

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.



The one noticing it first was Renya. As he was currently in the middle of pouring mana into the magic crest covering the city's interior, he could somehow grasp what was going on inside the city.

As soon as responses that seemed to align with Shion and the other girls climbed the huge trees growing all over the place, they carelessly severed the branches at top, allowing Dra-kun to fly out through the freed-up space.

Renya had also known that Dra-kun was still stuck around that area. But, since he had no means to lower him to the ground, he'd decided to leave him up there until they arrived in Klinge. Just when he was wondering what they were planning, Croire jumped down in front of him. Once she explained the countermeasure they had decided to adopt moments ago against the barrier sealing off the demon domain, Renya got dumbstruck by the overly sloppy method.

Renya felt like a barrier would be way too crude if you could pass it by digging a tunnel underneath, but having said that, even the idea to dig a hole big enough for this huge flying mass to pass through raised the question whether it didn't go way, way overboard.

But, he had no right to complain about it. After all, he was currently preoccupied with recovering his mana and couldn't move about, on top of not having an alternative plan to the one proposed by Shion and the other three. Since Renya had the belief that it was presumptuous of a person, who couldn't do anything, to complain to someone trying to do something, he had no choice but to pray that things would work out, no matter what method it might be.

"Being unable to do anything is really tough."

Contrary to Renya who was assailed by feelings that could be described as bitterness or irritation, Croire sighed, cast her eyes down, and responded, "If I consider that forest will be blown away soon, I get all depressed."

"Ah...well, I guess we should plant new trees then to replace those that are going to get destroyed, once we get back to Klinge."

While wondering whether he should come with her once to restore the share of forest that's going to be gouged out, Renya stroked Croire's head to at least soothe her mind a bit.

Shion and the others, who weren't aware of this at all, explained the circumstances to Liaris and Az, partially dragged them along against their will, got on the back of Dra-kun after rescuing him out of the overgrown foliage, and broke away from the city.

The best part about Dra-kun's flight speed was him being easily able to leave the city behind. Moreover, Shion, Emil, and Frau weren't regarded as enemies by Dra-kun, but once he got urged on by such terrifyingly threatening beings, even Dra-kun frantically flew as fast as possible, and left the city in the lurch as he dashed across the sky.

"D-Dra-kun, c-calm down a bit..."

His flight speed was so fast that Liaris got worried about him being able to control it, but as any delay in the arrival at the barrier's wall meant less time to build the necessary trench, Shion and Emil entreated Liaris to keep flying at top speed, even if it was somewhat unreasonable.

Only Frau sat cross-legged on Dra-kun's head with her arms folded, continuing to ponder about something during the entire flight.

"Frau, you're doing well to sit in such a narrow space. Make sure to not fall off, okay?"

"I think it'd be wise to stop thinking of Frau as normal silky at this point, you know?"

Shion looked at Emil while rolling her eyes as if regarding it as pointless to mention it at this point, but there was a clear difference in the level of recognition between someone actually spelling something out, and everyone present vaguely thinking something. If someone didn't really know about silkies, they might get the wrong impression of silkies being like that, if Frau claimed to be one. There shouldn't be any real harm in that, but if you didn't always make sure that silkies were correctly recognized for what they were, things would become troublesome if something happened. Looking at it from this angle, Emil's comment might have been something that had to be mentioned by someone sooner or later anyway.

"But, if that's the case, it leaves the question open how to perceive Frau then, right?"

"Hmm, you're right. You can think of her as a soul, which is almost perfect in a certain sense, as she used a silky as a core, and compensated for the lacking parts by absorbing countless souls while cutting out the undesired parts."

Emil brooded for some time while mumbling, "If you look at the shape of her soul, it's easy to tell," but eventually squeezed out, somewhat reluctantly or unhappily, with a sulky tone, "It might be weird to hear that out of my mouth as a researcher, but I've been wondering whether that hasn't become something close to a god by now," while donning an expression that made clear she knew she was being watched by Shion from the side.

All living beings possessed some kind of deficiency in their soul. That was a common trait shared among all souls in this world, but what if there existed a soul without any deficiencies? What if a soul with an exemplary shape of a true globe, which had cut off all unnecessary parts of itself as if to set all of the countless parameters to the same value, really existed?

According to Emil, the owner of such a soul could probably only be described as a god.

"It's a theory I can understand, but...close means that it's not perfect, right?"

"Yes. I mean, Frau doesn't possess any divinity or some such, does she?" Emil evaluated with a grin.

Being told so, Shion directed her eyes to Frau's back, then looked back at Emil, who was sitting next to her, and nodded in agreement. But right at that moment, two objects similar to pebbles came flying from the front, hitting the two on their foreheads. The objects themselves were small and light, not causing much of a damage at the places they hit, but once Shion looked at the object that had fallen on her knees while rubbing her forehead, she identified it as small candy.

As Shion picked the candy up, wondering why something like that, Frau yelled from atop Dra-kun's head, "I can hear you loud and clearly ~noo!"

"Ah, sorry, but why candy?" Shion asked, guessing from the direction the candy came from that Frau must have thrown it.

With her conjecture appearing to be correct, Frau answered while straining her voice, "Rather than blabbing about unnecessary things, you might as well eat a candy ~no."

"Oki, thanks." Frankly giving her thanks, Shion tossed the candy into her mouth.

The gentle sweetness, which immediately spread inside her mouth, allowed to infer that a fairly good sugar had been used for making this candy. Sugar itself was a spice that could be obtained on the market commonly, but ordinary sugar had lots of impurities, a bad color, and many components blemishing its taste, but this pure sweetness surprised Shion who estimated this sugar to be of a finer quality than the one she had eaten when she still was a princess.

"Was sugar being produced in Klinge?"

Shion knew that sugar of such quality wasn't available on the markets of the Trident Principality. Frau proudly threw out her chest in response to Shion's thoughtful question.

"It's homemade ~nano."

"...Ah, somehow this made me doubt the quality for a moment there..."

"What do you mean by that ~no!?"

Shion felt it'd be cruel to spit it out, and thus continued to suck on it just like that, but she grimaced as what she had perceived as gentle sweetness moments ago now tasted somewhat black for some reason.

"Frau created it with all her effort ~no! Shion-ane-sama, you're really mean ~no!"

"Somehow it feels like the blackness has gone up in level, doesn't it?"

"Emil-ane-sama, you're also mean ~no! If you're too mean, I'll turn you into a sugar ingredient ~no!"

Once they were told that they'd be chopped up, melted, and turned into goo, Shion and Emil both thought that Frau was probably joking, but it'd be scary if she was serious by any chance.

"I feel kinda nervous..."

"Leave them be, Liaris. It's best to not get involved with them."

Just as Liaris was about to carelessly cut into their conversation, Az stopped her by hugging her close.

Since Shion could somewhat understand the future tragedy that could happen if someone got in-between Frau and Emil's silly bantering without resolving themselves, she believed Az's judgment and action to be correct, but in addition to that, Shion became slightly jealous over Az's affection towards Liaris after being shown such a scene.

"I think we're also being loved, though." Emil said, seemingly having guessed something from her atmosphere or look.

While Frau looked in the flight direction, pretending to not have heard anything, Shion tilted her head, harboring a bit of doubt.

"You sure?"

"No doubt. If not, he wouldn't have come along with you over such a long distance to get back a person with a character like mine while going even as far as suppressing a battlefield." Emil laughed, and added, "If it were anyone else, he'd have just abandoned them."

Shion wasn't so sure about that. Even though he looked unfeeling and cool-headed on top of having the bad habit of getting easily swept along by his emotions and the circumstances, he was here for some reason with a face telling anyone that it was only natural for him to be here. Shion couldn't help but believe that he'd go rescue even a distant acquaintance without doing a loss-win-calculation first. He'd do that without any reason, and after finishing it, brag about it as something he simply wanted to do. Shion couldn't imagine that he, who felt like an incarnation of chaos, harbored any special feelings about her, but as there might be things an onlooker could tell but not someone involved, she stopped doubting at this point.

'At the least, it's not like he dislikes me, seeing how he allows me to be by his side, so he might also notice my feelings someday.

"It's like, what are you saying at this point after kissing?"

"Isn't that because they haven't properly crossed the line? It sounds like she also failed at creeping into his bed at night as well, no?"

"Next time I'll pack plenty of aphrodisiac into the food ~no."

"You think that works on Renya?"

Due to the conversation by the outsiders reaching her ears, Shion was at her wits' end, wondering whether she couldn't even ponder in silence. In front of her, who had decided to be very careful about the food for the time being, Frau looked down towards the ground, seemingly having noticed something.

"I think the wall should be around here ~no!"

Shion and Emil tried to look down at Dra-kun's flanks in response to Frau's comment and her pointing downwards. They felt like they could see a place, where the trees inside the forest were gone in a straight line as if something was there, slightly ahead of Dra-kun's flight path. It stretched

out in a vertical direction when compared to Dra-kun's flight direction, and you couldn't tell just how far it continued, even when looking at it from quite high up in the sky on Dra-kun's back.

"It looks like it, but it doesn't seem like a wall is here." Emil strained her eyes, looking at the empty space.

Frau, who had been pondering something, eventually lifted her head as if having come up with something, tapped Dra-kun's head, and forcefully pointed in a direction.

"Dra-kun, full speed ahead ~nano!"

"Hey!? Frau, just what...!?"

Shion tried to ask in order to find out what Frau was thinking, but her words were drowned out by Dra-kun's sudden acceleration. Due to Dra-kun suddenly speeding up without receiving any kind of order from Liaris, who was supposedly his dragoon, all of them wondered what to think about this, but there was another problem they had to settle first.

"Frau! If the wall materializes, we're going to crash, you know!?"

"No matter how sturdy Dra-kun might be as a dragon, that'd be way too much, okay!?"

Dra-kun kept raising his speed as if to not let the panicking voices of Emil and Shion reach him. As he advanced at a speed that made all of them think that things wouldn't end nicely if he crashed into a wall at this speed, only Frau didn't show any surprise or panic on Dra-kun, and kept tapping his head while single-mindedly staring ahead.

"We're going to pass through the place where the barrier had been!"

"Everyone, please hold tight onto Dra-kun!"

Even without being told so by Liaris, everyone except for Frau was glued to Dra-kun's back. Shion squeezed her eyes shut, having resolved her for a terrifying impact to follow very soon, but even after some time had passed, no shock assailed her body. After waiting a little longer, Shion carefully opened her eyes.

What she could see through the gap in her eyelids was the scenery quickly passing by as if to indicate Dra-kun's continuous, high flight speed, and how Frau was loudly laughing atop of his head.

"Ahahaha! Stupid demon king ~nano! Stupid, stupid!"

"What's going on...?"

As Frau showed no indication of wanting to explain anything, Emil muttered an answer to Shion's aimless question.

"This is...what do you call it? The condition to activate the barrier has changed for the sake of dealing with the flying city, so the barrier didn't show any reaction to tiny beings like us, kind of?"

If Renya had been here, he might have explained it as a pressure sensitivity device not reacting to the weight of a child if it was set to that of an adult, but with him not being here, Shion did her utmost to understand what had happened from what Emil had explained to her.

"Would you understand it if I explain it as an old man being able to read big letters, but being unable to read them, if they're small? In short, I think the barrier simply hasn't registered our presence."

"O-Okay?"

"If you set the barrier's activation condition to anything that passes, even a small insect would cause it to activate, right? That's why it has been set to respond if someone with a certain weight and size passes, but compared to the city, we're tiny and thus don't meet the conditions."

Thanks to Emil's patient explanation, Shion finally grasped what had happened. At the same she wondered whether it wouldn't be possible to stop the city, split up its residents to carry them over with Dra-kun's friends or something else, and pass the barrier in such a way.

Emil had apparently thought the same, but shook her head after noticing that this solution would lead to too many problems.

"Splitting up the people would surely not work. First off, we can't immediately prepare enough dragons to transport all residents, and if it takes a lot of time, the demon king would realize what's going on. Even the method of having Dra-kun do many roundtrips likely won't work for the same reason."

In the first place, the precondition of preparing this many dragons would be odd to begin with, but still, if they used Dra-kun and Renya's power, it'd somehow work, most likely. But, by adding the time condition, it was impossible to put it into practice.

Shion wondered whether they couldn't use some kind of plan to deal with this fact. Because she thought that there might be a simpler method than digging a huge trench into the ground, Shion pondered whether they couldn't use these facts in some way, but Frau's loud laughter continued as if to interrupt her thinking.

"Frau? Just what is going on with you...?"

"Ahahahaha ~nano! I'm fine, Shion-ane-sama ~no! The problem is as good as gone with this, even without any need to ponder deeply about it ~no! Everything will be resolved if we head over to Klinge just like this ~no!"

"Eh? To Klinge?"

Frau's words meant that she had given up on the plan on digging a trench, causing Shion to become confused. Because Frau stated that it was no problem so far as it went, Shion believed that she had some kind of plan in mind, but she had absolutely no clue what that simple solution might be.

"While at it, the city's landing point seems to have been set as well ~nano! Come on, Dra-kun, fly as

fast as you can until your wings fall out ~no!"

"No, I mean, I'm the dragoon here, so, umm..."

"Stop it, Liaris. That's a being you mustn't get in touch with."

Once again Az restrained Liaris by hugging her as she was about to file a strong protest towards Frau who gave instructions to Dra-kun over her head as dragoon.

While vacantly wondering whether it was about high time to retort, "aren't you just looking for reasons to hug Liaris?", Shion accepted the idea of relying on others to solve the problem, believing that all would be fine if she left things to Frau who was hurrying on Dra-kun by cockily tapping his head.



On the other hand, Renya was ascertaining the condition of his body while surveying Jade's city, which Shion and the others had left earlier, and the area around it from the balcony of the room situated at the highest point of Jade's mansion. Next to him stood Croire who had followed outside after saying that she was worried about him.

The feeling of mana being drained didn't really stop, but as he sensed that his mana was gradually recovering, Renya could actually experience how his physical condition was returning to its former state, albeit very slowly. Renya suspected that the reason for him to keep recovering despite keeping this huge city afloat might be grounded in his aggregate amount of mana growing little-by-little as it recovered in addition to the consumption decreasing.

Jade, who had been looking all over the place in order to check the condition of his city next to Renya, turned his eyes to Renya's face, donning an expression as if he was seeing something unbelievable.

"I don't really get any joy out of a passionate stare by a guy, you know?" Renya commented while feeling uncomfortable from Jade's gaze which you could as well describe as clingy.

Without averting his eyes, Jade responded, "Don't worry, I don't have any such fetishes."

"Don't stare at me like this then. If you feel the urge to stare either way, you can settle for that lovely girl over here." Renya spat out while pointing with his eyes at Croire who was snuggling up to him.

Hearing his words, Croire immediately became embarrassed.

However, without the slightest change on his face and in his voice, Jade indifferently replied, "I have no interest in thin elves."

"Wai-, what was that!?"

"Ah, I see. Because it doesn't sway, right?"

"Even you, Renya!? You're hurting my feelings here, okay!? The same applies for you as well, demon!"

Croire was on the verge of flaring up at the demon Jade and Renya, a man outside any norm as a human, although any other life-form would have probably deemed it the smarter option to run away while throwing such concepts as shame or honor to the wind. In response, both voiced out the same line in perfect harmony for some mysterious reason.

""It's not like I've been talking about your chest in particular.""

"Ugh..."

"A slim body should be something similar to a characteristic of elves, and my opinion should be the general view of the public. It's not like I've pinpointed it to a special part of you."

"Not swaying was about your skirt. That one is way too much of an impregnable fortress, you know?"

Renya felt like it was slowly getting pathetic to tease Croire with this gag, but among the women around him, only Croire seemed to be the perfect target for that joke. Moreover, since it was the first time for Jade to make that kind of a joke, Renya wanted her to endure on this occasion. On the other hand, Croire, who thought that she might collapse emotionally and in reality, prevented her fall by tightly holding onto Renya's arm while putting strength into her look and declaring, "I-I do have parts t-that sway!"

"...Enlighten me then."

"My hair, for example..."

'She must have died internally after saying this.

At the same time as she made that statement, all power vanished from her eyes and she slid down on the floor. While looking down at Croire, Renya thought that it must be quite difficult to always put on airs, treating it completely as someone else's affair.

"Leaving that aside, why are you staring this way when you're not hoping for a feast of the eyes?"

Even throughout the whole chain of events just now, Jade's eyes had never stopped being fixated on Renya's face. When Renya tried to ask him for the reason while not feeling all that happy about Jade's persistent stare, the demon answered with a calm voice, "You'll naturally end up staring at something unbelievable if it's in front of your eyes."

"Don't treat other people like monsters..."

"A monster would still count as cute in comparison to you."

Renya thought that this assessment might be overboard, but Jade continued with a very serious expression, "Simply not running out of mana while spending enough to let a mass as big as this city

fly is already worthy of pure admiration, but how should I describe if not monster when you start recovering your mana on top of all that?"

"Being evaluated like that by a demon makes me wonder whether I should feel honored or offended..." Even though he answered like that, Renya's eyes concentrated on the flight direction of the city.

Quite some time had passed ever since Shion's group had departed on Dra-kun. Considering Dra-kun's flight speed, it wouldn't be strange for them to have arrived at the predicted barrier manifestation spot by now.

"Can you feel anything, Croire?"

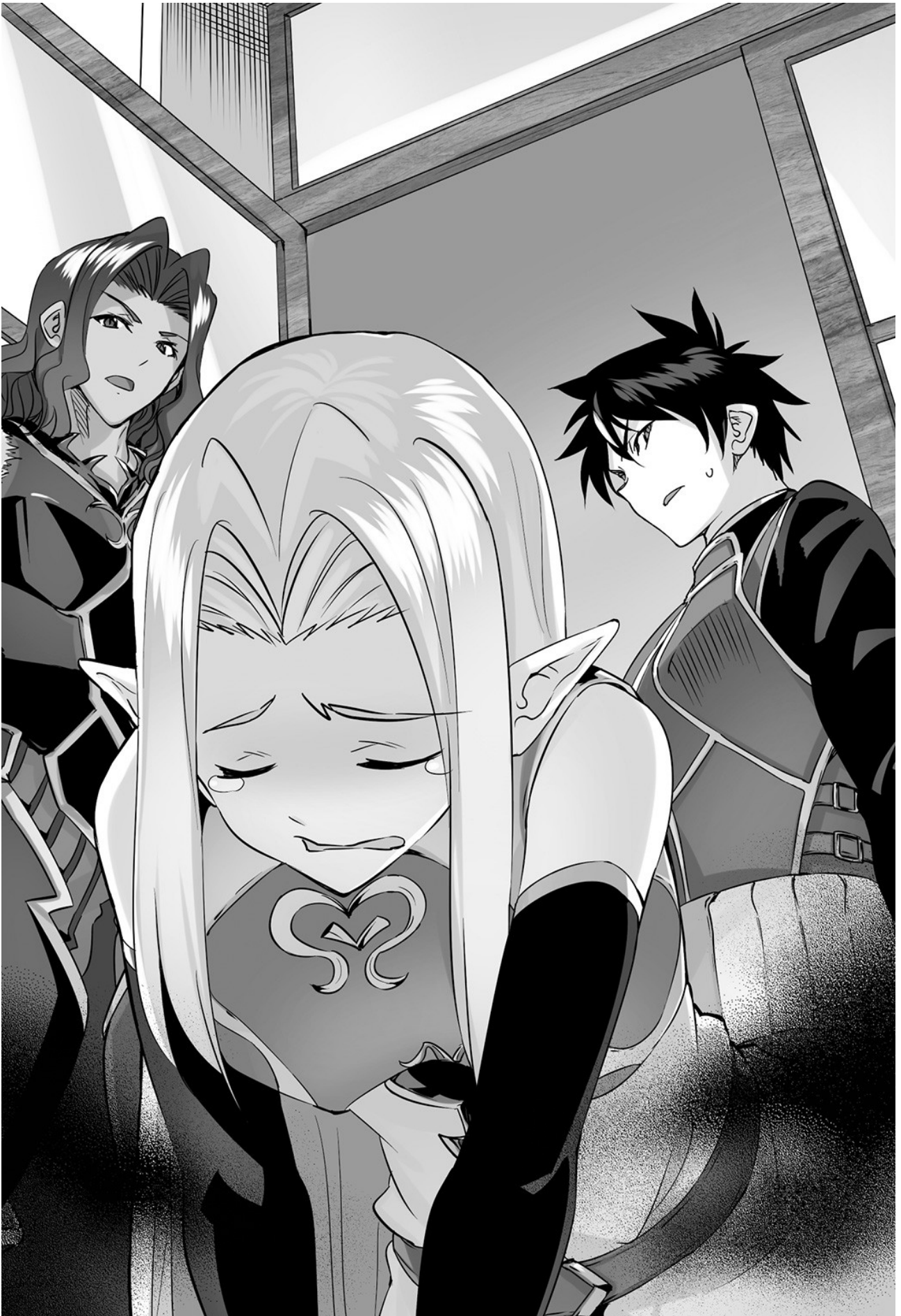
"A faint feeling of despair..."

Renya let his shoulders drop slightly because of Croire's gloomy reply. While grabbing Croire's arm and pulling her up as she hadn't yet stood back up, Renya came up with some words that might improve Croire's mood, "Don't worry. I don't judge women by their thickness or their swaying parts."

"If this was supposed to be a consolation, I'd say they missed their point, don't you think?"

It was a remark based on what Renya had concluded in his own way, but it seemed dissatisfying for Croire. And yet, seemingly having recovered some of her mood, even if only a little, Croire got up with Renya's help, and turned her attention in the flight direction of the city in order to find an answer to Renya's question.

"I feel like we'd immediately see something outrageous, even before I sense anything, if Shion's group were to do something."



"You've got a point...they have Shion, Emil, and Frau with them after all..."

Depending on the circumstances, those three were far more dangerous than the likes of a demon king in Renya's eyes. Since they had departed to destroy something, it'd be no wonder at all if something outlandish were to happen at any moment, just as Croire said.

However, there were no conspicuous movements in the flight direction of the city with only the forest endlessly continuing to stretch out.

"I can't feel the sensation of the trees in the forest disappearing either." Croire mumbled under her breath while straining her eyes to stare ahead.

"Explosions aren't visible either."

"Isn't there something...like...yea, something like a black presence or some such?"

"You people...are talking about your friends, aren't you?" Jade cut into Croire and Renya's conversation, somehow feeling like drawing back from them, but the two kept gazing into the far distance without even trying to answer Jade's question.

"What do you think?"

Renya asked without specifying what he meant. Croire pondered for a little while, and answered, "It's hard to imagine that they failed. We're talking about that crazy lineup. Considering it like that, maybe they succeeded with a smart, quiet method...?"

"No, that's out of the question."

Due to Renya's instantaneous denial, it was this time Croire who let her shoulders slump down, before continuing, "Or maybe they came up with another method. That's all I can think of at least."

"Another method..."

"I think that a failure on their side is in the realm of possibility, but even in such a case, they should be alright. It's not like Shion and the others would be affected by falling off Dra-kun."

Renya felt conflicted on judging whether those words were an expression of trust or irresponsible resignation, but he had no objection to the content of what Croire was saying.

"If there's going to be a problem, it'd be on our side, huh?"

Renya and Croire were naturally confident that they'd be able to somehow cope with the situation, even if Jade's city were to break apart in mid-air or crash into the barrier. But, there was no way they could expect the same from the demons who were likely huddling together in this city at present while driven by fear. A part of the might be able to escape by themselves or get rescued by others, but the majority would likely get swallowed up by the city's destruction, and pass away then and there.

"If I release my control of the city for a moment, I might be able to somehow destroy the barrier by

myself, but..."

"I feel like you said something preposterous just now? That's definitely not a line I'd expect out of a human's mouth, you know?"

"If the other side tries to destroy the city by hitting it with the barrier's wall, we won't be able to do anything."

"I've already considered the option to cover the entire city with a barrier and let it fall to the ground in such a case."

'Even if they adopt the method of crashing the wall into the city by using the generation of the barrier like a shutter that's being raised or lowered, it might be possible to make it float back up as long as the city itself doesn't get destroyed,' Renya assessed.

He argued that it might be an option to release the control of the flight spell temporarily and route all his power into defense, but Croire rejected that idea.

"Even if you were to protect the city itself from the impact after crashing down, greater parts of the people in the city will die after getting smacked against the floor or a wall, I think."

"Demons sure are frail then..."

"Wait a sec there! Be it humans, elves, beastmen, or dragonoids...most of them would die from something like that!"

"Besides, I believe you'd need the same amount of mana as you had to use earlier to get it to float again. Would you be able to handle that, Renya?"

Renya honestly shook his head in response.

As his ability had grown thanks to the massive consumption of mana, he might now have an aggregate amount that would make it easier for him to launch the city up again compared to the first time, but Renya was currently in the middle of recovering and not fully rested. If asked whether he could provide the mana necessary to launch the spell again in such a state, he had no choice but to deny it.

"Finding the time to recover enough mana to launch the spell again while having people with you that need to be protected right in the middle of the Miasma Forest would be an impossible undertaking. I can't really recommend attempting it."

"Looking at it like this, demons, who're always feared as dreadful existences, unexpectedly aren't all that tough, are they?"

"Even demons have all sorts of different people! Stop assessing people while using yourselves as standard!"

"No, I'm judging with Emil as standard."

Once Renya answered, probably feeling bad about having continuously ignored Jade who repeatedly raised his voice in protest, Jade fell silent while donning an indescribable expression. If he were to honestly voice out his thoughts, he'd probably ask to not be lumped together with 'that', but he appeared to be quite hesitant to use such wording for his blood-related sister, and since he had no means to object without speaking up here, his only option was to remain silent. That was the impression Jade gave Renya.

"Well, let's leave the teasing of the serious lord at this."

"Hey, elf..."

"We have to come up with some kind of method and put it into action. Time is running...uh?"
Croire's expression changed in the middle of speaking.

While hugging her own shoulders, Croire shivered while faltering to speak. Seeing her like that, Renya became confused.

"What's wrong?"

"Just now...something cold has...you haven't felt anything, Renya?"

Renya focused his concentration and scanned their surroundings, but he could sense a hint of something that would make him shiver with just his perception alone. However, he tilted his head as he did feel some strange discomfort.

He had a hunch that it was some presence he had sensed in the past, but he couldn't immediately recall what it was.

"What's up? Is something here?"

"What is it? Just what the hell is it?"

Jade was the only one not perceiving anything, but even Renya couldn't give an explanation since he didn't know what that something could be despite knowing that something was nearby. He felt like the true identity was on the tip of his tongue, but faster than Renya, who searching his memories while feeling quite irked, Croire apparently managed to realize the true identity of that presence, but seemingly unable to properly voice out its name, she released her hands from hugging her own shoulders, and held down her forehead with her left hand while spinning around the index finger of her right hand.

"Umm...look, umm...that is...the something Frau brought with her from the beach...umm..."

"Beach? You mean the Gordonal Barony?"

There was no other beach Renya had visited in this world so far. And if it came to things Frau had brought back from there, only one being would meet that condition.

"In that case, this presence is..."

At this point, Renya finally remembered its name. It inhabited the space between the continents and the bottom of this flat world. An ultra-big life-form which stretched its huge amount of super long tentacles across all oceans of this world.

"The katurul!? No, but we're on land right now...wait, it also came to Klinge?"

If it was the katurul said to span its tentacles all over the world and considering this here was the demon continent, located in the central part of the world where the katurul's main body seemed to be, then it wasn't all that strange for the katurul to pierce its tentacles through the ground to make them come out on the surface. However, Renya had absolutely no clue what the katurul was planning by extending its tentacles right in the middle of a land mass.

Renya wondered why the katurul, which was difficult to communicate with, would wriggle its tentacles around here, but then he remembered Frau.

"...I don't want to believe it, but..."

"Are you saying you have an idea what might be going on?"

"Doesn't this mean that Shion's group has passed through the barrier in some way or another...and returned to Klinge?"

The end of a katurul tentacle was wobbling around in the room with the spell formula of the transfer gate after having been extended all the way to Klinge instead of a transfer gate path to the Gordonal Barony. And assuming Frau was capable to arrive at that place, and assuming she was able to make a request to the katurul through the tentacle with some kind of method,

"I have a really bad feeling about this."

"I'm with you on that."

"I don't understand what you're talking about, but I agree with the part about the bad feeling."

The instant the three had reached an agreement, they could see from the balcony how the earth trembled and the trees shook. And then a swarm of countless huge tentacles thrust out through the ground with a force as if to pierce through heaven while raising thick clouds of dust.

"Uwaah..."

"It might be too late, but Jade, tell the residents to not look outsi...nevermind, I guess it's too late after all."

Looking down on Jade who had fallen down with a thud after fainting and was now completely still, Renya only prayed that there would be no casualties among the residents and soldiers.