

Great Mage 591

Volume 2 - Chapter 291

Lukas remained silent for a while. He needed time to organise his thoughts.

But Rina didn't wait for him and instead began asking him questions right away.

"Does anything come to mind?"

It seemed she had noticed something from his expression.

This woman seemed to be very quick witted, so it would be difficult to just gloss over the reaction he just had.

"...it feels like I've heard that name before. But I'm not sure."

"I see."

Rina nodded.

"Do you remember anything about the 'Day of the Apocalypse'?"

"Day of the Apocalypse...?"

“It seems you don’t know. So I’ll just explain it briefly.”

After organising her thoughts for a moment, Rina opened her mouth.

“10 years ago, several countries and major cities all disappeared at the same time on what we call ‘The Day of the Apocalypse’. It was by the transcendent beings, the Demigods... It was said that they were terrifying beings. Their numbers were rumored to be no more than a hundred at most, but each one of them was powerful enough to rival a country.”

“...”

Lukas’ expression changed slightly at those words.

As if she misunderstood his expression to mean something else, Rina gave him a plain smile.

“I know it might be hard to believe. But I’m not lying. Beings like that really existed only 10 years ago.”

Well, most people, including herself, had never actually seen them in person.

Rina added that bit in her head before continuing.

“It would have been nice if beings with that much power were kind and just, but unfortunately, they weren’t. They treated every being that wasn’t their kind as insects.”

“ ... ”

“And it was the organisation called the Circle that kept them in check.”

“...then isn't the Circle the good guys?”

That was the question Lukas had wanted to ask the most. Thanks to Rina's meticulous explanation, he was able to ask it without it being strange.

“That was the case at that time. In fact, the Circle were also the ones who finally drove the Demigods away. But they've changed now. Their behaviour has become... coercive and self righteous.”

Lukas was silent for a while because he truly didn't know what to say. His gaze slowly drifted to the carriages filled with weapons.

“...then what about those items you're transporting.”

“Those are equipment to support the Anti Circle Alliance. I'm only telling you this because you're already deeply embroiled in this.”

She was telling him that this information should not be spread.

Lukas was in a daze.

This situation was one that he couldn't easily understand.

...In other words.

Was she supporting a rebel force that was fighting against Lukas' companions?

'Peran too?'

Why? What was the reason? Didn't he always want to join the Circle?

He felt dizzy.

Of course, in the past, when Lukas was Frey, the Circle could not be called a good organisation.

They were controlled by and filled with people who had crooked beliefs, like Rezil Wilsemann. They refused to fight the Demigods and hoped to survive by submitting to them.

—The day of the purge.

Most of those people had been killed.

Right. That was the most decisive reason for his confusion.

At that time, most if not all of the rotten parts had been cut off. The people leading the Circle now were those that Lukas trusted greatly.

Ivan, Iris, Snow, and the others should be leading the Circle now.

“...these items, did Peran order them?”

He thought that he'd heard something like that when Rina and Budilem were talking.

“Yes. That's right.”

“...”

Peran Jun.

This meant that those Lukas trusted the most, those he had entrusted this universe to, considered Peran as an 'enemy'.

If that was the case, then was Peran the bad guy?

Had he chosen to help the wrong side?

In fact, would it have been better to help Budilem slaughter all of them instead?

'No.'

He couldn't even bring himself to agree to something like that.

His ability to grasp the nature of a person was unparalleled.

Peran was a truly kindhearted person who was willing to save and take care of a suspicious and mysterious stranger who claimed to have lost their memories.

Of course, there had been a hint of doubt in his kindness, but it still couldn't be denied that he was a good person.

Budilem, on the other hand, was a piece of trash that had great power but liked playing with the lives of others.

"Are you okay?"

Rina was looking at him with a worried expression on her face. His face had become much paler than before.

"Yes... just, my head is hurting a bit."

“That might be a sign that your memories are returning. I think your past might have something to do with the Circle.” (TL: If only she knew.)

“...”

“In any case, I’m really glad we’re headed to the Kastkau Empire.”

“What do you mean?”

“The empire is one of the few places on the continent where the Circle’s influence is weak. It used to be one of their main strongholds, but they were declared heretics by the Emperor and forced out.”

That was an event that Lukas knew about.

Lord had threatened the Emperor and forced him to declare the Circle as rebels and treat them as such. As a result, most of the Circle’s bases hidden throughout the Kastkau Empire had disappeared.

“Those who managed to escape should have kept your appearance in mind. Maybe next time, they’ll send a stronger person after you.”

“Do you really think they’d go that far?”

“As far as I know. That’s the kind of group the Circle is.”

Rina spoke in a calm voice, as though everything she was saying was only natural. Lukas, on the other hand, shook every time he heard what she said.

He sighed and decided to guide the flow of their conversation a bit.

“I guess the leader of the Circle must be a really vicious person.”

“Well. I’m not too sure about that. The leader of the Circle is an unsolved mystery.”

“...”

“Lord Peran would know more about it than I do.”

In the end, Rina only knew so much.

Lukas once again came to a realisation.

Peran was the key to answering several of his questions.

‘...Ivan.’

What the hell was he doing with the Circle right now?

* * *

“Sir Lukas, it’s time to eat.”

A gentle voice called out to him.

Lukas slowly opened one eye to observe the man that had come to him.

Garp.

The man who had taken over the leadership of the mercenaries from Idail, who died.

Lukas wasn’t sure what type of man Idail was since they never got the chance to talk. But he judged that the charisma and leadership skills displayed by Garp were sufficient to lead this group.

Was this the reason he’d been able to become a vice leader despite his age? After all, he was a bit old compared to other mercenaries.

Placing his sword down, he got up from his seat and followed the man out. As soon as he stepped outside, an enticing aroma stirred his appetite.

He saw the mercenaries beneath the setting sun, preparing to receive their meals. When they saw him, a few mercenaries were immediately intimidated by Lukas.

In the past, Lukas always gained the attention of the others when they were gathered together in such a large group, though this was usually at mealtimes.

Nevertheless, the atmosphere now was completely different from the atmosphere at that time.

“You can sit here.”

“Is your body feeling okay?”

Their voices and attitudes were very polite.

Whenever Lukas passed, the mercenaries gave way or bowed their heads to him in respect. Some of them even looked at him with sparkling eyes that seemed like they might pierce through his face.

Lukas was a bit shocked by the sudden change of attitude, but he soon came to learn that it was just the way mercenaries behaved.

Their lifestyles were basically a meritocracy. The respect given to the strong was not as simple as one would first expect. Among mercenaries, the prestige of the strong was greater than in a pack of wild animals. In a sense, it was extremely pure.

For them, Lukas had now transformed from a lucky cripple bastard who met a good supporter and was being treated well for no reason, to a mysterious talented man with unknown circumstances.

Tuff-

Not long after he took his seat, the food was served.

Until now, all he'd been given to eat was hard bread and thick soup, but now, he was given beef jerky and lamb stew. In particular, the beef jerky was deliciously salty because it had been seasoned well and kept in the proper conditions. In fact, he was almost certain that the seasoning used was fairly expensive.

As Lukas picked up his spoon and scooped a mouthful of stew, Garp, who was sitting beside him, also began eating his cornbread.

After a sip of water from his canteen, he wiped his mouth and turned to Lukas.

"Please forgive the disrespect we showed to you in the past."

Volume 2 - Chapter 292

Garp wasn't really the one apologising. In fact, he probably hadn't even known that Lukas was being mistreated.

Nevertheless, as he watched him give a sincere apology without any awkwardness, Lukas couldn't help but wonder if he was a good person, or a wise person.

"It's fine."

It was already in the past and it wasn't that big of a deal in the first place.

In the end, it wasn't hard for Lukas to understand the actions of the mercenaries. It was natural for them to be wary of a mysterious person who was picked up during their journey, and seeing that person receive better treatment than them filled them with displeasure.

Of course, this didn't mean their bullying wasn't underhanded, crude and childish, but it didn't cross Lukas' bottom line.

Garp swept his hand across his chest before continuing.

"I heard that you lost your memories."

"...what of it?"

"So what kind of swordsmanship was Sir Lukas using...?"

Lukas looked at Garp, whose voice faded at the end of his sentence, with a slightly puzzled expression on his face.

The swordsmanship Lukas used in the battle against Budilem was Lucid's Dreadment.

Of course, it was his own interpretation of it due to the condition of his legs, but it was still a clear and organised sword technique.

This was something that Garp, an experienced mercenary, could never miss.

'I don't even remember the swordsmanship I used.'

If he felt suspicious and tried to question him along this line, Lukas didn't really have a good excuse to give.

But Garp's next words took him by surprise.

"...it must have been engraved on your body."

"...huh?"

"Sir Lukas must have been a famed Knight. Maybe your head has forgotten, but your body still remembers. In other words, it's clear that you've reached the conscious body stage, something that all the swordsmen desire.

"..."

Garp's gaze was blazing. Upon closer inspection, it wasn't just him, but also those around who had similar, or even hotter, gazes.

When he saw this, it finally occurred to him that mercenaries were the ones who were most enthusiastic about heroic epics and legends.

'It seems like they are creating their own delusions.'

Lukas felt burdened by their gazes, but he could only give a shaky response because he couldn't think of anything better.

"You're exaggerating."

He wondered if he should correct their delusion.

"It's not an exaggeration!"

"Budilem's tricks are called 'an inescapable death' in the dark!"

"I heard that he once broke free from a deadly ambush, before counter ambushing his attackers and killing all of them! Sir Lukas was probably a great Knight with an incredible background."

The mercenaries around him all shouted in excitement.

At that moment, the atmosphere had become so noisy that Lukas couldn't help but open his mouth again and speak in a low voice.

“Although I have lost my memories, I know myself well. I can feel that I was not such a good person.”

The mercenaries could feel the firmness in his tone. Their loud cries slowly died down, and they played with their food.

The burning atmosphere cooled in an instant.

‘Was that the wrong response?’

He wondered what he should do.

He didn’t know what it felt like to be a noble swordsman or famed knight. Because Lukas had always lived the life of a Wizard.

Without any other option, he naturally thought of the most knight-like person he’d ever known.

Lucid.

However, it would be difficult for him to imitate Lucid when he was at that age. If he were to act and speak in an old fashioned manner despite his young appearance, people would certainly find it strange.

This led Lukas to think of Lucid when he was much younger and more immature.

At that time, Lucid had a sharp personality that made it difficult for others to easily approach him. As they grew older, mentioning the 'Lucid of that time' became a taboo among their party, but...

No one was going to find out about it, so it should be fine.

"...I... am just me."

Lukas held the knife in his hands and smiled as coldly as he could.

"The moment I lifted the sword, my body moved on its own... Even if my memories have disappeared, my 'soul' must have remembered the memories I have with my partner."

"..."

"..."

The mercenaries were silent for a while before the murmurs began rushing in like a wave.

That was probably a bit too much.

Just as Lukas was quickly trying to think of another response...

“S-, Sword God.”

Someone muttered.

“O-, ohhh...!”

“A Sword God has appeared.”

“Amazing! Thrilling!”

The mercenaries began to cheer with excited expressions.

In response to the reaction that far surpassed his expectations, Lukas simply lowered his head and quietly began to eat his stew once again.

...For the time being, it would probably be better to leave their delusions.

(TL: Sword God Lukas.)

* * *

After the meal, Lukas was called. It was Rina.

As he went to the carriage pointed out to him by the mercenaries, he found Rina surrounded by a pile of documents.

“You’re here.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t think the relationship between us is over just yet.”

As she said this, Rina handed a thick pouch to him. With a puzzled expression on his face, Lukas reached out to receive the pouch.

Clink-

It was heavy.

Behind the thick layers of the pouch, he could feel several round objects, presumably made of metal. It wasn’t just a few either, the pouch was filled.

Lukas immediately realised that it was a money pouch.

“This is...?”

“It’s the return for saving me. I would like to once again thank you for saving my life.”

As she bowed her head, her auburn hair flowed down like a veil. And when she lifted it, he could see the sad but relieved expression on her face.

...She really was a merchant through and through.

“It’s a lot cheaper than the cost of my life, but I hope you’ll understand that I didn’t formally hire you, so I can’t afford to give you more than that.”

“How much did you put in here?”

Rina’s eyes widened slightly as she never expected him to directly ask something like that. For the first time since they met, she smiled in a manner befitting her age as she answered.

“50 gold coins.”

“It feels like there are more coins than that...”

“I mixed silver coins in to make it appear bigger.”

“I see, so you made it look fuller on the outside... Oh. Was that rude to say?”

Rina’s face became a bit serious and she furrowed her eyebrows as she explained to him that it was a part of merchants’ proper etiquette

Of course, the reason Lukas had asked wasn’t because he felt bad.

He shook his head and pocketed the pouch.

“I’ll use it well.”

He couldn’t remember exactly how much 50 gold coins were worth. Nevertheless, it was the reward for saving the life of a fairly well known merchant. So it certainly wasn’t an amount that would disappear after only a few days of spending. If he used it sparingly, he could probably live comfortably for a few months.

It was an unexpected harvest.

“Is that all you wanted?”

“No. There’s one other thing.”

Rina cleared her throat a few times before speaking in a clear voice.

“I would like to formally hire Sire Lukas. The period will be until we arrive at Bairak. I can give you 30% as an advance now, and the rest will be paid as soon as we arrive in the city.”

Rina then pulled out another money pouch. It was similar in size to the one he’d received before.

Lukas gave a small smile.

“Does this one also have silver mixed in?”

“Nope.”

Rina smiled brightly.

“This one has a bit more gold.”

Volume 2 - Chapter 293

Rina’s request suggested one possibility.

There might be more attacks like the one they just suffered.

Of course, Lukas had no reason to refuse her request since he had intended to help them if they were attacked anyway.

‘With this, I’ve now secured 150 gold coins.’

For the time being, he wouldn't have to worry about finances. That was the only thought Lukas had towards his gains.

While he knew the power of money, it was only something he had to worry about while remaining in the bounds of human society. Of course, considering the fact that he would have to live within that framework for a while, he couldn't ignore its value.

"We will arrive at the Rulan River Bridge tomorrow."

He heard Garp murmur. The new leader of the mercenary group was pressing his fingers to his eyes, perhaps because he was tired.

The mercenaries around him who heard his voice began to stretch exaggeratedly.

"Ah. Then it won't be much longer till we arrive in Bairak. When we get there, the first thing I'll do is sleep. I think I could probably sleep for 20 hours straight."

"The street food in the Bairak night market is pretty famous. Apparently, they're the best side dishes to eat while drinking... Just thinking about it makes me drool."

"I'll be heading to the dens to make a big fortune. I have a really good feeling this time."

"Bullshit. If you saved the amount of money you wasted gambling, you probably could've opened three stores by now. You bastard."

The mercenaries burst into laughter.

They sat side by side in front of the bonfire and talked happily among themselves.

It was a sight that young people who dreamt of adventure longed to see, but Lukas could tell that the mercenaries weren't as happy as they appeared to be.

'They're forcing themselves to not think about the attack.'

They were intentionally creating a pleasant atmosphere so that the atmosphere wouldn't subconsciously become gloomy.

In a way, it could also be called a rough funeral.

Due to the nature of their jobs as mercenaries, there were memorials and tributes for their comrades who died. Otherwise, the atmosphere of their group would be like a funeral home year round. And there was no way that customers would hire such gloomy mercenaries.

Their dead comrades would probably want them to laugh happily too.

"What about you brother?"

It was the bald mercenary who asked this. For reference, his name was Dumbo. (TL: oof)

He'd been one of the few who bullied Lukas the most, but after he killed Budilem, Dumbo's eyes became as bright as a loyal dog looking at his owner whenever he saw him.

Of course, Dumbo was not as cute as a loyal dog. It was very burdensome when a bald giant, who was at least 2 metres tall, stared at you with bright eyes.

"I'll have to find a job first."

Lukas averted his gaze as he answered. Dumbo spoke to him informally, so Lukas also spoke informally.

"Because I'll need money in order to find my memories."

He'd learned the value of money in this world to an extent.

Currently, Lukas had 80 gold coins in his possession. After completing the request, the total amount would become 150.

This was by no means a small amount. It was enough to allow a commoner to live a comfortable life for a few years. But Lukas didn't intend to settle down in a city and diligently work after finding a job.

He intended to wander the continent instead.

'The price to use a Warp Stone... is probably around 20 gold coins.' (TL: For reference, this was the price 10 years before)

It was incredibly expensive, but the merit of allowing him to save time could not be ignored.

Lukas couldn't use magic at the moment. In other words, the fastest way for him to travel would be to use Warp Stones.

'There's no need to rush, but I also can't waste time unnecessarily.'

At the very least, he couldn't afford to waste time on travel. He would probably need to use Warp Stones frequently. In addition to that, there were also dozens of other things he'd have to spend money on, especially if he were to encounter any unexpected situations.

"Why don't you do more mercenary work similar to what you're doing now?"

"...mercenary work."

Of course, it wasn't that he hadn't thought about this.

It was the easiest way for powerful persons to make money, and there wouldn't be anything to worry about since it only prioritised skill.

But Lukas couldn't help but glance down at his legs.

“I don’t think the mercenary guild would accept me with my legs like this.”

“Ah. Would that still be a problem with your level of skill? Or you could just join our mercenary group.”

“Your mercenary group?”

“Yes... This time, we’ll probably have to replenish our numbers.”

As Dumbo said this he glanced over at Garp, who nodded.

Perhaps the conversation caused them to think about their dead comrades once again as the mood became a bit gloomy.

A young mercenary, who had been looking at Lukas the entire time, abruptly opened his mouth.

“Hey, maybe Sir Lukas is from Luanoble.”

His tone was pretty calm for a mercenary.

“Luanoble? Isn’t that the land of the Knights?”

“What land of the Knights? That place is basically the land of criminals. The cities there are so disgusting.”

“Huh?”

“Read the newspaper sometimes. There they have a slave market that runs on basically a national level and I heard that it even grew in scale a few years.”

This was something that Lukas knew.

He'd visited Luanoble in the past, and at the same time, he'd seen firsthand a slave breeding house run by a certain noble. The Demigod, Riki, had even called Luanoble 'the most corrupt place among the human nations'.

'...10 years ago, they were able to keep that fact well hidden.'

Now, it was something that could even become the conversation of mercenaries.

That was enough to show what kind of scrutiny Luanoble was currently receiving.

“It's not just human slaves either, even other races and monsters are treated as commodities. So they did a good job when they named it [Country of Honour and Pride.]”

“Come to think of it, Aren, you're from Luanoble aren't you?”

“Yeah.”

Aren had a calm expression even as his homeland was blatantly insulted. He didn't seem to be particularly patriotic towards Luanoble.

He continued to talk to Lukas.

“In Luanoble, a Knight competition is held once a year. Regardless of status anyone who is a Knight can participate.”

Dumbo frowned.

“What kind of bullshit is that? In the first place, all Knights are nobles.”

“Not anymore. Luanoble introduced an honorary Knight a few years ago. Anyone can become a Knight as long as they have the skills to match and there are no major issues with their past. Of course, this means that there are hundreds of Knights in the competition.”

“Hmm... I see.”

Lukas turned to Aren and tilted his head to the side.

“But what does the competition have to do with anything?”

“When I was young, I used to watch the Knight competition. I think I saw Sir Lukas’ swordsmanship in the competition.”

“Re-, really?”

Dumbo asked with a more excited expression than Lukas.

“Do you remember who it was?”

“If my memory is correct... it was Marquis Aquarid.”

“A-, Aquarid...?”

A ripple spread through the mercenaries.

It seemed that it was a famous family name. Lukas felt that he’d heard the name before somewhere... but he couldn’t remember. (TL: He forgot Sonia.)

However, he understood the situation.

The Luanoble Kingdom was built on Icollium, Lucid’s homeland. There were probably descendants of Lucid there, so it wasn’t strange for them to have inherited his swordsmanship.

“It’s possible that Sir Lukas might be a Knight trainee from the Aquarid family.”

“House Aquarid is considered the hope of the Luanoble Kingdom. They’re the only family who have Knights with integrity and honour.”

“Indeed...”

“It’s just as I expected. Because he showed a sword technique that was able to easily break ‘the inescapable death’.

Apparently, the man named Budilem that Lukas had killed was very strong. The mercenaries all had looks of respect on their face as they remembered that time.”

But Lukas’ expression couldn’t help but become complicated.

The only reason he’d been able to kill Budilem at that time was because he was aware of the situation and his surroundings, and he used his opponent’s own psychology against him.

To put it bluntly, when it came purely to physical capabilities, he fell short of the mercenaries around him, not to mention Budilem.

‘...swordsmanship alone is not enough.’

It would take more than just a day or two to train his body.

Only by repeatedly and steadily training for a long time would his body be able to reach an acceptable level. That was the difference from magicology, where the performance of the mind was the most important. No matter how great his technique was, there would still be a limit to the level of power he could produce if his body was weak.

'I need something else.'

But for the current him who couldn't even use magic, what the hell could he do?

Lukas stayed up all night thinking about it.

The next day.

The convoy finally arrived at the bridge.

Volume 2 - Chapter 294

Terrible scars were left in the places where undead appeared.

Firstly, they smelled worse than rotting corpses. It was a smell so pungent that it was difficult to describe. It was so powerful that those who smelt it wanted to cut off their noses and faint at the same time.

It wasn't just the smell. The temperature in these places also dropped sharply. It was more chilly than cold, but this chill was still too much for many people.

“...”

Peran looked down at the pitch black lake in front of him.

This was Lake Comos. Although it had very little in common with the beautiful lake he remembered, it was clear that he hadn't come to the wrong place.

Rotten chunks of flesh floated in the once pristine waters.

In the past, the water of Lake Comos was so clear and clean that one could drink it directly, but if anyone dared to drink it now, they would either be inflicted by countless unknown diseases or die instantly as if they had drunk lethal poison.

The appearance of this lake, which was filled with sticky black filth, was disgusting enough to make one want to vomit. But there was no disgust on Peran's face, no hatred.

He couldn't feel the presence of any undead.

Were they hiding?

No. If a high level undead had truly appeared there, then it wouldn't just be the lake, but the forest around it that suffered.

Peran turned his head and looked towards the forest. The entrance to this dark forest was like the gaping maw of a beast.

Tap-

He put himself into the mouth of this beast without any hesitation. Although it felt like the darkness was trying to restrict him, Peran's steps couldn't be stopped.

But he didn't walk for that long.

This was because of the sight he saw as he arrived in a large clearing.

It was strange to say the corpse of an undead, but 'pieces of undead corpses' were scattered across the clearing.

Peran had rushed to the lake as soon as he received the report of the appearance of undead. Although he hadn't been keeping track of the time, he was certain that it hadn't taken him more than half a day.

'This was a group of at least a few hundred undead.'

Even considering that most of the number would be made up of low level undead, it was not an amount that could be easily cleaned up within half a day.

No. It had taken less than half a day. Looking at the traces around the clearing, it had been at least a few hours since the corpses had been left there.

In other words, this meant that hundreds of undead had been annihilated in only two or so hours.

“...”

The number of people capable of such a feat was extremely limited.

By combining the scattered zombie corpses, the scars all over the forest clearing, and the faint traces left in the air, Peran was able to guess who was responsible for this scene.

In the first place, he knew she was nearby.

After thinking that, Peran’s expression became a bit hard.

“...surely not...”

He investigated the direction the traces were leading to.

It seemed she didn’t have any intention of hiding her presence. Thanks to this, Peran knew where she’d gone.

—Northeast.

In the direction of Bairak.

* * *

The Rulan bridge was so large that even ten carriages were able to cross over side by side. But now, it didn't feel large enough.

This was the only entry point in the southern section of the empire. And the crowd that formed was large enough to cover the entire bridge without gaps

"But it doesn't feel disorderly, does it? There are even a lot of mercenaries here."

"Do you see those guards over there? Would you believe me if I told you that they are all stronger than most A rank mercenaries?"

"Ay. Is that... supposed to be a joke?"

"If you don't believe me, try to do something. On Rulan Bridge, even crazy bastards try to act like normal people. Have you never heard of the rumors about them? It's said that the Ghost Catching Guards of Rulan Bridge are stronger than most Knights."

Certainly, their size, gaze, and aura were unusual for simple guards.

“If you make a fuss here, you will not only be banned from entering the empire for life but your bones and flesh will also be separated and thrown into the Rulan River. So just stay quiet.” (TL:So they ban you... then kill you? Extreme.)

Lukas looked around while listening to the mercenaries’ idle chatter. The thing that caught his attention more than the guards was the abundance of other races. While the empire couldn’t be said to exclude other races, it couldn’t be considered an open country either.

—As he looked around the flowing river, it was finally their turn to enter.

“Please present your identification card.”

The guard spoke in a blunt tone.

Rina presented her identification without saying a word. It was a certified identification card that was only issued to certain persons.

The identification ‘card’ was a small bronze plaque engraved with symbols and writing denoting her origins, all signs that showed it was not something that could be mass produced.

With this card, she was able to enter more than 20 countries, including the Kastkau Empire, and stay in cities of other races that had good relationships with humans for as long as she liked.

Among the many merchants of the Red Hub, only those who were recognised as elites could obtain it.

The guard carefully scrutinised the card before glancing at the carriages behind her.

“Were you attacked?”

“Yes.”

“...it must have been a disaster. You have my sympathy.”

“Thanks.”

The guards beckoned some of his comrades over to check the luggage inside.

“The ones behind you are the mercenaries you hired, ‘The Crazy Gargoyles’, correct?”

“That’s right.”

“Understood.”

By then, the luggage check had been completed. The guards made eye contact with each other and nodded at almost the same time.

The guard in front of them returned the bronze plaque.

“You are formally permitted to enter. Welcome to Kastkau.”

It was much faster than the others.

Lukas was curious about the reason, but Garp muttered under his breath a moment later.

“As expected, merchants are the best when it comes to this. The Kastkau immigration process, which is known for being absurdly complicated, is over in just an instant.”

Rina, who happened to hear his murmur, smiled.

“Do you want to be a merchant too?”

“...that’s not a funny joke.”

Of course, Rina didn’t mean it, so she just let out a laugh.

Their journey continued beyond Rulan Bridge.

The mercenaries subconsciously let out a breath.

It was natural to feel relieved.

After all, while there was still a bit of distance to the city, they had finally managed to successfully cross the border into the empire.

* * *

Lukas sat in the bumpy luggage compartment and thought back to his fight with Budilem.

Budilem's level. Considering the fact that he was a Magic Warrior, it should have been close to the top. He was by no means weak, but he hadn't been strong enough to be counted among the 'truly strong'.

Nevertheless, Lukas had no choice but to admit that he was a difficult opponent.

'I can probably only defeat those around Budilem's level.'

No matter how experienced, skilled and in control of his body he was, it was impossible for him to defeat someone stronger than Budilem in his current state.

In fact, if the fight against Budilem had been more normal, he would have had to suffer a bit more damage.

In the end, there were three factors that led to his victory.

Budilem had been more wary of Lukas than he needed to be, his fighting style wasn't much of a threat to him, and finally, he was pressed for time.

If they had fought fairly in an open space without a time limit, it would have been much harder for Lukas to win.

Throb-

He felt pain in his shoulder and stomach.

Although neither attack had hit a vital spot, they were not shallow wounds. He would need to rest for at least a week in order to let them heal.

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Lukas then began to think about the enemies he would encounter from now on.

Multiple enemies.

Quick enemies.

Enemies whose main means of attack were long or wide ranged attacks.

At this point, the enemies that would be the most difficult for Lukas to face were Wizards.

Generally, as the level of spells increased, the range also increased. In addition, attacks without a distinct shape such as fire, water, wind, darkness, and light were difficult for Lukas to counter.

This meant that he had to find other countermeasures than the sword, but he couldn't think of any at that moment.

'...I need a more systematic swordsmanship.'

Of course, the first thing Lukas thought about was Lucid's Dreadment.

But unfortunately, Lukas didn't know enough about Dreadment.

Dreadment hadn't suited his body, so he'd only trained it to an elementary level.

'Riki's memories...'

Were of no use to him right now.

Riki's methods were simple and crude, but it could be called something similar to swordsmanship.

But it couldn't be copied. He was a Demigod, a being who was one step out of the mortal realm from birth. A being that could cleave a mountain in one swing if he wanted to. If he tried to imitate that guy's swordsmanship, his body would collapse.

In other words, what Lukas needed was swordsmanship that matched his current self.

'...Master.'

He thought of the being who had taught him about swords.

Volume 2 - Chapter 295

Bairak was a prosperous city.

As mentioned before, Rulan Bridge was the only point of entry in the southern region of the Kastkau Empire, and Bairak was one of the closest cities to the Rulan Bridge.

It wasn't the closest city. Lukas saw several small towns and cities on their way there.

Nevertheless, the reason Bairak flourished the most among the nearby cities was purely because of the existence of the Warp Stone.

Warp Stones were only placed in cities authorised by the state.

There were less than 100 Warp Stones officially deployed throughout Kastkau. While this couldn't be called a small number, considering the size of the empire, it wasn't quite enough to be called generous.

This wasn't because Warp Stones were difficult to make. While it required the power of experts like Alchemists and Wizards skilled in magical engineering, if the Empire wanted, they could make several hundred of them.

Nevertheless, the limited number of Warp Stones was purely because the Imperial Family was controlling the quantity.

Prosperity was guaranteed for the cities that had Warp Stones. Conversely, no matter how prosperous a city was, removing the Warp Stone would inflict serious damage.

Naturally, the City Lords had no choice but to pay great attention to the presence or absence of Warp Stones.

In other words, the Imperial Family kept the Lords who ruled each city in check simply by controlling the number of Warp Stones they issued as well as maintaining control over them.

"Ha. My eyes are spinning. Why is this city so big?"

"Hey. You're embarrassing me. Stop acting like a country bumpkin."

"What did you say, you bastard?"

"Enough, find a place to stay first before you start arguing. While you do that, I'll take care of the wounded."

The most important thing was to treat their wounded. Garp led the injured members to look for a clinic. The rest went straight to an inn.

Since all the costs were being borne by Rina, the mercenaries rented out the entire inn.

Then, without any regard for the fact that it was still the middle of the day, the mercenaries banged their beer mugs together. Of course, they were also eating.

Lukas got up from his seat after eating his meal. Dumbo, who was about to ask him to drink together, looked up in surprise.

“Brother, where are you going?”

“Blacksmith.”

Firstly, he had to get a sword, and if they had decent armour, he would purchase it as well. As soon as they arrived in Bairak, he received the rest of his payment from Rina, so he now had quite a bit of money on his hands.

He couldn't speak for anything else, but at the very least, he didn't intend to save when it came to equipment that would keep him alive.

‘After buying a weapon.’

He would look around for any old bookstores.

Not only to look for books on the history of the past 10 years that Lukas didn't know, but also for books on swordsmanship and physical training.

"Excuse me."

Rina called out to Lukas, who was about to leave.

When Lukas silently turned to look at her, she let out a soft cough.

"Do you have time to spare?"

"How much?"

"Until lunch ends."

That wasn't too long. Lukas nodded, then Rina gestured for him to follow her.

She walked through the streets without any hesitation which displayed just how many times she'd visited Bairak. After a while, they arrived at a large building made entirely of marble. It seemed to have about 7 or 8 floors and was easily the largest building in the area.

Lukas followed Rina into the building. And immediately knew what it was.

It was the City Administration Office.

“Welcome. -Oh, Rina.”

An intelligent looking woman greeted them with a bright smile.

Rina smiled and sat beside her.

“Tia, you girl, your face has become so oily.”

“Huhuhu. Your face has also become thicker, girl.”

“It’s my job, I can’t help it. I guess this job suits you.”

“It’s not just comfortable, it also makes me happy.”

“Right. I knew you were enjoying sucking honey, that’s why I came to give you another job.”

“A job? What is it?”

Rina turned and gestured to Lukas.

The woman named Tia bowed her head to him slightly before turning back to Rina.

“Please give this man a temporary identification card. By tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow? That’s hard. At best it would take at least a week.”

“That’s why I said a temporary one.”

“Do you think it’d be different just because it’s temporary. It takes three to four days just to reach the higher ups. It’ll only take a week now because this isn’t a busy period, otherwise, it would probably take two to three weeks.”

“You don’t have to report to the higher ups. Just give me an identification card I can use to register him as an apprentice merchant for the Red Hub.”

This caused Tia’s attitude to soften a bit.

“Apprentice? Ahh. Is this person your junior?”

“...well...”

“Mm. If that’s the case, then it’s fine. Did you say tomorrow? You can come back this afternoon.”

“Then I’ll come back later. Thanks.”

“It’s fine. How about dinner tonight? Rose told me to tell her when you came.”

“Sure.”

Rina nodded, then after sharing some private words, returned to the inn with Lukas.

“It’s difficult to stay and buy things in the empire without some form of identification.”

It was then that Lukas realised that Rina was doing all of that for him.

“I see. Thank you for your help.”

“No problem. I owe you my life. -Ah. And you don’t have to worry about being an apprentice merchant either. You’re not really a part of the organisation, I’m just using it because it is the fastest way. You could say it’s a trick.”

“I see.”

“Did you memorise the way here?”

“Yes. I think I can come back on my own.”

“If you forget, you can just ask me.”

“Thank you.”

“It’s nothing.”

Lukas expressed his gratitude once again.

“Ah. And you said you were going to the blacksmith, right? Here’s a map.”

Rina handed him a folded piece of paper. Without opening it, he knew it was the map of Bairak.

“It’s a bit old, but there shouldn’t be any major differences, so it shouldn’t be too hard for you to find your way. As for this, you don’t have to thank me again. I’m just paying back what I owe.”

Lukas let out a bitter laugh.

She really was a merchant.

“Then I’ll use it well.”

Volume 2 - Chapter 296

Lukas walked out to the street on his own and opened the map.

First things first, a blacksmith.

‘...there aren’t any nearby.’

It seemed that there was a street where all the blacksmiths were located, but it was quite far from where he currently was. To be precise, it was on the other side of the city.

On the other hand, antique bookstores were closer. In fact, there were two or three of them nearby.

“I’ll go to a bookstore first.”

With that thought, Lukas headed to the nearest one.

Ring-

“Welcome.”

The nasally voice of an old man who appeared to be the shopkeeper greeted him as he entered.

There didn't seem to be any guests in the store, which smelled of old books and dust, other than Lukas. While it couldn't be said to be good for one's health, he couldn't help but enjoy this stale smell.

Lukas began to browse through the collection of books on the shelves. Although it looked like the books had been placed randomly, he was surprised to find that they were actually organised by field.

[Fifteen Unexplored Secrets of the Kastku Empire that Most are Unaware Of]

[Determining Magical Aptitude with a Simple Test]

[An Atheist Speaks About Demigods]

[The Four Heroes who led the Era of Light]

[48 Instant Recipes developed by Adventurer Carlton Gowland]

Most of the books he saw there were books about magic, but there were also books about history and philosophy, novels, and even cooking books.

This was the advantage of coming to an antique bookstore.

He was able to find various books from several different fields all in the same place.

After browsing the shelves for a while, Lukas was able to find what he was looking for.

[A Systematic and Effective Guide to Physical Training by Nia Hamilton]

[Basic Swordsmanship by Don Giaski]

[Regarding the Knights of Luanoble]

The first two books were because he wanted help, but the third was purely out of curiosity. A quick glance told him that all the books were written in an easy to understand manner and were suitable even for those who had no foundation.

He could use this.

After looking at them for a while, Lukas decided to purchase them.

Tuk-

But when he turned around, he immediately bumped into someone.

“—ah, sorry.”

He heard a dignified voice. It was a woman.

She was taller than he expected. About half a head shorter than Lukas.

“It’s fine—”

Lukas stopped.

The woman in front of him was wearing a strange mask made of wood.

The shape of this mask was strangely familiar.

No. It wasn’t just the mask.

...Her voice, her aura.

“Do you plan to learn swordsmanship?”

The woman asked in a curious tone. The eyes behind the mask were looking at the books in Lukas’ hands.

“...right.”

“Hmm. I think it would be a bit difficult with the condition of your legs.”

“I didn’t ask for your opinion.”

As he responded in a cold voice, Lukas tried to walk past her.

Firstly, it was to give himself time to think.

But the woman didn’t move away, and instead put her hands on her hips, blocking him.

“Pardon my manners. This Queen... no, I am Swordna.”

“...”

Lukas’ expression changed.

He knew that pseudonym.

He also knew that old-fashioned way of speaking that didn’t match her thin, high-pitched voice.

“I would like to talk to you for a moment. That should be fine, right?”

There was a hint of mirth in her voice, but the eyes behind the mask remained cold. Nevertheless, Lukas couldn't smile or answer easily.

...This woman.

Was obviously one of those that Lukas longed to meet.

But he couldn't feel happy or relieved after reuniting with her.

-Those who managed to escape should have kept your appearance in mind. Maybe next time, they'll send a stronger person after you.

-Do you really think they'd go that far?

-As far as I know. That's the kind of group the Circle is.

Rina's voice sounded in his mind again.

Lukas looked at Swordna... no.

He looked at the Elf Queen Snow de Predickwood and thought. (TL: So long since I tl'd that name)

...She...

Was she there to kill him?

* * *

If that was the case, then in all honesty, there was no way the current Lukas could run from her. With her skills, his entire body would be torn apart by her in seconds before he could even think of resisting.

...the word sword reminded him of something.

Lukas' eyes fell to Snow's waist. It was stuck in a simple sheath, but he could tell just by looking at its hilt.

It was Deukid, the beloved sword of Lucid, who could be called the greatest swordsman.

“...”

He couldn't help but once again feel bitter about his situation. Since he wasn't sure about the current situation within the Circle, he had decided that he wouldn't reveal himself even if he were to be reunited with his companions.

But seeing Snow in person made him realise how difficult that really was.

The desire to reveal himself soared in his heart.

“I’m busy.”

But he was used to suppressing his desires.

So, holding himself back like he always did, Lukas opened his mouth again.

“I would like to leave, will you move out of the way?”

“...”

Snow looked at Lukas strangely for a moment before unexpectedly stepping back with a shrug.

After paying for the books, with a limp, Lukas left the antique bookstore.

He walked for a while before looking behind him. But he couldn’t find any signs that anyone was following him.

After confirming this, Lukas let out a sigh.

Snow de Predickwood.

Had their meeting only been a coincidence?

“ ... ”

Lukas shook his head.

Of course, he couldn't rule out that possibility entirely. After all, he knew better than most how common such situations were in the world.

But the timing was too coincidental.

Then was Snow someone that had been sent by the Circle? Sent to take Lukas' life?

If that was the case, then why did she let him go? Was it because she could kill him at any time, anywhere?

Suddenly, Lukas stopped walking.

Without realising it, he had walked all the way to the blacksmith street.

Heat radiated from the smithys that lined both sides of the street. It seemed that his body had subconsciously walked to this place while he was lost in his thoughts.

He decided to go ahead and buy the gear he wanted. It wasn't hard to purchase a few things while thinking things over.

With that in mind, he entered the first smithy he saw.

"What a coincidence. We meet again."

Snow stood there as if it was natural.

Of course, there was no one in the world foolish enough to believe such a blatantly shameless statement. Unless they were incredibly naive or scatterbrained.

Lukas narrowed his eyes.

'There's no way I can detect Snow's presence in this state.'

Despite Lukas' rotten expression, Snow stood smugly in front of him.

"Now that I think about it, you never told me your name. I already introduced myself. I think that's a bit unfair."

That was just a pseudonym.

Forcibly holding back the words he wanted to say, Lukas decided to reveal his name.

“Lukas.”

It didn't fall off his lips as easily as it did with Peran. Unlike him, Snow knew his true identity and they had even fought together.

Even if it was faint, he expected her to have a different reaction than Peran.

“Hmm. I see.”

However, Snow nodded without any sign of suspicion and changed the subject.

“...are you here to buy weapons or armour?”

“Both.”

“I see. How much money do you have? How about I pick out a few for you?”

“No thanks.”

Ignoring her, Lukas walked into the smithy. At this point, he didn't want to talk or interact with her any longer.

“Why not? It’s a rare opportunity for this Queen to choose a weapon for someone.”

“...”

“Or is it that you think beautiful women don’t know anything about weapons?! You’re not that narrow minded? Right?”

If you want to claim to be beautiful, at least take off your mask first.

Lukas continued to ignore her. He had no idea what Snow was thinking.

No. Now that he thought about it, did she always have this kind of unpredictable personality?

‘...she wasn’t this energetic last time we met.’

Snow at that time had been made aware of her powerlessness and was frustrated by that fact. Lukas didn’t want her to collapse. That’s why he’d given her Deukid.

‘It’s been 10 years.’

It was enough time for anyone to overcome their setbacks and stand up on their feet again.

“How much for this sword and armour?”

“35 gold coins.”

“Here.”

“You have to show me some identification first.”

“...”

Lukas’ body froze at those words.

Rina had told him that it was difficult to buy things in the empire without an identification card. The bookstore hadn’t asked him for it so he’d forgotten...

As Lukas’ expression became troubled, he felt a cool presence behind him.

“Will mine suffice, sir?”

The shopkeeper shot an indifferent glance at Snow before speaking.

“Take off your mask.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t show my face without this mask. It is a very sensitive subject for me, I hope you’d understand.”

“I’m sorry, but it’s the law. I can’t-”

“Please.”

Snow’s voice became a whisper. The shopkeeper, who was shaking his head, froze. Then, his eyes glazed over and he nodded slowly.

Snow took the gold coins from Lukas and gave them to the shopkeeper before they left the smithy with the equipment.

“Such an inflexible shopkeeper.”

“...was that magic?”

Although he asked that, Lukas knew it wasn’t magic.

If it were magic, it wouldn’t have been able to escape his eyes.

“Well...”

“...”

“In any case, Lukas, you owe me now, don’t you?”

“...how much do you want?”

“Money doesn’t solve everything... Right.”

The eyes behind the mask seemed to curl slightly.

“Buy me food.”

Volume 2 - Chapter 297

“This is a pretty good book, but it’s not suitable for you.”

“...”

Snow giggled below her mask as she flipped through the book.

Lukas let out a sigh and opened his mouth.

“That’s my book.”

“I know.”

“I didn’t give you permission to read it.”

“What’s the problem? It’s not like it’ll get damaged just because I read it.”

“I haven’t read it yet.’

“So stingy. Don’t you know the term ‘ladies first’? You’ll have to wait a bit. Since I plan to read the entire thing.”

“...”

After a while, Snow giggled again.

“Isn’t that a book on swordsmanship?”

Of course, Lukas knew this because he was the one who had bought it.

The book she was reading was [Basic Swordsmanship by Don Giaski].

“Huh? That’s right.”

“Then what’s so funny?”

“It’s all funny.”

After giggling again, she turned the book to show Lukas what she was looking at.

“The guy who wrote this book is a complete idiot, a scam. His knowledge base is shallow and poor. His thoughts about the functions of a sword are all limited and plain. At best he sees it as ‘a blade used for cutting’... Well, that’s not completely wrong.”

“...”

“Besides, look how old fashioned his training method is. What era is this that he thinks cutting trees is a good form of training? That’s just harming nature for no reason.”

Coming from the Elf Queen herself, these words naturally had a lot of weight.

Lukas drank half of his cup of cold water. Then he spoke in a slightly calmer voice.

“Why do you keep following me?”

“Mm? Uh...”

Snow seemed to think about it for a moment as she tapped the book in her hand.

“Maybe it’s because I feel like we’ve met before.”

“...!”

“Ahaha! It was a joke!”

...What a joke. (TL: Poor Lukas almost got a heart attack.)

Lukas had always been confident in his patience, but now, he realised it might not be as good as he thought. In that moment, he had almost spat out some of the few swear words he knew at her.

“Would you mind ordering some more food?”

“Why me?”

“I ate nothing but grass for an entire week. I deserve to eat meat.”

...Coming from the Elf Queen herself, these words naturally had a lot of weight. In a different sense from before...

Right. Eat to your heart's content then leave.

With this thought, Lukas directly ordered five more servings before looking at Snow.

...Had she always been like this? He wasn't sure. Maybe she'd always thought like this, but now, she was acting more arbitrarily than before.

Throughout the meal, Snow skillfully ate without ever taking off her mask. She was also quite fast too. Five servings of food disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Finally, Snow finished her glass of water before closing the book once more.

"A book like this will do you no good."

"What?"

"For a Swordsman, a leg disorder is more critical than anything else. Whether it's cutting, stabbing, or blocking, the most important thing is the strength of your feet."

"..."

“Even for First Class Swordsmen, if they were to lose even one big toe, their power would drop by more than half in that instant. Your situation is worse than losing a single toe, isn’t it?”

Although she said this in a light tone, Lukas realised she was giving him serious advice now.

“Then what should I do?”

“I don’t know. As you can see, all my limbs are fully functional.”

Her tone was still light as she got up from her seat. Then she smiled at Lukas.

“Thanks for the meal, Lukas. We’ll meet again.”

“...”

With those words, Snow disappeared in a flash.

Lukas continued looking in the direction she left in. Maybe she would come back like before.

That’s what he thought.

“...ha.”

But after a while, he realised that she'd really left this time.

* * *

Lukas' tiring day was not yet over.

When he returned to the inn, he thought he would once again find the noisy atmosphere the mercenaries had created, but that wasn't the case. In fact, the first floor of the inn, which served as the restaurant, was quiet.

There were a few mercenaries there, but even they only lightly tapped their glasses together.

The reason for that was easily understandable.

It was the familiar face sitting at a table in a corner of the room.

It was Peran.

He quietly moved his tableware as he focused on his meal. Even though the food served at the inn could only be considered mediocre at best, his etiquette could still be seen in his movements.

He was slicing through a cheap steak in a luxurious manner when he noticed Lukas' presence and put down his knife.

“Oh, you’re here.”

Lukas nodded slightly.

Not showing whether he was offended by Lukas’ blunt attitude or not, Peran simply gestured to the chair in front of him with a nonchalant expression.

“Have you eaten yet?”

“Yes. I ate before I came.”

“I see... Then would you like a cup of tea?”

“Aren’t you eating?”

“I was about to stop anyway since I don’t have much of an appetite.”

Peran spoke with a slightly tired expression before calling out to a nearby waiter.

“I’m sorry, but please clear away these dishes.”

“Yes.”

“Also... if you have any good tea, I’ll have two cups.”

The waiter’s expression became a bit tense when he heard this. Perhaps his intuition told him that Peran was no simple character.

“Sir... what do you mean by good tea...?”

“If you have something like Aman Frere, or Colonial...”

Peran slowly trailed off after saying this. The waiter in front of him looked as if he wanted to cry.

“...forget it. Two glasses of cold water will do.”

“Thank you.”

As if he’d been pardoned, the waiter quickly disappeared and returned with the cold water. Peran coughed slightly in embarrassment before taking a sip of water.

After changing his posture a bit, he opened his mouth.

“I heard that I am in your debt.”

“It was just in the course of protecting myself.”

“Regardless, you saved a lot of people. As their client, I would like to express my gratitude.”

“...”

Knowing that it would only prolong the topic if he continued to act modest, Lukas nodded.

In any case, he had to thank him for bringing up the topic of the raid first.

“Those that attacked. I heard that they are from an organisation called the Circle.”

“Yes.”

“Are they your enemies?”

“That’s right.”

“...the man I killed, Budilem, was the leader of the operation. His men at the scene witnessed that, and most of them escaped alive.”

“ ... ”

There was a subtle change to Peran’s expression for a moment.

It was strange, it didn’t give him a positive or a negative feeling.

Lukas also became silent.

This was as he expected.

While Peran was fundamentally good, his atmosphere changed completely when the Circle was mentioned. Peran still had the soft expression on his face, but the pressure being released from his body was so intimidating that anyone would find it difficult to speak their mind to him.

‘He’s grown up.’

In the past, Peran had also been a formidable figure. He was an exceptionally talented person whose future was limitless, but as expected, after accumulating years of experience, he’d also become skilled in the political side of things.

“I need protection.”

Lukas decided to first bring up the main point to him in a straightforward manner.

“Rina told me that people stronger than Budilem would come for me, is that true?”

“The probability is high.”

“...defeating Budilem was half a coincidence. If such an attack happens again, I’m not certain I’ll be able to protect myself.”

“So you’re asking us for protection.”

Lukas nodded.

The small smile that had been on Peran’s lip’s the entire time finally disappeared and he carefully looked at Lukas.

It was impossible for him to read someone’s intentions or inner thoughts just by looking at them. Nevertheless, it was possible to find some strangeness if they were hiding something from him. This was one of Peran’s specialties.

‘How strange.’

He couldn’t feel anything from Lukas.

Was it because he truly was telling the truth? Peran was hesitant to jump to such a conclusion.

“I know a place beyond the reach of the Circle.”

“...”

“I promise on my honor. It is a small and quiet village, but no one would be able to hurt you if you went there. I can also give you enough money to comfortably live for the rest of your life.”

“...you’re telling me to go there?”

“At least until your memories return.”

Peran’s proposal was extremely attractive.

But Lukas knew he shouldn’t accept it. He couldn’t.

He had seen the corruption of the Circle with his own eyes.

“There is no guarantee that my memories will ever return.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“...after I fought the attackers and heard the word Circle, it was like a bolt of lightning had struck my head. I believe that my loss of memory might be related to them somehow.”

“...”

Peran’s face became slightly startled when he heard those words. It seemed Rina hadn’t told him that part.

“Then what do you want me to do?”

“Take me with you.”

“...for what reason?”

“You are the leader of the Anti Circle Alliance.”

“Did Rina tell you that?”

“It was my own guess.”

“On what basis?”

“There were several. Your status as a member of a high ranking family, your individual strength which reaches the realm of heroes, and more than anything else, your innate talent.”

Peran remained silent.

It seemed like he was telling him to continue.

“Charisma. The talent to attract and lead people, regardless of whether they want to follow or not.”

“...hmm.”

He hummed softly for a moment. He also began fiddling with his cup. It didn't seem like he was thirsty though, since he was only looking at his reflection in the water.

Finally, after staying silent for a while, Peran spoke.

“I cannot accept your request.”

Lukas' expression changed slightly.

In all honesty, he'd never considered the fact that Peran might refuse. No. That even if he did refuse, he would be so firm.

“Why?”

“Because I don’t have the authority to do that.”

That surprised him.

“You don’t have enough authority? Then are you...”

“Don’t get me wrong. Your guess was pretty close. My position in the Anti Circle Alliance is by no means low. If this was a different time, I would easily accept your proposal.”

But he was saying he couldn’t now.

“...I have to accompany someone for a few months or even longer from today.”

It was only then that Lukas understood.

“The ‘person’ that you have to accompany is your superior.”

Peran nodded easily.

0

“I came here to meet her halfway.”

Her?

“We were supposed to meet at this very inn, so she’ll probably come soon-”

Just at that moment, the door of the inn flew open, and Peran’s expression changed.

“She’s here.”

Lukas looked back.

And when he saw the woman standing at the door, his eyebrows couldn’t help but twitch slightly.

It was a woman wearing a strange wooden mask.

“...you.”

“Over here.”

Peran looked at the woman, Snow, and beckoned her over to them in a calm voice. Lukas couldn’t help but look back at him in surprise.

They knew each other? No, wait a minute. It couldn't be that she was the superior Peran had mentioned.

Suddenly, Snow strode over to the table and sat down beside Lukas.

"Let me introduce you. This is Snow, the current leader of the Anti Circle Alliance."

Leader of the Anti Circle Alliance.

The weight of those words could not be brushed aside lightly.

Snow smiled at Lukas.

"I told you we'd meet again, Lukas."

Volume 2 - Chapter 298

Snow.

Full name, Snow de Predickwood.

Every person could be said to have many different identities, but in Snow's case, it was particularly severe.

The Elf Queen, sole survivor of the extinct Ice Elf race, the Apostle of the Demigod Riki who betrayed his own kind, and also a Master Swordsman with talent comparable to Lucid.

That wasn't all.

In addition to all of that, she also had another identity, 'Swordna', who served as the Circle Master for the Hiral Garden circle.

...In other words.

Snow had definitely been a member of the Circle just 10 years ago.

"You know each other?"

It wasn't strange for Peran to be a bit surprised.

After all, Lukas was going with the story that he'd lost his memories, and Snow was currently not in a position that allowed her to randomly interact with strangers.

Snow took the cup that was in front of him and took a sip while shrugging.

"I met him not so long ago. I am in his debt."

“On what condition?”

“The price of a meal.”

“For reference, the meal had cost about 10 silver, which was enough to spend over 3-4 days considering Lukas’ low meal average.

“...you are the leader of the Anti Circle Alliance?”

“Right.”

“How did you know about me?”

“Peran, and the people you missed. So you don’t have to worry anymore.”

“...what?”

Snow’s eyes curved into half moons.

“Weren’t you worried that the Circle would learn your appearance?”

It seemed she had been listening to their conversation.

“They all died before they could report to their superiors. This Queen can guarantee it.”

There was no need to ask how they died.

Lukas looked at Snow with a complex expression.

Leader of the Anti Circle Alliance.

This meant that she'd left the Circle and created her own force. That also meant that currently, Snow was enemies with Ivan, the Master of the Circle.

Why?

“Since all the witnesses are dead, the threat of death has disappeared. Do you still want to travel with us?”

Snow didn't give him time to think and urged him to answer.

Lukas nodded.

“Right.”

The thought of sticking together with them had only grown stronger.

Snow put her chin in her hands as she stared at Lukas curiously.

“I see. Alright. Then you can go up for now.”

“...?”

“I have some important things to discuss with Peran.”

It seemed she didn't want any outsider listening which is why she asked him to leave.

Her voice was soft, but strangely coercive. Lukas knew there was no point to staying anyway, so he calmly headed upstairs.

Dumbo had already told him in advance which room was his.

He was certain it was E-2.

With a click, he opened the door and entered the room.

“ ”
...

The soundproofing between the first and second floors was not very good. In other words, if conversations on the first floor were a bit loud, then those on the second floor would be able to hear it. This meant that there was a chance for him to hear what they were talking about downstairs.

Although the noisy mercenaries made it difficult to hear things clearly, as long as he focused on his hearing, he might be able to hear the conversation...

....

....

But he could hear no sound from below.

‘They set up a sound barrier.’

It was a barrier that only stopped sound from passing through. While it was an application of barrier technology, the formulas required to cast it were much more complex. To be precise, the quantity increased by up to three times.

Nevertheless, such a thing would not be difficult for the current Peran.

He wondered what they were talking about.

How to treat Lukas. The Alliance's next step. Or the movements of the Circle.

He didn't know.

But Lukas felt that he would be able to gain valuable clues from their conversation.

'... should I eavesdrop?'

It was morally wrong, but it couldn't be helped.

At that point, Lukas needed to hear their conversation. It was no longer a matter of choice.

Then, the 'how' was the problem.

How could he eavesdrop?"

He looked at the sound barrier Peran had created. His mana was powerful and vast enough that it could easily cover the entire building.

In addition the formula he used was exquisite. Just by looking at the formula, Lukas was able to see just how much effort a Wizard put in.

Of course, it was by no means an accurate measurement. It was similar to interfering with a character someone else had created.

'...formula.'

Lukas understood the source of mana. Otherwise, he never would have been able to use endtongue.

So to the current Lukas, it was like he was looking at several dozens or hundreds of formulas floating in the air.

Suddenly, a thought appeared in his head.

Touch it with a finger, even if only for a moment.

'What would happen if I interfere with the formula?'

It was a wild idea, but it wasn't impossible.

No matter what he did, the current Lukas was absolutely unable to use magic.

But interfering with spells that had already been cast or changing their properties... might be possible.

Sshng.

Lukas unsheathed his sword. There wasn't any particular reason for this.

Since the blade was sharper than his finger, he felt that it would more easily scatter the surrounding mana and change it.

—Great.

Thinly, slowly, carefully, as if he was slowly cutting a bit of meat.

The flow of the mana changed.

A cast spell was like an artist finishing a painting.

But Lukas stormed in without even asking for permission and changed it as he pleased.

The mana moved. The formula was rearranged.

Naturally, Lukas had the most comprehensive understanding of magic, mana, and formulas out of everyone in the world. This allowed him to spot the weaknesses and blindspots that most wouldn't notice. Even if Peran was an Archmage, when it came to pure understanding, he was no match for Lukas.

Ssss-

Peran's elaborate painting was soon dyed with Lukas' color. It was so secretive that even the caster didn't notice.

It was impossible for ordinary people to use mana. In other words, Lukas was the only being in the world that could use this method.

Juk.

The tip of his blade slid forward once again.

Beads of sweat rolled down his forehead. It was his body, not his mind, that was crying out and complaining about the strain.

He was only holding his sword in his right hand.

His left hand was thin, weak. If he were to try to use both hands for no reason, it would probably affect the ultra precision required for his task.

Nevertheless, Lukas' right arm was not trained to handle such strain.

"...urk."

His arm almost slipped. A groan escaped past his lips without him realising. It felt like his arm was about to fall off.

0

By that point, the only thing he could feel at that moment was pain.

Lukas focused his gaze, his eyes bloodshot.

Just.

Just a little more.

Tuk.

Just as a bead of sweat began rolling down his nose...

[...is it?]

He heard a faint voice.

[Interesting.]

The voices quickly became clear, and he could clearly hear both Peran and Snow.

Brrr.

His entire body began to shake heavily. At first, he thought the reason for his convulsions was because he'd overworked his muscles, but that wasn't the case.

Instead, what Lukas felt at that moment was an indescribable feeling of pleasure. It filled him with confusion at first, but he soon realised why.

Uncertain challenges, crises, and fruits of his labour.

All things that were foreign for an Absolute.

That was why he was happy.

It felt like a long lost feeling had been revived.

At that moment, he felt human again.

Volume 2 - Chapter 299

“How is it?”

“Interesting.”

When he heard her response, Peran smiled slightly as if he was expecting.

“I thought you’d say that.”

“Right. As you said, he definitely is an interesting man.”

“...I thought he’d be a Wizard, but he wields a sword.”

“You said he killed Budilem in one hit right? He might have been overwhelmed if it was a real fight.”

Peran nodded.

“How is it? I don’t know enough about the Swordsman field to confirm. But since he killed Budilem, he should have been at least First Class.”

“In terms of pure ability, he’s Third Class.”

Peran couldn’t help but be surprised when he heard this.

“Really?”

“No. Even Third Class feels a bit generous. You saw his body too, didn’t you? The most eye-catching thing is the limp in his right foot, but the situation of his left arm isn’t good either.”

Snow looked down at her own left hand as she clenched and unclenched it.

“The grip strength of his left hand is probably not even half of his right. His reaction rate should also be very slow. For example, even if he thinks about moving his left arm now, there will probably be a few seconds of delay before it actually moves. That’s fatal for a swordsman.”

“Then do you think he used a different kind of power to kill Budilem?”

“That may or may not be the case.”

“...”

“How about you? What is your judgment towards this man?”

“I can’t see through him.”

If it was said that Snow paid attention to the exterior, what Peran focused on was the interior.

“I don’t know what kind of training he was given. However, his mental strength far surpasses most Wizards. He has reached the state of ‘mind as calm as a still lake’.”

Peran seemed to want to say something more, but he closed his mouth. Saying more than that would just be his own suspicions and speculations, and it wasn’t something he should say lightly in front of his superior.

“What else?”

“I’m sure he’s hiding something.... But, whatever it is doesn’t seem to be malicious. That much I can tell.”

“Hmm.”

Snow hummed softly beneath her breath and folded her arms. As she hummed, she swung her head back and forth as if she was listening to a song. While this might seem like a playful attitude, Peran knew that she was seriously thinking at the moment.

“I think we should move on to talking about more practical things.”

Snow’s humming died down.

“What is his usage value?”

“...about five points.”

“Out of 10?”

“Out of 100.”

Snow’s expression changed.

“That score is very low for someone you rated so highly.”

“Isn’t the usage value you mentioned in regard to the meeting in two years? At his current level, he wouldn’t be of much help.”

While it was amazing that Lukas had killed Budilem, Peran had at least a dozen more talented people capable of the same feat. It was also clear that they all had something that made them better than Lukas.

Growth potential.

Even at that moment, they were consistently growing stronger.

Right. That was an important factor.

“It’s impossible for him to get any stronger at this point.”

“I agree, but that’s not completely correct.”

“Huh?”

“It’s not impossible. It’s just very close to impossible.”

“...”

“In any case, now is the time to focus on nurturing elites. At the meeting in two years, either this Queen or Ivan will have to die.”

“...are you okay?”

“Are you worried about me? Ahahaha. I’m flattered.”

He wasn’t worried about that.

Not knowing what to say, Peran remained silent.

“In any case, it looks like we’ve managed to reach a rough conclusion. I’ll go tell him.”

“I’ll go with you.”

Snow didn’t stop Peran from following her, and instead went upstairs to Lukas’ room and directly opened the door.

Click.

“...mm?”

“Hm...”

Snow and Peran simultaneously let out sounds of surprise.

This was because they were met with a strange sight when they opened the door to the room.

Lukas was standing alone in the room in a strange position with his sword in his hand. In addition, he was sweating profusely and breathing heavily.

Snow tilted her head to the side.

“What were you doing?”

“...that.”

They had come up so fast that he didn't even have time to put the sword away.

Naturally, he couldn't say that, so Lukas just came up with a rough excuse.

"I was doing a bit of training..."

"Training? Why would you do it here?"

"..."

When she asked this in a confused voice, he didn't know what else to say.

Suddenly, as if he realised something, Peran spoke to Snow.

"Lady Swordna, I don't think it would be polite to delve any deeper into this matter."

"What do you mean?"

"That..."

Peran lowered his head and whispered something into Snow's ear.

“...ahhh~”

Snow let out a sound as if she finally understood before nodding in a shaky manner.

“If that’s the case, well. Then I guess it can’t be helped.”

“...”

“Still it would be better to find a more suitable time and place.”

Lukas didn’t know what they were talking about, but he felt that the longer this topic continued, the worse it would become.

Pushing his suspicions aside, he opened his mouth.

“Have you made a decision on how you will deal with me?”

“Ah. That’s right.”

Snow nodded and straightened up slightly.

“From tomorrow, you will be accompanying us.”

“...!”

Peran looked at Snow with a hint of surprise on his face.

On the other hand, Snow’s voice remained calm as she continued.

“We’ll be in your care for a while, Lukas.”

* * *

It was a cloudy night.

Lukas woke up in the dim moonlight around midnight. He’d woken up much earlier than usual, and it wasn’t because of the moonlight shining on his face.

Rustle-

He could hear the sounds of pages being flipped.

Lukas had been given a single room, so he should have been the only one in the room.

But now, he could clearly sense someone else's presence in the room. The sound came from the desk.

He sat up in bed.

The first thing he saw when he looked over was something white. At first, he thought it was a white blanket. It reminded him of a high quality white blanket made from the fur of the snow ferrets living in the snowfields, or the hair of silver maned foxes.

But it wasn't.

He was looking at someone's back, which meant the white curtain was their hair.

White hair seemed to glow mysteriously in the moonlit room.

Tak-

Snow closed the book and turned around.

She wasn't wearing the mask. Of course, Lukas had already realised this when he saw her hair.

"Aren't you surprised?"

“Do you want me to treat you like a ghost?”

“That would be interesting.”

“...I am surprised. I wouldn't have expected you to break into my room without permission.”

“Ahaha...”

Snow let out a laugh. The sound was much quieter than usual, almost a whisper.

“What were you doing?”

“Waiting for you to wake up.”

“You could've woken me.”

“It's not good to do that to someone who's sleeping peacefully.”

Snow's consideration was a bit off putting. Was it because she was an elf? No. Maybe it was because of her unique personality.

“Undead have appeared in the forests in the eastern part of Kastkau.”

“...”

“After dealing with a few more things here, we’ll go there.”

It was strange.

While the appearance of undead was something that could happen naturally, the undead that appeared at that time would usually be few in number and their power would be negligible.

There was no reason for Peran and Snow to be so wary if it was just the appearance of undead.

“It didn’t happen naturally.”

“It seems you know about undead. You have a lot of general knowledge.”

Lukas ignored Snow’s words and asked.

“Who is behind it?”

“Would you even understand if I told you? You don’t even remember anything.”

“...”

She wasn't wrong.

Lukas felt a bit of regret and couldn't help but wonder if he had messed up by choosing to go with memory loss.

“We plan to leave around tomorrow afternoon. We'll be using Peran's magic, so there won't be a need to prepare much. Oh, and...”

Snow placed her hand on the books Lukas had bought.

“These will be of no use to you.”

As she said that, frost spread from her fingers, freezing all of the books in an instant.

Crack!

With a bit more pressure, the block of ice was crushed beneath her palm.

“One month.”

“...”

“This Queen is a busy person. I only plan to teach you for one month.”

Snow valued him more than he expected.

As he thought this, Lukas asked a question.

“What if, after a month, my growth doesn’t meet your expectations?”

Just before she left the room, she turned around and gave him an answer with a smile.

“Then there would be no reason to meet again in the future.”

Volume 2 - Chapter 300

When dawn came, Lukas went down to the first floor of the inn.

The first floor of the inn was quiet. The caravan was scheduled to depart in the afternoon of the next day. Their departure was delayed more than initially planned after Peran had a conversation with Rina and the others.

This meant that the mercenaries were suddenly given another free day. They would probably slowly begin to trickle back now after visiting all the bars in Bairak. They would then go to bed and sleep till noon.

Lukas ate his breakfast slowly and wasted a bit of time before leaving the inn in the afternoon.

His goal was to get the identification card he'd applied for.

When he entered the building which seemed to be the city hall, he saw Rina's acquaintance, the woman named 'Tia'.

It seemed that she remembered him as she nodded as soon as Lukas appeared.

"Were you able to get my identification?"

"Yeah. Here you go."

He looked at the card Tia handed to him.

It displayed his name, age and origin. At the bottom of the card was an engraving of a herb that had been cut in half.

This insignia signified that the identification card belonged to a member of the Red Herb*. (TL: I did think that it was 'herb' at first, but 'red hub' sounded like a more plausible name for a merchant association. It'll be Red Herb from now on. For reference, the word is '허브 – heob/hub')

Lukas was registered as an apprentice merchant. Because he was a merchant who could not work on his own, the herb on his card was only half.

'It says that I am 30 years old and from a rural village in Luanoble.'

Rina had probably written this on Lukas' behalf since he'd forgotten his memories. Nevertheless, he still wondered where the age 30 came from.

As far as he could tell, this body was still in its 20s.

'Did she think I was older because of the hair color?'

Putting those useless thoughts aside, he left the city hall. When he returned to the inn, he found Peran standing at the entrance.

"Good afternoon."

A bright smile stretched across his face. Peran was probably in his early 30s by now, but he didn't look older than someone in their mid 20s.

If they were to walk side by side, Lukas would probably be taken as the older one between them.

"Where'd you go?"

“To collect my identification card from the city hall. I got it with Rina’s help.”

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“That’s good news. There are many restrictions in the empire for those without any form of identification.”

Peran nodded.

“Are we going to head to the forest in the east now?”

“No. We’ll be going to Westroad Academy first.”

“...Westroad Academy?”

Now that he thought about it, Snow did say that they still had some things to do first. Did that have something to do with their trip to the academy?

“We plan to use the Warp Stone in this city. I try to refrain from using the Warp spell in cities as much as possible.”

Lukas nodded since he naturally knew the reason for this.

“Wouldn’t it be better to go with the caravan? I heard that they were also headed to the academy.”

“It wouldn’t be cost effective to move that many people and carriages over.”

“Then why didn’t you just take the things that were supposed to be delivered?”

If that was possible then there wouldn’t have been a need to hire the carriages or mercenaries.

Peran answered sincerely without any signs of being annoyed by his questioning.

“Those items were bought in a different region. There are many restrictions on Warping between countries. That would only be used for very special cases.”

Indeed.

As Lukas nodded in understanding, Snow walked out of the inn.

Her wooden mask was on her face once more. Well, if she didn’t wear it, she’d be even more noticeable while walking around.

“Peran, have you contacted the academy yet?”

“What about Syris and Sonya?”

“I’m sure they’re already waiting... By the way, are you sure this is okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m talking about the meeting. If things don’t go according to plan...”

Peran’s voice was serious but not grave.

“It’s not like I don’t already understand the situation. There’s no need to worry even if a problem arises.”

“Why is that?”

Snow responded in a calm and soft tone.

“Because I’ll be the strongest.”

* * *

For Lukas, Westroad Academy was one of his many ‘starting points’.

It was the first place he opened his eyes after escaping from the Abyss and inhabiting ‘Frey Blake’s body.

Nevertheless, nothing really came to mind when he thought about it. After all he'd only stayed in the academy for a month. He left at the beginning of the vacation and never returned.

But there was still one thing he remembered.

At that time, there hadn't been a Warp Stone at Westroad Academy.

Woowoong-

The Warp ended successfully.

Although there was still some brightness in his peripheral vision, that would soon fade.

"Welcome, your Majesty."

As the light from the Warp faded, they heard a voice.

After blinking a few times, he found a woman bowing in front of them in a dignified manner.

"Such a stiff greeting as always, Syris. It's been a while. Did everything work out?"

"That's right."

“Hmm.”

Snow nodded before rubbing her chin.

“Lead the way.”

“Yes.”

Syris.

The woman bowed her head once again with an elegant gesture before turning around and walking away.

Her gracefulness seemed to be second nature. This meant that she was a noble who learned about etiquette from a young age.

“The others?”

“Your Majesty is the first to arrive.”

“I see. That’s not too bad.”

Snow clicked her tongue softly, to which Syris nodded before naturally turning to look at Lukas.

“By the way, this man is...?”

Instead of Snow, it was Peran that answered.

“He’s a new member of the alliance.”

“...I see.”

Regardless of whether she was convinced or not, she didn’t ask anything after that. The sound of their footsteps was the only thing that resounded in the hallway.

‘This place.’

It was a building he’d never been to during his time in the academy.

It wasn’t a building where the cadets were taught, nor did it seem to be a dormitory, library or cafeteria.

This meant that it was probably one of the buildings for the professors. A place that students generally weren’t allowed to enter.

Syris continued to lead them through the building before finally coming to a stop in front of a door.

Then she opened it and gestured for them to enter.

Just as Lukas was about to follow Snow and Peran inside, Syris spoke to him.

“You wait outside.”

“No. Let him come.”

Syris’s eyebrows rose slightly.

“Do you mean this man will accompany you?”

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“Sir Sonya is still waiting for you.”

“I know. Sorry, but tell him to wait a bit longer.”

Syris remained silent instead of responding. She didn't show it, but she was obviously dissatisfied with Snow's order.

Snow waved her hand with a lazy expression.

"It's not an official meeting anyway. Why are you being so strict? This is fine, isn't it? It'll allow us to hide our power a bit. Peran alone is enough to deal with any unexpected situations."

"...understood."

For some reason, Syris' displeased gaze turned to Lukas.

Maybe she was taking it out on him... maybe not. Lukas decided to not think about it as he slipped inside the room.

It was a very large space. It had probably been used as a conference room in the past, but now, the furniture was far from sufficient for such a large space.

There were only three chairs surrounding a large round table.

Snow calmly walked over and occupied one of the chairs. Peran naturally took his position at her side before blinking at Lukas. He was hinting for him to stand on her other side. As he complied, Lukas couldn't help but feel like an attendant accompanying his monarch.

In fact, Snow was a Queen and Peran was a noble, so it wasn't entirely wrong.

“You might feel like your life is in danger later.”

It was Peran’s voice.

He was looking at Lukas with a serious expression.

“The ones who are about to appear might seem to transcend common sense, but they won’t harm you. I don’t understand her Majesty’s intentions, but you shouldn’t be afraid. We’ll protect you.”

“...”

Snow swung her feet back and forth with a sullen expression.

Peran’s words were like a riddle. But it didn’t seem like he was intentionally being mysterious. Instead, it was more like he didn’t have the time to explain in more detail.

Lukas’ entry into this conference room had probably been an unexpected situation for Peran too.

But Lukas soon found out the reason.

“-she here?”

A deep voice sounded from outside the door.

Lukas' eyebrow twitched slightly.

“Yes. Her Majesty is already inside... W-, wait. What are you doing?”

Bang!

—The door flew towards them.