

## **Chapter 2 - Story 29: Provocation**

A tearing sound cut through the atmosphere on top of the hill where the sun had just risen. It's a sound caused by a machete being swung powerfully. The machete, wielded alongside a sharp breath, repeatedly tears through the chilly air, a remainder of the night.

The one doing it was Manbaha.

With his upper body naked after having taken off the ivy torso armor, Manbaha silently swung his machete against an imaginary foe.

It's a training that should look like a simple practice-swinging to others. However such a grim expression had edged itself on his face that one wouldn't believe he's simply practicing.

However, that only natural.

What's in front of Manbaha's eyes as he keeps swinging his machete is the scene of that past duel against Garam.

The successful life of Manbaha went amiss with that day as the turning point. Until then he was idolized as the strongest of the plains, commanding the warriors in the battle against the humans while even disregarding his clan chief. However, the moment he lost in the duel, many people turned their back on him.

"He's the strongest warrior of the plains only in attitude."

"The strongest warrior having lost against a brat, he's just all talk."

He was insulted by such malicious rumors.

Recalling all that, Manbaha tightly bites his fangs down with a grinding and puts even more strength in the arm holding the machete.

He wields his weapon against the Garam of his memories.

Just like back then, he smashes Garam's face. In the duel he ended being negligent at this point, but he won't commit such mistake anymore. Manbaha swipes his machete left and right, knocking down both arms of Garam and slitting his throat in his mind.

He repeats that over and over again.

This was his daily routine since losing the duel.

At such time one of Manbaha's followers ran up to him while panting.

He thought that his follower probably has come to inform him about breakfast soon being done, but the zoan rushed over to Manbaha and then started to talk without pause in a flustered state.

"I-It's terrible, 《Savage Mane》! Those bastards have shown up!"

In front of the panicked man, Manbaha intentionally stuck his head through the torso armor that he had put aside in a calm manner while saying over his shoulder,

"Did the messengers of the Head Priestess show up again? My demands won't change. Tell them that I won't neither recognize a feces-like human brat as Clan King nor the other brat as Great Clan Chief, and send them away."

"T-That's not it. 《Savage Mane》, those guys — just 《Ferocious Fang》 and 《Mad Claw》 have come here by themselves!"

"What did you say!?"

For an instant Manbaha's face was dyed by surprise, then he immediately started to run towards the

hill's mouth.

When Manbaha arrived at the spot, the majority of the same-minded zoon that approved his view had already crowded there.

And the one's being on the other side are definitely Garam and Zurgu.

Both were surrounded by Manbaha's comrades. However, in front of the two great warriors, whose names are known throughout the plains, they obviously act timidly. It's annoying, but even in Manbaha's eyes the two have a dignity differing from his followers.

"My, my! Look who has blessed us with their presence! The fool who has received the seat of Great Clan Chief by sucking up to a human, and his flunky!"

First Manbaha insulted the two loudly in order to show that he won't shrink away from Garam and Zurgu, and also to scold his comrades who have been backing away from them.

"I was sure that you'd curl up your tails until the Borollo, but I got a slightly better opinion of you. —Right, you lot?"

His followers tried to scorn the two after being asked by Manbaha, but only hoarse breaths came out of their mouths.

But, that's understandable.

Men, who are at the level of having to borrow Manbaha's fame as they are unable to voice out their discontent themselves, don't even have the guts to laugh in front of Zurgu who allows his wrath to seep out from his big frame.

"Flunky? Who might you be talking about, Sir 『Former』 Strongest Warrior of the Plains?"

Zurgu emphasizes the "former" with a threatening tone. At that Manbaha proudly threw out his chest without being scared of Zurgu's wrath.

"Humph! In the past I thought that you might be somewhat promising, but I'm disappointed, oh clan chief of the Mane Clan. Since when did the Mane Clan start to shake its tail at the Fang Clan?"

It's a well-known story that Zurgu and Garam had been hostile of each other until just a little while ago. However, hearing that Zurgu had recommended Garam as Great Clan Chief, Manbaha was filled with feelings of scorn and anger. And that intensified all the more since Manbaha, who hates Garam to the teeth, selfishly felt an affinity with Zurgu, who likewise regarded Garam as enemy. But, Zurgu laughs scornfully at that.

"Hoh, that's quite the tone to take with this 《Mad Claw》 Kraga Bigana Zurgu, clan chief of the Mane Clan, which is one of the ten zoon clans, for a man whose name was known a little bit in the distant past, don't you think?"

No matter how much Zurgu might be at a young age that's no different of Manbaha's own son, for Manbaha he's a clan chief entrusted with one of the clans. Abusive remarks against aren't excusable, even not for Manbaha, who was called the strongest of the plains in the past.

To say nothing of an insult against a clan chief representing a clan being the same as an insult against the entire clan. If they go at it imprudently, Manbaha and his followers might very likely turn the entire Mane Clan into their enemies.

But even so, Manbaha still ridiculed Zurgu without shrinking away.

"This me is Sir «Savage Mane» Menuin Nulga Manbaha! I have fought as warrior since the time when you two were still sucking the nipples of your mothers! Don't become pretentious, you youngster whose fur still hasn't fully grown out!"

Once again Zurgu returns as smile plastered all over his face at that. However, that's the smile of a ferocious beast. Feeling that Zurgu's big body has grown by one or two sizes due to the wrath and bloodthirst overflowing from his body, Manbaha's comrades instinctively placed their hands on their machetes. While cracking his fingers, Zurgu takes a step forward.

"Wait, «Mad Claw»."

The one holding back Zurgu by spreading an arm in front of him is Garam.

"Don't forget our objective. We came to talk."

"Hah! What's there to talk about at this point in time!?"

But, Manbaha laughed Garam's words off. And yet Garam earnestly explained to Manbaha. About the zoan being placed in a situation where they can't live on while staying secluded in the Solbiant Plains any longer. About them having to shift their focus outside the plains to survive. And, about Souma's abilities being indispensable for that sake. While searching for his own words, Garam explained those matters in detail to Manbaha. However, without even lending an ear to it, Manbaha discarded all of it as the rambling of a gutless dimwit.

"Even after telling you this much, it's no good, huh?"

Nevertheless Garam urged Manbaha to change his mindset. But Manbaha refused that.

"You talk too much! Tell this to the human boy: Come here if you wish to be accepted by me. If you beg while licking my asshole, I will recognize you."

Saying so, Manbaha opened his mouth widely and laughed out loudly. His comrades follow Manbaha and start laughing as well.

"Garam, it's the same for you bastard, too. If you want me to accept you as Great Clan Chief, then you have to lick my asshole. Stick out your tongue like this and lick-lick, okay!?"

Manbaha extends his own tongue and moves it around. Even after being insulted to this extent, Garam didn't even feel angry. As if pitying Manbaha, he sighed, held out his right arm and pointed towards the plains in the eastern direction, visible from the hill, with his index finger.

"Look over there."

Looking in the direction where Garam's finger pointed at, Manbaha squinted.

A big pond, a precious water place in this area, glittered as the morning sun shone on it in the plains which are illuminated by the sun that had just risen. And, in front of the pond, he can see the figures of around thirty people.

"Soma is waiting for you over there."

Manbaha laughed through his nose at that.

"Are you saying that the human brat wants to talk with this me?"

"No. That's not it——"

Garam tried to continue his words, but Zurgu places his big hand on his shoulder.

"Now, wait 《Ferocious Fang》. I will explain in your stead."

What Garam saw when he looked over his shoulder as if to say that just conveying Souma's words is nothing where Zurgu has to go out of his way, is Zurgu's unbelievably happy face. Zurgu, with his face being painted with joy all over, stepped in front by pushing aside Garam, and said to Manbaha,

"《Savage Mane》, you will find Sir Soma and the dwarves over there."

"Shut up! I have no duty to talk someone that's similar to cow dung!"

Due to Manbaha curtly denying all talks, Zurgu waves his hand slightly while saying, "You're misunderstanding," in a jestful manner. In front of Manbaha, who's unable to grasp what kind of misunderstanding it might be, Zurgu folded his arms and frowned as being extremely troubled.

"But, hey, is it really okay to tell this guy? Let's see, what should I do...?"

Even while knowing that it's Zurgu's aim, the quick-tempered Manbaha became irritated due to Zurgu hesitating to continue in an unnatural way.

"Bah! Just what do you want do say!?! Be clear about it!"

Zurgu answered with a bright smile,

"『Don't whine about trivial stuff and bring it on』."

For a short time Manbaha has a befuddled expression as he's unable to understand what he was just told. Zurga further adds,

"Don't you get it? 'Hurry up and bring it on. I will beat you guys anyway.' That's what Sir Soma has said."

In the next moment anger gushes out of Manbaha's body.

"You son of a bitch! You have the cheek to say that I will be beaten up by a human brat?!!"

Zurgu urged Manbaha, who was moments away from grasping his collar, to calm down with a gesture of his hand.

"No, not at all. I will be troubled if you tell that to me. I just came to pass on Sir Soma's words, you know?"

Garam, who had silently listened to it all from behind, was utterly amazed. It's true that they came here after being told so by Souma. But, Souma had just asked them to provoke Manbaha. All of the lines just now were improvised by Zurgu. 'This is beyond doubt revenge for him being ridiculed as flunky by Manbaha not long ago. In front of Garam, who wearily thinks, 'what a childish guy,' Zurgu continues the provocation in high spirits.

"『The likes of you as opponent is no more than a piece of cake at the level of a light workout. I want to relaxedly enjoy the breakfast prepared by 《Noble Fang》 as soon as possible. It's just a hassle to take you guys on one-by-one. As I will defeat all of you guys easily anyway, get on with it at once』 are his words, it seems."

Due to that, the flames of rage burst forth from not only Manbaha, but also between the warriors in the vicinity.

The remark that looks down on their strength as warriors is a matter of course, but the story about Shyemul, the divine child of the Beast God, incited their fury even further. Just the act of the divine child, who was recognized by their adored, great Beast God, serving the likes of a human as her Navel Master is already aggravating to them. Moreover, Shyemul is a famous girl whose beauty is so peerless that even they, who hail from different clans, know about her. You wouldn't find any man who wouldn't get enraged after being told that a beauty of their race is being used by a man of another race. And, even Manbaha yelled while grinding his fangs again.

"I see! You're saying that cow dung called Soma or whatever wants to be tormented to death by me!?"

Manbaha is a man who subdued the warriors around him through physical strength. For a man like that an insult of such degree is nothing that can be forgiven. If Manbaha held back himself, he would be belittled by the warriors instead. For him it's a time where he has to get enraged. The other warriors didn't have any intention to restrain his anger either.

"Very well, greenhorns! I will tear that cow dung, you idiots made your leader, to pieces, and prove your foolishness!"

Saying so, Manbaha went down on all four and started to run.

"You lot, follow me! We're going to mess up that piece of shit!"

Answering his call with angry shouts, his comrades all at once ran down the hill, following after Manbaha.

A short time later only Garam and Zurgu were left on top of the hill.

Garam sighs deeply at Zurgu who sees off Manbaha with the face of a brat, who was satisfied over

his prank having worked out, while waving his hand.

"Zurgu. Say what you like, but you went too far."

Zurgu stuck out his tongue at that.



"Soma, the group around 《Savage Mane》 started to run down the hill."

Shyemul said as she gazed in the direction of the hill while using a hand a sunshade.

"Do you know whether Manbaha is with them?"

Having asked Garam and Zurgu to provoke Manbaha and his gang isn't just for the sake of stealing their calm discernment and cloud their eyes, but also to have Manbaha himself run in the lead. Going by Manbaha's character, which Souma heard about from Garam and the others, it's a sure bet to expect Manbaha running at the front in the first place, but Souma had Shyemul still check just in case.

"...I won't really know until they get a little bit closer — is what I want to say, but the guy running in front is very likely Manbaha."

Until now Shyemul had never met Manbaha personally, but she had heard about his arrogant attitude of overestimating his own strength in rumors before. It's unbelievable that a man with such character will stay behind anyone.

"Let's prepare the welcome over here then, too. —Dvalin."

Once Souma calls out to him, Dvalin mightily hits the ground with the butt of the halberd in his hand. In response the dwarves waiting behind him line up their shields like a wall, preparing for the interception by thrusting out their spears above the shield.

"Heck. I was wondering why he had us play with dirt all night long, just to stumble into this battle against zoan. Does he plan to use and then kill us?"

Muttering so, Dvalin swung his halberd once, causing a buzzing sound with it.

"Well, it doesn't look like there'll be a chance for this guy to have a turn though..."

"It would be the very best if that proved to be true, but I will rely on you in the worst-case scenario."

Dvalin threw out his chest as if to agree with Souma's words.

There's still a little bit time until the group around Manbaha reaches their location. Shyemul, who would have nothing to do until then, tried asking Souma about his words from the other day.

"Say, Souma, you said there are countless methods to beat the zoan, but is that really the case?"

No matter how much it might be the words of her Navel Master, Shyemul used a sulky tone due to the contents that appeared as if Souma is looking down on the zoan.

"Well yes, that's true. I mean, I'm always considering methods how to defeat the zoan."

After the preface of "Don't misunderstand, okay?" towards Shyemul, who grimaces, wondering whether Souma is planning to turn against the zoan, Souma said,

"The biggest combat force I possess are the zoan warriors. Even in the coming battle against Holmea, the zoan warriors will be my strongest power."

Souma let a small chuckle slip at Shyemul, who roughly breathed through her nose in pride at that, and then continued,

"With just that, an enemy, who tries to kill me, will certainly come up with plans to defeat the zoan. If the zoan were to be defeated, it will spell my defeat. That's why I have to protect everyone from the enemy. For that sake I have to first grasp how the enemy is going to try defeating you guys."

After saying that, Souma smiled sweetly at Shyemul.

"That's why I'm always considering ways how to defeat the zoan."

Souma awkwardly scratches the tip of his nose in front of Shyemul, who assents with "I see."

"Well, because of that I could immediately come up with a good method to deal with Manbaha's group, even after being suddenly told by the Head Priestess to beat them."

At that point Souma's tone becomes serious.

"Hey Shyemul, what do you think is the zoan's biggest weapon?"

Even though Souma question was quite abrupt, Shyemul pushed out her chest and replied at once,

"That's of course the speed of our feet, right?"

The zoan are a race who are proud of being able to run as fast as horses. The only ones that can rival the zoan, once they become four-footed, are the harpyians who can fly through the sky.

"What's the zoan's weak point then?"

However, having been asked such by Souma on top of that, Shyemul ended up brooding while groaning lowly. Shyemul pondered for a while, but in the end she shook her head, not knowing the answer.

"I don't really know. Something like us being inflexible because of our high pride?"

Souma jokingly replied following at that:

"The zoaan's weak point is their ability to run quickly."



The raging Manbaha dashed across the plains on four feet while leading his comrades.

'I see, that the human brat called Soma has prepared an interception by having the dwarves line up their shields and ready the spears in front of the pond.

'However, they are in a location where it would be possible to push them into the pond in their back. As such we have no other option but to attack them straight from the front.

He can't forget the bitter experience of the zoaan's all-clan alliance's warriors, who assaulted the armed forces of the humans who had assembled into a similar formation around 30 years ago when he was still young.

'As might be expected of the human brat who's said to have repelled a human army that was several times bigger than his own forces. He's a determined fellow.

However, Manbaha judges that there's nothing to fear from it.

'Compared to the ranks of troops that formed up back then, it's just less than 30 dwarves. Moreover, that human brat stands in front of them without a care in the world. Taking the head of that brat and flattening the formation of the dwarves will be no trouble.

Believing so, Manbaha went around to cut in right from Souma's group's front.

And at that moment Manbaha's eyes are dazzled by light.

It's not only because of the sun that rose just now that he was dazzled directly because of his maneuvering to get in front of Souma. The pond, located behind Souma's group, was also radiantly glittering as it reflected the sunlight.

"Don't screw around! ——You lot, don't falter! It's just a dazzling!"

Manbaha howled while squinting his eyes.

'Using the terrain and sun is a prized technique of the humans that hoisted the banner of the "Black Beast." Having the memories of "Black Beast," which made him suffer on countless occasions, dug up, Manbaha's anger got stirred up even further.

"Don't flinch from a human who acts so cowardly! If there's anyone among you who does that, I will personally slit their neck!"

Due to Manbaha's rebuke, his comrades, following him from behind, answered with "Ooh!"

'The human brat, who has forgotten his own standing, is already right in front of my eyes.

'He will be soon at a distance allowing me to leap at him within less than two breaths. Once that happens, I will push him down on the ground and cut his thin neck with my machete.

Manbaha dashed across the plains while planning all that, but at the moment his right hand, which he widely extended forward, touched the ground, he felt a strange sensation.

Manbaha is no common warrior. The instant he noticed that strange sensation, he promptly kicks the ground with his legs, faster than his body's weight can affect his hands, and jumps forward.

"Uohh!?! What's this!?"

"Uwaaah! M-My feet!?"

While leaping through the air, he can hear surprised calls from behind in succession. Manbaha had jumped from a forced posture, but thanks to his excellent sense of balance, he fixed his body's posture while in midair. And then he touches down on the ground, starting from his legs. At that moment mud hit his face alongside a splash.

"T-This is...!?"

Looking down at his feet, Manbaha was shocked. His legs were buried in mud up to his shins.