

Chapter 178 - It seems to be before the Recapture Battle

As they are getting closer to the dragonoid's capital, the surrounding scenery changes gradually. It was a view that made even the courageous Leopard and the calm Grün look gloomy. All dragonoid soldiers have become pale. It's to the extent that the really bad cases repeatedly jump off the carriages pulled by sub-dragons carrying them, and vomit violently on the spot. It was likely the deed of the demon king's army that investigated the vicinity or something like that after the capital had been attacked, but there were still traces left proving that the thoroughly burned, small settlements had been still the ones having been better off. Corpses that look as if they were kneaded by some powerful force. Something human-shaped that had its entire skin peeled off and was impaled on a stake, which had been thrust into the ground, while upside down. A road where heads, which had the despair of their time of death carved into their faces, are lining up endlessly on the ground. Women whose bellies had been ripped open, and children that been crammed into that tear as if it weren't already enough. Such scenes could be seen occasionally, but the entire area is dotted with them.

"What a nasty taste."

These scenes are so tragic that even Emil, who's usually not perturbed by most things, lets her feelings show. Only Renya alone turns his eyes towards those scenes with a mystified expression lacking any indication of him feeling bad about them as if examining them while patting the back of Shion, who felt uncomfortable while putting up with nausea.

"You're...alright, Renya?" (Shion)

Shion asks while feeling how she's being saved a bit by the warm sensation of his hand slowly and gently stroking her back. There's no sign of any agitation in the voice of the answering Renya.

"Well, there's a difference in the level of cruelty, but they are still mere corpses." (Renya)

Shion thought that he might be pretending to be tough with his calm voice, but after turning around, she couldn't perceive the slightest fragment of such pretense in his expression.

"How tough. I guess I can sum it up with 'as expected of you'." (Shion)

"Since I feel the evil intention, it's a bad sensation. But, there's something that seems somewhat odd." (Renya)

The place the dragonoid army is currently passing is the middle of a plain not far away from the capital.

In proportion to the lack of things blocking the view, objects of bad taste are visible - even against one's will - spreading across the whole area.

"Something odd? What is it?" (Shion)

"It's so many corpses that they had been scattered over this vast range. A considerable number of people has already been killed, I think. Isn't it possible that there are no surviving residents in the capital, if we're unlucky?" (Renya)

'Now that he mentions it, he's certainly right,' Shion assesses.

This many corpses scattered all over the plain means the number of people needed to enact something like this can be considered lacking with just a few hundreds or a thousand.

It's not that Shion knew the population of the dragonoid's capital, but if they had been slaughtered in 10,000s, it's possible that there's no survivor left in the capital anymore.

"Besides, don't monsters such as goblins, orcs or ogres eat people?" (Renya)

"That's...you're correct there." (Shion)

Especially ogres are nicknamed as Man-Eaters as they actively try to eat human-shaped creatures. In front of their appetite racial differences only hold trivial nuances.

"Why did they create those objects then? Aren't these fodder in their eyes?" (Renya)

Assuming she set aside the contents of Renya's brain, seeing as he declared the corpses of people to be fodder without any hesitation, the points brought up by him were on Shion's mind as well.

At the very least Shion has never heard that goblins, who eat literally anything edible to the extent of devouring even the corpses of their brethren, mutilated the corpses of people in such a nasty manner.

What's additionally worrying is the fact that a great number of female dragonoids is included among those who were mutilated.

Monsters such as goblins and orcs normally use the women they captured to increase their numbers without eating or killing them.

It also doesn't matter whether the captured women are humans, beastmen, or dragonoids.

However, for some reason only elves aren't reserved for breeding purposes. They get mostly eaten or messed around with until the monsters get tired of them, but you could call this an exception.

"Incidentally, no matter how low their intelligence might be, they will at least station lookouts, right? The fact that our numbers are no more than a fragment of theirs should have been exposed one way or another, don't you think?" (Renya)

Renya believes that to be a rather annoying fact.

As those feelings apparently were visible on his face and could be perceived from his aura, Albert, who noticed this at a place that's slightly apart, begins to get all squirrely again.

"Maybe."

"In that case..."

Renya concentrate his eyes ahead of the dragonoid forces' march.

Over there a city with high walls started to come in view by now.

"Why can't I see any signs of the enemy army around that city?" (Renya)

As Renya says, the dragonoid capita, which started to show up, calmly towers without any movements in contrast to the terrible sights in its vicinity. There are no monsters around it, and there are no signs of something flying in the air either. Yet there's no smoke rising from the city, and any presence of living beings and sounds is missing. In front of that city, which seems like a ruin with no one living in it, unrest starts to spread between the soldiers.

"Wasn't the story that several tens of thousands monsters are stationed here?"

"That should be the case, but...maybe they retreated or something like that?"

Shion tried to voice out a possibility that came to her mind, but she immediately denies her own words.

After all there's no reason for the demon king's army to retreat.

Certainly, they suffered a crushing defeat on one battleground thanks to Renya and lost quite a few troops, but in the end that was just one of many battlegrounds. It's not like it's going to have an influence on the general war progress.

Speaking of the real state of affairs, the demon king's army is still occupying large parts of the dragonoid's continent. Their remaining forces should be drastically exceeding those of the dragonoids, too.

"The army pulled back after hearing about the four heroes having gathered?" (Shion)

"Are the heroes so terrifying?" (Renya)

"Look at what heroes we have," Renya points at Lepard and the others, who are advancing in a line next to each other, with just his eyes.

Lepard, who noticed Renya's look being turned their way as he apparently somehow heard the conversation between Renya and Shion, reveals an openly displeased expression. Grün smiles bitterly, and Kurz smiles innocently.

Only Albert doesn't understand what's going on. He nervously moves his eyes back and forth between Renya and the heroes.

"Come to think of it, where did those two priestesses attached to Kurz go...?" (Renya)

Although he confirmed Kaede next to Lepard, Renya realizes that the two childish priestesses are not there.

Given that those are still very young, Renya didn't feel like bringing them along to a battlefield at all, but Renya also knew that they had somehow gotten close to Kurz little-by-little.

"I feel like Kurz stowed them away inside that mist all of a sudden, saying that the battlefield is nearby."

"Is that actually fine? No, I think he wouldn't have done so unless it's fine, but is it really alright?"

Renya doesn't clearly understand the true identity of that black mist of Kurz.

He somehow guesses what it is, but if his imagination isn't wrong, that mist shouldn't be anything decent, no matter how he thinks about it. He worries whether the priestesses, who have been stored away while enveloped by that mist, are okay.

Seemingly sensing Renya's concern, Kurz waves his hand atop his mount.

In Renya's opinion, it should be very unlikely for Kurz to be any better at riding a horse than himself, but Kurz safely handled his horse with one hand.

Having absorbed the skill and knowledge of very many people that he captured with his black mist, Kurz displayed a fairly proficient level of horsemanship.

Renya felt a little bit depressed over the fact that he couldn't do something such a little child could do, but Shion has the impression that the eyes of the horse, which Kurz is riding, are somehow empty, or rather, lifeless.

She thinks that he must have done something bad to it, but since she would lose the opportunity to ride together with Renya if he becomes able to ride a horse with some kind of method because she mentioned it, she stayed silent.

Once Kurz swings his arm, a pitch black line is drawn in empty space alongside the trajectory of his arm motion.

Renya knitted his eyebrows after seeing the two beastman priestesses peacefully sleeping within the black mist that oozed out from there.

"I wonder just what kind of theory is at work here?" (Renya)

"Sorry, Renya. I have absolutely no clue..." (Shion)

"That Kurz, he's going to eat the enemies with that black mist, isn't he?" (Renya)

"Are you possibly worried that they will be mixed up with the enemies captured during battle, Renya? I think even Kurz is well aware of that issue..." (Shion)

Shion said, but Renya can't deny the possibility of Kurz having completely forgotten to take that into account.

He only prayed that those two priestesses wouldn't run into a situation of having their minds injured.

If it come to a situation where those two priestesses appear from within the mist with blood stains all over while having lost all light in their eyes once the battle comes to an end, it won't be possible to handle this in various meanings.

"I guess it can't be helped even if I worry about it... Anyway, it's not like the demon king's army drew back its forces just because the four heroes assembled, right? He's still the demon king. The demon king, I tell you." (Renya)

Renya's impression after seeing all heroes together was that the demon king actually won't be that much of a threat if he can be defeated by those four.



Assuming he counts Kurz as special case since Frau tampered with him in the middle, he couldn't believe that the demon king would become such a dreadful threat, even if he added Yuuki, whom he fought before, to the other three heroes besides Kurz.

But, currently Renya is reassessing those thoughts.

After all the demon king not only attacked Klinge with his offshoot instead of his main body, but also achieved a draw against that Frau.

It wasn't just any draw either.

They fought under the extremely advantageous condition for Frau of being right next to Klinge, Frau's base and her source of power, and additionally with the extremely disadvantageous condition for the demon king's main body and offshoot being separated over a very long distance. And yet it resulted mostly in a draw that was achieved by Frau making her copy blow itself up by using Renya's mana, on top of being outpushed in mana and strength.

"An opponent that somehow or other got a draw against that Frau who can apply quite a bit pressure against a hero if she went one on one? There's no way they would pull their army just because of the information that the four heroes have gathered."

"Yeah...the more I hear about Klinge, the more nonsensical that city becomes in my mind..."

It was common sense in this world that even if all forces of a nation are mobilized, they won't be enough to kill the demon king.

A single city repelling him, even though it was his offshoot, by itself goes far beyond the term outlandish.

Shion murmurs that feebly while looking as if she had utterly given up, but Renya continues without minding that.

"Even though it's an army dispatched by such a demon king...and albeit it would seem fine even if they came out to annihilate us in high spirits after learning about our few numbers... There not being signs of a single living being in the city; just what does that mean?" (Renya)

"No, even if you ask me, I don't know. I don't know, but..." (Shion)

While pondering how to answer his question, Shion manages to come up with an answer.

"...how about asking the opinion of the other members if it bothers you so much?" (Shion)

"Hmm?" (Renya)

"I can't provide an answer that will be of much help to you, but if it's Rona and Emil, they might at least come up with some kind of guess." (Shion)

"I see, that makes sense. Alright, everyone gather for a moment!" (Renya)

The four heroes, Rona, Croire, Emil, and Kaede approach Renya while wondering what's going on. While the dragonoid soldiers watch them and pondering what they intend to start at this point in time in front of the enemy, Renya and the others form a circle with their horses while ignoring the looks focusing on them, and began a meeting then and there.