



On the next day, after the big furor, Renya's party neatly cleaned up the campsite, and got back on Dra-kun's back, who then kicked off the ground, slowly rising into the skies. The source of the furor, Frau, had stood watch together with Renya all night long, but fortunately monsters that would prey on humans didn't attack the camp, or heard the screams of Frau.

Following Renya's instruction to go to sleep with a peace of mind, all of them were able to get a good long rest over the entire night. Renya had somewhat noticed Az and Liaris entering the same tent from atop Dra-kun, but he didn't say anything about it, pretending to not have seen anything.

However, while Renya spent the whole night on Dra-kun's back as his chosen bedding, he also noticed the strange phenomenons of Dra-kun stirring every once in a while, or suddenly opening his eyes, looking as if he was about to die. As he witnessed the very unusual expressions of a huge lizard being on the verge of death, Renya had been mystified, wondering just what might be going on for Dra-kun to pull such faces, but in the end he failed to come to a conclusion as to what the cause could have been. He had also considered that Liaris, Dra-kun's mistress, might possess some kind of knowledge that could help solve the riddle, but since he somehow sensed that he mustn't touch on that topic with her, Renya decided to erase it from his memory.

In regards to Frau, Renya let her dangle above the bonfire for the whole night, believing that she occasionally needed a strict punishment. However, this fairy was truly terrifying.

Even though she had continuously been roasted above a fire for many hours on end, she hadn't a single burn mark when morning dawned. Given that she had fussed about it being hot and smoky all the time, Renya thought that it might be perfect as punishment since it'd hurt her somewhat. But, Renya definitely hadn't expected for her to get through the whole ordeal without even a single stain.

But, when he considered it further, he realized that Frau was a fairy, and moreover possessed knowledge about sorcery.

'Something at the level of preventing any kind of damage to her body if it comes to something as weak as flames of a bonfire might be a piece of cake for Frau,' Renya realized his own shallow thinking.

"I guess I'll keep hitting her with spells all night long on our next stop."

"Master, even Frau would perish from something like that ~no."

Even if protecting herself from flames was trivial to her, it seemed to have caused a certain level of exhaustion as she had to keep it up all night long. Frau prostrated herself in front of Renya with a worn-out expression. Seeing that, Renya judged that Frau would likely tone down her mischief for a while. But then again, this 'while' was a limited and vague period of time, and Renya was sure that she'd definitely revive like a phoenix from ash sooner or later. He gave up, judging that it might be impossible to deprive a fairy of its mischief, and shelved any further thoughts about this matter for the time being.

Renya's mind couldn't be described as overly serene and peaceful, but contrary to his circumstances,

Dra-kun continued to steadily fly through the thickly overgrown Miasma Forest at a decent speed. While watching the scenery stream past and vanishing into the rear, Renya suddenly voiced out something that irked him.

"It's fine and all that we're moving while riding on Dra-kun's back, but..."

"Pardon?" Croire reacted to him.

The other members didn't respond as they were captivated by the scenery they wouldn't be able to see often, remained unmoving as they were dead tired, probably because having used up all their strength, or didn't hear Renya's words as they were fully concentrated on Dra-kun's flying.

"Normally, the heroes would have to cross this forest, invade the demon territory, and go all the way to the demon king's castle located in the center of the demon's continent, right?"

"That's correct. It should almost never happen that the demon king himself would appear at the front line, but what about it?" Croire tilted her head in confusion, wondering why he was mentioning all this.

In response, Renya tossed a question at her, "Ordinary military forces of the humans and beastmen would also take part in the battle against the demons, no? That means they'd move by foot, wouldn't they? Just how are they supposed to worry about something like a war, if they'll be totally exhausted from just passing through this huge, harsh forest?"

"Assuming they would cross the forest in one breath, your worries would be rectified, Renya."

No matter how powerful an army, the Miasma Forest was infested by many monsters, even before being ridiculously huge. Renya regarded walking through such a forest while constantly dealing with attacks as something extremely difficult. That's why he also believed that the soldiers and heroes would be completely exhausted when they finally managed to get out of the forest on the other side. Moreover, it wasn't as though they would immediately stand in front of the demon king just because they finally left the forest. The army would be forced to march towards the center of the demon country through land inhabited by the demons. It was an endeavor that didn't seem very feasible to him.

"Since they can't get through the forest in one go, they will take it slowly."

"Slowly?"

According to Croire's explanation, the four races would slowly conquer the Miasma Forest leading their respective armies once the demon king subjugation got started. It'd turn into a very careful conquest where the races would slay the surrounding monsters, clear a path by felling the trees, and build military bases along the way.

"The longest demon king war recorded in history took five years from its start to its conclusion."

"That's way too long, isn't it?"

"It looks like a hero passed away to sickness on the way, or some such."

"Sounds like too much of a weakling!?"

Even though Renya gave such a retort, he was sure that the hero in question had regretted passing away without being able to accomplish his goal. He had been preordained as the strongest combat asset of the anti-demon king army, and yet passed away after succumbing to sickness. It should have given him endless mortification and regret.

"There's a general trend that the damage done by the demons will grow the longer the demon king subjugation drags out. Even during the time of this oldest recorded subjugation, the reconstruction after the conclusion took many, many years until the four races had mostly recovered to the same level as before the war."

'Just what are the residents of this world doing,' Renya was baffled, but naturally didn't voice it out. However, if the people of this world had to pay with this many casualties and lost years, the demon king could also be described as a being that had to be defeated by any means.

"But, if they invaded over such a long period of years and months, wouldn't it have been fine to simply keep the path and bases created within the forest for later generations?"

"The demon king subjugation was carried out many times in the past, but...the paths and bases created during those times were never used again afterwards." Croire said while looking at the forest spreading out beneath them, "Even if the Miasma Forest is cleared away on one occasion, the trees will grow back at an absurd rate once you neglect it for a short time, burying any traces of past clearings in the process."

Croire explained to Renya that there had been movements to maintain the invasion routes for the times when the demon king would reappear several times in the past. However, each time it resulted in the people abandoning the invasion routes after losing out to the forest's regrowth speed. Not being able to frequently maintain the whole route as the routes were simply way too long became the reason why the people couldn't protect the routes and bases from the forest's encroachment.

"If you allow me to say it from our standpoint, this right now could be called abnormal. We never considered the idea of crossing the forest, using dragons as means of transport."

"Dragoons existed in the past as well, didn't they?"

Currently Liaris was the sole existing dragoon. But, even if there had been an incident leading to the dragoons' destruction a long while ago, it still didn't negate their former existence on the continent.

"You're right about that, but it's not like you can invade all the way to the demon king's castle with only dragoons, right? Even if all dragoons were to be mobilized, the dragons would still run out of strength before reaching the castle when flying while carrying the heroes on their back," explained Croire.

If the dragons ran out of strength, the dragoons would be deprived of most of their combat power. Then the heroes would likely get ganged up upon by the demons after being stranded in the midst of the demon country. No matter how powerful the heroes might be, anyone would give a negative answer if asked whether the heroes would be able to fight their way through all demons, and then

defeat the demon king at the very end.

Ultimately the whole war was about allowing the heroes to stand in front of the demon king in a somewhat secure setting, and that was the very reason why all races would mobilize their armies and march into the demon's territory.

"We are right now doing something just like that, though?"

"Considering it normally, it's mad."

Croire didn't voice any objections towards the search for Emil, but she thought that there could possibly have been a somewhat smarter way to handle it.

'Still, it's a saving grace that we don't need to fight the demon king this time. If we manage to locate Emil's whereabouts and kidnap her, this whole undertaking will become a success, even if we need to run for our lives afterwards. Gladly we can have Rona search for Emil with her divine arts, so I think we'll be able to locate her without too much trouble,' Croire estimated.

'However, considering all these conditions, this whole trip would be normally labeled as extremely difficult to achieve. Giving others the impression that this crazy endeavor might work out one way or another is owed to Klinge's people possessing outlandish combat prowess, beginning with Renya. But then again, I'm being counted as one of them as well,' Croire flashed a bitter smile. It was a story she wouldn't ever believe during her student days in the elven country.

"Well, it's because elves grow up very slowly."

"I'm sorry to bother you, but do you have a sec?" Liaris suddenly cut into their conversation after having concentrated on steering Dra-kun's flight so far.

Having their chat interrupted, Croire and Renya faced Liaris, wondering what might be wrong. Sensing something from her state or similar, Shion and Rona also stopped gazing at the scenery, focusing on Liaris. Without them noticing, Dra-kun had stopped flying in a straight line, as he did up until now, and had now shifted to a flight path similar to circling.

"It looks like Dra-kun has sensed something like a wall."

Everyone looked in the direction Liaris was pointing, but from what they could see, nothing like a wall was visible anywhere. Still, if a dragon with its sharp senses said that there was something, the wall mentioned by Dra-kun must exist with a very high probability. And it was very feasible that it'd be the barrier Kilie had told Renya about alongside the information that news had stopped flowing in from the Trident Principality's intelligence unit in the demon territory.

"Now then, all that's left is the question of how we're going to break it and get inside."

"The best option would be to sneak in and sneak out in secret, I'd say." Shion commented, but it didn't take a genius to know that this would be the hardest of all options.

You could say, they wouldn't be in such a bind if something like that would be possible in the first place. In the first place, judging by Renya's knowledge of dragon sorcery, a barrier like this

possessed functions to repel invaders from the outside, and to inform the caster in case it was breached. In other words, whether they do it sneakily or flashily, the caster would suspect an invasion the moment the barrier got broken.

"In such a case, we should go all out here and put on a flashy show ~no!" Frau stood up on Drakun's back and loudly declared after having revived at some point.

After everyone besides Frau exchanged looks, they all nodded at almost the same time.

"In the end, using force is the simplest and most promising option here."

'Also it's a way of handling things that suits us the most,' Renya assessed while staring in the direction where the wall was supposed to be.

