

Chapter 5 - It seems to be a Flight through the Miasma Forest

The preparations and rest took a bit of time, but in the end, Dra-kun had Renya's party get onto his back, and then took off from Klinge's plaza. Before their departure, Renya had offered Kilie to accompany them as well. However, Kilie readily refused, volunteering to stay back to watch Renya's home. Kilie said that she would immediately fly over if necessary, and Renya couldn't help but feel that she would literally do so if the need arose.

Dra-kun's take-off was quieter than his previous landing, but probably because of the big number of passengers on his back, he flew up with a speed that felt somewhat slow. He gained altitude while circling in Klinge's skies, and before long, he departed towards the demon country, located in the central area of this world, at a relaxed speed.

"As expected...I guess we're heavy."

Even Dra-kun, whose body had grown up considerably, had to labor away quite a bit to fly while carrying seven people. His flight speed was a lot lower when compared to Emedra and Rubydra, who Renya rode before. Renya believed that it might be owed to the weight of their luggage, but Liaris, sitting at the front with the reins in her hands, looked back, and denied his assumption.

"Dra-kun's speed is always around this fast, you know?"

"He's not slowed down? I feel that he's slow compared to the dragons that carried me before, though."

"Weren't they of a higher ranking dragon species than Dra-kun? Dra-kun's rank among the dragons isn't overly high to begin with. Above all, I think it's because he became slightly too big..." The rest of her words were mumbled, her obviously avoiding spelling it out clearly.

Renya wondered just what she might have meant with those ambiguous words, and immediately struck upon a possible answer.

"Is he slow because he's become fat?"

Dra-kun skilfully managed to make only his torso tremble with a start while continuing to flap his wings with loud whooshing sounds. Liaris only returned a weak smile at Renya without saying anything else.

Renya thought that her response already counted as a clear affirmation, but he decided to not deliberately probe any further as it was likely her kindness that kept her from voicing it out.

"In the first place, Dra-kun had been such an inferior specimen within his flock that he was chosen as a sacrifice for you, Renya, so it's set in stone that his food situation shouldn't have been all that great until he was caught."

While adding the unnecessary comment that Dra-kun might have been the only individual with inferior abilities as dragon when he was still with his flock, Az followed up on Liaris with something that didn't sound like a follow-up at all.

"His food worries disappeared thanks to becoming the dragon of Trident's dragoon, so it might not be all that strange for him to quickly grow up."

"Just be honest about it and call him fat ~no." Frau resolutely cut down Az's explanation, which he might have considered to be a backing of Dra-kun, with a short, decisive comment.

She had balled herself between Renya's legs who was sitting cross-legged on a seat affixed to Dra-kun's back. With her partway leaning her back against Renya's belly, Frau looked very comfortable, but the stabbing words leaving her mouth deeply penetrated Dra-kun's heart. While opening his muzzle as if crying out that he received a tremendous shock, Dra-kun's body stiffened up, stopping even the flapping of his wings, resulting in him starting to slowly lose altitude as he glided through the air.

"I-It's alright, Dra-kun! You might be big, but you're still cute!" Liaris frantically began to soothe him.

Since it wasn't as if a dragon was flying by flapping its wings, it wouldn't crash down right away just because its wings stopped moving. However, considering the fact that his altitude was visibly dropping, Frau calling him "fat" was apparently so devastating to him that it caused Dra-kun to forget about controlling his flight ability.

"Wouldn't it be fine to simply work out if it's so shocking to you?"

"For a dragon, you sure have a weak spirit ~nano."

"How about leaving it at that, you two? I mean, Dra-kun might truly be in his growth period..."

If this resulted in Dra-kun crashing after having become unable to keep flying, it could take a very bad turn for Renya and the others on his back. Thus Shion attempted to stop her lord and his silky as they started to gang up on Dra-kun, seemingly not minding that possibility at all.

No matter how rapidly her abilities might have developed most recently, she didn't have the confidence that she'd be able to remain unscathed when crashing from a dragon's flight altitude. Rona had been sitting in the seat next to Shion, but for some reason Rona maintained a vacant expression looking completely exhausted with her body wincing in response to something every now and then.

"Fat."

"Uuhh..."

"Corpulent."

"Uuhhh!!!"

"Drooping, gaining weight, out of shape~"

"Uugghhh!!!"

"Frau...can you stop messing with Rona? Somehow Rona's face is starting to look funny." Shion chided Frau with a sigh while patting Rona's back who had started to repeatedly quiver in waves, being at her wits' end.

In response, Frau stuck out her tongue without the tiniest sliver of guiltiness.

"Swinging between joy and sorrow over having little or much fat is only foolish." Sitting next to Renya, Croire said something oddly enlightening with understanding dyeing her voice as she enviously stared at Frau monopolizing Renya's lap. "A woman's worth isn't defined by the amount of fat on her." Croire put on a proud expression as if she said something great.

The looks of everyone except of Croire focused on a certain part of her body, and after averting their eyes all at once as if they had timed it, everyone besides her retorted in perfect unison, "''''''''Sure, sure, from your mouth to God's ears.'''''''"

"Wai-!? What's with that response!? Renya! Why are you averting your face with a faint smile? Frau, stop with that cheeky grin! Shion, can I have you stop patting my shoulder with a pitying look!? Rona, please stop nodding while grabbing my shoulder!"

"You guys sure are lively." That impression spilled out of Liaris' mouth after she had somehow managed to pacify Dra-kun while looking at Renya and his female companions who had started to loudly kick up a fuss over trivialities.

"We're going to trespass into the demon country soon. Is it going to be okay going at it with such a mood?"

"You see, Renya might unexpectedly be in a mood of going on a picnic."

Renya was obstinately gazing into the far distance as if to avoid looking into Croire's eyes, no matter what. Both Croire, who was grabbing his shoulder while trying to somehow make him turn towards her, and Frau, who was trying to somehow prevent Croire's from that, were keeping at it.

"Croire, Frau, stop acting so violently! We're high up in the sky on top of Dra-kun's back, do you understand that!?"

"Just ignore them, Shion. They'll probably get tired of this sooner or later." Rona started to hold back Shion, who had been trying to somehow separate the three squabblers, as she believed that it would just add one more squabblers to the mix instead.

While such things were going on, Renya's party continued their air trip. Although Renya had perceived Dra-kun as being slow, they still kept flying above the Miasma Forest at a reasonably high speed.

However, the Miasma Forest was extremely vast. Its scale wasn't so small that Dra-kun would be able to cross it one sitting, even if he flew while boosted by a dragon's stamina. The vastness of the forest, which had been isolating the demons from the other race's territories so as to make it impossible for both sides to easily invade each other, went far beyond Renya's imagination. Moreover, since flying after sunset would be accompanied by risks even for Dra-kun, Renya decided to have Dra-kun land and pitch a camp when the sky started to grow dark.

It was only reasonable, but there was no way that a convenient landing spot for the huge frame of a dragon would exist in this deep forest.

"No choice but to clear a place by burning it down, right?"

"Let me at least give you warning..." Shion said with a lowered voice in response to Renya's attempt to get a confirmation. "...You're not allowed to have Dra-kun spit his fire after pouring your mana into like you did with Rubydra the other day, okay?"

"Huh?"

Having Renya stare back at her with a dumbfounded look, Shion furrowed her eyebrows, "We're inside a forest, you know!? Did you already forget the disaster last time? Renya, do you wish to turn this forest into a barren land of smoldering lava?"

"I thought we could neatly burn it down without the fire spreading, if we raise the heat?"

"Think about afterwards! There will be after-effects, right!? In the first place, how long do you think will it take for the temperature of a place that had been razed to the ground by a dragon's breath to drop low enough that we could use it for camping!?"

Rubydra's breath's heat had continued to smolder endlessly on the soil near the dragonoids' city, and it was only recently that the vicinity around there showed slow signs of recovery. Shion tried to make Renya recall those events, but Renya's reply widely deviated from what Shion had expected.

"If it's freezing sorcery..."

If Renya used the sorcery knowledge he had received from Emedra, and his own tremendous amount of mana, he would be capable of quickly cooling down an area that had been burned down by a dragon's breath. And if they were looking for an instantaneous solution, it would also be possible for Renya to splash freeze the ground after triggering the same downburst phenomenon he had used in the past right now and here.

"If you'd allow me to make a suggestion as a normal sorcerer," Az humbly interrupted their conversation, albeit likely not fully understanding what they were talking about, "I'd like to request that you choose a peaceful method, if possible."

"Do you have some kind of ingenious idea, Az-sensei?"

"Stop it with the sensei..." Az pulled a very gloomy face, and then started to ponder for a while. "I guess I'll handle it..." he said while originally wanting to save on wasting his mana.

However, he had apparently concluded that the most peaceful solution would be him using his own spell while taking into account to create a place that could be used to spend the night, seeing how the forest would be likely burned down to ashes by Dra-kun's breath if he were to leave this matter in Renya's hands.

"Liaris, please have Dra-kun drop his speed and altitude."

"Sure." Liaris responded curtly, and passed on the instructions to Dra-kun.

After confirming that the flight speed and altitude had started to slowly drop, Az picked up the wand laying at his side, closed his eyes, and focused his mind. Renya watched the whole process now that he had decided to leave it all to Az, seemingly because Az had suggested to do it himself.

"<Congregate mine power, oh hellfire, turn everything and anything into ash by devouring it in a maelstrom of raging flames>"

From the mana swelling up in Az, Renya knew that Az was apparently using a fairly powerful spell. The mana put into his chant immediately transformed into reality, rolling up a section of the huge forest in a tornado of big, crimson flames.

"A flame storm spell, eh? It sure looks pretty when seen from above."

The spell's scale covered a fairly huge pillar of flames, even when compared against Emedra's sorcery knowledge. Because it was for the sake of creating a landing site for Dra-kun, Az had invoked the spell after pouring a lot more mana than usual into it to enlarge its effective range.

The flame storm brewing brightly within the dark forest was a beautiful sight to behold in the eyes of Renya's party as they merely watched on from above, and that was the end of the story for them. However, probably because he had abruptly expended a huge amount of mana to enact the spell, Az leaned back against his seat while looking somewhat tired and worn-out as his breath heaved roughly.

"How much did you enlarge it?"

"I think around...64 times more than usual. I've turned a 4 meter circle into a 32 meter one. If we also consider that the fire should spread a bit, I think there will be enough space for Dra-kun to make his landing. I leave the fire fighting and cooling to you." Az answered Renya, sighing at the weak reaction to this feat of all present, including Renya.

Except for Liaris who didn't have much knowledge about sorcery, the other members likely didn't think anything of Az's words since they had been associating with Renya for a long time, allowing them to personally witness his crazy mana, but the number of sorcerers capable of pulling off what Az did should be fairly low, even across the wide human continent, and the true ability of Az, which allowed him to cast the spell without fainting on the spot, would make it actually proper for him to claim the title of strongest sorcerer on this continent. But, since he had someone, who could only be described as outlandish, right next to him, Az had completely ended up vanishing in their shadow.

"Okay, for the sake of cooling it down in one go, I'll use <Ice Storm> at full power..."

"Won't that make it impossible for us to land, even before needing to worry about cooling down the heat!?"

Shion grabbed Renya's neck from behind and frantically restrained him from starting to instantly and chantlessly invoke a spell at the same level and scale as the one Az had somehow managed to cast after using a wand, which had the function to support the spell control, and using the proper

spell chant.

Az couldn't help but clearly feel the abysmally deep difference in their abilities, but he also harbored a feeling that it was inevitable, seeing how the other party was Renya. Having a dire need to take a rest for now, Az averted his eyes from Renya, who was now being stopped by Rona from trying to cast yet another spell of aberrant scale, and breathed out very deeply, letting all power escape from his body.



The spell, which Renya used for the sake of extinguishing the fire caused by Az to secure a landing spot for Dra-kun, after being thoroughly cautioned about its power in advance, covered a range going slightly beyond the area set on fire by Az despite all the warnings. Neither Renya himself nor Az, as an expert looking at it from the side, knew whether it was an issue with the technique or Renya's personality, but it was pretty obvious that Renya sucked at using spells which had their firepower dampened.

'Even so, we're very likely lucky that things finished at Renya only cooling the area ignited by me, and freezing some of the trees around it,' Az judged.

Although Az had secured a fairly big area, Dra-kun's body filled a big part of its space when he slowly touched down. Renya thought that the room might be slightly too small to provide bedding for seven people. He deliberated whether he should expand the area a bit, but gave up on it. It's because it could take a bad turn, resulting in them losing a camping ground, if he burned the area too much, leaving freezing totally out of the quotation.

While persuading himself that they'd just need to bear with it for one night anyway, Renya retrieved a tent, which had been rolled up to make it small, from his inventory.

"Hey...what's that?"

Due to the low, subdued voice he could hear from behind, Renya, who had taken out their luggage, reflexively stopped working, lowering his eyes at an object lying nearby. Its outward appearance was that of a plain, folded tent. However, for some reason a note was attached to the rope tying it up. "Exclusively for married couples" was written on it in red letters.

Renya couldn't help but get a bad feeling about this. It actually woke the urge in him to stop unwrapping the tent any further. However, with various goods being stuffed into his inventory, it wasn't as if Renya had gone as far as bringing a spare tent with him. If he were to give up on using one of the tents now, it'd cause a situation where some members of their group wouldn't be able to sleep in a tent.

While sensing the intense gaze of Az on his back, Renya felt regret over not having checked his luggage a bit stricter if he had known that things would turn out like this. Still, going with the approach that he couldn't help it at this point either way, he untied the rope, immediately setting up the tent. Once it was finished, it was no more than an ordinary tent.

Quizzically in Renya's case, and dubiously in Az's case, who had gotten close to Renya without him noticing, both peered into the tent. It was definitely a tent that would feel somewhat too cramped to designate it to be for two people. However, it wasn't as small that two people wouldn't be able to enter without clinging to each other tightly. It gave one the impression that they might at most touch each other's bodies if they were to stir around a bit. Even if he felt a resistance towards calling it to be catered towards a married couple, it wasn't anything justifying a scolding.

As this seemed to be unexpected for Az, he looked at Renya with a complicated expression, a mix of apology and awkwardness. Renya only shrugged at that.

Renya, who tried to open the next tent thinking that such anticlimactic things occasionally happened as well, suddenly had small letters appear in his visual field.

<Information: Appraisal Function - Confirmed effects: 「Soundproof」, 「Stamina Increase」, 「Concealment」, and 「Deodorization」. These effects will be triggered upon detection of breach of a fixed threshold for each effect.>

Once his sight went back to normal with him being startled, he realized that the appraisal target had doubtlessly been the tent he had set up moments ago. Even when he tried using appraisal on his volition, believing that something might have gone wrong since it had triggered on its own, he was shown the same line of text.

Renya spontaneously covered his face with his left hand baffled by the opportune timing of appraisal's invocation, but it was too late. Next to him, Az had fully guessed that Renya had noticed something from his expression and his re-examination of the tent.

"Renya, did you grasp something? Won't you try telling me what you noticed?"

Renya lacked the words to return to Az who was pressing him for an answer with a smile. The effects applied to the tent were way too blunt. It was plain as day what purpose all those effects had.

As for the offender, there was really only one person that came to mind here. With Emil being absent right now, the only capable of casting so many effects on the tent was Frau, and no one else. As for the person in question, she swiftly climbed on Dra-kun's back as soon as her deed came to light, watching over the progress of the situation, ready to flee at any moment.

Even while Renya thought, "That damned, ill-minded cat," Frau wasn't in the reach of his hands, and she was too skilled to be caught with sorcery. Only Liaris alone stood still, not understanding what was going on. The other party members somewhat guessed from the atmosphere that Frau had done something bad once again, and looked up at Frau on Dra-kun's back from the side.

"Come on, please tell me Renya, just what's wrong with this tent?"

"N-Nothing."

Having determined that he'd likely receive no help from anywhere, Renya decided to pretend ignorance.

'It might seem unnatural and fishy, but there's no other path I can take here. For sure it's absolutely

impossible to be completely honest here, and tell him that they can fuck like rabbits as it's a tent with tricks set up so that nothing will leak outside.

"Your attitude is far too shady for it to be nothing. It's not good to keep secrets. Spit it out."

Probably convinced by now that something was wrong, Az closed the distance between them by taking a step forward, causing Renya to retreat the same distance. It wasn't as if Renya himself had perpetrated anything. However, considering their conversation before the departure, it was mostly decided that Az would place the responsibility on Renya, even if he might know that all of it had been done by Frau.

"Hurry up, Renya. You know that resistance is futile."

"It's really nothing. At the very least nothing will happen if you don't do anything."

Renya's remark, which indirectly hinted at something through a change in pronunciation and emphasis, caused Az to get far more flustered than Renya had expected. In the first place, the tent didn't contain any effects that would harm the people staying within. It was merely equipped with a trick that would block the exposure of what was going on inside. As to how to use that function, it had been completely entrusted to the judgment of the tent users.

Once Renya had realized that aspect, it wasn't all that difficult to escape Az's persistent interrogation. When Az was told that everything would depend on Liaris and him, even Az couldn't press Renya for an answer any longer.

Renya smiled as he tapped Az's shoulder who was at a loss of words with an expression that seemed to be somewhat vexed. In reality, it wouldn't be any problem at all, as long as Az and Liaris were to sleep in different tents. However, since things had developed in the direction of them using the same tent going by the flow and atmosphere, Renya decided to entrust the whole situation to its natural flow without saying anything in particular.

'For starters, I think I should catch Frau and tie her up somewhere,' Renya assessed.

There were no particular issues with the tent's effects, but he was almost 100% sure that he could perceive that tent as a trap. That didn't mean that it was furnished with some kind of contrivance. The problem was the condition to trigger the respective effects cast on the tent, namely, the detection of the number of targets for each spell going beyond a threshold. The spell activation would be passed on to the enchanter.

If something were to "start" inside the tent, Frau would learn of it through the activation of the spells.

'In other words, this tent...' Renya glared at the tent he had just set up in annoyance, '...isn't a place offered to Liaris and Az for something to happen, but a trap created by Frau for the sake of doing something by luring the two into it.'

As for what Frau was planning to do here, Renya didn't believe that he really wanted to know. He really didn't want to know, but Az and Liaris were Renya's friends. Renya believed that he had to prevent something like video recordings of what the two were doing in bed spreading through

illegal channels in Klinge before it actually took place.

"It's just for my own, private entertainment ~nano!"

No matter how much Frau was a silky outside regular norms, she had no means to escape Renya once he got serious. Renya swiftly wrapped her up in a bamboo mat without listening to any of her protests, and hung it at the branch of a tree close to the camp as if she was a bagworm.

Renya felt like she could get out of it right away if she wanted, but he believed that he had made clear to Frau what he wanted to tell her with this.

"Good work, Renya." Shion greeted Renya as he was looking up at the result of his work - Frau swaying back and forth without any wind blowing while looking sullen.

Renya wondered why he had to be so exhausted from just camping.

"No kidding. Well, whatever. I'll prepare dinner, and once we've eaten, we'll go to sleep. Most likely we'll need to get up very early tomorrow. No matter what you and I might say, in the end this is still the Miasma Forest."

Since a dragon was with them, the probability of monsters approaching was low. Even if the Miasma Forest was a trove of monsters, not that many monsters capable of dealing with dragons lived in here, and even if they were to approach, their presence would be noticed.

While looking behind Shion, where Croire was struggling after having her hands tied behind her back by Rona for some reason, Renya continued, "We'll leave the watchout duty to Frau for the most part. A fairy that has no particular issue going without sleep is quite handy at such times, isn't she?"

Frau raised her voice in discontent about being treated as an alarm, but Renya heartlessly ignored her.

'If she has a body not needing any sleep, she should rather take a proactive approach and offer to stand watch,' Renya believed.

The matter of it being a fairly savage method, if you just went by the fact that a being with the appearance of a cute fairy was forced to stand watch while hanging down all night long from a tree, didn't even register with Renya as something to be considered.

"To be honest, I couldn't care less about Frau's treatment."

"Shion-ane-sama!?" Frau screamed out in surprise and protest while swinging back and forth, but Shion completely ignored her as well.

As if having something to talk about that was far more important than this, determination dyed Shion's eyes, and yet she let her eyes wander for a faint moment. But, before long she looked straight at Renya, and said, "Renya, tonight...I was wondering where you're going to sleep..."

"Oh, I'll sleep on Dra-kun's back. Considering where we're right now, I'll stand watch as well, just

in case."

If it was atop Dra-kun's back with its decent height and unobstructed view, he would likely know if something happened, even when asleep. Once Renya explained so, Shion's shoulders slumped down with her donning a very disappointed look. Just muttering, "I see," she trudged away with a hanging head.

As he was wondering whether she might have prepared a tent for him, Renya noticed at the end of his line of sight how Croire, who had stopped struggling all of a sudden, and Rona, who still pinned her down, were looking in his direction as if they wanted to tell him something.

"Master, you're too much of a herbivore ~no." Frau said while still swaying back and forth.

Even Renya would notice that her swaying wasn't merely due to her struggling, but that she was actually trying to snap the rope through friction or to break the tree's branch, if she kept swinging back and forth all the time. Of course Renya had foreseen as much, and chosen a sturdy branch and strong rope so that they would endure such attempts.

"If your behavior is too gentlemanly, you will be taken as good-for-nothing ~no."

"Being a good-for-nothing is fine with me. At least in regards to this matter."

"Master, do you possibly have a seminal problem? If you wish, Frau will carefully examine you and apply the necessary treatment ~no."

Renya pondered for a while due to Frau saying weird stuff with a serious face, and then whispered, "Now then...I guess I'll build a bonfire here to keep the area illuminated."

"Eh!? W-Wait a moment, master!? Please stop ~no! You don't need to pile up firewood beneath Frau's feet ~no! A roasted fairy doesn't taste good ~no! ...You've started to say "crack crack" ~no? Eh!? You're serious!? Wait, it's hot! Hoot ~no! Smooky ~no! I'll apologize so please let me off ~nooo!!"

The firewood seemingly contained some moisture. Once Renya started it with the <Ignition> spell, a weak flame and lots of smoke rose up. The sound of the wood popping, smoke, and blended into all of that, Frau's screaming.

While wondering whether that might lure over all the monsters left in the vicinity, Renya watched over the state of the bonfire after driving this worry out of his mind.



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 Dra-kun'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.



'If we're talking about destroying a wall with brute force, it's definitely my turn', Renya places his hand on the katana at his waist. Just when he had risen almost half to his feet, Rona's voice stopped him.

"Please wait, Renya." Once Renya looked in Rona's direction while remaining half risen to his feet as he didn't understand the intention behind her stopping him, Rona added with an expression teeming with fighting spirit, "It's something else if it comes to battle, but the target this time is an immobile wall. Wouldn't it be the perfect occasion to leave this to us while preserving our strongest combat asset if possible?"

Renya carefully scrutinized Rona's question in his mind. He concluded that she didn't say anything overly unreasonable, but still felt doubtful about the part of Rona being the one making such a demand out of all present, and not Shion or Frau.

If someone brought up a topic they usually never touched upon, it was only natural to believe that there must be something behind this. Renya was sure that it was no different this time either, and thus frankly confronted Rona, who looked rather complacent as if she had said something very decent.

"And what's your real intention?"

"Not only do I want to try releasing my divine arts at full power every now and then, now that I have become a saint, my repertoire of arts has increased as well." Rona bluntly declared something reckless and dangerous with a smile plastered all over her face, reflecting her confidence, while throwing out her chest.

Not knowing how he should answer her, Renya helplessly offered a prayer by clapping his hands twice to her magnificently protruding twin hills.

"What's this about...?"

"I just felt like it. Anyway..."

This time it was Croire who interrupted Renya as he was about to say something, "It might be a good idea, Renya. That wall might be a good target to have you learn our current powers before we charge into the demon country."

'You sure are a smooth talker,' Renya thought, but didn't find any objection that could be fielded against Croire's argument and the whole idea. 'She's right. Seeing how we're going to enter enemy territory soon, an opportunity to see the abilities of those following me is necessary.'

Even if it developed into a situation where Renya had to destroy the wall himself, it wouldn't worsen the conditions in any way. Assuming they'd fail altogether, hitting the wall from outside would draw the attention of those inside, but it was difficult to imagine that the person, who was refusing entry into the demon territory by setting up such a huge wall, wouldn't notice a dragon flying around close to the wall. If they had planned to make some kind of move, they'd have done so by now.

'All that's left is how long it's going to take, but if it looks like it'll take too long, I just need to wrap it up myself,' Renya judged. But then again his judgment was based on the assumption that he could destroy this wall with his own hands, and in the current situation, even Renya couldn't definitely declare whether this was true.

"If you're fine with it, Renya, I don't mind either, but what's your take?" Shion asked Renya as he was absorbed in his own thoughts.

However, as her tone revealed that she wasn't all gung-ho about going along with Rona and Croire's suggestion, Renya said while looking confused, "How unusual. I was pretty sure that you'd immediately jump on this opportunity, Shion."

"Renya, I'm at a disadvantage here. What I can do from atop Dra-kun's back is fairly limited."

It appeared that Shion wasn't very eager to join this because it took place under circumstances where she couldn't make full use of her abilities, and not because she believed the idea itself to be wrong. Renya felt relieved as it was a very normal, Shion-like way of thinking.

'But she's correct. A swordsman can only exhibit their full strength by using their sword. Slashing the sword atop Dra-kun is difficult, and it's not like the swings will reach the wall either.

Renya had the additional option of relying on his huge mana pool and the dragon knowledge to launch sorcery attacks. But, even if Shion might have become able to manipulate mana recently, she'd only be able to fire spells that would be remarkably inferior to any of Renya's sorcery.

Having considered things up to this point, Renya stumbled upon a single truth. Shion's current weapon was the katana Renya had forged for her. And without any particular need to mention it, Renya's weapon was a katana as well, or in other words, there was almost no difference in the combat range of both.

"There's no way for a weapon that doesn't reach the target to hit, no matter whether Shion or I wield it."

Renya's reach might go a bit further. However, the difference between Shion and Renya could be labeled as measurement error in front of Dra-kun's huge body. In short, Renya didn't have any effective means to make his strongest blow reach the wall either.

As last measure, he could get down on the ground, approach the wall by foot, and cut at it from down there, but in comparison to having flown all the way here on a dragon, it'd be a rather lackluster, plain method to choose.

"So, what's it going to be, Renya?" Croire asked.

Renya immediately answered, "Alright, I leave it in your hands then."

'If Croire and Rona manage to somehow handle it with their methods, that would be the much more stylish approach.

"I suppose I'll serve as opener then." Az got up, holding back Rona who was about to move now that she had received Renya's permission.

While Shion was soothing Rona who was trying to object with a terribly unhappy expression, Liaris cheered on Az who started to concentrate while holding his wand.

"I believe in you, Az!"

"Sure, I got this."

Renya muttered, "Damn love birds," at Az, who lifted the corners of his mouth as he gave that short reply. But that only earned him a slap against the back of his head from behind by Shion and Rona.

"<Offering mine power, what I desire is a jail of crimson flames>"

Hearing Az' chant, Rina immediately tried to look up the corresponding spell within the draconic sorcery knowledge he owned, and got startled. He couldn't find anything.

"<Twist, rage, ravage - Oh world, scream as you shall become a blazing field of fire>"

The red brilliance, which had converged at one point in the air, completely dyed the visual field of Renya's party crimson one beat later. The explosion, which was kind of difficult to classify as sound, became a shockwave that jolted Dra-kun's big frame.

"50 points ~nano." Frau gave a very harsh assessment as she was tightly hugged from behind by Renya while he braced himself so that they wouldn't be blown off Dra-kun's violently shaking back.

Panting, with one knee on Dra-kun's back, Az smiled bitterly after hearing her scoring while the red gleam and the shockwave kept fading away.

"That's a fairly harsh grading."

"I didn't expect that you could use the fire attribute's Extreme spell <Roaring Fire> ~no. But, it's a spell for causing wide-area destruction, which means you have mistaken its usage here ~no."

'The fact of it being a spell unknown to the dragons probably means that it's been hidden from them by the people after developing it on their own,' Renya assessed. Even if that in itself wasn't anything extraordinary, it still bore the question within Renya why Frau knew all about it, but it vanished within no time. It's because he realized that this kind of question would be quickly repelled with the argument that it was Frau they were talking about here. By the way, it goes without saying, but Renya's own assessment was identical with that of his party members.

"So, what's the state of the wall?"

"It seems to be going strong ~no. But..." Frau pointed at a single point in the sky from within Renya's arms.

Once all of them looked at the spot indicated by her, the space which ought to be empty seemed to be distorted over a fairly wide range at roughly the same altitude as Dra-kun was flying.

"I'd say it worked up to the point of distorting the wall's structure ~no."

"Dra-kun, ready your <Dragon's Breath>!"

Immediately following Liaris' command, a red light dwelt within Dra-kun's muzzle. The light was condensing while flickering, and flared up in a bright red color as Dra-kun put even more power into it.

"Aim! Dra-kun, fire your <Dragon's Breath>!"

A straight line of fire ripped through the sky upon her command. Compared to Az's spell moments ago, it was somewhat inferior, but it was still a breath unleashed by a dragon.

The flames crashed into the distortion, causing the distortion to grow even further in size, but unable to destroy the invisible wall, the flames dispersed.

"Third shooter, Croire!" Croire started in no time.

Even while it wasn't yet clear whether Dra-kun's flames had vanished, her mouth began to spin a chant.

"<Beloved forest, pay heed to the voice of one worshiping you, and please grant her wish>"

This spell had no equivalent within Renya's sorcery knowledge either.

"Frau, what's this?"

"I don't know ~no. Frau only possesses the knowledge of humans. Frau doesn't know the techniques characteristic of elves ~no."

As might be expected, even Frau apparently hadn't absorbed the elven knowledge. And even if she had obtained that knowledge without Renya being aware of it, Renya felt that the spell used by Croire right now wasn't commonly known by all elves. It was very obvious from the vast and mighty power set in motion by Croire's chant.

"<Clench thy fist and spur thy anger at the folly blocking mine path, smashing apart anything and everything without distinction>"

Compared to the spell used by Az, Croire's sorcery lacked in the department of flashiness. However, the enormous mana, which had been given directionality by Croire's chant, turned into a gigantic, physical fist, punching the distorted space created by Az and Liaris.

Without an explosion or any sound, the sky shook from just the impact, and Dra-kun screamed as

he was unable to endure being jolted around.

"A correct choice of techniques ~nano. But, it has resulted in a terrible aftermath ~no." Frau said with her eyes spinning while watching the space warp drastically.

Even Renya leaked a small groan from the shockwave that seemed to pierce his entire body, albeit soundlessly. Among all that, only Croire sharply clicking her tongue could be heard very clearly.

Although the mana fist had widely extended the space distortion, it wasn't powerful enough to fully penetrate the wall.

"Fourth shooter, Rona Chevalier!"

Standing up and looking towards the sky, Rona sonorously began to sing while extending her arms high into the sky.

"<I beseech thou, oh lord whom I worship, heavenly guardian of this world, thy name is Giliel>"

Startled, Shion, Liaris, and Az stared at Rona. Croire fixed her sitting posture on Dra-kun's back with a bitter expression, and Renya didn't understand the meaning behind the three's reaction.

"The name Rona-ane-sama just now called..." Frau was gazing at Rona with a somewhat dumbfounded look as if having heard something unbelievable.

"What do you mean?"

"Normally it'd be considered disrespectful to call upon the name of a being of a higher rank than the caster when it comes to using divine arts ~no. That's why priests never use the name of their deity when using their divine arts ~no." Frau continued, "Well, even if they want to, none of them knows the name in the first place ~no."

Rona boldly continued her chant which seemed to do away with what had been considered common sense so far, "<Exhibit thy great might to these inferior lands, and make thy grace known through this body of thy humble apostle>"

Light was cast down from the sky. And even while believing that he might be hallucinating here, Renya felt like he saw the figure of a certain black-haired twintail girl within the light that formed into what seemed to be many wing-like shapes.

"<Bless the lands with thy light>"

〈我は請い願う、我が信奉せし高きお方、

世界の守護天たる存在、御名はギリエル〉

ぎよつとした表情で、シオンとリアリス、アズの三人が

立ち上がっているローナを凝視する。

〈御身その力、地へと指し示し、その使徒たるこの身に、

その恩寵を知らしめ給え〉

空が、光を放った。

〈大地に、光あれ〉

天と地が、一条の光で結ばれる。

遠くから見ればそれは、神秘的で神々しい景色だったかもしれない。

しかし、直近にいる蓮弥達にとってはそんな生易しいものではなかった。



Heaven and earth were connected through a pillar of light. If seen from far away, this whole spectacle might look mystical and sublime. But, it wasn't anything so simple for Renya's party, who experienced it from close proximity.

"Isn't this kinda dangerous!?"

Besides the noise and impact, an unbelievable heat assailed Dra-kun and those on his back. Sensing the danger in an instant, Renya deployed a defense barrier at full power, but they were hit by a shockwave so strong that even Renya's barrier looked like it could break at any moment. Dra-kun, who didn't even have the power to scream, single-mindedly concentrated on flapping his wings while looking as if he had somehow resigned himself to fate.

Given that things had turned out like this from just the aftermath, it wasn't difficult to imagine what would happen to the part directly hit by the light.

"Did it manage to pierce through!?" Rona shouted while covering her face with an arm since her eyes would likely get blinded if she were to directly look into the light, but as the other party members were in a similar situation, none of them could answer her what had happened to the wall.

Only Frau alone stared at the impact point of Rona's divine art while squinting her eyes within the dazzling light.

"...It looks like it endured ~no." Frau muttered with annoyance written all over her face while neither the light nor the shockwave had died down as of yet.

Renya fully grasped that the four attacks hurled at the wall possessed enough power that they could have possibly destroyed a country in the worst case. He was partially amazed and surprised at the wall's high degree of toughness, allowing it to persist.

While at it, he also harbored the extremely rude expression that Giliel wasn't of much use for being the goddess of this world. In response, Renya felt like he heard a woman sobbing somewhere.

"Shion-ane-sama! It needs one more push ~nano! It's your chance to snatch away the spotlight ~no!"

In front of Renya, who wondered about this ridiculous way of cheering, Shion unsheathed the katana at her hip. Frau released a spell at Shion who held the katana in both hands as it glossily reflected the still gleaming light of Rona.

"<Lightning>!"

Shion brandished her sword, aiming at the surging lightning attack. Of course Frau had cast her spell at a timing allowing Shion to intercept, but once Shion's slash fully hit the lightning strike, the katana was clad by the lightning as it coiled itself around the blade.



"Mana Enhancement, full power!"

As soon as Shion's mana and Frau's restrained spell combined, the lightning gushing out of the blade increased in intensity, glittering whiteley.

Watching how the crackling electrical discharges began to violently strike against the defense barrier from within, Renya hurriedly canceled the barrier, changing it to a barrier protecting his, Croire, Az, and Liaris' bodies.

"Shion, the lightning is leaking! Hurry up and release it since it's dangerous!"

"Gooooooo!!!"

A lightning blade flashed as it tore through the atmosphere from the katana, swung down with all of Shion's might. Renya thought that it'd be his turn next if this didn't finish the job, but at the end of his line of sight he could see how the warped space was completely ripped apart, following the cut line of the sword flash unleashed by Shion.

"It's open!"

"Dra-kun! Charge in!"

Upon Liaris' command, Dra-kun turned his head back for an instant, looking like he wanted to protest about plunging in there, but succumbing to the pressure exerted from the stares of everyone on his back, he did as told, and dove towards the breach in the wall.

"Okay, good work everyone ~no. You should use this opportunity to replenish your mana from the magic stones created by master ~no."

Just as Renya fired himself up again as it'd be the demon country from now on, Frau began to scurry around between Rona and the others after slipping out of Renya's embrace, distributing fist-sized magic stones to everyone.

Recovery was certainly an important duty, but Renya somehow felt how his motivation, which he had just boosted, plummeted down again from the lacking feeling of tension around him.

"Now, now, it's how we handle things, right Renya?" Shion intervened while laughing, seemingly having guessed Renya's feelings.

Thinking that she was right about it on the one hand, and that it was just fine like this on the other hand, Renya faced Dra-kun's flight direction in order to stay cautious for the time being since he didn't need to recover any mana.