

“Normal speech”

‘Thought’

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Uhm, well, here we are. I had a little bit of a problem with Ch. 21, or it would be best to say, people reading it the wrong way.

The scene that most seem to misinterpret is the one in the sky, in which Satoru refers to Renner as beautiful... and here is the error. He wasn't simply calling her beautiful (and even if he did, I don't see the problem in calling a child beautiful. Many people do that or call them cute or something) but he was actually referring to the whole SCENE! You know, the starred night sky, the moonlight reflecting in Renner's eyes, her golden hair shining in the dark, creating a scenario more similar to a painting than a true scene. THAT was what Satoru was calling beautiful!

Ok ok, calming down now, but seriously, if you still think Satoru sees her in a sexual way then please just go away and go read something else. I don't really care.

For those who understand that, please, enjoy the chapter!

**Beta Reader: Don Orbit (go check out his amazing works!);
SirWertsalot (Thank you to every who checked out my fanfiction 'The Sorrow of Memories Past.' Your kind words fill my heart with joy and made me want to continue it. If you were ever curious what it would be like to have both The Great Tomb of**

Nazarick and the guild Seraphim in the new world, look no further!)

Chapter 23: Our Hearts melt in the Raging flames of Battle

“I said no! Stop pestering me about it, Stronoff!”

The ex-swordsman grunted out in irritation as he downed a sixth mug of beer.

“Young Lakyus is worried you are angry with her after she asked you that and you snapped at her like that.”

The Warrior Captain continued.

“I don’t give a shit about that brat Stronoff, just leave me alone already...”

The blue haired man dismissed the brown-haired warrior’s words.

“We both know that those words aren’t true.”

Said warrior retorted; the other man didn’t answer.

“I told you already, I left that life behind me...”

He finally said as he slumped into his wooden chair, the alcohol finally reaching up to him.

“You just gave up after a single defeat? Is that the true limit of your warrior spirit? Where is the man that fought tooth and nail to defeat me four years ago?”

Gazef tried to provoke in hope of a prideful reaction from his ex-rival, who instead just sighed in exasperation.

“That wasn’t just a simple defeat Stronoff... and you know it well... that man died and shattered alongside his blade months ago.”

Brain mumbled emotionlessly.

“If it would make you feel any better, I am fairly sure I would stand no chance against Satoru, either. He is just on a different level from us, the pinnacle of humanity.”

The Warrior Captain said in a serious tone, admitting his own inferiority to the magic caster.

“Bah! That Thing is no human at all! He does not eat; he does not drink... I wouldn't even be surprised if he didn't sleep at all... in the end we humans remain the weak ones, burdened by walls and limits all around us... and I'm tired of climbing those walls. The higher you go the harder you will fall and break.”

The blue-haired man scoffed as he threw his empty mug away.

“It may be as you say. That doesn't change the fact that seeking power for the sake of power is a weak excuse in the end... the walls may be insurmountable, but you may just have to climb high enough sometimes, to achieve what you want. There is no need to climb all the way up.”

The drunk warrior scoffed at those words.

“So that is your answer... settle for mediocrity? To know that there will always be someone stronger than you? A weak excuse to stop climbing...”

Brain sighed as his eyes went unfocussed.

“You know, I am actually good at other things... I seem to be good at wood carving. An old man seems interested in taking me as an apprentice in his shop...”

He whispered. Gazef stood up giving him a sympathetic look.

“Then I wish you good luck.”

The brown-haired man said, patting the other man's shoulder.

For a moment, the blue-haired man's eyes seem to regain focus and glance at the Warrior Captain in rage.

"Is that pity I see on your face Stronoff... you bastard!"

He continued to mumble in a low, dangerous tone.

"Just speak with Lakyus once more. Even if you don't want to participate in the tournament, let her know you are not angry at her... and then let that girl be, forever. You don't seem to be interested in her anymore."

Gazef said as he began to walk away, but he didn't even make a few steps before the sound of a chair falling resounded in the inn and he felt something hard hitting him on the back of his head, making him stumble forward.

"Leave me the fuck alone Stronoff! You know nothing! You understand nothing! Don't speak to me again!"

The drunk swordsman almost shouted as he gritted his teeth in rage. Gazef said nothing and simply left the inn.

{The Next Day}

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

{Outside the Grand Arena}

The undead looked up toward the sunny sky as the imposing figure of the Grand Arena got closer and closer as the royal carriage approached it.

'Waaaah! That's an impressive arena to be sure! It reminds me the one on the 6th floor of the tomb!' he reminisced in his head.

"Are you nervous Lakyus?"

He heard the third princess ask her handmaiden.

“J-just a bit... I mean... there will b-be a lot of people watching...”

The blond noble answered, stuttering a little, eliciting a small smile from said princess.

“I am sure you will do amazingly, Lady Lakyus.”

Encouraged the young emperor with a small smile of his own. But Satoru noticed how that smile didn't reach his eyes at all.

‘Being an emperor at such a young age must stress him a lot... poor boy’ the undead magic caster thought.

“As long as you do your best it will be fine.”

He decided to add, trying to take away, at least, part of the tension emitting from the pale 11 years old girl.

“Remember; there is no shame in giving up on a losing battle. You are young and still have much to learn. Consider this another lesson.”

Gazef gave his own piece of advice. Not long after that exchange, the carriage stopped, and they were allowed out once the zone was secured.

“I guess here our paths diverge.”

The emperor stated as his guard created a protective circle around them.

“Please Baziwood, make sure the young Lady Lakyus reaches the arena without incident.”

He continued as one of the men in dark armor broke formation and came toward them.

“Sure thing, Your Majesty.”

The man answered in a gruff tone muffled by his helmet.

“C’mon little one, let us go.”

He said as he gestured for Lakyus to follow him. With a small moment of hesitation, the young noble gulped loudly before following the tall knight.

“Lakyus!”

Before the marquis heiress could go too far the voice of Renner stopped her. The green eyed girl turned around to face her friend.

“Unsheathe your sword and get on one knee while presenting it to me.”

The noble hesitated before complying with her princess’ orders and unsheathing the enchanted blade Satoru gifted her for her birthday.

Once she was in position, Renner unfolded one of the golden ribbons on her dress and folded it around the lower part of the hilt of Lakyus’ sword, much to the surprise of the noble.

“You now bring with you the favor of the Third Princess of the Re-Estize Kingdom, young knight. Bring glory to my name.”

The blond princess proclaimed to the shock of many around them and even Satoru himself, who was most surprised about the unexpected turn of events. ‘Didn’t Touch-Me say once that ladies used to gift these kinds of things to their loved knights before battles or a tournament?... I guess Lakyus and Renner are closer than I initially thought...’ while he formulated that thought, Lakyus returned to her assigned guard as a small blush came to her face.

“And with that... we will be off.”

The tall guard said as he escorted the noble away, leaving a pregnant silence before the rest of the group was brought toward the VIP box of the arena.

{Osk's P.O.V.}

“Are you sure this? It reduce mobility.”

The giant armored figure of a war troll spoke in an inhuman but calm voice.

“Oh, my big friend, you will have no need to dodge anything. The other warriors will not see an opponent but just an armed wall of steel coming at them... they will be the ones in need of dodging.”

Explained the stout bodied merchant, before giving a hard slap on the troll's armored side; to him it was nothing if not a light pat.

“I believe you. I sure you right.”

Answered the troll before giving a pat of his own to the man's shoulder, resulting in the merchant making a few steps forward due to the force used.

“I sorry.”

Apologized the troll while the man waved his concerns away.

“Don't worry. Remember our training together during this last year and you will be fine... no! You will absolutely win this!”

Exclaimed the man in excitement, a sentiment shared by the troll judging by the grin he now had on his face.

“I excited to meet all great warriors; a great battle coming.”

Even if the words were spoken in pure confidence, the man could not abstain from disagreeing in his mind ‘probably more like a massacre on your part my friend... oh well, at least we will give the emperor a spectacle to behold’ he thought.

“I am just annoyed I could not give you a full body armor, but my finances would not allow for it. But don’t worry. When you become the champion of the arena, money will be no problem.”

At his words the war troll just shrugged.

“Me strong. I don’t need protection. My skin hard enough.”

The tall demi-human answered, and in part, the human could not do anything but agree. Normal steel would stand no chance against his skin. The same could not be said for enchanted weapons, though.

“I will be watching you from the stands Go Gin. Go and show them what true warriors are made of.”

At those words the troll lowered his helmet to cover his face.

“No worry Osk, it will go fine.”

The war troll said before walking away toward the preparation room.

‘This will be your debut my friend... Show them the power of a true warrior’ Osk thought before joining the crowd entering the stands. This was his dream. To finally come inside the great arena. Unfortunately, due to his lack of talent, he will not do it as a warrior, but as a patron. The patron of the greatest warrior the empire ever saw.

{Arche’s P.O.V.}

Something felt strange, and even at her young age, Arche could not help but think that something was very wrong with how her academic life turned out.

At first, she felt honored to be chosen to show around the Academy a magic caster on similar caliber to Fluder Paradyne himself, but the more this went on the stranger it became; she was invited to events and dinners that had nothing to do with academic studies, or anything remotely similar. And on every occasion, that magic caster was there, not too far but not too close either. But if he simply got interested in her, she would not have found the whole thing so baffling. What confused her most was the fact that every invitation came from the Emperor himself; and yet, the emperor did not show any interest in her and merely glanced at her a couple of times during all the events.

Asking support and clarity from her parents turned out to be a bad move. They just were ecstatic at the possibility of her becoming the next empress, something she was sure wouldn't happen.

And now she found herself in the VIP room of the Empire's Grand Arena, unsure of why or how she ended up there to begin with.

"Nervous about something?"

The deep and solemn voice of the 5th tier magic caster known as Satoru took her out of her trance like state.

"N-no, Lord Satoru, I-I just don't know why I a-am here..."

She answered honestly.

"Umu, don't you want to cheer for Lakyus?"

He asked. She bit her lip. That wasn't what she expected to come out of his mouth. It was true that Lakyus was the only one she managed to get a functioning conversation with, apart from Satoru, but she did not think of her as a friend to cheer for. The Re-Estize noble could be courteous if she wanted to, but she could just as well turn crass as soon as her obsession over swordsmanship was brought up.

"I-I am sure she will do fine."

She just resigned herself and gave the best answer her noble upbringing brought to her mind.

"Indeed, Gazef and Sir Brain taught her well from what I heard... but I am very curious to see what kind of equipment and participants this whole competition would attract."

Those words echoed in her mind. She already knew that his thirst for knowledge was great, considering his request after battling her mentor and his speech at the academy, but sometimes he really seemed like a horse with blinders in his way of thinking. 'But that could not be... otherwise he would not have come as far as he is' she thought disregarding her previous impression.

{Lakyus' P.O.V.}

The girl gulped as her heart began to beat erratically and she could feel her head pulsing alongside it. She could feel the sweat on her hands begin to dampen her armored gloves a bit. Her mouth was dry, and breathing has never been as difficult as now. To say she was being dwarfed by the other participants would be an understatement. Even the shorter one was at least double her height, and she already heard all the snickers and saw the smirks aimed at her.

The situation would have probably escalated further if the imperial knight assigned by the emperor wasn't looking over her from a moderate distance.

She closed her eyes and tried to take some deep and calming breaths. She could not let herself be intimidated by the situation. She had a wonderful sword and light armor that would give her an incredible advantage when it came to movement. She would stand tall and proud, as her two teachers taught her.

But the thought of her second teacher, and the way they left each other, brought a new wave of sorrow to her. She didn't mean to upset him so much while insisting on him participating with her in the tournament. He didn't even seem to be present to watch how she would do, and she was worried she would not see him again before they departed from the empire.

The sound of a blowing horn signaling the beginning of the competition made her return to reality as the participants began to walk out of the gate and inside the arena itself.

The cries and ovations of the crowd were deafening and Lakys just spared a look at the stands, hesitating a little on the VIP box, where she knew her friends were watching from.

The first part of the tournament consisted of what was called a brawl. Everyone against everyone until only 16 of the 100 warriors participating were left. From there 1 vs 1 matches would be organized until only one stood victorious above all others.

The judges began to put them in position, 5 meters of distance between each other. They ended up creating a giant circle alongside the border of the arena.

“YOU SCARED SQUIRT?!”

The bearded man on her right taunted her with a smirk.

“DON'T WORRY! IF YOU ARE A GOOD GIRL, I'M NOT GONNA HURT YOU... TOO BAD I MEAN, AHAHAHAHAH!”

Her grip tightened around the hilt of her short sword, gifted to her by Satoru almost a year ago, ready to unsheathe it, her eyes falling on the golden ribbon her princess, no, her friend gifted her.

She scanned the area around her. Many seemed as nervous as her. Her eyes stopped for an instant on a cloaked figure who stood almost opposite to her in the arena. ‘That is a flawless stance...’ she thought, making a mental note on avoiding the cloaked participant for the moment. Then her eyes fell on the most imposing figure in the arena, a demi-human clad in shining armor, more than 3 meters tall. ‘Yeah... let’s avoid that...’ she thought, already imagining her gruesome end at the hands of that beast.

“LET THE TOURNAMENT IN THE HONOR OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY JIRCIV RENE FARLORD EL NIX BEGIN!”

Cried one of the judges from the stands aided by a [Loud] spell which allowed him to surpass the noise made by the crowd.

In an instant, everything went to hell as the 100 warriors in the arena left their locations, charging at the nearest foe. The bearded man did not waste time and was immediately on her, or at least she would have thought so if said man wasn’t so slow. ‘Well, I guess heavy armor would do this to you...’ she thought, thankful for her lighter choice.

The man raised his axe ready to strike her, but the movement was so slow and predictable that Lakys, in the meantime,

managed to fall into a fighting stance that Brain's brutal training practically marked into her brain.

'He is probably starting slow and easy thinking me an easy target... well he is wrong!' she cried out in her mind as she fully unsheathed her dark blue sword and met the descending axe midway.

As she felt no resistance, she thought she missed and her eyes widened 'w-what, h-how could I-' but then her thought stopped as she realized she didn't miss. No, her weapon simply went through all the man had.

His axe was cut in two as was his skull and even his helmet. She looked in shock as the man, now corpse, fell lifelessly on the cold ground that now was painted red. The sounds all around her died down as her brain was into too much of a shock to register anything else.

But as soon as she felt a shift in the air behind her, her instincts forced her to react by turning and raising her sword, right in time to block a swing from another blade. The man who attacked her tried to push his surprise attack forward, but Lakys held her place; and when she was about to push back, the man was sent flying a few meters in the air, falling ruinously a good ten meters from her location.

But Lakys was not relieved by the sudden event, because now, standing before her, was the giant demi-human who just sent a full grown and heavy armored man flying with a single swing of his metal club. 'T-that thing is bigger than m-me' the young noble found herself thinking as she prepared herself for a final desperate stand against the towering beast.

“Eh! You small but you determined! I want to fight, later.”

The inhuman rumbling voice of the monster reached her ears, she couldn't completely be sure, but she could almost swear she heard some degree of respect in his words. 'Could the first adversary to finally acknowledge me really be a demi-human?' she wondered as the armored wall marched away toward the middle of the arena, where the battle was raging with more intensity.

'Yes, let us fight, later' she mentally agreed to the demi-human challenge as she marched away as well, seeking an opponent for herself.

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

The masked skeleton looked down at the arena as humans slaughtered and maimed each other for the enjoyment of the cheering crowd. 'Wow, this is even worse than that time police caught that illegal fight club back in Japan...' he thought as what seemed to be an armored troll smashed through three warriors; 'at least, back there, there was no magic items enhancing the slaughter' he continued talking to himself. For once he was really appreciating his undead apathy toward death and bloodshed.

His nonexistent eyes soon found Lakyus among the mess of people screaming in rage, pain or fear. She was silent, and in her silence, she brought down opponent after opponent. He even noticed how many in the crowd began to notice the young noble and point at her in excitement.

'Well, it's not most days you see a child who barely reached puberty bringing down men thrice her size' he stated to no one but himself once more as his eyes left the young noble to find

another figure he was interested in. 'it seems like he is doing just fine... even tho-' his thought was abruptly interrupted as Renner, who sat next to him, slightly bent forward, her eyes glued to the form of Lakyus who now found herself fighting two fully armored men who ganged up on her.

The young noble, while skilled, still found herself pushed back by the two opponents, one wielding a spear that made sure she stayed as far as possible, while the other was using a bow to snipe at her.

Satoru saw how Renner's eyes sharpened and her hand laying on her lap clenched into a fist. 'Well, she is her friend after all... I must get ready to teleport her away if things get out of control' he thought as he got ready to cast said spell if needed.

But then something changed. Lakyus became faster and almost seemed to blur through the spear user attacks until she struck him down with a single hit before proceeding to put down the archer who didn't even have the time to pull out his short sword.

"This isn't good."

Stated a calm but visibly anxious Gazef whose eyes were focused on the blond noble down in the arena.

"What do you mean?"

Asked Renner who was as confused as Satoru on the Warrior Captain's statement.

"My Princess, what young Lakyus just used was the Martial Art [Flow Acceleration], a skill she learned but not yet perfectionated, and while it may seem like a good boost to her abilities, the mental strain is great as well, even more for

someone of that age and who is not used to utilizing it in such stressful situations.”

The Warrior Captain explained the severity of the event unfolding before them.

“Umu, so young Lakyus just halved the time she could resist down there.”

Satoru tried to summarize, receiving a nod from the experienced warrior.

“The sooner it ends the better for her... and if she knows it, she will try to stay on the defensive from now on.”

The strongest warrior continued his evaluation; and, true to his statement, Lakyus began to retreat from the fray that was the center of the arena to the side where she could shield her back thanks to the walls.

Satoru gave a quick glance around and to his surprise noticed how, apparently, more than half the participants were already retired, unable to continue or dead. ‘Well considering that guy is down there and the other big fellow, such an outcome shouldn’t be too surprising...’ he assured himself as the troll smashed two more swordsmen, reducing them to pools of meat and blood splattered on the ground.

While this was going on, Lakyus’ retreat didn’t go unnoticed as three more coalized participants charged at her, which, judging by Renner’s slightly twitching eye, incredibly annoyed said third princess.

“Your Majesty, is it not against the rules to coalize in such an event?”

Asked the princess with all her usual decorum and ice-cold calmness.

“It is indeed frowned upon... I cannot deny that, but in the end, it doesn’t actually break any official rule, unless the group is so large that it would interfere with the choosing of the 16 winners.”

The emperor answered, shrugging away Renner’s slight accusation with one of his usual charming smiles.

“A dishonorable tactic.”

Offered Gazef in support of Renner’s statement.

“It may be so, but still, winning is the only thought on these warriors’ minds right now.”

Countered one of the high-ranking looking nobles sitting not far from their group and currently enjoying the company of a young uncomfortable maid.

{Arche’s P.O.V.}

The noble heiress found herself silently clenching her fists at the sight before her. She just couldn’t help it; she could not stop relating herself to Lakyus. Here she was, besting with sheer skill men thrice her age who resorted to ganging up on her in hope of wearing her down. A shameful display to say the least.

In a certain sense, this was also what she had to go through when she first entered the Academy. And if she didn’t know better, she could swear this was an arranged attempt at bringing down Re-Estize and its diplomatic party. She could not, in all honesty, totally disprove such a claim though.

And even if she should be on her country’s side on this, she couldn’t just cheer for such a shameful display. ‘The unskilled and

lazy elders, unable to stop the passionate and flaming youth, resorting to forcefully pushing it down by any need deemed necessary...' she thought in disgust.

In the meantime, the young, green eyed blond noble down in the arena was forced back against a wall, forced into a defensive stalemate, in which the first to make a risky move would probably end up tasting the ground.

"She is going to fall soon. She has lost too much stamina throughout the whole thing and from the use of Martial Arts. Now she finds herself at a loss and a tight leash."

She heard Re-Estize's Warrior Captain say with a matter-of-fact tone; and if such an experienced warrior stated this with so much certainty, there was no way he was wrong.

Lakyus' opponents began to surround her, and Arche began to fear the worst for her fellow noble, but the green-eyed girl showed her wrong once more as she began to madly flail her sword around, throwing off her opponents who randomly scattered in order to avoid the barrage of deadly slashes. That single moment of surprise was enough for Lakyus to run and get out of the deadly trap she was forced in.

Of course, the three didn't give up and, after a moment of hesitation in order to reassemble their situation, they sprinted after her, quickly overcoming Lakyus' initial advantage. But, as everything seemed lost once again, the young warrior spun around and, with a ponderous kick, sent a flying mass of sand directly at her pursuers' faces, making two of them derail from their straight path and sending one directly against another participant, while the other stumbled and fell ruinously on the ground. As for the last one, the momentum of his sprint was too

much to stop and between trying to avoid the sand and seeing the fate of his comrades, he never saw the dark blue blade flash before him as it plunged into his chest.

That side of the crowd cheered loudly as Lakyus brought down her opponents and removed the blade from the man's chest.

And after that display, a loud sound echoed all around the arena signaling the end of the brawl, which meant that the initial 100 participants were now reduced to merely 16, but only one would be proclaimed as Champion of the Arena.

Now it was time for the true show of skill to begin. For bets to be made and for warriors to fight till the very bitter end. But in the young magic caster's heart burned an undying flame, an unwavering passion for the girl currently panting in exhaustion in the Grand Arena. 'maybe we weren't so different after all...'

She was so enraptured by the scene before her that she didn't even notice when Satoru excused himself and left the VIP box to go and do who knows what.

{Osk's P.O.V.}

As the chosen 16 returned to the preparing area, awaiting the judges to come and instruct them on what to do next, the merchant patiently awaited his champion's return.

The brawl was everything he hoped it to be. Go Gin showed the whole arena and various sponsors his combat prowess; an unstoppable wall of metal who could smash even three swordsmen with a single bash of his club. Truly, he was the epitome of what a true warrior should be like.

As the armored war troll stepped and sat in front of him, Osk didn't waste time and congratulated him on his first debut in the arena.

"I am sure these people will not easily forget your performance in there!"

He assured him. The demi-human just nodded, making Osk's smile falter for a moment. Usually, his big friend was far more talkative than this; usually he only went silent when he was in deep thoughts.

"Is something wrong?"

He whispered in a worried tone which was a far cry from his earlier excitement. The demi-human seemed to hesitate once more, his face still hidden behind his helmet, his expression inscrutable.

"No; the opponents did not offer challenge at all... but, best is left for later, I guess... but blue one worry me."

He said in his broken language. He was still struggling to learn the human speech after all, something Osk was trying to remedy. Said merchant turned to glance at the other participants and indeed, he found a blue cloaked warrior sitting alone in a corner while all the others stood alongside their sponsors.

"He doesn't seem like much. A mysterious warrior clad in blue. Seems like someone who is trying to get a name or something, not that he would be the first to try..."

The sponsor of the war troll said, and indeed the clad warrior didn't seem like much in his eyes. He had an average height, and no particular build could be seen under his cloak. If anything, that cloak seemed more like a handicap than anything. But his tall

companion didn't seem to agree with his statement as he shook his covered head.

"He never use weapon... he take away warriors' weapon and left them there."

At those words, Osk's eyebrows furrowed in confusion. That was indeed a strange behavior. He never heard of a warrior in the arena not using any kind of weapon. He should have noticed earlier but then again, he was probably too focused on looking at Go Gin's performance.

Lost in his thoughts, he didn't see the figure approaching them as well, but who could blame him? The girl was just too short for her to be easily spotted among the towering warriors.

"Hey you! Demi-human!"

She called and attracted the gaze of the two partners toward her. Osk immediately recognized her. She was the girl who got all the west wing of the arena fired up; 'a nameless prodigy fighting with 3 men thrice her size at the same time and coming out victorious... those are stories worthy of legend in the arena... I wonder if she could be a worthy catch...' he pondered to himself.

"I hereby accept your challenge! Let us meet blades in an honorable duel!"

She declared in all seriousness, and, if Osk didn't see her fight, he would have found the scene before him hilarious, not that he believed her to stand any chance against the likes of Go Gin.

"Yes, let's meet blade in arena!"

The war troll answered eagerly, in a tone Osk knew was only reserved for when he was excited.

A metallic gloved hand gently grasped the young girl's shoulder as all the attention went from the skilled child to the towering black cloaked and masked figure just behind her.

“So... this is where you ran off... already going for the bigger fish, Lakyus?”

The dark and solemn voice echoed deep inside Osk who just got the unexplainable feeling of standing before another Go Gin, but without his usual good temperament.

“How could I become the greatest swordswoman if I went for anything less than the best?! I will make master proud! And I will make a name for the sword you gave me, Satoru!”

Proclaimed again the excited girl, eliciting a chuckle from the robed man whose name Osk knew well. The name of the greatest merchant of the Re-Estize Kingdom, pillar of the Adventurer and Magician guilds, a name not easily disregarded among the elite merchants of the Empire.

Of course, he heard of the coming of such a man to the empire, but even he could not believe his luck in meeting him like this face to face.

Even if Osk was just beginning to enter among the elite of the Empire's merchants, he already heard enough of the man currently standing before him to send shivers down his spine. It was said that this merchant not only was a ruthless competitor but a 5th tier magic caster as well. He submitted under him a guild almost 2 centuries old in less than a year and was on his way to becoming the lead merchant of the Re-Estize kingdom, or, at least, so said the rumors.

And while he was someone to fear, Osk could not stop but admire the man who brought such innovations to the market for magic items. It was said that he opened a shop in all the major cities of Re-Estize and had complete control over the circulation of a fourth of the total money circulating around the kingdom. It could be said he had an empire of his own in the form of his many shops. And if someone dared to challenge him, he would not even need to move a finger as the Adventurer guild and Magician guild would step in and force back down whoever tried to get in the way of their benefactor.

Before him, the greatest Osk ever heard of a merchant was someone who managed to open 3 shops in the same city, but this was on a completely different level. And to know such a man stood before him was as frightening as it was exciting.

But then, after such an epiphany, the hard reality came down on him with all its weight. This man wasn't here for no reason; this man had a champion, just as Osk did; and said champion was the young girl before him.

'And who knows what would happen if that girl...' Osk didn't get to finish his dreadful realization as the giant man turned toward the two of them in all his intimidating height.

"And who might you two be? Oh, the troll I recognize, but I can't say the same for you."

He said clearly referring to Osk.

"I Go Gin, he is Osk, my patron."

The war troll said before Osk could think of a way to get out of that situation.

“Umu, I see. I am happy to see demi-humans do not shy away from this kind of challenge. I wish you good luck.”

The magic caster said as he offered a handshake to the war troll, who, after a few moments of hesitation due to different culture or surprise at his gesture, Osk wasn't quite sure which, accepted the offered hand.

Osk noticed how the masked merchant didn't even seem to flinch from the probably stronger than normal, grip of the demi-human.

After Osk shook hands with the robed man as well, he and his young champion departed from the scene. The unsure merchant turned toward his friend, in hope of convincing him to go easy on the girl, even if it was a fool's errand and he knew that already. But his words died in his throat as he saw a drop of sweat trickle down Go Gin's tense arm muscle.

“That man... he strong, he can kill all in here, my instinct say to me to flee... is this fear? This is death smell?”

The demi-human said to no one in particular, but that was enough for Osk; for his whole life, he always thought true power lied in the courage and skill of a warrior, but only now he realized, that even if Go Gin, the epitome of the word warrior, fell; maybe there was no courage, no skill and no warrior who could stand tall and mighty against the stench of death.

{1 hour later}

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

An interesting duo. Even after their interaction, he continued to glance at the troll and his patron every now and then. He was really surprised to see such an intelligent demi-human. Judging from how people talked about them, they didn't seem much

more than brainless creatures acting purely on instinct, but apparently, like many other supposed truths, this was merely the vision of one side of the coin.

‘I should investigate this further; it may be possible to establish good relationships with the most pacifistic demi-human races’ As he pondered those ideas the judges began to extract the names and place them randomly in what seemed to be a graphic representing a tournament like diagram, with 16 participants, but just one winner.

He immediately noticed that the troll ended up on the opposite side of Lakyus ‘this means that they would need to get to the finals to fight...’ he thought, thinking back about the challenge Lakyus issued.

“Remember what I told you... always stay prepared.”

He whispered to Lakyus, who now wore a serious expression on her face after their private talk. The blond girl nodded as her grip tightened around the hilt of her blade where Renner’s golden ribbon still remained, contrasting with the general dark tone of the sword.

‘I have never been the fairest player either... but to so blatantly target someone during a match...’ he thought; in all honesty, it really wasn’t hard to see what was happening. A foreign participant being targeted by a group, probably ordered by some higher ups to make sure to kill or maim them.

The image of a group of players insulting him and beating him came back to his mind as his gloved hand clenched without him noticing. Satoru never appreciated gankers in all his life. Unskilled players just remedying their weakness through numbers.

'Cheaters... what a despicable bunch...' and with that mentality, it would only be fair for him to intervene... to equilibrate the sides once more.

A.N.

Very long wait, I know, but ton of stuff is happening in my life right now. I'm probably going to move again, and my new full-time job doesn't help with the overall stress. Oh well, enough with my ramblings about the unfairness of life.

Hope you all enjoyed the chapter; this is of course the first part of a two-part small tournament arc... I never thought I would end up writing one of those though...

Let me know as always what you think in the reviews! Maybe, if I get enough of those, the next chapter will come out sooner... so review!

Till next time! And stay safe!