

Great Mage 281

Season 2 Chapter 41

That was something past a joke.

“ ... ”

With a stiff expression on his face, one of the hunters approached Kim Go-hyuk. His entire body was exuding a tremendous amount of murderous intent.

Paht-

The figure of this hunter, who was walking, slowly disappeared.

He reappeared behind Kim Go-hyuk, and in his hand, a kukri(1) covered in ki appeared.

The man swung his kukri at Kim Go-hyuk's waist.

Paak!

But soon after, the hunter felt a great shock to the back of his head. He didn't even notice the attack. He simply fell to the ground like a broken doll without even getting the chance to scream.

“What the hell?”

“Just now...”

Most of the hunters there didn't even see Kim Go-hyuk move.

Noticing this, Kim Go-hyuk couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed.

“I heard that the quality of European hunters was really poor, but I didn't expect it to be this bad.”

At that moment, one of the hunters in the stands looked at Kim Go-hyuk and stuttered.

“Hea-, Heavenly Dragon Kim Go-hyuk...?”

“Ah. It seems one of you punks managed to recognise me.”

Kim Go-hyuk said those words with a proud voice. Then he looked around with a satisfied expression on his face before it suddenly changed.

“Huh. There's a familiar face.”

He was looking at Min Ha-rin.

Her expression hardened as she met his gaze.

“I heard that the White Flower had been freed from slavery, but she didn’t go back to her country and instead stayed to wallow in this pit. Lee Jong-hak was the same. Are there lumps of gold buried in this place or something?”

“...”

Min Ha-rin tried to hide the tension she felt.

This wasn’t her first time meeting this man. They were from the same country, and they were both most active in the East Asia region. She was a Titled Hunter who’d made a name for herself, and Kim Go-hyuk was one of Asia’s greatest heroes. So it was natural for them to be acquainted with each other.

‘However...’

The same branch, the same country.

None of that mattered to this man in front of her. Although there were only a few people who cared about their nationalities nowadays, Kim Go-hyuk had always made Min Ha-rin feel uncomfortable.

She’d felt that way from the first time she’d met him, and she felt the same now.

On the other hand, she liked the Human Dragon, Lee Jong-hak, and the Earthly Dragon, Kano Aya, much more.

“Is what you just said true?”

Min Ha-rin asked in a slightly strange tone.

She was asking whether Nina was dead or alive.

If Nina was really dead, then this matter would no longer be so simple. There might be a war between humans for the first time in decades.

“Kiki.”

Just as Kim Go-hyuk smiled, a middle-aged man beside him stepped forward.

“...let me continue from here. You step back.”

Min Ha-rin also knew who this man was.

Sword Saint of Mount Hua.

He was one of the top hunters in Asia and was a Swordsman who was said to be approaching the peak of the Master rank.

When Kim Go-hyuk shrugged his shoulders and stepped back, the Sword Saint continued in a calm voice.

“I’m sorry to come to my European comrades for such an unpleasant matter. I’m Jong Ho, a Swordsman from Mount Hua.”

“B-, by Mount Hua, he means...”

“It’s the Sword Saint.”

Those who heard this prestigious title couldn’t help but falter a little.

“I will tell you straightforwardly. Nina Rednikova, the President you were following, is a traitor who colluded with the Demons. We’re here to purge that witch and any who followed her to do evil.”

The atmosphere in the room became even colder.

Everyone had disbelieving expressions on their faces, but someone stepped forward.

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

This man with a cold expression was Matthew Costa, who had officiated the duel today.

He was one of the few European Titled Hunters and had the highest status among the hunters in the room.

When he made his appearance, everyone naturally stepped back and let him take the lead.

“Our President is a witch? She colluded with Demons? Stop using such a clumsy incitement tactic.”

“It’s not incitement. It’s a fact.”

Kim Go-hyuk spoke in a cold voice.

“Do you have any evidence?”

“There should be a man named Lukas here.”

Min Ha-rin’s eyes shook when she heard that name, and Kim Go-hyuk’s eyes curved slightly when he noticed it.

“By Lukas...”

“Are you referring to the man who often goes in and out of the President’s office?”

“Why are you talking about that man?”

Jong Ho sighed.

“He is a Demon.”

“Who told you that?”

“Our new President.... I don’t have any more time to explain. Please trust me. We have seen enough blood today.”

“What did you say?”

No way.

Matthew’s expression distorted when he belatedly realised what Jong Ho’s words meant.

“You guys... no way...”

“Stop, Sword Saint. You already told them enough. Step back.”

Kim Go-hyuk waved his hand.

Jong Ho seemed hesitant, but he slowly stepped back.

“Now. The best conclusion I can come to is that you didn’t believe us. And now, you should accept the consequences for that, shouldn’t you?”

“...Kim Go-hyuk, please show mercy.”

Kim Go-hyuk ignored Jong Ho’s words.

“I honestly don’t care what happens to you weaklings. So let’s sort this out quickly.”

Then he looked around before nodding.

“There are some good ones here. That one, that one, and that one.”

Kim Go-hyuk pointed his finger three times and nodded in satisfaction.

He’d pointed to Min Ha-rin, Matthew Costa, and Gerard, who was still in the duel ground.

Crack!

“...!”

Matthew’s eyes widened.

This was because Kim Go-hyuk had just crushed the head of the hunter, who lay stunned at his feet, like a watermelon. It was the hunter who had attacked him with a kukri.

His blood splattered.

Kim Go-hyuk licked some of the blood that splattered on his lips before saying.

“Kill everyone except those three.”

* * *

Gerard was watching the situation from the duel grounds. When the Asian hunters appeared, he recognised the man standing at the front of the group.

It was the Heavenly Dragon, Kim Go-hyuk. But why was he at the European Headquarters?

“...”

He couldn't hear their conversation very well. It might've been different if he was in his peak condition, but at the moment, he was exhausted.

However, a cold shiver soon ran down his spine.

Crack!

Blood splashed.

He wasn't sure who it was, but he knew that someone had just died.

Just as Gerard's expression hardened.

Paht.

An Asian person leapt into the duel ground in an instant. It was a woman who had a cold expression on her face, and there were throwing knives between her fingers.

Pupuk.

“...kuk.”

Gerard was puzzled inwardly. He didn't understand what he was doing.

He felt warm blood roll down his skin. He felt pain. Even without looking, he could tell that there were throwing knives stuck in his body.

Three knives had been stuck in his shoulder, left arm, and thigh.

'Why did I...?'

He'd protected Leo.

Was it guilt? Was he trying to atone?

No, such human emotions didn't exist in Gerard. From his perspective, he would even throw a newborn baby off a cliff if he had a good enough excuse.

But before he could think about it, his body had moved. He didn't know why.

He just didn't want this woman to kill Leo. So first, he decided to focus on that fact.

Gerard looked at the woman while checking his condition.

His left arm couldn't move. It seemed that the knife had struck a tendon. His right wrist was also sore because of the previous clash.

This meant that he couldn't use either of his hands. Well, he didn't have any weapons anyway. Leo had smashed his sword to pieces.

Most of his ki had been used up, and his stamina was almost completely exhausted.

And to make matters worse, Gerard was sure that he'd been pointed at just a moment ago.

'I don't think I've been in such a bad situation even when fighting against Demons.'

The woman pulled out more knives.

Gerard looked at her and smiled.

He felt that he might die today.

* * *

God disappeared after saying what he wanted.

And Lukas knew he had no way to pursue him. He didn't have the time.

'A being from the same universe?'

They were in this world? Who the hell could he be talking about?

No, more importantly, how could such a thing even happen?

In order to leave one's universe of birth, one had to break free from the yoke of mortality.

One had to become an Absolute.

Lukas' past struggles showed just how close to impossible accomplishing such a feat was.

It wasn't something that was possible merely with talent and hard work.

You had to be born at the right time, carry destiny on your back, and survive dozens of life-or-death situations before you had even the faintest possibility of becoming an Absolute.

'Lord or Lucifer...'

Lukas couldn't help but think about the two beings who'd had a high chance of becoming Absolutes.

But they were already dead.

The possibility that they'd come back to life?

None.

Their cores had become one with Lukas.

Apart from them... he didn't think there were any other possibilities.

His head was a mess. It would take time to unravel the tangled threads. Time he didn't have.

Lukas had something to deal with first.

Just as Lukas left the Personal Space, the dark space suddenly brightened. If it was said that the space he stepped out from had no light, then this space was entirely made up of light.

It was a space that was so bright that it blinded him for a moment.

This was a Dimensional Gap.

And standing there was Sedi.

When Lukas appeared, she opened her eyes slightly and said.

“Three.”

“...”

“That’s the hint I got from God.”

A light flashed in Lukas’ eyes at the unexpected word.

It was true that he wanted to hear it, but he never thought that she’d be naive enough to tell him.

Sedi looked at Lukas with a slightly strange expression. In her mind, she was still remembering the way he talked to God.

He was indeed a madman. That name was perfect for him.

“Don’t be mistaken. I just thought that telling you this would be a good balance.”

“Balance?”

Sedi snorted.

Although she had entered a temporary alliance with Lukas, she wasn’t willing to let him know more. She had already given him this much, so he would have to rely on himself for the rest.

As soon as she turned around, Sedi’s figure disappeared.

Lukas looked at the spot where Sedi had been standing for a moment before looking away, thinking that it was time to return.

Three and Hybrid.

There was only one more clue remaining, but the mystery seemed to deepen instead. Right now, those two words didn’t seem to have much of a connection.

[Haha. Of you three, you have the greatest advantage, Lukas.]

“...”

God's words once again reappeared in his mind. He didn't know what he meant when he first heard it, but now, he thought he might have an idea.

Lukas couldn't help but think about the mysterious black-robed man.

He was a soul who lived on this plan and could even be called a Balance. However, after the appearance of the Demons, he lost his authority and became a simple spectre.

This being, who existed before the birth of this world, and who could even be called the God of Heaven and Earth of this world, might know something.

Woosh.

Lukas returned to the European headquarters.

Otsuru's body was still on the floor, his mouth agape.

He was dead. And Nodiesop's influence had already left his body.

But it still seemed like he had something to say.

With that thought, Lukas left the room.

Pchk-

He stepped on something unfamiliar.

When he looked down, he realised that it was a piece of flesh. He could feel an unpleasant warmth coming from his shoes, so he knew it hadn't been long since they'd died.

The corridor, which had been clean before he and Otsuru entered the room, was now covered in red.

The disgusting smell of blood filled his nose, and there were so many corpses that it seemed like a terrible battlefield.

"Huh?"

"Hey."

Suddenly a group of hunters appeared.

The group consisted only of Asians, and when they saw Lukas, they tilted their heads to the side.

"What's going on? There's still one left."

"Where was he? I checked this area before."

“It doesn’t matter. We’ve found him now.”

The man in front of the group smiled.

“You must be stiff because you haven’t realised what’s going on. When you’re done coming to terms with the situation, raise your hands and kneel down. Then we’ll se-, sen...”

The man’s tongue suddenly felt stiff.

“Se-, sen-, send...”

What was going on?

He suddenly felt cold sweat over his entire body.

His pupils and body shook like a thin tree in heavy winds.

He couldn’t calm down.

Instead, the shaking became worse.

'Uh... uh...'

This was wrong.

This thought suddenly came to him.

If you asked him what was wrong, he wouldn't be able to answer.

But it was wrong.

Something about this situation was wrong.

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Bang!

There was a sound similar to a balloon bursting.

When the man turned around to see what it was, he froze in horror.

The heads of all the hunters who were standing behind him were missing. It was as though they'd been rubbed out by an eraser. The fact that their bodies still stood there without any blood spilling made the scene even more terrifying.

“Hi-, hiiik...!”

The man collapsed. His head subconsciously turned to look at Lukas.

Lukas looked down at the man whose eyes were filled with fear and horror.

He wasn't sure how this action appeared to the man, but it caused him to immediately kowtow on the ground.

“P-, please... s-, spare me...”

“...”

He didn't have any pride in the face of death.

He was a human who wouldn't even live 100 years. Was it unreasonable to expect such a weak creature to hold onto their pride?

No.

It wasn't. Despite being human, there were those who would carry their pride to their graves.

Did they not fear death? Did they have no fear?

That wasn't the case.

Lukas was certain.

There was no human who wasn't afraid of death. There may have been large or small differences between them, but in the end, everyone was afraid of death.

There were only people who revealed this fear and people who concealed it.

This man was the former.

Lukas felt disgust well up inside him.

This man had killed people here. He had ended their lives. It didn't matter how many he had killed personally.

In the end, he had committed murder.

But now, when he realised his death was imminent, he bowed his head without hesitation and begged to be spared.

How disgusting could one human be?

Bang!

He wouldn't accept such sickening begging.

The man's head burst open.

Even before his blood and brain matter gushed out, Lukas had already turned away from him. Just as he was about to walk away.

Kijik, kik.

Making a strange sound, a corpse rose to its feet. The body had only one eye remaining. With this one eye, it looked at Lukas.

"Let's... make... a deal... Lukas."

Even the corpse's vocal cords seemed to have been damaged.

Lukas had seen this phenomenon once. The same thing had happened to Otsuru earlier.

This meant that Nodiesop's consciousness had entered the corpse.

Lukas didn't answer as he swung his finger slightly.

* * *

Kim Go-hyuk wasn't fighting. After all, the only ones here were a bunch of weaklings.

The few strong hunters who guarded the base had either been subdued or killed.

'Nicholas, that man wasn't bad.'

10 years... No. If he had been 15 years younger, it would have been a much better fight.

As he thought this, Kim Go-hyuk yawned.

Fwoosh!

A Fireball flew towards Kim Go-hyuk. He swung his dagger lazily as if it wasn't worth paying attention to.

Again, Kim Go-hyuk wasn't fighting.

He was simply accepting his junior's whining.

"You, what the hell are you doing?"

He asked in a genuinely puzzled voice.

He looked at Min Ha-rin. He could see her calm temperament while objectively noticing her pretty face and well balanced body.

'That doesn't matter.'

White Flower.

A First class Swordsman whose sword unleashed streaks of white light reminiscent of flower petals which matched her title.

That was the Min Ha-rin he remembered.

He could still remember watching her fight. Her talent for swordsmanship was remarkable. So he'd kept an eye on her.

In three or so years, another Dragon might have appeared in Asia.

Or so he'd thought.

But now.

"Why did you learn magic?"

His voice became filled with irritation.

Min Ha-rin didn't respond as she began casting another spell.

For the first time in a while, Kim Go-hyuk became angry.

Crack!

He closed the distance between them quickly before lifting Min Ha-rin by her neck.

"Kuk..."

Min Ha-rin struggled, but Kim Go-hyuk's hand was like a clamp around her neck that did not let go.

She'd seen Kim Go-hyuk move. After all, her eyes were well trained.

Nevertheless, she couldn't respond. She had barely trained her body during the last month. No, even if she had, it would be the same.

Suddenly, Kim Go-hyuk lifted Min Ha-rin's shirt.

"...!"

A white stomach with no blemishes was revealed.

Min Ha-rin's face flushed with shame, but Kim Go-hyuk didn't pay any attention to her as he kept looking at her stomach. There wasn't a speck of lust in his eyes.

Instead, there was curiosity then anger.

"Ha."

This anger then morphed into contempt.

With a sneer, he threw Min Ha-rin at a wall. Unable to do anything, Min Ha-rin's body struck the wall heavily.

"Urk..."

Her back felt like it had broken. She didn't think it had, but the pain was immense.

She looked up at Kim Go-hyuk, who seemed to be simmering with rage as he gripped his dagger tightly.

"You don't have a danjeon?" (TL: That one comment that mentioned using 'dantian' instead. I thought about it when I first encountered it, but since it's a Korean novel, I'd prefer to use Korean terms)

"Cough, cough..."

Min Ha-rin struggled to catch her breath.

Kim Go-hyuk continued in a disbelieving voice.

"And you have a mana room now. I don't know how that's possible, but... Haha. I'm not sure what to say about this."

He laughed loudly, but anyone could see that it wasn't out of happiness. Kim Go-hyuk was visibly annoyed.

It felt like seeing someone uproot a steadily growing tree and fill the hole with dog dung instead.

No, it was even dirtier than that.

“Ah... shit... that was really f**king stupid.”

Kim Go-hyuk walked up to Min Ha-rin before looking down at her.

Despite the pain, Min Ha-rin still glared fiercely at him.

If this were any other time, seeing such a gaze would have filled him with joy. He might have even derived some pleasure from it.

But not anymore. Kim Go-hyuk wasn't interested in broken toys.

Paak!

Min Ha-rin's face suddenly turned to the side. He'd kicked her in the face.

He hadn't put his full strength into it. Considering Kim Go-hyuk's power, this could have been considered a light slap.

If he had wanted to, Min Ha-rin's head would have been torn off and sent flying like a football.

This was simply to vent his anger.

However, the pain was so sharp that she lost consciousness for a moment. Min Ha-rin's lip was torn and bleeding.

Kim Go-hyuk clicked his tongue before grabbing her by the hair and slamming her head to the ground.

Paak!

"Seriously. You just did what you wanted without even trying to hide it. Who the hell do you think you are? What made you abandon the way of the sword? Huh?"

Min Ha-rin's face looked terrible, but her voice was still firm when she spoke.

"It was... my choice."

She spat out some blood before continuing.

"You have no right to intervene."

This wasn't what Kim Go-hyuk wanted to hear. But it seemed that no matter what she said in this situation, he wouldn't get what he wanted.

He smiled.

“You talk really well despite your appearance. If I had a mirror, I’d love to show you.”

He picked her up again.

Then he kicked her in the stomach.

“Kuk.”

“Where’s the White Flower I remember? It would have been better if you drank nonstop for an entire month than do this. Look at this. You don’t even have abs anymore...”

Paak!

He kicked her again. This time, he added more strength.

“Gah!”

Min Ha-rin’s eyes rolled upwards.

This was a natural reaction when getting kicked in the stomach with military boots. Especially when considering the fact that Kim Go-hyuk was a superhuman being with great experience when it came to violence.

For a moment, she couldn't breathe. It felt like her guts were trying to climb through her throat.

'This is danger-... ous...'

She'd almost lost consciousness.

Min Ha-rin coughed up another mouthful of blood.

"That shock went directly to your intestines."

Kim Go-hyuk was genuinely sad.

He couldn't believe that his junior, who was growing up so well, had fallen so far.

His heart hurt so much that he could barely even look at her.

"Magic is garbage."

Kim Go-hyuk spoke in a tone as though it was obvious.

Despite the pain, Min Ha-rin raised her head and glared at him.

“Statistically speaking, it’s the truth. Are there any Wizards in the Top Three Demon Hunters? No. Has a Wizard ever succeeded in defeating a high-ranking Demon Noble alone? No. The role of Wizards is just to stay at the back, as support. That’s all.”

That was all Wizards were.

Of course, you could only choose that path if you had the right aptitude.

But Min Ha-rin was talented. She had the potential to reach or even surpass him in the future.

And yet, this stupid girl had torn that potential apart with her own hands.

How could he not be upset?

“In the end, I guess there are only two people in this room worth sparing.”

After saying that, Kim Go-hyuk turned his head to the duel grounds before clicking his tongue.

“No. He’s dead too.”

A man was standing there. He was covered in blood, as if all the blood in his body had been drained.

Gerard appeared to have died standing because of the sheer willpower in his body.

“Haa.”

He sighed deeply.

Sssng.

Kim Go-hyuk drew his dagger. Now that he was done venting his anger, he had no reason to keep her alive.

Just as he was about to approach Min Ha-rin and end her life.

“...!!”

Kim Go-hyuk hastily retreated.

Fwoosh!!

An enormous Fireball passed through the spot he'd just been standing.

With a glance, he realised that it was a spell.

‘What the hell is this output?’

If he had remained in that spot, he would have been burnt to ashes. He turned to where the fireball had come from.

But there was no one there.

Bang!

In the next moment, Kim Go-hyuk avoided ‘some kind of attack’ with a transfer technique.

The reason he called it ‘some kind of attack’ was because he knew he was being attacked, but he couldn’t tell exactly what the attack was.

But he knew one thing for certain.

If he’d remained in that spot, he would have been dead.

“...aigoo. When did you arrive?”

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Kim Go-hyuk's lips curled upwards.

A blonde-haired man was standing in front of Min Ha-rin.

It was the man he'd passed in the hallway before. It was Lukas.

"That man..."

"Hmm."

The Asian hunters who had been fighting, no, slaughtering the European hunters until now all gathered around Kim Go-hyuk when Lukas appeared.

They had all seen the spell just now. And they realised that Lukas was a formidable being.

'This guy.'

Sssk.

Kim Go-hyuk licked his lips as he looked at Lukas.

This was the first time he was getting a proper look at him.

He had light blonde hair and a skinny build. More importantly, he didn't have any special aura at all.

If he saw him on the street, he would walk right past him without giving him a second glance.

That was why he felt slightly apprehensive.

The fire spell and the 'unknown attack,' which he had just narrowly escaped from, had come from this seemingly 'ordinary' man.

"What about Otsuru?"

"Dead."

"Hoh."

Kim Go-hyuk let out a soft exclamation. It seemed that their prediction that he wouldn't kill humans was wrong.

However, this didn't mean they didn't stand a chance.

Nodiesop had told them that Lukas was strong, but he couldn't use his full power. And that he was a Wizard.

Only magic at 6 stars or above could truly threaten Kim Go-hyuk. However, 6 star spells and above usually had a large range.

There were still a few living European Hunters, so he wouldn't use such spells easily.

This was proven by the fact that Kim Go-hyuk had been able to avoid Lukas' two attacks.

"Mas-...ter..."

Gasping for breath, Min Ha-rin called out to Lukas, relief clear in her eyes.

Kim Go-hyuk sneered.

"Master? Aha. So you were the one who cut off the White Flower's path. What the hell were you thinking? Even if she didn't receive any guidance, she wouldn't have any troubles reaching Lee Jong-hak's level, but she was trampled on before she could even bloom."

"..."

"Well. As the President said, you are an amazing guy, but you make the wrong choi-"

Shuk.

Kim Go-hyuk twisted his body, but he was still unable to avoid it.

Crack.

He clenched his teeth tightly. He felt intense pain. But more than the pain, he felt surprise.

Tuk.

His right arm fell to the ground, and blood spurted from the cross section of his severed arm.

“What the-?!”

“What’s going on...?!”

The hunters behind him exclaimed in shock. None of them had been able to see Lukas’ attack.

“Kim Go-hyuk. You’re an amazing human.”

“Haha. Why do you say that? Were you trying to kill me with that attack?”

Kim Go-hyuk forced himself to sneer and bluff. But contrary to his expression, his back was covered in cold sweat.

“If I wanted to kill you, you’d already be dead.”

“What?”

“When I look at you, it makes me want to forget my original obligations and let myself get carried away by childish emotions.”

Kim Go-hyuk’s expression hardened. He finally realised the meaning behind Lukas’ words.

“You bastard. Do you see me as some kind of rat?”

Lukas didn’t pay any attention to him as he looked down at Min Ha-rin. She had injuries all over her body as well as signs of one-sided assault while she was defenseless.

“I don’t think it’s time for you to care about your disciples. Don’t think you’ve won just because you cut off an ar-.”

Shuk.

“Kuak...”

This time, the pain was too severe for him to suppress.

His right leg had been cut off neatly at the base of his thigh. Losing his balance, Kim Go-hyuk was forced to fall onto the floor.

He glared up at Lukas with bloodshot eyes.

“You f**king bastard...! Who the hell do you think you are?”

Lukas looked down at him and spoke softly.

“I’m angry.”

* * *

Kim Go-hyuk was unable to fight. After losing an arm and a leg, even standing was difficult.

Even humans with superhuman capabilities like them were no exception. Now, his strength was less than a tenth of what it was.

Jong Ho’s judgement was quick. He gave a brief command to one of the hunters.

“Stop Kim Go-hyuk’s bleeding.”

“Yes.”

He drew his sword.

The Plum Blossom Sword Method was the representative sword technique of Mount Hua. So naturally, Jong Ho had also learned the Plum Blossom Sword Method.

Twenty four, fourteen, seven. He had mastered three techniques in the method.

This was natural. After all, he’d devoted his entire life to learning the Plum Blossom Sword Method. He didn’t think he would lose to anyone else.

Sss-

Jong Ho’s sword shook.

The first question was which method would be the most effective. But the answer to this question came easily.

The Phantom Sword, one of the best techniques of the Plum Blossom Sword Method.

His sword flashed dangerously like a flickering candle flame.

The distance between Lukas and him was five steps.

In other words, he was within the range of the Phantom Sword.

Sss.

The flickering gradually became faster. It fluctuated as though it had been struck by a fierce wind.

Following these movements, the sword began to appear as though it had multiplied.

It was meant to confuse Lukas' eyes as though the blade was a flower in full bloom.

No.

He had to make it confusing.

Juk.

"..."

Cold sweat dripped down Jong Ho's wrinkled face.

The sword shadow multiplied continuously. Dozens of afterimages were created by the Phantom Sword, and each one appeared real and unreal at the same time.

And within these illusions, the real sword lay in wait.

But the sword didn't move. No, it couldn't move.

The reason for this was simple.

He couldn't see any openings.

There was an easy way to tell if the Phantom Sword worked or not.

And that was by looking into your opponent's eyes. If their eyes were a little hazy, Jong Ho would know that they had been entrapped. And in the best case scenario, they would even stumble as if they were hypnotised.

But Lukas was different.

'It has no effect at all.'

He bit his lip.

Even though he was experiencing this scene for himself, he couldn't help but feel disbelief.

This was something that not even President Cha Gung-hwan or the Human Dragon Lee Jong-hak were capable of.

Lukas' gaze was locked onto the tip of his sword. This showed that this man didn't know how to deal with the Phantom Sword.

In truth, this was not surprising. It was natural for a Wizard to not know about sword techniques.

And if they knew nothing about the Plum Blossom Sword Method, they would naturally pay attention to the tip of his sword. It was usually the wisest choice when going against a sword technique for the first time.

Therefore, those who experienced this technique for the first time would naturally fall into the swamp of phantom swords.

And even if they belatedly realised that something was wrong, they would already have trouble seeing through the illusion.

But Lukas was different.

He didn't use any tricks, and it was clear that he was looking at the tip of the sword.

Nevertheless, his eyes remained cold enough to send chills down his spine. Anyone could tell.

Lukas' mind was still firm and stable.

'It's like...'

It felt like his technique had been used on a rock or a lake instead of a human.

He was afraid of that.

Jong Ho retracted his sword. Since it was clear it didn't work, there was no reason to continue exhausting his ki to use the Phantom Sword.

He kicked off the ground as a flash of light flowed from his sword.

It was the 4th step of the Plum Blossom Sword Method's Seventh technique.

Shadow of the Plum Blossom in a Chaotic Era. (TL:...)

Clang!

“Kuk!”

He wasn't given a chance to execute it.

Jong Ho felt a burning pain in his side as he was sent flying. He seemed to see yellow because of the impact that felt like being hit by a truck.

The power of Hyper Bolt was considered weak among 6 star spells, but it was a different story if it hit a vital spot. Above all, Jong Ho had not taken any defensive measures because he didn't even notice the spell's approach.

“Huk...!”

“Pro-, protect the Sword Saint!”

The hunters moved in unison to protect Jong Ho.

Some of them rushed towards Lukas. Jong Ho's eyes darkened when he saw this.

‘Y-, you can't...’

You can't defeat him.

Jong Ho wanted to shout these words, but he was still not able to control his body due to the shock he felt.

Woosh!

A terribly cold air that brought a chill to one's bones suddenly swept across the room, and the five hunters who'd rushed towards Lukas froze in place.

Crack!

Then blades of wind shattered their bodies.

"Huh...?"

"Wh-, what just happened?"

They were all hunters who had at least 10 years of experience.

They were veterans who had experienced everything, and there were even a few among them who had slain high-ranking nobles.

None of them would have thought that at that moment, they would die so vainly. Without being able to do anything, they became powder without even knowing how they died.

“This... doesn’t make sense...”

One of the hunters muttered in a terrified voice.

That was probably the reaction of everyone who saw that scene.

But there was one person who was different.

“You used some kind of strange sorcery.”

The Hwarang Leader, who had been silent before, spoke to Lukas while removing the sword from his back.

“Did it look like sorcery?”

“That’s the only way you would have been able to defeat Kim Go-hyuk and Elder Sword Saint so quickly. As expected. At first, I was still unconvinced, but now, you’ve finally revealed the truth of your nature. You really are a Demon.”

The Hwarang Leader sneered.

“But that won’t work against me. Because sorcery won’t work in front of my Hwandudaedo(1).”

Season 2 Chapter 44

Bang!

The Hwarang Leader shot towards Lukas like a cannonball, the force of his charge so strong that it caused the floor of the Duel Room to shake heavily. Ki oozed from his body.

He was the most domineering hunter.

People often referred to the Hwarang Leader as a human tank. This was because he wielded a hwandudaedo the size of his body and left nothing but blood and meat paste in the places he passed through.

His Hwandudaedo was engraved with special symbols that nullified magic, demonic energy, and other supernatural forces and converted them into his own ki.

If a large amount of energy was converted, it was impossible to estimate just how powerful he could become.

Clang!

“...!”

The Hwarang Leader's expression hardened.

His hwandudaedo stopped a short distance away from Lukas, unable to move further. It was as though an invisible wall was blocking his hwandudaedo. His wrist also throbbed as though he'd struck a large piece of iron.

'What strength...'

With his power, even a lump of steel would be split in half. In other words, the invisible wall in front of Lukas was harder than steel.

His eyes met Lukas' indifferent gaze.

"Kuk."

The Hwarang Leader had never felt so humiliated in his life.

His muscles swelled explosively.

"Hup!"

Then he swung his hwandudaedo again.

This time, he unleashed consecutive attacks.

Even if he couldn't see it, he was sure that it would crack if he focused on the same spot.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

...How many?

How many times had he hit it?

The Hwarang leader couldn't help but ask himself this question. He'd probably hit the wall more than a dozen times, but it was still blocking him.

There didn't seem to be any change at all. So he couldn't tell if it was working or not.

"This... Dammit!"

"Stand back, Hwarang Leader."

Army Nun, Geum Ryeo-hwa*, murmured as she stepped forward. White light shone from her eyes. (TL: I've never encountered a name like this before, so apologies if it sounds strange. Also if you have any suggestions on what it might be, please do tell me in the comments.)

God's Eye. It was for this reason that she was called a Nun. She observed Lukas with this innate, magical power.

'...a Demon?'

Was this man really a Demon?

She wasn't just judging by his appearance. She could also not find any traces of demonic energy in his body.

What she did find was an immense amount of mana... and...

'He's the same as Nodiesop...'

Her instincts caused Geum Ryeo-hwa to stop that line of thought.

Then, she bit her lip and said.

"He's not using sorcery."

"Then what is it?"

"A spell."

“What?”

Geum Ryeo-hwa continued.

“It’s just a magic barrier.”

“Bullshit!”

The Hwarang Leader shouted in disbelief. Barrier was a 4 star spell at best.

He refused to believe that he and his hwandudaedo could not break through a simple 4 star spell.

“No, Geum Ryeo-hwa is right.”

Jong Ho muttered as he forced himself to sit up.

He didn’t know how, but he was certain that this man was a Wizard.

Kim Go-hyuk had a very cynical view towards Wizards, and while Jong Ho wasn’t that extreme, he also didn’t think much of Wizards.

The stronger a warrior was, the more likely they would have his thought.

Wizards were rare talents whose power was indispensable for humanity. This was a fact that couldn't be denied.

However, they were extremely vulnerable to direct combat and could not play a decisive role in battle against high-ranking nobles.

In the first place, the powers the Demons used were very similar to magic. But they were able to use power much stronger than magic without much of a cost.

Statistics, history, and Jong Ho's own experience told him that.

But Lukas' appearance had shattered every concept he'd formed in his mind.

They weren't fit for close combat? There was a limit to the things they could do? Their power was worse than the power used by the Demons?

Was there anyone who dared to say those words while looking at Lukas?

Jong Ho couldn't even begin to guess how powerful Lukas was. But he knew that the threat of death he was sensing was heavy.

Even if a Duke was standing in front of him, he wouldn't feel so helpless.

'Kuk...!'

Jong Ho bit down on his tongue. He forcefully restrained his will, which was about to be broken.

Suddenly.

"D-, don't move!"

One of the Sword Saint's disciples shouted in a frightened voice. He was also a member of Mount Hua and had displayed tremendous talent from a young age.

However, Jong Ho's expression became harder than stone when he turned to look at his disciple.

The frightened disciple was holding an unconscious European hunter in his hand.

"If you move, I'll kill him!"

Jong Ho clenched his fist so hard that blood seeped past his fingers.

He'd been restraining himself ever since they came to the European hunters.

When fighting Nina, when killing their own kind, and even when Kim Go-hyuk wantonly slaughtered everyone he saw for pleasure.

But he could not hold himself back anymore.

This was simply the act of throwing away the last morals he had and truly becoming trash.

“What the hell are you doing-?!”

Jong Ho’s voice cracked as he roared.

“Ma-, Master?”

He stumbled towards his disciple, who stared at him in surprise, and hit him on the back of his head with the hilt of his sword, knocking him out. The disciple fainted to the ground immediately, never expecting that his Master would strike him.

“Huk... huk...!”

He felt Lukas’ gaze turn to him.

Catching his breath, Jong Ho spoke desperately.

“...we can't defeat you. But we also had our own circumstances. I hope you can understand we didn't have a choice.

As he said this, Jong Ho smiled defeatedly.

'If you go... you'll die...'

Jong Ho remembered the words of one of his old friends, Bow God Na Jong-cheol. Even when his mind and body had been severely weakened by continuous torture, he said those words with sincerity.

At first, he hadn't believed a word he'd said. He thought that Na Jong-cheol had simply been tricked by the Demon.

So he decided to come and see for himself.

And now that he could see him face to face, he realised. Lukas wasn't a Demon.

But he wasn't a human either.

“Senior, it's too early to give up. If we all work together, we still have a chance of winning.”

Hearing the despair in Jong Ho's voice, the Hwarang Leader hefted his sword and spoke with determination. His attitude wasn't wrong, but it simply made Jong Ho's mind feel heavier.

There were some opponents who could have been overcome by youthful vigor, and there were some who couldn't be overcome at all.

Lukas was the latter. And the reason for that was simple. The difference in power was too severe.

That's why he was confused.

'Why is he still keeping us alive?'

If he wanted to, he could kill all of them within a heartbeat.

"I have no intention of killing you."

Jong Ho flinched.

Although he knew it was unlikely, he couldn't help but feel that Lukas had read his thoughts.

"...what did you say?"

"Lay down swords and go back to where you came from."

"Why are you letting us go?"

“Because I made a deal.”

“By deal...”

Jong Ho’s expression suddenly distorted.

“...you mean with our President?”

Lukas nodded.

“...”

Jong Ho’s head felt light at that moment. Only then did he realise what their role was.

They were simply bugs in a battle between unbelievably powerful existences. Simply chess pieces on a board whose life and death depended on the movement of their fingers.

That was all that they were.

He felt miserable.

Lukas looked at Jong Ho, who had lowered his head slowly in realisation.

“The reason I’m not killing you isn’t because of the deal.”

“...what are you talking about?”

Then, Jong Ho heard a voice in his head.

[I’m sparing you because you spared Nina. That is all.]

Season 2 Chapter 45

Jong Ho remained silent, but countless thoughts flowed through his head.

“He was sparing me? In return for sparing Nina?”

President Nina Rednikova.

It was correct that Jong Ho had spared her. However, he hadn’t done so with good intentions in mind.

He just thought that Nina would be worth more as a hostage. So he persuaded Kim Go-hyuk to not kill her.

If they used Nina's life to threaten and subdue them, it would be easier to take over the European Branch with fewer casualties.

Did this man not know that? Or was he saying that despite knowing that?

"..."

Jong Ho didn't continue thinking about it. Instead, he suddenly looked around for some reason.

Just a few moments ago, Lukas killed five hunters. He didn't even leave them proper corpses. Instead, their bodies shattered into pieces of ice, which were scattered across the floor.

The sight had been so terrifying that he had subconsciously believed he would die in a similar manner.

What about Kim Go-hyuk? The Heavenly Dragon had fallen from the sky and now had to crawl on the ground.

He stared at Lukas with a crazed smile, but Jong Ho could tell that it was false bravado.

He'd stopped bleeding, but he'd lost too much blood. His injuries were so serious that it wouldn't be strange if he fainted or died at any moment.

Jong Ho suddenly had a thought.

“...what about the rest of them?”

“You are the only human in your group.”

“What does that mean?”

Lukas spoke with a cold voice.

“It means you are the only one I will spare.”

“What did you say?!”

“Kuk...!”

The remaining hunters burst into an uproar at those words. Jong Ho, on the other hand, bit his lip hard.

It appeared that they still hadn't realised the difference between them. That man just had to move a finger, and they would all die.

In a way, he envied their ignorance.

Jong Ho closed his eyes for a moment. It wasn't something one should do when there was an enemy standing in front of one, but it wouldn't make a difference.

He already understood that he couldn't avoid any attacks whether his eyes were open or closed.

He didn't have to think for long.

When he reopened his eyes, Jong Ho's heart and mind had calmed down once again.

"I refuse."

"I see."

Lukas glanced at this man, who willingly threw away his only chance at survival.

In truth, he wasn't surprised. To put it bluntly, he'd expected Jong Ho to make such a choice. And in all honesty, it didn't feel good to give him the choice despite knowing that.

After all, it made Lukas appear no different from Nodiesop. From Jong Ho's perspective, he might even be considered a hypocrite.

Nevertheless, Lukas respected his choice.

"Farewell."

With that word, everything ended.

All the chaos, fighting, and conflict that engulfed the underground base disappeared in an instant.

Instead, pure white light covered the Duel Room, the floor they were on, and the entire European Headquarters.

“...”

Min Ha-rin blinked, not understanding what was happening.

The light only lasted for a brief moment, and when it disappeared, the Asian Hunters were gone.

“Ah...”

“What the hell is...”

The surviving European hunters naturally turned to look at each other with blank expressions on their faces before gathering together.

Then, they looked at Lukas, their eyes filled with a mixture of awe and fear.

Ignoring their gazes, Lukas walked over to Min Ha-rin and examined her injuries.

“Can you stand?”

Min Ha-rin forced herself to stand up. Her body still throbbed from the pain, but she had the energy to at least stand up.

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

Lukas nodded slightly before his gaze turned to Leo, who, in his unconsciousness, didn't know anything that was going on.

It seemed that the time had come for him to leave the European Branch Headquarters.

But before that, there were still some things for him to do.

* * *

The damage to the European Headquarters was severe, but the worst of the damage was to the humans.

The total number of casualties reached 2,000, and among them, more than 500 people were killed, with a similar number being seriously injured or completely unable to recover. The rest of the population also suffered large or small injuries.

The key figures in the European Headquarters were the ones who suffered the most severe damage.

They were all Titled Hunters. And their influence wasn't limited to external force. This was especially so after considering that there weren't many Titled Hunters in Europe in the first place.

The more famous a hunter was, the more followers they had. Because in this hopeless world, people wanted something they could depend on. And strength was the most effective method to attract them.

When Lee Jong-hak went missing in the past, thousands of people who followed him wondered whether they should move to a different region or not.

Now, the famous hunters of the European Headquarters had been reduced to three.

Nina, the President, Ludwig, the Vice President, and Nicholas, the head of the Knights.

Ludwig and Nicholas had received permanent injuries. Their danjeons had been destroyed, meaning they could no longer hold ki, and their tendons in both arms were severed.

Even if they recovered, they would never be able to fight as they once did.

But the one who suffered the most was the President, Nina Rednikova.

To put it simply, she was barely alive.

“ ... ”

A Catholic Archbishop and multiple doctors came out of the hospital room with solemn expressions on their faces.

The hunters who were waiting outside immediately surrounded them.

“Ho-, how is the President’s condition?”

“ ... ”

The Archbishop sighed.

“Death was averted. She will have no problems surviving, but... I’m afraid the aftereffects will remain.”

“Aftereffects?”

“Her eyeballs were directly cut out. And it seems that they used a cursed weapon because my divine power can’t heal it.”

“Ah...”

“Oh, my God...”

The hunters collectively collapsed at those words. Some even began sobbing.

The Archbishop looked at them sorrowfully. To be honest, Nina’s injuries were much more severe than he made them seem, but now wasn’t a good time to talk about that.

Nina Rednikova.

The influence that her charisma had across Europe was unimaginable. Because of her, the Head of the Iron Blood Division, countless hunters decided to come to Europe.

And yet, such a European treasure had been irreparably damaged. For a hunter, losing their sight was the worst possible injury.

Nina would not be able to fight bravely or lead hunters on the frontline ever again.

And only they could understand the helplessness and despair this fact would cause European hunters to feel.

“...”

Lukas went into the room with Nina.

Seeing this, the Archbishop hesitated for a moment, wondering if he should stop him. But in the end, he shook his head.

He knew that this man had saved their headquarters using great magic.

When Lukas opened the door and stepped into the room, he saw Nina sitting on the bed with bandages around her eyes.

“Nina.”

“...Master?”

Nina’s voice shook.

Lukas sat on a chair in front of her.

“Yeah. It’s me.”

As he responded, he inspected her body.

Most of her injuries had been healed thanks to the Archbishop's divine power, but there were some injuries that couldn't be healed.

One of them was her eyesight.

'However...'

There were countless other wounds on her body.

Nina was silent for a moment before suddenly speaking in a bright voice.

"Kim Go-hyuk was definitely strong. I thought he was just strong for his age, but that wasn't the case. Aside from him were the Sword Saint, Army Nun, and Hwarang Leader... none of them were easy to deal with."

She chuckled.

"But I'm glad you saved us. Nicholas and Ludwig also seem to have survived, and the damage to the European Branch is serious. But when I get out of bed, I'll be right-"

"Do you really think that?"

Lukas asked, interrupting her.

Nina fell silent. Then her head slowly lowered.

“...why do we fight each other?”

When she finally spoke again, complex emotions could be heard in her voice.

“This isn’t the time. We’re in such a desperate situation that it’s hard to see the end even when we put all our energy into it. So why are we still fighting ourselves?”

Since the advent of the Demons, humanity had united as one.

At least, that’s what most hunters thought.

However, those who held high positions, like Nina, could see the truth.

Even in such a situation, humanity failed to unite.

Humans still pressured or opposed each other. The fact that catastrophic beings like the Demons had appeared hadn’t changed that fact.

Europe resented Asia for treating them like shields. Asia tried to think of a way to escape North America's influence. Oceania* was not interested in anything but their own survival. Africa had become a land of death that suffered the most damage. And North America watched the situation of the world from their safe haven. (TL: Oceania is a geographic region that includes Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia)

Most of the large and small disputes had disappeared, but in their stead, other disputes had become much larger than before.

"Master told me. Humans are the most beautiful beings in the universe. The only ones capable of accepting or overcoming the poison of evil. That the more desperate the situation became, the more strongly we would bond together and unite..."

Nina's voice shook, and it felt like she was about to cry.

"...I thought so too... I believed you... But... But..."

Finally, it seemed that she was unable to contain herself as she began sobbing.

"I can't now. I used to only see the good side, and I felt great pride to be human. But I've finally seen the bad side that I was trying to ignore."

A human like Kim Go-hyuk had appeared, as if testing Nina's will.

His mindset and actions caused Nina to wonder if he was even a human like she was.

Of course, the underlying cause of all of this was Nodiesop. It was this man, who had forcefully taken over the position as head of the East Asia Branch, who incited the Asian hunters.

But Kim Go-hyuk didn't need incitement.

Nodiesop gave them an option and an opportunity.

Die as humans. Or abandon the humans.

And Kim Go-hyuk laughed happily while choosing the latter. He showed his true nature without hesitation, as though he was waiting for such a chance to come.

It was impossible for her to know just how much blood he'd shed.

No one had told Nina about how much damage the European Headquarters had suffered. But she knew instinctively.

She knew that the damage was so severe that it was probably impossible to recover from.

Hundreds of people had died and thousands were injured.

Not at the hand of Demons but their own kind...

“Master, I know I shouldn’t, but I... Right now...”

The bandages around Nina’s eyes had become wet. She shed tears of blood as she poured out her true feelings to her Master.

“...I hate humans more than the Demons.”

Season 2 Chapter 46

Nina cried for a long time before falling asleep.

The Archbishop, who returned to see this, blamed Lukas. Because he had stimulated the patient in a time when her mental stability was the top priority.

After apologising to the Archbishop, Lukas returned to his room.

“...”

He hadn’t comforted Nina.

He was the reason those hunters invaded the European Hunters. And as a result, he was responsible for the tragedy that happened here.

...God had suddenly appeared at that time.

If he hadn't followed him, he might have been able to minimise the damage. At least he would have been able to prevent many of the casualties.

'No.'

Nodiesop's operation was also hampered by God's appearance. He didn't care about the devastation caused or the deaths of thousands of humans.

All he cared about was Lukas.

Don't be burdened by those you couldn't save.

Such an argument burdened his mind and ate away at his belief. He knew that, but he couldn't stop his heart from feeling heavier.

Lukas forced himself to think about something else.

In any case, the European Headquarters was currently in a very precarious situation. In its condition, it would not survive a second attack by the Asian Branch.

It might have been greatly damaged in their assault, but the Asian Branch was at least ten times larger than Europe.

That wasn't all.

Because of this attack, the European Headquarters had lost the deterrent factor to control the Demons in the surrounding area.

'The supplies from Asia will be cut off.'

That would be another fatal blow.

Europe was used to receiving a lot of support from Asia. If that support was suddenly cut off, most of the resources in the branches across Europe would soon be exhausted.

Most of the land in Europe was already dead.

And there was a limit to how much one could sustain oneself on dead land. In less than a year, most of the hunters in Europe would move to other regions.

Then the protection in Europe would naturally become lax, and soon afterwards, the Demons would be able to easily take over the territory.

Humanity would once again lose a vast territory.

But now, there was only one region in the world that Europe could trust and ask for support.

North America.

And in order to receive that support, he would have to persuade one man.

Neil Prand.

He was the President of the North American branch, which was the strongest force in the world as well as the current President of the Hunters Association.

His influence spread beyond the Hunters Association and reached the entirety of the human race.

He was also a man who was associated with Lukas. In fact, he was the first human Lukas saved after coming to this world.

Neil's transformation power was far greater than that of the Human Dragon Lee Jong-hak, Bow God Na Jong-cheol, or Min Ha-rin.

It could be said that his power was one that appeared every hundred... No, every thousand years.

He was a person who was destined to change the fate of mankind.

Lukas had tried to make him his first disciple, before Min Ha-rin, but he'd failed.

Because Neil had one big problem that he could never fix.

* * *

The blood hadn't been completely cleaned from the hallways. But this was to be expected as it had only been a day since the attack.

Lukas headed to the communication room.

The communication room, control room, and portal management room could be said to be the three most important rooms in the entire base. So naturally, when the Asian hunters launched their attack, they took control of these rooms first.

"You..."

Matthew Costa, who was organising the communication room, couldn't help but pause slightly when he saw Lukas enter.

He had been the referee in Leo and Gerard's duel, and he had fought fiercely against the Asian hunters who showed up afterward.

So naturally, he'd seen Lukas, who appeared just before he thought he would die, easily take care of the situation.

Therefore, Matthew's feelings towards Lukas were very complicated.

He'd heard many rumors about who this man might be. Some said he was a secret executive of the Hunters Association, some said he was the President's relative, and some even said that he was the mysterious Vice President. There were many rumors.

Of course, even now that Lukas had showcased his strength, his true identity remained a mystery.

They didn't know how to treat him.

Many of the hunters in the European Headquarters blamed Lukas. The Asian hunters had attacked their branch looking for a man named Lukas. And that's how they came to know that he was the reason for the attack.

Matthew was rational. He thought that Lukas might be the reason, but the real instigator of this event was the Asia Branch's new President.

But he didn't reveal these thoughts to anyone.

The European hunters needed an outlet to vent their anger and frustration. So in a sense, Lukas was a good scapegoat.

They hadn't overstepped any boundaries yet, but it was clear that it would gradually get worse even if they were only talking behind his back for now.

However, it was not possible to stop the flow of this tide. Because he couldn't tell just what the hunters would do.

In fact, some of the hunters in the communication room were looking at Lukas with fierce gazes.

Matthew coughed.

Among those present, he held the highest position.

"What are you doing here?"

"I would like to communicate with North America."

"...mm."

Matthew couldn't help but frown at those words.

This wasn't to say that it was impossible. After all, the branches around the world had naturally established communication lines between themselves.

The problem was that North America had never had a good relationship with Europe. This was because during the conflict between Asia and North America in the past, Europe chose Asia.

This was a choice that Europe couldn't help but make. Because there was more certainty of being protected by the neighbouring Asia than by North America, which was across the ocean.

'But there is a high chance that the request will be ignored...'

Lukas had a close relationship with President Nina, so it was possible that he also had connections in the North America branch. And if he did, it would be of tremendous help in the current situation.

"They won't refuse. As long as you send them the password I tell you."

"By password..."

"Frey Blake."

"..."

Frey... Blake?

Matthew tilted his head to the side in confusion, but Lukas' expression remained unchanged.

Seeing that he gave it out without hesitation, it might be a one-time use password.

After thinking about it for a while, Matthew finally decided to do as he wished.

Chichichi-

A noise sounded from the hologram desk which sat in the center of the communication room. And for a while, it was the only sound that could be heard.

“Ha.”

“Pretending to be a bigshot...”

Some hunters laughed outright.

Matthew turned to look at Lukas with an embarrassed expression.

This was because their voices were clearly audible to everyone in the room. But Lukas' expression remained unchanged.

‘If they haven’t responded after so long, there is a high chance that they chose to ignore it...’

Just as Matthew was about to turn off the hologram desk.

Paht-

“...!”

The screen brightened.

And the face that appeared stunned Matthew as well as every other hunter in the communication room.

“Hu-. huk.”

“Th-, that person...”

It was a man with an amazing physique. He was wearing a black suit that looked like it would rip if he flexed his muscles even a little. He was a man who seemed to contain unlimited power within his body.

His short blonde hair and cold blue eyes gave everyone who saw him a glimpse at his personality.

It was Neil Prand, President of the Hunters Association.

The man who stood at the pinnacle of millions of hunters looked at Lukas for a moment before speaking.

[Should I say it's been a long time?]

“...”

He knew him?

Looking at President Neil's expression made Matthew's already complicated feelings even more complex.

He thought that at best, it would be a Branch Head or even just the Head of Communications at a random branch. He never would have expected it to be a direct line to President Neil.

Matthew shuddered.

What kind of person was this man in the hologram?

He was the most powerful man in the world. The former President of the United States wouldn't have as much power as Neil currently possessed.

Even Cha Gung-hwan, the Asian President, and Nina, the European President, were mere fireflies before the sun when compared to Neil's power and influence.

Their position in the association might have only differed by two or three levels, but the difference in their individual powers was unsurmountable.

Just as Matthew wondered if he should leave the room for a while, Lukas spoke.

“There is something I want to talk to you about.”

[...How surprising. I would have thought you never wanted to see my face ever again.]

He muttered with an expression that looked anything but surprised before nodding.

[Fine. I will leave the portal open for two days.]

Tuk-

With those words, the communication ended.

‘Is he asking me to come over directly?’

Lukas frowned slightly.

The current situation was so critical that even a single day couldn't be wasted. It would have been better to talk and negotiate through the communications room, but if he wanted to talk face to face, then he had no choice but to comply.

After all, this was urgent.

"Yo-, you..."

Meanwhile, Matthew couldn't help but stutter as he looked at the man standing beside him.

"...who the hell are you?"

Season 2 Chapter 47

Leo lay on a hospital bed while staring blankly at the ceiling.

The last thing he remembered was his fight against Gerard. It had probably been the most painful and desperate fight he'd ever had.

But in the end, he won. It was Leo who won in the end. The moment Gerard admitted defeat, that fact became set in stone.

With the great joy and satisfaction that came with victory, Leo lost consciousness.

...And when he opened his eyes again, Gerard was dead.

“...”

When he first heard it, his entire face had become pale.

Did he kill him? No, that was impossible.

Unlike Leo, who fainted, only Gerard’s sword had been broken. His body was in a much better condition.

In addition, Gerard looked different from how he had when he fell unconscious. His entire body was covered in blood, and there were numerous knives embedded in his body.

He had died from excessive blood loss, and he’d died standing. But what truly confused Leo was where Gerard was standing.

He had his back towards him as though he was protecting him and died facing an enemy who had probably stood in front of him.

Afterward, Min Ha-rin filled him in on what happened.

She told him that Asian hunters attacked the base. As a result, the key figures in the European Headquarters were either killed or severely wounded, and the damage done to the base was irreparable.

“...”

Too many things had happened. And in all honesty, he still wasn't sure how to feel.

Just as Leo sighed for the umpteenth time, he heard a knock on the door.

“Yeah.”

After giving a brief response, the door opened and the first thing he saw was glossy black hair.

It was Min Ha-rin.

When she entered the room and saw Leo, she smiled softly.

“Hey, Junior Brother.”

“Hey, Senior Sister.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Fine.”

“I’m glad.”

Min Ha-rin sat on a chair beside the bed and silence fell in the room for a while.

“How is the situation in the headquarters right now?”

“Should I be honest?”

“Yeah.”

“...not very good.”

She sighed.

“The President, Vice President, and even the Head of the Knights Division. The three people who could be called the core of this base all suffered irrecoverable damage.”

“...I see.”

Min Ha-rin turned to look at Leo.

Unlike her, who had only been in Europe for a short period of time, Leo had grown up here. So it was natural for him to feel great sorrow and confusion.

“Master is going to North America today.”

“North America?”

“Yeah. I think he’s going to meet the President of the Association and discuss a way to deal with Asia.”

Leo nodded.

The attack by the Asian Branch was a treacherous action. And if North America was informed of their actions and promised their support, it might be possible to reverse this desperate situation.

“I will be going with him. I might not be in the best condition, but I think it would be a good learning experience. That’s why... I came to ask what Junior Brother would like to do.”

“If you allow me to, I’d like to join you.”

Leo expressed his opinion with a calm voice.

Then Min Ha-rin’s expression became serious.

“...you know why the Asian hunters attacked the European Headquarters, don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

They came looking for a man named Lukas.

According to them, Lukas was a high-ranking Demon Noble, Nina was a witch who was colluding with him in the dark, and everyone who sheltered him was evil.

From Nina’s perspective, this argument was so far-fetched that it wasn’t even funny.

“A few hunters seem to believe that claim.”

When Min Ha-rin said those words with a solemn voice, Leo spoke out with disbelief.

“That’s impossible. That rumour is just ridiculous. Master doesn’t even have the slightest hint of demonic energy in him. If they thought a bit more rationally, they’d realise-...”

“The situation can no longer be considered rational.”

Leo had no choice but to fall silent at those words.

The European hunters always risked their lives when they went out on missions. And because of its position on the frontline, the hunters in Europe tended to have a closer relationship than those in other regions.

Their colleagues and teammates were annihilated overnight, so it was natural for them to look for someone to blame.

However, the Asian hunters who attacked them were already dead.

So, naturally, their resentment fell to Lukas, who was thought to have attracted them in the first place.

“I won’t hide the fact that I’m Master’s disciple.”

“...!”

“It’s going to get harder. It’s going to get dangerous. And I might even die.”

Min Ha-rin rubbed her stomach. She had already been healed, but the pain of Kim Go-hyuk’s attack was seared in her mind.

“And there will probably be more misunderstandings like this one in the future. But if we want to help Master, then we’ll have to deal with similar... no, we might have to deal with even worse situations than this one. Leo, can you handle it?”

“Are you okay, Senior Sister?”

Min Ha-rin was surprised by Leo’s sudden question.

“Huh?”

“You might end up fighting the Asian hunters.”

“Haha.”

Min Ha-rin couldn't help but laugh.

This is because Leo's care for her really comforted her. She stroked Leo's hair gently, just like she did with her siblings.

“I'm fine.”

Min Ha-rin was probably the only person who'd seen Lukas' power up close.

She'd seen him kill a Demon Duke. So she knew that Lukas wasn't a Demon.

...No.

She didn't believe in Lukas just because of such a logical reason.

Lukas had taught her for a month.

Being taught by someone meant getting to know them. Because the way a person taught had a certain degree of subjectivity. And through his teaching, Min Ha-rin was able to get a glimpse of the type of person Lukas was.

Lukas wanted to save the humans. He wanted to save the humans more than anyone else.

And he was planning something huge in order to do that.

She didn't know what the exact plan was. However, she was convinced that it would benefit her, the hunters, and the entirety of the human race.

And Min Ha-rin wanted to help Lukas with his plan, even if it was just a little.

It was different from simply hunting the Demons or Demon Beasts. At that time, she simply swung her sword like a machine.

She didn't want to die. And in order to just see the sun rise on the next day, she killed the Demons. But she knew that her actions didn't have much of an effect on the bigger picture.

Could she change anything by simply killing a Demon Noble, a few dozen Demons, or Demon Beasts?

She couldn't.

Another noble, another Demon, or another Demon Beast would simply take their place.

Nevertheless, Min Ha-rin continued to do it.

Because she couldn't see the way or find the answer, she simply did the only thing she could think of.

But Lukas had shown her the way.

He was moving towards the ultimate goal not of driving out the Demons but of freeing the entirety of humankind from their misery.

She was truly happy and honoured to be able to join such a great cause.

Unlike before, when she simply killed Demons and Demon Beasts, she felt different. Her spirit was uplifted.

For Min Ha-rin, it was like she'd been reborn the moment she decided to step off the path of swordsmanship and become a Wizard.

Since then, her body and mind were constantly under tremendous pressure, but the heaviness in her heart had disappeared.

She felt free.

“I will continue following Master.”

“Me too.”

Leo looked up at Min Ha-rin as he spoke.

“I feel the same way as Senior Sister.”

“I know you can handle it.”

Min Ha-rin smiled as she stroked Leo’s hair once again. She was confident that Leo would walk a similar path to her.

Then, after a moment, she asked a question that had been bouncing around in her mind for a long while.

“By the way... What shampoo do you use?”

“I use soap.”

“Huk...”

Season 2 Chapter 48

Beijing, China.

There was a commotion in the city where the Asian Headquarters were located. And standing at the center of this commotion was a handsome man with a stern expression.

A man who had finally reappeared in this base after a few months.

“Le-, Lee Jong-hak!”

“The Human Dragon has returned...!”

The hunters grew excited as soon as they saw Lee Jong-hak. But Lee Jong-hak simply walked past them coldly.

Before, he might have even stopped and said hello to them for a moment, but now, he did not.

His expression was as hard as stone. He seemed so angry that he might explode at the smallest provocation.

Maybe it's because they noticed this, but those who went up to greet Lee Jong-hak stepped back and cleared the way for him.

Like this, Lee Jong-hak entered the base.

His firm, determined steps were leading him to a specific place.

At that moment, he remembered Kim Go-hyuk's words.

He'd asked him about Lukas, and Lee Jong-hak hadn't answered. Nevertheless, Kim Go-hyuk learned that Lukas was at the European Headquarters. And later, the Asian Hunters attacked the European Headquarters.

They had only given one reason.

'Lukas is a Demon?'

Lee Jong-hak clenched his fist.

He wasn't. Nina had told him what he'd done, and Lee Jong-hak also had his own ideas of what he might be.

He was neither human nor Demon.

His thoughts and hypocrisy were completely unacceptable to Lee Jong-hak, but it was undeniable that he'd helped mankind tremendously over the years.

That's why he couldn't believe it.

The dozens of hunters who'd gone to attack the European Headquarters were all dead.

Among them were the Sword Saint, Army Nun, Hwarang Leader, and, above all, the Heavenly Dragon, Kim Go-hyuk. The European hunters would not have been able to stop such a lineup.

It was obvious who killed them.

“...”

Lee Jong-hak stood in front of the President's office.

He'd already heard about what the man behind this door was like. So after taking a deep breath, he opened the door and stepped in.

“Nice to meet you.”

He didn't even knock. In a way, he was showing his displeasure.

Nevertheless, the man responded to Lee Jong-hak's appearance as though it was natural and expected.

He had bright blue hair, which was a color that didn't quite suit his western features, but his appearance seemed to have a strange balance.

This was the man who'd overthrown Cha Gung-hwan to become the President of the Asia Branch, Nodiesop.

And it was his first time seeing him in person.

"Are you the new President?"

"That's right."

Nodiesop nodded without pointing out the blatant lack of respect in Lee Jong-hak's tone. Instead, he looked at him with a gaze filled with interest.

"The Human Dragon, Lee Jong-hak. You truly are a human worthy of being called the greatest hero."

"..."

His words made Lee Jong-hak feel like a giant snake's tongue was licking his body. The man's eyes also seemed to shine with a mysterious, magical light.

Just looking at him caused Lee jong-hak's palms to become covered in sweat.

'He's different but similar to...'

However, Lukas was more...

"I know what you want."

Nodiesop's voice interrupted Lee Jong-hak's thoughts.

"Exterminating the Demons is not difficult for me. I have the power to completely erase them from existence."

This wasn't a lie.

Lee Jong-hak recalled the miraculous scene he'd witnessed in Germany. A stream of water that he'd sent from thousands of miles away had annihilated every Demon without injuring a single human with incredible precision.

It was literally the power of God.

Nodiesop smiled as he continued.

"Unlike Lukas, I'm no hypocrite. I will not hesitate to save all of you. I will even swear on my name. After I get rid of that man, I will destroy all of the Demons on this continent."

“...what do you want from me?”

Nodiesop’s answer was simple.

“Obey me.”

* * *

It was around 5pm when Min Ha-rin and Leo headed to the Portal Management Room. By then, all of their preparations had been completed.

They were scheduled to leave at 6pm, but their Master always arrived ahead of the scheduled time and waited.

This was not a very comfortable situation for disciples, so they hurried over this time around.

Fortunately, Lukas wasn’t standing in front of the portal when they arrived. Instead, they saw a man they’d never seen before.

It was a man with gray hair and a cold expression on his face. This was their first time seeing him, but for some reason, he felt familiar.

“Ah...”

The man opened his mouth when Min Ha-rin's mouth widened in realisation.

"It's me."

"...Master?"

Lukas nodded.

Only then did Min Ha-rin step closer to him before saying.

"Your appearance... did you change it with magic?"

"It's the Illusion spell. When you reach 5 stars, you will be able to learn it."

Min Ha-rin was amazed.

She knew that Illusion was a 5 star spell. But even if she reached that level, the complexity of the magic formula and the extremely high mana consumption meant that she would have to be at least 6 stars in order to use it so naturally.

Of course, she knew the being in front of her wasn't a 6 star Wizard but someone who could be called the creator and teacher of Magical Science in this world.

Then she realised that she couldn't feel any mana from him.

“When I have this appearance, I use the pseudonym Frey, so you can call me that.”

He was using an identity he'd created before so that there wouldn't be any problems when he went to North America.

“Yes. Understood.”

Min Ha-rin nodded.

She could guess why he changed his appearance. The hunters in Asia would be looking for him everywhere, so it would be best to hide his appearance whenever he had to do any activities outside.

Lukas looked at his two disciples carefully before turning to look at Min Ha-rin.

“What did you tell Leo?”

“I told him everything.”

“Good.”

Then there was no need for him to say anything more.

Lukas simply tapped Leo on the shoulder.

“It will be a tough journey from now on.”

“I can handle it.”

“I believe you can.”

Leo smiled brightly at those words. And Min Ha-rin laughed slightly because she'd been told the same thing.

* * *

The North American Headquarters was located in Manhattan, New York.

Standing in front of the portal, Min Ha-rin felt a little anxious like a child who was about to go to an amusement park for the first time.

She'd heard a lot about North America, but this would be the first time she was going there.

It was probably the same for most hunters.

Heaven, Utopia, Another World.

North America was called countless names, and none of them were negative.

And as soon as she stepped through the portal, a huge light covered her body.

She felt the strange, floating feeling that came with portal transportation, as if heaven and earth had been overturned and all the directions had been jumbled.

'Urk...!'

Maybe it was because the distance was quite far, but she felt more nauseous than she usually did when travelling by portal.

Min Ha-rin forced herself to fight the urge to vomit.

Paht.

"...!"

Finally, the sense of weightlessness disappeared.

She felt herself land on solid ground, but her vision was still blurred.

Whispers- (TL: This was the best onomatopoeia I could find for the effect T~T)

The surroundings were quite noisy.

What's going on?

When her vision cleared, Min Ha-rin looked around. And It was the first time she'd seen such a sight in her life.

Dozens of people in suits were aiming cameras at them.

Then, above them, she saw the view of the city.

“Ah...!”

Min Ha-rin subconsciously let out a cry of admiration. Her eyes widened, and she couldn't help but wonder if she was dreaming.

The sun was high in the sky, unlike Russia, where it was already dark.

And the city that stood under the brilliant sun did not have smoke billowing out of it nor the abandoned or dilapidated buildings that she was used to seeing her entire life.

Instead, she saw a forest of skyscrapers that reached the sky and a sunlit river that flowed beside the city. On this river floated a pure white yacht.

Sochi, in Russia, was a relatively well preserved and redeveloped city. But Manhattan was so beautiful that it couldn't even compare.

The portal was in the middle of a large square, which allowed her to take in all of these sights at once.

This fact shocked her greatly. After all, hunter bases were usually constructed in hidden locations, for example, underground.

Click – Click –

Then bursts of light began flashing from every direction. Leo shrank slightly.

It wasn't magic. It was simply the flash of cameras.

“The European hunters are finally here!”

“Ah! There's also the White Flower, a Titled Hunter from Asia! What is her relationship with them?”

“Huh? There is such a handsome boy. Who is he?”

What the hell was going on?

Tense, Min Ha-rin turned to look at her teacher.

Lukas stood with the same expression he always had on his face. Even though the appearance was different, it was easy for her to tell that it was the same person.

Her confused mind calmed down a little.

Suddenly.

“Please wait a moment. Let me through.”

A woman with a stern voice appeared.

She was an extremely beautiful woman dressed in fancy clothes. She wore a red dress and high heels, with a luxurious-looking overcoat hung lightly on her shoulders.

She reminded Min Ha-rin of the Hollywood stars who existed in the past.

The woman put her hand on her hip as she spoke to the reporters.

“You will get the chance to interview them in a moment, so please calm down for now. Let me talk to them first.”

The reporters murmured under their breaths for a few moments, but they still reluctantly stepped back in the end.

It was only then when the woman turned around and addressed Lukas.

“Are you Frey?”

“That’s right.”

When Lukas nodded, Min Ha-rin couldn’t help but look at him. It was the first time she’d ever heard him speak so politely.

It seemed he truly intended to hide his identity.

“Hmm. Doesn’t seem like much, so why would the President want to see such a man...”

The woman murmured this in a soft voice, but it was still clearly audible to all of them.

Min Ha-rin and Leo glared fiercely at this woman for her rude remarks.

As if she noticed, the woman's blue eyes turned to Min Ha-rin.

Then she smiled.

“What's with that look in your eyes? Is this man your lover?”

“...”

When Min Ha-rin remained silent in shock, the woman laughed.

“Smile. It was a joke. Hmm. This is your first time in America. Am I right?”

When Lukas nodded, the woman spoke with a pitying expression.

“It must have been quite the surprise. Look at how tense you are. Relax your shoulders. This is a place for humans. Well, considering that you came from Europe, I suppose it's natural.”

As she said that, the woman looked at Frey, Min Ha-rin, and Leo's attire, one after the other.

Min Ha-rin immediately realised what the feeling she felt at that moment was. It was something she'd been feeling ever since this woman spoke to Lukas.

Min Ha-rin hated this woman.

"Ah, silly me. I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Joanna. I'm an American hunter who came to pick up our European guests on orders from our President."

"Joanna...?"

When she subconsciously asked back the name she heard, Joanna giggled in a satisfied manner.

"Oh, my. It seems I'm well known even in Europe."

"..."

She wanted to deny it, but she couldn't. Joanna was a hunter who was not only famous in North America but in the entire world.

However... Min Ha-rin saw Lukas frown slightly.

"In any case, please adjust to the pace. It's been a long time since we had hunters from Europe here, so I called the reporters. You don't have to do much. Just smile and answer a few of their questions. Ah. You don't have to answer anything you don't want to."

Lukas couldn't help but wonder if this was Neil's scheme.

After saying what she had to, Joanna turned around again and headed to the reporters with sparkling eyes.

“...”

Lukas finally looked around, taking in the scene that Min Ha-rin had been amazed by.

It was a beautiful city, but they didn't overdo it.

They had enough economic power to pursue glamour while also remaining confident in their safety.

'I didn't expect it would be this much.'

Although their presence was weaker than in other regions, North America wasn't completely free of the Demons. After all, at one point, North America was also facing dark times.

However, the hunters in the region, under the command of Neil Prand, managed to drive the Demons out of most of their territory.

It had been decades since then.

And the utopia built upon the ruins had become a true paradise.

Perhaps Min Ha-rin and Leo felt like they were in a completely different world.

Then Joanna returned. She glanced at the three of them for a moment before speaking.

“By the way, I forgot to ask for your names. Could you give a brief introduction?”

Lukas opened his mouth first.

“I’m Frey.”

“Are you a hunter?”

“Right.”

“What job do you have?”

“I’m a Wizard.”

“Pfft.”

Joanna snorted at that.

When Lukas turned to look at her, she apologized without seeming the least bit sorry.

“Ah. Sorry. It’s just that there are many ‘self-proclaimed Wizards’ running around these days. I’ve seen far too many people who don’t even have a hint of skill.”

When Lukas remained silent, she added.

“Mm. Of course, I’m not referring to you. After all, you came from the frontlines in Europe, so you couldn’t be completely useless...”

Joanna narrowed her eyes.

“It’s just that I can’t feel any mana fluctuations in your body. You wouldn’t happen to be calling yourself a Wizard after reaching only 1 star or 2 stars, right?”

Her voice was soft, but the mocking tone in her voice was unmistakable.

Then a man in a suit standing beside Joanna bowed to her as he said.

“Wouldn’t any Wizard look like nothing in front of you, Miss Joanna? You are one of the few Archmages in North America.”

“Hmph, you don’t need to flatter me.”

While Joanna waved her hand and said those words, it was clear from her expression that she enjoyed the compliment.

Lukas simply looked at her without responding.

“...”

And Min Ha-rin and Leo simply stared at her with strange expressions.

Season 2 Chapter 49

Press conference.

This was something that Min Ha-rin had never experienced in her relatively short life.

“Haa...”

She sighed.

She didn't even realise when it had ended. The constant flashing of cameras and the rapid spitfire of questions caused her mind to grow numb.

After a while, she couldn't even remember the answers she gave. If it weren't for Lukas, she might have said something wrong.

'I'm so tired.'

It was different from the fatigue that came with hunting Demons. It felt like her energy had been sapped.

When she looked over at Leo, she noticed that he was also tired although he didn't show it.

'I just want to rest for 5 minutes.'

And water. She wanted to drink water so cold that it would make her bones ache.

"What are you doing? There's no time to relax."

But the witch didn't seem to have any intention of letting them rest.

Joanna gave her a look as if to ask if she was tired from just this much.

“We’ll be traveling by car, so you can take a rest on the move.”

“Car?”

Was she talking about a vehicle?

At that moment, a black limousine entered the square and gracefully pulled up in front of them.

Min Ha-rin’s jaw dropped subconsciously.

Smiling, Joanna boarded the limousine with elegance and grace before saying.

“Get in.”

“Ah... yeah.”

Lukas, Min Ha-rin and Leo boarded the limousine.

The moment her butt touched the soft seat, she felt like she would sink into it completely. It would only be a small exaggeration to say it felt like her body had become one with the seat.

There were also vehicles in Asia, where she had been most active. However, those had mostly been military vehicles or trucks used to transport personnel or supplies.

She'd seen damaged cars a few times in ruined cities during explorations, but she had never seen such a clean-looking car like this limousine in her life.

'It feels like I'm floating.'

There was almost no noise, and the ride was smooth. There was even a small refrigerator in the car.

Joanna took some canned drinks from the refrigerator before handing them to them.

"Take it."

"Ah... Thank you."

"Thank you."

She didn't like this nasty woman, but her conscience didn't allow her to refuse.

So she simply bowed her head slightly and accepted the can. It was a brand of cola she'd never seen before.

When she took a small sip, the sweet taste and slight fizz of carbonation made her taste buds tingle.

...It was delicious.

Leo's attention seemed to be locked onto the scenery outside. For Leo, who was born in Britain and never left Europe, the forest of skyscrapers that he could see outside the window was literally a new world.

"Where are we going?"

It was Min Ha-rin who asked.

"To the Headquarters."

"I thought the headquarters would be nearby since the portal was located in the square. But I guess it's not."

"North America is different from the other regions."

"...right."

Min Ha-rin muttered softly before taking another sip from the can.

Joanna looked at her with a slightly solemn expression.

Hunters from Europe. Europe was supposed to be the frontlines where hunters fought against Demons constantly. So because of that, she thought the European hunters would be a skilled and powerful group.

Of course, she didn't think they would be a match for American hunters who continued to grow explosively due to having the best resources and support from the association. But she at least hoped to meet a hero.

This expectation was even greater ever since she heard that this hunter was a guest of Association President Neil Prand.

So why was it only this much?

A woman, a boy, and a self-proclaimed Wizard.

Min Ha-rin was a rookie hunter who'd made a name for herself in Asia. But there was one thing she found strange.

'I heard that the White Flower is a swordsman, so why can I feel mana fluctuations?'

Min Ha-rin had the scent of a Wizard. At first, she thought it was just an illusion, but now, she didn't think so.

This woman was at least a 3 star Wizard. She had done something to cover it up, but it was impossible to trick the eyes of an Archmage like Joanna.

In the first place, she had put aside her busy schedule to come greet them. After all, there was no way for her to refuse an order that came directly from the President. Because of this, her expectations had been quite high before she came here.

She never would have expected these three to be the guests she sacrificed her valuable time for.

'Even though the President said to be polite to them...'

She thought it was stupid.

There was no need to be polite to low-rank hunters.

Joanna's eyes turned to the grey-haired man.

She could only think of one thing as she looked at this man.

Unlike the other two, who were excitedly taking in all the sights, this man had remained calm from the start. However...

'He's obviously bluffing.'

Without a doubt, this man was the most pathetic of the three.

His identity was a mystery, but unlike Min Ha-rin, who had made a name for herself, or Leo, who clearly had a good foundation, she couldn't feel anything from this man.

It was unpleasant.

He didn't seem to have any mana, yet he dared to call himself a Wizard.

It was as though he thought it was easy to be a Wizard. For people like this, she felt it was best to destroy their mana rooms so that they wouldn't be able to use spells for the rest of their lives.

“...”

It was at that moment that an interesting idea popped into her mind.

“Hey. Frey, was it? What rank are you at?”

“You can take a guess.”

It was the same answer he'd given before.

Joanna sneered.

“Ah, is that so? Then I think you should be at least 5 stars.”

Although she usually felt that 3 stars was the limit of most average Wizards, Joanna deliberately raised her guess.

In fact, it didn't matter whether she said 3 stars or 5. In the first place, she couldn't feel any mana from this man.

So either this man didn't have the talent at all or he was a measly 1 star and his mana was so pitiful that she couldn't sense it.

“You can think so.”

“...”

Joanna's eyebrows raised at that.

This man had just admitted to being a 5 star Wizard.

She had to forcibly stop herself from laughing.

There was still some time till they arrived at the headquarters, so she decided to kill time. She wondered just how far this man could bluff.

“...”

Then Lukas turned and looked Joanna in the eyes for the first time.

In that instant, Joanna felt like her entire body had become frozen for some reason, and without realising it, she grabbed the hem of her dress.

“Don’t act recklessly.”

It was a murmur that was close to a whisper. It was so soft that it seemed one would not be able to hear if one wasn’t paying attention. Nevertheless, Joanna heard Lukas’ voice as clearly as if he was shouting.

Lukas continued.

“There won’t be a second time.”(TL: *fangirling*)

Hup.

She felt an indescribable pressure, like an invisible hand was gripping her heart.

For a moment, Joanna couldn’t breathe. Her pupils shook.

She stared at Lukas with wide eyes, but he had already looked away and was now staring out the window once again.

And.

Not another word was spoken until they arrived at the North American Headquarters.

* * *

The North American Headquarters was housed in an extremely tall skyscraper. Even if they tilted their heads 90 degrees, it was hard for them to see the top.

Joanna coughed slightly before opening her mouth.

“This is the headquarters of the North American branch. It’s also called the Pilsky Tower.” (TL: Pilsky, Pil Sky, or Pill sky? Maybe even Philsky)

After saying that, she glanced at Lukas. Joanna’s attitude was different from before.

When they entered the building, Min Ha-rin looked around the first floor before muttering.

“It’s so peaceful.”

It reminded her of a shopping mall. There were restaurants, coffee shops, clothing stores, and even arcades.

People sat at tables that were scattered throughout the floor. Their expressions showed no tension at all.

“...I don’t think they are hunters.”

“You have good eyes. These people are not hunters.”

Hearing Joanna’s words, Min Ha-rin tilted her head to the side.

“Ah. Then are they civilians who work with the association?”

“No. They’re just ordinary people.”

“The public can enter the North American Headquarters...?”

“Pilsky Tower is the North American Headquarters as well as one of the top tourist attractions in Manhattan. Public access is permitted up to the 50th floor.”

“...”

Min Ha-rin's jaw dropped at those words.

The Hunter Headquarters was a tourist attraction?

It felt like her common sense was being challenged. However, this was not uncommon in North America, where attacks from Demons were rare.

Joanna led them to an elevator on the left, which had an ID scanner. It seemed that this was an elevator that could only be used by hunters.

Then, a man who appeared to be a security guard approached them and gave Joanna a wireless earpiece.

"Joanna, you're here."

Joanna didn't respond, instead simply collecting the earpiece, and stepped into the elevator.

Click.

A long finger pressed the button of the 125th floor. It was very high up.

Joanna suddenly became silent, and it seemed that she was listening to something from the earpiece in her ear.

When they reached the 60th floor, she spoke again.

“Come to think of it, have you eaten?”

“No.”

“Good. I’m a bit hungry, so let’s eat first. We still have some time to spare.”

They didn’t have time to spare.

Min Ha-rin complained inwardly, but she didn’t say anything.

After a while, the elevator came to a stop, and Joanna stepped off first as she spoke.

“The 125th floor is the resting area for hunters. It has a restaurant, a lounge, a library, a karaoke room, a game room... Oh. They’re a bit small, but there is also a golf course and a movie theater.”

Huh. It seemed that there was no end to the surprises.

She didn’t expect the resting area to have so many facilities. Probably only North America was like this in the entire world.

Looking at Min Ha-rin and Leo who were glancing around the floor, Joanna continued.

“Each region hides information about American hunters as much as possible. Do you know why?”

“...I don’t.”

“It’s because most people wouldn’t want to leave if they came here. Of course, we would not stop hunters from coming. After all, this is a world where the land mass is large but the people are scarce.”

People were also a resource. This was basically what Joanna was saying.

Then they saw the restaurants.

There were many different varieties.

Western, Chinese, Japanese. There were even Korean restaurants.

Just the slight smell that drifted from them caused their mouths to water. The chefs in these restaurants were definitely top-class.

When they finally sat at a table, Min Ha-rin and Leo tried to decide what to eat. Then, Joanna tapped Lukas on the shoulder.

“Can I talk to you for a minute?”

“...”

Wondering what she was up to, Lukas turned to look at Joanna, but she avoided making eye contact with him. It seemed what happened in the limousine was still fresh in her mind.

Did she want to talk about that?

No. She didn't have the guts to do that at the moment.

Did she set a trap for him?

That was even more unlikely.

Maybe she really just wanted to talk.

Lukas got up from his seat.

“You guys eat first.”

“...Yeah.”

Min Ha-rin and Leo looked curious, but they chose to listen to their Master.

Lukas and Joanna headed to a lounge a short distance away from the restaurant. The glass walls in the lounge gave the customers a clear view of the city.

There were many chairs there, but Joanna didn't take a seat. It seemed the conversation would end soon.

“The President contacted me. He said to have you meet him alone.”

Joanna pointed to her ear as she said this.

“Alone?”

“Yeah.”

“...”

He knew Neil's personality. So he wasn't surprised that he wanted to meet him alone without Min Ha-rin and Leo.

It seemed he wanted to have a private conversation.

“You can go to the 177th floor. Well, then. That’s all.”

Then, as if her task was complete, she turned around and tried to leave.

“You’re not going to accompany me?”

“The 177th floor is the President’s private room. Unauthorised personnel are not permitted to enter. Myself included.”

“ ... ”

“I’ll take care of your companions. So you can come back here when you’re done.”

Lukas followed her with his eyes for a moment, then he headed to the elevator and pressed the button for the 177th floor.

Neil Prand’s private room.

As the elevator went up, it stopped on another floor.

A man entered from the 159th floor.

It was a middle-aged man wearing a biker jacket and jeans. He had long hair that reached his shoulders, and his beard grew from his sideburns to his chin.

But as soon as Lukas saw this man, he became speechless.

—He was surprised.

You could even say that he was shocked.

“Ahn.”

The man yawned tiredly as he raised his hand to press the floor button before lowering it again.

Seeing this, Lukas quickly regained his composure. His eyes narrowed slightly.

Only the button for the 177th floor was currently pressed.

In other words, this man was also going to the 177th floor.

To the private room of the Association President that unauthorised personnel couldn't enter.

...No. That wasn't the problem.

Looking at this man's back, Lukas spoke.

"Hey."

"What?"

The man answered bluntly without looking back.

"What's your name?"

Only then did the man turn to look at Lukas. His eyes appeared calm and disinterested.

"Letip."

Ding-

With the sound of arrival, the elevator came to a stop.

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When the elevator doors opened, the first thing he saw was a long, straight hallway. Red carpet was laid along the hallway, and there were even luxurious artworks displayed on both sides. It felt like an art museum.

Letip was the first to start walking down the hallway. He didn't seem to have any power in his body, but that in itself seemed a bit contradictory as he stepped forward without hesitation.

Lukas looked at his back.

'Letip.'

Lukas couldn't help but mutter his name inwardly.

This man was the last of the three Absolutes who entered this world.

The moment he met him, he realised... but on the other hand, he wouldn't have realised if he hadn't met him.

Letip gave him a strange feeling.

Unlike Sedi, who openly released her aura to attract Lukas, or Nodiesop, who had shown his ambition by acquiring his own faction, this man didn't show any such behaviour.

Of course, this didn't mean he would jump to any conclusions. After all, he could just be acting more covertly than Nodiesop.

'...'

But Lukas couldn't help but feel that he was completely different.

When their eyes met, this man should have naturally realised who Lukas was. Nevertheless, he didn't seem interested at all.

What was the reason?

Wasn't the goal of the Absolutes who came to this world to kill Lukas?

Concealing his doubts, Lukas followed Letip.

First, he would meet Neil Prand. It was clear that he had some kind of connection to Letip.

Of course, he didn't think Neil would be willing to tell him, but he might be able to get a clue from their conversation.

When they opened the door at the end of the hallway and stepped inside, they found themselves in what appeared to be an office.

The reason it 'appeared to be' was because this room seemed far too large to be called an office.

It was as large as the lounge he'd briefly entered on the 125th floor.

And at the end of this large space sat Neil Prand.

He seemed to be filling out some documents, but he put his pen aside when he noticed their arrival.

Letip walked forward before plopping down on a sofa on the left. Then, he picked up a remote from the coffee table in front of him and turned on the TV.

The TV was so large that 100 people would be able to watch it comfortably.

"Pukuku."

Letip chuckled as he found a show he liked. Without taking his eyes away from the large display, he said.

"I'm hungry. Do you have anything to munch on?"

"I'll call someone."

"Beer, too."

Neil picked up a phone to his right and ordered the food while Letip continued laughing as he watched his show.

Click-

Only after hanging up the phone did Neil look at Lukas.

He nodded at a door to his right before walking towards it. Lukas followed him.

It appeared to be a reception room attached to the office. It was much smaller than the office, but it was more suitable for a one-on-one conversation.

“I was rude last time.”

“...”

“There were a lot of eyes looking at us. And I’m in a position now where I have to be careful about the things I do.”

Lukas ignored Neil’s apology. It didn’t matter when he spoke formally or informally. He knew that this man in front of him had no respect for him.

“This city is pretty well developed.”

Neil's eyes shined slightly.

"I can barely remember how it looked a few decades ago. You achieved your goal."

He believed that Neil could do it. But he never thought that he would be able to achieve his goal so perfectly in such a short amount of time.

Neil Prand was truly an amazing human.

He was a man who could change not just a city, country, or continent but the entire world.

"This country is my everything. I will protect my homeland with my life."

"I see your thoughts haven't changed."

"I'm only human. Unlike you."

Whenever he heard those words, Lukas felt a stabbing pain in his chest.

This man in front of him couldn't know, but Lukas had once been human.

Neil Prand continued in a calm voice.

“And humans have limits. So I only look after the humans I can save.”

“By that, you mean the Americans?”

There was a faint glimmer in Neil’s eyes.

“I’ve made numerous suggestions. Even at this moment. We don’t stop people from coming. The economy of North America has grown large enough to support all the hunters from Eurasia, Africa, and Oceania.”

Nevertheless, they didn’t accept his proposal. They might have had their reasons, but Neil didn’t pay attention to that.

“It’s their own choice. Everyone must bear the burden of their own choices.”

“The Demons aren’t active in America.”

Neil paused for a moment at Lukas’ sudden remark before saying.

“...they don’t like to cross the ocean.”

“There are Demons who have the power to move through space. The higher the nobility rank, the more common this power is. With their power, carrying a legion of Demon Beasts across the ocean is not difficult.”

“That’s why we have barriers. Our barriers are stronger and have fewer flaws than those of other regions. This is due to the collaboration between the many Wizards and Sorcerers in this country.”

Lukas’ expression changed slightly.

“Don’t try to fool me with Magical Science, Neil Prand. Do you think I can’t tell it’s just a 7 star barrier at best?”

“...”

“You greatly increased the strength of your defenses using soul crystals that you bought from the other branches, but they would only work on Demon Marquises and below.”

This also varied depending on the individual. Among the Marquises, there were a few who could easily break through North America’s barriers.

“There’s no reason for them to come all the way over to America. There are many humans closer to them already.”

His words sounded like the most plausible excuse, but it wasn’t something one would expect to hear from a human.

Many humans closer to them?

That sounded as though he was talking about livestock instead of his own kind.

“The higher ranked the Demon, the more greedy they are. There are many Demon Nobles who would love to get their hands on the hunters in North America.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Did you make a deal with the Demons?”

Neil fell silent for a moment. Maybe three seconds.

“Hoo.”

Then he let out a breath.

“...the topic of our conversation seems to have shifted. Aren't you here as Frey Blake, a Hunter from the European Branch who came to seek aid from North America?”

“...”

“I would like for us to move on to our negotiation now.”

He forcibly changed the topic.

This time, it was Lukas who sighed.

Neil Prand had not changed at all from the last time he saw him.

No. Instead, it seemed that he had become more extreme.

However, Lukas couldn't recklessly call him evil.

He knew how strong his convictions were and how devoted he was to humans. It was just that he needed to widen his view.

That should have been the role of his teacher. This was why Lukas felt responsible for Neil's deviation.

"How much do you know about the situation in Asia?"

"I know that a man named Nodiesop has become the new President of the Asia Branch. He didn't just stop there, however. He also took control of most of the forces and facilities of the Hunters Association in that region..."

Neil looked at Lukas for a moment before adding.

“He even got in touch with North America, claiming that he wanted to have a good relationship with us.”

“What did you say?”

“That’s confidential.”

“Do you know what kind of being Nodiesop is?”

“He should be something similar to you. A transcendent being with power comparable to that wielded by God.”

Nevertheless, he didn’t appear to be wary of Nodiesop.

It was the same as when he’d first met him.

Neil did not shrink back even when he had an idea of how powerful Lukas was.

This was something that Lukas appreciated.

He believed he could become the symbol who led mankind.

“It’s not difficult for us to protect Europe in itself. After all, our association dislikes Asia much more than Europe. But I can’t make that decision on my own.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’d have to bring it forward to the council of the American Association. Most of the executives with great influence are part of the council, and most of them don’t have a very favorable opinion of Europe.”

Lukas knew that the ‘most’ category also included Neil Prand.

Neil now divided the world into two parts.

Whether it was helpful to North America or not.

His logic could not have been more black and white.

Even now, Neil must have been making calculations in his head.

He was calculating how North America could benefit from the confrontation between Europe and Asia.

He didn’t think about the hunters who would die. Because they weren’t American hunters.

He was a man who already had such a twisted belief. And Lukas couldn't do anything to change it.

"I'm not asking you to openly put pressure on Asia. You don't even have to be hostile with them. After all, the true enemies of the hunters are the Demons, not their own kind. All I want you to do is exercise your influence so that the conflict between humans doesn't escalate."

"You make it sound so easy. Once we step in, we will no longer be able to hold a neutral position. We'd be forced to take a side in the mud fight."

"Then you want Europe and Asia to continue fighting like this? Don't you understand what the outcome would be?"

"At least one side would collapse. And it would most likely be Europe. If the knowledge of this conflict reaches the ears of the Demons, perhaps all the association branches in Eurasia would disappear. Well, that's only the worst case scenario."

So he did know.

Lukas looked at Neil with cold eyes. He felt his heart sinking.

"Then the remaining survivors would flock to America. We wouldn't reject them."

"...Neil Prand, are you serious?"

Neil didn't respond right away.

Instead he observed Lukas for a moment.

“And if I am?”

Suddenly, Neil spoke up.

“I’d like to make a proposal.”

“A proposal?”

“Yes. If you agree to it, then I will help Europe. No, I’d give them my full support. If you like I’d even dispatch a number of troops to Asia.”

“...”

This was Neil’s usual manner of speaking.

He would draw attention by suddenly speaking in a completely different manner to how he had been before. He would then list a number of things that he could offer before bringing up his own conditions at the end.

Neil only spoke like this when he was sure.

Sure that the other person would be unable to turn down his offer.

“Lukas, please come to America.”

The emotion in his voice seemed to fill the entire room.

“If you become America’s protector, I will accept any condition.”