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Just as Igaru suspected, no reinforcements would arrive from the other cities near the Samis Great Forest. It was highly probable that Sshiris had deployed troops all around the forest in order to prevent anyone else from interfering.

There were two reasons why such tyrannical actions were possible.

One was that the Great Forest technically fell under Hirup's jurisdiction and could be considered its territory. This meant that even if he didn't try to think up some grand excuse, Sshiris had the right to prevent the intervention of other cities.

The other was the difference in strength between the cities.

To put it bluntly, Herui was only a small city on the edge of Combat Island while Hirup could be considered a mid-sized city.

So if he was determined to restrict access to the Samis Great Forest, then there was nothing Herui could do.

'He's being so shameless.'

Like Igaru, Ashstar's expression was also bitingly cold.

She was glaring at Sshiris with her fists clenched.

She couldn't believe that the City Lord was displaying such a low-class, shameful appearance in front of the hero she greatly admired.

Sshiris smiled and looked at Lukas.

Since he was not a fool, he should have already understood his point by now.

There would be no reinforcements from other cities.

In other words, Sshiris had reduced his options to one.

Nevertheless, although he had lost his right to choose, it couldn't be considered a bad deal for either of them.

After all, he really couldn't do anything else in this situation. If he didn't choose to cooperate, then the value of the Ancient Dragon's corpse would plunge.

Sshiris didn't openly say this because he wanted to see if this man could understand his situation. The same was true for the Dragonman, who had an appearance similar to a monk, standing beside him.

Lukas might have been desperately thinking at that moment, but that didn't mean that other options would suddenly appear.

'Now, then.'

Since he'd shown him the stick, it was time to show him the carrot.

Sshiris smiled at Lukas and said.

"It seems that you froze it with some kind of sorcery trick, but something on such a large scale can't be used often, right?"

Then he added in a soft voice.

"Hirup is the city closest to the Samis Great Forest. In other words, these parts could be transported to it much faster than to any other city, so you wouldn't have to worry about the ice melting."

"...hoo."

Lukas let out a soft sigh.

Sshiris took that as a sign of resignation, but that wasn't the case.

When he looked up, he found that Lukas' eyes were brimming with irritation.

In all honesty, this short meeting was beginning to get on his nerves.

He had a lot that he wanted to do, and from the start, he didn't really care about how he disposed of the Ancient Dragon's body.

He didn't even care about selling it at a price higher than its original value. In fact, he didn't care even if it was sold at a lower price.

As long as it wasn't too cheap.

He'd heard that even if he got the lowest price possible, it would still be something that most people couldn't afford.

That's why Lukas wasn't very pleased with 'Bargan's plan'.

Nevertheless, he decided not to say anything. After all, only a Dragonman would know Dragonmen best.

But when he saw them arrive, Lukas had intended to trade with Sshiris since he came first, but it seemed that the feeling wasn't reciprocated.

Instead, Sshiris was clearly trying to take advantage of him.

Lukas became very displeased.

“Firstly.”

So he decided to clear up the illusion that this man in front of him seemed to be under.

“This ice will never melt.”

After everything he’d seen, he’d come to realise that Sshiris wasn’t a polite person at all, so there was no need to continue being polite.

“Haha. Can you still make jokes like that?”

Sshiris burst out laughing. He didn’t even care that Lukas was no longer being polite to him. In his opinion, Lukas had already lost his cool, which proved that everything was going just like he planned.

He pointed to the black dragon’s corpse with his fat fingers.

The half-melted ice had already caused the ground in the area to become damp and muddy.

However, Lukas spread his fingers and pointed his hand towards the pieces of ice. Showing it one time would be much more effective than explaining it one hundred times.

Crack crack crack!

From his open palm came a burst of icy wind that was so cold it felt like it was biting into their skin. This icy wind was so terrifyingly cold even though it had been blown away from them.

In an instant, the melting ice-covered parts of the Ancient Dragon's corpse froze once again.

"O-, oh my God!"

"I-, impossible...!"

The mouths of not only Sshiris but also the Fighters from Hirup who accompanied him fell open.

In the blink of an eye, the Ancient Dragon's corpse had become frozen once again.

"Secondly."

Lukas looked up at the sky.

"You're not the only one I can trade with."

"Mm? What are you talking...?"

Suddenly, a huge shadow covered the area.

It was as though an enormous object had blocked the sun.

It couldn't be a cloud. The Heavenly Realm was a world that existed above the clouds, so there were only two things in this world that could block the sun.

Flying dragons soaring across the sky,

And Sky Carriages.

But with this size... This was not a normal Sky Carriage.

Sshiris' expression became stiff as he stared up at the sky.

"Th-, that...!"

Just as he let out a cry of shock, it appeared.

It was huge.

Extremely huge.

This was natural. After all, it had been able to cast a shadow so large it covered up the entire area for a moment.

Nevertheless, from its shape, it was obviously a Sky Carriage.

However, it was much larger than the ones Sshiris had brought with him. In fact, it was so large that it was still not certain whether all thirty or so of Sshiris' carriages would be larger than it even if they were all combined.

And pulling this carriage was an enormous flying dragon. From a single glance, one could tell that this flying dragon was an Ancient Dragon.

"T-, the Sun Carriage..."

"It's the Sun Carriage."

"Did the Lord of a major city come in person?"

—Sun Carriage.

An extremely large means of transportation that only existed in eight major cities. And yet, five of these Sun Carriages appeared in the sky at the same time.

That wasn't all. Each of the carriages carried a flag with different patterns engraved on them.

"Wh-, what the hell is this...? How did they...?"

This time, Bargan was the one who looked at Sshiris with the corners of his mouth raised.

It was very similar to the smile he had just shown at him.

Of the Eight Major City Lords, five of them had come to the Samis Great Forest at the same time.

This result far exceeded his expectations.

"...then, my Lord."

Bargan bowed towards Lukas before continuing.

"Shall we prepare the negotiation table?"

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“My Lord, it’s possible that you will be pressured by the City Lords that arrive.”

“Pressured?”

“Yes. Especially from Sshiris, the City Lord of Hirup. There are many bad rumors about him... It’s possible that... he will try to take your property through unfair methods.”

Lukas slowly closed his eyes at those words.

He wasn’t really worried about getting pressured or forced by anyone, but he also couldn’t just let Bargan’s advice go to waste.

After all, Bargan wasn’t the type to needlessly worry or interfere.

Since he came to Lukas with such a serious expression, there was probably a certain amount of danger to take note of.

“Please leave it to me.”

Bargan suddenly spoke out in a clear voice.

“I will turn this situation around.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“No, but... I have a slightly rude request.”

His tone was cautious, but Lukas nodded without drawing any attention to it.

Bargan then turned to look at the corpse of the young Dragonling.

“Please give me a few of its scales.”

When he heard that, Lukas waved his hand, causing the Dragonlings scales to fly off and float towards them. Then, he handed the scales over to Bargan and said.

“You can have all of them if you need them. Is that enough?”

Bargan nodded.

“It’s enough.”

* * *

Bargan didn't do anything special.

He simply gave a few letters to one of the subjugation squad members heading to Herui and asked them to deliver it to the major cities.

In fact, finding someone to deliver the letters was the hardest part. After all, the Squad Leaders had ordered their members to keep the details about the Ancient Dragon a secret.

Fortunately, Bargan was well acquainted with one of the members set to return to the city.

No, they weren't just well acquainted. Bargan had saved his life about three years ago.

For Dragonmen, not to mention three years, they wouldn't forget the favor of someone saving their life even after three hundred years.

Therefore, by making use of the communication channels in Herui, the squad member was able to send the details about the Ancient Dragon to the Eight Major Cities.

Of course, even if they were to suddenly receive such a report, he would only be treated like a crazy person, which is why he also attached the scales to the letters. This was the so-called 'concept of proof'.

Transmission techniques had many restrictions that the senders had to abide by.

For one, the item being transferred couldn't be much larger than a fist, and it could not be too heavy. Additionally, no living creature could be transferred, not even a small bug the size of a fingernail.

Fortunately, the young Dragonling's scales were small enough to meet the demanding requirements of the transmission technique.

Therefore, the subjugation squad member was able to send 8 scales with a single message attached to each of them.

"This isn't from a real Ancient Dragon. This is simply the scale of one its offspring."

Any discerning eye would be able to recognise the value of those scales. And Bargan was certain that there would be at least one person talented enough to see it in each major city.

Nevertheless, it was half a gamble.

Bargan was the one who made this plan, and he thought that it could be considered a success if even two Major City Lords were to come.

What he wasn't aware of, was the overflowing competitive atmosphere that had overtaken the entirety of Combat Island.

The Championship.

The most honorable competition on Combat Island to determine the one and only Grand Champion.

Like uncut gemstones, Fighters who had been training in secret would begin to appear one after the other.

And in order to protect the honor of their arenas, each city needed to get their hands upon these Fighters before the other cities.

If the overall quality of their Fighters improved, so would the chances that an outstanding Champion would appear in their cities, and naturally, the chances of them producing the Grand Champion would also increase.

Then, what was the most important thing to attract these independent Fighters to their arenas?

Honor? This would naturally be obtained the more they won. Dragonmen Fighters risked their lives for their pride, so they would not covet honor that someone had artificially created for them.

Wealth? While it was nice to have, few Fighters attached great value to money.

No.

The thing that Fighters raved about the most was a 'good weapon'.

Whenever a weapon that could be called a 'treasured weapon' appeared as a prize, hundreds of Dragonman Fighters would risk their lives in fierce, bloody battles to obtain it.

And if it was the corpse of an Ancient Dragon, then hundreds of such weapons could be made.

That was the reason that five of the Eight Major City Lords went to the Samis Great Forest.

It was to the point that they even brought out the Sun Carriages that they were most proud of.

* * *

The Sun Carriages didn't land on the ground. If the five carriages were to all land in the forest, the ground of the great forest would be completely ruined and the damage would be irreparable.

Clank-

Instead, doors at the side of the huge carriages opened, and five smaller carriages flew out.

These carriages were all normal-sized, but they were all more luxurious than even the best carriages that Sshiris had brought, and the flying dragons that pulled them wore shining iron armor.

However, instead of the luxurious carriages or the majestic flying dragons that pulled them, what Bargan paid attention to were the flags on each carriage. Then, he approached Lukas and spoke in a soft voice that only he could hear.

"They are the Major City Lords of Uruk, Akad, Bakdad(*), Tikrit, and Babylon."(* – Would you guys prefer I used 'Baghdad')

Those were the names of the major cities. Perhaps it was because each city had different cultures, but the styles and decorations of the various carriages were quite distinctive.

But before they could properly appreciate these differences, the carriages landed on the ground.

“Hup.”

Sshiris took a few steps back.

Until just a moment ago, his face had been filled with confidence, but now, he was so anxious that he looked like a different person.

He couldn't help it.

Just because they were all City Lords didn't mean they were on the same level.

Just like he could ignore Herui, which was a small city, because he was the lord of a mid-sized city, the lords of the major cities could ignore him.

No. In fact, the difference between them was even wider.

Of the hundreds of cities on Combat Island, there were only eight major cities.

Therefore, even if there wasn't any sort of thing as a Small City Lord or Medium City Lord, there were Major City Lords.

Finally, the doors to the carriages opened, and the Major City Lords made their appearance.

'...these are the Major City Lords.'

Bargan looked at them with a slightly nervous expression.

This was his first time seeing so many Major City Lords in one place. When these five people who all had overwhelming presences made their appearance, Sshiris, the fat, greedy Dragonman, was nowhere to be seen.

This couldn't be helped.

The requirement to become a City Lord was to hold the Champion position for a year in five different cities. But in the case of Major City Lords, there was an added requirement.

That was to reach 'at least the semi-finals' in a Championship.

This meant that at one point in time, the Major City Lords had to have been within the top five among all the Dragonmen on Combat Island.

The Major City Lords weren't the only ones who got off the carriages. Next to them were around four Fighters who had come to accompany them.

Bargan felt that every one of these Fighters was stronger than most of the Champions from other cities.

“...”

Suddenly, Lukas' eyebrow twitched slightly.

This wasn't because he admired their strength like Bargan.

The Major City Lord of Babylon.

The face of a Fighter standing beside her, who was the only female among the Major City Lord's present, looked very familiar.

Even though it had changed a bit, it wasn't so different that he couldn't recognise them.

The change wasn't as dramatic as Min Ha-rin's, but it was clear that he hadn't come to the Heavenly Realm recently, like Lukas. This was because the similarities between him and the surrounding Dragonmen weren't things that could appear in a short time.

“...!”

Then their eyes met.

His eyes widened slightly as he spotted Lukas, but he soon calmed down and regained his composure.

Lukas looked at him for a moment and had a thought.

Was it possible for him to view his status window?

As it turned out, he could.

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[Lee Jong-hak]

[Level: 97]

[Titles: Whirlwind of the Arena, Swordsman of Destruction]

[Occupation: Warrior]

[Race: Human]

[Skills: Plum Blossom Sword Method(Lv.9), Demon Slaying Sword Method(Lv.7), Nine Palaces Sword Method(Lv.7), Tempest Sword Method(Lv.7), Taiqing Sword Method(Lv.7), Seventy-Two Waves Sword

Method(Lv.7), Thirty-Six Worlds Sword Method(Lv.6), Sword of Destruction(Lv.9), Endurance(Lv.9), Patience(Lv.7)....]

“...”

He'd gotten stronger.

Lukas wasn't quite sure exactly how strong Lee Jong-hak had been originally, but he had definitely gotten much stronger. He could easily tell from the fact that he was 20 levels higher than Min Ha-rin.

Lee Jong-hak looked at Lukas for a moment before shaking his head slightly. Did that mean that he should pretend he didn't know him for the time being?

To show his understanding, he nodded his head slightly.

Nevertheless, Lukas couldn't help but feel a bit curious.

Lee Jong-hak's status window had neither loyalty nor difficulty. Was it because he wasn't a native of this world?

He wasn't sure.

In any case, there were many things he wanted to ask him. His relationship with him wasn't as close as with Min Ha-rin, but he was still glad to see him.

Nevertheless, this wasn't the time for the reunion.

"Are you the Dragon Hunter?"

One of the Major City Lords spoke up.

It was a Dragonman with an extremely large body. His scales were covered in various scars of different sizes, his neck was long and thick, and his nose and mouth protruded to form a snout filled with sharp teeth.

According to Bargan, this large man, whose appearance was very reminiscent of a Dragon, was the City Lord of the major city, 'Uruk'.

"You are?"

"Gargad."

As he responded briefly, he turned to look at the corpse of the Ancient Dragon before turning to Lukas once again. Then, he spoke in the same blunt tone.

"10 million erus."

"...what?"

“If you agree to sell it to Uruk, I will give you 10 million erus, on top of the cost for the Ancient Dragon itself.”

“...”

Lukas preferred conversations that got straight to the point, but that wasn't exactly the case with Gargad. To say that it was sudden would be an understatement.

Not to mention that the amount of money he offered was completely unbelievable.

10 million erus. Now that he'd gained some knowledge after reading the various books in his possession, he understood, to an extent, just how formidable this sum was.

To put it simply, with such a sum, even if he were to buy several houses in the heart of a medium-sized city, the amount he had left wouldn't change much from the original.

And yet, Gargad was saying that not only would he give him this amount, he would also pay him for the corpse.

This wasn't a joke, nor was it a lie. From his serious expression, it was clear that he meant it.

Suddenly.

“I’ll give you 12 million erus and 20 high-class Slave Fighters.”

The Major City Lord of Tikrit spoke up.

He had the appearance of an old man who might die at any moment, but the aura radiating from his body and the glow in his eyes was no weaker than Gargad.

“We will give you 13 million erus and ten flying dragons.”

The expression of the Major City Lord of Bakdad didn’t change, but he gave off a faint feeling that he would never give up the Ancient Dragon’s corpse.

Apparently, because of Lukas’ lack of expression, they all seemed to think that he found all of their offers unsatisfactory.

“You’re all being so generous. But I won’t back down either... Let’s see.”

The Major City Lord of Akad had the appearance of a young boy. Of course, that was only his appearance. There was no way to confirm just how old he actually was.

He looked at Lukas with sparkling eyes that suited his apparent age. Then, he lifted a finger and said.

“I heard that you are a powerful Sorcerer. So I will give you 15 million erus and three extremely rare magical tomes that I obtained from Dragon God Island. Mm..., I’m sure you’re already aware, but those

are not something that you can just find at the market. Unlike Slave Fighters and flying dragons, they are not things that can be obtained with money alone.”

The Major City Lord of Akad smiled confidently.

And, in fact, his confidence was not misplaced. Although he remained expressionless, Lukas had been paying close attention to their offers, and he was most interested in the proposal of this young-looking Dragonman.

This was because he was interested in the sorcery techniques of the Heavenly Realm.

Suddenly.

The Major City Lord of Babylon, who had simply been watching from the side with a smile on her face, finally let out a burst of laughter.

“Ahahaha. You guys don’t know anything.”

It was a very pleasant laugh.

In all honesty, this woman had the appearance of some kind of noblewoman instead of a Dragonman Fighter, and a former Champion at that. She even fanned her face gently with a folding fan in her hand.

However, the feature that stood out the most was her piercing purple eyes.

When one looked into them, it was as though strange magic power tried to suck out their very soul.

“...Ishuta, don’t try anything stupid.”

Gargad spoke in a displeased voice, but Ishuta didn’t stop whatever it was she was doing. Instead, she simply lifted her fan to cover her smile.

“This man doesn’t want riches or wealth. You can tell just by looking at him.”

Then, she secretly shot a gaze at Lukas.

When he realised this, the expression of Lee Jong-hak, who was standing beside her, shifted slightly. He sighed inaudibly.

“Hey, Mr. Dragon Hunter. What do you really want? I can give you anything you desire, even if you want me.”

Her voice appeared in his ear like a whisper.

Lukas felt a tickling sensation as if something soft was gently nibbling on his ear.

In fact, when she spoke, most of the people in the area stumbled drunkenly.

[The 'Magical Eye of Enticement' is seducing you.]

It was some kind of mental attack.

And in fact, its effect was true to its name.

Lukas looked around subtly. It wasn't just the subjugation squad members or Sshiris' troops, even some of the Major City Lords reacted openly.

They weren't as affected as the other Dragonmen, but it was clear that they were all doing their best to deal with Ishuta's mental attack.

It must be a relatively high-level power that could even affect Major City Lords on the same level.

'Was Lee Jong-hak also affected by this?'

Lukas couldn't help but wonder.

[Skill 'Thousands of years of Innocence' has been activated.]

[You have perfectly defended against the gaze of the Magical Eye of Enticement.]

He locked eyes with Ishuta.

“A-, ara?”

Ishuta blinked slowly, her expression filled with bewilderment.

Whether her skill worked or not, and if it did work, how effective it was.

She could easily tell that by looking into the other person’s eyes.

That’s why she was so surprised.

This was the first time.

This had never happened before.

There had never been a time where her Magical Eye of Enticement had failed to affect someone.

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While Ishuta was experiencing full-blown panic at this unexpected situation, Lukas had finished his inspection of Lee Jong-hak.

And he concluded that he wasn't being influenced or manipulated.

'Right, just like I thought.'

It was none other than a firm will that couldn't be shaken by anyone else that formed the basis of Lee Jong-hak's personality. His imperturbable mind was not something that could be influenced easily. Even if it was by a power on the level of Ishuta's Magical Eye.

Of course, this didn't mean that Lee Jong-hak would be able to completely negate the power of her Magical Eye. He would still be affected to some extent, but at the very least, he would be able to remain in control of his actions. If worse came to worst, he would still be able to take his own life before doing something he didn't want to.

There were a few people who would choose death over subservience, and Lee Jong-hak was one of them.

"Ahahaha! How interesting. It seems Ishuta's Magical Eye has no effect at all."

The Akad Major City Lord burst into laughter.

The more one looked at him, the more one would feel that his real age actually matched his appearance. His gestures and way of speaking seemed to reflect that.

Ishuta stared at him in displeasure for a moment before lifting her folding fan to cover her face again. Then she spoke in a posh manner similar to a noblewoman.

“In addition to 20 million erus, I will introduce you to Babylon’s ‘Fire Hammer’.”

“Mmm.”

“Hoh...”

At those words, the eyes of the other Major City Lords lit up. This was the same even for the Akad Major City Lord, who had been ridiculing her just a moment ago.

Of course, Lukas had no idea who Babylon’s Fire Hammer was.

After all, it was natural that he wouldn’t learn about famous figures by simply reading a few books.

It was times like this that made the usefulness of Bargan’s presence stand out.

“He is one of the greatest blacksmiths in Babylon... no, in the entirety of Combat Island. He is known for making famous items like the ‘Fire Dragon Armor’, ‘Wind Listener’, ‘Supreme Spear’, and countless others.”

“...”

“However, he is known for being extremely proud. So much so that he wouldn’t lift his hammer even if the heaven’s forced him to. From what I’ve heard, there are only a few people who can control him, including the Babylon Major City Lord.”

An excellent blacksmith.

That wasn’t necessarily a bad offer, but Lukas couldn’t help but silently lament the fact that he wasn’t a refiner.

Of course, he still felt that it would be good to obtain a good quality staff, but what he needed most right now was neither weapons nor armor.

Lukas’ lack of expression caused those looking at him to feel that he was still unwilling.

Once more, Ishuta’s confident expression crumbled. At this moment, in her eyes, Lukas was a completely unreadable outsider whose desires she was unable to grasp.

“We can also match the price of 20 million erus.”

It was Gargad who spoke.

The other Major City Lords also nodded to show their agreement. If they were to compete without any regard for each other, the price would definitely have soared beyond their control. But now, it seemed that the price would not go past 20 million. This was probably the maximum amount that they had agreed to beforehand.

Suddenly, the Bakdad Major City Lord spoke up.

“This is the greatest sign of sincerity that we can give. Outsider, if you continue to be greedy, then...”

He intentionally lowered his voice at the end of his sentence.

He thought that would be enough of a warning, but Lukas turned to look at him and said.

“If I continue to be greedy then...?”

“...”

The Major City Lord looked at Lukas with surprise for a moment before responding in a cold voice laced with killing intent.

“It would make us very angry.”

The atmosphere became frozen.

Nevertheless, Lukas' expression remained the same.

The Bakdad Major City Lord hated being looked down upon and ignored the most. And the current situation made him feel like that was exactly what was happening.

Crunch.

Just as he clenched his fist tightly.

“Relax, relax. We’re not here to threaten you.”

The Akad Major City Lord chuckled.

“Lukas was it? We are people who don’t have much free time on our hands. So I hope you can make your decision soon.”

Bargan gulped slightly, inwardly agreeing with that statement.

Those were exactly his thoughts.

After all, these were Major City Lords. They were inherently different from pigs blinded by greed, like Sshiris.

Even Ishuta, who still had an expression of surprise, was known in the arena as a ‘Demonic Woman’ who never revealed the full extent of her abilities.

‘In that case...’

Bargan began to calculate the profits and losses of this situation.

The offers made by the five Major City Lords.

First of all, the money offered by all sides was set to 20 million erus.

Then, he thought about the other things that had been promised. Slaves, flying dragons, magical tomes. But in truth...

'...that isn't all.'

Not at all.

Accepting the proposal of one of them meant refusing the other four.

Of course, they wouldn't openly express their displeasure or try to attack them, but having a bad relationship with a Major City Lord on Combat Island was very bad for many reasons.

More importantly, it wouldn't just be one Major City Lord, but four.

In other words, they couldn't just look at the products that were promised.

The answer should only be given after thoroughly comparing the actual influences of each Major City Lord, the sizes of their cities, the popularity of their arenas, and whether their cities would be suitable to stay in the future.

'This is all my fault.'

Bargan's heart suddenly felt heavy.

If he had known this would happen, he wouldn't have sent letters to each of the major cities. In the first place, he thought they could be considered lucky if even a single Major City Lord was to make an appearance.

But in the end, it could only be said that Bargan's hasty judgement had been incorrect.

Bargan turned to look at Lukas.

He saw that his head was lowered and he seemed to be agonising over something.

'It's natural for him to feel troubled.'

No matter how bold Lukas was, there was no way that he could easily give an answer in this type of situation.

Time.

Right. The thing he needed the most at that moment was time.

But in this situation, asking the five of the Major City Lords for time might bring ridicule and scorn.

Such a role should be taken by the subordinate, not by the Lord.

“Can you please give us some time to think about it?”

At those words, five pairs of eyes all turned to focus on Bargan. Within their cold gazes were traces of surprise and contempt as though they never expected someone else to interfere.

Those gazes alone were enough to make him feel immense pressure.

In an instant, Bargan found that it was hard to breathe, and his legs began to shake subconsciously.

This caused a question to appear in his mind for a moment. How did Lukas manage to remain calm under these gazes?

Bargan tried to not show how much he was suffering from the pressure, but there was no way for him to stop the cold sweat from slowly rolling down his cheek.

He forcibly spoke through his constricted throat.

“...Ma-, Major City Lords, please understand that this is not an easy decision to make.”

At those words, the Akad Major City Lord nodded slightly with a soft smile on his face.

“Your courage is commendable. You are a pretty good slave.”

“...”

“Let’s see.... We’ll give you 15 minutes. How about that?”

“Spera.”

Even when the Bakdad Major Lord called out his name, the Akad Major City Lord’s expression didn’t change.

“What is it? I didn’t say anything wrong.”

“...”

Gargad, who had been silent for a while, finally spoke in a heavy voice.

“We will give you ten minutes to think about it.”

“Th-, thank you.”

Bargan bowed his head to them slightly before turning toward his Lord.

But Lukas spoke without looking at Bargan.

“Are you trying to buy time for me?”

“Yes.”

“There is no need. I’ve already made a decision long ago.”

“...i-, is that so?”

He shouldn’t have said anything.

Bargan’s face flushed slightly as he had this thought, and he bowed his head.

“Then I suppose I did something unnecessary... I’m sorry.”

“No. You did well.”

“Huh?”

Lukas’ eyes remained on Ishuta.

To be precise, they remained on Lee Jong-hak, who was standing beside her.

Lee Jong-hak seemed to be saying something to Ishuta. And as she listened to what he said, Ishuta’s eyebrows rose up in surprise. Then, she glanced over at Lukas before nodding with an expression of interest on her face.

Lee Jong-hak bowed slightly towards her in a business-like manner before walking over to Lukas.

Seeing this, Lukas spoke.

“Bargan.”

“Yes?”

“Step back for a moment.”

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Lee Jong-hak looked pretty good in the clothing style of the Dragonmen.

He had tied his slightly longer hair into a single ponytail behind his head, and his gaze seemed to be deeper than before. He also appeared calmer than before.

Nevertheless, there was one thing about him that didn't change. And that was the sword that rested at his waist.

"...Dragon Hunter Lukas, it certainly was worth it to apply for this escort mission after hearing your name."

"I'm sure that my name is quite rare in the Heavenly Realm."

Lee Jong-hak nodded before bowing slightly.

"It's been a while."

"Right."

"..."

After that, neither of them spoke for a while.

Compared to the warm reunion with Min Ha-rin, the atmosphere between them could only be described as stiff.

...This was natural.

After all, Lukas' current relationship with Lee Jong-hak was very awkward.

Even until now, he was unsure of just what Lee Jong-hak thought of him. His attitude seemed to be much softer and more polite than in the past, but the difference was barely noticeable.

"Where have you been all this time? I looked around for the others but I wasn't able to find anyone."

"Not even Ha-rin?"

"...do you know where she is?"

"In a small city called 'Herui' that's not too far from here. She's the Champion there."

"Herui's Champion... you mean Rin Summers?"

Lee Jong-hak raised an eyebrow in surprise before nodding slightly.

“It makes sense that she is Min Ha-rin. I did think that name was a bit unusual, but...”

“Are you also using a pseudonym?”

“Yes. I’m going by the name ‘Li Hao’ right now.”

If both of them were using pseudonyms then it made sense that they weren’t able to find each other.

“I haven’t been in the Heavenly Realm very long. It has only been about a week.”

“Huh? What do you...”

Lukas then explained that each participant entered the Heavenly Realm at different times. Then, in order to figure out the reason behind it, he decided to finally ask the questions he was most curious about.

“How many stages did you clear in the tutorial?”

“8 stages.”

“And when did you enter the Heavenly Realm?”

“...about two years ago.”

“I see.”

Lukas nodded his head.

“It seems that each stage of the tutorial counts as a year.”

“Ah.”

Lee Jong-hak also nodded,

Now that he thought about it, that indeed seemed to be the case.

Min Ha-rin, who had cleared five stages, entered the Heavenly Realm five years ago.

Lee Jong-hak, who cleared eight stages, entered two years ago.

And finally, Lukas, who had cleared all ten stages, was only able to enter the Heavenly Realm around a week ago.

This conclusion gave rise to several possibilities.

Leo Freeman had entered the Heavenly Realm at the same time, or maybe even sooner than Min Ha-rin.

Arid was still an uncertainty.

And finally, Sedi. With her abilities, it was highly probable that she had also cleared all ten stages like Lukas.

‘In other words.’

Sedi had probably entered the Heavenly Realm very recently as well.

* * *

“...”

Sedi Trowman lay on the ground, looking up at the sky.

It was currently as dark as her hair.

A hot yet familiar breeze brushed against her skin. Any other living being might have shuddered at the sensation, but Sedi didn't seem to notice it as she muttered.

"Where am I?"

She couldn't help but wonder as she laid there.

She had just cleared the tutorial and was told to check her status window, but when she did, a bright light covered her, and when she opened her eyes again, she found herself in this place.

In other words, all she knew was that she was finally in the Great World or whatever it was called.

Whoosh.

A burst of hot air ruffled her hair.

She didn't know where it was coming from.

Nevertheless, this place wasn't unpleasant for Sedi who was used to being surrounded by demonic energy.

'In fact...'

It felt like her entire body was filled with fighting spirit.

Perhaps this place would allow her to regain some of her past strength.

With that thought in mind, she continued to enjoy the breeze with her eyes closed.

Thud-

Then she felt a vibration.

Wondering what it was, she opened her eyes and was immediately greeted by a gigantic yellow eye.

“...”

[...]

The owner of this eye was looking down at Sedi from a very high place. This wasn't to say that this being was standing on a mountain or a large building.

No, this being seemed to be able to touch the sky with just the height of its body. It was a monster that looked somewhat like a Dragon, but it was so large that she found it a bit strange.

As she stared at it, Sedi tilted her head to the side.

When did this guy appear? No. In this case, did this mean that she'd appeared in its territory?

"You're really big."

It was so ridiculously big that she couldn't help but say those words out loud. If she weren't lying down, she would have had to tilt her head almost 90 degrees to look at its eye.

More importantly, there wasn't just one of these big guys.

Thud, thud...

Maybe it was because they smelled Sedi, but huge dragon-like monsters began to appear one after the other.

Thick saliva dripped from their mouths.

It was only at that moment that she understood just why these guys were looking at her like that. Was this place so desolate that they had nothing else to eat?

But they were all so big. Sedi was pretty sure she wouldn't be able to fill one of their stomachs even if it swallowed her whole.

Stretching her fingers, Sedi counted the dragons.

“One, two, three, four, five.”

[Krrr...]

Sedi didn't know.

That these Dragon-like monsters were all Ancient Dragons, beings that could be described as disasters in the Heavenly Realm. More importantly, every single one of these Ancient Dragons was larger, stronger, and more ferocious than the black dragon Lukas had hunted.

Well, in truth, nothing would have changed even if she knew.

At that moment, there was only one primitive thought in her mind.

“Fortunately, I won't have to worry about going hungry.”

As she muttered this, Sedi got up from her spot on the ground.

“These five lizards will be more than enough.”

Season 2 Chapter 176

Lukas decided to ask Lee Jong-hak about his relationship with Ishuta.

“Is she controlling you?”

“No.”

His response was firm and clear.

Although he didn't explain, he spoke in his usual calm tone.

“I owe Ms. Ishuta a great deal. She was the one who taught me, who was still ignorant about this world, how to live and grow. In return, I will work in Babylon as a Fighter for a year. There is about half a year left until the deadline.”

After hearing what Lee Jong-hak said, Lukas couldn't help but bring up something else that he was concerned about.

“Do you intend to take part in the Championship?”

“Yes.”

“Then you are the Champion of Babylon?”

“That’s not it. Now that I think about it, you haven’t been in the Heavenly Realm for a long time so it’s natural for you to not know.”

After mumbling those words, Lee Jong-hak explained.

“The Arenas in Major Cities are incredibly large, so they are allowed to enter three people into the Championship.”

“I see.”

In other words, in Babylon City, even if Lee Jong-hak wasn’t the Champion, he could at least be considered within the top three of the entire arena.

Of course, that didn’t mean that it was lower or easier than being the Champion in another city.

In Babylon alone, the number of Fighters belonging to the city easily surpassed 500. If the independent Fighters were to be included then this number would certainly surpass 1,000. And even if their numbers were large, the average level of these Fighters was not low.

So, to put it simply, to become one of the top three Fighters in such a large arena was actually even more difficult than becoming the Champion in a small or medium-sized city.

“Then the Champion of Babylon is stronger than you?”

“Yes. Much stronger.”

Lukas couldn't help but feel a little surprised when Lee Jong-hak answered his question without any hesitation.

Lee Jong-hak's current level was 92, and he was much stronger than any Dragonman Lukas had encountered in the Heavenly Realm before that day. Compared to Min Ha-rin, who was the Champion of the Herui Arena, Lee Jong-hak was still several steps ahead.

Nevertheless, Lee Jong-hak was now claiming that the Champion of Babylon was much stronger than him.

‘No.’

Lukas turned to look at the Major City Lords that were standing at the side. The difference between them and Lee Jong-hak hadn't reached a ridiculous level, so the strength of the Babylon Champion should still be within an acceptable range.

“Two years...”

Lee Jong deliberately trailed off after saying those words.

It seemed that he wanted to ensure that Lukas was paying attention to him at that moment.

“I have seen and experienced many things in this place.”

There seemed to be some kind of hidden emotion within Lee Jong-hak’s voice.

Lukas knew that two years was by no means a short amount of time.

The majority of Absolutes would never be able to sympathise with this, and they would instead find it amusing or ridiculous, but Lukas was different.

Because he was an Absolute who was once human.

“Looking back at it, when I agreed to follow you, I was still unsure about many things.”

There was a reason why he was unsure.

This was because Lee Jong-hak himself could not tell right from wrong.

Before that, his life had been different, much simpler. His enemy was clear and they were beings that had to be destroyed.

Demons.

They could be called absolute evil. Therefore, Lee Jong-hak never had any hesitation or guilt when he killed them.

Even thinking about whether it was right or wrong had never been something he needed to do. Because there was no real reason for his actions.

But Lukas... forced Lee Jong-hak to look back and think about his actions for the first time.

At first, he couldn't accept the things Lukas had done.

This being, who was more powerful than anything he'd ever seen, chose to support the humans from the shadows without helping them directly.

That fact alone caused his anger to soar. He didn't understand it. And he thought that it wasn't something he could accept, irregardless of the reason.

But that wasn't it.

When Nodiesop, the man who devoured the Asian Branch, demonstrated his power without restraint, Lee Jong-hak felt that it was wrong for some reason.

'This power, can he use it without any restrictions?'

It didn't make sense.

However, he could only describe it as a 'feeling'.

It could be called an instinctive reaction.

To put it into simpler terms, it felt like he was using a nuclear bomb to get rid of an ant nest. Such power wouldn't simply stop at destroying the ant nest. Instead, it would leave enormous scars and aftereffects on the surrounding area.

...So what if Lukas had a similar reason?

What if the reason that he didn't use his power wasn't because of some preconceived idea, arrogance, or a lack of care, but because he was worried about the world's existence?

If that was the case, then Lee Jong-hak had made an unforgivable mistake towards him.

While he was filled with these worries, Lukas came to him. And he asked for his help.

He didn't have a choice.

At least, when he decided to go with Lukas, that was how Lee Jong-hak felt.

It was only after entering the Heavenly Realm that Lee Jong-hak regretted his hasty decision.

“Are you still unsure?”

When Lukas asked this question, Lee Jong-hak only smiled bitterly.

“Somehow, it feels like when I solve one problem, another one appears to take its place. I’m not complaining. It’s just that it feels like that’s always been the case.”

“...”

In all honesty, Lee Jong-hak’s current attitude filled Lukas with a strange feeling.

To a certain extent, this was all unbelievable. But this was natural.

After all, from Lukas’ perspective, he had met Lee Jong-hak only a little over a week ago, and at that time the man had appeared lost.

But for Lee Jong-hak, it had been two years.

Again, two years was by no means a short time. It was enough to figure out at least one thing that troubled you.

This was why the inner change he had experienced was somewhat understandable.

“Mr. Lukas.”

It felt like this was the first time Lee Jong-hak had called his name.

Lee Jong-hak looked at him with a gloomy expression and spoke in a low tone.

“I saw a demon in Nodiesop.”

Lee Jong-hak wasn't talking about the Demon Race that had ruined his life.

Instead, he was talking about demons in a symbolic sense. The evil which stood on the other side of God.

Monsters that brought disasters and calamity to people for no reason.

“I realised afterward that, in his eyes, humans were nothing. We were no different from weeds growing at the side of the street. It was such an existence that held the Asia Branch in his hand and waved it as he pleased. I want to stop that. So...”

Lee Jong-hak decided to stop hesitating.

He decided to finally put the solution he'd thought of after careful consideration into action.

"Please forgive me for my rudeness in the past. And please help me."

"..."

"I would like to fight by your side."

Lukas didn't answer.

Instead, he simply nodded slowly.

But that small action was enough to make Lee Jong-hak feel like a large lump, which had appeared in his chest at some indiscernible time, was melting away.

Season 2 Chapter 177

Lee Jong-hak said that he would remain with Ishuta for the time being. He was a man who took favours and grudges very seriously. So he probably didn't intend to leave her side before he felt that he had repaid his debt in full.

This wasn't much of a problem for Lukas. In fact, it could even be described as a good thing. Lukas intended to travel alone for the time being, and it wasn't a bad thing to have a reliable contact in a major city like Babylon.

Of course, Lee Jong-hak wasn't staying with Ishuta just to pay her back.

"Ms. Ishuta has a pass to Death Island."

"Death Island?"

"Yes. I was looking for a way to go there. That is the only place in the Heavenly Realm I have yet to go."

Lukas couldn't help but look at him in surprise at those words.

"Do you mean that you've already been to the other six islands? Including Dragon God Island?"

"Yes."

Lee Jong-hak nodded before deciding to explain a bit.

"It's not as amazing as it sounds. I only went there and I wasn't able to thoroughly search. As you should know by now, except for Dragon God Island, the seven islands which represent the Heavenly Realm are all similar in size to a small continent."

It was impossible to thoroughly search such a large place.

Lee Jong-hak had visited the busiest regions and asked if any strangers had appeared in the region but to no avail.

Min Ha-rin was proof of just how difficult searching for each other was.

Even though they were on the same island, they hadn't been able to find each other because they were both using aliases.

'This is why fame is important.'

Championship.

If they were to participate in this event and fight to the top, rumors about them would certainly spread across the entirety of the Heavenly Realm.

After thinking this, Lukas turned to look at Lee Jong-hak again.

"Did you get to meet the Goddess?"

"No. I wasn't allowed to. I simply followed Ms. Ishuta as an escort."

"I see."

Lukas also asked Lee Jong-hak about the 'four special statues'.

That got a reaction out of him.

"The most important statue in the entire Heavenly Realm is definitely the Dragon God's Statue."

"I heard that it is kept on Dragon God Island. Did you get the chance to see it?"

I didn't see it. From what I've heard, it only reveals itself to those worthy of seeing it."

"The statue reveals itself?"

"That's what the rumors... No. That's what the legends say."

"..."

Lukas fell silent for a while.

Of course, it didn't surprise him that much that a statue seemed to have its own consciousness.

There were dozens of reasons for such a phenomenon.

Nevertheless, there was still something that weighed heavily on his mind.

If the Dragon God Statue was truly one of the 'four special statues' mentioned by the voice, then it might be troublesome if it really had its own consciousness.

After exchanging a few more words with Lukas, Lee Jong-hak returned to Ishuta's side.

The 10 minutes period that he'd been granted was slowly running out.

When Lee Jong-hak left, Bargan approached Lukas once again. His expression was a bit tense.

"What did you talk about with the Whirlwind of the Arena?"

Whirlwind of the Arena.

Recalling that it was one of Lee Jong-hak's titles, Lukas responded.

"He's an old acquaintance, so we just had a short reunion."

"...I see."

Bargan nodded as if he'd understood something.

“Then do you plan to sell the Ancient Dragon’s corpse to Babylon?”

There was no time for Lukas to answer him.

This was because the five Major City Lords had approached him as if they were counting the time. The atmosphere in the clearing instantly became heavy.

Looking at their expressions, it was clear that they could no longer stall for time or refuse to answer.

“Now then. Let’s hear your answer.”

After saying that, Gargad pointed towards himself.

“Lukas, are you willing to sell the Ancient Dragon’s corpse to Uruk?”

“No.”

Gargad’s expression became hard at this answer which came without any hesitation.

Then, the Major City Lord of Bakdad, who was behind him, spoke.

“Then do you intend to sell it to Bakdad?”

“No.”

“...Tikrit?”

“I won’t sell it to you.”

The atmosphere became even heavier and a faint scent of blood began to fill the clearing.

The faces of the Major City Lords who had been rejected by Lukas were all as cold as ice, and their gazes were as sharp as blades. The killing intent that began radiating from their bodies was enough to make the other Dragonmen in the clearing numb.

Spera, the Major City Lord of Akad, seemed to have roughly understood the situation. He smiled in embarrassment before speaking up anyway.

“Looking at this situation, I don’t suppose you will sell it to Akad either, right?”

Lukas simply nodded without answering.

Then the Major City Lord of Akad scratched his cheek with a complicated expression.

“Hmm. This is awkward.”

At that moment, a roar of laughter could be heard.

It was Ishuta. She spread her folding fan wide and gently waved it at her face.

“Ahaha. It seems that you have a good relationship with my ‘Li Hao’.”

“...”

“You’re definitely his close friend, so it’s not strange that you also have amazing abilities.”

Although Li Hao was an outsider, he was strong enough to easily overpower all but the most powerful Dragonmen Fighters in her arena.

Amazing people usually grouped themselves with other extraordinary people, so she could barely accept the fact that her Magical Eye, which she was most proud of, didn’t work on him...

‘...but I can’t really...’

Of course, even if she tried to brainwash herself, it wasn’t something that she could overlook that easily.

But for now, the Ancient Dragon’s corpse was more important.

She wondered if this victory could be attributed to luck. It was all thanks to Li Hao, a Fighter that she'd worked hard to acquire, that she was able to win the competition for the Ancient Dragon's corpse today.

Ishuta smiled brightly and said.

"Mr. Dragon Hunter, Babylon guarantees that you will be treated as our greatest guest..."

"There's no need for you to do that. I don't intend to sell it to Babylon either."

When Lukas finished talking, Ishuta's expression cracked for the third time since they had met.

The Major City Lord of Bakdad spoke up with an angry expression.

"Did you call us Major City Lords out to such a distant place just to tell us that you won't sell it? Don't tell me you just wanted to use us to get rid of that trashy City Lord over there."

The once confident Sshiris, who was now being called out despite trying to make himself as small as possible, flinched.

Even Spera, who had maintained a playful attitude all this time, couldn't help but speak out with a vicious smile on his face.

“We all rushed through the sky for four days and four nights without even taking a break to rest. And it’ll take just as long for us to return. So that would mean that you made five Major City Lords waste an entire week.”

It wasn’t just about wasting time.

Each of them had brought multiple Sky Carriages and troops with them to assist with the transportation of the Ancient Dragon’s corpse. If they hadn’t been brought for this task, they could have been sent to complete at least a few dozen tasks even if they were to only do the most important ones. Naturally, this meant that the losses for this trip would be enormous.

The Major City Lords’ anger was more than justified.

“Answer me, Dragon Hunter. Do you intend to make fools out of us Major City Lords?”

“You’re being too hasty. Why are you already concluding that you will return with no gains?”

It was Ishuta who shot back an answer with an annoyed expression on her face.

“You’re the one who said you won’t sell it to anyone.”

“I did say that I wouldn’t sell it, but is that synonymous with saying that you won’t be able to obtain the Ancient Dragon’s parts?”

“What are you talking about?”

“...”

When Lukas didn't respond for a while, Gargad decided to speak up.

“If you're trying to play some trick...”

“I'm not. I just have one thing to say.”

Lukas pointed towards the Ancient Dragon as he continued.

“I won't accept your money. Instead, I intend to split this Ancient Dragon up and share it among the Major City Lords.”

“...wh-, what?!”

It was Barga, who was beside him who cried with disbelief.

Although there was a certain gap of strength between them, the Major City Lords reacted similarly.

“...”

On the other hand, Lee Jong-hak looked at Lukas with narrowed eyes.

He knew a bit about Lukas, so he wasn't as panicked as the others.

Lukas wasn't the type of person who would simply do good deeds for no real reason. He was extremely logical, had more experience than probably everyone there put together, and had the broadest and furthest vision.

That was why, more than anything, Lee Jong-hak was curious at that moment.

Just how far ahead was Lukas looking to make such a decision?

Season 2 Chapter 178

A refreshing breeze tickled his hair.

Gently sweeping away the hair that had been blown into his face, Lukas muttered.

"This city is huge."

Although he knew Lukas was just talking to himself, Bargan still nodded his head and responded.

"[Lirua] has a large arena and is considered one of the Eight Major Cities, but just a few decades ago, it was still classified as a small city."

“Small city.”

That didn't seem to be the case at all.

Anyone who saw the sight in front of them would have the same thought.

Of course, Herui was the only city in the Heavenly Realm that Lukas had visited, but it was classified as a small city.

This was why Lukas was feeling a sense of disparity at that moment.

He couldn't quite believe that this enormous city in front of him was developed from a small city like Herui in only a few decades.

Lirua had an appearance similar to that of a castle city, and it had a staircase-like structure in which the ground gradually rose as one passed through the different inner walls of the city.

Because of this, the building located in the very center of the city also occupied the highest point in the area, and its tall and large size made it appear even more daunting.

Lirua was large, so large that it wouldn't be strange to describe it as a city-state. And yet, there were still seven other cities of similar size on Combat Island alone.

As expected, the Heavenly Realm really was a place that could be described as its own world.

“Is that the arena?”

It was obvious that it was, but there was a reason that he asked that question. That was because, be it appearance or size, that building didn’t appear at all like an arena.

Even the royal castles of some countries would not be so large and luxurious.

The building was very thick, almost like a tower, but the difference from a normal tower was the fact that the building was flat on one side, almost as if it had been cut by a huge knife. Nevertheless, it was extremely tall and wide.

Maybe the architects had deliberately designed the building in this way to give the feeling that it was still unfinished.

“On the days of major fights, the ceiling is removed so that people can enjoy watching the matches from above.”

“Watching from above? Do you mean by using Sky Carriages?”

“There is a grandstand installed on a floating platform. Of course, such a thing is incredibly expensive to maintain, so those who don’t have a lot of money would never be able to enjoy it.”

Upon hearing that, Lukas narrowed his eyes and looked carefully at the arena, and sure enough, he found a small floating platform above the building.

From this distance, it appeared as nothing more than a pebble, but he was able to infer just how large it actually was.

Dragonmen were born on floating islands, so they probably didn't have a fear of heights, right?

Just as Lukas had this thought, Bargan spoke.

"...are you really okay?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The Ancient Dragon's corpse. Even if you gave it to the Major City Lords..."

—It had already been a week since Lukas gave the Ancient Dragon's corpse over to the five Major City Lords.

But there were still a few things that Bargan couldn't understand even when he thought back to that time.

This included Lukas' attitude, as well as the attitude of the Major City Lords.

They were offered the Ancient Dragon's corpse for free, but none of them appeared happy about it.

In fact, they all had subtle changes to their expressions and their faces became stiff as if they were seriously contemplating something.

In Bargan's opinion, the best way to handle the Ancient Dragon's corpse would have been to sell the parts equally to the five Major City Lords. As for areas with higher value like the skull they could have let them compete among themselves and sell it to the ones who offered the highest price.

By adopting this method, they wouldn't need to give in to any specific Major City Lord.

However, to his surprise, Lukas didn't do that. Instead, he decided to give the Ancient Dragon's corpse to them for free.

Was he trying to win the Major City Lords' favor? No. They weren't that simple.

To expect them to owe or return a favor just because of this could only be considered naive.

In any case, although they were reluctant, the Major City Lords didn't reject Lukas' proposal. They must have thought that Lukas was up to something, but the temptation of the bait was much too strong for them to reject.

"I didn't give it to them. They paid me for it."

"...compared to the price of the corpse, it was barely enough."

The Major City Lords all decided to give Lukas 20 million erus, the amount they had previously agreed upon. And since he was receiving it from all of them, it meant that he'd gained 100 million erus. He didn't refuse this.

But the other incentives like the flying dragons and slave Fighters were all refused. This was because he didn't really need those things at that moment.

'And the tomes.'

Lukas thought about the three magical tomes in his bag.

They were the items offered by Spera, the Major City Lord of Akad, which he accepted because of his interest in sorcery.

He'd originally intended to read them on the way to Lirua, but he didn't have the chance to because he was still working on the heart of the young Dragonling.

In any case, the Major City Lords left with the corpse of the Ancient Dragon. With the cliched words of treating him well if he ever went to their cities.

Lukas roughly responded appropriately while making eye contact with Lee Jong-hak, who nodded slightly.

That was enough.

Lee Jong-hak was currently in a position and had the ability to become a strong backer for Lukas. Therefore, for the time being, it would be beneficial to let him solidify his position building his skills and reputation on his own.

In the end, the only parts that Lukas kept for himself were the Ancient Dragon's skull and heart, and the body of its offspring.

Bargan asked Ashstar to help them transport the goods.

He didn't ask Igaru because he felt guilty to ask him when he didn't receive anything.

Of course, it was the same for Ashstar, but she was already feeling guilty for the Sshiris incident. So when Lukas asked her for a favor, she readily accepted it.

Ashstar transported all of their luggage for free, and when they arrived, she bowed her head to Lukas.

"...I am sorry."

Lukas didn't think she had anything to apologise for, but after thinking about it for a moment, he decided to nod his head and accept it.

"There are many skilled blacksmiths in Lirua. They might not be on the same level as Babylon's Fire Hammer, but they should be able to handle the skull of an Ancient Dragon."

“I don’t have any intention of using the Ancient Dragon’s skull or its offspring’s corpse for now. I would just like to store them for the time being.”

“That’s possible. But it will cost a lot to store them.”

The cost to store the skull of an Ancient Dragon was not something to be overlooked, but with the amount he had at hand, money was the least of Lukas’ worries at that moment.

After storing the items away, they finally walked along the streets of Lirua.

‘It’s been an intense week.’

From encountering an Ancient Dragon and witnessing it being slain to meeting five of the eight Major City Lords and even negotiating with them.

Bargan realised that this short period had been the most intense experience he’d had in his entire life.

On the other hand, Lukas, who was the center of all this turmoil, appeared calm and unreadable as usual.

Sometimes, Bargan couldn’t help but wonder if he even had feelings in the first place.

“I would like to visit the arena, but before that, let’s find a place to stay. Bargan, lead the way.”

“...of course. Please follow me.”

As he followed Bargan, Lukas looked around at the streets of Lirua.

He could get a rough idea of the atmosphere in the city just by observing a few blocks on the street.

Lirua was a city filled with vitality. It was early in the morning, but those walking through the streets seemed to be overflowing with vitality.

That wasn't all. The overall condition and quality of the various buildings in the city were very high. He'd had this feeling when he looked at the arena in the center of the city, but it seemed almost too sophisticated to have been made by the rough hands of the Dragonman race.

“The buildings in Lirua were built according to designs made by architects from Peace Island.”

“I see.”

According to what he'd read, Dragonmen living on Peace Island were so different it was almost as if they were an entirely different race.

It was said that those living on Peace Island were usually calm, intelligent, and had incredible artistic talents.

The building Bargan guided him to was also a very stylish building.

Creak-

As with most inns, it also had a bar on the first floor. The difference was that the ceiling was very high as it seemed they had removed the floor between the first and second floors.

Because of this, even though it wasn't a very large space, it didn't feel cramped at all.

The bar was relatively quiet. It wasn't that there weren't any people there, it was just that most of the seats were empty. This was natural since bars were usually the busiest around sunset.

Bargan approached the man standing behind the counter and exchanged a few words before returning to Lukas.

"Would you like to eat at the counter or at a table?"

"Let's eat at a table."

"Understood."

Bargan nodded before ordering the meal.

In the meantime, Lukas found a quiet spot before taking his seat. After finishing the order, Bargan came back and sat in front of Lukas with a slightly awkward expression on his face.

In fact, it felt extremely wrong for him to sit beside his Lord, but it couldn't be helped.

Lukas was a rational person, and he didn't think that one group should sit at separate tables to eat.

Perhaps because the inn wasn't busy at that moment, they received their meal quickly. It was piping hot bacon soup, smoked meat, with optional beef jerky. The side dishes were also filled with meat, but by this point, Lukas had already become accustomed to Dragonmen culture to an extent. (TL: Sounds like my kind of meal...)

He scooped a few mouthfuls of soup and ate it without complaints.

For a while, only the clattering of tableware could be heard. And before long, their meal was over.

The two of them lowered their tableware at almost the exact same time. This was possible mostly because Bargan had intentionally matched Lukas' eating speed.

Lukas took a sip of water before finally opening his mouth.

"Bargan."

"Yes."

“You said that Lirua was a city that had already lost its fight, right?”

“...that’s right.”

“I would like you to explain that for me.”

Bargan’s face became a bit dark when he heard that.

Lukas looked at him silently.

[Wandering Dragonman Fighter Bargan]

[Level: 54]

[Titles: Headsmasher Bargan, The One Who Does Not Compromise]

[Occupation: Fighter]

[Race: Dragonman]

[Skills: Swordsmanship(Lv.7), Malice(Lv.6), Survival Skills(Lv.7), Untamed Sword(Lv.5)]

[Loyalty: 81]

[Difficulty: C]

[Feelings towards Participant: Trust, Admiration, Loyalty]

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Lukas realised that when the loyalty stat passed 80, new information would be revealed in the status window.

And this information actually included the feelings that person had towards him.

It seemed that Bargan fully trusted him now. He could tell as much just by taking a single glance at the status window. This meant that he would probably tell him everything about what was happening in Lirua.

“The darkness in this city is much deeper and more dangerous than you think, my Lord. Of course, I don’t mean to underestimate you. But if you were to really listen to what I have to say... it might put you in danger.”

“It’s fine, you can tell me.”

“...understood.”

Just as Bargan opened his mouth with a heavy expression on his face.

Creak-

The door opened and a group walked into the bar.

Lukas' eyes turned to look at them. He wasn't the only one, and the reason for this was obvious.

It was because this group was being so obnoxiously loud, that they filled the entire first floor of the inn with their noise, and they acted like the entire world revolved around them.

By the look of them, it could be assumed that they were Fighters.

Nevertheless, Lukas soon took his eyes off of them before turning back to Bargan. Since the first floor had become so noisy, it would be better to go up to their room before continuing the conversation.

However, he saw that Bargan was staring at this group with a hard expression.

"Bargan."

"Ah... Yes. Yes. I'm sorry."

Bargan shook his head, quickly returning to his senses.

Deciding not to mention it, Lukas continued in a calm voice.

“It’s noisy here, let’s go up.”

“...I think that would be a good idea.”

With that said, the two of them got up from their seats and went up to the second floor. Or, to be precise, they tried to do so.

“Bargan?”

Someone called Bargan’s name.

Bargan stopped walking, his expression becoming even more severe.

“Right, it’s Bargan.”

Did he know Bargan?

However, maybe because of his exuberant mood, the man's voice seemed to have a hint of ridicule mixed into it.

Lukas turned around to look at the person who called out to Bargan, and upon seeing the man's face, he knew that it wasn't because of his mood.

"The cowardly bastard who ran away like a dog with his tail between his legs has returned to Lirua?"

The one who spoke was an extremely large man who had nothing but sarcasm and contempt on his face.

However, the problem was that it wasn't just the man. All of the Fighters around also had similar expressions on their faces.

"Bargan? The guy who got kicked out of the arena and became a wanderer?"

"Rumor had it that he'd been drifting around the area near Herui."

"Ha! How pathetic. I can't believe he decided to settle in a small city like that... It's a disgrace to the Lirua arena."

One by one, they all shouted their own insulting remarks.

Some of them even spat on the floor, saying that their alcohol had lost its taste.

Bargan took a deep breath before turning around to look at them. By then, his expression had become much colder.

"...long time no see, Himba."

"Right. It's been about 10 years, hasn't it?"

"It should have been longer."

"Kukuku."

Himba chuckled.

"Come drink with us. It's been so long, let's have a good talk."

"No. I'm busy right now, so I'm just going to leave."

After shooting those words back with a cold tone, Bargan turned around again. But Himba spoke in an exaggerated tone.

"Uhuh. You don't have to be ashamed. It's been a long time since we last saw each other. Or is it that you can't afford it? Don't worry, it'll be my treat. As you know, Lirua's Fighters never lack money."

“...”

Bargan’s expression became filled with contempt. He clenched and unclenched his fist a few times. He knew that if he were to stay, he would no longer be able to control his emotions.

“My Lord is waiting for me.”

“...Lord?”

Himba asked with genuine surprise before turning to look at Lukas for the first time.

Then, he asked with an even more bewildered expression.

“That wimpy looking man over there is your Lord?”

* * *

Wimpy man.

Lukas looked down at his forearms.

Now that he thought about it, he'd always heard people mention how thin he was. Even though he'd done his best to train his body when he was fighting against the Demigods or when he had become 'Frey Blake' his body had always been like this.

'Now that I have a different body...'

He could practice martial arts and develop his body.

When he thought about that, the first thing that came to mind was the Warrior King Fist. It was the perfect martial art for developing and building muscles.

But for now, Lukas didn't really have any desire to practice the Warrior King Fist.

"Ah. Don't be scared, little man. Even though I look like this, I'm not that type of person."

Himba grinned slightly as he said that.

Lukas, who had been lost in thought for a while, finally raised his head and looked at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I would never attack someone who isn't even a Fighter."

“ ... ”

When Lukas failed to respond, Himba seemed to have come to the conclusion that he was scared stiff. It was a big mistake, but Lukas didn't bother to correct it.

Instead, it was Bargan who could no longer contain his anger. He gritted his teeth roughly as glared at Himba.

He had long become used to others mocking him. In fact, at this point, it didn't even bother him.

However, when he saw them looking down on and mocking Lukas right in front of him, Bargan found that he could barely hold himself back.

Several times, his lord had been insulted by someone.

Now, he could no longer contain his anger.

“You guys...”

“Enough.”

It was none other than Lukas who had stopped Bargan, whose aura had erupted as though he was about to attack.

Bargan turned to Lukas with a puzzled expression.

“My Lord.”

“We just came to Lirua. It would be better to not cause a commotion.”

“...understood.”

Himba looked at him with an expression of disgust and pity.

In the past, he was the ‘Headsmasher Bargan’, a Fighter admired by all of Lirua. But now, he was nothing more than the subordinate of someone who appeared to be an outsider.

Moreover, Lukas’ ‘shabby’ appearance made Bargan seem even more pathetic.

Lukas also sensed the meaning in Himba’s gaze, but he still turned and headed upstairs without any other reaction.

This was blatant disregard, but to Himba, it only looked like he was running away.

“Kikiki.”

“Be careful on your way, cowards.”

His companions also waved their hands and jeered as they left, but Lukas never looked back in the end.

Click-

The bedroom door closed.

The interior of the room was neither too spacious nor too narrow, but it had everything that it should.

Beds, chairs, a table, a window, and a sink to wash their faces.

Lukas gave a cursory glance around the room before pulling one of the chairs, sitting down, and looking at Bargan.

Bargan stared out of the window for a while, and it seemed that he had something on his mind. Finally, he slowly raised his head as he felt Lukas' gaze.

"...the Major City Lord of Lirua."

Bargan's voice was soft. This was proof that he'd regained his composure.

"Is a man named Kangki"

“That’s a funny name.”

A smile threatened to spread across Bargan’s face at Lukas’ honest statement.

“Yes. However, no one on Combat Island would ever laugh when they heard that name. Instead, they would be filled with awe and admiration.”

“Because he is a Major City Lord?”

“That is one of the reasons, but the most important reason is that he is a former Grand Champion.”

Lukas couldn’t help but be a bit surprised by this statement.

Grand Champion.

In other words, Kangki had once completed his goal of becoming a Champion and winning the Championship.

“He also won the title of Champion in as many as 16 cities. Kangki is... one of the strongest Fighters in the world.”

“Is that still true?”

“Probably. He was never the type to neglect his training just because he earned the title of Major City Lord. Sometimes he even participates in exhibition matches, where he would overpower the current active Fighters as if it was nothing.”

Lukas, who was even more confused at that moment, couldn't help but ask.

“And you're saying that such a man condones match-fixing? Someone who was once the Grand Champion?”

“It's not just condoning. Kangki is... the one who started it all.”

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After a moment of silence, Lukas opened his mouth again.

“Something could be going o-’

“The circumstances don't matter!”

Bargan seemed to be startled by his own outburst.

He immediately realised just how rude his actions were. Not only had he cut off his Lord's words, but he'd also raised his voice at him.

Nevertheless, Lukas continued looking at him with the same calm expression as before. There was no anger or condemnation in his eyes.

As his eyes met this gaze, Bargan felt his anger cool down.

Then, after taking a deep breath, he continued in a much calmer tone.

“...the outcome of a Fighter’s match should never be decided before the match has even begun. It is an insult to the Fighters who constantly risk their lives on the battlefield, and to the spectators who cheer them on with pure hearts.”

“...”

“Kangki is... the one who brought corruption to Lirua. He poisoned the noble souls of Fighters with just a small amount of money. I couldn’t understand or accept that.”

“So you left Lirua.”

“Yes.”

In fact, it would be better to say that he had run away.

Knowing this, Bargan couldn’t help but chew on his lip slightly.

“How many people are aware of the match-fixing?”

“...all of the renowned Fighters in the arena, and the wealthy and powerful people in the city support it from the shadows.”

“So the Dragonmen who enjoy the fights don’t know.”

“Yes.”

Then why didn’t he spread the rumors about it to the Dragonman populace?

There was no need for him to ask such a question. The answer was obvious.

Kangki was a former Grand Champion.

Lukas had already experienced the kind of effect such powerful achievements have on most Dragonmen.

This meant that Kangki had an enormous amount of wealth, overwhelming power, and a reputation that everyone on the island raved about.

At the very least, it could be said that within his territory, his reputation was absolute.

On the other hand, Bargan was only a Fighter who had a bit of reputation for his performance in the arena.

Even if he were to cry out about the match-fixing until he spat blood, very few people in the city would believe him.

‘Nevertheless.’

Lukas couldn’t really understand Kangki’s carelessness.

If he had been more thorough... Bargan would never have been allowed to leave the city alive.

It also couldn’t be that he’d forgotten Bargan’s existence or didn’t know his whereabouts. Himba and the other Fighters in Lirua knew exactly where he had been wandering around.

No matter how insignificant they might be, as long as there was even one other person who knew the hidden truth, they could become an unknown variable.

There was no way a man in Kangki’s position wouldn’t know something like that.

‘...no.’

He recalled the characteristics of the Dragonmen living on Combat Island.

The good was that they were tough, but the bad was that they were simple.

If Kangki's personality was the same, then his choice to let the secret leak out would be a bit more acceptable. Nevertheless, he still couldn't understand.

"You said that just a few decades ago, Lirua was a small town."

"That's right."

"Then it can be said that Kangki is the one who developed the small city into a major city."

Bargan didn't want to accept this fact, but the truth was the truth.

He nodded reluctantly.

"Yes."

"..."

Lukas became lost in thought for a while.

The match-fixing involved most of the Fighters in the arena, not just the Major City Lord.

The wealthy and influential people in the city also supported it from the shadows.

“As expected, I’ll have to see him for myself.”

“Huh?”

“I’m talking about Kangki.”

Bargan’s explanation alone wasn’t enough. It seemed that he would have to see it for himself before he could make a decision.

Lukas raised his head and looked at Bargan.

“Where can I see him?”

* * *

Leaving the inn, Lukas headed towards ‘Paigwam Square’, one of the largest shopping districts in Lirua.

There was a large fountain in the center of the square, which made it easy to spot from a distance.

Since it was midday, the square was filled with people. Street vendors selling food and miscellaneous items could be seen everywhere, and many would-be customers stood, wondering what to buy.

Passing them, Lukas headed to the fountain.

Being sold next to the fountain were newspapers that showed the various news and rumors circulating the city and surrounding area.

That was Lukas' goal.

The price of each newspaper was 5 erus.

This could be considered fairly expensive for a newspaper, but for Lukas, funds were the least of his problems.

After purchasing it without hesitation, he opened the newspaper and began to scan the information contained within.

[Hilla's Twin Blades' dethroned after keeping his seat for six years?! Who is the new Champion?]

[Relics of an ancient kingdom have been found on Adventure Island!]

[Big Match of the Century! Totoran VS Archisus! An expert claims, 'This fight has already transcended the level of 'a friendly'...]

It was normal news about Champions and rookies who were quickly rising to fame from every city.

The analysis of the upcoming 'Championship' was also hot news.

Among the articles was a ranking list of the Championship candidates. It was said that this list was created after dozens of arena experts debated for a very long time.

Lee Jong-hak's name was also included in the list.

He was ranked 24th.

This evaluation was much higher than Lukas expected.

Were there really only twenty-three people stronger than Lee Jong-hak?

'...maybe they overestimated...'

Lukas only had this thought in passing. He knew that there was little chance of such a thing happening.

Flip-

When he turned the page, a large phrase at the top immediately caught his eye.

[The first Dragon Hunter in 10 years has appeared! His name is 'Lukas']

“ ... ”

Lukas' eyes narrowed slightly.

[An outsider made an incredible contribution to the subjugation of a black dragon. Could he be a Great Sorcerer?]

[What is the relationship between the new Dragon Hunter and Dragon God Island?]

[The value of the Ancient Dragon's corpse is estimated to be at least a few billion eru...]

[Babylon's Fire Hammer picks up his hammer for the first time in six months after seeing the Ancient Dragon's corpse!]

After that, there were several speculative articles written about Lukas' true identity.

'Rumors are certainly faster than feet.'

The entirety of Combat Island had already heard Lukas' name before he had even reached Lirua.

'The story has changed slightly. Instead of being slain by me, they claim that it was a collaboration between several major cities with me as the main contributor.'

Lukas had become a sorcerer who'd stood out in a major battle against an Ancient Dragon.

The Major City Lords were probably not the ones who had spread the false rumors. Instead, it was probably the people who found the truth too hard to believe. That was why it wasn't too surprising that the rumors weren't completely accurate.

There was a lot of interesting news in the newspaper, but Lukas hadn't bought it to see these things.

He found what he was looking for on the very last page.

[Lirua Arena Match Schedule]

The schedule was packed.

Small letters filled the entire page with no gaps.

There were at least 20 matches per day, and there were even days where 30 or more matches were scheduled.

The notable matches were written in larger fonts and different colors. Lukas memorised dates and times for a few matches before putting the newspaper away.

Then, he headed towards the arena.

* * *

The Lirua arena was truly an amazing place. It was completely different from the one in Herui, which had a bit of a rustic feel. In particular, the lobby area, which had receptionists in charge of various tasks like organising the spectating areas, receiving applications, or posting projections, was so dazzling that it might even cause you to go blind if you were to come here in the middle of the night.

Lukas headed to a free reception desk.

“Welcome. May I ask what brings you to the Lirua arena?”

A young Dragonman woman greeted him with a polite smile.

Not beating around the bush, Lukas immediately got down to business.

“I would like to register as a Fighter.”

“I see. Do you have any experience working in other arenas?”

“I don’t.”

“Which arena are you affiliated with?”

“None.”

“So you are inexperienced and independent.”

The receptionist continued with a slightly more strained smile.

“I’m sorry, but since Lirua is classified as a major city, you cannot register to be a Fighter here without experience.”

Lukas’ expression shifted slightly. This was not a problem he’d expected to experience. Why hadn’t Bargan or Min Ha-rin told him about this?

Just as he was wondering about this, the receptionist continued.

“Or, if you’ve done anything worth mentioning.”

“Anything worth mentioning?”

“Yes. Even if you’re not a registered Fighter, you can have unique achievements. Or a reputation for doing something other than fighting in the arena...”

Lukas thought for a moment before speaking.

“I killed an Ancient Dragon.”

“Huh?”

The receptionist blinked.

“What did you just say?”

“I said I killed an Ancient Dragon.”

The receptionist froze, her pupils shaking slightly.

“Umm, may I ask your name?”

“It’s Lukas.”

“Dr-, Dragon Hunter Lukas!”

The receptionist’s exclamation was much louder than expected, and because of the structure of the lobby, it easily resonated throughout the building.

In an instant, it became so quiet that one would be able to hear a pin drop.