and raised his sword while yelling, "Youuu!"

'A magician dares to rashly enter the range of a sword? Then I will punish that arrogance in the name of God!'

The golden blade struck out with such determination and—

"Fool."

...It slashed through empty space. A few strands of hair were cut off, but Orta plunged into Ruben's arms with no injuries. To be precise, Orta pierced through them.

"You require more training in the sword," Orta ridiculed Ruben while waving his hands. It was a magic which cut through space. Before Ruben could move his upper body, Orta's fingertips cut Ruben's body in a diagonal line. No, to be precise, it should be said that it looked like it was cut?

"Eh?" There was no pain or bleeding, and Ruben's elated expression returned. He didn't know what mistake Orta made, but the attack was pointless. Orta had made a mistake was made when he had the perfect advantage.

Now Ruben could run away. Ruben didn't miss this moment when the airtight defense was relaxed. He moved all his remaining divine power into his legs—

Kwatang.

Ruben couldn't do it. He fell on his butt and made a frustrated

expression. Why had he fallen down in such a dangerous situation? This was a ridiculous mistake. However, he soon realized it. No sensations were being transmitted from the lower part of his body!

“W-What?”

“I cut some of your spinal nerves,” Orta spoke dully, as if he was talking about the bread he’d eaten that morning. “Your cockroach-like vitality can’t restore wounds that it can’t sense. From a medical point of view, this power is inefficient.”

Orta looked down at the fallen Ruben with scornful eyes. Ruben went into a frenzy from the contempt.

Puk! Baek Jongmyung’s sword then pierced through Ruben’s back, penetrating his heart and pinning him to the ground.

“Kuheok…keok, kuheok…!” Nevertheless, Ruben didn’t die.

Baek Jongmyung glanced at Ruben with cold eyes and clicked his tongue. “Hah, you don’t even die from this.”

“It isn’t enough to penetrate the heart.”

“Then?”

Instead of answering the question, Orta raised his thumb. Simultaneously, he cut Ruben’s two legs again.

“Keooook!”

“Don’t make a fuss. Your spinal nerves are cut, so you can’t feel any pain.”

It might seem cruel, but Baek Jongmyung didn’t say anything.

The regenerative power Ruben had shown throughout the fight meant there was a good chance he would survive the serious injury. He would struggle even if both his legs had been cut off and his heart had been stabbed. If Baek Jongmyung pulled out his sword, then Ruben would recover quickly.

Peok!

In the end, Orta kicked the chin of the silent Ruben.

“I’m sick of them, these cockroach-like paladins.” Orta acted like he was remembering a bad memory, before recovering Ruben’s sword and shield.

The nature of the relics depended on divine power, but it was better than leaving them alone. Orta placed the relics in his dimensional pocket and then took out restraints. They were the restraints which had previously been used on Mujak.

Baek Jongmyung received the restraints and sighed, “Sigh, we did it. Thank you for your help, Lord Orta.”

“It is natural to respect the will of the alliance. I know what the crown prince is concerned about.”

Either Prince Elsid or Duke Cornwall would become the winner of this civil war.

Meltor and Andras would return home after this war was over, so their positions were different. The Northern Powers were far away, compared to the Lairon Kingdom which was close to Soldun. If possible, Elsid wanted the crusader to be defeated without being killed.

Orta didn’t refuse this favor. This fight would’ve ended 30 minutes sooner if he had aimed to kill instead of subdue. So, Baek Jongmyung expressed his gratitude for Orta’s consideration.

Then at that moment...

————————————!!

A few kilometers away from the two of them, a tremendous force exploded. A mushroom cloud rose into the sky, and the earth trembled sharply. The distance was considerable, but the heat and pressure still tickled their skin.

Orta realized the meaning first and muttered, “It seems like the fight is over.”

One of the two strong presences had disappeared. Even with Orta's skills, it was impossible to tell from this distance who had won or lost. He sighed as his brows furrowed beneath the mask. "Didn't I tell you not to forget to report, Sir Theodore?"

This was the first time White Tower Master Orta realized that his head could hurt from having a competent junior.

Chapter 228 – Great Battle (4)

Kukukung…

The clash between the two masters had long since passed, but the cry of the earth still hadn't stopped.

The great magic, Abraxas, and the deadly sword technique, World Break…

The clash of these forces caused the terrain to change, creating a tremendous crater. It wouldn't be hard to believe that a meteorite had fallen here. A dark cloud of dust and smoke covered the ground, which had melted from the enormous heat and looked like black tar.

There was a shadow moving inside the pit.

"Cough!" Blood rose in his throat and emerged from his mouth. The pain wasn't just in his bones, but in his entire flesh. Was it because he was too close to the epicenter? No, the exterior damage wasn't that great. Then it was reasonable to assume that this pain came from within him.

'A little… No, it is quite difficult.' Theodore looked inside himself as he tried to maintain his stumbling body.

His seven circles which normally spun smoothly were creaking and in discord with each other. This was Rebound, the cost of using magic which didn't fit into the circles. Abraxas was a great magic that far exceeded the standard of seven circles.

It was much stronger than when he had collided with Hyde, so it was harder to cope. Abraxas was a magic he could only try after completing the 8th circle. That had been a reckless move, but it couldn't be helped since this was the only method he had thought of.

Still, he won, so it wasn't the wrong choice.

“This is absurd. How long will it take to get out of here?”

As his dizziness calmed down, Theodore looked around. The land had sunk, and he was surrounded on all sides by dark walls. The cloud of dust had become a shield which blocked the sunlight, and shadows loomed on the ground.

“My body is a mess, and it will take several months to recover.”

It was nothing compared to his insides, but part of his skin and muscles were torn from the explosion. Even now, his wounds were still bleeding despite using recovery magic. If he released his tension, he might lose consciousness on the spot.

However, Theodore couldn’t faint yet. It was still too risky until he confirmed the death of his enemy, Pan Helliones. Fortunately, Pan Helliones was nearby. “...Co-me.”

“……” Theodore might be injured, but it was nothing compared to Pan Helliones’ state.

A sword master’s body was closer to an adamantium golem than a human, and they could freely control their weight. They were monsters that could survive an enemy’s magic with just their pure aura defense.

Nevertheless, Pan Helliones’ current appearance was terrible.

His lower body didn’t exist, and his right arm was torn, leaving only the part from the elbow up. The greatsword in his left hand was shattered like shards of sugar candy, and there wasn’t anything left of the armor which had been made by the emperor’s master craftsman.

Helliones’ skin had been hit by enormous heat and was distorted by burns, while the vitreous of his eyes was flowing down.

“Great, ha...h,” Pan Helliones gasped for breath as he spoke words of praise, “My power... crushed... in fro...nt. This... qua... lity, I don’t know...”

“What do you mean by that?” Theodore clicked his tongue. “Are you saying that you can’t acknowledge a young man? Didn’t you get smashed by my technique?”

“T-That…”

“No, that’s okay. There is no point asking you since you are having trouble breathing.”

It wasn’t an exaggeration. Pan Helliones’ life was literally at stake. He was only a few moments away from death, so it wouldn’t be strange if he stopped breathing. Therefore, Theodore asked about something that he hadn’t been able to erase from his mind throughout the fight. “Why did you lie?”

“U-Umm?”

“About Randolph’s sister, Rebecca.”

At first, Theodore hadn’t known. The tension that boiled during their battle had covered up his eyes. Funnily enough, he had figured it out while preparing Abraxas. His insight had been supplemented by the two divinities, and he figured out then that Pan Helliones wasn’t the type of person who would do such a thing.

“Senses, good.” However, it stirred the last bit of life inside the dying man. In the East, it was a phenomenon called dying flash, a last moment of lucidity before death.

Pan Helliones’ breathing was briefly restored, and he spoke calmly without any shaking. He looked up at the distant sky with blurred eyes and muttered quietly, “Rebecca is a brilliant disciple. It is a shame to kill her because of such a thing. The authenticity of the statement didn’t matter, as long as Sir Clovis departed.”

“You always thought about a one-on-one fight?”

“Correct. It was true that I made this place to kill you. As a result, I was defeated and you won-” Pan Helliones’ words suddenly stopped, but it wasn’t over yet. He hesitated for a moment before

barely opening his mouth, “And because I can’t see the future of the empire.”

“The future?” Theodore asked reflexively. “What do you mean?”

“…Time is up.” Pan Helliones didn’t explain as he changed the subject. “I am a person who gives my sword and life to the empire, and this is what I can teach the winner. Next time, you should recognize your own power.”

“Why are you saying this?”

“Think of it as a final grudge. It was a good fight, but… the taste of defeat is bitter. In the end, I don’t want to lose to someone too weak.”

Strength was gradually escaping from his body, and the time he had to speak with Theodore was over. It was the last will of a dying person, so Theodore couldn’t help feeling strange hearing it.

Pan Helliones’ breathing gradually ceased, and his heart stopped beating. Shortly afterward, Theodore recognized the moment when Pan Helliones’ soul escaped his body. The empire’s 4th Sword had died.

‘…He couldn’t see the future of the empire?’ Theodore didn’t bask in the glow of victory as he pondered on the words. It was a pessimistic comment coming from one of the empire’s Seven Swords.

Was something going on inside Andras? It would be nice if there were more clues, but even the White Tower spies found it hard to penetrate into the deepest part of the Andras Empire. It wasn’t something Theodore could investigate alone.

“Ugh, is it hurting more because I released my tension…?”

His body throbbed as the forgotten pain resurfaced. He hurriedly drank a potion from his inventory, but he couldn’t reverse the burden on his circles and mind. It was a wound which couldn’t be healed.

Theodore thought that he needed to avoid fighting for the time being. There were no people in the area.

‘Indeed, it wouldn’t be easy to approach this horrible scene.’

A person who could approach probably wouldn’t be ordinary. Theodore thought so as he sat on the rocks around the crater. He was now completely at his limits. His head hurt as all his power drained out of him.

As his vision darkened, he saw a man and woman with blonde hair approaching him.

“……!…!”

“……!”

‘Then I’ll ask you to clear this up, Randolph.’

*

The battle of Babarino Plains ended exactly half a day after it had started. It was a fairly short period of time for the largest battle in the civil war, but the scale of the groups going against each other was the greatest.

The result of the battle was naturally Prince Elsid’s victory. The crusader was suppressed, and Marquis Fergana was unable to fight anymore.

Duke Cornwall quickly fled once the tables turned.

“Catch Duke Cornwall and the other leaders! Arrest the soldiers and send the result of this battle to every estate in this country!”

The news spread faster than a person traveling by horse. Elsid’s victory spread quickly through the Soldun Kingdom and lowered Duke Cornwall’s position, causing the nobles’ heads to start turning frantically.

The duke had lost his 50,000 troops, so there was no longer a chance of victory for him. In other words, it was confirmed that this was Prince Elsid’s victory. The small nobles watching the

battle were forced to start moving, and they could only think of one method to get on the prince's good side.

"There is no future for the nobles faction. Let's capture Duke Cornwall for Prince Elsid."

"The Cornwall Duchy still has 10,000 troops remaining..."

"Isn't it okay if we capture him before he gets there?"

"Prepare an encirclement. Do it instantly."

Yesterday's enemy was today's friend, and today's friend might become tomorrow's enemy. Duke Cornwall reigned at the peak, and he was now branded as the public enemy. In fact, many people felt joyous at his downfall.

The seven small nobles within the influence of the Cornwall Duchy moved their troops and conducted an airtight perimeter around it. It only took a week for the rebel leader, Duke Cornwall, to be sent to the capital. Perhaps it would have been better for him to have died on the battlefield.

Additionally, Marquis Fergana was captured in his mansion without any resistance, and once the other nobles heard that Duke Cornwall had been captured, they surrendered themselves.

It was the moment when the so-called 'Elsid's Civil War' ended. However, there weren't many people who knew the hurdles which Meltor had faced during this brief war. It was a much tougher battle than the conflict between the crown prince and duke.

The fact that Theodore Miller had won against one of the empire's Seven Swords...

It took time for the hidden history to be revealed.

Chapter 229 – Elsid's Gifts (1)

Regardless of the era, wars were never a good thing. They consumed resources, and the process was always harsh on the loser's shoulders.

The victorious leaders had to justify the benefits they'd gotten from the armed conflict and why the people had to bleed. The anger and grudges of the people wouldn't go away just because it was over.

They would consume everything…

Kill as many as those who had died…

And destroy as much as what had been broken.

This was the equal revenge policy, and this line would be crossed the moment they allowed emotions to take over their decisions. They were in pain from the loss they suffered and wanted to use violence as a response. Even so, they couldn't regain what had been lost in the war. No, even if it couldn't be regained, they had to do it.

All of them knew it was the chain of revenge, but no one could escape. However, that didn't really apply to this war.

"…It is complicated, this civil war."

"I think so as well, Your Majesty."

The winning side of the civil war, Elsid and his close adviser Marquis Piris, sighed. It would be more comfortable if this had been a normal war. The winner would have the right to acquire all of the loser's territories and replenish the resources consumed in the war.

However, that wasn't possible in a civil war. The nobles were also part of the Soldun kingdom, while the soldiers were its blood and flesh. Elsid might have been able to cut off the head of the

nobles faction's leader but exploiting their estates would just be eating at his own flesh.

He looked at the documents in his hand with a complex expression. "The ones who arbitrarily added to the duke's army will be punished, but it is difficult to dispose of those who only supported with a few troops or supplies."

"They probably didn't want to join the rebels either."

"However, they lacked the strength to declare neutrality and didn't have the courage to refuse the duke's demands. They aren't innocent, but... it is too much to put them to death."

This was the sorrow of the weak. Those within the sphere of influence of Duke Cornwall hadn't been able to receive Prince Elsid's protection and had no choice but to supply troops. If the duke had won and they hadn't cooperated with him, they could've been trampled on by the duke's overwhelming force.

If these people were executed, it would clearly make the kingdom's affairs more turbulent.

"Confiscate 80% of their assets and prohibit them from crossing the borders of their estates for the next three years. If there is an official request, I will grant permission to leave according to the circumstances."

It wasn't much different from unofficially acquitting those minor rebels. The advisers around Elsid looked surprised, but they sullenly accepted that there were no alternatives. There was something more important than those sinners, and they weren't talking about Duke Cornwall, whose execution had already been decided. It was something else.

"Marquis Fergana. The problem is how to handle him."

As one of the only two masters in the Soldun Kingdom, losing a 7th Circle magician was painful in many ways. In the first place, he wouldn't have been involved in the rebel forces if Duke Cornwall

hadn’t been his son-in-law. Maybe the duke had foreseen this far and planned the marriage for this reason.

However, it was like this now.

“It is too much to kill him, but we can’t let him live.”

His punishment had to be different from the minor nobles who had participated in the war. After all, Marquis Fergana had the power to resist Duke Cornwall, regardless of their family relations. It was impossible for them to excuse his actions.

No, not just them. Even Elsid couldn’t easily forgive Marquis Fergana. So, Elsid asked for advice from the Meltor magicians, “Is there a magic to bind the life and will of a person in the 7th Circle, making them submit completely?”

It sounded ridiculous, but the magician in the white mask nodded easily. Despite being a foreigner, nobody challenged his right to participate in this meeting. He was the main commander of the Meltor army, White Tower Master Orta.

“As long as you give consent, it isn’t an impossible task.”

“Please explain in detail.”

“It is a spell called the Oath of Obedience.”

This was magic which rulers had used in the distant past when they didn’t believe in the loyalty of their followers.

Regardless of whether the person’s origin was in aura or magic, the stigma of complete obedience would be carved into their heart. The magic agreement made it impossible for outsiders to interfere. Once installed, it wouldn’t be resolved until death.

It was a technique which had been used in several countries until three centuries ago, and now it was almost untouched. However, this wasn’t due to a humanitarian reason. It was just that the number of senior magicians who could use the Oath of Obedience had been reduced.

Elsid listened to Orta before speaking in a subdued voice, “That process… Can I request your aid for it?”

He understood the dreadfulness of the technique, even without hearing the explanation. Nevertheless, Elsid had no other choice.

At this point, he couldn’t lose Marquis Fergana. He was sitting on the throne thanks to Meltor’s help, but the threat of the Lairon Kingdom still remained. There was no reason for Elsid to hesitate when he had willingly made an exchange with the East. As the king, he had to prioritize the future of the Soldun Kingdom, even if it deprived a person of their dignity.

“I understand. Please let me leave so that I can prepare the tools.”

“I will allow it. More than anything else… I’m very grateful.”

Orta nodded to Elsid before turning around. The White Tower Master might bow to another king, but he wouldn’t be submissive. Soon after that, the meeting was concluded. The commanders of the rebel army, including Duke Cornwall, were sentenced to death, while Marquis Fergana received a special punishment. The minor nobles who had unwittingly joined the rebels received a light punishment, while the ones who had captured Duke Cornwall received their rewards.

Elsid saw this and couldn’t help muttering, “There is a long way to go, really.”

The revolution of the Soldun Kingdom had just begun.

*

This day was officially recorded as the date when ‘Elsid’s Civil War’ ended.

Duke Cornwall and the 32 nobles who had caused a rebellion as soon as the king died were brought in one by one to be executed. Some were crying while others breathed quietly like they were already resigned to their fates.

Duke Cornwall was the only one who had a different reaction. He had chains on both of his wrists and ankles, and he glared at Elsid while kneeling down.

Then he looked up at the throne and ranted, “…Do you think you are sitting on that throne with your own strength? Without the Cornwall family, there would be no Soldun! I am the true descendant of the king!”

“This rude guy!” The executioner punched the duke.

However, the duke didn’t stop talking despite his bleeding wound. “Call me a traitor! But you aren’t qualified to punish me! You also borrowed the power of another kingdom!”

“…Well, your words aren’t entirely wrong.” Elsid didn’t even twitch an eyebrow as he faced the duke with a signified attitude. He looked down with cold eyes at the person who still didn’t realize his folly until the end.

Duke Cornwall didn’t understand why he hadn’t been able to win.

“Nevertheless, you lost. In a situation where you have no bloodline or legitimacy, you didn’t even know you were being used like a puppet and eventually ran away.”

“W-What?”

“You have no luck, wisdom, or the courage to take responsibility for your mistakes. Such a person doesn’t deserve the throne.”

So, the duke would die here. Elsid raised his left hand. It was the signal to enforce the punishment.

Duke Cornwall’s mouth opened as the executioner’s axe descended. The duke’s attempt to refute the insult to his pride was cut off. The sharp blade of the axe performed its mission as perfectly as always.

The dignity Duke Cornwall had lived with came to an end, and

his head fell down with an ugly expression.

Elsid looked down at it with an unknown expression in his eyes.

“Congratulations on your crown, Your Majesty.”

Hearing a voice from behind, Elsid turned his head. The white-masked and white-robed person was White Tower Master Orta. However, it wasn’t just him. Vince, Viscount Carter, and Theodore were also gathered together with him.

Eldis received the words and shrugged with a slight laugh. “… Congratulating me after the duke dies? You sure are very thorough.”

“There is no guarantee before the embers are put out.”

“That’s right. There is nothing wrong with being careful. Now, the Cornwall estate will revert to the crown.”

The atmosphere lightened as they switched to talking about the land, and Elsid descended from the throne. The execution of Duke Cornwall had been the last one, so Elsid didn’t have to sit there any longer.

Today’s executions completely ended the civil war. The coronation ceremony might not have taken place yet, but Elsid had already become the king. He walked two steps ahead and told the guests, “That reminds me, you said you were leaving in the near future?”

“Yes, we aren’t free enough to stay here for long.”

“Indeed… Is it okay for you leave after this evening?”

“Was there something else you needed?” It was a question which sounded rude, but Orta asked it without any hesitation. Elsid might’ve won the civil war, but the Soldun Kingdom was far from being able to gain its proper capacity.

Orta had requested not to make too much of their presence if possible, so he would be very displeased if Elsid were to say there

was a banquet.

Elsid understood and hurriedly denied it, “No, it isn’t that. It isn’t what you think. There are too many things to do right now.”

They had to restore the buildings destroyed by the sieges as well as compensate the families of the dead soldiers. Elsid had risen to the throne, so he had a responsibility to bear all of this burden and stabilize public sentiments. There was no chance for him to hold a banquet.

Orta read the truth on Elsid’s face and looked at him curiously. Although Orta thought there was nothing else to talk about with Elsid, he would still carry out his duties seriously. “…I understand. I’ll meet you here.”

A bright smile appeared on Elsid’s face. “Thank you for listening to me. I won’t let you down.”

Won’t let them down? A subtle expression appeared on the magicians’ faces. Based on the context, Elsid had prepared a gift for them. Theodore also had a similar thought and soon met Elsid’s gaze. It wasn’t a passing moment. Elsid’s eyes were clearly staring at him.

‘What?’

Simultaneously, the tongue in the palm of his left hand stirred. It was due to the smell of treasure.

Chapter 230 – Elsid's Gifts (2)

It was that night.

Meltor's commanders, who had been resting in their rooms, were escorted somewhere by knights. The destination didn't seem to be a public place like the hall where executions took place. Every time they took a step, the shadows lengthened and their guess was proven correct.

Theodore, Orta, Vince, and Bors took their own paths and soon arrived at the same place.

"I'm sorry for making you come so late at night." Sure enough, the haggard looking Elsid was waiting for them in a secret room.

That wasn't all. From Marquis Piris to Baek Jongmyung who had become the marquis of Atron, all of the king's closest associates were present. These were the people who would lead the next generation of the Soldun Kingdom. It was too big a group for empty flattery or gifts.

'If so, is there another reason?' Theodore's brow furrowed as he grasped the meaning. If all the leaders were gathered together, this meant it was for more than simply saying 'thanks' to Meltor.

The conditions were normal, so it wasn't easy to think of an answer. In such a case, it meant there weren't enough clues to come to a conclusion yet, or that the hand prepared by the other party was unprecedented.

What did Elsid call them to talk about exactly?

Four pairs of eyes turned to Elsid, and he raised his right hand like he had been waiting for this moment. Then one of the knights standing behind him disappeared into a secret passage. Then Elsid's firmly closed mouth opened, "The full story will begin after 'that' is brought out… but I will say a few words before that."

The young man, who had become king, looked around with

dignified eyes, and spoke with a much more solemn face than before. “First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation for Meltor’s help. You have your own interests, but that doesn’t change the fact that you helped us. As long as this body of mine is on the throne, think of us as solid allies.”

“Thank you for Your Majesty’s words.”

“But I am well aware of how meaningless words are when it comes to international relations. So, I prepared my own sincerity.”

The moment that Orta was about to reply…

“Your Majesty, here is the sinner.” The knight who had disappeared into the secret passage a short while ago returned pulling a large chain. The clanging sound of the metal echoed in the confined space, but nobody complained about the noise. It was because the subject was more important than the chains.

“This…!”

“Crusader!”

Vince and Viscount Carter cried out first.

It was the sword of the Lairon Kingdom, Crusader Ruben.

The paladin who had been captured on the Babarino Plains now appeared before them. Both of his legs had been cut off and left untreated, while the thick chains wrapped around his arms and chest looked like they could be used with an anchor for a sailboat. Something had been placed in his mouth to prevent him from recovering his divine power. It was made of ogre tendons which even a killer whale would find hard to chew.

Elsid looked down at him with cold eyes and ordered, “Release only his mouth.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” With an iron gauntlet, the knight pulled out the string, which was made of tendons, from Ruben’s mouth. In the process, some parts of Ruben’s lips were torn, but nobody

rebuked the knight.

Blood dripped from his mouth. Ruben rubbed his mouth and spoke for the first time in almost a fortnight, “Cough! C-Cough! D-Damn, cough!”

His saliva was dry and his lips were torn. Even so, the wounds were already beginning to heal. Ruben looked at the representatives of Soldun and Meltor, and spoke with a distorted expression, “You are worse than dogs! Do you know that? How long can you keep me as a prisoner? I, Ruben, will never forget today’s humiliation!”

The quietly listening Orta suddenly looked at Elsid and said, “Your Majesty.”

“I will allow it.”

‘Allow it…?’ While the crowd looked confused, Orta kicked Ruben’s chin. The sound of his jaw breaking rang out.

“Keoook…”

Of course, those bones would recover soon, but Ruben stopped speaking. It was because Orta’s violence had come without any notice, and Ruben feared Orta’s ability to push him one-sidedly. Above all, there was killing intent coming from behind the white mask. Orta’s eerie aura was a serious threat.

Elsid raised his hand again to stop Orta and said, “Crusader Ruben.”

“…What is it?” Ruben was like a mad dog who had become well-behaved after being punished. The eyes of the Soldun officials twitched, but they didn’t do anything.

Elsid simply smiled and looked down at Ruben placed below him.

“Did you hear His Holiness speak? I heard that the crusaders of the Lairon Sacred Order can hear his words at any time.”

“Hah, his eyes and ears aren’t far away.” Ruben laughed and

color filled his cheeks when he heard the words ‘His Holiness.’ “He said he would be benevolent. If you release me now, as well as cut off that barbarian’s limbs and send them to Lairon, he will acknowledge your crown.”

“Hoh, really?”

“Yes. Give up on the delusion of communicating with the land of barbarians and be baptized by Lairon. Then Lairon and Soldun will be able to get along peacefully.”

Ruben was far too arrogant for a prisoner, but the Lairon Kingdom was difficult. It wouldn’t end here if Elsid killed the crusader.

Unlike normal masters, the Sacred Order was able to cover the vacancy of a crusader after a certain amount of time. The true power of the soldiers, berserkers, and paladins in the Sacred Order had never been revealed. Ruben was acting like this because he knew that Soldun couldn’t afford another war after their civil war.

“Get along peacefully…” Elsid murmured with a sneer.

They would become a tributary and have to make ‘donations.’ Just the name ‘Lairon’ made him sick. These disgusting donations were to be packaged as ‘peace?’ Thanks to Ruben, Elsid was able to make a decision without hesitation. “Sir Orta.”

“Yes.”

“This is the present that I—no, the Soldun Kingdom has prepared for you,” Elsid spoke firmly as he raised his left hand.

Simultaneously, there was a flash inside the room.

Puok! To be precise, a blade pierced the back of a person’s head. Ruben didn’t understand it even at the last minute when he collapsed onto the ground. His brain, where his divine power had been stored, was now destroyed. The brain was the place where the soul dwelled, so even an immortal being would be seriously hurt. Undoubtedly, a half crusader wouldn’t be able to endure it.

“Your Majesty.”

At Orta’s questioning look, Elsid shrugged and added, “I didn’t say it in advance, but all prisoners have been executed. With this, we are completely Lairon’s enemies.”

“…What does that mean?”

“As a religious country that doesn’t acknowledge magic and sticks to Andras, the Lairon Kingdom can’t coexist with you. Of course, we are weaker than Lairon, but Soldun would like to form an alliance with Meltor.”

Orta’s mind moved quickly. It was natural for Lairon to join Andras, and Meltor needed as much power as possible. They had an alliance with Elvenheim thanks to Theodore, and they were also in negotiations with Austen. Soldun’s land warfare was slightly lacking, but the fleet of a coastal kingdom couldn’t be neglected.

“I will speak to My Liege positively about this.”

“Sigh, thank you. I have barely managed to stop myself from stepping over the cliff.”

It wasn’t an exaggeration. If Orta refused this offer, Soldun had no place left on the Central Continent. They were Lairon’s enemy and their national power was weakened due to the civil war.

However, what if Soldun joined hands with another kingdom? In just a few days, Orta’s actions of taking down 11 estates had already spread through the central region. No nation would preemptively strike with his name attached to the Soldun Kingdom.

Then Elsid turned his gaze toward Theodore. “Sir Theodore.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“It was through chance that I fortunately made a connection with you. It is clear that if it wasn’t for the connection with Lord Baek and his son, Meltor’s support wouldn’t have made it in time. Your impression of me at the first meeting probably wasn’t very

good, but I am really grateful that you answered my call."

"I am undeserving of those words."

Elsid grinned and gestured to the knight behind him again, who then brought out a pole wrapped in cloth. The pole was like a spear or a cane, and it was hard to know its purpose.

'If I look at it with X-ray Vision... eh? It isn't working?'

Theodore's eyes shook after using Hawkeye, which was a power he had obtained from absorbing an artefact. However, it had evolved to become several times more powerful than it had been originally. Moreover, this vision magic was supplemented by his seven circles and the two divinities.

Yet Elsid didn't give any explanation about the item as he unwrapped the cloth.

"Ah..." A strange expression appeared on Theodore's face as he saw it.

It was because the blue presence coming from the stick, which was less than 2 meters long, made his skin tingle. Be it a blessing or a curse, an unbelievable amount of power was contained in that rod.

"This is an artefact handed down through the Soldun royal family. It's called the 'King's Flagpole.'"

It was said that a king had crossed the ocean and set up a kingdom in a corner of the Central Continent. The name of the 'Wave King' was Okeanos.

Some speculated that he was from the East, while others worshipped him as a divine human who had fallen from the heavens. The works he had done during his life were so wonderful that it was hard to think of him as an ordinary human.

Be it protecting the country by controlling the rough ocean currents in nearby waters, mitigating the flood damage which

occurred several times a year, or sending away a malicious sea dragon…

The king of that kingdom had evidently been a sword master or great magician, a mysterious hero whose stories were still being passed down. Furthermore, according to Elsid, this was the first flagpole that the Wave King had used to hang his flag.

Theodore wanted to have it, but he asked before that, “Is it okay to give me such a historic object?”

“Well, normally it is forbidden.” Elsid smiled and pointed at the flagpole. “But the Wave King said that someday a qualified person would come to get this. The proof is that it is shining blue right now. As soon as I thought about you, it started emitting this light.”

“Still…”

“Everyone has agreed. Anyway, this was just used as a decoration, so it is several times more useful to give it to our benefactor.”

Theodore couldn’t refuse. So, he politely extended both his hands and accepted the King’s Flagpole. A cool power seeped into his palms. Unlike Aquilo’s blood, this felt cool and refreshing like the waves of the sea.

‘Appraisal.’

He instinctively used it as always, but suddenly—

[Please note! The divine artefact is damaged!]

[You can only see some of the information with Appraisal. It might be further damaged if you try to obtain more information.]

[+28 ————’s ——dent (Divine Artefact)]

The god of the sea, ————’s is his treasure. All ——beings stabbed by it, a person stuck by this — will become extremely vulnerable. ——’s divinity, and it won’t exercise its power unless the person possesses a corresponding divinity. ——————

* The rating of this magic tool is '——.'

* It can't be viewed.

* It can't be viewed.

* It can't be viewed.]

This was the first time he had seen an information window like this.

'W-What?' Theodore's eyes widened with confusion, causing Gluttony to react to his emotions and wake up. What happened to make the User stir Gluttony awake? Gluttony yawned a few times before looking out.

-……Huh!?

'Ah, what a surprise!'

Theodore was scared by Gluttony's shout and rebuked it, but it didn't listen. Gluttony was gazing at the King's Flagpole with a strange expression. Theodore noticed its gaze and asked, 'What? Do you know that rod?'

–Of course, Gluttony spoke heavily. –The god who ruled the oceans, ————'s trident. Damn, I can't say the name. Am I still bound by causality?

'Wait a minute, that is a trident?'

-That's right. I don't know where the ends are, but this was originally a trident. It was a treasure that could cause tidal waves just be stabbing once.

Then Gluttony noticed something while explaining to Theodore.

There was the contract with Dmitra, who became an ancient elemental, as well as Aiolos' Pocket which had been removed from the Library. Now, Theodore was handed a divine treasure by a descendant who didn't know its value.

There was only one step left until the four world outlook was

complete. If the last remaining fire divinity in this age came into Theodore's hands, he would no longer be a mortal.

Gluttony felt agony and anxiety because it couldn't rejoice over this fact, but those emotions soon faded. No matter what was involved, Gluttony's role was to guide the breakthrough. Only one question remained.

–What is your intention, Prometheus?

It was a monologue that no one could understand the meaning of yet.

Chapter 231 – Elsid's Gifts (3)

The conversation ended with Elsid's gift. An alliance might be established, but Orta didn't have the full authority of the state. He needed to clear it with Kurt III first before more details could be discussed.

Thus, the magicians in the secret room decided to return to their quarters. Vince and Carter followed their guides, while Orta accompanied Theodore. The place where the two people were heading was a private room.

It was a room which contained the defectors, whose identities only Orta and Theodore knew. Randolph Clovis and Rebecca Clovis, the successors of Clovis who once excelled in the empire as one of the Seven Swords, were now hiding in this room after defecting from Andras.

Knock, knock.

The senses of a sword master would've noticed the approach of the Theodore and Orta a long time ago, so Theodore knocked briefly without any worries. Unsurprisingly, the door opened as soon as he raised his hand.

"Ah, you've come?" Randolph greeted him cheerfully as usual, but then he looked awkward when he saw Orta behind Theodore. Randolph's intuition sensed that Orta was strong, so he didn't let go of his vigilance from the first meeting. Theodore was aware of this, so he felt the tension constrict his neck.

Then Randolph spoke with an awkward expression, "...It looks like you didn't come to play, but would you like some tea?"

Theodore smiled wryly and shook his head.

"No, that's okay. White Tower Master?"

"I would like a drink."

Orta nodded and crossed the threshold, while Theodore followed and closed the door. Then he used magic to completely block sound from escaping the room. Spells which could deceive a sword master's senses were rare, but a magician always needed to be prepared for the worst. Of course, there was someone watching Theodore's actions obsessively.

Theodore looked forward and faced her.

"Good evening, Sir Theodore."

She had blonde hair which fell to her shoulders and green eyes that were a different color to Ellenoa's. Her white skin showed she was from a noble family, but her firmly disciplined body showed that she didn't grow up like a plant in a greenhouse. A storyteller would describe her as a 'manly beauty.'

Rebecca Clovis was truly a knight.

"...Good evening. How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay. I had no big injuries in the first place."

It was as she said. Pan Helliones hadn't inflicted any injuries on Rebecca while binding her. He hadn't wanted her to be injured while bound on a big battlefield. As such, Theodore's condition was worse than Rebecca's.

"Captain Theodore." The conversation between the two of them was interrupted by Orta.

He looked down at the black tea Randolph handed him before sighing and placing it on a corner of the table. It was an elusive taste which was hard to express.

Then Orta spoke as casually as always, "The expedition army, including me, will return home two days later in the early dawn. The war mages are Meltor's core power, so they can't stay away for too long."

"Yes, I'm aware of that."

“The magic circle preparation will be done by that time. The problem is… your body’s condition is worse than I thought.”

The Clovis siblings’ expressions stiffened as they listened.

Simultaneously, Orta tapped his index finger on the table. “Your circles are overloaded. It is uncommon for a 7th Circle magician, but maybe it will be rewarding on the way to the next level. These symptoms will get better over time. But…”

Theodore interrupted, “I won’t be able to go through the long-distance movement.”

“…That’s right,” Orta confirmed with a heavy voice under the mask. “It is only a little bit painful now, but long-distance space travel can cause serious problems. However, we can’t keep the troops in the Soldun Kingdom until you are healed.”

“I understand, Tower Master.”

Theodore’s body was important, but the war mages were Meltor’s precious lifeline. They weren’t a force that could be left neglected in the Soldun Kingdom. Theodore was well aware of this and accepted it.

Orta’s judgment was correct, so Theodore had one favor left to ask. “Then please look after these two people.”

Apart from their relationship with Theodore, the two people were ultimately defectors who had come from an enemy country. There might be some who would doubt their intentions, or some people might use them to get closer to Theodore. However, if a famous person like White Tower Master Orta was looking after them, then it was possible to block such attempts.

“..I’ll do so. Don’t forget that you are ultimately responsible for guaranteeing their identity.”

“Of course.”

“Hrmm.”

Orta's conversation ended there. He gulped down the rest of the tea and left the room with a simple goodbye. Perhaps that was his own consideration. No matter what they were to Theodore, Orta was still a stranger to the Clovis siblings. Therefore, the contents of the conversation would be greatly reduced.

Randolph looked at Theodore with a subtle expression. "Theo, is that person reliable?"

"Yes..." It was an unexpected question but Theodore replied quickly.

"A worthy ally?"

"...That is for certain. He is a person you should never be careless around, and it is impossible to see the bottom of him. It is reassuring if he is an ally, but I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if he were an enemy," Theodore said, smiling bitterly.

It couldn't be helped. Orta was a completely different type of person from Veronica and Blundell, who openly showed off their presences. He didn't care about right and wrong when achieving his purpose, and used whatever method was necessary to defeat his target, even if it was cowardly. In some ways, he was more of an assassin than an actual assassin. It was no wonder that Kurt put him in charge of important external missions.

Following this, Theodore, Randolph, and Rebecca talked casually. They conversed about what had happened after their separation in the Sipoto wilderness, the reunion with Rebecca, thrashing the rotten elders of their family, and so on.

As Theodore focused on their stories, he would occasionally laugh loudly or smile darkly. There was a bitter story and also a depressing story. Even so, they could laugh. The places and events were different, but they could congratulate each other on the result.

Then the conversation between the three people ended. It

happened when Theodore got up from the chair and stood in front of the door.

Sururung. Rebecca abruptly pulled out her sword and approached him. Theodore didn't feel any hostility, but it was natural to be confused. However, it was nothing compared to what followed.

"I swear on the Clovis name, this body..."

Randolph knew the meaning of the phrase and his eyes widened, while Theodore remained silent because he didn't know what was going on.

Thanks to that, Rebecca's words echoed in the room, "From now on, this body will serve you like a piece of steel. I swear that this body may break and melt, but it will never bend. My heart will jump at your command, or stop at your command."

"R-Rebecca?"

"I will serve you until the day that the sun no longer sets."

Rebecca reversed the sword she held in his hand, placed her right knee on the ground and bowed deeply.

Theodore didn't know the meaning of this gesture, but he could feel the weight behind it. It was a covenant an Andras knight used when they wanted to serve a master for the rest of their life.

"Rebecca, Clovis's daughter, sees her master."

Rebecca raised her sword with both hands, laughing with an expression that Theodore had never seen from her before.

*

"Hah..." Theodore sighed as he fell onto his bed.

Setting aside his physical fatigue, Rebecca's vow was very shocking. It was something that a warrior could only do once in their lives. The knight who swore this oath devoted their life and death to their master. Randolph had explained so with a heavy

sigh.

–Sigh, I am asking this of you.

Randolph didn't even try to persuade her, probably because he felt the weight of her words and her stubbornness. If she intended to withdraw this oath, she wouldn't have made it in the first place.

His only sister had become the subordinate of his friend. Theodore was reliable. However, as Rebecca's brother, it was natural for Randolph to feel disturbed.

Rebecca's words still remained in Theodore's ears.

–I won't follow My Lord right now, Rebecca said. Then she laid her hands on her heart with a face filled with joy and continued, –This body of mine is not yet able to be your sword and protect you. I will come find you again on the day when I won't be a burden to you.

Rebecca said she would become a sword master for Theodore and then stubbornly bowed her head. She showed her intention to fulfill her oath, even if he refused. Theodore reluctantly accepted her sword and returned it. As a result, an unofficial relationship formed between the two.

"...Well, it can't be helped."

Fortunately, he couldn't find any feelings of affection on her face. He already had the courtship with Ellenoa, so fortunately the situation hadn't become more complicated.

Right now, Theodore's current capabilities were more important than Rebecca's actions.

'Let's think about this instead.' After all, the problem with Rebecca wouldn't have another answer even if he worried about it. 'Let's replay the fight against Pan Helliones.'

It was easier to think about magic than love relationships. His body cooled down as soon as soon as he imagined Pan Helliones'

face. Pan Helliones was the owner of a destructive power which could collapse a mountain in one attack. It wasn't the first time Theodore had confronted a sword master, but it made him realize that the world was truly wide.

Additionally, it helped him to realize what he lacked.

'I fought too crudely. If I combined my techniques effectively, I wouldn't have had to gamble with Abraxas.'

It wasn't arrogance but the truth. Theodore's total powers already exceeded those of a normal master. He had the fires of Muspelheim, the blood of a sea dragon the divinity of the wind, and the divinity of Mother Earth. There were also the dimensional abilities of Umbra and his Forced Harmonization. For him who was nearing an 'almighty' state, Theodore had many options.

What if he had moved Hellfire through space by exploiting Dimensional Leave?

What if he had bombarded Pan Helliones in all directions with lightning strikes?

What if he had used Mitra's power to soften the ground?

There were a few effective alternatives. However, at the time of the fight, he hadn't been able to come up with these solutions. Why hadn't he thought of those ideas at the time? He had stayed cool in his own way, but he still hadn't been thinking calmly.

'...This is the problem with having too many powers.'

The skills each had strong personalities, and if even one ability reached its peak, that would be the ultimate power.

Umbra, Muspelheim, sea dragon, Mother Earth, wind god...

A person normally devoted their life to studying one power, while Theodore was trying to grasp all of them. Was this greedy method wrong?

–Don't misunderstand. Gluttony trampled on the anxiety which

sprouted within Theodore. –This diversity is User's strength. Right now, it is meaningless to pursue another way. You will eventually reach the peak of all of them when joining them together.

'…Is that so?'

-That's right. You can fill up what you are lacking. Eat them, eat everything. There is no reason for User to feel ignorant.

Indeed, this was the remark of a gluttonous grimoire. Theodore couldn't help laughing as he acknowledged that Gluttony had a point.

If Theodore consolidated his powers into one, he would surely become stronger. However, he couldn't relax before it was consolidated. Currently, it was difficult to demonstrate the true value of Forced Harmonization, which mixed all magic into one.

So, he had to eat until it was all filled up.

Then an idea flashed through Theodore's mind. "I've decided."

–What?

"I will head toward Kargas."

Before Gluttony could ask why, Theodore explained, "I am going to meet that old man again."

The elderly face of a competitor he'd met in Kargas' underground auction rose into his mind. It was Heinrich. Unlike Theodore, Heinrich had been collecting original books for decades. The value of his library couldn't be measured.

Thus, Theodore's next destination was Sipoto.

Chapter 232 – Elsid's Gifts (4)

It was two days after that.

As Orta had announced in advance, he completed the creation of the large-scale magic circle to return with the expedition army. He was a 7th Circle magician and the best at space magic, but it still wasn't easy to take hundreds of people with him.

It had taken a few days to prepare a magic circle with a diameter of 100 meters and gather all the magic power.

'The recoil will be big, even if he is the tower master. Will he be okay?' Theodore's concern wasn't excessive.

After all, it was a big burden to move hundreds of people through long-distance space travel from the Central Continent to the Northern Continent. Theodore himself wasn't sure he would be able to do it at the 8th Circle.

Perhaps White Tower Master Orta had a 'Sorcery' that made this possible. At that moment, there was a throbbing pain in Theodore's chest. "Ugh."

This was circle overload; pain filled his abused body in exchange for completing the great magic Abraxas. Unlike trauma which could be treated with potions, this overload didn't have effective means of treatment. Despite the modern advances, the Magic Society didn't have a solution for it aside from 'time.'

He had consumed two elixirs, but he couldn't see any effects taking place.

'Well, I didn't think it would recover in just two days. ...At least one month,' Theodore diagnosed himself and looked at the man approaching him.

The man's expression had been hidden since the moment Theodore met him.

“You are leaving for Kargas,” the White Tower Master, Orta, spoke in a dry voice as usual.

“Yes, I will return via Sipoto.”

“The border city. Are you perhaps planning to attend the underground auction? It isn’t held at this time.” Orta was head of the intelligence network, so he was well aware of the underground auction house associated with Sipoto. Maybe he had more details than the information guild.

While thinking he would need to find out later, Theodore replied to his question, “No. I have a person I want to meet. I will come home as soon as I finish with him.”

“Give me the name of the person, just in case.”

“Heinrich, famous for his nickname of the ‘Old Books Maniac.’

“Old Books Maniac Heinrich… I understand. Then I will be going.” Orta turned around at the reply from Theodore and headed to the center of the magic circle. It seemed that he needed to make final adjustments before the long-distance teleport.

Some people followed closely after him in approaching Theodore. They were Vince and the Clovis siblings, who were worried about Theodore’s condition. The three people lined up before Theodore.

“In the end, you will be left alone,” Vince said with a bitter smile. He couldn’t do anything, despite his position as a teacher.

“Nothing will happen in a day or two.”

“Then take care of yourself and return. There is no need to rush, but don’t be too late.”

“Yes. I will keep that in mind, Master.”

Vince left after his farewell speech. Then Randolph spoke while scratching the back of his head in a sign of uneasiness, “…Are you sure I shouldn’t stay by your side? It doesn’t make sense to leave

without you.”

“Randolph, I understand your heart, but there is no need.” Theodore shook his head with a light sigh. “Don’t worry about me. Wait in Mana-vil with Rebecca.”

Of course, there was an option to have Randolph accompany him. He could request the escort of a sword master. However, Theodore didn’t choose that option. It wasn’t because he didn’t want to lean on Randolph but because he wanted to exclude the risk factor. He couldn’t tell if there was a benefit to Randolph accompanying him.

‘There might be some type of tracking device. The empire collects and uses all types of artifacts instead of magic. It is wiser to leave Randolph in Mana-vil in case his position is exposed to Andras.’

When they took Rebecca hostage, Andras had probably been expecting their betrayal. They wouldn’t have ruled out the possibility of one of the Clovis siblings escaping. That was why it was decided to have them move to Meltor through Orta’s space magic.

Randolph thought it was unfortunate, but Rebecca bowed to Theodore and followed his words. “I will wait until you return, My Lord.”

“...Yes, I’ll see you later.” It was the best answer for Theodore, who still wasn’t familiar with her. She was a knight he competed with once in public and the sister of his friend. Now, she had sworn a pledge of loyalty to him. There would be a chance to sort out this complicated relationship, but it would not be now.

Then almost a thousand people stood on the magic circle. The preparations were finished. Orta closed his eyes in the center, and the magic circle flashed.

Wuuuong...

The huge amount of magic power caused a gust of wind to blow, and an unknown pressure to build up. There was enough power that even a person who didn't practice mana could feel it. In the midst of that vortex, Orta's mouth opened, "「————」"

Unfortunately, Theodore couldn't hear it. The space around Orta started to distort as soon as the words were spoken. It resembled a haze or a mirage, but anything which touched it disappeared without a trace. Space magic was dangerous and difficult magic. However, unlike the scale of the magic circle, the invocation was instant.

Flash! The light couldn't be penetrated with human vision, and the 800 people in the magic circle disappeared. One of the many mysteries of this age vanished without a trace.

"...This is amazing. It is hard to believe that a person can do such huge magic."

"It is ridiculous for us too." Theodore shrugged with a smile. If anyone could use this magic, the entire continent would be under the feet of the Meltor Kingdom. Theodore spoke to Baek Jongmyung for a while and then his means of transportation arrived.

Hii-hihihihing!

It was a carriage pulled by two horses. Although it seemed rough, the body of the carriage was actually covered with lightweight spells, and the inside of the carriage was four times wider than it seemed due to space magic.

This was a carriage for distinguished guests. It was the gift from King Elsid, who considered the fact that Theodore wouldn't want to be seen by others.

"Then I will be going now." Theodore shook Baek Jongmyung's hand, noticing his appreciation and anxiety. The appreciation was directed to Theodore, while the worry was probably...

“Please look after my son, Sir Theodore.”

“You don’t need to worry. The person who found his way to me isn’t the same as before.”

“Really? That boy…?” Baek Jongmyung was strangely moved by Theodore’s words. Perhaps, it was like a baby bird leaving its nest? Theodore never had a child or disciple, so he didn’t know the feeling.

The conversation between the two people ended there. Baek Jongmyung left, and Theodore entered the carriage, lying down on the bed.

This was his last memory in the Soldun Kingdom.

*

In a place that no one knew, someone opened their mouth. The person’s appearance couldn’t be seen because they were covered in darkness, but the voice seemed to come from a middle-aged man.

No, it was a voice that was like that of a young man. “I just received the news. He has crossed the border of the Soldun Kingdom. He is alone.”

“Hoh.” This time, it was the voice of an old man. “It is a good period to open the jaws of death… Can it be done?”

“No, we can’t be sure of his power in the present.” The third voice was that of a young woman. Just listening to the voice made a person feel like the owner of the voice was a beauty.

She spoke in a voice that didn’t contain any emotions, “The target dealt with the 4th Sword, Pan Helliones. In addition, based on the level of the destruction marks left on Babarino Plains, he is a top-level master.”

“Ohh… He is terrifying at this age. He is someone who deserves to be our enemy.”

“But there is a variable that he doesn’t know we are watching,”

another voice filled with admiration and hatred replied to the old man.

There were four people rattling in the darkness where nothing could be seen. Their genders, ages, and species were unknown. Then the meeting shortly came to a conclusion.

“Use this occasion to remove him,” the fourth voice, which sounded like molten iron, suggested.

“How?” The young man asked.

The old man replied, “There is a maneuver called ‘Let the Barbarians Fight Among Themselves’ on the Eastern Continent. How about using it?”

“Let the Barbarians Fight Among Themselves?”

“Barbarians will fight the barbarians. It means we don’t have to move since the enemies will take care of each other. Now, isn’t it a suitable method in this situation?”

The other three voices were silent. They were reviewing the old man’s proposal and considering if it was possible or not. Subsequently, the beautiful woman’s voice complained toward the old man, “How much of our influence in the Central Continent will we lose if we drag them in?”

“Um, that might not be the case,” the old man spoke with an eerie laugh. “The loss of the 4th Sword is big. Andras won’t be able to let go of this chance to retaliate. We just need to give them a push.”

“...It means to pass them information.”

“Besides, the shadows are easier to deceive than the white tower.” The old man’s voice contained a dark hatred at the end.

The White Tower Master, Orta... Everything from his birth to his growth was unidentified. It was almost impossible to fool that monster’s attention inside Meltor, although it might be possible

outside of it. The old man had tried to penetrate Orta's surveillance a number of times, but he had never succeeded. So, it was humiliating for the old man. This time, the old man would break that arrogant man's nose.

"...What destination is the target heading to?" The voice like molten iron asked.

"The target's carriage is heading to Kargas. It is hard to see it as a trap because the carriage is moving on a straight path."

"Then he will likely pass through Sipoto."

"I guess he is thinking of going to Meltor through Kargas."

The four voices asked questions and made plans. Despite the four people being of different ages, genders, and species, their discussion was rational and calm.

Kargas' border city, Sipoto...

The target's location, distance to the city, and other variables were answered.

"...It isn't too late if we hurry."

"It isn't good to send anyone with less power than the 4th Sword. If Andras moves on this information, his death will be confirmed."

"We must find a way to get rid of the bodies and the byproducts."

"Yes, I will take all necessary measures."

The group had a reason for doing this. Charlotte's Necklace had been taken away from them at the underground auction house. The Orcus Company's headquarters had been devastated by an unidentified battle.

They had ignored the humiliation and hidden in the shadows. They would kill the target, Theodore Miller, to get rid of their resentment. The four warlocks hiding in the darkness of the Central Continent... The eyes of the Four Horsemen glimmered with an eerie light.

The ominous and fascinating sight resembled blood dripping down. Then the four pairs of eyes closed, and nothing remained in the darkness.

Chapter 233 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (1)

The trading kingdom, Kargas, which was in the heart of the Central Continent, was close to being a non-aggression zone. Since ancient times, Kargas had known it was meaningless to expand with force. Its military power was just like a reed before the storm that was the Northern powers.

Andras and Meltor… Over the centuries, these two powers had repeated a war which was far beyond Kargas' capabilities. Kargas had long since been convinced that it would be impossible to confront them with force.

–Then we must survive in other ways, someone had said. –The power to control this world isn't just through violence.

Power, financial resources, intellect… all species wielded these things. With politics and the economy, this so-called society wasn't so simple. If the power gap was obvious, then there was no reason to compete with power. Fortunately, Kargas was able to become a key trading area and receive the secret assistance of other nations that didn't want to share a direct border with the Northern powers.

It was like the idiom 'without lips, one's teeth would feel the cold (fig. intimately interdependent).' Over the years, there were a few kings who had tried to gain Kargas' wealth, but no one had ever achieved it.

It was unacceptable for the other kingdoms to let what they had developed to enter into the hands of others. In a sense, Kargas had survived as a result of exploiting human psychology. If it was put nicely, they were clever. If it was put badly, they were sly and cunning. This was the way of survival for weak countries.

「 A strong person doesn't survive. It is the survivor who is strong. 」

This was a type of worldly wisdom. If the Kargas Kingdom had tried a military expansion, it would likely have been destroyed without surviving 100 years. A kingdom with a different name would be built in this place, and this process would be repeated over and over.

As a result, Kargas was successful. The evidence was that it was completely calm despite being the closest kingdom to the North.

Austen suffered from the drought which occurred on an irregular cycle, while Soldun suffered from the actions of the kingdoms it was surrounded by. Lairon, on the other hand, was a kingdom full of fanatics.

So, Kargas was safe and abundant compared to all of them. Moderately famous people settled in Kargas.

'I have been living in Sipoto for 20 years already.' The Old Books Maniac, Heinrich was similar.

After retiring, he had moved to Sipoto in Kargas. He enjoyed buying rare books and didn't plan to leave. Heinrich had completely withdrawn from political circles and thought his plan was going smoothly.

...If only his hobby hadn't brought in a new problem.

"Haha! Sir Heinrich, famous for your collection of books. Your library is truly amazing." The person who spoke had a mustache and a greasy looking face. His fat belly proved his laziness, while his expensive clothing hung in several folds.

The man was like a big toad, and Heinrich barely managed to suppress his sigh as he said, "I am undeserving of your words, Viscount Brahms."

Heinrich wanted to kick him out right away, but Brahms' status wasn't one that was easy to deal with. Brahms was a noble and senior magician of Kargas, and it was rumored that he had recently challenged the wall of the 6th Circle.

It wasn't uncommon in Meltor, but a 6th Circle magician in the Central Continent was strong. He wasn't someone an outsider could handle.

"... What book did you come for today?"

There was only one reason why Brahms would come to Heinrich. Brahms' real purpose was to steal rare magic books in the name of 'renting' them. Unsurprisingly, greed filled Brahms' eyes which resembled those of a toad. "Excuse me, I have to ask you a favor today. There are rumors that you got your hands on 'Book of Clouds'?"

"No, where did you hear...?" Heinrich stopped himself, but it was already too late.

Viscount Brahms rubbed his palms together and urged Heinrich to answer, "I don't know the source of the rumor, but can I borrow it? I swear on my name, I will reward you generously."

"Ummm..." If Heinrich believed that, he would be a goldfish, not a man. It would be fortunate if Viscount Brahms paid even half the price of the book. Moreover, he didn't want to lose a book like the Book of Clouds. Was it okay to refuse at least once?

Heinrich made a cautious look and shook his head. "I'm sorry, but it's a little difficult."

"Hah, thank yo... Hrmm? What did you say just now?" Brahms's frivolous expression turned to stone.

Simultaneously, Heinrich felt his heart grow heavier as he saw Brahms' expression. This wasn't uncommon. The magicians who came to him didn't understand why an old man, not a magician, would collect magic books. They would demand the books, stating that they were the ones who could make the best use of them.

Viscount Brahms had the same look and tone.

"Insolent...!" Viscount Brahms' thick flesh shook as he shouted wildly at Heinrich. "How dare you refuse when you don't even

know the greatness of magic? I am Viscount Brahms, who will be in the higest position in the next 10 years!”

“V-Viscount.”

“Hey, shut up!”

This wasn’t unusual for Heinrich, but he lost sight of who Brahms was. Intense magic power filled the room and pressed down on the old man. Even though Heinrich wasn’t familiar with fighting, Brahms’ killing intent was instantly revealed. “It is annoying to visit here every time. I’ll just erase you here.”

At this moment, Heinrich regretted his past for the first time. It was because he realized that by forgoing other relationships and status, he had made himself vulnerable. There was no reason for Brahms not to kill him. Sipoto’s rich old man, Old Books Maniac Heinrich, was only this much.

‘Huh, it is ironic.’

He had chosen Kargas because it didn’t choose the path of violence, only to get robbed and killed here. Heinrich predicted his own death and laughed hysterically.

“Laughing? You, don’t you understand that you are going to die?” Brahms was furious and started chanting a spell.

There were rare books here, so he couldn’t use a massive attack spell. In the first place, why would he need such a strong spell to handle an old man who didn’t know how to fight? A few Magic Arrows would be enough. The blue magic power grew and turned into arrows.

Then at that moment…

Paang!

The magic arrows were dispersed, and the recoil hit Brahms. His five circles creaked, and some of his blood vessels broke, causing him to kneel on the floor. If the magic had been more than the 4th

Circle, then he would be vomiting up blood.

[This garbage can't be recycled,] a cold voice rang out in the room at that very moment. [You dare to use your magic as a means to look down on others? I didn't want to do this, but I can't let you go.]

"W-Who... are you?" Aside from his rotten personality, Brahms was a 5th Circle magician and knew the meaning of this phenomenon. His magic had been intercepted by a superior magician! Moreover, a difference of more than two circles was required to block his Magic Arrow. In other words, Brahms' opponent was a magician of at least the 7th Circle.

However, Brahms didn't get to know the identity of the other person even until the end.

"You don't need to know," Theodore said, appearing behind Brahms. Then he sentenced Brahms with a grim expression, "You will no longer be a magician."

Brahms lost consciousness before he could say anything. Magic power flowed from his spine and carried it all the way to the circles in his heart. If Brahms were conscious, the two powers might've collided and he would've died trying to repel the force.

This was what Theodore intended.

However, it was annoying to kill a person who was a senior magician, and he didn't want information to leak by showing his face. Therefore, Theodore went for the next best thing—Circle Sealing.

Circle Sealing was closer to the application of magic power than a spell, and it was a way to seal the circles of a weaker magician. The Magic Society occasionally used this technique as a method of discipline. However, Theodore was a 7th Circle magician, so it was equivalent to a seal.

Kargas didn't have a 7th Circle magician, and the masters of

other kingdoms weren't willing to be hostile to another master for someone they didn't know. Since someone at the same level as Theodore was required to remove it, Brahms' future as a magician was dead.

Pajik.

After Theodore finished the procedure, Brahms sprawled across the floor like a broken doll. For the time being, he would remain unconscious from the shock. This was Theodore's first time using it, but it had turned out great. He felt a strange sense of accomplishment. Theodore expected Heinrich to have a startled expression, however...

"Circle Sealing, this is the first time I've actually seen it." The old man was gazing at Theodore with interest, rather than surprise. "Besides, the capability to block the circles and the age of your voice, despite your changed appearance... Theodore Miller, Meltor's hero. I never thought I would directly meet the rumored person."

"...You are very quick to notice."

Theodore's identity was discovered as soon as he appeared. The battle of Babarino Plains had revealed that Theodore was a master, but Heinrich was very quick to put the rest of the information together and come to a conclusion. From the very beginning, Theodore had a hunch that Heinrich wasn't ordinary.

Then Heinrich shook his head at Theodore and gazed at the collapsed Brahms. "It isn't that I noticed everything. Maybe you don't realize how famous you are."

"I never wanted to be popular."

"Hoh, if you don't mind, I would like to hear more about you."

Heinrich's mood changed easily, and Theodore couldn't help laughing. He didn't know their meeting would turn out like this. If he had been a few minutes later, Heinrich would be dead. This was

truly lucky.

“Then I should greet you since we are reunited.”

‘Reunited?’ Heinrich thought.

Before the bewildered Heinrich, Theodore raised a hand to his face. It was to reproduce the appearance he had used as a disguise the last time he had been in Sipoto. Heinrich’s fearsome intuition would notice it without needing an explanation.

Indeed, as Theodore thought, Heinrich’s eyes widened. “...Huh, d-don’t tell me?”

“Yes, your thinking is correct.” Theodore was satisfied with Heinrich’s reaction and nodded. “Thank you for your actions at the underground auction house, Sir Heinrich.”

Chapter 234 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (2)

Heinrich was surprised by the unexpected situation, but he decided to get rid of Brahms first before talking.

The shock Brahms suffered from Circle Sealing was too great, so he was eventually dragged and thrown out like garbage onto the streets of Sipoto. Perhaps it was better that he had lost consciousness. Now that Brahms wasn't a magician anymore, his position would obviously collapse.

Anyway, that wasn't any of Theodore and Heinrich's business.

Clink. A steaming cup of tea was placed in front of Theodore. His nose was hit with the scent of herbal tea. After Heinrich placed two cups of handmade tea on the table, they started talking in earnest.

"So, what brings you to find this old man?"

In the past, Heinrich had been a member of a royal court, but few people knew this. Furthermore, Heinrich was a person who had cut off all his connections. This meant he didn't have the strength to do favors for anyone.

If so, there was only one reason why Theodore would come to see him. Theodore also knew this fact and spoke straight away, "You might've already guessed, but I have a great interest in Sir Heinrich's collection."

"That reminds me, you bought books at the underground auction." Thinking about it again, Heinrich found it a little strange.

Be it an original copy or duplicate, magic books could be found in Meltor. Nevertheless, Theodore had used a lot of money to buy the books at auction. Was Theodore a type of collector? Or was this purely out of interest?

Heinrich's elderly eyes gazed at Theodore with curiosity and caution. However, Heinrich couldn't figure out the correct answer without knowing about the existence of Gluttony. Heinrich spoke before posing a question, "I would like to say something first."

Theodore didn't seem like Brahms, but Heinrich's preconceived notions had accumulated over many years.

"You might be acting gracious, but will you demand a book for my life?"

"Huh? I have no intention of doing that."

"You can be honest. If you want anything from my library, you can just take it."

Theodore immediately denied it, but Heinrich didn't believe him. No, the old man was already tired. He didn't know that his hobby of collecting books as a scholar would cause him to be harassed like this.

Heinrich was tired of magicians coming to demands books, as well as being threatened with death in broad daylight. If Theodore asked for a book now, he was just going to hand it over. However, Theodore wasn't such a shameful person.

"How can a magician not respect someone who worships wisdom? If I was going to be so brazen, I would've hit the pig after he killed you."

"This..."

It was true. As Theodore spoke to him in a calm voice, Heinrich was speechless. He was a person who didn't know about fighting. The memory of being threatened a short time ago still filled his body.

Theodore spoke calmly, "You yielded a few books to me at the auction house, so I was thinking of paying you back today. If it hadn't been for that day, this reunion would be uncertain."

Heinrich's face turned red as he regained his composure. Had he become too whiny or cynical in his old age? Heinrich gave a deep bow of apology from his seat. "Cough, my words were too shameless. Please think of it as an old man's nonsense."

"I didn't hear anything." Theodore shrugged while taking a sip of tea, before speaking again. "Let's return to the main point. Sir Heinrich, I know that you are interested in books in many fields."

"Yes, my curiosity doesn't stop at this age. I only have money, so my hobby is reading interesting books."

"So, are you interested in books from the East?"

"Hrmm?" Heinrich's eyes opened wider at the mention of the East. The existence of the East had been known for a long time, but it still wasn't easy to go beyond the ocean. For this reason, the culture of the East wasn't often transmitted to the West.

Heinrich tried to regain his composure, but it had already long been revealed to Theodore. The old man coughed a few times before replying, "Hmm, it does interest me, but... it is hard to get a properly translated book. The interpretation of the same words is different, and there are many dialects that aren't understood..."

"Please read this once before answering." Theodore reacted like he understood and pulled out a magic book. It was one of the books he had translated while staying with the Baek Family.

The original had already been eaten, but the translations he had written during the process of increasing his understanding were still intact. This book was the handcrafted interpretation of Theodore, who had been given the memories and language skills of Lee Yoonsung. The result couldn't be compared to those of a shabby translator.

Heinrich received the book with a strange expression. However, he soon forgot to blink as he indulged in the contents.

'Good. It is as I thought.' Theodore smiled darkly as he sensed

that this was a success.

The two people didn't talk again until the contents of the cups cooled.

*

An hour passed by.

"P-Please excuse me. This old man was too rude to my guest..." Heinrich read to the middle of the book and only realized the situation after he reached a portion he couldn't understand.

This guest... Wasn't he currently the most well-known hero on the continent? Yet Heinrich hadn't maintained decorum and was too rude. If Theodore's mood had turned sour, then Heinrich wouldn't be able to say anything.

However, Theodore shook his head with a bright expression. "No. This was what I asked for. Rather, how are the translations?"

"Ohh, these translations? They are amazing!" Heinrich praised before carefully lifting the magic book. It was the type of behavior seen from those who sincerely loved books. "I don't know which famous scholar translated this book, but they understand Chinese very well. I can almost believe he is a local. To be able to translate the proverbs, dialects, and strange adjectives... It is easy to understand, even for a person who doesn't know much about magic."

Theodore was embarrassed by the praise and scratched his nose. Heinrich's eyes widened as he noticed the reaction. Surely this young master hadn't mastered the language and knowledge from beyond the sea...? Theodore read the question in Heinrich's gaze and nodded. "Yes, your thinking is correct."

"Oh, my god. I don't know how many times I can be surprised today!"

Theodore understood Heinrich's astonishment.

The structure of the Chinese language was fundamentally different from the common language of the West Continent. It would take a long period of time, research, and talent to smoothly compensate for the difference. This wasn't a field which could be fully mastered by someone who was less than 30 years old.

How could Theodore have broken down the boundaries of both languages and translated the professional knowledge without any errors? It was beyond the level of some Eastern scholars in academia. Theodore wouldn't have been capable of it if it wasn't for Lee Yoonsung.

"I have one more thing to say." Theodore raised 10 fingers in front of the surprised Heinrich. "I have dozens of similar books."

"Hoh." Heinrich smiled as he grasped Theodore's intentions. "Do you want an exchange with my collection?"

"That's right."

"Indeed, it isn't bad for me. Changing old books for new ones. It is really tempting." Heinrich gestured for Theodore to follow.

Then Heinrich picked up a book at the corner of the bookshelf. The massive bookcase creaked as it slid open, revealing a secret space inside. This was the real study of Sipoto's Old Books Maniac.

"It is a little shabby, but the books I've put here can't be easily seen by others," Heinrich started to explain as he entered the secret library. Each book was worth at least 100 gold, so it was obvious why they couldn't be shown to others.

There was a signed book of poetry by a legendary bard, as well as original books. The Book of Clouds, which Viscount Brahms had wanted, was such a book.

"Sir Theodore should know this."

Theodore nodded as he looked at the magic book that Heinrich had taken out. It had a white cover made of unknown material.

‘The Book of Clouds… It is clearly a book left by a previous white tower master.’

Space magic was famous due to Orta, but the root of the white tower was wind magic. Among them, there had been a white tower master who reached the peak of weather magic and could manipulate climate.

“There is an anecdote about snow appearing in the middle of the desert, or dozens of kilometers of coastline being dried out. This magic book contains such wisdom. It is no wonder that someone like Brahms desired it.”

“I heard that a duplicate copy of it doesn’t exist?”

“That’s right. For some reason, duplication magic doesn’t work on this magic book. So, there are some people who think that the Book of Clouds is a grimoire.” Theodore laughed at the thoughts of the foolish people as he looked down at the Book of Clouds.

Was it courage or ignorance? Anyone who had seen a true grimoire wouldn’t use its name so easily. Theodore had looked at the ominous bottomless hell, so he knew it better than anyone.

‘Appraisal.’

Theodore examined the cover of the book and naturally placed his left hand on it.

[Book of Clouds]

[-This book explains the laws of climate, atmospheric currents, and weather phenomenon. The author, who was once well-known as a white tower master of Meltor, retired and wandered around the continent to observe the weather. After decades of research, he reached a point where he could reproduce the phenomena magically.

* This magic book is rated ‘Precious.’

* When consumed, affinity to the ‘wind’ attribute will increase

greatly.

* When consumed, knowledge of ‘meteorology’ will be acquired.

* Clues to the Supercell magic have been recorded. You must be at least the 8th Circle to acquire this spell, or your wind attribute must be at the maximum. The conditions required are high.]

There was a saying about a pearl necklace around a pig’s neck, but this was more like a diamond than a pearl. The book’s difficulty and depth of wisdom were similar to space magic. Theodore was able to know this just from Appraisal and flipping through a few pages.

‘…Excellent. It was worth it coming to Sipoto.’

Of course, not all the books would be like the Book of Clouds. Nevertheless, Theodore couldn’t help but smile. He was someone who had spent his youth in the library and had then become more aware after consuming hundreds of books for Gluttony.

This was Heinrich’s secret library… and the bookshelves lined up all over the study were giving off a delicious smell.

“Sir Heinrich,” Theodore pointed to the Book of Clouds and opened his mouth, “Let’s start with this one.”

Chapter 235 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (3)

The transaction between the two bibliophiles reached a satisfactory end.

One was a magician, and the other a scholar. There were many differences in their jobs, but their desire for new knowledge was the same.

Regardless of how expensive they were, the balance between ‘books which had been read’ and ‘new books’ tilted toward the latter. They were books which hadn’t been seen in Kargas, and there was no doubt that the translations of the books were perfect.

Starting from the Book of Clouds, dozens of books were traded.

It was a barter which was based on thoroughly subjective standards, completely disregarding financial standards. If there were a merchant in this place, they would’ve squeezed their own head.

Every time one exchange was made, one side lost money. The amount lost was several hundred gold. Nevertheless, the two people made the exchange without any hesitation. There was an unspoken consensus that this was okay.

‘This grandfather, isn’t he a good match for me?’

‘It is rare for there to be a young man like this…’

Theodore and Heinrich felt a sense of kinship with each other. They were willing to throw away money if it was a book they wanted. They craved knowledge from the bundle of old papers because their spirits couldn’t be satisfied with their current knowledge.

This kinship crossed the age difference of almost 50 years, and they spoke like they had known each other for a long time.

“Sir Theodore.”

In the end, the sun headed to the west, and the blue sky became dark. After a few hours, the two men moved from the secret library to the reception room.

Heinrich felt a deep affinity with Theodore and offered an unprecedented proposal, “If you don’t mind, would you like to stay overnight? I live alone except for the servants, so there are quite a few rooms left. It should be enough for a short stay.”

“Well, I haven’t found accommodations yet.”

Due to his circumstances, Theodore tried not to reveal himself as much as possible. Therefore, it was hard to find a good place to stay at sunset. In that case, it would be better for Theodore to accept Heinrich’s offer. “I will accept your goodwill, Sir Heinrich.”

“Haha! I am honored to have a ‘hero’ stay overnight. Tell me if you need anything.” Heinrich gave a laugh and clapped his hands. Then a maid waiting outside entered, and Heinrich told her, “This is a precious guest. Please guide him to the room on the third floor and make sure he doesn’t feel uncomfortable.”

“Yes, I will do so.”

“Ah, what do you want to do for dinner?”

Theodore didn’t have a great obsession with food, so he just ordered lightly, “I’ll have a simple meal in the bedroom. I spent a few days in the carriage, so I just want to rest.”

“Oh, I was being rude again.”

“No, I also had a great time.”

The two people finished their goodbyes and got up from their seats. Then the maid naturally turned around. Theodore followed her into the corridor, where she spoke with a polite voice and attitude, “I will guide you to your bedroom. Should I move your carriage to the stables?”

“Ah, please do so.”

“By the way, where is the driver? I will also give him a room.”

“That’s okay. He has already left and will come back to the mansion tomorrow.”

“Yes, then I will have the carriage put away.”

Heinrich’s residence was rather large, but it was nothing compared to the royal palace and magic tower which Theodore was familiar with. Shortly after speaking a few words with the maid, he was able to arrive at the bedroom.

“Then I will go now. Please pull the string from the ceiling when there is a problem,” the maid said and closed the door.

Theodore immediately threw himself onto the bed once he was alone. It was because the carriage ride had been quite severe.

The shortest distance meant crossing over a mountainous road, not a paved road. No matter how good the carriage was, the wheels would jolt when they hit something. He had barely slept since it had been a few days’ worth of this. Moreover, he had motion sickness and dizziness as well.

However, the result made it all worthwhile.

“Even so, I didn’t think I would see the Book of Clouds.”

In fact, Theodore had seen the Book of Clouds in the past.

There was no copy of it, but a manuscript was present in the white tower. The symbols and drawings were too difficult, and there were many passwords hidden in the words to show that other manuscripts were false. At that time, Theodore hadn’t been able to understand half the contents. Then what about now?

‘Okay, I should try again.’

He would set the goal of reaching 98% understanding by the time he reached Meltor. Theodore made a pledge and opened the book. ‘I can do it somehow if I don’t give up!’

Then exactly 30 minutes later...

“What?”

He remembered it clearly. There had been high-level formulas and descriptions, as well as a magic power control which hadn’t allowed even a single leak. This had been close to the level of obsessive-compulsiveness, so it hadn’t been easy for Theodore to understand despite being in the 7th Circle.

However, Theodore opened and closed the Book of Clouds several times with confused eyes. It wasn’t because it was too difficult, but because it was the opposite.

“Why is it so easy?”

His understanding had originally been at 32%, and it was now already up to 97%. He just needed to read it once or twice more to go over 98%. It was a great success, but Theodore felt no sense of accomplishment. He had spent less than half a day reading and his understanding was already at 97%? It was a phenomenon that was hard to understand.

The unfamiliar notions came easily to him, and the difficult formulas felt like simple arithmetic operations. It was like he received knowledge from the gods—

‘Wait a minute, the gods?’

At that moment, Theodore recalled Aiolos’ Pocket which contained the divinity of the wind. What if it raised not only his affinity with wind but his comprehension of magic as well? It was just an uncertain hypothesis, but it wasn’t a story without credibility.

Apart from talent, magicians had aptitudes to certain magic attributes. Theodore originally had little wind magic aptitude, but it was now sufficient with Aiolos’ Pocket. However, Theodore shook his head and reached out his hand.

‘It is still just a hypothesis, no matter how I think about it. It would be faster to ask the party involved.’

The criteria to eat a book was 95% understanding, and he had already reached that standard with the Book of Clouds. Originally, Theodore would've anticipated it, but now he was filled with deep suspicion.

"Eat."

–You have brought me good quality food.

Gluttony had been awake from the moment it felt the Book of Clouds, so now it reached out its tongue.

Gulp.

The magic book, which had only two copies in the continent, disappeared.

['Book of Clouds' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[Proficiency in wind magic has increased. The wind attribute affinity has reached its limit. In compensation, the level of skill proficiency will rise even further.]

[You have acquired knowledge related to 'meteorology.']

[An original copy has been consumed. Synchro rate will be checked with object name 'Heathcliff'...It is judged to be a fine rate. Heathcliff has accepted your request. At his discretion, Heathcliff has approved the spiritual connection.]

Theodore was laying in bed when his eyes darkened. His mind couldn't withstand the separation of his consciousness and rejected it by making him faint. In retrospect, it had been a long time since he had experienced Synchro. The authors of the recent original copies he had eaten were monsters, and they had refused the Synchro.

Surely a former tower master wasn't common?

Theodore laughed a little bit as his consciousness disappeared.

*

He didn’t know when precisely his consciousness returned. Theodore opened his eyes and saw the landscape of the sky.

When he saw that he was lying on clouds, Theodore realized that this space was someone else’s imagery. Were clouds nothing more than mass of water vapor, or were they filled with hopes and dreams?

At that time, a loud voice spoke out from behind Theodore, “I understand your appreciation, but you are acting a bit impolite, my junior.”

Theodore turned around at the voice and saw a middle-aged man in a white robe. Once Synchro was established, one’s surface thoughts could be read. Theodore was reminded of what he had forgotten and hurriedly bowed apologetically. “I’m sorry.”

“Well, it’s okay. Anyway, I am a dead man, and you are a magician of the magic tower. You don’t need to be so formal.”

“It is nothing, Senior.”

Theodore looked at the senior before him.

Heathcliff had been a white tower master. He had been a great magician of the 8th circle when he’d still been alive, and his reputation continued on to this day. Heathcliff might’ve left the magic towers, but he was still one of the great masters whom Meltor was proud of.

However, Heathcliff just chuckled as Theodore said this and waved his hands. “You… Aren’t you quite eloquent? I had no idea that I would hear such words after my death. I know that glory is useless, but it feels better than I thought.”

According to rumors, Heathcliff had been famous as a playboy. He scratched his head like he wasn’t accustomed to such praise and sat next to Theodore. Unlike the closed-off Orta with his mask and cold atmosphere, Heathcliff seemed like the type to get close to the first person he saw.

“Okay! Rejoice, Junior. I will give you three answers.”

“Huh?”

“I know your first question, and I will answer it.”

Theodore recalled his thoughts from before he ate the Book of Clouds and stared at Heathcliff. He was doubtful, but Heathcliff really knew the answer.

Heathcliff began the explanation by raising his fingers with a cheerful expression, “As you know, divine power and magic reject each other, so you don’t know what effect divine power has. Isn’t that right?”

“…Yes, that’s right.”

“I will say something before explaining. Divinity is a form of the circles and is one of the final destinations that magic can reach. It is a ‘power’ that can exert maximum strength in the material world.”

Deities were the incarnations of this material world. Their power to defend the world was so great that they repelled the demons who invaded from outer space. Their traces had disappeared when the Age of Mythology ended, but their impact lasted for thousands of years. Magic imitated that power.

“It is inferior, but a magician’s circles are like the deities in that they control the power of the material world. It is just that the scope and authority fall far behind. If I compare it to the power that an 8th Circle magician can exert, the gap is at least 3,000 times greater.”

“3,000 times…”

“I’m not exaggerating, Junior. Even the dragon’s heart, which is far superior to circles, is 10 times less powerful than divinity. Divinity is literally the supreme authority that rules the material world.” Heathcliff looked at Theodore with bright green eyes. “And you have two divinities. Is it called Aiolos? The god of wind…

It is an incomplete divinity, but it still makes the 8th Circle look like a small trick. Once you reach the 9th Circle, you should be able to see through it, from the principles to the application."

Then the master of wind and the previous white tower master stopped speaking.

"Now, so let's move on to the second thing. Is your heart ready?"

"...What are you saying?" Theodore asked with uneasily when he saw Heathcliff's strange expression.

What was Theodore going to be told? Theodore endured patiently to the end, as Heathcliff finally opened his mouth.

"You... Aren't you doing to die soon?"

Chapter 236 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (4)

Theodore's face became dazed at Heathcliff's words. Heathcliff recognized that as an expression of disbelief but didn't know how to explain what he'd said.

Perhaps he was unfamiliar with teaching others.

"I'll go back to the story. I went too far forward." Where should he begin? Heathcliff touched his chin and revealed his knowledge. "Since ancient times, meteorology was a scene that looked into the future. The primitive spells were used to determine how much crops could grow that year. Finding out the weather in advance was like predicting where a leaf would fall. The science alone couldn't be perfect."

"Is this the realm of seeing the future?"

"You understand quickly. Yes, it is a type of foresight. In ancient times, the priests of each tribe were responsible for this."

There had been no means more effective in raising the authority of a god than to predict the future. It had opened the path to escape from natural disasters and gave people prosperity.

During a time when civilization had yet to mature, the priests had always assumed the position of a god. As such, the weather had been believed to be a phenomenon closely related to divinity.

As Heathcliff was a magician who had reached a higher level than anyone else in climate manipulation, his eyes also naturally looked into the future.

"I started to see it when I finished my 7th Circle. Something fuzzy that I called 'clouds'... So, it turned into real clouds. Cirrocumulus cloud, stratocumulus cloud, nimbostratus cloud, cumulonimbus... Every time I make a dangerous choice, it becomes dark? That is how I know there's danger."

If he were to face a strong enemy, he would see clouds with lightning. If the peaceful days were to continue, he would be comfortably surrounded by white cotton clouds. By the time he reached the 8th circle, he had become capable of seeing disasters in distant kingdoms.

It had been around that time that the name of the storm magician, Heathcliff, had started to gain popularity abroad. He had saved a village about to be washed away by a flood, and he had also predicted the eruption of a dormant volcano.

Heathcliff, the author of the Book of Clouds, gave a monologue as he recalled the past. “Well, I ended up dying in the middle of nowhere.”

Theodore was amazed by Heathcliff’s words and hurriedly asked, “It can’t be…! Didn’t you see it?”

“Maybe, maybe not. I don’t know what happened after I died. Now, it is your turn,” Heathcliff said as he looked Theodore up and down. Then he spoke in an admiring voice, “Wow, this enemy is terrible. Incredibly strong. Probably stronger than I had been during my lifetime…? What type of person are you to have such monsters as enemies at this age?”

“This isn’t a quest.”

From the Orcus Company, that Theodore had unintentionally provoked, to Andras who had lost three swords as well as the Lairon Kingdom, that had participated in the civil war… There were many strong people who wanted to kill Theodore.

‘But the enemy is greater than I imagined.’ Someone equivalent to an 8th Circle magician was going to attack him?

If Theodore thought about it, there were only a few possibilities.

It was either one of the empire’s first three swords or the secret of the black magic organization. He didn’t think so, but it might be someone from the Lairon Kingdom.

Heathcliff watched as a deep look appeared in Theodore's eyes. Then he said, "Hrmm? It seems like you have your own ideas. You should be careful though. The one who will threaten you is a monster that can't be measured with common sense."

"Yes, I will keep that in mind."

"Then my advice will end here. Okay, now I will move onto my magic. Then it is the third one."

Theodore's eyes brightened the moment the topic changed to Heathcliff's magic. Was it due to Gluttony or his own innate tendencies? Theodore's interest was stimulated whenever it came to magic. How much of that 'storm' magic could he receive? Wasn't it also from Heathcliff himself? It was a story for any magician, not just Theodore.

"You... Are you interested in my Supercell?"

"Yes," Theodore replied without any hesitation.

"The final form of Thunderstorm is an achievement that downgrades weather phenomena like natural disasters. It is a magic that no one can reproduce. It is my Sorcery. So, of course, no one can do it."

In his prime, Heathcliff had been able to summon a storm with one hand or cause a lightning bolt with one word. He had been a walking natural disaster, with the nickname of 'Storm.'

Supercell was the extreme magic that Heathcliff had reached in his last years. With it, he had been able to control meteorological phenomena. If Theodore could obtain it, then he might have a chance.

"Hrmm, thank you for the praise." Heathcliff shrugged while scratching his nose. "But I am sorry. In your current state, the magic will just be a burden on your circles. You have just used one great magic, so you shouldn't receive another great magic."

"Circle Overload... It is more annoying than I thought."

“It is better if you think of it as growing pains. But if I subtract Supercell, it should be fine to transfer everything else.”

Then Heathcliff pointed his hands at Theodore. However, Theodore didn’t feel any evil intentions from this gesture. Otherwise, he would’ve been ready for battle. Then several notifications entered Theodore’s ears successively.

[Object name ‘Heathcliff’ has requested the transfer of knowledge. Analyzing the details of this request…]

[Request from object name ‘Heathcliff’ has been approved.]

[The ‘Meteorology’ skill will be adjusted to your level of proficiency.]

[The skill ‘Cloud Magic’ has been learned. The skill experience of ‘Cloud Magic’ has increased due to unknown intervention. Please note that errors might occur.]

[‘Aiolos’ divinity’ has responded. The increase in proficiency will be doubled.]

Simultaneously, Theodore shook where he was sitting. “Kuk!”

The massive amount of information that suddenly poured into his brain gave him an intense wave of dizziness and headaches. Theodore would have fainted if he hadn’t experienced something like it before.

The magic knowledge of the 8th Circle magician, Heathcliff, was deep and vast. At least, there was no one in this modern age who could match him when it came to wind magic.

Theodore nowrealized how clouds moved. He also realized how thunderbolts were born and why they came down to the ground. He even knew why wind was drawn to the surface layer of the sea.

The information that Theodore accepted would probably go beyond 10 thick encyclopedias.

He now knew how the wind passing by his skin moved and why

the clouds were floating above his head. It was Weather Control that people in this modern time didn't know how to use.

'A-Amazing...! This is why Senior Heathcliff wandered through the entire continent.' Theodore admired the knowledge through his throbbing skull. 'Seeing it directly... He directly observed and reconfigured the weather information of the entire continent to complete Cloud Magic. It would've taken 5 years, 10 years...'

Heathcliff's absence from the Meltor Kingdom would've been very painful, but Heathcliff had been the epitome of a magician. He had traveled for decades to find the truth. He had truly been a great and monstrous magician.

Theodore felt reverence for him and bowed deeply to Heathcliff. "Thank you for your generosity, Senior."

"Ah, don't be so stiff. Isn't it the duty of a magic tower magician to transfer knowledge to others? It is unfortunate that you're not a magician of the white tower, but I hope that you can take all of my knowledge next time."

"Yes, I will work diligently."

It didn't end with just absorbing this knowledge. According to the accepted knowledge, Supercell was the peak of climate magic. It was clear that Theodore wouldn't be able to get any benefits if he didn't fully embody the knowledge and magic he had just acquired.

Heathcliff liked Theodore's modest words and knocked against his shoulder. "Then I will tell you my quest at the next opportunity. Until then, survive well and teach your juniors."

Heathcliff felt sorry that he couldn't teach them personally as he waved his short staff. Then the whole world started to turn black. It was like a signal. Synchro was disconnected, and Theodore gazed at Heathcliff as he returned to reality. Feeling grateful, Theodore smiled until the end.

The Book of Cloud's Synchro was over.

*

“Phew.”

Theodore opened his eyes in bed and felt a sense of fulfillment. It took him 30 seconds after his encounter with Heathcliff to summarize the Cloud Magic given to him. He took deep breaths and decided to think about his approaching threat.

‘Isn’t this my second prediction of death?’

The first time had a time limit, while this one depended on the conditions.

“Moreover, it’s someone stronger than Heathcliff... There are few such monsters on the entire continent.”

Heathcliff might’ve specialized in one type of magic, but he had been an 8th Circle magician. He had been incomparable to some of the sword masters that Theodore had dealt with. If so, let’s assume Veronica was the one attacking him. Let’s imagine a monster whose destructive power surpassed Pan Helliones, whose speed was beyond Randolph, and who also had innumerable combat experience...

How would Theodore be able to survive, rather than win? The answer was simple.

“I shouldn’t fight.”

His death would be confirmed the moment the fight was established. It was a cold conclusion, but Theodore accepted it. In fact, it was the reason he had left Soldun in a hurry. Since his power had been revealed, an assassin would be a monster who could kill Theodore in his best state. The Soldun Kingdom was too weak to prevent the attack of such a being.

He thought it would be safer to return quickly before his movements were revealed.

“...It is too quick, no matter how I think about it. They shouldn’t

be able to catch up with me at this point unless they have been following my actions since Soldun.”

His logic and intuition were shouting in one voice that this situation wasn’t a coincidence. It was caused by someone.

‘Murder by proxy.’

This was the phrase which popped up from Lee Yoonsung’s memory. It was a warning from his super sensitivity, and it was a logical conclusion. Anyway, it didn’t matter.

“Gluttony.”

–Um.

He had made a decision based on Heathcliff’s memory. It was foolishness to oppose natural disasters. Instead, it was best to find a way to reduce the damage if a typhoon hit, or to stay away if a volcano exploded.

Likewise, it was the same for this fight. The power of his enemy was close to a natural disaster, and his coping method was no different.

Then he said to his left hand, “Open the Library.”

If even a divinity was stored in Gluttony’s stomach, then it meant there would also be things capable of causing a natural disaster.

Chapter 237 – Second (1)

The day after arriving in Sipoto, Theodore had breakfast with Heinrich and said goodbye.

Heinrich couldn't hide his confusion as he asked if there was a problem, but Theodore just shook his head with a smile. Setting aside their age difference, it was easy for Theodore to talk to Heinrich.

If it wasn't for Heathcliff's prophecy, Theodore would've stayed for three or four more days.

Heinrich seemed to read this in Theodore's face and sighed with disappointment. He would've enjoyed a conversation with Theodore while reading books all day long, but an old man couldn't keep the young here.

"Huh, you are only staying one night... If I had known this, I would've stayed awake talking last night."

"My heart wanted to, but my body didn't obey. I'm afraid I'll have to take a rain check."

Then Heinrich laughed playfully. "Do you want new books?"

Theodore understood that Heinrich was half joking and half serious. "Huh? Ha, hahaha! Sir Heinrich hit the nail on the head. That passion would've been great if you walked on the path of a magician."

"Hearing such a compliment from the hero of Meltor, this old man's lungs won't survive. Hahaha!"

The two people's hearts met on the same page for a while before they got up.

The servants cleaned up the table, while Heinrich and Theodore walked along the hallway toward the main entrance. This encounter with the young hero who might leave his name in the

history books... It was interesting for Heinrich to have met a hero who was interested in knowledge.

They left the mansion and headed outside. Theodore looked at the carriage in front of the main gate before pausing and turning to Heinrich.

“Then Sir Heinrich, take this.”

“Hrmm?”

It was an iron piece engraved with two horses. The piece was high-quality iron with few impurities. Obviously, it wasn’t an ordinary iron piece. Heinrich had lived for at least 20 years in Kargas, so he recognized the iron piece at first glance.

“A badge of the Polonell Company.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Why are you giving it to me?”

Theodore nodded and gave a brief explanation, “I know this is something that can’t be traded. But it proves my identity. If Viscount Brahms from yesterday or someone else makes a fuss, please go to Bear in the Polonell Company and tell him my name. Then he will help you.”

“...You are too mature for your age. Despite my reluctance, I will accept your consideration.” The emotions in Heinrich’s eyes deepened as he received the Polonell badge. It was easy to overpower or defeat others with force. However, it was rare to pay attention to the consequences that happened afterward. In this turbulent age, Theodore was truly a hero.

Feeling a slight reverence toward Theodore, Heinrich bowed again and thanked Theodore for his goodwill.

After that, Theodore got on his carriage. “Let’s go.”

The knight sitting in the driver’s seat wielded the reins firmly. It wasn’t done with any sophisticated technique, but it was enough

to move the horses.

Hiiiing!

The two horses ran forward, and the carriage soon left Heinrich's residence. The border city had well-maintained roads, so the carriage's traveling speed wasn't greatly reduced in the city. Theodore sat in the occasionally shaky carriage and regretted the farewell before starting to worry.

'The unknown enemy... In what way will he come?'

After his numerous combat experiences, Theodore had learned the importance of the first strike. So, he couldn't help worrying. If he lost control in a situation where he was already lacking, that would be the end.

He wouldn't be able to make a preemptive strike against an enemy who might appear anywhere, so he had to prepare countermeasures. If the person had great destructive power like Pan Helliones, Theodore could use ranged attacks. If they were exceptional in surprise attacks like Hyde, then Theodore could use his sensitivity.

He had to think of all the possibilities. As Theodore remained silent, the carriage continued moving northwards beyond the boundaries of Sipoto, drawing tracks through the wilderness. The chill on Theodore's neck signaled that the threat was getting closer. It was a feeling he had felt several times before, but this time it was terrible.

'...Indeed, it is a sure death.'

It was similar to what he'd felt when he had still been immature and faced Pride with Ellenoa behind him. This would be an absolute death which couldn't be turned on its tables, even if he went beyond his limits.

If victory or defeat was determined with resolve, then even a mouse could kill a lion. However, that didn't work in reality.

Before an overwhelming gap of power, a person's attitude was worthless. The weak would just be trampled on.

Therefore, Theodore's condition for victory was to just survive. He needed to leap over the opponent's overwhelming power. As such, he had already made preparations last night.

"Bring it on at any time."

His blue eyes shone as he prepared to jump over any adversity.

*

Despite Theodore's preparations, the assailant revealed himself in front of the carriage without trying for an ambush.

Kkiiiiik....

The moment that the driver pulled the reins and the carriage stopped, Theodore quickly jumped out of the carriage. It was because his sensitivity had warned him of the enemy's appearance in advance.

By the time landed on the ground, his circles were already prepared to fight.

"...This." Nevertheless, Theodore was one beat late.

"Hi," a drowsy voice rang out, "Theodore Miller?"

The assailant had dark brown hair and half-closed eyes. His patchy beard gave him a shabby appearance. He would've looked like a homeless person if it wasn't for the sword at his waist. His clothes were decent, but that didn't mean much.

"...If I am, who are you?" Theodore didn't hide his vigilance as he questioned the man.

"Number 2," an absurd reply was given, "Zest Speitem."

At that moment, Theodore stiffened. If Veronica and Blundell represented Meltor's power, then the 1st and 2nd Swords represented Andras' power. Most people didn't know their faces,

and there was little known about how they fought because most of their opponents had been killed.

Zest, the person who had overwhelmed Sword Master Randolph with one blow, was now appearing before Theodore.

'Really.'

Zest's appearance didn't matter. The chill that Theodore felt proved the authenticity of his remark. Even if this man wasn't truly the 2nd Sword, his skill was comparable.

"Hehe." Sword Demon Zest looked at Theodore with blank eyes. Then he made a strange sound as he looked at the knight next to Theodore. As Zest's eyes blurred, the passing wind stopped like it had been cut by a blade. It was a phenomenon which couldn't be understood with common sense, but it clearly happened.

'A human stopping the wind with his will...? What a monster.' The nervous Theodore's breathing became rough.

Then Zest suddenly nodded at the knight. "Hey, who is this guy? He gives off a vaguely familiar feeling."

"...Why should I answer?"

"It doesn't matter. Well, this might be good."

Sururung, the sword Zest drew cried out, and he patted the sword politely. His languid expression disappeared, and Zest Speitem's voice became clearer, "Thanks to you, I was able to go outside. I am a little sorry to kill you. So—"

Theodore's breathing quickened as he became tense like a rubber band.

Kaaang!

Suddenly, sparks flew as two swords collided with each other.

"Keok!" Theodore hurriedly retreated backward as the shockwave from the collision of the two swords hit him in the chest. He coughed a few times, but he couldn't hide his

astonishment.

‘I didn’t see it at all? No, it isn’t in the dimension of fast or slow…’

This was a blow which couldn’t be defined with the concept of speed. Perhaps Randolph had also been beaten by this sword. It was an attacked which surpassed recognition. Had Zest planned a surprise attack from the front? Theodore’s head would’ve been cut off if it wasn’t for the driver.

“Eh?” Zest tilted his head with sincere confusion. “My sword was stopped? How?”

Of course, Theodore naturally knew the answer. The man, who had been called Lloyd during his life, had the Aura Ability ‘Pathfinder’ engraved on his body after being turned into a machine.

Pathfinder was the ability to read the right ‘path.’ However, rather than rejoicing at the enemy’s attack being stopped, Theodore was surprised to realize one fact.

‘He blocked the attack, but there was no interval to attack back!’

This was essentially a fight. The winner would be the one who could read ahead to attack or defend. In such an environment, Pathfinder was a very powerful ability. If the actions of the opponent were known one or two beats ahead, then that was enough to make a counter. In fact, Lloyd had taken down several sword masters that way.

Yet he was barely able to block this attack!

On the other hand, Zest was intrigued. “This is a fun toy. How many times can it endure?”

Zest figured out that the opponent wasn’t human and raised his sword.

‘I can’t miss it this time!’ As Theodore concentrated, the sword

disappeared again.

Kakang! The first strike couldn't be denied. There was no precursor as it cut deep into Gladio's right wrist. The body of an automaton was different from that of humans, but half of its function was lost when it was damaged.

Jeeeong! The second strike was a piercing blow. Theodore still couldn't see it at all. Gladio tried to defend but was pushed back by the power behind the sword, which caused serious damage to Gladio's internal organs.

Kakakang! The stab turned into a slash. The sword was moving at a pace which already surpassed the domain of human cognition. Even a master level person wouldn't be able to tell what had happened.

Gladio blocked the sword with his left hand, but half of it was cut off. This was the end. Even an automaton couldn't maintain its combat ability in this state. The time it took Gladio to be defeated was two seconds. Given that there was no big difference between Lloyd's power in life and in death, Zest Speitem had shattered one of the Seven Swords in just two seconds.

A sword master's pure power was high, but this was pure skill.

"Reverse summoning," Theodore called out, and Gladio disappeared into its bracelet. It would take time and a lot of resources to fully recover from that damage. Clearly, it was safe to say he couldn't use Gladio for a while.

However, thanks to Gladio, Theodore managed to gain some time.

'As long as I can't recognize it, the power is unbeatable. It is suicide to fight in close proximity.'

Theodore's seven circles rotated as he gathered his strength, while Zest smiled. Zest's face was relaxed as if he could kill Theodore at any time. "It is a fairly well-made toy, but in the end,

it is just entertainment. Will the owner be more than that?”

Theodore gulped down the horror as he gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. “You will regret that you didn’t kill me just now.”

Chapter 238 – Second (2)

Unlike his aggressive answer, Theodore was extremely nervous right now. He had expected someone with Veronica-level strength would emerge, but he hadn't expected that he wouldn't be able to see the combat capabilities of a sword demon.

If Lee Yoonsung's memory was correct, this was a sword ring. Despite retreating 30 meters in two seconds, Theodore was convinced that he wasn't out of the sword's range. He just noticed it, but he had already stopped breathing.

Theodore realized that he could lose his head if there was even a small gap between his inhale and exhale. He currently had an unprecedentedly extremely sharp sensitivity, but the time he needed to maintain this confrontation was around 20 seconds more. If he lost his concentration for even a moment, he would die.

'I need to catch up with that speed somehow.'

Theodore's breather had only lasted three seconds, but thanks to Gladio's sacrifice, Theodore managed to get a clue.

Zest's sword was certainly quick, but the interval between the strikes wasn't completely zero. It was just such a short gap that it was impossible to catch with human senses. Gladio had been able to respond by reading the orbit of the sword.

If Theodore wanted to catch up with this speed, he needed reflexes at the level of the ancient species, Ulfheðnar, that Superbia had transformed into. How could Theodore reproduce such reflexes?

'... I can do it.'

It was possible if he used the same technique he had used against Marquis Fergana but at a higher proficiency. If the electrical signals of the nervous system were accelerated to the extreme, the

entire world would seem like it had stopped. He might not be able to overtake Zest's sword, but he wouldn't fall behind in speed.

Dozens of tactics and ideas mixed in Theodore's head as he concentrated till he reached his limit. It had been exactly 17 seconds from the start of the confrontation until the conclusion. The moment that absolute death was three steps away, Theodore Miller stepped forward boldly.

Then the murderer raised his sword like a reaper.

"Be prepared."

Zest's sword pierced through the air.

Paijijik.

Almost simultaneously, Theodore's body shone with a blue light. He might not have Gladio's Aura Ability, but he had Alfred's extreme sensitivity. His concentration was so extreme that he couldn't miss the sound of a falling needle.

'It's coming.' The world of his optic nerves was black and white. It was a world where everything stopped. In this slow scenery, Theodore stared at the blade before him. 'It isn't just fast. Omitting the intermediate process... It's a phenomenon that can't be understood by common sense. Is his Aura Ability the power to interfere with 'space'?'

Maybe it was 'time.' A few speculations came to his mind as Theodore observed Zest's sword, but he didn't have the time to ponder.

Saack.

Theodore took a step back as the space in front of his neck was split apart.

'Kuk! This is ridiculously fast!'

In this black and white world, only one sword and Theodore Miller seemed to move freely. The blade passed by the side of his

neck and suddenly cut down the side, then it tried to split him from his crown to his groin. This was when Theodore finally saw a gap, so he extended his hand out and reached for the four elements.

‘Forced Harmonization.’

The sword was moving at a terrible speed, so it was likely that Zest’s defense would be just as fast. In this situation, the most appropriate attributes were lightning and light.

‘Alfred’s Magic Missile x Melt Downer.

‘Melting Complete: Finger of Death.’

As these two spells merged, Theodore’s five fingertips glowed with an ominous green light. It was the combination of a destruction magic, which could melt even metal, and Magic Bullet, which contained a quick destructive power. The defensive power of aura wouldn’t be able to block this.

In an instant, the fingers of death aimed at the enemy’s abdomen.

Piiing—

Five rays of destructive energy burned through the air. Then the ionized air turned into a vacuum as the rays aimed for Zest’s abdomen.

[Hoh.]

The moment that the flesh was about to be pierced, Theodore heard it clearly.

[This is quite good?] Zest whispered with an eerie smile.

Kiing! Then the rays were cut off. Theodore couldn’t even see Zest’s movements as he cut all five rays of light with one slash. Zest truly was a sword master of the strongest empire. His aura density could probably withstand even great magics. It was impossible for Theodore to break through that defense. So, when

Theodore saw the scene, he was astonished.

‘Did he stop the rays in that posture? The magic light is a bit slower than a lightning bolt, but… my magic can’t break through that defense!’

On the other hand, Zest’s lazy expression started to be overtaken by a predator. “It has been a long time since I’ve felt like this. I’m excited.”

Zest had always defeated the enemy with one-sided attacks, so he hadn’t struggled for years and could never feel satisfied. His lazy behavior derived from a feeling of boredom, but Zest was actually a beast that was more vicious than any swordsman.

Unfortunately, Theodore’s struggle had woken up that sleeping beast. Zest pointed his sword at Theodore with a strangely twisted smile. “Okay, I’ll play properly.”

It wasn’t worth using a lot of effort, but it wasn’t bad to play around. Theodore Miller’s skill caused the sadistic nature of the sword demon to boil up. Should he cut off the limbs first? How about cutting off those cheeky fingers?

The monster, Zest Speitem, threw away his mask of laziness.

Chill. Theodore felt a wave of fear and couldn’t help taking half a step back.

Pit…! Zest’s blade narrowly passed through cloth and scattered drops of blood. If it had entered a little bit deeper, Theodore’s carotid artery would’ve been cut. Theodore hurriedly moved back while healing his neck. This attack was so quick that the previous strikes seemed like a joke. However, from Zest’s point of view, this was a normal attack.

‘Damn, I have no chance of winning in a melee…!’

Theodore was still faster than lightning. When it came to speed, it was common sense that human speed couldn’t overcome lightning. Even if the opponent had the ability to go beyond space,

how could he stop lightning that went into the sky?

Theodore determined after opening up the distance between them and flying up into the sky.

“Hey, you can’t run away.”

...No, Theodore tried to fly up.

“Now let’s have so fun, yes?”

Zest remained on the ground and swung his sword in an empty space.

Jeeeong! Then there was a roar, and Theodore fell down.

‘... What, this...?’

It wasn’t until Theodore fell 30 meters and landed on the ground that he realized what had happened. He had hit an invisible wall in thin air. It was lucky that he hadn’t released his lightning mode. It was clear that his bones would’ve been shattered if he had received the collision with his human body.

Theodore landed on both legs and barely opened his mouth. “... H-How?”

“Hah, everyone’s reaction is always the same.” Zest walked step by step and chuckled. “I cut space. The space is cut many times to form a wall. Of course, the world will immediately restore it... It is good for those who are fast like you.”

“Cut... space?”

“It seems like you can’t believe it. Isn’t this swordsmanship?”

It was confidence in his Aura Ability. This was a declaration that Theodore could be killed at any time and that he couldn’t escape. Theodore now understood why the empire had dispatched the 2nd Sword.

...A swordsman who could cut space? Zest had completely cut off Theodore escape route. Even if Theodore’s body’s condition was

perfect, he wouldn't be able to move through the space. He felt reluctant to use Umbra because he sensed that the result wouldn't be good.

'I can't avoid it with Umbra. I don't know what effect will happen if he cuts the space, even if I avoid it by moving to another dimension.'

Reality showed that he was absolutely cornered, but Theodore still didn't give up. His disadvantage wasn't the only thing he learned from Zest's answer.

'I found a weakness. The only thing that can be cut from a distance is space. If he could cut me directly from a distance, I would've already died. He is fast because he erases the space in the gap between us, but if his blade is visible at close range, I can somehow avoid it.'

Theodore maintained a barrier of magic power exactly 3 centimeters above his skin. He would only be able to survive by avoiding the death which appeared in front of him. It wasn't much different from dancing on the blade. However, if he survived the crisis... he could seize the opportunity to reverse this unfavorable situation.

"Huuuu..." Theodore turned into lightning again and lowered his body. The difficulty of his current task was much higher than any difficulties he had faced before.

One mistake could mean death. Zest seemed to like that Theodore didn't lose his fighting spirit. Then Zest raised his sword with a grin. "Are you hiding something? This time, try to hold on for a while."

He would stab in any gaps that Theodore showed. Theodore couldn't rely on a gap in the opponent to win, so he spent a lot of points in the Library to ensure victory. Theodore once again became lightning and enhanced his cognition in preparation to meet Zest's sword.

The magician who transformed into lightning and the sword master who cut the space… In the wilderness where no one was a spectator, the struggle of two beings who had transcended humans had just begun.

*

The exchange between two masters ended in just five minutes.

“Kuheok!” Theodore’s imperfect lightning eventually reached the limit, so he rolled across the ground and coughed up blood. It was rather miraculous that he had managed to maintain it for five minutes with his unstable circles. He hadn’t been able to rest, and now his legs didn’t have the power to rise anymore.

In comparison, Zest looked no different than when he first appeared. Just like a cat playing with a rat, he trampled on the devastated Theodore. Zest pointed his sword as he spoke with satisfaction, “It was really entertaining. For you to be able to avoid my sword up to here, it was beyond my expectations.”

“…This is entertainment for you?”

“Of course. It might be different if you are the fire witch or muscles-obsessed magician, but your skills can’t threaten me. Didn’t you focus on running away because you are well-aware of this?”

Theodore couldn’t deny the words. The difference between him and Zest was that big. If they fought a hundred times, Theodore would die a hundred times. If they fought a thousand times, Theodore would die a thousand times.

He was lucky to have been able to run away, but Theodore’s logical thinking couldn’t deny Zest’s answer. Zest, one of the strongest people in the present world, was three stages higher than Theodore Miller in every way.

‘It would be the same in Meltor.’

The general soldiers or even 100 elite knights wouldn’t be able to

overpower a superhuman like Zest. If Theodore confronted him with Baek Jongmyung, both of them would be killed. Veronica and Blundell were the only ones who were an equal match. In the first place, Theodore had no intention of confronting Zest directly.

“Well, you’re not wrong but… But it is a big mistake if you think I only ran away.”

“What?” As Zest frowned, Theodore pointed to the ground where the two of them were standing. Zest noticed it the moment he looked down at the ground. “A magic circle? This is… Ah.”

It was a super large magic circle which was 50 meters in diameter. Zest thought about when this magic circle had been formed.

Theodore, who had turned into lightning, must’ve drawn it while running away. His movements seemed like he didn’t know martial arts, and had only been occasionally ineffective. It made sense if he had been drawing this magic circle during the fight.

However, Zest didn’t panic when he noticed it. “So, can you beat me with this magic circle?”

“No way.” Zest was confused after Theodore denied it. “Attack magic can be avoided, and I can’t bind you since you have the ability to cut space.”

No matter what method Theodore used, he couldn’t win. So, he had thoroughly prepared a strategy based on this premise. Theodore Miller couldn’t defeat Zest Speitem. However. there was a way to call an existence that could beat Zest Speitem. The completed magic circle was summoning magic.

‘Today, in this place… it’s all connected.’

Theodore’s magic power flowed into the magic circle on the ground, and it flashed red. A summons that could deal with Zest wouldn’t be ordinary. The current condition of Theodore’s body meant he would just self-destruct if he called Fafnir, and other

existences wouldn’t be able to deal with a sword master.

So, Theodore had searched the Library last night. It had been to find a catalyst for the summoning magic he had thought about since hearing who the author of Hellfire was. It was the species that was responsible for the division of this material world, and they had been the main enemies in the great war, with worshipers who still remained today.

“「 Open, blazing gate of hell— 」”

An enemy of the world, a demon, was called.

Chapter 239 – Second (3)

Even so, the border of this material world had been shut down a long time ago. Theodore might succeed in calling out a demon, but its power wouldn't even be 1% of the main body.

However, that was enough, Theodore was sure of this.

Gods and demons, the transcendents of the Age of Mythology, were armed with a power which wasn't present in this age. They were of a spirituality that was several times higher than the present humanity.

It was possible to win even if it was 5%. This was the result of the summoning magic he envisioned.

–Do you want me to tell you before you eat that book?

It had been a while back. After Theodore entered the Zero Library with Paragranum, she had smiled unpleasantly at him, who had chosen 'Hell Fire,' and told him who the creator was.

–The magician who created Hell Fire was the demon king of fire, Fulito, who sent an avatar down to the material world. Hell Fire is a form of summoning that calls Fulito.

From then on, after discovering that Hell Fire was a variation of summoning magic, Theodore had studied the magic formula with summoning in mind. The role of the 'gate' was to invoke a summons through Hell Fire.

If so, Theodore's remaining role was to provide the causality and magic power which allowed it to operate in the material world. Just like Fafnir had been given 'Charlotte's Necklace', this demon summoning ceremony wasn't much different.

"「Offering.」"

The magic circle which was flowing red suddenly turned black. Like Hell Fire, it was a dark color that swallowed the light, shaking

the boundaries of the material world and the ground at the feet of the two masters.

This was ‘dimensional vibration,’ a phenomenon equivalent to a higher level concept of ‘space’ which Orta and Zest could handle.

The confused Zest shouted, “What are you trying to call?”

Instead of answering, Theodore continued chanting the spell, “「Monarch of the distant land, lord of fire, I will give an offering to your fire here, so please listen to my minor request.」”

Then something emerged from the inventory into his left hand. It was a large and dull piece of skin. However, why was there a haze in the air, like heat rising from the surface of the skin and distorting the surrounding air?

The skin was the catalyst of a red dragon that was thousands of years old, and it required 11,000 points to take it from the Library. It wasn’t something which should be used as a consumable, but this wasn’t a situation in which Theodore could afford to save it.

Then at that moment...

【It has been accepted.】

An irresistible fear captivated the souls of the two masters.

‘J-Just hearing this voice...!?’

The face of the demon king, Fulito, came from a distant dimension and overpowered the peak of humanity.

7th Circle magician? A swordsman that could cut through space?

Both of them wasn’t at the level of a god and were nothing but worthless trash in front of a demon king. They stiffened as soon as they heard the voice, and their souls would’ve perished if they hadn’t already transcended mortality.

Shortly after Theodore and Zest became frozen like stones, black flames appeared in the magic circle and the door opened.

Huuuuuuong!

Subsequently, an evil demon walked out from the gate. It had a body which exceeded 5 meters in height, a pair of wings like a bat, two flaming horns that protruded from its temples, and a burning red gaze. The demon gave off a scorching heat. The power of a demon, which had been absent for thousands of years, had now arrived in the material world.

【 According to the king's orders, this Magnus will annihilate. 】

Magnus, a senior demon with bat wings and the head of a lion, swallowed the fire dragon's catalyst before looking at Theodore, his summoner.

It seemed that he enjoyed the taste of the catalyst as he closed his eyes and laughed.【 This is truly a delicacy that I haven't tasted in a long time. I am the avatar of Fulito, king of fire. Summoner, let this Magnus destroy your enemy. 】

Perhaps it was because Fulito's intimidation had disappeared with Magnus' summoning, but Theodore opened his mouth and said, "I want the death of the enemy, Zest Speitem who is before me."

Then Magnus' burning eyeballs glared at Zest' existence.【 Hoh, a moderately strong person in this declining age... 】

Magnus determined Zest's strength and told Theodore, 【 Summoner, I can't be sure that I can completely annihilate this human with the magic power and offering that you gave. Is that still okay? 】

"It doesn't matter. Just do your best."

【 Okay. I will show my sincerity for the delicacy you gave me, 】 Magnus replied in a gentlemanly manner, unlike his vile appearance. An ogre would look cute standing next to the black leather and flames. There was also a sword and whip in each of Magnus' hands.

The two weapons increased in length and weight to match the demon's physiques. Then Magnus took on an intimidating fighting posture. This caused Zest to gulp unconsciously. "... A demon in this day and age, you were hiding something absurd."

Theodore laughed despite being drained by Magnus' summoning. "I said you would regret it."

"I never thought you would be such a scary guy. This is definitely my mistake."

As expected from Andras' 2nd Sword, Zest didn't stop his talking despite the presence of a senior demon. However, unlike his usual self, his grip on the sword was stiff. Was it because he sensed he couldn't go against this opponent?

Magnus held the greatsword in his right hand and whip in his left hand as he spoke,【 Let's try it once, Human. 】

"I am desperate to get the unique title of Demon Slayer!"

Zest sword was covered in blue, while Magnus' hands were surrounded by fire. A senior demon and a sword master... This was the beginning of the second stage of the match.

*

Obviously, it was Zest who ended up worse off. He was overwhelmed by the lich-like state of Magnus' limbs, and he couldn't compete with Magnus using his ability to cut 'space.' Due to the absolute speed of his initial movement, Zest's attack filled with killing intent was completed.

Zest's Style Space Cut: Decapitation.

This was a technique he had never used against Theodore. The sword technique which Zest had trained all of his life crossed 10 meters toward Magnus' neck. Zest's terrifying speed was beyond a realm that Theodore's eyes could follow.

'Kill!' Zest was delighted the moment his blade touched Magnus'

neck. It didn't stop at fabric, cutting through muscle and bone. Even a demon would die from this. However, Zest's expectations were soon betrayed.

Paaaang! A shockwave burst from the whip that moved through the air. Zest desperately tried to avoid it, but blood burst from his body as he was hit. Magnus didn't stop moving the whip, despite half of his cervical bone being cut.

Zest wasn't a magician, so he didn't know it well. However, senior demons had evolved into a completely different form of life from the material world.

The concept of a vital point didn't exist, and even death was a temporary monster.

Magnus had appeared in this material world and imitated the appearance of a living creature, but it was only a shell. His brains and heart didn't function. A demon was close to being invincible after being summoned, so they were always subjects of reverence.

However, Zest didn't know this, and even if he did, he had no intention of trying to understand.

"Why isn't your head cut off?! You damn lion head!"

Zest had trained with the aim to cut everything. He had cut rocks, steel, water, and wind countless times, so he could even cut space. He couldn't accept it just because his opponent was a demon.

Zest's Style Space Cut: Heart Cut.

Zest's sword moved again, but Theodore was unable to see the power of the empire's 2nd Sword.

Puhwaak!

The sword was covered in a blue-green light, and it suddenly popped out from Magnus' chest. This would be a mortal wound for any human. However, Magnus just laughed casually.【 Kuahahaha!

What a fun ability, Human! It is a sword that can't be avoided or blocked! This is great!】

"I ripped out your lungs, so how are you laughing?"

【I didn't have such a thing from the beginning!】

While Zest was fuming, Magnus stuck his sword into the ground and a wave of heat spread.

Kwakwakwakwa!

The ground shattered, and the soil which melted from the heat boiled up like lava. This was Magnus, the subordinate of the fire demon king, Fulito. So, naturally, this massive body contained the power to control fire.

Every time Magnus waved his greatsword, heat raged, and every time he swung his whip, a storm occurred.

【Now, it is still too early to breathe!】

It wasn't a sophisticated style of swordsmanship. The whip swept simply through the ground and air.

Zest was forced to step back.

With fast and strong motions, the end of the whip constantly disappeared from view. Meanwhile, the greatsword cut through the air from a distance, causing the blood in Zest's body to boil like it was heated up. The outcome had completely tilted to one side.

Magnus was completely intact after several rounds of battle, so the fight between the two sides naturally became one-sided. However, Theodore calmly saw through the battlefield.

'The balance hasn't tilted yet. Zest's sword might not seem to have any effect, but the ability to cut 'space' is cutting at the knots of my summoning magic.'

Zest didn't stop even when he was hurt by the heat or shockwaves. Even though it seemed meaningless, he continued attacking the demon.

He attacked Magnus' neck, heart, lungs, stomach, collarbone, and so on. A human would've died one hundred times over. However, Zest continued consuming his aura to attack, despite Magnus' sneer.

Thus, this fight eventually turned into a battle of attrition.

"Ugh!"

The limits would've been reached sooner if this wasn't an extra large magic circle. Theodore maintained the magic circle which had hundreds of disconnected strands with his own ability. He groaned as he used his magic power desperately, hoping that Zest wouldn't notice.

Theodore had to endure it until Magnus killed Zest, or until Zest gave up on Theodore and withdrew.

Now, Theodore had around 5 minutes left? Or was it 10 minutes? He calculated his limits and stared at the ground, only focused on maintaining the summoning magic. The occasional debris which blew over was blocked by Magnus' shield, so his concentration wasn't disrupted by outside interference.

"Damn, I can't endure this!" Zest's patience broke first.

His vast amount of aura was running out, and a discord between his limbs started to grow. He had to deal the decisive blow today. Zest made his decision and took three steps away, pulling up the rest of his aura. "I will use my final strike, Lion Head! Receive it if you are confident!"

Magnus was excited for the first time in a long while, so he responded to the provocation,【 Try it, Human! I will crush it! 】

"It is coming!" Zest smiled with satisfaction and grasped the sword tightly with both hands. His specialty to cut space normally involved the use of one hand, but two hands were necessary for this move.

First, he had to gather all his aura onto the blade. 50

centimeters... 1 meter... 2 meters... The blue-green aura rose incessantly from the end of the blade. Once it reached 10 meters in length, Zest realized that he reached his limit.

‘This is the last one.’

If Magnus didn’t lose to this skill, Zest would die.

“One Hit Kill! Either you will fall or I will! I will decide my fate with this sword!”

Zest pointed his sword upwards. Was he going to swing it downwards, or did he have other intentions? It happened before Theodore could guess Zest’s intent.

Kiiiiing!

Zest’s aura manifested itself, and the 10-meter-long aura blade stretched out, cutting the entire space dozens of times. The disadvantage of this move was the long preparation time, but it was a deadly blow that had never once failed when he completed it.

Zest’s Style Space Cut: Ten Thousand Killing Swords.

A momentary burst of blue and green light covered the area.

Chapter 240 – Second (4)

Shaaaack-!

The air was torn. Darkness couldn't be seen in this gap, while the 10-meter-long aura blade was hidden in it. This was a sword which cut through space.

If the world was like a watercolor painting, then Zest's blade was a streak of black on the paper. Physical strength and defense were meaningless in front of it, and it was more like destroying the space where the other person stood, rather than cutting.

Even the senior demon, Magnus, couldn't be careless against this attack!

【 No?! 】Before the astonished Magnus, the aura blade tore through the space.

Then it cut Magnus' head, heart, and neck. The blade took one step away from the material world and created a ridiculous tear. There was no way to survive in this life-threatening hell which covered 360 degrees. A body would be torn to pieces, disappearing without a trace.

This was Zest Speitem's special move, cutting a person to pieces. It was a technique where the aura blade literally shattered the space along with the target. Death was a certainty, even for the famous Orta.

Immediately afterward, countless blades of light surrounded Magnus.

Hwaaak!

Black blood emerged. The distinctive smell of sulfur was emitted from Magnus' body which didn't exist in the material world. It was evidence that Zest's attack was valid for the first time.

"Kuheok!"

The space which was cut dozens of times shook unsteadily, and Theodore coughed up blood as he maintained the summoning spell.

‘Damn, I can’t last much longer…!’

The summoning circle had already been broken to an extent that the shape couldn’t be recognized, and the connection with Magnus was on the verge of being severed. It wouldn’t be strange if Magnus’ summoning was canceled immediately.

Zest was exhausted after using all of his aura, but he was convinced of his own victory.

【—Good, now is it my turn? 】

The demon moved despite his shattered body.

“What?!”

Magnus’ flaming sword, a greatsword which was larger than the pillar of a building, moved toward Zest at an amazing speed. The powerless Zest couldn’t afford to go against it. However, he managed to avoid it desperately at the right timing.

As expected of Andras’ strongest swordsman, the attack was blocked. A direct strike would’ve taken his life, but Zest reduced the damage as much as possible by moving far away.

Kwaang!

Alas, that didn’t mean his body wasn’t injured. Magnus’ destructive power was really great, and Zest paid the price. Despite offsetting most of the power, both of his arms were broken, four of his ribs had snapped, and some of his internal organs were damaged.

Zest would’ve been seriously injured if there had been a little more strength in the attack.

【 As expected, I’m sorry. In the end, I am lacking one step. 】 Instead of chasing after him, Magnus turned to Theodore and

grumbled.【 Summoner, prepare for the future. 】

“Is there a reason why I have to hurry?”

【 That human’s skill has touched the dimensional gate. My flames and the boundaries of this material world are bound together, so this whole area will be blown away. 】

Theodore understood Magnus’ words and his eyes widened. “Surely, it isn’t dimensional shaking?”

【 As expected from a magician. 】Magnus’ body gradually faded away. The connection which brought him to the material world was cut off, so it was natural for him to return to his original world. The demon, who enjoyed himself after thousands of years, disappeared, and the space around him distorted.

Huuuuuuong!

It was as he said. After Magnus disappeared, the entire space where the magic circle was drawn had distorted. A world which couldn’t be understood by the human senses unfolded.

There was a dizzying array of sound and sights that couldn’t be distinguished. Theodore tried to raise his body but panicked as he found that the ground had already disappeared. It wasn’t a phenomenon which could be escaped with human legs.

He would die.

That’s why he went with his first instinct. Theodore couldn’t find the answer on his own and quickly called an advisor.

‘Gluttony!’

–I was already awake. You didn’t have to call me so urgently, User, Gluttony talked as calmly as usual, despite Theodore standing at the crossroad of life and death. Its attitude calmed Theodore’s impatience.

Gluttony was trustworthy as always as he delivered some instructions, –Protect your body before I give you a way to escape

this place. If you take advantage of Umbra's strength, you can resolve some of the pressure of this distorted space.

'Use Dimensional Leave?'

–Umbra relies on mental power, not magic power. Even if your magic power is depleted, you can hold it for about 30 seconds.

Gluttony's advice was correct. Theodore felt his breathing ease as soon as he unleashed Umbra's strength. The distorted space had made it hard for him to breathe. Theodore became calm as his breathing was restored, and Gluttony moved onto the next step.

–You need something to get out of here.

'That something, do I already have it?'

-That's right. It is necessary to bring out 'Death's Worship' that is sealed in the inventory.

'What?'

Theodore was lost for words. It was natural when thinking of Death's Worship.

It was the grimoire that had created thousands of undead a few years ago when Theodore returned home. The grimoire contained the soul of the ancient legendary warlock, Jerem. He was a specter of the 9th CIrcle that didn't remain in this age. Yet Gluttony wanted to release the grimoire that had turned an ordinary magician into a top-grade undead in just three months?

However, Gluttony's subsequent explanation convinced him.

'...I roughly understand your explanation. I'm to use the grimoire's space transfer to escape this place?'

–That's correct.

Theodore lacked proficiency in space magic, and he couldn't escape from this distorted space with his circles' overload. In that case, he should grab the tail of an escaping item. The space transfer function of the grimoire was continent-wide. Gluttony anticipated

that Death's Worship would try to escape and devised a method to grab onto it. The destination might be a bit random, but Theodore nodded.

"Okay, let's try it."

There was no time left to worry, and he had no other options. Theodore held out his left hand with a nervous expression and opened his mouth to shout. He hoped he wasn't making a mistake here.

"Come out, Death's Worship!"

Simultaneously, a grimoire wrapped in chains emerged.

《■■■■■■■————!!》

Was it an expression of joy from its liberation, or an outburst of anger? The grimoire let out a terrible roar and exerted itself to escape from this space. Theodore could see that the grimoire wasn't affected by the distortion of space. Rather, space was bending around Death's Worship.

At that moment, Gluttony stretched out its tongue.

–Where are you going alone?

《■■■...!? ■■■■...!》

–Shut up!

The grimoire struggled against the tongue that grabbed it. It didn't seem like much, but Gluttony and Death's Worship were fighting fiercely in this distorted space. Theodore watched them with a nervous face. Now, he could only maintain Dimensional Leave for 10 seconds. After that, he would be crushed by the pressure.

However, Death's Worship wasn't a grimoire that could beat Gluttony.

–Good! We are leaving here, User!

Death's Worship was caught by Gluttony's tongue and jumped forcefully. Theodore disappeared seconds before the distorted space was about to explode.

Flash!

After that, there was a tremendous wave of heat.

*

The explosion was so large that even the inhabitants of Sipoto could see it from tens of kilometers away.

The flames burned the clouds, and the earth screamed. Rather than a mushroom-shaped dust cloud, it was more like the eruption of an active volcano. In fact, it caused the skies of Sipoto to turn dark.

To add one thing, it wasn't just the space distortion which had caused this explosion. The cause had been Ragnaros, the hell ruled by Fulito the demon king.

It was a catastrophe which occurred when the boundary between that dimension and this material world broke down. A world where thousands of hot winds always blew and lava overflowed instead of water... It could be said that Fulito's territory eroded this land for a while.

Fortunately, there were no casualties due to the heat. It wasn't a coincidence that Theodore and Zest had clashed in the wilderness. This had been thanks to Theodore's concern that innocent people might be affected.

Kukukung...

A moderate amount of time passed by since the explosion, but the land didn't stop crying. The noise mixed with the sound of the wind created an eerie feeling. The same was true for someone covered in a black robe.

"...Finally, I found it."

No, that wasn’t fear in the voice. Delight and unpleasant joy overflowed from the robed person. One of the four horsemen, the white knight spoke with trembling eyes. The eyes, exposed through the robe, were gently curved and moist, as if the person was crying.

“Apostle of Death. Our merciful master, who will lead us to the path of immortality…?!”

It was a voice that sounded like a bell. The loud, cheerful voice resonated in the wilderness. This passion seemed unfamiliar to the person, but they weren’t surprised or panicked by it. They had been waiting centuries for the resurrection of the Apostle of Death and sought his relics.

He was the founder of the four horsemen. It had been an extraordinary honor. In the forgotten history, he was the king of hell. He was the notorious warlock whose four horsemen tried to cover this material world with death…

Even now, humans who learned black magic admired and feared him, and the high-ranking demons still remembered his name after thousands of years. Even so, the successors to the four horsemen couldn’t recognize ‘it.’

“Ah…! Please pardon our foolishness! The rudeness we have committed! We were stupid for not recognizing you!” The white knight, Hipatia, bowed before all traces disappeared. “Next time I will find you, Lord Jerim.”

However, Theodore didn’t know it yet. He never thought that another puzzle piece would be inserted due to the grimoire he had taken out as an escape method. Ash powder blew into the place where Hipatia once stood. Hipatia left as soon as possible to share the good news with the other horsemen.

It wasn’t yet known that this would lead to another incident.

For now, it was enough to know that the land had become

devastated due to the battle between Zest Speitem and Theodore MIller, who had summoned a demon that hadn’t appeared in thousands of years.

It was a few days later that the news of the great battle in the Sipoto wilderness was transmitted to Meltor.

Chapter 241 – Where is This (1)

It was dawn, when the sky still wasn't bright.

There were a few empty seats in the royal conference room in Mana-vil, the capital of the Meltor Kingdom. The chiefs of each department had firm expressions, while the elders of the magic towers sat down heavily.

Two tower masters were sitting in their seats, but Veronica was missing.

The people present looked different. Some were concerned, while others were angry. There were also some who were sad, and some others who were silent. The way they expressed it was different, but everyone in the meeting room had some 'weight' bearing down on them.

"Attention." The atmosphere calmed with the king's voice.

As they bowed their heads, the tower masters quietly raised their closed eyelids. Once everyone's gazes were concentrated on him, Kurt III opened his mouth, "...I think everyone knows the situation."

The heavy silence was proof of his words.

"Let me share my view with you before we discuss what measures to take. First of all, who is the villain? White Tower Master."

"Yes, Your Majesty." As if they already discussed it, Orta took one step forward. Orta was the head of the white tower that specialized in espionage, and he had a career which was close to a legend. It was hard to find someone who was a better fit than Orta for this role.

Orta's lips moved under the white mask as he said, "The first and most likely possibility is one of the Seven Swords of the Andras Empire. They know that Theodore recently defeated the 4th

Sword, so they would've sent at least the 3rd Sword—a strong person that can't be defeated."

Then Blundell asked a question which reflected the feelings of the other people, "Who is the most powerful among the three?"

"Needless to say, it is the 2nd Sword, Zest Speitem," Orta replied quickly. "Many of you don't know this, but Zest Speitem's ability is to interfere with space. He is a person who threatened my life several times in the last war, as flying magic and space magic loses most of their utility before him."

"It means that common methods of escape aren't possible."

"Yes. Additionally, he is extremely cruel on the battlefield. There would be no chance if he was sent as an assassin."

Indeed, everyone nodded at the words. It was an easy to understand explanation for those who didn't have experience in battle. Even Orta's excellent mobility was useless, so other magicians would have no way of surviving if they met Zest.

However, some of the attendees couldn't accept that opinion, and they objected to it. One of them was the minister of the military, Robert. "White Tower Master's words are true, but isn't it said that the 1st and 2nd Swords never leave the empire? Isn't it more likely to be the 3rd Sword or another possibility...?"

Orta shook his heads at Robert's words. "I don't know the capabilities of the 3rd Sword, but I know that he is a prince. It is hard to imagine such a person would go to Sipoto to assassinate someone. And the precedent that you mentioned..."

The 1st and 2nd Swords didn't leave Andras. That premise which had lasted for half a century had literally collapsed overnight. It had allowed for a surprise attack. The vigilant Orta didn't deny the mistake. He just scolded himself for being complacent.

"It means that either Andras' policy has changed, or Theodore is such a threat that they were forced to change the policy."

Orta and the others considered this a series of misfortunes in many ways.

The circles' overload…?

That was a rare phenomenon for senior magicians and was treated as a type of growing pains. If they had thought this would happen, they would've sent Veronica or Blundell to pick Theodore up. However, it was too late now.

Kurt sighed a few times before looking around. "Continue. Is there another possibility aside from the empire's Seven Swords?"

"I have a few hypotheses…" Orta continued the explanation, and the meeting room became heated with discussion. There were the warlocks lurking in the Orcus Company, as well as the Lairon Kingdom, that had lost a crusader due to the Soldun civil war. They might not want to risk a full-scale war with Meltor, but those forces could pursue Theodore.

A few hours passed by.

Then by the time the sun reached the middle of the sky, the people left one by one. It meant that the emergency meeting was over. After most of the seats in the meeting room were emptied, Kurt III turned to the side and asked, "Where is Veronica?"

"Last night, she went straight to the Sipoto wilderness. She will come back after directly investigating herself."

"…Will it end with just an investigation?"

Orta thought about it for a moment before shaking his head. He was well aware of her nature. A wildfire might occur in the Andras Empire, or the rain clouds would evaporate to cause a drought. Directly or indirectly, she would cause a tantrum until this mess was finished.

Kurt's role was to calm her down, but he had no intention of holding the reins at this time. "For the moment, I will let her run around as she likes."

The two tower masters remaining in the meeting room nodded. They would put any blame on Veronica instead of the kingdom. Of course, the topic wouldn't end here if Theodore had died, but they had a unique source.

Kurt stared at a spot where nobody was seated and said, "You can reveal yourself now."

It was then that a bewitching beauty appeared in the empty chair. A blue dress clung to her body and revealed her smooth skin. She was a beauty who would bewitch any shallow man—Sea Dragon Aquilo.

This wasn't the place to openly host a dragon, so she had to conceal her appearance.

"I hope you weren't bored."

"No, I thought it was fun," Aquilo murmured with interest in her eyes. "A kingdom where the selfish interest of politicians doesn't take precedence... This is the first time I've seen it. Personally, I think it was a bit more messy than usual, but it's fresh."

"...You truly are a dragon."

The ability to treat a kingdom as a toy truly belonged to dragons who lived for thousands of years. Kurt lost his thoughts for a moment before asking, "You're sure that Theodore is alive?"

"Yes."

It was a strange question and a strange answer. Despite being thousands of kilometers away from where the fighting took place, Aquilo was certain of Theodore's survival.

"I am connected to the boy by blood. Until this connection is cut off, I am sure that the boy is alive. You don't need to worry because he doesn't seem to be in much danger."

"Sigh, that is fortunate."

Orta interrupted from where he was listening to the

conversation, “Lady Aquilo. Can you determine his location?”

“Um… It is a bit strange,” Aquilo explained with a slightly confused expression, “I can tell that he is 3,000 kilometers away from my position, but I can’t find him. I can tell that he is alive, but I don’t know where he is.”

“What does that…”

“It means someone has hidden him, or he is far away. Either way, it is hard to understand.”

Certainly, it wasn’t wrong for Aquilo to say this.

After fighting one of the empire’s Seven Swords, Theodore was either hiding or had somehow moved thousands of kilometers in just a few days? Common sense said that this was a situation which could never happen.

Orta and Blundell were in a dilemma.

However, Kurt raised his hand, indicating that it was pointless to feel anxious. “It is fine as long as we know he is alive. We will continue our search for Theodore. In the meantime, complete the investigation into this attack as soon as possible.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Andras or Lairon… It doesn’t matter who was behind it. We will make them pay a few times over,” Kurt III declared. Then a rare enthusiasm filled his purple eyes as he added in a strong voice, “If that is the case, we need to keep war in mind.”

They were considering war, just because of a single person. It showed how much the kingdom valued Theodore Miller. Orta and Blundell accepted Kurt’s words without objecting. Meanwhile, Aquilo looked on with interest as the emergency meeting in Meltor ended.

*

At a similar time, Theodore woke up in an unknown place.

‘He…re?’

He regained consciousness and could feel the pain throbbing all over his body. His bones were tingling, and his torn muscles brought him considerable pain because they were in the process of reattaching.

There was one area which was causing him the sharpest pain. It was his circles’ overload. The pain was unbearable. Fortunately, there were no fatal cracks, but just a little more and his circles would’ve cracked.

“Well, it is good that I survived.”

However, Theodore didn’t regret it. That had been an opponent he couldn’t hold back against. The empire’s 2nd Sword, Zest Speitem… Theodore had no chance against him from the beginning. Yet Theodore had stayed vigilant and managed to survive.

Then at this moment…

“Hmm?”

A scent passed by his nose. He seemed to have smelled it somewhere before, but he couldn’t recall what it was. As he felt a sense of discomfort and deja vu, Theodore looked around the room.

‘This is Eastern furniture? Does the owner have such tastes?’

Some wealthy people in Kargas converted their entire homes to an Eastern style, so the room that Theodore saw wasn’t unique to the East.

The strange thing was that most of the furniture looked shabby, rather than the charming antiques which rich people preferred. The furniture appeared to have been made a long time ago, or maybe they had been repaired several times.

‘Perhaps…?’

Theodore hurriedly raised his body, grabbing his pained waist. He wouldn't be able to sleep well for a few days. One step, and then another step... He walked a few more steps like a sick person, before facing a door which was just as tattered as the furniture.

Kkiiiik.

The door wasn't greased, so it opened with a loud noise. Simultaneously, a strong wind blew at Theodore's hair, and he frowned as he felt the coolness. The wind was so strong that it wasn't easy to look ahead. However, there was another reason why Theodore frowned.

'This wind is also somehow familiar?'

He felt a sense of incongruity every time he moved, and Theodore anxiously wondered if his senses were broken. However, after the wind died down, he could finally see.

"...Ah!" Theodore couldn't help exclaiming. The scenery stretched out before him, and the land below him filled his vision. Theodore was standing on a mountain at an incredibly high altitude.

However, that wasn't why Theodore couldn't hide his surprise.

'I know this place?'

It was familiar to him despite never having seen it before. Gluttony's power allowed Theodore to share his memories with someone, causing this sense of contradiction. Yes, this was the landscape that Theodore saw in 'his' memories.

"...Sun Clouds Mountain Ranges?"

The man from the Fairy Dance Lee family had gone to the Western Continent to overcome the deficit he had been born with. The view that the founder of Battle Song, Lee Yoongsung, had wanted to see was stretched out in front of Theodore.

Chapter 242 – Where is This (2)

“This is impossible.”

No matter how many times he looked away, the scenery that appeared was the same. The mansion in the distance was no different from what he remembered. Baekun Mountains...

According to Lee Yoonsung’s memories, this was the land which the Fairy Dance Lee family had defended for generations, a place where many types of spiritual things lived. Theodore had wanted to come here someday, but he couldn’t help wondering about why he was here now.

So, he questioned the source of all this, “Gluttony!”

The grimoire had been the one who suggested using Death’s Worship as a means of escape. The grimoire’s ego which dwelled inside Theodore responded, –You called.

“Of course, I called! Why have I ended up all the way in the East Continent? Explain it so that I can understand!”

The virtue of a magician was to stay calm in any situation, but it was hard at this current moment. Even a space magician like Orta would be exhausted if he crossed a few borders. However, Theodore had transcended the gap between two continents. Additionally, this was the Sun Clouds Mountain Ranges which were located in the middle of the East Continent.

Gluttony’s voice remained as composed as ever, -Relax, User. You can be excited once you find out the situation we are in.

“...Okay, let’s work this out.”

Theodore suppressed his emotions. He had learned from their past few years of knowing each other that it was useless to argue against beings who didn’t have human emotions. After his head cooled, Theodore opened his mouth again, “Yes, so what happened to Death’s Worship that was taken out of the inventory? Surely,

you didn’t miss it?”

Death’s Worship was a grimoire that could turn the whole continent into a kingdom of death. Theodore wouldn’t be qualified to be called a hero if he hadn’t managed to keep the grimoire.

Theodore was tense, but Gluttony dispelled his concerns.

–I naturally got it. The struggle was a bit intense, but I got it right before the space transfer. However, the grimoire will be more cautious and quicker when using space distortion next time.

“The same trick won’t be successful… Still, the biggest worry is gone. It is fortunate.”

Zest might have died in the explosion which occurred afterward, but Theodore’s logic denied that optimistic conjecture. Magnus’ last blow was defeated by Zest, so Theodore couldn’t be confident that a sword master or great magician would’ve died from the explosion. If it were so easy to kill Zest, Zest would’ve lost his head to Veronica or Blundell previously.

‘Well, isn’t this situation good?’

Theodore was on the East Continent, so Zest couldn’t threaten him. He looked down at his left hand with cold eyes and returned to the story.

“Everything else is minor. I want a complete explanation about how we arrived here on the East Continent.”

–Okay, Gluttony accepted Theodore’s words and started explaining, –When we escaped using Death’s Worship’s space warp, I could see that it randomly moved without a destination. If it was left alone, you could’ve been destroyed somewhere on the ground or the sea.

“So?”

–I intervened in his magic and placed other coordinates into the formula. I used the causal string attached to User.

It was a memory that Theodore had forgotten.

“Don’t tell me the quest…?”

–That’s correct.

Lee Yoonsung had wanted to go home once, and Gluttony had used this covenant as a vehicle. Gluttony was a parasitic entity in Theodore’s left hand and had no direct ability to do magic, so it could only interfere with the coordinates by using Theodore’s relationships. In that case, Gluttony couldn’t be blamed for this situation.

“…Dammit, I brought this on myself,” Theodore grumbled reflexively.

However, Gluttony returned with an unexpected answer, –Hmm, I don’t think the situation is that bad.

“What?”

–There are no threats to User around here, so can’t you rest until your circles’ overload is gone? You can also complete the quest, so it is effective in many ways.

Gluttony’s words weren’t wrong. Theodore needed time to stabilize his circles, and it would be best if he could resolve the quest during that time as well. However, Gluttony’s view of the situation was also different. It wasn’t tied down by relationships with other beings and thus had come to an unemotional conclusion.

“Gluttony, you… Eh?”

Then Theodore was suddenly confused by something.

“Why are you going to sleep already?” He asked as he felt the surface consciousness of Gluttony start to sink downward.

Gluttony barely managed to answer in a sleepy voice, –In the process of interfering with Death’s Praise… I used a lot of power. For the time being… waking up, it is hard… maybe.

“How long until you recover?”

–A week if it is short… a fortnight if it is longer.

Then Gluttony fell silent after that. Theodore was left with a blank face as his companion departed. No, it wasn’t just Theodore’s expression but his mind as well. Having suddenly appeared on the East Continent, Theodore couldn’t think about what to do with this absurd situation.

Then he someone’s voice say, “Ah, you’re finally up!”

It was a bright and cheerful voice, and it sounded like it belonged to someone who still had yet to reach adulthood. Theodore turned his gaze and saw a young girl with braided hair. She looked like she was barely over 15, but he couldn’t help feeling a sense of déjà vu.

‘Who is she?’ Theodore looked at her with a confused expression.

The girl smiled while scratching her head. “Heheh, can you speak Chinese?”

“…I can.”

“Wow! Your pronunciation is very old-fashioned!”

It couldn’t be helped. It had been over a hundred years ago when Lee Yoonsung had been alive, so the pronunciation of those times would feel old-fashioned now. The cheerful girl smiled brightly at Theodore and bowed. “My name is Lee Seol. You are in the cabin where I have been living for a while. I found you collapsed on the ground!”

“T-Thank you for your help.” Theodore couldn’t endure the gaze of her shining eyes and eventually stepped back. He had overcome sword masters and a dragon’s threats, but this was the first time he was being pushed back by a person’s atmosphere. Were these shining eyes the eyes of a child looking forward to a birthday party…? The girl said her name was Lee Seol.

Then the reason for her enthusiasm was soon revealed.

“This is the first time I have seen a foreigner since I was born. I read about it in books, but you are much more handsome than I imagined!”

“Miss Lee Seol, you are pretty enough.”

“Kyah, your words are also great! Please keep calling me Miss Lee Seol. It is different from usual, so I feel good. It is an experience I can’t get anywhere else. Now, let’s go inside and talk some more!”

Theodore was able to read curiosity, longing, and anticipation in her clear eyes. However, despite her young age and bright outer facade, she had something deep and dark inside of her. Yet she was someone who had picked him up from the ground and moved him to a bed, as well as taken care of him.

Theodore thought up to there and immediately realized, ‘ … Indeed, there was a reason for the déjà vu.’

The cabin where Theodore slept for days resembled the one in his memories exactly.

The cabin where Lee Yoonsung had lived for many years after being kicked out of his family overlapped with this one. It had aged and been repaired over the years, but the arrangement of the foundation stones and the pillars hadn’t changed.

It was naturally a place which would cause him to feel déjà vu.

“Hey, aren’t you coming in?”

“I’m coming now.”

Theodore entered the cabin with a wry smile. This was where Lee Yoonsung had stayed a long time ago.

*

Later that night…

Wuuuong~

The wind became cooler when the sun rose. As Theodore enjoyed

the wind on his skin, he recalled the face of the girl he met a while ago.

Lee Seol, the girl with the name which meant ‘snow,’ was brimming with curiosity and never seemed to get tired. Judging from Lee Seol’s behavior, the saying that Eastern people were closed off to the West seemed to be false. If Baek Dongil were a little younger and a female, would he have grown up like Lee Seol?

“…I don’t know,” Theodore murmured as he looked up at the sky.

‘I feel closer to the stars here compared to when I’m on a plain.’

Theodore’s current location was only a few kilometers higher than the plains, but human senses were easily tricked. The stars studding the dark sky drove away the darkness. It was a view different from the Western landscape, but he couldn’t help feeling like he was being welcomed home.

“Excuse me,” Theodore couldn’t help but say, “Do you have anything to say to me, Senior?”

From the moment that he met Lee Seol, Theodore had felt that Lee Yoonsung’s consciousness had woken up inside him. Lee Yoonsung coughed a few times before speaking, –Cough, cough. Since when did you notice?

“Since the beginning.”

-…You have grown a lot. I don’t know where my obedient junior has gone.

“That is a useless story, Senior.” Theodore changed the topic. “Did you think I wouldn’t notice? Lee Seol is clearly your direct descendant.”

–Sigh. It is impossible not to notice.

The two people sighed together.

“You’re so immature.”

-You’re so immature.

Theodore didn’t know what had happened over the years, so he couldn’t harshly rebuke Lee Yoonsung. Lee Yoonsung might’ve been banished, but he was a direct descendant of the Lee family and its deceased patriarch. It didn’t matter if he wasn’t recognized by the Lee family. He was just sad because he didn’t know the facts.

–I’m really sorry, Junior, Lee Yoonsung said bitterly. He thought it would be a great honor to leave for the sake of his descendants in the distant future, but he didn’t know about human greed.

Why was the girl, Lee Seol, living in this cabin? Lee Yoonsung wondered what had happened to the Lee Family. He was so curious that he remained in this modern age. However, before Lee Yoonsung could speak, Theodore interrupted and said, “I understand.”

-...What?

“You don’t have to say anymore. I understand. I will take care of that child and find out the answers to your questions. Until then, remain inside me and don’t disappear.”

He couldn’t allow the incident with Satomer to happen again. Satomer had missed the moment when his dream became a reality. As a magician, how could Theodore not understand this lamentation? Theodore had seen the passion of Satomer, who had continued to study magic until the moment he died. So, there was still a burn mark left behind on Theodore’s heart by Satomer.

He wouldn’t allow the same bitter thing to happen again. Theodore had made a vow. Lee Yoonsung was speechless after hearing Theodore’s determination. Theodore wanted him to stay until the completion of the quest, so Lee Yoonsung couldn’t deny Theodore that. Lee Yoonsung would leave only when he had nothing left behind.

Indeed, Theodore chose the hard way. The great people who became Theodore's strength... He couldn't betray them.

-...Thank you, Theodore Miller. Lee Yoonsung resented that he couldn't bend his knees and bow to express his gratitude.

"You don't have to do that. I will just be embarrassed." Theodore received the appreciation and watched the sky above the mountains which he would never get tired of.

This area had good air and a good environment. Tomorrow, he would go down the mountain and buy some meat. His diet couldn't change while living in this cabin. Moreover, Theodore's dimensional pocket had enough money to buy this mountain village a hundred times over.

...And besides, what could happen at this mountain cabin?

*

The next morning, Theodore saw some uninvited people climbing toward the cabin, and he sighed.

Chapter 243 – Where is This (3)

It was clear they weren't coming with good intentions.

Did they come to this mountain to search for a girl who wasn't even 16 yet? Theodore didn't think they were here to promote friendship.

Among them, there was a bald man at the front who seemed to have an inflated sense of ego. Theodore watched them secretly and guessed their intentions.

'Of course, there is no killing intent. From the very beginning, they didn't come to fight. Perhaps they are coming to make a sense of crisis...? I don't know why, but their purpose is to threaten Lee Seol.'

It was a too accurate an analysis for a person who didn't know the situation very well. Theodore looked out the window with cool eyes as his insight had increased beyond the norm. At this moment, Lee Seol ran out of the cabin and started to confront the men. If Theodore's analysis was correct, then he should go outside to help organize the situation.

"You! Daring to come to the Baekun Mountains without the permission of the mountain god... Do you not fear his wrath?"

The difference in Lee Seol's attitude toward Theodore and the group of men was astronomical. Her face filled with anger as she yelled at the men without hesitation. A few people were overwhelmed by her spirit and took a few steps back.

However, the bald-headed man, who seemed to be the leader, stepped forward instead of backward. "Girl, you shouldn't act all grown up. Should the descendant of a prestigious family be shouting so loudly?"

A normal girl would burst out crying, but Lee Seol just snapped at him with sharp eyes, "If you know who I am, why are you

concealing your name like a rat? I'm not a timid person!"

"Huhu, you are trying to lecture me? Don't regret it after asking me." The bald-headed person pulled out a sword and slammed it against the ground with a loud noise. It was impressive since the sword had a considerable weight, causing the hard ground to become dented like clay.

The bald man showed a menacing power and shouted in a timely manner, "I am the knight who cut off the head of the ferocious tiger! Crushing Knife, Sir Wang Hochul!"

The other man cheered in response, and the big guys shouted, shaking their weapons. An average person would feel fear from this act, but Lee Seol just clicked her tongue like it was absurd.

"Yes, yes. So, you are a passerby?"

"This girl! You should speak more politely to your guests!"

"Are you saying that you're not a passerby? By the way, can you tell me what you came here for?"

They proclaimed to be guests, but Wang Hochul and his men were the ones who had come here with weapons. There was only one reason why they would come to see Lee Seol: someone hired them and directed them here.

"No, you don't have to answer. It is my maternal uncle."

Wang Hochul was shocked that his client had been discovered and cried out, "What? If so, do you know why we have come?"

"Of course. It has been a few years already."

"Then this conversation will be fast. Girl, what proof do you have of the mountain spirit? My employer said that she will pay five gold coins, so it is better for you to come quietly, then you won't get hurt," Wang Hochul threatened Lee Seol.

"I don't want to."

"What?!"

“Don’t you know that there is nothing that can touch me on this mountain? It would be better if you don’t think about dragging me away with force.”

A few people stiffened upon hearing her words but not Wang Hochul. He’d already heard from his employer that the Baekun Mountain helped the one who was living here. The rumor was that if he tried to hurt Lee Seol, the mountain spirits would come immediately to tear him and his men to death.

However, Wang Hochul didn’t believe in that rumor.

“This girl…!! If you don’t follow me right away, I will smash your house!”

“…What?”

“I can’t touch you, but your house is different. If you don’t have a place to eat and sleep, you will have to come down the mountain.”

Before Lee Seol could react, Wang Hochul raised his sword and moved toward the cabin. It was a house which had survived over a hundred years, but it would obviously collapse if it were hit a few times with a big sword. Furthermore, there was currently a guest staying in the cabin!

Lee Seol belatedly thought of Theodore and screamed hurriedly, “W-Wait a minute!”

“It is too late to say that!”

The moment Wang Hochul was about to swing his sword at a pillar…

Kwack!

The blade got stuck on something, and Wang Hochul quickly noticed something strange. So far, he had swung his sword for decades. As such, even with his eyes closed, he could see the blade sticking into wood.

However, something was wrong. Wang Hochul opened his eyes

and met the gaze of two blue eyes. Theodore blocked the blade with the palm of his hand and said, “You attacked.”

“…Y-Yes?!”

“You attacked me, and I was just defending myself. Am I wrong?”

“T-That’s right.”

Wang Hochul didn’t know what he was saying. He wondered why a Westerner was standing before him, blocking his sword with the palm of his hand. Furthermore, he also wondered why the Westerner could speak fluent ancient Chinese.

All types of questions swirled in his mind, and he remained silent. Therefore, Wang Hochul didn’t really listen to the words which came right afterward.

“Then this is self-defense.”

A flash emerged from Theodore’s finger. Peeok!

Wang Hochul couldn’t even scream as he flew back a few meters. He was an aura user, but he couldn’t react to the attack. So, he was no different from a scarecrow. When Wang Hochul flew into his men, they scattered. This was proof of the huge impact Theodore caused.

“U-Uh, what is this…?” One henchman asked, barely managing to raise his body.

However, instead of replying, Theodore raised a hand. Simultaneously, dozens or hundreds of lights floated behind him, distorting the atmosphere. It was Magic Missile. This was a 1st Circle attack magic, but it contained huge destructive power if a magician of Theodore’s level used it.

It was also a variant developed by Alfred, so Magic Missile didn’t fall behind other top-grade spells. Instead, it meant that these lousy aura users wouldn’t be able to endure them.

“There is no point telling you my name,” Theodore declared to

the flinching henchmen. “If you keep staying in the Baekun Mountains, I will make you pay the price of your leader’s disrespect to Lee Seol.”

“H-Hiik!”

They didn’t need to ask what would happen. The Magic Missiles floating behind Theodore could break their bones with one hit. Immediately, they took Wang Hochul and disappeared from sight. They might go into hiding somewhere in the Baekun Mountains, but they would die by Theodore’s hands if they appeared again.

Theodore watched them leave before looking back. ‘Well, it is natural to react this way.’

Lee Seol was staring at Theodore with a frown, like she didn’t understand the current situation. Theodore tried to lighten the atmosphere by speaking, “I would like to hear about your situation. Is that okay?”

After all, he was a third party who had gotten involved. Lee Seol recognized this fact and nodded. It seemed like today’s breakfast would be skipped.

“Let’s go inside.”

Theodore followed Lee Seol back into the cabin. Unlike last night, she sat before Theodore now with a polite manner which was suitable for the descendant of a prestigious family.

“I am the 14th generation of the Fairy Dance Lee family, a family that has protected the Baekun Mountains for generations. Before I get into the story, I would like to thank you for your help earlier.”

“No, it could’ve been avoided even if I wasn’t present.”

“They might not have harmed me, but this cabin would’ve been destroyed. There are a lot of memories in this place. Thanks to you, it is safe,” Lee Seol said, giving a deep bow. Then she lifted her head and continued the story, “They are probably people hired by my maternal uncle.”

“Why do such a thing…?”

“In order to understand, I have to go back to the past.”

This was the main point, so Theodore listened along with Lee Yoonsung.

The Fairy Dance Lee family…

They had protected the Baekun Mountains long before Lee Yoonsung had been born, and he wanted to know what had happened. The story they were told was shocking.

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It was said that over a hundred years ago, a man who had been expelled from the family had returned to the Baekun Mountains.

Despite being a direct descendant, he had been expelled due to a birth defect. However, he had mastered the family’s techniques to an exceptional level through other methods. He had carried the Lee family name and laughed at those who ridiculed him. There had been a duel, but he had won.

This had been when the schism in the Fairy Dance Lee family had begun.

“Someone questioned the situation. Could a loser who had fallen to his knees lead this family?”

It was truly an absurd accusation. At the time, there had been no one who was more superior than the head of the family in the attribute of strength. There would’ve been no problem if the head had stood up again and showed his strength.

However, the 6th generation head, Lee Ingwang, had given up. He hadn’t been able to withstand the insult of being an incompetent leader and loser, so he had stepped back from his position as head of the family.

This helpless compliance had caused the biggest problem.

“It wasn’t a proper resignation, so the line of succession couldn’t

flow properly. The candidates eligible to become the head of the family tore each other apart, and the Lee family split into several factions."

"Then your maternal uncle..."

"Yes, he currently leads the largest faction in the divided Fairy Dance Lee family." Lee Seol made a bitter expression as she put down her mug. "I inherited the role of 'keeper' of this mountain. The origin of the Fairy Dance Lee family is in the Baekun Mountain, and my maternal uncle wants to negotiate or forcefully take it away."

She didn't explain any further. However, Theodore had Lee Yoonsung's memories, so he knew what a 'keeper' was. A keeper was the guardian of the Baekun Mountain, and the intermediary between a human and spirit.

It wasn't a burden which could be held by someone greedy. Even if Lee Seol's uncle received the 'keeper's token,' the spirits of the mountain wouldn't recognize his qualifications. Instead, there might be a war between humans and the spirits of the Baekun Mountains.

Unfortunately, Lee Seol was more talented than her peers and looked ahead into the future. Despite being only 16, she lived in the mountains to prevent a war. She didn't want to see the death of her clan.

"This is the only explanation I can give you. From this point on, it is a matter for my family, and foreigners can't get involved."

"Foreigner... is it?"

"Yes, I don't want to cause you any more trouble over this." Lee Seol was sincere.

A guest had come from a distant place, and the stories they had discussed were interesting.

Theodore's presence was a breath of fresh air to her, who

couldn’t leave the Baekun Mountains. They were stories from across the sea. Sceneries which couldn’t be seen in any book and adventures which couldn’t be read... They all flowed out of Theodore’s mouth.

If possible, she wanted Theodore to stay a few more days.

‘If my uncle finds out about the existence of the foreigner... he will surely do something. I have to send him away before that.’

Lee Seol put away her greed. Her heart was that of a pure adult. Her kindness that thought about others instead of fulfilling her own private greed might be something she had learned from the spirits of this mountain that raised her.

Theodore answered without any hesitation, “I’m not a foreigner.”

“Huh?”

“Come outside.”

Theodore left the cabin without waiting for her answer, while Lee Seol followed with a bewildered expression. He wasn’t a foreigner...? From the color of his hair to his place of birth, Theodore had nothing in common with Lee Seol. They were both humans, but it was far-fetched to base it just on that.

Theodore ignored her and stood in the open.

‘Senior.’ From here on out, it wasn’t Theodore Miller’s turn. ‘Give your descendant a good show.’

–Yes.

It was time for Lee Yoonsung, the man who was a stigma in the history of the Fairy Dance Lee family, to prove himself. There was no need to use Overwrite. Theodore’s body was the embodiment of Battle Song, and he had experience with martial arts. Therefore, it was only a mild transition of consciousness.

After a hundred years, Lee Yoonsung once again stepped onto the

ground of his home.

Kung!

They were powerful steps. Footprints were carved on the ground with each of his steps. Meanwhile, Lee Seol's eyes widened at the sensation. "Ah...!"

Each step exuded pressure. This was the kind of pressure she felt from her father, but it was more intense and perfect. It was a form which existed in the Fairy Dance Lee family's martial arts, the base of their martial arts.

"...Your body has become well-trained in the meantime. This should be enough to use it."

Theodore—no, Lee Yoonsung admired the body of his junior. It wasn't easy for a magician to have physical abilities like these. Unless he was a mixed race like Veronica, it would be impossible without training every day.

Huuk!

A hand stretched out. It didn't stick to the air. Instead, it flowed through the air like a leaf riding the wind. It was more appropriate to call this a dance, rather than martial arts. He stood on his toes and stretched out his fist, then his palm moved through the air. The beginning and end points of his movement weren't clear, making it seem mysterious.

'It doesn't distinguish between attack, defense, and evasion...!' Theodore watched from the depths of his consciousness and felt admiration toward Lee Yoonsung.

Then Theodore focused his senses. If he could follow even half of the skill that Lee Yoonsung was showing now, his martial arts ability would double. He was deep in the depths of ignorance, but he wasn't foolish enough to not drink the water in the lake.

It might've been an hour or the period of a single meal. This haze caused him to forget the flow of time as Theodore's body moved

through a hundred years.

Tears started falling from Lee Seol's eyes. It was a martial art which her bloodline had forgotten, and her heart wasn't prepared to see the culmination of it in front of her. As a martial artist, she couldn't help being completely overwhelmed.

"Huoong..." As Theodore calmed his breathing, Lee Seol fell to her knees without hesitation. Then she gave a deep bow. Her eyes showed a clear conviction. "I am Lee Seol, from the Fairy Dance Lee family's 14th generation. Please forgive this stupid child's rudeness."

"Raise your head."

"Yes." Lee Seol obediently raised her head and looked at Theodore.

Lee Yoonsung gazed at her and said, "Yes, you have the role of the keeper?"

"I am still lacking."

"I'm not trying to blame you. Rather, I want to praise you. I am truly impressed by your dedication to the role of the keeper despite your young age, as well as your actions to prevent anger between the mountain spirits and our family."

He wanted to stroke her head, but this body belonged to Theodore. Lee Yoonsung tried to suppress his own hopes. He thought he had been disillusioned with his whole family, but he could shake off his resentment if there was this girl.

Despite having been abandoned by his father and having left for a distant kingdom, the beauty of the Baekun Mountains and his affection for the land of his home hadn't blurred.

"You already know my name, but I will once again introduce myself," Theodore said. Then with Lee Yoonsung in his mind, Theodore firmly declared, "I am Theodore Miller, a descendant of the Fairy Dance Lee family and a direct descendant of Lee

Yoonsung. I will put an end to this fighting."

Chapter 244 – Where is This (4)

Theodore was the one who had declared that he would subdue the fighting in the Fairy Dance Lee family. However, unlike his aspirations, Theodore couldn't move immediately.

There had been the incidents of unreasonable summoning magic and intercontinental space movement, so his circles had been overworked. If he confronted a proper master, he would be killed instantly.

In the meantime, he had to focus on restoring his body.

Theodore set his course of action and focused on sealing the cracks in his wounded body, breathing in the mana of the Baekun Mountains. He looked himself over calmly and saw his torn body.

'...It is literally a wreck,' Theodore sighed as he diagnosed his condition. 'I can use 5th Circle magic without difficulty, but there will be a burden on my body at the 6th Circle. It is also impossible to use 7th Circle magic. If I use it carelessly, my heart, as well as my circles, will be torn.'

As Gluttony said, it was fortunate that he had some time to rest. He now had enough time to care for his body and not use any magic.

The Baekun Mountains was a spiritual land filled with mana. Magicians were several times stronger than normal here, and the speed of recovery was incomparably faster. Now, Theodore didn't want to stay anywhere else.

He had first guessed that he would recover in two months, but if he stayed in this land, he would be able to recover in one month. In that case, Theodore wouldn't waste that time.

-As you know, the Moving Clouds and Flowing Water has its foundation in martial arts, but you shouldn't be caught up in this concept. Clouds can change color and scatter rain and lightning,

while water can sometimes be rougher than a wildfire. The Fairy Dance combines both flow and softness.

If he couldn't use magic, then he would train in something else. For three hours a day, Theodore would work to restore his circles. Then he would train in the Fairy Dance with Lee Yoonsung.

He might not be able to use aura, but Lee Yoonsung was the remaining person who had the best understanding of the Fairy Dance in this age. An opportunity to learn directly from him was worth 1,000 gold.

–The Fairy Dance can be divided into four types of hidden techniques.

According to Lee Seol, only two of these hidden techniques were left in this age. It was because each faction had one hidden technique, only to let it die out. Lee Yoonsung learned of this reality and taught them to Theodore.

–1st hidden technique, Moon Breaking through the Clouds.

The moonlight leaked through cracks in the clouds and scattered them. A stealthy and sharp attack, made by stirring both arms in the air, shot out. What powered it if mana wasn't used? Theodore's eyes became foggy as he followed the theory.

–2nd hidden technique, Rain like an Axle.

The scattered clouds would suddenly pour rain. Just like heavy rain pouring from the sky, a quick hand gesture swept quickly in front of Theodore. It wasn't a flood but more like raindrops piercing through a rock.

The blow was stiff and heavy. By this time, it had already become a series of continuous attacks.

–3rd hidden technique, Fierce Wind and Rain.

The true value of the hidden techniques appeared from here. The origin of the Fairy Dance was that each move wasn't independent;

they had to be connected together in order to exert their power. There would be a gale of wind swirling around the clouds to produce the heavy rain.

Hwiooo, wind really blew from between Lee Yoonsung's two palms. Despite not feeling any qi, there was no doubt about the wind. However, this was covered by feelings of wonder, as seeing it appear in front of him caused him to feel great pleasure.

Finally, there was the finishing move.

'Boundary of Heaven and Earth.'

Theodore and Lee Seol were looking forward to it, but Lee Yoonsung was uncertain. As he concentrated, the wind passing by stopped and the mountain birds stopped singing.

"...Hrmm, it is up to here." Lee Yoonsung released his posture.

"Esteemed elder? What is it?" Lee Seol called out to him in a confused manner. Then Lee Yoonsung smiled bitterly with Theodore's body. "You can just call me by name."

"Elder T-Taodoru?"

"That is a little bit wrong... The pronunciation is hard. Just call me Theo. I am unfamiliar with Eastern forms of respect."

Lee Seol's expression showed that she didn't understand, and she looked down like she was really sorry. She thought she had been rude to the elder who had come here. Lee Yoonsung treated it casually, but Theodore wasn't used to such formal behavior and his stomach hurt.

When Theodore soon got his body back, he sighed. "Let's go down. The sun will set soon."

"Yes, Elder Theo."

"You can remove the elder."

The two people chattered as they headed down the path. It was about what side dishes would be on the table this evening...

And about the stars which were only visible from a certain peak on the mountains.

Theodore had always been at the center of a battlefield, so this laid-back conversation was pleasant. He wanted to meet a spiritual being, but it seemed like he had to go through some type of procedure or ceremony to meet them.

So, he would talk about it again when it came time to leave the Baekun Mountains. Just when Theodore was watching the cabin in the distance...

"...Seol."

"Yes! Eld, no, Sir Theo!"

He ignored the way she called him and asked softly, "Do you have any idea what is in front of the cabin right now?"

"Huh? What is it... Ah!" Lee Seol belatedly looked at the cabin and shouted with surprise. It didn't seem to be a face she knew, but her expression wasn't good. There was another reason why Theodore was wary.

'An uncanny presence. It is like the intensity of a fire and river... I haven't felt something like this before.'

He didn't know who the two uninvited guests were, but it wouldn't be easy if there was a fight. His super sensitivity gave him an ambiguous warning. Soon afterward, Theodore and Lee Seol arrived at the cabin and met with the uninvited guests.

The first one to speak was not Theodore but Lee Seol.

"Why have you come here, Uncle?" She spoke firmly, but the tone of respect was just on the surface.

The man she called Uncle frowned at her greeting. "You are too rude! You are the keeper of this mountain, not a wild animal. Your uncle has come a long way, but you can even say 'Hello'?"

"Didn't you send someone else to greet me just a while ago? I

don’t know what type of greeting you want me to give now.”

“That was my last consideration. I was doing you a favor, but you kicked it away. So, I have to come here personally.”

Lee Seol replied in a cold manner, “Favor? The master of the honorable Fairy Dance Lee family is a deceiver. Leave if you just came here to speak meaningless lies.”

“Y-You cheeky girl! Yes, then I’ll do what you want!” Lee Seol’s uncle, Lee Inyoung, stepped back.

Then he gestured to the person accompanying him, who looked quite unique. They wore old-fashioned clothing with the pattern of a snake embroidered in gold thread, and it moved over the clothes like it was a living thing.

The clothing was strange, but it was the person’s face that looked more unusual. Black linen completely covered their face.

‘I can’t see through that cloth. There is a strange magic on it.’ Theodore observed the person.

Then an unexpected voice spoke out from under the cloth with the gentle voice of a woman. “Hello everybody. I am a notary from the Imperial Family, who has been commissioned to observe the proceedings of the trial, Shim Samho.”

“Notary?”

Unlike the confused Theodore, Lee Seol immediately understood the implications of the words.

“A notary from the Imperial Family! Uncle, are you thinking about a duel trial?”

“Kuhaha, it is as you said!” Lee Inyoung gave a disgusting laugh. “Even though we aren’t as prominent as we used to be, our family is one of the pillars of the empire. Therefore, His Majesty wants to clear up this internal conflict. You do know that no one can resist his decision, right?”

"…The preliminary discussion is over."

"That's right. If the notary here professes my victory, the Fairy Dance Lee family will be one like it was before! There is no need to be tied up by the archaic tradition of having a keeper for this mountain!"

Hearing this, Theodore stepped forward in order to protect Lee Seol. While Lee Inyoung was displeased with his action, Theodore emitted the presence which he had been suppressing.

Kuooooh!

The pressure of gravity multiplied. Lee Seol couldn't feel it from behind Theodore, but the two people facing Theodore could feel the pressure directly. Theodore was a 7th Circle magician. Moreover, his body contained a few divinities and dragon's blood, so this pressure was like a mental attack.

"H-Heoook!" Lee Inyoung turned pale despite being an excellent aura user, while the notary didn't move. No, nobody could see her reaction. Like Theodore, she stepped forward, smiling underneath the piece of cloth. She didn't look like she was affected by his pressure at all.

'She is the real danger, not Lee Seol's uncle.' Theodore raised his vigilance.

She casually opened her mouth, "Calm your anger, guest from a distant place."

"Before that, I want to hear something from you."

"Me?"

Indeed, Theodore's eyes shone as he nodded. "I want to know exactly what a duel trial is and how it relates to this child."

"Well, it isn't that hard," Shim Samho responded to the request before starting to explain.

A duel trial…

It was a law enacted after the emperor's ascension, and it referred to a duel presided over by a notary of the Imperial court. The Middle Kingdom was a place where all types of armed forces coexisted, so they weren't allowed to fight indiscriminately. The duel trial was the only opportunity to argue for specific results through force.

Of course, the duel trial wasn't valid if there was no justification. However, once a conclusion was reached, it couldn't be challenged.

Shim Samho then spoke to Lee Seol, "In this case, Lee Inyoung suggested the 'unification of the Fairy Dance Lee family' and the emperor agreed. All other faction members except for Lee Seol have already joined Lee Inyoung's faction."

"...So, this child has to fight those forces alone?"

"Ah, that isn't it. The goal is to create as fair a trial as possible, so it will be a one-on-one duel."

"How ridiculous."

'Fair? A child of 16 is facing a giant force alone, but this is fair?' Theodore scoffed and denied it.

However, he was an outsider in this country and couldn't overturn the laws set by the Imperial court. It was easy to escape with Lee Seol, but this would destroy her efforts of having protected the mountain for all this time.

In order to protect the Baekun Mountains, Lee Inyoung's ambitions had to be restrained.

'It is a situation where I have to achieve both of those things.'

There was only one option in which this would be possible.

"Notary, did you say you were Shim Samho?"

"Yes."

"I will participate in the duel on behalf of this child."

Shim Samho wasn't surprised.

However, Lee Inyoung immediately protested, "This is ridiculous! I don't know who you are, but this is a matter regarding our Fairy Dance Lee family! There is no room for a foreign to enter a duel trial notarized by the Imperial Court!"

"...Is that right?"

"Yes."

In response to Theodore's question, Shim Samho nodded. The intervention of uninvolved parties wasn't permitted in the duel trial.

It wasn't an area where a notary could interfere, since it was something only the emperor could do. Lee Seol's expression became grouchy, while Lee Inyoung looked elated, certain of his victory.

Maybe it was his own delusion.

"Then I will prove my qualifications."

Before anyone could respond, Theodore's left hand aimed toward Shim Samho.

Pang! There was the sound of wind bursting out. If it hit the human body, bones would break. However, Shim Samho didn't show any reaction. She just looked at the palm which stopped before her.

This lasted until she heard the words that Lee Inyoung spoke right afterward, "M-Moon Breaking through the Clouds...? H-How can a Westerner have the technique that our family lost...?"

It was over with that. Theodore laughed at Lee Inyong's reaction and lowered his left hand. If Lee Inyoung hadn't responded like this, things would've become much more troublesome. However, as a greedy person, Lee Inyoung had no choice but to respond to this.

After all, this was a missing hidden technique. Lee Inyoung just admitted it with his own mouth that Theodore wasn't an outsider in this duel trial.

"Hah, so it is like this." Shim Samho recognized Theodore's intentions and smiled. "You can't be an outsider if you can use this hidden technique. As the notary of this duel trial, I recognize your qualifications. What is your name?"

"Theodore Miller."

"Theodore Miller... Yes, I have recorded it. The trial date will be a fortnight from now. If you have a reason to postpone it, the duel trial can be postponed to a month later."

Lee Inyoung listened to the conversation of the two people and proceeded to interrupt belatedly. However, he was too shocked by the terrifying presence that Theodore gave off, so Lee Inyoung was too late.

He felt desperate at the thought of his goal being taken away.

"Notary! He is a shaman! How can a foreign shaman participate in the duel trial that will determine the fate of the Fairy Dance Lee family's unification?!"

"I have also thought about that."

Theodore inwardly laughed and rebutted the argument, "As Lee Inyoung said, I am a foreigner. I have no claims on this land. So, if I win, they will be given to Lee Seol. Oh, I also won't use any magic except for strengthening my body during the duel. If I break this condition, it will be my loss."

"Huhu, you are thorough. According to your words, there is no reason to refuse."

"E-Even so!" Lee Inyoung couldn't accept it.

So, Shim Samho glared at him with cold eyes. She was a person who had easily endured Theodore's pressure. The expression of

her irritation shut the mouth of Lee Inyoung, who was ‘only’ an expert.

“Don’t be mistaken. I’m not organizing this duel to your liking. I just came to notify you of the duel trial. You should stop thinking of your own convenience.”

“Kuuack…”

Shim Samho gracefully stopped Lee Inyoung’s mouth and bowed politely to Theodore. Then she said goodbye with that thick voice, “I will contact you again later with the place and time. Then may the two of you be at peace until the reunion in a fortnight.”

Chapter 245 – The Rightful Heir (1)

The deadline of a fortnight that the notary had given Theodore wasn't a long time, but it wasn't short either. Theodore healed his body while breathing regularly in the Baekun Mountains, and he was getting better day by day.

The absurd recovery wasn't just due to the Baekun Mountains. It was also due to the efficiency of the Fairy Dance which Theodore had been training in for the past month.

There was one aspect of the Fairy Dance which he hadn't noticed until now. It was a secret technique to circulate his blood with fewer movements. In this era, it was just a simple training exercise, but it was beneficial for Theodore who was deeply wounded.

The cracks in his circles were like rice paddies in the midst of a drought. However, the Fairy Dance restored the broken blood vessels and accelerated Theodore's recovery. Even Gluttony couldn't help commenting on his speedy recovery.

–Amazing. Eastern shamanism is neglected because there are many places that aren't systematic. However, I didn't know it would reach such an irrational area beyond rationality, Gluttony muttered in a strange voice about a theory it had never considered before.

The basis of shamanism was ultimately a denial of rationality.

In mathematics, a theory referred to the act of finding the laws of this material world and establishing a system. Until now, all magic had been born or developed based on this theory. Only a very small number of spells imitated the power of a god, demon, or dragon.

However, Gluttony recognized it as the pinnacle of magic.

–Theories based on rationality are bound to have limits. The ignorant draw boundaries and focus within those boundaries,

rather than thinking about going outside them. The efficient guidelines that are the driving force behind the development of civilization is actually a barrier to transcendence.

In a sense, it is a laughable story. In ancient times, people didn't know astronomy and didn't think the stars in the night sky were that far away.

There is a saying that the ignorant are brave. The meaning might be a little different, but I can say that they are right. As humans gained knowledge, they realized the limit of 'recklessness.' They can't reach the stars no matter how high they jump, and humans can't conquer the sun.

If possible, challenge it. If it is impossible, don't challenge it.

Magic is a power based on rational values, but shamanism is a power that doesn't stop irrational challenges.

Gluttony admired the shamanism which healed Theodore's body now. It was a force which caused phenomena that couldn't be defined with theory. In spite of magic overwhelming it in overall ability, in some fields, shamanism managed to reach areas which ancient magicians had given up on.

Theodore thought about the matter, 'Shamanism... I am on the East Continent, so it wouldn't be bad to look at it.'

–Good decision, User.

He had been thinking about it since practicing the Fairy Dance. Unlike the aura method which differed from magic, a magician could learn a lot from Eastern magic. Although he had only learned two of Lee Yoonsung's hidden techniques, his physical abilities and mana control had increased dramatically.

It wasn't enough to tap on the wall of the 8th Circle, but if he kept stacking it up one by one like this, he would see the benefits one day.

'If possible, I want to learn Shukuchiho before I leave.'

The magic which White Tower Master Orta had used to move a few kilometers instantly was really attractive. If Theodore could use it, he would be able to run away even if he faced someone strong like Zest.

Theodore was thinking this when he felt someone approaching and opened his eyes. It was a presence he had become accustomed to in the meantime.

“You came quickly. Have you finished the preparations?” Theodore, who had been waiting outside the cabin, looked at Lee Seol. She normally wore shabby clothing running around the mountains, but she couldn’t leave like that today. This was a duel trial hosted by the notary, so she would stand out.

“Yes, thank you for your patience, Sir Theo.”

She wore fancy clothing and simple makeup, while her expression was serious with no signs of playfulness. This duel trial would influence the future of the Fairy Dance Lee clan.

She seemed to be carrying a heavy burden despite being only 16, but her expression didn’t reveal her troubles at all. Theodore would respect that determination. He thought this and headed toward the path down the mountain.

“Then let’s go.”

“Yes.”

With some anxiety and confidence, the girl who protected Baekun Mountain took steady steps. How long had it been since she had gone down the mountains? Nevertheless, Lee Seol didn’t stop.

After that, it was a rapid advance.

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According to the notary, Shim Samho, the venue for the duel trial was the Lee Family’s main building. Some would ask if having

a duel in the mansion was okay, but the Fairy Dance Lee Family would find it insulting.

There was a house with over 10 floors, and the front yard was big enough to hold a parade ground. It was around the time when the sundial was pointing exactly at noon.

“Oh! There! It is the mountain’s keeper.”

“Is Lee Seol really here?”

“It has been several years since she left the house…”

“That is just the main house. The woodcutters sometimes deliver news to us!”

As the parties of the duel trial, Lee Seol and Theodore arrived, and the villagers gathered around the mansion. They were curious about Theodore’s identity, worried about the future, and slandering Lee Inyoung in secret… Theodore was relieved that nobody was saying anything really bad.

For Lee Seol, who was only a child, the crowd’s malice could be deadly in many ways. Then the two people were reunited with unwelcome people.

“Fortunately, you aren’t late,” Shim Samho, wearing the same cloth over her face like last time, greeted Theodore and Lee Seol.

Theodore hid Lee Seol behind him and spoke, “When will the duel begin?”

“Oh, my. Don’t be so rushed.”

“A long conversation isn’t needed. Additionally, please fulfill your promise to protect Lee Seol until the end of the duel trial.”

“You are especially cold to me. Well, I understand.”

Theodore watched with sober eyes as Shim Samho guided Lee Seol to her seat. According to Lee Seol, there were no masters in the present day Fairy Dance Lee family. This meant they weren’t great threats to Theodore who had almost regained his physical

condition.

However, the woman called Shim Samho was different. She had a strong, unidentifiable presence which tickled his neck. This feeling was the cause of his alertness.

At that moment, Theodore felt a gaze boring into his back.

'Hoh.'

Theodore turned his eyes in the direction of the gaze and saw someone with Lee Inyoung looking at him. The person was older than Theodore but less than 30 years old. In the East, this person was called a youth, but his capabilities had already reached the peak. Theodore grasped the man's level without much difficulty and was slightly impressed.

However, Lee Yoonsung's reaction was the opposite.

–Hoh, it is so pathetic that I can't say anything.

'What is it?'

–No matter how much the family has decayed, the person who represents the family is a youth who isn't even a master. Far from competing over who will become the master of the Lee Family, he can't even face the ancestral tablets.

'...Really bitter,' Theodore thought inwardly about Lee Yoonsung's spiteful words. The man seemed to be directly related to Lee Inyoung and was a strong person close to being a master while under the age of 30 years old.

Of course, his speed wasn't comparable to Theodore, but it was pointless to compare the masters of the East and the West. However, Lee Yoonsung had complained that the man's level was poor. How strong had the Fairy Dance Lee family been in the old days, and how strong was Lee Yoonsung who had shattered it?

Theodore couldn't even fathom the Fairy Dance Lee family. Shim Samho returned to the center of the empty space soon afterward.

“All the participants have arrived. Then is it okay to start the duel trial immediately? Both of you?”

“It doesn’t matter to me.”

“It also doesn’t matter to me.”

Theodore answered and walked forward, while the man next to Lee Inyoung came forward as well. The man representing the other side wasn’t Lee Inyoung but this man.

Shim Samho noticed Theodore’s suspicions and whispered in a low voice, “That is the only son of Lee Inyoung, Lee Joonyoung who is going to participate in this duel trial. Do you want to say ‘Hello’?”

“There’s no need. I don’t feel like igniting a friendship.”

It was as he said. Lee Joonyoung’s eyes weren’t much different from his father’s, burning hot with enmity toward Theodore. Theodore didn’t know what Lee Inyoung had said, but it had placed Lee Joonyoung in a state of complete hostility toward Theodore.

Theodore rejected Shim Samho’s proposal and moved to the open space. It was an unspoken signal that he was ready to fight for anytime.

“You aren’t afraid.” Lee Joonyoung seemed to be stimulated by his signal and entered the duel arena without hesitation. He had shown his talent since childhood and had been raised as a successor to his prestigious family. This was the Lee Yoonsung who stood facing Theodore.

“Huhu, it seems like your minds are ready. Then in the presence of this notary, Shim Samho, I will enforce the duel trial,” Shim Samho said. Then she spread out her palms and ordered, “The two of you, please step away from where you are standing now.”

The distance between them was to be 30 meters, so Theodore slowly moved to the edge of the duel arena.

A skill could cover this distance instantly, but right now, Theodore wasn't a magician. He was a man fighting for the leadership of the Fairy Dance Lee Family in place of Lee Seol. It wasn't a close distance when it was a melee fight.

Shortly afterward, the two men faced each other.

"The rules of the duel trial are that you can't use weapons or drugs, you can't have any helpers intervene, and you can't leave this duel arena. If you do any of the above, it will immediately be declared an offense, so please keep this in mind."

Theodore and Lee Joonyoung both nodded and agreed to Shim Samho's words. However, they were distracted because they were watching each other's eyes and movements. The confrontation between the two of them wasn't pleasant as Shim Samho raised a hand.

"Huhu, okay. Then..." She spread open the red fan in her hand and... "-Start!"

All pretensions were omitted as the beginning of the duel trial was declared.

Kuuong!

Of course, it was Lee Joonyoung, confident in his own power, who attacked first. He had yet to enter the realm of a master and couldn't notice Theodore's power, so he wasn't intimidated by Theodore. To think that this foreigner dared step his dirty feet into the place of the Fairy Dance Lee family...?! It was unacceptable to Lee Joonyoung, who had great feelings of patriotism.

'I acknowledge his boldness, but that is it!'

Lee Joonyoung's black robe flapped as his body narrowed the distance between them. This was the footwork of the Fairy Dance Lee Family which had been passed down through generations.

It was like clouds always flowing in the wind. Some masters could even use the footwork to cross the water. Lee Joonyoung

hadn’t reached that extent yet, but he did narrow the distance in an instant.

His fist moved as fast as lightning.

Kwaang!

He used Thunder Blast. Generally, this was a technique suitable for a preemptive attack which didn’t allow counterattacks. As such, Lee Joonyoung’s fist approached like lightning. It blurred with a blue aura and was strong enough to crush steel. Theodore wouldn’t be able to endure it without using magic.

…This was the moment the audience thought that.

‘What?’ Theodore had embodied Lee Yoonsung’s martial arts many times, so he muttered as he saw the fist, ‘This is the extent of the fist?’

Lee Joonyoung’s fist didn’t move along the flow because he believed in his speed and strength. The power was strong, but this fist wasn’t the Fairy Dance. It was just a strong punch which would push many stupid people. It would do a critical hit if the fist struck, but Theodore just sneered and moved.

Then he unfolded his left hand and struck back with:

Fairy Dance’s Direct Transmission;

Hand Counterattack Technique;

And Left Palm Lone Peak.

Simultaneously, there was an unexpected noise.

Jeeeong!

It sounded similar to something hitting heavy metal, not a human body.

Lee Joonyoung grabbed his throbbing fist and retreated a few steps back. It was like hitting a wall of adamantium. The fist which had struck Theodore’s palm was swollen, and a few fingers looked

broken.

However, he gave more priority to his question than his pain.

“…Shaman. You… How did you stop my technique?”

That’s right. The presence of aura was absolute in close combat. Theodore’s counterattack was exquisite, but he had been hit by a fist filled with aura. So, it was natural that his left hand would’ve shattered.

However, Theodore’s left hand was fine while something white swirled in the middle of it. This was special magic developed as a substitute for aura.

“Ether.”

It lagged behind magic power and aura, but the ‘density’ was complemented by the power of transformation. The disadvantage was that it couldn’t be reverted back to magic power, so the consumption was inefficient.

Instead of aura which couldn’t be used by magicians, magicians worked to produce an aura-like energy which wouldn’t conflict with magic.

“This is a power that my teacher, Lee Yoonsung, accomplished in his life.”

It hadn’t been enough to learn just Battle Song. Theodore had only been able to use this power after learning the hidden techniques of Fairy Dance. Now, Theodore had inherited all of Lee Yoonsung’s techniques.

Chapter 246 – The Rightful Heir (2)

“A-te-ru…? What a weird technique name.”

Lee Joonyoung was bewildered by the word, but he quickly corrected his posture and calmed his expression. He had a hunch that his enemy’s capabilities were better than his.

The Hand Counterattack Technique was a technique which threw back the power of the incoming attack using the palm of the hand. This was something he had learned from childhood as a direct descendant of the Fairy Dance Lee family. It wasn’t something which could be used casually with just one or two days of training. Rather, it was a technique that someone had to dedicate a few years at minimum to learn.

Yet this Westerner was able to use it. Clearly, Theodore wasn’t a shallow opponent. Rather than approaching hastily, Lee Joonyoung put strength into his legs.

The original Fairy Dance basically manipulated the flow, and the users of Fairy Dance were like the tip of a spin top. The stronger the load, the stronger the rotational power would become. It was like Lee Joonyoung turned into an arrow.

‘It is worth challenging now.’

Despite Lee Joonyoung becoming stronger, Theodore took a step toward him without hesitation. Theodore’s purpose was to complete the Fairy Dance. His purpose was to steal the experience of the Fairy Dance from the man called Lee Joonyoung, before sorting out the family that was ruined by discord.

Theodore approached unceasingly and put out both his hands, performing:

Fairy Dance’s Direct Transmission;

Double Palm Hit;

And Sun and Fertile Earth.

The two palms referred to the sun and the moon, and the palms of the sun and the moon moved in both directions. Theodore's two palms, which could crush a rock, hit Lee Joonyoung's belly with ether surrounding his hands. A person hit by this attack would have their bones and intestines crushed.

Unsurprisingly, Lee Joonyoung also stretched out both of his hands, performing:

Fairy Dance's Direct Transmission;

Hand Counterattack Technique;

Two-handed Wind and Moon.

Wind seemed to blow nonstop from both of Lee Joonyoung's hands. They looked like a moon as they received Theodore's attack.

His hands didn't receive the attack from the front. Instead, they flowed gently and pushed the orbit of the attack away. The strength which could crush a rock would be meaningless if it hit empty air.

Paaang!

When Theodore's palms struck the air, Lee Joonyoung moved like he had been waiting for it.

The Fairy Dance had two types of counterattacks.

One was the type which threw the strength back to the opponent, just like the 'Left Palm Lone Peak' that Theodore had used at the beginning. However, Lee Joonyoung's Wind and Moon was, unfortunately, the second type.

He attacked when his opponent's power flowed in the opposite direction! Theodore's arms were hit by the counter and pushed until a large gap was exposed. It was truly a skill that was the representative of the Fairy Dance in this age.

Theodore admired it while hurriedly yanking back both his arms. If he delayed even a little bit, he would receive a deadly blow. He managed to block the palm, which was aiming for his side, just in time.

Shortly afterward, Theodore's and Lee Joonyoung's gazes met.

'From here on…'

'…Victory!'

A blast of wind blew in the center of the duel arena.

*

The fight between the two was like a dance. They moved together and split apart at intervals. Their martial arts repeatedly tangled together and fell apart. The footprints of the two men were like brush strokes on the ground.

They would come and then withdraw. These were truly the movements of the Fairy Dance, which didn't distinguish between attack and defense, advance and retreat.

"Hup!"

"Suuuuoh…"

However, the flows of the two people weren't the same. Lee Joonyoung, who didn't hesitate to attack every time there was a gap, was like a storm, while Theodore was a cloud or fog. Sometimes there was the sound of thunder, but Theodore's defense blocked the offensive like an iron wall.

A fist met a palm, palms met palms, and so on. Theodore's defensive posture constantly changed like a cloud, suiting him perfectly.

The battlefield gradually leaned toward Theodore's favor. It might seem like Lee Joonyoung was overwhelming Theodore, but in actuality, Lee Joonyoung was worried as he felt an increasing pressure come from Theodore.

First and foremost, the biggest problem was that Theodore was becoming stronger with every exchange.

‘Okay, I’ve grasped it now. Practice truly is necessary to release the power.’

Lee Yoonsung had taught him directly, but it was just a formal framework. If Theodore didn’t increase his proficiency, it would remain as purely knowledge. Then the best training opponent, Lee Joonyoung, had appeared.

Theodore had been training in the Fairy Dance for more than a year, and it was still incomplete. However, he was getting better. Unnecessary actions disappeared with every exchange in the battle.

Theodore applied things that couldn’t be learned by practice alone. He was absorbing decades of experience. This was the moment when his innate genius learning ability was displayed. At first, it had been hard, but Theodore’s movements were maturing at a fast pace.

In contrast, Lee Joonyoung couldn’t do that. He had taken a long time to apply a perfect form to his body. Moreover, he didn’t have a foul means like Gluttony, so he couldn’t steal Theodore’s techniques while fighting.

“Cough, t-this is unbelievable...!”

One step, two steps... Soon afterward, Lee Joonyoung started to get pushed out of the battlefield, and he let out a small moan. He didn’t want to admit it, but there was a feeling of defeat. If this continued, he would be defeated. While he was feeling desperate, a chill ran down his spine.

Then at that moment...

“Yes.” Theodore, who was dominating, stopped his hand.

Meanwhile, Lee Joonyoung didn’t miss this chance to quickly jump back. He didn’t know why his opponent had stopped, but this

was a chance for him to recover. Lee Joonyoung looked at his opponent in a questioning manner while restoring his breathing.

Theodore had an unconcerned expression on his face. “This is enough, Senior.”

Lee Joonyoung couldn’t understand the meaning of those words. It wasn’t in Chinese but the official language of the West Continent. Then Theodore finished speaking and stepped forward nonchalantly.

Lee Yoonsung was present behind Theodore’s eyes. “It is finally my turn.”

At that moment, the atmosphere changed.

“Uh?” Lee Joonyoung couldn’t help shaking and unknowingly stepped back. To think that his opponent who had always been on the defensive was finally attacking…?

However, Lee Joonyoung didn’t give up resisting.

Lee Yoonsung in Theodore’s body gave a nod of acknowledgement upon seeing Lee Joonyoung’s attitude and then opened his mouth, “It is good that you don’t give up despite understanding my superiority.”

However, Lee Yoonsung just raised both his hands. “Realize the futility of your will that can’t be expressed with force.”

Lee Yoonsung had spoken with a tone which looked down on him, yet Lee Joonyoung couldn’t say anything. However, it wasn’t just due to the pressure pushing down on his body. Lee Joonyoung determined Lee Yoonsung’s intentions. “Don’t tell me… Moon Breaking through the Clouds…?!”

“That’s right.” Lee Yoonsung lifted the index finger of his left hand. “Be prepared. If you try to oppose this hidden technique, you might die.”

“Ridiculous!” Lee Joonyoung yelled and took a fighting posture.

What idiot would give in just because of his opponent's words during a battle? Even if it was a hidden technique, the Fairy Dance wasn't strong in offense. This meant that it was highly unlikely that he would die.

"Fool." Lee Yoonsung laughed and ruthlessly extended his arm, performing:

Fairy Dance's Direct Transmission;

Four Major Hidden Techniques;

And Moon Breaking through the Clouds.

Lee Yoonsung's two hands blurred and created a cloud. It was possible to perfectly recreate this hidden technique using exquisite magic power manipulation. For Lee Yoonsung, it was no different from breathing.

He might have no aura talent, but he was full of magic talent. As such, he had managed to reproduce all the techniques of the Fairy Dance with magic. Lee Yoonsung had been a person who couldn't use elemental magic even after crossing the wall of the 7th Circle.

Then the first hitting technique, Moon Breaking through the Clouds, was unfolded.

Wuoooooong! The wind made a strange sound. The space around him distorted like a haze, and it was impossible to see how his arms moved. It was like dense clouds shrouding moonlight. Lee Yoonsung took two steps toward Lee Joonyoung without hesitation.

Syuoook!

Lee Joonyoung had good reflexes and tried to intercept it with an intimidating attack. A sharp blue aura aimed for Lee Yoonsung's neck. It was sharp enough to penetrate through a person.

Chaaeng!

Then as soon as Lee Joonyoung came into contact with the haze-

like space…

“What?” Lee Joonyoung’s eyes widened in astonishment. However, Lee Yoonsung just looked at him coldly. This was the first hidden technique, Moon Breaking through the Clouds. It created a layer of aura in the form of a net to confuse the opponent’s sense of distance, as well as build a barrier. A descendant of the Fairy Dance Lee family should know that much.

Moon Breaking through the Clouds was a hidden technique which combined both types of counterattacks. It produced a counterattack that pierced through the gaps which were revealed by deflecting the enemy’s attacks.

Fairy Dance’s Direct Transmission,

Freehand Counterattack Technique,

And Right Wrist Three Attacks…

Theodore’s right hand moved three times through the exposed gap. It struck the middle of Lee Joonyoung’s body. As soon as the three strikes finished, Lee Joonyoung flew away while coughing up blood. It was a blow which didn’t even allow him to scream.

‘This is the finishing blow… Take a look.’

As he was sharing his body with Lee Yoonsung, Theodore could tell that Lee Yoonsung hadn’t used all his strength in the last blow. Otherwise, he would have completely destroyed Lee Joonyoung. He didn’t know why, but Lee Yoonsung didn’t intend to end it there.

“Get up. If you don’t rise by the time I count to five, I will kill you. One.”

“Kuuack…” Lee Joonyoung heard the words and barely managed to get up. Even if the recovery power of aura was great, this wasn’t damage which could be healed in a few seconds.

Lee Yoonsung gave a warning.

“This will come twice,” he warned with a frosty expression. Then he performed:

Fairy Dance’s Direct Transmission;

Four Major Hidden Techniques;

And Moon Breaking through the Clouds.

Lee Yoonsung proved his will through action, not words. The space around him distorted again. If the Lee Family had been declining for centuries, then Lee Yoonsung wouldn’t linger on it anymore. The man who brought down the family he had been born in took another step.

Chapter 247 – The Rightful Heir (3)

In the end, Lee Joonyoung's fighting spirit rose as he was driven to the edge. "Okay. That arrogance, I will make you regret it...!"

Wind had pushed clouds since the ancient times. Likewise, Lee Joonyoung started swinging his arms around Theodore. The wind howled whenever Lee Joonyoung palms stretched out. Lee Yoonsung looked at it with interest.

This was the 3rd hidden technique, Fierce Wind and Rain. It was a hidden technique filled with destructive power, and it was impossible to get rid of all the force which was comparable to a storm.

"You managed to use that hidden technique alone. It is wonderful that you have reached that level without the 'cloud' or 'rain.'"

This was a hidden technique which was completed only after forming a cloud with the first technique and rain with the second technique. As such, Lee Yoonsung's evaluation of Lee Joonyoung went up two notches. The completion and power of Fierce Wind and Rain weren't enough, but this accomplishment was worthy of praise.

However, Lee Joonyoung cried out angrily at the praise, "Don't look down on me!"

Lee Joonyoung didn't know about the existence of Lee Yoonsung inside Theodore, so Theodore was just a young Westerner to him.

Yet, such a person was praising and looking down on him? A scorching heat rose inside Lee Joonyoung, and his aura flickered, as if in response to those emotions. The turbulent wind had long dispersed the clouds.

Lee Yoonsung naturally moved back two steps and changed his posture. It wasn't the posture for Moon Breaking through the

Clouds. Moon Breaking through the Clouds was effective for one-shot attacks, but it wasn't suitable for going against Fierce Wind and Rain.

Fierce Wind and Rain wasn't just a single gust of wind.

Fairy Dance's Direct Transmission,

Four Major Hidden Techniques,

And Rain like an Axle…

Clouds couldn't resist the wind, but what about rain?

"What? The axle?" Lee Joonyoung cried out with shock as Lee Yoonsung clenched his fists and moved.

It wasn't an overflowing river. These were raindrops piercing the rocks. Based on the enlightenment of 'penetrating through stone,' Lee Joonyoung's storm was penetrated.

Pang! Papang! Pang! Papapapang! Paang!

In a breath, dozens, possibly hundreds, of raindrops entered the storm. Fingertips struck the fist which was heading toward them.

The 2nd and 3rd hidden techniques collided.

If the two people were on par with each other, then Fierce Wind and Rain would've won. However, Lee Joonyoung was going against a great man who had once devastated the Fairy Dance Lee family.

At that moment, the momentum of the storm weakened.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwak!

Lee Yoonsung's fingers didn't miss this gap and struck Lee Joonyoung's upper body. There were specific weights of gravity and high frequency lightning bolts everywhere. When Lee Joonyoung's bones broke, there was a terrible sound. He barely managed to calm himself down as blood emerged from his lips.

"Haaaap!"

Nevertheless, he didn't stop. Rather, he took one step forward and punched Theodore's face.

Peok!

It was pointless since it was blocked by ether. Theodore's skin was a little bruised, but that couldn't even be called damage. However, it was the first time that Lee Joonyoung had managed to hit Lee Yoonsung's body.

"...Good." Lee Yoonsung laughed. He acknowledged Lee Joonyoung's pride in maintaining the strength of Fierce Wind and Rain despite being in this state. Lee Joonyoung could be reassured that he had managed to hit his opponent.

"Rest assured. I won't allow it twice."

"Kuack, w-what does that mean...?"

"You don't need to know. But I won't take your life."

Finally, Lee Yoonsung took a posture which Theodore had never seen before. Simultaneously, the officials of the Fairy Dance family sprang up from their seats. They were aware of this posture.

"SSurely, that isn't?"

"This is a hidden technique from the distant past...!"

"I heard it was lost a hundred years ago!"

Among them, there were some who had memorized this posture since childhood—Boundary of Heaven and Earth.

The first three hidden techniques were the foundation of their training before acquiring the final hidden technique, and only those who could use 'Boundary of Heaven and Earth' were recognized as a true successor.

Lee Joonyoung recognized it as well and was upset. If this wasn't the middle of a duel, he would be asking many questions.

–Junior, Lee Yoonsung ignored the astonishment and spoke to

the master of the body he borrowed, –Don't miss it. I will only show this hidden technique once.

'Huh? What does that...?'

–There is no time to explain. There isn't much time left, Lee Yoonsung spoke in a voice that was different from usual. Lee Yoonsung had borrowed Theodore's body without using Overwrite, so he was reaching his limit. His soul was screaming, and his consciousness was starting to fade.

The use of this hidden technique would hasten his collapse. However, he didn't show it. Lee Yoonsung had an obligation to pass this onto his descendants and disciple.

–Go.

One step... The moment that Lee Yoonsung took a step in the posture of Boundary of Heaven and Earth, Lee Joonyoung's heart stopped for a moment. A heavy pressure seemed to be falling down from the sky.

It felt like the earth was falling down. The two opposing pressures clashed, bearing down on all of Lee Joonyoung's five senses. It was the feeling of death. Lee Joonyoung's five senses screamed, causing him to pour everything he had into Fierce Wind and Rain.

Kuooooh...!

It was literally a dragon of wind. The wind dragon roared while pushing at the surrounding air. Lee Joonyoung's Fierce Wind and Rain formed a wind dragon around his hands and rushed toward Theodore with enough force to tear steel.

However, this wasn't wind pressure. It was a storm made with aura which had the power to cut flesh down to the bone.

"Wonderful," Lee Yoonsung praised and moved. The Fairy Dance technique that was passed down through the heads of the family.

Four Major Hidden Techniques…

Boundary of Heavy and Earth…

—The world divided into two.

*

It happened in an instant.

“…Eh?”

Theodore couldn’t help questioning it.

‘What happened?’

He remembered Lee Joonyoung’s Fierce Wind and Rain which had taken om the appearance of a storm dragon, but he couldn’t recall what had happened after. However, the movements of his hands were engraved on his retinas.

It was the Boundary of Heaven and Earth. Lee Yoonsung had moved his arms, and the whole world was overturned. No, it just felt like that.

As Theodore remembered the feeling in both hands, Shim Samho raised her voice from outside the stage.

She was performing her role as a notary.

“Victory!” She declared while pointing at Theodore with her fan, “Since Lee Joonyoung is out of the arena and unable to fight, the winner of this duel trial is Theodore Miller! From now on, the authority of the Fairy Dance family will belong to the mountain’s keeper. Please note that this trial is notarized by His Majesty the Emperor. If you disagree with this result, you are guilty of treason!”

The silent audience started to become noisy.

Somebody shouted angrily while others cheered Lee Seol’s name, and another anticipated Lee Inyoung’s fall. The duel trial had an unexpected result, and there would be great confusion before the

Fairy Dance Lee family became one.

The reversal of a situation always made people excited. The downfall of Lee Inyoung, who had tried to take control of the Fairy Dance Lee family through coercive means and make the Baekun Mountains his property, had to be talked about in many ways.

In the midst of all this, Theodore wasn't listening to anyone's voice.

'...I see. Have you been consuming your soul since you started teaching me the Fairy Dance?'

-Well, this is what happened. Lee Yoonsung's voice sounded no different from usual despite the fact that his soul was dying. The only difference was that his voice was a little cloudy.

Theodore's eyes blurred as he talked to Lee Yoonsung. If Theodore had known this, he wouldn't have allowed it. He knew that separation always came when it was unexpected, but this wasn't what he had wanted.

'Why do you have to leave this way?'

There was still a pile of regrets. Theodore knew this because they were sharing his body. Lee Yoonsung felt responsible for the family that had fallen due to his own selfishness. It was why he had tested Lee Joonyoung's spirit.

Lee Yoonsung didn't hesitate as he responded, –No, this is enough.

'Senior!'

–I met my favorite descendant. I was able to know the status of my family that I was curious about, and I even found a disciple to pass on my martial art. For a ghost like me, this is enough.

The dead had their own paths to take, so Lee Yoonsung spoke to comfort Theodore. It was as if their positions were reversed. This was a skit where a dead man who would soon disappear was

comforting the living, but Theodore couldn't laugh.

Before Theodore asked any more questions, Lee Yoonsung spoke quietly, –Thank you.

They were short words. Theodore was filled with a deep sadness which blocked his throat. This was the weight of a sincere goodbye.

Lee Yoonsung stopped talking for a moment, before continuing in a dimmer voice, –I told you not to miss it. Did you see the technique?

'…Yes.'

-Don't be discouraged if you can't use it right away. It is an area visible only to those who have reached the highest level. You can only use it perfectly when you go beyond that. It is literally the boundary between heaven and earth.

Theodore had yet to master the highest degree of the Fairy Dance, even though Lee Yoonsung had shown it to him. However, it was a success as long as the sensation remained.

The Boundary of Heaven and Earth seemed to be in the same area as the great magics, Abraxas and Supercell. Theodore's understanding of the Fairy Dance was still far below Lee Yoonsung's. It was an area Theodore wouldn't be able to reach unless he devoted himself to it.

–Well, this is the last one.

Theodore realized that ego of Lee Yoonsung was diminishing inside him. It felt like solid ice melting into water and then scattering like mist. In the end, Lee Yoonsung said farewell.

-Be well.

A good man lost his life, and his end was dull compared to Satomer's. However, the empty space which formed in Theodore's chest was big and empty.

[The disappearance of the object fragment ‘Lee Yoonsung’ has been confirmed.]

[The completion of the quest has been confirmed. I will begin the transmission of object name ‘Lee Yoonsung’ in 30 seconds.]

Lee Yoonsung’s memories and experience flowed in. As the records of Lee Yoonsung’s existence filled up Theodore’s mind, he looked up at the sky and engraved these pieces of Lee Yoonsung, which he couldn’t forget, into his mind.

The cloudless sky felt young.

‘This is good for you… Damn it.’

Despite winning the battle, Theodore clenched his fists sharply and stared at the sky.

If the virtue of a good man was to accept life and death, then Theodore was probably a good man. There was a bitter taste in his mouth every time a person, who wasn’t actually still alive, left.

A person who hadn’t been acknowledged in life but returned to his home after his death…

This was the end of Lee Yoonsung.

Chapter 248 – Ominous Identity (1)

The emperor's authority was absolute in the Empire, the middle kingdom of the East Continent. As the duel trial was conducted in the presence of a notary who had been appointed as his agent, the result was absolute and impossible to overturn or distort.

For this reason, Lee Inyoung's power decreased and the dispute of the Lee Family, which had lasted for over 100 years, came to a close. Even so, the integration process was never going to be smooth.

It was true that the faction war was over, but the majority of the Fairy Dance Lee forces didn't think much of the 16-year-old Lee Seol.

They were afraid of the eyes of the imperial family and pretended to be quiet, but there was nothing strange about indirect insults. Since Lee Seol had no support base, Theodore's share of authority shot into the sky. Therefore, Theodore didn't intend to hesitate if he needed to use force.

Yes, he stopped at this thought.

Theodore sat on the unfamiliar cushion and said to the man sitting in front of him, "...I am grateful for your help."

However, Theodore couldn't figure out why the person was helping him. There were no favors which were done without compensation. Despite this, in the wide world, there were adults who didn't follow this principle. However, there was something fishy about the person before him.

"I never thought I would come forward to help."

"Speak more informally."

Lee Joonyoung, the man in front of Theodore, corrected his manner of speaking with a polite and formal attitude. He was a mess due to the injuries of the duel trial, but he was strong because

he was close to being a master. The bandages wrapped around his body couldn't hide his peculiar ambition.

"If you have difficulty calling me by name, just called me 'Outsider.'"

"I will do so. Outsider, can I answer your first question?"

"Yes."

Lee Joonyoung spoke his reply to the question, "This is the right thing to do as a member of the Fairy Dance Lee family. Your position has been established with the duel trial, so we can incur the anger of the emperor if there is dissonance."

"That is a superficial reason. I hope that you will tell me your true feelings."

"What I said earlier... those are my true feelings. I knew that my father pursued his own desires, but I thought it was a necessary evil to end the hundred years of confusion. However, more paths have emerged, so I am just following them."

In reality, Lee Inyoung was the person who was supposed to be head of the family. However, his faction had been defeated in the duel trial and his position was reversed. During the duel trial, the family's missing hidden techniques had been shown by the foreigner, Theodore Miller.

Due to this, Lee Seol had been accepted as the next head of the family by the emperor's notary. It was a chance to restore two lost hidden techniques, so he needed to latch onto it. For Lee Joonyoung, who was born and raised in the Murim world, switching positions was a natural choice. (TL: Murim = easy way of explaining is the martial arts world)

Of course, Theodore hadn't been born in Murim and couldn't agree.

'He is serious.'

His super sensitivity, which had evolved to be close to a psychic ability, recognized that Lee Joonyoung's words were true. Lee Joonyoung was a young hot-blooded person, so he disregarded his father's fall.

He was a person Theodore couldn't easily let down his guard around.

However, without Lee Joonyoung's assistance, the integration of the Fairy Dance Lee family would've taken months, maybe years, instead of weeks. It was hard for Theodore to understand the reasons, but he finally acknowledged Lee Joonyoung and let it be. It didn't matter as long as Lee Joonyoung didn't betray Lee Seol.

"...Okay, I believe that," Theodore acknowledged. Then he asked Lee Joonyoung. "Can you explain why you requested a meeting with me?"

"Yes, of course," Lee Joonyoung answered, pausing as he chose his words. Then he looked at Lee Seol sitting next to Theodore and said, "I think the mountain's keeper already knows."

"Yes."

Theodore's eyebrows twitched for a moment at the title. There had yet to be a proper inauguration for Lee Seol yet. So, calling her 'keeper' was like showing her what her position actually was.

However, Theodore denied that idea. Lee Joonyoung wasn't stupid enough to reveal it on the surface, even if he might feel that way. Then he must have a good reason for it.

Unsurprisingly, Lee Joonyoung responded to Theodore's speculation, "In the duel trial, Lee Seol's inauguration was decided. But there is still room to act."

"For example?"

"There are three qualifications needed in order to become the Fairy Dance Lee family's head. Firstly, it doesn't matter anymore but the knowledge of at least one hidden technique that has been

passed down for generations. Secondly, the agreement of the majority. This isn't difficult either. The problem is the third requirement."

"What is the third qualification?" Theodore couldn't hide his doubts as he asked.

However, it was Lee Seol who responded before Lee Joonyoung. "Age."

"Age?"

"Yes. The law states that the minimum age to become the head of the family is 17. And there is still a year left until my ceremony of adulthood."

"Even so, it was a duel trial conducted by the emperor. Isn't that enough to disregard a small law?"

Lee Joonyoung nodded like Theodore was right, but he then smiled wryly and explained, "Yes, it is normally not a problem. However, similar provisions exist in the law of the empire. The decision of the duel trial can't be reversed, but it is enough reason to buy time.

"...The grace period can be extended?"

"That's right."

Theodore understood what Lee Joonyoung was trying to say and stroked his chin. They couldn't oppose Lee Seol becoming the head of the family, but they could use this law as a pretext for a grace period.

Anybody would be able to notice their intentions.

'They intend to treat her as a figurehead. Even if she isn't naive, it will be troublesome in many ways. I thought they gave up because they couldn't win from the front.'

One year wasn't a long time, but it wasn't short either. The internal assets of the Fairy Dance Lee family hadn't been grasped

yet, so it was more than enough time to hide them.

After a year passed, they would act like they were giving the leadership of the family back to Lee Seol, but they actually wielded the real power. After all, there were some who might find fault with Lee Seol's leadership.

However, it was difficult to overthrow them all with force. Above all, it was doubtful if Theodore would remain on this continent. Despite this, instead of panicking, Theodore asked Lee Joonyoung, "So, the solution is?"

"There are two effective measures."

Indeed, Theodore nodded. Perhaps Lee Joonyoung had thought of a solution before coming here. He was an outstanding martial artist and also quite smart.

Lee Joonyoung was a master of the pen and sword. If Theodore hadn't come at this time, the Fairy Dance Lee family would've fallen into his hands. Then why was Lee Joonyoung smiling? No tigers had been born since a long time ago. However, in this case, a dog had given birth to a tiger.

Lee Inyoung was probably just the face of the faction, while Lee Joonyoung was definitely the head. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been possible for him to integrate the factions together so quickly.

Theodore listened curiously without forgetting his vigilance.

"I will take full responsibility and launch a preemptive strike with Sir Theodore's forces. In the end, the other side will choose if they should fight or not. If they fight, we can win."

"Dismissed," Theodore refused Lee Joonyoung's suggestion with a single word. "Is it right to shed blood for wrongs that haven't been committed yet?"

"It is called cutting the grass and pulling out the roots as well."

To cut the grass and dig out any roots...

That was the act of eliminating the root of the problem in advance. From a short-term point of view, this method was really efficient. However,

Theodore just sneered cynically. “Right now you aren’t a farmer but a weed who has abandoned the other weeds. Do you think it makes sense to execute the members based on your words?”

“Then I will tell you the best solution.” Lee Joonyoung had thought this would be the case from the beginning, and gave his opinion without worrying about Theodore’s contemptuous words. “If Sir Theodore becomes the temporary head, then everything will be solved.”

“What?”

“Kuk, I’m not telling you to take Lee Seol’s position.”

Lee Joonyoung took a step back from the momentary explosion of pressure coming from Theodore while simultaneously inwardly admiring it. He thought he had understood Theodore’s strength in the duel trial, but the scale of the power Theodore just revealed by was well beyond that.

Quickly bowing, Lee Joonyoung gave his solution to this problem.“In the case of the Fairy Dance Lee clan head, it is possible for the guardian of the next head to temporarily take the spot if they aren’t qualified yet. This is based on family law, so the other side won’t be able to do anything.”

“But…”

Certainly, it was a solution. Behind his protesting attitude, Theodore understood that this was the most efficient way. Theodore met the first qualification. No one would raise any objections because Lee Inyoung, the chief of the largest faction, was under his authority. The biggest problem was that Theodore had no intention of staying in this place for a long time.

“Sir Theo…” Lee Seol, who was beside him, looked at Theodore

with an uneasy expression as it seemed like Theodore would disappear soon.

Lee Seol had acted as the mountain's keeper for more than 10 years and maintained her pride as a member of the Fairy Dance Lee family. For Lee Seol, Theodore was the first protector she had ever met. It was thanks to him that she had managed to acquire the Fairy Dance Lee family.

"I am asking this of you." Lee Seol stepped back and bowed flawlessly.

After seeing that, Theodore smiled bitterly, knowing that he couldn't refuse the request.

'Sigh, it can't be helped. I was going to stay for a month anyway... and I have to pass on both of the lost hidden techniques.'

It would take some time, and it was necessary to examine the 'Boundary of Heaven and Earth' that Lee Yoonsung left behind. Was there a saying about how he shouldn't be too hasty?

It would take several months to return to the West Cntinent, and it was natural that he take responsibility for what he had done. Theodore rationalized his decision for a number of reasons and shrugged.

Then he patted Lee Seol's head lightly. "If you don't mind me for a few months, I will be your guardian."

"...Sir Theo!"

"I might be a foreigner, but I will temporarily lend you my name. I will act as the head of your family for you. Understood?"

Lee Joonyoung politely replied, "As you command, Temporary Head."

Temporary Head... This wasn't a title Theodore was used to. Realizing he would have to get used to it, he sighed.

This was still the prelude of his journey in the East Continent.

Thus, Theodore Miller embarked on acting as the head of the family.

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Then it was three months later.

“Okay, the tenth book has been completed.” Theodore wrote the last sentence and put down the quill in his hand. The text was a different color from that of the West Continent, and all the letters written on yellow paper were Chinese characters. The lines were a little crooked because he wasn’t accustomed to it, but anyone who read the contents wouldn’t be able to discount the book.

This was the Fairy Dance Skills Series.

Lee Yoonsung’s memories were written down perfectly. Originally, there had been no plans to put so much content, but there were many parts of the Fairy Dance which were lost. Therefore, it was difficult to fill the gaps without writing everything down.

Theodore had quickly decided that and spent at least eight hours a day writing.

‘Well, I haven’t just been sitting down writing a book.’

To know with the mind was different from knowing with the body. Theodore was well aware of this fact and devoted himself to training. Unlike magic, of which had already reached the top, he felt like he was developing day by day for this.

In the end, he couldn’t catch a clue to the final hidden technique, but he trained the remaining three to a level which he could somehow use. Would he now be able to last 5 minutes against the 2nd Sword?

His circles were now able to rotate more strongly and smoothly than before. His body had also become robust by acquiring the hidden techniques, so he couldn’t really be called a magician anymore.

The time he devoted to martial arts had resulted in his overall development. The feeling of being blocked by the 8th Circle subsided, and he could now place his full concentration on the Fairy Dance.

"...Is it time to go soon?" Theodore asked himself in a quiet voice.

It was sooner than planned, but it wasn't a bad thing. This just meant that the jobs he had to do had been quickly reduced. The dissonance in the Fairy Dance Lee family had almost stopped as Lee Joonyoung assisted Lee Seol.

Once he finished the last book of the Fairy Dance Skills Series, it would be time for him to say goodbye.

'I need to talk about it when Lee Seol comes back.'

There was a meeting in the nearby estate. The two people had been on the road since early morning, and there was still a long way to go. It was a long time to sit and wait. Then at the moment when Theodore was about to get up...

"Temporary Head!"

Thumping sounds rang out from the hallway, and an attendant rushed to the door with an urgent expression.

"Being so noisy indoors. What is going on?"

"I'm sorry! A guest suddenly arrived and said they wanted to see you..."

"What?" Theodore's expression drew a blank. It wasn't comparable to its prime, but this was still the Fairy Dance Lee family. Yet there was a person who dared cross the threshold to confront the head without a prior appointment? Who would do such a rude thing?

However, Theodore's questions were soon resolved as the person entered.

Dururuk!

‘She’ opened the door without hesitation and smiled as she found Theodore. No, it just felt like she smiled. The cotton cloth from last time was still covering her face.

“It has been a long time, Lord Theodore.” The voice which seemed to melt the eardrums of whoever heard it was also still the same. The voice and ominous presence caused Theodore’s body to immediately prepare for battle. She was a person who made his neck go cold.

Theodore was convinced that nobody could stop her if she came as a guest.

“...It has been a while, Shim Samho.”

She was a delegate of the emperor and the notary of the duel trial. The woman who introduced herself as Shim Samho stood before Theodore.

Chapter 249 – Ominous Identity (2)

“What have you come to me for?” Theodore’s tone was naturally wary as the dark presence around the mysterious Shim Samho touched on his nerves.

He didn’t think she could win a fight against him. However, she had something which wasn’t combat power. As long as he didn’t know her identity, he couldn’t be confident that he was superior in force.

Despite Theodore’s calm attitude, Shim Samho’s coy tone didn’t change, “Huhu, you are still the same. Didn’t we promise to meet again?”

“I don’t remember us being that close.”

“It is a relationship that is meant to be more intimate,” Shim Samho said as she stepped over the threshold. The action was so natural that even the nervous attendant at the back couldn’t stop her.

“Excuse me. Can I get a cup of tea?”

“Sure.” It couldn’t be helped, so Theodore sighed reluctantly. He couldn’t go against that pushy attitude. Moreover, she was a notary of the emperor. Theodore beckoned to the attendant and instructed him to keep people away from this area. It would be safer if there was a battle.

Shortly afterward, a tea set was placed between Theodore and Shim Samho. Jade colored tea was poured into the cups, and a refreshing smell rose.

It was a tea which even a rich person had to wait three years to obtain.

There were several tins of the finest tea leaves stocked in the Lee family’s warehouse, proof of their glory days. The tea was mainly enjoyed by the head of the family, but Theodore had little interest

in tea. Therefore, he usually only brought it out when serving guests like this.

“Oh, my. This is great Longjing tea,” Shim Samho said admiringly as soon as she took a sip of the tea.

Tea leaves were graded depending on when they were harvested. Those which were plucked just before they were ready for harvest were treated as the finest quality since there was a low production rate and they had the finest taste. These tea leaves weren’t available for anyone without a thick wallet.

Theodore looked at Shim Samho and spoke without drinking the tea, “Stop talking about meaningless things. If you want good tea, I’ll give you a few bags. So, tell me why you came here to visit.”

“There is no need to be in a rush.” Shim Samho laughed as she put down her teacup. “Just like a draft is necessary for a story, this conversation needs context. My lips are closed at this moment when I’m drinking tea.”

“…How verbose.”

There was nothing else to say. Theodore fell silent as he waited for Shim Samho to finish her tea and talk. After around two cups worth of time (30 minutes)…

“I was very surprised to hear that Theodore became the temporary head. Unifying the Fairy Dance Lee family in just three months… it isn’t something that could be done with mere force.”

“I have competent subordinates.”

“There is no need to be so humble. Moreover, it is amazing that you can learn martial arts with the body of a magician.”

“Um,” Theodore answered in a short manner before glaring at the woman sitting opposite him. “Magic… You know it well.”

There was something Theodore had realized after spending a few months here. Unlike in the West Continent where magic

penetrated deeply into real life, it was difficult to find shamanism in the East Continent.

It could be due to the prejudice against it. Shamans were extremely reluctant to reveal their identities, so they hid from the public eye. Therefore, the Eastern people often didn't know the distinction between magic and shamanism.

So, what about the person called 'Shim Samho'? Her knowledge of magic was far beyond that of the Eastern people. Rather, it was equivalent to the knowledge stored in the magic towers. How had she studied the magic of another continent when she was a high-ranking notary of the emperor? The more Theodore talked to her, the more her identity fell into a bog.

He didn't know if she was strong or weak, and her presence was also a factor which made her identity questionable.

"Are you curious to see my face?" Shim Samho seemed to interpret Theodore's gaze in a strange manner as she playfully touched the edge of her cotton cloth. He hesitated before nodding. In some ways, it was a chance to figure out her identity. At the very least, he could get a clue. Shim Samho lifted her cotton cloth, and Theodore immediately realized it...

This decision was a mistake.

*

"————Ah." It was disorienting. His reason broke down, and blood boiled up in his body like a furnace. His thoughts stopped the moment he saw Shim Samho's face.

Her beauty, which was too fatal to be praised as beautiful, pierced into Theodore's eyes. He couldn't explain the features he was looking at. The sight of this beauty which was outside the human domain of cognition was almost like a mental attack.

No, it could only be expressed as a mental attack.

'D-Damn, what is with this face...?' His eyes felt like they were

melting away as he looked at Shim Samho's face.

Then Shim Samho's body odor neared him.

His five senses were running wild with desire her, urging him to let go of his strings of reason. If even the mind of the highly disciplined Theodore couldn't withstand this, then other masters wouldn't be able to endure for a very long time.

Theodore could still hold on. It would be the end if he let go. As he thought this, Shim Samho moved.

"Hah... If you look at me with those type of eyes, will the heat go away?"

The corners of her mouth raised slightly raised, and lightning flashed through her mouth. As Theodore shook, her fingers held the strings of her loose clothing. Then she pulled without hesitation.

Sururuk.

Theodore stopped breathing. She wasn't wearing anything underneath, so her intent was obvious. Otherwise, her clothing wouldn't have been removed so easily.

This was a sin.

Theodore's reason completely melted away when he saw Shim Samho's naked skin. Before he knew it, his upper body leaned forward. Her white skin which was as smooth as porcelain and her beautifully curved body that fit the golden ratio... It was impossible for any male creature to resist her. Theodore's instincts stopped responding as soon as he realized this fact.

If he persevered more than this, his brains would boil up and he would die.

"Urgh."

The moment that Theodore's left hand touched that gentle skin...

[The mental interference of a myth-grade existence is detected on your body.]

[Gluttony resists the dreadful curse.]

[You have succeeded in resisting the ‘Burning Carnal Desire.’]

Shortly after that, Theodore’s head became as cold as ice. It was a curse which dominated even a master’s mind and couldn’t be stopped even with preliminary preparation. Theodore looked at the situation calmly and did what he thought was best.

His seven circles rotated vigorously, and magic power emerged from his left hand, which was still in contact with the skin.

Peeeong!

The shockwave hit Shim Samho’s chest from a close range and caused her to be thrown back. Blood soared up toward the ceiling, and the flesh around the explosion was a mess. It was a fatal wound.

‘…Did I do it?’

-Dead.

However, that didn’t mean anything.

‘What?’

At that moment, Shim Samho’s body, which had been turned into rags, stood up.

“What?” In shock, Theodore immediately retreated three steps. This wasn’t a creature which could be called human and yet could still move even when it was fatally damaged. No, it was a monster.

This was the life-sustaining power worthy of being called ‘immortal’, which had been shown by Pride in the past. Theodore panicked as he realized where his thoughts were headed.

‘No, it isn’t playing around. What is this?’

Shim Samho’s body was crushed. There was a big hole in her

upper body, and blood was pouring out. From the first time they met, Theodore had felt like his combat ability would be no use. Now, her appearance was more like an undead than a human being. This made Shim Samho bite her lips like she was embarrassed.

–What? How did a mortal escape my mind control? Shim Samho's alluring voice rang out in a low-frequency range which couldn't be heard by human ears. She was an existence at a higher level than that of a human.

If it hadn't been for Gluttony's strength, Theodore's reason would've been taken away by her. This was despite the fact that he was a 7th Circle magician who possessed a divinity. It wouldn't be difficult for Theodore to resist if an 8th Circle warlock tried to control him, yet Shim Samho had easily overturned his reason.

Was she a senior demon? Or perhaps a grimoire? Theodore tried to find the answer to his questions.

However, the answer came from Gluttony. –I thought I heard a familiar mental thought. So, it was you. I didn't think you would cross over to the East Continent.

-...Eh? It was you, Gluttony. Shim Samho's expression changed after she heard Gluttony's voice.

Shim Samho was an existence that transcended beyond humanity, so the speed of her thinking circuits was different from humans.

Simultaneously, Theodore guessed her identity. 'Gluttony is a grimoire that eats grimoires, so other grimoires are just food to Gluttony. A regular grimoire would just be eaten if Gluttony encountered it. Then that means this person...'

–It is as you guessed, Gluttony read Theodore's mind and confirmed his speculation.

A grimoire that Gluttony knew...

A power that could suppress the mind and stimulate human sexuality...

Having discovered some common points, Theodore concluded that this must be one of the Seven Sins grimoires.

-She is one of the Seven Sins, Lust of the carnal desires. A grimoire who exerts its power through sexual stimulation, an existence that no man can deny... Maybe this empire has fallen into her hands.

Chapter 250 – Ominous Identity (3)

Theodore didn't think that Gluttony was exaggerating when it talked about the East Continent's empire. Masters like Theodore couldn't stand that temptation for a minute, so ordinary humans would fall with just one gesture.

Shim Samho must wear the cotton cloth to suppress that mind control. Or it might be a device to induce the opponent's carelessness, just like with Theodore. Either way, it was an insidious ability.

However, Theodore was more concerned with what Gluttony said.

'Shim Samho—no, Lust might've got her hands on this empire? Is she a grimoire that seeks power?'

–You are half right, half wrong. For Lust, power isn't a purpose but a means. She always takes control of the power base in order to carry out the purpose of her existence. I will describe it in detail later. Right now, I need to deal with her.

'...Okay, I'll leave it to you.'

A human couldn't intervene in the conversation between two of the Seven Sins. Just like how Pride had treated Theodore as a monkey in the past, there was no way that Lust wouldn't look down on humans.

Still, there was no need for Theodore to provoke her.

As such, Theodore remained silent, and Gluttony opened its mouth, –Your behavior doesn't seem to have changed from before. That female body is just a 'terminal?'

–Well, that's right. I can't use it anymore because of your host. Shim Samho—no, Lust giggled as she pointed to the hole in the middle of her upper body.

Her body had been damaged by the 7th Circle magic, Shock Bound. The shockwave which had struck from a short distance wasn't a power that could be sustained with human durability. A rock would've shattered, and a piece of iron would've been crushed. As such, the attack magic had certainly destroyed the woman's body.

Pride would've restored the injury in an instant, but Lust wasn't equipped with such ability.

However, Gluttony coldly shot down Lust's complaint, –Don't be condescending. It was a preemptive attack. Didn't you and I make a promise of non-aggression?

–Ah, that is true. I didn't think it was your host, so let's end it here. You know that I don't have any direct combat skills, right?

–Hmm. Gluttony fell silent for a moment at Lust's words. In any case, Lust's body wasn't here, and it was dangerous to be hostile to a person who had taken control of the middle kingdom.

Additionally, the Seven Sins had originally been designed not to be hostile to each other. Pride and Gluttony were inevitable because their natures were contradictory, but Lust usually maintained neutrality with all of the Seven Sins.

–This is the only time. Gluttony thought about the pros and cons and stepped back.

Lust received the answer, and her lips, which were as red as blood, twisted sexily. –Indeed, you understand quickly, Gluttony. But it is too bad. I thought I could finally get a decent seed after a long time.

"Uh!" Theodore felt a heat rising in him as Lust glanced at his lower body. To think that his body became filled with sexual desire with just a look...? The mental interference from a myth-grade existence was truly terrible. If someone other than Theodore had been tempted, they wouldn't have hesitated. Fortunately, it wasn't

at the same level as before. However, the loss of his reason was a truly terrible feeling.

Lust asked Gluttony, –By the way, why have you come to the East Continent? Didn't you say that you gave up on shamanism?

–It was an accident.

–Accident? Lust asked with a bewildered expression.

Then Gluttony explained, –I was caught in a random space transition. I never imagined that I would be moved to the East Continent.

–Aha! I knew you wouldn't have come by yourself. Lust nodded a few times before looking down at her broken body.

It might've been controlled remotely, but Theodore's blow had stopped the body's life function and disconnected Lust from the body. The evidence of this was how the low-frequency voice was becoming increasingly weaker.

She shrugged and said to Gluttony, –I am reaching my limit. I'm sorry but please take care of this. I don't have any convenient features like destroying evidence.

–Are you going to come again?

–No, this person is your host, so I don't want to touch him. If you are thinking about coming to the capital, then I will meet you again, Gluttony. Human, if you change your mind, you can always contact me, Lust whispered coyly before Shim Samho's body collapsed like a broken puppet.

Once the connection with Lust's main body was cut off, it returned to being an ordinary body. Its life had been lost the moment Theodore's strike hit it. Due to the loss of connection with Lust, Shim Samho's dead body could no longer capture Theodore's eyes.

"Sigh..." He sighed as he looked around at the bloody room. "In

the end, the cleaning up is left to me.”

–I will start telling you the story as soon as you are done.

Why did Gluttony’s words sound so spiteful...? There was the naked body of the woman on the floor, and blood covered the ceiling, making it look like a gruesome murder scene. It was impossible to call the servants to clean this up.

Theodore summoned flames on his palm with a weary face and got started.

*

After an hour, Theodore cleaned the room of all the bloodstains and stench, and sat down.

The cleaning didn’t consume a great amount of magic power, but his fatigue was great due to his meeting with Lust. It was like when he used Umbra to the limit.

“Hah, I still can’t stand against real monsters.”

In the past, Pride had overwhelmed him with force, and now, Lust had just suppressed him mentally. The memory of his body trying to escape from Lust’s control was terrible, and he didn’t want to think about it again.

As if it knew Theodore’s mind, Gluttony woke up as soon as the cleaning finished.

–User, are you ready to hear the story?

“...Start.”

Theodore was tired but he had no intention of resting. At the very least, he wanted to know what power that Lust of the Seven Sins had.

As Theodore’s blurred eyes became clear, Gluttony started to list Lust’s information.

–The collection production type grimoire, Lust. You met her

terminal so you know that she has no direct combat ability. She is a creature with a reproductive instinct that uses an irresistible mental dominance and places a subordinate instinct in her intercourse partner. She can be called a type of queen bee.

“She brainwashes them by having sex?”

–It is similar. The other person submits to Lust’s command with their own will. He is loyal enough to devote his life, even if he knows he is being manipulated. Once applied, this brainwashing can’t be released, so it is the highest level ability.

Theodore got goosebumps at these words. To think that even Gluttony, who had knowledge from the Age of Mythology, asserted that this brainwashing ability couldn’t be lifted...

If Theodore hadn’t been able to regain his sanity, he would’ve become Lust’s slave. At this level, her lack of combat capability wasn’t an obstacle at all. This was comparable to Pride’s feeding evolution and Gluttony’s predation.

Simultaneously, Theodore had a question. “Gluttony, I was wondering one thing.”

–Um?

“What is Lust’s purpose? What is it trying to accomplish with these two functions—sexual intercourse and brainwashing?”

Pride tried to regenerate into the ultimate creature by eating all creatures and absorbing their qualities. Meanwhile, Gluttony’s purpose was to collect magic knowledge with its predation ability, so it saved rare artifacts in its body to achieve this purpose. As such, the powers of the Seven Sins was directly linked to their purposes of existence.

If so, what were Lust’s powers for?

Perhaps Theodore’s question was unexpected. Gluttony paused for a moment before speaking again.

–It is within the acceptable range. To be as clear as possible, Lust's existence is to become the ultimate womb.

"…The ultimate womb?"

-That's right.

'The ultimate womb…' Theodore looked down at his left palm.

The tongue protruded and moved slowly. –Lust's ability to seduce and brainwash others through sexual intercourse is a by-product of reaching the end. It is possible for Lust to collect genetic information from an organism she has sex with and to store this separately.

"So, it is the same ability as Superbia."

–No, it is similar but significantly different, Gluttony denied it decisively. If Pride took on the characteristics of the creatures it fed on, then Lust took advantage of it through reproductive behavior. However, there was a big difference between the two abilities.

–The ultimate creature… As you say, two of the Seven Sins have the same goal, but the method is different. If Superbia wants to reach it with its own body, then Lust's purpose is to 'give birth.'

"Give birth?"

–It is to give birth to a child that is superior to the parents. This is Lust's ability and the purpose of her existence. I don't know how many generations it will take, but if this process keeps repeating, she will reach the goal someday. Lust is the incubator.

Despite the words Theodore didn't know, his brilliance meant he immediately understood Gluttony's explanation.

In some ways, Lust's goal was to make the ultimate hybrid.

In a species, it was easy to observe the difference in the quality of each individual. Among the same type of humans, some of them were inferior. Some had superior athletic abilities, while others

had superior learning abilities.

The power of Lust was to analyze the genetic information, extract it, and give birth to a more advanced fetus. In other words, it was an ability that could be the origin of a divine human being.

–Lust's fetus will continue to progress with each generation. Physical, mental, and even the purity of the soul will keep rising until the end. In fact, some of the top species that existed in the Age of Mythology were her descendants.

Theodore heard Lust's purpose and realized the depth of the danger. In the ancient myths, there was a story about a marriage which had been ruined because of the prophecy that a child superior to the father would be born.

The process of evolution didn't take place overnight. It couldn't happen overnight. No, it was a miraculous phenomenon that would take place over hundreds, thousands of years. Yet Lust could artificially reproduce such a miracle.

Gluttony connected this power to its application in reality before Theodore did and muttered with a heavy voice, –It is dangerous.

Theodore's head was still confused by the mental interference, but the gears of Gluttony's mind rotated at a different speed to those of humans.

–User, do you remember the words of Abe no Seimei?

"Seimei? Why are you suddenly mentioning the Onmyōji—ah!" Theodore's eyes darkened as he was reminded of the forgotten advice.

[If you go to the East Continent, never approach the capital in the center. If you have to go, only try it after you have reached full transcendence.] Seimei's warning about not going to the middle kingdom echoed in Theodore's mind.

What had Lust said as she left here? That they would meet again if Theodore went to the capital?

“Seimei’s warning, was it about Lust?”

–The possibility is high, Gluttony’s voice flowed from Theodore’s left hand as it trampled on the rest of his hopes. –According to the records, it has been a long time since Lust vanished from the West Continent. If Lust disappeared 2,000 years ago and repeatedly gave birth over the past thousands of years… The potential of that ‘child’ would already surpass the top species.

“Perhaps…”

–It is as you think, User.

Both of them came to the same conclusion.

In contrast to the astonished Theodore, the grimoire Gluttony spoke its hypothesis in a somewhat interested voice, –The royal family of the Middle Kingdom, the family that has ruled over the East Continent for thousands of years… that is probably where the most likely candidate is.

Chapter 251 – Ominous Identity (4)

‘The imperial family of the central empire!’

Theodore had been living in the East Continent for the past few months, so he was able to know the weight of these words. The empire had reigned supreme in the East Continent for more than a thousand years. Its reign was so great that the empire could be called the center and source of the Eastern world.

So, it was natural that the founder of this empire and his descendants would be closer to gods than to humans.

‘If the imperial family are the children of Lust—’

Then as Theodore recalled the founding myths of the center of the East Continent, he opened his mouth and said, “Gluttony, I have something I want to ask.”

–What is it?

“Did you say that Lust’s children are born with greater strength and aptitude than their parents? In order for this to be efficient, won’t she need to commit incest?”

–Hoh, that is a decent point. Did you infer this from when Lust tried to seduce you?

“…Well, something like that.” Theodore frowned when Gluttony once again reminded him of the incident. He had been drowned by Lust’s sexuality. It was a shame that would be hard to face if anyone else had seen it.

However, Gluttony just wished to praise Theodore, so it waved its tongue in more active movements than usual. –User’s statement isn’t wrong. In fact, Lust has repeatedly committed incest over a hundred generations, creating monsters beyond the limits of that species.

“Monsters?”

–I talked about it once before. The peak of the Ulfheðnar and king of all beasts, Fenrir.

The words, ‘beast king’ and ‘Fenrir’... These clues caused Theodore to remember something. He had heard about it in Elvenheim that Fenrir’s death had caused the downfall of the Beast Clan.

Additionally, Pride had transformed into an Ulfheðnar when they fought at the Pirate Archipelago in the past. The durability and strength of the Ulfheðnar’s body had allowed Pride to surpass the speed of a sword master’s aura blade and avoid a falling lightning bolt.

It was a monster that gave Theodore the creeps when he thought about it a few times. As such, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the head of the Ulfheðnar and the Beast King would be similar to a dragon.

Theodore thought this far and was amazed by Lust’s power. Simultaneously, he came up with another question.

“Wait a minute. Didn’t you say that the monster called ‘Fenrir’ was eventually killed?”

–That’s right.

“But not all of the Beast Clan were wiped out. There were Ulfheðnar left, so couldn’t Lust have given birth to a child that surpassed Fenrir? Why didn’t Lust give birth to the next Fenrir?”

Theodore’s point was extremely reasonable. Lust had created the species called Ulfheðnar for over a hundred generations, so it would be a terrible waste to let an entire species die with Fenrir. Even if a grimoire had no concept of time, this wasn’t efficient.

Wouldn’t the grimoire have prepared for the next generation and delighted in birthing a creature beyond Fenrir?

However, Gluttony laughed at him.

-Kuhuhuhu. User, it is the reverse order.

“What? The order is reversed?”

-That’s right. Lust didn’t give up on the species because Fenrir died. It is because Lust abandoned the Ulfheðnar that Fenrir died. While it isn’t appropriate to give advice in this situation, the question that User just asked is the answer.

The question was the answer. The meaning was unknown, but Theodore felt like a lightning bolt had just struck him. It was the exact opposite of causation; the cause and result were reversed.

Fenrir’s death wasn’t the cause but the result. In that case, moving to what happened first…

Due to Fenrir, Lust had concluded that choosing the Ulfheðnar had been a failure.

“There was a problem with Fenrir?”

–Yes, Gluttony praised his user’s brilliance and briefly explained, –Ancient civilizations that pass a certain level treat incest as taboo. Do you know why?

“I don’t know the details. I just heard stories about babies coming out deformed.”

–It is the same issue regarding eugenics. By limiting the gene’s breadth, its disadvantages are maximized. Of course, Lust’s performance isn’t the problem. The problem was with her child, not her, Gluttony said and then summarized it briefly with a chuckle, –Fenrir had sexual dysfunction.

“Ah…!” Theodore exclaimed as he grasped an understanding of all the circumstances. Over the course of generations, the genes were improved and the incest continued. However, the Ulfheðnar pedigree had eventually reached its limit.

King Fenrir…

According to records, the Beast King had lost his ability to

reproduce in exchange for his transcendent ability. No matter how good an incubator Lust was, it wouldn't be possible to extract the genetic elements from Fenrir if he hadn't been sexually active.

As such, she had been unable to reach the ultimate creature and failed. Therefore, Lust had left Fenrir and the Ulfheðnar in search of other possibilities.

The Ulfheðnar, who had been pureblood for generations, soon developed problems with Fenrir, and it didn't take long for the species to collapse. It was the death of a creature that could stand shoulder to shoulder with a dragon, as well as the decline of the Beast Clan.

"... Things are connected in the strangest places."

Theodore had unearthed another secret of the Age of Mythology, and he felt a strange sense of accomplishment. In this day and age, there were few ancient records remaining. Every time he dug up a hidden story, his magician's curiosity would soar.

So, he forgot about the main topic for a while.

'No, is this the time to be satisfied?'

Theodore should be paying attention to Lust in the present, not her tracks in the Age of Mythology. He hurriedly asked Gluttony his next question, "Unlike in the past, Lust is collecting genes from a large number of humans. So, is there no incest?"

–Perhaps. The system of the duel trial and her role of a notary is probably part of this. It is a fairly efficient way to collect the genes of the strong, as well as gain control of each force.

"If she has repeated this for a thousand years..." Theodore murmured with a horrified expression.

This meant Lust had been acting in secret for a long time. Otherwise, there would have been more rebellions or great power struggles in this vast land. It was clear that Lust had controlled those behind disputes and stopped unnecessary consumption.

This method of trial and error would've also made a mark in the Age of Mythology. Theodore couldn't imagine the result of Lust's experiment, which would've advanced one step further after the failure with Fenrir.

–Hrmm, I don't know about that. However, Gluttony's thoughts were a little different. –It is easy to be mistaken. But unless one is born with a great talent, they can't become transcendent. In Lust's case, a counterproductive effect is more likely to occur.

"Counterproductive? Fenrir is a horrific monster."

–Even Fenrir couldn't reach transcendence in the true sense. I think this is Lust's limit.

Despite being part of the Seven Sins, Gluttony's assessment was grim. In some ways, it might be natural. The Seven Sins pursued seven different paths to their destination. Affirming other methods was like denying their own.

–A transcendent is a perfect being who overcame their own destiny and transcended their natural limits. The more burdened someone is at birth, the harder it will be to go forward. Lust's method is nothing but setting a trap for herself.

"... Indeed, the more excellent the vessel, the greater the volume that needs to fill it. So, is Lust just repeating a meaningless act?"

–I believe so, but I don't know, Gluttony spoke in a tone like it wasn't expecting anything. –Someday, she may be able to give birth to a fetus with a transcendent value from birth. This is Lust's purpose.

"Indeed, well it doesn't mean anything to me. It sounds like she will either complete it or not."

Thousands of years had been wasted on one trail, but that was meaningless for a grimoire. Theodore was well aware of this, so he only sighed and didn't ask anymore. It didn't matter to him if Lust's experiment was successful or not. After all, it wasn't as

though she was threatening the world directly like Pride. Therefore, it was best not to fight her if possible.

-That idea is right. She promised not to attack first, so there won't be an ambush. However, her children's genes have improved over the one thousand years, so they can still threaten User. You have completed your purpose, so you should return to the continent quickly.

"I was already planning on that. This is just one more reason to leave the Fairy Dance area," Theodore answered before looking around the room. After confirming that there weren't any drops of blood left behind from Lust, he moved. He was going to get some sleep before Lee Seol returned.

*

That evening, the two people who had gone to the outskirts of the Lee Fairy area returned after sunset.

After three months of effort, everything was almost organized. The talks themselves seemed to have ended successfully, and Lee Joonyoung's strength had advanced a step further with Theodore's teachings. He also had a unique position within the Fairy Dance Lee Family, so Lee Seol's position was quickly stabilized.

It was just a matter of being late. The integration of the Fairy Dance Lee family was a decision which had been made three months ago.

'It means the situation won't worsen if I leave.'

Theodore wasn't the type of person who would relax indefinitely. He was worried about what Meltor thought about his disappearance, and his body's condition had returned to normal. Then Theodore looked at Lee Seol sitting next to him. "So, the thing I have to say is..."

Lee Seol looked fairly bright, rather like a lark. She was also a determined child. Otherwise, could she have lived for more than 10

years in the remote mountains? Lee Seol might've learned the role of the mountain's keeper at a young age, but it was still hard for a 16-year-old girl.

Despite being burdened by the responsibilities of being the head of the family, the delighted expression she had made at being able to live in the village was still vivid in his mind.

"Seol."

"Yes?"

Theodore thought it would be okay to leave now. "It is time for us to part."

Two pair of eyes widened at Theodore's words. Even though they had known it, Lee Seol still found it painful to face.

She shook her head a little bit and spoke with a tremble in her voice, "H-Hasn't it only been three months? There are still five months left until my coming of age ceremony...! I also haven't learned..."

"It is sufficient for the other family members to teach you martial arts."

"But...!"

"Temporary Head." At that time, Lee Joonyoung opened his mouth with a gentle expression. "You have made up your mind."

"You understand?"

"You aren't the type of person who would joke about something like this. Do you mind staying for a few more days?"

"Yes... three days will be appropriate."

Once Theodore made up his mind, he needed to move before it was shaken. If he wasn't prepared to take this step, he wouldn't have said it out loud. Three days was the minimum period to complete all his preparations, as well as inform the whole family.

Then Theodore spoke to Lee Joonyoung, “I have finished writing the books I promised. There are 10 volumes of the Fairy Dance Skills Series. I have written starting from the basic training methods to the hidden techniques, so you should spread the books out rather than hiding them in a warehouse.”

“Yes, I will follow your words.”

“It is good that you are consistent. You will do very well in the future.”

Theodore finished talking with Lee Joonyoung and looked back at Lee Seol. Her clear eyes were filled with tears, and she bit her lips when she met Theodore’s gaze. It was a frank expression showing the emotions of a mountain girl.

Theodore smiled and patted her neat black hair. “I’m sorry.”

“…I don’t know. You are bad.”

“Kukuk.” Was she acting like a child on purpose, or was it her natural temperament? Theodore felt like she was his little sister as he kept patting her head. “The last three days will be all for you. Tell me if you want to do anything.”

“…” Lee Seol lingered for some reason and then whispered in a voice that was difficult to hear, “Then I’ll ask one thing of you.”

It was a request she hoped Theodore would grant.

Chapter 252 – Baekun Mountains (1)

Morning appeared quickly on the spacious plains to the east, north, and west of the Baekun Mountains. Even though it was a mountain range, the cries of roosters during the early dawn didn't allow them to oversleep. In terms of time, an early morning person started the day at 5 or 6 a.m.

However, it was precisely 4 in the morning. This was a time when even the people who woke up the earliest hadn't escaped from sleep yet. At this time, a small farewell ceremony was taking place near the main gate of the Fairy Dance Lee Family's home. However, those who sneered at the size of the ceremony would be shocked when they saw who was present.

These six people were the current powers of the Fairy Dance Lee Family.

Among them was the main leader, Lee Joonyoung.

"Really..." Theodore looked at them and laughed. "Why did you come out here? I thought the five of you didn't feel good toward me."

It was as he said. No matter how resourceful Lee Joonyoung was, it was impossible for there to be no friction during the integration of the family. Among them, the heads of the five factions had been uncooperative, so Theodore had stepped forward to take down their haughty pride.

The law of the jungle came into play. They hadn't been able to withstand Theodore's strength and suffered from shame, but they conceded to the result.

"I am really sorry about that, Temporary Head," one of the faction leaders said. "To be honest, we thought you wanted to devour this family through the young lady. Even if you studied the Fairy Dance, we thought that the lineage of a Westerner could

never mix with us. We were really stupid."

"Hmm, such misunderstandings are expected. Why did you change your mind?"

"You have eyes like us."

Three months wasn't a long time. It was a quarter of the year, where one season had just passed. It was too short a period of time to see through the essence of a person. Only crude results could be seen during such a short period of time, especially under the gazes of five pairs of eyes which had been hardened by prejudice over several generations.

Nonetheless, three months had been plenty of time for Theodore. From early morning, he had sat on a desk and done the work of the family head. After finishing the work, he had practiced his martial arts. All those who had passed by and seen him were amazed. It was a fresh dance, a feast of movements which had been lost for several generations.

He had taught others without asking for anything in return, making the five faction leaders feel ashamed.

'Can we truly say that we are better than him?'

'As a martial artist and family man, we can't beat him.'

Theodore was faithful to his own desires, but he had still done exemplary work as the family head. As such, the five leaders truly admitted their defeat.

They abandoned their grudges and actively assisted in the unification of the family along with Lee Joonyoung, who acted as Theodore's agent. Now, the vassals of the Fairy Dance Lee Family were reliable.

"Please come back anytime, Temporary Head!"

"Next time, I wish to learn things from you!"

"Temporary Head, don't worry! We will do well."

Lee Joonyoung smiled at the five leaders. “Well, I guess it is like this. This is because of your virtue.”

“...Hah, I didn’t know this would happen.”

“Here are the things I’ve prepared.”

Theodore took the bundle from Lee Joonyoung and confirmed the contents. It was a badge to prove Theodore’s identity, as well as gold that could be used anywhere in the East Continent. There was also a map which contained detailed directions.

It was a luxurious bundle of items.

“Thank you. Now, I can go back with ease.”

It would take a considerable amount of time to exchange goods and money to that of the East Continent, so there would be unavoidable delays. Fortunately, Theodore was able to cut down on this thanks to Lee Joonyoung. From a hidden angle, Theodore put the bundle into his inventory and realized that someone wasn’t present. “Seol?”

“She will come soon... Hah, speaking of which.”

As Lee Joonyoung spoke, Lee Seol ran out the door in blue clothing. She proved that it wasn’t just Lee Joonyoung who had made further progress in the past three months, as her movements had doubled compared to her previous self. aLee Seol arrived in front of Theodore and cried out, “Theo! I’m sorry for the delay!”

“No, you aren’t too late. Anyway, didn’t you decide to fulfill your request today?”

“Yes!”

Lee Seol’s request was that she wanted Theodore to go see the spirits of the Baekun Mountains with her. It was why she had prepared for this journey from early dawn. She couldn’t leave her position for a few days, but it was possible to accompany him for a day or so as the mountain’s keeper.

“So, then please take care of the Fairy Dance Lee Family.”

Theodore stood next to the happily smiling Seol and spoke formally to the people who had come out to bid him goodbye. Theodore’s request was for them to be the pillars of the Fairy Dance Lee Family as well as to respect Lee Seol. They understood the meaning of his words and nodded.

It was the moment when Theodore’s short-lived life as the head of a family was over.

*

“Wah! It has been so long since I’ve come back!” Lee Soel laughed as she walked around a familiar cabin.

There were no big changes, but it felt a bit gloomy, probably because no one was going to return. Dandelions bloomed instead of pumpkin vines in the front yard, while mushrooms grew in the rafters.

‘I have to say goodbye to this place now.’

Theodore was already used to Lee Yoonsung’s empty space within him, but he still couldn’t help feeling bitter. He looked around the cabin for a moment, before following Lee Seol outside. It was a place he hadn’t seen when he stayed here a while ago.

“Ahem!” At that moment, Lee Seol suddenly looked back. “From here on, you can’t go into this area without the permission of the mountain’s keeper.”

“Are the spirits living inside here?”

“Yes, but I haven’t been here in a while, hehe.”

Theodore admired the place and infused magic power into his eyes, temporarily increasing his vision to the equivalent of a hawk’s. He could see rice seeds from 30 meters above the ground. Thanks to Hawkeye, Theodore had the ability to look at the peak. Beyond the hundreds of trees, there was a place where animals and

plants couldn't be seen. Then without any warning, his vision magic was turned off.

'...Indeed, this isn't an ordinary place.'

There might be something intervening, or perhaps it was the place itself. Either way, his curiosity as a magician boiled up. Theodore suddenly called out, "Seol, stop."

"Huh? What is it?"

"Your pace is too slow. Get on."

Lee Seol, who was about to climb the mountain, made a bewildered face that soon turned red. It was because Theodore was offering her his back.

So far, Lee Seol hadn't encountered men outside her family. Thus, it was no wonder that her heart started pounding. She thought of Theodore as an adult male of the family, but his exotic appearance was rather appealing.

'I-If I tell him that I want to refuse because I'm embarrassed...' Lee Seol finished rationalizing her thoughts and slowly wrapped her arms around Theodore's neck.

She had the normal heart of a girl, so she was worried about being heavy.

"Hold on tightly. I will be moving fast."

"Huh?"

However, she only had a few moments to worry about her heaviness.

Huwoook!

As Theodore took one step forward, her hair rushed behind her and the wind blew past. Was it a sudden gust of wind? No, it wasn't that.

The wind was blowing due to Theodore's ridiculous acceleration.

15 meters for the first step, 24 meters for the next step... By the time he took 24 steps, Theodore's body had reached maximum speed and was like a fired arrow.

"Kyaaaak!" Lee Seol couldn't help screaming and grabbed onto Theodore's neck tightly.

Speed was often compared to the wind, but Theodore was currently faster than a gale. Those who weren't accustomed to such high-speed movement would undoubtedly be intimidated.

So, Lee Seol didn't realize that although she had forgotten her role as mountain's keeper, Theodore was moving up the mountain peak naturally. He moved with no hesitation because he was moving off someone else's memory.

It was the memory of the one who had been abandoned by his family, Lee Yoonsung.

Despite not being the mountain's keeper, Lee Yoonsung had been left here. The mountain was filled with beasts; it was where wild wolves and snakes roamed around. Maybe his family expected him to disappear here.

The word for 'forbidden zone' wasn't in Lee Yoonsung's memories. He had never been warned not to go there, but he had known he would die if he entered.

'But Senior survived.'

Perhaps it had been due to coincidence or good luck that Lee Yoonsung had managed to repeatedly hunt and gather in the forbidden zone several times.

His stomach had hurt after eating poison, and he had fallen from a cliff while running away from a wild horse. In the process, the geography had gotten so deeply imprinted in his body and mind that it applied even 100 years later.

Theodore quickly climbed the mountain and stopped after arriving at the peak.

“Oh…!” Theodore briefly admired the view.

He was thousands of meters above sea level, so the view was truly spectacular. Of course, it was simple compared to what he had seen from the world tree, but was there any place higher than that in this age? It was enough to admire the scenery shining under the sunlight.

“T-Theo.”

“Yes?”

“This Baekun Mountains, two spirits rule over the forest.”

“Elder spirits?”

“Yes.” Lee Seol shortly regained her composure after being let down and pointed to the place beyond them. “There is the Tiger King in the canyon on the right and the White Bear in the forest on the left.”

“Tiger King and White Bear?”

“Yes, I heard that they have lived for a few hundred years… They are the ones you should meet today.”

It was interesting. Theodore nodded and alternated pointing between the two directions. “I see. So, who are we going to see first?”

“The Tiger King is the nearest.”

“Okay, to the right then.” Theodore set the path and stepped back.

The wind blew from below, causing the hairs of the two people to rise. However, this time Lee Seol didn’t scream. The wind blew through the mountain peaks, and Seol clutched tightly onto the man she wouldn’t be able to meet again for a long time in the future.

Chapter 253 – Baekun Mountains (2)

“The Tiger King is a tiger, just as the name implies.”

Theodore’s pace was fast, but it was challenging to climb the slope of the Baekun Mountains on the East Continent. Under the biting wind pressure that tore at their ears, Lee Seol started talking about the boss spirits—Tiger King and White Bear.

Regardless of whether they were spirits, tigers and bears were beasts that stood at the top of the ecosystem. They each had the ability to tear up a small troll. If they were the boss spirits, then they must have individual strength.

“A long time ago, tigers used to be a target for hunters because of their nice hide. But after the Tiger King appeared, no one tries to hunt tigers in this country anymore. This is why the markets are almost out of tiger leather.”

“Come to think of it, I have never seen it before.”

“Sometimes there are fools who attempt it without knowing anything. I don’t know how many of times I’ve met one while living in the mountains,” Lee Seol said with a sigh. “But I wasn’t part of the Fairy Dance’s main house, so I couldn’t ask them to control the people in the Baekun Mountains.”

“Seol,” Theodore quietly listened to the complaints and then asked her a question, “But even if the Tiger King is so powerful, it can’t always protect the tigers. Surely there are some poachers who act outside of its sight?”

“Yes. It is exactly as you said.”

“Hrmm?” Theodore couldn’t understand the meaning of the words.

Lee Seol understood the meaning behind his gaze, so she shrugged and explained, “It is a simple story. The tigers of the Baekun Mountains are too strong to hunt.”

“What, the tigers?”

“Yes, the Baekun Mountains is the best spiritual land in the center of the continent.”

Theodore’s eyes filled with interest at the words. In magic, it was a place called a ‘Power Spot,’ where mana gathered abnormally.

The flora and fauna in that area exceeded the specification of the species. There were also cases where intellect beyond a human being was formed. It was hypothesized that the centaurs, that existed in the Age of Mythology, had developed due to this phenomenon.

Theodore thought this far and asked, “So, it wasn’t just the Tiger King. The other tigers became spiritual as well?”

“Yes, although they aren’t as strong as the Tiger King. But they can’t be compared with ordinary beasts. They are too strong for first-class warriors to win against one on one.”

“It is already a war, not a hunt. You should ask the imperial family to prohibit access.”

First-class warriors were abundant on the East Continent. It was a term referring to those who had trained in martial arts for more than 10 years and played a full-fledged role on the battlefield. Even so, the first-class warriors couldn’t win against the tigers?

In these mountains, beasts had the advantage over humans. Those who were unable to conceal themselves would become the prey of the tigers. So, it was dangerous, even if a master was mobilized.

‘The mountain’s keepers might not actually be protecting the spirits.’

It might be different for the Fairy Dance Lee Family in its prime, but if the declining family tried to forcefully take over the Baekun Mountain Ranges now... They might be wiped out by the boss spirits that led hundreds of spirits.

Theodore kept moving. By the time the story ended, the two of them were already at the foot of the Tiger King's mountain. Perhaps it was because he was listening to an interesting story, or maybe Theodore's speed as faster than he thought.

"....Indeed, this terrain is extraordinary."

It was a sheer slope with rock tips protruding everywhere, and there was a worn track like someone had been treading on it. There were marks on the walls which weren't made by a human, but rather, they were made by a beast. The marks were perfect territory markers.

Sometimes the wind blew coldly, and shadows wriggled in the valley.

Tiger King's Valley...

It was the residence of the Tiger King, one of the boss spirits that reigned in the Baekun Mountain Ranges. A weak person wouldn't dare step into this valley, while even the animals backed away.

However, Theodore's reaction wasn't either of these.

"Seol." After arriving at their destination, he set Lee Seol down again and talked to her. "Your request was to arbitrate between the two boss spirits. Will you tell me what the circumstances are?"

"Of course, Theo," Lee Seol said, looking at him with a somewhat regretful expression. Then she explained in a serious tone, "There is a dragon vein that circulates that energy of the Baekun Mountains. It begins in the heart of the mountain range and flows down several rivers to different areas. There are two trees that have received this energy and grown into sacred trees."

"Sacred trees?"

"Yes, spirits often live around these sacred trees. There is one tree in the Tiger King's Valley, and another tree is in the forest where the White Bear resides." Then a shadow crossed Lee Seol's face. "The sacred tree that the Tiger King was taking care of is

dying. It will take at least 100 years for a new sacred tree to grow, so the Tiger King asked the White Bear to share the remaining sacred tree."

"Asked... This request, was it refused?"

"Yes."

Perhaps the feud had started with this refusal. Theodore thought inwardly with a bitter smile, 'Spirits don't seem very different from humans.'

If there was one thing another person needed, it wouldn't be given. In a sense, it might be an instinct born in both humans and beasts. This wasn't just a matter of the Tiger King and White Bear. No, this was a confrontation between the two groups they commanded. It seemed that this problem couldn't be solved easily, so Theodore breathed in deeply.

Chill. A sudden chill ran down his spine.

"-Retreat!"

"T-Theo?"

Theodore pushed Lee Seol behind without any hesitation and stepped forward. Theodore's senses warned him that if he didn't respond immediately, he would suffer fatal damage.

■■■■■■———!!

A roar shook the earth! The mountains trembled, birds flew into the sky, and elks that were grazing started to urinate. The instincts of wild animals were more developed than those of humans, so they were able to see it right away.

The owner of this roar was at the apex of the ecosystem. It was the roar of the king of beasts.

'It's coming!'

However, Theodore wasn't stunned stiff. Instead, he faced the monster that caused unbearable physiological interactions and

bore down at him with a quick speed.

Pajijik!

Unlike the unstable lightning of the past, this time the blue light around Theodore's body flowed like water. The three months he'd spent at the Fairy Dance Lee Family's home hadn't been a waste.

Theodore was so sensitive that he didn't miss a drop of mana inside his blood vessels. He focused briefly, and exactly 0.12 seconds after that, Theodore looked ahead.

'...Much faster than expected. The speed is comparable to Randolph's.'

Four claws flew out before Theodore, aiming at his skull. It was a power that even a wall of mithril couldn't endure. Therefore, Theodore didn't confront the blow. Instead, he moved diagonally into the arms of the assailant.

Fairy Dance's Direct Transmission.

Hand Counterattack Technique.

Left Palm Lone Peak.

This blow wasn't sufficient. Theodore sensed this fact and rotated his seven circles after a long time. He used attack magic which could be produced at the maximum speed.

Sevenfold Thunderbolt.

Spell Fusion: Keraunos.

Lightning emerged from Theodore's palms.

Kwarururung!

The heavens seemed to be split in two. The animals on the ground fell down, while the birds flying in the sky crashed into the ground and turned into a mess. The roar of the Tiger King echoed several times, causing the rocks to shake. It could be called a perfect counter.

Theodore's skill at blending martial arts and magic at once was amazing. However, his expression was still dark. He had felt it through his hands that he had hit the opponent perfectly. Nevertheless, he wasn't convinced that the enemy was knocked down.

'Ridiculously hard.'

Theodore stared at the enemy, who had fallen further away, while raising his palms. This time, he could see the appearance of the opponent.

"Tiger person?" Theodore muttered it to himself.

However, he was sure that the other person's ears twitched at the sound.

"Huh? Where do you see a beast person when looking at this body? You're a little boy who has yet to grow a beard, yet you have such bad eyes?"

"Still..." Theodore didn't respond to the words, as he carefully looked his opponent up and down.

A pair of eyes looked out from amidst golden hair. A striped tail emerged from its buttocks and swung from side to side. The canines which emerged from a pair of lips revealed it was a carnivore.

With the exception of the tall body that was close to 190cm, the owner could be called a sensual beauty. The body was covered with several pieces of fur, and it was so voluptuous that it seemed like it would burst out at any moment. There were no signs that it had been hit by lightning, except for a few strands of curled hair.

At this time, Lee Seol stepped out from behind Theodore and cried out, "Tiger King! What are you doing all of a sudden?"

"Oh, our cutie is here! Are you worried because we haven't said hello for a few months?"

“Please don’t change the subject! Why did you attack Theo?”

“No, that is…” The half human, half beast beauty scratched her head at Lee Seol’s question. It seemed like she had acted without thinking. “That… you know? I am feeling a bit bad these days, so I can’t push down my will to fight when I see a male. It is fight or mate, so I chose this method to solve it.”

“M-Mate? Gross!”

“By the way, haven’t you brought a fairly good male? I was worried about you, but it seems like there was no reason for it.”

It seemed like the Tiger King liked making fun of Lee Seol. Theodore finally understood that a fight wasn’t going to start and relaxed. He had thought the Tiger King would emerge, but he never thought she would be a beauty.

‘No, it is unclear if she even is a human?’

Words couldn’t help flowing out of Theodore’s mouth, “I didn’t think the Tiger King would be a woman.”

“Well, I am a female according to the standards of your species. It doesn’t matter from my viewpoint,” the Tiger King answered smoothly and laughed, turning her back to Theodore while mocking him with her tail. “What? Is it important that I’m female? Since you are a male, do you want to try me one time?”

“Eh…”

“Kyahahaha! It is a joke, a joke. I honestly don’t mind, but the little cutie won’t come back forever.”

“T-Tiger King!”

The tense air from the previous exchange loosened. Theodore let out a long sigh as he realized the Tiger King had a personality which was hard to deal with. She was a spirit, and she was wilder than humans. Although she had been drawn by instinct to launch a preemptive attack, she now seemed childlike.

Then at that moment…

“Don’t be so shallow, Tiger King. Your dignity is crumbling,” a heavy bass voice rang out over the heads of the three people.

Meanwhile, when the Tiger King realized who owned the voice, she grumbled, “Tch, this damn bear.”

As she spoke, something gigantic jumped down to the ground.

Kuuong.

It was a considerably heavy weight, which caused a crater to form in the ground. If that fall had been meant as an attack, the target below would’ve been flattened like a pancake. There was a body within the small crater.

‘…Big.’

He had white hair and white skin, and he was wearing white leather like the Tiger King. At least 2 meters and 30 centimeters tall, he was much taller than the previous Pan Hellions. The White Bear might have a human-like appearance, but his body was several times larger than an ordinary bear. Additionally, the presence he emitted was intense despite there being no hostility.

‘I can win against one… but not two.’ Theodore instinctively measured the power of both spirits and made a calm assessment.

They might have powers different to those of humans, but it wasn’t difficult to compare strengths. The Tiger King and the White Bear were both intermediate level masters. Moreover, Theodore didn’t know the inherent power of spirits, so they could have a few more hidden powers.

It was impossible to suppress them or to make both of them surrender.

‘…Now, then how should I move?’

The two spirits gazed at each other, and the atmosphere became tenser. Theodore observed the situation calmly.

It was wiser to take a neutral position until he judged who was right and wrong. Magicians always assumed the worst in order to create the best premise. This code of conduct wouldn't change regardless of the circumstances.

However, an unexpected variable popped out before Theodore could pick an option.

[Hoing!] A little girl emerged unexpectedly from the ground of the valley. There was a swaying bud on her head, and her healthy skin had earth tones. She was Mitra, a fragment of Mother Earth and the ancient elemental of the earth.

Her sudden appearance made the two spirits focus on her.

The Tiger King made a surprised look and muttered as she looked at Mitra, "...M-Mountain deity?"

"Mountain deity?" Theodore asked about the words which were unfamiliar to him.

Meanwhile, the White Bear corrected the words with wide eyes, "No, the earth deity!"

"Earth deity?" Theodore didn't know what was going on, but he was stunned when the two spirits each grabbed one of Theodore's hands. The warmth of the beasts' fur was transmitted over to Theodore.

As Theodore tried to remove his hand with an absurd expression, they both cried out, "Please help us!"

Chapter 254 – Baekun Mountains (3)

The previous battle atmosphere went away as the two spirits grasped Theodore's hands simultaneously. They each weighed was over 100 kilograms, so the strength of their grips wasn't to be trifled with. It wasn't at a level that could be endured.

Rather than flinching back, Theodore alternated looking back and forth between the two spirits. Then he demanded an explanation, "Explain what happened. I can't answer your request for help if I don't know what it is about."

Based on the way the mountain spirits were looking at Mitra, it seemed to be something related to an earth spirit, but it was too complicated to guess.

Why were the two boss spirits of the Baekun Mountains bowing their heads without hesitation? Maybe they were mistaken, or perhaps Mitra really did have a clue to resolve this incident.

The half human, half bear blinked and let go of Theodore's left hand. It seemed that White Bear acted rudely because he wasn't aware of the courtesies of the human world. "Hmm, sorry. My mind is rushing ahead because I am in a hurry. I haven't even introduced myself yet. Please be lenient with me. I am White Bear, the head of the white forest."

"I am Theodore Miller, who came at the request of Seol. If the pronunciation is difficult, you may call me Tae-oh."

As the two of them were exchanging greetings, the Tiger King kept holding onto Theodore's right hand and interrupted, "Tae-oh (Laziness)? It might mean something different, but that name isn't quite right for you. I like Tao-oh (Greatest Crow)." (TL: Same Korean spelling but different method of spelling with the Chinese characters)

"Well, I don't hate crows." Theodore nodded with a smile.

The inhabitants of the East often treated crows as a bad omen. However, in the West, especially for magicians, crows were the synonym of a wise bird. One ancient god was said to have two crows that sat on his shoulders and looked around at the world, while Theodore had also contracted with a crow called Hugin.

Four people—two people and two beasts, to be exact—started to move inside the canyon. It was to see one of the two sacred trees, the one that belonged to the Tiger King.

“Male—no, Tae-oh. You formed a contract with the mountain deity?”

“Earth deity, Tiger King.”

“Shut up, Bear. Anyway, is that right?”

Theodore ignored the two fighting spirits and stroked Mitra who was on his shoulder. Then he asked both sprits, “Right, why do you think she is an earth deity and not a mountain deity?”

“I met one in the past. It is slightly different, but I will never forget that strange presence,” the Tiger King answered casually and looked at him. She was taller than Theodore, so her eyes naturally looked down at him. Maybe she was looking at the top of Mitra’s head?

However, she didn’t dare stretch out her hand and spoke with a little bit of awe, “It has already been more than 500 years, but he was the one who brought the sacred trees to the Baekun Mountains. He was the one who made me a cunning spirit when I was just a beast.”

“It is the same with this body,” White Bear added.

Rare human feelings of nostalgia emerged in the expressions of the two spirits.

The Tiger King and the White Bear hadn’t been spirits from the beginning. They were beasts who had been born as animals and had succeeded in becoming spirits after accumulating a lot of

karma.

The odds of that happening was one in a thousand—no, maybe one in a million.

The Baekun Mountains was a special area, but this couldn't drastically affect the animals in the area. It was because that there was another reason besides the energy of the Baekun Mountains.

"There are two sacred trees left now, so they are indispensable to our lives," White Bear said in a quiet voice as he took one step forward. "The dragon vein is concentrated near the sacred trees, maximizing our vitality. Rare plants grow like weeds, and the children who consume it every day will become spirits within a decade. But now the sacred tree is worsening. The children who have yet to grow into spirits will return to being beasts."

"Isn't it enough with just one tree?"

"It isn't enough."

Indeed, Theodore was convinced by the explanation. Why had the Tiger King and White Bear confronted each other over a sacred tree? It was to do their best for the spirits they led. Despite the arguing, the relationship between them wasn't bad. The balance was maintained because the free-spirited Tiger King and mature White Bear were total opposites.

Shortly after that, they arrived in front of the sacred tree.

"Ohh..." Despite Lee Seol having seen it a few times in the past, she couldn't help letting out a sound of admiration along with Theodore. It was because the top couldn't be seen. The tree was approximately a little over 100 meters tall. It couldn't be compared to the world tree of Elvenheim, but this tree was grown just from a dragon vein. The sacred tree had a great size, and it was beautiful.

'But there is definitely something going on. The edges of the leaves are faded. Despite the dense mana... the movements are surprisingly inactive.' Theodore diagnosed the condition with one

glance and was troubled. How could he improve this with Mitra's power?

It was something Theodore never attempted before. An animal could be healed. He could cut off the sick stem of a plant. However, it wasn't known if he could revitalize a tree like this. However, the gazes of the two spirits pierced Theodore's conscience.

"How is it? Can you do it?"

"Tell me to do anything. I will follow your words."

Theodore sighed and took a small step forward. "Is it okay if I touch the sacred tree for a moment? This is the first time I've encountered a situation like this."

The Tiger King and White Bear nodded easily. The sacred tree would die if they left it alone anyway. They could certainly tolerate someone touching it for a moment. There was a deep sense of confidence from the two spirits toward Mitra.

"...Then I am starting." Theodore stretched out both hands without hesitation and touched the rough surface of the wood. This was reasonable behavior, but it had no meaning so far.

'Mitra.'

[Yes! I will do as you ask!]

Simultaneously, a green light emitted from Mitra's bud. After ingesting the seed of the world tree, she had manifested the ability to form a consensus with plants.

Theodore had been using it as a type of clairvoyance, but as Mitra grew, he realized that he had been mistaken. Clairvoyance only borrowed the vision of the distant vegetation. However, she could now exert her true power.

Shortly after that, Theodore's conscious was pulled somewhere else.

*

“Heok!” How much time had passed by? Theodore suddenly stepped back and opened his eyes.

This caused Lee Seol to call out with surprise, “Theo! What is going on?”

“...Seol.” Theodore repeatedly took in deep breaths and recalled what he had seen.

Was it because the structures of humans and plants differed greatly?

It had only been a few seconds of contact, but Theodore hadn’t been able to keep up with the enormous amount of information and his consciousness had cut off. His brain might’ve been fried if Mitra hadn’t acted as the bridge between them. He reflected on it and neatly arranged the information he had received from the world tree.

‘A huge whirlpool... and the branch that stretches from the center of probably the flow of the Baekun Mountain’s dragon vein.’

The images, which were engraved in his mind, were vivid. It was as if the base power, the source of the mana here, was swirling all over the Baekun Mountains. Among them, the largest flow was divided into two stems.

One stem flowed to the west forest where White Bear stayed, while the other one flowed to this sacred tree. There were traces of other branches apart from these two, but it was so long ago that the power must’ve been exhausted or dried up.

However, that wasn’t the only thing the sacred tree wanted to share. Theodore contemplated the cause of the problem that had flowed into him. If he didn’t have good intelligence, Theodore’s brain would be overheated. After all, the mentality of a plant was really different from a human’s.

“I would like to say something first,” Theodore barely calmed his

confusion and spoke to the two spirits. Then he disclosed shocking news, “The sacred tree’s life isn’t over yet.”

“…What?”

“What?!”

Tiger King’s eyes widened, while White Bear cried out loudly. Oddly enough, these reactions were the opposite of their usual behavior. This showed he had attracted the attention of the two spirits.

Theodore looked at Mitra clinging to his neck like a cicada, then he took a deep breath and explained, “The sacred tree isn’t a tree that could originally grow to this size. Like you said, it grew due to the strength of the dragon vein. Then what will happen if the supply of power from the dragon vein decreases?”

“…It will gradually weaken.”

“That’s right. That is the primary problem.”

The flow from the dragon vein had decreased, weakening the sacred tree. If this were the end of it, Theodore wouldn’t be so serious. As time went by, the dragon vein would lose some power, but it was still at a level which the Baekun Mountains could bear. The Baekun Mountains could still flourish for the next few centuries.

However, something was hindering that flow. The White Bear’s branch of the flow wasn’t affected, but the flow going toward Tiger King’s sacred tree had been cut off somewhere. To summarize it briefly…

“If we can restore that broken area of the dragon vein, the sacred tree will revive soon?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

It seemed like a simple solution, but they realized that wasn’t the case when looking at Theodore.

A branch of the dragon vein wouldn't be cut off if it got struck by lightning, so this disruption couldn't be due to natural causes. At a minimum, a massive earthquake or volcano eruption was required for it to be disrupted by nature. If there had been such a natural phenomenon, both the Tiger King and the White Bear might've guessed the cause of the problem.

In other words, that wasn't the case.

"...It means that someone has broken this branch of the dragon vein," White Bear murmured.

Theodore nodded. "Just before, I approached the dragon vein through the connection with the sacred tree. I thought I could find out when the flow was broken."

"Did you see it?"

"Is it bad? Your consciousness was cut off like someone interrupted it. So, I'm surprised."

Sometimes, a mental impact could be greater than physical damage. Theodore had already trained his mind to the extreme, whereas most people would've fainted from this. He was lucky to be left with no physical after-effects.

A person who could interfere with a master... It meant the enemy must be at a master level. Theodore guessed the opponent's ability with that one contact and was immediately convinced.

'When converting to the ranking of magicians, the opponent is at least a 7th circle shaman.'

The magic he had learned from Seimei was definitely magic involving feng shui. This meant the opponent had to be a great shaman who could control the rise and fall of mana, and even affect the flow of the dragon vein. A shaman who could do such things certainly wouldn't be an easy opponent.

Aside from Seimei, whom Theodore had met with Gluttony's power, Theodore had never encountered a great shaman! Yet, he

now had to be fully prepared to deal with a strong one.

“Seol.”

“Ah, yes! Theo!”

Having a non-combatant with him was a fatal weakness. Lee Seol was outstanding, but she was still young and hadn’t reached the level of a master. It would take decades for her to participate in a master level fight.

Therefore, Theodore calmly decided what to do with her.

“Go back now. It is likely that something will occur that you can’t intervene in.”

It came earlier than he had thought it would be, but it was now time to say goodbye to Lee Seol.

Chapter 255 – Baekun Mountains (4)

Papak!

Every time his feet hit the ground, Theodore's body moved a few dozen meters at once. He was moving much faster than when he had been carrying Lee Seol on his back, and the leaves only started to fall after he passed by completely.

However, the two spirits didn't lag behind at all. Despite their big size, they managed to kick off thin branches and rocky edges to accelerate more. They were beasts who were more familiar with these mountains than humans.

"Sigh…" Theodore sighed as he led from 3 meters ahead of them. It was because he couldn't forget the face of the girl who had just left a while ago.

–Yes, I will head back first.

The three months had been both a long and short amount of time, but she was memorable. The link between Lee Yoonsung and Lee Seol, which had led to the Fairy Dance Lee Family… Lee Seol made Theodore think of his younger brother who wasn't here.

From now on, she would be a child living among adults. As the next head of the Fairy Dance Lee Family, she would pioneer her own life in this land without him.

–May luck be with you on your way back.

She had said farewell, but Theodore had been able to read the regrets on her face.

'That child, she had a lonely expression.'

Following behind Theodore, the Tiger King said, "Hey."

"Why are you calling me?"

"Don't worry about it. My kids will send that girl back safely. Well, I don't think there are females who hate being looked after

by a male. By the way, isn't this situation too relaxed?"

"That—" Theodore became temporarily speechless and closed his mouth. He hadn't expressed it on the outside, but he couldn't hide it from the Tiger King. Even if she mimicked human form, her essence was a beast. In regards to 'reading' the other person, it was difficult for a human to match the ability of a beast. After all, a beast could even read the motion of blood circulating under the skin.

"...You are correct. I should be vigilant." Theodore sighed and released his worries.

Lee Seol was protected by the two boss spirits, the Tiger King and White Bear, so what could hurt her in these mountains? It seemed that the several months he'd spent in the Fairy Dance Lee Family had softened him.

At this point in time, he shouldn't be thinking about Lee Seol's safe return but the threat that had to be dealt with. The shaman who twisted the dragon vein in the Baekun Mountains for his own purpose...!

'The most difficult thing will be that shaman.'

Unlike magicians who systematically increased their abilities, there was no clear learning system for shamans. Someone would teach that A was right and B was false. Someone else would teach that B was right and C was false. Then someone else would teach that A, B, and C were false, and D was right.

Therefore, there was no room for an integrated institution like the magic towers. Each person claimed the other was speaking heresy, and this couldn't result in unity. Even shamans belonging to the same sect used different powers, so what about the other shamans?

As Seimei had said previously, there was no point in guessing. Theodore wouldn't know until he saw it. In that case, it would be

best to determine the common weakness of shamans.

Theodore rummaged through Seimei's knowledge that was stuck in his head. The amount of knowledge was massive, and there were many areas of shamanism that couldn't coexist with magic, but he managed to use the knowledge to find a way to deal with shamans.

'It is the Divide Method... and the Nine Seals Method.'

While Theodore was coming up with two plans, he and the two boss spirits stopped moving at the same time. This was despite the fact that before them was a normal mountain slope.

"...What, this land? It feels strange."

"I also get an unpleasant feeling. I feel sick at the bottom of my stomach."

The two spirits had higher sensitivity than humans, causing them to growl. Something was wrong, but they didn't know what was wrong. Theodore also felt the same way.

It was a feeling of discomfort. The chill he felt was like blades scratching at his skin and cutting his flesh. It was a sense that only spiritually aware beings developed, and it didn't just rely on the five senses of the body.

Then at that moment...

[Hoing!]

Mitra jumped onto the ground and ran somewhere, waving her arms. The three of them, including Theodore, chased after her. After running hard for a few meters, Mitra suddenly stopped. She picked up one of the stones on the ground.

[Bad stone!] She then shouted and vigorously threw it away.

"...Mitra?"

[Wait!]

Before Theodore could ask what happened, Mitra rushed away to find the next stone. She lifted it, threw it, and repeated this again and again. As the two spiritual beings looked on with a blank face, Mitra finally called out with a triumphant expression.

[This last one!]

The moment that rock flew away…

Wuoooooong!

The peaceful scenery distorted, and a wall of darkness, which rejected even the sun, appeared before their eyes. The two spirits recoiled with shock.

“W-What is this?”

“Umm, it is a really terrible wall.”

However, unlike the spirits, Theodore looked at the wall of darkness and carefully reached out a hand. “Perhaps this is…”

Several layers of search magic flowed out from his fingertips. Detect Mana, Penetration, and Dissection Magic… The 7th Circle magic connected to the mysterious darkness. Even magic from the Age of Mythology couldn’t help being revealed.

Dissolve Magic, unlike Dispel, didn’t release the magic but dissected it instead. It was a special magic that Theodore had accidentally discovered in a certain book, and it was a magic no one else had.

The structure of shamanism might be different from magic, but the roots were the same, so he could deconstruct it.

“I knew it,” Theodore spoke after doing a half analysis of the darkness. “It is a large barrier. It is of a very high level. Perhaps this is the source of what is stealing from the dragon vein.”

“Can you get rid of it?”

“The removal itself isn’t that difficult. I can destroy it. It is even possible for you, though it will take some time.” However,

Theodore's eyes sunk deeply. "The problem is the purpose of this barrier. It was built using the dragon vein as a source, and it seems like something is confined within the structure's set up..."

Theodore concluded that it was some type of seal, and he couldn't destroy it easily. It was the same as 'Pandora' in the ancient myths. What if there was something chained inside that he couldn't afford to let out? Attempting to restore the sacred tree would actually bring more ruin. However, the answer to that came from an unexpected place.

"Hoh, that is completely accurate. Truly great."

It wasn't Theodore, the Tiger King, or the White Bear. Instead, it was a fourth person, an unfamiliar voice that was heard from above!

"You, who—!" The White Bear determined the position of the unknown person before anyone else and let out a roar that was like thunder. Rather than a simple yell, the roar was closer to a sound wave attack, and rocks in the path of that sound wave would be destroyed.

However, the fourth person who had appeared in the air casually jumped over the sound wave. The person wore a black mask that covered his entire face. It matched the rest of his clothing. Theodore's super sensitivity told him that the cause of this situation was the man in black.

Avoiding the White Bear's roar, the man in black watched Theodore and said, "It is difficult. I opened this section to check, but to think there is a being who untied it and looked into the ward..."

'Open?' Theodore was puzzled for a moment, before realizing that he was talking about the ward that Mitra had released.

The ward assimilated this space into nature and concealed it. The two boss spirits might be sensitive to the change in the material

world, but that sensitivity was nothing compared to that of Mitra, who was the embodiment of nature itself.

Theodore stepped forward and cried out to the shaman in black, “If you think you are innocent, identify yourself!”

“What if I don’t want to?” The man in black received the question and chuckled. “Would you answer?”

“Then…” Theodore didn’t respond to the ridicule as his blue eyes flashed and he raised both hands. “—I will force you to confess!”

There was some room for dialogue, but Theodore abandoned negotiations the moment he faced the man. It wasn’t just because of the man’s suspicious clothing or selfish behavior.

Mitra had yet to be recalled, and Theodore, who shared eyes with her, penetrated into the malice that couldn’t be hidden by the black clothes. It was an evil malice, like tar boiling up from the bottom of hell.

‘Forced Harmonization.’

Theodore’s seven circles used two types of attack spells—Lightning Vortex X Fire Storm and Integration Complete: Volcanic Thunder. He produced a blow purely focused on destructive power. Fire and lightning were the strongest attributes, so this was thrilling.

Originally, fire and lightning would be busy cutting at each other’s strength, but it was different with Theodore’s sorcery. This was literally lightning fire.

Kwarururung!

A storm of devastating power swallowed up the man in black, who was in the distant sky. There was no room for him to avoid it. The enormous firepower was fast as well, so there was no doubt that the two types of magic had a synergy effect. It was a destructive power which could even wound an adult dragon.

“…Cough! Attacking out of the blue… That is too much.”

Theodore’s opponent didn’t die. After the attack disappeared, the man looked down at Theodore from his spot in the air.

‘No, he didn’t block it completely.’

The man’s left arm was gone. However, he simply grabbed his left shoulder and shrugged like he didn’t care. There were a few drops of blood on his masked face. It was a surprising reaction considered one of his arms had been destroyed.

“Western magic… You aren’t an opponent I can compete with when it comes to power. I focused on defense, but… I didn’t think it would be like this. From the very beginning, I didn’t intend to fight.”

“…No?” Theodore’s eyes suddenly widened. It was because the man’s left arm, which had obviously been destroyed, started growing back from the left arm socket. First, the bones were formed, and the nervous system was connected to the blood vessels. Then skin grew over it, and the arm hung down limply.

Theodore had seen this scene before.

‘Top grade recovery ability.’

Even if it wasn’t on the same level as Superbia’s, this regenerative power meant that the man in black couldn’t be killed unless his head was destroyed. Maybe Theodore needed to burn off the man’s flesh.

Theodore raised his alertness and lowered his posture. However, the unidentified shaman turned around without hesitation. “I will leave this place to you to handle. In any case, I don’t expect much from that trash.”

Theodore guessed the intentions from those words and shouted, “Are you going to run away?”

“Is it wrong to run away from an opponent I can’t beat? We will

meet again anyway.”

“What?”

“Okay, I shouldn’t say any more. Then I’m going.”

Theodore and the two spirits didn’t have time to react. The shaman took out an odd amulet from his clothes and tore it in half with his good fingers. Simultaneously, the space around him twisted, and the man disappeared.

“...Is it a transfer object?”

Artifacts, teleport scrolls, and other items like these were rare on the East Continent. This was a talisman that only a master level shaman could produce, so the man in black must be at least of that level.

Theodore raised his threat assessment of the man in black by two stages and looked at the two spirits. “That man in black seems to have abandoned this place, so what would you like to do?”

“Of course, we have to destroy it! Isn’t that right, Bear?” The answer naturally came from the aggressive Tiger King. Maybe it was because her blood was boiling from the fight between the shaman and Theodore, but her two fists were clenched more tightly than usual.

“...Go inside. It is something too worrisome to leave alone, my intuition is telling me.” White Bear thought about it for a while before coming up with a similar opinion.

“I understand. Then let’s open this ward.”

It was decided that it would be better to destroy the ward. Theodore gathered both of his hands together and prepared to get rid of the ward.

‘Forward Force Array.’

This was a technique which embodied the shamanism recorded in the grimoire, Baopuzi. It was a method that boosted the strength

of shamanism but also reflected the application of the law of destruction.

‘The lacking power of shamanism is boosted by this law.’ Theodore concentrated his mind as the air became taut.

The two spirits were surprised by the unbearable intimidation and reflexively stepped back. Shortly afterward, a thunderous shout burst from Theodore’s mouth, “Hah!”

Then the wall of darkness separated, and the crack was like a doorway. This hole was opened by Theodore’s power and would close soon. The three of them approached the crack and stiffened. The smell coming from inside the darkness was familiar to the three of them.

‘The smell of blood. It is also extremely dark…’

Theodore was convinced that a good sight wouldn’t unfold before them.

“Let’s go.”

He set foot in the ward before the two spirits.

Chapter 256 – Receptacle of Solitude (1)

‘The road to hell.’

These words popped into the minds of the human and beasts the moment they entered.

The smell of blood entered their noses, and there was flesh at their feet. There was no ventilation in this place, so the rotten air was practically a foggy miasma. One swallow would make gastric juices rise in their mouths.

As soon as Theodore recognized the situation, he hastily cleansed the surrounding atmosphere with his wind divinity.

‘Wind.’

The foggy miasma was pushed away, and the two spirits took deep breaths. They were more adversely affected as they were used to the clean air of the Baekun Mountains. The Tiger King’s claws tore through the air as she looked up at the black sky. “Dammit, what is this place? My nose feels like it will fall off if I stay here for half a day.”

The White Bear lifted up the black soil and opened his mouth, “It isn’t a place that can be made naturally. This poisonous land has its own efficacy, and there is nothing here but a malice that spreads death.”

“So, let’s tear it down! Why else did we come into this rotten place?”

“Don’t be too hasty. If the cause of the pollution is within this barrier, we need to remove the cause before destroying it.”

It made sense. If this ward was destroyed, the pollutant might escape and spread poison throughout the Baekun Mountains. Theodore was convinced by the words and persuaded the Tiger King, “In any case, we have to enter the center to destroy this place. Until then, focus on searching.”

“…Tch, do what you want! Males always get along well with each other.”

“Thank you.”

The Tiger King grunted cutely. Then her striped tail moved unhappily, making the Tiger King look no different from a cat. That reminded Theodore, ‘Isn’t a tiger a type of feline?’ Theodore couldn’t help laughing. He might’ve stroked her head if she wasn’t so big.

The three people advanced. Theodore took the lead to purify the air, followed by the spirits. Usually, it wasn’t wise for magicians to be in the lead, but it wasn’t a problem for Theodore who was proficient in close combat.

After heading for 10 minutes in one direction, Theodore realized that the space was distorted.

‘Space expansion…? Or was it a partial difference field? Either way, this is a trick that appears in ancient literature.’ In Seimei’s time, there had been a few people who could do such a trick.

Theodore constantly spread out his magic power to explore several kilometers at the same time.

‘Creating an independent space and then placing a large number of creatures inside… This is a technique I read about somewhere. It’s to… create an army.’

[Is it okay for this body to say something?]

“Ack!” Theodore was surprised by the sudden voice and stopped, causing the two spirits following him to look around reflexively. He lifted his palms to calm himself down and turned his consciousness to focus inside himself. The voice wasn’t from Gluttony. No, the owner of this mocking and neutral voice was—

‘How did you come out, Seimei?’

It was Abe no Seimei, the great shaman who pioneered the

system of the Art of Onmyōdō. Unlike with Lee Yoonsung, Theodore only had a thin connection with Seimei, so how did he run rampant inside Gluttony?

[Don't treat a person like a cockroach. This Seimei is rather soft-hearted.]

'How are you saying such things?'

[You are still the same. I understand,] Seimei said. Hearing Theodore's attitude urged him to reply, so Seimei explained, [This is a pretty good place to settle. It is completely separate from the world, so I can act autonomously. However, that doesn't mean I can act against you, so don't worry.]

'...I understand.'

[By the way, it is well made. Among my disciples, there aren't many who have learned to make this type of ward. It isn't as good as mine but still quite well done.]

Seimei dismissed Theodore's concerns and borrowed his eyes to look around, praising the capabilities of the shaman who made this place. The creator of this space had exceptional skills. However, Seimei praised himself more.

[This is the 'Receptacle of Solitude.']

'Solitude?'

It was a word which was in Theodore's memories. He had read a few lines about it in a book on shamanism from the Baek Family. Theodore hurriedly recalled the contents and asked, 'Isn't it a jar that insects are placed in to create poison?'

[You know it? It doesn't need to be insects. It is efficient, so it doesn't matter if it is a poisonous creature like a toad or snake. Furthermore, this space is even more awful.]

'More awful?'

[It isn't just poison. Those in this ward slaughter each other to

gain power. This idea might be novel, but a blood-crazed slaughterer might be born?]

The indifferent explanation was terrible. A blood-crazed slaughterer was worse than a demon who avoided killing. Additionally, he said that this space didn't just contain poison. So, the flesh he saw when he first came in were remnants of living creatures... Theodore was about to ask Seimei about that, when the 'answer' appeared.

Kuaaaack—!

There was a terrible cry; the roar was a murderous scream. Along with this cry, unknown shapes started to appear all over the place. The dark sky and earth meant that Theodore could see nothing but a hazy shape when he looked at 'them.'

"...These bastards, what are they?"

However, the eyes of the beasts were different. The Tiger King was nauseous at the sight of their terrible appearance and opened her 10 claws. The White Bear didn't respond as much as the Tiger King, but he still trembled. "Terrible things!"

They were half beasts and half humans whose eyes were burning with madness. There were tails that protruded from their parietal lobes or claws coming from cheekbones which tore at their cheeks and caused wounds.

Even chimeras didn't look this terrible.

Kyaaaak!

There was a creature that moved on four legs like a leopard. Unlike its ugly appearance, its speed was comparable to an aura user, and its exposed teeth were sharper than steel blades. However, it picked the wrong opponent this time.

Kwang!

A sledgehammer-like fist hit the creature's head. Brain matter

flew out, and the monster that had just lost its head fell to the ground. The Tiger King looked at the substance covering her fist and roared in anger, “Kuheook! This trash dares dirty my skin!!!”

Did they even understand her words? She let out an intimidating presence and plunged straight into the crowd of monsters. Three or four monsters were thrown back with just one punch, and their bodies were torn apart when the Tiger King used her claws.

It was a storm of slaughter. Blood spurted out wherever the Tiger King moved to, while the bizarre monsters could only scream.

‘…Amazing. I don’t even need to take action.’

Theodore swiftly investigated some of the dead bodies while admiring the Tiger King’s fighting skills. The monsters might’ve been smashed like scarecrows, but they weren’t easy opponents. Their skin was an unknown material that was harder than steel, and they had a remarkable recovery ability.

Those gathered in this place had the power to wipe out a few knight divisions.

–User, the silent Gluttony suddenly spoke, –Be vigilant. These creatures are Lust’s failures.

‘Failures? Lust doesn’t always give birth to good children?’

–Becoming stronger doesn’t necessarily make it a success. As they keep developing, parts outside of the human framework start appearing. Maybe this place is a collection of such failures.

One wise person once said, ‘Be careful not to be swallowed up by the abyss.’

The context was a little different, but the advice was the same. Progress that had no costs was just a fantasy. Lust couldn’t create the strong without having some failures. She extracted only the ‘beneficial’ genes from the parents and gave it to the child. It wasn’t uncommon for these ‘benefits’ to cause too much instability, breaking down the balance.

[Hoh, it is rational in many ways.]

‘Seimei.’

[If there are failures, it is a good idea to recycle. If these offerings are combined into a single mass… Even if they are failures, a considerably strong monster will emerge. At least 1,000 monsters will need to be joined together.]

As Seimei explained, his knowledge flowed into Theodore’s mind. A sacrifice of a species higher than beasts or insects made the Receptacle of Solitude into a poisonous land. This was considered taboo by the ancient shamans.

Even if these creatures were failures, they were still Lust’s children. They devoured each other, and an incomparable creature would be born.

‘Then I have to find it and stop it before that happens.’

The conclusion Theodore came to was obvious. A difficult monster should be destroyed before it was completed. It was a reasonable answer as a human and magician.

The Tiger King had almost finished cleaning up all the failures present. It was best to destroy the incomplete creature and then this space. He didn’t think it was impossible for three master-level existences to defeat the Solitude, no matter how strong it was.

[Uh, that reminds me… I’m sorry I didn’t tell you this in advance.]

‘…What is it?’

Seimei’s words sounded ominous for some reason.

[This Solitude is different from the others, right? The strong ones are confined with the weak ones…]

‘Summarize it briefly.’

[I mean, that tiger girl is killing all the weak ones. From the standpoint of the strong creature, aren’t you intercepting its food?]

‘Ah.’ Theodore finally understood the meaning of Seimei’s words.

This was a world controlled by ‘Solitude.’ The weak were eaten by the strong. This cycle was repeated until there was one creature left that ate all the offerings. If so, it would be natural for the person behind this to stimulate hunger and the ability to recognize each other’s positions.

Now, a considerable number of offerings had died at the Tiger King’s hands. There was no way that a strong creature suffering from hunger wouldn’t recognize this situation!

————————————————!

As Theodore realized this, there was a wailing sound. It was the scream of a predator that had lost its prey. The scream contained infinite hunger. It was the incarnation of hatred that had been thrown into the Receptacle of Silence without anything and had devoured its brethren.

“What the hell is this?” The confused Tiger King asked Theodore hastily.

“...Hrmm, today is an unlucky day.” The White Bear, who had been standing on his feet like a human, slowly fell to the ground on all fours. “It is coming!”

The presence approaching them was a few hundred meters away. Then some changes occurred in the Tiger King and the White Bear.

Their appearances which had been a mixture of human and beast were now closer to that of beasts. This was because their innate instincts as animals whispered that it would be dangerous if they didn’t confront this enemy with all of their power.

Soon after, ‘it’ arrived in front of them.

“...Tails?”

The creature was smaller than Theodore had expected. Its body

seemed to be similar or just slightly smaller than Theodore's. However, Theodore couldn't verify it that well. There was a black aura burning around the creature's entire body, but there was clearly the shape of tails behind it.

From left to right, there were eight tails. The monster of Solitude, the creature that contained a terrifying power, stared at Theodore and the two spirits with red eyes.

"Ugh?" At that moment, Theodore felt the power try to tie him up, and he quickly took action. He was able to see the power trying to tie up his body.

'Magic eyes. No, snake eyes...?'

It was said that a person couldn't move if a snake was staring at them. This was a variation of the traditional spell used by shamans, 'Snake Eyes.' An ordinary person would be frozen and couldn't move their feet. If it was severe, they would even have difficulty breathing.

The creature tried to capture him, but it wouldn't work on a senior magician like Theodore. Still, it was a child of one of the Seven Sins, Lust. The two spirits succeeded in shaking off the spell as well, and the eight-tailed beast just stared at them.

Perhaps this was the first time its trick was unsuccessful. However, the stalemate only lasted a short time as the creature opened its mouth, ————————————!

Without any negotiations, the fight against Solitude began.

Chapter 257 – Receptacle of Solitude (2)

‘It’s coming.’

It had eight tails, so he naturally called it Eight-Tails. Theodore’s super sensitivity read its actions ahead of time, but he didn’t move and focused on the Eight-Tails’ movements.

Eight-Tails’ human form might’ve already been lost, but the power wriggling around Eight-Tails’ tails was close to eight circles. Theodore would suffer a serious injury if he was hit by them. Likewise, the movements of the two spirits became more cautious.

Five or maybe ten seconds later…

In a state of maximized concentration where the concept of time was forgotten, the two spirits and one magician witnessed the same sight. The black tails shook. Left to right, right to left… Theodore was shocked as the waving tails created an illusion.

“What…?”

Then the eight tails were suddenly right in front of him.

Puhwaaak!

It moved at a fast speed. Theodore was able to respond to this speed due to his previous experiences of dealing with opponents who had tremendous speeds. Otherwise, his breathing might’ve been cut off by this.

The six shields Theodore reflexively created were shattered, while he took four steps in this gap and quickly moved his hands.

Fairy Dance’s Direct Transmission.

Four Major Hidden Techniques.

Moon Breaking through the Clouds.

Ether coalesced together like clouds, and the hidden technique, Moon Breaking through the Clouds, showed an absolute defense

when being hit by an attack from the front.

Theodore paid attention to the tails and realized why he had been surprised. Eight-Tails wasn't simply moving at a fast speed. It used the gap when they were dazzled by the movements of its tail to narrow the distance using footwork.

'Kuk, it isn't merely a strong monster...!'

It might've been only for 10 seconds, but his arms were numb from blocking the attack. Theodore clicked his tongue at the destructive power, while the tails struck 10 times per second.

Jeeeong! Jjang! Chaaeng!

Eight-Tails struck from above and then the side. Each blow was heavy and fast like it would break Theodore's bones. Theodore deflected all the attacks and counterattacked in the gaps. However, there were moments when the enemy's destructive power was too strong, and he couldn't strike back. He had to focus on defense. Otherwise, his arms would be crushed in a flash.

It was an extreme strength that could overwhelm steel. Above all, the eight tails were attacking the two spirits as well as Theodore. The monster born of solitude was able to overwhelm three master-level people.

However, they wouldn't be pushed so easily.

'Fire!' Theodore narrowly cast a spell through a gap. Even if his opponent was a monster, it was still a disadvantage for them to be hit at close range. The magician's magic power eventually appeared as attack magic.

"Inferno!"

When the maximum output was used, 7th Circle magic could burn an entire village to ashes. A storm of fire flowed from Theodore's left hand and instantly hit three tails of darkness, momentarily pushing the darkness away.

It was possible to destroy three or four tails. However, Theodore's bright expression disappeared the moment he saw Eight-Tails' suspicious movements.

Dhanyata... Ohm... Vajra... There was an unknown and meaningless murmur, a monologue that was strange for a monster without any intelligence. Yes, it was like a magician's chanting.

"This...!"

Theodore prepared a spell, but he was one step too late.

Sva...ha!

As soon as the cry emerged, the darkness in the vicinity sprang at Theodore. This was a shaman's curse.

There were countless types of curses, ranging from those that rotted the flesh, curses that poisoned the air, and curses that burned the caster's opponent. Unlike magic, there were several curses which couldn't be prevented, so Theodore couldn't be careless.

'Dammit! It is such crude shamanism!'

Most shamans separated their magic power into a three-circle system, or maybe a four-circle system. Theodore's hairs rose as he felt a sense of crisis from Eight-Tails' power.

[Hoh, then should this body help you?] At this moment, Seimei took control of Theodore's right arm. [How long has it been since I met a shaman? I am a bit dissatisfied that the opponent has little rationality, but this is sufficient.]

"W-Wait a minute!"

[Don't delay! I have to take care of this quickly!]

Amidst the heavy rain of curses pouring at him, Seimei started to form unknown characters with his right hand. Theodore was able to recognize some of them, but there were many he didn't know.

However, the remarkable thing wasn't the variety of characters

but the speed at which they were being made. There were at least three to five characters per second, so the change in hand gestures had to be praised. The phenomenon that resulted from it transcended Theodore's common sense.

'T-The curses were scattered?'

[Of course. Daring to use curses in front of this Seimei... I will make that ugly body realize how stupid it is!]

Just like the sea splitting into two, the wave of curses divided around Theodore. This was proof that Seimei's shamanism could counter all the different types of curses used. It was truly not an impossible feat for the greatest onmyōji, Abe no Seimei. If magic was an architectural technique, then shamanism was a string. A magician stacked bricks to construct a big building, while shamans used strings to knot a man's neck.

[No matter how hard you try, the loose knot won't be tightened. Even if the rope turns into a chain, it isn't difficult to break if you know how. Well, it would take a few months for someone like you!]

'...Do you have to be so patronizing?' Theodore complained, but he still paid attention to the shaman as he couldn't miss this opportunity. Theodore was adept at maintaining the line between life and death, so he couldn't miss this chance before him. He had the power to overwhelm three tails at once.

Theodore took in a deep breath after finishing his thought.

「Убирайся-к-чёрту (Go aw-ay)!」 He let out a thunderous shout that couldn't be made with a human voice.

Kwarururung!

These were Dragon Words! The power to rule this material world pushed at the space itself, and three tails flew far away. It wasn't a force which could be endured. Eight-Tails abruptly bounced back hundreds of meters, while the two spirits approached Theodore to

speak while panting roughly.

Only a few minutes had passed, but their fur was tinged with blood.

“I’m alive thanks to you, Human Male!”

“I wasn’t alert and almost got hit. Dangerous monster.”

Theodore nodded and replied to them, “We shouldn’t hand over the initiative. We might not know the techniques it is using, but its firepower is three times higher than ours. We don’t have a chance if we compete in strength. We need to hit it with everything we have.”

“I don’t know anything, so I’ll just follow you.”

“Your words are correct for once, Tiger King.”

Theodore was busy thinking while talking with Tiger King and White Bear. Their opponent seemed to be a mixed demon fox. Fortunately, there were only eight tails.

[Well, succeeding in nine tails would be unreasonable. A ninth tail can’t be created with such dull power. Look, isn’t the eighth tail unstable in shape? If it consumes more power or receives a serious blow, that tail will scatter immediately.]

–But be careful. Even if it isn’t a perfect nine-tailed fox, it has eight tails and can produce the output of eight circles. You won’t be able to last for long if you face it head-on.

[Ah, one more thing. This creature has a regeneration ability that’s close to immortality. When it is blown away, don’t feel at ease. Keep hitting it until it was destroyed.]

Seimei and Gluttony could be called the owners of a great deal of knowledge about magic and shamanism. So, Theodore hurried after hearing from the two voices. It was because Eight-Tails was coming back. Eight-Tails was close to being immortal, so how could Theodore beat it without a frontal confrontation?

Coincidentally, both people had the same answer.

-Continue to beat it up until it dies.

[Strike until it dies, and don’t get hit.]

Simultaneously, Eight-Tails jumped toward them from far away.

■■■■■■———!

Eight-Tails was angry at the person who had blown it away. It was an irrational annoyance that couldn’t be understood. So, it aimed for the three uninvited guests. Going against that terrible oppression, the Tiger King walked forward.

“You want to beat me up? This time, it is my turn, Fox!”

For centuries, there had been a nucleus of mana in the mountains which had existed for hundreds of years, and the spirits that could use it freely had their own special abilities. Some spirits could emit flames stronger than lava, while some land spirits developed wings.

The Tiger King was a bit more special.

Kuweeeeeoh!

As if in response to her roar, the number of Tiger Kings increased by five, and it wasn’t an illusion. The weight of her bodies crushed the ground, and an overwhelming presence filled the surroundings.

Theodore figured out her power and gulped. ‘Doppelgangers...! Additionally, they are produced without a loss of power...’

In a flash, five more tigers surrounded Eight-Tails. The perfect physical body of the Tiger King had increased by five. Even a Seimei-level shaman couldn’t achieve such a feat, so the inherent ability of the spirits was something far removed from common sense.

“Be honored to receive death from the five tigers!” The Tiger King cried out excitedly.

Meanwhile, Eight-Tails chuckled and trembled for some reason. Then its eight tails moved in a fan shape.

“—Huh?”

“...Hey, this bastard! This is a foul!”

The Tiger King—no, six Tiger Kings cried out. Eight-Tails, whose body had increased by seven, laughed at the Tiger King, the White Bear, and Theodore, and showed off its power. It was similar to a child wanting to show their strength, rather than an evil being.

Theodore didn’t panic. Eight-Tails’ intention was certainly to ridicule the Tiger King, but in this situation, it was like a handshake. Eight-Tails was intimidating because its power alone overwhelmed the three. However, unlike the Tiger King, its power was distributed between the seven clones.

“How foolish and young.” Unlike the angry Tiger King, the White Bear noticed this fact straight away. The White Bear moved faster than Theodore could instruct and activated his own unique ability.

It was a simple yet powerful ability—becoming giant. The White Bear was originally 4 meters in height, and he now grew to over 15 meters tall. The Tiger King was busy with the battle of nerves and didn’t notice the situation. As soon as the transformation was complete, Theodore shouted to them, “Tiger King, White Bear! Take three each! In the meantime, I will deal with the main body!”

“Uh, what? U-Understood!”

“I understand!”

It was before Eight-Tails could react. The Tiger King answered half a beat late, but the White Bear raised his arms as if he had been waiting.

His weight had increased by many times, but his movement speed wasn’t much different from before. It wouldn’t be a unique ability if his movement speed was slowed down. In that case, it

would just be a simple penalty.

Theodore rushed forward while appreciating the White Bear's unique ability. Eight-Tails' main body and clones couldn't be distinguished with the naked eye, but it had made a big mistake.

'The unstable eighth tail.'

Eight-Tails couldn't take that tail with it when it split into several clones, so there was one Eight-Tails with one and a half tails. That was the main body. Theodore's seven circles rotated as he rushed toward Eight-Tails.

Fairy Dance's Direct Transmission.

Freehand First Strike Technique.

Right Fist Blast Thunder.

Then he punched out as hard as he could.

Chapter 258 – Receptacle of Solitude (3)

Kraaack!

Eight-Tails was hit in the face and thrown back. It might be different with a proper defense, but the creature couldn't be calm after being hit in the face. This was even more so after it had dispersed the power of six tails.

It was true that its durability was different from a human's, but this fist could even crush a rock. Eight-Tails trembled from the unfamiliar pain and stared at the worm that hurt it. Then Magic Bullet aimed like a Thunderbolt at Eight-Tails' tattered eyes.

Kyaaaak!

No matter how strong the body, the durability of the eyes was inevitably weaker than other areas. The pain was like a heated poker burning on its head. Theodore didn't slow down as he watched Eight-Tails roll around on the ground.

"Be a sword, fire of purgatory."

Theodore finished the chant for a spell. This was the purgatory sword that had cut the 4th stage Pride previously, the application of attack magic which Veronica had used in the distant past.

"Infernal Blade!"

A flame sword was summoned, distorting the surrounding air. This flaming sword could cut any substance which existed in this material system. Eight-Tails instinctively sensed the danger and raised its body.

This was 7th Circle fire magic—destructive compressed black flames. A hit in the head would be a serious injury that couldn't be easily recovered even with Eight-Tails' regenerative power. Theodore held the flaming sword and rushed toward Eight-Tails.

Hwaruruk!

Swordsmanship wasn't needed; he just swung along the path that Eight-Tails moved. The flaming sword which burned everything in its way was powerful enough by itself. If Eight-Tails tried to avoid the flames, Theodore would use magic or fists to obstruct it.

Kwarurung!

A lightning bolt struck Eight-Tails, then a mace-like fist hit its staggering body. This time, the impact struck Eight-Tails' stomach, and it spurted blood out. In fact, a human would die from this wound 10 times over, but it wasn't enough to fatally wound Eight-Tails.

Theodore closely observed the situation with a grim expression. 'This can't continue.'

Contrary to the appearance of the battle, Theodore wasn't actually dominating this fight. Eight-Tails was still alive no matter how many times it was bandaged. It would be a fatal injury if Inferno Blade destroyed its brain, but Eight-Tails knew this and had desperately stopped that from happening several times already.

Moreover, that fact that a fatal wound wasn't possible was a minor problem.

Kyaaaak!

How many times had it done this? Eight-Tails received the Magic Bullet, which Theodore had shot out, on his forearm and then rushed over.

At first, it hadn't been able to prevent the attack, but it had now grasped the timing and could counterattack. Its lack of fighting ability was quickly being filled up by fighting with Theodore and the two spirits. Eight-Tails' unknown shamanism, which was difficult to deal with, became more elaborate and precise.

Seimei also noticed Eight-Tails' ability climbing.

[Ohu, a novel technique? It pushed ahead with strength at first,

but now it is using little tricks.]

‘Tch, is that so?’

[Well, it should be able to hold on for a few more hours if it is like this. You need to hurry. I can’t help you if it isn’t shamanism.]

It was as he said. Eight-Tails’ strength wasn’t just shamanism. It was eating up martial arts and other unknown powers to become more mature. If they didn’t defeat it, they might inadvertently make Eight-Tails a perfect monster.

“Haap!” Thinking this, Theodore stretched out both fists.

Fairy Dance’s Direct Transmission.

Four Major Hidden Techniques.

Rain like an Axle.

It was a technique he hadn’t shown before. His fists ruthlessly pounded Eight-Tails’ face and upper body dozens of times in one breath.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

It was truly a shower of fists! Eight-Tails’ body faced a tremendous power and was pushed back. The power of the punch was enhanced by ether, so Theodore’s fist was stronger than a mace.

Beaten at a blurred speed, Eight-Tails’ skin crumpled, while its flesh and bones burst. Still, it was unbelievable that Eight-Tails only suffered a few broken bones. It wasn’t a serious injury, despite receiving the force of the second hidden technique.

However, instead of being amazed, Theodore frowned. He hadn’t intended to just knock Eight-Tails down with this attack. Merely pushing back his opponent with this attack was something he hadn’t experienced before.

Theodore Miller was a magician, and martial arts was just a bonus. In the end, the truth Theodore believed in was magic.

‘It was theoretically perfect, but what is this?’

In fact, there were other methods to destroy Eight-Tails. He had Abraxas which could overwhelm its regenerative power. Yet there was a reason he didn’t bring out his original magic.

Receptacle of Solitude…

Theodore had observed it a few times, and the intensity of this shamanism wasn’t something that could handle magic. As soon as Theodore used Abraxas, the borders of this place would open, and the monsters would rush out. He didn’t know about Eight-Tails, but Theodore couldn’t be assured that there weren’t other offerings.

He needed to defeat this monster without giving others a chance to escape. Coincidentally, the method was already in Theodore’s hands.

‘Forced Harmonization!’

The focus of this new magic was lightning. He had been using lightning for some time and realized some facts.

The most important thing was that the human body couldn’t perfectly handle lightning’s speed. The moment that Theodore’s body became lightning, it would lose its substance and turn into a collection of currents, with most of the force being lost in his brain.

‘This was why Marquis Fergana didn’t collapse with one blow.’

If Theodore’s blow had been true lightning, Fergana’s body would’ve shattered without a trace. Of course, Theodore’s body would also be broken, so it was a one-off magic. The loss of power was in exchange for safety.

Due to this, Theodore used lightning to accelerate his thinking speed, or when he needed high-speed movements. That was enough to make it a useful skill. However, Theodore was a magician and had embarked on developing magic that surpassed

this premise, and he had actually succeeded some time ago.

Giga Lightning X Ether.

Complete Integration: Thunder Giant.

If he had to name it a different way, it would be ‘Attract the Lightning God.’

Kururung! Kwarururung!

A giant made of golden thunderbolts emerged. The giant behind Theodore was 20 meters tall, but there was no sense of weight at all. It was a natural story. After all, lightning had no weight.

Guarrrrr....?

It wasn’t just Eight-Tails that was confused. Everyone present stopped to look at the giant. The Tiger King stopped biting at the clones, while the White Bear paused from where he was holding three clones to the ground. The sudden appearance of the golden giant was shocking.

The price for this short moment of surprise was fatal.

‘The human body can’t properly make lightning, but it can be copied with ether.’

The true power of this unique magic was that the power of ether and lightning moved into Theodore’s brain.

Kwaaaaang!

No one could see it. The giant moved at the same speed as a lightning body, and its fist punched Eight-Tails’ body.

‘Go!’

The golden giant moved.

————————————————!!!

It hit, hit, hit, and hit again. The golden giant exceeded the speed of sound, but no shock waves were created. It might be because lightning affected the air around the body. Or was it because fluid

mechanics didn't apply to the flow of electricity?

Gruesome roars rang out in succession.

The earth shook, and Eight-Tails were buried in sand as it was crushed by the fists. The destructive power was enough to ruin a body stronger than mithril. It wasn't just the shock. There was also a huge blast that burned the bones.

100—no, it surpassed 1000 hits a long time ago. Eight-Tails' body was thrown back 100 meters and forcefully stuck into solid rock. Theodore's brain could only maintain this for 10 more seconds, but it would be 10 minutes of hell for Eight-Tails.

Kyaaack!

Eight-Tails couldn't escape no matter how it struggled. A scream burst from its mouth as all its limbs were broken. Then Eight-Tails' body bent over. It had long since gathered its dispersed power. Eight-Tails wrapped itself in its eight tails and waited for the horrible punching to stop.

At that moment...

[Oh, I see. It is possible if it is this type of technique.]

'...What?' Theodore's expression subtly changed.

[Listen well. So...]

The explanation was swift. Usually, Seimei would've taken his time, but Theodore currently couldn't control the lightning god. Seimei knew the seriousness of the work and didn't act frivolously. Theodore nodded after hearing the story. He wouldn't be harmed even if this failed.

'Okay. Try it once.'

[Ohh! Leave it to this Seimei!]

At the same time, his right hand moved on its own. No, it was Theodore's lips as well as his right hand.

“Alara Kalama, Uddaka Ramaputta.”

Sanskrit, the secret words of the monks, poured out of Theodore’s mouth. Naturally, it was Seimei who was chanting the spell. He had seen the situation and suggested the use of shamanism.

“Rajagaha, anuttara sammasambodhi, vesakha!”

The thunderbolts became tangled together, and the giant’s fists shone with an unknown light as it continued to hit Eight-Tails. Then the quiet Eight-Tails started trying to struggle again. Theodore didn’t know what was going on, but it was proof that it was working!

Seimei continued to move his hands as he chanted.

It was the mantra of Breaking Evil and Manifesting Good, a spell that borrowed the power of the King of Heaven who ruled over all wrongs. Although it had a different origin from the Art of Onmyōdō which Seimei used, Seimei was a master shaman capable of using the esoteric techniques.

Indra, the king of heaven and the one who controlled thunder and lightning... His lightning strikes turned all evil spirits into dust, and they could get rid of negative emotions in the human mind.

Indeed, Eight-Tails’ tails started to scatter.

Kyaack-! Kyaaack!

Did it know that its strength was disappearing? Eight Tails didn’t stop struggling even when it was hit by the giant’s power. Eight tails went down to seven, seven tails went down to six...

The power of the Receptacle of Loneliness collapsed before this technique. After five, four... and then finally three tails were left, the black tails regained their color.

‘...Gold?’

Maybe this was its true color. Theodore closed his eyes against the brilliant light, while Seimei ended the chant.

“—Svaha!”

For a moment, a golden light covered the heavens and the earth.

Chapter 259 – Receptacle of Solitude (4)

"...Kuheook!" Feeling drained, Theodore fell to his knees. In terms of time, it had only taken 10 seconds. However, 80% of his magic power had been consumed.

He had expected the abrupt consumption of power, but he hadn't been expecting such a burden on his circles. Perhaps this incident would've been dangerous to his circles if Theodore hadn't already been conditioned once before.

'Was it a blessing in disguise? This is the way it is.' As he thought this, Theodore looked at the center of the attack.

It was scorched earth. There were no words more appropriate for the sight before him. The unique magic, Attract the Lightning God, left charred marks on the ground. The ground itself had split open like a tortoise shell, and more than one hundred meters of the soil had disappeared.

Who would believe that this was the result of two fists? It would be unbelievable for those who hadn't seen the phenomenon themselves.

"Hah, this is great. I can't see the bottom of it with my eyes?"

"Tiger King."

The Tiger King neared Theodore while watching the crater fill with dust. Eight-Tails had gathered all of its tails back to endure the lightning onslaught, so the clones that the two spirits had been fighting disappeared.

The Tiger King returned to her humanoid form and asked, "That flashy guy just before, was it someone you called?"

"Yes, it isn't a living thing."

"Is that so? You are really amazing, human male!"

Strangely, her shining eyes were like those of a beast in front of

their prey. He recalled seeing eyes similar to these somewhere before. Yes, it was at the Pirate Archipelago. It was when he had been invited by the water elemental to meet Aquilo, who had been staying in the cave. Theodore felt a sense of crisis and was going to take a step back when...

"Not yet," the White Bear opened his mouth from next to the Tiger King. "There is still life in the pit. It is weaker than before, but it has definitely survived this attack."

"There is no need to be alert now," Theodore said.

"...What does that mean?"

The two spirits looked at him with confusion, causing Theodore to laugh and raise his body. If Seimei's words were true, the creature remaining in that pit wasn't evil right now. It was due to the power of the mantra, Breaking Evil and Manifesting Good.

The great onmyōji master had performed an exorcism on Eight-Tails' body. If its soul had been tainted by evil, then its body would be destroyed. However, the fact that it was still breathing meant there was some good remaining.

Theodore shrugged and headed into the pit. "Well, let's go down and see. I can't be certain yet."

They couldn't walk down a hundred meter hole, so Theodore used magic on himself and the two spirits.

At first, the White Bear and the Tiger King wriggled at the uncomfortable feeling, but they soon got used to it and descended to the bottom of the pit at a slow pace. Light was blocked off, so it became darker the further they descended.

By the time their feet touched the ground completely, there was no light left.

Pong. Theodore used Light to create a few spheres of light. Then the two spirits looked around with a strange expression.

“Umm, this, won’t it crumble?”

“The ground is fairly solid, so it should be okay…”

The beasts who lived above ground seemed quite uncomfortable with this pit.

They could escape without any problems even if the earth poured down, so this sight of the bear and tiger acting like this was cute. Theodore watched the two spirits for a moment before recalling his purpose for coming down here.

‘Detect Life.’

His magic power spread out in concentric circles. This was magic to detect life. If the opponent used some basic tricks, signs of life wouldn’t be picked up. However, Theodore guessed that Eight-Tails had fainted or was in a weak state.

Unsurprisingly, a reaction returned from the nearest point.

“This way.”

“Ah, wait a minute!”

“Don’t move so suddenly!”

Theodore arrived first, with the two spirits behind him. The three of them saw the same thing.

“Hrmmm…”

“It isn’t evil?”

“…There are three tails.”

There was a fox that was fast asleep. It had rich golden fur and three small tails. Perhaps it could be called a three-tailed fox? However, it was said to take 300 years to grow three tails, and the fox was only a little bigger than a puppy. It seemed to have been affected by the loss of the Receptacle of Solitude’s influence.

‘Seimei.’

[Huh?]

Theodore made a stiff expression and asked Seimei, ‘Didn’t you say that this Receptacle of Solitude was made of humans? All the evil power scattered, but why is it a three-tailed fox instead of a human?’

[It is because it was already too late.]

‘Too late?’

Seimei cleared his throat and explained, [Well, it isn’t your fault. Once a person has turned into an evil spirit, they can’t return to being human again. Since it is caught up in the Receptacle of Solitude, it probably doesn’t have any memories of its life left. The only thing that remains here is the set of genes of ‘someone’ who was born again as a fox.]

‘Then the survivors…’

[There weren’t any from the start. Unfortunately, their lives were over the moment they were trapped here.]

The shaman declared calmly that this place had already been a field of the dead before Theodore even arrived. So, this wasn’t a matter for Theodore to worry about. Theodore was still unable to feel a sense of crisis, while the two spirits looked over his shoulder at the fox.

“This kid was that monster from before…? No matter how I look, it doesn’t match.”

“It is the same for me. Looking at this, it is just an ordinary spirit,” the White Bear said, carefully stroking the fox’s golden fur. “All the evil energy is gone. So, we don’t have to kill this fox cub.”

“I agree. There is no ominous feeling no matter how I look at it.”

“We must be unanimous about this matter.”

The two spirits looked at Theodore. Theodore had previously played the main role, so they couldn’t ignore him if he wanted to eliminate this fox. At this moment, the sleeping three-tailed fox

opened its eyes.

Yiiip… Yiippp…. It let out small cries.

The fox's golden body and its three tails shook. It was terrified at the sight of the two spirits. The fox couldn't escape and cried out sadly, but it soon discovered Theodore and its eyes widened. Then it rushed over to Theodore's feet and started rubbing its head against them.

"U-Uh?"

If Seimei's words were true, then this fox was just like a newly born wild animal. Then why was it acting so intimate with Theodore? No, it was more like a cub with its parents. The proof of this when it rubbed its most important tail fur against Theodore without hesitation.

[Hoh, it seems that it has recognized you as a parent.]

'Huh? Parent?'

[It is because you are the one who expelled all the evil energy from this child's body. Somehow, during the process, it imprinted on you as its parent.]

'Imprinting!' Theodore stiffened when he understood the situation. Just like how newborn birds perceived the first being they saw as their mother, the three-tailed fox felt Theodore's power inside that darkness and considered him as its parent.

Moreover, it wasn't easy for a spirit to change its perception about magic power, which was more intense than visual information.

"Hah, it can't be helped." Theodore was convinced and stretched out his hands to hug the fox. The fox felt warmth for the first time and tried to express its delighted joy. It knew the human called Theodore, but it couldn't help sniffing nervously at the spirits.

Then the exhausted three-tailed fox fell asleep again. It was still

tired from the process of fighting with the three people and then being born again. Then at this moment...

Jjejejeok.

There was the sound of something splitting apart in the ceiling. The three people looked up in surprise and saw spider web-like cracks all over the ceiling. This space, the Receptacle of Solitude, was collapsing.

Theodore grasped the situation faster than the two spirits and realized the reason, 'The Eight-Tails' power has been lost, so the axis of this space is gone!'

Usually, the axis of a separate space was a natural object or artifact, not a creature. However, a powerful creature might be the right axis for the Receptacle of Solitude.

In order to break this space, a person needed to destroy Eight-Tails. That was several times harder than breaking it from the outside. Even Theodore would've been at risk if it wasn't for the help of the two spirits. He was satisfied with this result, and they all exited the pit.

Kaaang!

Simultaneously, the darkened walls of this space shattered. Theodore suddenly looked at the two spirits with an urgent expression. They had destroyed quite a lot of creatures, but there were still a few offerings that hadn't been eaten by Eight-Tails. It would be bad if they escaped.

"Wait a minute, there are still monsters inside...!"

However, the two spirits smiled and reassured him.

"Don't worry, we have our own thoughts."

"Tiger King's words are right. You just need to rest."

Had they talked when he hadn't been present? The Tiger King and the White Bear exchanged unknown glances before roaring as

loudly as possible toward the hazy mountains.

Kuheeeeeong!

Kueeeeeong!

It wasn't to intimidate but to invite their peers. Both of them were the leaders of two groups and had the ability to direct the spirits. There weren't just bears and tigers in the Baekun Mountains. There were also birds that nested in 1,000-year-old pines and moles that dug huge burrows under the ground.

Normally, they didn't leave their habitats, but the two elder spirits could demand the help of all spirits if there was an emergency.

...Like right now.

Kkieeeek!

Kites flew out at a fearsome speed in response to the call. They were birds of prey which could fly hundreds of kilometers in an hour. Then what about the speed of a kite that had been reborn as a spirit? The speed of the kites broke through the wall of sound and was a weapon in itself. The kites made a creepy sound as they aimed at the heads and torsos of the monsters.

Indeed, they were the majestic predators of the sky.

Awoooooo!

The kites were followed by wolves. The wolves were weak compared to Tiger King and White Bear, but their great number was their advantage. Following the wolves, there came the deer, gazelles, and leopards. Animals that would never cooperate in normal ecosystems emerged from the monsters to defeat the ugly monsters.

"...Indeed, this is a splendid sight." Theodore looked down at the sight with admiration. The monsters trapped in the Receptacle of Solitude would all be forced to fall if there were so many spirits as

their opponents.

Anyway, with the subordinates of the two elder spirits around, it was easy to finish the battle.

‘Now, this is settled. There is the recovery of the dragon vein, and I still don’t know the purpose of that damn shaman… but I can’t afford to stay longer on the East Continent. My time in this place is up to here.’

Theodore stroked the three-tailed fox as he looked at the horizon with distant eyes. It had been over 100 days since he had arrived at the East Continent.

His survival was known because of Aquilo, but it was unknown what would happen in the meantime. In the northern part of the West Continent, the ‘armistice’ was easy to tear apart. So, a war could break out at any time.

“I have to hurry a bit more.”

After saying goodbye to the two spirits and leaving the Baekun Mountains, he would move to the area of Western Xia. From there, he would find a boat going to a harbor in the north. The problem of the sea currents was solved by Aquilo’s blessing, so time was the key issue.

“Let’s go back.”

Theodore wished to go home as soon as possible. He wouldn’t be one-sidedly pushed in a fight against Zest now. No, he would put an end to the nonsense this time.

Theodore’s eyes blue eyes looked purple as he gazed up at the twilight sky. His task in the Baekun Mountains was done.

Chapter 260 – Unexpected Reunion (1)

It was the very next day.

“Okay.”

Early in the morning, Theodore took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and placed both hands on the bark. It wasn’t a matter of rushing but of personality. After all, Theodore had always worked hard at solving anything ever since his days at the academy.

Theodore concentrated and opened his mouth, “I’ll ask you once again Mitra.”

[I noe!] Mitra, who was on his head, raised her arms and responded to the call. The bud gleamed through her tan hair, and the scene she was seeing started to flow into Theodore’s mind.

The flow of light spread like a spider web across the Baekun Mountains. It was a map of the dragon vein which couldn’t be seen with human eyes. That was only possible for the famous feng shui shamans who practiced feng shui for decades.

‘It is still dizzying, but I have become more used to it. Shall I go back up from the sacred tree?’

At first, he was surprised by the tingling in his brain, but now he could contemplate the flow of the dragon vein in a calm manner.

Theodore’s eyes were already following the dragon vein to a far-off axis. Like a salmon greeting the spawning season, Theodore’s consciousness flowed towards the source—the river of light that began at the Tiger King’s sacred tree.

This wasn’t an easy task, even for a warlock skilled in necromancy. However, it was rare that a person would have more experience than Theodore when it came to separating his consciousness. The experience which had accumulated unexpectedly in his body allowed him to succeed.

Shortly afterward, Theodore's consciousness reached his destination. It wasn't the mountain peak. Instead, this was where the Receptacle of Solitude had existed yesterday, the place where the dragon vein had become blocked.

Theodore's eyebrows twitched as he looked around the area.

'It is much better than yesterday... but it will take a few more years for the crooked flow to return to its original shape.'

If one were to compare it to life, the dragon vein was like the earth's blood. The dragon veins connected to the sacred trees weren't capillary blood vessels but the veins and arteries. As such, the Receptacle of Solitude was a blockage in the middle of a vein.

It was a leech-like magic that blocked the smooth flow of blood and removed the nutrients in the blood. Theodore and the two spirits had defeated Eight-Tails and removed the blockage, but it needed at least a year for the wound to recover.

Of course, a few years wasn't a long time in nature.

There was a saying that 10 years would make a difference in the world. In other words, it meant that changes wouldn't be noticed unless they were counting by periods of 10 years. By human standards, a few years was only a few minutes.

Theodore was just giving this process a little bit of help. He was binding a few disconnected flows together and cleaning the polluted land. It would've been impossible without Mitra's strength.

"...Phew, this is roughly finished."

Restoring a dragon vein wasn't an easy task. The sun was above his head by the time Theodore removed his hand from the sacred tree. It was now noon. Theodore had consumed a huge amount of mental power and just restored his breathing when a deep voice spoke out from behind him. It was White Bear, whose voice had an aged feeling to it, unlike Tiger King's.

“Is it finished?”

“Yes, I have done what I can.”

White Bear looked at the sacred tree and saw that some yellow leaves had turned green again. It was proof that the sacred tree had begun to regain its original vitality. With this, Tiger King and White Bear didn’t need to fight over one sacred tree, and the Baekun Mountains would regain the same peace from before. It was all thanks to Theodore’s help.

“I truly thank you.” White Bear bowed to Theodore without any hesitation. “It is true that I had a ray of hope… but I didn’t know you would do such a great job. I would like to thank you as a representative spirit of the Baekun Mountains.”

“It was only right.”

“Doing the right thing is hard, as I have seen over my centuries of living. I’m not ashamed to boast about your merits.”

Before the humble Theodore, White Bear brought out a bag which was attached to his waist. The size of the bag was a bit larger than a watermelon, and a good scent flowed from its cloth, despite it being firmly closed.

Theodore took it and looked at White Bear, who gestured at him to open it instead of explaining.

‘A surprise gift?’

Then something happened the moment that Theodore untied the knot of the bag…

Huuk.

A sudden refreshing scene filled his mind. It was of the recovery of the sacred tree and the connection with Mitra. Then the power that Theodore had consumed was refilled at a tremendous rate!

Theodore looked inside the bag with a surprised expression.

‘What is contained in this…?’

It was really unthinkable. Theodore's insight told him that the things inside the shabby bundle could buy a high government position if they were converted to money.

'One Hundred Year Fleeceflower Root, One Thousand Year Ginseng... I don't know the names but the rest sure aren't ordinary either!'

Shamans would risk their lives for these ingredients and yet they were grown like vegetables in the garden of the spirits? Theodore looked at White Bear with a blank expression, but White Bear just shrugged with satisfaction at Theodore's reaction.

White Bear showed no signs of regret. It was an attitude that showed he wouldn't listen if Theodore refused to accept the gift. Then another voice rang out above them, "What? You shouldn't act in such a cowardly way, Bear."

"It isn't like that. You are just late as always."

"Uhh, I arrived as quickly as possible!"

Tiger King changed from a beast to two legs and started arguing with White Bear. In the end, Tiger King knew she couldn't win the quarrel and grumbled, "I didn't expect you to prepare a gift alone. I would've gathered things too if I'd known!"

"It doesn't matter anyway. Do you think you can pick anything good?"

"Shit! I'll just do it my own way!"

Tiger King looked from White Bear to Theodore and then put a finger in her mouth. Then...

Bbuduk. There was an eerie sound as she pulled out a large canine.

"Now, take this. I already pulled it out, so you have to accept it."

"T-Thank you?"

"If you use a spell, you can summon me. It will be easy to call my

spirit if my tooth is used as a medium. Feel free to call me if my strength becomes necessary."

"Ah!" Theodore gulped as he realized the value of the gift. Tiger King was a senior spirit who had accumulated spiritual power for hundreds of years. So, the canine of the Tiger King was a catalyst symbolizing herself.

Above all, this gift was proof of her trust. If Theodore put a curse on this canine, the Tiger King would die without any resistance. Nevertheless, she didn't hesitate at all.

"I will keep it carefully." Theodore placed the fang and bag in his inventory, then he bowed to the two spirits. It wasn't a long encounter, but he couldn't forget the memories of the few days he spent with them.

"Are you leaving soon?" White Bear asked after sensing that Theodore was saying goodbye.

"Yes."

"Lee Seol... You should meet with that kid one more time."

"...Maybe, but I have already said goodbye. I don't feel like it is the last time I'll see her, so there is no need to waste time."

"I see. I'm sorry if I spoke out of turn."

In the end, Theodore bowed and stepped back with the three-tailed fox in his arms. He slowly floated up with flying magic and said his farewell, "Then this is goodbye until we meet again someday."

"Don't worry."

"Of course! Take care of your own work!"

Theodore smiled one last time at the two spirits and then flew into the distant sky.

This was a farewell to his three-month stay in the beautiful Baekun Mountains.

*

Huuuuong!

The wind blew loudly as he passed by. Although being up high at 5,000 meters above sea level was cold, Theodore was warm inside his red robe. He held the three-tailed fox tightly in his arms while flying.

'It has been a long time since I've done a high-speed flight.'

He couldn't use long-distance teleport in the East Continent since he didn't know the coordinates of places, and the Baekun Mountains was too rough to cross with a vehicle like a carriage. As a result, there were only two means of transport left to Theodore—running on two legs or using magic.

It would be faster to run on two legs if it were flat ground, but flying was more efficient in the mountains. There were no obstacles, so there was less consumption of power and he could proceed in a straight line.

How long had it been since he had traveled as a magician? Theodore felt a subtle emotion as he realized he had been living as a martial artist instead of a magician. He looked down at the landscape which was passing by at a rapid pace.

'Is it okay if I go home like this?'

Despite the success of these challenges, the restoration of the Baekun Mountains and the integration of the Fairy Dance Lee Family, the fundamental problems had yet to be solved.

The royal family of the empire that was dominated by Lust of the Seven Sins, and the identity of the shaman who had twisted the dragon vein to create the Receptacle of Solitude... If Theodore dug at it with earnest, these remaining problems were like overwhelming mountains.

"...No, not yet. I can't solve these problems with my level of strength yet."

Theodore gave up on entering this labyrinth. He didn't want to be deeply involved in the problems of other kingdoms, and he was worried about Meltor. Moreover, he recalled the advice Seimei had offered him.

[If you go to the East Continent, never approach the capital at the center. If you have to go, only try it after you have reached full transcendence.]

If he had to guess, full transcendence meant a minimum of eight circles, maybe nine. If Seimei's vigilance was against Lust, who had created her children over thousands of years, then this advice wasn't at all exaggerated. In the great empire of the East Continent, there would be a strong existence that Theodore wouldn't be able to defeat.

As such, Theodore determined that it was time to step down here. He was in deep thought as he looked down at the ground from the sky. It was to find the lights of a village to stay in.

"Oh, there's some." Soon after, Theodore found some lights and slowly dropped to the ground. He had enough strength to continue overnight, but it would take him a week to reach Western Xia anyway. There was no meaning in hurrying from the beginning.

...That was, if he hadn't heard a voice.

「I've found you! Indeed, you were in the East Continent!」

"Ack!" Theodore heard something in his head and fell to the ground in an unseemly manner. It was commendable that he protected the three-tailed fox even as he fell. Fortunately, his speed had dropped, so it wasn't a big shock.

"W-What? That voice just now?"

Someone answered Theodore's reflexive question,「 What? Is it too much for me to look for you, Boy? 」

"This voice... Don't tell me..."

It was a voice from his memories. There was a clear mental wave from a far distance as he recalled the owner of the liquid-like voice. She was the notorious tyrant of the ocean, the ruler of the eastern seas...

'Aquilo!'

「 You took too long to notice. How hateful. 」

The sea dragon Aquilo was talking inside his head.

Chapter 261 – Unexpected Reunion (2)

“Ah, no. How on earth…?”

「Boy, that is what I want to ask. How did you end up in the East Continent? 」

Unlike Theodore who was stunned silent, Aquilo sounded quite excited.

Hadn’t she come to this place hoping to find him? If it was Aquilo, it couldn’t be a coincidence. Immediately after Theodore clashed with Zest Speitem in the Sipoto wilderness, the dimensional movement had occurred, leaving no traces in the dust.

It was impossible for navigation magic to have kept track of his actions.

「Hey, I’m not joking. Do you know how much I suffered? I traveled from the north to the south and all over the West Continent. It made me want to quit. 」

However, Aquilo was connected to Theodore with blood. So, it was possible for her to pinpoint Theodore’s location anywhere in the continent, since their mental connection could go beyond a thousand kilometers.

It was naturally Meltor’s king and the tower masters who had seen the possibilities involved in this.

“Meltor commissioned you to look for me.”

「Correct,」 Aquilo confirmed. Then she continued to explain in a cheerful tone, 「At first I thought it would be easy, but it wasn’t. I couldn’t feel you no matter where I looked in the West Continent. Later, I looked for you around the outskirts of the West Continent and felt something strange. 」

“What?”

「 Even if I couldn’t connect to you, there was a reaction as I got closer. So, I entered the magic boundary. 」

Theodore responded to the unexpected words, “Magic… boundary.”

Magic Boundary was a place that magicians and warlocks often called the Abyss. It was a ‘hole’ in the material system which was governed by natural laws, and it was referred to as a space where life couldn’t survive.

The Abyss was a place where Satomer had spent several years trying to pass through. According to Aquilo, her blood connection with Theodore was blurred even in that place.

「But I couldn’t find you, so I changed my thoughts. ‘The boy isn’t in the West Continent.’ 」

“…So, you came to the East Continent. Great.”

Theodore admired it. The reasoning itself was surprising, but it wasn’t that inconceivable for Aquilo, who could travel anywhere using the sea. It was an accessible distance for her. The proof of this was that Aquilo had found Theodore before anyone else, and it also indicated that she was the right person for this search mission.

「Now, will you call me to where you are? I have been wandering for over a month, so I don’t want to move any further on my feet. 」

“I understand. Wait for an hour.”

It sounded like childish grumbling, but Theodore couldn’t refuse Aquilo’s request.

However, summoning an adult dragon required considerable preparation. Theodore was able to offset most of the burden with the contract, but it was his previous experience with summoning Aquilo that greatly shortened the required preparation. Otherwise, it would take him half a day to complete this magic circle.

Then exactly one hour later…

Flash!

The magic circle, which Theodore had drawn on the outskirts of the village, flashed with a blue light. The dark sky was brightened, and the silhouette of a woman appeared. The curves of her body were eye-catching even in the dim lighting.

The presence she emitted couldn't be compared to a human's. Unlike the last time they met, she currently wore a blue robe, which revealed the sea dragon's beautiful appearance.

"It has been a while, Boy! Although, it was a very short time for me."

"I'm glad to see you, Aquilo."

How many months had it been? The merciless tyrant of the sea gave a pleasant greeting and stretched out her hand. For a dragon who lived for thousands of years, a period of three months was just like three hours or three days to a human.

Theodore grasped her hand. It was cool and had a soft texture. Theodore might've felt embarrassed if it wasn't for his recent experience with Lust.

"Hrmm..." However, Aquilo noticed the difference and instantly narrowed her eyes. Theodore didn't know why, but he felt a chill at this moment. Then he removed his hand as the three-tailed fox emerged from his chest.

Kkiyoung?

"Oh?" The dragon's eyes looked the fox up and down. "What is that fox? Was it reborn like this?"

"In the East, it is called a spirit."

"It is much cuter than other kids. Besides, it has quite a lot of strength for a kid? It may be able to grow into a sacred creature."

Yiippp...

Aquilo stroked the fur of the frightened three-tailed fox and

looked at its inner strength.

A dragon's eyes had excellent insight.

The fox had become Eight-Tails for a while due to the Receptacle of Solitude, and some remnants of Eight-Tails still remained. It had consumed a tremendous amount of power during the struggle with Theodore and the two spirits, but if it kept growing over the next hundred years, it might become a nine-tailed fox.

However, Theodore turned his attention to another topic.

'It will take at least 700 years, so I don't think it matters.'

Unless special measures were taken, even a magician who reached the 8th circle barely lived beyond 300 years. 700 years was only achievable for the legendary 9th circle magicians or by becoming a high ranking undead.

Theodore roughly finished the greeting with Aquilo and said, "Let's talk more in the village. How about it?"

"Okay, I want to rest on land for the first time in a while."

"Ah, excuse me for a moment."

"Yes?"

Before Aquilo could ask about what Theodore meant, one of his hands hit her forehead. Aquilo froze in place. Theodore's magic power spread out from the point where he touched her. It was simple magic that overlaid the target with a magic illusion.

"Okay, all done."

The beautiful Aquilo now looked like an ordinary village girl. Aquilo belatedly realized the situation. "Hrmm, you don't want me to show my beauty to others? Has the boy become a man?"

"Well, something like that. There will be no man anywhere who won't stare if they see you."

"..."

“Then let’s go. The village is right in front of us, so we can walk there.”

As Aquilo remained quiet, Theodore started walking toward the lights in the west. She followed behind him and muttered in a low voice, “…Wow, it was a bit dangerous just before.”

It was fortunate that it was dark because Aquilo’s pale skin couldn’t hide her agitation.

*

The two people changed their appearances with illusion magic and quietly entered the village. The village wasn’t very large, but it wasn’t bad since there was an inn for visitors to stay in. Theodore booked two rooms with a few silver coins and sat down at the same table as Aquilo.

“Sigh, then where should I begin?” Aquilo had a pipe in her mouth as always.

“I have a lot I want to ask, but… tell me about what happened to the two northern powers after I disappeared.”

“Okay. As you have guessed, the king and tower masters of Meltor know about your survival thanks to me. The other side isn’t aware of it even now. So, if the incident of your attack is publicized, a war might break out.”

“…Perhaps.” Some might see it as him being arrogant, but Theodore calculated his value and nodded calmly.

A person who created the alliance with Elvenheim and who had a blood contract with Aquilo. Furthermore, there was news that a 7th Circle magician had been attacked by a sword master from the enemy? If it hadn’t been for Aquilo, Meltor would’ve accepted Theodore’s death as a fact.

There was only one thing which could start from publicizing this incident—the recurrence of war during the armistice!

It was clear that the wrath of the kingdom that had lost its hero wouldn't stop until someone paid for it.

Additionally, Andras had lost their 4th, 6th, and 7th Swords, so their power was now much comparable to Meltor's. If a fire ignited at this point between the two northern powers, they would bite at each other until only one side was left.

'Win or lose, both sides will be damaged.'

In other words, both sides were boiling over. There were also third forces awaiting for the sinking of the two superpowers. Immediately after victory was decided, the allied forces of the central part of the continent could then avoid the north.

Andras' inner thoughts were unknown, but the upper hierarchy of Meltor wanted to avoid this situation.

"Andras has remained unexpectedly silent. According to the masked man in white, it was an inside conflict? It is said that the emperor wants to continue the truce, while the crown prince's faction wants a confrontation."

"Hmm, the crown prince?"

The crown prince had been the one who sent one of the empire's Seven Swords as a consumable item, and he had also caused Andras to lose a god sword. Theodore only guessed these, but he was convinced by Aquilo's words. The prince was behind the assassination attempt on Theodore and was eager for the unification of the northern powers.

He clenched his fists and remembered the prince's name.

"Oh, and this is my question," Aquilo added.

Then at this moment, she raised two fingers and asked him, "Boy, did you stop the number 2?"

"Um."

To be exact, it had been the senior demon Magnus whom he had

summoned, but Theodore couldn't say that. However, Aquilo was already convinced by his reaction. It was clear that Theodore was involved.

"I knew it. The 2nd Sword can be called the trump card of the crown prince, but he didn't appear in this situation. It makes sense now."

Theodore listened to Aquilo's words and opened his mouth, "The 2nd Sword is the crown prince's trump card…"

"The 1st Sword belongs to the emperor. I determined this through the process of elimination, but he really didn't say a word at the conference."

"Wait a minute, what are you talking about now?" Theodore hurriedly asked as he heard some words that couldn't be overlooked. Apart from discussing the truce, the relationship between the two northern powers had continued for centuries without any exchanges.

The ambassador had come to Meltor a few years ago, and now there had been another meeting of the northern powers during the three months he had been gone?

"This is my way of talking. Well, isn't it good?" Aquilo shrugged before speaking again, "It was around a month before I left for the East Continent. In the central border area of the north, I participated in a secret meeting with Red. It was clear they wanted to use me, but I didn't mind."

It was the habit of a blue dragon to not move if there was no price, but the situation would change if it was for their own interests. As such, Kurt III hadn't missed this opportunity.

Veronica and Aquilo were equivalent to three ordinary masters. She wouldn't intervene in the conflict between nations, but if Andras attacked first, she could attack in the name of self-defense. It had been a trap from Meltor's side, and Aquilo had gone despite

knowing all of this.

“The biggest problem wasn’t me, but the other person.”

“Other person?”

Aquilo laughed ominously. “Only the 1st Sword and the crown prince came to the meeting. The 2nd Sword didn’t appear. Everyone knew what he was doing, but the crown prince tried to provoke a fight.”

“Then?”

“It was a really sad provocation. Perhaps it was because he said you died a dog’s death in a poor kingdom? Someone was rattled by those words.”

Theodore started sweating as he realized what she meant. Aquilo would’ve ignored the provocation, so who else at the meeting would have responded?

“It seems like you’ve guessed it? That’s right. In the end, Red launched a preemptive attack.”

It was truly Veronica, who didn’t betray expectations.

Chapter 262 – Unexpected Reunion (3)

Theodore looked calmly at the situation before crying out once again, "…This is a ridiculously serious situation!"

The Magic Kingdom, Meltor, was proud of its tower masters, and amongst them, Tower Master Veronica was the strongest and most famous. She was a monster who could be compared with the 1st and 2nd Swords of the empire.

Veronica didn't have the physical weakness of a magician since she had inherited the blood of a red dragon. A preemptive attack from the strongest person in Meltor was nothing short of declaring a war on the whole empire.

It wouldn't be strange if a war had started immediately on the spot!

Furthermore, the Andras Empire had also sent their strongest person, the 1st Sword.

If the strongest representatives of Meltor and Andras were to fight, there would be no delaying the war any longer. Either Veronica or the 1st Sword would die, collapsing the balance of power and causing the nations to move.

"Well, don't get too excited and listen until the end." However, Aquilo still had a relaxed expression and started to elaborate on the circumstances of that time. "It was a fairly good surprise, but neither one of them died. Apart from the 1st Sword, there was also that crown prince? He used his strange ability. It is either Distortion, Interference, or Refraction."

"Aura Ability….!"

"Anyway. Regardless of whether he knew that Red would react to that provocation, the prince hastily stepped forward. Then—"

*

Kwaang!

Prince Fermut was hit in the face, giving him a nosebleed and blowing him away. If he hadn't defended with a high-density layer of aura, he would've been killed by the shock. The space distorted from mere physical force!

Perhaps he should be proud of surviving Veronica's blow. However, Fermut didn't agree with this opinion.

"You damn bit...! How dare you touch this body?! You human and dragon mongrel!"

Aside from his father, who was the emperor, everyone had to act respectfully in front of Fermut. It wasn't just because of Fermut's high rank. He was the next emperor who had the power to become the empire's 3rd Sword. Only the 1st and 2nd Swords were above him.

When did such a valuable body last shed blood? Fermut's eyes filled with killing intent as he looked at his nose that was crooked from the hit.

"—You were lucky." Veronica didn't pay attention to him at all, as she shook the blood off her fist. "I unconsciously moved my fist. You should've flown off nicely if I hit you properly. I'm sorry."

It was true. Fermut's mouth had been moving, and before Veronica realized it, she was already punching him. It was like hitting a fly that was right in front of her.

So, of course, Fermut and the 1st Sword hadn't been able to respond in time. She hadn't had a purpose, and her punch had been the embodiment of 'absence of self', which made it undetected. It probably would've been blocked if she had been planning to kill him.

In any case, it didn't matter. Veronica felt regretful that her attack had failed to kill Fermut. Both rationality and instinct supported her thought that Fermut was the one who had ordered

Theodore's assassination.

"I thought I should leave it to the boy to kill you, but... now I can't endure it anymore. I'll kill you here."

"What nonsense are you saying...?"

Shortly after that...

Huk.

The space three centimeters in front of Fermut's face heated up. If someone hadn't pulled on his clothes, his head would've been blown off. His instincts cried out one beat too late. He absolutely shouldn't fight this monster.

As the flame sword heated up the space around her body, the greatest magician of Meltor faced her enemy. "Do you intend to interrupt, 1st Sword?"

"...I don't want to be hostile to you here." With dark hair and green eyes like evergreen plants, he was a swordsman who looked to be in his 30s despite having been active for over half a century.

He was the empire's 1st Sword, Crowd von Russell. In this era where the grandmasters had disappeared, he was the man who could be called the strongest swordsman on this continent.

"This isn't the place to fight. How about we end today's talks here since they aren't working out?"

"What? Sir Russell! This is too shameful!" Fermut was quicker than Veronica in protesting the proposal. "This mongrel threatened a prince of the Andras Empire, this Fermut! It is also the meeting where there is a tacit promise of non-aggression! We can't leave this insult alone...!"

"Your Highness," Crowd von Russell cut off Fermut's enraged voice. He then bowed politely and whispered at a volume which couldn't be heard by the two people from Meltor, "If you fight here, both of us will die. If you don't understand the situation, just

follow me.”

“…Huh?”

“You can’t tell?”

Crowd von Russell looked over at Aquilo, who was next to Veronica.

Realizing the meaning of his gaze, Aquilo gave an amused smile. ‘I used a camouflage, but I guess my identity was found out. Does he think it is burdensome to deal with me and Red at the same time?’

The swordsman judged that Aquilo was a considerable monster. She didn’t have pure power like Veronica, but her strength was the pursuit of ‘depth.’ Despite being far behind Veronica in a one-on-one fight, Aquilo was a wild card capable of killing a giant.

If Veronica were here alone or with the White Tower Master, Crowd would’ve chosen to fight here. However, he couldn’t win against both Veronica and Aquilo.

It might be different if the 2nd Sword had accompanied him, since Prince Fermut hadn’t reached the same level as them yet. However, fortunately, Crowd saw that Aquilo wasn’t active, so there was room to retreat.

Indeed, Crowd’s judgment was correct.

“…Tch,” Veronica clicked her tongue when she realized the situation.

Aquilo enjoyed seeing Veronica’s frustrated expression and whispered in her ear, “I have no intention of attacking people who are running away. What will you do? I might consider it if the boy was in my arms. But of course, I will refuse if you ask me.”

“Damn pirate, shut up.”

It was a delicate situation. Meltor would dominate if Aquilo joined in, but it would be disadvantageous if she didn’t. Veronica

was torn by the intervention of the 1st Sword and didn't know what to do.

However, she didn't want to just let them go. She looked at Fermut with murderous intent and worried about the situation for a moment before coming up with a compromise. "Hey, number 1."

"What is it?"

"Get that piece of shit away from me before I change my mind. I won't chase you."

"I will do so." Crowd understood the meaning of Veronica's words and turned to retreat. In some ways, this result could be called his victory. Andras was in a disadvantageous situation, yet Meltor couldn't remove the two people despite their superior firepower. It was also a bonus that they noticed the existence of Aquilo.

"...Huh?" Therefore, Crowd was one beat delayed in realizing it. Veronica said she wouldn't chase them, but she never said she wouldn't attack. The sword masters, who were wide open targets, were subjected to a merciless magic bombardment.

——————————————!!!

The Infernal Blade struck the ground, causing a cause explosion. This was followed by a severe firestorm which melted the ground. The explosion burst outward before disappearing.

Clouds in the distant sky were torn apart, while some sandworms sleeping deep in the ground ended up dead. A few birds that unfortunately looked down were blinded. If they were lucky, they would die before struggling with the pain.

It was truly a transcendent destruction. The grassland, where butterflies had been flying peacefully, had now changed into a hell-like scenery. The land was burned to a depth of a few hundred meters and would only recover after centuries. This damage was produced by the peak of the most destructive magic attribute.

The scale of the damage was proof of Veronica's destructive power.

"Sigh, couldn't you have warned me? You savage," Aquilo, who had quickly flown into the sky, grumbled as she looked at the distant horizon. "Besides, those guys avoided the attack surprisingly quite well."

For dragons, extended long-distance vision was merely a part of their senses. As such, Aquilo noticed that the two sword masters who had escaped far away weren't injured at all.

Veronica's robes flapped as she agreed, "I can't kill them anyway. If the 1st Sword could be hit by a surprise attack like this, the war would've already been over. It would be strange if it was effective."

"Then why did you attack while knowing this?"

"I just wanted to vent my anger. I didn't want to just sit down and do nothing like you."

After pricking Aquilo with her words, Veronica sighed as she stared at a distant place. She had wanted to kill one person in this place but missed her chance because the 1st Sword moved so fast.

As such, the talks ended without any conclusions.

*

"Crazy." Theodore grabbed his head as he listened to Aquilo's words.

It was fortunate that Veronica hadn't gotten hurt in the talks, but it couldn't be called a positive end to the meeting. The northern powers had taken a step toward a war. No, it happened a month ago, so there was a possibility that the war had already begun. Theodore's mind went blank at the news.

Aquilo smiled at him and enjoyed the funny sight. She might not always show it, but Aquilo was essentially an evil dragon. She was someone who accepted the suffering and agonies of mortals.

Despite her goodwill toward him, she enjoyed the sight of Theodore's agitation.

"...Aquilo." A few minutes of silence passed by before he spoke.

During this period of time which no one had counted as to how long had passed, Theodore raised his head. Aquilo saw his hardened eyes and laughed, "Yes. Do you have something to ask this evil dragon, Boy?"

For her, Theodore was a hero. He had used Aquilo's power to dismantle the Pirate Archipelago, rather than use it for his own private desires. Originally, he should oppose Aquilo, who existed as an evil dragon.

Yet, a just hero was currently asking an evil dragon for help. This situation caused a thrill to run down Aquilo's spine. Without knowing her wicked thoughts, Theodore said, "I will pay anything. Please let me borrow your strength and take me back to Meltor via the shortest path."

"Any...thing?" Aquilo bit the pipe in her hand pervertedly and licked her lips.

Chapter 263 – The Die is Cast (1)

For those who lived over 100 years, how long and how short was a month? If scholars from all over the world gathered to discuss it, they wouldn't be able to reach a conclusion.

This was because it was subjective and varied depending on the person.

Just like how a man giving a serenade could feel like a few seconds was a few years, a person reading an interesting book could feel like an hour was just a few minutes. A month could change a person's life, or it could pass with nothing happening.

Therefore, an objective measurement was needed if one wanted to measure time.

What happened in a month which could be measured? Without knowing this, the seriousness of time couldn't be discussed.

From this point of view, it could be said that the last month had been a once-in-a-century turning point for the Meltor Kingdom. Elvenheim had broken their neutrality, there had been the birth of a new master, as well as the deaths of three of the Seven Swords... And finally, there had also been the secret talks which Veronica had been sent to.

Prince Fermut's taunts...

The 2nd Sword who hadn't been seen recently...

After deliberating on these circumstances, Meltor's leaders reached a conclusion.

"Your Majesty! This is an opportunity!" The minister of the military, Robert Alpenheimer stepped up and gave his opinion. "If the enemy's power is superior to ours, there is no way the people of Andras will step back first! It is finally time for us to unify the Northern Continent! This is a chance to destroy our enemy!"

“Lower your voice, Minister,” the minister of domestic affairs, Jerome Violeta, spoke against him. “The enemy’s attitude is moderate, so we can’t guarantee our superiority. Most of all, the magic towers haven’t recovered from the damage received from that convoy mission a few years ago. Even if it is true that Andras’ power has weakened, we aren’t necessarily stronger.”

It was a reasonable point. The 1st Sword had stood behind the emperor, who wanted a continuation of the truce. There was a good chance that Andras had retreated for political reasons. However, Robert didn’t accept this and yelled, “This weakness is why the north can’t escape the turmoil of war, even after hundreds of years!”

“It is better than acting hastily and dying!”

“What?”

As usual, the argument between the two people intensified. Then the quietly listening Kurt raised a hand. After all, it was the role of a king to make conclusions and direct the mood of the meeting.

Simultaneously, the meeting room in the royal palace sank into silence. The two ministers, striving to outdo each other, paled and looked at Kurt.

“Listen carefully,” Kurt rebuked them. Then he closed his eyes and said, “White Tower Master, report.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” A man emerged in an empty space.

The ghostly master of the white tower, Orta, appeared in the middle of the meeting room. It was a surprising sight, but the people assembled here couldn’t be surprised by it anymore. They had all guessed why Orta was appearing at this point, so all of them had calm expressions.

“The 2nd Sword Zest Speitem. I will report on his status.”

“Um.”

The name which emerged from Orta's mouth increased the tension in the meeting room. Zest Speitem, along with Crowd von Russell, was one of Andras' strongest swordsmen. To think that Orta had been investigating him?

"I tracked the Cardinal Antonio, who secretly departed from Lairon and entered Belfort, Andras' capital. I couldn't follow him until the center, but I discovered that his carriage reached the mansion known to be the 2nd Sword's residence."

"Cardinal."

He was the owner of a healing ability. Unlike magic power, divine power didn't cause any backlash from aura. Rather, it intensified aura's inherent vitality, so divine power users had been able to establish an intimate relationship with aura users since a long time ago.

Additionally, the Lairon priests were hostile to Meltor. So, there was only one reason to call the cardinal who was located in the middle of the Central Continent.

"Maybe our hero isn't the only one who needs to recover."

The empire's 2nd Sword, Zest Speitem, was injured! If it was necessary to call a cardinal, it meant he wasn't in a state which could be fixed with a healing potion.

It was a curse which couldn't be overcome with a sword master's self-healing ability, or it was an injury which hadn't healed after three months. Nobody could've thought that Theodore had summoned a high-ranking demon, but they were certain that the cause of the injury was Zest's fight against Theodore.

"Your Majesty." There was silence for a moment before Jerome opened his mouth.

Kurt nodded once.

Then Jerome continued, "I will withdraw what I said earlier. Please declare war as Robert suggested!"

“Hrmm.” Kurt III cupped his chin with an interested expression and indicated for Jerome to explain.

Robert’s face was a bonus, since his eyes were wide with shock.

“Meltor and Andras. In both places, there are two absolutely strong people who hold the balance of the battlefield. Red Tower Master and Blue Tower Master, and the 1st and 2nd Swords. So far, we were able to achieve equilibrium because all of them are present.”

“It isn’t the case now?”

“Yes. The 2nd Sword can’t come to the battlefield, so it is a chance for Meltor. And…” Jerome spoke with a sorrowful expression, “If we miss this chance because of an indecisive attitude… I—no, we will be failing Captain Theodore!”

“…I see.”

Jerome’s cry stimulated everyone’s enthusiasm. Determination filled their faces as everyone in the meeting room stared at a certain empty space. The nobles weren’t warriors or magicians. They didn’t have the attitude of warriors, but there was clearly an atmosphere of going to war which filled this space.

“Okay.” On behalf of their will, the king of the magic kingdom rose from his seat. “I will move to destroy the armistice. From now on, we will declare a wartime situation throughout the kingdom, started from Mana-vil Capital. We will set up three vanguard units to preemptively attack the three border areas.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

“White Tower Master, immediately call all the tower masters together. And—”

Holding the king’s scepter firmly in hand, Kurt finally took a step toward the war that was approaching him.

“Call Veronica.”

*

Exactly one week passed by.

Meltor declared the dismissal of the armistice agreement without any notice, and Andras accepted it without raising an objection. This was proof that they were prepared for war at any time. Of course, even assuming that was true, war wasn't something which could be started in a short period of time. It took a good month to convene the reserve soldiers and organize the troops.

Therefore, the border zone wasn't fully equipped yet. However, it did exist in this world—a transcendent being that could break down a fortress and annihilate thousands of soldiers. The movements of a master couldn't be determined with common sense.

"...It is dreary."

There was a magician floating in the sky, looking down at the lights that seemed like fireflies. Crimson hair and red robes...

Her appearance and clothing seemed to burn in the darkness as Veronica looked down at the empire's fortress which would soon become ashes.

"I only want to attack military facilities, but I'll have to kill them all anyway. At the very least, there are no 'innocent people' in this part of the north. You are soldiers that will someday become enemies if left alive. You have always done the same time, so don't blame me."

Of course, there wasn't a reply. It was pointless complaining to the distant ground, so she raised a hand. In fact, she wasn't in a bad mood. Rather, joy was bubbling up inside her. The blood of a red dragon, which loved fighting and bloodshed, woke up inside her.

However, she didn't accept that instinct. Veronica had been raised as a human and a magician, so she couldn't afford to accept

it. As such, she had to hurry before this dirty feeling got worse.

“Still, I will only feel sick for a short while.”

Veronica’s eight circles rotated, and the dark sky reddened.

It was a natural phenomenon where magic power distorted the environment.

She had only been a little stronger than others in arm wrestling as a child, but after reaching the 8th circle, her blood had become stronger. She might not be a pure blood, but it wasn’t hard to get close to a limitless dragon’s heart.

A rain of destruction poured down from the burning sky.

The steel gates melted.

The solid walls collapsed.

The air had long been turned into a deadly poison.

The wind was scattered by the heat, and those on the ground struggled to breathe.

In the East, it would be called fire hell.

It was a hell where an unquenchable fire burned and even the winds would burn the body. Just five minutes after Veronica started the bombardment, this city that awaited the opening of a war was effortlessly turned into hell.

A siege defense had no meaning. The soldiers who had trained for a decade weren’t even scarecrows. Screaming lips turned to charcoal, and the ashes of people soon scattered.

“—Wow, is she the ‘Witch of Heat?”

There was one survivor in that hell.

“But she isn’t an opponent I can face. If she is as annoying as Zest says, I will just be turned into bloodstains.”

There was a spear close to 2 meters long on the survivor’s back. The curves of their body showed that this person was a woman.

Her face wasn’t visible because of the heat haze, but her voice didn’t sound old.

She was the empire’s 5th Sword, Delkur of the ‘Shadows.’

Delkur had come to this city for the purpose of defending the border, but the devastating scene happening before her wasn’t something she could stop. Apart from her boiling fighting spirit, her sword master’s instincts told her that this wasn’t an opponent she could win against.

However, Delkur smiled as she gazed up at the distant sky. “Is this winning? Putting the strongest card at this weak place, it allows for an easy victory.”

Delkur’s red eyes shone as she spoke meaningful words, “But what about elsewhere?”

Chapter 264 – The Die is Cast (2)

Rutben Citadel, a city in the furthermost eastern part of the empire, was already a fortified city.

Its walls, which were over 40 meters tall, had been increasing steadily over the centuries. They even had anti-magic barriers and anti-magic measures like magic bombs. Meltor had tried to destroy them numerous times in the past, but they had taken heavy damage and had to retreat.

However, this time, uninvited guests were visiting Rutben.

A few hundred meters away from the walls, there were shadows of people moving in the darkness. There were a total of 10 magicians, including the person in the lead.

It was the elite army of the white tower, directly trained and commanded by White Tower Master Orta who led the way in a black mask. Due to their nature as secret agents whose identities must be concealed, all of them were wearing masks like Orta's on their faces.

–Stop. Orta suddenly stopped at where he was moving ahead of the party. –From here onward, move while maintaining your shields. We are 200 meters away from Rutben's walls and watchtowers, so your magic power can't leak out. If you can't get past the walls and you get caught, don't wait for my instructions and just try to escape first.

The remaining magicians nodded, while Orta made an unknown hand gesture and muttered a spell.

Perhaps it was his own unique magic.

The defense of Rutben, which Andras had set as its outpost, was truly exquisite. Without Orta, even the elite agents of the white tower would be detected before getting past one layer of the wall, and they were likely to be killed immediately.

Wuuong…

After a while, a hemispherical haze appeared around Orta's body and concealed the rest of the magicians.

–Go.

The 10 magicians stepped forward, secretly moving close to the walls which would crush even ants.

This was the role of the white tower on the battlefield.

If Veronica was the brutal force that could devastate an army, then the white tower magicians were the ones who would cut the enemies' throats from behind. They were like the rats who hid in the crack of a sturdy wall or like a hole which could break a thick wall regardless of its size.

Their aim was to assassinate Rutben's general and elite knights. If a fortified city lost their chain of command, they would be defenseless against senior magicians. It was a tactic which hadn't succeeded a few times in the past war, but it had given Meltor a considerable amount of experience.

Seuk.

The moment they arrived at the bottom of the wall, Orta got the attention of the other magicians with his hand. Even if their bodies were trained, it was impossible for them to climb a wall that was 40 meters tall.

So, Orta came directly to Rutben. He activated his magic and continued to block all traces of their presence. That was impossible for a normal magician to do, but this magic was possible for Orta. Soon after, the ten magicians followed him into the air.

'Ohh…! There is no alarm from Rutben…'

'As expected of the tower master. There is no end to what he can do.'

'It would be ridiculous for Andras as well.'

Of course, no words emerged from their mouths, but these feelings flowed from under their masks.

The impregnable fortress, Rutben Citadel…

For the first time in history, they had the opportunity to break it. Even the calm agents couldn't help being excited.

Nevertheless, the elite were the elite. They gradually calmed their minds and recovered their blank expressions once they crossed two layers of the wall. Their heads were cold by the time they crossed three layers. Private feelings were mere obstacles to the mission's performance.

The 10 pairs of feet touched the ground and advanced a further 200 meters.

They were invisible ghosts who infiltrated without a sound. The unit that was codenamed 'Phantom' by Andras had finally infiltrated the fortified city!

–Assassinate the lord first. After that, we will neutralize the military officers, knights, and communication facilities. Don't be so relieved just because we've crossed the wall. If it was this easy, the war would've ended earlier.

The nine people each laid a hand on their chest. It was a hand signal which meant 'agreement.' Orta was satisfied by the sight and headed toward a mansion in the distance. It was Rutben Castle which didn't have a big reputation. As long as they paid attention to the alarm in the bedroom, it would be child's play to take the lord's life.

They ran past a security checkpoint and moved through the empty city in the middle of the night. From the outskirts of the city to the lord's residence—

"Hmm?" Orta thought that something was strange. It wasn't strange that no alarm rang due to his magic, but…

The odd thing was inside Rutben.

‘So far, we haven’t seen a single patrol…?’

Orta hated to admit it, but Andras was strong. Their knights and soldiers were well trained and disciplined.

Rutben was one of the main fortresses of Andras. There was nothing weird about having patrols in five-minute intervals at the outskirts of the city. However, it was strange that they never encountered a patrolling party despite being close to the lord’s residence.

Orta became wary and hastily gave a command, –All members, pull…

No, he was trying to give a command.

“You noticed quickly, Rat.” A man emerged from thin air.

“Avoid it!” Orta shouted instinctively, but he couldn’t be faster than the blade.

A blood-red aura appeared.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

However, that wasn’t the orbit of the sword. Then the aura started to distort like a mirage. From a straight line to a curve, a curve to a straight line… The aura distorted the air it moved through.

“Kuk, this ability is probably…?” The panicked Orta reacted quickly.

He took two steps away with space magic and was able to escape from the aura. However, the other magicians couldn’t follow him.

Chwaaaak!

Three heads soared, and a few limbs fell down.

“Kuaaaaak!”

“There was something so strange?”

“Ugh, m-my arm…!”

Three people died, and four were seriously injured. There were only two people who avoided the attack without any injuries. However, the opponent seemed dissatisfied with this horror.

“You are doing quite well, Meltor’s rats. I didn’t expect to only kill three people.”

“…You.” Orta gritted his teeth as he recognized the identity of the enemy. It wasn’t unexpected, but this situation was a bit dangerous.

The 2nd Sword, Zest, was in a state where he couldn’t move because of a serious injury.

The 1st Sword couldn’t move from the capital because he needed to defend the emperor and Belfort. If so, there were only two people who could appear in Rutben. The 5th and 3rd Swords, both of whom had aura abilities that Orta couldn’t easily deal with.

In particular, the man before him was the worst opponent for a space magician. The man was Andras’ Crown Prince, Fermut, and the attack just then was the manifestation of the ability to bend space.

Refraction or distortion…

Orta judged that it was closer to the former.

‘If he gets close, I will die. It might be different if he is alone, but…’

There were signs of other people approaching after Fermut emerged. The presence indicated that they were the Shadow Knights, the Andras Empire’s special forces who sneaked around in the shadows.

It would be difficult to handle such a large number of enemies with injured men. As such, it was time for Orta and his men to retreat. However, the moment Orta was about to give up on his mission without hesitation, Fermut moved.

“Don’t move without my permission, Dog.”

A red sword moved through the air.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

Sleeping Moon.

At first glance, it seemed like a false move, but Orta’s face soon hardened like wax. He could feel the space connecting with his senses.

The strings of the connected world were like a net around him, threatening to cut him. Under these circumstances, closing himself off in another space or a shield wouldn’t work properly.

“Do you know that this place is set for your death?” Fermut looked at them impatiently, before turning to look at the shadows surrounding them.

It was a signal that they should move.

Confronted with this fate, Orta laughed under his mask. “You’ve put in quite a lot of effort. Are you mad about being hit by the Red Tower Master? You must be afraid to compete with her again. It seems like this was a trap to catch me from the beginning.”

“—You.”

“Did I hit the nail on the head? Pretending to be so great, but your intentions are just petty.”

A sound suddenly rang out from somewhere.

“…This dog is barking without being aware of who I am.” Fermut gripped the sword in his hand, as his arrogant face changed into a blank one. However, he was only cold on the surface. His burning aura exposed his anger.

All words lost meaning, as magic power and aura boiled. In this heavy stillness, someone gulped and the battle began.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

The space bent around Fermut.

Beheading Sword, Indiscriminate Stab.

It was a chain of moves that seemed like it would cut him to pieces. The bloody aura twisted around his body like a mollusk. However, Orta could still somehow deal with this attack if he could see it.

“Hup!”

The space in front of Orta’s fingertips was torn. Clearly, a common defense against bent space was pointless. Interfering with space was the minimum requirement for a frontal confrontation.

Tearing and bending space…

A large shock wave occurred as the two forces collided.

Kwarurung! Then a thunderous sound rang out all over the place, while the shadows and six remaining magicians started to fight. However, the situation wasn’t good.

Elite senior magicians and knights were both the representative troops of each nation, but the balance of power wasn’t absolute. The magicians of the white tower were wounded and surrounded, so they weren’t in a position to defeat the Shadow Knights.

“Kuheok!” The magician who lost his left arm was the first to be stabbed in the neck.

“T-Tower Master, I, first…” The body of the magician fell down in a puddle of blood.

‘Four possible escape routes… But there is no way out.’ Orta didn’t shake upon seeing the deaths of his subordinates whom he had trained for more than 10 years. Instead, he kept his cool, blocked Fermut’s offensive, and calculated ways to escape.

Even so, there seemed to be no way to get out of this predicament. The strongest enemy with the worst ability was in front of him, while the enemies that made up the net weren’t

easily handled.

After calculating many times, Orta admitted it. ‘It is up to here.’

He couldn’t always win. Unless he had absolute strength, he would someday lose to someone. After all, Orta was weaker than Veronica and Blundell. However, he was clever and could analyze the battlefield quickly, finding ways to win. So, in such a situation, he was aware that he couldn’t win.

Chwaack!

Was it due to being distracted? No, the loss was inevitable. Even if they could both control space, the power of aura exerted an ability which exceeded magic. Fermut prevailed because he refracted space.

If two beings interfered in the same space, the more dominant one would win. This was what Orta had read from the beginning, and thus, he tried to escape. Orta was struck from his left collarbone to his right side. He narrowly avoided losing a limb, but the bleeding was serious.

“...Um.” Orta braced himself and desperately put strength into both his legs. Even if he were to die, he didn’t want to show a miserable appearance to his enemy. It would be nice if there was a chance to drink a potion.

“If you surrender, this body will kindly kill you.”

It was ridiculous. Orta spat in the direction from where he heard the voice and then started to draw up magic power from the bottom of his circles. If he were to die, he would take as many enemies as possible with him. This was Orta’s favorite ending, and it was the last thing he could do for his colleagues who had fallen first.

“Tsk, if you want to die like this, then I should kill you.” Fermut neared his enemy who wouldn’t collapse despite having blood flow down half his body. Although injured, a master was a master.

Meltor's ghost wouldn't fall so easily.

'The end.'

Ultimately, Orta couldn't hold out much longer.

Both masters knew what the ending would be, so there was a tight tension between Orta and Fermut. The three remaining magicians and shadows also stopped moving. They didn't dare move because the pressure was too great.

The only thing which could interfere with this situation was the intervention of a third party that didn't exist. Then at that moment...

"What?"

"What...!"

The two masters looked up a the sky at roughly the same time. Someone was coming. Both the great magician and sword master felt a presence. It was immensely fast, coming from beyond the clouds. No, at this speed, it was more accurate to describe it as 'falling down,' rather than approaching.

It was faster than an arrow, much like lightning.

"Haaap!"

'He' fell over Fermut's head.

Kwarururung! The sound of thunder boomed in the sky. It was a roar that originated from aura flowing on the surface of two swords. The curved lines were sharp enough to even cut steel. The falchions, swords used by mercenaries rather than knights, pierced Fermut's ankle deeply. Suddenly being struck by a strong impact caused blood to fill Fermut's mouth.

Prince Fermut was furious. "...You!"

With blond hair and tanned skin, his armor emphasized mobility, and he himself was reminiscent of a sleek wolf. Fermut gazed angrily in front of him as the other swordsman grinned.

“It has been a while, you dog bastard! I will make you pay for using my sister as a hostage!”

“Don’t bark in front of me, Traitor!”

He was the sword master who left his family for his sister’s sake in the past and then eventually turned his back on the empire. It was the sudden appearance of Randolph Clovis.

Chapter 265 – The Die is Cast (3)

Kaaang!

The three blades bounced off each other, causing sparks to fly. Even if Fermut was injured, he wasn't an easy opponent. As soon as the shock subsided, he raised his aura and pushed Randolph's body away.

It was a dense aura which was disproportionate to his age. Despite having a difference of nearly 10 years, Fermut's swordsmanship didn't lag behind Randolph's.

"Tch, this bastard trying a surprise attack...!" Randolph stepped back and naturally stood close to Orta.

Randolph's purpose was to assist Orta and his men. It would've been good if the last blow had succeeded, but it was still good.

"Hey. Heal yourself quickly while he can't move."

"The first aid is done," Orta replied before Randolph could finish his words.

Orta truly had a good ability as the captain of the intelligence unit. While Fermut had been briefly tied up by Randolph's sword, Orta had healed himself with a potion he carried. Unfortunately, he couldn't expect to be completely healed right away.

"All trauma has been fixed, but the blood loss and magic power affected by aura can't be reversed. By the way, I didn't know you would come to help."

"I was also surprised. My status is still unclear, but this is a critical mission. Meltor is a fairly flexible kingdom."

"That— No, I'll talk about it later." Orta was about to explain but then stopped. He didn't want to let Fermut know about Theodore's survival.

Besides, there was one thing that made Orta more astonished

than Randolph's close timing. "...Honestly, I am more surprised about something else. You landed in such an ignorant manner without being hurt. Was the culprit Elder Shugel?"

"Ahh, that old man made me very nervous. I would've died if a mistake was made."

The remaining magicians who knew what the two masters were talking about were shocked. Surely 'that' method hadn't been used?

It was a strategy Meltor had designed in the past to counter Andras.

Rutben and the other major cities in Andras had devices which interfered with magicians protecting the surrounding area, including the sky. Teleportation would cause a catastrophe, so Veronica and the other magicians couldn't survive in the opponent's space where flying magic was ineffective.

For this reason, air operations over a city had never been adopted in actual combat previously.

...Until today.

"Indeed, the physical strength of a sword master and the protection of an artifact will allow you to withstand the impact of the fall."

"Well, my hands are still trembling."

A sword master's body strength was beyond the ordinary, but Randolph was still affected by the shock of the situation. Fermut had unintentionally helped him absorb his shock. "You dare, Clovis loser...!"

There were a few visible signs of trauma, but the significant impact was accumulated inside Fermut's body from the first attack. Fermut wished he could've avoided it, but this arrogant prince didn't dare step back. His grip on his sword was tremendously strong. It would take Fermut 10 minutes to fully

recover, and the two seasoned masters couldn't miss this gap.

"Okay, I'll kill him here."

"We should leave this place."

"....Eh?"

"...Hrmm?"

As it happened, their opinions were split.

"Even if you are in a bad shape, it is two against one. Why don't we retreat quickly after killing him?"

"If this fails, we will both die. The risk is greater than the merits, so we shouldn't hesitate to retreat."

It was a simple matter of arithmetic. Between Fermut's life or the two masters' lives, the latter was more important. Randolph still showed signs of resistance. So, Orta added another reason, "It would take at least 30 minutes to kill the prince, who hasn't given up yet."

"And?"

"We are in the enemy territory of Rutben, and it will become worse if we drag out the time. The empire has teleport scrolls. If another of the empire's Seven Swords arrive, this advantage will be easily reversed."

"...Tch, I got it."

Randolph was eventually convinced, and the two sword masters changed to the defensive. The center of gravity was lowered as they prepared to jump to the rear at any time. However, Fermut wouldn't let them go easily.

His body wasn't fully recovered, but if he added the Shadow Knights, he could make up for his lack of power.

"Rats, do you think you can escape?"

Femut held a blazing sword. The red aura was like magma

around the sword, representing the passionate owner's will. It was the full-fledged manifestation of Fermut's Aura Ability, 'Refraction.'

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

Stab to Death Attack.

It meant simply for the opponent to be stabbed to death. In the past, a king was said to have killed more than 10,000 prisoners by skewering them in order to incite fear in the troops of other kings.

This stab was inspired by this torture-like method and developed into a technique by Fermut, a cruel man. It was a single stab that penetrated eight vital points at the same time. This was physically impossible without the ability to bend space, as it was like how folding a paper allowed several holes to be pierced at once.

"Die!"

Confronted with Fermut's killing move, Randolph took action.

Clovis Two Swords Style.

Hidden Technique.

Kill the Hydra.

His two falchions changed into a flashy dance. Four times with the left sword, five times with the right sword... Nine slashes stretched out in the blink of an eye, blocking the eight stabs.

"No?" Astonishment was clear in Fermut's eyes.

Randolph's speed was fast enough to block Fermut's technique, but it wasn't possible with speed alone. However, Randolph's Aura Ability was 'Pursuing and Overtaking.'

"You are too shallow!"

Fermut was certainly talented. However, the strength of Pride, who he had fought with Theodore, was engraved in Randolph's mind. Fermut was much slower than the monster that could catch

lightning with its bare body.

Clovis Two Swords Style.

Hidden Technique Combo.

Kill the Arachne.

From two to four, four to eight... Randolph's swords started to divide at a speed which couldn't be followed with the naked eyes. There was an afterimage that was like a spider web!

If this attack couldn't be blocked, the target's body would end up in pieces like well-sliced vegetables. It wasn't a technique which Fermut could avoid without receiving serious injuries, so he was forced to use a technique.

"Haaap!"

A bloody aura emerged from the blade to create a barrier.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

Tornado Wall.

The principle of this technique was the same as the Fairy Dance's first hidden technique, Moon Breaking through the Clouds. The difference was the addition of Fermut's ability to distort space, which increased the defensive power.

Fermut was convinced that he could even block 7th Circle great magic with this.

'As soon as this attack is over, I will fight back. I will hit the neck of the traitor who joined Meltor...!'

It might take longer than expected, but it wouldn't change the future in which Andras won the war. Rutben Citadel...

More than 100 elites knights resided here, and there were plenty of experts in aura. It had been 10 minutes since the battle started, so reinforcements would arrive soon. However, his confident expression soon distorted.

“—What?”

Once the Tornado Wall was gone, there were no signs of Randolph or Orta. It was clear that they had run away from him. A few shadows tried to block them, but they weren’t at a level to overcome Randolph. Their bodies were the traces of where the five people passed by.

“T-These bastards...! You dare to leave?” The furious Fermut shouted angrily, but he didn’t move.

It was because he instinctively knew that it was too late. He knew it was impossible to trace a sword master and space magicians. Fermut coolly put away his sword and glared after the invaders.

“Next time, I will kill you!”

Fermut stepped on the head of one of the fallen magicians. Then the prince turned around, and the shadows followed him. This was the end of a long yet short night.

*

The capital of Meltor, Mana-vil.

At the center, there were four towers symbolizing the kingdom. The towers, which had been painted in distinctive colors, stood tall in all directions. Among them was the blue tower. The blue tower was famous for its water and life magic, and its top floor was a space where unauthorized people were prohibited from entering.

Knock knock. However, the Blue Tower Master, Blundell knocked lightly on the door like he was a visitor. It was an unusually timid move for the master of the blue tower. Who was in there that the owner of this tower needed to obtain permission to enter?

“...Come in.” A voice was heard through the door. It was the high and clear voice of a woman. There was only one person who met these conditions.

Blundell opened the door softly and spoke to her, “Are you well, Sylvia?”

“Yes, Grandfather.”

With flowing hair and shining blue eyes, it was Sylvia Adruncus.

She was a genius magician who had been raised by Blundell since she was a child and had now become a Superior of the blue tower. This was the third month that she had borrowed the tower room as a training room, but a period of three months was too short to cross the wall of the 7th Circle.

“My dear.” Blundell’s eyes were filled with an uncomfortable light despite Sylvia being his granddaughter. It was because he knew where her decisive will came from.

He gave advice to his only granddaughter, “You can’t cross the wall of the 7th Circle in this way. It is a field that requires effort, talent, and luck. I know that Theodore’s disappearance was shocking but try to take care of your body…”

“Grandfather,” Sylvia interrupted in a much stronger tone than expected. “I’m aware of that. This is a distance that I can’t shorten with my talent, and this effort might be meaningless.”

“Then?”

“Even so, I can’t stay still.”

Sylvia wasn’t trying to be stubborn, neither was she being unreasonable. She just couldn’t stop walking with one hand on the wall through the labyrinth, where a breakthrough wasn’t visible. After all, she knew someone who had turned the impossible into the possible. Therefore, this obstacle wasn’t impossible.

“Even if I can’t protect Theo, I don’t want to be protected by him.”

It was enough to be a burden to him once. She wasn’t a dreaming girl but a person wandering the path of a magician. There was no

childishness in her face.

“…Yes, you are all grown up.” Blundell was forced to admit it.

Sylvia Adruncus had chosen to be born again as a magician, not a girl.

As a magician at the peak of this kingdom, he had to encourage her. Blundell was about to pat her head, but he chose to pat her shoulder instead. It was his own admission that he would no longer treat her as a child.

On one hand, he was proud of her growth. On the other hand, he was ashamed that it was ‘that person’ who led her determination. He should talk to that boy when he returned.

“Blue Tower Master! Are you in there?” A loud voice called out from outside the room.

“It is noisy. What is going on?”

“I have just received breaking news!” The voice of the clerk, who was gasping for air, rang through the top floor of the blue tower. Just what was so urgent?

Blundell asked seriously for the report. Then the clerk started speaking, “Reporting from the coastal city, Ribenda! The safe return of Quattro’s captain, Theodore Miller is confirmed!”

“What?” Blundell looked over with surprise and saw Sylvia looking at him. He could understand the meaning in her eyes without needing any words. Sylvia struggled a few times and was finally about to open her mouth, only for Blundell to speak first.

“Go to Ribenda.”

“…G-Grandfather.”

“Shugel is still in the white tower. He owes me a favor, so talk to him. In any case, Theodore should be received by someone he knows.”

The justification was sufficient. Sylvia paused briefly before

gladly replying to Blundell, “I will go straight away!”

“Yes, please take care of yourself.”

A door closed in the corridor, and the clerk was surprised to see Sylvia going straight out of the tower’s window. It was much faster than going down the stairs. Blundell watched her energetic appearance and laughed while touching his beard. “Huhu, he has returned with excellent timing.”

The Northern War was just about to begin, and it would only be a few days before the two powers gathered all their forces. The hero who had disappeared had finally returned home.

“If this world were a play, the role of the main character would belong to him.”

At the top of the blue tower, an elderly man who had been with Meltor for over a hundred years chuckled. The world was too wide, and there were many things which couldn’t be predicted with the wisdom of an old person.

A wise sage had once said, ‘Life wasn’t boring until it was over.’

Chapter 266 – The Die is Cast (4)

At the easternmost part of the northern continent, in the port city of Ribenda in Meltor, there was a disturbance.

In fact, even though it was a port city, the sea currents in the north were so rough that it couldn't be used as a trading port. It was common for boats and large passenger ships to break easily in stormy weather, so this port was usually empty.

However, today was an exception, as a special guest was filling up the vacant seat. It was a sea dragon that sailors called 'sea serpent.'

Despite the tight restrictions of the guards, there were constant footsteps of those who wanted to see Aquilo. They felt both honored and fearful. The people were also in awe. The petty monsters on the ground were incomparable to dragons.

"Back off! This is the army!"

"Anyone who approaches any further will be arrested!"

Far from the tight barrier of the guards, Theodore sighed with relief as he stepped into his homeland for the first time in ages.

"This is why I wanted a secret landing."

It was as he said. Sea dragons might be half as big as the dragons of other dragon clans, but their size still couldn't be hidden by the high waves.

Aquilo created 20-meter-tall waves as she carried Theodore to the shore. Unlike a tsunami, there was no secondary damage. However, it was inevitable that he would catch the attention of the residents.

However, instead of apologizing for it, Aquilo tightly hugged Theodore's left arm and giggled. "What's wrong? No one got injured or killed. Besides, you arrived on time, so shouldn't you be proud?"

“Hah.” Unlike before, Theodore didn’t move his arm. He just sighed with a resigned expression. Aquilo’s white skin felt smoother than usual. What had happened to cause this diminishing distance between the two?

“Anyway, thank you for your favor, Boy. With this, our contract has further deepened.”

“Hey…!”

While whispering sweetly into his ear, Aquilo reached out and touched Theodore’s body.

She touched his well-tempered chest and abdomen. It wasn’t sexual at all, but whenever she touched him, Theodore recalled the memories of the past few days couldn’t help gritting his teeth. Or maybe it was because Aquilo’s blood, which was inside him, was thicker than before.

He barely overcame the temptation.

To be honest, Theodore had said ‘I will do anything’ because he knew the nature of the sea dragon. He never worried that Aquilo would try to make an unfair demand, and that she would ask for something equivalent to crossing the sea.

So, when he first heard her request, he had doubted his ears.

–Then I want to take your ‘essence’, how about it?

Theodore had no experience with the opposite sex, but it was impossible for him to not understand what ‘essence’ meant.

There had been a fierce conflict in Theodore’s mind the moment he received Aquilo’s invitation. She was a wicked dragon, but she was beautiful and had developed the skill of melting males for over a thousand years.

Ellenoa’s confession and a few other things crossed his mind. However, Theodore’s suffering occurred next.

–Hrmm, does that mean it is fine as long as I don’t go all the way?

–What? No, wait a minute!

–There is no reason to refuse. There are many ways…

Theodore realized that remembering it was causing a counterproductive effect, so he shook his head. He hadn't crossed the last line, but he had climbed the stairs of an adult in many ways. Therefore, he wasn't upset at Aquilo clinging to him like this.

Her thin white fingers and moist lips…

"Ugh." Theodore shook off his light dizziness and pulled his arm away from Aquilo. "It is done now. Don't stick so close to me."

"Kek, there is no need to be ashamed—" Aquilo was still relaxed despite Theodore's rejection. She had the face of a sated lioness and didn't hide her satisfaction at all. He couldn't beat her when it came to this.

Theodore was convinced and placed his left hand on his body instead of dealing with Aquilo further. Then…

[+20 Aquilo's Blood Mark (Imprint)

-An imprint using the blood of the sea dragon, Aquilo. Additionally, Aquilo has received permission from the owner of this imprint and has strengthened the contract. The imprint has reached stage 2, allowing the owner to receive part of the dragon's power. If the relationship with the partner of the blood mark becomes hostile, it will naturally be destroyed.

* The rating of this imprint is 'Treasure.'

* The user's water affinity will significantly increase.

* The user will be given the 'Sea Dragon's Blessing'.

* It is possible to summon the sea dragon, Aquilo.

* It is possible to use Dragon Words five times a day.

* User's physical abilities and magic power will greatly increase.

Applying magic power to the blood mark will allow dragon scales to appear. The lowest level of ‘Dragon Fear’ can be used.]

The information window of the blood mark, which was two times more powerful, appeared before Theodore’s eyes. The number of times he could use Dragon Words had increased from three to five, and the procedure required to summon Aquilo was shortened.

However, those changes were minor compared to the added abilities. His physical abilities and magic power were amplified, and he gained dragon scales and even Dragon Fear. Theodore received an overwhelming power that similar to Veronica’s mixed blood.

Kkuok. Theodore clenched his fists and shook his head.

‘Both my strength and endurance have increased significantly. I haven’t used the dragon scales yet, but this alone is a tremendous achievement.’

He had the power to bend iron with his hands, and his magic power was almost at the 8th circle. It couldn’t be judged simply by the total amount of magic power, but Theodore could proudly proclaim that he was twice as powerful as other 7th Circle magicians.

If he fought Marquis Fergana now, wouldn’t he be able to win easily?

“Well, it looks like you are satisfied in your own way.”

“I won’t thank you.”

“Of course. It was part of the deal. But still…” Aquilo murmured. Then like a serpent, she wrapped her arms around Theodore’s neck and whispered, “Didn’t it feel good?”

Theodore didn’t deny it as his cheek was stroked, and the notorious dragon snickered. He looked at her and suddenly realized, “Are you leaving?’

“Yes, for the moment, I plan to wander and watch the war. If I stay here, I think I will somehow get used to it. It might be fun, but it isn’t to my taste.”

Just like how humans watched the ants at their feet, this war was just a spectacle to Aquilo.

She might be a beautiful woman, but she was also a dragon. Aquilo didn’t try to deny or excuse her nature. She would stay true to her essence until she was killed or reached the end of her life.

Theodore gazed at her calmly. Then Aquilo smiled and said goodbye. “Boy, those eyes… Don’t forget. If you melt easily for me, you will just be an ordinary idiot.”

“Don’t speak nonsense and just go.”

“There is no need to be ashamed.” Aquilo walked into the sea without looking back. Then she turned into her dragon form and said to him, “Ah, I’ll say one thing before I go.”

“What is it?”

“It isn’t a big deal. The next time you call me—”

Her mouth submerged in the water didn’t make any noise, but Theodore heard the rest.

“…Damn.” Theodore’s face flushed red as he let out a breath. In this field that wasn’t a fight, he seemed to be defeated by Aquilo. Theodore gazed at the distant sea until the people from Mana-vil arrived to meet him.

In many ways, it was a disturbing farewell.

*

Theodore headed into an unused VIP room in the mansion of Ribenda’s lord and found familiar faces.

“Master!” Theodore called out.

Vince Haidel, a Prime of the red tower and his teacher, jumped

up and greeted him.

News of Theodore's circumstances was concealed inside the magic towers, but Theodore's story had been fully conveyed to Vince since he was Theodore's teacher. Theodore's return was miraculous for Vince, who was well aware of the reputation of the 2nd Sword, Zest.

"You are surprisingly okay!"

Theodore awkwardly smiled at Vince's disbelieving voice and scratched his head.

"You are very excited, Master."

"I guess you are fine since you are talking like this. I'm glad."

"I'm also glad that Master is well."

They embraced firmly and shared the joy of the reunion. It couldn't be helped since Theodore hadn't met him for a while. After all, Vince was a war mage, and he was already on the battlefield.

However, Theodore saw that he wasn't alone.

Sylvia, who had come to meet him with Vince, waited for her turn with shining eyes.

Theodore turned to look at her and felt a sense of discomfort. '… Um? Her atmosphere seems different from before?'

Sylvia had grown up as a genius separated from her peers, so she didn't call anyone a friend aside from Theodore.

Like a watercolor painting painted in black and white, Sylvia was always distant from her surroundings. It wasn't what she wanted, but she didn't know how to change it. Therefore, Sylvia always reluctantly stepped back from people.

"It has been a while, Sylvia. Have you been well?"

Unlike before, her presence was sharp. Sylvia smiled brightly as

she greeted him, “Yes, I’m glad that Theo is healthy.”

Her features and body were the same. However, her childish emotions were gone, and Sylvia seemed more like everyone else. Was it called the three days of bereavement?

He could feel that her magic power had been well trained in the three months which had passed. Her old weakness that could have been pierced at any time had completely disappeared. It seems Theodore wasn’t the only person who had progressed in the last three months.

The three people talked for an hour.

Theodore explained about his experience in the East and other small things. The two people paid close attention to Theodore as he spoke. They didn’t want to admit the difficult reality where he had almost been killed and then returned from far away.

He appreciated their care, but it was time to stop this warm moment. “Master, Sylvia.”

The two people looked at each other. Then Theodore laughed. “I am fine. I know the current situation. I really appreciate your intentions, but I think our kingdom is more important than my trip.”

“Theodore, I…”

“Master, don’t hesitate to speak. What is happening in Meltor?”

Vince sighed at his words. It wasn’t a sense of guilt or responsibility toward Theodore but a daunting reminder of who his disciple was. The boy was different from when they first met. The young boy from the countryside had grown into a dignified hero of the kingdom.

Vince settled his heart, arranged the situation in his head, and opened his mouth to speak. “To put it briefly, it is a seesaw game.”

Then Vince continued explaining to Theodore.

Shortly after the declaration of war, Meltor had hit three of Andras' border bastions with three vanguard units: Veronica who could be called a one-man army; the assassination operation of the troops led by White Tower Master Orta; and the war and ghost mages who were mobilized on the plains.

Among them, one had been successful, and one had failed. The remaining one had yet to fully engage in battle.

"Veronica smashed the fortress without difficulty, but White Tower Master was engaged in a desperate battle with the 3rd Sword. Except for Karul Plains where the fighting continues, the rest is in a lull."

"I see."

"Meltor has secretly dispatched envoys to Elvenheim and Austen. According to the intelligence agency, there are 2,000 troops from Lairon that are moving to Andras. An unprecedented war will take place this time in the north."

On one side, there was Meltor, Elvenheim, and Austen. While on the other side, there was Andras and Lairon. This was at a scale which seemed like it was including the whole West Continent in the dispute.

The prelude to a historic war was rising. Theodore got a thrill as he once again realized this fact.

'Andras and Meltor... One of them will surely perish...!'

Regardless of whether he knew the feelings of the silent Theodore, Vince's hadn't finished speaking yet.

"Kargas is neutral, but they don't want Andras to win. Well, they aren't a big force."

"...Finally, it is starting."

"Yes, it is finally starting," Vince's eyes flashed intensely as he declared with fighting spirit, "The unification war of the Northern

Continent...!”

Chapter 267 – Three Days Free (1)

Immediately after the battle began in the three areas by the border, the northern powers started the work for a full-fledged war.

Unlike the Central Continent which hadn't experienced large wars for centuries, the two northern superpowers had clashed an average of two to three times a century, over the course of many centuries.

The military system Meltor had mastered was already a war machine.

The business companies started to distribute military supplies necessary for war without a hitch, while residents who learned about the brutality of the empire volunteered to join the army.

Nevertheless, a war was a war.

It was a symbol of bloodshed which couldn't be rationalized by anything. Regardless of victory or defeat, the weight of the bloodshed and corpses wasn't light.

The energetic streets were now filled with an unknown tension, while the residential areas which were usually filled with laughter were now silent. Fortunately, Meltor was used to war, so there weren't any large disturbances. War meant disaster would sweep the kingdom.

"Hrmm." Kurt III looked around him.

'Maybe today will be an exception.'

It was currently the prelude to the unification war, so the royal palace should be serious. However, right now, the atmosphere of the meeting room was quite exciting. Anyone reading the current mood would find it strange.

Veronica had destroyed one goal, but Orta's failure and injury

hadn't been in their predictions. Meanwhile, the small-scale engagements on the Karul Plains were at a lull. Yet, why were they excited in this situation?

However, instead of feeling angry, Kurt understood their feelings. "...It is hard to keep a cool head today, that's true."

It was yesterday that their hero, Theodore Miller, had returned to Mana-vil. There was no reason to keep it secret, so the news had been passed on to everyone and this was the aftermath. Theodore had come a long way, but the meeting with him was delayed to calm down the excitement.

However, one day was probably not enough for the excitement to settle. Kurt clenched his fists with a jubilant joy that wasn't revealed by his calm expression. Even if they poured in all of their power, Andras was an enemy that would be hard to beat.

Adding one more senior magician wouldn't make much difference. However, a master who had proven his capabilities had returned.

...A hero whose name alone would make the army want to fight! If Theodore were in front of him right now, Kurt would've grabbed his shoulders without regard for his dignity.

"Your Majesty!" From behind the firmly closed door, a servant cried out in a slightly trembling voice, "Quattro's Captain! Marquis Theodore Miller is asking to enter!"

He had come. It was the appearing of the hero they had been discussing, so everyone looked in the direction of the entrance.

Kurt inwardly laughed before saying, "Send him in."

The moment the king gave permission, the guards at the door opened it with great force. Shortly after that, 'he' entered the meeting room with a stately gaze.

He wore the red robe symbolizing the red tower, with the dark blue uniform of Quattro underneath it. As Theodore Miller gazed

at Kurt with shining blue eyes, the atmosphere around him was more prominent than it had been a year ago.

“Theodore Miller, the captain of the magic division Quattro.” Theodore went down on one knee and greeted the king politely. “Before I properly greet the sun of Meltor, I want to apologize for my absence in the past three months.”

“There is no need.” Kurt’s mouth hardened as he spoke. “Everyone gathered in this place knows what happened. You defended yourself against the despicable actions of the 2nd Sword, Zest Speitem. I can only say that you did well.”

“Your Majesty, still…”

“I won’t allow any objections. Your absence during the past three months was nothing. You have repaid it 20—no, 30 times by returning alive at this time.”

This scene of a subject who wanted to confess his sins and the king who dismissed them… It was a scene that made the people smile. Theodore was pushed by Kurt’s firm will. The king looked at him with satisfied eyes and opened his mouth again, “Normally, there would be a big banquet to welcome you back, but please understand that the timing isn’t good.”

“I understand, Your Majesty.”

They shared a few words before naturally cutting to the chase.

After all, both Theodore and Kurt both knew that Theodore was an important figure in the war with Andras. Depending on how he moved, he was a wildcard that could control victory or defeat in this unification war.

“Did you hear the story about how the White Tower Master failed his mission?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Then this conversation will progress faster.”

The preemptive attack, carried out simultaneously by three vanguards, couldn't be called good or bad.

The value of the fortress destroyed by Veronica was quite high.

However, there was the significant injury of Orta, as well as the loss of seven elite agents who had infiltrated Rutben with him. This was a war where masters were the key. The war hadn't truly begun yet, so the Orta getting injured was a big loss.

"According to the diagnosis, it will take the White Tower Master at least two weeks to recover and return to the battlefield. The problem is the time in between."

"Two weeks... That isn't a short amount of time."

"That's right. Two weeks on the battlefield can cause significant damage to the army. I have been discussing it with those gathered here and..." Kurt paused, looked at the serious Theodore, and then spoke the words he'd prepared, "Theodore Miller, I want you to fill that vacancy."

"Isn't this a daunting task to be left to me?"

"We have discussed it seriously." Kurt grinned at Theodore's concern and pointed to the other people present.

The core of Meltor's power was the magic towers.

One of the 8th circle magicians needed to defend the capital, so Veronica and Orta were supposed to take the lead with attacking. The chairman of the Magic Society could also go on the front lines, but it wasn't easy to place him in the vanguard due to his importance.

To put it briefly, Orta's vacancy was like pulling off one of Meltor's wings.

"No one has disagreed that you are the only person eligible for this task."

"...Thank you."

“I want to give you more time to relax, but I can’t afford it. Go to Karul Plains in three days. In addition to Quattro, the personnel you will command will be there.”

Theodore saluted Kurt’s will, and Kurt got up from his seat.

The envoys from Elvenheim were still far away, and even if troops were immediately sent from Austen, it would take a minimum of a fortnight. The enemy didn’t know this, so they would go on a full-scale offensive to end the war before Orta recovered.

The return of the hero, Theodore, was like a ray of light on the battlefield.

“Rest for today, Captain Theodore.”

It was only a three-day grace period, but Kurt hoped that Theodore could unburden his heart during this time. Kurt’s eyes shone brightly.

“Thank you again for returning and for your efforts.”

They were heartfelt words without any exaggeration.

*

Theodore left the meeting room and let out the breath he had been suppressing. “Sigh, it was burdensome in a different way.”

He wasn’t scolded but praised instead...? If he had turned his eyes even a little bit, he would have been met with the shining gazes of the other people present. Their bloated expectations had been on full display.

This atmosphere was due to Theodore, making him feel a sense of burden.

‘Three days... What should I do?’

Three days wasn’t a long period of time, but it wasn’t short either. If he did the right things, it would be a proper investment of the time. He could meet someone, or he could restore his

condition by resting quietly.

Theodore was thinking in the garden when he suddenly recalled something he had forgotten.

“Ah, that reminds me, has the automaton not been repaired yet?”

The automaton produced by the Yellow Tower Master, also known as the grimoire, Paragranum. The combat machine, made from Lloyd Pollan’s body, had broken down three months ago and had yet to return to its original form.

Was it because Zest’s aura was so strong? Or perhaps his ability to cut space might’ve severely damaged Lloyd’s body. If the Yellow Tower Master could repair it in three days, Theodore would get the power of one more master.

Theodore came to this conclusion and quickly raised his head.

“Yellow tower...” The gold tower shone in the sunlight from far away. The Yellow Tower Master’s main body was always in Mana-vil, so Paragranum would reveal herself once Theodore arrived in the yellow tower.

“Okay, let’s stop by.” Theodore finished pondering on what action to take and moved quickly. After arriving at the crossroad of the four towers, he moved along the road toward the yellow tower.

It would take time to climb to the top of the yellow tower. He was thinking about flying there when he heard a familiar cry. It was a yip.

“Tres?”

It was a word that meant ‘three’, so Theodore had given the three-tailed fox this name.

Theodore hadn’t been able to bring him into the palace, so he had left him in the garden. So, why were Tres’ cries ringing out around here? Theodore immediately strengthened his body and flew to the place where the three-tailed fox’s cries were heard.

Yiiip...! Yiiiip...!

Theodore soon arrived at where the fox was.

“Oh? Long time no see, Gluttony’s host.” The familiar-looking Paragranum was standing there.

“...Can I ask why you are catching that fox?”

“This species isn’t present on the West Continent. I want to dissect it.”

“No!” Theodore cried out with horror, taking the fox from her hands and placing him deep in his robes. The anxious three-tailed fox trembled inside his loose robe pocket. Paragranum just raised her hands and teased Theodore, “It is a joke. Well, I would’ve done it if you had given it to me. It is yours, right? I won’t dissect it without paying a reasonable price.”

“...How did you associate it with me?”

“Hey, I have sources even if I am stuck in the tower. Didn’t you go to the East and return on a sea dragon? If so, you are the only one who can bring back a species that doesn’t exist here.”

It was a simple explanation, and Paragranum’s smiling eyes weren’t shaken at all. After all, she hadn’t intended to dissect the fox without his permission, but she would’ve done it if she had permission.

...As expected from a grimoire that wasn’t human. Theodore shook his head at her inhuman nature and brought up the reason for his arrival. “I’m sorry but I can’t give the fox to you. Rather, I want to show you something.”

“Huh? What is it?”

“Open Inventory.” Theodore pulled out the wreckage of the automaton from his left hand.

There were five pieces and a head. Fluid flowed from it instead of blood, producing a bizarre sight.

Paragranum stared at it without any surprise and soon deduced the cause of the damage. “It is from a high-density aura blade. This can’t be done with simple physical force. Didn’t you fight the 2nd Sword? So, it must be hit by ‘space cut.’ The spirit was cut as well as the body, so it can’t regenerate.”

Theodore learned alchemy from the Fairy’s Book, so he was somehow able to interpret this meaning. The damage was spiritual, rather than physical. It meant that the automaton’s regeneration ability didn’t work properly because the nucleus had been cut by the aura ability.

“Will you be able to fix it quickly?”

“Of course. This isn’t hard for me. But…” Paragranum faced Theodore with red eyes and made a circle with her index finger and thumb. “How are you going to pay for it? The materials required to repair this damage will be significant. In addition to what you received in the laboratory, there are a lot of rare materials. Can you afford to pay…”

“Look at this before saying anything else.” Theodore interrupted Paragranum and pulled a bundle out of his inventory. It was the package White Bear of the Baekun Mountains had given to Theodore.

Paragranum’s eyes shone with a strange light at the fragrance leaking from the cloth. Power spots weren’t uncommon on the West Continent, but most of them were the dwelling of dragons and it was too risky to invade those areas.

However, dragons didn’t live on the East Continent for some reason. Instead, it was common for native spirits to protect the earth and nature from humans. In other words, the materials in this package were rare on the West Continent.

Theodore opened the bag in front of Paragranum, who had stiffened, and smiled cheekily. “Oh, yes, what was that about my ability to pay?”

“...I will take it back.” Paragranum canceled her words with a blank expression, then she trembled and grabbed Theodore’s hands.

After making eye contact with Theodore, the grimoire with an ego abandoned its pride and asked, “What price are you setting for these?”

Chapter 268 – Three Days Free (2)

Theodore was returning to Paragranum's laboratory after half a year, and it was still filled with bizarre things. Homunculus sleeping in huge tanks, crystal skulls, strange gemstones, brewing potions, bubbling reagents…

If Theodore visited this place without knowing Paragranum's identity, he would've misunderstood it as a warlock's lair.

"Come, there is no hurry, so sit in this chair."

Perhaps it was because Theodore looked uneasy that Paragranum took out a chair left in a corner of the room and sat Theodore in it. Then she sat at a big table and started to move her quill over the parchment. It was a silent agreement that allowed him to be in here.

Theodore was puzzled for a moment as he looked at her back before laughing. '…Does this mean these medicines are really valuable?'

The top priority for the grimoire, Paragranum, was to acquire materials to achieve the purpose of her existence.

As she had said in the past, she wasn't good at combat. So, this bag of medicine was like a pie dropping out of the sky. It was a chance to obtain rare materials without invading the territory of a dragon!

30 minutes later, Paragranum got up. She took a few designs that she had drawn and placed them on the easel in front of Theodore. The designs showed a figure which resembled a human and complex calculation formulas. It was something that couldn't be understood unless Theodore's knowledge of alchemy reached a certain level.

As he admired it, Paragranum opened her mouth, "Cough, let me explain the first design. It is a war machine that switches from the

existing bipedal walk to the far more advanced quadruped walk, and three pairs of arms appear like aura blades.

“…What?”

“By changing the entire skeleton to an orichalcum alloy and converting the blood to a high-density liquid—”

Theodore interrupted Paragranum words, “No, wait a minute. Quadruped walk and six arms? Did I hear that wrongly?”

“You heard it properly. This promises to be three times more powerful than before. I call it Blade Centauros!”

Was it a monster that mixed aspects from the East Continent and West Continent? Theodore momentarily lose his composure and shouted, “I don’t need that!”

Meanwhile, Paragranum inquired like she was confused, “You don’t need it? You are about to go into the battlefield, so you need something with a strong fighting power. If you are dissatisfied with the appearance, you can customize it into any form you want.”

“There is too much to fix! I can’t wander around with something like this as my property. I will think about it a little bit if I can use your name as an excuse.”

“Ummm, that is a bit difficult.”

It might be different with a human form automaton, but Theodore couldn’t take credit for a war weapon in this shape. If Theodore acknowledged ownership, he would have to give details about the maker and the materials used. He couldn’t accept being mistaken as a warlock just for more attack power.

Theodore thought this and asked Gluttony, ‘Is this realistically possible?’

-There are no loopholes in the theory. It is true that this appearance can exert three times Lloyd Pollan’s combat power.

The problem is that in order to maintain the output, more than ten times the materials are consumed. I calculate that it will only be able to fight 30 minutes.

'…Then it isn't possible.'

–Well, it isn't bad as a disposable item. I'll leave it to User's discretion.

Theodore pointed out the drawbacks, and Paragranum clicked her tongue. She hadn't thought Theodore would notice.

"Tch, that's right. Damn Gluttony…! Even if Gluttony doesn't have the same design ability as me, it can see through the design…?"

The grimoire, Paragranum, only excelled at 'alchemy,' while Gluttony showed more abilities.

However, the difference wasn't enormous.

Paragranum would win if they were competing in the same environment, but it was impossible to avoid Gluttony's insight when it came to this design. Theodore didn't know if Paragranum could lie, but Paragranum's principle of existence was based on an equal exchange. As such, it was taboo to lie during negotiations.

"It can't be helped. I will have to scrap this design." Paragranum tore up the first design and moved to the next one. "Next is Hell Blazer."

"It is another tremendous name."

"Please listen. This design allows for a widespread attack by placing the 7th Circle magic, Inferno, along with aura swords and armor, to be unleashed. The internal heating is a bit intense, but after 5 minutes of cooling, it will restart without any problems."

"A type of magic gun…"

When comparing the same level magicians and knights on the battlefield, the reason why magicians were superior was their

ranged attacks.

Even the most skills aura users couldn't match the efficiency of a magician's destruction. It was the same with the sword masters, with a few exceptions. Without the destructive power of the 4th Sword, Pan Helliones, it was hard for an aura user to match the destruction of great magic.

Paragranum's design wasn't enough to fill that limit, but it could add another strong firepower to Meltor. It was worth considering, unlike the first design.

"Then the cost?"

Paragranum smiled brightly and replied, "70% of that bag."

"...What?"

"It needs the heart of an Eastern dragon, seals of a high ranking spirit, and 10 liters of manticore blood. There will be a deficit if I don't receive 70% of that bag."

"Dismissed," Theodore rejected the proposal without hesitation and shook his head. "I'm sorry but I have to use some of these as medicines. I can't afford to waste 70% of it repairing the automaton."

"Hrmm, should I discard this design as well?"

"The amount I am willing to pay is up to 50%. Choose a form that other people won't pay attention to. Otherwise, this isn't going to end."

"Um... I understand. Wait a moment."

Paragranum's actions became faster after several conditions were attached. She cut the designs down to less than five, and they looked at the drawings in order. Theodore was interested in some of them, while he dismissed others. After spending 10 minutes thinking about it, two designs were left.

Then he made a choice.

“This one.”

“It is complicated but practical. The commission has been received.”

Paragranum thought the design Theodore chose was a good choice. However, it was obvious that she would praise him no matter what he chose. She looked around Theodore, sorting through all the clutter. There was no reason for him to stay in this space any longer after the transaction took place.

“I will complete it before you go, so don’t look for me in the meantime. I need to do careful work.”

“I understand. Ah, that reminds me,” Theodore said as he was reminded of something he’d forgotten, and he asked her, “You aren’t participating in this war?”

“Huh?”

“Not as the female avatar but as the Yellow Tower Master. I heard that you never participated in the past wars, but I think this is a situation that shouldn’t be missed.”

“Umm, indeed, it is a good opinion from your perspective,” Paragranum spoke positively, before rejecting the idea, “But like I said earlier, I don’t have many combat skills. I am strong in a space that I have built, but I won’t be a big help on the battlefield that is changing at every moment. My avatar will function as a 5th circle magician in ‘Quattro’, but my role is the defense of Mana-vil.”

“Defense? That is Blue Tower Master’s role…”

More questions appeared as though he was digging continuously into an onion. Paragranum shrugged and raised an index finger to her lips.

It was hard to tell the meaning of the gesture.

Theodore didn’t back down, so she opened her mouth with a serious expression, “From this point onward, it is a confidential

secret that only the king of Meltor is allowed to know. I want to let you know, but from the standpoint of the Yellow Tower Master, Norden, it isn't possible. Still, if you pay me…"

"Ah, it is okay."

"The price… eh?"

Theodore grinned at Paragranum. "The situation won't get better if I know the secret, right?"

"Well, yes…"

"So, you don't have to tell me."

One day he would find out, so Theodore got up without raising a fuss. He gave a short farewell and left the yellow tower.

Paragranum, who was left alone, stared at where Theodore had just been like it was ridiculous. Then she burst out laughing, "Ahahahahaha! What's with that person?! It isn't normal for a magician to not respond to a secret! Gluttony's owner is really interesting!"

The young girl wiped the tears caused by the physiological process as she stood in this empty lab.

"It is unfortunate that I only got 30% of the goods, but… isn't this fun? Anyway, he will come back. It is his destiny."

Was a hero born or made?

Either way, the hero always had to go through tremendous suffering and trials. Just like how Zest had turned the automaton into scrap metal, there was no guarantee that this round of repairs would help it to hold out for long.

The grimoire waited for that day to come as she set out the ruined automaton in the room. The repairs were due in three days, a tight timeframe even with Paragranum's skills.

*

“Sigh.”

After handling the repairs of the automaton, Theodore moved toward the red tower.

He’d met the king in the morning, and he had been busy negotiating with Paragranum when the sun was in the middle of the sky. His body wasn’t greatly fatigued, but he felt like resting now.

Regardless of whether it was fortunate or unfortunate, there weren’t many people left inside the red tower due to the war preparations. Theodore greeted three people as he passed by and arrived at his room.

The door was clean, despite him having been gone for a few months. It was proof that people managed the red tower well. Theodore grabbed the doorknob with a giddy feeling. The metal door wasn’t rusty at all. He unlocked the door with an unlocking spell and turned his hand clockwise. Simultaneously, the closed door opened.

Huk.

The heat which had been trapped in the room knocked against his face.

“W-What?”

It was like hot water being poured onto his thighs, which made the confused Theodore look ahead reflexively. Why was there hot air in a room where no one should be present? This was like entering a hot bathhouse. Then he saw the source of the heat sitting before him.

“You are late.”

With red hair and golden eyes, her beauty could be seen at a glance even in the darkness. It was the great magician of the red tower, Veronica. She looked at Theodore with a dour expression as she sat on the chair and grumbled, “I’ve waited since morning to

surprise you but… I guess you didn't want to see me."

"T-Tower Master." Theodore's eyes widened as he made eye contact with Veronica.

"What?"

"I thought you were still on the battlefield…?"

"Orta. I stopped by to check up on that idiot. I have to go back soon, so I wanted to talk to you. Shit," she grunted as wriggled on Theodore's chair.

Even Veronica, whose body and mind were like steel, was revealing the fact that the battlefield wasn't a good place. The heat around her body reflected her mood.

"Kid."

"Yes?"

Veronica got up, approached him and opened her arms like she was hoping for something. "I don't like acting like this, but I am having a hard time these days. So, can you cheer me up just once?"

"C-Cheer you up…"

"Don't you see my pose?"

Theodore noticed it without needing an explanation. Having her arms wide open indicated she wanted a simple hug. It could be called an expression of kindness.

Theodore had long lost his hesitation, so he stepped forward and held Veronica in his arms. Her body temperature was a few degrees higher than that of normal people, so it felt like his body temperature was also going up.

'But it isn't that hot…'

Veronica was probably being careful. The temperature of the heat haze near her never increased. A short time passed by. It seemed like Veronica hadn't expected Theodore to respond to her

request, because her expression was stiff.

Then…

“Kid.” In contrast to Veronica’s hot body temperature, Theodore heard her cool voice in his ears. “Why is the smell of Blue so thick around you?”

Chapter 269 – Three Days Free (3)

Theodore's face stiffened. There was no scent remaining, but Veronica precisely sensed what had happened between him and Aquilo.

This might be a magician's insight, or perhaps the senses of a quarter dragon.

Otherwise, maybe it was the senses of a woman. Veronica's thin arms started to silently tighten around Theodore's body. Then his warm body temperature started to heat up. It was a testament to the fact that her powerful magic power was wriggling out of her control.

"T-That." He shouldn't lie. Theodore desperately thought and managed to come up with a convincing excuse. "We spent three, almost four, days together while crossing the sea."

"Hrmm." It was lacking. Veronica made a sullen expression before sighing. It was a sign that she would let it go, rather than she was being convinced. "Well, this is fine... It's not like I was there, and I am too tired to make a fuss..."

It was just a month since the war had started, yet Veronica's face had already lost its usual vibrancy. She was an 8th circle magician who had inherited the blood of a red dragon. The absolutely strongest human was making an expression like this... Of course, she only revealed it in front of Theodore, but it let him know how hard the battlefield was.

Veronica hugged Theodore tightly one more time before letting go.

"Kid." There was no playfulness in her deeply sunken voice. "Now, there aren't many people who can teach you. Vince is decent, but he can't see everything because he trusts you completely. This is my role."

A half-breed wasn't just a mixture of the blood of two species. Their natures were also obtained.

A half-elf had more than three times the lifespan of humans, was friendly with nature, and had gentle personalities. Meanwhile, half-orcs were larger than humans, lacked intelligence, and had violent tempers.

In Veronica's case, she had obtained the wildness of the red clan and the insight of a dragon that had lived for thousands of years. So, she saw a gap that Theodore was yet to be aware of.

"Theo, you experienced a civil war in the Soldun Kingdom. You acted in your own way and probably thought that you have adapted."

"It isn't the case?"

"No." Veronica patted Theodore's cheeks in a friendly manner. "The only thing you did in the Soldun war was face a few masters, Marquis Fergana and Pan Helliones, not the 'enemy.' You didn't experience leading a group or bearing the hatred of the enemies with your body."

"That..."

It was an undeniable truth. Theodore had been a third party in the Soldun civil war. He had acted to prevent Andras from interfering in the Soldun war. However, his position in this unification war was different.

Theodore would stand at the front lines as the hero of the Meltor army, and he would be the target of hundreds of thousands of enemy soldiers. It was completely different from defeating one powerful person. This time, he would have to step over mountains of bodies and lakes of blood.

Just how many talented young people had broken down because of this? It wasn't unreasonable for Veronica to be concerned.

"Well, I don't have to be afraid if it is you," Veronica continued

talking with a soft smile. “We have to be careful not to allow our hearts to be cut. Look down at the ground from the sky, and don’t get drunk on power when you kill a thousand people with a single spell. Have a sense of fear when you are above someone.”

“…I think I understand.”

Humans were naturally emotional. Those with power were naturally superior to those without power. The Andras Empire was such a place which functioned based on strength.

Theodore also wondered sometimes. He wanted to see the classmates, who had despised him in school, bow down to him. Knowing this wasn’t the answer didn’t mean he could shake it off.

Moreover, the battlefield was a breeding place for power to corrupt. Law and order lost meaning there, while strength was the only value. Turning the dignity of life into numbers and resources, it was a hell that many people fell victim to. Some people became drunk on the feeling of superiority caused by the slaughter, while others got carried away by their wartime achievements.

It wasn’t uncommon for them to become cruel and actively participate in murder.

“But in the end, aren’t we magicians?”

So, as Veronica said, Theodore should take care of his mind.

“Don’t forget that while you can use this power to fight, you can’t use it for murder. Understood?”

Theodore closed his eyes at the warmth coming from his cheek and nodded. It wasn’t just because of the warm body temperature but Veronica’s voice as well. Perhaps that was why Theodore unconsciously replied, “Yes. I will keep that in mind, Sister.”

“…Uh!” Veronica’s face reddened. Then she cleared her throat and pressed firmly on Theodore’s face to stop him from seeing her face. “Y-You really caught me off guard! Where did you learn this technique? Are you really a player?”

“P-Player…?”

“Don’t act like you don’t know!” Veronica withdrew her hand from Theodore’s head and stepped back. “…It is time to go.”

The sun had started to descend, and the sky was red from the sunset. Veronica’s expression was shadowed, like she was looking at the distant battlefield which couldn’t be seen from this tower.

She barely managed to calm her breathing, neatened her disheveled hair, and waved to Theodore. “I won’t be able to come see you again. Rest for three days, and let’s meet again on Karul Plains.”

“Yes, Sister should also take care.”

“Yes. You take care, Theo.”

With this exchange, Veronica finally left. The sound of her footsteps faded until nothing could be heard coming from the corridor. After she left, Theodore gazed at the empty chair with a blank expression.

‘A real war… is it?’

He might’ve been thinking about it shallowly before… Theodore acknowledged his own arrogance.

Until now, he had mostly fought people who were stronger than him.

Sometimes they had been monsters, not humans, so there had been no room for conscience and morals. How could he consider the circumstances of the opponent when it was an emergency situation?

“I have to think about it from now on.”

In a war, he would have to kill people who weren’t a threat, like moths flying toward the flames. It would be a massacre that even the war hero, Alfred, had never experienced. Theodore couldn’t be sure that his spirit would’ve been safe without any preparations.

So, he had to be ready for this moment.

It was for the sake of his parents and younger brother who lived in Meltor...

For his fellow magic tower magicians who would be shedding blood...

For Veronica was struggling, Orta who was injured, and the companions who would accompany him.

'-Um?' At this moment, something flashed through Theodore's mind. 'Is it possible? No, it is quite possible. If I time this correctly, it will be an effective opportunity...'

After the negotiations, he had 70% of the medicine from the spirits left. He also had 50% of the materials obtained from Paracelsus' laboratory. There was a bright flash in Theodore's mind. Both the empire and Meltor were unaware of it. In order to deceive the enemy, it would be more effective to deceive your friends first.

"Okay, let's try it."

Theodore forgot his fatigue as he made his decision.

*

At Belfort Castle in the capital of the Andras Empire:

"—Hoh," the man looked down at the kneeling knight and made an admiring sound. The man had gorgeous blond hair and reddish eyes. There was a blood-soaked sword hanging at his waist. This was Fermut, the 3rd Sword who had returned to Belfort after defending Rutben.

"'He' is back?"

"Yes, he arrived at Ribenda Port. He entered the port with the sea dragon, supposedly Aquilo. The dragon dropped him off and headed back to the sea."

"...Sea dragon. It must be that woman who was at the meeting."

Fermut clenched his fists upon recalling the bad memory.

After escaping from Veronica's bombardment, Crowd had explained why he had chosen to step away from the fight. The blue-haired beauty, who had accompanied the witch, was supposedly a dragon. Therefore, Fermut couldn't reprimand the 1st Sword. Perhaps that dragon was involved in 'his' return?

"That damn lizard dares to interfere...!"

Still, Fermut couldn't admit that he was afraid. Was it because of his arrogance that soared into the sky? Fermut wasn't really afraid of her, just purely angry. Of course, only the shadows in this place were crushed by his pressure.

Soon afterward, Fermut calmed down and asked, "That is enough for the report. What did the emperor say?"

"He will leave commanding the front lines to you."

"I see... He doesn't want to go to the front lines at this age."

Fermut had grown up knowing the strength of the present emperor, his father. Despite being an elderly sword master, the emperor was powerful enough to subdue all Seven Swords.

Witch of Heat, Sage of Water...

Even the two biggest obstacles in Meltor could be beaten by the emperor. Fermut was sure of it, since his memories of his father were so amazing.

"It can't be helped."

Fermut wasn't willing to give up. From now on, his era was coming. It wasn't necessary to send the fallen sun back to the battlefield to revive his glory. After this unification war was over, Fermut would be coronated.

He suppressed his fear of the emperor and looked at the battlefield, which had been ongoing for less than a month.

It was a big accomplishment that he had stopped the White

Tower Master in Rutben. After all, Orta was a magician that Andras found hard to deal with. Fermut was able to predict how long the White Tower Master's injury would last.

'For at least two, maybe three weeks. He won't be able to move for that long.'

Fermut had wanted to kill him, but a traitor had appeared and ruined it. He visualized the Clovis family and smiled grimly. 'I'll have to complete this war within a fortnight.'

In Meltor, the White Tower Master's role wasn't just of an assassin and secret agent. He was the one in charge of all flows of information, which could determine the shape of the battlefield. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that Meltor's army had lost 30% of their efficiency after losing him. If he didn't take advantage of this time, the whole world would laugh at Fermut.

"Tell this to the entire imperial army," Fermut rose from his seat and spoke in a malevolent tone, "Gather all the troops, leaving a minimum of guards behind, and head to the Karul Plains. I will destroy Meltor's army there!"

Chapter 270 – Karul Plains (1)

Karul Plains.

It was a plains at the border between Andras and Meltor, a place where the two nations shed blood at least twice a century.

Despite the terrain maximizing a magician's range and offense, Meltor had never managed to overcome Andras' defense. Rutben Fortress was strong enough to be called an impregnable wall.

Moreover, Karul Plains had changed its appearance over the centuries.

To this day, it had been pounded by hundreds of 7th circle great magic, creating bumps in the ground which weren't normally found on the flat land.

The deeply dug land turned into canyons, and the build-up of soil became hills. The battlefield where superhumans and senior magicians gathered in the thousands had already reached the stage where nature had become twisted.

"In that sense, maybe this is the last time was can call this place a plains," the elderly man muttered as he touched his beard.

It had already been 50 years.

He was currently the top of the Magic Society, but the memories of that time were as clear as day. It was the same for any magician of a similar age who had survived that battlefield. The magic and swords had clashed together, fighting fiercely to preserve their names.

The torrential rain of fire which had fallen from the sky…

The sticky ground that hadn't been covered in water but mud that was wet with blood…

Deadly blades had come from all sides. The obstacles at their feet hadn't been rocks but the heads of people. The fog and clouds had

been dyed red; it had been a hell where human life was trampled on like weeds.

How many corpses were buried underneath this now peaceful looking land?

Unable to imagine it, he couldn't help shuddering.

"Commander." Then a middle-aged person approached the chairman of the Magic Society with some documents. "We have corrected all the inconsistencies with the terrain from the last war. It was also reported that the terrain surveying team found Andras' scouts and tried to capture them, but they failed."

"It won't be easy to take them alive."

"Yes. It is an old-fashioned method, but they each have a poison pill in their mouths. They all committed suicide as soon as their escape method was cut off."

The expression of the Magic Society's chairman hardened at these words. In the dangerous areas of Karul Plains, there were two types of scouts: those brilliant enough to not get caught; and those who were worthless when caught.

If there was an attempt to capture the scouts, the latter would swallow poison without hesitation, even if they were non-elites. This was already beyond military discipline; it was at a level that was close to madness. The soldiers of the Andras Empire were like the Janissaries of Austen.

"...This is their determination. It is tricky."

"Yes, it really is annoying."

It wasn't a one-sided relationship. Just as Meltor hated the empire, Andras hated Meltor too. They had been enemies since the early days of the founding of the kingdom, so this hatred was at the instinctual level.

"Well done, Earl Carter. Without your experience, the

completion of the map would've been a few days late. It is a big achievement."

"I just fulfilled my role." Carter, who had become an earl after his achievements in the Soldun civil war, politely received the praise. He was a war mage of the red tower who had left his mark as a veteran, so it was obvious that he would be placed on the front lines of Karul Plains.

For Commander Benedict, chairman of the Magic Society, there was no one more competent.

"Hmm?" At this moment, Benedict heard a ringing from an artifact. "...Hoh. 'He' has arrived. Understood. Tell all the leaders to gather in one place until I arrive, and call the troops that he will lead."

"Commander. Who is that 'him' that you are talking about?" Earl Carter asked carefully, showing an unconcealable interest in Benedict's words.

It was hard for Carter to hide the anticipation in his eyes.

Benedict laughed and gave an answer that fulfilled those expectations, "The hero has arrived."

It was the arrival of the kingdom's hero, Theodore Miller.

*

Shortly after arriving at Karul Plains, Theodore was guided to the commander's barracks and saw several familiar faces.

The most surprising among them was the commander's face.

"Chairman?"

"It has been a long time since I've seen your face, Captain." Benedict, the head of the Magic Society at the center of the magic towers, was looking at Theodore from the main seat.

Theodore was amazed as he quickly interpreted this situation. The fact that the chairman called him 'captain' instead of 'prime'

meant that he hadn't come here as a magician. It meant the chairman was the commander of Meltor's army.

Theodore finished thinking and politely saluted him, "Yes. It has been a while, Commander."

"Hrmm." His judgment was right. Benedict shook his head and spoke to the leaders sitting around them, "I don't need to introduce him, but this is Quattro's captain, Marquis Theodore Miller. There are a few people here who know him, but let's leave the small talk to later."

The old man spoke sternly, refusing to show the excitement in his voice. At a glance, it could be seen that Theodore was an excellent magician. Magic power was overflowing from his trained body, and it was unknown if the people gathered here could overcome it. How had he reached this level at his age?

"It is good to see you, Captain Theodore. When I heard that you were only three days away, I couldn't help rejoicing. You can blame my incompetence."

"No. Please use me fully."

"Huhu, you are so modest. I'm sorry if this doesn't meet your expectations, but we have already decided on your position."

"That is...?"

Theodore's position was already determined...? Theodore himself was stunned, while Benedict and the other leaders nodded with a smile. Then Benedict pushed a piece of paper toward Theodore and said, "Read it slowly."

"Yes..." Theodore received it with a questioning face and started to read the paper.

Then his eyes widened. "Commander, this is..."

Theodore didn't know the army's formation, but he couldn't help responding to the contents.

【 Quattro's Captain, Theodore Miller will be given sole command of a unit composed of up to 50 people. The candidates will be recruited from Quattro, the war mages, or the magic towers, and the members will be organized according to Theodore Miller. Additionally, Theodore Miller has the right to override the commander, Benedict Alpen's orders. 】

It meant that Theodore had the power to command a single unit at his disposal. He could even ignore the commander's orders!

Theodore was at a loss for words.

However, Benedict just spoke like it was nothing. "There is no precedent to this, but don't think too much about it. We have come to the conclusion that a master's power isn't efficient when used in a non-flexible formation."

"But..."

"It is the same as the Red Tower Master. Her combat power and maneuverability are too good to be held back by the army. Of course, I can't allow you to wander around alone like her, so I thought of this."

The power of a master, which could surpass 100 soldiers, was a military strength. A master could overturn the flow of the battlefield with a single gesture.

Thus, it was more efficient to leave it to their own discretion, rather than fit them into the army. Just like how a sword master hid in the melee for assassination opportunities, Meltor controlled the battlefield with magicians that could appear anywhere.

Moreover, Theodore and the war mages were the wild cards of Karul Plains.

"Also, Earl Carter."

"Yes, Commander." Carter stepped forward at Benedict's call.

"If you don't mind, I would like to recommend him as your

assistant, as long as you don't have someone you've thought of beforehand."

"I'm sorry."

It was true that an active veteran would be helpful, but Theodore refused the offer without hesitation. However, it wasn't because he didn't like Earl Carter. Benedict read Theodore's expression and asked him, "Do you have someone in mind?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me who?"

"This..."

It was a bit difficult, so Theodore whispered the answer only to Benedict.

"—Hrmm." As the head of the Magic Society, Benedict didn't utter any surprised words. He just closed his mouth with an unpleasant expression. A person who didn't know the situation would be deceived. Theodore admired him inwardly, while Benedict spoke to Earl Carter in an uncomfortable manner.

"Well, I understand. Earl Carter will guide you to the people you will be commanding. A full-scale operational meeting will begin tomorrow."

"Yes. Thank you, Commander." Theodore accepted the command and left the barrack. Earl Carter followed hurriedly behind him, while the barrack seemed bleaker than before.

Theodore had refused to accept the commander's favor, and Benedict had a careful expression on his face...

However, unlike his outward appearance, Benedict was pleased. Indeed, Benedict was forced to accept it if it was 'him.'

'It doesn't matter how brilliant Earl Carter is compared to him. Well, yes. The imperial army will properly become mad.'

Benedict, the chairman of the Magic Society, laughed because he

hadn’t expected something so interesting. This absolutely wouldn’t do any harm to Meltor. That’s why he was convinced by Theodore’s decision.

Chapter 271 – Karul Plains (2)

“Then please follow me.”

Theodore left the barrack and started to cross the military camp under Earl Carter’s guidance.

Indeed, the scale was so large that Theodore would get lost without a guide.

Barracks were stationed on all sides and filled with Meltor’s troops. There were more than 100,000 troops, a number which couldn’t emerge unless they mobilized more than 80% of the standing army in the border army. In fact, there were troops who hadn’t joined yet, so the total number was probably closer to 150,000.

‘This will be a complete war.’

In the meantime, Meltor and Andras had been bitterly antagonistic to each other, so this war was fate. They had gathered all the troops, except for those needed to protect the capital and the kingdom.

Maybe both powers had guessed it already.

In order to win and destroy the enemy in front of them, more strength and sacrifices were needed.

Theodore’s expression grew heavier at the thought. In some ways, this war had been sparked by Theodore Miller. Elvenheim, and the three swords whom he had killed…

With the addition of this strength which tipped the scales of power, Andras realized that they needed to strike. If they delayed the fight any longer, they were going to lose. If it wasn’t now, they wouldn’t be able to win.

‘This is a chance to break the horrible long history of war in the north, but I feel a little bit of responsibility.’

However, that didn't mean he felt guilty. Regardless of Theodore's presence, the two powers would've fought again. There was no guarantee that the blood shed at that time would be less than the present.

In the end, the flow of this era was just magnified by him. Rather, Meltor should rejoice since it was more advantageous to them. Put in another light, it meant that Andras was in a position where they had no choice other than to go to war.

Theodore clenched both fists tightly and prepared himself.

"Captain Miller."

"Yes, did something happen?" He turned to answer Earl Carter's call, who pointed to the barrack opposite them.

"Almost there. Beyond that hill, the magicians who will give you support are waiting."

"Oh, are you going back?"

"Yes. I was badly rejected, so I have to go back and drown my sorrow," Earl Carter said jokingly before leaving Theodore. However, his walk wasn't light, so it seemed like he did regret being rejected.

Unfortunately, Theodore couldn't accept his recommendation.

He understood Earl Carter's abilities after Soldun, but the one he appointed as deputy was much more excellent. No, he could be called incomparable. This was the secret card that Theodore prepared before coming to Karul Plains.

"...Later, I will go see him."

Anyway, his thoughts were up to here. People were waiting for him beyond that hill, so he couldn't delay his pace any longer. Of course, Theodore didn't expect much. This position might seem plausible, but in reality, it was just a perfect place to die. Theodore was a master and captain of the unit, but his subordinates would

be the ones thrown to death.

'First, Sylvia, William, and Para will follow me, but... will there even be 10 people for this insane unit?'

He might not even fill up 10 people, let alone 50 people. Theodore crossed the hill while anticipating pessimistic numbers. Then at that moment...

"All members! Rise!" The loud voice of the man was familiar.

"...William?" Theodore's blue eyes widened as William, standing on the stage, looked up at him and raised a hand to his left chest. It was a natural salute without any flaws.

"Our hero! Salute to Captain Theodore Miller!"

After that, a heavy sound rang out.

Kung!

It was the sound of over a hundred people stamping their feet and hitting their chest with their hands.

What about their blazing eyes?

A look like that of beasts of prey was flowing from their eyes. Their neat uniforms and controlled magic power gave off a feeling of elegance while proving their individual skills simultaneously.

'The people here... They are all applying to my unit?'

He counted at least 100 people with just his eyes.

"It has been a long time, Captain."

"...William."

"Why do you look so surprised? Is it because there are more people than you think?"

Theodore tried to answer with honorifics, but then changed his tone and said, "That's right."

"It is your fame. As long as they can fight with the 'hero', they

are willing to die. 120 people volunteered."

"120 people... I have to screen them."

"Well, it is a good thing. A chance to pick the best talents, any leader would want this."

This was also true. Theodore coughed and climbed onto the podium next to William. Then he looked at the 240 people staring at him and greeted, "It is nice to meet you. As you know, I am Theodore Miller."

Some people laughed at the self-introduction, but it only lasted a short while.

Who needed introduction to the person called Theodore Miller?

He was the man who had defeated three of the empire's Seven Swords before he was even 30 years old, as well as the main cause of the alliance with Elvenheim. Even the spies hiding in Meltor remembered his achievements.

After feeling that the rigid mood loosened a little bit, Theodore raised a hand and drew the attention of the people.

"First of all, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be a part of my unit. I can only pick 50 people. I hope you understand that I have to send back the rest."

Theodore came down from the podium after saying those words.

"The screening method is simple. Show me your skills."

Theodore looked down at the magicians and used a spell in an empty space.

'Iron Wall.'

Kururung!

Walls made of steel soared from the ground at ultra high speed. It was at an astonishing speed and perfection, even for magicians belonging to the magic towers. The magicians' eyes widened as

they saw the iron wall which had risen up so quickly. It was thick and contained a weight which could be seen, even if it wasn't touched. This was a barrier which wouldn't be scratched by mere attack magic.

While everyone was staring at the wall, Theodore spoke, "Your destructive power will be based on the complete destruction of this iron wall."

Simultaneously, Theodore cast an attack spell—Flare Burst. It was a 5th circle fire-based magic, a favorite attack spell used by war mages. However, Theodore's Flare Burst was different.

Ku kwa kwa kwang!

Flamers poured out of thin air and crashed into the iron wall, melting it away. It was unmistakably 5th circle magic, yet it contained the destructive power of 6th circle magic! The magicians freaked out as they looked at the wreckage, while Theodore restored the wall like it was nothing. It looked like it hadn't been broken at all.

"The next is mobility. Yes, this will be fine."

One step. When Theodore moved, only 10 people were able to grasp his movements. It was an acceleration made by strengthening and lightening his body. Experienced veterans like Vince or Earl Carter could use it as casually as Theodore. However, the confident volunteers stiffened.

Destructive power, mobility, defense, stealth, flight, magic circles...

After a few demonstrations, those who were full of admiration started to feel shocked.

"Hah. He is obviously a genius, but this is more than that."

"Is Prime Theodore's Sorcery an all-rounder?"

"Nonsense... It is too great to dismiss it as just that. I will toss

that opinion.”

Finally, after demonstrating some exploration magic, Theodore looked at the volunteers with a tired expression. “I will accept people who meet the standards in three or more fields. I’d like to do more in-depth testing, but we don’t have time. I am going to complete the formation today and then start training tomorrow. Now, Quattro members.”

Three people moved at Theodore’s call.

“I will give the three of you the job of screening them. Don’t look at convenience. Pick them based on my demonstrations. Yes, you don’t have to worry about picking 50 people. Just pick those who meet my criteria.”

“I will follow your words!”

“Let’s start immediately.”

The three members of Quattro were set up as teaching assistants. Then Theodore went up to the stage and shouted to the volunteers, “All members! Gather in three columns!”

This was the moment when Theodore’s test, later known as the Wailing Wall, would become notorious.

*

“...So, there are only 30 people left?” Benedict made a dumbfounded expression.

“Yes, there are 31 people including Captain Theodore.”

“There is a vacancy of 20 people. Is he recklessly believing in his own power?”

“I don’t think so.” Earl Carter put down his report and emphatically shook his head at the anxious old man’s words.

Theodore had selected 30 people, with three being from Quattro, and started drastic training from the next day.

“It is an unthinkable scene considering it is his first command.”

No one, let alone Earl Carter, knew that... Theodore Miller might be in his 20s, but he had the war hero called Alfred Bellontes inside him. Despite his identity as a prince, Alfred had been at the forefront of the battlefield, spending more than a decade on it. As such, it was natural for people to underestimate Theodore.

However, Earl Carter soon gave an answer, “Rather than moderately strong people, an elite force is needed in the field. If they’re not strong enough, it would be much more efficient to walk around alone.”

Benedict responded positively, “That’s right. He didn’t go to military school, but he understands his role. This is the principle of finding a suitable path.”

“I think so as well.”

It was as he said. Theodore’s firepower was three or four times an average master. If he was to do guerrilla attacks, he wouldn’t need a unit. However, his role was to be a leader and command the unit.

If so, he needed to judge and move according to his unit.

‘I will let him move freely.’

It was perfect logic. However, it was just a bluff if it wasn’t used properly. Benedict instructed for Theodore and his followers to remain autonomous for the moment, and then proceeded to the next agenda. Then the atmosphere in the barrack became tense as he read the next report.

“Finally.”

“Yes, finally.”

The contents stated that a large number of imperial troops were gathering on Karul Plains. The information department estimated that there were at least 150,000 troops. In addition to the current

100,000 troops on the defense line, Andras was trying to overwhelm them with 250,000 troops.

“Ridiculous.”

However, Benedict and the other staff members just scoffed.

“Wanting to overwhelm us with numbers? The prince is in command this time? He might have sword skills, but I don’t know if he has any ability as a commander.”

“It is as you say.”

“I will teach that infant what war is.”

So far, Meltor had never had more troops than Andras. It was natural. Judging by the population and size of the land, Meltor was half the scale of Andras. Nevertheless, the two powers had remained antagonistic to this day.

Having only 100,000 troops, it was a disadvantage which had occurred more than 20 times in this long war.

“But we don’t need to deal with the angry boar head on. First, I will break the horns and teeth, and then lay a trap at its feet.”

A magician’s firepower wasn’t infinite. If they reduced the empire’s troops before entering the full-scale battle, the battlefield would become better. If so, there should be an initial exploration.

Knights were faster at a short range, while magicians were three or four times faster at long range because they had flying and acceleration magic. If they broke off the supply line of the empire and blocked the path of the reinforcements... The imperial army would find out how obnoxious they could be.

“Hrmm, let’s try it.”

It was also a chance to check their power.

“Earl Carter, please bring Captain Theodore here.”

“You will use his unit?”

“It is good as a precursor.”

The leaders might consider it as nothing, but the soldiers would be troubled by an extra 100,000 enemies. What if Theodore’s status performance became widely known? It would be enough to make up for the reduced morale.

“This greeting will take the imperial army down a notch.”

The hero of Meltor—the name of Theodore—would become a nightmare to Andras. The more he acted, the higher Meltor’s morale would rise and Andras’ would fall. The other leaders at the meeting nodded.

Thus, Theodore’s first mission was decided.

Chapter 272 – Karul Plains (3)

Exactly four days afterward…

‘…Demonstrating my skills, is that it?’

Theodore unfolded the order sealed in wax and read the words inside.

The search of the eastern canyon on Karul Plains and all other operational areas would be left to Captain Theodore Miller. It was obvious, but the fact that he was entrusted with this power meant he had to take responsibility.

Theodore needed to personally prove that he and his men were worthy. Benedict’s clear handwriting stated the order. It had been less than a week after the 31 members of the group was selected. Considering the special circumstances, this wasn’t a normal command.

The eastern canyon was much more favorable to Andras than Meltor since it was closer to the empire. Therefore, the defense systems like watchtowers had long been established. It wasn’t a place which could be attacked with only 30 people.

“How interesting.”

However, Theodore grinned after burning the letter.

“It seems like the headquarters are making a bet on what we can do in the canyon. We will either run like a pony with my tail on fire or die like a canary in the mine.”

Theodore and the 30 members of the unit had already arrived at the entrance of the eastern canyon and were in the middle of a discussion.

If the features of the terrain were ordinary, then simple navigation magic would be sufficient.

However, this wasn’t the case with Karul Plains. It had been hit

by massive amounts of magic and aura for centuries, so the mana of the plains itself was chaotic. Navigation magic which spread far beyond the user's body wasn't effective in Karul Plains.

Amidst the plains, the eastern canyon was very deep and full of chaotic mana, preventing the scope of the search range from increasing. Therefore, the eastern canyon had fallen into the hands of the empire.

It was a fatal terrain for magicians, since the field of view and space was narrow.

With a narrow space of 40 or 50 meters, this was a distance which the elites knights of Andras could narrow in two breaths. It was an environment where attack and defense weren't possible. Thus, Meltor was hesitant to dig deeper into the eastern canyon.

"Well, isn't this good?" Theodore looked around at the silent members and pointed toward the dim canyon. "Let us defeat this notorious place."

Theodore was one step ahead of everyone else as he placed his hand on the floor of the canyon. He didn't hesitate any longer. Navigation magic couldn't look at the rugged terrain which the empire occupied. However, Theodore had another way to explore this terrain.

'Mitra, please.'

[Hoing! I will look!] Mitra was summoned and responded vigorously before entering the ground.

The ancient earth elemental, Mitra...

After swallowing the seed of the world tree, she had acquired the power to communicate with vegetation, making her effective on Karul Plains. Even if this wasn't like the Red Plateau, there weren't many weeds and trees inside the canyon.

Mitra moved through the terrain at a fearsome rate. Gluttony called it a 'rader,' but Theodore didn't understand that word. Was

it forgotten ancient magic? He didn't need to know right now.

"...Okay."

Less than 10 minutes later, a map of the eastern canyon was drawn in Theodore's mind. He knew the location of Andras' watchtowers, the patrols, the sniper points, and the camp at the end of the canyon. Theodore wouldn't be a magician if he didn't know how to attack after all of this.

"William."

"Yes."

Perhaps it was due to the vacancies that William answered politely, and Theodore proceeded to organize a separate unit for him.

"Take 10 people with excellent mobility and move according to my instructions. Use stealth. Destroy the enemy watchtowers and sniper posts without being discovered.

"I will destroy the watchtowers and sniper posts."

"And Para."

"Yes."

Paragranum came forward in the female avatar, and Theodore gave her another mission.

"Use the excellent alchemists to create obstacles in place. Make it look as natural as possible, like real rock walls."

"Aha, are you trying to beat the patrols?"

"Correct. There is another purpose as well, but... it is for later."

It was a strange strategy which divided the small number of 30 troops into three groups. However, Theodore was convinced that this was the best way. He could see the future, and this strategy was supported by Alfred's experience in his head and body. Then the 10 remaining people accompanied Theodore into the heart of

the canyon.

“William, Para, and I will go in order.”

Like a seasoned veteran, Theodore waved his hand with cold eyes.

“Go!”

*

To put it plainly, there was nothing more tedious and annoying than guarding the military boundaries. The soldiers had to stare at the canyon for hours at a time to see if the enemy would approach. This repeated several times before concentration fell to the bottom.

Robin of the 12 Imperial Army strongly agreed with such views.

“Damn, why would the Meltor guys come to this damn canyon? There wasn’t even a proper battle here in the last war,” he cursed.

Robin shivered in the cold wind blowing through the canyon, as he berated Meltor and everyone who had placed him here. If he didn’t do this, he would fall asleep. It had been less than an hour since his shift started. There were still two hours until the next person would take over his post.

“It is a little cold, so can’t they give me a blanket or let me leave an hour earlier? At this rate…”

Then it was at that moment…

Puk! There was the piercing sound of wind.

“…?” A hole appeared in this neck, and Robin wasn’t even able to moan before he died. It was the 5th circle wind magic, Gale Gimlet. Gale Gimlet had a narrow range, but its penetration ability was better than that of some 6th circle magic. There were few better means of attacking in the darkness.

A transparent figure muttered, “This is the 22nd one. There are 17 remaining watchtowers and 34 snipers.”

The voice that flowed out was certainly William's. Following Theodore's instructions, William climbed the cliffs with his men and secretly subdued the snipers and watchtowers.

The imperial knights were experts who were skilled in bow techniques, and they were one of the reasons why the eastern canyon was known as a dangerous area. Without them, this canyon would've already fallen into Meltor's grasp.

Paragranum and her people were also active.

"On this side, there will be a rockfall, with evenly mixed sand and soil."

Under Theodore's guidance, they created walls which disguised as natural objects.

Soil was piled up in a 10-meter-tall heap to look like a landslide. They also created artificial landforms which couldn't be overcome with an aura user's extraordinary abilities.

Unlike the other attributes, this earth magic dealt with mass. Even if the magic power maintaining it was exhausted, the finished result would remain unchanged. Some magicians might not be good at it, but the results of the alchemy, which Paragranum had assisted with, was literally perfect.

"What, this...? Was this way originally blocked?"

"It was clearly an empty space yesterday."

The patrols were confused and turned around.

"It looks like a landslide has happened."

"We'll have to modify the map. Record what you see."

"The patrol route should change?"

"It can't be helped. We'll have to report it to the higher-ups later and find a new path."

The efficient paths of the patrols had been rendered inefficient

and inaccessible.

It was a feat which wasn't possible unless the terrain was fully understood. Both Andras and Theodore's magicians would never think of the possibility that Theodore could see the entire canyon. If they knew it was happening in real-time, they would freak out.

Theodore knew whenever William's troops destroyed a watchtower, and he knew every time a patrol went around a blocked road.

'Thus far, it is going as planned.'

A dark smile appeared on Theodore's face. The watchtowers and snipers were dealt with, and Paragranum had diverted the patrols.

This was already sufficient for headquarters to call it a big achievement. The mobile magicians and alchemists were elsewhere, while Theodore was with troops who specialized in destructive power. There was a reason he had come up with this combination.

"Captain, that...!"

"Don't be surprised, Sylvia. That is our destination."

Theodore looked away from Sylvia's frightened face and stared at the faraway blue-black iron wall. It was the permanent post of the Andras army in the eastern canyon. After exploring with Mitra, he discovered that the defense system of this campsite was the poorest.

'But the magic barrier is perfect. 4th circle magic will scatter before reaching it.'

The walls of the barrier were made of the great metal, titanium, which only great magic could destroy. It was a mysterious metal that was mined in an unknown place. Shields and walls made of this ore scattered mana, and the strength of the metal was also comparable to that of adamantium.

The metal was unsuitable as a weapon because it didn't accommodate aura like adamantium. However, if it was made into a facility or huge shield, it would have the power to endure ranged firepower, which was the biggest advantage of a magician.

–It isn't comparable to adamantium. It can't be helped. People in this era aren't familiar with it.

'What do you mean?' Theodore responded to Gluttony's unexpected words.

It felt like information he shouldn't miss.

–Did you call it 'Titanium'? It is a metal made by mixing adamantium with other materials through a special process. Its resistance to magic is excellent, but the disadvantage is that it can't be processed with magic and there is a limit to its utilization.

'Golems or artifacts can't be made from it?'

-Well, in the same context. It would be necessary to consume a large amount of rare adamantium, yet magicians in the Age of Mythology could easily penetrate the defense. So, it is a metal that didn't see much light in ancient times.

This was an explanation which couldn't be found in any book. Theodore kept listening as he devised a way to attack this camp.

–By the way, the existence of that metal is questionable. Paragranum might know how to make it, but it isn't an alloy that can be figured out just by digging it up. There is probably another grimoire in the Andras Empire.

'That isn't a problem I can worry about now. What is its weakness?'

–There are two big ones.

Theodore listened to Gluttony's description and rotated his seven circles without hesitation.

Kuooooh!

With such a large-scale gathering of magic power, the phenomenon was naturally huge enough to be seen by the distant imperial army. Theodore ignored the bewildered gazes of his members as he decided on a strategy to take advantage of one of the two weaknesses.

First, there was attack magic which contained mass projectiles.

'Maybe magic like Meteor Fall.'

Meteor Fall...

Meteorites were rocks which were pulled out of the atmosphere and fell at terrific speeds, and the role of Meteor Fall was to summon such meteorites. The speed and firepower were amplified by the gravity of the planet. Magic resistance had no effect before falling meteors.

However, Theodore wasn't yet in a position to cast Meteor Fall, and the other mass magic was Volcanic Shell. However, that wasn't enough to crush the iron wall.

Therefore, he chose the second method.

'Overwhelming firepower that the titanium can't endure!'

Theodore's gathered magic power shook. The power swirled around him, and the clouds overhead scattered, causing the area around him to be strangely calm. It was a natural disaster in human form. Theodore was a 7th circle magician, but this magic event was like something created by an 8th circle magician.

"All troops! Cast your biggest attack spell with me!" Theodore yelled out the command while activating a feature he hadn't used for a while.

'Memorize.'

The ability allowed him to store his desired spell and use it without casting, and he could now store seven spells. It was possible, but Theodore's magic power hadn't been able to

completely control two or more great magics.

‘…But now, it is possible!’

His memories of the East came to mind. In the three months he’d spent there, Theodore had been able to properly train his mind and body. The full acquisition of the Fairy Dance filled an empty spot in his body and magic.

He couldn’t use all seven slots, but three or four was possible!

Memorize.

Four Slots Open.

Quadruple Inferno.

Four fire pillars rose. The power of one pillar was enough to burn down a town, but now four fire vortexes equal to one great magic roared like mad dragons. The clouds which got hit by the mana had already disappeared. The heat was enough to melt the rocks in the distance.

Theodore’s eyes were bloodshot with extreme concentration as he managed to control it—Rage of Ragnaros! The fire which had appeared at Magnus’ summoning had just been recreated. Then the vortexes of flames started to move.

The high temperatures melted steel like it was butter, while the birds in the distant sky died from the heat.

The tremendous force of light burst against the walls of titanium.

Chapter 273 – Karul Plains (4)

Kwaaaaaaah-!

A flash of light erased everything in its path as it crossed to the center of the imperial camp. The light burned through the walls of the barracks, as well as the soldiers. It was an ultra-high-temperature light which destroyed everything in its path.

It wouldn't be strange for it to have a piercing sound, but surprisingly, the noise wasn't very loud. The magicians paled as they figured out the reason for that.

'It can't be...?'

'It means the power is beyond explosions!'

An explosion was the sudden expansion of materials due to high temperature and energy. However, Theodore's magic destroyed the material before it even expanded. It didn't seem that strong, yet it contained 10 times the firepower of a large explosion...

As such, it was natural that even the titanium barrier couldn't withstand it.

The degree of the titanium's purity couldn't neutralize the spell, but even if it could, it was impossible for it to block the heat and storms which arose from the spell.

It might be possible for the capital of the empire, Belfort, which had six-story-high walls with a high purity of titanium. However, this destructive force couldn't be endured by a roughly made field barrier.

"Now! Deal the second blow before the enemy reforms their ranks!"

At the sound of Theodore's voice, the magicians awoke from their trance.

"F-Flare Burst!"

“Thunderbolt that tears the clouds…! Thunder Calling!”

“Withdraw after hitting, Gust Impact!”

Pillars of fire, lightning, and wind fell on various areas of the empire’s camp.

The firepower was minuscule compared to Theodore’s magic, but it was enough to turn the camp into a wreck. Even if they avoided direct hits, the radiant heat could even kill aura users. The enemies fell into a critical state and didn’t even know why they were dying.

This was the true value of war mages in an army! To produce a firepower which destroyed a solidly built barrier and cleansed all the troops and facilities… This was the strength of a magician on the battlefield.

At first glance, it seemed like there wasn’t one survivor.

‘…No, there are some people still living.’ Theodore narrowed his eyes as he looked through the flames and heat haze.

Hawkeye—the vision magic Theodore had learned from an artifact a long time ago—penetrated right through the flames. Simultaneously, eight knights burst through the flames as well. They didn’t care about their blackened skin and melted armor as they roared angrily.

“You—aaaaack!”

“Dieeeeee!”

‘Wonderful.’ Theodore raised his arms as he admired their fighting spirit. One of them was an expert level aura user, and Theodore couldn’t be too complacent if he was in a perfect state.

However, this knight was already dead. His arms and legs had long been transformed into charcoal, and his eyes and lungs were burned by the heat which couldn’t be blocked with aura. Even if Theodore didn’t do anything, the knight would die in a minute.

“I’ll send you off together.”

However, Theodore didn’t back down. His robe flapped as he stepped forward and greeted the knights. It was obviously a mistake as a magician, but it was right for the successor of the Fairy Dance.

Shortly afterward, the blue aura blade of one the knights headed toward him.

‘An upper right diagonal slash.’

Theodore pushed the sword down with his left hand and struck at the exposed gap with his right hand. The ether reinforced fist had already reached the point where it could kill an aura user.

Moreover, these enemies were on the verge of death from the magical bombardment. The knight’s unstable aura was scattered, causing his ribs to break and his heart to be crushed.

‘Pierce the philtrum.’

Theodore avoided the second knight’s sword by half an inch and struck his neck. The relatively thin armor covering his neck was crushed. Even the most persistent undead couldn’t keep moving with the cervical vertebrae broken.

Kwaduduk!

As the second knight collapsed, Theodore raised his knee towards the third knight’s stomach. It was a robust strike aimed not just at a vital point; it also targeted the opponent’s internal organs. Theodore used the body of the third knight as a shield and struck two hesitant knights.

This was Lee Yoonsung’s special magic ether, which was a substitute for aura. When it imitated the shape of a blade, it exerted the same cutting force as aura. It didn’t take long for the remaining three enemies to fall.

As the expert knight lay in a puddle of his blood, he muttered with his dying breath, “…C-curse, M… Mel… tor…”

This was the end, and the knight's movements came to a stop. Theodore looked down at the bodies with a blank expression, letting out a long sigh before lowering his arms.

'Cursed magicians...'

He looked up and saw the camp which had been devastated by him and his subordinates. The noise of a human residence had vanished like a lie, leaving only the sound of fire behind.

"...This is war."

It wasn't to survive or practice. Theodore's power was used only to kill the enemy. In this brief battle, Theodore had killed at least 100 people. He didn't know the contents of the inside of the camp, but there had to be enough personnel to carry out the defense.

Above all, the scary thing was Theodore's state in which he hadn't even realized he was exterminating them.

"Theo— Ah. No, Captain?"

"Sylvia?"

"Please give us the next instructions. Everybody is waiting for you."

When Theodore saw that the squad members were staring at him, he nodded at Sylvia's words. He could struggle with this mental issue after they returned. Right now, he had to move according to the strategy he had developed and do it without a single mistake.

"We will withdraw."

Turning back as soon as they made a big break...?

Theodore explained to the puzzled members, "We have done this much, so Andras will send reinforcements from nearby. The watchtowers and snipers have been taken care of, so they won't be able to know our location. Instead, the pursuers will follow Para and William."

As such, Theodore's group would hunt their pursuers and reverse the situation.

"Anyway, the eastern canyon isn't an important place for the empire. If we go too far forward, we will only get surrounded. We should aim for a sure victory rather than risks our lives with an uncertain achievement."

Alfred had been the owner of such tactics. He had always fought in a disadvantageous situation where one defeat would lead to the destruction of his kingdom. A commander must know when to step back. Other people might not agree with this idea, but Theodore had inherited Alfred's experience.

Theodore grabbed the badge on his chest and poured magic power into it.

[William, Para. Report on your progress.]

It was the communication spell given to all Quattro members. It might be because the badge had been made directly by the Yellow Tower Master, but this artifact boasted an excellent performance on the Karul Plains.

Upon hearing the replies from the two people, Theodore turned his back on the destruction.

From now on, he needed to rush a little bit.

*

At that time, the Andras Empire's forces in the eastern canyon became alert.

It was due to the report that a base on the outskirts had been attacked. They must've been wiped out seeing as all contact had been cut off and not even a beacon was lit. Despite the many times they had been defeated in this canyon, Meltor had embarked on a bold preemptive attack!

General Torbell thought it was ridiculous. "Sir Amel! Have you

gotten in contact with the watchtowers yet?”

A knight came running urgently at the call and reported to the 50-year-old general. If they didn’t want to get lost in this narrow canyon, they needed a precise map or to get directions from the watchtowers built at the top of the canyon.

However, the closer they got to the attacked camp, the less the watchtowers replied, and it was silent now.

“I have sent a signal 10 times, but there is no reply! Perhaps the enemy has intervened.”

“Damn Meltor bastards… They sure are doing it properly.”

The fighting in the eastern canyon had been going on for nearly 100 years. Due to that, Andras hadn’t had the slightest sense of caution. They hadn’t thought they would be severely poked at this time.

It was a good blow. He had to admit it.

At that moment, the knight at the front opened his mouth, “General! The road is blocked!”

“What?” General Torbell looked at the map, but a path was clearly drawn.

Was it a mistake by the person who had created the map?

Just as Torbell was thinking of finding him and punishing him severely, a knight said, “General! 30 minutes ago, I received a report from a patrol. Some roads are blocked by landslides, so a new map needs to be created…”

“Fool! You should’ve told me sooner!”

The furious Torbell decided to advance, so he told the knights to find a detour.

Fortunately, the knight in charge of patrolling had an excellent memory, and he remembered the changed geography. It might be a longer path, but the speed of advancement was much faster than

before.

They would arrive at the camp in 10 minutes.

Kururung!

...That was if things went as planned.

“No, a landslide!”

The empire’s elite knights were surprised by the sudden collapse of a cliff, but they took a defense formation without any chaos. If aura users gathered all in one place like this, it would turn into an impenetrable fortress.

“All members! Be prepared for impact!”

“People with shields, hurry and raise them!”

In addition to the front, back, left and right, the knights raised large shields over their heads to block the soil and sand pouring down. It was a huge mass which could turn the human body into rotten tomatoes.

Kurururung! The landslide swept over them.

Puhak! The earth shook.

Then a knight emerged from the ground covered in rocks. No, it wasn’t just one. Like moles poking their heads out of a dug hole, the dozens of knights slowly emerged. Anybody familiar with landslides would be impressed by their health and defense.

In the meantime, General Torbell kept calm.

“Those people!”

At the end of the path, faint figures could be seen in the canyon. A real landslide wouldn’t have been as light as it was now.

It was an artificially created landslide, so the knights had been able to prevent it with their defense. Of course, most of the horses died in the process, but for aura users, horses were just a way to save stamina.

“All members, chase those rats!”

They weren’t wearing lightweight plate armor, but they were knights of the empire. If they were held back by this weight, they didn’t deserve to stand on the battlefield. The knights climbed the steep slope and chased after the fleeing enemies. In the meantime, they saw the ruins of the watchtowers and the fallen snipers.

This canyon was supposed to be their territory. The pride of the Andras knights wasn’t low enough to leave magicians wandering around freely. They followed the enemies wearing robes of an unknown affiliation.

If it was a long distance, it would be difficult for knights to compete with magicians when it came to speed. However, if it was a medium distance, they could catch up if they overdid it a little with aura.

Torbell rushed ahead as the fast-moving knights used aura on their legs.

Kwakwakwak!

The sight of dozens of knights knocking hard rocks out of the way with their heavy armor was terrifying. The robes of the magicians got closer. Of course, they didn’t make it easy to catch up as traps were triggered under the feet of the knights.

“Tch, these little tricks!”

“Fight like men!”

The booing didn’t stop the magicians. The knights eventually broke the traps and kept chasing after them, while the magicians installed more traps. This was repeated throughout the chase and seemed like it would last forever.

However, the mutual fatigue wasn’t taken into consideration. Unlike Meltor’s troops, who had to consume magic power and stamina to move, the knights were in a better condition. There was more room for them in the chase.

Soon after, William's troops were surrounded by them.

"Ah, I got caught."

Ignoring William's quiet mutter, General Torbell pulled out a sword from the sheath at his waist.

"These people! Daring to strike at Andras' dignity... You won't die easily!"

"Well, I wonder if that is really the case?"

"How ridiculous!"

The empire was strong. They would be able to recover from this much damage in an instant.

Torbell snorted and spoke while covered in a red aura, "A rat cornered by a cat is trying to bite back? But you should know that you can't beat the cat! Today, I, Torbell, will engrave that into your bones!"

"That is correct. A rat can't beat a cat."

"...Hrmm?" To think that William was convinced by Torbell's words...? Torbell couldn't seem to speak.

So, William continued, "But did I really get caught?"

"What are you saying?" Torbell asked bluntly.

William raised a hand to cover his mouth as he laughed. "You are the ones caught, you idiots."

Torbell and the knights present didn't notice it. Shadows were looming behind them.

Chill.

Torbell had been on the battlefield for nearly 30 years, but this was the day that he experienced the feeling of horror. It wasn't just because the enemy was behind him. That wasn't enough to cause chills. However, what was this feeling that seemed to press at his soul? This unknown fear changed to horror, and the dozens of

knights looked back.

With a red robe, black hair, and blue eyes... a man, who was young and yet not young at the same time, was facing them. Normally, they would've laughed at him.

However, the Andras knights knew. This person, who didn't even look 30 years old yet, was a threat to the empire. He could never know the size of the wound he had carved into the Andras Empire.

"—You, I have heard of you," Torbell spoke on behalf of everyone, "Theodore Miller."

"That's right," Theodore responded in a grave manner.

Now, Torbell and the knights' deaths were confirmed. It was a fact whenever meeting a master. They knew they couldn't defeat a master who had already killed one of the empire's Seven Swords. Therefore, they were determined to put just one wound on their enemy before dying. The resolution that filled them caused the air to shake.

"For the empire!"

Torbell rushed forward with the knights behind him.

"For the glory of Andras!"

Aura soared up. Every one of them was an elite knight. Without Theodore here, the 30 war mages would've had to fight for their lives. Nevertheless, this world was about the strong. One master was equivalent to thousands of troops, and this absolute power difference couldn't be overcome with the advantage of numbers.

Without surrendering to the end, they all fought fiercely until they were killed.

*

On this day, Andras lost one outpost, two generals, 100 knights, and 1,000 soldiers. On the other hand, Meltor's damage was only

some injuries and wasted magic power.

The skirmish in Karul Plains thus ended in Meltor's victory, and Theodore's name rose to a higher level than before. Then two days after the stunning skirmish...

Andras' spiteful counterattack began.

Chapter 274 – General War (1)

Kuuong! Kuuong! Kuuong!

Beyond the horizon, the soldiers who were enclosed in steel stepped forward one by one with loud noises. They were covered with iron and leather from head to toe, the swords in their hands flashed in the sun, and their feet left deep footprints in the solid earth.

Weeds were crushed and small pebbles broke as they looked forward.

There was no sound of drumming or any war cries. The eyes of the soldiers shone from underneath their helmets as they remained silent and poured all their strength into moving forward.

This was the strong army of the Andras Empire.

Rather than shrinking back from the defeats which had happened since the starting of the war, the army was overflowing with the will to retaliate. It was terrible that 150,000 troops were moving forward, while 100,000 still remained in reserve.

Benedict, who climbed onto a hill to watch this spectacular sight, opened his mouth to speak.

No, he burst out laughing.

“Huhuhuhu! Those imperial idiots have really become spiteful after their pride was broken! I never imagined it would turn out this way…”

This had all stemmed from Theodore. The damage wasn’t big enough to change the course of the unification war, but it was true that the damage was great for one blow. Benedict’s initial purpose was achieved, but it also ignited the enemy’s fighting spirit.

Earl Carter laughed at the situation and spoke, “Hahaha, isn’t it a happy miscalculation? For them to overpower the eastern canyon,

that is more than I expected.”

“Huhuhu, that’s right. Our hero has played a part, so this old man should also use some strength.”

Benedict looked around at his advisers before staring at the approaching Andras army. The laughter disappeared, and his eyes filled with a dignity suitable for a leader.

“An all-out confrontation on the plains.”

In a battle on the plains where no obstacles existed, it was usually a battlefield where magicians dominated. Attack spells such as Fire Ball were more powerful than dozens of arrows, and the firepower of a magician could annihilate thousands of soldiers.

Even if one Fire Ball could be ignored, the knights couldn’t survive hundreds of them pouring down. It was unknown about sword masters, but it was a fantasy that an individual could overcome an army.

“It is a strange struggle that common sense says they can’t win, but…”

However, none of the leaders could agree.

“Andras is outside of common sense.”

Benedict’s advisers nodded and gazed at the enemy’s frontline which had already come into view. The infantry advanced without stopping, and it seemed like the knights might rush forward at any time.

The most annoying things were the great shields which were made of a blue-grey material. They covered several hundreds of square meters. It was the titanium shield, called the ‘Magician’s Despair.’

This unidentified material was the enemy of Meltor. The magic towers attempted to find its weakness and found it could only be neutralized with an organized bombardment of at least 5th circle

magic.

This titanium greatly reduced the magicians' firepower, giving the Andras Empire room to fight Meltor on the plains. Otherwise, the north would've been unified under Meltor's banner early on. Therefore, Meltor couldn't help feeling spite when they saw these colors.

"...A little closer and they will be within range."

However, that didn't mean Meltor had no strategy to deal with it. Benedict recalled the blood that his ancestors had shed and raised his left hand. "Let's do the standard procedure first."

"Should we use the Tactics Mages?"

"Mobilize the 3rd unit just in case. Use Judgment of Eurus on the great shield in the heart of the imperial army."

"I will follow your words!"

The advisers raised a few flags, and the command was quickly passed on to the magicians. It took 14 seconds starting from Benedict's command for the action to take place. The only kingdom which could maintain such a high-speed command system with more than 100,000 troops was Meltor.

Soon, a pale light shone on the left side of Meltor's army, where the Tactical Mages 3rd unit was located.

Hwiuooong...

The wind blew. It was a tactical spell which twisted the air currents and created a vortex of power. This was proof that Judgment of Eurus was being used. There were 16 magicians of the 5th circle and 100 magicians of the 4th circle.

With all that ability gathered in one place, it meant they could exert a power equivalent to a great magic. This was the strength of tactics mages, who functioned as an army rather than individuals.

Kuooooh!

Judgment of Eurus, a vortex born in the sky, suddenly plummeted toward the ground.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“R-Retreat, no, aaaack!”

“Hand! Take my handdd!”

The troops of the advancing imperial army were swept away like dead leaves, and the whole area was covered with dust.

No matter how much magic power was lost, the physical power which arose from the phenomenon remained. The titanium shields became distorted, and the soldiers depending on them were thrown away with their limbs broken.

Tactical magic, which was comparable to 7th circle magic, wasn’t something that the titanium could endure.

“Hrmm.” However, Benedict looked dissatisfied. It was because after the storm passed, there were still a few people crawling out of the cloud of dust. They were knights and aura users. If they were directly hit, they would’ve stopped breathing. However, the power was offset by the titanium, so they avoided any fatalities.

Then it was at that moment...

“Commander! Look over there!”

“What is going on? There... Hrmm?”

The eyes of Benedict and his advisers widened. They saw a portable catapult being rolled on four wheels. It was a massive structure that was being dragged from the rear of the imperial forces.

This wasn’t a siege, so why was Andras bringing a catapult to the plains? Their opponent was Meltor, a kingdom which could intercept the stones fired by the catapult. The Meltor troops were silent because they couldn’t understand the scene, then the loaded catapult fired a shell.

It aimed exactly for where the Tactical Mages 3rd unit was located. The unexpected thing was that although the action was fast, the shell fell on empty ground, and there weren't any casualties.

Kwaaaang!

At first glance, it seemed like a pointless attack.

"K-Kuaaack! M-Magic power?"

"The links... They are all broken. At this rate..."

"The tactical mages' magic circle is being destroyed! The 3rd unit will become individual magicians at this time!"

The tactical mages' magic circle, which had taken a minimum of four years to produce, had collapsed. Benedict was at a loss for a moment after hearing the news, but he soon figured out the situation.

The catapult was fine. The problem was the shell that was fired.

"Surely it isn't a titanium shell...?"

It was a metal which dissipated magic power itself, so the titanium exerted an effect even if it wasn't in the form of a large shield.

Andras had fired a catapult to the 3rd unit, which had been exposed after the utilization of Judgment of Eurus. The goal wasn't the individual magicians but to break apart the magic circle, preventing large-scale tactical magic from being used for a few days.

However, before Meltor could evacuate the area, the Andras Knights read the flow and launched an assault.

"Commander! There are 100 knights coming to the front!"

"Order the 2nd unit to use Anger of the Earth..." Benedict paused while speaking.

He was hesitant about the possibility of losing another unit after the 3rd unit. This was the exact gap that Andras aimed for.

Kwaang!

The power of the knights in full heavy armor wasn't something that the soldiers could prevent. Blood scattered as the knights rode through the human bodies. After reaching Meltor's front, the choice of stopping them with tactical magic was lost.

They ran through the wall made of 1,000 soldiers at once and sliced at the necks of the magicians. This was Andras' terrible breakthrough power. The soldiers were broken like scarecrows, and even the well-trained magic soldiers died before they could act.

If this were left alone, the mage unit would be lost in 5 minutes. It was the same damage Theodore had inflicted the other day, so it was impossible to leave alone. Benedict made a quick decision and spoke to Earl Carter, "It can't be helped. Send 'him' out."

"Isn't it too early?"

"His power is half-exposed already. It is unfortunate, but this isn't a situation where we can spare anything."

"I understand. I will tell him straight away."

'He'? Despite the unknown identity, the advisers all nodded at the decision. That person would be able to stop it.

The eyes of Meltor's troops were dark as they looked at the enemy knights.

*

"Kill them now!"

"Don't get caught! The first thing is to keep going forward!"

The knights in the lead called out as blood covered their blades in the blink of an eye. The blood belonged to the enemies, not the knights. The soldiers who bravely jumped forward were cut by

dozens of aura blades. The efficiency was a bit worse than that of magicians, but aura users were also like reapers for general soldiers.

This repeated but they soon encountered resistance.

Kakang!

The swords, which were being wielded, stopped for the first time, and the knight in the lead realized that the soldiers around him had changed. These were the magic soldiers that Meltor was proud of. They wore military artifacts and had magic, so their combat power was a lot higher than ordinary soldiers.

“You are good… but! You will never be our enemy!”

Nevertheless, it was impossible to stop Andras’ advance.

Chwaaaak!

The magic soldiers collapsed with their necks pierced. They could buy more time, but they weren’t at a level to fight the knights. Still, they sacrificed their lives to be shields for the magicians in the rear.

This was a mission implicitly given to the magic soldiers. In order to prevent the knights’ advance, they needed to have power on the level of a war mage. War mages that this place didn’t have.

“—Oh, sorry for being late.” There was a grim voice and then it seemed like two bolts of lightning struck.

Clovis Two Swords Style.

Wartime Confusion Hidden Technique.

Wolf’s Frenzy.

12—no, 24 slashes simultaneously struck the bodies of the knights in this space.

Puhwaak!

It was too late to notice by the time blood was spurting out The

swordsman avoided the drops of blood which splattered near his eyes and kicked the corpse of a knight. The knight's head and limbs were cut off, and the knights stopped for a moment as they saw their colleague's body.

"Are you stupid?" Randolph laughed coldly as he stabbed the two knights who had stopped moving.

As soon as Randolph appeared, he showed off his strength, which defeated three knights, and shook the blood off his blade. The other knights stared at him. Their instincts told them this monster's power.

"...Sword master?"

Why was there a sword master in a magic kingdom? They hesitated as this question appeared in their minds. Randolph didn't miss this opportunity and raised his pair of swords.

Puok!

Then a knight was pierced in the heart from behind. The stabbing motion was too fast and sharp to be seen. It was like an attack from a warrior who had been on the battlefield for years. Simultaneously, several knights collapsed, and several people appeared behind their backs.

"What, who are you?" The nervous leader of the knights cried out.

Meanwhile, the people chuckled and didn't reply.

The aura at the ends of their swords and spears proved that they weren't magic soldiers. If they had one thing in common, it was the wolves which were carved somewhere, like on their armor, sheathes, or waistbands.

Then Randolph opened his mouth to answer the question, "We are mercenaries hired by Meltor, the Wandering Wolves."

"What?"

A sword master working as a mercenary…?

Randolph pointed his blades at the knight who couldn't hide his disbelief.

"I'm sorry, but you have to die."

"D-Dammit!"

A sword master had come into an area with dozens of aura users. Most of all, there were the magic soldiers in the area. The operation would fail if they got caught this way.

The chief knight grasped his sword tightly as he sensed this, while the knights also raised their aura. There was no surrendering even if it meant dying. The knights had been raised to be loyal to the empire, so there was no changing their allegiance.

Shortly afterward, the knights and mercenaries started the melee.

It seemed impossible, since the mercenaries were less skilled than the knights. However, the difference was small in comparison to the magic soldiers, and the mercenaries had good artifacts with secondary magic.

Additionally, Meltor's assistance improved the conditions.

Kakang! Kang! Chwaack!

The knights lost their strength and fell to the swords of the mercenaries. It would've been impossible without help, but this was a war and this was the result. The knights fell down one by one.

It was even more prominent in Randolph's case. His invisible swords caused the heads of several people to fly away at once. It was done at a speed which only one of the Seven Swords could keep up with.

"Well, should I let them earn their pay…"

Little by little, Randolph stepped back, allowing his men to finish

the job. Putting aside the mercenaries, he was a master who would shake up the battlefield by himself. It was more efficient to move according to commands, rather than without any thought. Now it was time to go back to the outskirts of the army and look at the enemy's gaps.

Randolph thought up to there, but his feet stopped.

'No, I was stopped.'

It was more accurate to say that he was forced to stop. This was like his feet were glued to the ground, causing Randolph to turn his attention to behind him. His double swords were pulled from their sheaths and aimed at the enemy.

"Who?"

A white-haired woman appeared like a ghost and replied to his question, "The empire's 5th Sword, Delkur. It is a pleasure."

'Delkur,' Randolph's eyebrows raised slightly at the name. He looked at his stuck legs and asked again, ...I see. Are you the 'Shadow'? Is this it?"

"Yes, is it strange? It is a technique called Shadow Step. I can't move, but you can't escape before I release it."

"It is a nasty technique."

Kyah! For Randolph to speak in a tough tone with that face? "I like it."

After these words, Delkur suddenly pulled out a spear and pointed it at him. No, it wasn't a normal spear. At 1.8 meters long and with the semblance to an arming sword, it was a strange weapon that replaced the handle of a sword with a spear handle.

Kakiing.

She smiled with killing intent in her eyes.

"How is it? I wonder if you can beat me at this distance?"

“Hrmm, we’ll see.”

The distance between the two masters was only 3 meters. A falchion had a much shorter reach, however, it was a reasonable distance when stabbing with a spear. Even so, Randolph laughed as he raised his double swords.

“Why do I feel like I won’t lose?”

“Ahahaha! How impudent!”

A little distance away from the battlefield, the two masters of Andras aimed their weapons at each other.

Chapter 275 – General War (2)

Kaaang!

There was a sharp noise, and sparks flew. It was a sign that the spear and blade had struck each other like lightning bolts.

However, at this point, Delkur's superiority was absolute.

A spear attack required the use of one's shoulders, elbows, and wrists, but the time it took to attack and recover the weapon was short. It might be different if Randolph's legs were free, but in this situation of limited mobility, he was late by half a measure.

In the time that Randolph slashed twice, Delkur had stabbed three times.

The forehead, philtrum, throat, solar plexus, thighs... This was one of the Seven Swords of the empire, capable of grasping the essence of the whole body and attacking without a single error.

Randolph struck at the snake-like tip of Delkur's spear with his blades. However, that wasn't the only reason why Randolph was simply defending.

'So far, this has been the 123rd time. I should be able to gradually see the pattern, but... I still can't catch it.'

Once a person exceeded a certain level, they could see that every person had a unique pattern of movement. It might be a flick that was a habit, but once it was repeated so many times, it formed a strange consistency which allowed the attack orbit to be seen.

Randolph, in particular, was excellent at reading these patterns.

This was a type of ability that was different from Theodore's super sensitivity or Lloyd Pollan's ability. It was a skill Randolph had developed by leading a mercenary team, touring the battlefield, and soaking up the mud.

However, he couldn't read anything from Delkur. If she wanted

to stab him in the stomach, she looked down. If he looked down, she would come from the side.

It was a puzzling and tricky trajectory. He tried to blindly read ahead, but it just caught him off guard. Instead, Randolph avoided the spear that was aiming at his body and returned it with 12 strikes.

Neither of them could win with normal attacks. As soon as the two masters had the same thought, Delkur took action first with Delkur Style Snake Shadow Spear. It was like a shadow of snake wriggling on the grass.

Poisonous Snake.

Flow Change Technique.

Double Snakes.

The tip of the spear suddenly split in two and aimed for both sides of Randolph's neck. One of them was fake, or maybe both were real...

However, Randolph didn't have time to worry about it as a stabbing sound was heard. Randolph raised his two swords without thinking, blocked the right and left stabs at the same time.

Jeeeong!

Delkur's green aura and Randolph's blue aura clashed.

"Kuk!"

"...Tch."

It was appropriate to call this an 'offset.' Blood flowed down Randolph's hand. However, Delkur wasn't in a good state either. Randolph's strike wasn't a small scratch, so at least one wrist should be cut off.

"Hey. Aren't you great, Lady? One year ago, my head would be flying away. This is why I dislike geniuses."

In Randolph's eyes, Delkur looked like a woman in her late 20s. She had actually become a sword master in her 30s and was the owner of a talent that could even be called genius inside Andras.

This monstrous orbit wasn't something which could be accomplished just with training. Delkur's innate talent, thoroughness, and instincts put her opponent in an unfavorable position.

"Ha? Aren't you also a genius? This is the first time I've seen a sword master using dual swords, so I can't seem to beat you. Wouldn't it be better if you just die?"

It was as she said. The reason why Randolph could endure the spear's speed and orbit was because he was the user of two swords which could quickly defend attacks coming from all directions.

Instead, it would be more disadvantageous for him if he was a normal aura user. Being able to block the spear despite being half a beat late... the dual wield was a natural enemy that Delkur had never met before.

Randolph looked at her slightly disheveled self and spoke, "You have a fairly complicated story."

"What?"

"I was convinced by that hidden technique you just used. It isn't a spear technique from the West Continent. It is based on the Eastern Spear technique, Seizing and Penetrating. There are many parts that have been rearranged, but it is close to the Pear Short Spear. Why is an Eastern spear technique in the Andras Empire?"

"Hrmm."

Randolph had stayed with Theodore for a few months at the Baek Family's home, so he could see it. Regardless of whether he was right about her history, Delkur didn't answer him. She just looked disgruntled, like she had lost the heart to fight. "...Tch, it ends here."

Delkur tightened her grip on the spear and took off her right foot, which had been stepping on his shadow. Simultaneously, Randolph realized that he could move. However, rather than feeling relieved, he looked at her suspiciously.

Delkur's skills were certainly great, but her superiority was only guaranteed when she blocked his movements. In this environment, Randolph could kill Delkur within 300 strikes.

"Did you think I would let you go?" Randolph warned, raising his dual swords as he stepped closer.

"An obsessive man isn't popular with women."

"I'm sorry, but I am a persistent wolf."

"What is that? Calling yourself a beast? Then I should throw you a bite to eat before leaving."

'What?' Before he could ask, people rose from behind Delkur.

They were covered from head to toe in black armor, and they held black swords in their hands. It was clear that they were Shadow Knights. These were the mad dogs of the empire who would throw their lives away without any complaints.

"I will see you later! I will kill you then!"

"Annoying...!"

As soon as Randolph stepped toward the fleeing Delkur, the Shadow Knights threw themselves forward. Of course, they clearly weren't a match for Randolph. He used exactly the time of three breaths to kill all five of them, each receiving one strike per sword. The problem was that during this time, Delkur's presence couldn't be felt at all.

'No, there is the possibility that she hid herself along the way.'

It might be an unknown shadow ability that couldn't be understood yet. Thinking about it, it was probably the ability which had allowed her to suddenly appear behind him like a ghost.

As such, it was likely he would just waste time chasing after her.

Randolph decided to take a step back and return to Meltor's military command base. In a battlefield where a minute or a second could take thousands of lives, hesitation was a luxury.

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The knights' assault was the starting point, as Andras and Meltor entered the full-scale war. The knights might have been annihilated without showing great success due to the mercenaries, but Andras had yet to show even half their power.

There were still 100,000 troops waiting in the rear, as well as the emergence of the Seven Swords who could be called the symbol of the empire. Therefore, Meltor had to overcome the empire in this phase.

However, in this phase when they should take advantage of the terrain of the plains, the magic kingdom was being pushed back by Andras' army.

Their strategy wasn't bad, but the difference between the troops couldn't be overcome. All of the empire's soldiers had been trained for more than five years, followed by three months of training every year. It wasn't a training regime that Meltor could go against when it was a 1:1 fight.

"...We need the tactics magic."

"Yes, we can't wait anymore."

With expressions like they were chewing on worms, the Meltor leaders prepared for the tactical magic bombardment that they had postponed until now.

If the previous attack had eliminated the shield, then that meant it was possible to kill thousands of enemies. The large damage that tactics magic dealt in a single attack was one of the reasons why Meltor had never been defeated on the plains so far.

However, this war was different. There was that titanium shell which had been fired by the catapult. If that damned thing destroyed the tactical magic circle, then they would be down two tactics magic units, and Meltor would lose the means to reverse that 100,000 power difference.

'We can instruct the magicians to intercept the shell, but…'

There wasn't just one catapult. The catapults were placed in the very rear, making them impossible to destroy with tactics magic. Meltor's troops might be able to destroy three or four of the catapults… Two in the worst case scenario.

Benedict's expression twisted darkly as he made a pessimistic prediction. What should they do? It was the role of the leaders to find a solution even if it was through unfamiliar means. Benedict was even willing to jump onto the battlefield with his old body.

He was about to pull a staff out when he received an unbelievable message. "What?"

However, it wasn't just him, as the eyes of all the advisers also widened. Then Benedict ordered the reporting magician to repeat it. After confirming that his ears didn't hear it wrong, Benedict asked incredulously, "Someone infiltrated behind enemy lines and destroyed a catapult?"

Then at that moment…

Kukukung! The sound of thunder rumbled in the clear sky, and the earth where three catapults were located collapsed. An earthquake? No, that was impossible. How could earthquakes only occur in the ground where the catapults were?

Benedict looked at the catapult with vision magic and screamed, "He did it! He really is a reckless hero!"

He was half concerned and half full of admiration. Beyond the incredulous and disapproving advisers, Theodore raised himself up. He used magic to move underneath the catapult and collapse

the ground.

‘Why are my ears tickling?’ He looked around as he scratched his ears.

“Is everybody safe?”

[2nd group! There are no casualties.]

[There are no problems with the 3rd group!]

The voices he heard from the communicator weren’t unclear. Despite being in the middle of the opponent, they expressed absolute confidence in their victory after moving with Theodore. Theodore laughed and connected the communicator to someone else.

It was the ‘man’ whom he had nominated as his deputy.

“Thanks for the hard work.”

[Yes.]

The success of this ambush was more than half thanks to him. Theodore had noticed the empty space beneath the surface of the ground with Mitra’s ability, but he didn’t have the ability to move 30 people to that space.

There was only one person could do that…

Unsurprisingly, William’s voice quivered as he heard the voice that transmitted over the network, [C-Captain. S-Surely that wasn’t…?]

“Your guess is correct.”

[Hiik!] William was so surprised that he hiccuped, while the enemies started to approach Theodore.

“From now on, move as we planned in advance.”

[Understood. How will you get out?]

“I have thought of my own way. Even if I can’t destroy all of them, I can escape before the resistance becomes severe.”

[… I wish you luck.] There was no time to explain. Orta understood the meaning and broke the communication network first. Theodore also cut off the communication spell, organizing his thoughts before he implemented the strategy he had envisioned a few days ago.

What was the best way to raise the greatest achievement on this battlefield?

It was nice to show off his firepower with great magic. However, it was disadvantageous because he needed to recover after consuming a large amount of magic power, leaving him vulnerable to attacks. Additionally, the presence of the titanium great shields would block all great magics, unless it was Fafnir's breath attack.

Yes, the shield called the 'Magician's Despair' was the problem. It was difficult to destroy with magic, and it was a significant reason why Meltor was struggling right now. Thus, Theodore decided to deal with the shields directly.

'Gluttony, I will ask you once again. Is this really possible?'

–Of course.

Theodore had the power to break the shields. However, if he broke them, there would still be enough debris left to make new shields.

Meltor's ranged firepower couldn't be exerted unless he removed the titanium itself. Theodore couldn't use magic attacks or physical attacks. He needed another way to remove the titanium from the imperial army.

It was a tactic that any strategist would dismiss, but Theodore had a way.

"Okay, I will let your tongue play."

–Don't make it sound so dirty.

'Inventory' was a passage which led to the dimensional space

that was Gluttony's stomach, unlike the other dimensional pockets which were maintained with magic power.

It could contain a large volume like a pirate ship, so Theodore had already confirmed that it could accommodate large shields. Theodore's role was to approach the great shields in the midst of the strong 150,000-troop army and allow Gluttony's tongue to make contact with them.

"I have to take at least half the shields!"

Was Theodore being influenced by the deepening of his contract with Aquilo? The magician with the red robes glared at the enemy and plunged into the Andras army, which was still confused.

Chapter 276 – General War (3)

Still, it was unreasonable to confront an army from the front. 10 people were easy, and 100 wasn't difficult. However, once it went over a 1,000 people, a lot of magic power would be consumed. Once it became 10,000 people, it would leave time for him to be surrounded by the elite enemy forces.

Theodore rapidly approached the soldiers while figuring out the most effective way to capture the great shields.

'First, I need a trick.'

His red robes and brilliant appearance attracted attention to ensure the safety of his unit. So, after achieving his purpose, there was no more need to be eye-catching. Theodore's body overflowed with strong magic power.

"In the name of Aiolos...!"

An old and forgotten deity... The name itself had the same effect as summoning magic. Of course, it couldn't be manifested by name alone, but it was enough to awake the divinity in Theodore's body.

The divine nature of the wind god, deeply immersed in Theodore's soul, responded to his call.

—What do you want?

Then for a moment, Theodore's wind affinity and magic comprehension rose to the extremes. If Theodore shared a little bit of the divine vision, he could produce magic beyond the ultimate magic.

The climate magic that Theodore chose was from the Book of Clouds. It was a spell that White Tower Master Heathcliff had used on a previous battlefield, which had caused a 'storm.'

"Go crazy, Maelstrom...!"

As magic power flowed from him, Theodore was convinced that

the climate magic was successful. Simultaneously, the airflow around Theodore gradually moved in circles, and after a few times, the acceleration was enough to cause dust to rise from the ground. The distant clouds in the sky also spiraled as a whirlwind connected the sky and earth.

Huuuuuuong!

At first, it was just difficult to open one's eyes, but it soon became hard for people to keep their feet on the ground as well. Even the knights wearing full plate armor weren't able to endure it, while the horses that were several times heavier than a person also fell. How could this be a spell used by a magician?

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

"Lower your bodies! Don't confront the wind head-on…uwacck!"

"S-Sir Bradley!"

Theodore's magic wasn't over yet, but the storm was already causing even the knights to be swept away.

'It is quite spectacular in many ways… but it isn't enough.'

Theodore had reproduced it on a plausible scale, but the power of the Maelstrom he cast was far less than Heathcliff's. Originally, the wind's rotation would tear at flesh and crush bones. Additionally, Theodore didn't originally intend to use this magic for killing. It was just a gimmick to hide him.

'Invisibility.' As he chanted a spell, Theodore's appearance disappeared.

It was transparency magic which deceived the enemies' vision. Then he removed his eye-catching red robes and placed them in his inventory. From here on out, he had to move secretly and quickly.

As the soldiers were scattered by the storm, Theodore flew 5 meters above the ground. His goal was the nearest titanium shield. The shield's large size meant it easily entered his line of sight.

When Theodore saw the dark blue shield which was 240 meters away to the east, he flew past the confused soldiers.

If he tried to break through with force, it would take at least 10 minutes. However, the Andras formation had fallen into chaos due to the whirlwind, and they were now in no position to capture a transparent magician.

“...Good.”

Theodore settled down slightly on the surface of the great shield. He frowned when he felt the faint feeling of mana scattering. As expected, this metal was the natural enemy of magicians. It was difficult to break with direct magical interference. If it wasn’t for the inventory, Theodore might’ve withdrawn at this point.

Theodore whispered inwardly, ‘Then please, Gluttony.’

–Um.

The tongue protruded from the palm of Theodore’s left hand and touched the surface.

[’Titanium Shield’ has been housed in Inventory M1.]

The giant shield that was ~20–30 meters wide disappeared from where it was covering the soldiers’ heads. The soldiers became anxious as they realized that the solid shield had suddenly disappeared.

“T-The shield disappeared...?”

“No way! My palm was just resting on it!”

“Find it! If there is no shield, we will now...!”

It was truly chaotic.

Someone looked around to find the lost shield, while another person stared at his palms in confusion. However, no one knew what had happened to the great shield, and Theodore moved to the next target without any resistance.

This time, it was a big shield around 180 meters to the southeast.

“What…?”

“The shield has disappeared again?”

By the time he seized four of them, Andras didn’t remain stupid any longer. The scattered knights surrounded the remaining shields, causing Theodore to become increasingly burdened. He floated in the air as he worried about the eight fortified shields.

‘What should I do now?’

Should he seize a few more or step away here?

‘If possible, I’d like to take one or two more…’

Before Theodore could abandon this lingering thought, he fell into trouble.

Kiiing-! He heard an unpleasant ringing sound. It was a noise that gave him a headache, like something was scraping the inside of his skull. Once he realized that the cause was his super sensitivity, Theodore felt something piercing in front of his eyes.

Ping—

One second later, there was something penetrating the spot on the ground where Theodore would’ve been standing. He might’ve thought it was a blindly fired arrow. However, Theodore felt through Mitra that the arrow had penetrated the rocks hundreds of meters underground.

‘A person who can shoot an arrow like this…!’

‘Bow master,’ these words came to Theodore’s mind as a rain of arrows came from a few kilometers away.

It was like lightning.

A sound was left behind as there was a blue flash. The speed and penetrating power were higher than those of Magic Bullet. He would be turned into a rag if he tried to stop the arrows’ paths.

To make matters worse, Theodore's super sensitivity was giving him a paralyzing feeling. This meant the supersonic arrow's speed exceeded his foresight!

Pajijik.

Theodore's body quickly turned into lightning and zigzagged. Nevertheless, there were a few scratches which tore at his skin, and a few strands of his hair were cut off. The arrows contained a killing power which could pierce even the scales of dragons. Theodore didn't understand since the shots seemed to be fired in advance.

'Don't tell me the person has the power of foresight?'

It was said that the power of seeing the future, foresight, would collide every time two users saw the future simultaneously. Was it because the future became favorable to each person that an image couldn't be drawn?

As such, Theodore's super sensitivity was giving him a headache because it clashed with the opponent's foresight. The rain of arrows, with one arrow per second, lasted for 15 seconds. Then the rain of arrows suddenly stopped heading toward Theodore. His transparency had long been unraveled, but none of the knights could reach him from where he was in the sky.

"...10 seconds."

Theodore's garments were covered with blood as he guessed the limits of his opponent's foresight.

It was exactly 10 seconds from the moment of the first attack.

This was when the sense of numbness from his super sensitivity disappeared. Judging by the power of the arrows, his opponent hadn't restrained his strength. The bow master's arrows could only overcome Theodore for 10 seconds.

'It is up to here.'

After the one-sided assault finished, Theodore reassessed the situation with a calm gaze. He hadn't taken more shields, but at least he revealed the presence of an enemy bow master. An unseen master was a powerful strategy and hidden card. It would've been a good judgment if Theodore was killed, but now it was just an irreversible error.

"Well, next time, let's stick together," Theodore ridiculed the opponent before heading toward the Meltor camp.

Arrows flew after a while, but Theodore was already close to Meltor's camp and he jumped through the space with the power of Umbra. The threatening arrows lost their meaning once the distance was more than doubled. The opposing side knew this fact, so they stopped after a few more arrows.

The result could somewhat be called Theodore's judgment.

'From now on, I need to move more carefully.'

The unidentified bow master, with an ability related to 'foresight,' could kill a skilled warrior with one blow.

A supersonic shot which could strike accurately over a few kilometers... It was a foul ability that didn't give anyone a chance to respond unless they possessed foresight like Theodore or a strong defense like Veronica. If the target had been the rest of his group instead of Theodore, half of them would've been wiped out even with Orta's protection.

Then at that moment...

"—What?" Theodore stood firmly and looked into the distance, confirming what looked like a volcanic eruption.

As a large amount of magic power stirred, it was on such a great scale that didn't compare to tactics magic or great magic. The peak of humanity, the one who reached a higher realm...

The dragon's blood and eight circles corresponded to each other, while the hot magic power pressed down on the entire plains.

Before long, ‘she’ appeared in Theodore’s field of view. Behind her, there were four pairs of wings made of fire as the strength of an 8th circle magician distorted the space.

The Red Tower Master, Veronica, dominated the entire area.

[I command the great one-eyed king.] Her voice resounded through the plains as she, the strongest magician currently in existence, chanted a spell.

It was an arrogance that no one could interfere with.

The arrows shot at her melted in the air, so Theodore knew that defense was unnecessary. The enormous heat itself was a shield and spear. The opponent had to be an absolute being like Veronica to break her defense.

[On behalf of the four rulers, give me magic power. Open your eye, and make everything that you see turn into ashes. See what you want, and kill what you want. Burn to the ends of the horizon, returning all life back to the earth.]

Theodore listened to it and realized the identity of the magic, “Surely this isn’t….?”

Among the few 8th circle magics which remained in modern times, Veronica was casting an ancient annihilation magic which nobody could use. It was a destructive magic that was forbidden to use in places other than the battlefield because it borrowed the name of an evil god.

If Theodore remembered correctly, its name was…

[Open your eyes and burn them.]

It seemed to tear apart the sky and the earth.

[—Death Gazer.]

The eyes of death appeared. No one could see anything. No, it was more accurate to say that they couldn’t look. Veronica’s 8th circle magic, ‘Death Gazer,’ wasn’t a spell which could be seen with

the human eyes. Gluttony said it was a high-density infrared.

“No way…”

There weren’t any spectacular explosions or loud noises. However, Theodore couldn’t help shivering. This was just from a glimpse of the magic which appeared before Veronica.

“…Is it dead?”

The entire plains subsided into a fearful silence. Veronica’s magic, ‘Death Gazer,’ was fired in a certain direction. The figures who remained in its path didn’t look human anymore.

From head to toe, the humans had been turned into ashes. Death appeared everywhere it passed. From the beginning of the spell to where it ended, maybe 10,000 people were turned to ashes.

It was the death magic which borrowed the name of Balor.

“…Hi, hiiiii?!”

“R-Run away! How can we win against such a thing??”

“Monster! Monster!”

The soldiers of both camps retreated from Veronica, regardless of whether they were enemies. This power proved to be a subject of fear for both enemies and allies alike. There was only one adversary who could face her—the empire’s 1st Sword, Crowd von Russell.

A little while ago, Veronica had aimed at the rear of the imperial army where Prince Fermut’s headquarters was located. Beyond the army that had been turned into ashes, the barrack remained in a strange shape.

It was an attack which had burned 10,000 troops and tried to end this war. Yet this magic which had killed so many others couldn’t surpass the sword of a man. Holding the sword which had killed Death Gazer, the swordsman who was called the strongest in the empire walked into the middle of the plains.

“You still want to get the jump on me, Witch.”

“You are still trying to disrupt my work.”

They chatted like old friends who were meeting after a long time, despite having the tremendous strength to kill at any time. The distance between these two people, who had absolute strength, was exactly 100 meters.

Veronica and Crowd faced each other at a distance they could cross in an instant. They clashed shortly after that.

*

Later, an officer who recorded the battlefield said, 「 The battle on Karul Plains was nothing but an appetizer until the two absolutes were revealed. 」

The clash between the strongest people of the two powers, Veronica and Crowd, had continued for nearly an hour. The sky was torn, and the earth was crying out. Meltor and Andras had been forced to hide until the fight between the two absolutes was over. It was a struggle to move due to the aftermath of the fight.

Regardless of whether they were happy or unhappy about it, they were forced to stay still. The two absolutes had caused terrifying changes to the entire plains, before turning their backs on each other.

Did they judge that nothing would change if they kept fighting? For those who were already a few steps beyond being human, strategic analysis had no meaning. In any case, the battle on the Karul Plains was over. One officer called it ‘being lowered.’ Due to the two absolutes competing for strength, the ground was so badly damaged that it was no longer suitable for continuing a war.

From this point on, the unification war entered its next stage. The two sides retreated from Karul Plains, cleaned up the disorganized army, and divided the army units again. The holy kingdom, Lairon, and the kingdom of elves, Elvenheim, were

originally expected in a fortnight, but the reinforcements coming from far away joined the rear camps early.

It was the start of a full-scale war where all the military power of the Northern Continent was concentrated.

Chapter 277 – Revenge (1)

A few days after retreating from Karul Plains, Theodore breathed for a moment at the command barrack.

To put it simply, the current situation of the war wasn't bad.

No, it was actually good. The empire's army had lost four shields thanks to Theodore, resulting in the deaths of several ten thousand troops due to tactical magic. Additionally, the empire was now unable to come out boldly like before.

Most of all, Meltor only had 20,000 casualties in comparison to Andras' 50,000. If this all-out war continued, Andras would receive devastating damage.

The problem was the aftermath of the fight between the two absolutes.

"It has become a place that can no longer be called a plains."

It was as Theodore said. The battlefield where Veronica and Crowd, the strongest monsters in the north, had met for an hour was now so destroyed that it was impossible to remember its previous appearance.

Lava pits had formed throughout the flat terrain, while rocks reminiscent of icebergs rose from crevasses. This was such a terrifying sight that no one would think was a plains. It was impossible for a thousand people to fight on this battlefield, let alone hundreds of thousands.

The commanders of the two powers roughly grasped the terrain for half a day, before retreating with their entire armies. It meant they couldn't fight here anymore.

There were many places where their armies could be stationed, not just Karul Plains. However, since there were few areas where hundreds of troops could confront each other head-on, the commanders of the two armies had to devise a new strategy and

reorganize their armies.

–User, the silent Gluttony suddenly spoke.

“Why are you calling me?”

–I have something I want to ask.

“Go ahead. You will just speak anyway.”

–You understand me well. Then I won’t hesitate.

Theodore waited for Gluttony’s question while feeling inwardly amused. Considering Gluttony was a grimoire that only cared about magic books, Theodore was sure that it would be a question about magic books.

However, his expectations weren’t fulfilled.

–It is about this war. Why isn’t User using all the hands you have?

“What?”

–It isn’t a difficult story. Right now, there are several ways for User to devastate the battlefield alone. You might not be able to summon Fafnir but summoning a high ranking demon alone is significant. You don’t even need to order it directly. You can just throw it into the middle of the enemy territory, and it will perform its role.

That was a sharp point. Theodore didn’t have just his power. Even if he couldn’t summon Aquilo due to the crisis of his chastity, the number of summons that were possible by using the ‘Library’ was endless.

As a last resort, he could also give up the god sword, Claimhb Solais, to summon Fafnir. It might just be for two or three minutes, but Andras’ army would be destroyed. However, Theodore didn’t use the summoning magic. He had unconsciously sealed the method for some reason.

Gluttony wanted to hear this reason.

“Uhh, don’t laugh once I tell you.”

–Hmm?

“…There is no logical reason. It is just a feeling. My super sensitivity is telling me I shouldn’t use it. I have a feeling that things will just get bigger.”

It was a worry that he couldn’t tell anyone. He had hidden the method without any grounds, and now his allies were suffering damage… So, he didn’t feel good. If the leaders were aware of this fact, it was inevitable that they would rebuke him.

Gluttony was a grimoire of reason and rationality, so Theodore closed his eyes and waited for the ridicule. He wouldn’t be surprised if he was called an idiot.

–Hoh.

Theodore was forced to feel surprised.

–You came to the same conclusion using intuition, not logic? Your judgment is correct.

In this situation, Gluttony praised him instead.

“W-What?”

–Once again. User’s intuition is right. You shouldn’t call a transcendent being like Fafnir.

“If you say so… but why?”

–From here on out, it is just my own hypothesis.

A hypothesis was something that hadn’t been proven yet, and Gluttony didn’t want to speak just using conjectures.

–Let’s change the story. User, have you ever thought that the North was strange?

“Strange… What part?”

–All of it, Gluttony declared without hesitation. –Think about it. It has already been 500 years since Meltor and Andras, the two

nations that worship magic and the sword, were created and first confronted each other.

In common sense, this was natural. However, Gluttony continued to talk in a sarcastic manner.

Regardless of the climate of the kingdom, there were no extreme cases like the Northern powers. Meltor had developed the magic towers and rejected the sword, while Andras had waged war on magic since the days when they first became a kingdom and declared that Meltor was their enemy. Either way, both were unusual.

It was strange that in 500 years of war, the result hadn't leaned to one side. Despite the superior and inferior positions changing several times, there had never been a definitive result. After almost cutting off each other's power, they had concluded with an armistice agreement like it had already been promised.

Anyone who thought deeply about the history of the war in the North would find it strange.

Why had this useless war of attrition in the North persisted? Why had they gone to war every few generations and continued to consume great numbers and amounts of people and goods? Why had they not tried for a peaceful resolution just once?

-The Andras Empire is the heart of the incongruity. Regardless of which side seeming to have the advantage, they will make a move that 'prolongs' the war. After driving Meltor to the brink, they would step back and declare war again if Meltor begins to revive. According to actual history, Andras had a chance to unify the North many times by making a truce with Meltor. It is strange if you think about it.

"...In other words," Theodore organized what Gluttony was trying to say, "This long war in the Northern Continent is following the intentions of 'someone' in Andras?"

–That is my thought.

“Andras and Meltor… The history of the two nations might be due to that bastard?”

–That’s right.

“…Don’t make me laugh!”

If he hadn’t cut off the noise around him in advance, it wouldn’t be a surprise if he got treated as a crazy person.

Theodore was even more furious than he had ever been before.

How many people had died up till now? Since the early days when the two nations were founded, they had collided with each other. At least 10 million lives had been snuffed out like candles. All these deaths had been because they were dancing on the palm of an unknown person?

‘I can’t tolerate it.’ Theodore ground his teeth and barely managed to calm himself. It was still a hypothesis. Yes, he could think about it as a hypothesis. Theodore barely calmed his breathing and spoke to Gluttony again, who had been waiting, “… Yes, assuming that the ‘someone’ exists, will using Fafnir stimulate him?”

–Of course. In addition, User still isn’t prepared to kill millions of lives.

“Ugh,” Theodore groaned.

Then Gluttony added in an attempt at a comforting tone, –I don’t blame you. A clear mind is a great quality for a magician. It is a hundred times better than being drunk on black magic and malice like the black magic apostles.

“Well, whatever,” Theodore came to a conclusion, “I will ask that person who would know the story later.”

–Indeed, that person.

“Yes.”

‘That’ person who had been there since the early days of the kingdom’s founding, who would know the history of the North and prove the truth of this hypothesis…

Theodore and Gluttony came up with the same thought at the same time.

They thought of the person who had founded the magic towers in the magic kingdom, Meltor, and devoted themselves to it. On the surface, everything had seemed to be for Meltor’s revival, but there was nothing to rule out that they weren’t involved with the ‘bastard’ who had caused the Northern Continent to be like this.

The grimoire, Paragranum… It was time to question it.

*

“Oh, you came.”

As Theodore entered the barrack, Benedict welcomed him with a brighter expression than before. Was it because the duties of a commander were quite heavy? Or was it due to the help of an ally?

Shortly after Orta secretly joined the party, he had revealed his identity and moved to the command center under Theodore’s direction. It might be necessary to move in secret, but it was too wasteful not to use his abilities as head of the information gathering network.

‘It is enough reason to use the ingredients.’

Theodore had helped Orta’s body recover quickly, and Kurt had given Orta permission to accompany Theodore. Furthermore, Orta’s presence in the last operation hadn’t been revealed. It had been difficult to notice Orta’s existence since the teleportation had been underground. This meant he could still be mobilized as a trump card.

“You came, Benefactor!”

“…Good morning.”

On the right side of the commander's desk, two elves seated next to each other welcomed Theodore. One was Edwin, who had come to Meltor as an envoy in the past, while the other was the guardian called Ellaim, who had fought valiantly against Laevateinn.

By sending two guardians, Elvenheim proved they weren't taking this war lightly. In addition to the guardians, there were 100 elf warriors.

100 elf warriors, which included elementalists and archers, were truly powerful. They would be able to compete with the red tower's war mages and the elite knights of Andras in a one-on-one match. The fact that Elvenheim had sent 100 people, who could be defending the Great Forest instead, showed their regard for Meltor.

It seemed like another 1,000 elves would arrive in the next few days because they were moving more slowly.

"Okay, you have all gathered on time?" Shortly after that, Veronica entered the barrack. The red hair and heat around her body didn't seem any different from before. However, Theodore's expression became slightly shadowed.

'Her magic power is a little thinner than usual... It looks like she used a lot of power in her fight against the 1st Sword.'

It was difficult for a normal person to feel the difference, but Theodore had faced the monster called Veronica many times in the past. He might be the youngest in this place, but everyone had different experiences.

Unsurprisingly, Veronica immediately disclosed this fact, "First of all, I will leave the battlefield for the time being."

Meltor's strongest power, an 8th circle magician, was equivalent to two armies. So, for a moment, there was chaos inside the barrack, and many people muttered with pale expressions.

However, Veronica couldn't have expected it either. "Of course,

my condition isn't good. I consumed around 40% of my magic power and only scratched that guy once or twice. Blundell will soon arrive to keep the 1st Sword in check. He will teleport in tomorrow."

"Hrmm, I-I see."

"Don't be so amazed. Well, there isn't a problem since I'm not connected to the command system. Orta recovered faster than expected, so it is favorable to us."

In the all-out war on the Karul Plains, Meltor had gained a slight advantage. As for the benefits that could be gained by using that advantage, that was the issue that the current leaders and magicians had to address.

The two guardians and 100 elf warriors...

There were 5 people with the power of a master, including Orta. How should they split up this power in order to defeat Andras? Prior to that discussion, Veronica turned to Theodore and said, "For the next few days, your role will be the most important."

"...Yes, I'm aware."

The 1st Sword and Veronica had stepped away, so it was a battlefield where the absolutes weren't present. However, this wasn't definitive. It took just one step for the empire's Seven Swords to move here since it was closer to Andras' territory than Meltor.

Since they had the healing power of Lairon, Andras' sword masters would be able to recover quickly. It wouldn't be strange to see the 1st Sword tomorrow. Moreover, everyone had forgotten, but there was one more absolute power in the Andras Empire.

"Zest, that bastard, will come after you."

Zest Speitem was the Imperial Sword with the ability to cut space. In other words, it meant he could jump through space itself. A sword master of the highest level could attack in an unexpected

place with extraordinary timing.

He hadn't failed so far, meaning he couldn't leave Theodore alive as proof of his failure.

Veronica held both of Theodore's shoulders and asked, "How about it, can you do it?"

Could Theodore deal with Zest, the empire's 2nd Sword? The question probably wasn't referring to 'victory.' It would be good if he could survive. With Theodore's age and abilities, that was the best outcome.

However, Theodore wasn't satisfied with that.

"Once is enough to learn from my defeat." This time he vowed that he wouldn't give up. "I will properly smash him."

"Okay! That is my kid!" The mysterious magician who was at the peak of the red tower, Veronica, laughed excitedly as she ruffled Theodore's black hair.

Her ambitions toward this magician, this man with her, kept on rising. She was satisfied with this fact.

"Now, reorganize the troops!" Veronica loudly raised her voice and proudly announced the name of the younger generation, whom she wouldn't see for a while.

Chapter 278 – Revenge (2)

The meeting on the reorganization of the army took a lot of time. In addition to the newly joined Orta, there were the elf reinforcements and the two master level guardians. Not only that, but most of the elf warriors were from different fields, ranging from reconnaissance to fighting. Therefore, they had to come up with a plan of how to move them.

The meeting was held until the sun was in the middle of the sky. As a result, Theodore was placed in a vacant lot with his assigned personnel.

He looked around at those who had joined him and said, “First, Quattro and the detached group will move directly under me like before. The performance that you showed on Karul Plains was excellent. Please show the same thing in the future.”

Yes! The 30 magicians saluted. The groups under Sylvia, William, and Para didn’t have any casualties. They might have been lucky, or it might have been due to good commands. Theodore didn’t think this optimistic outcome would continue, but he hoped it would drag out as long as possible. He didn’t want his heart to be bothered by the loss of familiar faces.

Looking around at his subordinates, Theodore’s gaze stopped on a person for a moment—a blonde girl.

‘Paragranum.’

She was the Yellow Tower Master who had founded the cornerstones that were the magic towers.

Theodore used to think that Paragranum had simply picked Meltor as a good place to study magic, but not anymore. If there was someone who guided the northern war for centuries as Gluttony presumed, then the grimoire hiding behind a shell was also a winner.

There was a chance that the recipe to make titanium had been handed over by Paragranum.

“…Next.”

However, it was still too early to question Paragranum. Theodore tore his eyes away from the grimoire in the guise of a young girl.

Anyway, her body was just a terminal, and there would be no big outcome if Theodore killed her. Additionally, there was a need to find the grimoire’s main body in order to threaten it with Gluttony.

‘It is obviously hidden somewhere in Mana-vil.’ Theodore thought of a few suspicious places as he looked at the waiting elf.

The elf had blond hair that was close to silver, and he looked like a sculpture. He was Edwin, the guardian of Elvenheim who was placed under Theodore’s command, along with 50 elf warriors.

“I am happy to be with you again. Third branch of Elvenheim, Sir Edwin.”

“I am also thankful for your guidance, Benefactor.”

This time, they shook hands instead of using a military ceremony. Edwin was Theodore’s subordinate, but he was also a guardian with the highest reputation in Elvenheim. As an elf with the power of senior elementals, Edwin didn’t bow to anyone except for the high elves.

He wasn’t someone to speak informally with.

‘I didn’t ask, but things turned out well.’

Theodore was relieved as he spoke to Edwin, who followed him like a mild puppy.

The bow master of Andras, who had aimed for him last time on the Karul Plains…

Apart from Theodore who had foresight with his super sensitivity, the best person to match the bow master was Edwin.

Ellaim wasn't weak, but right now, the unit needed a master specialized in ranged combat rather than close combat.

It would strengthen the strongest part of the unit, rather than the weakest part.

In the first place, war mages acted on the principle that they would defeat the opponent before they got close. Close combat was a last resort. A magician who allowed a knight to get close was already halfway defeated.

Furthermore, Theodore hadn't seen it yet, but the Gladio that Paragranum had repaired was sleeping in his inventory. Even so, there was a chance that the bow master might strike when Theodore's feet were tied up by another one of the empire's Seven Swords.

The presence of the enemy bow master, who could shoot arrows over a few kilometers, was a nightmare.

'In the worst case scenario, the 1st and 2nd Swords will have recovered rapidly and then strike at me, but... it is meaningless to worry too much about it.'

The probability of that was close to zero. Theodore might be a hero, but on the surface, he was just a 7th Circle magician. He wasn't an opponent that two of the strongest swordsmen in Andras would team up against to assassinate.

Meltor had the combination of Veronica and Blundell, so it would strategically be very stupid.

Putting the powerhouses in one unit might allow a terrible power to be exerted at one point. However, if they didn't act according to schedule, this could become a huge hole. For instance, if Theodore didn't move at all, how long would the 1st and 2nd Swords wait in their locations?

Meanwhile, Meltor would be able to trample on the empire. Blundell and Veronica would cut at that gap.

Additionally, that could also be applied to Theodore's force.

"Dame Rebecca, sister of Sir Randolph."

"Yes, My Liege."

In response to the call, Rebecca moved forward and knelt on one knee like a knight. Her left hand was on her waist, while her right hand was on her heart. It was the greeting of a person who would devote both her sword and her life to him.

'...Indeed, she has a genius talent like Randolph.' Theodore reflexively read and admired her skills.

Rebecca's performance had probably advanced by two stages since they said goodbye four months ago in the Soldun Kingdom. She was probably around Randolph's level when he had been at the duel trial?

Rebecca was at the last wall before becoming a sword master, realizing her Aura Ability. It was the turning point where crossing the wall depended on a person's capabilities. Despite his admiration, Theodore spoke in a cold voice, "Is this enough to keep what you have promised me?"

He was asking if she could survive on the battlefield where even the life of a sword master wasn't guaranteed.

"I'm sorry. But Brother said that in order to move onto the next stage, action, not practice, is needed."

"That's right. He also crossed this wall because of real action."

It had been a stormy night when he had been on the side of the infamous sea dragon, fighting against a grimoire from the Age of Mythology. The experience of that day surpassed the decades of experience that Randolph had built up.

After that, Randolph found his Aura Ability and his overall skills soared. It couldn't be compared to that night, but this war might be enough to awaken Rebecca's ability. However, that wasn't the

answer that Theodore wanted.

“Do you intend to use this war as your springboard? If you have such a thought then leave right now.”

“My Liege, please allow me to speak.”

“I give permission.”

After receiving Theodore’s permission, Rebecca looked up at him with her green eyes. “My Liege, I swore to be your sword.”

“So?”

“Swing me freely. My blade will bathe in the enemy’s blood, and I will cut more sharply than before.”

“I am a magician. You might not get the role you desire.”

“If I’m interfering, then leave me. I will return to my sheathe at your waist.”

Rebecca abandoned her pride as a knight and only followed him. Yet as the beautiful knight spoke in a dignified manner, it was clear that some of her pride still remained. It was enough to make the people gathered here feel overwhelmed.

Sylvia looked serious, but Theodore couldn’t read her mind and just accepted Rebecca’s request.

“Okay. Make sure that you thoroughly move according to my instructions.”

“I will keep that in mind, My Liege!”

As Rebecca stepped back, Theodore realized that all the personnel had been sorted out. It was a group of fewer than 100 elites. Although it might be difficult to attack Rutben, it was a unit capable of destroying a decent fortress in half a day.

“Apart from the leaders, I will see the rest of you here tomorrow morning. Dismissed!”

The work he had to do wasn’t over yet. As all the members of the

unit returned to their quarters, Theodore moved to the barrack with his executives. As mentioned earlier, he had to be careful not to waste this power.

He had to do something that wouldn't become a negative. Theodore looked through the maps and used Alfred's memories to determine the place to attack.

"Rutben is too crowded. It is a little further, but how about Elverin?"

"The distance is too great. It will take time for troops to arrive to occupy the area, and there aren't any great benefits to occupying it."

"Moselle Castle looks okay."

"Umm... The terrain is vague. We don't have to rush into things. In the East, it is called 'something that one hesitates to give up even though it is of little interest'?"

"Then Moselle is put on hold. What is next?"

Someone asked, "What about Dofrun Castle?"

'Dofrun Castle' was a unique name, so the people in the barrack looked at the location on the map.

Then they sighed.

"It is too much. The empire's rangers are guarding that mountain. The whole area is completely covered with defensive lines. The enemy reinforcements will arrive in half the time."

"Even if we can fly over the defensive lines, Dofrun Castle itself is quite a strong fortress. If we are surrounded while exhausted, our odds won't be good. Moreover, the senior officials of Lairon are staying there, so their power would be increased."

"It seems impossible for anyone to move stealthily toward Dofrun... It is a fortress that needs to be captured from the front, similar to Rutben."

Dofrun Castle itself was manageable. The walls weren't thick, and the elite troops, including the knights, were of an ordinary level. Theodore and his unit could easily destroy the fortress. The problem was the harshness of the path leading to Dofrun.

'Ranges cover the mountain area over tens of kilometers.... It is impossible to pass through without being detected by a defensive line. Dofrun Castle should be excluded from the list of targets.'

Theodore grunted as he looked at the map and realized that the words of the other people weren't wrong. Even Alfred, who was called a genius at tactics, couldn't find an answer to this obstacle.

Wouldn't it be better to get a small profit, rather than aim for something big and get into trouble? Theodore was leaning toward Moselle Castle that was mentioned earlier.

"Ah."

Then an old memory popped into his mind.

'Yes, if it is that...'

Theodore looked at Edwin's face. He remembered what he had experienced when he first stepped into Elvenheim. His mind shone as he thought of a similar method.

"...Shall we try it once?"

The next day, Theodore and his subordinates disappeared from Meltor's military camp.

*

Berbatov Mountains—it was one of the largest mountain ranges in the empire, with peaks which reached an altitude of 6,000 meters.

The spectacular terrain of the mountains and its geographical proximity to the border meant it had the nickname of 'Imperial Wall.' The rangers who defended the Berbatov Mountains were always proud of this fact, not tolerating even a single bird flying

above their heads.

Today, some unlucky birds died from arrows.

“Ohh, that was pretty good practice. Did you shoot two at the same time?”

“There is a saying about two for one. So, I decided to try it once.”

“Very interesting. Should I also try it once?”

Hitting two birds with one arrow... The imperial archers were certainly remarkable, but the Berbatov rangers were the only ones who could show this type of archery—shooting flying birds with arrows.

All of the rangers were good enough to distinguish faces on the horizon, and they could even see the leaves rustling a distance away. They were the reason why Meltor didn’t target these mountains. The entire mountain range could be burned down, but they didn’t use this method because there were no benefits.

The knights were filled with pride, and eventually, one of them shot down three birds with one arrow.

“Today the mountain is peaceful. Won’t we die of boredom?”

“I agree. I wish an intruder passed by.”

“Eh, just one person? There should be 100 people.”

“Hahahaha! Is that so? Indeed, I should be able to shoot 100 people!”

This remark might seem arrogant, but it was the truth. The rangers of the Berbatov Mountains could shoot hundreds of people alone.

They were garbage if they missed one shot in 10. If they missed one in 100, they were a fool. Then if they missed one in 1,000 shots, they would avoid going out, stating it was an unlucky day.

So, the Berbatov rangers couldn’t have imagined that as the two

knights in the watchtower were chatting, there really were almost 100 invaders passing under their feet.

‘Fools, shoot me if you can.’ Theodore laughed as he walked through a tunnel 800 meters under the Berbatov rangers.

It wasn’t easy for a sword master to detect something 800 meters below ground. This was impossible to detect with just a bow and good eyesight even if the elementals weren’t being used. Theodore borrowed Mitra’s vision to watch the rangers above ground, enjoying this bold infiltration.

“Hah, I never thought it would be reproduced this way…” Edwin murmured as he walked near Theodore.

This method was familiar to Edwin.

It was the way of the forest. Previously, Ellenoa had shown this power to Theodore when he arrived in Elvenheim. The tree branches, roots, and bushes had moved to create a road that hadn’t been there previously.

However, Theodore applied it under the ground, not to the forest, making a tunnel which went for several tens of kilometers.

“It is only possible with your help, Sir Edwin.”

It would be noticed if they used magic, even at this depth. So, Theodore made this tunnel purely by borrowing Mitra’s power. But the amount of power consumed exceeded what Mitra was capable of. Theodore would only be able to make a tunnel that was two or three kilometers at most by himself.

Fortunately, a few days ago, he had been given 50 elementalists who would support Mitra’s power.

“I can’t refuse the Dancer’s partner…”

“An auspicious day…”

Theodore ignored the burdensome rumors behind him and kept on walking. His super sensitivity whispered that it would be a

disaster if he asked what they meant. Theodore turned his thoughts to a different direction.

‘We will get there by evening. It should be fine to rest a little bit and start in the middle of the night.’

Dofrun Castle itself wasn’t far. It just seemed far away due to all the defensive lines in the mountains. If they moved in a straight line, they could reach there within a day.

According to secret agents of the white tower, it was the place where high ranking officials of Lairon were staying. Theodore’s eyebrows twitched as he remembered the ugliness he had seen from those in Lairon. They were the ones who were trying to spread the flames of war in the name of their god for the purpose of gaining benefits from it.

‘The cardinal and crusaders. No, the priests are enough.’

They were a big variable that could treat people on the battlefield, so he needed to kill the ones in Dofrun. If they prepared their chants, the knights of Andras were almost immortal.

‘They always like pushing others from behind.’

That was why they had participated in the Soldun civil war and were participating in this war. They didn’t take action personally. Instead, they killed their enemies by using other people. Could this indirect killing be called murder?

The people of Lairon were the type of people who looked down on others while keeping their own hands clean.

“…This time, I will stick their faces in the mud.”

Theodore would use this opportunity to teach them that they couldn’t stay concealed forever.

Chapter 279 – Revenge (3)

It might be hard to compare it to Rutben, the impregnable fortress, but Dofrun was one of the fortresses included in the defense of the border. In a normal situation, a large army needed to be mobilized in order to properly capture it.

The geographical advantage of the Berbatov Mountains and the durability of Dofrun Fortress, with its multiple layers of defense, made it one of the top three fortresses in Andras.

However, there was a pitfall that no one knew about.

Its reliance on the geographical advantage and external defenses meant that the defenses of the fortress itself weren't so great.

If uninvited people were to appear in front of it, Dofrun Castle would be a place with its shell stripped off. The elite troops were focused on a flexible and movable outer defensive line, while the reputation of the Berbatov rangers resulted in a reduction of the standing army at Dofrun Castle.

Dofrun Castle, which hadn't been attacked by the enemy during the last two centuries, was a ripe apricot.

'Well, it is still faithful to the basic defenses.'

Once they were a few hundred meters away from the outer walls, Theodore climbed up to aboveground and looked at Dofrun Castle, which was shining in the darkness. If there was some light, then Theodore's 'Hawkeye' could see.

There were a few bonfires on the walls, as well as the moon from the sky, giving Theodore dim lighting.

"...The wall material is titanium. Alert devices are arranged at regular intervals, so we can't go through with invisibility or flying magic."

"There are many guards. There are around 100 on the east wall

facing the Berbatov Mountains. It will be hard to get past without getting caught."

The observation wasn't wrong, so Theodore nodded. As William said, it was impossible to avoid the eyes of so many guards. It might be possible if they could use magic freely, but it was hard due to the devices which would ring when magic was detected.

"That is the case if we are just a unit of magicians."

Andras failed to take into account the variable that was the elves.

"Sir Edwin, will you be able to swiftly silence the guards on the wall?"

"It isn't difficult. Leave it to me."

The Berbatov rangers of Andras might be known for their archery, but they couldn't compare to the elf warriors who had held bows for hundreds of years. No matter how hard the Berbatov rangers' training had been, their targets had been human.

As such, their skills couldn't compare to the elf warriors who hunted the creatures in the Great Forest and defended Elvenheim. In the darkness, 50 elves pulled out their bows and held their breaths as they loaded the arrows.

One between the index finger and string, and another between the ring finger and string...

Surely they weren't planning to shoot two at once? It defied the common sense of magicians as Edwin and the elves stared at the wall. They were familiarizing themselves with the darkness, never blinking.

Blood vessels appeared on their well-trained upper arms that were pulled back. The elves' bows were made of tendons from ogres and other monsters, so their tension was far beyond a normal longbow.

"Suuuuoh..." Edwin let out a long breath and then...

Piing.

He didn't hesitate to let go. There was the sound of a thin string snapping, and two arrows flew some somewhere. The same was true for the other elves. Nevertheless, there was only the sound of one snapping.

It was a feat caused by 50 people firing at the same time, without any errors in the timing. The 100 arrows rode the wind as they flew. The wind wasn't something that had to be overcome. An elf's bow could draw orbits that human bows couldn't reproduce.

The arrows weren't heard because they didn't go against the wind. The barrage of two arrows struck the guards on the east wall.

"Keok."

"Ack."

Hit in the uvula, larynx, and cervical vertebrae, the Berbatov rangers were stopped from making any sound the moment they were pierced, causing them to produce just short groans.

The arrows had been aimed at critical areas, just like how skilled hunters would do.

It was great that the elves could hit the target from a few hundred meters away, and all of the arrows had hit the exact spots. Some magicians, previously unaware of the elves' capabilities, felt relief that the elves weren't their enemies.

Theodore gave short praise for the elves' skill and then urged the group, "We have to cross the wall before the next shift comes. Hurry!"

Some people might wonder why he was in such a hurry over Dofrun Castle. However, Theodore couldn't let himself overlook anything.

Dofrun's defensive lines were stacked around the outside, and

this could immediately turn into layers of encirclement once their infiltration became known. If they were glimpsed coming from the tunnel, they wouldn't be able to escape using that method.

Then unnecessary casualties would occur. Moreover, the obstacles weren't just the guards on the walls. There were the titanium wall and alarms which interfered with magic, both of which resulted in the magicians having to climb the wall with their bodies.

Fortunately, this problem was solved easily.

"C-Cough. Thank you."

"Isn't it heavy?"

This was thanks to the elves, who could easily climb the walls using elementals and their own physical abilities, carrying the magicians. It was enough for them to carry one person each. With the wind elementals assistance, the 80 people were able to climb the wall without difficulty.

Theodore was more powerful than ordinary aura users and didn't need help, which strangely caused Rebecca and Edwin to subtly express feelings of disappointment.

'It is much easier than I thought. Elves can substitute for the weak physical abilities of war mages, and the elementals can get past the alarm devices... This might be a surprisingly good combination.'

An average person thought that the combination of knights and magicians was the best, but the magicians and knights didn't agree.

Magicians thoroughly aimed their firepower from a distance, while knights quickly narrowed the distance to take down the enemy.

It was difficult for the two types to work together when they moved in opposite directions. When a knight mixed in with the

enemy, the magicians wouldn't be able to exert the destructive power that was their strength. On the other hand, a knight who had to protect a magician would be like a tied up wild horse. Rather than benefit, they only hampered each other.

However, the elves who could use the sword, bow, and elementals were different.

Sometimes they maximized firepower from a distance like magicians, and other times they closed in on the enemy for close combat. Of course, they would be at a disadvantage when compared to magicians or knights in both fields, but their utilization on the battlefield was unrivaled.

A three-man cell of two magicians and an elf warrior wasn't a bad tactic.

Kiiing-!

Then it was at that moment...

"Stop."

At the same time as Theodore spoke, the 80 people quickly stopped. They were on the outskirts of the castle. The elves were famous for being sensitive, but even Edwin looked puzzled and didn't know why Theodore had stopped.

'Indeed, it is this feeling.'

The last time, Theodore hadn't been able to sense it because it was mixed in with the chaos of the battlefield. However, now that he could concentrate, he could feel it clearly. His super sensitivity faded and then disappeared. It was evidence that another person's foresight was interfering with his ability. The bow master, whom he had fought on Karul Plains, was hiding in Dofrun Castle.

"Sir Edwin."

"Yes."

"The bell tower that is 500 meters southwest. Fire an arrow to

the top floor of the tower.”

It went against their efforts to remain hidden so far. However, before anyone could speak, Edwin immediately loaded the arrow and fired. This was the storm arrow that he had once shown in the Great Forest.

The force contained in the arrow was less than that time, but it was enough to blow away the top of the bell tower.

Piing!

One octave sharper, Edwin’s bow cried out.

Kuoooooh—!!

Oddly, more power was added the further it moved. The arrow rotated the wind in the space it passed by, making the surrounding airflow become as sharp as a blade! There was a creepy piercing sound as the arrow hit the bell tower.

Kwarururung!

Like a sandcastle, the solid marble tower collapsed.

“T-This...?”

“Don’t tell me they were waiting...!”

The moment the top of the bell tower collapsed, human figures stood up from the shadow they were hiding in. This had been overlooked because Theodore’s unit couldn’t use navigation magic.

The human figures were using aura to restrict their breathing and heartbeat as they hid in a place that couldn’t be seen. It was a familiar tactic for the Shadow Knights who carried out assassinations and espionage.

However, Theodore and the unit didn’t flinch. They wouldn’t lose out on power even if they were surrounded. Two masters alone exceeded 100 people. Hundreds of shadows were just an exercise for them.

Therefore, the person who appeared after this would be the real threat.

“Yes, you can perceive my ability.” A man appeared beyond the shadow knights. “I intended to kill you on Karul Plains, but I never imagined there was a magician who could flee from my arrows.”

“The foresight ability isn’t unique.”

“That’s right. Our enemy, Theodore Miller… I’m glad to know that you didn’t die in vain.”

The man, who was more like a hunter than a knight, smiled as he held a big bow in his right hand. He had the eyes of a beast of prey, rather than a human.

It was the gaze of a beast who knew how to shoot and how to kill. Theodore had faced many people, but this was the first time he had seen such a blatant gaze. As a bow master born in the sword empire, he wasn’t an ordinary person.

[Sir Edwin and each squad captain, listen to me.]

As Theodore faced the bow master, he opened the communication network and delivered instructions. According to his reasoning, they weren’t tonight’s main players.

[Sir Edwin, please fight the bow master. The rest will form teams of 10, with your respective squad leaders. You can’t let the Shadow Knights go. Priests and paladins will also join in.]

[Then Theo—no, what about Captain?] Sylvia asked reflexively.

Then Theodore responded with knowledge that the rest of them didn’t know, [If the bow master had intended to fight me, he would’ve made his appearance right away. Instead, he hid in the city in order to concentrate on sniping me. This means there are separate people who will deal with me.]

[Separate… D-Don’t tell me?]

[It is possible. I expected us to reunite, but I didn’t know it would

be so soon.]

They were coming. Tension and excitement filled his blue eyes as he gazed in a certain direction. There was a man wearing luxurious white clothing decorated with gold.

This man was probably Cardinal Antonio, one of the ringleaders of the Soldun civil war, whom Orta had spied on. After looking at that ugly face and remembering it, Theodore focused on the person who was more important.

“Ohh! Using evil magic and then walking into a dragon’s mouth with his own feet! It is truly God’s guidance, Sir Speitem!”

“Shut up, you fanatic.”

Shaking Antonio off with rude words, Zest stepped forward while pulling out a sword hanging at his waist. Unlike last time, there were no signs of him being relaxed. The air sharpened with every step he took. Theodore’s skin stung, and a chill ran down the back of his neck as tension filled his body.

“We met again, kid.” It was a reunion with the sword master, Zest Speitem, who cut space. He was the person who had turned Theodore’s automaton into scrap metal in just two seconds.

This was the person who stood shoulder to shoulder with Veronica, Blundell, and Crowd as the strongest in the North. It was the appearance of a mighty enemy whom Theodore had to confront alone.

“...Your broken ribs look better.”

“Ahh, it’s thanks to that damn bastard. I would’ve killed him a long time ago if he wasn’t the one who healed me,” Zest spoke with sincere killing intent as he glanced over his shoulder at Antonio.

It seemed like he didn’t have a connection with religion. Rather, his connection was closer to hatred. Regardless of whether he felt the killing intent or not, Cardino Antonio just smirked and waved his hand. It was a gesture to move along.

“Son of a bitch,” Zest spat out before turning back to Theodore. “Shall we begin? I absolutely won’t miss this time. Be alert, I will kill you with the best of my ability.”

“Are you sure? Last time was probably your only chance.” Theodore took a step back and immediately summoned Gladio from his inventory.

His life was at risk, so there was no point in saving it.

People looked astonished at the armored knight that suddenly appeared out of thin air.

Zest, who had fought Gladio once before, sneered at Theodore. “That toy again? You repaired it only for it to be turned to pieces again.”

“It is different from before. It is upgraded.”

“Hoh.”

No more words were necessary. The air shook as the two people, Theodore and Zest, gathered their power.

It might’ve been 10 seconds, or maybe 5 seconds.

Zest’s blade moved forward, while Gladio took one step under Theodore’s control. Two archers pulled back their bows, their arrows blocking each other. This was the beginning of the rematch.

*

Zest’s sword cut the space first.

Zest’s Style Space Cut:

Decapitation.

From the start, there was no carelessness. Zest had acknowledged Theodore’s strength in the last battle. For Theodore to have summoned the senior demon, Magnus, and have the wit to be able to pull off a trick like that... Zest might be arrogant, but he had a

cool head.

Theodore Miller wasn't an enemy to be looked down on. The sword master's aura shook as he understood this.

'I have to get rid of this can first.'

The piece of scrap metal that felt curiously familiar... The presence of the doll, who had an aura equivalent to that of a master and could use an Aura Ability, was a mystery to Zest. Apart from Zest or the 1st Sword, the other members of the Seven Swords would struggle against it.

It couldn't be mass produced, but if he didn't smash it every time he saw it, his allies in other parts of the battlefield could be hurt by it. Zest's blade moved through the air and fell upon Gladio's head.

Chaaeng!

Nevertheless, he couldn't cut it. Two blades collided and sparks of aura flew. Zest frowned at the recoil.

"...What?"

He checked it again.

Zest's Style Space Cut:

Dividing Cut.

Not one but many cuts at the same time. It was an Aura Ability that went beyond speed itself. The clavicle, femur, and vertebrae were aimed at almost simultaneously, so they couldn't all be blocked.

At least, he thought so.

Kakakang! Kang! Kaaang!

Exactly six attacks were all blocked. Zest's sword wasn't able to land on Gladio. Not only did Gladio succeed in defending, he was also going for a counterattack.

Kang!

There was an exchange before Zest and Gladio took three steps apart. It was a temporary lull. If Theodore's strength were added, it would turn into an outright melee. Gladio's performance was proven, so he no longer needed to be passive.

"Hey," Zest opened his mouth while filled with doubts and anger, "What is this bastard?"

"I told you, it was upgraded."

Gladio was a natural enemy of space magicians, while also being a cheat against swordsmen who interfered with space. Theodore desperately thought and developed a plan for Gladio. There were two additional features that he had asked Paragranum to add.

Chapter 280 – Revenge (4)

"…Acceleration spell? No, it is a little different," Zest muttered as he felt a subtle discomfort.

His sword couldn't be caught simply by speeding up. As such, it wouldn't be different if Randolph, who had an acceleration ability, was here. The ability to cut space was that powerful. Even if the attack was foreseen with 'Pathfinder', it couldn't be caught with a fast speed. Theodore was only able to avoid it by turning to lightning.

Yet Gladio was somehow catching up with Zest's sword.

'Well, there is no reason to talk about it.'

Theodore knew the secret, but he didn't open his mouth anymore. As Zest was feeling the discomfort, Theodore rotated his circles and gathered magic power. The amount of magic power surpassed that of a typical 7th Circle magician.

Theodore's red robes flapped from the pressure, as dozens of fire spears appeared in the air.

Memorize.

Four Slots Open.

Quadruple Flare Lance.

The number of spears which could be created with one spell was seven, so the four Memorize slots were added to his spoken spell to create 35 fire spears. The chilly night air started boiling, and the darkness was driven away.

The Shadow Knights hiding in the darkness were exposed, and light struck the middle of the stage.

"Go!"

The 35 spears shot forward without hesitation.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

He didn't think they would hit Zest's body. A sword master could move a few dozen meters in one step, so lightning magic was more appropriate than fire magic if he wanted to hit a sword master.

Theodore knew all this, but he still chose to use fire magic. The reason for it was revealed shortly afterward.

"Kuk, this doll is quite decent!" In a sharp and violent manner, Zest shouted angrily as he took three steps back.

It was because the explosion of the fire spears swallowed him the moment Gladio struck with his sword. Of course, the damage to Zest was only marginal. As one of the most powerful sword masters, Zest's defense meant he could withstand 5th circle magic.

The problem was that the fire spears were only the beginning.

'Triple Casting.'

Theodore unleashed three spells at the same time.

Chain Lightning.

Gravity Bound.

Acid Mist.

A net of lightning, gravity, and poisonous fog formed around Zest and Gladio. It was different for the non-living Gladio, but it was a deadly series of attacks for Zest's body. 'It is an attack that can easily be avoided if he is only dealing with me…'

Right now, Zest had to deal with the sword master and automaton Gladio that could catch up with his sword. The moment he tried to step away from the fog, Gladio's sword aimed at Zest's head.

Jeeeong!

Zest's ankles sank down into the ground. "Damn, this shitty can!"

That’s right. Unlike Zest, Gladio didn’t receive any damage from the lightning, gravity, and acid. Theodore used this point to successively use wide-area magic. Additionally, a sword master’s defense was proportional to their aura. If Zest tried to block the magic with his aura, he couldn’t help being exhausted. If he tried to retreat, Gladio would catch his ankles, and if he tried to survive, his aura would be exhausted rapidly.

Nevertheless, the strength of the 2nd Sword, Zest Speitem, hadn’t reached the bottom yet.

Zest’s Style Space Cut:

Footwork Hidden Technique.

Kill Interval.

At first glance, Zest’s blade cut nothing but air. Gladio didn’t have an ego and didn’t care, but Theodore was suspicious. In retrospect, it was natural to think about the application. It reduced the path that the sword passed through, speeding it up. If this was possible, could it be used for something else?

Yes, let’s give one example.

—Cutting down the interval used to approach the enemy.

“Gotcha, kid.” Zest suddenly appeared in front of Theodore and aimed his sword.

Zest’s Style Space Cut:

Decapitation.

The blade shone in the light. The space cut appeared behind Theodore and aimed for the cervical spine at the back of his neck. A red glow scattered like blood. In fact, it wasn’t actually blood because Theodore had jumped forward into Zest’s arms and aimed both palms.

‘He’s caught!’

Theodore suppressed his tempo at first because he had

anticipated a surprise attack, then he borrowed Umbra's power to escape to another dimension.

No matter how sharp Zest's Aura Blade was, it couldn't cut Theodore who was temporarily in another dimension. It might be different with the hidden technique he used in the past, but Theodore couldn't be reached with a normal aura attack now.

Theodore used his courage and wit to move through the gap and reached out a hand.

Fairy Dance's Direct Transmission.

Double Palm Hit.

Sun and Fertile Earth.

Zest was unprotected, and he was hit sharply in the stomach. It was a blow that reproduced aura with ether, strengthening the impact of the blows.

Kaaang!

Zest's body was thrown back with a bang. The blood flowing from his mouth was proof that his insides had been impacted. He wasn't careless, but it was the price he paid for not doing his best.

Gladio mechanically chased him with his sword, while Zest raised his head.

"...Indeed."

Zest wasn't angry about being hurt, he was just indifferent.

"I should go all out."

The aura overflowing from Zest's sword faded. No, it was converging with a much stronger density. That power which oscillated space gathered on the blade, transforming it into a sword that would kill anything it touched. Theodore saw it and knew it was a signal for the end.

'He is bringing out his trump card.'

The first style of Zest's technique, cutting through space to shorten the attack process, was just the basics. Zest's true combat power wasn't attached to preemptive attacks.

It wasn't just the attacking process, but also the attack power that cut at the target. This wasn't just physical strength, but a destruction that could make it through magical defenses. This was the true value of his space cut.

Theodore needed to avoid it unconditionally or use a magic that resisted the concept of space. There were only two ways to fight. Theodore wiped at his sweat and pulled out the trump card he had prepared.

Memorize.

Three Slots Open.

Triple Infernal Blade.

Infernal Blade compressed the 7th Circle magic, Inferno, into a single blade. This was an original spell that Veronica had once shown him, and he had received it directly from her. A sword of purgatory which could threaten a sword master...

Zest remembered seeing it in the last war, so he raised his sword and commented, "That is the Witch's heat sword. You didn't use this last time?"

"I guess that is true."

"You have grown so much in four months...? It sounds like nonsense, but I believe it because I have been watching you."

His frosty eyes said that he recognized Theodore as an equal power. At this moment, Zest Speitem decided to use everything he had to kill Theodore. He would abandon his pride as the 2nd sword and face the adversary in front of him. His determination sent a cold chill down Theodore's spine.

Then at that moment...

“Huhu, your stubbornness is up to here. Sword Brother.”

“…You, didn’t I tell you to get lost?”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t. According to the ‘Revelation,’ I have to drive out all evil in this world. It is the reason why this Antonio lives.” Cardinal Antonio, who had been watching the two people fight from behind, walked forward. The cardinal ignored Theodore like he was dirt on the roadside and whispered to Zest, who didn’t lower his guard, “Why don’t you admit it? If you want to kill him with all your strength, it is okay to borrow my hands.”

“…You.”

“You aren’t refusing, huhuhu!”

This was a disadvantage for Theodore. He didn’t know the cardinal’s battle ability, but if the cardinal was on the same level as a crusader, he would be a master. Theodore had grown from his experience in the East, but he couldn’t afford to go against Zest and another master.

Would he have to call out Fafnir? Or he might have to take out what he had saved as a last resort.

‘Damn, they are a nuisance in Soldun and here.’

Then it happened when Theodore was busy staring at the disgusting cardinal and thinking of options. Someone saw a dull mist appear around Dofrun Castle. Between Andras and Meltor, another force started to intervene in their battle. They reached out to those who fell and died on the battlefield.

Indeed, it was a disaster.

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In the night sky which was lit up by flames, arrows revealed their fangs toward their master’s enemies.

Sometimes, it was like a swallow.

Sometimes, it was like a strand of wind.

Sometimes, it was like a flash of lightning.

The two archers fired arrows at the same time and had similar thoughts.

‘Hrmm, a formidable opponent.’

‘This human, he is amazing…!’

The two archers, Edwin and the unknown bow master, watched the battlefield at an interval of 100 meters and pulled back their bows. Either way, the goal was the same—Theodore Miller.

The empire’s archer tried to shoot him, while Edwin stopped the attempt. Zest was a strong opponent, so it would be fatal for Theodore to be hit by the bow master. Therefore, Edwin was desperately trying to stop him.

He couldn’t miss a single one. Rather, Edwin was the one overwhelming the other side with the number of arrows. Unlike the bow master who needed to reload, Edwin used the power of elementals as arrows. There wasn’t even a moment when an arrow wasn’t loaded.

Jjang! Chaaeng! Jjang! Jeeeong!

Four arrows hit in the air and exploded. Edwin understood as he watched the scene.

‘Seeing the future… it is an annoying ability.’

It might be a little exaggerated, but the ranged attacks were basically shooting in the ‘future.’ After 1 second, 2 seconds, maybe 10 seconds…

It was the ultimate goal of an archer to envision future attacks, an area which could only be reached by raising accuracy through experience and talent. However, the bow master observed and shot in the future. Even before Edwin’s arrows had finished their acceleration…

The arrow was deflected. A powerful shot was fired even before

Edwin's arrow left his bow. The difference in half a tempo caused him to be suppressed. Edwin didn't feel like he was losing, but neither could he win. If this situation continued, the enemy would continue to antagonize him until the enemy's quiver was empty.

"Hmm, it doesn't feel bad."

According to what he could see, the battlefield was flowing slightly in Meltor's favor.

Despite the superiority of the Shadow Knights' encirclement, Theodore's unit wasn't easily pushed. It was due to the strong combination of war mages and elves, who possessed magic, spirits, bows, and swords, compared to the knights who could only use the sword.

'It is our first time working with humans... This is a very interesting scene.'

The elves competed against the knights with the sword, while the mages supported from the rear with various support and recovery spells. In the end, the elves pushed their enemies away and the magicians didn't miss this gap, pouring offensive magic toward the exhausted knights.

This combination was surprisingly good. If the opponent wanted Edwin to collapse, he would have to push through with firepower or defeat Edwin with one well-aimed shot. It was impossible for the Shadow Knights to get close to him.

"...Then the problem is over there."

There was a reason why Edwin didn't think the winner was certain yet. It was the people wearing white clothes embroidered with gold.

They wore sun symbols symbolizing their god, and the priests sang soft songs which didn't fit the battlefield. It was a wide-range hymn that drew out the divine power in their bodies, interfering with the magicians' concentration and restoring the body of the

knights.

The chants from the Lairon Kingdom were truly annoying.

A golden light wrapped around the knights. Knights with bones burned by fireballs, knights hit by shock waves, and destroyed knights stood up in just a few minutes.

Of course, they weren't completely cured. However, the impact of being able to continue in the battle was quite large. In the case of Meltor, it meant they couldn't kill the enemy unless it was a blow that caused instant death.

They overwhelmed the enemies with an efficient combination, but more enemy reinforcements would arrive over time or their magic power would run out.

"Shit! Attack those damn fanatics!"

"No! The shields of the knights are too hard. It looks like a titanium alloy..."

"It is supposed to be a rare metal, so why is there so much of it?"

"Son of a bitch! They aren't zombies, so die already!"

Someone mentioned zombies. It was a type of undead that didn't react even if their limbs were broken or torn off. The knights restored by the priests were indeed like zombies. It was just lucky that they didn't smell bad. As someone laughed at the joke, another knight raised himself from a pool of blood.

"Ku...kuaa...aaaah!"

Strangely, the pool of blood indicated that it was definitely a lethal blow.

The priests couldn't restore all the lost blood, no matter how good their divine power was. The wounds were filled up, so maybe this knight was overcoming the limitations of his body with mental force?

The moment the Shadow Knight tried to get up, a fellow

colleague tried to help him.

Kwaduduk! He got bitten. The Shadow Knight's mouth, revealed by the broken helmet, struck the neck of the colleague who had come to support him. People gawked at the bizarre sight. Blood rose from the torn carotid artery, and the bitten Shadow Knight slumped down.

"...W-What?"

"Who used Berserk magic on that knight?"

"Are you crazy? Why would we make them stronger?"

"And even if that magic was used, it wouldn't turn them into a cannibal..."

The confused Shadow Knights and magicians forgot to fight for a while because they couldn't understand the situation. Before they could figure out why, the truth was revealed.

...Ku...ooo...aahhh...!

The knight, who had been killed after being bitted, groaned and raised himself up.

"U-Undead?" The word emerged from someone's mouth. It was like a door had opened during the fight.

Kiiik, kiiiik.

Not just one or ten... There were sounds of dozens, maybe more, footsteps in the darkness. Once they got closer, everyone realized it. The area had been contaminated by the magic of death, and it covered both Meltor and Andras.

The public enemy of everyone on the continent, the warlocks...

The darkness, which caused hundreds of thousands of casualties every time they emerged, appeared in Dofrun Castle.

Chapter 281 – Revenge (5)

The zombies were moving bodies with rotting flesh. They had lost the image of humans and moved on all fours like beasts. Their souls were forcefully pulled out of their bodies and turned into banshees.

The crowd of undead emerged from the darkness of Dofrun Castle. This was the most famous area of black magic, the remnants of death made from necromancy.

“Warlocks? Why are they here…?”

“These bastards are like cockroaches!”

The reactions of the confused magicians varied. Some were puzzled, and others felt indignant. However, there was one thing in common—no one welcomed the appearance of a warlock.

The Magic Society declared that black magic was evil.

People who weren’t familiar with it thought it was just different attributes, but magic and black magic didn’t have anything in common except their foundations. They were both the exclusive property of humans and exercised power based on the circles. It was a unique intersection of authentic magic and black magic.

To briefly summarize, black magic was the power to deny this world. The mark that symbolized black magic was the reverse pentagram, and the warlocks were split into five factions.

One faction was of necromancy, a spell that broke the circle of life and death. Another was of domination magic that made the body and soul submit. There was also a faction that called forces from outside of this world. Aside from those, there were Chronos warlocks and those who worshipped demons.

They made up the five corners of the reverse pentagram. Among them, necromancy was the one that caused the most number of casualties. Necromancers would be targeted by the entire

continent if discovered.

Anyone who saw the devastation of Dofrun Castle would think this decision was valid.

“They’re coming!” The scream was the signal for the curtain of slaughter to rise.

Kieeeeeeek-! Terrible screams! The banshee’s cry was an acoustic weapon that shook the soul itself. The magicians knew this and prepared sound-proofing magic, but that wasn’t possible for the Shadow Knights.

Understandably, the first victims appeared in the Andras camp.

“Aaaaack!”

There were screams as long nails from a ghoul were shoved into a crack in a helmet. The eyes of a knight were pierced deeply. Simultaneously, the poison from the ghoul’s fingernails quickly burned through the knight’s optic nerves.

The broken Shadow Knight fell to the ground.

“Be vigilant! Circulate aura through your entire body! Otherwise, you will be affected by that scream!”

“Switch to protective magic! Maintain the defensive posture while moving back!”

However, the people of the Andras Kingdom weren’t fools. They used the one casualty as a reference and concentrated on protecting their troops, rather than worrying about Meltor. It was clearly the correct judgment, and the Shadow Knights faithfully followed the command.

The undead treated all living beings as targets, so Meltor would be attacked as well. The Meltor unit came to the same conclusion and waited. They were expecting the ugly deaths to come rushing toward them.

Soon after, the moment came. The zombies’ yellow teeth, the

ghoul's poisonous nails, and the banshees' screams...

However, there was something wrong with the scene as the undead all headed in one direction.

"...Eh?"

Someone expressed everyone's feelings.

"W-What, these bastards!"

"Don't panic! Don't let your breathing be disturbed!"

"Why are they only aiming at us?!"

The undead flocked toward where the Andras knights were.

There were some undead in the area near Meltor, but it didn't compare to the number surrounding the Shadow Knights. In a sense, it was a great opportunity. However, Meltor suffered from the unfathomable situation and couldn't move.

'Why are the undead leaving us alone?'

'Why aren't they attacking us?'

The war mages panicked at this bizarre scene while the elves stood by idly. The leaders of both the Meltor and Andras groups were also confused.

"No, what is this all of a sudden?"

The undead suddenly appeared in the middle of the city and were only attacking the Andras side? There was no one who would've predicted this, even if the best strategies of the continent were brought together.

In the end, Zest gave up on understanding and his mouth fell open. Theodore thought it was ludicrous despite it benefiting him. He didn't have a good relationship with warlocks, so why would they help him and Meltor?

'...I don't know.'

There wasn't enough evidence to reach a conclusion. Theodore

worried about this situation and looked around.

His unit had a great advantage once the undead were added. He didn't know why, but it was clear that they were benefiting from it. If dozens of Shadow Knights and the priests protecting them were killed, then Theodore's purpose of coming to Dofrun was over.

Despite this, Theodore didn't like this option.

'I don't know the intentions of this warlock, and it is risky to stay here.'

He couldn't judge this as assistance. Theodore focused on the still disturbed Zest while thinking of the necromancer hiding somewhere in the city.

However, someone moved before Zest and Theodore.

"These people! You are the messengers who have called these demons!" Cardinal Antonio, an elderly man who came from the Lairon Kingdom in the far north, shouted with a rough voice and pale face. "Sacrificing good people to use the power of demons! I am the seed of heaven that will punish you! If you repent now and give me your lives, you will only burn in the fires of purgatory for half a day!"

"...Excuse me Cardinal, what is the basis of your barking?"

"It is a revelation from God Lairon!"

"It is just nonsense."

Theodore and Zest forgot to fight, as they listened to Antonio's words and exchanged subtle looks. It was unclear if they should continue fighting. Their concentration was forcefully dispersed by this disturbance, and they couldn't gather their power again thanks to the atmosphere. Theodore and Zest both struggled.

Then at that moment...

"What?!"

“This is…?”

Theodore and Zest, one beat later than Cardinal Antonio, looked in the same direction with surprised expressions. On the roof of a mansion near where the two people were fighting, a black knight stood. It had a fiery and unearthly presence. Theodore had felt this empty feeling before in the duel trial.

‘Death knight…!’

It was a master level knight who was given life by the magic of death!

The death knight’s physical abilities were amplified several times. It didn’t feel pain, and its durability was close to immortality. Randolph had been the victor, but that was because the death knight had been unable to exert all of its powers at that time.

This death knight that appeared in the middle between Theodore and Zest wasn’t bound by any constraints.

“…Grrr…grr…” It couldn’t speak. The death knight made strange sounds while holding a sword in its hands.

Wuuuong…!

A gray color aura rose from the blade. It was a color that living humans couldn’t have. It couldn’t exert an Aura Ability, but a death knight’s aura was said to contain the power of death that decreased life. The blade was a sword of death that weathered flesh and bones.

If Zest allowed an attack from the death knight to pass through to him, it would be fatal.

“Shit. Do you really have nothing to do with this Kid?”

The killing intent was thoroughly directed toward Zest. Theodore sensed it and made a decision.

‘Okay, I’ve decided.’

The three fire blades behind his back were pointed in different directions as they let out a tremendous amount of magic power. One was aimed at Zest, and another at the stupid cardinal. The remaining one...

“Go.”

The fire swords shot like meteors across the night sky.

————————————————!!!

Theodore saw it the moment the sky and earth flashed.

‘Indeed, the attack power is superior.’

Zest wasn’t surprised at all and focused the power of space on cutting the sword. The empty space before him blocked the flaming sword and soon exploded. It was the ultimate ‘space cut’, a force that cut the space itself to create a new section.

It might be Zest’s space cut, but now it was used for Theodore’s benefit.

“...Well, that is unexpected.”

The surprising thing was that Antonio managed to cope with it, despite seeming incompetent.

The Golden Rays were the symbolic power of the Lairon Church, a power received from the god of the sun. Once it reached the stage of a cardinal, the output was at a level comparable to great magic. It seemed this wasn’t an exaggeration.

Infernal Blade was blocked. Antonio’s white clothing was blackened and he cursed crazily, “T-These guys! I will kill all of the demons’ puppets!”

The reason was simple.

“Attacking the children of Lairon! This is a sin that can’t be forgiven, even if they are killed thousands of times!”

The third Infernal Blade aimed for the priests behind the Shadow

Knights.

Their protection was temporarily disrupted by the undead raid, so this magic literally caused a catastrophe. The senior priests and a few cardinal candidates were turned to ashes, leaving only a few survivors.

Even the legendary resurrection magic couldn't revive them. There were several survivors because they had used divine power to create a shield in the middle. In any case, the purpose of his unit had been achieved.

'I don't think they can chase after us in this mess.'

Theodore thought about it and looked around. The unit members had confidence in their eyes like they could jump into the battlefield at once. It was a situation where the knights would surely be annihilated by the undead while the group of priests had almost collapsed, greatly reducing the duration of combat.

Theodore raised his voice and commanded the unit members, "All members, retreat out of the castle as quickly as possible!"

Theodore's decision was firm, despite the war mages preparing to attack. Meltor's detached unit retreated from Dofrun Castle which had become a mess.

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"...Hrmm, there is no chase. As expected," Theodore said, looking back at the castle as they reached the tunnel they had dug.

'It is terrible, but I can't deny that it is effective.'

It could be called the most fearful point of necromancy.

He didn't know about low-level necromancers, but a high-level necromancer could use the undead to spread an infection. A human who was bitten by a zombie would become a zombie, while a soul drawn out by a banshee would turn into an evil spirit and become another banshee. Of course, there was a limit to the

contagion. However, there was no shortage of targets in a land of blood and death.

If Zest's sword were free, he would've suppressed the undead immediately. The problem was that it wasn't possible.

"The death knight is a pretty big opponent."

Theodore's choice to hit and run was also because the death knight had appeared. It could threaten Zest and grab his ankle.

An operation utilizing the necromancy was only possible if Theodore was superior to Zest. The opponent's power was likely to overtake him, so it was better for Theodore to retire after a modest gain.

The enemy of an enemy was a friend? This was different from that saying. It was common to stab that alliance in the back. As the saying from the East went, it was natural to defend yourself and never show your back to anyone.

Theodore was entering the tunnel last when his eyebrows twitched.

"Theo, aren't you coming?" There were only two people left, so Sylvia spoke to Theodore in a comfortable tone.

Theodore replied with a smile, "Go first. I want to get some air."

Sylvia looked at him with a strange expression. "Yes, understood. But are you sure you can't get hurt? This is Andras territory, so more people can come."

"I will follow you in 10 minutes. Until then, leave with the others."

"Okay, I will believe in you. Then come slowly."

Sylvia finally entered the tunnel. Her silver hair disappeared into the darkness, and Theodore paused for a while.

The rematch with the empire's 2nd Sword, Zest Speitem...

It was before the real fight, but the suspense and excitement weren't much different from the previous fight. The scales of life and death could tilt to one side during a battle. Now that hot heat cooled down...

"...Indeed," Theodore said like he had known all along, "I felt your gaze when I came out of the castle. I didn't feel any hostility, so I felt like we needed to talk."

He turned, speaking the person behind him. Theodore was expecting to see an ugly warlock. The symbol of evil from the storybooks, the warlock...

What did the evil who wanted to bring about the end of the world look like?

"—Wh-at?" Theodore fell silent.

He was facing a woman with snow-white hair. As Theodore remained silent, the woman prostrating herself on the ground raised her head. "I sincerely congratulate you."

The beautiful face was wet with tears. If he had to compare her to flowers, she was a lily. White clothes, white skin, and the water droplets that fell from her pale eyes...

She felt genuinely pleased and didn't hide her joy.

White Knight Hipatia politely greeted her king, "I—the white rider, Hipatia—greet King Jerem, king of the end."

Chapter 282 – Followers of the End (1)

“King of the end?” It was a title, and Theodore looked at the other person’s face as he reiterated it.

The woman was neat, well-cleaned and had pale white skin. Her features had a lily’s simplicity that completed her beauty. Who would want to hurt this tearful and beautiful woman? A normal male who didn’t know the situation would’ve pulled out their handkerchief.

However, Theodore just looked down at her mercilessly.

‘…What, this woman?’

He had seen many beautiful women and knew that Hipatia was very beautiful. She was a white beauty comparable to Veronica, Aquilo, and Ellenoa. Nevertheless, his head was cool. All his senses were alert, and he wouldn’t be tempted by lust or sympathy.

Just after that, something came to Theodore’s mind. It was the ‘Jerem, King of the end’ that had emerged from the white woman’s mouth. ‘Jerem’ was a name he had heard once before, and the distant memories of the past popped up.

Finally, Theodore remembered the origin of the name, and his expression stiffened.

‘Jerem, is it that grimoire…?’

As if in response, the information window of Death’s Worship came to mind.

[Death’s Worship]

[-This grimoire contains the soul of the legendary warlock, Jerem. As a 9th Circle necromancer who attacked mankind on the side of the demons, Jerem will steal the body of any creature who reads the grimoire and turn them into an undead. He dreams of the perfect resurrection as his soul awaits in the abyss.]

It had already been several years since Theodore obtained the grimoire. Back then, the grimoire, Death's Worship, had taken over the body of a Meltor investigator in the Miller Barony and was now sealed in the inventory by Gluttony.

However, it was a grimoire that a 9th circle magician dwelled in. At that time, and even today, Theodore hadn't been able to consume Death's Worship, so it was just an object left in the corner of his inventory.

How did this woman, Hipatia, know the name of the warlock, and why did she call Theodore 'Jerem'?

'There are a few possible hypothesis, but…'

It was just a hypothesis. His super sensitivity warned him that one wrong word would cause an antagonistic relationship with this woman. Of course, he couldn't have a friendly relationship with a warlock.

However, he could use this misunderstanding. Theodore's experience whispered to him. Rather than denying it, he should see what the other person was mistaking him for.

Theodore made a decision and boldly spoke to her, "King of the end? I'm sorry, but I can't remember."

Was it the right answer or wrong answer? Hipatia's eyes widened at his answer and looked at Theodore with a mournful expression. "Ah, our king…! Did you lose your memories? I am White Rider Hipatia, one of the four riders of the end! I judged that with the wonderful skills you just showed, you must've been secretly growing your power in the magic kingdom…"

"Too verbose. If you don't want me to leave, you better explain right away." Theodore moved his magic power, pretending to be angry. His seven circles turned lightly, but the magic power shook the area and gave off a strong pressure. A body wouldn't be able to handle this pressure without good skills.

However, there was no shaking at all in Hipatia's posture. She kept prostrating herself politely, looking up at him with soulful eyes.

'This woman is the death knight's controller.'

He had roughly guessed it based on the magic power he felt, but now he was fully convinced with this test. A necromancer who had reached at least the 7th circle was enough to cause a disaster in a small kingdom.

If she was hostile, he had to end her here.

Additionally, if the four riders of the end were four warlocks, it meant that Hipatia's organization possessed four masters. It was a variable sufficient to overturn the course of this unification war.

It seemed like Death's Worship was something important to them, but Theodore hadn't admitted that he possessed it. As Theodore was swallowing his dry saliva, Hipatia looked at him and started speaking, "...I am your subject, but I will dare to speak."

She put her hands on her lap in a defenseless posture. "My king, we started watching you since we missed Charlotte's Necklace at the Kargas auction house."

Indeed, Theodore nodded. He had guessed it since that Orcus Company appeared with the death knight. This type of power wouldn't be mobilized if the necklace wasn't an important object.

"Didn't you go the Pirate Archipelago with it? In retrospect, I don't understand my folly. Rather than following Your Majesty's will, I hastily tried to grab your ankle..."

"What do you mean?"

"You yielded to that arrogant sea dragon, Aquilo! Since your body isn't yet complete... And this Hipatia... I don't doubt that the day of the end is coming."

If a ring was attached to the ear, it was an earring. If it was

attached to the nose, it was a nose ring. Hipatia kept saying things that couldn't be understood. If Aquilo were here, she would've torn Hipatia apart.

As Hipatia's explanation continued, Theodore's expression grew more serious. Her speculation about Aquilo was completely wrong, but all the reasons cited afterward were plausible. From when Theodore summoned the high ranking demon, Magnus, on the Sipoto Plains up until when he had taken out Death's Worship to escape...

Finally, there was one crucial part in Hipatia's understanding.

"By that way, did Your Majesty make 'that' directly?"

"...That?"

"The death knight with the Aura Ability! Without any traces of necromancy, you pioneered the death knight to an unprecedented level... This Hipatia once again realized that the king was resurrected!"

Theodore belatedly realized what she was referring to, 'Don't tell me she mistook Gladio as a death knight?'

It was an exquisite coincidence. Necromancers, as those who made a mockery of life, were bound to be more sensitive to live force than anyone else. Hipatia would naturally understand that the automaton 'wasn't alive' when she looked at it.

She saw that it contained a sword master's soul. The automaton was a by-product of a time when magic engineering was common. It was natural that she would mistake the automaton for a death knight variant.

Theodore was convinced, '...Wouldn't I be mistaken if I was in the same position?'

–I agree.

It wasn't just one or two coincidences but many overlaps that

caused the Hipatia to think this way. Gluttony's voice poured into one ear while Theodore thought about it. How could Theodore use this misunderstanding?

Should he shake hands or create a hostile relationship with the four horsemen? They were already exhausted from fighting with their old enemy Andras, and now they had to deal with a warlock organization with four masters? It was something that Meltor couldn't afford.

However, if the opposite was applied, Meltor might be able to overwhelm the battlefield.

'Let the "barbarians fight among themselves"... is it?'

In other words, he could force the four horsemen to collide with the Andras Empire and destroy them. It might be beneficial, but it was hard to conspire with warlocks who could threaten a kingdom.

Andras wouldn't be able to avoid a catastrophic disaster.

"Okay, I'll believe your words this once. That... Hipatia?"

"Yes. I will do anything, my king." Hipatia didn't care about her white clothes being stained as Hipatia kneeled down and looked at him with eyes full of affection. Theodore's conscience was throbbing. She might be a warlock, but was it okay to take advantage of such a pure affection? He felt some guilt. Thus, Theodore couldn't help asking Hipatia.

"Call it a test, but I want to ask you one more question."

He wanted to know if it was capable of coexisting with warlocks.

"What is the ultimate goal of the four horsemen?"

"Huhu, you are asking something obvious," Hipatia's sweet face laughed as she rose. Opening her arms widely, she exclaimed, "It is a promise that we didn't forget after thousands of years of waiting, my king!"

Under the night sky, where thick darkness descended like a

curtain, a beautiful woman dressed in white called out in a bell-like voice. There was an emptiness in her eyes as she looked toward something indescribable.

Hipatia's body danced in the wilderness where starlight shone down, and she answered Theodore's question, "It is our mission to put an end to this world."

There was madness in the pure eyes that looked at him.

"The purpose of the four horsemen is to destroy this ugly civilization and the entire human race."

"...I see." Theodore realized it with her answer. "I understand."

They could never tolerate each other.

*

Step, step.

The sound of footsteps was heard. The elementals made the tunnel, but they couldn't pave the ground. Theodore stepped on rugged pebbles as he hurried. It would take him 10 more minutes to join the party that had departed earlier.

Theodore fiddled with something in his arms and couldn't overcome his discomfort, eventually pulling it out.

"...Damn, warlocks are famous for their bad taste."

It was a small crafted skull. Hipatia had explained in a cheerful voice that he could use this artifact to talk to her at any time.

She said that it shouldn't be put in a separate space, but he couldn't withstand the physiological discomfort for more than 30 minutes. Theodore eventually threw the dark red skull into the inventory.

He washed his hands a few times with water magic and called a companion to make him feel better, 'Gluttony.'

Gluttony responded immediately, –What is it, User?

‘Did you hear the whole story with Hipatia?’

–Of course. Those warlocks, they seem to be the same in any age. The followers of the end… Those who believe that death is superior to life are everywhere.

Warlocks naturally worshipped death. Life was only a moment when they weren’t dead, and it was believed that true life was just before being born and after death.

They assumed that the lives of others were worthless based on their view of life and thought that they should slaughter people to return them to the right path. The fanaticism of the Lairon Church but without any morality or conscience was the essence of a black magician.

In the end, the four horsemen were nothing more than an organization aiming to destroy the world. It was a very ordinary warlock organization.

“Know the enemy or you will be burned…”

It was forbidden knowledge, but Theodore now had a close association with the four horsemen and couldn’t ignore it any longer. He took a deep breath and told Gluttony, “Gluttony, I want to hear about black magic.”

–Hrmm. It was silent for a moment, before the grimoire replied, –Okay. Let’s talk about the past.

Chapter 283 – Followers of the End (2)

It took a thousand years to prepare for a simple experiment, but a grimoire had the patience to wait a thousand years. What was Gluttony referring to when he talked about the 'past'? The origin of black magic might be more profound than what modern magicians imagined.

Theodore walked through the darkness which felt more gloomy as he listened to the voice inside him.

–Let's start with the essence of orthodox magic. It is a magic that changes the laws of the material world, manipulating natural phenomena according to the caster's wishes. It can create fire at the desired spot or change the direction of the wind. It might seem strange, but it is a phenomenon based on the physical laws that exist in this world, Gluttony explained. Then it lowered its voice and continued, –Black magic is contrary to orthodox magic, it opposes the causal law of the material world, reviving the dead, forcibly capturing souls, repressing the will of others. It spreads diseases that don't exist and draws out the evil laws. They are people with depraved hearts that can't help being enemies of the whole world.

"...Gluttony, there is a part that I don't understand," Theodore quietly listened to the explanation and then asked a question.

He was forced to do so because, from his point of view, magic that deviated from natural phenomena was quite orthodox.

There were two of the most representative examples.

"Black magic borrows the power of the world to bring back the dead... Isn't that summoning magic? And magic like space movement seems like it bends natural phenomena."

–There are two questions. I will explain it in the order mentioned, Gluttony replied without any hesitation. –As User says,

summoning magic and death magic can look quite similar. In times when the division wasn't clear, paladins often misunderstood summoners as warlocks and killed them. In the end, it was revealed that there was a big difference between summoning and black magic.

"A big difference?"

–That's right. Summoning magic is a technique that invites guests from beyond this world, allowing them to exert their abilities. It is like the moon's shadow on the water. Even with mighty powers, they can't go beyond that boundary.

Listening to Gluttony, Theodore couldn't help remembering Fafnir. The dragon of Muspelheim could only stay for a few seconds after Theodore sacrificed Charlotte's Necklace.

Perhaps that ghastly body hadn't even been its true one.

This was a transcendent being that had burned down the world tree alone. Satomer's summoning magic had been perfect, and he had prepared the correct sacrifice, but Fafnir hadn't been able to be sustained for more than a few seconds.

The stronger the being, the more caught it was by the binding power of this world.

The peak of Muspelheim, Fafnir, was no different than a god of the material world. Fafnir was a being who was born strong, who used that power without hesitation. Even the demons were much stronger, but they couldn't freely cross the walls of the dimension.

The Fafnir that Theodore had called had been just a shadow of its body. It had been impossible for Muspelheim to free itself from the bindings.

-The second is very simple, but it was hard to explain, Gluttony spoke in a delicate tone as Theodore used space magic as an example. Gluttony knew the answer but didn't know how to convince Theodore.

Theodore failed to repress his attitude and demanded, “Why can’t you give a simple explanation? Tell me anything.”

–Sigh. User said that space magic doesn’t seem to correlate with natural phenomenon?

“Then?”

It was common sense. How was it possible to jump through space in this world without magical intervention? At least, that was the case for Theodore. Of course, it wasn’t the same for Gluttony.

–Withdrawal. A phenomenon that can frequently be seen when looking at the surface of the planet.

“…What?”

–It is science that this world hasn’t been revealed yet. The concepts of wormholes, black holes, and other four-dimensional space haven’t been revealed yet. User won’t know about them. Space magic is certainly based on the laws of physics.

Theodore realized that he couldn’t object to this. Was it possible to argue against science that he didn’t know?

A grimoire lived on for infinity in the world and accumulated invaluable knowledge over the years. So, to a grimoire, Theodore’s knowledge would be no different from a caveman. It was wiser to just accept what he heard.

Gluttony silenced Theodore with a few words and added more information about black magic, –If space magic went against the laws of physics of this world as User said, the only magicians who can use Teleport would be limited to those who reached the 9th circle. It is like going against a huge river that is the world. It is because magic that doesn’t borrow power from the natural laws of the world comes with a price that is several times that of orthodox magic.

“Uh, then black magic?”

–I am getting to the point now. Warlocks use taboo practices such as ‘sacrificing humans’ and ‘draining’ in order to cover their lacking power. They sacrifice another creature and convert it into their own magic power.

The taboo of human sacrifices and draining…!

Theodore stiffened at these words, and he stopped moving.

Warlocks weren’t public enemies of the continent from the beginning. They were just insidious and used spells of an unknown system. They were branded as enemies of the world due to the active abuse of these two taboos.

Theodore started moving again and spat out, “It is a bloody history.”

–I also agree. But the problem wasn’t that simple in the Age of Mythology. It was rare that they would act in the domain of the gods, and the demons’ work was more heinous and dangerous than theirs.

“Hah, I can understand that.”

–The problem was that the warlocks came into contact with the demons.

“…What?”

Inside the astonished Theodore, Gluttony recalled the memories of the distant past.

–As invaders of this world, the actions of the demons were limited. However, warlocks gave sacrifices to loosen these constraints, and the demons taught them black magic in return. The reverse pentagram, the five-phase system of black magic, was completed at this time.

Gluttony’s analysis revealed that the demons had broken away from the constraints of life. They didn’t die in the flow of time, and they were also difficult to kill using outside means.

They freely invaded other dimensions and raised their power by enhancing other beings. Indeed, they were predators with the power of immortality! It wasn't unreasonable that the warlocks were fascinated by the power of the demons and wanted to be part of them.

Then the twilight of a new world, Ragnarok, broke out.

With the demons that invaded this world and the warlock forces that tried to end it... After the Dracomachia, the dragons had become almost extinct.

This was already the second half of the Age of Mythology. The gods had lost their strength and eventually called for help from the transcendents who had become independent. The gods and transcendents had then united to confront the demon army.

'The end of the Age of Mythology... To think that I will discover it in a place like this...!'

With the warlocks who had become fascinated by the demons and conspired with them...

That had been the end of the Age of Mythology, Ragnarok!

In modern times, the only person who would know the situation was Theodore. Other than that, it was probably the dragons and grimoires like Gluttony who knew. It wasn't knowledge that humans, who could only live for a hundred years at most, would have.

Theodore shivered with thrill, while Gluttony whispered after this rough explanation, –With their defeat during Ragnarok, the demons were expelled from this world and the warlocks lost most of their power... It is hard to forget the sense of omnipotence I once felt. I saw all types of works break down the boundary of this material world.

"To destroy humanity and civilization...?"

–One of the methods is to weaken the walls of the dimension. By

the way, the four riders of the end, they have quite a bit of ability.

Theodore immediately responded to these words, “What, you know about the four riders of the end?”

–Of course. Do you want to hear about them?

“Of course! Please.”

–I want two books of at least a rare rating in return.

“...Hey,” Theodore grumbled but pulled out the books. “Ah, you can’t read the atmosphere.”

It seemed like his turmoil in the tunnel would continue a little longer.

*

A few days after that...

The fact that Theodore had managed to raid Dofrun Castle and gotten good results was spread through all of Meltor. In a position where a single act of deception affected the morale of thousands, Theodore was a good propaganda tool.

The soldiers were happy about the news, but the leaders were troubled.

“Warlocks... They actually appeared at this time.”

Hearing the words of the Magic Society chairman, Benedict, Orta nodded.

“I missed the tail of the Orcus Company once, but I never realized that they would appear again here. It is quite a bold move.”

“It is true that we can’t afford to go against them. Fortunately, there is no possibility that they will ally with Andras.”

“There would be a big resistance from Lairon. To Andras, knights and priests are more important than hard-to-deal-with warlocks.”

Warlocks weren’t people that nations would consider allying with. If they accepted the power of the public enemy of the world,

Andras would be hostile to not just Meltor but everyone on the continent.

In particular, they already had an alliance with Lairon!

The religious country despised magicians who tried to break God's will, and they also hated warlocks that messed with the world. It was impossible for the church to embrace the power of warlocks.

"According to Theodore, they came to obtain sacrifices for this war. They are like hyenas eating corpses."

"They are extremely vulgar."

Theodore had reported that the purpose of Hipatia's organization was to obtain 'sacrifices.' It wasn't possible to expose Death's Worship, so he made a reasonable excuse. The battlefield, which was overflowing with many deaths, grudges, and emotions, was a good altar for the warlocks. It was difficult to understand their recklessness of going to the North where there were plenty of masters, but they were like psychopaths.

"Well, this isn't the problem right now."

"It is as you said, Commander."

The two magicians conversed as they left the barrack.

"Theodore has raised the morale, so I will have egg on my face if I don't keep this going."

"You have suffered a lot. I am also burdened, but not as much as you."

"It is nothing. I know that you stayed up all night yesterday."

Benedict coughed and blushed, before looking at the horizon. Andras' army was facing the brave soldiers. With no talking and no distractions, their discipline made Meltor's army shrink back. Besides, there was no doubt that 'he' was on the other side of the camp.

“... Excuse me, can you do it?” As Benedict spoke, there was a heavy pressure on Orta’s back. “You have already lost to him. If you can’t win, it is good to try other tactics. You should use every power possible, even if it dirties your honor.”

“I won’t deny it,” White Tower’s Orta agreed as a strategist and magician. After this, his lips curved in a mysterious manner under his mask. “But he made a mistake.”

“A mistake?”

“Please believe in me. I won’t lose to the same opponent twice, especially to one who deals with the same type of abilities,” Orta said. Then he declared as he adjusted his mask, “I will repay him with interest.”

Chapter 284 – Followers of the End (3)

At Nagma Riverbank, the armies of the two powers faced each other again approximately one month after the engagement on Karul Plains.

Unlike before, this area was too narrow for a full-scale war. Therefore, the commanders of both armies advanced by selecting ~20,000–30,000 troops respectively. The beasts of the land, as well as the birds, had all fled. Thousands of troops moved as one, shaking the ground with their steps and the air with their shouts.

Kung! Kung! Kung!

There was a magnificent drumming sword as the horses moved and the swords flashed brightly. The blades deflected the noon sunlight, and their helmets shone.

Indeed, they were the empire of swords.

However, the Meltor army that opposed them were also tough. The victory their hero had gained at Dofun Castle had ignited a fighting spirit in them; its influence on the battlefield wasn't lacking at all.

'Not bad,' Orta judged as he moved at the forefront on his horse. 'Thanks to Theodore, the number of shields has been significantly reduced. Of course, we can't afford to install a tactical magic circle here, but this level is worth a try.'

The Andras army had lost a few of their titanium shields, which were the annoying things that greatly reduced the destructive power of a magician. So, a gap had appeared. If Meltor attacked that spot, they could sweep away at least 5,000 people.

As the distance between the two armies decreased by half, Orta calculated it in his head. If the reins of the horse were shaken, they could cover that distance within 30 seconds.

The two commanders raised their hands in the air.

“Charge from the first row—!”

“Raise the flag of fire! Wipe out all of the enemies!”

The knights emerged from the Andras camp, while fire and lightning flew from the rear of the Meltor camp. It was already too late to turn the horses around. The bombardment poured down. The knights abandoned the retreat, gathering aura around their body and rushing forward.

It was a showdown between the knights’ breakthrough and the magicians’ firepower.

Kwarururung!

The sound of horseshoes drew near. Then a ball of fire fell from the sky, burning one horse and a knight in armor. The knight’s body was turned to charcoal. He couldn’t even scream, only letting out smoke.

This was a firepower that even the specially treated armor couldn’t endure. It was a simple magic spell amplified by the magic power of a 5th circle magician. Lightning boiled the brains of a knight, while fire pillars burned half a dozen knights at once.

In a moment, a hundred cavalrymen were turned into lumps of charcoal.

Puhwaak!

Nevertheless, there were dozens of survivors. They had seared skin and burned lungs, but the group of knights came to the front of the Meltor army.

“Ohhhhhh!”

They fell from their dying horses and used the last of their strength to swing their aura blades. Their bodies were already half dead, but their souls were still attached, so their auras responded to their request.

It was truly a mad loyalty! As the Meltor soldiers took a step

back, the blades in the knights' hands flashed.

Chwaack! Hwaaaaack!

Several bodies lost their heads and collapsed. Bloody rain fell from the sky, while the knights attacked again.

Kakang!

However, the magic soldiers blocked them.

"Don't back down! Fight the opponents!"

"Stand firm! For one minute—no, 30 seconds!"

It was a fearful decision to ignore the threshold of life and death, even if the knights were in the worst condition. Somehow, the magic soldiers had to receive the sword, even if it meant self-destruction. They didn't fight to win. Instead, they concentrated on hanging on. The magic soldiers were able to do that, even if they were relatively lacking in combat power.

The real test came with the 2nd row of the Andras army.

From then on, the command system was meaningless at the forefront. Destruction magic fell toward the enemy from the sky, while the soldiers were drunk on madness and killed the enemies who came before them.

They stabbed their spears until they couldn't feel anything, then they lay on the ground, with blood dripping from their bodies. This was a battlefield, a place where human life was trampled on like weeds.

In the middle of this, two men encountered each other.

"We meet again, Rat. For you to not be threatened after our first match... this isn't bravery. I have to praise you if you've come here directly as a sacrifice," the empire's 3rd Sword, Prince Fermut, said.

He wore a set of luxurious armor and held a sword which shone with a red light. Clearly, they weren't ordinary equipment. Orta

felt an unknown energy from the blade, causing him to increase his concentration.

Countermeasures had been devised, but the relationship between the two people hadn't changed. When it was the same type, Aura Ability was absolutely superior to Sorcery. If Orta lost his concentration for even a moment, his breath would be cut off.

"I thought you were sharp, but I guess it was just a rumor."

"...Hoh?" Orta met the provocation, "I don't know what to say to you, foolish prince. You call Meltor your enemy, but you don't understand what a magician is."

"Don't you run when disadvantaged?"

"No, we learn from the unknown. In that sense, your surprise attack was wonderful. If an ally hadn't arrived at the time, I would've died on the spot."

The Aura Ability, Refraction, was Orta's natural enemy. It deflected any attack, and any unique maneuvers would be blocked. Using an analogy, it was like cutting the limbs off a knight and putting them on the battlefield.

Fermut wasn't an opponent whom Orta could win against without preparation. However, Orta was different today. He opened his arms wide and raised his magic power. "Regret it. You should've killed me last time."

"Don't worry. Today, I will kill you."

After a few passionate words, a brief silence covered the two masters.

Wiiiiing!

The space between them was bent. Immediately, there were 36 space cuts aimed at Orta, while Fermut smashed through three attacks.

This was the difference between the two people.

Space magic couldn't be defended against with normal aura, but Fermut was different. His aura twisted the three-dimensional space around him to override physical interference. Its utility was in both attack and defense.

"What is there to learn? There is nothing different from before, Rat!" Fermut drew his red aura around him like a tail and rushed toward Orta.

The principle of Fermut's Aura Ability was similar to Zest's, but it wasn't comparable.

Fermut bent space to shorten the distance he had to move. In some ways, Fermut's application of it could be considered close to Shukuchiho. Narrowing dozens of meters in one breath, Fermut's red blade distorted the empty space.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

Sleeping Moon.

Break the Seams of Space.

It wasn't easy to catch Orta when he used Blink, but on the other hand, it meant it would be easy if Blink was blocked. Fermut's aura pulled at the space, causing Orta to stiffen in the air after using Blink.

"Die!" Fermut cried out with a desire for slaughter.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

Round Decapitation.

The sword clearly curved to cut at the neck. The space around Orta's neck shrunk. There was no way for Orta to avoid this as his space movement was blocked. A space cut which couldn't be blocked with physical strength... This wasn't a trick that was used often, so Orta wouldn't have known.

However, he did know.

"Bend," Orta spoke in a voice that couldn't be heard by anyone.

Kiiing—

There was a difference of exactly one inch as the red aura circle took on a curious shape, and Orta escaped from the noose of death. For Fermut who had been certain of his victory, this was a bolt out of the blue. “H-How could you?”

“Over Bound.” Orta’s shockwave hit Fermut’s body that wasn’t being protected by aura.

Unable to use the power of refraction, Fermut coughed up blood due to the great damage to his internal organs. “Cough, t-this rat...!”

In the meantime, Orta opened the distance again and ridiculed Fermut, “Do you feel a sense of crisis now?”

“Don’t be arrogant just because of luck!”

That was a valid rebuttal since the damage wasn’t that big. The explosion in Fermut’s body calmed down, and aura increased around him. The place where the blade touched proceeded to distort, twisting and turning into a whirlpool of chaos. It was a spiral sword which would tear at anything it touched.

Fermut held it and rushed forward again. ‘I won’t miss this time!’

It had been his mistake to have let go of his aura before, but this time, his sword would definitely cut that rat’s neck. His fury caused his blade to become even sharper. Space was bent without any errors, and his sword extended in a perfect orbit.

Fermut had never been so focused ever since he obtained the ‘Refraction’ ability. So, why didn’t his sword reach its target?

Jeeeong!

Fermut was hit by another shockwave, and he roared angrily.

“...You!” He shouted with anger and shock in his eyes, “What tricks are you using, you coward?!”

“Are you calling wisdom cowardice? Indeed, you wouldn’t be able to understand it with your dumb intelligence. I’ll teach you personally.”

Despite Orta’s ridiculous insults, Fermut listened carefully. It was possible that the rat had found a weakness in his ability. He would kill the rat as soon as he heard the story. A large number of large blood vessels popped up on Fermut’s arm as he desperately suppressed his anger.

Then Orta finally opened his mouth, “It isn’t a big deal. Your Aura Ability is to ‘bend’ space, not erase or make it. Based on my observations, I calculated the index of refraction and changed the magic formula accordingly.”

“—What?” Fermut immediately refuted it with a face that was filled with fury. “Don’t make me laugh! As a magician, don’t you know the principles of magic? The density of my refraction is always changing. You can’t possibly read it in real time and use magic to match it!”

“Ho, it looks like you are slightly better than I thought. That’s right. It isn’t possible for ordinary magicians,” Orta confirmed and denied it.

Then Fermut was surprised by Orta’s unexpected behavior.

Click. Orta untied his mask and removed it. “But I can.”

His exposed features were quite attractive. The wrinkles made his face more dignified, while the large and small scars covering his cheeks proved he was a veteran. However, the most unique part was his pair of eyes.

“...What are those eyes?” Fermut forgot his anger and asked with confusion. It was because Orta’s eyes were different from those of other people. Putting aside the pupil, the whites of the eyes didn’t exist.

Orta’s eyes were recessed in their sockets, embodying the concept

of ‘emptiness.’ Anybody who recognized it would be full of praise. They were eyes that the magicians from the Age of Mythology had yearned for and desired.

They were called the Empty Mystic Eyes.

“Well, I don’t know the details either,” as he replied to the question, Orta touched his eyes and looked back on the distant past. “One thing is clear. I was born blind, with eyes that were unable to see. Since childhood, I learned the shape of things using my ears. I was fortunate to have talent in magic.”

He was downplaying it. Orta was a genius. He solved complicated formulas in his head, analyzed what wasn’t detectable by sight with his hearing and touch, and learned everything.

One day, he had hit the ‘wall’ of the 6th circle and lost his way for a while. He had forgotten the self-confidence which had sustained him in place of his missing eyes, and he had struggled every day.

“I wasted 10 years.”

The answer to his wall was these pair of eyes that shouldn’t exist.

“I realized it the first moment I saw the world.”

To be honest, he didn’t even care about the 7th circle. He just gazed at the scenery in front of him. A world that no one could see stretched before him.

“My eyes can penetrate the ‘world.’ I see beyond the three dimensional walls and gain insight into indescribable concepts.”

“T-This is ridiculous...!”

“Space refraction—I understand it after seeing it once.”

Fermut’s body trembled as he understood what this meant. It meant that he couldn’t do anything in Orta’s presence. It was no wonder why Orta was so sure that he wouldn’t die.

Unlike the first unexpected battle, the current Orta could see through Fermut’s ability. No matter how quickly Fermut changed

his refractive index, it would still be slower than Orta's movements. It was impossible for Fermut to gain the advantage in this situation.

Orta was firmly convinced of his superiority and asserted, "The reason for your defeat is simple. You have abused that power."

In response to the cold declaration, Fermut poured all his aura into his sword and shouted, "-Don't be foolish, talkative magician!"

Born as the successor of the strongest empire in the continent, Fermut had never tasted frustration. To Fermut, Orta's declaration was an insult. Fermut's patience ran out, and he used a hidden technique that he hadn't shown yet. "I won't leave a single piece of flesh left on that cheeky body!"

There was a burst of light from the dark red sword.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

Final Hidden Technique.

End of the World.

The space bent all around him, slaughtering anything in its grasp! Even the 2nd Sword, Zest, admitted that it was wonderful. There was no way a magician could survive it except by running away.

...No, there was one way.

"You lack the ability to learn. Didn't I say it was futile?" Within the whirlwind of bloody aura, Orta walked forward and declared, "This is the end."

Orta pointed at Fermut in an expressionless manner, and a brilliant flash emerged.

Paaang!

Immediately afterward, a large hole was drilled into the middle of Fermut's chest.

Chapter 285 – Followers of the End (4)

“Cough!” Fermut couldn’t even scream.

His heart, lungs, and ribs were destroyed at once, causing fatal injuries. The transcendental vitality of a sword master and the reflexive actions were barely recognizable. Fermut couldn’t be saved, even if a cardinal found him. Orta was confident about Fermut’s death and relieved that this fight was easier than he thought it would be.

‘The arrogance, that closed his eyes, and the foolishness, that didn’t allow him to use his talent, killed him.’

The Aura Ability to bend space was an innate talent. Fermut wasn’t 30 years old yet, but he was in line to be the next emperor. As such, there was no one who could keep his arrogance in check.

Where would a person like this experience adversity or go against a person they couldn’t fight? Fermut was clearly strong, but in contrast to his strength, he had too many imperfections. It might be different at the first encounter, but when fighting twice against a seasoned veteran like Orta, he would soon be disadvantaged.

If Orta looked at it calmly, it was a well-deserved victory.

In just a few seconds, the blood coming from Fermut’s mouth formed a puddle. It was at least a few liters worth of blood. An ordinary person would’ve died three times already from the blood loss.

It was impossible for Fermut to keep fighting, so Orta just needed to wait until his heart stopped beating.

Orta raised a hand in order to mercilessly stop the pain. “I won’t mourn you, but go well.”

The space blade aimed at Fermut’s neck—

Chaaeng!

It bounced off. Orta grabbed the broken index finger of his right hand as he faced an unbelievable situation. Fermut, who was supposed to be a dead body, wielded his sword.

‘This is impossible. Being able to counterattack with such a body…!’

Then at the very next moment, Orta saw it.

“Grrr…kuhu…kuaaaaah!” The blood vessels all over the face and body swelled up, while the round hole where Fermut’s heart used to be was filled with chunks of flesh.

It was too horrible to call it a human heart. Black blood flowed like tar, while his eyes turned black and unfocused. An unknown aura was filling Fermut’s dead body, a power that was hostile to all life!

Orta’s eyes widened as he identified the origin, “Don’t tell me… An ancient magic sword?!”

It was on a different level from the magic swords which were often traded. Orta felt the alien power overflow from the prince’s sword and started sweating anxiously. This was a magic sword that had the power of a demon infused in it.

However, unlike the god sword, it wasn’t for demons to use directly. Its purpose was the degeneration and destruction of other species. At first, it simply lent its strength, but now it dominated its master. The power was so formidable that idiots who would try to obtain magic swords from the Age of Mythology continued to exist.

However, why would the crown prince be carrying a magic sword like this?

“Hmph, I don’t intend to just watch!”

If Orta let it be, Fermut would completely revive. Sensing a crisis, Orta moved his hands at a dazzling speed, forming a total of 13 magic circles. Unlike his usual magic, this was a series of attack

magic focused on lethal force.

Elimination Sphere.

Downsizing.

Wedge of Ruin.

The black sphere which had destroyed a gate in the past emerged as a few small shapes. It was a special magic that destroyed matter just by coming into contact. Orta didn't hesitate to shoot all of it at the prince's body. It aimed precisely at 13 of Fermut's unprotected vital spots!

"Kuaaaaaack!" Fermut lost his temper.

The bent space blocked some of the magic spheres, but Fermut's left arm and right leg were cut off. Three holes were made in his abdomen, and the regenerated heart was destroyed again. However, Orta didn't feel relieved.

'He focused on protecting his head. Is the brain the only part that can't be reproduced? Furthermore, the magic sword's power has increased...'

It might be a sword that regenerated the user's body in exchange for strength. By the time Orta inferred up to this point, Fermut's black eyes returned to being white. The tremendous impact brought back his sanity. "K-Kuooooh...! Y-You, see, soon...!"

Using the sword's power to bend space, Fermut threw his own body a few hundred meters away. Of course, it was a distance that Orta could easily cover.

"...Hrmm." However, instead of chasing after him, Orta raised a hand. He wasn't intending to leave future trouble behind. Orta could see beyond space. Despite being far away, he accurately saw through Fermut's body.

'It is like he is already dead.'

Fermut's life was saved, but he had lost his heart twice, as well as

a large amount of blood that contained aura. This couldn't be reversed by the regenerative power of the magic sword or a cardinal's power. Furthermore, by maintaining his flesh using the power of a demon, he would suffer side effects.

Rather than returning as a sword master, it would be lucky if he could even stand on the battlefield again. In the empire where the weak were suppressed, Prince Fermut's prestige would fall. It was time to prioritize the army's victory, rather than chase after Fermut.

"Sending a command from the deputy commander!" Orta's voice resonated on the battlefield due to the communication artifact. "The enemy commander, Prince Fermut, has been defeated and has departed from the battlefield! From now on, we will focus our power on annihilating the Andras Empire's troops!"

Orta used magic to magnify his voice on purpose. The order rang out in the middle of the battlefield, raising Meltor's morale while lowering Andras'.

Prince Fermut, who was the next emperor, had been defeated! The defeat of a master was painful, but it was also the departure of the chief commander and head of the army. The Andras troops realized the severity of this situation.

It only took an hour for them to be slaughtered.

The Andras soldiers were reduced from 30,000 to around 2,000 and were suffering from major losses due to the battle. Meanwhile, Meltor's casualties were less than two-tenths of their fighting force.

It was a one-sided victory. As Orta thought, Prince Fermut of Andras never showed up in battle again. Even for the white tower, it wasn't easy to find out what happened to him once he returned home.

*

Kaaack, kaaack.

For humans, the battlefield was a terrible horror, but for hungry beasts, it was a feast. Crows, wolves, and many other wild animals gathered on the riverside after the two armies had left.

The victorious Meltor took away the bodies of their casualties, but the busy Andras Empire abandoned the corpses of their casualties as they fled. There were around 30,000 corpses strewn around.

“Huhuhu, this is a good smell,” a man remarked as he walked through the pit filled with the stench of blood and putrefaction. “The air of the battlefield where blood and death are overflowing! I don’t know how long it has been since I’ve seen so much blood.”

His red hair and red eyes were such an uncomfortable color that anyone would frown if they saw it. It was quite different from Veronica’s beauty. The man’s body was covered in a dark red color, like dried blood. The beasts, who had been drawn by the smell of blood, felt something ominous and withdrew.

He was the Red Rider of War, one of the four horsemen like Hipatia. This man was one of the lunatics who wanted to bring peace to this earth through war and slaughter. At first glance, his polite tone and stylish clothing were all a sharp contrast to his nature. The red knight’s eyes flashed with joy, and he spread his arms widely.

Ominous lights flashed one after another, and the blood on the floor started to wriggle like slime.

Kullong… kullong kullong…

On average, only a few liters of blood spilled from each body. However, the amount of blood that had flowed out from 30,000 bodies was so much that it was like a large red river, despite the blood being dried up.

The mass of blood was sucked into the body of the red knight.

“Kuhuhuhu…! Okay, this is good. Very good! This is such a great and splendid banquet. Like Hipatia said, that magician really is our king!”

Theodore had used it as an excuse, but the warlocks close to the battlefield became certain. They collected the blood, corpses, and ghosts, turning them into their strength!

A large number of sacrifices that couldn’t be obtained even by annihilating one village often occurred in a war. If possible, the red knight wanted to take them when the blood was still warm and the bodies were in good condition… However, Meltor’s army was too strong. It might be possible if all of the riders took action, but it was impossible to go against them with just two knights.

“—Don’t be rash, Red,” an elderly man leaning on a staff rebuked the red knight. “As Hipatia said, there is still a corner of the child’s spirit that hasn’t been convinced yet. If he really is our king, we need to figure out why he is in Meltor and why his memory is incomplete. Keep in mind that you shouldn’t make contact with him.”

“Of course, Black Knight.”

That’s right. The elderly man, who seemed like he would soon fall down and die, was another of the four horsemen who had come to confirm the king’s resurrection—the Black Rider of Famine.

The old man struck his staff down once, and all the dead rose up around him. It was a white shape, a form that would be contaminated and reborn as evil spirits. The black knight nodded while swallowing the souls. “…This situation is also satisfactory for me.”

They had been hiding since the last war. The Central Continent had long stopped fighting, so they had to hunt for blood and death elsewhere. It might be a bit of an exaggeration, but the number of sacrifices they had collected over a century was much less than

what they had just accumulated over the last few days.

‘I’m not sure yet, but there isn’t much doubt.’

According to the records, it had been a wait of 1,000 years, and there was no reaction from their vigilant senses.

The black knight had thought it wouldn’t happen in his own generation, but Hipatia was immediately convinced. The red knight was in the best position, and the last one wasn’t even human. Among them, the black knight was the most cautious, so he was put in charge of this task.

As a specter of black magic who had already lived for over 200 years, the black knight gazed at something with empty eyes. “This land is unusual.”

The northern powers that maintained an unnatural confrontation, and the empire that abandoned the function of a proper nation...

The black knight gazed in the direction of Andres’ capital, Belfort, and gulped. ‘The empire of swords... It is ridiculous.’

Was it visible only to the vision of a warlock? A whirlpool of energy soared into the sky of the distant horizon.

‘I’d rather call it the empire of evil energy.’

As the two warlocks stood there, the war continued. Meltor had the overall advantage and pushed to the border. The loss of so many of the empire’s Seven Swords and their hidden cards meant that half of Andras was lost. This was the moment when Meltor’s victory was confirmed.

However, the warlocks sensed it. This war wouldn’t end so smoothly. More blood and more magnificent deaths would overflow. As if confirming their intuition, the situation changed drastically.

Finally, the emperor of Andras moved. Simultaneously, this

unification war headed in a direction that no one had imagined.

Chapter 286 – Emperor Moves (1)

The capital of Andras, Belfor, resembled a well-refined sword from a bird's eye view.

Straight buildings were laid out in straight lines, giving off the impression of 'efficiency.' It didn't really fit an architect's aesthetic, but there was no one who could dismiss the grandeur of the city.

Above all, the towering spire in the center was crucial. Seven sword masters guarded the empire, so there were seven towers in the image of a crown that surrounded the imperial palace. This structure flashed with a bright aura that was equivalent to a master. It was illuminated night and day, proving the empire's greatness.

Unlike Meltor, there was no meeting room in Andras' imperial palace. This was because the emperor determined the guidelines for everything. It was an absolute monarchy that moved only according to his decisions. If there was one facility, it was an audience room.

"Dammit, when can I get out of here?" A man pushed at the shoulders of two knights, moving with a deep anger and nervousness.

As soon as the man returned to Belfort, he had asked for an audience with the emperor and entered the imperial palace before there was a reply. Usually, this wasn't possible, but the man's identity made it possible.

He was Fermut el Andras, the heir to the throne. There were no knights in the imperial palace who could block the crown prince.

'Kuk, come on. If I don't hurry, my body won't last…'

It was seemingly fine, but the insides of Fermut's body had started to collapse. The injuries, that Fermut had received from

Orta, had been recovered with the regenerative powers of the magic sword, but his aura lost hadn't returned.

His strength that had been able to bend an iron rod had been reduced to less than half, while his right leg staggered because his legs weren't balanced. Fermut's heart had been destroyed and his aura eaten by the magic sword, so now Fermut wasn't even a sword master.

However, he still had a string of hope. It was because he believed that his father, who was the emperor of Andras and had been an almighty being since Fermut's childhood, could heal this wound.

Finally, Fermut's steps reached the audience room.

"Your Majesty!" Fermut called out. He didn't center the room carelessly. Rather, he raised his voice and cried out longingly, "The 3rd Sword, Prince Fermut is here! Please excuse me!"

Then a sonorous voice was heard from the other side of the door as the emperor of Andras replied, "You can come in."

The green-tinged Fermut hurriedly opened the door. In his experience, his father, Emperor Kether, wouldn't meet anyone if he wasn't willing to talk. So, Fermut absolutely couldn't miss this opportunity.

As the two luxurious doors opened, the throne which was made of dozens of broken swords came into view. According to the records, the throne had been made by collecting the swords of the past Seven Swords who died.

'Someday, I will sit in that great position...!' Fermut couldn't abandon his ambitions despite his ragged body.

He bowed to the old man sitting on the throne. This was Andras' sun, Emperor Kether.

"—You are a disgrace, my son." Kether's voice was heavy on Fermut's shoulders and chilled his heart.

Kether had white hair, white eyebrows, and a white beard. It was an appearance appropriate for his age. He had a solid build that was greater than that of a young person, and the tendons of his hands stood out clearly as he grasped the throne. Perhaps the strong grip of the hand would crush it.

“You said with your own mouth that you would win. Now, you are begging me for mercy after losing? This isn’t like you.”

“I don’t dare make excuses, Father.” Fermut kneeled down in a rare polite manner, giving up his high self-esteem. “Just one more chance! This time I will be more vigilant and crush the army of that cowardly Meltor!”

“Hrmm… I don’t know about the words of a loser.”

“Father! Please! Father, if you want to be in charge, then I will unconditionally obey you! No, if Father takes up the baton, this war will be easy to win!”

The winner would take it all. Eating the weak was the life of the Andras Empire.

Fermut might be a prince, but he couldn’t be freed from this food chain. Fermut held the position of the next emperor, and he had reached this position by killing all his other brothers and sisters.

This person who had aggressively gobbled up the weak… He wanted another chance? It was a laughable story.

“…You are really stupid, my son.”

Then what type of person was Kether, the emperor of Andras?

“But I forgive you. You are my child and Andras’ third sword. I gave you that sword in order to protect your life from the pit of death.”

“O-Ohhh…! T-That means!”

“Your life is Andras’ and mine.”

Fermut felt a familiar and fierce joy at the words. Fermut’s life

had been declared as the emperor's possession, so no one other than him could kill Fermut. It was the same for that damn Witch of Heat and Sage of Water. From now on, Fermut's era was coming. Even the emperor of the iron throne had affection for his flesh and blood.

"Then I will take it directly with this hand."

"...Huh?"

What did that mean?

Puk. A coin-sized hole was drilled in Fermut.

"K-Kuaaah....kuheook..." Fermut screamed as something entered his body, draining it.

To be precise, he tried to scream.

The moment that Kether's finger penetrated Fermut's brow, Fermut's flesh was no longer his. The connection between the body and the soul was cut off, and the feeling of the soul being pulled into the abyss was horrifying.

'T-This monster... is he, really, my father?' Fermut questioned as he reached the final threshold of life.

Jjikeok.

Kether looked down at his dead son with a dull facial expression. It was the nasty death of the 3rd Sword.

Fermut had completed his duties, but now he was useless.

The emperor muttered, "It hasn't even been 1,000 years since I started ruling Andras and the balance is already collapsing. The mortals, who are useless except for causing chaos, are bothering me again... Do I have to move directly with this incomplete body...?"

He had empty eyes that watched the people and a voice that casually discussed a time period of 1,000 years. Kether thought about it before deciding. He couldn't leave this situation alone. It

was a matter where he needed to move personally. “It can’t be helped.”

He commanded Crowd, who had appeared in the audience room, “Gather all of the Seven Swords. I will make this war simpler.”

“Are you going to end the empire?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t thought about it yet.”

The two people talked about absurd things without changing their expressions.

“Don’t waste effort on needless work, Crowd. Remember that you might be a little exceptional, but you are still part of me. You will have to join them someday.”

“Of course, I always keep that in mind.”

“You are really good at speaking. Well, okay. Go now. I must end this tirelessly repeating war game.”

The emperor, whose empire was in a desperate situation, called this war a game. Nevertheless, the 1st Sword didn’t contradict his words. It wasn’t because he didn’t have the authority but because he knew it was correct.

The moment Kether moved, this war would soon end. It would end in a way that nobody expected or wished for.

“War is just the struggle of insects.”

He would finish it in one go.

*

After the battle on Nagma River, the dispersed Meltor troops gathered in one spot to reorganize.

It was necessary to observe how Andras reacted to the great damage, and a new face joined. It was Blue Tower Master Blundell, who had come to fill the vacancy that Veronica left after leaving Karul Plains.

“Hahaha! I am glad to see your happy face!” Blundell laughed, causing his swollen muscles to swell. His staff was no different than usual. There was no tension as the leaders laughed.

“I would like to raise a glass in celebration, but I have to put off this joy until after our victory. How long have I been waiting in the capital? I am so happy to be able to fight with you, despite it being late!”

“Yes, we think so too. Blue Tower Master.”

Benedict coughed a few times before asking, “The war is going well, but what about the situation back in the kingdom?”

“It isn’t bad! The economy has shrunk a little bit due to the war, but it is still good. The situation with the supply unit is good, so we can sustain it for half a year without difficulty.”

“Hoh, it is good news.”

The soldiers were risking their lives fighting on the front lines, but the support people in the rear also shared their pain. Food was shipped at a cheap price to the front, while merchants placed the supplies before their own interests. It wasn’t uncommon for them to go bankrupt from the burden.

However, Meltor’s national power endured that burden. The patriotism, accumulated finances, and sympathetic elements allowed them to do it. They couldn’t help feeling proud as citizens of this kingdom.

“Okay, now it is my turn,” Blundell said, his grinning expression becoming serious. He asked, “How is the current situation? I heard there was a big win at Nagma River, but nothing since. Don’t tell me that nothing happened…”

“That’s right,” the masked Orta immediately replied to Blundell. “Since that day, the enemy troops haven’t moved. There have been no movements, apart from a defensive formation. Therefore, we were worried about how we should respond.”

“Huh? They really aren’t moving? Those warmongers?” Blundell had a lot of experience, but even he shook his head as he looked at the models on the map.

Meltor might have the upper hand, but this advantage wasn’t absolute.

Andras still had more troops than Meltor, as well as a lot of hidden strengths. There was no reason for them to act passively.

“What are their intentions?”

Orta shrugged in response. “I’m not sure. I can’t get a sense of their actions. The secret agents I sent didn’t get any results, and I am reluctant to poke at the gaps.”

“Don’t tell me… Perhaps they are planning a truce?”

“Perhaps. For the first time, Meltor is dominating in the war. We absolutely can’t step back, and they know that.”

There was a moment of silence in the control center. They were each having their own thoughts and guesses about what Andras’ actions meant. Then a messenger ran into the barrack, which had a heavy atmosphere.

“C-Commander!” The messenger’s fear-filled pale face made Benedict realize that what the messenger brought wasn’t good news. “A small unit is making its way past the western border! Four magic soldier units and 26 war mages tried to delay them, but they are all dead or in a serious condition!”

“What, the defense line?”

“It was broken in an instant! The speed is insanely fast!”

The shock spread to all the leaders, including Blundell and Benedict.

The soldiers at the defense line of the border were elites, yet the soldiers at the defense line were broken in an instant? Moreover, it had been done by a small number of elites with overwhelming

force.

Benedict somewhat recovered his composure and asked, “The power of the enemy? Surely you know that?”

“T-That…”

“What is it?!” In the end, Benedict lost his patience.

The messenger hiccuped before opening his mouth, “A-According to the report, it is the 1st, 2nd, and 5th swords…”

“What?”

“Is that true?”

“A-And one more thing.”

Apart from three of the Seven Swords crossing the border, there was more to report? The eyes of the leaders glared at the innocent messenger. If they hadn’t controlled their magic power, the innocent messenger might’ve had a heart attack.

However, he spoke despite the pressure, “I’m not sure, but… one of the surviving war mages said he saw it.”

Before they could ask, the messenger continued, “He said the emperor’s flag was among the Andras unit that crossed the border…!”

The flag that expressed the emperor himself was a symbol that could only be seen in Andras. If they really were carrying that flag, it meant that three of the Seven Swords and the emperor had crossed the border personally.

‘This is crazy!’

It was a surprise raid that would never happen again in the future.

“What did these bastards eat?” Blundell’s murmur resonated through the barracks, seeming to represent everyone’s feelings.

Chapter 287 – Emperor Moves (2)

It was as he said.

All of the remaining Seven Swords, the pillars of Andras, had been mobilized and were moving with the symbol of the emperor in an insane operation. If this were a chessboard, it would be the same as placing the king into the midst of the enemies.

Of course, the emperor of Andras had to be a powerful sword master, but it couldn't be enough to reverse the battlefield.

This was a suicide operation.

To sum it up briefly, it was true that a sword master was superior to great magicians at breakthroughs, but this breakthrough would only have value if it was followed up. What would they do if they broke through? It was merely an ineffective demonstration of force without the military force to take over.

Furthermore, the operation was being carried out by the remaining Seven Swords and the emperor, who were all masters. Even the most skilled aura users wouldn't be able to catch up with masters.

'What is he thinking...?' Theodore's brows furrowed.

It was a plan that couldn't be understood with common sense. The most likely option was that they would immediately attack the capital of Meltor, Mana-vil. With at least four masters and dozens of expert aura users...

Certainly, it wasn't guaranteed that any kingdom's defenses could block that elite power. The high walls would be smashed apart and the king beheaded. However, with Meltor, that strategy would run into a wall.

There was the defense of the four magic towers. Additionally, considering the presence of Veronica who was recovering her magic power, it was impossible for Mana-vil to fall to a small

number of elites.

On the other hand, Meltor could choose to collapse the capital of Andras or gather troops to strike the elite force from the rear. At first glance, this situation was really too ridiculous.

'...Wait.' At this moment, Theodore recalled something. 'If it is the western border, then Master...!'

If the enemy forces penetrated through the western border zone as the messenger said, then Vince definitely belonged to the unit blocking them. The four magic soldier units and 26 war mages had taken action to delay them.

There would be some casualties from the four sword masters' breakthrough. What if his master was included among them? The war mages were already few in number. The casualties wouldn't be low.

"Messenger!" Theodore urgently called the messenger over and asked him, "Do you have a list of survivors from the west? I want to know the status of the personnel involved in the delaying operation!"

"T-There were too many magic soldiers, so it hasn't been organized yet. I only have a list of war mages."

"Show me."

The messenger pulled out a scroll, and Theodore took it with trembling fingers. The leaders belatedly realized why he was troubled. Vince Haidel was a famous name among the war mages. Orta, Blundell, and the other leaders who had taken action with him several times also looked worried.

Theodore read down the list of the deceased.

From the top, Beruch, Ilan, Zirmud, Haman...

There were 26 people. It wasn't a large number, but it was natural for his fingers to hesitate. Vince's name might be here. The

fear stilled his fingers. Finally, he reached the end and scanned it again several times.

“….Phew…”

Fortunately, Vince’s name wasn’t present. Then he saw Vince’s name on the list of wounded.

[Vince Haidel: Amputated left leg, serious condition.]

Vince had lost his left leg, but he had survived. Theodore felt both deeply sad and greatly relieved. It was enough if Vince survived. Even if he couldn’t continue as a war mage, Vince wasn’t one to give up just because he lost his left leg.

As Theodore made a relieved expression, Orta whispered to him, “I’m sorry but you don’t have time to go visit him.”

“…I know,” Theodore said, handing the scroll back to the messenger. “It will be okay just to deliver medicine.”

Theodore pretended to take the potions out of his pocket, pouring them from his inventory onto the table. They were the highest quality potions he had obtained from Paracelsus’ laboratory. His heart wanted to give Vince an elixir, but Theodore couldn’t give Vince special treatment. He could go and talk with Vince after the war was over.

The messenger disappeared with the potions, and the leaders started a meeting under Blundell’s command.

“Then it is time to determine the course of action.” The magician, who had lived for over a century, grasped his beard and raised two fingers. “It can be divided into two categories. Do we fight that stupid group or ignore them and head straight to Belfort?”

“Tower Master, I think we should advance,” Benedict, now the former chief commander, declared with a certain voice. “Without the Seven Swords and the emperor, the empire doesn’t have the power to stop us. Belfort’s fierce walls can be removed with the

combined attacks of three or four masters. One week is enough."

"Then we should ignore those guys running around?"

"It is cruel, but yes. That's correct. There is the Red Tower Master, and the Yellow Tower Master also promised to participate in the capital's defense. They will be able to hold on until we obtain Belfort."

Unlike the decisive Benedict, Orta shook his head. "I am the opposite. Such a predictable operation, even the emperor of Andras would've thought of it. Furthermore, there are a total of seven masters in our camp. It is a level where we can act to stop that elite group."

"That is White Tower Master's position on this matter?"

"Yes."

Aside from Benedict, who advocated to advance, and Orta, who wanted to stop the unit of masters, there were now only two commanders remaining who could speak out. They were the Chief Commander Blundell and Theodore Miller. In a 2-against-2 situation, Blundell's opinion would be more powerful.

However, he made an unexpected decision. "Hrmm, this old man will abstain."

Everyone stared at Blundell, and he explained, "I have only just joined the battlefield, so I don't have a clear view. It might end up as a divided opinion. Therefore, I think it is right to let the last commander, Theodore, decide."

"That..." Theodore hesitated but sighed as the rest of the commanders agreed.

Then he closed his eyes and focused on his super-sensitivity. '... Damn, it still isn't visible.'

Theodore tried again, but darkness was the only thing reflected by his super-sensitivity. Just like when the bow master's foresight

interfered the other day, an unknown factor was blocking his super-sensitivity.

March to Belfort or go to Mana-vil...?

What should he do? The future couldn't be seen, but Theodore felt like his choice would have catastrophic results either way.

"I..." He started hesitantly and then continued, "I think it is right to block the small unit."

Theodore judged that it was correct to interfere with the emperor's intention, which would be linked to the truth of this Northern Continent.

Then Blundell clapped and shouted, "Okay, it has been decided. White Tower Master!"

"I'll prepare it right away."

"How long will it take?"

"If I take action immediately... I can do it in three hours."

Returning to Mana-vil from the front lines in three hours, that was a feat impossible without Orta. Due to the sudden decision, the leaders ran around reorganizing the army, while Theodore stared at the rain clouds in the distance.

In spite of the favorable situation, his mind didn't stop shaking, just like how the surface of the sea would stir uneasily before a storm.

This was surely the climax of the unification war.

Theodore was confident of this and closed his eyes to control his boiling magic power.

*

Three hours later, a light appeared somewhere.

Flash!

There was a flash, and white dust rose like mist. It was the

aftermath of dozens of magicians appearing through space magic in a room with no furniture. They breathed in the dust reflexively, with even the masters coughing. Theodore was the only exception due to his wind divinity.

'Eh? This place...'

He looked around before anyone else and noticed the familiar appearance of the room. Theodore had been to this place before. Yes, a few years ago on the mission with Vince...

Theodore was able to realize it immediately. "The Bergen Barony?"

"You noticed. Have you used it before?" Orta stepped out. "After estimating the speed of the empire's Seven Swords and the emperor, I thought that Bergen would be the best place to deal with them."

"Ah, that's right. If they go straight through the mountain range..."

"It is the shortest distance to reach Mana-vil. The mountain terrain won't slow down four sword masters, so it is certain that they will pass through Bergen."

Indeed, Theodore agreed and looked around. The core power of the army was gathered in this place. They had to consider that there would be a minimum of four sword masters, and perhaps an unknown master like the bow master from the other day.

Thus, six masters had joined in this space transfer.

The two guardians of Elvenheim, Ellaim and Edwin. White Tower Master Orta and Blue Tower Master Blundell. Theodore Miller and Randolph Clovis.

There were also senior war mages and William and Sylvia. A master might be dominant, but the more firepower they had, the better. This group could easily defeat the allied forces of the Central Continent. Benedict had been left behind to command the

army, but this was still an enormous power.

‘Yes, if it is this much… It is enough to win the battle,’ Theodore thought as he left the narrow and dark room behind Orta. They passed through the secret door into the back alley like the last time, and the crowded streets of Bergen soon filled their eyes.

In the front of the group, Blundell used invisibility magic and said in a playful tone, “Good. There is still a day or two according to the calculations of White Tower Master.”

“Please be more cautious, Blue Tower Master.”

“Huhuhu, can’t I joke around? A good night’s rest isn’t possible in this situation, so I should at least joke…”

Then it was at that moment…

— — — — — — —!!!

It wasn’t the sound of an explosion or a roar. The sound, which couldn’t be described by any modifier, tore through the sky.

The sound was a type of vibration, a type of shock wave.

If the strength was too much, it could tear apart a person’s eardrums as well as cause the destruction of inanimate objects. The scene of the clouds being torn apart was proof of how terrible this sound was.

“…!”

“……! ……!”

Despite the magicians spreading out a barrier of magic power, the eardrums of the ordinary people were affected. Fortunately, it got better when the sound passed. However, the people who suddenly lost their hearing were crying on the ground.

It was because of the overwhelming sound that burst out! The old buildings seemed to shake uneasily in the aftermath. If the sound rang out one more time, Bergen would collapse like an earthquake had occurred.

Therefore, Theodore commanded the wind faster than anyone else.

‘In the name of Aiolos! Be a wall to calm down the shaking on the outskirts of this city!’

The sound was vibration, and vibration wasn’t visible to the naked eye. Just as nothing could be heard in a vacuum, building a shield with wind could reduce the power of the noise. Theodore’s will spread out, causing the mountain breezes to wrap around Bergen in a sphere. In order to recreate this phenomenon, an expert of Orta’s level was needed.

Orta and Blundell admired it and responded belatedly.

“Calm Mist!”

“Aerial Winder!”

The double barrier of fog and wind calmed the chaos. The crowd of people gradually calmed down, and the wind barrier Theodore had made became as strong as a steel wall. It would remain strong even if the sound occurred again three or four times in a row.

Then Theodore’s group looked in the direction where the sound had come from. What had created such a blast? Rather than an attack, it might be the aftermath of an explosion that someone had caused.

‘Eh? This power is perhaps…?’

Was it because he had calmed down? Theodore read the magic power and looked at the horizon with confusion. It was heat magic.

Theodore had felt the flow of this scorching magic power many times. The density of the power of aura might be much higher, but only a magician could wield such massive mana in this way.

“This strength, surely it isn’t that tomboy!”

“This is ridiculous! They are supposed to be a few days away from

Bergen...!”

Blundell, who had the same thought as Theodore, was confused, while Orta was embarrassed about his calculations being off. Then the explosive sound burst out again.

——————————!

——————————!

——————————!

This time, it was multiple smaller versions. The earth shook and the clouds were torn apart every time flames shot up to the sky. This power was equivalent to at least five consecutive 7th circle magics. They didn’t know why, but Veronica was pushing a bombardment toward someone!

‘No, it isn’t just anyone!’

This situation had already been set up. Veronica alone couldn’t deal with Andras’ core power. The emperor would be directly commanding the Seven Swords.

“It can’t be helped. Join in!”

The plan to stay in Bergen and build up defenses was abandoned. The group prepared to head toward the gigantic flames. Starting with Blundell, 20 magicians rushed forward. The glare, noise, heat, and shock waves reaching Bergen was proof of the power involved in the conflict.

The curtain raised on the final battle to end the unification war.

Chapter 288 – Emperor Moves (3)

The magicians, led by Blundell, quickly crossed the walls of Bergen, leaving the deafened people staring stupidly at their backs. They didn't know what was going on, but they knew it wasn't something they could interfere with.

Kurururung!

The earth was still shaking violently. Dirt fell from collapsed hills and landslides occurred, spreading the flames and dust further. It increased the height of the obstacles in the path of Theodore's group, but that was all.

'Ugh, how many times have the magic attacks been shot out…?'

With Randolph and the two guardians by his side, Theodore looked at the Nadun Mountains that started to come into view.

Black smoke and flames were rising.

The giants keeping this spot for hundreds of years were broken like fragile reeds, while the monsters were rushing around like wild beasts. It was like a natural disaster, the eruption of a large volcano, had occurred.

Even though it was great magic, it didn't have one or two times the power.

It was at least 10 times the power, a destructive force that could take out the middle of a large mountain range. This was a firepower that no one else except for Veronica, Meltor's ultimate fire magician, could exert.

Theodore might be able to do one shot, but he didn't have a way to release such strong destructive power in a row.

"This woman, she's not thinking about other people at all…" Blundell grumbled as he felt the heat in the air and drew water from the area.

Then he covered the group with a thin protective layer.

It was a proficiency worthy of the peak of the blue tower. Theodore felt admiration for him when he found that the shield didn't interfere with his breathing and movements. To think he could use a spell this sophisticated in an instant! Theodore had reached the threshold of the water attribute, yet he couldn't do it so perfectly.

'An 8th circle master, I am still far away.'

It was a wall beyond a wall. However, Theodore was pleased, rather than frustrated.

Shortly afterward, the party arrived at the entrance of the mountain range and looked around. Burned trees emitted heat into the sky, while the half-melted and uneven ground made it hard to walk on unless they were cooled and hardened.

Thanks to Blundell, there were no inconveniences. However, it was uncomfortable to wait in such an environment. Then at that moment...

"—Oh, you came faster than I thought? I expected it would take a few more days," a cheerful voice rang out from above their heads, belonging to the person who had made the Nadun Mountains like this.

It was the appearance of the great magician with the lineage of a red dragon, Veronica. She landed on the ground and chuckled when she saw Blundell's wrinkled face. "What, you've just gone and already come back? It must be hard to wander around at your age."

A vein throbbed on Blundell's head as he countered, "Hey, at least have some manners!"

"What if I don't want to~? Isn't it hard moving those muscles? Eek, look at them squirm. You should put on looser robes!"

"Ridiculous! I'm not ashamed of my muscles!"

For the two pillars of the kingdom, this was the normal conversation between them. However, the expressions of the other magicians changed when they discovered this reality. The two people then belatedly became aware of their lost dignity and closed their mouths.

Veronica cleared her throat a few times before talking first, “Kuk! Let’s stop joking around and talk about the situation.”

“Cough, yes. You must’ve been in a delaying battle, right?”

“Yep, I can’t deal with so many sword masters alone. I fired off attack skills from a distance that is hard for them to reach. And I have a feeling that I shouldn’t approach.”

“Your gut… I shouldn’t look down on it.”

Unlike their first frivolous appearance, the two people became serious as they started the discussion.

According to Veronica, she had chosen to intercept, rather than tighten the defenses around Mana-vil. She could sit quietly and wait for them to arrive, but she was worried about the power of the emperor, as well as the 1st and 2nd swords.

If possible, she wanted to at least identify the emperor’s Aura Ability, but that seemed to have failed.

However, Veronica’s face was shining brightly, rather than shrinking back. “Well, I don’t think I can lose with all this power gathered. I just need to take a breather before penetrating the enemy.”

“Is it okay? You must’ve consumed quite a bit of magic power.”

“The same is true for the other side. I think it will be worse if we wait for my recovery. A sword master’s resilience is almost at the level of a troll,” she said without exaggerating.

If a magician required 10 hours to recover from the magic power consumed, then a sword master only needed 2~3 hours to recover

their stamina. It was possible that the opponent would be ready if they waited for Veronica's recovery.

"Red Tower Master."

"Huh? What is it, Kid?"

Theodore pulled something out without any hesitation.

*

After approximately 30 minutes of waiting. The heat filling the entire mountain range faded, and the fire started to shrink. It was an environment where they could walk around and breathe, even if they didn't have Blundell's magic.

However, it wasn't just environmental benefits that Theodore had gotten in those 30 minutes.

"...Once again, thank you for your help, Captain Theodore. I will repay you for this medicine when we return."

"W-What, this tree root? I took only half of it, and I've recovered almost all of my magic power?"

It was the stunning effect of the Thousand Year Knotweed Elixir that Theodore had given out. He was very satisfied with their reactions.

'The 500-year-old ones aren't as efficient, but they are still good.'

There was no doubt that he could buy a mansion with the value of one elixir, but he needed to keep supplies for big battles. It was worth investing all the remaining plants if it was possible to restore Veronica's power. Blundell was well aware of the meaning of Theodore's actions and pounded on Theodore's back. "Good! Very good! As His Majesty said, you really are the treasure of our Meltor!"

"B-Blue Tower Master, i-it hurts."

"Don't be sorry about today's spending! I will petition the king to give you something of equal value!"

“T-Thank you?” Theodore’s back throbbed from being hit several times by that large hand, and he barely managed to respond.

Anyway, this was favorable to all of them.

There were two guardians, a sword master, three tower masters, and Theodore. Additionally, there were the Prime-grade elites following them for secondary assistance. It would be hard for the four sword masters in the mountain range to win.

The two great magicians came to the same conclusion and raised their voices.

“Go! We don’t need to waste any more time!”

“That’s right. Stay focused. From now on, we will be entering a battlefield where one inch of carelessness isn’t allowed.”

They tightened their formation. Randolph and Ellaim were excellent at melee battle and were placed at the forefront, while the strongest Veronica was placed in the middle. Blundell moved in the rear, and Orta, who hadn’t completely recovered yet, was a support. Meanwhile, Theodore and Edwin were moving fluidly between different positions.

It was a formation that allowed them to cope with any situation.

A heavy silence filled the air as they walked through the desolate landscape, causing Blundell to mutter a few words. Anyone who remembered the Nadun Mountains in the past would react the same way. “...It is quiet. It is hard to think of it as the Nadun Mountains. Will it be able to naturally regain its original appearance?”

“This won’t be enough to stop the enemies. We’ve wiped out the little ones, but the main players of the Seven Swords are still there. The defensive ability of the 1st and 2nd Swords is unnecessarily high,” Veronica gave excuses as to why she had gone so far.

Theodore inwardly accepted the excuses.

This destruction was necessary if she wanted to tie up the feet of the 1st Sword, who had blocked Death Gazer on Kural Plains without any injuries, or the 2nd Sword who could cut space. There was no value in preserving the natural environment when facing them.

“No, I’m not trying to blame you…” Blundell was trying to explain when…

Wuoooooong…!

Despite there being no warnings, everyone prepared for battle.

The magic power of the four great magicians oppressed the region, scattering the aura of the wind, fire, and water elementals that were called. No matter who rushed out from beyond the charred grass, Theodore knew that they wouldn’t be able to survive.

‘He’ stepped forward.

“…Hah.” A pool of blood formed every time he took a step. Blood was flowing from his torn left arm and the hole in the abdomen, ignoring the recovery effect of aura as it soaked into the earth.

No matter where they looked, he was in a miserable condition. His aura was flickering like a candle about to be blown out. He raised his right arm over his head.

“Hey, will you save me if I surrender?” Zest Speitem suggested with a desperate expression.

“…What is going on, 2nd Sword?” Blundell asked as he moved forward, causing Zest to shake his head. Did he mean that it was difficult to explain with his own mouth?

“I don’t know. Why did this happen? Why did he attack us…? I don’t want to die like this. So, save me, okay? I will do whatever you want.”

“Him?”

“D-Damn. It is hard to stand…”

Flop. Zest’s body fell to the ground. The sword master, who should be tougher than steel, found it hard to stand. This meant that his condition was extremely serious. Should they give him first aid?

While Blundell was feeling baffled by the unknown situation, Zest looked behind him and spoke in a faint voice, “Again, we meet… Kid.”

“…Zest Speitem.”

“I couldn’t kill you twice, and now the third encounter… I won’t be able to even if I am saved…” The strongest swordsman who guarded the Andras Empire with the 1st Sword chuckled with derision.

He had missed the opportunity to kill his opponent twice, and now he was begging for his life? If pride had a solid shape, it would’ve completely shattered at this point. Nevertheless, Zest wanted to live. Theodore looked into Zest’s eyes and saw his condition more precisely than anyone else.

Then Theodore declared in a calm manner, “I’m sorry, but you are already dead. Your wounds can’t be repaired by any means.”

“…W-What?”

“The hole in your abdomen, it isn’t a mere flesh wound. It destroyed the soul. Your soul is strong and managed to hold on for a bit in that state, but now… there isn’t much left.”

Theodore’s ability to see the soul had increased while learning eastern martial arts and shamanism. As such, he was able to see that the hole had been drilled into Zest’s soul. It was an injury that couldn’t be fixed. The soul and the flesh were completely different concepts. Repairing a broken soul was a feat only possible for a 9th circle magician.

“…I see…” Zest accepted it with a lighter expression like he could

read the truth in Theodore's face and voice. "Damn, that monster... He had such power... Dammit. Rather, if I died by your hands, it... would've been better..."

"There is much to be said about running away and winning."

"...Kuk, cheeky, child. Of course... I..."

Tok, Zest's right hand fell to the ground. It was the end of a sword master, the 2nd of the empire's Seven Swords. Theodore didn't miss the way Zest's soul was drawn somewhere along with his death.

"That way."

"You..."

"There is no time to explain. The one who killed Zest is over there." Theodore was certain and spoke without thinking.

Something was burning up in his body. Seeing the death of the person, who had almost killed him in the past and had threatened his kingdom, made him angry. Zest shouldn't have died like this.

Theodore had wanted to kill Zest with his own hands. Or maybe he felt a sense of rapport with him from when they fought? He couldn't know now.

"...Understood. We will go this way." Blundell followed Theodore's words without asking.

There was no reasoning for it. He was just convinced by Theodore's previous achievements and current firm conviction. As they moved in the indicated direction, they passed by the body of a woman with white hair. Randolph looked at the strange looking spear and the woman's body with a strange expression.

Then at the end of the path, they faced him.

"—You're late."

He was big. Anyone who saw him would think so. The man sitting on the rock was taller than the average person, and his wide

shoulders were magnificent like a mountain. His white-tinged hair reminded them of the snow peaks, and his grandiose voice echoed. He was holding onto a sword that had blood dripping from it.

Even though he didn't introduce himself, everyone knew who he was. This man was the emperor. He was the peak of the Andras Empire, the emperor who carried the Seven Swords and dyed the north with blood.

Emperor Kether—anyone born in Meltor couldn't help hating this man. However, Theodore felt confused. He didn't know why, but he felt a strange sense of familiarity from the emperor.

"Indeed, it was like this."

The emperor's eyes, which didn't contain a shred of humanity, focused on Theodore. No, it was like he was looking inside Theodore.

"Indeed, it has been a long time, my brother."

No one knew the meaning of his words. Why did the emperor of Andras call them brother and why had he killed the 2nd Sword? They didn't know anything and couldn't make a guess. As the fear of the unknown settled upon the magicians, 'it' woke up inside of Theodore.

–I made a guess, but it truly is him.

Theodore immediately responded, 'The emperor's brother... Don't tell me...?!'

–It is as you guessed, User. In the midst of this confusion, Gluttony's voice was as calm as ever. –He is one of the Seven Sins that has been in conflict with me since time immemorial—Invidia, the parasitic grimoire that symbolizes the sin of envy.

Chapter 289 – INVIDIA (1)

It was Invidia, ‘envy’ of the Seven Sins!

Theodore’s mind became blank for a moment, then he quickly recovered.

The emperor of Andras was a grimoire, one of the Seven Sins like Gluttony? It was shocking, but it also made the current situation more dangerous. Theodore’s intuition, which often helped him escape from the jaws of death, was telling him that this was a priority.

A grimoire that had been able to grow his power for over 500 years…

It was one of the Seven Sins that was superior to any other grimoire, and it had the status of emperor of the only empire in the continent.

Theodore couldn’t even imagine the strength that would’ve accumulated using this omnipotent power. The grimoire, Death’s Worship, had managed to turn a 4th circle magician into an elder lich in only three months. What would pop up when it was 500 years?

‘Gluttony, tell me what you know about him.’

–Understood.

It was the best way to gain an idea of Envy, who wasn’t attacking, and to figure out how to deal with him.

-As I mentioned, Invidia is a parasitic grimoire that needs a host. He maximizes the potential of the host and accelerates its growth rate. Up to here, it is similar to me.

‘Then?’

–The Seven Sins each have a unique ability. In the case of Pride, it is feeding evolution, eating its prey. Envy’s inherent ability is

called ‘envious plundering,’ according to its characteristic.

Once Theodore heard those words, ‘Envious plundering’, he looked at the emperor who was still sitting down.

The emperor’s aura was relaxed, and he didn’t show any hostility.

Invidia, who wore the emperor’s skin, opened his mouth, “You won’t answer? Hrmm, good. You are a good listener, but your talking is the worst. If you choose to remain silent, close that filthy mouth until the end.”

While talking, Invidia opened his arms in an exaggerated manner. He was like the conductor of a band, an orator on a podium.

His appearance was full of gaps, but no one could think about attacking him. Despite the hatred that had been ingrained in their bodies since childhood and the magic they had trained for decades, all the magicians were overwhelmed by their instincts.

‘Death.’

They would die if they tried to strike one of the old man’s weaknesses.

Cold sweat dripped down their bodies. Everyone gathered here subconsciously recognized the difference in power between them.

“Now, have you had enough time to look around? My brother, I told you not to speak, but I also want to hear your comments. How is it?” Envy ridiculed Gluttony’s silence. “How is the breeding ground that this body has created?!”

“…Breeding ground?”

“Yes, the whole of the North is a breeding ground for me,” Invidia responded in an excited voice like he thought Theodore’s words were Gluttony’s.

The others gulped at this unfamiliar atmosphere.

They didn't know what was going on, but they could tell that a sinister secret was going to be revealed next. There was no need to break the excitement of the monster. Everyone implicitly agreed and focused on the conversation between the two people.

"The idea was pretty good, but carrying it out was more difficult than I thought. The talent to build a nation without any foundations is rare. A king like that is rare. Those heavenly qualities... If he had been born in the flesh of a god, he could've become transcendent."

"If you are talking about the king of Andras... Sword King Kesein?"

"He had that name? Well, it doesn't matter. With his body, I built this Andras, creating a system that revered aura. I was going to try in the East at first, but someone already got there first."

"Ah," Theodore muttered in agreement, "Lust..."

"You are familiar with it. Well, you can probably guess the next thing, Brother? Aura users can improve themselves to a certain level, but then they need to take on others. In other words, a struggle is needed to build them up."

"...Meltor."

"That's right. A sword empire going against a magic kingdom. Aura and magic, the countries with two opposing powers became my breeding ground. Humans are foolish. Once a fire is lit, they don't care where the fuse came from. They kill each other, and my purpose is achieved. Huhu, what lovely creatures."

It was a guess. The fact that the king who had established a great empire in the middle of nowhere was a grimoire meant that Paragranum, who had helped establish Meltor, was suspicious.

The pieces connected in this way.

Grimoires didn't care about human ethics. They would commit good and evil in order to achieve their purpose of existence. The

two grimoires cooperating for their own purposes would be able to produce the deep-rooted history of this Northern Continent.

There had been the appearance of titanium, the establishment of the magic towers which then became the foundation of the magic kingdom, and the recurrence of the armistice agreement.

More than 10 million people had died over the past 500 years, but the two grimoires felt no guilt at all. They didn't regret it if it meant getting closer to their goals.

Behind Theodore's rigid face, Gluttony whispered, –His inherent ability is to steal the power of others. Invidia symbolizes the sin of 'Envy', always searching for a power that he doesn't have.

'...Raising sword masters and eating them.'

–That is accurate.

'Then why not magicians or elementalists?'

–It is simple. The only thing he can steal is a 'unique ability'. Magic and elementals belong to the same source. He can steal Sorcery, but it isn't worth it unless he can use magic. It is more efficient to collect many Aura Abilities.

Convinced by Gluttony's easy explanation, Theodore's eyebrows twitched.

If Invidia was able to steal Aura Abilities, it meant that all the abilities of the sword masters that existed in the history of the empire were gathered in one body. He could be a big threat, having combined dozens of abilities.

Not all abilities were as powerful as 'space cut', but Theodore couldn't guarantee that there weren't more powerful abilities than that.

'The odds... Damn, I don't know. I can't get a sense of how strong he is.'

Theodore didn't sense an overwhelming power like he had with

Fafnir or Desertio. However, that didn't mean Invidia felt weaker than them. The previous two dragons were so overwhelming that it was like looking up at the distant night sky, and Invidia had the same abyss-like presence.

Regardless of the magnitude of his power, it was ominous.

'If possible, don't fight.' Theodore suppressed his emotions and made a decision.

"Hmm, it isn't pleasant to have bugs listening to my words. I need to remove these bugs before talking to you."

Invidia pointed his sword without a single bit of killing intent.

'What?'

He couldn't react. Theodore's super sensitivity screamed out one beat late, but there was a person who reacted faster than that.

——————————Kiiing! There was a sharp ringing sound!

As Invidia heard it, his gaze shifted somewhere. For the first time, it wasn't toward Theodore but Blundell Adruncus.

"Hoh, you blocked it. Ah, the owner of this Aura Ability lost to you, master of the blue tower."

"I didn't think I would see this ability again." Cough. A few drops of blood fell from Blundell's lips. "You've shortened my lifespan even more, Emperor."

"Indeed, it was like this. Your 'flow' magic is a Sorcery that interferes with this ability. I was wondering how a person at the 8th circle could use Time Stop, but it was at the expense of your life."

"A foul is a foul, isn't it? Cough!" As the blue robe became stained with blood, Blundell's large body stumbled.

This was the moment that an unsightly scene occurred.

Chaaeng!

Around that big body, all movements stopped as white smoke filled the surroundings. The flow of air, conduction of heat, and reflection of light all stopped due to something interfering with it.

It was Time Stop, the ultimate magic that originally could only be used by 9th circle magicians. Therefore, Blundell's body received a huge burden every time he used it.

"White Tower Master, now! Move as far as possible!"

"I understand!" The White Tower Master saw the emperor's capabilities and immediately accepted Blundell's instructions, drawing a magic circle under his feet.

This was already the second Mass Teleport today. It placed a considerable burden on him, but it was a hundred times better than dying. Even with Blundell's Time Stop, Orta cast the spell just before the emperor moved his sword.

Flash!

The approximately 20 people couldn't do anything and fell down the edge of a mountain. They were 10 kilometers away from their previous location. If possible, Orta wanted it to be 100 kilometers away, but this was the limit for instantly created magic circles.

Orta breathed roughly through the pain and said, "Sigh... Give me a few minutes to breathe."

However, at that moment...

"—Get down!" Theodore shouted as he felt a chill.

Zest's Style Space Cut.

Hidden Technique, Kill the Gap.

Fermut Style, Refraction Sword.

Cutting from Both Ends!

Shortly after that, a fountain of blood rose.

Chwaaaaak!

Some people managed to avoid it thanks to Theodore's warning, but six people were cut in half, causing blood to gush up. It was truly a horizontal blow that cut people in half. The ones who couldn't escape had used defense magic, but shields had no meaning before bent space itself.

'This technique... Is it Zest Speitem's?'

Skipping through space... Theodore was familiar with it.

According to his memories, Zest had only been able to move a few meters with it. It wasn't a technique that could be used to narrow a distance of 10 kilometers, even if all his power was exhausted.

'Gluttony, don't tell me this is Invidia's ability?'

–He wouldn't be a Seven Sins if he simply took the ability. He can use the ability to its maximum potential and combine several abilities. Even if it is the same ability, the power changes after entering his hands.

'Crazy!'

Regardless of whether he knew Theodore's astonishment or not, Invidia admired the fact that several humans had survived his strike.

"Hoh, interesting. I thought I would finish it all at once. It seems like I can enjoy this outing. I will give you one chance. Feel free to attack."

"This bastardddd!"

"I will sure kill you!"

The magicians were in a frenzy after losing their colleagues.

"Wait! Be more careful..."

However, it was too late. Instead, Theodore stopped talking and gathered his magic power to help as much as possible. Since it was already too late, it would be better to join in on the attack.

Theodore released two Memorize slots.

Memorize.

Two Slots Open.

Double Infernal Blade.

One was just created by Theodore, while the other two had been stored in advance. The three fire swords burned the space as they moved. They aimed at the seemingly defenseless Invidia.

The other determined magicians also fired their own attack spells. Diamond Dust, Hell Fire, Acid Dragon, Thunder Calling... The firepower to make a high-level monster disappear wrapped around Invidia's body..

— — — — — —-!!

The earth shook. The range of their firepower was narrow compared to that of Veronica's previous firepower, but it was highly concentrated. The magical bombardment melted the ground like magma, and the wind turned into a vacuum.

This would wound a dragon, let alone a sword master. It was the destructive power of an adult dragon, so one person wondered if it was enough.

"—Now, is it my turn?"

That person cursed their own stupidity.

"I only took out 'Adamantine Might' and 'Immutability', but you couldn't even cause a scratch. I'll have to get rid of the low-level bugs."

Surrounded by a golden aura, Invidia looked like King Kesein who had been revered as a 'Sword King.' Even though what was inside was a fearful creature of the abyss, the power was no different. No, it had become even more powerful over the years.

Invidia walked over the boiling magma and declared their sentence in a dry voice, "Die."

Then a number of translucent swords appeared around his body.

Heart Sword State.

Despise the Weak.

It was the ability of a sword master from the distant past who had the ability to mentally influence reality. A heart sword that couldn't be blocked by physical defense needed to be blocked purely with the mind. If they didn't resist, the ability wouldn't just affect the mind but kill their actual body

A person who had reached the realm of a master would be able to bear some of the impact, but...

"T-This! Shit!" Theodore yelled half a beat late as he realized the situation.

He responded too late because it was his first time encountering a mental Aura Ability. Apart from Theodore and the six masters, all of the other magicians would die. Yes, even William and Sylvia who accompanied him.

'T-Too late...'

The heart sword was already shooting at William and Sylvia. In this situation, it was impossible to protect them. Please let William's and Sylvia's mentality be strong. Theodore closed his eyes, unable to stand the horrors he would soon see.

Chwaaaak!

Unsurprisingly, a large amount of blood splattered. Theodore saw the epicenter of the blood soaking the ground, and his eyes widened.

Chapter 290 – INVIDIA (2)

The body that was stronger than anyone else's was shaking dangerously.

"Blue Tower Master!"

"Old Man!"

The robes of the 8th circle great magician, Blundell Adruncus, were dyed red. It was due to the damage of the sword which destroyed the body and spirit without leaving traces on the clothing.

However, Theodore couldn't help wondering.

A magician's accomplishment couldn't be said to be proportional to mental power, but a powerful magician possessed a strong mentality. Veronica and Blundell would only feel a mild dizziness after receiving this attack. So, why did Blundell suffer such serious injuries?

The reason for it was revealed by Invidia. "You are doing stupid things, transferring the damage of others to your own body. What is the use of such ineffective behavior?"

"Cough! It might be dangerous to those children, but it is just a slight scrape to this old man. Anyway, if I can use my life to save them, there is no reason to hesitate...!"

Indeed, Blundell didn't fall down. The heart sword would've sliced William's heart, as well as Sylvia's carotid artery. Instead, the spirit and physical strength which had been trained for a hundred years received the blow that would've killed dozens of people alone.

The expressions of the magicians, who were burdens to Blundell, stiffened. Meanwhile, Invidia scoffed, "Why should the strong protect the weak? You should've let them die and attacked me instead."

“Hu, a monster like you won’t understand humans. I wasn’t expecting this!” Suddenly, Blundell pointed his staff. “Wait a bit longer!”

“You..!”

Once again, time stopped. As the space around the emperor stopped, Blundell shouted urgently toward the weary-looking Orta, “White Tower Master! Get anyone who isn’t a master away from here! Hurry!”

“...Yes!”

There were elite magicians of the 6th circle. They would be a great help in a normal confrontation between masters, but if the emperor was the opponent, they wouldn’t even be able to grab his ankles.

It was just like how general soldiers couldn’t help in a war between warriors and knights. When had they ever received such treatment? The magicians were in distress because they didn’t understand the situation.

Among them, there was a magician who refused the teleportation. “I don’t want to, I don’t want to! Grandfather, Theo! I can help too! I don’t want to run away alone like this!”

“...Sylvia.”

Sylvia struggled against the confused William’s hands, shaking her long silver hair to the left and right as desperate tears overflowed from her blue eyes. She looked at Theodore as the magic circle started to shine beneath the magicians’ feet. It was the precursor to a mass teleport.

William was sweating while struggling with Sylvia. Then Blundell walked over and spoke softly, “Sylvia, sweetie.”

“I don’t want to! I don’t want to hear it, Grandpa! I couldn’t show you anything! Please don’t disappear like this! Theo, I wanted to be helpful to Grandpa, so I worked hard...!”

“Then you have achieved that goal, my granddaughter.”

“…Huh?”

Blundell gently wiped Sylvia’s tears and gave her a warm smile. “I have been living all this time because of you.”

“Ah…” As she paused for a moment in a slight daze, the magic circle flashed once. The light disappeared and no one was standing there anymore.

‘Sylvia…’ Theodore’s chest felt tight as he recalled her crying face. Did she sense that she would be separated from Blundell in this fight? He didn’t know why, but he felt anger at Sylvia’s crying face.

Then as if to light the fuse, he emerged.

Chaaeng!

It was the emperor of Andras, Invidia ‘Envy.’ The Time Stop could only hold him for a few minutes. As he walked forward, Invidia ridiculed them, “It is the end of the boring melodrama.”

He didn’t care about the heavy atmosphere as he raised the sword in his hand.

“Now, come on,” he declared, looking at the seven masters.

“I was already planning on it!” Understandably, Veronica was the first to respond to the provocation.

Kurururung.

She took one step, and the ground melted from the vast heat and pressure. The power of Veronica, who had inherited the blood of a dragon and the magic of eight circles, was more than twice that of Blundell’s. There wasn’t a single magician who surpassed her in pure destruction.

Simultaneously, 10 Infernal Blades appeared beside her. The moment that the space in front of her was distorted by the terrible heat, the world’s strongest magician jumped forward. In a flash…

Veronica's fist burst forward.

————————————————!!!

A hill was crumbled in one blow, and the debris destroyed in two. By the third blow, the air was burning to produce a vacuum. From then on, it couldn't be seen with the human eyes. When measuring with time, each blow took a fraction of a second. The bombardment which could destroy a mountain crashed into Invidia's body.

"Hrmm."

Before that destructive power, Invidia's sword flashed.

Zest's Style Space Cut.

Broken Space—Thin Air Cut.

This was the technique that had blocked Theodore's heatwave in the past. A section of space was cut, blocking any physical forces. Then Invidia's sword moved again.

Delkur's Defense Method.

Immutability—Impregnable Wall.

Temporarily cutting space wouldn't be able to completely prevent the destructive power, so he would strengthen his defenses with other Aura Abilities. Simultaneously, a dark aura appeared in front of Invidia's body and blocked all of Veronica's blows. The space trembled, and the clouds above their heads were torn apart!

Nevertheless, the wall of darkness didn't collapse easily. However, Veronica wasn't Invidia's only enemy.

"—Your back is exposed." Randolph's double swords flashed behind the emperor.

Kakiing.

There was no chance to use a hidden technique. However, there

was no need for anything other than strength to kill. With his speed, Randolph could stab at Invidia's vital spots. Then Randolph's two arms moved.

His right hand aimed for Invidia's neck, shoulders, ribs, and side, while his left hand aimed for Invidia's temple, clavicle, wrist and abdomen. The speed didn't leave any afterglows and couldn't be reacted to.

"It is fast, but that is all," Invidia spoke a few words and struck back.

Ainz Round Sword Style.

Mirror—Imitation.

Just like a mirror, he deflected all of Randolph's attacks, launching eight strikes to block all of them. It was the ability of Ludo Ainz, known to be the backbone of the Seven Swords from 200 years ago. However, Randolph didn't know this and was hit in his abdomen by Invidia's kick.

"Kuheeok!"

There were still two people. Edwin and Ellaim hid their nervousness and started their distinctive breathing. It was to call the high ranking water and wind elementals. The two guardians who used the spear and bow were veterans who defended the outskirts of Elvenheim. The problem was just that the other person was more of a monster.

"What, my legs?"

"You aren't the only one who knows lost skills."

Invidia used Delkur's shadow ability to completely stop Ellaim from moving. As their mobility was stopped, Invidia slowly and vertically raised his sword in his hand.

'This...!' Theodore was the only one who responded.

He had recent experience fighting 'him', so his instincts made

him revolve his circles faster than anyone else.

Pan Helliones' Super Heavy Sword.

1st type, Earth Break.

Shortly afterward, aura fell down like a meteor.

*

Kwarururung!

There was a landslide. No, it was too moderate to call it that. The lava on the ground soared into the clouds, and the earth was turned upside down, forming a huge basin in the middle of the mountain. It was like a giant, that was several kilometers in height, had stomped their feet as hard as possible.

Pan Helliones possessed a strong destructive power, but it wasn't enough to destroy a mountain range like this.

"...How can we win against that monster?"

Theodore barely pulled out the two elves with Fluidization and looked at the devastation. If he had been half a beat late, Edwin or Ellaim would've literally been smashed.

'Perhaps if it wasn't for Blundell's assistance, I would be too late.'

Theodore didn't miss the moment Invidia's body turned black and white as time was stopped for a moment just as the sword was about to fall.

Time Stop, the original ultimate magic used for victory could only stop the enemy for a moment? As Gluttony said, the ultimate magic to not have much effect on grimoires that were already at the 6th stage.

Blundell's Time Stop was a big help because unlike Veronica's destructive power, he could assist in the direction of the fight.

'No, even so...'

Too strong. His super-sensitivity was still a mess, but Theodore

had passed the threshold of life and death many times and realized there was no chance.

‘Not power or speed. He has used six or seven Aura Abilities. If I assume that there are dozens more… we don’t stand a chance.’

It might be possible if only one Aura Ability was used at a time, but he was a monster who could combine several abilities. Were the legendary grandmasters like this?

-No, not a grandmaster.

Gluttony firmly denied Theodore’s words.

–Well, if we only consider the output, he has long surpassed a grandmaster. However, you are overlooking the most important part.

‘The output is more than a grandmaster? What is the difference?’

–It is the difference in ‘standing.’ I would like to explain more but… please be prepared. He is coming again.

‘Dammit!’

Invidia was coming again. “Is it up to here? Then it is my turn.”

Theodore felt something. Invidia’s blade greatly bent and took an unknown shape. It was a 3D shape that couldn’t be recognized by the senses of a creature. Then Theodore shivered with a sense of discomfort as Invidia used a special technique without hesitation.

Triple Compound Hidden Technique.

It was the combination of three Aura Abilities that Invidia had obtained from three slaughtered sword masters.

Broken Space—Cut to Pieces.

Refraction—The End of the World.

Maze—Decisive Stage of Labyrinthos.

It was the extreme space cut that could damage a high ranking demon, as well as a refraction sword that crushed the bent space

itself. In addition to those, it combined the ‘Labyrinth’ ability which allowed Invidia to rebuild space freely.

Kill, kill, and kill.

How many people could survive in this space where three types of deaths coexisted? It was a technique that Blundell couldn’t afford to take on alone!

‘Shit, I can’t escape with all my limbs intact…!’

Theodore could escape if he sacrificed his left arm. Then it happened when Theodore faced the approaching hell.

Clang! There was a loud sound that came from an unknown place.

“…Eh?” Theodore’s eyes widened. All of the hellish attacks had disappeared without a trace.

Invidia stared at someone with an interested look. “How did a 7th circle magician penetrate this…? It is those eyes. The Empty Eyes are the nemesis of the labyrinth. I will leave you alive and pull out your eyeballs.”

“…Kuk.”

The one who suffered damage and the one unaffected were the opposite of what had been expected. The blood that flowed down from Orta’s mask proved that he had paid a considerable price. It was difficult to break down Invidia’s technique even with the transcendent power of his eyes. Furthermore, he wouldn’t be able to block the next technique with his Empty Eyes.

In this increasingly unfavorable situation, someone whispered in Theodore’s ear, [Kid, do you have any countermeasures?]

[T-Tower Master?] Theodore didn’t look back despite his surprise, as he lowered his voice and replied to her, [...Why are you saying this to me?]

It might be different in a normal situation, but right now, there

were many suspicious things about Theodore. He was being called brother by Invidia, and no hostility was shown toward him. Invidia had even said that they would talk later.

If it wasn't for this urgent situation, it wouldn't be strange if he was arrested and interrogated. Then why did Veronica ask him if he had any countermeasures?

Veronica made a sound like she heard something ridiculous and sent her voice to him again, [Hah! There are many things I want to ask, but there is no one here who thinks you are an enemy. How long do you think we've watched you, fool?]

[...Thank you.]

[Ah, stop talking about this embarrassing story! So? Have you thought of something? If this continues, we will definitely lose. Suggest anything.]

Theodore was troubled for a moment. Then he thought of a last resort. However, in order to carry out this method, somebody's sacrifice was needed.

"...I need time."

"How much?"

"5 minutes—no, 3 minutes."

"3 minutes..." Veronica narrowed her eyes. Frankly speaking, this confrontation was being maintained by the opponent's whim. They wouldn't be able to hold on for 3 minutes if he really wanted to kill them.

In such a situation, 3 minutes was impossible. However, this made Veronica even more convinced by Theodore.

"It is hard, but isn't this good?"

"...Tower Master?"

"This time, I will show you a wonderful appearance! Don't be late with your preparations."

Theodore's hairs rose as she stepped out without hesitation. Strategically, it was ridiculous for her to face the opponent alone. Due to that, Invidia didn't attack immediately. He opened his mouth with a strange look, "Red hybrid dragon. What are your intentions?"

"What are my intentions?"

"Surely you can see the difference in strength. What are you going to do by yourself?"

"Hmm, how about this form?" Veronica threw off her red robe, revealing her solid and well-trained body. It was a feat that required a lot of courage to do in front of a monster like Invidia. Then at that moment...

Duguen! It was the sound of a heart beating, and it came from Veronica's body. The air seemed to shake. It was like a giant drum-like sound. Dugeun, dugeun. A strange shockwave emerged with Veronica in the center.

"3 minutes... That is the limit of my time," Veronica murmured in a grim voice as she tucked her hair behind her ear.

Then Invidia was able to see it. "...Hoh?"

In Veronica's eyes, there were golden dragon pupils, not human ones.

Chapter 291 – INVIDIA (3)

“Suuep—puhaaaa—...”

It wasn’t just her pupils that had changed. Whenever Veronica breathed in and out, a cloud of hot steam emerged from her nose and lips. This was a phenomenon that was normally only seen in the snowfields. It was caused by the extreme difference between Veronica’s body temperature and the temperature of the atmosphere.

If Theodore were to compare an ordinary human body to a hot water circulating system, Veronica’s body was a boiling furnace.

The steam emerging from the respiratory tract was just the aftermath. The blood of a red dragon could reach hundreds of degrees Celsius, and it was now evaporating the moisture around her.

Every time her heart pounded, Veronica’s body became closer to that of a dragon than a human. The quarter blood of a dragon regained its strength by using the eight circles as a substitute for a dragon heart.

Scales grew on Veronica’s white skin, and a pair of small, pointed horns popped up on her head.

Judging from the appearance, she was a dragon person.

“You want to reproduce the power of a dragon with the lineage of a quarter dragon? The idea is quite interesting, but it won’t last a long time with your flesh which is closer to a human’s.” Invidia instantly saw through the situation.

This caused Veronica to snap her sharp fangs as she retorted, “That much, I know as well...!”

So, this would only last for three minutes. Her heart was beating like it would burst, and her blood was boiling hot. This was a double-edged sword for her.

In exchange for acquiring magic power and physical abilities far beyond that of a human, Veronica's body was quickly breaking down. Her bones that were stronger than steel and her muscles that were tougher than an ogre's couldn't handle the power of a dragon. It was only possible for a pure-blooded dragon or a high ranking demon.

Invidia guessed the limits of this transformation and was interested. So, instead of attacking, he observed her mutation.

15 seconds later, Veronica's transformation was over.

Hwaruruk!

Now, flames came out when she breathed. The king of fire that could swim in lava... The red dragon's unique violence shouted fiercely, 'Use your power!' She formed a fist and looked ahead.

'...From now on, it is three minutes.'

Her body was already creaking. Veronica smiled bitterly and faced the monster in front of her. Was it because she was closer to a dragon than a human in this state? Her eyes penetrated through Invidia, who was disguised as an elderly human. He was ridiculous. She couldn't conserve her energy and had to fight him with the resolve to die.

Once Veronica's change was over, Invidia raised his sword and said, "Don't give up, come."

Veronica was unshakable before his declaration.

"Get lost———!!" She let out a terrifying roar and punched.

Kwaaaaang!

It was like the earth was bursting apart. The sonic boom that accompanied her fist caused Invidia's body to fly back. He had managed to completely block the attack, but the impact caused his legs to lose their balance.

Invidia laughed as he flew back hundreds of meters. He had

confirmed one thing. “Hmm, I can’t play around with this level.”

The power of ‘Adamantine Might’, which blocked great magic, had been destroyed by Veronica’s strength, indicating that Veronica might currently be stronger than an adult red dragon. Her pure physical abilities lagged behind a dragon’s, but her eight circles made her combat force superior.

Breaking the speed of sound with one step, she destroyed his defense with one fist. Invidia flew through the air and recalled the enemies he had faced in the past.

Peeng! Peeng! Peeeong!

There were a few sonic booms, and Veronica appeared.

“I think I will finish this in one blow!”

She jumped beyond the walls of the speed of sound, clinging to him with four pairs of burning wings. It wasn’t an elegant trick like flying magic.

The flames propelling her from behind ran wild, and she could barely control the direction. Even though she was lacking control, it would cause a catastrophe if they just fell to the ground. She was moving at a speed that was several times the speed of sound, so even a body made of mithril wouldn’t be able to withstand the impact.

Veronica’s aim was shocking. She focused on the wings on her back and aimed toward the still flying Invidia. Unlike magic, it was a power that dominated the flames itself.

“Dieeee!” Veronica reached hypersonic speed and dropped like a falling comet. Her afterimages couldn’t even be recognized as the physical properties of the air changed rapidly. Invidia couldn’t avoid her attack, and the kick that was like a crashing meteor struck his abdomen.

————————————————!!!

The entire mountain range was shaken by Veronica's blow.

Kukukukukung!

It didn't end with just the crash. With her feet deep in Invidia's abdomen, Veronica continued to push deeper into the ground, traveling a few kilometers below the surface. She demolished the solid granite and the limestone beneath it. The strata contained enormous heat and pressure. It wasn't an environment where living organisms could live.

In this hell-like environment, the skirmish between the two monsters ended.

'This isn't enough! A little more explosive power...!'

Her scales became clearer and her horns grew larger as she sucked in the mana of the environment. The deep heat and pressure of this underground world was an ideal environment for a red dragon. The flames near Veronica's body became incandescent, and the olivine in the area melted.

"...Interesting. Is this enough to match the firepower of the 9th circle?"

'Envy' of the Seven Sins pointed his sword at Veronica, who had become the incarnation of white fire, and declared spitefully, "Why don't you try it and see, hybrid?!"

Shortly after that, the Nadun Mountains suffered greatly.

*

Kururung! Kukukung...! Kukukukung...!

The earth kept shaking. It was the vibration caused by Veronica's fight with Invidia.

'She is enduring desperately. I also have to surpass my limits.' Theodore kept moving his hands, despite the shaking.

He needed to reduce the task that would take five minutes to three minutes, preparing for it with Gluttony's advice and

Satomer's wide knowledge. The two tower masters remained silent at his desperate appearance.

No, Orta approached the magic circle without hesitation. "I'll help you. What should I draw on the edge?"

"Thank you. The crown and sword marks..."

Blundell also wanted to help, but he was at his limit.

"Cough." Black blood emerged when he coughed. It was proof that his body's organs were already dying. His heart rate was slowing down and his lungs weakening. He looked anxiously at the two people and sighed.

Then he looked down at the jeweled ring on his left hand. The jewel which had looked like a ruby when he first got it had now turned dingy like coal.

'Hrmm... I have spent it. I wanted to live until Sylvia was all grown up, but the world didn't let me.'

It had been 10 years since Kurt had given Blundell this ring. For a magician who could control the flow of magic, Blundell had known that his life would be over in a few more years. This ring was a national treasure, another 'heart' that contained life force. However, the remaining lifespan of several years had now flown away after continuously using Time Stop.

Rather than lamenting his fate, Blundell muttered, "Damn... A young magician who plays around."

This was Blundell's perception of Theodore. Having watched Theodore since he won against Sylvia in the tournament, Blundell had become vexed. Theodore left Sylvia and went into the world to associate with other women? If it hadn't been her request, he might've made a big decision as a grandfather.

'Well, I know why you did it.'

As a man who could take steps toward the uncertain future

without hesitation... Theodore was charming as a man and as a magician. In that case, an old man shouldn't grab his ankle.

Blundell faced his impending death and asked Theodore, "So, what are you going to try against that monster emperor?"

"Summoning magic."

"...Summoning magic?" Blundell was dumbfounded. There was no magician who didn't know that the golden age of summoning magic had passed. When he was younger, he had also tried summoning magic and had only gotten a few turtles. Yet, in this situation, Theodore wanted to use summoning magic?

Blundell was prepared to withdraw all his praise when he saw the magic circle drawn on the ground.

"Hah..." He was deeply impressed with the absurd perfection.

'Four-dimensional calculations superimposed over three-dimensional craft...! The idea is new, but his skill at completing this magic circle in a few minutes is more amazing. Is he better than me and Veronica when it comes to magic circles?'

This was the combination of Theodore's brains and Satomer's knowledge, a magician with a genius talent and one with a passion for summoning magic. As Blundell admired the magic circle, Theodore placed his left hand on the ground without hesitation. "I will use this sword as the medium for the summoning."

Then a sword emerged from the palm of Theodore's left hand.

"Ohh...! T-That sword...?"

"This dense power...!"

Ellaim and Edwin were sensitive to the movement of mana and responded first. The sword shone brightly, light reflecting off the sacred blade. Even a person not familiar with swords could tell the greatness of this sword.

It was the god sword, Claimhb Solais. This was the loot Theodore

had acquired when he took down the 6th Sword, Hyde on the Sipoto Plains.

"...Indeed, this sword can call a strong presence," Orta acknowledged it. Then he asked Theodore, "Captain, what are you planning to summon?"

If this sword was used as a sacrifice, he could summon even the evil demons who had been expelled from this material world. Orta was going to stop him if he intended to call a tiger to fight a wolf.

Theodore started talking like he had guessed Orta's thoughts, "At first, I was thinking about the dragon, Fafnir. Randolph, as you know, it is hard to find a summons with more destructive power."

However, that thought was soon overturned. Fafnir was certainly powerful, but this wasn't the middle of the sea. His power could sweep over the entire continent. The continent would become like the Red Plateau, a wasteland where life can't grow.

It would be a catastrophe bigger than this perpetual war in the Northern Continent.

Furthermore, Invidia wasn't an opponent to be pushed with pure firepower like Superbia. He could get away through space, and as someone who had already reached the 6th stage, there was a possibility to reverse the situation since Fafnir was limited by the summoning.

"So, I thought about the biggest and strongest."

"That is?"

Theodore placed the god sword in the middle of the circle and pointed at it. "The master of this sword."

The people present still didn't know the truth of the god sword and were confused. Meanwhile, Theodore spoke with a serious expression, "The forgotten king, Nuada Airgetlám."

He who was praised as the left arm of God, the king of the Tuatha

Dé Danann. A warrior who won with an invincible sword, he was the god of victory who shed blood on the battlefield, bringing the gods to victory in two great battles.

“From now on, I will call a divine summon.”

A god descending to destroy evil...

There was nothing more suitable! Theodore’s hands moved as he made up his mind, and soon after, a spell started to flow from his lips.

Chapter 292 – INVIDIA (4)

“「 I speak to you, the god-king who has fallen asleep on the Mag Tuired Plains—」”

Simultaneously, the magic circle under Theodore’s feet emitted a gentle light and pulled in mana. However, it wasn’t actually necessary to provide the power needed for summoning magic. This was a type of osmotic pressure, a phenomenon that happened because the world’s mana concentration on this magic circle was too high for this material world.

“「 You have golden hair like the sun, and your red cloak flaps to guide you to victory. You, the honored king whose lost arm was replaced with silver, once wielded a sword that destroys wickedness. 」”

It was a story that didn’t exist in this day and age. This was a summoning spell based on the biography of the god-king of the god clan, Nuada Airgetlám. Theodore had to consume most of the Library’s remaining points in order to create this spell.

An ordinary person might not know this, but the value of a forgotten myth was literally endless. The spell that borrowed the power of a forgotten god was actually 9th circle magic.

Keraunos, a lightning god descended from Zeus.

Gungnir, a blessing destined to always hit the target.

The bow that could shoot down the sun with one arrow.

Now, Theodore was trying magic that went beyond those.

“「 You, who have welcomed the three women of destiny as wives, who once withdrew from your place and regained your throne… A warrior with more fairness and courage than anyone else, Lia Fail shouted at your coronation, and the noon sun was your crown. 」”

A forgotten god was still a god. Even a great magician who

achieved the ultimate magic couldn't arbitrarily call upon such a mighty existence. Normally, at least one million people and four dragon hearts were needed. This wasn't a lower level god but the king, the most famous of them all.

Unlike black magic summoning, Theodore and any other summoner would have to pay a fair price.

'...If I didn't have Claimhb Solais...'

Funnily enough, the sword he'd taken from the empire's Seven Swords was the key.

'One of the four treasures of the Elin, a sword that symbolizes Nuada Airgetlám... A treasure that no one has escaped once it is pulled from its sheath, a treasure that they have to respond to.'

The god clan was a contradiction. They were part of the material world and disappeared after death, but remained behind in the world to respond to calls and prayers. However, it wasn't easy to contact a god.

A divine message and calling a god down were national events, where only the wills of many people praying together would make it succeed.

"「 I swear, this is to fight against evil. 」"

Thus, this summoning was a foul.

"「 I swear, this is a just fight. 」"

A monster that had been gathering absolute power for 500 years was also a foul.

"「 I swear, this is a fight to save the world! 」"

The pressure from the magic circle became stronger as Theodore shouted to Nuada, who still showed no signs of coming. The promised time was three minutes. If Veronica was killed because he was a few seconds late, Theodore would swing his fist even if the god-king appeared next to him.

-...Hah.

Was Theodore's desperate cry heard?

–Hahahaha! An excited laugh rang out in his head. It was clear, cheerful, and no evil could be felt from it. The happy and pleasant laughter soared into the sky.

The voice of God-King Nuada was truly great.

–Yes, that's it! Rather than defeating evil or carrying out justice, a woman is more precious than saving the world! Well, yes. If you are a man, you should save a woman who loves you! That honest aspiration, Nuada Airgetlám admires it!

Theodore was puzzled and asked hesitantly, 'Are you really the god-king?'

–Yes, you summoned me with my sword. There have been many who have tried to borrow my strength so far, but this is the first time there is a mage who wants to manifest my body directly.

'That...'

Of course, it was natural. It was possible to obtain the blessing of a god or receive some of its power if he sacrificed Claimhb Solais. There wasn't a lunatic like Theodore who used it directly to summon Nuada.

It wasn't unreasonable for Nuada to wonder why.

'The enemy has to be killed at any cost.'

That was enough. Summoning magic opened up Theodore's soul, attracting the existence of another world. In the process, information about 'Envy' naturally flowed into the consciousness connected to him.

For this reason, Nuada fell silent for a while.

-...Invader, who was left behind in this world.

Theodore read the deep burning hatred and anger flowing from

Nuada, and felt confused.

Did Nuada Airgetlám have an antagonistic relationship with the Seven Sins which stemmed back to the Age of Mythology?

Before Theodore could express his question, a hand emerged from the light of the summoning circle. It was white like marble but different from a statue, and its forearm was wrapped in silver armor.

Gripping Claimhb Solais with a divine hand, Nuada Airgetlám whispered in a low and cold voice, –Indeed, now I understand your words. Fighting evil, saving the world, fighting for justice. There is no stage more suitable for this Nuada.

The last step of the summoning magic... the other party's consent! The God-King Nuada accepted the summoning to this material world.

Then at that moment...

*

Kwaaaaang!

The surface of the ground opened with a loud explosion. It came from several kilometers beneath the surface.

There was an elderly man wielding a sword and a white flame. Every time Veronica punched out, it would hit Invidia's blade, and the ground would shake. The lava that could melt metal wasn't much different from lukewarm water for both beings.

In this flow of magma, Veronica thought despairingly, 'Dammit, this monster...! It seems to be getting stronger and stronger...?'

Veronica realized that she was becoming disadvantaged with every blow. The dragon scales on her body were covered with blood from the wounds all over her body.

"Your pre-motions are too much. Your breathing is simple. Do you have no experience learning martial arts?" Invidia remarked.

However, unlike her guess, Invidia wasn't pulling out more power. He was simply using the battle experience taken from all the sword masters to move one step ahead of Veronica. If she tried to punch him, a sword would end up at her collarbone. Her speed and power were superior, but it was clear that her battle experience was lacking.

"You are on the defensive, but your strength has a limit." Invidia narrowed the gap and stabbed his sword.

Roland's Rapier Sword.

Penetration – Reverse Thrust.

The power of 'Penetration'—the ability to half-neutralize physical strength—pierced Veronica's shoulder. Her fist flew from the other side and Veronica opened up the distance, grunting nervously as she touched the wound. "Ouch! How many Aura Abilities are you capable of, you monster...!"

The 'Rapid' ability that made her speed look slow, the 'Penetration' that made it through defense magic and dragon scales, and the 'Super Heavy Sword' that matched the destructive power of magic... they were the best abilities of this age.

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that Invidia's strength, which collected dozens of Aura Abilities and used them freely according to the circumstances, had reached the same level as a transcendent.

「 пламя нож (Flame Sword)! 」 She used Dragon Words to gather four scorching swords and merged them into one. It was an application of magic that would run wild, but it wasn't impossible with the strength of Dragon Words. Four destructive 7th circle spells were compressed into a sword shape.

Veronica gathered her remaining power and released it in order to overturn the situation. "Turn to ashes!"

She unleashed a flaming storm that seemed to burn the sky and

the earth!

“You want to rely on the advantage of your destructive power? It is a foolish judgment.” In response, Invidia swung his greatsword vertically.

Quadruple Compound Hidden Technique.

Heavy Sword – Style 0, World Break.

Severe Earthquake – Great Strike.

Storm Force – Decisive Storm Bringer.

Amplification – Transcendent Power.

One of them was from a sword master that symbolized the current Andras, while the others were from sword masters in the past. The four powers were combined, and their power amplified to a terrible degree.

The strong flames were cut in two and couldn’t even touch Invidia’s armor before collapsing. There was too much power for Veronica’s force to have an influence. Veronica and Invidia were already living natural disasters.

Shortly after that, a terrible explosion occurred.

————————————————.

Once she regained consciousness, Veronica felt a sense of defeat. “...Ah, ahh...”

The red scales on her skin were all gone, and she could feel that her horns no longer remained. Her body had determined that it couldn’t maintain the draconic state anymore and released it.

Her heart, normally filled with magic power, was empty, and she couldn’t even move a finger, making her feel helpless. She wanted to lose consciousness, so she bit her tongue and barely regained her focus.

‘This place...?’

The wind that tickled her skin and the warm sunshine meant that she was above ground. They had been fighting several kilometers underground, but her body had been thrown out by that last explosion. She was freed from her draconic state shortly after that.

Otherwise, Veronica would've been destroyed without a trace.

"You've opened your eyes?" Invidia looked down at her, speaking with his sword at her neck. "It would've been more comfortable if you fell asleep."

"...Don't... make me... laugh!"

"What, don't be so clueless. You did well. It is the first time I have consumed so much power since the founding of Andras. I praise you, Meltor's Red Tower Master, Veronica."

Veronica looked up at her approaching death that couldn't be overturned by anything. Invidia acknowledged her strength in this short battle. He acknowledged that 'Red Tower Master Veronica' could become an obstacle and decided to kill her to remove this variable. In a sense, it could be called an acknowledgement.

'...Ah, I am going to die here?'

Veronica wasn't someone who would beg for her life. She looked up at the clouds in the distant sky and felt the blade getting increasingly closer to her neck. There were 15 seconds left in the three minutes she had promised to Theodore.

She felt uncomfortable and barely opened her trembling mouth. 'The kid will somehow be able to do something. I did my best, so don't be too disappointed.'

Veronica closed both eyes and felt a final regret, 'Damn, if I knew it would be like this, I would've kissed him once.'

Then she prepared herself for it. Invidia didn't say anything as a blue aura gathered on his blade. Then as he was about to cut Veronica's neck—

Kuoooong-...

There was a divine light. A majestic pillar of light rose a few kilometers away from where the two beings were. Lairon's strength was like a firefly compared to this light. The glory of the gods, which had vanished after the Age of Mythology, had returned to this material world.

Veronica's weary body was fast regaining its vitality, while Invidia stared at the pillar of light.

"...This presence, this light! It is impossible. It can't be! What are they trying to do?" The confused Invidia forgot about the presence of Veronica under his feet and walked away. If 'he' was being summoned, Invidia couldn't delay for even a moment. There were few existences that could destroy a 6th stage Seven Sins, and the owner of this presence was one of them.

"Gluttony! Do you think I will let you do this?" Invidia expressed his nervousness, anger, and resentment as he jumped through space with all his might.

Zest's Footwork Hidden Technique.

Kill Interval.

Invidia's body traveled a few kilometers, appearing in the middle of five men standing before the summoning circle. It was just after Nuada agreed to Theodore's summoning request.

"You dare to act so foolishly in front of me...?!" Invidia's face distorted like a demon from hell as he headed toward Theodore who stood within the summoning circle.

It was truly a narrow difference. If Invidia had arrived even 10 seconds later, the summoning would've succeeded first. The owner of the hand holding Claimhb Solais was undoubtedly the God-King Nuada, someone who could destroy a 6th-stage Seven Sins.

Even so, the five masters didn't feel despair. Only 10 seconds, they thought they could somehow block the way. Exactly 8 seconds

after that easy judgment.

“Kuaaaak!”

Randolph was thrown out with both arms crushed.

“Kuoock, urgh… Avoid it!”

“Ashamed…”

As soon as Edwin grabbed the bow, his left arm was cut off, and he keeled over from a huge wound on his abdomen. Ellaim couldn’t even stab the spear as blood poured out from a cut on his neck. Orta had long since fainted.

They’d risk their lives to block Invidia? That they could do it somehow?

The masters regretted the stupid thoughts they had a few seconds ago. Once Invidia was serious, it wasn’t even a fight. Theodore, Blundell, and Veronica were the only ones who had known the truth from the beginning.

There were only 2 seconds left, 2 seconds until the summoning was completed. Invidia could strike Theodore more than a hundred times in those seconds.

“—Haha,” Blundell laughed bitterly.

“No?!” It was Time Stop. The sword aiming at Theodore’s neck got caught in a black and white space. Invidia’s power was great, but even he couldn’t ignore this ultimate magic. As Gluttony had said, the ‘standing’ was different, so the Time Stop could be released after a few seconds.

A few seconds later, it broke.

[The dedication that you showed at the end of your life, I will remember it.] ‘He’ walked out of the summoning circle and praised Blundell in a majestic voice. He had golden hair and a red cloak flapping behind him.

An existence that all people would feel awe toward praised the

dying magician. However, the words just reached empty air. Even the ancient king, Nuada Airgetlám, didn't have the power to revive a dead man.

"...Blundell."

The moment that Blundell stopped Invidia with the last of his life, he greeted the grim reaper who had been waiting for a long time. Even so, there was no regret on his face.

In honor of the end of the great magician, Theodore's eyes filled with a fierce anger. "This summoner, Theodore Miller, will dare to petition the king of the Tuatha Dé Danann."

Filled with resentment of the reality that couldn't be overcome with his power, Theodore shouted angrily, "Please destroy Invidia, Envy of the Seven Sins!"

[...The forgotten king, Nuada Airgetlám...] A righteous anger aimed a sword toward the source of evil. [From now on, I will punish this evil!]

Chapter 293 – Reproduction of Myths (1)

Once Nuada answered Theodore's call, a divine light flowed out and filled the area.

This was the body that was the symbol of victory. Nuada's divine power covered the greatly wounded masters and revived their vitality, to the point where fighting again was possible. Most legends admired him as a war god, but there were a few where he was a healing god.

The king of the gods wasn't almighty, but he was close to all-powerful. He protected the fishermen in the sea, healed all diseases on the ground, and was the sun god who ruled from the sky. There was no god as powerful as Nuada, and he also had an army of followers. In the second battle of Mag Tuired, the guardian who risked his life to overthrow Crom Cruach was Nuada Airgetlám.

He spoke to Invidia in a voice filled with dignity, [You look different from that time, Invader.]

As Theodore had guessed, the two beings knew each other.

Nuada looked coldly at Invidia, who was in the shape of an old man. [No, I don't think the shell means much to you. The shallow need to take away the power of others to fulfill that desire remains the same.]

"...Nuada Airgetlám. A ghost is insulting me?" Nuada's words seemed to have struck a nerve as Invidia stiffened from the insult.

Even though Nuada had died, he was the king of the god clan and couldn't be compared to simple ghosts.

However, instead of falling for the provocation, Nuada laughed like Invidia had made a funny joke. [Huhaha! If I am a ghost, what are you? You might split into 10,000 pieces, but you can't become one by collecting 10,000 pieces. It has been thousands of years, and you are still walking in the wrong place.]

“Don’t talk as if you know everything!”

It was a conversation that couldn’t be understood. Theodore could sense profound principles in their words, but he lacked the ability to understand the conversation between the god-king and the Seven Sins grimoire.

However, there was one thing Theodore was able to know for sure. It was Nuada who took the lead in this struggle, while Invidia was falling prey to his provocations.

Nuada shrugged at the hedgehog-like response. [Well, okay. You haven’t changed your method even after falling down a few times. I will praise you for not knowing how to give up.]

As he looked down at his prey, Nuada sneered, [This seventh or eighth attempt, I will score it with my sword.]

It literally occurred in an instant.

“—Kuk!”

At the next moment, Invidia stepped back with a sword mark on his face. Theodore couldn’t see the attack or how it was avoided.

This was the power of Claimhb Solais. According to legends, it was said to produce black flames and emit light. However, this was an absurd remark made by people who had never seen Nuada fight in person.

[Hoh, you only got a light wound? I’ll give you 60 points.]

The essence of Nuada’s sword was that it couldn’t be recognized.

“Light Speed Sword, is it?” Invidia muttered as he barely dodged a serious blow. However, Nuada denied it, [That answer receives 0 points. If you can only think about that, you should give up on your unskilled attempts.]

“What would you know…?!” Invidia roared, drawing his sword. He used four types of Aura Abilities when dealing with Veronica, but now it exceeded 10 abilities.

Acceleration, Enhancement, Special Talent, Operating System, Discharge…

All types of Aura Abilities came together, distorting the space around the blade. If it were just the output, this would already be more than that of a grandmaster. 1+1=2, but Aura Ability wasn't constant. If the abilities were well-balanced, it was possible to cause a synergy of four times, maybe even 10 times.

In a few cases, the synergy of the Aura Abilities was multiplied by 16.

The ability of the 6th stage, to combine all abilities to the maximum, was now being freed. It was a dimensional interference that could only be seen with ancient dragons. This power was undoubtedly the domain of the transcendents.

"Insignificant personification, go back to where you came from!"

Simultaneously, Invidia's sword crushed the construct of time and space.

16 Compound Hidden Technique.

Six Paths to Kill a God.

World Breaking Emperor Strike.

The essence of swordsmanship was extracted from dozens of sword masters, and the 16 synergistic abilities combined. Theoretically, it could separate the walls of the dimension…

[A swordsmanship that is just a shell, with no depth of power…] Nuada looked at the fearsome swirl of power, evaluating it in a mocking tone, [It really is useless.]

Then the god sword flashed once again.

"…Kuheook?" Blood flowed from the arms, legs, and many parts of Invidia's body as he rolled on the ground in an unsightly manner. World Breaking Emperor Strike… A technique with such a powerful name crumbled from one flash of light.

It was useless compared to the total amount of power contained within it.

There was a huge difference, like comparing a mountain to a grain of sand, or a lake to the sea. Of course, it was Invidia who had the dominant power in his attack, and Nuada was the inferior one.

In that case, what was this ridiculous result?

[Hmm, I tried to kill you, but you survived. Is it due to the extra power you put in your defensive abilities?]

According to Nuada, Invidia had just barely survived a fatal blow.

“You… you, you, youuuuuuu—!!”

Invidia’s broken ribs and torn lungs were recovering at a rapid rate. The exposed bones from his right collarbone to his left hip were being covered up. ‘Adamantine Might’, ‘Immutability’, ‘Restoration’, ‘Joining’… It was thanks to the countless Aura Abilities that protected his body.

However, Invidia’s pride had long been torn to shreds. It had been a long time since he was knocked down by a person. If he were ‘Pride’, it wouldn’t be strange for him to be brain-dead from the shame.

Finally, a dull madness filled Invidia’s eyes. “You died, forgotten god who is a ghost…!”

[Ah, thank you for that fact, Invader,] the god-king said, nodding lightly. Then he declared, [If this was my divine body, you would be dead already.]

*

Kwarururung!

The sky was torn. It wasn’t an exaggeration. The sky was torn apart by the swords, revealing the black universe. It was evidence that 1,000 kilometers of the atmosphere had been destroyed. It hadn’t been the aim, but it was the aftermath.

A sword that could cut down a mountain? The capturing of a fortress? Such sagas weren't even worth discussing under that eerie sky.

"Hey. I was fighting with that guy up there?" Veronica recovered some strength and looked up at the sky, where two colored beams were colliding.

Her body's condition was a mess, and their movements were too fast for her to even catch afterimages. She had no confidence to block three of those attacks in her draconic state, and evasion was out of the question.

When she thought about it now, her actions had been truly reckless.

"...Invidia didn't think of this as a fight from the beginning," Theodore replied while moving his hands. He roughly joined together Edwin's severed left arm and bandaged the neck of the barely breathing Ellaim.

Thanks to Nuada's power, there was no need to worry about any life and death injuries. However, half the people here had lost their combat capabilities.

Randolph had his arms cured by Theodore's potions, but the two elves were severely wounded. Orta had lost consciousness earlier and was in the best state, but space magic couldn't be a threat to Invidia.

'No, everyone is helpless in this situation.'

The masters realized it when watching the battle between Nuada and Invidia. They couldn't get involved in this fight. Blundell's Time Stop had only lasted a few seconds, and Veronica's rampage seemed like child's play. The only role left for them was to wish for Nuada's victory.

"White Tower Master," Theodore said, making the best decision he could, "Take the Blue Tower Master's body and the two elves

out of here. If Nuada wins, we will follow after you. However, you must be prepared for the worst."

"In other words... I am running away alone?"

"Yes." Theodore ignored Orta's uncomfortable expression as he looked at the people around him. "I would like the other two to go with you as well, but... they don't look like they will go."

"Of course! How can I leave you alone?"

"Do I look that unsightly? Besides, that son of a bitch will just chase after me to kill me. It will only be delayed a few minutes if I ran away from here."

They were already prepared to die. Theodore looked at the two smiling people and gave up on persuading them.

Orta remained silent for a moment before eventually nodding. "...Be sure to come back alive. Red Tower Master and Sir Randolph as well."

"Ohh! Who knew you could say such sentimental things?"

"Let's have a drink when we return."

After fixing his mask, Orta picked up Blundell's body and laid it beside the elf guardians.

It didn't move. The body had sturdy muscles and a calm face. Orta stopped moving as he gazed at Blundell, who seemed to be asleep, before acting again. The teleport circle finished quickly, maybe because there were fewer people.

Flash!

There was a bright light, and only three people remained.

"Okay, we will be watching from now on? Which one is our side?" Randolph worried as he looked up at the sky.

"The silver light is probably Nuada." Hearing Theodore's words, Randolph and Veronica gazed at the silver light in the sky.

The universe visible beyond the torn apart sky, the starry sky in daylight, was spectacular. The two rays of light constantly facing each other against that backdrop were reminiscent of fireworks at festivals.

Nuada's silver glow and Invidia's blood red light...

Theodore, Randolph, and Veronica couldn't fathom the fight, but most of the light filling the sky was silver. Sometimes, a bloody vortex burst out, but it always disappeared without a trace due to the silver glow. It was clear who had the initiative.

Veronica had the same thought as Theodore. "It seems like that guy called Nuada is dominating. What do you think?"

"I had a similar thought, but we still don't know."

That's right. They didn't know yet.

'Nuada called Invidia 'Invader'.'

The Seven Sins grimoire was colliding with a god from the Age of Mythology. Theodore couldn't forget that Nuada had accepted the summoning due to personal emotions. It meant that the grimoire was an enemy of the gods, similar to the demons.

However, unlike the gods and demons, who no longer remained in this era, the Seven Sins were still active. In this area of survival, they surpassed both the gods and demons. Invidia had been active for 500 years, so it wouldn't be strange if he had something hidden up his sleeve.

He wasn't an opponent that Theodore could relax against until the very end.

Chapter 294 – Reproduction of Myths (2)

Silver and red tore through the sky.

————————Kakiing.

As the wall of sound was broken several times, the god-king accelerated with silver wings. Physical dynamics and inertia laws were nothing more than meaningless limits to a divine being. Acceleration and stopping were freely repeated up and down, left and right, and in any direction.

S turn, Z turn… Even a dragon would get a concussion from the acceleration, but Nuada moved freely.

[Hrmm, you are running away well with human flesh.]

Rather, it was strange that Invidia could keep up.

[Suspension, Acceleration, Release, Refraction… There are three more. You have quite a few tricks to play.]

Nuada didn’t hesitate to evaluate the acceleration that combined seven Aura Abilities. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been able to find, let alone escape from, the god that wasn’t bound by the laws of physics.

“Ugh, you! How long are you going to follow me?” Invidia climbed up to the stratosphere in less than a minute and finally swung his sword as he gave up on running away.

This would be an injury that Nuada wouldn’t be able to avoid. The Aura Ability to see the future had allowed him to see it. An incredible amount of aura twisted the space around him and ripped the clouds apart.

Kesein’s Breaking the Sky Sword—this was the sword of the man who was respected by all swordsmen in Andras.

Sky Slash—the symbol of the founding king of Andras, Kesein Fernado, showed its power after centuries. It was a transcendent

attack that tore apart the sky! According to Invidia, who had seen grandmasters, this was a power that Nuada wouldn't be able to endure.

[This is a good one.]

Like blood pouring down from the torn sky, the bloody flash of the aura blade approached Nuada. There was no room to avoid or block it, the ultimate sword of one who saw beyond the peak and peered at the end.

It hadn't reached transcendence, but Invidia's immense power made up for the shortcomings. If this fell to the ground, it would pass through the mantle and outer core of Earth. Thus, Nuada raised some of his saved strength.

Claimhb Solais shone brightly. It started collecting the mana, light, and heat from around it. This sword was a treasure, a light in the dark that would bring victory. It was the symbol of the god-king, who had magnified the name of the gods and led the Elin to victory.

The moment that Nuada struck with the brilliant sword in his hand, there was a golden blast, like the roar of the sun.

Kuooooooh————————!

Then the golden light rushed off. It was sacred and beautiful, a wave of overflowing light that broke the ominous blood. The blood split apart rapidly, with the golden light digging into every piece.

It wasn't just the power that was different. The degree of completeness was different as well. As Nuada was a god and a warrior, his sword was able to strike down Kesein's ultimate technique.

[Hrmm?]

Maybe it was because he lacked strength, but the golden light broke through the sky slash and lost its sharpness, turning into a shockwave.

The golden light's form wasn't a blade but a barrier.

The wall of gold grazed Invidia's head and threw him back into the mountains, like a pebble struck by a big hammer. No, it was obvious that he had gone underground and penetrated into the bedrock.

The body of the host was indispensable for a parasitic grimoire. It took a few seconds for Invidia to recover from the damage received and to reach the surface.

[Let's finish it here.]

Nuada called out in the name of the god of light, and all of the light responded.

Ku kwa kwa kwang!

Light poured down toward the area where Invidia had crashed. It contained more destructive power than a 7th circle great magic.

For Nuada who was the god of light, this power wasn't much different from snapping his fingers. One side of the mountain collapsed, and one of the mountain peaks disappeared. The land melted, becoming a lake of lava.

Even the red dragon, who was almost completely resistant to fire, wouldn't be able to endure it. An enormous amount of dust and heat rose from the shocked land. The shock was big enough to be delivered to Theodore, who was dozens of kilometers away!

The cloud of dust rose into the air like a volcano eruption, and Nuada's eyes suddenly widened. He was convinced of the opponent's death, so the result of the attack was unexpected.

[...Hoh.]

A translucent shield could be seen on one side of the mountain where Claimhb Solais had hit. It wasn't even cracked despite taking on this onslaught. This wasn't a level of defense that was possible with Invidia's abilities. At first, the face of a woman with

snakes for hair could be seen, but it soon vanished with the shield.

However, Nuada's wisdom saw through it right away. [Aegis, Pallas Athena's shield.]

This was the god-weapon that took away the power of a gorgon, a legendary monster. It was a shield that petrified all opponents facing it, as well as reflected most attacks. No, there was something strange about this.

[Invader, you aren't its legitimate owner and can only use it once. Do you plan to use a divine artifact as a disposable item?]

"...God-King Nuada, I understand why you were called that," Invidia responded to the question with a non-answer as he walked out from the protection of the shield. "The sword that brat, Fermut, took was Claimhb Solais. Your summoner stole it and used it to call you."

[What?]

"How funny. If I wasn't involved, I would laugh. But now that I am in this situation, my anger is rising." Invidia didn't want to talk. He was just trying to spit out his anger. Fermut, that brat, had grabbed his ankles. The item that Invidia collected was just used to call his worst enemy, and now he had to consume other collectibles that were in short supply. So, it was natural for him to be furious.

"...From now on, I won't consider holding back for my own interests."

His anger reached the boiling point, and Invidia reached out in a calm manner. Then he pulled out a sword from somewhere.

[—What?] Nuada's expression hardened.

The shape of the straight steel blade, the bluish light—

Kwarururung!

Fearsome lightning bolts emerged from it. The absurd power of the 'hard lightning bolts' which had destroyed mountain peaks in

the past... Nuada couldn't help crying out the name of the sword, [Caladbolg?!]

It was the sword of Fergus mac Róich, Elin's honorable hero! Nuada covered his sword with divine power and blocked the lightning bolts.

Invidia's Aura Abilities might be crude, but he was holding divine battle gear that could kill a god. He wasn't the legitimate owner, so the gear would disappear after one use. However, that one use was threatening enough.

This was the reason why Andras had been exploring the ruins from the Age of Mythology since its founding. The relics that Invidia monopolized for centuries started to finally shine.

"Kill, Dainsleif."

It was a cursed sword that increased in strength when blood was steeped in blood. The curses were 'Retribution', 'Retaliation', and 'Destruction.' The consumable sword was broken the moment the curses were released, but Nuada received an injury on his left side.

"Come down, Moralltach!"

This was a sword that, once brandished, emitted a wave of light. This time, Nuada received the attack with his sword. The aftermath was so intense that the ground sunk down by dozens of meters.

Indeed, this was the power of the Age of Mythology. If Nuada hadn't been using Claimhb Solais, any other blade would've broken because it couldn't cope with the power.

[—Don't climb up!]

Even so, Nuada Airgetlám was the god-king.

Kakang!

Nuada's sword was one step ahead and shattered the sword that Invidia pulled out. It wouldn't have been so easy if Invidia was the

legitimate owner, but the sword chose to be destroyed by the god-king, rather than lend power to the 'collector.'

Four swords were broken in succession, then the light from Claimhb Solais pierced Invidia's body. No, it was more accurate to say that it looked like it was pierced.

Kwaduduk...!

The pieces of broken armor disappeared without a trace. That pure white gloss... it was Witege's Armor. It was too late for Nuada to notice that Invidia was wearing it. However, this could only buy time.

Invidia barely survived and pulled out another sword, but it was rare that any sword could compare to the god-sword, Claimhb Solais. It was fortunate if Invidia could block a single attack. There were even cases where he needed to use two swords at once.

[Stolen power, stolen techniques, and now stolen weapons,] Nuada ridiculed as light emerged from behind him.

"Kuk, try and stop all of this...!" Invidia threw out many swords. The 34 blades were hit by a ray of light and disappeared without leaving any traces.

Increasing the number of weapons couldn't win against these two qualities of Nuada, the instincts of a warrior and the acumen of a strategist.

[What will you bring out now? Almace? Or Beagalltach? Balisarda and Morglay are also not bad. You might be able to breathe longer if you have Tyrfing. You might not be struggling if you brought them out earlier.]

"Mocking me till the end!"

[Ridiculous. You don't even deserve my mocking. Invader, this low nature of yours is grabbing at your ankles.]

It was time. Nuada raised his sword. Theodore had given him a

non-standard offering, but Nuada couldn't bring out the unlimited power of the god-king. Nuada would be evicted from this material world in 12... 13 seconds?

He, the god of victory, was sure this was enough.

[Maybe you have no more weapons to take out. If so, die here.]

Claimhb Solais drew in the light. The silver sword burned up as the light became close to the density of an artificial star. This was equivalent to an ancient dragon's breath or even more.

Hyde had once wielded the god-sword to destroy the warlocks, but this was more than a thousand times more powerful. It was far from its prime, but this was still enough to completely kill Invidia.

A pseudo-sun was called. Claimhb Solais lost the shape of a sword, and a second sun emerged in the sky. The gold and radiant light, like the old sun, was the symbol of Nuada Airgetlám. It was the supreme light that warmly embraced all of its people and defeated the enemies!

[Annihilate the enemy, Claimhb Solais!]

According to the will of God-King Nuada, the pseudo-sun fell on Invidia's head. A mortal's Aura Ability couldn't endure this for even a moment. Any shield would be destroyed. No armor could defend against this sun.

The only enemy who survived the power of this sword had been the evil Crom Cruach. The majestic and divine light of the sun enveloped the world.

Chapter 295 – Reproduction of Myths (3)

The wind stopped blowing for a long period of time, and there was a huge vacuum of calm bathed in light. The light that couldn't be recognized by the eyes of mortals, the light of the God-King Nuada, spread out all over the world.

Before long, the brilliant light subsided.

The sky, which had been bright enough to prevent people from opening their eyes, recovered its color. Claimhb Solais had already lost the shape of the sun and returned to Nuada's grasp.

[…This.] Nuada looked down at the thing penetrating him. [Manannán mac Lir's god sword, Fragarach.]

As the sun settled down, the sword had penetrated through the glare and lodged into Nuada's heart. It was a blue-black short sword, similar to a dagger. This was a sword which couldn't be blocked by any armor or shield, never missing. It was a sacred sword that the elf king in the past had been reluctant to part with, despite the many treasures he had.

It could be used to attack, but its true value was revealed in counterattacks.

[Sigh, was I too hasty?]

Fragarach was a famous sword, but Nuada was also a god-king. He wasn't an opponent that could be defeated with one god-weapon.

In this case, the mistake Nuada had made was the problem.

Fragarach was a counter weapon which absorbed the power of the opponent's attack and returned it with more power. The 'revenge' that was added to Claimhb Solais's mighty power wasn't something the summoned Nuada could endure.

The limit of the summoning time and the last trump card that

Invidia had prepared caused this result.

However, Invidia wasn't entirely lucky. At the point when Claimhb Solais had fallen, Invidia's body had turned into a charcoal-like mass of human form. It was because Fragarach's counter ability couldn't bear all of Nuada's power. If Nuada was in a more complete form, this outcome might've been reversed due to Invidia's current state.

[In the end, everything is an excuse.]

It was ugly to make excuses when the match was over. Nuada accepted his defeat. Anyway, his time limit was over the moment he got his heart pierced by Fragarach. He had been invited by an unexpected call, and it was now time for the guest to leave.

Nuada's body started fading from his toes upward. He touched Fragarach which was stuck in his chest and muttered with a bitter smile, [You were used to defend a coward. It is a tough fate for you as well.]

Kuuong...

As if in response, Fragarach cried out once and was destroyed first. Then Nauda turned his eyes proudly toward the person he hated. [First of all, congratulations, Invader. It is your victory.]

"...Dis-app-ear...!"

[Well, don't be in a rush. I will leave a prophecy.]

To the person whose vocal cords were badly damaged, Nuada left his last greeting and disappeared. It was a curse under the name of a prophecy.

[This is the last victory that you can enjoy.]

*

At that moment...

"Nuada. He was defeated?" Theodore was able to tell straight away when Nuada disappeared from the material world. The light

of the summoning circle under his feet scattered, and the recoil from the summoning momentarily paralyzed his circles. It would take 5 seconds for his magic power circulation to recover normally.

The two masters heard Theodore's words and reorganized their postures, staring in the direction of the explosion. Even at that moment, they didn't know what would happen next. Their response was commendable.

"—Lowlives."

However, it had no meaning in front of their opponent.

Jeeeong!

Randolph reflexively responded to the approach, but he was thrown away along with his two swords. With one kick, his two arms were bent and his ribs broken. Even if the attack was blocked, it was a deadly hit.

Setting aside as to whether it was good or bad, the unit of power was just too different. Randolph realized the cruel reality as his consciousness became blurred.

'...R-Run aw...ay, Theo...' Randolph flew back several hundred meters and barely gasped out before fainting. However, his condition was good compared to Veronica's.

"Keok, kuuock, ah, kuoooock..."

Both of her shoulders and thighs were cut deeply. Her flesh and muscles were split apart, and it was serious enough to reach the nerves and bones. Additionally, Invidia was holding the helpless Veronica by her neck.

A vein appeared on the back of his hand as he increased his strength. Veronica gathered her magic power to fight back. However, she wasn't in her draconic state, so she hit her limit by protecting her neck bones.

It was an annihilation.

Theodore barely recovered from his paralysis and roared wildly as he saw his companions being brutally trampled on by Invidia.

“You’ve ruined my task up to here, Gluttony!”

Theodore saw Invidia’s face and stopped breathing. ‘…It is a horrible appearance.’

His face was half melted, and his armor had lost its shape. He still hadn’t recovered from fighting with Nuada. Based on his presence, he only had 3% of his power left. Nevertheless, Invidia’s power was absolute. Whenever he growled with fury, the space around him twisted, cutting off the connection between the circles and mana.

This monster was still transcendent! Theodore was unable to move as he looked at the captured Veronica with bitter and sad eyes.

“Hu, I see.” At that moment, Invidia’s low and venomous voice rang out. “It seems like this hybrid is important to your host.”

“…Wait!”

“This is the punishment for hindering this body. Enjoy the taste of despair.”

It happened before Theodore could reply.

Puk!

A blade pierced through Veronica’s heart.

“Aaaaack!”

“Veronica!”

After thrusting his sword several times, Invidia threw her body away like it was garbage. Blood flowed from her mouth and chest as she flew in a parabola. Theodore immediately grabbed her body, but Veronica’s eyes were blurring rapidly. Her golden eyes were clouded as she gazed up at him gently.

“…Ah… Kid…”

“Don’t say anything! Your injury is severe!”

Theodore forgot about the presence of Invidia before him and quickly moved his hands. There wasn’t a specific injury site. Veronica’s heart and surrounding blood vessels were torn like rags. A lethal amount of blood was flowing out in seconds. It wasn’t possible to regenerate even if a cardinal was present.

‘I don’t have healing magic! If this continues…’

Invidia was just watching. They couldn’t escape from him even if Theodore revived Veronica. Then Theodore came up with the idea of using an elixir.

After a moment, Theodore reached out his hand. “Veronica, open your mouth.”

“Hup…um…!”

He carefully brought the edge of the bottle to her mouth. It was a mortal wound, so he had to be very careful when pouring in a drop so that she could swallow. This was an elixir, a legendary remedy that could buy a castle with just one drop.

Theodore didn’t hesitate to pour the whole bottle into Veronica’s mouth. He understood the pros and cons, but he couldn’t leave her to die. What did Gluttony think about this decision? Did it think Theodore was stupid?

However, Theodore couldn’t care less.

“…Uhh…”

“Ah.”

Veronica’s flesh was growing back in real time. The blood pouring out from the hole in her chest stopped, and her torn heart recovered its original shape.

Indeed, the elixir was a miracle medicine which could restore any injury as long as there was one breath left in the body. Just when he was feeling deeply relieved at the sight of color returning to

Veronica's cheeks, Theodore heard a voice.

"Hoh, an elixir. You have a rare thing."

"What are you going to do?"

"What?" Invidia laughed like he heard something funny. "Didn't I kindly teach you? I told you to enjoy the taste of despair."

"...What?"

While Theodore was confused by the words...

Puhak!

Blood surfaced from Veronica's wound again. Her body started twitching from the shock, and Theodore looked at Veronica's injury to figure out what had happened.

The heart repaired by the elixir was once again torn apart.

"The soul of the hybrid was specifically cut with the 'Destruction' Aura Ability," Invidia mocked Theodore's devastating face, telling him the whole story. "The elixir is a great remedy, but its healing power is ultimately limited to physical damage. Once the soul is broken, the body can't be fixed anymore. Do you realize your plight now?"

"You—You son of a bitch...!"

"How do you feel now that you can neither save a dying woman nor retaliate against me? Are you resentful? Are you miserable? Do you know how stupid it is to face this body? Either way, it is good. This is punishment for not knowing your place."

Theodore felt nauseous as he confronted the nature of 'Envy' and gave up.

It was better to commit suicide than to beg for mercy from this damn monster. This was the same for Veronica. The elixir still remained, so the wound was healing repeatedly. However, it had a time limit of 10 minutes.

He hadn’t realized it at first because of the urgent situation, but the wound was the same as Zest’s injury. An injury caused by the power to destroy the soul… it required a 9th circle magician to heal it.

‘…Gluttony, please.’

–Are you serious? Gluttony, who had been silent until now, finally spoke up.

‘You know that this is the only way.’

Gluttony didn’t respond to Theodore’s words. Instead, it began to prepare for the task planned out in advance. Theodore Miller was going to bet it all on the gamble of a lifetime.

‘…Well, Sister will surely be angry if she knows.’

Theodore stroked her face, that was struggling with the pain, and decided.

In order to save Veronica and Randolph… In order to destroy the bastard in front of him… For Blundell, who sacrificed his life to earn a few seconds, and for the magicians who died terrible deaths…

Theodore would bet his life this time.

“Why are you so quiet? Did you give up?”

The biggest mistake Envy made was giving Theodore time because he wanted to inflict more pain on Theodore. It was coincidence, but it was inevitable. As Nuada Airgetlám had warned, Invidia’s nature led to his deadly predicament.

Theodore continued with his silence, while a mouth appeared on the palm of his left hand.

–Stupid.

“You are finally speaking, Brother? But it is too late. Even if you beg me to save your host…”

–Think in advance, my foolish brother.

What was Invidia's response? Then the moment he was about to speak…

['Death's Worship' has been consumed.]

[Jerem's spirit has awakened. The mental suppression has failed, and the flesh is taken over by the object name, 'Jerem'.]

[Understanding of magic and mana control has greatly increased.]

A black fog emerged from Theodore's body after he consumed Death's Worship, which had always been in a corner of his inventory. Theodore gained the power of death to kill all living things, the magic of the end.

The confused Invidia reached out with his sword, but the dark fog swallowed up and polluted the area. The darkness, like an abyss, sat heavily on the earth. It was a 'land of death' Invidia shouldn't be in contact with since he was a parasitic grimoire that relied on the host's body.

This was the 8th circle domination magic, Erebos. And at the center of the fog, Theodore opened his eyes.

"…Huhat." It was unpleasant laughter. He was like a malicious spirit as he spat out phlegm and laughed.

Then Theodore's lake-blue eyes became bloody.

The two powers, Aquila's blood and the Ring of Muspelheim, still circulated in his heart. However, unlike before, there were now eight circles. After accepting the soul of the 9th circle magician Jerem, this wall was forcibly broken.

Theodore's body shook a few times before Jerem expressed his ecstatic joy, "Hahahahaha! You finally called me! This is me! The king of the end! Good. This Jerem will grant your wish!"

This was the best. Jerem was completely revived after a few

hundred years, but this flesh was a dish truly worthy of turning into an undead. Divinity, dragon's blood, Umbra, and two grimoires...!

If Jerem used this body, he could restore his full capabilities in a month. Unlike Theodore, who didn't fully utilize his powers, Jerem was a transcendent magician of the 9th circle.

"Come, gather! My faithful servants!" Once Jerem raised his voice, four figures emerged from the shadows around him.

They were the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

The four riders—a beauty in white robes, a young man in red armor, an old man leaning on a staff, and a monster with his body wrapped in bandages—ignored Invidia and prostrated themselves before Jerem.

"White Knight Hipatia greets the king."

"Red Knight Elohim greets the king."

"Black Knight Delos greets the king."

"...Pale Rider greets the king."

Jerem's eyes flashed with madness as he accepted the greetings of the four horsemen.

Then he glanced at his enemy, Invidia, without shaking.

A few years ago, it had been the same in the Miller Barony. In order to completely dominate the host's body, the fastest and most efficient way was to eliminate all grudges left behind by the host. Theodore wanted to save his two companions and destroy Invidia, so...

"Make that insolent fellow kneel before me!"

The moment that Jerem spoke, the four horsemen raised their heads.

"I permit the manifestation in the name of Jerem!"

Simultaneously, the four riders regained their original strength which had been sealed for centuries.

Kiaaaaaah———!

Kihihihi!

Ku…hu…hu…hu!

The body of the White Knight, the beautiful Hipatia, became half-transparent, and she let out a terrible scream.

This was the apex of the undead, the terror-wight!

It was the scream that could destroy the minds of thousands of people and even turn the bodies of sword masters into puppets. Even Invidia got goosebumps from the scream.

Hipatia wasn’t the only one who changed. Red Knight Elohim turned into a vampire lord, and Black Knight Delos became an arch lich. They were senior undead that could threaten even 8th circle magicians. The Pale Rider’s appearance didn’t change, but the evil energy flowing from him increased even more.

“Kill him.”

In front of the four monsters, the worst warlock of this material world sentenced Invidia to death.

Chapter 296 – Reproduction of Myths (4)

“Kihihihihit! For the king!”

As soon as the command was given, the red knight, Vampire Lord Elohim, moved first. The bat wings and pointed fangs proved he was a vampire, a species that couldn’t use half of its power under the sun. However, it was a different story now that Erebos’ fog occupied the area.

Vampire Lord Elohim took two steps, moving faster than sound and without any afterimages, as a bloody aura wrapped around Invidia.

Jeeeong!

There was a loud sound, and Elohim deflected. His arms were badly shattered, but his regenerative power, based on all the blood he had accumulated over the centuries, meant he was close to immortal. He acted without caring about his body. Thus, even Invidia couldn’t cope easily.

“Damn Gluttony! Do you intend to deal with me by borrowing the power of a low ranking warlock?”

However, it wasn’t a human voice that answered.

Kiaaaack!

It was White Knight Hipatia’s scream! A terrible mental wave filled the area, attacking without regard for friend or foe. However, the undead’s spirits had long decayed, meaning only Invidia received a substantial blow. The sound struck accurately, rattling his nervous system. Invidia’s mental state was close to invincible, but his host was just a human body. The confused host temporarily escaped from Invidia’s control.

「Death… follows behind… you…! 」 The arch lich’s 8th circle curse magic wrapped around Invidia’s body. After feeling his body grow heavy rapidly, Invidia’s eyes turned bloodshot, and he raised

his strength.

He had consumed more than half his power in the fight against God King Nuada, but he still had many sword master abilities left. A bloody aura flashed, and the curse on his body exploded.

“—Good, I will play with you! The one who gathers the remnants of the deceased, I will make you regret stumbling in front of me!”

Invidia’s aura soared into the sky.

The four riders all stiffened for a moment. They were monsters with a considerable amount of experience, but the opponent was a grimoire that had existed since the earliest days of history. It was hard for even the four riders to win against him.

“A clown is speaking such funny words.” However, Jerem chuckled without any fear. “You don’t even know the mistakes you have made, lost in fear after being driven to the extremes. Aren’t you just a clown?”

“What?”

“I’ll teach you personally. I will teach you with your life.”

The riders accepted their king’s will and raised their magic power again. Invidia took on a fighting posture, twitching as the ominous power swept toward him like a wave.

The four riders, including the pale rider, rushed in.

The terror wight screamed, the vampire lord used his blood, and the arch lich launched curses when there was a chance. The aura of death coming from the pale rider’s hands and feet was also terrifying.

This was the second round between the four riders and Invidia.

“They should last a few minutes without my help.”

After letting his riders face Invidia, Jerem looked at Veronica who was collapsed at his feet. ‘This is a quarter-dragon hybrid?’

Veronica was still at the border of death due to the power of the elixir and her own strength. An average person wouldn't have been able to endure the shock and would've died already.

"Let's see... Hrmm, this is a little annoying."

Black magic, including necromancy, was a magic that dealt with death. Therefore, they had a high sensitivity towards the 'soul.' A 9th circle warlock like Jerem would be able to see it instantly. Theodore's body only had eight circles, but Umbra was enough to make up for the lack of power.

Based on Jerem's judgment, Veronica's wounds couldn't be healed with 8th circle magic.

"Tsk, I have to patch it up first."

Umbra shone on Theodore's right hand, and a string of green magic power penetrated Veronica's body.

An 8th circle magician couldn't cast magic that directly interfered with the soul. However, Jerem's deep understanding of magic and Umbra's ability raised that impossibility into the realm of possibilities.

The astral-like magic power transformed into a needle, and Jerem roughly stitched Veronica's soul together. Then he shifted his gaze toward Theodore's other companion, Randolph.

"Over there... the wounds are serious, but he should be fine. A sword master's recovery will handle it."

It was as he said.

As long as it wasn't a deadly wound, the body of a sword master would recover quickly with time and nutrition. There were a few broken ribs and damaged lungs, but they would help with a few days of nursing. His injuries couldn't compare to Veronica, whose soul was torn apart.

In case something might happen, Jerem moved Veronica and

then looked at the battlefield, which was becoming more disadvantageous. His four riders were quite busy, but they were being pushed back after Invidia opened the lid of his power.

“Indeed, this is one of the Seven Sins despite being a non-combatant.”

Invidia had already spent most of his power against Nuada. If Invidia were at full strength, Jerem would be at a disadvantage. Therefore, Jerem needed to kill him here. Jerem smiled evilly with Theodore’s face. It was burdensome to confront Invidia with a body that was only at the 8th circle and possessed insufficient strength.

Therefore, he needed to add more power.

「Answer me, pillars of the underworld! 」

It had been a few centuries since the legitimate owner opened the door. The barrier to the back of the material world opened its mouth.

Named after a mythical record, Tartarus, this was the space where Jerem had placed the undead he created in his prime: a bone dragon, made from the body of a black dragon; a death knight lord, made from a grandmaster’s body; a chimera daemon, created from the fusion of a human and demon body; and a hydra, a legendary creature in this era.

If he released even just one of them, it would be a disaster on a continental scale. It had been different during the Age of Mythology when there had been nearly 100 grandmasters. In this era, his undead were invincible monsters.

They were so powerful that only a few 8th circle magicians together could control them.

“Ghoul prince, helix ogre. These two should be enough.”

Both undead answered Jerem’s call and rose from the abyss.

■■■■■■■———!!

■■■■■■———!!

An ogre with four horns, magma-like eyeballs, dark leather, and a mace in its hands emerged, with the ghoul prince following him. Each of them was the incarnation of disaster, like an adult dragon. For Jerem to set a target for them, it was comparable to sentencing the target to a death penalty.

“Go.”

Two monsters that could collapse the balance were released.

*

This was an earth-shaking fight. Only a short amount of time had passed, but the amount of power exchanged between the opponents was enough to destroy a kingdom several times over. On one side was a notorious grimoire from the Age of Mythology, and on the other side was a warlock who had almost turned the entire continent into a living hell.

Either way, it would clearly be a disaster regardless of who won. In the end, a winner was produced.

“Kneel. The circus is over, so the clown has no right to raise his head in front of the king.”

The red knight acted as soon as Jerem spoke.

Kwajik!

Invidia’s face was pushed into the ground. Invidia wanted to resist, but his limbs had been cut off, and his stockpile of Aura Abilities was depleted, leaving him powerless to fight back.

Of course, the damage that Jerem’s undead received was enormous.

The red knight consumed 80% of the blood he had collected over the centuries, while the white knight and black knight wouldn’t be able to move until their bodies were restored. The ghoul prince

and helix ogre were in the same state as they returned to Tartarus.

If Invidia still had all his divine artifacts, Jerem would never have won this fight.

“Well, I can’t call you cowardly because I also used an external force. It is time to end this Seven Sins grimoire, who built up a futile thing.”

“…Do it.”

“Hmm?” Jerem wanted to listen to what Invidia had to say and nodded to the red knight. Then the red knight removed his foot, and Invidia raised his head to say, “Tell me. You said that I made a mistake, and you would teach me with my life.”

“Ah, there was that.” Jerem nodded as he was reminded. “It isn’t a big deal, clown. You chose the wrong path from the beginning.”

“What does that mean?”

“Judging by my intuition, you are trying to gather Aura Abilities and fit them together like a puzzle, right? You thought to reach transcendence by filling up all these deficiencies and going backward to achieve it.”

Invidia’s body shook at the words. He wasn’t angry. Rather, he felt awe and envy that Jerem had noticed all of this despite meeting him only once.

Jerem continued talking like he didn’t know Invidia’s feelings. “Your idea was wrong, idiot. Transcendence isn’t like a puzzle. It is fundamentally different. Just like a solid surface can’t become a three-dimensional surface, your thousands of years were worthless.”

For a mortal to walk on the path of transcendence, they needed to tear down the surface and cross the wall. In order to cross that wall with the power of a mortal, the power needed to be concentrated on one point. Invidia’s ‘puzzle’ was the complete opposite answer.

Perfection and transcendence had nothing in common.

All transcendents understood this fact, but Invidia didn't know it. He had infinite time and resources, but he had been carried away by his own beliefs instead of listening to others. Indeed, it was the reason why Invidia was responsible for the 'envy' sin.

Invidia stiffened when faced with the truth.

Meanwhile, the king of the end spoke in a low voice, "Now, it is time to pay the price."

Jerem placed a hand on Invidia's head and 'ordered,' 「Death.」

This wasn't magic. It was much closer to the source, a power which had left the mortal realm and was adjacent to the realm of the gods. One of the great magicians of the Age of Mythology had defined it as this—Order.

It was the expression of one's own will, a power that carried out the will to the world. The closest thing to it was Dragon's Words. The Order could spark a natural disaster with just one word. Many magicians had researched into it, and not one of them had succeeded.

However...

"I... Am I going to disappear...?" Invidia spoke with astonishment. It was then that Jerem realized that he had succeeded.

"Nonsense, this is nonsense. You aren't Sloth or Wrath. Even if you have Gluttony, for a human warlock...!" The parasitic grimoire, Invidia, could find another body if this host died. So, he was calm before death.

However, what if the grimoire itself disappeared? While Invidia faced an unforeseen crisis, Jerem used the power again.

"Death Sentence. No, Power Word Kill would be great." It was a power that Jerem hadn't been able to use in his prime. However, it

was possible to reproduce it by utilizing the knowledge of Dragon Words gained from the sea dragon's blood inside Theodore's body.

'Death' was the concept most familiar to warlocks. Unfortunately, Invidia became the test of this 'Order' and was suddenly in a position to be destroyed.

"N-No! I can't disappear like this! I will make note of this error and in the next experiment—..." He struggled until the end, before Invidia's elderly voice was cut off.

It was the last of 'Envy' of the Seven Sins, a grimoire from the Age of Mythology. Of course, the information would be passed to the real body outside the dimension, but it would take at least 10,000 years for the grimoire to return.

Jerem was convinced that he would never see the grimoire again.

"—Kuhuk." The joy that was hard to restrain boiled up inside him as his mouth opened. "Kuhahahaha! Excellent, truly excellent! Divinity, dragon blood, Umbra! There is even this Jerem's soul! If I use this body, I can become a god without the help of a great demon!"

Who wouldn't savor a host with so many things gathered in his body? No, not just that. Jerem was reminded of something he had forgotten. There was one more, apart from the grimoire Death's Worship where his soul was sealed.

Any magician who knew the power of the Seven Sins desired the grimoire, Gluttony.

"I wish to talk to you, Gluttony," Jerem spoke in an excited voice as he felt the bottomless presence in his left hand.

A few seconds later, a dark voice was heard from within, -...You know me?

"That's right. Any magician would want to be with you. It is the same with this Jerem, who wants to be recognized as your user."

This was the grimoire with infinite wisdom, Gluttony. Jerem looked at the palm of his left hand with a dark greed.

It wasn't just the knowledge from the Age of Mythology. According to the rumors, this grimoire contained even the magic of other worlds. In the past, Jerem had treated it as just a rumor. However, after receiving Theodore's memories, he became almost certain of it.

This grimoire contained the truth that all magicians must obtain!

Gluttony was silent after receiving the suggestion.

However, the nervous Jerem persevered, "Gluttony, I was told that your purpose is to achieve the 10th circle in magic. Is that true?"

–It is true.

"Then shouldn't I be the best fit?" Jerem called himself the 'best' and summed up the reasons why he should be Gluttony's master. "The child who was your former user can't even compare with me, who has already reached the 9th circle. And I don't have the unnecessary sense of justice that will hold back a magician."

–Hrmm.

"I am different. I learn magic for my own cause and am seeking the same destination as you. I will reach the ultimate form, even if I have to consume all life in this world. Is there anyone in this age who is more qualified than me?"

No, Jerem was filled with confidence and believed that Gluttony would choose him.

It was natural.

There had been two 8th circle magicians in this age, and now only one remained. If Jerem didn't follow up on treatment, that one remaining magician would die. A grimoire wouldn't choose that person as a host, so Jerem had no reason to worry about it.

Unsurprisingly, Gluttony responded to his proposal, –Certainly. Your proposal is reasonable.

“A magician should pursue rationality.”

–That’s right. My user was quite immature and had many stifling morals. Compared to him, you are a perfect magician.

Jerem listened up to there and felt delighted.

…Until he heard Gluttony’s next words.

–I refuse.

“…What did you just say?”

–I won’t accept you as my user.

“Why? What am I lacking? Or did you like the previous user?”

–Everything is wrong.

While Jerem was thinking that it was ridiculous, Gluttony revealed his reason, –I don’t like Theodore Miller. It isn’t because you lack anything. I just don’t want to tolerate this situation.

“What nonsense…”

–I’ll get my user back, Gluttony spoke these words and ordered an artifact to be melted into him. It was the king’s flagpole that Theodore had received from the royal family during his involvement in the Soldun civil war.

At that time, Theodore hadn’t been able to swallow it.

[Poseidon’s Trident has been consumed. The status of the divine artifact isn’t perfect.]

[The divinity of the water (small) has been acquired. The flow of water will move in a direction favorable to the user. You can interfere with currents, including ocean currents, as your proficiency increases. Regardless of elemental affinity, you can contract with water elementals.]

[Your understanding of the flow has greatly increased. You will

be able to grasp the flow of the world with your senses, rather than just touch.]

Jerem's expression changed at the sudden notification windows. What was going on? He didn't know what connection consuming this divine artifact had with taking back the user. If even a 9th circle magician had no clue, then it was impossible to find an answer.

In the end, Jerem gave up trying to deduce the reason and opened his mouth, "What are you doing? This body is already mine. It belongs to me, Jerem!"

-You don't need to know, Gluttony said, ignoring Jerem. Then it spoke to someone in a frosty voice, –Get started.

Someone who was hiding in secret answered vigorously, [Hoing!]

Chapter 297 – Victory Scar (1)

This was a fact that Theodore didn't know, but the ancient elementals were proof of the similarities between gods and spirits.

They were fragments of gods that had lost their power and divinity for some reason.

It was the same for Mitra, born from the ancient Mother Earth—Demeter. At the end of the Age of Mythology, after Titanomachy ended and Olympus was trampled on, this little girl was born.

While it was bored inside of Theodore, Gluttony had come up with a hypothesis.

This material world is subject to the law of circulation. If a fallen god took the shape of an ancient elemental, there was no law which said an ancient elemental couldn't return to being a god after regaining strength and divinity.

Maybe the ancient elemental could become a 'god's egg.'

Of course, it was difficult to prove this hypothesis. How many ways were there to obtain divinity in this age? Wouldn't it be difficult to regain the divinity that was equal to a god's? It wouldn't have been possible if Theodore hadn't met certain conditions.

[Hoing!] Mitra responded vigorously to Gluttony's signal.

"What, who is it? Whose voice is this?" Jerem looked around with shock, but he couldn't find the source of Mitra's voice.

That was natural as Mitra had currently been summoned inside Theodore's body!

–Wind of Aiolos, water of Poseidon, earth of Demeter, fire borrowed from Nuada Airgetlám. Based on the four elements, a 'temple' is built in the body.

The body of a magician was a world, meaning it wasn't

impossible to reproduce the divine hierarchy and fertilize this world.

In a voice that Jerem couldn't hear, Gluttony repeated the contents of the arrangement.

If the hypothesis that an ancient elemental was a 'god's egg' was correct, certain conditions needed to be met to hatch it. Temperature, humidity, and so on were important with all eggs. Of course, the difficulty was literally the difference between heaven and earth.

However, Gluttony filled the gap between heaven and earth.

–All materials in this world are made up of the four elements of fire, water, earth, and wind. The unique properties of these four elements—dry, wet, hot, and cold—are used to form all things. Paracelsus built the system of the four elementals by substituting the elementals into this theory, but I have a higher goal.

There was no concept of right and wrong when it came to theories of the world. Muspelheim which was filled with flames, Cocytus that was frozen, Pandemonium where demons resided... In this universe, many dimensions existed, each with their own unique origin.

The four elements theory was just one branch of this infinite world.

In addition to the framework of the four elementals, Gluttony laid down the foundation of the 'temple' that would support Mitra as a god. Since ancient times, Mother Earth had been a goddess representing the world itself.

Now, Mitra was a representative of 'Theodore Miller's world,' and she recovered the past when she had existed as a goddess.

[Hoing? H-Hoo...ee, ahhh...]

In Theodore's mental world which no one else could see, Mitra's body was growing little by little.

Her wheat-colored hair fell to her waist, and her small arms and legs grew. Her two eyes, that shone with an innocent light, were now filled with wisdom. Cracks in her body were filled, and her skin glowed with a divine light.

The goddess, Demeter…

Compared to her prime, this was at the level of one flower. However, the light was real. At this moment, Mitra climbed to the rank of a lower god.

“What? Don’t tell me… This power…?” Jerem paled as he realized it.

The power of a god, born from the circles inside Theodore’s body, started to overflow.

It might be different for a divinity without a master, but a proper deity was the enemy of warlocks. For Jerem who was stigmatized as the enemy of the world, the power of a god would deal a fatal blow even if it was only a light touched.

For Jerem who had it inside his body, it was like an extreme poison spreading from his heart. It was the first time Jerem had suffered like this.

[…You, who are you?] Mitra asked in a clear voice. [Uhh, I am drowsy and feel bad. Get out of Theo’s body right now!]

“Kuaaaack!”

Pure divine power exploded in Theodore’s body. Mitra had released a powerful force without thinking, but as Jerem was connected to the body, it felt like his soul was being torn apart by the rage.

He would’ve only received a small blow if it were an external force. However, now that they shared the same body, it was a fatal blow. This was similar to exorcising an evil spirit by pouring holy water directly onto the patient’s brain.

‘I-I will die. This Jerem, the king who should cause the end…? But I can’t give up this flesh…’

A moment of hesitation caused a crisis.

[Get out now!]

“Kuaaaaah!” Jerem’s soul was brutally torn apart. There was no more time for him to worry now. One more blow would kill him completely. Holding the tattered pieces of his soul together, Jerem barely cried out, “P-Pale Rider, come here!”

The unidentified bandaged undead responded to his call. Then Jerem reached out with one hand and grabbed the monster’s neck, ordering with bloodshot eyes, “Give your body to me!”

“…As you please.”

“I’ll take it!” Simultaneously, Jerem’s soul flowed out of Theodore’s hand.

The soul fled from Theodore’s body through Theodore’s right hand that was holding onto the pale rider. In addition to ownership of Death’s Worship, half of Jerem’s vast amount of knowledge had been lost.

Jerem stared poisonously at Theodore after taking over the pale rider’s body. However, he didn’t have the ability to fight against Mitra, who was protecting Theodore. His connection with Tartarus had also been cut off, and his knights had consumed a lot of power.

“…Don’t think I will give up so easily,” Jerem said before changing his body into a blue fog. Then he vanished without a trace.

-A defeated dog barks in every age, Gluttony ridiculed. Then he spoke to Mitra, –Now, it is time to go back.

Mitra didn’t speak, but she pouted like she understood the meaning of the words.

[I don’t want to return to being a puny kid.]

–It can’t be helped. User’s vessel still can’t contain a god.

He might’ve unintentionally reached the 8th circle, but it was preposterous for a mortal to become the vessel of a god. Even a lower god was more transcendent than a dragon. As an entity that could manipulate the material world at will, the current Mitra could cause an earthquake just by breathing.

[…I understand.] Mitra, who became a beautiful woman, let out a long sigh. [Then give my best regards to Theo, Uncle Tongue.]

She disappeared into Theodore’s body with a mischievous smile.

-…Uncle Tongue?

For the first time in thousands of years, maybe longer than that, Gluttony was shocked by someone’s words.

*

Theodore’s consciousness emerged shortly after that.

“…Um…” He let out a groan and raised his throbbing upper body. His blurred vision cleared immediately, and he sorted through his confused senses and thoughts. A few seconds after regaining consciousness, Theodore finished looking at the situation and said, “Thank you, Gluttony.”

-…What are you saying all of a sudden?

“From your position, it would’ve been more efficient to choose Jerem instead of me.”

Gluttony was silent for a moment before speaking in a rarely used, surprised tone, –User, you remained conscious? Wasn’t your body taken over?

“A little bit, it wasn’t clear. I know how things went, but it isn’t detailed.”

–I-I see, Gluttony felt relieved for some reason and continued

speaking, –There is someone you should greet before that.

“Ah.” That’s right. Theodore stretched out his hand, and a little girl appeared on top of it.

She was the ancient elemental who had lost the power of a lower god and returned to the appearance of a child.

[Hoing! Deoo!]

“Mitra, thank you for saving me.”

[Hoong?]

It seemed like Mitra had no memory of when she had been a god, as she looked at him with a strange expression. Theodore just chuckled and tickled her head. One day, he would tell her these words when they could communicate properly.

Theodore recalled that memorable sight and choked down his emotions.

After a moment, Gluttony spoke again, -User. It is okay to relax your mind and body, but don’t you still have something to do?

“Something to do… Ah!” Theodore belatedly recalled his two companions, and a fearful momentum rose from within him.

Just one step…

He only moved his legs once, but he leaped over a hundred meters.

‘This is the power of eight circles!’

The impact Jerem left behind, the eight circles multiplied Theodore’s magic power and physical abilities by several times.

This was the path to transcendence beyond the human framework.

Theodore might not have red dragon blood like Veronica, but he was the vessel of divinities and Aquilo’s blood. Now, his strength and reflexes reached a level where he could have a close combat

fight with a sword master of the same level. In the past, he couldn't use lightning and Dimensional Leave for long because his body hadn't been able to bear the burden, but the application of those two magics would be much easier now.

Before long, Theodore reached the two people. "Sister! Randolph!"

First, he pulled out Randolph, who was stuck in a rock wall, and laid him down next to Veronica. He opened his hands, and his detection magic was activated much faster than before. Theodore diagnosed the two unconscious people.

'Randolph... He is still okay. His wounds are pretty heavy, but they should heal quickly when combined with magic potions. The problem is Sister's soul was stitched together by Jerem...'

Theodore's face stiffened. "Shit. His magic is being released now that he has been kicked out of my body! The collapse of her soul will soon begin!"

The damage Invidia's 'Destruction' ability dealt onto Veronica's soul wasn't something that could be cured with an 8th circle body.

Thus, Jerem had sewn up the soul as a temporary measure. Now that Jerem's magic was being released after Theodore regained his body, the crack in Veronica's soul would widen and her body would be torn apart in the aftermath.

Theodore could see Veronica's soul with his eyes. The efficacy of the drug was going away, and Veronica would soon be lost.

'What should I do? Is there a way? I don't have time. Hurry!'

Heat was spreading in his head. As the heat rose, blood dripped down from his nose. This was a rapid acceleration of his thinking power that even an 8th circle magician couldn't endure.

He went through all the magic and shamanism knowledge he had in his mind at super speed. Saving Veronica couldn't be done by any one magic. Theodore sensed this and looked through rituals.

‘Not just magic or shamanism alone. I have to try combining magic and shamanism.’

There was no room for Gluttony to speak. Theodore’s eyes turned red. His blood-red vision meant that was Veronica’s life was fading. It was proof that the vitality of her dragon blood was at its limit.

Then at that moment…

“…Yes, there is that method!”

Theodore shifted his hand, bringing his palm to the middle of Veronica’s chest. He didn’t shake at all as he calmly moved his magic power. From now on, there couldn’t be any errors. The mark of Umbra on his right arm shone with a green light, the light becoming sharper due to his eight circles.

‘Normally, I would seek permission from her, but it can’t be helped now…!’

Veronica’s wound was fatal because an injury of the soul couldn’t be healed. In order to heal a destroyed soul, the person needed to be at a transcendent level or have healing abilities equivalent to a god.

At least, that was the limit for ‘normal’ methods. Therefore, Theodore went through all the eastern and western methods and came up with a shortcut—a spirit contract!

It was a forbidden magic which bound the soul of the master and slave together, forcing a vow of allegiance that couldn’t be betrayed. However, Theodore intended to apply this technique to Veronica’s treatment.

This was a binding magic where the soul of the slave would die if they disobeyed the master. In some cases, the personality of the slave could even be manipulated.

–Do you still want to do it?

‘…I will apologize to her and pledge myself to her. I can’t think of a method other than this. And if this continues for much longer, it will be irreversible.’

–Well, good. The method that User thought of is much more efficient than any measures that I envisioned. There is a high likelihood of success.

Theodore felt a little reassured as he took a deep breath and cried out, “「метемпсихоз (Soul Reversion)!」”

Borrowing the power of Dragon Words, Theodore started the unprecedented soul treatment.

Chapter 298 – Victory Scar (2)

Wuuuong...!

The Umbra imprint shone. The green light emerged in the form of a silver string, and Theodore felt his mental strength being sucked into it. It might be a minor undertaking for Jerem, but this was a daunting task for Theodore.

However, this was natural. After all, interfering with a soul was only possible after becoming a real transcendent, in the realm of the 9th circle. Theodore wouldn't be able to try it at all if it wasn't for Umbra.

'Stay focused. Sister will die if I fail once!'

There was no second time. Veronica's life was at stake, causing Theodore to raise his concentration to the limit. Theodore sighed with relief as the light from his right hand entered Veronica's heart.

"Okay, step one is successful."

Their two souls were connected. After the next trial, Veronica's soul would be bound to his.

"Huuu—..." One last deep breath. He couldn't afford a moment like this later on. Theodore held his breath as he concentrated his remaining mental power on the imprint on his right arm.

The mind was just the tip of the iceberg that was called the soul. At the body's surface, there was the conscious mind. Then once you delved into the bottom of the mind, the soul would naturally be reached.

This was the domain of the soul. Theodore's soul was compressed in one breath and sank deeply. As his eyes dimmed, the light from the imprint became clearer. His consciousness flowed down from his brain to his right arm. It rode through the cerebral blood vessels into the arteries of his right arm, reaching his wrist and

palm. This process occurred while Theodore was in a trance, and his soul left his body.

‘Now!’

It was time for stage two, escaping the body. A part of the soul was sent out of the body, directly interfering with the contractor’s soul. From Theodore’s right palm into Veronica’s body, a green soul bead dug in.

“—Hak!” Veronica screamed and convulsed.

‘Ugh!’

It was a natural reaction. He would’ve been thrown back at the pressure coming from her if this was a fatal blow. However, Veronica was in a critical state and her resistance was considerably weakened. Thus, Theodore overcame the pressure and dug into her wounded heart.

Then inside Veronica’s wound, her soul was visible in front of him.

[Damn, it is serious.]

It was like the claws of a large animal had torn at her soul.

[The soul’s nucleus is at 30%. Even a soul master would only last a few minutes. If she wasn’t a quarter dragon and I hadn’t fed her the elixir…]

Veronica would surely have died. Theodore felt a chill at the future that hadn’t happened. Still, he had work remaining. Theodore looked at Veronica’s wound and gently touched the surface. If he couldn’t fill this hole, she couldn’t survive.

Then the two souls met.

[—Kuk, what is this suction?]

His soul was being sucked somewhere. It was like a drain collecting rainwater on a rainy day. Veronica’s instinct to repair her soul was demanding Theodore’s soul. At first, he panicked, but

he soon realized that he could use this situation.

It would be easier for him to interfere if she didn't resist.

Kiiiiing!

Simultaneously, the two souls began to resonate.

—.....!!

Somewhere, Theodore heard a voice that didn't belong to his memories.

–Something like you, a child that shouldn't be born...!

–Dragon blood? Are you a reptile or a mammal? You smell fishy, so can you not come near me?

–Ack, hot! Were you trying to kill me? You monster!

–Huhuhu, I will get a lot of money if I sell this kid.

Contempt, loathing, hatred, greed... Voices filled with negative feelings resonated from all directions. These were memories that stabbed at someone's heart, someone's trauma. They didn't exist in Theodore's memories. Then perhaps these memories...

[Sister's memories...?]

It was the childhood of Veronica, who always looked dignified and strong.

[This is too much!] He yelled in resentment, but no one answered.

It couldn't be helped. They were just echoes of Veronica's past. Nevertheless, Theodore couldn't help shouting. Despite his experience in Bergen Academy, he didn't have such terrible memories.

How had Veronica managed to go from this terrible past to what she was now? The strongest magician in Meltor, the incarnation of destruction that all magicians feared... To think that the exciting beauty had these shadows.

There was no distinction of time as the flood of memories continued. Theodore couldn't remember clearly from then on. He just knew that he was angry as he cried and yelled, unable to do anything about the emotions that Veronica had felt in the past.

Then he escaped from that flood of memories and opened his eyes.

"...Eh?"

Somehow, Theodore had returned to his own body.

'Was it successful?'

He could feel the warm body temperature and beating heart under his palm. It was weaker than usual, but it was not life-threateningly weak. Theodore focused his mind. His soul had filled the hole inside Veronica's heart. With his soul eyes, he could see that his right arm and Veronica's heart were connected by a green cord.

"I succeeded..." Theodore's legs weakened, and he fell to the ground.

He was falling out of the trance. Maybe the dragon blood and connection to Veronica had made him stronger. It was good, but if he didn't concentrate, he would faint.

'Not yet, not yet. I need to bring both of them to Bergen.'

He somehow got up and carried Veronica's and Randolph's bodies. The omnipotent feeling he'd gotten after entering the 8th circle had long since disappeared. This meant that the power he had consumed to heal Veronica's soul was enormous. His magic power, physical strength, and mental strength were at their limits.

He drew a small magic circle with his toes and cried out, "Mass Teleport!"

Was it thanks to reaching the 8th circle? Unlike before, Theodore succeeded in moving through space with a brief chant. Then there

was a bright light. Flash!

The destination was Bergen, a magic zone preset as the retreat area. From the middle of the desolate Nadun Mountains, the three people quickly jumped across the wall of space. There was a touch of cold air, and Theodore opened his eyes as he felt the success of space movement.

"...Theo?" A crying voice greeted him. Sylvia came running with red eyes, like she had been crying for a long time.

"...Sorry, I'm late."

"It's okay! Everything is okay! Your body? You aren't hurt anywhere? I won't forgive you if you die in front of me!"

"I'm exhausted but fine." Theodore shrugged, causing Sylvia to cry with a relieved expression. She helped him place the two people he was carrying on a stretcher, before entering Theodore's arms and rubbing her red nose against his chest. Her emotions overflowed again.

"Grandpa. Kuk. Theo, Grandpa...!"

"Yes, Sylvia."

"Liar, liar. He said he would officiate... sob... my wedding... H-He left me...!"

"Yes, Blundell is really bad."

"No, my grandfather isn't... sob... bad..." Her words were a mess.

Theodore smiled bitterly and patted Sylvia's back. She had lost her family in this fight. He wouldn't be stingy if he could comfort her with this weary body.

'Ah, I am reaching my limit.'

Theodore had abruptly reached the 8th circle, and there had been the unreasonable soul healing as well, so the burden on him was considerable. The last thing he saw was Orta rushing at him.

Staring blankly at Sylvia, Theodore hoped that Orta would take care of things well.

Then the long and fierce day ended.

*

If he had to describe it in one word, it was a library. There were piles of books and bookshelves decorating the space. Books were stacked from floor to ceiling, with the smell of parchment tickling a person's nose.

It was no exception for those who were sleeping, and it helped to wake up the consciousness of someone lying on a mountain of books.

"Umm." Theodore opened his eyes in an unknown place. "This place...?"

It was a familiar place. Theodore explored the landscape of the library and realized it was a separate space. This place was similar to Gluttony's library, but it was slightly different. He knew what he would see if he opened a book. This was a space made up of Theodore's memories. It was the spiritual world that existed at the bottom of his consciousness.

"I see. I fainted when I tried to comfort Sylvia."

Theodore identified the situation and sighed. Was the fatigue from healing Veronica's soul so much that he'd sunk down to the bottom of his consciousness? Maybe even a little bit of mental power was lost.

He sighed at overcoming the crisis and looked at the scattered books.

'Should I do a review?'

Theodore's memory was excellent. He never forgot a book that he had read once and could write a brief summary on the spot. For him, a 'review' was just a tedious and repetitive task. If he read a

book that he already knew, what new and interesting knowledge could be acquired?

“...Well, it is better than nothing.”

In the end, just as Theodore was about to pick up a book...

“—What, neglecting me after leaving me alone with your possessions? You are a bad person,” a playful voice spoke out from behind him.

“...”

“What is with this reaction? Why do you have a stupid look on your face?”

Theodore stared at her and muttered in a quivering voice, “... Sister?”

“Huh?”

“Veronica, Sister.”

Veronica realized why he was surprised and laughed. Then she walked over and pulled the stiff Theodore into her arms. It was a soft and warm touch. Veronica whispered in an affectionate voice toward Theodore, who stiffened in another manner, “Yes, I’m your Veronica now. Thank you for saving me.”

Then he realized it. This body that felt good to touch and the warmth that was conveyed... All of his senses proclaimed that she was alive. The terrible memory of the bleeding Veronica came to his mind, and Theodore reflexively inserted more strength into his hands.

“Ah.” Veronica made a noise.

However, Theodore kept holding her tightly. He was terrified that she was going to disappear.

“I’m sorry.”

He was guilty of having given her a dangerous role. He felt sorry

for having looked into her memories. He hated his own inexperience when he healed her soul.

“I’m sorry.” Theodore kept repeating his apologies.

“It’s fine.” Veronica patted his head as he hugged her. “Everything is okay, so don’t cry my little one.”

Chapter 299 – Victory Scar (3)

The two people held each other firmly and stood there for a while. It was a distance where their warm breaths could be felt, as well as the rise and fall of their chests.

Theodore's unfamiliar tears quickly subsided.

However, Theodore kept burying his face in Veronica's hair. When was the last time he'd cried? It had been at least 10 years since he stopped letting his emotions run wild. These weren't tears shed from extreme pain.

He didn't want to show his face to Veronica because he himself didn't know what he looked like.

'Ah, I don't know why, but I feel relieved…' He had a personal desire to stay where he was.

However, he couldn't fool Veronica's senses.

"Are you okay now?" She gently pulled slightly away, wiping away the tear marks still left behind on his face.

Veronica's touch was so mild and sweet, so different from her normal self that Theodore felt his face flush.

"Ahh… My kid, you are really cute." Unsurprisingly, Veronica noticed his blush and playfully ruffled his black hair.

Maybe their inner turmoils were easily revealed because this was his spiritual world. Just as Theodore didn't control his feelings, she did actions that she wouldn't normally do. Veronica realized what she had done and stiffened.

Meanwhile, Theodore released the hug and opened his mouth, "Sister, there are many stories that I have been hiding."

There was a mountain of stories that no one knew aside from Vince—no, some even Vince didn't know. Veronica was connected to him with an eternal contract, so he wasn't worried about her

betraying him. Above all, she had almost died from Invidia's sword, so she deserved to hear Theodore's secrets.

Everything had started the moment Theodore met the grimoire, Gluttony. He was about to confide the whole truth when—

"Oh, that's enough."

Veronica pressed her fingers against his lips.

"Huh?"

"I already know. Just as you were looking into my memories, I was watching yours. Let's just say we are a draw when it comes to this part, okay?"

Theodore looked at her with bemusement, before asking a question, "…Then why don't you blame me?"

"Huh? For what?"

"You became Invidia's target and ended up like this because of me."

"Why is it because of you? It is the fault of that damn monster. And I am responsible for protecting myself. Don't be sorry about not protecting me, understood?"

Was she angry? Veronica stared fiercely into his eyes. This caused Theodore to bow his head and mutter, "Still, now you will die if I die."

There was no way to release a permanent contract. Even if he reached the 9th circle, the bound souls would still be the same. The person with a quarter dragon's vitality would die when Theodore died.

It had been the only way to save her, but Theodore couldn't help feeling guilty. However, Veronica's reaction was unexpected. "Uh, it is fine."

"…Huh?"

“I don’t hate it because I feel connected to you…” Veronica stopped speaking the moment the words popped out. However, she couldn’t swallow down the words that had already emerged, causing the two of them to hide their red faces.

Then Veronica remembered something. “Ah, that reminds me, I did see one thing that made me angry.”

Before Theodore could respond to the change in expression, Veronica got right up close to him and growled fiercely, “The things you did secretly with that worm, I saw it all.”

“Eh?” Theodore was embarrassed by the unexpected words when Veronica’s hands hit his chest. “Uwaaat!”

As expected from the power of a quarter dragon, it was enough to blow Theodore away. Theodore flew through the air for a few meters, before landing on a fluffy floor. No, it was a fairly large bed. This place was filled with a pile of books just before, so why was there suddenly a bed?

“This is your mental world, but it is possible for me to interfere as long as you aren’t hurt. It isn’t a big deal to turn this library into a bedroom.”

Rather than the scent of parchment paper, there was a sweet fragrance and red curtains draped over the bookshelves. It had the subtle atmosphere of a typical bedroom. Theodore was about to speak when a red robe fell and covered his eyes. “W-Wait a minute.”

Just after that…

“I won’t wait,” Veronica declared.

While Theodore was throwing the red robe to the side, Veronica got on top of him and pushed down on his chest with her left hand. It might be different with magic, but she was stronger when it came to pure arm strength.

With one hand holding Theodore’s body, she pulled off the rest

of her clothes. Her smooth curves were revealed as her clothes were removed. By the time she was left in just her underwear, Veronica realized that all of Theodore's resistance beneath her had disappeared.

"Haaah... Theo." She took her hand off his chest and touched his face.

There were no thoughts about running away. As she looked into Theodore's eyes, Veronica whispered sweetly, "Now, are you ready? More time is needed before your body wakes up..."

Subsequently, her red hair mixed with black.

*

Tweet tweet, chirp chirp.

The cheerful cries of birds announced the morning. Some people were sleeping and wouldn't hear the sound, while others had already started their day. It was a common thing. The same thing would be seen differently from other points of view.

In that sense, this morning was a special moment for Theodore Miller.

"...Ah...."

He raised his eyelids and made a bemused expression.

'This place...?'

It was a familiar ceiling of a room in his distant memories. Then Theodore looked around and met her eyes. The great magician, Veronica, was lying on the opposite bed. She stretched out like she had just woken up and looked at him with blurred eyes.

"—Did you sleep well?" Veronica sent him a bewitching smile, making his stomach spin.

"Uh!" That was enough to send an electrifying feeling shooting down his spine, and the buried memories overflowed. In the depths of the spiritual world, they had spent a few days in a place

where only the two people with connected souls could share.

Well, no, a few days wasn't accurate. It might've been a couple of minutes or a few months. In the midst of the pleasure, the two of them hadn't rested for a single moment until their bodies were restored.

'Sigh, I don't know what face to make after that.'

Theodore, who had been famous for his chastity during his school days, had old-fashioned ideals. The relationship they had in the spiritual world wasn't light and couldn't be treated as nothing.

On the other hand, Veronica was perfectly at ease. She was watching him happily like a lioness who was full. This bizarre atmosphere continued until the servants entered the room. They finished the meal, and there was a brief overview.

"Red Tower Master Veronica and Captain Theodore. His Majesty desires an audience. However, he said that if you want, you can rest until the sun goes down," the servant respectfully bowed as he spoke to the two people.

Theodore and Veronica had lost consciousness for four days and were injured, so he gave them some time. However, this matter was so heavy that Kurt couldn't help feeling anxious. Veronica guessed the situation and laughed lightly, getting off the bed. "It can't be helped. Then what now?"

Veronica hugged Theodore's arm.

"Vero—ah, no, Red Tower Master…"

"Are you going to be shy now? I think it is too late."

It was true. The nature of her relationship with Theodore had deepened. He tried to suppress the memories that the touch of her arm recalled and spoke her name, "Veronica."

"Yes, Theo." She no longer called him a kid. They called each other's names because they were now on an equal footing.

The two people stood shoulder to shoulder naturally and left the infirmary, with the people outside creating a path for them. Blue Tower Master Blundell had died, so there was no one who could block the path of two 8th circle magicians.

They walked through the corridors and passed into the uninhabited hallways of the palace. They were almost to the room where Kurt III was waiting when Veronica spoke. Her voice was unusually quiet, reminiscent of her exquisite elegance.

“Theo.”

“Yes?”

“Don’t worry about our relationship. I was the one who pressed you down, and I didn’t think it would last long after waking up.”

“But—”

“Besides, there is a confession that you haven’t answered.”

He paused, but he then managed to take another step. That’s right, there was Ellenoa’s confession. She was someone who had sincerely whispered that she loved him.

It was too much to hold onto another’s woman’s hand while leaving Ellenoa to wait.

“...Thank you, Veronica.”

Veronica laughed and hugged his arm more firmly. “Heh, anyway, I am yours. I will be by Theo’s side, no matter who you choose.”

“Isn’t that a bit difficult?”

“You will understand if you have a red dragon’s blood.”

Even if he insisted on logic, it was nothing in front of a charming beauty. Theodore realized it and faced the door of the reception room in front of him. Did the king want to secretly meet both people?

Unlike other times, there were no guards or servants present. Before Veronica could kick down the door, Theodore reached out his hand.

Kukukukung...!

The giant door split open, and the king was revealed.

“First of all, thank you for agreeing to my unreasonable request.” The face of Kurt the third, the king of Meltor, was more haggard than usual. His wise purple eyes were blurred with fatigue, and his bright golden hair had lost its shine.

There were too many possible options to guess the reason for his tiredness.

The two people approached and tried to give their greetings.

However, Kurt waved his left hand and stopped it. “There is no need for formalities. I shouldn’t trouble you after you just got out of bed. I wanted to give you a few more days to rest, but a king’s duties don’t go away.”

“It isn’t a problem, Your Majesty.”

“I’m thankful for your words. First, I heard a series of reports from White Tower Master, but only you know what happened after Blundell’s death. Please tell me.”

There was no one better for this role than Theodore.

“...I understand.” Theodore stepped forward, away from Veronica, and faced Kurt. Was it due to his repeated struggles with so many monsters? The king’s face now looked middle-aged and fatigued.

“However, I have something to say before that.”

If so, the hesitation belonged to Theodore, whose hesitation was unrelated to external factors.

Unlike his plan to face the king with all his determination and seek cooperation, the words didn’t fall easily from his mouth.

After all, he had hidden it for several years. It wasn't easy to talk about it to the ruler of a country whom he didn't have a close relationship with, unlike Veronica.

Kkuok.

Did she read his hesitation? Theodore trembled at the warmth that grabbed his right hand and he soon relaxed. She, Veronica, was with him. What did he need to be afraid of?

"Your Majesty. I, Theodore Miller—"

Theodore jumped with his own free will over the wall he had hit.

Chapter 300 – Victory Scar (4)

Grimoires—they appeared in the forms of books, with a call to power and disaster that mocked a mortal's common sense. None of the existing magicians could interpret them, and all remaining records in the world only explained the scars left behind by grimoires.

It meant that the owners of grimoires were the cause of worldwide massacres. Just look at Giovanni to be convinced.

The magician, Giovanni, had been investigating the ruins discovered in the Miller Barony. Then he discovered the grimoire, Death's Worship, and was turned into a warlock who commanded thousands of undead. If Theodore hadn't contained the situation so quickly, a catastrophe would have occurred in Meltor a month later.

Theodore knew the risk of revealing this truth about himself better than anyone else, but he told Kurt the whole story anyway.

"…The owner of a grimoire." Kurt touched his chin and nodded. "It is funny to say it now, but that was one of the possibilities we came up with."

"What does that…"

"A person stuck at the 2nd circle for nearly 5 years suddenly jumped beyond the best genius in the kingdom in just a few months. It is natural to question that growth."

It was as the king said. After all, who could have imagined that Theodore Miller, the dunce of Bergen Academy, would manage to win against Blue Tower Master Blundell's granddaughter?

His master, Vince, was quite talented, but he couldn't compare to a great magician of the kingdom. A hidden talent might've woken up after years of insecurity, but that wasn't enough for Theodore to have jumped over so many walls in a short period of time.

This hadn’t been the 3rd and 4th circles, but the 5th circle. This was a ‘wall’ that magicians often called the gateway to senior magicians. It didn’t make sense for Theodore to have overcome that wall so quickly unless a shortcut to accelerate growth had been used.

Yes, it must be a grimoire or a national treasure.

“This fact isn’t well known, but it isn’t unprecedented. 200 years ago, the 7th Red Tower Master was the owner of a grimoire called ‘Evil Lamp.’ According to records, the grimoire looked like a giant flame and supplied the magic power to use 8th circle fire magic many times.”

“…I see.”

If there had already been a precedent, then Kurt’s reaction wasn’t strange. After all, if he knew that a grimoire didn’t only cause disasters, then it was the role of a ruler to find ways to take advantage of it. Theodore realized the point he had missed and fell silent for a moment.

Then Kurt laughed with his weary face and said, “It isn’t uncommon. A magician with a grimoire is more valuable than a national treasure. If this secret is revealed before the person is strong enough, idiots would try to steal it, without knowing that it is pointless. So, your behavior was wise.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“As proof of my acknowledgment of your good behavior, I won’t question you about the grimoire. Moreover, based on the report, the problem hasn’t been solved yet.”

Kurt was right. This caused Theodore to nod immediately. “Yes, the remnant of the warlock that I released still remains in the world. And I couldn’t confirm the life or death of Crowd von Russell, 1st Sword of the empire.”

“Certainly, neither of them can be overlooked.”

Jerem had been badly damaged by Mitra, but a warlock of the 9th circle was still a disaster itself. The strength of the Pale Rider and the undead was alarming. It was imperative to pull out their roots as soon as possible. Compared to that, Crowd was a slightly lower priority. However, he still wasn't a person to be treated lightly. He was a man with the ability to reverse the war, which was almost over.

Misfortune could still occur if they were careless.

"...Even so, the horrible history of the war in the North was the experiment of a grimoire... It is a truth that shouldn't be recorded in history."

"Yes, I think so as well."

"I wonder if I should be relieved that it is over or feel angry about the rest of the work that needs to be done. These days, the weight of the crown has increased even more." The king laughed as he spoke.

He was glad that the war which had lasted for centuries was finally over, but he was sad that all this bloodshed had been from acting as someone's puppet. It was the first time Theodore had seen Kurt look like this. The wise king of Meltor, the one who led the magic kingdom, was speaking sincerely to him. Was it from the fatigue? Or—

'Ah, I see.' Theodore finally realized his own position. 'Blundell is gone, while Veronica is tied to me. It isn't intentional, but Meltor's power has been swallowed up by me.'

One of the two magicians who reigned as Meltor's pillars had died, and the other one was tied to Theodore. Theodore was also an 8th circle magician, so he was the only one who could be called superior to Kurt. He was unquestionably the supreme power in Meltor.

Facing this, Kurt had two choices—no, it was only one. He had to

be open and sincere, sharing the matters of the kingdom with Theodore. If he tried to push Theodore away from the kingdom, he would lose too much.

The alliance with Elvenheim that Theo was the cause of…

The alliance with Austen that was based on Aquilo's strength…

Two 8th circle magicians…

For Meltor, who had consumed a great deal of power in this war, these losses would be a huge blow to the national force.

'Well, I don't want to leave in the first place.'

Theodore could grasp this kingdom if he wanted to, but he didn't have that type of desire. He would rather grab a few books from the Zero Library. Setting that thought aside to ask about later, Theodore brought up a topic that Kurt hadn't mentioned. "Your Majesty, about the Yellow Tower Master…"

"Yes." Kurt cleared his throat in response to 'Yellow Tower Master.' "The Yellow Tower Master—no, Paragranum. I know its identity. It is a secret passed down through generations of the royal family. I'd like to arrange a separate place to talk about it. You have just woken up, and I don't want to keep you for too long."

"I'm fine… but if that is Your Majesty's will."

Indeed, was there a secret between the royal family and Paragranum? Theodore felt curious as he accepted the proposal. If Paragranum had planned to flee, it would've already been gone by the time Theodore returned to Mana-vil. However, it still remained, showing that it was confident it could persuade Theodore.

"Okay, the talk will end here for today."

The two magicians nodded at the king's command, and the unexpected audience came to an end.

*

After separating from Veronica who had work to do as the Red Tower Master, Theodore walked through the empty hallways of the palace.

Had it been Kurt's consideration to allow him to avoid meeting people in public? Theodore walked away from the palace, where teleport magic was blocked. He intended to move to his room in the red tower as soon as he could use Teleport.

-User, Gluttony suddenly spoke up, -I didn't get to mention this to you before, but I have something to say.

"What's going on?"

-Let's start with my conclusion. There is no need to worry about that warlock called Jerem.

"What?" Theodore stopped moving at the words, before continuing again. "Even though his soul is severely damaged, isn't he a 9th circle magician with countless undead? I've only just reached the 8th circle, so I'm not sure I can win."

Theodore wasn't acting weak. The two undead summoned from Tartarus, the ghoul prince and helix ogre, were monsters that could only be killed by a few 8th circle magicians. What if there were hundreds more of those monsters? It was clear that Theodore would need to reach the 9th circle or a dragon on the continent would have to move to defeat them.

-But not at this time. Gluttony didn't agree. -The damage from Mitra's divine power has greatly limited his abilities. If he hadn't reached the 9th circle in his life, he would've perished on the spot. It isn't the kind of damage that can be recovered in a short period of time, even if he uses Life Drain or another technique. In the next few years, it will be difficult to use 8th circle magic, let alone 9th circle.

"...So, I can defeat him now."

-That's right. And about his undead... I agree that User can't go against them, so I handled it with my own authority.

This time, Theodore's feet couldn't move from the ground. "You handled it with your own authority? What does that mean?"

The undead hidden in the negative dimension—Tartarus—of the ancient warlock, Jerem, was enough to ruin the entire continent. How had Gluttony dealt with it despite not being able to escape from Theodore's palm? He couldn't understand it.

Then Gluttony replied in a somewhat satisfied voice, -After I ate Death's Worship, I gained control of the negative dimension. However, the creator of the negative dimension is still the boss. I decided to break in using a backdoor and try to steal the undead using the sub-master's authority. Moreover, if User was planning to go down the path of a necromancer, I had to dispose of any shortcuts as quickly as possible.

It was a reasonable point. Theodore nodded at the explanation and told it to get to the point.

-So.

"So?"

-I swallowed all of them and changed them into User's library points.

"...Huh?!"

The undead had been turned into Theodore's achievement points! Theodore's eyes widened with amazement, while Gluttony added to his joy.

-There are quite a few undead that couldn't be converted, but the harvest isn't bad because of the number of them. A dragon lich's life vessel is very rare. The chimera made of a demon's heart is also worthwhile. Thus, more points were obtained from the undead than I thought.

“Somehow, it feels like selling stolen goods.”

Theodore was stunned as he had a large problem resolved and also obtained a lot of achievement points.

“How many points did I get?”

-Huhuhu, don’t be surprised, Gluttony encouraged Theodore’s expectations. -157,329 points.

“…Say it again.”

-157,329 points. It is at least twice the points you got from Laevateinn. After this, the accumulated points total over 200,000, so a special function within me was released.

It wasn’t enough that he had gotten over 100,000 achievement points in one go. A special function had been released as well. Theodore felt like this was a dream and knocked on his forehead several times. Fortunately, it wasn't a dream. As Theodore tried to regain his composure, Gluttony continued in an excited voice, -Isn’t it better to see it once than listen a hundred times? I’ll show you.

Simultaneously, several notification messages popped up.

[Your cumulative achievement points have exceeded 200,000 points.]

[A hidden function of Gluttony has been discovered. The user should check the information about the function. This function will work normally regardless of the rank.]

[A grimoire that collects the strength and wisdom of books and artifacts. All of the magical pioneers are sleeping within Gluttony’s soul. You can use the accumulated points to learn the knowledge of these distinguished magicians.]

[The Hall of Fame has been opened.]

Table of Contents

- The Book Eating Magician
  - Synopsis
  - Copyright
  - Chapter 201 – Sand Dragon Desertio (1)
  - Chapter 202 – Sand Dragon Desertio (2)
  - Chapter 203 – Sand Dragon Desertio (3)
  - Chapter 204 – Together with a Dragon (1)
  - Chapter 205 – Together with a Dragon (2)
  - Chapter 206 – Together with a Dragon (3)
  - Chapter 207 – Library (1)
  - Chapter 208 – Library (2)
  - Chapter 209 – Library (3)
  - Chapter 210 – Upcoming Battle (1)
  - Chapter 211 – Upcoming Battle (2)
  - Chapter 212 – Upcoming Battle (3)
  - Chapter 213 – Upcoming Battle (4)
  - Chapter 214 – The Swirl of a Civil War (1)
  - Chapter 215 – The Swirl of a Civil War (2)
  - Chapter 216 – The Swirl of a Civil War (3)
  - Chapter 217 – All-out War (1)
  - Chapter 218 – All-out War (2)
  - Chapter 219 – All-out War (3)
  - Chapter 220 – All-out War (4)
  - Chapter 221 – All-out War (5)
  - Chapter 222 – Babarino Plains (1)
  - Chapter 223 – Babarino Plains (2)
  - Chapter 224 – Babarino Plains (3)
  - Chapter 225 – Great Battle (1)
  - Chapter 226 – Great Battle (2)
  - Chapter 227 – Great Battle (3)
  - Chapter 228 – Great Battle (4)
  - Chapter 229 – Elsid’s Gifts (1)
  - Chapter 230 – Elsid’s Gifts (2)
  - Chapter 231 – Elsid’s Gifts (3)
  - Chapter 232 – Elsid’s Gifts (4)
  - Chapter 233 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (1)

Chapter 234 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (2)
Chapter 235 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (3)
Chapter 236 – Old Books Maniac Heinrich (4)
Chapter 237 – Second (1)
Chapter 238 – Second (2)
Chapter 239 – Second (3)
Chapter 240 – Second (4)
Chapter 241 – Where is This (1)
Chapter 242 – Where is This (2)
Chapter 243 – Where is This (3)
Chapter 244 – Where is This (4)
Chapter 245 – The Rightful Heir (1)
Chapter 246 – The Rightful Heir (2)
Chapter 247 – The Rightful Heir (3)
Chapter 248 – Ominous Identity (1)
Chapter 249 – Ominous Identity (2)
Chapter 250 – Ominous Identity (3)
Chapter 251 – Ominous Identity (4)
Chapter 252 – Baekun Mountains (1)
Chapter 253 – Baekun Mountains (2)
Chapter 254 – Baekun Mountains (3)
Chapter 255 – Baekun Mountains (4)
Chapter 256 – Receptacle of Solitude (1)
Chapter 257 – Receptacle of Solitude (2)
Chapter 258 – Receptacle of Solitude (3)
Chapter 259 – Receptacle of Solitude (4)
Chapter 260 – Unexpected Reunion (1)
Chapter 261 – Unexpected Reunion (2)
Chapter 262 – Unexpected Reunion (3)
Chapter 263 – The Die is Cast (1)
Chapter 264 – The Die is Cast (2)
Chapter 265 – The Die is Cast (3)
Chapter 266 – The Die is Cast (4)
Chapter 267 – Three Days Free (1)
Chapter 268 – Three Days Free (2)
Chapter 269 – Three Days Free (3)
Chapter 270 – Karul Plains (1)
Chapter 271 – Karul Plains (2)
Chapter 272 – Karul Plains (3)

Chapter 273 – Karul Plains (4)
Chapter 274 – General War (1)
Chapter 275 – General War (2)
Chapter 276 – General War (3)
Chapter 277 – Revenge (1)
Chapter 278 – Revenge (2)
Chapter 279 – Revenge (3)
Chapter 280 – Revenge (4)
Chapter 281 – Revenge (5)
Chapter 282 – Followers of the End (1)
Chapter 283 – Followers of the End (2)
Chapter 284 – Followers of the End (3)
Chapter 285 – Followers of the End (4)
Chapter 286 – Emperor Moves (1)
Chapter 287 – Emperor Moves (2)
Chapter 288 – Emperor Moves (3)
Chapter 289 – INVIDIA (1)
Chapter 290 – INVIDIA (2)
Chapter 291 – INVIDIA (3)
Chapter 292 – INVIDIA (4)
Chapter 293 – Reproduction of Myths (1)
Chapter 294 – Reproduction of Myths (2)
Chapter 295 – Reproduction of Myths (3)
Chapter 296 – Reproduction of Myths (4)
Chapter 297 – Victory Scar (1)
Chapter 298 – Victory Scar (2)
Chapter 299 – Victory Scar (3)
Chapter 300 – Victory Scar (4)