

Great Mage 451

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Visualised information.

Indeed, if it was possible to access information in this way, then it was certainly possible to identify unknown herbs and fruits.

Of course, that didn't mean to trust it blindly.

As if she read Lukas' mind, Min Ha-rin calmly continued.

“To be honest, I didn't really trust it at first. However, during a fight with a Dragonling, I suffered from grievous injuries and would have died if not for a medicinal herb that I found nearby.”

The information window had said the herb was effective at staunching bleeding and restoring energy, so Min Ha-rin had taken the risk to crush some in her hands to spread over her wounds before chewing on the rest.

After that, she passed out for several days before she finally woke up, her condition much better than before.

“That's when I began to trust it.”

Min Ha-rin had stayed on the Untamed Island for about a year, and in that time, she explored a large portion. This was because she'd hoped she'd meet one of the others.

Of course, it couldn't be said that she had searched the entire island. After all, considering the size of the island and the amount of danger it contained, one year was far too short.

In particular, some areas were under the control of certain, powerful monsters.

Usually, as long as one didn't step into their territory, they didn't show much aggression or hostility. Unfortunately, Min Ha-rin, who didn't know anything about that, had entered those areas. As a result, she'd almost died two times.

From then on, she ensured that she always knew who was in control of what territory, and she always paid special attention whenever she was passing by.

As time went on, Min Ha-rin began to feel tired and lonely.

At that moment, she no longer wanted to just meet one of the others. Instead, she simply wished to find some other intelligent being she could communicate with.

It was only around a year and two months after her arrival that she was able to meet a Dragonmen she could communicate with.

"Fortunately, they didn't display any hostility towards me. In fact, they looked at me with a bit of awe."

They were researchers who had gone to study the island.

These researchers were greatly surprised to learn that Min Ha-rin had survived on that island for more than a year, and they were very curious and interested.

Even if she felt a bit strange, Min Ha-rin gladly welcomed this. She immediately joined their group, and after a while, she was able to go to the largest and safest of the Seven Islands, 'Peace Island'.

"While on Peace Island, I made my money by doing several miscellaneous jobs while seeking news about the members of our team."

Of course, as Lukas knew, her search hadn't yielded any results.

The researchers who had taken Min Ha-rin to Peace Island told her that there wasn't much contact between islands.

From what Lukas was told, the culture, lifestyle, and values of every island were all different.

In fact, apart from speaking the same language, they were basically a bunch of separate countries.

In other words, despite being on Peace Island, the information she could receive was very limited.

That was why Min Ha-rin decided to explore the other islands after acquiring the minimum required funds.

The Heavenly Realm was made up of seven islands.

Combat Island, Untamed Island, Peace Island, Death Island, Adventure Island, Desire Island.

And Dragon God Island.

Min Ha-rin had been able to enter all of the islands except two.

“Death Island is a forbidden area, and Dragon God Island is a sanctuary. Access to both of them is strictly off-limits. Nevertheless, I heard that it’s possible to go to Dragon God Island if you become the Grand Champion.”

“Grand Champion?”

“Yeah. It’s the title given to the strongest Champion on Combat Island. A competition is held every ten years.”

“...”

In other words, Min Ha-rin had to become the Champion of the city in order to enter Dragon God Island.

“I knew it was possible for there to be others here, but... this world is much larger than I expected.”

'Yeah.'

Min Ha-rin nodded.

If even the 'Heavenly Realm' which sat in the sky was large enough to be called a world in its own right.

Then they couldn't help but wonder just how large the world beneath the clouds was.

In that case, Min Ha-rin and Lukas might actually be luckier than they thought.

After all, although it took five years, they had been able to start in the Heavenly Realm, and they had even managed to reunite.

But what about the others.

'When will we meet them?'

No, could they even meet them?

They had no idea where they were, and more importantly, they didn't even know if they were in the same time period.

What if someone had already appeared in this world decades ago? Or what if they only appeared over a hundred years in the future?

If that was the case, then even searching for them would be a waste of time...

“Ha-rin.”

Min Ha-rin was awoken from her thoughts by Lukas’ voice.

She turned to look at him. The face of the Master from her memories. A face that she’d thought about hundreds and thousands of times in the past. The face she likes the most, although she never told anyone.

“You’ve learned a bad habit.”

“Huh?”

“I mean, you don’t have to worry about things on your own anymore.”

Those words caused Min Ha-rin’s mouth to fall open slightly.

It was only then she realised that at some point, she’d stopped opening her heart to others.

In fact, she'd even begun to forget what she was like originally.

"Maybe we'll meet the others sometime in the future. This was a game designed by the Rulers, and they were the ones who made us pick five teammates. If there was no way for us to meet each other, they wouldn't have designated the number of people we could bring."

"...yeah."

"There's no need to rush. Now, we can think it over together."

"..."

Min Ha-rin's expression softened subconsciously.

Together.

For some reason, that word was really nice to hear.

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After talking for a while, Lukas also told Min Ha-rin of his experience.

By comparing what they encountered, they were able to find a few discrepancies.

“I didn’t hear a voice... telling me about four statues.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. But I think I might have heard some information about one of them.”

As she said that, Min Ha-rin got up from her seat, then, she took a piece of dried parchment from a drawer in the corner and spread it on the table without bothering to close the drawer.

Drawn on this piece of parchment was a map. It appeared to be a map of the Heavenly Realm.

“This is Combat Island, where we are now.”

“To the extreme west.”

“Yeah. And this... is Dragon God Island.”

Min Ha-rin’s finger was now pointing at the very center of the map.

There, an island that was many times smaller than those around it, sat directly in the middle.

Unlike the other islands which were all large enough to be called continents in their own right, Dragon God Island was extremely small, comparable to an actual island.

“I’ve heard that there is a statue of the Dragon God here.”

“The Dragon God?”

“I’m not sure about the details. There’s also the possibility that it’s only a rumor. As far as I know, very few Dragonmen were actually able to enter Dragon God Island.”

After hearing those words, Lukas lowered his head and appeared lost in thought for a while.

Min Ha-rin glanced at his side profile for a bit before opening her mouth.

“Hey, Master, your power is limited right now, isn’t it? I remember you said you can only use up to 7-star magic.”

“That’s right.”

“...then, I’ll protect you from now on, Master.”

“...”

Lukas raised his head and looked at Min Ha-rin.

For some reason, she was puffing out her chest, and there was a confident expression on her face.

“I’ve grown much stronger in the past five years. Trust me.”

Lukas nodded inwardly.

She had the right to be confident.

Min Ha-rin had always been extremely talented. In the past five years, she had fought in countless life and death battles like during her time on Untamed Island or in the arena. And yet, she survived.

Those endless battles were the perfect opportunities which allowed her to grow explosively.

In fact, even Lukas wasn’t exactly sure just how strong she was at that moment.

“Then, shall we fight?”

“Huh?”

“What’s wrong? I can only use 7-stars spell right now.”

She knew that. He’d already told her earlier.

Min Ha-rin’s expression was a bit strange.

“No. I mean... I think I’ve reached 7 stars.”

This was thanks to the special fruits and herbs that she’d eaten on Untamed Island. Of course, she didn’t know any relevant spells, but it was clear that she had at least stepped her foot into the realm of an Archmage.

“That’s something to celebrate.”

“...”

She wasn’t sure how to react.

Magic wasn’t Min Ha-rin’s only weapon. Her magical swordsmanship had almost reached a state of perfection through the countless battles she had experienced. At present, she was confident that she would be able to win even if she were to face several Fighters at her level in the arena.

It was only at that moment that Lukas realised what his student was thinking.

“I see. So you were worried about me.”

“U-, umm.”

Min Ha-rin coughed slightly as Lukas accurately hit the nail on the head.

In his current state, Lukas could only use 7-star spells at best.

In addition to 7-star spells and magical swordsmanship, Min Ha-rin had also learned several tricks over the years.

It wasn't exactly unreasonable for her to be confident in her victory.

“It's not a bad thing for you to worry about me, but I don't think you've reached that stage yet.”

“Huh?”

“Once you face me, you'll understand.”

A gentle smile spread across Lukas' lips at that moment.

“Why your Master is called the Great Mage.”

* * *

“By the way, Master, what exactly is your relationship with Bargan?”

“He calls me Lord.”

“Huh?”

“We fought and I won.”

“Ahh.”

Min Ha-rin nodded in understanding.

“‘Headsmasher Bargan’ is one of the most famous Fighters in the region. I’ve heard that several Fighter teams in the arena invited him, but he ignored every one of them.”

“...”

Lukas frowned slightly, thinking about Bargan.

At first, he had been doubtful of Bargan allegiance. He found it very hard to believe and accept. But this was natural. After all, Lukas didn't know how honest and honourable Dragonmen were.

In fact, the only real reason that he kept him at his side was to obtain information about the Heavenly Realm.

It was much more efficient to listen to an explanation given by someone else than to investigate on his own in a place he'd never been to before.

But Bargan's loyalty was no joke, nor was it a trick. At first, Lukas felt that it was fortunate, but now, the situation had become a bit more ambiguous.

Because he'd met Min Ha-rin. After traveling around this region for five years, she would certainly have experienced many things by now. So even if he didn't rely on Bargan, he could simply ask Min Ha-rin if he was curious about something.

"I wanted to let Bargan go, but I can't seem to convince him."

Lukas could feel the stubbornness within the Dragonman Fighter.

It was highly unlikely that Bargan would nod and say 'yes' if Lukas told him to leave.

"Master, did you fight a life and death battle with Bargan?"

"Right."

“Mm... Then it’s possible that if you try to force him to leave, he will just kill himself.”

Naturally, Min Ha-rin knew that Lukas didn’t want him to die.

But they couldn’t exactly keep him with them either.

Lukas and Min Ha-rin hadn’t come to this world to play. They were participants of the ‘Qualifiers for the Great Game’. They were fundamentally different from the Dragonmen and other races that were native to this world.

There were times when they would have to talk about the ‘original world’, or ‘Rulers’, of the ‘Great Game’. And it wouldn’t be feasible for them to avoid Bargan at those times.

‘In all honesty, Bargan isn’t worth that much.’

Min Ha-rin knew.

Even if the ‘Heavenly Realm’ was only a part of the ‘Great World’, there were countless powerful beings with unfathomable strength.

Even if she had become stronger, Min Ha-rin wasn’t confident that she could win against them just yet.

‘If he was strong enough, it might be worth it to think of an alternative, but...’

After thinking for a while, Min Ha-rin finally spoke in a slightly subdued tone.

“I might have a few ways.”

“A few ways?”

“Yeah. One would be to simply order Bargan to stay put. A loyal Dragonman Fighter will obey their orders unconditionally, so he probably wouldn’t refuse.”

“...”

Lukas’ expression showed that he didn’t like this option.

That meant that even if Bargan wouldn’t be following them any longer, he would still be under Lukas’ command.

That wouldn’t be good for Bargan or Lukas.

Of course, Min Ha-rin expected such a response from her master.

“Another would be to make him return the favor he owes you, Master.”

“What do you mean?”

“Bargan has given his to you. Master didn’t take his life even though you won the fight. So in his eyes, he literally owes you his life. Bargan is a Dragonman, more specifically, he is a Red Skin. That means that his loyalty towards you will never waver until he thinks he has repaid his debt.”

Until he has repaid his debt.

Lukas understood what Min Ha-rin meant.

“So it’s just a matter of making Bargan think he has repaid his debt.”

“Right. In other words, if he believes he saved your life or did something comparable to that, we can make Bargan go back to his own life.”

“Mmm...”

Lukas lowered his head in thought.

Make Bargan think he saved his life.

Such a situation wouldn’t just happen suddenly.

This meant they would have to create a crisis, but that was a tiring and annoying endeavor.

Suddenly, a thought came to mind.

“What if we entrusted Bargan with the task of finding the other?”

Those words took Min Ha-rin by surprise.

“That could work!”

Such an order would mean that they wouldn't have to keep Bargan with them, and at the same time, they would be able to receive clues or even directly find the rest of their companions. It would be a great help.

In addition, Bargan's strength was around the top of the wandering Dragonmen. Although it wouldn't be worth it to set their expectations too high, it was still possible for him to surprise them.

“Then we'll let Bargan do that...”

Min Ha-rin's voice trailed off after saying that.

She had her sword in one hand, and the other was held out with her palm facing upwards.

This was a stance that had been created from her five years of combat experience. Her ready stance.

“Do you really want to fight?”

“Right?”

Lukas nodded.

“I’ll let you make the first move.”

They were currently standing in the arena.

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Min Ha-rin was a Champion, and the treatment she received befitted that title.

At least on Combat Island, individual strength was placed above law and order. This meant that gaining the title ‘City Champion’ in this land was a very big deal.

In addition to the mansion they were in earlier, she was also given her own private training grounds. And there were probably many more unseen benefits besides those.

The arena in the center of the city was extremely large. To put it into modern terms, it was several times the size of an indoor gym.

Naturally, this large space wasn't just one large battleground.

Instead, not counting the space allocated for spectators, it was separated into eight small arenas.

As the Champion, Min Ha-rin had the right to use two of these arenas as she pleased. Of course, this was only applicable when there were no scheduled fights, but it was an amazing privilege nonetheless.

It was in one of these very arenas that Min Ha-rin and Lukas stood, facing each other. There were no spectators.

If there were any, they were already sent away.

Min Ha-rin looked at Lukas with a slightly worried expression.

'I'll let you make the first move.'

Lukas' words rang out in her head once more. Nevertheless, Min Ha-rin found that she couldn't easily draw her sword.

Was she intimidated? That would normally be the case, but now, she was hesitating for an entirely different reason.

Min Ha-rin knew just how powerful her master was.

However, she didn't think her master understood how much stronger she'd become.

In fact, that was true. Lukas wasn't sure exactly how strong Min Ha-rin was at that moment. He also didn't know exactly what she'd gone through over the past five years.

Though their conversation had stretched over an hour, it still wasn't enough to fully convey the hardships and desperation she'd experienced.

At that moment, Min Ha-rin even thought about showing him her status window.

[Min Ha-rin]

[Level: 67]

[Title: Snow Flower, Great Mage's Disciple, Untamed Survivor, Champion of the Arena, One who has witnessed Five Islands]

[Occupation: Magic Swordsman]

[Race: Human]

[Skills: Magic(Lv.7), Swordsmanship(Lv.8), Magical Swordsmanship(Lv.5), Superior Toughness(Lv.5), Adaptability(Lv.4), Untamed Killing Intent(Lv.6), Fire Resistance(Lv.3), Poison Resistance(Lv.5), Survival Skills(Lv.6), Cooking(Lv.5)...]

In this world, level signifies one's overall strength.

When she first arrived, Min Ha-rin had only been level 27, but now, it had been raised by 40.

That wasn't all.

Her magic level was now 7-stars, she had regained part of her former swordsmanship ability, and her magical swordsmanship was near perfection.

In addition, she had many skills that would all play a role, large or small, in the fight.

On the other hand, what did Lukas have?

His '7 star magic' was all.

That was why Min Ha-rin was concerned.

'...if I were to win...'

Would it be a form of disrespect to her master?

Would it affect their relationship and cause things to become awkward?

Nevertheless, these worries all vanished a few moments later.

Piht-

Because Lukas disappeared.

Min Ha-rin's eyes narrowed in an instant, her gaze sharpening.

'Blink.'

It was a spell that could be used to cross a short distance.

For a 7 star Wizard, covering the distance between them was something that could be done in an instant. But Lukas didn't come directly to her location. As if to test the waters, he was slowly covering the distance by a series of Blinks.

No. Rather than that.

'He is closing the distance to a Magic Swordsman?'

She couldn't understand.

For Wizards, it was common to fight from a distance, and in a limited area like the arena, it would be even more difficult to maintain that distance. But now, Lukas was doing the exact opposite of that.

Was he trying to catch her off guard?

If that was the case, then Min Ha-rin felt that Lukas was looking down on her too much.

The calmness that had been developed over thousands of life and death battles wasn't something that could be shaken by a simple unexpected situation.

Paht!

Deciding to stop hesitating, she drew her sword and rushed towards him.

She had a vague understanding of the intervals and distance traveled with each Blink, so she felt she could predict it.

Every 0.7 to 1 second, he would move a distance of about seven steps.

'He must be up to something.'

But there was no way that she, a Magic Swordsman, would avoid a close combat opportunity with a Wizard.

Min Ha-rin swung her sword after predicting when Lukas would appear with his next Blink. The Scarlet Killament, a sword made from the fang of a mutant Dragonling, released an intense burst of heat as it rushed forward.

Piht!

And just as she predicted, Lukas appeared. While performing his blink, Min Ha-rin had suddenly appeared in front of him, but there was no change to his expression.

Shik.

Then Lukas disappeared again.

Only this time, it wasn't Blink. Instead, Lukas moved so quickly that it seemed like his entire body had disappeared. He crouched down as low as he could, before shooting up like a spring.

Paak!

“...!?”

Subsequently, Lukas' fist struck Min Ha-rin's face.

Min Ha-rin stumbled backward, a drop of blood rolling from her nose.

“There is a saying that making the first move leads to victory.”

Then she heard Lukas' soft voice.

“But making the first move is not always enough. Only when the first move is successful can your victory be assured. In battle, the most important aspect is the initiative, and your ability to control the fight.”

“Ugh...”

Min Ha-rin finally regained her balance. Lukas' physical abilities were unexpected, but that was only because it was a surprise attack. It wasn't at a level where she couldn't even react to it.

Min Ha-rin silently cast a Magic Missile.

In an instant, five Magic Missiles charged towards Lukas, each one aiming for a different vital point. Even though her mind had been shaken and she was in pain, her aim was still accurate.

Nevertheless, it still wasn't enough.

Bang bang bang!

The Magic Missiles all exploded without even being able to touch Lukas. This was because they were blocked by Energy Bolts that suddenly appeared from behind Lukas.

'No.'

Not suddenly.

It was clear that this spell had been cast beforehand, it was just that he hadn't used them.

He had probably cast it while using Blink.

Right. The reason he hadn't immediately closed the distance between them with Blink was that he was casting Energy Bolt as well.

'I didn't think enough.'

She'd never stopped to wonder why he was using Blink so many times.

Min Ha-rin swung her sword and struck an Energy Bolt that was rushing towards her. But that spell wasn't the only one.

Clang clang clang!

Each and every one of them was only a weak spell.

Just like Magic Missile, Energy Bolt could only be considered a 1-3 star spell.

Nevertheless, if the number reached tens or hundreds, with each one targeting a vital spot, then it was a different story altogether.

'Kuk!'

Min Ha-rin grunted as she constantly swung her sword at the incoming spells. But Lukas didn't let up. He continued to pressure Min Ha-rin with his fists, feet, and sometimes even his head, making sure to always keep a close distance.

'I can't think.'

Min Ha-rin bit her lip.

She had completely lost the initiative.

One second.

If he had just one second, she was sure that she could regain her composure and change this situation, but she couldn't find any gaps. Weak spells continued to bombard her as though a dozen Wizards were supporting Lukas.

Nevertheless, she couldn't ignore them. No matter how weak these spells were, they were still powerful enough to break skin and damage blood vessels. The only areas Lukas kept aiming for were her vital points.

It was only then that she finally realised.

The period where she had the highest chance of winning had already passed.

'It's different.'

Different from fighting the Dragonlings or the Fighters.

Lukas' fighting style completely shattered her prejudice against Wizards.

There were some similarities with her own occupation, Magic Swordsman, in that it made use of both magic and martial arts, but that was it.

In the end, Magic Swordsmen were nothing more than humans who used two different skills. In other words, if they focused on magic, then swordsmanship was simply a support, and if they focused on swordsmanship, then magic was the support.

But that wasn't the case for Lukas.

He was using magic and martial arts simultaneously, almost as if he had two brains.

While this might sound simple, such a task was incredibly complicated. Even the most intelligent humans might not be able to replicate such a scene. To put it into more understandable terms, it was more difficult than drawing ten different pictures with each of your ten fingers.

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Min Ha-rin realised that this sort of close-up battle was extremely disadvantageous for Magic Swordsmen.

She at least needed enough distance to swing her sword, but Lukas was so close to her that she didn't have the chance to catch her breath as he continued to swing his fists. And as time went by, she found herself more and more on the defensive.

Tuk-

Suddenly, Lukas grabbed Min Ha-rin by the collar.

"Ah."

This was bad.

Just as she had this thought, Min Ha-rin felt her body float up into the air.

Similar to a shoulder throw, this was one of the techniques of the Warrior King Fist, 'Overturning the Bull'.

Bang!

Min Ha-rin's body hit the ground so hard that cracks were formed beneath her.

As her back crashed against the ground, she felt all the air leave her lungs. If the slam had been a bit stronger, she would have fallen unconscious.

"..."

Lukas didn't follow up his attack. He only looked down at Min Ha-rin while shaking his hand slightly.

Min Ha-rin couldn't bear to meet his gaze.

She'd lost.

It was a complete and utter defeat.

She could still move, but when she'd hit the floor, her entire body had been full of openings. If this were a real battlefield, she would be dead without a doubt.

—As for making some kind of excuse, she didn't even think about it.

Min Ha-rin had been defeated before she could display even half of her true strength. In fact, if it wasn't for the experience she had gained over the years, she might have asked for a rematch.

'That's what Master wants'.

He had intentionally ended the fight without allowing her to properly display her strength.

If they were to fight again, while she might not lose as easily, it would be nothing more than a loser's consolation.

Then, Lukas spoke.

"Get up. You shouldn't be tired already, right?"

"...huh?"

“We’re going to have another round.”

Min Ha-rin looked at him with a blank expression.

“Right now?”

“Right. I want to see all that you’ve developed over the past five years. At the very least, I can see that you’ve developed some level of calmness and quick thinking.”

“...”

“And... I might have been a bit emotional just now.”

Lukas smiled wryly as he said this.

“After seeing my disciple worry about beating me after only playing around for five years, I unintentionally forgot to hold back.”

“...”

Min Ha-rin’s mouth hung open, unsure of how to respond to that.

Hiding her blushing face, Min Ha-rin got to her feet.

“M-, Master is an Absolute, so that’s why you can fight like that, isn’t it? If you were a human, I think fighting like that would be very...”

“Do you mean the combination of magic and martial arts?”

Min Ha-rin nodded, but Lukas shook his head.

“That’s not true.”

“Huh?”

“At this moment, I am just an ordinary 7-star Wizard, as weak as any other human. Of course, my experience is much deeper than any other human, but that’s all. My pure combat power, mental capabilities, and mana reserves aren’t much different from back in the day.”

“Y-, you’re saying that...”

“Right.”

Lukas nodded.

“When I was a human, even as a 7-star Wizard, I was able to use magic and martial arts simultaneously. Just like now.”

“...”

Min Ha-rin’s mouth fell open.

She’d always known that Lukas was amazing. But now that they were standing on the same level, she was finally able to understand a bit.

Just how special this being in front of her was since the days when he was a human.

* * *

After that, they fought five more times.

However, she was defeated every single time. Almost as if it was a natural outcome.

The more they fought, the longer she was able to last, but that was it.

From beginning to end, she hadn’t been able to land a single attack on Lukas.

“...”

Min Ha-rin’s face was pale.

She was still proud of everything she had achieved over the past five years and how much she had grown, but in front of her master, it felt like the achievements she’d gained at the risk of her life were only so-so.

Compared to her master’s current state, all of her attributes were superior.

Nevertheless, it was the one area that she was inferior in that decided the outcome of their fights.

User capability.

Click.

It was at that moment that the door opened and Lukas walked into the room.

“Did you have a good talk with Bargan?”

“Right. He didn’t have any complaints.”

“That’s good.”

Lukas looked at Min Ha-rin for a moment before opening his mouth again.

“You look depressed.”

“...well, it’s just.... I wonder if I’ll ever be able to defeat you, Master.”

“You might be able to after about 4,000 years.” (TL: Pfft)

“C-, can a person even live that long?”

“You can.”

Min Ha-rin didn’t know that Lukas had spent 4,000 years in the Abyss when he was a human. Because he never mentioned those days when he talked about his past.

That’s why Min Ha-rin took Lukas’ words as a joke.

“You’ve grown stronger.”

Lukas continued.

At first, Min Ha-rin thought he might be joking again, but her master would never be sarcastic with her.

“Really?”

As he heard this tentative voice, Lukas nodded.

“Right. Do you remember what I said before? That you’d need five years to surpass Lee Jong-hak.”

“Ah, yeah.”

Min Ha-rin nodded.

After saying that, he’d said that if she listened to his teachings, she would be able to surpass Lee Jong-hak using magic within a year.

“Ha-rin, you’ve definitely gotten stronger. Currently, you are on par or even above him already.”

“...”

Min Ha-rin’s expression remained bewildered. Even if she trusted what Lukas was saying, she still found it very hard to believe.

“Of course, this is only true if Lee Jong-hak is still on the same level compared to five years ago.”

“Ah.”

She immediately understood what he meant.

If Lee Jong-hak had also entered this world a few years ago and continued his training during that time, then he definitely would have become much stronger.

After all, Lee Jong-hak was no less talented than she was.

“Magical Swordsmanship... that is the path you chose in the end.”

Lukas continued in a low voice.

Magic and swordsmanship were not particularly easy fields even when one chose to focus on them.

Nevertheless, she was already showing great success in both fields. Such an achievement was difficult even for geniuses who had excellent comprehension abilities.

But Lukas didn't bother to say those things out loud. He didn't think Min Ha-rin didn't know that already.

Everyone had their own innate gifts. You could even call it a talent.

Min Ha-rin must have constantly been contemplating and confirming her innate gift while toiling for those five years in the Heavenly Realm.

And after all that time, the conclusion she reached was to continue the path of 'Magical Swordsmanship'.

And since Lukas respected Min Ha-rin, he would naturally respect her choices as well.

He wouldn't be a true master if he were to recommend she give up her path just because it was difficult.

Sometimes, it was necessary to support and understand a choice without saying anything.

"What do you think your biggest problem is right now?"

"Umm... I'm not able to show 100 percent of my abilities."

"Exactly. Now all you need to work on is refinement."

"Refinement...? What does that mean?"

“I realised something during our fights. You picked up on a lot of tricks.”

“Yeah. Well...”

Min Ha-rin had learned about a dozen or so skills during those five years on her own. There were many different kinds of skills. Some of them weren't very useful, while some of them had even saved her life.

“However, in our fights just now, you couldn't use many of those tricks.”

“Yeah.”

She nodded.

Had they had this conversation before the fights, she would have been a bit skeptical, but now, she understood.

What it was like to make use of all the weapons in your arsenal.

She could tell just from watching Lukas.

Because of his understanding of his weapons, he was able to bring out 120 percent of their power by using them in the right place at the right time.

“In truth, it’s not very easy to use all of your power in a fight. This is because the situation can change in many ways depending on who your opponent is, the terrain, and whether or not you’re in peak condition.”

“Yeah.”

“Since you’ve mastered a large number of tricks and skills, you have a relatively large number of options by which to respond to a variety of situations. The only problem is that you can’t fully utilise them yet.”

“...then what should I do?”

“Until you can make every skill completely yours, limit the skills you use.”

“Huh?”

Season 2 Chapter 155

Min Ha-rin looked at Lukas, her head tilted to the side in confusion.

Lukas got up from his seat and walked to the window. From there, he was able to see the arena in all of its glory.

“For now, when using sword techniques, you should minimise your use of magic. Don’t just cast blindly. Sometimes, it’s necessary to do without something in order to realise what you need.”

“Ah, okay...”

Min Ha-rin didn't understand her Master's intentions, but she decided to just listen to him. In truth, as she was now, if Lukas were to look at something white and call it black, it wouldn't be too surprising for Min Ha-rin to tilt her head to the side and ask 'Really?'

“I also think it would be better for you to not increase your level or learn any new skills for the time being.”

“Okay.”

“You don't know any 6 or 7 star spells yet, do you? I'll teach you a few of them in a little while, so make sure to pay attention.”

“Understood.”

Lukas nodded. This much advice was enough. After all, Min Ha-rin was a smart kid.

Now, it was time to discuss the next topic.

“Our final goal is to find the 'four special statues'. But in our current state, it would be troublesome if we clashed with the other groups.”

Their group only had two people, and Lukas was currently limited to 7 stars.

On the other hand, although Min Ha-rin had become stronger to an extent, she still hadn't reached the point that Lukas considered the 'peak of mortality'.

Min Ha-rin's eyes lit up.

"So we should find the rest of our teammates first."

"Or, find an item that will help me break free from these restrictions."

They had two options.

Min Ha-rin also knew that there were many incredible items in this world. After all, she had personally experienced explosive growth in her mana after eating special fruits on Untamed Island.

"If we were to look for our teammates, who would we look for first?"

"Arid."

Lukas answered without even needing to think about it.

The reason for this answer was obvious, so Min Ha-rin nodded.

“His Brilliance power would be very useful.”

“Right. If we have Arid’s Brilliance, it would be much easier to find the others.”

Arid’s Communication power was something that would be extremely helpful in a situation like this where they were all separated.

If they managed to find Arid, then finding the others would be a breeze.

“However, that leads me to believe that Arid hasn’t entered this world yet.”

“...if Arid was already in this world, he would have used ‘Communication’ to send us a message by now.”

Lukas smiled slightly.

“That’s right. You’re definitely thinking more flexibly than before.”

“Ah,ahaha...”

That was because she had gone through many days where she would lose her life if she made even a single mistake. Thanks to that, her stiff and conventional thinking had loosened up quite a bit.

'More than that...'

Min Ha-rin looked at Lukas.

Maybe he was in a good mood or something, but she felt that he was smiling much more than he did before. It was the same for his attitude.

Of course, this didn't mean she didn't like it or anything. On the contrary, it felt much warmer than before, so she felt it was much better this way.

She wasn't exactly sure how to describe it.

But she couldn't help but feel that Lukas seemed more... human.

'...it's really been a while, hasn't it?'

Min Ha-rin shook her head slightly to get rid of her thoughts before speaking.

"Who's next?"

"Sedi."

“Um... may I ask why?”

“That’s simple. She is probably the strongest person in the group now.”

In all honesty, Sedi was probably stronger than Lukas at this point.

Unlike Absolutes like Lukas, who had been restricted back to a mortal state, she had probably not been restricted, and even if she were, she has the ability and experience to achieve explosive growth.

In the five years that she was here, Min Ha-rin hadn’t encountered the other factions, but it wouldn’t be strange if that changed tomorrow.

Therefore, it was imperative that they secured their strongest fighting power, Sedi.

Min Ha-rin lowered her head in thought for a moment before opening her mouth.

“So, statues, teammates, and an item that can help Master unlock your power. There might be a chance to get all three at once.”

“What is it?”

“Championship.”

That word made him think about the conversation they'd just had.

"Do you mean the competition to determine the Grand Champion that is held every 10 years?"

"Yeah. If you become the Grand Champion, you will be able to go to 'Dragon God Island' and receive the 'Dragon God's Blessing' from the Goddess."

"Dragon God's Blessing?"

"I heard it was the Goddess' special ability which would allow the receiver to bring out their full potential."

"...I see."

Such a setting seemed to have been pre-arranged by the Rulers.

In other words, it was highly likely that it was the key to unlock the Absolutes' powers.

"If you become the Grand Champion, your name will definitely spread throughout the Heavenly Realm. This is because that is the highest and most honorable position in the eyes of the Fighters. If that happened, then I'm sure our other teammates would be able to learn about us."

Min Ha-rin then added in a slightly solemn tone.

“Of course, there are some risks involved.”

It was the same risk that Lukas was prepared for when he decided to use his real name.

Increasing his fame meant not only publicizing his name, but also his appearance to an unknown number of people.

In other words, the other factions would also come to him.

Nevertheless, Lukas felt that Min Ha-rin’s idea was currently the best option they had.

“In addition, it is said that there is a statue of the Dragon God on Dragon God Island. Only those who are given permission have the honor of seeing it. It is an important relic for all Dragonmen and is said to be quite special. So I think that it might be what you’re looking for.”

This was also a fairly reasonable guess. If they were lucky, they would be able to kill three birds with one stone.

“Alright. Then we’ll participate in this ‘Championship’.”

“Yeah. However, you can only participate in the Championship if you’re a Champion. I can participate since I’m the Champion of ‘Herui’, but you wouldn’t be able to.”

“Then what should I do?”

“That’s simple. You can claim the title of Champion by conquering the arena in another city. For someone as strong as Master, that wouldn’t be difficult at all.”

“Mmm.”

Lukas nodded before turning to look at Min Ha-rin.

Naturally, he knew that he wouldn’t be able to move with her. Min Ha-rin was the Champion of this city, and she would soon begin to train herself based on the advice Lukas had just given her.

“Then it seems we will have to part for a while again.”

“...”

Min Ha-rin, who had fallen silent, finally nodded in a slow, exaggerated manner.

“So it seems.”

“Will you be alright?”

“Of course.”

She smiled brightly.

“Just meeting Master again has already given me a lot of strength.”

* * *

“You’re going to ‘Lirua’?”

When Lukas nodded, Bargan’s expression became a bit strange.

He was just getting ready to leave the city. Since he was going to have to travel all around the Heavenly Realm anyway, he decided to head to the largest major city nearby, which was ‘Lirua’.

It was Min Ha-rin who had suggested Lukas should head to Lirua.

She told him that when he could become the Champion, the various rewards and benefits he would receive were proportional to the size of the city. If he was lucky, he might even option special items and equipment.

“What is your goal for going to that place...?”

“To become the Champion.”

“Mmm...”

Bargan’s expression became solemn.

He seemed lost in thought for a while before finally speaking in a heavy voice.

“My Lord is strong. You defeated me without even trying, so you are more than qualified to become a Champion. If you were to go to a small town, you would be able to secure the position with ease... So, I would really not recommend you go to Lirua.”

“Why?”

“...that is a place that has lost its fight.”

A place that lost its fight?

[It is recommended that participants head to ‘Lirua’.]

[Listen to the details from ‘Headsmasher Bargan’.]

After a long while, he heard the voice once again.

Lukas turned back to look at Bargan.

[Wandering Dragonman Fighter Bargan]

[Loyalty: 51]

The translucent window he saw before appeared above his head once again.

However,

[Difficulty: C]

There was a new line added beneath it.

Season 2 Chapter 156

“There is always a reason why a wanderer becomes a wanderer.”

These were the words Min Ha-rin had told Lukas before he left.

“This is especially the case for Dragonmen living here on Combat Island. I’m not sure if it’s a racial trait or not, but... Dragonmen tend to have a very strong attachment to their hometowns.”

This was a part of the reason why the Championship, which was held every ten years, received so much attention from the Dragonmen.

If Min Ha-rin managed to do well in the Championship, then the entire city of Herui would hold a large festival that would last for at least a week.

The Championship wasn't just a competition to determine who was the strongest among the Champions. It was a great regional event that not only Combat Island, but the entirety of the Heavenly Realm paid attention to.

"It is incredibly rare for a Fighter as powerful as Bargan to become a wanderer. Even if he didn't have any attachment to his hometown like other Dragonmen, he would still be treated well in any arena he decided to go to. By choosing to become a wanderer, it meant that he had a complicated past that he wasn't willing to reveal to others."

After a short pause, Min Ha-rin added.

"It might be a bit presumptuous for me to say this, but I think it would be best to not pry into it."

* * *

"What do you mean 'it has lost its fight'?"

When Lukas asked this question, Bargan responded without hesitation.

“I mean that Fighters cannot survive there.”

“That’s strange. Rin was the one who told me about Lirua.”

‘Rin’ was the pseudonym Min Ha-rin used in this world. The full name was ‘Rin Summers’.

When she told him this, with a slightly embarrassed expression, she added that she hadn’t really thought much about it when she chose the name.

“She told me that Lirua is one of the eight major cities here on Combat Island. In terms of the size of its arena alone, it is among the top five, and the level of fighters there is quite high. Was she wrong?”

“No. Everything she told you was right.”

“Then why...?”

“...”

Bargan’s face became bright red.

This wasn’t because he was embarrassed or shy. Instead, it was because he couldn’t control his agitation. In fact, he even began to breathe heavily.

For a while, he did his best to suppress his emotions, so he didn't speak. It was almost as though it was taking all of his concentration to calm his rising passion.

Lukas waited calmly to the side without hurrying him.

Then, after finally calming himself enough to speak, Bargan opened his mouth.

"There is darkness in Lirua."

"Darkness?"

"Yeah. They have broken one of the greatest taboos."

"Which taboo?"

An expression of extreme disgust and contempt flashed across Bargan's face. He closed his eyes as if he felt it was disgraceful to even say it, and spoke as if he had swallowed a bug.

"Fight fixing."

"What?"

“The arena in Lirua has a lot of fixed fights.”

Fight fixing... In other words, it meant that they were manipulating victory and defeat in the arena.

“Why?”

“There are many reasons, both large and small, but the biggest reason will always be money. With an arena as large as the one in Lirua, the amount of money that is moved whenever there is a big fight is astronomical.”

“...I see. Others can bet on the fights.”

“Right.”

Bargain nodded, but Lukas frowned slightly and opened his mouth.

“Aren’t there people who can crackdown on corruption like that? There is no way they would allow something like that to happen on a large scale.”

“There certainly are auditors, but they aren’t well known. In truth, they are nothing more than puppets for those with money and power. They are scum who wouldn’t even dare to stand against the City Lord of Lirua.”

It was possible that the people Bargain hated the most were those 'auditors'. His eyes were filled with fierce rage as if he was thinking about some irreconcilable enemy.

"How do you know so much about them?"

"..."

Bargain closed his eyes once again.

Then, he muttered in a low, defeated voice.

"I used to be a Fighter for Lirua."

* * *

He heard everything.

Nevertheless, Lukas didn't change his destination from Lirua.

There were several reasons for this decision.

The words the 'voice' had spoken before, the 'darkness' lurking in Lirua, and his curiosity, among other things.

Bargan didn't seem very pleased by Lukas' decision, but he didn't try to persuade him any further.

Lukas also didn't try to pry any further into Bargan's past. It would still be fine to ask in the future if his loyalty went up a bit more.

Lirua was a fair distance away from Herui. At the very least, with his current strength, it would take him about two months to get there by foot.

'The Championship will commence in two months.'

In this situation, he didn't have the time to walk. He would have to find some other mode of transportation.

When he mentioned this to Bargan, he nodded his head.

"I think it would be best for you to ride the 'Sky Horse Carriage'(1)."

"Sky Horse Carriage?"

"Yes."

Sky Carriages were a mode of transportation using Dragonlings. According to Bargan, they were drawn by monsters known as 'Flying Dragons'. Although it was a bit strange for them to be called 'horse carriages', it would be a bit strange and improper to call them 'Dragon carriages'.

"Of course, there is a bit of a problem with that. They are incredibly expensive."

"How much is it?"

"If it's from Herui, a one-way trip would probably cost about 5,000 eru."

Even after he heard that Lukas didn't find it too expensive. This was because he was still ignorant of the monetary values of the Heavenly Realm.

Of course, it might also have something to do with the fact that he had the money to pay for it. This was because Min Ha-rin had given him 10,000 eru for travel expenses.

To be honest, it was a bit strange for the Master to receive money from the disciple, but when he saw Min Ha-rin's proud expression, he found it hard to refuse.

After all, he felt that it wasn't a good thing for Min Ha-rin to spend the money she earned with her blood and sweat for him.

Then Bargan continued.

“Of course, if that amount is too much for you, there are other methods. However, these methods come with disadvantages.”

“That’s fine. Tell me what they are.”

“Well, you could join a subjugation team’s mission.”

Season 2 Chapter 157

Lukas tilted his head to the side as he heard the unfamiliar term.

“Subjugation team’s mission?”

Bargan naturally realised that he didn’t understand, so he explained in a calm tone.

“In addition to Dragonmen, there are many Dragonlings here on Combat Island.”

Dragonling.

This was a generic term used for the monsters found in the Heavenly Realm.

Most of the monsters on these floating islands all had some characteristics that were reminiscent of Dragons, so they were given that name.

“It might be hard to see them near the cities, but they are quite common in the wilderness untouched by civilization.”

“That sounds like a large threat.”

“Right. That’s why there are subjugation teams. These groups receive money from the royal family to travel around the island at regular intervals. And based on eyewitness accounts and other reports, they subdue the Dragonlings living in the wilderness.”

Now that he had some understanding of it, Lukas realised what Bargan was suggesting.

“So you’re saying I should move with the subjugation team?”

“Yes. This is usually the method used by people who don’t have enough money. It might take a bit longer than using the Sky Carriage, but there is little risk involved.”

Then he added that it would take about two weeks to get there if he went with the subjugation team.

That was about twice as long as the carriage.

“How much does it cost?”

“500 eru, but the meals cost extra.”

One-tenth of the price was a noticeable difference.

Lukas pondered for a moment.

In any case, there were still about two months to go before the Championship began. And even if there was a delay, he didn't think it would take more than a month for him to obtain a spot.

'The first thing I should do is unlock more of my strength.'

In a large city like Lirua, it was likely that he would find strong individuals that he couldn't defeat with just 7-star magic. If he wanted to defeat them, and subsequently win the Championship, he would need to become stronger than he was now.

'...special items.'

These things were more likely to be hidden in the wilderness than in busy cities. Min Ha-rin had been able to experience tremendous growth in the past five years due to the numerous items she found during the time she spent on Untamed Island.

With that in mind, he thought about the explanation he'd just received from Bargan.

In truth, although they were called a subjugation team, what they did seemed to be more similar to that of a reconnaissance team. He said that there was a very small chance to encounter Dragonlings, and even if they did, the 'passengers' usually didn't have to do anything.

This system was designed because the cost of running this subjugation team was incredibly high.

Although this mode of travel wasn't as safe as the Sky Carriage, the Dragonmen were a race who welcomed adversity, dangers, and unknown adventures. So no one really had a problem with it.

Of course, the biggest reason why people chose this method was because they were short on cash.

After thinking about it for a while, Lukas nodded.

"I'll go with that then."

"Understood. Then... I'll inform the subjugation team in advance. My Lord, please head to the 'Flame of Herui' on the northwest side of the city tomorrow morning."

The subjugation team had a base in every city, and Herui was no exception to this.

The Flame of Herui.

While thinking of this strange name, Lukas nodded to himself. It would be a short two-week trip, but there were still a few things he had to prepare first.

The first place he headed to was an old bookstore. It was pretty easy to find since he had received directions from Min Ha-rin before he left.

When he arrived, he opened a book and briefly glanced over it.

'It's English.'

Perhaps it was because most of the participants this time were from Earth.

Nevertheless, it was a good thing for Lukas. After all, even if he was quick, if it was a new language, it would take him at least two days to learn it.

After confirming that he could read them, he picked several books in the store. His plan was to study the culture and history of the Heavenly Realm. He could always ask Bargan about the things he didn't know, but it would be much less of a hassle if he built up his foundation of knowledge before doing so.

Next, he headed to a weapon store. He wondered if there were any staff-like weapons for sale.

In the end, his search was fruitless.

Not to mention staff, there wasn't even a single magic related piece of equipment in the store. All of the shiny weapons displayed in the store seemed to be perfect for stabbing, slashing or, smashing, but none of them had any special qualities.

'Bargan called my magic sorcery.'

The Dragonmen might tend to despise those who fought with other abilities instead of using their bodies.

Nevertheless, he didn't seem shocked by Lukas' display of magical abilities. In the first place, Min Ha-rin used both magic and swordsmanship in order to secure the title of Champion.

For a moment, he couldn't help but wonder if this concept was only limited to those on Combat Island, or if it was a sentiment shared by the entirety of the Heavenly Realm.

Lukas found an inn to spend the night.

He had originally been planning to leave on that very day, but now, he would end up staying in Herui one day longer than intended. If he went to Min Ha-rin's mansion he would certainly be able to stay for free. But it would be a bit strange to meet again after they already said their goodbyes to each other.

Just as he took out a book to read, Lukas felt his eyelids become heavy.

'I'm tired?'

This unfamiliar sensation shocked him for a moment.

Then he realised that he was even a bit hungry.

'I see.'

Now that his body had basically returned to a human state, it seemed he would have to eat and sleep regularly again.

“...hoo.”

It was a bit frustrating because he would not have as much time as he was used to, but it felt somewhat nostalgic to have physiological needs once again.

Lukas went down to the first floor and received a few pieces of smoked meat as well as some cold soup from the inn's owner before returning to his room. While eating, he decided to take out his book once again and read it.

As he gnawed on the slightly chewy and salty smoked meat, Lukas' eyes rolled back and forth as he read quickly.

'The Lightning God said that this world would be interesting.'

Lukas thought that there was some kind of hidden meaning in those words.

He thought of everything that made up this world, its very old culture and long history, races with self-awareness and high intelligence, and size much greater than most planets.

Right. This was literally a huge world, but it was highly likely that this world didn't exist before.

No. It wasn't just highly likely. Lukas was certain.

This incredibly vast world was, in the end, an improvised stage created by the Rulers in preparation for the Great Game.

Flap-

He flipped through the pages.

What Lukas was looking for were hints that might have been left behind by the Rulers.

And as he expected, he did manage to find some clues in the book.

Especially since it was a book about mythology.

'All of the Dragon tribes in the Heavenly Realm came from one source.'

The Heavenly Realm was not a mass that had been separated from the lower world, and the Seven Islands had been divided since the beginning of time. This was proven by the fact that the characteristics of each region were distinctly different.

What intrigued Lukas the most was the information about the other regions.

This world consisted of the Heavenly Realm, Thunder Gorge, Black Earth, and Giant Field, with a large supercontinent in the middle.

However, it was a bit awkward to call these places regions. This was because each one of them was so large, it wouldn't be strange if one referred to them as individual worlds.

Nevertheless, they weren't separated like the different worlds in Lukas' universe. Each 'world' basically coexisted on one planet.

'Though it is difficult to go to other regions.'

One couldn't just enter the Heavenly Realm by flying into the sky.

In the Thunder Gorge, a seemingly never-ending thunderstorm constantly sent down lightning bolts, irrespective of day and night.

The Black Earth was a place where thick miasma corroded the ground and air. A land of death where most beings couldn't survive for a second.

And regardless of their race, no being with even the slightest shred of intelligence dared to get close to the Giant Field.

From their descriptions, Lukas was able to realise one thing.

It was basically an affirmation of the conjecture he'd formulated when he first learned about the Dragon God.

'Each region is associated with a Ruler.'

The Lightning Gorge was associated with the Lightning God, the Black Earth with the Black Horned Demon King, the Giant Field with the Sun God, and finally, the Heavenly Realm with the Seven Fanged Dragon God.

Each region seemed to have a distinct connection to the respective Rulers.

'Then did each of the four Rulers create a region?'

That shouldn't be the case.

It was said that the Seven Fanged Dragon God, the final Ruler, didn't agree with the others' idea for the 'Great Game'.

'Except for the supercontinent, Gaia, there are four 'worlds'.'

In simple terms, there was a high possibility that one statue was located in every world. After all, it wouldn't be balanced if all of the statues were located in one world.

Taking out a small notebook, Lukas began to take notes.

Scribble scribble-

For a while, the sound of a pen scratch paper was the only sound in the room.

Time went by, and the sky gradually became dark. Not much time had passed. After all, it had already been halfway through the afternoon when he found the inn.

Lukas lit a candle, illuminated the table in front of him. There sat a notebook filled with his handwritten notes.

“...”

Suddenly, he turned to look out the window.

There, he was greeted by the sight of the beautiful night sky. Perhaps it was because this world sat in the clouds, but he had a slight feeling that the stars were so close, all he needed to do was reach out and grab them.

This reminded him of when he used to study magic in the past.

It was a sentimental memory that filled him with longing. Perhaps with a glass of alcohol, he would be able to have a comfortable night's sleep as he reminisced about those times.

But he didn't.

It was not yet time to dwell on the past.

Season 2 Chapter 158

Lukas got up from his bed around dawn. From his estimation, he had slept for about two hours.

After tidying the bed and washing his face, he put on the clothes that he wasn't yet used to.

Then, he headed to the first floor of the inn to have breakfast. The item on the menu for breakfast was crispy bacon.

In Lukas' opinion, this was a bit too much, and something like a salad or bread would have been better. However, the Dragonmen seemed to prefer to eat meat to an almost extreme degree.

When he headed out onto the street after eating, he saw some Dragonmen also beginning their days.

As he looked at them, Lukas couldn't help but marvel at their different appearances.

Some were practically the same as humans except for the skin and eyes.

Some had protruding horns or tusks.

And there were even some who basically looked like bipedal reptiles.

Nevertheless, they recognised each other as their kin. Of course, this wasn't to say there wasn't any prejudice at all, but in a modern sense, it was the same way that humans recognised each other as humans.

This knowledge was also something that he'd obtained from the books.

Without further ado, Lukas passed them, heading towards the 'Flame of Herui' that Bargan had mentioned the day before.

The Flame of Herui was one of the tallest buildings in the northwestern side of the city. To speak in modern terms, it was the Heavenly Realm's equivalent of a skyscraper.

Of course, this didn't mean that it was incredibly tall. At best, it was only a 10 story building, but when compared to the 1 and 2 story buildings around it, it looked like a mountain jutting out from the ground.

"..."

Lukas looked up at this large building. He could already tell from where he was standing.

The top of the building had been designed to be a kind of landing pad for flying dragons.

Flying Dragons.

Dragonlings who had the ability to fly across the sky.

Lukas couldn't help but wonder just how big they were. Considering the size of the building, it was fairly likely that they were much larger than he initially believed.

He headed into the building.

The first floor of the building was a large lounge. It had an atmosphere similar to a bar, if not a bit harsher.

The smell of alcohol seemed to permeate every inch of the space, and above all else, it was incredibly noisy.

It was still very early in the morning, but there was already a large number of people sitting in the bar. It was likely that it remained open all day.

"..."

When Lukas entered, the volume in the bar lowered a bit.

The Dragonmen, who had been relaxing in the bar, glanced at Lukas and began to whisper among themselves.

“Is he an outsider?”

“I’m not sure...”

“I don’t think so. Not even the outsiders look so weak.”

“...”

Ignoring them, Lukas headed to the middle of the bar.

Standing there was a man who looked incredibly close to a lizard and had almost no human features.

To put it bluntly, he was more like the ‘Lizardmen’ from Lukas’ homeworld.

The man’s yellow eyes flashed dangerously as he spoke.

“Outsider, what brings you to the Flame of Herui?”

“I’m here to join the subjugation team’s travel service.”

Since the other wasn't polite, Lukas didn't try to be respectful either.

After looking at the Dragonman for a short while, he added.

"Bargan should have come to speak with you beforehand."

"...you are Bargan's Lord?"

"That should be the case."

"I don't believe it."

The Dragonman's voice was tinted with disbelief.

"Bargan was defeated by such a skinny outsider?"

"..."

His tone was strangely rough, but it didn't seem like he was trying to refute him. This was because there was a clear expression of admiration on his face.

It was the same for the other Dragonmen who heard their conversation.

This reminded Lukas of the attitudes of the guards who protected the gates to Herui.

It was at that time that Bargain came down from the second floor. As soon as he spotted Lukas, he walked over at a brisk pace.

“You came early.”

“Should I have come later?”

“No... The preparations are already complete. All we need to do now is wait for approval...”

Bargain turned to the Dragonman Lukas was talking to and opened his mouth.

“How about it, Taotan?”

“Your request has been approved. Did you say it’s just the two of you? Then you can join Igaru’s squad.”

Bargain’s expression brightened at those words.

“Thanks. I’ll remember this favor.”

“What are you saying?”

The Dragonman Lukas had been talking to was Taotan, and Bargan seemed to know him. Although their words were cold and stiff, there was a hint of familiarity mixed into them.

After checking the schedules a few more times, Bargan turned to Lukas.

“Let’s go up.”

“Sure.”

After saying that, he followed Bargan up the stairs. Even though it was still early in the morning, Dragonmen filled every floor of the building. Many of them didn’t seem to be members of the subjugation force. Perhaps they were passengers like Lukas and Bargan.

“If we were a bit later, they might have left without us. There are many more people than I anticipated. If it wasn’t for Taotan’s help it would have been impossible.”

“It seems that the process is very complicated.”

“Not necessarily, it’s just a lot of reading. There are a lot of documents that you need to go through.”

“Documents?”

“Right. It includes things like precautions you should be aware of when moving with others, the risks involved, actions to be taken during an emergency, etc. And you also need to write a waiver stating that, in the event you die, the subjugation team would not be held responsible.”

Season 2 Chapter 159

The explanation Bargan gave was concise, but Lukas had a feeling that it was much more complicated than that.

Nevertheless, Bargan did all of those frivolous tasks on his own.

Lukas was inwardly surprised by this fact. It seemed that he wasn't just a wandering Fighter who could only earn his living by fighting.

That wasn't all.

Bargan seemed to have a good understanding of the behaviour one should have for their superior and knew exactly how rude or polite he should be at any moment.

But this kind of behaviour couldn't be innate.

Lukas suddenly asked.

“Did you serve someone before me?”

When he heard this question, Bargan's expression changed slightly.

"No. This is my first time serving a Lord."

There were other types of superiors that one could serve.

Lukas was curious, but he didn't ask any further. He knew that, were he to ask, he would certainly receive an answer. However, such an action would affect Bargan's loyalty.

'Though I don't really plan to increase his loyalty.'

He was a bit curious about this man named Bargan's past, but that was all.

While Lukas was lost in his thoughts, they arrived at the roof of the building.

Upon opening the door and stepping outside, they were immediately greeted by strong winds which ruffled their hair.

As Lukas had expected, the roof of the building had been fashioned into a landing strip of sorts.

The Flame of Herui was the tallest building in the area, and from it, they were able to see the beautiful scenery of the waking city. However, there was something else that drew their attention.

Sitting beneath the slowly brightening morning sky were a group of large carriages. And in front of each carriage, was an even larger flying dragon.

'It's big.'

The monster seemed to be at least five meters long, and if it spread its wings, it would certainly be much larger.

Although it sat on the rooftop in a seemingly calm manner, the feeling it gave wasn't like that of a docile pet. Instead, it seemed to give a faint sense of danger like that of a sleeping lion.

It was strange.

This monster was a flying dragon, something that should be as ferocious as the drakes and wyverns in Lukas' homeworld. That was why he found it strange that they were able to tame them enough to pull their carriages.

"You're here, Bargan."

It was at that moment that a Dragonman approached them. It seemed that he also knew Bargan.

"Squad Leader, Igaru, we'll be in your care for a while."

“Haha. I should say the same. After all, it is ‘Headsmasher Bargan’ that’s joining us. You are much more reliable than even a hundred of my foolish squad members.”

When Bargan simply nodded, Igaru’s gaze turned to Lukas.

“You can call me Igaru. Are you Bargan’s rumored Lord?”

“Yes. I’m Lukas.”

“Hmm...”

Igaru briefly glanced at Lukas’ body before nodding.

“Nice to meet you. As you may have already heard, the cost of the trip will be 500 erus. Since there are two of you, it would normally cost 1000 erus, but Bargan has joined us as a mercenary, so you only need to pay us half.”

“...a mercenary?”

It was Bargan who answered Lukas’ question.

“To put it simply, I’ll be helping the subjugation team.”

That explained why Igaru was so happy to see Bargan.

“I’m sorry for not telling you earlier. I thought it would be better to save, even if it was only 500 eru.”

“No, thank you for your consideration.”

After saying that, Lukas turned back to look at the carriages once again.

Each carriage had one flying dragon attached to it. Before boarding, he decided to see how the flight worked.

‘There is no way it can fly properly just by putting reins on a flying dragon.’

Considering the weight of the carriages and their occupants, no matter how powerful the flying dragons might be, there was no way they’d be able to fly for extended periods.

Lukas decided to take a closer look at the carriage. As he expected, runes were engraved all over it.

There were runes for reducing weight, runes to block the wind and prevent shaking to some extent, and also runes that helped with levitation.

‘The Dragonlings on Desire Island are said to be good at using runes.’

Runes was a field that could be considered quite common in different types of magic.

The difference between spells and runes was the fact that even those who might not have the necessary magical talent would be able to use runes as long as they had the required knowledge, materials, and tools.

'It probably has something to do with the abundant mana in the air.'

Since there seemed to be a never-ending supply of potent mana in the air, it was natural for the Dragonlings to not see the need of storing it in their bodies.

This also caused the direction of their development to move from using spells, to using runes.

The principle behind runes was to take the energy flowing in the air and transform it to suit your specific needs. For that reason, it was possible that the runes the Dragonlings created could have only been used in the Heavenly Realm.

As he watched Lukas carefully observing the carriage, Igaru tilted his head to the side.

"Are you a Sorcerer?"

Lukas thought for a moment before nodding.

There was no reason for him to tell him about spells, which would probably be a new concept for him.

Suddenly, the squad members who had come over with Igaru burst into laughter.

“A Sorcerer...”

“I didn’t think there would be sissy’s who played with runes here on Combat Island.”

“...”

Unlike Igaru, the other squad members didn’t seem to have a very good impression of Lukas. And when he turned to look at them, they gave him provocative glares as if to say ‘what can you do about it?’.

Naturally, Lukas wouldn’t care about this kind of childish provocation, so he simply got onto the carriage without giving them a second glance.

The interior of the carriage was much larger than he expected. It was large enough for five or six people to sit comfortably.

Then, he heard Igaru’s voice.

“Everyone, get on the carriages!”

* * *

Three flying dragons flew across the blue sky.

The group this time consisted of nine squad members, including Igaru, Lukas, Bargain, who was also controlling a flying dragon, and three other passengers.

On an island above the clouds, it was certainly a novel experience to be flying once again, but Lukas didn't find it interesting.

He had long since lost any interest in the scenery flashing past the window.

Rattle, rattle...

In all honesty, the ride was not good. Instead, it would be better to say that it was terrible.

No matter how many runes were inscribed on it, the carriages were drawn by living creatures. Whenever the flying dragons flapped their wings to propel themselves forward, the entire carriage shook as if it had been buffeted by heavy winds.

Nevertheless, although this shakey trip was uncomfortable and puke-inducing, Lukas simply sat with a nonchalant expression, reading the book he'd prepared in advance.

"Are you really Bargain's Lord?"

When he lowered his book and looked past it, Lukas saw a man looking at him with an expression of interest on his face.

The horns sticking out of the sides of his head were a clear indicator that he was a Dragonman as well.

“That’s right.”

“Amazing. You really don’t look like much from the outside. In that case, how about we spar later?”

“If we have the chance.”

“If we have the chance... That’s fine.”

The man then spoke with a smirk.

“I’m Guaba, by the way.”

“Lukas.”

“That’s a pretty weird name.”

Contrary to his serious appearance, Guaba was quite the chatterbox.

While the other squad members didn't seem to pay any attention to Lukas, he continued to talk nonstop.

"I've been doing this for 10 years."

"Do I like this job? To an extent. As long as we fill our quota, we can take the rest of the time off."

"You don't need to be scared. In the past 10 years, only two passengers who came with our squad died, and they were both accidents."

Of course, Lukas just read his book without responding to his chattering, but that didn't seem to bother him.

He had reached an interesting part in the book so he began to concentrate even more.

[The lifespan of Dragonlings is much higher than that of Dragonmen. They also continue to grow until they die.]

[Individuals that managed to survive for several hundred years are called Ancient Dragons, and they gain strength that is on a completely different level from other Dragonlings.]

[The 'Untamed Island' is the place where the most Ancient Dragons can be found, but that doesn't mean they can't be found on other islands too.]

[Because of their extreme adaptability and tenacious vitality, it is possible for Ancient Dragons to even survive on Death Island, which is known as the forbidden land.]

Ancient Dragons.

That name reminded Lukas of the Dragons from his homeworld, but they seemed to be a bit different. (TL: For reference, Lukas' Master, Isolla, was an Ancient Dragon.)

'No. I can't say they are completely different.'

In the history of his world, according to Lord, Dragons were simply massive, incredibly strong unintelligent beings who gradually developed as time passed.

So it was also possible that the Ancient Dragons had developed intelligence after thousands and tens of thousands of years.

Lukas kept reading the book intently.

The next phrase piqued his interest even more.

[The corpse of an Ancient Dragon can only be described as a treasure trove. It is a valuable treasure in itself, but many parts of it can also be used as unparalleled elixirs, or supreme ingredients.]

[Bones, teeth, claws, scales. All of these are things blacksmiths pray to get their hands on, but only a few are so lucky.]

[For most Dragonmen, fighting an Ancient Dragon would be no different from throwing themselves off a floating island.]

[There is no confirmation of this fact, but it is stated that the heart of an Ancient Dragon has miraculous properties. Only a handful of those who try to refine it would be able to handle the immense power contained within...]

‘An Ancient Dragon’s Heart.’

Recalling his past, Lukas nodded inwardly.

It could certainly be said that the heart was the essence of life. Especially for monsters who have lived as long as the Ancient Dragons. Their hearts alone would contain a tremendous amount of energy.

‘That might be a special item.’

Lukas raised his head slightly and looked at Guaba.

Even now, he was still chattering happily.

“That’s why, after this mission is over, I intend to confess to her...”

Lukas stopped Guaba before he could continue.

“Have you ever encountered an Ancient Dragon?”

Guaba rolled his eyes at that question.

“If I met one, do you think I’d still be here to talk about it?”

Lukas’ expression became a bit unsightly when he heard those words, and maybe he picked up on it, as Guaba laughed heartily.

“Now I understand. You’re scared. Haha. There’s no need to be scared.”

Guaba laughed until his stomach hurt.

“In all of my ten years on the subjugation team, I have never seen even a trace of an Ancient Dragon. Hahaha!”

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After about three days, the group was able to reach their first destination.

[Samis Great Forest.]

It was a place filled with trees over dozens of meters tall. By the time they were able to see the forest clearly, the sun had already begun to set.

Igaru's eyes shone as he looked for a place to land near the dark forest. As he searched, he spotted a plume of smoke rising from a clearing near the forest's entrance. That wasn't all. If one looked closely enough, they would see an orange flame flickering beneath the smoke.

Igaru pointed in that direction.

"Land over there."

Soon, the three carriages landed near the forest. Then, Igaru led the three flying dragons pulling their respective carriages and walked towards the clearing he'd spotted from the sky.

Sure enough, when they arrived, they saw ten people sitting around a large bonfire. This group also had a flying dragon and carriage.

That wasn't all.

All of the members of this group were equipped with weapons and armor. Their equipment wasn't extravagant, but just from looking at them, one could see that they were well used and well maintained.

Upon spotting them, a member of the group got up and headed over to them.

Igaru was able to see their silhouette from the light of the fire, and it was easy to tell from the shape of their body that it was a woman.

“Who are you?”

It was a cold voice.

The woman’s expression was as icy as her voice.

She had a scar across one of her eyes and she was taller than most men. If it wasn’t for her harsh expression, she could even be described as good-looking, but the dangerous aura surrounding this woman made it impossible for anyone to have any wayward thoughts.

Nevertheless, the thing that attracted the most attention was the giant saber she held in her right hand. This vicious weapon, which appeared too large and heavy for most men, was being held in one hand by this woman.

Igaru took a step forward and opened his mouth.

“The Herui Subjugation Team Branch 2nd Class Igaru Squad.”

“...Herui?”

The woman shook her head after a moment of thought.

“What brings you to the Samis Great Forest? I don’t think this area falls under your jurisdiction.”

“The Herui Branch received a request for help.”

When she heard those words, the woman’s eyebrows furrowed and she spoke in a harsh voice.

“Dammit. Those fools from the branch did something that embarrassing.”

“...”

The woman then looked at Igaru again and clicked her tongue before reluctantly introducing their group.

“...Hirup Branch 7th Class Ashstar Squad.”

Even though it was revealed that this group wasn’t her enemies, the woman’s voice remained cold. It seemed that she didn’t welcome Igaru’s squad at all.

Nevertheless, Igaru’s squad members didn’t get offended by the woman’s rude behaviour.

Instead, looks of surprise blossomed on their faces.

“A-, Ashstar...?”

“The Butcher Ashstar...”

It seemed that she was quite the celebrity as even Bargan’s eyes lit up slightly. On the other hand, Igaru seemed like he was lamenting inwardly.

“I’d like to set up camp, can I use the empty here?”

“Do what you want.”

After saying that, Ashstar immediately turned around and walked back to her group. The members of her squad also retracted their gazes.

“That’s a rather unwelcome reaction to members of the same group.”

When Lukas said this, Guaba laughed bitterly.

“It’s natural for them to feel disgruntled. As she said, Samis Great Forest is not our jurisdiction. We wouldn’t have been here if not for the direct request from the Hirup Branch.”

“...I see.”

Sending a request for backup meant that they didn't think this group would be able to handle their mission alone...

In fact, in normal circumstances, there was nothing wrong with this kind of situation. The problem here was that someone in the Hirup Branch had acted on their own judgement.

Ashstar seemed offended by the fact that her superiors didn't trust her team and instead requested reinforcements.

Dragonmen, especially those living on Combat Island, seemed to have a very strong sense of pride.

"It might seem a bit childish, but this is a pretty sensitive issue for the subjugation team. If it had been the other way around, I would have been pissed too."

Guaba let out a sigh.

"I don't think this will be a very comfortable rest."

* * *

As Guaba expected, the presence of the Hirup Subjugation Squad made the atmosphere very uncomfortable. It was almost as though an invisible war was being waged between the two groups.

Lukas realised that the Ashstar squad was higher ranked than the Igaru squad. In addition, the Samis Great Forest was their territory, so they naturally held the initiative.

“It’s a good thing we have Bargan.”

When Lukas tilted his head and Guaba’s words, he explained with a smile.

“They must have heard the stories about ‘Headsmasher Bargan’. That’s why they’re not openly picking a fight.”

It was certainly obvious that several of the Ashstar squad members were eyeing Bargan.

It was at that moment that Lukas realised Bargan’s reputation might be greater than he initially expected. He also realised just why Igaru was so happy when Bargan joined them.

He was actively taking advantage of Bargan’s presence. This fact was clear even now. After all, as he was talking to Ashstar, he had Bargan at his side.

“How far have you gone?”

“We have only searched the area around the entrance.”

“Have you gotten any results?”

“Not yet.”

Several people had recently been reported missing near the Samis Great Forest. Including the most recent disappearance, a total of seven people had already gone missing, and it had only been about two months since the first reported disappearance.

Seven people had gone missing in just two months.

“...Rather.”

Ashstar looked around before muttering in a low voice.

“Several of our group have also gone missing.”

“Mmm...”

Igaru frowned.

He could now understand Ashstar’s attitude to an extent. She must have been frustrated not only by the actions of her superiors but also at the fact that they had already suffered losses without making any progress.

“Tell us more about the situation.”

Ashstar glanced at Bargan before continuing.

“Our group has already lost three members. It’s been about a week since the first one disappeared. The second was three days ago, and the last one... was this afternoon. He went missing just a few hours ago.”

This meant that in addition to the original missing people, ten Dragonmen had gone missing in this forest.

Igaru’s expression became serious.

These series of events pointed to only one fact.

An unknown being was currently lurking in this forest.

“...this isn’t the best time to eat leisurely. Have you stopped searching?”

“No. We are just taking a break. We will begin searching again immediately after eating.”

“Then we’ll help you. Let’s split up and search two areas. My group will head west.”

Ashstar nodded.

“Then we’ll head east.”