

Great Mage 541

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'I can let this happen.'

That was the only thought Kaz had at that moment. It was a thought that anyone in his situation would have, but unfortunately for him, his body couldn't move like he wanted it to.

While he struggled to dodge or at least put up some form of defense, Sedi finished charging her attack.

And like her first attack, she aimed for his face once more.

Boom!

[Kuk...!]

There was a sound similar to a cannon being fired, and Kaz's body was sent flying into the air like a cannonball.

He'd been sent several hundreds of feet away. It would have been nice if she could have sent him so far that he was no longer visible, but unfortunately, that was the strongest attack Sedi could muster up in her current state.

"Huff...! Huff...!"

Panting, Sedi collapsed onto her butt.

Lukas...?

She turned to look beside her.

“...so he... passed out.”

So it seemed.

She couldn't help but feel like he deserved the rest. From beginning to end, he had used the resources at his disposal to turn this unfortunate situation in their favor.

He'd intentionally provoked Kaz in order to make him get close before shoving his staff into his mouth.
(TL:...)

However, it was a very dangerous plan. If anything had gone wrong, he would have died.

He gambled with his life. He chose to risk his life in order to give them a chance to win.

'But...'

For some reason, she couldn't help but feel that Lukas was used to doing things like this.

She knew that most Absolutes who were once mortals were beings who had very dramatic pasts. Lukas had probably gone through countless life and death situations, and experienced many things.

Sedi suddenly felt a strong curiosity about the life Lukas had lived, but now was not the time to think about that.

Panting, Sedi looked into the distance again. Her vision was blurry and she couldn't see the spot where Kaz landed, but she kept looking nonetheless.

If he were to come back one more time... she was now certain.

They couldn't win.

Of course, with the damage she dealt to him, it wouldn't be strange if Kaz remained unconscious for a long time. She had hit his defenseless body more than a hundred times, and the bones in his face had definitely been smashed with that punch.

He shouldn't be able to get up again. Or at least that's what would happen in a normal situation.

Nevertheless, her anxiety didn't go away.

"...please..."

For the first time in her life, Sedi prayed earnestly.

She prayed for that disgusting bastard to never appear again.

She sat for a while, waiting.

Perhaps her prayers had been answered. Because there were no signs of Kaz even after a long time had passed. Even the dust storm that had risen in the area had begun to calm down.

She knew that he wasn't dead, but... if he was unconscious, then they might have a chance to escape.

He said he was bound to the island, so they could just run to another island for now.

With that in mind, Sedi turned to look at the sea.

“ ... ”

And instantly became speechless. She was so shocked that she wouldn't be surprised if her hair had turned white.

When did he move? She hadn't seen him. She didn't even feel him approach.

Behind them, in the direction of the sea, a being was standing there.

[It hurts.]

Kaz smiled, showing off his bloodied mouth and broken teeth.

Even though his tongue should have been torn apart, he could still speak with perfect pronunciation.

[What is it? Do you think I look ugly now?]

“ ... ”

What the hell? Was this guy some kind of zombie or something?

Kaz rubbed a finger against his lip for a while before muttering.

[Almost all my teeth are broken. My tongue has been torn to pieces, and my oesophagus has been burned. Even the roof of my mouth has been smashed. I think I'll probably have trouble eating for a while. This is the second time I've ever been this injured. But...]

His cold gaze turned to Lukas.

[This is the first time in my life I've ever felt so dirty.]

It was different from when he fought that woman.

Obviously, being completely destroyed by a stronger being hurt his pride greatly, but it was still understandable.

But what about Lukas? He was so weak and fragile that he would burst into pieces if he just squeezed him too hard. He claimed to be some kind of Absolute or whatever, but Kaz didn't believe a word of his bullshit.

No. Even if what he was saying was true, at least for now, he was still weaker than him. 'Absolute'ly weak.

That was the truth.

And yet, he had been pushed to such a state by this garbage.

It was the greatest humiliation, and an incurable scar on his pride. His pride and desire to show off had disappeared, now, all that was left was rage and hatred.

Anyone could predict what Kaz was going to do now.

Thud.

With heavy steps, he walked towards Lukas. He was already unconscious. He was certain of this fact. So now it would be easier than—

[...]

He stopped.

Kaz looked down at the black haired girl that had moved to stand in front of him.

[Get out of the way.]

“...what are you going to do?”

[I will kill that man.]

No further explanation was needed.

But Kaz decided to add one anyway.

[Originally, I had planned to torture him. I was going to make him regret ever being born. After all, this is my first time feeling so humiliated in my life. Fortunately, I'm quite skilled in that area. No matter how proud or stubborn a person pretends to be, I can make them look worse than a pig in less than a week.]

He knew countless ways to break a proud spirit. When Death Island was more prosperous in the past, there had been many like that. Beings that he couldn't suppress with his strength.

Even if their bodies were destroyed, they refused to give in.

Destroying such beings and forcing them into desperation used to be one of his favorite pastimes.

[But I'm tired of it now. No...]

Kaz thought for a moment before nodding his head.

[...I was afraid. Right. I'll admit it. I just received such a blow and I still can't wrap my head around the fact that this guy could be a threat to me.]

This was probably the greatest tribute and expression of respect that Kaz could give to an enemy.

This man, who was weak and unconscious.

He was still seen as a threat by Kaz.

[That's why, I have to kill this man somehow, no matter what.]

Sedi felt a chill. It was a frightening feeling, like a blade was being pressed to her spine.

Kaz's attitude was clear. He had no intention of backing down.

So if this situation was allowed to progress, Lukas would die.

Lukas?

...Would die?

'Hah.'

Her throat felt dry as though she had swallowed sand. She prepared to say something that she never wanted to say.

'Since when?'

When she first called Lukas father, that had just been an act of desperation.

She'd just been defeated by the Demon King. She'd lost everything. The favor she got from the Black Horned Demon God, her devilish energy, and her external force as an Absolute.

All that she had left were her mortal body and her name, Sedi.

Crunch.

She hated those words so much her teeth ached. Because there was no more accurate description of her miserable condition.

And that's when Lukas came to her and made a suggestion.

To become his incarnation and once again step onto the path of an Absolute.

In truth, at that time, she wasn't that interested in that proposal.

Sedi was exhausted and wounded. She had been betrayed by the master she had devoted her everything to. The despair she felt was indescribable.

The feelings of belonging and fullness that had empowered her entire body had disappeared.

She felt like she was all alone in the world.

She hated that feeling so much that she would rather die, so she recklessly stuck to Lukas instead.

She demanded that he take the role of her father. She knew it was a ridiculous request.

Knowing the type of people Absolutes were, it could be called a half-crazy idea. In fact, if she were placed in such a situation again, she couldn't say whether she would act like that again.

Nevertheless, Lukas had accepted her.

He mentioned that Sedi would be his first child.

...She was shy. To hide it, she changed her words and teased him.

In fact, it was the same for Sedi.

Lukas was her first parent. Because those who gave birth to her couldn't be considered her parents.

She felt like she'd been saved from death.

After that, it was pretty fun.

She began to understand Lukas. It was very different from her time with the Black Horned Demon God.

It wasn't a one-sided interaction. Instead, it was more like a two-way connection.

Lukas was clumsy, but he clearly tried his best to treat her like a real daughter.

Then, one day, Lukas said to her.

'The way a father should treat his daughter. What I can do for you. And what the ideal relationship between a father and daughter should be.

Think carefully... About what you'd want a father to do.'

After that, she'd thought long and hard before eventually realising.

Lukas had given her a new life. He was no different than her saviour.

'No.'

It didn't need to be packaged in such a grandiose manner. They were parent and child.

It was filial piety between a parent and his child.

She liked that more.

"Kaz."

[What is it?]

“I’m the one you want.”

[...]

“If I listen to you...”

At that moment, Sedi did something she’d never done before in her entire life.

“...can you let my father go?”

Sacrifice.

She never would have thought there would be a day when she did something like this. After thinking this, Sedi smiled forcefully.

In order to save Lukas, she was willing to be with this guy who was so disgusting that just looking at him made her want to throw up.

Those were her honest feelings.

[...]

Kaz was silent for a while. He looked down at Sedi without any expression on his face before finally opening his mouth.

[...it can't be helped.]

Just as Sedi was about to let out a sigh of relief at his words, Kaz continued.

[If you had said this when I first arrived, I probably would have agreed to that request. But that is impossible now. It's too late.]

“What...?”

[Move aside, my partner.]

Kaz's voice remained indifferent.

[Or I'll kill you too.]

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Although Lukas had fainted, his consciousness hadn't faded. His mind was still aware.

This might sound contradictory for most, but for Lukas, this was something he was familiar with.

‘Temporary faint.’

He would probably be able to open his eyes soon.

He naturally began to imagine the scene he would see when he finally came to his senses.

The last thing he’d seen was Kaz’s mouth becoming bloody because of his attack, and Sedi rushing towards him with a vicious momentum.

It would be best if Sedi’s last attack was enough to finish Kaz off.

But Lukas always had the habit of assuming the worst. Of course, this habit couldn’t really be called a good thing. Nine out of ten times, it was just useless worrying.

...But in other words, it meant that there was at least one time when it was the right choice to make.

It was the same for this situation.

If Sedi was unable to finish Kaz off, then Lukas would probably lose his life at his hands as soon as he recovered.

'How can I respond to him?'

There was very little he could do.

He couldn't use magic. He didn't have any mana left. He would also have to deal with the consequences of completely exhausting his mana pool.

No matter how much mental power he might have, it was impossible to use magic without mana. This was especially so considering that he had to also deal with the backlash.

Hand-to-hand combat?

Even if his mana was depleted, he could still move his body, but Lukas' fragile body wouldn't even be able to scratch Kaz's scales. Instead, he would be the one whose bones were broken from his attack.

It was a question that he couldn't find an answer to.

All of his options were blocked. In the first place, the level difference between them was too high. The most appropriate response to such enemies was to avoid them until one was strong enough to deal with them.

Dragon King Kaz. Half step out of mortality.

In a way, he was similar to Lord, who had been Lukas' greatest enemy in the past. Of course, Lord was much stronger than Kaz in every way.

In fact, if he had to pick someone that Dragon King Kaz reminded him of...

“...”

At that moment, a ‘maybe’ appeared in Lukas’ mind like a bolt of lightning.

It was an absurdly dangerous idea, but it would be enough to help them overcome this seemingly hopeless situation.

Personally, he didn’t want to use a method like this.

However, his instincts or intuition, which had helped him all his life, were screaming at him.

‘...maybe I...’

Immediately after regaining consciousness, he would use this extremely dangerous idea.

* * *

Sedi shivered. Not because she was afraid of Kaz’s threat, but because she couldn’t think of a way to prevent Lukas’ death. Her trembling was a result of her overwhelming frustration.

She couldn't see any emotion in Kaz's eyes. If she tried to stop him, he really would take her life.

'What should I do?'

She clenched her fists and bit her lip.

In all honesty, she really wanted to shout that if this dirty bastard wanted to kill her father, he would just have to kill her first. However, in this situation, such an emotional response would probably cause the worst possible outcome.

Lukas and Sedi, both of them would die.

Since she couldn't crush him by force, she had to think of a way to persuade him with her words. This was a conclusion that any intelligent being could reach, but it was very unfamiliar to Sedi, who had relied on violence all her life.

What exactly could she say to persuade this crazy bastard in front of her?

"...why... Do you want me to be your partner?"

She tried to buy some time.

Kaz didn't answer. Instead, he continued to stare at her. The pressure on her body increased.

Sedi grit her teeth. She wouldn't let herself be intimidated by his attitude.

"What would being your partner mean?"

[There is no meaning.]

She gained a bit of leverage.

For the first time, Kaz chose to respond to her. Sedi inwardly sighed in relief, but in the end, she was only buying time. Nothing had been solved.

[On this floating continent, there is only one being who can claim to be stronger than me.]

"...you mean the woman who imprisoned you on this island?"

[In all honesty, I have no confidence to defeat her even with my current strength.]

"So? Did you want me to be your partner so that I'd help you fight her?"

[That thought is too simple. She is not an opponent that can be defeated with numbers. Even if you were as strong as I am, I'm not sure if it would be possible.]

Everything he said made Sedi regret her decision to make him talk. It felt so disgusting to be discussing the strengths of half Absolutes.

If only she could exert her original power, then this smug bastard...

This was what she thought, but it was nothing but a wishful thought.

Even before entering this world, Sedi had already been defeated, lost everything, and been forced back to the realms of mortality. This meant that she was the reason she was so weak at that moment.

[You should give birth to my offspring.]

—What the hell was this madman talking about now?

[I need an excellent offspring... A child who has received my seed will definitely be strong. They might even have the potential to surpass me. In truth, I've been attempting to birth one for the past few hundreds of years.]

“Wait a minute...”

[But most of the carriers died before giving birth.]

Ignoring Sedi's reaction, Kaz continued.

[They couldn't withstand my power. I even tried mating with Ancient Dragons that had adapted to the island's harsh environment, but the results were the same. But you will be able to endure it. No. Even if you can't withstand it, you should still be able to give birth to at least one offspring. A side effect of this might be that your body gets destroyed, but what happens to you after you give birth is none of my business.]

This guy was really a crazy, disgusting piece of garbage.

Sedi finally came to accept this fact. Of course, she didn't have any childish thoughts that he'd fallen in love with her at first sight or anything of the sort. But she never thought that he would have such an obscene reasoning behind his actions.

[...so have you stopped buying time? I don't think anything changed.]

Moreover, he had completely seen through her intentions.

[Thanks to you, I was able to calm down a bit. My partner. I won't kill you just because you block me. That would just be a waste. Fortunately, you're strong enough... Even if I cut off all your limbs and your tongue, you should still be able to survive. And you'll still be able to bear my offspring.]

"You... disgusting bastard...!"

[You can say whatever you like.]

Because it wouldn't change anything.

Kaz was about to continue speaking but he suddenly stopped with his mouth open.

There was a deep ripple in his eyes, and his gaze shifted to behind her.

Realising this, Sedi also turned to look at whatever it was he was looking at.

“...Father?”

Lukas was standing there.

His body still swayed slightly, but his gaze was calm.

[I hoped you'd remain unconscious.]

Kaz was surprised for a moment, but that was it. There was no need for him to be too shocked. He knew the reason this man had passed out before.

This is because he pushed his body beyond the limit that it could withstand.

He didn't fully understand the power Lukas was using, but he noticed that he was so exhausted that he definitely wouldn't be able to use it again.

There was definitely no way for him to fight back now.

He knew that. He knew that, but...

Gurk-

At that moment, the pain in his mouth seemed to intensify for a moment. It was like a wake-up call.

He had already experienced it once before. At that moment, when he thought that he had completely overpowered Lukas and could easily kill him, he was hit harder than at any other time during their fight.

If that explosion had been a little bigger, or if Sedi had been a little stronger... Kaz would've died.

Suddenly, Kaz shot backward, increasing the distance between them.

"...huh?"

It was an action that Sedi didn't quite understand.

Then she heard Lukas' whisper.

“He’s probably wary of me. He came close without thinking once and got burned.”

“Are you okay?”

“Right.”

“...do you have a plan?”

“...”

Lukas remained silent for a while before putting his hand on Sedi’s shoulder.

“F-, father?”

Sedi’s face became red at his sudden action, but Lukas’ expression was solemn.

“How much demonic energy do you have left?”

“H-, huh? Ah. Demonic energy. I still have a bit left. But I don’t think I’ll be able to use it in my current condition.”

As she said this, Sedi looked down at her reddened skin.

“That demonic energy... give it to me.”

“...what?”

“There is no time to explain, quickly inject your demonic energy into my body.”

“Are you crazy? If you do that-”

“Sedi, I already said there is no time to explain. Soon, Kaz’s wariness will disappear. Then everything will be over.”

Sedi flinched when she heard Lukas’ cold tone. This was the first time Lukas had ever talked to her like that. She’d only spoken up because she was worried, but now she felt like she’d done something wrong.

To Lukas, demonic energy was like a potent poison. There was no way that he didn’t know this.

And yet, he was now saying that he would swallow this poison.

No matter what Lukas said, she didn’t want to watch him commit suicide.

However...

Sedi bit her lip.

“I don’t know what will happen, but if that’s what you want...”

“Right. Thanks.”

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Sedi grabbed Lukas’ hand, which was on her shoulder, and directly pushed her demonic energy into it.

Krrr-

“...kuk!”

The influx of demonic energy caused Lukas to grunt and stumble back a few steps. His face became dark in an instant.

When she saw that, Sedi thought she’d made a mistake by listening to him, but she didn’t say anything in the end.

Because even at that moment, Lukas’ eyes were calm and firm.

Rumble-

Lukas' blood vessels became swollen and red. His eyes became black as if ink had been injected into them. And a mist of demonic energy slowly began to flow from his mouth. Even his saliva had become discoloured.

[Don't even think about it!]

A moment later, Kaz lifted both of his hands. He'd widened the distance between them because he was wary, but he finally realised that it might have been the wrong choice. He didn't know exactly what they were doing, but he knew that if he let them do as they pleased, things would become troublesome.

Boom!

Huge beams of light shot out from both of his hands.

Maybe it was because of the mood and setting, but it felt like the Dragon Breath attacks were flying towards them in slow motion.

"Sedi."

Lukas' voice drifted into her ears. She turned to look at him with a blank expression on her face.

His lips were spread into a smile, but for some reason it gave her a strange feeling.

"Since we're on a continent floating in the sky, some of my calculations might be incorrect. So I'm not entirely sure where you'll go."

“What?”

“However, I’m pretty sure that anywhere is safer than here.”

“Wait, what are you talking...”

“It’s one of my bad habits. I’ve always been like this. I’d rather carry the burden on my own than watch someone else carry it.”

Sedi’s eyes widened as she looked up at his face. It was only at that moment that she got a vague idea of what Lukas intended to do.

She hurriedly opened her mouth.

“Fath-”

“Forgive me.”

Piht-

Sedi disappeared.

[...!]

Kaz saw this scene clearly.

She didn't move at a high speed or hide herself away with some kind of stealth technique.

Instead, almost as if she'd evaporated, Sedi's very being disappeared from this fraction of space.

Boom boom boom!

And in the next instant, the Dragon Breaths hit Lukas.

The safe area immediately disappeared, the force of the explosion so strong that it sent the nearby ocean water into the air like a geyser.

Whoosh—

And in the artificial rain he created, Kaz muttered.

[What did you do?]

He didn't receive an answer.

He gritted his teeth and roared in a loud voice.

[Where did you send my partn-!]

“...”

Crunch-

Lukas slowly stepped out of the crater that had been created by the explosion.

Kaz's lips twitched slightly.

'He's still alive?'

...No. He was probably just overreacting.

That guy had been beside Sedi this entire time. Knowing that, Kaz had intentionally weakened his attack. That was probably the thing that saved his life. In fact, the state of Lukas' body was enough to say that he'd barely survived.

After wiping blood from the corner of his lips, Lukas finally gave him an answer.

“A place far beyond your reach.”

[...you sent her out of Death Island.]

Kaz spoke in a voice that contained barely suppressed rage.

[I will give you one chance... Bring Sedi back. Then, I'll give you a painless death.]

“A mere Half-Absolute dares to give me orders?”

[Half?]

Kaz's gaze became cold.

[It seems you still have the energy to wag your tongue around. However, your struggles are pointless. You should have realised this countless times by now. Your little tricks won't work on me.]

“They're not tricks. I'd prefer it if you called them magic.”

[I don't care what they're called. You still don't seem to understand the being that is standing before you.]

“Dragon King.”

[That’s me.]

“...”

After a brief pause, Lukas continued to speak slowly.

“...if that name means the lord of Dragons, then I could call you Dragon Lord.”

It was a very forced interpretation, but more than that, it was completely out of the blue.

Kaz remained silent because he was still unsure about Lukas’ intentions.

“Did you know, Kaz. In a universe that you never even heard of, there is also a race called Dragons. But they are much higher and more powerful than the Dragonmen, Dragonlings and Ancient Dragons here.”

[What are you trying to say?]

Lukas lifted his hands with his palms facing the sky.

Rumble...

Kaz's expression changed when he felt the clouds above begin to stir with lightning once again.

How?

Although he didn't know what sorcery or 'magic' Lukas was using, he knew that it required the consumption of some form of energy to be used. He also knew that in order to perform attacks as powerful as the ones Lukas had used so far, it would require a lot of said energy.

And as far as Kaz could tell, Lukas no longer had enough of that energy to use.

...No, that wasn't right.

If he didn't have the energy, then he couldn't have made Sedi disappear.

'Is he using his life energy as fuel?'

Such an act would be as foolish as strangling yourself to death.

It wasn't worth it.

Lukas' magic couldn't do anything to him unless it hit a vital point.

Besides, he'd already seen the type of magic that Lukas could use. They were all like the lightning bolt that had struck him at the very start.

At best, they were artificially created elements. And that kind of thing could never scratch his scale-

[...!]

Kaz's expression suddenly changed.

This lightning was different from the lightning that he'd used earlier.

He wasn't sure what it was, but he knew that something had changed.

This...

Boom!

Suddenly, the lightning bolt struck, piercing through Kaz's body in an instant.

His eyes went wide.

[Ku-, aaaack-!]

Then he let out a scream that he wouldn't have been able to hold in even if he tried. An extreme pain, greater than anything he'd ever felt, seemed to fill his entire body in an instant. It felt like every inch of his skin was burning.

His scales, which he was so proud of, hadn't stopped it.

What just happened?

[You... What did you...?]

Puffs of smoke came out of Kaz's mouth as he stuttered.

On the other hand, Lukas simply looked at him with a calm expression and continued his explanation.

“—There was a race that drove those Dragons to extinction.”

Kaz would never know.

The existence of beings who carried the name Demigod.

“Indra's Lightning.”

Crackle.

Lightning crackled all across Lukas' body.

His gamble had been a success.

Demonic energy.

This tainted power could not be used in place of his mana, which could be called the energy of nature itself. But it was possible to convert it to another type of power.

A power that greedily devoured and converted any energy that was mixed with it, making it its own.

“Fortunately, this power seems to work on you. Since magic doesn't work on you, I'll have to change my methods.”

Not magic power, but the power of the Demigods.

Divine power.

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There were times when Absolutes collided, but it wasn't a common occurrence.

In the first place, usually only one Absolute would be assigned to a world, so there were rarely any chances for them to meet each other.

And even if multiple Absolutes were assigned to the same world, their top priority was usually to carry out their mission— to return balance to that universe.

They saw confrontations with each other as a waste of both time and mental strength. Therefore, even if there were cases where they might have differing opinions or modus operandi, they would usually try to solve those differences through conversation.

Nevertheless, considering the prideful and stubborn natures of Absolutes, confrontations were inevitable. And when they did happen, Absolutes chose to settle them in the simplest way possible.

Fighting.

The victory or defeat of Absolutes weren't determined by their years of life. Instead, there were other factors that had to be considered.

First was their grade.

Absolutes were divided into four grades, and the difference between each grade was quite pronounced. Lords, who were second only to Rulers, were generally stronger than Assistants who ranked at the bottom.

—Generally.

In other words, there were times when that wasn't necessarily the case.

Lukas was one of those special cases. He had defeated a Lord when he was just an Assistant.

The second factor was whether one side had a more advantageous position in the matchup.

Attribute compatibility was also a thing among Absolutes. In fact, it could be said that it influenced them more than other beings.

Naturally, all Absolutes had their own pasts and histories. Some of them were terrifying beings who had been born Transcendent or Semi-Transcendent.

And the rest were like Lukas. Beings who had been born from a mediocre race, but after a long and difficult journey, were able to become Absolutes.

The lives they lived before becoming Absolutes allowed them to create their own attributes. In other words, everything they'd accumulated up to that point became the foundation that made them an Absolute.

For example, let's say there was an Absolute who had killed millions of insects in their life, and an Absolute who had the appearance and abilities of an insect since birth.

In that case, even if the former was a few ranks lower than the latter, it was still possible for them to have an advantage in an actual fight.

This power was called their Root Power.

For example, Lukas was born a mortal. Nevertheless, he constantly fought against beings that were almost on the same level as Absolutes. He never gave up.

Even when he was defeated time and time again, he still got back to his feet. And eventually, he was able to defeat all of the beings known as Demigods, who were Semi-Transcendent from birth.

He won the battle for the fate of his race.

And this life gave attributes to Lukas' magic.

Lukas' spells would become stronger whenever the following conditions were met.

Whenever he encountered beings stronger than himself.

Or whenever he encountered beings with the attributes of Absolute, Transcendent, or Immortal.

Conversely, his power would be slightly limited when facing Absolutes with mortal origins. (TL: Great Mage became pokemon)

Some might say that the existence of attribute compatibility between beings who belong to different universes was contradictory. However, there is a place in the multiverse where everything that happens in every universe is stored, including the lives of Absolutes.

It was called the Akashic Records, the largest library in existence.

A place that most Absolutes referred to as 'The Diary of God'. The amount of information stored in that library was so vast that God was the only being capable of digesting and understanding all of it.

It was this fact that highlighted the majesty of God, the creator of the multiverse.

Even if his power was weaker than that of the Rulers, it could be said that the results of a confrontation between Absolutes were determined by his whims.

Of course, God never recorded false facts in the Akashic Records.

Lukas recalled the origin of one of his powers, divine power.

In the past, the Demigods fought a war of fate against the Dragon Race.

It was a desperate war between two races that were equivalent to Absolutes, and naturally, it would have been recorded in The Diary of God in bold letters.

The Demigods won in the end, an event which had a great influence on the concept of divine power.

As a result, the effects of divine power became much stronger when used against members of the Dragon Race.

* * *

'This can't be...'

Kaz narrowed his eyes.

That bolt of lightning, an artificially created technique and something that he should have been all but invincible against, had managed to easily pierce through Kaz's defenses.

This was the case for the magic that Lukas had used before. Kaz had never experienced that power before, but he had still managed to block it easily.

Boom!

The lightning struck once again.

Kaz hesitated. What if that time was just a coincidence? Should he take the risk and let it hit him again?

'My scales haven't gotten weaker.'

Despite his thoughts, Kaz's body moved almost on its own. For the first time in thousands of years, he dodged an attack.

Boom!

The ground where the lightning bolt hit immediately became black.

Kaz looked at the ground in confusion. Since it had the power to pierce through his scales, he wouldn't be surprised if it were to crack the ground open, but it stopped after barely making a small crater.

Nevertheless, he didn't have the time to contemplate this phenomenon. Before he was given the chance, another attack came from Lukas.

Attack?

When he saw what it was, Kaz was speechless for a moment. That guy had gotten a boulder from somewhere and thrown it at him.

—Nevertheless, Kaz evaded this attack as well.

A boulder of that size wouldn't hurt him even if it were to fall from the sky and land directly at his head.

He was certain that...

'Lightning.'

When this thought appeared in his head, he remembered the pain of the lightning bolt piercing through his body, and his body reacted before he could even think about it. He felt that he couldn't ignore even something that seemed to be just a minor attack from Lukas.

If this was all a trick, then Kaz had already been tightly wrapped up in its web.

"You don't have a lot of experience dodging. You're full of openings."

Following this whisper, he felt a power shock from the back of his head.

Crack!

[Kuaak!]

Once again, he let out a scream. Kaz hurriedly swung his arm behind him.

It was an impulsive action, neither offensive nor defensive.

In all honesty, it was an immature action. No matter how fast or powerful the movement might be, if there was no clear goal while doing it, it was nothing more than a flounder.

Lukas tilted his head to the side to avoid Kaz's 'attack'. Then, he grabbed the outstretched arm and hit it with his fist.

Crack!

His scales broke. Not only that, but even the bones in his wrist were broken.

This time, Kaz didn't scream, not because he was suppressing the pain, but because he was so shocked he couldn't even make a sound.

Lukas wanted to continue his attack, but he suddenly stopped.

Gulp.

Dark blood flowed up his oesophagus. His body was telling him to expel it. He wanted to vomit it out, but instead, he forced himself to swallow it back down. He couldn't let Kaz know about his physical condition.

Lukas looked calm at that moment, but if anyone were to look at him carefully, they would find that his entire body was covered in cold sweat. If anyone else were to feel the pain he was currently experiencing, instead of crying out, they might just faint directly. Just wiggling a finger made him feel like his entire body was being torn to pieces.

This result was natural.

After all, he had forcefully absorbed demonic energy in order to convert it to divine power, and now, he was forcing himself to use this power of the Demigods.

There was only one way to describe such an act when he had only reached 8 stars. Suicide.

To make matters worse, his already damaged clothes had been completely destroyed by the previous Dragon Breath.

This meant that Lukas was now being directly exposed to the demonic energy on Death Island. This was proven by the fact that his skin was slowly becoming discoloured.

He had to end this fight as quickly as possible.

‘A decisive blow.’

He needed a decisive blow in order to kill Kaz.

Lukas recalled all of the Demigod’s powers.

Death, wind, fire.

In his current state, there was only one power he could use from the group who had once been called ‘Apocalypses’.

'Cut.'

The power to cut through anything in the world.

Since he didn't have a sword, he held onto the smashed remains of his staff with both hands.

Then he took a stance.

Kaz felt a strange omen. He wasn't sure what was going on, but he knew he was in danger. So the first thing he had to do was widen the distance.

[...!]

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Shuk.

Kaz looked down, his eyes wide. Although he had done his best to dodge, he'd failed to do so.

His arm had been cut off cleanly from shoulder to armpit. Not only his scales but even his bones had been sliced with ease.

Pfft.

A moment after, blood spurted from the cut. An intense pain struck him like a bolt of lightning, but he didn't even have the chance to scream.

This was because Lukas started attacking once again.

He didn't have any room to attack. All he could do was dodge.

The previous cut had made him realise something. And he couldn't help but wonder why he hadn't noticed it sooner.

Kaz observed Lukas closely.

Only then did he notice the pain hidden within his eyes, the cold sweat that covered his body, his skin that was gradually becoming dark red, and the blood that dripped from the corner of his mouth.

'His condition is not good!'

He didn't know the reason, but Lukas' body was dying.

Why had it taken him so long to notice?

There was only one reason for this.

Lukas' expression was too calm. He did not look like someone on the brink of death.

Nevertheless, even if it was a bit late, he still noticed.

And from then on, there was only one decision that Kaz had to make.

'Buy time.'

It was obvious that if he just left him alone, he would die on his own accord.

Therefore, he decided to avoid direct confrontations. Lukas was already pushing himself to the extent of abandoning his body. It would be foolish for him to continue fighting him. If he continued running and dodging, Lukas would self-destruct without him having to do anything.

"..."

Unlike Kaz, whose expression eased after realising he had a chance of winning, Lukas' expression wasn't good.

He immediately noticed when Kaz' movements changed. Kaz was no longer moving in fear.

Although he had lost an arm, he had noticed Lukas' condition. And he realised that he could win as long as he bought enough time.

He should have ended it with that first attack, but he hadn't been able to do so. Kaz had managed to barely dodge the attack and he only cut off one arm as a result.

Now, it was Kaz, not Lukas, who was in an advantageous position.

'It's too early to give up.'

But his chances of victory hadn't completely disappeared.

Lukas openly spat out the mouthful of blood that flowed up his throat. Since his opponent already knew his condition was a mess, there was no need for him to hide it anymore.

The fight had reached its final stages, and now, it became a contest of endurance.

Would Lukas' body be destroyed first?

Or would Kaz suffer a lethal blow before that?

The end of the battle would probably be decided by a narrow margin.

* * *

Dodge an attack. Dodge, dodge, and dodge some more.

...how long had it been?

'Why?'

Kaz looked at the being in front of him. In his eyes, his agitation and fear could not be hidden.

Quite a while had passed. He never faced him directly.

He was going to faint soon. He was going to die soon.

He'd had these thoughts countless times already.

But... How long has it been since the first one?

Paht!

He dodged Lukas' attack once again. Was he slower than before? He couldn't tell. His mind was a mess. He had used too much energy.

Kaz clenched his teeth.

Lukas' condition could no longer be called bad, it was horrendous. His discoloured skin dripped off of his body like wax, and his gait was unsteady. He was probably even more messed up on the inside. His internal organs had probably become completely liquefied long ago.

He shouldn't be able to move in his condition. No, he shouldn't even be alive.

And yet, he was still moving.

Kaz had had enough. He was tired of looking at Lukas' calm eyes and expressionless face.

He realised that this zombie-like bastard would not fall unless he finished him himself.

Kaz looked at Lukas. By now, his fear was not as pronounced. Avoiding his attacks had allowed him to regain his composure.

He used his calm mind to analyse the current situation.

Although he had lost an arm, he was definitely the one with the upper hand.

Just one attack would be enough. Then he would be able to sever the thin, tough life thread of this terrifying bastard.

He could no longer use his Dragon Breath. If he wanted to finish it, he would have to do it with his own hands.

'He should have lowered his guard by now.'

Kaz hadn't attacked for a really long time, so his opponent probably wouldn't expect him to counterattack now. That was a gap he could aim for.

Lukas came towards him once again, fist outstretched. Maybe it was just him, but he felt that his movements were even slower than before. Naturally, this meant that the opening was even bigger.

He dodged again. But this time, instead of immediately widening the distance between them, he got closer.

His chest was completely open. Kaz raised his claws. He didn't have much strength left, but it was enough to pierce his fragile skin and rip his heart and lungs to shreds.

'It's time to die...!'

As he had this thought Kaz looked up at Lukas' face.

And instantly became terrified.

[You...!]

He saw Lukas looking down at him calmly. He didn't appear even slightly shocked. Almost as if he had been waiting for this moment for a long time...

'He was waiting for me to attack...?'

Kaz realised that something was wrong, but it was already too late to retreat. Now that he had come this far, attack was his best defence. Gritting his teeth, Kaz thrust his claws into Lukas' chest.

Squelch!

His skin split.

But that was it. Kaz's claws didn't go any further. This was because Lukas leaned back at the last moment before his attack arrived.

And at the same time, he stuck two fingers into the wound on his shoulder.

Puk!

[Kuk!]

Kaz immediately let out a grunt of pain.

“...a place that has already been wounded is like a vital point for you. Just like your mouth, this means that if energy is forced into it, you have no way to stop it.”

[Wh-, what...?]

“You were a very persistent and troublesome opponent.”

[You son of a bitch...!]

Kaz was terrified by the tone that made it seem like the fight had already come to an end.

What was he going to do?

Kaz tried to struggle, but it was already too late.

Fwoosh!

Like the outlet of a dam, divine power rushed out of Lukas' fingers and into Kaz's body. Kaz's struggles stopped immediately.

Starting from his severed arm, the fierce power was able to reach Kaz's heart in an instant.

Puk-

And then his heart exploded in his chest.

[...]

Kaz, who was standing there like a statue, coughed up a mouthful of blood.

Gurgle, gurgle.

Then, blood began to flow from every one of his orifices.

[U-... ur-...k...]

Kaz stared at Lukas in disbelief one last time before falling backward.

“...”

The wind blew gently, but this wind was enough to almost push Lukas over, but he forcefully straightened his staggering figure.

—He defeated Kaz.

By using every single means available to him, he managed to kill a being who was close to an Absolute.

However, Lukas' body had also been torn apart in the process.

In fact, his outward appearance was worse than that of Kaz, who had already become a corpse.

He had absolutely no energy left.

But he couldn't let himself faint. He knew that if he were to lose consciousness like this, he would die.

He couldn't help but wonder what would happen if he were to die in the Great World.

He didn't know, but he was certain that the concept of death wouldn't be taken lightly just because this world had been created specifically for the Great Game. In fact, it was possible that it would have been even more severe.

Because it might give the Rulers control of his very existence.

He knew that.

He knew that, but his consciousness was still fading, and he had trouble remaining on his feet.

His knees buckled, and his body tilted forward.

“...”

However, Lukas couldn't help but feel that the texture of the ground was much softer than he expected.

No. Did he even fall down?

It was warm and soft.

-You really can't help yourself.

He seemed to hear a voice laugh bitterly.

It sounded familiar.

Curious about what was happening, Lukas tried to open his eyes, but he couldn't.

Instead, his consciousness slowly descended into darkness.

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A young man was standing on the deck of a transport vessel headed towards Combat Island.

Standing with the sea as his backdrop, the young man seemed to become the focal point of a painting that had been created by the hand of God himself. The women on the vessel kept looking at him from the corners of their eyes and giggling amongst themselves.

His eyes were bluer than the clear sky above them, and his blonde hair gleamed in the sun like a halo around his head. His face was thin, its lines gentle, but his body was well-balanced. Anyone who looked at him would know that this man's body was precisely trained.

"Hey, hey. Go say something."

"Huh? Me?"

"You're the most social and outgoing one in our group."

"U-, um. If that face is right in front of me, I don't think my mouth would even open."

The women in the corner whispered to each other in quiet voices.

They were all aspiring artists from Peace Island. These were people who went out of their way to find and make beautiful things, and now they were on their way to see the lives of the artisans living on Combat Island.

The blacksmiths living on Combat Island were so talented that the rumors had spread to the other islands.

It was said that not only were their armors practical, but they also had artistic appearances that anyone who saw them would admire.

However, before they could even appreciate the works of those masters, they encountered a young man whose appearance was even more of a work of art.

As they hesitated on whether to approach him or not, the young man retired to the cabin. The women, who realised that they had missed such a good opportunity, could only exclaim in regret.

Tak-

“...huuu.”

The young man, who had returned to the cabin, let out a long sigh.

He felt that he couldn't get used to this peaceful atmosphere. It was awkward and uncomfortable, like wearing clothes that didn't fit.

He recalled the island he had stayed on before.

Desire Island.

A trash den full of people who were more disgusting than Demons, a land infested with betrayal, conspiracies, and hatred.

He'd spent as many as five years 'living' in such a place.

Had he changed a lot?

Leo Freeman wondered as he looked at himself in the mirror. It was clear from his appearance. First of all, he'd grown a lot. His androgynous face, which he'd never liked before, now looked a bit more masculine.

But what about on the inside?

...He didn't know. A lot of time had passed.

Leo couldn't remember what he was like five years ago, even if he wanted to.

Naturally, this meant that he really had changed, whether it was big or small.

His eyes turned to the mask that sat on the table beside him.

This mask, which covered half of his face when he wore it, was the mask he used when cleaning up the trash on Desire Island. The rulers of the island had great influence and wealth, so it wouldn't be difficult for them to put a bounty on his head for the crimes he had committed.

That's why Leo needed methods to hide his identity, and this mask was one of them.

However, he hadn't worn the mask since boarding the transport vessel.

This was because he was only wanted on Desire Island, and there weren't any portraits of him in circulation.

All that was known about him was that he was a young outsider who didn't use any weapons.

Moreover, wearing a mask on the ship would cause him to appear even more suspicious. And as he expected, throughout his journey, no one had suspected him. If he left for a while, he was certain that the dust would settle by the time he returned.

Leo looked away from the mask to the newspaper article beside it.

Championship.

A major event that was held every ten years on Combat Island.

This article contained a list with the personal information of all the Champions participating in the event.

When he saw it, the first thing Leo noticed was a contestant named Kran, who had appeared like a comet and was now considered a strong contender for the title of Grand Champion.

This name might be unfamiliar to the Dragonmen, but it wasn't to Leo.

Kran, one of the Top Three, The Strongest Hunter. This was someone that he could never forget.

After finding someone he knew, Leo immediately examined the rest of the list and was able to find the ones he had been looking for all along.

Rin Summers of Herui, and Li Hao of Babylon.

He was certain that they were Min Ha-rin and Lee Jong-hak. He could recognise them by their aliases with a single glance.(1)

“...Senior Sister.”

Leo’s heart shook when he thought of Min Ha-rin’s face. He wondered how much she had changed, what she was doing, and what she would say when she saw him.

Then Lukas’ face appeared in his mind.

Did she know where their Master was?

“...”

All of his questions would soon be answered.

After all, the transport vessel would soon arrive at Combat Island.

—It was about two weeks after the Championship had commenced.

* * *

Adventure Island.

The place where heavy rain had fallen unceasingly for several decades. It wasn't uncommon to find sunken cities in this place.

In fact, such a sight was familiar and sought after by the countless wanderers and explorers on this island.

A sunken city was like a giant treasure trove.

This was the reason that the exploration team [Crystal Skull] was currently exploring such a city. A huge ship had been anchored above the sunken city, and they were in the midst of looking for treasures through diving.

Most exploration teams owned ships. Some even said that a group could only be considered an exploration team if they had a ship. As such, in order to explore Adventure Island, a ship was a necessity.

In addition to travel, ships also served as accommodations and places where they could cook and eat. Not to mention the fact that they could be used to transport any treasure that they obtained.

Standing on the deck of the ship, the leader of the Crystal Skull Exploration Team looked down at the sunken city beneath them.

Suddenly, one of his subordinates poked his head out of the water.

“Puha! Ah, dammit. It’s freaking deep.”

“Did you find anything?”

“No. I don’t think there’s anything here either, Boss.”

The subordinate shook his head as he replied.

They had already been searching for four days without any harvest, but the leader of the exploration team just nodded calmly. In the first place, treasure hunting was a task that required patience and perseverance.

If he got impatient after searching for just three or four days then he wouldn’t have set up an exploration team in the first place.

“But there is something weird.”

“What is it?”

“There aren’t any sea dragons in the area.”

“...”

This strange phenomenon was something that the team leader had also noticed a few days ago.

Sea dragons were one of the biggest threats during an expedition.

For the exploration teams, who retrieved treasures by diving into the depths, ferocious sea dragons, who moved freely in the water, and ate everything in sight, could be considered their worst enemies.

The place they were in was also a Class A Danger Area, which was especially known to have many sea dragons. This was the reason he had paid special attention to the number of people and equipment that he had brought for this expedition. But now, they hadn’t encountered a single sea dragon.

Of course, if one looked at it simply, this could be considered a good thing, but the team leader only felt a strange sense of unease.

Suddenly. The expression of the team leader, who had been looking around while thinking, hardened.

“...hey.”

“Yes?”

“Do you see that?”

The place the captain pointed to was above the surface of the water. His subordinates all turned to look, and the expressions on all of their faces changed as well.

After a moment of silence, someone muttered in disbelief.

“...a person?”

The figure of a person was standing on the surface of the water not too far from them. It was an unbelievable and bizarre sight.

“How is he standing on the water?”

“Maybe he’s standing on a building and we just can’t see it from here?”

“Where did he come from? There aren’t any ships nearby.”

“Is it a sea illusion?”

“There isn’t any fog so it can’t be an illusion.”

The explorers repeated their reasonings and counterarguments quietly.

“...Captain, what should we do?”

But in the end, the most important thing was their leader’s decision.

Just as the exploration team leader hesitated to make a judgement, something terrifying happened.

The man began to slowly walk towards them.

“...!”

“Wh-, what the hell?!”

It was like he was walking on flat ground. There was no way that a building would be sitting so perfectly beneath the surface of the water, so that could only mean that the man was truly walking on the water’s surface. Such a bizarre act was something that not even a Sorcerer could do.

Moreover, the man seemed to be taking small steps, but the distance he covered with each step was hard to comprehend.

The explorers were horrified.

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To the horror and dismay of the sailors, the man appeared in front of their boat in an instant.

Taht-

Fwoosh!

Then, with a soft tap of his foot, he soared tens of meters into the air before settling on the boat as gently as a cloud.

Sssng.

The members of the Crystal Skull Exploration Team drew their weapons as they warily observed this man.

“Who are you?”

The man had golden hair and striking blue eyes. There was also a soft, almost mocking, smile on his thin lips.

“This is a beautiful city, I really like it. It really was worth forcing myself to come here.”

"I said, who are you?"

The man's smile became brighter.

Suddenly, the members of Crystal Skull felt something rushing up their throats.

"U-, rk. Kuk. wek..."

Then, almost as at the same time, they began vomiting. It was bright red blood.

Somehow, seemingly for no reason and without warning, their blood had begun to flow up their throats.

"Kurk, kuk, gurk, uwek, wek, uwek..."

The blood continued to flow. It flowed without any signs of stopping.

They didn't want to spit it out, but they didn't have a choice. None of them were able to swallow the blood that was flowing up.

To make matters worse, they were having trouble breathing because they were constantly vomiting blood.

They struggled and grabbed their necks, but it was all in vain.

Moments later, there was only one person standing on the deck that had been repainted with blood.

Dozens of explorers had died without being able to do anything but swing their arms or choke themselves in vain. At the end, they all had the same horrifying appearance of dried corpses that seemed to have lost all of their moisture.

“My name is Nodiesop.”

It was only then that the man, Nodiesop, introduced himself.

He looked down at the sunken city once again.

It really was a beautiful city. Those weren't empty words. Nodiesop could confidently say that he had never seen such a dazzling sight in any of the universes he'd traveled to before.

In a way, it could be called an inspiration for him.

A very nice plan emerged in his mind.

“If a huge continent like this one was to fall into the ocean, it would definitely create an unprecedented tsunami. Did you know? The ocean is a favored tool of destruction for most Absolutes. It's a perfect way

to wipe out all of the living beings on a planet without actually harming the planet itself.” (TL: Is that his idea of balance?)

No one responded.

Nodiesop, of course, knew that this would be the case, but he still continued in a voice that could barely hide the joy within.

“I want to make this entire world like this city, but... there is something I’ll have to do first.”

He lifted his head, his gaze cutting across the horizon.

There was someone that had to be killed no matter what.

Nodiesop let out a shrill laugh.

* * *

Lirua was selected to be the venue for the Championship Finals.

This was because Lirua’s arena was incredibly large. The Lirua arena could be ranked within the top three of all eight major cities when it came to the size of their arenas.

That wasn't all. Compared to the others, the Lirua arena was fairly new, and it was considered a humongous artwork because it had been built by some of the best architects in the entirety of the Heavenly Realm. There were no shortages of expressions of shock and admiration from those Fighters and visitors from other cities.

In fact, watching a fight from the floating stands in the air was highly praised by many, which caused even those expensive seats to be completely sold out.

[This Championship was an event that shook the Heavenly Realm for a month! Now, the long journey is approaching its end!]

An amplified voice rang out in the arena.

This was the voice of the host, who was currently standing in the center of the arena.

[Welcome! Everyone who came to watch the finals in person! Thank you! Thank you for your continued interest in the Championship!]

Leo looked around.

'So this is Combat Island.'

Lirua was one of the largest cities in the Heavenly Realm.

It was shockingly large. He knew that it was a festival period, which meant that the population would be much more than it usually was, but even then, the city didn't feel cramped or clustered.

After thinking for a while, Leo looked down at the newspaper in his hands.

On it was a brief explanation of everything that had happened in the Championship so far.

...Including the death of Li Hao, no Lee Jong-hak.

According to the article, he had lost and died at the hands of none other than Kran.

It was hard to believe, but if it was true, then their situation might be a bit dangerous.

[Let me introduce you to our first contender! The title dark horse doesn't seem to suit him anymore. He is a Fighter! He reached this stage with a perfect performance and strength that seemed to have no gaps! The Champion of Kisura! Kraaaaaan!]

Waaaaah!

The roar from the stands was so loud that it shook the arena. At the same time, the eastern door of the arena opened and Kran strode out.

However, Leo was much more concerned about the person he was about to face.

[No one expected this Fighter to be the one to face him! From beginning to end, this Fighter never had an easy battle! Every single match was an amazing battle! Shinz of Babylon, Shambar of Akad! They defeated some of the strongest contenders in the Championship and finally managed to reach this honored position!]

The momentum in the crowd was even hotter than when Kran was introduced.

[The Fighter who had the biggest growth spurt in the Championship, using the worst matchups as the best nutrients! Will they be able to give us a surprise once again?! Introducing the Champion of Herui, Riiiiin Summerssss-!]

The west door opened following the host's introduction.

But the space behind it was empty. This was something that was visible even to those watching from the stands.

“What’s going on?”

“Where’s Rin?”

The audience began to murmur.

The host looked at the west door in shock.

[U-, uhh...? Ahem! My apologies! Please wait a moment!]

One of the moderators ran out towards the host. Everyone could see him report something with a serious expression. With every word he said, the host's face became more and more pale.

After staring blankly for a while, he fixed his expression and spoke in the most professional way he could.

[T-, the Champion of Herui, Rin Summers, has chosen to withdraw!]

“What did he say?”

“Withdraw? From the Championship finals?”

“What the hell is he talking about?”

The commotion in the crowd steadily grew louder.

Perhaps the host also realised this fact, because he suddenly shouted out.

[Rin Summers' withdrawal gives Kran a bye! A-, another Grand Champion has been born! Everyone, let us put our hands together for the birth of a new hero! Kran of the Kisura Arena!]

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“Aak...!”

With a scream, Min Ha-rin shot up in her bed. There wasn't a single drop of blood in her pale face.

When she looked out the window, she saw that it was still dark outside. This meant that she hadn't slept well today either.

"Huff... huff..."

Her body shook. Her heart pounded in her chest as if she'd just been running at full speed, and her skin was covered in sweat. Her hair was plastered to her face, but she couldn't even pull it away.

This was because the tips of her trembling fingers were numb and cold as though no blood was being circulated to them. Even her eyes behind her closed eyelids shook uncontrollably.

She had lost something again. She couldn't keep hold of it.

She'd just found another person that she had begun to grow closer to, but then she had been forced to helplessly watch him die right in front of her eyes.

For Min Ha-rin, helplessness was one of the worst feelings imaginable.

Ever since she'd become a Hunter, she had never encountered a situation where she had no choice but to let someone she knew or cared about die.

It reminded her of when her parents died.

That was why she always did her best to take care of everyone she knew, no matter who they were.

If she saw that someone was going to die, she would do everything she could to save them, even if it meant giving up her own life in the process.

...Lukas.

Her Master saw this as an act of sacred sacrifice. He said that he saw hope in Min Ha-rin, and had great expectations because of that hope.

She'd been proud when she received that compliment. She'd even thought that she was on the right path.

But she wasn't.

In truth, there was a slightly more twisted reason for Min Ha-rin's lack of hesitation when it came to throwing away her life.

'It was self satisfaction.'

Was it because she wanted to save people? Or because it was the right thing to do?

No. Min Ha-rin didn't act that way for such a good reason.

Instead, it was because she felt it would be better for her to die than anyone else. She'd been aware of the fact that she'd been thinking this way all along. But she didn't think she was wrong, even if it was a slightly twisted thought.

But the death of Lee Jong-hak had led her to a realisation.

In truth, Min Ha-rin's actions were a result of her own selfishness. It wasn't something that could be gift wrapped in a pretty title like 'sacrifice'.

"—urp!"

She felt like vomiting. Because of the stress of the Championship, she'd decided to drink a lot of alcohol, something she wasn't used to.

"Uwek!"

She vomited on the bed.

Alcohol. She'd vomited because of alcohol.

Min Ha-rin had never felt so disgusted in herself.

She felt like she was going to lose her mind. Gasping for breath, she couldn't help but think about someone.

It was a face that she thought about dozens or even hundreds of times every day.

"...Master."

As she thought of this face, her mind gradually cooled down, and her body slowly relaxed. It was almost as if she had ingested a sedative.

Knock knock-

Suddenly, she heard a knock on the door.

Min Ha-rin turned to look at the door with her dead eyes.

* * *

There was no response.

Was it because he hadn't knocked hard enough?

No, that couldn't be it.

Taking a deep breath, Leo decided to knock on the door once again.

Knock knock-

“ ... ”

Nevertheless, there was still no response from within the room.

He hadn't come to the wrong place. He was certain that Min Ha-rin, his Senior Sister, was in this room. It seemed that she had hidden her identity when she came here, but Leo's tracking skills had already reached the level of a master.

With just their personal information, it was possible for him to find someone within a few days unless they meticulously tried to hide themselves.

Did she leave the room?

That wasn't it either.

He could definitely feel the faint presence within the room.

Knock knock.

Thinking that it was not enough after knocking again and receiving no response, Leo finally opened his mouth.

“...Senior Sister.”

When he muttered these words in a soft voice, there was finally a response within the room.

He heard a muffled shuffling from inside. Then a few small footsteps. Afterwards, the room fell silent again. He couldn't be sure, but he believed that she was standing at the door now.

Did she think that she had misheard his voice?

No. Now that he thought about it, his voice must have changed a lot after five years. After all, he'd already reached puberty and his voice now carried a clear bass undertone.

“It's me. Leo Freeman.”

“...Junior Brother?”

A weak, trembling voice asked back in confirmation.

Although she couldn't see him, Leo nodded, happy to hear the voice of his Senior Sister.

“Yeah.”

Click-

The door opened, and a foul odor immediately flowed from the room. Leo almost frowned, but before he could, he became speechless instead.

“...”

Min Ha-rin.

Unlike himself, her appearance hadn't changed much.

However, her aura was completely different. It was almost as though she was half broken. Her eyes, shrouded in darkness, drifted for a while before finally rising to look at Leo's face.

“It's really you, Junior Brother.”

There was a hint of joy in her weak voice.

Leo should have felt the same. However, after seeing Min Ha-rin's appearance, he felt more worried than glad.

“Yeah. It’s me.”

“You’re safe. I’m glad.”

“Senior Sister too.”

“And you got so big. Is everything okay? I found some clues about you. I heard that you were on Desire Island, I intended to go find you later, but-”

“I’m not the issue right now.”

Leo interrupted her with a slightly firm tone.

“What happened?”

“...”

Min Ha-rin gave a faint and slightly helpless smile.

“...would you like to come inside? N-, no. Actually, it’s a bit messy right now. Give me a minute. Let me get dressed and I’ll come out.”

Leo nodded, and while she was changing, he went down to the first floor and bought two bottles of water.

Min Ha-rin got dressed and left the room. Leo looked down at her for a moment before raising her hood over her head.

“This would be better for now.”

“You’ve become more manly.”

“...”

Originally, those words would have made him smile, but now, he didn’t say anything because he was worried about Min Ha-rin’s condition.

It was quite chilly outside. This was natural since the sun had long since set. Nevertheless, the lights in the city hadn’t gone out, and there was still a crowd of people on the streets.

This was because the afterglow of the Championship hadn’t dispersed yet.

“Dammit! It took me more than a month to get to Lirua! When I got here I was completely exhausted!”

“Did you hear? This is the first time in 150 years that someone withdrew from the Championship. It’s also the first time that anyone has ever withdrawn from the Championship Finals.”

“At least we were able to witness such a historic moment. Ha!”

“I heard that the Fighters on Combat Island valued honor more than their own lives, but that must have just been a bunch of rumors.”

“...”

Leo turned to look at Min Ha-rin.

But her blank expression made it hard for him to figure out what she was thinking.

In any case, he felt that it wouldn’t be good to stay in the downtown area for long. After all, it wasn’t a suitable place to have a conversation.

With that thought in mind, he quickened his pace.

Min Ha-rin matched his pace.

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After walking for a while, they arrived at one of the rest areas in Lirua. This area looked like a park, but there were more statues than trees.

“Would you like to have some water?”

“Wouldn’t it be lukewarm by now?”

“No. I just bought it.”

“Ah, when?”

“While Senior Sister was changing.”

“You’re really thoughtful.”

Min Ha-rin smiled as she accepted the water he handed over and took a sip of it. But she only took a few sips before she burst into a fit of coughs.

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah. I’m alright.”

She didn’t look alright at all.

In fact, Leo felt like she looked even worse than before.

'Maybe I should've told her I'd come back in the morning.'

He had this thought for a moment, but he eventually shook his head. He didn't think her condition would improve even if he did that. Min Ha-rin wasn't like this because of lack of sleep or poor physical condition.

There had to be a more fundamental reason.

"What happened?"

He repeated the question he'd asked before.

Min Ha-rin didn't answer immediately, instead, she took a few more sips of water before finally opening her mouth.

"Jong-hak oppa is dead."

Jong-hak oppa?

Leo had his doubts about the unfamiliar title, but he decided to not bring it up for now since it might interrupt the flow of the conversation.

"I saw it in a newspaper. It said that he died at the hands of Kran."

“It was my fault.”

“How is it Senior Sister’s fault?”

“It was something I could’ve prevented, but I didn’t.”

“...”

The weakness in her voice made him really uncomfortable.

Leo was able to infer a few things on his own, but over the past five years, he’d learned to be more patient.

Without rushing, he decided to ask questions one by one.

“Why did Kran kill Lee Jong-hak?”

“He’s being controlled. No. I think it would be more accurate to say he’s been brainwashed.”

“...the Demon King?”

“Yeah. It seems that he has a bit of control, but I don’t know the details.”

Leo thought for a moment before saying.

“Then let me investigate Kran fir-”

“No!”

It was a sudden shout in a cold voice.

Leo unknowingly flinched and turned to look at Min Ha-rin.

“Senior Sister?”

“Absolutely not. Don’t even go near him. I can’t take it a second time. I-”

Her trembling voice poured out like bullets from a machine gun. It was dark, so he couldn’t really see her complexion, but she seemed to have grown a few shades paler.

Did he touch her reverse scale?

Leo hurriedly did his best to calm her down.

“Alright. I’ll do as Senior Sister says. So please calm down.”

“...”

Min Ha-rin took a deep breath and slowly let it out in order to calm her rapidly beating heart.

As he looked at her, Leo couldn’t help but wonder if Min Ha-rin’s condition was even worse than he thought. She didn’t appear agitated, but she’d just completely lost her cool in an instant.

He’d seen people like this countless times on Desire Island.

People who suffered from severe emotional anxiety. No, he didn’t even need to consider those that he’d met before. After all, the current Min Ha-rin was just like Leo had been in the past. She’d experienced a major trauma, and now she was constantly suffering from it.

It wouldn’t be possible to fill the hole in her chest simply because he wanted to. And counseling her in a public setting like this one wouldn’t have much of an effect either. Instead, what she needed was reliable advice and encouragement from someone she trusted, like a mentor or teacher.

In Leo’s case, he was able to overcome the trauma of his past with Lukas’ help.

“What about Master? Have you met?”

“...ah. Right. Now that I think about it, I haven’t mentioned that yet. Master went to Death Island to look for Sedi.”

“To Death Island?”

It wasn’t strange for Leo to be so shocked.

This was because, in general, Death Island had a specific meaning for those living in the Heavenly Realm.

With a hint of urgency in his voice, Leo asked.

“When did he go there?”

“...around two months or so ago.”

“...”

Two months in that place?

Unlike Leo, who was filled with worry, Min Ha-rin’s expression was calm. It was an attitude that he couldn’t understand.

“Does Senior Sister not know about Death Island?”

“Of course I do. It’s one of the most dangerous restricted areas in the Heavenly Realm.”

She knew about Death Island, and she still wasn’t worried...

“Did Master tell you in advance that he would spend a long time there?”

“No. Originally, he was supposed to return before the Championship started.”

The Championship had ended two days ago.

“...so he didn’t return at the time that he mentioned to you?”

“Mhm.”

Min Ha-rin nodded calmly.

Unable to hold back any further, Leo decided to ask directly.

“Isn’t Senior Sister worried at all?”

“Have you forgotten who Master is? No matter the situation, Master will have the power to overcome it.”(1)

“...”

“Something must have happened. He’ll probably contact us soon.”

This wasn’t the kind of trust or belief that a disciple had in their Master. Instead, this felt more like blind faith.

Leo almost asked a question without realising it.

Then what if something happened to Lukas and he couldn’t come back?

‘I can’t.’

He barely managed to hold himself back.

That was because he felt that if he did ask that question, Min Ha-rin’s condition might become even worse than it was now.

Two things were abundantly clear to him at that moment. One was that Min Ha-rin was in an extremely dangerous situation, and two was that he himself had no way to solve the problem.

Suddenly.

“So this is where you were.”

A familiar voice came from behind them.

Min Ha-rin and Leo turned their heads at the same time.

“...Arid?”

“Yeah.”

Arid was standing there.

A look of joy flashed across Min Ha-rin’s face. She’d heard about him from Lukas, but this was her first time seeing him for herself.

And Leo was here as well.

For her, this was a very commemorative day, as it was her first time meeting two people from her home at the same time. (TL: I guess Lee Jong-hak and Kran don’t count)

“Senior Brother Leo is here as well. You worked hard.”

“Thanks. Have you been well?”

“Yeah. Compared to you guys, I could be considered to have had a smooth life.”

Leo couldn't help but feel that Arid's expression became a bit heavy after saying those words.

“What's wrong?”

“...both of you... must return to Dragon God Island with me right now.”

“Dragon God Island? Even if you say that there's no way for us to obtain...”

“I've already received permission from the Priestess. No. She is the one that requested you in the first place.”

Arid spoke in a firm voice.

“The situation has changed drastically.”

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Swish,

He felt a hand brush his hair to the side. The fingers seemed to be long and thin. The reason why he wasn't sure was because his eyes were closed.

But even if he wanted to, he couldn't open his eyes. His eyelids were heavy and his head was dizzy. It felt like he was trapped within his own body, and the state of his flesh and blood had a great impact on his mind.

For an Absolute, such a situation was incredibly unpleasant.

Lukas tried to clear the fog in his mind. He was trying to forcefully awaken. Of course, that wasn't the best thing to do. Forcefully awakening his body which hadn't fully recovered would cause numerous side effects, both large and small.

"I'd advise you to rest a bit longer."

A calm voice came from beside him.

It was a dignified, female voice.

Lukas moved his lips. He wanted to respond, but he was unable to make a sound.

"Open your mouth."

Strangely, Lukas didn't think about refusing.

When Lukas obediently opened his mouth, lukewarm liquid flowed into it.

It was water. It was only then that he felt his burning thirst. His adam's apple bobbed up and down as he drank the water without hesitation.

Throb-

He felt pain in his throat and stomach. It felt like he'd swallowed a bunch of thorns instead of water. He didn't show it, but the voice seemed to respond to his pain.

"Your internal organs have been restored to some extent. You'll have to thank Arid for that. If it wasn't for that child's ability, you probably would've died by now."

"..."

"In fact, it can still be considered a miracle that you're still alive."

This was something that he knew.

Lukas checked the mana in his body. Some of his mana had been restored which hinted to how long he'd been unconscious.

Nevertheless, that didn't mean that he could use magic. His body was too messed up for that.

It was a shame. For example, if he could have used the Ghost spell, he could've let his mind out while leaving his body to rest.

'I have so many questions.'

How long had he been unconscious, what happened to Sedi, where was he currently.

And above all, who was the owner of the voice...

"I'll tell you all you want to know when you wake up."

As if she had read his thoughts, the voice whispered softly.

"For now, just get some rest."

Lukas sighed inwardly.

Then he let go of the consciousness that he had been forcibly maintaining.

* * *

“Who... was...”

“...we need to... first...”

When he woke up again, he found that his surroundings had become noisy.

He wondered what was going on, but decided to check his physical condition first.

Wiggle.

He moved his fingers. His eyelids also didn't feel as heavy as before. This proved that at the very least, his condition was better than it was last time.

“...excuse. We need to wait for him to regain consciousness.”

The voices also became louder and clearer.

Lukas slowly opened his eyes.

“Ah...!”

The first thing he saw were tearful eyes. Afterwards, he noticed the familiar features. It was Arid.

“Master...!”

“Are you alright?”

“Father!”

A series of voices called out to him. His ears rang and his stomach twisted as a result. When he frowned slightly, his surroundings instantly became quiet.

Lukas took a moment to calm himself before nodding. When he struggled to lift himself to a seated position, Arid came to help him. He stacked several pillows behind him so that he could lean back in a more comfortable position.

“...I’d like to drink some water.”

A hoarse voice sounded.

Then, a tall young man who was standing beside him brought a glass forward. Lukas took a sip of it before saying.

“Thanks, Leo.”

The young man blinked in surprise.

“...you recognise me?”

“Of course I do. You’re all grown up now. I’m proud to see it.”

“...”

Leo couldn’t help but smile when he heard those words. Lukas slowly let out a breath before turning to look at the rest of the room.

Arid and Leo were not the only ones there. Sedi and Min Ha-rin were also in the room. But unlike Min Ha-rin who looked at him with a tearful yet happy expression, Sedi was looking at him with her arms folded, her dissatisfaction evident. She was even pouting slightly.

He could guess the reason for that, but there was something he wanted to say before bringing that up.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen you all. I’m glad that everyone is okay...”

Lukas paused.

Maybe it was because his head wasn’t completely clear yet. He had made a mistake.

The people in the room were the participants from earth who had entered into this world with Lukas and were a part of his team. But not all of them were there.

One of them was missing.

“Where’s Lee Jong-hak?”

“...”

The atmosphere became solemn. It seemed that none of them wanted to open their mouths.

But Lukas’ gaze was locked onto someone. It was none other than Min Ha-rin.

She spoke in a calm voice.

“He died.”

“He’s...dead?”

“Yeah. While fighting Kran.”

Lukas was speechless for a moment.

Dead? Lee Jong-hak?

“Well, I’d like to explain the situation to Master. But since you’re not in the best condition now, I think we’ll have to put our conversation off until later.”

“...ah. That’s right. It’s not good to have a lot of people in a patient’s room.”

Min Ha-rin nodded at Arid’s words.

“Then, Arid, you take care of Master. You can explain it well.”

Min Ha-rin and Leo got up from their seats, and after bowing slightly, left the room. Sedi didn’t leave right away. Instead, she kept looking at Lukas with a pout as she walked up to him.

Then she looked Lukas directly in the eye and spat out word for word.

“If you do that again, I really won’t forgive you.”

“...I’m sorry.”

Lukas had no choice but to apologize because he knew that he was in the wrong. After hearing his apology, Sedi snorted heavily before also leaving the room.

Click.

The door closed, leaving Lukas and Arid as the only occupants of the room.

Arid was about to let out a sigh, but then he looked at Lukas and smiled instead.

“How are you feeling?”

“I don’t think I’ll ever faint again.”

“Ahaha. That’s good.”

“...where are we?”

Lukas looked around.

It was a simple room with only a few essential items and furniture. Such a room would usually feel empty or dreary, but this room felt warm instead. Perhaps it was because of the reddish brown wallpaper.

“This is my mansion here on Dragon God Island.”

“Mansion?”

“Yes. It’s called Young Dragon Nest. This is one of the guest rooms.”

“...I see.”

Lukas recalled his last memory.

He also thought of the familiar voice he’d heard when he was rescued. Was it Arid? He wasn’t sure. At that time, his consciousness was so blurred that it could have been a hallucination.

“Arid, were you the one who saved me?”

“No.”

Arid shook his head.

“It was the Priestess that saved Master.”

“...the Priestess?”

“Yeah. But it’s really weird. As far as I know, she never leaves Dragon God Island.”

“ ... ”

“The Priestess is here as well. She told me to send you to her as soon as you regained consciousness.”

A situation where he would finally be able to talk to the Priestess.

This was something he had been waiting for. Ever since he'd learned of her existence, Lukas had wanted to meet her.

Lukas got up from the bed. When he saw this, Arid stuttered.

“M-, Master? It's fine even if you don't go right now...”

“I'm fine, so tell me. Where is the Priestess?”

* * *

The garden behind the Young Dragon Nest. This was where the Priestess spent most of her time.

Thump-

It was hard for him to walk on his own, but he couldn't stay in bed. Although it would put great strain on his tired body, it was better to move directly to get his questions answered.

The clear air was refreshing. Perhaps it was because his last few memories were all from Death Island, but it felt even more special.

The beautiful natural scenery on Dragon God Island had been preserved almost perfectly. Even the Young Dragon Nest appeared to have been built in a way that didn't harm the trees and grass nearby.

The garden was so beautiful that it caused even an unartful person like Lukas to admire it, but it was also incredibly large. This caused Lukas to wonder if he would even be able to find the Priestess.

Suddenly.

"You bastard."

"...!"

Lukas couldn't help but be surprised. This was because he heard the voice, but he couldn't feel any signs of a presence.

Turning around, he saw a fairly large lake filled with crystal clear water. In the middle of the lake was a pavilion, and sitting in that pavilion, was a woman. This scene was so eye-catching that one couldn't help but wonder how he hadn't seen it before.

The woman wore a soft gown that showed off the curves of her body. Nevertheless, it was the piece of cloth covering her face that stood out the most.

Her face was completely covered by a pure white cloth.

“Don’t go away like that, don’t go, even if you must, you look so good~ come on.”

The woman hummed to herself, her words audible but incomprehensible.

What was she saying?

Lukas narrowed his eyes slightly. The woman who was sitting in the pavilion and swinging her feet, smiled.

“Don’t stare at me. Or I’ll pluck your eyes out.”

“Who are you?”

“The person who saved your life.”

“...Priestess.”

“Good answer.”

...Although her words were strange, Lukas recognised her voice.

Lukas looked at her. Considering her age, she appeared to be very young. In fact, she reminded him of Sedi.

“Why are you still looking at me like that? Didn’t Arid tell you?”

“...”

“If you met the person who saved your life, the least you can do is say something.”

Although it was a bit obtuse, she wasn’t wrong, so Lukas bowed his head slightly.

“Thank you for saving me.”

“That bow won’t be enough. You have to take responsibility.”

“Responsibility?”

“Something is going to happen because of you. Child. Do you think this is a joke?”

As he listened to her talk, Lukas wondered if he simply couldn’t understand the language anymore.

He asked back.

“...what happened?”

“That guy, Kaz, he wasn’t someone you were supposed to meet.”

The Priestess frowned. With a sigh, she got up from the pavilion and started walking around the lake.

Lukas followed her to continue the conversation, but he didn’t get too close, maintaining a distance of a few steps.

“Even though that guy was weak, he still had some uses. But what about now? Kaz is gone to the afterlife, and all the work I’ve done has been flipped upside down. You really made a mess of things. If someone warns you not to do something, you should at least pretend to listen to them. You’re too stubborn.”

From the Priestess’ words, it seemed that she had tried to stop Lukas from going to Death Island.

“I only heard that you didn’t want me to go.”

“No. I kept telling you. Child, you’ve been listening to my voice ever since you came to this world.”

“Huh?”

“Ahh. Ahem. Cough cough. Ahem.”

The Priestess cleared her throat for a moment.

“[Death Island is extremely dangerous! Entry is not recommended.]”

“...!”

A voice that he’d heard numerous times before.

It was only then that Lukas realised why the Priestess’ voice was so familiar.

It was the voice that gave him directions and sometimes warnings.

The Priestess smiled.

“In any case, it’s nice to finally meet you in person, Lukas Trowman.”

“Who... are you?”

“Look, you can’t even go for five minutes without talking informally.”

When Lukas simply stared at her without responding, the Priestess burst into laughter.

“Did you know, there’s only one place in this world where you can get privacy. Wherever you go, those other kids will try to eavesdrop on you.”

“...other kids?”

“The Rulers.”

“...!”

Lukas looked at the Priestess in surprise yet again.

“This is the first time we’ve met face to face, isn’t it? Madman. It seems like you’ve met all the others at least once.”

It was only then that Lukas realised who the Priestess was.

The last Ruler that he’d never met before.

“...Seven Fanged Dragon God.”

“This is making me emotional. You don’t know...”

With a grumbling tone, he shook her head.

The wind shook the fabric around her head slightly, revealing purple hair for a moment.

“How hard I worked to meet you.”