# 100 - Druid

It has been two days since the dark sorcerer was killed.

At this point, there was only one day left until the joint training session. The atmosphere within the academy was even hotter than usual.

The students from the non-combat department always crawled around lethargically, but the combat department students were all wearing excited expressions. After all, starting tomorrow, they could legally beat up their seniors and juniors. Who wouldn’t be excited about that?

“Down with the first years! Down with the freshmen!”

“Waaaaah!”

“Let’s show the dignity of our seniors! Let’s let them know how great it is to be born a year earlier!”

“Second years! Second years!”

“Let’s take revenge on the Disciple of Creation who shattered our sanctuary!”

“Ah, that’s a bit much.”

“What?”

On one side of the academy, the boisterous voices of the second years echoed.

“Let’s take down the second years who are acting all high and mighty just because they were born a year earlier!”

“Kyahhh!!”

“We are the ‘humans who survived meeting the great sorcerer.’ If you act up, you’ll all die.”

“We are the golden generation! Grace and Asel will take care of everything! Right, Asel?”

“Get lost.”

“What?”

On the other side, the shouts of the first years continued from morning till evening.

Asel, who happened to be passing by, forced himself to ignore their embarrassing antics and opened a book. He even put on glasses to clearly signal his intention to concentrate. Of course, they were non-prescription glasses.

‘The atmosphere seems a bit too heated.’

Excited about the joint training? That was understandable. It was an event that would reflect on their grades, so it made sense to risk their lives for it.

Moreover, since family members might come to visit, they had no choice but to work hard to show them a great performance.

However, the gap between the first and second years was almost as vast as heaven and earth, except for a few.

In the first place, not many people expected much from the duel between the first and second years. Both sides were considered lower grades in the academy, and everyone’s attention was focused on the duels of the third and fourth years, who were the prospective graduates.

From the third year onward, students were strong enough to be deployed directly into combat without any issues.

The first years could hold their own, but the third years could be expected to perform remarkably. This meant the difference in skill was extreme.

The duels showcasing the results of the education they had received over three to four years naturally drew everyone’s attention. It was historically a given. No one expected much from the duels of the first and second years.

But this year, the situation was a bit different.

“Who are we? We are the Disciples of Creation, sorcerers of Wiheim, and members of the Witch Council, who have returned alive from Virsia.”

“Hey, where did you sell the princesses of the Valdemia Duchy and the Baidel Duchy, and Lady Hargelin?”

“Ah, damn. Are you not going to fix your speech? Do you really want to die? And where did Celine go?”

The freshmen’s backgrounds were anything but ordinary. The direct disciples of the great sorcerer, the youngest Aura experts, and so on. The first year of the academy was filled with individuals who might have already earned nicknames if they had been on the battlefield.

At that point, one couldn’t help but think.

“Hey? Aren’t we just second years?”

In reality, that was a very plausible story. Of course, it only applied to those who currently held the top and second positions.

Few had actually seen their skills, but the rumors of their greatness were enough for people to think they could win against the second years, who lacked practical experience.

So they believed that even if they lost individually, if they won, it would be the same as the entire first year winning. The moment even one first-year student defeated a second-year student, bonus points would be awarded to the entire grade.

“Asel, he’s a god!”

“Grace, she’s a goddess!”

“Honestly, I think Ellen is prettier.”

“What? You little….”

Thanks to this, the expectations for the first-year top and second students within the academy were sky-high. For an ordinary person, it would have been enough to drown.

But unfortunately, the current top and second students were all individuals who transcended the ordinary. Grace, the reincarnator, was a given, and both Elena and Ellen went about their daily lives with indifferent expressions despite the expectations from others.

Asel was the same. He sighed deeply while copying a romance novel he had borrowed from the library onto Aleph.

“This is the third one.”

[Hmm, good. It was a very interesting story. I never expected the heroine to kill the protagonist at the end. Even if she was cheating, I didn’t think she would actually commit murder. Quite intriguing.]

“……Every time I copy it, I feel like these novels. Is it really romance? Someone dies, betrays, and commits adultery every time.”

Aleph insisted that not all romance novels were the same and strongly urged Asel to only copy those with specific titles. Asel reluctantly accepted this with a grimace and copied the novels lying around the library.

“This isn’t romance.”

The contents of the novels were bizarre. They were more suited to the horror or thriller genre than romance.

However, Aleph seemed to think differently and spoke confidently as if he were a seer.

[These are novels that were popular during Cromwell’s time. I couldn’t read them back then because Cromwell wouldn’t listen to me. Thankfully, it was worth holding off on reading them. They exceed my expectations. Classics are indeed more flavorful.]

“Your taste is something else.”

[Please respect it. Don’t you also have peculiar tastes, my lord? Bomb-like breasts! Hips! Don’t you like that?]

“What the hell. Who the hell is your lord? I want to see your face.”

[Wasn’t it? I thought it was obvious since you always hung out with Grace or Elena.]

“No. I don’t have any preferred body types.”

[Hmm. To say that, there was a tendency for blood flow to concentrate in the lower body during the vampiric act that happened yesterday.]

Aleph chuckled and continued.

[Well, let’s say you’re right, my lord.]

“This bastard has been so cocky lately—”

Just as Asel twisted his face in annoyance.

“Ugh!”

Thud!

He collided with someone who suddenly appeared from an alley.

Asel didn’t budge. Before he could react, the Shield moved and pushed the assailant’s body away. Thanks to that, only the person who had jumped out of the alley was sent tumbling backward onto the ground.

“Ouch….”

He was wearing the academy student uniform. He had a small build, and his hair and eyes were a rare green. Even though he was right in front of Asel, a fragrant scent of grass brushed past his nose.

All of these were characteristics of a druid. Asel, who never expected to meet a druid in a place like this, extended his hand toward the fallen man with an apologetic expression.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going.”

Not knowing the other’s grade, Asel responded with honorifics. The druid awkwardly smiled and took Asel’s hand to get up.

“Oh, no! I acted too hastily… I’m sorry!”

“Are you hurt anywhere?”

“No!”

The druid answered cheerfully. Asel was about to smile back but suddenly narrowed his eyes at the strange feeling that arose.

“……That’s a relief.”

“Hehe… I’ve always been strong, but other than that, I didn’t have any advantages. By the way, how did you push me away? Was it magic? Or superpowers?”

“It’s magic. I’m Asel from the Magical Department.”

“Oh, Asel!”

The druid clapped his hands as if he knew Asel’s name.

Asel no longer showed any expression while looking at the druid.

It had come to mind.

“The famous disciple of The Beginning! The pride of the freshmen!”

The plan that the dark sorcerer had held. The race of Gorsel written there.

“I’m also a first-year student just like you, Asel! I just returned not long ago because of a group project… Uh, I’m sorry. Just thinking about the group project makes me tremble.”

The only son of the forest and nature in the academy.

“Oh, I’m sorry for the late introduction. My name is Gorsel. I’m a druid, and I’m part of the Magical Department.”

Druid, Gorsel.

“Nice to meet you!”

The minion of the demon worshiper appeared before Asel.

“Wow, this is delicious! It’s a taste you can’t easily find in my hometown!”

Gorsel exclaimed while eating ice cream from the café. Asel forced a smile and sipped his cold coffee, deep in thought.

‘Gorsel’s recent return must be to participate in the terror that will happen during the joint training.’

It was too coincidental to think of it as a mere coincidence.

There was no need to doubt it in the first place. The dark sorcerer had openly mentioned Gorsel’s name, and his name was clearly written in the orders and plans.

The possibility that the dark sorcerer was bluffing was ruled out. There was no reason for him to do so in that situation, and there was no reason to deceive with a plan that he couldn’t show to others.

Thus, the proposition that Gorsel was a demon worshiper remained unchanged.

He appeared to be a pure boy in front of him, but could his true nature be the same as his exterior?

“I’m glad it suits your taste.”

Asel spoke with a smile, trying to hide his doubts.

Gorsel also smiled brightly as he scooped up the ice cream.

“It’s so delicious! I can’t believe something like this exists!”

“Haha.”

“But, still, shouldn’t I pay for what I ate? If Asel pays for everything, that’s a bit…”

“It’s fine. Consider it the price for bumping into me.”

“Ugh… still…”

Gorsel mumbled as he swung his legs between the chairs. His cute demeanor caught the attention of the women in the café, who slowly turned their heads toward Asel and Gorsel.

“Oh my, there’s a cute gentleman and a handsome gentleman together. Doesn’t it look like a painting?”

“Right? Should we ask if they want to join us?”

The women’s murmurs reached Asel’s ears. However, despite hearing the compliment about being handsome, he gritted his teeth inwardly.

‘Why is he acting like that in front of another guy? Is he gay?’

Before being a demon worshiper, Asel’s fondness for Gorsel began to plummet as a fellow man. The moment their bodies touched, Asel felt a surge of electricity that twisted his insides.

“Hmm… then, Asel.”

Fortunately, Gorsel’s antics stopped just before Asel was about to lose it. He placed his spoon on the table and continued with an awkward expression.

“Could you tell me if you have any favorite items? I feel like it wouldn’t be right for a druid to just accept without giving something in return.”

“There’s no need for that.”

“But…”

Asel engaged in conversation with Gorsel while also discussing with Aleph.

‘Tonight at midnight, I’ll meet Gorsel at the rendezvous point. How can I prevent the terror that will happen at the academy?’

[If you think about why they are taking sacrifices, it’s simple. The most basic items needed for the demon’s descent are hundreds of living humans, heads, and souls. By sprinkling the remains or blood of a powerful being, they can fully descend.]

‘Hmm.’

[Gorsel will likely carry out the kidnapping for the final step. As you saw on the list, since they mentioned they could take just one of the candidates for the sacrifice, they must be trying to fulfill the final procedure of the descent through a young and remarkable individual.]

“So Asel…”

[And you are also one of those candidates, my lord.]

‘I understand.’

Asel nodded and lightly tapped Aleph’s presence with his fingertips.

‘I have a rough idea of what to do. Thank you.’

[You’re welcome.]

He chuckled at Aleph’s banter, finished his coffee, and abruptly stood up.

At that moment, Gorsel looked up at Asel with an awkward expression.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I was talking too much by myself.”

“It’s fine. You had quite a few interesting stories. The tale of the Green Ground, the organization created by druids, conducting large-scale hunts was impressive enough to pique my interest.”

“R-Really? Then could we talk a bit more?”

“That might be a bit difficult.”

As Asel glanced at the clock hanging in the café and forced a smile.

“I have another appointment. It seems I’ll have to promise to meet again. Please consider today as a repayment for bumping into me.”

“……I see. Understood.”

Gorsel openly showed his disappointment as he stood up. Asel didn’t even glance at him, paid for his drink, and left the café.

“Then, see you next time.”

“Yes, see you at the academy.”

The two exchanged greetings and moved toward their respective destinations.

“……”

Asel glared at the back of Gorsel’s green head, then reached out toward the dark alley where no sunlight penetrated.

……Tap.

In his outstretched hand was a black mask.

At midnight on Wednesday, when the joint training was to take place.

“……”

The masked man sat quietly in a bar located in a remote area of the academy grounds, waiting for time to pass.

There were quite a few other people in the bar. However, no one dared to even glance at the man.

‘Damn, look at the atmosphere. Is he a serial killer?’

‘I’ve never seen a normal person among those who hide their faces. If I touch him, I’ll be the one in trouble.’

The overwhelming aura emanating from the man was immense. Just sitting in a chair, ordering a beer, and remaining still made one feel as if all the vitality was being drained from their body just by looking at him.

Saaah…

It was due to the thick mana of the dark sorcerer that dominated the space. The mana, like a well-trained dog, gnawed away at the life force of those who cast their eyes upon its master and immediately brought down the hammer of punishment.

The man had not intended for this outcome.

However, it was a familiar act for dark sorcerers.

“……Hmm.”

He adjusted the position of the mask covering his face and sat in the chair, fidgeting as if waiting for someone. The bar owner didn’t dare tell someone who openly advertised himself as a dark sorcerer to leave, as it would ruin the taste of the drinks.

Ten minutes passed, and someone in a robe entered the bar. He briefly scanned the surroundings and plopped down across from the dark sorcerer.

“Sorry for being late.”

Under the robe, with a hint of green hair peeking out.

The druid spoke, exuding the scent of grass.

“There were circumstances.”

[……Circumstances?]

The dark sorcerer let out a hollow laugh at the druid’s excuse.

His voice was very strange. It sounded as if both an adult man and woman were speaking simultaneously, creating an alien sound that swam through the bar’s interior.

With irritation and dissatisfaction filling his voice, the movements of the customers who had been quietly observing the situation suddenly halted, and soon began to tremble like aspen leaves.

The voice of the sorcerer carried power. Depending on what thoughts, imagery, or emotions were contained within the voice, it could be perceived as very peaceful or horrifying by others.

The dark sorcerer’s voice was clearly the latter.

[You’re late, and that’s the best excuse you can come up with?]

“……If you were displeased, I apologize.”

Gorsel spoke in a low voice. The dark sorcerer chuckled and flicked his fingers on the table.

[Apologize only when I tell you to.]

“……What?”

The moment Gorsel questioned back.

Saaahhh…!

The darkness that had settled throughout the bar began to writhe as if it were a living being. Gorsel tried to react to that horrifying sight, but the dark sorcerer was even faster.

[First Commandment]

[My word is law.]

The magic was completed in an instant and manifested. The writhing darkness shot forth at subsonic speed, piercing Gorsel’s entire body like a spear.

"……!"

Gorsel contorted his face, attempting to retaliate against the sudden attack.

Thud.

The black magician gently grasped Gorsel's neck with a hand made of shadows and whispered.

[Apologize now.]

His voice was overflowing with blatant mockery and contempt.

[If you don't like it, I'll break your neck bones one by one.]

# 101 - Long Time No See!

"......This is too much, even for me."

The Formula Asel used was black magic, yet it was somehow ambiguously in-between.

Its origin lay in black magic, but instead of embracing Imagery, it was a simple, brute-force magic of defiance, relying solely on the caster's talent and ability.

Normally, the moment the Formula manifested, the caster's mind would be bleached white. But Asel's talent allowed him to use power beyond what he should have been capable of.

Knowledge of black magic gleaned from the Black magic grimoire. Combined with Asel's own new system of black magic, obtained by dissecting and studying the Formulas of black magicians he had met directly.

It was an absurd act that would make other black magicians foam at the mouth, but it was not impossible for Asel. The power of the Formula was also so immense that it could crush an ordinary building.

Twisting the mysteries of black magic that began with Imagery, a new Formula that replaced all power with only the Formula itself. Through repeated research, Asel had clearly realized how powerful this magic was.

If he wanted to, it wouldn't be difficult to tear Gorsel apart on the spot.

But instead of killing Gorsel, Asel merely pierced his entire body with sharp darkness and grabbed his neck.

Because he still had some use left.

'I can't kill Nom until I find out the location of the demon worshippers' hideout.'

In other words, from the moment he found out the location, he could dispose of Gorsel. Asel opened his mouth, eagerly awaiting that day.

"Too much?"

His voice was filled with contempt and annoyance.

"Do Druids have a tradition of shamelessly breaking appointments? What a great tradition."

"......I already apologized. I don't understand why you're overreacting like this."

Gorsel frowned, bleeding from his entire body.

"Are you perhaps a demonkin? Judging by how sensitive you are to appointments, there's a possibility you're one of them."

"......"

Instead of answering, Asel thought silently.

He knew the characteristics of the demonkin very well.

Byproducts created by demons, but traitors who betrayed them and sided with humanity. Specialized in various Sorcery and black arts, and more sensitive to promises and contracts than anyone else because they were traitors themselves.

So it was quite reasonable for Gorsel to misunderstand Asel, who kept bringing up the appointment, as a demonkin.

And Asel intended to use this immediately.

"......Let's get to the point."

By not refuting Gorsel's words and changing the subject, he would plant the implication in Gorsel's mind that the black magician was a demonkin.

Then he wouldn't even think that Asel and the black magician were the same person. Even if he suspected, it would be difficult to be certain.

It was a necessary step for a double identity. For Asel, who had been wondering how to manipulate his identity, it was an opportunity he couldn't afford to miss.

It was also a skill to pick up the pieces when the board was set so openly.

A demon worshipper and a demonkin black magician.

Asel drew a clear concept for his new identity and opened his mouth.

"I've read the plan for the academy terror attack."

He removed the darkness that had been piercing Gorsel. Gorsel groaned and stuffed a handful of dirt into his mouth.

Druids, the race of nature and earth, were able to restore their bodies by eating dirt like that.

In addition, the intensity of the pain they felt was also less than others. The reason why Gorsel didn't get angry even though Asel had slashed his entire body was partly because he realized how great Asel's magical ability was, but also because it didn't hurt that much.

Gorsel, who was looking down at his body that had become normal again, took Asel's share of beer and drank it before opening his mouth.

"How is it?"

"Terrible."

"......What?"

"Is that what you call a plan? I massacre a large number of citizens in the middle of the academy grounds, and the moment the professors who come to suppress me leave the training grounds, I kidnap the students? Even a child could come up with something better than this."

Gorsel's face contorted at the harsh criticism.

"This is the best I can do. The terror that can be done inside the academy is limited."

"Not my problem."

"......"

"Wasn't it your job to come up with the plan in the first place? I came to cooperate, not to rack my brains. And this plan. Isn't it too dangerous for me?"

"......Tsk."

"I'm fine with the massacre. But you want me to survive and escape while fighting off the incoming professors? Do you know how high the level of the academy professors is? The moment the Dean shows up, I'll die on the spot. I don't want to sacrifice myself for you."

"We have a collaborator planted on the professor side."

"Hoo."

The story he had been worried about popped out. He had been half-expecting it, but they had really planted a mole among the academy faculty. The demon worshippers' abilities were quite impressive.

"Who is it?"

"Do I have to tell you that?"

"It's a matter of trust."

Asel crossed his arms and leaned back against the backrest.

"How can I trust you?"

"You don't have to."

"Then it doesn't matter if I don't participate in the plan."

"......Why are you being so uncooperative? Didn't you have any intention of cooperating with us from the beginning?"

Gorsel frowned, openly expressing his displeasure and murderous intent. Asel chuckled at the killing intent that pricked his skin and raised both hands onto the table.

"I'd like to ask you the same question. Do you have any intention of cooperating?"

"......What?"

"You're telling me to jump into a death trap. I do the easy work, and you do the hard work. I have no risk of dying, but you might die."

"......"

"It's ridiculous that you thought I would sincerely participate in such a plan. Are you still young and your brain hasn't fully developed? Or were you born with a hole in your brain?"

"......Hoo."

Instead of refuting, Gorsel summoned a small wooden spear between his fingers and chanted in a low voice.

"Watch your mouth before I kill you."

"How absurd."

Asel burst into laughter.

"Is it because you were born an orphan in a dirt floor? Your intelligence seems to be stuck at the level of an infant."

The moment he said that.

Whoosh!!

Gorsel grabbed the spear he was holding in reverse and thrust it towards Asel's temple.

"......!"

—It was blocked midway. A shadow hand that sprang up from behind Asel grabbed Gorsel's wrist and forcibly stopped him.

Crack!!

"Kuaaaack!"

As the output of the shadow increased, Gorsel's wrist was compressed as it was. Broken bones pierced the skin, and tattered muscles and blood vessels were exposed.

The excruciating pain that even a Druid with pain resistance couldn't bear heated Gorsel's brain.

"You still don't know your place."

Beyond the monochrome black mask with no features drawn on it.

Asel looked straight at Gorsel and moved his lips.

"Do you think I'm below you because I'm playing along?"

Gurgle......!

The shadow writhed violently beneath his feet.

Immediately afterwards, dozens of shadow hands rose from the darkness. The hands wrapped around one of Gorsel's arms and tore it off as it was.

Tear!

Blood spurted out along with the torn arm. The Druid's unique greenish blood soared into the air, and Asel grabbed Gorsel's mouth, who was screaming, with his hand and threw him against the wall as it was.

"Cough!"

Bang!

With a huge roar, Gorsel's body broke through the wall and went forward.

A dark slum.

Gorsel, with one arm missing, was lying on the floor, panting heavily and sweating profusely.

Step by step.

Asel, with the moonlight behind him, walked towards Gorsel with calm steps.

The darkness swarming in all directions responded to Asel's will and blocked Gorsel's rear, changing its appearance sharply as if it had become a single spear blade and piercing Gorsel's instep.

"Kueueuk......!"

The surging blood splattered on Gorsel's face. It was impossible to even get up because of his fixed feet. He glared at Asel, who was approaching with a distorted face, and gnashed his teeth.

"Black magician......!"

"Your vitality is like a cockroach."

Asel burst into a sneer and stopped right in front of Gorsel. Then, he threw his torn arm roughly to the side and stepped on his head.

"The appearance is not much different either."

"Don't think you can get away with this! I will definitely make you pay the price for this!"

"How many people do you think have said that to me so far?"

"......!"

"I'll let you off if you guess right."

Crackle.

Asel muttered, putting strength into the foot that was stepping on Gorsel.

"Answer me."

"......Kueuk!"

"So you still have pride, huh?"

A strange voice that seemed to overlap genders pierced Gorsel's ears. It was a tone mixed with obvious mockery.

"Even though you look like a bug, you still have pride to protect. How ridiculous."

"......Heueu."

"If I leave you alone like this, you'll eat dirt and come back to life anyway. I didn't intend to kill you from the beginning."

Asel removed his foot from Gorsel's head, bent his knees, sat down, and grabbed his hair tightly.

"The plan is completely revised. I'll take care of it myself, so you just stay put and do nothing. That's more helpful."

"......Aren't you being too arrogant?"

"Arrogance is a word that suits you more, who is staring at me with your eyes wide open in front of me."

Gorsel didn't answer.

"Shut up and follow my words. You won't lose anything anyway."

"Aren't you afraid of the future? What if we don't cooperate when it's our turn to help you? Why are you using such a crude method?"

"Not my problem."

Asel had no intention of returning to the demon worshipper group that the black magician originally belonged to anyway. He was planning to find and destroy the hideout of the demon worshippers, including Gorsel, and then collect information as a wandering demon worshipper.

What happened to the demon worshippers later was not Asel's concern.

"However, I'll give you just one piece of advice."

Thud!

Asel muttered, slamming Gorsel's face into the floor.

"If you interfere with me, I'll kill you on the spot. Just stay put."

He didn't hear an answer. Asel got up as it was, walked past Gorsel, and walked away.

A moment later, the darkness that had filled the alley disappeared like a lie. The spear that had been piercing Gorsel's feet was also gone.

"......"

But instead of getting up, Gorsel was panting heavily and scratching the floor with his hands. Green blood was flowing from the torn skin.

"......I'll kill you."

He muttered, glaring with bloodshot eyes.

"I will definitely kill you."

It was at that moment.

Swish!

A fragment of the Formula that was still left severed one of Gorsel's legs. Gorsel screamed in terrible pain and rubbed the severed area on the floor to block it, and frantically ate dirt with his hands.

Asel was sitting on the rooftop of a nearby building where Gorsel had fallen, looking down at him.

"Aren't you going a bit too far?"

Aleph suddenly spoke. Asel adjusted the position of his mask and replied.

"I deliberately went too far. I needed to make sure he clearly engraved what kind of person the black magician is."

"If you do this, your notoriety will rise even among the demon worshippers."

"I don't care."

Asel breathed out into the air.

"It's even better if they come looking for me for being arrogant. They're all guys I have to kill anyway."

"......"

"Let's not lose our identity. I'm not a demon worshipper, but a parasite that steals their information. A parasite that kills the host as a bonus."

"Are you a beneficial insect?"

Aleph joked.

Asel chuckled and got up.

"I'm a pest to them."

His body was enveloped in darkness and disappeared.

Wednesday, 6 AM. 3 hours before the joint sparring begins.

"Thank you, Leader!"

"It's nothing. It's been a long time since we've reunited, so have a good time."

"Yes!"

Evelyn, who had moved through the rift, arrived at the academy grounds.

Author's words (Author's afterword)

Thank you so much for celebrating the 100th chapter.

I will try harder.

If you have any character illustrations you would like to see, please leave a comment!

(◞˃ᆺ˂)◞♡

# 102 - Long Time No See! (2)

A bridgehead leading into the academy grounds.

It was a short bridge that only allowed authorized merchants to pass, but it was built quite sturdily, considering the amount of goods they usually brought in. A large crowd was gathered on it.

"Please keep your places!"

"Please enter slowly! You can enter quickly only if you follow our instructions!"

"We would appreciate it if the families of the top students of each year would go to the professor on the left! You can enter immediately!"

The staff standing at the entrance to the academy grounds at the end of the bridge amplified their voices through magic.

"Wait, the families of the top students can enter immediately? Isn't this discrimination?"

"It's a perk for the top students."

Some nobles complained, but the academy staff didn't care.

They were already used to dealing with nobles. After working at the academy for years and clashing with nobles, no one was intimidated by their authority. The nobles seemed to know this, as they only grumbled and didn't genuinely get angry.

What could they do? It was their fault that their children didn't become the top students at the academy. He sighed deeply, looked at the still densely packed bridge, and clicked his tongue.

At that moment, a woman with black hair entered the straight queue reserved for the families of the top students.

A beautiful woman with an iron sparrow on her shoulder and bizarre spheres dangling from her waist.

She looked like a young noble at first glance. The clothes she was wearing were made of high-quality materials that were hard to find, and her hair was more vibrant than most nobles. Her face was also attractive, with a mix of sensuality and innocence.

"Hmm... I think this is the right place..."

However, unlike her appearance, her personality seemed very authoritarian.

It was obvious from the fact that she couldn't stand waiting in line like everyone else and cut to the side. It was possible that she was the family of a top student, but if that were the case, she wouldn't have come alone like this. She would have mobilized her entire family and entered the academy proudly.

'Seems like a lower-class noble. Her personality is already twisted at such a young age. The future of her family is obvious.'

The noble man clicked his tongue and grabbed the woman's shoulder as she passed by.

"Hiyak!"

The woman was startled and slapped the hand on her shoulder with her palm.

"No! Don't do that! I don't like it!"

"You're making a ridiculous misunderstanding, young lady."

The man frowned unpleasantly and withdrew his hand. The woman breathed threateningly and placed her hand on the metal sphere hanging from her waist.

"W-What are you doing in broad daylight!"

"...How old do you think I am to lust after a young woman like you, young lady? I was just trying to give you some advice."

"...Advice?"

"Do you see this line? These people have been waiting since dawn to enter the academy. But what are you doing not keeping in line? That path is not allowed for you, but only for the families of the academy's top students. Go back to the end of the line."

"...?"

The woman tilted her head at the man's words.

"Then is it okay for me to go this way?"

"...What?"

The man asked back in a dumbfounded voice.

"Ah, you've arrived."

One of the professors standing at the end of the bridge had already approached the woman and had a welcoming smile on her face. The woman flinched as if surprised by her sudden appearance, but relaxed when she realized that the professor was smaller than her.

"...Who are you?"

"I'm a professor at the academy. My name is Mari. I'm currently in charge of guiding the families of the top students who are trying to enter the academy. Are you Evelyn, by any chance?"

"Ah, yes."

Evelyn nodded. The sparrow sitting on her shoulder made a cute sound and flapped its wings.

Mari looked at the sparrow with admiration for a moment, then seemed to come to her senses and guided Evelyn.

"Asel's sister, confirmed. You can go inside and unpack your luggage in the accommodation we have prepared, or you can go sightseeing until the sparring starts. What would you like to do?"

"Uh, uh..."

Evelyn's eyes rolled around at the more extreme hospitality than she had expected.

She had lived comfortably in Wiheim, but she had never lived with someone waiting on her. Rather, she was more often the one waiting on others.

Perhaps that was why Evelyn was so unfamiliar with the situation of someone bowing down to her...

And Mari, who lived by reading the professors' expressions, quickly understood what Evelyn was thinking.

She smiled gently and naturally took the luggage bag from Evelyn's hand.

"If you're having trouble deciding, how about doing as we recommend for now?"

"Ah, ah! Yes, yes! Then I'll do that!"

"Okay. Then please follow me."

Mari smiled at Evelyn once and then took her luggage bag and walked towards the inside of the academy. Evelyn hesitantly followed her.

The staff guarding the entrance to the academy immediately cleared the way as soon as Mari appeared.

"...Well, well."

The man who had been meddling with Evelyn scratched his empty head in embarrassment as he watched the scene.

"Kyaaak! My eyes!"

The young lady standing behind him screamed at the sudden glare.

"Wow... this is the academy..."

Evelyn exclaimed as she walked around the academy grounds with Mari.

Stylish tiles. Trees and streetlights installed at intervals. Lively shops and academy students running around busily.

It didn't have the mysterious atmosphere of Wiheim. It wasn't leisurely either. But the freshness and vibrancy unique to school life were everywhere. It was an atmosphere that Evelyn liked.

Evelyn didn't dislike the calm but free-spirited, mysterious but closed-off atmosphere of Wiheim that much. Rather, she liked it, there was no reason to dislike it. No matter what anyone said, her hometown was now Wiheim.

Still... her personal taste was more suited to the academy.

Talking about assignments with friends, complaining that classes were difficult, falling in love with someone. She preferred that kind of peaceful, novel-like atmosphere.

It couldn't be helped, since she had been living with old wizards who were much older than she looked.

However, she didn't particularly want to enter the academy.

It was better to study only the subjects she was interested in at Wiheim than to learn unnecessary subjects. And the Magical Engineering taught by the academy professors didn't seem to be more impressive than the engineers who had been in Wiheim for over a hundred years.

'It's enough if Asel is happy. There's no need for me to enter the academy too.'

Evelyn thought so and gently stroked the sparrow sitting on her shoulder. The sparrow made a pleasant sound and rubbed its head against Evelyn's finger.

"This is where you can use as your accommodation."

After chatting with Mari for a while, a tall hotel came into view.

The exterior was quite fancy, but Evelyn, who was used to Ena's mansion, wasn't that surprised to see the hotel.

"Let's go inside."

She followed Mari, who had entered the hotel, and walked in.

In the lobby on the first floor of the hotel, various dignitaries who had already arrived were seated. Vampires with pale skin and white hair, dukes with red hair, grand mages from the Aurora Magic Tower academy branch, blonde nobles boasting muscular bodies like orcs, and more.

"..."

"Hmm. A young girl!"

Some of them glanced at Evelyn, who had entered the hotel following Mari. Evelyn felt their gaze and hiccuped.

But she didn't show any signs of nervousness.

After all, she was visiting the academy as Asel's family and guest.

If she was intimidated by others in this place, it could also harm Asel. So Evelyn deliberately whistled and passed by the muscular giant. The giant stared down at the top of Evelyn's head and then chuckled and turned his head away.

"The people who use this hotel are the families of the top and second students, and those who have already booked several days of stay."

"I, I see."

"As it is a place full of precious people, the service is also prepared luxuriously enough to satisfy even high-ranking nobles. So you are free to use all the facilities in this hotel."

"Ah, aha! That's great! I like it!"

Evelyn shouted in an exaggerated voice. Mari chuckled and handed Evelyn the card she had received from the hotel staff.

"The room number written on the card is Evelyn-nim's room. To enter, simply hold the card over the recognition device in front of the room. You can also use the card when using the facilities..."

Mari handed Evelyn her luggage bag and smiled.

"Welcome to the academy. I hope you have a comfortable stay and make good memories with your younger sibling."

"Yes, yes! Thank you!"

"Then I'll be on my way. There are about 2 hours left until the sparring starts, so you are free to do as you please until then."

But.

Mari added that and said in a serious voice.

"Do not go to the back alleys of the academy grounds. There was an illegal intrusion by a black magician just yesterday."

"H-Heeeek! Intrusion?!"

Evelyn's eyes widened. Mari nodded.

"Yes. I don't know how or where they came in, but many people witnessed it directly. They said they used black magic through shadows or darkness. We are currently trying to locate them, and we have also increased security, but... we have not yet found their exact whereabouts. It is possible that they have already left the academy."

"Hieeek..."

"Anyway, please avoid dark or secluded places as much as possible. Our guards are blocking all the paths leading to the back alleys, so you won't get lost, but please be careful."

"I, I'll keep that in mind."

"Thank you. As I mentioned earlier, how about arranging a sightseeing course and going with a guide?"

"Uh, uh... I'll just go meet my younger sibling right away..."

"Okay. If you want to meet your younger sibling, you should probably head straight to the academy's main building. Then have a pleasant trip."

Mari bowed politely to Evelyn and then left the hotel. Evelyn saw her off, then went into the room written on the card and quickly unpacked her luggage.

She didn't bring much. Clothes and underwear to change into for a few days, a gift for Asel, and Magical Engineering items to show off were all she had.

She stood in front of the mirror, checked her appearance one last time, and smiled brightly.

"Alright! Perfect! I can't show him an ugly side of me after seeing him for the first time in a while!"

Evelyn touched her soft cheeks as if kneading dough, then took her card and left the hotel room.

At the same time, a young man with black hair appeared from the room across the hall.

"Oh?"

He was wearing a black uniform and coat, and he tilted his head when he saw Evelyn coming out of the room at the same time as him.

"The room across the hall was supposed to be empty? Did you check in today?"

"Ah, yes. My family is at the academy..."

Evelyn replied with an awkward smile.

The young man nodded as if he understood, and stared at Evelyn with lifeless eyes.

"If you're a family member staying here... you must have a top or second student as family. Wow, that's amazing!"

"Ehehe! It's nothing! My younger sibling is just a bit amazing!"

Evelyn was the type of person who reacted indifferently to compliments about herself, but was happy to hear compliments about Asel.

She was a typical younger sibling fanatic.

"They're the top student of the Magical Department, no less! And a freshman! Do you know how surprised I was when I heard that?"

"The top student of the Magical Department? A freshman?"

The young man asked with wide eyes.

"Then... could it be Asel, the disciple of The Beginning?"

"Yes! They're my younger sibling!"

"No way! I'm a huge fan of The Beginning! To think I'd meet the older sibling of their disciple in a place like this. It's an honor!"

The young man made a fuss and reached out his hand to Evelyn. Evelyn shook his hand energetically and smiled triumphantly.

"Hehe. I'm also The Beginning's personal maid!"

"Heeok!! I'm so jealous! I want to be a butler too!"

"No can do."

"You're too firm."

The young man said that, then suddenly remembered something and made a sound of "Ah," and let go of Evelyn's hand.

"Come to think of it, I'm late with my introduction."

He tore his lips into a wide smile and greeted Evelyn with the etiquette of a noble.

"My name is Villeje."

"That's an unusual name. I'm Evelyn."

"Evelyn. That's a pretty name. Just like Asel."

"Our names are pretty, aren't they?"

Evelyn laughed.

Instead of answering, the young man hid his hands behind his back and smiled.

...Crackle.

Some of the rotten flesh fell to the floor with a thud.

# 103 - Long Time No See! (3)

Bilje left after having a conversation with Evelyn, saying he had something to do first. Evelyn greeted him and immediately headed toward the academy.

“...He was a bit unsettling, wasn’t he?”

Evelyn mumbled as she stroked the head of the sparrow perched on her shoulder. The sparrow nodded vigorously, as if agreeing with her.

There was something quite twisted about the man's praise for Asel and the admiration he showed for Ena.

She forced a bright smile in front of him, but inside, she was busy planning how to distance herself from him.

Fortunately, since he left first, there was no need for awkward lies, but regardless, she never wanted to see him again. Just thinking of those lifeless eyes sent chills down her spine.

“His face is ugly! It’s disgusting!”

[Chirp! Chirp!]

“Right? You think so too?”

As she continued to walk while chatting with the sparrow, Evelyn suddenly realized that the people around her were looking at her strangely, causing her face to turn bright red as she hurried her steps.

Before long, she arrived at the entrance of the academy. The guards stationed at the gate politely asked her as she approached.

“Where are you headed?”

“Um... I came to meet my younger brother. Professor Mari said I could meet him at the academy...”

“May I ask your younger brother's name?”

“Asel.”

“I see. Could you please show me the invitation sent from the academy?”

Evelyn complied with the guard's request.

The invitation, with the academy's seal clearly visible. After verifying the authenticity of the invitation through a magical artifact, the guard stepped aside to let her enter the academy.

“Verification complete. Have a pleasant tour of the academy.”

“Thank you! But, um... where would be the quickest way to meet Asel?”

“Well, the duel is about to start soon, so it would be best to head toward the waiting room. The guards will be stationed at the entrance, and if you show the invitation like you did now, you can enter as the family of the first and second place students.”

“Ah...”

“Of course, you will have to leave once the duel starts. Until then, you are free to wander around.”

“Thank you! Bless you!”

Evelyn passed by the guard with a bright smile.

At that moment, the guard shyly grabbed her shoulder and spoke.

“Um... do you, do you have a boyfriend?”

“Ugh.”

Caught off guard by the sudden question, Evelyn frowned and gently brushed the guard's hand away.

“I’m sorry. I’ll just live alone unless I find a man who is more handsome and charming than my brother...”

“...”

“Well then.”

Evelyn bowed her head slightly and followed the map drawn on the invitation toward the waiting room, humming a tune.

Two hours before the joint year duel began.

Asel sat in the first-year waiting room, staring blankly at the ceiling. He had a lot on his mind.

The outcome of the duel was honestly predictable. It was true that Hamon was strong, but he wasn’t strong enough to reach Asel. If Asel set his mind to it, he could finish it in just a few minutes.

There was no need to exert himself. Due to the rules of the duel, high-level magic couldn’t be used, but even manifesting several mid-level spells would be enough to overwhelm Hamon.

It was a pity, but Asel didn’t even consider him a worthy opponent. The moment he fought seriously, it was clear that Hamon wouldn’t even have a chance to swing his sword before kneeling.

However, Asel had no intention of ending the duel so easily.

Rather than worrying about the duel itself, he was contemplating the fruits he could gain from it.

‘The last ingredient needed for the Demon Summoning Ritual was the blood or soul of a young sorcerer.’

Asel remembered Aleph’s words.

A high-ranking demon capable of devastating the surroundings just by descending, not merely manifesting. To summon him into this world, Gorsel and the dark sorcerers had planned to create chaos at the academy and kidnap students.

That was the plan. Asel had intervened midway, causing both the terror and the kidnapping to fail. Thanks to that, the way to obtain the last ingredient to summon the demon had vanished.

And Asel, strangely enough, felt the need to find that method he had directly eliminated.

He had no intention of summoning a demon. But at the very least, he needed to maintain appearances. To blend in with the demon worshippers and to deal with the vessel of the demon just before its summoning.

That said, he had no intention of kidnapping someone or extracting blood or causing bodily harm. Unless the opponent was an exceptionally vile villain. Finding a villain in the middle of the academy was practically impossible.

So, there was only one method available.

If he couldn’t rely on others, he had no choice but to depend on himself.

‘If I deliberately cut off a finger during the duel and take the blood I’ve prepared in advance, that should suffice to maintain appearances. After all, it’s the body and blood of a young and great sorcerer.’

[Setting yourself up like that aside, are you sure about this?]

Aleph, who had been tucked away in his arms, reacted to Asel’s thoughts.

[Even if it’s just a finger, losing a part of your body comes with great pain. I know it’s possible to regenerate, but isn’t this a bit too reckless...?]

‘There’s no other way. I can’t just ask others for blood or a part of their body.’

[That’s true, but... sigh.]

Aleph sighed deeply and grumbled.

[Personally, I don’t want to see you get hurt, Master. Especially if the opponent isn’t that strong.]

‘Don’t be so dramatic.’

[I apologize. Due to my nature, I can’t harbor any feelings for anyone other than you. So, I can’t help but feel displeased at the thought of you getting hurt.]

Asel smiled wryly at Aleph’s words.

As she said, she didn’t have feelings for anyone but Asel. Neither positive nor negative.

But when it came to matters related to Asel, it was possible for her to have some feelings about the situation, even if faintly.

And this was exactly one of those moments.

Aleph didn’t hide her displeasure and expressed it openly.

[I’ll let it slide this time, but from now on, make sure you never get hurt on purpose. Do you understand, Master?]

‘Yeah. I promise. Unless it’s a special situation like this, I won’t get hurt on purpose.’

[Even in special situations, I want you to avoid that. Silly Master.]

Instead of answering, Asel chuckled and lowered his head. At that moment, Elena, who had been sitting next to him, suddenly thrust her head in front of Asel’s face.

Elena stared intently into Asel’s black eyes and opened her mouth cutely.

“Wah!”

“Why?”

Asel replied in a flat tone while gazing into Elena’s blood-red pupils. Then Elena puffed her cheeks and playfully tapped Asel’s arm.

“What’s up? Your reaction is boring. Be surprised!”

“I’m so surprised. I’m shaking in fear.”

“...Do you want to die?”

“Gah! Just spare me!”

“No way! Waaah!”

Elena plopped down on Asel’s thigh with a blank expression and leaned her head against his neck.

At that moment, Grace, who was also sitting next to Asel, forcefully pulled Elena away from him by grabbing her shirt.

Startled by the rough touch, Elena shrank back, and Grace looked down at her, clicking her tongue.

“What are you doing in a place where there are other people? Keep your distance.”

Her tone was cold, the complete opposite of how she usually spoke to Asel. But Elena wasn’t going to stay quiet.

She brushed off the part of her clothes that Grace had touched with a cold expression and glared at Grace with her blood-red pupils.

“...Don’t touch my body without permission. I never allowed you to.”

“...Ha. Ridiculous. Did you allow Asel to touch you? Why?”

“Why should I tell you that? Were we that close?”

Elena sneered and sat back down next to Asel.

“I don’t think I need to report what happened between me and Asel to you. You’re not even Asel’s girlfriend, so why should I?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Mosquitoes are swarming around Asel, so I have to deal with them somehow. Do you think nothing will happen if I leave them alone?”

“...Mosquitoes?”

“Oh my, look at your expression. You’re going to stab me to death like that.”

Grace, seeing Elena’s fierce expression, lightly wrapped her arm around Asel’s.

“Go ahead, you little brat. If you’re confident.”

“...You’re getting too cocky. Do you think you can act like that toward a True Ancestor and get away with it? I’ve marked you. Humans stay out of this.”

“Your tone has changed, huh? Are you dropping the pretense now? That’s more mosquito-like and sounds better. Buzz buzz.”

Elena’s expression vanished at Grace’s words, which were said with a smile.

...Drip, drip,

A pool of blood began to form at her feet. Grace stared at the scene and placed her hand on the hilt of her sword at her waist.

“Stop, stop it. Why are you fighting?”

At that moment, Asel, who had been quietly observing the situation, shouted as he pressed down on both of their heads.

Then they both leaned toward Asel, as if they had made a promise, and made sheepish expressions.

“Sorry... just let it slide this once...”

“It wasn’t intentional. P-please don’t dislike me.”

“...Hah.”

Ellen, who had been meditating in a corner of the waiting room, sighed at the sight of the two who had suddenly turned from predators to prey. Celine shook her head, looking exasperated.

‘To think that such people are the top of the Knight Department and the second place of the Magical Department. This year’s first years are doomed. I should have been second place.’

As Celine subtly raised herself up, trying to refine her mana one last time before the duel began.

Creeeak.

The tightly closed waiting room door opened, and someone peeked their head in.

The waiting room where Asel was was a special room prepared for the top and second place students.

Everyone who was supposed to come in had already entered, and as far as Asel knew, there were no additional people joining. Just as Asel turned his head toward the door, wondering if it was someone related to the academy.

“Ah, there you are!”

A woman who looked just like him locked eyes with him.

“Um...”

Asel felt his head go blank at the sudden appearance of a familiar face. But his mouth instinctively moved.

“Sister?”

“It’s been a while! My little brother!!”

As soon as she spotted Asel, Evelyn burst through the door and entered the waiting room, pulling Asel into a hug. Asel let out a muffled sound as he was attacked by the massive lump of flesh covering his face, and he patted Evelyn’s back.

Misinterpreting that as a request for a tighter hug, Evelyn squeezed Asel even harder.

“...Sister?”

“Gasp, is that your sister-in-law?”

The two people sitting next to him murmured quietly as they looked at Evelyn.

# 104 - 7th Rank

“I knew my family was coming…”

Asel sighed deeply, looking down at Evelyn, who had naturally settled on his lap.

“Couldn’t you at least tell me you were coming?”

“I wanted to surprise you!”

“…Yeah, I was surprised.”

Asel shook his head and rested his chin on the top of Evelyn’s head. Her familiar scent lingered at the tip of his nose.

It was a scent he had smelled so much that he was sick of it until just a few years ago. But after not seeing her for only a few months, it felt incredibly welcoming. It felt like coming home.

“Ehehe. That tickles, Asel.”

Evelyn felt Asel’s breath and giggled softly. At the same time, she also brought one of Asel’s hands near her face and placed it on her cheek.

Evelyn was just as happy to see him.

She was the only blood relative left in this world. There was no reason to dislike him, but there were plenty of reasons to cherish him. To Evelyn, Asel was someone she had to protect and her whole life. From the time they ran away together from their parents until now.

Asel’s presence in Evelyn’s heart had always been constant.

“How have you been?”

“I’ve been fine… How about you, Sis? I heard you started learning Magical Engineering.”

“Ehehe. Pale is teaching me herself!”

Pale, huh.

It was a name that remained in Asel’s memory. Surely, it was the name of a mage who had achieved a high position within Wiheim solely through Magical Engineering.

The value of the things she had invented herself was so great that it was worth hundreds of gold coins. The first self-propelled carriage and Wiheim’s special Messenger bird were also made by her.

The fact that Evelyn, her disciple, made a delicate sparrow-shaped Messenger bird was probably thanks to Pale’s great help.

“Pale recently left Wiheim for a while to make a self-floating hot air balloon. That’s why I had the time to come find you!”

“Is she strict?”

“…A little? But, she’s a good person.”

Asel chuckled at Evelyn’s words, which were accompanied by cold sweat.

Everyone in Wiheim already knew that Pale had a quirky personality. Nevertheless, the fact that she was defending her like that meant that she was treating Evelyn well in her own way.

‘That “in her own way” is probably based on Pale’s standards, though…’

Still, he was relieved that she didn’t seem to be getting bullied.

Asel thought so and levitated Evelyn’s body with Telekinesis Magic, carefully sitting her down in the empty seat.

Even with the sudden flight, Evelyn didn’t panic and kept her balance.

She had already done so much flying in Wiheim that she was sick of it. Asel had forcibly grabbed Evelyn, who was resting in the garden, and made her do head spins dozens of times, saying he wanted to get a feel for the Telekinesis Formula. It was enough time for her to get used to Asel’s magic.

“Ah, right. Asel! Is your body okay? You almost died recently!”

Evelyn, who had been sitting on the chair and dusting off her clothes, suddenly jumped up from her seat at the thought. Then, she ran towards Asel.

She had just sat down, but she took her place on his lap again. Asel forcibly grabbed Evelyn’s hand, which was unbuttoning his clothes, and said.

“I’m fine. Didn’t I already explain everything?”

“I can’t believe it until I see it with my own eyes. How many times have you hidden your injuries?”

“……”

At a loss for words, Asel stopped resisting and waited patiently until Evelyn was satisfied. Without hesitation, Evelyn took off Asel’s shirt and carefully examined his skin.

“…Haa.”

“……”

As time passed in that state, Asel could feel the gazes of the two people sitting next to him becoming increasingly ferocious. Asel felt a strange chill when he saw a stream of saliva flowing from Grace’s lips.

“Hmm… You really are fine.”

Fortunately, Evelyn’s physical examination ended quickly. She put Asel’s clothes back on him and flicked him on the forehead.

“Don’t get hurt recklessly from now on! If you get hurt without my permission, I’m really going to get angry!”

“…It’s not like I can control it.”

“Tsk!”

Evelyn made a stern voice and poked Asel’s lips with her finger. Asel smiled bitterly and reluctantly nodded.

“I’ll try my best.”

Asel didn’t bother to tell her that he was going to cut off one of his fingers in the sparring match in a few hours. It was better for everyone that way.

After the conversation with Evelyn ended, Asel left the waiting room under the pretext of going to the bathroom for a moment.

As soon as he did, only women were left in the waiting room. Asel, the only person she was close to, disappeared, and Evelyn immediately shrank into a corner and took out the sparrow she had been keeping in her arms.

[Chirp chirp.]

Just as she was about to talk to her own creation.

“Evelyn!”

“Sister!”

“Hoe?”

Grace and Elena, who had been quiet until now, took their places next to Evelyn. Evelyn shrank back at the sight of the two people, who exuded an obviously luxurious atmosphere.

“O-Oh… Why are you doing this…”

“There’s no need to be scared! My name is Elena! Asel’s closest friend!”

“A-Asel’s friend…?”

“Yes!”

Elena smiled brightly and gently grabbed one of Evelyn’s hands. Evelyn gasped at the cold touch.

“I want to get close to you too, Sister! If you’re Asel’s sister, you must be a good person!”

“…Th-Thank you, but unlike Asel, I can’t use any magic…”

“Hey, that doesn’t matter at all! I just like you as a person!”

“…We just met, though?”

“…Oh, um…”

Elena’s mouth was momentarily blocked by Evelyn’s appropriate remark.

Taking advantage of the gap, Grace spoke to Evelyn this time.

“Nice to meet you. My name is Grace, the daughter of the Baidel Duchy. I am very pleased to meet Evelyn.”

“…Y-Yes…”

“I never imagined that I would meet Asel’s family in a place like this. As a result, it seems difficult to give you proper treatment. If it’s okay with you, would you like me to treat you separately after the sparring match is over?”

“Ah, no.”

It was an immediate answer. Grace’s beautiful smile cracked. Evelyn moved slowly next to Ellen with a sullen expression. Ellen flinched at Evelyn’s sudden approach.

Evelyn hid behind the small Ellen and said.

“Ah, I don’t think we’re that close yet… I’m a little uncomfortable with nobles…”

“…I’m a noble too.”

Ellen blurted out. Evelyn looked down at Ellen and muttered in a small voice.

“…You look like me when I was young. That… To be exact, your physique…”

“……”

Ellen began to seriously consider how to respond to her words. Objectively speaking, is it a compliment that a beautiful woman says that she has a similar physique to her childhood, or is she mocking her for being scrawny?

Ellen couldn’t find the right answer…

“I’m not a noble.”

At that time, Celine, who had been quiet, sat next to Evelyn and whispered. Evelyn reacted like a cat, making a hiyak! sound.

“I was born in the slums too.”

“R-Really?”

“Yes. My mom was a prostitute, and I don’t know who my dad is. Even my mom died because of some strange Corpse Sorcerer.”

“My parents tried to eat me alive! In the literal sense!”

“Ah, that happens a lot.”

“……”

Grace and Elena listened to the conversation between the two with their mouths open. It was a topic of conversation that was hard for them to imagine.

In that way, the waiting room was divided into two people who seemed to have lost their souls, Ellen who was contemplating, and Celine and Evelyn who were talking.

“…What is this.”

Asel, who had returned from the bathroom, frowned as he looked at them.

Before he knew it, time had passed and the start of the sparring match was imminent. Evelyn returned to the spectator seats that had been prepared in advance according to the procedure, and Asel stared at the screen set up on one side of the waiting room as he waited for his turn.

The scenery inside the sparring arena, captured by the Brilliance Formula Magical artifact, was copied and projected onto the screen. Thanks to this, it was possible to watch the sparring match here without having to go to the sparring arena.

[……Hoo.]

The figures of a first-year student and a second-year student began to appear on the screen.

Unlike the first-year student, who was obviously full of tension, the second-year student’s face was full of composure.

It was only natural. Unlike them, who had already had a sparring match last year, everything was a new experience for the first-year students. Of course, they couldn’t help but be nervous.

[Both sides, take your stance. The sparring match will begin the moment the gold coin falls to the floor.]

Soon, the professor in charge of the moderator spoke in a serious voice and inserted a gold coin between his fingers.

Then, without hesitation, he flicked it.

Ting!!

The gold coin, which rose with a clear sound, rotated and fell downwards. Watching the gold coin that crossed their vision, the two prepared for battle.

Thud.

The moment the coin touched the floor.

[Ice Spear]

[Earthquake]

The two people, who had learned different types of magic, activated their magic at the same time.

Asel watched the two people’s battle with an interested gaze and his eyes sparkled.

Conflicts between other mages, except for himself, always inspired him.

This was exactly the case. Instead of the familiar Freezing Magic, Asel carefully observed the Earth-based Formula and drew a rough map of the Formula in his head to understand the mysteries.

But before he could be satisfied, the sparring match was over.

[I-I lost.]

After about 10 minutes, the first match ended with the bloodied first-year student declaring surrender.

Cheers and cries of regret were heard in equal measure from the audience seats. The scene of the two students who had finished the sparring match shaking hands warmly was shown on the screen.

After that, similar patterns continued. The first-year students lost, and the second-year students continued to win.

[Yay! I won, Asel!]

Elena, who had participated in the middle, also crushed her opponent, but that was the first and last victory for the first-year students. After her, only news of defeat was heard one after another.

As time passed like that.

“Asel. It’s your turn.”

Asel’s sparring turn had come.

Author’s words

(˵ •̀ ᴗ - ˵ ) ✧

# 105 - 7th Rank (2)

"Hamon Yankov."

Hamon, who was sitting in the waiting room, turned his head at the sound of his name being called.

In the waiting room, where the top and second-ranked students were gathered, a second-year student who had just won a duel was cheering, his figure reflected on the screen.

While everyone’s gaze was fixed on the screen, Hamon was not among them.

This was because the professor in charge of the duel had slightly opened the waiting room door and gestured toward him. Hamon realized why he was being called and forced a wry smile.

"Yes."

After a brief response, he grabbed the sword that was nearby and walked toward the professor. Only then did a few of those sitting in the waiting room notice Hamon's movement and turn their heads.

Among them was Hamon's fiancée. With her lavender hair, she whispered softly to him.

"Hey, do your best."

"Thank you."

As Hamon passed her, he gave her a gentle pat on the head before leaving the waiting room. The professor, leaning against the door, looked down at him and said,

"The next duel is your turn. Are you ready?"

"Yes. I will head to the duel arena right away."

"Good."

Their conversation ended there. There were no cheers or words of comfort exchanged. Instead, the professor gave his shoulder a couple of light pats.

Although the professor cared for Hamon, who was diligent and talented, the opponent was simply too formidable. Both of them knew well how the duel would end.

After all, he was the direct disciple of a grand sorcerer. A being so extraordinary that it left deep scars in the sky, raised by a sorcerer representing the heavens, a monster beyond monsters.

No matter how hard he tried, Hamon, who was merely running on the ground, could never reach Asel, who flew in the sky. Both the professor and Hamon were painfully aware of this fact.

However, Hamon did not feel intimidated.

In order to leave a deep wound on the bird that soared in the sky, he had sharpened his claws over the past few weeks.

He was confident that he would be satisfied just by not missing the opportunity when it came.

‘Winning would be even better, but…’

If that were to happen, what would be the point of effort? Hamon wore a wry smile as he stood firmly at the entrance to the duel arena, guided by the professor.

In his line of sight, he caught a glimpse of Asel, who stood far away, just like him. With an icy expression, he seemed to be checking his formulas, manifesting countless spells into the air.

The magic was so vividly powerful that it felt chilling, even from a distance.

The more he looked, the more impressive it became.

"When the announcer calls, you can enter right away. Until then, feel free to stay."

"…."

"…Hamon?"

When the professor called Hamon's name, he finally snapped back to reality and bowed his head toward the professor.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I was lost in thought for a moment."

"…Alright."

The professor noticed that Hamon's attention had been momentarily focused on Asel and wore a wry smile.

After giving Hamon’s shoulder one last pat, he stepped outside the entrance.

"Good luck."

"Thank you."

Hamon replied formally and took a long breath. He felt his pounding heart begin to settle somewhat. He did not stop there; he relaxed his grip on the sword and closed his eyes to find his calm.

[First-year Magical Department top student Asel.]

[Second-year overall top student Hamon Yankov.]

[Both sides enter.]

Not long after, the announcer called the two names. Hamon opened his eyes, put on a serious expression, and stepped into the duel arena. At the same time, Asel walked out from the opposite side.

"…."

Asel sensed Hamon's gaze and slightly lowered his head. Hamon responded with a smile and turned to his family sitting in the audience.

Fortunately, his family was all present. His fiancée's family was also seated nearby. Hamon bowed to them, showing the etiquette of nobility.

Then, a thunderous cheer erupted. Taking advantage of the chaos, Asel sent a small lightning flower toward Evelyn, who was sitting in the audience.

A beautiful, deep blue flower that posed no problem to touch. It was a product drawn forth through pure mana manipulation without the aid of a formula.

This caused a stir among those sitting around Evelyn. Meanwhile, Evelyn simply hugged the flower and smiled brightly.

[Both sides to their positions.]

After the two had finished greeting the distinguished guests, the announcer spoke. Asel and Hamon immediately took their designated positions and looked at each other.

An awkward silence enveloped the two. After a moment, Hamon smiled and spoke first.

"Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too."

Asel accepted his greeting with a smile.

Cheers erupted from the audience, filled with warmth for the duel.

It was a battle between the top students. The faces of those who had been indifferent to previous duels were now filled with anticipation and interest. However, despite the weight of their expectations, there was no sign of pressure on the faces of the two combatants.

[Hamon Yankov, the swordsman, is prohibited from using lethal techniques; Asel, the sorcerer, is prohibited from using high-level magic. The outcome of the duel will be determined when one side is incapacitated, surrenders, or when I deem it excessive. Please be aware.]

After explaining the rules of the duel, the announcer placed a gold coin between his fingers.

[Then, let’s begin.]

And without hesitation, he flicked it.

Ting!!

The gold coin made a cheerful sound as it soared into the sky. The coin, unable to defy gravity, quickly plummeted toward the ground.

For the audience, it was a fleeting moment. But both Asel and Hamon were superhumans capable of splitting that moment to observe it.

As the coin passed in front of them, both prepared their respective attacks.

The moment the coin touched the ground.

[Destruction of the Purple Blossom.]

[Thunder Bow.]

Kwahhhhhh!!!

The clash of sword and lightning filled the duel arena with a tremendous roar.

The announcer, who had not expected such a display from the very beginning, stiffened slightly, and before the thick smoke cleared, he transformed into a serpent and lunged toward Hamon.

[Serpent of Mist.]

A serpent made of smoke coiled around Hamon's body. Hamon grimaced as he began to crush the serpent that was tightening around his arm.

"Is that… a smoke formula?"

"Weren't they called the Disciples of Creation? Why is he using Yeonri's magic?"

"Could it be that the strict Irina taught magic to someone else's disciple?"

The faces of the sorcerers sitting in the audience stiffened as they saw Asel using the mist formula. Only Ermina, who knew his magical abilities accurately, chuckled and shouted loudly.

"Hey! Use the Holy Formula too! Show everything you can!"

"Ah, Ermina!"

Angelica, who was sitting next to her, tried to calm the excited Ermina, but Ermina would not be stopped.

"This is a place of proof! Show those who have only heard rumors about you what you're capable of!"

Her shout reached Asel's ears clearly. He chuckled and decided to grant Ermina's wish.

[Application of the Holy Formula.]

"That's right, you!"

[Combination of Elemental Formula.]

[Double Chant.]

[Double Stars.]

"That’s…!"

"That magic is quite similar to Lady Ermina’s… Could it be…!!"

The faces of the sorcerers turned pale as they sensed the flow of Asel's mana.

Electrification Art, Smoke Formula. Following that, the flow of mana continued into the Holy Formula, all too smoothly.

The transformation of the formulas was so free that it did not feel like different types of magic.

He even combined the Holy Formula with the Elemental Formula. Those sorcerers who understood how absurd that was could no longer sit still and began to stand up to observe the duel. The audience around them grumbled, but they shouted back at the spectators.

"You know nothing! That boy over there is doing something—"

The moment the white-haired sorcerer uttered those words, he felt a chill run down his spine and immediately turned to gaze at the duel arena.

What he saw was—

"…Hoh."

A small red and black double star crossing the sky.

[Black Flame Star Advance.]

Whoosh!!!

The overwhelming heat of the double star seemed to distort space as it charged toward Hamon. Hamon gritted his teeth and thrust his sword toward the center where the double star was maintained.

Boom!!

The impact from forcibly severing the connection of the formula created a massive shockwave.

Hamon's body was pushed back, and Asel caught the dispersing mana and reclaimed it.

Normally, it would have been impossible for Hamon to disrupt Asel's magic. How could he break a formula that did not care about the interference of grand sorcerers?

However, thanks to Asel adjusting the low point of the formula and intentionally making the connection unstable, Hamon was able to react violently to his interference.

"I cut the magic…! A monster has been born in the Yankov family…!"

"But the shockwave is too severe. If he does that a few more times, his arm will break."

"The backlash from a broken formula is significant for the sorcerer, so it shouldn't be a big problem."

Young sorcerers discussed as they watched the duel.

The backlash from forcibly dismantling the formula was severe enough to literally crush the sorcerer's organs. The stronger the magic, the greater the backlash, so Asel's physical condition would likely not be fine either.

"No. That won't happen."

But their master denied their words. He clicked his tongue as he looked at Asel, who stood unharmed despite the broken magic.

"He absorbed all the effects of the broken magic before it could return to him, turning it into his own power. Only a portion of the mana that caused the shock was lost, and the rest was perfectly reclaimed."

"Is that even possible?"

"I don't know."

The master glared at the duel arena with wide eyes.

"But it seems to be something a monster can do."

[Spiral Shock.]

Zzzzzzzzz!!!

He immediately released the reclaimed mana again. The lightning pouring out in a spiral seemed poised to completely annihilate Hamon, who was rolling on the ground.

Hamon gritted his teeth and, instead of fleeing backward, slid across the floor, charging toward Asel.

A daring maneuver that utilized the blind spots of magic. The audience erupted in cheers as Hamon swung his sword toward Asel's neck.

Clang!

"…!"

As expected, the tip of the sword was blocked by Asel's Shield, twisting in the process.

A transparent defensive barrier. Hamon's face contorted at the fact that he could not even break a single shield despite his attack being infused with aura.

"This is maddening!"

"It would be easier to fight from a distance."

Asel spoke casually to the swearing Hamon. In that moment, both Hamon and the audience fell silent.

"My magic has been revised for long-range bombardment."

[Thunder Break.]

Zzzzz.

A short bolt of lightning sprang from Asel's hand, lightly touching Hamon's body.

And then—

Zzzzzzzzzzzzz!!!

"Kahhhhhh!!"

Hamon's body convulsed as he was enveloped in the deep blue lightning. Asel struck his defenseless abdomen with a shock magic, forcibly pushing him toward the corner of the duel arena.

In an instant, the distance widened. Hamon, trembling, somehow managed to grip his sword and glared at Asel.

Asel looked down at him, extending his hand into the air.

"This distance is the best for you."

[Flame Banner Summoning.]

Whoosh!!!

In Asel's hand appeared a flag made of flames. A spatial control magic that had been forcibly revised from a high-level magic to a mid-level magic.

He immediately planted the flag into the ground, releasing heat and flames around him.

Hamon stared at the flames that had stopped right in front of him and let out a hollow laugh.

"…The rumors were not exaggerated."

"…."

"You've surpassed the level of merely being someone’s disciple. Just how many types of magic can you use?"

"I don't know."

Asel replied nonchalantly.

"I just do what I can."

"…Hah!"

After spitting out a mouthful of blood, Hamon staggered to his feet, igniting aura on his blade. He did not stop there; he surrounded his entire body with strong energy to resist Asel's magic.

"Good."

He swung his sword with all his might toward the flag planted beside Asel.

[Purple Fragment Sword Sound.]

Screeeech!

The purple aura split into dozens of swords, striking the flame banner. Unable to withstand the attack, the banner shattered, extinguishing the flames, and simultaneously, a shockwave erupted.

This time, instead of flying away, Hamon, who withstood the shock with his aura, pointed the tip of his sword at Asel and said,

"I won't go down ugly even if I lose. The word surrender no longer exists in my mind."

"…."

"I'm coming. Future grand sorcerer."

A purple light burst forth from Hamon's entire body.

"Please grant me enlightenment."

"…Hmm."

Instead of answering immediately, Asel ignited a current with his fingertips and threw it into the air.

At that moment, the clouds passing over the duel arena turned deep blue.

[Natural Resonance.]

[Maximization of the Formula.]

[Thunder Cloud.]

Kwahhhhhh!!!

A massive bolt of lightning struck down on either side of Asel.

Asel smiled as he felt the current electrifying all matter present in the space.

# 106 - 7th Rank (3)

"Professor Firenze..."

A waiting room closest to the dueling arena. A small room designed for immediate intervention.

Among the faculty sitting there to intervene if the duel became too heated or someone used foul play, the professor with the relatively youthful appearance whispered softly into Firenze's ear.

"That lightning strike just now. Isn't that high-level magic? It seems incredibly powerful."

"Did you want to advertise your ignorance of magic that badly?"

Firenze clicked his tongue and glared at the young professor.

The lingering traces of the lightning strike still clung to his entire body. He had deliberately not erased the aftereffects of being directly hit by Ena's magic.

Firenze had lived his entire life as a combat mage. He wasn't about to heal just because of the pain, not when he had the chance to directly experience and study Ena's magic.

Although there were intermittent pains and tremors, Firenze's thirst for knowledge wasn't quenched by something so trivial.

He touched his bandaged eye with his hand and continued.

"You hold the title of professor, and yet you don't know what that 'mage' just did?"

"...Mage? Professor Firenze is famous for not calling students mages—"

"What else would I call someone who has been granted the qualification? Electromancer? Asel? Ena's disciple?"

"..."

"None of that matters. He's already a complete mage. Hierarchy doesn't matter. In the first place, hierarchy itself is a concept created by humans. Like how you call a head a head, and a heart a heart. It's just a concept we defined because we needed a way to divide the scale."

The professor didn't answer, but bowed his head as if to listen intently.

Kuururung!!

Firenze watched the lightning-covered clouds spew out screams and curled up the corners of his lips into a smirk.

"Magic is a field of study. At the same time, it's a means to take lives. If so, what is a mage? A scholar, or an assassin?"

"........."

"The answer is both. A scholar studies magic, and an assassin kills someone based on the magic they studied. And Ena's disciple... no, 'Asel' is a mage who fulfills both of those aspects."

"...Hmm."

The young professor made a humming sound, and Firenze stared intently at Asel's face with a smile.

"And, did you just ask if Asel used high-level magic just now?"

"...Yes, I did."

"That statement is half right and half wrong. Do you understand why?"

"...I'm sorry. My knowledge is insufficient, so I don't know."

"That's right. It's severely lacking. But I like that you're honest."

Kwaaaaaang!!

The clouds continuously hurled irregular lightning bolts.

Asel stood still, recovering the lingering echoes of the fallen lightning. He wove them directly into new magic and launched a barrage at Hamon. Hamon laughed as if in pain and pleasure, cutting, slicing, and blocking the magic with his body.

"Most of the magic Asel is using are high-level magic formulas."

"...In that case."

"But he intentionally twisted and diminished those formulas, lowering the level to intermediate magic. The way he was checking the spells before entering the arena. He probably manipulated the formulas directly at that time."

"Are you saying that's the power of intermediate magic?"

The professor asked with a hollow laugh. Firenze stroked his chin and grinned.

"At least, it seems that way for that mage."

"...How can a mage who just came of age..."

"I don't know. It's the first time I've ever seen a mage who can twist formulas on the spot, lower the power, and create magic with the same effect. Normally, it shouldn't even activate at all. It seems he's turned the impossible into the possible with overwhelming mana control and sensitivity."

"..."

The professor didn't answer and silently stared at the arena.

Pajijik.

Firenze covered his arm, where pure white currents were blooming, with his hand and sparkled his eyes.

"The future is promising."

The moment he uttered those words.

"Oh, you can say that again. I never dreamed he would grow this much."

"...!"

A frivolous but boyish voice echoed softly from behind Firenze.

An unfamiliar voice that wasn't in his memory. Firenze immediately tried to react by drawing up mana.

Thud.

At the same time as he turned his head, Firenze's face was grabbed by someone's hand. Firenze gritted his teeth at the crushing grip that tightened around his head and glared at the intruder.

"Who are you...!"

"Zervil. Nice to meet you."

Beyond the palm that grabbed his face, the face of a man with long black hair and a uniform came into view.

Just his presence in the space made the air tremble madly. Firenze's survival instinct rang alarm bells, screaming at him to run away from this place immediately.

It felt as if he was facing death itself. The opponent's appearance was no different from a young man, but the aura he exuded was far beyond that of an average archmage. Just the foul energy stabbing at his skin was slowly rotting his flesh.

The terrifying mana unique to a greatly accomplished Corpse Sorcerer.

There was only one Corpse Sorcerer on the continent with such a high level. Firenze gritted his teeth and muttered as if spitting out the words.

"Corpse Lord...!"

"Correct."

"...Damn it. How did a criminal who should be in a destroyed kingdom get in here?"

"I came in through the front gate."

Zervil chuckled and forcibly sealed Firenze's mouth.

He turned his lips and tongue into a corpse, causing them to lose their function. Firenze distorted his face as his oral cavity rotted in an instant, and Zervil casually threw him into a corner.

The professors who were in the same place as him had already lost consciousness long ago.

Zervil sat down on a suitably empty chair and stared at Asel, who was wielding magic.

"Oh, he's amazing the more I look at him. To think that a kid who used to deliver drugs in the slums would grow up like this. Who would have imagined it?"

"..."

"It's all thanks to me for letting Asel go. If I had killed him there, I wouldn't have been able to see such an amazing scene. I wonder if I should charge an admission fee."

Zervil said that and then looked back at Firenze with a smirk.

"Let me give you a piece of advice. Next time, change the academy's defense system to detect 'corpses' or 'spiritual bodies' as well. Because it doesn't react to corpses, people like me can waltz right in."

"..."

"Ah, you can't answer. Well, you don't need to anyway. I won't kill you. Killing a professor at the academy would be quite troublesome... Oh?"

Zervil suddenly trailed off and tilted his head.

His gaze was fixed on the dueling arena.

Hamon, gritting his teeth. Asel, who seemed to have a problem with his magic, spitting out a little blood and frowning.

Zervil muttered as he watched Asel desperately reach out his left hand as if to block Hamon's blade.

"Why... is he intentionally trying to get hurt?"

The duel itself was overwhelmingly in Asel's favor. The clouds floating in the sky continuously dropped lightning bolts towards the ground, and the currents rotating around Asel blocked Hamon's approach itself.

"Haa... haa...!"

Hamon was already exhausted both physically and mentally from dodging, blocking, and cutting. He had rushed in boldly, and the fighting spirit hadn't disappeared from his eyes even now, but it was obvious that even that would soon be extinguished.

An opponent who would collapse without being able to resist if Asel showed even a little bit of his true power.

The two people's practical ranks were similar, but Hamon wasn't even a match for Asel. Even though their levels were similar, the actual difference in capabilities was so great that it was unimaginable.

Frankly speaking, there had been at least dozens of opportunities to cut off Hamon's breath so far. Asel's innate combat sense had been looking for opportunities to take Hamon's life several times.

If this was a battlefield, Hamon would have died in the first few moves.

The situation wasn't much different now.

Unlike his burning spirit, his exhausted body was definitely duller than before. Unless he could cut through the giant lightning cloud swimming in the sky, Hamon's defeat was predetermined.

But Asel didn't forget the goal of the duel.

'Win or lose, I have to cut off his finger first.'

He mustn't end the duel until he achieves at least his goal. He had to somehow create an opening so that Hamon could attack.

That process had already been slowly built up from the beginning.

The magic that Asel had been using were all destructive formulas with formidable power.

And it was common sense that destructive formulas voraciously consumed mana. Unreasonable magic that would cause even average mages to faint if they used it even a little.

That was the destructive formula including Electrification, Holy Might, and so on.

Of course, Asel's mana capacity was large enough that he could spam destructive formulas without much problem, but in order to achieve his intended purpose, he had to show a picture of momentarily staggering from 'mana exhaustion'.

So, it was necessary to use destructive formulas like crazy and act like the backlash had come.

Now was that moment.

"...Kuhk!"

Asel furrowed his face and staggered his body. He grabbed his head with his hand and briefly twisted the flow of all the magic he was manifesting in a complicated manner.

"...!"

A blatant gap. Hamon, who had been catching his breath for a moment, accelerated his body with gritted teeth. Asel fired a powerful magic towards him with a desperate expression.

But the seams of the formula were unstable. A storm of lightning that was obviously going to break with just a slight touch. Asel had intentionally twisted the formula, but Hamon, who didn't know his intentions, swung his sword horizontally and cut off the lightning.

"Keuhp!"

Exhausted mana. Shaking mind. Unstable magic. And formula destruction.

All of that combined, Asel spat out a little blood as if he had a rebound.

It was blood that he had cut his tongue and spat out. However, it looked like he had internal injuries to others.

"O-oh! No, Asel!"

Evelyn, who was sitting in the audience with a beaming expression, jumped up and shouted. Asel apologized to her inwardly and stretched out his left hand towards Hamon's flying blade.

Clang!

The weakened Shield broke as it was, and the blade and Asel's finger touched.

[Master. Prepare for the pain.]

At the same time, Aleph sent a warning. Asel steeled his mind in preparation for the pain as she said, and finished preparing to reconstruct the Shield so that the rest of his fingers wouldn't be cut off.

'It's coming.'

At that moment, when his finger was slightly cut by the blade containing Aura.

Kwaaaaaang!!!!

A sudden crimson explosion erupted from under Hamon's feet.

Viscera and blood that surged up in an instant filled the dueling arena, and Hamon, who was caught off guard, rolled on the floor of the dueling arena with both knees gone.

"...Cough!"

Not only that, but the severed surfaces began to rot in real time.

The people sitting in the audience, the professors waiting, and the people watching the duel through the screen.

Everyone realized that the explosion just now wasn't something Asel had done.

Then, who on earth?

"Shit!"

There was no time to think. Asel ignored the smell of rotting corpses vibrating from all directions and focused on saving Hamon first.

Swish!

A cutting magic that accurately cut off the rotting part. Thanks to that, the rot stopped, but the bleeding didn't stop.

Asel urgently shouted at the flustered academy official.

"Cleric! Call a cleric! As soon as possible!"

[...Ah.]

"What are you doing! Call them quickly! He'll die like this!"

[...Asel.]

At that time, the host, who had been silent, spoke in a trembling voice.

[Look, look behind you.]

"..."

At that voice filled with fear, Asel hardened his face.

Thud.

Someone put their hand on Asel's shoulder. Asel only slightly turned his head and stared at his back.

That's how he saw it.

"Hello?"

"..."

"It's been a while since I've seen your face."

Long black hair. The uniform worn by the soldiers of the destroyed kingdom and lifeless eyes. The stench unique to a rotting corpse. A chilling smile. A spectacle of corpses rising from behind.

He was tall, but his build was small. The haggard face unique to drug addicts was clear, and his skin was pale without any vitality. He looked fragile as if he had lived his whole life without seeing the sunlight. But no one could underestimate him.

Saaaaa...!

Due to the enormous amount of foul energy spreading out from him, some of those sitting in the audience lost consciousness as it was. The exposed skin and organs slowly rotted, and blood flowed from their mouths, noses, and ears.

"Lord!"

"Quickly, call a cleric quickly!"

"Surround yourself with Aura! Don't be exposed to foul energy unless you want to rot alive!"

Urgent voices erupted from all directions. Knights desperately deployed Aura to protect their lords who had fainted, and mages drew up mana.

The momentum exuded by superhumans close to dozens, hundreds.

"Haha."

But all of those were crushed and crushed by the man's foul energy. Superhumans with low levels had already fallen into a state of brain death long ago.

Those who were still sane were all staring at the dueling arena with gritted teeth.

The headmaster who was eating fruit.

The head of the Hargelin family who was watching the duel with interest.

The founder of the duchy who was staring intently at Asel.

The head of the Weidel Dukedom who was making a serious expression.

Asel too.

Stared at the man with an expression close to astonishment.

"How have you been?"

Continental subjugation target.

Approximately 15,000 counts of crimes.

Number of destroyed kingdoms: 15.

Number of destroyed cities: 5,724.

Number of massacred victims: Unknown.

Number of corpses in possession: Unknown.

Number of defeats of subjugation forces: 134 times.

The last aristocrat of the destroyed kingdom.

The owner of the corpses.

Corpse Lord.

Zervil Esto.

"But why were you suddenly trying to cut off his finger?"

He, appeared at the academy.

Author's words

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# 107 - 7th Rank (4)

An overwhelming foul energy emanated from Zervil. The moment it touched the body, that area would rot and decay, a truly horrific aura.

However, even such a foul energy from Zervil could not invade Asel's mana. If Zervil had given it his all, the outcome might have been different, but the current Zervil was not even showing half of his abilities. He fell slightly short of piercing through Asel's mana barrier.

In other words, with that less-than-half strength, he formed a domain that encompassed the entire training ground.

The weak would not last even a second and would fall into a state of paralysis in the Sanctuary of Death. A land that existed solely for the dead.

“Zervil!!!”

Friede shouted, forcing back the piercing foul energy. Her mana surged greatly with her turbulent emotions.

The unique green mana of the elves flowed through the air.

A pure, life-filled energy, in stark contrast to Zervil's foul energy. The mana of the elves was like a natural enemy to the corpse sorcerers.

Though it was not as strong as holy power, it was a force used by the forest fairies that could return not only the sorcerers but also the corpses back to nature. Yet, Zervil felt no discomfort facing Friede's mana head-on.

Despite being of the same eighth tier and both being grand sorcerers, there was an unspoken hierarchy between them.

Under the overwhelmingly strong Beginning, powerful beings lined up one after another. Zervil was a grand sorcerer who played in the upper echelons. Friede was positioned much lower than him.

She was not weak, but she was not at a level that could be fortunate for Zervil. If they fought with all their hearts, there would come a moment when her face would be mixed among Zervil's corpse legion.

Yet, Friede did not hide her anger. Gritting her teeth, she leaped from her seated position and stood protectively in front of Asel.

“Dean.”

“Stay back.”

Friede spoke as she turned to look at Asel, who was gathering his mana.

“He's not someone you can handle.”

“Then are you going to face him?”

Zervil chuckled and tilted his head. His lifeless eyes filled with Friede's face.

“Friede, our Friede. When you joined the extermination squad, you ran away pathetically, and now you want to act like a dean?”

“......”

“Those hundreds of elven warriors who died to protect you that day will not return. Why did you crawl out of the forest? You should have just quietly supported the World Tree.”

“Shut up, Zervil.”

Friede spat out in a voice that sounded like a growl.

“You were the one who struck first at the Great Forest and took my kin hostage. The elves joining the fight to capture you was something you brought upon yourself.”

“Is that so? And what of it?”

“......What did you say?”

Friede retorted, and Zervil shrugged.

“I had the confidence to annihilate the elves right then and there. But what about you? You rushed in without certainty and ended up getting wiped out, didn't you? Ahaha, I realized then that when blinded by revenge, humans and elves think at almost the same level.”

“......You bastard.”

“Well, let's leave the past behind. That's not why I came here.”

Zervil smiled slightly and turned his gaze to Asel, who was standing behind Friede.

“Asel, do you remember that day? The stench rising from the slums. We had no choice but to part with tears in the pouring rain.”

Asel did not respond. Instead, he gathered his scattered mana and slowly spread it throughout his body.

A dark blue light cast over his eyes.

“Run away.”

Friede whispered softly to Asel. He nodded and began to prepare the flight spell.

Meanwhile, Zervil continued speaking.

“Originally, I intended to use you as my experimental tool. But now that the Beginning has taken you in and you’ve grown into a proper sorcerer, you’ve become more of a toy than an experimental tool.”

“......”

“Do you know the significance of a toy? It’s to bring joy and interest to the user. And I came all this way to play with that toy.”

“You're talking nonsense without a care.”

Asel muttered, feeling unease trickle down his spine.

The flight spell was as slow to cast as it was to consume mana. With Asel's talent, it was not impossible to deploy it in an instant, but to move stealthily without Zervil noticing would take some time.

However.

“It's nonsense.”

Zervil grinned and began to actively manipulate his foul energy.

Crack!!

The ground where Asel stood split open, revealing a massive maw. Asel immediately began to chant another spell to respond, but the maw opening was faster.

“......!”

In an instant of weightlessness, Asel's eyes widened. He gritted his teeth and desperately unfolded the flight spell he had been secretly manifesting. He shot up into the air, but collided directly with a massive figure that fell vertically from the sky.

Boom!

“Gah!”

The tremendous shock shattered all the shields he had stacked up. He gasped for breath and glared at the man who was pressing down on him.

Though he wore robes similar to those of a monk, the trained rotten muscles beneath writhed as if alive. Blood poured from the eye sockets where the eyes had vanished, and with a palm that had eyes, he reached out and grabbed Asel's neck, throwing him deep into the gaping maw.

Asel's body was engulfed by darkness with a sonic boom.

“Asel!”

Friede called out urgently, but Asel had long since disappeared into the maw. She gritted her teeth and glared at Zervil.

“You filthy bastard!”

“Friede. I have no interest in you. Please don’t call out so desperately.”

Zervil chuckled and snapped his fingers. Just then, graves began to drop beneath the feet of the academy guards and professors, as well as the distinguished guests who were about to join the fray against Zervil.

Creak...!

Something with a massive presence began to stir beneath the graves. The moment everyone’s faces hardened at the horrific energy.

“Your opponent is not me.”

Boom!

Magic and aura surged from within the graves. Friede clenched her jaw as a sharp dagger brushed past her cheek and turned to glare at Zervil.

However, Zervil did not even glance at her.

“Feel free to play. I won’t kill you, but you might die, so keep that in mind.”

“Zervil!”

“Well then, I’ll take my leave. May you all have a happy duet.”

Zervil said this and lightly tapped the ground. At that moment, a maw identical to the one that had opened beneath Asel appeared and gaped wide. Zervil burst into laughter and quickly fell into it.

Thus, the battlefield where Asel and Zervil had vanished.

“Greetings, everyone.”

Someone slowly rose from the grave that had formed beneath Friede. The same was true for the other graves. Corpses that either retained their former strength or had grown even stronger awakened in bizarre forms everywhere.

“......I’m worried about my daughter.”

The founder of the duchy murmured as he looked at the four-headed clown corpse. The clown, with faces depicting joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, stared at the founder and burst into laughter.

[The fun performance begins!]

[Damn it, you bastard! I’m the star of today’s show!]

[Ugh... If we fail the performance, our master will kill us.]

[We’re already dead, you fool! So let’s just enjoy the performance!]

The clown had six daggers held in each of its three pairs of arms. An assassin who had reached the master level in life, reborn in Zervil's hands, exuded indiscriminate killing intent.

“......Huh.”

The founder sighed deeply and closed his eyes, only to open them again.

Zzzzz...

His eyes were stained with blood.

Those preparing for battle were not just the founder. The graves formed beneath everyone with the will to fight. The corpses that emerged from within rushed at each person with the intent to kill.

Friede was no exception. She raised her mana while glaring at Katarina, who greeted her with an elegant gesture.

“I’ll deal with this quickly and go save Asel. Move aside.”

“I’m sorry. I’ve been assigned the role of holding onto your ankle.”

Though she had no neck, her voice resonated calmly through the space. Katarina extended her gloved hand toward Friede and spoke with a tone mixed with laughter.

“Let’s do just one duet before you go.”

Asel, shot at supersonic speed, collided with the ground shortly after. But there was no pain. It felt as soft as falling from a bed, enveloping his entire body.

That said, he did not let his guard down. Asel immediately rose and shot magic toward the maw floating in the air.

[Lightning Flash]

-Kieeeeeeeek!!!

The maw, struck directly by the magic, let out a monstrous scream, spewing forth blood and chunks of organs. Just as Asel frowned at the sight, someone landed lightly beside him.

There was no need to check the identity. Without hesitation, Asel dropped a high-level spell toward Zervil. A lightning bolt fell in a straight line from the sky, burning and melting Zervil's entire body.

“Hmm.”

Yet Zervil showed no change in expression. He casually brushed off the dark blue currents rising from his body and grinned at Asel.

“You arrived well. I’m glad. I was worried you might break your spine while falling.”

“......Zervil.”

Asel spoke as if chewing the name.

“Why did you suddenly invade the academy?”

“Hmm. I don’t understand the intent of your question. Didn’t I say it was to play with my toy? There’s no deeper meaning.”

“......”

“Or is it? Was it a formal question to buy time? That’s not a bad idea, but you should give up hope. No one can come here anyway. Everyone is already trapped.”

Zervil grinned and spread his arms wide.

“This place is right in the middle of the academy grounds destroyed by the Beginning. It’s the best battlefield for you, and the worst kind of battlefield for me.”

“......What do you mean?”

Asel frowned and looked up at the sky.

......Rumble.

The sky was filled with clouds. A white lightning bolt continuously emitted currents across the center, turning the ground into a massive electric field. The high-voltage currents that would turn an ordinary person to ash upon stepping in were swimming through the air and deep within the ground.

As he said, this was indeed inside the academy grounds. But the atmosphere was much heavier than before.

‘......The current has become even stronger than before. Normally, anyone could enter without issue, right?’

“It’s because of me.”

Zervil, noticing Asel’s doubts, raised a trembling hand.

“The Beginning’s magic automatically detects me, who harbors malice toward you, and goes wild to exclude me. The longer I stay here, the stronger the magic will become, and my breathing will tighten.”

“......”

“Isn’t it amazing? No matter how much the extreme magic contains part of the sorcerer’s intent, it’s remarkable that it goes wild just to protect you. It seems the Beginning’s imagery has changed a bit since it met you. Whether that change is positive or not, I don’t know, but it’s clear that it cares for you quite a bit.”

Zervil chuckled as he looked down at the split skin on his hand caused by the rising currents.

“Now then! Let’s start the duel. It’s an extension of that joint duel or whatever! Aren’t you itching to fight after dealing with that strange examiner? You were probably trying to cut off a finger for some thrill, right?”

“......You’re talking nonsense.”

“Whether it’s nonsense or not is for me to decide. In fact, I wasn’t that curious.”

Small spheres began to form above Zervil's palm.

“What I want is simple.”

“......”

“I just want to see how much the child I let go has grown, how much joy he can bring me, and how much he can grow in the future. It’s truly fitting for a toy, isn’t it?”

“......You’re completely insane.”

“Now, from now on, do your best to face me until the magic of the Beginning ignites. You have no choice but to do so. After all, you can’t run away from me.”

“......Huh.”

Asel exhaled deeply and raised his mana.

He was right. Escaping from Zervil was nearly impossible.

So there was only one thing he could do.

Asel's face hardened as he spoke.

“That body. It’s not the main body. You’ve just put your consciousness into a spare corpse.”

“Oh? How did you know? I went to great lengths to shape the face to look as much like mine as possible—”

“The amount of foul energy you can contain is only about half of the main body. But even that is inefficient, as it doesn’t match the physical form. The output of the formula can only handle about 70% of the main body’s power. It’s not that you can’t use more, but if you increase the output, that body will collapse and melt away.”

Zervil's mouth was shut. Asel continued to recite the information contained within Zervil's foul energy while stacking shields upon shields.

“If you fight with only 70% output... you’ll probably be able to withstand my master’s magic for about 15 minutes at most. Beyond that, not only will that body collapse, but your main body will also be affected. Since the consciousness is connected, you won’t be free from pain at all.”

“......”

“Am I wrong?”

Asel asked with a smile. Zervil fell silent for a moment before grinning widely and responding.

“Indeed, I have a good eye for people.”

Rumble!!!

The spheres held in Zervil's grasp began to convulse wildly. Asel slightly bent his upper body and exhaled.

Crackle!!

Lightning exploded from his entire body. The lightning that erupted resonated with Ena's currents that dominated the space, enhancing Asel's magic overall.

Rumble!!

The remnants etched in the sky roared violently according to Asel's will. As if energy was condensing, the currents began to gather toward the center of the white lightning crossing the sky.

Zervil burst into laughter at the sight. Asel activated the magic he had prepared in advance.

[Cadaver Solution]

[Great Wheel of Annihilation]

The corpse shells and the rings of lightning collided.

Boom!!!

With a tremendous roar, blood and organs spilled among the shattered corpses. Asel seized the formed blood mist and swung it around.

[Blood flow shaping]

[Extreme Death]

Crack!

The blood mist shot in a line, forming a massive thorny path. Zervil grinned and unleashed his foul energy.

Boom, with a resounding noise, Asel's magic shattered. Zervil slipped through the gap and lunged at Asel.

“......!”

With mobility far faster than ordinary warriors. Asel immediately canceled his attack spells and redirected all his formulas to defense.

It was already far too late to evade. It was more effective to defend first and then look for a chance to counterattack.

“Hahaha!”

Zervil's fist flew toward Asel's left eye. Asel widened his eyes and simultaneously deployed all his spells.

[Thunder God Descent]

[Thunder Emperor]

[Thunderous Wall]

[Blazing Fire Fortress]

Electricity overlaid Asel's skin. An interception Formula activated, and a barrier of electricity soared. As if that wasn't enough, flames threatening to burn down the entire forest erupted like a barrier.

Crackle!!

—It was all smashed to pieces. Zervil forced his arm, dripping with blood, pus, and ash, to brute-force his way through all the magic, and directly struck Asel's Shield.

The layered Shields shattered in real-time each time his hand touched them.

And then, the last remaining Shield collapsed.

"...Keugh!"

Zervil's fist burst Asel's left eyeball, sending him flying like a cannonball.

At the same instant, dozens of streaks of pure white lightning fell towards Zervil. Zervil, struck by lightning of a different dimension than Asel's magic, burst into mad laughter.

"Hahaha! Aren't you coddling your disciple too much, The Beginning! Stop spying here and focus on your own fight!"

As if responding to his voice, the sky flashed with pure white light.

KWAHHHHH!!!

Tears of lightning poured down.

# 108 - 7th Rank (5)

Kwaaaang!!

Asel's body, sent flying by Zervil's attack, slams deep into the hillside. His upper body is pinned into the cratered earth, and crimson blood drips from his crushed ankles.

"……."

Clear, bright red liquid flows from his lowered head. It was vitreous humor and blood leaking from his burst eyeball. His left eye was completely crushed.

Forcibly opening his ruined left eye, sticky clumps fall down. Asel blankly stares at the scene and bursts into a hollow laugh.

Just one blow. And it wasn't even magic, but martial arts. Despite using every defensive Formula and layering Shields, his fist, in its tattered state, shattered Asel's eye and shook his head.

Is that… really possible?

"……Keugh."

Blood gushes out as he opens his mouth. His shaken head no longer functions properly, and his consciousness flickers in and out.

Recently, Asel had faced the great mage, Ena. Her attacks were unusually strong, but not to this extent. Being hit just once didn't blur his consciousness or threaten to shatter his body.

The difference in level is literal. It's hard to believe that facing him is even possible.

"……Ptoo."

Asel spits out the black iris that flowed into his mouth and raises his head.

Beyond his blurred vision, he sees Zervil, struck directly by lightning. The arm that was hit by Asel's magic was already so damaged that it couldn't function properly, but he didn't care and swung his arm to deflect Ena's lightning.

With Ena's magic falling on his already damaged body, his body is melting in real time.

But the speed of regeneration was even faster than the speed of destruction. It was only natural, as it was lightning caused by a magical phenomenon contained within Imagery, not the mage's own magic. Perhaps a Formula more advanced than that wouldn't manifest.

"……Hoo."

Breathing out a blood-soaked breath, he rises from the buried hillside. He must have been hit in the head, but his whole body creaks as if the muscles are broken.

Perhaps his spine is slightly cracked, as his nerves aren't responding. He tried to move his arm, but his legs and eyelids moved. This must be because of the concussion caused by Zervil's Mana, and the peripheral nerves were contaminated from the optic nerve.

If left alone, it would obviously hinder the battle. So, Asel arbitrarily adjusted the electrical signals in his body to move. As a result, the momentum of the lightning emanating from his body intensified.

Mages should avoid directly slamming Mana into their bodies as much as possible.

Because the body is so sensitive to Mana, if something goes wrong, the muscles can become addicted to Mana, making it impossible to return to a normal state. Perhaps the addicted area will melt away like water, causing physical defects.

But now was not the time to be picky. He had to move his body somehow.

Closing his empty left eye, he activates his Mana Eye with his good right eye. Because the Mana Eye is directly related to the brain, activating it alone caused a headache as if an awl was scratching his head.

He ignored it.

He draws up Mana and resonates with Ena's magic. Asel forcibly swallows the blood that welled up and opens his mouth.

"Are you watching, Master?"

No answer returns. But pure white lightning gently extends around Asel. Asel stirs them with his hands and chuckles.

"In the end, I'm getting help like this again. It seems I haven't changed from a few years ago. I'm still young and immature, and it seems impossible for me to grow without your help."

So.

"Please come back soon. We were going to go see the sea together, weren't we?"

Koo-roo-roong!!

At the same time Asel said that, the sky was instantly dyed white. Along with that, Zervil, realizing that Asel had awakened, smiled and turned his head.

"Let's go again!"

He raises his Foul energy and manifests a Formula. Asel absorbs Ena's Mana floating in the air into his own and wipes the blood from his lips.

[Black Lightning Rampage]

Paji-ji-jik!!

Black lightning is ejected at high speed from Asel's feet. A huge slaughter magic covering all directions. Zervil plunges his hand deep into his chest, pulls out his flesh and blood, and swings it.

[Mors]

The swung flesh and blood clump together to form a round placenta. Zervil shoves the umbilical cord, left dangling at the end, into his throat and receives the lightning into the placenta.

Glug……!

The lightning absorbed into the placenta travels through the umbilical cord and into Zervil's Mana Engine.

A crazy Formula that forcibly absorbs other people's magic and uses it as his own power, Mors.

"……Huh?"

But this time the result was different. Asel's Mana, which invaded his Mana Engine, didn't mix with Zervil's Mana, but instead caused a huge repulsion and exploded.

Kwaaaaaaaa!!

In an instant, a storm of lightning that soared from his neck swept through the area. It was the result of Asel's dominant Mana and Ena's violent Mana resonating.

"Haha!"

Zervil's body, swept away by the storm, was dismembered and flew into the air. But the decomposed body, contrary to drooping, began to rush fiercely towards Asel as if each part had its own ego.

"……Crazy bastard!"

Asel is horrified by the grotesque sight and stomps hard on the floor.

[Lightning Line]

Hundreds of strands of lightning, where high-voltage current is compressed, bloomed like a spider web. Zervil's arm came through the gap, his leg was cut off, and his upper body was split in two. But his head was intact.

"Aang."

His head, rolling on the floor, suddenly popped up in front of Asel like a balloon. Immediately after, it caused a huge explosion, evaporating the entire area.

"Keugh!"

An overwhelming power that shattered dozens of Shields. A Formula that only Zervil, who had modified his body into a corpse, could use, sacrificing himself as a sacrifice.

Even with the Mana Eye activated, a completely different situation unfolded than when he fought Ermina. At that time, he had defended against her high-level magic once, but Zervil's magic forcibly deactivated the Mana Eye as soon as it hit.

It was only natural. The Mana Eye, which is invalidated by Ena's lower-level magic, could not withstand Zervil's high-level magic.

Still, the damage was reduced. If it hadn't, his body would have already been split in two.

Asel, seeing that his hand, which he had stretched out to reduce the damage just before the explosion, was tattered with only bones left, boldly cut off his wrist.

He cauterizes the pouring blood with fire to stop the bleeding. Then, he extracts as much Mana thread as possible and weaves it to form a prosthetic hand.

A prosthetic hand made of Mana that moves as if it were Asel's body from the beginning. Asel immediately makes a hand seal and pants roughly.

"Hoo…… Hoo……!"

Fluid flows from his forehead, torn by the explosion. A stinging pain, phantom pain, and a tingling pain from his broken ankle rise up and coolly heat his brain. Thanks to this, his mind was sharper than ever.

"Wow. What is that?"

Zervil, who had already recovered his entire body, looked at Asel's prosthetic hand and made a surprised expression.

"Are you making a prosthetic hand by extracting Mana thread directly from this spot? That's absurd. To do such a thing, your Mana control ability must be so great that it can be compared to a pure-type great mage."

"……."

"You handle multiple attribute-type magic, and your pure Mana control ability is also considerable……."

Zervil stroked his blood-soaked lips and smiled brightly.

"You are the best after all. Your talent is arguably the best among the mages I've seen."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"No. You're welcome—

[Mana Resonance]

[Nature Resonance]

[Formula Maximization]

[Multiple Overlap]

[Implanting Tremor]

[Lightning Strike]

Flash!

The moment Zervil was about to continue speaking, a brilliant light flashed above his head.

By the time he realized it, it was already too late. He tilted his head with a fairly serious expression this time.

"Oh. This is a little dangerous—"

Before he could finish speaking, lightning mixed with half of Asel's and half of Ena's Mana fell down. An overwhelming amount of light that momentarily flashed the world bloomed, and lightning that turned the area around Zervil into ashes swept through the space.

The sound came after the light had passed once.

Kwaaaaaaaa-!!

A deafening roar reaches the sky. As if responding to the sound, Ena's traces react, and a single line of lightning, condensing hundreds of strands of lightning, falls down further above Zervil.

"……Cough."

Above the spot where the two lightning strikes had swept through. Zervil, who had suffered damage not only to his body but also to his consciousness, coughed up a handful of blood while kneeling on the floor.

"……Haha."

He looked up at Asel with a dry laugh.

The optic nerve writhes in his burned-out, empty eye sockets.

"Didn't you say you were a 6th Circle mage?"

"……."

"But why is the power of your magic like this? It's so strong that even a decent 7th Circle mage can't even show their face. No matter how much help you have from The Beginning, this shouldn't be happening. You're denying common sense head-on."

"……Are you the one saying that?"

Asel let out a hollow laugh and recalled the feeling when he fought Virsia.

"Can we still call a human who doesn't die even if their limbs are blown away a human?"

"Don't call me a human. It's not like I care about that kind of thing."

Zervil lightly brushed off Asel's words and swept up his blood-soaked hair. At that moment, the current remaining in his body annihilated the arm he had raised, along with his shoulder.

"Hmm……."

Zervil made an embarrassed expression as he looked at his arm, which had turned to ashes and scattered.

"Ena's magic is really strange. Strangely, the parts that are hit by her can't regenerate. Ah…… wait a minute. Isn't this Ena's fault?"

"……."

"Hmm…… Ah, that's right. It's not entirely Ena's fault, but a reaction caused by mixing with your Mana. No matter how much you've learned magic of the same type, it's impossible to mix so harmoniously. It seems the two of you are a match made in heaven. If a child is born between you two, a mage unprecedented in history may be born."

"Stop with the pointless chatter."

Asel breathed out and wiped the fluid from his face.

"Five minutes left."

"Oh my, were you counting that? That's really kind of you. I had forgotten."

Zervil chuckled and jumped up.

His body was not normal. Both eyes were gone, and one arm was completely gone. Organs were flowing out of the wound in his side, and his body was stiffening and relaxing repeatedly, perhaps because his heart was intermittently stopping.

Perhaps it was thanks to the Implanting Tremor given to the lightning that did its job properly.

'Implanting Tremor is a magic that arbitrarily repeats the awakening and destruction of the target's organs and muscles. If regeneration is really impossible, Zervil's combat ability is likely to have dropped sharply.'

A sharp dagger that Asel devised himself after countless battles with the strong. Since it was a Formula that had been revised to self-destruct regardless of the opponent's level, it didn't matter if Zervil's body was a corpse.

No, it was even more effective because it was a corpse. Since organs that shouldn't be working in the first place are forcibly awakened, the sense of alienation from that sensation would further interfere with his thinking ability.

'If he's going to make a mistake, it's now. I can't give Zervil time to adapt to the magic.'

The time remaining until Zervil is neutralized by Ena's interference is about 5 minutes. It's not a long time, but it's not an insufficient time to take someone's life. He must either endure as much as possible or push the offensive even harder to cut off his limbs.

'The fact that he's not using most of the Formulas he showed when he fought Master is probably because it's not his main body. The fact that he's moving mainly with martial arts rather than Formulas is probably—'

"I've decided."

The moment Asel was organizing his thoughts while chanting magic, Zervil opened his mouth, waving his only remaining arm.

His face was filled with undisguised joy.

"Today. I will make you a 7th Circle mage."

"……What?"

"The conditions are already met."

Zervil slowly moved his steps to the side at Asel's absurd question.

"There have been quite a few cases like you in history. Geniuses who are strangely stuck in the 6th or 7th Circle despite their excellent Mana quantity, power, and knowledge. Do you know why?"

"……."

"It's because they were too outstanding to have a reason to define their Uniqueness or harbor Imagery. More precisely, there was no opportunity. Since they can do anything easily, there's no need to worry or be desperate like others. Why work hard when you can just do it? They succeed as soon as they touch it, and they achieve whatever they think of. There's no reason to crawl on the floor to realize Uniqueness or to contemplate themselves to realize Imagery."

Asel frowned without answering. Zervil stretched his arm out to the side and rotated his body once. Ena's Mana was slowly starting to gnaw at his skin just by existing, but he didn't care.

"Those people can achieve Circle ascension just by realizing their Uniqueness and Imagery. Would you be any different? Frankly, in my eyes, you look much stronger than a mediocre 7th Circle mage."

"……."

"If you, who are like that, realize your Uniqueness and officially reach the 7th Circle. How much stronger will you become? Who knows? Maybe it will be possible to compete with the great mages."

"……What are you trying to say?"

"It's simple."

Zervil smiled and answered that way, then suddenly put his hand into his chest and pulled out his cold heart.

Pajik, paji-jik.

A heart that continuously emits lightning, pulsing and stopping repeatedly due to Asel's magic.

Zervil didn't hesitate and grabbed and burst that heart.

Peo-seok!

"I will give you an opportunity to awaken your Uniqueness."

"……What?"

"I didn't really intend to kill you, but my plan has changed."

"……."

"Asel."

Zervil continued, blood streaming from the hole in his chest.

"From now on, I will do my best without worrying about the consequences. If you don't realize your Uniqueness in the process…… you will probably have to meet The Beginning as my soldier."

"……Ha."

"The time limit is about 3 minutes. No, if I forcibly bring and use the abilities of my main body, it will probably be 1 minute."

Asel gritted his teeth and began to draw up Mana. Zervil smiled brightly at the sight.

"Then let's start! Please proudly show your Uniqueness in front of Ena—"

The moment he spat it out.

Kkii-ii-iik!!

An unusual sound was heard from the sky. The two of them looked up at the sky almost simultaneously and hardened their faces.

It's disappearing.

The traces of pure white lightning that Ena had engraved are slowly disappearing. The power of Mana floating in space is gradually weakening, and eventually it completely disappeared. Ena's presence, which had been pressing down on his whole body, disappeared like a lie.

Asel wasn't stupid enough not to know what that meant. Asel stared at Zervil with a face that didn't feel any emotion and opened his mouth.

"……Did you do this?"

"……Hmm."

Zervil scratched his head as if he was troubled by Asel's question. Then, he realized that the time limit had increased from 1 minute back to 3 minutes and just smiled.

"I don't know? If you're curious, disarm me and ask!"

"You son of a bitch."

Powerful lightning that reached the sky poured out from Asel's entire body.

Mana that had become more intense due to the turbulent emotions. Zervil burst into pure admiration and chuckled.

"Well, it seems I'll be getting a new title today?"

Author's Note

The title of the work has been changed.

I didn't think the title completely penetrated the work, so I contacted Novelpia and changed it.

I think this is better, but what do you think, readers?

Also, the cover rough is scheduled to arrive this week. Instead of putting the rough directly on the cover, we plan to release it as an announcement, so please give it a lot of attention.

# 109 - 7th Rank (6)

Lightning that reached the sky fell in reverse and lined up in front of Asel. He grabbed the foremost bolt with his hand and swung it roughly as if to shake it off.

Dududududud!!!!

The shaken lightning bolt began to glow wildly, resonating with the other bolts. Into the wave of mana, Asel forcibly injected the power of the Ice Peony.

The magical artifact containing the freezing formula, Ice Peony. Not only did he extract all the mana charged within, but he also expelled the mana that maintained the artifact's formula and kept its seams intact.

Then, the ring began to slowly lose its light. It was evidence that it was returning to an ordinary ring.

It didn’t matter. In the blazing lightning, Asel confirmed the presence of cold energy and immediately shot forth a spear of lightning. The lined-up bolts plunged into the ground in unison, shattering the earth at light speed.

“Haha!”

A slight tremor was felt due to the immense energy. The lightning, soaring at a speed beyond cognition, pierced through Zervil's entire body.

But it didn’t mean much. As long as the main body was exerting 100 percent of its capabilities, Asel's magic could not inflict any meaningful damage on him.

However, Asel did not act anxiously. A colder and sharper rationality than ever before manipulated his brain.

Remaining mana. Zervil's action patterns. Mana patterns. Knowledge. Barriers. Environment. Weather. Clouds. Lightning. Seeds. Flames.

The optimal combat method, considering everything, rose in Asel's mind like a picture. Without hesitation, he accelerated his body and threw a punch at Zervil. Zervil felt puzzled by his sudden use of martial arts but didn’t pay much attention and stomped the ground hard.

[Cadáver Páries]

Boom!

An overwhelming wall of corpses rose from beneath his feet. A wall filled with blood, organs, and rotten flesh. Human heads occasionally embedded in the surface screamed in agony, spewing acidic pus.

But Asel did not panic. Just before the body and the pus collided, he sharply erected a shield vertically, deflecting the pus to the side. He surrounded himself with a space spell, passing through as if there were no wall in front of him.

“Is that so?”

Seeing Asel pass through the wall like a spirit, Zervil's eyes widened. Asel immediately grabbed his jaw and unleashed magic.

[Fire Dragon Flame Fang]

-…Krrrk.

A low beastly growl resonated from the place where Asel's hand touched. The moment Zervil realized it sounded similar to a dragon's roar.

Crash!

A massive dragon's head burst forth from Asel's grip, biting and tearing through Zervil's body, unleashing a breath strong enough to split the clouds.

Kwaaaah!!

Flames hot enough to scorch the trees and grass of the forest surged toward the sky.

A high-level spell of the flame formula that Asel had directly revised and created. A specialized penetrating formula modified to affect only the main body, ignoring the opponent's mana and aura.

Although the mana consumed was considerable, it was not a burden for Asel at this moment. However, the longer it was maintained, the more the consumption increased exponentially, so it could not be used for long.

“Whoosh…!”

After expelling the breath for about ten more seconds, he withdrew the magic. At that moment, Zervil, with his entire body burned, smiled broadly in the air, reflecting in Asel's eyes. He gritted his teeth and brought his hand down from above.

[Lightning Strike]

Boom!!!

With a massive roar, a lightning bolt the size of a giant tree fell. A high-level spell with such tremendous power that Zervil, who was in the sky, was immediately slammed to the ground.

“…!”

There was no time to comprehend. Zervil approached Asel at a speed faster than he could perceive, placing his hand on Asel's abdomen and murmuring.

“Corrúptus.”

Woom…!

The foul energy blooming from Zervil's fingertips shattered all of Asel's shields and invaded his skin and organs. Although Asel's mana, which had been sustaining his life through electrical signals from the beginning, resisted Zervil's foul energy, it could not completely annihilate it.

“Cough!”

The invading foul energy literally rotted Asel's organs. His large and small intestines began to decay in real-time, and the functions of his liver and stomach weakened. Asel vomited blood like a madman, glaring at Zervil with burning eyes.

“...You... bastard...”

“Why so serious? If you don’t incapacitate me quickly, you won’t hear any news about your beloved master—Eek!”

Zzziiing!!

Asel unleashed a shock magic on Zervil's face, casting multiple incantations. He slammed Zervil far away, embedding him into a tree. Zervil, who had smashed through dozens of trees, thrashed his body, while Asel took a deep breath and collapsed to the ground.

The pain was too intense. The sensation of his organs rotting was too vivid. It was fortunate that his lungs, heart, and brain were unharmed, but he was not in a condition to continue fighting.

‘...There’s no choice.’

Ultimately, Asel made an extraordinary decision.

The sense-killing technique he had learned from the battle with Virsia. He forcibly drew a part of it to block the pain. As the crushing agony that had been weighing on him vanished like a lie, his head cooled.

“...Hoo.”

Asel exhaled a bloody breath and slowly raised his body. Just then, Zervil was also crawling out from the ground. It would have been easier to break the ground, but his deliberate ascent revealed his bizarre nature.

It could easily be seen as ridiculous, but it was possible because he had the confidence that he could win even while acting like that. Asel had not yet reached that realm.

“Let’s go for the fourth match!”

Zervil shouted, stretching his optic nerves like a caterpillar beyond his hollow eyes. It was such a grotesque sight that it made one question whether he could truly see, but Asel did not concern himself with that.

He must not be mistaken. Although he had erased the pain, his body was still rotting. If he did not receive treatment soon, his organs would cease to function, and he would die.

He absolutely did not wish for such an ending. Asel spat out the rising pieces of rotting organs and walked toward Zervil. Zervil also chuckled and slowly approached Asel.

Still a considerable distance apart.

“Tell me where the master has gone.”

“I will let you know once you realize your uniqueness.”

“...You crazy bastard. Why are you so obsessed with my uniqueness? What does it have to do with you if I reach the 7th tier?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Midway.

“But I have a personal interest. I’m curious just how far a wizard with unprecedented talent in history can go. It drives me mad. That’s why I’m trying to elevate you to the 7th tier. The 8th tier would be even better.”

“...Are you trying to play the role of my master?”

“If I had to put it that way, yes. Well, if you wish, you can serve me as your second master.”

“...”

Now they were close enough to see each other's faces clearly.

Zervil's burned face reflected in Asel's right eye.

Asel's face, crumbling within Zervil's optic nerve, reflected back.

“About one minute left until your body collapses.”

Zervil spoke first.

“About one minute left until your organs cease to function.”

“...”

“How unfortunate. Even if my body collapses, it seems impossible to escape death. Unless you realize your uniqueness, that is.”

“Zervil.”

Asel spoke in a plain tone.

“Where is the master?”

“...You weren’t someone who couldn’t communicate this much, were you?”

Zervil sighed deeply and said that, then looked up at Asel, shrugging his one remaining shoulder.

“Fine. Let’s have a slaughter for one minute. Are you ready?”

“Thanks to you.”

“Pardon?”

At Zervil's moment of blinking in surprise at the unexpected response.

“I bought some time.”

Asel tossed a small bolt of lightning toward the sky. Immediately, he activated the magical artifact. The magic that had been rotting his organs was forcibly dismantled and analyzed, then shot back toward Zervil.

A form of magical artifact he had never seen before. The moment Zervil realized the bracelet was a Witch Council item.

Boom.

The sky roared.

“...!”

Surely, Ena's magic should have disappeared, but in an instant, a chilling surge of mana brushed past Zervil's consciousness.

He reflexively raised his head to gaze at the sky.

And there it was.

“...Hoo.”

At the center of the desolate mountain range. Above Asel, a dark blue lightning bolt writhed like a dragon. Asel tilted his head back to gaze at the spectacle.

“It is still a realm not permitted to me.”

The number of dragons swimming in the sky began to increase. As if they were dividing, they dyed the clear weather a dark blue and blocked out the sunlight. Nevertheless, the ground was filled with light. Thousands, millions of lightning bolts filled the sky.

“But absorbing the mana of my master and fighting has inspired me to realize a way to actualize the magic I had only organized theoretically.”

“...Haha.”

“However, casting it required time. I had to use all the remaining mana and form a pact.”

“Was the reason you kept forming pacts until now for that?”

Zervil asked with a voice full of delight. Instead of answering, Asel swept his tired hair back.

“The power to manipulate nature was not granted to humans. But for a great mage, it is not impossible. It is possible to go against providence.”

Crackle.

The lightning that filled the sky slowly began to grow in size.

“And I forcibly mimicked and manifested a part of it. I explored the power and knowledge contained within my master's mana, created magic that I had not been able to use, and brought it down to this world under all sorts of conditions.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

Zervil asked with a grin. Asel exhaled a long breath and replied.

“If the question is obvious, the answer is obvious.”

“...”

“Because that’s one of the conditions for activating the magic.”

“Hahahaha!!”

As if confirming his expectations, Zervil burst into cheerful laughter and glared at the sky. Asel ignored him and joined his hands, quietly murmuring.

“Windstorm Thunderbolt. Wind Rush Lightning. Trusting Wind Fury.”

The sky responded to Asel's incantation. In a place devoid of clouds, the dark blue lightning-filled sky quietly emitted electric currents, waiting for Asel's will. Zervil chuckled at the prickling electric shock against his skin.

And then.

“Extreme magic.”

Asel slowly opened his remaining eye and gazed at Zervil.

“Thunder Heaven Arrival.”

The moment he uttered it.

Crackle.

The sky violently writhed, and soon millions of lightning bolts began to plunge toward the ground all at once.