

Great Mage 461

Season 2 Chapter 161

After a short while, the search operation began.

Half of Igaru's group were chosen to join the search party, while the other half was left behind to guard the camp.

Lukas was one of the members left to guard the camp.

"I'll be away for a while."

"Be careful."

"Yes."

Bargan had been selected as one of the members of the search party. Before leaving the camp, he bowed his head to Lukas, which caused the members of the Ashstar squad to look at him strangely.

Headsmasher Bargan was bowing towards an outsider?

Did the outsider grasp his weakness or something?

All of a sudden, their attention had been drawn to Lukas. Even Ashstar turned to look at him.

Their expressions seemed to be asking, 'What's going on?', but Lukas didn't pay any attention to them. Instead, he was staring at the great forest.

'...without a doubt.'

Something was in there.

Lukas wasn't sure what it was, but he could feel faint traces of its presence.

Meanwhile, Guaba, who had also been chosen to guard the camp, began to chatter once again with a relaxed expression.

In truth, over the past three days, Guaba was the person who spoke to Lukas the most.

Bargan was in charge of another carriage, so he couldn't find time to talk to him. Igaru, who he had the best impression of among the squad members, was the most important person in the group, so he couldn't find the chance to talk to him privately.

Of course, this didn't mean that Guaba was a bad person.

Except for being a bit talkative, he could be considered quite good, especially since he didn't have any prejudice towards outsiders. And above all else, he had a wealth of experience.

From his stories, it was clear that he had not just explored Combat Island, but other islands as well.

"Places to look for treasure?"

After asking that, Guaba glanced down at the mouse corpse in his hand before swallowing it in one bite. His action was so nonchalant it was as though he had just eaten a piece of beef jerky.

Lukas, of course, didn't have any intention of meddling with another race's diet, so he remained silent.

"If that's what you want then 'Adventure Island' is the best place to go."

Lukas nodded.

From what he'd heard and read, Adventure Island could best be described as 'unexplored', and it was also the place where countless treasures could be found.

The reason there were so many treasures there was simple.

There had been dozens of countries on Adventure Island in the past.

“The people who used to live there were known for their viciousness and extreme sense of belonging to their countries. After separating into different forces, they were at war for hundreds of years...”

Guaba lowered his voice slightly.

“It is said that they eventually drew the ire of the Goddess.”

Lukas had already read this in a book, but he continued to listen instead of stopping Guaba.

Nevertheless, he couldn't help but ask.

“What happened after they drew her ire?”

“She made it rain.”

“...rain?”

“Right. For decades, it rained so hard the droplets could pierce through the scales of any Dragonman.”

“...”

Heavy rain in a land above the clouds.

Had that also been created by the runes the Sorcerers used?

“The heavy rain from that time caused most of Adventure Island to be submerged. Now, Adventure Island looks like an archipelago. Only about ten percent of the area is land.”

And it was said that somewhere in the submerged regions, the legacies of dozens of countries lay untouched.

“And, well, this might just be a rumor, but it is said that there are quite a few treasures on Death Island.”

“I hear that it’s a forbidden land.”

“Right. Only a few people know why we’re banned from going there. But since it is an order that came directly from Dragon God Island, no one dares to defy it.”

Dragon God Island.

Perhaps it played the role of a monarchy that ruled over the Heavenly Realm.

The awe the Dragonmen felt for the Goddess was similar to how subjects looked up to their monarch.

Lukas wondered if the first thing he should do was meet this Goddess.

'The stronger you are, the more hidden truths you are made aware of.'

This was one of the truths that transcended any specific world.

"By the way, why are you going to Lirua?"

Lukas decided to respond honestly to see his reaction.

"I'm going there to become the Champion in order to take part in the Championship."

"...huh?"

Guaba's expression became a bit strange.

"You do know that Lirua is one of the major cities that represent Combat Island, don't you?"

"Right."

"And that its arena can be ranked within the top five of all cities."

"Of course."

“...right. I suppose only someone as ballsy as you could become the Lord of Headsmasher Bargan.”

He nodded as if he had some kind of understanding.

And he continued in a voice as though he didn't find anything wrong.

“Well, good luck. I'll come take a look when I get the chance.”

“...”

That was it?

Guaba didn't show any disgust or contempt as Bargan had.

What this meant was simple.

‘Guaba doesn't know about the fight fixing in Lirua.’

Just as he drifted along this train of thought.

Thud...

A strange vibration came from the forest.

Flap flap!

And dozens of birds flew up from the forest at the same time.

Lukas was surprised that birds were living on the floating island, but now wasn't the time to think about that.

The ground shook again, almost as if an earthquake was occurring. It was so heavy that the firewood scattered and the large bonfire immediately went out with a puff.

In an instant, their surroundings became pitch-black, which caused the members of the subjugation team to become a bit panicked.

"Wh-, what's going on?"

"Dammit. What the hell happened?"

"Ugh! Which bastard just hit me!?"

It was Igaru who organised the chaos.

“Everyone, take out your weapons!”

Unlike Ashstar, who had directly joined the search, he stayed back to guard their base.

Igaru’s loud voice pierced the panicked haze that had settled on everyone’s minds. They all drew their weapons and stared at the forest in anticipation.

“...”

“...”

As the commotion subsided, the area immediately became drowned in silence. So much so that the sounds of gulping were clearly audible.

Huff... huff...

It also allowed them to hear the sound of panting. It wasn’t from someone in the camp.

Instead, this sound came from the forest when the strong vibrations had just been felt.

Only then did the subjugation team members realise that someone was crawling towards them from the forest.

“Ku-, hu-, urk!”

“...!”

Igaru’s expression hardened.

The person who was slowly crawling out of the forest with unsteady movements was his subordinate, ‘Naul’.

His face was white with fear, but he didn’t seem to want to get up. No, upon closer inspection, they realised he couldn’t get up.

The lower half of Naul’s body was no longer there. Therefore, he had no choice but to use his arms to slowly drag himself forward like a slug.

He called out in a shaky voice.

“S-, squad leader... ru-, run away... da-, danger is... co-, co-....”

Naul collapsed before he could finish his sentence.

The adrenaline that had been pushing his body forward had finally run out.

Lukas turned to look at the forest again.

Then, he heard a familiar voice once again.

[A great power has been sensed in the 'Samis Great Forest'.]

[Warning!]

[It is recommended that the participant doesn't approach the Great Forest at this time.]

'Why?'

The answer to this question came promptly.

[That being will be difficult for the participant to confront at your current level.]

* * *

"...relight the fire."

At Igaru's order, one of the squad members lit the bonfire once again.

Fwoosh.

Soft light once again filled their surroundings. Igaru also created a torch by wrapping a cloth around a piece of firewood. Then he carefully inspected Naul's corpse.

"..."

There were numerous injuries on Naul's body. However, as he looked at these injuries, Igaru couldn't help but feel that none of them were enough to kill or even incapacitate him.

Every single injury missed his vital points.

Was it because Naul had done a good job of dodging?

'No.'

From Naul's pale complexion and his missing lower half, it was obvious that the difference between him and his opponent wasn't small.

'He was toyed with.'

Instead of intentionally killing him, the beast simply devoured his lower half and enjoyed it as he crawled away in fear.

Right, devoured.

From the injury, it was obvious that Naul's waist had been torn off by the teeth of a huge monster. Naul must have tried desperately to crawl away from it after that, filled with immense pain and even more fear.

Kori, the most knowledgeable member of Igaru's squad frowned as he looked down at Naul's corpse.

"It has a powerful bite. It was able to tear through his skin like paper and his bones snapped like twigs."

"Was it a Dragonling?"

"Yeah. It's possible that it's a Mutated Dragonling, or..."

After a moment of hesitation, Kori added.

"It's possible that it was an Ancient Dragon." (TL: Here it is...)

"..."

Even though it was a shocking statement, it didn't cause a big commotion. Instead, all the Dragonmen present felt as though a cold wind was blowing against the napes of their necks, and they didn't dare to open their mouths.

That was the weight of the words 'Ancient Dragon'.

Guaba, whose expression had been stiff this entire time, finally turned to Igaru.

"Squad Leader. What are your orders?"

"..."

It was a difficult situation, but that was exactly why the squad leader's orders were important.

Igaru took another look at Naul's corpse then back to the pitch black forest from which nothing could be seen before letting out a long sigh.

"...we will wait here until dawn."

With the situation, the way it was, entering the forest now would be no different from committing suicide.

Especially if their opponent was truly an Ancient Dragon.

All they could do was wait there for those who might come back alive.

'...however.'

Night had only just arrived. They would need to wait for half a day for dawn to come. Could those in the forest survive that long?

"Hoo."

Igaru sighed and shook his head.

This wasn't the time to worry about the search party. Right now, Igaru had to focus on protecting those still in the camp.

There was no guarantee that the unidentified Dragonling in the forest wouldn't come here for them.

Guaba, who was wiping cold sweat off his forehead, spoke to his side.

"What a mess. Hey, Lukas, you're a Sorcerer right. Is there any rune you can use to send messages to those ins-..."

But he didn't finish his sentence.

"...Lukas?"

This was because Lukas, who had been standing beside him the entire time, had disappeared.

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An eerie wind blew through the pitch-black forest, causing those who felt it to be filled with a primal fear.

This feeling was magnified by the fact that they still didn't know exactly what the being trying to take their lives was.

'If only it wasn't so dark.'

Then they wouldn't be as panicked as they were now.

As she had that thought, Ashstar looked up. The night sky was barely visible through the thick leaves of the trees around them.

"How many are left?"

"Four of us, including you, Squad Leader."

Ashstar almost clicked her tongue when she heard that answer.

When they first entered the forest to begin their search, their party had been made up of nine members. But now, five of them had disappeared without a trace. In other words, only less than half of her group remained.

‘There were already more than five screams from the darkness.’

In this situation, even the brightest optimist wouldn’t be able to feel hope for the survival of those missing members.

Trying to get rid of her cynical thoughts, Ashstar opened her mouth.

“Did anyone manage to see it?”

“I only saw a shadowy blur, but... It wasn’t as big as I expected. At the very least, it was smaller than a flying dragon.”

“That’s strange.”

Normally, Dragonlings’ strength was proportional to their size. If it was smaller than a flying dragon, then even if it was larger than Dragonmen, it could only be a normal Dragonling.

It wasn’t a group either. They were at least certain that it was only a single being that was tormenting their group.

For just one being to deal such devastating damage...

Ashstar frowned.

“...no, it makes sense that it’s small. Otherwise it wouldn’t be able to maneuver among the trees and toy with us the way it is.”

After pondering for a moment, she spoke in a heavy voice.

“We need a fire.”

“Wouldn’t that just give away our position?”

“From what I can tell, that monster doesn’t have any problem with the darkness. Since it can find us without any light, making a fire won’t change anything. Do any of you have cloth?”

“Yes.”

Firewood by itself wasn’t enough to make a torch. Instead, they needed cloth soaked in flammable liquid to wrap around the end.

Luckily, one of the squad members happened to have one such piece of cloth.

Fwoosh.

When the torch was finally lit, their surroundings instantly became brighter. Their situation hadn't gotten any better, but at the very least, they felt less panicked now that they weren't surrounded by darkness.

Of course, this didn't mean that they let their guards down.

Ashstar decided to look around first for any clues that might help her figure out exactly where they were. But there weren't any. There was no way for her to tell which part of the forest this was. In the first place, this forest was so large that it was given the name 'Great Forest' so such a result was kind of expected.

Just as she thought that.

Crunch-

A sound came from the bushes in front of them.

It wasn't just Ashstar. Her entire squad heard it. They all immediately fell into battle stances as they focused intently on the bush where the sound came from.

And after a short while, something appeared from the bushes.

"...you."

It was a familiar face.

A Dragonman who had entered the forest with them. The Dragonman panted heavily, and the various injuries that covered his body looked extremely gruesome as he opened his mouth.

“Oh, Hirup’s subjugation team.”

“Bargan.”

As she called out the man’s name, Ashstar made a gesture. Although he looked like their ally, she couldn’t be sure he wasn’t an enemy. At her signal, her squad members slowly lowered their weapons, but they didn’t relax their vigilance.

“You were in charge of the west, weren’t you? Where are the others?”

“They’re all dead.”

Someone sucked in a cold breath at his response.

Meanwhile, Bargain, who had caught his breath a little, said in a steadier voice.

“We have to get out of the forest. It’s that thing’s territory.”

“Have you seen it?”

Bargain didn't answer immediately. Instead, he looked down at the club in his hand. The club was filled with cracks.

This was a weapon that had been carved from the branch of a top-notch dragonwood tree, and he had used it for over ten years without it suffering a single scratch. With its quality, it would have been able to last a few more decades before he needed to replace it, but now, it had been ruined in a single blow.

He could probably only swing it two or three more times at most.

“It's almost safe to say that guy is a completely different species from normal Dragonlings. He's not that big. Only about three meters tall at most, with a large pair of wings and tail. But he walks on two legs.”

“It's bipedal? That...”

Just as Ashstar blurted out those words, a low murmur arose from the Dragonmen around her. Some of them had become incredibly pale, and if one looked carefully enough, one could see that their bodies were shaking slightly.

For a Dragonling to walk on two legs, it could only mean one of two things.

It was a mutant Dragonling, or it was an Ancient Dragon.

“Right. But that’s not something you need to pay attention to for now. Keep in mind that he’s faster than most Dragonmen, a lot more vicious than normal Dragonlings, just as clever as we are, and he knows how to make use of his advantages.”

Bargain spoke in a soft but firm voice.

“If we don’t leave this forest soon, we will all die.”

* * *

Afterwards, they began to rush to escape the forest.

Bargain had climbed the tallest tree to get a scope of their location. However, he hadn’t been able to see the entrance. After being chased around by that guy, they had unknowingly entered the depths of the forest.

Therefore, he had no choice but to use the stars in the sky to figure out which direction to go.

South.

However, within just a few minutes of finding their bearings, the first casualty occurred.

“U-, uahh...!”

It was the Dragonman at the back of their group. Something reached out from the darkness and grabbed him by the ankle.

The Dragonman screamed and struggled with all his might, but was simply too strong for him to resist.

“Frix!”

“Dammit!”

By the time the other Dragonmen tried to reach out to him, it was already too late.

“Sa-, save me...!”

Frix dug his fingernails into the ground, but he only left deep gouges as he disappeared into the bushes.

The other Dragonmen tried to run after him, but Ashstar’s voice sounded like a crack of thunder.

“Don’t move.”

Her words caused the Dragonmen to freeze in place.

Ashstar clicked her tongue.

In the current situation, everything would only get worse if she allowed them to break formation. So she had to avoid that as much as possible.

Of course, it wasn't easy for her to keep her cool either.

Ashstar bit her lip hard as she looked at the bushes where Frix disappeared.

Crunch, crunch...

From it, the sound of flesh and bones being slowly chewed was clearly audible.

When she heard it, she clenched her fists so hard they began to bleed.

'Fucking bastard.'

It was eating him so close to them on purpose so that they could hear it. It wanted them to be scared. It was clearly staged, but it still managed to get the reaction it wanted.

"U-, uh..."

"Frix is..."

Fear quickly began to spread through the group.

The squad members Ashstar had selected were all talented individuals who could be called elite in their own right, but they were not so cold-blooded as to keep their calm in a situation like this.

'He's the only one that's able to remain calm.'

Ashstar glanced at the man standing beside her.

He continued to look in front of them with sunken eyes, not showing the slightest hint of fear or restlessness at the terrifying sounds that drifted from the bushes.

Headsmasher Bargan.

She'd heard a few rumors about him.

He was an outstanding fighter who stood out even in a place like the Lirua Arena. But she heard that one day, he suddenly stopped being a fighter in the arena and instead became a wanderer.

When she first heard the rumor, she thought he'd just run away because he got rusty or was afraid of fighting, but now that she saw him for herself, she didn't think that was the case.

Suddenly, Bargan muttered.

“It was its tail.”

“What?”

“The thing that just dragged Frix away. It had a long prehensile tail.”

“...”

Of course, knowing that didn't make much of a difference.

The monster had finished its meal and it would soon hunt again.

They had no way to deal with it either. It was clear from the start that their enemy was many times stronger than them.

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Bargan frowned slightly as he looked into the darkness.

The monster wasn't hiding and attacking from the shadows because it didn't have the confidence to face them head-on.

Instead, it was doing it just so it could enjoy the hunt.

For example, even if it was day instead of night, and they were in a plain instead of a forest, their chances of winning would still be very slim.

That was why Ashstar was so angry.

For the extremely proud Dragonmen, this kind of death was the most shameful. From the start, they were the type who wouldn't even want a peaceful death where they could lay on a bed, close their eyes, and smile.

However, they had now been reduced to nothing more than prey and could do nothing more than wait for their deaths.

For Ashstar, that was a kind of death that she could never accept.

By the time she had made this silent resolution, Ashstar realised that all her squad members had disappeared.

To be precise, they were all dead.

And, as if to mock them, they arrived at a clearing.

Of course, they hadn't escaped the forest. Instead, this clearing represented the center of the Great Forest.

Standing in the middle of this clearing was their assailant.

As Bargan described, it was relatively small for a Dragonling.

In fact, its appearance was closer to that of a Dragonman than a Dragonling. Its slim body and the fact that it stood on two feet emphasised this feeling.

The monster had jet-black scales, six sharp horns, and a tail. This tail, which seemed to be much longer than its body, was pointed straight up toward the sky.

At first glance, it appeared more like a black spear than a tail.

Nevertheless, its most noticeable feature was the fact that it was covered in blood. It was needless to say who this blood belonged to.

Bargan spoke in a frustrated voice.

“Looks like it’s grown tired of hunting. It probably intends to take us both head-on.”

“Ha. Should I be happy that I’ll die a different way?”

Ashstar sneered.

Bargan looked down at his club for a moment before speaking in a soft tone.

“I should be able to hold it back for about five seconds.”

“How surprising. You plan on acting as bait.”

While one side caught its attention, the other would deal the final blow. It was the simplest and most efficient plan that could be used in the current situation. But there was a high possibility that the one who took the role as bait would die.

It wasn't possible for Bargan to not know this.

“My club can't get through its scales. But your weapon might be able to.”

“...I see.”

Ashstar snorted.

“Well. We'll both die anyway if I fail.”

[Ka, ka, ka.]

The Dragonling let out a sinister laugh as though it had heard the conversation between them.

And upon hearing this laugh, Bargain and Ashstar kicked off from the ground at the same time.

* * *

Ashstar had a distinctive weapon and fighting style which granted her the title 'Butcher'. Once she designated someone as her enemy, she never showed any hesitation or mercy when slaughtering them, and this trait was showcased in her fights.

A weak-willed person would never be able to watch her fight. The process of her slowly turning her opponent into minced meat with her huge saber was shocking enough to cause many to vomit.

But now...

Ashstar's renowned fighting style could not be displayed at all.

Clang!

Her saber bounced off once again. Her wrist ached as if she'd hit polished steel armor made by a master craftsman.

It was bloody hard.

How could scales that hadn't gone through any smelting process be so hard?

Bargain seemed to have expected her saber to be able to cut through its scales, but at this rate, it seemed that would never happen.

Whoosh!

The long, flexible tail bent like a whip, hitting both Ashstar and Bargain at the same time. Its tail wasn't very thick. Rather, it was pretty thin and smooth.

But the shock she felt as it smashed into them was closer to being hit by a huge boulder.

She could only barely get back to her feet after rolling several times across the ground. Her heart pounded in her chest.

That attack had broken at least three ribs.

[Ka, ka, ka.]

The bastard didn't take advantage of the opening. Instead, it simply clapped its hands together and laughed at them.

It felt as if it could kill them at any time, and it was true.

At that point, she couldn't even feel angry. Should she be grateful that it had spared her life until now?

Ashstar let out a laugh.

She couldn't believe she was having such thoughts. At this rate, she couldn't tell when she would finally kick the bucket.

"If this continues, we'll both die."

"It'll probably happen when it gets tired of us."

Bargan muttered softly before spitting something to the side. It was a broken tooth.

Ashstar narrowed her eyes as she looked at the monster in front of them.

"Is it an Ancient Dragon?"

"Probably."

"Hoo..."

Ancient Dragon.

Ashstar had seen an Ancient Dragon before. It hadn't been this small, but at that time, she'd felt a similar sense of helplessness.

She knew that Ancient Dragons weren't invincible. They also had weaknesses. It was just that they couldn't find them in their current circumstances.

It was simply too dark. Its scales were even darker than the night around them, and if they concentrated, no, even if they focused with everything they had, it was so fast that it could disappear in an instant.

Suddenly, Bargan spoke.

"Its tail."

"What?"

"Target its tail."

"The scales on its tail are hard too."

"It would still be better than its body. Its tail is very flexible, which means it will have a lot of joints, and the gaps on its tail at those spots are the best targets when compared to anywhere else."

“...”

It was true.

Whether or not his accumulated experience was useful or not, this was the best he could think of in this situation.

Ashstar also thought that Bargain’s plan was pretty good, but she still pointed out the major loophole.

“It won’t die even if we cut its tail off.”

“But we would gain a weapon.”

“...you want to attack it with its own tail?”

It was a really crazy idea.

Bargain responded in a flat tone.

“Do you have any better ideas?”

“ ... ”

Of course, she didn't.

Ashstar rolled her eyes slightly as she said.

“Fine. Fine. The only other choice is death anyway. But won't that be our only chance to catch him off guard?”

“That's why we have to catch the tail before it falls to the group and stab a vital spot with it.”

There was only one reason why the Ancient Dragon was so relaxed at that moment.

Because it didn't see them as threats.

That is to say, it had let its guard down. This also meant that the moment it became vigilant, they would lose all hopes of winning.

The level of difficulty was absurdly high considering that they only had one chance, but that was the reality. Especially for the weak who were on the brink of death.

Nevertheless, Ashstar felt grateful at that moment.

At the very least, the possibility that she would die a meaningless death was gone.

Even if she were to die now, she wouldn't feel any regrets because she aimed for a chance at victory, a chance to take its life.

Suddenly, the Ancient Dragon began to walk towards them. It could move faster, but it was walking slowly on purpose.

In all honesty, the sight of an Ancient Dragon walking towards them was terrifying.

If it's hard to understand, think of a lion or tiger suddenly standing on two feet and walking towards you.
(TL: Here kitty kitty...)

It was strange.

But Bargan was focused on another fact that he noticed.

Its back was hunched.

In other words, while it could walk on two feet, it was probably most used to walking on all fours.

Suddenly, the Ancient Dragon disappeared from their sight.

And at the same time, Bargan and Ashstar focused their hearing. After all, it was almost impossible to follow him with their eyes in the darkness.

Sshhk.

The sound of something moving through the bushes was faintly audible.

It was on the left.

As he had this thought, Bargan increased the strength with which he gripped his club.

‘This will probably be the last attack.’

Hang in there for one time.

With this earnest desire in his heart, Bargan swung his club to the left.

Crack!

And it immediately broke into several pieces. It had hit the tail.

The Ancient Dragon’s tail could almost be considered as an independent entity. This was because it seemed to move as if it had a mind of its own.

Rumble-

Bargan's muscles swelled greatly.

When his club broke apart, the Ancient Dragon must have been happy. But Bargan had intended to give up his weapon from the start.

Paak!

[...!]

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For the first time since their fight began, the Ancient Dragon had an expression of surprise. This was because Bargan had caught its tail with his bare hands.

[Kaaak!]

With a loud cry, it pulled its tail back.

The tail of the Ancient Dragon was like a whip with shards of metal embedded into it. When someone tried to hold it with their bare hands, their hands would naturally be shredded.

Bargan's hands were filled with hard calluses that had formed over decades of hard work, but when compared to the Ancient Dragon's scales, they were no better than paper.

"Kuh...!"

Nevertheless, Bargain refused to let go. Instead, he increased the strength of his grip even though his hands felt like they were on fire.

Blood freely flowed from his palms, covering the tail and dripping to the ground.

"Good job, Bargan!"

It was at that moment that Ashstar appeared, her cleaver held high.

With all the strength she could muster focused on her arms, she swung down on the tail that was held defenselessly.

Crack!

And felt it immediately.

The Ancient Dragon's tail had been cut off. By then, Bargan's palms were ragged and bloody, but his next actions were still as quick as lightning.

Grabbing the tail, he twisted it around before stabbing it into the monster's chest like a spear.

Crack!

The sharp tail easily penetrated the Ancient Dragon's scales.

Ashstar cheered.

"That's it!"

"..."

However, instead of excitement, an expression of shock slowly spread across Bargan's face.

He had a lot of real world experience, and he had killed many people in his life.

So he knew.

He knew exactly what it felt like to pierce someone's heart.

"This guy... its heart isn't-...!"

Crack!

Bargain was unable to finish his sentence before he was sent flying. The same was true for Ashstar, who had released a cry in anticipation of their victory.

[Kaaaaah!]

The Ancient Dragon roared and spread its wings. It was then revealed that its wings were twice as large as its body.

Flap!

Then, it flew into the sky. Ashstar, who was laying on the ground, coughed up a mouthful of blood and said.

“What the hell... happened?”

“... its heart wasn't there.”

“What...?”

He stabbed the tail through its chest and didn't feel anything.

Was its heart on the right side? Or was it a species whose heart wasn't in their chest? Did it even have a heart in the first place? Could there be a living being who didn't have a heart?

All these questions disappeared in an instant as the Ancient Dragon looked down from the sky and opened its mouth.

"...it's over."

This time, Bargan was certain of his death.

Deep in his bones, he understood that Dragonmen would never be able to deal with Ancient Dragons on their own.

In general, Dragonmen didn't have the means to reach the same level as Ancient Dragons.

For one, Dragonmen didn't have wings. Of course, they couldn't use flying dragons, either. After all, in the end, flying dragons were Dragonlings, and for Dragonlings, Ancient Dragons were at the very top of the food chain and couldn't be contested.

No matter how fearless a flying dragon might be, the moment it heard the roar of an Ancient Dragon, its entire body would freeze instinctively.

It didn't matter how amazing its trainer was. It was impossible to train a flying dragon to confront an Ancient Dragon. This has been proven by tests and experiments carried out over the past few hundreds of years.

Of course, if they were to use the power of sorcery, it was possible for them to remain in the sky, but, at best, that could only be called floating in place.

Flying freely in the sky and floating in place were so different that they didn't even need to be explained.

It was like a person who had lost both of their legs going against a professional runner.

[Ka, ka, ka.]

The Ancient Dragon let out another laugh. It had already realised its absolute superiority.

It always enjoyed slaughters like this one.

It could never get this kind of pleasure while killing Dragonlings. There was no point in killing weak things that only ran or froze without doing anything.

It wasn't fun at all.

Devouring a trembling Dragonling was no different from eating food that had been set out on a table.

But Dragonmen, on the other hand, was different.

They were also terrified whenever they encountered it, but they never gave up and always did their best to survive. Some of them even tried to fight it.

It liked that.

What the Ancient Dragon wanted to do was hunt, not butcher, and Dragonmen were the perfect actors for its play.

Fwoosh.

The Ancient Dragon opened its mouth wide and black flames appeared in it.

Whoosh.

But what shot out was more like a bullet than a breath attack.

Bang!

The instant the ball of black flames hit the ground, half of the clearing was destroyed.

The force of the attack sent Bargan and Ashstar rolling across the ground like ragdolls.

'Kuh...'

It had missed them on purpose.

It knew they couldn't avoid it. The black ball of flames was far too fast for them to even hope to dodge.

Fwoosh.

The Ancient Dragon opened its mouth again.

It was about to spit out another bullet.

Originally, it had intended to play with them until dawn, but it had changed its mind. These Dragonmen had dared to attack it and had even cut off its tail.

The intelligence was still there, but the patience had run out.

This was probably the most decisive difference between Dragonmen and Dragonlings.

"Ha."

Ashstar snorted as she finally let go of her saber.

She never thought she would die in such a ridiculous way.

...It wasn't so bad to die to this kind of opponent.

“ ... ”

Unlike Ashstar, who had already resigned herself to her fate, Bargain continued to glare at the Ancient Dragon.

There wasn't any big reason for this.

It was simply because he had sworn to never turn his head away if the day of his death finally arrived.

However, this allowed him to witness a very strange sight.

From somewhere in the forest, a whitish blur suddenly shot towards the Ancient Dragon.

It was almost like a group of pure white bats were flying.

[...]

It took the Ancient Dragon a while to notice their presence, but when it did, it immediately shot its ball of black flame towards them.

But these objects which suddenly appeared flew through the black flames as though it wasn't there before tearing the Ancient Dragon's body to shreds.

[...ka, guh, uk...?]

The Ancient Dragon's body shook as it looked down at itself in disbelief.

This was because it realised that the things that had pierced the scales it was so proud of and made its body a ragged mess were only pieces of ice.

"Ice...?"

It was Ashstar who called out in disbelief.

It was a bit chilly as there was still some time before dawn, but it wasn't cold enough for ice to form. And even if it was, there was no way the ice would be strong enough to withstand those powerful black flames, or sharp enough to pierce the scales that even her prized saber could do nothing about.

Bargan, on the other hand, immediately knew the source of this incredible phenomenon.

Bang!

At that moment, the Ancient Dragon's body fell to the ground.

Its mouth was wide open, and doubt, shock, fear, and resentment were clear in its dark eyes.

Instant death.

A death that was still unbelievable even after they witnessed it with their own eyes.

How could this monster, who even Bargan and Ashstar had to risk their lives to just cut off its tail, die so easily?

Juk-

It was at that time that a man appeared from the forest. There was a cold, hazy mist drifting off of his body.

“You...”

Ashstar’s eyes narrowed slightly.

It was the outsider that Bargan had been strangely polite to.

Lukas looked over to them and spoke.

“It seems I wasn’t too late. Are you okay, Bargain?”

“Yes.”

Bargain responded while suppressing the pain from his ribs and palms. Instead, he smiled slightly.

“...to defeat an Ancient Dragon on your own. I knew you were an amazing person, My Lord.”

But Lukas’ expression became strange when he heard those words. He shook his head as he looked down at the monster’s corpse.

“You’re wrong about something.”

“What do you mean?”

“This isn’t an Ancient Dragon.”

“What did you say?”

It was Ashstar who asked this question.

Lukas looked into the forest and said.

“Don’t you remember the huge vibration that shook the forest earlier? It caused most of the birds in the Great Forest to fly away simultaneously. This guy isn’t strong enough to cause that kind of vibration. In other words...”

Lukas looked down at the Ancient Dragon again.

No.

“This is nothing more than a mutated Dragonling.”

“...!!”

As he ended his words, he pushed the ‘mutated Dragonling’ slightly with his foot.

Bargan’s expression stiffened.

Although he didn’t really want to accept it, it certainly did clear up some of the doubts he’d been feeling from the start.

For example, the monster was even smaller than normal Dragonlings, and its physical structure was so ‘deformed’ that it could hardly be called a Dragonling. Finally, its pride, fighting style, and burgeoning intelligence were different from normal Dragonlings.

Ashstar spoke in a trembling voice.

“So the thing that beat us so badly wasn’t an Ancient Dragon... It was just a mutated Dragonling bastard...”

Krrrr...

Suddenly, another vibration shook the entire forest. Something was moving on the other side of the forest.

Whatever it was, it was big. So big in fact that they couldn’t even see all of it at once. Its size was so overwhelming that they didn’t even have any thought of fighting back.

Even though it was night, a feeling of immense darkness seemed to cover the entire forest. It was almost as if a mountain had suddenly appeared and its majesty pressed upon the shoulders of everyone in its shadow.

Flap!

The real Ancient Dragon Spread its wings.

This movement alone sent a tremendous gale rippling through the forest. It was so powerful that the ancient trees that were deeply rooted in the ground were sent flying like small weeds.

Bargan and Ashstar, who had only just returned to their feet, suddenly lost all sensation in their knees, causing them to collapse to the ground once again.

Lukas, on the other hand, remained standing, gazing at the Ancient Dragon.

Indeed, if it was a being on this level, it wasn't a surprise that the voice would think he was unable to deal with it.

"You did well, Bargan. Now go join back up with the main group."

As he said that, Lukas turned around.

For a moment, Bargan didn't understand what Lukas was doing. Then, when it clicked in his mind, he hurriedly tried to get back to his feet, his feet trembling all the way.

"M-, my lord. What are you planning to do?"

"Hunt the Ancient Dragon."

It was crazy. Absolutely Insane.

Even Bargan was unable to keep his cool when he heard this response. He cried out to Lukas in an anxious voice.

“It’s suicide...!”

“I’ve heard that many times before.”

Once again, Bargan was made speechless by Lukas’ remark, but Lukas simply smiled at him and added.

“That just means that no one has ever done it before.”

Season 2 Chapter 165

The Ancient Dragon, which was the size of a small mountain and covered in jet black scales that seemed to devour the moonlight, finally opened its golden eyes.

‘Overwhelming.’

That was the only way to describe this monster.

Only Dragons that had survived for at least a few hundred years were qualified to be called

‘Ancient Dragons’.

Lukas had realised that the wilderness of the Heavenly Realm was a place ruled by the primal rules of the jungle. In fact, it was very similar to the Demon World from his home universe, a place where the desire to become strong was embedded into the very roots of every being.

After all, only the strong had the right to survive in such places.

Ancient Dragons had survived not for decades, but for centuries in such an environment. That fact alone was proof of just how strong they were.

[Warning!]

[Immediate escape is strongly recommended.]

[At the participant's current level, it would be extremely difficult to face such an opponent.]

The voice's warning sounded in his ear once again.

Even so, it was already too late.

The burning gaze of the Ancient Dragon had already pinpointed Lukas as something that had to be exterminated. It was clear as day that even if he were to turn around and run with all his might, the Ancient Dragon would chase him to the ends of the world.

At that moment, however, Lukas was only wondering if there was any way to turn off the annoying voice.

[There is no way to disable the advisory function.]

“...”

He shook his head with a sigh.

‘Then at least you can be quiet for now.’

After he snapped inwardly, he no longer heard any response from the voice. Maybe it was just him, but it almost felt like the voice was sulking.

Nevertheless, Lukas decided to ignore the voice as he analysed his current strength.

He could only use 7-star and lower spells. That meant that his options were incredibly limited. And to make matters worse, the Ancient Dragon was certain to have annoyingly strong defenses.

Suddenly.

[Rooaar!]

The Ancient Dragon let out a loud roar before charging towards Lukas.

As if to vent its rage, it simply charged towards him without any technique, but when one put the Ancient Dragon's size into consideration, such a sight was terrifying.

It was as though a natural disaster was rushing towards him. Trees were sent flying in every direction, heavy winds buffeted the entire area, and the ground shook heavily.

Lukas avoided the attack by rising into the air with the Fly spell.

However, the speed of the Ancient Dragon's rush belied its enormous size, so he was only able to barely avoid it after using Blink as well.

Boom!

The ground where Lukas had been standing sank.

Based on the extent of the damage, it would probably take a few decades before the forest would be able to recover to its former state. While the thought buzzed in the back of his mind, Lukas analysed the Ancient Dragon's state.

'It's angry.'

Incredibly so, in fact.

The reason for this wasn't too difficult to guess.

The mutated Dragonling that Lukas had killed was probably its child.

Lukas cast a spell at the Ancient Dragon's defenseless back.

Bang!

It was just a spell to test the strength of its defenses.

A sphere of energy formed in his palm before shooting down towards the Ancient Dragon at so fast a speed that the air split apart.

The Ancient Dragon sensed the attack, but it didn't try to avoid it. Clearly, it had great faith in its defenses.

But apart from that, it was a bit confused.

In the hundreds of years that it had been dominating this island's wilderness as the top predator, it had never encountered such a fighting style. It was very strange. To avoid its attack, this tiny being had flown into the sky with strange movements.

For the Ancient Dragon, Lukas' magic was unknown.

Lukas, on the other hand, was very familiar with beings like the Ancient Dragon.

He had fought many monsters of similar size and he already had an idea of their habits and attack style.

Clang!

The energy sphere directly hit the back of the Ancient Dragon.

However, if others were to view this scene, they would not have believed the spell he had just cast was Hyperbolt.

The destructive power of this spell was immense.

That was a fact. The spell Lukas had just cast, in theory, contained the maximum output one could compress into a Hyperbolt.

In theory, it should be impossible for any Wizard to truly achieve a 100% magic power output, but Lukas had just done this.

There were two reasons for this.

One was the abundant mana which seemed to fill the Heavenly Realm to the point of saturation.

[...]

The other was the fact that Lukas was no ordinary Wizard, he was the Great Mage.

After a short while, the smoke cleared up and he was able to inspect the Ancient Dragon's back once again.

There, he saw faint scorch marks on its scales. The Ancient Dragon was jet black, so one really needed to concentrate in order to see the faint marks.

Lukas nodded inwardly. It seemed that even an enhanced Hyperbolt was only able to leave a few scorch marks at best.

[Rooaa-!]

The Ancient Dragon began to let out another roar, but it was forced to stop in surprise.

Papapa!

For a moment, it couldn't help but wonder if it was already dawn. But instinctively, it knew that there was still a short while before dawn arrived.

If that was the case then...

Where had this bright light that instantly washed away the darkness of the forest come from?

“ ... ”

Lukas wasn't chanting any spells at that moment. He didn't need to.

At his current level, it was possible to cast spells just by thinking about it. With just a little hand gesture, he could cast dozens of spells at the same time.

This wasn't possible for normal 7-star Archmages, but it was possible for Lukas because he had only been suppressed to this stage by a special force.

The restrictions limited his state, but it didn't limit his mind.

Earth Fang, Flame Ball, Frost Scream, Hyperbolt, Howling Tempest.

Most spells from 4 to 6 stars were sent towards the Ancient Dragon at the same time.

The Ancient Dragon felt as though it had been placed into a magical storm. The sight of dozens of spells created a beautiful image that lingered in one's mind.

It was like an illusion.

Nevertheless, it wasn't lethal.

Boom!

Dozens of spells rained down upon the Ancient Dragon like an aerial bombardment. It was as if its scales were being struck by extremely powerful hail.

The image of a supreme Wizard pouring countless spells onto a large black Dragon had such a classic feel that it would almost make one laugh.

This was a story that could only be found in those old hero tales that no one read anymore.

Of course, Lukas' expression didn't show any of the determination or ferocity one would expect when fighting against a deadly foe.

Instead, he watched on in silent contemplation as the spells crashed into the Ancient Dragon's body.

Burns, cuts, and other injuries were slowly accumulating.

This proved that the Ancient Dragon's scales were not invincible.

In fact, its defense didn't seem to be much higher than the mutated Dragonling from before. Or maybe it just didn't have a way to cope with magic.

'Or is it both?'

Lukas had this thought, and he came to a conclusion as he looked at the damage.

It wouldn't be possible to kill the Ancient Dragon with just this much. At best, it would only make it feel pain akin to being continuously slashed with a knife.

'I'm glad I can use up to 7-star spells.'

Otherwise, it would have taken him much longer to deal with this monster.

Lukas' eyes narrowed slightly as he observed the Ancient Dragon's body.

He hadn't just cast dozens of spells without thinking.

Every living creature had its own unique trait.

This was especially true for beings that had lived for a long time.

Living for a long time meant that it had polished the talents, traits, and characteristics gained at birth over time. For non-human beings, these traits tended to have greater influence on their outside rather than their inside.

For the Ancient Dragon, its black scales were one such trait.

Lukas judged that the Ancient Dragon's scales had been 'transformed to have strong physical defense'.

And from what he could tell, its mutated Dragonling baby had inherited this trait.

That was why he had poured spells from multiple different elements onto it.

From the basic elements like water, fire, earth and wind, to lightning, light, and darkness.

In terms of pure power, each spell was about the same, but some only lightly scratched the Ancient Dragon's scales while others successfully sliced through the scales to reach the flesh beneath.

'As expected, it seems that ice magic is the most effective.'

This was something he believed to be highly likely.

After all, it was the ice spell, Frost Scream, that had killed its young.

By the time Lukas finished his analysis, the Ancient Dragon spread its wings once again.

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[Rooaar!]

Chht-

The fierce roar of an apex predator caused the muscles of every creature that heard it to tense up in fear, their legs unable to move because of how intensely they were shaking. This was true even for Bargan and Ashstar, who heard the Ancient Dragon's roar despite being several kilometers away.

Lukas, on the other hand, was only a few hundred meters away from the Ancient Dragon. This meant that the effects of the roar should have been multiplied several times.

However, the stimulating effects only worked for those whose mental power was weaker than the Ancient Dragon.

It was no exaggeration to say that Lukas was immune to such mental attacks.

[...]

And the Ancient Dragon also noticed this fact.

This bug in front of it was different from the other bugs. It used tricks that it had never seen before, and it wasn't intimidated by its immense power.

It had never experienced such a situation in the entirety of its long life.

It wasn't afraid, but it felt like this enemy could not be easily defeated.

The Ancient Dragon wasn't sure what to do.

But Lukas was already thinking about how to end their confrontation.

Flap!

When the Ancient Dragon had spread its wings once again, it wasn't to intimidate its opponent with its large size but to prepare for any emergencies.

The forest shook heavily.

This was natural, as an immensely large being was preparing to take off.

But Lukas was already prepared.

No, 'prepared' wasn't really the right word.

Instead, it could be said that Lukas now knew his greatest strength.

Spell casting speed.

He didn't need to use any chants or runes to cast spells.

There were only two things that could indicate what Lukas was doing.

One was gestures. Of course, these gestures were unnoticeable, as they ranged from the shake of a hand to a simple wink.

But the other was even harder to notice.

"Hoo..."

A sigh.

As he built up a huge amount of mana in his body, he had no choice but to relieve some of the pressure, and that was the reason for the sigh.

As he sighed, a puff of white smoke escaped from Lukas' mouth.

There was no way for the Ancient Dragon to notice this.

Of course, even if it had noticed, there was nothing it could have done.

Crackle!

A cold breeze swirled around Lukas before spreading in every direction. Like a raging wildfire, this breeze swept through the forest, freezing everything it touched. And as if it had a will of its own, the cold breeze surrounded the Ancient Dragon.

The Ancient Dragon roared and struggled, but the ice had already begun to spread. Like a predator hunting prey, the cold breeze rushed into the Ancient Dragon's body.

It only took a few seconds before this majestic creature became nothing more than a giant ice sculpture.

Blizzard.

Among all 7-star spells, this was the only one with enough range and lethality to freeze the giant body of the Ancient Dragon, who was the hegemon of the Samis Great Forest.

Lukas looked at the ice statue for a moment before casting another spell.

This time, he pointed his finger to the sky before making a forward slashing motion with his hand.

Boom!

A huge bolt of lightning shot down from the sky.

Giga Lightning.

It was a 7-star spell like Blizzarrd, but its single target destructive power was on par with Lava Blast. Naturally, this meant that it had the power to destroy the ice statue.

Krrr...

The Ancient Dragon's enormous body fell to the forest floor in dozens of large ice chunks. Its body had been split into dozens of pieces, and there was no longer any chance of it surviving.

He'd won.

In all honesty, he'd won much easier than he expected.

In the end, the Ancient Dragon couldn't even be considered a formidable foe for Lukas.

At best, it was like fighting any other monster.

Even if it had gained intelligence comparable to humans, the Ancient Dragon prioritised its emotions over logic. In fact, in terms of cunning, the mutated Dragonling that had hunted Bargan and Ashstar was much more superior.

Lukas couldn't help but wonder why the great 'Ancient Dragons' were overestimated to such an extent, but it didn't take him very long to find the reason.

For Dragonmen, an Ancient Dragon was certainly invincible.

This was natural.

After all, Dragonmen were a race who preferred bladed weapons and close combat.

The Ancient Dragon's scales might have appeared weak under Lukas' elemental bombardment, but it boasted an almost impregnable defense against swords and spears.

And even if they did manage to break through its scales, for a being of its size, such injuries would be similar to being pricked by a needle. In addition, all of these arguments were only based on the assumption that they were fighting on the ground. Ancient Dragons usually had the ability to fly.

A being able to soar in the sky and release incredibly powerful breath attacks was nothing short of a disaster for the Dragonmen.

On the other hand, Wizards had the means to offset these advantages of the Ancient Dragons.

Even if they had scales that couldn't be penetrated by blades.

Even if they flew into the sky out of reach.

Even if they were to spew their breath from the air.

Even if their roar would stimulate the primal fear of every creature who heard it.

None of that could hinder Lukas.

No one in this world could understand.

What Wizards were, what powers they wielded, and what they were capable of.

‘Wizards.’

Compared to humans, they shined even more when dealing with monsters.

It might be a bit hasty, but Lukas had a thought at that moment.

In the Heavenly Realm, when it came to ‘Ancient Dragon hunting’, he might be a specialist.

[You have successfully defeated the ruler of the Samis Great Forest, ‘Bultasie’.]

[Great Achievement!]

[You have earned the title 'Legendary Dragon Hunter'.]

[The prestige of 'Dragon Hunter Lukas' spreads throughout Combat Island.]

'Prestige spreads'.

So it seemed that this was a way to spread his name in addition to winning the Championship.

With that thought in mind, Lukas turned around.

Most of the giant trees in the area had been uprooted. Thanks to this, it was easy for him to spot the survivors of the Dragonmen subjugation team that were looking at him from a distance.

Bargan and Ashstar were also with them. It seemed that they'd been able to find Igaru without any problems.

Bargan was the first one he noticed. He was currently staring at Lukas as if he was a mythical hero.

[Due to your amazing achievement, the loyalty of the wandering Dragonman Fight, 'Bargan', has increased.]

Lukas nodded inwardly.

This was a by-product he expected.

It would probably allow him to learn even more about the situation in Lirua.

He wasn't sure exactly how strong the individuals in a major city would be. But he wasn't afraid. In all honesty, the reason he felt discomfort was because he had been suppressed to 7-stars.

In his current state, even a single Swordmaster would be more of a threat to him than the Ancient Dragon who once ruled over the Samis Great Forest.

Just as he had this thought.

[The loyalty of subjugation squad leader, 'Ashstar', has increased significantly.]

"..."

This was unexpected, so he was a bit speechless.

However, it seemed that the voice had only just begun.

[The loyalty of subjugation squad leader, 'Igaru', has increased significantly.]

[The loyalty of subjugation squad member, 'Kori', has increased significantly.]

[The loyalty of subjugation squad member, 'Numaha', has increased significantly.]

[...]

[...]

The continuous ringing of the voice in his ear was deafening.

Lukas' attention was then drawn to the Dragonmen behind Bargan.

That was why he realised that the gazes of these dozen or so Dragonmen were similar to Bargan's.

...No.

Their gazes might have been even more intense.

Season 2 Chapter 167

Lukas recalled the passage he'd read in the book.

[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.]

[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...]

Then he looked at the corpse of the Ancient Dragon that was currently before him.

Bones, teeth, claws, scales.

It was a huge mountain of treasure that blacksmiths would sell their souls to get even a single portion of.

However, in all honesty, Lukas didn't feel like this Ancient Dragon's corpse was a treasure trove.

After all, the Ancient Dragon's body had been broken into pieces. This was natural because it had been turned into a giant ice statue before being shattered with lightning. Not to mention the fact that the magical bombardment it suffered had greatly damaged its prized scales.

Animal hide was always worth more the less it was damaged.

That was why it was usually difficult to obtain good quality hide from powerful beasts. It was very difficult to kill a beast that was struggling to survive without doing any damage to its hide.

Therefore, Lukas felt that the value of the corpse of the Ancient Dragon he'd slain would be rather low.

Of course, that didn't matter to him. What he was after was its core, not its shell.

Lukas looked at the Ancient Dragon's heart. It was as black as its scales, and one rubbed it gently with their hand, they would find themselves with a handful of ash.

The heart was also much larger than Lukas. It was about as large as a small cabin.

'I need to control the ice so it doesn't melt.'

Lukas also had fairly deep knowledge about alchemy. He knew that if he were to let the ice around the heart melt, it would gradually begin to lose its vitality, which would, in turn, mean that it would lose value.

'Can I really refine this?'

This thought appeared in his mind for a moment, but he shook his head after thinking about it.

He didn't think he would completely fail the refinement at all, but on the other hand, he wasn't 100 percent confident in his success either.

After all, he knew nothing about the biological structure of Ancient Dragons, nor did he know how their parts should be handled.

Such things were better left to the professionals.

Refiners.

His current priority would be to find someone who could purify and refine the heart of the Ancient Dragon for him.

Of course, if he couldn't find one, then he would have no choice but to research on his own and figure it out himself...

But that was only a last resort.

* * *

“None of it should be thrown away.”

Bargan spoke in his normal cold tone.

But despite his voice, his eyes shined with respect and admiration.

Not really paying attention to it, Lukas said.

“What do you mean?”

“The Ancient Dragon my Lord defeated.”

“...”

“The rights to deal with the Ancient Dragon’s corpse goes to the one who defeated it. I will keep an eye on it so that no Dragonman tries to touch your property.”

After saying that, he turned to stare at the Dragonmen who were wandering around the Ancient Dragon’s corpse. When they felt his gaze, they flinched as though they had been pricked by something.

“Do you not trust Igaru and Ashstar?”

As for the wandering Dragonmen, they were naturally the surviving members of Igaru and Ashstar’s squads.

Bargan shook his head at those words.

“Those two are proud. They will only pay respect to my Lord’s achievement and will never try to take your spoils unjustly.”

“Then...?”

“Don’t you intend to move the parts? As I said before, no part should be thrown away.”

His gaze then turned to the carriages pulled by the flying dragons.

“However, even if we were to remove all the cargo from the carriages and use all the available space, we still wouldn’t be able to load the entire Ancient Dragon.”

That was natural.

The Ancient Dragon was the size of a small mountain.

The carriages they came with were relatively large and the luggage compartments were spacious, but as the name suggested, they were made to store luggage. As Bargan said, even if they used up all the available space, they wouldn’t be able to fit even a single one of the Ancient Dragon’s arms.

“Both squad leaders have called for reinforcements from their respective cities.”

“Ah.”

Lukas finally understood.

Flying a carriage in the middle of the night wasn't particularly dangerous, but the chance of encountering a wild flying dragon was definitely higher than during the day.

Nevertheless, the squad leaders could not wait for daytime.

"They might have just called for backup and to report the situation, but there will definitely be vehicles capable of transporting the Ancient Dragon's corpse in the group. It's even possible that the respective City Lords will also make an appearance. And they will definitely fight to decide whose city the Ancient Dragon's corpse is moved to."

"Is moving a corpse that important?"

"It's very important."

Bargan nodded several times before he explained.

"After moving the corpse to the city, won't you try to sell the parts? After all, you can't keep such a huge corpse by yourself."

"That's true."

"A black dragon the size of the one you slew is enough to equip hundreds of Fighters."

"I see."

It was that he understood what Bargan was trying to say.

“Would that increase the average level of the Fighters in the city?”

“It wouldn’t just increase, it would increase explosively.”

Lukas knew a bit about the subtle relationships between the cities on Combat Island. While they weren’t exactly hostile towards each other, there was still a certain level of competition between them.

‘The level of the Fighters in the city represents the strength of the city.’

This relationship would be even more strained than usual since the ‘Championship’, a competition that would determine the strongest in the realm, was soon approaching.

“My Lord, in this kind of situation, you slew an Ancient Dragon. I’m not too sure about the details, but I can guess that the value of this black dragon will be beyond imagination.”

“I’m not sure if I agree. It’s quite damaged.”

Lukas looked back at the corpse as he said this, but Bargan’s expression became a bit strange.

“Is it even possible to kill an Ancient Dragon without damaging its hide? In addition, the damage to its body is limited to its scales at best. The claws are still intact, and the bones are still in good condition except for the cute ones. I think this can be considered a top-quality material.”

Bargain knew.

Just how much manpower, effort, patience, and luck were required to defeat an Ancient Dragon.

The subjugation rate of Ancient Dragons was generally considered to be less than 10 percent, and even if they succeeded, the Ancient Dragon’s corpse was usually no better than a damaged wet rag. Nevertheless, such corpses were still viewed as incredible treasures, not to mention the one Lukas had killed, which suffered practically no damage except for its scales.

Lukas nodded slightly.

The dozens of spells he casted had thoroughly damaged the Ancient Dragon’s scales, but most of them had failed to penetrate its flesh and cut its bones. And naturally, its claws were fine because it hadn’t even gotten a chance to use them in the fight.

“And above all, the skull... I heard that the skull of an Ancient Dragon was comparable in strength to that of mythical metals. And that part has been perfectly preserved. The value of that alone would be enough to make anyone cry out.”

Bargain’s voice was filled with confidence as he spoke.

Even so, Lukas simply listened at the side without much change in his expression.

He naturally did have a need for a certain amount of money, but on the other hand, if he received an exceedingly large amount, then he wouldn't have anywhere to spend it.

Of course, there was a saying that as far as money went, the more you had the better, but that was just one of the tricks spread by those obsessed with coins.

'I don't know if I'll even require such a large amount of money.'

Lukas looked up at the sky as he had this thought.

A dim orange glow was beginning to spread from the horizon.

The long night had finally come to an end, and dawn had come.

To be honest, at that moment, Lukas was still underestimating the achievement of slaying an Ancient Dragon.

He didn't expect that it would create a storm that would affect the cities near where he had single-handedly defeated an Ancient Dragon, no that would affect the entirety of Combat Island.

Season 2 Chapter 168

Even in the cities of Dragonmen, City Lords existed.

However, it was a bit incorrect to view them as absolute or supreme powers. This was because the meaning of the position was stronger than the City Lord's authority.

Of course, this didn't mean that it was just a nominal position or that they didn't have any real power.

It was simply the fact that it was not easy to get the position in the first place.

In order to become a City Lord on Combat Island, there was a condition that first had to be satisfied.

'Maintain the position of Champion for at least one year in five different cities.'

It was a condition so difficult that most would just give up upon learning it.

Becoming the Champion of a city was, in itself, a difficult task, but it was even harder to maintain that position for a year.

And yet, one would only be eligible for the City Lord position after repeating this process five times.

It was for this reason that all City Lord were relatively well-known, including the City Lord of 'Hirup', Sshiris.

However, Sshiris was different from other City Lords.

Even after taking the seat as City Lord, most Champions do not neglect their training, but it had been more than 10 years since he last held a weapon.

His pretentious appearance, which was completely unlike any other Fighter, proved that fact.

The reason for this was simple. Sshiris had become infatuated with the charm of wealth. Something extremely rare for Dragonmen, and even rarer for those living on Combat Island.

This was the reason why he didn't easily believe the report he received just after dawn.

"...what did you just say?"

He stared at the Dragonman in front of him in disbelief.

He was certain that this was a member of the 'Ashstar Squad'. He just couldn't remember his name.

At first glance, this Dragonman appeared nervous, but he was even more excited than that.

"An Ancient Dragon appeared in the Samis, Great Forest...!! A, a huge one! And a Sorcerer named Lukas managed to slay it on his own! S-, Squad Leader Ashstar said that we should quickly go retrieve the body before other cities have the chance to intervene...!"

"..."

Sshiris frowned slightly.

For someone like him, who was picky 24 hours a day, he usually wouldn't tolerate this kind of rude gibberish.

More importantly, the squad member's report was filled with unbelievable nonsense.

The fact that an Ancient Dragon had appeared in the Samis Great Forest. The fact that the monster was huge enough to be described as a small mountain.

And above all, the fact that the monster had been slain not by a group of well-known heroes or great Champions, but by a single Sorcerer.

Just as he was wondering just how to deal with this foolish squad member who had come to tell him such nonsense first thing in the morning, the squad member hurriedly pulled something from his pocket.

Perhaps he had sensed his bad intentions.

"T-, this is Squad Leader Ashstar's letter."

"Give it here."

Sshiris quickly looked over the piece of paper with the letter.

“...”

It didn't take long for his eyes, which had been a bit dull and blank to become sharp. This sharpness gradually became surprised, and the surprise soon morphed into shock.

Tang!

Sshiris roughly smacked the letter onto his desk. His beard trembled.

This was a rare(?) sight that could only be seen when he was extremely excited.

“How many Sky Carriages are available right now?”

The attendant at his side quickly answered.

“17, sir.”

“Not enough.”

That wasn't enough.

Sshiris stroked his chin for a moment before saying.

“Contact every carriage that is out on missions of lesser importance and tell them to return immediately.”

The attendant made an expression of surprise.

“That means not only those on subjugation missions but also those transporting passengers... There will definitely be some backlash.”

“Tell them that we will refund them double the fee and they will be able to use a direct carriage after the city has completed its task.”

“Understood. What do you intend to do, my Lord?”

“Head to the Samis Great Forest with the least amount of people necessary.”

Intense greed flashed in Sshiris' eyes.

An opportunity of a lifetime had appeared before him.

Fortunately, he'd received the news before anyone else and would be able to move one step ahead of the other City Lords.

'Dragon Hunter Lukas.'

It was said that he was an outsider, so it was highly likely that he was ignorant of the true value of the Ancient Dragon's corpse. In other words, if he played his cards right, he could get his hands on a mountain of treasure for practically nothing in return.

As he had this thought, sweat began to appear on his palms and his heart raced.

'Is this finally my chance to get out of this god-forsaken city?'

Sshiris' heart pounded heavily in his chest.

He had great ambitions, and in order to realise them, he needed to get out of this small, cramped city as quickly as possible.

It was possible that this opportunity would become the great cornerstone to him achieving his ambition.

Sshiris left his seat and practically floated out of his office.

At that time, his excessive excitement caused him to overlook a certain fact.

The more one tried to hide something, the faster it would spread.

* * *

Igaru was a squad leader from the city of 'Herui'. So naturally, the news of what Lukas had done reached the City Lord there.

And once the news reached the City Lord, it wasn't hard for it to spread to the ears of the City's Champion.

In other words, Min Ha-rin.

"Ahahaha! Ahahaha...!"

Upon hearing the news, she burst into laughter like a little girl. In fact, if she could, she would have even wanted to roll around on the ground.

That was how happy she was.

She felt much more refreshed than if she was standing on a coast, being hit by the ocean breeze.

As expected, he was on a completely different level.

In less than a month, Lukas had easily overtaken even her greatest achievements.

Nevertheless, she didn't feel jealous or inferior.

She felt proud.

She remembered when she'd first entered the Heavenly Realm.

For Min Ha-rin, it was a world that was big, scary, and altogether unfamiliar.

Wild Dragonlings threatened her life daily, and extremely strong beings constantly stimulated her inferiority complex.

And yet, in this place infested by monsters, her Master stood tall, as usual.

Right.

In her eyes, even this huge world wasn't enough to be much of a problem for Lukas.

To put it bluntly, what she was feeling was, in essence, surrogate satisfaction, but Min Ha-rin almost felt like saying, 'What's wrong with that?'

After all, she was that person's disciple.

“I’m not really surprised.”

...Dragon Hunter Lukas.

It wasn’t quite as nice sounding as Great Teacher or Great Mage, but she thought the name suited him quite well.

“I have to work hard too.”

This wasn’t really the time to feel admiration.

She was the Great Mage’s first disciple.

Lukas was preparing to run. This was simply the first step. And yet, it had already created such a stir.

Min Ha-rin couldn’t help but wonder just how powerful the storm would be when he finally began sprinting.

Gripping her sword tightly, she muttered.

“As expected of the Great Mage Class.”

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They were told that it would take around three to four days for reinforcements to arrive at the Great Forest. This meant that he would be delayed much longer than expected.

In truth, Lukas wanted to stop worrying about the Great Dragon's corpse and go to the major city, 'Lirua', as soon as possible.

Since it was a major city, there was a very high chance that it would have expert refiners, and he also wanted to analyse the Fighters there.

Bargan was incredibly shocked when Lukas expressed this to him.

"You don't really intend to abandon the Ancient Dragon's Corpse, do you, my Lord?"

"...would you like to have it? I really don't care as long as I get a bit of the money and the heart."

"Haha. That's a cruel joke."

Bargan shook his head at Lukas and let out a laugh. This showed just how absurd Lukas' words were, as it was his first time seeing Bargan laugh.

Reluctantly, Lukas decided to stay in the forest until the Ancient Dragon's corpse was properly taken care of.

The question that remained was how to efficiently make use of the time he now had on his hands, but luckily, Lukas found something he wanted to try.

He looked down at the Dragonling's corpse.

It was the one who had killed dozens of Dragonmen with its extremely long prehensile tail.

This guy's scales and tail were high-quality materials, but what Lukas paid the most attention to was its core.

[Heart of the Mutated Dragonling]

[The heart of a mutated Dragonling. Although it was only a young Dragonling, it had a huge amount of vitality inherited from its parents. If processed with a special refining method, there may be many uses for it.]

[✕Because it was left unattended for a long time, most of the inherent vitality has dissipated.]

Visualised information.

It was the thing that Min Ha-rin called 'Information Window'.

Lukas decided to call it that as well. He liked the name because it was simple and intuitive.

'As expected, it lost its vitality because it wasn't preserved properly.'

This was natural since it was left unattended for a long time after it died.

Though it was only a day or two, the heart was the organ that could be described as the 'source of life', so it wasn't strange that its vitality would dissipate if it had nowhere to pump it to.

If it wasn't for the fact that Blizzard reduced the temperature of the surroundings, it would have lost all of its vitality by now, and the Dragonling's body would have begun to decompose.

Lukas decided to refine the heart of the mutated Dragonling with the knowledge he had. This was because he thought it was fine to experiment with it since its value was significantly less than the Ancient Dragon's.

But in order to do that, he would need other materials as well.

Luckily, the place they were in could be called one of nature's treasure troves. Thanks to this, he would be able to obtain the items he was looking for just by walking through the forest.

"We will help you."

"Do you know anything about herbs?"

“...no.”

“Then it’s fine.”

Bargan’s expression at that moment was priceless.

Although it could be said that Lukas was just as ignorant when it came to the herbs in this world, he had the information window.

Thanks to that, he could easily distinguish different medicinal and poisonous herbs, and he was also able to learn their uses.

He didn’t have a mortar and pestle to crush the herbs, or test tubes and beakers in order to separate and combine them into different ratios. Moreover, he didn’t have any equipment with which to have accurate measurements.

But that didn’t matter.

Because Lukas’ collection of herbs could only be described as ‘researching to pass the time’.

—And so time passed.

Four days later, someone looked on intently as Lukas gathered dozens of medicinal and poisonous herbs that had many useful effects depending on how they were used.

“...”

The person half hid behind a tree, staring at his back.

It was Ashstar.

In fact, this wasn't that surprising.

It had already been a few days since she'd begun staring timidly at him from a distance. It seemed that she wanted to tell him something, but she simply couldn't muster up the courage to do so.

Nevertheless, Lukas didn't approach her first and simply allowed her to continue looking at him.

But it seemed that today was bound to be a bit different from usual.

Ashstar clenched her fists at her sides and was walking up to him with a determined expression on her face.

Then, she opened her mouth and spoke in a cautious voice.

“Are you from Dragon God Island, Mr. Lukas?”

She was the first Dragonman, other than Bargan, who had gathered the courage to speak to him after he slew the Ancient Dragon.

Not to mention Igaru, who was a squad leader, even Guaba, who he'd thought had a relatively good relationship with him, was hesitant to approach him.

It wasn't that they disliked him or anything like that. The voice had already proven that wasn't the case.

Nevertheless, the problem was simple.

[Hirup Subjugation Team Squad Leader Ashstar]

[Level: 58]

[Occupation: Fighter]

[Race: Dragonman]

[Skills: Swordsmanship(Lv.7), Brawling(Lv.8), Charisma(Lv.4), Bloodthirst(Lv.4)...]

[Loyalty: 76]

[Difficulty: E]

They had an absurdly high amount of loyalty.

Ashstar was staring at Lukas with a gaze similar to the way one would look at a legendary hero or historical figure.

That was also the reason why Lukas was able to see so much of Ashstar's information compared to when they first met.

'More information is revealed as loyalty increases.'

For example, with Bargan, only his name, loyalty, and so on were visible at first, but as his loyalty increased, details such as his level, titles, occupation, race, and even his skills, were visible.

The same was true for Ashstar.

Her loyalty was 76, which was even higher than Bargan, who was Lukas' actual subordinate.

Judging from Bargan's attitude, it wouldn't be hard for him to make her come under him with only a few words.

However, Lukas had no intentions of increasing his follower count at that moment. Bargan alone was more than enough.

'...in any case.'

When he thought about Ashstar's attitude when they first met, he couldn't help but feel like she was an entirely different person.

Standing up, Lukas turned to look at her.

"Why do you say that?"

"I've heard that the Black Sorcerer and White Sorcerer who protect the Goddess can create mountains and cut the sky in two."

"..."

Create mountains and cut the sky in two.

In other words, they were so powerful that they could affect nature, something only 8-star Wizards were capable of doing.

Suddenly, Guaba's words rang out in his head once more.

The Goddess from Dragon God Island made it rain for decades, even to submerge an entire island.

'To make it rain for such a long time over such a vast region...'

It was very strange. Who or what exactly was this 'Goddess'?

Lukas shook his head, deciding to put aside his doubts about Dragon God Island for now.

"I'm not."

"I see."

He decided to shut that thought down before any unnecessary misunderstandings arose.

Luckily, Ashstar didn't seem to have any strange thoughts. He thought he would be suspected because he was an outsider, but that didn't seem to be the case.

Lukas once again looked at Ashstar, or to be more precise, he looked at her status window.

[Difficulty: E]

This was the part that he was the most curious about.

What exactly did the difficulty mean?

In the case of Bargan, his difficulty was C, but the difference between him and Ashstar was not that big.

In fact, if the two of them were to fight, the odds of winning and losing would be almost even to the extent that a single paper-thin factor could influence the outcome.

This meant that the fact that one was C and the other was E didn't necessarily have to do with their combat power.

He'd looked at others as well, but he had yet to find someone higher than Bargan. This was because the others tended to be F or E, like Ashstar.

"Squad Leader!"

It was at that moment that someone called out to Ashstar.

Ashstar, who was about to begin what she believed was a pleasant conversation with the hero she admired the most, immediately turned to face her squad member. Her expression at that moment would freeze the heart of even the bravest Dragonman.

Nevertheless, she had no choice but to quell her anger when she heard her squad member's following words.

“Reinforcements from Hirup have arrived!”

When he heard that, Lukas looked up at the sky.

There, he saw a large squadron of sky carriages flying towards them with the sun at their backs.

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“Nice to meet you, Hero.”

Sshiris, Lord of Hirup City, was the first Dragonman of his kind that Lukas had encountered.

Most of the Dragonmen that Lukas saw were Fighters, those who didn't neglect their self training and care. Such single-minded people usually had similar expressions, gestures and vocal tones.

Sshiris, on the other hand, had a face that was almost hidden behind plump flesh. It was as though his features had been submerged beneath waves of skin and fat.

And yet, the smile on his face as he came to greet Lukas was filled with such confidence that it was almost amusing.

‘Are all City Lord's like this?’

Nevertheless, Lukas bowed his head slightly to the man in front of him.

Since the other side had been polite first, it was only right for him to return the favor.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Lukas.”

Of course, there was no need to be more polite than that.

In Dragonman society, apart from the Goddess, there wasn’t much of a difference of status.

Sshiris didn’t show any signs of displeasure.

In fact, from the start, his gaze hadn’t been focused on Lukas, but on the corpse of the Ancient Dragon beside him.

‘Indeed.’

He had to force himself to hide his smirk.

The report wasn’t wrong. In fact, it might have even been an underestimation. This Ancient Dragon corpse was the size of a mountain. It was more than enough to equip all of the Fighters in Hirup.

In addition, since it was frozen with sorcery, the degree of preservation could only be described as top-notch.

“I’ve heard all about you... great achievements from Squad Leader Ashstar. In fact, I’m sure that the entirety of Combat Island will soon learn the name of the great ‘Dragon Hunter Lukas’.”

“You praise me too much, City Lord.”

“Haha. It’s not too much praise. Instead, it could even be considered a bit inadequate.”

He continued his unnecessary flattery.

This was the type of conversation that Lukas disliked the most. Therefore, before Sshiris could open his mouth again, Lukas spoke up.

“So what exactly brought Lord Sshiris of Hirup City all the way here?”

“Naturally, I’m here to pay homage to the mythical achievement of a great hero, and to help you.”

“By helping me...”

“I mean help you move the black dragon’s corpse.”

“ ... ”

Lukas turned to the carriages behind him.

Just from a glance, he could determine that thirty or more carriages were waiting there. Most of them were even larger than the one he'd arrived in. With this much, it would probably be possible to move the entire corpse of the Ancient Dragon in one go.

However, the expression of Igaru, who was standing beside him, looked at Sshiris and the carriages behind him with a trace of suspicion.

Come here to help him? He must have worded it intentionally in order to take advantage of Lukas. Nevertheless, Igaru never thought that he would do it so confidently and openly. Was it possible for even a scumbag like this to become a City Lord?

But Lukas nodded cooperatively at Sshiris' words.

“Thank you for the help.”

Igaru's expression at that moment was priceless. Was Lukas really going to fall for such a simple trick? That couldn't be possible.

Igaru looked up at the sky with anxiety clear on his face.

When would the reinforcements from 'Herui' arrive?

If this continued like this, he would only be able to stare as the entire Ancient Dragon's corpse was taken away in one go.

"But it's a bit too much."

At those words, Sshiris' eyes widened slightly.

"...it's too much? What do you mean?"

"Squad Leader Ashstar only asked for reinforcements and aid, didn't she? But City Lord brought an entire squadron. It seems that the injured will each be able to sit on a carriage."

"..."

In just a few words, the dozens of carriages at the back, which had come to carry away the corpse of the black dragon, had become reinforcements and aid.

* * *

Sshiris was silent for a moment before finally bursting into laughter.

"Since I was a child, I always heard that I did things excessively. Nevertheless, don't you think you are lucky in this case? I came just in time to help you carry the large amount of cargo you obtained."

“...”

“I’ll help. Originally, it would have cost a lot of money to move so much cargo, but since I’m already here, I won’t charge you a single...”

“This is all my Lord’s property, City Lord Sshiris. Thank you for the favor, but there is no need to force yourself.”

It was Bargan who cut him off with a sharp voice.

Sshiris’ expression became a bit unpleasant. While it was true that Bargan was a well-known Fighter with a good reputation, Sshiris was a City Lord. Whether he was well-known or not, there was no reason for him to care about a single wandering Dragonman.

From his perspective, it was as though someone, who was nothing more than an attendant, had interrupted him.

However, the displeased expression disappeared even faster than it appeared.

Sshiris was a man who was very good at hiding his true feelings.

“Did it seem like I was pressuring you? I beg your pardon. However, think of my words as advice. After all, it’s just a matter of time.”

“A matter of time?”

“I mean the ice. It looks like it will soon begin to melt. If the Ancient Dragon’s corpse starts to decompose, don’t you think its value will decrease significantly?”

“...”

Those words were true, so Bargan had no choice but to close his mouth.

Sshiris was gradually gaining the initiative.

This couldn’t go on. After having this urgent thought, Igaru decided to step in.

“Excuse me, may I say something?”

“You are?”

“I am Igaru, a Squad Leader from the Herui Branch.”

“Hmm. Herui Branch...”

Sshiris lowered his head slightly as he muttered.

His narrowed eyes swept across Igaru's entire body like a snake looking at its prey.

Then, he smiled and spoke.

"Say it."

"I have also sent a report and request for reinforcements to Herui. Hirup is one of the cities closest to the Samis Great Forest, but Herui is the same."

"So?"

Igaru gulped slightly before continuing.

"...so I think Herui can also help Mr. Lukas with his cargo."

Although the other was a City Lord, Igaru didn't back down. Instead, he stared at Sshiris with blazing eyes.

The value of an Ancient Dragon's corpse was much too high for him to be frightened or intimidated by the other's status. Even if he was overwhelmed by Sshiris' power and authority, he could not miss out on such a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Suddenly, Sshiris let out a laugh.

“So that’s what it was. Herui is definitely not far from here. In fact, the distance between our two cities is fairly even, but... I wonder why they’re not here yet.”

“Huh?”

“Strictly speaking, the Samis Great Forest can be considered the midpoint between Hirup and Herui. That’s why we perform joint missions here from time to time. But that brings to question, why haven’t the reinforcements from Herui arrived if we are already here?”

“Th-, that...”

Igaru stuttered with a slightly anxious expression.

Sshiris’ words had accurately pinpointed the problem that had been making him nervous this entire time.

It was at that moment that the corners of Sshiris’ lips curled up slightly.

“They must have encountered some kind of unforeseen circumstances.”

“Unforeseen circumstances...?”

“It’s rather common, isn’t it? They could encounter a swarm of flying dragons, or get into conflict with another group, or any kind of unforeseen situation like that... And I suppose they would have no choice but to slow down or stop.”

It would be rather unfortunate.

The moment Sshiris added those words quietly, Igaru’s eyes went wide.

“C-, City Lord Sshiris...! You... No way...!”

“Watch yourself.”

Sshiris’ narrowed eyes became cold. There was also a chill in his low voice.

Igaru flinched at the sudden attitude change.

Even if he had become weaker due to his lack of training, Sshiris had once been a true Champion. Even if fat grew on his body and his mind dulled, the achievements and memories of the past would never disappear.

“If you try to insult me with that kind of uncertain guess, I’m not sure my men will be able to endure it.”

Shling-

At those words, the Dragonment that Sshiris had brought with him, who had been silently watching on from the back, all drew their weapons.

Igaru couldn't help but take a few steps back, his complexion pale.

There were at least a few dozen Fighters standing behind him.

'Lord Sshiris of Hirup City.'

He had heard many rumors about his vulgar personality, but he never thought that he would be such a scumbag.

Igaru cursed inwardly.

'Shit.'