

Great Mage 301

Season 2 Chapter 61

After a while, they finally arrived at the rocky area.

Joanna got out of the car and started preparing the meal while Lukas refilled the gas tank and took a look around.

“Hurry back. If you take too long, I’ll eat everything first.”

Joanna patted her stomach as she said this, indicating that she was pretty hungry already. Lukas nodded before heading towards the largest nearby mountain.

When he left Joanna’s field of view, he quickly flew up to the top of the mountain using magic.

A cold wind blew over.

This wasn’t the winter season, and it certainly was strange, considering this was Africa. After all, during winter, the temperatures during midday could still reach 20 degrees celsius.

But it was different now. It was the middle of the year, and Lukas was wearing a thick coat. Nevertheless, he didn’t feel hot at all.

This was probably because of the demonic energy.

“...”

He opened the map and looked around.

In Lukas’s mind, two new routes to Egypt were formed.

One on the left and one on the right.

Focusing his eyes, he looked around for the first city to pass through.

A white glow emanated from Lukas’ eyes.

Whoosh!

He instantly caught sight of a city, hundreds of kilometers away. As if he had expanded his eyes hundreds of times, Lukas was able to see every corner of the city.

Clairvoyance!

This was the power he’d gained from the Demigod, Milled, whom he’d fought in the past. A power that he rarely used.

Vast amounts of information surged into his head in an instant. If he were an ordinary person, he might have suffered a cerebral hemorrhage from being unable to process all of the information.

With Lukas' strength, he could easily perceive the entirety of the African continent, but he didn't have time for that.

Lukas ignored the information about the characteristics and size of the city, and he instead focused on the living creatures in them.

Although he couldn't grasp complete details, he was at least able to determine the type and number of entities.

'In the city to the left, there are only Demons. And...'

On the right.

There were both humans and Demons.

It was a strange sight. It felt like they were very close. Almost as though they were living together.

That wasn't all.

He was also able to sense a large amount of demonic energy.

The Demon was suppressing his power, so Lukas was unable to get a clear view, but he was certain that it was at least a high-rank Demon Noble.

Lukas narrowed his eyes.

If he could have used the full power of his Clairvoyance, he would have easily been able to see just how powerful the Demon was. Unfortunately, that power was beyond this universe's tolerance. It was a shame, but for now, he had no choice but to be satisfied with using this level of power.

When he first came to this world, he couldn't use his Demigod powers at all.

'If a little more time passes, it won't just be a thousand miles—' (TL: About 1600km)

Lukas had this thought for a moment before shaking his head.

Then, he stopped using Clairvoyance and headed down the mountain.

When he got back to where Joanna was, he saw her reading a small book with a serious expression on her face.

The wear on the book showed just how many times she'd read it, and now that he thought about it, he realised that she would take out and read this book whenever she had time. He couldn't tell what was written in the book, though, as there was nothing on the cover.

Despite reading with great concentration, Joanna still lifted her head and looked at Lukas, as though she felt his gaze.

“Why did you take so long?”

He thought she said she’d eat first.

Lukas thought about asking her this for a moment before deciding to give a rough answer instead.

“The mountain was taller than I expected.”

“Hmph... here.”

Joanna snorted before handing him a cold can of food. Even the lid was still on it.

When Lukas accepted the can, she began eating her chicken with a disposable fork. Lukas ate as well.

It was Lukas who placed down his utensils first.

He’d eaten half of the can of food and stopped there.

“Why do you eat so little?”

“It has become a habit.”

To be precise, Lukas no longer needed to eat. However, if he didn't eat anything at all, people would grow suspicious. Therefore, he just pretended.

Of course, he was still able to taste, and eating delicious food was an excellent pastime.

However, these combat rations would never be called 'delicious food'.

“Why don't you eat some more? Men who are too skinny aren't popular with women. Your face isn't bad, so you'd look good if you gained more weight.”

“Is that so?”

Despite his rough reply, Joanna still responded enthusiastically.

“Of course. I have a good eye for unpolished gems.”

Then her eyes suddenly lit up.

“Come to think of it, that boy you brought with you is exceptional.”

“Boy? Ah.”

It was obvious that she was talking about his disciple, Leo Freeman.

Lukas nodded.

Even someone like him who had no interest in personal appearance couldn't help but admire Leo's good looks.

“His appearance has a strong ambiguity now, but that will only last a few more years. Girls would probably lose their minds if he simply wore a v-necked t-shirt. Seriously.”

Joanna spoke while eating chicken from her can. Lukas glanced at her.

“You eat well.”

“Is it surprising?”

“I didn't think you'd be able to stomach anything other than gourmet food.”

“Hmph. That's right. I have really picky tastes.”

Joanna snorted, but she didn't seem upset.

"But I could still eat almost anything."

"Anything?"

"Even steamed frogs or fried cockroaches."

When Lukas froze, Joanna burst into laughter.

"I'm joking!"

* * *

For Lukas, the main priority was to meet Kran, one of the Top Three.

The most reasonable choice to achieve this goal would have been to cut across the wilderness without going to either city.

But Lukas decided to head to the city on the right.

This was because he thought it would be better to figure out the situation now while he still had time than allow it to become a hindrance later on.

He didn't feel comfortable leaving what was almost certainly a high-ranking Demon Noble unchecked.

By the time the sun began setting, they arrived at the city.

"Huh?"

At the same time, they saw a convoy of vehicles leaving the city.

They were light, off-road vehicles that were perfect for traveling across the wilderness. Buggies.

As they came closer, the buggies honked their horns aggressively.

"Ah. So noisy."

While Joanna frowned at the racket, Lukas looked over at them before speaking.

"It seems like they're asking us to stop."

"Are they humans?"

“Maybe.”

“Well. I’ve never heard about Demons driving buggies before.”

Joanna pulled over obediently.

One of the buggies swerved around and stopped in front of the truck, creating a large cloud of dust.

Joanna coughed, covering her mouth as she glared at the car.

A man stepped out from the left side of the buggy.

It was a black young man with a gun in his hand.

He looked like a mercenary.

“Excuse me. You don’t seem to be from around here. Where are you from?”

“Who are you?”

“Can’t you tell? I’m a hunter.”

Click.

The man answered while cocking his gun.

It was a blatant threat, but Joanna responded without shrinking back at all.

“We’re hunters too. We came to this land on a special mission from North America. I can’t tell you the details of our mission, but we already received permission from the Congolese Branch President.”

“Do you have anything to prove that?”

Joanna pulled a document out of her pocket and held it out for the man to see. The man looked at it for a moment before nodding and smiling.

“If you already got permission, then I have no right to interfere. Well, do you need anything? Food, water, a place to rest?”

“It’s late, so we’d appreciate it if you could give us a place to stay for the night.”

“Hmmm, no problem. Follow me. I’ll take you to our leader first.”

The man turned around after saying those words.

“Who is your leader?”

“You might have heard of him, so I don’t mind telling you.”

The man laughed. Then he turned to look at them and spoke in a slightly prideful voice.

“Our leader is a man called Dragul Phisfounder.”

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“Are you okay?”

Lukas raised his head at the unexpected question.

“What do you mean?”

“If I had a mirror, I’d show you. It’s the first time I’ve ever seen you make a face like that.”

“...”

“I always thought that you were emotionless because your expression never changed. But I guess that’s not true.”

Was there something wrong with his expression?

Lukas couldn't help but reach up a hand to touch his face.

It felt a bit stiffer than usual.

"Do you know him?"

"Huh?"

"The man he referred to as his leader. You lost control of your expression after you heard his name."

"No, I don't know him."

Joanna looked at him strangely when she heard this.

But it was the truth.

This was the first time Lukas had heard of this man called Dragul. The reason his expression had become stiff was different.

“I want to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“Is the last name Phisfounder common?”

“Phisfounder?”

Joanna tilted her head to the side and tapped her finger against the steering wheel as she thought.

For a while, the soft tapping sound was the only thing that could be heard in the truck.

But after some thought, she shook her head.

“This is the first time I heard it. But it doesn’t really sound like a last name. It sounds more like a car brand.”

“...”

It was as he expected.

Lukas had never encountered a familiar last name in this world. And if he did, it would only be an extremely rare one.

That's why he couldn't help but wonder if the last name, Phisfounder, of this man, Dragul, was a mere coincidence or not.

Lukas looked at the buggy that was driving ahead of them.

Then, at the three buggies that were located on either side and behind the truck respectively.

"I feel like we're being escorted."

While Joanna spoke in a smug voice, Lukas could tell that the escort was more to prevent them from fleeing.

Nevertheless, it wouldn't be too hard to flee and erase their traces now. It would be much trickier once they got into the city.

And yet, Lukas was headed directly for the city.

'Is Iris in this world?'

And if that really was the case, how did she accomplish it?

Did she become transcendent? Had she been following him? Did she know that he was in this world?

After these thoughts filled his head, Lukas couldn't help but smile bitterly.

'I don't want to meet with Iris just yet.'

Those thoughts made him feel more sad than happy. In fact, they filled him with guilt.

Because if she came to him first, it meant that she'd probably come to blame him for not keeping his word.

* * *

They got off the truck.

Up close, the city looked much better than they expected. Nevertheless, it didn't look much better than 'clean ruins'. It would be more appropriate to call it a temporary base than a home.

Considering the size of the city, the area in which people could stay was incredibly limited. And as a result, the area had high population density.

Joanna looked around in surprise.

"How many people live here?"

“There are probably more than 10,000 people in this city.”

The black man, who introduced himself as Keegan, yawned as he replied.

“Come to think of it, there are a lot of customers today. How annoying...”

“...?”

“He will show you to your rooms, so please wait there. Our leader is very busy at the moment.”

After saying this, Keegan turned around and walked off somewhere.

“Follow me. I’ll guide you to where you’ll be staying.”

Another hunter spoke in a stiff manner.

They followed him into a building.

It was a three-story building, and they could see artificial light coming from the various windows. This showed that power was being supplied to it.

Also, despite the rugged appearance of the city, there were also working street lights.

When they entered the first floor of the building, the first thing they noticed was the unique smell of food. Perhaps it was because it was dinner time, but most of the people in the building seemed to be on that floor.

“The first floor is the restaurant. You can order food any time you like unless it’s too late, but if possible, please try to have your meals on time. There is also a bathroom at the end of the floor. And hot water is available around this time.”

“Hot water!”

Joanna’s eyes sparkled.

It seemed that she was excited at the thought of showering after so long.

In all honesty, it hadn’t been that long. It hadn’t even been a week since they left North America.

They were each given individual rooms on the second and third floors respectively.

“Keegan will probably be back in an hour. So you can rest here first.”

After saying those words, the man turned around and went back down to the first floor, leaving Lukas to inspect his assigned room.

The scent of old wood that filled the room calmed the mind and body.

Clack.

Lukas opened up the only window in the room and looked down at the street below, which was softly lit by the streetlights.

He could not see any hunger on the faces of the people working there. In fact, these people looked much better than those in the Congo Branch.

This should have been a comforting sight to see, but instead, it made Lukas uncomfortable.

There had to be a reason for this.

This city was not in a good geographical location.

It was clear that Demons or Demon Beasts could appear at any moment. So how were they able to perfectly defend against the Demon and Demon Beasts invasion? And where did they get enough food and water to feed such a large population? Not to mention the stable supply of electricity.

The questions that flowed through his head weren't just these few.

Lukas closed the window before heading down to the first floor.

Many people, who appeared to be hunters, clinked their glasses together as they drank beer like water, their cheers and laughter filling the hall.

After looking around the room for a moment, Lukas was able to find an empty table, and he sat down.

A middle-aged woman walked up to him with a smile on her face and placed a glass of water in front of him. But Lukas shook his head when she asked if he'd like to order anything to eat.

Joanna wasn't there.

Judging by her reaction earlier, she was probably washing herself in the bathroom.

Then, he saw a man come down the stairs.

When Lukas saw this man, he couldn't help but narrow his eyes slightly. This was because of two reasons.

The first was because he was Asian, the first he'd seen since coming to this country.

And the second was because this man happened to be someone he knew.

It was the Human Dragon, Lee Jong-hak.

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Lukas would never have expected that their next meeting would be in this place. That was why he couldn't help but look at Lee Jong-hak with surprise.

Fortunately, he was currently using 'Frey's face. So unless he released the spell himself, Lee Jong-hak would never recognise him.

“ ... ”

When Lee Jong-hak came down, the noisy hall immediately became deathly quiet as though a bucket of cold water had been poured onto it.

And even those who had been in the middle of laughing or cheering stifled their voices when they noticed him.

Seemingly not noticing his effect on the people, Lee Jong-hak looked around with his distinctively calm expression.

Perhaps he was looking for an empty table. But Lukas had picked the last one.

After a brief moment, Lee Jong-hak finally turned to look at Lukas. It seemed that he thought the table for four might be too big for just Lukas alone.

After walking up to Lukas, Lee Jong-hak bowed his head and asked politely.

“Can I sit with you?”

“Go ahead.”

When Lukas nodded and gave a brief response, Lee Jong-hak pulled the chair across from him and sat down.

The middle-aged woman he saw earlier approached the table once again.

Tak-

But this time, she placed the glass of water on the table in a cold manner before walking away.

Her actions convinced Lukas of the thought he had. It seemed that the residents here didn't like Lee Jong-hak.

Lukas turned to look at Lee Jong-hak once again.

It had been months since they'd last met, but he didn't seem to have changed much in that time. The only difference was that he had a more determined aura than before.

This was a sign that he'd made great progress in swordsmanship.

It was not easy to achieve so much progress in such a short amount of time. This was also proof of frightening talent.

'Did this man return to the Asia Headquarters?'

The last time he'd heard news of him, he was working in Germany.

Lukas became curious.

Had Lee Jong-hak heard about what happened in Russia? And if he had, what were his thoughts about it?

"I don't think you're from around here."

Lee Jong-hak's soft voice came once again. It was so quiet that Lukas would not have heard it if he hadn't been sitting at the same table.

Realising that he was talking to him, Lukas took a sip of cold water.

"Yes. I'm from Europe."

“ ... ”

Lee Jong-hak's hand froze as he was about to pick up his own cup.

He looked up at Lukas, a complex emotion hidden within his eyes.

Lukas wondered how he would react.

Following the incident, Europe and Asia had become irreconcilable enemies. So it wouldn't be surprising if he were to suddenly attack after meeting a European hunter in a foreign country.

“That...”

Just as he was about to say something, Lukas looked up, sensing Joanna's presence.

It was not an exaggeration to call her appearance striking. As soon as she appeared, some of the hunters couldn't help but stare at her with their mouths wide open.

Joanna, who had changed into light clothes, seemed to be in a good mood. She looked around the room for a moment before cheerfully walking over to Lukas after spotting him.

Then she sat on a chair beside him and waved her hand.

“Ah, how refreshing. Huh? Didn’t you freshen up?”

“No.”

“Ugh, you’re filthy. Stay back.”

When she pulled her chair away from him, she bumped into Lee Jong-hak. Naturally, she turned to look at the person she’d hit.

“I’m so-... rry? This gentleman, I feel like I’ve seen you before...”

Joanna pressed her hand against her forehead as she struggled to think. Then, after a moment, she asked with a slightly hesitant voice.

“Are you the Human Dragon?”

“Yes, I’m Lee Jong-hak.”

Joanna smiled brightly.

“I’ve seen many pictures, but this is my first time seeing you in person. Nice to meet you. I’m Joanna Goldberg.”

Lee Jong-hak had a look of realisation at those words.

“Now, I recognise you. You’re that Archmage from North America. Your reputation precedes you.”

“Oh, my.”

His polite attitude made Joanna unsure of how to react for a moment.

Right. This was it. She had forgotten after spending so much time with that block-headed guy, but this was the attitude people usually had when talking to her.

She was at a level where even heroes from Asia had to be polite to her, and more importantly, she was a woman who had been chosen by the Great Mage.

Joanna shot a triumphant look at Lukas. As if to say ‘look at the type of woman I am’.

But even when she looked at him smugly, Lukas’ gaze remained locked on Lee Jong-hak, and he seemed to be thinking about something else.

A bit embarrassed, Joanna let out a small cough.

“Hmhm. So, Mr. Lee, what brings you here?”

“I came here for a mission. But I can’t tell you the details.”

“I see.”

It was a rule that unless you were talking to a member of the same branch, you should never reveal the mission you were doing. Knowing that he was on a mission, Joanna didn’t try to question him any further.

Lee Jong-hak’s gaze then turned to Lukas.

“Who is this?”

“I’m Frey Blake, from Europe. I’m on a mission with Joanna.”

“I see.”

Lee Jong-hak seemed to be lost in thought for a moment, and Lukas observed him.

A joint mission between Europe and North America hinted at the possibility that the relationship between the two regions was becoming closer.

Depending on how he reacted to this knowledge, he might be able to learn Lee Jong-hak’s thoughts, but...

They were interrupted once again as Keegan appeared.

He looked at the three of them sitting at the table before tilting his head slightly.

“Well, would you look at that. The three of you are all sitting together .Do you know each other?”

“We just met.”

“This is great.”

Well. It was nice because it meant he wouldn't have to go looking for them.

Keegan smiled.

“Our leader is ready to see you. Follow me.”

* * *

The hierarchy among Demons was determined by power. At the very bottom were the normal Demons, and above them were the Demon Nobles. And only those Demons who stood at the very peak among Demon Nobles could be granted the title Duke.

However, this didn't mean that every Duke had the same amount of power or authority.

Of the Demon Dukes, there were only five who could be called the Demon King's closest aides. It was for this reason that they were referred to as the Five Dukes.

And among the Five Dukes, there was one who could be considered the Demon King's right hand.

Azazel.

He was a Demon who had an appearance that was strikingly close to that of a human, except for his gray hair, pale skin, and two large horns growing from his temples.

Some of the Dukes often half-honestly and half-jokingly called him the 'Grand Duke'. Because the title suited him in a way.

This was because he was the one who often took over whenever the Demon King was absent.

Azazel was currently walking through a forest in France.

This was no ordinary forest as the demonic energy in this place was many times thicker than even at the Versailles Palace. This demonic energy caused the entire forest to look like it was covered in a thick smog.

This was natural.

After all, this forest was basically the place that could be called the Demon King's true residence.

“...”

Azazel looked around.

The entire area was a mess, as though a typhoon had swept through it. The ground was filled with large holes and trenches like a giant worm had crawled through it, and the demonic energy in the air was so thick it condensed into fog.

And in the middle of this devastated area was a single, large being.

Azazel immediately knelt down on one knee and politely bowed his head.

“My King.”

At those words, the huge being opened his eyes. Black eyes, which seemed to suck in all the surrounding light, turned to look at Azazel.

[Azazel Trowman.]

“I humbly await your order.”

[The preparations are complete.]

“That means...”

Azazel shuddered for a moment. Unspeakable joy overflowed from his gaze.

The Demon King’s lips twisted into a smile.

[I am now the strongest.]

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“I’m sorry, but can’t we postpone the meeting with Dragul until tomorrow?”

When Lee Jong-hak suddenly said this, Keegan, who was prepared to leave the building, turned around with a strange expression.

“Didn’t you come here demanding to see our leader in the first place?”

“I think it’s too late to have the meeting now... and there is something I’d like to discuss with them.”

As he said this, Lee Jong-hak turned to look at Joanna, his eyes hinting at her to play along.

She knew that, but...

Joanna withheld her judgment with a surprised look on her face.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t think that would be okay.”

This was said in a strangely heavy voice.

Keegan looked down at Lee Jong-hak and folded his arms in a cold manner.

“We have something called face here too. I’ve already reported to our leader about you guys, and he expects to see you soon. Do you think if I go to our leader and tell him that the guests are tired and that they’ll meet him tomorrow, he’ll accept it with a nod and a smile? My position would be in jeopardy.”
(TL: Long story short, ‘face’ is basically respect.)

Though this was said in a harsh tone, his words weren’t wrong.

“I can’t believe you’re staying in our city but won’t meet our leader. I heard that Asians valued courtesy, but now, I’m wondering if I heard correctly.”

“...”

“It won’t take long. You’ll be back before you know it.”

Lee Jong-hak looked down at his cup and seemed to be lost in thought for a moment.

He didn't know why, but he felt that the hunters, employees, and even civilians in the restaurant were all focused on what was happening at their table.

After a while, Lee Jong-hak finally opened his mouth.

"Understood."

"Now, we're on the same page."

Keegan smiled brightly before turning around and leaving first, Lee Jong-hak close behind.

Joanna stared at their backs for a moment before shaking her head.

"What's going on? Am I the only one who feels this strange tension?"

"No."

After giving this brief answer, Lukas got up and walked out as well.

With a strange expression on her face, Joanna could only follow him.

A jeep was already waiting for them outside the building. And there were three others surrounding it. Inside these jeeps were men who appeared to be hunters.

“...”

Joanna’s expression became even stranger.

Even an inexperienced hunter like her was able to realise that this was way too much for a simple escort.

“Hop in. We’ll take you there quickly.”

“Where is Mr. Dragul?”

Keegan pointed towards the end of the road.

“See that mansion? It looks close, but it would be annoying to walk to it.”

“Let’s walk.”

Keegan’s expression became one of irritation.

“I don’t know why you keep trying to annoy me.”

“I just want to move my body after my meal to help with digestion... Is that a problem?”

As he said this, Lee Jong-hak turned to look Keegan in the eyes. Keegan’s lips twitched for a few moments before he averted his gaze and clicked his tongue.

“...tch. Sure. Guys.”

When he beckoned, the hunters who had been sitting in the other vehicles piled out. There were at least ten of them. They spread out around the four of them with practiced ease.

The atmosphere became tense.

“...”

Lee Jong-hak carefully looked at all of them before turning around and walking down the street.

The hunters surrounded him as though they were escorting him.

And like this, this large group of people slowly began walking towards the mansion where Dragul lived.

After they walked for a while, the bustling streets gradually calmed down. For some strange reason, the further they moved, the darker their surroundings became. And by the time only their own footsteps could be heard, they could no longer see buildings with lights in them on the sides of the street.

The only things offering light were the few streetlights that lined the street, causing the walk to suddenly feel lonely and ominous.

It was at this time when Lukas heard a voice.

[Just listen.]

Sound Transmission.

It was a technique at a much higher level than the Telepathy spell.

It was Lee Jong-hak who had sent sound transmission to Lukas. No, from the slight change in her expression, it seemed he'd sent it to Joanna as well.

Just being able to use sound transmission was a feat that showed incredible skill, but at the same time, he'd done it so perfectly that the hunters around them didn't notice anything.

[I don't know what your mission is or why you are here. However, it was a mistake to enter this city.]

A mistake?

[Do not move. Stay completely still. I swear that I won't hurt you.]

Then, after sending that, Lee Jong-hak drew his sword in a quick, smooth motion. His sword-drawing was so fast that even the word 'fast' was a bit lacking when used to describe it, and barely any sound was released.

The drawn blade lightly reflected the light from the streetlights around them.

It was a beautiful sight. However, contrary to the beauty of the sword, the swordsmanship that was unleashed with it was incredibly fierce.

Shuk-

"Kuk!"

"Gurk!"

The two hunters who were working in front of them let out soft cries before collapsing to the ground. Blood spurted from the backs of their necks.

Only then did the others react, drawing their weapons.

“What the hell are you doing?!”

“This crazy bastard!”

Lee Jong-hak slid into a stance without responding, a fog of ki slowly billowing from his body.

“Wh-, what’s going on...?”

Joanna turned to look at Lukas with a shocked expression.

But Lukas was looking elsewhere. Keegan, who had been walking in front of them, clicked his tongue once before turning around immediately and running away.

It seemed that Lee Jong-hak had expected such a response as he threw his sword lightly.

The motion was light, but the force behind the throw was enormous.

The sword, which whistled through the air, cut Keegan in half. And although he’d tried to dodge it just before it hit him, the speed and force of the attack made him completely unable to block or dodge.

“Kuk...!”

Keegan's body was sent flying in two different directions with fatal injuries that probably caused instant death.

"You arrogant bastard!"

"He threw away his weapon!"

The remaining hunters all attacked Lee Jong-hak, who was now unarmed. However, without any changes to his expression, Lee Jong-hak simply kicked off from the ground. His body was propelled backwards, allowing him to avoid the attacks directed at him.

Then, a hunter pulled out a submachine gun.

"Die!"

But Lee Jong-hak's finger moved before he could pull the trigger.

With a single gesture, the sword that had cut Keegan in half suddenly flew towards him as though it had a will of its own.

The hunters were all shocked by this sight.

"Th-, that!"

“Controlling the sword with ki...!!!”

The sword flew through the air like a swallow. Then, it dyed the street with blood.

The level of these hunters wasn't low. Every one of them was a veteran, and if they were sufficiently equipped, it wouldn't be difficult for them to hunt low-rank Demon Nobles.

Nevertheless, they had met the wrong opponent.

Lee Jong-hak was already only a half-step away from the peak of swordsmanship.

Shuk.

“Ku-, urk...”

The last hunter's chest was split open, and his blood spurted out.

The sword stopped in the air, covered in dark red blood. Then, with a 'brrr' sound, it shook itself clean like a wet cat before flying towards Lee Jong-hak.

Click.

And with a soft sound, Lee Jong-hak returned it to its sheath.

Joanna, who had been stiff for a while glanced at Lukas before taking a step forward. She was pretending to be calm, but she couldn't stop her chin from quivering slightly.

"Human Dragon, Lee Jong-hak. I never took you for a murderer."

"..."

"Are you going to kill us too?"

"Leave this city immediately. There is an exit on the west. Don't go anywhere else."

Lee Jong-hak looked at the building at the end of the street coldly before continuing.

"I don't know what mission you're here for, but now isn't a good time. Ask the people in the forest to the west for help. If you use my name, they will even help you use Warp."

"...you haven't even explained the situation, yet you want us to do as you say?"

Lukas looked around.

The Lee Jong-hak he knew wasn't someone who would carry out murder for no reason. Despite the hatred he had for him, Lukas still admired this human called Lee Jong-hak.

“What is wrong with this city?”

Lee Jong-hak turned to look at Lukas when he heard this question before giving a brief answer.

“...it is a breeding ground.”

“Huh?”

Just as Joanna blinked in surprise, a powerful wave of energy rippled through the city. This energy caused the streetlights to buzz and flicker. And a disturbing pressure seemed to cover their bodies.

Lee Jong-hak sighed.

“That guy has already sealed the entire city. It’s no longer possible to escape.”

“That guy?”

“The Demon, Gullard, the owner of the mansion we were being guided to.”

“Huhhh?!!”

Horrified, Joanna cried out in a trembling voice.

“B-, by Gullard...”

“Yes.”

Lee Jong-hak nodded.

“The true identity of Dragul Phisfounder, the leader of this city, is the Vampire Duke, Gullard.”

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Lee Jong-hak walked towards the west. He didn't say anything, but Joanna and Lukas had no choice but to follow him.

“Can we trust this person?”

Joanna whispered in a soft voice. Lukas looked at Lee Jong-hak's back for a moment before responding to her.

“The Human Dragon, Lee Jong-hak, is a man of great character.”

“Have you met him before?”

“...no.”

“Then that’s just a rumor.”

“Yeah.”

Joanna seemed a bit apprehensive.

Not long afterwards, Lee Jong-hak stopped walking. He was standing in front of an angel statue.

Maybe it was because of the angle or the ominous aura that surrounded the entire city, but the angel, who was supposed to be a holy being, seemed to make the atmosphere feel even more bizarre.

“Do you know ‘The Crying Angel’?”

“What’s that?”

“...it’s fine if you don’t know.”

Joanna rubbed her forearm and shook her head.

Lee Jong-hak pressed on a corner of the statue with his foot. Then, something strange happened.

Grrrk-

The angel statue moved slightly, revealing a hidden space beneath it.

Joanna flinched violently when the statue moved.

Without any hesitation, Lee Jong-hak entered the space below. Lukas and Joanna followed suit.

In the underground space below the statue, there was a dimly lit passage. After walking for a while, hearing only the sound of water droplets softly hitting the ground, they saw a man standing in the middle of the passage.

This man appeared to be in his mid 20s, and he didn't seem to have any characteristics that stood out. Except for the fact that he wore dark sunglasses in this dark space.

The man looked at Lee Jong-hak and spoke.

"You came earlier than we expected."

"Kaisa, so it was your turn today."

Lee Jong-hak sighed before he said, "There's work to do."

"Hmmm..."

The man named Kaisa then turned to look at Lukas and Joanna with surprise.

"Who are the people behind you?"

"They're hunters from North America and Europe. They almost got involved in all of this."

"Looks like something happened... Let's go to the hideout and talk. It's still dangerous here."

After saying that, Kaisa turned around first. And it was at that moment when Joanna was surprised to see a tattoo on his right arm.

"Gray Sun...?!"

When Joanna started drawing upon her mana with a suspicious expression, Kaisa waved his hand.

"I know what you're thinking, but it's a misunderstanding."

"What misunderstanding?! How could you say that..."

“Please trust us.”

It was Lee Jong-hak.

He looked into Joanna’s eyes and spoke with a calm voice.

“I know this isn’t really a good time to say something like this, but I swear. I have no intention of hurting you.”

“Mm...”

When Joanna still didn’t let down her guard, Lukas had no choice but to speak up.

“Let’s listen to them for now. If he wanted to kill us, he would have made a move earlier when he was dealing with those hunters.”

“That’s... true.”

Joanna reluctantly released her mana. This sight caused Lee Jong-hak’s eyes to shine slightly as he turned to look at Lukas.

Perhaps it was because of the fact that he had not lost his calm even once despite the ever-changing situation.

Perhaps it was his ability to calm down Joanna, who seemed to be quite stubborn.

Or perhaps it was both, but the latter had more traction.

Lukas was well aware that he was viewed either as Joanna's manager or subordinate.

Nevertheless, it wasn't a good thing to attract Lee Jong-hak's attention. Though unlikely, it was still possible that he would realise who he was.

Lukas decided to be more careful from now on.

Lee Jong-hak soon retracted his gaze and followed Kaisa.

This underground passage was probably a part of a sewer system. But since it didn't smell bad, it probably hadn't been used yet.

It was hard to tell how long they'd been walking in the tunnel, but after a while, they reached a large iron door.

Kaisa, who was at the front, knocked on the door.

Krrrr...

The door slowly opened with a loud noise, revealing a large space within.

There were also quite a number of people within the room. About 20 or so.

They were either sitting on boxes and talking to each other or exercising and training.

Then a man approached them.

“Lee Jong-hak, you’re early.”

It was a middle-aged man whose short white hair contrasted with his dark skin.

Joanna looked up at him, and her mouth fell open subconsciously.

This man was three times larger than the average adult male. In particular, the muscles on his upper body were so large they appeared as though they would tear through his shirt at any moment.

He gave off a ferocious aura, like a mafia boss with thousands of subordinates.

‘...no. This man is really...’

Joanna's eyes drifted down to look at the man's right forearm. There, she saw five suns overlapping on each other. As far as she knew, there was only one person in the entire organisation who was allowed to have five suns.

The big boss of the organisation, Elijah Kipatosh.

Lee Jong-hak bowed his head to him.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Elijah. Our plan failed."

"No. I prefer to do it this way. I didn't feel very comfortable sending you in alone from the start."

Elijah spoke with a strangely soothing voice. For a moment, Joanna forgot that this man was the notorious boss of the Gray Sun.

"And the young people behind you?"

"They are hunters from North America and Europe. They said they came to this land for a special mission."

"Hmmm. Their timing is rather poor."

Elijah chuckled before he turned to look at them.

“You must have come here using a Warp Portal. Which facility did you use?”

“The Congo Branch.”

When Lukas responded, Joanna turned to look at him. It seemed she was unsure whether it was wise to reveal that information or not.

“That’s Destin’s territory.”

Elijah took a large cigar from his pocket before lighting it.

“I know what you might think about the Gray Sun. But I’ll tell you now that most of that information is false.”

“...false?”

“Right. We’re not a mafia or criminal organisation.”

“Then what are you?”

Elijah stroked his dark beard.

“The resistance.”

* * *

“I apologize for the lack of hospitality.”

“It’s fine.”

Joanna sat on a box and responded in a casual manner.

This group claimed that they bore no hostility, but she couldn’t trust them so easily. It wouldn’t be strange if their attitudes suddenly changed and they threatened them.

Nevertheless, Joanna appeared indifferent despite this.

This attitude was very important in situations like this. There was no rule that said because they were comrades now and they couldn’t be enemies later. And in such an ambiguous relationship, it was best to stand your ground.

The pressure exuded by Elijah Kipatosh’s entire body was incredible. Lukas could tell he was no weaker than Lee Jong-hak.

As for the men and women who sat around them? Each of them had a tattoo of three overlapping suns on their forearm. According to Joanna, these were Gray Sun executives, and each of them was equivalent to a Titled Hunter.

And there was also Lee Jong-hak, who led them there. No matter how they looked at it, there weren't many who could take on such a group.

This group's attention was mostly on Joanna. Not just because she was from North America but because she was also a world famous hunter.

This was a good thing for Lukas. Thanks to that, he was able to look around and observe this group with ease.

"Did you come to Africa for a confidential mission?"

"Yes. So I can't tell you."

"Hmm... no matter what?"

Elijah had a solemn expression on his face.

Joanna clenched her fist, which was hidden beneath the table, as she felt pressure in her stomach.

'He's such a tough old man.'

She wasn't sure how strong he was, but she was sure that he was very formidable. Those huge muscles were definitely not for decoration.

That wasn't all. He also had a piercing pair of eyes in conjunction with his hideous size. As soon as she met his eyes, she felt that he could see all of her secrets.

Nevertheless, Joanna didn't look away. In fact, she steeled her resolve under the pressure.

She could not back down.

Because she was the next Great Wizard who had been chosen by the Great Mage.

"Hoh."

Elijah looked at Joanna with interest before bursting into laughter.

"Joanna Goldberg. I heard you were a disgrace to North America, but it seems the truth can only be revealed when seeing something for yourself."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

Elijah seemed even more pleased when Joanna responded in a calm voice.

Then, when Kaisa, who was standing beside him, coughed lightly, he finally stopped laughing.

“Fine. You must have some guts to step foot in this land. Apart from that, I don’t think you are reinforcements since you don’t seem to know anything about the situation.”

“North America ignored our request for assistance for 10 years. There’s no way that psycho would send reinforcements now.”

This was said by a young woman sitting on the right. She spoke in a cold voice that didn’t match her soft features. On top of that, her hostility towards Joanna was obvious.

Joanna was never the type to take such things lightly.

“Psycho? You’re not talking about President Neil, are you?”

“What if I am?”

“I’d make you pay the price for running your mouth.”

“Ha.”

Just as the woman sneered and was about to say something, Elijah lifted his hand.

“That’s enough, Camilla.”

“...sorry.”

The woman named Camilla bowed her head, her dissatisfaction clear on her face.

Elijah chuckled.

“Will you forgive my subordinate’s rudeness?”

“There won’t be a second time.”

Camilla frowned at her attitude, but she didn’t open her mouth again.

“Thank you. Still, it might be better if you hid the fact that you’re from North America. Camilla isn’t the only one who would react in such a way.”

Joanna didn’t respond.

Elijah smiled and took a drag from his cigar.

Sssp-

In one breath, half of the cigar was burnt away, dense smoke then flowing from his nostrils.

“Kaisa, those things you captured during your last mission, are they still alive?”

“One should still be alive.”

“Good. Bring it here. They would understand it easier if we let them see for themselves.”

Kaisa nodded and left the room.”

Noticing the unusual atmosphere, Joanna spoke.

“What are you going to show us?”

“The situation in Africa can’t be summed up with one word. So it would be easier to understand if you were to see it with your own eyes. Is there a Chinese proverb that’s suitable for this situation, Lee Jong-hak?”

“Seeing something once is better than hearing about it a hundred times. Doing something once is better than seeing it a hundred times.” (TL: T~T)

“Right, that’s it.”

Kaisa returned almost at the same time.

He was pulling a cart, on top of which sat a steel cage. It was a large and secure cage that would usually be used to transport fierce animals.

However, Lukas' expression became strange when he saw what was inside.

What was trapped in the cage wasn't some ferocious beast. Instead, it was a small boy who looked like he would have a hard time harming a single bug.

The boy was so motionless that he appeared to be a doll at first, and he looked at the humans outside the cage with an expressionless face.

Joanna's expression became one of disgust and loathing.

"Is this what you wanted to show me?"

"Right. How is it?"

"...it's disgusting. I'm not sure what your goal is. All I can see is you treating a fellow human like an animal."

The boy's limbs were covered in large chains, and there was a collar around his neck. He was also covered in dirt. It was clear that he hadn't been washed in a long time. This meant that they didn't even give this boy basic human rights.

That wasn't all.

Joanna could see the humans who had been enslaved by the Demons in this little boy. She'd heard that the Demons who enslaved humans would also put collars on their necks.

A man on the left spoke up at that moment.

"This boy killed dozens of humans with his own hands."

"Are you sure he's the murderer?"

"Yes. However, if that was all, we would not have placed him in such a special cage... Kaisa."

Kaisa nodded once before muttering in a soft voice.

"Punish."

Crackle!

"Aaaak!"

The boy let out a scream of pain. The culprit was the collar. Blue sparks of electricity could be seen bouncing from it.

It was electrical torture.

The current was so strong that it brightened the surroundings for a moment.

“What the hell are you... Ah!”

Joanna’s expression became hard.

She realised that the current flowing from the collar was strong enough to instantly burn any normal person to a crisp. Nevertheless, the boy only seemed to be in pain.

Then, the boy’s face twisted in a hideous manner.

His skin also became red, and his eyes became yellow. Not only did they become yellow, but his eyes also became elongated, similar to the eyes of a reptile.

Joanna couldn’t help but open her mouth in shock at the sight.

“Is this boy a Demon?”

“Half of one.”

“Huh? What do you mean...?”

When Joanna asked this question in a confused voice, Elijah finished his cigar.

“Did I not say it properly? I’m trying to say that this boy is a mixed race.”

“Mi-, mixed?”

“Right.”

Elijah nodded while looking at the boy who was squirming in pain.

“They have the traits of both humans and Demons. So we call them Hybrids.”

Season 2 Chapter 66

Kaisa disappeared with the boy again.

Joanna didn’t seem to be able to overcome her shock. Lukas, on the other hand, was thinking about the last word Elijah said.

'Hybrid.'

This word, which he heard in the place where the member of the Top Three, Kran, was, perfectly matched the hint he'd been given by God.

Lukas was confident that he'd grasped a faint clue. Of course, he couldn't do anything with that information yet.

"The African Branch of the Hunter Organisation is already rotten to the core. They chose to live on their stomachs rather than stand and die, and the proof of this is the Hybrid you just saw."

All of the humor had disappeared from Elijah's face.

After managing to finally calm herself down, Joanna spoke.

"What the hell is going on in this place?"

"You could say it's a living matter experiment or a hybridisation experiment. Countless experiments were carried out on countless second-generation humans and demons. The corpses could pile up to form a mountain, and the blood could create a river."

"Th-, that..."

Joanna shook her head with a pale complexion. The determined attitude that she'd displayed earlier had completely disappeared.

“But... is that really possible? In the decades that the Demons have been on Earth, this is my first time hearing about hybrids.”

She knew that some demons had the disgusting hobby of sleeping with their human slaves. But there had never been cases of women becoming pregnant with the demon’s child or of a demon becoming pregnant with a human’s child.

The genes of humans and demons were so different that it was fair to call it ‘impossible’. Common sense deemed it impossible for them to conceive, so naturally, no second-generation would be born.

“As expected of an American hunter.”

It was Camilla who spoke up with a sarcastic tone. But this time, Elijah didn’t restrain her.

“It’s not that bad. They were working on this project very discreetly. In all honesty, it hasn’t been 10 years since we found out. And by that time, the experiments were already almost complete. So even we don’t know when this madness truly began.”

“...”

“It gives me goosebumps. It’s a hunter’s duty to protect the civilians and stand up against the Demons, and yet they were kidnapping people and delivering them to the Demons. What’s even worse is that most people didn’t even know about it. It’s the same for the Congo Branch that you passed through. The people there have complete faith in the association. Even though hundreds of people go missing every day.”

Joanna gulped slightly.

“You could tell them the truth...”

“We tried, but it didn’t do much. For most people, the Gray Sun is the most dangerous thing after the Demons.”

“...”

Joanna had no choice but to remain silent at those words.

Until that day, she had also thought the same thing.

“After learning this, we sent requests to the leaders of each region. Just holding their line was the only help that Europe, who is in a similarly urgent situation, could give. Asia and Oceania helped by sending key talents to us. And North America...”

“Didn’t help at all.”

It was Lee Jong-hak who interrupted Elijah’s words. He continued in his distinctively calm tone.

“In the past decade or so, Mr. Elijah must have sent at least a hundred requests for assistance.”

With the support of North America, the misunderstanding and distrust that the general population had towards the Gray Sun could have been washed away. It might have even been possible to inform everyone that it was the African Branch of the Hunter Association that went astray instead of the Gray Sun.

Only North America, revered as the greatest government in the world, could've fulfilled this role.

Knowing that, Elijah explained the situation dozens or even hundreds of times, asking Neil for help.

The African Branch was working with the Demons and experimenting with hybridisation, and those who refused to give in had created an organisation called the 'Gray Sun'. He explained that the Gray Sun was being slandered as a criminal organisation in order to discredit them. And he asked for help.

"However, Neil Prand, President of the Hunter Association, never responded to our requests."

"It wasn't just that he didn't respond. I'm not sure if it was because he was afraid American Hunters would leave on their own, but he completely hid the situation in Africa. I can tell, just by looking at you, how well Neil kept the secret."

Camilla looked at Joanna with a mocking expression.

An Archmage was someone with considerable authority and qualification in North America. Naturally, this meant that they were also aware of confidential information that ordinary hunters weren't privy to.

And yet even an Archmage wasn't aware of the situation.

Camilla's words were biting, but she wasn't wrong.

Joanna remained silent because she couldn't refute her despite her harsh attitude.

"This is the situation in Africa right now. And this city, Zinga, is one of the largest breeding grounds in Africa. Where Lee Jong-hak was supposed to carry out an important mission, but..."

Elijah's expression dropped a little. His face appeared solemn.

"...he failed."

"..."

This failure was a result of the appearance of Joanna and Lukas. Knowing this, Joanna couldn't help but lower her head.

Elijah paused for a moment before continuing.

"So, what I'm trying to say is... Joanna Goldberg, will you help us?"

"Huh?"

“Africa is absolutely devoid of Wizards. In the first place, magical science wasn’t widespread, and we rarely had the chance to interact and exchange with other regions.”

“1...”

Joanna shook her head in confusion.

Lukas couldn’t help but sigh inwardly when he saw this.

In truth, he couldn’t blame Joanna for this. Because her response was already not so bad. It was Elijah’s ability to speak that was too great. He pressed Joanna slowly as the conversation progressed, controlling the flow completely. Then, he induced guilt in her heart.

It was possible that he’d planned to do this from the moment he learned who she was.

Elijah’s offensive had been delivered perfectly. Now, Joanna’s sharp aura couldn’t be felt at all.

This wasn’t a good situation.

Of course, helping them in itself wasn’t bad. It seemed that Gray Sun’s influence stretched across the entirety of Africa, so building a close relationship with them would help him find Kran.

But the thing Lukas was scared about was the first step. If their relationship was developed from this situation, then they might get dragged around by Elijah and made to do more missions here. Being his hands and feet and moving around busily until they eventually forgot their original objective.

So they had to pursue an equal relationship. It wasn't just about helping them but also receiving help. But it was hard to expect such a result from Joanna.

Reluctantly, Lukas opened his mouth.

"I'm sorry, but I don't think that is something we can agree to do so easily."

For the first time, the eyes of those in the room turned to Lukas.

Some of them had even forgotten his existence.

Camilla made an unpleasant expression, like someone was interfering with their work.

Elijah, on the other hand, seemed interested.

"You... said you were Frey, a European hunter, right?"

"Yes."

“But it’s Joanna Goldberg whom we’re asking for help, not you.”

“We are on a joint mission. If she accepts your request, I will have to follow her. I think that gives me enough right to refuse.”

Elijah’s gaze grew deeper when he heard Lukas’ words.

He stared at him for a while before narrowing his eyes slightly.

“You...”

After a while, Elijah sighed and muttered.

“It seems I made a mistake. I didn’t choose the right target.”

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Lukas said that they needed time to discuss.

Elijah accepted this without thinking too much about it, but he gave Lukas a deep look of interest before leaving the room.

Lukas deliberately pretended not to notice his gaze.

Thud-

After the door closed, silence befell the room for a moment. Lukas sat on a nearby wooden box, lost in thought.

Currently, there were two paths they could take.

The first was to go to Kran as they had originally intended.

To do that, they would have to say goodbye to the Gray Sun. In other words, they would have to refuse their request for help. This might cause the Gray Sun to feel discontented, and there was a chance that they would do something drastic.

Of course, he wasn't really worried about that.

The Gray Sun already had its hands full carrying out resistance activities. It couldn't afford to pay attention to Lukas and Joanna, and if it did, it would only be a weak observation.

It was almost certain that they wouldn't want their relationship to devolve beyond that point.

So the first path wasn't so bad. In fact, it might even be the best choice.

After all, meeting the Top Three was the reason he came to this land in the first place.

'However...'

Lukas recalled the halfblood boy he'd just seen.

Hybrid.

A being who had the traits of both the demons and the humans.

God had talked about being able to 'fool the laws of this universe'.

So what if the hint wasn't about Kran but about the half-bloods?

In fact, wasn't it Lukas' assumption that the hint, 'three', that God had mentioned to Sedi referred to the Top Three?

Helping the Gray Sun might give him more clues on 'hybrid', which he was still uncertain about.

That wasn't the only advantage.

Lee Jong-hak had said that the true identity of Dragul Phisfounder, the ruler of Zinga, was Gullard, the Vampire Duke.

One of the Five Dukes, who was the most powerful and influential among the Demon Dukes.

Lukas had never met one of the five dukes before. That wasn't all. Unlike the other Dukes, whose information was easily attainable, little was known about the Five Dukes.

And yet, such a mysterious being had Iris' last name. At first, he thought it might have been a mere coincidence, but now, he wasn't sure if that was the case.

The most obvious way to resolve his doubts was to capture Gullard alive and ask him about the last name 'Phisfounder'.

But that was hard for Lukas at the moment.

'I can't overpower one of the Five Dukes with just 9 star magic.'

It might be possible to kill him, but that would be going against his agreement with Sedi. And it wasn't the time to do so. He at least had to maintain his alliance with her until they got rid of Nodiesop and figured out Letip's goal.

Then what could he do?

The only other power that Lukas could use at that moment was Joanna, but even if she was an Archmage, she would only end up dead if she ever had to fight against a Duke.

Furthermore, capturing a target was many times more difficult than killing one.

“...”

Lukas turned to look at Joanna.

She still had her head bowed in a depressed manner.

“Joanna.”

“Yeah.”

Joanna looked up at Lukas. Her gaze seemed to be asking him what he wanted.

“Are you feeling guilty? Or perhaps you’re disappointed by North America’s policy.”

“...I.”

She bit her lip for a moment before finally opening her mouth.

“I never thought it would be like this.”

“...”

“I grew up thinking that America was the best. And I thought that while being revered as the leader of the world, we were fulfilling the duties and responsibilities that came with such a position. But we weren’t.”

Joanna wasn’t really to blame for this. After all, the trust and approval that Neil gained from the Americans were overwhelming.

Gaining such trust wasn’t particularly difficult for him. As Lukas always said, he was a transformer who only appears once every thousand years. For him, securing public sentiment and manipulating public opinion was as easy as flipping your hand over.

In a way, Neil had deceived the entirety of North America.

And Joanna was one of the many people who had been fooled by this deception.

“Do you think America is wrong?”

“...that...”

Joanna opened her mouth, but the words wouldn’t come out. After a while, she could only lower her head again.

Only then did Lukas notice Joanna's biggest flaw. The reason why she couldn't become a true 7 star Archmage.

Joanna had become too reliant and entangled. And in this state, she didn't know how to move on her own.

North America had always supported her. It would be accurate to say that she depended on them. She was afraid to stand on her own. She was worried that the shield which protected her, would disappear.

This wasn't something to despise her over. After all, no one hated the warmth of a shelter. The feeling of gently closing your eyes without having to worry about anything.

However, to grow up, to be a better being, you had to have the courage to step out of that warm room on your own.

Lukas had been lost once, too. There was a time when he hadn't been confident that he would be able to handle the storms of the world alone. He lacked confidence in himself. He stayed up all day and all night, drowning in his thoughts, but he still couldn't find an answer.

After all, the answer laid outside the warm shelter. In the harsh, freezing winds which tore at his flesh and nibbled at his bones.

Only those who had managed to step into those cold winds deserved to be called Great Wizards.

"Are you America?"

“Huh?”

“If not, then there’s no need for you to feel guilty for the wrongs they have committed. Because you’re not the one who committed them.”

Lukas looked at Joanna and saw a lost being who was in desperate need of advice.

“Being a part of an organisation isn’t a bad thing. Especially if it’s with people you like or care about. However, that doesn’t mean you have to leave your thoughts and choices to the group.”

“...!”

“Maybe it’s the Association President or other executives who give you orders. But it’s up to you to decide whether you want to accept those orders or not. Because in the end, you will have to take responsibility for your actions. So think carefully before making a decision. So that in ten years, you wouldn’t look back and regret something you did now.”

Maybe he was more determined to help Joanna after teaching Leo and Min Ha-rin.

The people Lukas felt the most sorriest for, were those who were born with outstanding talent and good personalities but fell onto the wrong path.

Many of them walked along this path to the point where they could no longer turn back.

But Joanna hadn't. It was not too late for her.

"This place is outside of President Neil's reach. So you have plenty of time to think for yourself, no one will interrupt you. Take this time to make your conclusions. And when you've found the answer, tell me."

"..."

After those words, silence fell once again.

Outside, people seemed to be moving around hurriedly, as their bustling footsteps could be heard.

Then, the sound of breathing could be heard.

It was Joanna.

She took a few deep breaths before slowly raising her head again.

"Why should I tell you that?"

Her voice was still soft, but it seemed that she had regained some of her energy.

Lukas smiled.

“Of course, it’s up to you whether you tell me or not.”

“...you’re a good talker. You’d be amazing if you were in sales or something like that.”

After saying that, Joanna suddenly let out a soft cough before glancing at Lukas and blushing slightly.

“A-, and. Thank you for comforting...”

It was at that moment that the door was suddenly opened and someone walked in.

Joanna frowned as she turned to look at the door.

A man was standing there.

It was the man who had been sitting on Elijah’s left earlier. He had a tattoo of three suns on his forearm.

Now that she thought about it, she realised she hadn’t heard his name yet.

The man spoke in a blunt tone.

“Have you made a decision yet?”

“Haven’t you heard about knocking?”

The man folded his arms instead of answering. It seemed that he didn’t like Joanna either.

If it had been before, she might have flinched at this action, but now, she didn’t react in any way.

Joanna turned to glance at Lukas, who nodded to say that she could decide on her own.

She felt greatly encouraged by his attitude.

This man was a strange person.

He was weak, his looks were only so-so, and he didn’t seem to have any special abilities, but strangely, she couldn’t treat him lightly.

Joanna had a wide range of knowledge since, instead of hunting, she frequently met with the famous hunters and leaders of various regions.

Thanks to that, she was able to build a facade that allowed her to not shrink back when faced with the various big names.

Nevertheless, she had been completely overwhelmed by Elijah Kipatosh. The pressure that this man, the Big Boss of the Gray Suns, gave her was beyond imagination.

At first, Joanna was able to pretend to be determined, but it didn't take long for him to peel her mask off, causing her to flounder.

But Lukas didn't.

He had clearly expressed his opinion in his distinctively calm demeanor. It was as though he couldn't feel the heavy pressure rolling off Elijah's body.

It was only then that Joanna saw the true face of this man named Frey.

'This man is weak, but he's not weak-willed.'

At the very least, Lukas had always displayed confidence in himself.

When he'd run away during the beast tide, she'd wanted to pull his head off, but when he returned she couldn't even be mad at him. Because he acted like he'd done nothing wrong.

It was to the point that Joanna couldn't help but wonder if maybe something was wrong with him. Nevertheless, she couldn't help but envy him a little.

'I want to live like that too.'

Though faint, it couldn't be denied that she'd had that thought.

She had a thought that she'd never had even with Association President Neil, whom she admired the most, for a man that she hadn't even known for a week.

"Joanna Goldberg."

The man at the door called her name as if urging her to answer.

Joanna turned to learn him.

Lukas had already displayed the attitude of leaving the decision to her. So Joanna had to make a choice that wouldn't disappoint his expectations.

But at the same time, she had to make a choice she wouldn't regret.

Her lips slowly parted.

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"Hmmm."

Elijah smoked a cigar as he looked at the man standing in front of him. It was the man who had gone to receive an answer from Joanna. His name was Joffrey.

“Right. So she said she would collaborate with us.”

“Yes. However, she asked for more information that would give her a better picture of the situation and the right to withdraw at any time. Also...”

“There’s more? She sure is demanding.”

It was Camilla who said these words with a displeased expression.

After pausing for a moment, Joffrey continued.

“She wants information about the member of the Top Three, Kran.”

“...”

Elijah’s eyebrows furrowed.

The Gray Sun was active all over Africa, so it was natural that they’d have detailed information about Kran, including his ridiculous achievements in Egypt.

Naturally, this included the feat of killing a Demon Duke on his own, which he'd accomplished not so long ago.

“Ha. Those dirty bastards. Now, we can see their goal. They came here to poach Kran.”

Camilla spoke with a mocking sneer.

It had already been three years since Kran first became active in Africa. In that time, the number of Demon Beasts, Demons, and high-ranking Demon Nobles who had died by his hands had reached an astonishing number.

In total, the number of Demons Kran had killed on his own was comparable to the number killed by the entire Gray Sun organisation. And even the quality and rank of the Demons he'd killed was greater.

Thanks to this, the Demons had mostly focused their attention on Kran, which in turn meant that their attention on the Gray Sun was relatively small. Over these past three years, their territory and forces had been greatly expanded.

Of course, this didn't mean that Kran and the Gray Sun had a good relationship.

Kran was a talent who was coveted by every organisation in the world. If a price could be added to his value, it would easily surpass billions of dollars.

And now that he had slain a Demon Duke on his own, he had proved he was the strongest hunter in the world. A being who could not be replaced.

Nevertheless, Kran wasn't a team player. There was already a large number of people who had to flee desperately after being struck by his sword while trying to recruit him.

The Gray Sun was among the groups who had already been rejected by him.

Because of this, they had no choice but to focus on his every move. The moment he left Africa, the pressure from the Demons would return to them in full.

'Now is the best time.'

Elijah bit his cigar.

The position of the Vampire Duke, Gullard, had been secured, and they'd been able to gain the reinforcement of the powerful Lee Jong-hak to deal with their enemy. Just a moment ago, they had even confirmed the assistance of a 7 star Wizard.

Gullard was the true ruler of the African Continent. If they killed him, the Demons' power in this land would drop by at least half.

Of course, the difficulty to slay a member of the Five Dukes went without saying.

'But it can't be helped.'

The Gray Sun also had to bet its life on this subjugation battle. Even if there was a high chance that they would end up irreparably damaged after the confrontation, he didn't intend to back down.

Suddenly.

The door was flung open, and a man ran in with an anxious expression.

He was one of the Gray Sun's intelligence officers. When he saw Elijah, he hurriedly lowered his head.

"P-, pardon my intrusion, Big Boss."

"What is it?"

"It's an emergency report."

Elijah's eyebrows raised.

"Emergency report?"

"Yes. A-, about the Top Three, Kran..."

Elijah's jaw quivered slightly when the man said this name in a soft voice.

The man gulped slightly before continuing.

“Kran has started to move.”

“...started to move? Already? Shouldn't he still be recuperating from his injuries after the last battle?”

Elijah couldn't help but be surprised.

Kran had managed to successfully hunt down a Demon Duke, but he'd also suffered grievous injuries as a result. Many experts concluded that his rehabilitation would take at most one month and at least three weeks.

But he'd started moving before even a single week had passed.

This sort of recovery speed was truly inhuman.

“W-, we're certain. We already know where he's headed.”

“Where?”

“To Zinga.”

“...what did you say?”

When Elijah asked this question, the man responded with a slightly feverish expression.

“The Top Three, Kran, is heading to this city, Zinga! Big Boss...! His next target is the Vampire Duke, Gullard!”

* * *

Elijah decided to inform the two strangers of Kran’s imminent arrival. This wasn’t an act done out of goodwill but was instead a calculated one.

He wasn’t completely sure why Joanna and Lukas were there. However, he did know that they wanted information on Kran and seemed to want to meet him.

So by telling these people this information, he was able to gain some advantages without needing to do anything extra.

The first was that although it seemed trivial, the fact that he’d given the information to them without asking for anything in return gave him the initiative.

And the second was that this information would keep them there.

Depending on how he said it, he would be able to persuade them to stay there for much longer than they intended. It was a bit of a lowly move, but it was worth it if it meant obtaining the assistance of an Archmage.

It was Kaisa who went to deliver the news.

He looked at Joanna before speaking slowly.

“Kran is moving at a speed that defies common sense, but it will still take some time for him to reach Zinga. You can stay here till then.”

“Thanks.”

Joanna expressed her gratitude with a small nod.

After delivering the message, Kaisa bowed his head and left the room.

Then, Joanna’s expression brightened up.

“This is great news! We don’t have to go to Egypt anymore.”

“I see.”

“Ahh. I’m so glad~”

Joanna sank into the couch as she hummed contentedly.

...It definitely was good news.

The Top Three, Kran, their reason for coming to this land in the first place, was on his way to this very city. What mattered now was the chain reactions that would follow.

It could be seen just by looking at Kaisa, who had just left. His attitude was much more polite than it was the first time they’d met. So it was either that he’d gotten a change of heart or that Elijah had told him to do so.

And it was most likely the latter.

‘Elijah Kipatosh.’

In simple terms, he was a cunning human.

Lukas hadn’t shown much, but Elijah had been able to grasp his nature just from the little he’d shown. This meant that his insight far exceeded that of a normal person.

‘Cooperation with the Gray Sun.’

He still needed to observe the situation a bit more, but at least it wasn't something that had to be blindly rejected.

After having this thought, Lukas rose from his seat. He could feel Joanna's gaze following him, but he ignored her and headed to the door.

As expected, a man was standing outside.

The man spoke in a business-like manner.

"Where is Lee Jong-hak? I would like to ask him something."

"He should be resting at this time. Should I call him?"

"Please do."

When Lukas returned to his seat, Joanna tilted her head to the side.

"What do you want to ask him?"

"A lot of things."

“Wouldn’t it be better to ask that guy named Kaisa instead? He’s a member of the Gray Sun, so he would have a much better grasp of the situation. Lee Jong-hak is an outsider like us.”

It was a valid opinion, but her thoughts were still too shallow.

Without revealing his inner thoughts, Lukas answered.

“Lee Jong-hak probably has the most objective view of anyone in this base. And that’s what we need most at this moment.”

Joanna’s expression became strange when she heard this, but she didn’t question him any further.

After a while, Lee Jong-hak came into the room. He had his usual, calm expression on his face as he turned to Joanna.

“What would you like to ask?”

“It’s me, not her.”

At those words, Lee Jong-hak turned his head slightly and looked at Lukas.

“What do you want to know?”

“I’d like to know what mission you were carrying out in the city.”

Lee Jong-hak answered without thinking much about it.

“I was trying to determine the exact location of the Vampire Duke.”

“...isn’t that too risky? No matter how strong you are, you can’t fight a Duke alone.”

Lee Jong-hak had definitely become stronger, but he hadn’t reached the stage of being able to fight a Duke on his own. In fact, there were no humans capable of fighting a Demon Duke except for the man named Kran.

And yet he was willing to enter the Vampire Duke’s lair to find his exact location?

This sounded like an recklessly dangerous mission. It was no different from walking into a predator’s territory naked.

“Besides, you should have already known the Vampire Duke’s location.”

A large mansion sat at the end of the main road. And in this mansion, which overflowed with demonic energy, was the Vampire Duke who had created the persona, Dragul Phisfounder.

“You’re right. I have no intention of fighting the Vampire Duke on my own. But even if I had gone into that mansion, I wouldn’t have died or been in any danger.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because the being in the mansion isn’t real; it’s a double.”

Lukas’ expression became strange.

“A double?”

“It’s one of the secrets that the Gray Sun managed to uncover over time. Dragul sometimes appears in the city, but he’s not real. The real Vampire Duke has never revealed himself.”

“Then isn’t it possible that the Vampire Duke isn’t in this city at all??

Lukas was asking so much because he knew that the Vampire Duke was hiding in this city. He just wanted to know Lee Jong-hak’s thoughts.

“It’s unlikely but still possible that the Dragul double knows where the Vampire Duke is. Besides, it would be much easier to take control of this city if the Vampire Duke isn’t here, so that’s not bad either.”

It was only then when Lukas realised Lee Jong-hak’s true mission.

“You intended to capture the double in the mansion to get information.”

“That was my goal.”

Lukas thought for a moment before opening his mouth again.

“Why did the residents dislike you so much?”

“I’ve killed countless Demons after arriving in this place. Zinga’s hunters seemed to have formed some kind of relationship with the Demons, so they didn’t like me from the start.”

Those words were a bit strange.

No matter how close they might have been, in the end, the hunters had to hide the fact that they were collaborating with the Demons. So even if they disliked him for that reason, they wouldn’t show it so openly...

“I’ve killed a few. I never counted, but if you included the low-level Demon Beasts, then it should be in the thousands.”

Joanna, who was beside him, couldn’t help but look at him like he was a monster.

It was needless to say how impossible it was to imagine killing thousands of enemies single-handedly. And he wasn’t even a Wizard who could use large scale attacks. He was a Warrior.

“However, the main reason why they hate me is because I’ve also killed a few of the halfbloods.”

“...halfbloods?”

“Among the residents in the city, there are many who are the parents of hybrids.”

A cold smile blossomed on Lee Jong-hak’s lips.

“They seem to regard the halfbloods they create with the Demons as their children. Disgusting.”

Joanna couldn’t help but feel a chill at those words.

However, the cold expression on Lee Jong-hak’s face disappeared as quickly as it appeared.

Season 2 Chapter 69

After Lee Jong-hak left, Joanna turned to Lukas, who was organising his thoughts.

“What are you going to do now?”

“...what would you like to do?”

Joanna made a sour expression before replying.

“You always do that.”

“Huh?”

“You like to answer questions with questions. It’s not very polite to do that.”

“...”

Was that true?

He’d never realised it, but he didn’t think she was wrong.

While Lukas pondered about this, Joanna’s voice sounded again.

“First of all, I think we need to gather more information. Hmm. We’ll be staying in the Gray Sun’s base for a while, so if these people ask for help, we’ll have to assist them.”

After saying that, Joanna paused for a moment before suddenly jumping up.

“But what about our truck?”

“Ah.”

It was only then when Lukas remembered the military truck that they'd used to get there.

It was probably in the hands of the residents of Zinga now. They wouldn't have destroyed it, but it probably wouldn't be easy for them to get it back.

“Ugh. I can't believe we forgot about it.”

Joanna held her head in despair.

She couldn't believe that she'd completely forgotten their most important means of transportation, regardless of how the situation had changed. She was upset at her own absentmindedness.

Of course, she didn't like the thought of continuing to use it because it had been borrowed from Destin, but it couldn't be helped.

...It was truly a stroke of luck that their target, Kran, who was originally in Egypt, was coming to them on his own. That eliminated the need to traverse the African continent.

In other words, even if they didn't have a vehicle, it wouldn't be a major hindrance to their mission.

“...let's get some sleep. I'm so tired I feel like I'm gonna die.”

Joanna, who had been agonising for a while, let out a sigh. She couldn't be certain because they were underground, but it was probably close to dawn already.

It was no wonder she felt so tired. A lot had happened today, and she hadn't been able to disperse the fatigue that had accumulated from the day before.

Lukas nodded, and they rested for the rest of the day.

—And so, three days passed.

Nothing special happened during this time. Joanna focused on recovering to her peak condition, and she seemed to look better compared to three days ago.

The sewer base was a boring place, but it was perfect for relaxation.

From time to time, Kaisa or Lee Jong-hak would come to deliver some information before leaving again. Kaisa mainly updated them on Kran's location while Lee Jong-hak focused on the situation in Zinga.

Lukas spent most of this time meditating.

At first, it was simply to stabilise his mind and body, but now, he was doing it for a specific purpose. Of course, he couldn't tell anyone about it at this stage, but in a way, it was something that had higher priority than any other situation.

It was only on the fourth morning when something changed.

On this day, Lee Jong-hak and Joffrey visited them at the same time.

“He will be on the road today.”

“He?”

“The Vampire Duke’s double.”

Lukas’ eyes brightened slightly.

“Are you sure?”

“It’s highly likely. A chaotic aura has enveloped the entire city, so we think he will be going on an inspection.”

“That’s a great opportunity.”

If an inspection was his goal, it was inevitable that he would go to some secluded places. If they were able to find a good location to launch a surprise attack, they might be able to capture the double more easily than they expected.

“Demons and Hybrids are currently roaming the city, looking for the Gray Sun. So there is a high chance that we’d be discovered if we move in large numbers. So we will move in a small group.”

Lee Jong-hak turned to look at Joanna.

“Archmage Joanna, we really need your help.”

“Of course I’ll help.”

“Thank you. So the group will consist of me, Archmage Joanna, Gray Sun executive Joffrey, and the last person...”

Lee Jong-hak spoke slowly.

“She’s not here, but it’s Ms. Camilla. She’s also an executive.”

Joanna’s heart jumped slightly at his words.

“Huh?”

“Is there something you don’t like about my selection?”

“Of course there is. Why didn’t you mention Frey?”

Lee Jong-hak turned to look at Lukas.

“Pardon my rudeness, but how strong are you?”

“Enough to play my part.”

Joanna almost burst into laughter at the words that were so similar to what she’d heard in the past.

But in direct contrast to her, Lee Jong-hak spoke in an increasingly serious tone.

“...this is a very important mission. Can you kill Demons if necessary?”

Lukas answered this question without hesitation.

“No.”

“...”

A subtle hint of disappointment flashed in Lee Jong-hak’s eyes, and Joanna turned to look at Lukas with a blank expression.

The same was true for Joffrey who was standing beside them.

He recalled the conversation he'd had with Elijah before he came.

'Don't provoke that man named Frey.'

'Huh?'

'He is dangerous.'

Joffrey had been unable to hide his astonishment at those words.

Elijah Kipatosh was the Big Boss of the Gray Sun.

Until now, there had only been one other person whom Elijah had directly called 'dangerous'.

And that was the Strongest Hunter, Kran, one of the Top Three.

Did this mean that Elijah thought that this guy was on the same level as Kran?

'I'm thinking too much.'

Joffrey shook his head.

It was advice from Elijah, whom he admired more than anyone else, but he could only assume that he was trying to think too deeply.

He was confident in his own eyes, and according to what he could see, this man was not dangerous at all.

Although he claimed to be a Wizard, compared to Joanna, who constantly exuded mana, his body was like a desert.

While Joffrey was lost in his thoughts, Joanna awoke from her daze.

“We have to take Frey!”

“Why?”

“Th... that...uh... Frey is very quick-witted and calm, and he knows a lot of strange, useful spells like the Alarm spell. A-, and...”

While Joanna floundered for words with an embarrassed expression, Lukas nodded and said.

“I understand. I will defend this place.”

Joffrey burst into laughter at those words. What did he mean by defend?

“H-, hey? Why would you agree to that?”

Joanna said that, but Lukas didn't think this was a bad situation.

He just needed the time to move alone—

“...”

Lukas' expression suddenly hardened.

With a startled expression, he looked up at the ceiling. Of course, all that could be seen on the ceiling of the sewer base were a few water spots. The outside wasn't visible at all.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing.”

Lukas shook his head at Joanna's expression, but his expression didn't relax.

A 'special aura' that could never be mistaken had suddenly entered the range of his senses.

Lukas thought of someone with a complex expression on his face.

'Sedi.'

She should have been in Northern Ireland, so why was she here?

Season 2 Chapter 70

Joffrey couldn't help but stare at the man in front of him.

"What did you just say?"

"I said I want to move on my own."

Was this man crazy? No, maybe he meant something else.

Joffrey couldn't help but massage his temples as he asked.

"Do you mean you want to move around Zinga on your own?"

"Yes."

"You can't."

He didn't even have to think too deeply about it.

Joffrey's expression became cold as he said this. Then, he continued before Lukas could argue.

"You know the location of this hideout. What if the enemy captures you and the information is leaked? Can you bear the burden and responsibility for that?"

"This is just a temporary hideout that can be discarded at any moment. Is it necessary to take it so far?"

"..."

Joffrey's pupils shook slightly.

"...what are you talking about?"

"You don't have to pretend."

There wasn't even the slightest quiver in the voice that rang in his ear. This wasn't just the sound of confidence. It was one of absolute certainty.

Joffrey sighed.

“...how did you know?”

“It was Lee Jong-hak, not a member of the Gray Sun, who brought us here. In the end, an outsider is still an outsider. There is no way that Lee Jong-hak would be introduced to the group’s main hideout, one that probably contains many secrets.”

Kaisa had not shown any disapproval at Lee Jong-hak’s act of bringing strangers into their hideout unannounced. This proved that this hideout wasn’t very important.

There was also another reason.

Since the very first day, they had not seen Elijah again. And Lukas had sensed him leave the hideout before the first day had even ended.

Zinga was a relatively large city. So it was almost guaranteed that the Gray Sun had numerous hideouts hidden throughout the city. And Elijah was likely wandering from hideout to hideout while relaying his commands.

“...you’re right. This hideout is temporary at best, so it wouldn’t be much of a loss if it was discovered or destroyed. However, it still isn’t a good idea for a Wizard to go out alone. I can’t allow you to. Even if you were an Archmage, it would be dangerous to move around this city on your own.”

Lukas looked at Joffrey for a moment before opening his mouth.

“Did Elijah Kipatosh say anything about me?”

“...!”

Joffrey couldn't hide his shock.

Things about him.

...He did.

Elijah had said that whatever Lukas said, he should respect his opinion and listen to him as much as possible.

“...hoo.”

Joffrey sighed heavily.

His boss had given him orders that he hadn't been able to understand at the time. Of course, regardless of whether he could understand or not, there had never been a time when Joffrey had disobeyed his orders.

And this time was no exception.

* * *

Lukas had earned the right to move on his own.

But he couldn't leave immediately. This was because there was the condition that he should match the time when Lee Jong-hak and the others left to carry out their operation.

They had already finished searching for the best spot to carry out their attack, and they were likely to move at sunset.

Fighting when the sun was up was incredibly advantageous when fighting against Demons, but the Vampire Duke's double only moved after the sun had set.

This was obviously to avoid the sun. In fact, it was possible that the double was also a fairly high-ranked Demon.

At first, Lukas hadn't intended to go out on his own. He'd thought it would be better to travel through the city using Ghost as he had in the previous city.

But Sedi had come to this city all of a sudden. And there was a high chance that it was because she wanted to meet him.

'Why did she come here?'

He hadn't killed any Demons. Lukas had thoroughly kept his word to Sedi.

Or... had she noticed that he'd destroyed the minds of the two Demons in the previous city?

The chances were low, but he decided to be prepared if it was true.

"Ugh..."

Then Lukas heard a soft groan.

He turned to the side and saw Joanna. She was looking at a notebook while pulling at her hair. Her fair forehead was also wrinkled.

It was the same notebook that she took out whenever she had the time.

Of course, Lukas still wasn't sure exactly what was written in it.

Then their eyes met.

Joanna instantly got rid of her agitated expression and instead replaced it with her usual, nonchalant look. It was as though she was managing her image.

"What is it?"

“I’d like to see it.”

“...”

He didn’t know why, but the answer didn’t come for a while.

Joanna was silent for a long time before she finally answered in a slightly snappy manner.

“It’s just some spells and magical formulas.”

“Formulas?”

“Wanna see it?”

After saying that, she threw the book without warning.

Lukas easily plucked it out of the air and skimmed through it. The entire book was tattered and stained from how many times it had been read.

Compared to the shabby exterior, however, the contents were still legible.

It was obvious that Joanna had read this book countless times. But it didn't appear to be something she cherished.

This could be seen from her act of throwing it just a moment ago or the fact that the cover of the book was in such poor condition.

Lukas looked at the first page.

Then the interest on his face became more and more prominent the more pages he turned.

"It gets progressively harder."

"Yes."

Lukas looked through the notebook, unable to hide his admiration. The spells and magic formulas in it were quite sophisticated.

Many of them were things that were difficult to calculate when considering the current level of magical science in this universe.

"Where did you get this book?"

"...I got it from somebody I know."

These words were said in a very hesitant voice. So Lukas didn't press her any further as he could tell that she didn't want to talk about it.

Lukas looked through the entire book to the end before nodding once with a pleased expression on his face.

Then he turned to a page that he'd noticed before handing the book back to Joanna.

"This spell, if you use it, I'm sure it would be of great help during your mission."

Joanna smiled bitterly.

"Well, I guess so."

"Can't you use it?"

"Of course I can."

At Joanna's level, she would be able to use any of the spells in the book. This particular spell didn't require much mana either.

Lukas looked down at the book for a moment before realising the problem.

“You can’t read the magic formula.”

“Yeah.”

Joanna nodded without being embarrassed. She spoke as if it was natural and instead looked at Lukas strangely.

Lukas kept looking at the book, seemingly lost in thought.

“Do you have a pen?”

“I do. Why?”

“I was thinking of giving you some advice.”

“Ahahaha.”

Joanna let out a rare laugh, but she still handed her pen to him without hesitation.

“There are empty pages in the book, so feel free to use those.”

Lukas nodded before he began to move the pen with ease.

His eyes and hands were focused on the book while his thoughts bounced around.

Lukas then asked.

“What type of magic do you mainly use?”

“Fire magic.”

“Then what? Tell me your proficiencies in order.”

“Healing, Wind, and Water.”

This was clear proof of some form of development.

He was sure that Joanna would not have answered this question when they first met. In fact, he couldn't help but feel that she was a little obedient now.

Lukas occasionally asked Joanna more questions, but throughout this time, the pen never stopped moving.

He asked things like the number of spells she could cast at once and how many she could have active at the same time.

They were key questions that could allow someone to accurately pinpoint just what level a Wizard was at, so Joanna was a little surprised.

'He's pretty meticulous.'

While she had this thought, Lukas handed the book back to her.

"I've written down some interpretations and comments. Read it first and tell me if there's anything you don't understand. There's still some time before the mission."

"...hey. This book is about..."

"...?"

When she saw Lukas' puzzled expression, she didn't have the heart to mock him. So she simply shook her head with a sigh.

"Hoo. No, it's nothing."

After saying that, she looked down at the notebook.

Then she read through it slowly.

At first, there was nothing but indifference and annoyance on her face, but after a while, curiosity and interest blossomed in her eyes.

“...huh?”

Then came the surprise.

Joanna’s eyes shook slightly and appeared shocked.

But soon, she fell completely silent.

“...ah.”

Joanna muttered dumbly.

She looked up at Lukas for a moment before burying her nose in the notebook once again. Her expression was strange.

Joanna started reading the notebook with a much more serious attitude than before. Her expression also changed constantly.

At first, she had an expression of doubt and suspicion, which then switched to one of denial before finally settling on disbelief.

“This, this, this...”

“...this?”

“This isn’t possible!!”

Joanna let out a scream. She leaped up from out of her seat and pointed a trembling finger at Lukas.

“Wh-, wha-, what the hell are you?! Who the hell are you?!”

“Why are you asking that so suddenly?”

He’d never seen Joanna so shocked.

She usually tried to maintain a dignified image with everything she did. But now, it seemed like she’d forgotten all about that.

“What the hell do you mean so suddenly?! You, do you know what the magical formulas written in this book are?!”

“No. What are they?”

Joanna swayed slightly and stumbled, looking as if her soul had been sucked out. It took her a few moments before she could regain her balance.

Then she walked over to Lukas and tapped him on the chest with the notebook.

“The biggest conundrums in Magical Science...!”

“Huh?”

Joanna shouted with a voice filled with frustration.

“All of the spells and formulas in this book are the biggest conundrums of modern magical science that no Wizard has been able to decipher!!”

“...ah.”

No wonder she was so shocked...