

THE BOOK EATING MAGICIAN

BOOK 01

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The Book Eating Magician

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Synopsis

['Lightning Magic Primer' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[The 2nd Circle magic 'Lightning Bolt' has been acquired.]

The unprecedented magician who will eat all the magic books of the world has appeared

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Chapter 1 – The Greedy Grimoire #1

“Theodore Miller.”

A man with dark circles under his eyes called Theodore’s name. The man’s thin cheeks pushed his cheekbones higher, giving off a bonier impression. He would’ve been considered a resident of the slums if he had been dressed poorly.

However, this man was actually a third-grade professor and a 5th Circle master, making him one of the best within Bergen Academy.

The skinny man, Professor Vince, spoke in a businesslike tone, “You should know why I called you.”

Theodore Miller, shortened to Theo, nodded with a shadowed face. This was because he couldn’t bear to open his mouth and answer the question. He had been prepared for a while, but it felt like his heart was falling apart now that it was actually happening.

“Your written grades are brilliant. You were only deducted three points among all your subjects. Even then, they were just minor mistakes. There was no one else who could answer it except for you, so you can think of it as a perfect score.”

Although it couldn’t be confirmed publicly, some test questions had been ‘designed to be wrong’. It was a tacit rule in the academy so that a full score wouldn’t be granted easily. Nevertheless, Theo only had points deducted for three questions. Perhaps it was a better performance than some professors.

Vince admired the talent of this young man while feeling sad at the very same time. It was because Theodore Miller lacked the talent to become a magician.

“However, you can’t graduate because your practical results were a failure.”

The decisive voice pressed firmly on Theo’s back.

The academy had two graduation requirements: one was to have a written score above 70 points; and the other was to become a 3rd Circle master. The former wasn’t difficult, but the latter condition was the problem.

For Theo, who had been born with a low amount of magic power and sensitivity, the wall of the 3rd Circle was too high for him. Even though he had reduced his amount of sleep just so he could practice, he couldn’t even reach the level of his classmates’ feet. Despite his practice, his magic would pour out wildly.

As a result, Theo hadn’t been able to graduate for three years.

“Hu… Theodore, what circle are you now?” Professor Vince asked with frustration.

He had asked the same question last year and the year before that. However, the answer had never changed. Theo once again repeated the same answer, “…2nd Circle.”

It was a terrible number.

Most of the academy's students usually reached the 2nd Circle by the end of the first grade and the 3rd Circle when they entered the third grade. It wasn't uncommon for excellent students to reach the 4th Circle by graduation.

However, Theo had stayed at the academy for five years and still couldn't cross the wall of the 3rd Circle. Additionally, that wasn't the only problem.

"Have you mastered 2nd Circle magic?"

"...I failed." Theo's voice died down even further.

If the only thing that was lacking was just the amount of magic power, then he could supply it from outside sources. This was a bit expensive to do, but if he took reagents made of magic power, he could gain enough power needed for the 3rd Circle.

However, Theo's sensitivity was close to the bottom, and this was indispensable for using magic. The lack of magic power could be overcome, but there was no method to increase mana sensitivity.

It was why Professor Vince had given up on sponsoring Theo.

'It is a waste of Theo's brilliance, but... with poor magic

sensitivity, he will never survive as a magician. Spending 5 years and not even mastering 2nd Circle magic, it is hopeless.'

He looked down at Theo with a wistful expression.

Any other student would've given up sooner... Theo, who knew better than anyone else that he was without talent, had been trying for three years. That commitment was incomparable to the other students who had grown up like plants in a greenhouse.

If Theo had ordinary levels of magic sensitivity, then the position of chief graduate would've been his.

However, reality was too cruel to Theo.

Professor Vince pulled out an envelope from the drawer and hesitated for a moment. This wasn't the first time, but it felt like the weight of the envelope had increased as the years passed. It was a letter given to a grade repeater.

"This is my role as a professor, but... I can't help feeling like I'm doing something wrong to you. I'm sorry."

"...No, it's fine."

"Read it once and discard it. There shouldn't be anything different from last year, but you never know."

Theo accepted the envelope calmly.

His fingers were continuously on the verge of trembling, but he managed to resist it somehow. This was his third repeater letter. Receiving it once would make someone an object of ridicule, while receiving it twice would make someone the shame of their family.

Theo was the only student at Bergen Academy ever to have received it three times.

More than anything, the third repeater letter had a separate meaning. This was the last one. A fourth letter didn't exist.

Professor Vince hadn't said it, but if Theodore Miller didn't graduate next year, he would be expelled. It would be a scandal so disgraceful that it would be better for him to quit and defend his honour.

'Is it only up to here?'

Theo looked down at the repeater letter with empty eyes.

His eyes which had once been filled with dreams were darkening. The young man, who had stepped into the academy to become a great magician, now had to face the grim reality which would cause his knees to buckle.

'I can do it next year. I can graduate next year.' Such a hope was now devastating for him, as he stood on the precipice of ruin.

Theodore Miller…

He was born the eldest son of a disgraced noble family. The Miller family, which at one time had served the feudal lords as earls, had been pushed to their downfall 100 years ago. Their attempts at re-establishing their family had left nothing for Theo.

So, Theo had wanted to become a magician. Unlike those who had to undergo harsh training since childhood, children with noble titles were able to enter the academy without much difficulty. He thought he was quite smart, so he convinced his parents and stepped inside, beyond the threshold of the Royal Academy.

However, it was up to there. Theo would sleep later and got up earlier than anyone else. He worked enthusiastically in class and reduced his amount of sleep in order to practice his mana. Rather than blaming the scarce environment, Theo had believed he would be rewarded if he put in more effort.

‘Was I too optimistic?’

His classmates had graduated two years ago, and juniors one year younger than him had graduated already. Now, there would be juniors two years younger than him who would accept their degrees.

Even the new students knew his name. He was the academy’s long-time dunce.

Theo would bring dishonour to the fallen Miller family.

‘Where did it go wrong?’

Was it when the spells used in the first test had failed? When he had realized that it was hopeless with his magic sensitivity? When he had accepted his first repeater letter a few days before the graduation ceremony? When he had thought that his efforts had been lacking after receiving two letters?

Or maybe… it had been when he first dreamt about becoming a magician.

‘Dammit.’

So far, he had never resented his own poverty. There were people who ate less than him and those who couldn’t live in abundance. Even though their status had fallen, Theo was still a noble and had managed to enter the Royal Academy.

However, his patience was reaching its limit.

The magic reagents which other students drank like water? Theo had given up on those knowing that one bottle would cost two months of the Miller family’s budget.

Hiring another magician as a private tutor? He wouldn’t be able

to afford one even if he sold the Miller estate.

Of course, many students graduated without using such methods. They increased their magic power with natural born talent and didn't need to be taught separately. With no talent or no money...

One could still graduate even if they were lacking just one of these things. However, Theodore Miller had nothing.

"I should be going back."

As soon as the professor nodded in agreement, Theo turned around.

He wasn't confident about maintaining this cool composure much longer. His calm face was already half-distorted. At the very least, he didn't want the professor to see something so ugly.

Bang.

The door closed with a harsher sound than when he'd entered.

With a heavy expression, Professor Vince looked toward the door through where Theo had disappeared, but the professor soon dropped his gaze back down to the book he was reading. The pages of the book weren't turned for a long time.

*

Ding!

The loud bell could be heard in the hallway. It was a clock signaling that it was evening.

Due to magic, the volume was constant no matter where it was heard. Students staying in the dormitory couldn’t leave school after this time, while students not staying in the dormitories were required to leave.

As Theo headed to the dormitory blankly, he suddenly stopped moving.

“...Come to think of it, I haven’t eaten dinner yet.”

Should he go to the cafeteria now?

He thought for a moment before shaking his head. Due to the repeater notice in his hand, Theo didn’t have any appetite. Should he go back to the dormitory and sleep? No, his drowsiness had been lifted a long time ago. It would be fortunate if he didn’t get a nightmare while sleeping.

In the end, Theo’s footsteps headed to the same place as always.

It was a place that rarely had visitors, and it was the most comfortable place for him in Bergen Academy—the library.

Chapter 2 – The Greedy Grimoire #2

The library wasn't far from the dormitory.

When he was a few steps away the library's shabby door, the scent of old paper and bookshelves tickled his nose. It was a pleasant smell he was now familiar with.

After pushing the door half-open, the empty library was revealed.

'Well, I thought it would be like this.'

The sight was always the same. It could be said that no student other than Theodore Miller would be found in the library after class.

Most of the books collected here talked about difficult concepts which the professors only explained the simplest parts of in class. There was no reason for adolescents to feel excited when they were busy playing.

Thanks to that, Theo was able to secure a peaceful space.

"Today... I should look up lightning magic one more time."

Theo walked between the bookshelves in a familiar manner. Having spent five years in this library, he was able to find any book

with his eyes closed. Even professors who occasionally came to find books would come to Theo before the librarians, so there was no doubts about his accuracy.

Theo pulled out the books he wanted.

‘[Lightning Magic Primer]… I’ve memorized everything, but I might have missed something. Additionally, [Why is Lightning Difficult to Control?] could be helpful. [Principles Behind Lightning Strikes]? It is closer to meteorology than magic, but let’s take this as well.’

Three thick books were instantly piled up.

Each book was very thick. Even a person with a fast reading spend would have to spend a day and a half to finish them. One book might be memorized, but that didn’t apply to the other two books.

There would be a loud spectacle if other students needed to read this for homework. However, to Theo, this thickness was only a day’s worth of reading. The professors were aware of this but ignored it because it was no use.

If they knew the amount of knowledge Theo had read, they wouldn’t be able to hide their regret like Professor Vince.

Rustle… rustle…

There was only the sound of pages being turned in the library.

Theo liked this silent time. It was because he coveted knowledge which could help him shake off this suffocating situation. Here, there were no professors who dismissed Theo or students making jokes.

Theo channeled all his stress into studying everyday. Theo's superior brain was used to this stress, and it absorbed the knowledge which had been accumulated in the library like fleece sucking up water.

It had been five years. Was he imagining it?

As Theo looked at the books carefully, it was like the letters on the paper were sparkling.

*

Tak.

Theo's fingers closed the last book. This was the third book. The clock in the library was pointing to 10 o'clock. He had arrived in the library at 6 o'clock, so he had read three books in only four hours. This was a pace truly worthy of being called speed reading.

'Um, that was quite interesting.'

They were interesting books. In particular, [Why is Lightning Difficult to Control?] systematically summarized why lightning magic was so difficult.

The most difficult spell in the 2nd Circle was ‘Lightning Bolt’ as creating lightning and keeping it flowing in a straight line was difficult. It wasn’t uncommon for even 3rd or 4th Circle magicians to be inexperienced with lightning magic.

Theo laid aside the book before aiming his palm at the window and muttering.

“Lightning Bolt.”

Just maybe… He hoped it would work.

Pajik.

However, the result was as expected. There was faint electrostatic discharge before the spell was broken. The formula of the magic spell was perfect, but his ability to control it was too weak. A person who lacked control couldn’t be a magician.

It was something he had heard time and time again, but it was still a sad sight.

“Damn! What the hell is wrong with me…!”

Sensitivity was also known as affinity, and it was considered a talent. It referred to one's ability to control magic power. Magicians with high sensitivity were more powerful than other magicians, even if the same spell was used. It was the same for the rate of magic power accumulation.

Therefore, sensitivity was an indispensable part of being a magician. Since there was no method to raise it, the trait became more prominent. For Theo, it was like reaching for a pie in the sky.

"Haaaah..."

He couldn't help sighing.

After five years, Theo's hope had been worn thin. Theo thought of his parents who were waiting for him and the people who thought of him as their master. He would be shamed if he couldn't get his degree.

A magician who graduated from the academy would be able to waste time for several years just by relying on the academy's name.

'But can I graduate next year?'

Despite having reduced his amount of sleep, he had only reached the 2nd Circle. It was almost impossible for him to master the 3rd Circle, which was a Bergen Academy graduation requirement, without dying. Next year would be meaningless.

The boy, who had been so confident when he left home, became a young man afraid of failure.

Ding!

It was the bell which signaled lights out. This was also the sound which indicated Theo's time was over. He had to hurry or the door of the dormitory would be locked.

First, he needed to put away the three books. Theo embraced the three books, like he had done in the beginning. However, the moment he tried to raise his body...

"Eh?"

A book on the desk caught his attention.

'Didn't I clearly only bring three books? Did I accidentally carry another book among the three?'

It was strange, but he should put it away anyway. Theo stood up and stretched out his left hand. It was a fairly thin book, so he was going to pick it up with one hand. However, the sensation at his fingertips was strange. It felt like he had stuck his hand in a sticky barrel of syrup, or like a slimy flesh was tickling the palm of his hand.

...It was like he had put his hand in the mouth of something alive.

Slurp.

“Uwaack!”

Theo hurriedly pulled back his left hand at the creepy feeling. He fell to the ground hastily, letting go of the books in the process. However, that didn’t matter. Theo needed to identify the thing which had touched his palm.

After he scrambled back up, Theo gazed toward the unidentified book. However, there was nothing on the desk.

“Eh?”

Theo’s eyes widened as he couldn’t understand the phenomenon. Had he seen a hallucination? He could still feel that creepy, sticky feeling that tickled his palm.

Theo touched his left hand carefully. He wanted to check if it was damp. It would prove that what had happened just before hadn’t been a hallucination. However, the palm of his left hand was dry without any signs of wetness.

“Hallucination...? Didn’t it feel slippery? There was clearly a shabby book on the desk...”

Theo muttered and sank weakly to the floor. He sat on the edge

of a book, so his butt was sore. However, the pain was nothing compared to the psychological impact.

Didn't a magician always need to be cool-headed? Had his mental state fallen to the bottom due to his sense of insecurity?

'Should I drop out this year?'

It was better than being expelled. Theo knew that, but he had held onto the hope of becoming a magician for five years. It wasn't a dream he could just throw away. Without making a decision, Theo sighed, then he put his hand on the cold floor to raise himself up.

It was at this moment that...

Slurp...

All of a sudden, his left hand felt a strange texture. It was slippery and sticky... The hallucination which had tickled Theo's palm had appeared again!

Theo looked down reflexively at his left hand touching the floor...

And he saw something shocking.

"...T-Tongue?!"

A tongue was sticking out of Theo's palm. It had a smooth pink surface and was a long piece of flesh which looked like it came from a reptile. The tongue sprang from a hole in the middle of his palm and shook like a snake in front of food.

The tongue swayed slowly from side to side.

Slurp!

Like a frog grabbing a fly, it snatched a book from the floor. Its speed was so fast that Theo couldn't even see the afterimage. The tongue wrapped itself completely around the book.

No one could've predicted what happened next. The tongue which held its prey was then sucked back into the hole in Theo's palm.

Gulp.

There was the sound of something being swallowed. A book on the ground had suddenly disappeared into his left hand.

Theo looked down at his left hand with an absurd expression. However, the book his palm had swallowed didn't emerge.

Instead, Theo heard a voice. It was a voice with a strange tone he had never heard before.

[‘Lightning Magic Primer’ has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[2nd Circle magic ‘Lightning Bolt’ has been acquired.]

[After waking up from a long sleep, Gluttony is very hungry. Hurry and relieve Gluttony’s hunger. The time limit is 10 minutes from now. (1/5)]

Chapter 3 – The Greedy Grimoire #3

What? There was no time to have doubts.

As soon as the unknown voice cut out, waves of knowledge entered Theodore Miller's brain. The amount of information couldn't be controlled by the human's five senses. A few years of experience filled his head at once.

Simultaneously, Theo had a hunch that he could now use 'Lightning Bolt' fully.

Theo hadn't learned mere knowledge; he had received the wisdom of the author of the book, [Lightning Magic Primer].

"...Lightning Bolt."

He chanted the spell unconsciously. This was a magic which had failed just a few minutes ago, yet the results were quite different this time.

Paijijik!

Blue lightning shot out the open window. The image Theo had visualised in his head was a complete success. The leaves which the lightning bolt passed by turned black. If the lightning bolt had hit a living creature, then it absolutely wouldn't have been safe.

‘Success.’

It was a spell he had failed to execute several hundred times. Theo had even failed frequently in the basic elements. Lightning attribute magic was considered to have the highest difficulty level, so it was bound to be even harder for him.

Seeing the static electricity on his palms as if he had experienced an earthquake, Theo was glad. Had he really succeeded in Lightning Bolt at once?

‘This isn’t a hallucination…!’

He folded his fingers which were trembling from the shock and felt the sweat on his palms.

Theo realized this was the turning point of his life. He was a magician lacking in sensitivity and magic power. This was his chance to reach the 3rd Circle which had been impossible for him!

‘Okay, let’s start over from the beginning.’

This was when Theo sobered up.

The strange phenomenon had cleared his confusion and depressed emotions, giving him a ray of hope. At this moment, his thinking abilities returned to normal. His brain, which even first-class magicians had acknowledged, began doing a high-speed analysis.

This situation had started when he found an unidentified book. He'd felt a horrible touch on his left hand when he tried to pick up the book and the book then disappeared somewhere. After that, a strange tongue had sprouted from the palm of his left hand. The tongue had grabbed and swallowed the book, [Lightning Magic Primer] on the floor, and Theo had learned Lightning Bolt.

...No, just before that, he had heard a voice. Theo recalled the words the voice had said.

['Lightning Magic Primer' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[2nd Circle magic 'Lightning Bolt' has been acquired.]

[After waking up from a long sleep, Gluttony is very hungry. Hurry and relieve Gluttony's hunger. The time limit is 10 minutes from now. (1/5)]

The important thing wasn't the first two sentences. Swallowing the book and learning Lightning Bolt was a secondary thing.

As Theo remembered the last sentence, he mumbled involuntarily, "...Gluttony?"

Unexpectedly, there was an immediate reaction.

Jjeok.

A hole appeared in his left hand, and a red tongue emerged from it. The hole didn't just have teeth, there were lips as well. Theo observed the scene closely instead of being astonished or frightened. He was filled with expectations about whether the tongue could talk or not.

However, the answer came from a place he hadn't expected.

[Severe hunger. If you want to talk to 'Gluttony', relieve that hunger. Feed it four more times to relieve that hunger. The remaining time is 6 minutes and 24 seconds.]

[Gluttony is a grimoire which comes from an era not recorded in the history books. It increases strength by eating magic items and likes books the most. The owner can benefit from providing food to Gluttony. However, if neglected, Gluttony might treat its owner as food.]

Although Theo heard the answer he'd been wondering about, it was something he hadn't expected. It would eat the owner if it wasn't fed? The words were chilling for Theo, who seemed to be the owner. Gluttony would eat him if he didn't feed it anything in the next 6 minutes and 24 seconds.

Theo felt a cold chill down his spine as he looked around

hurriedly.

Books, books, books and books. Fortunately, the food was piled up like a mountain. Theo looked around with his eyes, rather than moving his hands.

‘There is still time. It is in the single digits, but this is enough…’

He moved his feet while thinking continuously. Theo had obtained ‘Lighting Bolt’ from the book, [Lightning Magic Primer]. This meant that the food and the reward weren’t independent from each other.

If he had to feed it books, then he should choose food which would benefit him. Theo knew the location of all the books, so his hand didn’t hesitate. The voice had definitely said that it needed four more. Theo pulled out a stack of books without any hesitation.

They were books he had read a few times but hadn’t helped him. Theo had understood them with his head, but he couldn’t use the magic. Anyway, he’d memorized all the contents, so there wouldn’t be a problem even if he wasn’t rewarded with anything.

“Then…”

Theo took a deep breath. He pointed at the pile of books with his left hand and called out the name, “Gluttony, eat.”

And the mouth answered.

Slurp.

The tongue stretched out again. It seemed impossible to swallow several books at the same time, so the tongue twined around the top book. This was like a frog eating.

The books were sucked into the mouth on Theo's palm in the blink of an eye. More than 500 pages had disappeared without a trace. No, there were some traces left. Was it correct to say it was engraved in him?

> ['Fundamentals of Subduing the Elements' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]
>
> [Affinity with the four elements has increased.]
>
> [Gluttony isn't satisfied yet. Feed him three more times to relieve his hunger. The time limit is 5 minutes and 11 seconds from now.]

He was right. As Theo had speculated, he received the knowledge of the book which was swallowed.

The elements were the fundamentals of all magic. The criteria of becoming a master of each circle was to prove that the elemental

magic could be used freely. Theo had known this after becoming a 2nd Circle master.

Fire, water, wind and earth...

The flow of magic for each element was now becoming more intense and familiar.

However, there wasn't time to feel emotional. The tongue stretched out and grabbed the next book. It licked the cover, as if savouring the taste, before Gluttony swallowed the books in succession. At the same time, Theo was hit by relentless waves of information.

['The Circulation of Magic Power' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[Your sensitivity to mana has increased slightly.]

['Creating a Magic Circle – Fundamentals' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[You can create 2nd ranked magic circles. Starting from 3rd ranked circles, the probability of success will drop sharply.]

['Application of Defense Magic' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[You can alter the shape of the 2nd Circle magic ‘Shield’.]

“Keuk!”

The aftermath was quite intense after the three books were eaten instantly. Theo wobbled like he was drunk and flopped down on the floor. It was obvious he would’ve fallen if he hadn’t done that.

His eyes were spinning, and his head felt like it was going to burst like a boiling kettle, after receiving a great deal of knowledge. Theo felt dizzy, like he had a high fever. It took around 10 minutes for his status to calm down.

‘Damn, from now on I will feed it one by one.’

Theo muttered inwardly as he pressed a hand to his still throbbing temple. This was the first time he had ever got a headache. It was a terrible pain, like his head was being stabbed with an awl. He didn’t want to experience this pain ever again. Theo had never imagined this dizziness would occur while eating one book at a time.

Still, the pain was worthwhile.

“Magic Power…”

Magic power was stirring in his body. It spread from his heart and moved through the blood vessels to every part of his body. However, it hadn't accepted Theodore Miller. Just quickly pulling at the magic power usually required a huge concentration from him. The lack of sensitivity was a burden which was hard for him to bear.

His eyes turned red from his choked up emotions. Theo tried desperately to refrain from crying. He couldn't be satisfied with just this.

Right now, he had only reached a 2nd Circle Master. In order to graduate, Theo needed to master the 3rd Circle.

For the first time since entering the academy, after enduring all types of shame, the rope of destiny had finally appeared before him.

"...Yes, isn't it full?"

Theo said in a low, subdued voice. He looked at his left hand on the ground and spoke to it.

"It is supposed to speak after eating five books."

He remembered...

The Gluttony Grimoire had the ability to speak. The voice had said to get rid of its hunger for that to happen. Theo didn't know

the identity of the voice, but it had never lied so far. So, he had to believe it for now.

Indeed, the voice didn't betray his trust.

Jjeok.

The mouth opened just like when it ate a book. It was a hole with no visible bottom. The tongue popped out of its dark hole and flickered like a snake listening to a flute. This would be a scary sight for a weak person.

Before long, sounds began to emerge from Gluttony's mouth.

-I, eat magic, greed, grimoire, Gluttony.

It was a creepy, eerie voice, like a simmering swamp. Somehow, its way of talking made the gloomy atmosphere more prominent. It didn't have eyeballs, but he could feel its gaze.

-Theodore, Miller.

After calling Theo's name...

–What... do you... want to know?

The greedy grimoire asked.

Chapter 4 – The Greedy Grimoire #4

Theo gulped unknowingly.

It was because the sound of Gluttony calling him, seemingly from the depths of an abyss, had caused him to stiffen. He loosened up his rigid neck.

Theo had to say something, but his lips wouldn't open. Fortunately, the voice was there to remind him.

> [The greedy grimoire, Gluttony, has filled its hunger. Gluttony's intelligence has been restored temporarily. It is willing to repay the owner who filled its stomach.]
>
> [Gluttony's current state is incomplete. Please provide it plenty of food in the future to restore its performance. Gluttony will fall into a deep sleep except when asking for food. It will answer one question immediately after it feels full. The wisdom of the old grimoire, Gluttony, is truly vast.]
>
> [Please ask your question before Gluttony goes to sleep.]

The explanation was verbose, but the conclusion was simple. One question and answer... It meant he would receive one answer to one question.

According to the description from the strange voice, Gluttony was a very ancient grimoire. It must of spent years swallowing books, so the knowledge it had would be enormous. Even if it had only eaten one book a day, that would be over 300 books in a year. If all the books were related to magic, then the value truly couldn't be measured.

For magicians seeking endless wisdom, the value of this conversation might be greater than the heart of a dragon.

'What question should I ask?'

He didn't have much time to worry about it. This little guy only opened its eyes for a moment because it was hungry, but it would soon fall into a deep sleep again. Theo didn't know how long it would take, but he knew it wouldn't be long.

What should be asked and what answers would be sought? Theo looked within himself.

'I have to ask something that will help me now.'

To Theo, who had just become a 2nd Circle master, the knowledge of ancient magic was meaningless. Questions about hidden treasures and the ability to find them were separate things.

There was an old tale which told how being overly greedy would invite disaster. Theo wasn't going to be an idiot like those people. If so, the questions he could ask now were fixed.

“I will ask a question.”

Gluttony responded briefly,

-What, I wonder?

The voice was still creepy, but he could withstand it better the second time compared to the first. Theo still couldn’t stop the creepy feeling from running down his spine, but he managed to open his mouth somehow.

“Gluttony, I want to ask for information about you. Let me know what type of grimoire you are.”

There was silence for a moment. Was it an unexpected question?

Theo didn’t know. He just felt that the voice became clearer.

-Okay.

It agreed to answer his question.

-However, to understand me, your insight... narrow, poor. Language, convey, can’t.

Theo frowned at the words. The grimoire couldn’t convey it in

language? It was the same as saying it couldn't answer the question, and the reason was because Theo's insight was narrow and poor. Theo had never fallen behind when it came to his brain, yet he couldn't reach the ancient grimoire's standards.

However, Gluttony's words didn't stop there.

–I, visualize, information. Human, owner, show, like it.

"Visualize?"

–This, it is the feeling.

It said to him.

As soon as the dialogue was over, odd characters flowed from the palm of his left hand to Theo's head. There were numbers, letters, and language concepts. He felt dizzy and understood why Gluttony couldn't communicate it through language. It was a huge behemoth which defied common sense.

'This—grimoire...!'

Grimoire...

It wasn't a book nor a magic spell. This was the fragment of an existence which mocked the world. The best magicians living today wouldn't be able to produce it. Even Theo, who had accepted

the information about Gluttony, could barely explain it.

Yes, Theo only saw a vague form.

[Grimoire “Gluttony”/ F Rank]

[Effects: elemental affinity increases by 1p; magic sensitivity +10; calibration and creation of magic circles; ‘Lightning Bolt’ acquired; and increased proficiency in ‘Shield’.

* Incomplete state. Most of the functions are sealed.

* Once a day, it will wake up to relieve its hunger.

* Immediately after relieving its hunger, it will answer one question.

* The abilities it feed on will be given to its owner.

* Extracts an essence from eaten books or items. The higher the owner’s understanding, the greater the efficiency.]

Indeed, it was an easy-to-understand description. Perhaps it had been frequently used by humans before entering Theo’s hands. Otherwise, it would be difficult to summarize the information into such clear words.

As Theo went over the information in his head several times, Gluttony yawned.

-Hrmm…then, I answered…

Gluttony's voice drifted off at the end until it could no longer be heard. The tongue and hole disappeared.

Theo looked down at his left hand with a blank expression. There were no traces left of the five books it had swallowed. The knowledge remained in his head, and the unfamiliar magic power proved that this was real.

"Ha, hahaha…"

A dry laugh emerged from somewhere. He didn't realize where until his dry lips touched. Theodore Miller… The sound was coming from his own mouth.

This was the same library, a place to where he fled from the helpless reality which despised him. How could he have known he would find something amazing here?

'I can graduate. No, graduating isn't a problem now. There will be more chances!'

Theo had a good head, but was a dunce at magic. He absorbed

knowledge like he was pouring water into a bottomless pit. Theo understood that it meant nothing, but he hadn't given up. No one else had noticed his talent except for Professor Vince. Even Professor Vince's efforts was like a pile of leaves. Yet, a bud had now sprouted from those dead leaves...

> [The higher the owner's understanding, the greater the efficiency.]

The meaning of this brief sentence was something the current Theo couldn't even guess. This wasn't just memorizing books or formulas. Every time notes filled with his handwriting piled up, wisdom began increasing in his brain.

The Grimoire itself had selected its owner. It wasn't a coincidence that Theodore, who craved knowledge more than anyone else, had been the one to find it.

Ding!

A heavy bell broke the silence. Theo looked reflexively at the clock in a corner of the library. The clock hands were pointing straight up. It was already time for the dormitory to be locked. He had discovered Gluttony around 10 o'clock, so quite some time had passed.

'I can't sleep in my bed... but well, I feel good.'

His magic power was boiling up from excitement. Right now, Theo was confident he could succeed in any 2nd Circle magic. His sensitivity had only increased slightly, but this feeling of satisfaction was frightening.

Theo once again looked at Gluttony's information. There was a brief mention of the change in his sensitivity.

'Mana sensitivity +10.'

It wasn't a big number because it said there was only a slight increase. Still, what if this 10 increased to 20, 30 or 100? It might take some time, maybe a few decades... but he could fulfill it.

"...Okay, I will read more books."

Theo wanted to use magic, but the library wasn't a place to use it. If he accidentally set fire to something, he didn't know what punishment he would receive from the professors. It was necessary to choose books for Gluttony in advance, and that would be more useful than napping in his seat.

Theo moved with excitement in his steps. The books which had been like a pie in the sky now seemed like treasure chests placed right in front of him.

The existence of the repeater letter in the outer pocket of his coat was already long forgotten. Now that his long-awaited dream was right before him, Theo had no time to think about dropping out of

school.

The greedy grimoire, Gluttony...

This was its first meeting with Theodore Miller.

Chapter 5 – What Does This Book Taste Like? #1

Ding-dong-dang-dong…

The lively bell sound announced the end of the second semester. Every student's final report card would be distributed one week from this day.

Bergen Academy's school year had ended today. Students, who were not dressed in their school uniforms, ran out the doors, and the professors' advice to not play around during winter vacation was disregarded by the students.

Generally, except for some young students, the academy's students avoided staying in school.

"Huu, there is an uproar. Even though it's chilly, they can still run around like this. Truly, I think being young is the best."

"Who doesn't? Ah, maybe a lich?"

"Hahaha, I'm afraid that a lich will just be more bones."

"Aha, that is a pretty nasty point!"

Even the professors were in a good mood. Finally free from the students who caused them all types of problems, they enjoyed a

cup of coffee while chatting with their colleagues. Some talked about the students, while others talked about what to study during the holiday. Some professors were planning to go home a few days later too.

One professor asked Vince, “Professor Vince, are you staying at school during this vacation?”

“Yes, I am,” he replied with a cold expression as usual.

Professor Vince’s soulless voice matched his blank expression.

His fellow professor couldn’t help flinching.

However, due to the fact that they had spent a few years together and had adjusted a little bit, he didn’t stutter when he spoke again. “Recently, I heard that you were focusing on a research project. Is it because of that?”

Professor Vince’s eyes became cold. Naturally, it was rude for magicians to spy on each other’s research. His low voice revealed his discomfort. “That isn’t something to be talked about here.”

“Ha, haha. That’s right. Forget that I asked.”

“……”

Vince glanced at him for a moment before turning his gaze out

the window.

The atmosphere of the room suddenly grew chill. Professor Vince was famous for not being very friendly. He was a first-rate magician dispatched from the capital to Bergen Academy, and his position as a senior magician (6th Circle) put him above the other instructors.

In other words, he was a dispatched lecturer and was difficult for the other professors to deal with.

“Oh! You were here, Professor Vince.”

At that moment, a professor entered the office. To put it mildly, this professor was a person with a lot of fat. He packed it in a neatly dressed suit, making him look like a balloon. Thus, the students nicknamed him ‘Balloon’.

The so-called balloon, Professor Balloon, spoke in a giggly voice, “Can I ask you one thing?”

“…Yes.”

Vince couldn’t spit on that grinning face. He stared at Professor Balloon with an annoyed expression. Vince didn’t like this pig who liked to chatter on. Not surprisingly, the words which emerged from Professor Balloon’s mouth didn’t fail to irritate Vince’s nerves.

“Did that boy not graduate again this year?”

His eyebrows wriggled in an obvious taunt.

Theodore Miller…

Professor Vince’s eyes flashed as he recalled the student. Theodore Miller was a student who was betrayed by his talent and wasn’t rewarded for his efforts. The fact that Theodore had received a repeater letter three times meant he became a notorious celebrity.

Other faculty professors approached them.

“Aha, is it that Theo child?”

“Isn’t this year his third repeater letter? After next year, we won’t see him anymore. I’m sorry… Should I not say it? Hahaha!”

“Professor Claude is very mean, saying such empty words.”

“In the end, he is a child of a fallen noble family. Their talent has dried up.”

Obnoxious remarks were being spoken.

‘The ones who open their eyes but can’t see anything.’

Vince took a few steps back and stared at them with disdain. It felt like his ears would rot away if he continued to listen to their conversation. These were educators who didn't even know the truth about the students they were teaching.

No, even if it was correct, should an educator be disparaging their students?

He shook his head firmly at this question.

'Theo is a far better magician than you.'

Yet those words couldn't emerge from his mouth. Vince wanted to grab Professor Balloon's hand and throw the coffee cup in his face. However, Vince stopped himself... because in the end, it was true.

He had given up his personal sponsorship of Theodore due to Theodore's lack of sensitivity. There was no denying that Vince had turned away a student due to his lack of talent. That was the only thing which stopped Vince from meddling in their words.

'Theodore Miller.'

Vince looked out the window with a nauseous feeling in his stomach. The newly darkened sky seemed to represent his inner heart. Then he realized that the lights at the opposite building were coming from the library and sighed once more. There was

only one person who would visit the library on the day of the closing ceremony.

Vince prayed for the day when that effort would be rewarded.

*

At this time, Theo's shoulders were dancing.

"Uha!"

The desk shook with a loud thump. This was because seven hardcover books had just been placed at the center of the desk. Dropping these many books on his foot wouldn't end with just a bruise. It was a joke but there was a ghost story which told about how librarians were often killed by cursed books.

'Even if there isn't a curse on these books, wouldn't I die if this were a normal situation?'

The books were heavier than bricks. If one of them fell from a high bookshelf and hit someone, the skull of that person passing by would be broken. That's why there was a warning to not make a disturbance in the library.

It truly was dangerous, so they had even put a sign up.

"Okay, this is enough for today."

Theo rubbed the grey substance off the palm of his hand. The library was a place where people didn't frequent often, so every book he picked up was dusty. The person in the position of librarian would just check the locks occasionally. It was lucky that Gluttony had swallowed without chewing, otherwise he would've had to wipe the books down first.

'First, I have to use Appraisal.'

Theo moved his left hand in a familiar motion. He was about to measure the value of the book using Gluttony's 'ability to judge food'. The way to use this power was much simpler than he'd thought.

Theo pointed his left hand at the book, just like when Gluttony had been eating. Then he gave the command, "Appraisal."

Slurp.

The tongue shot out from Theo's left hand. It appeared with a loud sound and reached out towards the targets. Then it licked the cover of the book on top. At the same time, a visual representation of the information emerged.

[Ignition and Ignite are Different]

[-This book is about an improved version of Ignition magic

and explains Ignite magic. Unlike Ignition, which creates fire on a surface, Ignite can create an ignition point in the air. The advantage of Ignite is being able to use it from a distance. However, the firepower is slightly lower than that of Ignition.

* Your understanding is very high. (96.7%)

* The grade of this spellbook is ‘Normal’.

* After ingesting, 1st Circle magic ‘Ignite’ will be acquired.]

“I remember that this spell seemed useful.”

He laughed and picked up the book.

Gluttony’s ‘Appraisal’ was a means of measuring the food. This helped him determine the benefits of the food which was consumed. Using Appraisal meant there would be no problem even if it was a book Theo hadn’t read before. Having the Appraisal magic also meant he could pick out the books with special qualities.

‘Thanks to this, picking a book is much easier.’

It was also possible because it was Theo. After spending five years in the library, there was no book that he didn’t know. Theo put the books he’d read once and those he’d read a few times but didn’t understand on separate lists.

The moment he was about to use Appraisal on the second book...

-...Hungry. feed, please.

Gluttony woke up.

[Gluttony has woken up from its sleep and is complaining about an empty stomach.]

[The regular meals have reduced his hunger a lot. There is more room to choose its food. Gluttony will answer one question after eating two books and will immediately fall asleep after the third book. The remaining time is 30 minutes.]

Two books or three books...

It was a choice he'd made several times already, but it was always a struggle. If he selected two books, he could get an answer. If he selected three books, he could extract one more essence. Last time, he'd thought it was important to improve his skills and had chosen to feed it three books.

What should he choose this time?

Chapter 6 – What Does This Book Taste Like? #2

‘Well, I won’t lose anything either way.’

In other words, it was a matter of priority.

Theo could choose to learn one more magic or borrow Gluttony’s wisdom. If he selected the wrong thing, he could just wait for tomorrow. As a result, there was no difference. If Gluttony suddenly started fasting, then he would be more worried about the situation.

Therefore, Theo came up with a simple answer.

“Let’s do two books this time.”

He had something that he wanted to ask Gluttony.

Theo grabbed [Ignition and Ignite are Different] and put it aside. Ignite was a rather useful magic for the 1st Circle, except that the difficulty was too high.

Above all, it consumed less magic power than anything else. Despite Theo only having the magic power of a 2nd Circle, he would be able to use it 100 times.

It was now time to pick the other book.

‘I think that all six books I selected earlier are good but… I don’t know yet.’

He would leave it to Gluttony’s Appraisal rather than his self-judging. Appraisal magic was probably better than his own analysis anyway. Instead of being unreasonably stubborn, Theo extended his palm.

“Appraisal.”

The hungry tongue slipped out quickly. It moved over the six books lined up before it and started using Appraisal. As the books became sticky with saliva, the information entered his head.

With calm eyes, Theo looked at the essences of the books Gluttony had discovered.

‘[Fire Elemental Summoning]… eliminated. If I don’t have an affinity with the elemental, then I can’t make a contract with it, which means there wouldn’t be much point in summoning the elemental.’

30 years ago, the mystery of making a contract with an elemental had been revealed, showing that it was impossible to make a contract with an elemental without having an inherent affinity.

A magician who adored elementals had finally achieved success. He had opened the door to the elemental world with a magic circle

and developed a way to make a simple contract.

The [Fire Elemental Summoning] was a book from that magician, and Theo could summon the elemental with Gluttony's abilities.

However, this book only gave him the magic to summon the elemental. Making a contract with the elemental and using its power was a different story. When Theo entered the academy, he had been told to give up because he had an elemental affinity of close to zero.

"It is regrettable, but it can't be helped."

He had experienced it several times already. Thanks to that, Theo had gotten used to getting rid of any lingering attachments without any fuss.

It had been a week since he first began the strange cohabitation with Gluttony. Theo might be the academy's dunce, but he had grasped this guy's bizarre nature.

One, it was meaningless to feed Gluttony a book if Theo's understanding was low.

Two, no matter how high was Theo's level of comprehension, it was impossible to acquire magic beyond his competence.

Three, there was some magic which was useless even if he learned them.

Four, eating the same book again wouldn't give him anything.

...There might be other habits which Theo didn't know about yet, but he never saw anything apart from these four. [Fire Elemental Summoning] was an example of the third case.

There were other magic with a magician affinity attached as a condition. This was why he didn't acquire white magic, which required 'divine power'.

'There's a magic where 'castration' is the prerequisite... Urgh, just thinking about it gives me goose bumps again.'

Apparently, some lunatic in the east had done it to learn magic. Even Theo didn't have the stomach to read through the pages. What had the person been thinking?

Theo touched his skin before moving his hand to his next prey. It was [Circulation of Water] which would increase his water affinity but was put as pending for now.

His understanding of [Enchant – the Basics] was lower than he'd thought. He would eat it after studying it a bit more, so it was eliminated. The vision enhancing magic [Hawk Eyes] had a side effect of gradually worsening his eyesight—eliminated.

Theo repeated this as he filtered through the books.

By the time 15 minutes passed, there was only one book left in front of Theo. He remembered the title of the final book, so expectation filled his face.

According to Theo's conjecture, the value of the last book in the list was obviously the highest among the seven books he'd gathered today.

"Appraisal."

Finally, the essence of the book popped up.

[Ballistics Magic]

[This book describes the high application of magic missiles. It explains techniques to form compressed magic missiles and modify the shape of the arrowheads. The author, Alfred Bellontes, became a hero of the war with these magic missiles. The depth of the wisdom is superior to that of ordinary magic books.

* Your understanding is very high. (97.2%)

* This magic book is rated 'Rare'.

* Once ingested, the proficiency of 'Magic Missile' will increase greatly.

* This is the original copy which was directly written by the author. There is a low chance to absorb some of Alfred's experience.]

Indeed, its contents didn't betray his expectations.

"No, wait a minute. This book is the original?!"

Theo was shocked to read the final line in the description.

Magic books were usually created by the author and then a copy was made of the original. Everything from the cover to the contents would be copied completely using magic.

Therefore, it was very hard to distinguish between the original and the copies. The originals were hidden by those who hated having a value added to knowledge by collectors.

If it wasn't for Gluttony's abilities, Theo wouldn't have known that the book in front of him was the original.

Alfred Bellontes...

He had been born approximately 30 years ago as the third son of King Bellontes. Magic power didn't accumulate naturally for him, and he only became a master of battle magic after cutting into his

bones.

Magic Missile was only a 1st Circle magic. Alfred had killed dozens of knights and hundreds of magicians with this shabby magic. He'd died at the end of a long war, but he then became renowned.

'Alfred Bellontes wrote [Ballistics Magic]! If book collectors know about this copy, it would be worth a few thousand gold, even covered in dust.'

Theo removed the dust carefully. If he were to prove its authenticity, then this book wouldn't be piles of paper but an item more expensive than a gold bullion.

Yes, if it was possible to prove it. Theo's excitement subsided at the thought.

"...No, there is a problem even if I can prove it."

In the first place, this book was owned by Bergen Academy. Although he was feeding the books to Gluttony, he planned to put back some of the books which were eaten one day.

If Gluttony didn't threaten his life, then he wouldn't have taken the books. In some ways, it could be called a struggle for survival.

However, taking Alfred's book was simply stealing. It wasn't seeking knowledge as a magician or saving lives. As a noble,

Theodore Miller couldn’t throw away his pride.

He would rather feed it to Gluttony than exchange it for money. His worries lasted for a while, but his decision was quick.

“Eat, Gluttony.”

The tongue popped out without any hesitation.

Slurp!

Gluttony grabbed [Ignition and Ignite are Different], and it was sucked into Theo’s left hand.

> [’Ignition and Ignite are Different’ has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]
>
> [* After ingesting, 1st Circle magic ‘Ignite’ will be acquired.]

A familiar wave flowed into his body. It was knowledge about ignition magic. At this point, Theo could create a small fire in the air.

Due to the fact that it was a 1st Circle magic, there wasn’t that much information, and the wave soon calmed down. It was similar to eating bread, but Theo was satisfied.

Gluttony's meal wasn't over yet. The unsatisfied tongue snatched its next prey...

The original [Ballistics Magic] written by Alfred Bellontes. It was the moment when a precious book with the same value as a gold bullion would disappear forever.

Gulp!

Then there was a moment of silence.

Theo waited for the change with a more nervous expression than usual. It was the first 'rare' rated book he had fed Gluttony. This was also the original copy of a famous war hero's book. This food would definitely be worth more than ordinary books.

Previously, it wasn't unusual for Theo to feel pain when four books were eaten in one go. Theo closed his eyes and prepared for the aftermath.

'Now, come at any time!'

Shortly after that...

['Ballistics Magic' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[Your proficiency of the 1st Circle magic ‘Magic Missile’ has increased significantly.]

[An original copy has been consumed. The synchro rate with Alfred Bellontes is being checked... You are at an appropriate level. You can absorb some of Alfred’s experience. The episode will play for 21 minutes and 35 seconds.]

[Synchro is starting.]

“...Synchro?”

What was that? Then at that moment...

Kiiiiing-

There was a sharp ringing sound! The sound cut through his eardrums and made him dizzy. It felt like he was being pulled out of his body. Before that godlike sucking power, the human mind was like a weak blade of grass.

In the end, Theodore’s mind was sucked into the palm of his left hand. He fell into the darkness and reached the faint stars.

This was the remnant of the memories contained in Alfred Bellontes—no, in [Ballistics Magic].

*

Around 45 years in the past, on the frontlines of the Bellontes Principality...

Theodore Miller opened his eyes.

Chapter 7 – What Does This Book Taste Like? #3

Dagadak, dagadak, dagadak.

As Theo's consciousness returned, the scenery around him was moving at a frightening pace. No, it was more correct to say that he was moving through it. Theo, who still didn't understand the situation, turned his head as someone's shouts reached his ears.

"General! The enemy forces have appeared before us!"

General? The enemy forces had appeared before them...? This was something which would be heard on the battlefield.

Theo tried to make a bewildered expression, but his vision moved independently of his will. Then he looked at the face of the knight running next to him. Shortly after that, Theo realized his lips were moving on their own.

"Hrmm, it is a little faster than I expected." It was the deep and and solemn voice of a man.

His fingertips touched his chin and felt a rough texture. Theo wasn't 20 years old yet, so the beard on the chin definitely wasn't his. If so, there was only one possibility.

'My voice... No, this isn't my body?'

Maybe this was the right answer. Theo thought confidently.

This was right after he'd consumed Alfred Bellontes' [Ballistics Magic]. So, Theo could guess that this phenomenon was related to the description which had said he could absorb some of Alfred's experience.

He didn't know what synchro meant, but if it was absorbing Alfred's experience—

"Prince! I will stand in the lead! The general infantry can't possibly defeat the charge of our knights. I, Vince, will protect Prince with this sword at all costs!"

It was a cry that sounded like roaring flames. The passion in that voice was incredible as the person moved in front of him. Based on his shout, this man seemed to be the leader of the group of knights. Furthermore, his blazing eyes proved what he'd said weren't just words.

However, the prince, Alfred, didn't accept Vince's comment.

“No, I will stand in the lead! You must follow behind me!" The one with the most noble body declared that he would stand in the most dangerous position.

Despite seeing the enemy coming close, Alfred Bellontes didn't slow down his horse. Alfred shrugged off Vince's hand and rushed

forward. The two armies soon crashed into each other.

Kukwakwakwang!

There was a huge roar as the warhorses collided with the the infantry troops. The terrible power of the charge was added to the horse hooves and smashed the human body. The enemy's formation collapsed from the surprise, and the Bellontes troops were temporarily dominant as they pushed the enemy forces back.

Alfred roared wildly from the vanguard.

"Bellontes' prince, Alfred, is here! Come forward if you want to claim my head for yourself!"

It was an obvious provocation. As the prince and war hero of Bellontes, Alfred's head really was worth several thousand gold. If they killed him, then this long war might end.

A knight moved through the confused soldiers in response to his provocation.

“I am Richard, the eldest son of Earl Jason!"

Every time his sword flashed, several soldiers were knocked down. It wasn't uncommon to cut through humans like they were straw. Any knight should have at least this much skill. A mere magician would have their heads cut off.

Richard smiled as he moved closer to Alfred. Theo became frightened as he faced the murderous intent in front of him.

'It is dangerous. At this distance, there is no way to survive unless I am a 6th Circle magician!'

In any era, a magician's enemy was a knight. They were masters of weapons which dominated in close combat. A knight could cut off a magician's head before a spell was completed. Therefore, magicians always hired escorts. However, there was no one near Alfred right now. It was a great opportunity for Richard Jason, who was famous for his agility.

As Richard quickly took care of 30 people, he shouted righteously, "Bellontes' hero! I salute your bravery to confront me with the body of a magician! But..."

'But it ends here!' was what he was trying to say. However, a gruesome ball of pressure passed through him.

Paang!

"...Then I will pay homage to your stupidity," Alfred scoffed as he aimed his finger.

One beat late, the body fell to the ground. The brave knight, Richard Jason, who had been rushing toward Alfred just a moment ago, suddenly died.

This was because a hole was drilled into the middle of his brain. It was impossible for any human to survive that, even if they had the blood of an ogre. Once the brain was destroyed, even an ogre couldn't regenerate.

Meanwhile, Theo was astonished by the incredible situation.

'That is Magic Missile? No way!'

It was a blue flash. If Theo hadn't been inside Alfred's body, then he wouldn't have grasped the moment when the spell had activated.

Although it was 1st Circle magic, the chant had been omitted and the output of Magic Missile had been far beyond common sense. It was likely that even the 5th Circle Magic, 'Force Bolt', was weaker than that.

Paang!

Once again, light emitted from Alfred's finger.

"Kuaack!" Simultaneously, somebody else's breath was cut off.

Every time Alfred's fingertip flashed, one person fell over and died. It was the same for magicians who used defense magic or knights covered in body armour. The speed of the Magic Missile

didn't let anyone escape, while its power penetrated the defenses and caused havoc. It was literally a mortal blow.

After a few hundred Magic Missiles were shot...

'...Indeed, Alfred's Magic Missiles are fired in this way. Even if the same formula is used, it is bound to fail.'

Theo had surprisingly succeeded in digging out the principles of the powerful Magic Missile. So far, scholars had been studying [Ballistics Magic] for 30 years and hadn't been able to achieve it. It wasn’t because Theodore Miller's talent was superior.

The 'synchro' which allowed him to share Alfred Bellontes' senses was the answer.

'The magic is completely within his body.'

Usually, magic was a technique to handle mana outside the body. Sensitivity was the concept which referred to the efficiency of drawing mana out of magic power. However, Alfred improved Magic Missile in a way which was completely contrary to that concept.

He completed the magic inside his body and shot it out of his body.

It wasn't an easy method. The human body wasn't a vessel to hold magic spells. Alfred had to give up other spells in order to

learn this Magic Missile. Through special training, his bones, flesh, and blood had been converted into the magic circle specific to Magic Missile.

As a result, he was able to produce the most powerful Magic Missile.

'A magician who only shoots Magic Missile... Can he be called a magician?'

What made Alfred think of this magic? He had given up the freedom of being a magician and just concentrated on killing people with Magic Missile. Theo couldn't help sympathising with Alfred. He attributed it to the shadow on Alfred's face as he calmly shot a human being.

Soon after, the last enemy soldier was brought over.

“Kuk, release me! Let me go! I am Marquis Belford Astro. My status isn't something to be trifled with!"

He wore a burgundy cloak over splendid plate armour. The intricacy of the embroidered pattern showed that he wasn't an ordinary soldier. Wearing such flashy clothes on the battlefield proved that he was a high-ranking noble.

The soldiers kicked him, making him kneel down. Alfred gazed down at the man with cold eyes and said, “Marquis Astro is worse than a dog, that's what you are."

Resonating with an eerie voice, Alfred continued to say, “Didn't you plunder the houses near the border and sold the women as slaves? I have no intention of letting you live as a captive of war."

"Now, wait a minute, Prince Alfred!"

“I don't have a hobby of listening to dogs. You will die here like a dog."

Alfred stretched out his finger, condemning the man in front of him to death. This man was a person who wasn't even worthy of captivity. Alfred’s finger shone with a blue light.

Paang!

The corpse collapsed with a hole in it.

"...Dispose of the body," Alfred said while turning around.

Usually, it was polite to take the body and send it back to the enemy kingdom. However, this was a person who had burned down villages and caused men to lose their wives. In such a situation, there was no need to preserve his body. The ugly mass of flesh called Belford soon disappeared without a trace.

At this point, Theo left Alfred's body.

'Ah, it ends here.'

The experience was truly impressive. Theo looked down at the ground which was becoming more distant. It was a battlefield filled with blood, death, knights polishing armour, nauseous magicians, and soldiers calling for medics...

Then finally, he saw Alfred Bellontes. At that moment, Alfred also looked at him.

"W-What?'

Theo was confused as he saw Alfred's lips moving.

–Young magician who craves my strength.

The profound voice echoed.

Alfred wasn't talking to himself. It was advice from Alfred Bellontes to Theodore Miller. This was a gift from the man who had given up freedom for strength and had lived as a war hero instead of a magician.

–Don't give up your way as a magician.

Finally, the connection with Alfred was cut off.

[The synchro with Alfred Bellontes has ended.]

[The synchro rate is 85.7%, the experience has been maintained.]

[1st Circle magic 'Magic Missile' has sublimated into 'Alfred-style Magic Missile'. Alfred Bellontes' experience has turned into proficiency for that magic.]

[Gluttony is satisfied with the food that it has consumed. Ask a question or feed it one more book.]

In the eastern part of Meltor Kingdom, Bergen Academy's library...

The fallen Theodore regained consciousness.

Chapter 8 – What Does This Book Taste Like? #4

Theo first touched the back of his head before examining his palms, which had no calluses unlike Alfred's. He had only left for 20 minutes, but his body already felt unfamiliar. This meant that the memory of the hero called Alfred Bellontes was deeply ingrained in him.

Even now, it felt like a blue flash of light would emerge from his fingertips.

'No, is it possible right now?'

Theo aimed his finger impulsively. This was the secret of the war hero, Alfred Bellontes... the flash of death which had shot and killed even first-rated knights.

That feeling was still vivid. The magic power would be pulled from the fixed magic circles inside the blood vessels of the body, then the magic power would take action outside the body.

Pajijik.

"Ugh!"

There was a pang, like his skin was burning from the inside.

His arm was different from Alfred's. It was much weaker than the arm which had been conditioned for many years, perhaps even decades. The formation of the Magic Missile caused several of Theo's blood vessels to rupture. If Theo tried to reproduce Alfred's output, then his entire right arm would be broken.

Fortunately, Theodore Miller wasn't that arrogant.

He had asked whether it was possible for the him, as he was now, and the memory of Alfred had nodded. Simultaneously, as Theo's blood vessels were ruptured, a blue flash popped out.

Piing!

The blue light, which was thin and hazy compared to Alfred's, shot through the window of the library and disappeared. However, the power was double or even three times that of conventional Magic Missiles. Even so, the amount of magic power consumed wasn't much different from conventional ones.

This was the essence of [Ballistics Magic] and the art of Alfred Bellontes, which had been studied by many magicians.

"...Really, it is a success."

Theo looked at his index finger with trembling eyes after managing to reproduce it. His forearm was throbbing from the reaction to the Magic Missile, while bruises appeared where the blood vessels had burst.

Anyway, Theo couldn't care less about that right now. He was the academy's long-time dunce, someone who had received the repeater letter three times.

No one expected anything from him. Even Professor Vince, the only one to recognize his talent, had eventually turned his head away. The common magic which anyone else could do wasn't possible for Theo.

He had resigned himself to it. It was too difficult to chase after others, so he had given up. Maybe that was why...

The emotion boiling inside him was a joy he had never felt in his entire life. An unknown joy tickled his spine at the thought of mastering a magic that no one else had managed.

'I can do it. I can!'

Theo had been betrayed by his talent and neglected in reality. He had gone five years without anyone stretching a hand out to him. Everybody in the academy had called Theodore a loser, and he didn't have the power to contradict that. He had just shut himself up in an old library.

However, it could be different from now on. No, it would be different.

"...Good."

Theo breathed for a while as he suppressed his heated emotions, then he looked down at his left hand. Today, it had swallowed two books—

Ignite and Alfred-style Magic Missile.

Thanks to this achievement, which was beyond expectations, even the gross tongue seemed cute to Theo.

"Gluttony."

The tongue swung at his call.

–Question, do you have?

Theo nodded without hesitation. The two magics he'd learned were enough for today. The magic he got from Alfred Bellontes was greater than the entire profit of the past week. Furthermore, Theodore examined himself calmly and realized that there was no other spell he needed to 'consume' at the moment.

'I have enough of the 2nd Circle magic right now. With some exceptions like Afred's magic, I don't need to feed it any more. Now, I need magic power that can help me reach the 3rd Circle.'

If magic was a flame, magic power was its fuel. He couldn't use magic spells if he didn't have enough magic power. Conversely, if

his magic power was huge, poor control could cause terrible havoc.

Possessing almost limitless magic power was the reason why dragons reigned as the strongest species.

If Theo had been born in a wealthy family, then he wouldn't need to think about this. He could gain large amounts of magic power if he bought reagents. It was said that the effect decreased the more it was taken, but it would be enough to fill the amount of magic power required for the 3rd Circle.

The problem was that the amount of money needed to buy that many reagents would require selling the Miller estate five times.

So, he asked Gluttony, “I would like to know how to increase magic power."

The ancient grimoire... A relic from a time which wasn't recorded in history books... Among the numerous knowledge which Gluttony had consumed, Theo believed there would be a way to increase magic power without taking reagents.

–.....

Gluttony was silent for a moment.

“What, do you not know?" Theo asked, suddenly anxious.

Gluttony then replied in an unpleasant, mocking tone,

–Silly, guy. Question, too verbose. Magic power, over 100 ways, increase it. And, I can tell, you, only one thing.

"T-There are over 100 ways?"

Theodore's mouth fell open with astonishment.

The Tower of Magic announced that there were only three ways to increase one's amount of magic power: eating flora and fauna which contained magic; taking alchemy-refined reagents; or receiving a magic circle from another magician.

All these methods demanded an expensive price, so he had never dared to think about them. Yet, apparently, there were over 100 methods. Additionally, Gluttony said he could only tell Theo one method.

“T-Then what should I do?"

If there were 100 methods, then Theo could find one which suited him. Gluttony urged in a trembling voice,

–Conditions, attach. I, narrow down, answer.

“A condition... for example?"

–Most, efficient.

"Indeed."

If the adverb 'most' was attached, then there could only be one answer. Having two or more answers would violate the meaning of the word 'most'. Theo understood Gluttony's explanation and hesitated for a moment before deciding.

"Teach me the most efficient method that I can use right now."

No matter how excellent the method, it was useless if it was impossible for him.

For example, it would be useless for him to receive advice which required the use a dragon heart or forbidden black magic. Moreover, he could ask for the most efficient method in general and something that would benefit another species could pop out.

So, Theo narrowed the range. This allowed for Gluttony to tell Theo the most efficient method that was possible for him.

–I understand.

The familiar voice was then heard.

[A hidden feature of Gluttony has been unlocked! As a greedy

grimoire, Gluttony can feed on anything that is magical. Until now, it has only been extracting the essence. However, it will now absorb a portion of the item's abilities.]

[Items with magic power will increase the owner's magic power. Gluttony can even digest cursed artifacts.]

[Simply eating, instead of essence extraction, can be used in Gluttony's sleep state.]

The information the voice provided was amazing.

Theo was surprised Gluttony had hidden features and that asking this question had unlocked it. It seemed that questioning Gluttony wasn't simply to acquire knowledge. If Theo used it well, he could increase the functionality of this powerful grimoire.

'Things which contain magic power... It seems easy but may be more difficult than I thought.'

It was easy to find objects which contained magic power in the academy.

The academy was a place to teach magic, so there was a lot of equipment and materials filled with magic power. If he went to the alchemy classroom right now, there would be a stack of magic tools.

However, eating these tools was different from eating the library books.

The library didn't have any proper administration as all the librarians did was lock up. Who would know that a few books were missing from the library? Even if a few bookshelves were taken out, there wouldn't be any sense of incongruity.

However, the classrooms weren't neglected like the library. Even in the alchemy classroom, there were three or four caretakers who checked the quantity everyday. If even one reagent vial were taken, they would be able to check the entry and exit records, and figure out that it had been Theodore.

'I can't do it inside the academy. The risk is too big.'

If so, the answer had to be found outside the academy. As Theo agonized over it, he eventually came up with an answer.

He needed someone's help to implement the answer. One person came to mind.

"...I have to ask the professor."

Professor Vince...

Vince, who felt regret regarding his talent, wouldn't turn down Theodore's favour easily.

Chapter 9 – Dealings With A Black Market Trader #1

The next day, Theodore went looking for Professor Vince.

‘The path is set, so the sooner I act, the better. I’m glad that Professor Vince is staying this year.’

It really was lucky.

Theo was known as the academy’s long-time dunce, so his relationship with the other professors wasn’t very good. Some professors blatantly told him to drop out while others ignored instances of bullying.

A person like Professor Vince, who didn’t care about his statue or origin, was hard to find.

Knock, knock.

When Theo arrived at Professor Vince’s laboratory, he knocked on the door .

–Come in.

His voice was cold as always.

“Excuse me,” Theo greeted as he entered the room.

He closed the door silently and faced Professor Vince, who was looking at him with confused eyes. It was Vince who put down his fountain pen and opened his mouth first, “You are an unexpected guest. I didn’t know you would come to find me… Come over here and sit down.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Theo sat down, and Professor Vince asked, “So, what brings you here?”

Theo replied like he had been waiting for the question, “I’m here to apply for a permit to go outside.”

“Huh? Go outside?” Vince’s eyes widened at the unexpected words.

Theo quickly placed the documents he had prepared last night on the desk. If the conversation got too long, then questions about why he wanted to go out might be asked. The confused Vince stretched out his hand. It was so abrupt that he didn’t understand anything.

‘I expected him to be shocked about receiving the third repeater letter. Yet he says that he will go outside.’

Usually, Theo was a student who would only be interested in the

books at the library. Vince hid his confused expression and signed the papers Theo had brought. However, Vince was a little bit concerned about the validity period. During the vacation, students were more free to leave the school than usual.

"Theodore, even if you don't apply for a separate permit, you are permitted to go out until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. This should be sufficient for wandering around the city."

"That isn't enough for me," Theodore replied without hesitation.

The city of Bergen, where the academy was located, was quite spacious. As Professor Vince said, that time limit would be just enough for wandering around the city. However, Theo's purpose was to obtain some magic items, and it would take time to travel there and return.

Vince cocked his head and asked a few more questions.

"What is your purpose in going outside?"

"It is a simple diversion."

"Are you planning to stay out overnight?"

"I don't think so."

"Hrmm."

The fountain pen starting moving and didn't stop until it had filled out all the paperwork.

Professor Vince hesitated before the final stamp, but he finished everything and handed the permit over to Theo. With this, Theodore would be able to leave the academy until the end of dinner time.

Theo then spoke with a brighter expression than before, "Thank you, Professor."

"You don't need to thank me for this minor thing."

Vince waved his hands like it was inconsequential and immediately changed the topic. There was also something he wanted to talk to Theo about. He pulled an envelope out of a drawer, put it on his desk, and opened his mouth. Depending on Theo's answer, Vince would decide whether or not to hand over the envelop.

"Theodore Miller, have you thought about what I told you last year?"

Theo searched through his memories hurriedly.

Last year, Professor Vince...

A few core keywords came up, and Theo could figure out what he was talking about.

“Becoming a magic scholar… that conversation?”

Magic scholars referred to those who studied magic with pen and paper instead of mana and staffs. In order to become a magic scholar, high intelligence was required more than being super sensitive or having powerful magic power.

Theodore was worthy of that standard. Last year, while Theo had been frustrated with his second letter, Professor Vince had invited him to become a magic scholar.

Sure enough, Vince nodded.

“Yes, if you think positively, then it would be a good choice. I can’t stand to see someone with your talent decay simply due to a lack of sensitivity.”

His sincere voice rang throughout the room.

In fact, Professor Vince had been really disappointed. Theodore could obviously become a distinguished researcher at a magic institute. If Theo wanted it, then Vince would send a recommendation to the capital’s magic laboratory.

What was Theo thinking? Theo’s eyes shook for a moment before he bowed his head.

“Thank you for your concern, Professor.”

Professor Vince spoke in a slightly louder voice, “Then…”

“I’m really sorry.” Unlike before, Theodore Miller spoke his dream with a strong and confident voice, “Nevertheless, I would like to become a magician.”

Vince was silent for a moment before replying, “Hoo…is that so?”

“Yes.”

“Even though I am your professor, I can’t deny your dream. However, if you change your mind, come find me at any time.”

Theo rose from his seat and bowed to Professor Vince before turning around. He was the only one who recognized Theo in a place where no one looked at him. Although Theo was really appreciative of the offer, he couldn’t accept it at present.

Bang.

The door closed with a sudden sound.

After the visitor had left, a heavy silence filled the room. Vince put aside the papers he had been looking at, put down the fountain

pen, and leaned back on this chair. He picked up the now useless envelope and placed it in the bin. Vince had a premonition that his student would never become a magic scholar.

“Theodore Miller.”

Until recently, Theo had been a sad student. He was a young man in despair at his lack of talent, desperately seeking knowledge in order to resolve it.

Vince thought that the way out was to become a magic scholar but...

“...Have you found a different answer?”

Hope now filled his student’s eyes. Maybe he had found a way to live as a magician.

Vince’s intuition made him feel optimistic, despite cold reason telling him otherwise. Professor Vince smiled like he had found something interesting after a long time.

*

“Third grade, Theodore Miller... confirmed. You must come back here before 7 p.m.”

“Yes, then work hard.”

Theo crossed the academy's gates for the first time in a while.

Last year and the year before that, he had never left the campus. Therefore, it had been almost three years since he'd gone outside. His last memory of going outside was to practice during the 2nd grade.

As he recalled that time, the city of Bergen soon filled his field of view.

"Ah, I guess not much has changed in three years."

There were neatly arranged roads with street lights installed at regular distances as well as facilities common in most major cities. Additionally, all the facilities were powered by magic. The presence of the academy, which nurtured magicians, made Bergen richer and more magical than before.

'So, magic related items and artifacts are more common here than other cities.'

The average price difference was more than double. Meanwhile, rare items had five times the difference. An item which other cities were selling for five gold could be bought here for one gold. Therefore, the number of people looking for items increased and so did the circulation of goods and money.

The current intersection at which Theo was standing alone had

four artifacts stores.

"...It isn't like this at Miller Barony."

There was a bitter taste in his mouth. Anyway, today's destination wasn't an artifacts store. Even if the artifacts was cheaper than other cities, the value of the artifacts themselves hadn't changed. Due to the high volume of supplies, the prices had fallen but they were still out of Theodore's budget.

"I should speed up."

Theo headed to the outskirts of the city, rather than the centre. He wasn't looking for a proper store. Theo's wallet was too thin for an equivalent exchange. That meant he needed to take advantage of the power he currently held.

If things went the way Theo planned, he could sweep up artifacts without spending a penny. The memories from his second grade were helpful in guiding him to an odd place.

'There was a black market trader on the outskirts who handled genuine, defective, and cursed artifacts.'

They were things which ordinary people couldn't use. The idiots who wanted to save money would buy the defective goods, while the fools who expected a big hit would buy the genuine items. There were villains who tried to trap people with cursed items.

It was a place without any proper goods.

“But that shouldn’t matter to you, right?” Theo said as he looked down at his left hand.

Cursed items were nothing compared to this guy. The greedy grimoire, Gluttony…

Everything was just prey for it to eat up all the magic.

Chapter 10 – Dealings With A Black Market Trader #2

In any city, the outskirts were always more deserted than the center, with fewer people walking around. The same was true for Bergen City. The tall buildings were gradually decreased in height, and the clean roads became covered in dirt. The nobles would automatically frown at the sight.

However, Theo just felt a strange nostalgia.

‘This area hasn’t changed at all.’

It was different from the main streets which were always changing. Most of the hanging signs were difficult to read, worn out from the wind and rain. It was also common for signs to fly away or to have no letters written. If Theo stepped into the dark alleys, he would see the beggars tossing and turning.

The scenery, which remained the same despite the three year gap, caused Theo to think back on past memories.

‘Three years ago.’

Three years ago, he had just entered the second grade.

The Theodore Miller of those days hadn’t been cynical nor distant from others. In the first year, the lessons had focused on

theory rather than practical skills, so he had been able to get better grades than everyone else.

Theo's future prospects shone brightly enough for some noble children to pay attention to him. He knew there was a black market trader in this area because he had visited it with a friend at that time.

"Ha, what friend?"

Theo laughed coldly at the memory. As soon as his inferiority was revealed, they all turned their backs on him. The one they'd regarded as their friend was an 'excellent magician', not 'Theodore Miller.' It was ridiculous that he hadn't recognized their duplicity, and their act of turning their backs on this relationship was disgusting.

He recalled up to here. Theo stopped walking as he arrived at his destination. There were no errors in his memory.

"This place... is it open?"

However, Theo hesitated for a moment without turning the door knob. There was no sign on the shabby shack. The windows showed no signs of being cleaned, and the stairs creaked like they would fall apart at any minute. If there wasn't a sign saying 'OPEN' on the door, he might have turned around.

In the end, he turned the door knob.

Kkiiik.

The decrepit door opened with a strident sound, and as it opened, the interior was revealed. In short, it was a general store. There were many miscellaneous things piled up, of which the purpose of many of them was impossible to guess. However, unlike a general store, the prices weren't attached.

One of the characteristics of a black market trader was that the prices would fluctuate due to bargaining with the owner.

'So, any naive or stupid person will have their nose cut off.'

Black market traders were still merchants. They were talented at extracting money from the pockets of their customers. In fact, their main source of income was selling things cheaply. So, when using a black market trader, it was necessary to be accompanied by a person who wouldn't be easily shaken.

Theo recalled this fact and prepared his heart. It was at this moment that...

"What, a customer?" A flippant voice was heard from somewhere. Theo turned toward the counter and realized one more thing.

'...The black market dealer has changed.'

In the past, it had been a balding middle-aged man with a sturdy physique, but the one who greeted him now was a slim young man. The arms exposed under the sleeves were clearly trained, and a snake-like gaze was staring out from between dropped eyelids which made him appear sleepy.

He wouldn't be as easy to deal with as he seemed.

"Then please look around. Our store isn't kind enough to explain things, so you will have to choose on your own."

It was a mess, but this was also a rule for a black market trader. They wouldn't explain anything about the goods they were selling. In the case of defective products, they would lose the sale if they explained it.

Above all, the cost of cleansing cursed goods exceeded the price of selling it.

Sometimes, people would pay the price for an appraisal, but if such a thing was common, then black market traders wouldn't be able to sell their goods. Rather, it was much easier to find fools sitting on the street expecting to make money.

'Now, I shall begin.'

Theo first looked at the products on display. The first thing was to check whether or not the 'abilities' would be eaten. He carefully picked up a dagger which was displayed on a shelf in the corner.

Then he muttered in a low voice, “Appraisal.” There was a slurp, and Gluttony’s tongue licked the dagger.

[+1 Canine with a Lingering Attachment (Sword Type)]

[A common dagger made of steel. There is no magic treatment, but a deep grudge is embedded in the blade. When cut by this dagger, ‘Open Wounds’ will be applied to the injury.

* The grade of this dagger is ‘Normal.’

* When consumed, a very small amount of magic power will be absorbed.

* When consumed, your understanding of ‘Open Wounds’ magic will increase.

* When consumed, the digestion time is 5 minutes and 11 seconds.]

‘Okay, let’s go!’

Theo grabbed his right hand unconsciously. The result was more than he’d expected. Not only did it reveal the effect hidden in the dagger, but he could obtain something other than magic power

from it.

Furthermore, magic such as ‘Open Wounds’ wasn’t easy to learn because it could be used for bad purposes. This was hard to find in the academy’s library, where all types of magic books were scattered.

Theo paused for a moment before searching through the other objects enthusiastically.

‘This dagger is usable. This leather armour… Ack, magic to keep it dirty? And who is the idiot who put a haste spell on an hourglass? There are a many useless items as well.’

Well, it didn’t really matter whether the items had value or not.

Theo stared at the information windows which popped up and picked things out without hesitation. He picked anything which would increase his magic power after Gluttony ate it. Useless things were the same. The black market shop filled with useless things was literally a golden hunting ground for Theo.

20 minutes later, Theo headed to the counter with a basket of items.

“…Hoh?”

The black market trader looked at him with interest.

“Customer, isn’t this at least a month’s worth of sales for our store? Even with a discount, it will be at least two gold.”

“Let’s see? I don’t think so.”

Theo boldly rejected the black market trader’s offer. Two gold was ridiculous. The only things he put in his basket were defective products. It would be lucky if they were sold for 20 silver, and the seller would still be receiving a profit.

However, the black market trader didn’t know that Theo had all this information. Unsurprisingly, the black market trader laughed lightly.

“Hey, Young Master. Don’t you know that will be a bargain if a genuine item appears? Who knows what will come out from something that has a flaw in it?”

“Well, that is normally the case.”

The black market trader’s expression changed at Theo’s blase attitude.

“Normally? What does Young Master mean?”

Instead of answering, Theo lifted his index finger. Then he pointed to an object on the counter. It was a necklace which was

falling apart at the ends. It was a necklace which couldn't be used as an accessory.

Furthermore, according to Gluttony's abilities, "That necklace, it will tighten around the wearer's neck. The material is too cheap, so it will break. How can I pay so much for such a defective product?"

"...What?"

"These gloves are even more rubbish. It is difficult to grab anything because the fingers have the 'Grease' magic on them. And this..."

The trader's eyes became blank as he kept on describing the items. However, after a moment, the black market trader quickly realized what the descriptions meant. There was only one possibility if a person could speak such genuine information.

Of course, Theo might be lying. but there was another way to check it.

"Young Master, are you an appraiser?"

Appraiser...

It referred to users of 'appraisal' magic, which was a type of magic that could only be learned by magicians with special qualities. They were welcomed in many places due to their small

number and their usefulness. Even the king, royal families and nobles wouldn't hesitate to pay a high price for an appraiser.

"Well, I suppose so," Theo said brazenly with no shame.

Thanks to Gluttony, Theo could pretend to be an appraiser. It was the result of Appraisal, but he wasn't actually an appraiser. However, it was necessary to conceal its existence from the Tower of Magic. If they noticed Gluttony's presence, then they would try to cut off Theodore's wrist.

"...How interesting. It has been a while since I've been so interested."

The black market dealer got up and changed the signboard on the door to 'CLOSED'. He determined that it would be more beneficial to talk to Theo for a while. After he closed the door and covered the windows with curtains, he was now ready to talk.

"I'm sorry for my previous words. I never expected for an appraiser to come to a black market trader."

"I think so as well."

Theo didn't deny the black market trader's words. Right now, Theodore was an 'appraiser'. He'd stumbled onto a weak spot and had to play this role. Therefore, he waited for the opponent's words instead of making demands. As long as his position was superior, it was the other person who would become hasty.

Soon, the curious black market trader took the bait.

“Yes, Young Appraiser. Why have you come to this humble place?”

The real bargaining would start now. The first part of his plan to increase his magic power through the black market trader began.

Chapter 11 – Dealings With A Black Market Trader #3

Theo started to explain about the ‘deal’ he had envisioned.

Right now, he was offering a chance to turn meaningless products into a viable commodity. In return, he would take a certain amount of low-grade artifacts and merchandise. In other words, it meant paying for appraisal of genuine products with defective goods.

The black market trader thought about it before giving Theo a look of caution. He didn’t understand. No, it was incorrect to say that he didn’t understand.

“So… you will appraise the goods in my store, and the cost will be for you to take the defective or low-grade artifacts?”

For the black market trader, it was a suspicious proposal.

The cost of hiring appraisers was expensive. The price of appraising a genuine produce was around three to five gold, and the profits obtained from selling it was only around one gold. By the way, the fee for a non-genuine item was 50 silver. If he called the appraiser in vain, 50 silver would go flying into the sky.

Of course, the story was different if it was genuine, but… how likely was a genuine item at a black market trader to be worth the expense? If there were 10 items appraised, would there be any good

ones?

Let's say that eight of the products were deficits. The hole made by the eight defective artifacts would be larger than the profit from the two genuine artifacts. Thus, he had been selling off genuine products like cheap lottery tickets. However, he would be able to reduce the cost significantly with Theo's suggestion.

"Yes, I will take some of them."

The black market trader's poker face finally cracked as he smiled at Theo. Theo was well aware of how expensive appraisers were. He guessed that the black market trader wouldn't be able to cover the costs.

'This is an offer that a black market trader absolutely can't refuse. I am the only one in this world who would offer such a deal.'

This was actually the case.

In the black market trader's head, an abacus was calculating frantically at the thought of such a jackpot. What seemed like a boring day had turned into a drastic change in the store's books. Anybody would be confused. Before long, the abacus in the trader's head gave a result.

'No matter how I look at this, it is an enormous profit!'

Even if nine out of ten items were defective, it was enough to pay for the appraisal. The largest damage would be 50 silver, while the profit would be several times that. Besides, what if he got not one but two genuine products? Or three? The money the black market trader could earn would vary.

He wanted to agree to the proposal right there. However, the black market trader cleared his throat and shook his head.

“Hoo, I am at a loss. I don’t know what to do.”

Theo frowned at his words.

“How come? These are exceptional conditions.”

“Of course. It is because I am well aware of that. This is an offer that can’t be refused… So, I am worried.”

A smile flashed over the black market trader’s face.

“It is strange no matter how I think about it. What benefits will Young Master receive from these conditions?”

“You don’t need to know that.”

“I see.”

The black market trader stared at Theo with snake like eyes. It was like the eyes could see into his head. Quite a few people would jump at those eyes, but Theo didn't look away. The black market trader smiled as he assessed the response and explained the reason.

"Since I was a child, I learned not to accept one-sided profitable deals. I never know what I will have to pay afterwards. In fact, the person who taught me that was killed for not keeping his word."

It was worrisome since the black market trader didn't know what the other person was intending. In this world of humans, he couldn't believe in anyone but himself. That was why the black market trader hesitated. He couldn't guess the reason why the appraiser had suggested this proposal.

'It is too wasteful to reject but too good to accept.'

Should he give up a good deal due to a few doubts or place priority on earning a profit?

The black market trader was accustomed to a rough life, so he thought calmly.

"I'm sorry, but if you can't answer, it will end here."

Theodore stiffened at the unimaginable resistance.

'No, he's refusing because it's too beneficial? Is this the world of the black market traders?'

Should he go and find other black market traders?

Theo hesitated for a moment before shaking his head inwardly. He wouldn't have known this place even existed if he hadn't visited here three years ago. Theo had no proper information to look for other black market dealers, and the likelihood of closing a deal was close to zero.

Somehow, he needed to close the deal with this black market trader.

'But I can't reveal Gluttony's existence... How do I convince that guy? A lie created hastily won't convince him.'

Simply put, it was difficult to instill trust in others, especially if he had to hide the reason. It would be nice if there was a notary, but a black market store wasn't the type to have a notary. His attempts to hide his identity might prove futile.

At that moment, something passed through his head.

'...No, wait a minute.'

Theo's face brightened as he remembered something. He looked at black market trader and said without hesitation, "I'm sorry, but I can't say why. I can only tell you to trust me."

“Is that so? Then this conversation…”

“Come on, don’t be too hasty.”

The voice of the black market trader was cut off.

As he looked at Theo with a confused expression, the concept of a notary emerged.

“If you are a black market trader, illegal transactions aren’t uncommon. You will often come across untrustworthy people.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“…Do you have a Geass Scroll?”

A Geass Scroll was, in other words, a scroll which forced a geas. They were items mass produced by the Tower of Magic. The black market trader’s face stiffened at those words.

He asked in a nervous voice, “Young Master, are you serious?”

“Yes.”

“…Then the story is different.”

The trader got up and walked towards the counter, pulling out a

small box from underneath it. He opened the box and pulled out a piece of parchment. Even from a distance, the noticeable reddish colour and magic circles on the surface proved its authenticity.

This was the first time Theo had seen a Geass Scroll.

“Is this it?”

“Yes, it has been a while since I took it out. There aren’t many great things that require writing on this.”

The red parchment between the two people shone brightly. Just like its name, the function was to force a geas. There would be a compulsion to adhere to the contract written on the parchment. If the contract was broken, then they risked blindness or losing their lives.

Thus, a Geass Scroll was more reliable than any notary.

“...Let’s start. My name is Canis. Young Master?”

“Theodore Miller.”

“You truly are a noble. Then I will write down the terms of the contract as you described earlier. Don’t regret it later.”

The black market dealer started drafting the contract. If this deal failed, then he would be seeing a loss. The Geass Scroll got rid of

any lingering doubts, but he needed to make certain. As a result, it took a long time for half of the parchment to be filled with clauses.

Theo quietly looked at the parchment and added one thing.

“Canis, I would like to add one provision.”

“What is it?”

“Silence about me and this transaction. If you can’t accept this clause, then the deal will be over.”

In fact, Theo had no room to step back, but he maintained a calm face. It was counterproductive for humans to appear weak, so he should seem like he had the advantage.

A strange expression appeared on Canis’ face before he smiled. He thought it wasn’t a big deal.

“Ha, is this revenge for before? Well, okay. This is why we are using the Geass Scroll. I will accede this much.”

This would prevent any information from leaking out. Theo couldn’t help sighing with relief. Although he had a good head, bargaining with a black market trader was a different story. He didn’t have an aptitude for dealing with people. He could only hope that this didn’t happen next time.

“Hey, Young Master.”

“…What?”

This time, Canis was the one who wanted to say something. Theo buried any annoyance when he replied.

“Can you appraise cursed items? If possible, I would like to ask that as well.”

“Um…”

Cursed items?

It was an unexpected question. Gluttony was a grimoire which ate magic books. He hadn’t verified if Gluttony could distinguish magic curses separately before eating. However, the black market trader had many things that could be used to verify this.

“I’ll try it once.”

Canis brought out an item without saying anything. He was agile when it came to his own benefits.

‘Well, I’m not in a position to speak about that.’

Theo grabbed the ring with his left hand and closed his eyes to

focus.

“Appraisal.”

The tongue could be felt within his closed fist. The visualized information entered his head, dispelling any worries.

[+2 The Widow’s Wail (Accessory)]

[A ring made of high purity silver. The first owner of this ring lost her husband early on, and soon followed afterwards from an illness of the heart. The widow’s sorrow remained in this ring and turned into a strong curse. If the wearer of this ring is a woman, the ‘depressed’ state will occur. If the wearer of this ring is a man, there is a low probability that the ‘depressed’ state will occur.

* The grade of this ring is ‘Normal.’

* When consumed, a very small amount of magic power will be absorbed.

* When consumed, the digestion time is 8 minutes and 22 seconds.

* When worn, the owner of Gluttony isn’t affected by the curse.]

However, this wasn’t the end.

The following sentences were enough to make him forget his tired mind and body.

> [You have appraised a cursed item. The faint curse has shrunk back at the presence of a predator.]
>
> [Curse magic is a mysterious phenomenon. When you feed Gluttony a cursed item, there is a low probability that the owner may learn the memories, experience of skills of the person who left the curse behind. The more powerful the curse, the greater the probability.]
>
> [Gluttony’s owner isn’t affected by the curse.]

The result was more than he expected. Theo accepted the request without any hesitation. Of course, he didn’t forget to extract a price. The distribution of cursed items instead of artifacts was added as a better condition.

After that, the process went smoothly.

Wuuong-

Once the two people added a bloody thumbprint, the parchment absorbed the blood and shone with a red light. It meant the Geass Scroll had activated successfully. Canis placed it in the original box and sealed it tightly. Since the clause had a condition of silence, the existence of the contract itself became an absolute secret for Canis.

“Now, since the deal is established…”

Theo, who was feeling tired, raised his left hand with a gentle expression.

“Let’s start immediately.”

From that moment, it was time for him to fill up his magic power.

Chapter 12 – Dealings With A Black Market Trader #4

The city of Bergen was famous for its beauty. As the sun set over the Nadun Mountain Ranges which spread widely throughout the west, the people living there realized the day had come to an end.

The same was true for the guards at the academy's main gate. Jason, who was waiting for the shift change with his colleagues, watched the glow of the sunset as always.

'I don't like winter vacation... It is comfortable because there is no work, but I am bored without any people.'

Only a few students stayed in the dormitory during summer vacation and even they went home during winter vacation. If he included the professors who remained in their offices, there was a total of approximately 10 people who came and went in one day.

It would be worse if someone heard him say this, but Jason's boredom was severe.

At that moment, someone was approaching in the distance.

"Pant, pant. Not, pant, not late?!"

The panting and sweat on the person's forehead showed that he had been running without any rest.

Jason nodded, and Theo sat down with a sigh of relief. The business with the black market trader had taken longer than he'd thought it would, so he'd almost broken curfew. No, if he hadn't run hard, he would've been late.

'It is okay because it was a good trip.'

He had signed a contract with the black market trader and completed his first work. The things he received in return were enough to cause the backpack on his shoulder to swell. Thanks to that, sweat flowed down but the weight added to his sense of accomplishment.

Additionally, the weight of this backpack would soon lead to an increase in the amount of magic power! It was pleasant, so there was no reason for him to feel displeased.

Jason checked the permit and gave it back.

"Third grade, Theodore Miller... Yes, I have confirmed it. You can go inside now."

"Hah, yes, thank you."

Theo was still panting as he crossed the threshold. He had a staggering gait but managed to somehow cross the grounds without falling over.

Jason watched the scene from the entrance and muttered to himself, “What the hell did he do?”

From behind, he couldn’t even see Theo’s hair. It was because Theo kept on wobbling from the weight of the backpack. Jason thought about it for a while, but then he met his colleagues who would replace him and soon forgot about it.

‘Well, who cares?’

In the end, it had nothing to do with him.

*

Theo skipped dinner and headed straight to his dorm. Normally, he would’ve gone to the library, but today, there was something more important.

It was an opportunity to increase his lacking magic power! He couldn’t buy magic reagents due to his thin wallet, so he couldn’t miss this chance. The reason he’d skipped dinner was to raise his concentration.

Theo first opened his bulging backpack.

Chwarararak!

The objects in the backpack poured out onto the ground. Gloves,

necklace, broken cooker, worn out staff... objects of various weights and length filled the room. Although their appearances were humble, they were artifacts which contained magic power. If he found the right item, then it could be worth at least a few gold.

Unfortunately, Theo only had one such item.

‘Still, there were five winners out of 20, so it is pretty good. Not every day will be like today.’

Today, Theo had appraised a total of 20 items for the black market trader. It was a quantity which matched the limits of an ‘average’ level appraiser. It would be dangerous to show the black market trader an ability to appraise over 20 items.

Although he did appraise curse items, it didn’t raise any doubts in Canis. As a result, today’s income was fifteen defects and one common artifact.

“Then... shall I feed it one first?”

According to the previous explanation, the ‘simple eating’ function was different from feeding it magic books. Thus, he needed to look at what the difference was.

Theo sat down and picked up one of the defective products. It was the magic gloves enchanted with ‘Grease’ magic.

“Eat, Gluttony.”

The tongue responded to Theo's call and swallowed up the gloves.

> ['Clumsy Hands of a Fool' has been consumed. The amount of magic power it possesses is very marginal.]
>
> [It will take 3 minutes and 12 seconds to digest it fully.]

3 minutes and 12 seconds passed by. The moment the clock hands spun exactly three laps and moved 12 spaces, a voice was heard.

> [Your magic power has increased slightly.]
>
> [Proficiency with the 1st Circle magic 'Grease' has increased.]

At the same time, changes took place within Theo's body.

"Uh...!"

An unidentified magic power was boiling up. The amount wasn't large, but it moved through Theo's body like it was his magic power. The two circles on his heart turned like cogs which had just been oiled. Additionally, a narrow area of the application of 'Grease' magic entered his mind.

‘This... It is different from magic spells. It is more like pouring knowledge into my head rather than it being engraved. If that is the case, I don’t need to worry about a headache like last time.’

This wasn’t like when he fed Gluttony magic books. When a book was eaten, he felt like the magic was being burned forcefully into his body. However, with the artifact, it felt like he was being taught how to handle the magic. Above all, learning was Theo’s specialty. Even if he fed Gluttony a few at a time, he could accept it without any problems.

Theo found some confidence and swallowed the artifacts in succession.

['The Tightening Necklace' has been consumed. The amount of magic power it possesses is very marginal.]

[Proficiency with the 2nd Circle magic ‘Hold’ has increased.]

['Angry Pot' has been consumed. The amount of magic power it possesses is very marginal.]

[Proficiency with the 1st Circle magic ‘Freeze’ has increased.]

['High-speed Hourglass' has been consumed. The amount of magic power it possesses is very marginal.]

[Proficiency with the 2nd Circle magic…]

[……]

[It will take 45 minutes and 12 seconds to digest fully.]

Despite swallowing 14 items, Gluttony's tongue moved as always. There was so much food that the voice was heard continuously. Theo paused as he listened to the last sentence.

'The digestion time is determined by the sum total of the food.'

The digestion time had increased until it was up to 45 minutes. If he added the digestion time of all the items eaten before that, he would get a similar number. It was hard to think of this as a coincidence. Ultimately, it seemed like it was necessary to have a lot of free time when eating the artifacts.

"45 minutes… It is an ambiguous length."

He could focus on other things, but he was unsure if he should leave this place or not. Thus, Theo waited in his spot silently. After 45 minutes, his magic power boiled again.

'Ohh, this is…!'

The magic power in his body was raging differently from when

he ate one artifact. The two circles creaked as they accepted the magic power, since it was close to the limit that the two circles could accommodate.

Theo sensed it intuitively and immediately concentrated on it. There was a response to his call.

Wuuuong-

The voice of magic which could only be heard by Theodore Miller started resonating. It was the sound of magic power flowing through his blood vessels. This was the sweetest sound to a magician, and it proved that Theodore wasn't wrong.

As Theo's consciousness sank to the bottom of a lake...

'—Now.'

He started spinning the magic power gathered in his heart. In a space which contained nothing, he had to draw a perfect circle.

He would add a third circle to the current two circles. The magic power moved around according to his will. If this image collapsed, then everything would be in vain.

His lack of sensitivity meant he had to use all of his concentration power. As usual, Theo's mental prowess was already beyond that of a 2nd Circle magician. A senior magician would be no match for him when it came to concentration power. Theo's spirit had

unintentionally been tempered by his extremely low sensitivity.

Soon, the third circle started to take shape. Unfortunately, it was up to there.

“Huuuu…”

Theo breathed out and opened his eyes. The result was that it was a half-success. The magic power gained from the artifacts was amazing, but it was a bit short to complete the third circle. Despite his fierce concentration, his limit was just forming the shape.

He would need to consume artifacts one or two more times to achieve a perfect third circle.

“…Was it originally that easy to reach the 3rd Circle?”

There was still more than a month left of winter vacation. If he increased his magic power regularly, even if it was difficult for him to reach the 4th Circle, Theo could reach the 3rd Circle safely. He didn’t need to worry about the academy’s diploma anymore now.

Theo wondered just how far he could go with this help. The owner of this ridiculous monster would never be able to live as an ordinary magician. If so, Theo would go as far as possible.

‘Well, shall I start by cleaning up the knowledge inside my head?’

The story of the future would be postponed until later. Theodore Miller once again made his way to the library.

Chapter 13 – Here Comes The Mutiny #1

The two months winter vacation was coming to an end.

The students, who had gone home, gradually began to return, while the professors were already preparing the class materials. The campus, which had been empty and cold, soon regained its usual warmth.

However, the wind was still chilly, so there weren't many people outside. In the midst of that, one student was running around the campus grounds.

"Pant...! Pant...!"

Theo heaved as he moved around the grounds. This would be his 32nd lap. When he first started exercising, he couldn't even do 10 laps. At least he hadn't vomited up what he ate after the first day. He used the knowledge he had to exercise properly. His body, which he had trained systematically for two months, was gradually becoming more manly.

'With this... 40!'

As soon as he completed his 45th lap, Theo fell to the ground instantly. It was the basic strengthening method of placing his palm against the floor and pushing up and down. He'd read in a book that it was a method the northern knights used.

As his arms trembled, Theo thought about why he was doing this. It started from when he accepted Alfred's memories.

-From [Ballistics magic], the magic is an arrow and the magician is the bow. The magician not only needs to hone the magic but also to train the body.

In fact, he remembered that Alfred Bellontes' body had been as conditioned as a knight's. In particular, the arm which shot the Magic Missile had been like a log. It was clear that physical training was necessary to withstand the recoil and release of magic.

Since then, Theodore had added working out to his routine. He didn't miss a day of running every morning, and he conditioned his muscles steadily. Although his body was fatigued and screaming with pain, Theo didn't give in. Rather, he doubled his usual food intake and immersed himself in the training.

"1...90, 2...00!"

Theo fell down after fulfilling his quota.

Despite the fact that his forearms had thickened compared to two months ago, it was difficult to increase the amount he did everyday. This much training was possible because a magician's body recovered faster than an average person. It couldn't be compared to the knights who refined mana, but it was enough to allow him to not struggle to get out of bed the next day.

‘Uhh, this is why studying is the easiest part.’

It would be hard to find someone who agreed with him, but Theo was sincere in his own way. Since he’d been born, his memory had been good.

His active wear was sticky with sweat and his limbs were rubbery to the point where it was hard to stand up. Still, there was a sense of accomplishment like when he was studying magic, so he was able to endure for another day.

Every time he looked in the mirror, his appearance which was different from yesterday was a big motivation for Theo.

‘...Get up.’

Despite the sweat, his body was cold due to the chilly wind. It would be bad if he caught a cold. He got up and brushed away the dirt on his hands. Ordinary people would need to go to the bath, but Theo was different.

“Clean.”

With a simple spell, the dirt on his body was stripped away. Other students often ignored this method since they lived well, but Theodore understood the practicality. As the magic power wrapped around his body gently, he became cleaner than before.

‘Is this the 3rd Circle? It feels cleaner than when I used it

before…’

It wasn’t a simple feeling but the truth.

Any magic required magic power to maximize its performance. 1st Circle magic could be made more efficient by inserting more magic power. Therefore, the difference between a 2nd Circle and 3rd Circle magician was obvious.

There was a difference between the 2nd Circle Theo and the 3rd Circle Theo.

Wuuong-

The third circle around his heart was still strange. He touched his chest unconsciously. However, the number of circles didn’t change. This was a state he had accomplished after visiting the black market trader three times and feeding on 40 artifacts.

3rd Circle magician…

Theo was now at the same starting point as the other students.

*

“Oh, cold. It is finally worth living.”

Unlike the outside where the cold wind blew, the air inside was nice and warm.

The heating had been turned off during the vacation. Theo was more sensitive and realized that artificially created heat was seeping from the walls and corridor tiles. He raised his cold hands and let the warmth penetrate his skin.

‘Applying Heat magic, simple but efficient.’

He admired the person who designed this heating system. It was at this moment that…

Tak… tadak… tak…

Theo, who was warming his hands on the wall, opened his eyes he heard the sound of footsteps. He unconsciously counted the number of steps which could be heard.

‘Someone is nearing… roughly three people?’

This ability was closer to an ability of an assassin or tracker than a magician. It was a type of sensory perception in which he could sense the movement of magic power. Theo had gained the ability after experiencing Alfred’s memories from [Ballistics Magic]. As a war hero, Alfred Bellontes had conditioned his senses to the level of tracking magic. Theo, who had obtained a little bit of the hero’s memories, awakened a similar sense of perception.

Unsurprisingly, three students wearing uniforms appeared in the corridor leading to the dormitory. The four pairs of eyes met in the middle.

‘These guys…?’

He glanced at his opponents reflexively. They had loose ties and rolled up sleeves…. Accessories and shoes with heels which were technically going against the school rules. Theo could tell what type of people they were just by the way they were dressed.

This led to the next development.

“Hey, isn’t he that bastard?”

“It seems like it? It is obvious just by the face.”

“Whoa, we are now in the same dormitory. Now I can finally feel like I’m in the third grade.”

Indeed, they spoke loudly to make sure he heard it. Theo moved his feet as he suddenly felt like laughing. This much wasn’t enough to be called harassment. Last year, there had been someone who had shot at the back of his head with shock magic. There had also been someone who created a hole in his bag with a magic arrow.

It was a very good level if they were just talking.

Trudge. Trudge.

Theo passed by the three people calmly. Was it because they didn't like this response? It was at an angle where the three people couldn't see his eyes.

The long-time dunce of the academy, the one who was the symbol of a loser since they entered school... Why was he so confident? He didn't even ask them to move out of the way with a subservient expression. The three people's sense of superiority boiled over.

Kiiing-

Theodore stopped moving as he sensed the movement of magic power. Magic... The magic was only 1st Circle at most, but the epicentre was right under Theo's feet. If he took one more step, then he would've fallen.

'This magic... 'Grease'? What a trivial trick.'

It was a trick he was familiar with. Everyone who attacked from behind was the same. They wanted to laugh while watching him fall. It was to ridicule the loser who was older than them but considered inferior. If it was last year, then Theo would've been numb to it, but...

'The suffering ends here.'

As a 3rd Circle magician and the owner of Gluttony, Theodore Miller was a completely different person from before. Theodore identified the position of Grease using Alfred's detection ability and immediately counterattacked. At the very least, he should return what they were trying to do.

He didn't hesitate to point his fingers behind him and cast 'Grease'. The three idiots didn't know what was happening at the soles of their shoes.

"Idiots," Theo said softly before moving again. As he stepped over the area where Grease was, he heard a loud sound from behind him.

The three people shouted loudly from the ground. but Theo didn't turn back. He would see countless of these idiots in the future.

"The opening ceremony... is in a week," a cold voice emerged from Theo's mouth.

A new semester had begun again. It was time to pay back the three years of scorn from the professors and taunts from the students. He knew it was simple, but he couldn't stop his mouth from curling upwards.

Then a week later, Theodore Miller's final year in the third grade began.

Chapter 14 – Here Comes The Mutiny #2

Long-time dunce…

The presence of the long-time dunce was a feature of Bergen Academy which was known not only amongst the existing students but the new freshmen as well. Everybody knew the fact that Theodore Miller had to repeat the same year three times. Someone said that this would be his final year, while others said he would drop out.

None of the countless people at the academy thought Theo would be able to graduate. Professor Bernard Wheeler, who was in charge of the third grade's alchemy classes, was the same.

'I don't know why he decided to step foot in the academy… Although he endured four years of it, that impudent fellow will soon return to the countryside.'

He looked at Theo, who was staring outside the window like he wasn't aware of the gossip.

The relationship between the two of them hadn't been so bad in the beginning.

Although Professor Bernard was a narrow-minded person who judged a student's worth by their status, Theodore Miller was from a noble lineage, no matter how low his family had fallen. There was a separate reason for Professor Bernard's hostile attitude.

It was perhaps two years ago…?

Theo, who had received his first repeater letter, had still been working enthusiastically in class, and Professor Bernard had still been treating him as a student. The relationship between the two had changed due to something which had occurred in one of the alchemy classes.

-Professor, I'm sorry, but that paper you quoted from was withdrawn from the Magical Society two years ago.

-…What? Are you saying that my class is wrong?

-No, the Magic Society said it.

–How dare someone like you say such a thing?!

Maybe it wasn't such a big deal. If an ordinary student like a duke or earl had made the same comment, he might have accepted it quietly. However, Theodore was a baron from the countryside and a poor student who had repeated a year. Such a person was finding fault with Bernard's class…

Bernard was proud of his status and authority, so he hadn't been able to endure being shamed like that.

Since that day, Bernard shook every time he looked at Theo. He

had spent many nights worrying about how to remove him from the academy. However, Theodore's conduct was exemplary, and there was nothing to be faulted except for his practical performance. Therefore, Bernard came up with another approach.

"The combination formula you will be learning today is 'Full Moon Bead', which is more complicated than you might think. If you make a mistake, then the precious ingredients will crumble. On the other hand, too much magic power will turn it into a poison, not medicine. But the effect is amazing, enough to allow a half-dying person to catch their breath."

Bernard kept writing on the board while watching Theodore. He was staring at the blackboard without writing anything down. Even so, that gaze was extremely annoying. Knowing that he had already crossed a irreversible river, Bernard forgot his conscience and laughed.

"Then the question... Theodore?"

"Yes." Theo answered the call with a gentle expression.

"Explain why 'Full Moon Bead' is difficult to combine. Haven't you been taking my class for three years?"

Some of the students giggled at the taunt. There were a few students who remained expressionless, but they weren't able to hide their side glances of interest.

The day was the same as always, with the same taunts. It was only Theo who had changed.

“Each of the ingredients of the ‘Full Moon Bead’ has strong magic power and can’t be dealt with unless the person is a magician. If you can’t control the magic power precisely, then the material will be corrupted. For this reason, the ‘Full Moon Bead’ is very difficult to make.”

Although Bernard was secretly laughing at the answer, he gestured to the other students.

“Yes, you know it. Everybody clap!”

Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap…

The insincere applause rang out through the classroom. What else was there? Theo was almost afraid to look at Bernard.

Bernard pointed to the podium where the ingredients for the ‘Full Moon Bead’ were placed and said, “But anyone can do it with their mouths. Theodore, please combine one ‘Full Moon Bead’.”

“…You mean?”

“Yes. If you have studied in this school for five years, then you should be a model for the other students.”

This was what Bernard had been aiming for.

Theo clicked his tongue inwardly as he understood Bernard's intentions.

Bernard was probably convinced that Theo would fail this combination formula. The 'Full Moon Bead' was the most difficult combination drug in the third grade. A task of such difficulty wasn't something to be given to the 2nd Circle Theo, who often failed.

However, Bernard wanted to show his incompetence to the other students and throw him out for wasting expensive ingredients. If Theo refused, then he would be mocked for the five years he had spent here.

The academy's professor had a pretty good plan.

'Well, I can also use my head.'

However, Theo was different compared to before the winter vacation.

"I understand."

Theo got up from his seat and headed to the podium where the ingredients were placed. Bernard thought that he had made a mistake when he saw Theo's confident attitude. However, his logic decisively denied his intuition. He believed there was no way it was

possible.

After a moment, a brilliant light filled the classroom.

“Ohh…!”

“That is the ‘Full Moon Bead’!”

The glass which Theo was holding contained a liquid medicine with tiny granules in it. Bernard watched the scene with blank eyes before grabbing the glass with a disbelieving expression. He had already forgotten about the other students.

“T-This is ridiculous. Y-You… how…?”

Even if he checked it a few times, it was clearly a perfect ‘Full Moon Bead’. No, Bernard couldn’t even make such a perfect combination. As someone who was a magician before a professor, Bernard’s face turned pale.

Theo added a few words, as if to drive in the wedge, “Professor, I’m sorry, but it is better to add one more moon grass to the formula on the blackboard in order to increase the efficiency.”

“…W-What?”

“It was in a paper published by the Magic Society last year.”

It was the same situation and same voice as two years ago. Bernard, who faced the revived memory of a nightmare, sank into his chair. After that, he didn't even look in Theodore's direction.

The full-fledged change began the day after this incident.

The news that the famous dunce had succeeded in combining the 'Full Moon Bead' spread throughout the academy.

All the professors, except for Vince, didn't believe the rumour, and each one prepared a task for Theo. In particular, Professor Claude who taught magic circles prepared a task which even the other professors would find hard to do.

The task was to execute a triple compound magic circle. Apart from the amount of magic power, they had to understand the meaning and circulation of the magic circle.

In the old days, Theo had understood the secret, but he hadn't been able to succeed because he hadn't had the minimum level of sensitivity required. However, for him, it was now at the level of a mere headache.

Theo smiled silently at Professor Claude who was internally aghast.

'I was fed up because I didn't have much sensitivity... To think just this slight difference is so big.'

As a result of the steady feeding throughout the winter break, Theo's talent had jumped almost four or five times.

He learned most of the magic which he'd only had knowledge of and his magic power reached the middle of the 3rd Circle. If he continued growing like this, he would reach the 4th Circle before the first semester ended.

However, in the meantime, the rise of his sensitivity was minimal. According to Gluttony, it was at most [Mana sensitivity +30]? It was still lower than the average figure.

Even so, Theo's magic skills had developed brilliantly. Compared to the past, where he had almost no sensitivity, this was like water washing onto a dry land. Did those born with high magic sensitivity feel like they were flying around in the sky?

Theo walked back to his seat while thinking about this, and many pairs of eyes followed after him.

*

People who witnessed Theo's change often responded in three ways.

"That person is called a dunce? No way."

"Yes. Is there something wrong with the professors?"

“That might be the case. Or he really was a dunce until last year.”

“Hey, does that make sense?”

First, there were people who questioned the existing evaluation of Theo. They couldn’t understand why such an excellent person was called a dunce. There were even conspiracy theories that he had intentionally stayed in the academy.

Then came the second reaction.

“He has studied for five years, so I guess this is the outcome.”

“Wasn’t there a saying in the east about a ‘late bloomer’? Maybe Senior grew like that.”

“I think the top graduate this year will be him.”

Some people accepted the reality they saw with their own eyes.

Theo was a man who had succeeded with ‘Full Moon Bead’ and a ‘Triple Compound Magic Circle’. The students who had watched the process from beginning to end began to talk publicly about Theodore Miller’s excellence. Some students even came up to him during break time to ask questions.

Finally, there was the third type of reaction.

“Look at the failure showing off…”

“Isn’t he just a senior with some good luck?”

“A baron from the countryside who knows some things.”

Despite the rumours, there were people who were convinced Theo was still a failure. Their sense of inferiority or discrimination rose to the surface as they stared at Theodore’s back with hostile eyes.

The academy’s strict rules made fighting almost meaningless, but some tried to find a method.

“Isn’t the next class battle magic?”

“Yes, and it is clearly the first lesson…”

In the third grade, students started learning how to fight using magic.

During the first class, sparring was conducted under the professor’s supervision in order to find out the levels of the students. The method they came up with, for the purpose of fighting Theo, was that spar.

“I’ll do it. I’ll crush the pride of that dunce.”

“No, it is my role if it is battle magic.”

“My family has received awards for magic.”

Each one spoke in a confident voice. They would defeat the arrogant loser and show him who the poor one was. A smile appeared on their faces at the thought.

...Of course, it was doubtful that they would be as good as they thought.

Chapter 15 – Here Comes The Mutiny #3

Battle magic was the most popular subject in the academy. Additionally, having achievements in battle magic was equivalent to being first when academy graduates were assessed for their value. There was even a competition for students of various academies to recruit the graduates.

It was the same with Bergen Academy, Therefore, the professor in charge was naturally the best magician in the academy, Vince. In fact, he had a distinguished career as a war magician and had received a noble title for it.

However, that was just annoying to Vince.

“Since ancient times, magicians have had a very close relationship with war. The reason for this is very simple. Magicians are extremely efficient soldiers. While a well-trained knight can cut down more than 10 people, a 4th Circle magician can burn 100 people.”

Some of the students paled at the realism in his cold voice. For them, murder and war were overly heavy topics. The expression ‘efficient’ was simply too cold. However, not everyone responded that way.

Some students’ eyes shone at Vince’s words and became eager to try the magic right now. There was no other greater route to success than being a combat magician. Rather than refusing to kill, they were the type of people who wanted their abilities to be

recognized. In any case, this type of personality was much better. At the very least, they wouldn't throw up.

'Either way, they are just young chicks.'

Vince assessed the students' reactions with a sober eye. According to his experiences, those who could fight in battle didn't respond that way. Rather than being lighthearted, their emotions wouldn't be exposed on the surface. For an ordinary person capable of becoming a separate person on the battlefield... That was the talent needed to be a war magician.

"This academy was once a facility to raise magicians who would be sent to the battlefield. It isn't obligatory to enter the army now, but the battle magic course is left to develop a sense of real warfare."

There were a few references in the curriculum he used to teach the students. The one-on-one spar in the first class was a product of those days. Although a few steps had been erased, there was no better way to identity a student's qualities.

Two students would alternate between the roles of attacker and defender, and the one who was superior would be decided as the winner. Even if it was a structured, this was a proven training method.

Vince started explaining the rules of the spar.

“Well, the rules are simple. I will keep watch, so don’t worry about getting injured. Just do the best that you can… However.”

For a moment, magic power flashed in his eyes.

“If you commit a foul, such as disregarding the order of attack or an unexpected strike… I will use my name to get you expelled from the academy. Understood?”

“Yes!”

Professor Vince was famous for being strict and fair. Knowing that warning wasn’t a bluff, the students replied with stiff voices.

Vince then took out the attendance sheet and pointed to the first person who would do the spar.

“Then we will begin immediately. Number 1, Evans. Pick a person.”

*

Bang!

A fireball exploded against a shield with a loud sound. Dozens of magic missiles then flew through the air, causing the shield to lose its shape. Lightning was shot into a curtain of water, and wind deflected an arrow.

At first, the students were nervous, but they now used the magic naturally. The presence of Professor Vince and the pleasure of using magic like this for the first time started to draw out the students' potential.

The students watching the sparring students didn't stay still. They watched the exchanges of magic closely and discussed areas to be fixed as well as their own assessments.

Some of the students gave harsh assessments.

'What a mess. The vast majority don't know about the details of the attributes, and the magic they use is too obvious. Why are they taking 10 seconds to use 2nd Circle magic? If the roles weren't being alternated, they would have been attacked and finished already.'

There was no end to the problems. Theo pressed against his temples as he tried not to sigh.

To be precise, Alfred's memories were giving him a headache. In the eyes of the legendary magician who had spent his whole life on the battlefield, Alfred Bellontes saw all the flaws. Having absorbed his experiences, Theodore had the same opinion.

Some time passed by.

The remaining number of students left to fight each other

decreased until the students who hadn't yet dueled could be counted on both hands. Then Professor Vince called someone's name, "Number 25, Garcia Carter. Choose your sparring opponent."

As soon as his name was called, the students suddenly became quiet. Garcia, the second son of the famous Carter family, got up from his spot. This caused the faces of the students, who had yet to fight, to harden.

Thanks to the support of Garcia's family, his amount of magic power was close to the 4th Circle and he was a combat magician with high sensitivity. It was obvious that they couldn't defeat such a person.

–Don't choose me, not me...

–Stick to some other guy...

As if he knew the students were praying earnestly, Garcia looked around leisurely like a wild beast searching for his prey.

Then he noticed Theodore Miller who was looking at him with a calm expression. With neither fear nor curiosity, it was a gaze with no emotions.

Garcia opened his mouth and said the name impulsively, "Theodore Miller."

Professor Vince raised his eyebrows as he heard it. “…Um?”

Theodore casually got up and moved to the other side of Garcia. It meant he accepted the nomination.

Vince paused for a moment before stepping back. It was ridiculous to stop them when the other person had already accepted the nomination. Above all, Theo was a student who never acted without thinking.

‘No, I don’t know why but…’

Vince felt strangely like Theo would be the dominant one.

However, that was impossible. Theo, a dunce who was close to the 3rd Circle, was going against someone who was from a prominent family and was almost at the 4th Circle. The balance would clearly lean toward the latter.

Had his intuition become rusty after leaving the battlefield?

“…The both of you, start as soon as you are ready.”

After the moment of hesitation, Vince stood between the two people and started the spar. Thanks to the coin toss, Garcia Carter was the first attacker. He was from a family of prestigious battle magicians, so he aimed for Theo without hesitation.

“Lightning Bolt!”

Blue lightning shot out from Garcia and flew toward Theo at a terrifying pace. Lightning was the best attribute to use in an actual fight against people. It was at a student’s level, but the general aim wasn’t shaken.

Indeed, it wasn’t bad. Theo created a wall of magic power.

“Shield.”

The lightning blazed as it struck the translucent barrier before losing its momentum and fading away.

Lightning Bolt was a practical and brilliant magic, but its strength was limited to its speed and destructiveness. The output itself wasn’t very high and if the timing of the defense wasn’t too late, it could be blocked easily.

This time, it was Theo’s turn to attack.

“Fire Bolt.”

A total of 12 fire arrows appeared in the air. It was the maximum number he could implement at one time as a 3rd Circle magician. However, Garcia’s defense was completed before Theo could shoot them.

“Shield!”

It was much thicker than a conventional shield and had a tight texture. Even if there were 24 fire arrows instead of just 12, its defense wouldn’t be shaken. Garcia was confident in his defense and smiled fiercely.

Theo smiled as well.

“Go.”

The 12 fire arrows shot through the air.

The strength and disadvantage of bolt-based magic was that it poured out randomly within a certain range. It was good when dealing with a large number of people, but there wasn’t enough power to break through a tightly fixed defense.

Thus, Theo added some things to the magic formula.

Pepepepeng!

Instead of there being a time difference, they all focused on one point.

“Keuk...! What is this?!”

Garcia stepped back at the unexpected firepower. The perfectly raised shield became half-crumbled, and there was a shockwave which pushed his body back a few steps. Eyes filled with surprise and suspicion stared at Theo on the other side. That wasn't the power of a mere Fire Bolt.

However, Garcia wasn't able to see through it with his capabilities.

'After adding to the rotation and acceleration, it is pretty usable.'

Theodore's Fire Bolt was upgraded to a level which was completely unrelated to the existing magic formula. The arrowheads rotated; they were concentrated on one spot and the speed was increased. The Fire Bolt, with these three supplementary magic, was already at a level which Garcia's shield couldn't handle.

"Then what about this?!"

The troubled Garcia couldn't understand why he was inferior, and a ball of fire appeared on his palm. It was the 3rd Circle attack magic, Fireball. Since Garcia's magic power was close to the 4th Circle, the scale was three or four times that of the other students.

'I can't stop it head on... A magician should also use their head.'

A shield wouldn't be able to take the full impact. For this situation, something more efficient and optimized was required.

In Theo's mind, dozens of magic formulas mixed together until he created one which met those conditions.

"Shield."

A triangular shaped shield appeared in front of Theo. Simultaneously, the Fireball shot from Garcia's hand with a frightening momentum. If there was a direct hit, then a three meter area would be damaged!

It was literally a collision of power and technique.

Peeeeeong!

The result was that technique obviously won.

"What?!"

The fireball struck the triangular shaped shield and lost its shape, scattering over the edges and creating scorch marks on the sides of the shield.

It was a perfect defense which even Vince marvelled at. If the creator of [The Application of Defense Magic] was here, he would praise the accomplishment with enthusiastic applause.

Theo then became the attacker, and a Fireball appeared in his

hand.

“Fireball.”

Compared to Garcia’s, the size was insignificant. However, its inherent power was comparable to Garcia’s larger Fireball. It was an improved Fireball which compressed the strength on the inside rather than the outside, greatly increasing the explosive power. It was difficult to block with the existing Shield, which was vulnerable to a one-point attack.

Therefore, it would be better to block it with a wall of dirt instead of Shield.

“S-Shield!”

The confused Garcia used Shield reflexively. Shortly after that, a gigantic wave of heat hit.

Kwaang!

“Kuaaaak!”

The shockwave shattered the shield and threw Garcia’s body back a few meters. If Professor Vince hadn’t reduced the impact using magic, then he might’ve been seriously wounded. This was proof that there was a clear difference in skills.

A member of the Carter family was defeated by the dunce!

The students, who witnessed the shocking sight, couldn’t help crying out.

Chapter 16 – Here Comes The Mutiny #4

“No way! Theodore won!”

“He defeated Garcia in battle magic…!”

“How is he a dunce?”

The students were truly very noisy. It was difficult for them to accept that Garcia, one of the best in their year, had been defeated. The even more frustrating thing was that the man who defeated him was Theodore Miller.

He had studied for an extra three years, but the gap in talent couldn’t be that much. The students knew that better than anyone else, so their surprise was greater.

Professor Vince was the most surprised person.

‘Great… Fire Bolt aiming at one point, a shield with a variation in shape, and a compressed Fireball… It’s already at a good enough level to be an active war magician.’

No, maybe even more than that. Theo’s face never showed any tension, and he didn’t take a step from his first standing position. It was literally a one-sided win. Vince raised a hand in order to calm the students and declare Theo’s victory.

However, at that moment...

"...Not yet, not yet! I'm not backing down yet!"

Garcia's eyes were wild as he awkwardly raised his body from where he had fallen. Clearly, he wasn't in a normal condition. His magic power was running out of control outside his body, and his distorted face revealed his wounded pride.

'If Father and Big Brother know that I've fallen in such an unsightly way, they will never forgive me!'

His father, Viscount Carter, was famous. His family was several times stricter and more hierarchical than other families. If rumours spread that he had lost to not just any student but to the famous dunce, he would never be able to leave the Carter estate.

That was something that could never happen.

"This is the last one. If you can take this spell, then I will admit defeat, Theodore Miller!" Garcia shouted wildly toward Theo, who still had a casual expression on his face.

Garcia knew it was nonsense, but he couldn't retire like this. He started preparing the spell before Theodore even replied.

'Tsk, this is why children of prestigious families...'

In the end, Professor Vince clicked his tongue and stepped back. If Theodore had rejected it, then he would've interfered. However, Theo didn't seem to have any plans to resign either. Rather, he was carefully observing Garcia's boiling magic power with cool eyes. His eyes, which were as sharp as blades while concentrating fiercely, gave the illusion that he was standing on a battlefield.

Thus, the final confrontation between the two students began.

"「Red light streaking across the sky–」"

A strange voice emerged from Garcia's mouth. It was a chant which accompanied a magic spell and displayed a different power compared to magic with only one or two starting words. Even if the same amount of magic power was used, the power was increased overwhelmingly. Once it was high-level magic, it could be used as a tactical weapon.

Additionally, there was a function hidden behind the chant.

Wuuuong...

The jeweled pendant hidden in the uniform began resonating with its owner's will. It was the artifact, Roaring Flames, which was only give to a legitimate child of the Carter family. This artifact greatly increased the magic power of the contracted owner as well as the output of fire magic.

It was because Garcia trusted in this power that he requested for

another round with Theo.

‘Now, I can use 4th Circle magic. No matter how hard the three-time dunce tries, it will end with this!’

Simultaneously, Theodore’s face stiffened as he sensed the suspicious magic power. Alfred’s sensory perception sensed a sudden increase in the opponent’s magic power, and he knew it was 4th Circle magic. Theo frowned at the difference in the magic flow.

‘What? The amount of magic power in his body has suddenly increased. Is it a Carter family secret technique?’

Theo could suspect that it was due to the use of an artifact. However, if he made the accusation and it was wrong, then it was likely to backfire on him. Therefore, Theo prepared his defense instead of objecting. Anyway, Professor Vince would stop him from getting hurt.

Thanks to Garcia’s crude control, the magic formula was read and Theo found an effective means to stop it.

The material was dirt, and he would created a spherical barrier to withstand the heat and shock.

‘If I had to name this, it would be Earth Dome.’

He could load the formula with magic power at any time to create

it. So, now, he just needed to match the timing. If he stacked a few layers of magic power, then it should be enough to stop a single 4th Circle fire magic. Theodore believed in his calculations and collected his trembling emotions.

Garcia soon completed the magic. It was a crimson fireball, a magic bullet which would turn a person into charcoal if it touched them.

“Blaze Shell!”

Garcia called out the name of the magic with a confident expression. It was a high-ranked fireball and was considered one of the greatest spells to use against a person in the fire attack magic. The slow speed, destructive power of the flames, and penetration power were supplemented for military use.

It was a fire spell capable of easily destroying a Shield of the same level.

“How about it, will you surrender now?”

Garcia was sure of his victory.

There was no way that Theo, a 3rd Circle magician, would be able to beat the 4th Circle magic. While the other students became restless because they didn’t know what would happen, Vince’s expression grew colder as he watched on.

However, Theo just replied with a blank expression, “Shoot.”

“…What?” Garcia asked in disbelief.

“The class needs to finish, so shoot it.” As Theo spoke, his voice didn’t shake at all.

Briefly, Garcia was lost for words. Then a thick vein bulged and the halted shell started to move through the air. The 4th Circle magic, Blaze Shell…

‘It’s coming.’

As soon as Theo confirmed it was moving, his magic power responded. He poured magic power into the pre-designed magic formula and placed the greatest amount at the point where the shell would hit.

Luckily, Garcia was limited in making the Blaze Shell and couldn’t control its trajectory. Needless to say, there were no improvements such as rotation or acceleration.

“Earth Dome!”

Theo placed his two palms on the ground, and the floor of the academy wriggled like it was alive. The ground crumbled, and the dirt and stone mixed together were hardened by magic power. A spherical dome, with Theo in the center, formed in an instant. The improvised magic spell was truly genius.

Then once the Earth Dome was completed…

The fire shell collided with the earth barrier.

Kwaang!

There was a loud rumble.

“Kyaaack!”

“Ack!”

The students covered their ears and, belatedly, their eyes as the dust fell down. Indeed, it was a mess.

Only Vince was walking around with a wall blocking the dust, wind, and sound. It was common to use things such as smokescreens on the battlefield, so he was used to such measures. Soon after, the dust settled down, and the scene within was revealed.

“N-No way… This—ridiculous…” Garcia Carter was sitting there with a pale face,

“…This, isn’t it just laundry magic?”Theo muttered as he cleaned his clothing.

‘How interesting. Where did I hear something similar?’ Vince laughed at the sight.

Blaze Shell and Earth Dome…

If he compared it to weapons, it was like a spear and a shield. Today’s battle wasn’t a contradiction but the victory of a shield which boasted a stronger defense.

*

“Okay, it is over.”

Vince clapped after he finished cleaning up the playing field.

The students, who had gathered in one place according to his instructions, looked around with disbelief. Just five minutes ago, the academy grounds had been ravaged. However, Professor Vince had reset that destruction in five minutes.

‘He has truly amazing skills.’ Theodore was also filled with admiration. These were the skills of Bergen Academy’s top magician.

He understood the formula and application of restoration magic, but he wasn’t confident he could produce the same result. Perhaps it was a trick to control magic, his experience, or the difference in

techniques.

Professor Vince returned to the front of the students and frowned as he called a person's name.

"Garcia Carter, get up."

"Huh?"

Garcia, who was still stunned by his defeat, got up from his seat. He was confused about why he was called, but the answer didn't come back in words.

Ppak!

Vince's fist hit Garcia's chin.

"Keok, P-Professor?"

A war magician also knew hand-to-hand combat. As proof of that fact, Professor Vince's hands were callused and Garcia's lips were bleeding.

Garcia trembled from the pain and shock as he grabbed his chin.

"You idiot. Did you think I wouldn't know?"

“W-What are you saying…?”

“Roaring Flames.”

The colour drained from Garcia’s face because he had secretly used an artifact.

This was a serious violation of the school rules. There was the possibility that Garcia would have to repeat a year or he might even be expelled. No, he had attacked another student with an unregistered artifact, so he was likely to face further punishment.

Vince then briefly explained why he knew about the artifact, Roaring Flames. “I served in the same unit as your father on the northern front. I thought he would’ve raised his child better. What a mess.”

Garcia despaired after hearing the reason. “P-Professor! That isn’t…”

“Shut up!” At Vince’s yell, the other students flinched. Some students even lost control of their bladder.

“You will follow me as soon as the lesson is over. I will review your situation at the faculty meeting. Understood?”

“A-Ahh…ahhhh…”

“And Theodore Miller.”

Theo raised his head at the sudden call.

“After class, finish your dinner and come to my laboratory. Understood?”

“Ah, I understand.”

“Yes.” Vince nodded after hearing the answer and looked at the frozen students. “Today’s lesson ends here. Next time, I will teach you about the attributes of magic. Dismissed.”

After his words, Professor Vince immediately headed toward the faculty members’ office with Garcia. The rest of the students didn’t know what to do, but they soon started moving toward their next class. They managed to melt the frozen atmosphere by wondering why Garcia was taken away.

‘After school, the professor’s laboratory…’

Only Theodore remained in place as he worried about why Vince had called him.

Chapter 17 – At The Crossroad Of Trust #1

After school, Theodore finished his dinner, like Professor Vince had said to do, and walked with a sunken expression.

He didn't have a chance to enjoy his victory over Garcia because he knew why Vince called him. In the academy, there was no other person who knew Theo better. He realized that Theo's abilities had increased abnormally.

'Plus, he knows that I don't have the money to buy magic reagents or hire a tutor.'

Vince had cared for him more than anyone else in the past three years.

Theo had talked about his miserable money situation, which was almost like a poor peasant's, and his horrible mana sensitivity.

Vince was different from the other professors who didn't pay much attention to Theo. This situation was more dangerous because it was Professor Vince, who always regretted seeing Theo's talent go to waste and tried to open up another path for him. Professor Vince would be able to grasp the authenticity of Theo's words.

Above all, there was the problem of coming up with a way of hiding Gluttony's existence.

‘Damn, there is no answer no matter how I think about it. I can’t make up excuses to Professor Vince. It will cause a misunderstanding, and I might not be able to salvage this.’

Gluttony had said that there were over 100 ways to increase magic power, but it had only told him one.

In this day and age, only three or four methods were known. Other methods included black magic or fraudulent techniques, but it wasn’t rare for the magic power to decrease instead. In a situation like this, there was no hole to escape to.

How long did he worry about it? Theo had already arrived in front of Professor Vince’s laboratory.

“…I’ve arrived.”

It was his first visit here since coming for the permit. Theo looked at the brown door before him. At that time, he had come out of this room with a gloomy face, and he now returned with entirely different worries.

The position he was in had changed a lot. The one-time 2nd Circle dunce now had the best marks in the grade. This was the result of facing his difficulties without turning back.

‘It is the same this time as well.’

He wouldn’t run away. Theo decided he would face it as he raised

his hand.

Knock, knock.

“Professor, it is Theodore.”

An answer came from behind the door, as if he had been waiting.

–Come in.

Theo turned the doorknob, and he could smell the usual scent of coffee. The parchments and books spread out on the desk showed Professor Vince’s diligence. He put down the parchment he was reading and looked at Theo with a face that was difficult to read.

“You came right on time. The faculty meeting took longer than I expected, so I just got back.”

It was as he said. The handling of Garcia Carter was a difficult problem for the academy. Viscount Carter was famous, so they didn’t want to punish his son and cause a problem. The professors were so concerned that Vince was eventually forced to give up on expulsion or repeating a year.

After the meeting ran for two or three hours, it finally came to an end with Viscount Carter’s showing up personally in a crystal ball.

–I’m really sorry that my foolish son was such a nuisance.

As an upright and honourable nobleman, Viscount Cater didn't try to make excuses for Garcia. Rather, he asked Vince to punish him strictly. As a result, the principal of Bergen Academy decided to leave the decision to Vince.

"It is unsatisfactory. The principal was afraid of the possible future troubles if he made the wrong decision."

Vince described the situation up to there and stopped talking for a moment. Then he took a sip from the coffee cup on his desk, dissatisfied that the professors at the academy were bureaucrats who only cared about their own well-being.

On the other hand, Theo hadn't expected much from the professors, so his expression was still calm. Vince saw his reaction and put down his cup.

"I spoke for too long. Should I go straight to the point?"

Before that, Vince pulled something out. It was an impressive pendant on a silver chain. Theo could feel a considerable amount of magic power coming from the red jewel in the middle.

Theo's eyes naturally widened when he saw the pendant.

'It's an artifact! I've never seen such a high quality one before.'

Thanks to spending two months at the black market trader, Theo quickly noticed it. The silver pendant was something which couldn't be compared with any of the goods from the black market trader. Its configuration of the magic power was completely different.

It might be possible to shorten the path to the 4th Circle by more than half if he swallowed it. The pendant was like an à la carte dish. Then Professor Vince told him the identity of the pendant.

"Roaring Flames is the name of this pendant."

"Roaring Flames...?"

"Yes. Garcia, that idiot, used this artifact during the spar with you."

Indeed, it had been due to the power of the pendant. Theo nodded unconsciously. This answered the question of how Garcia, a 3rd Circle magician, had been able to use the 4th Circle Blaze Shell. It was possible with the magic power of 'Roaring Flames'.

However, his surprise didn't end there.

"Now, take it."

"—Ah?"

Professor Vince suddenly threw Roaring Flames at Theodore.

An artifact, which would be worth at least 100 gold and treasured by magicians, was being thrown through the air. Theo raised his hands reflexively and grabbed it.

Before Theo could ask anything, Vince said, “You won’t receive an apology from the academy. However, you were attacked by this artifact. I think this pendant, Roaring Flames, was sent as an apology by Viscount Carter.”

“No, even so…”

Handing over an artifact like this as an apology… no one in the Meltor Kingdom would do it. At the very least, Viscount Carter wasn’t known for his wealth.

Theo knew this and wasn’t convinced, but Vince casually explained the story behind the incident.

“Instead, Garcia will receive a one month suspension. I chose his punishment without consulting you, so if you have any complaints, give back the pendant and he will be expelled.”

“…I have no complaints, Professor!”

“Well, I thought so.”

As Theo was stunned by his sudden windfall, Vince smiled and picked up his cup of coffee again.

No matter what punishment Garcia received, Theodore wouldn't receive any benefits. No, Garcia might hold a grudge if he received a severe punishment. Whereas, accepting the Roaring Flames would give Theo a benefit.

'Okay, it might be possible for me to become a 4th Circle magician before graduation.'

For a moment, there was a peaceful silence. Theo's hands were tingling because he wanted to use Appraisal straight away, while Vince closed his eyes and savoured the smell of coffee. However, the silence between the two of them was broken shortly afterwards by Vince's voice.

"From here on, it will be my personal question."

The inevitable checkmate had arrived. The relaxed tension was pulled tightly like a rubber band, and Theo's expression grew grim.

He lost the false sense of security Professor Vince had given him by handing him the artifact, and a hypothetical dialogue of how this conversation would go popped into his head. The atmosphere in the room seemed to cool within a mere 10 seconds.

"I don't doubt your capabilities. No, anyone who understands

your nature wouldn't feel doubt. Haven't I told you a few times already? Theodore Miller, if you had a little more sensitivity, then you would've been the top graduate three years ago."

Theo's expression didn't soften even with the praise. Rather, it became more tense. Theodore was afraid of that splendid reputation. Nobody in the academy knew, but one person had guessed about Theodore's talent. That person was Professor Vince.

"However, that is the limit. There is no way to increase one's sensitivity, and I felt regret for you."

But—

Vince looked at him with sharp eyes.

"Since the winter break, you have changed. No, the word 'change' is lacking. You have become completely different."

It was a bit of a relief that no animosity was obviously visible. Theo might have absorbed some of Alfred Bellontes's talents and experience, but he wasn't a match for the Vince. Vince was a person who had been a war magician for decades and was a powerful person with the 6th Circle in sight. If Theo fought Vince 100 times, then Theo would die 100 times.

Fortunately, Vince was just questioning Theo and didn't seem to have any hostile feelings.

“It is okay if you don’t want to answer. You are sincere and not a personally flawed student. I know you wouldn’t use a dirty method for such a development.”

“Professor…”

“But if you think of me as your teacher, I wonder if there is anything I can do to help you.”

‘I want to teach you’ was the conclusion. At that moment, Theodor Miller had a hunch.

‘Here, this is a crossroad.’

His life would change depending on which side he chose. Should he tell Vince or should he hide it?

If he concealed it, then his days would continue like they were now. He would continue eating books from the library and receive his diploma as an elite student. No, would it really be like that?

There was a limit to how many books he could take from the library. Over the past two months, Gluttony had already eaten over 100 books. He had somehow concealed it by changing the layout of the collections or moving the desk positions, but if someone looked closely, then it would soon be clear.

However, if he had Professor Vince’s cooperation, he wouldn’t need to take such risks.

‘No, that doesn’t matter.’

In the end, that was a secondary matter. He had to look at the essence of the situation.

What was the meaning of this crossroad?

Theo stared solemnly at Professor Vince. In retrospect, it was a simple question...

...Should be believe or not believe in Vince?

“Professor.”

After a period of silence which was both long and short, Theo finally made his decision.

Chapter 18 – At The Crossroad Of Trust #2

Having spent five years at Bergen Academy, Theo had realized one thing: he shouldn't judge people by their light words or temporary actions.

Classmates who pretended to be friends had turned away from him, while the professors treated him like a fool. It would be foolish to trust people like them.

However, Professor Vince was different.

–Are you the long-time dunce? I don't know what idiot created that nickname.

–The answer to this final exam was excellent. If you don't mind, come to my laboratory after school. I will teach you a little more.

–Don't mind those playing tricks on you. You are a better person than anyone at this academy.

-Theodore Miller, do you want to try being a magic scholar?

Theo remembered all of their conversations. They were words which had saved the frustrated, disappointed, and ashamed Theodore.

Vince was the only one who recognized Theo's value. The

academy's best magician had said that he believed in the talent of the long-time dunce.

His words had created the present Theodore.

'Professor Vince... the only person in this academy that I trust and can confide in...'

If even Vince wasn't trustworthy, then he would never been able to tell anyone in the future.

Theodore's eyes sank as he realized something; he couldn't live like this forever. Eventually, someone would notice books were missing from the library, and people would raise doubts about Theo's sudden skills and performance.

In that situation, he was a mere student with neither the power nor the status to preserve his rights. However, it was a different story if he had Professor Vince as his ally.

'Obviously, I can try to stop that situation from happening... but like this, I can get help. It will also be easier to get the necessary books.'

There was the possibility that he wouldn't get caught before graduation, or the probability that Professor Vince wouldn't betray him. Either way, the indefinite future couldn't be quantified.

The scales in Theodore's mind were leaning toward the latter.

“Professor, I’d like to show you something, so please don’t be surprised.”

“I’ll try.”

Vince, who was watching him quietly, nodded with a serious expression. It was just for a moment, but the weight of the worries which appeared on Theo’s face was really heavy. After such distress, it was a secret he would tell Vince. So, he needed to be dignified.

Theo took a few deep breaths before placing Roaring Flames, which he was holding in his right hand, onto the table. Then he placed his left hand above it.

“Gluttony, come out.”

As always, it responded faithfully to his call.

Slurp!

A tongue protruded from the open hole in the palm of his hand. Professor Vince jumped, but he didn’t cast a spell thanks to what Theo had said earlier.

As the eyes of the two people met, Gluttony’s tongue wrapped around its prey as usual. Its prey was the pendant, Roaring Flames,

which was emitting an intense magic power.

[+7 Roaring Flames (Accessory)]

[As a silver pendant containing a small amount of mithril, it is a high-grade magic stone. This pendant was produced by Viscount Carter, and the way to create it doesn't exist anymore. The owner can form a contract by dripping blood on the pendant in order to use all the functions. When this pendant is activated, magic power will temporarily increase and affinity to fire magic will also increase.

* The rating of this pendant is 'Precious'.

* When consumed, a considerable amount of magic power will be absorbed.

* When consumed, the digestion time is 1 hour and 38 minutes.

*Current contractor: Garcia Carter.

* Starting spell: Red light streaking across the sky]

'Precious rating...?! It is truly different from the other items.'

Theo admired the value of ‘Roaring Flames’. Until now, most of his items had a Normal rating, with an occasionally Rare emerging. However, ‘Roaring Flames’ was beyond that limit.

It was also the first time that the digestion of an object exceeded one hour. The stronger items would probably take longer to digest.

“C-Can I ask for an explanation?”

Professor Vince belatedly regained his spirit and pointed to the tongue with his finger. However, Theo looked down at Gluttony instead of answering his question. It was waiting for his permission like a well-trained hound.

“It isn’t over yet… Eat.”

The tongue instantly wrapped around Roaring Flames, and it was sucked Theo’s left hand. As always, it made a sound, expressing that the food was delicious.

Gulp!

At the sound, Professor Vince sank back into his chair with an agitated expression.

“Huh, huhuhuh…”

“Professor, are you okay?”

Theo wanted to take a moment for the shock to wear off, but Vince's eyes were shouting at him to explain. Originally, magicians emerged amongst those who couldn't refrain from their curiosity.

To do this to the curiosity of a 5th Circle master, who was almost at the 6th Circle, was like throwing a thirsty man into the desert.

In the end, Theodore started explaining what had happened to Roaring Flames.

*

The story ended earlier than expected.

Vince was a magician as well as a genius scholar. If Theo explained one thing to him, he could grasp three or four other meanings, and Vince soon understood Gluttony's existence.

"Indeed, it is a greedy grimoire."

Professor Vince shook his head as he let out a cry of amazement. He was much wiser than Theo, who had absorbed the knowledge in the library, so he knew how ridiculous it was. It was possible to obtain the magic or magic power of the owner just by eating...?

This was something which modern magicians couldn't imagine.

Vince, who was excited for a while, calmed down and smiled at Theo.

“But as a professor, I can’t praise the fact that you fed it library books.”

“I’m sorry…”

“Well, it can’t be helped if your life is at stake.”

It was either the books in the library or his life. Anybody would have made the same choice as Theodore. So, instead of reprimanding him, Vince made a joking remark, and Theo responded like that.

It was a story which could be laughed off because the price of books had dropped a lot 150 years ago, with the advent of the book copying magic.

After Vince’s questions were over, it was Theo’s turn to ask something.

“Professor.”

“Huh?”

“Excuse me, there is one thing I would like to ask.”

However, Vince already knew the question before he even asked it. “I think I know. Do you want to ask why I’m not greedy for the grimoire?”

“I-I’m really sorry.”

“There is no need to apologize. It is an obvious question.”

He took another sip of his already cold coffee and explained about grimoires. “Magicians who don’t major in archeology won’t be familiar with it, but anyone who studies ancient magic like me would know. Theodore, the grimoire stuck in your palm is useless to me.”

“Huh?!” Theo’s eyes widened at the unexpected words.

“Although it is unusual to have a grimoire that takes the form of the name of the book, they tend to choose their masters themselves. If a person kills the owner, they would be lucky if the grimoire doesn’t steal something or retaliate against them. Actually, there are a few cases of magicians being killed by grimoires that they tried forcibly to take away.”

“That…”

“Of course, it is also impossible to transfer it. Rather, it would be better to study the grimoire by the owner’s side.”

‘Ah.’ Theo raised his head. He now understood what Vince was

saying.

He nodded with a satisfied expression. It didn't need to be a one-sided relationship. Theo could negotiate using 'studying' the book as a bargaining chip. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that the two people were on equal footing.

As a seasoned person, in comparison to someone who wasn't even in their 20s, it wouldn't be difficult to fool Theo. However, Vince taught him without concealing any information.

Additionally, Vince bowed deeply toward Theo.

"Thank you for telling me. I, Vince Haidel, will reward your trust as a teacher and fellow magician."

"Professor..."

"Then shouldn't something be done to maintain this trust in our relationship?"

There was no time to say anything.

Pahat!

As Theodore lifted his head with surprise, a red light shone around Vince's hands. It wasn't attack magic nor defense magic. This was the Oath magic which only magicians who reached the

5th Circle could use.

'It can't be...!'

Vince's voice resonated due to the the magic power.

"I, Vince Haidel, make this oath. I will be quiet about any secrets that Theodore Miller doesn't allow me to share. This oath will be observed by the rules of magic."

It was a magic used in trials and interrogations.

The magic couldn't be triggered through the coercion of others. The user had to make the decision on their own. Additionally, it was a magic which couldn't be canceled once activated.

Compared to the 'Geass Scroll' Theo used, this was a higher-ranked restriction. As the red light around Vince's hands faded away, Vince stretched out his hand.

"I look forward to our relationship in the future, Theodore Miller."

Theo was no longer seen as a student or child, but a fellow magician. Theodore grabbed Professor Vince's hand excitedly. Now that he was recognized as a magician, he wasn't a child anymore.

“…Thank you.”

Somehow, he couldn’t shed any tears.

Theo closed his eyes as warmth came from Vince’s hand. It was the first time that the academy’s long-time dunce, Theodore Miller, made a true ally.

Chapter 19 – Outside The Academy #1

It had been a week since then.

“If you put the ingredients in the triangle drawn in the center of this magic circle and insert magic power—”

As always, the professor was standing in front of the chalkboard, giving an explanation on magic circles.

Theodore had already studied this three years ago. So, instead of wasting ink on writing down something meaningless, he was looking back on his conversation with Vince.

A relationship filled with trust had been established with Professor Vince, but Theo’s routine didn’t have any major changes. He still attended classes as a student and the fed Gluttony’s hunger with library books.

However, he didn’t have to worry about the aftermath now.

–In the future, submit a list of library books consumed on that day to me. There aren’t any teaching staff managing the library, so it won’t matter if I say that I am in charge.

Indeed, Vince was a professor at Bergen Academy, and his position was very different from Theodore, who was a repeat student. It wouldn’t be difficult for Vince to supplement the library books which had been consumed.

No, there would be no shortage of money even if he bought out the whole library. As a 5th Circle master, he had the prospects and income of a senior magician.

Vince's face had also distorted when he heard that Theo had been visiting a black market trader.

-...I won't deny that it was a good method for you. But the black market is a much more dangerous place than you think. I would recommend that you don't go anymore.

–Even though I used the Geass Scroll?

–Yes. A Geass Scroll is just a forced pledge between you and the black market trader. It isn't uncommon to be caught in other places. The darkness of that world is deeper than what ordinary people know, and the black market trader is only at the entrance.

Professor Vince hadn't shown a single smile as he spoke. It was the face of a man who had looked into the darkness seriously and experienced the madness of that world. Facing such an expression, the only thing Theodore could do was nod quietly and retreat.

'Besides, there is no reason to go to the black market trader like before.'

If he needed artifacts to increase his magic power, he could get them through Professor Vince. The price of artifacts was relatively

high, but it was cheaper compared to conventional magic reagents and the ratio of magic power was also excellent. Furthermore, there was the advantage of absorbing the magic skills.

That wasn't all. Theo looked at the visual information in his head again.

[Grimoire "Gluttony"/ E Rank]

[Skill: Magic Power Amplification, Attributes Affinity

One of the seals containing Gluttony's power has been removed. From now on, Gluttony can save a few spells and cast them freely. This ability can be further extended depending on the amount of magic power. The previous owner called this feature 'Memorize.' As the current owner, you can change the name if you want.

* Incomplete state. Most of the functions are sealed.

* Once a day, it will wake up to relieve its hunger.

* Immediately after relieving its hunger, it will answer one question.

* The abilities it feeds on will be given to its owner.

* Extracts an essence from eaten books or items. The higher the owner's understanding, the greater the efficiency.

* Absorbs some magic power from an item which contains magic power.

* The Memorize function has been activated.]

This change was triggered a week ago when he ate 'Roaring Flames' in Professor Vince's room.

The amount of magic power rose from the beginning of the 3rd Circle to more than half-way, and one of Gluttony's seals was lifted. The activation of the Memorize ability was enough to make Theodore's mouth drop open.

'Magic can be saved and then used freely...?! That is a difficult ability to find even in higher ranked artifacts!'

Theo's astonishment was indeed correct.

Even the Carter family's 'Roaring Flames' had been an intermediate ranked artifact. Once an artifact reached a higher rank, it wasn't something that a family or person could possess. It was common for the artifact to go directly to the kingdom and be designated as a national treasure.

Just the 'Memorize' function was enough for it to be considered a

national treasure. However, Theo had acquired the ability just by feeding Gluttony.

‘Only three spells can be stored at one time, but… the explanation means that there can be more.’

Since he had three circles, a simple calculation was one magic spell per circle. Even so, the momentary firepower had quadrupled, so he would be able to exert more power. Professor Vince had called the grimoire a ‘book of unprecedented power.’

As fear rose up inside Theo while he thought about it again…

Ding~! The bells of the wall clock rang.

Chatter instantly spread through the quiet classroom, and the professor put down the chalk as he noticed the lively atmosphere. It was the professor who had been humiliated last time due to the ‘Full Moon Bead.’ In the end, Professor Bernard left the classroom silently without ever looking in the direction that Theo was sitting.

‘Phew, pitiful human.’

Theo thought as he stared at the professor’s back before raising his body from his seat. Professor Bernard wouldn’t apologize for his harassment, so Theo would never apologize for embarrassing him. It might stay like this until graduation.

Theo sighed and left the classroom. It was time to find a book to feed Gluttony.

*

Theo stopped by the library as usual, pulling out a few books and placing them in his backpack. Until a week ago, he would wait for Gluttony to wake up first, but now, he could just take the books. The written permit from Professor Vince solved a lot of things.

‘Well, there are several things that I need to do.’

It was nothing compared to what Theo received in return. Apart from submitting a list of eaten books to Professor Vince, there was nothing else he needed to do.

So, he moved toward Professor Vince’s laboratory as usual. Soon after, he arrived at the laboratory. Theo knocked politely on the door.

“Professor, it is Theodore.”

–Come in.

He turned the doorknob as soon as he received permission. After the conversation last week, it wasn’t burdensome to go to Professor Vince’s laboratory like before. As always, there was the familiar smell of coffee, and Professor Vince would be covered by the thickly stacked books and papers…

‘Huh?’

Theo looked around as he felt a subtle sense of discomfort. He looked for something different than usual and quickly realized the difference.

“Professor, did you do some cleaning?”

The cause of Theodore’s discomfort was simple. Professor Vince’s lab was unusually clean. The parchment and books scattered on the floor were neatly organized. The other part was the laboratory equipment, but those were left alone by Vince.

Vince laughed lightly and answered Theo’s question, “Something has happened. It isn’t unrelated to you, so our talk today might be a little longer.”

“Yes? What...?”

“Please sit down.”

Theo sat down in the chair he had become accustomed to. Vince pulled out a pile of paper from his drawer and rummaged through it until he found two sheets of paper. He then handed them to Theo.

Theo looked down at them reflexively. A few letters on the top of

the first page filled his vision.

“Meltor Kingdom… 126th annual… magic contest?!” His initially quiet voice grew louder as he exclaimed with shock.

Meltor Kingdom was famous for its magicians.

The magic contest held every year in the capital attracted magicians from everywhere in the continent. Magicians from the kingdom, as well as foreign magicians, would swarm to Mana-vil, the capital of Meltor. However, magicians who couldn’t prove their credentials weren’t allowed to enter the contest, so there was a long line of people waiting to be tested.

Yet, the sheet of paper Professor Vince just gave him was a letter of invitation allowing Vince to enter the magic contest. Although Theodore was a student, he was also a magician. He knew the value of this invitation.

“Professor, you’ve been invited to the magic contest?”

“It isn’t a big deal. I get it every year.”

In contrast to the excited Theo, Vince was sitting down and sipping his coffee calmly.

Until last year, he had been busy with his research and hadn’t paid any attention to the invitation. He had also planned on staying at the academy this year to focus on his research, but the

situation had changed.

He asked with a casual expression, “Do you know the reason why I showed you this invitation?”

Theo looked at Vince’s face with expectation.

“You can probably guess. The invitation states that I can enter accompanied by one assistant. Normally, I would throw it in the trash but…”

As anticipation filled Theo’s eyes, Vince trailed off and laughed. Normally, Theo’s expression was stiff for his age, but what about now? Theo looked no different from the excited peers of his age.

Vince presented his gift with a pleased mood.

“How is it? Do you want to go to the magic headquarters with me?”

The answer was already fixed.

Chapter 20 - Outside The Academy #2

Theo nodded at the irresistible words, and Vince immediately handed him the application form to fill in.

It was an event which people couldn't attend unless they proved their identities clearly. For this reason, Theo spent a long time trying to recall the name of his great-grandfather on his mother's side. However, he eventually managed to fill in all the blanks.

Vince received the application form from Theo and nodded.

"...Okay, this is fine. Last year, a magician misspelled the name of one of his family members and was dragged out by the guards. So, if you can, it is better to put everything down."

"Hoo, it is thorough."

"The magic contest is a symbol of the kingdom. This level of security is justified for this event."

There were quite a few foreign spies or magicians who tried to sneak into the affairs of the kingdom, so they had to be thorough. Theo checked the application form again; there were no parts which needed to be fixed.

Theo's face was tired from spending nearly two hours on the application form, but the conversation wasn't over yet.

Vince smiled at him and said, “Theodore, do you know why I am taking you to the magic contest?”

Theo tried to answer but soon fell silent. Professor Vince wouldn’t ask about obvious things. Perhaps there was something Theo didn’t know or couldn’t guess. Indeed, his reaction was satisfactory as Professor Vince smiled.

“It is important to distinguish between knowing and not knowing, but understanding what you don’t know is the most important thing. You have a talent for the path of a magician.”

“Thank you.”

“Then I’ll explain.”

There was a thud as a thick book hit the desk. Theo looked at the familiar cover and soon realized the identity of the book. It was the guidebook which contained all the rules of Bergen Academy. Theo had read the book once when he’d been admitted to the academy, then he’d stuck it in his dormitory’s closet. There was no test on the book, so it was enough to just look through it.

Vince laughed at Theo’s bewildered expression.

“You must be wondering why I brought out this old book. Well, don’t worry. I don’t intend to teach a class on it.”

Then he opened the book and pointed to the corner of one page.

Theo unconsciously chased his finger and read the words. It was a recently revised Article 38, Clause 12. Looking at the year, it had been changed approximately 10 years ago.

> [Section 38.12. Students of this academy are eligible for graduation after completing three and a half years of studying. However, there is an exception if the student wins a level 3 prize or higher at an contest organized by the Magic Society. The winners can obtain their diploma whenever they want.]

Theo had read it, but he couldn't understand.

"Professor, this...?"

"You might have guessed already. I don't think you can obtain anything else from this academy."

"That..."

Theo stopped because he couldn't deny it. Vince's words stabbed straight at the boredom he'd been feeling these days. In fact, Theodore's theoretical knowledge was already comparable to the professors. This was already the third time he was repeating the third grade, so he couldn't help getting tired of it.

He could only relieve his boredom briefly with the library books. However, the level of the books in the academy weren't very high,

and he hadn’t been able to find a single magic book over the 4th Circle.

“Additionally, you have become a controversial subject in this academy.”

To Professor Vince, Theo wasn’t a student but a fellow adult.

“Do you remember the professors who tried to expel you? They are people who live for the sake of their pride and authority. Those idiots will never regret their actions. They will just blame the other person.”

“...Ah.”

Theo couldn’t help recalling Professor Bernard. He was a middle-aged man who never looked in Theo’s direction, and sometimes an unknown expression would cross his eyes. Perhaps, malice was growing behind that expression. It was quiet now, but Theo didn’t know what Bernard might do someday.

“It would be better to put some distance between you, rather than get tangled up in something dirty. Anyway, I will soon be going to the capital. If you graduate early, you can practice in an environment better than this place.”

“I understand what you are saying.”

The capital of the Meltor Kingdom, Mana-vil...

It was a place with four magic towers and a central magic institute. There was no magician on the continent who hadn't heard about it, and there was nobody who dared not to feel respect for it. Mana-vil was overflowing with all types of artifacts, magic books, and talented magicians...

However, Theodore couldn't help but ask, "But can I win the contest? I might have the grimoire, but I am still just a 3rd Circle master."

"Well, normally, it would be impossible." Vince agreed with Theo's words. "But the story is a little different when it comes to you. Garcia can't be compared to them, but with your skills, you should be able to deal with 4th Circle magicians. Against another student, you will win."

"The battle magic division?"

"That's right. The magic contest has a division where only the assistants of the magicians invited can participate. They are students like you."

At that moment, Theo had a hunch. 'Indeed, it is worth a try.'

Even though the difference between the 3rd and 4th Circles was large, Theo's situation was a bit unusual.

He had the 'Memorize' ability and his perception had risen

thanks to Alfred's experience. It was a sensory perception which other magicians could only achieve by spending years or decades on the battlefield. If it had been so beneficial in a spar, he couldn't imagine what it would be like in a contest.

Vince, who had once been a war magician, must have realized this and made the proposal. If Theo had expert-level experience, then he would be able to overcome his magic power difficulty. Truth be told, if Theodore could use Alfred-style Magic Missiles at will, then he would have no reason to fear 4th Circle magicians.

"I will try it."

"Well, I can fill in some of the lacking parts."

As if Vince had been waiting for it, he opened a chest of drawers.

"The Magic Society prohibited the distinction of the original and copies of books 50 years ago. Therefore, distinguishing between an original and a copy can't be done using an ordinary method. But people are always looking for methods. Do you know what this is?" He laughed and handed over the book to Theo.

"A duplicate can't be made from another duplicate. So, you will know if you use duplication magic on it. It is a simple and reckless trick, but there are some people who go around collecting original books. For reference, this one is worth 50 gold."

"Then wouldn't the original have to be kept separately?"

“It is enough to make a physical copy of the duplicate and then use duplication magic on that copy.”

But in that case, it won’t have the abilities of the ‘original’. It would have the same affect as a copy.

The original and second physical copy can be distinguished because a mark if left when doing this. If any illegal copying takes place without the mark being left, those caught will be severely punished.

The price of a normal magic book was around 1 silver, so this was a huge price. It proved that people had a strong lust for collections. However, Vince didn’t care about such things. He would never have bought this book if it wasn’t something that Theodore needed.

However, Theo’s reaction was more intense than Vince had expected.

“C-Can I appraise this?”

“Of course. This was the deal.”

Theo reached out cautiously and picked up the book on the desk. If this was an original, it likely had a special ability like Alfred’s [Ballistics Magic]. He took a few deep breaths before touching the book with his left hand.

“Appraisal.”

The tongue stuck out and licked the cover of the book.

[Introduction to Elemental Magic]

[This book describes the four elementals in more detail than any other book. It is a book about the relationship between magicians and elementals, how to call and make a contract with elementals, and the concept of elemental magic. The author, Myrdal, has been called the greatest elementalist of the century. He is the only one who has succeeded in calling an elemental king.

* Your understanding is very high. (95.4%)

* This magic book is rated ‘Rare’.

* When consumed, the proficiency of ‘elemental magic’ will increase.

* This is the original which was directly written by the author. When consumed, the elemental affinity which suits you will be opened. There is a low chance that you might form a contract with an elemental.]

‘Elemental affinity!’

Theodore’s mouth dropped open as he discovered what he had been hoping for. He didn’t know how many times he’d read the books on elemental magic in the library. [Introduction to Elemental Magic] was a book that he had read many times.

However, it wasn’t the original book, and he had given up on eating it due to having no elemental affinity. Yet Professor Vince was giving him a gift like this?

“This is one book. What is the rating?” Vince murmured in a low voice.

Theo finally realized the meaning of this gift.

One week ago, Theo had confided his secret to Vince and signed a contract with him. It was in order to obtain the infinite wisdom which the owner of Gluttony had available to him.

–Vince Haidel will provide Theodore Miller with magic books or artifacts.

–Theodore Miller will give Vince Haidel the right to ask a question and receive an answer.

“It is Rare.”

“Then there are two books left. I’ll give them to you soon.”

It would be either three Rare grade items or one Precious grade. That was the decision which Theodore and Vince had made. The Precious rating was difficult for even Vince to find, but Rare grade items could be obtained through just a little difficulty.

Even so, receiving one book after a week was really very resourceful.

“That’s it for today.”

It seemed like it was over.

Vince picked up the parchment he had laid down and spoke while picking up his pen, “We are departing for the capital in three days, so be ready to leave.”

Chapter 21 - Outside The Academy #3

Cheolkeok!

Theodore closed the door to Professor Vince's laboratory and headed back to his dorm room.

There was no need to rush, but he wanted to feed Gluttony the 'original' as soon as possible. Maybe a special phenomenon would happen, like when he received Alfred's memories through [Ballistics Magic].

'It should be time for Gluttony to wake up.'

He lined up the books on the bed and waited for his sleeping partner to wake up. How long did he wait until...?

-...H-Hungry. Come, feed me.

The hungry Gluttony finally opened its mouth.

[Gluttony has awoken from its sleep and is complaining about an empty stomach.]

[The regular meals have reduced his hunger a lot. There is more room to choose its food. Gluttony will answer one question after eating one book and will immediately fall asleep

after eating two books. The remaining time is 1 hour.]

Theo's expression changed subtly as he listened to the guide voice.

After eating 'Roaring Flames' and reaching the E rank, Gluttony's hunger had reduced. The quota of one or two books a day was much lower compared to the five books it had required after waking up for the first time.

Theo might have welcomed the change during his days of secret eating the library books, but that wasn't the case anymore.

'If this is the case, won't I have to be more selective about the books...? Once more seals are released, it might wake up every few days instead of once a day.'

Or it might only want to eat Rare grade magic books as its food...

A magician should always calculate all the possibilities to get the best results. Theodore worried about how Gluttony's changes would affect him and decided to discuss it with Professor Vince next time.

Today, he would focus on [Introduction to Elemental Magic]. Theo shook his head and spread open his palm.

"Come out, eat."

At those words, the tongue stretched out towards the two books on the quilt. As if it wanted to eat the appetizer before the main meal, the tongue started from [Understanding of Healing Magic] which was next to [Introduction to Elemental Magic].

['Understanding of Healing Magic' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[Proficiency with the 2nd Circle magic 'Cure' has increased. You can heal wounds efficiently.]

A cool breeze blew through his head, and a soft sensation seemed to permeate through him. Theo understood how to use magic on the blood vessels, muscles, and bones. He knew the tricks and tips which magicians at healing clinics used. Now, he could attach sliced off fingers back on.

However, Gluttony didn't end there. Next was today's main dish; [Introduction to Elemental Magic] was sucked into Theo's left hand.

Gulp!

Theo couldn't help gulping along with Gluttony.

[Introduction to Elemental Magic' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[Your proficiency in elemental magic has increased significantly.]

[An original book has been consumed. Promoting a connection to Myrdal Herseim... success. Myrdal Herseim has accepted the connection with the user.]

[Connect is starting.]

That's it! Theo formed a fist when he heard 'Connect'. Last time, he had heard the word 'Synchro'. This time, a new word had popped out. Theo wondered what the difference was. However, there was no time to think about this question.

Kiiiiing-

"Ack!"

Despite his determination, the sharp sound gouged at his head.

There was a feeling of uncertainty, as if his spirit had left his body and was being lifted into the air. He was aware that it was futile to resist, but the fear of looking into the abyss aroused his reluctance.

Was this the feeling of taking a carriage to a marriage meeting?

‘D-Damn…’

Theodore’s pointless resistance ended, and his consciousness fell into the abyss.

Myrdal Herseim was waiting for him.

*

Fresh grass, moist air, and a sweet scent…

The warm wind tickled his skin, and he was lying on a bed which felt like it was made of cobwebs. Theodore, who was enjoying the coziness, suddenly opened his eyes.

“Ah!” Theo got up with a startled expression.

The hammock, tied between two trees, swung roughly, but it turned out fine. A moment ago, he had been on the bed of his dormitory, and now, he was in a place like this. The only possible reason for this was that Gluttony had eaten the [Introduction to Elemental Magic].

Theo looked down and saw that he was in his own body.

‘This time, my body hasn’t changed. Is it different from last time?’

It wasn’t Synchro but Connect. He didn’t understand the meaning, but the two words seemed to trigger different phenomenons.

Synchro was assimilation, while Connect was connecting to something. Theo decided to think about the two words in that sense.

It was at this moment that...

“Ah, you are a noisy child.”

A decrepit voice filled with the weight of years spoke out from behind him. Theo looked back hurriedly.

There was an old man with a white beard and long hair. The moment he tried to speak, Theodore realized there was something strange. His eyes widened, but his body didn’t move.

‘W-What? Why don’t I have a voice?

His body became stiff the moment he met the old man’s gaze. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t move even a finger. How could the eyes of the old man exert this type of binding force when

he didn’t give off any pressure?

The confused Theo continued staring into the old man’s eyes, and he soon realized the reason why.

> –Your presence is lacking in front of this grandeur.

The white hair of the old man was like an ice-capped mountain peak, while the shabby body reminded him of the greatest mountain range on the continent. His eyes were clear as the sea and seemed to see right through Theo.

‘T-This person, is he a human…?!’

A magnificent mountain in the shape of a man seemed to be before him. The huge presence was like a weight on Theo’s shoulders.

There was no doubt about the man’s identity. He was the greatest elementalist of the century, Myrdal Herseim. With a pure lineage, the one who opened the door to the elemental world…

He was a genius who would’ve reached the ultimate nirvana if he had lived longer and succeeded in calling an elemental king.

“Hrmm… Let me look at you, ” he said in a low voice as his eyes became sunken.

Myrdal's blue eyes pierced through Theodore Miller. It was with the perception and wisdom that he had acquired as a magician. The eyes of the old man, who had reached the peak in both fields, gazed into Theo's essence.

Elementals wouldn't open their hearts to the impure or the false. They only reached out to sincere people. Inevitably, the eyes of an elementalist looked closely at this essence.

After looking at Theodore for a long time, Myrdal opened his mouth. "You don't know how to burn like fire. You avoid burning yourself and don't enjoy reckless challenges. A fire elemental would not go well with you."

It made a lot of sense. Theo was a magician who moved with a cold head rather than a hot heart. As Theo grew as a magician, he didn't have a fire-like nature as he'd tried to suppress all impulsive behaviour.

"You're not free like the wind. You are strict on yourself and hate acting without purpose. The wind spirits won't feel any interest towards you."

Myrdal saw it correctly. Theodore had always condemned his talent and worked hard to overcome it. Every act which wasted time was a sin, so relaxing was regarded as laziness.

"You're not as flexible as water. You have defined your life and will move along the set course. That rigidity is certainly

wonderful, but the water elementals who always change shape won't welcome such a person."

This too made a lot of sense.

Theo had walked the path of a magician until the end, even when he was mocked and told to give up. Instead of acknowledging his insufficiency, he added more effort. Despite knowing that it was pointless, he couldn't give up on such a life.

'Are you saying that I'm wrong? Is it wrong to not be as hot as fire, as free as the wind, or as flexible as water?'

Theo, who was rejected by three types of elementals, bit his lip with a bitter expression. That bitterness... it was like protesting that he did have talent.

However, Myrdal wasn't finished.

"But you know how to persevere. No matter how large a rock is, it will someday become sand. The rock has to endure hot lava and have its rough surface smoothed by rain. Fire, wind, and water. Nothing can shake that perseverance."

Then Myrdal's mouth, half-obscured by the white beard, rose upwards in a smile. He tapped the floor with the staff in his hand, while Theo was still immobile.

"I will call the elemental that is suitable for your stupid honesty!"

Simultaneously, a bright glow emerged from the end of his staff and brightened the surroundings. Theo blinked unintentionally because of the light, then tears started welling up in his eyes.

'A young child...?'

The shape of a young child was vaguely visible. It was at least the size of an adult's palm...?

A small child made of clay floated in the light toward him. Then it hit its head lightly against Theodore's forehead.

"Hahaha! That child likes you! The child's name is Mitra, a forgotten ancient elemental."

Myrdal's voice was getting further away. Was the connection with him ending? Myrdal's voice became increasingly faint as Theo's consciousness faded. Only the tiny dot of soil on his forehead became clearer.

The earth elemental, Mitra...

As the strange bond formed with Theo, his consciousness returned to reality.

[The connection with Myrdal Herseim has been terminated.]

[You have formed a contract with the forgotten earth elemental, ‘Mitra.’]

[Affinity to earth has increased significantly.]

[Gluttony is satisfied with the food it has consumed. Having fed it two books, it falls back into a deep sleep.]

Chapter 22 - Outside The Academy #4

Three days later, Theodore stood by the gates of Bergen Academy in the early morning.

Instead of his normal uniform, he wore casual clothing and carried a few large pieces of luggage on his back. If he hadn't exercised for two months, he wouldn't have been able to take even a few steps.

'H-Heavy! I only brought what I needed, but this is still...'

Theo only brought his clothes and daily necessities. Despite that, his backpacks were thick and bulging.

In order to reach Mana-vil from Bergen, it was said to take 14 days, with 10 days being the fastest. In that time, he had to deliver between 15 to 30 books to Gluttony. If he had known this, he would have learned how to enchant objects with a weight reduction spell. However, he had previously decided to postpone it due to a lack of comprehension.

'Do I have to ask the professor again?'

Theo dropped his luggage and massaged his stiff shoulders.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. I had a lot more to do than I thought."

Professor Vince showed up in casual clothes he rarely wore. It seemed like the procedure to participate in the magic contest was quite complicated. In the recent days, even Theodore had found it difficult to meet him.

Vince wiped the sweat off his brow and looked at the luggage Theo had put down.

“I forgot to tell you something since I’ve been so deluged with things.”

“What do you mean?”

“It is better to show you directly, rather than talk with my mouth.”

Then Vince took out something.

‘A pouch…?’

It looked like a pouch made of shabby leather. Vince aimed the opening at Theo’s baggage and muttered a word, “Storage!”

Simultaneously, the entrance of the pouch widened, and there was a strange suction.

Strangely, the suction didn’t touch the air or the other objects. It just sucked up the designated target—Theo’s luggage. The scene of

a backpack 10 times the size of the pouch it was being sucked into... just didn't seem real.

Theo was amazed as he grasped the identity of the pouch, "Space pocket!"

As Vince put the space pocket away, he agreed, "This item is famous in many ways. It is also convenient." Indeed, if there was a space pocket, then he didn't need to carry his baggage around like Theodore. It was a high grade artifact which could carry as much things as possible.

'What is the rating of that space pocket?' Theo wanted to ask but postponed it as Vince walked ahead.

"Time is a little tight. We can talk while moving."

"I understand."

The two walked through the main gates and headed towards the city at a fast pace. At first, they walked silently, but then Vince, who was a few steps ahead, turned back and asked, "Theodore, can you show me the elemental that you made a contract with?"

An ancient elemental... Vince majored in archaeology, so he would naturally find it attractive. He couldn't hide the overwhelming curiosity in his eyes. This was an incurable disease for a magician. The usual coldness was gone from his eyes, leaving him with bright eyes like those of a child's.

Theodore laughed lightly and talked to the girl inside him, ‘Mitra.’ The sleeping girl opened her eyes at his call.

“Ohh…!” A cry of admiration emerged from Vince’s mouth.

It was because the lump of dirt at Theo’s feet had changed into the shape of a little girl. Her eyes and nose were vague. However, a general spirit could barely take the image of a beast, let alone a human. This was only possible for upper ranked elementals.

Yet the elemental, Mitra, became a human figure as soon as she’d made a contract with Theo.

“Is it possible to talk with her?” Vince asked in a trembling voice.

If it was possible to communicate, then Mitra’s potential was almost the same as an elemental king. However, Theo shook his head with a regretful expression. “I’ve tried talking to her.”

Mitra felt Theo’s gaze and said, [Huing?]

It sounded like the cry of a puppy.

“I can only hear this sound.”

“Do you know what it means?”

“Well… it is a little subtle.”

Theo focused on the feeling which was being passed to him from Mitra. The contract with the elemental was a connection of their souls. It was a simple matter to read each other’s surface thoughts, but the situation would be overwhelming if the elemental was more mature.

However, Theodore soon opened his eyes and clicked his tongue.

“It feels like I am dealing with a child who doesn’t know how to speak yet. There are only simple words like good, no, I don’t understand.”

“But communication itself is possible. Very interesting.”

Unlike Theo, Vince’s eyes shone. It was different from the intermediate and low grade elementals who only passively followed their contractor’s will. Vince gave advice to Theo, who was holding Mitra in his arms, “Call her often to talk. An ancient elemental is an individual spirit, so the exchanges it has with its contractor is a great way to grow.”

“She just whined about being called continuously.”

“Hoh, there is already a self-consciousness!”

Vince was amazed again and eventually wrote down things about Mitra in his notebook.

There were a few more things he would like to ask. Where would he get a more interesting study material? Talking to Theo for a few days was much more beneficial than years of research at Bergen Academy.

A big smile, which didn't seem to suit Vince, was on Vince's face thanks to his disciple.

"Professor, do you mind if I ask you one thing?"

This time, Theo had a question. He waited until Vince finished writing in the notebook and asked, "How are we getting to Mana-vil? I know that the current transportation arrangements won't work."

The west side of Bergen contained the mountain range and toward the north was the Moya River. Thanks to this, invasion from other lands could be avoided easily. However, the journey to Mana-vil, to the northwest of Bergen, would be compromised in several ways.

On the assumption that the horse-drawn carriage didn't rest, it could take anywhere between 10 days to a month. In order to participate in the magic contest, they had to arrive in 10 days.

"Well, don't worry about that. I thought about it in advance."

However, Vince smiled leisurely and kept moving.

“There are many people leaving for Mana-vil Capital during this time. Tourists, magicians, foreigners from another kingdom... Do you know who values this period of time the most?”

Theo was puzzled by the unexpected question, but he soon reached the answer that Vince wanted. “...Merchants?”

“That is correct. The number of people will be 10 times more than usual, and there will be magicians with thick wallets. Merchants who can smell money won’t miss such an opportunity. They will try to get as much profit as possible.”

It was no exception for the merchants of Bergen. They ended up creating a new path through the mountain range in order to shorten the travel time. Vince was thinking of using that.

“I’ve used it a few times in the past. It is rare for individuals to use that path, and normally only upper ranked companies can enter. There are several monster dens, and it is also haunted by bandits.”

“I guess it is fast enough to accept that risk.

“As I recall, it took me around a week. Compared to conventional travel methods, it is twice as fast.”

Merchants, who realized the idea that time was money, couldn't ignore such a path.

A simple calculation was that double the speed equaled double the profit. Threats such as monsters and bandits were easily taken care of by hiring mercenaries to escort them. The money earned was greater than what they paid, so the upper-ranked companies almost always took this path.

Theo saw a procession in the distance. Their destination must be Mana-vil because he counted close to 30 wagons. There were also at least 100 mercenaries resting nearby.

Then the moment when the two people approached the procession...

"Oh! You came!" A middle-aged man in a tunic suddenly popped out of the procession. He was a big figure in the company, but his attitude was like a peasant who hadn't seen a noble before. The man bowed toward Vince, who looked impassive as usual.

"There is no better luck than having Professor join us!"

"I should be thanking you, Boss Gordon."

"Hahaha, you can relax! By the way, is this your disciple?"

As Vince nodded, Gordon grabbed a merchant passing by and gave him instructions.

“Prepare a carriage and bring it here. These two are precious guests and shouldn’t be disrespected.”

“Yes, I understand!”

Looking at his attitude, Theo realized the reason for the hospitality—5th Circle master, Vince Haidel.

In other words, Vince’s presence was equivalent to 100 or more mercenaries. Being a powerful magician in itself was a precious identity...

And Theodore Miller would be one as well.

Chapter 23 - Night In The Nadun Mountain Ranges #1

Not long after the two people joined, the massive procession began to move. The sight of 30 wagons and a few hundred people moving together was really spectacular. Dust rose up from the earth like a cloud, accompanied by the sound of mercenaries marching.

“Then I will be going now. If you need anything, please look for me straight away. I’ll come running immediately.”

“Thanks for your consideration.”

“Haha, no problem. Please relax!”

Gordon maintained the respectful attitude until the end as he bowed and then moved to the front of the procession. He was a model example of a reputable merchant who refrained from extreme flattery. Even though Theo was wary and vigilant against other people, Gordon left a good impression on him.

Vince stroked his seat a few times and nodded.

‘...A good carriage. He is resourceful to be capable of preparing such a carriage in advance. After a few years, Gordon may become a key figure in this company.’

The carriage Gordon offered to the two men was one which would only be arranged for VIP guests.

It hardly shook while travelling on the steep mountain trail, and the blanketed floor gave off a soft warmth. Additionally, the curtains hanging over the elaborately carved windows were able to give some shade. It was just like a travelling inn room.

‘I didn’t think I would be able to see the Nadun Mountain Ranges in this way…’

As they left the academy, Theodore looked out the window with a feeling of excitement.

The people of Meltor Kingdom knew the harshness of the Nadun Mountain Ranges. It was a land where numerous groups of monsters fought. In the deepest parts of the mountains, there were many dangerous things which would cause even famous adventurers to die.

This massive procession was merely passing through the outskirts, never going near the depths.

However, Theo’s interest soon faded.

‘Apart from the thickness of the vegetation, it is just a normal mountain.’

All types of strange creatures grew in the depths. There were no

such things in the outskirts where the massive procession was moving.

He lost interest in the procession and watched the spectacular sight of the mercenaries climbing up the mountain for a bit. There was nothing much for Theo to see, so he soon turned his attention to something else again.

“Mitra.”

The girl answered his call like she had been waiting.

[Huing!]

It seemed like she was in a good mood. Mitra loved all the soil around her as she spun round and round! She ran around every corner of the carriage. Theo laughed as he watched her and extended a finger unconsciously.

[Huung.]

Mitra clung to his finger. The moist texture of the soil was unpleasant, but her behaviour was so cute that he left it alone. As his right hand gently stroked her head, she swung herself on his finger. He doubted if this would be helpful like Professor Vince said, but at least he wouldn’t be bored.

Thus, Theodore took the time to play with Mitra while the carriage headed to Mana-vil.

*

In the end, the procession didn't encounter any obstacles and the sky gradually turned dim. The people, who had climbed the steep mountain trail all day, took out pots and dishes to make dinner, pushing away the cool evening breeze with a campfire.

Thanks to Vince, Theo was also treated as a VIP and was able to eat stew and a few pieces of soft bread.

'Isn't it quite a treat for eating outside? Indeed, merchants won't go around chewing on things like dried sardines.'

Eating was one of the most important things on a long distance trip. Even if the purpose was nutrition, a meal which didn't have a minimum of taste would just disturb the people's minds and bodies.

A warm and delicious meal didn't just alleviate physical fatigue but mental fatigue as well. The group which realized this faster than anyone else and devised a solution was a high-ranked company.

After finishing the satisfactory meal, Theo looked at the head of the procession and muttered, "Hoo, I feel sorry that I am more comfortable than the professor."

Vince had gone to install alarm magic near the campsite after his

meal. It was also possible for Theo, but the reliability of a 5th Circle alarm compared to a 3rd Circle alarm was like the difference between heaven and earth. The practical effect would differ significantly depending on the level.

As a result, Theo was left alone with nothing to do.

‘Well, it isn’t necessary for me to do anything.’

Rather than returning to the boring carriage, he called Mitra and set her down on the ground.

Mitra cocked her head hesitantly for a moment, before sitting down and using her hands to play with the dirt. The soil touched by her hand became soft or hard and turned into her desired shape. This was possible because Mitra was an earth elemental. Mitra had just completed the fifth of her small earth carriages when…

‘-Uh?!’ A cold chill ran down the back of Theo’s neck suddenly.

“Detect Evil!” It was a magic to detect enemies.

A magician of the 3rd Circle could detect enemies up to 50 meters away. So, with Theo at the center, a wave of magic power spread out over 50 meters. Theo ignored the confusion of mercenaries around him and focused on analyzing the results of the magic wave.

‘…It didn’t catch anything? That is impossible!’

Alfred's perception was still predicting the approach of enemies. He couldn't tell where it was coming from, but the chill which hit his neck was freezing. It was proof that a threat was approaching.

Theo thought about where he'd gone wrong. Detect Evil was a magic which sensed the enemy on the surface. Even if an enemy magician neutralized the magic, it couldn't hide the fact that someone existed.

'No, wait a minute.'

"It can't be...!"

Theo's eyes fell to the ground where Mitra was playing.

"Mitra! Go into the ground!"

[Hoing!]

As soon as he gave the order, Mitra instantly plunged into the ground. While she sank into the ground like it was water, she showed Theo the landscape under the ground. The connection of their souls was a strong bond, so it wasn't hard to share audio and visual.

Theo's and Mitra's vision captured the enemy.

‘Hobgoblins?!’

Creatures with dark blue skin and ugly faces were coming up through a tunnel in the ground. The axes in their hands indicated that they weren’t friendly. The headcount was approximately 20-30 enemies. It was a force which could do considerable damage if they did a surprise attack in the rear.

“Professor, I have to tell Professor Vince...!”

Theodore reflexively turned his gaze and saw a scene of flames rising in the front of the procession.

Kwaang!

There was an intense wave of magic power! This was a spell which was possible for 5th Circle magicians. The head of the procession was probably also being attacked by enemies. In this situation, it might cause unnecessary confusion for Theo to try and contact Vince now. Additionally, there was no time left.

The hobgoblins in the tunnel were 5 meters below the surface. The time remaining was less than 15 seconds. Theo only had one option remaining.

‘I have to respond on my own!’

Preparing his mind, Theodore took deep breaths and shouted like he had never done before, “O-h-h-h-h!!”

He hadn’t enhanced his voice with magic, but the desperate yell was enough to reach the mercenaries near him.

“W-W-What?!”

“Ooh, what a surprise!”

“What is that kid suddenly doing?”

However, Theo just dropped his palm near the ground where the hobgoblins were coming up. Now, it was 4 meters—no, 3 meters. If he didn’t adjust his timing properly, chances were that he would fail. Nevertheless, Theo didn’t worry that he would fail. Instead, he concentrated on using elemental magic through Mitra.

‘Right now!’

“[Turn into mud!]”

The advantage of elemental magic was that he didn’t need a magic formula; he just needed a clear image to get results. After accepting Theo’s power, Mitra naturally transformed the surrounding area into mud. This was a disaster for the hobgoblins about to come out of the tunnel.

Kurruk? Kwieeeek!

Kwuaaack!

Kyaak! Kuwaaaack!

Some of them slammed their heads into the mud, while others got their waists stuck, and some hobgoblins only managed to get their heads out. However, all the hobgoblins stuck in the mud were furious.

That said, Theodore wasn't done.

"[Stiff like a stone!]"

His magic power swept the ground once again, and the mud solidified. It was just a temporary phenomenon, but the power was great. The hobgoblins screamed as the ground hardened into a grey clay, and they became stuck. The ones who were hardened at the top slumped down.

Theo wiped the sweat off his face and shouted at the mercenaries standing around him, "What are you doing? Kill them now!"

"A-Ah!"

"What is going on?"

They lived on the battlefield, so they soon realized the situation. It was currently a good opportunity. The hobgoblins, which had

their heads or upper bodies exposed, were killed, just like crops being harvested. Halberds broke the hobgoblins' heads, while others were smashed to death.

In an instant, the 30 hobgoblins from the tunnel had been wiped out. However, the chill Theo felt hadn't disappeared yet.

Pew pew puet—

If it wasn't for his extreme concentration, he wouldn't have noticed the sound. Theo turned in the direction of the sound and saw something familiar.

'Arrows!'

The hobgoblins were monsters who used tools like humans and also attacked tactically. If Theo hadn't responded to the ambush, then many mercenaries would've died from the previous attack. This was why hobgoblins were troublesome and dangerous monsters. They stole loot from humans and used them to attack humans.

In his head, he recalled Alfred's memories.

> –The speed is normal, with a wooden shaft and metal tip.

If this was the case, the arrows could be stopped without much

difficulty. Together with that intuition, Theo instantly created a wide area wind barrier. There was no need to stop it with armor.

He just needed to affect the trajectory to kill the power of the arrows. After encountering a headwind, the power of the projectiles would fall by half.

“Aerial Defender!”

The evening breeze passing by lent a hand. Strong winds were helpful in this situation. Just a slight change in direction could reduce the threat of the arrow. The arrows affected by the headwind eventually fell to the ground before they reached the procession.

Theo was satisfied with the results, but his eyes narrowed as he gazed in the direction of the arrows.

‘…They are coming.’

The hobgoblins, hiding in the shadows, started to move after knowing that two ambushes had failed. In the darkness beyond the campfire, eerie shrieks and red eyes could be seen.

During the night in the Nadun Mountain Ranges, a full-fledged battle began.

Chapter 24 - Night In The Nadun Mountain Ranges #2

Meanwhile, at the head of the procession, an entirely different scene was unfolding.

The number of hobgoblins at the front was incomparable to the those at the rear. It was difficult to measure the number of hobgoblins appearing in the darkness, and they charged forward while equipped with armour and weapons.

Kuwaaaack!

Kieeek! Kiyaaak!

Around 10 minutes after that...

Pasak!

Vince stepped on a lump of charcoal at his feet with a cold expression. Few traces were left of the hobgoblins who had just been attacking. The only thing left behind was the melted metal from their armor.

The imposing figure of one man was standing over the traces. There were over 100 traces struck together, which meant at least 100 hobgoblins had been killed in 10 minutes.

‘T-This is a 5th Circle master…!’

Gordon’s eyes were wide with astonishment as he looked at Vince.

He’d thought he understood the significance of the existence of a magician, but the scene Vince had just showed was much more than he had ever imagined. Gordon clearly realized why it wasn’t knights but magicians who were said to dominate the battlefield.

Above all else, the fearsome thing wasn’t the horror created by the flames.

“How trivial.”

The magician who had turned 100 hobgoblins into chunks of charcoal was the terrifying thing.

Even though they were hobgoblins and not people, Vince had casually burned 100 of them to death. Thanks to that, Vince and the others had survived, but the mercenaries couldn’t help gulping with expressions which didn’t hide their horror.

No, in a way, this was Vince’s essence.

He had the image of a good teacher at the academy, but the number of humans which Vince had killed on the battlefield couldn’t be counted. The power of a 5th Circle war magician, especially a fire war magician, was literally at the level of a siege

weapon. Over the decades of his life, Vince had killed more than 100 people in one battle.

At one time, he had been called, ‘Destruction by Fire’ or ‘Fire Killer Vince.’

“Gordon.”

“Huh? Ah, ah, yes!” Gordon was surprised at the sudden call and barely replied.

“Send some people to the rear. Perhaps the hobgoblins also hit that area. It looks like they have responded properly, but there might be more than one commander.”

Vince wanted to go to the rear, but if he left his current location, the whole front lines would be in danger.

The hobgoblins had already been defeated, but there was still the commander. If Vince left without finishing off the commander, he would be leaving behind deadly consequences. The defeated hobgoblins would evolve into more cunning and vicious enemies.

Standing there was a hobgoblin shaman holding a staff.

“...Is it an artifact?”

It was a wooden staff with a purple crystal embedded in it.

Despite the coarse workmanship, the level of magic power coming from it was significant. Perhaps the staff was what allowed the hobgoblin to withstand his fire.

Vince hadn't expected to find such a good gift in this place.

"I guess I better hurry."

He could feel that the waves of magic power in the rear were becoming more intense. The sound of metal screaming didn't stop. If a commander-level enemy appeared in the rear, then Theodore would suffer.

Vince let go of the force which had been restrained due to the surrounding people.

Clack!

As soon as his fingers moved, a terrible fire pillar emerged from the ground.

*

The flames at the front were so warm that they could even be felt in the rear. Of course, it was possible that Theo was deluding himself, but it was still a spectacular scene.

Theo, who had just aimed a Fire Bolt at a hobgoblin's head,

looked at the front.

"Wah, it seems like a real mess is happening over there."

Fire-based magic was considered to be the best in a large army. The shockwaves generated by the explosion would burst the intestines of those who came in direct contact with it, while the aftermath of the flames and high heat would damage the lungs.

If a Fireball from the 3rd Circle was that powerful, there was no need to talk about the 4th or 5th Circle.

'Blaze Shell... no, Flare Burst. If I was right next to the professor, then I would be roasted right now.'

Theo clicked his tongue and fired a Lightning Bolt at a hobgoblin who was preparing to attack the back of a mercenary. The hobgoblin was hit by the lightning bolt and twitched before falling to the ground. For enemies which were creatures, lightning magic was extremely effective. Theo realized it again as he used his magic power.

'However, Lightning Bolt consumes too much magic power. I can't use a Fireball in this situation where it is a melee.'

He didn't have enough magic power to keep using single-attack spells, while there was a possibility that his allies might be affected if he used a wide-area spell. Inexperienced battle magicians often didn't know how to act in this situation, but Theo moved without

much hesitation.

If it was a melee, he would take advantage of it.

“Shock Bolt,” as Theo spoke in a loud voice, eight lightning arrows appeared.

Their strength was far less than Lightning Bolt, making it hard to even catch a rat. It was a magic which students forgot about after learning it.

However, this was enough.

Paijijik!

The eight Shock Bolts aimed towards the hobgoblins. The magic was slower than natural lightning, but it was at a speed which the hobgoblins couldn’t avoid. Additionally, they were holding swords which attracted the lightning.

Kiruruk?!

Kiyaaak?

Static rose all over the bodies of the hobgoblins. An electrocuted body would temporarily lose control, with pain and instincts momentarily paralyzed. Of course, it was only for a few seconds, but that was enough.

“What? Why did I get a bruise all of a sudden?”

“Get lost!”

It created a gap for the mercenaries fighting them. The hobgoblins, who suddenly stopped moving, had their heads cut off or necks sliced, and fell to the ground.

Some of the mercenaries knew it was due to Theo’s help and raised their thumbs. Theo also gave a thumbs up and used Mitra or Ignite to help the mercenaries fighting the hobgoblins.

As this continued, the balance between the two groups began to crumble, and the humans gained the advantage.

‘It is almost over.’

Theo took a moment to recover as he looked at the hobgoblins, whose number had been reduced by more than half. The mercenaries had few casualties except for a few unfortunate ones. Those who were injured took a moment to bandage their wounds before running back into the battle.

If this continued, the situation would be cleaned up in less than 30 minutes. However, the moment he put his mind at ease...

Kwaang!

The reason Theo avoided the blow was thanks to pure luck and a sense of urgency. Theo, who had rolled forward reflexively, stood up and looked at the place where he had been standing.

The ground was cracked and his skin irritated from the shock wave. If it had been a direct hit, it was obvious that his bones and flesh would've burst.

"Keuk, this... spear?!"

It was a spear... a spear entirely made of metal! The weight alone made it hard to swing, so how could a hobgoblin throw it with the same speed as an arrow? If it had been blocked with a shield, the spear would have penetrated the body through the shield.

Theodore held his trembling arms close to his body and looked in the direction from which the spear had been thrown.

In that direction, a figure appeared.

Kuwaaaaack—!

As the figure ran out of the forest, an axe flashed and sliced apart two bodies in front of him. The bodies weren't cut but torn apart. As the upper halves of the two mercenaries fell to the ground, one mercenary barely managed to block the swinging axe with his shield.

“M-Monster!”

“Killing Jones in one shot…?”

“Hobgoblin chief!”

The scream revealed the identity of the enemy.

‘Chief…! This guy has appeared…’

Theo knew it as well.

Hobgoblin chief… A chief was someone who led at least 100 people, with many presiding over thousands of people. Simply being superior in leadership or intelligence wouldn’t allow them to become a chief. As always, the world of the wild turned to the law of the strong.

The chief had to be the strongest in the group.

Kururuk, kuraaaack!

The chief picked up the spear he’d thrown and pointed it at Theo while holding the axe in his other hand.

It seemed like Theo was his target. This meant that he knew about the existence of a magician. As if he had no desire to escape,

the hobgoblin chief held the spear boldly like he would throw it at any time.

This couldn’t be avoided.

Theodore sensed this and withdrew his magic power instead of raising it. It would be good if he didn’t have to fight, but if there was no exit, he would need to make sure to win against the opponent.

Alfred’s memories pushed at him, saying he would have to deal with this enemy.

“Come!”

Kaaaak!

As a cold wind blew, the magician and monster ran toward each other.

Chapter 25 - Night In The Nadun Mountain Ranges #3

The strength of a magician was their ability to easily overpower a person with their firepower from a safe distance away. Even war magicians trained in martial arts would become headless bodies the moment they got into close range with knights.

The same thing applied to the hobgoblin chief who possessed greater physical abilities than humans.

However, Theodore ran forward first.

'If I retreat, I will die!'

A naive magician would've stepped back and died. Instead of ignoring the advice of his senses, Theo gritted his teeth and charged. Backing away was absolutely not a wise choice.

Theo only took five steps before he was within the range of the chief's spear. No, the chief wouldn't be able to kill him now by throwing the spear. However, Theo wouldn't be able to defeat the spear head on with 3rd Circle magic. Even if he avoided the spear, the axe would slice off his head.

"Haste!" The acceleration magic wrapped around Theo's body. Theo's movements were faster, and the ugly face of the hobgoblin chief was soon right in front of him.

The chief was holding the axe over his head like he would bring it down at any moment. Theo had only exercised for two months and his speed was only slightly faster, so it was a blow which couldn't be avoided.

He called out to Mitra while sliding, "Now!"

At the same time, the right leg of the hobgoblin chief moved, and the balance of his body collapsed. Mitra had penetrated the ground and created a pit at the chief's feet. It was only 30cm deep, but thanks to that, the axe hit empty air.

Huoong!

As Theo listened to the sound of air blowing above his head, he aimed at the side of the hobgoblin chief.

"Fireball!"

The fireball got a direct hit to the chief's side.

Kwaang!

The shock waves caused by the explosion made Theo take a few steps back. Usually it would've ended here for the hobgoblins, but it wouldn't be a fatal wound for the chief. Theo stared at the grey smoke emerging from the center.

‘Damn, if his head was exposed, then I would’ve used the Magic Bullet.’

Alfred-style Magic Missile, also known as Magic Bullet, would’ve penetrated the hobgoblin chief’s skin without any difficulty.

However, the lethal force was exerted only when it hit the vital points.

The skin of a monster was much tougher than a human’s, and their body structure was also different. So, Theo needed to hit the right place for a fatal wound. Unfortunately, he had never read a book about the hobgoblin’s body.

So, he had used Fireball instead of Magic Bullet.

Kuwaaaah!

The chief roared with a mixture of pain and anger from within the smoke. Fireball had hit the chief’s skin, and the sizzling was painful to watch. Nevertheless, the hobgoblin’s combat power was still going strong.

“Fireball is insufficient,” Theo muttered as he saw the chief’s state.

In the 3rd circle and below, Fireball was the magic with the strongest firepower. If it wasn’t effective, then he only had two choices left… two means of attack to overcome that defense.

‘Blaze Shell or Magic Bullet.’

The first was dismissed. Theo was able to use Blaze Shell as a one-time ability after eating ‘Roaring Flames,’ but the preparation took too long. He would’ve died 10 times by the time he managed to gather the magic power and chant the spell.

It would be a different story if the other mercenaries tied up the hobgoblin chief during that time, but…

‘Hoo, I was wrong to expect a lot.’

The mercenaries had retreated after seeing the difference in skill and were taking care of the hobgoblins instead. No matter how good the money was, it would be no use if they died. The mercenaries had no desire to confront the hobgoblin chief when it was likely that they would die. Rather, it was fortunate they hadn’t escaped and were instead blocking the other hobgoblins.

“…Okay, I will try it once.”

Theo stared at the hobgoblin chief’s red eyes and gathered magic power in his arms. He only had two chances.

If Theo shot with all his power to penetrate the hobgoblin chief’s defense, he would only be able to use the magic twice. It would be different if he was Alfred, but this was the limit for Theo who hadn’t completely mastered the magic yet.

The hobgoblin chief was panting, while Theodore Miller gathered magic power in his arms. The confrontation between the two beings was suddenly broken.

Kurwaaak!

The hobgoblin chief ran out of patience and attacked.

Swaeeek!

He charged with his spear and tried to pierce Theo's body with it. If Theo hadn't moved back hurriedly, then he would've been skewered like a chicken. This was followed up with a slash from the axe. It was obvious that the axe had enough power to break down a huge log.

"Mitra!"

Mitra responded to Theo's call and made a pit under the chief's feet like before.

Kuruk, kururuk!

Instead of wielding the axe, the hobgoblin chief jumped over the pit. Then he scoffed at Theo. The anger filling the chief's eyes disappeared. Despite the pain, he was cunning and knew how to use sly tricks. He hadn't forgotten about the trap he'd once fallen

into.

As he thought that, Theo sneered.

Puk!

Another pit suddenly appeared. This time, it was at Theo's feet instead of under the hobgoblin.

Huoong!

As the axe missed Theo, who had suddenly fallen down, confusion filled the face of the hobgoblin chief. While lying on the ground, which had become soft thanks to Mitra, Theo pointed his index finger at the chief's face. At this distance, the chief wouldn't be able to avoid the Magic Bullet.

A blue flash launched from Theo's fingertip.

Piyuuuong!

The extremely compressed magic power broke through the wall of sound and tore apart the wind. The power was enough to penetrate armour and turn thick leather into a piece of cloth. The flash reached the head of the hobgoblin chief.

'Hit!'

It wasn’t unreasonable to feel confident. The blow was precisely timed. However, perhaps due to the wild nature or a warrior’s instincts, the chief’s axe moved desperately and blocked the flash.

Kakang!

Pieces of the axe scattered, and the hobgoblin chief was pushed back with a hole in his forehead. Despite the blood splattering on Theo’s face, Theo got up hurriedly and looked at where the hobgoblin chief was.

The chief had already gotten up and grabbed his wounded forehead.

“Dammit, too shallow!”

The wound was too shallow. The flash had faded away before piercing the skull. It was because quite a bit of power had been consumed to break the axe. With this, Theo only had one shot of Magic Bullet remaining. It would end with the next attack.

Kuruk, kururururu...

Theodore’s Magic Bullet was too threatening, so the chief didn’t dare to approach. Rather, he grasped the spear and kept swinging it. He moved swiftly to the left and right, not leaving any gaps. Theo wasn’t confident about hitting a target moving at such high speed.

In the end, the narrow gap widened to a greater distance than it had been at the beginning.

‘That posture...!’

The chief’s arm was flexed like a bow, and the spear was pulled back like an arrow. It was the typical posture of someone preparing to throw the spear. A fearsome blow which would threaten Theodore’s life was about to be used again.

Theo raised his right arm, which still had one Magic Bullet remaining.

Hwiiiing!

A chilly wind blew past as the two beings aimed for each other’s lives.

The tension was intense, and even the mercenaries and hobgoblins became breathless as they watched the confrontation. The winning side would gain the advantage... Everybody instinctively understood this fact.

So, it was no wonder that the hobgoblin chief moved first.

Kuraaaaaah-!

The speed at which he rushed was like the wind. At that speed,

the distance would be narrowed down in five seconds or less. Theo's spine grew damp with tension. However, the chief understood the horror of the Magic Bullet and jumped into the air.

'He's coming!'

Theo had planned this, but he couldn't help feeling nervous. Even if he had Alfred's memories, this was still his first battle. The vivid smell of blood and widespread killing intent tickled his nerves. However, a magician fought with their heads, not their bodies. Theo pulled out the card he had prepared.

'Memorize.

All Slots Open.'

The three magic spells, which had previously been stored, were now used at the same time.

"Rise! Walls of Earth!"

The spear couldn't be blocked by one layer, and two layers were still insufficient. If that was the case, he would block it with three layers. Earth Wall, the 3rd Circle defense magic, was used three times. It was further enhanced by his contract with Mitra, turning the Earth Wall completely solid.

The iron spear struck down on the triple barrier.

Kwaaaaang!

The outermost barrier broke. After that, the second barrier started crumbling down. Finally, the last and thickest barrier blocked the fierce momentum of the spear.

Kwajik!

The spear seemed like it was going to pierce through to Theo behind the barrier, but then it stopped.

Theodore inserted his finger through a crack in the barrier and said, “I got you.”

His sharp eyes didn’t miss the target which was still in the air. It was different from the ground where the chief could move easily. No animal could move freely through the air without wings. At least, that was the case for the hobgoblins. The same was true for the chief.

A second flash penetrated through the darkness of the sky.

Piiing!

The hobgoblin chief crossed his arms in front of his face to block it somehow, but the Magic Bullet wouldn’t be stopped by such a clumsy thing. The blue flash lit up the two arms and the head

behind it.

Then the body which lost its life fell to the ground.

Kuuong!

There was a loud noise, and a pit formed around the body. It was close to 2 meters deep, showing the weight of the corpse.

Theo placed his foot on the body of the hobgoblin chief and threw his head back. Then he raised his clenched fist.

“Ohhhhhhh!” The mercenaries who witnessed his victory cheered.

The remaining hobgoblins soon realized they’ve been defeated and fled to the forest, leaving only the corpses of the hobgoblins behind.

Theo’s first battle in the Nadun Mountain Ranges ended spectacularly.

Chapter 26 - Mana-Vil Capital #1 (End Of Book 1)

The raid on the first night was really fierce, but the damage was less than expected.

Hundreds of the hobgoblins had been turned into charcoal due to Vince's flames, while Theodore's appropriate actions had taken care of the ambush in the rear. His merit was especially big since the chief had died.

After that raid, nothing had occurred. Was it because they repelled the hobgoblins who ruled the whole area?

Thanks to their weapons being soaked in the blood of the hobgoblins, monsters such as goblins, kobolds, and direwolves didn't dare charge toward the procession. There were a few trolls who attempted an attack, but they were soon butchered by the bloodthirsty mercenaries.

'Speaking of which, can't a troll's blood be used as a raw ingredient for potions? It's no wonder they fought harder against the trolls than the hobgoblins.'

There was no need for Vince and Theodore to interfere. No, the mercenaries were likely to be angry if the magicians interfered. Fire was most effective in killing a troll, but the raw blood couldn't be obtained.

There would be many complaints if they went and burned the trolls with a Fireball.

Therefore, Theo was staring out the window when he saw someone on a horse approach their carriage. The horse had a glossy brown mane, and there was only one person in the procession who would ride such a horse. It was Gordon, the general manager of this procession.

He approached without hesitation and praised the two people, “This time, I really survived thanks to the two of you! If the professor hadn’t accompanied me, I would’ve suffered enormous damage. At least half the procession would’ve been wiped out! The professors of Bergen Academy really have great skills.”

“Thank you.”

“And your disciple as well.”

Gordon bowed his head to Theo as well as Vince.

The leader of such a large procession was bowing to a 3rd Circle magician, but it was appropriate treatment after Theo’s actions. Theo had killed a hobgoblin chief!

The one who led the attack had been the chief of the Surprising River village.

Depending on the size of the group, the strength of the hobgoblin

chief was at least a C rank. It meant they were tough opponents for 4th Circle magicians. If Theo hadn't stopped the chief, the rear of the procession would've been destroyed.

However, a 3rd Circle magician had defeated a hobgoblin chief in a one-on-one match...?

If it hadn't been for the mercenaries saying the same thing, Gordon wouldn't have believed it. Still, Gordon's mind was fairly flexible as he was an excellent merchant. He was convinced about Theodore's value, despite not truly understanding.

"I can't repay this favor with just my mouth, so I've personally prepared something to repay you. My conscience will be more comfortable if you both receive it."

"Hrmm, if you say so..."

"Ah, you will accept it?"

Vince nodded, and Gordon took out a box he had placed on his saddle.

The metal box had chains and a lock wrapped around it, making the item seem quite valuable. Gordon took out a key from his pocket and unlocked it. After the chains were released, the box opened its mouth with a rumbling sound.

Inside it was a crystal shining strangely. It was a ball which

occasionally changed colours, turning from blue to red.

When Theo saw it, he couldn't help asking doubtfully, "This...?"

There were many encyclopedias in the library about magic stones, but this was the first time he had seen such a strange ball. However, Gordon didn't give a satisfactory answer.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know. It is something that the Magic Society has been searching for these days, but since the quantity is too low, this company could only obtain a few. I am hoping that it will be helpful to both of you."

"Can we take such a precious thing?" Vince said as he looked at it closely.

At the positive reply, Gordon nodded with a bright expression. If he could form a relationship with a magician by using this unknown crystal, it would be a few times more profitable than selling it.

"Of course! If you weren't here, I might have lost everything. This is under my sole discretion."

"Then... I really appreciate it."

"Hahaha! Now my mind can feel at ease! Ah, would you like to return with us after the magic contest is over? I'll provide a better carriage than the one you currently have."

“Well, okay.”

After exchanging a few more courtesies, Gordon returned to the front of the procession with a brighter look than before.

From his standpoint, he had been able to prevent the hobgoblins’ attack without much damage. He had also been able to form a relationship with a strong magician. With these, his evaluation within the company would increase greatly. Therefore, Gordon rode off in a good mood.

However, Vince made a noise of derision as he picked up the crystal. “This is why ignorance is truly scary. That merchant didn’t know what he was carrying.”

“Professor, do you know what this is?”

“...I’ve seen it a few times in the north. Technically speaking, this isn’t a crystal. Sometimes plants that absorb the blood of monsters will make berries filled with magic power. This one, the Magic Society calls it, ‘Monster Berry.’” Vince explained as he placed the crystal back in the box and locked it with the key he received from Gordon. Then he placed it in his space pocket with swift movements.

“Monster Berries tempt nearby monsters with its fragrance and will strengthen the monster who eats it. The hobgoblins on the first night probably came for this.”

No matter how hard it was to climb the Nadun Mountain Ranges, such a large group of monsters wouldn't be living on the outskirts. The monsters were well aware of the damage they would suffer if they neared human territory. The hobgoblins were more cunning than other monsters, so they wouldn't have been unaware of this fact.

The reason why the hobgoblins had carried out such an unreasonable attack was now revealed.

Vince touched his chin and muttered in an interested tone, "I remember it as an object which use was unknown... Maybe a use for it might have been discovered recently."

"Discovered?"

"The gifts that I will give you may increase by one."

'Gifts?' Theo stared at him with a puzzled expression.

At that moment, someone shouted from outside the carriage, "It is the capital! I see Mana-vil Capital!"

Theo might be a magician, but in the end, he was a boy from the country. He soon forgot to ask about the gift and looked out the window. Every person in the Meltor Kingdom dreamed of living in Mana-vil Capital. It was said to be a heavenly city where white spires pierced the sky.

Theodore Miller had grown up surrounded by the rice fields of the Miller Barony, so he had dreamed about the big city many times as a child. Finally, the moment came when his expectations were rewarded.

“Wow…” Theodore had no choice but to let out a cry of admiration when he saw Mana-vil.

There was still a while until the procession reached Mana-vil, but the towering spires could be seen in the distance. The city surrounded by white walls truly seemed like a heavenly city. Carriages were flying over it like part of a fairy tale landscape.

This was the capital of the Meltor Kingdom, Mana-vil…

The place which people called the home of magic. Even the empire with the strongest national power didn’t have such a city. There were myths which said the dwarves and elves had help to build the city in the past. The city was a symbol of the extreme architecture which couldn’t be reproduced by the skills and manpower of modern humanity.

As Vince sat beside Theo, who was filled with admiration, he looked at the capital he had returned to after a long time.

‘It is still stunning.’

Vince hated the politics and had removed himself to Bergen

Academy, but he couldn't help pay tribute to the city as a magician. He then pulled out a robe from his space pocket and put it on. It was a luxurious robe made of an impressive red colour. Vince didn't know how many years it had been since he last wore this.

The robe symbolized that he was Vince Haidel of the Red Magic Tower.

He muttered as if he was talking to himself, "As soon as we pass through the gates, I will take you to the Magic Society."

The magic contest drew a huge crowd to Mana-vil. Vince remembered the scene from a few years ago, which was why he had started moving a few days earlier. If he procrastinated, one day of work could turn into 10 days.

It would also become annoying if the Red Magic Tower knew about Theodore's existence.

'I have to avoid them as much as possible.'

The Red Magic Tower didn't focus on development as a magician but on fostering magicians specialized in combat. From their point of view, Theodore would be a rising star.

Chapter 27 - Mana-Vil Capital #2

As the capital of the kingdom, Mana-vil was famous for its strict checkpoints during the magic contest.

In fact, a fool had been dragged to jail after trying to cross the checkpoints without any proof of identity. It was said that he'd spent a month in jail chewing on hard bread until he heard from his family.

Therefore, the tourists, travelers, and delegates lined up at the capital's main gate couldn't hide their tension. It was for good reason since the event they had been preparing for several months could all be in vain. Gordon couldn't hide his nervous smile either.

However, Professor Vince looked the same as always. He walked out of the procession confidently with Theo and spoke to Gordon, "Leader, we'll be going first."

"Huh?...Ah! You don't need to wait here?"

"I have a letter of invitation."

Vince nodded as he looked down at the envelop in his hand. It was an invitation to the magic contest. The invitation letter to the magic contest wasn't just a measure of the person's reputation and status but a clear identification card.

The magician who held it had the right to preferentially pass

through the Mana-vil checkpoints, and all the stores in Mana-vil would be cheaper for the duration of the magic contest. They also had a bonus right to pick their accommodation.

Gordon looked at the invitation with envy, but it only allowed the magician to bring their assistant. So, Vince couldn't bring the hundreds of people in with him. In the end, Gordon decided to be satisfied with leaving a good impression.

"Things turned out well thanks to Professor. If you need anything, come and find me at any time. I will help you as much as I can."

"Thank you for your kind words. Then I'll see you next time."

"Yes, please go ahead!"

Gordon bowed politely. Vince and Theo left Gordon behind and moved forward, past the long line. Whistles and chatter came from the crowd, but nobody cared about it. Anybody with a normal head on their shoulders would understand what Vince's red robe meant.

'Professor Vince, he belongs to the Red Tower.'

Theo couldn't ask about it and swallowed back the words. He was a student of Bergen Academy, so how could he not know about the four towers of the capital?

The four towers built in the north, south, east, and west

surrounded the Magic Society, which stood in the center. The outer walls of each magic tower was said to be painted in a colour which symbolized the four elements.

Among them, the place where the fire magicians mainly resided was the Red Tower. It was the most militant magic tower which raised magicians excellent in battle. The mercenary industry was filled with instructions that they shouldn't confront a magician with a red robe.

Most of the members were excellent warriors who formed the core power of the Meltor Kingdom. The idiots who fought with those war magicians didn't deserve to step into Mana-vil. The same was true for the guards at the main entrance's checkpoint.

"Excuse me!" The guard saluted as soon as he saw Vince's red robes.

By default, those with an invitation card had to be at least of the 5th Circle and equivalent to a viscount. Even Mana-vil's guards, who were superior to the guards of the noble estates, would have to pay homage to them.

Vince received the salute naturally and handed over the invitation.

"I am Professor Vince Haidel from Bergen Academy, a Superior of the Red Tower. The last time I visited Mana-vil was seven years ago. Are there no errors?"

“Yes, that is correct.”

The guard confirmed the identity with a tool which contained all the information about magicians recorded in the Magic Society. Then he asked some questions about the information which had appeared on the tool. After confirming there were no problems with the answers, he returned the invitation to Vince.

Then the guard saluted again, “Excuse me, Professor! You can now pass!”

“I’m sorry that you will be so busy. Then, do your best.”

“Yes, thank you!”

Vince and Theo crossed the checkpoint and passed through the gate. All the basic checks, including examining their luggage, were skipped, allowing them to enter Mana-vil faster than anyone else.

This was the privilege of a magician who had received an invitation. Theodore once again realized the identity of the person who accompanied him.

Thus, Theodore took his first steps into Mana-vil Capital, the headquarters of magicians.

*

The ‘Sky Wagon’ was an exotic method of transportation which existed only in Mana-vil.

The word ‘wagon’ wasn’t appropriate, but there was no other proper term for it. The magician, who played the role of the wagon driver, would supply magic power to the mana stones, and the wagons would move through the air using the magic power.

Of course, it wasn’t flying magic, so the speed of the wagons was quite slow. However, looking over Mana-vil from the air was considered a great tourist attraction. A single sky wagon flew over Mana-vil and settled down gently at the front door of the Magic Society.

“We’ve arrived at Magic Society’s front door. 30 silver!”

“That is a lot higher than before. Hoo, I guess that is inflation,” Vince grumbled and gave the driver three silver coins worth 10 silver each.

They’d used a sky wagon which nobles and wealthy merchants often used, so the fee was incomparable to a normal sky wagon. If Theo had come alone, then he would’ve chosen to make his way through the terrifying crowd.

“Now, let’s hurry.”

“Yes.”

The two people got off the wagon and immediately entered through the Magic Society's front door.

As soon as Theo passed through the two antique pillars and wide open gates, his expression changed.

Any magician would be able to feel the density of mana in the air. Their precision might be different, but they could distinguish between a deep or light density. Theo, however, was much better at distinguishing the difference due to his sensory perception.

'Four or five times what is outside... No, maybe even more than that.'

It had only been a short period of time since he stepped inside, but his breathing was already rough. He struggled with his breathing as he followed behind Vince. Occasionally, a magician with rare garments or one with strong magic would catch his eye, but he managed to make it to his destination without getting lost.

The destination was the reception desk in the center where any external work related to the Magic Society was handled. Vince found an empty spot and extended his letter. "Vince Haidel, a Superior of the Red Tower."

"Please wait a moment." Since this was the magic society, the staff at the reception desk was also a magician. He used a magic tool to verify the authenticity of the invitation.

“Yes, it is verified.”

After completing the simple confirmation procedure, the staff returned the invitation and started to explain the schedule for the magic contest this year. It was an explanation which had probably emerged from his mouth hundreds of times.

After the full explanation, the staff member took a short breath.

“…That is all. Do you have any questions?”

Vince was organizing the information in his head, so he nodded one beat late. He glanced at Theo behind him and brought up the reason why they were here.

“I want to ask for a registration form for my student to apply and enter the Pupil Tournament.”

“Ah, I will be happy to complete that for you.”

The staff member was familiar with this, so he got a piece of paper from a drawer and started asking questions about Theo.

“Please tell me the name and age.”

“Theodore Miller, 19 years old.”

“What do you belong to?”

“I am a student of Bergen Academy.”

“And…”

“……”

10 minutes later, all of Theodore Miller’s personal information was filled in. The staff member was about to put the application in the filing cabinet when he remembered something he had missed. It was an omitted question because he had always gotten the same answer back.

“Is your disciple of the 4th Circle?”

It was a question that he didn’t even need to ask. They had to be the most talented person in the academy to come to the magic contest and participate in the competitions.

As well as having financial support, all the participates were talented 4th Circle magicians. While the 5th Circle could only be achieved through separate enlightenment or achievements, the 4th Circle could easily be reached by accumulating enough magic power to overcome the threshold.

For that reason, all the participants of the Pupil Tournament were 4th Circle magicians. That was why Vince’s answer was even more confusing.

“3rd Circle.”

“…Huh?”

“I said the 3rd Circle.”

The employee was confused and said with a bitter smile, “I’m sorry, but can you ask your disciple again? All other participants of the Pupil Tournament are 4th Circle magicians. There are basic safeguards, but every year, someone is wounded and even sometimes killed.”

The staff member was afraid to accept the participation of a 3rd Circle magician and therefore explained desperately. It was common sense. Overcoming the difference between circles was never easy. It was difficult for a veteran magician, let along an academy student.

However, Vince looked back with a casual expression and asked Theo, “That’s what he said. What do you think?”

“I will do it,” Theo replied without any hesitation.

On the way to Mana-vil, he had knocked down a hobgoblin chief alone.

In the process, Alfred’s memories and experiences had integrated

into his body, so his self-confidence became stronger. No matter how strong the participant, he didn't think they would be stronger than a hobgoblin chief.

However, the staff member still hesitated as he sighed over the application. He was afraid that the responsibility of the student's death would come back to him. It was at this moment that...

"What, only a 3rd Circle? If the disciple is being raised by the Red Tower, then he might be able to overcome the difference of one circle. There's no clause that states a person has to be of the 4th Circle to participate." Someone's voice was heard behind Vince and Theo.

"Hrmm?" Vince looked back with a strange expression and saw a blue-robed magician approach.

A blue robe was a symbol of the Blue Magic Tower. In many ways, they were as famous as the Red Tower.

The blue-robed magician approached Vince without hesitation and spoke in a mock friendly manner, "This is a face that I don't remember. It looks like this is the first tournament for your pupil, right?"

"That's right," Vince gave a short response.

A battle of nerves began, causing the surrounding mana to shrivel. If a 5th Circle magician's emotions got intense, the

atmosphere would shake a little bit.

Despite Vince's chilly answer, the blue-robed man wriggled his eyebrows and lowered his voice as he said, "I came to give you some advice, but your reaction is so cold. Don't you know that the rules have changed since last year?"

"The rules of the tournament have changed?" Vince's voice raised slightly at the unexpected words.

This caused the blue-robed magician to smile and nod. "Maybe I can help you."

No matter how he appeared, his expression wasn't one which gave off good intentions.

Chapter 28 - Mana-Vil Capital #3

“A scramble?”

“That’s right.”

Loren, an Average from the Blue Tower, walked ahead of them while speaking.

His explanation was quite detailed, unlike the suspicious expression he had shown at their first meeting. Theodore, who knew nothing about the Pupil Tournament, was able to understand it easily.

“The participants received an application and, at the same time, one of the token payments. Now, you are called Theodore, right? You should’ve received something from the reception desk earlier.”

“Ah...!”

Theo pulled out the item.

It was a gold medal which looked like a coin, but it was attached to a string, so it could be hung around the neck. The number 132 was engraved on it, indicating his registration number.

Loren confirmed it and nodded. “Yes, the participants

demonstrate their superiority by leaving this token intact. The loser will be deprived of all the tokens he has, and the number of tokens last owned will become the official record."

Vince said, "This method wasn't used in the past."

"Well, there were several things that happened."

It was a strange story for Vince, who had left Mana-vil seven years ago. Although he had heard news periodically from his friends in the capital, Vince never heard anything about the Pupil Competition.

Loren noticed Vince's attention and quickly opened his mouth, "The root cause is that there are too many participants."

That's right. As the number of participants who joined the magic contest increased, problems occurred. The rise in the number of incoming magicians meant the number of disciples brought with them also increased.

For high ranking magicians, a direct duel was burdensome, so the fight spread unconsciously to the Pupil Tournament. In addition, the goods set as prizes from the Meltor Palace fanned the flames.

"As you know, the competition was originally a round-robin tournament, but that start is too late. The Pupil Competition must be finished before the magic contest starts."

“…So, it became a scramble.”

“There are some who say it is barbaric, but I don’t think it is a bad change. You can challenge an opponent and lose in the first round because you have no luck.”

His words weren’t wrong. This competition format had been decided at the end of a rational discussion. Compared to a round-robin, there were advantages and almost no disadvantages.

A competent participant could quickly rise in the rankings by knocking out participants with a large number of tokens, while incompetent participants would fall first. Obviously, this dog-eat-dog type of competition was recommended because it was faithful to the laws of the magic towers.

However, Vince didn’t miss the loopholes in rules of this competition format.

“What happens if a person aims for a tired opponent, or a participant gains a moderate number of tokens and then avoids having another fight? Is there a means of urging the participants?”

“Hoh, good points.” Loren slightly admired the magician from the Red Tower.

He had never seen Vince’s face before, so he had thought Vince was just someone from the countryside. Never would he have imagined that the other person would be famous in the Red Tower.

However, it was too late. With a scoff of derision, he pointed to the stadium at which they had arrived.

"I'll explain first. This year's Pupil Tournament takes place in the multi-stadium, Pentarium. It consists of five independent stadiums, with the main space open only in the finals."

"Hmm, they look moderately durable."

"Hahaha! Even if both of us used all our power, we wouldn't be able to scratch the outside wall of the stadium."

Without such durability, the lives of the audience members would be in danger. A 4th Circle magician had strong attack spells which affected a wide area. Like Loren said, the solidarity of Pentarium could be compared to the gates of a large city.

Of course, Vince didn't agree with the words.

Loren spoke up to there and looked back at Vince and Theo. "Well, my explanation ends here. I don't know if it helped you."

"...It was a lot of help. Thank you."

The explanation that Loren gave was truly informative. Vince had to discard all the strategies he had planned for a round robin. One disagreeable point was the reason why Loren was being so friendly.

As expected, the question was resolved in an unexpected way.

“Huhu, that isn’t necessary. From now on, it will be your turn to help me.” Loren smiled, giving off a sly feeling. He gestured to a boy standing nearby, revealing the reason why he had brought Theo this far. It was closely related to the loopholes Vince had pointed out a little while ago.

“Say hello. This is my disciple and the son of Viscount Gullock, Philip Gullock.”

“It is nice to meet you.”

However, Vince remained silent.

Loren was uncomfortable by the reaction and said a beat late, “Hmm, cough. It was pointed out last year, but some participants were slow to fight. So, this year, there are a few rules to speed things up.”

“Too verbose. Can you cut to the chase?”

“Yes, for example… can a person with only one token deny the challenge of another participant?” Loren asked his disciple Philip, who smiled and applied for a match with Theo.

If this rule was true, then there was no way to avoid a fight.

Loren had brought Theodore as a meal for his disciple. It was a cowardly trick taking advantage of the rules.

"Kuhuhu, don't think that this is cowardly. Don't magicians from the Red Tower often do this? It is your fault for overlooking the mistake."

However, instead of getting frustrated, Vince just clicked his tongue. Loren, who didn't understand how to be vigilant, had probably just reached the Average status. Thus, he was trying to increase his career through his disciple.

"The Blue Tower is still using such petty tricks. Are you acting like this despite knowing that reputation?"

"W-W-What?"

"What will you do, Theodore? I think the date of the match can be decided by the person who was challenged," Vince asked Theo, blatantly ignoring Loren.

Theo had no intention of avoiding this fight. The fool's disciple didn't seem that great, and above all, his personality wasn't the type to delay annoying things. Rather, Theodore asked Vince, "Professor, is there anything else scheduled for today?"

"Uhh… I booked a restaurant for dinner this evening."

Theodore's eyes shone as he heard the words. In recent years, he

had been filling his stomach in the academy's cafeteria. Bergen Academy's meals weren't bad, but they couldn't be compared to a restaurant in Mana-vil.

Theo felt motivated and nodded enthusiastically. "I will finish it as soon as possible."

His first fight in the tournament occurred like this.

*

Was it because the competition had yet to really start?

Pentarium, which had four stadiums, immediately started Theo and Philip's match.

The two people each received a robe with three hanging crystals from the host. According to the host's explanation, these crystals would be able to block spells belonging to the 4th Circle and below.

It was the same as the participant's health. Once all three crystals were destroyed, the participant was defeated.

Theo asked the host, "Aren't these quite expensive artifacts?"

"They are disposable, so they aren't that expensive. I heard they are a few gold."

“A-A few gold…” Theo stuttered in amazement.

Philip sneered. “As expected from a hillbilly. It is only a few gold, yet you are making such a commotion.”

“I bet you’ve never earned a single gold coin yourself.”

“…It seems like you haven’t been educated properly.”

The atmosphere between the two people became more tense, but the host approached and pushed them to either side of the stadium.

Ready to fire a spell at any time, they looked at the spectators wrapped in a transparent shield. Theo and Philip were nameless, so there were no people in the stands. There were only Vince and Loren sitting across from each other.

Since that was the case, there was no need to wait any longer.

The host confirmed that the two competitors were prepared and immediately signaled the start of the match.

Peng~!

The 1st Circle magic, Light, was used.

As a small ball of light appeared in the centre, the magic power of each magician started to rise. Philip, who was proud of his superior magic power, acted first. “Icicle Bolt!”

The ice magic caused the ambient temperature to drop rapidly. Icicles formed from the cold air, and dozens of ice arrows soon formed in front of Philip. The strength of the refined ice magic power was temporarily equal to iron. The solid mass meant that the arrows could contain a power which Fire Bolt and Lightning Bolt didn’t have.

“Go!”

The blue arrows flew through the air. The speed of the arrows was less than that of actual arrows from an archer, but the wounds caused by the icy bolts were deadly. If one of them hit, Theo’s speed would slow down, then he would lost his life with the next one. This was the scary part about ice magic.

However, Theodore countered it without the slightest bit of discomfort. “Shock Wave!”

The arrows were different from the hobgoblin’s attack. Straight arrows would lose strength immediately upon colliding with something. Therefore, he had refined the existing Shock Wave formula by making its area wider and improving the way it blocked. In this manner, Theo’s magic power blasted against the blue arrows.

Pew pew pew pew puk!

Despite not completely killing their strength, the arrows lost their momentum and struck the ground. A shot which didn't hit its goal was wasted effort. The confused Philip hesitated, and Theodore took the initiative.

Theo promptly aimed his finger, triggering a magic formula which had already been calculated.

Ttaak!

Ignite was invoked without an order and suddenly appeared in front of Philip. Even if there was no damage, few people would be able to feel brave with fire right before them. It was no wonder that Philip tried to take a step back.

"U-Uh?" Philip then slipped due to the Grease magic that Theo had activated along with Ignite.

As people usually turned their heads when falling, before Philip could even recover, something hit him in the neck. It was the 2nd Circle attack magic, Wind Cutter.

Pakang!

In exchange for taking the damage, one of the crystals hanging from Philip's robe was broken.

He stared at Theo with a blank face. Theo faced him with a comfortable expression.

Then Theo said, “What? This is tidying up.”

Here's a picture of Mitra.



Chapter 29 - Mana-Vil Capital #4

Theo had used Ignite to distract Philip and Grease to make him fall, then Theo ended it with Wind Cutter. The combination of 1st and 2nd Circle magic had created such a result, with no spells from the 3rd Circle.

If this had been a battlefield instead of a competition, Philip's head would already be rolling around on the ground. In fact, Philip touched his neck a few times to reassure himself.

Then he got up and spat out angrily, "Y-You bastard! Don't you know how shameless it is to use such coarse magic, you hillbilly!"

"What?"

As soon as Philip stood up, Theo fired the magic he'd gathered in his hand.

Pajijik!

It was an arrow with blue discharge around it—the 2nd Circle magic, Lightning Bolt.

The speed, derived from the characteristics of the lightning attribute, greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the 2nd Circle magic. By the time the opponent saw the lightning spell with their eyes, it was already too late.

However, Philip wasn't that incompetent.

"Don't expect to surprise me twice!"

Even if he'd been born in a good family and had rich support, he still had to rely on his own talents and efforts. Compared to Theo, his head wasn't as good, but his sensitivity was several times better. Philip witnessed the discharge of Lightning Bolt and reflexively prepared the magic formula for Shield.

The moment that he was about to shout out the magic with a confident face...

Puk!

"Shie...ld—aack?"

The ground suddenly rose and swallowed Philip's right foot. The magic formula he had been preparing shattered just before it was completed, and the lightning struck Philip's face as his magic power dispersed.

He grabbed his tattered face as he fell, before rolling around. It was truly a sight to behold.

Pakang!

Once again, the crystal which absorbed the damage was

shattered. Now, Philip only had one crystal remaining. If one more was broken, Philip's defeat would be confirmed, and all the tokens he possessed would go to Theodore.

Theodore looked up as victory appeared before him in an instant.

'So much silliness... No, is this type of guy common?' He started thinking about it.

Where would people who studied at academies or with a private tutor experience true fights? They might be praised during a relaxed spar or at best, experience being attacked while surrounded by guards. The true meaning of a 'fight' had never once been felt by them.

After absorbing Alfred's experience and the fight with the hobgoblin, Philip was like a child compared to the tempered Theodore.

However, Philip's thoughts were different. "Kuaack! Damn hillbilly! Don't you have the desire to fight fairly as a magician? It is insulting to use 1st and 2nd Circle magic in an honourable duel!"

"You, are you stupid? Why does the circle matter, as long as it is magic?"

Vince, who was sitting in the stands, nodded in agreement with Theo's disbelieving feelings.

It was rarely the case that big magic was used in a battle against a large army. Whether it was from Hellfire or Fireball, they still died. The spotlight of small-scale magical battles was dealing a blow to the neck with a small magic spell.

On the other side, Loren hit his forehead at his disciple's stupidity. Perhaps it was thoughtless to just teach him battle magic.

Theo's next words were like daggers stabbing Loren. "If your teacher tells you differently, can you really be proud of such a teacher? Or maybe you haven't learned this part yet?"

"Kuk!" Philip grew silent as the nail had been hit on the head.

The expressions of the two magicians watching the argument were interesting. A smile broke through Vince's poker face. Meanwhile, Loren's face swelled like he was going to explode; his blood pressure rose because of Theo's words.

Had a wise man said this? A person who lost to words could only swear or throw a punch.

Philip Gullock was a person who didn't fall far from that category. "Shut up! Soldiers from the frozen ground, hear my call!"

As he drew up magic power angrily, the temperature around him fell rapidly. Frost covered the smooth stone floor, and a chill,

which seemed like it would turn everyone into statues, began to gather. Once completed, Theodore Miller would find it hard to prevent the 4th Circle magic, ‘Frozen Orb.’

Of course, if it was completed.

“Don’t you know not to use big things?”

Theo raised his fingers like he had been waiting.

Ttaak!

It was an action which was no different from when he cast Ignite.

‘Is he trying to do the same thing again?’ Philip scoffed and moved his head back. He hadn’t known it the first time, but he wouldn’t fall for something after experiencing it already. If Philip didn’t back away, he wouldn’t fall, and his spell wouldn’t fail again.

That was the crucial mistake.

Puk!

“Keo… Huu…uk?” An unexplained pang occurred in the vicinity of his hips. The crystals which absorbed damage didn’t completely erase the pain.

Pakang!

Philip didn't care about the last crystal which broke, but as he looked down, he managed to see what caused the terrible suffering. It was a sharpened piece of stone made to resemble a spear. The stone had emerged from the ground and pierced his hip at a precise angle.

Needless to say, it was a collaboration between Theodore and Mitra.

"That, cooperation, ha... keek." Philip couldn't finish what he was saying as he fell to the ground. For someone who wasn't used to pain, this injury was really terrible.

Even the host turned to Theo with a pale expression. Theo scratched his head as if he had made a mistake.

"Mitra, let's make the end a little more blunt next time."

[Huing?] Mitra made a sound as she emerged from the ground and looked at Philip with a naive face.

*

Philip looked so terrible that the host called for a stretcher and sent him away. Damage was mostly absorbed by the crystals, so the host had never seen such a terribly wounded person before.

He tried to make a calm expression as he told Theo the result of the match, “Theodore, congratulations on your first victory in the Pupil Tournament.”

“Ah, thank you.”

“You have achieved one victory and obtained Philip Gullock’s four tokens. It doesn’t matter if you lose them, but you are responsible for any damages, so please be careful.”

The four tokens were placed on Theo’s palm. Due to the metal material, they were heavy. Theo realized it was his first victory and stared at them blankly until Vince neared him.

“How was it? Isn’t it easier than you thought?”

“Yes, it wasn’t a big deal.”

“That is the difference of experience. When you received Alfred’s memories, you had already become familiar with fighting. Students who grow up like plants in a greenhouse aren’t a match for you.”

It was the reason why Vince had allowed Theodore to participate in the Pupil Tournament.

Skilled war magicians penetrated through the armour and

helmets of vigilant knights and were grim reapers who could kill senior magicians. Practical experience made a big difference, and Theo's sensory perception wasn't much different from the intuition of a warrior who had been on the battlefield for decades. He could find small gaps in the opponent and dig into that to defeat them.

So, it wouldn't be too hard for him to win this type of competition. As the two people were thinking hopefully, someone approached them. "Hey, Vince Haidel!"

"What—?" Vince, who hadn't felt the person's presence, looked behind with a confused expression.

Then he immediately sucked in his breath. No matter how much he'd fought on the battlefield, it was rare to see such a person. Vince's face distorted strangely as he confirmed the other person's face. "Aren't you too busy to come to a place like this?"

The person's white beard and hair were a sharp contrast to the muscles which could be seen underneath the blue robe. His two forearms were as thick as logs and seemed strong enough to crush a person's head. He carried a staff on his back, since it was too large and heavy. If he had been carrying a greatsword instead of a cane, he would look like a warrior, not a magician.

At Vince's grim answer, the sturdy old man grinned and knocked against Vince's shoulder.

"Hahaha! Don't be like that when I haven't seen you in such a

long time!”

“Ugh, wait. Ah, that hurts!”

“A man should at least have this much strength. Now, introduce me to the disciple that you brought!”

Vince, who finally managed to escape from the old man’s violence, shuddered as he massaged his shoulder. Despite his trained body, that was enough to hurt his bones.

The old man wasn’t known as the Terror of the Blue Tower or the Muscle Master for nothing.

Vince introduced Theo reluctantly, “This is Theodore Miller, a student from Bergen Academy.”

“It is nice to meet you.”

“Yes, yes! Nice to meet you as well!”

The old man laughed for a moment before it disappeared as he stared at Theo’s face. The expression was quite different from the old man who had been laughing just a moment ago. His gaze seemed to see right through people, similar to what Theo had felt from Myrdal.

“...Interesting. Did you get picked up on the battlefield? It is

shameful to call you a greenhorn."

The gaze of the old magician was so heavy that Theo turned his head away to escape. In order to change the subject, Theo asked Professor Vince a question, "Professor. This is...?"

However, the attempt was interrupted by the old magician. "Hmph! Why are you asking Vince instead of me? If you are ignoring me because I am an old man, you shouldn't!"

"I-I'm really sorry."

"Huhaha! Well, it doesn't matter!"

The old magician was like a storm. He grabbed Theo's hands, and Theo felt dizzy. There was no magic power in the old man's hands, just simple strength. Maybe it was possible for the old man to pick Theo up with one hand? Questions kept circling inside his head.

As Theo was feeling dizzy, the old man let go and put on an air of importance. Then he squinted at Vince and urged him to speak.

Vince carried a worn out expression as he told Theo the identity of the old man, "Don't be too surprised. He is... the Supreme of the Blue Tower, Blundell Adruncus."

"Ah, indeed... Huh?" The shocked Theo asked with blank eyes.

Then Vince repeated the truth again. He whispered in Theo's ear so the old man couldn't hear, "That old geezer is the Blue Tower Master."

"...?!" Theodore's eyes shook fiercely as he encountered the most important person he'd ever met in his 19 years of life.

Chapter 30 - Catch The Genius #1

‘The Blue Tower Master!’ Theodore’s mind went blank as he realized what that short title meant.

The magic towers, which defended the Meltor Kingdom, divided their magicians into five stages. It wasn’t as strict as noble titles, but magicians did have to treat those higher than them with respect.

New members who had just entered the magic tower were Basic, while those with some experience were called Average.

People who built up fame and merits were Superior, whereas veterans recognized as pioneers of the magic tower were Prime.

Finally, the wise person praised as the master of the tower was Supreme. The Supreme was the absolute magician and could be called more precious than the seven sword masters of the Andras Kingdom. They were also the backbone of the Meltor Kingdom.

The old man standing in front of him was the top magician of the Blue Tower, a Supreme rank!

“B-Bergen Academy’s third grade student, Theodore Miller greets Tower Master!” Theodore bowed belatedly as he realized the situation.

This caused Blundell to stroke his beard and laugh. “Huhu, there

is no need to be so uptight! It is good to be polite, but don't bow down too much. Isn't that right, Vince?"

"Hah...that's right." Vince immediately replied with a dour expression. It was a shameless approach to someone who seemed to dislike him. Either way, he was a difficult person for Vince to deal with.

Blundell was the master of a magic tower, yet he had approached under the pretense of a pleasant old man. So, he might have approached with an ulterior motive. Vince thought like this and naturally covered for Theo.

"So, what happened?" Vince had a headache because he hadn't thought the master of a magic tower would approach them, but his troubles didn't end here.

As annoyance stiffened Vince's face, Blundell took a step back. It seemed like he knew how disruptive he was. A personality which didn't know how to quit was bad. "Hmm, ahem. It isn't anything big. It's just that it has been a long time since you came to the capital, so I wanted to see what happened. Furthermore, I couldn't believe the rumour that Vince brought a disciple."

"The rumour has already spread?"

"What else would be interesting in these narrow towers? They have no choice but to be curious about the people from outside." Blundell shrugged a few times, but it was more scary than charming.

Theodore was curious about how Blundell had exercised to get that type of body.

Just then, Blundell turned to face him again. “Huhu, the more I see, the more I like you. If I hadn’t met another child, then I might have tried to take your disciple.”

“You can’t just say that… Wait.” Vince’s eyes widened as he realized something strange.

It was a matter of grave importance if the Blue Tower Master had taken a disciple. No matter how indifferent Vince was to the news, it was a matter he would’ve definitely heard about. He remembered that the Red Tower Master and Blue Tower Master didn’t have students yet, which was why he had tried to avoid them.

“…Does Blue Tower Master have a disciple?”

Blundell laughed at the expected reaction, “Huhuhu, don’t be surprised.”

It was a laugh to show off his well-raised child. This was an expression which fit well with the phrase, ‘a stupid face.’ Blundell puffed up his thick chest muscles with a face filled with pride. It was obvious right away that he wanted to boast.

“Your pupil is good, but this year’s tournament winner has

already been decided.”

“What are you talking abo…”

As Vince spoke, a voice announcing the result of a match rang out in the waiting room.

[Stadium 4, the match between Marcus Giovanni and Sylvia has ended. With a time of 24 seconds, it is participant Sylvia’s victory. Marcus will exit the tournament with three tokens.]

‘…24 seconds?’

The people in the waiting room doubted their ears. It was a difficult record to destroy three crystals in 24 seconds, even if magic was fired from the very start. It would be impossible unless the opponent had stood still like a scarecrow or if they had minimal defense.

In other words, the winner of Stadium 4 had completely overwhelmed the opponent. As dozens of gazes focused on the exit of Stadium 4, one person was stroking his beard with a pleased expression.

Kkiiik…

The door of the Magic Society facility opened and someone

entered. The pale magical lights in the room didn't blind them like the sun, but people still rubbed their eyes as they gazed at the exit.

It was because 'she' had a brilliant presence around her.

'Silver hair…?'

Theo's eyes narrowed as he couldn't help feeling in awe.

Her hair was like white snow, and her skin underneath it was also fair. The girl's two eyes were as blue as a clear lake and blended with the blue robes she was wearing. Every time she blinked, there was a mysterious dazzle of magic power.

Dozens of tokens were hanging from a large staff which seemed disproportionate with her body. While everyone was shocked by the presence of the gorgeous and strange girl, she headed toward the three people with a casual walk.

"Master."

"Ohh, good work!"

Blundell laughed and opened his arms, but the girl turned away from him without any hesitation. The old man's expression became grouchy at the girl's cold response, but he soon returned to normal like this exchange was normal.

He patted her head and told the other two people, “The introduction was delayed. This is the child who I have been teaching secretly for a while, Sylvia.”

“...Hello,” a calm voice entered their ears. It was a voice which showed no emotions, just like her eyes. Most young men would lose their composure if she spoke to them.

Indeed, Theo was astonished by her presence, but it was for a reason other than her beauty. It was due to Alfred’s sensitivity which allowed him to glimpse her reality. It said that she was an opponent Theodore Miller couldn’t beat!

‘No way...! That girl is stronger than the hobgoblin chief?!’

He doubted it a few times, but his inner conviction never wavered. His intuition was telling him that the Blue Tower Master’s disciple, Sylvia, was much more formidable than the hobgoblin chief.

The strength of a magician couldn’t be judged just through common sense. However, when comparing the appearance and superiority between Theo and Sylvia, he couldn’t help feeling incompatible.

“Hrmm—? It seems like you are interested in Sylvia.” Blundell saw Theo’s trembling eyes and sent him a wry smile. “Why don’t the two of you have a match? Isn’t this a chance to show Sylvia a wonderful appearance?”

The joke wasn't funny. Theodore now realize why Vince had been sneaky regarding the magic towers. There was no way a top magician wouldn't be able to know Sylvia's skill after seeing her. If he was stupid enough to nod here, he would lose five tokens and Vince's reputation would take a hit.

Theo took his eyes off Sylvia and refused the invitation. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to refuse. Right now, I can only show you an unsightly appearance."

Did her interest disappear? Sylvia's gaze moved away from Theodore.

He felt some regret, but it would be stupid to compete with her right now. It was brave to challenge opponents who were hard to beat, but challenging opponents he couldn't win was just foolishness.

Blundell also clicked his tongue at the answer. "...It is too bad. Then I hope you two will fight later."

With those words, Blundell turned around, and Sylvia bowed before following him. As soon as the two people who boasted different types of presences disappeared, the tension in the room was released. The combination of a muscular old man and a girl with silver hair was truly strange.

However, Theo and Vince were still tense.

Vince was the one who opened his mouth first, “...What about the booked restaurant?”

“Unfortunately, it will have to be for later.”

The certainty in victory after his first match had been blown away by an encounter with the strong. Sylvia, the disciple of the Blue Tower Master, Blundell Adruncus...

She had the magician genius which Theo had been longing for since childhood. The fact that she was a disciple despite being younger than him proved this fact. An unknown feeling which might be jealousy or longing exploded in his stomach.

“It is best to avoid her and aim for a high ranking.”

“I know that is easy.”

A genius like her wouldn’t appear that often. The majority of participants would fall victim to her and be eliminated from the tournament rankings. It would be easy for Theo to find people to collect the tokens from and rise in the rankings.

Challenging Sylvia was a foolish act.

“Even so, I want to challenge her.”

The genius recognized by the Blue Tower Master, an existence

born with the talent Theo didn't possess... However, Theo couldn't regret his talent now. The grimoire he got his hands on was a genius like Sylvia, giving him a talent that might be comparable to her natural one.

Due to this, he wanted to compete against her even more.

"I think it is a ridiculous and foolish choice. But..." A crack appeared on Vince's cold face. It was the face of a beast which had been seen often during his days as a war magician, the Red Tower's 'Fire Killer Vince.'

"My blood is boiling after a long time. I want shock to appear on the face of that old man."

"Oh, that is good. I want to see it too." Theo agreed.

"It really is a great relationship when hearts connect. I didn't think you would be so motivated."

Vince pulled out his wallet from the space pocket and stared into it with narrowed eyes. Then he muttered in a moderate tone, "Let's go to the artifact stores and bookstores. Tell me if you want anything."

After 10 years of fighting on the battlefield, this was the moment that the thick wallet opened widely.

Here's a picture of Sylvia.



Chapter 31 - Catch The Genius #2

After deciding to spend a large amount of money, Vince led Theodore out of the Magic Society building. Commercial activity was forbidden in the vicinity of the Magic Society since it was a research institute.

For this reason, the two of them quickly boarded a sky wagon as there was no better method of avoiding the crowds in Mana-vil. As soon as Vince got in the back seat, he said the name of their destination, “Please go to the commercial district. Sector D, area 27-2 is fine.”

Then as the sky wagon began to move, Vince turned toward where Theo was sitting. “What do you think is the most urgent thing you need to do?”

“...Reach the 4th Circle.”

“Definitely.” Vince nodded at Theo’s correct answer.

The circle was considered the most basic and important indicator of a magician’s abilities.

The number of circles wasn’t just limited to the amount of magic power. The more circles a magician had, the faster their magic power moved and the more complete the spell became. Even if the same procedure was used, a 5th Circle’s Magic Missile would be stronger than that of a 3rd Circle.

Sylvia was a genius of the Blue Tower Master, an opponent who would definitely have the advantage when it came to perfecting the magic.

However, didn't Theo have an advantage when it came to experience? This meant he would have to use a shortcut to raise his odds, rather than filling the gap in other places. Fortunately, Gluttony's ability meant he could speed up his growth.

'I wish that I could go up to the 5th Circle if possible, but... it is impossible to reach the 5th Circle simply through accumulating magic power.'

If it were possible to reach the 5th Circle in that way, anyone with money could become a 5th Circle magician.

Just like in an field, there was a limit which couldn't be overcome by investing money in magic. This was the so-called 'wall' which had to be overcome through their own research and enlightenment.

Therefore, Theodore couldn't escape from this fundamental principle despite possessing Gluttony.

Vince looked down at Mana-vil and said with a confident expression, "This time, there will be many good items in the commercial district. There will be plenty of items that will be able to help you."

*

Rattle! A cheerful bell sound rang out.

A bell had been placed at the front door to signal of any visitors.

After hearing the sound, the owner, Fred, raised himself up at the counter. This was a busy time for tourists, but there was no big difference in the number of customers at high-end artifact stores. Since the prices were so high, it was burdensome to even enter.

Today, he had only had visitors, so he couldn't help having no strength in his voice. "Welcome-"

However, his helpless attitude disappeared the moment he confirmed Vince's attire. Since Fred first opened his store in Manavil, he had seen thousands of magicians and artifacts. A person in a magician's robe always had the smell of money around them.

However, Fred's sense of smell shook for the first time in many years.

'The Red Tower, and also... a Superior rank...! From his gait, he looks like a war magician. There are no artifacts on his body, and is the person accompanying him the disciple? Maybe I can get two servings.'

Typically, the largest spenders came from a magician's research funds. The Yellow Tower, known as the Alchemy Tower and

money-eaters, consumed 30% of the kingdom's yearly budget buying materials.

In comparison, the research costs of the White Tower and Blue Tower, which were relatively cheaper, exceeded the annual budget of a trading company.

However, there were some exceptions.

"Owner, show me all your good products, regardless of price. It doesn't really matter, but I have an invitation to the magic contest."

"Yes! I will happily arrange it for you!"

Fred was excited by the expected sale and rushed into his warehouse.

'As expected from a war magician from the Red Tower, their spending ability is different!'

The only tower which didn't have large spendings was the Red Tower, which was considered to be the headquarters of war magicians who spent more time on the battlefield than in the laboratory.

Apart from buying pieces of equipment which would save their lives, they normally collected most of the money they earned. If the magicians were satisfied with the goods, they would pay as

much as possible. So, a war magician from the Red Tower was considered a VIP in artifact stores.

Fred ran like lightning toward the warehouse and back again at the same speed.

“Sorry to keep you waiting!”

Kuuong!

An iron box containing dozens of artifacts was placed on the floor of the store. Despite the strict seal, the magic power leaking from it was fearsome. As Theo stared in anticipation, the lid of the iron box was finally opened.

When he saw the contents of the iron box, Theodore’s eyes widened.

‘Ohh…!’

Theo had touched many artifacts at the black market store, and that’s why he knew that the artifacts in front of him were all of the ‘Rare’ rating! If he absorbed all of this, he would be able to fill up more than half of the magic power required for the 4th Circle.

However, Vince asked about the rating of these artifacts and made another request to the owner.

“Didn’t I say regardless of the price?”

“Huh? But these are the best items in our store…?”

“No, there is definitely still something.”

Vince smiled at Fred and knocked on the counter. “B rank, please take it out.”

“…I understand.” Fred nodded with a face filled with tension.

A Superior magician of the Red Tower was indeed qualified to purchase this item. It was an artifact which he hadn’t taken out for the last few years since opening the store. He’d thought he wouldn’t be able to find an owner for it because of its tremendous price.

Clink! The metal lock of the tightly sealed space under the counter was released, and silver gauntlets appeared.

“Appraise it.”

“Yes.”

Following Vince’s whisper, Theo picked up the remarkable gauntlets carefully. Then he called out to Gluttony, ‘Appraisal.’

[+ 8 West Wind's Protection (Armour)]

[These are gauntlets made of mithril alloy by dwarven craftsmen. The defense is amazing on its own, but the right method is to use the magic engraved on the gauntlets. By applying wind magic, the owner's magic power will create an air current which deflects any projectiles. In the past, the owner of these gauntlets was said to have passed through barrages of arrows without much difficulty.

* The rating of the gauntlets is 'Precious.'

* When consumed, a considerable amount of magic power will be absorbed.

* When consumed, the digestion time is 1 hour and 45 minutes.

* When consumed, the skill in wind defense magic will increase.

* When worn, 'Blessing of the Flowing Wind' is applied.]

'Precious rating!'

Theo's eyes shook as he confirmed the information.

These gauntlets were at the same level as ‘Roaring Flames’ which had been given to him by the Carter Family as an apology.

Theodore wasn’t very knowledgeable in worldly affairs, but he could judge that the value of the gauntlets wouldn’t be below 100 gold. It would be a few times the Miller Barony’s budget, so it was natural for Theo’s calm to be shaken.

“T-The price?”

“It is 180 gold, but there is a discounted rate for those with invitations. I am willing to accept 144 gold.”

“144 gold…!”

As Theodore felt a little breathless, Vince stepped forward and pulled out his wallet.

It wasn’t a gold coin that appeared but a gold ingot stamped with the symbol of the kingdom. It was worth 100 gold. Vince placed two of them on the counter and said to Fred who was staring blankly, “It is a lump sum for all of them. Are more procedures needed?”

“Uh, no.”

“Then I will take it.”

Artifacts worth 200 gold were swept away in an instant by Vince. The objects disappeared into the space pocket like they were a dream. Fred, who hit the jackpot, just stared after them blankly as the bell at the door sounded.

"...I can stop business for the day."

Then he placed a [CLOSED] sign on the door as he thought about drinking a cup of expensive sake.

*

Vince and Theodore didn't stop with just Fred, who had few customers.

Even in Mana-vil's luxurious stores, only one or two more B rank pieces could be found. After purchasing 'West Wind's Protection', Vince bought items from other stores. The amount consumed in the process was enough to buy a manor house in Mana-vil.

Theodore arrived at their accommodation and was finally able to look at all the artifacts they purchased.

'Wow, how much did all these cost...?'

He had never seen such a sight before in his life. Most of the items belonged in the 'quantity' category, but there were some quality ones among the mountain. Gluttony, which was still asleep, stretched out its tongue like it could feel something. It was

because of the tempting the fragrance of the magic power coming from the artifacts.

Vince pushed the ‘Rare’ grade artifacts forward first.

“Feed it all the Rare grade items. If Gluttony was a person, then this would be an appetizer.”

“I understand.”

After taking several deep breaths, Theodore aimed his left hand towards the artifacts. He knew that there was no problem if he tried to feed it several different things at the same time, but he was nervous at the thought of trying to swallow items worth a few hundred gold.

It was a tremendous amount of money for a person from the country.

“Now, eat it.”

At that moment…

Gluttony’s tongue started on its sumptuous dinner. Necklaces, bracelets, boots, daggers, and armors were sucked into a whirlpool. As the tongue swung once, the familiar voice rang in his head continuously.

[‘The Necklace of Cleanliness’ has been consumed. The amount of magic power is common.]

[Proficiency with the 2nd Circle magic ‘Clean’ has increased.]

[‘Stone Fist Magic Bracelet’ has been consumed. The amount of magic power is common.]

[Proficiency with the 3rd Circle magic ‘Stone Skin’ has increased.]

[‘Sticky Boots’ has been consumed. The amount of magic power is common.]

[1st Circle magic…]

[……]

[It will take 1 hour and 58 minutes to fully digest.]

Chapter 32 - Catch The Genius #3

After eating the bulk of the artifacts, Theodore's next choice was to start reading.

It wasn't just about gaining enough magic power to reach the 4th Circle. As a 4th Circle magician, Theo needed to be able to use 4th Circle magic. He only had a short amount of time, so he had to select useful magic in advance and increase his understanding.

Vince, who still had plenty of time remaining until the magic contest, also joined in. As someone with a rich amount of experience as a war magician, he was able to give detailed information about the strategies which the magicians of the Blue Tower used.

After looking at books for two hours...

"Ah...!"

The magic power in Theo's body suddenly boiled up. The last time his magic power had increased this much was when he had eaten 'Roaring Flames.' The flow of magic power emerged from the palm of his left hand and wrapped around Theodore's body, drawing the faint outline of a shape outside the three circles.

'4th Circle...!'

It wasn't at the completed stage yet. The shape was there, but he

needed more magic power to fill it up.

However, even that was a great accomplishment compared to the days when the 3rd Circle had been far away. Theodore calmly scattered the remaining magic power throughout his body and opened his eyes once the 4th Circle outline finished. He certainly felt more magic power than before.

Vince recognized the magic power emerging from him and congratulated him, “Congratulations. Now, you are a fellow magician and walking the same path as me. Don’t forget this fact in the future, and I hope you will continue to devote yourself wholly.”

“Yes, Professor,” Theo replied in a trembling voice.

The 4th Circle was just the start of the magic path. The invention of the magic reagents meant that many people crossed the threshold of the 4th Circle. However, those who reached the 5th Circle were just a handful. Some blamed the limits of their talent and remained in the 4th Circle until they died, while others felt desperation and frustration at the existence of the ‘wall’ beyond the 5th Circle.

In fact, even those who were considered as the top magicians in the continent couldn’t cross the wall of the 7th Circle. The tower masters, excluding the Blue Tower Master and Red Tower Master, were also stuck at the 7th Circle.

The 9th Circle, which was considered the apex of humanity, had

already become a legend and myth for a long time.

In the truest sense, the 4th Circle Theodore had now stepped into was a desert where numerous pilgrims had died.

Then Theo looked at the three Precious ranked artifacts remaining on the bed. They were similar in price to the West Wind's Protection, purchased for 144 gold at the first store. Each one had a great performance matching their price.

[+7 Hawk's Skull (Armor)]

[The helmet, made of steel and adamantium, is truly artistic and shaped like a hawk. The blacksmith, who created this helmet for a magician, added the ability for it to function like a real hawk. As a result, the 'Insight' magic is given to the wearer of the helmet. The person who wears this helmet will immediately acquire the Insight magic.

* The rating of this helmet is 'Precious'.

* When consumed, a considerable amount of magic power will be absorbed.

* When consumed, the digestion time is 1 hour and 32 minutes.

* When consumed, the Capture magic formula will be

acquired.

* When worn, the skill ‘Hawkeye’ is applied.]

[+8 Night Prowler’s Mirage (Shoes)]

[These are shoes made from luxurious leather with magic circles of mithril thread sewn on them. These are the reason why the thief Orwell hadn’t gotten caught until the end. The guards had continued chasing the illusions Orwell left behind, and the secret had only been exposed after he’d been killed at a gambling place. The wearer of these shoes can create a lifelike illusion of themselves.

* The rating of these shoes is ‘Precious’.

* When consumed, a considerable amount of magic power will be absorbed.

* When consumed, the digestion time is 1 hour and 41 minutes.

* When consumed, the Illusion magic formula will be acquired.

* When worn, the skill ‘Illusion Track’ is available.]

‘Hawk’s Skull’ had been worn by a famous mercenary leader, and ‘Night Prowler’s Mirage’ was the symbol of the legendary thief Orwell. They were too expensive and rare to be used as artifacts to gain magic power. If the craftsmen were here, they might’ve tried to break Theodore’s neck.

To the hesitant Theo, Vince said, “Don’t hesitate.”

“Huh?”

“Use whatever means possible for the full preparation. Once you have made up your mind, don’t stop. I will take on all the costs, so you don’t have to be sorry.”

“…I understand.”

The last of Theo’s hesitation went away at Vince’s words.

It was correct that he should use all means possible. According to the guesses of the two people, ‘Precious’ grade artifacts wouldn’t end with just increasing magic power. After eating ‘Roaring Flames’, he’d been able to acquire two abilities as well as magic power.

Artifacts couldn’t be used in the Pupil Tournament. However, there was no rule prohibiting the use of a grimoire. Therefore, it was possible for Theo to use the function of the grimoire, not that anyone would notice.

The grimoire was separate from artifacts, so there was no way to detect its existence. It was fine as long as Theo didn't reveal the tongue in his palm. In a sense, it might be cowardly, but it didn't break any of the stated rules.

Despite being sick of war, Vince was still a war magician of the Red Tower. War magicians didn't care about the means and methods used to win. Similarly, Theodore had received Alfred's memories so he had no objection to it.

"Gluttony."

In the end, Theo moved his left hand towards the three artifacts worth around 500 gold.

"Eat."

The tongue was still unsatisfied and popped out like it had been waiting for the command. The gauntlets, helmet, and shoes were sucked in. This was the moment when the value of a mansion in Mana-vil was sucked into the stomach of the grimoire.

*

After reaching the 4th Circle with Gluttony's abilities, Theo received special lessons from Vince for a few days.

Theo had gained a fraction of Alfred's experience, but it was nothing compared to Vince's years on the battlefield. He searched through memories of the past and picked information which would help Theo.

"The biggest advantage of the water magic attribute is its versatility. Offense, defense, suppression... these applications aren't impossible when it comes to the water attribute. A skilled magician in the water attribute would be an annoying opponent."

If he thought about water, there was no other attribute which existed in such a variety of forms. The clouds floating in the sky were water, and the river running through the ground was also water. The snow capped peaks were water, and so was the fog rising early in the morning.

The freedom to go between solids, liquids, and gas was the strength and essence of the water magic attribute.

"Are you saying there are no special weaknesses?"

"Its attack is weaker than fire, its defense is lower than earth, and its speed is slower than the wind. The limitations of the water attribute is that it doesn't specialize in anything."

"...It is the medium in various aspects." Theo understood the meaning and nodded.

If so, there were some methods available to him. His earth-

related defense magic had increased greatly due to the contract with Mitra, so he could block 4th Circle magic without much difficulty. He could also use the skill gained from ‘Roaring Flames’ to break through Sylvia’s defense.

While Theo thought for a while, Vince opened his mouth and said, “This is just my guess but… you should avoid a close confrontation with Sylvia as much as possible.”

“A close confrontation?” Theo was confused by the unexpected words.

However, Vince firmly nodded and explained, “The Blue Tower Master. Do you remember the staff the old man was carrying? It is a crude and large wooden staff.”

“Of course.” It was rare to meet a person who gave off such a strong impression. If Blundell hadn’t been wearing a robe, Theo would’ve thought he was a warrior. Blundell’s terrifying appearance matched his staff.

“That staff was really big.”

“It isn’t a staff.”

“…Huh?”

Theo made a lost expression, causing Vince to shake his head with a sigh.

“It is good as a stick.”

“……”

“He learned the eastern method of fighting with a stick as a hobby. The problem is that he reached the rank of a master with it.”

Theo’s face turned pale as Vince added, “He broke the heads of a few knights with it on the battlefield.”

Sylvia was carrying a similar staff to her master. He would rather be hit by a Fireball than a rough staff wielded by a pretty girl.

“Don’t narrow the distance if possible. That is my advice.”

“Ah, I understand.”

The two people took a break for a while before the discussion continued again.

Fortunately, Vince was a good mentor, and Theo was an excellent disciple. Vince explained the weaknesses of the Blue Tower Magicians, and the information came together in Theo’s head with Alfred’s experience.

Even though one thing was taught, Theo would gain

enlightenment in a further three things.

*

As the end of the Pupil Tournament approached, Vince rented out a practice room for a final check.

If Theodore's abilities didn't meet his standard, then he would oppose the match with Sylvia. He didn't want Theo to be ridiculed in front of everyone. However, he became sure of something. 'This much is enough to win!'

Vince didn't specialize in water magic, but he was still a Superior rank of the Red Tower and a war magician. He was a few times stronger than an Average of the Blue Tower, but Theo had stood up to him without backing down. Theo had even saved some of the functions of the grimoire.

Theo, laying on the floor of the practice room with a weary expression, took deep breaths and looked up at Vince. "Professor, did I pass?"

Vince smiled and nodded. "I'll give you a perfect score."

Chapter 33 - Tournament Finals #1

The final day of the Pupil Tournament arrived.

In the waiting room at the center of Pentarium, there was a measuring device to check the rankings of the participants. The names of 150 young magicians and the number of tokens they had were accurately described there.

The bottom-most players naturally only had one token and weren't in the waiting room. Fortunately for them, no one was interested in the participants at the bottom.

"Hey, look at that...!"

"What is it? Oh, the number one rank? Of course, it is... Huh?"

"...Surely there wasn't an error in the tool?"

"It was installed today, so what error could there be?"

"If this is true, how many times has she fought?"

The audience murmured in disbelief after seeing the leaderboards.

It was the last round, so the outline of the winner was revealed in the rankings. Participants satisfied with their ranking gave up on

any more fights. This was because their rankings could lower if they challenged or received a challenge from someone else.

For that reason, previous Pupil Tournaments the final token count had been somewhere in the range of 30 to 40 tokens. There had been no big difference between the token counts of the winner and the other challengers.

However, what did the top of the leaderboard look like now?

> [1st Place: No. 13 Sylvia – 95 tokens
>
> 2nd Place: No. 7 Pogani Wolgast – 21 tokens
>
> 3rd Place: No. 31 Robert Diane – 18 tokens]

The number of tokens possessed by the person in 1st place surpassed the previous record by nearly double, causing the audience to let out cries of admiration.

“9-95 tokens…?!”

“2nd place is only 21 tokens… Doesn’t it mean that other people didn’t have time to collect the tokens?”

“That is the Blue Tower Master’s disciple.”

As the disciple of the famous Blue Tower Master Blundell, she was considered as the favourite to win the competition.

However, nobody had thought she would reach 1st place with such a ridiculous record. It was a contest where young magicians participated, but it wasn't easy to establish such an overwhelming record.

The people who saw the leaderboard naturally looked at the silver-haired girl sitting in a corner of the waiting room. If it wasn't for the huge mass of muscles sitting next to her, she would've been buried by those who wanted to speak to her.

The mass of muscles, Blundell, spoke in a somewhat rough voice, "Ah, young people these days have no spirit!"

He was lamenting the fact that there had been no challengers for a few days. Blundell had tried to give a good experience to his disciple, but the other participants had turned on their tails as soon as her strength had been revealed.

Did they want to become magicians who had to live with failure because they were afraid of defeat? Blundell couldn't understand the concept of 'run away.'

'It is a chance to compete safely with a superior magician. A lucky opportunity like this is hard to come by!'

The magicians in the area stirred uncomfortably every time Blundell's eyebrows twitched, and the sparks flying around him were almost as strong as the Red Tower Master. Their anxiety grew as he grabbed his staff—no, the club on his back.

However, before his temper could explode...

"Good morning, Tower Master," someone entered the waiting room and spoke directly to Blundell, despite the heavy atmosphere.

"Um...?" Blundell's seemed unmoved, but his expression changed as soon as he saw the owner of the voice. His expression was one which wondered why this person had spoken to him. "Vince's disciple... Yes, aren't you Theodore?"

"Yes, that's right," Theo replied calmly.

He had experienced the presence of the Blue Tower Master once before, so he could tolerate it more easily now. In any case, Theo hadn't come here to confront the Blue Tower Master. Theo didn't lose his respectful attitude as he looked at Sylvia sitting next to Blundell. Sylvia's dream-like beauty still remained, but Theo noticed a change.

'...I don't feel like I am unable to win, unlike before. Does it mean I should try it now?'

Unlike when Theo faced the hobgoblin chief, he wasn't feeling a

strong sense of tension at this moment. There was only a cold chill on the back of his neck. It was obvious that she wasn't an easy opponent, but she wouldn't be as difficult as before.

Blundell realized the meaning of that subtle gaze and stared at Theo thoughtfully.

"Hoh, have you reached the 4th Circle? Congratulations."

"Thank you."

"You wouldn't have looked for me just to hear these words... Perhaps...?"

As Vince had said, the old man was quick to notice. Blundell laughed and moved his massive body away the moment he noticed Theo's purpose. Theo was now able to meet Sylvia, who had been hidden by Blundell.

Her eyes were emotionless, like she had already forgotten his existence. However, that didn't matter.

"Number 13, Sylvia. I challenge you to a fight in the Pupil Tournament," Theo's voice resonated throughout the somewhat silent waiting room.

Some people laughed at his reckless challenge, while others were pleased they could see a funny sight. Sylvia just stared at him blankly and parted her pink lips, "...Me?"

Instead of answering, Theo held out the tokens he had. The five tokens made a rattling sound. They were shabby compared to Sylvia's 95 tokens. However, the tournament's 1st ranked participant couldn't refuse a challenge. It was a rule to give everyone a chance to ascend to the top, making it a perfect opportunity for Theo.

Finally, Sylvia rose from her seat. "...Okay, I also wanted to reach 100 tokens."

She accepted Theo's challenge.

Kukukung...

The moment the two people agreed, the main hall of Pentarium was opened.

There was two hours left until the end of the tournament, so the match with Sylvia would be the last one. The magic tool recognized that this was the 1st ranked final's fight and opened up the main hall.

"Oh? The main hall is open!"

"Does this mean the final is starting?"

"That reminds me, the Blue Tower Master's disciple is

participating this year…”

“The time spent here is worth it.”

The people who noticed the opening of the main hall gradually began to gather in Pentarium. They all wanted to see the final match. People were interested in boisterous events, and so the crowds swept in.

They came to see the disciple of the Blue Tower Master. As all sorts of spectators were gathering, the two competitors entered the main hall.

*

‘No, why are there so many people…?’ Theo was half-stricken as he looked at the crowd behind the transparent barrier.

When he fought Philip, there had been barely anyone in the crowd. However, this was the main hall and Sylvia’s fame had increased, gathering an audience of more than 1,000 people. Theo’s stomach hurt since it was the first time he had seen something like this.

Fortunately, the voices of the audience members didn’t reach his ears.

“Theodore Miller? Have you ever heard of him?”

“No, I don’t know it.”

“I heard that he came with a magician called Vince…”

“Vince Haidel? Fire Killer Vince?!”

“But a few days ago, he was only at the 3rd Circle. It might end up being more boring that I thought.”

There were doubts and curiosities. A few rare people remembered Vince’s old nickname, but there was no one who thought that Theodore could win.

They noticed Sylvia’s abilities had already surpassed the magic tower’s Average rank and didn’t think that another genius like her would appear in the Pupil Tournament. After all, geniuses were called geniuses because they were rare.

However, Vince, sitting next to Blundell, thought differently as he looked down at his disciple.

“…This is a fight that can surely be won. Win the fight that can’t be won. Isn’t that the motto of the magic towers?”

“You remembered.”

“The Red Tower Master, she always said those words.”

Then Blundell said, “You think that he is a rival to Sylvia. That child called Theodore, will he be able to win?”

“Well, it isn’t a story that should be told with my mouth,” Vince replied, indicating that Blundell should see with his own eyes.

The match started shortly after that.

Peng~

As a ball of light rose between the two people, Theo pulled up his magic power at full speed.

He had watched Sylvia’s fights several times and noticed one thing—she deployed magic unusually fast. It took 5~10 seconds for her to activate 4th Circle magic, and 3rd Circle magic was invoked with just a word.

‘If she takes the initiative, then it will be hard to take it back. It may be unreasonable, but I have to act first!’

Even if they started their spells at the same time, Theo would be half a beat slower than Sylvia. However, Theo had a means of storing magic in advance.

‘Memorize. Two Slots Open. Double Blaze Shell.’

“Blow forward, strong winds!”

Two fireballs were created in the air, and an additional magic was used at the same time.

Among the four attributes, fire was the best at causing damage, while the wind enhanced one of its weaknesses—speed. Due to the physical repulsion, the compressed fireballs, called Blaze Shell, accelerated.

“Gale Force!”

If this was a battle, Theo would’ve used all his slots for the first attack. However, he couldn’t use all his cards in a tournament match where he had to hit the opponent three times. Therefore, this was the best combination.

The combined power of Blaze Shell and Gale Force, which had both destructive power and speed, couldn’t be stopped with any simple defense magic!

‘Go!’

With the wind blowing at its back, the fireballs rushed forward like wild beasts. As a ghastly heat filled the air, Sylvia’s silver hair caught his eyes. Sylvia moved forward with her brutish staff and scattered a blue magic power. Theo didn’t know what defensive magic it was, but it wouldn’t be able to completely block any damage.

With that conviction, the two fireballs shot forward.

Kwaaaaang!

It was a bombardment fierce enough to close the mouths of the audience members feeling doubtful about Theodore.

Chapter 34 - Tournament Finals #2

The huge explosion caused smoke and steam to fill the air. Two 4th Circle magics had been accelerated by wind, causing a deadly explosion on the battlefield. The solid stone floor of the stadium cracked apart, and dust rose up in the aftermath.

Visibility was sharply reduced in this situation, but Theodore's eyes shone a brilliant gold.

It was Hawkeye! Hawkeye, the skill he had received a few days ago after consuming 'Hawk's Skull,' naturally penetrated through the smokescreen which covered the stadium.

The moment Theo discovered Sylvia, Theo's eyes shook. It was because none of the crystals hanging from her robe were broken.

'She blocked it? The accelerated Double Blaze Shell?'

The clear ice pieces nearby were indications of Frozen Wall, a 3rd Circle defense magic. It looked like she had overlapped two or three layers of it. However, she couldn't have blocked that with a defensive ability which was lower than Earth Wall. The strength of the two materials, ice and stone, absolutely couldn't be compared.

The moment Theo thought this, he felt a chill on his skin.

"...Indeed, it is temperature!"

He couldn’t help feeling in awe as he understood how Sylvia had improved her defense. Some time ago, he had stumbled upon this concept while reading a book.

According to the study of a magician, ice was said to increase in strength as the temperature dropped. If the temperature was minus 30 degrees Celsius, the strength would be similar to human teeth. Once the temperature was below minus 40 degrees, it would be stronger than minerals like amethysts.

If Sylvia had created an ice wall at a lower temperature, then its defense would almost be comparable to that of a steel wall. The barrier had been crushed, but the ice wall had been sufficient to block Theo’s attack.

Theo realized this fact and prepared the next spell, but Sylvia was the one who moved first inside the smoke screen. Her robe flapped as she used her staff to draw a circle of magic power. Theo’s Hawkeye vision penetrated the identity of the magic circle faster than anyone else.

‘Ah, it is the first time I’ve dealt with this magic…!’

Theo broke off the spell he was casting and hurriedly retreated as it popped out of the smoke screen.

Shaaaaack~!

‘Liquid Snake!’

It was an attribute control magic which existed in the 4th Circle. The opaque body of water wriggled, and the delicate scales shone as they reflected the light from the ceiling. Clumsy magicians often produced worms, but this was like a work of art.

That power was never beautiful.

Shaaaack-!

The water snake rushed aggressively toward Theodore like a real snake. It was like a big swamp snake, but its speed was comparable to that of a wild beast. The tail of the water snake shot upwards quickly.

‘Dangerous!’

Theo sensed an early warning as a chill ran down his spine. A lump of water wasn’t that painful, but the Liquid Snake wasn’t an ordinary mass of water. The heavy water was compressed at a high density, making it hard and heavy like metal.

If he was hit once, then it had the ability to cause damage beyond the absorption capacity of the crystal.

Kwaang!

The descending tail hit the spot where Theo had just been

standing. The ground was shattered like a warrior had hit it with a hammer, and Theo's robe was punctured by the fragments. It was good that the crystals didn't recognize that as damage.

Theo hurried out of the range of the water snake.

'Faster than I thought...!'

However, it wasn't over after the water snake missed. The water snake quickly turned its head toward Theo. It was a dozen times Theo's size, but it was almost twice as fast as Theo. It wouldn't have been possible to avoid the first blow if it hadn't been for Theo's sensory perception.

He rolled across the floor and desperately avoided the successive attacks of the water snake.

Kwaang! Kwang! Kwaang! Kuwang!

The tail and body of the snake kept crushing the floor of the stadium. Every move was an attack corresponding to 3rd Circle magic. Theo changed direction repeatedly to aim at Sylvia, but the water snake continued blocking him off.

Indeed, it was appropriate to call the water snake a moving defense. Fireball and Lightning Bolt couldn't stop the momentum of the water snake. It blocked a few shots that Theo had fired already. If this continued, he would consume too much stamina and magic power. It was time to use one of his hidden cards.

‘My stored Blaze Shell doesn’t have enough power.’

The 4th Circle fire magic could offset that snake. However, that was all.

Wouldn’t it just revert the situation back to the beginning?

There was still a large difference between him and Sylvia, so the choice would just result in a one-sided loss. Then the second option was the Magic Bullet. Even the hobgoblin chief hadn’t been able to withstand it.

The index finger of Theo’s right hand stretched out quietly. He had to prepare enough power to penetrate through the water snake. Now that his magic power had reached the 4th Circle, he could shoot three or four of magic bullets. Unlike last time, there was no need to risk his life for one hit.

“...Okay, I’m going.” Theo got up and maintained his posture. The water snake was chasing after him at a terrible speed, but it wasn’t difficult to stop for a moment.

Sylvia’s water snake was persistent magic, but Mitra had been waiting for his call from the beginning!

‘Now, Mitra!’

[Hoing!] Mitra's cute voice resonated in his head as the shattered floor of the stadium suddenly soared up.

Shaaack-?!

The water snake failed to overcome its own momentum and slammed its head against a wall which had suddenly been raised. The strength of the collision shook the firmly constructed earth barrier, but it couldn't destroy it instantly. The water snake had to hit it three times to break Mitra's barrier.

Then beyond the barrier, the recreation of a previous scene appeared.

"Too late, reptile."

As a bluish glow emerged from the tip of his index finger, Theo aimed at Sylvia standing behind the water snake. Funnily enough, the opaque snake's body became an obstacle hindering her view. Her trust in the water snake's defensive ability cased her to become the prey of the Magic Bullet.

Immediately, a streak of light flew across the stadium.

Piiing!

The sound was slower than the streak of light. As the sound caught up one step late, the light had already pierced through the body of the water snake. It didn't care about the snake, which

exploded like a water balloon, and flew unceasingly to its target.

As the audience responded to the blue light, Sylvia's talent meant she immediately unfolded a shield reflexively.

"...Ah!"

However, Theo's attack wasn't something which could be stopped with a basic shield. The Magic Bullet ruthlessly pierced through the surface of Sylvia's robe and hit her stomach. She took a step back from the shock of a power which couldn't be stopped by the Liquid Snake and Shield, and a crystal hanging from her robe broke with a loud sound.

Pakang!

It was a shocking start. While everyone in the stadium went into shock, Sylvia's bangs covered her face. It was impossible for the spectators to guess what expression she carried. How would she respond to this?

Would she have tightly clenched fists and an angry face? Perhaps she would be startled? Maybe there would be tears from the unexpected pain?

Or—

At that moment...

“Huooh...?!”

His teeth started clattering together. Goose bumps appeared on his skin, and his body shook from the cold. It was an extreme feeling, but it wasn’t caused by fear. The pure cold was cooling down Theo’s whole body. The sensation of his muscles contracting as he moved in this cold made him shudder.

Theo looked up reflexively at the ceiling, and his expression hardened. A huge number of ice arrows were pointing at the ground.

‘No, isn’t there at least 100 of them?’

How could Sylvia produce such a number? As Theo pulled up his magic power while being bewildered by the huge number, the arrows started to pour down. If they had a strength proportional to this cold, they would have the same power as a steel arrow. Any accidental scratch would be enough damage to break a crystal.

Above all, there were too many to avoid all of them.

“Burning Hands!”

As soon as Theo’s spell was completed, three pairs of hands made of fire appeared in the air. The hands heated up the air. He learned from Vince that it was better to get get rid of a magic like Ice Arrow, rather than letting it skim past his body.

Chiiiik!

The 100 ice arrows and fire palms danced together. The steam caused by the evaporated arrows rose up from the ground. If it hadn't been for 'West Wind's Protection,' he would've been hit. Still, Theo's efforts weren't in vain as he managed to get rid of the arrows without a single bit of damage.

'This steam...'

Theo got rid of Burning Hands and tried to penetrate the steam when...

Hwaaak!

A girl with silver hair suddenly ran through the steam which had spread like fog.

"Eh?!" Theo's eyes widened when he saw that Sylvia had suddenly come toward him.

The distance which of almost 50 meters between them had narrowed in a matter of seconds. It wasn't the 5th Circle magic Blink, yet Haste was too slow compared to this speed. The secret to her rapid movements was the ground at her feet.

'Ice?'

She slid along an ice road created by ice magic. It was a technique which was contained in Alfred's memories. The ice road was a feat impossible without an exquisite control over the centre of gravity in the body and the frictional force.

Nevertheless, the technique was possible due to Sylvia's exceptional genius. However, Theo didn't have any more time to think.

Huoong!

The staff which contained magic power appeared right in front of Theo's nose.

"Kuk!"

He would've been hit if it wasn't for the warning of his sensory perception. If he had been hit without the damage absorbing crystal, his face would be squashed like a tomato. Theo had just barely managed to avoid the first attack, but the staff was notorious for its length.

Huoong! Hung! Huoong!

Sylvia's staff was wielded in succession. It grew increasingly closer to Theo's body and was now at a distance where it rubbed against his clothes.

‘Damn, I’m reaching the limit…!’

Theodore had never learned proper hand-to-hand combat, so he couldn’t escape from the professional techniques. He had only managed to avoid having all three crystals broken due to his sensory perception.

It was urgent for Theo to widen the distance. As soon as he made the decision, he jumped to the rear.

Ppak!

At almost the same time, the staff moved and hit his crossed arms. His crystal broke half a beat later.

Pakang!

With this, the two of them had returned to a tied score of 1:1.

“Ugh, that hurts…”

Most of the damage had been absorbed, but his bones were still throbbing. He probably had a bruise now. However, Theo used the shock while jumping and was able to widen the distance to almost 15 meters.

He wouldn’t allow her to get closer like before. Theo understood that he shouldn’t get close to Sylvia, so he paid close attention to

her. If he took his eyes off her for even a moment, the same situation would repeat.

For that reason, Theo glimpsed something unexpected as he used Hawkeye.

‘Smiling?’

Sylvia’s emotionless face which seemed to be carved out of ice… Her marble-white face was smiling like a child would.

Chapter 35 - Tournament Finals #3

As the exchange between Theo and Sylvia entered a lull, the unknowingly closed mouths of the audience members finally opened. In the beginning, it was just heavy breathing, but it soon changed to cheers.

The Pupil Tournament had simply been treated as a children's festival, but the competition ended up being at this level!

The mouths of the audience members at the stadium began to move busily. Some of them gave a good evaluation to Theo, who had opened with a heated attack. His explosive power had grabbed the spirits of all the spectators in the stadium.

"That child on the left, did you say his name is Theodore? That first attack was really good. If it was another participant instead of Sylvia, he might've taken two points."

"Blaze Shell and Gale Force... It is a basic teaching in the Red Tower. The skill proficiency of Vince's disciple isn't bad."

"If his achievements accumulate, then he can reach the Average rank."

However, Sylvia's moves also caused a few people to talk.

"Hrmm, but I would put the Liquid Snake at a higher level. Some of the Blue Tower Magicians wouldn't be able to control it with

such skill.”

“As expected from Blundell’s apprentice. Distracting the opponent’s eyes with ice arrows and then sliding along the ice sheet for high-speed movement, followed by a blow with the staff in close combat. It is Blundell’s famous hand combat style.”

“I think that using fighting techniques in a magic contest is a bit… but her opponent did lose a point to it.”

A person who didn’t know real magic might say something like this.

-No matter how magical a person is, isn’t it strange to treat a weapon hit as valid?

Then every war magician would give the same answer.

–That’s right, if you are someone who wants to be hit. Either way, there is nothing strange about it.

It might seem quite ignorant, but it was true.

Magicians basically had to keep an eye on the distance from their opponent in a battle.

How much space did they have to cast and what magic could be prepared? The magicians had to take into account the opponent’s

movement speed and the range in which they would be a risk. Such precious calculations were the basis of all magic before the spells were cast.

Magicians knew better than anyone else that they were vulnerable in close combat. Therefore, they would prepare a few spells or tactics to prepare for enemies who were nearby.

If they were hit by a close combat attack, then the inexperience of the magician or the skill of the opponent was to blame. However, it wasn't just a matter of questioning the magician's experience or skill.

Blundell had a rare expression of surprise on his face as he looked at the interesting match.

"...I remember that magic."

Blundell Adruncus, the Blue Tower Master, was over 130 years old this year.

The days with the war hero, Alfred Bellontes, had just been part of his youth. In fact, Blundell had fought in the war against the Bellontes Principality. The feeling of the chill which shot down his spine as the blue flash emerged from the finger was still vivid.

Blundell hadn't died at the time, but his wound throbbed every time it rained like that time.

Clack!

With a flick of Blundell's fingers, Vince and the surrounding area were covered with a sound barrier. It was a magic curtain which combined air and water to block the transmission of sound. Blundell, who took care not to let the conversation between the two of them leak, looked at where Vince was sitting.

"Alfred's Magic Missile, did you reproduce it?"

"No. It is that kid's talent."

"...Um, 'Fire Killer Vince' truly has great eyes at recognizing talent."

The fact that a sound barrier had been activated meant Blundell didn't want the words to spread. Above all, he didn't have a need to exploit a mere child. Vince answered Blundell's questions honestly, quickly distinguishing between the information to hide and the information to reveal.

Blundell knocked on his wallet and muttered in a loud voice, "Indeed, I accept your bet. If he has that much skill, then there is a chance he could win."

Theodore's victory or Sylvia's victory...

The betting odds over who would win increased significantly thanks to these two magicians. In addition to Vince's 100 gold and

Blundell's 300 gold, the total was close to 1,000 gold.

For the most part, the bets were placed on Sylvia's victory. However, some people chose to bet on Theodore in the hope of getting a big jackpot. If they won, they would get back almost six times the amount they bet.

However, Blundell wasn't focused on the stakes.

"...Too much talent makes people lonely."

"Huh?"

"Sylvia, that kid isn't good at making friends. She was clearly different, so the other children ignored her."

His words weren't a commentary but a complaint. Blundell, who was her only family and teacher, couldn't solve her loneliness. Despite being 17, his disciple had lost all traces of being a child.

Perhaps the Blue Tower's youngest talent had been blocked from reaching the 5th Circle due to this 'psychological wall.' However, the wall was now collapsing in several places.

'How is it? Is it fun playing with a friend?'

Was it because he had raised her as his daughter? His words might sound stupid, but they weren't completely wrong. Her

smiling face which she had never shown to him…

Looking down at Sylvia who was smiling brightly, Blundell couldn't help smiling as well.

"Yes, try to play as much as possible."

…Until she got all the joy that she had forgotten in the past.

*

Regardless of the situation in the audience seats, the match between the two got hotter after both had lost one point.

Dozens of fire arrows flew through the air. It was a continuous magic which would burn the enemy it hit. Similarly, there were ice arrows which emitted a cold chill. As the bluish lightning struck, the translucent shield of water scattered electric currents everywhere.

Sylvia's magic didn't miss the moment the ground became wet.

"Icicle Grow."

"Earth Wave!"

Icicles sprang from the ground and a wave of earth covered it.

The weak weight of the icicles were suppressed by the weight of the soil, and they were soon buried. However, the girl with silver hair made an ice road on the ground again.

'I'm sorry, but I've already seen that pattern!' The speed was obviously scary, but once Theo knew the direction, it wasn't hard to cope with.

He followed Sylvia's orbit with his index finger. Reversing the opponent's offensive was also a tactic. The Magic Bullet could break through any trick. Magic Bullet was launched from his finger.

Piiing!

The flash of light flew through the air faster than an arrow, piercing the side of Sylvia's robe. Sylvia grinned as she spoke, "... That, you showed me earlier."

Theodore wasn't the only one who had grasped the opponent's skill.

The Magic Bullet's weakness: avoidance was possible in a narrow area. As a result of specializing in penetration power and lethality, the small coin size was easy to avoid. The direct injection method also influenced the way it worked.

The original user, Alfred, had covered that weakness with tremendous speed, but Theodore's Magic Bullet was still lacking.

Sylvia used Haste and outstanding reflexes to barely avoid it. This meant she expected it to come out.

Huoong!

Sylvia's staff hit Theo only for him to scatter like smoke.

"Eh?"

It was Illusion Track! This was the skill Theo had obtained from 'Night Prowler's Mirage.' Night Prowler's Mirage produced a lifelike illusion of the user. The precision was as great as its reputation, fooling Sylvia easily.

Theo didn't miss that gap and created a pit.

Kururung!

Sylvia hadn't regained her balance and fell down as three stone spears protruded. As a precautionary measure, Theo had prepared the pit and Ground Spear trap in case of a frontal attack. The fact that she managed avoid two of the spears was praiseworthy. However, she couldn't avoid the spear which rose up in her blind spot.

Pakang!

In the end, the spear stuck in her back and shattered the second

crystal. Theo was one point ahead, but he wasn't careless and retreated a few steps.

It was because she was likely to counterattack. This time, the traps worked well, but it was unlikely that Sylvia would fall for it again. Unsurprisingly, she ran out of the pit wildly.

'She's coming. Don't turn your eyes away from her. Sylvia's first movement will be—'

Previously, she had used the ice arrows and steam to create a smoke screen. He had taken his eyes off her for a moment, and she had borrowed the speed of the ice road. If Theo kept a close eye on her, then he would be able to cope with whatever Sylvia did. Theo's eyes became gold due to Hawkeye, and he concentrated in front of him.

At that moment, Sylvia suddenly stopped moving.

Puk!

"Keuk...?"

An icicle jumped out from behind, suddenly piercing Theo's back. It was at the exact same spot which Sylvia had been struck just before. She used a surprise attack from the rear as well! One of the crystals hanging from Theodore's robe broke.

However, there was something else which was painful.

‘This girl, has she been watching my skills and tactics…?’

Even though Sylvia was one step ahead when it came to magic deployment, Theo was ahead of other in this area. She lacked experience as a war magician, so she was lacking when it came to useful applications of magic and proper timing. It was how he stayed a few steps ahead of her despite her genius.

However, she was absorbing even that at a terrifying speed.

“Hoo, troublesome.”

This was the first time he had encountered someone with an equal learning ability among his peers.

*

On the contrary, the girl was pleased.

‘This person doesn’t hate me. He isn’t afraid. Furthermore, he is continuously surprising me with magic.’

It was the first time Sylvia had encountered such a thing. The boy in front of her contained no feelings of jealousy or disgust. He was a peer who could unexpectedly compete at the same level as her.

‘So much fun!’

The clear smile she had lost during childhood appeared on Sylvia’s face.

Since childhood, there had been no child who approached her. Her rare silver hair and beautiful appearance had incited jealousy in the hearts of the other girls in her village. Additionally, even though Sylvia wasn’t of noble birth, her natural genius in magic had created a vague situation where her status had been unclear. If it hadn’t been for Blundell stopping by her village by chance, her talent might’ve been buried before it had the chance to blossom.

–Why is she speaking so incomprehensibly?

–Isn’t she just trying to show off?

–Tell me if you don’t want to teach me. Don’t lie.

–You are innately different from us. You are a genius. How about finding a genius like you and playing with them instead?

Someone had been jealous…

Someone else had hated her…

Someone had misunderstood her…

And someone else had turned away from her.

Thus, Sylvia closed off her mind before she got hurt. She gave up on trying to approach others and forgot to extend her hand first.

Blundell and the other elders of the Blue Tower took care of her, but they couldn't take the place of a friend. Their age limited them to being parents. Therefore, the wall in her mind which she had built up since childhood became a 'real wall' which interfered with her reaching the 5th Circle.

Had it already been a few years since she'd stopped in place?

–Hoo, troublesome.

Theo reached out to her from beyond the collapsed wall.

Chapter 36 - Tournament Finals #4

‘I want to win against this person! I want to be friends with this person!’

For the first time in her life, feelings of enthusiasm, interest, and appreciation filled her. How long had it been since she felt such intense feelings?

The moment her emotions exploded, Sylvia’s stagnant circles started to rotate. The door of the cage which had been locked until now started to open slowly.

Wuoooooong!

A wave of magic power shook the entire stadium! Sylvia’s magic power sprang up as the ‘wall’ was destroyed, creating a rough wind. It was still too early to call it the 5th Circle, but it was beyond the standards of the 4th Circle.

“I want to win!” The words she was thinking popped out unconsciously from her mouth. Whether it was due to the boiling magic power or her red cheeks, Sylvia seemed quite different from usual.

Theodore paused at her bold declaration before laughing. “Yes, I also want to win.”

He had always been chasing someone’s back.

Back when he was a child, it had been the magicians he read about in the storybooks. After entering the academy, it had been his seniors. After repeating a year, it had been the classmates who graduated first. When he had gotten tired of chasing countless backs, the wings hanging on his back filled with new strength.

So, from now on…

“This is the last one.”

Theo’s constant chasing of someone else’s back would end here. At the same time, Theo used Gluttony’s abilities of [Magic Power Amplification] and [Attributes Affinity]. The circles started to revolve slowly, and the magic power in his blood vessels rose. He still had one trump card remaining.

Both Theo and Sylvia were convinced of their victory as the two magicians raised all their remaining strength.

Woong, woong, woong, woong!

The flow of strong magic power emerged from the two people, colliding and spreading in every direction.

The magnitude of the magic power shaking the stadium was already beyond the level of a student’s magic. Some magicians became nervous and forgot about the presence of the barrier protecting the audience.

First, Sylvia was surrounded by blue magic power and floated in the air.

‘Levitation. Is she concerned about a surprise attack from underground? It isn’t a bad decision.’

2nd Circle magic, Levitation… There was nothing special about it; it was just magic that allowed someone to float in the air. However, it was useful when enemies attacked from underground or when facing ranged attacks.

Against a magician like Theodore who was good with earth magic, it was a decent countermeasure. However, as Theo possessed the mysterious Magic Bullet, Levitation was just an ordinary magic which gave him a still target in the air.

Sylvia, who had encountered Magic Bullet directly, couldn’t not know this fact. So, it was natural to think that she had set up a countermeasure. Theo looked up at her with a strong determination. As expected from the genius, Sylvia pulled out a magic spell.

“…Ice Shield?” Theo murmured.

It was a bit large to call it a shield, and it wasn’t transparent enough to see inside the ice. Maybe it was the shield she’d used to block the Double Blaze Shells in the first attack. Six shields surrounded Sylvia, causing the space she was floating in to be blocked from Theo’s view. It was a carefully thought out

countermeasure.

‘There is no way to penetrate that shield with a clumsy Magic Bullet, and I can’t see her, so I can’t aim precisely. If the hit misses and I receive the counterattack, that will be the end.’

Should he bet on Magic Bullet and gamble, or do a frontal confrontation? Sylvia was likely asking such questions as well. She also had magic which she could use in a frontal confrontation. The one who could reverse the other person’s card would win.

Could she break the magic that Theodore envisioned? It wasn’t an exaggeration to say the results would depend on this move.

“Okay, I’ll do it.” Theo accepted her challenge.

He would use the strongest magic possible and the affinity he was best it. Both of them had great strengths in attack and defense. The power of the the two hidden cards was something which wasn’t inferior to ice magic.

There were two Blaze Shells remaining in the Memorize slots, plus he could store additional spells.

“Giant of the earth, I command you to throw the stones…”

It was the chant for the 4th Circle magic, Catapult. After finishing the chant which lasted almost five measures, he gathered the magic power and pushed it into a Memorize slot. Catapult was

stored in Slot 3, and another Catapult was stored in Slot 4.

With this, his preparations were finished.

‘Sorry to trouble you.’

[Hoooung…]

Theo communicated with the exhausted Mitra and waited for the ice shield around his head to clear up.

It was ridiculous to consume attack power when the barrier would disappear anyway. Based on the magic power coming from the barrier, he could tell that his opponent’s preparations were almost over.

“Amazing.”

Ice started to form on the floor of the stadium, which was a mess due to all the attacks. This was a phenomenon which could be seen in ice magic above the 5th Circle.

Humans caught in the chill would freeze in an instant and die. Even though the destructive power of water magic was lower than fire magic, there was a reason why nobody had said that it wasn’t destructive.

However, Theo didn’t back down and faced the cold. As the edges

of his robe started to freeze, the ice shield melted. Beyond that was Sylvia who emerged belatedly. Theo felt a terrible chill the moment she appeared.

"Master of the cold, Ymir. Show your strength to those who dare to ask for it...!"

It was originally the chant for the 7th Circle magic which turned the ground into a lump of ice. However, Sylvia simplified the magic formula and improved it so that she could use it now. Of course, it didn't have the strength of the original, but it was far beyond a normal 4th Circle magic!

'Minor Force. Blizzard...'

A murderous blizzard started swirling on the ground.

'Let's go, Mitra!'

Theodore also fired the spells he had prepared.

'Memorize. All Slots Open. Double Blaze Shell. Double Catapult.'

Four 4th Circle magic spells were triggered, but it was still lacking to go against the Blizzard. Two fireballs and two stones couldn't resist that.

As Sylvia called the fearsome Blizzard, the skin exposed by his

robe started freezing. He needed to act before the damage absorbed would cause the crystal to break.

“Fusion Magic.” It was a spell which overlapped the two images of fireballs and stones.

Then Theo imagined the greatest disaster on Earth. The entire human race was fearful every time it burst out, and they believed it was the wrath of God. As magma started emerging from deep below the ground, a volcano emerged. In the process, lumps of stones covered in lava fell like meteorites.

Then the so-called volcanic ash, in other words...

“Volcanic Shell-!”

It was persistent and rough. The power of the spell which combined the strongest attack with the strongest defense wasn’t comparable to when they were separate.

This wasn’t simply a stone covered in fire. The firepower of Blaze Shell was nestled in the massive rock. It didn’t reach the pressure of an actual volcanic eruption, but the destructive power was similar.

Kuooooh!

Indeed, the two Volcanic Shells rushed from in front of Theo to the center of the Blizzard.

The blizzard was just a breeze before that overwhelming destruction. In the end, Blizzard's magic power greeted the Volcanic Shells. Immediately afterwards, the two magic nuclei clashed together.

————————————————!

The mouths of the spectators dropped open. "Kuah...!"

Black smoke, water vapour, and all types of natural phenomenon appeared. Theo was barely able to withstand the shock wave by triggering a blessing. All his magic power was consumed, and his body wobbled as he held onto the last remaining crystal.

'My limit... This fight... isn't over...'

If Sylvia walked out okay, then it was over. Theo was physically and mentally tired, but the anxiety of the situation caused his mind to shake. Theodore couldn't use Hawkeye anymore, so he had to wait until the dust sank down gradually.

'Damn.'

Beyond his blurry vision, Sylvia was walking over.

"...You, what is your name?"

Sylvia admitted she didn't know his name, but Theo couldn't help smiling. He was able to reply somehow through dry lips, "Theodore Miller."

"Can I call you Theo?"

'Do whatever you want.' It sounded like nonsense right now.

"Then Theo, next time, let's play again…"

The sound of someone falling over and a crystal breaking entered his ears. It was a very light sound and seemed like it was coming from a distance away…

"…Huh?"

Theo looked down at the crystal in his palm with a bewildered expression. The crystal didn't have a single crack in it, let alone for it to be broken. Then what was the sound he'd heard just now? The sound was so vivid that he almost dismissed it as a hallucination.

Theo couldn't help lifting his gaze and looked at the girl with silver hair on the ground. Sylvia had collapsed. Then who was standing?

–Right now! The winner of the Pupil Tournament has been decided!

The yells of the host echoed through the stadium and into Theo's ears.

–The winner of this tournament is Participant Number 132, the disciple of the Red Magic Tower's Superior ranked Vince Haidel! Theodore Miller!

"Wahhhhh!" The audience cheered and clapped.

It wasn't just magicians but normal people who clapped their hands together, unable to control their excitement.

This was because both the boy and the girl were so impressive. A battle between fire and ice... The two dynamically moving battle forces were fiercely reminiscent of being on a battlefield.

What about that last clash? It was unclear if even Average ranked magicians could do such things.

As the two mentors looked at each other with satisfied expressions, the two disciples collapsed on the ground in a similar manner. Unlike the spectacular match, it was a comical finish.

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"She was a formidable opponent," Vince said as he wrapped a bandage around Theo's swollen forearm.

A healing potion was applied to the wound, but it would still throb for three or four more days. Theo nodded as he touched the bandages. “Yes, she was tremendous. Perhaps that is a genius.”

In fact, Theo couldn’t imitate his opponent even if he could grasp what they were doing. It was different from magic he already knew. Rational understanding was different from understanding with his senses.

However, Sylvia had displayed both of these in the match. Furthermore, her rational learning ability wasn’t inferior to Theo’s. He’d gone through an intensive training course in the last two or three months and had barely won the match.

Above all, it was because Theo’s body was too soft to display all of Alfred’s experience.

‘I still have a long way to go…’

No matter how fraudulent the grimoire was, Theo needed to focus on his growth. Theo’s eyes sunk as he became aware of this fact. Memorize was a useful feature, but it shouldn’t be relied upon. He needed to accelerate the training of Magic Bullet even further.

Vince interpreted Theodore’s sunken expression and tapped on his shoulder. “Well, how about you admire your victory instead of her genius today?”

“Even if you say so… I still can’t believe it.”

“It is all about winning. Now, can you get up?”

Theo wanted to fall asleep, but he raised his body forcefully. The awards ceremony would be held shortly after the Pupil Tournament ended. It was a meaningful event he couldn’t miss, even if he had a severe injury.

His right forearm was a bit sore, but fortunately, it didn’t stop him from moving. Vince handed him a robe and asked, “You haven’t worn a robe before, right? I will help you.”

“Ah, thank you.”

“First of all, put your arm here…”

Vince guided Theo on how to wear the robe, transforming Theo into a wealthy nobleman. The robe was made of a luxurious black fabric, and Theo looked impressive in it, like both a magician and a noble.

“Hrmm, now you look like a gentleman.”

“Something feels a bit awkward…”

“It can’t be helped since the robe isn’t tailored to you. Just wear

it until the end of the awards ceremony. You are allowed to participate wearing your original clothes.”

“Eh? Then why did you borrow this robe?”

Vince tapped his red robe several times and explained, “I heard that His Majesty is appearing at the awards ceremony. So, isn’t this the basics?”

Chapter 37 - Awards Ceremony

Among the events at the Meltor Kingdom's magic contest, the Pupil Tournament wasn't such a great one.

Magicians who participated in the contest sent out their disciples for the Pupil Tournament. Speaking bluntly, it could be called a child's playful banquet. This year was a bit unusual, but it wasn't a competition which high ranking magicians or nobles would attend.

However, that awareness was turned upside down due to just one person—the King of the Meltor Kingdom, Kurt III.

"W-What? His Majesty himself?!"

"Doesn't he usually stay at the palace?"

"If this happens, my face needs to be like jade... I can't look ugly in front of royalty."

"Attendant! Prepare my dress!"

"Where is the Pentarium?"

The nobles of Meltor were in an uproar after they heard the sudden news.

Even though Kurt III had risen to the throne under the halo of the Magic Towers, he held all the military and administrative powers. So, the officials didn't dare oppose him, especially after some of the noblemen, who had tried to act for their own interests, had been beheaded.

'Now is the time to bow my head.'

'I don't want my head to fly away...!'

'It is best to wait for the next generation.'

If they couldn't win, it was best to become close to the king. They had to bow their heads in order to live for a long time in a society like this. In the end, the nobles gave up on fighting against Kurt III and tried to look good to him. Funnily enough, the actions of the nobles strengthened the king's power.

However, Kurt III concentrated on governing while pretending to listen to their flattery. All the gifts were sent to the treasury to maintain the budget while the young women filled with greed were sent back to their families. Kurt III was the example of a perfect ruler, with no flaws at all.

So, why had the perfect ruler suddenly decide to hand out the prizes for the Pupil Tournament?

Anyone with a brain would think there was something special about the awards ceremony. That's why so many nobles had

gathered in the main hall of Pentarium, where the final match of the Pupil Tournament had been held. When the magicians heard that the disciple of the Blue Tower Master was involved, the scale of the ceremony grew to a bizarre level.

It was natural that the face of the young man, Theodore, was pale, since he was the center of the ceremony.

“Professor, isn’t the audience in the stands really strange?”

“Hrmm... I can see that. The bureaucrats of several departments have come flocking. Huh, this place has become a spectacle. The three most powerful families of the kingdom have gathered.”

“Uhh, why is this situation...”

It was an event involving the king, but the big shots had gathered in only a few hours!

Theo had never even met an earl, so he couldn’t help feeling alarmed. His skin was already prickling from having multiple gazes on his face, so it was more torturous at the thought of all these high-ranking people watching him.

Theo thought up to there and suddenly looked towards the right.

“!!!”

Sylvia was looking at him. She didn't know what to do for a moment. Looking embarrassed, she then waved her hand stiffly. He almost smiled at her awkward movements but nodded without doing so.

Sylvia was relieved by his actions and smiled brightly. She seemed more concerned about Theo's reaction than that of the people in the stands.

'Indeed, there is no need to be nervous until I come out.' Theodore's tension was released thanks to Sylvia.

Theo looked more relaxed than before as he waited for the king with Vince. He recited the basic etiquette in his head and prepared himself to be ready for whatever happened.

Before long, the king emerged from behind the curtain.

"Presenting His Majesty!"

As they heard the booming voice of the servant, the people gathered lowered their bodies simultaneously. The movements of the bodies were similar, but the difference in the bows showed each person's status.

Commoners lay flat on the floor, while nobles bowed at a 90 degree angle.

Magicians, however, knelt down on one knee. Their right hands,

placed by their hearts, indicated the circles and, in other words, the magic system. One knee against the ground was to show loyalty, while the standing leg was meant to honour the magic, not the king. If this were the Empire, they would be punished for disloyalty. However, that was not the case here.

This was Meltor, a kingdom where magicians were the cornerstone. It was a unique etiquette that could only be seen here. As everyone remained silent, a man's voice rang out, "Everyone present, raise your heads."

It was indeed the voice of the king. There was power in his voice. In the past, magicians had stated that the power of words were a lie. They thought that the shorter the chant, the stronger the spell would be.

It was currently treated as an old saying, but Theo could now understand it. The people were guided by Kurt III's words and raised their heads unconsciously. Their minds were overwhelmed by the king's dignity, and they raised their heads before they could think about it.

Similarly, Theo raised his head and saw the king for the first time in his life.

The king had golden hair and purple eyes which shone mysteriously. His appearance and atmosphere meant one could see at a glance that he had a noble lineage as well as the elegance of a king. He gave off such an intangible presence that Theo was convinced everyone would recognize the king even if he wore rags.

‘This person is the king, Kurt III…!’

As Theo felt unfamiliar feelings, Kurt opened his mouth again, “It has been a while, Tower Master Blundell. Three months, perhaps?” It was a very familiar tone.

The tower masters were basically treated as the most distinguished people, with no one else having a higher status than them as they accounted for more than 70% of the national power. So, it wasn’t unreasonable for the king to treat Blundell like this.

“Hahaha! It feels like it was the day before yesterday for this old man, Your Majesty.”

“If you hadn’t missed the meeting without any notice, it really would’ve been the day before yesterday.”

“C-Cough!” The smiling Blundell immediately became silent at the sharp criticism. He now looked like a child who was being scolded.

Kurt III looked at Blundell’s awkward expression and changed the topic while smiling. “Did you take a vacation to look after your disciple? This king came here because I wanted to see her.”

“Ah, right. I will definitely show her to you.”

“So, you kept her a secret for 10 years?”

“Cough!”

It seemed like Blundell received damage every time he opened his mouth. As Blundell fell silent, Kurt looked down at the two people before him. One was the disciple of the Blue Tower Master, and the other was the one who had knocked her down.

These children would support Meltor in the future.

“Then I will proceed with the awards ceremony.”

He hated pretentious things, so he started the awards ceremony without any congratulatory remarks.

According to instruction, the person in charge of the Pupil Tournament came forward. He called the identification number and then announced the names of the mentors and the amount of prize money given to the participants.

In the end, there were only two names left, leaving only two children in the center of the stadium. Kurt made the host step back and picked up a handmade plaque.

“Sylvia, Blundell Adruncus’s disciple, come forward.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Sylvia moved forward at the call and bowed

slightly.

Even though she was told to rise, it was blasphemy to look directly at the king's face. Kurt accepted the bow and spoke while handing her the plaque, "As the runner up of the Pupil Tournament, I will give Sylvia 'Jack Frost's Staff' and the title of a baron."

"Sylvia, disciple of the Magic Tower, thanks Your Majesty."

"Yes, I look forward to your future growth."

It was an exceptional reward, but no one objected to Kurt's declaration. Once beyond the wall of the 5th Circle, the title of baroness had no great significance to Sylvia. Moreover, she could gain gold and artifacts from Blundell.

Then Kurt called out Theodore's name next, "Theodore Miller, Vince Haidel's disciple, come forward."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Theo barely managed to reply in a calm voice as he rose from his spot.

"As winner of the Pupil Tournament, I will give Theodore 200 gold, the 'Protection Bangle,' and the title of a baron."

"Theodore, Bergen's student, thanks Your Maje—"

“Additionally…”

Theo shut his mouth hurriedly when he was interrupted by Kurt. After receiving 200 gold, an artifact, and a title, Theo hadn’t expected that there would be anything else.

“After he succeeds the title of Baron Miller, Theodore Miller will receive the title of a viscount.”

‘Viscount promotion!’

Theo’s eyes shook at the shocking declaration, but his mouth was a step ahead of his brain.

“Thank you, Your Majesty!”As Theo lowered his head, chatter quickly spread through the stands.

A promotion… it was an honour that wasn’t possible unless many merits were accumulated. Yet it was given to the winner of a small contest? It was an unprecedented situation, so some of the nobles couldn’t hide their confusion.

Regardless of whether people understood it or not, Kurt looked at Theodore and Sylvia with warm eyes and finished the awards ceremony.

“This Meltor Kingdom of ours is surrounded by the Harkan Mountain Ranges in the north-east and by the Andras Empire in the north-west. In order to defend our homeland from the savage

imperialists who desire war, we need to raise people like these two young magicians. The Magic Society should spread today's events and don't slack off... Understood?"

The people gathered in the stadium replied simultaneously to their ruler:

"Yes, Your Majesty! As you command!"

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Finally, Kurt III left Pentarium.

Afterwards, the nobles swarmed around him like a tide, and the most magnificent event in Theodore's history came to a close.

Theo and Vince finally went to the restaurant they hadn't been able to go on the first day. They then returned to their accommodations shortly after the sun set, and Theo lay on the bed while holding his belly. He usually preferred to eat less, but his mouth hadn't listened at the restaurant in the capital.

Vince laughed at him before saying, "I don't need to hear you speak to know that the meal was satisfactory. Isn't that so?"

"...It is exactly like you said."

The two people looked at each other and laughed lightly. It had

been a great day.

There was no better way to enjoy his victory. Vince even took out a few bottles of expensive wine, but they didn't get drunk. It was because both of them were magicians.

Not long after, the moment they had been waiting for came.

Keeok.

A red tongue crawled out from a hole in Theo's palm. It was the grimoire which ate magic books. Gluttony had woken up.

–Hungry. Bring meal.

Gluttony swallowed books and absorbed their knowledge. After satisfying its hunger, it would take the time to answer one of its owner's questions.

The two people had been waiting for this time. Theodore and Vince's contract... The moment for the first question and answer had begun.

Chapter 38 - Question And Answer #1

Due to Gluttony's hungry status, Theo first picked out two books. As soon as he put the books on the bedspread and aimed his left hand in that direction, the hungry tongue quickly swallowed the two books.

> ['Power of Sand and Wind' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]
>
> [4th Circle magic 'Sandstorm' has been learned.]
>
> ['Surviving in Cold Weather' has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]
>
> [3rd Circle magic 'Resist Cold' has been learned.]

The books Gluttony had ate today were on the magics, Sandstorm, which was required in a desert, and Resist Cold, which was needed in a cold area. Gluttony fed on two books and quickly sent their knowledge to Theodore.

"Huuuu..."

The sensation of two magic spells entering Theo's brain was still strange. Above all, 4th Circle magic contained quite a lot of information. Theo took a deep breath to calm the aftermath, then

he opened his eyes.

At the same time, Gluttony started speaking,

-Two books, it seems like you have a question to ask today.

‘Why is there a sense of discomfort?’ Theodore wondered before realizing that Gluttony’s tone had changed.

The speech, which used to be cut off, now sounded like a normal person. Wondering why the change had happened, Theo asked, “You… Hasn’t your way of talking changed?”

–Hrmm?

“Before… you would break off from what you were saying.”

Gluttony snorted and responded,

–It is because you have fed me a large number of artifacts recently. It isn’t enough to unseal the next stage, but it did recover my voice.

“…There was such a function.”

–It is just retrieving my original function. Or did you think I normally spoke like that?

Now that it had recovered its voice, Gluttony talked with more pride than before. Feeding it books would cause it to grow faster, while it almost vomited when Theo fed it cheap artifacts. If he continued listening, this might continue for days, so Theo interrupted Gluttony. “Wait, I’d like to ask you one more thing.”

Gluttony stopped talking and then asked,

–Aren’t you slow?

“Huh?”

–I answered your question already. Isn’t the question regarding why my way of talking changed?

Theo’s expression grew distorted. It would only be a one-day wait, but anyone would be frustrated at wasting all that preparation time. However, that frustration soon changed to irritation.

–It is a joke.

“…What?

–Don’t you know? Jokes are words meant to cause amusements…

“No, I know what a joke is!”

To think that Gluttony was someone who could play around like this... The grimoire really was a strange creature. The main story hadn't even started, but Theo was already exhausted. He sighed a few times before opening his mouth to speak again. Fortunately, the previous question hadn't counted as a question for an answer.

"Can I transfer my right to ask a question to others?"

Gluttony made an interested noise.

–Hoh, how interesting.

Was Theo imagining it? An 'eye' seemed to appear at the hole the tongue emerged from. It looked at Vince standing beside Theodore and understood the meaning of the question. Even if it said no, Theo was ready to ask the question which Vince had prepared.

Unsurprisingly, Gluttony readily replied,

–It doesn't really matter. You are the first person to do such a transaction, but there isn't a problem with the action itself.

"...Go ahead, Professor."

"Thank you for your concern."

Theo stepped back, while Vince moved forward. Vince was

slightly different than usual due to his excitement at communicating with the greedy book. It was the feeling of a magician finally reaching an answer after running down a long, unknown road.

Vince asked in a trembling voice, “Can I call you, ‘Gluttony’?”

–Any title is good. Do I seem like I care about such trivial things?

“I see. Then let me ask you a question.” He took a deep breath and after several tries, finally asked the question that he had decided, “I want you to teach me about the relationship between language and magic.”

***

In the far distant past, magic had existed before humans even gave a name for it.

Elves who had lived for thousands of years, dragons who had lived for tens of thousands of years, demons tied to a false eternity, and countless other species all used magic power under different names.

Additionally, the magic system was different for each species.

Elves danced with the elementals, while dwarves hit metal using fire and earth. Demons mocked the laws using strange rituals, and dragons made the world struggle with just a few powerful words.

Humans were the only ones born without any power. They stole the song of the elves, tapped iron like the dwarves, and sometimes mimicked the rituals of demons.

The first millennium was meaningless. However, the next millennium saw a bit of light. Then in the next millennium, the concept of circles was finally completed. For the first time since the beginning of the world, ‘magicians’ were born into the human species.

Several thousand years had passed by since then, and the grimoire, which had existed since before the foundation of this world, replied to the question of the human magician.

-The question is too comprehensive. To completely explain the relationship between language and magic, there isn’t enough time in your life.

“What if it is limited to the human language?”

–It is the same. There are 526 minority languages, so the amount of information exceeds the limit allowed for one question.

“Hrmm.” It was a difficult situation, so Vince touched his chin while thinking.

In the magic towers where the magicians of the continent gathered, there were few who studied archaeology. Hundreds of

thousands of monuments had been destroyed in the past two centuries due to wars, so many previous records had been lost.

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that there was no way to explore the forgotten ancient languages except through something like a grimoire. Vince struggled for awhile before opening his mouth, "Then please tell me why the words of the ancient languages and modern language cause different magic effects."

He gave up his greed. Rather than trying to find out too much at once, Vince asked the question he had been facing recently. Words which had the same meaning were often used interchangeably. He wanted to know why it was sometimes more powerful and sometimes weaker.

–That is fine.

Gluttony accepted the question.

-I will define one thing first. I don't know what you human magicians think, but magic is the act of persuading the magic power in the world. It can be said that you are earnestly asking for it to move.

"Persuasion... That sounds plausible."

–I will continue. The concept of 'language' that you are asking about involves persuasiveness. The closer to the beginning things are, the more the world will listen to the voice of the magician.

Vince's expression turned strange at the words. Certainly, magic which used ancient languages was more powerful and efficient than modern ones. That was the beginning of his archaeological research.

However, it didn't manifest frequently, so such incompleteness was a big challenge for Vince. Fortunately, Gluttony explained the part Vince was wondering about without any delay.

–Language is a contradictory medium. Reducing the number of users increases the power. But on the other hand, if there are more users, its existence becomes firmer. If there are few or no users left, the meaning of the ancient language becomes ambiguous.

"I thought I understood ancient languages in my own way."

–It is insufficient compared to the real ancient people. Unless you can replace your daily life with the ancient language, it will be hard to take advantage of it.

As it was a grimoire, its words were more devastating. Even if Vince's research skills were perfect, his language skills were significantly lower than the people who lived in those days. Setting aside simple words, it would become more severe if he used magic spells which involved sentences or paragraphs. That's why it was hard to use ancient languages at higher circles.

Vince listened to the painful words and accepted it.

–What is the name of the ancient language that you are researching?

“It is called Balcard.”

–It remains in my records. It was a language used during the time of the Balcia Empire, when magic was at its peak. Foreigners couldn’t follow the pronunciation well.

At that moment, enlightenment struck Vince like lightning. He muttered unconsciously with a bemused expression, “… Pronunciation?”

-The true value of the Balcard language can’t be seen unless the eight syllables are pronounced harmoniously.

-The same goes for any language. The pronunciation and expression of a language is settled by standard usage.

-The world accepts the courtship of magicians on the basis of words…

It was up to there. Vince couldn’t hear anything else.

This was a type of phenomenon called cognitive load. Vince himself had blocked the influx of information since it had exceeded the amount he could handle. He could feel his head turning blank,

so any more words would break his brain!

Huuuuong!

Suddenly, a wave of magic power emerged from Vince and gently swept through the room. It was a phenomenon which Theo had encountered once before. During the final match of the Pupil Tournament, he had felt a wave of magic power coming from Sylvia. The fact that the same surge came from Vince could only mean one thing.

'He crossed the wall!' A thrill ran down Theo's spine as he watched Vince while in awe.

There was no other choice. Before Theo's eyes, a 6th Circle magician was coming out of his shell. There were only around 100 6th Circle magicians in the Meltor Kingdom, so how could he not pay homage to Vince as a man and a magician?

However, there was one presence in the room which wasn't moved.

-Hey, user.

At the sudden call, Theo looked back like he had been deprived of something.

"What? It is over, so you should go to sleep again."

–I guess you are joking. Normally I would be sleeping, so I understand.

"...So, what is your point?"

Normally, it wouldn't say anything and would just fall asleep. Theo was aware of this guy's physiology, and it was just as it had said.

Gluttony seemed embarrassed, and its tongue waved around like it was drunk. However, that reaction lasted for only a second.

–I have advice for rapid growth. At this rate, you would be old and dying before you unlock all the seals.

"What is it?"

–As you might have guessed, I have a few more hidden features. Unlike Memorize, unsealing them is something that can't be done without fulfilling special conditions.

Gluttony spoke in a low voice, just like the temptation of a demon in the legends.

–I'll teach you one of the hidden functions, without any conditions.

Chapter 39 - Question And Answer #2

After hearing those words, Theo couldn't hide the shocked expression on his face.

'A hidden feature...?'

Over the past few months, he had tasted the value of the grimoire, Gluttony. There was the 'eating' which changed knowledge into proficiency through the eating of magic books. Theo could also gain 'skills' through eating rare artifacts as well as use 'Memorize' to store magic.

If there were artifacts capable of recreating just one of Gluttony's abilities, it would be enough to instantly become the national treasure of a country. Yet, now, there was a condition to add another function to it? It was enough to overwhelm anyone.

–It seems like it is appetizing.

"I won't deny that, but what is the catch?"

–No catch, I just want to help my user grow quickly.

Gluttony whined before continuing.

-The problem is the quality of the food. You've never fed me rare books except for [Ballistics Magic] and [Introduction to Elemental

Magic]. Don’t just feed me commonplace books.

“The quality of the food…?”

-You might think I am greedy, but doesn’t it benefit you as well?

Certainly, he had experienced eating a ‘Rare’ grade magic book twice. However, there was a limit to how many original books were still roaming around the public.

[Ballistics Magic] had been obtained by coincidence, and [Introduction to Elemental Magic] had been thanks to Vince’s help. The books of applications from heroes in other fields weren’t things a student could covet.

However, if Gluttony’s words were true, then Theo had no reason to refuse.

‘In any case, I need to eat Rare books for my growth. If one hidden function is freed up in the process, then that is advantageous to me.’

The same was true even if the conditions to free it were absurd. Whether Gluttony released the hidden function or not was up to its will, so Theo could always give up if it was difficult. There was nothing to lose, only potential benefits to gain.

In the end, Theodore listened to Gluttony’s suggestion.

–The release condition for this function is simple. You can free it by eating something that exists around you.

“What is it?”

–It is just…

Theo’s eyebrows twitched as he heard the condition to free the hidden function.

‘…Why is it that?’

***

Some time passed by.

Vince, who had been in a trance for a while, opened his eyes slowly. His blue eyes glowed for a moment, but the glow soon began to fade. It was a phenomenon caused by the new 6th Circle stabilizing in his body.

“Huuuu…”

A soft sigh emerged from Vince’s lips, and Theo realized Vince was awake.

“Congratulations on your 6th Circle Professor!”

“Thank you. It is all thanks to you,” Vince responded to the celebration in a sincere voice.

Vince had been stuck at the 5th Circle for more than a decade. If he hadn’t met Theodore and heard advice from Gluttony, he might’ve been stuck for many more years. No, would it have just been be a few years? Some magicians were fated not to cross the wall until death. For Vince Haidel, his relationship with Theo might have been his only chance.

“If I had been studying alone, I might have wasted the next 10 years, maybe more. I think it’s the greatest luck of my life that I met you at Bergen Academy, Theodore.”

“P-Professor.”

“Don’t look at me like that. The question I asked was something which will advance the archaeological field for many years.”

It wasn’t exaggerated praise. All relics involved with the ancient magic empire, Balcia, had already been destroyed.

If Vince hadn’t discovered a slate by chance, then he would’ve never studied the Balcard language. The ancient document had preserved the Balcard language in a good condition. It was an opportunity for Vince to study archaeology, but it also acted as a shackle to stop him at the 5th Circle.

He had studied dozens of Balcard slabs and spent 10 years waiting uselessly for more artifacts to be excavated.

‘I have been rewarded for the years I waited.’ Vince barely managed to suppress his magic power as he shook with joy.

Filled with overwhelming emotions, Vince couldn’t help grasping Theo’s hand. Any senior magician knew what it meant to cross the ‘wall.’ Now, Vince’s mind and body were overflowing with magic power. His aging would be suppressed, and he would take the first step on a path to transcend humanity.

It wasn’t unreasonable that uncontrollable joy would be bubbling within him.

Theo thought, ‘Is it okay… to do it now?’

One of the virtues of a magician was having sober thinking, so such excitement was rare. It was highly likely that Vince would accommodate a small demand from Theo. Theo thought about the ‘condition for liberation’ Gluttony had told him before falling asleep.

‘Feed it a dimension pocket… Doesn’t it know how expensive and rare that is?’

That’s right, the condition Gluttony had presented was to feed it a Dimension Pocket.

Spatial magic required at least the 6th Circle, and in the case of a dimension pocket, a certain amount of space had to be sewn into the pocket, which meant the difficulty was high.

So, in the kingdom, it could only be sold to those who were authorized by the Magic Society or magicians of at least the Superior rank. Obviously, private sales were prohibited, and it was almost impossible to replace if lost or destroyed.

Yet Gluttony wanted to eat such an object? Theo would've sneered if Vince hadn't been there.

"Excuse me, Professor."

"Huh?"

"That... Well, there..."

However, Theodore wasn't such a person. He knew the amount of money Vince had used for Theo to win this tournament and would pay him back one day. Theo couldn't say that he needed a dimension pocket, so he swallowed back his words. "No, it is nothing. I forgot."

"Ah, I see." Vince smiled and tapped Theo's shoulder. His warm hand stabbed at Theo's conscience.

‘Hoo, let’s find another way. I can feed it substandard goods if needed.’

Just as Theo changed his mind, Vince said, “Oh, that reminds me, I have something to say to you as well. I almost forgot about it because of this.”

“Professor…?”

“Umm, don’t think of it as a burden.”

As Theo looked at him with a confused expression, Vince hesitated slightly before asking. “Theodore Miller, will you be my successor?”

“…Huh? Those words… perhaps?”

“It is as you think. I want to put your name as part of my family tree.”

Theo’s expression turned blank as he listened Vince’s words.

Any magicians of the Average rank and above were eligible to obtain a disciple. A magician could wander the whole world in search of the second generation to whom they would pass on their research.

It was different from teaching students at the academy. This was

the same as being the successor of the research which Vince had built up over his lifetime. The student would become the teacher's responsibility until death.

Vince's declaration that he wanted to hand over everything to Theo caused Theo's eyes to turn redden.

"…Will it be okay with me?" Theo asked like it was ridiculous.

However, Vince nodded with a little smile. "You may think it is cowardly. I am a shameless person for aiming at the grimoire's knowledge, even if I don't deserve it."

"……"

"Still, will you believe in me? I am quite old and have been wanting to ask you this for a while," Vince spoke these words and finished with a refreshed expression.

He didn't know what Theo thought of him, but Vince wasn't a saintly person. The war magician, who used to kill people for no reason on the battlefield, was now asking someone to trust in him. The existence of the grimoire was merely a chance and not the main target.

Vince liked the human called, 'Theodore Miller,' so he was pushing this firmly.

Soon, Vince Haidel's name would become enormously famous.

He had reached the 6th Circle in his 40s, so his name would surely be among the top ranking magicians within the next decade. If he could go further, then he would become a candidate to be the next Red Tower Master.

If Theo accepted the proposal, he would become the disciple of such a person and take over later. Theodore was well aware of the weight of this proposal. 'It really is a burden. This...'

If he refused, then Vince was sure to accept it. He would continue helping Theo like before without revealing his sadness. Occasionally, they would feel obliged toward each other and the cycle would repeat. They would work together without opening up their innermost hearts. It would be equivalent to a calm exchange between magicians.

Theo didn't want to remain in that type of relationship. He walked forward with a calm face and grabbed Vince's hand firmly. The trembling passed across each of their palms and met in the middle.

"Thank you, Professor."

"...No, I'm not your professor now. You have graduated from the academy." Vince smiled brightly and corrected his title, "In the future, please call me Master."

During this moment, the relationship between these two magicians, the long-time dunce and a senior professor of Bergen Academy, was newly established.

***

The next day, Vince enrolled himself as Theodore's master at the Magic Society's reception desk. It was a difficult process to cancel once it was established, but he didn't hesitate to give his signature. He had made up his mind from the beginning.

"Y-You can do it slowly..."

"Don't worry about it."

"...Yes, I understand."

The receptionist in charge of the desk advised Vince, but he didn't listen. Vince's expression was cold as usual.

Thanks to that, the process which normally took one hour ended in 20 minutes. After receiving the completed file, the receptionist disappeared with an expression like he had seen a monster, while Vince and Theo walked away.

The schedule for the magic contest would really start today. There weren't many events where the magician could be accompanied by their disciple, but that wasn't all.

The center of the Magic Society had a large poster which contained the schedule for the magic contest. Vince pointed to the

events there and explained what he knew. There were many events he didn't know about, but fortunately, there were a few events his disciple could attend.

"If you are interested in summoning magic, that event isn't bad. This time, magicians from the east are participating, so it is an opportunity to see different types of elementalists."

"That sounds interesting."

"The 'attack magic' hosted by the Red Tower is also good, but... personally, I don't think it's a place you should go. There are many there who are interested in crushing small trees."

In the first place, most of the events from the Red Tower were focused on the battlefield and destruction magic. Consequently, the Red Tower's budget would be used to pay for the repairs of the damaged buildings.

The two people shook their heads briefly and looked for the next event.

At that moment, someone spoke to them, "Excuse me, are you Vince Haidel and Theodore Miller?"

"Hrmm? Who are you?" Vince asked as he turned around, only to see a magician in a blue robe scratching at his temple.

"I am Melrose from the Blue Tower. I have come to find you for a

specific reason.”

Compared to Loren, the blue-robed magician was very polite. Therefore, Vince replied in a blase manner, “Yes, what is going on?”

However, he didn’t anticipate the words which came after that.

“I’m sorry, but please accompany me for a while. The Tower Master has called for the both of you.”

Chapter 40 - Return Home After Five Years #1

The call of the Blue Tower Master, Blundell Adruncus...!

Both men were puzzled by the unexpected call but were forced to accept the request. Even if their senior and junior relationship was flexible, this was a command from the person at the top of a tower. They couldn't refuse even if they didn't know Blundell's intentions.

The Blue Tower wasn't that far from the Magic Society, so the two people followed Melrose and soon entered the Blue Tower. Many faces swung toward Theo as he walked through the entrance.

"..Master, why do I feel eyes on me?"

Vince was also sensitive to the gazes of the people, so he nodded with an uncomfortable expression.

"It seems like you have become a celebrity after yesterday. As expected from the Blue Tower, rumours spread unnecessarily fast."

"Is there anything I should care about?"

"Just ignore it. If you give them any attention, they will just cling

to you.”

The Red Tower was crude, while the Blue Tower was shady. Those were the words the two towers used when mocking each other. However, there was a basis for them. The Red Tower emphasized strength rather than logic, while the Blue Tower used a lot of tricks rather than frontal competition. The identities of the two rival towers were quite consistent with this.

Just like it wasn’t good to face a red tower magician who would immediately duel instead of debating, it was also best to not deal with a blue tower magician who could drag things out for hours.

Theo listened to the advice of Vince, who had the experience, and walked while ignoring his surroundings. The two people followed Melrose’s lead and arrived at the top floor where the tower master lived.

They stopped in front of a door decorated with colourful patterns, and Melrose bowed down politely. As Vince stepped forward, the door opened with a horrible sound.

Kkiiik-

Then as soon as the Vince and Theodore entered, magic was used to close the door again. Just like magic, the room was suddenly filled with artifacts. The old man sitting on the stool, Blundell, got up and welcomed them.

“Ohh, welcome! Sorry for calling you so early in the morn…ing?”

Blundell opened his arms, then he suddenly stopped moving and fixed his gaze on Vince. His eyes which had been laughing suddenly shone like transparent glass beads. After 10 seconds, Blundell smiled so widely that his mouth wrinkled, “Kuahaha! Vince, you finally took a layer off!”

“…What do you mean?”

“Ah, this person! Why are you trying to cheat the eyes of this Blue Tower Master? Anyway, congratulations on going beyond the wall!”

“Hoo, thank you.”

As expected from a 8th Circle magician; Blundell had noticed Vince’s achievement with one glance. He gave a cheerful laugh. They exchanged greetings before sitting down at a large table. An unknown fragrance came from the hot tea. Perhaps the conversation wouldn’t be short.

“Vince, can I ask you something first?”

“Speak.”

“932 and 1106. Do you know what these numbers mean?”

Vince frowned at the sudden emergence of numbers. When asked, any wise person would be better off holding their tongues. He didn't answer, so Blundell naturally taught him the meaning of the numbers.

"Those numbers represent the number of people who have been looking for information on Vince Haidel and Theodore Miller, respectively, since yesterday."

"…?!"

The eyes of the two people widened when they heard this. They had achieved some fame from yesterday's awards ceremony, but they hadn't expected so many people to pay attention to them. Considering that those who were qualified to access information at the Magic Society were limited, it was a considerably large force.

As Vince and Theo stiffened, Blundell shook his head and released some of the tension.

"Well, you don't have to worry. I realized this and blocked it before the ceremony began. The only one with more authority than me is His Majesty, so you can relax."

"…Did you know it would be like this?"

"It always happens. Every year, people keep trying to recruit promising participants. The scale is just bigger this time," Blundell replied calmly while sipping his tea.

On the other hand, Vince couldn't help frowning. He despised these political things and had escaped the capital, but the same people were now reaching out to his disciple. As anger boiled within him, his six circles emitted magic power unconsciously. The air around them quickly became heavy.

The wrath of a 6th Circle magician was truly terrible. Fortunately, there was one more powerful magician in the room.

"Come now, don't get too heated up." Then Blundell beckoned.

Chill.

The air instantly cooled down. The distorted air became cool like the autumn wind, allowing Theo to know the power of the being before his eyes. It was an absolute magic where chanting and casting were meaningless!

The power of this magician, who had reached the 8th Circle 30 years ago, was closer to a natural disaster. If Blundell wanted, he could create ice with one flick of his finger. He could make Sylvia's Blizzard look like child's play, and it was even possible to cover sand with ice.

After cooling down the atmosphere, Blundell spoke, "Even if you are a 6th Circle magician, you can't throw away politics. It isn't a wise choice to be antagonistic to those in power."

“Then what would the wise Tower Master do?”

“Huh? If it were me, I’d just beat up all them up. I’m an 8th Circle magician, so I don’t care about stepping on them.”

As the two people gaped at the ridiculous words, Blundell laughed and pulled something out.

“That is a joke. I’ve prepared this for you.”

“That…?”

It was an envelope stamped with the seal of the Magic Society. Unlike Theo who had a bewildered expression, Vince knew exactly what it was.

“Is it a dispatch? Theodore is still just the Basic ranking.”

“If you can’t get rid of the shit, avoid it. It is better than staying in your room until the end of the magic contest.” Blundell smiled with satisfaction as he added, “Theodore, hasn’t it been five years since you returned home? How would you like to take this opportunity to go back?”

“Huh? Return to my home?”

“Coincidentally, the destination of this dispatch mission is to the Miller Barony.”

“Ah...!”

This made the story a bit different. Vince could remove Theodore from the nuisance eyes of the nobles without worrying about offending them, and Theo could meet his family after a long time. It wasn’t a bad proposition if the difficulty level of the request was reasonable.

Vince watched as Theo identified the contents of the dispatch. It was a report of a cave and contained a person’s biography. The final mission statement contained a few short instructions.

“...Investigate the whereabouts of the magician sent to survey a cave found in the Miller Barony? Isn’t it a pretty simple request?”

Blundell agreed with Theo’s words and continued the explanation, “It isn’t a dungeon but an ordinary cave found three months ago. A moderately smart person was sent to survey the inside, but...”

“Contact has been cut off.”

“Cough, that’s right.”

It happened quite frequently. By default, magicians were self-indulgent people, and their essence didn’t change much after belonging to the magic towers. Once they found something worth investigating, they would become immersed in it for several

months. If so, it was common to send someone else to find that investigator.

"You don't need to do any hard work. It is enough to rest at home and avoid some of the rumours. If you find the magician, it would be nice if you came back with them."

"...I understand."

It wasn't that difficult. The Miller Barony was his playground, and his father was a poor lord with nothing to hide. If they weren't really deeply hidden, then he would be able to find the magician instantly.

Theo received Vince's permission and accepted the envelope.

Then all of a sudden, Blundell started to speak in an melodramatic tone, "Ah~ This old man is suddenly worried because you are so young. If that person didn't deliberately cut off contact, it may be a bit dangerous~"

"What are you saying all of a sudden?" Vince asked.

"Hey! I have a suitable companion for you!" Blundell ignored Vince and beat his staff against the ground. It seemed like a signal for someone else to appear.

As suspicions appeared on the faces of the two people, someone emerged from behind a large bookcase. With blue eyes and

dazzling silver hair, Sylvia was carrying a white staff which was different from the one she used in the competition.

"...Sylvia," Theo muttered quietly.

Sylvia muttered in response while bowing her head, "Ah, hello."

"Ah, hello...?"

It was an awkward exchange. Both were distant from society, and one person was unilaterally favourable toward the other. It wasn't a scene where they could possibly communicate smoothly. The two of them had only exchanged a few words during their match, so they were awkward until Blundell pushed Sylvia.

"You aren't the only ones who have received attention since yesterday. Sylvia is going through a similar thing."

"Don't tell me that the companion..."

"Yes, it is Sylvia!"

Theodore swiftly put down the envelope as he realized this. "I'm sorry, but I'll take the next opp-"

"No, wait a minute," Blundell interrupted before Theo could say the words of rejection and grabbed Theo's shoulders. As Theodore was being grabbed by an immense strength, a subdued voice rang

in his ears. It was a situation where couldn't help feeling afraid.

"It might be a little burdensome, but Sylvia has absolutely no experience with friendship. Her magic skills are great, but she is mentally young. So, I would like her to build up some social experience on this trip."

"Oh, even so, isn't it too much for a woman to go on a trip with a man?"

"As I mentioned, that child is still unaware of the opposite sex. The interest shown to you is due to a feeling of similarity. A friendly person is necessary."

Still, Theo couldn't help feeling burdened. Theo wasn't able to answer easily, so Blundell took out something resembling a plaque and showed it to Theo. It had the symbol of the Magic Society and Blundell's signature on it.

"This...?"

"This is a nameplate given to the inspector from the Magic Society, and a grant is given according to the rank of the nameplate. If you take a mission that corresponds to the lowest Rank 9, you will receive a grant of three gold. But..."

Blundell raised a finger to the nameplate, changing the nine to a number five. "I can do this at my discretion."

“Then the grant…”

“Of course, it will increase. As I recall, I can pay up to 100 gold.”

Theo’s eyes widened as he heard 100 gold. ‘If I receive 100 gold at this time…’

It was a huge amount of money that was several years worth of budget for the Miller Barony! Above all, there were many farmers who were starving to death because they couldn’t produce a harvest.

If he added the 200 gold he’d received as the prize for the tournament, they wouldn’t need to worry about the harvest for 10 years. He could buy nice clothes for his parents who always wore old clothing as well as ease the burden of the poor and hungry in his home.

Of course, he was forced to agree. “…I understand. I will go with Sylvia.”

“Ohh! Yes, you thought well! The opportunity to be accompanied by a 5th Circle magician isn’t that common! Huhahaha!”

While Blundell was laughing loudly, Theo faced Sylvia who was staring at him.

As their eyes met, she waved with a shy expression. Sylvia’s beautifully smiling face felt much younger than her appearance.

What would he hear when he took her home?

‘Phew, can’t this be called a gold mine?’

Theo had become a 4th Circle magician and was returning home with 300 gold and a pretty girl. It was something which would appear in the early stages of a hero’s story.

While any young man would be in a state of envy, Theo could only let out a deep sigh.

Chapter 41 - Return Home After Five Years #2

After the meeting, the events progressed really quickly. They received the full support of the Blue Tower Master, so the Magic Society completed all the necessary procedures to dispatch an investigator, and the 100 gold was immediately paid to Theo.

Although he was distracted, he was able to obtain transportation to the Miller Barony. It was thanks to the merchant company that he had accompanied recently.

“Thank you for your help in acquiring it so quickly.”

“No, shouldn’t I be thanking you? Thanks to Professor and your disciple, didn’t my company reach the capital safely? I can certainly do this simple request for you!”

“You are truly worthy of becoming the boss of the company.”

The carriage Gordon had prepared for Theo wasn’t something which could have been made in one day and as a favour.

The body of the carriage was lightweight due to magic, and it could seat up to six people. Even though it was only a temporary rental, it was a carriage which would cost a few gold. Yet it was used to pay back a mere favour.

However, Gordon just smiled widely.

‘The professor is wearing a robe with the symbol of a 6th Circle magician… This is the chance to form a link with a senior member of the Magic Society!’

Gordon was a seasoned merchant. So, when he learned of Vince’s achievement, he pretended not to know. It was necessary to offer human ‘affection’ in order to form a relationship with a magician who was disconnected from the world.

He kept this position in mind and obtained the luxurious carriage.

‘A thorough merchant. Well, it isn’t bad.’

Of course, Vince knew of Gordon’s ulterior motives but accepted the small favour anyway for his disciple. There was no need to give back what had been given to him. As soon as Vince finished his conversation with Gordon, he approached Theo who was waiting beside the carriage.

He wanted to exchange a few greetings before leaving.

“Have a good rest. After the contest is over, most of the annoying people will return to their homes to concentrate quietly on magic.”

“Yes, Master.”

“And keep that dimension pocket well. There is magic on it for the investigators to track, so the costs will be charged to you.”

“…I will take care of it.”

Theo grew nervous as he looked at the dimension pocket in his hands. He had to consume two to three books a day, which meant he needed a means to carry the large volume of books. So, Vince had rented a space pocket and given it to Theo.

However, the management was strict, so there were many bloody stories about the investigations. If Gluttony swallowed the dimension pocket…

‘I might be dragged to a hearing and…?’

Theo had heard rumours about the Magic Society, so his complexion turned pale at the thought.

He even thought that he shouldn’t hold the pocket with his left hand. So far, Gluttony had never popped out without being called or when it was hungry, but Theo never knew. There was nothing wrong with taking extra precautions.

As they talked about a different subject, the coachman arrived and sat down on the carriage.

“Then, I’ll be going now, Master.”

“Yes, please take care of yourself.”

Theo finished saying goodbye to Vince and disappeared inside, then the colourful carriage started moving slowly. Due to the lightweight magic on the carriage, the movements were soft. Shortly afterwards, Sylvia and Theo were taken away by the carriage, and Vince turned around.

He wished for the safety of his disciple who had left home for five years.

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Dakadak! Dakadak!

The limited express carriage provided by the Pullonet Company sped up after leaving Mana-vil’s gates. The lightweight magic on the body of the carriage made it possible for the horses to run pleasantly. They ran at a dizzying speed as the scenery outside the window sped past them.

‘Yes… If we continue traveling at this pace, we will arrive at the Miller Barony in five days.’

It would’ve taken a fortnight if this were a normal carriage. Gordon had confidently said that it would arrive in a week, and Theo could accept that confidence after experiencing the carriage.

It seemed like there was no need to waste a long time traveling back and forth between the capital and his home.

The problem wasn't the carriage, but what was inside it.

'Uh, so awkward...!' Theo desperately glanced at Sylvia who was sitting next to him.

Despite the glaring natural light, Theo could see her brightly coloured eyes and silver hair clearly. He had no idea what she was thinking. Sylvia suddenly dropped her gaze after meeting Theo's eyes and pulled something out of the pocket of her robes.

"Theo, let's play cards."

"Huh? Cards?"

She pulled out a pack of cards.

The back didn't have any decorations, so he couldn't see what the cards were used for. Common sense suggested trump cards, but he couldn't imagine Sylvia playing poker. He willingly received the pack of cards from her and checked what was written on the front.

"Uh, these characters are...?"

Theo's eyes widened as he saw what was written on the front of the cards. 'Are these runes?'

Runes formed the most familiar language for a modern magician and an essential element to configuring magic formulas. Sentences written in runes were lined up on the front of the cards.

When he interpreted the runes on one card, he saw that they formed an accurate representation of a magic formula. It was the same for the other cards. There were parts of the formula on different cards and they had to complete the spells.

Theo's expression became troubled as he understood what she meant by 'play cards.'

"You want to play with these cards?"

"Yes. Since early childhood, I played this with my grandfather. Theo will have a lot of fun."

"No, wait a minute."

Theo turned the cards over a few times and understood how difficult it was. This degree of difficulty would make the academy professors groan. Nevertheless, Blundell seemed to have taught her magic through this game.

Sylvia's ability was excellent, but Theo's expression wasn't bright.

Who could she play these cards with?

With the exception of Theodore, there was no one else her age who could play with her. Even those who wanted to be close to Sylvia hadn't been able to be a match for her to play with, so she had gradually moved away from them.

Being friends was more difficult than other people thought, so it was rare to be friends with someone overwhelmingly superior. Sylvia's beauty, genius, and nature had kept her away from people.

'Maybe she can play with me... No, I can't change Sylvia's attitude this way.'

Blundell wanted to teach her social norms. If Theo played cards with her, he would be treated in a special way. Other people would remain distant, and she would clearly end up relying on the person called, 'Theodore Miller.'

Then her magic would become stagnant again. The thing she needed now was a non-magical environment.

"Instead of that, tell me a story."

"Story?"

"I don't care if it is anything trivial. It can be your favourite food or place. Something that was fun recently..."

‘Oh!’ Theodore suddenly had a good idea. So, he said, “Are you interested in elementals?”

“Elementals?” Sylvia’s eyes brightened at the sudden word. She seemed to have some interest.

“Mitra.”

[Huing?]

A lump of dirt flew in the window and changed into the shape of a little girl. Mitra had become slightly bigger since Theo reached the 4th Circle, but she was still just slightly bigger than his palm.

“...Cute.” Sylvia’s face brightened as she looked at the little elemental who jumped into the carriage.

[Hoing?!] Mitra made a cute sound as she was held by Sylvia. Sylvia stroked the head of the little elemental carefully like she was scared Mitra would break down. Did Mitra like Sylvia’s touch touch? At first Mitra was in a bad mood, but then she eventually purred like a cat.

It was like a page from a children’s book.

Theo felt more relieved now.

‘The susceptibility still remains. It is impossible for a magician to not be interested in Mitra.’

While playing with Mitra, Sylvia smiled and laughed, looking more like a girl her age. This was an expression that Theo probably wouldn’t have gotten see if they had just played cards. Sylvia was normally impassive like water, but a woman who smiled like that wouldn’t be burdensome.

The journey of the two people continued in a much gentler atmosphere than he had expected.

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The luxury carriage ran from Mana-vil like the wind. The horses were from an excellent lineage, so they were able to go through the hard mountain trails without much difficulty. As they left the mountain ranges, there were no longer any delays.

On the fourth day, the carriage entered the territory of Viscount Teheran, which was right next to the Miller Barony.

Five years ago, Theo had taken a month to reach Bergen Academy. However, this time it only took four days.

“What is Theo’s hometown like?” Sylvia’s awkward way of speaking now seemed quite natural.

Her words had changed a lot. Unlike when she first wanted to

only talk about magic, she now talked about the colour of her favourite clothes and the scenery outside the window. It was also common for her to be interested in Theodore's personal history.

He thought it was a good sign and replied, "Well, it is just the countryside. The people farm, eat, and live while surrounded by mountains and lush forests. When wild animals come down, they hunt and have a feast. Life isn't always abundant, but they don't hesitate to give to their neighbours. It is a place where such fools live."

As he spoke, the scenery of his home entered his mind.

He pictured the people sowing seeds, playing in fields, working busily in the springtime, running around in the summer, harvesting crops with a smile, gathering with their neighbours, and burning firewood.

Thinking about it again, there had been more years of poverty than abundance. His father had opened up his warehouses and starved along with his people, so Theo had often gone hungry during his childhood.

The taste of a piece of bread formed from the wrinkled hands of an old man was much more memorable than the white bread he ate at Bergen. The weight of those memories echoed in Theo's voice.

Sylvia felt something warm and muttered, "A good place."

“…Yes, it is a good place,” Theo agreed.

As Sylvia said, it was indeed a good place. Theo’s hometown was just that. They never lived richly, but they were happy. The 14 years he’d lived there were more precious than the countless beauty he’d seen in Bergen and Mana-vil.

‘Mother, Father…’ Theo’s eyes turned red at the thought of greeting his parents and neighbours after a long time.

The atmosphere inside the carriage had become warm, when…

“-Uh?!”

“Ah.”

A groan emerged from both of their lips at almost the same time. Theo felt a chill on his neck, a warning from his sensory perception. Sylvia had excellent sensitivity, so she noticed the mana around the carriage being depleted.

The two of them opened the windows on both sides without hesitation. However, despite it being sunset, their range of visibility was extremely short.

‘Too dark… The sun can’t have set already. If this is the case…!’

Theodore’s eyes shone gold. He invoked Hawkeye which allowed

him to see even through darkness. If Theo concentrated, he could find a single coin situated a few hundred meters away. It was dark around the forest, but there wasn't any difficult obstacles.

The golden light penetrated through the shadows in the distance. Theo stiffened the moment he grasped the outline of the shadows.

A gasp escaped from his lips, "Undead in this place...?!"

As if in response to his words, the shapes wriggling in the darkness emerged. They were distorted, broken, and crushed bodies. The procession of the undead caused a feeling of aversion inside him.

They were moving catastrophes which ate living creatures to increase their numbers, by-products of necromancy magic used by warlocks. The two people faced the undead that circled around them.

Woong, woong, woong, woong...!

The owner of a grimoire and the Blue Tower's best genius... Theo's and Sylvia's magic power wrapped around each other and caused a mana storm. The undead was stopped by the momentum of the mana storm, but it was only for a moment.

A hard and firm voice emerged from Theo's mouth, "I will take the left, you the right."

“Yes,” Sylvia affirmed.

After the simple exchange, the two magicians left the carriage and greeted the crowd of corpses.

Chapter 42 - Return Home After Five Years #3

As Theo stepped forward, the driver looked at him with a pale face. Why had such terrible monsters appeared around a village like the Miller Barony? This was the first time he had encountered this in his long career as a carriage driver.

“Oh, Magicians! What is happening all of a sudden?”

“Mister, go inside the carriage. We will take care of this and come back.”

“Please do so! Take care!”

As soon as Theo spoke, the driver entered the carriage. The driver’s movements were swift due to his previous experiences with bandits and monsters. Theo wouldn’t need to worry about the carriage.

Instead, he stared at the crowd of dead bodies coming this way. ‘Goblins, kobolds, and orcs… The bodies of large monsters aren’t visible yet. Is a warlock lurking around?’

By default, necromancy was a magic which required control. Uncontrolled dead bodies would attack living creatures indiscriminately, causing turmoil in the area. Then in order to ruthlessly oppress the whole area, the knights, magic towers, and fixers from the country in question would be dispatched.

So, most warlocks were reluctant to reveal themselves. It was because they weren't confident with a frontal confrontation and because the forces going against them were so powerful. Theo listened to his sensory perception for a moment, but he couldn't find the warlock.

"...It can't be helped."

If it was like this, the only thing he could do was sweep up the crowd before him.

Hwaruruk!

The magic power from four circles resonated in the air. It started with a small spark, then it changed shape into an arrow. A huge quantity of 100 fire arrows were created. It was the same amount of ice arrows Sylvia had created in the final match.

The weakness of the undead were divine power, light, and fire. The sudden appearance of fire caused the approaching corpses to pause. A body which had been dried up of its moisture would become good firewood.

Theo felt sorry for them, but he wasn't going to leave a single undead around his home.

"Go." As soon as he gave the command, the fire arrows fell from the sky.

Pyu, pyu, pyu, pyuuong…

It was a frightening sight and a real crisis to the undead. The dead bodies couldn’t defend or avoid the attack, so the fire arrows struck them. The rotten skins of the undead were pierced, and the flames entered their bodies, causing a secondary explosion.

Peng! Pepeng! Peng! Pepepeng!

Their necks broke and their heads fell off. There were also torn arms and legs scattered all over the place. The goblin zombies fell to the ground, while the orc zombies stopped moving. Some zombies crawled like maggots after losing their limbs, while others turned into lumps of flesh.

It was a hellish sight, but Theo didn’t show any signs of agitation.

‘Their physical capabilities are low, and they don’t use weapons. If it is like this, we can deal with 1,000 more.’

There were three factors which determined the completeness of the undead: their ability to reproduce the necromancy ability; the utilization of the techniques their bodies contained; and the intelligence they’d possessed during their lives. If all three of them were present, they would be advanced undead. With two factors, they would be intermediate, while if only one was present, they would be of the inferior rank.

By that standard, these undead had the lowest ranking.

Unless the undead's body was an ogre, he could deal with 1,000 more of these low rank undead. Theodore created another 100 fire arrows. Just on his own, Theodore turned the bodies at the front lines into charred masses with the 100 fire arrows.

However, more undead were surging ahead of the fire arrows.

Kuoooh~! A terrible roar emerged from their rotting lungs.

As Theo looked at the epicenter of the monsters, an undead monster ran out of the bushes. Maggots squirmed on its skin and in its rotten flesh. It had lost its eyeballs, and dark magic power flowed around it.

This creature was a type of 4-meter-tall bipedal monster who lived in a swamp or forest. He had previously seen them during the procession with the merchant company to Mana-vil.

"Troll...!"

Kuoooh-!

Yes, the troll roared and rushed forward.

–Pukwaaaack!

The troll swung its club, and a few unfortunate orc zombies burst like persimmons. There was almost no evidence of the troll losing strength after dying. Although it might have lost its natural regenerative power, it was still troublesome as an undead. Rather, some of the troll's weaknesses had disappeared thanks to becoming undead.

'Damn, Magic Bullet isn't good against the undead...'

These monsters would move even if their heads were blown off. There were some unusual undead like dullahans, while zombies and ghouls would continue to function unless their core was destroyed. Using something like Magic Bullet was like penetrating them with a needle.

He needed to use something big like Blaze Shell to blow away the whole body of the undead. However, 4th Circle magic couldn't be abused in a situation where the warlock behind it hadn't even been revealed.

Theo needed a way to defeat them without using a lot of magic. He needed to draw them together. It was at this moment that...

Shaaaah-!

"G-Guook?"

A water snake suddenly protruded from the rear and struck the undead.

“Liquid Snake?” Theo muttered.

This was the water attribute spell which Sylvia had used in the final match. The snake made of water twisted around the legs of a the troll zombie and started to tighten. The troll zombie’s massive body held on for a while, but its bones soon broke. Its flesh broke as well and fell to the ground, turning into a pile of dirt.

Thanks to the troll zombie being taken care of, Theo had a moment to spare and looked in the direction that Sylvia was in charge of. He was curious about what destructive water magic she had used to clean up the situation.

As he realized what had happened, Theo couldn’t help admiring her.

‘…Hah, so it is like that.’

At the back of the carriage where she was standing, there were traces of a large water snake.

The floor was like mud. As the saying went, overwhelming mass was in itself a weapon. If there wasn’t divine power, then pure physical power would be the undead’s nemesis. Sylvia’s Liquid Snake had wiped out all the undead, including the orc and goblin zombies.

Theo couldn’t help being in awe. “Liquid Snake is a 4th Circle

magic, but it is pretty fuel efficient. It would certainly be useful when dealing with cases like this."

Sylvia, who was manipulating the Liquid Snake, nodded as if the words had flowed into her ears. "Yes, my grandfather said something similar to Theo."

"Indeed, control type magic..."

It was different from fire which consumed a large amount of magic power to sustain the attack. Of course, magic power was consumed when condensing moisture and making the shape of the snake.

However, it didn't require a lot of magic power to control and maintain the water snake. It was different from fire or wind magic which would disappear if the control was disturbed even a little bit.

Although Theo didn't use water magic, he gained enlightenment in other areas.

'Mitra, can you do it?'

[Hoi!]

Mitra gave a cute answer and jumped out of his arms.

As an earth elemental, it was possible for her to gaze freely at the surrounding area by penetrating into the ground. Additionally, Theodore's magic power was the 4th Circle and close to the 5th Circle. Lastly, the most efficient attribute for control and maintaining the snake wasn't the water element. So, was it possible to reproduce the liquid snake in earth?

Theo's brain came up with an impromptu idea.

"Name... Earth Worm!"

Soil rose up steadily around Mitra.

Kurururung!

Mud, sand, and pebbles mixed into a lump of earth. The form which lifted its head was like a worm. Like Sylvia's water snake, this creature was a piece of artwork, but the coarse features meant it wasn't beautiful. However, he didn't care about such 'minor' problems.

"Wow..." Sylvia's mouth dropped open as a shadow covered the undead. It was the shadow of the Earth Worm under the moonlight. From their perspective, the body of the worm was at least a few dozen meters long. Even the undead which didn't have any intelligence stopped at the unreal scene as well.

In the middle of this silence, Sylvia smiled and asked, "By the way, can you control this?"

Her statement wasn't without merit. It was likely that any magician who saw it would mock Theodore's Earth Worm. Generally, the difficulty of control type magic increased in proportion to its size. Theodore wasn't brilliant enough to control something of this size.

Yes, but that was if this Earth Worm was 'normal' magic.

'Mitra, can you hear me?' As Theo's voice called out inwardly...

Wuuong~ The giant Earth Worm shook its huge body. Sylvia's eyes widened as she saw the familiar gestures. "Ah, perhaps...!"

"That's right. I created it, and Mitra is controlling it. This way, I can control it no matter the size!"

It would be impossible for an ordinary elemental with no self-consciousness, but Mitra was an ancient elemental. She could control the earth and had no choice but to play the role of the Earth Worm. This magic was possible due to both of them splitting the role.

Then in the next moment, the Earth Worm rushed toward the undead.

Kukukung...!

Kukukung...!

The earth shook!

Every time the Earth Worm landed on the ground, the undead would shatter into pieces. Trees fell, and the undead which the worm collided with all collapsed, regardless of whether they were trolls or goblins.

The Earth Worm headed toward the forest where the undead were flocking from and crushed them. The sight of the dead bodies in the darkness wasn't much different than a swarm of ants being trampled on. It was truly worthy of being called destruction.

If anyone had seen this, then no one would argue about which destruction attribute was the strongest.

Just three minutes later, a wasteland of broken undead and trees had formed. Judging from the devastation, the warlock hadn't been present in the first place.

"Amazing..."

Who could imagine that this scene was caused by a 4th Circle magician? Sylvia's admiration for Theo wasn't unreasonable.

The magic that Theodore demonstrated far exceeded common sense and was a trick which wasn't possible without many variables. Theo felt a little dizzy because he himself found it hard

to believe.

“Ack!” At the same time, the body of the gigantic Earth Worm collapsed like a sand castle.

“Theo?” Sylvia moved forward toward Theo hurriedly.

He had a bitter smile on his face as he realized he had almost died from his magic core being exhausted.

Theo had experienced something similar when he absorbed all that knowledge from Gluttony. No matter how much he cooperated with Mitra, he couldn’t completely eliminate the burden of Earth Worm.

However, instead of frowning, he made a pledge. ‘It succeeded… Next time, I’ll do it a little more perfectly. There are still many points to improve, so I will think about it slowly.’

He had a headache, but he also felt intense joy from the success of the magic he had envisioned. Theodore Miller’s persistence, a persistence which hadn’t allowed him to give up on the magician’s path for five years, wasn’t as common as Sylvia’s lack of social graces.

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After a while, Theo and Sylvia had recovered, and they opened the door of the carriage.

The shaking driver welcomed the two people. “...Oh, Magicians! You took care of all those ugly enemies!”

“For now. However, there could be more of them. We should leave as soon as possible.”

“Yes, I understand. I’ll start straight away!”

The drive paled and quickly picked up his whip from the driver’s seat. It was better to drive the carriage in the night than to see those terrible monsters again. The driver swung his whip and made the horses run faster.

Dakadak! Dakadak!

The surrounding landscape, which had become a wasteland, passed outside the speeding carriage.

“Huuuu...” Theo sighed as he glanced at the scenery.

The anxiety he had forgotten about for a while due to the excitement of the battle had returned. ‘Calm down. Based on this number, the undead haven’t been active for long. The warlock and undead have only appeared recently. No matter how remote the Miller Barony is, I would’ve heard about a catastrophe.’

He tried to calm himself logically, but who could get rid of their

anxiety so easily? Then he realized that blood was coming out from the fist that he had unconsciously formed.

The joy he'd gained from the success of Earth Worm was receding, and Theo looked at the darkness with shaky eyes. His home lay beyond the darkness, but he didn't know its current state.

In the end, he couldn't suppress a curse from emerging, "Damn."

This journey was gradually sinking into a bog.

Chapter 43 - Return Home After Five Years #4

Shortly afterwards, Theo organized his thoughts as he watched the scenery outside the window change gradually.

Theodore's encounter with the undead had occurred closer to the Miller Barony than the Teheran territory. If they crossed a few more small hills, then the plains he had played on during his childhood would soon appear.

It was important for Theo and Sylvia to recover their depleted magic power until then. Of course, it would be best if another unexpected situation didn't occur.

Rattle! At that moment, the carriage rattled, and Theo's eyebrows raised slightly.

'It is the fourth one, and now there is just one left.'

Theo was recovering his magic power through meditation but didn't forget to count the number of hills they passed. He remembered that there were five hills between the border zone and the Miller Barony.

As they passed the last hill, Theodore opened his eyes. His magic power hadn't completely returned, but it wasn't always possible to be in a perfect condition. Sylvia sensed it and also woke up from her meditation. "Theo, have we arrived?"

“Almost. Sylvia. Come out of the carriage when I give a signal. I wish that nothing would happen, but I have a bad feeling.”

“Huh, signal?”

“I will knock on the carriage roof three times like this.”

Theo knocked on the ceiling of the carriage. There was a blunt boom boom boom sound. It would be noticeable even if the surroundings were noisy.

Sylvia nodded as he opened the door of the still-moving carriage.

Huuuuong!

The wind was strong; the wind pressure facing the horse carriage wasn’t at a normal level. If Theo fell, he wouldn’t be able to avoid serious injuries. He stepped cautiously on the hanging door decorations and climbed to the roof of the carriage.

“Uh!” Theo’s body wasn’t disciplined enough to be able to balance on the roof.

He hurriedly used Cling, a 1st Circle binding magic, to stick his shoes to the roof and only stood up once his legs were firmly fixed. From this vantage point, Theodore could see some of the scenery from beyond the last hill could, and within moments, his

expression distorted greatly.

“Damn! Dammit!”

His eyes, shining with ‘Hawkeye,’ spotted black smoke from beyond the last hill. The black smoke rose up, followed by a nasty smell which was carried over by the wind. It was the stench bodies which were burning just minutes ago.

What was happening beyond this hill?

“Mister! Please move faster!” Theo yelled.

“Yes! U-Understood!” The driver was shocked by Theo’s yell and used the whip again. The carriage seemed like it jumped down the fifth hill at once. If Theo hadn’t used the Cling magic, he would’ve be thrown off the carriage by the acceleration.

However, Theo didn’t care as he stared ahead. His gaze was already frozen in that direction. He was determined not to be shaken by any devastation. But Theo now faced an unexpected sight. As they finally crossed the last hill, Theo could see the fight taking place on the plains.

Waaaaaah-!

A group of people were fighting against the undead. They were still quite a distance away, but the heat of the battlefield tickled his flesh. It wasn’t a one-sided defensive position. The battlefield was

in a state of flux.

‘Fighting? How?’

As someone who had been born and raised in the Miller Barony, Theodore Miller couldn’t understand the situation. He knew that there were no troops in his hometown. Farmers would occasionally walk around town dressed as soldiers, but of course, there was no one who was actually properly trained.

It was impossible for them to create a formation, like what Theo was seeing right now, and defeat the monsters systematically. Additionally, most of the people fighting had rugged faces.

“…Mercenaries,” Theo muttered as he determined the identity of the group of humans. “Moreover, the mercenaries have quite decent skills?”

It was as he said.

The mercenaries’ skills, as a group and individually while dealing with the undead, were fairly good. They first broke the legs with medium ranged weapons and then finished them off with blunt weapons.

Theo wasn’t familiar with melee tactics, but the movements of the mercenaries were faithful to linked movements.

He didn’t know why these low-level mercenaries were protecting

the Miller Barony, but this was a great opportunity. The undead were preoccupied with fighting the mercenaries and had no interest in going to the villages.

Theo shouted to the trembling coachman before him, “Mister Driver, go ahead first!”

“B-But Magician…”

“Don’t worry, and just run! Quickly!”

As the driver stopped the carriage, Theo’s shoes slammed against the roof of the carriage three times. Then Theo jumped down from the carriage, quickly followed by Sylvia. After the two of them descended, the carriage quickly left. If the driver didn’t do that, his life would be in danger.

The two people watched the carriage approach the village before turning to the direction where the battle was taking place. The mercenaries were still crushing the undead, but there was a limit to their stamina. If this continued, the balance between the two groups would collapse within an hour.

The momentum of the mercenaries would fall, and they would be destroyed shortly afterwards. That was, if Theodore and Sylvia sat still.

“Then, shall we begin?”

“Yes.”

The two magicians raised their magic power without any interruptions. As it had been mentioned several times, a magician was strongest when they had secured a safe distance away from the target.

No matter how much time and money they had, the preparation of a warrior was limited. However, a magician’s resources were directly connected to them. Additionally, Theo had a means to use that preparation time more effectively than others.

‘Memorize.

‘Three Slots Open.

‘Triple Fire Arrow.’

A fire filled up the dark skies! The suddenly emergence of light created shadows, causing the mercenaries to feel amazed.

“Wow, w-what is that? Fire arrows?”

“Fire Arrow?! Magicians!”

“Friends or enemies? Tell us!”

“If that is the enemy, we would be dead right now, you bastard!”

The mercenaries continued talking even in the midst of fighting. They split apart rotten heads with their axes, but their mouths didn’t stop moving. There was no one who seemed frightened even when seeing the fire arrows.

One beat later, Sylvia’s magic was completed.

“Icicle Arrow.”

The magic formula for the 2nd Circle magic itself was simple. It took only one beat of time to gather the moisture. However, the magnitude of the magic was much larger compared to what she had done at the magic contest.

Sylvia’s magic power had reached the 5th Circle, and her sensitivity was several times that of Theo’s. In addition to the fire arrows, over 200 ice arrows appeared in the sky.

“……”

“……”

“……”

There were at least 500 magic arrows in the sky. Using simple calculations, the number of arrows were enough to mercilessly

annihilate the mercenaries twice over. The mouths of the mercenaries dropped open when they saw the overwhelming amount. They thought they'd made a mistake as the arrowheads seemed to be pointing at them. The mercenaries hadn't expected to face such a large scale battle at this small village.

After a moment of silence, the arrows aimed at their targets and flew.

Dududududududu!

It was like a rain of hail. The solid and heavy ice arrows were like rocks punching holes into the undead bodies. The rotten flesh, muscles, and bones shattered, and the bodies which were turned to rags couldn't move anymore.

There was no need to talk about the bodies which were burned by fire. As their attack reduced the number of undead by half, the mercenaries realized they weren't enemies and cheered.

"Okay, they are allies!"

"A magician's spells are so reassuring!"

"Hey! I'll buy you a drink when it ends, so don't go anywhere!"

"Now! Don't rest! The kids who fall now won't be allowed to rest easily for the rest of their lives!"

The increasingly disadvantageous battlefield had been reversed in a single move by the two people, Theo and Sylvia. The mercenaries brushed off their paralysis and continued attacking the undead, allowing Theo and Sylvia to use their massive attack spells without worrying about the undead approaching them.

This was ideal for war magicians. It was a fixed position with a solid escort.

“Fireball!”

“Me too, Fireball.”

Kwakwakwang! Kuwang! Kwaang!

Scorching hot magic continued to be used, allowing the fighting mercenaries some room to rest.

This was the virtuous cycle of the battlefield, where reducing the enemy’s defense led to helping their allies. It was due to the existence of magicians who dominated the battlefield.

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Thus, one hour passed by like this.

“Sunrise! The sun is rising!”

“These guys are going back! Don’t get caught up and maintain the formations!”

The shouts of the mercenaries awoke Theo, who had been immersed in casting magic.

As the mercernaries said, the sky was gradually becoming brighter in the east. It was evidence of sunrise. The undead could move under the sun, but they were greatly weakened unless they were strong undead.

Indeed, the undead which had been charging senselessly began turning around.

As Theo watched the corpses return to the mountains, he muttered quietly, “…The worst moment is over for now.”

After confirming that the undead would retreat the moment the sun came up, Theo shook his sweaty head and started calming his breathing down. His stamina expenditure wasn’t great, but he had consumed a significant amount of mental power while casting the magic. Sylvia was also leaning against a nearby tree and breathing hard.

Their bodies were exhausted, making their usual senses dull. Was that why? The reactions of the two people were one fatal beat late.

Kkieeeek!

There was a creepy sound. The roar of a terrible predator rang in their eardrums. Above the heads of the mercenaries who thought the situation was over, a rotting flying monster appeared. It was an intermediate undead which had its flight skills preserved.

This was the Ghoul Wyvern!

Theodore cried out as he realized what it was, “Wyvern?!”

There were no wyvern habitats in this area, nor was it an undead which could be made from the monsters nearby. If so, this meant the warlock had unleashed undead which had been found elsewhere. However, that was strange. Why would they do that for a small village like this?

However, he had no more room to think. There was a terrible roar as the ghoul wyvern flew toward Theo and Sylvia.

‘It’s fast!’

This was more like a crash landing than flying.

The destructive power of the wyvern increased in proportion to its heavy body as it dived from above. It was clear that if the two magicians tried to avoid it, the wyvern would change directions with its wings.

The unimaginable power of the ghoul wyvern wouldn't just kill the two people but also destroy their bodies. They could block or strike back, but the remaining time in which they had to do it was only three seconds.

'Blaze Shell interception—no, too late!'

There was no time. Theo immediately unleashed the skill he had recently acquired.

It was the Triple Barrier skill from the 'Protection Bangle' artifact he'd received at the awards ceremony. The defense of the artifact, which could create three layers of shield, was said to even withstand 5th Circle magic.

However, it was unknown if it could withstand the ghoul wyvern's physical power.

The shields of the two people were activated late, so the shape was thin and soft compared to the wyvern's attack. The two magicians despaired as they intuitively sensed their imminent destruction.

Yet at that very moment, a man appeared between them.

"What? You are still children."

There were falchions in both his hands. The man had thick golden hair and wore shabby chain mail. He also had two clinking

ornaments hanging from his waist.

The man looked unlike the other mercenaries as he raised his pair of swords toward the ghoul wyvern. It happened in an instant.

Chwaaaaak!

The wyvern was cut to pieces as its body collapsed.

“...Eh?” Theodore and Sylvia hadn’t even been able to what had happened.

There was just a flash, then the ghoul wyvern shattered. The only thing they could see was the man’s arms moving as he held the falchions. Both hands had moved six times for a total of 12 movements.

This was the technique of a first-class swordsman.

“Hey, I finally got this annoying guy,” the man said with a cheerful grin as he kicked the ghoul wyvern’s head. Then he looked back at the Theo and Sylvia. “It never came down from the sky, so I had no way of catching it. I don’t know who you are or where you came from, but I really appreciate your help.”

Sylvia still hadn’t recovered, so Theo stepped forward first and spoke in a courteous tone, “...We just did what was needed.”

The man before Theo absolutely wasn't a mercenary. Not even knights could cut a wyvern this way. If he fought this man, he would become a piece of meat before he could even chant a spell.

So, Theodore decided to reveal his position first. "I'm Theodore, an investigator sent by the Magic Society. This is my colleague, Sylvia."

"Ah, hello." Sylvia looked at the scene like she was scared and bowed slightly.

The man smiled for a moment like he thought she was cute, then the smile disappeared. There was no evidence of the previous expression on the man's serious face.

From now on, personal feelings wouldn't enter the conversation.

"Then I will tell you my name," the man said as he placed his falchions in their sheaths. "We are the 'Wandering Wolves' mercenaries hired by the lord of this village. I am Randolph, the one in charge. I'm sorry, but I'll have to check your identities first."

Chapter 44 - I Ask You #1

Theo's expression changed subtly at Randolph's words.

'After returning home in five years, I get an identity check.' Theo couldn't laugh or feel angry.

Randolph grunted and scratched his head as he interpreted Theo's expression in his own way. He understood that it could sound quite rude to verify a person's identity after they had helped him. "I don't want to be fussy. But looking at the situation, it is hard to let you pass easily without checking. It will just be a brief verification."

"Yes, it is understandable."

They were fighting a group of undead in a corner village like the Miller Barony. Theo didn't know why the mercenaries were in this place, but now wasn't the time to question it. Theo first needed to gain Randolph's trust and enter the village.

Theo pulled out the investigator's badge and the certificate that he had received from the awards ceremony.

"Oh, an investigator's badge. It has been a long time since I've seen it. And this is... the owner of this certificate is an honorary baron, Theodore Miller. There is a royal seal stamped, so I am pretty sure... Huh?" Randolph looked at the certificate carefully and touched his chin with a puzzled expression.

The names of nobles were different from the common people. Even if the first names overlapped a little, there wasn't a single family which used the same surname as that of another. For nobles, their surname was a proof of honour received from the king and evidence of the blood flowing through their veins. What idiot would want to share that with others?

However, this name was the same as the lord of the Miller Barony.

"...I heard that the lord here has a son."

"My father."

"Darn, you're the son of my employer."

Theodore laughed, and Randolph smiled as he realized why Theo had such a strange expression on his face before. The lord's son had returned but needed to prove his identity. It was funny when they thought about it.

Randolph's pleasant expression returned, and he stretched out his hand. "Welcome home, Young Master. There has been a small fuss, but so far, it hasn't been a big deal."

"It was a pretty big group."

“Well… let’s go in and talk about it.”

The undead didn’t strike when the sun was shining, so Randolph turned around first. It seemed like the story he needed to tell was quite long. Theo and Sylvia followed behind him. In a sense, it was definitely a surprising return home.

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By the time the two people and Randolph entered the village, the mercenaries were already scattered all over the village. It was because of the fatigue which came from staying up all night. The residents gave bowls of warm porridge to the mercenaries and wrapped bandages around the injured.

One of them recognized Theo sooner than anyone else. “Eh…? You, aren’t you Theodore?”

“What? Why would Young Master be here when he is studying?”

“No, just look!”

“Well, he certainly looks a lot like the Young Master…”

It had been five years, and Theo was dressed fashionably, so the people hesitated to call his name. He looked like a nobleman at first glance, so they didn’t believe their Young Master had returned.

As buzzing started among the residents, an old man stepped out. “Y-Young Master Theo…?”

Theo felt like crying when he heard the faint voice and looked over. “Grandfather Albert…!”

Since early childhood, how many pieces of bread had he received from those hands? The hands of the old man were much weaker than he remembered, but Theo grabbed them without hesitation. A gentle feeling was conveyed through the old man’s wrinkled hands, causing Theo to hug him while crying. Theo could finally feel the weight of all those years.

For the old man who didn’t have any relatives, Theo was truly like his grandson.

“Ah, our Young Master! How is it that you look so respectable…?”

“Grandfather!” Theo couldn’t speak and just hugged him tighter.

“Young Master!”

“Young Master Theo has come back!”

After that, the residents started flocking from everywhere. Someone was still holding the thread they had been knitting, and

another person had rushed out with a piece of bread in their mouth. As all the residents of the village ran out, Theodore was instantly surrounded by a large crowd.

"...?!" Sylvia was standing close to Theo. With her silver hair which shone like a fairy from a story, she drew attention wherever she went. She was unfamiliar with people's attention, so she stuck closer to Theodore, causing the residents to cheer at her reaction.

"Who is the young lady? Young Master, perhaps?"

"Ah, come on. Why else would he bring such a lovely girl?"

"Young Master! There is silk at our linen store! It will be enough for a veil!"

"Come on, don't make me laugh! It is lucky if rags don't emerge."

"What is wrong with you?"

The loud commotion caused the mercenaries to wake up or look up from where they were eating. The atmosphere had darkened as the fight against the undead continued, but now there was an air of warmth about the village. It was proof of how precious Theo was to them.

The disturbance soon passed on to the Miller Barony's manor house.

“Theo, where is our Theo?”

A middle-aged man, with thinning hair and dressed in a humble tunic, moved through the crowd. Fortunately, those who recognized him gave way. Everyone wanted to welcome Theodore, but this person had more right than anyone else.

The man who finally reached the center, Dennis Miller shouted, “Theo!”

“…Father.” Theo could never forget that voice.

As Theo’s father pulled him into a tight embrace, the familiar smell of soil and bread tickled Theo’s nose. The smell of his hometown was emitted from his father’s body. No words were needed. They hugged for a while until Dennis let go first.

He firmly grabbed his son’s shoulders and said, “Welcome home.”

“Yes, I’ve come home.”

“Don’t you have a lot to ask about? Returning home after so long… I’m sorry this had to happen.”

“Don’t say that.” Theo shook his head. What did his father have to be sorry about? The residents and his father were the ones

suffering from the undead.

Dennis was pleased with his son's appearance but noticed the dust on Theo's robes. He also noticed Sylvia's shy existence.

"Aren't you tired? Let's discuss the rest of the story at home."

The two tired people nodded at the same time.

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It had been a while since Theo had returned home, but nothing had changed.

The fireplaces and the staircase were still worn out, and the floor creaked every time he stepped on it. The sound of water could be heard coming from the kitchen, and the stain on the ceiling was still there. In fact, Theo could see that the number of stains had increased as he looked at his family seated before him.

His father had a bit of a moustache, his mother was a little slimmer, and his three year old brother was holding onto his mother.

'Oh, it is the first time I've seen him personally.' His little brother's growth was a sight he had missed out on seeing.

However, the caring conversation between his family members

was still the same. Theo prioritized solving the problem before his personal feelings. It was enough to spend time with his family after solving the immediate crisis.

"...Then, the undead started appearing around a month ago?"

"Yes, the woodcutter was the first one to find them."

According to his father, the undead had appeared around a month ago, and they had only started the attacks a week ago.

It was a time difference which Theo couldn't understand. What had the undead done during those 20 days? Perhaps the missing magician had fallen into black magic, but it would require more than two months to learn how to create a ghoul wyvern. Even a swordsman like Randolph would find it hard if there were more than one on the battlefield.

Moreover, Theo had one more question. "What about the mercenaries? Our estate doesn't have the money to hire those type of mercenaries..."

"Hoo, I owe too much to them."

'Owe?' Theo looked at his father quizzically.

"They are mercenaries who came to fight the bandits around here. There was no relationship with our territory. But on the same day that they stayed in our village, the monsters came."

“…So they’ve been protecting this place for a week?”

“Yes. When they leave, I can’t feel regret… I can only say thank you.”

It was hard to believe. Mercenaries were people who would do anything for money. A rare few were righteous and faithful, but many became mercenaries because they wanted to be able to kill people legally. Those people needed to be filtered out. Nevertheless, they were never the type of people to volunteer to do a job.

‘Unless there is a hidden treasure in this village but… that isn’t possible.’

It seemed like he would have to talk directly to Randolph.

After thinking that, Theodore didn’t speak anymore and just quietly ate the soup his mother had prepared. The thin soup with few ingredients went down his throat. There were many delicious soups at Bergen Academy and also in Mana-vil Capital. However, he had wanted to eat this soup.

Sylvia didn’t seem to be picky about food as she also chewed on hard bread. Theo pretended to be unaware of his mother’s glad face and lifted his spoon again.

However, there was still a stack of problems to worry about. The

temporary calm of the moment continued as only the sound of cutlery moving could be heard.

“Then I’ll see you later.”

“…Yes.”

After finishing their meal, Sylvia and Theo separated toward their own rooms. They had traveled awkwardly together for five days from Mana-vil, but a man and woman absolutely couldn’t stay in the same room. Sylvia followed Theo’s mother nervously.

Then Theo entered his room with familiar footsteps.

Rattle.

His room, which he returned to after five years, looked no different from when Theo had left. Even the order of the books on the shelves was still the same. The bed he collapsed on was still mushy, and the torn wallpaper showed no signs of repair.

“Huuuu…” Theo took a few deep breaths and then said, “Hey, can you wake up now?”

He was speaking to Gluttony, who was sleeping quietly.

It was something Theo had started to get a sense of after the last question and answer. Not long ago, he had begun to be able to

detect the condition of the being living in his left hand. He could sense when it was hungry or whether it was feeling good or bad. Thanks to that, he could feed it the books without worrying about Sylvia, but he thought it was possible to call Gluttony directly now.

Unsurprisingly, Gluttony responded to his call.

-...You understand. You are more sensitive than I thought.

A sullen voice emerged from the hole in his left hand. The voice had a distinct drowsiness to it, meaning that it had just still been asleep. Theo realized that his awareness was starting to increase slowly.

“Long words aren’t needed. How many books do you need today?”

-Two or three.

“Okay. Then I will feed you two books.”

He grabbed the two books he’d prepared in advance with his left hand.

Gulp. The tongue swallowed the two books.

[‘Magic Wall’ has been consumed. Your understanding is very

high.]

[Proficiency with the 4th Circle magic ‘Stone Wall’ has increased.]

[‘Explosion is an Art’ has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[4th Circle magic ‘Explosion’ has been acquired.]

He learned two 4th Circle magic at one time, but luckily, he had already learned one of them. Thanks to that, the headache affecting him was reduced.

Stone Wall was a higher ranked application of Earth Wall. It was a persistent magic which built a wall with solid rock. As for the Explosion magic, Theodore used his knowledge and could quickly organize the information in his mind.

This was one spell which would surely be able to deal with a lot of undead.

“...Okay, it is done.”

After the waves of wisdom passed through him, Theo looked down at his left hand with sharp eyes. He could feed it three books, but he had chosen two so that he could ask a question. It was more important to dig around than to have extra magic.

Theo had to figure out how to stop this disaster.

“Then I will ask.”

The grimoire might just know the right answer.

Chapter 45 - I Ask You #2

However, it took a while for Theo to hear the answer.

It seemed like Gluttony didn't know what had been happening while it slept.

Theo was forced to explain the situation briefly. He spoke about the missing investigator, the massive number of undead in the area, and the presence of the warlock who controlled them. There were so many questions, but he had to ask just one thing.

-...Yes, I understand.

Gluttony said as Theo paused.

–According to your explanation, this certainly isn't a normal case. I can guess the source.

"What is it?" Theo was taken aback.

A magician event like this fell into its range of questions and answers? This was unexpected. Gluttony, the grimoire who ate wisdom, pulled out an answer which the two geniuses would've never been able to guess.

–It is likely that a 'grimoire' has been found in the cave.

Theo's eyes widened at the word 'grimoire.'

Numerous magicians called them 'unidentified.' As Vince Haidel had explained, the grimoires possessed huge strength. They were creatures containing wisdom and power, of which the source and origin were unknown. The existence of the grimoires could make the whole world dizzy.

He couldn't agree with some of the evaluations, but as an owner of a grimoire, Theodore knew just how beyond common sense was the existence of a grimoire. It had made a dunce of the 2nd Circle into someone capable of beating Sylvia.

If the power of such a grimoire had intervened, it was possible to increase a person's black magic in a short period of time.

"There are other grimoires like you?"

-I am a grimoire belonging to the Seven Sins set. When it comes to grimoires... No, I don't know exactly. It would be more accurate to detect it, rather than make a hypothesis.

Gluttony seemed to mumble to itself before making a suggestion.

–User, if you agree, I will consume your power to detect any grimoire in the vicinity. I will look for the place where the warlock is hiding as an extra.

"That's a welcome offer but..." Theo looked down at his palm in

a dubious manner. “Why are you being so nice? It isn’t like you, so tell me what you want.”

–Hohoho, it isn’t bad for you either.

There was the sound of laughter, and the tongue acted like the thought was mouthwatering.

-I can also eat ‘grimoires.’ It is possible to absorb the knowledge and functions or even free a seal. If so, your achievements as a magician will grow several times faster than it does now.

“…As usual, you are hungry.”

-It is my essence.

Theo was worried about the suggestion for a moment, but there was no choice. Even if grimoire didn’t exist, it was still necessary to find the location of the warlock. In the end, he nodded, and Gluttony activated the function.

Du-geun.

There was a loud heart beat similar to a wave of vibration, which resonated beyond the range of a human ear. This was a technique which would be called science instead of magic in other societies. Instead of sound or radio waves, the function was reproduced with magic power.

The wave of magic power extended several kilometers before returning to its epicenter.

> [Detection complete.]

The voice was heard after the search was over.

–I found it.

Gluttony, which had been silent for a while, had found its target.

–Fairly powerful. It is only the second stage, but it managed to partially block my detection. It also seems to be eating its owner.

“Eating?”

–Not all grimoires have a symbiotic relationship like me. Most of them live by becoming a parasite in a suitable host and manipulating the host’s body and mind. The grimoire which attacked you belongs to the Green category.

In fact, grimoires themselves were powerful magic creatures. They were monsters which possessed humanoid intelligence as well as functions equal to national level artifacts.

Theo didn't know their creators, but a grimoire was something which normal magicians couldn't possess. Rather, it was common for grimoires like Gluttony to completely dominate its owner. The thought of this caused goosebumps to pop up on Theodore's forearms.

–I figured out their location. I think the cave they went to investigate is the base of the grimoire and its host.

Gluttony gave a long yawn after speaking.

–I answered your question so I will fall asleep.

"Ah, wait a minute."

–What is it?

The question had already been over, but Gluttony was generally flexible when it came to questions about his function. Theo knew this and asked, "You... Can you eat the undead? They are also made of magic."

-...Your idea is sound. If that were possible, I could eat stones that were made to float using magic spells. However, the undead only moves through magic. They aren't made of magic power or wisdom themselves. There are some exceptions, but...

"But?"

–I can’t answer that until you ask it as a question.

Then Gluttony went to sleep without allowing him to ask anything more. Theo tapped the palm of his left hand several times, but there was no response. It seemed to fall into a deep sleep soon after eating.

However, there was no time to complain about that attitude.

Step… step…

There was the sound of someone’s footsteps approaching.

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The footsteps were uniform and quiet. Most people who had these type of footsteps were masters of martial arts. It was because the body maintained unconsciously its center of gravity, minimizing the noise generated by the body.

Theo analyzed the footsteps using Alfred’s experience and quickly realized the identity of the person who was approaching.

‘Randolph.’

Unsurprisingly, Randolph’s voice was heard from beyond the door. “Young Master, are you still awake?”

“Yes.”

“Can we talk for a bit?”

It sounded strange. but Theo had been half expecting it. This way he didn’t need to sneak out to the village to talk. “Come in.”

“Then, I’ll do just that.” Randolph entered the room after receiving Theo’s permission. “I’m sorry, since you must be tired.”

“Don’t worry. I thought you would come.”

“Hrmm?”

The expression in Randolph’s eyes changed at Theo’s words. Theo was a magician who knew how to fight, so Randolph decided to treat him as a equal. Without further ado, Randolph sat down on the bed across from Theo.

‘Cut to the chase.’ The two men sensed it at the same time.

It was Theodore who opened his mouth first, “Are you going to reach the limit soon?”

“…As expected, you’re not ordinary. How do you know?”

“You had no choice but to fight a bloody battle for a week with only 100 people. The fact that you have endured for so long is amazing.”

It wasn’t exaggerated praise. If it wasn’t for the combat power of the ‘Wandering Wolves’, the Miller Barony would’ve already become the land of the undead. Even if regular troops were stationed here, they wouldn’t have been able to show such achievements.

Theo was really amazed by the ability of the mercenaries to overcome a large difference in numbers using pure skill. However, Randolph’s expression simply darkened. “I’m thankful for your words.”

“Can I ask one thing?” Theo said.

“What is it?”

In a sense, it was a question which might decrease Randolph’s friendliness. However, it was better than having a questionable ally. Theo asked the question which had been lingering in his mind, “Why are you staying in this village? You should be able to break through the undead siege without any problems.”

“Simply… I guess you won’t believe it is goodwill. Damn.”

Randolph scratched his head before whispering. “I can’t tell you everything. Is that okay?”

“As long as you can convince me.”

“...Okay.” Randolph hesitated for a while before carefully taking something out. It had shiny gold and looked valuable.

The item was a pocket watch adorned with gold. There was a curious image of howling wolves engraved on the watch, but there was no second hand or minute hand on the watch. Only the hour hand was turning strangely.

Randolph began explaining about the object, which was either a watch or a compass.

“A long time ago, an ancestor of my clan chased after a certain warlock to a foreign country. He left carrying the two heirloom swords and never returned. This watch is an artifact created to detect those heirlooms.”

“Then the direction that the artifact is pointing—”

“It is these damn mountains. It has been 100 years, so I wasn’t expecting anything, but the place that the artifact reacts to is covered in undead!” Randolph let out heartfelt curses.

This was enough to cause Theo to admire Randolph’s bad luck. The heirlooms which had been missing for 100 years had been found in the center of such a disaster, so Theo couldn’t help feeling sympathy.

However, there was still something which made Theo uncomfortable. “I know that heirlooms are precious… but in the end, you remained because of two swords?”

“They aren’t just swords. The techniques that he learned were left in those heirlooms. If I can control them properly, I may become a sword master in 20, maybe 10 years.”

“…Indeed.” Theo immediately nodded after hearing it.

He could understand this reason. Any magician would value a book which would allow them to cross the ‘wall.’ Randolph might be able to become a sword master, so it wasn’t something he could give up due to some undead. It was like crossing the wall of the 7th Circle for a magician.

However, there was no answer as to the very real limitations. Even if the swords could make Randolph a sword master, it would be useless if he lost his life here.

That was why he muttered with a gloomy expression, “But it is up to here. I don’t think I can recover the sword, and my men will just lose their lives. Anyway, the undead will be taken care of by the people sent by the king… So, Young Master, you should be ready to evacuate with the villagers.”

Theo’s eyebrows raised at the unexpected words.

This was unexpected. In fact, mercenaries cared about nothing but their own bodies. There was no reason for them to protect the residents, except for their voice of conscience which could be ignored.

Nevertheless, Randolph was suggesting running away...? Randolph and the 'Wandering Wolves' were all good people, however, Theodore couldn't accept that proposal.

"Thank you, but I will reject."

"...Why?" Randolph stared at him. It was impossible to find a better suggestion than this. If Theo suggested that he would stay behind to help the evacuation of the villagers, Randolph might beat him up. "I must acknowledge your skills, but in the process, half of the residents here will die."

"No, speak properly. Half will get out alive."

"The result is the same no matter how you express it."

They refuted each other without giving a single concession.

Pajik!

As the gazes of the two people met, the surrounding air distorted. To be exact, it was Randolph's anger reaching out toward Theo. If he hadn't absorbed Alfred's experience, then he might've been frozen by that terrible energy.

Theo barely maintained his calm expression and pulled something out. “So, I have a different offer.”

“Offer? You?”

“To be precise, it is a commission. The Magic Society investigator, Theodore Miller, wants to hire the Wandering Wolves.”

As Randolph’s atmosphere was disturbed by an unintelligible sound, Theodore pulled out three thick pouches from the dimension pocket and set them on the table.

Kung! Kung! Kung!

Each pouch let out a loud thump, and the loud sounds resonated. No, it wasn’t just that. Randolph’s sensitive hearing heard something inside the pouch. It was a sound which was familiar to merchants and mercenaries.

Finally, Theo grabbed the pouch and poured the contents out next to Randolph on the bed .

Chwarururuk...!

Gold coin, gold coins, and gold coins! 100 gold coins poured out of the pouch. Spread over the tattered bedspread, there were enough

coins to hire the mercenaries for a while, giving the bed a strange golden colour.

"Ehhh...?" Randolph stared at the money with a blank expression before looking at the remaining two pouches.

Surely those too? His face was saying. Theo nodded to the unspoken question and said,

"The 100 gold is the deposit, and you will receive 200 gold when the work ends. I will hire the 'Wandering Wolves' for two days with this 300 gold."

It was necessary in order to make this proposal acceptable. Negotiations and the price would come next.

Thus, Theo judged that it was best to get rid of Randolph's soul first.

Chapter 46 - I Ask You #3

Indeed, Randolph's expression changed at the sight of the gold coins.

300 gold wasn't an amount which could be taken lightly. However, that huge number became much smaller once divided between 100 mercenaries. Even though it was significantly higher than other payments the Wandering Wolves had received, it wasn't worth risking their lives for two days.

"Let me hear the story."

Theodore's gaze sank at Randolph's ambiguous answer. "It is surprising. Is the pay lacking?"

"Not at all. 300 gold is enough. No, I'm afraid the situation will be a mess. So, I will listen to the story first."

It didn't matter if it was a high or low amount. Randolph ignored such meanings. He was a mercenary, so he knew their essence.

Mercenaries were people who would slander and kill a person for money or chase after a drake only to be killed. They accepted any dangerous request as long as there was money. That was the principle behind being a mercenary.

However, Randolph placed his instincts before those principles. "No matter how good the money is, I won't fight a losing battle. I

will listen to your plan and then decide if I will accept this commission. It was foolish of you to reveal your wallet. Frankly speaking, I want to refuse the gold, but you wouldn't have brought out 300 gold without a plan." As the Wolf spoke, his eyes were gleaming.

'This person, he is a little strange to be a mercenary.'

If Theo hadn't brought out the 300 gold, then he wouldn't have even been able to sit at this negotiating table.

Randolph was different from common mercenaries. They didn't know how to calculate the odds and losses, only gauging the commission based on the reward. Since Randolph was a descendant searching for lost heirlooms, maybe he was the descendant of a great warrior.

However, from now on, Theo would be the one in charge of the conversation. "As you can see, holding on is unreasonable. At most, two or three days is the limit."

"It is as you said. The undead are too annoying." Randolph was also sick and tired of all this.

The undead had unlimited numbers and stamina, so it was an extreme disadvantage. This was why necromancers were targeted with a national campaign. They were vulnerable to powerful individuals but superior when causing mass casualties.

In fact, a warlock using infectious undead had once created a whole undead kingdom. However, the warlock had eventually been killed by a sword master hiding in the center of the city.

“There is only one valid method—a counterattack.”

In other words, the warlock’s main body would have no combat ability. The grimoire ate away at the host, but the essence was still the same. So, the warlock would be defenseless if Theo and the others managed to jump over the barrier of undead.

Above all, this was a great opportunity to get rid of the warlock.

‘The undead weren’t walking around here a month ago, and the grimoire hasn’t completely eaten the host yet. That is probably why the number and quality of the undead is slowly increasing. This has given me more time before it becomes a disaster for the kingdom.’

There were enough clues for him to form this reasoning: the woodcutter’s first discovery of the undead; the appearance of the undead which had then become stronger throughout the week; and the emergence of the ghoul wyvern which had reached intermediate level.

It was obvious that the abilities of the warlock, who had become the grimoire’s host, were still improving every day. If he kept growing like this, he would be able to summon advanced undead. Once that happened, it would be the end. This area would turn into a land of complete death, and there was the possibility that

the spread of the undead would be faster than the evacuation rate of the village.

Theo planned to strike before that happened.

“You have a point. So, you intend to hit the base with a small number of elites?”

Theo nodded at Randolph’s words. “Yes, I’ve already found the warlock’s base. Randolph, if you protect the two of us, then it won’t be that hard to take out one necromancer at night.”

“Why bother to attack in the middle of the night? It would be ideal to hit the undead in the daytime when they are weaker.”

“A night operation is better.”

If they were fighting on the plains, then Randolph’s point would be correct. However, the target was based in a nearby cave which was so dense that sunlight couldn’t penetrate it. He would need to engage in a war with thousands of undead to get to the warlock.

So, it was better to strike when the undead were being sent to the village and the cave was at its most vulnerable. During that moment, the trio of Theodore, Sylvia, and Randolph would raid the base. This was a strategy which really matched the term ‘counterattack.’

‘…What a monstrous kid. And he’s only 19? What the hell are the

magic towers teaching kids these days?'

Randolph started having cold sweat after grasping the outline of the plan. He had a long history of studying tactics as the descendant of a warrior, yet it was a 19 year old boy who had envisioned such a bold move.

If it failed, Theo would lose his life, but he didn't hesitate to challenge it. It was like he was carrying someone's (Alfred) madness.

Apart from that chill, Randolph had to admit that Theodore's strategy was indeed worthy.

"...I will add a clause here. The Wandering Wolves will remain to defend the village while the two investigators and Randolph attacks the base. If the counterattack fails, the troops will evacuate with the villagers. I will also give you 300 gold. How about it?"

The troops would block the undead steadily as they moved toward the escape path.

Randolph laughed as he realized he had no reason to refuse. If he listened to this and retreated, then it would be humiliating in its own way. He would gain 300 gold as well as the heirlooms, so it was a reward which was worth the gamble.

Randolph finally got out of his seat and took out his mercenary badge. "Randolph, leader of the Wandering Wolves, will accept

Theodore Miller's commission. This oath is made in front of Marcus, the God of War."

The mercenary badge made of steel shone with a red light for a while. It was similar to the 'Geass Scroll' which Theodore had used in the past, creating a compulsion that would prevent the mercenary from breaking the contract.

If the contract was broken, then the mercenary would be punished by the priest of the God of War, Marcus. Now in a true sense, Theodore and Randolph were in the same boat.

However, Theo's strategy was far from over. "Ah, that reminds me."

"Huh?"

"During a commission, all the loot normally goes to the people making the commission. Is that correct?"

Randolph blinked at the unexpected question. He just thought that the young magician wanted to know about the rules of the industry. When Randolph nodded without thinking, Theo smiled with satisfaction. He had accomplished his purpose of hiring mercenaries, so it was now time to reap back the money.

This was why people should listen until the end.

"Hrmm, since there seems to be family heirlooms inside the

warlock's base... I don't know how much they will cost."

"W-What?!" Randolph's eyes bugged out like he had been hit on the back of the head with a hammer.

The heirlooms weren't near the base but inside it...? If so, according to the rule, the ownership of the heirlooms would pass over to Theo. In a sense, Randolph's eyes had been blurred by the 300 gold. The smoke screen covering Theo's words had now been removed.

Ultimately, Randolph was stunned by the counterattack. '... Surely, he hadn't been aiming for this from the beginning?'

As Randolph looked into Theo's eyes, he was lost for words. There was a wide smile on the face of the ecstatic magician.

'I did well to read the report carefully.' Theo thought.

Perhaps it had been discovered before the erosion of the grimoire had begun, but the magic tower had given him some reports written by the investigator. In one, it mentioned the presence of twin swords found in the cave.

Theo recognized the hierarchical relationship had flipped and pointed to the gold coin pouches next to him. "Randolph, you have 300 gold at the moment, but would you like to share any with me?"

Randolph had never heard it before, but this was probably the

devil's whisper.

***

In the end, Randolph was forced to exchange ownership of the heirlooms for 200 gold. Thus, Theo hired the Wandering Wolves and an excellent swordsman, Randolph, for only 100 gold. A profit of at least 50 gold was made.

'I could have more, but... I shouldn't be too greedy. I can't ask the mercenaries to fight for nothing.'

He looked back on the conversation a few hours ago.

If he had taken back all of the 300 gold, then Theo and Randolph might have become enemies after this task was over. Unpaid labour was a sin for mercenaries who sold their lives. Whereas if Randolph didn't have the 100 gold, he would be forced to pay the mercenaries out of his own pocket or they might abandon him. A few gold coins was enough for Randolph since he was mainly after the heirlooms.

"Well, this is a win-win situation," Theodore muttered brazenly.

Randolph appeared behind him and asked brusquely, "This damn employer, how is it a win-win situation?" He was uncomfortable since a 19 year old child had tricked 200 gold from him. However, he would get the heirlooms he was searching for, so the damage wasn't too big.

Theo said with a smile, “We both get what we want, I suppose.”

“Hah, you are really good.” Randolph laughed and continued saying, “The defenses are all in place. We can still block them off even if what shows up is double of yesterday’s number of undead…”

Then as he looked around, Randolph spoke in an admiring tone, “To be honest, it is really amazing. Even though you are magicians, it is great that you can create all of that in half a day.”

The plains near the Miller Barony had been completely altered, making yesterday’s scenery seem like a lie.

White walls sprang up all over the desolate plains. It was the 4th Circle magic ‘Stone Wall’ which Theo had used to create improvised defenses. The walls would survive even if a zombie crashed into it a few times.

Additionally, the mercenaries could use these defensive walls to be more efficient than they’d been yesterday. If a flying-type creature like the ghoul wyvern appeared, they would be able to cope more safely than before.

“Well, it is almost all thanks to Mitra,” Theo muttered and patted the small girl resting on his chest.

There was a faint [Hoooung] sound which tickled his chest. In

order to create these walls which could block the black magic that didn't belong in nature, Mitra had been forced to exert herself.

Then as Theo and Randolph looked around at the walls, Sylvia approached them slowly.

"Hrmm, Theo..."

"Did you wake up just now?"

"...Yes, it has been a while since I took a nap."

Sylvia had a drowsy face, but the magic power around her body was in a perfect state. The mana responded to her sensitivity, so the area around her was much cooler. Randolph looked at her briefly before turning his attention to the forest which the undead came from.

The reddish sky was gradually turning darker.

"It is sunset, Employer."

As Randolph spoke, the two magicians looked in the same direction.

The sun was sinking below the mountains, and the children of darkness came out of the shadows. There were already several eyeballs visible in the dense forest. The reddish blue light was

absolutely not coming from living creatures.

The corpses were glowing due to the power which denied the laws of nature. Once again, the night of the undead began, and the period filled with the stench of blood and death would soon start again.

The mercenaries breathed nervously, and some of them even took a sip from the alcohol they had concealed. It was at this moment that...

"...Until today!" Randolph's passionate voice drew the attention of the mercenaries. "You have suffered in the meantime! Enjoy the night until the sun rises tomorrow! Tonight is the last time! We'll say farewell to these damn guys!"

After the leader's words finished, 100 shouts exploded.

"Ohhhhhhh——!" The shouts filled with anger and joy caused even the hiding undead to tremble. It was like the howling of wolves responding to their leader.

The night wind blew, shaking the leaves of the trees as the sun finally set below the western horizon. Simultaneously, the stench of death emerged from the darkness.

-Roaaaaar!

-Roaaaaar!

The corpses headed toward the mercenaries. Even if they couldn’t be seen, the stench of death made it obvious that the undead were coming. Moonlight bounced off the mercenaries’ polished blades as they focused their senses.

Undead and humans... This was the moment when the boundary between life and death crossed.

Chapter 47 - Trio's Counterattack #1

Obviously, the mercenaries were the ones who attacked first.

The mercenaries retreated to the rear of the barrier and pulled out something from their waist. Then they loaded it with stones piled up nearby and started to spin it. The item was a sling, a ranged weapon which used centrifugal force to launch rocks like they were arrows.

Slings were easier to carry than bows, and unlike arrows, rocks could be found everywhere. Such advantages were attractive to mercenaries who couldn't afford expensive equipment.

"Fire!" Instead of Randolph, the vice commander Hank shouted, and the stones flew.

Pak! Pakak! Pak! Puhak!

The small undead like kobolds and goblins were broken in one hit by the stones. The orcs didn't fall instantly, but it was the same result after being hit three or four times. In a flash, the remnants of the undead fell to the ground.

However, that damage was nothing when there were thousands of corpses gathered.

"They are like a swarm of ants."

Theo, Sylvia, and Randolph observed the bodies from their position on a barrier. Looking at the crowd of rotten undead approaching was enough to make a person nauseous. One undead wasn't much, but the story was different if there were thousands. It was a disaster similar to grasshoppers devastating a field of crops.

Randolph's mouth dropped open as he stared at the scene.

According to the plan set up by his employer, Theodore, the three of them had to go to the rear of the wave of undead. However, it was impossible to open a path among such numbers, even with the firepower of a magician. If they used 4th and 5th Circle spells, there was a chance, but then they would lose the capacity to fight by the time they reached the warlock's base.

So, Theo thought of a way to get through without fighting.

"Weight Reduction." Theo's magic was completed a step ahead of Sylvia's and wrapped around the two of them.

It was a lightweight magic frequently applied to objects but not humans. With that, Theo and Sylvia's body weight was reduced by half. The magic which Sylvia had been preparing was also completed now.

"Hidden Mana Force." Magic power emerged from her staff and wrapped around all three people this time.

It was a magic which hid the mana pouring from their bodies. It wasn't a good magic to use against an opponent with all five senses, but there was nothing better against undead which only pursued mana.

With this, the basic setup was done. Theo confirmed that the spells were working properly and nodded.

"It's done. We can start at any time."

"Young Lady?"

"I'm ready."

"...Right then, both of you come over here."

After hearing their answers, Randolph clicked his tongue and tied his sword more firmly to his waist. Then his large hands grabbed the boy and girl, and he hoisted them over his shoulders. As Randolph's great strength was now combined with the lightweight magic, he couldn't feel the weight of the two people at all. Their appearance was indecent, but that couldn't be helped.

In next moment, Randolph jumped fearlessly toward the wave of undead while carrying the two people!

"Don't open your mouth, Employer! You might bite your tongue off!"

As a first rate swordsman, Randolph's power was already beyond the domain of an ordinary human.

He jumped 10 meters high in a single step, and the distance he leaped covered 50 meters. It was a leap which defied the existence of gravity. However, he didn't have wings, so he would eventually have to fall down, even if he jumped high.

Soon enough, Randolph began to fall at a terrifying speed.

'Kuk, opening a path this way…' He chuckled as he gathered aura in the soles of his feet.

When he thought the it, he realised it wasn't that difficult. Even if the undead were rotten, it was a lot easier to trample on their heads and move that way! Randolph's foot landed on the head of an orc zombie.

Peng!

The impact of the fall and the resistance from Randolph's aura caused the zombie to explode. As soon as the orc zombie's head exploded, Randolph jumped again.

It wasn't just that. The heads of a goblin and hobgoblin further away soon burst open as well. Randolph used them as stepping stones as he crossed the group of undead. This was method called 'flying on grass' in the east, but Randolph used aura to replicate

the trick.

(TL: Meaning to run so fast that it is like you are flying on grass)

As a result, the three people were able to get through the wave of corpses, like a fish swimming up a waterfall.

‘Amazing…! Is this movement due to aura? To think a human can move like this without magic…’

In the meantime, Theodore was busy observing Randolph’s movements. He understood the concept of aura when studying at the academy, but he had never experienced it at the level of someone like Randolph.

Unlike magic which refined mana in the body, aura was a way of strengthening the human body. It was one of the tricks for those without magic power, and this was also the national power of the arch rival of Meltor Kingdom, the Andras Empire.

It was different from magic which utilized mana in various ways. Aura was the crystallization of pure power, a method developed from studying fighting from beginning to end. An extremely skilled aura user could compete with an ogre, which was an advanced monster, or be reborn as a monster who could split apart a wall with a single sword.

“This… last one!”

Puhak! Randolph crushed the head of a troll zombie and jumped

forward. From now on, he could use the tree branches instead of stepping on the undead.

Randolph looked at his right shoulder and said to Theo, “From here on, I will follow the instructions of my employer. Guide me to the fastest path, even if the terrain is a little steep.”

“I understand,” Theo acknowledged.

This was a place where he’d played frequently during his childhood. The vegetation was a bit different, but he was able to find the location of the cave written in the report. Without considering the arduous terrain, a map with the straightest line to the cave appeared in Theo’s head.

“40 degrees to the left until you see a small cliff!”

Following Theodore’s instructions, Randolph shot off again like an arrow. The undead passing below them never noticed the presence of the party. Even if they did, there was nothing they could do to the three people in the trees.

The trio’s counterattack began in the darkness.

***

The leader of the Wandering Wolves, Randolph, was indisputably worth 300 gold. He stepped on the undead and tree branches, and even climbed up small cliffs and waterfalls. Thanks

to that, the trip was reduced from one hour to 20 minutes. However, Theodore's expression was stiff.

Starting from where they'd entered the forest to their present location, Theo estimated that the number of undead was close to 10,000.

'That number is ridiculous... What did the warlock do to invoke such a large number of undead? Does this grimoire specialize in summoning undead?'

In particular, the warlock had summoned wyverns and ogres which didn't exist in this area. It was more likely that he'd called the bodies from somewhere else instead of making them personally. Or maybe he released the undead from the 'Negative Dimension' available only for outstanding necromancers. There would nothing unusual about that if he possessed a grimoire.

Just like how Theo unlocked Gluttony's seals, maybe the warlock had released a seal which gave him access to the Negative Dimension.

"Hey, Employer." At that moment, Randolph stopped and pointed somewhere. "We've arrived at the target area. What are your next instructions?"

"...Put me down first."

"Whoops, I forgot since you are so light." In less than five

seconds, Randolph's grin broke his serious expression.

Theodore and Sylvia had been lightened by magic, but Randolph showed no signs of hard breathing even despite all the running. Rather, it was Sylvia who wobbled when she was put down, like she had motion sickness.

Theo walked calmly before the cave.

"View Mana Force." Blue magic power flashed in his eyes.

The 2nd Circle magic allowed him to visualize mana in the air, so he would be able to tell if the warlock was in the cave. Indeed, the result of the magic was quite good.

"Ack...?!" Theo's vision was suddenly covered in darkness.

The dark mana spread like a poisonous gas and entered his eyes. He suffered no injuries, but the sudden loss of sight could be called terrible. The density of the dark mana, which he countered for the first time, was at a level which Theo couldn't have guessed.

He turned off View Mana Force and wiped the sweat off his forehead. "I'm certain. That guy is in there. The mana spread around the cave is filled with darkness. It can truly be called hell."

If the warlock had left this cave, then Theo's group would be like a dog chasing after chickens. The counterattack plan would fail, and they would have to immediately return to the Miller Barony to

prepare for the evacuation.

The 200 gold received as collateral for the swords would also have to be returned to Randolph.

“Sylvia, how’s your condition?”

“Yes, it is okay. I was just dizzy for a moment.”

“Randolph, are your legs okay?”

“Of course. I can’t be a mercenary if I am already tired.”

After verifying their conditions, Theo fell deep into thought. It had been successful thus far, but he couldn’t be sure what would happen next. The dark cave was the warlock’s base, and he didn’t know what was being done in there.

At the crossroad of victory or defeat, he took a step forward.

“Let’s go in.”

It had taken them a long time to reach this location. If the warlock became aware of the trio’s strike, he could escape and bring back the undead. They couldn’t afford to stop due to tension or fear.

“Randolph will be in the lead, I’ll be in the middle, and Sylvia will be at the rear. Keep this formation as much as possible. If you encounter the warlock, then you can move freely.”

“Yes, understood.”

“I understand.”

Theo hadn’t known it, but the memories he obtained from Alfred awakened his abilities as a commander. The two people naturally accepted his direction as they lined up around Theo, and Randolph entered the cave first.

There was no need for them to carry separate tools like torches.

“Light.” Simultaneously, two balls of light appeared in the darkness. The shadows in the cave were pushed away, and its appearance was revealed.

Indeed, not all the undead had been sent to fight. The three of them prepared for battle.

It was at this moment that...

[Rats...! You dare to... invade my residence...!] An ugly and distorted voice echoed through the cave!

It seemed like a voice from the depths of hell instead of a human

voice. The negative mana responded, and Theodore's party was covered with a cold chill.

[You may have found my dwelling place, but...! You will never be able to go back alive...!] Anger filled the terrible voice as the undead started moving.

A burned orc warrior picked up an axe, and a direwolf zombie revealed its fangs. A moderate number of undead had been left here as protection.

[Kill...! And, die...] This sentence of death was spoken by the grimoire!

However, Theodore just laughed at the sentence. "I guess we made it in time."

"Yes. Shall we make that fool shit himself while begging?" Randolph noticed and also spoke in a ridiculing manner.

A lion didn't bark; a person convinced of their victory would have no need to threaten their opponent. If they ran away from this threat, they would miss their prey. Only those who sensed defeat would bark like this while asking the opponent not to approach.

"Let's go." With renewed confidence, a crimson flame ignited in the palm of Theodore's hand.

Chapter 48 - Trio's Counterattack #2 (End Of Book 2)

The combination of three people, also known as a three-man cell, was really effective in small-scale engagements.

In Meltor Kingdom, the tactics of two magicians and one warrior or two warriors and one magician had been established. There were numerous proven combinations, so nobody doubted its utility.

Theodore's group agreed with this theory.

Shaaack!

At the front of the party, there was flashes of light as Randolph's two swords moved. He used aura as well while his blades moved through the ghouls. The two blades swung about like whips and mercilessly destroyed five orc ghouls. Before Randolph could be hit by the undead, magic was used.

"Resist Cold."

"Frost Wave."

Theo's resistance spell protected Randolph from Sylvia's wave of cold air.

All living creatures and the undead froze from the cold, but Randolph had the cold resistance, so he quickly shattered the frozen undead without a moment of delay. The intermediate ranked undead ghouls were washed away like garbage.

Randolph clicked his tongue in admiration as he felt like he was hitting scarecrows. ‘Wow, amazing. My employer and the girl are linking their magics in accordance with my movements. I guess he isn’t just talk. This is why he planned the counterattack.’

Even if the combination of three people was excellent, it was useless if the hands and feet of the members didn’t fit together. Bad teamwork could interfere with the movements of their allies and in the worst case, even help the enemy kill each other.

Therefore, Randolph had to appreciate the work of this three-man combination.

“Randolph, jump!”

He followed the sudden command without any panic.

“Wind Cutter!”

Simultaneously, a wind blade appeared underneath Randolph’s shoes as he jumped. It was several times faster than an ordinary Wind Cutter but just as sharp! A ghoul’s ankles were severed, causing it to fall, and Randolph’s sword finished them off.

As the unstoppable linked movements of the three flowed, the passage was filled with the wreckage of the undead.

“Hoooo… Let me breathe for a moment.” Theodore caught his breath after the third battle and looked at Randolph.

Despite the fact that Randolph had to swing his two falchions continuously, his breathing was still calm. It was evidence that he still had a lot of energy to spare.

‘It is reassuring having someone as powerful as Randolph here.’

Just as Randolph admired Theodore’s skills, Theodore was also amazed at Randolph. Randolph’s sword skill which didn’t retreat at all was truly ruthless. Even the orc ghoul couldn’t withstand the two whirling swords.

Theo was relieved that he was an ally, but he also felt the need to improve in close combat. If Theodore had to fight Randolph now, he would only last 10 seconds. There were fighting tactics which used magic as well as close combat martial arts like the ones Blundell used. Once Theo finished this job, he was going to find one.

Theo finished arranging his thoughts and looked around him. “Sylvia, how is your magic power?”

“Around 80%? There is still a lot.”

“Randolph.”

“I’m the same. I can keep fighting at this pace.”

Theodore confirmed their statuses and looked at the path covered in darkness again. After three attacks and as many as 100 ghouls, only silence was remaining in the darkness. Was he imagining it? If he didn’t hurry, it seemed like there would be an uncontrollable situation in the darkness.

“…Then let’s move on.”

As the two light spells led the way, Theodore once again began to advance into the darkness.

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How long did they move through the darkness?

Theodore felt a sense of incongruity and paused for a moment. According to what he’d read in the report, the depth of the cave was only a few hundred meters, so they should’ve reached the end by now.

However, they path hadn’t ended, and the room containing artifacts was nowhere to be seen. One possible hypothesis popped up into Theo’s head.

“Randolph.”

“Huh?”

“Carve the cave wall with your sword. If you can afford it, please use aura.”

“...I will try it once.” Randolph was confused but complied with Theo’s order without questioning it.

It was due to his previous experience with Theo that he knew Theo wouldn’t speak for no reason. So, Randolph placed his hand on the hilt of his left sword and held it at an angle while concentrating.

One strike lashed out. A blue flash emerged, and the wall cracked. The ordinary wall couldn’t stop the aura blade. However, Randolph’s eyes soon widened. “No...?”

The cracked wall was closing up again right before his eyes!

As a swordsman since birth, Randolph didn’t know what it was, but Theodore’s and Sylvia’s faces became serious as they understood the situation. Severely dark mana leaked from the wall, like guts emerging from a living creature. The two people muttered almost simultaneously as they were reminded of a magic.

“Dungeon...”

It was a powerful 6th Circle black magic spell which turned an area of a certain range into the user's domain.

The time and resources consumed were huge, but if the magic was completed, the power of the dungeon master would increase significantly. Whether it was due to the grimoire or the warlock already reaching this level, this was absolutely not a good situation.

The warlock had turned this cave into a dungeon and could freely shape the structure. At that moment, a creepy noise started to ring in their ears.

Kieeeeeeek-!

Chills ran down Theodore's spine. The physiological aversion was three or four times more powerful due to the sound waves echoing in the cave. The group automatically activated their aura and magic power as the source of the chill emerged. They were translucent shapes floating in the air.

"Specters?!"

"Damn, I don't have any holy water...!"

The group frowned at the specters. Unlike the undead, specters didn't have physical shapes and were collections of grudges which united together. They attacked by stealing a living body or

draining vitality from it.

Since they existed as spiritual bodies, physical attacks were ineffective, and divine magic was essential. Cutting them with a sword was like throwing a duck into the frying pan. For Randolph, they were tricky opponents because he didn't have any holy water.

Shortly after that, the specters discovered the living beings and ran forward aggressively.

"It can't be helped, let's try it first!"

Although it was unfavourable, the two magicians would be in danger if Randolph stepped back here. Being in the vanguard meant blocking the enemy's attack first and then becoming a wall. Therefore, aura sprang up fiercely around Randolph's blades. He would stop the specters even if he had to overuse his aura.

However, he then received an order he hadn't considered.

"Randolph, fall behind me!"

"What?"

"Quickly!"

"...Damn, understood!"

It was confusing, but Theo didn't disappoint him. Despite delaying by half a beat, Randolph stepped behind in accordance with the order. As soon as he backed away, Theodore stepped forward without any fear.

Kkieeeek! Kikikiiiik!

Kikikiiiik! Kihihihik!

Why didn't Theo feel afraid of them? The specters laughed wildly and flew at them. It was a charge which intended to suck out every bit of vitality from Theo's body.

As Sylvia and Randolph watched in preparation to jump in, the specters reached Theo.

–Eat everything…

This wasn't his voice. It was the instinct of Gluttony sleeping in his left hand. The unknown hunger was why Theodore was laughing at the specters and why he went forward without hesitation.

He felt Gluttony's tongue emerging from the hole in his left palm. There was a saying which went like this, 'There is no predator that is afraid of its food.'

Then the eating began.

Kiaaaaaaack!

In the face of the original predator, the specters lost their madness. Even though all the grudges and despair tried to escape, Gluttony had already caught them. The cries filled with pain, horror, and fear were heard as the ghosts were sucked into his palm. They were different from the undead like ghouls and zombies. Specters were born with black magic and were made of magic themselves, so they met the conditions for what Gluttony perceived as ‘food.’

[The ghost of the goblin shaman has been consumed.]

[The ghost of the orc warrior has been consumed.]

[The ghost of a foolish troll has been consumed.]

[……]

[The user still hasn’t unlocked the function yet.]

Theodore’s consumption of the specters caused an unknown feeling to fill up his body. It was different from eating artifacts or magic books. This was an abstract representation, but Theo felt like his ‘bowl’ was full.

Theo opened his eyes as he enjoyed the sense of fulfillment. By then all the specters filling the corridor were gone. They had all been eaten, or perhaps the rest had run away. Either way, his original goal of stopping the specters was achieved.

“Hey, Employer?”

“...Theo?”

However, the other two people were another story.

“What happened just now? You raised your left hand, and the specters were sucked into it...”

“Theo, teach me that! What did you do? Is it from the drain system? Or a modified version of sealing magic?”

Fortunately, Sylvia and Randolph had been behind him. The hole in his hand and the tongue moving were at an angle which they couldn’t see. This was enough for Theo to evade it vaguely. He was planning to make an excuse by saying it was the ability of a pendant he’d pulled out.

However, the surrounding space began to shake before he could say anything.

“Wah! What is going on?”

“This…!”

“It is getting wider…?”

This was Dimension Expansion!

Suddenly, the area where the three people were standing widened into a dome. Theo went from standing in a narrow corridor to a huge room, but he quickly regained his composure. Only the warlock could do something like this inside the dungeon.

Unsurprisingly, there was an ornately decorated door.

Kkiiik-

As the doorknob turned by itself, the door opened, and someone in black robes emerged. Instead of walking out like a person, he slowly appeared in midair.

Then a sound was heard from inside the black robes, [Well…you broke my creations.]

It was a loud and terrible voice which resonated through the cave. The physique inside the robes didn’t seem strong, but the three people could see the eerie and enormous flow of power enveloping him.

A darkness, which couldn’t be seen through, surrounded the

robe, and the evil voice resonated like it was singing.

[You can kill my creatures, but you can't kill me. If you were here a day, no half a day earlier, you would have stopped me from completing it. But now, the destiny you will suffer is death!]

The magic power expanded as the voice became louder. The black robes flapped. Unable to withstand the pressure anymore, the robes burst like a popped bubble. The two magicians turned pale at the nightmare which was revealed amidst the torn cloth.

[Look, the image of death itself! The greatness of the one who is beyond the bounds of a lowly mortal!]

It was a skull without any flesh left, and blue light appeared in the hollow holes where the eyes should be. The black magic gathered there so deeply that even people who weren't magicians would be able to see it circling around like a fog, while the soil which the death magic touched became rotten, and bodies sleeping in the ground raised themselves.

This was a top level undead made by a corrupted magician. Even the magic towers would be stunned. Its name was Elder Lich.

Unlike a lich which evaded death by keeping its soul bound, a magician had to extract their own soul from their body and seal it. The elder lich would be immortal unless the Life Vessel was destroyed.

A monster which the magic tower would designate with a level 3 difficulty had appeared before Theodore's party.

The bones floated naturally in the air. [At first, I wanted to kill all of you and turn your bodies into my servants, but...]

In front of the three nervous people, the elder lich raised its bony index finger. Then he pointed to Theo in the middle of the party.

[Your body will be an interesting experiment. I will take you alive.]

Chapter 49 - Uh, This Is Eating? #1

It was truly a prideful declaration. The elder lich's appearance of black robes cloaked in darkness made resembled a reaper leading the living to death. An ordinary person would panic if they heard those words.

"Ha, you bark well!"

"Who do you want to take on, Theo?"

However, the three people weren't overwhelmed by the elder lich. It was a top ranking opponent who could use 6th Circle black magic, but they weren't weak either. They had an expert aiming to become a sword master, the disciple of the Blue Tower Master, and the owner of a grimoire. In regards to their combat strength, there was no reason for them to be incapable of defeating a necromancer.

Randolph raised his two swords, while frost emerged from the end of Sylvia's staff. The three people instantly got into their fighting postures as the momentum of the elder lich's attack hit them.

Wuoooooong!

They stiffened! Neither side was pushed back, so the boundary between them didn't break. It meant that the three people were equal in power to the elder lich. No, they were slightly ahead in some ways. The three people had the benefits of a three-in-one

combination, while the elder lich would have to deal with them coming at him from all sides.

The elder lich floating in the air realized that he was at a disadvantage. [Hrmm...it will be hard to adapt to your trivial power in this unfamiliar body.]

However, his voice still sounded confident. [Experiment... You have a unique power, but in the end, you are a 4th Circle magician... I'll deal with you later.]

As the words struck Theo with a wave of nervousness, the elder lich suddenly pointed his finger at Theo, and a dreadful magic power streamed from the end of his bony finger.

[Disappear!]

"What—?" Theo's figure disappeared without even a crack in the air.

"Theo?!"

"Employer!"

Confused, Sylvia and Randolph turned to look at the place where Theo had disappeared from, but he never returned. Sylvia cried out as she belatedly noticed what the elder lich had done. It was a magic which someone who had just entered the 6th Circle couldn't learn without great difficulty, but the opponent had succeeded

easily.

“Space Transformation...!”

[That’s right.] The elder lich, who had broken the balance of power with a single magic, spoke in an even more relaxed manner. [This cave is already in my hands... Didn’t I say that? You missed out on your opportunity to beat me. While lamenting your fate, be reborn as my servant...!]

Simultaneously, the shape of a man rose from a shadow on the ground.

Wearing broken armour and an old-fashioned helmet, the knight shone with a red light. A great knight had clearly been produced. Anyone would feel a sense of intimidation from the presence of the skull knight.

Most of all, Randolph’s eyes were drawn to the two swords it was holding.

“...It can’t be!”

The pattern of howling wolves on the swords showed they were the heirloom swords lost more than 100 years ago. The horizontal stance of the arms was also familiar. Randolph’s eyes were blank for a moment before anger started to boil inside them. “Kill... I’ll kill you no matter what!”

[Hoh? Do you think you can beat the blades your ancestor couldn't?]

"That doesn't matter," Randolph spoke curtly and took his position.

The skeleton knight responded with the same stance. It was like facing a mirror, but the skull knight had a greyish white aura around it. The elder lich watched the confrontation between the two swordsmen before glancing at Sylvia, who was holding her staff.

[You're a prized disciple of the Blue Tower Master of this era... A strange sense of inferiority is coming from my host.]

He was truly excited. To be exact, it was the elder lich, the grimoire, who thought so. If the host felt negative feelings, then the rate of erosion would increase. He would have two specimens to experiment with and the erosion rate would increase even more. He would make the swordsman into a dullahan and the female into a banshee.

[Come play with me.]

"What if I don't want to?" Sylvia replied in a cold voice as she waved her staff.

Then the air cooled as magic power emerged.

“I will get Theo back.” There was no further conversations after her declaration.

The irrational tag match of Randolph and Sylvia going against the skull knight and the elder lich began.

***

On the other hand, Theodore was subjected to the elder lich’s forced transfer and fell to an unknown place.

Darkness completely covered his view. Theo instantly activated Light, but the dark mana floating in the air reduced the brightness of the light to less than half. Still, dim lighting was better than nothing.

Theo gulped inadvertently as his surroundings were revealed by the hazy lighting.

“This place…?”

It wasn’t a big space. At best, it could be compared to one of the rooms in the academy. However, it was different in that there were no windows, and it seemed thoroughly enclosed. Surrounded by dark red walls, there was no visible way to go outside this room.

The red crystal in the center was the sole thing which told him where this place was; it was the Core Room, the heart of the dungeon. However, rather than being stunned by the fact that he’d

been moved to the core room, Theo was stunned by the identity of the red crystal which functioned as the core of the dungeon.

A high-density black magic power was coming from the red crystal. It was the elder lich's sealed life, the Life Vessel.

'He put his heart into the core of the dungeon... That was how he could use Space Transformation!'

Life Vessel... It was the word for the life stone where the elder lich sealed his own soul.

Unlike ordinary liches who died when their bodies were destroyed, the elder lich wouldn't die no matter what happened to him. Even if his bones were turned to ash and thrown into a volcano, he would eventually be restored.

The Life Vessel was the reason why the two magicians, Theo and Sylvia, had become desperate after seeing the elder lich.

In fact, there was no reason to be afraid of the elder lich aside from the fact that he sealed his life outside his body. If he considered it in terms of a human, their heart would be detached from their chest. Was the elder lich afraid of the three-man combination so much that he exposed his own weakness?

However, the reason for this was simple.

"Blaze Shell!" Crimson flames emerged from Theodore's hand as

he completed the 4th Circle magic in a flash.

It was a massive fireball which could destroy rock formations and kill trolls famous for their regenerative power! The powerful attack, which war magicians from the Red Tower enjoyed, rushed toward the red crystal.

That rushing fireball exploded right away. Puhwakak!

However, as soon as it approached the Life Vessel, it disappeared without a trace. Despite it being what he'd expected, Theo cursed with a dark expression. "...Dammit."

This mysterious defense was also a reason for the elder lich's existence. It nullified all attacks below a certain level. According to historical records, only the aura of a sword master or the firepower of a 7th Circle magician worked against it.

In other words, Theodore Miller had no available means to damage it.

'Rejoining the other two... It will be hard to do that. I don't know the direction, and I would be finished if the ceiling collapsed while I destroy the wall.'

His group would die if he couldn't overcome the Life Vessel's defense. However, it was too risky to create a passage by destroying the wall. Theo was in a situation where he had no sense of direction and didn't know how far he had fallen. It was more

likely that he would collapse from exhaustion after wasting magic power.

This was why the elder lich had confined him in here.

"...Should I try a last hurrah?"

According to common sense, there was no way to be free of this predicament. Theo couldn't escape from here nor destroy the Life Vessel.

The checkmate situation drove Theodore's thoughts into an extreme direction. 'If I concentrate all my remaining magic power and sacrifice one of my arms to use Magic Bullet...!' He may be able to break through the Life Vessel's defense.

A blue light covered Theo's arm, and his blood vessels began to burst as he concentrating on pushing his magic power beyond his limit. The flash would be enough to even break through the defenses of 6th Circle magic. So, he tried to recreate the power contained in Magic Bullet during Alfred's prime.

He might lose his right arm, but wasn't that better than dying? It was at this moment that...

"...Eh?"

A memory floated into his mind and dispersed the gathered magic power.

–The undead only moves through magic. They aren't made of magic power or wisdom.

Gluttony had continued. What else had it said?

-There are some exceptions, but...

Theodore's mind started spinning faster.

Gluttony couldn't eat zombies and ghouls, but it did eat specters. What was the difference? The presence or absence of the flesh? No, that wasn't it. If so, it would be possible to eat spirit,s but Gluttony had never showed interest in Mitra.

Then the noteworthy part should be, 'Did it have magic power or wisdom dwelling inside it?'

"Is that right?"

The Life Vessel which contained the elder lich's immortality should fit that condition! Theo unconsciously walked a few steps and raised his left hand. The Life Vessel only negated attacks and didn't have the ability to intercept any approaching objects. That nature served as a deadly poison for it this time.

The cohabitant of Theo's left hand, the primordial predator, recognized its prey and stretched out its tongue!

“Appraisal.”

Indeed, Gluttony didn’t betray Theo’s expectations.

[+13 Giovanni’s Life Vessel (Magic Tool)]

[This is a seal created using evil wisdom. It contains the soul of Giovanni who was corrupted by black magic. A negative resource contract protects this seal. It invalidates all attacks below a certain level and can’t be targeted by spatial magic spells. As long as this seal exists, Giovanni will acquire limited immortality.

* The rating of this magic tool is ‘Treasure.’

* When consumed, a large amount of magic power will be absorbed.

* When consumed, the digestion time is three days.

* When consumed, some of Giovanni’s knowledge and proficiency will be absorbed.

* When consumed, a hostile relationship will form with ????.]

After Rare and Precious, the first Treasure-rated item had appeared! The fact that Gluttony's Appraisal worked was proof that the Life Vessel was suitable for eating.

Theodore recognized this fact and quickly said, "Eat it right now!"

There was no choice left except for Gluttony to eat it. Above all, Sylvia and Randolph were fighting the elder lich in his absence. If he didn't hurry, they might be placed in an irreversible situation. Did it notice the urgency of its owner? The tongue was moving a lot faster than before.

Then it quickly swallowed the crystal.

Gulp.

The moment that the Life Vessel of the top ranking elder lich was eaten...

[You have overcome 'Giovanni's Life Vessel.' The amount of magic power it contains is huge.]

[You have absorbed some of the knowledge and proficiency of the warlock 'Giovanni.'

[It will take three days to completely digest.]

[……]

[An unknown person is interested in your existence.]

Chapter 50 - Uh, This Is Eating? #2

At the time when Gluttony was eating a huge jackpot, the Sylvia and Randolph's tag match was slowly ending. Obviously, it was the elder lich who had the edge.

[Rot away...!]

The black magic spread and rotted everything, regardless of whether it was organic or inorganic matter. The ground became compost, and the air turned into a poison which would decay the lungs. It was a level of pollution which even aura users couldn't tolerate.

The 6th Circle magic, Life Drain, was completed. The elder lich, the top ranking undead, was immortal. Fighting him with 5th Circle magic was unreasonable.

Thanks to that desperate gap, Sylvia reacted one beat later. "Freeze!"

The air and ground froze, stopping the pollution. The high speed freezing was due to the artifact, 'Jack Frost's staff.' Addition, if it wasn't for her overwhelming sensitivity, she would've suffered more.

Other magicians would've already reached their limits, but she had just under 3% magic power remaining.

“Hah...! Hah...!” Her hair stuck to her sweaty face in an unpleasant manner.

She wiped angrily at her hair and glared at the white bones floating before her.

Her opponent’s capabilities were a few times higher than hers. The amount of magic power and speed of magic casting didn’t fall behind either. If the immortality was added, there seemed to be no way for Sylvia to attack.

The situation was similar for Randolph who was fighting nearby.

Kakiing! The two swords collided with two swords, causing sparks to fly from the four swords.

The blades moved faster than the sound. Randolph’s left sword broke the opponent’s shoulder, while the skull knight drew a line of blood on Randolph’s neck. The incessant attacks caused a fearsome wind to rise around the two swordsmen.

The knight was just a mere skeleton, so its swordsmanship lacked flexibility after becoming an undead, Randolph cleverly moved through those gaps. However, that didn’t change the fact that the skeleton knight was a tough opponent.

‘Damn old geezer!’

At the same time, Randolph blocked three of the skeleton

knight's stabs with a single blow.

Keeng! Randolph let out a huge sword pressure.

He retreated a few steps from the pressure. It was a perfect type of counter attack which could have come straight from a textbook. If the opponent wasn't hardened as an undead, his head would've fallen off around 10 times now.

'Still... I found a gap I can dig into.'

The skeleton was using a swordsmanship which had stopped improving 100 years ago, so Randolph didn't miss the small loopholes which were revealed.

[Young Lady.] Randolph's voice was heard using a trick which directed his voice toward only one person. [I will give you a gap. Use the biggest technique you have available...!]

Without waiting for a reaction, Randolph focused on his dual wield. For the first time in this battle, the skeleton was thrown back by pure strength. Randolph's momentum had changed in a very short moment.

'Have I seen this posture before? An old-fashioned inspiration...'

If a technique had been lost 100 years ago, there would also be a new technique born 100 years later. However, there was no such posture in Randolph's family's swordsmanship. The moment it

changed from a familiar posture to an unfamiliar one, there was a gap in his body's defense. It was a mistake Randolph wouldn't have done if his opponent were alive.

'Now!'

Randolph's two swords were like two fangs—two streaks of light!

Gwarurung!

Cracks occurred in the two swords as they accelerated to the extreme, and light flowed from the cracks. Just like a thunderbolt running through the ground, the two swords, which were covered in aura, struck the skull knight's upper body. Then an intense shock wave was generated and knocked firmly against the skeleton knight.

The large skull knight flew right toward the elder lich.

[What is this...?] The elder lich's chanting stopped at the unexpected situation.

If he completed the magic, then he might destroy the precious corpse with his own hands. Right now it was just a skull knight, but it was valuable material which could someday be transformed into a death knight.

During that moment of hesitation, the cold magic power grew. "Master of the cold, Ymir! I beseech you...!"

It was the final magic Sylvia had used in the final match of the tournament, but its completeness and power had greatly increased. The elder lich belatedly noticed the movements of the magic power, but the skeleton knight before him hindered him from avoiding it. At that moment, Sylvia's magic was completed.

'Minor Force. Blizzard.'

A terrible whirlwind swallowed up the two undead!

Jjejejeok! Jjejeok! Jjejejeok!

The ground and even the water in the atmosphere froze. Even the black magic power had no way to resist this overwhelming cold. The skeleton knight turned into a statue as it brandished its swords, while the elder lich's skull was visible in the translucent ice.

In a sense, it was the best attack. The Life Vessel couldn't be destroyed while the elder lich was still safe. If so, using ice magic which restrained his freedom was the most effective thing to do. In an instant, a huge sheet of ice was built in the middle of the room.

[...How great. Truly excellent skill, girl from the Blue Tower.]

However, his attitude was unchanged.

Despite being trapped in the ice, the elder lich was still in a relaxed state. There was no way for them to destroy his immortality. The result had been decided from the beginning, and this battle was just a process of getting there.

[Nevertheless, you can't escape from death. The moment that your magic power runs out and this ice dissolves, that will be your last moment!]

"Ah, you're still barking a lot even until the end," Randolph murmured as he released his grip on his two swords. He knew this was a fight which couldn't be won. It would've been the same if all three people were present.

As long as there was no means to overthrow the elder lich, it was all was just a meaningless struggle. Sylvia's magic power, which had been maintaining the ice, reached its limit.

Jjejejeok... The ice capturing the two undead started to split apart.

As Sylvia's magic power was depleted, the cold air thinned. Small cracks spread, and the ice mountain soon collapsed. Finally, the skeletons emerged from it.

[This is the end... From now on, you will become my servants and forever serve the great death...!]

Sylvia and Randolph had no power to resist or get away. As the

two people stood in place, the black magic of the elder lich reached out like a wave of fog. It was black magic which would rot the body of a living person in an instant. Not long after that, Randolph would become a skull knight and Sylvia a banshee.

Then at this moment, an unpleasant sound rang out from somewhere. Gulp.

The fog stopped and the skull made a confused sound. [Um? What does this mean...?]

The sound was accompanied by a strange sense of loss. It felt like something had disappeared from his body as an inexplicable emptiness tickled his head. The soul of the grimoire's host, the man called Giovanni, had ended up in someone's stomach.

His end came shortly after that.

[————–!!!] The elder lich struggled noiselessly as his soul melted. The skeletal body rattled, and magic power was scattered randomly.

Sylvia and Randolph saw the immortal flesh turn into ashes. This was the fateful end of the elder lich, Giovanni.

Pusususu...

As he disappeared into ashes, the two people gaped with blank expressions. Victory and defeat had been decided in a place they

didn’t know.

***

The dungeon which had lost its core would certainly collapse. According to that principle, the dungeon created by the elder lich started to shatter back to its original form. It became a cave which was just a few meters wide and a few hundred meters deep.

The core room that Theodore was trapped in was no exception.

Kukukukukung…

As the earth trembled, everything returned to its original state. The expanded walls, the bizarre sculptures, and the soil contaminated with a red power all recovered their original vitality. The core room wasn’t a newly created space but a remodelled one.

Theodore understood this fact as he looked around. “Indeed, this is the room that was written in the report.”

He nodded while looking at the antiques and ragged parchment paper on the ground. According to Giovanni’s report, he had found a room full of treasures, including Randolph’s heirlooms.

‘But there isn’t anything that looks like a sword… Perhaps it is somewhere else?’

The positioning of the items might have changed after the dungeon had been created and then removed. Theo placed the antiques into the dimension pocket and stepped out of the room to join the party.

No, it was more correct to say that he tried to.

Wuoooooong!

Feeling an eerie presence behind him, Theo widened the distance reflexively. He was one step ahead of the ominous presence due to his sensory perception. Theo's eyes looked around quickly, and he found a book covered in darkness.

It was a book which stretched out chains of darkness!

"Grimoire!" As Theo cried out with shock, a hole opened in the palm of his hand.

–Huhu, you found it! Leave it to me from here on, User!

Gluttony's usually emotionless voice was filled with a fierce joy. The tongue extended, grabbed the dark grimoire and threw it to the ground.

(■■■■■■...!)

–A fresh guy!

Gluttony ignored the eerie scream coming from the grimoire and continued to beat the book. The grimoire was just like a fly caught by a toad. Darkness occasionally seeped into the cave, but Gluttony's tongue ignored the shock and continued to hit the grimoire persistently.

[■■...■■■...]

Gluttony's attack proved to be effective as the darkness gradually became silent. It was like a person getting thrashed. Theo felt sorry for the grimoire as he was forced to stand still and watch the scene.

The grimoire was probably hit roughly 30 times? It flopped wildly on the ground.

–Impertinent fellow! Daring to take over my user... It would have been better to pick a random person to run away.

Gluttony laughed in a pleased tone. Based on his ridiculing words, the grimoire seemed to have attempted to steal Theo's body as its next host. The grimoire admitted defeat and became like a piece of food as it rolled toward Gluttony.

Just like a beast grabbing its prey, Gluttony placed its tongue on the cover of the grimoire. At the same time, the information of the grimoire flashed in Theo's head.

[Death's Worship]

[This grimoire contains the soul of the legendary warlock, Jerem. As a 9th Circle necromancer who attacked mankind on the side of the demons, Jerem will steal the body of any creature who reads the grimoire and turn them into an undead. He dreams of the perfect resurrection as his soul awaits in the abyss.

* The rating of the grimoire is 'Legend.'

*When consumed, there is a very low chance of absorbing 50-100% of the abilities possessed by the warlock, Jerem. The 'Negative Dimension' and undead which belong to Jerem will also belong to you.

* When consumed, there is a very high probability that the warlock, Jerem, will rob your body. If you want to hinder this possibility, release another one of Gluttony's seals and increase your achievements.]

"...9th Circle?" Theo let out a shocked cry when he saw the number.

The peak of magic, the 9th Circle magicians had disappeared from the continent for nearly 1,000 years.

Only the Blue Tower Master and Red Tower Master had reached

the 8th Circle, and they were transcendents who dealt with power beyond the limits of humans. They were also the reason why the Meltor Kingdom was able to compete with the giant Andras Empire who surpassed them in size and strength.

However, the 9th Circle? If a 9th Circle magician reappeared, they would be able to dominate the continent alone. Alas, the advice written on the explanation suppressed his greed.

"...Hey, you can't eat this now."

–Let's see? This is an extremely rare chance. Isn't the opportunity to become a 9th Circle magician worth the cost to your life?

"Don't speak such funny words."

Theo could tell by the exchange of words. If he had nothing to do with Jerem, Gluttony wouldn't have prevented the grimoire from eating Theo. Maybe Gluttony had a separate means of capturing the book or the ability to suppress it.

Theodore's conviction caused him to open his mouth and say, "You... do you have a way to handle that grimoire?"

–Yes and no.

It was a vague answer, but that was enough.

Theo's concentration reached its peak, and he quickly found the answer: feed it the dimension pocket and open the hidden function. It was the reason why Gluttony had given Theo the hint without any price.

"A hidden feature. Right?"

Theo might be imagining it but Gluttony's mouth seemed to distort.

–I can't answer any more than that. Ah, and the time I can hold onto the book is only five minutes from now. I just wanted to let you know, so don't worry.

"This bastard...!"

It was a devilish and enticing answer. If Theo didn't unlock the hidden function, he would be unable to capture the book. Once that happened, the grimoire would escape from Gluttony's tongue and find another host.

In the near future, the elder lich or a host, which had reached a higher level, could cause an unprecedented catastrophe. Thanks to the dangerous grimoire, he didn't have time to worry about the value of the dimension pocket.

In the end, Theo's right hand reached into his clothes.

Chapter 51 - Uh, This Is Eating? #3

‘Dimension pocket… It is an item I borrowed from Master, but I don’t have the means to spare it in this situation.’

If it entered Gluttony’s mouth, then it wouldn’t be considered as lost or sold. Just like the magic books, the devoured dimension pocket would leave no traces. He could use the excuse that it was destroyed during the battle with the elder lich.

However, if he missed eating the grimoire here, it was clear that a second or third Giovanni would appear.

In barely two months, a 5th Circle magician had been transformed into a 6th Circle elder lich. If given half a year or a year, a legendary undead like an arch lich might be born. At the scale, it was a disaster which would need to be dealt with by the continent, not one single kingdom.

More than anything else, Theo couldn’t feel assured that the grimoire wouldn’t have a grudge against his existence. He thought for a moment before making a firm decision. “…Gluttony.”

–What?

“What will happen to the contents of the dimension pocket if it is eaten?”

Gluttony then replied with a pleased voice,

–There is no need to worry. They won't disappear.

"It is an ambiguous answer… but, hoo… it can't be helped."

Theo put the dimension pocket on the ground. It was still hard to believe that the pocket made of ragged cloth and tattered strings was worth hundreds of gold. It was a tremendous luxury which would be the target of any thieves.

Theodore hesitated once more before letting the artifact worth hundreds of gold be eaten. "Now, eat."

The tongue swallowed the dimension pocket before Theo even finished speaking.

[The 'dimension pocket' has been eaten. Error! An unknown phenomenon has occurred due to eating a dimension magic essence!]

[A hidden function of Gluttony has been discovered. The user should check the information about the function. This function will work normally regardless of the rank.]

[Grimoire "Gluttony"/ E Rank]

[One of the hidden functions of Gluttony has been opened after eating the dimension pocket. The grimoire Gluttony has a storage space to store the prey that it can't digest. The previous owners kept their possessions in it and called it 'Inventory.' If the owner wants, the name can be changed.

* Incomplete state. Most of the functions are sealed.

* Once a day, it will wake up to relieve its hunger.

* Immediately after relieving its hunger, it will answer one question.

* The abilities it feeds on will be given to its owner.

* Extracts an essence from eaten books or items. The higher the owner's understanding, the greater the efficiency.

* Absorbs some magic power from an item that contains magic power.

* The Memorize function has been activated.

* The Inventory function has been activated.]

Theo looked at the information quietly before opening his mouth to say, "Inventory... a type of space storage. If it has the same

function as the dimension pocket, then it wouldn't have been necessary to eat it. You don't mean to push me to open one more function do you?"

–I don't do that type of thing, User.

It was a reasonable question, but Gluttony spoke in a low voice like it was scowling. It seemed like Gluttony was dissatisfied about being compared to a mere artifact. Then that meant the dimension pocket must lag behind the 'inventory' and couldn't be compared to Gluttony.

–You can't hold a grimoire with a dimension pocket. Well, you might keep it for a while but as soon as it regains consciousness, it will flee through the space.

"That won't happen with the inventory?"

-That's right. The inventory is a dimensional entity that exists within me and differs from other spaces. Without a power to travel beyond dimensions, the grimoire can't escape by any means.

Indeed, the story was different if that was the case. It was a dimensional space which could even block the grimoire's space jump! If he gained that ability, then it was worth sacrificing the dimension pocket. Furthermore, the storage space of the inventory was larger than the dimension pocket, so Theodore had nothing else to say.

Theo finished the conversation and looked down at the book on the ground.

Wuoooooong!

The book was covered in a faint darkness, and an ominous vibration was coming from it. This was the legacy of a legendary warlock, but he probably hadn't expected to meet a predator like Gluttony. Theodore had never imagined a grimoire which ate other grimoires until he met Gluttony.

"Well, I always considered myself unlucky."

Shortly afterwards, Theo's left handed extended toward the ground.

Gulp!

Thus, the grimoire, 'Death's Worship', immediately entered the inventory where it couldn't escape.

There were no more items left in the room, and he didn't know when the cave, which had been greatly altered, would collapse. He also needed to join the group which he had inadvertently been separated from; Theo didn't know what might have changed during his disappearance.

However, the two people found Theodore first.

“...Theo!” There was a high pitched voice accompanied by fluttering, torn robes. Sylvia ran over to Theo on wobbly legs and hugged him.

“Uh? Sylvia?” Theo uttered.

“You’re safe, Employer! You seem to look much better than us?”

“...Captain Randolph.”

Randolph, who came a beat later, hit Theo’s shoulders as they celebrated each other’s safety. They didn’t think he would look this well after the lich had caused him to disappear. Come to think of it, it was a wonder that both sides were safe.

The two people had survived the battle with the elder lich, while Theodore had destroyed it. In the meantime, Theo noticed that something had changed about the swords hanging from Randolph’s waist.

“It seems like you got your hands on them.”

“Oh, you noticed?”

Despite the blood pouring from his body, Randolph laughed like a child and touched his swords. For swordsmen, swords were like another limb, and it seemed to be the case with him. Randolph

wanted to show off the swords, but there was no more time remaining.

Kukukung!

There was a loud noise and the shaking began as a blazing sound echoed through the cave. Thanks to the dungeon conversion being removed, the cave had started to collapse.

The three people stared at each other before they started running without a word more. The victory over the elder lich took a backseat to escaping.

***

As a result, the Miller Barony was rescued.

Once the elder lich had been destroyed, all the undead had turned into ashes. The things based on the existence of the grimoire couldn’t stay in this world anymore. Those which hadn’t been made directly, like the specters, were forcibly returned to the negative dimension. The undead made of corpses weren’t removed in this way. Thanks to that, the residents were forced to get rid of the rotten flesh and blood personally.

Once peace was finally found, a small festival was held to celebrate the defeat of the disaster. The wife of the miller, Becky, opened her warehouse. Albert of the pastry shop lit up his hearths. The pub owner, Stephen, poured the wine.

Only a short time in a mercenary's life was filled with wine, leisure, and money, so they didn't let their fatigue keep them from celebrating. However, there was one person who couldn't fit in easily with this raucous atmosphere.

"Huuuu..." A deep sigh emerged from Theodore's mouth as he looked at the rubble stacked up. It was a fortunate victory they had gained with luck. If he had made the wrong decision, then it would've been impossible to protect his own life as well as his hometown.

He wouldn't have been able to look at the full moon in the sky like right now.

'I don't have enough strength. No, I am lacking time.'

There was a number of means he could use to become stronger. With Alfred's Magic Bullet, the Memorize Function, and fusion magic, he could become several times stronger. Theo couldn't expect another situation to occur like how he had found a solution to the Life Vessel. He really shouldn't expect it. Relying on luck would get him killed one day.

Rather than basking in the victory, Theo looked back on what he was lacking.

"Hey, Young Master! Why are you looking so grouchy?"

At that time, he heard a voice from behind.

‘This voice…’

As he looked back, he saw Randolph holding a glass of beer, and his face was red. Theo didn’t know how many glasses Randolph had drunk, but his red nose was a sight. Maybe it was because Randolph had just left the festival, but he didn’t seem to have any of the dignity of a first rate swordsman.

Theo smiled at the funny sight and asked, “Are you calling me Young Master now?”

“Kuhuhu, it is natural. After giving you 200 gold, didn’t you try to get overtime? I need to get rid of you quickly.”

“I gave you the heirlooms you were looking for.”

“What, do you want me to show them to you just once? Men have been crazy about swords since ancient times.” Randolph was delighted by Theo’s reaction and drew the two swords the skeleton knight had dropped.

Kakiing! There was a sharp sound as the swords were drawn.

Even Theodore, who knew nothing about swords, felt like the sound was sharp enough to cut the skin. These were excellent swords and were similar to some of the best swords, despite not going through a magical process.

“…Wow.” Theo’s attention was captured by the image of the wolves.

They almost seemed alive. Every time Randolph raised his sword, a bunch of wolves seemed to charge through the air. The pattern which was reflected in the moonlight seemed like a work of art. Even now, the howling of the wolves seemed to come from the sword.

Randolph turned the blades a few times and said with an elated expression, “As Young Master said, I wouldn’t exchange this for 200 gold. Even if they weren’t heirlooms, I like these guys. In conclusion, their value is one that I won’t give up until death.”

“Should I make you give me more money?”

“…Young Master, how about becoming a merchant instead of a magician? I’ve never seen a noble as shameful as Young Master.”

The two men faced each other and laughed. Maybe it was because Randolph’s light mood moved him, but Theodore’s gloomy face brightened. The two men talked for a while before Randolph turned around, saying that his subordinates were waiting.

“Ah, and Young Master.” He pointed his finger in a direction and said mischievously, “You shouldn’t let your girl wait too long.”

“What?” Theo looked in the direction Randolph was pointing

and stiffened as his gaze met a pair of blue puppy dog eyes.

'...This... I knew it would be like this.' Theo scratched his head as he realized his lack of consideration for Sylvia. Sylvia wasn't cold towards people, she just didn't know how to interact with them. She might seem indifferent, but she was actually awkward toward anyone who approached her.

It was a new experience for her to have people introducing themselves to her and saying she was their future mistress.

"Ah, it isn't like that." He let out a sigh which was much lighter than before as he walked toward Sylvia, who was surrounded. Theo stopped the miller's wife from talking and thought about how to send Grandfather Albert back home to rest.

He had now finally stepped back into the comfort of his hometown.

Chapter 52 - The Voices Calling Him #1

A few days later...

‘Today is the fourth day, and there will be some time for the next three days.’

After finishing his mission, Theodore sent word to the Magic Society the next day. The procedure was to report directly after returning, but in a serious situation like this, word should be sent first.

As soon as the news was heard, it was clear that a senior investigator from Mana-vil would be sent to the Miller Barony. Theo assumed the person would arrive in three days if they rode a limited express carriage like Theo.

Until then, he needed to calm his unstable circles.

Wuuuong...

While Theo focused his mind, he was sweating. The bed sheet grew damp with his sweat. He had spent almost half a day in meditation, but the shaking 5th Circle in his body showed no signs of stopping.

The 5th Circle, which had generated from eating the Life Vessel, was quite unstable since it hadn’t been reached through the normal process.

“...Hoo, there seems to be discrimination against taking shortcuts.” Theo closed his circles and grumbled as he wiped the sweat off his forehead.

Still, it was fortunate that they had become more stable over time. Circles were mandatory for magicians, and they were also another organ fused onto the heart. The movement of unstable circles was no different from a heart disease which could cause life-threatening situations.

As a result, a fortnight hadn’t even passed since Theodore jumped to the next circle.

‘Grimoires are really absurd.’

The same was true for ‘Death’s Worship.’ Giovanni was a magician who had just entered the 5th Circle. He was a man who had been jealous of Sylvia’s accomplishment and had been turned into an elder lich in two months. In retrospect, reaching the 5th Circle wasn’t that great.

“How can I tell Master about this...?” Theo thought about this as he left his room and approached the living room.

His father gestured to him from where he was chewing bread at the table. Thanks to the disappearance of the undead, his father’s face seemed calmer than usual.

“My eldest son has woken up. Did you sleep well last night?”

“Yes, Father.”

“I don’t have a lot to worry about now. A trustworthy son has come home. Hehehe!”

He was the noble of a village, but he wasn’t a fool. If Theo hadn’t come back, then Dennis couldn’t guess what the village would’ve been like. His son, who he thought was young, had ended up solving the problem.

Dennis didn’t know about magicians and the monster called the elder lich, but he knew one thing: he had raised his son well. Theo smiled at the voice which was filled with warmth.

“Cough. Father’s words are too much.”

“Oh, that reminds me about the child called Sylvia.”

“Huh? Ah, yes.” Theo blinked as Sylvia’s name appeared.

He wasn’t sure what his father was going to say, so he couldn’t help waiting nervously. Fortunately, there was nothing to worry about.

“She went to the front gate as soon as she got up. I think someone came?”

“Who would come?”

“That child clearly said…”

Right now, it was around the time that his message would’ve reached the capital. Unless they rode a legendary pegasus, an investigator from the Magic Society wouldn’t have reached the Miller Barony.

‘Did someone else come?’ As Theo cocked his head with confusion…

“I think it was an elder from the White Tower?”

It was like a fireball had appeared in front of Theo.

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‘Sylvia, you should use that good head of yours!’

Theo ran out of the house as soon as he heard it. He had to arrive at the appointed place as quickly as possible. Sylvia seemed to be comfortable, but what type of new magician would keep their elders waiting?

Furthermore, ‘elder’ generally referred to Prime rank magicians, which meant they were above Vince. Theo might be at a

disadvantage if he was pushed by such a person. He used Haste and managed to find Sylvia near the entrance of the village. “Sylvia!”

“You came! ...Huh?” She welcomed him, but her expression became one of confusion when she turned around. Indeed, it was strange that he was sweating so much.

“Theo, why are you in such a rush? I thought you would be tired, so I asked someone to send word when you woke up.”

“No, an elder of the White Tower has come?”

“Yes, Grandfather Shugel.”

“Do you know already?”

Sylvia nodded in affirmation. Then she pointed her finger at a place near the village entrance.

There was a tent which hadn’t been there a few days ago. The magic used on the terrain during the fight against the undead had been refined into neat pillars. He didn’t know when it happened, but it had been reshaped into a fairly organized defense.

The elder from the White Tower, Shugel, seemed to be staying there.

Theo tried to calm down his breathing as he gestured to Sylvia.

“Then shall we go in?”

“Yes, he asked me to bring you in today.”

“...I rushed here for nothing.” Theo cooled off his body with magic and arranged his clothes before stepping into the tent.

There wasn’t as much tension as he’d expected. Was it because he had already met big names like the Blue Tower Master and King Kurt III? He slipped through the tent entrance and bowed with a calm expression.

Inside, a deep and aged voice welcomed the two. “Ohh...you came.”

The magician with a beard and hair as white as his robes laughed. Unlike his hair, the aged magician’s skin was taut, and there were no signs of aging found anywhere. Like a child, his bright eyes were filled with overflowing energy.

Sylvia walked belatedly into the tent and stood closer to the aged mage. “Grandfather Shugel, this is Theo.”

“Yes, thank you for the hard work.” He patted Sylvia’s head gently like she was cute and turned his eyes toward Theo. Theo bowed as soon as the magician looked at him. However, it wasn’t because he was pushed by the pressure. He was a young magician paying homage to an adult magician.

“Theodore Miller, disciple of Vince Haidel, greets Elder Shugel of the White Tower.”

“Yes, I am called Shugel from the White Tower. This time, I came as an examiner of the situation that you reported.”

“What is an examiner?” Theo knew about investigators, but it was the first time he had heard about an examiner.

Shugel laughed and stroked his beard at the question. It was always the responsibility of the senior to answer the curiosity of his juniors.

“Usually, I wouldn’t be dispatched. However, this is an extraordinary incident, so I was sent down separately to determine the causal relationship. It is the reason why the existence of examiners are almost unknown,” Shugel explained.

“Ah…, I see.”

“Isn’t there one more thing that you’d like to ask?”

Theodore flinched at Shugel’s words. He did indeed have one more thing he wanted to ask.

Even by horse, it would take one week to go back and forth from the Miller Barony to the capital, yet Shugel had gotten there within less than a day since the news reached the capital. It was a speed which defied common sense in many ways.

However, Theo found the answer instead of asking the question. “Elder Shugel is a space magician.”

His voice was filled with a lot of respect. It couldn’t be helped since space magic was a magic system which was classified as having top level difficulty. Wind attribute magicians had a fairly high aptitude, but nevertheless, those who could be called, ‘space magicians,’ could be counted with fingers. Moreover, sitting right before Theo’s eyes was Shugel, who had crossed the distance with rare space magic!

“Huh... That is the right answer. You should feel bad for intercepting what this old man wanted to say to you.”

“Huh? Ah, I’m sorry.”

“Hahaha! It was a joke, a joke. It isn’t bad to be serious, but life will get tiring if you don’t have a sense of humour.”

“I-Is that so?” Just like the Blue Tower Master, it was difficult for Theo to deal with the elderly people of the magic towers.

Theo inwardly sighed as he already felt tired. Meanwhile, Sylvia was just sitting down and reading a book. She must have already finished her conversation, or Shugel must want to hear the report entirely from Theo.

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Indeed, the old man stopped with the small talk and began hearing the story of the elder lich.

“Finally, I heard that you were the target of the elder lich...” Shugel smiled as he looked at Theo and then continued saying, “Even if you were transferred to the core room, how did you destroy the Life Vessel? Theoretically, it can only be done by a sword master or 7th Circle magician.”

“For me, it was a last ditch effort.” Theo had prepared an answer for the difficult question a long time ago. He had a simple answer to the trick which could destroy the Life Vessel.

“I put the Life Vessel into the dimension pocket I borrowed from Master and destroyed the entire pouch. It is crazy when I think about it now.”

According to Gluttony’s explanation, the Life Vessel had only been protected by the negative resource, so there had been a possibility of destroying it if it had been isolated in a dimension pocket. Of course, it was just a possibility, so it couldn’t be for certain.

However, in this situation, there was no way to verify it and it didn’t sound ridiculous. It was also a great excuse for how he managed to destroy the dimension pocket.

The astonished Shugel repeated his words, “Ah, you destroyed a dimension pocket?”

“Yes, it happened by accident.”

“Dimension pocket… Oh, the dimension pocket? I didn’t think it could be used for such a purpose… Indeed, truly creative…” Shugel muttered with blank eyes like the answer was quite shocking. Anyone who saw him would be afraid that the old man had lost his soul. However, Elder Shugel of the White Tower gradually regained his original complexion.

“I was thinking in the wrong direction… It is possible. In the end, you did do it.”

“O-Of course.”

“Huh… Killing an elder lich with a dimension pocket… It is truly lucky.”

In fact, it was. If the elder lich hadn’t moved Theodore, the owner of Gluttony, down to the core room, then the elder lich would’ve won. Subsequently, he would have destroyed the Miller Barony and completely eroded the host, causing a worldwide catastrophe. As Shugel said, the catastrophe had been averted due to luck.

Shugel calmed his rough breathing and continued to speak, “Thank you for cooperating. Your words make sense. It matches the testimonies of the other people… I’m sorry that I thought you were an accomplice in this situation.”

“No. You just did your job.” Theo finished the conversation with a polite expression.

Thanks to his thorough preparation, he convinced the examiner without revealing any dubious parts by mistake.

However, Shugel looked at Theo with a warm expression, like he was impressed by Theo’s attitude. “Your words have eased by heart. Then I will give you the final message and end this old man’s job.”

Theo’s eyebrows twitched as the warm atmosphere finished. His work as a examiner was over, so what was left?

Sylvia also looked up from her book like she was worried. Was Theo’s peaceful routine going to be caught up in a big whirlpool again? A strange feeling went down his spine.

“If I just came as an examiner, other magicians would be sufficient. But I came here personally because I received an order to bring you.”

“Bring… me?”

“That’s right.” Shugel pulled out a piece of paper and read out its contents, “The investigators dispatched to the Miller Barony, Theodore MIller and Sylvia, should return as soon as possible. I give this instruction to Elder Shugel of the White Tower… In the

Meltor Kingdom, only three people can command me directly like this."

The old man spoke as he folded his wrinkled fingers one by one, "Red Tower Master Veronica, Blue Tower Master Blundell, and His Majesty Kurt III."

At this point, Theodore's tension reached its peak. Was it the call of the Red Tower Master who didn't know his face, the Blue Tower Master who had given him the mission, or His Majesty the King?

Theo made assumptions for all three cases, but none of them fit his expectations.

"But this is the first time I've seen all three names on the command. Theodore Miller, you seem to have caught the eyes of those in the upper echelons."

Chapter 53 - The Voices Calling Him #2

The power structure of the Meltor Kingdom differed from other kingdoms in many ways. The Meltor Kingdom had been founded by a great magician and prospered due to magic. In modern times, the magic towers occupied the center of its national power.

Thus, the nobles were just custodians of wealth and status. The ones who wielded power in the kingdom were the senior magicians. It went without saying that the royal family had risen to the throne due to the support by the magic towers.

In particular, the Red Tower Master and Blue Tower Master were treated as being of a higher rank than the other tower masters. Nobody could beat them in rank except for the king. In other words, Theo was called by the three people at the peak of the Meltor Kingdom.

After finishing his conversation with Elder Shugel, Theodore immediately informed his family. Thanks to his inventory, he didn't need to bother about packing, but he needed to say goodbye to his family.

"...Something like this happened, so I have to return to the capital immediately."

His family had blank expressions after he told them the news. His Majesty and two tower masters...? That was a far cry for a family that was just the head of a village. His father, Dennis, came back to his senses first, while his mother was busy taking care of his little

brother.

“Huh... His Majesty has called you, so you can’t go slowly.” Dennis sighed deeply.

He had thought Theo would stay for a few more days, but there was a sudden decree. This was the reason for the heavy atmosphere around his family. For a rural nobleman, Dennis had done nothing except inherit his title.

Dennis approached his son, who had become much greater than him, and spoke while grabbing Theo’s hand, “Theo, live for yourself in the future.”

“...Yes?”

“I’ve felt it in the past. We were blind. I, as well as the villagers, had too many expectations of you... the expectations for you to become an important person and increase the fortune of this village.”

Theodore tried to speak, but he couldn’t.

He had never hated their expectations. Theo had believed that he could be a special and great person, just as they had said. It was because of them that he had decided to enter the Bergen Academy which was far away.

However, it had sometimes been a burden. There had been days

when he didn't want to go home looking pitiful, so he'd struck his back to move.

Now, he felt like a knot tightening his throat had been released.

"If it wasn't for you, this village wouldn't be around right now. No, with the money you added, the sick and poor will be able to have a warm winter. At the very least, you are a much bigger man than this small Miller Barony."

"...Father."

"So, I'm looking forward to it. Walk to the point that you want and then come back when you want to rest. That is enough for us."

The body temperature transmitted through his father's palm was hot. Instead of answering, Theo nodded with a tight neck. In his heart, he'd always thought he was alone, but his father had touched on that pain.

It was the same for his mother, who spoke belatedly, "Your father has said everything I wanted to say. And when did you start understanding this? You talk like that even though you don't know anything about it."

"C-Cough!" Dennis coughed at her words.

His mother looked askance at Dennis before smiling and hugging Theodore. "There is no need for you to be a big man or to go far

away. Don’t get hurt and be healthy. Please remember that we’ve wished for nothing else since you were born.”

“…Yes, I’ll keep that in mind.”

“And that Sylvia, I like her.”

Finally, she kissed Theo’s cheek and hugged his little brother again. The child called Leo waved his fingers toward his much bigger brother. As Theo grabbed those small hands, he wondered what his brother wanted to be when he was older. Magician or knight… Maybe he would be a farmer.

Theo stepped out his house, filled with expectations for that day. It was time for him to go back into the world.

“What, are you going, Young Master?”

At that moment, a man leaning near the entrance spoke to him.

“…Randolph.”

“We will also be leaving this territory. I wanted to say goodbye before you left.” Randolph fidgeted with the two swords at his waist and said in a laughing voice, “It is a shame about the 200 gold, but the time I spent with Young Master was a lot of fun. If you want to hire me for something next time, I’ll do it for half price.”

“Maybe it won’t end up as just half price?”

“Ha, you are a rotten employer. But will I be tricked twice?” With those words, he walked away with his usual light footsteps.

Randolph placed his life on the edge of his swords and tried to tempt fate in unknown locations. Maybe he was more suited to life as a mercenary than the descendant of a warrior.

‘I hope I meet him again.’ Theo also turned in the opposite direction.

The two men went on their own way as they hoped for a day of reunion. So, the magician and mercenary went different ways at the intersection.

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“Okay, are you ready?” Elder Shugel looked at both of them in turn as he finished painting a magic circle on the outskirts.

“Yes, everything has finished.”

“I’m ready.”

The two robed people nodded without hesitation. Theo had said farewell to his family, and Sylvia had quickly finished her

preparations.

After confirming their answers, Shugel nodded slowly and talked to the investigator who came with him. “We will return to the capital first. Examine the residual black magic remaining here and report it to the Magic Society when you return.”

“Yes, I understand!”

“I’m sorry, but… then I’ll be going.” As he finished speaking, there was a sudden wave of magic power.

Huuuuong! Shugel’s white hair and beard were pushed up from the stirring magic power. It was different from Theodore’s heavy magic power and Sylvia’s cold power. The magic power of a Prime magician who trained in the wind attribute filled the surroundings like real wind, and the magic circle painted on the ground began to shine with a silver colour.

A haze emerged as the space around them seemed to distort.

[Hold your breath…] Shugel’s voice echoed.

Even though he was speaking clearly, the sound wave wasn’t transmitted properly. This was the aftermath of the space starting to bend inside the magic circle.

Theo and Sylvia held their breaths simultaneously. As well as its high difficulty, space magic was famous for being dangerous. They

didn’t want to see the devastation which would occur if they didn’t follow the advice.

Shugel quickly finished his magic spell and slammed his staff in the center of the circle. [Mass Teleport!]

The appearance of the three people distorted and then disappeared.

‘Ugh…!’ Theo almost exhaled due to his fear. There was an instinctive rejection as the magic circle was activated.

First, colour disappeared and then shapes collapsed. As his five senses shook, he felt dizzy and nauseous. They were travelling through a gap in time and space which wasn’t allowed for living things, so it was inevitable that the magicians would suffer.

Was it for one minute or just 10 seconds?

“Huuuu!”

“Hah…!”

Theodore and Sylvia let out their breaths with surprise when they felt like their original senses returned. Theo took a moment to restore his balance before looking around.

‘This place…?’

It was a wide, clean room without any furniture. On the floor was a magic circle similar to the one Theo had just travelled through.

Shugel noticed his curiosity, and after recovering his breathing from the aftermath of the space magic, he explained, “Space movement requires an empty space like this one. If there are any objects or people on the other side, then I can’t guarantee the party’s safety.”

Theo was convinced of this as Shugel moved to the door. There weren’t many space magicians, but it was wise not to stay in the transfer room for too long. The probability of Theo and Sylvia overlapping with each other was like being hit by lightning.

“I will guide you to the reception room. First, I need to go to His Majesty and tell him about your work.”

They exited the transfer room, and Shugel led the two people down the corridor. Theo had not spent a lot of time at the Magic Society, but the structure around him seemed like the inner areas. This was because space magicians were normally dispatched for important missions.

Yet Shugel’s footsteps soon came to a stop as he encountered someone. “You…?”

The person had dark brown hair and had on a red robe symbolizing the Red Tower. Theodore looked over from behind Shugel and discovered the person’s appearance. Surprise,

curiosity, and welcome entered his eyes.

Theo cried out without even knowing it, “Master!”

The person who Theo’s group were encountering was Vince Haidel.

Shugel’s eyes wrinkled as he realized who it was. “Vince… Yes, there was that name. Did they contact you as Theodore’s teacher? Otherwise, you wouldn’t have known that we would be back at this time.”

The dispatch of a space magician was always kept secret. They were valuable workers for the Meltor Kingdom, but there was also a need to conceal them. Apart from the three people who could send them places and the White Tower Master, no one else had the authority to find out the missions of a space magician.

However, Vince dismissed him without replying. He was looking at Theo with a pleasant gaze, but it was uncomfortable for him to be in this spot.

He confessed like it was embarrassing, “Huu. Elder Shugel, I would’ve stopped you properly, but I hope you consider that I didn’t have time to communicate it properly.”

“Huh? What does that mean?”

The three people were confused for a moment because of Vince’s

words.

‘H-Heok!’ A violent presence appeared behind Theo and made his spine freeze forcibly.

This presence was different from that of the elder lich, and the quality of it was different from that of the Blue Tower Master. It was a pressure which pushed at him. Perhaps the other person didn’t even intend to do it. Even though the person was just standing there, the pressure coming from them crushed the surroundings.

This was the presence of an absolutely strong person which couldn’t be hidden!

“What, this little guy is our newbie?” A sweet and deep voice, similar to a well-aged wine, rang out. The voice emerged casually as the speaker appeared before Theodore and Sylvia.

They had really bright crimson hair and golden eyes which were bright like the sun. The robe which wrapped around their body was deep red. The robe covered a feminine and curvaceous body which was truly amazing, but nobody would dare stare at this woman.

‘The air… It’s hot?’ It wasn’t a hallucination.

This was a terrible magic power which caused the mana in their air to respond and raise the temperature. Despite the cool weather,

the heat tickled his skin. There was only one person who was so transcendent she could change the environment and who looked so beautiful in red.

“Looking at his face for the first time, he is quite a handsome kid,” the Red Tower Master said as she held Theo’s chin. “From here onward, this Veronica will guide him.”

Veronica



Chapter 54 - The Voices Calling Him #3

The Red Tower Master, who called herself Veronica, met Theo's gaze naturally. Her gold eyes, shining with curiosity and interest, were burdensome in a way that was different from the Blue Tower Master's.

As Theo tried to step back unconsciously, Veronica's white hand gripped his shoulder. Unlike the soft texture, there was a monstrous strength coming from it.

"Eh? You are different from what I heard." She looked Theodore up and down before asking Vince behind her, "Vince, didn't you say your disciple was a 4th Circle?"

"Yes, that's right."

"This guy, isn't he clearly a 5th Circle... No, wait a minute."

Veronica spotted his circle with one glance, but then her expression suddenly changed. She gazed into Theo's heart with sharp eyes and instantly saw the problem he had been struggling with for a few days.

"It is unstable. Did it wake up through this incident? This is what happens if you cross the 'wall' with an unprepared body."

Indeed, he couldn't fool the eyes of Veronica who was a 8th Circle magician. Theo admired her inwardly while nodding.

Speaking of which, Blundell had also instantly seen that Vince had achieved the 6th Circle. So, it wouldn't be hard for Veronica, a magician of equal rank, to figure out that his 5th Circle was unstable.

"Kid, is your magic power wriggling by itself, and the circle keeps opening and closing?"

"Yes."

"It is a typical symptom of disharmony. It occurs when the body can't accept something your head understands, or when the body awakens without an enlightenment. It isn't a problem that can be solved with time."

Theodore flinched at her words. He had accumulated a great deal of knowledge from the library books, but he had never seen a single book describing disharmony when crossing a 'wall.' Basically, it was something which was experienced only after the 5th Circle, so information about it wasn't placed in the academy.

Veronica smiled like she knew that and said to Shugel, "Then can I take this kid, Old Man Shugel?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that. Even if you did submit the call, His Majesty is the top priority."

"Hah, Old Man, who do you think I am? I'm just trying to bring

him to the reception room instead. Is there anything strange about bringing them to the reception room?”

It seemed like Shugel found her difficult to deal with as he couldn’t come up with a response easily. It involved a large incident which could lead to a disaster. However, he thought it was more dangerous to stimulate Veronica, so he eventually stepped back. “Hoo, then please do so.”

“Okay! It has been decided,” Veronica said as she placed an arm around Theo’s shoulder.

Theo stiffened at the sudden contact. It was truly tempting to feel something touch his back while in such a tight hold. This was fatal to a 19-year-old young man. He could feel Sylvia’s stinging gaze on him, but Veronica spoke quickly, “Hey kid. Can you tell me about the tournament on the way to the reception room? I wasn’t in the capital at the time.”

“…I understand.”

There was no time to spare for his reunion with his master as Theo was now firmly caught by the Red Tower Master.

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Her identity was unknown, and her age was unknown. She was one of the few dragon slayers currently in existence. Veronica was the peak of the war magicians, and the strongest and most

dangerous person from the magic towers.

Until now, he had only heard about the Red Tower Master through rumours, but he was now having a conversation with her.

'This person… She doesn't hide her feelings at all.'

To put it mildly, Veronica was crude and honest. She was the opposite of Blundell, who always had something behind his smiling face. If Veronica was happy, then she would laugh. If she was surprised, then her mouth would drop open. The sight of her beautiful face change in various ways was quite eye-catching. As for Veronica's violent aspect, it was probably due to her personality, as she wouldn't hesitate to go crazy when she was angry.

As the conversation reached the moment when Theodore became victorious, she laughed without any formalities and knocked against his shoulder. "Fusion Magic! It is an old theory, but it must be quite powerful if you used it to win. It had enough strength to eat that kid over there."

"…I'm not a kid." Sylvia complained in a disgruntled voice as she followed behind them. In response, Veronica stopped walking and just said a few ridiculing words, "No, you are a kid if you are only 17."

However, her reply wasn't the reason why she had stopped. It was because they arrived at the reception room that was their destination. There were magnificent and luxurious doors before

the party.

“Then let’s go!”

At that moment, the destructive instincts of the Red Tower Master ignited.

Dukwang! She lifted her foot without hesitation and kicked the door! The heavy doors which seemed difficult to push were opened with one strike. This was her strength without using magic?

Even Vince, who was familiar with Veronica’s strength, gaped as the door to the reception room was thrown open, and the figures of the two people waiting inside appeared.

“V-Veronica?!” One of them, who had an astonished expression on his face, was the Blue Tower Master, Blundell. The robed covered muscles were still twitching. Veronica frowned at him before turning to the person sitting next to him.

“Uh, Your Majesty. Hasn’t it been a while?”

“That’s right. Is this the first time since you left for the south?” Kurt III, the blonde middle-aged man sitting in a chair, replied lightly.

“Y-Your Majesty!” The shocked Theodore and his companions immediately fell to one knee.

They hadn’t been prepared for it. Theo’s head became blank as he had met Veronica and then the king so suddenly. Considering the king’s presence, it would’ve been a big deal if someone other than the Red Tower Master had kicked open the door.

Fortunately, Kurt III didn’t care about that. “Oh, don’t worry too much about that. It will be hard to praise your efforts if you maintain that position.”

“As you wish.”

“First of all, get up. Theodore Miller and Sylvia, please step forward.” Despite the king’s quiet voice, it still contained tremendous power.

Naturally, the two people stepped forward.

The king’s purple eyes alternated between Sylvia and Theodore while gleaming with a pleased light. As the master of the kingdom, the appearance of a Superior magician would lead to the advancement of the national power. So, there was no reason not to be pleased.

“I acknowledge your merit for the subjugation of the elder lich that appeared in the Miller Barony. If it wasn’t for you, then he might’ve ravaged the area by now. This isn’t the official position, but I wanted to communicate it directly.”

“I am much obliged for your words.” The two people accepted the praise according to court formalities and bowed.

“A Class 3 dangerous object, the elder lich… Either way, it was a situation that could have developed into a nation-wide disaster. The merit is too big to be recognized with just a few words. Therefore…” Kurt reached out, and Blundell handed him two pieces of paper.

The two pieces of paper were tied with a red string. Kurt handed them over to Theo and Sylvia, who politely accepted the item with both hands.

The contents of the paper were heard directly from Kurt’s mouth, “This time, Theodore Miller’s and Sylvia’s ranks will be upgraded from Basic to Average. We will pay for the additional expenses incurred and reward for a Class 3 dangerous mission, as well as reissue the dimension pocket that was destroyed during the mission. That is the edict of Kurt III.”

As the two people were shocked by the words, Kurt gazed at Theodore. “This mission’s main contributor, Theodore Miller?”

“Yes.” Theo suppressed the shaking in his heart and faced Kurt III.

The king wouldn’t call someone’s name carelessly. Even if a person were to be called, the king was likely to borrow the mouth of another person. It wasn’t an official thing, but he had to have a good reason to call Theodore’s name.

Unsurprisingly, Kurt III pulled out an extraordinary reward. “I have determined that your merit is too large to be judged under the existing rules. So, after discussing with the Blue Tower Master Blundell, I have decided to ask you directly.”

“I am listening.”

“Theodore Miller, tell me what you want.”

Theo trembled as the voice of the king resonated through the reception room. “I, at the discretion of Kurt III and Blue Tower Master Blundell Adruncus, will grant you a wish. However, it can’t exceed your merit level.”

A wish that he desired… There was no greater reward in heaven and earth than this!

Theo listened to the words but couldn’t understand them. No, he couldn’t accept them. The national power of the Meltor Kingdom might be somewhat lower than the Andras Empire, but the Meltor Kingdom was still classified as a powerful nation in the continent.

Yet, the Meltor King was granting him a wish? It was truly a lucky event which would only occur once in a lifetime.

‘…Wish… I will be granted a wish.’ Theo’s head started rolling before he could feel alarmed. In fact, it was surprising that he was rather calm. Theo calmly measured the gravity of this

opportunity. Anyone wouldn't end without just one or two small wishes. Desire was a part of human nature, and Theodore was no different.

'To have one national treasure... No, the risk is too great. I don't know if the elder lich is worth a national treasure and asking about it is too much.'

Perhaps artifacts which exceeded the 'Precious' rating such as 'Treasure' and 'Legend' would be treated as national treasures. Theo wanted to get a national treasure with all his heart, but he wasn't sure if the value of the elder lich was worth one.

Like the old saying, he should refrain from being too greedy or else he might lose more than he gained.

At this moment, he was reminded of a conversation he'd had with Gluttony.

-The quality of the food. Don't just feed me commonplace books.

Thanks to its advice, Theo had been able to obtain Death's Worship after the inventory feature had opened. Until now, Gluttony had never given a suggestion to him. Perhaps it would demand to be fed higher grade books as Theo grew.

'Come to think of it, Gluttony never ate Rare books until recently. Maybe this is a good chance to stabilize the 5th Circle.'

The magic books in the Magic Society and the palace couldn't be read unless he had permission. If he wasn't at least a Superior rank, he couldn't put in a rental application. Additionally, there was a place which was only available when he reached the Prime rank.

The name of the place was the Zero Library. It was the Meltor Kingdom's treasure house which contained magic books and 'grimoires' that couldn't be replicated.

Theodore finally made a decision and opened his mouth, "Your Majesty, I have an impudent request."

"I will listen."

Theo took a deep breath and then uttered his wish in a voice which was as calm as he could make it, "Your Majesty and Tower Masters, if you forgive my impudence, I would like to ask for a book from the Zero Library."

Chapter 55 - Zero Library Delicacy #1

‘A book from the Zero Library?’ Kurt III and Blundell’s expression changed at the same time.

Of course, they knew how valuable the books from the Zero Library were to magicians. The books could raise the person’s learning ability or even give a magical protection. These were treasures which even Superior magicians found difficult to borrow.

However, were the treasures amazing enough when the person could get any wish they wanted?

Kurt III understood Theodore’s words first and opened his mouth, “A book from the Zero Library… It isn’t difficult to rent, but it seems like you are asking for something else.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Do you want ownership of the book?”

Like this, the context was right. Obtaining ownership of one book from the Zero Library was worthy of a wish, even if it wasn’t a national treasure.

Those who understood the meaning of Theo’s wish showed different responses. Blundell made a perplexed expression as he fidgeted with his beard, while Veronica squinted at Theo with

interested eyes. Whereas Sylvia wriggled uncomfortably, and Vince nodded knowingly as he was the only one who understood the situation fully.

As the owner of Gluttony, Theodore could transform reading the book directly into proficiency, so it was hard to find a better reward. If he obtained a book from the Zero Library, then he could learn an ability like Alfred's Magic Bullet and the ancient elemental.

Kurt III worried for a moment but made a decision within minutes. "...Okay."

Fortunately, his answer was positive. Kurt III looked down at Theo with a serious expression. "I will give you a book from the Zero Library. However, if you ever fail to properly fulfill your obligations, then you, Theodore Miller, will return the book to the Zero Library."

"Thank you for Your Majesty's generosity."

The king spoke in a roundabout manner, but he was basically just giving it to Theo. The obligation to pass on the accumulated knowledge to later generations was a matter of course for any magician, and the book could be retrieved after his death.

In any case, Kurt III determined that Theodore's achievement deserved such a reward.

“Veronica.”

“Yes? Why did you call me Your Majesty?” The Red Tower Master asked from where she occupied one of the armchairs.

“I want you to accompany Theodore Miller and assist in the screening of the books from the Zero Library. And you should be aware of this, but you can’t take anything out from it.”

“Well… okay! It has been a long time since I’ve smelled a book.”

“Then that will be all.” Kurt looked around before raising his body.

As he stood up, the people in the room naturally bent their knees. Blundell and Veronica were the only ones still standing. The two tower masters simply bowed their heads as goodbye to the master of Meltor.

“Thank you once again for your merits. I hope that you enjoy your duties and responsibilities for the Meltor Kingdom in the future. I can’t believe that it has been a fortnight, and I’ve already seen your faces twice.”

At the unexpected words, Theodore and Sylvia shouted in unison, “As Your Majesty commands!”

Finally, their second encounter with the king came to an end.

***

“Now, shall we go to the Zero Library?” Veronica clung to Theo again as Kurt left.

Veronica might be powerful, but her distinctive scent and soft touch were dangerous to Theo’s senses. Sylvia had left with Blundell. So, it was fortunate that Vince was accompanying Theo.

“Tower Master, Theo is uncomfortable.”

“Huh? Is that so?”

As Theo met Veronica’s golden eyes, he couldn’t help stammering, “A-A bit…”

“Ah, that reminds me, I emit a lot of heat. I don’t feel it, so I forget sometimes. I’ve been doing it since I was born.” She pulled away the arm which was around Theo’s neck.

As soon as the contact surface was reduced, Theo’s hot body immediately became cold again. That said, this heat wasn’t due to her magical accomplishment but had been present since birth?

“Well, people already know this story.” Veronica noticed his curiosity and said cheerfully, “I have the blood of a red dragon.”

She spoke casually like she was just revealing she had soup with white bread for breakfast. Theo unconsciously stopped walking, but Vince already knew the story and walked on with a blasé face.

As Theo regained his spirit and quickly caught up with her, Veronica shrugged it off. “It isn’t such a great thing. It isn’t even half but a quarter. I just live a little longer than ordinary people, and my hair and eyes are vivid.”

Nevertheless, Veronica had inherited the blood of the dragon which was considered the toughest species on this earth, so she could never be ordinary. The limitless magic power and the sensitivity capable of dominating nature wasn’t a realm which could be touched by humans. Her lineage must have contributed to the fact that she had reached Blundell’s level at a younger age.

Veronica brushed back her hair and muttered, “I can push down consciously to reduce the heat... but it is hard to walk around normally. I’m sorry for making you uncomfortable. I was too insensitive.”

“It’s okay.” Maybe it was due to her embarrassed expression but Theo answered reflexively, “It was just a little warmer.”

To be honest, it was pretty hot, but he wasn’t an idiot who couldn’t figure out the atmosphere. It was likely she must’ve only had idiots around her.

“...You have a good mouth for a kid.” Veronica tried to look casual, but her stride widened in response. Indeed, her reactions

were really honest. It was a different feeling from the cute Sylvia. Their arrival at the destination was 10 minutes earlier than expected because Theodore and Vince had to hurry to catch up with Veronica's lengthened stride.

The door of the Zero Library was impressive in many ways. When Theo saw the door carved from opaque ice, he muttered, "No, that is adamantium alloy."

While he muttered in a soft voice, Veronica banged on the door several times.

Kwang! The blows were powerful enough to cause a loud sound, but the door didn't move. Rather, her white fist became red as it bounced from the impact.

Veronica went on to explain, "If I want to destroy it, I need to use a full day to gather all my strength. It's the same for a sword master. This place is equal to the secret warehouse of the royal palace. It is impossible to pass through with space movement because this wall surrounds the entire room."

There still wasn't a consensus on what the best metal was, but it was clear what the strongest metal was; Adamantium was the king of metals. Once refined, it was a metal which would block all physical and magical attacks. It couldn't be used to make a weapon like a sword, but it was absolutely effective as a wall that protected something.

Veronica turned to Vince before opening the door of the Zero

Library. “Vince, you wait here. I’m sorry, but you aren’t eligible to enter this library. Theodore was the only one who received permission from His Majesty.”

“Of course. Go ahead.”

As Vince stepped away from Theodore, Veronica stretched out her hand toward the door.

Huuuuuuong! As soon as her palm touched the surface, a powerful wave of magic power spread everywhere.

The scale of the magic was at least that of a 6th Circle magician. It might even have reached the 7th Circle. This meant that the keyhole wouldn’t appear if a person didn’t have this much magic power!

Veronica charged the magic power at once and placed the key which she’d pulled out into the center of the magic circle on the door.

Simultaneously, the two people suddenly disappeared.

***

Flash! Veronica and Theodore disappeared with a brilliant light and appeared inside. The space movement magic was triggered through the temporarily opened gap and accepted the two people. It was a short distance, so he wasn’t affected like last time.

Theo immediately looked around. ‘This… it is the Zero Library?’

It was a space which was lacking realism. The room was bright despite being a fully enclosed space. This was due to the light tool on the ceiling. The light magic functioned semi-permanently, and books were kept in glass boxes.

There were sometimes empty glasses boxes, and Veronica explained these to him, “People borrowed or lost these books. The boxes are left in the hope they will return one day. However, I have yet to see a book returned to the Zero Library.”

“How do they get lost?”

“Let’s see…? All the lost ones so far has been when someone died and the book was stolen. How can we punish a dead person?”

Indeed, there was no magician who would neglect a book from the Zero Library. It was more realistic for the book to be stolen than for it to be lost through the carelessness of the owner.

Theodore was convinced by the answer and started to look at the books surrounding him without saying anything more. The glass boxes were opened without the need for a separate procedure.

‘Appraisal.’

A reddish book giving off magic power attracted his interest.

[Hell Fire]

[This book contains the method to summon a flame which exists in the Demon World, a flame which burns all matter. Once called, the flames of hell can't be turned off in a normal method but only when the user's power is exhausted or his life force is cut off. This is magic that is difficult to heal. The author of this book has hidden their refinement method.

* The rating of this magic book is 'Treasure.'

* Acquisition Conditions: 7 circles, affinity for fire magic is required.

* When consumed, 'Hell Fire' will be learned.

* When consumed, your ability in fire magic will increase greatly.

* This is the original copy which was written directly by the author. There is a very low probability of absorbing some of the author's proficiency.]

It was the 7th Circle Magic, Hell Fire! Apart from the Red Tower Master, it was one of the highest ranked magic which no one could

handle freely. Even a sword master would be suicidal if they moved into the path of that magic.

The power of Hell Fire was famous for burning down any aura which tried to defend against it.

However, Theo saw the conditions to acquire it and returned the book to its place without making a fuss. It would take a few years or even decades to reach the 7th Circle.

The discovery of a ‘Treasure’ ranked book at the start had excited him, but that feeling didn’t last long.

Theodore looked at the books around him with bitterness and complained inwardly, ‘This book is too sophisticated, and the condition to acquire this one… I need to gouge out one eyeball? There is magic for a one-eyed person? Is it similar to the magic that can only be learned if the person is a female or if they are bald?’

As the level of the books went up, the conditions to eat them seemed to get harder. He needed to be of the 6th or 7th Circle to eat some books. He didn’t even consider the ones which demanded a loss or impairment of the body.

Since normally only Prime magicians entered this place, there were few magic spells which could be mastered by Theo, who was a 5th Circle magician. However, at this moment…

“Eh…?” A leather cover with a gold leaf on it caught Theo’s

attention.

His sensory perception tickled his neck. The instinctive desire to grab that book caused Theo to stretch out his hand.

‘Appraisal.’

The information from Appraisal stretched out in front of him.

[Battle Song]

[This book contains various ways to strengthen your body in order to fight in close combat. As it was designed by a child from a high ranking family who couldn’t use aura, Battle Song greatly strengthens the body using magic power. The efficiency is superior to any secondary magic, so it is difficult to find an analogy. However, there is one drawback to using this magic.

* The rating of this magic book is ‘Treasure.’

* Acquisition Conditions: At least the 5th Circle.

* When consumed, ‘Battle Song’ will be learned.

* When consumed, your ability in close combat is greatly enhanced.

* This is the original copy which was directly written by the author. When consumed, some of the author's abilities will be handed down according to your fitness level.]

Chapter 56 - Zero Library Delicacy #2

Theodore's eyes widened as he read the information window. 'A magician can fight in close combat? Is that really possible?'

Theo had pride in being a magician, but he also acknowledged the strength of aura users. No matter how much he strengthened his body with secondary magic, it would be impossible for him to deal with a real swordsman like Randolph.

Aura, an extremely refined bio-energy, was a power which gave terrific physical abilities in exchange for giving up other possibilities. Even if a 7th Circle magician used Haste, it would be difficult to respond to Randolph's sword.

"Ah, is that Battle Song? It has been a while." At this moment, Veronica approached and looked over Theo's shoulder at the book he had picked up.

As a tower master, she could freely go back and forth from the Zero Library, so it wasn't strange that she knew about the Battle Song. It might be awkward, but she truly was qualified to be his guide.

Theo turned around naturally and asked, "Is it a famous book?"

"Huh? Rather than famous... it is a bit wicked?" Veronica thought for a moment before explaining why. "Usually, ordinary magicians won't touch this. It is popular with our kids, so studying it is a requirement, but it is more difficult to find someone who has

actually learned it.”

“Why? Magic that assists in close combat would be useful in any situation.”

It was as Theo said.

Battle Song reinforced the lack of physical abilities, so it wasn’t just limited to war mages. It was a magic which could take care of a magician’s only weakness! So, why did other magicians ignore this magic?

Veronica smiled like she knew what Theo was thinking. “Everyone who sees the book for the first time will say something similar. Kid, Battle Song is a magic that is as great as you think. If you are a skilled war mage, then it is possible to move at the level of aura users.”

That wasn’t all, so she continued speaking, “However, Battle Song is permanent magic, unlike Haste or Strength. Do you understand what I mean?”

“…Perhaps.”

“It is like this. If you want to use Battle Song, you have to allocate at least four circles and chant the order without stopping. Which one is more risky?”

Indeed, Theodore had no choice but to accept it.

Just as Veronica said, this was different from magic which would be kept in effect automatically. In order for the effect to persist, he had to spin his circles continually in order to maintain it. Additionally, the flow of magic power had to be fixed by chanting the spell without interruption.

If a 5th Circle magician used ‘Battle Song’, they would only be able to use 1st Circle magic. In that case, it would be better to stand in place and chant a spell.

‘Apart from war magicians, it is a good idea to avoid this…’

Even 7th Circle magicians would be limited to magic of the 3rd Circle when Battle Song was used. If they weren’t war mages who had perfected their fighting skills to the master level, the disadvantages far outweighed the benefits. Even if a magician could move at the speed of an aura user, it would useless if they didn’t know any fighting techniques.

Despite the fact that Theo could use Alfred’s Magic Missile with only one circle, it was hard to trust his unstable fifth circle. While Theo was worrying about Battle Song…

–User, select this book.

Out of nowhere, a familiar voice was heard in his head.

‘Gluttony?’

He was glad that Veronica was standing behind him instead of before him. She didn't get to see the astonishment which had formed on Theo's face, then he recovered after realizing it wasn't a hallucination.

–Don't ask questions you already know. It is a waste of time.

'You, can you speak through this method?'

–It is a function that returned some time ago. Isn't it welcome since you want to hide my existence?

It made a lot of sense. Right now, Theodore's choice of magic book was more important than a minor addition to Gluttony. So, Theo asked for advice about the magic book.

'What is the reason for selecting this book?'

-It is Treasure rank, so it is a prey to release the 3rd seal. In addition, the function that will be released from the 3rd seal will allow you to use this magic more efficiently.

'...You can't tell me what that function is?'

-That's right.

At the end of the day, the one with the final decision was Theo.

He looked at the book in his hand and the glass boxes around him. There was only one choice available to Theo at present, but one day, he would come back for the wisdom in another book.

In the end, Theodore picked up [Battle Song]. Veronica nodded with a pleased expression at his choice. It seemed like many of those who learned this magic were from the Red Tower.

“Well, it isn’t a bad choice! The magic that a kid like you can learn in here isn’t easy, so you should pick something that is in your scope.”

“Yes, thank you.”

“I will be staying in the capital for a while, so you should visit Vince and have a good night’s sleep. We can talk about your circles later, okay?”

It seemed Veronica wasn’t the friendly type to adjust her schedule for others. She poured magic power into the wall while tapping Theo’s head with her other hand. Despite it being a truly awkward touch, he could tell that she was expressing her affection.

“See you later, Theodore!”

Theodore was sent out alone before he even realized that he had been kicked out of the Zero Library.

***

After finishing his work in the Zero Library, Theodore headed to his private room with Vince. The magic towers and Magic Society were greatly enlarged on the inside, so there were rooms to accommodate 1,000 magicians.

Of course, the conditions for a private room were tricky, but it wasn't hard when the person was a Superior magician.

After an early dinner, the conversation between the two people began in earnest.

"...So, that's what happened."

Vince listened seriously to the story and was amazed.

It had only been a fortnight since Theo's tournament finals, but it seemed like the owner of a grimoire could never live an uneventful life. As soon as Theo returned home, he'd had an encounter with an elder lich and Death's Worship.

After Theo finished telling his story, he bowed his head and apologized, "I'm sorry Master. The dimension pocket that you lent me..."

"No, your judgment was correct. It would be a disaster if that grimoire was running free. If the issue could be resolved with one dimension pocket, then everything is fine. Consequently, the dimension pocket has been reissued and the grimoire is sealed, so

this is the best result," Vince praised Theo's decision.

Despite borrowing the power of the grimoire, the salvation of the Miller Barony was a feat which had been accomplished by Theo.

It was a heroic accomplishment which had saved hundreds of lives and prevented the unprecedented disaster that might have followed. There would be no idiot who would disparage Theo just because of one dimension pocket.

Vince wanted to lighten the mood, so he switched to another topic. "By the way, I didn't know that Tower Master would like you so much. She has a temper and is fickle in many ways, so it isn't easy for people to approach her."

"...Is that so?" Theo's expression changed subtly.

As soon as they met, she had put her arm around his shoulders and dragged him along. She hadn't showed any signs of dislike toward Sylvia or Vince; she just seemed more interested in Theo. Her facial expression had been the same when looking at the muscular Blundell.

However, Vince spoke decisively, "She is someone who gives off a bad first impression like a dragon, and it takes time for her to get to know a person. In my case, I remember that it took two years until I was called by name."

"I-It is tricky."

“It isn’t just me. In any case, I thought you might have chosen for Gluttony to eat something that would be wrong for you.” Vince thought it would be a poison like Hell Fire, but he then saw the book next to Theo and whispered in a moist voice, “Is this Battle Song? It must’ve been 10 years since I last read a copy.”

“Master also learned this?”

“Of course. It is appealing to have a melee ability even though it is limited. Even if it can’t be used often, it is a hidden trick.”

Duplicated copies of the books in the Zero Library existed. If duplication magic didn’t work with it, then it meant it was a duplicate. The special power in the book couldn’t be copied, but it wasn’t a problem to distribute the knowledge contained in it.

Books were archived in the Zero Library were treated as special because they were original copies, but most of the knowledge itself was widespread through the duplicate copies. Of course, there were some prohibited and forbidden books, but… it was impossible for them to be read, unless the person was a tower master or the king.

Vince had also learned the Battle Song and repeated all the words. The memory of a senior magician wouldn’t dim even after a few years had passed.

“If you don’t understand something, you can ask me. I don’t know what you will get from this book, but I haven’t forgotten any

of the verses of the song.”

“Thank you.”

“Does this mean you will come to the Red Tower?” Vince’s question might sound strange, but in fact, a mentor and his disciple weren’t obligated to belong to the same tower. Even though they were split into four towers, the root was still the Magic Society. So, regardless of the tower they belonged to, there was no impact on their relationship.

Every magician had the right to belong to the tower they wanted to, and Theo chose the Red Tower. “Yes, I want to go to the Red Tower.”

He had become quite interested in the Yellow Tower until he returned home. Theodore had a contract with Mitra the earth elemental, so he’d thought that the Yellow Tower would be good. However, that idea was overturned after meeting the powerful elder lich. Theo had a hunch that his life would never flow calmly.

‘Power is required. If I don’t become stronger than I am now, I am bound to be overtaken by the grimoire. This time, I managed to get out from the situation, but I shouldn’t expect the same luck next time!’

From the very beginning, Theo hadn’t want to live as a researcher. He wanted to live like the adventurous magicians he’d read about during his childhood. Theo wanted to save people and find treasures... He had been obsessed with living the special life of

magicians.

After meeting the grimoire, Gluttony, he'd thought his dream had come true, but in the end, he was still an immature magician.

As Theo's desire was made clear, Vince nodded firmly. "Okay, I will go and complete the entrance procedure now. Since you are an Average magician, you will be given a private room inside the Red Tower."

"Thank you, Master."

"Well, then I'll be going. Read it at once."

As Vince left with a warm expression, Theo opened up [Battle Song]. "Uhh... There are a lot of ambiguous words."

It seemed like the myth that the Battle Song had originated from a foreign magician was true as strange words were mixed into the song. So, the translation of some words were difficult. It was a tricky book worthy of being kept in the Zero Library, but it wasn't beyond Theo's comprehension.

His eyes fixed on the characters and started to move back and forth in a mechanical manner.

'Life energy flows in the body, just like magic power and aura. The body's performance will change drastically depending on the direction it flows, and the magic described in the book aims to

direct this change…’

In the room where Theo remained alone, silence flowed. This tranquility was a haven for magicians acquiring wisdom. His consciousness quickly sank to the depths as his uncommon level of concentration remained focused on the book in front of him. If he could use the Appraisal ability on himself, he would witness his understanding level rise quickly.

95% was the minimum of understanding required to extract an essence. It was the so-called ‘very high’ level when Theo paused halfway through the book. The combination of exotic vocabulary and extraordinary knowledge reduced his concentration.

Nevertheless, he chose to push himself in order to learn the strange form which was different from the existing magic he already knew.

***

On the sixth day, Theodore finally put down the book.

Chapter 57 - Zero Library Delicacy #3

“The preparations are finished,” Theo said.

Vince, who was also immersed in reading, looked at Theo. Vince knew how much Theo had concentrated in the past six days, but he couldn’t help exclaiming with admiration. The book [Battle Song] was famous for its theory and vocabulary which was different from existing magic systems. There were a few phrases which were unclear, attesting to their foreign origin.

‘But taking less than a week to comprehend it… Theo’s comprehension is beyond my expectations!’

The cover of the book had become even more tattered during the last six days. In a situation where the understanding didn’t reach 100%, calling it ‘complete’ might be offensive. However, it was difficult to understand any more of the book’s contents without the author.

The differences in perception between the author and reader: the noise caused by the gaps between the eras and civilizations; the various interpretations of different expressions; and so forth… When such errors were reduced, Theo’s understanding was at 95%.

Vince already had nothing he could teach Theo about ‘Battle Song.’ In fact, Theo might have a deeper understanding in some parts. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that skill in magic was different from comprehension.

For Theo to improve the magic as a 5th Circle magician, it was impossible. If it was that simple, then other magicians would've already announced the improved magic. The current situation was one in which he could only have Gluttony eat the book.

"Hooo… Then I shall start." Theo took a deep breath and extended his hand.

This was the third time he would experience something like this.

The first time had been when Gluttony ate Alfred Bellontes' [Ballistics Magic] and shared Alfred's experience on the battlefield. The memory of shooting the Magic Bullet was still engraved vividly in his mind.

The second time had been when [Introduction to Elemental Magic] had been eaten and he'd met Myrdal. Myrdal had casually seen through Theo and called Mitra for Theo to make a contract with.

'What will happen this time?'

The previous two times had been 'Rare' books, but the rank of this book was 'Treasure.' It was likely that an unpredictable phenomenon would occur.

"…Eat."

–I have been waiting, User!

Theo’s left hand was held open, and the tongue emerged and found its prey. Gluttony paused for a moment like it was enjoying the taste of [Battle Song] before swallowing it. This was the moment when a book from the Zero Library would be permanently lost.

[‘Battle Song’ has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[The unique magic ‘Battle Song’ has been acquired.]

[An original book has been consumed. Checking synchro rate with Lee Yoonsung… It is judged to be at a very suitable level. Lee Yoonsung will interact with the user. Lee Yoonsung has accepted the spiritual connection.]

[Synchro is starting.]

His ears started ringing when he heard the familiar voice of the guide. As he felt the sense of confusion which came with his consciousness being separated forcibly, Theo collapsed silently onto the bed.

Vince’s worried voice echoed as Theo’s consciousness was sucked away.

Theo fell into the infinite abyss of knowledge inside Gluttony.

***

Wuuuong...

As Theodore regained consciousness, a refreshing wind blew against his face. It wasn't a wind which could be felt on the plains. He knew from his past experiences playing in an old mountain valley.

This was a light wind which could be felt near a mountain peak. Theo's lips moved by themselves as he understood this fact.

"...How is it? Is this a good wind?" It was a voice Theo had never heard before.

Since he had already entered Alfred's body, Theo quickly accepted the situation. He had been half confident when he lost consciousness while hearing the word 'synchro.' Then the owner of this body must be the magician, Lee Yoonsung, who wrote [Battle Song].

'By the way, who was he talking to just now?'

"You, the person who is in my body right now."

‘Heok!’ Theodore jolted with a surprised expression as he was spoken to.

Whether he believed it or not, the man was standing and pointing his finger in one direction. Theodore’s gaze followed that finger. Then in the distance, a wooden building which looked like a large mansion came into his view. Even though he was looking down from a mountain peak, the structure was clearly visible.

“I was born into the Fairy Dance Lee family which protects the Baekun Mountains. If this were in the western countries, it would be similar to being the successor of a family of knights.”

‘Western countries? Perhaps an Eastern person?’

“Yes, it seems like this wasn’t known after my death.”

‘An Eastern person!’ Theodore’s consciousness stirred for a moment.

There was a place to the southeast of the Meltor Kingdom and could only be reached by crossing the sea. It was a place where aura was more predominant than magic, so magicians were reborn as independent magicians.

‘How did an Eastern person come to Meltor and create his own magic like Battle Song?’ It was natural for Theo to wonder about that.

“Well, just listen to me,” Lee Yoonsung said with a bitter smile. “I was born with a high status, but the path of my life was never straight. I was born with a body that was unable to use aura. As soon as this fact was revealed to my family, I was removed from the family register and driven to the peaks.”

Lee Yoonsung’s voice was calm as he looked back through the memories of his life. There was a shabby hut that looked like it was on the verge of collapsing, and images of eating food left by a servant passed through Theodore’s mind. Lee Yoonsung’s memories flowed naturally into Theo due to the influence of synchro.

“That was my destiny, but I couldn’t accept it.”

Fortunately, Lee Yoonsung had been an intelligent boy. After months of preparation, he had left the hut in the east and decided to turn his eyes toward magic.

At the age of 15, he had left the rugged mountain ranges to enter a magic kingdom. There were a few almost deadly experiences, but he had managed to cross the continent using jewels he’d stole from his family.

After several twists and turns, he had arrived at Meltor.

“Fortunately, I met a good teacher. Thanks to him, I was able to start my research in a magic tower and developed a magic based on the secrets of my family that I remembered from my childhood. That is the ‘Battle Song.’ I managed to complete it in 20 years.”

‘…That’s amazing.’ Theodore truly admired him.

Not only had he crossed continents at the age of 15, Lee Yoonsung had finished his purpose in an unknown country. Despite having no talent, he had pioneered his own fate.

“But that magic wasn’t perfect. Since it was based on my family, I added in unnecessary things in order to fill that guilt. I will try to teach you the complete version of ‘Battle Song’ before you leave.” As Lee Yoonsung spoke, he took on a stance.

Simultaneously, the circles on his heart started burning. Akin to a waterwheel, magic power flowed out like streams of water and filled up the body. As the magic flowed in accordance to his heartbeat, the sound of the song, ‘Battle Song,’ resonated in the body shared by the two people. It was a violent flow which was intense enough to cause his shoulders to shake.

“Since we are called the Fairy Dance clan, my family’s martial art is close to a rhythmic dance. I recreated the aura flow through ‘Battle Song’ for me, who wasn’t allowed to use it!” Lee Yoonsung spoke furiously while moving his body.

Then as the uncontrollable passion escaped, his gentle dance changed forms.

Kung! His feet were firm against the ground.

‘A fearsome power…!’

As Lee Yoonsung firmly centered himself on the ground like a tortoise shell, he stretched out his fist. His fist was so powerful that the air exploded from a shock wave.

Peeng!

Lee Yoonsung unfolded his martial arts without any rest, not even caring if his clothes were blown away. Every time he did a dance move, the ground would shake and the air would explode. It was an outburst of violence which he couldn’t imagine as a magician.

Magic born from martial arts, martial arts created with magic…

Theo forgot his admiration and focused as much as possible on Lee Yoonsung knowing he would be a fool to let this once in a lifetime opportunity pass by. Whether or not Lee Yoonsung was conscious of this, he continued moving without any hesitation.

“Later on, I once returned to my family. I wanted to prove that I wasn’t a worthless person they could ignore.”

Then he roared like a beast and kicked the air with his right foot.

Kwang!

The wind pressure caused by the kick blew the shabby hut away without a trace. His boiling passion moved the magic power even more, enhancing the power of the martial art. After a few more times, Lee Yoonsung stopped kicking the air. Despite making a mess around the hut, he wasn't out of breath at all.

His voice shook like a storm was occurring. "...My father was still alive at that time. His face distorted as he said I sold myself for magic. This was despite the fact that I was better than any other person in the family."

Nothing was left as his passion died down, and Lee Yoonsung was eventually murmuring in an empty voice. As his words came to an end, there was a sadness which hadn't been revealed before. This was the fragment of soul which had been left behind in the [Battle Song] book.

"Then I returned to the Meltor Kingdom and spent the rest of my life there. Perhaps I paid the price of abusing my body during the process of creating this magic."

Creating new spells were a challenge, and numerous magicians had died in their attempts. A single failure with Battle Song would tear the muscles and cause the failure of one's internal organs. As a consequence, Lee Yoonsung was near death after the magic was completed.

He spoke in a voice which sounded lonelier than ever, "I didn't know I would get a successor in this way, but I don't intend to ask you for anything. In the end, I am just a fragment of the foolish Lee Yoonsung. Rather, I would like to thank you."

‘Thank me… What does he mean by that?’

“It was a dumb life where I couldn’t leave anything behind. The magic I created wasn’t complete, and my family didn’t acknowledge me. I don’t know how I died, but it wasn’t a satisfying life,” he spoke to no one as he extended his hands into the empty space.

It was a strange posture where his palm was placed over the fist of his other hand. Theo didn’t know it well, but it was the eastern etiquette called a fist and palm salute. This was Lee Yoonsung’s appreciation for Theodore Miller, who inherited the result of his foolishness.

At that moment, Lee Yoonsung’s world started to collapse.

“I hope this will help you a little bit in your life, Young Man.”

There was no time to respond to his gracious words as the world collapsed. Then as always, Gluttony’s unkind function expelled Theo’s consciousness. As the appearance of Lee Yoonsung looking around the Baekun Mountains became distant, Theo’s third synchro experience came to an end.

[The synchronization with Lee Yoonsung has ended.]

[The synchro rate is 92.8%, the experience is maintained.]

[The unique magic ‘Battle Song’ has been restored to its perfect state. Lee Yoonsung’s experience has turned into proficiency for that magic.]

[The suitability between Lee Yoonsung and the user Theodore Miller is quite high. Depending on the user’s body, some of Lee Yoonsung’s skills and abilities will be handed down. As the user’s physical abilities will increase significantly, a long period of sleep is required. In the meantime, Gluttony will also go to sleep.]

[At the present time, you will sleep for 30 hours and 12 minutes.]

Chapter 58 - Zero Library Delicacy #4

After exactly 30 hours and 12 minutes, Theodore regained consciousness.

As soon as he recovered his mind, he felt a strange incompatibility with his body. His body felt both heavier and lighter. Either way, the weight difference couldn't be confirmed. His five senses also seemed sharp and several times more sensitive.

Sarok... saruruk... A soft sound tickled at his eardrums. His eyes, which hadn't opened yet, twitched in response to the noise.

'...This, is it the rustling sound of the hem of a robe?' The sound was coming from somewhere near him.

As Theo's consciousness gradually became clearer, his tightly closed eyelids opened to reveal blue-green eyes. Just like his hearing, his eyesight also seemed to have improved, as the stains on the ceiling had become much clearer. It was strange since Theodore's eyesight had been worsening due to all the books he'd read in the library.

Theo quickly realized that he was lying on Vince's bed and slowly raised his body. His limbs were stiff due to not moving for 30 hours, so as blood flowed back into his stiff limbs, a moan naturally emerged.

“Ummm…”

“Oh! Have you woken up? What is the status of your body?” When Vince heard his voice, he immediately jumped up. Theo had collapsed suddenly, so Vince had prepared a few emergency potions in case there was a problem. Fortunately, there seemed to be no external issues.

Vince sat back down on his chair and said, “It has been around 30 hours since you consumed [Battle Song]. I don’t know what happened, but you should first take a look in the mirror.”

“Mirror… What are you saying?” Theo got up with a bewildered expression.

He soon had no choice but to look down at himself. It was because the clothes he had been wearing before Gluttony ate [Battle Song] had almost been turned into rags. His shirt sleeves were fine. However, his chest area, and so on, were snug, and his thigh areas were covered with holes, like the wrong size had been forced on. Then Theo didn’t hesitate anymore and followed Vince’s advice.

He stood in front of the full-body mirror in the room and found himself lost for words. “Eh?”

Truth be told, Theodore Miller’s body had been in a poor state. He had been exercising for a few months, but his body was still skinny. He wouldn’t be able to win against an apprentice knight if he didn’t use magic. He might have some real life experience with

weapons, but it was the same as putting a pearl necklace on a pig.

However, what was with this reflection in the mirror?

"...This is ridiculous," Theo unconsciously muttered when he saw his body. It was because the image reflected in the mirror was strange.

The shoulders which had exposed shoulder bones a few days ago were now covered with thick muscles, and he would fill up any previously baggy clothes. His two legs, which had been as thin as branches, were now as strong as a warrior's. If he had a sword hanging from his waist and wore armour then, he would look like a young swordsman.

'It isn't just that. My strength, stamina, and senses have also improved.'

Theo carefully made a fist. The series of movements stimulated his frontal muscles, and his forearm rose up sharply. The strong muscles were like twisted ropes. He could feel a tremendous strength gathering in the palm of his hand. If he was holding an apple, then some juices might be leaking out right now.

Despite having only gained some of Lee Yoonsung's abilities, Theo was now at the level of a decent knight. Then that meant Lee Yoonsung must've been a monster. He had probably devoted himself to training despite not having the constitution for aura.

That persistence was equal to Theo, who hadn't gave up on the academy despite his low sensitivity.

'...Your dream, I've surely received it.' Theo recalled the lonely back of Lee Yoonsung and bowed solemnly. He had left without being able to say any of his gratitude.

The completed 'Battle Song,' the magic which had been created in order to prove the worth of Lee Yoonsung's life, had been left to Theo.

After expressing his respect to his satisfaction, Theodore turned to Vince. "Master, I wanted to ask you one thing."

"Hrmm? You can ask me anything."

However, before Theo asked his question, he looked at himself again. The result of the third eating experience was more than imagined. He had just wanted the ability to respond in close combat, but the power he got from Lee Yoonsung completely overcame his weakness as a magician.

Theo's hardened forearm could now withstand the recoil of a strong Magic Bullet, and fighting in close combat would be no problem if he combined Battle Song with secondary magic.

Above all, Gluttony's third awakened function was fearsome.

"The Red Tower Master, Veronica... how can I contact her?"

Now, Theodore had one challenge remaining: to complete the unstable 5th Circle.

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Every magic tower had their own role in the Meltor Kingdom.

With their high versatility, the Blue Tower used their life magic to install laundry and hygiene facilities all throughout the kingdom. The majority of magicians in the Yellow Tower were alchemists, and they contributed to the kingdom in fields such as construction and metallurgy. The members of the White Tower, however, were sources of information.

If so, what about the Red Tower which was famous for its war mages? Of course, their role involved fighting.

“Tower Master, a pair of trolls have emerged in Viscount Bermund’s territory. Forces have been sent from the estate, but a many people are suffering, so there is an urgent request to dispatch war mages.

A man rushed to the top of the Red Tower and read the report to the Red Tower Master. He knew her personality, so he also knew what she disliked.

Veronica responded to the man’s request only after dealing with one of her documents. “Send Superior David. Additionally, ask for

two knights to join as escorts. There will be no problems with a group like that."

"I will do as you say!"

As the man rushed out, another magician entered the tower. He also quickly delivered his report. "Tower Master, a large group of robbers was detected near Marquis Orten's territory. Marquis Orten has sent a request for help, so how should we handle it?"

"Orten? Oh, that mustache guy. Why is someone with many knights asking for our help? Tell him to take care of it."

"Yes, I will."

While taking care of the two dispatch requests, Veronica had signed over 10 documents. It wasn't just cursory signing as she read over them first. She had the ability to remember everything and didn't miss the slightest typo or error. Despite her hot-blooded and violent behaviour, she was an extremely competent 8th Circle magician.

The problem was that the extent of her abilities depended on her patience.

"Ah, damn! Why is this my only work these days? Why are they asking the Magic Tower for help with their own security? We aren't dogs to be sent around the royal court!"

In the end, Veronica reached the limits of her patience and tore up the papers. Her eight circles responded to her wrath and burned down the torn documents without leaving a trace behind. She shook off the ashes and placed her legs on her desk. As Veronica lay down, someone popped up in her head.

'I found an interesting guy... No matter how relaxed I am, 10 days is too much. Does he think he can stand me up after I guided him to the Zero Library?'

The bloodline of a red dragon meant that the most important thing to her was whether she was interested or not. She didn't want to see people or things that weren't interesting. Veronica's nature meant she couldn't ignore her duties, but she could refuse to entertain empty words.

It was at this moment that...

"Tower Master!" Someone entered the room once again.

"Ah, what is it this time?"

The man turned pale at Veronica's temperamental reaction and quickly prepared to read out the report in his hand. After all, he couldn't just make up an excuse to leave the room.

"There is a request to meet you."

"Meet me? Who?"

“A new magician who just entered the Red Tower, an Average magician called Theodore Miller…”

Veronica popped out of her seat at the name. “Send him in! Right now!”

“Yes, yes?”

“No, don’t do that. It will be faster if I go personally. Hey, go and call an elder to sit here. I have a task to do, so I will leave the rest to them.”

“Huh?”

“Then I’ll be going!” Veronica ignored the man’s bemused expression and rushed down the tower. It didn’t matter what happened as long as she could get away from that damned paperwork. Additionally, she was going to meet a very interesting kid.

‘Your timing is praiseworthy, Kid!’

Thanks to her exceptional physical abilities as a quarter dragon, Veronica quickly arrived at the Red Tower’s waiting room. As soon as she arrived, she kicked open the door and was met with Theo’s surprised face.

Simultaneously, Veronica's footsteps slowed. "Huh...?"

Something had changed. She felt a sense of discomfort, and instead of rushing, she looked Theo up and down slowly. Her mediocre impression of him had disappeared after just 10 days. Theo's standing posture was the same, however, his center of gravity had shifted like he had learned a solid martial art.

'Can a human change this much in just 10 days?'

Theo greeted the puzzled Veronica first, "Thank you for your time, Tower Master."

"Yes? Well, I told you to come and find me. Is it about what I mentioned last time?"

"Yes, that's right."

The phenomenon involving his circle was a problem which couldn't be understood through books, and Veronica had asserted it couldn't be resolved with time. In order to resolve this issue, Theo had come to ask Veronica for help. After all, aside from Veronica, there was no better teacher for this task.

"You are welcome at any time, but... um..." Her golden eyes shone with a strange light as she looked at Theo.

It was impossible to hide his skills in front of Veronica as she could see through him with one glance. Fortunately, she just

marveled at Theo's change instead of feeling curious.

"Well, it doesn't really matter since I like this better! But don't be inspired by someone disgusting like Blundell. That is unreasonable."

"Ah, I understand."

"Okay, then shall we go?" Veronica started moving.

Theo followed her despite not knowing the destination. As if she knew what he was thinking, Veronica looked back and added, "It is probably a place that you know."

Chapter 59 - Veronica's Special Training #1

It was just as Veronica said. The two of them stopped at a place Theodore was familiar with.

They were at the five stadium Pentarium where the Pupil Tournament had taken place. Veronica entered the central stadium where the final match had been held. The person who seemed like the caretaker opened the door as soon as they saw Veronica's face.

Maybe she had come here more than once or twice.

"Isn't there much more space here than at the Magic Society? It is usually used as a training ground or a place to demonstrate magic when a tournament isn't occurring," Veronica explained as she stretched her flexible limbs.

She wasn't wearing much under her red robes. As every movement she made revealed a part of her body, Theo didn't know where to look.

It was like she had no idea how provocative she was being as she continued her explanation. "The best solution to the disharmony you are experiencing is to completely reproduce the situation at the time your circles increased, but that isn't possible. So, we will use the second way."

“…What is it?” Theo asked while trying look unconcerned. It was hard for his gaze to not rest on specific areas of her body.

“It is simple. In the end, the disharmony is a discrepancy between the body and the mind, so we just need to make it into one.”

Once the warm up was completed, Veronica stopped stretching her limbs and stood in place. Her stance seemed to reveal gaps all over her body. However, Alfred’s sensory perception was crying out the reverse: those gaps were dangerous. Theodore accepted the contradictory analysis.

Veronica smiled when she saw Theo instinctively lower his posture.

“I will help you reach the limit.” Shortly after she said this, the heat around Veronica’s body began to boil

Huuwoook…!

The ground turned red, and the hot wind blew into the air. Due to the wind pressure, her red robes were fluttering. Awe filled Theodore’s eyes as his skin tingled despite the distance.

‘She isn’t intentionally doing this. She is just releasing her magic power…!’

It wasn’t a special phenomenon. A magician who reached a

certain level would naturally affect the environment. For example, water never dried up around the Blue Tower, and the White Tower always had a breeze around it. Additionally, snow would never accumulate around the Red Tower.

However, this was on a different scale. Even if dozens of senior magicians gathered together, they would only cause the temperature to rise or drop a little bit. However, Veronica was burning like a living flame!

Her voice resonated in the haze, “Then kid, do you want to play with me?”

She only looked at him, yet there was a blast of hot wind. Theo got rid of the hot wind with simple wind magic and responded to Veronica, whose form was unclear. He said, “Spar? With you?”

“I’ll give you some concessions. I won’t use magic of the 5th Circle and above, and I won’t attack in any direction other than the front. I will adjust my strength too, so don’t worry.”

One of the two greatest magicians in the Meltor Kingdom was right before him, so Theo’s concentration level reached its peak. Even if she attached 100 types of penalties, she wasn’t a person he could face easily.

In general, 7th Circle magicians were on the same level as a sword master, and Veronica’s power was one step beyond that. So, Theodore couldn’t fathom it. However, despite his sober judgment, he could feel his spirit boiling. “I understand.”

Her titles, as being one quarter dragon as well as an 8th Circle magician, were brilliant, but Theodore was the owner of a grimoire. He wouldn't shrink back just because of his opponent's name. Regardless of victory or defeat, this was a chance to test things out. It would be nice to make Veronica's relaxed face look shocked.

'I will try it once.'

It was possible to spar with Veronica if Theo combined Gluttony's third function with Battle Song. He would see if it was effective or not.

Theo looked down at his left hand and was reminded of the ability which had awakened.

[Grimoire "Gluttony" / D Rank]

[One of the seals containing Gluttony's power has been removed. From now on, Gluttony will tell you the origin of the artifact or chant a spell in a voice which can't be heard by anyone else. The former owners called this feature as 'Another,' but you can change the name if you want.

* 'Another' activates magic with the user's magic power. However, magic which hasn't been mastered by the user isn't available.]

It was a ridiculous ability. The ability, ‘Another,’ which had been unlocked from the third seal, was literally a cheat.

For magicians, there was always the risk that they would be attacked while chanting a spell. It was highly likely for the magician to fail in the chant if they were moving. However, a magician who stood still would be exposed to attacks.

So, if Theo’ had ‘Another,’ he would be able to use magic without any risk.

‘It is also possible to apply it this way!’

Five circles revolved within Theo’s body. He used his shaky 5th Circle as an aid while building up the magic formula of ‘Blaze Shell’ within his other four circles. Simultaneously, the mouth on his left hand chanted the spell for ‘Catapult’ in a voice which only Theo could hear. It was Theodore’s strongest Fusion Magic, ‘Volcanic Shell,’ which he’d used in the final match of the tournament.

‘It is magic similar to Memorize, but-’

It was possible to complete the two magics in an instant, as if there were two people.

“Volcanic Shell!” As soon as a giant rock emerged, red flames appeared around it.

The combination of mass and firepower was more intense than before thanks to the aid of the 5th Circle. It could destroy any 5th Circle defense magic with one blow, and Theo shot it without any hesitation.

Veronica extended her hand with a nonchalant expression. “Oho, is that Fusion Magic?”

There was no chance to be impatient as the Volcanic Shell flew towards her. Magic power surged around her palms, and a red flaming spear popped out. The spear shot forward like a flash of light and pierced the shell.

Kuwaaang!

The pieces of shattered stone scattered in every direction. Fire Spear was just a 4th Circle magic, but Veronica had made it stronger. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have been able to destroy Volcanic Shell in a frontal move like that.

Veronica truly was going to use only 4th Circle magic. She deemed it would be enough to overwhelm Theo. At that moment, dark smoke filled the stadium, and there was a temporary lull.

Huuk!

Suddenly, a human shape shot out from the smoke. It was faster than it seemed, and Veronica involuntarily let out a sound, “Eh?”

She'd expected Theo to use magic to cover her field of vision and drag her into close combat, but his speed was too fast. Even if he used Battle Song, those weren't the movements of a magician. It was an acceleration speed allowed only for Theodore, who had mastered the full version.

'Battle Song.

'Sonata of Speed.

'Vivace.'

Theo ran like he was just grazing against the ground. He wouldn't have achieved this speed if he hadn't received some of Lee Yoonsung's abilities. With a perfect center of gravity, Theo's body neared Veronica and leapt forward like a thunderbolt. Then he used the momentum to knee her in the abdomen!

Paaang!

There was a heavy sound, and Veronica took a few steps back. She couldn't believe that a man's knee had hit her as the impact was so powerful. The attack had forced Veronica to leave her spot. However, instead of taking joy from his successful hit, Theo turned pale after the collision. '...What, this feeling?'

At the moment of conflict, a devastating image passed through the mind of the attacker, Theodore. It felt like a child's fist hitting

a wall several meters thick or like a young child going against a heavily armed infantry unit.

Unsurprisingly, a strange smile flashed on Veronica's face. "Good, isn't this pretty exciting?"

Theo felt a sense of impending crisis from Veronica's beautiful voice.

He moved as soon as he felt a chill go down his spine. Theo wasn't late because he had jumped back desperately.

Peeng! The air burst due to her fist.

Theo had seen this scene during his synchro with Lee Yoonsung. It was a fist which could shatter a rock in one hit, crossing the barrier of sound. His bones would break from that strike, even if he activated Battle Song.

As one quarter dragon, the blood flowing through Veronica's body gave her an ability equivalent to an aura user.

"Good movements. Haven't you become a completely different person in 10 days? Why is it that I get so curious every time I see you? You are the best!"

"That— tha—nk— you," Theodore replied through clenched teeth.

Veronica's hand-to-hand combat skills were terrible. She did nothing aside from punch or kick. Even so, the absurd strength and speed of her attack made it beyond the level of a human.

In the first place, techniques were just for efficiency. It was what the weak studied to figure out how to defeat the strong. However, Veronica had been born with sufficient strength, so techniques were unnecessary for her.

'I can't fight her in close combat! Widen the distance!' Lee Yoonsung's experience and Alfred's intuition told him this.

Veronica's combat skills were bad, but there was no way for him to win in close combat. The analysis was contradictory, but it was reality. While escaping, Theo prepared magic with 'Another' and aimed his right hand at the approaching fist.

'Memorize.

'All Slots Open.

'Double Blaze Shell.'

Two fireballs shot out hastily.

"You can use magic while moving?" Veronica's eyes widened with surprise. Interest and surprise filled her golden eyes as the

two fireballs headed towards her. “But it won’t work!”

Wind Cutter was invoked with a single gesture. Countless gusts of wind overlapped and broke the two shells.

Despite the 4th Circle magic being destroyed by 2nd Circle magic, Theo was able to achieve his purpose of widening the distance between them. Veronica approached Theodore but suddenly stopped moving.

She smiled brightly and clapped several times. “Wow, amazing! Learning the Battle Song in 10 days… Your movements are great as well. Moreover, you can use Fusion Magic and even cast while moving. This is enough to take down a few 6th Circle magicians that I know.”

She was praising him. However, Theo just listened instead of rejoicing. The result was that he’d failed to land a single strike on Veronica, and he hadn’t reached his limits. Talking in the middle of this situation meant there was something else.

She brushed away the dust on her robe as she spoke, “But that isn’t enough. Kid, do you still have any other means left? You will only feel the limit after using everything possible.”

“I also heard it from the Blue Tower Master. Didn’t you reproduce Alfred’s Magic Missile? Even if Alfred returned alive, he won’t be able to beat me. He isn’t a match for me.”

As she spoke, Veronica threw off her robe. “From now on, prepare to die. I’ll make you regret going in front of me.”

Red magic power rose from her body like lava.

Ku ku ku kung…

The violent presence swelled even more. Veronica had intentionally activated her dragon blood. This meant the scale of her power before couldn’t even be compared to what Theodore had previously experienced.

Even people a few kilometers away would flee from this presence. Any sickly person in the Pentarium might have their heart stop beating.

Standing before her, Theo raised his finger. “I will surprise you once more.”

Chapter 60 - Veronica's Special Training #2

Certainly, Theo didn't have many means left to face Veronica.

Alfred's Magic Missile, aka the Magic Bullet, could penetrate even 6th Circle magic defenses. Veronica had decided to only use up to 4th Circle magic, so she didn't have the means to prevent the Magic Bullet.

'Well, it won't be that easy.' However, Theodore never lost his vigilance.

Even Alfred, who had turned numerous knights and magicians into corpses, had rarely faced a master level. According to the records, he'd been defeated by Blue Tower Master Blundell who had been of the 7th Circle at the time.

In other words, even the Magic Bullet's utility against a master level magician wasn't absolute.

"...Stop and raise the index finger," Theo muttered as he looked at his index finger several times.

In order to use Magic Bullet with its original force, he had to train his fingers. The strength of Theo's body had increased considerably after receiving some of Lee Yoonsung's abilities, but unlike Alfred, Theo's range was limited to the mid-range. However, it was, of course, a great improvement compared to

when it could only be used several times a day.

Fortunately, Veronica waited until he finished thinking. It was an attitude which showed she was confident in her strength. There were still gaps, but he had no way to dig into them.

‘Is there any way I can catch her weakness again? I felt like I had hit a wall with my knee, but it should be somehow okay if I use Magic Bullet. I can’t think of any other way… Okay.’

As Theo finished his preparation, Theodore’s magic power settled down. While his magic power remained still, it was like the calm before a storm. Veronica detected this and started circulating her four circles. Then shortly after that…

Pak! Theo triggered Battle Song, and his body disappeared in an instant. It was at a speed which exceeded a human’s eyesight.

Theo would maintain a large distance between them the moment he realized there was no chance for him to win in close combat. That seemed like the most plausible move he would make, but Veronica’s keen vision quickly caught his movements.

“Coming to the medium range? I like you even more.” As Veronica spoke, she created fire arrows.

One Fire Bolt had enough power to pierce through any heavy armour. There were roughly 100 of such arrows. The arrows were completed in the blink of an eye and flew forward.

Dudududududu! The stadium floor was soon punctured with holes like a honeycomb.

Sweat dripped down Theo's face as he barely avoided the fire arrows without any damage. He had used Battle Song to strengthen his skin as much as possible, but if he had blocked the attack from the front, he couldn't guarantee that any 5th Circle defensive magic would've been able to block it.

It was reckless to fight against her with fire magic. Theo experienced this fact directly and immediately changed his attribute.

"Earth Wave!"

The ground shook from where he touched it with his palm, and the already tattered stadium floor moved like a wave towards Veronica. Having an enormous mass of earth rising up to swallow her would be really annoying, even for Veronica.

Kwaang! A wave of fireballs shattered the wave.

The destructive power was even stronger than normal Blaze Shells! Hot air blew away from the blast. It was a pressure which didn't let up even when smoke was covering Veronica. She looked forward with no fear.

However, instead of being overwhelmed by the pressure, Theo

poured magic power into the ground with a smile of satisfaction. ‘Mitra, now!’

[Hoing!] Mitra had been sent near Veronica with Earth Wave, and she now responded to his signal. This was Ground Spear, the trap which had taken one of Sylvia’s points. It might be incomplete, but its power and size was incomparable due to Theo reaching the 5th Circle.

The problem was that his opponent was too absurd.

“Ah, an elemental.” Veronica instantly knew about the existence of Mitra and stomped lightly on the ground.

Kung!

[Hoyayang!]

Mitra, who was preparing a spell, was hit by a shock wave and went into hiding in the ground with a cute scream. She didn’t seem hurt, but she had received a big surprise. Theodore spoke to her a few times but didn’t receive any replies. Mitra was closer to a spirit than a solid form, so the emotional impact was transmitted to him directly.

Still, Theo’s goal of grabbing Veronica’s feet was achieved.

‘Memorize. All Slots Charge.’

It was incomplete, but he now had five circles, so Memorize had five slots. Theo filled up all the slots while she was looking down at the ground. If he unleashed five magic spells at the same time, then he could complete one combination. It was Theodore's original magic which was different from traditional Fusion Magic.

'This is currently the strongest magic I can use!'

In theory, Veronica wouldn't be able to neglect it since it had the power equal to an upper 5th Circle or low 6th Circle. As Theodore gathered all his magic power, his eyes glowed blue. The magic power in the air shuddered, and when Veronica noticed it, she halted. Perhaps it was because she expected the attack.

However, Theo overturned that prediction as he rushed forward once again.

"Again?" Veronica looked at him with a confused expression.

Theo should've understood that close combat was no use. So, she didn't know what the meaning of this approach was, especially when he hadn't used Alfred's Magic Missile yet. Whatever the case, she would smash everything he'd planned.

Hwaruruk!

Veronica once again created fire arrows. The number of fire arrows was double what she'd made earlier. 200 arrows aimed

directly at Theo. She would make him run side by side, so that he couldn't approach the front.

Of course, Theodore anticipated this as well.

-Illusion Track!

As the mouth on his left hand cried out, dozens of Theo copies appeared in the stadium.

"Illusion magic? Additionally, he's using Battle Song at the same time?" Veronica's shock caused her reaction to be delayed by half a beat.

This was because it went against common sense. It was unimaginable that a 5th Circle magician could invoke Battle Song in conjunction with illusion magic which was at least of the 3rd Circle. Despite Veronica's dragon senses and high sensitivity, it would take her a short amount of time to see through the dozens of illusions.

As a result, Theodore was ahead of her by one beat.

"Master of heat, Surtr. Blow away those who dare desire your power!" This was a chant he had learned from Sylvia.

It was a top circle magic, but it was possible to reproduce some of its power by omitting some things. His lacking sensitivity was covered up by Memorize. This was the fire version of the 7th Circle

ice magic, Blizzard.

'Minor Force. Inferno.'

The fearsome storm raged and struck Veronica.

"...Indeed, I should become serious."

If Veronica were a pure-blooded red dragon which swam in lava, she could endure this with her bare body. However, she was only a quarter dragon. Putting her hand in a bonfire was fine, but she couldn't face these flames, which could melt down rocks, without doing something else first.

The moment that Veronica was caught up in the fire storm...

'Now!' Theo raised his index and middle fingers of both hands, and aimed the four fingers at the front.

However, Theo didn't think the attack would be effective, even if he reproduced the 7th Circle Inferno.

His opponent was the Red Tower Master, literally the strongest magician who reigned at the peak of fire magic. This was Theo's best attack, but Veronica would only struggle a little bit. He knew from the beginning that he couldn't win through firepower.

In the end, the heat was just a cover.

His eyes shone gold as he used Hawkeye to see through the flames and aimed as soon as he confirmed the Veronica's presence within the flames. Even a master magician couldn't perfectly defend against a surprise attack.

Aimed at Veronica's forehead, philtrum, heart, and stomach, four streaks of blue light pierced the flames.

Kiiiing.

As the wind blew, there were sharp sounds as four holes formed in the flames. Theo's attack could even pierce through the power of Inferno. This was the moment that the Magic Missle of the war hero, Alfred Bellontes, returned to the world in a true sense.

"Cough!" Blood spurted from Theodore's mouth.

This was the cost of activating his circles to the limit. He staggered as the flames went out.

"Nice!" Finally, the Queen of Fire who kicked away Inferno appeared.

There was a nice smile on her face as well as a line of blood which hadn't been there before. It was the mark of the Magic Bullet, which had lost most of its strength against the defense of the quarter dragon.

‘Only one shot connected. It is still lacking…’

Veronica had phenomenal reflexes. Theodore sighed deeply as he guessed the reason. The flow of magic power around her body was familiar to him. It was the incomplete version of Battle Song, but it still enhanced Veronica’s physical ability. It allowed her to withstand Inferno as well as respond to Magic Bullet. He couldn’t come up with any more means to win.

***

On the other hand, Veronica was shaking with joy. ‘Is my spine shivering?’

Despite the penalties, there had been only one person in the city who could make her so nervous until now. It was the great magician, Blundell Adruncus. With the exception of this old man, no one else could excite her. However, she wouldn’t get a chance to fight him as both of them were the pillars of this country.

However, what about this kid called Theodore?

‘If he keeps growing like this for 20… No, 10 years…’

He would grow into someone powerful enough to threaten Veronica. She imagined the day which had yet to come, and her nervousness became a cheerful feeling. Even Theo’s looks were good. Veronica had never been interested in the opposite sex before, but this wasn’t bad. No, she rather liked it.

It would've been nice if Vince hadn't found him first, but unfortunately, she had to give up on taking the role of mentor.

She pulled a potion out of her dimension pocket. "Drink this now. The blood is clogged around the circles on your heart, so it is better to drink and treat this."

"Ah, thank you."

"And the attack you showed at the end was really good! Keep doing this in the future."

Theo stiffened as he asked, "...Future. Does that mean?"

"Yes!" Veronica nodded with a bright expression and dropped the expected bomb. "Drink the potion and rest for 30 minutes. We will spar half a dozen times a day. Results will usually emerge after less than a month. Are you going to be one of those whiny children who say they won't do it again?"

Theodore stiffened as he looked at the shattered stadium, torn attire, and blood he had thrown up. Veronica's smile caused him to feel a chill, despite it containing no ill will.

Theo could see why Vince had called her a natural disaster, but he couldn't go back now. In the end, Theodore dropped his head with a resigned expression.

The fierce one-on-one tutoring with Veronica ended after approximately a fortnight.

Chapter 61 - The Second Mission #1

It was definitely worth sparring against Veronica, one of the greatest magicians of the present day, despite the harshness. She seemed accustomed to attacking and defending in this way as she acted at a level which Theodore could handle. Moreover, she also used her speed and power to push him to the limit.

'She's coming.' Theo moved his body as soon as his senses noticed it.

He took two steps to the right, and a terrible thunderbolt struck where he had just been standing. His body moved in a way it wouldn't have been able to a fortnight ago, while his sharp five senses read the movement of mana and squeezed out the magic formula one step ahead of his mind.

It was followed by a fearsome rain of fire arrows.

–Arrow Protection.

Theo took one step forward and triggered the water skill. He was already in a state where Battle Song was helping him. Just like a dancer, he moved through the arrows while kicking and blocking things with his fist. They were natural movements but they seemed like clothes borrowed from someone else.

'Battle Song. Rhapsody of Power. Mezzo Forte.'

Theodore’s fist filled up with magic power, and he hit a fireball.

Peeeong!

Some of the embers from the scattered fireballs hit his face, but Theo watched Veronica’s movements without moving a single eyebrow. It was because missing her position for a brief moment would lead to defeat.

However, Veronica surpassed even that level of concentration.

“Are you looking at an illusion in the distance?” As Veronica’s voice rang out behind Theo, a chill ran down his spine. He had missed the moment she used illusion magic when he had been intercepting the fire arrows and fireballs. The shape in front of him was just a refraction of her heat.

‘This time, it is only up to here.’

The intervals and timing… Theo couldn’t see a way out.

Hwaruruk!

The heat burst. He had predicted the fireballs thanks to the movement of mana. It wasn’t a conventional Blaze Shell, but there was no way to stop it at this distance. He had already used the Protection skill a long time ago, and even if he combined Battle

Song and Shield, he couldn't avoid the situation.

The moment he tried to open up Shield with a bitter smile...

Clink.

There was a strange sensation in his body, like a misaligned cog clicking back into place. The uncomfortable magic power flow stopped, and the 5th Circle started rotating with the other four circles.

Theodore felt this and unconsciously completed the formula for the 5th Circle defense magic, Protection.

Peeeong!

The wall of blue magic power completely blocked the fireball.

"...Eh?"

Theo couldn't help smiling at the successful defense, and Veronica grabbed him with a bright smile. She realized that Theodore had completely crossed the threshold to the 5th Circle after using Protection.

"You succeeded! Well done Kid!"

“T-Tower Master. Please let go.”

Veronica wasn’t wearing a robe, so Theo’s head became empty at her touch. The skin moist with sweat caused him to feel dizzy.

However, Veronica didn’t know what was going on in his head and smiled playfully. “When we are in private, shouldn’t you call me ‘Sister’? At any rate, the disciple is stubborn, just like his master. This is the last time I will play with you. I’m a little sad.”

She had left her position for a fortnight to be Theodore’s opponent. In a sense, one of the greatest magicians in Meltor had acted as his private tutor. It was huge when he thought about how he couldn’t even afford a single bottle of magic reagent.

Yet, right now, someone this great was asking him to call her ‘Sister’? Just as Theodore opened his mouth hesitantly to speak…

“Tsk, there are guests who can’t read the atmosphere.” Veronica sensed someone approach and moved Theo to an angle in which he wouldn’t be visible.

Kkiiik-

A white robed man from the White Tower hurriedly entered Pentarium and bowed to her.

“Tower Master! There is something urgent that you need to look at!”

“The rating?”

“At least the 4th grade of importance.”

“…Oh, that is vaguely high. It can’t be helped.”

She would’ve ignored it if it was the 5th grade, but Veronica was forced to release Theo. Theo was filled with some regret, but his eyes shook at the next words.

It was because she was giving him an order with a serious expression. “Follow me. I may need your strength.”

***

The missions given to war mages and the Red Tower were fundamentally militant.

If it was a mission which involved ‘fighting’, most magicians would be dispatched from the Red Tower. They were for sent when there were appearances of strong monsters or groups of criminals, or to destroy forces preparing for a revolt.

Therefore, the Red Tower had introduced a policy with two classifications for the missions: the degree of risk; and the degree of importance.

Veronica walked in front of him and explained, “The elder lich that you dealt with in your hometown is 3rd rank in terms of risk, but his importance is unexpectedly low at the 4th or 5th rank. I could handle it without any difficulty. At most, one or two territories would be lost. Oh, grimoires are an exception.”

“One or two…”

It sounded scary from the point of view of those territories, but it wasn’t such a big deal when looking at the whole country.

According to her, the 1st rank importance was assigned to things like a massive rebellion, invasion from a hostile nation, or the assassination of the king. 2nd rank was associated with large-scale epidemics, natural disasters, and disasters such as a monster wave.

“Then what is the 3rd and 4th rank when it comes to importance?”

“It is simple. Issues that might become the 1st or 2nd rank. But most of these cases can be solved with violence. They are things that we can handle with strength.”

Veronica kicked the doors of the tower master’s office with a frown. The door was made for such an situation, so it swung open and they entered. The door knob seemed to have no meaning, but nobody cared.

She sat down on her chair and looked at the intelligence member.

“Now, let’s hear the report.”

The magician in the white robe read out the report like he had been waiting. “It was three days ago. Agents of Earl Bergen intercepted talks of ‘slavery’ while they were watching some merchants. The name of the organization is [Shackler], an organization that is active in the Austen Kingdom.”

“Slaves? They didn’t hear wrong?” Veronica expression showed that she didn’t understand.

It had been 100 years since the great powers in the northern part of the continent, the Andras Empire and the Meltor Kingdom, banned slavery. The knights and magicians had taken action, and the slave trade dried up. Families associated with slavery were destroyed, and those who gained wealth from it became cold corpses in the morning.

The policy remained even now, and few idiots tried to use the Meltor or Andras countries as intermediaries. The intelligence agent from the White Tower nodded in agreement. “I have reviewed this a number of times before telling Tower Master… They truly are slavers. I saw them smuggling several human sized barrels.”

“They must want to be killed… Then we will kill them.” A creepy killing intent filled Veronica’s gold eyes.

Slavers were absolutely not allowed to step foot in Meltor.

The role of the Red Tower was to annihilate any harmful existences to Meltor. No, slavers were just vermin who couldn't be allowed to exist. It was best to kill them right away, without bothering to capture or arrest them.

If this was true, then the importance was at least the 4th rank.

"The species of the slaves being traded?"

"Elves."

"I knew it. If it was just handling human slaves, then the importance would only be at the 6th rank."

The elf species, with their beautiful appearance and long life span, had been popular as pets for the powerful since a long time ago.

At one time, there had been large scale hunting of all elves on the continent. It was to the point where they had been at the risk of becoming extinct, and the rage of the elementals had brought the country into disarray. However, the human greed still hadn't faded.

Therefore, the elves had decided to make their own country separate from humans. The elv es gathered their strength and established a country called Elvenheim, located deep in the northern mountains.

The environment, which humans couldn't easily approach, was a paradise for them. The slavers didn't dare approach the large group of elves. Rather, they were frequently beaten by the elven warriors dispatched to liberate the slaves.

Since then, the sale of elven slaves had become a taboo on the entire continent. However, the number of humans who wanted elf slaves were still too high to be counted, so slavers continued to meet the demand in the shadows.

"...It is a long awaited chance to gain some favour with Elvenheim. You figured out the power of [Shackler], right?"

"Of course." The white robed magician respectfully placed the scrolls on the table.

It seemed he was hesitant to speak in front of Theo, who didn't have any relation to the the mission.

Veronica then opened the scroll with a chant. She frowned as she finished reading the contents. "I can't believe it. Did they bring five senior aura warriors? It means the organization has a large stake in this deal."

The power of the force the slavers brought was enough to sweep away a small or medium sized estate. The price of elven slaves were high, but was it worth bringing so much power?

Frankly, Veronica was skeptical. If this power was to be wiped

out then the organization [Shackler] would be almost destroyed.

‘Those guys won’t do anything that will lose them money. It can’t be.’

There was something fishy about this. They didn’t need to take such risks for something like the simple sale of elves. It seemed like there was another purpose. The intelligence network of the White Tower didn’t seem to have penetrated to this extent, but there was a question at the end of the report about the unsustainability of this venture.

It seemed like Veronica would have to increase the power of the magicians who would be sent. She set the report aside and pressed the bell on her table.

Chaeng! The bell rang through the tower, and a clear of the Red Tower ran up from the bottom of the tower.

“Did you call, Tower Master?”

“I need at least two Superior magicians. Call all the people remaining in the capital right now.”

“I understand.” The clerk pondered for a moment before his face suddenly turned pale.

Veronica saw his look and frowned. It was clear she wouldn’t receive a satisfactory answer from such an expression.

Unsurprisingly, the clerk spoke in a small voice like he wanted to crawl into a mouse hole, “T-Tower Master, there is only one Superior war mage left in the capital right now.”

“Who is it?”

“Vince Haidel.”

Theodore flinched as he suddenly heard his teacher’s name. However, Veronica’s face distorted as she asked, “What about our veterans?”

“Only Herman remains.”

“He can’t fight because of an injury. Damn, there is too much work these days, so my hands are twisted like this. I can’t take people from the other towers.”

It was different if it was a monster subjugation, but it was hard to hand the task of killing people to magicians from another tower. Their minds wouldn’t be prepared, and they didn’t know the tricks.

If they were experienced veterans, then it would be okay. However, it would take a while for the request to go through. She needed to find a candidate who could be dispatched immediately.

“The remaining ones?”

“There are 23 Average ranked magicians... Most of them have recently upgraded while the rest have started missions already.”

“I can’t use them. Don’t bother telling me.”

She bounced her fingers irritably for a moment before shaking her head like it couldn’t be helped. Theodore stood awkwardly before that golden gaze.

“Call Superior Vince Haidel to me right now. Vince Haidel and Theodore Miller will be given this mission. Also go to Shugel and request a transfer with space magic.”

The magician didn’t dare refuse and ran out of the tower.

Chapter 62 - The Second Mission #2

Soon after receiving Veronica's call, Vince hurried to the Tower Master's office. Veronica told him the whole story and said that he would be one of the two people being dispatched. Vince's expression hardened at the mention of the word 'slave.' To him, a criminal organization which sold intelligent species for money were the worst gutter rats.

"I understand the mission," Vince replied in a tone which was different from his usual cold self. "Liberate the slaves from the organization, [Shackler], and eliminate members of said organization. In addition, find out why they've come to Meltor and investigate the truth behind the deal, right?"

"Exactly. If there is some room, capture the commander. If you can't afford it, torture and kill them."

"I understand."

It was a bloody conversation, but this was normal when it came to Red Tower tasks. Things couldn't always go smoothly, and sometimes violence was needed. The royal family allowed Red Tower magicians to commit violence, and they even had the right of execution depending on the circumstances.

Moreover, utilizing torture in order to extract information was, of course, acceptable. It was why Meltor's villains didn't dare go against red robes. War mages were an existence on an entirely

different level to them.

"...Tower Master," Vince spoke to the Red Tower Master instead of immediately leaving the room.

Apart from the difficulty of the mission, he didn't want his disciple to dip his feet in a dirty ditch like this. It was enough for Vince to dirty his hands. He should be able to handle this much of a force on his own.

However, Veronica realized his thoughts and shook her head. "No. I don't have a good feeling about this. The information from the White Tower is excellent, but they couldn't find out everything. If there are more hidden forces, then you won't be strong enough on your own. Take the kid."

"Theodore is still only 19 years old."

"He is also a 5th Circle magician. This Veronica has personally seen that he has a promising future."

The gazes of the two people clashed in the air. Neither of them doubted Theo's skills. Theodore's capabilities had already surpassed the top Average, and he could keep up with his mentor, Vince. Above all, it was important that the person involved, Theodore, didn't intend to refuse the mission.

Theo took a step forward and broke the confrontation between the two people. "I will do it."

“You will?”

“I don’t want to send Master to a dangerous place alone. If I can be of assistance, then please let me accompany you.”

Veronica smiled at his attitude. “The kid said so, Vince.”

“…Then it can’t be helped.”

“Well, think of this as the price for having a very good disciple. You don’t have to worry about him doing well.”

In the end, she smiled at Vince and picked up a piece of parchment from her desk drawer. Then she wrote on it roughly with a pen and stamped it with her seal. The stamp had a special ink, which only the Red Tower Master could use, and a certificate holding her name.

Veronica threw the piece of parchment toward Vince. “This is my stamped order. If necessary, use it to ask for the cooperation of Earl Bergen. You may not be able to encircle the organization with just two people.”

“Huh? Wouldn’t it be a nuisance for you to handle?”

“Hey, if I give it to you, then just accept it. What are you saying?” Veronica shouted, forcing Vince to accept the parchment with a

grim expression.

Vince didn't think it was a good idea, but he thanked her anyway. She didn't finish there as she pulled out one more thing. "Kid, take this."

"Huh? Ah." A small pouch was placed on Theodore's palm. The outward appearance of the pouch resembled something he knew. Veronica spoke and reminded him of something he had forgotten about, "Apparently, your dimension pocket hasn't been reissued yet? So, I will lend you mine instead."

"Thank you for your consideration... Huh?" Theo made a confused sound as he found that the pocket had a strange weight.

"Tower Master, are there things inside?"

"Don't mind the clutter. Potions, scrolls... These things aren't very useful to me."

'Why would she leave useless things in her dimension pocket?' Theodore questioned inwardly, but he was able to see the reason after Veronica avoided his gaze. He smiled when he understood her secret intentions, while Veronica fanned her face with her hands. She still couldn't hide her feelings.

"Go. I've said everything I needed to say. Old Man Shugel must be waiting."

“I understand.” Vince and Theo answered at almost the same time, but unlike Vince, Theo didn’t turn around to leave. Instead, Theo looked at Veronica with a strange expression and said, “I will be back.”

These last words were said soundlessly, with only the movement of his lips. He was embarrassed to say them in front of his master. However, the meaning of his words was conveyed. Veronica’s eyes widened, then she was smiling like a blooming flower.

***

Flash!

A light suddenly shone in a narrow space. It was an empty space without any furniture, and the dust on the floor rose up like a whirlwind. This was the phenomenon of spatial magic as people moved from Mana-vil Capital to Earl Bergen’s territory.

Two people appeared in the distorted space. This time, they weren’t accompanied by the caster of the magic, so Theo and Vince were the only ones to appear.

“...Hoo, these damn side effects haven’t changed.” Vince was no exception to the dizziness caused by spatial magic as he pressed a hand to his forehead. It was an inevitable side effect which affected anyone other than the White Tower elders who crossed space repeatedly.

Theodore was also affected, but it wasn't as bad for him as it was for Vince because Theo had experienced it recently.

"Should we take a rest for a while?"

"No, it is fine. This dizziness will go away quickly." As Vince said, he quickly regained his sense of balance. Then he immediately walked toward the exit.

Their location was a secret mansion on the outskirts of Bergen. It was a facility unavailable to magicians unless they were of a certain rank. Perhaps even Earl Bergen, the master of this territory, didn't know about the existence of the mansion.

The two people from the capital opened the secret door into the back alley and naturally blended with the crowd.

"...I didn't expect to come back to Bergen again. I sent a resignation letter after going to the capital," Vince murmured as he saw the familiar city views.

In retrospect, they had only been gone for around a month. However, there was a strange sensation, like he had been away for a long time.

Theodore felt the same way. 'The hobgoblin chief, Sylvia in the finals... the elder lich, the grimoire, and Veronica.'

He had struggled against monsters and met a genius he never

thought he would reach in his lifetime. Theo had also encountered a monster he'd only read about in books and survived. Unexpectedly, Theo had even gotten acquainted with an unimaginable person who asked him to call her, 'Sister.'

Theodore had gone through so much in just one month. Vince had accepted Theo's diploma for him, but that didn't matter. Those days were like a dream in the night.

'...No, it isn't.' Theo denied it firmly as he looked at his heart. The five circles were moving as they followed the instructions of their master. It was clear evidence that the past month hadn't been a dream.

At that moment, Vince spoke quietly, "Theo."

"Yes, Master."

"Let's look around first. We came secretly, so we shouldn't expose ourselves."

"Understood."

Their clothing were different from usual. Theodore and Vince were dressed in casual clothes and didn't look like magicians. The clothes were roughly woven mixtures of brown, grey, and green cloth which could be seen everywhere.

This was a mission to infiltrate the seedy world, so they couldn't

be revealed as magicians from the magic towers.

Step, step.

The two people walked along the outskirts. Occasionally, they bought food which couldn't be called delicious from the street stalls. This type of camouflage wasn't difficult.

They walked around for approximately an hour while conversing.

"Foreigners... There seem to be a lot of people from Austen."

"There are aura users and well-trained warriors."

"They are either members of the [Shackler] organization or mercenaries. Either way, this isn't great. It is probably a patrol."

The veteran war mage and Theodore's sensory perception meant they could sense things ordinary people couldn't feel. It was easy to grasp the level of mana or if a person learned martial arts by looking at the movements of someone passing by.

As such, Theo's Hawkeye discovered strangely curved swords on someone's back. Theo pointed it out to Vince who explained,

"They are shamshirs, swords used by Austen warriors. The shape of the handle and the blades are streamlined."

The form made it difficult to stab something, but its utility was excellent. Such weapons were specifically designed for the warriors of the desert kingdom, Austen. It was at this moment that...

“Yes.”

“Ah.”

The two people recognized it at almost the same time, but they pretended to be ignorant and started moving again. Vince understood that he shared the same feeling with Theo, so he didn’t look back as he opened his mouth.

He let out a small whisper which was difficult to hear even at close range, “There is a tail on us.”

“Yes, but I don’t feel any danger.”

“I don’t feel any killing intent either. Not assassins... Maybe they are intelligence operatives.”

The two of them hadn’t done anything which would cause doubts. They didn’t know why there was a tail on them so quickly. The two people silently came to the same conclusion and turned toward a place that wasn’t populated.

They were going to… ‘Catch the tail.’

After a while, they reached an alley with no one around them.

‘…?!’ The person following them flinched as he sensed something strange, while the two magicians activated their magic power at the same time.

Vince finished his magic one minute earlier than Theo, and a blinding light emerged from his palm.

It was the 4th Circle magic, Burning Flash. This magic was extremely effective when used as a surprise attack. An empty void was revealed amidst the blinding light. Vince and Theo didn’t know the method that the person used to hide, but the stealth was exquisite.

Furthermore, in a situation where the target’s eyesight was lost, they reflexively prepared for battle. A person unused to fighting might’ve tried to flee, however, this person was outnumbered. “Ugh, dammit!”

Theo’s spell, which was completed afterwards, caused an enormous pressure to tighten around the person following them, and the magic used to hide their body was turned off. However, a strange expression appeared on Theodore’s face. “…You?”

The face revealed underneath the magic was of someone Theo knew.

Chapter 63 - The Second Mission #3

“Do you know him?” Vince asked as he noticed Theo’s reaction.

Theodore nodded unconsciously. He remembered that face too clearly. In a sense, it was one of the people who had helped him in this city. The person was the black market trader he had visited in order to fill up his insufficient magic power.

Theo clearly recalled his name, “Canis?”

“...Thanks for remembering,” the black market trader, Canis, replied with a resigned expression. He had tried to withdraw but had been suppressed helplessly. His stealth had been noticed, and he couldn’t resist even once. One mistake was enough to bind him on the ground.

Vince grasped the situation and asked, “Is this perhaps the black market trader that you dealt with?”

“Yes, it certain is.”

Theo and Vince had talked briefly about the black market trader. He was a human from the dark side of the world who couldn’t be trusted, and they had caught him in an unexpected place. Since that day, Theo hadn’t gone to find the black market trader. He could obtain artifacts with Vince’s help, so there was no reason to take the risk.

The quietly listening Canis interrupted, “Excuse me, can you just let me go?”

The two people were talking, but the magic binding him hadn’t been lifted. No, the power continued increasing, so sweat flowed down Canis’ forehead. Theo’s magic power had become stronger after completing the 5th Circle, to an extent where he could suppress some aura users.

Theo heard the request and looked at Vince, who shook his head with a resolute expression.

“No, we need to hear why he is following us,” Vince said. Then grabbed Canis’ neck and threatened, “But keep this in mind. I know lowlives like you very well. If you lie even once, I will pull out an eyeball and repeat this until you stop lying. You know that this isn’t just a threat, right?”

“...Damn, you’re an executor?” Canis gulped as he determined Vince’s identity.

Vince’s killing intent was different from rookies. He was an expert at hunting humans and wasn’t the type of opponent who Canis could go against. The executives of the Red Tower would tear people into pieces without raising an eyebrow. They were natural enemies of those who lived in the lawless zone.

“Keok, I understand. So, let me go. At this rate—kek—I can’t speak.”

“You only have one chance.” Vince let Canis go after one final eerie warning, and Canis hurriedly took in deep breaths.

The grip of the magician was so strong that finger marks still remained on his neck. It was also a warning that Canis’ life could be taken at any time. Canis opened his mouth and spoke in a slightly hoarse voice, “So, you must be wondering why I was following you?”

“Today was pretty much a coincidence. Young Master hasn’t come to visit me for almost two months already. I just thought of it as extra income until I coincidentally passed by you today.”

“Coincidence? It seems like you want to lose an eyeball.”

“W-Wait a minute! Please listen a bit more!” Canis screamed hurriedly as a flame emerged from Vince’s fingertip. It was a conventional threat, but it was extra scary since it came from an executive of the Red Tower.

“I’m going to leave this area! I thought I would find Young Master and do one last deal!”

Vince turned off the flames and asked, “Leave? A black market trader?”

It was hard to leave an organization, especially one in the dark side of the world. Cutting off fingers, arms, or legs would be

considered a moderately severe ritual required before a person could leave.

Why would a black market trader, who was treated as a senior executive, want to leave? His unrecognizable body might be found after a few days.

However, Canis' thoughts were a little different. "Things have gone wrong in this territory. The guild idiots don't know what they are doing and are digging their graves. I never expected slavery in Meltor, and I don't want to be burned along with those idiots."

"...Slavery?"

"I'm not lying! A week ago, people from Austen secretly crossed the wall! It will eventually come out!"

The two magicians looked at each other, ignoring Canis' urgent voice. Maybe the organization that the black market trader belonged to was directly connected to this case. Indeed, an organization without any connections to Bergen couldn't have done something as large as slave trading here. It made sense to join hands with the local organization.

Then it was worth using the black market trader. The two people exchanged glances a few times before coming to a mutual understanding.

In the end, Theodore released the spell binding Canis.

“The story, tell us in a little more detail.” Vince’s voice grabbed Canis before he could enjoy the sensation of freedom.

***

As soon as the three people left the alley, they started walking toward a specific destination.

The location was somewhere out of the reach of outside gazes, so it was a good location to share a secret story. It was the black market trader’s store.

Kkiiik… The rundown door hinges creaked as the door opened. Canis entered the store first. Then Theodore followed him inside and looked around the store.

‘It has been around two months… Quite a long time.’

Things hadn’t changed too much. Items were jumbled together and covered in dust, while there were a few items at his feet. Canis haphazardly made a seat by kicking all these things. It took around five minutes to clean the area, so that there was enough room for three people to sit down.

“Come on, sit down. There is no where else to entertain you.”

It was pretty ridiculous for three big men to sit down on small desk chairs, but the atmosphere got a little lighter.

“Forget the small talk, and tell us the story. I will decide your treatment depending on the value of your information.”

“Hoo, how bloodthirsty.” Canis had managed to regain some composure from being in a familiar place, but that went away again with Vince’s words.

Neither did Theodore show Canis a bit of softness at all. Theo just looked away at every joke.

Canis had a hunch and quickly opened his mouth, “Do you want information related to slavery? Like the locations of the people from Austen and the transaction dates.”

“Didn’t I say to tell me what you know?”

“I’ll be honest, I don’t know a lot of the details.”

The atmosphere inside the room subsided. This was the result of the increased pressure from the surrounding mana as the two people’s circles rotated. Canis knew there would be this reaction, but he couldn’t tell them things he didn’t know.

“My cardinal rule is to never set foot in dangerous places. My life is at risk in such incidents. So, I was preparing to flee from this area.”

Canis was the careful type who didn't accept a favourable deal until there was a strong pledge. If he were a person directly involved in slavery, Vince would've cut off his legs without any hesitation and chosen torture instead. In a sense, that prudence was the same as Canis'.

"So, I am suggesting a deal." Sweat flowed down his back as he spoke the words he'd prepared in his head, "I will bring you the information you need. In return for that cooperation, I would like your help."

"Do you think you are in the position to ask for funds?"

"I'm sorry, but my life is also at stake. Anyway, I don't know anything worth torturing out of me. Think of it as a good story for a bit of money."

Canis' words weren't wrong. The slavers hadn't been revealed yet, so it was highly unlikely they would be found tonight. Using an insider to obtain information was an opportunity. It was good business for Canis if he could get a new identity and a bit of money.

The question was whether or not to trust him. Vince glared at Canis with cold eyes. It was because he had learned from experience not to trust the words of a criminal. This person was related to his disciple, so his guard was thicker than usual.

"How can I believe you? You might betray us as soon as you meet the organization. Do you have any guarantees that you won't go

back on your words?”

“The same goes for you as well. I don’t think an executor will keep his promise to a person like me.” Canis looked at Theodore after he spoke.

Theo knew how to fix this situation as he recalled the past. Theirs had also been a relationship where neither of them trusted each other. The appraiser had proposed a trade where the black market trader would gain money, but the black market trader was worried about the suspicious proposal.

The two people had built a trusting relationship through one method.

“Do you want to use the Geass Scroll?”

“Well, there is that method.” Canis smiled as the intended words were spoken.

The Geass Scroll was a means of binding each other, and the effect was applied, regardless of whether they were a criminal or executor. After all, artifacts couldn’t distinguish between a person’s status or position. In any case, verbal promises could never be trusted. The Geass Scroll was a means for an equal negotiation.

Vince belatedly grasped Canis’ intentions and laughed. “...One of the skills of a mouse is escaping through holes.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment. If I didn’t dig holes like this, then my life would be different.”

“But don’t be mistaken. You understand it isn’t enough, right?” Vince laughed again.

At first glance, it seemed like a favourable condition, but Canis had a hidden loophole in his proposal. If he failed, there would be more negative consequences for the two people. Therefore, Canis needed to get rid of that risk.

Canis didn’t miss this and eventually said, “Dammit, I’ll pay an advance.”

He got up and sighed as he looked around.

There were genuine, defective, and cursed items displayed in a confusing array. Among them were many things Theo had appraised, as well as those he hadn’t. He didn’t know about the quality, but the amount was enormous.

The owner of the store, Canis pointed to the items with a grim look. “Take what you want.”

“Huh?” Theodore was unable to understand the words.

However, he hadn’t heard wrongly as Canis repeated again in a

regretful voice, “I’ll give it all to you, so take as much as you want.”

Chapter 64 - Slavers Raiding Mission #1

As a result, the deal was successful.

Vince carried a disgruntled expression until the end, but he wrote down on the scroll that he would help Canis move and give him a new identity. When considering that the power of a Superior magician was equal to that of a superior noble, Canis had an unquestionably strong backer.

After each of them signed the contract, Canis got up with a satisfied expression. “Okay, wait here a bit. It will take some time, so I’ll probably be back when the sun goes down.”

“Do you intend to start immediately?”

“Isn’t time running out? From now on, your work is my job. If I fail, then I won’t gain anything either. You can be confident that I will return after working diligently.”

After telling them to wait, Canis ran out of the store. His movements were full of a vitality which couldn’t be seen until now. He must feel good that he had managed to save his life. The two men left behind in the store without its owner were stunned for a moment, but they soon looked around.

Everything around them was an artifact.

“Take as much as you want. He made a mistake to say that.” Vince laughed as he repeated Canis’ words.

Canis would never have thought that Theodore could take all the things in the store. There were so many things that they wouldn’t fit in his dimension pocket, but they were sufficient as meals for Gluttony.

The quality wasn’t high, but the amount of magic power which could be absorbed from this amount of artifacts was considerable.

First of all, Theo approached the shelf containing the defective goods and raised his left hand.

“Then I will start.”

Unlike genuine products which might have a hidden value, a defective product was useless. Their own value was to be eaten and converted into magic power. With a single command of ‘Eat,’ the tongue emerged from Theo’s left hand and started sweeping through the store.

Wooruruuru… With a blunt sound, the various objects disappeared into Gluttony’s mouth. Regardless of size, it swallowed everything into its mouth. The dozens of defective products disappeared, and the floor was quickly exposed.

Dozens of voices were heard until they were cut off after a few minutes.

[……]

[It will take approximately 31 minutes and 14 seconds to fully digest.]

With the release of the 3rd seal, Gluttony's abilities had improved. The previous digestion time which had been over an hour was now reduced to only 30 minutes. However, this meant it wasn't difficult to absorb all the things piled up in the store.

Vince let out a cry of admiration as Theo stood before an empty shelf. "…It is amazing when I think about it. Converting the artifact into the user's magic power is a really amazing feature."

"I don't know what the principle behind it is."

"If you find out, then the magic prowess of humanity will advance a few steps."

It was as Vince said. The grimoire was a foreign object to modern humans. How it worked and the reason why it existed was a mystery. This wasn't a problem for the two of them to worry about.

Theodore walked past the empty shelf to another corner filled with objects. This was just the beginning of Gluttony's meal time.

***

It was around four hours after Canis left the store when he returned. Like he'd said, he returned just as the sun was about to set.

As Canis entered with an exhausted expression, he was shocked to see that the interior of the store was different from how it had been just a few hours ago. To put it in a nicely, the store was tidy, but the bad thing was that it was bare.

Canis looked around the empty store several times before clicking his tongue. "Huh... I told you to take what you wanted, but I didn't think you would sweep them all away. How terrible."

"I wasn't allowed to?"

"No, you just followed my words. In any case, I can't carry any of this with me when I leave Bergen. They aren't my things, so consider this as a big advance payment."

Canis pretended to grumble, but Theo wasn't deceived by his appearance. Theo had seen how clever Canis was through his exchange with Vince.

There were probably goods which Canis had concealed for the purpose of converting into cash. It was likely that he had already abandoned all the things left behind in the store. So, Theo didn't feel any remorse about sweeping it all up.

As the two people stayed still, Canis shrugged and sat down on the chair. Then he took something out and laid it down on the table. It was a cloth much like a handkerchief, but there were strange pictures on the surface.

There were curved lines and straight lines, kind of like…

“A map?” Theo asked Canis, who smiled and nodded.

“I can’t read it, but you should be different. Now that you’ve looked at the picture, what do you think? Can you understand it?”

“Yes, this much is enough.”

There was a slight feeling of roughness, but there was no problem in reading it. As Vince and Theo checked the condition of the map, Canis dipped a pen into a jar of red ink. Then he started to write something in the square marking on the map.

“I’m sorry, but I couldn’t personally confirm the slaves. They are working with my organization, but the guys from Austen are thorough. The boss and some executives offered a few slaves, but they didn’t bite.”

“You couldn’t dig deeper?”

“…I stroked their ego, so yes. The patrols are at a level that can

be dismissed, but the guards are the real deal. I don't see any gaps in their abilities and the security they set up."

Theodore's and Vince's expressions turned grim at Canis' words.

Canis had been spotted quickly by the two people, but Vince and Theo were special cases. If they hadn't been vigilant, they might not have noticed Canis following them as it was also hard to spot him.

However, the security was at a level where Canis had been noticed? There was something strange.

"Now, it was roughly like this." Canis pointed to the map and explained, "There are two barracks installed on the outskirts of the camp, with guards around the prison barracks containing a total of four slaves. Their positions don't change, and they don't leave. As I said before, the four guards standing at the entrance to the barracks are at a higher level than the patrols. In particular, there are 10 people surrounding the large barracks."

"Do you know the interval and number of patrols?"

"I drew it on the map. The interval is one to one and a half hours, and they patrol in pairs, with an average of five patrols running at one time."

Vince looked at Canis with new eyes. He had thought Canis was just a rat, but with this level of information collecting ability, it

was enough to work as an intelligence agent within the military. Maybe he was a human who had left such a world.

If all the information was correct, it was worth the price he'd paid in advance.

Vince asked his disciple who was closely gazing at the map, "Theo, what do you think?"

"...We should strike from two directions. If we don't surround them, then they may escape with the slaves. So Master, I should save the four slaves on the outskirts first."

"That is true. Should we strike tonight?"

"Yes, I think so as well."

The information collected by Canis might change after today. The possibility of a fluctuation tomorrow was high, so it was better to chase the chickens tonight. Since they'd received a breakthrough, they should strike at full speed. They had enough power, so breaking through the front was the most efficient method.

At that time, Canis, who had been listening to them talk, interrupted, "Wait a minute, my story still isn't over yet."

"There is still more?" Vince looked at him with a strange expression.

The patrol route, guards, slave positions, and number of enemies... that was all they had asked Canis to find out. Vince hadn't expected that a thief from the dark side of the world would do more than that.

However, Canis soaked his thumb in red ink and stamped a point on the cloth.

***

Hwiyuoooong...

Night in the Nadun Mountain Ranges was as cold as ever, while strong winds blew in the densely populated city of Bergen. At first glance, it sounded like the wind was whistling above Theo's head. He was hiding among bushes, so grass and twigs tickled his skin.

Rustle! He looked down at the cloth in his hand and recalled the decision he'd made after discussing it with Vince.

Theo would free the four slaves from the two barracks on the outskirts and leave with them. It was possible to enter quickly and discreetly. Meanwhile, Canis had been sent away with Veronica's certificate to gather the lord's army.

A strange feeling emerged in Theo's settled heart. 'Is this my first time killing a person?'

The boat might have already sailed as Theodore had cut down hundreds of monsters and undead before. However, he had never killed a living human. Therefore, this battle would involve his first murder.

Theodore didn't have any exhilaration about such a thing. He looked down at his own hands and arms with a qualitative eye.

"...Murder."

His hands weren't shaking at all. Rather, his fingers were wriggling toward the target. Alfred's experiences and memories naturally sharpened his nerves. Theo could shoot and kill at any time. It was no different from being a living weapon.

'A person who killed one thousand people was considered a hero.' As the saying went, every hero was forced to become insensitive to murder or be accustomed to carrying the weight of the blood. Alfred was no exception, and Theo, who had received his experience instead of just knowledge, was no different.

Additionally, his opponents were trash who considered living beings as commodities, so they deserved to die. The fact that there was no hesitation in Theo's fingers might be natural.

At that moment, a red light shone from far away. 'The signal.'

It was a magic light which only someone who was using View Mana Force could see, and it was the signal agreed on by Vince and

Theodore. Simultaneously, two men on patrol appeared near the bush where Theo was hiding.

“¥CGGÅC?”

“ÅÅ¥°C£!”

Their skin was dark, and they spoke a language which Theo couldn’t understand. At their waists, they carried strangely curved swords. These were swords which Vince had explained were shamshirs, which were used by warriors of Austen. The two men were the trash from [Shackler].

Their balanced gait and firm arm muscles revealed underneath folded sleeves showed that they were warriors. Then the moment they passed by Theo’s bush...

Piing-

Light emerged from his index finger pointing out from the bush. Magic Bullet passed through the back of the warrior walking on the right and out of him without making a noise. A hole was formed in the flesh within seconds.

“¥...Œ£˚C.”

The other warrior walked walked two steps ahead before realizing his colleague wasn’t following, but Theodore’s hand then moved in a flash and struck his neck.

Bakak. The blow was as hard as granite due to Battle Song. The warrior's trachea and neck bones were broken, and his body collapsed just like his colleague had done.

The two patrolling warriors were wiped out in an instant. Theo buried the two bodies roughly and looked at his hands. They weren't shaking at all.

'...Go.'

Theo ignored the fact that he didn't feel anything and headed for the barracks without any hesitation.

Chapter 65 - Slavers Raiding Mission #2

The slums of Bergen, where [Shackler] were hiding, were as complex as an ant cave. If a stranger, who didn't know this, travelled about recklessly, then they would disappear into the shadows of the city.

The air weighed heavily on Theodore's shoulders. There were wine bottles rolling on the ground as well as stains which could be blood. Whatever it was, Theo ignored it and focused on the situation calmly. 'On the right, 25 meters away, there are three at the back.'

This precise sensing ability didn't just depend on physical detection. It was a possible feature because he shared the feelings of the elemental, Mitra, who had assimilated with the ground. The mole-like ability to grasp the movements and physique of others through vibrations was extremely useful to the present Theodore. He could see things he couldn't see with Hawkeye.

Indeed, there were three thieves whispering beyond the wall. Theo took a few steps until sound entered his ears.

"I saw it! It was definitely an elf!"

"You're crazy, Hans. Did you take medication during the day?"

"You are probably hallucinating from not seeing a prostitute for a

few days. Do you want me to lend you some money? The interest rate is 2% per day.”

“Hey, this son of a bitch!”

Somehow, one of them had seen a captive elf, and his colleagues didn’t believe him. The thief became angry at this treatment and stormed away from his spot. He moved beyond the corner and came face to face with Theodore. The man opened his mouth with surprise when he saw Theo, but...

Piing—

A hole was formed in the middle of his forehead before he could speak. Even the strongest magician, Veronica, had no way to completely avoid Magic Bullet at this distance. The fate of the thief ended the moment he met Theo.

‘There are two left... I will handle it.’

Theo pointed his index fingers over the wall and fired at the heads of the two remaining thieves. The light of death pierced them, and they were smiling as their brains scattered. This was the last of the three common thieves.

Not long after that...

In a guerilla warfare, the level difference meant nothing before the Magic Bullet.

“Eek.”

“Kuack…”

Theo killed anyone he met. He moved thoroughly according to this principle, burying dozens of bodies along his route until he met a second patrol. It might be a coincidence or skills, but a warrior had managed to make a shallow scratch on Theo’s forearm.

‘Che, I’m still inexperienced. It was an attack I could’ve avoided if I had fully digested Lee Yoonsung’s experience.’

He healed the wound slightly with magic. It was just a few drops of blood, but it couldn’t hurt to be careful. Theo then concealed his body and realized he had reached the barracks. It was a barrack where two elves were trapped. Just as he was worrying about which of the two barracks to attack first…

Shouts rang out from the barrack on the right. “No? Why not?!”

Theo naturally moved toward the right barrack in response to the sound. His two golden eyes looked over the fence and examined the situation inside. There was a large group of thieves arguing with four warriors standing in front of the barrack with grim expressions.

Theo tensed as he grasped their level at one glance.

‘There are five aura users… Maybe the intelligence agent from the White Tower missed something. Isn’t it better to watch the situation before entering?’

Theo was tense enough to move at any time, but he decided to listen to their argument first.

“This is against the agreement! Didn’t you agree to turn over two elves to me? You don’t know how risky a position our guild is in because of you!”

“Wait a little longer, Boss Rakon.”

“It has already been over a week! We don’t know when those rascals will come!”

Theo narrowed his eyes at Boss Rakon. He was the boss of the guild which Canis belonged to. Perhaps he had decided to take a few elves in exchange for mediating this slave trade. That was why Rakon had agreed to a deal which normally wouldn’t have been accepted, even for a few hundred gold coins. The thought of possessing an elf beauty had made him forget the fear of execution for a while.

Yet as time passed, he had begun to feel uneasy. Rakon wanted to get the elves out of the city as soon as possible. It had been a few days, so he was sick at the thought of an executioner coming.

However, the members of [Shackler] shook their heads with resolute expressions. They seemed to think the thieves would stab them in the back if they handed over the elves, but doing this was annoying since the thieves came several times a day to ask.

“Dammit, just let me see them once!” Rakon tried to shake their cold attitude, but there was nothing he could do. These people couldn’t even be bribed. The subordinates of Shackler were different from his own.

Wuuong~ The wind cooled his inflamed head.

Rakon exhaled and then inhaled with surprise as his eyebrows twitched when he smelled the faint scent of blood from the wind. The blood wasn’t coming from anyone near him. The extraordinary smell of the thief boss had detected an enemy.

Clink. Rakon flicked his wrist, and six daggers appeared almost simultaneously. The series of actions were really quick. The warriors winced at his sudden action, but he threw the daggers in the direction where he smelled the blood. Amazingly, it was aimed toward Theodore’s location!

‘How?!’ Theo questioned reflexively. He had completely erased his presence, but Rakon had attacked him accurately. They hit the fence around the height of his thighs.

Pyupok! Pyok Pyupok! There was the sound of something flying through their wind, and holes appeared in the wood.

As the fence collapsed in the aftermath, the hiding Theodore was revealed. It was then that the guards finally realized his presence and pulled out their shamshirs. A red radiance lit up in the eyes of the aura users.

Theo was confronted with five aura users before him. “Hoo, then it can’t be helped.”

Instead of retreating, he stepped forward. It wasn’t difficult to escape, but if he left, it would add to the burden of Vince, who was on the other side. Above all, the experiences of the two people inside him were talking. This was a situation where he could win.

“It is a young man. Hey, kid! Did you get lost from your mommy?”

Theodore’s cheekbones twitched at Rakon’s taunt. It was a sensitive response to the strange provocation.

‘...Uh, it feels worse than I thought?’ It was a single word which touched on his nerves.

The same word felt different depending on whose mouth it came out of. Veronica and the bearded robber had both called him ‘kid’ but the difference was like night and day.

However, Theo’s head cooled off thanks to that thought. This was too different compared to facing Veronica. There were five people and four in the nearby barracks, making for a total of nine

people. However, they weren't stronger than her.

Theodore's right hand calmly moved. 'Open Inventory. Equipment #3.'

Meanwhile, his left hand pulled out a red robe. Veronica had given it to him personally. It contained the emblem of the Red Tower and five circles. The robe was a symbol of honour and force in the Meltor Kingdom.

As the red cloth fluttered over Theo's upper body, Rakon's eyes widened as he realized the identity of the person in front of him. "Damn, executors have already been sent!"

The villains in Meltor were sensitive to this clothing. Containing defensive and secondary magic, the robes were exclusive possessions of the envoys of the battlefield. It wasn't an artifact which an ordinary kid could obtain.

Finally, Theodore checked his Memorize slots before raising both hands.

'Battle Song.

'Sonata of Speed.

'Allegretto.'

Then he ran at a fearsome pace through the darkness.

***

At that time, Vince Haidel was leaping between buildings on the other side of Theo's location.

After reaching the 6th Circle, Vince's physical abilities had increased. His movements were just like when Theodore used 'Battle Song.'

Paak!

Vince used Battle Song in midair and secured his body with magic. The numerous warriors on the ground couldn't discover Vince in the sky. It was a reason why magicians were capable of playing an active role on the battlefield. Magicians could wipe out patrolling scouts, so a veteran war mage was the most efficient person on any battlefield.

Among the Superior ranked magicians, Vince was one of the best.

'Here.' From the sky, he looked at the point which Canis had marked and landed without a sound.

Vince couldn't feel it. He used 'Detect Evil' as he gazed at the grey tent in front of him. The quarters here felt like the warriors had been living here for several years. As Vince recalled Canis' information, he felt a sense of discomfort.

That’s why it wasn’t easy to avoid the blow.

Kiiing! It was faster than sound. As the blade tore through the air, the sound emerged one beat late with the scattering of red aura. The tip of the shamshir cut Vince’s neck, scattering drops of blood in the air. However, it didn’t hit the artery. It was due to the increased reflexes of Battle Song.

However, rather than being surprised by the unexpected attack, Vince muttered as if he realized something, “Hah, so that is what happened.”

A man walked out of the darkness near the tent. The black turban decorated with gold was quite distinct. It was a feature of the men from the Austen Kingdom on the northern part of the continent.

The man had long arms, and red aura shone around his shamshirs like a haze. He looked Vince up and down and precisely guessed Vince’s identity.

“Meltor, war mage.”

“That’s right. Janissary of Austen,” Vince responded while putting on his robe.

The man was more shaken by Vince’s words than his red robe as Vince’s tone expressed that Vince was completely confident he was

correct.

While the Janissary protecting his identity closed his mouth, Vince wiped at his wound. “What crime organization would do this so fearlessly? Even if they succeed in selling the elves, they would only lose money. There aren’t many idiots who would try to buy slaves in this country. You aren’t using Meltor as an intermediary. Instead, you’re just passing through.”

“…Why do you think that?” It was a crude version of the official language, but the meaning was still clear. Vince had no intention of letting the man survive, but the man was tenacious. As the man stepped backward, Vince stepped forward, gesturing with a nod toward the tent before him.

He was already convinced that his guess was the right answer. “The elf held in there… No, isn’t it a ‘high elf?’”

The eyes of the Janissary shook.

Chapter 66 - Slavers Raiding Mission #3

High elves were the most secretive of the elven species who were covered in mysticism. Those who didn't know would think they were an upper tier of the species, but that wasn't entirely correct.

A long time ago, Arv's blood experienced atavism and the elf became a high elf.

Their natural strength was the reason why all kingdoms coveted high elves and secretly detained them.

A low voice emerged from Vince's mouth, "...Three months ago. I heard that the Pilar River, the lifeline of Austen, started to dry up."

In the heart of the Austen Kingdom, an incredible river flowed through the desert. Pilar River was the driving force behind the Austen Kingdom functioning as a nation. It was literally the lifeline which allowed the inhabitants of the desert to thrive.

However, the river had dried up. Every 60 to 100 years, a drought would arrive and kill the kingdom. It was a disaster which couldn't be predicted through magic. It was the reason why the national strength of Austen didn't increase over a certain level. There was always a limitation since they had to gather food and water to prepare for the drought.

However, things would change if they had a high elf.

It is a reasonable conclusion. High elves were a species that enriched nature just by being there. Their power turned poisoned swamps back into clear lakes and caused blades of grass to grow in rocky mountains. Even if they couldn't completely resolve the drought, the situation in the Austen Kingdom would improve.

As descendants of Arv, the high elves' inborn strength was truly wonderful. As natural elementals, they were able to cause miracles just by breathing. They cleansed poison and grew vegetation, and could moisten dry land and grow any crop. That was difficult even for the great elementalist, Myrdal.

Above all, the Austen Kingdom needed a justification to kidnap a high elf since they risked Elvenheim's wrath.

"I don't know how much power is in this convoy, but I know how desperate you must be to disguise it as slavery."

"You will still block me despite knowing this?" The Janissary's sword trembled.

He wasn't part of the [Shackler] organization. A Janissary despised sins and assisted the rulers with their accumulated knowledge. For the sake of Austen, they were servants who obeyed their ruler loyally. So, he hid in this kingdom in disguise under the belief that he would eventually solve the disaster. The mission had to be accomplished, even if he threw away his life.

As Vince kept that determination in mind, he nodded. “I don’t know your situation. It would be a few times better for me to save the abducted high elf and gain favour from Elvenheim.”

“If you just close your eyes, the Sultan will repay the favour.”

“How funny. Are you asking me to become an accomplice?”

It was Meltor’s loss, no matter how he thought about it. Elvenheim was different from the distant Austen. For a kingdom which was antagonistic to the Andras Empire, the emergence of a new adversary was fatal.

On the contrary, what if Vince rescued the high elf and brought them back to Elvenheim? It might led to a strong ally in this tug of war. In short, Austen didn’t have anything to offer Meltor for negotiation.

“...I understand, I’ll have to take care of you here.” The Janissary understood this fact and suddenly lifted something into the air. Vince tried to stop it, but the action was too sudden.

Piing... peeng! The Janissary sent up a signal flare.

He couldn’t allow this magician to live even if it meant making enemies of the Meltor Kingdom. A kingdom facing the Andras Empire would have to avoid an all-out war with Austen. As long as the high elf was transferred to Austen, it wouldn’t matter if his head was taken.

‘He is willing to die. These guys are annoying.’ Vince clicked his tongue as red flames appeared in his hands.

It wasn’t difficult to deal with the Janissary in front of him, but the reinforcements would come thanks to the signal flare. So, it would be annoying if Vince didn’t kill him before that. He had to use ‘it’, even though it was still incomplete. His six circles spun as he realized there was no other way.

“Blaze Burst!”

“Å°CCE!”

The curtains of the grand finale rose in conjunction with the pillar of fire.

***

On the other hand, Theodore’s fight was reaching the end.

‘…It feels like this. I understand.’

Indeed, this experience was different from fighting monsters and undead. It was a fight which required precise timing and techniques. His body quickly absorbed the techniques it received from Lee Yoonsung. The techniques were based on the six concepts of the eastern continent.

Swaeeek.

Theo leaned back gently, and a blade passed right in front of his nose. He barely avoided the damage. Theo's fist struck the guard's chest, and the guard flew back while coughing up blood. Then Theo's speed and power accelerated thanks to Sonata of Speed and Rhapsody of Power.

"ÅCÅCG!?"

"C¥₡£!"

'Maintain the gap!' After shouting to each other, the guards were more vigilant. Two people had already died because of the magician. The five aura users had been reduced to three, so they became increasingly desperate.

Rakon also realized the reality. 'I'm screwed. This young bastard is so strong...!'

Theo was fast and strong. If the aura users maintained the distance between them and Theo, they would be attacked by powerful magic. However, going into close range would cause them to be hit by strange techniques.

The daggers Rakon was so proud of were meaningless if he couldn't even use them. Despite being surrounded, the brat had dealt with the situation like he had eyes in the back of his head.

The most Rakon could do was cut off a few strands of hair.

Goosebumps ran all over Rakon's body as he sensed he would die here.

'Run away while they buy time-' Rakon's judgment told him that he should run away to avoid death. As he prepared daggers for a diversion, horrific bolts of lighting emerged from Theodore's hands.

It was the 4th Circle magic, Chain Lightning! Chain Lightning, which was amplified by three times due to Memorize, drove away the darkness of the night. It was a magic lightning bolt which could turn a person to ashes just by touching it.

The two warrior guards close to Theo instantly stopped breathing, while Rakon, who had retreated a few steps, was hit in the right leg.

"Kuaaack!" As he rolled to the ground, he experienced terrible pain. Rakon could endure stab wounds, but it was the first time he was hit by lightning.

Was this the most excruciating pain the human body could feel? The pain burning through his nervous system was no different from professional torture. Even drinking expensive healing potions wouldn't cure the wound easily.

In the end, gaps like these were fatal to those unfamiliar with

fighting war mages.

‘It is over.’ Theodore thought as he wiped away the blood on his fists. This was more boring a fight than Theo had expected. It wasn’t magic but the feeling of cutting of life with his own hands and feet. He couldn’t help feeling a little uncomfortable, even if it was inevitable. As such, in the middle of the fight, Lee Yoonsung’s and Alfred’s styles had mixed together slightly.

Then Theo pointed his index finger at Rakon.

Piing! It was the end of the boss who reigned behind Bergen. However, the moment Theo tried to bury the body, something dark emerged from Rakon. Before Theo could react, the ominous shadow was sucked into his body.

[A powerful curse has infiltrated your body.]

[Gluttony scoffs at the poor curse.]

[Gluttony’s owner isn’t affected by the curse. The curse has been neutralized.]

Nothing happened. It seemed like Rakon had tried to curse him. This was the effect of the infamous black magic artifact, ‘Companion of Death,’ but to Theo, it was as harmless as drinking sour milk.

Rakon couldn’t achieve what he desired, and even his revenge failed. In a sense, it was the proper ending for his bad karma.

Theo buried the unseemly corpse. It didn’t take long for all the guards of the second barracks to collapse.

***

The process was rapid and successful.

The eight guards defending the two barracks as well as Rakon’s men had been defeated, and the elves were freed. Fortunately, there were no elves who were too injured or exhausted to move. The slaves had value, so they had been handled carefully.

The problem was why did the elves, who had been caught by humans, follow Theo?

‘What is this?’ Theodore looked back with a bemused expression.

There were four elves following him like a chick following the mother bird. It was different from the elves who treated other species coldly. These elves followed Theo’s instructions like he was their superior.

Theo was curious. So, naturally, he asked about it.

–We can feel the aroma of dirt from you.

–We love the earth.

-Please lead us to that person.

…Those were the answers he heard.

‘The scent of dirt, loving the earth.’ He could guess only one thing from those words.

Theo stepped on the ground and felt the presence of the earth elemental, Mitra.

Did it mean her presence was so great that Myrdal’s contract gained an unexpected application? It was said that it was difficult to become close to elves even with an elemental, but their attitudes seemed to be of holding Theodore in great honor.

However, Theo also didn’t know who ‘that person’ was. Theo’s curiosity eventually got the best of him, and he asked the blonde female elf at the front of all the elves, “Excuse me, who is that person?”

“Delphinas of the Blue Evergreen Tribe will reply. That person is the blessing born to our tribe, the light of all life. The prophet saw it, and the sky danced.”

Theo still didn't know what Delphinas was talking about. "Can you tell me in an easier manner?"

"Perhaps you know of that person under the name of 'high elf'."

"Ah, I see... Ah?!" Theodore was intrigued by the sudden conversation and heard a word which couldn't be missed.

'High elf?' He only had a smattering of knowledge from the books in the library, but he was well aware of the value of their existence. An elf born with such a mutation was an astronomical probability. As soon as they became adults, they were moved to Elvenheim and protected by their own people.

If they were ever caught by other species, Elvenheim's elite warriors would move immediately.

'For a high elf to be held in this place...!'

If the situation were less tense, Theo would like to talk a bit more. However, it seemed like there was no time.

Kukukukukung...

A fearsome fire pillar rose in the distance. It was a powerful magic event which caused the ground to shake and the mana in the atmosphere to struggle. The firepower of a 6th Circle magician dyed the black sky red. The elves shook as they were more sensitive to mana than humans, while Theodore was worried

about his teacher.

The battle on the other side was also reaching a turning point.

Chapter 67 - High Elf Ellenoa #1

Theo felt the waves of mana and hastened his pace.

None of the elves lagged behind because they were in a good condition despite their imprisonment. The elves had regained their vitality as soon as they were released from their restraints, so it wasn't difficult for them to follow him. Thanks to that, the movement speed of the party was quick, and they soon reached the large barracks.

Theo searched the empty surroundings several times using magic and Mitra, before muttering with an absurd expression on his face, "They didn't leave any guards?"

Perhaps Vince's fight had caught their attention. Even so, it was weird that there would be no guards. It was common sense to leave a minimum number of troops in case there were still enemies remaining.

Theodore questioned it since he hadn't seen the Janissary's flare signal while rescuing the four elves.

He ended up rescuing all eight elves. As the four new elves stared at him with strange eyes like the first four had done, Theo struggled to make a decision. Should he step back from this mission or join Vince?

The plan they had established was based on the assumption that there were eight captured elves. Of course, the presence of the high elf wasn't within the calculations. Vince was supposed to have attacked the large barracks, yet he had been distracted in another place.

It was time for Theo to be more flexible instead of insisting on sticking to the mission plan.

"A little bit further." Instead of stepping back, Theodore decided to move forward.

There was an eerie silence, but he couldn't sense anything. It meant there weren't any elements threatening him at the moment. Theo started to walk again with the eight elves.

This place wasn't on Canis' map, but fortunately, there was no need to get lost. The many footsteps scattered in different directions were all heading toward the same place. Soon, the party reached the spot where the fire pillar had occurred.

"This...!" Theo's eyes widened as he witnessed the devastation from the front of the group.

It was horrible enough to make his stomach nauseous, while the elves turned pale as they subsequently saw the scene. This was the answer to his earlier question about the guards.

The humans, who had been burned alive, were scattered

everywhere. Even their eyeballs were melted down from the high heat. The burnt skin of the corpses stuck to the ground, and the bitter scent filled their noses.

"Urgh!" In the end, the elves couldn't stand it and took a few steps back. Otherwise, they would've probably puked. At this moment, they resented their sensitive sense of smell. Unlike humans, the noses of the elves, who lived in the forest, weren't used to bad smells.

However, Theo was relatively less affected and jumped toward the source of the odor without hesitation. It was because he saw a familiar person. "Master!"

"Geez, you came first." Vince, the middle-aged man wearing tattered robes, smiled as he looked at the elves behind Theo.

There were exactly eight elves. Vince realized that Theo had rescued the elves in the large barracks. This was something Vince was supposed to have done. It was like Veronica had said; it wouldn't have been enough if he came here alone. Vince flinched as he felt a throbbing pain.

"Master, your injuries...?!"

"I took a blow. They are inconsequential wounds, so don't worry."

Of course, the wound wasn't really inconsequential. The Austen

Janissary hadn't missed the chance to wound Vince with his sword while half of his body was burning in the fire storm. As soon as the almost dead Janissary realized there was no chance of winning, he had struck Vince.

Vince had narrowly avoided a fatal injury, but he was still wounded. He endured the pain and said, "Well, it looks like both of us encountered trouble."

The two people recovered their strength while talking about what had happened. They were able to breathe better after removing the bad smell with magic. Then the elves unconsciously turned toward the grey tent which contained the high elf.

"High elf... I read the name in a few books, but I never thought I would see them in person."

"It is the same for me. Usually, they never leave Elvenheim. Only four people at most would've met them in this kingdom."

"Four people...?"

Vince grinned as he folded his fingers. "His Majesty, Tower Master Blundell... and now, us."

"They are really rare."

Some self-proclaimed elf scholars doubted the existence of the high elves as within the Meltor Kingdom, the closest kingdom to

Elvenheim, only two people had seen a high elf. Theodore and Vince might never have seen one if it wasn't for today.

At this moment, the entrance of the grey tent fluttered like a wind was blowing past.

"Ah." No one could be blamed for unconsciously let out a sound.

The existence which appeared from behind the tent cloth was perfect enough that no embellishments could describe it properly.

They had light green hair with a gentle shine and pale limbs which were white even in the darkness. There was a strange sense of androgyneity since it was hard to tell what their sex was just by looking at their appearance. Their hazy eyes looked at Theo, Vince, and the elves.

'Man... No, woman?' The person looked like both a male or female.

The dreamlike face smiled at them before speaking.

"Daughter of the Blue Evergreen Tribe, the tribe's sixth dancer, Ellenoa, thanks my benefactors." The calm voice sounded like a bell through the darkness.

Just like her appearance, her voice was gender neutral, but she referred to herself with a definite gender. Theo and Vince accepted the greeting belatedly and introduced themselves.

“I am Vince Haidel.”

“I am Theodore Miller.”

However, Theo saw a strange sight as he bowed his head.

In the place where the ground had turned black from the large-scale fire magic, a small bud was rising from the ground. The soil around Ellenoa’s bare feet was regaining its vitality. A miraculous scene was unfolding right before his very eyes!

Theo realized why the existences of the high elves were concealed so thoroughly.

‘They have the power to revive nature itself. This is the identity of the high elves…!’ Theo lifted his head with an admiring expression and came into contact with Ellenoa’s silver eyes.

It was at this moment that…

[Hoing!] Mitra sprang out unexpectedly from the ground where the bud was sprouting.

Ellenoa’s eyes widened with surprise. Meanwhile, Theo held the small body in his palm. “Ah, what a surprise. Why did you jump out all of a sudden?”

[Hororororong!] Mitra made strange motions on the palm of Theo's hand. It seemed like a dance, but her short legs and arms waving about was just a funny sight.

Thanks to the contract, Theo could share Mitra's feelings to some extent. The feeling which came from her was of pure joy and excitement. The elemental was excited due to the presence of the high elf.

"...You are accompanied by a precious person." Ellenoa's response was surprising. She stared at Mitra dancing on Theo's palm and smiled gently. If she was within reach, she would've stretched out and stroked Mitra's head.

Maybe Ellenoa knew some secrets about Mitra that he didn't know. Just as Theodore opened his mouth to respond...

"I'm sorry but we'll have to delay the story for a while, Theodore."

"Huh?"

"Guests are coming." Her words were scary and ominous. Then there was the sudden sound of horseshoes against the ground, and armour and weapons rubbing against each other as the Bergen guards arrived in the area.

Lee Yoonsung's five senses, rather than Alfred's sensory perception, quickly noticed their approach. He nodded to the high

elf and backed off. They would be able to talk later.

"...Hoo, I can rest a little bit." Theo finally realized the fatigue which had accumulated in his body as he looked at the group approaching from afar.

Pain was lingering all over his body. The pain, which had been dulled by the excitement of battle, was slowly returning, so he naturally sat down.

Thus, the disturbance in the night came to an end.

***

The effectiveness of the order which Veronica had written was amazing. She was the great mage who reigned at the top of Meltor along with Blundell. As the Red Tower Master, her name was almost the same as the king's.

When Earl Bergen saw the order from the Red Tower Master, he immediately treated the Theo and Vince with great care. From the huge baths to the ingredients used in their dinners, nothing was spared. In Theo's case, he had to struggle to chase away a maid who had entered his room secretly.

The same was true for the nine elves, including Ellenoa.

"They are being served separately in the annex. They are being given fruits from the city streets. Earl Bergen is truly a resourceful

person.”

After having a busy night and sleeping nearly all day, Vince and Theodore walked side by side along the corridor. Unlike their shabby clothes from last night, their clothes looked quite luxurious today. The finest clothing from the mansion were wrapped naturally around both bodies.

Theo tried to ignore his feeling of awkwardness as he replied, “Is the Earl of Bergen that resourceful?”

“At least, I think so. He is good at keeping favour with other people without going out of line. Didn’t you suffer from this last night?”

“Master!”

“He did the same when I first arrived at the academy. He hasn’t changed.”

Theo’s face turned red as he thought about the naked maid in his room last night, but Vince nodded as if he understood. Vince had experienced many things in life, so it wasn’t a big deal for him. They followed a guide and soon arrived in front of a large door. Then the guide politely said goodbye to them.

“So, shall we enter?” Vince glanced at Theodore before entering.

After waking up, the two people had received an invitation from

Earl Bergen stating he wanted to dine with the people who had stopped the slave trade. Despite meeting senior magicians previously, this was Theo's first experience having dinner with a nobleman.

Vince was hoping that Theo wouldn't be burdened, but...

"Master?"

Vince smiled at Theo's calm expression.

Indeed, Theodore had already met Kurt III twice. He had also exchanged fists with Veronica and conversed with Blundell. It wasn't burdensome to meet a noble after already encountering such huge figures.

If Vince had to use an analogy, those huge figures were like dragons, while Earl Bergen was an ogre.

"No, it is nothing. Let's go straight in," as Vince replied, he pulled the door knob.

The big door spread to the left and right, and a bright light entered their eyes. As the two people passed through the dazzling light from the chandelier, a loud shout rang out, "Honoured guests, Vince Haidel and Theodore Miller, from the Magic Tower are entering!"

Chapter 68 - High Elf Ellenoa #2

Simultaneously, a spectacular banquet room appeared before both of them.

There were silver and gold decorations, and a jeweled chandelier, as well as marble states which seemed like the work of a master craftsman. The wooden dining table was made from the trees of the Northern Great Forest, and they held dishes which were difficult to find even if someone offered dozens of gold coins. It was luxurious but not vulgar; this was a space which was hard to find in other noble homes.

Earl Bergen, the man sitting at the dinner table, greeted Vince and Theodore with open arms. “Ohh, the heroes of Bergen have arrived!”

He had a fairly handsome appearance. His clothing were slightly wrinkled, but it wasn’t enough to make someone frown. Rather, it softened the impression of the rather bulky man. Above all, the bright smile on his face contained a true sincerity.

It was because slave trading was a national felony. If the two people hadn’t come or if they failed the mission, he would’ve had to take responsibility for allowing slavery to exist in his territory. For Earl Bergen who didn’t know anything, it would’ve been like a lightning bolt striking from the sky.

The two people arrived in front of his chair and bowed.

“I am Red Tower’s Superior magician, Vince Haidel.”

“I am Red Tower’s Average magician, Theodore Miller.”

Earl Bergen received their greetings with a smile and gestured for them to sit down. Despite being in a higher position, the two magicians weren’t people he could easily trifle with. Additionally, he already had a relationship with Vince.

“Hahaha! It has been a long time, Professor Vince. I didn’t know that I would see you again like this.”

“Yes, it is the same for me as well. I quit my position as a professor, only to come back here in a few months. I didn’t know I would deal with such a big event like elf slave trading.”

“This was a really big incident. Why in my territory…”

Despite the Earl talking like he knew about everything, Vince hadn’t told him a few facts.

It was kept from the Earl that a high elf was present among the kidnapped elves and that the slave organization [Shackler] was just a front for the secret unit of the Austen Kingdom. This was because it could develop into a huge political issue.

‘I don’t know if news has reached the capital yet, but it is still

early at the moment.' Vince calmly distinguished between what information could and couldn't be told.

Setting aside from Earl Bergen's personality, the hidden facts of this case were too big. They couldn't be allowed to rise to the surface of the water. If it was known that the high elf was present in Bergen, there existed the possibility that other kingdoms would start interfering. However, there were only two magicians here, and Vince wouldn't be able to cope with the situation in his injured condition.

It was why he turned Earl Bergen toward another topic. There was one thing bothering him.

"Earl."

"Oh, feel free to speak! I will help you with anything you need."

"The things you have given us so far is enough. I just wanted to ask something."

Both Theodore and his teacher turned their attention to someone sitting beside Earl Bergen. The person was a girl was long blonde hair who looked to be around the same age as Theo. Her skin had the distinctive unblemished fairness of a noble, and she had a beauty which wasn't easily seen on the streets.

Then Earl Bergen introduced her like he had been waiting for this cue. "She is my dear child whom I gained in my later years.

Sweetie, what are you doing? Come and say hello."

"...I-I am Fiona Bergen."

"Huhu, isn't she cute? She hasn't made her debut yet, so she is still unsure about how to treat people!"

It was too obvious! The two people saw what Earl Bergen was thinking and exchanged looks.

At the age of 20, Theo was already an Average of the Red Tower and had great talent. It wasn't uncommon to desire for a daughter to get together with such talent. His intention was to make Theo his son-in-law.

Unsurprisingly, he started to talk more shamelessly. "Isn't being greeted by a young lady instead of an old man better for the young Baron Miller? I'm not just saying this because she is my daughter, but she is a pretty cute kid."

"...Thank you for your consideration."

Fiona was swiftly moved to the seat next to Theodore. She wasn't wearing perfume or cosmetics, but out of nowhere, a sweet scent seemed to tickle his nose. Due to the uninvited guest, Theo couldn't enjoy the food.

He looked at Fiona and inwardly sighed, 'Hoo, she is pretty though...'

Any male would dream of having a romance with a noble lady when they were young. Fiona was the epitome of such a romance with blonde hair, big breasts, and immaculate skin. If Theo was a common youth, he wouldn't be able to keep his eyes from her.

The problem was that he had met females prettier than her.

–Theo, this is how to finish the spell.

For example, Sylvia was a silver-haired girl overflowing with innocence. The mysterious atmosphere around her wasn't something a sheltered noblewoman could compete with.

–What, Kid. Are you tired already?

The next one to pop up was Veronica. Not only was she beautiful and mature, every hug and touch left Theodore's head blank.

Theo had met incomparably beautiful women, so he had become strangely resistant to beauty, let alone a young noblewoman like Fiona who didn't know how to tempt men. Theo ignored her squirming and ate his food quietly. He was similar to an iron wall.

'Well, I don't have to worry.' Vince laughed at the sight of Theo before concentrating on his conversation with Earl Bergen.

"Someone from the Magic Society will probably come in three,

maybe four days. Until then, I would appreciate your hospitality, Earl."

"Of course. It is for the kingdom. It is okay even if you stay for three or four years."

"Hahaha, that is too much."

Two hours passed slowly. There were facts which weren't revealed to each other, but the atmosphere of the dinner wasn't bad.

Theo continued eating quietly, but he occasionally talked to Fiona since a strange atmosphere would be bad for relations with Earl Bergen. Leaving a good impression was one way to make a connection.

As the food on the table gradually disappeared,

"Ah, that reminds me of something, Baron Miller."

"Yes?"

Earl Bergen suddenly said to Theo,"Baron Miller is from our academy right?"

"Yes, that's right."

“I heard that you won a tournament in the capital and graduated. So, I prepared something for you.”

The earl received a scroll from a servant and passed it to Theodore. Theo received the scroll and pulled the red string tied at the center. He had an idea of what this scroll meant. Indeed, it was as he expected.

“I wanted to invite the dean of the academy, but he had no time to spare. Still, he gladly gave me the certificate of graduation.”

“……”

“Ah, I don’t know if I did something bad or not.”

Theodore read the contents several times with blank eyes.

It was a senior diploma from the Bergen Academy. The item he hadn’t been able to dream about in the past was now in his hands. Seeing the name ‘Theodore Miller’ at the top didn’t feel like reality as he was someone who had never even met the dean.

Why, just a few months ago, it had been something he desired, but now he just felt strange.

“No. Thank you for your care, Earl.”Theo hid his emotions and smiled.

He now realized that the academy wasn't worth anything as he put down his knife and formed fists.

*

The dinner party was over soon.

Parting from the reluctant Fiona and Earl Bergen, the two people left their seats. The sound of the dinner party was cut off as the doors closed behind them, leaving a deafening silence. Maybe it was because the corridor of the mansion was so much quieter than the dinner party.

After declining a guide, they walked for a while before Theo spoke in a low voice, "Master."

"Huh?"

Theo pulled out the scroll. "What does this diploma mean to me now?"

Vince pondered for a moment before replying with a serious face, "... Frankly, it isn't a valuable item. Your graduation is irrelevant because you have already reached a level where that doesn't matter."

As Vince said, the academy diploma was just to prove the identity of a first-time magician. It was useless for Theo who had already crossed the 'wall' of the 5th Circle. Proving that he was a magician

was no longer important as his circles were proof of superiority.

Theo knew this. He just couldn't accept that the five poisonous years he'd endured had ended with a single piece of paper.

"But Theodore..." Vince's words weren't over yet. "Your five years aren't in that scroll. Just like magic isn't ink written in books, the proof of Theodore Miller is contained in here."

Vince's finger poked Theo's chest.

'...Ah.'

It wasn't that strong, but it felt like a blade cutting off a sick piece of Theo's heart. Vince Haidel, who had worried over his identity as a war mage for years, cut off the bud of uncertainty growing inside Theodore.

"Be aware that certificates are given because they exist, but the certificate itself isn't a qualification. Theodore Miller, you yourself will prove that you aren't a scribble or stamp on a piece of paper."

"...Yes, Master."

"So, what will you do with the diploma?"

Theo playfully smiled at the question.

The discomfort, confusion, and dizziness he just felt had disappeared somewhere. The diploma in his hand wasn't heavy like he had been thinking. It was just a common piece of paper, and everyone knew that paper was a good burning material.

Hwaruruk~ Theo used the 1st Circle Magic, Ignite. Fire emerged from his fingertips, and the diploma was turned to grey ashes and scattered onto the floor. Theo invoked the wind to sweep away any traces.

It felt like the worry eating at Theo's heart was also blown away, and the pain which had accumulated for five years was now gone. While Theo was caught up in his memories...

[Theodore.] Suddenly, someone's voice was speaking in Theo's ears.

It wasn't surprising. At first, he thought it was Gluttony, but then he realized that it wasn't. It was a voice he had heard just yesterday.

High elf Ellenoa... It was her voice.

[I'm sorry, but can you come to where I am? I would like to continue the conversation from last time.]

Today's second invitation had arrived.

Chapter 69 - High Elf Ellenoa #3

It was a bit late due to the dinner party with Earl Bergen, but the moon was still in the middle of the sky. Perhaps there was still some time until midnight. It wouldn't be a problem to have a quick conversation in the room where Ellenoa was staying.

Theodore asked for Vince's understanding before turning around.

"Then, guide me."

To anyone looking at Theo right now, it would seem like he was speaking to no one. However, he had the ability to see what ordinary people couldn't see. This was a power which elves were born with—eyes which could see elementals. It was a translucent bird-shaped elemental which conveyed Ellenoa's voice to him.

The bird-shaped elemental was the low class elemental, Sylph, seen in [Introduction to Elemental Magic]. The wind attribute was convenient for conveying 'sound', so sylphs were often used as messengers.

Porong.

The sylph might not have a clear ego like Mitra, but the sparrow like elemental nodded and sped off. It flew a few steps ahead of Theodore. Unlike ordinary birds, it didn't need to flap its wings to

prevent themselves from falling. This was because the body of the sylph was closer to a spirit body.

'By the way, this mansion is really wide.'

It would never run out of room for guests. Theo realized this fact directly as the sylph only led him around five corners and yet the number of rooms he passed was already in the double digits. He walked for almost 10 minutes before arriving at the annex where Ellenoa was located.

If an earl's house was like this, he didn't want to know what type of maze the house of a marquis or duke would be.

Theodore stopped in front of the door and stroked the sylph. "Thanks for guiding me."

Pororong. Perhaps due to its mood, the sylph let out a pleasant sound before disappearing into the air.

Originally, elementals were invisible to human eyes. Once the supply of magic power was cut off, it would melt back into nature. Lower class elementals were different from the higher class elementals who had independent existences and were nothing like breezes in fields.

At that moment, a clear voice rang out from beyond the door, "Come in."

Theodore turned the doorknob and was hit with a thick, sweet scent. It was the smell of ripe fruit. He had only eaten it a few times, but the fragrance still remained in his memories. Theodore's expression was a stunned one as he saw the sight beyond the door. Ellenoa's room completely defied common sense.

"...Grapevines?" He spoke in a bemused voice as he touched the grapevines covering the wall.

It was a thick vine which was hard to see even in proper orchards. What about the grapes hanging from the vines? Each one was as big as a walnut. Even though he didn't eat the grapes, he could already feel the sweetness of the juice contained within them. This was a sight which was impossible to imagine existing in the room of a nobleman's mansion.

Ellenoa sat in the center of the green room. "Good evening Theodore."

She was like a flower or leaf which blended perfectly in with this far-fetched landscape. There were a few potted plants at her feet and grapevines surrounding her. Theo was observing the strange sight and replied belatedly, "Ah, good evening."

"Are you curious? I planted the seeds of the grapes that I had for dinner. Would you like to try one?"

'These vines grew from a grape seed planted in the evening?' The stunned Theo picked a grape and ate it.

As expected, the juices were sweet and rich, moistening the inside of his mouth with the flavour. Even for those who drank wine, the taste exceeded that of wine made from grapes. If the high elves set up an orchard, then other orchards would be ruined.

Theo sat on the chair opposite Ellenoa and ate a few more grapes. “…I’m sorry.”

“No. Rather, it feels good. I was worried about whether it would suit the palate of a human.”

“That’s impossible. Anyone would welcome such fruit.”

Was the atmosphere good due to the delicious food? It was surprising the conversation between the two people didn’t start out awkwardly.

At first, Ellenoa thanked him for the rescue, then they talked about the power of the high elves before moving on to Ellenoa’s neutral appearance.

She told Theo the reason, “It is natural for people like Theodore to feel uncomfortable at the sight of my appearance.”

According to Ellenoa, high elves were more like elementals than elves. They didn’t need to eat often, they wouldn’t die of starvation, and they wouldn’t feel tired even if they didn’t sleep. Thanks to the atavism of their ancestors, their gender fell upon a vague boundary.

“So, Ellenoa has no gender?”

“Um… It is a little different. The term ‘neutral’ may be a closer match.”

“Neutral?”

Yes, Ellenoa nodded with a slightly flushed face.

“We are born female instead of male, but once we have decided on our mate, this will change according to their gender. If the partner is a male, I will become a female. If they are a female, I will be a male.”

“Ah, then…”

“Yes, I still haven’t met a mate.”

Well, it made sense. He glanced unconsciously at Ellenoa before looking away.

Theo had the memories of Lee Yoonsung, the descendant of an eastern warrior, so his knowledge of the human body had increased greatly. He could easily recognize a male and female body. Despite that, he couldn’t distinguish Ellenoa’s gender. It was because her gender hadn’t been decided yet.

As he listened quietly, he suddenly had a thought, ‘Haven’t I learned a lot about high elves?’

It was as he thought. Right now, Theodore probably had more knowledge about high elves than anyone else in the kingdom. If he wrote a book, then it was obvious that the elf scholars would come running. He would be able to sweep up a few hundred gold in one go.

However, such worldly desires seemed meaningless when he gazed into Ellenoa’s clear eyes.

“Now, Theodore.”

It was time for the reason why she called him here.

“Can you summon the one who signed the contract with Theodore?”

*

There was an answer as soon as he pulled the cord of the contract.

[Hoing!] As always, Mitra appeared with a loud sound as her head popped out of a pot planted with a grape seed. Looking just like a mole, she looked around and leaped out with a smile the moment she saw Ellenoa.

“Oh, my god.” Ellenoa was confused when Mitra suddenly jumped onto the palm of her hand.

Mitra hugged the index finger like it was warm. Theo wasn’t very sensitive, but he couldn’t help the thump of his heart. This was despite the fact that Ellenoa was gender neutral.

“...I only heard the stories, but I didn’t know you were so cute.” Ellenoa smiled sweetly at Mitra before turning to face Theodore again. “How much does Theodore know about this?”

“I just know that she is an ancient elemental and is an exception to the ranks of the Elemental World.”

“Yes, that is true.” Ellenoa smiled and placed Mitra on her shoulder. Mitra was confused by the sudden loss of the finger, but she soon started to climb Ellenoa’s green hair like it was a rope. Mitra looked like a cicada on a tree branch.

Ellenoa ignored her and continued the explanation, “Please listen. An ancient elemental isn’t necessarily a member of the Elemental World. They are considered to be ‘seeds’ of a much more mysterious and higher existence.”

“See...ds?”

“Yes, this is an example.”

As soon as she unfurled her left hand, wind formed the translucent shape of a giant. Horns rose from the giant's head like a crown, and its body was as hard as armour. It seemed to be a giant from the myths.

As Theo gazed at it, Ellenoa nodded and told him its identity, "This is an illusion of Zephyr, the god of the wind who existed a long time ago. According to the myths, he brought a storm to the earth by turning the world around and sighing."

"Old god, Zephyr..."

"He is also the prototype of the ancient spirit, Jeros, who signed a contract with Myrdal Herseim 120 years ago."

'Myrdal Herseim!' Theodore's face stiffened at the unexpected name.

Why had that name emerged? No, he was the greatest elementalist of the century, so it was natural for the elves to know his name. As humans developed, their connection to the forces of nature weakened. Myrdal was the only one who was able to call an elemental king.

Ellenoa noticed his agitation and paused for a few moments. "Not all of the old gods were as divine as Zephyr, but it is certain that they were like him. For some reason, they lost their 'status' and the fragments of their bodies became seeds. The seeds that germinated became those known as ancient elementals."

The two people gazed at someone who might've been a mighty god.

Mitra, who was braiding Ellenoa's hair, looked up as she felt their gazes. She looked much like a mischievous child playing with dirt. It was hard to believe that such a cute earth doll had once been a mighty god.

Ellenoa understood Theo's unasked question and grabbed Mitra. Then she stared into Theodore's eyes and presented him with two choices.

"If you like, I can try to revive some of her strength. It won't be on the same level as the prototype, but she can probably regain the power of a lieutenant level elemental."

"Lieutenant elemen…tal."

Certainly, Mitra wasn't significantly different from other elementals except for the fact that she had an ego. In the absence of Theo's magic power, her abilities were greatly reduced, and she couldn't even appear freely in the earth. If she became lieutenant level, she could cross some of those limits.

However, before deciding, Theodore asked Mitra, "Mitra, what do you want to do?"

Ellenoa smiled secretly at Theo's act of not one-sidedly controlling the elemental. Theo didn't know it, but that was close

to how elves behaved. It was why other elves favoured him, despite not knowing about Mitra's presence.

So, what was the reply? Mitra worried for a moment before... [Hoing!]

'I will!' was what she meant. Theodore stroked Mitra's head a few times before handing her to Ellenoa.

"Please do so, Ellenoa."

"Then I will. Just think of it as repaying some of what I owe you." Ellenoa didn't give him a chance to reply as she held Mitra in both hands. "Then I will start."

Wuoooooong!

A light filled with vitality covered the room where the two people were located.

Chapter 70 - High Elf Ellenoa #4

It was a force which couldn't be called anything other than the power of life.

The green light spreading from Ellenoa started to encourage life in everything it touched. The unripe grape vine leaves strewn on the ground started growing and small grains of grapes puffed up.

Theodore couldn't escape from the brilliance either. He looked down at his forearms as a tickling sensation went through his body, then he witnessed an amazing sight.

'...The wounds, they're healed...?'

Although Theo hadn't been seriously injured during the course of the mission, that didn't mean there was no damage. There were shallow bruises, cuts, and muscle damage, and some parts of his skin were still stinging. He hadn't wanted to use healing potions for such minor injuries, so he'd left them alone. However, the wounds and scars were now gone without a trace.

It was a recovery similar to the priests who used divine power. Once the light of vitality reached him, the shallow wounds disappeared, and the fatigue in his body became energy. This was the special ability of the high elves, who had inherited the lineage of the ancient species, Arv. The ability of the high elves was to unconsciously amplify the power of nature and accelerate them when used consciously.

This was the reason the Austen Kingdom had sought Ellenoa as a solution to the drought. They thought it really was possible, which is why they came up with a ridiculous kidnapping plan.

'Now, this healing power is the aftermath of waking up Mitra... So, if she concentrates on someone's recovery, she might be able to cure a fatal injury in a flash.' Theo gulped involuntarily.

Would the Cardinal of Aether, a religion known for its healing power, be able to create a miracle like Ellenoa's? Theo had never met a cardinal before, but he couldn't help being inwardly shaken by this amazing sight. Without blinking, he stared at Mitra and Ellenoa who were wrapped in a green light.

At that moment, Ellenoa's voice was conveyed clearly, [Theodore?]

It wasn't a sound that he heard; the voice was being conveyed through his heart. So far, only Gluttony and Mitra had talked to him in this way as it wasn't possible to access the mind of a magician with strong mental defenses.

Yet Ellenoa was talking directly to Theodore's spirit! So, it was natural for Theodore to feel startled.

[Ellenoa?! How?]

[I used your connection with Mitra. It is impossible unless I am

touching her like this.]

[S-Something like that is also possible.]

As a magician, it wasn't hard to understand the principle behind it. If Ellenoa had bad intentions, then it would be possible to attack his mind directly. Of course, she would be thrown out by Mitra who would realize her intentions. Mitra wouldn't allow anyone with impure intentions to harm her contractor.

Ellenoa's words calmed Theo down.

[From now on, I will awaken Mitra's essence. I don't know the effect it will have on Theodore due to the contract, so please calm your mind.]

[...I understand.]

Theo closed his eyes under her guidance. His vision closed off first, then his hearing was cut off as he immersed himself in his mind. The tactile sensations touching his skin dimmed as well, and the odours remaining in his mouth and nose were completely dispelled.

After closing all five senses, his sixth sense would naturally sharpen, and the movements of his circles became clearer.

As he admired the stillness, Ellenoa pulled the handle. She opened the door inside of 'Mitra.'

*

In the far distant past, there existed a time when humans were just monkeys swinging stone axes.

There were existences who lived beyond the dimensions of a living thing. They were transcendent, breathing in nature naturally and caring for all life. The intelligent beings gave sacrifices to them, calling them by the title of ‘god’ and praising them.

Deity…

The praising voices called them into new forms.

[□□□□, please come commiserate with us!]

The man shouted in front of the magnificent altar, and my name became □□□□. My ‘form’ was drawn by them, and my presence, which had been free, became captured by the wind. However, I remember that it was myself who accepted their captivity.

For some reason, I thought that discomfort was lovely.

It was a life which couldn’t withstand a few months of drought; they couldn’t dispel the origins of those who were weak.

They were like ants compared to my power, yet I was delighted by their calls. The cries of my name enriched me.

No one noticed that it was a corruption.

When did I realize that the power which caused me to be praised as Mother Earth started to decline?

The transcendent gods started to become closer to destruction as they moved away from nature. The powerful strength withstood for a long time. Their destiny, which was now closer to humans than nature, had been fixed.

Funnily enough, the gods realized their own ego due to the humans and self-destructed from that enlightenment.

I, □□□□, couldn't stop my own end either.

……

[…Theodore!] At that time, a sharp voice forced his consciousness away from somewhere.

Theo's mind was dull for a moment, but he soon recalled who the owner of the voice was. It was the high elf who had been talking to him using Mitra's connection.

[Ellenoa?]

[Oh, you've woken up! I'm glad.] Ellenoa was sincerely relieved.

As she woke up Mitra's essence, Theodore's consciousness had been pulled in. Right now, Mitra was just a subordinate spirit, but she had the presence beyond an elemental ruler. The consciousness of a human who remained inside her essence would be melted, like it had fallen into lava.

Fortunately, Theodore had broken away before that happened.

[This happened because Theodore's affinity is too high. Please stay separate like you are now.]

Thanks to her explanation, Theo understood how dangerous the situation had been and took in some deep breaths. Deep breathing didn't do anything to his mind, but it wasn't bad for a self-hypnosis. Theo sank into his breathing.

Then Ellenoa said in a loud voice, [Slow down your mind and look down.]

He immediately dropped his gaze.

[·····.] His eyes widened with surprise.

It was huge. A large mountain of an unknown size was moving below him. The peak pierced through several layers of clouds, and

it was impossible to distinguish between the mountain and the plains from a distant.

After several examinations, Theo opened his mouth as he realized what he was looking at. [This is Mitra's prototype?]

[Yes.] Ellenoa answered without any hesitation.

['She' is the essence of the elemental contracted with Theodore. She is the seed of an old deity who existed a few thousand years before the beginning of the present age. The deity was a symbol of abundance and fertility.] Whenever she spoke, several scenes appeared in the flood of memories which Theodore had fallen into.

With the exception of a few scholars, it was a name which nobody remembered anymore. Mother Earth who had a higher status than any other god and who opened the agricultural era...

Her great and divine name was [Mother Earth, Dmitra.]

She was the goddess of earth who was worshipped as Ceres in some countries and Demeter in others.

Dmitra made crops grow and the land fertile. Due to being the source of life and the being which ruled the earth, she had a much higher status than other gods. Theo had never thought that Mitra's identity was this big.

Theo looked down at Mitra unconsciously.

[————————Ah.]

‘She’ met his eyes.

*

“Owaaaaack!” Theo screamed as he was thrown back into reality.

It was because the gaze of the giant entity shook his consciousness. Despite only being a faint trace, it was impossible to make eye contact. She was a god, a transcendent being, a monster that even the legendary 9th Circle magicians had to revere. Theo’s body was still shaking nervously from the gaze.

Theo had fallen off his chair and onto the ground.

“...Wow, that was more amazing than I thought it’d be.” Ellenoa’s voice sounded somewhat exhausted.

“Ellenoa.”

“Is this your first experience? Your head might be dizzy so take it slowly...”

“No, it’s okay.” He had already gone through this three times before, and this was actually his fourth time. Theo had become used to it, so he got up without any hesitation.

Ellenoa opened her tired eyes, but before she could speak, something ran toward Theo.

Bam!

“Wah!” Theo was surprised by the sudden impact and looked down at his legs. There was no pain from the impact, but he couldn’t help frowning. Mitra had grown more than before, looking like a somewhat awkward earth doll. She had grown to the length of Theo’s head.

[Deo!] Additionally, she called his name with a clumsy pronunciation.

“M-Mitra?”

[Yes! Midra!]

The image of Dmitra disappeared, and the little girl returned.

As Theo stroked her with a relieved expression, Ellenoa said, “The ceremony was a success. Now, Mitra can exercise the power of a lieutenant elemental. As you can see, she has the ability to grow more.”

“Growth… is it?” He certainly could feel that Mitra’s power had doubled.

Previously, he had to limit the use of earth magic to efficient things, but now he could use a few more elemental tricks. However, Theo was happy to see the small and cute Mitra. An elemental of this size wasn't burdensome.

"You shouldn't become bigger than me. Understood?"

[Yes?] Mitra tilted her head with a confused expression, while Ellenoa understood Theo's words and smiled.

Chapter 71 - Convoy From The Capital #1

For the next two days, Theodore stayed at the residence of Earl Bergen and focused on deepening his connection with Mitra. There was a lot of information flowing from her after she evolved to the level of a lieutenant. It wasn't to the extent that Theo couldn't withstand it, but an adjustment period was needed. It was his routine to play with Mitra anyway.

While watching Theo, Vince opened his mouth and said, "Elementalists have trained for more than 10 years to call lieutenant level elementals... The meeting with the high elf is a huge opportunity for you."

As he said, a lieutenant level elemental wasn't something easily gained.

For magicians of the 4th Circle and above, a lieutenant elemental was the exclusive possession of elementalists who had gone beyond the beginner level. An elementalist in contract with a lieutenant elemental would gain the power and resistance of the attribute, and could borrow the power at will without asking the elemental.

That was just like Theodore, who was playing with Mitra.

[Midra?]

"Yes, Mitra."

A little girl-shaped doll sprang from the ground when he pointed. The doll resembled Mitra, causing the real Mitra to tilt her head with curiosity.

Mitra watched the doll with a bewildered expression before laughing and hugging it. [Fwen!]

'Is she asking if it's a friend?'

Mitra liked the doll and locked arms with it.

Theo adjusted the doll to match her timing, which was a form of training for him in controlling the earth. It felt like nature was an extension of his hands and feet. Ordinary magicians couldn't feel it, but it would obviously be a big help down the path.

Maybe this was a chance for him to jump over the 'wall' of the 6th Circle.

'...My magic sensitivity is definitely more than it was a few days ago. Maybe now I can use 5th Circle magic continuously?'

On average, the magic that a magician could use immediately was about half of their current circles. 4th Circle magicians could cast 2nd Circle magic instantly, while depending on their abilities, some 5th Circle magicians could cast 3rd Circle magic immediately. Only a few geniuses born with a lot of sensitivity and great calculating ability could climb to a higher level.

It was limited but Theodore had stepped into that area.

Seeing Theo's growth, Vince had a gentle expression, but he then frowned suddenly. It was because the last blow from he received the Janissary was causing his body to throb with pain again. It took time for a wound from a master-class aura to heal, even if he used expensive healing potions.

"Master, your wounds are still...?"

"Uhh, it is taking longer than I thought. It has improved a lot though."

Theodore smiled bitterly. Vince's injury weighed heavily on his chest, despite not being responsible for it. He had requested for Ellenoa to heal him, but she had shaken her head the moment she saw Vince's wound.

–The perpetrator's willpower contained in it is too strong. My abilities can only cure the wounds of the flesh, meaning I can't heal it before this willpower disappears.

–Then what should he do?

–It will naturally heal over time. Or he can get the blessing of a high priest.

However, it was difficult to find a high priest in Meltor, since it was a kingdom which denied the existence of religion.

It was a wound which would heal in a month, so Vince chose to rest in Bergen. He didn't want to hold his disciple back due to his own mistake. Anyway, he had experienced this type of injury many times.

'The Magic Society knows the value of a high elf. I hope they send at least one person with influence.'

If Blundell or Veronica came in person, then it would be okay if he was injured. Vince looked over his own condition calmly and made a decision.

Then someone rushed over to the two people who were sitting in the garden. "Haidel! Miller!"

It was an attendant of the manor. He came running over with a red face and opened his mouth to speak as soon as he arrived in front of the two of them. It was an attitude which placed priority on telling them the message over restoring his breathing. "E-Earl Bergen said to come to the front door immediately! People from the capital are here...!"

The two people instantly rose from their spots.

On the third day after the mission, the convoy from the capital arrived at Earl Bergen's estate.

*

“Master,” Theo spoke as he followed Vince who was walking leisurely. It was only a while ago that Theodore realized the meaning of the word ‘convoy.’

Why was it necessary to send a convoy when the Magic Society had space magicians?

“Can’t they just use Mass Teleport?”

It was a good question, but Vince shook his head.

“Elves are inherently magical, so they have a strong resistance to magic. Since they are born with the blessing of nature, they tend to instinctively invalidate ‘magic’ used on them.”

“...Even space magic?”

“Well, it would be impossible with ordinary elves. Space movement requires a minimum of the 6th Circle, so it isn’t something that can be resisted.”

However, high elves were a little special. They calmed the surrounding mana just by being present and unconsciously interfered with the activation of magic. It would be a catastrophe if that came into contact with a precise magic like space magic.

This meant they had to use the land route to travel from Bergen to the capital; that was why a convoy was sent. The convinced Theodore and Vince approached the main gate from the mansion's garden.

"Oh, you came!" A loud voice entered their ears.

Unlike Theo who frowned reflexively, Vince's eyes widened at the familiar voice. He never thought that such a person would participate in the convoy. It was a senior magician who had lost his legs more than 10 years ago. He was a Prime rank magician from the Red Tower, who had stepped back from the front lines.

"It is great to see you after a long time, Elder Herman."

"Yes, it has been a while. Have you reached the 6th Circle? You were faster than I expected!"

"Thank you."

Herman sat on a wheelchair and celebrated Vince's accomplishment. The pants flapped loosely where his legs should be, but the hot magic power around his body made up for that. Although he had lost a circle in the war with the Andras Empire, his power was more than a 6th Circle magician.

Theodore gulped as he stared with admiration. 'No, that isn't the only great thing...!'

In addition to Herman, Elder Shugel from the White Tower and other veteran magicians were standing behind him with exhausted faces. The people gathered here could annihilate one or two great estates without a hitch. The convoy for the high elf was actually this great.

Herman chatted with Vince for a while before suddenly turning his gaze to Theo. “Hoh, this is the disciple who caught our Tower Master’s eyes?”

“E-Eyes?”

“Kulkulkul, there is no need to be embarrassed. Her temper is bad, but it is hard to find a woman like that. A young person like you won’t break your back.”

Theodore blushed at the elder’s words. It was partly because Veronica’s appearance rose in his head after he heard the explicit joke. Herman laughed at the naive response and looked at the approaching elves. He could feel the presence of Ellenoa in the center.

The mana seething around the powerful magician became calm. “Hoh… Is the child in the center the high elf?”

The other magicians looked at Ellenoa with amazed eyes. It was hard to believe when they heard the contents of the mission, but they were now actually seeing a real high elf. For the magicians, today’s experience was like an expensive treasure. It was why no

one complained despite being sent here with no break after finishing their previous assignment.

Ellenoa approached the convoy and greeted them politely, “It is nice to meet you. I am a daughter of the Blue Evergreen Tribe and the tribe’s sixth dancer, Ellenoa.”

“I am the representative of the convoy, Herman Alphen. You must understand that this old man is excited about the prospect of meeting you.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Herman.”

Ellenoa smiled sweetly and grabbed Herman’s hand. The light touch made him forget his age as his vitality suddenly rose. He shook his head with admiration and amazement. Herman knew the power of the high elf, which is why he wanted this mission. Still, it was truly amazing.

The old magician shook it off and took her hand. “Then I will guide you. Please follow me.”

He manipulated his chair with a familiar gesture and it started rolling somewhere. Theodore and Vince followed Ellenoa and the convoy. It was a strange group for anyone who didn’t know the details.

Fortunately, the destination wasn’t very far away. In the spacious backyard of Earl Bergen’s manor, ‘it’ stood in the middle

of an empty space.

“Now, this is the convoy we have prepared for you. I hope you like it.”

Theodore, Vince, Ellenoa, and the elves’ faces changed as they saw three ‘objects.’ They were similar to wagons in that their framework and wheels were made of metal. Oddly enough, there weren’t any animals in front of the wagons.

Flap… flap…

Theo spoke before anyone else could, “Why are there sails on a wagon…?”

The other people nodded in agreement.

The large wagons looked nice, but there were large sails on the roof and side. It was made so that the sails could be folded and unfolded at any time, but this wasn’t a boat made to cross the sea. Why would they be placed on wagons?

What acceleration was possible on the ground that was filled with all sorts of obstacles and ramps? However, the magicians of the convoy just laughed triumphantly and got onto a pedestal at the back of the wagons.

Herman then explained, “This wagon runs on the power of the wind and is called the gust wagon.”

There was a limit to the speed of a vehicle, even if the weight of the body was lightened.

At first, the ‘speed’ crazy White Tower magicians had invented a technique to accelerate the wagons using wind, but that wasn’t commercialized after more than a thousand drivers were injured. A new concept magic wagon was later created, which had two to three times the speed of conventional wagons. Theoretically, it could even go up to five times.

“Come on, get in! I’ll show you what speed truly is!” Herman called out.

Theo and Ellenoa’s faces paled at the thought of passing through the mountains on the carriage before them.

They didn’t want to ride in this type of thing…

Chapter 72 - Convoy From The Capital #2

Regardless of Theo's and Ellenoa's intentions, the procedures of the convoy proceeded at a rapid pace. The magicians shook away the fatigue of the massive space movements and were ready to leave in an instant.

They would be accompanied by a high elf. High elves were symbols of the elves, and there were said to be less than 10 in the whole world. If Ellenoa died in the Meltor Kingdom, there would be repercussions from Elvenheim.

It was confirmed that it had been the Austen Kingdom which had tried to capture the high elf, so they still had a grace period left.

Herman gave a formal goodbye to Earl Bergen, "...Thank you for your cooperation, Earl Bergen. His Majesty will keep your loyalty in mind."

"Ohh, such glorious words! I was just doing my duty as a servant of the Meltor Kingdom. Herman, you don't need to give such flatteries."

Indeed, it was the eloquence of a noble family. The earl's smooth answer humbled himself without losing his dignity. However, Herman merely waved his hands. "Hmm, I understand. Excuse me."

Unfortunately, Earl Bergen wasn't aware that Red Tower magicians didn't care about things like that. Instead of giving the anticipated answer, Herman indeed left the earl's office, and only the sound of the wheelchair's rolling could be heard. There was no time to build up a relationship.

Dururuk... dururuk...

Herman's wheelchair rolled at a fast pace until it stopped in front of an old man. There was no need to mention the identity of the old man wearing white robes.

Elder Shugel of the White Tower looked down at Herman and clicked his tongue. "How can a conversation end in less than five minutes? Did you just throw a few words at him? A person should use his mouth to get good treatment."

However, Herman didn't agree and scoffed at him. "Stop talking nonsense. If I keep talking with that guy, we will be delayed at least for two hours, and won't that be foolish?"

"What is? Aish, it is no use talking to you. How can I teach manners to this ignorant man?"

"At any rate, we can use teleportation. Don't you know the importance of time? I'll think about it if you give me a pair of useless legs."

Herman knocked on his loose pants, and Shugel was forced to

step back. How could he refute someone who didn't even have legs to walk around? Even excellent healing magic wasn't enough to regenerate lost limbs. The two elderly men were always arguing like this.

It would've continued for 10 more minutes if Vince hadn't intervened with a bitter smile. "Elder Herman, I need to talk to you."

"Oh, Vince!"

The two elders stopped quarreling as if they had been waiting for this. The fierce frowns and wrinkled expressions went away. They didn't actually have any bad feelings toward each other. After doing this for almost half a century, it had become like a daily routine.

Shugel turned away first. "Hmm, then I'll return to the capital first and we'll meet again there. The wind power may be a bit burdensome for you... Well, at this age, your joints probably feel sore. Isn't that right? Hahaha!"

"That damn old man...!" Herman stared at Shugel's back but didn't try to catch him to start another fight. They were elders of the Magic Society and knew how to partition things.

This was proven by the fact that a calm expression appeared on Herman's face. "Yes, what did you need?"

Vince started to tell the story he'd heard from Ellenoa the other day. He had been accompanying Theo when she told them. Despite a 'question and answer' with Gluttony, they hadn't been able to find out the truth behind the incident. More than anything else, the information they had was too lacking.

Herman's expression became serious as he heard the story.

"I roughly understand." Herman accepted the information with a tense expression. "It is true that the agents from Austen kidnapped the high elf, but something separate killed her guards?"

"Yes, that's correct."

In the first place, abducting a high elf wasn't that easy. Any mutant high elf would be noticed by Elvenheim as soon as they were born, and it was a rule to send elite warriors to escort the high elf to Elvenheim. The elites were of a warrior class among the peace-loving elves and were equal to aura warriors.

They weren't at the level that a unit with only one Janissary could kill. Yet Ellenoa hadn't been able to meet her guards.

"The escort from Elvenheim were eliminated without anyone knowing?"

"Perhaps. Ellenoa was caught by the Austen agents while waiting for her escorts. It would be simple for her to escape, but her friends were captured as hostages, so she couldn't help being caught."

“Hrmm… It is hard to judge. There are too many things we don’t know.”

The two people contemplated it for a while but couldn’t come up with any answers.

“It can’t be helped.” In the end, Herman came to a conclusion. “We need to move quickly. It might’ve been quiet for a few days, but if they haven’t given up on the high elf, just the power here can’t guarantee her safety.”

“Isn’t it better to stay here?”

“I would do that if there are no reinforcements coming.”

Herman didn’t lose his calm despite finding out about the threat. He noticed Vince’s confused expression and tapped his forehead. It might be different for the other magic towers, but there was only one person which a magician of the Red Tower would trust with their lives.

“The Tower Master has been sent somewhere, but she is hurrying to join the convoy. If we move toward the capital, we can meet up with her sooner.”

“Ah…!” Vince nodded at Herman’s words.

If they joined Veronica on the way, there was no need to be afraid of anyone. If the enemy were strong enough to kill Veronica, they would all be dead no matter where they were. Otherwise, Veronica would turn the enemy into chunks of charcoal.

Vince had been full of concerns about his disciple, but he could now calm down.

“Why are you feeling assured? Aren’t you leaving your disciple here?”

“I can’t do that.” Vince smiled bitterly at Herman’s question. “If ‘that bastard’ is tracking the high elf, it is likely they will come to Theodore. It would be safer for Theo to join the convoy and head to the capital.”

“I understand, but you will stay here?”

“I will grab the ankles of the enemies aiming for my disciple. If they come to me, I can hold on for a few minutes.”

Vince was ready to die at any time. However, he didn’t want to die in front of Theodore. Additionally, if his disciple were killed, then it would be the worst shame of Vince Haidel’s life. A wounded person was a burden on the battlefield, so Vince couldn’t join the convoy.

He was determined to remain alone in Bergen and risk his life to slow the enemy down.

Herman nodded vigorously at this attitude. “I can’t stop someone who has already decided. Do your best to defend yourself. We will safely escort your disciple along with the high elf.”

“Thank you.”

The two of them shook hands. Rather than acting like senior and junior, they respected each other as war mages who lived in the same era. Both of them might have withdrawn from active service but the pride engraved inside was still the same.

Thus, the two war mages split apart at the crossroad.

*

Unlike normal wagons, the White Tower magicians climbed into the back seat and shouted in a loud voice, “Now then, let’s go!”

Simultaneously, the three wind turbines moved the wheels in turn. The wind coming from the magicians at the rear caused the sails to blow up halfway, as it started to move at a speed similar to a horse-drawn carriage.

Theo was astounded as he watched the process. “Wow, almost one hundred magic spells are used to drive this wagon... What is this obsession?”

Magic to adjust friction of the wheel, magic to balance the body of the carriage, magic to reduce air resistance, magic to automatically adjust the direction with wind…

Theo was convinced that he could buy dozens of artifacts with the money and effort used to make the wagon. This was the crystallization of the madness which desired that wagons ran on wind power.

Theo looked back and forth while watching the wind power. ‘Moreover, there is tight security. It would be hard to come within 50 meters even with Canis’ level of stealth.’

As the wind blew, Herman and the Red Tower Magicians proceeded around the border while also sticking closely to Theo and Ellenoa. They could buy some time even if a Master level enemy attacked.

Due to Vince telling them about the enemy, the vigilance of the convoy was at its peak, and they would continue moving with maximum vigilance until Veronica joined. As the wind increased, the wagons created by the magicians of the White Tower started to reach its full speed.

Huuuuuuong!

‘What is this?’

After hearing the strange wind sound, Theo and Ellenoa cried out

as they looked out the window.

“Heok...!”

“Oh my god...!”

There was hardly any inertia inside, but the landscape outside the window was passing by at a truly terrifying rate. It was a speed which quickly distorted the trees and bushes. Theo now understood why they had been warned not to reach their hands out. If they hit something at this speed, there would be enough force to break their bones.

Mitra was also shaking as she looked out the window.

[Hoeee~]

Her eyes spun around like a vortex, as if she was dizzy by the scenery passing at a fast pace. Theo grabbed hold of her small body while analyzing the principles of the wind. The more he looked, the crazier the wagon seemed.

‘I understand the principles behind it, but I can’t follow it.’

Theo was convinced after a short moment that this was a feat only possible for those who devoted their lives to wind magic and were at least of the 5th Circle.

It was easy to blow wind into the sails and accelerate. However, they needed to take care of the air resistance and headwind while making sure that the power didn't scatter. It was like using five different spells at the same time.

Rather than using magic, it was a technique closer to controlling magic power.

"...Maybe we really will arrive in one day?" Theo had honestly thought it was a bluff, but it wasn't impossible if this speed was maintained.

The distance covered would normally take a week for a top level company. If this ridiculously fast method were to be known, the Meltor's Merchants Association might go on strike. Theodore looked at the receding Bergen with half admiration and half anxiety.

He prayed unconsciously in his mind. 'Please let this convoy reach the capital safely.'

Then he would be able to reunite with his master, Vince.

Chapter 73 – Convoy From The Capital #3

The three gust wagons rushed down the mountains.

Transformed into the wind itself, the wagons occasionally ran into monsters obstructing the way. The wagons slammed into kobolds and goblins with huge destructive power and turned them into blood on the wheels of the wagons.

Even big monsters like trolls and ogres couldn't escape dying.

Kwang!

It seemed like the number of those killed by the wagons had increased by one.

'Wow, isn't it completely shattered?' Theodore clicked his tongue as he watched the blue blood scattering outside the window. Since the blood was blue and there were the remains of an insect, it must've been a giant mantis which was crushed.

A threatening monster which even first-class mercenaries were afraid of had been destroyed by the wagon. On the contrary, the wagon didn't feel the impact at all.

'Maybe this could be used as a weapon?' Theo rejected it as soon as he had the thought. '...No, it is impossible.'

The wagon had great power and speed, but the workforce required to get the most out of the wind power was too advanced. Rather than assigning a few 5th Circle magicians to a wagon, it was more efficient for them to fight directly.

He shook off the thought and turned to Mitra who was playing in the seat next to him.

[Hoi!]

Pororong.

She was playing with the sylph Ellenoa had summoned. The elemental, which looked like a translucent sparrow, spread its wings at Mitra's signal. The scene of a little girl and a bird playing together happily was like an illustration from a fairy tale book. Theo's heart calmed down slightly at the sight.

At that moment, he felt a soft touch as fingers entwined with his.

"Eh, Ellenoa?"

Theo looked down at his hand and was shocked as he realized the identity of the other person. It was because Ellenoa, sitting across from him, was holding his hand. The pleasant sensation of her slim, soft hand was vividly transmitted through the palm of his hand. This was despite him knowing that Ellenoa was a neutral gender.

However, her voice was as calm as always as she said, “Are you worried about your mentor?”

Those words pierced right inside of Theo.

His blushing complexion instantly turned pale. His thoughts turned grim as soon as he thought about his mentor, Vince, volunteering to stay behind in Bergen. They had talked a few times about the decision, but Theo still couldn’t fully understand it.

To Theodore Miller, Vince was his one-of-a-kind mentor, and his value was immeasurable.

“Yes, that’s right.” Theo nodded with a bitter smile.

It was funny that he was worried about his mentor, but Vince was in an injured state. According to Shugel, Vince’s injury would worsen if he moved using space magic. Theo was reluctant to let such a person act as bait.

Then Ellenoa squeezed his hand and whispered in a small voice, “Don’t be too concerned. His fate has yet to reach the time when the knot will be tied.”

“Huh?” Theo’s eyes widened at the words.

He would’ve ignored her if she were a fortuneteller on the

streets, but Ellenoa was a mysterious high elf. Furthermore, elves were a species famous for not being able to tell lies. Theo mulled over the meaning of Ellenoa's words before asking in a trembling voice, "...Ellenoa, can you see the future?"

Seeing the future—or in other words, Foresight—was a type of power given to gods, demons, and ancient dragons a long time ago. The weakness of mortals was always time, as they feared the future. So, the prophets who could see the future were considered as gods.

Ellenoa was a descendant of an ancient species, but could a high elf really see the future? In response, Ellenoa shook her head with a subtle expression. "It isn't anything so tremendous. I can just understand when the 'end' comes. It is a half-power that appears when I'm in danger."

"No, but...!" Theo tried to say something more, but he soon fell silent.

Ellenoa wouldn't lie just to reassure him. As long as his mentor was safe, there was nothing more to ask. Besides, there was something he should say first before questioning Ellenoa's abilities.

"Thank you for your concern."

"It is nothing."

It was an appreciation for exposing her ability in order to comfort him. As Theo's face brightened a little bit, Ellenoa smiled and shook her head. Then Mitra leaned back and fell to the floor of the carriage.

[Heeeng?!]

The awkward air in the wagon broke.

"Pfff!"

"Ahaha!"

The atmosphere inside the wagon became brighter, and as the two people laughed at Mitra's behaviour, Mitra hit Theo's feet with a sulky expression. Her gesture was telling them not to laugh, but it just made the duo laugh even more.

As the pleasant sound emerged from the windows, the wagons passed by the middle point of the mountain range thanks to the wind power.

How long had they been on the mountain trail? Around this time, the sun was going down, so the magicians lowered the pace and handed Theo a package. The identity of the small bag was soon revealed.

"This is your meal with Ellenoa."

“Ah, thank you.”

Theo picked up the bag and placed it on a table in the center of the wagon. He hadn’t realized it, but he was really hungry. Theo opened the bag and pulled out a few fruits, baked sweets, jerky, and two bottles of water. The fruits were probably prepared for Ellenoa as the conventional wisdom was that elves didn’t enjoy eating meat.

However, Ellenoa denied it outright. “Well, it isn’t that we don’t enjoy meat. It’s just that living beings are all the same, so is there a reason to discriminate between plants and animals? Rather, our bodies will weaken if we don’t consume meat at all.”

“Uh, then why do the Elvenheim elves only eat fruits on their missions?”

“I’m not sure.” She ate an apple and thought about it for a while before answering the question. “Maybe there is a problem with the way the meat is cooked?”

“The way it is cooked?”

“An elf’s tastebuds is a few times more sensitive than that of humans, so it is hard to eat food with a lot of spices. I guess they only ate fruits that weren’t cooked separately.” Ellenoa proved her words by eating the jerky. “We basically eat raw food, so there isn’t much food that is cooked using fire. It is common to eat a fresh and lean cut of meat.”

Theodore involuntarily imagined the elves eating meat.

An elf hunter running through the forest, shooting a boar, and then cutting its flesh with a dagger and eating it...

He imagined the elf's mouth covered in blood and felt like his fantasies about elves were being broken. It had been imagined that elves were graceful beings who enjoyed fruit and tea leaves, as well as playing with wild beasts.

However, that was just a fantasy of humans.

*

It happened around the time when Theo had finished his meal and Ellenoa was putting down the last apple core.

"2nd Car, 3rd Car, stop!"The wind power stopped after a yell was heard from outside the window.

Thump.

Simultaneously, the door of their carriage opened, and a magician entered. The blue robe indicated he was a Blue Tower magician, and he was powerful enough to make Theo's sensory perception tingle. The magician came from the third car which was attached as an escort role and explained why the carriage had

stopped so suddenly.

"The 1st Car that is 250 meters ahead has started to engage with something. We will go again as soon as the 'Clear' signal is received, so Ellenoa shouldn't worry."

"Wait a minute. You aren't joining the fight?" Theodore asked with a strange expression.

He was questioning a senior, but the magician replied calmly, "That's right. The formation of the Red Tower is so unique that is it different for other towers to fight with them. Elder Herman is there, so there is no reason to join."

"But what if—"

"If it can destroy the 1st Car in a short amount of time, there is no way to win even if we join. And the important thing isn't winning."

They were escorts, not combatants. It was the duty of the convoy to deliver the high elf, Ellenoa, safely to Mana-vil Capital. Even if they could defeat the enemy, they had to first eliminate any possibilities of Ellenoa being harmed.

However, Theo had just been thinking about winning. The experiences he'd absorbed were all about 'fighting and winning,' not escorting someone. Theo was convinced by the difference and fell silent. No, he was forced to shut his mouth.

Kukukung...!

It was a Heat Wave Chain. As a pale red pillar rose in the distance, the earth started to cry out.

It shook like an earthquake. A part of the dim sky became brighter. Clouds were torn apart by the strong flames and explosions rang out. Despite the interval of a few hundred meters, the mana in the atmosphere was struggling like crazy.

It was the aftermath of a magic collision which was at least of the 6th Circle!

“Kuk...!” Even the air touching Theo’s eyelids felt hot. A wind shield was opened in a reflexive manner.

After using the cold magic, he felt the ambient temperature going down a little bit. If there was this much heat from the aftermath, the center must be as hot as lava. It was proof that Herman’s group was literally pouring out their power.

The total number of magic power detected with his senses were eight. ‘Five 5th Circle magicians and three 6th Circle magicians.’

One of the 6th Circle magicians was half a step away from the boundary. It was without a doubt Herman, who used to be at the 7th Circle. Just him alone was a huge threat. No matter who the opponent was, they absolutely couldn’t be safe. Even if the

opponent was of the master level, this much firepower would be enough to take care of them.

However, Theodore frowned instead of feeling relieved. Why? It wasn't because of a chill down his spine but cold air flowing from his left hand which tickled his bones. Was it a warning from the sleeping Gluttony? Or maybe a feature he didn't know about had been triggered? Either way, there was no way to resolve the question immediately.

Kukung...! Kururung! Kung! The thunderous sound rang out repeatedly.

A fire pillar tore apart the clouds, and smoke which looked like a mushroom covered the sky. It was magic which would tear apart any defenses Theodore had. Despite such fearsome attacks being launched, the battle still hadn't finished.

Shortly after that, all sound was cut off like it had been sliced by a sword.

.....

Silence covered the night sky, and the burning flames were overwhelmed by the darkness of the night. A few burning treeS were the last remaining traces of the battle. The silence was so clear that the sound of someone gulping could be heard.

"...Is it over?" Someone asked.

The signal indicating the end of the battle hadn't risen yet. As the magicians of the 3rd Car waited for instructions, 'it' fell from the night sky.

Tok, todok, tok...

It was dark red and round. The ungainly shape rolled forward between the two wagons. Someone used 'Light' magic reflexively as the shape gradually grew clearer.

White hair turned to ashes, wrinkles distorted by burns, and eyes which were filled with fear...

A name escaped from Theodore's mouth, "...Elder Herman."

It was the head of Herman, who had been brutally murdered.

Chapter 74 – SUPERBIA

The magicians from the magic towers looked at each other and wondered if they were seeing a nightmare.

The sight of Herman's head rolling on the ground didn't feel like reality. He had lost a circle due to injury, but his capabilities was still equivalent to the 7th Circle. Yet eight war mages, including Herman, had been wiped out in just 10 minutes?

It was an opponent they absolutely couldn't afford to go against.

"2nd Car, get ready! 3rd Car, get down and enter the 6th Combat Formation! Don't hesitate!" A thunderous shout emerged from the person who regained their mind first. It was Anton, a veteran of the Blue Tower and the next highest ranking person in this convoy after Herman.

Having many years of experience on the battlefield, Anton knew that unexpected events could occur at any time. Thus, he made a cold judgment after the 1st Car was suddenly annihilated. He didn't forget to look ahead with observation magic while giving instructions.

However, Anton couldn't see beyond a physical barrier. "Tch, this is why fire-based magic is so annoying...!"

The flames from the fire magic were blocking his sight. The battlefield contained a distorted atmosphere due to the high temperatures, and the smoke rising from the trees and the flames

paralyzed his sight. It would take at least 30 more minutes until it returned to normal.

Anton abandoned the task of identifying the enemy's shape and moved quickly towards the 2nd Car. Then he grabbed the shoulder of Theodore, who was sitting next to Ellenoa.

"Hey, Newbie!"

"Yes?"

'What?' The reaction was better than Anton had expected. In this situation, Theodore's voice wasn't shaking at all. His calm eyes, breathing, and magic power didn't fit his age. Above all, Theo had the atmosphere of a person who had experienced 'real life.' The rumours about him being a great rookie seemed plausible.

After evaluating Theo, Anton spoke in a decisive voice, "Newbie, don't think about anything other than keeping her safe from now on. We will stay and buy as much time as possible at least until Veronica comes. Do you understand?!"

"I will do my best."

"You are an unusually careful person for a Red Tower magician. Okay, I'm going." Anton knocked against Theo's shoulder several times, then he pushed them into the wagon and shouted to the four magicians steering the 2nd Car, "Start right away! The direction doesn't matter, as long as you get as far as possible!"

At Anton's words, a terrifying gust of wind emerged from the palms of the drivers. The sails inflated again, and the wagon started running in the direction of the wind. As expected from the White Tower, they confidently increased the pace.

It dug roughly into the ground before disappearing from Anton's field of view. This was all he could do.

"Now, then..." Anton looked around at his colleagues, who were gathered in the formation unique to the Blue Tower.

Although their relationship with the Red Tower wasn't good, it was never malicious or hostile. Rather, it was closer than the relationships they had with the other towers because of their arguments.

In the 1st Car, there had been someone who came to the capital at around the same time as Anton. That man was a proud person, but Anton didn't hate him.

Wuoooooong...!

Unlike the Red Tower magicians who focused on firepower, the Blue Tower taught mainly about working in conjunction with each other. They had the ability to share magic and create a synergy which would maximize their strength. It was different in a one-on-one fight, but in a fight with many people, the Blue Tower absolutely didn't fall behind the Red Tower.

‘The enemy is coming.’ In the centre of the formation, Anton stared at the front with a firm expression.

Oddly enough, the mana was thinning. This was the sense of incongruity he felt before. This existence was on a totally different dimension from senior magicians and sword masters, as it could overwhelm the world with just its presence. His intuition noticed the enemy’s greatness before it even arrived.

Soon, ‘something’ came out of the darkness.

Anton gazed at it and spoke with a bitter smile, “…Hah, this place is my grave.”

None of the other magicians refuted him. Just the fact that he could still open his mouth meant that Anton deserved to be called the best magician here.

The intense fury they felt froze, but none of the seven magicians stepped back.

They began the battle where the outcome was already determined.

*

Dudududududu…! The gust wagon moved at a tremendous speed.

This was different from when they conserved strength for long-distance traveling. It was literally an acceleration using all their strength! The four 5th Circle magicians drew out all the magic power in their blood vessels, and this was the direct result of that.

Every time the wagon hit a stone, their bodies would go up a few meters, but the wagon continued running at full speed. There was no moment to spare for the high-speed driving.

The atmosphere inside the wagon was cold as well.

'An opponent that can kill Elder Herman is at least of the master level... There are few kingdoms which could such such power for a dangerous infiltration operation.' Theodore analyzed the situation calmly. When he faced a crisis, the experiences he absorbed were worth their weight in gold.

An unidentified opponent had appeared at the head of the convoy, blocked the path, and instantly annihilated the elite troops, including Elder Herman. A person who could do such a thing should be a sword master from the Andras Empire, one of the Seven Swords.

However, why would the Andras Empire take such a risk?

Based on the international situation, Theo immediately denied that possibility, 'No, even if one of the Seven Swords penetrated into Meltor, there is no guarantee that they can return. Why would they risk one of the pillars of the empire? That is crazy.'

Additionally, the Andras Empire couldn't get any benefits from a high elf, unlike Austen. Their relationship with Elvenheim would get worse, and they could even lose one of their precious sword masters. However, when he excluded the Seven Swords of the Empire, there was nobody left. It was preposterous that an unaffiliated master would be mobilized.

His logical reasoning couldn't reveal the shadows behind this situation. While Theo was frustrated over not finding an answer, the quiet Ellenoa opened her mouth, "That... Is something scary happening because of me?"

"Ellenoa."

"If I hadn't left the village... if I wasn't a high elf... this wouldn't have happened, right?"

It was a very cruel question to affirm. More than anything, Ellenoa already knew the answer without needing to hear Theo's reply. However, Theo didn't nod. Fortunately, he was still young and had the innocence of looking at the world through good and evil, not cause and effect. So, he was able to comfort Ellenoa.

Theodore grasped Ellenoa's hands gently like she had done to him before. "Don't blame yourself."

At the very least, she shouldn't feel guilty.

“You are just a victim. You are the victim who is being chased after by evil just because you are a high elf! Don’t act like you are the perpetrator of this.”

“B-But…”

“Or just feel sad. Don’t feel guilty.”

Even if all this happened because she was a high elf, the positions of perpetrator and victim couldn’t be reversed. No, it shouldn’t be. According to that logic, the ones in the wrong were the person scammed or the person murdered. It was something which Theodore could never agree to.

Ellenoa was astonished by his hard-line attitude, but she immediately nodded with a slight smile. At this moment when the atmosphere was about to loosen up…

Warak!

Theo ran desperately and hugged Ellenoa.

“T-Theodore!” Ellenoa blushed as she suddenly entered his arms, but that quickly faded away.

Theo was so pale that he almost looked bloodless. With a face that seemed like he wasn’t breathing, Theo quickly got up. His sensory perception told him that danger was nearing!

‘Impossible! It caught up already?!’

Not only had it broken through the elites of the 3rd Car, it had caught up with the wagon which was moving at the maximum speed!

A sword master’s physical abilities might be called strange, but the enemy approaching this wagon was a monster which deviated from common sense. It wasn’t possible with the legs of a human. Then a cold chill on his neck pierced that thought.

There wasn’t even time to speak a word of warning.

Chill.

The illusion of the reaper’s scythe was at his neck.

“Protection!” Theodore screamed the spell and jumped out of the gust wagon. Within his arms, Ellenoa was surely protected as Theo threw himself out of the fast-paced wagon. The damage from the drop and collision with the ground was huge, causing the 5th Circle defense spell to be half broken.

However, his judgment was correct. The moment the two of them escaped from the gust wagon, a huge shadow fell on top of the roof.

‘…!!!’

It was like a meteor had fallen from the sky as the gust wagon was smashed. A large shock wave spread from the impact of the collision with the trees nearby, forcing Theo to use defense magic again.

‘What is with that shock wave…!?’

The shock wave wasn’t magic but a phenomenon generated due to a surge of pure physical power!

Theo’s stricken face looked at the dust which had risen at the point of collision. He could even believe it if this shock wave were the enemy’s attack. If he hadn’t used defense magic, Theo’s and Ellenoa’s guts would be crushed like rotten tomatoes.

Theo managed to survive the attack and stepped back a few meters with Ellenoa.

He had no thoughts about running away. Theo was just overwhelmed by the eerie presence which could be sensed from within the cloud of dust. Whatever it was, it wasn’t something which could be faced with the power of the duo.

A sharp fear pushed down his curiosity. He would rather have that dust cloud cover his eyes forever. However, the wind blew it away.

Hwiuooong...

As the dust settled, the first thing he saw was the crushed wreckage of the gust wagon. There were traces of blood from the drivers everywhere as well as a gruesome shape in the corner.

Theo clenched his teeth as he faced the wriggling shadow. Finally, the identity of the assailant was revealed to the two people.

'...Ah.' Theodore Miller understood now.

This was the incarnation of death, the materialization of fear in a solid form. It wasn't a human. No, it wasn't like any creature he knew. The ugly and powerful monster was too ambiguous and disorderly to name. It couldn't be called anything but chaos.

With eight twitching legs, the lower half of its body resembled a spider. The body itself consisted of a mixture of leather and carapace. There was a scorpion-like tail which scattered blue lightning, and four different claws bit at the air.

No, that was wrong too. The strange body changed its appearance to the parts of other creatures. It now had the arm of an ogre and the horns of a minotaur. Like a wyvern, wings sprouted from its back, but scales covered its skin.

The unidentified monster turned Theo's and Ellenoa's minds blank.

However, there was a separate existence which responded to the appearance of the monster.

–Hrmm.

A hole appeared on Theo's left palm, and a low voice was transmitted in a low-frequency range which insects could hear. The greedy grimoire, Gluttony, growled in a voice which was several times more unpleasant than usual.

-Pride, that disgusting appearance of yours still hasn't changed.

The monster approaching them suddenly stopped in place. It looked confused by Gluttony's voice, then it suddenly hit its head with a sharp claw. The behaviour looked like an act of self-harm, but a mouth appeared in the previously smooth head. Then like Gluttony, it started to talk in a low frequency.

–You still have the habit of being attached to inferior species like humans, Gluttony.

Chapter 75 – A Traditional Hero (1)

Ellenoa was surprised by the monster's sudden stop, but as Theodore shared senses with Gluttony, he could hear the conversation between Gluttony and Pride. The voices which spoke in the low-frequency range were not at all gentle. The disgust they had toward each other was clear and out in the open.

In particular, Pride (Superbia) spoke with outright disdain, –You are still obsessed with inferior monkeys. It is shameful to classify you as one of the Seven Sins. What is the value of those who rely on time and luck?

–Beauty and intellect is a concept that a mass of flesh like you won't understand.

Gluttony didn't back down and gave as good as it got.

–No matter how you collect and combine genetic factors, you are still limited to living creatures. You are nothing but a loser who has given up on surpassing the limits of a species. Gathering the best parts of creatures, isn't that nothing more than a chimera?

–Nonsense! Pride dismissed Gluttony, speaking with the arrogance it was named after.

Now, the vocal range was lowered even further. The sound caused Theo and Ellenoa to feel discomfort as they sat down. The unheard shout broke the spirits of the two people. It was a terrifying threat associated with Dragon Fear, something which

appeared in forgotten legends.

“Cough!” Theo coughed up some blood. Following the series of shock waves, his circles were strongly shaken by Pride’s shouts. If a human didn’t know magic or aura, their heart would’ve stopped.

The enemy’s very existence was different, allowing Theo to feel the gap directly with his body.

‘Damn it. What the hell is this monster? Why is it attacking us?!’ Theo’s hysterical question was thrown out without him expecting an answer.

-The autonomous maneuver type grimoire, Superbia. Like me, it belongs in the Seven Sins set. If the attribute I symbolize is [Gluttony], then it is [Pride]. It is a ‘species usurper specialist’ and is made up of the species it eats.

Gluttony returned with a clear answer as always.

Theo quickly picked out some keywords and asked another question. He had a feeling that this information would determine the life and death of the two of them. ‘Usurping species? Is that Pride’s power?’

–That’s right.

Theodore listened without missing a single word.

-Just like I am a grimoire that collects magic books, it is a grimoire that collects creatures. It has the ability to store the genetic information of a species, regardless of the individual performance of the organism. Once it eats a sample of a species, it can reproduce the innate traits of that species.

'The innate traits?'

–For example, a troll's regeneration or an ogre's muscular strength.

That was enough. Theo's expression turned into one of fright as he understood Pride's power.

Pride had the ability to eat a species and gain its best traits! It wasn't inferior to Gluttony's ability to extract essences from magic books or magic power from artifacts. No, it might even be superior when it came to fighting.

Moreover, based on the horrible creature, the traits which could be reproduced didn't stop at just one or two.

'How many traits can it use at the same time?'

–Hmm. Gluttony looked at Pride for a moment before replying. –It has already unlocked four seals. Right now, it can use five combined... User, do you mean to fight Pride?

‘What choice do I have?’

–There is no need. He didn’t come to eat us.

‘What?’

The one who answered Theo’s question wasn’t Gluttony, but Superbia who had been thinking about something.

–Well, it is good. It is a waste of time to chat like this.

The eight legs started advancing. As the ugly form leapt forward, Theo naturally stepped out in front of Ellenoa and raised his magic power. Theo’s sensory perception was telling him to run away, but his human instincts made him act. He couldn’t seem to run away after thinking of the sacrifices the senior magicians had made.

Then Superbia asked in a strange voice, –What are you doing, Gluttony? I came to eat a high elf. I have no interest in a monkey.

“...Don’t make me laugh.” Theo ignored his spasm of fear, and while staring at Superbia, he declared firmly, “I won’t give anything to you.”

It was a courageous action which deserved a standing ovation.

-Then die. The predator sentenced him to death without any hesitation.

Pride changed in an instant. Its eight spider legs turned into four horse legs, while the upper body became a weird mixture of a locust and grasshopper. It quickly shifted to three traits which would produce results: a centaur's lower body; a storm locust's wings; and a spriggan's acceleration ability.

–Swaeeeeek!

It moved beyond the barrier of sound as the hooves, containing enough destructive power to crush steel, slammed toward Theodore's body.

'Ah, I'm doomed.' Theo was sure he would die from the blow.

His body couldn't even grasp the timing of the acceleration of the huge body, let alone respond to the attack. So, it wasn't Theodore who responded to the death blow, but the instincts of Lee Yoonsung who was sleeping inside him.

Kwaduduk...!

The skill, Protection Bangle, was activated. Three shields unfolded around Theo's body in a reflexive manner, then Theo used his magic power.

'Battle Song.

‘Last Requiem.

‘Presto.’

Battle Song revolved all five circles and improved his reaction speed to the maximum for a moment.

The monster’s horse hooves were crazy fast, and Theo sank deep into his consciousness in order to use a secret technique to survive. It was one of the most advanced techniques in the eastern martial arts, Force Dispersion. (TL: literal meaning is using 4 taels of force to win against 1000 jin, or using a little amount of force to win over a greater force)

Theo’s two arms moved at a dizzying speed.

Paaaang!

Despite alleviating a lot of the damage, Theo was thrown back like his arms were broken. The shock wave, which threw Theo, shattered seven trees and the rocks behind him. If the shock wave had hit him directly, it would’ve wreaked havoc on his body!

“Cough!”

Although the the attack hadn’t even hit Theo, it snapped several of his ribs. While sitting down, Theo used healing magic. He was pushed to Ellenoa’s side due to the shock wave, but he was too shocked to be aware of it.

It was commendable that Theodore had managed to defend himself, but he couldn't do it again. He couldn't afford to be hit by Superbia even once.

'If I get hit one more time… I will die.'

Putting aside winning or losing, Theo would just die. Superbia's resistance was at least of the master level. Considering Theo's luck, winning wasn't even an option. He would just struggle desperately until he died like a bug. There was a terrible gap in strength between Superbia and Theodore.

However, Superbia laughed at Theo on the ground before giving one last ridiculing remark.

–You are quite good for a monkey. I will forgive this once.

It didn't say anything else as its eyes stared at Theodore. There were six pairs of compound eyes which could observe 360 degrees. The red light coming from the eyes induced a horror which humans couldn't face. Their minds would likely be broken by the sight.

As for Theo, he could stay as he was. Then he could survive. It might be cowardly, but survival was his first priority. Gluttony had advised Theo that he could survive if he just stayed still. Gluttony whispered like a snake for Theo to turn away from the high elf shivering by his side. It wasn't a bad thing to run away.

‘…I’m crazy.’ Theodore smiled and slapped his cheeks hard.

Jjak! Blood filled his mouth, but that was good.

Theo didn’t have to listen to this voice. The magic, which had subsided due to fear and powerlessness, began to boil again. Still, there was no chance of winning, so Theo asked his companion for advice, ‘Gluttony.’

–What?

‘Tell me how to defeat it. No, it is okay if I can’t win. Teach me how to beat up that son of a bitch.’

Despite being a grimoire like Gluttony, the opponent was an independent monster which didn’t need a user. If so, Theo wouldn’t be able to catch it unless Gluttony cooperated.

Feeling Theo’s strong intentions, Gluttony asked in an uncomfortable voice, –Why User? Why try so hard? This high elf isn’t that precious to you.

‘I’m not fighting for that reason.’

If Theo compromised once, it was easy to do so a second time. The third time would be even easier. Theodore Miller would become someone who was alive due to his cowardice. He would

rather die of his own will than become a cowardly bystander.

Theo's voice, filled with a determination to die, was transmitted strongly to Gluttony, whom Theo was connected to.

This was a foolish, irrational judgment. However, Gluttony drawn to the unknown choice. -...Okay. I will pay the price in advance. This is the first time I've had a user like you.

Gluttony's previous users had always been cold, and their goal in life had always been to become a master of magic. There had been many magicians who filled these pages to the end and died without leaving a name behind. However, none of them had tried to fight to the end for their own beliefs. Perhaps this strange user might show Gluttony what it hadn't found in the meantime.

The original sin, which collected wisdom, made a gamble for the first time.

[Error! Error! Unauthorized request. The 4th Seal has been released through an unusual means.]

[Gluttony's function has been opened forcibly. The user should check the information window of the corresponding function immediately. However, this function was unlocked via an abnormal path.]

[Grimoire “Gluttony” / C Rank]

[Gluttony’s 4th Seal was released through unusual means. From now onward, the user can borrow the power of an author which Gluttony has extracted. However, once the author has been overwritten, the author can’t be loaded twice.]

[The C Rank ‘Overwrite’ has been triggered!]

[The object ‘Alfred Bellontes’ has been loaded into the user’s body.]

Alfred Bellontes was the war hero who had murdered thousands of soldiers during the Bellontes Empire’s Revolutionary War half a century ago, and his reputation had become widespread.

Even master level opponents had avoided fighting him, and he had been called a genius of battle. As Alfred’s ego, who had been sleeping deeply, overwhelmed Theodore’s body and soul, a blue light appeared at Theo’s fingers.

This was the fourth function of Gluttony, the greedy grimoire.

At that moment, a hero from the history books returned to the present age.

Chapter 76 - A Traditional Hero (2)

–Hmm?

Simultaneously, Superbia noticed the changes happening to Theodore's body.

Its senses exceeded a human's by dozens or perhaps hundreds of times, so it could catch even the slightest differences. The analysis was completed instantly, covering the amount of sweat, the speed of the pulse, the body temperature, and the expansion and contraction of pupils.

'Oddly enough, the fear in the monkey's body has disappeared.' Superbia was puzzled.

–You… What type of trick are you playing?

Any creature had to be afraid of Superbia, since it was at the apex of the food chain. It didn't matter what the creature's individual strength was as they would be filled with an instinctive fear. Magicians and aura users were no exception, even for those beyond a certain level, and it was the same with monkeys. Unable to understand the phenomenon, Superbia felt uncomfortable.

Theodore slowly raised his body. He lifted his right hand, which was ridiculously small in comparison to Superbia's claws. Then…

Paang! A flash emerged from his index finger and broke into

Superbia's skull.

"...Ah?" Ellenoa, who wasn't breathing well, couldn't help opening her mouth. It was because the sight of the head being broken wasn't realistic. For a normal creature, it would be an instantaneous death blow.

Theodore—no, Alfred looked down at the body with clear eyes after striking the blow.

He nodded and clenched his fingers. 'Wise. You realized that it was better to pick me.'

At the present time, there were only two authors Theo could summon with [Overwrite], Alfred and Lee Yoonsung. In the case of Myrdal, the option to use the Overwrite function with him never came up, so Theo only had one of two choices. Theo was torn between Lee Yoonsung and Alfred, but he eventually made his decision... and Magic Bullet's Creator, the war hero Alfred Bellontes, was loaded.

Gududuk...gududuk...

However, a monster which had killed dozens of elite magicians couldn't fall to such degree of damage.

The flesh at the bottom of the head started growing back, and the bones rising from the neck were completed. The regeneration was almost like a reversal of time. There was a cold light in Alfred's

eyes as he watched the bizarre phenomenon in front of him.

‘It is more than a troll. This isn’t regeneration but closer to immortality… It isn’t an enemy I can win by killing.’

That was the mistake Herman and the other convoy magicians had made. In order to completely destroy the monster, a master level or someone with Veronica’s or Blundell’s firepower was needed. If they had just focused on tying up its feet thoroughly, the magicians in the 1st and 3rd Cars wouldn’t have been killed.

–You bastard. Monkey, you…! A horrific low frequency scream emerged from Superbia, whose face was already half recovered.

The flesh the monster now had was different, but it still stared at him with six pairs of compound eyes. The fact that it had been attacked by a mere monkey scratched its pride. The will to kill was immediately reflected in its form.

‘Ogre’s power. Minotaur’s power. Cyclops’ power.’

Superbia’s body suddenly swelled up.

It grew beyond three meters and was twice as wide, while the muscle fibres rose above the skin to cover the whole body. Red tendons and muscles tangled together like rope to create a form boiling with murderous impulses.

The incarnation of violence raised an arm which was thicker

than a log.

-■■■■■■—!!

The monster’s four fists struck the ground with a furious roar.

-——————————————!!!

It was literally a great destruction! The earth cracked and shook in the places where Superbia’s fists hit. The sound of the world crying out rang loudly as Alfred jumped up while holding Ellenoa. The shock wave was transmitted through the ground and would explode their insides if it hit them!

“Ellenoa!”

“Yes, yes!?!” Ellenoa replied involuntarily to the powerful voice.

“I will blow you away! Take care of your landing!”

There was no time for a reply. Alfred pulled out wind magic from Theo’s memories.

He used Gust Wind, a blast which could blow a person away like a leaf. Combining that with Superbia’s shock wave, it wasn’t difficult to fly a few hundred meters. He needed to use this interval to shift Ellenoa to a safe distance away.

So, Alfred blew Ellenoa away without any hesitation.

“Kyaaak!” Ellenoa shrieked with an absurd expression as she was pushed and sent disappearing into the night sky. Alfred was anxious about the landing, but it wouldn’t be a problem for a high elf who was loved by nature. He also kicked away from the epicenter of the destruction as he continued to think.

However, as soon as he landed on the ground…

Huuung!

A huge fist emerged from the dust cloud. It was enough power to push away the dust using wind pressure alone!

This hit was three times more powerful than the first. If he were hit with this, he would disappear without a trace. So, Alfred gave up on attacking and concentrated all his strength on his chest. This was the body technique received from Lee Yoonsung—the Iron Board technique.

A red pillar stretched up before his upper body at 90 degrees.

Pik!

He got a nosebleed as the huge fist hit him. However, he raised a hand to his nose while throwing himself to the right. It was overwhelming just being near the violence. As he attempted to open the gap, the monster stretched out the other three fists at the

same time.

Aldred smiled coldly as he faced the wall of death. “Fool.”

His body accelerated, momentarily appearing like a haze.

‘Battle Song. Sonata of Speed. Vivace.’

Moving one beat faster meant he would die. Moving two beats faster also meant he would die. If that was the case, then he would move three or four beats faster.

Alfred dispersed the force of the three fists more precisely and accurately than the inexperienced Theodore would have done. He penetrated the gap, which was the size of a needle hole, without any error. Alfred moved like he was dancing and dug toward Superbia’s chest.

Then his hand, which was sharp like a spear, pierced the monster’s chest.

Puhwakak!

The four Magic Bullets, fired from every digit of the right hand, except for the thumb, cut through the muscles covering the monster’s heart.

–■■■■■——!! Superbia’s body started glowing from the terrible

pain.

One attack from Superbia would break down the human body instantly. It would be over in one blow. Just a light scratch would cause a severe injury. Then the human's breath would be cut off in the following attack. On the other hand, Alfred had the battle penalty of not being able to kill his opponent.

Despite that, the hero was dancing like a storm in front of the monster.

–This rat bastard!

Neither of Superbia's attacks with its fists or feet worked. Alfred avoided the punches and kicks, and then brutally attacked any gaps which were exposed. It was the essence of a marksman to pierce the vital points. With simple attacks, Superbia was just Alfred's prey.

Alfred sent Superbia a look of derision. 'If you can't die, I'll just turn you into a living beehive.'

If it continued like this, Alfred would be able to endure for an hour or two. Every time a flash was fired from his fingers, the monster struggled while the hero firmly defended his superiority.

However, that thought was soon overturned.

*

Exactly five minutes later…

-….Indeed, I know your trashy trick now.

Its pride was more important than anything else, but Superbia's intelligence was absolutely not low. Just as Alfred observed it, Superbia was also watching Alfred. This was the type of prey which should be hunted.

As Superbia transitioned into another form, Alfred felt a chill run down his spine.

Crunch… crunch…

Its front legs were like that of an octopus while the tail was like a blade. This was a shape which completely deviated from the human form.

Alfred was able to overwhelm Superbia because he had anticipated its behaviour. It wasn't difficult to know the timing by reading the movements of the muscles, joints, and cartilages since they resembled humans, no matter how strong they were.

However, he didn't know the characteristics of the monster. so his responses would be delayed.

–Die.

Shortly after that, the space was cut horizontally. It was Caracalos' blade tail!

Alfred jumped backwards reflexively, but blood still sprang from a cut in his chest. He didn't receive a scar due to most of the power being blocked by the fabric, but if his response had been a bit late, his heart would've been split in two.

This time, Theo's knowledge had saved him. Caracalos was a dangerous A rank monster which inhabited the southern swamps. Its tail was small but contained mithril, so it was well known as a weapon which could slash through any metal or defense spell.

'Damn it, that is more than an aura user.' Alfred clicked his tongue as he came to know the information belatedly. He had lived in the north all his life, so he'd had no interest in the southern creatures. Moreover, he hadn't read books like Theodore.

If surprise attacks like this kept on happening, it would be difficult to hold out for 10 minutes, let alone an hour.

Therefore, Alfred talked to 'him,' who was watching. 'Boy, can you hear me?'

–I can hear you. Speak. It was Theodore Miller, the owner of the body.

The two men, who were like the front and back of a coin, finally

looked at each other.

Although Alfred was using Theodore's body, he couldn't fully utilize his abilities as the skills acquired by Memorize or the artifacts thoroughly belonged to Theodore Miller. Alfred Bellontes was a stranger in Theo's body, so there were limitations.

'From now on, I will deeply connect to your consciousness. I need your consent to do that.'

–Sure, I agree.

'That is a fast response. Is it okay to decide so quickly when you don't even know what side effects there will be? Connecting my consciousness to yours can be dangerous, even if I am inferior when it comes to magical knowledge.' The blonde man looking at Theo with an anxious face.

Alfred's appearance remained unchanged in the world of their consciousness. He had the majesty of royalty and the dignity of a warrior who had been called a hero.

Theo felt strangely impressed as he slowly nodded. He was determined from the moment he decided to fight that monster.

'...I respect your will, Boy.'

There was no way to withdraw anyway. It had reached the point where Theo needed to rush to the end... at least until Ellenoa's

safety was guaranteed, or when Veronica arrived. Until then, he needed to protect himself from the death appearing before him. Gambling with the hero's soul was better than having a worthless death.

Then at that moment...

[Object name 'Alfred Bellontes' and the user 'Theodore Miller' have perfectly harmonized their consciousness. The Overwrite function has been stopped. The user's self might become contaminated.]

[Hidden feature 'Transmission' has been activated.]

[If Transmission is successful, the fragment of Alfred Bellontes will be completely restored. If you fail, you will lose all the skills you have acquired from the essences. The mental shock can also cause the self-destruction of your ego.]

[Are you sure you want to approve 'Transmission'? – Y/N]

Theo didn't hesitate, even with the creepy advice.

"Transmission!" As he answered, two flashes of light sprang from the dark mental world. One was the soul of the majestic and brilliant hero, while the other was the soul of a body not yet fully grown. The two lights danced erratically in the air before

becoming one stream.

Kiiing!

It seemed like a lightning bolt struck Theodore Miller’s head.

Chapter 77 – A Traditional Hero (3)

Gluttony's 4th stage function, Transmission, was the core of Overwrite, and it was literally a double-edged sword. If it was successful, it would give Theo more of the author's ability, beyond the little which had been extracted from the essence. However, if it failed, he would lose all the abilities he had obtained previously and, in turn, receive a mental blow.

Theodore was currently standing on a perilous cliff.

'...?'

The focus completely disappeared from his eyes, and his body lost its vitality. The whirling memories swirling in his head forced him to cut down his five senses. He couldn't tell where Alfred Bellontes' memories ended and where Theodore Miller's memories began. As the boundaries between their egos collapsed, their memories mixed together into a mess. Theo's mentality didn't fit his age, but it was hard for him to completely accept the hero's soul.

Somehow, Theo managed to form a mental structure which captured the broken egos, but the mental challenge caused his eyes to become bloodshot.

'This... Hang on...!'

If he didn't look back on himself constantly, it was likely that he would forget who he was. Even though it was only a fragment,

Alfred's soul overwhelmed Theo's consciousness, and the memories and abilities drove Theo's body to the brink. His senses expanded, producing what seemed to be short-term visions of the near future, and it also made him feel dizzy.

However, if this continued, he wouldn't even last five minutes before being overwhelmed. It was a reality which couldn't be reversed through will and determination; it was the predicted ending for an idiot who couldn't figure out his limits.

Funnily enough, it was Pride who rescued him.

–How dare you ignore me when I'm right in front of you!

While Theo was engulfed by the confusion of his mind, Superbia became furious and attacked him.

The flesh of the predator unintentionally stimulated Theo's survival instincts. The heart which had stopped moving started beating again, while his loosened nerves and muscles became taut and filled with tension.

Focus returned to Theodore's empty eyes as the sound of the tail sliced through the air. This time, it was aiming for Theo's neck instead of his heart. It was a blow which even Alfred couldn't avoid completely, so the willpower of the two people facing death became perfectly matched up.

Kiiing-

Theo moved one beat ahead. The tail, which was capable of tearing steel apart, fell before him. Even if he managed to deflect half the trajectory, his neck would still get sliced. Nevertheless, Theo was confident he could avoid it as he ducked and the sound passed over his head. A few strands of hair were sliced off and scattered around.

–It is a useless effort! Superbia stretched out its forelimbs, which looked like tentacles, at a terrifying speed.

They didn't reach the speed of sound, but there were 27 of them. It was a 360-degree attack which made evasion impossible. The number and range completely surpassed Theo's mobility.

However, Theodore observed the tentacles with a calm expression. 'This is the acid roper from the western swamps... Its tentacles will melt the human body immediately.'

The tentacles, which emitted strongly acidic slime, came from a predator in the swamps. They were light, so getting hit by the tentacles wouldn't hurt, but the slime which melted bones and muscles was a really terribly weapon.

However, Theo had read about the weakness of the acid roper in the encyclopedia before, so he raised both his arms up without retreating.

'Battle Song. Rhapsody of Power. Forte.'

Simultaneously, one additional magic wrapped around his arms. “Enchant-Burning Hands!”

From his fingertips to his elbows, Theodore’s arm burned with a red flame. The focused magic power would turn anything it made contact with into charcoal. It was enough to evaporate the acid before it touched the skin!

The blazing fists hit the tentacles aiming for him. Papang! Bang! Papang!

This was different from the fluidity of Lee Yoonsung. Alfred had learned practical fighting techniques directly. They were strikes which utilized the fists, back of the hands, and the elbows. His strikes left behind a dim haze as he knocked away the 27 tentacles.

-What?! Superbia hadn’t expected its attack to be overcome, so it couldn’t hide its surprise.

If Theodore hadn’t used Transmission, then he might have died right then. Alfred lacked knowledge and magic, while Theodore lacked the boldness and combat senses of a warrior. So, this was a response made possible only due to the combined abilities of the two.

After defending against the tentacles and blade tail, Theo received a clear view of Superbia.

‘Memorize. Two Slots Open. Volcanic Shell.’

The Volcanic Shells hit its upper body directly.

Kwaang!

There was a large shock wave. Theo used the momentum of that shock wave to widen his distance from Superbia. He was able to gain a temporary advantage, but he didn’t have a chance of winning this battle. The next time, Superbia could come up with a creature he didn’t know about.

Once Theodore was 20 meters away, he saw the mass of flesh taking on a new form.

‘Its regeneration is pretty fast even though the upper body was completely crushed… Seems that master level destructiveness is truly required to defeat it.’

He couldn’t deal the final blow. Theodore bit his lips as he realized this once again. Inferno was the only magic he had which surpassed the destructiveness of Volcanic Shell, and he didn’t think that it could completely erase Superbia’s whole body as it had survived the bombardment of Elder Herman and the other war mages.

Unsurprisingly, Superbia quickly recovered. After the damage areas of the head were restored, Superbia glared at Theo. Magic Bullet, Burning Hands, Volcanic Shell… they were the means of

attack which worked against it.

–I see. Your style is shock and fire, Superbia muttered in small voice, then it started to reassemble its traits accordingly. Its nickname of ‘peak predator’ wouldn’t fit it if all it used was violence. The true power of Superbia was its ability to eliminate its own weakness and neutralize the opponent’s strength.

The use of flames as a weapon had appeared all over the world, along with the means to neutralize it.

‘A red drake’s scales, a chroma turtle’s carapace, a salamander’s heat-proof skin, and a hellhound’s body.’

Crunch…. Crunchhh… Crunch….

Three traits were applied to the body of a hellhound which was emitting heat. The red drake’s scales appeared on top of the salamander skin that shone with a light red, while a black shell wrapped around Superbia’s fragile face and joints.

This was the form which had slaughtered the eight war mages, including Herman.

–I made you wait, Monkey.

A red light shone in Superbia’s eyes. Once it took this form, even swimming in lava was possible. The combination of the three qualities could neutralize 6th Circle fire magic, making it a deadly

enemy for Theodore.

If Theo's attacks didn't work at all, it would be nothing but a public execution. The only thing which could break through was Magic Bullet, and that depended on pure destructive power.

Piing!

As he thought this, a blue light emerged from Theo's index finger and struck Superbia's head.

Jjejeok.

The black shell wrapped around Superbia's face split slightly.

–Kuhuhu, that tickles.

Not a single drop of blood emerged. It was evidence that Magic Bullet couldn't pierce the carapace wrapped around it. Theo stiffened as his intuition felt it. That wasn't the maximum output, but it still contained a considerable amount of power. The shell of the unknown creature was simply too hard.

The monster roared with the assurance of its superiority.

–■■■■■■■———!!!

The noise also caused a vibration. The huge roar caused the earth to shake, and any beast which heard it froze. Theodore's eardrums burst as he used healing magic, and he momentarily frowned from the pain.

Kuuong!

The monster kicked off against the ground and plunged toward Theodore.

'Dammit!'

Its movements was several times faster than that of a human or beast. The monster was over 5 meters in length, but it crossed a few dozen meters in the blink of an eye. Indeed, in just three steps, Superbia erased that gap Theo had opened.

Its long sword-like claws were now lunging toward Theo.

Swaaack!

Three lines were drawn at the spot where Theo had just been standing, and the cut stones split apart. The claws were as sharp as swords and contained a massive weight. It was horrifying to see leaves split apart just from the wind pressure.

Every time Superbia swung its claws, a few trees were cut to pieces, and empty spaces appeared in an instant. In the end, four claws sliced at Theo.

–Um?

However, that Theo scattered like a mirage. As the illusion of Theodore faded, his form could be seen breathing heavily in the distance.

It was a skill he had saved until now—Illusion Track. It was the ability to leave an illusion of himself. This was a successful trick because Superbia had concentrated all its traits on physical abilities.

‘Perhaps I can do it twice more. Damn, it’s too good to waste like this.’

He didn’t have time to take measures and ended up using one of his hidden cards. Illusion Track had saved his life, but it had wasted one of Theo’s hidden cards.

Just like how Magic Bullet and fire magic lost their usefulness, the ability would become irrelevant once it was shown to Superbia. He needed extraordinary tactics and methods which hadn’t been displayed yet.

…Yes, there was one tactic and method he had yet to show.

Theodore looked down at his hands and spoke in an uncertain tone, “Is it possible?”

Right now, his body was in an extremely unstable state. It was the limit of Alfred and Theo's strength as their memories and spirits continued to mix and scatter. If the two people hadn't united to take care of Superbia, their egos would've collapsed together already.

However, neither Theodore nor Alfred had thought of this tactic until now. If it were successful, even that monster couldn't escape a deadly injury.

"Well, let's try it once, Prince Alfred."

Theo nodded and smiled as he heard, 'A man shouldn't avoid a challenge.'

It was the temperament of a hero. The innate qualities of Alfred Bellontes were blooming inside of Theodore Miller. Heroes always won at the crossroads of fate and did what people deemed were impossible.

If so, his victory would be decided at this moment.

As Theodore gathered up all of his remaining magic power, a relentless heat rushed through him.

Chapter 78 – A Traditional Hero (4)

That body's length was over five meters and its weight was estimated to be in the tonnes. Just being hit by that body would turn a human body into chunks of meat. The creature roared wildly while jumping forward.

–■■■■■■■…!!!

The huge roar caused Theo's already burst eardrums to throb. However, he didn't have time to care about such minor pain. Theo stared at what was before him without moving a single strand of hair on his eyebrows.

Judging by its movements a while ago, Superbia's power was two steps ahead of Theo's vision. So, Theo couldn't afford to blink even once. The monster took two steps on the ground.

Huuk!

Then the shape of the monster expanded suddenly. No, it only appeared to be growing because it was approaching so rapidly. As Superbia's body neared Theo, it pushed off from the ground.

Kwaang!

The solid ground became broken like a grilled pancake. The spot where Theodore had been standing split apart like a spider web as Superbia landed. The shock caused a small earthquake, and Theo's

body wobbled for a moment. Superbia's claws didn't miss this moment and tore his body into dozens of pieces.

However, Theodore's body once again scattered like a haze. This time, it wasn't just a single use of Illusion Track. A total of 12 Theodores appeared around Superbia. The sophisticated illusion that couldn't be distinguished from reality was the power of the artifact which symbolized the legendary thief, Orwell.

However, Superbia just laughed instead of panicking.

–You… I knew you were going to do this again.

The ability of the peak predator, Pride, allowed it to form countermeasures for anything it saw once. As such, it now had flames which could melt rocks, a tail which was sharper than a blade, and a shell which was harder than steel.

However, it was the same for countering the illusions. The ability to deceive the eyes of other creatures was unexpectedly common, while the ability to see through deception was rare but not impossible to find.

Another red eye appeared in the middle of Superbia's face—the eye of the observer.

It was the eye of a famous creature known as the 'magician killer.' The one eyeball could see any magic which entered its field of view and counter it. Without magic power, Superbia could only

reproduce its insight ability, but that was enough.

Soon, Superbia's vision revealed the truth of the illusions. Among the 12 people, the real Theodore...?

-None?!

Superbia stiffened. The 12 figures were all illusions, and there was no sign of the body which had created them. Before Superbia could understand the situation, it felt something underneath its chin. It was a really light sensation. However, above all, it gave Superbia a frightening chill.

"...It took me a while."

It was impossible to amaze Superbia with anything new. So, Theo had used a lavish spectacle as bait.

Pride was used to being the strongest, so it had never expected a counterattack to come when its opponent was in a clearly disadvantageous position. What could Theodore do when his flames as well as his greatest weapon, Magic Bullet, were blocked?

'I can't break through the normal way. But...!'

The expression on his face proved this wasn't a meaningless struggle or approach.

‘Battle Song. Rhapsody of Power. Sforzando.’

Theo only strengthened his right arm. As the muscles swelled, his sleeves were torn apart, exposing the raised blood vessels. The effect of forcibly strengthening his body was revealed, but it was still good. If he didn’t do this, he wouldn’t be able to withstand the shock.

[In fact, Magic Bullet is an incomplete magic. To be more accurate, it is a magic that can’t be completed.] Alfred Bellontes had said so.

There was a limitation because his fingers couldn’t cope with the strong backlash of Magic Bullet. However, if he used his palm, then the pressure and range of Magic Bullet would be greatly reduced. The bonus was that the arm he used would be destroyed by the enormous repulsion. It was a defective spell which could only wreak havoc at a medium distance.

Therefore, he plunged into the monster’s arm and used a desperate method.

‘Memorize. All Slots Open. Magic Missile-Penta United.’

All five Magic Bullets stored at maximum power gathered in the palm of his right hand. Even though Theo felt like his right forearm was going to burst, he was able to somehow endure it thanks to the strengthening. In addition to this, he compressed one more Magic Bullet into his palm.

There was now a huge six shots in his palm. One blow concentrated at six times the power would be able to penetrate any 6th Circle defense spell.

Bududuk…buduk…

His muscles were torn as blood flowed from the skin. This was a strong blow which wasn't possible unless he sacrificed an arm. Theodore stared into Superbia's eyes and used all his strength.

"Die…!"

There was a blue flash of light which surpassed even Alfred's prime.

*

A flash of light soared into the night sky of the Nadun Mountains. In contrast to lightning which fell from the sky, the flash of light rose from the ground and penetrated straight through the clouds. Of course, this light was the trail left behind by Theodore's Magic Bullet.

Theodore lay on the ground and looked up. 'Succe…ss.'

The body of the beast which had lost its head was struggling. Black blood sprayed like a fountain, covering the scales and carapace. Despite its fearful defense, it couldn't withstand Magic Bullet which had been amplified six times. In the end, Superbia's

body fell to the ground.

Theodore chuckled when he saw it. “One blow, I did it properly.”

[Yes, well done.] Alfred smiled from inside Theodore and knocked on his shoulder.

It was a power which would’ve been impossible to achieve if they hadn’t worked together. They had fought well against the monster which was a Seven Sins grimoire. If he had made a wrong judgment, then it would be Theodore with his head missing right now.

As a result, the winner and loser had been decided. Of course, the loser was Theodore who couldn’t kill Superbia, and the winner was Superbia who had survived a number of fatal blows.

Kududuk...! Kudu...! Kududuk...!

With an unpleasant sound, a skull rose up in the empty space, and flesh, muscles, and nerves covered it as the head started to regain its original shape.

As Alfred had said, this wasn’t in the realm of regeneration but immortality. No matter how well the two people fought, they couldn’t beat it. In the first place, Theodore and Alfred lacked a way to destroy that huge body without leaving a trace of it behind.

–Your last hurrah ends here. Superbia’s voice was convinced of

its victory.

Why did it need to be agitated in front of its food which had already lost strength? Superbia laid a sharp claw at Theo's neck. It wasn't dumb enough to leave this threat alive. Superbia would tear off the head of the being which irritated it and then eat slowly.

'Well, it is just up to here. I fought well.' Theodore closed his eyes in the face of death. He felt a bit sad about his parents, but he believed that his mentor would take care of them.

Finally, Superbia's sharp claw moved.

Kakang!

It was quite a cheerful sound for someone's head being cut off. As he thought this,

"...Kid." It was a cold but beautiful voice.

"T-Tower Master...?"

"Sorry, I'm too late."

Theo opened his eyes hurriedly and saw Veronica, whose red robe was flapping in the wind.

She had spoken in a heavily subdued voice, which made him wonder what she'd seen on the way. Blood was dripping from Veronica's firmly closed fists, and Theodore thought the blood almost looked like her tears.

Veronica moved forward, toward the monster before her.

"Wait a bit. I'll end it quickly."

Shortly after that...

Kwaang!

Something was waving like a worm from Superbia's crushed head. The half skull and crushed eye looked like a frog which had been hit with a hammer. Superbia was one beat too late to recognize the damage. Then as it opened its mouth to scream...

"Be a sword, fire of purgatory." Veronica summoned a sword of fire—Inferno Blade. She used a spell which compressed Inferno into the form of a sword.

No matter how fire resistant the monster was, it couldn't withstand a temperature which would melt it in an instant. It was impossible to block this fire sword with pure durability.

However, Superbia started to regenerate when it was sliced apart. Its speed was faster than a troll, and there were no traces left of the wounds Veronica had inflicted upon it. Nevertheless,

Veronica gazed at the scene with cold eyes and suddenly jumped from the ground.

No, the moment she jumped, she was already punching out.

Kwaang!

It was a huge blow. The slender fist of the beautiful woman contained the weight of several tonnes, and the creature was thrown back into the air.

–A-A monster like you…! This mixed-blood monkey!

“What?” Veronica had the dragon senses, so it wasn’t difficult for her to hear Superbia’s low-frequency voice.

She then pointed to the creature which was 100 meters away and sentenced him to death. It was the worst attack magic of the 7th Circle, a flame of the Demon World which couldn’t be erased with the usual method.

“Hell Fire.” A black fire storm appeared without a sound and wrapped around Superbia.

–■■■■■■——!?! It was a scream, not a roar.

The senses of Superbia, who focused on the traits of creatures, were extraordinarily sharp, so its perception of pain was different.

The sensation of its body's cells burning was hell. Superbia couldn't endure this. The firepower exceeded its regeneration, so Pride, who had encountered few monsters in this age, decided to escape.

Simultaneously, Veronica decided to deal the last blow.

"Suuuuop..." She used a great suction power to swallow the air around her.

"Huwaaaack————!" Then a fearsome jet of fire blew from her mouth!

'D-Dragon Breath?!' Theo didn't know why a quarter dragon like Veronica could use that power, but the red dragon's breath was famous for having a destruction equivalent to the 8th Circle.

She blew her breath toward the airborne Superbia and destroyed any clouds in the way. The power of it truly couldn't be described in books. Nothing was left in the place where the breath passed.

"Huuuu..." As the breath died, Veronica let out a tired sigh and took several deep breaths while steam emerged from her mouth.

"Tch. It ran away? It is more annoying than a master level aura user," she grumbled in an annoyed voice.

Veronica had definitely missed out on the kill. She didn't know what creature it was, but it was more difficult than she thought.

“Indeed, he wouldn’t have died if it wasn’t that much.” A bitter expression crossed Veronica’s face as she thought of Elder Herman’s body which she had passed by along the way. Elder Herman had been one of the elders who had known Veronica for decades and treated her like a daughter or granddaughter despite her mixed blood. She had never thought he would die in a place like this.

Even though death didn’t belong to a time or place, she couldn’t help feeling regretful.

After a moment of silence for her dead colleagues, she turned toward Theodore. “You did well, Kid.”

“Yes…”

“Don’t answer and stay still. Your wounds are deep.”

It wasn’t easy for Theo to speak. As the sense of urgency and tension faded away, a heavy fatigue came which seemed like it would cut off Theo’s consciousness right away. Veronica realized this and placed his head on her lap while calling to someone, “Hey, you can come out now.”

Who was she calling? His heavy eyes found green hair among the trees. She had probably met Veronica while fleeing and guided her toward the location of the fight. The high elf, Ellenoa, came out with Veronica’s permission and grabbed Theo’s right hand gently.

“Theodore, Theodore...!” Her glad calls echoed in his ears a few times.

Vitality flowed from her fingertips and gradually improved the condition of his right arm and body. He wanted to reply to her call, but the damage accumulated in Theo’s body didn’t allow him to remain conscious any further.

‘Ah, how long will I sleep this time...?’ He could sense it. This was the aftermath of forcefully having Alfred ‘transmitted’ to him.

Theodore fell unconscious as the two beauties called his name. Shortly before his vision and hearing cut off completely, he heard a voice.

[The 4th Seal which unlocked through an unusual path has been resealed. The user won’t be able to use ‘Overwrite’ until the 4th Seal is released normally.]

[You were mentally hurt by Transmission. Time is needed to restore your mental state.]

[At the present time, there is no knowing how long it will take.]

[Entering a forced dormancy.]

Chapter 79 – Silver Medal Of Merit (1)

Two days later, the upper echelons of the Meltor Kingdom were literally overturned after finding out that the high elf's convoy had been almost completely wiped out.

It was truly a catastrophe!

Five 6th Circle magicians, sixteen 5th Circle magicians, and three gust wagons formed a tremendous loss. It wasn't a damage which couldn't be recovered from, but it would be hard to fill their vacancy for the next 10 years.

If Veronica hadn't been able to protect the survivors of the convey, Theodore Miller and the high elf, then the damage might've expanded by several times.

Kurt III praised Veronica's achievement publicly while convening an emergency meeting to deal with this case.

"Listen carefully. The Tower Masters, heads of the Magic Society, and members of the court must gather in the meeting room without anyone being absent. This issue has an enormous impact, and it is strictly forbidden to leak any information to the outside world. This is an edict I proclaim in the name of Kurt III."

An edict in the king's name...! The meaning of such a thing was never light. If a person rejected this edict or broke it, they could immediately be hung on the gallows for treason. That was why they all headed to the meeting room of the royal palace after

receiving Kurt III's order.

Among the people present were the Tower Masters, who rarely gathered in one place.

"Huhu, it has been a long time since I've seen some of the faces gathered here," Blundell Adruncus, the Blue Tower Master, muttered while still carrying his staff.

"Oh, what is all this? I am young, but I feel old when gathering in this place," Veronica, the beautiful Red Tower Master muttered in a petulant tone.

"....." The man wearing a white robe and a plain mask which covered his eyes, nose, and forehead was the White Tower Master, Orta.

As always, the position of the Yellow Tower Master remained vacant, but no one questioned this. He was the only one qualified to refuse any call, and this was an open secret at the heart of Manavil. More than anything else, he had no interest in national affairs.

Blundell settled his big body in a chair and opened his mouth to speak, "Now, let's all sit down first. It is awkward to talk while standing."

As three of the four seats around the throne were filled, the rest of the people started to sit down.

On the right side of the round table was Kurt III's court, who were responsible for state administration. It included the household department, the military, foreign affairs and so on. Meanwhile, the left side of the table was for the nobles present in the capital. There were a few earls and dukes waiting for the king.

Not long after that, Kurt III entered the meeting room.

"Presenting His Majesty!" Unlike other times, the king's knights declared the presence of the king directly. It meant this meeting had such an important agenda that it was impossible to even approach him.

Kurt III opened his palm and restrained them before they bowed. "The bowing will be omitted today. Please be seated."

Nobody dared refuse. They quickly followed his order and sat down.

Kurt III nodded and headed to the throne in the center. He sat down on the throne covered in white leather and looked next to him. "Veronica, summarize the case briefly."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Veronica wasn't playful like usual. She got up from her seat with a cold expression and spoke as the attention of the people focused on her, "Two days ago, the convoy passing through the Nadum Mountains was attacked by an unidentified monster. All the gust wagons mobilized for the mission were destroyed, and 21 magicians killed. The high elf was unharmed at the end of the engagement, but the monster escaped."

Silence fell for a moment before a storm exploded in the meeting room.

“W-Wiped out!”

“Red Tower Master, the monster got away from you?!”

“Surely this will become bigger…!”

Each reaction was different, but they were all shocked. The 21 magicians dispatched as the convoy were a strong power. They had been veteran war mages from the time of the war against the Empire. It was an elite group which could even grab the ankles of a sword master when working together.

However, the convoy had been wiped out suddenly? Did it mean that master level monsters existed in the world? Perhaps Veronica was lying?

Dismay, horror and disbelief filled the eyes of the people in the room.

“Stop,” Kurt III spoke and calmed the atmosphere at once.

The attitude required in this situation was to find the best countermeasure for the outcome of this event, rather than them being shocked. The people gathered noticed the chilly look in the

king's eyes and quickly got into the right mindset.

"It is fortunate that the high elf is safe. We avoided the worst case scenario somehow."

The people nodded at Kurt III's words. What would the damage be if the high elf had also been killed? Meltor would've suffered at least three times as much in the future. They would lose the chance to gain a good relationship with Elvenheim.

The damage this time was painful, but there was some small comfort.

"Provide compensation to the families of the magicians who were sent as part of the convoy. And we must thoroughly receive compensation from Elvenheim. Isn't that right, Blundell?"

"The elves are a species who consider silver as a sign of gratitude and no grudges, so it will be done according to Your Majesty's will."

"Right. No, it would be difficult if that wasn't the case." The wooden arm holder of the throne was crushed by Kurt III's grip.

Due to international relations, he had lost more than 20 elites. If the value of the high elf was lower than this, there would be no point in them sacrificing their lives. No matter what, he had to obtain a price for them.

After a while, Kurt's face returned to that of the sober ruler. "Blundell, escort the high elf to Elvenheim. I'm sorry since you've just returned from a long distance mission, but you know that the elves don't like Veronica."

"I would be delighted. By the way, Your Majesty."

"Hmm?" Kurt III looked puzzled by Blundell's additional words.

"I have a request to ask of you from the high elf."

"A request? For me?"

"Yes, that's right."

The king made a gesture to allow the message.

Blundell grinned and delivered Ellenoa's words. "She asked to stay until the healing of Theodore Miller, the survivor of this incident, is over. She doesn't know about the other injuries, but his right hand is in a serious state. If it isn't healed with the power of the high elf, she predicts there will be aftereffects."

"I have no reason to refuse the request. Rather, I would like to ask that from my side." It was a warming story. Kurt III's stiff face loosened as he heard it.

Whether the myth about the silver was true or not, the high elf

hadn't left Theodore alone after being escorted to the capital. She had hugged the bloody and bandaged right arm and continued using her healing power on Theo.

The cold atmosphere of the room became a little warmer.

"Hoh, this young man has earned the grace of a high elf."

"Isn't he 20 this year and already at the 5th Circle? Brilliant. Why wasn't this talent known until now?"

"Look carefully. He took first place in the Pupil Tournament recently. It was just a few months ago."

"I see that he has no sponsors."

They read about Theodore enthusiastically and expressed their appreciation for him. The court fought over which department the young man would fit into, while the nobles wondered what conditions they could use to recruit him.

However, the fierce debate was once again stopped by Kurt III. "...Theodore Miller, that young man again."

Kurt III looked at the paper which contained Theodore's history with his distinctive purple eyes.

Theo had won the Pupil Tournament and taken care of the elder

lich, and now, he had even survived the convoy. It was a rare case where a 20-year-old magician would end up facing the king three times in less than half a year.

Naturally, the king was forced to develop an interest Theo.

‘Is his talent luck or does he have the qualities of a hero? Or maybe he has something extraordinary.’

There was something unknown which couldn’t be discovered from the information written on the document. It was clear that he had helped the kingdom a few times, and it was the king’s role to make the most of it.

According to Veronica, within the next 10 years, Theo would grow enough to be able to threaten her. Then the right thing to do was spray water and fertilizer on the ground to help the tree grow.

Kurt III decided on the way to treat Theodore. “Listen carefully.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

The king refused to allow any arguments as he announced in front of everyone present, “To the only survivor of the convey, Baron Miller, I will present the title of Viscount and, in addition, reward him with a Silver Medal of Merit. This decision is an edict in my name, meaning it can’t be overturned.”

“Y-Your Majesty!”

“What? If you didn’t hear it, then I will tell you one more time.”

The court officials, nobles and tower masters couldn’t hide their surprise. The title of viscount was good. An honorary nobleman didn’t have a manor, and magicians belonging to the Magic Society weren’t likely to care about title anyway.

However, the Silver Medal of Merit was a reward that none of them had imagined.

The nobles who tried to suggest it was too much soon fell silent at Kurt III’s harsh voice. They knew this tone meant that no objections were allowed and that the decision couldn’t be overturned.

“There are no objections. Then it is time for the next agenda.”

30 years after the last recipient, the next recipient of the Silver Medal of Merit was decided in a secret spot.

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Theodore didn’t know he was the protagonist of a glory which hadn’t appeared in the last 30 years, as his eyes hadn’t even opened yet when the decision was made.

Thanks to Ellenoa’s dedicated healing, all of Theo’s external

wounds, including his right arm, were recovered perfectly. However, she couldn't heal the crack in his mind which had arisen from Alfred's 'Transmission.'

In the end, Ellenoa couldn't wait for Theodore to open his eyes and was forced to leave Meltor. Blundell, who was assigned as her escort, scratched his head with an apologetic expression when he saw her sad face.

"Hmm, I'm sorry but we can't afford to wait any longer. The ambassadors from Elvenheim are urging for your return."

"...Yes, I understand."

Still, Ellenoa couldn't help feeling disappointed as she kissed Theodore's forehead gently. The kiss of a high elf was like receiving the blessing of an elemental. It was a blessing which would prevent any elementals belonging to enemies from getting close to Theodore.

"Will we meet again someday, Theodore?"

Ellenoa said goodbye, and the forest dancer returned to Elvenheim.

Then exactly 10 days later... After the battle with Superbia, Theodore Miller had been collapsed for three weeks due to his mental fusion with Alfred.

The topic of conversation in Meltor finally woke up.

Chapter 80 – Silver Medal Of Merit (2)

Theodore, who had lost consciousness for more than a fortnight, seemed to be sleeping comfortably. However, he was actually in danger. Even if it was just a fragment, Alfred had been named a war hero and the power of his soul was beyond the limit which Theodore could accept. If Theo had attempted to get his hands on all that power, his ego would be shattered like broken glass.

Theo knew that intuitively and chose the next best thing. He might have to give up inheriting all of the power, but it would surely separate Alfred's and Theo's souls.

Surrounded by darkness in the world of his mind, Theo gradually noticed that he was regaining his senses. It was evidence that his mind and body had recovered enough to wake up from the dormancy.

'Is it time to wake up? Thank goodness I somehow succeeded.' Theo looked down at himself with a sigh.

Not long ago, he had stood at the boundary between Alfred and Theodore and hadn't been able to tell who he was. It was only a few hours ago that Theo had returned. He had barely managed to win by walking the tightrope with a precipice below him.

Although Alfred's life had been short-lived, Theo was a young man of only 20 years old. However, Theo was pushed to his limits when it came to the depth of his life and his experiences.

Finally, his consciousness stirred as his eyelids pushed up. “Umm…”

‘Stiff.’ After not waking up for more than a fortnight, the way he felt could be summarized with that one word. His muscles were stiff like a tightrope, and his joints creaked continuously.

Despite receiving treatment from the royal family, a fortnight was too long. Even his upper torso and spine were aching slightly. Theo eventually gave up on trying to get up and lay down quietly.

‘Damn, how long have I been lying down? If I am this stiff, I must’ve been lying down for at least a week.’ He wanted to get up quickly, but it was obvious that he would be seriously injured if he moved with his current body.

Theodore diagnosed his condition using Lee Yoonsung’s experience and sighed with relief. He barely noticed it in his mental state, but he might have to rest a few more days. Despite that, he wanted to know where this place was and what had happened to his mentor.

The only consolation he had was what he got from this incident.

‘This…? Is it Alfred’s senses?’ At that time, Theo flinched as he felt a sense of heterogeneity.

Unlike his five senses, this was a sense which wasn’t attached to his body. Indescribable information tickled his head.

This was different from Theo's sensory perception which seemed like his five senses were just extremely sensitive. Alfred's talent seemed to be able to see a bit into the future. Born with innate qualities, it was a sixth sense which seemed to bloom on the battlefield. It was one of the reasons why he had become a war hero with only the weapon called Magic Bullet.

However, that didn't mean Theodore's sixth sense had reached the same level as Alfred's.

"...It's hard. It will take awhile to get used to it." Theo closed his eyes for a while and concentrated, before shaking his head.

This was a gift given by Alfred Bellontes, and it was like suddenly obtaining fish gills. Usually, ordinary people wouldn't know who to breathe with gills. Theo had acquired the ability, but he would have to spend a lot of time and experience to fully exploit this talent.

However, it wasn't impossible, so Theo couldn't help smiling.

'Prince Alfred has disappeared, but his traces still remain. I can clearly remember the feelings we shared while fighting together. If I follow that feeling, I will surely reach it again soon.'

Due to having joined together with Alfred, Theo had become strong enough to face the terrifying 'Pride.' Theo's aim was to become strong enough to knock Pride down. Now that he had faced Superbia once, there was no way to avoid being hostile to it.

‘I will win next time.’ Theo formed a fist as he made such a determination.

“…Theo…”

Theo froze as he heard a voice out of nowhere. ‘W-What? Who else besides me is in this room?’

He hadn’t been aware of it because his senses were dull. Where were they? Theo thought of the expressions he had been showing and wanted to hide inside a hole. However, the person only mumbled Theo’s name once before falling silent.

Theo was puzzled by the silence, and he lifted his head up carefully. It was then that he was able to see someone.

“Theoo… dead… no…” Sylvia was sleeping in a chair and mumbling ominous things while drooling.

That reminded him, how had she been? He’d had no contact with her since returning from the Miller Barony. Due to his identity as the disciple of the Blue Tower Master, it would be hard for her to walk around for private reasons. Theo himself had been busy with Veronica’s special training and then the mission.

That’s why Sylvia came to visit him.

‘Is this place Mana-vil’s infirmary?’

Veronica seemed to have brought him and Ellenoa back to Mana-vil after defeating Superbia. Theo quickly reached this conclusion and lay back down with a smile. It was a bit awkward, but seeing Sylvia’s sleeping face was quite nice.

At that time, he felt a familiar sense of discomfort in his left hand.

-...You woke up, User.

‘Gluttony.’

Just like him, Gluttony had woken up from its dormancy.

–For the time being, it is impossible to get the same privilege as last time. I won’t be able to release my autonomic function until the next seal is released.

‘You won’t be able to exercise your autonomic function?’

–I am also part of the grimoire, so the system has authority over me. It is possible to put a temporary ban on me after I released the 4th Seal through such an unusual path.

Indeed, no matter how much it wanted to, Gluttony couldn’t release its own seals.

–Then, hurry, next seal…

Theo nodded as Gluttony fell asleep again. It seemed like Gluttony had also been challenged during the fight against Superbia. Maybe it would be difficult to talk like before until the next seal was lifted.

As the infirmary quieted down again, Theo closed his eyes. He was going to rest until his body recovered. However, that silence didn't last long.

"Theo! You are awake now!" Vince, the middle-aged magician who came to visit, looked at him with a pleased expression.

*

Theo's mind might've been in a risky state, but his body was already completely cured.

It was because Ellenoa had focused on treating him for a few days, and there was no trauma except for his right arm. If he hadn't received a psychological shock, he would've regained consciousness the day after he collapsed.

Thanks to that, Theo had no problem telling his story. "…Yes, Elder Herman died."

Vince's face filled with regret as he heard about what happened to the convoy. Herman, a magician of the previous generation, had been there since Vince had been an apprentice.

Herman had been famous for his talent and ability to take care of his juniors, so he had been a spiritual pillar of the Red Tower. After his retirement, he had continued making strong contributions to Meltor.

The fact that he had died made Vince's heart ache. However, Vince soon suppressed his sadness, and his complexion returned to its original state. As a veteran war mage, he was accustomed to sending off many comrades on the battlefield.

He was just grateful that his senior had performed the mission to the end and returned his disciple safely.

"Then it is my turn."

After Theodore lost consciousness, he didn't know about anything which had happened outside his body. Thanks to Sylvia, Theo knew he was in Mana-vil's infirmary, but that was all.

A secret meeting had been held at the palace, and the high elf's convoy had been a topic of discussion for a few days. Theo had now become one of the greatest celebrities in the present Meltor Kingdom.

He was unfamiliar with people's attention, so his forehead

immediately creased as he frowned.

Sylvia was also listening in, and her eyes shone at the words. “Wow! Great, Theo! You are probably the only one who has become so famous at our age!”

“Well, Sylvia’s words aren’t wrong,” Vince chimed in playfully. “An academy student won against a tower master’s disciple, and a few days later, he defeated the elder lich. Not long after that, you rescued a high elf. This might just by the introduction of a remarkable hero.”

“B-But Professor was with me as well…!”

“That isn’t important. The royal family has already started work promoting you as a hero.”

Then Vince pulled out a newspaper and showed him the contents. Theo’s eyes shook as he read the contents while lying down. By the end of it, he was shaking almost at the level of a seizure. It was the announcement of a national scale event.

“M-Medal ceremony? Furthermore, a court ball?!”

The court ball was a social event held several times a year in any other kingdom, but it had a special significance here in Meltor.

The king of Meltor, Kurt III, hated useless luxuries. His character was known for avoiding excesses, so this applied to the ball at well.

It was said that there were no court balls in Meltor except when the delegation of another kingdom visited, or at the opening or closing ceremony of the magic contest.

However, the letters written in the newspaper didn't make sense.

"This is all because of me...?"

Hearing his disciple's disbelieving voice, Vince affirmed, "That's right. Perhaps they want to highlight your presence over what happened to the high elf convoy. Comedy is always used to conceal tragedy."

"Am I worth that much?"

"Of course. Although if they were only going to use your name, you wouldn't have been awarded a medal."

'Medal, medal...' Theo gazed at the illustration drawn in the newspaper.

'Silver Medal of Merit?' He had read the books in the academy's library, but he had little knowledge about this type of thing. Theo wasn't interested in things related to the nobility and preferred to read the encyclopedia about monsters.

'Is this medal that great?'

As Theo gazed at it, Vince spoke in a pleased voice, “By the way, that is the Silver Medal of Merit! It has been 30 years since someone last received it. I never thought that it would be my disciple, Theodore!”

“…Professor?”

“Is it unbelievable? Well, that is understandable. It is a medal equivalent to a viscount title.”

Theodore tried to stop Vince who had misunderstood him, but his words were blocked.

A medal equivalent to a viscount title…? Something so preposterous existed in this country…? If this were true, it meant that the value of the medal couldn’t be converted into money.

Soon, the reason emerged from Vince’s mouth, “The Silver Medal of Merit is worth a national treasure. You will probably receive a national treasure at the medal ceremony! You should be surprised and happy!”

‘…National treasure?’

One beat—no, two beats later, Theodore’s mouth dropped open.

Chapter 81 – Silver Medal Of Merit (3)

News that the main character, Theodore Miller, had woken up was soon reported to the royal palace.

Even so, the court ball couldn't be held right away. Therefore, the preparations took place while Theo recovered in bed. The date was decided to be four days after Theodore was discharged.

Thanks to him, Mana-vil Capital was suffering from an unprecedented boom.

Even though only the nobles could participate in the court ball directly, performers and wine were released onto the streets. The quantity of wine required was so large that it set a fire under the feet of the merchants, who had been idle after the Magic Contest.

"Alcohol! We need alcohol! Hey, is there anything left in the warehouse?"

"No! We've run out a long time ago! Why is there an event this large so soon after the Magic Contest?"

"There isn't enough alcohol now? If there is no volume at the store, go and strangle some from the merchant companies!"

"No, this is the first time since I've lived that there isn't enough pork!"

None of the people around him, including the court people and tower masters, had expected the king to declare a court ball. So, it was too late for even the top merchant companies closely associated with the nobles to react. The small and mid-sized merchants struggled to pull up any remaining stock that they had as Mana-vil was more vigorous than ever before.

“What is all this fuss about?”

It wasn’t just the merchants but also the guards who were suffering from this.

The number of people who entered Mana-vil, the capital of Meltor, was enormous. The biggest event of the year had been the Magic Contest, so after it was over, it was like heaven to the guards. Yet, having been placed on duty again, all the off-duty patrols and guards were now irritated.

The sight of more than 100,000 guards circulating day and night was spectacular in itself. This was evidence of how great the court ball was.

Shortly afterwards, the news of the court ball spread throughout the entire northern continent.

“What? The Meltor Kingdom has called a court ball?”

The other countries didn’t have time to dispatch ambassadors or people to the sudden event, but there was a lot of interest in the

ball and its protagonist. Even if they were publicly disclosed, Theo's achievements were hard to believe.

Some watched with interested eyes while others criticized him as a hero created by Meltor.

"Isn't it vulgar to spread a foolish story about a hero to increase their national power?"

"Elder lich? If such a thing existed, a campaign would've been launched to take care of it. Meltor must be attempting to mislead the people with ridiculous rumours."

Some were convinced while others reacted violently.

Regardless of whether they believed it or not, time passed by. Then as the date set by the Meltor Kingdom approached, the kingdom naturally fell silent as the people waited for the festival.

Thus, the day of the court ball dawned.

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"Eh?" Theo felt strange as he tightened his tie with his good hand.

So far, he had to be helped by others whenever he wore any finery like a tailcoat. At the awards ceremony, he'd needed Vince's

help, and Earl Bergen's servants had helped Theo during his stay there.

However, he was now wearing this outfit by himself.

'There are no wrinkles or folds, so is it okay?' Theo looked at himself in the mirror.

He hadn't even given it much thought while wearing it. His body just moved like he was accustomed to wearing such clothing. Theo casually arranged the sleeves, collar, and tie pin. The movements of his hand weren't possible unless he had considerable experience.

Theo had grown up in a rural estate and only worn the academy's uniforms after that, so he shouldn't be that familiar with it. However, Theodore was able to guess the cause.

"...He was a hero and prince." He laughed lightly as he tightened the tie and then looked down at his palm.

Alfred Bellontes had been a war hero, but he had also been the third prince of the Bellontes Principality which led the War of Independence. It meant Alfred had been an existence whose status couldn't be downgraded. Such a person couldn't be ignorant of etiquette or laws.

Maybe the sixth sense wasn't the only thing to flow into Theo's body after 'Transmission' was used. He didn't know it yet, but his method of walking and posture were slightly different from before.

It was due to the spirit of royalty.

Creak.

At that moment, the door of the waiting room opened.

“Theo, how are the preparations going?” Vince entered the room without any hesitation, and his eyes widened as he saw Theo’s clothing.

According to the attendants, Theo hadn’t worn the clothing, yet here he was, perfectly dressed. Everything was perfect, from the posture to the atmosphere around him. If it wasn’t for Theo’s familiar face, Vince might’ve mistaken Theo for someone else.

Vince opened his mouth and spoke with a satisfied expression, “Excellent. I don’t need to call some attendants.”

Then he put a box on the table and unlocked it quickly. The inside of the iron box was revealed with a snapping sound. The item inside was a luxurious cloth embroidered with red and gold thread. Theo was aware of the identity and nodded. “A robe of the Red Tower?”

“That’s right.”

It wasn’t a normal robe. Generally, mass-produced items didn’t

have such complicated patterns nor did they use such good cloth. Additionally, the magic placed on mass-produced items was only at a certain level.

However, the magic power coming from this crimson robe was around the same level as the magic imbued in a rare artifact. The crimson robe was then tied around Theodore's neck.

"Oh...!" Vince said admiringly as he looked at Theo.

The red robes fluttered like a flame as they wrapped around Theo like a coat. Theo was wearing a black suit, so the robe gave him a great finish as a magician. This was all done in preparation for the ball.

The two of them then spent some time exchanging personal stories, and Vince kindly warned Theo what to be careful about. Theo was calm for his age, but the nobles had tongues like snakes.

"Finally, don't bend your back." Vince put his hand on Theo's waist while saying so. "You are the main character of this ball. Who can be rude to you, the one who is receiving His Majesty's medal? You don't need to make enemies, but you don't need to shrink back before anyone either."

"I will do so."

"Well, you will do well even without me saying anything."

Theo had already met high ranking people: the Blue Tower Master; the Red Tower Master; and Kurt III. So, he wouldn't be scared even if he encountered a marquis or a duke as far more extravagant people were hanging around him. Truth be told, Veronica's fist was far scarier than the power of the nobles.

'I can't see her fist properly… that is much scarier…'

Theo ignored his shivering and turned around because he heard a voice calling him.

"Baron Miller! Please enter the venue!"

Vince and Theo met each other's gazes for a moment. Simultaneously, Vince patted Theodore's shoulders. "Now, go first. I'll see you later in the ballroom."

"Yes, Master." Theo left Vince behind and followed the guide.

Thump, thump. His heart pounded every time he took a step.

Theo's keen senses picked up the presences of hundreds of people, and he knew that they were all waiting for him. He could never get accustomed to this amount of interest in him. Theo had been hurt by all the interest he'd received previously in school. Still… 'I'm not trembling thanks to you, Prince Alfred.'

Alfred had learned dignity as royalty and as a hero. In both cases, Alfred hadn't been the type to shrink back from ordinary nobles.

It was only a fraction of Alfred's but Theo had a similar air wrapped around him. The tension of standing before all those people faded into nothingness. After all, a tiger wouldn't be intimidated by a herd of dogs.

At that moment, the host's voice started booming loudly, "Then let me introduce him! The main character of this ball and the first recipient of the Silver Medal of Merit in 30 years...!"

Theo took a few steps further than the guide and found the spot designated to him. There was only a curtain blocking him from the ballroom. Shortly after that, the barrier was taken away as a loud voice said, "The Red Tower's Average ranked magician, Baron Theodore Miller!"

As Theo took a step forward, he was covered by a dazzling light. 'Don't shrink back.'

This wide ballroom was Theo's stage. The grace left behind by Alfred and Theodore's upright nature were displayed in his steps. Some of the nobles expecting to make fun of a rural baron were confused as they murmured to each other.

"No, isn't he a member of a declining noble family?"

"No matter how I look, he seems like a young master from a good family..."

“He must have a good education. It isn’t easy to not shake in a big place like this.”

Their evaluations of Theo were good.

Theodore stopped five paces before Kurt III, who was waiting for him at the high podium. Theo naturally fell to one knee, not as a noble but as a magician. However, he didn’t seem subservient and looked more imposing than the nobles surrounding him.

“An Average of the Red Tower, Baron Theodore Miller greets the Great Sun of Meltor.”

Kurt III laughed with a cheerful expression at Theodore’s greeting.

“You can rise, Young Hero.”

Theo didn’t rush as he got up. It was dignified without being impudent. This was an exquisite balance which even veteran nobles couldn’t easily imitate.

Kurt III admired him from the podium. In order to honour the hero who had accomplished praiseworthy feats, the king was standing at the same level as his servants. How many people in the records had achieved such glory at the age of 20? He wasn’t sure but there wouldn’t be many.

In front of hundreds of eyes, the king and hero faced each other.

“Theodore Miller, listen,” Kurt III said with a small box in his hand. “You have rescued a high elf from slavery and saved her from an unknown enemy. This feat is one that can never be disparaged. Such a loyal servant deserves to be rewarded.”

He placed the box on Theodore’s hand and declared with a profound voice, “Listen carefully.”

All the nobles and magicians present lowered their bodies. Then as Theodore knelt down again, Kurt III knocked on Theodore’s shoulder.

“From this moment on, Baron Theodore Miller will be given the title of a viscount, and he will be awarded with the Silver Medal of Merit! Additionally, he will be given 1,000 gold coins, a national treasure, and this court ball to recognize his glory!”

“We will obey, Your Majesty!” The crowd’s thunderous cheers announced the start of the court ball.

Chapter 82 – National Treasure Umbra #1

Kurt III's speech ended and the ballroom was instantly filled with joyful music.

♪♬♩♬!

The court musicians didn't usually have a place to show off their skills, so they didn't miss this chance. The musicians literally used their whole body to pull out beautiful tones from various musical instruments as the sound filled the spacious ballroom. People were naturally attracted to the music, and the number of men and women dancing with each other increased.

It was a great performance that caused even Theodore to shake his shoulders. However, Kurt III hadn't moved from before him despite having handed over the medal.

"Hmm, all the formal procedures are finished." Kurt looked at Theo with his purple eyes and said, "There is a separate person in charge of handing you the national treasure. It isn't hard to recognize the person, so just act according to their instructions."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Then have a great time. You should mingle with the people waiting for you."

As soon as Kurt finished speaking, a group of nobles gathered in a

place not far away.

People with intelligence and influence in the capital had responded to the sudden ball. Most of them were more powerful and cunning than Earl Bergen. These old snakes were just waiting for Kurt to leave so they could descend on Theodore.

This was the young hero's social debut.

"I look forward to your work in the future, Theodore Miller," Kurt said as he tapped on Theo's shoulders, before moving aide.

No matter how high ranking the noble, they couldn't surround Theo with the king in front of him. Thanks to that, the area around the podium was clear for a moment. It was a golden opportunity for Theo who didn't like this type of bustle.

He quickly stepped down from the podium. 'Okay, I should move quickly toward Master or other people from the magic towers. Who will come to a place where high-ranking magicians are?'

At least in Meltor, the status of the magicians were equal to the nobles. A 4th Circle magician was equivalent to a baron. After that, the number of 5th Circle magicians were drastically reduced due to the presence of the 'wall.' So, it was common for nobles to earnestly honor senior magicians.

However, a barrier of people formed in front of Theo as he had that thought.

“Ahh, Theodore!”

“It is nice to meet you, Viscount Miller!”

“It is an honour to meet you!”

There were dresses which revealed the body, ornaments hanging from the ears, and waists which gleamed in the light of the chandelier. Along with these, there were also colourful fabrics covering white skin.

‘Soft!’

Dozens of nobles plastered themselves to Theodore while chattering. The soft flesh and sweet fragrance clouded his head.

‘D-Dangerous. At this rate...!’ Theodore had keen senses.

However, this was the first time that he experienced this type of offensive. Additionally, the charm of the girls who had been raised to increase the honor of their family was fatal. It was natural to manage their skin and body, while they learned how to talk and even trained in the art of capturing a man’s eyes.

For them, Theodore Miller would be the most charming husband.

Many of the nobles were much older than them and were frequently involved with concubines as they weren't sincere. So, the young women would do anything to marry the handsome young man who was a hero.

"Viscount Miller, could you please dance a song with me?" A lady with golden hair wrapped her hand neatly around Theo's. The soft texture of her skin and the warmth conveyed made him embarrassed.

He didn't know what to do, as it was a situation where moving the wrong way could cause a situation. As he was thinking about what to do...

"...Wait a minute, Young Lady? Do you know who you are touching right now?" A voice rang out from somewhere. "I'm sorry, but that is mine. If you can't give him up, are you thinking about fighting with me? I don't care either way."

None of the people surrounding Theo dared to stand up to that voice. The pressure coming from the owner of that voice was intense, and there was a large gap in their statuses. Her appearance was revealed after the young women faded out of Theo's sight like a tide.

Just then, Veronica's face appeared in front of Theo. "Ah...!"

She was wearing a black dress which clung to her body, while her clear skin was enhanced by her crimson hair and transparent veil. Her exposed arms and even more exposed chest naturally attracted

Theo's gaze. Compared to the upper body which had a lot of exposure, the bottom garment was a long skirt with a deep slit in the left side. The outfit might seem a bit crass, but once her natural presence was added, she shone like a queen.

Theodore, the young men, and the beauties confident in their own beauty couldn't help being silent.

Veronica laughed at them and grabbed the right hand of the newly freed Theo. Then as she pulled him into her arms, she whispered, "Okay, then shall I mingle with today's protagonist for one song?"

The areas where his hands were in close contact were hot. It wasn't due to the mood but the heat that Veronica was emitting. The heat wasn't unpleasant or hard to endure, but her scent and texture combined together to cloud his mind.

Theo grabbed the last bit of his reason and said, "Tower Master, I've never learned to dance."

"Uh, really?" Veronica's eyes widened for a moment before she smiled. "Don't worry about it. It is good enough if you move according to how I guide you."

"Guide?"

"Yes. In the east, there is a saying that 'martial arts' equals 'dance,' so it won't be hard for you to follow." She winked a golden

eye at Theodore who was still frowning. “It will be okay. This kid, don’t you believe in me?”

It was a question often asked by people who shouldn’t be believed.

*

As a result, Theo and Veronica’s dance was highly praised.

Veronica’s words were correct as she had considerable skill, and he just needed to follow along. More than half the cheers were for Veronica, but there was some cheering for Theodore.

She touched him with a sweaty palm and said, “Now, shall we go out for a breath of fresh air?”

Theodore made a puzzled expression while Veronica smiled strangely and indicated toward a direction. It was the terrace of the ballroom which was covered with thick curtains. Simultaneously, Theo’s face turned several times redder. “T-The terrace?”

“Yes, do you not want to?”

“That’s not it, but…”

The reason why Theodore stuttered was simple. As she said, the

ballroom's terrace was intended to be a resting place to cool off from the heat, but it was tacitly implied to be a place where men and women did covert activities. Theo wasn't well-versed in social knowledge, but he knew this much, so it was an embarrassing suggestion.

Veronica walked past a few people and disappeared beyond the curtain first, with Theo carefully following behind. It was probably an illusion, but he felt like the buzzing sounds increased behind him.

Finally, Theodore appeared on the terrace where Veronica was. She was in a position where one smooth leg was placed over the railing of the terrace. However, it wasn't a posture intended to seduce him. Rather, it seemed like she was trying to jump over the railing.

Theo felt like something was wrong and asked carefully, "Excuse me, Tower Master? Where are we going?"

"Huh? Don't you want to go to the place where your natural treasure is hidden?"

"...So this is why you wanted to go to the terrace?"

"Of course. What's wrong with that— ...ahh."

Veronica finally realized the agony of a healthy young man and raised her index finger with a cheerful smile. "Heh, isn't it too

early for you? You will have to grow a few more years before wanting to challenge this Veronica."

"T-That isn't it!"

"Okay, let's go. The location of the national treasure shouldn't be known to other people."

Without giving Theo time to make any excuses, Veronica swung her body over the railing first.

In the end, Theo also jumped from the terrace. It was different from what he had expected, but he couldn't neglect the national treasure. So, he followed Veronica's red hair through the royal gardens.

Less than five minutes later, the two people came to a stop.

'This place...?'

The place where Veronica led Theo was a huge fountain surrounded by marble sculptures in the center of the royal garden.

Before he had time to wonder where the national treasure was, she placed her left hand into the fountain and started to explain, "It is enough to keep common treasures in warehouses, but things like national treasures can't be kept in one place. Each one has such a mighty strength that they can't coexist. It is possible for some of them to explode when tied with space magic, so the royal

palace decided to keep the national treasures in certain areas inside the palace.”

As Veronica spoke, the place where she inserted her hand began to boil, and the water soon turned to steam. After all the water turned into steam, the bottom of the fountain was revealed. Then she climbed into the dried fountain and placed the palm of her left hand on the magic circle drawn on the bottom.

“The heads of the magic towers memorize different areas according to their position, and I am in charge of the national treasure hidden in this fountain. I know what is hidden, but I’ll explain after it is taken out.”

Magic power emerged endlessly from Veronica’s left hand into the magic circle and broke it into pieces. Whenever a part of the magic circle broke, a green light emerged from the statue at the center of the fountain. Once there was only one left, it shone with a brilliant light.

It wasn’t magic power or aura. This was a power which belonged to an area completely separate from Ellenoa’s vitality.

Soon enough, Veronica dismantled the last of the seal.

Wuoooooong!

As soon as the magic circle disappeared, the statue where the national treasure was hidden wriggled. It wasn’t a power which

mere marble could withstand. The sculpture couldn't withstand the massive eruption of power and eventually burst from the inside.

Kwajik! An emerald bead emerged from the debris of the statue.

It was indeed a strange sight.

"...What?" Theo couldn't help muttering when he saw the bead.

There was no sense of distance or presence, but no, that changed within a minute. The bead looked like it was in front of him as well as beyond the horizon. It felt light and fluffy but heavier than a sledge hammer.

Theo knew about all types of treasures, but he couldn't fathom such a strange thing. Therefore, he listened closely to Veronica's description.

"National treasure no. 3, Umbra." She came to Theo's side as she eyed the emerald bead. "It is the legacy of a species that resides on a different level from the material world in which we live. They are said to exist like spirits and don't know the concept of time and space. The one who has the bead can gain their abilities, but... I don't know anything more than that. Anyway..."

Veronica gently pushed Theo and said, "From now on, Umbra is yours. Take it right away."

Chapter 83 – National Treasure Umbra #2

Veronica's words seemed to reach the emerald bead as the brilliant light scattered like it was protecting itself from Theodore. Strangely, the light seemed to obscure the shape of the bead, but he couldn't feel the influence of magic power.

It was a natural instinct to be alert to the unknown. So, Theo couldn't touch it carelessly.

Theo didn't know how long he would've hesitated if Gluttony hadn't spoken up at that moment.

-...Hoh? You've brought me an interesting food, User.

At the same time, Theodore was able to feel a little bit of Gluttony's mood through their connection. There was an intense hunger and appetite due to the presence of Umbra. It was even more than when Gluttony saw the elder lich's Life Vessel.

Theo noticed this fact and asked, 'Do you know what that bead is?'

–Of course. It may not be a grimoire, but it is too taxing for you to digest right now. Gluttony continued speaking, That quarter dragon's explanation is half right, half wrong. Umbra isn't technically a species but a two-dimensional thing. It is a world where there are no boundaries between material and nonmaterial things, and it can't be understood using human common sense.

‘In other words, Umbra is a type of other world?’

–You understand pretty fast. To be more precise, it is a primitive spiritual world. Unlike the material world, the other dimension is a place where only spirits can exist.

Magicians, who emphasized understanding the world more than aura users, recognized the existence of spiritual worlds a long time ago. Among them, the representative of spiritual worlds was the Elemental World. The Elemental World maintained the laws of nature and was one of the spiritual worlds closely linked to the material world. It was said that the first elementalists could access the Elemental World directly.

Throughout the worlds, there were also the Abyss, where evil spirits or evil gods resided, and spiritual worlds like Chaos, which was a whirlpool of chaos, but…

According to Gluttony’s explanation, Umbra had a different shape.

–Hmm, don’t be so concerned about it. A primitive world is incomplete and easy to collapse. In fact, Umbra is a world that was destroyed a long time ago, and this is nothing but a fragment of the destroyed world. If it hadn’t been fixed by magic, then it would’ve vanished.

The prey suited its taste, so Gluttony wriggled its tongue.

–I will eat to my heart’s content. I will take care of it!

At those words, Theo stretched out his left hand. Umbra struggled in the air as it felt an ominous feeling, but Veronica was prepared for this and her magic power bound it tightly. Above all, there was an existence more magical than it, so Umbra couldn’t escape from the magician’s hand.

Eventually, Theodore’s left hand gripped the bead gently.

[+15 Umbra Fragment (???)]

[This is a lump of debris which floated into the material world after the two-dimensional world Umbra collapsed a long time ago. A magician fixed it into the form of an emerald bead. As it is based on another world, there is a strong resistance to attacks in the material world. If the power of this fragment is absorbed, it may be possible to manipulate Umbra’s law.

* The rating of this ??? is ‘Treasure.’

* When consumed, the power of Umbra will be absorbed.

* When consumed, there is no digestion time.

* When consumed, your spiritual awareness will increase

greatly.

* When ingested, the user still won't be able to use this ??? perfectly. A portion of the absorbed power is sealed, allowing for only 20% of the abilities to be used.]

'20%, that is the limit for me right now.'

Theodore had a larger capacity than another magician of the same circle, but even he could only absorb 20%. It meant that the essence contained in Umbra was enormous. Umbra had the same rating as the elder lich's Life Vessel, but it was much more powerful.

However, the remaining 80% potential wasn't lost. Theo didn't hesitate as he focused on Umbra in his left hand. The bead on the palm of his hand naturally disappeared.

[The 'Umbra Fragment' has been absorbed. A heterogeneous power has accumulated in your body.]

[From now on, you can get in contact with spirit bodies directly.]

[From now on, you can see spiritual bodies with the naked eye.]

[The mark of ‘Umbra’ is engraved on your body.]

[Gluttony has fallen asleep in order to save power.]

It was different from absorbing the artifacts. Umbra didn’t require a separate digestion time, so it immediately melted into Theodore’s body after being eaten by Gluttony.

Wuuuong!

A strength which was completely different to magic power flowed through his veins. The overflowing power of Umbra turned the capillaries under his skin into an emerald colour, before focusing on Theo’s right arm.

This was only 20%, but it felt like his bones and muscles were going to burst.

Then a strange stamp appeared on his right arm. ‘Is this Umbra’s mark?’

The emerald patterns made of complex lines and shapes reminded him of characters of an ancient kingdom.

Then finally, the mark of Umbra disappeared after being engraved on Theodore. It engraved only 20% of its power and then fell asleep, waiting for the time when the remaining 80% would awaken.

After the mark disappeared, Umbra's abilities flowed into him. It was similar to when he received knowledge about magic.

"...Indeed, it is a miraculous ability," Theo muttered as he examined the knowledge inside his head.

The knowledge conveyed from the mark of Umbra on his right arm was literally breathtaking. He pulled back his sleeve to reveal the shining green tattoo and then carefully touched the surface. However, someone else touched his right arm before he did.

"Oh, it is used in this way? How strange." Veronica came up from behind him without any notice and grabbed Theodore's forearm.

As he stiffened from the unexpected contact, she continued to observe, rubbing the green tattoo with her finger. The tower masters couldn't easily take out the national treasures, so she couldn't help being interested.

At that very moment...

Huuk!

Theodore's arm suddenly turned translucent, and he escaped from Veronica's grip.

"Eh?!"

This was Umbra's first ability, Fluidization. Theodore, who triggered the ability reflexively, and Veronica were both surprised. Theo's body turned fluid without him even muttering a word? It was something that even magicians who learned the 7th Circle magic Astral Body couldn't imitate.

Veronica looked at Theodore's right arm with shining eyes as it returned to its original state. "I-It's been awhile since I was so surprised! Is this the power of Umbra?"

The surprised Theo nodded silently. He knew that he could use Umbra's Fluidization ability, but he hadn't expected to invoke the ability just by thinking 'I want to get out.'

If he could always use Fluidization like this, he would be able to avoid flying arrows effortlessly. Additionally, it was possible to utilize it to pass through a wall or other similar situations. It was a useful ability for any circumstance.

'If I have this ability… I can beat a master level opponent!'

Certainly, the existences in the material world were very limited in their abilities to affect the spiritual world. Even a sword master's power would drop when it came to a spirit body. Additionally, most magicians wouldn't know how to fight against the fluidity. Theo would be able to gain the advantage in any situation just by turning his body into fluid.

However, he was too optimistic.

“Haack...! Haack...!”

Theo experimented with his newly acquired ability a few times, but suddenly experienced a headache and shortness of breath.

‘What, why is this happening all of a sudden?’

His stamina and magic power were in a perfect state, but his condition suddenly deteriorated. Just calculating a magic formula or moving his body caused him to be tired. Veronica noticed the change and approached Theo to help him.

She was experienced, so she quickly realized why Theodore was in a bad physical condition.

Veronica laughed as she held his side. “It seems like this national treasure consumes mental power. Kid, is your magic power and stamina not good right now?”

“Yes, it is as you say...”

“Geez, this is completely unexpected. If I knew, I would’ve warned you beforehand. Well, don’t be so depressed since there is a saying that lessons should be learned with the body.” She giggled as she directed him to sit down on a bench. Then she pointed to his right arm that was still glowing green. “The concept of mental power might be quite strange, but its recovery is quick. If you sit and rest for a while, you will soon be able to move around.”

“…Mental power, what is that?”

“Umm, let me explain it briefly.” Veronica sat down next to Theo and explained the concept of mental power, “In short, it is the most basic force. It is no different from using magic, aura, or even elemental power. The only difference is the importance. Magicians who tend to rely on mana and circles often don’t know about the concept of mental power.”

However, mental power was crucial in manipulating forces based on other dimensions, such as magic, aura, and Umbra. If mental power was non-existent, they wouldn’t be able to control magic based on mana. The most primitive mental power was the only one capable of controlling Umbra’s power.

Theo’s mindset was restored due to his mental power being temporarily exhausted.

‘This means I need to train my mental power in order to master Umbra.’

There was no easy gift in this world, so the mark on his right arm was just another homework. An ability like Fluidization couldn’t be used with no cost. By the time the quick explanation ended, Theo’s power had come back.

“Then my explanation will end here. Can you get up now?”

“…Yes.” He carefully raised his body up from the bench.

Fortunately, the dizziness had completely disappeared, and the muscles which had felt weighed down returned to their original condition. After experiencing mental power depletion, Theo calmed his breathing.

Veronica turned around first and said, “Kid, what will you do now? I still have to return to the ballroom, but you can leave first. It seems like your personality doesn’t like balls too much.”

“…Well, that isn’t wrong.” Theo smiled bitterly and shrugged. Any other day, he would’ve left without being noticed. However, today was Theodore Miller’s ball. There would be bad rumours if he left without saying anything.

…Finally, he turned to Veronica.

“Let’s go. I will be happy to mingle just for today,” he said softly while holding out a hand to Veronica.

It was minor revenge for always being dragged along by her.

Veronica’s golden eyes widened like she was startled, then she said, “Ah, right. Maybe I was kidding about the few years?”

She smiled widely and grabbed Theodore’s palm.

The song of the young hero who challenged the red dragon... It was still an unknown story.

Chapter 84 – Empire Mission (1)

[‘Reasons Why Flames Rise’ has been consumed. Your understanding is very high.]

[5th Circle magic ‘Flare Burst’ has been acquired.]

[The number of spells the user has consumed is immense. The essence of magic books will be extracted more efficiently.]

As always, the non-emotional voice was heard in Theo’s ears, and Theo immediately closed his eyes to focus on the knowledge.

It was different from before, when he had no problem eating several books at once. This was a 5th Circle book, so he received a storm of knowledge. It wasn’t an amount which could be accommodated without any preparation.

After five minutes, Theodore opened his eyes again. ‘Flare Burst… I thought it would be a more complex magic.’

Vince spoke up from where he was watching on the other side, “Flare Burst is today’s final book?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Try it once. Try to align the timing of the magic spell accurately.” Simultaneously, Vince’s magic power boiled up.

The blazing magic power drew a magic circle in the empty space, and a pillar of heat appeared inside. Flare Burst was an attack magic in the war mage period which turned a lot of enemies in a mass of charcoal.

Just before Vince’s magic created the fire pillar, Theodore also completed the same magic in front of him.

“Flare Burst!”

Immediately before the two fire pillars collided...

Hwaaack-!

Then the flames shot at each other and clashed. The high temperature and flames, which were fierce enough to burn humans, began to spread. This was the flame which had swept up all the hobgoblins on their way to Mana-vil in the past.

“Hrmm, the degree of completeness isn’t bad,” Vince remarked.

The two magicians had formed a shield and were watching the competition between the two fire pillars. The flames struck exactly in the middle, and after waiting a while, Theo’s was gradually pushed to one side. Vince’s Flare Burst had a slight advantage. If this was the case, Theodore would have been turned into ashes.

However, the pushing and pulling between fire pillars ended abruptly. As soon as all the magic power contained in the circles was gone, the two fire pillars disappeared like they had never existed.

It was determined that Theodore's Flare Burst was a success. Vince removed the remaining heat and approached the spot where the fire pillars collided. The ground had melted due to the strong flames, but it solidified again as soon as he chilled it lightly.

Vince touched his chin and evaluated it, "...Indeed, it is an incredible proficiency for someone who has never used the magic before. An ordinary magician would have to devote two or three years of training to reach that level."

"But Master's Flare Burst is faster than mine. The momentum of your flames is also more intense."

"Well, if you use the same spell for more than a decade, you will pick up some tricks in using it. That is the difference," Vince explained in a dignified voice before adding. "Things like how to concentrate the flames more reliably and how to construct the magic circle faster... The knowledge gained from books is certainly valuable, but the wisdom refined from experience is also important. Don't forget that the ability of the grimoire is just one part of you."

"Yes, I will keep that in mind." Theodore nodded lightly.

As Vince said, Theo had only gained the fundamental principles and knowledge on how to use the magic Gluttony extracted from the things it ate.

The know-how and application of the magic which mages accumulated after years of experience couldn't be learned from eating. However, Theo didn't neglect his skills, so his talent was much better than it had been half a year ago. It was the result of devoting himself to magic training every day for half a year since the battle with Superbia and the court ball.

"Theodore, you have now reached a level where you can be called a master of the 5th Circle. I, Vince Haidel, acknowledge your accomplishment."

"Thank you."

"Now, you are just one step away from the wall of the 6th Circle. It is hard teaching a disciple who grows so quickly," Vince said before giving a warm laugh. His disciple was growing too quickly.

Theo hadn't even been of the 4th Circle when he left the academy, then he broke through the 5th Circle after being sent to his hometown. He was now almost at the end of the 5th Circle and on the edge of becoming equal to Vince.

Vince used his experience to teach his disciple, but it was doubtful he would have enough knowledge to keep up at this rate. After some time, Vince might not be able to handle him alone.

‘No, now isn’t the time to think about it.’

Vince thought for a while before changing the topic. “Today’s magic training is up to here. Then let’s start the scheduled mental power training. In fact, there isn’t much I can do to help with this part.”

“No, I realized how to use this power thanks to Master’s advice.”

“Well, you can think about it that way.”

Theo laughed at his mentor and raised the sleeve covering his right arm.

National treasure no. 3, Umbra… After absorbing the bead on the night of the ball, it had remained in the form of the tattoo and scattered a green light continuously. It was evidence of ‘Umbra,’ a treasure which surpassed the boundaries of matter.

Theodore’s eyes turned bluish. ‘Fluidization!’

The moment the light flashed, his whole body turned transparent. Wind passed through his body, and it temporarily transcended the realm of matter. The current Theo could do many impossible things.

Indeed, what were his abilities after training for half a year?

Syuok!

After his body turned transparent, Theo suddenly disappeared into the air and appeared a few dozen meters away. The speed he used to reach his destination was clearly beyond the laws of physics.

If the purpose of Fluidization was to just appear in another place, it wasn't as good as a short-ranged Blink.

'Okay, I will do it a few more times!' Theodore sensed that he was still capable of more as he disappeared and appeared again a few times.

Vince secretly admired Theo's movements around the room.

They were ultrafast movements using Fluidization. Since Theo wasn't affected by the boundaries of matter, there weren't any of the side effects associated with space jumps. Even aura masters wouldn't be able to capture the timing of Theo's appearances.

This was the fraudulent power given by the national treasure, Umbra.

"Hah...! Hah...!"

However, the ability also came with something being consumed. Theodore performed five or six space leaps in a row before sitting down with dizziness and a headache. This was the headache which

resulted from the consumption of his mental power. It was like the condition of a human body when running long distances.

This terrible pain was an indication that Theo's spirit was growing. The method of training his mental power was extremely simple: use the ability to its limit, let it recover, and then repeat the process. In a sense, mental power was like the muscles. By repeating these actions, the limit could be increased.

Of course, the answer was simple, but the execution was different.

Theo stood up after 10 minutes to see Vince looking at him in an uncomfortable manner. The headache had been so intense that it still felt like his head was spinning. Theo had trained for half a year in Fluidization, but his limit was still half of his original goal of 10 space jumps.

Theo barely regained his balance and wanted to ask something.

Vince noticed his feelings and advised sharply, "Don't be so hasty."

Theo was taken aback and felt ashamed, but Vince just shrugged. Recently, he realized that Theo was getting distracted. No, the reason for the distraction was obvious. It was time to face the 'wall' again.

"As I said before, you have mastered the 5th Circle, so you'll have

to leap to the next level if you want to achieve more. I know that it is hard and frustrating, but you will only get hurt if you rush it."

Vince had spent 10 years at the 5th Circle, so Theo couldn't disregard his advice.

The Meltor Kingdom had a much higher number of senior mages than the other countries. It was the result of magicians who had passed the 'wall' transferring their knowledge down to their disciples, creating a cycle which could last dozens of generations.

Theodore listened to Vince's words with a serious expression. "Master, what should I do then?"

"Hmm, if you were an ordinary magician, then I would advise you to build up experience steadily, but... there might be another way if you use Gluttony's abilities well."

No matter how much of a genius a person was, they still needed luck to cross the wall of a circle.

Vince and other Superiors of the magic towers had once been called geniuses, but they rarely went beyond the limit of the 6th Circle. It was a path of despair which they couldn't escape from, other than building up their efforts.

However, a forked path existed for Theodore.

"It is like when I ate the elder lich's Life Vessel."

If he ate a Treasure ranked artifact, then he might be able to break through the wall of the 5th Circle at an unprecedented rate. Of course, it wasn't easy to obtain things like an elder lich's Life Vessel, but it was better than waiting for a moment of enlightenment.

To Theodore, who was tired of being at a standstill, it was the most advice he would be able to hear.

Vince said as he put on his robe, "If you have recovered, let's go. It will soon go beyond the time that we have reserved this room."

Theodore checked the clock on the wall and picked up his robe. "Oh, it has already happened."

The robe hanging on the wall was smooth and well-maintained, looking exactly like when he'd received it before the ball. Theo was now fully accustomed to putting on the robe and headed to the exit of the magic training room one step in front of Vince.

However, the moment that Theo placed his hand on the door knob... "Eh?"

A person opened the door to the training room from outside. He wore a grey robe without the colour of any of the magic towers, indicating that he was an apprentice magician. Instead of completing the academy's curriculum, apprentice magicians earned achievements by acting as the Magic Society's internal messengers.

The magician in the grey robe apologized first with a perplexed expression. “Ah, e-excuse me!”

“It’s okay. It seems like you are looking for us.”

Due to the difference in positions, the messenger bowed his head a few more times before revealing his purpose. “Are you Vince Haidel and Theodore Miller?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“I came because there is an urgent notice from the Magic Society. It has been issued to both of you.”

As the two people remained confused, the messenger took out a piece of parchment.

Then he started to read the contents to both of them, “This is a message to all Superior ranked magicians who are in the capital. The Andras Empire has recently expressed their intention to send a delegation here. All magicians who receive this announcement should gather in the auditorium at the center of the Magic Society!”

Chapter 85 – Empire Mission (2)

The Andras Empire…

The so-called sword empire, famous for its power, had existed for centuries as an enemy of Meltor.

The two nations which occupied different parts of the northern region of the continent were similar in many ways due to their long rivalry. However, the core power promoted in the Andras Empire was aura. Just like how the Meltor Kingdom was dedicated to fostering senior magicians, the Andras Empire nourished aura users.

The Andras Empire was said to be a kingdom of sword kings.

Additionally, boys and girls were required to undergo mandatory rigorous training at an agency operated directly by the Imperial Household Agency when they reached the age of seven. Two thirds of the students died, but the empire was able to form a corps of powerful aura users, more numerous than any other country.

“The biggest problem regarding the Andras Empire is that something so crazy produced results. A country that has seven sword masters in one generation can’t be found anywhere else except the Empire.”

The result was the existence of the Seven Swords who represented the Andras Empire.

It was why the Andras Empire didn't lose to the Meltor Kingdom, who had two 8th Circle magicians and a number of senior mages. Aura users who achieved the state of a sword master were already close to a living storm.

The most well-known sword master was said to have not stepped back in a battle with Veronica.

Theodore carefully listened to Vince's words and asked, "...Then why is the empire sending a delegation? They seem like people who will speak with swords rather than words."

The Meltor Kingdom had already been struggling against the empire for hundreds of years. The education system had been designed a long time ago to emphasize the bad aspects of enemy countries and inspire hostility towards them. However, despite that education, Vince Haidel didn't deny the stereotypes. It was because the military power of the Andras people whom he'd encountered on the battlefield wasn't actually lacking in comparison to the portrayals in the stories.

At the very least, they preferred getting into sword fights rather than arguments.

"Umm, that may be the case for those not involved with politics. Countries that rely on force can't last for long. The Andras Empire is scary because they know how to use force differently."

"Using it differently..."

“The mission this time is to talk about the armistice which was signed in the last war. Of course, you are one of the reasons.”

“Huh? Me?” Theodore was surprised by the sudden change in topic.

However, Vince answered the question casually, “They are wondering about your relationship with the high elf and Elvenheim. They also doubt the authenticity of the hero who appeared half a year ago. The ambassadors will probably start the bargaining in earnest after seeing your value.”

“Hah, international relations are fairly complex.”

“It means that you are a key figure. The status of a high elf is larger than I’d thought.”

In Elvenheim, a country where half the elves on the continent lived, there were only five high elves. The recently added Ellenoa increased it to six, but that didn’t change the fact that they were extremely rare.

Therefore, they had a huge debt to Theodore Miller who had defended the sixth high elf. Due to this, they might change their position of neutrality which they had maintained for hundreds of years.

Even if Theodore wasn’t of the Superior rank, they would’ve

called him separately. This was a phenomenon which Vince could guess easily. From the perspective of the Magic Society, it was no surprise that Theo was treated exceptionally well in the Superior rank.

‘It is a specification that can be a little annoying.’

There were uninvited guests when he was concentrating on magic training, so Theo couldn’t help clicking his tongue.

He wouldn’t complain if it was a mission, but he didn’t want to be treated as stakes in politics.

*

Shortly after their conversation, Theo and Vince reached the destination.

‘Tch, as expected.’ Theo moved forward while ignoring the gazes which had begun to gather on him.

The number of people increased as he got closer to the auditorium, and they all recognized him. After all, there was only one young Superior with dark hair. There was no one in the Magic Society who wouldn’t recognize the hero, Theodore, whose name had been sworn in at the court dance half a year ago.

Some of the gossip from the magician entered his ears.

“That young man is Theodore Miller…?”

“He is younger than I thought. It seems like the rumour that he has barely turned 20 years old is true.”

“Becoming a 5th Circle master at that age… I can’t believe it. He is also the only survivor of the convoy. He is a prospect of the Red Tower, so maybe they exaggerated that achievement?”

“Well, let’s just watch for a while. We will know if his name is exaggerated or real.”

There was no need to respond, so Theo just ignored their voices and crossed the threshold of the auditorium. It was the venue which the Magic Society used for presentations during the annual magic contest, so the space was huge. The 100 magicians gathered there were unable to fill up the auditorium.

However, there was something which filled up the empty space.

‘Even though this is such a big place, the density of mana is awful… Ordinary people wouldn’t be able to breathe properly in here.’

It was a terrifying mana flow! A total of 132 Superior ranked magicians were gathered, raising the mana density to unusual levels.

Theodore was forced to admire the fact that the intangible mana could become so heavy. If the magicians in the room concentrated their powers intentionally, the target would immediately be overwhelmed by the tremendous pressure.

At that moment, an old man suddenly appeared on the stage of the auditorium. “Huhu, everybody has gathered quickly.”

Strangely enough, the old man didn’t lose his composure among the waves of mana which felt like a tsunami. Looking closely, the old man’s surroundings were calm like he was the center of a typhoon, It definitely wasn’t a common phenomenon.

However, Theo had a lot of experience with ‘them’ and realized it.

‘That person, he is at the master level…!’

A 7th Circle magician who went beyond the limits of a human and could adjust the laws of nature… Only masters could dominate and control mana itself. It was possible to manipulate the pressure of mana, just like they controlled their own limbs.

Theo had never met the president of the Magic Society before, but he was another powerhouse master. Indeed, he was qualified to be the president of the Magic Society.

“First, I would like to thank you for coming despite the sudden announcement. The coming of the Andras delegation wasn’t

planned, so this old man heard about it too late. Thank you for your understanding." The president of the Magic Society bowed and expressed his heartfelt gratitude for their presence.

After his words, the discomfort on the faces of some people was wiped away forcefully. The important issue right now was the Andras Empire's delegation to Meltor.

Once that unspoken consensus was reached, the president of the Magic Society raised his head again.

"Then I will start talking. Everyone has heard the news that a delegation from Andras is coming to Meltor, so I won't mention it. We have gathered here to discuss how to treat the uninvited guests," the president of the Magic Society started his speech eloquently. His voice rang throughout the auditorium, which would allow Theo to hear it clearly even if he were outside.

There was an interesting mix of information in the speech which resonated with Andras' aggression and brutality.

There was one thing that especially interested Theo.

'Isn't the practice of having daily duels more like the custom of an orc village rather than an empire?'

It wasn't a modest fight where they sparred against each other. This was a real life-threatening duel where people often died in the process. In the Andras Empire, there were men who climbed to the

position of duke after a duel as well as a slave who occupied the seat of one of the empire's Seven Swords.

These duels were even applied to other countries.

"Does everybody know? In Andras, duels are a battle for life, not the moderate fights that we know. 30 years ago, a group of magicians clashed with the ambassadors, resulting in several casualties. Don't follow in the footsteps of the past."

The arrival of an Andras delegation happened two or three times a century, but there was bloodshed every time. This had to be avoided as Meltor had suffered massive damage with the destruction of the convoy half a year ago.

Apart from the damages, if the Andras Empire thought that the Meltor Kingdom was weak, they might invade again.

The magicians gathered in the auditorium nodded at the words.

The president's words were plausible, and there was no logic to refute it. More than anything else, he added a few words at the end which made their blood chill. "Oh, two of the Seven Swords will be joining this delegation. There is no hope if you are greeted with the blade of a master."

The nemesis of senior magicians, the sword masters...!

They were reapers of the battlefield who could cross a gap of

several hundred meters in an instant and cut through their defensive spells like they were trash.

Since childhood, magicians were raised with a fear toward sword masters, so the veteran magicians stiffened as they faced reality. A sword wielded absolute strength, so magicians below the 7th Circle were just like straw to them.

As the auditorium grew quiet, the president's eyes turned in another direction. It was toward Theo, who was sitting on the edge.

The president of the Magic Society met Theo's gaze and advised in a loud voice, "Theodore Miller, you should be especially careful. As the main target of the delegation, you shouldn't accept their duel challenges no matter what."

"Yes, I understand."

"I don't doubt your competence, but you should refrain from uncertain gambles since this is about the relations between nations. Don't fall into the foolishness of youth."

After seeing Theo accept his cautionary words, the old man turned his eyes to another place.

'Andras delegation... and the sword masters.' Unlike the other magicians, Theodore wasn't intimidated at all. No, he was actually feeling a little expectant.

Of course, he didn’t think he could compete against the masters. However, Theo was knocking against the wall of the 6th Circle, so he might get new inspiration from the existence of the masters themselves.

As the atmosphere in the auditorium remained tense, Theodore formed fists under his desk silently. He had a feeling that his six months of quiet were ending.

Six days after that, a group of delegates arrived, including two sword masters.

Chapter 86 – Empire Mission (3)

“Your Majesty, the Andras delegation has crossed the threshold of the palace!” A royal knight reported.

Royal knights always reported three times when meeting the ambassadors of another country. It was when they passed through the gate, crossed the threshold of the palace, and finally when they entered the hall.

The royal family was always ready to meet the delegation in accordance to the report as it gave them time to calm their minds. This was the second report, so there was still some time before the Andras delegation would arrive.

Kurt III nodded from where he sat on his throne. As soon as the royal knight stepped back, the air in the room became heated.

“They finally came, those barbarians from the Andras…!”

“I’m curious about what they are going to say.”

“Sending two sword masters, did they not have the guts to come alone?”

There was a sense of solidarity based on hostile feelings. It was even more so when the opponents were their centuries-long enemies. The magicians, who were whispering in hostile voices,

were dressed in court robes of red, blue, yellow, and white. The robes were divided into four colours and were proof of which magic tower they belonged to. They were the 132 Superior magicians who had been summoned recently. The current generation's youngest Superior,

Theodore Miller, was also waiting for the delegation's arrival with the rest of the Red Tower magicians.

''Isn't the atmosphere tougher than I expected?' Theo thought as he looked around.

It was different from when they gathered in the auditorium. This space was narrower than at that time, and the gathered magicians were hostile toward the Andras delegation. So, the mana in the surroundings was like a raging storm. It was obvious that the enormous pressure would overwhelm the delegation once they entered the hall.

No, maybe that was the reason why all the magicians had convened.

"...Is this a war of nerves?"

"You saw it correctly." Theo whispered to Vince who replied in agreement. "It is childish but effective. The pressure will be enormous if all these magicians are gathered."

"Won't the Andras delegation think of it as a weakness?"

“It is common. The Andras Empire also creates a sense of oppression by using a collection of elite knights. Furthermore, it is rare for the Meltor Kingdom to do this with anyone besides the Andras Empire.”

This was an exceptional case in many ways. Theodore accepted the explanation and turned back to the front again.

It was hard to find a precedent where 132 senior magicians as well as dozens of high ranking officials and nobles were gathered. In particular, two tower masters were standing in the vicinity of the throne, ensuring that the king was thoroughly protected.

At that moment, the third report rang out from outside the door.

“Your Majesty, the Andras delegation is seeking an audience with you!”

“I’ll allow it.” As soon as Kurt III answered, the room fell into a cold and intimidating silence.

The eyes of over 200 people were concentrated on the doors of the audience hall, and they soon spread open. Beyond that, there was a sight which surprised Theodore.

Rattle, rattle, rattle.

There was steel and more steel. Shining metal armour reflected the light pouring from the chandelier. The Andras delegation were dressed head and toe in armour, with no skin showing at all. The steel corps entered through the door with orderly steps.

Then as if it had been waiting, a shock wave of mana struck them.

Kuuuuong!

“...Kuk!”

“Umm...!”

The Andras delegation experienced the extremely unusual pressure with their heavy armour.

Ironically, it was more annoying due to their heavy armour. The pressure pushing on their heads and shoulders became stronger with every step, as moans emerged from the mouths of the knights who could no longer endure it.

There were only five steps left to the center of the audience room when the pressure reached a level which the delegation could no longer continue walking under. Even the elite knights couldn’t advance one more step due to the pressure!

In that fearful space, two men walked out.

Huuk!

It was amazing. They wore more splendid armour and walked through the mana storm.

There was a knight a few heads taller than the others and another knight with black hair flowing under his helmet. By the time these two knights reached the center of the room, the pressure of the fierce mana had already faded away.

Finally, the two knights stopped once they saw the king. Then they took their helmets off and went down on one knee.

“The great Andras’ 7th Sword, Lloyd Pollan, greets the sun of Meltor.”

“The great Andras’ 4th Sword, Pan Helliones, greets the sun of Meltor.”

The empire’s 7th Sword, Lloyd Pollan, and the empire’s 4th Sword, Pan Helliones… These two men overpowered the atmosphere with their short introduction and rose to their feet. Just like how the Tower Masters received the reverence of Meltor, the same was true for the Seven Swords of Andras as the rights given to them was just below that of the Emperor’s.

Kurt III eyed the sword masters before speaking, “It has been a long time, Sir Helliones.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. This is the first time since the last agreement.”

“We have known each other for a long time. What do you think about getting rid of the futile formalities?”

The knight with yellowish skin and black hair smiled like he was pleased. “Pan Helliones will follow Your Majesty’s will.”

“Then I will be blunt.” On the other hand, there was no hint of laughter on Kurt III’s face.

The king’s dignity couldn’t be overlooked by the sword masters, despite having no aura or magic power. As the ambassadors gulped involuntarily, the king of Meltor asked in a loud voice, “Are you hoping for an extension of the truce? Or do you once again wish for war?”

It was extremely straight-forward behaviour.

The ambassadors, who were covered in steel, and the magicians, who were pretending to be invisible, were perplexed. Usually, there would be a series of procedures, but Kurt III had shattered the traditional customs with a few words.

The two sword masters couldn’t hide their confused expressions either, but they quickly regained their composure.

“You are still bold. If so, I will speak bluntly like Your Majesty wishes,” Pan Helliones said with shining eyes. “I’ll ask first. The story of the hero who saved the high elf that emerged from Meltor half a year ago, is it true?”

“Why do you care about that?”

“We were told by His Majesty to confirm the authenticity of the story. This Pan Helliones is one of the Seven Swords, so I have to do as the Emperor wills.”

“Don’t make me laugh. You have increased your eloquence during the time in which I haven’t seen you,” Kurt III retorted in a cynical tone. “You want to discuss the truce after confirming the relationship between Meltor and Elvenheim. Am I wrong?”

“……” The two sword masters remained silent. However, only an idiot wouldn’t realize that the silence meant affirmation.

Kurt III displayed a scornful expression at their silence before opening his mouth to speak again. Since they said that it was a mission for the Emperor’s knights, then he wouldn’t turn away from the thrown bait.

“Well, good. Let’s not quibble over your intentions. How do you plan to check the authenticity of the story? Will you send an envoy to Elvenheim to ask?” Kurt III prompted.

“…A knight of Andras doesn’t trust words. It is the same for the

testimony of the elves."

"Then?"

The big sword master knocked on his belt like he had been waiting for this. The heavy gauntlet made a sharp sound as it collided with the sheath of his weapon.

Kang!

"There is only one law in the empire which is to prove the strength! If we see the hero fight, we will know the truth. Your Majesty, please let this Pan Helliones see the young man!"

"Ridiculous!" Kurt III rejected the request. "What if you use the pretext of the duel to kill him?! Even if he is a hero, he is only 20 years old. Isn't that shameful as a sword master?"

Kurt III's rejection was like the roar of a beast.

Lloyd looked up at Kurt III with admiration. As expected of Andras' enemy, the Meltor king. His dignity was at a similar level to that of the Emperor. He wasn't an enemy who could be threatened or manipulated. Having been on the front lines for decades, Pan Helliones had been well aware of this for a long time.

Therefore, he prepared his own compromise. "Your Majesty, I have no intention of doing such a thing. If I do that, we will gain Elvenheim's hostility, and the Andras Empire doesn't want such a

thing. I am just trying to make a useful suggestion."

"...Don't just end your talk with empty words."

"Of course. Rebecca!"

As soon as the call was made, a knight walked over to the two sword masters. The person's build was much smaller than the others, and the reason was immediately revealed. Kurt III's eyebrows raised the moment the knight took off the helmet.

Golden hair poured down like gold dust.

"4th Sword Pan Helliones's disciple, Rebecca, greets Meltor's sun."

Her face was beautiful, but compared to the daughters of nobles, she gave off a distant feeling. There were cuts on her skin and few decorations. It was evidence that she was extremely indifferent to her own appearance. Perhaps that was why she gave off a rather manly look.

The two swords hanging from her waist proved she wasn't just an ornament. Indeed, she seemed like the embodiment of a steel knight.

"...They weren't just empty words."

The power of aura gave strength regardless of gender, but the stereotypes about the abilities of men and women couldn't be completely eliminated. However, the sharp air around her was enough to strip away those stereotypes.

Theodore used the eyes of a warrior to see her essence.

'She's a senior aura user, and she is of a similar age to me.'

An eerie chill went down his spine at the assumption that she would be an enemy. He didn't feel like there was no chance of winning, but she was dangerous. When looking at his peers, was she equal to Sylvia?

A genius aura user who had become a master's disciple at a young age. However, unlike Sylvia, whose emotions were immature, the eyes of the female knight showed that she already knew the realities of a knight.

Simultaneously, a strange sense of discomfort irritated him. 'Where have I seen that face...?'

Theodore Miller was certain; he had never seen this woman before. Nevertheless, the knight called Rebecca gave off a familiar feeling. Maybe he had met her relative before. However, he didn't have any more time to think about it.

"Let me ask you again, Your Majesty." Pan Helliones, the 4th Sword of the Andras Empire, suddenly turned his eyes toward

Theodore. “Sword and magic… Why don’t we let the youngsters of the two countries dance together?”

Chapter 87 – Sword And Magic Confrontation (1)

However, the rude demand couldn't be accepted immediately. Pan Helliones had proposed a friendly match between the two countries. As Kurt III didn't say anything, Pan Helliones stepped back to respect the king's will.

Nevertheless, the atmosphere became heated. So, the talk couldn't progress further, and the delegation left. No, maybe that was the delegation's intention.

As the atmosphere in the room turned dreary, Kurt III muttered in a low voice, "...He is still tricky, Andras' 4th Sword."

The empire's 4th Sword, Pan Helliones... His big build made him seem dull, but he was actually quite crafty. He was a politician who knew how to take advantage of his appearance as an ignorant swordsman to strike the opponent.

Perhaps he had intentionally avoided talking about the whole story in the first meeting. If the proposal was accepted, they could review Theodore directly. If it was rejected, they could leave this place like they were victims. In other words, either answer wouldn't be a loss for the Andras Empire.

The old man in the blue robe, Blundell, nodded like he agreed. "He is a bothersome opponent. He is probably expecting us to refuse the proposal. That way, he can stall for some time during the negotiations."

“Meanwhile, the rest will go through the capital and gather information. Their intention is probably to drag out the time.”

“Yes, I think so as well.”

Kurt III and Blundell frowned in a similar manner.

The White Tower’s intelligence network was watching the delegation, but the opponents were an elite group accompanied by two sword masters. The empire’s Seven Swords could block off the intelligence network directly. It might be different if the White Tower Master was in the capital, but he had left for a remote region after the last meeting about the convoy.

‘It is better to get rid of them as soon as possible.’

Of course, Meltor’s security wasn’t that poor, and there was little chance of anything major or confidential being leaked. However, the problem was that even the slightest possibility was offensive. The enemy they had been facing for centuries was growling at their border.

Kurt III naturally turned to one person. It was Theodore Miller, one of the people who, along with Blundell, had been ordered to remain in the hall after the delegation left.

“Tell me honestly. You do not need to accept this offer. I know it is a high demand, and there will be no penalty if you refuse.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“But if you are able to defeat them thoroughly, we will have a considerable advantage in the negotiations.” So, he asked as the king of Meltor, “That Rebecca, can you beat her?”

Theodore replied without any hesitation, “Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Even if you don’t use the power of the national treasure?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Kurt III would like to believe Theo’s confidence. However, the king’s fighting ability wasn’t that great, so he didn’t have the knowledge to judge accurately. He would only make the decision after deliberating with the two greatest masters in Meltor. “Veronica, Blundell. What do you think?”

Veronica came forward like she had been waiting. “If they fight 10 times, he will win nine times, and there will be one tie. At the very least, I don’t think there is a chance of the kid getting hurt.”

“Hoh, is that so?”

“I will bet my name, Your Majesty.”

Kurt III was surprised by the answer. The duel opponent was the

disciple of Pan Helliones. Rebecca's young age and pretty appearance weren't reasons to devalue her strength. As the most likely candidate for the next generation of sword masters, her skills should be close to the peak. Otherwise, she wouldn't have joined this delegation.

Still, the odds were nine victories with one draw? In effect, that meant victory.

"Hmm, this old man has the same opinion. It might not be a one-sided match, but he won't be lacking in quality. As long as the conditions are good, it is impossible for him not to win."

"Then there is no reason for us to show our backs." A smile spread across Kurt III's face at the answer he obtained.

Until now, he had been hesitant to accept the delegation's suggestion because he had calculated the losses and benefits. He would gain nothing and lose a lot, so there was no reason to make the gamble.

However, if the chance of victory was 100%, then it wasn't a gamble.

"Minister of State."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Look at the treaty from the last truce. Report on the land that

can be obtained from near the border. Moreover, look up any conditions that you think can be rewritten!”

“As the Minister of State, I will accept Your Majesty’s command!”

Excitement filled the Minister of State’s face at the king’s powerful words.

This was a chance to take something away from the Andras Empire. It cut into his holiday time, but the Minister of State was boiling with motivation. His associates also nodded eagerly at the king’s command.

Kurt III looked at Theo’s face again. After receiving the assurance of the two tower masters, the king’s purple eyes were filled with wonder as well as an unknown emotion.

“...It is strange. After the elder lich’s defeat and the rescue of the high elf, you are now once again entrusted with a great deal of responsibility.”

“Your Majesty.”

“There is no need to be humble. Your merits are already at a level where they can’t be hidden.” Kurt III got up from the throne as a light gleamed in his eyes.

For him, the Andras Empire were an enemy which had killed many soldiers. They were a symbol of bloodshed which had

threatened Meltor since Meltor's first king. This was a chance to beat them peacefully, so there was no reason to hesitate.

He gazed into the air and spoke in a heavy tone, "They always come with force. They cross our borders to steal our scarce wheat, and they have plundered and burned our homes. The ink used in the armistice is the blood of our people, and the borders that have been redrawn a few times are the broken arms and legs."

The king's voice contained sincere and profound emotions. Hearing it, the atmosphere of the room naturally became solemn. Magic power rose around some bodies while fighting spirit appeared in the eyes of others. Theo was kneeling before the king, and he too felt that way.

Everyone in Meltor had lost someone in the wars against the empire.

"Theodore Miller."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The solemn voice of the king grew stronger. "Take the name of Meltor, fight, and win. Teach those fiends the history of this country! Let them know what a large and mighty enemy they have created! And I will give you a reward for the victory!"

Theo replied in a powerful voice to the edict, "I, Theodore Miller, will do as Your Majesty commands!"

*

The news that the hero, Theodore, and a disciple of a Seven Sword would duel spread like a thunderbolt. There was already agitation from the delegation, and the duel was like an oasis in a desert. Despite the attendance being extremely limited, the audience seats were completely filled.

Theo looked around the area. '...Wow, there are almost no faces that I don't know.'

He had stayed half a year at the Magic Society, so he had met many people. Due to his relationship with Veronica and Sylvia, he was able to know almost all the famous people in the capital. However, the majority of the celebrities were gathered in this place. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that the people gathered here were within the top 2 or 3% of Meltor's national strength.

It meant there was great interest in this duel. In addition to Kurt III, there were members of the royal family who rarely showed their faces, so Theodore could definitely feel the burden. Therefore, the feeling of discomfort he felt toward the face of his opponent had diminished.

Soon after, Blundell climbed to the stage since he was acting as the referee. As it was a fight between a magician and knight, the stage was quite wide. The two people listened to Blundell's words as they receded to the edges of the stage.

“Meltor’s side, Theodore Miller.”

“Yes.”

“Andras’ side, Rebecca.”

“Yes.”

Blundell received an answer from both of them and knocked against the stadium floor with his staff, producing a blunt sound. The strength of the hulking magician damaged the floor, and the sound’s volume was so loud that people sitting in the audience covered their ears.

Blundell silenced the surroundings and spoke, “The duel will start with this sound. Prior to that, make an oath as representatives of both countries. The winner will tolerate the loser, and the loser shouldn’t forget to honor the winner. If I think the fight is over, I will stop you from attacking any further.”

Theodore and Rebecca nodded. Theo didn’t know his opponent’s heart, but he didn’t dare object in a situation where Blundell Adruncus was the notary. As Theodore’s and Rebecca’s eyes met, Blundell raised his staff up high.

Then it slammed down against the stone floor. Kakang!

Two streams of light emerged from Rebecca’s sheath before the sound even finished. They were double swords called scimitars.

She shot off like a thunderbolt, quick enough that some of the people in the audience missed it. Some would die without even realizing that Rebecca had pulled out the swords.

Fortunately, Theodore didn't belong to that group. Rather, he noticed the posture Rebecca had taken as she pulled the swords out, and his sense of discomfort increased. Theo had seen it somewhere before. He also faintly remembered the attack which immediately followed.

Shortly after that...

"Hup." Rebecca appeared in front of Theo with a slight breathing sound.

There was no room to panic or react. Her two swords turned into flashes of light with no warning. The light emitted from both her hands moved up, down, left and right, and twisted like a whirlpool around Theodore. It was a sword technique which wouldn't leave even one bit of flesh unsliced.

Six consecutive strikes from the left hand and six from the right hand. A dozen attacks poured out almost simultaneously.

Chwaaaaak!

The arena's floor cracked like a spider web. The materialized aura was a type of weapon which could even damage the defenses of senior magicians. Rebecca was already at her peak, and her

strikes could shatter 5th Circle defense magic.

Everyone was shocked by the torrent of attacks from Rebecca.

“Ohh!”

“How did those attacks…?!”

“The rumours are true!”

Lloyd, one of the Seven Swords, lost his dull expression as he exclaimed, “…Excellent!”

The target of the exclamation wasn’t toward where Rebecca, the disciple of Pan Helliones, was standing. His eyes were more intense than usual as he gazed at the young man who moved 12 times. This level of movement wasn’t usually seen from a magician.

Theodore, the youth who broke Rebecca’s 12 attacks, faced her with a cold expression. He was completely sure after the series of strikes.

She had showed him the swordsmanship of Randolph, the mercenary leader who had slaughtered the ghoul wyvern in his hometown. They were either relatives or had studied at the same school…

‘Think about it once I defeat her.’

Theo removed all other thoughts, and his magic power boiled up as he gazed at Rebecca’s back.

Chapter 88 – Sword And Magic Confrontation (2)

‘Battle Song. Sonata of Speed. Allegretto.’

As the duel progressed, Gluttony’s mouth was chanting the spells under the glove which covered Theo’s left hand.

Theo had triggered Sonata of Speed as soon as the duel began, allowing him to respond to Rebecca’s preemptive strike. Compared to Randolph’s swords, she was lacking power, and compared to Superbia, she lacked speed.

Before Rebecca could move again, Theo cast his magic hurriedly, “Chain Lightning!”

A net of lightning instantly covered dozens of meters. Regardless of one’s speed, there was no way to escape from the chain of lightning. Just the power of one stream of lightning was enough to fry a person. If Rebecca hadn’t raised her aura reflexively, then the match might’ve been decided here.

Pajijik! Paijijik!

“Kuk…!”

However, receiving damage was inevitable. The lightning penetrated the gaps in Rebecca’s armour and struck against her

aura, causing smoke to rise from her armour. It was pure destructive power, one of the reasons why aura users found it hard to compete with magicians.

Therefore, knights always tried to avoid a magician's attacks or went for preventative measures. They had to stop Chain Lightning and other magic before they were activated. Thanks to this, Rebecca was one step slower.

"Lightning Spear."

A brutal attack came from Theo just as she managed to escape from the lightning. Lightning Spear focused on one point, so it could cause deadly damage to a body protected by aura. Theo called five lightning bolts in mere seconds and aimed for Rebecca's abdomen. Simultaneously, the five streams of lightning struck horizontally.

It was possible to respond to one lightning bolt. Three would be difficult even if she was fully prepared. By the time it reached five bolts, even elite knights couldn't avoid a serious injury. This was impossible to defend, and trying to avoid it would also be meaningless.

Therefore, Rebecca boldly grasped her double swords and struck the lightning bolts head on. "Hap!"

Blue aura leaked from the blades, and the two swords broke through the lightning bolts. The remnants of the lightning, which weren't completely eliminated, struck her fingers, but she never

let go of her swords. No, her hands actually held on tighter.

There were three more Lightning Spears. Even if she took care of two more, there would still be one remaining.

Rebecca gritted her teeth with a determined expression.

Kiiing-!

The moment that her two swords struck two lightning bolts, the remaining one hit her abdomen.

Peeeeeong!

It was awful. Rebecca swallowed the blood which had risen into her mouth and put strength into her legs. Her concentrated aura defense had burst, and the impact was transmitted inside her. Fortunately, there was little impact on her combat strength.

As she returned to herself, Rebecca pointed the tips of her swords toward Theodore.

Theodore couldn't help admiring her fierce fighting spirit. 'She is fairly familiar with pain. Additionally, her body is hard enough to block a Lightning Spear. I don't think she can be defeated by an ordinary blow.'

In fact, he had restricted his own abilities to a certain extent in

this duel. It was too dangerous to show the power of Umbra, a national treasure, to another country's delegation, let alone the empire's Seven Swords. He had various hidden cards, so he decided not to use any skills related to Umbra.

The case of Magic Bullet was a little special.

'...I can't control the strength.' Theo was worried about the power of his index finger.

After regaining the original strength of Magic Bullet, he had only shot it once against a human. Despite the fact that he had suppressed the output, the power had still been enough to leave a wound on Veronica's cheek. If it hit a vital point, the person would die before a healing spell or potion reached them. He didn't want to kill someone who might be related to Randolph.

Theo's aim was to knock her down thoroughly. The determination in his eyes deepened, and he ran toward Rebecca.

"What, he's approaching?!"

"A magician going into close range..."

"Once again, those guys from the Red Tower have strange heads!"

Buzzing chatter could be heard from the stands.

Theo stared at the double swords pointed at him and accelerated toward Rebecca. For a magician to enter a knight's close range voluntarily... This was an effective method of provocation.

Rage sparked in Rebecca's green eyes.

Shaaack-

Her scimitar blades disappeared like they had melted into the air. This acceleration, which used the power of aura, had the ability to disrupt the laws of physics, which in turn caused the swords to move faster than the air resistance. That speed exceeded even Theo's enhanced eyesight.

The duration was short because it consumed aura rapidly, but it was a secret technique which increased her speed by a few times. A storm of steel raged around Rebecca. Even an ogre famous for its sturdy muscles and solid skin would be turned into minced meat if it got close.

The audience started screaming when they saw that Theo was heading into that storm. Rebecca's technique was a terrible weapon.

Theodore felt in awe as he jumped into her storm. 'Truly fast. Is it speed-focused swordsmanship like Randolph's?'

The tips of Rebecca's swords came down and aimed to cut his

waist into pieces. Lee Yoonsung's experience was essential as he used Shift Energy to turn away the blades. The robe with defense magic was turned into a rag, but the result was that Theo was only bruised.

The storm of steel didn't touch him, as he moved through it like a light feather. Of course, the reason was also due to the difference in their abilities. Theodore was much stronger than before.

'It is lighter than Randolph.' More than anything else, there was a difference in the weight of the falchions and scimitars, as well as their arm strength. If the strikes had been as heavy as Randolph's and at the same speed, Theo would be cut easily.

Due to the lack of weight on the swords, it was easy to shift the orbit by hitting the sides of the blades.

'She is slower than Superbia.' Superbia had a bizarre form and was able to shift to the traits of powerful creatures. Among them, the caracalos tail was one of the feared threats, and the speed and sharpness of Superbia had been enough to beat Alfred.

However, that comparison wasn't proof that Rebecca's skills were lacking. After the Pupil Tournament, Theo had gained Lee Yoonsung's book and absorbed all of Alfred's abilities, so he had a definite advantage. That said, Rebecca certainly had enough talent to be chosen as a disciple by one of the Seven Swords.

Theodore calmly deflected her swords until the end. No matter how efficiently the swords were swung, the human body didn't

have an infinite capacity. Inevitably, it would reach its limit. It might be different for a sword master who transcended the limits of life. However, Rebecca was still at the level of an elite knight, and she was unable to maintain the storm.

"Su...suaa..." She had a shortness of breath and a pale complexion, and her muscles were trembling as she held onto her swords. The perfect storm of swords became weaker and began to collapse. Theo calmly waited for her to reach her limit.

He didn't care about his arm which had become bloody after deflecting the swords and simply stared on with ice-cold eyes. Finally, the moment came.

"Haack!" She reached the limit of her breathing and a tortured gasp burst out from Rebecca's mouth.

The movements of her two swords stopped completely, and Theo stepped into that gap. He used a winning technique; the palm of his hand touched the defenseless body naturally.

'An ordinary blow won't deal much damage...!

'Memorize. All Slots Open. Shock Impact. Penta United.'

The shock wave attack magic, Shock Impact, was contact magic normally used to break down walls. However, Theodore had excellent melee skills, so he could use it this way. The five accumulated shock waves would exert a destructive power which

could penetrate aura.

Shortly after that, the huge shock wave hit Rebecca's breastplate.

Kwaaaaang!

Rebecca's body was thrown back with a tremendous sound. She bounced a few times along the ground before barely stopping at the edge of the duelling stage. This was a good chance, so Theo didn't hesitate to call some Lightning Spears.

If Rebecca tried to counterattack, then he would intercept immediately. However, before she could stand up, a person jumped down from the stands. Theo stopped the lightning reflexively and stared at the person with a tense face. It was a situation where only one person could intervene.

"Sir Pan Helliones?"

"That's right." The big knight, Pan Helliones, nodded as he hoisted Rebecca onto his shoulder.

Pan Helliones didn't seem angry, so Theodore withdrew the lightning spell. Although Pan Helliones had jumped down here, Veronica was clearly visible behind him. Everybody had a hunch that the duel between the two countries had ended.

"I admit defeat, Meltor's young hero. Your abilities are certainly beyond my disciple's, and I am grateful that you didn't take her

life.” Despite the shameful verdict, his voice contained a clear respect.

The empire was a place where they believed what they saw with their own eyes, not through words. The man before Theodore truly acknowledged him.

“What does that mean?”

“This duel is the Andras Empire’s defeat! I will accept this result in the name of the empire’s Seven Swords!”

One of the empire’s Seven Swords declared defeat! The audience realized the weight of this result, and the air around the delegates grew heavy. The empire’s logic of communicating with strength had always been victorious.

It was only once in several generations that they would be defeated like this in a public duel. This was clearly a big event which would be mentioned in the history books.

Then Kurt III clapped his hands, and the unnatural silence of the audience was shattered.

“...!!!” The magicians and courtiers yelled, causing the voices to echo. The loud cheers were enough to cause shivers. In the center of this, Theodore and Pan Helliones stared at each other. He couldn’t read any emotions in Pan’s black eyes.

Therefore, Theodore couldn't understand his identity. No, it was more accurate to say he wasn't sure.

'...That guy.'

The moment Theo had stepped toward Rebecca, just before he'd used the shock wave magic... He wouldn't have felt it without his sixth sense, but there had been a terrifying killing intent. Due to that murderous feeling, the timing of his magic had been delayed by one beat.

That killing intent had been from the imperial sword, Lloyd Pollan.

Looking at the back which had already turned around, Theo went down from the stage with a grim expression.

Chapter 89 – Sword And Magic Confrontation (3)

After accomplishing a perfect victory in his duel with Rebecca, Theodore didn't head toward the dinner venue. Instead, he headed to the infirmary of the royal palace.

Theo came down from the stage in a much better state than Rebecca, but that didn't mean he was without damage. The power of the blade which was literally like a storm had leapt beyond the defensive power of 'Battle Song.'

The healer clicked his tongue when he saw Theo's tattered forearm. "...How terrible. It isn't easy to heal injuries caused by aura, but this is more than that. Simple treatment using potions or herbs would be more effective than magic."

Basically, the mana which passed through a person's body was altered according to the person's inherent nature. In order to resonate with that nature, magicians minimized the degree of deterioration by forming an artificial circulation organ called circles, but knights were different. For them, their inherent nature was merely a good thing. Since aura strengthened physical abilities, the closer it was to the user's own nature, the greater the efficiency and power would be. However, this left behind traces which interfered with magical healing.

"So?"

"Yes. Knight Rebecca... the density of her aura is already

reaching the level of a pro-knight. If you suffered a serious injury, you might've been lying in bed for months."

"Then how long will it take for this wound to heal?"

"Please wait a moment." The healer carefully examined the stab wound on Theo's forearm. There was occasional pain, but it wasn't enough to make a fuss about it. Theo's behaviour was like that of a veteran soldier.

The healer used his magic power to heal the wound before lifting his head again. "Fortunately, the blade didn't enter too deeply. I will use a healing spell, apply a medicine and then a bandage. The wound should be healed in three days."

"Three days..."

"Oh, please avoid any heavy exercise or movements for a week. The wound might reopen."

Theodore had no reason to refuse, so he nodded gently.

The healer proceeded to start the full-scale treatment. First, he removed the aura remaining in the wound with healing magic, then he connected the muscles in the blood vessels which hadn't healed yet. Subsequently, the blood completely stopped flowing out. After the bleeding stopped, the healer performed a simple treatment with potions and herbs.

The healer's workmanship was truly worthy of a healer working in the royal palace. A white bandage was wrapped around one of Theo's arms, and the pain from the wound was away. Theo moved the arm wrapped in the white bandage and said, "It is much better. Thank you very much."

"...It is nothing. Rather, I should be thanking you." The healer checked the bandage's knot meticulously and laughed at the gratitude.

He had been employed as a royal healer for several decades. Once the war broke out, the number of patients he treated had been in the thousands, and hundreds of them hadn't been able to be saved. Their lives had been taken by the Andras' blades.

"It was always a victory if we returned from the battlefield, and a defeat if we returned with the bodies of our colleagues. So, there were times when I regretted being a healer. I couldn't fight, and sometimes I blamed myself for choosing who to leave behind."

"....."

"But today, I knew what it felt like to win for the first time."

It was too early to call him an old man, but wrinkles could clearly be seen on the hand which gripped Theo's. Perhaps he had also been sitting in the audience and had seen with his own eyes the imperious and rude demands of the empire.

The healer bowed his head and thanked Theo once again, “Meltor’s Hero, it is an honour to treat you with these hands.”

“...It was my pleasure.” Theo was forced to accept the fierce praise.

He felt burdened by the healer’s emotions and left the infirmary after a brief goodbye. Most of the crowd was at the dinner party, so the corridor was a few times darker and emptier than usual. As soon as the door closed behind his back, a cold silence fell.

“Hoo, it is too burdensome.”

Whether it was positive or negative, it didn’t fit Theo’s nature to attract the attention of others. He was able to put on a firm face after absorbing the experiences but encountering such sincere praise made him feel itchy.

‘What should I do now?’ He walked down the corridor while locked in thought.

The soft sounds of his footsteps rang out amidst the silence of the corridor.

Veronica had encouraged Theo to go to the dinner party when he was available, but he didn’t want to go to such a burdensome place. He also didn’t think he could rest comfortably in a place where the two sword masters were.

It was much more attractive to use his injury as an excuse to return to the tower, as a political place would obviously be uncomfortable in many ways. Furthermore, there was a destination he hadn't thought of.

Theo advanced a few steps before stopping and breathing lightly. He looked over at a shadow in a corner of the corridor and said, "Why don't you come out now?"

The shadow was faint like fog. Despite his senses being refined to the limit, he only grasped the hiding place after a few minutes. As Theo's voice rang through the corridor where nobody was present, 'he' naturally appeared. It was like he had been there from the beginning.

Lloyd Pollan, one of the empire's Seven Swords, shrugged and said, "Oh, I followed you unintentionally."

"...I thought you were attending the dinner party?"

"I'm sorry, but Meltor's food and alcohol don't suit my tastes. I was going around on a walk."

It was nonsense, and Theo regretted that he couldn't dismiss it. Theo stared at Lloyd with cold eyes. Although it was a separate building, a sword master wouldn't be allowed to wander around the royal palace by himself. Besides, a walk? It was a pathetic excuse for following the winner of the duel.

“What did you come to me for, Sir Pollan?” Theo struggled to suppress his indignation. It was pointless to be rude here. Theo lacked the power or position to be rude. Lloyd also knew this fact. If Veronica or Blundell were near, then he would’ve disappeared quietly.

‘A sly human.’ Theodore had an accurate insight into Lloyd’s nature.

“The purpose… I suppose it is an apology.”

“Apology?”

“As you already know, I made a mistake during your duel with Rebecca. I didn’t know that your senses were so sensitive. You responded to my killing intent that I accidentally let out, and I admire that,” Lloyd praised with a smile, but his eyes weren’t warm.

On the other hand, Theodore paled as he noticed the meaning of the words. Lloyd was saying that he didn’t mean to disturb the duel, but his killing intent had leaked out accidentally leaked.

It meant that… this sword master wanted to kill Theodore Miller.

“Well, you don’t need to be tense here.” Lloyd smiled and continued saying, “I was scolded by Number 4 because he read my killing intent. At the very least, it is impossible to cut off your head

here. It is regretful, regretful."

"...Why?"

"Huh?"

Theo spoke the words he had been repressing, "Why do you want to kill me?"

This wasn't an order from the Andras Empire or from Pan Helliones. He wondered why Lloyd Pollan was so eager to kill him. Murderers killed people for no reason, but it was unlikely for a sword master. Theo was more curious than afraid of the master.

Lloyd sincerely sighed at the bold question.

"Hoo, it really is a pity. Why wasn't someone like you born in the empire?" He grumbled in a low voice before continuing, "10 years, that is the deadline of this truce."

The emotionless face started to spout terrible facts, "In the next 10 years, you will become an enemy of the empire. My senses have never been wrong even once."

"Your senses... You want to kill me for such an uncertain reason?"

"You... Did you use more than 30% of your power in that duel?"

There was conviction was in Lloyd's voice, so Theodore remained silent. "You have the potential to match the Seven Swords in the future, so I think I should kill you here, even if that causes a war."

"Ah...!"

There was an eerie killing intent. The killing intent pressing down on Theo was different from Superbia's. It felt like a sharp blade was being held against his neck. Still, the sword never came flying. Lloyd just passed by, like he meant his words about not killing Theo here.

His voice gradually moved further away, "10 years later, I won't let you live like today."

Theo couldn't move from his spot even after Lloyd had completely disappeared. The killing intent of a sword master was indeed terrifying. He would've fallen down if he hadn't built up tolerance in the fight with Superbia.

In retrospect, it was fortunate that he hadn't exposed Umbra and Magic Bullet. Lloyd would have rated Theo higher and might've ignored the command given to him in order to kill Theo. Theo wouldn't go obediently, but there was no chance of winning.

"Yes, 10 years," Theodore murmured in a low voice.

10 years... it was both a long and short period of time. After that, he would be sentenced to death by a sword master. Hearing that,

anybody would feel fear. However, Theo just laughed at the words. “I won’t be relaxing.”

He had jumped from the loser of the academy to Meltor’s hero in one year. Things which would take magicians a month only took a few days for him. Then weren’t 10 years for Theo like a hundred years for ordinary magicians? Common sense didn’t apply to the owners of grimoires.

A sword master was definitely a great existence. ‘But I don’t think that it is an insurmountable wall.’

Theo took a step forward. He regained his original stride and left the place where he’d met Lloyd. It was yet to be decided as to who would be the one to fall 10 years later.

*

Kkiiik. The doorknob turned with a small noise.

Theo arrived at somebody’s room and looked inside it carefully. As soon as he entered, the smell of herbs and potions hit his nose. He removed the smell with simple wind magic and looked in the direction of the occupant.

With golden hair, green eyes, and vivid features, Rebecca, the duelist for the empire, looked at Theo from where she lay on the bed. Her ribs, which had been broken by the shock wave, were bandaged and traces of herbs were visible on bruised skin. Her

condition was completely different from that of Theodore, who was wandering around.

He was confused by the situation as he sat down in the chair beside Rebecca's bed. Theo had no other choice.

'...No, what is going on?'

Theodore had entered Rebecca's room because he wanted to ask about Randolph. However, the guard standing in front of the room had let him in easily after his identity was proven.

'Why did they just let me in?'

Theodore was famous, but the Andras Empire and the Meltor Kingdom were still enemies. Why would they obediently let in a visitor from an enemy country? He just wanted to tell the guard to mention Randolph's name to Rebecca and see if she responded to it. However, the empire's delegation didn't hesitate to let him in to see Rebecca.

The atmosphere was awkward. Rebecca's eyes stared at Theo without blinking, increasing the burdensome feeling. He didn't know how to start. In the end, Theodore opened his mouth to say a simple greeting, but Rebecca spoke first.

Her voice was like a clear bell which resonated clearly, "Have you come to exercise the rights of the winner?"

Chapter 90 – Sword And Magic Confrontation (4)

Theodore's expression became grave at her words. He came here because he had business with her, but it felt like he was being misunderstood. The same was true for the guards who left the two people alone in the room.

Therefore, Theo decided to ask what the winner's rights were. "What are the winner's rights?"

"...I'm sorry. Of course, Sir Theodore wouldn't know the concepts of the Andras Empire." Rebecca stared at him and explained, "The empire doesn't guarantee the loser's life. Only the winner can spare the loser's life, and the loser must hand something over in return. This is done regardless of the clauses in the conditions of the duel, and there will be severe punishment from your family if you reject."

"....." Theodore was speechless at the harsh explanation.

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that the barbarian empire spoke with swords and strength instead of words. The winner was strong, and the loser was weak. It was a food chain of violence which wasn't related to ethics or morality. A society with a system where the strong could do anything simply because they were strong wasn't a society but a group of animals.

Theo was astonished at how a nation with such a primitive system had become an empire.

‘No, this might be what made it possible.’

The people had to survive intense training during their childhood. Then once they joined the society, they had to survive in the competition called the duels. The harsh process would inevitably create seasoned killers. From the most powerful army in the northeastern continent to the empire’s Seven Swords… The custom of blood and tribute might just be the driving force behind the Andras Empire maintaining its huge size. In many ways, it was a country beyond common sense.

Theo became dizzy from the culture shock. However, he soon regained his sanity and continued the cut off conversation. “This place isn’t Andras. Will you still listen to my request?”

“Yes, I am Andras’ knight.”

“…It is hard to understand. I don’t know what is the upper limit of the demands.”

Rebecca was silent for a moment before opening her mouth to say, “It is possible to demand wealth, statue, and even skills. Slavery doesn’t exist, so it is impossible to become a slave, but you can hire the other party for free one time. If the two parties have different genders, there might be a special request.”

“Special request?”

“…A one night stand.” The subject naturally embarrassed Rebecca and her voice was subdued. Her face flushed as she gazed down.

Theodore was at a loss on how to respond. He examined her figure lying down unconsciously before clearing his throat a few times. However, Rebecca couldn’t help noticing his eyes.

Rebecca gazed at Theodore with cold eyes and said, “I’m sorry but I have no experience. My body is also in this state, so if you want me, you’ll have to take care of everything. My clothes are thick, so you’ll have to take them off yourself.

Theo became embarrassed by the blunt words and hurriedly waved his hands. “No, I have no intention of doing that!”

“Is that so? I guess Sir Theodore can’t be satisfied with someone like me. I’m sorry.”

“…Dame Rebecca, please don’t tease me.” Theodore belatedly realized she was joking and dropped his head with a sigh.

“Ah, I’m sorry. You are more innocent than I thought.”

From their first contact till now, Theo had thought Rebecca was an old-fashioned knight, but she could actually joke this way. The smile on Rebecca’s face was very mischievous, and her light smile really caused her to resemble Randolph.

Then Theo recalled what he wanted to ask, “Rather, I wanted to ask Dame Rebecca something.”

“What?”

“Do you know a man called Randolph?”

As the name flowed from his mouth, the smile on her face faltered.

Rebecca looked at Theodore’s face like she was seeing a demon, and the colour of her skin was so pale that it was like she was a statue. The reaction which she couldn’t hide was proof that she knew Randolph.

She stammered as she asked Theo, “T-That name, where did you hear it?”

“First of all, I want to know his relationship with you. I can’t disclose it prior to knowing that.”

“...I see.” She was excited for a moment, but she quickly restored her breathing, and her complexion returned to normal.

Her composure was similar to Theodore’s. This was the talented mind and body of someone accepted as a disciple of a sword master. Rebecca gazed at Theo silently before making up her mind. “Sir Theodore, can you make it so that sound doesn’t leak out of this room?”

He quietly created a wall of silence.

*

The Andras Empire was a country where everything was determined through violence. The empire's Seven Swords reigned at the apex and could be called the leaders of the people. In fact, they had the right to rule over everyone except the emperor.

Assets like estates or property were meaningless. What value would that have to a sword master who was like a walking storm? They had omnipotent power within the empire.

The clans which the Seven Swords came from could be called the heart of the Andras Empire.

"Our family, Clovis, was once prestigious within the empire as we had produced one of the Seven Swords."

According to Rebecca, around 130 years ago, the Clovis family had risen due to the presence of a sword master. For the first time, their house had been filled with chandeliers and luxurious furnishings. They had believed it would lead to hundreds of years of trust.

However, that belief had been shattered.

“One day, His Majesty gave a decree. Track down the warlock disturbing the empire and cut off his head.”

The Seven Swords were absolutely obedient to the emperor. The sword master ancestor of the Clovis family received the order and crossed the border. However, he never returned.

The clan’s downfall had begun from that time. The sword master hadn’t been able to fulfill his emperor’s order, causing the jackals to descend upon them, and the Clovis name had been dropped in an instant.

Randolph and Rebecca had been born into that dying family.

“My father had his own skills. He didn’t have enough strength, but he searched for talented women and sowed his seed.”

“You mean…”

“Randolph and I are half siblings.” Her cold eyes stared into the distance, like she was gazing at someone who wasn’t here. “Most of the children he created were failures. Apart from Randolph and I, the others were sold to other families. In order to raise a sword master, the family needed to put all their strength into one person.”

Magicians were born, but the empire had their own way of fostering aura users. Genius children were selected and elixirs poured into them. Then they would be fostered by one of the

Seven Swords, and there was a high probability they would become the next generation of sword masters.

Randolph and Rebecca had both met the criteria of a genius. However, Clovis hadn't had the power to strengthen both of them. It was a situation where the clan had to abandon one of the two people. At that time, there had been tests to inspect the quality, so Randolph and Rebecca had been forced to be on opposite sides.

Then Randolph Clovis had gone on to leave the house in the middle of the night. It had been for the sake of his sister.

"He left a letter saying he would see me again, but... since then, I haven't heard any news about him," Rebecca spoke up to there and looked at Theo quietly. Her green eyes were a little bit wet. Her story didn't seem to be false. Additionally, she had no reason to lie. Why would she need to create a detailed soap opera for Theodore, who didn't even know the climate of the Andras Empire?

That was why Theo decided to talk. "I met Randolph half a year ago."

His voice flowed in the room surrounded by Silence magic, and Rebecca became much brighter as she listened to the story.

She was surprised to hear that Randolph had been searching for their ancestor's double swords and then delighted once she heard he'd found them in the elder lich's dungeon. At that moment, she looked like a girl her age.

“I see. He is still my brother.”

Rebecca listened to her favourite parts again before burying her body back into the bed with a satisfied expression. She seemed to have forgotten about the pain of the broken ribs. The conversation between the two people as well as the Silence magic was almost over.

Ding! At 9 p.m., the bells rang through the royal palace, signaling the start of the night.

It wasn’t an appropriate time for an adult male and female to stay in a room together. Theo hadn’t realized how much time passed and quickly got up from his seat. This had been a pleasant time in many ways.

“Then I will be going. It is funny for me to say this to a person I wounded, but please be careful.”

“Ah, Sir Theodore—” Rebecca tried to call out to him, but her ribs hurt, so no voice emerged from her parted lips.

In the end, the door closed, leaving her alone. The room grew quiet as Rebecca carefully stretched out a hand toward the door. She hadn’t paid the price of defeat yet.

“...Let’s promise to meet in the future, Sir Theodore.”

She vowed that she would repay this debt someday as she closed

her eyes.

*

The thing which happened after that was really ridiculous.

Theo left the room and stared at the guard with lukewarm eyes, before returning to his room with a feeling of uncertainty. As always, he fed two books to Gluttony and made a training schedule before falling asleep.

Then he was pounced on the next day. Theo had been planning to ask Veronica for some training when he was suddenly turned several times in the air, with the source being Sylvia and Blundell.

It was then that Theodore realized a rumour had spread, and he recalled Rebecca's playful smile.

'That pair of hateful brother and sister are both the same!'

He had never expected a blow from Randolph to return this way. Theo struggled to escape from Blundell's clutches but eventually gave up.

Chapter 91 – Leap In Sensitivity (1)

The two countries' discussion continued for a few more days.

Using the pretext of goodwill from Theo winning the duel, the Andras Empire was forced to sit at the negotiating table in an unfavourable position. It wasn't just because Rebecca had been defeated by Theodore. After it was revealed that Lloyd Pollan had snuck away from the dinner party, the delegation was forced to bow their heads in apology to Meltor for the trouble they had caused.

Four days later, the new agreement between the two countries was settled.

"Then I will check the final version." Meltor's chief delegate, Karlov, read through the new agreement slowly. "Both Andras and Meltor have extended the deadline of the existing armistice agreement to 10 years from now. Furthermore, Andras will transfer the Purth, Begul, and Hergen estates to the Meltor side of the border. Additionally, the management of the three iron mines and one gold mine, of which the ownership is unclear, shall be taken over by the estates concerned. The ratio of tariffs…"

The dozens of great and trivial clauses were read in a loud voice, with none of them in favor of the Andras Empire. The longer his voice continued, the more the faces of the delegation wrinkled. No, the Meltor side was inwardly grinning as they looked at those crumpled faces.

How many opportunities would they get to negotiate a favourable deal with Andras, the strongest military power on the northern continent? In Meltor's long history, it was a rare case which couldn't even be counted on five fingers.

Karlov continued for nearly 10 minutes before stopping.

"It is accurate. The Andras Empire agrees with Meltor's proposal and will extend the armistice agreement with such conditions." The surprising thing was Pan Helliones' reaction. He accepted the agreement, which was disadvantageous for his country, without any objections.

Meltor had prepared many countermeasures in case the empire refused, so they couldn't help being taken aback by the easy agreement. However, as a result, Meltor had obtained what it wanted.

Having lost the excuse of negotiations, the delegation was forced to leave the capital city of Mana-vil six days after arriving.

*

'Six days is really too quick.'

Theodore laid down the book he was reading and looked at the delegation moving through the gates.

It was a sight which could only be seen from the highest

buildings in Mana-vil, the tall magic towers. He looked at someone using ‘Hawkeye,’ but unfortunately, she still wasn’t recovered enough to use a horse.

‘If she really was riding, then I would be more scared.’

Afterall, she had received five Shock Impacts from a close distance without dodging.

Theo looked at the bandage which was still wrapped around his forearm. He knew that aura was excellent for defense, but the defensive power of a skilled knight was beyond imagination. He didn’t use all his power, but only a few of her ribs were broken?

If it hadn’t been a situation where most of the aura had been deflected, it might not have ended with just a scratch on his arm.

A day would come when he would feel the attack power of an aura user again. If they reunited someday, Rebecca would be several times more terrible than she was now. There was no spare room for Theo to enjoy the short victory.

In the past six months, many nobles had tried to court him which was why he hid in the library.

“...It should be okay if I move.” Theo moved his arms several times and gradually loosened the bandage wound from his wrist to his elbow.

Fortunately, the skin beneath it was neat, and there was just a single trace of a scar. According to the healer's advice, it was still too early for strenuous exercise, but Theo could move it. Thus, Theodore moved his body lightly while reading a book.

"Theodore! Theodore Miller!" Somebody's voice rang out in the hallway.

Theo responded to the call by raising his body. "Yes, did something happen?"

"Ah, here you are! I am Andy from the Magic Society. I have been directed to bring Theodore to the society's main office."

"The society's main office?" Theo asked with a strange expression.

It was at the top of the central magic tower and was a room which magicians normally didn't have access to in their lifetime. By default, tasks were solved by the four towers, and the society just handled the legal procedures. The society's president was normally the only one in the room.

"Yes, the president of the Magic Society called you directly. He wants you to come as soon as you can."

"Well, I understand. I'll go straight away."

The Magic Society's library was located at a fairly high level.

Theo had to climb up several floors from this library, so he put the book away. Then he started walking behind the messenger, Andy. The office wasn't far away, so the two people stopped in front of a door after five minutes.

As always, Theo was soon left alone. He then touched the society office's door carefully. The door was lighter than it looked, and a soft light shone from inside the office.

"Oh, you came," the old man he'd seen at the gathering last time, the president of the society, greeted Theo in a pleasant voice.

Veronica waved from where she was standing beside him. Theodore stepped forward and bowed. Neither of them were people he could treat comfortably.

"Red Magic Tower's Superior, Theodor Miller greets the President and Tower Master."

"It is good to see you. Sorry for my sudden call but there is something that we need to do."

"It's okay. I was just finishing what I was doing."

"Then I'm glad. Now, sit down."

Theo took one step further at the words.

“Ah?” However, he was shocked to see something behind them. No, it was more accurate to say that he freaked out.

The shape of the ‘thing’ which appeared in the soft lighting was so shocking that he almost reflexively shot out a Magic Bullet. Maybe he didn’t feel its presence because it wasn’t a living creature? It looked like a statue of a bald troll.

‘A statue, a statue.’ Either way, it wasn’t a decoration that the Magic Society would place in its office. The dynamic nature of the awful appearance made it seem like the troll could come alive at any moment.

However, as the surprised Theodore sat down in a chair, the two people didn’t explain what he was seeing.

The president of the Magic Society opened his mouth with a wry smile, “The work this time turned out really well. I didn’t think the people of Andras would accept the proposal. You were the high elf’s escort, and you’re now the main contributor of this agreement.”

“You’re overpraising me.”

“No, not at all. Don’t you know it yourself? The reason why I called you here.”

Frankly, he did have an idea. “A reward, isn’t it?”

The president's mouth stretched widely at Theo's hesitant answer. "Correct. His Majesty and I discussed it with the tower masters and decided to give you a reward. The problem is that it is still top secret, so there will be a lot of controversy if we award it externally."

"Secret..."

"Keep this in mind. It is an item not even known in the Yellow Tower except for me and the tower masters. Therefore, you won't be able to avoid punishment if the information leaks."

The president tried to warn him, but the listening Veronica immediately cut off his words. "Old Man, why are you trying to scare the kid? We decided to give him the reward, so we will take responsibility."

"No, it is still..."

"Kid, you know this much, don't you?" Veronica cut the old man off again and grinned at Theodore.

Theo nodded hurriedly, and the president swallowed his words. He wanted to grumble about people not respecting the elderly these days, but it would seem like he was bullying a pretty girl. More than anything else, he wasn't the senior in this place.

[From there, can I explain?]

At that time, a scraping sound like wood being scratched resonated through the room. The president and Veronica didn't react much, but Theodore instinctively sprung up from his chair. The flowing voice irritated his nerves.

Theo moved 10 meters away from the direction of the sound, then he looked at the source. Once he saw it, an absurd expression appeared on his face. "…The statue, it spoke?"

It was as he said. The bald-headed troll-like statue was moving like a living creature. It rubbed its neck several times before sitting down on the floor. Then the eyeballs carved of stone stared at Theo and it started laughing.

[Kuha, ha, surprised? Long time, see, reaction.]

Of course, Theo was surprised. Even the legendary gargoyles didn't flap their wings like they were real. The same went for golems created by ancient magicians and dwarves combining their strength. They moved roughly like dolls and exerted a powerful destructive strength. That strength was wonderful, but there were no records of any golems which acted like real people.

The bald troll transcended modern magic. However, it didn't transcend the laws of physics.

Kwaang!

Veronica couldn't stand the jarring laughter and kicked the bald

troll in the shins. The statue was half-crushed by the blow and thrown to the floor of the office, cutting off its laughter. In many ways, it was an unusual situation.

Veronica spoke with her foot on the statue, “Didn’t I tell you a few times not to laugh out loud, you gremlin? Don’t scare the kid.”

[This, strength, old lizard…!]

“What?” A vein throbbed on her forehead as she shouted and moved her feet a few more times.

Kwaang! Kwaang!

One hit and then two hits to the arms and legs. The statue was beaten up and had no limbs. Veronica’s kick could smash a heavy door, so even the statue which was beyond modern magic couldn’t withstand it.

The president sighed heavily at the sight and looked at Theodore. Maybe he had seen this sight a few times.

Theo looked at his attitude and asked carefully, “President, that statue…?”

“Hmm, I didn’t want to do the introductions in this messy situation, but it can’t be helped.” The president pointed to the statue which had been turned to scrap metal. “As you can see, that statue is extraordinary. The way it moves and the materials it is

made up of are unidentified. It is an unknown golem that only a 7th Circle magician can control."

This was one of the undiscovered mysteries of the magic towers.

"Yellow Tower Master Norden... He is controlling that statue."

Chapter 92 – Leap In Sensitivity (2)

Theodore swallowed a breath.

In fact, he had guessed it before the Magic Society's president replied, but the feeling after it was confirmed was different. The only possible existence was the Yellow Tower Master. He was the mysterious tower master whose age and gender was unknown.

According to rumors, he had the right to refuse any summons, and no one other than the tower masters and the king could meet him. The top floor of the Yellow Tower was literally a forbidden area.

According to the president of the Magic Society, even he had only seen the Yellow Tower Master once or twice in 100 years.

"Wait, did you say 100 years?"

"That's right. I understand your surprise, but it doesn't end here."

Theo was amazed by the large number.

"According to the central office, the magic towers were built according to his designs, and he contributed to the prosperity of this country more than any other tower master. Norden's position in pharmacy, alchemy, metallurgy and architecture is already equal to a god's. He is the reason why the northern continent

boasts of more superior artifacts than other regions.”

“The design of the magic towers...?! But President, according to your explanation, the Yellow Tower Master should be-”

“At least 600 years old.”

It was an answer beyond imagination, so Theodore finally became speechless.

From what he remembered, the magic towers had been built around 500 years ago and had completed their structure over several generations. The prosperity of the Meltor Kingdom was said to have taken a few steps as soon as the magic towers had started functioning.

The Yellow Tower Master was the foremost pioneer of the Meltor Kingdom! It was no wonder as to why the royal family had kept the secret of his identity. His extraordinary lifespan and transcendental capabilities would be burdensome if exposed.

‘More than 600 years old... he is definitely not human.’

A sword master or magician couldn’t live that long. Elves boasted a long lifespan of 200 years, but even the high elves who inherited the ancient linage only lived up to approximately 300 to 400 years old.

If he had to choose a candidate as beings that lived forever, it

would be the demons or gods, or the dragons that were praised as the strongest creature. However, it was too much to accept them as the correct answer.

More than anything else, their species couldn't become magicians. Magic was a skill tailored to the human species, and they learned it from other species. For those innately born with magic, they had no desire to learn such an inefficient system. It was absolutely impossible to have the magic ability to lead civilization into new types of fields while living as a tower master.

The magic society's president picked up on Theo's thoughts and laughed. "It is useless."

"Huh?"

"The things you are thinking about right now have already been covered by numerous magicians. As long as he doesn't reveal his identity, it will be pointless to make any assumptions. So, don't worry too much about unnecessary things."

As if to confirm those words, the fighting between the two tower masters finished. The banging sound from a corner of the office stopped, and something appeared. Veronica had completely crushed the arms, legs, and body of the Yellow Tower Master, so only the head of the bald troll remained. The head which shone yellow rolled to Theodore's feet.

As it rolled, the troll head mumbled, [Huge, recovery function, not working. That's why, from the beginning, make it again.]

“Will you stop whining?” Veronica walked behind the head and placed it on her palm. “The Red Tower will pay for the costs of the repairs, so quickly give it to the kid.”

[Hmm, just a thing, it’s not. This.]

“Explain it to the kid, not me.”

[Cough.] The troll head turned toward Theodore at Veronica’s words.

Suddenly, the face melted down as the eyes, nose, and ears disappeared before appearing again. It was a magic phenomenon of which Theo couldn’t guess the principles. The previous cut off voice changed completely as it said, [The reward given to you is ‘Sensitivity Amplifier – No. 37.’]

“Sensitivity Amplifier…”

[That’s right. You should know how large of an existence sensitivity is to magicians. No training or items can increase your sensitivity.] However, the voice then declared triumphantly, [But with this amplifier, you can go beyond your limits!]

Then he poured out a jewel box from his mouth.

“Ah.” Theodore was amazed by the action and took the box.

This caused the Yellow Tower Master to speak in a surprised voice, [Ah right, sorry. I forgot that my limbs were broken.]

“No, it’s okay,” Theo responded as he naturally placed the box in his left hand. It was made by magic, so could Gluttony eat this?

The thin tongue crawled through a gap in the box, and the phenomenon he wanted occurred soon afterwards.

[Sensitivity Amplifier – No. 37 (Remedy)]

[This is an elixir born as a result of combining eastern alchemy, western alchemy and pharmacology. It has gone through 36 failed attempts, so the number 37 was included in its name. It was completed with rare ingredients, ancient alchemy, and the workmanship of a high-level magician. It is a remedy which greatly increases the sensitivity to mana.

* The rating of this remedy is ‘Treasure.’

* When consumed, sensitivity is dramatically increased.

* When consumed, there is no digestion time.

* When consumed, understanding of alchemy will increase by two steps.

* It is more efficient to consume this through the mouth than by using Gluttony's eating function. Once taken, immunity to this remedy will build. It will become invalid after two doses.]

'This is real.'

It wasn't that he didn't believe the Yellow Tower Master's explanation, but Theo was able to truly realize the value after seeing the information window.

In the past, he had a lack of self-confidence due to his poor sensitivity. It was said that sensitivity couldn't be increased at all. So, a remedy capable of doing that would be truly expensive. Not just dunces but ordinary students would be able to make a few steps of progress. If it could be supplied in large quantities, the national power of Meltor would increase by several times.

[By the way. From the idea to its completion, the amount of ingredients consumed is worth 350,000 gold. Yet I can't even sell the finished product. It is ridiculous.]

"...?!" Theodore stiffened at the words that the Yellow Tower Master grumbled.

64 years of research and ingredients worth 350,000 gold had been placed in his hand. The light jewel box was now like a heavy gold coin box. Indeed, there was no need to keep it a secret if they could mass produce it.

Veronica didn't know his feelings and said, "Now, Kid. Take it right here. It is cleaner in many ways."

"Here? Now?"

"Yes."

"...Ah, I see. It shouldn't be kept or sold. Right?"

"Truly amazing, Kid." She laughed and patted Theo on the head.

As she said, the upper echelons gave him this medicine for the purpose of 'taking,' so they wouldn't tolerate the act of selling or keeping it. This was a national secret, so the amplifier had to be consumed while the president of the Magic Society and two tower masters were present.

Of course, that wasn't the only reason why the tower masters gathered.

"Besides, isn't it better to have masters watching you? We can't help, but we can ensure your safety. It is why I called you here."

It was definitely like she said. Veronica was a master magician of the 8th Circle, and the president had reached the 7th Circle. There were no humans who could touch Theo with the two of them guarding him.

Theodore was finally convinced and opened the lid of the box.

Huuk!

A sweet and sour scent flowed out. Just smelling the fragrance made him feel like his lungs had cooled. The smell was coming from a blue bead lying in the center of the box. Theo picked up the remedy carefully, and…

Gulp.

He swallowed it.

[‘Sensitivity Amplifier – No. 37’ has been consumed. The power is stimulating your potential.]

[The user’s mana sensitivity will be adjusted to the maximum value.]

[You can experience a temporary sensation of the sensitivity running wild. Maintain a strong spirit against it.]

The remedy was amazing in many ways. It melted as soon as it reached his tongue, and the texture was like licking fog. The water vapour flowed down Theodore’s throat. A refreshing aroma hit his

nose, and he could feel it go down his esophagus.

After he finished consuming it, a mysterious expression crossed Theo's face.

'I wonder... is this all?'

However, the full-scale reaction happened after this.

"……!?" Theodore fell off the chair and rolled about on the ground.

He didn't feel the pain from hitting the floor or hear Veronica's and the president's voices calling out to him.

Theo was familiar with pain, but this sensation was something which couldn't be described as pain.

It was difficult to explain, but let's look at a simple example. If a person's nose suddenly became as sensitive as a wolf's, would they be able to smell like a wolf? If a person's ears suddenly became as sensitive as a bat's, could they move freely in the dark? The answer would be 'no.'

Sometimes, sensory information going beyond the limits was like violence. Just like how eyes adjusted to darkness were pained by light, the five senses were based on a person's everyday self. Mana sensitivity was the same. They were some who felt a crisp sensation like they caught it in their hands, while others struggled

to pursue a feeling which was fainter than dust.

The usual Theodore perceived sensitivity as a light water vapour around him, but it was now a big iceberg. The forcibly extended sensitivity blocked his breathing.

‘I-I can’t breath… this situation…!’ He felt like he was dying under the non-existent pressure which pushed down on him.

Then at that moment, the hand of salvation grabbed his neck.

“Kid, wake up!”

The fingers wrapped around his neck were hot. Veronica’s heat momentarily allowed him to regain his senses.

His five senses came back, and he could breathe despite the mana still pressing on his body. However, he couldn’t escape despite knowing it was an illusion. As Theo struggled to overcome it somehow, he heard Veronica’s sharp voice.

–Don’t refuse the mana! The mana crushing you has always been around you! You just didn’t feel it until now. There is no reason to refuse it just because you didn’t know it until now. Use some magic!

The unconscious acceptance of the advice was probably the result of living for years as a magician.

“…Light…ning… Bolt.” It was the beginner magic which hadn’t succeeded even once until Gluttony had awoken the first time. Theo’s disturbed mind pierced through the faint memory. It was a 2nd Circle magic which could, at best, produce dozens of lightning arrows.

However, the result was far beyond his expectations.

Pajijijijijik—!

100 or 200… Several hundred streaks of lightning appeared inside the society’s office. The papers which were grazed by them ended up burning, and soot appeared on the floor. The havoc proved that his power was several times larger than what it had been before.

The phenomenon of sensitivity running wild was close to a disaster.

“Good! You’re doing well!”

Nobody present would get hurt by something like this. Veronica had been hit by several dozen lightning bolts at close range, but there wasn’t a single burn mark. The basic 4th Circle defense magic around her body bounced it off.

Rather, she placed a hand on Theo’s shoulder and encouraged him to use more magic. In the end, the statue was the only thing which shattered in the office. Was it because of that…?

Theo gradually regained his sanity. '...Ah.'

The fog-like mana was now like mud, and it weighed down on his skin.

'So, this is the feeling of mana.'

Unlike before, his breathing wasn't blocked. Mana didn't exist, so it wasn't a real weight. It was just proof of his increased sensitivity. Theo got up slowly and waved his hands in the empty space. There was something in the air where there should only be air resistance.

"...Mana."

Some said water. Some said earth. Some said fire.

Theo had never felt it until now. He'd thought it was just an exaggeration or the senses of a genius. For Theodore Miller, mana had always been a mirage mocking him in the distance or a cloud in the sky he couldn't reach with his magic.

However, that wasn't the case from now on. The overwhelming talent which Sylvia had showed previously... the level of sensitivity which didn't even require a chant...

Finally, Theo got his hands on what he hadn't been able to

obtain.

Chapter 93 – Leap In Sensitivity (3)

“Ah, the kid’s reaction to consuming it is too sudden,” Veronica spoke, sighing with relief, while Theo was feeling thrilled.

They knew that the increase in sensitivity was accompanied by some side effects, but Theo’s reaction was much worse than they had anticipated. There was a chance that he might’ve really suffocated. Even the Yellow Tower Master who created the remedy hadn’t expected the situation.

He stared at the empty box and muttered seriously, [Strange. For that much reaction, the sensitivity should be near the bottom… but a person who climbed to the 5th Circle at age 20 wouldn’t be like that… Is the stability still insufficient? I should review it once again.]

It was the right answer, but the Yellow Tower Master didn’t realize that it was right. The young hero of the Meltor Kingdom, who was already mentioned as a candidate for becoming a master magician, truly had bottom-level sensitivity.

In the end, the Yellow Tower Master would carry out months of research without any idea of this.

“Kid, have you regained your mind?” Veronica reached through the remaining lightning around Theo and grabbed his shoulder.

Theodore was startled away from the mana. Despite the fabric, the heat coming from her was considerable. Like mana, it wasn’t

real, but it was intense enough for him to confuse it as a real tactile sense.

His neck which had been grabbed a while ago was still hot.

“Thank you for your help, Tower Master.”

“It isn’t a big deal.”

A stuffy feeling still remained, but Theo thanked Veronica for her help. Her furnace-like presence had awoken his senses so that he could endure the crushing mana pressure. In some sense, Veronica was the most appropriate helper.

As Theo’s complexion returned to its original state, Veronica started speaking, “For the moment, you should be cautious when using magic. Your sensitivity is now greatly increased, so the speed and power of your magic power will increase greatly. However, your ability to control it will be a mess. There may be a catastrophe if you use wide area magic.”

“…Certainly.”

Theo just needed to look at the Lightning Bolt from before. The power had been several times larger than the maximum power of his original spell. Even if it didn’t work on Veronica, the spell’s power was more than that of the 3rd Circle. If it hit ordinary people, then they would go to the Underworld.

It felt like wings had suddenly appeared on his legs! However, it was impossible for Theodore, who had just started to fly, to deal with his senses completely. So, he paid careful attention to Veronica's next words.

"If your magic so far has been forcing bottled water into a cup, from now on you will have to control the water level by opening and closing a reservoir. You'll need a lot of concentration."

"I can't just excel in sensitivity."

"Of course. Sensitivity or magic power is like a weapon, so it depends on the user's skills. A fool who is good at sensitivity only appears a few times in one generation."

Veronica laughed at those faceless fools. They were lazy people who depended on their innate talent and didn't know the rigors of magic. So, they didn't realize why it took them years or decades to cross the 'wall.'

The majority of them became frustrated and stopped in front of the first 'wall' they encountered, while a moderately talented person who worked hard was a greater magician than some geniuses.

Talent might come from the sky, but the spirit was tempered by hardships.

The five years of being shackled by a total lack of capabilities had

refined Theodore Miller's spirit into steel. It was the reason why his growth rate was exceptional after receiving the grimoire. He had worked hard and expanded his capacity beyond his limits.

"Additionally, if you jump over the wall of the 7th Circle and become a master, you will reach the limits of sensitivity. So, don't indulge in your senses and continue doing what you've been doing so far. This concludes Sister Veronica's advice. How is it, isn't it helpful?"

"Yes, very much so." Theo gazed at her with heartfelt gratitude.

Veronica's advice was worth a thousand gold. In this age, there were only two people who had reached the 8th Circle, so one thousand gold for her advice was really cheap. However, Veronica who gave him such kindness couldn't look in Theo's eyes. If it had been anyone else, they would've laughed.

Instead, the mood was ruined by the Yellow Tower Master's voice coming from the troll's head, [Don't turn your head away, lizard girl. Why are you acting like this toward a much younger child?]

"Ugh, I will deal with you at a later time." Veronica fell into anger for a moment.

However, she then shook her head and handed the head over to Theo because she wanted the Yellow Tower Master to stop joking. Of course, she would beat him up later, but that unfortunate future was delayed.

The troll's head looked at Theo and said, [Hrmm... a truly interesting guy. Additionally, I can smell an enormous elemental from you. I thought the Red Tower Master was being an alarmist when she said you would be the next great magician.]

"Ah, thank you...?"

[I just judged you objectively. Congratulations for being the first subject... no, beneficiary of my remedy. I will remember your name.]

Then he said a few words only to Theo, [I won't see you for a while, but we will meet again someday. Theodore Miller, when that time comes, I will discuss the secrets hidden in you.]

"...?!"

[Then, it ends here.]

While Theo was astonished, the troll's head turned into dust.

Theodore eyed the dust remaining in his hand, but it didn't change into something else. In any case, the magic power of the Yellow Tower Master seemed to have reached a high level, regardless of the number of circles.

'No, maybe he has stepped beyond the 7th Circle.'

The existence of the Yellow Tower Master was a top secret. In fact, it was enough to say that he had the abilities of a magician which exceeded the 7th Circle.

Theo had that thought in mind just before he blew away the dust. He wouldn't be able to take any countermeasures to anything the Yellow Tower Master did, so it was ridiculous to strain his mind with anxiety. Indeed, it was a judgment made by an efficient mind.

So, the voice he heard then was surprising.

–User, be careful of that person called the Yellow Tower Master.

Gluttony woke up from its sleep and cautioned Theo. Before Theo could ask for the reason, Gluttony continued speaking.

-The remedy that User ingested… the entity that made it is likely the descendant of an ancient species or the owner of another grimoire.

'What?'

–The alchemy procedures and techniques used in that remedy were performed more than 2,000 years ago. Not only obtaining the knowledge but applying it to pharmacology… I can guess a few grimoires, but I can't confirm it now.

‘A grimoire’s master.’

Theodore’s face stiffened at the reminder of the past devastation caused by the ‘Death’s Worship’ grimoire. The legion of undead under the elder lich was a terrible disaster. However, Theo soon regained his composure.

‘The owner of a grimoire… Does that mean the Yellow Tower Master isn’t eroded by the grimoire?’

–If he actually is a grimoire owner, that is correct. Rather, he is taking full advantage of its features.

‘Indeed.’

It wasn’t necessary to be afraid of or evade the Yellow Tower Master at this time as it was unlikely Theo would be attacked like that time with the elder lich. If the Yellow Tower Master had been such a person in the first place, he wouldn’t have contributed to the prosperity of Meltor for hundreds of years.

Moreover, there was also no reason for Theo to boast about his secret. Right now, the information that Theo had was too little.

The magic kingdom, Meltor… There truly were many secrets hidden at its heart. Along with the secrets of the Yellow Tower Master and the masked White Tower Master, there were also many mysteries sleeping in the magic towers. Someday Theo might reach those secrets but not today.

"...I'll see you again someday," he repeated the Yellow Tower Master's words.

There were many things he couldn't imagine about Meltor, and it was overflowing with mysteries. He shouldn't reach out rashly towards them. It was currently time to confront the challenges and devote himself to training.

'First, I need to fix this.' Theo's eyes shone as he felt the mana pressure again.

The talent he had been longing for was right in front of his eyes.

*

From then on, Theodore's routine changed a bit. After half a year, he had already learned the magic of the 5th Circle. There might be a difference in proficiency for each magic, but he was proud to say that he had learned everything properly.

From then on, Theo had to accumulate experience in practice. He continued his training, despite his falling efficiency. At the same time, a challenge arrived to knock him off that plateau.

Kwarurung! The fire, which exploded with a fearsome rumble, knocked roughly against the barrier of the practice room.

Its power and shape looked like the 5th Circle attack magic, Fire Blast. This was a powerful ranged spell which would burn dozens of meters around a single point. Only Superiors of the Red Magic Tower could use it properly.

However, Theo's face didn't brighten at the success of the magic.

"...This... Blaze Shell."

The magic formula and timing of the spell were perfect. However, the result was different from what he had intended. A 4th Circle magic turned spontaneously into a 5th Circle magic? It was a mistake a rookie just learning magic would make.

Theodore sighed as he looked down at his palms and then the messy practice room. He didn't know how many times he had failed already.

'I know why I failed. The reason is...'

The speed of mana flow had been too fast, and the amount of mana he had drawn had been too much. Additionally, the power of the mana had become too strong in response to his emotions. In summary, it was because his sensitivity had increased too rapidly.

The problem was that it was difficult to correct the errors caused by his own effort. Theo hadn't been born with abundant sensitivity, so he couldn't help finding this abundance annoying. More mana than necessary responded to his call, then the magic

had become unintentionally tangled up with the mana which hadn't been called.

'It is necessary to learn the tricks.' It didn't take long for Theodore to realize this.

However, he had limited people to seek advice from. Masters exceeded their sensitivity, but the tower masters and Magic Society's president couldn't become Theo's tutors. Veronica gave him a few tips occasionally, but the senses of a quarter dragon were very different from that of ordinary humans.

In the end, the candidates were narrowed down to one person. It was one of Theo's peers and a person who had acquired the highest level of sensitivity since birth, and then cultivated magic in a blessed environment.

She was a genius who wasn't as good as Theodore but had built a number of achievements and was going to be promoted to a Superior next quarter.

"Please take care of me!" She, Sylvia Adruncus, spoke to him shyly.

Chapter 94 – State Guests Of Elvenheim (0), End Of Volume 4

In retrospect, it was hard to find a more suitable person than her. Sylvia could talk at the same level as Theodore, and she was a top prospect who received Blundell's teachings. Compared to the masters who were difficult to understand, she was a good match for his level.

"Yes, please take care of me as well." Theo felt strange as he accepted the greeting.

It had been a long time since he'd met Sylvia, but they had a friendly relationship. No, he hadn't seen her often except for the time when they'd traveled together by carriage to the Miller Barony. After that, they had been more busy than anyone else in the past six months.

That period of time was long enough for them to notice the changes in each other.

'Uh, her hair is longer?'

Sylvia was 18 years old. She was still growing and had become more feminine than she'd been half a year ago, making Theo moderately confused. Her hair, which had been cut around her neck, now flowed down her back, and the smooth curves of her body were revealed despite her straight posture. Additionally, her previously round, childlike eyes had become curved, and her chin line was also more defined.

The difference of six months had also affected Theodore.

‘…Theo, you’ve grown.’ Sylvia look up carefully at Theo, who was a head taller than her.

During the carriage ride, the difference had been just a few fingers. The muscles revealed under his loose clothing made Theodore seem like a strong young man instead of a boy.

In fact, Gluttony and Lee Yoonsung should be credited for this growth. Theodore was a baron’s son who had grown up in the countryside, so his physique was at a mediocre level. He didn’t have the blood of a warrior, and both parents were only averagely sized. Theo had grown up in such an environment and yet reached a height of 6 feet.

The reason for this was that after learning ‘Battle Song’ and extracting the essence of the original, his innate framework had been reconstructed. Lee Yoonsung hadn’t been able to learn aura, but his physical condition absolutely hadn’t been normal. No ordinary boy of 15 years would be able to traverse the continent alone. His body had been extraordinary as it had contained the blood of hundreds of years of martial artists.

Well, for whatever reason, Sylvia and Theo felt uncomfortable with each other.

“Ah.”

The eyes of the two people finally met, and Sylvia instantly turned bright red. The action was quickly followed by the movement of her long silver hair.

Her introverted nature was still present. Theo was glad to realize this for some reason. Perhaps it was because he had only seen Sylvia look like this.

“Then shall we start?” As Sylvia spoke in a small voice, her slender fingers clutched her staff.

*

Chants were words that a magician cried out more often than the names of family and friends, and it contained the power to activate magic. A few words would cause a lightning bolt to pop out or for flames to soar. For those who didn’t know magic, they were really mysterious words. However, if asked whether there was any special power in the chant itself, every magician in the world would deny it.

Casting was merely an autosuggestion.

“Fireball,” Sylvia muttered, and a fireball appeared in the air.

It was the 3rd Circle’s most famous attack spell, Fireball. This was a magic to summon a fireball and explode it toward a target.

She moved the fireball around and continued explaining, “[Basic Magic Theory] teaches that magic and chants can’t be separated like this. A chant is definitely amazing. It isn’t an exaggeration to say that a new history of magic appeared once chants were developed. …Kuk.”

Sylvia grabbed her staff and looked in the air.

Hwaruruk!

In the place where she looked, the same fireball as the one she had just called suddenly appeared. It was clearly a 3rd Circle Fireball.

“Prior to that, no one used chants. Now, it is common to consider no casting as special. The appearance of chants greatly expanded the power of a magician, so all magicians were captivated by the magic chants.”

“Chants… are they a restriction?”

“Yes, Theo should know a bit about chants. Putting a certain amount of magic power into a magic formula is a type of ‘chant’.”

In other words, it was a type of association work. It was like recalling the texture, smell, and shape of a tree when thinking the word ‘tree’, just like how ‘rock’ reminded people of the texture, rigidity, and weight of a rock.

Likewise, Sylvia unconsciously calculated the magic formula, deployment method, and amount of magic power consumed when thinking of the word ‘Fireball.’ The speed and completeness were the advantages and disadvantages of a chant.

“In other words, casting is a habit. A habit we created ourselves and nestled it inside us. It is difficult to rewrite a habit that has been ingrained for a few years up to several decades. I think it is the reason why Theo’s magic keeps failing.”

“Amazing, I never thought about it that way,” Theodore admired involuntarily.

Sylvia’s advice was an insight difficult for anyone else to have given him. From the moment of her birth, she had been overflowing with sensitivity. Due to this, she had to ‘constrain’ it in the normal casting method which everyone else used.

‘She has a point. The feeling and calculation is the same, but the power to control it has suddenly changed. It may be a conflict between the unconsciously calculated contents and the consciously calculated contents.’

At the novel advice, Theo felt like a wall inside his head was collapsing.

“Okay! Then I’ll move onto the next topic.” On the other hand, Sylvia was excited about this situation.

It was her first experience of talking like this with a peer. Only the elders of the magic towers and her grandfathers could be a match for her. Having met the person she had long been waiting for, Sylvia poured out the knowledge in her head. Even when Theo refuted some of her words, it made her happy.

How many hours had they spent sitting on the floor of the practice room? After digging out everything in each other's heads, the two people somehow managed to find a solution.

"...Is it truly no casting?"

"Yep, I think this is the case."

The conclusion reached by the two geniuses was simple. From now on, Theo was to use no casting for all magic!

It was possible to fix the habit of 'casting,' but it was calculated that it would take Theo three months to learn up to the 5th Circle again. This was on the premise that he devoted day and night to training.

However, the situation would change greatly if he got used to not using the casting method.

'It might take more than three months, or less than three months.'

The crossroad depended on Theo's own learning ability, so he

didn't hesitate. He was confident that he could do it. That was because of the girl in front of him. He would do this, with the pride of a magician and a man.

Theo got up from his spot and reached out to Sylvia while saying, "I will try it once that way."

The path of making a habit out of not casting was a thorny road which no one had succeeded in except for Sylvia. Maybe the difficulty would be worse than recovering his chants one by one. However, if Theo was successful, his magic abilities would take a step closer into the master's realm. It was a cliff which stretched out before him.

The girl smiled brightly at Theo's determination. "Yes! Theo can do it!"

At first he led her, and now it was her turn to lead him. Sylvia ignored the pounding of her heart and grabbed Theo's hand. As always, she was grateful to him for coming to where she was.

From that day onwards, the special training of the two people began.

*

It had been a month since then.

After deciding to use every magic with no casting, Theodore

literally saw hell. The training to deal with his expanded senses wasn't easy.

Using an analogy, it was similar to having three or four arms on his body. Still having both arms didn't mean he could skillfully control his new arms. No, instead, it just confused his pre-existing arms.

'At first, 3rd Circle magic took a few seconds.'

The no-casting method Sylvia taught Theo was different from what he was used to. It wasn't just a quick oral formula. He had to calculate it using his growing sensitivity while trying to complete the magic faster. It was here that Sylvia's magic was faster than Theo's.

The difficulty of the technique she established was murderous, and Theodore's head hurt for the first time while learning. However, the culmination of his efforts didn't betray him.

Hwaruruk! A huge fireball appeared above Theodore's head without any precursors. It was the 4th Circle Blaze Shell that he had failed a month ago. As soon as Sylvia's nod confirmed its completeness, he used the next magic.

His magic power pushed at the surrounding air roughly.

4th Circle ice magic, Frozen Orb...

4th Circle lightning magic, Lightning Spear…

4th Circle wind magic, Gale Force…

Including Blaze Shell, Theo completed four magic spells simultaneously, and they were in a stable state. This meant that Theo could maintain 4th Circle intermediate magic without any parameters.

Sylvia nodded and ordered another magic, “Erase everything. Last one.”

The four terrible magic spells faded into the air. It was evidence that he could do both activation and cancellation well. Perhaps he could use magic under the 4th Circle in the blink of an eye. However, Theodore’s and Sylvia’s capabilities didn’t end there.

The very next moment, the air distorted strangely.

“Ah.” Theo’s head hurt.

However, Theo didn’t lose his concentration and completed the magic. It was fire magic which pushed the limits of the 5th Circle. The two people simultaneously looked up at the ceiling where a red flame was blazing.

“…Minor Force-Inferno, perfect,” Theo placed strength in the declaration.

Swiiik... The 6th Circle flickered, and Theo sighed as he released his concentration.

It was amazing that he had almost completed it in a month, but the improved magic was a burden. He couldn't maintain it for even 10 seconds. Still, it was a success, and both of them clapped with joy.

As Theodore was about to express his gratitude...

[Hoing!] Mitra suddenly popped up under his feet.

"Mitra? What's going on?"

Perhaps due to Theodore's higher sensitivity, she could freely appear in the material world whenever she wanted. Usually she played with Sylvia or with the dirt in a corner of the practice room, but her current attitude was strange. She tried to tell them something as she tapped on their shoes.

Theo leaned down to listen and heard the soft voice saying, [Deo! Jun! Jun!]

"Jun?"

He was trying to understand what she was saying when there was a sudden tapping on the door of the practice room.

Chapter 95 – State Guests Of Elvenheim (1)

The magic kingdom, Meltor, had more magicians than any other country on the northern continent, and each magic tower acted as an axis. This magic system they had which integrated with science could be called the root of Meltor's prosperity. Compared to the combat focused aura, magic was an all-rounder versatility, allowing Meltor to rival the Andras Empire despite their scarcer land and resources.

However, there was one area which magicians avoided which was politics, where schemes and deceit abounded.

'I was called for a political reason.'

Theodore looked at himself in the mirror as he dressed in the now familiar robe.

Magicians were used to wearing robes on the outside, but the minor ornaments and complicated fabric didn't fit Theo's tastes. Did it have to take a few minutes to get dressed? If it wasn't because of etiquette, he would've just worn the robe over his casual clothes.

"Well, this is enough."

He tied the last knot and pulled the cord hanging from the ceiling.

Rattle!

Then an attendant entered the room like he had been waiting. His keen eyes examined Theo's clothing quickly. By default, an immature young man wouldn't know all of the court etiquette.

If Theo made a mistake, then the attendant wouldn't be able to avoid responsibility. Theo had refused his help and said he was going to dress by himself. However, the attendant could see that Theo's clothing was completely perfect.

"...Theodore, I will guide you to the audience room."

At first, the attendant was surprised, but he then remembered that the person in front of him was a noble and regained his composure. It was both true and false, but the man was able to keep calm by making his own excuses. The Miller family was now a great noble family.

Theodore didn't know about the assumptions the attendant was making and walked through the corridors of the palace he was now familiar with. It was the path he had walked when he had been called half a year ago, and he still remembered where the statues were located. Frankly, he could walk without the help of the guide. Apart from restricted areas, he could make a map of everything else. It was an ability separate from ordinary magicians.

"Theodore."

“Oh, we’ve arrived.”

They had arrived while he was pondering. The door, on which an eagle was engraved, was the area where the king presided. The eagle was a mark given only to some areas, including the audience room.

In contrast, the important areas of the magic towers were marked with animals known for their wisdom. Did the tower masters have a turtle or an owl? Theo would find out at a later date as the door was currently opening.

Kkiiik…

It wasn’t a very loud sound. Maybe it was because it was well greased, but the noise was soft for such a heavy door. Still, the heavy silence inside the room made it seem like a loud sound, and all eyes focused on the one who opened the door—Theo.

Theodore stiffened as he faced dozen of eyes.

‘What, why is the mood like this today?’

Theo had certainly become a celebrity in his own way, but he wasn’t special when compared to some of those gathered here. It was a place where the real power of Meltor had convened. Anyone he picked out would be a high ranking noble or court official.

Theo was interesting, but they weren’t the type of people who

would be interested in him. Yet the weight of their gazes were now different from usual. It was beyond the level for the court ball or duel.

His questions increased at the following words.

“Theodore, you will be sitting here today.”

“…A senior seat?”

“Yes, I was ordered to seat you here.”

Theo looked around with confusion. He was forced to do so while most of the lords were sitting in lower seats. Theodore couldn’t see any viscounts, and there were only a few marquis where he was sitting. Even a magician had to be at least an elder to sit here.

It was unprecedented for Theodore to be sitting in such a high ranking seat. So, it wouldn’t be unusual for him to receive resentment from the people sitting in the lower seats. However, none of them protested Theo’s position.

This was his first experience sitting in such a luxurious seat. The silk material of the chair wasn’t much different from the others, but the air felt different.

At that time, someone placed a hot arm around his neck. “Hi Kid. Have you been well in the meantime?”

“…Tower Master.”

His skin tingled. There was only one person who drove mana so crazy.

The red hair of the Red Tower Master, Veronica, tickled Theo’s ears. It was a voice he hadn’t heard in a month due to dedicating himself to the special training. He moved back reflexively, and Veronica laughed.

“Come on, is this your first time sitting in a senior seat?”

It still wasn’t a good enough distance for his heart. Theo spoke to her as he tried to calm down, “It has been a long time… but Tower Master?”

“Huh?”

“Do you know why I was placed in a senior seat? I don’t know why since this is my first time.”

Veronica’s eyes widened at his words, then she nodded like she understood. “Aha, you came without knowing anything? Indeed, it isn’t a matter that would be passed on. It seems like the others used their methods to know in advance.”

She looked around as she spoke and coughed when she saw the

pressure from the eyes of some people. It was because Veronica had pierced right through them. That was indeed the reason why the nobles silently accepted Theodore's seat.

Veronica looked at them like they were pathetic and said, "Obviously, your position isn't high enough to sit here yet. I think it will be soon, but at the moment, it isn't the case. However, today you are the most eligible person to sit here."

"Today?"

"Yes. They didn't come for Meltor; they came to see Theodore Miller."

Before he could realize the significance of those words, the royal knight near the throne raised his voice, "His Majesty—! The king is coming—!"

Simultaneously, dozens of people got up from their seats. They bowed as Kurt III appeared from beyond the curtain. As always, Kurt III omitted the formal procedures and sat down on the throne. He waited until everyone was seated before talking.

"First, I want to thank everyone for coming at the sudden call. This situation is unexpected, but I want you to know that it is an important turning point for this country. Perhaps there are people who have already heard the story and some who haven't. So, I will summarize it simply."

He turned toward the upper seats. To be exact, he turned toward Theodore.

“An envoy from Elvenheim has arrived. For the first time in history, it is for the purpose of friendship instead of trade. After this moment, we will be meeting the envoy.”

When the explanation ended, the noise in the room gradually rose as people talked excitedly.

The country of elves, Elvenheim, wasn’t completely cut off from the outside. The elves maintained a moderate mutually beneficial relationship with the human species on the continent, but the humans didn’t have a friendship with the elves.

The specialties of Elvenheim were so great that they couldn’t be produced anywhere else, and the elves accepted the rapidly developing human civilization. However, friendship had always been rejected.

“F-Friendship…?!”

“If this is true, the climate in the north will change!”

“I didn’t think that Elvenheim would come out with this…”

Elvenheim didn’t ally themselves with any country, nor did they become enemies with them. They stayed neutral and just watched the wars or alliances of other countries. The Great Forest at their

borders made it possible for them to exist as a third power.

Andras or Meltor could advance into Elvenheim, but they couldn't afford to risk crossing their border with enemies on the other side. However, that balance was now going to collapse.

Once the people settled down, Kurt III clapped several times and looked toward the entrance of the hall.

"Come in."

Everyone remained silent. This was the moment when Elvenheim's envoy, the person who could change this era, would be revealed. They couldn't help being tense. Someone pushed up their glasses while another person tightened their tie. Even Theodore couldn't help gulping due to the tension which had spread in the room.

A few minutes or maybe a few seconds of silence followed. Finally, the envoy from Elvenheim appeared.

"Umm...!"

"Is that the envoy...?"

Blonde hair which was close to silver flowed down the envoy's shoulders, while their nose and eyes were as perfect as a statue. The person matched the nickname elves had for being a species of beauty. Their skin was transparent, and their clothing and armour

were made of unknown metal and cloth. All eyes were taken by the shining appearance, but Theo admired the person in another way.

It was because he could see the elementals dancing around the elf.

“23? No, more than that…”

“The kid noticed as well.”

Veronica showed interest in Theo’s soft muttering as she looked at the elf with narrowed eyes.

“A Spiritual Sentinel, the guardians of spirits? The cowards in the forest sent quite a big shot.”

“Sentinel? What is that.”

“It is a title used among the elves. Elite elementalists who can handle senior elementals and the highest ranked elven warriors are called by that title. In other words, a master.”

Veronica’s voice was calm, but the contents of what she said shocked Theodore.

The Spiritual Sentinel was a presence which was equivalent to a sword master or a 7th Circle magician! If Veronica was correct, it made sense that the envoy came alone. A master was enough to

represent the country.

The envoy stood in place and bowed respectfully. “I recognize the owner of Meltor, the magic kingdom. Edwin, the son of the third Beech Clan in Elvenheim greets you. Forgive me for any rude manners.”

“We don’t know the courtesies of the forest either. Edwin, I sincerely welcome you to Meltor.”

It was a gracious greeting, unlike with the Andras Empire. The envoy introduced himself as Edwin without losing any grace, while Kurt III showed his dignity as the king, but he never pressed the other person.

Edwin ceremonially gave a tribute, and Kurt III accepted the tribute. Thus, the basic greetings were completed.

As the atmosphere turned toward a conversation, Kurt III carefully sent out feelers. “Elvenheim is our neighbour, but it is still a distant land. You don’t intend to get close to humans for purposes other than trade, and I think we have respected that.”

“Yes, Your Majesty’s words are correct.”

“So, I have to wonder. For what reason did my neighbour come such a long way?”

Edwin raised his head like he had been waiting for those words.

There was no need to look in separate directions. The elementals around Theo let out a scent. It was a fragrance which all elves could smell, irrespective of their power.

Edwin looked at ‘him’ and opened his mouth to say, “Then I will tell you. I have come here to pay back the person who saved the clan’s sixth dancer, Ellenoa, and to invite him and his companions to become state guests of the Elvenheim kingdom!”

Chapter 96 – State Guests Of Elvenheim (2)

‘State guests!’ They were only two words, but everyone’s complexion changed significantly.

So far, Elvenheim had accepted other the delegates countries, but it was nothing more than a procedure for trading with outsiders. In a true sense, Elvenheim had never treated the delegates of even one country as state guests.

Kurt III was the only one who maintained a calm composure. “Hrmm, state guests.”

No, that was just on the surface. He didn’t know Elvenheim would do this. At best, he thought that the number of trade items or the range of activities in the Great Forest would increase. Was Edwin saying that they would be allowed into Elvenheim’s borders, where no one else had been let into? That, more than anything else, was worth considering.

“Sir Edwin, can I take your words to mean that Elvenheim is accepting a delegation?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Is it on the outskirts of the Great Forest again?”

Edwin shook his head with a wry smile. “No. We can’t treat guests like that. The meeting will take a little longer, but

Elvenheim has decided to welcome Theodore's companions in front of the world tree."

"The world tree at the heart of the Great Forest..."

"Yes, our parent tree."

After hearing this confirmed, Kurt II raised the value of this mission by three stages.

Elves couldn't tell lies. It wasn't due to beliefs or superstition. Those who danced and sung with nature would lose their power when they lied. Consequently, elves who lost their affinities due to lying were regarded as sinners in their society and expelled from the clan.

As a master, Edwin's binding was several times stronger. He might lose all his power just from speaking a few words of lies. So, Edwin's assertion was, in itself, evidence.

"How many people can accompany Theodore?" Kurt III asked calmly as he envisioned a few ambassadors.

"The fewer the better. If there is an attacker like last time, the escort will be difficult with a large number of people."

"Well, that is definitely tricky."

“Ah! There is one thing I forgot to tell you.” Edwin’s next words made his complex thoughts more disturbed. “The closer it is to the world tree in the center of the Great Forest, the higher the concentration of mana. A body that isn’t properly trained won’t be able to endure it.”

“What is the level?”

“On the basis of a magician… they must be at least the 5th Circle.”

“Then most of the court are eliminated,” Kurt III muttered quietly and looked around.

Some of the court officials could use magic, but none of them had reached beyond the ‘wall’ of the 5th Circle. Some were busy with their duties, others regarded magic as self-defense or a hobby, and the rest spent years or decades hitting against the wall. If they needed five circles, it looked like a minimum of Superior ranked magicians could be sent on the mission.

“…It is hard since the staff is too scarce.”

This needed more than just a magician but a political magician. If he dispatched fighters from the magic towers, it was clear they would return empty handed with chicken or fruits they had been given, or they might just go sightseeing. Half of those who met the criteria had died in the last convoy. However, if he sent the rest, there wouldn’t be enough left in the kingdom.

If possible, he wanted to send a tower master, but… “Veronica.”

Edwin’s complexion subtly changed at the name. “Y-Your Majesty!”

“…As expected, she can’t?”

“I’m sorry, but please refrain from allowing her to join the delegation.”

It was funny to see a master so freaked out, but he had a reason to be. Meltor and Elvenheim were close enough to have a history of commerce and trade, among which Veronica had visited the Great Forest with a delegation. Her combat power was a surefire safeguard, so the danger level would be like the front yard of a mansion. However, that caused a problem when she approached Elvenheim.

There were elementals guarding the exterior of Elvenheim and the boundaries of the world tree, which amplified the power of the elementals. However, they started to burn as soon as Veronica’s power reached them.

“It wasn’t a deliberate destruction, so we let it go at the time. However, we can’t endure a second time.” Edwin started sweating at the memory of that day.

However, Veronica was offended by the cautious refusal and shouted at him, “Hey! Why are you blaming me when your grass is

poor?”

“T-That isn’t it…”

“Then what is it? I will use a breath on top of the world tree!”

Edwin knew the real nature of her words, so he turned pale. If that happened, both countries were likely to suffer catastrophic damage.

Kurt III forgot about maintaining his expressions and tried to stop her, but Theo was one beat quicker. It was better to call her by something which would catch her attention. “Calm down, Sister.”

“I will burn down the world tree and everything… Huh?”

When Veronica paused for a moment at the magic word, Theo pulled her into his arms and held her in place. The sight of the Red Tower Master, the god of destruction in Meltor, being defeated was met with applause.

While she tried to get Theo to call her that again, Kurt III quickly changed the topic. Inwardly, he decided to give Theo a few more rewards.

Unexpectedly, one of the interior ministers stood up and recommended someone, “Your Majesty, what about the Blue Tower Master?”

“I want to do that but…” However, Kurt III shook his head. “Blundell is currently heading to stop the flooding in the eastern rice fields. For the time being, he can’t return to the capital.”

“Then how about the elders of the magic towers?”

“We have to hurry to fill in the lacking manpower. There are a few elders who are being treated for old age, but we can’t send them.” Kurt III could recall a few people from missions, but he didn’t want to see the possible harm that would occur in those areas as a result.

After that, a light debate started. Disputes arose between nobles who wanted their magicians to join and those who didn’t care. At this rate, it wouldn’t come to a conclusion in a few days.

Kurt III decided to take some damage and opened his mouth to speak.

However, a man suddenly appeared in the room. “If you don’t have the right person, I will go Your Majesty.”

It was a masked man wearing white robes. Mouths dropped open as the people in the room realized his arrival.

“White Tower Master?!”

Unlike the Yellow Tower Master who didn't reveal his identity, the name of the White Tower Master was well known. The best space magician was floating in the air. Orta, the White Tower Master, slowly descended to the ground and fell to one knee.

Kurt III beckoned for him to rise and said, "You've just returned from Genga, Orta."

"Yes."

"I thought you would take two more days, but you were much faster. This is a happy miscalculation."

It was as Kurt III said.

As one of Meltor's strongest magicians, he could believe in the skills of the tower masters. The each of them might have flaws in their personality, but he could overlook such minor things as part of their charm. The White Tower Master was the most active tower master when it came to missions, and he handled everything with utmost care.

"Good, this mission will be entrusted to Orta. Gather applicants from each magic tower. They have to be magicians of at least the 5th Circle. Don't go beyond 10 people."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"And Theodore Miller."

Theodore, who held Veronica in his arms with half resignation, responded to the call as he escaped from the dangerous embrace with a regretful feeling. Kurt III looked Theo up and down and asked a question which didn't make sense, "How is your body?"

"Huh? Oh, it is good. Your Majesty."

"Is that so? I heard that your condition wasn't good. It was around a month ago, so I don't know about these days."

Theo realized the meaning of the question after hearing 'a month ago.'

'The side effects from the Sensitivity Amplifier, His Majesty was aware of them.'

However, the presence of the Sensitivity Amplifier was a secret, so the king had to ask in a roundabout way. Theo was already planning to give his all in the mission, but he became more motivated by such care.

Fortunately, his ability to use no-casting had already passed the minimum point where it could be used in a fight. If he wanted to aim for more than this, he would have to polish it off in a fight, not in practice.

'Elvenheim, the Great Forest and the world tree.'

For Theo who needed a new opportunity to cross the wall of the 6th Circle, this invitation was a great opportunity.

“There are no problems, your Majesty. Please don’t hesitate to send me.”

“…I see.” Kurt III smiled at the confident answer and nodded. Theo was someone who never let Kurt III down. If so, it was the king’s role to trust him.

Kurt III understood that the story was now completed and got up from the throne, with everyone standing up after him.

Before everyone, the Meltor king declared, “Today is the moment when I declare that new possibilities have opened in the relations between Meltor and Elvenheim! There will be a delegation centered around the hero, Theodore Miller, and I will only allow you to discuss it once diplomatic relations have been re-established!”

“Yes! Your Majesty!” The people responded.

“And this mission’s representative, Theodore Miller!”

‘Isn’t the White Tower Master the representative?’

“Yes, Your Majesty!” Theodore barely maintained his expressionless face as he waited for his king on one knee. He was inwardly nervous, but they were personal words. It was toward

Theodore and no one else.

"At a young age, you will bear honour as well as a heavy burden. However, I believe that you will be Meltor's light. Please remember that you are the main character of this diplomatic mission to Elvenheim."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

"On this mission, I will grant you the same authority as the White Tower Master. Don't hesitate to speak what you think!"

Theo bowed and answered as firmly as possible, "I, Theodore Miller, will do as Your Majesty commands!"

He had become more familiar with the increasing burden on his shoulders.

Someone had said this, 'A person's footsteps is as deep as the weight of the load they are carrying on their back. If the person doesn't fall along the way, they will be strongly conditioned. It is a hundred times better to be overwhelmed than to not receive any expectations.'

Before all the influential people of the magic kingdom of Meltor, Theo embraced his task in a dignified manner.

Chapter 97 – State Guests Of Elvenheim (3)

The news of the mission to Elvenheim spread through the magic towers and the Magic Society.

The king had commanded them to be silent about it, but it was unavoidable in order to find magicians to participate in the mission. Anyway, the number of Superior magicians currently in Mana-vil was less than 100, so there was little chance of it leaking onto the streets.

However, those who heard the news were ecstatic.

“At present, there are 93 Superior magicians remaining in Mana-vil, of which 71 are willing to participate in the delegation. Of the remaining, 13 wanted to apply but had to give up due to their circumstances,” Vince smiled wryly as he explained the craze raging inside the Magic Society.

Elvenhein was the holy land of the elves where humans weren’t allowed to step foot in, so the ability to explore that mysterious world pulled out desire even from magicians. Even if it wasn’t a major expedition, it was worth going into the heart of the Great Forest.

The magicians of the magic towers were always thirsty for stimulation.

“...It is very noisy.”

“Who wouldn’t want to go? It may not be exposed to the outside, but it is currently an unbearable situation where people are mobilizing all types of bribes or stories.”

Elvenheim was a mystical land overflowing with elementals and mana. So far, the kingdom of the elves had never been exposed. It was a sanctuary where six high elves were staying. If the magicians could see the hidden secrets, they would be able to jump years or decades in understanding.

Some people wanted to cross the ‘wall,’ while others wanted to acquire new research material. Magicians with their own purpose tried to show their worth to the White Tower Master, Orta.

In a sense, Kurt III had made the best judgment when he entrusted the recruitment to the White Tower Master. If it were Theodore who didn’t know politics, who knew what would happen?

“Hoo… It might seem a little pathetic, but I’m glad I don’t have that role.”

“Haha, it is true for me as well. If you were to act as the screening officer, I wouldn’t even have time to talk to you.”

There was a difference in treatment of a Superior ranked magician and a tower master. Needless to say, it was much easier to approach a Superior magician with a bribe than a tower master. Kurt III had considered this, which was why he hadn’t given

Theodore the authority.

Vince explained up to there and got up. “I should go. There isn’t much time left until the interview?”

“Interview?”

“It is the instruction from the White Tower Master. He told us to summarize what national interest we can obtain from Elvenheim.”

In the end, Theodore couldn’t help laughing. “Aren’t you busy with your study of the ancient language?”

“Well, shouldn’t I get fresh air sometimes? Besides, I may be able to find some clues in Elvenheim. If you think about it, elves are like witnesses of history, so it is a reasonable conclusion.”

Vince’s words weren’t wrong. Elves lived more than three times as long as humans, so Theo couldn’t deny the possibility that records of ancient languages could be left in Elvenheim’s library.

However, Theo didn’t nod and whispered to Vince who was standing stiffly, “Master, isn’t that an excuse?”

“Uhuh! I like intelligent disciples, but disciples who are sharp are uncomfortable.”

In a word, Theo was correct. The two people looked at each other

and laughed. Then Vince headed for his private room. Just as he was about to move away from Theo, he looked back like he thought of something.

“That reminds me, I saw that the child is participating in the application as well. Her interview papers are well prepared, so she may surprisingly pass.”

“That child…?”

“Sylvia.”

Indeed, a genius who had reached the 5th Circle before 20 years old was entitled to apply for this mission. Sylvia had been helping with his training for a month, but a genius was a genius. She had prepared enough to apply for the mission.

Theo nodded with admiration, but Vince sighed lightly at his reaction.

“That kid still has a long way to go. This is why the parties…”

“Yes?”

“No, it is nothing. It isn’t a story that a third party should be talking about.” Vince let it pass and returned to his room.

Theodore remained alone in his private room and didn’t think

about anything.

*

Exactly three days afterwards, the White Tower Master verified the reasoning and capabilities of the magicians, and ruthlessly dismissed them.

Magicians were scholars who sought to explore the mysteries of magic, so senior magicians held a lot of knowledge. As a tower master, it wasn't surprising that Orta's amount of knowledge was already equivalent to a few libraries.

"Gathering wild herbs for the purpose of breeding. I'm sorry, but the B2-Mandragora doesn't grow in the Great Forest. Maybe you should study more herbs in the western swamps."

"P-Please forgive me once!"

"Exploring elemental magic at Elvenheim? It is reasonable, but don't you know that elves abhor the act of enchanting elementals? This isn't an exploration but a mission. Dismissed."

"T-That..."

Orta didn't miss the manipulation of research data and also knew lesser known elven customs. He had a wider range of knowledge, and his ability to conduct himself was better than that of any other tower master.

Magicians who were stupid enough to prepare in Orta's vicinity and those who made mistakes were sent away by Orta. Fortunately, Theo's acquaintances didn't fall into such cases.

Theodore received the list of names a few hours before departure and found two names on it. "Red Tower, Vince Haidel... and Blue Tower's Sylvia Adruncus."

Both were amazing. They had competed with over 70 magicians of the same rank and won. Vince had accumulated his experience, while Sylvia was younger than 20. Wouldn't the eliminated magicians be grabbing their wine bottles by now?

Then at that moment...

[Hoing!] Mitra sprang up from a pot on the window, flew into the air, and hit Theodore's cheek. Mitra emerged lost in thought, so she was also surprised.

"Wah, Mitra?"

However, Theo didn't get a chance to ask as his senses stirred. There was a presence which couldn't be ignored by his sixth sense. It seemed to be both here and nowhere. This was different from Veronica, but the presence was so great that it was hard to ignore.

If he had to express it in words, the presence was close to a non-materialized elemental. Theo's logic grasped the identity of the

person before his intuition did. “Sir Edwin?”

He opened the door and pretended to be surprised.

“…Ah, excuse me. I don’t know about etiquette, so…”

“You can come inside. Next time, tap lightly on the door a few times.”

“Ah! Is that called ‘knocking’?” Edwin responded as he entered through the door. Unlike his mysterious appearance, he seemed different when he was not facing the king and nobles.

Edwin crossed the threshold carefully and sat on a chair according to Theo’s instructions. Then he gazed at Theo with glowing eyes. “I’m sorry for seeing you separately so late. I wanted to come find you on the first day, but my duties slowed my steps. I am glad to see you like this.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you. Then…” Theodore asked without hiding his expression, “Why are you acting so polite? From my perspective, Sir Edwin’s attitude is a little burdensome.”

“Huh? Is that so?” However, Edwin’s response was more surprising. He stared at Theo blankly with an expression indicating that he didn’t understand. “You don’t have to be burdened. You are the strength and grace that rescued Ellenoa! The saviour of one of Arv’s blood isn’t lacking at all.”

“No, that isn’t…”

“I don’t know about human customs, but it is natural for us to treat you with such honour. Please understand.”

It was a culture shock, so Theo didn’t know what to do.

From his point of view, a master level person was able to flaunt their position in any country. The possession of that sort of strength could break through any social structure like identity, rank, or wealth! Theo had never dreamed that such a transcendental being would act like this toward him.

It seemed different from humans who focused on individuals. Elves were faithful to the value of a group. The difference in perception between the two species was hard to accept, even for Theo. However, it would be rude to ask Edwin further, so Theo decided to tolerate it. Apart from the awkwardness that filled his body, the courteous treatment wasn’t doing any harm.

However, that decision was tested in a few minutes..

“Benefactor, is there any place that you want to go to in Elvenheim? I will be happy to take you there.”

“I don’t know any places, so…”

“Ah, that’s right. I was too short-sighted. I will show you things you will appreciate.”

“It is okay if you do it moderately, moderately.”

Edwin kept asking him questions enthusiastically, while Theodore replied with a weary face. The exchange between human and elf was rare in this era. Compared to Theo’s first impression of him, Edwin was a surprisingly talkative elf. Theodore liked to be silent, so he couldn’t help feeling pained.

Thus, it was inevitable that the subject was changed.

“That…” Edwin held a gift from Ellenoa.

It was a seed which gave out a bluish light. As soon as the cloth was untied, a fragrant scent rose up from the seed. It attracted Mitra and all the elementals around Edwin! They came running with loud sounds.

Edwin smiled brightly at Theo’s reaction and explained its identity, “The seed of the world tree. Of course, it is different from the myths, but it still has this effect.”

[Deo! Deoo!] Mitra drooled and at pulled Theo’s clothing. Theo couldn’t ignore it and hugged her.

Then Edwin suddenly extended the seed to Mitra. “This is a message from Ellenoa. Give this ‘seed’ to Mitra.”

Chapter 98 – Great Forest (0)

“Mitra?” Theodore looked dubious, but he accepted the seed for Mitra.

The seed glowed with a blue light. If this truly was a seed from Yggdrasil, the sacred world tree which stood at the center of Elvenheim, the value of it would be priceless. However, Ellenoa said to give this seed to Mitra.

Alas, it was doubtful that an answer would come just by thinking about it. So, rather than worrying alone, Theo decided to ask the person sitting before him, “Sir Edwin, do you know the meaning of this seed?”

“What do you mean?”

“What is the efficacy of the seed… or why did Ellenoa tell me to give it to Mitra?”

Edwin pondered for a moment before nodding and answering the questions, “I can’t fully know her will, but I will tell you what I know.”

His explanation dated back to the time of the birth of Yggdrasil and Elvenheim. It had been around 300 years ago, which wasn’t that long considering the longevity of the elves. Elves had gathered from all over the continent to make a new home in the mountains of the north. Using the power of the elves, they then created a world tree. From then on, Elvenheim, the kingdom of elves, began.

Although incomplete, but Yggdrasil was still a world tree. Just like its name, Yggdrasil defended Elvenheim with its power. Its falling leaves cleaned the ground, while its roots extended to the surface to create a natural ecosystem. This was why the elves were able to secure a safe area in the northern great mountains, where all types of creatures lived.

The elves of Elvenheim were grateful and admired the world tree as the parent tree.

“The parent tree helped the elves thrive. The sap helped with conception due to its vitality, and the branches became the weapons of the warriors, while the petals and fruits had the power to heal the sick and injured.”

“Perhaps…”

“Yes, your thinking is correct.”

Theo had noticed that many potions and specialties could only be made in Elvenheim.

This was because of the world tree, Yggdrasil. Since the potions and specialities were a byproduct of the world tree, they could never be reproduced by human technology. It was the reason why Elvenheim had the absolute advantage in trade.

However, Theo continued waiting despite his surprise. It was

because the explanation about the efficacy of the seed still hadn't appeared. Edwin paused and finally pulled out the next topic. "The world tree produces many fruits in 100 years, but only a few seeds. I am one of those who have received the seed."

"Sir Edwin?"

"Yes, according to old sayings, the seed of the parent tree is said to germinate the abilities hidden within the being who takes it. I took it and got on the path of a guardian."

'Germinating potential!'

It was indeed a byproduct of the world tree. Theodore marveled at those words before looking down at the seed. According the Edwin's explanation, the seed wouldn't be a big help to Theo. It was one thing if it gave a talent that didn't exist, but it wasn't meaningful since his innate talent was small.

His innate talent was far smaller than Mitra's. 'Mother Earth…'

In contrast to the god, Dmitra, who was larger than a mountain, the potential of a human was nothing. No one would've imagined it based on the small Mitra jumping on his knees right now.

[Wuong?] Mitra became aware of his gaze and made a questioning sound.

"Now, this is a gift." Theo handed the seed to her without any

hesitation. Mitra stared blankly at the seed for a moment before jumping onto his palm. At first, she wanted to bite on the seed, but then she looked up at Theo.

[Deo! I eat it?!]

“Eat?”

[Ye!]

Mitra was drooling, so it seemed like she found it very appetizing. Maybe there was something which only elementals could feel. To him, it just seemed like a bead with a good fragrance.

Theodore nodded, causing Mitra to laugh and lift the seed above her head.

[Aam-!] She opened her mouth and swallowed the bead in one go.

Gulp.

*

The heart of the northern Great Forest, Elvenheim, was on the same continent as Meltor. It would take one month with express wagons to travel from Mana-vil to the Great Forest. Furthermore, transportation such as wagons would lose their functionality inside the large forests.

For that reason, a minimum of 100 days were scheduled for them to reach Elvenheim. However, the delegation's departure room was strangely empty.

"...You came," Orta, the man standing in the middle of the room, murmured as soon as the door closed tight. Behind him was Edwin who had a long talk with Theodore.

Theo stood beside Orta who asked him, "Are the preparations finished?"

"Yes."

"Then let's leave. It is a long journey, so we need to hurry."

Regardless of status, Theodore and the White Tower Master had the same authority on this mission. Orta obtained his consent and moved to the center of the circle, while Sylvia ran to Theo's side. However, before Sylvia could even say 'Hello,' something suddenly popped out of Theo's arms.

"Kya?" Sylvia caught Mitra reflexively. She had excellent reflexes for a magician.

[Hoing!] Mitra waved her hands around like she was saying hello. She peeked about at Sylvia and laughed. Sylvia placed Mitra on her hand and felt a strange sense of incongruity.

As she stroked Mitra's hair, she muttered with a surprised expression, "...A bud?"

It was as Sylvia said. A sprout of green grass was poking out from Mitra's hair

Sylvia looked at Theo for the answer, but he just smiled mysteriously. Theo and Edwin were the only ones who knew that the bud had grown after Mitra ate the seed of the world tree. Mitra was amazed, but she also didn't know what it was.

'Well, I will know if I ask Ellenoa directly.' It wasn't something Theo should think about while they were in a rush.

Having experienced teleportation before, Theo waited calmly for the space magic to be activated. According to the White Tower Master, he would teleport them near the border. The distance they were crossing would cause them a great deal of dizziness and side-effects.

The moment that Theodore was done preparing himself...

"Mass Teleport." Simultaneously, as the words were spoken, the magic circle under the party lit up. The space transfer magic circle, which was the symbol of the White Tower, swallowed up the one elf and nine ambassadors.

'Ah!' The three dimensional space folded up into a line.

The unrestrained bending of space wasn't something which could be perceived with human senses. Moreover, it didn't just end with dizziness. The matter wasn't solved with closing their eyes, but it was several times better than being stupid enough to look.

Fortunately, the distorted sensation soon ended.

"Keuk!"

"Huuuu..."

"Umm."

Upon arriving at the destination, everybody calmed their dizziness in their own way. Some breathed in deeply, while others bit their lip. However, there were a few who looked around without a single stumble, and Theo was one of them. The only side effect he had was a slight headache, so he looked around carefully.

At that time, beads of light floated up in the dark interior.

"This place is an underground facility near the border. It is a place where we can't stay for long. Follow behind me," Orta gave instructions as he walked through the room with familiar steps.

After climbing numerous steps, he saw a wooden plank blocking the doorway. Regardless of whether it was a magical object, Orta pushed it with his hand without saying a word.

Kkiiiik. Simultaneously, light poured down from the ceiling.

Was it due to the light magic...? Strangely, nobody covered their eyes or groaned with pain. As the nine people climbed up, Orta closed the wooden plank behind them. He poured sand on the top, leaving no traces of anything being there.

Only then did Theo start looking around. "...This place."

There were no obstacles to be seen on the horizon. An open wilderness was all that filled the eyes of the 10 people. The red sand blowing in the wind was the only highlight of this wilderness.

'Is this wilderness the Red Plateau?'

This was the northern border of Meltor, the Red Plateau. It was a red soil which seemed to reject all life.

Why didn't the strong creatures of the northern Great Forest cross the Meltor border? The reason for that could be found in the Red Plateau. This was a barren land of several hundred kilometers which only rained once every couple of years. The number of hungry creatures who died here were too numerous to count.

Therefore, many preparations were necessary to overcome this wasteland. A lot of food, water, and supplies to withstand the attacks of the undead creatures were required in order to cross hundreds of kilometers.

Everybody knew this fact, so one person asked a question. “Tower Master?”

“Hmm?”

“Where are the carriages we are going to ride?”

The remaining eight people also looked at Orta.

Since he was a magician from the white tower, they thought he would’ve prepared carriages or gust wagons. Masters could use higher ranked elementals, but even Edwin had limitations. He didn’t have the ability to carry the baggage of nine people.

However, no matter where they looked, they couldn’t find any carriages or gust wagons.

“It is annoying to explain. All of you wear these rings.”

Orta pulled out a box and handed out rings one by one.

The rings were made of silver and didn’t have any decorative patterns, but the party put on the ring as instructed by the White Tower Master. Edwin hesitated for a moment, but he eventually put it on his index finger as well.

Orta watched them put it on with calm eyes. “Then let’s depart.

If I have to tell you one thing, it's to just stand in place."

"...?" The others all had puzzled expressions.

"Rather than explaining, it is quicker to show you directly," the White Tower Master spoke strange words before taking one step, then another step.

His steps seemed stagnant. His legs were obviously moving, but he didn't move away from the party. Was he showing them a trick? Some started to suspect that the White Tower Master was slightly strange in the head.

However, there were those who noticed the abnormalities. Theodore was extremely sensitive to supernatural sensations and the 'world changing,' so he was the fastest among them. Even Edwin's expression became one of shock as he understood that the landscape around them had changed skillfully.

The clouds appeared their heads disappeared into the distance, while the clouds on the horizon moved above them. Yes, the landscape changed every time he took a step.

'...How can we move so far in one step?!'

Was this a type of space magic? The group centered on Orta was jumping hundreds of meters, or maybe a few kilometers, all at once. It wasn't immediately noticed due to all four directions being a wasteland, but the rest of the group soon understood.

“S-Spatial distortion?! It is with every step?”

“Impossible...!”

“Even if he is the White Tower Master, this...”

As Orta had instructed, the rest of them didn’t move, but the party was astonished as they stared at the constantly changing sky. They were moving very quickly through the notorious Red Plateau. Indeed, there was no need for carriages.

The gust wagons were slow compared to moving hundreds of meters in the blink of an eye.

White Tower Master Orta, who was the peak of space magic, declared bluntly, “We will arrive at the Great Forest as the sun sets. Be prepared to stop and set up camp.”

Chapter 99 – Great Forest (1)

Nobody could answer. No, it was more accurate to say that they had no spirit left to answer.

Moving from the capital to the border in a single space transfer transcended common sense. The difficulty of the magic rose exponentially according to the distance and number of companions. However, as soon as Orta completed this, he used another magic.

It was a magic which was difficult to even understand, let alone know the principles behind it.

'I wouldn't know just by looking at the movement of the magic power. This is the White Tower Master's magic...!' Theodore looked at the White Tower Master with admiration.

He recalled the words he had heard from Veronica before leaving on this journey. She had been disappointed that she couldn't come with him, but she hadn't been worried about his safety. Veronica had evaluated the man standing before Theo.

"Well, there is no need to worry if it is Orta. He is a more competent escort than me."

"More than Sister?"

"Yes. Of course, I can win in a frontal battle. However, I have no

way to catch Orta if he runs away. In a situation where victory isn't needed, his mobility is frankly frustrating. In the last war, he escaped from the siege of three sword masters. Is this something you could do?"

At that time, Theodore had shaken his head unknowingly.

Sword masters were supermen who had gone beyond the limitations of life. Their flesh was an excellent weapon as well as a vessel for aura. They had the strength of an ogre, and their durability was better than a metal golem. It was only a matter of time before one would be caught by them.

In fact, some sword masters were famous for causing shock waves with their movements. Their range of movement was a few hundred meters in one breath, regardless of the length of the swords in their hands. Once a person was caught in the eyes of a sword master, there was no way for them to escape.

'But Orta is able to do it.' Theo could accept it now.

Orta could escape from a sword master who was faster than an arrow. A few hundred meters in one breath? That wasn't even half of Orta's steps. There would be no way to stop Orta from going where he wanted to. The White Tower Master's space magic had reached the level of transcendence.

Gluttony was the only one who realized the essence of the magic.

–Hoh, is that Shukuchiho?

Wiki

‘Shukuchiho?’ Theodore asked reflexively.

It was a unique pronunciation. Somehow, Gluttony seemed to know the White Tower Master’s space magic, and Theo’s curiosity was stimulated. Above all, if Gluttony initiated the conversation, then his right to ask a question wasn’t consumed. As always, the greedy grimoire responded to its owner’s expectations.

–Reducing the axis. It means the land. It is an eastern immortal technique allowing the user to jump great distances by narrowing the space.

‘Immortal technique? A type of magic?’

–It is a little different. It is sloppy to compare it to magic that has a system. This relies on the natural qualities and building up of strength over time with mental power. It is closer to a superpower rather than magic. Then suddenly, Gluttony changed his tone. –However, a magician recreated Shukuchiho using pure magic. He distorted space precisely and switched the points around himself. Humans are really capable of wonderful feats.

It was rare for this guy to praise someone, so it must be really impressed. This was something which wasn’t recorded in it, so the grimoire respected the magic of modern humans. Theo wanted to ask a few more questions, but Gluttony fell back to sleep.

As the sky changed, Theodore continued looking up at it.

‘Space magic…’

A minimum of six circles was needed to use space magic. Theo didn’t know if he had the aptitude for it, but there were many options to choose from. However, the ‘wall’ was the problem. Theo made fists firmly as he renewed his determination again. He would make as much progress as possible in Elvenheim.

The 10 delegates crossed the northern border, the Red Plateau, at an unprecedented rate.

*

In the end, the White Tower Master’s declaration was right. Just before the sun crossed the horizon in the west, the delegation was gazing at something other than the wilderness. The Great Forest finally stretched out before them.

A sound of amazement popped out from someone’s mouth, “This is the Great Forest in the north…!”

Since ancient times, this was a place which hadn’t allowed human feet to step in it. On the surface, it was just a thick and beautiful forest. However, no one would say the same thing after going inside. Only transcendents who had reached master level could guarantee their safety in that forest. A country without a

person of the master level wouldn't be able to trade with Elvenheim.

Faced with that sight, the White Tower Master finally stopped moving.

"We will enter the Great Forest tomorrow. We will camp here tonight and enter the forest when the sun rises. Please return the rings that you are wearing."

He received questioning expressions, but the party pulled the ring off their fingers with awe-filled eyes.

Orta stored the ring in the box and placed it inside his robe. Perhaps the rings were what allowed the party to accompany him when he used Shukuchiho. Theo put his baggage down as he recalled Gluttony's explanation.

The camp for 10 people was set up quickly. Sleeping bags were placed in tents which would keep out the wind, sand, and cold, while a campfire burned in the center of the camp. Magicians were usually seen as desk people, but that was a wrong perception in Meltor. Due to the long war and the missions, the delegation could set up something like this blindfolded.

"...Master, how did you do it so quickly?"

"Experience, experience."

Vince had set up his tent a few minutes earlier than Theo and was sipping tea from a cup. By the time Theodore and Sylvia finished their setups, the rest of the group had already prepared everything for dinner.

As the two people sat down with blushing expressions, the others chuckled and waved their hands.

“Hey! We were all like that when younger!”

“Don’t mind it and take a bowl. This is the best meal when eating outdoors.”

“You were still quite fast. … They are much better than you when you were younger.”

“Hah? Do you want to try it?”

The people comforted Theo and handed him a bowl, and some of them started talking about their youths. Thanks to that, the Red Plateau felt warm despite the cold breeze blowing. Theo ate a spoonful of the beef stew and looked around.

The White Tower Master was looking at the Great Forest while the rest were still busy eating. Vince had on a serious expression as he discussed something with a Yellow Tower magician, while Sylvia was swarmed by two Blue Tower magicians giving her food.

Crunch.

At that moment, Edwin came to his side. “Benefactor.”

“Ah, Sir Edwin.”

The beef stew didn’t fit with Edwin’s tastes, so he was eating an apple. Then he threw the apple core toward the distant Great Forest.

Edwin looked around for a while before sitting next to Theo and saying, “I didn’t know we would arrive so soon. Human magic has already surpassed our imagination. My species would doubt that anyone could cross the Red Plateau in just one day.”

“I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t experienced it directly.” Theodore smiled and empathized with Edwin. Theo would’ve had the same reaction if he hadn’t already experienced the White Tower Master’s magic previously.

A land where water and life didn’t exist… A land which killed those who weren’t fully prepared… Even the creatures of the Great Forest gave up crossing the Red Plateau in one day. Magicians truly transcended common sense.

The magician and elementalist formed a consensus, and an easy conversation flowed between them.

“Benefactor, was there no change?” The story of Mitra was quickly brought up.

Theo looked down at the ground and hesitated before saying, “Mitra.”

[Hoing!] The little girl came out with a cheerful sound. Except for the bud sprouting from her hair, her size and tone remained the same. It was cute, but that was all.

Edwin was also confused, but he didn’t have an answer. He just thought they would find out naturally once they entered the forest, just like Ellenoa had said. The conversation between the two people ended without a great result.

After their meals finished, the delegation went to bed. Theodore and the White Tower Master were excluded from the guard roster as heads of the delegation, making Theo feel subtly uncomfortable as he entered the sleeping bag.

‘I understand that it is because of my position, but I feel bad sleeping while Master is on guard.’

Therefore, sleep didn’t come easily. After he tossing and turning around a few times, Mitra approached him from where she had been playing near the entrance. Her round eyes seemed to be asking, ‘What is the matter?’

Theodore just smiled slightly and shook his head. “It is nothing.”

[Weally?]

“Yes, really.”

Mitra repeated her worries about Theo several times before jumping onto his chest and sitting there. The weight was almost imperceptible, but it was embarrassing. Just as he was about to fall asleep, Mitra raised her head.

Then at that moment...

Wiiing! With a slight oscillation, the bud coming from Mitra’s head started to shine with a green light. Was it a rotation rather than a vibration...? The bud spun in a clockwise direction, looking like a waterwheel. Mitra was amazed as she spun around with a [Hoi] sound. The bud didn’t stop.

Before Theo could take any action, something happened.

[Hoee!]

Mitra, who was moving around, was unable to overcome the dizziness and fell toward his forehead. The collision wouldn’t hurt either one of them, so Theo didn’t avoid it. The shining green bud rested on his forehead.

“Ah—” It was an unexplainable sensation, like his body had changed into the soil and trees. However, Theodore’s flesh was still human, and it was just an illusion.

Then, what was he hearing?

Kwaaaaah! There was a terribly loud roar.

The source of the roar killed a goblin and became more excited by the smell of blood. A heavy paddle was dragged behind it. Its thick belly was full of blood and oil, and its stubborn skin would quickly heal.

The number of creatures couldn't be counted. The shadows ran through the trees and bushes like rats. They were heading towards 10 tents.

"Heook!" The sensation was cut off, and Theo jumped up. He pulled Mitra away from his forehead and ran out the tent. It wasn't a mere illusion. He might've thought that it was just a bad dream. However, Theodore was convinced by the sense of realism.

"Master!"

The one on guard shift was Vince.

Vince was surprised by his disciple's emergence and even more surprised by the tension in his face. He didn't bother asking for an explanation from Theo as he fired magic toward the Great Forest.

Flash! As the darkness was peeled back for a moment, the area around the camp brightened. The shadows lifted, and the light of the campfire was overshadowed. The magical flash spread

throughout the darkness.

The intense movement of magic power caused the magicians to wake up reflexively, and...

Kuwoooook!

It struck the nerves of those who were approaching from a few kilometers away.

Chapter 100 – Great Forest (2)

It was rare to find sunlight in the Great Forest due to the thickness of the trees. The flash of light in the middle of the night damaged the eyes of some of the running creatures, while even the creatures with bad eyesight frowned.

The ogre, the king of creatures in an ordinary forest or mountain, roared to express its discomfort.

Kuweeeeeoh!

Despite the number of kilometers still remaining between the creatures and the camp, the camp was still shaken by the roar. Along with the flash magic which Vince used before, the loud yelling of the ogre immediately awakened the party. As veterans, their reaction was fast and cold.

“What, a raid?”

“The sound on the far side…”

“The loudest one is an ogre.”

There were no signs of drowsiness in their eyes, and each of them had a strong grip on their staffs. Someone was looking at the inventory, while another gazed into the distance to identify the enemy. Their magic power started fluctuating as they prepared for the battlefield.

The White Tower Master, wearing a white mask as always, left his tent and approached Theo who had given the warning.

“How interesting. That ward wouldn’t be able to detect presences a few kilometers away.”

It was as Orta said. The creatures Theo had discovered were almost twice as far away as the range of the alert magic Theo had laid around the camp. It was a distance which could be detected with large-scale detection magic, however, a lot of mana would be required for that, and no one in the camp had sensed it.

This meant that Theodore had become aware of the creatures approaching from a few kilometers away by using a secret means.

“Yes, it is difficult to explain, but…”

“There is no need to explain. As a result, we have time to prepare for their attack. Since you have proven yourself, you can play an active role.” The White Tower Master stopped talking and stared at the Great Forest.

The trees were shaking from afar as shadows ran out. Although they couldn’t be seen clearly, their momentum was fearsome. Their distance to the camp was around one kilometer.

“Count it down.”

As Orta raised a hand, several magicians who prepared their magic looked at Theo. Theodore and Sylvia had no experience with war, so they were unaware that the destructive power of a magic corps was maximized when working in conjunction with each other. In order to construct the net properly, the timing of their shooting was the most important thing. Yet the White Tower Master had given the most important role to Theodore.

"...Mitra."

[Wuong?]

There was no room for explanations. Theo looked down at the girl in his arms. Her bud was still shining with a green light. Perhaps that bud was the source of her ability to show things. He had been swept away by the strange sensation a while ago, but it might be possible to control it if he prepared his mind firmly.

No, this was a moment when he needed complete control.

"Can you show it to me one more time?"

At his cautious request...

[Ye!] Mitra laughed and plastered herself to Theo's forehead.

'Ugh!' It was the same as before. All his senses wriggled the moment Mitra's bud came in contact with him. Theo's fingers seemed to become branches with leaves on them, and he could feel

the ants coming and going between his toes which extended underground. It was the sensation that his body had turned into a tree!

Theo felt like he would drown and suffocate from the flood of sensory information. However, he managed to concentrate calmly.

'I have been training my mental power steadily.'

Theo had become repeatedly ill in order to deal with the tremendous national treasure, Umbra. Thanks to that, his firm mind searched the vegetation of this area for what he wanted. He saw the ground which was being trampled on, the branches which were passed, and then the ogre with two heads running in the lead...

As soon as Theo found them, he opened his mouth to speak, "10."

The creature was fairly fast. Rocks were kicked, and trees and bushes torn to pieces.

The twin-headed ogre... Their intelligence and physical abilities were usually double that of a normal ogre. As they grew older and gained more experience, they would grow more arms and eventually evolve into a monster which could fight a cyclops, a well-known senior monster. Furthermore, if the distinctive magic resistance of senior monsters were added, the twin-headed ogre would be a challenging opponent.

“5, 4.”

Now, their appearances began to be revealed. A massive creature popped out of the bushes with others following behind it like dogs.

“3, 2.”

The twin-headed ogre and ordinary ogres were at the front, followed by trolls carrying heavy clubs.

“1.”

‘Now.’

Kiiiing.

As Theo was ready before anyone else, a blue flash fired from Theo’s fingertip. It was the unprecedented Magic Missile which could break aura and penetrate 6th Circle defense magic. Magic Bullet’s light stretched out and pierced the head of the twin-headed ogre, as well as the ogres running behind it.

A huge nine ogres were thrown to the ground at the same time.

“Now!”

The road was blocked by the corpses of the ogres, so the creatures

wondered for a moment about what to do. Prey which stopped in place were easy targets for magicians. The magic power of seven senior magicians gathered in one place as attack magic filled the air.

It was literally a great destruction!

————————————!!!

Strong lightning bolts struck, and a storm of flames rose up. A thin stream of water cut through any object in its orbit, and steel rocks fell down. There was no room to show the creatures' regeneration power. This was a destructive power which didn't leave any traces of the bodies behind.

"...Amazing. I'll lend a hand." Edwin was impressed by the scene and raised his bow to join the attack. On Edwin's shoulders, a serpent-like elemental made of clouds wrapped around him, but only Theo knew of its existence.

"Aiolos, enter my arrow."

[Gururung...] The wind elemental, Aiolos, entered the arrow with an expression of annoyance. Its body resembled clouds but infused the arrow with tremendous power.

Edwin placed the arrow on the string and aimed at the creatures.

Piing! The sound was like that of an ordinary arrow, but the

phenomenon which happened right after wasn't common.

The wind arrow, infused with the high ranked Aiolos, melted into the air. Then the wind became a whirlwind. The blades of wind cut away at anything it reached, and the power was comparable to 7th Circle wind magic.

Kukwakwakwa...! The blade storm swallowed up the creatures.

Then it became a blood wind! The blood storm rushed toward the Great Forest and turned hundreds of creatures hidden in the bushes into pieces of flesh. Blood was the only thing which could be seen in the places where the storm passed.

"It is a really terrifying power."

"This elf's elemental, it is an ancient elemental...!"

It was an attack which could truly be described as master level. Theodore was shocked as he stared at the spot where the storm passed. What if the opponents were humans instead of creatures? Over 1,000 people would die from that arrow. Even if he could only shoot 10 a day, it was an attack which could annihilate 10,000 people.

The two powers didn't use Elvenheim as a counterweight.

'If Elvenheim becomes Meltor's ally... we can truly win against the Andras Empire. If one or two more like Edwin assists...'

The chain of blood which had lasted hundreds of years might be broken.

An exhilarated thrill went down Theodore's spine as he realized again the meaning of this mission. Perhaps in his generation, Andras might disappear and Meltor would rise as the main power in the northern continent.

No, Theo might be able to achieve it with his own hands. Such expectations made him excited.

Edwin walked beside Theo and said, "It seems to be up to here for tonight, Benefactor."

After focusing on Mitra, Theo realized that the creatures had started to leave. Edwin's arrow had been shot out immediately after the magic attacks, causing the creatures to realize the power gap. While looking at the decimated boundary of the Great Forest, Theodore replied, "We haven't entered the Great Forest yet, but at this scale... I don't know how the elves live in there."

"It is thanks to the parent tree. No creatures can go near the world tree, so the forest is a good place for us to live and there is plenty of food. Hunting and gathering alone can provide plenty of food."

As a species closer to nature than civilization, the elves had no need for manors.

The natural border of the Red Plateau protected Elvenheim from invaders, and no slave trader was bold enough to enter the Great Forest to hunt elves. The world tree inside the Great Forest made this place a paradise of their own. Compared to such conditions, the threat of the creatures was nothing but a risk which could be solved.

The White Tower Master confirmed that the situation was clear and declared, “It was easier than I expected. I was prepared to fight all night, but the wild creatures are sensitive to the difference in power. It might’ve taken a little longer if Sir Edwin hadn’t helped out.”

“You don’t have to give me face, Magician. You would’ve handled it even if I hadn’t helped out.”

“Hrmm, I don’t particularly deny it.”

Edwin’s words seemed to be true as Orta’s mouth curved in a smile under his mask. Orta was confident that he could use even more powerful magic than the storm arrow that Edwin showed.

After the short battle, Orta followed Theo around the campsite and muttered, “There is a problem. We can’t sleep well in this situation.”

“…It seems so.”

The wind carried the scent of blood, and the cries of creatures could be heard from the decimated forest border.

There was still the lingering excitement from battle, so no one could calm down in a short period of time. The sudden assault interfered with their ability to get a good night's sleep. It was the problem of having a veteran's instincts.

In the end, the delegation, including Theodore, had to spend their first night on the Red Plateau awake.