

Great Mage 611

Volume 2 - Chapter 311

“Stance is important.”

“...”

“In particular, the basic stance is the most important. There are several reasons for taking a stance, but the most fundamental reason is that it allows you to flexibly respond to your enemy’s attack. In that regard, your basic stance isn’t bad.”

Snow closed her eyes for a moment.

Lukas realised that she was reducing the strength she put in her left arm and right leg.

Just like his condition now.

“...I see.”

After nodding to herself, she then took the stance Lukas had shown.

No. It was different. Her stance was similar, but it felt more sophisticated than his.

This surprised him.

Snow had managed to replicate a physical condition similar to Lukas' using nothing but her imagination, and she'd even found a more appropriate stance.

Her talent was astonishing.

"..."

Lukas copied Snow's stance.

When he moved his body to match her, he immediately felt the difference between the two stances.

For one, the gap between his legs had been narrower. It felt a bit too close, but if he were to use his right leg as the focal point like Snow said, this stance would allow him to stand more firmly. (TL: Lukas has big balls remember)

Secondly, his left arm was no longer hanging without purpose.

It was necessary for a swordsman to focus their weight on the hand holding the sword. In Lukas' case, it was his right. Nevertheless, because of his condition, he needed to focus his weight on his left side as well. In this new stance, his shoulders were level.

"Hmm."

He could feel a gaze.

It was Snow. She was looking at him with narrowed eyes while rubbing her chin with her hand. In this strange pose, she circled around Lukas.

“...”

A moment later, her expression changed subtly, but she didn't say anything and continued to circle, this time, much slower than before.

Then she stopped.

With one hand on her waist, Snow stared at Lukas contemplatively.

Swoosh!

Then, without any warning, she stabbed forward with the twig in her hand.

Lukas tilted his head, dodging the strike. Strangely, he felt a few strands of hair fall despite it being only an attack from a blunt stick.

Nevertheless, he had no time to think too deeply about it.

Without stopping, Snow continued to attack.

The twig appeared above his head before naturally falling down. The stab, which had enough force to pierce his eye, quickly changed to a slash. If he stood still, then he would probably get cut in half from forehead to groin. This was by no means a joke.

Whoosh!

Using his right foot as a pivot point, he rotated his body in a half circle. Although it was only a small margin, he'd managed to dodge the attack.

Snow's eyes shone. A curious smile spread across her lips as she continued to attack.

Papapat!

Her attacks were no longer limited to the twig. At first, she just used her left hand, before following with elbows, knees, feet, and even her forehead.

Lukas had no chance to fight back.

In the first place, the purpose of this spar wasn't to test Lukas' offensive abilities. Lukas knew that she was focusing on the effectiveness of the defensive stance as well as his responsiveness.

So he simply focused on dodging her attacks.

Lukas' body seemed to be moving more than ever, but in truth, the part of him that was being worked the most was his eyes.

He looked at Snow's eyes, the branch in her hand, her shoulders, and her feet in order to read her next attack. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to dodge any of her attacks.

Swoosh!

Snow's movements grew faster and more ferocious. She was gradually increasing the level of her attacks, as a result, sweat soon began pouring down Lukas' entire body.

This spar lasted for more than 10 minutes.

"—ah."

Snow let out a soft cry.

And Lukas' body was sent flying.

Thud!

Soon after, he felt pain in his back. This was natural since he'd landed on the hard ground without any form of cushioning.

“Urk...”

He couldn't stop the groan that leaked out.

As Lukas laid spread eagle on the ground, Snow looked at him with an embarrassed expression.

Suppressing the pain, Lukas squeezed out a few words.

“...that... is not a speed I could handle.”

He wasn't exaggerating, it was the truth.

Snow had continuously increased the speed and strength of her attacks to see if Lukas could react to them.

She probably wanted to see how well he could respond instead of simply copying the stance, as well as how he would fare in a real battle.

But that last attack was different.

For some reason, she used a speed that was at least a few times faster to snatch Lukas by the collar before throwing him backward.

“Mm. It was this Queen’s mistake. Sorry. I was just getting really annoyed that you kept dodging everything.”

“...”

He never would have expected to hear such a ridiculous reason.

Snow walked over to him and held out a hand with an awkward expression. He felt that she was genuinely sorry, so he grabbed her hand.

It was cool. And firm. Without a doubt, it was the hand of a swordsman.

“In any case. You really surprised me.”

Snow tapped her chin and spoke with a hint of praise in her voice.

“Your memory and comprehension are extraordinary. You’re like a sponge. You were able to almost perfectly absorb this Queen’s stance... And there is something I just realised.”

Her eyes shifted to Lukas’ left arm.

“We can fix your left arm.”

“Really?”

“Right. There is an elixir that can heal nerves and regenerate tissue. It should work for you. I know a pretty good alchemist, so I’ll get it for you. As an apology for what just happened.”

Snow smiled as she brushed dust off of Lukas’ back.

“It might even be possible to fix your right leg too.”

In the current situation, there was nothing he wanted more than to fix his arm and leg.

Apart from that, he couldn’t help but pay attention to the ‘pretty good’ alchemist that Snow had mentioned.

By far, the best alchemist that Lukas knew was Schweiser.

Although he had died, Anastasia, who had inherited Schweiser’s memories and personality, still existed in this world.

‘Is she with Ivan? Or Iris?’

In all honesty, Schweiser had always been a bit of an idealist. In other words, Lukas expected that he would have joined Iris' side. Another reason for that was their relationship which had been forged through life and death battles.

However, he wasn't sure how much 'Anastasia' had changed over the past 10 years. It was possible that she had come to share Ivan's ideologies, or she might have even joined the Anti Circle Alliance.

...Of course, it wasn't like he could directly ask about her at this point.

"In any case, my miscalculation was a good thing. I can't believe we managed to complete the first step in less than an hour."

After making sure he was okay, Snow picked up the twig again.

"Now then, let's head straight into the second step."

Volume 2 - Chapter 312

Paak!

Lukas sucked in a breath as he felt a sharp pain in his stomach. He could taste a hint of blood in his mouth. Despite this, it was clear that Snow was holding her strength back so as to avoid damaging his internal organs.

His gaze slightly blurred, he lifted his head.

Before he knew it, he saw Snow standing about ten steps away from him.

“ ... ”

He got into the stance again.

He wasn't able to see Snow's movements. Originally, he had been able to because Snow had been moving at a speed that did not surpass his dynamic vision.

Thanks to that, he was able to get used to her movements. But that had changed.

Swoosh.

Once again, Snow disappeared.

Was it his stomach again? Or his back?

Lukas thought about Snow's tendencies and battle style for a moment before coming to a conclusion.

'Front.'

As he expected, Snow appeared in front of him.

Paak!

Of course, even though he knew this, he wasn't able to react.

His wrist felt like it was about to fall off. He couldn't overcome the force of the strike and was sent rolling across the ground. Nevertheless, he didn't let go of his sword.

'She became an amazing Swordsman.'

Riki's swordsmanship.

The subtle movements that she'd developed on her own.

The traits of an Ice Elf.

And finally, the rare treasured sword Deukid.

Even Kran from Earth, who had reached the peak of mortality, was not a match for Snow.

Over the past ten years, Snow had fully digested all the products she had in her possession.

'She must have undergone grueling training.'

In other words, the power she was displayed now was her own power.

Lukas couldn't help but smile. The last time he'd seen Snow, she was wallowing in her own helplessness. There were no signs of that now. This proved that she'd perfectly overcome that tribulation.

"Are you masochistic?"

Snow was staring at him with a strange expression.

"No."

"..."

Snow looked at this man who lay on the ground, before turning to the side and spitting.

"You are a strange man."

There was a brief pause then Snow continued.

"Of course, I don't know you well enough to say this. Do you know why I said that? It's because of your eyes."

The wind blew, causing Snow's white hair to flutter.

Brushing her hair from her face, she continued.

"Detached observation is not an easy attitude to obtain. It's an innate trait that not just anyone can acquire. Usually, only those who have reached the end of their field or those who've had a special experience can... Did you say that you lost your memory?"

Lukas didn't respond.

But Snow continued to talk while fiddling with the branch as if she hadn't expected to receive an answer in the first place.

"I don't care if that's true or not. But one thing is certain, you have many secrets."

Lukas finally got to his feet again and brushed the dust off of himself.

"What do you want to say?"

"Lukas, I'm not a fan of arrogantly preaching, but I'll tell you one thing. You. No, your calm mind is basically poison at this point."

"..."

“It’s your life, your struggle. You keep contemplating problems with a distant mindset. That is not a virtue that a Swordsman needs. You need to be able to use your emotions when you need them.”

“Sorry.”

Lukas shook his head.

“This isn’t something I can change.”

This was different from his body.

Lukas had lived for an extremely long time as a Wizard. He could deceive his body, but he couldn’t deceive his mind.

Of course, it might be a good idea to destroy everything and restart from scratch. If he was going to be a Swordsman, it would be better to abandon his mindset as Snow advised.

However,

“I don’t intend to only fight as a Swordsman.”

“Do you have other means?”

“...maybe.”

He had no choice but to give a vague answer. Because even he wasn't sure at that moment.

...When he had broken into Peran's barrier back at the inn, Lukas had been greatly inspired. It felt like he might have found another means other than swordsmanship.

He looked down at the sword in his hand.

Not with this.

He couldn't accomplish it with just a high quality steel sword. It was an impossible task with a sword that didn't have runes.

“That sword.”

Lukas pointed at the sword hanging at Snow's waist.

“Can I borrow it for a moment?”

Snow's expression changed at that moment, and a frosty glint appeared in her eyes.

“Do you know how rude that question is?”

“I know. That’s why I asked so politely first.”

“That wasn’t that polite…”

Snow muttered in a soft tone, but unexpectedly, she handed Deukid to him.

“Here. Keep it clean.”

“Thanks.”

Lukas slowly pulled Deukid from its sheath

Sssng-

It felt like he would be cut just from looking at it.

It was obvious how amazing of a sword it was.

He’d also heard about the process of making this sword.

The main material had been the fang of a Dragon, and all kinds of mystical metals had been included. At that time, the greatest blacksmiths of Lucid's homeland, Icollium, quenched it for a year in lava from the hottest volcano.

When it finally began to take the form of a sword, Schweiser and his disciples engraved all kinds of runes on it.

Self recovery, sharpness maintenance, strength increase, hot and cold resistance...

Thanks to this, Deukid could still last without rusting even after 4000 years.

But the thing that Lukas was paying attention to now wasn't Deukid's formidable strength or sharpness.

It was one of Deukid's special abilities.

'Magic break.'

It depended on the user's competence, but even if a Second Class Swordsman were to wield it, they would easily be able cut through 4-star spells.

Lukas understood this principle.

Mana was essential both for spells and for runes.

Deukid's blade had the ability to interfere with the flow of mana in cast spells. In other words, it was possible for it to disperse even runes that had already been engraved. And the mana would remain on the blade for a long time.

But there were no spells cast there.

So Lukas only had one option to choose from.

“...”

Snow silently watched Lukas' actions.

It was her first time seeing a stance like this, or swordsmanship like this.

No. Her eyes narrowed.

'That isn't swordsmanship.'

“...”

Lukas stopped moving and slowly let out a breath.

“This is a large forest, but the mana here isn’t dense. That’s probably because many people have been here.”

“What?”

“Nevertheless, I think I got the hang of it.”

As Lukas finished muttering, he drew a line in the air with Deukid.

And

Fwoosh!

A flame appeared in the air from nothing.

Volume 2 - Chapter 313

The fire didn’t go out even after hanging in the air for a while.

Snow silently watched on from the side. Well, it was more accurate to say that she wasn’t sure what to say at that moment. After observing for a while longer, she walked towards the flickering flames and stopped a short distance away before stretching her hand out.

She felt the heat on her skin.

In other words, it wasn't an illusion.

There was no difference between the flames that floated in front of her and the flames of a bonfire. After finishing her observation, Snow turned to look at Lukas once again.

"This... did you create this?"

"That's right."

"It looks like magic."

"It's the 2-star spell, Fireball."

Fire was one of the most basic attributes so he didn't really need to add any more explanation after that.

Snow's expression became complicated.

"Are you a Wizard?"

"No."

Lukas shook his head.

He never would have thought that there would be a day when he denied that he was a Wizard, but this was the reality. He couldn't claim to be Wizard now that his manaroom had collapsed. As the Great Mage, Lukas was naturally extremely knowledgeable about this field.

Snow, on the other hand, furrowed her eyebrows as if the person in front of her was speaking a language that she'd never heard before in her life.

"If you're not a Wizard, then how can you use magic? Are you trying to mess with this Queen?"

"Even those who are not Swordsmen can use a sword."

"Those two things are completely different. As far as I know, you can't even enter the field of magicology without the right talent. It's completely different from swords that anyone can make or pick up."

This was the truth.

Even if one wasn't a Knight or a Swordsman, they would still be able to use a sword. Even if they might not be able to fight against someone, anyone would be able to use a kitchen knife.

In other words, there were no 'conditions' or 'qualifications' that one needed before being able to hold a sword.

Magic, on the other hand, was different. People who could not sense mana would never be able to use magic.

Snow knew that Lukas didn't have mana in his body. She also knew that he didn't have any magical items, artifacts or scrolls.

And the more she knew, the more suspicious she became.

"The principle behind it is simple."

Lukas moved Deukid once again.

Once again, she couldn't help but feel that it wasn't swordsmanship.

It felt more like he was using the sword like a paddle.

"I wrapped the mana distributed throughout the atmosphere around the sword. Then, before the mana disappears, I rearranged it in the specific pattern of the spell. Then..."

Snow narrowed her eyes. She hadn't realised it before, but now that she was paying attention— Lukas' sword was wriggling in a very specific manner.

It was like he was drawing a small picture by using the tip of the sword as a brush.

And.

Paht!

This time, a white ball appeared in the air.

“The 1-star spell, Magic Missile.”

He didn't just stop at casting the spell. Since it was an attack spell, he had to carry out calculations in order for it to fly to its target.

How fast the spell could move, air resistance(drag), wind, terrain, and even the location of the target.

—Lukas stretched the sword forward.

“...”

To Snow, it was more like a Maestro(1) giving instructions to the musicians than a Swordsman.

With a soft hiss, the Magic Missile shot forward before striking a tree at the edge of the clearing.

Thud.

The sound was much heavier than she expected, and many leaves fell from the tree, almost leaving it bare.

“...how is that possible?”

Snow grunted softly in disbelief.

If she were a Magic Warrior, then she would have been able to understand the principles Lukas had explained to an extent, but Snow was a Swordsman who had nothing to do with mana.

That was why it was so hard for her to understand and accept what she was seeing.

Her gaze turned to Deukid.

“Is that a skill that you can only use with a sword?”

“It’s more efficient if I do it with a sword, but the effect isn’t that good with this sword.”

In the first place, Deukid’s characteristic was magic break. Therefore, mana only stayed on the sword for a short period. No matter how Lukas tried, he would never be able to make anything more than a 4-star spell in that time.

'I need a sword that can store mana on its blade.'

If he had that, then the range of spells that Lukas would be able to cast would increase exponentially.

"Hmm."

After a while, Snow shook her head and her expression was no longer as complicated as it was before. This wasn't because she'd finally understand what Lukas was talking about. Instead, she'd simply stopped thinking about it.

She just decided to accept it as it was.

Lukas could use magic in a way that she'd never seen before.

"That's perfect for ranged attacks. I think it would also be quite useful as a surprise attack. Because no one would think you could use magic by swinging a sword."

Lukas agreed.

Unless they were an Archmage class Wizard, they wouldn't even notice that the mana in the air had been disturbed.

Lukas slid Deukid back into its sheath before returning it to Snow. She shrugged and collected her sword.

“Sorry. I’d love to lend it to you, but this sword is very precious to this Queen.”

“It looks like a really valuable sword. Did someone give it to you as a present?”

It was none other than Lukas who had given Deukid to Snow, but Lukas’ existence had been completely erased from this world. When he recalled this fact, his heart ached in his chest. It felt like he was digging into a wound that was just beginning to heal.

Nevertheless, he needed to check. He didn’t know when again he’d be able to use the flow of the conversation to ask a question like this.

“I got it from my comrade.”

“...”

“Well, even if I were to tell you, it’s not like you’d know them.”

Feeling like it would be best to not ask anything further, Lukas kept his mouth shut.

Volume 2 - Chapter 314

Snow realised that she couldn’t teach Lukas like a normal Swordsman. This man in front of her was a rare breed of Swordsman who possessed a special never before seen battle style.

More importantly, he was very intuitive and had an outstanding personality.

Neither his intuition nor his personality could in any way be considered weakness.

In other words, Lukas didn't need any help from her with regards to those two factors. This meant that she could focus her attention on other things.

For example, the openings that even Lukas himself didn't realise he had. The most efficient way to do this was to teach him the pros and cons of specific stances.

Fortunately, Lukas' comprehensive ability was extraordinary.

No, it was even more than just extraordinary.

Snow had encountered many geniuses.

And among them, she'd even met 'unprecedented geniuses' with ridiculous talent like Peran.

But none of them had the same qualities that Lukas did.

For example, when someone became aware of a bad habit, it usually took them a few months or even years to fix it, even if they knew that they had it. (TL: I've been trying to stop biting my nails for 15 years T~T.)

Habits were called such because they weren't easily fixed or changed, and in some cases, they were even harmful to the body if left unchecked.

But Lukas was different.

As soon as this man heard Snow's advice, he would nod once and immediately get rid of the aforementioned habit.

'That means he has complete control of his body.'

She was amazed by this fact, but she was all the more disappointed.

If the condition of his arms and legs was better, and if his tenacity towards swordsmanship was a bit higher, a Master Class Swordsman would have been born as easily as having a meal.

In fact, the thing that disappointed her the most wasn't Lukas' disability, it was the fact that he didn't seem to be very interested in swordsmanship. This wasn't that different from saying he had no talent for it.

In any field, it was impossible to succeed without tenacity and a certain amount of obsession.

—After she'd finished giving him a rough explanation about stances and swordsmanship, Snow focused on giving him more theoretical explanations.

"Consider the sword as your life."

“ ... ”

“...when I say this, people usually ask ‘What if I lose my sword after becoming obsessed with it’.”

Snow decided to not pay attention to his reactions.

“You have to be careful to not let such a situation occur. Is there anything worse than a Swordsman without a sword? For us, our sword is like our arm, our leg, even our torso. Of course, if you fight, there’s a chance of getting hurt. Your sword might get chipped, or even broken to the point where it’s unusable. But it’s just like your body. If you don’t take care of it, you can’t use it.”

It sounded like sophistry, but strangely enough, it also seemed plausible.

This wasn’t because Snow’s words had solid logic or anything like that. Instead, it was the confidence in her voice that made her strange, nonsensical words feel more trustworthy.

“That’s why you should never be neglectful when taking care of your sword. Well, this Queen’s sword doesn’t need to be taken care of, but yours is different. It’s not just about wiping off the blood and flesh that might remain on it. It’s about whether the joint between the blade and the hilt is loose, or whether the sheath is too large or too small. You must always make sure to check these things carefully. In a sense, you have to pay more attention to it than to your body. If you have any kind of discomfort in your body, your brain would send a signal immediately, but for your sword, you wouldn’t know until you see it and feel it for yourself.”

To put it simply, the importance of a sword to a Swordsman was something that could be emphasised hundreds of times. Lukas put his hand on the hilt of the sword hanging from his waist, his expression changing subtly.

...In all honesty, he didn't think it was possible for him to consider this item as his life. For Lukas, who was a Wizard, a sword was nothing more than a tool.

Even as a Wizard, he didn't pay much attention to weapons like staves or canes.

Perhaps it was this mindset that caused him to feel that the Warrior King Fist was more suitable than sword techniques.

"Alright, that's enough for the boring explanation. Now, we will spar again. But this time, don't focus on just defending like before. Use all the means you..."

Snow suddenly stopped talking. Her bright expression also fell, becoming serious.

Then, she turned her head and stared into the forest.

"...the forest."

"What's wrong?"

"The forest is crying."

Snow tilted her head to the side, her long ears twitching slightly. It seemed that she was listening to something.

After a while.

An exceptionally cold expression descended upon her face.

Was that... killing intent?

Without turning her head, Snow spoke to Lukas.

“I’ll be right back. I won’t be gone for long, so wait here.”

“What?”

Taht.

Snow’s figure disappeared without another word. In fact, she’d left before Lukas had even responded. He hadn’t even managed to figure out which direction she’d gone in.

Lukas couldn’t help but look at the spot she had been standing in before she disappeared with a strange expression on his face.

Whoosh.

A warm wind blew across the clearing. It was unpleasant, like someone licking his skin with a slimy tongue.

...It was probably just in his head.

Shaking the thoughts away, Lukas decided to head over to where the tents had been erected in the clearing. There, he found cooking and eating utensils.

Now that he thought about it, he felt that he should probably eat something. After all, he hadn't had a single bite since entering the forest.

Heading over to the nearby river, Lukas filled a bucket with water and caught a few fish. Afterward, he returned to the clearing and made a bonfire.

Luckily, firewood had already been stored beforehand, but it still took him a while to start the fire.

This was because he'd tried to cast Fireball with his steel sword.

As he expected, it was much less efficient than Deukid, so it took a while for him to get the hang of it. In the end, he was only able to make the Fireball after trying for 10 minutes.

If this was how long it took to just make a Fireball, then he wouldn't be able to get much practice. Nevertheless, there was some fortune in his misfortune. It was the fact that he would be able to greatly reduce the time through practice.

Of course, for him to use high level magic, he'd probably need better equipment or a more suitable environment, but at the very least, he would be able to use low level magic after he got the hang of it.

There was another thing that he realised.

'I can't do it with my fingers.'

Nor could he use a tree branch.

In order to wrap mana around an object, it seemed that a certain amount of metal was required. In addition, the tip of the blade was very sharp, so it was very suitable for arranging and rearranging the mana. On the other hand, his fingertips were blunt, so it was impossible for them to carry out such a delicate task.

At this point, Lukas was no longer using his sword as a sword. Instead, it was more like a staff that just happened to be in the shape of a sword.

He roughly grilled the fish and ate it before continuing to practice his swordsmanship.

Lukas decided to simply name his swordsmanship the Zero Technique. (TL: Or zero style?)

It was only possible for him to use low level magic, but Lukas found that training with the sword was pretty fun.

However, he didn't know if he could climb back to the Absolute level with just this.

...To become an Absolute.

For now, he could only look at it as an incredibly distant goal.

‘...power.’

In the end, the thing Lukas lacked the most was power.

If he had power, he could have revealed himself in a spectacular manner during the meeting. He could have asked them about the strife in the Circle without needing to worry about anything.

He needed power.

But he didn't have any now.

With this thought, Lukas immersed himself in his training.

Volume 2 - Chapter 315

After a while, his body began announcing its limit. Even when he stood still, he could feel his arm muscles trembling.

He wasn't sure how long he'd been training with the Zero Technique, but it seemed that he would have to stop for now.

“Huu.”

A sigh mixed with regret escaped his lips.

The environment was lacking.

There was too little mana in the Amalgam Forest. Because of the low mana concentration in the forest, Lukas was only able to cast 3 Star spells at best with his current weapon.

It would be more effective if he trained in a place where the mana concentration was more dense, like the Ispania Mountains.

After letting out another sigh, he returned to the area with the tents. There, he drank from the water he'd gather before going to pick fruits from the nearby trees. Of course, it was for food.

In all honesty, it was a very dangerous act to carelessly eat fruits in a forest, but there were half rotted fruit skins beside the tents which let him know that some of them were safe to eat. With that logic, he only picked fruits that had the same skin so that he wouldn't have to worry about getting sick.

Crunch.

It was hard and sour. However, the aftertaste was a bit sweet.

In a word, it was edible.

While struggling to chew the fruit, Lukas looked up at the sky. It seemed that dawn was approaching.

It was only then that he belatedly realised two things.

One was the fact that he'd been focused on training for almost an entire day.

And the other was that Snow, who said she would come back soon, still hadn't returned yet.

Whoosh.

"..."

The wind blew again.

And just like before, it felt warm and ominous.

* * *

—Five days before.

In the capital of the Kastkau Empire, Kausymphony.

Swoosh.

A man appeared from the Warp Stone. The head guard gestured to stop the other guards who were prepared to approach the man and ask for his identification.

“...”

Peran looked around with a solemn gaze.

This could be said to be his first time returning home to Kausymphony, the empire’s capital, but he didn’t feel particularly nostalgic.

Of course, the same would be true for his destination. Or at least, that was what he thought now, but it might be different when he actually arrived.

He walked through the streets.

Even when it was late at night, the streets of Kausymphony were usually filled with people. Someone had once said that there is no night in the streets of the empire. That saying wasn’t completely wrong.

After walking for a while, Peran’s surroundings finally began to grow quieter. This was natural since this area was under the direct control of one of the noble families.

Finally, a familiar mansion appeared in his sight. In front of this beautiful mansion which exuded an opulent aura even in the darkness of night, was a structure that Peran was even more familiar with.

It was the main gate, which was large enough to accommodate four carriages passing simultaneously, and the four guards guarding it.

—The Jun Family Mansion.

The place where Peran had been born and raised.

“Welcome.”

“It’s been a while since we last greeted you, Young Master.”

The guards were not surprised and instead welcomed him politely.

This meant that they’d already gotten word. With a slow nod, he accepted their polite greeting.

As he passed through the main gate and entered the garden, a butler appeared before him. He claimed that he would guide him, but Peran thought that it was an unneeded luxury, so he continued on his own with a firm attitude.

“It’s fine.”

Of course, that wasn't the only reason.

The person he was about to meet would probably also want him to be alone.

Click.

The mansion was quiet. Even though the moon was high in the sky, maids could still be seen around, but there was no sign of the occupants of the house. The hallways were practically empty. Recalling the bustling downtown area that he'd just passed through, Peran couldn't help but feel like he'd stepped into a completely different world.

...It gave him a strange feeling of incongruity, but he shook his head.

It was probably because this was his first time returning to the mansion in 5 years.

Before long, Peran finally stopped walking.

In front of him was a door made from cypress wood, and behind it was the study of the Family Head, a place that not only the servants but even Peran and Lylia could not enter without permission.

He knocked on the door lightly, and it wasn't long before he got a response.

"Come in."

Candles flickered in the room, and a middle aged man could be seen sitting behind an auburn desk.

“It’s been a while.”

His heart shook a bit when he heard the familiar, caring voice.

The man was Peran’s father, the Head of the Jun Family.

Shepard Jun smiled softly, and rejoiced at being reunited with his son after such a long time.

“Have you been well?”

“Right. Nothing happened. How about you? I worried a lot because you never sent any letters.”

“...please forgive me for being an unfilial child.”

“That’s enough. To think that you’d turn out like this...”

“...”

“Would you like some tea? I remember you preferred tea leaves from the Kalur Mountains. I think we got some high quality ones...”

“Father.”

Peran interrupted Shepard.

This was a rude action that was rarely committed by Peran, who was very strict when it came to manners. That’s why, instead of rebuking him, Shepard stopped talking and looked him in the eyes.

“I would like to know why you summoned me from Westroad Academy as the Head of the Jun Family.”

A few days ago, Shepard had summoned Peran, who was at the Westroad Academy, with the authority of the ‘Family Head’.

It had been almost 5 years since Peran had last set foot in this house. And in that time, Shepard had never interfered with Peran’s actions. No matter what he did, he let him do as he pleased. Of course, Peran had never done anything that was unbecoming of someone from the family.

“...”

Shepard realised that Peran wanted to hear the main point before they had their reunion conversation.

A bitter smile spread across his lips.

Talking about the private things before the public things was something that was often done by older politicians. Although it was simple, it allowed them to form a closer connection to the other person which made it difficult to deal with and the effect of the later conversation better.

However, since he had hit an iron wall like this, there was nothing more for Shepard to say.

“Hmm.”

Shepard let out a soft cough and his gaze became serious.

“Son.”

“Yes.”

“You don’t regret it, do you?”

Knowing what he meant by not regretting, Peran answered with a firm tone.

“I don’t.”

“...I don’t understand why you want to walk down such a thorny path.”

“...”

“I would like to hear an honest answer. I’m asking as your father, not as the Head of the Jun Family. Can you tell me a bit about your inner feelings?”

The sincerity in Shepard’s voice was clear.

Peran was silent for a while.

“...the ideology of the current Circle makes me uncomfortable.”

Then he spoke in a low, cold tone.

“Whenever I see them bickering with each other, I can’t help but find it pathetic. I’m disappointed in their clumsy decision making. I don’t want to be associated with their ideologies. I can’t even think about it. That’s why I chose a different path. A path I think is right.”

“What if that means becoming hostile with the Jun Family?”

“Even if I have to face the empire itself, my thoughts will not change.”

“...”

Shepard's expression was a bit strange.

But it seemed that he'd expected such a response to some extent.

"It's hard to have such unshaken subjectivity. It's amazing."

"..."

Of all the things he had expected, a compliment wasn't one of them.

No matter how gentle Shepard appeared to be, he was a member of the Circle and an executive at that.

Even though he criticised his ideology, he still complimented his attitude.

...This was more than just 'broad minded'.

"I'd like to make a suggestion."

"...I have no intention of joining the Circle, Father. My answer is the same as it was 5 years ago."

Regardless of whether it was an order from his father or the Family Head, his answer would not change.

Nevertheless, Shepard's smile deepened when he heard his response.

"This time it's different. This time, I will be the one not joining the Circle."

"...what do you mean?"

"I'll tell you one thing. Your father has also been displeased with the Circle's ideologies for a long time."

Sss.

Suddenly, black smoke began flowing from Shepard's body.

No, it wasn't smoke. It was mana that was so dark and thick that it was impossible to see through.

It was darker than the night sky and gave off a creepier feeling than the shining chitin of an insect.

Peran's face became harder than a stone statue.

"Black Magic? Father, why..."

Volume 2 - Chapter 316

Shepard looked at Peran.

“As my son, I’m sure that you know. The fact that I’ve been frustrated at being stuck at 7 stars for 20 years.”

...He knew.

Although he’d never mentioned it, Peran knew just how deep the despair and frustration Shepard felt was.

Of course, his father never showed it.

Instead, it was the fire always burning brightly in the library in the middle of the night when he was young. It was the many books that had become stained from the sweat of his father’s hands.

He knew that before being the 4th Tower Master and the Head of the Jun Family, Shepard Jun was a Wizard.

But Peran still couldn’t understand.

“Black magic and Magicology are separate fields. It was you, father, that taught me that.”

“There is no difference. Black magic is aimed at exploring mana, interpreting the truth, and understanding the laws of the world. It is not fundamentally different from magic.”

“...no.”

Crunch.

Peran grits his teeth. The anger and betrayal in his voice no longer subtle.

That was an insult.

It was not only an insult to Peran, but to every Wizard who followed the path of magicology.

“Black magic is a cursed power created by using the death of the innocent. It does not qualify as a field of study. Do you not know how many lives were lost to develop that terrible power?”

“It feels like this is the first time in 10 years that I’ve seen you so excited.”

“...”

“First of all, be polite. Even though I’ve started using black magic, I am still your father.”

“That is something I’m wondering about.”

Peran's cold gaze was locked onto Shepard's face.

"Are you really my father?"

"Hahaha."

With a soft whoosh, the black mana that had been spreading out disappeared.

"My eyes have been opened. And son, so will yours. After all, you are a Wizard like me."

"What?"

"Every time we uncover the secrets of mana and peek at the truth, it fills us with unparalleled pleasure. Can you imagine? Knowledge capable of satisfying even our unending desire, and satisfaction sweeter than any drug... It is a world that every Wizard dreams of."

Shepard emphasised once again.

"Right. 'Every Wizard'. The world of Wizards is about to open up, and you too should ride the wave."

"What are you talking about..."

“You don’t know, do you?”

Shepard’s voice became calm.

“There is already no one among the high level Wizards that still oppose him.”

Shuffle.

At that moment, someone walked out from behind Shepard as though he had been standing there the entire time. But he’d never noticed.

Their face, which was engulfed in darkness, was then revealed in the candle light.

“...!”

Peran’s mouth fell open.

* * *

Jik-

Lukas drew a line in the bark of a tree with his sword.

It slashed diagonally through the four vertical lines that had been there before.

Five days.

That's how long it had been since Snow disappeared.

After so much time had passed, he didn't feel like silently waiting any longer. Even if he wanted to concentrate on training, he couldn't focus because his mind would be drawn to Snow. In addition, he had already reached as far as he could while training in the Amalgam Forest.

If he wanted to grow stronger, then he would have to find another location.

Shuk.

Lukas sheathed his sword before fastening it to his waist. Then, he packed the water and fruits he'd gathered. If he used them sparingly, it should last him about two days.

Firstly, he planned to head north. The reason for that was simple. They had come from the south. In other words, if he headed in that direction, he would leave the forest.

'The forest is crying.'

That's what Snow said. So the reason that she had disappeared and hadn't returned yet was more than likely related to the forest.

Naturally, in order to find traces of her, he had to go deeper into the forest, not out of it.

After deciding where to go, Lukas headed North along the river.

—A short while later, he heard a sound behind him.

It was a very loud sound, as though its creator had no intention of hiding their presence as they rushed forward with tremendous momentum.

It wasn't just one person.

A group of people was rushing forward at a tremendous speed.

Then, after noticing Lukas' presence, they changed direction and surged towards him.

Ssrrng-

By the time Lukas drew his sword, they had already surrounded him.

Three men and two women.

All of them were quite strong.

Their intimidating aura, formation, and the speed they moved towards Lukas were enough to prove this.

The one who called out to Lukas was the man in the middle. He was a handsome man with a gentle expression, but there was a suspicious glint in his eyes as he observed Lukas.

“Who are you? And why are you in this forest?”

“...I am Lukas.”

“...Lukas?”

They exchanged glances. It seemed like they were asking each other if they'd heard the name before, but all of them shook their heads.

“You, why are you messing around in this forest?”

This time, it was a large man with a ferocious expression that called out in a rough voice.

“Aren't you the same?”

Naturally, Lukas' response wouldn't be soft.

Perhaps because he found his attitude displeasing, the giant's eyebrows twitched.

"...how dare a cripple question me?"

It was then that the gentle looking man opened his mouth again.

"We are the 'Swordnaz'."

"...Swordnaz?"

It was a name he'd never heard before.

When Lukas tilted his head to the side in confusion, the suspicion in the man's eyes became deeper.

Now that he looked closely, Lukas realised this man was an elf. He'd only just noticed the long ears sticking out of his hair.

"Look at this bastard. He doesn't even know who we are. He's obviously a spy who somehow managed to infiltrate this place. We should just kill him here. No. Let's torture him to death so that we can extract some information!"

The giant loosened his neck as he said those words, killing intent lacing his voice.

“...Hoffman, shut up.”

When the elf snapped at him with an annoyed voice, the cheeks of the man named Hoffman twitched.

“Hey, Eric. Were you just talking to me?”

Ignoring them, Lukas thought to himself.

Swordnaz, Swordnaz.

...Swordna?

“Are you guys acquainted with Snow... no, with Swordna?”

“...oho. Look at this bastard. He’s trying to act now.”

Hoffman, who still thought he was a spy, loosened his joints as a fierce smile spread across his lips. (TL: He’s loosening a lot of things)

“That’s right, but this situation is urgent, so please state your....”

“Eric.”

Suddenly, one of the women interrupted him. By her attire, Lukas assumed that she was a Wizard.

“We have to hide.”

“...!”

Eric hurriedly looked up at the sky, and Lukas’ gaze followed.

It was strange. Even though it was the middle of the day, the sunlight still felt too strong.

He also saw someone standing in the sky, but he wasn’t able to clearly see who it was.

“That’s...”

It was probably not meant as an answer to Lukas’ murmur, but Eric muttered in a low voice with a sigh.

“Monster... Queen...”

Monster Queen?

Just as Lukas' eyes narrowed slightly.

"Dodge!"

Hoffman suddenly cried out.

It was only then that Lukas realised why the sun seemed so bright.

There were two suns in the sky.

Rumble...

And one of them was slowly descending.

Straight towards them.

Volume 2 - Chapter 317

Lukas knew that he was in danger.

After all, he had no way to deal with the incoming attack. Of course, it wasn't a real sun, instead, it was an artificially created 'sun-like flame'. From what he could tell, it wasn't a spell either.

In other words, this meant that he had no way to destroy it.

Moreover, he couldn't avoid it either.

Even as it fell towards them, the artificial sun was large enough to seemingly cover the entire sky.

—There was no time to think. The sun was growing closer and closer. Even though it was still some distance away, he was already beginning to feel the burning heat on his skin.

Lukas' eyes shifted to the river.

It was a bit of a gamble, but if he were to throw himself in there...

Suddenly, Lukas' body began to float.

'This...'

It was magic. He could even tell who was using it. It was the Wizard girl standing not so far away from him.

She spun her fingers slightly.

Whoosh!

And Lukas was sent flying into the river.

It was a little rough, but he knew she wasn't trying to drown him. Nevertheless, it was so sudden that he still gulped down a few mouthfuls of water.

He almost lost consciousness.

The world seemed to be spinning around him at an incredible rate. Despite the loud sound of the current in his ears, he was still able to hear a large explosion followed by the sound of flames.

He couldn't help but feel that even the middle of a warzone wouldn't be that loud.

He cursed his body. Come to think of it, swimming was a really good full body exercise, but because of the condition of his arms and legs, his movements in the water were not natural.

No. It wouldn't have mattered even if his arms and legs were normal since he was being dragged around by magic.

...It was gradually becoming harder for him to hold his breath.

'If this continued, I might actually drown.'

Just as this thought appeared in his mind...

“Gasp!”

Lukas’ body surfaced.

As he panted like a wet mouse, the first thing he checked was whether his sword was okay. Fortunately, he could still feel the now familiar heavy weight at his waist. Fortunately, he’d fastened it securely.

...A bitter smile stretched across his lips.

He couldn’t believe that the first thing he’d checked in such a chaotic situation was whether his sword was still there. Perhaps this was proof that he was subconsciously following Snow’s advice.

In any case, he’d managed to survive.

Sweeping his wet hair out of his face, Lukas finally looked around.

Stifling heat.

That, together with his burning red surroundings, was the first thing that Lukas noticed. The loud noise he’d heard while submerged in the river hadn’t been an illusion.

The part of the forest that had been hit with the artificial sun was decimated. The area around him cratered as if it had been struck by a meteorite, and the residual flames had lit the surrounding forest on fire.

The billowing smoke coloured the entire sky gray.

This place could no longer be called a forest.

“...cough.”

This didn't look good.

In most cases, it wasn't the fire itself that killed those trapped within its blaze. Instead, it was the smoke that suffocated them.

Lukas tore a strip of cloth from his clothes, soaked it in the river, and then wrapped it around his nose and mouth. Although it wasn't much, this would be able to help him survive for a while.

Firstly, he decided to head downstream where the fire had not yet spread.

Suddenly...

Boom!

Dark clouds rolled in overhead.

Lukas narrowed his eyes slightly.

Fwoosh-

Then, rain began to fall heavily to the ground. It carried a fierce momentum almost as if a hole had been pierced in the sky.

Lukas had suffered from the rain not so long ago. Although it didn't leave him with a good memory, that was beside the point for now.

'This is a spell.'

To be precise, it was a magic application technique.

It wasn't just to make it rain.

Rumble-

A part of the river surged, becoming a huge wave that began to extinguish the fires spreading through the forest.

In an instant, the flames, which had been growing at a frightening rate, were extinguished. It was a wise move to deal with the fire before it was given the chance to spread.

Lukas looked up at the caster of the spell.

Standing in the middle of the crater with a staff that was excessively large for her small physique was a girl covered in a haze of billowing mana.

“...”

The girl lowered her staff with an expressionless face.

In terms of the spells and techniques that were used, what she'd just done couldn't be considered particularly difficult. However, putting out all the fires in such a large area was no simple feat.

To put it simply, one would need to have enormous mana reserves in order to carry out such an endeavor.

'7-stars?'

Lukas' expression became a bit strange.

He knew how rare 7-star Wizards were.

Even in Kastkau, which was known as the Magic Empire, there were only five official 7-star Archmages.

He couldn't believe that such a young girl was an Archmage.

He wondered if she wasn't human. Or if she was older than she looked. From her ears, she didn't seem to be an elf like the man named Eric.

Suddenly.

"Gasp!"

Another person emerged from the river.

It was the large man from earlier. From what he remembered, his name was Hoffman.

"Dammit. Cough! Cough! Dumb bitch!"

It seemed that Hoffman had swallowed a lot of water while submerged in the river. As soon as he got out, he lifted his head to the sky and swore heavily.

Then his gaze finally turned to Lukas.

“What the hell? Yuriah, did you save this guy?”

“Right.”

“Why did you save him?”

“We can’t let him die.”

“What does that mean...”

As Yuriah walked over, Hoffman asked.

“What about Eric?”

“He went after the queen. I thought out of all of us, he would be the last to do something so stupid.”

Among the elves, it was common to find those willing to give up their lives for the forest, and Eric, as a High Elf, was especially so. There was no way he could give up his anger after seeing something like this.

“He’d obviously be turned to ashes if he were to fight alone, so the others went to help him and left you here to put out the fire?”

“Mhm. That’s right.”

“...shit. Things have become messed up. To think we were separated in a situation like this.”

Hoffman clicked his tongue. Eric was usually calm, but it was understandable that he wouldn’t be able to remain so in a situation like this. Perhaps the Monster Queen had calculated this as well. If that really was the case though, she would be too frightening.

Yuriah then turned to look at Lukas.

“You, do you know Lady Snow?”

“You idiot! How can you say that name...!”

“Right. I know her.”

“...huh?”

Hoffman blinked.

On the other hand, Yuriah continued to speak in her uniquely emotionless tone.

“This man knows about Lady Snow. He even mentioned the name himself. But he didn’t know about us... Don’t you understand what that means?”

“I don’t.”

There was no change to her expression, but for some reason, it felt like that doll-like face was annoyed.

“...it means that he was being tested here to become a part of ‘Swordnaz’.”

“What did you say?”

Hoffman started slightly.

Lukas was able to realise something from their conversation.

For one, they were probably Snow’s subordinates and members of the Anti Circle Alliance. In fact, based on their individual strength, they were probably elite soldiers.

“We are the Swordnaz, the elite unit who serve as Lady Snow’s personal escort.”

Her voice did not even waver an inch as she continued.

“Four days ago, we received a distress signal from Lady Snow.”

“...”

Four days ago, that was the day after Snow disappeared.

Lukas’ expression hardened.

In other words, Snow was trying to deal with some threat in the forest but called for reinforcements because she didn’t think she could handle it alone.

‘There is something that Snow can’t handle on her own?’

It was hard to imagine just what kind of threat that could be.

“On our way here, we ran into the Monster Queen. We couldn’t afford to engage her, so we deliberately ignored her and continued on our way, but it seems that she followed us here.”

They hadn’t even noticed her pursuit. Yuriah added at the end.

Hoffman kicked a rock away and spoke in a slightly stiff tone.

“Hey! Should you really be saying all of that?”

“In order for us to understand the situation from his perspective, we need to gain his trust. To do so, it’s better to reveal our identity and goal first, besides, was there anything wrong with what I said?”

“...Wizards.”

Hoffman couldn’t have known, but Yuriah’s decision was the most effective towards Lukas.

“My name is Lukas. As you expected, I arrived in this forest about five days ago. With Snow.”

He then began to briefly describe what had happened over the past few days.

Volume 2 - Chapter 318

“...so you lost contact since then? For five days?”

“Right.”

“Hmm.”

The worry on Hoffman’s face was evident. Although his bad temper was apparent, his loyalty to Snow was undoubtable.

“...I don't think there was anything wrong with what you said. It doesn't seem like you're lying, but there is one thing I don't quite understand.”

“What is it?”

“The fact that you were taking the test to join the Swordnaz.”

Hoffman's eyelids twitched slightly.

“Of course, Lady Snow's thoughts and intentions are not something that a blockhead like me could understand. Nevertheless, it should be enough to trust my eyes, right? From what I see, you're not good enough to become one of us.”

“...”

“Just asking, but are you a Swordsman?”

As he said that, his gaze drifted to the sword hanging from Lukas' waist.

Lukas didn't respond. Swordsman... Could he be considered a Swordsman now?

Hoffman snorted at Lukas' silence.

“You’re not. I can tell that much just from looking at you. Because the body of a person who is used to holding a sword carries certain traces. At best, you have probably been training with the sword for less than a month.”

“...”

“Then is that sword just for self defense... or are you a Wizard?”

“No.”

It was Yuriah, not Lukas, who responded to this question.

“That man is not a Wizard.”

Lukas never thought there would be a day when someone denied him being a Wizard, but it was an unavoidable truth.

He had no choice but to gently accept it. In the past, this might have caused him to feel a bit gloomy, but he’d received a great shock not so long ago, so it was only able to cause a small amount of damage. (TL: Emotional damage)

“Then... What’s so special about you?”

Hoffman asked in a reluctant tone.

Like the first time they met, he wasn't being intentionally malicious. It seemed that he simply wanted to know why Snow acknowledged Lukas.

Of course, although Lukas also wanted to meet their expectations...

Most of the mana in this area that had been mixed in the atmosphere disappeared because of the fierce flames that burned everything away.

Even if he drew his sword and swung it...

...

...

As expected, he could not use magic in such an environment.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

With a soft mutter, Lukas returned his sword to its sheath.

The degree of doubt in Hoffman's eyes became stronger.

Yuriah no longer showed any interest in him. Now that she'd received all the information about Snow, it felt like she no longer cared about his existence.

"Ah. You there. Do you want to just stay here?"

"Why?"

"Compared to where we're about to go, isn't this place safer?"

Although it was a bit stiff, it seemed that she was being considerate in her own way.

Or perhaps she was just looking down on him.

"We're going to reunite with Eric and the rest first. It's highly likely that we will encounter the Monster Queen, and eventually fight the threat that Lady Snow is currently facing."

"I'll go with you."

"Don't you know that you might die?"

“I don’t care.”

“...”

“Hey, just leave him be. He probably wouldn’t understand even if you kept explaining it to him.”

After Hoffman said this, Yuriah didn’t say anything more.

“The Queen might be nearby. There might also be other threats lurking in the forest, so it’s better to keep a close eye on our surroundings and follow them at as cautious a speed as possible.”

“What? Wouldn’t Eric die then?”

“No matter how upset he is, he wouldn’t try to fight with only three people.”

“Bullshit. You’re only saying that because you didn’t see the look in his eyes as he left.”

Hoffman and Yuriah soon began to bicker. The atmosphere of their back and forth was quite fierce. In fact, it felt so harsh that they didn’t appear like teammates at all.

It felt like they had a bad relationship from the start.

Perhaps Eric was the one who usually mediated between the two.

—But it soon became impossible for them to hurry like Hoffman initially wanted them to. Of course, this wasn't because he'd finally agreed with Yuriah's opinion or anything of the sort.

"...what... is this?"

Hoffman poked at the air in front of him with a smile. His thick fingers seemed to be blocked by something invisible.

It wasn't the air. It wasn't visible, but it seemed like there was a wall in front of them.

"What's this?"

Hoffman muttered again.

Yuriah, who was wearing a conical hat, stepped forward.

"...a barrier."

"What did you say? A barrier? Then break it."

“I can’t.”

“What?”

“I’ve never seen such a solid barrier before. Its structure makes it impossible to break from the outside. The person who created this is a much stronger Wizard than I am.”

Yuriah bit her lip.

She probably had a lot of pride in reaching such a level.

“Hmm.”

Hoffman lifted the sword that was hanging from his shoulder. It was a sword large enough to be mistaken for a small tree, and it seemed to weigh quite a lot, but Hoffman was able to lift it easily with one hand.

Then he took a stance.

“Hup!”

Then he swung it.

It sounded like the air was torn apart.

Bang!

Then, the sound of an explosion rippled through the area as sparks were sent flying. Hoffman grit his teeth and pushed down on the sword with all his strength, but there wasn't even a scratch on the barrier. He kept going till his face became red and his blood vessels looked like they were about to pop.

"...kuah!"

Shortly after, Hoffman raised the white flag.

Panting, he stabbed his sword into the ground.

"Holy shit. It's so hard. Son of a bitch. I'm sure Eric is in there..."

"Probably."

"Did they put that much effort into separating us? Or was this just a coincidence?"

"I'm not sure."

Lukas ignored their conversation and approached the barrier.

54055

“...”

Then, he rubbed his hand across it.

Yuriah's judgement hadn't been wrong.

This barrier had been formed by someone above her level. It was very sturdy, and he couldn't find any openings.

...8 stars? Or 7 stars with a talent for barrier magic.

Lukas narrowed his eyes. It was difficult to determine the strength of that person with just this spell.

“Then what will we do now? We can't just wait here till they die, can we?”

“It'll take some time, but I'll try to find an opening.”

“What can I do to... Hey, what are you doing?”

It was only then that Hoffman noticed Lukas' actions.

“Analysing.”

“That's a high level barrier. It's not something that someone who doesn't understand magic can analyse.”

Ignoring him, Lukas drew his sword.

“Hey. Don't do anything weird. Put your sword away. If you swing it incorrectly, you might injure your wrist...”

He ignored those words too.

He needed all of his concentration at that moment.

...This was different from Peran's barrier last time.

Because this time, instead of modifying the barrier and digging into the cracks, he had to destroy it completely.

He wasn't sure if it'd work, but it was worth testing.

The joints that connected mana. In terms of size, these gaps were thinner than hairs, but that didn't matter. In fact, it was pretty easy for him to find them.

After all, barriers were fixed spells.

The realm that Lukas was aiming for was to be able to break down spells that were flying towards him at incredible speeds before they could reach him.

In other words, fixed spells like barriers were fairly easy to break.

'Found it.'

An opening.

Without hesitation, Lukas stabbed his sword into the small crack that only he could see.

Well, it couldn't be considered stabbing.

This was because his sword entered gently, like a paper knife into a cake.

Crack.

The sound of something being pierced caused Yuriah's eyes to widen.

"Uh...?"

Subsequently, a black crack appeared in the air.

It was a crack that stemmed from Lukas' sword.

Crack crack!

Like cracked glass, the cracks quickly began to spread.

Its momentum was as terrifying as a charging herd of bulls.

Crash!

Soon after, the invisible barrier shattered completely. The falling barrier fragments were harmless. After retrieving his sword from the falling fragments, Lukas briefly reported his success.

"I broke it."

When he said that...

“...whaa-?”

For the first time, Yuriah’s expressionless image was shattered as she asked back foolishly.

Volume 2 - Chapter 319

Hoffman looked at Yuriah, who had slurred her word, with a slightly stiff expression.

“Hey, Yuriah. Are you okay?”

“...”

For a while, Yuriah just stood there, blankly staring at the place where the barrier had just been.

“...ah.”

Then she let out a soft sound that resembled a sigh and frowned slightly. She turned to look at Luks with an expression that made it seem like her pride had been wounded.

No. It was a bit different from that.

Hoffman couldn’t help but mumble.

“...I can’t believe you managed to turn Yuriah into a fool.”

54055

“...turned her into a fool?”

What was he talking about? Even though Lukas asked this question with his eyes, he didn’t receive a response.

However, the way Hoffman looked at Lukas changed slightly. Was it because Lukas cut the barrier? Of course... while that certainly had a role to play, it felt like the fundamental reason was a bit different.

“But is it really gone?”

“...completely.”

This time it was Yuriah that responded. At the same time, her gaze was still locked onto Lukas. Others might think that she had become infatuated with him, but there was no such emotion in her eyes.

Yuriah hesitated for a moment before speaking.

“Can I take a look at your sword?” (TL: Hohoho, Yuriah’s moving so fast)

“My sword?”

Lukas tilted his head to the side for a moment but soon realised the reason.

Indeed.

No matter how she looked at it, a man who didn't seem like much had completely broken a 7 star or higher barrier. With ease.

Rather than think that he was hiding his power, it was more reasonable to believe that his equipment had some kind of mysterious ability.

In addition, Yuriah had not witnessed exactly how Lukas had broken the barrier either. This was because she had been behind him, and even if she had been in a position to see everything, she hadn't been paying much attention to him in the first place.

“On the surface, it looked just like a steel sword.”

Hoffman murmured as he stroked his chin.

Naturally, it wasn't just its appearance, it was actually a steel sword, but Lukas decided to not correct their misunderstanding.

“No.”

It wasn't difficult for him to show them his sword, but he thought it would be better for them to continue to misunderstand.

The Zero Technique was a sword technique that Lukas had developed on his own. No, in fact, it was shameless to call it a sword technique in the first place, but in any case...

It was not a sword technique that normal people could understand.

This was the same even for high ranking Swordsmen.

While theoretically, it was possible for a Wizard to understand the principles of the way the spells were being casted and broken down, they would need to be at least 8 stars to do so. And even then, it would be impossible for them to imitate it.

Nevertheless, he had no intention of revealing the Zero Technique yet.

Currently, the Zero Technique was Lukas' greatest trump card. And it could only showcase its true strength when it was hidden.

“...”

Yuriah's expression hardened at Lukas' firm rejection.

Nevertheless, it didn't seem like she was willing to let it go so easily. Just as she was about to open her mouth again.

"Enough."

Hoffman stopped her.

"It's rude to ask a Swordsman to show you their weapon."

"You just said he doesn't look like a Swordsman."

"I still think so. And..."

Hoffman turned to look at Lukas.

"I'm not sure if this guy has been lying to us or not."

"What?"

"Hmph."

It was a sharp remark.

It could be said that this man had a simple mind.

But his ability to derive an answer that was close to the truth using nothing but his own intuition reminded Lukas Ivan or Kasajin.

Skrr—

Suddenly, a strange sound came from the forest.

It sounded like something hard was being dragged against the ground. It also carried an ominous and gloomy aura.

Hoffman narrowed his eyes being smiling grimly.

“Yuriah, get ready.”

“Are we using Formation E?”

“No. Let’s do D. That guy can help us too.”

Realising that they were preparing for battle, Lukas asked.

“What’s coming?”

“It should be obvious.”

Then the creators of the ominous sound appeared.

Their arrival was heralded by a foul odour that pierced the nose. It was a smell unique to rotting corpses.

Each of the individuals had different appearances, but Lukas knew the name that grouped them together.

Undead.

“First it was the barrier, now it’s undead... I don’t know what to do with such overwhelming hospitality.”

“Be careful. They aren’t weak. There might be a few low ranked ones there, but I think that most of them are medium ranked undead and above.”

“That doesn’t matter. But time is a bit tight... If it’s like this at the entrance of the forest, then the situation inside must be even more chaotic. We need to reunite with Eric and the others as soon as possible. Yuriah, shoot an extra large spell and wipe all of these guys out.”

“Idiot. I’ll need at least 5 minutes to cast a 7 star spell. It’s impossible to get that much time alone.”

Hoffman turned his gaze to Lukas, who revealed his power without hesitation.

“I can take on two of them.”

For reference, dozens of undead had appeared.

“...seriously.”

Hoffman let out a sigh.

“I’ll take care of the undead in the back first. Hoffman, you deal with their frontlines, and you... just take care of yourself.”

“Alright.”

Lukas decided to follow their instructions for now.

Hoffman pulled out his sword and charged forward like a wild beast without any warning.

The ground that he passed across scattered with every step.

Boom!

With one swing of his sword, a loud explosion was heard.

No, it wasn't just a sound, an explosion actually burst forth from his sword.

It seemed that Hoffman's sword had been engraved with magic runes.

'That's a lot of power.'

In addition, his understanding of his weapon and the runes was quite high. If he made a wrong move, he would be caught in his own explosion, but he was twisting his sword and moving his body to minimise the force reflected onto him as well as using the momentum for even stronger attacks.

Hoffman was not the only one showing off an amazing performance.

Yuriah, who was a few steps away, was constantly pouring out spells. Her body floated about five metres above the ground, but instead of the Fly spell, it was with the help of a pair of boots that appeared to be magic items.

This was probably done so that she could see the entirety of the battlefield with a glance.

"Screech!"

Undead.

A method of reviving the body of a creature whose life had already come to an end by injecting it with negative emotions and dark mana.

Of course, there was some degree of ambiguity in the use of the word 'revive'.

Most undead did not maintain the personality and memories of their lives before death.

In fact, such cases were extremely rare.

Instead, most undead were heavily influenced by the memories that they had just before their death, and the emotions that they felt at that time.

Those who died of starvation only focused on predation despite the fact that their stomachs no longer worked. This was due to the fact that the memory of 'hunger' had been engraved onto their very existence, and they would move to eliminate this unfulfilled hunger until they returned to the soil.

Negative emotions were the greatest driving force when it came to undead.

That's why those who died while feeling intense emotions like rage or hatred tended to become strong undead.

“Roar!”

A ghoul rushed forward, black saliva dripping from its mouth.

...Use the right foot as the focal point.

Remembering Snow’s advice, Lukas turned his body. Since the attack was so simple, it was also simple to dodge. In an instant, an opening appeared on the ghoul’s body, and without hesitation, Lukas plunged his sword into the back of its head.

“Gurgle...”

The sound of gargling blood came from the ghoul. Even though it was an undead, it still had vital points. But instead of the heart, it was the head. Of course, that didn’t mean it was easy for them to die like living beings.

Lukas quickly withdrew his sword before slashing horizontally.

He’d swung with the intention of separating its head from its body, but his sword got caught in its spine.

‘It’s not possible with my current strength.’

He’d tried it because undead have weaker bones and muscles, but it had been stopped easily.

Although it didn't work out as Lukas had planned, his blow was still fatal for the ghoul. It struggled on the ground for a while, but it was unable to get up again.

...Necromancy was a type of black magic.

But Iris, who had reached the pinnacle of black magic, never used necromancy.

This was because she understood.

Just how terrible it was to use the corpses of those who had already died.

And just how much of an insult it was to the deceased.

'Were these undead made by Diablo?'

He didn't know.

Lukas didn't have much knowledge when it came to Necromancy.

Nevertheless, he understood that the undead they had encountered were exceptionally strong.

Volume 2 - Chapter 320

In this situation, Hoffman's performance was particularly amazing.

Although it looked like he was being buried under waves of undead, in reality, he was overwhelmingly smashing the enemies without receiving a single wound.

At least two undead fell with every swing of his sword.

Of course, this was only possible with Yuriah's exceptional support.

Thanks to their efforts, only one or two undead ever made their way to Lukas, and even then, most of them were low ranking, so it wasn't hard for him to deal with them on his own.

'Even if they bicker constantly, they have great teamwork in a fight.'

Being able to make up for each other's shortcomings in a fight showed just how well they understood each other.

It would probably be more interesting to watch all of five Swordnaz fight together.

'...five of them.'

Lukas forcibly suppressed the depressing thought that threatened to surface in his mind.

He knew that such an act was simply hiding from the truth, but with the current weakened state of his mind, he wasn't sure if he would be able to overcome it if he were to face it head on.

Bang!

—About 15 minutes into the battle.

‘This is weird.’

Hoffman frowned as he swung his greatsword.

‘Why does it not seem like their numbers are decreasing?’

By now, Hoffman had already turned dozens of undead into powder. And yet, the density of undead surrounding him didn’t seem to have changed.

‘...no way.’

Just as Hoffman’s expression became stiff at a sudden thought.

“They’re being reinforced—!”

A voice dug into his ears.

It was Yuriah.

Hoffman's expression crumpled.

This wasn't good. Although he still had stamina, the fight composition was really bad. He hadn't given up his rear yet, but there were undead pushing at him from the front as well as both sides.

If he were to slow down his speed of killing the undead by even a little, they would rush to occupy the rear, and then, regardless of how good of a Swordsman Hoffman was, he would not be able to last more than a few minutes at best.

Yuriah, who was at the back, was able to grasp this situation much more easily.

'This is my fault.'

Even though she had placed herself in a position that allowed her to grasp the state of the entire battlefield, she had taken too long to notice the enemy's reinforcements. This was a result of being too focused on getting rid of them.

To add a bit to her excuse, because she was floating in the sky, it was hard for her to notice the undead hiding behind the trees in the forest. But in the end, it was still an excuse.

'We have to retreat...'

Should they go across the river?

Undead couldn't swim. Even if they tried to cross the riverbed, most of them wouldn't be able to make it.

But the problem was Hoffman. He couldn't afford to relax even for a moment. If he slowed down the speed with which he swung his sword, he would be surrounded by undead in an instant.

Suddenly, she heard a voice.

"7-star... spells."

It was Lukas.

He was fighting three undead at the same time. In all honesty, he looked like he was in a more desperate situation than Hoffman, who was fighting dozens.

"Can you use... them?"

His heavy breathing broke his sentence into parts.

Yuriah responded in a cold tone.

"I am an Archmage."

“I can see that.”

He could see it?

“What I’m asking is if you have enough mana to spare.”

“I do. But it will take at least 5 minutes to cast.”

The enemy numbers were constantly increasing.

In these circumstances, she couldn’t be certain whether Hoffman would be able to survive for 5 minutes.

“You’re planning to use Blizzard...”

“How did you know that...?”

“...”

Most of the spells she had been using so far had either water or ice properties, of which, the latter had the greatest effect against undead, and Blizzard was the most effective 7-star ice spell.

...Instead of explaining this, Lukas just decided to skip to the main reason he'd called out to her.

"There's a difference between being emotionless and being calm. That is something you need to understand if you intend to call yourself an Archmage."

"What?"

"Mind like the surface of a still lake. Even if a stone were to cause a ripple on the surface of a still lake, it would eventually calm down again. Maintaining that stillness requires acknowledgement. Acknowledge the fact that you're in an unfavourable situation. Acknowledge the fact that you might die. Acknowledge the fact that you are feeling desperate. Then think of a way to overcome it."

"..."

Unknowingly, Yuriah began to focus on Lukas' voice.

Usually, it was easy to ignore the ignorant words of laymen, but for some reason, she couldn't now.

"Cast the spell. I will help you with the calculations."

"Help with the calculations?"

"You just need to focus on casting Blizzard. Distance, power, range, I will calculate the other things."

“...what the hell are you saying? You can’t leave things like that to someone else.”

“Do you have any other way? If this continues, that man will die.”

“...”

“If you don’t believe me, then use a different spell. In these circumstances... the 5-star spell White Hail is probably the most appropriate.”

Yuriah had said that this man was not a Wizard.

That thought remained unchanged even now.

“...heavy rain, frozen by the cold.”

So... she wasn’t doing this because she believed him.

Sss-

Cold air began to spread from her fingertips.

As he wielded his sword against the three undead, Lukas kept a close eye on her actions.

He could see it.

Mana flowed out of Yuriah's mana room. Then, it began twisting and merging to create the circle required for the spell. It was like a sculpture that was being carved at an extremely high speed.

"Become the teeth that bites at ash and dust."

Lukas took a few steps back, closing the distance between him and Yuriah.

At least, enough to interfere with Yuriah's magic.

"My enemies, please do not beg for mercy."

Her mana fluctuated.

With a soft cracking sound, countless hailstones began forming in the sky.

It was at that moment that Lukas swung his sword.

There was no sign of awkwardness in the sword that he swung with confidence. Even if he wasn't a Swordsman and his technique wasn't swordsmanship.

Right. This wasn't swordsmanship.

It would be more accurate to call it a sword dance.

Yuriah couldn't help but feel that Lukas' movements were smooth and beautiful.

Paht!

"...!"

Her eyes went wide.

Someone was interfering with her magic. The mana circle, which was the foundation of the spell, began to twist.

...Was it twisting?

No.

It wasn't twisting, it was evolving.

Crack crack-

The tips of the balls of hail became sharp like spears.

They also began to absorb the moisture in the atmosphere and grow in size.

More importantly, it transformed from just being an area of effect spell, as each individual hailstone pointed towards an enemy as if they had their own wills.

The next moment, Yuriah and Lukas' voices resounded terrifyingly.

54055

“White Hail.”

Kakakak!

White hail began to pour down.

“Screech!”

“Roar!”

The screams of the undead erupted. Before going silent a moment later.

“...huh?”

In the centre of it all, Hoffman stood stiffly with a blank expression on his face.

“...”

Looking at the spell that had manifested, Lukas realised he'd made a mistake.

There was no need to use a 7-star spell.

The enhanced White Hail was more than enough to get rid of all the undead reinforcements.