

Chapter 2 - It seems We're Going to Pass Below

"Now then, let's start the fun meeting, shall we?"

The first one to speak up after they moved to another room was Emil. Shion, Croire, Emil, and Frau had changed locations for the sake of coming up with countermeasures on how to deal with the very likely interference by the demon king. Renya didn't join this little get-together in order to fully concentrate on recovery, and Rona stayed at his side for the eventual case of a sudden change in Renya's condition.

On the other hand, Jade headed out to explain the situation to his citizens and soldiers, and Az and Liaris stayed clear of this place as it didn't seem like they'd be of much use.

"It's no fun, partner. If we fail, all of us are going to be bound straight for the netherworld."

"Ah, somehow it gives you the feeling of being the odd one out." Croire reacted sensitively to Shion calling Emil 'partner'.

Shion shrugged her shoulders with a wry smile, "No need to worry, we won't leave you out, okay?"

"I keenly feel like it's going to be a drawback during majority votes, if we've got different opinions."

"In that case, Frau is going to become Croire-ane-sama's ally ~no."

Emil looked down - inevitably so because of their difference in height - at Frau, who proudly declared that this would turn the situation into a 2 vs. 2, and bluntly said, "How dumb. You think you can win with your impromptu combination against the combination of Shion and me, so unparalleled and mighty that you won't find it anywhere else in the wide world?"

"How ridiculous ~nano. You'll immediately bite the dust if you look down on the impromptu combination of Frau, who can easily be called the strongest being on this planet thanks to the huge mana supply of master, and Croire-ane-sama who is the child of the elven emperor, even if only the 35th in the succession line ~no!"

"Either of us is like trash in front of Renya, though...wanna duke it out with a fist fight, all of you?"

"Frau, please tell me the reason why you're casually dissing me even though we're supposedly allies."

Shion knew that Emil and Frau weren't serious, but since both ran the danger of going too far with things, which then would truly develop into a small skirmish, if she didn't give them a warning, Shion interrupted their little argument with a displeased expression. Croire, on the other hand, scornfully glared at Frau, seemingly feeling unhappy about a part of the introduction used by Frau. In response, Frau quickly scurried behind Emil, using her as a shield.

"Since we don't have too much time, let's discuss this seriously?"

"I'd have loved you doing so from the very start, partner. So, do you have some kind of plan?"

"If we take the orthodox approach, we could deploy a defense barrier covering the entirety of this flying object, and break through the demon king's barrier just like that. That'd be the standard route."

Once Emil glanced at Frau to get her opinion, Frau shook her head behind her.

"That's not realistic ~no. If you don't have mana at the level of master, it's absolutely impossible to cover an entire city with a barrier. Please also keep in mind the strength the barrier would require ~nano."

"What if we use the usual method of drawing a magic crest and pouring mana into it?"

Just as before, Frau also denied the idea Shion came up with.

"This flying mass already has the magic crest of <Flight> drawn on it ~nano. If we drew a barrier crest on top of that, the crests would get mixed up, resulting in the first crest stopping to work normally ~no."

"How about opening up a hole by attacking the barrier's wall as we did when we came here?"

This time it was Emil to reply to Croire's suggestion.

"That'd assume the wall is already existing like it did when you came here. Since I could sense it being destroyed over at my place as well, wouldn't the demon king put it up just before we are about to pass the barrier's boundary or while we're passing it?"

"It'd be just like Renya said earlier."

"How about raising the altitude of this flying object? With the idea of flying over the barrier's wall."

Croire's new proposal suggested that it might be possible to pass the barrier above without being forced to break it, if it was nothing more than a wall-based barrier. Emil and Frau looked at each other while brooding for a short moment. Finishing their deliberations, they faced Croire again at almost the same time, and simultaneously shook their heads.

"I really can't recommend this method since we'll be stuck if the upper part of the barrier isn't open."

"This land mass is being held together by the roots of the plants grown by Croire-ane-sama ~nano. Unreasonably increasing the altitude would add to the burden of the whole, and in the worst case, it's possible that the whole object would fall apart, so I can't recommend it ~no."

Things might have been different if this land mass consisted of sturdy bedrock, but the foundation of Jade's city was simple earth. Although the roots somehow kept it all together by having extended all over the city to entwine every last crook and cranny, they wouldn't know just how much burden would be added by rising the altitude unless they tried it, but since such an attempt would result in its destruction, it was anything but safe as a gamble.

"What if we borrow Renya's katana and use it to destroy the barrier?"

All of them approved of Renya's sword skills having reached a boundary incomprehensible to anyone seeing it, but there were very many situations where his katana displayed a sharpness that couldn't be simply explained away with Renya's skills. This inexplicable part easily spurred on the idea that it might be based on the abilities of the katana itself. For this reason, Shion thought that she might be able to cut apart the barrier if she were to use Renya's katana.

"Shion-ane-sama, can you create a tear big enough to allow this huge mass to pass through the barrier ~no?"

"...I think that's impossible."

"Yes, it's impossible ~nano. No matter how much we'd reinforce you with mana, I think it would be quite unreasonable to expect you to pull off such a feat ~no."

Shion's plan might have been feasible if the barrier had the trait of collapsing on the whole when destroyed at a smaller part, but as this wasn't the case here, it was not only next to impossible, but completely impossible to create a tear with a width of several hundred meters using a single katana.

"In the first place, it'd be one thing if the wall was up before the passage, but a katana slash would serve absolutely no purpose if the wall is erected from above or below while we're passing the boundary."

"Going by probability, it's probably going to be erected from below."

This time everyone nodded in agreement at Shion's comment.

If the wall were to be erected from above, they might be able to try destroying the wall by launching attacks while passing below, but a wall approaching from below would be out of sight, making it hard to launch attacks against it. Frau had considered making Dra-kun, who was still caught within the leaves of the overgrown trees, sortie to the destroy the wall as mobile attack force, but going by the situation when they invaded the demon country after tearing the wall apart, it'd require quite an extensive firepower to destroy the wall, and if things went badly, the flying city itself would be in danger to get destroyed by the aftermath of such a powerful attack.

"We're sure being forced into a harsh stalemate here, aren't we?"

"Only as long as we can count on Renya's mana. I think we might be able to force our way through by forcefully deploying a barrier, but things would get really hairy if it stopped working at some point."

Everyone present in this room possessed abilities which would allow them to somehow survive even if Jade's city were to break apart.

The problem would be the demonic residents they brought along. Their abilities were powerful when compared to humans and it wasn't wrong to describe them as sturdy, but if you were to ask whether they'd be alright to fall from the sky right above the Miasma Forest, it'd be quite difficult to readily answer that they'd somehow manage. Some among them might be able to deal with it, but

there were children and elderly among the citizens. As they couldn't unconditionally declare that everyone would be safe, the destruction of the currently flying city would very likely result in not few casualties.

"If an approach from the front and the idea of flying across doesn't work, we don't have much of a choice besides passing underground, do we?"

Shion had said that as a joke, but Frau and Emil immediately latched onto the idea.

""Underground!?"""

"Ah, no. It's just it doesn't look like we've got any other paths to take, I think? It's definitely not like we can transfer something so big, right? Or rather, even if we really chose this option..."

Ignoring Shion who got all flustered by Emil and Frau raising their voices all of a sudden, Emil started to brood while folding her arms and mumbling under her breath.

"No, wait a sec. Underground, huh? I see..."

"It shouldn't be that silly a barrier that you can pass underneath by digging a hole ~nano. Still, it's hard to imagine that the barrier covers more than several dozen meters below the ground, or rather, considering it from the barrier's scale, it should actually be impossible ~nano."

"Eh? Somehow it looks like you're seriously considering this option?"

Shion nervously let her eyes wander around between Emil and Frau as they seriously scrutinized her words which she had said in jest, but Croire showed no hint of panic and calmly watched the two as if it was the usual for them to consider and implement outrageous ideas.

"Let me start from the conclusion: Shion, shouldn't we just go ahead with that move then?"

"Ueeeehh!?"

"It's much easier than confronting the demon king's barrier from the front. Above all, it's just the quick digging of a tunnel with a height and width of several hundred meters and a length of around one kilometer ~nano. That's no real challenge at all ~no."

Shion's face cramped up when she heard Frau casually saying something so absurd that it'd make any construction worker bawl their eyes out, as if she was about to take a little stroll.

"Not like we'd actually need a tunnel for it anyway. It's going to be plenty if we dig a trench following those measurements."

"That makes it even easier ~no! Compared to coping with the demon king's barrier, blowing away 270 million tons of loose earth is like a walk in the park ~no!"

Shion couldn't even begin just how much earth the figure cheerfully mentioned by Frau would amount to, but at the very least, she could clearly grasp that it was a ridiculous amount.

'Certainly, for you to compare it with opposing the demon king's power, it might be somewhat easier, but saying that it's an easy feat just because of that would be a clear lie,' Shion assessed.

"No, no, there's no need to grapple with such a huge amount of sand and earth. It'll be enough to dig a trench that gradually deepens as it gets closer to the barrier. After all, our goal will be to have this land mass pass right underneath the barrier's wall."

"Oh, it's even easier ~no!" Frau applauded, yelling, "Bravo ~no!"

Shion believed that they should apologize to all construction workers, but in this place dominated by Emil and Frau, Shion was the only one to have a decent view of things.

"...For starters, how are you going to dig up the earth?"

Shion asked as she couldn't believe that they'd be allowed to calmly dig up a trench within the day it'd take this flying city to reach the boundary. Emil's answer to that was very simple.

"You see, it's us we're talkin' bout here, right?"

"We will fire a powerful blow, destroying the area on a wide range with a bam ~nano."

In short, they were going to retrieve Dra-kun from in-between the trees as he'd be able to fly much faster than Jade's city was flying, and go ahead of the city on his back. Then they'd destroy the area where the barrier might appear on a large scale, and create a path for the flying city that would be below the ground level.

Of course it was a plan based on the destruction of nature over a grand scale. Hearing about it, Croire's face became gloomy, or perhaps you could say it became so dark that it would have been better for her to not have heard anything about this plan.

"I would like you to turn a blind on it since it's an emergency measure ~no!"

"No, well, umm...somehow your plan is riddled with things I can't quite agree with."

"Since the lives of people rely on it, I want you to turn your eyes the other way, really."

"For Emil to advocate in favor of the lives of other people..."

"Croire, you should give up here. I'm sure nothing is going to change, no matter what you might tell them."

"Doesn't any other solution exist though?"

"We'll do it so that there won't remain any lasting after-effects, so don't worry!"

"To the forest!? Or to the people in the vicinity!?" Croire asked - as could be expected quite warily - Emil, who said some truly dangerous things with a very bright expression, but she only received a silent smile as reply.

While resolving herself that it didn't look like she'd be able to change their opinion in any way, Croire sighed so deeply and heavily that you wouldn't believe her slender chest to be capable of such a feat.

"It's okay for me to not help with this, right?"

"It's inevitable, I suppose. It'd definitely be a lil' too harsh on an elf to order her to take part in the destruction of a forest."

"Croire-ane-sama, then I would like to ask you to inform master and the others of the plan's details ~no."

"Sure, I'll take care of that."

"I'll go find Az-san and Liaris-san to rescue Dra-kun, I guess?"

Shion felt like there was no need to forcibly drag Liaris along to get Dra-kun to fly them, but making her dragon transport them while selfishly ignoring its dragoon sounded a bit too cruel. Moreover, Shion thought it'd follow logic to have the dragon's rider fly the dragon, seeing how an official rider existed. Also, if they got Liaris to accompany them, you could naturally assume that Az would accompany them as well.

"But I wonder, is the wall going to be in the same place now as it was when we entered?"

"I believe it's next to impossible to completely rearrange such a large-scaled spell formation ~no."

"You can raise a barrier's strength by pouring more power into it, and since we haven't seen its shape, we don't know whether the wall will be formed from above or below, but the place of its appearance shouldn't change. If the demon king plans to alter that, he'd be forced to completely erase the first formation, and rearrange it from scratch."

Emil and Frau alleviated Shion's worry together. As Shion felt relieved, believing that it'd be impossible to realize it in this world if these two denied the possibility together, she heard the whispering of the two who had brought their faces together.

"But, maybe we can't exclude the possibility altogether ~no."

"Hmm, you're right. Let's widen the destruction range a bit. It might make up for a little deviation even if he changes the location of its appearance."

With the comment just now, a further expansion of the forest's destruction was apparently set in stone. Croire stared at Shion, who felt cold sweat run down her spine as she suspected she might have blurted out something unnecessary, with an expression which made it difficult to tell whether she was blaming Shion or not.

