

Great Mage 521

Chapter V2C221

Kran stood in the center of the arena with demonic energy billowing around him.

'I can't win.'

Lee Jong-hak honestly admitted this fact in his head.

He couldn't win.

His assumptions had been right to an extent, but there were still some things that he'd guessed incorrectly.

First of all, it seemed impossible to break the mind control just by having a long fight. The power that was hidden in Kran's body was much stronger than Lee Jong-hak expected.

Lee Jong-hak turned to the referee and lifted his left hand. It was a move that meant a timeout in the arena.

The referee turned to look at him.

It was a pity since the audience's excitement was reaching its peak, but it couldn't be helped.

"...I give u-"

At that moment, Lee Jong-hak felt a strange sensation.

The referee also looked at him in confusion.

"...! ...!"

No. He seemed to be saying something.

But Lee Jong-hak couldn't hear him at all.

That wasn't all. Even the sounds of the audience in the stands felt more distant.

As if he was submerged in water, their voices gradually grew fainter until they were cut off completely.

It was a terrifying feeling.

He was obviously in the center of the arena with tens of thousands of people looking at him, but he felt a sense of loneliness and isolation that he had never experienced before.

It was as though he had been separated from the world.

"Hi. Nice to meet you."

A whisper-like voice sounded at that moment.

It was Kran's voice, but he was certain that Kran wasn't the one speaking.

Their manner of speech were completely different.

He spoke with a soft, gentle voice that wasn't really suitable for a man. It was strange to say it, but it felt like there was a bit of coquettishness mixed into his voice.

That wasn't all.

Juk.

Beads of cold sweat rolled down his face. It was hard to breathe, and it felt like a hand was tightly gripping his heart.

It was pressure and fear that he had never felt before. It made him want to turn around and run away without looking back.

He suddenly had a thought.

He would definitely...

Die there.

'Kuh.'

Lee Jong-hak clenched his fist so hard that blood dripped from between his fingers.

Pushing through his fear, he forced his mouth to open.

"Who... are you?"

"Is that all you want to know?"

Kran spoke in a sultry manner.

"Who I am isn't important, and I can't maintain this state for a long time. It is really annoying in its own way, but I wanted to meet you no matter what."

"...me?"

"I would like to make you an offer. Just know that regardless of your decision, I will gladly accept it."

He couldn't respond to such a one-sided statement, so he licked his chapped lips instead.

Kran continued without caring about Lee Jong-hak's reaction.

"The first is for you to give up like you originally wanted to. If you do that, I will kill everyone in this arena in the most painful way I can think of and leave them all without complete corpses."

"What the hell..."

"Ah. Did it sound like I was joking? Maybe I should prove myself."

Joke? It wasn't like that at all.

It was because her words sounded like an unstoppable disaster.

Lee Jong-hak remained silent with an extremely pale face.

“The second option is the opposite. Continue fighting without giving up. The difference is that the final outcome won’t be decided until one party dies.”

“...”

Lee Jong-hak couldn’t beat Kran. This was a fact that this ‘being’ had to know.

Nevertheless, they still chose to propose this death match.

“...why are you even giving me a choice?”

“Mm?”

“If you wanted to, you could just kill me along with everyone else in this arena.”

He didn’t know who this being was. Or even how powerful they were.

However, he was certain that this being was one of the strongest that he’d ever encountered.

This was something Lee Jong-hak realised the moment he felt this being’s aura.

“Ahaha.”

Kran let out a laugh.

At that moment, Lee Jong-hak couldn’t help but feel that the being controlling him was a woman.

“Of course I can. Kran is a very powerful and versatile puppet. By the way, do you have any hobbies?”

“...”

“I guess not. How surprising. No, actually, I knew you would be a boring guy.”

She giggled and continued.

“This is just my personal opinion, but I don’t think it’s necessary to care about others while enjoying your hobby. No matter who looks at you, it’s better to just have your fun.”

Lee Jong-hak just stared at his opponent without answering.

The more they talked, the more he felt that this being was insane.

“Right. My hobby is a bit strange. I like looking at the expressions a person has while thinking. It’s even better when they have a limited amount of time or options. Do you understand? At that time, a person’s expression would shift from various emotions like joy, sorrow, and anger. The more deeply they think, the clearer those emotions are.”

“...”

“Ahaha. I really do like looking at those kinds of eyes. It’s like appreciating jewels that change color depending on the intensity of light and the direction in which it shines. That’s what I’m saying. So...”

She looked at Lee Jong-hak with an expression of anticipation.

“Please think about it.”

Ssrrng.

Lee Jong-hak didn't need to think about it. He drew his sword without the slightest hesitation or pause.

Although he hadn't intended to,

“...”

He could see the disappointment in Kran's expression.

Of course, she knew he would choose the latter in the end, she thought that he would at least agonise over it for a while.

Human Dragon Lee Jong-hak.

He certainly wasn't a hypocrite.

He was a good man, a true hero that only appeared in fairytales... Something like that. But that didn't matter.

The small interest she had in him faded. If she knew this would happen, she wouldn't have wasted the energy to fully take over Kran's body.

She classified this man as the least interesting human in the world.

“Then, see ya.”

He knew he shouldn't.

But Lee Jong-hak couldn't help but turn his head to look at the stands once again.

Min Ha-rin's face easily caught his gaze.

‘You were right after all.’

* * *

“...”

Blood splattered and flesh fell.

It was a scene that she had witnessed many times, but Min Ha-rin knew that she would never forget this sight.

It was something she wished she never had to see, but also something that she didn't want to forget.

The sight of a close friend, not a stranger, dying in front of her very eyes.

Thuk-

One Fighter fell.

And one corpse was made.

No. It wasn't just a Fighter.

Lee Jong-hak was dead.

"...ah."

Her hair stood up straight.

It felt like electricity was coursing through her body.

Babump-

The sound of a heart beating pounding in her ears. It was her own. But it was strange.

Has her heartbeat always been that loud? She was certain that it used to be quieter...

No. What was she even thinking about?

She didn't know.

She didn't want to know.

Min Ha-rin stared at Kran.

With an expressionless face, he sheathed his sword and walked away.

But she kept staring at him.

Rumble-

And deep within her.

Something moved.

Chapter V2C222

—About a month before the Championship.

Akad Port City.

"You want to go to Temple Island?"

"That's correct."

"Hmm...."

An old man looked at him with a dull expression before saying.

"You an outsider?"

"Yes."

"What does an outsider want with Temple Island?"

"Do I have to answer that first?"

“Normally, you wouldn’t have to, but the situation here has changed a bit recently. I can’t discuss information about our sea route to someone suspicious.”

The man standing in front of the old man thought for a while before slowly opening his mouth.

“...I can tell you about my personal circumstances, which would be long and boring.”

Then he flicked a silver coin into the air with his finger.

With agility that belied his age, the old man snatched the coin out of the air.

It was a silver 10 eru coin.

“Or I can cover senior’s drinks for the night. Which one would you like to choose?”

“...hmmm.”

The old man scratched his chin with one hand while pocketing the silver coin with the next.

Then, he gave a bright smile, showing off his yellow teeth.

“The price of alcohol has risen a lot these past few days.”

The man didn’t answer, and instead directly flipped another two coins over.

Like their predecessor, they were similarly snatched from the air before they could reach the peak of their flight.

The old man licked his lips.

“Follow me.”

Before following him, the man, Lukas, turned back.

He was looking in the direction of Lirua.

“...”

It would be a lie to say that he wasn’t worried at all.

But Lukas shook his head.

‘I just need to rescue Sedi and return home as soon as possible.’

Then he heard a voice.

“What’s going on? Are you coming or not?”

Lukas stared for a few more moments before turning and following the old man.

* * *

Vessels that seemed to focus more on beauty than practicality were moored at the pier. In a way, this hinted at the level of the Dragonmen shipbuilding industry.

The man slowly walked along the spacious pier. Following him, Lukas felt his surroundings become quieter and quieter.

Not just ships, even the people in the area were few.

“It’s best to not do something like that next time.”

The old man continued to speak in his slow drawl, and he continued without even waiting for a response.

“Trying to shut someone up with money. There are a lot of idiots like you who think this city is a safe place.”

“Isn’t it? This was chosen as the best city to live in the entirety of Combat Island.”

When Lukas said that, a loud, wheezing laugh erupted.

“Did you read that in a newspaper? Those publishing houses really won’t go bankrupt as long as there are idiots like you around.”

“...”

“You wanna know what’s the most disgusting thing about those publishing houses? They can write articles about their own opinions as though it’s the truth.”

The man spoke in a cynical tone.

But it didn’t seem like he was criticising Lukas. Instead, his tone was closer to self-deprecation.

“Of course, since you’re an outsider, you wouldn’t know the truth about anything. However, the Major City Lord of this city...”

After speaking up there, the old man shook his head.

“Forget I said anything. When we open our eyes and see the world, old men like me sometimes talk to ourselves about foolish things.”

Lukas knew the Major City Lord of Akad.

Not long ago, before killing Kangki, he’d even met him face to face.

Spera.

A Dragonman with the appearance of a young boy.

Of course, he didn’t actually think he was young. And after a few conversations, he learned that he was actually a few hundred years old.

“Understood. I’ll be careful.”

By the time Lukas said those words, the old man stopped walking.

They were now standing in front of a small boat that was moored to the pier in a rather lonely spot.

It was an old boat.

The man looked up at the sky. Since there were no clouds, it was easy to see the position of the sun.

“He’s probably still asleep...”

“...”

“The captain of this ship has probably passed out in it right now. Tell him that Grandpa Marco sent you.”

“Thank you.”

“You really came to the right person this time.”

Although his tone didn’t change, it was obvious that he was showing off.

The old man continued.

“I don’t know who told you about this old man, but I definitely found the right guy for you. Don’t worry if he appears a bit unreliable. As far as I know, he’s the best sailor in this city.” (TL: The best sailor always lives secluded in a shabby house/boat.)

After saying that, he turned around to leave as though he’d already completed his task. His attitude was truly heartless, but Lukas wasn’t too upset about it.

His eyes turned away from the old man’s back, and once again returned to the old boat. Then, he stepped onto it.

Creak!

The deck screamed shrilly the moment he stepped onto it. Lukas wasn’t being careless. Instead, he remembered the old man saying that the captain was probably asleep.

Although this ship looked old on the outside, he thought that it might be better on the inside.

Since it was a small ship, there weren’t many places that the captain would sleep. He decided to head to the cabin first.

Knock knock.

“...”

Knock knock.

He knocked several times on the door, but there was no answer.

Lukas pondered for a while, and instead of just knocking louder, he decided to just directly go inside.

Creak.

Tuk.

But immediately after opening the door, his foot hit something.

“Ugh...”

He looked down and saw a middle-aged man.

The first thing Lukas noticed was his unique appearance.

To be precise, his appearance was quite familiar to him, but rare in the Heavenly Realm.

He didn't have sharp claws, and the teeth that he could see through his open mouth weren't sharp. He didn't even have scales.

This man was an outsider.

"Mmm..."

It seemed that the tip of his shoe had hit the man's thigh. Although he didn't hit him hard, it was still enough for the man to wake up and look around with a blurry gaze.

"..."

After looking around for a while, seemingly to figure out where he was, the man's eyes found Lukas.

"...who're you?"

"Grandpa Marco sent me here."

"...so you're a customer."

The man said this with a hoarse voice and a wrinkled face. If a timid person had been there instead, they might feel guilty for waking him.

Staggering, the man stood up before beckoning to Lukas.

"Get out of the way."

When Lukas complied, he went outside, spat out some phlegm, and returned.

"Then... First things first, do you have money?"

"How much?"

"Depends on where you're going."

"I'm headed to Temple Island."

"That's a rare destination."

"Can you do it or not?"

"I can, but it'll cost you."

They once again returned to the original question.

The middle-aged man, who was probably the captain, continued.

"3,000 eru for a round trip."

That was pretty expensive.

Before searching for a ship, Lukas had scouted the market prices to an extent.

Even if he wanted a round trip to one of the Seven Islands, it wouldn't be as expensive. Moreover, Temple Island wasn't that far away.

"I'm telling you in advance, I'm not gonna give you a discount. If you don't like my price you can just go find someone el-..."

He froze as Lukas pulled out 30 gold coins.

Each gold coin was worth 100 eru.

"..."

The captain frowned.

Apparently, he hadn't expected Lukas to be so rich.

"...this is the perfect time for a nap."

After saying that, he sighed.

"Only people with special qualifications can enter Temple Island."

"I know."

He didn't need to worry about that.

The Dragon Plaque that he'd received from Arid should be enough to prove his qualifications. What he was more concerned about was finding a ship.

Lukas looked around the cabin.

It seemed that the cabin also served as the wheelhouse(1), and there were no other rooms on the ship. There was a small space under the deck that seemed to be for cargo, but there weren't many signs of use.

"Are there any other sailors?"

"It's just me. It's not that big of a ship."

"..."

Lukas wasn't very knowledgeable about the sea and sailing, but he knew that it wouldn't be easy to sail alone, even if the boat was as small as this one.

For a moment, he couldn't help but wonder if this man was just bluffing. Or if he was a scammer who had good control over his expressions.

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Lukas looked at the man in front of him, wondering if he was working together with the old man from earlier to scam him.

But after thinking that, he felt that his attitude was a bit strange. Instead of enticing him, it felt like the man wanted Lukas to go find someone else to take him to his destination.

“...Temple Island.”

The captain muttered in a soft voice and went out to the deck once more.

Then, he stared out at the endless ocean for a while.

—After a few minutes,

The captain returned to the cabin and spoke in a blunt tone.

“We’ll leave in three days.”

It really seemed like an arbitrary decision.

This was especially so for Lukas, who was currently in an urgent situation.

The captain continued.

“If you don’t like it, you can find someone else.”

“I’ll be back in three days.”

“...”

The captain frowned before walking to the end of the cabin. Then, as if he was telling him to leave, he said.

“I’ll collect your money then.”

“Enjoy your rest.”

With those words, Lukas got off the boat.

Click.

The sound of the door closing followed him.

* * *

That evening.

Lukas was having dinner at an inn in Akad. Perhaps it was because it was a port city, most of the dishes available were seafood. This meant that there was marine life in this strange ocean that existed above the clouds.

Tuduk, tuduk...

Suddenly, he heard the sound of rain from the outside.

This gave Lukas an incongruous feeling.

‘The sound of rain?’

With a strange expression on his face, he turned to look out of the window. And sure enough, a stream of water was hitting the window hard. Of course, it wasn't strange that it was raining, what was strange was that it was raining in this place.

This was the Heavenly Realm. A world that floated above the clouds. How could there be rain in this place?

Bang!

At that moment, the door to the inn swung open roughly, and a group of people rushed in. They were all soaked as though they had just come out of the shower.

"Dammit! My luck is so bad!"

The man in the lead shook his body while cursing loudly.

The innkeeper, who was covered by the water flying off his body, scowled.

"Do you want me to kick you back outside?"

"I'm sorry, boss, I was only thinking about going back to my room and getting a change of clothes. I'll wipe up all the water I scattered, so please forgive me."

The innkeeper's expression softened a bit.

"...I'll let it go this time. Rather than that, would you like to have some hot stew?"

"I'm a bit hungry, so please add plenty of meat."

The innkeeper then asked the chef to make 10 portions of stew.

"By the way, what's going on? Is it a Skystorm?"

"The worst one this year."

"What's the damage like?"

"Our departure has been delayed. We managed to notice it earlier and turn back, but it wasn't enough. Those ships that departed earlier in the morning are basically done for. Two ships sank, and most of the cargo on them had been swept away. If I was to estimate the damage to property and personnel as well as the compensation, we're almost bankrupt."

"Your luck really is bad."

The innkeeper let out a soft sigh.

"...this isn't the first or second time that sailors have been lost while traversing the vast ocean, but this time is different."

"It can't be helped. There are no more than five Flying Captains in Akad who can foresee the coming of the Skystorm."

The man spoke with a troubled expression.

“No one can even dream about leaving the island for at least three days. There were a lot of customers who were intending to come to the island for the Championship. I’ll be scolded.”

* * *

Three days later.

Lukas headed to the place where the small boat was moored.

As if the ship had been separate from everything that happened the past few days, there seemed to be nothing different about the boat or its surroundings.

No. There was one thing different.

Unlike the last time, the captain was standing on the deck. He was smoking a pipe while looking out at the horizon.

Lukas stepped onto the deck.

Creak!

Like a bell, the deck of the ship announced his arrival.

‘Hoo’, the captain, who spat out a puff of smoke, looked back and said.

“It’ll take about four days for us to get to Temple Island.”

“That’s longer than I expected.”

“...”

The captain seemed to be thinking about something. Lukas felt like he had an idea of what the captain was thinking about.

He was probably thinking about whether he should recommend him to another boat or not.

Of course, now that he had confidence in the captain’s skills, he didn’t intend to take any other boat.

“...the waters in that area are particularly dangerous.”

Seeing that Lukas didn’t intend to change his mind, the captain explained in a weak voice.

“As far as I know, there is only one risk-free route to the island.”

“Understood.”

“Ships cannot remain anchored outside of Temple Island for more than two days. If you think you’ll take longer than that, then please tell me in advance. As long as there isn’t any unusual weather, I’ll find a way to wait for you until then.”

Nevertheless, Lukas’ business was not on Temple Island.

Instead, his goal was to access Death Island from it.

Death Island was one of the largest of the Seven Islands that made up the Heavenly Realm. However, because most of the land was polluted with death energy, it was difficult for Dragonmen to live there.

Naturally, there was no one he could ask for Sedi's whereabouts, so it was impossible for him to know how long it would take for him to find her.

"I'll find my own way back."

So Lukas had no choice but to answer in that way.

"I won't lower the price even if it's one way."

That had never been a problem in the first place.

He didn't intend to brag, but money was the least of Lukas' worries.

Without saying anything, he simply held out the money bag he'd prepared.

Contrary to his seemingly unyielding attitude, the captain didn't check the money before putting it away.

"Meals will be served twice a day, but don't expect them to taste good."

"I brought my own food."

"You're well prepared."

As he said that, the captain sucked on his pipe.

"Then let's set sail."

It was at that moment,

[Warning!!]

[Death Island is an incredibly dangerous place! Entry is not recommended!]

He'd heard this message hundreds or even thousands of times since he had decided to go to Death Island. The contents of the warnings were slightly different every time, but the general meaning was always the same.

"..."

And like before, Lukas ignored the voice ringing in his ears.

He already knew it was dangerous.

And he already knew that he might die.

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The captain was a blunt person, and Lukas was not the type to initiate a conversation. So naturally, this meant that there was little to no conversation between them.

Lukas found a place for himself in a corner of the cabin.

This spot was filled with dust and miscellaneous items, but after the captain rearranged it a little, he was able to make enough space for one person to lay down.

Of course, such a place wouldn't be very pleasant. If someone were to sleep there for even a few hours, they would probably wake up with their noses clogged.

Nevertheless, Lukas managed to find something there that interested him.

"Do you mind if I read these books?"

He asked this while looking at a pile of old books that were strewn haphazardly across the dusty space.

He could tell the condition of the books without even opening them. Some of them had crushed corners, and some of them were discoloured as if they had been soaked in a suspicious liquid before being left to dry.

"...you can help yourself, but where are you from?"

When he heard this question, Lukas realised that they hadn't actually had a real conversation yet.

"You wouldn't know even if I told you."

This wasn't a lie, since there was only one person in the world who knew exactly where he was from.

Lukas also realised that he didn't know the captain's name.

This was partly because of the captain's attitude, since, from the start, he hadn't gotten the chance to introduce himself.

It seemed that the captain didn't care about Lukas' identity at all.

He just closed his eyes for a while, then spoke in passing.

"As you can tell from my appearance, I'm an outsider. I hail from one of the countless kingdoms on 'Gaia(1)'."

"..."

"I didn't mean to bring up my boring past. It's just that those books are all written in the official language of 'Gaia'."

This was natural since he'd brought them from there. With a bit of emotion, the captain added this last sentence inwardly.

When Lukas picked up the book and looked at the cover, he saw that it wasn't written in the language of the Heavenly Realm.

Nevertheless.

"Fortunately, it seems I can read it."

"...seriously?"

“[17 Reckless Ways to Enter the Sky Continent].”

“...”

When Lukas even read out the title of the book, the captain no longer had any doubts.

This ‘Gaia official language’ was actually ‘hanja’(1). He might not be able to fully interpret them since most of them were ancient texts, but he would at least be able to get a general gist of their contents.

“Are you also from Gaia?”

“I’m not.”

“Hmm.”

Perhaps he felt like Lukas was not speaking the truth, but the captain didn’t ask any more questions.

“Do as you please.”

After saying that, the captain turned his attention away.

Lukas decided to read the first book he’d picked up.

[17 Reckless Ways to Enter the Sky Continent]

The book was about the views the civilised persons living on the Gaia continent had towards the Heavenly Realm.

‘For the most part, it’s a mystery.’

Few people have traveled back and forth between the Heavenly Realm and Gaia. This was because there was a huge risk involved.

What Lukas was curious about was how other people came to the Heavenly Realm. This was because, as far as he could see, there was no easy way to enter this continent that floated above the clouds.

Nevertheless, while relatively rare, outsiders were not something Dragonmen were unfamiliar with.

And, as its title indicated, there truly were a few methods written in the book. However, the success rates of these methods were low, and the risk of death for each of them was high. To be frank, most of them were only possible in theory.

‘It feels like they were forcibly added to get the number 17.’

It was only after about halfway through the book that truly feasible methods began to appear.

Among them, the method that seemed to have the highest rate of success was called [The Giant’s Crown].

This referred to the tallest mountain in the world, which stood proudly in the Giant Field, the territory of the giants. The peak of this mountain was only 1,000 meters or so away from Heavenly Realm.

The Heavenly Realm didn’t reject the entry of outsiders. In fact, they even welcomed them, since they were interested in the cultures of the other continents.

This was because it was impossible for a group of people large enough to be considered an army to actually enter the Heavenly Realm, no matter what method they used. This meant that outsiders could never be a threat to the Heavenly Realm.

On average, the Heavenly Realm passed [The Giant's Crown] once every 10 years. In other words, this was an opportunity that only appeared once every ten years, and usually, only about a hundred people were able to make it.

Even if they used every method available, the number of outsiders who gained entry would not exceed a few hundred, and that many people could never start an invasion into the Heavenly Realm.

Tak.

Lukas closed the book.

It had probably taken about an hour for him to read from cover to cover.

Whoosh—

The sounds of the ocean filled the air.

The hull bobbed gently with the waves, and the boards creaked from time to time.

He could feel the ship steadily moving to its destination.

* * *

Lukas found quite a few interesting books in his little corner. In addition to books from Gaia, there were also a few books from the Heavenly Realm.

Most of them were about the ocean of the Heavenly Realm, and things that every sailor ought to know. Thanks to this, Lukas was able to learn a lot about this strange ocean floating in the sky.

First of all, he learned that storms were uncommon, which was a good thing for sailors, but that didn't mean the ocean waters were without danger.

Instead, there were quite a few threats that those traversing between islands could encounter.

One of them was the Skystorm, which had recently swept past Akad.

That was an ocean disaster that sucked up everything around it.

There was a mega whirlpool that started off as a tiny vortex but would quickly grow to hundreds of times its size in only a few hours. Unless one was an excellent sailor, the moment they encountered the whirlpool, they had no choice but to accept death.

That wasn't all.

There was a phenomenon called dead point.

It was literally a hole of death, and it was a natural phenomenon that was worthy of its grand name.

It was an unpredictable disaster that occurred frequently in random parts of the ocean.

This phenomenon was simple. Certain parts of the ocean would become black as if they had been sprayed with ink. Then, a few minutes later, all the black water would disappear.

It was as though a hole had formed.

The sea of the Heavenly Realm wasn't very deep, but it didn't have a bottom.

Most of the ships that sank usually weren't able to handle the force exerted on them and would be ground into dust, but even if they managed to somehow survive that, all that was left for them was a 10,000 foot drop.

Some scholars speculated that this phenomenon occurred when there was an excess amount of water.

So a hole was created, which was slowly filled by the surrounding water.

The oceans and seas on the continent were different. To put it simply, they were very large, stagnant puddles. (TL: I uh... I don't think that's how that works...)

On the other hand, the Heavenly Realm's ocean was different.

'Water seems to be coming from somewhere.'

But where? He couldn't seem to find any information about it in the book.

'I'm glad I didn't use magic.'

While staying in Akad for those three days, Lukas had contemplated simply using the Fly spell to go directly to Temple Island.

Now that he was 8 stars, even if he were to fly for ten days and ten nights, he wouldn't run out.

But in the end, he held himself back.

Lukas did this because he had little to no knowledge about the Heavenly Realm's ocean. If he were to act arbitrarily without consulting an expert, it was possible for him to cause an accident.

'Skystorm... It should be possible to freeze it with Blizzard.'

But if he were to do that, he would also freeze all the nearby water.

On top of that, Lukas knew that doing so would affect the natural order. Even if he forcefully suppressed it, it was still possible for the ice to affect the livelihood of the sailors of Akad.

As a result, Lukas decided to stick with his current method. Although it would take a bit more time, at least he didn't have any regrets about it now.

Tak.

He closed the book.

He'd read everything in it.

They were now on the fourth day of their voyage, and according to the captain, they would soon see Temple Island.

Lifting his stiff body, Lukas headed out to the deck.

—It was a very pleasant journey.

It even felt like the word ‘cruise’ would be a good descriptor for this voyage.

There was no crisis, no danger, and no accidents. (TL: RED FLAGS)

Lukas felt that the 3,000 erus the captain had demanded was a reasonable amount for his work.

There were many dead points around Temple Island, so the more experienced sailors usually wouldn’t go near that area. After all, no matter how good the pay was, you needed to be alive to enjoy it.

They understood that no amount of money could take priority over their lives.

“Do you only accept outsiders as customers?”

“...”

The captain took an ashtray from his pocket and tapped the ashes from his pipe onto it.

“If that was the case, I would’ve died from starvation a long time ago.”

It wasn’t like he was in a position to be picky about such things. He suddenly asked in a curious tone.

“Are you curious about my situation?”

“No.”

Lukas shook his head.

The captain chuckled for the first time.

“Hmm. I wish I had more customers like you.”

“...”

Lukas knew that there were people who wanted to live without forming bonds and relationships with others, and clearly, the captain was one of them. Perhaps, if he had the ability to be self-sufficient, he might have secluded himself deep in the mountains until he died.

The captain also didn’t seem to have the ability to be polite to his customers.

That’s why Lukas didn’t bother to ask anything. The captain pressed some more of what appeared to be tobacco leaves into his pipe before suddenly raising his head and looking in front of him. In the distance, a small island started to crest the horizon.

“It’s slowly coming into view. Prepare to disembark.”

Chapter V2C225

“I don’t know anything about the situation on Temple Island.”

The captain spoke these words to Lukas as he disembarked.

“So I wish you the best of luck.”

“Thank you.”

After saying that the captain headed in a different direction from Lukas. He was probably going to restock food and other supplies for the journey back.

Lukas turned his attention away and looked at Temple Island.

Before stepping off of the ship, he'd already gotten a full view of the island. It was just his speculation, but he didn't think the population of this small island was more than a few dozen.

Because of this, it felt like a small island village that could be found anywhere else. However, it was the scenery beyond the island that proved it was anything but.

Death Island was visible in the distance.

The sea around it was badly polluted, and the sky above was black. Like poisonous gas, clouds of purple energy rose up from the ground.

As Lukas stood on the pier looking at Death Island, several men approached Lukas.

The man in the lead spoke up first.

“Are you Mr. Lukas?”

“Yes. You are?”

“...mm. You probably received something from Lord Young Dragon. Please show it to us.”

Lukas took out the Dragon Plaque. After receiving it, the man took out a stone slab from his pocket. There was a groove in it, and Lukas realised with a glance that it matched the size and shape of the plaque.

Click.

As he expected, the Dragon Plaque fit perfectly into the stone slab. After which, the stone slab began to glow.

After performing this check, the man took the plaque out of the stone slab and handed it back to Lukas.

“I apologize for the delay. Lord Young Dragon has given us a rough explanation already. Welcome to Temple Island. I'm Mars, the island guide.”

“Lukas.”

Lukas nodded.

“Yes. First, please follow me.”

After saying that, Mars turned around and nodded. Taking this signal, the people who had come with him, scattered. It seemed that they had come because they were wary of the newcomer.

"I know that your situation is urgent. And I wish I could take you to Death Island immediately, but... Before that, you will need to prove your qualifications to the Temple Master."

"Temple Master?"

"He is the person in charge of managing Temple Island."

"...isn't the Dragon Plaque enough to prove my qualifications?"

Mars' expression became a bit shameful at those words.

"Well, originally, that would be enough but..."

His expression seemed to say that he couldn't say more than that.

Lukas glanced at him.

"Where is the Temple Master?"

* * *

There was only one temple on Temple Island.

And that was where the Temple Master was.

He was an elderly man with a rather stern temperament.

Lukas could tell with just a glance that he was no ordinary person. At the very least, he was on the same level as the East and West Priests that had accompanied Arid last time.

And yet, such a talent had been assigned to this small island. This showed just how much importance Dragon God Island placed on Death Island.

"Are you the Dragon Hunter?"

Lukas could immediately tell from his attitude and tone. For some reason or the other, this man was not pleased to meet him.

"You must be the Temple Master."

"..."

When he heard his tone, Mars, who was standing beside him, couldn't help but turn to look at Lukas with a confused expression.

A subtle light shined in the Temple Master's eyes.

"Quite the temper you have. Or do you think you can do what you want just because you received the Dragon Plaque from the Young Dragon?"

"Is it wrong to return what I receive? If you want me to be polite, then you should do the same."

This time, there was a hint of anger in the Temple Master's voice.

“Watch your mouth, boy. Regardless of whether you are the Young Dragon’s guest or not, I am the one who decides things on this island. Do you think it would be hard for me to bury you here and deliver a false report?”

Knowing that it wasn’t a bluff, Mars couldn’t help but gulp slightly.

He knew what the outcome of foolishly offending the Temple Master would be.

“Am I supposed to prove my qualifications by fighting you? Fortunately, that won’t take too long.”

“...while I praise your confidence, it isn’t necessary for me to personally check your skills.”

The Temple Master gestured with his chin.

Then, a man who was standing behind him, walked forward.

He was a young, muscular man, and he also looked at Lukas with a nasty expression.

“This is one of the Chief Warriors of our temple. He is qualified to enter Death Island, and in some missions, he has even had to endure the harsh environment for more than two months. If you can knock him down-”

Before he could even finish, Lukas tapped his staff to the ground.

Thud.

And in that same instant, a highly condensed Hyper Bolt appeared. (TL: Lukas is trying to commit murder.)

However, it was much smaller than a normal Hyper Bolt.

In fact, it was so small that it was almost invisible.

Soon after appearing, the Hyperbolt shot towards the Chief Warrior with incredible speed.

“...!”

The warrior instinctively realised that Lukas had done something, so he pulled out his sword and held it in front of him.

Nevertheless, although he had responded in time, he made the wrong choice.

He should have dodged.

Crack!

The sword shattered like a pane of glass. The warrior only had enough time to widen his eyes in surprise before he felt a sharp pain in his stomach. It felt like he was being ripped in two.

Bang!

Nevertheless, he wasn’t even given the time to scream. As if he’d been hit by a huge invisible being, the man shot backwards like a cannonball and crashed into the wall so hard that he became embedded in it.

Mars forgot how to close his mouth for a moment, and the Temple Master was similarly speechless.

Lukas spoke a phrase that carried many mixed meanings.

“I’ve wasted enough time.”

It had taken four days to get to Akad with the Sun Carriage, the Skystorm had forced him to wait three days, and it had taken four days after that to finally reach Temple Island by boat.

He knew that he had already used the fastest method available. But knowing that didn’t rid him of his impatience.

It had already been more than ten days, and Lukas still had yet to set foot on Death Island.

The time spent traveling couldn’t be helped.

Being in a hurry didn’t mean he could make the Sun Carriage or the boat go faster, nor did it solve the weather problems.

But this was different.

Convincing them or subduing them.

Depending on how Lukas acted, he could shorten the time he spent on Temple Island as much as he wanted.

Chapter V2C226

After that, Lukas fought three more times.

Every warrior he fought was stronger than the ones before them, but from Lukas’ perspective, it was all the same. This could be seen from the fact that he used the same method to deal with all of them.

He simply cast Hyper Bolt three more times.

“...”

After experiencing a series of emotions ranging from astonishment and anger to worry and disappointment, the Temple Master now sat silently in his seat.

Lukas simply stared at him.

He couldn’t help but wonder if the Temple Master was contemplating whether to step forward or not.

In all honesty, he knew that it wouldn’t be possible to win so easily if the Temple Master came forward to test him personally.

However, after a brief silence, the words that the Temple Master said next were surprising.

“...those clothes.”

“...”

“They were made by the hands of a master. With them, you could probably survive on Death Island for an entire month.”

“...they can only last a month?”

Of course, Lukas intended to return with Sedi much sooner than that, but it was still a bit unpleasant to know that he had a time limit.

The Temple Master snorted when he heard that.

“The clothes made by the craftsmen on Dragon God Island tend to last no more than two weeks. I don’t know who made those clothes for you, but you should appreciate their work a little more.”

“...”

“As for your qualifications... You have proven yourself capable enough.”

The Temple Master spoke in a voice as if he wanted to get rid of him quickly.

“I will have a boat prepared immediately. Mars, take him to the dock in 30 minutes.”

“Ah. Ye-, yes sir.”

Mars quickly came to his senses and bowed, but the Temple Master had already gotten up from his seat and left the room with a blank expression.

“S-, somehow, I think you gained his recognition.”

“...”

Lukas didn’t respond.

Gulping slightly, Mars observed the man beside him. He knew that this person couldn’t be ordinary since he was acquainted with the Young Dragon, but he didn’t think he’d be able to gain the Temple Master’s approval by force. Not to mention the fact that he’d defeated four Chief Warriors in an instant.

“Then for the next half hour... Ah!”

Recalling something, Mars reached into his pocket and pulled out a few items.

“Lord Young Dragon asked me to give this to you. Please accept it.”

In Mars’ hands were a black ring and a folded piece of paper which appeared to be a note.

After receiving them, Lukas decided to put the ring aside for now, and read the note first.

[Master, hello. It’s Arid.

Receiving this letter means you were able to reach Temple Island without any problems. Thank you for your hard work. And I’m sorry I wasn’t able to be of more help to you.]

Lukas could almost hear Arid talking to him as he read the letter.

[I left Master this letter because there are a few things I need to tell you.

Firstly, I’ll tell you about the Goddess. I don’t think the Goddess wants Master to go to Death Island. She seemed very angry that I told you to go to Temple Island and gave you the Dragon Plaque without asking her first. I got scolded a lot. But I don’t regret it.]

The Goddess?

Lukas didn't understand her intentions, but he chose not to think about it for now and continued to read the note.

[...I think the Temple Master who manages Temple Island received secret orders from the Goddess. He may try to use some tricks to prevent you from going to Death Island. The Temple Master is not someone to take lightly, so I'm warning you in advance.]

Lukas was finally able to understand the reason for the Temple Master's unexpectedly sharp attitude.

Nevertheless, from the contents of the note, it seemed that he was supposed to read it before meeting the Temple Master.

[The ring is my gift to Master. As I said before, my control over my power has improved a lot. With the ring, it would be a little easier for you to find Sedi. Besides that, I also added a few other functions for Master. I don't mean to brag, but it took me five years to make, so I'd be happy if you wore it all the time!

I pray that Master will be able to find Miss Sedi quickly and return safely.

I miss you, Master.]

"..."

Lukas could feel Arid's emotions in the note. Not wanting to throw it away, he folded it once more and placed it in his pocket.

Then, he put the black ring on his index finger.

A cool sensation filled him as soon as he put it on.

Now that he thought about it, this was the first time he'd received a gift from one of his disciples.

* * *

The boat the Temple Master prepared for him was by no means an ordinary boat.

The wood that the keel and hull were made of had a deep, earthy color.

"They're made of black beech wood. That wood is the only one capable of sailing across the polluted water."

This comment was from Mars.

The Temple Master was already on board the boat. He didn't seem to have any intentions of making trouble for Lukas anymore.

Maybe it was because he wasn't as loyal to the Goddess as he thought. Or maybe he had his own opinions on the matter.

Lukas felt that it was probably the latter.

The Temple Master seemed to be a prideful person, but he seemed to be more straightforward than that.

“Take this.”

Mars handed him a small canteen.

“What’s this?”

“It contains ‘purification liquid’. It can purify any polluted water into drinkable water. One drop per liter.”

On Death Island, finding drinking water and food was as difficult as picking stars out of the sky. So the top priority was always securing enough of the two.

Mars said that when Temple Island sent scouts into the island, they all carried purification liquid without fail.

“If you use it sparingly, it should be enough to last you a month.”

“Isn’t this a precious item?”

“...it usually takes about a year to make that much. Of course, various precious materials are also essential ingredients.”

“Thank you.”

Mars smiled humbly.

“You don’t have to thank me. This was also part of Lord Young Dragon’s arrangements.”

Lukas realised that he owed Arid a huge favor. Without his help, his journey on Death Island would have been many times more difficult.

—It didn’t take very long for them to get to Death Island. This was natural since the island was close enough to see from Temple Island with the naked eye.

After about half a day of sailing, he was able to set foot on Death Island.

Swoosh!

Lukas stood on the dead but unpolluted ground beneath him and listened to the sounds of the ocean.

The Temple Master, who was looking at him with his arms folded, said.

“Remember this location well. It is one of the few safe zones we manage here on Death Island.”

As if encircling the shoreline, stone statues were placed in a line not far away from them. The ground around the statues was many times darker than where they were. It was as if the stone statues were guarding this area.

Lukas realised that there were semi-permanent runes on every stone statue. These runes allowed the statues to absorb the demonic energy, pollution, and death energy in the area.

“If the protective function of your clothes is ever impaired because of unavoidable circumstances, evacuate to this place immediately. At the very least, you would be able to prevent your body from being contaminated with demonic energy.”

“What unavoidable circumstances?”

“For example, being exposed to too much demonic energy... You will have to use your discernment in order to avoid entering places with high concentrations of it, but unexpected and unavoidable situations can occur at any time.”

After saying that, the Temple Master shook his head.

“That’s enough of that. When do you plan to finish your task?”

It seemed that the Temple Master was performing his duties as the manager of Temple Island. Lukas answered briefly.

“I plan to complete it within a week.”

If he took longer than that, then he wouldn’t return in time for the Championship.

“I see. Come back to this place when you’re done. You see that flying dragon statue over there with one wing? When ki is injected into it, a signal flare will be fired into the sky. Personnel of Temple Island are always monitoring Death Island, so unless there are any unforeseen circumstances, a boat will be sent within half a day.”

In other words, to get off of Death Island, he would have to return here after completing his task.

Lukas nodded, and with that, the Temple Master left Death Island.

“Then I’ll be going.”

“Take care.”

Mars gave Lukas a slight bow before he left.

Lukas nodded.

He wanted to see the boat off until it faded into the distance, but he couldn’t afford to.

So with those words of farewell, he turned around and took the map out of his bag.

Chapter V2C227

“...”

He’d read it in several books before, but at that moment it really struck home.

—It wasn’t just large, it was the largest.

Death Island was the largest of the Seven Islands of the Heavenly Realm, surpassing even Untamed Island.

It was millions of square kilometers wide, and its population was so low that it would be difficult to find anyone to ask about Sedi's whereabouts. (TL: For reference, Asia is 44,614,000 sq km)

In fact, it could even be said that more people were living in one of the major cities on Combat Island than in this vast land. Moreover, it was still unclear whether he'd be able to communicate or not if he did manage to encounter someone.

He'd been told that the Dragonmen who lived here were all barbaric and violent.

Even if they could communicate, the probability that they wouldn't be hostile towards him was extremely low.

'...it might be possible to track Sedi's demonic energy.'

The environment on this island had already been heavily corroded by death energy and demonic energy.

These things wouldn't affect Sedi, but for Lukas, who was looking for her, it made the situation many times more difficult. It was like searching for a beehive in a dark room filled with the scent of honey.

Of course, there were differences in the energy signatures of Sedi and the demonic energy in the environment, but she would need to be relatively close for him to tell them apart.

'Moreover...'

Lukas looked down at his hands.

There was practically no mana on Death Island.

This was something that he'd expected to an extent.

It would be almost impossible to find the energy of nature in such a dead land. The coast, which bordered the ocean, was a bit better, but as he went deeper into the island, the mana in the air would gradually disappear.

In the end, his decision to not use flight magic to fly over from Akad was a wise one. From now on, he would have to save every single drop of mana. Because he had no way to replenish it.

It was truly fortunate that he'd managed to reach 8 stars before coming here.

'It would be nice if I could quantify my remaining mana...'

Just as he had this thought,

[The participant's request will be applied immediately.]

[MP(Mana Points) has been activated.]

[From now on, the participant will be able to check their remaining mana.]

[Current mana 10,000/10,000]

"..."

As he heard this voice, Lukas couldn't help but wonder if the voice was truly automated, or if it had an ego of its own.

Shaking the thought from his head, Lukas injected mana into the ring Arid had gifted him.

Fwoosh!

Immediately, a faint ray of light flew out of the ring. The flying streak of light shot out in a certain direction.

This meant that Sedi was in that direction.

At best, it would only show him the specific direction, but in his current situation, even that alone was a great help.

Lukas unfolded his map as he looked at the direction the beam of light had pointed out.

The faintness of the beam meant that Sedi was far away. It was even possible that she was in the heart of the island.

'The ray of light will get brighter the closer I get to Sedi.'

It was a bit basic, but he could still use it as a detector of sorts.

Humm-

This land was too large for him to just walk blindly, so he decided to use the Fly spell. This would inevitably consume his mana, but it had the advantage of being able to quickly cope with any unexpected or dangerous situations.

'I should hurry.'

With that thought, Lukas threw himself into the black sky.

* * *

Three days passed.

Or at least, he believed it had been that long. The reason he was unsure was that there was no distinction between night and day in this land.

The demonic energy that rose from the ground and the poisonous energy that formed clouds in the air combined and dyed the sky black. Naturally, there was no sunshine either.

This made it difficult for him to estimate how much time had passed with just his body. (TL: Hard to imagine that a being with a transcendent mind can't monitor the passage of time. This was something Schweiser could do in the first novel)

The further inland he went, the thicker the demonic energy in the environment became. Now, it has reached a point where ordinary animals would struggle to even breathe. Perhaps as proof of this, the land around him was so desolate that it was hard to find even a single blade of grass.

Except for the rocky mountain range that he was currently flying over, the scenery had not changed at all during his entire journey.

And it was in this place that Lukas encountered the first creature.

“...!”

Not far from him, a flying dragon flapped its wings.

No. This creature’s size was too abnormal for it to be a regular flying dragon.

Although it was incredibly thin, it was so large that it easily dwarfed normal flying dragons. Moreover, all kinds of dark and negative energies swirled in its dead eyes.

‘Ancient Dragon...!’

Suddenly, the ancient Dragon turned to look at Lukas.

Their eyes met.

Did it think he was prey?

Whoosh!

With a heavy flap of its wings, the Ancient Dragon flew towards him at an incredible speed. Since he was flying in the open, there was no place for Lukas to hide.

No. Hiding would be pointless. Lukas could tell just from looking at its eyes. The Ancient Dragon was staring at him with a demented gaze that one would only see in those who had already lost their minds to hunger.

Even if he tried to run away, it was clear that this beast would follow him even to the depths of hell.

And since a battle was inevitable, he had no choice but to handle it quickly.

Lukas gripped his staff tighter.

* * *

K-... uhhh... uh...

The Ancient Dragon let out a low moan. But that soon faded as its body stopped moving entirely.

Lukas looked down at it.

The battle itself hadn’t been difficult. The difficult part was trying to end the battle as quickly as possible while also conserving as much mana as possible.

‘...moreover...’

In the rich lands of the Heavenly Realm, his spells would be enhanced even if he used less mana, but it was different in this place. In this dead, desolate land, the same spells required twice as much mana. It went without saying that the power of the spells was also reduced.

‘This place is the worst for Wizards in many ways.’

On the other hand, the Ancient Dragon, which had adapted, survived, and evolved in this environment, was countless times stronger than the black dragon he'd fought before.

Nothing was more dangerous than a beast that was driven by hunger. Moreover, an Ancient Dragon was a being that could not be compared to a wild beast.

Lukas checked his remaining mana.

[Current mana 8,741/10,000]

'I used about 1,300.'

Of course, it wasn't like his mana didn't refill at all.

However, in this dead land, the amount of mana he could obtain was about 100 points per day.

'Ah.'

Suddenly, a thought crossed his mind.

The Ancient Dragon's heart.

It might not be possible to refine it here, but it should at least be possible for him to extract mana from it. With such hopes, Lukas used a spell to cut open the Ancient Dragon's chest.

"Mm..."

But he couldn't help but frown when he saw the mess that was revealed.

The Ancient Dragon's heart was black. This wasn't because it had decomposed after it died. After all, not that much time had passed.

Instead, Lukas was certain that it had been like that from the start.

This cursed land had even caused its heart to become twisted.

He couldn't absorb it.

Instead of replenishing his mana, he would be lucky if he didn't do any harm to his body.

"Huu."

With a soft, dejected sigh, Lukas turned away and injected his mana into the black ring once again.

Fwoosh-

The beam of light shot in the direction he had to go, but the light was still dim.

Chapter V2C228

Another three days passed.

Lukas filled a canteen with contaminated water before putting a drop of purifying liquid in as well.

Fwoosh-

As soon as the droplet touched the water in the canteen, it began to flash, and before long the contaminated water was purified into drinking water. Lukas only observed it for a moment before drinking it.

He once again felt a hint of frustration with having a body. He was forced to take care of his physiological needs now and then.

In his six days of travel, he'd covered a large distance. This was natural since he'd been using flight magic day and night.

Surprisingly, the fact that this land was so desolate had become an advantage. There were no obstacles to block him, allowing him to fly uninterrupted.

He hadn't even seen another Ancient Dragon since his previous encounter. Or, to be precise, he had avoided them.

If he found a location that he thought had a high chance of having an Ancient Dragon, then he took detours to avoid them. He calculated the time and mana it would take to fight an Ancient Dragon and compared them to avoid it, which led to this decision.

And on the sixth day of his journey.

There was finally a different reaction from the ring.

Whoosh-

This time, the light was brighter than before.

This was proof that he was close to Sedi. He Couldn't tell exactly how far away she was, but he was certainly closer. (TL:...no sh*t)

'It would be nice if she stayed in one place.'

Although he had this thought, Lukas knew that with Sedi's personality, such a thing was next to impossible.

The worst possible scenario would be if she were to head in the same direction as Lukas. If that was the case, it would take twice as long for them to meet.

Lukas looked back in the direction from which he came. It had taken him six days to get there. And it would take about four days to return, assuming that he used his maximum speed.

In other words, he had to find Sedi today or tomorrow at the latest. Nevertheless, although it would be a bit close, he would still be able to make it in time for the Championship.

Lukas got up from the rock he'd been resting on and continued to move.

But just a few hours later, he stopped again.

'Sedi's demonic energy...?'

It wasn't an illusion.

Although it was faint, he was certain he'd felt Sedi's signature. Without hesitation, he followed the trail, and soon, he arrived before a large mountain range. The terrain in the region was a bit more treacherous when compared to the other places he'd seen, but that wasn't the thing that stood out the most.

Kiieeek-

Kek, kek, kek.

Creatures with twisted appearances were crawling all over the mountain range. They all looked horrendous, as though they were beings who had crawled out of the pits of hell. There weren't just one or two of these beings there.

It had been six days since Lukas had entered Death Island, but this was his first time seeing so many creatures at once.

And he soon found the reason why.

Strewn across the mountains were the corpses of Ancient Dragons.

Five of them.

Their bodies were all terribly decomposed as though it had been a while since they had died. Nevertheless, these bizarre creatures didn't seem to care about that. Like maggots, they covered the corpses of the Ancient Dragons, consuming their rotten blood and flesh.

"..."

Lukas looked carefully at the Ancient Dragons' corpses.

Each of them was extremely large and looked very powerful.

With just a glance, it was easy to tell that they were all stronger than the Ancient Dragon he'd encountered when he first entered the island.

Nevertheless, all five of them were dead.

And from the gaping wounds on their bodies, it was clear they had all been killed by the same person.

'Sedi.'

Her distinct demonic energy signature still lingered on the wounds.

He couldn't tell when, but Sedi had definitely been here and killed these five Ancient Dragons. This gave Lukas a hint about Sedi's strength. And one thing was immediately clear. At least at the current stage, Sedi was much stronger than him.

Lukas opened his map.

He had entered the southern part of Death Island and was heading north. From his current location, it wouldn't take him very long to reach the center of the large island.

This map had been prepared for him by Arid.

On the map, the central area had been painted black, and there was even a large skull drawn beside it.

[Extreme Danger Zone, Probability of Survival 0%]

The central part of Death Island was a place that even the aerial scout unit of Dragon God Island did not dare to enter. This was because everyone who stepped into even its outer edge died without exception.

Even the reason for their deaths could not be found.

However, there was one thing they were able to find out. The demonic energy and death energy in the central region was at least ten times stronger than the surroundings.

In such a place, the clothes he'd received from Nekdu would probably not last very long.

'Is Sedi in the center?'

The demonic energy was an extreme threat even for Lukas, but for Sedi, it would be more comfortable than returning to her homeworld.

It was possible that it could help her regain her lost power, so the odds were that she'd instinctively head to the place with the densest and most terrifying demonic energy.

As he looked at the map while having this thought, he noticed a symbol.

It was the drawing of a hut.

This signified that there was a settlement of Dragonmen in that area.

It wasn't very far from him.

Lukas injected some mana into the ring.

Whoosh-

"..."

The light was pointing in the same direction as the Dragonmen settlement.

Until now, he had never encountered the Dragonmen living on Death Island.

This was partly because there had not been any settlements along his route, and partly because he'd intentionally avoided them.

'Should I contact them and ask for help?'

He might be able to get accurate information about Sedi's whereabouts.

And maybe some information about the central region as well.

However, there was also some risk.

If they were to attack him out of nowhere, he would have to use his mana to defend himself. And at this point, mana was an extremely scarce and valuable resource.

[Current mana 6,014/10,000]

He only had about 6,000 mana remaining.

Although it was a bit over half, it was still far from enough.

As Lukas pondered his next actions, he felt a commotion nearby.

Roar... roar...

Then he heard the roar of an Ancient Dragon.

The creatures of Death Island never used their energy for no reason. They usually stored their energy to the limit before explosively releasing it when they found prey. In other words, there was no way that it would roar for no reason.

There was only one reason for them to act so violently.

When they were fighting someone.

Thinking it could be Sedi, Lukas decided to head to the scene of the battle.

* * *

He was right that it was an Ancient Dragon.

It wasn't that large, but an unusual amount of demonic energy flowed from its body. Nevertheless, it wasn't a threat.

It was dying.

By the time Lukas had arrived, the battle had already reached its final stage.

Rooooaar-

The Ancient Dragon let out one final roar. The ground shook heavily, but the intimidation factor had already been lost. There were more than a hundred deep wounds all over its body. Blood the color of ink flowed down from these wounds, forming a large puddle beneath its feet.

Thud!

With the last bit of its energy poured into that roar, the Ancient Dragon soon collapsed to the ground, and Lukas finally turned to look at the ones who had slain it.

Unfortunately, it wasn't Sedi.

'Dragonmen from Death Island.'

None of them had human-like features like Bargan or Nekdu. Instead, all of these Dragonmen had the appearance of bipedal lizards.

They weren't wearing clothes. However, sharp and tough-looking scales covered their bodies, so they didn't give a primitive feeling. Instead, it almost looked like they were wearing sophisticated armor.

Their scales were either black or dark red, and all of them were around 1.5 to 2 times larger than the average Dragonman.

Nevertheless, the biggest difference was the huge wings on their backs.

‘Those aren’t for decoration.’

Unlike chickens and other flightless birds, those wings weren’t useless. Lukas realised that these Dragonmen could actually fly.

Was that the reason they were able to hunt an Ancient Dragon so flawlessly?

Seeing that they were talking to each other, it was clear that these Dragonmen had intelligence.

“...”

Lukas realised that this was a turning point.

Was he going to talk to them?

Or would he continue his search on his own?

Suddenly,

The smallest Dragonman in the group turned its head and looked towards Lukas.

“...!”

How did he sense him?

Lukas tried to hide behind a rock, but it was already too late.

“Who’s there?”

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“Who’s there?”

These words were spoken in a clear voice. Even the pronunciation was perfect.

It seemed that the language here was the same as on the other islands.

“Come out. If you don’t reveal yourself...”

“...”

Lukas clicked his tongue inwardly before revealing himself.

The eyes of the rest of the Dragonmen group widened in surprise, but their auras changed in an instant. They all glared at Lukas with killing intent in their eyes.

“Krrr...”

It was at that moment that the smaller Dragonman who had called Lukas out growled at them. It looked like a leader exerting his dominance over his subordinates. The Dragonmen all flinched and lowered their heads.

The Dragonman then turned back to Lukas before chuckling.

“I was wondering if it was a spy from another group. But it turns out it’s just another small fry from Dragon God Island.”

“...”

“Although, I’ve never seen one in so deep before.”

Crack-

As he said that, the Dragonman’s claws began to grow at an alarming rate. Black blood visibly dripped from those elongated claws.

This meant that those claws were strong and sharp enough to pierce the Ancient Dragon’s tough scales. Something which even the swords crafted by some of the greatest blacksmiths were unable to do.

Realising that the Dragonman was preparing for battle, Lukas decided to clear up the misunderstanding.

“I’m not from Dragon God Island.”

“If you’re going to say nonsense like that, why don’t you take that stupid robe off first.”

Lukas didn’t take off the robe. Instead, he simply lowered the hood.

A human face was not something common in the Heavenly Realm.

The Dragonman went silent when he saw the unfamiliar face before finally opening his mouth.

“What a weird-looking guy.”

“...”

“So what? Why have you come here?”

“I’m looking for someone.”

“Someone?”

“Right. A young girl that looks like me.”

“...young girl? Do you mean a female that’s not fully grown?”

That was an extreme way to put it, but Lukas nodded since he couldn’t find a better way to describe it.

“Right.”

“...”

The Dragonman went silent again for a while as if he was thinking about something. Those around him were also silent as they waited for his response. It seemed that his earlier thought was correct, this smaller Dragonman was the leader of this group.

After a short while, the Dragonman muttered in a low voice.

"I think I might have heard some reports that a group had picked up an unfamiliar creature not long ago. It seems that it is under their protection for now."

"..under their protection?"

"From what I recall, it was badly hurt."

Badly hurt? Sedi?

Lukas was a bit skeptical at first, but considering the direction, the light beam from the ring had pointed to, and the fact that there was an Absolute somewhere on this land, it wasn't absolutely impossible.

"Of course, it might not be the young female you are looking for, but... Why do you look so surprised."

"You are different from what Dragon God Island described to me."

They were willing to rescue and protect an unfamiliar being that had been seriously injured.

Such behaviour was impossible without morality.

The Dragonman chuckled cynically when he heard those words.

"Since you managed to come here, I'm assuming you entered this place from Temple Island. Did those fools call us savage barbarians?"

"..."

"There is life and civilisation here. Can you really trust the words of cowards who only observe from afar? The words of those who know nothing about this island?"

It certainly wasn't good to wholeheartedly trust the words of one side.

At that moment, Lukas spotted a few Dragonmen carrying corpses not far away from him. They appeared to be those who had died during the fight against the Ancient Dragon.

Did they respect their dead? If that was the case, then it would truly be as the man said, they weren't as barbaric as they were said to be.

But shortly after thinking this, Lukas was made witness to a shocking sight.

Crunch, crunch.

"...!"

One of the Dragonmen began eating one of the corpses. If it were the corpse of the Ancient Dragon, he wouldn't have been surprised. It wasn't strange for those who lived in a land where even firewood to make a fire was a rare commodity to eat raw meat.

However, what they were eating were the corpses of other Dragonmen. Those who had fought valiantly beside them not so long ago.

They were devouring their own species.

“Are you okay with that?”

Lukas pointed towards the incident in question while he turned to look at the leader of the group.

The Dragonman tilted his head to the side as he looked over.

“Is there something wrong?”

“They’re eating your own kind.”

The Dragonman’s expression became strange as though he couldn’t understand what Lukas was saying.

“Our own kind? Isn’t that just a corpse?”

“That doesn’t change the fact that they were fighting the Ancient Dragon with you just a moment ago...”

“That was when they were alive. Now that they are dead, they have become nothing but piles of meat.”

“...”

“I don’t understand the problem. Are you saying that we should just throw away such precious meat?”

As he said that, the Dragonman approached a nearby corpse and poked at it with his claw.

“Look here. Dragonman meat is softer and easier to digest than that of an Ancient Dragon. It’s especially good for feeding younglings who have relatively weak stomachs. All of the Dragonmen that are being eaten now are those without family. It is a rule that all the corpses collected should be given to their families, especially their young.”

“Once they get them, what would they do with them?”

The Dragonman looked at Lukas like he had asked a very foolish question, but he answered nonetheless.

“Eat them.”

It was at that moment that Lukas finally realised why those on Dragon God Island considered these people to be savages.

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The name of the small Dragonman was Pannata. For now, Lukas decided to follow them.

He didn’t believe anything Pannata had told him so far. In fact, his words only made his doubts worse.

Nevertheless, the ring was pointed in the same direction as their settlement, and Lukas had a feeling that he could learn something by going with them.

‘They have no intention of letting me go anyway.’

He wasn’t sure whether it was because they wanted to eat him or if they had another goal.

However, Lukas also had his own plans. He glanced down at the ring.

“We’re here.”

The Dragonman settlement, where they arrived after a short while, was a desolate place.

There were no buildings. It would be too difficult to gather enough materials for that in the first place. Instead, the Dragonmen dug several large pits, which they used as houses.

The settlement was roughly the size of a small village, and the population appeared to be less than 100.

Lukas looked at these pits for a moment before opening his mouth.

“Pannata, I would like to ask you a question.”

“What is it?”

“My companion that you’re protecting. Did she tell you her name?”

“She didn’t. She was unconscious.”

“Then what does she look like?”

Pannata frowned and replied.

“Didn’t you say she was a young female? That’s what she looks like.”

“Right. Then I’ll ask in more detail. What colour were her eyes?”

“...I don’t know. She never opened her eyes.”

“I see. Then I’ll ask one last question.”

By this time, all the Dragonmen that had come with him as well as the others from the village had completely surrounded Lukas. Even the young Dragonmen were among them.

Lukas realised that he was surrounded, but he continued speaking without a change of expression.

“What color was her hair?”

“...”

“It seems you can’t answer this. Why is that? Could it be that all her hair was gone?”

Pannata finally turned to look at Lukas. Then he looked at Lukas’ hair and said.

“...gold.”

Pfft.

A small scoff escaped Lukas’ lips.

Pannata chuckled softly as well.

He didn’t show any embarrassment even when his lies were finally exposed.

“As expected, it’s really difficult to trick others. Well, I guess it could be considered a success since I managed to bring you to the village.”

“Was everything you said a lie?”

“Right. If we found a wounded outsider, we would just eat them on the spot.”

That’s what he thought.

They were savages who considered even their own dead as meat, so he didn’t think they would go out of their way to rescue and protect an injured outsider.

Nevertheless, there was a reason that Lukas followed Pannata so easily.

“I would like to ask you something.”

“Do you think I’ll give you an answer?”

“I will soon be eaten by you guys anyway, so you can at least show a bit of generosity.”

“...”

Pannata’s eyes narrowed slightly. This guy really was different from those shrimps from Dragon God Island.

He wasn’t sure if he should call it bravery or disregard.

Nevertheless, he was curious about what this guy would say next, so he decided to play along.

“Ask your question.”

“Why didn’t you guys kill and eat me on the spot?”

“You’re probably fairly strong.”

Pannata muttered softly before shaking his head.

“If we tried to capture you on the spot, we’d probably receive heavy losses. After all, we were all exhausted from hunting the Ancient Dragon.”

“...capture?”

“Right.”

“You weren’t intending to eat me on the spot?”

“You’re an offering. We have no intention of eating you.”

Offering.

It was a rather strange word for a savage to use.

“Whose?”

“That’s not something you need to know. What do you intend to do now? It doesn’t matter if you fight back, but you can give up the thought of dying comfortably if you do. The first thing we’d do is make it so you can’t even lift a single finger.”

To be precise, they would cut off his hands and legs before cutting his neck and draining most of his blood. They would only stop the bleeding when he was close to death.

Of course, if they did do that, he would no longer be considered a fresh offering, but he would still be just enough.

Lukas thought for a while before saying.

“If I give in, will you tell me the things I’m curious about?”

“What did you say?”

“I have a few questions about this island.”

“...”

As expected, this fellow was really strange.

Pannata couldn’t contain his shock when he saw this man using his own life to make bargains.

“Do you understand what it means to be an offering?”

“Doesn’t it mean you’re going to sacrifice me?”

“Right. You will die.”

Of course, Lukas didn’t intend to die, but he still nodded.

“When is the offering ceremony?”

“A few hours from now.”

“Then that means you’ll have to keep me alive till then. In other words, you cannot hurt me arbitrarily since it would be bad to damage the offering. Am I wrong?”

“...you’re not wrong, but...”

“So before I die, I would like you to answer my questions.”

“I can’t-”

“If you refuse, I will fight back with everything I have. You just said it yourself that I seem to be fairly strong. You weren’t wrong. I am confident that I can take down at least half of your village before you manage to defeat me.”

Of course, the truth was that it wouldn’t be too difficult for him to wipe them all out, but it was necessary for him to emphasise his threat level without pushing them too far.

In any case, he estimated that it would take about 2,000 mana to deal with all of them, which was too wasteful.

“ ... ”

Wondering what he was up to, Pannata stared at him for a while before sighing and pointing at one of the pits.

“Get in there first.”

Lukas did just that.

The pit he jumped into was much deeper than the others, and its structure made it so that it was easy to get in, but difficult to get out of.

Pannata followed him in, while another five Dragonmen immediately surrounded the pit. It seemed that they would not tolerate any nonsense.

Lukas decided to not waste any time.

“The demonic energy in the central region is much stronger than anywhere else on the island. I would like to know why.”

“...even the bravest Ancient Dragon wouldn't dare to set foot in the central region. Because that's the ruler of the island's territory.”

“The ruler of the island? There was such a thing?”

“Right. He knows everything that happens on the island.”

Was it someone like the Priestess?

Lukas knew that the Heavenly Realm didn't have a ruling class.

At best, the Priestess from Dragon God Island could only be seen as the authoritative figure for that island. When it came to other islands, she could only intervene if the conflicts or chaos were things that couldn't be left alone.

Of course, there were beings who wielded great power in the shadows, like Kangki and the leaders of the underworld on Desire Island, but there were no rulers in the true sense of the name.

“What's his name?”

“Dragon King Kazu.” (TL: Kazu?)

Dragon King. Lukas narrowed his eyes slightly before muttering.

“Is that who you intend to offer me to?”

“No. You will be sacrificed to the Goddess(1).”