

Chapter 2 - Story 28: Savage Mane (End)

"The first time I met 《Savage Mane》 Menuin Nulga Manbaha, who was called the strongest of the plains, should be five years ago now, I think..."

Garam begins to talk while reminiscing about the past.

The zoan of that time, who had been pushed back into the hilly area by Holmea's tenacious attacks, still returned to the plains at times to continue their resistance by assaulting the fortress and the units heading there.

And, the time when Garam and Manbaha met was at an occasion when the Fang Clan and the Mane Clan joined up together to raid a supply company of Holmea's army transporting goods to the fortress.

"The raid succeeded and we killed many human soldiers. A part of the humans resisted by using the wagons as shields, but the outcome was already apparent for anyone."

And the commander of the supply unit, who understood that they would lose, offered their surrender to the zoan.

However, both clan's chiefs refused it.

The Holmean army, which had attacked many zoan villages until then, ignored any offer of surrender by the zoan and slaughtered the elderly, women and children without any questions asked. Wanting to survive by surrendering as soon as it was their turn despite all that was a far too selfish plea.

However, the one who impertinently cut in there was Manbaha.

"Disregarding the clan chiefs, that guy said, 『If you cut off your head by yourself, I will save the other humans』 to the human commander."

Remembering the expression of Manbaha as he made fun of the defeated back then, Garam wrinkled up his nose.

Because a person's neck possesses strong neckbones, it's nothing you can cut off so easily. Much less to say that it's next to impossible to do it by oneself. Manbaha didn't have the slightest intention to save the humans, and it was clear that his only objective lied in teasing the humans.

However, the human commander, who heard Manbaha's words, pressed his sword against his nape and fell backward. Using the force of falling with his own body's weight, he splendidly beheaded himself.

Even the zoan warriors couldn't help but be astonished by that.

But, even while in front of the commander's head, Manbaha ordered the zoan warriors to slaughter the surviving humans.

The one who opposed that was Garam, who had just earned the right to call himself warrior.

"At that time I had only become a warrior and was still a brat whose fur hadn't fully grown out."

He blamed Manbaha in front of the arrayed warriors of both clans that it was a disgrace for a warrior to spit on an once given promise of clemency in the same breath that promise had passed his lips.

Although they didn't voice it out, there were many warriors of the same opinion among not only the Fang Clan, but even the Mane Clan.

However, Manbaha laughed even that away by snorting and saying, "Proud zoan warriors don't make any oaths with the feces of cattle!"

"Against my better judgment, I really flared up at him due to that. Then and there I challenged «Savage Mane» to a duel."

Garam lifted the corners of his mouth as if laughing at his own immature, childish self from back then.

However, it was an overly impulsive duel.

Even Garam, who hid a kind of rare quality as warrior, lacked combat experience at that time. As warrior he was still quite inexperienced. In contrast to that, Manbaha had fought many battles to the end and was a veteran warrior who had won a large number of duels. His title as strongest of the plains was no fabrication. He was no opponent Garam could possibly hope to best.

It was a duel that took place in front the warriors and the two clan chiefs of both clans, but Garam was cornered into defense in no time. He barely managed to fend off Manbaha's sharp and heavy machete attacks with his two machetes.

And at last one slash of Manbaha cut Garam's face from the brow to his cheek.

"It's this scar."

Saying so, Garam traces the scar on his face with a finger.

"But, I was lucky. The wound on my face caused blood to spout out flashily. My appearance at that time was terrible, but it wasn't such a serious wound that it forced me to admit defeat. And what was fortunate more than anything was «Savage Mane» completely underestimating me due to being conceited of his own strength which designated him as the strongest of the plains."

In the eyes of Manbaha, Garam was a green, furless brat. Once he cut his face, albeit only shallowly, he thought that Garam would tuck his tail between his legs. He relaxed his attention as he was sure that this was the conclusion.

Garam didn't miss that negligence.

Making sure to allow the power, which he had amassed until then, to burst forth, Garam unleashed a full power attack with both machetes. However, Manbaha wasn't called the strongest of the plains for nothing. Because he jumped back at once, it finished with Garam lightly cutting Manbaha's left cheek with the machete in his right hand.

"But, at the same time, the machete in my left hand, which I had wielded in order to restrain the machete of «Savage Mane», inflicted a wound on that guy's right arm."

As if recalling the sensation from that time, Garam looked down on his left hand.

The wound caused by Garam apparently wasn't that deep. But, probably because he felt shaken by having his cheek cut, Manbaha ended up letting go of his machete.

Being forced to let the machete, the soul of a warrior passed down by his ancestors, fall by the hands of one's enemy is a disgrace for a zoan warrior.

To say nothing that it meant an utter defeat in a duel.

With this - no matter how much Manbaha objected that he can still fight - he couldn't overturn the result of the duel which took place with the chiefs of both clans present. The duel ended with Garam's victory and the humans were safely released.

"This is the fateful connection between me and 《Savage Mane》."

Souma, who finished listening to Garam's brief recount, released a sigh of admiration due to the heroic saga recited by the party concerned.

"Something like that happened, huh? — So, you're saying that he's holding a grudge due to that?"

"Yeah, there's that as well. But..."

Instead of Garam who hesitated to continue, the broadly grinning Zurgu took over.

"With that as turning point, that Manbaha fellow's popularity plummeted."

"Why all of a sudden?"

As far as he identified from the story, the reason for Garam winning was his good luck and Manbaha overestimating his own ability. Souma couldn't believe that a warrior, who was referred to as strongest of the plains, would lose all his popularity just because of such defeat and thus asked for the reason.

"The unvarnished truth is: Manbaha was hated."

According to Zurgu, there were many zoan who frowned at Manbaha's oppressive manner that was full of pride in his own strength. The reason why Manbaha was able to gain large influence was because his strength as the strongest of the plains was necessary fight against the humans. However, starting with the defeat against Garam, who was still a nameless boy then, the accumulated discontent gushed out at last.

"The moment he lost to Garam, the zoan around him changed their attitudes quickly, and he became isolated in the blink of an eye. Even my late old man said, "Serves ya right!"

Remembering the events from that time, Zurgu suddenly burst into laughter. In contrast to that, even though there were his snide remarks towards Manbaha, Garam instantly became the man of the hour and was set up as future strongest warrior of the plains. That only deepened Manbaha's resentment towards Garam all the more. Garam says with a sour expression,

"Honestly spoken, the me of that time didn't possess the power that allowed for me to be called the strongest of the plains at all. Thanks to being set up in that position despite that, it was terrible as there were guys challenging me and others who were jealous."

"Hoh, that's really unfortunate."

Zurgu, who should be called the representative of those that picked a fight with Garam, says with a faked compassion. Garam intently glares at him in response, as if saying, "That's not for you to say!" However, it didn't get through Zurgu's thick fur. For a while Souma scrutinized what he had heard from Garam and Zurgu in his head and then asked whether the impression of Manbaha, which he perceived from the story, was suitable.

"Is Manbaha possibly an awfully hot-tempered person?"

Garam nodded deeply.

"Yeah, it's just as you say. —It's no mistake to consider him a violent and irascible fellow who's only exceeded by a certain someone."

As if retaliating for just now, Garam took a dig at Zurgu.

Once Zurgu innocently asks, "Just who might you mean by that?", Garam retorts, "Hoh, someone seems to feel guilty here."

Souma folded his arms and brooded deeply while throwing a sidelong glance at the two squabblers. 'First off, the one I have to somehow deal with is a zoan called Manbaha, the former strongest of the plains. Close to 200 zoan warriors are led by him.

'However, as long as it's just limited to winning against him, it's not that much of a problem.

'If I asked Garam and Zurgu to call the warriors of their clans together, it would likely be easy to gather a force to suppress Manbaha's group.

'However,' Souma glanced at the Head Priestess.

Once he did, the Head Priestess looked at Souma with eyes as if appraising him while having a something that felt like grin clinging to her lips.

Souma, who was convinced due to that smile that it wouldn't be the best option to simply suppress them with brute force, wracked his brain about what to do.

At that moment Souma recalls one of the dishes he ate a while ago.

"That being present means...right. Since ten thousands of zoan are gathering here, it should naturally be close-by, right?"

For caution's sake Souma confirms with the Head Priestess whether the thing, which he came up with, is present or not. Once he asked her, the Head Priestess pointed at a part of the plains below them and said, "It's over there," while looking at him with a puzzled expression, wondering why he was checking for something like that.

"Yay, great. That's just fine. It's even better that it's east of the hill where Manbaha is located."

Having affirmed it, Souma nods repeatedly while looking satisfied.

"How about it, boy? Do you think you'll be able to manage somehow?"

The Head Priestess asked Souma, who seems to have thought of something good, while obviously being amused.

However, even the Head Priestess didn't foresee Souma's next words.

"Yes. — Let's see. If you want, I can settle the issue even by tomorrow morning, I think."

"T-Tomorrow morning, you say?"

'He had such a unreasonable demand thrust at him as soon as he arrived after being suddenly summoned to the sacred land Rollo. And yet he boasts that he will be able to resolved it tomorrow morning.' The Head Priestess was surprised.

"It will be a slightly rough way, but even so I believe I can beat them all without causing too many wounded."

Souma, who immediately bid farewell from the Head Priestess, stating that he has to prepare, cheerfully descended Rollo.

Finally descending from Rollo to the ground even though he once again thought that he would die, Souma places his feet on the firm soil and ends up instantly sitting down.

Zurgu called out to Souma in that state.

"Sir Soma. I will quickly begin calling the Claw Clan's warriors together. I think I can gather 200 or 300 at once."

After nodding once at that, Garam also suggest to Souma,

"I will call the Fang Clan's warriors right away, too."

However, even while thanking them, Souma refused their kind offer.

"Thank you very much. —But I think it will be alright, you know?"

"Alright you say?"

Souma replied to Garam, who furrowed his brows, without delay,

"I think I will be able to handle it somehow with just Dvalin and his men."

"You plan to somehow deal with Manbaha's group with just the power of the dwarves?"

Souma nodded at Garam, who called out to him being shocked by the surprise, and lightly affirmed in response. Once Souma stood up after finally power returned into his waist again, he started to walk to the place where Dvalin and the others were waiting.

Garam calls out to him from behind in a hurry,

"But, Soma, there's less than thirty dwarves! Are you saying that you can somehow deal with Manbaha's group, which has close to 200 people, with such small numbers?"

So far Garam had been surprised by Souma's plans countless times. Having said that, he was still half in doubt how Souma would be able to handle Manbaha's group with a few dwarves.

Souma confirms one thing with the doubting Garam.

"The ones present at the place of that man called Manbaha are only zoan, right?"

Of course there's no way that another race besides the zoan would be in a place like this. Once Garam assented, Souma said with a fairly indifferent tone,

"If the opponents are zoan, it will probably be fine. If it comes to beating zoan, I have as many methods at hand as I like after all."

Not only Garam, but also Zurgu and Shyemul were startled by the dangerous words that came out

of Souma's mouth. Seemingly not noticing that, Souma observed the dwarves, who were resting as they pleased at the covered wagon and its vicinity, and started to jog towards them.

"Dvalin, I've got a little request."

"Whatsit so suddenly?"

Dvalin, who was lightheartedly chatting with his friends while drinking wine from a leather bag, was surprised. He has a bad premonition due to Souma suddenly talking about a request right after coming back.

And, that bad premonition of his proved to be right.

While also relying on gestures, Souma gave an explanation. Having finished listening to that, Dvalin placed a hand on his forehead while donning a sullen expression.

"Saaay, Sir Soma, aren'cha misunderstanding that we'll be able to do anything if ya ask us?"

"...Is it maybe impossible?"

Dvalin huffily frowns at Souma exposing his disappointment. For a while after that he mumbled something into his beard, and then immediately afterwards, sighed deeply as if squeezing all the air in his lung outside.

"Do ya think I can say so after being told something like that? We just gotta manage somehow, aight?"

"Thank you, Dvalin."

Souma smiles all over his face after having received Dvalin's confirmation.

Due to that the dwarves in the vicinity sighed all at once, as if it had been arranged in advance.



The Head Priestess and Shunpa face each other inside the festival tent set up on top of Rollo.

"Now then, I wonder, how that boy is going to knock down Manbaha?"

At that question, Shunpa slightly tilts her head to the side and replies,

"Garam-boy and Zurgu-boy are working under Lord Soma. It will be easy if he uses the warriors of the Fang and Claw Clan, won't it?"

"Hmm, that would surely be the most simple solution."

'No matter how serious they are about crushing the Borollo, I don't know whether the warriors under Manbaha also plan to obstruct the Clan King's and the Great Clan Chief's ascension ceremony. If the two great warriors, Garam and Zurgu, who made a name for themselves in the plains, take their warriors along, many of Manbaha's men will likely give up with only that much.

However, the Head Priestess denied that.

"But, that's no good."

'It's very likely that Manbaha and a part of his followers won't be appeased with that. If Souma's side goes at it high-handedly, it's clear that they can be expected to resist unyieldingly. And, if it comes to battle, many warriors will get injured, and if it goes badly, it's quite likely for casualties to pop up as well. If something like that happens, it will likely give raise to new grudges by other zoan, even if they manage to suppress Manbaha's group like that.

"Lady Head Priestess, what do you think they should do then?"

The Head Priestess ponders for a short time upon Shunpa's question.

"Let's see. —If it was me, I'd challenge Manbaha to a duel."

"Duel, you say?"

Shunpa's expression made it clear that she considered that to be unlikely. If it comes to a duel against a warrior of Manbaha's caliber, the chances for Souma to win are next to zero.

"That boy has a weird blessing, right?"

Shunpa nodded once in reply.

"Indeed. Even after seeing it with these eyes, I still can't believe it, but his Lordship can't hurt anyone or break anything at all."

Shunpa, who was curious about Souma's blessing as priestess, checked out that blessing after receiving Souma's permission to do so.

'Even though he's capable of breaking bread in pieces to eat it or bite off dried meat, he can't cut a strand of hair even when allowed to hold a machete. Even if he slashes at someone, he won't be able to inflict pain, let alone any wounds. It's a blessing that still has many unsolved parts, but as for combat, Souma likely won't be able to win against a baby either.

The Head Priestess started her explanation with "That's exactly why" due to that.

"After Manbaha accepted the duel, he will reveal the facts about his blessing. Once he does, even Manbaha won't have any choice but to approve of a representative for the duel, right? Afterwards all will be fine as long Garam-boy or Zurgu-boy act as representative. This is the method with the least injuries, isn't it?"

Shunpa agreed with that. 'It might look like a deception to Manbaha, but if he's allowed to show his blessing, even Manbaha won't have any option but to accept a representative for the duel.'

'However, if it happens like this, the problem will be whether Garam or Zurgu can actually win against Manbaha.

Shunpa happened to see Manbaha fighting in her youth, but that person is the very definition of a mad warrior. It makes one think of Zurgu's raging, animalistic way of fighting, but Manbaha's battle style was something so terrible that you have to add the label "atrocious" to it.

'Defeating that Manbaha likely won't be easy even for Garam or Zurgu.

"I'm not sure whether this won't turn into a huge ordeal for that boy, who's going to become Clan King, and also for 《Ferocious Fang》, the future Great Clan Chief."

However, Shunpa graciously covers her mouth with a hand and lets a giggle slip out of her mouth.

"Lady Head Priestess, you do not know that human child called Soma."

Once the Head Priestess asked what she means with that, Shunpa laughed impishly and answered,

"Didn't Lord Soma say that he would 『beat them all up』? His Lordship will certainly do just that and get rid of 《Savage Mane》 and his followers."



Atop a small hill, situated slight away from the sacred land Rollo. In an open space, created by surrounding the vicinity with several zoan tents, more than hundred zoan warriors raised their voices.

""Hoot! Hoot! Hoot!""

It's the encouraging yell when cornering a prey during the hunt. The zoan clap their hands together alongside those yells, and stamp their feet.

The crowd was divided and several warriors led a single cow which had a rope coiled around its neck. It's a splendid bull possessing a sturdy body and horns that seem to pierce the heavens.

Affected by the heat and screaming of the surrounding zoan, the bull was extremely agitated. It struggled violently as if to tear off the rope attached to its neck at any time soon.

And, when the cheering of the zoan reached its peak, the ropes tying the cow were cut all at once. Finally released from its restraint, the cow loudly neighed a single time, and then started running while kicking up the ground.

A single warrior stood in the way of the cow running through the narrow path created by the crowd of zoan warriors.

It's a zoan with yellow-brown fur and black stripes like a tiger or a striped hyena. The zoan, who had bared his upper body as if displaying his well-trained body, confronted the running cow with only a machete in his hand.

In front of the bull that becomes even more enraged due to someone blocking its way, the warrior licks his left cheek, which has a sword cut scar, with his long tongue.

The instant when everyone thought that he might get impaled by the cow's horns, the zoan dodged them with a paper-thin difference. And not only that. While passing each other, he hooks his left arm around the cow's neck, and using the momentum of the charging cow, he jumps upon its back and then slits the cow's neck with his machete in an instant.

The cow, which had its neck artery cut open, raises a huge cloud of dust as it pitches forward and falls to the ground.

After a short while the zoan warrior stands up from the cow's back inside the dust cloud, and unbroken cheering welled up around him.

Within that cheering, the zoan warrior shouted towards the surrounding people, asking,

"Who's the strongest warrior of the plains!?"

The surrounding zoan give the answer to that question in a chorus.

""Manbaha! Manbaha! Manbaha!!""

"Who's really suited to be Great Clan Chief!?"

""Manbaha! Manbaha! Manbaha!!""

And, while being flooded with cheers from all over, that zoan warrior spread his arms widely and asked the final question while looking up to the sky.

"And who am I!?"

""《Savage Mane》! 《Savage Mane》! 《Savage Mane》!!""

The man formerly called the strongest of the plains, 《Savage Mane》 Menuin Nulga Manbaha raised a loud laughter in response to the excited cheering.