

Great Mage 551

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“I got about 20 VP. But considering the stuff you messed up, that’s not worth anything... Are you playing with me?”

“You speak in a way that’s difficult to understand. Can’t you speak more normally?”

“Huh? I’m friendly and nice, aren’t I, kid?”

The Priestess tilted her head to the side as she said this. Now that he knew her true identity, he should probably refer to her as the Seven Fanged Dragon God.

‘Either way...’

When Lukas didn’t immediately respond, the Priestess put her hands on her hips and said.

“When someone asks you if they’re ‘friendly and kind’, the considerate thing to do would be to nod your head and agree. Plus your attitude isn’t right either, so why should I change?”

“I understand. Would you like for me to use polite speech instead? I’ll change the way I talk.”

“Alright.”

When Lukas once again began using polite speech, the Priestess nodded her head in satisfaction.

“Then...”

Paht.

The Priestess clothes flapped and flowed gently, as though it had been blown by a nonexistent wind. Her swaying hair also changed colors as if it had been dyed. After a short while, her hair became blue.

An icy shade of blue.

“This should be enough to satisfy you, Lukas Trowman.”

It was a cold but dignified voice. One that he remembered.

“Were ‘you’ the one who gave water to me when I was unconscious?”

“‘You’ ... You’re addressing ‘me’ separately.”

There was a hint of curiosity in her voice.

It seemed like she was wondering why he had come up with that idea. He owed her for saving his life, so it would be fine for him to answer this small question.

“It’s just my guess, but it seems that every time your hair changes color, your personality changes as well.”

“Like split personalities. Is that what you mean?”

Lukas nodded his head.

“It’s not such a simple concept, but it doesn’t matter if you choose to understand it like that.”

Those words suggested that Lukas’ guess was wrong. Somehow, he felt that even if he were to question her more about it, he wouldn’t receive an answer.

“Then another question. I heard that you wanted to see me. Was that something you decided after I came to this world? Or was it something you wanted from long ago?”

This might have sounded like a trivial question, but there was definitely a reason why he’d chosen to ask it.

“It was before. To be precise, it was around the time when you’d first begun to stand out among the Absolutes.”

“...are you my enemy?”

The Priestess raised an eyebrow at this blunt question but she smirked slightly as she responded.

“Enemy or ally. It’s not a good habit to categorise people with that kind of dichotomy.”

“There is a possibility that you are neither an ally nor an enemy.”

“I saved your life.”

“I know that. And I intend to repay that debt to you at some point.”

“You don’t need to do that. The karma between us has completed its cycle.”

“...?”

Lukas tilted his head to the side for a moment because he couldn’t quite understand what she meant by those words, but he soon continued.

“You’re my ally because you saved my life’. I think that it’s much more dangerous to jump to conclusions like that.”

“Hmm. I see. That’s unfortunate.”

Although she said this, the Priestess' tone didn't change, making it seem like she didn't really feel that way.

The Priestess then changed the subject as if it didn't matter.

"Trowman, what thoughts do you have about this world?"

This didn't seem to be a meaningless question.

Before giving his answer, Lukas slowly reflected on everything he had experienced so far. It had already been quite a while since he'd entered this world.

He saw, heard, and experienced a lot. There had even been several times when he'd been in danger.

"It's much too large for just the qualifiers... and it makes me feel like it's complete."

Those words were correct.

This wasn't just the field for the Great Game to be played in earnest.

Nevertheless, it was impossible to think that this world, which was several times larger than most planets, was created just for 20 participants.

It wasn't just the size.

It was large and developed. There were several billions of people living in this world, each with unique characteristics and capabilities.

Of course, a Ruler could easily create all of these things, but it felt like a waste.

A four-way battle.

That's what they'd been told before entering this world,

However, when the actual preliminaries began, there was no conflict between the Rulers, not to mention those taking part in the four-way battle.

From what Lukas knew about the Absolutes he was competing against, they would have preferred a more direct and easy to understand fight.

In fact, when Lukas had first heard that a qualifier would be held, he'd thought that it would be a series of tag matches or something.

"It should be easier to talk now that you've understood so much."

This meant that there was no perfect answer to her question.

“Thunder Gorge, Black Earth, Giant Field, Heavenly Realm and the supercontinent Gaia. Five very different worlds. Did you notice? Except for Gaia, all of the worlds are closely related to a Ruler.”

Lukas nodded.

Thunder Gorge for the Lightning God.

Black Earth for the Demon God.

Giant Field for the Sun Giant.

Heavenly Realm for the Dragon God.

It wasn't completely clear, but at the very least, it could be confirmed that each of these regions had some connection to a Ruler.

“The Great Game. The Absolutes taking part in this qualifier don't truly understand what this concept means. Including you, Trowman.”

That was true.

Lukas didn't know anything. How the Great Game was played, what would happen to the winner, what would happen to the loser, or even how to win or lose in the first place.

“In the distant past, there was a time when the four Rulers could not come to an agreement about a major event. This might be hard to believe, but before then, such a thing had never happened.”

“...is that so?”

As she said, it was quite hard to believe. This was because Lukas knew how prideful and stubborn the Rulers were. This led him to believe that disagreements and confrontations between them were common.

“Right. Usually, everything could be determined by a majority vote. It worked out as long as two could agree on the same thing. Then the other two would have no choice but to follow that opinion.”

“...”

“However, that situation was different. Since it was something that couldn’t be taken lightly, the confrontation only got worse as more time passed without a decision being made. If we were at the same level as other Absolutes then we could’ve just settled it with a fight. But we couldn’t do that. For the sake of peace in the multiverse.”

This was an undeniable truth.

The power of the four Rulers was about the same. There was no confirmation of this since, with the exception of God, no one, not even they themselves, knew just how much strength and potential they had.

If these beings, considered the most powerful in existence, were to start fighting... countless universes would be destroyed by the aftermath alone.

Since the Rulers were beings who sought harmony before anything else, they would certainly not want such a thing to happen.

“Nevertheless, no one intended to back down. So God came up with a solution.”

“A solution?”

“Since we couldn’t solve it on our own, we would instead send representatives to decide the outcome for us.”

“...you mean...”

The Priestess nodded.

“That is what the Great Game is. It is a war that takes place between the representatives whenever a confrontation between Rulers reaches the limit.”

“...”

Lukas’ expression darkened.

If that was the case, then... Why did the Lightning God tell him to prepare for the Great Game?

'Did he want me to be his representative?'

That certainly appeared to be the case. However, Lukas would never accept such a thing. He had no intention of entrusting himself to a Ruler.

'If what the Priestess said is true, then my participation in the Great Game is a contradiction in itself.'

This was because he didn't represent any Ruler.

What would happen if Lukas won the Great Game?

Did that mean the Rulers would have to accept his opinion?

Deciding to hide his doubts, for now, Lukas asked.

"The fact that the Great Game is being held now means that a major 'incident' has occurred again. An event that the Rulers cannot easily ignore. What is it?"

"That's not something you deserve to know. And even if I did decide to tell you, nothing would change."

It was an arrogant statement, but Lukas knew that it was true. If it was something that the Rulers had to discuss with each other, then nothing would change even if Lukas knew about it.

However, it was the Priestess' next words that shocked him the most.

"Nodiesop has entered the Heavenly Realm. He should have already found the location of Dragon God Island by now, and soon, he will destroy all the barriers I placed and enter."

"...!"

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When she saw Lukas' expression, the Priestess chuckled softly before explaining.

"My power is very limited in this world. It wouldn't be hard to beat a half Absolute like Kaz, but against a real Absolute, there's nothing I can do."

"Nodiesop's power should be limited like mine. In that state, it's impossible for him to defeat you at your current level."

Just like Lukas couldn't defeat the current Priestess, Nodiesop, whose power should also be restricted, would not be a threat to the Priestess.

But the Priestess shook her head, refuting Lukas' claim.

"No. Among the Absolutes, Nodiesop's power wasn't as restricted at the beginning. He has probably obtained the statue in the Giant Field by now, and regained most of his power as an Absolute."

"What... how?"

For a moment, the Sun Giant's image appeared in his mind. Did Nodiesop receive assistance from the Ruler he followed?

"It's not what you think. Nodiesop can be considered a special case. He chose to participate in the qualifier on his own, without the help of a team."

"He chose to participate on his own...?"

"That's right. And naturally, that means he took a huge risk in the upcoming main game. As a minor reward for this, he was allowed to enter this world before any of the other Absolutes, and he was also given more clues about the specific location of the statue."

In other words, he was risking his life in this qualifier. This might be a foolish decision in the long run, but at least for now, it put him in the most dominant position.

"...what is Nodiesop's purpose for coming here?"

"That's obvious. To kill you and take the statue."

Lukas bit his lip.

Nodiesop, Nodiesop was coming there.

A man who wasn't a half like Kaz, but a true Absolute, was aiming for his life.

This situation was much more dangerous than he expected.

Nevertheless, there was something that Lukas still couldn't understand, so he decided to ask.

"If he has regained his power as an Absolute, why is he coming here to kill me personally? It should be easy to just destroy the Heavenly Realm as a whole."

"Because of me."

"Huh?"

"Up until now, I'm the one who's been blocking Nodiesop's invasion. Not only did I prevent him from attacking this land, I also prevented him from entering it. My powers are less restricted when I am on Dragon God Island, so I was able to at least do that much."

"...as long as you're on Dragon God Island."

Lukas repeated the words of the Priestess for a moment before letting out a sigh.

"So it's my fault. You left Dragon God Island for a while to rescue me, and during that time, Nodiesop was able to enter the Heavenly Realm."

“As an Absolute his ability to concentrate goes without saying. I was only away for a brief moment, but he was able to pinpoint that flaw perfectly.”

The Priestess shook her head like she had never expected this situation to happen.

“The Statue of the Dragon God that is here. Is it one of the special statues?”

“That’s not a question I will answer. But I can tell you that the statue is somewhere on this island.”

“What is your role in all of this? Why are you participating in this qualifier instead of simply observing like the other Rulers? No, before that...”

Lukas’ voice grew a bit sharp as he raised his head to meet the Priestess’ gaze.

“Are you really the Seven Fanged Dragon God?”

“...”

The Priestess smiled softly. Then, she changed directions and walked towards the lake instead of around it. It was only at that moment that Lukas realised she had been barefooted the entire time.

Splash.

She walked on the water. Such a feat wasn't that surprising, but Lukas couldn't help but frown when he realised that he couldn't tell what kind of power she was using to do so.

No. That wasn't the only thing that he found strange.

The Priestess had introduced herself as the Seven Fanged Dragon God. There were only four Rulers.

However...

"Do I not feel like a Ruler?"

The Priestess turned her head to the side. Her face was still covered by the veil, so he had no way of seeing her expression.

"You certainly do appear to be mysterious. But that's it. I've met all the other Rulers before. You're the last one. It's easy to tell who they were by the power they had, the amount of external force that they accumulated, and the pressure they unconsciously exerted on everything around them."

Lukas was used to fighting against beings that were stronger than he was.

But even he had almost succumbed to despair the first time he faced a Ruler.

He wanted to give in. He wanted to entrust his life to them.

He couldn't even describe how long it had taken for him to get rid of that pathetic thought.

And that was exactly the reason why he was currently doubting the Priestess' words.

It was strange for her to say her power was limited.

The Seven Fanged Dragon God was a Ruler. There was no being in the entirety of the multiverse that would dare to place restrictions on them. The only one who could or would restrict a Ruler, was themselves.

"I am the Seven Fanged Dragon God."

The Priestess chuckled.

"I think so, and so I will continue to refer to myself as such in the future. However, when Absolutes see me, they will have the same doubts as you do. None of them will regard me as a Ruler. In fact, unless it's a neutral Absolute like you, they will definitely try to do so."

She was the Seven Fanged Dragon God but she was also not the Seven Fanged Dragon God.

The corners of Lukas' eyes shined slightly at those mysterious words.

"...so if you encounter Nodiesop, there's a high chance that he'll kill you. But that makes me even more confused. Was saving my life worth it? Why would you take such a large risk just to save me?"

The priestess nodded slowly.

“If I keep hiding it, our conversation will never progress. So I’ll just tell you the truth.”

Then, without changing her soft tone, she said some shocking words.

“The Ruler, The Seven Fanged Dragon, is dead.”

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A heavy silence fell.

Lukas stared at the Priestess with an indiscernible expression. He found it hard to open his mouth. What she had just said was enough to make him speechless for a while.

Nevertheless, it was the Priestess that changed the mood yet again.

“You don’t believe~?”

Her tone was lively.

There was no flicker this time, so he hadn’t noticed when she changed. Lukas’ gaze shifted to the surface of the water where he could see her reflection. Her hair glistened.

Gold... No. Was it blonde?

“Instead, those words have made me trust you even less.”

“Hnng. Why’s that?”

“There’s no way we Absolutes wouldn’t know if a Ruler died.”

There were four Rulers, whose influence was as tall as mountains, that maintained the balance and harmony of the multiverse. It would be impossible for no one to notice if one of them were to disappear. This was true even for the Absolutes who hadn’t entrusted themselves to the Seven Fanged Dragon God.

“It doesn’t matter if you believe me or not. I didn’t bring it up to persuade you.”

The Priestess let out a laugh.

“But haven’t you ever thought it was strange?”

“What was?”

“The Black Horned Demon God. He hated you so much. But suddenly, his attitude changed as easily as flipping a palm. He wanted you to participate in the qualifier. And he even tried to entice you to do so by telling you that he would immediately leave earth alone in the event that you won.”

“...is there another reason for this qualifier?”

“You’re pretty quick on the uptake.”

The Priestess praised Lukas’ wit, but he couldn’t figure out more than that. Because there were no more clues to go on.

Fortunately, it didn’t seem like the Priestess expected him to ask anything more.

“The purpose of this qualifier is to find someone to fill my vacant spot.”

“You mean they’re looking for another Ruler?”

“Umm. It’s not that amazing.”

“...”

Lukas furrowed his eyebrows.

They were trying to fill the vacancy, but they weren't looking for another Ruler. It sounded contradictory at first glance, but...

"The Sun Giant bet on Nodiesop, the Lightning God bet on Letip, and the Demon God bet on Kasajin. And they all support them in their own ways."

"...support?"

"It's not material help. It's more like giving them helpful advice at the right moment. In fact, they might have heard voices too. Similar to the 'voice' you heard."

Lukas' eyebrow twitched slightly.

The voice he heard. He'd just heard from her own mouth that that voice belonged to none other than the Priestess, the Seven Fanged Dragon God.

But that wasn't the part that Lukas paid attention to.

"Does that mean you bet on me?"

Nodiesop, Letip, and Kasajin all had their own Rulers. This allowed him to guess that every Ruler could only support a single Absolute.

In other words, the Priestess had no choice.

Among the Absolutes that had entered the qualifier, Lukas was the only one who didn't have an affiliation.

"Not really."

But the Priestess' blunt words shut that thought down as quickly as it appeared.

Lukas felt like he couldn't keep up with her. In fact, it was quite annoying. By the time he started to figure out the nuances of a personality, she would switch to another. No. Didn't she say that it wasn't such a simple concept? In any case...

"Didn't those guys tell you? The Seven Fanged Dragon God is against this qualifier."

"They told us that you didn't agree to it."

"There's no way that anyone with even a hint of common sense would easily agree to having their seat taken away."

"Are you aiming for a comeback?"

"Right. By the way, aren't your words becoming more and more informal? Should I let Borang come out again?"

Borang?

Lukas thought for a moment before remembering the personality with purple hair who spoke in an incomprehensible manner.

“I apologize.” (TL: Finally someone to keep Lukas’ rudeness in check kekeke.)

Lukas hurriedly apologized.

The Priestess folded her arms with a soft ‘hmp’ before continuing.

“I’m betting on myself.”

“...then why are you helping me?”

“There are two reasons.”

“The first one is that I don’t think you would be very hostile towards me. Besides, if you become stronger, you’ll be able to keep the other Absolutes in check. Huh. It would have been better if Kaz hadn’t died.”

It seemed that the Priestess lamented his death more than he expected.

“What’s the other reason?”

“I can’t say it.”

“...”

For a moment, Lukas contemplated whether he hated this personality more than Borang.

“That isn’t so important right now. I just told you that Nodiesop is on his way to Dragon God Island. His powers are a bit restricted now that he is in the Heavenly Realm, but it would still be fairly easy for him to sink Dragon God Island. That includes burying you.”

“It’s impossible to know before we try-”

“Are you serious? Have you forgotten your physical condition? Even now, Arid’s power is not enough to fully heal you. How serious do you think your injuries were while you were unconscious...?”

“...”

“Nodiesop will arrive at Dragon God Island in four days at the latest. No matter what you do, it would be impossible for you to fully recover in that time. No, even if you were to somehow heal your injuries, it wouldn’t change anything. Your chances of winning wouldn’t increase in the slightest.”

“I see.”

Her tone was cold, but he had no choice but to agree.

Even if Nodiesop was restricted to an extent while in the Heavenly Realm, Lukas was not his match. Everything the Priestess had said so far was true.

Even if he were to fight him after fully recovering, his chances of winning were probably less than 0.01%. However, Lukas' current condition could only be described as the worst.

This caused a question to arise once more.

"Then why did you bring me to this island? If you had continued to maintain the barrier, then even if I died or not, you would have been able to block Nodiesop from even entering this place."

"Right. Or I had the option of throwing you out to Nodiesop while you were in a near death state. Although the probability is low, it's still possible that I could've developed good relations with him as a result."

"But you didn't do that."

The important thing was now. There was no meaning to thinking about what could have happened in the past.

"It's not just me, either. All of the participants that I selected are currently on this island. Dragon God Island is a sanctuary that can't be accessed without your express permission."

That's why he had worked so hard to try and win the Championship.

Lukas shook his head and continued.

"Were you the one who gathered them on Dragon God Island?"

"Right. I told Arid to bring them all here. Was it Sedi? I found the fallen Absolute all on my own. You sent her away through time and space. She landed all the way on the end of Peace Island."

"That... thank you."

"Well, it's fine. The important thing is what we will do from now on."

The Priestess' expression changed.

"If we allow this to continue as is, we will all die."

Her manner of speaking became rough, and he could hear the rage bubbling within her voice like magma before an eruption.

Lukas' eyes naturally turned to the reflection in the water.

Her hair was now red.

“And there is nothing you can do about it in your current state.”

“Don’t be so quick to judge.”

“It’s not a judgement, I’m just stating the facts.”

“...”

“However.”

For an instant, a violent smile spread across the Priestess’ lips.

“There is a way for you to fight Nodiesop.”

“...a way to fight him?”

“It’s the only sure method. And it wouldn’t be bad for you either, Lukas.”

Lukas no longer questioned her. If what she was saying was true, then he had no reason to refuse. He didn't have the option to.

However, from his experience so far, proposals like this were never to his liking.

"You just have to kill all of the participants."

"...all of the participants?"

"I'm talking about those you brought into this world with you. If you kill them all, you will be able to stand on the same line as Nodiesop."

"I don't understand. I'm not like Nodiesop, he didn't even bring a single participant from the start..."

"It will work because you have someone in front of you who will make the comparison possible. After you kill all of your participants, I will also give you the special statue. Only then will Nodiesop not be a threat."

Lukas' gaze turned cold.

"Do you really think I would accept such an offer?"

"Offer? Do you think you have a choice? Unless you consider suicide to be an option then that's the only thing you can pick. Either everyone dies or one survives. There's no need to even talk about which one is the smarter option."

It was a cutting remark.

It was absolutely impossible for Lukas, who was so badly injured, to recover in four days.

He couldn't even use magic. If he were to rouse his mana, instead of unleashing the spell he desired, he would only make his injuries worse.

The same was true for divine power. In fact, the consequences would be even more severe than if he tried to use mana. His entire body would melt into a pool of blood.

So for now, Lukas was nothing more than an injured person without a hint of power.

Then what about the forces standing behind him?

Min Ha-rin, Leo, Arid, Sedi.

They'd grown stronger. It could even be said that they were completely incomparable to how they were before the qualifiers began.

However, were they strong enough to face Nodiesop who had already regained his power as an Absolute?

They weren't. It was impossible even for them to subdue a half Absolute like Kaz.

“Lukas, if you are aiming to become a Ruler, I will give you one piece of advice.”

The Priestess spoke with a cold voice.

“Open your eyes wider. Make a clear distinction between small and large. If you die here, what do you think will happen to the other humans in the endless multiverse? Didn’t you say that you wanted to save all humans? Or do you think there will actually be another Absolute like you?”

“...”

“The Black Horned Demon God has developed an inherent hatred for the Human Race because of you. When this qualifier ends, all of the humans in the outside world will wish they were dead. It could also be said that this is karma created by you.”

The Priestess’ voice dug into Lukas’ ears and made his heart sink.

It wasn’t that this was something he was unaware of, but hearing someone else say it gave him a completely different feeling.

“Please answer one question for me.”

“Say it.”

“What happens to those who die in the qualifier?”

When she was asked this question by Lukas, the Priestess responded in a noncommittal manner.

“Death is death. It doesn’t matter where it occurs.”

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The Priestess looked down at the surface of the water below her feet. To be precise, she was looking at her own reflection.

“I didn’t expect him to say no without even bothering to think about it.”

The Priestess’ reflection responded to her soft murmur.

“Right.”

In that instant, the Priestess’ reflection began to multiply.

“Hmph. He probably doesn’t properly understand the current situation. I don’t like that bastard.”

“Didn’t we always hear that he was like that? I quite like him.”

“But Chorong, why didn’t you say anything? You always whined about wanting to meet him.”

“Haigo~ Why are you so inconsiderate? You know it’s better for Jokang to deal with situations like this.”

“Then what do we do now? Nodiesop will definitely try to annihilate us.”

“Can we just run away? Maybe Nodiesop will give up on chasing us if we escape to Gaia.”

Suddenly.

She felt a presence behind her.

Splash-

The Priestess tapped the surface of the water with her foot, causing ripples to spread across the entire lake. Her reflections on the water also disappeared as though they were never there.

“Priestess.”

A familiar voice sounded. The Priestess turned around.

“Arid.”

“Yes.”

Arid was standing there. He lowered his head and spoke with a slightly strange expression.

“...did you tell Master everything.”

“Right.”

“What did he say?”

“...”

The Priestess looked into Arid’s eyes.

Whenever she looked at this child, the Young Dragon, Arid, she always felt a strange sense of longing.

While Lukas was unconscious, she told him almost everything.

So he also knew.

That Nodiesop was coming, that he intended to kill Lukas, that Lukas would have no choice but to break the restrictions placed upon him in order to defeat him.

And that the process would inevitably lead to his own death.

Nevertheless, he didn't seem fearful.

He decided to leave everything for Lukas to decide.

If he wanted him to die, Arid would gladly accept it.

He was a strong child.

"He refused."

"...ah."

Arid let out a soft exclamation, but it was unclear whether it was out of regret or joy.

"I don't know what he was thinking by refusing. Do you have any idea?"

"...no. However, I think that I... no, we all have an idea of what role we have to play."

"Huh?"

“Master has always protected us. So this time, we, Argento Spell, will protect Master. Even if we have to give up our lives to do so.”

“...Argento Spell?”

“Yes.”

“What is... that?”

“It’s the name of the organisation Master created. It is the central point that brings all of us, who have nothing in common, together. I have never experienced the power of an Absolute. However, I do know that they are strong enough to treat us like bugs. Nevertheless, I don’t think we will lose.”

Lukas had turned down the Priestess’ offer, but that didn’t mean that he would just accept death. Arid had a clear idea of what his Master had in mind.

He was betting on them.

He was asking them to stop Nodiesop.

The Master whom he admired greatly was pushing them from behind. Even if there was only the slightest probability of success, it was enough to risk their lives.

“...”

The Priestess was silent for a long time.

For a moment, Arid was nervous because he thought that he might have angered her. Had he been too arrogant?

“...Priestess?”

“...I want to be alone for a while.”

“Ah, yes. Understood.”

Arid nodded and slowly left the garden.

Alone once again, the Priestess slowly lowered her head to look at the water.

“...I see.”

A faint murmur flowed from her lips.

“So you have forgotten even now.”

A scattered into the wind.

* * *

“Nodiesop will arrive in four days.”

Lukas muttered as he half lay on his bed.

As he expected, he was still having trouble moving his body. Arid blamed himself for not being able to do more.

His face was haggard. Originally, Lukas couldn't be said to have much of a physique, but now, because he had been unable to receive the proper nutrients while unconscious, he looked like someone with one foot in the grave.

No. He really was someone with one foot in the grave.

'I did everything I could.'

Arid bit his lip, his heart filled with a sense of helplessness. Then he saw the ring on Lukas' finger.

...The ring had another feature that he would have loved to tell Lukas about but now wasn't the time.

"...I know. Master."

"Did the Goddess tell you?"

"Yes."

"I see. And the others?"

"Yes. Everyone is already aware of it. Master, will you really not just take our lives?"

Arid spoke slowly.

"We all understand that it is the surest method. We've already steeled our resolve."

"What resolve? The resolve to die?"

"We all owe Master more than our lives. We have no regrets or doubts."

"So you want me to sacrifice your lives in order to survive?"

"It is our wish."

“...so you don’t have faith in me.”

Lukas muttered in a low voice.

For a moment, Arid forgot how to speak. From his angle, that muttering face suddenly looked a bit weak, a thought he wouldn’t have dared to have before.

However, that trace disappeared faster than it had appeared.

“There is a small chance of winning in the battle against Nodiesop, but it’s not completely impossible. His power is limited in the Heavenly Realm.”

And Arid, Leo, Min Ha-rin and, Sedi, who would fight him, were all much stronger than before. Unlike Sedi, the other three had yet to reach the peak of mortality, but they show tremendous growth potential.

On top of that, they would also receive the help of the other beings living on the island, such as the Black and White Sorcerers, who were considered to be the strongest Sorcerers in the Heavenly Realm. They might even receive the Priestess’ help. Though it seemed she had no intention of taking out the statue.

But that alone wasn’t enough.

If that was all they had, Lukas wouldn’t even be able to say that they had a small chance of winning.

He would have had to say that they had absolutely no chance of winning.

“You are the one holding the keys to victory, Arid.”

“...!”

Arid’s eyes went wide.

“Me?”

“I can’t even begin to estimate your true potential. If you were to use your powers for combat instead of support, healing and, information gathering, I’m sure you’d be able to defeat Nodiesop on your own.”

He received no response.

Arid really wanted to open his mouth and tell him that he could trust him to defeat Nodiesop, but his mouth refused to open.

Because he knew.

Just how difficult it was to control his power.

“Arid, have you killed anyone since you entered this world?”

Arid flinched.

He quickly tried to cover up his reaction, but that was already enough of an answer.

“I know your personality. You’re a kind, sweet child. Rather than kill someone, you’d hesitate to even hurt them. I don’t want to call it a weakness. However, there will come times when you have ‘no choice but to fight’.”

“...”

“Don’t think about it too deeply. What I’m saying might not necessarily be the right answer.”

“...I’m sorry for being a disappointing disciple.”

Lukas chuckled bitterly. Arid seemed to think that he wasn’t good enough because he couldn’t understand or accept his Master’s teachings because of his lack of confidence.

“I should be the one saying that. I’m sorry. I’m a bad Master.”

“Absolutely not!”

Arid denied in a loud voice.

“I am very fortunate to have you as my Master!”

“...Arid, I’m not as good of a Master as you think. I don’t always walk the right path. Instead, I can sometimes be so narrow-minded it would probably make you nauseous.” (TL: At least he has self awareness.)

“But Master is the saviour of all humankind...”

“I have killed countless humans as well.”

This was said in a voice that was so cold that it caused Arid’s heart to shudder for a moment.

“It is impossible to be a god or saviour for all of humankind. It’s literally a contradiction. In the entire multiverse, the greatest enemy of humankind is none other than humankind.”

That... was something he knew.

Just by looking at Earth before the Demons invaded, it was the wars between humans that took the most lives.

“I am but one person, and there are countless suffering universes. I’m unable to waste even a single moment. That’s why, even when the ones oppressing and torturing humans are other humans, I have no choice but to solve the problem in the fastest and most efficient way.”

Lukas paused for a moment before speaking in a solemn voice.

“Massacre.”

“...!”

“I wasn’t following anyone’s orders. Instead, I interpreted the orders and judgements given by God and the Rulers in my own way. Even when entering universes that had lost their balance, I solved the issue in whatever way I thought was best. I was always the one distinguishing the two sides, and I was also the one who judged them. And there is no such thing as a completely fair judgement. Judgments made by a person would naturally have some level of subjectivity.”

“...”

“I just wanted to tell you this. Don’t think of me as someone who always does what’s right. This is something that I want not only you, but the other disciples to know as well.”

Nevertheless, Arid remained silent as he was unable to easily accept those words.

Lukas looked at him with a solemn gaze. It was still too early for him to understand.

Just what he wanted. And the roles he wanted them to fill.

“I’m sorry. I suddenly started talking about something heavy.”

“It’s not.”

“...you’ve grown. In fact, I’m proud of who you’ve become. So forget what I just said. You don’t have to force yourself to change.

Lukas spoke in a voice that seemed soaked in emotion,

“Everything will work out somehow.”

Those words felt a little strange to Arid. This was because it was the first time that Lukas had ever tried to reassure him with such an uncertain tone.

‘...Master is also worried.’

This thought appeared in his head for a moment, but he quickly shook it away.

He was thinking too much.

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After Arid left the room, Leo walked in. It appeared to Lukas like his disciples all wanted to have a one on one conversation with him. But they didn’t seem to be following any particular order.

“Before, I wasn’t able to properly greet you because it wasn’t the best time. Master. I’m really glad you’re alright.”

As Leo Freeman said this, he bowed deeply towards his Master. Lukas looked at him as if he was seeing him for the first time.

Gone was the boy who had a hint of shyness hidden in his eyes. In his place, was a young man who gave an impression of reliability to anyone who saw him.

The changes to his body were obvious, but the things that Lukas paid most attention to were the changes to his gaze and his attitude.

Prudence and depth were reflected in every movement and tone of speech. This wasn’t something that could be copied or faked after a few days of practice.

He couldn’t help but wonder what the boy had experienced in order for him to become such a young man.

“You’ve grown.”

“Thank you.”

“We didn’t have the chance to talk before. I heard you were on Desire Island, but I wasn’t able to go look for you right away. I’m sorry.”

"I already heard everything. It's natural that Miss Sedi took priority. I believe that Master made a rational decision."

Rational.

Hearing that reminded him of the Priestess' suggestion. Lukas shook his head. He had no intention of accepting it.

"I wonder what you've been through."

"There are many things I want to tell you."

"Tell me them."

A slight hint of hesitation appeared on Leo's face at that moment.

"Are you sure it's okay? It won't be a short story. You should probably get some more rest..."

"I've rested enough already. I've rested so much that I probably don't need to close my eyes for a week. It's fine. So tell me."

"...yes."

Leo smiled faintly for a moment. Then he began to describe everything he'd experienced so far.

Desire Island.

The cities on this island were all dens filled with trash where the words safety and security didn't exist.

Rotten smells seemed to be soaked into the very streets, and fogs of cigarette smoke filled the air.

Leo first appeared in the center of one such city. Naturally, he had been unable to adapt to such an environment and acted naively and foolishly. Such a clumsy little boy was the perfect prey.

Firstly, he was an outsider, something that was very rarely seen in the Heavenly Realm, and usually never so young. And secondly, despite being of a different race, his appearance was very appealing.

For the Dragonmen living on Desire Island, it was akin to a lump of gold falling from the sky.

"I had nowhere to go and no money, so I didn't eat anything for four days. Whenever I lifted my head, it felt like the sky was spinning. At that point, I even began to seriously contemplate whether I could chew rocks or not."

That was the first time Leo had realised being hungry could be so painful.

"On the fifth day, a Dragonman approached me and gave me a loaf of bread. But after taking a couple of bites, I fell asleep. He'd soaked the entire loaf in sleeping medicine. When I finally woke up, it was like I was in prison. My hands and legs were all bound in chains."

Leo's voice as he told his story was calm, without the slightest waver.

"They tried to sell me as a male prostitute or a toy boy. In fact, they were just about to cut the tendons in my hands and feet before I opened my eyes. If I had woken up even a moment later, I would have been in a very miserable situation."

"..."

"I was somehow able to escape from that place, but I was still betrayed countless times after that. It got to the point where I began to doubt every favor I received, and I began checking behind me to see if someone was approaching even while smiling at the ones in front of me. The way I looked at the world completely changed."

Leo let out a bitter laugh.

"I grew tired of the race called Dragonmen. It was the first time that I ever thought there was a race as disgusting as the Demons. The malice they had within them was terrifying."

He slowly lifted his hand and rubbed his fingers against his face.

"This face... I don't know how many times I thought about destroying it with fire."

"Why didn't you?"

Considering what Leo had to experience because of his face, no one would have been surprised if he truly had done something like that.

“I felt like that would be admitting defeat. I felt that if I was stronger, I wouldn’t have to worry even if my face was even better looking. It made me want to bloom.”

Then he smiled faintly.

“I also didn’t want to mistreat the body my parents gave to me.”

“...”

Leo had grown stronger.

Not just in swordsmanship or physical ability. Instead, it was his inner growth that stood out the most.

He’d matured greatly.

Gone was the boy who trembled because of his trauma. He was no longer someone who needed his comfort.

Instead, Leo had become someone who could support others.

Nevertheless, Lukas noticed the bitterness hidden in his tone.

As a child, Leo had experienced things that most adults would not be able to handle. At his age, he could still be considered more of a boy than a man, but even the slightest bit of innocence had been stripped away from him.

Spending five years on Desire Island, which was infested with the ugliest malice, had covered him in all kinds of filth. After experiencing the sweetness and bitterness of the world, even the word 'seasoned' might not be enough to describe him.

"...Arid told us everything."

Leo's voice became serious.

"Master, please rest. This time, we will be the ones to protect you. There will be no need for you to risk your life."

"..."

"I took longer than I intended to. Senior sister Min is still waiting outside..."

Leo suddenly went silent.

Then he let out a deep breath and looked at Lukas.

“Master, this might just be a useless concern on my part, but I think... senior sister Min seems to be very worried.”

“Ha-rin?”

“It would be good if it was just my imagination.”

“...I understand. I'll talk to her.”

“Thank you.”

Leo nodded and left the room.

Then Min Ha-rin entered the room as though they were taking turns.

“Master, are you feeling better now?”

“I'm feeling much better. At least I won't be fainting anymore.”

“I'm really glad.”

Min Ha-rin rubbed her chest slightly.

Lukas stared at her as he recalled Leo's words.

Seemed anxious? He couldn't tell yet. He couldn't find anything out of the usual.

But at that moment, Lukas recalled the moment when he'd gotten a strange feeling from her.

...When Lee Jong-hak's death had been mentioned.

"I heard about Lee Jong-hak."

"..."

"I'm sorry, if I had come back in time, that wouldn't have happened."

"It's fine. It's already in the past."

He received a calm reply. He still couldn't find anything wrong.

Maybe he'd been wrong.

“I know that Nodiesop will attack Dragon God Island in four days.”

“Right. Don’t worry about it too much. I’ll think of something.”

“It’s fine. We’ll protect you, so please rest.”

“That would be best. But it’s not like I can’t do anything. I can still fight.”

“You’re still not in your best condition. So please, just rest.”

“Even if I’m in this state, there are things I can-”

“Master, please rest.”

“...”

It was a soft voice.

Like the soft whisper of a Goddess, gentle and pure.

Nevertheless, Lukas felt a strong sense of incompatibility when he heard this voice that was completely different from before.

“Don’t move. I heard that it’s dangerous to move in your condition. Both Arid and the Priestess said so. They said that if you move too much, you will die. So Master cannot move. You have to rest until you’re fully recovered.”

“...Ha-rin?”

“Master, you can’t.”

Her voice rose an octave as she continued.

“You can’t die before me. Of course, I don’t think you will. Because Master is strong. Master is stronger than anyone else. I’ll definitely kill that trash, Nodiesop. I won’t even let him touch a hair on Master’s body. So please tell me. No, please promise me.”

For a moment, Lukas forgot how to speak. When he lifted his head, his gaze found black eyes that seemed to have lost all their light.

Min Ha-rin came forward and held his hands in her own.

“I don’t know about anyone else, but Master would definitely not abandon me. Master won’t suddenly die or disappear.”

Crack.

The strength of her grip increased.

“Promise me.”

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“There’s something strange about that look in her eyes.”

Sedi continued to speak through clenched jaws.

Lukas looked down at the back of his hand without responding. Red marks were still visible there.

“I thought Father would know something.”

“...Ha-rin, lost her parents to the Demons when she was very young.”

“I heard that the kid called Leo was the same. I guess that’s pretty common in that world.”

“The population of that world was around 7 billion, but it dropped down to less than half. And most of those people died directly at the hands of the Demons. So on the contrary, it would be rare to find a living person without any scars.”

Lukas sighed.

“It’s as Leo said. I think that Min Ha-rin’s condition might be much worse than I initially thought.”

“Then what are you going to do? Do you want me to knock some sense into her for you? It would be easier to change her mind if she was half dead, wouldn’t it?”

“The side effects would only get worse. Stop it.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Sedi responded with an expression of annoyance.

Lukas sighed. As of now, he couldn’t think of a clear solution.

The most effective and certain method would be to deal with such trauma at an early stage. But when Min Ha-rin was suffering the most from her mental collapse, there was no one by her side.

In that time, the wounds had festered to a high degree and had become so rotten and tender that it would be impossible to heal them in a short period of time.

‘In the past, Leo was also at a very serious level.’

But Min Ha-rin’s current state was much worse than that.

It would be better if she was afraid of certain beings, like the Demons.

But the fear Min Ha-rin felt stemmed from the anxiety that she might lose someone close to her. As a result, she had become abnormally clingy and obsessed with everyone she has given her affection to.

'If only my body was in a normal condition.'

If that had been the case then he could have at least proved that Min Ha-rin's worries were unfounded. He could have even said that she was too weak to worry about him.

But such a thing was impossible in his current weakened state.

At that moment, Lukas was so weak that he truly needed the protection of others. That was the truth. If he were to stubbornly deny this fact, it might worsen Min Ha-rin's condition instead. She might end up thinking that even her Master didn't trust her to protect him.

'...I can't believe everything became so twisted.'

After looking closely at Lukas' tired face, Sedi opened her mouth.

"She had been clinging to Arid, asking to see Lee Jong-hak's soul, but it doesn't seem to have worked."

Arid's control over his power was much higher than when he was on Earth.

Nevertheless, he found himself unable to communicate with Lee Jong-hak's soul. Perhaps it was because he had died in Great World.

"I need to talk to Min Ha-rin a bit more. Can you call her for me?"

"It's really late, so you should take a break for today."

"The time is..."

"Ah. Really. This isn't the time to be overdoing it. Father is really sick right now. Should I bring a mirror for you to look at?"

"..."

Lukas touched his face. His cheeks were extremely gaunt. In fact, he didn't even need to check. It was hard to say exactly when it started, but his eyelids were heavy, and he felt dizzy. He knew that if he were to relax for even a moment, he would immediately lose consciousness.

His body was crying out for rest.

"Huu."

Lukas sighed again.

“...then I’ll get some sleep first.”

“Right. Sleep a bit. In any case, in a few days, we will all be sleeping together in the ocean forever, won’t we?”

Lukas slowly closed his eyes as he listened to Sedi’s mischievous joke.

“...”

He fell asleep almost immediately, the rhythmic sounds of his breathing filling the room.

Sedi sighed.

“...don’t show your weak side, really.”

* * *

The next day, it was around lunchtime when he finally opened his eyes.

He slept much longer than he expected. His body was stiff. Was it because he had moved a lot the day before? He’d thought that moving around a bit more would assist in his recovery, but it seemed his assumptions had been wrong.

In this state, he slowly stretched his body and sat up on the bed. His body still felt heavy, but he didn't seem to have any problems moving.

There wasn't anyone in his room this time. It seemed that everyone was busy.

Intending to go meet Min Ha-rin right away, Lukas got to his feet, but the door opened at that exact moment.

The one who opened it was a young girl with an expressionless face. From her attire, she appeared to be a servant.

"Sir Lukas, the Priestess is calling for you."

"Should I go to the garden?"

"Yes."

He felt that he should meet the Priestess first. With that in mind, he roughly got dressed and went to the same garden he'd been to the day before. As expected, he found the Priestess sitting in the pavilion on the lake.

However, this time, she wasn't alone.

“Did you know? There is more than one barrier here on Dragon God Island.”

That was how the Priestess started talking to him. It was the first time he’d heard her speak in such a tone. Perhaps it had something to do with the hair the color of cotton yarn, which he was seeing for the first time. (TL: I’m... not sure what color cotton yarn is originally... pale blonde maybe?)

After filing that thought away for later, he turned to observe the people standing on her two sides.

They had smooth, young, wrinkle-free faces that made it hard to distinguish their genders, but they both had auras that made them hard to ignore.

Lukas couldn’t help but quietly admire. He could tell with a glance that they were Sorcerers, but they were completely incomparable to any Sorcerer he’d encountered thus far.

Their strength far surpassed the East and West Priests that he’d encountered last time.

“There are large and small barriers that protect every area individually. In this way, there are hundreds of barriers clustered together.”

“That sounds complicated. Why would you do such a troublesome thing?”

“It makes it easy to deal with any unexpected situations. The applicability is good and besides, it’s much more energy efficient than having a single, enormous barrier. While it is a bit troublesome to take care of in detail, the benefits far outweigh the effort.”

“ ... ”

“Here in the Young Dragon’s Nest, the barrier is stronger than in most places. But I intend to weaken this barrier. Not only will your defenses become significantly weaker, but your ability to hide will also fade away, so Nodiesop will easily be able to pinpoint your location.”

It was easy to guess what she had in mind.

Lukas nodded slightly.

“You plan to use me as bait.”

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“I don’t have any issues. At this point, that’s the only way for me to make myself useful. Even if it’s only this much, I’d gladly help in any way I can.”

The Priestess looked at Lukas with a strange gaze.

They had decided to make him their bait without discussing it with him and then notified him after the fact. She had actually been expecting him to show some annoyance or reluctance before finally going along with it, but she didn’t think he would accept it so easily or happily.

“What do you plan to do after you lure Nodiesop over?”

In fact, Lukas appeared to be more interested in the outline of the operation than his own treatment.

The Priestess smiled wryly before continuing.

“Nodiesop’s entry method can be narrowed down to two ways. Breaking in from the sky, or by using space-time movement. The former would be easier to deal with, but he’ll probably use the latter.”

Then, she finally introduced the people standing beside her.

“When he appears, the Black and White Sorcerers here, as well as the priests of East, West, North, and South located at each corner of the island will use their sorcery to suppress his power to the fullest.”

Lukas nodded.

She wasn’t confident in preventing Nodiesop’s entry or outside attacks, so she intended to deliberately show him an opening and draw him into the center of the island.

The operation in itself didn’t sound too bad.

However...

“It’s too simple.”

“It’s simple, but it will work against Nodiesop.”

After thinking for a moment, Lukas agreed with her. This is because he had an idea of Nodiesop’s personality. With his arrogance, he would walk into a trap without fear.

Even if it might be a bit troublesome, he would choose to crush all opposition from the front.

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Lukas lowered his head in thought.

‘...there is still one thing that’s bothering me.’

At that point, the only thing that was still unclear was just how much of Nodiesop’s power they would be able to suppress.

“It’s not just the Black and White Sorcerers and the Priests of East, West, North, and South. Instead, every Sorcerer on Dragon God Island will assist in restricting Nodiesop’s power. I will also increase the effect of the barrier after he enters. I estimate that we would be able to suppress up to 90% of his power.”

In other words, if everything went according to plan, Nodiesop would only be able to use 10% of his power.

“Do you intend to have my disciples deal with the weakened Nodiesop?”

“Exactly. I might also be able to help them a bit.”

“That’s a surprise.”

“How so?”

“I didn’t think you’d be able to help me.”

Priestess.

No, the Seven Fanged Dragon God was aiming to regain their position as a Ruler. There was a high probability that she had been hiding and planning for much longer than Lukas could imagine.

The fight against Nodiesop would bring great risk to the Priestess. The safest choice she could make would be to take the statue and escape on her own.

It was possible that if she decided to hide, Nodiesop and the other Absolutes would never be able to find her.

Nevertheless, the Priestess chose to protect Lukas and fight with them.

...Was it because of the thing she didn’t want to talk about last time?

“I was originally going to do that, but Chorong strongly opposed it.”

Chorong?

Lukas recalled the Priestess' hair.

Green was the only color he had not seen so far.

“Lukas Trowman, what do you think are our odds of winning?”

Lukas stopped thinking about the Priestess' hair for a moment and instead immersed himself in his calculations.

The result he got was more promising than he initially expected.

“About 1%.”

“That's pretty generous.”

“Because I have faith in my disciples.”

“ ... ”

The Black and White Sorcerers who were standing at the sides couldn't help but look at each other with strange expressions on their faces.

The probability of winning the fight was 1 percent out of 100. And that was considered pretty generous?

“The barrier will be weakened by this time tomorrow. Is there anything else you would like to ask me?”

“...where is Nodiesop now?”

“I'm not too sure. The last time I sensed him, he was on Adventure-”

The Priestess didn't finish her sentence.

Instead, her expression became terribly stiff.

“Impossible. How could he already...”

“ ... ”

At that moment, Lukas' expression also changed to resemble the Priestess'.

They turned to look west at the same time.

“Priestess?”

“What’s going on?”

The Black and White Sorcerers asked, but the Priestess grit her teeth instead of responding.

“...dammit, that crazy bastard. Does he plan to just give up on the statue?”

Her hair became red in an instant.

Then she spoke in a harsh tone.

“Black Sorcerer! White Sorcerer! Help me! We have to combine all the barriers on Dragon God Island and raise the durability to the maximum! There’s no time so we have to hurry and make the seal!”

“Yes!”

“U-, understood!”

They hurriedly used their staffs to draw a seal on the ground of the pavilion.

Bang!

The Priestess clasped her hands together as though she was praying. A clear wave rose up from her body.

Crackle...

All of the barriers on Dragon God Island gradually began to merge to form a single, enormous barrier.

Increasing the durability of such a large barrier was by no means an easy task. In fact, it was so difficult, it wouldn't be strange if the Priestess' brain became overloaded while trying to accomplish it.

"Hurry up, we need to help..."

The White Sorcerer, who was making the seal, suddenly froze for a moment.

This was because they suddenly realised that a shadow was gradually covering the ground.

"...a shadow?"

They were immediately filled with a strange feeling.

There was no reason for such a shadow to appear in the Heavenly Realm since no clouds were floating above. In addition, the pavilion was in the center of a large lake, and there were no tall trees nearby.

Then, where the hell did this shadow come from...

The White Sorcerer turned to look West.

“Uh...”

Her mouth fell open.

It was an unbelievable sight.

A tsunami.

When people usually thought of the word tsunami, the first thing that came to mind was the natural disaster that took the form of a wall of water that soared up to a certain height.

But this tsunami was different. It wasn't a size that anyone would even begin to imagine.

This tsunami was so tall that she could not see the sky from where she was standing.

'This is... the center of the island...'

They were quite far from the coastline.

Dragon God Island was small, but that was only in comparison to the other Seven Islands. It was still an island that could easily hold thousands of people.

The center of the island to the coast, the distance had to be at least tens of kilometers away.

And yet, the tsunami was visible.

She could clearly see the tsunami despite being at the center of the island and not the coast.

'Just how big is it...'

Just as the White Sorcerer's mind began to drift away.

"White Sorcerer! What are you doing?! Hurry up and complete the seal! If it's like this...!"

The voice of the Priestess, who was shouting urgently, was cut off.

The tsunami had arrived.

* * *

Boom-!

The tsunami swallowed Dragon God Island.

In front of the enormous tsunami created by Nodiesop, the most mysterious island in the Heavenly Realm could only be likened to a ship that was about to sink.

“Hah...”

Nodiesop, who was standing in the sky above the island, let out a long, pleasure-filled sigh.

After he'd become an Absolute, most of his emotions had been suppressed. So he began to cling to every fleeting emotion he was able to. This was also a part of the reason why he acted so violently.

For Nodiesop, the mental ripples that he felt during those times became a drug, something he was addicted to.

However, at that moment, the pleasure he was feeling was by no means small.

Just as the island had been swallowed by a tsunami, so too was Nodiesop swallowed by a huge wave of pleasure.

It wasn't just because he'd sunk the island.

The Absolute that he despised the most, Lukas, was also there, and he had been destroyed together with the island.

"But... I won't feel relieved unless I see his body."

He would search the entire ocean to find it. He didn't care how long it would take. He had to find the lost statue anyway.

But Nodiesop's eyes soon lit up.

"Hoh."

This was because a huge tsunami appeared in the place that had just been swallowed by the tsunami. And at a glance, he was able to see the shape of the island.

"It managed to retain its shape..."

With a smirk on his face, Nodiesop descended.

He could feel Lukas' presence.

He thought that it wouldn't be a bad idea to end it with his own two hands.

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No one expected this.

No one thought that Nodiesop would be able to arrive at the island so quickly after so much of his power was suppressed.

And above all, no one thought that he would destroy the island without caring about the statue.

'Did we think too simply?'

It was possible.

However, there was no time for self blame.

The Priestess let out a slow breath as she looked around.

Pools of water could be seen in every direction. Water flowed in every direction and her surroundings appeared to be completely under water. In fact, the entirety of Dragon God Island was probably half-submerged in the ocean by now.

'This place that I'm standing is...'

It was the roof of the Young Dragon Nest. She, too, had been unable to completely escape the aftermath of the tsunami. While she had been focused on strengthening the barrier, she had been swept away by the torrent and somehow ended up there. It was the tallest building in the area, but now, it had been completely swallowed by water to the point where only its roof was visible.

In the first place, she should be glad she even had a place to stand. It was simple to stand on the surface of the water, but when it was moving so rapidly, it would take a lot of concentration to maintain her balance.

The Priestess looked towards the sky. The sight that was unfolding there was truly mythical and magnificent.

The surging ocean had created an enormous vortex with Dragon God Island at its center. Even at that moment, strong waves grinded against the barrier protecting the island.

If she were to relax for even a moment, the barrier would collapse and that huge wave would swallow the entire island.

In fact, she wasn't able to block it completely. Water was still managing to slip through small cracks in the barrier.

The Priestess coughed once, spitting out a mouthful of water before opening her mouth.

"...Black Sorcerer, White Sorcerer."

“Yes.”

“You called.”

The Black and White Sorcerers were standing on either side of the Priestess. Like her, they were also soaked in water, but they didn't lose their calm despite experiencing the sudden and calamitous disaster.

That alone was proof of their capabilities.

“Find Lukas. He was swept away by the current. He won't be able to get out of it in his condition. Hurry.”

If they couldn't find him in time, he might drown. Or while being swept around by the rapids, he might hit his head against a rock and die.

At that moment, Lukas was so weak that even such a threat was enough to endanger his life.

“But without us, the Priestess will be in danger.”

“Nodiesop will come down soon. You won't be able to suppress that person's strength on your own.”

“Put aside your worries about me for now, this is an order.”

“...”

Her voice was rough.

In this state, the Priestess would not forgive her subordinates for their willfulness.

The Black and White Sorcerers bit their lips and reluctantly bowed their heads.

“...we will obey your orders.”

Then, after exchanging glances, they dived into the water in different directions.

Almost at the same time, a figure leapt out from the water and landed on the roof of the Young Dragon Nest.

“These conditions are the worst.”

While grumbling in an annoyed voice, Sedi shook herself like a cat. The Priestess looked at her and said.

“What about the others?”

“I’m not sure. But I don’t think they’re here. I think they were all swept away by the water.”

“...that’s not good.”

At a time when they might not be enough even if they were gathered together, they had ended up being scattered.

Of course, the current wasn’t enough to kill them, but they would not be able to regroup in a short time.

It was then.

They could see the figure of a being slowly descending from the sky.

Sedi’s eyes narrowed. She was not at all happy to see this figure after not seeing them for a long time.

Tak.

Nodiesop, who landed softly on the roof, looked around before nodding.

“Indeed...”

The damage was less than he expected. He didn’t expect that they would be able to block a tsunami of that size.

It should have been impossible for Lukas. After all, it hadn't been very long since he'd entered this world, and he was already in a weakened state. This was something Nodiesop had realised after arriving in the Heavenly Realm.

'That woman.'

A being whose face was covered by a veil.

It was clear that she was the one who had been persistently preventing Nodiesop from stepping foot onto this Heavenly Continent.

"You really like to make these kinds of loud entrances. It doesn't suit you."

When he heard this harsh voice, Nodiesop turned to find a black haired girl glaring at him.

"Sedi Glaston? You're still alive? You're really a tougher life form than a cockroach."

"...it's Trowman."

Although she wouldn't admit it, repeating the conversation they'd had that day hurt Sedi's pride greatly. This was because she was certain that Nodiesop hadn't even noticed her before. He hadn't intentionally ignored her.

Instead, this bastard didn't have Sedi in his eyes at all.

Sedi clenched and unclenched her fists while checking her physical condition. The weather conditions were bad, but there were no problems with her physical condition. The injuries she'd suffered during the fight with Kaz had already healed completely, and she had also perfectly digested all of the demonic energy she'd obtained on Death Island.

'But...'

Beads of sweat rolled down her chin.

But the opponent this time was a real Absolute.

It was clear that he was weakened. Otherwise, her body would have become a puddle of blood the instant their gazes met.

Nevertheless, she didn't think she could win.

"First of all, I just want to say thank you. Last time, I was able to enjoy something after a long time. The experience of playing with a fallen Absolute is not easy to come by."

"I don't even want to know the types of things you enjoy, you perverted bastard."

Nodiesop chuckled.

“I’m not in the mood to play with you today.”

Piht-

Sedi tilted her head to the side. Dozens of strands of hair were severed as if something had shot past her face.

“Hoh. You managed to dodge that.”

Nodiesop smiled brightly and lifted his index finger. There, collected on his raised finger was a drop of water.

No one would believe it.

That the thing that almost pierced Sedi’s head was a drop of water. (TL: I’m getting major deja vu...)

“...this bastard.”

Sedi spat out a curse, but her heart still fluttered in her chest.

If she had moved her head even a second later, her head would have been pierced cleanly. That drop of water would have pierced through the armor of demonic energy around her body, smashed a small hole into her skull, and turned her brain to mush.

That much was possible. Because that drop of water contained the power of an Absolute, external force.

'He's serious.'

At that moment, Nodiesop intended to kill Sedi without wasting any time.

Suddenly.

Nodiesop's gaze shifted from Sedi to the Priestess beside her. A strange light fluttered in his eyes.

"It was you. The one who blocked my tsunami."

His tone didn't match his speech. (TL: In other words, he was saying rude things in a polite manner.)

As far as Sedi knew, there were only four beings that would cause an arrogant Absolute to speak in such a polite manner.

Then, Nodiesop slowly bowed his head.

"Did I guess correctly? Seven Fanged Dragon God."

“ ... ”

The Priestess was silent for a moment before slowly letting out a breath.

“I’d heard that the Sun Giant had obtained the loyalty of the Water Spirit King, Nodiesop.”

“You’ve heard of my name and origin? I’m honored.”

It was a rude reaction.

But the Priestess didn’t seem to care as she continued.

“Spirits are the self consciousness of nature itself. You are a Spirit King, so why do you have such a violent personality?”

“It’s only a slight inclination... Huhu, from the way I see it, you don’t really know me that well.”

Nodiesop grinned.

“The conflict on my origin planet was unceasing. Discord caused by greed turned into an uncontrollable fire that consumed the entire planet. In the end, all the Spirit Kings, except for me, disappeared. As you said, Spirits are the self consciousness of nature itself. When nature is damaged, we naturally lose our strength. After polluting the air and the land, they then tried to pollute the sea.”

A chill developed in Nodiesop's voice.

"So I started cleaning up. I shook the sea violently and made it devour the land. In that way, most of the tumors that were poisoning the planet disappeared, and peace was restored."

"..."

"It was actually quite funny. When the population was overflowing, they were busy arguing with each other, but as soon as their numbers started dwindling, they couldn't help but rely on each other. They finally learned what harmony was. It was a beautiful sight."

When he saw that scene, he realised.

The goal that he needed to aim for.

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"When the population overflows, it's usually hard to know what is lacking. Did you know? There are usually very few beings in a universe that would question their own death. And it's only intellectual life forms who learn to fear death that chase after and desire eternity. Those beings harm providence and upset the balance. Our role as Absolutes is to teach those poor and ignorant beings the true order."

Sedi thought that his spiel could be wrapped up in the simple word 'genocide', but she knew better than to say that out loud.

She'd never seen Nodiesop talk so much. He wasn't just talking either, instead, he was preaching about his goals and beliefs. Even though it was a sensitive topic among Absolutes.

Of course, most of it was just bullshit, but it wasn't bad to pretend to listen.

The longer he took, the more people who were washed away by the rapids would be able to come back.

"So, is there anything else you'd like to ask?"

Nodiesop spoke in a kind voice. But at this point, the Priestess couldn't help but look at him with a strange expression.

He let out a soft laugh.

"Weren't you trying to buy yourself some time? Although I don't know the reason."

"...are you saying you went along with it even when you knew that?"

"The moment I set foot on this island, I made a decision. No one in this place is a threat to me."

The Priestess was silent for a moment before her aura suddenly changed.

"-is that so."

Her voice became cold. At the same time, Nodiesop's eyebrows furrowed.

Paht!

A rainbow colored figure burst from the Priestess' body and shot towards Nodiesop in the blink of an eye.

Nodiesop tried to avoid it, but at that moment, he felt something hold his limbs in place.

'...what is this?'

At some point without him noticing, chains of light had wrapped around his wrists and ankles.

"...when did you do this?"

"When you broke through the barrier and entered the island."

Along with the Priestess' words, the rainbow light struck Nodiesop's body.

But that wasn't the end.

Paht!

Four more lights flew over from the corners of the island.

Light from the east, west, north, and south respectively combined with the Priestess' rainbow light and increased the force of its aura several times.

Rumble!

The roof collapsed.

Sedi balanced herself on a broken roof tile.

As quickly as it appeared, the soaring light faded away.

“...”

Nodiesop looked down at his body with an unreadable expression. Smoke rose strangely from his body.

“...I see, the restrictions placed upon me have become much stronger. Was this what you were aiming for?”

“It's as you said. We've restricted most of your power, Nodiesop.”

The Priestess took a deep breath before continuing.

“From the looks of it, you can only use about 20% of your power.”

She didn't appear to be lying. Nevertheless, Sedi couldn't help but click her tongue inwardly.

20%.

Their operation had already failed. Originally, they intended to include the power of the Black and White Sorcerers and suppress 90% of Nodiesop's power. But now, they had only managed to suppress 80%. In other words, Nodiesop could still use 20% of his power.

...And she wasn't sure if they could defeat an Absolute with 20% of their power.

“Originally, I was going to kill Lukas first, but it seems like I'll have to delay that for a while. Instead, I'll collect you first.”

The Priestess' breath fluttered for a moment at those words. Sedi suddenly realised that she was nervous.

“...collect me first? Didn't you mean to say kill?”

“You can quit your clumsy acting. Did you really think I wouldn't notice?”

At that moment, Nodiesop's figure appeared in front of the Priestess. Even though her concentration had been raised to the max, Sedi couldn't even see him move.

Crack!

Nodiesop grabbed the Priestess by her neck and lifted her into the air. The Priestess groaned and struggled, but Nodiesop didn't decrease the strength of his grip, instead, he roughly tore the veil that always covered the Priestess' face.

Crackle!

As he looked at the Priestess' bare face, his golden eyes began to shine brightly.

"Found you. Most special statue."

* * *

He'd fainted again.

However, this time was different.

This time, Lukas found himself alone in the dark.

His consciousness was drifting in this small world, but he could neither leave nor move as he pleased.

The fact that he could enter such a place could only mean that he had met a very special condition.

He was about to die.

It was a simple condition, but it was usually difficult to accomplish. Since becoming an Absolute, Lukas had met this condition less than five times.

In fact, even when he'd been pushed to the brink of death after defeating Kaz, his consciousness hadn't met the requirement to enter this place.

-This isn't like you.

He heard a voice directly in his mind.

It was a voice that he was familiar with. Although he couldn't see its owner, Lukas knew their identity.

-Are you going to let yourself stay unconscious like this? Without even trying to do anything?

"This isn't my fight."

-Is it your disciples' fight? Do you really believe that those immature beings would be able to defeat an Absolute?

"Those are the disciples that I personally gathered. As their Master, it's natural for me to put my faith in them."

-You still haven't learned from your past. Think about your first disciple. In the end, how did she end up?

Those words made him speechless.

As if mocking Lukas, the cold voice continued.

-Is it because her opponent is too strong? Or is it because she was too weak? Well, both are true. But the most fundamental reason that woman died was because you were one step too late.

A corner of his chest went cold as if he had been stabbed in the heart.

-It's the same now. What was her name again? Min Ha-rin? You left her alone for a moment and her mind was shattered. You know it, too. You always talk about believing in humans, but after saving them for so many years your thoughts have completely changed.

[Humans, can't do anything without my help.]

The voice muttered softly.

-You trust your disciples? That's a nice delusion. But they will just fail again. Then everyone you trusted will get hurt or even die, and you will finish everything one step too late. Has there ever been a time when that didn't happen? I'm asking if there has ever been a single problem that was solved without your help.

"..."

-You already have the means to do it too. All it'll cost is your life. But that isn't too bad either, after all...

The voice whispered.

-You've always wanted to die.

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Sedi finally made her move.

Taht.

With a light leap, her body shot up about two meters. Then, she spun in the air before bringing her heel down.

She could feel the momentum behind her attack. But she was doubtful about whether it would have any effect.

In a sense, Sedi's attack could be called half-desperate.

If the Priestess died, the restrictions on Nodiesop would disappear. And their already small chance of winning would disappear with them.

But Nodiesop let go of the Priestess and easily avoided the attack.

“Cough, cough...!”

Coughing, the Priestess fell to the ground.

Sedi clicked her tongue when she saw this. She’d heard Nodiesop’s words. Was this woman really the special statue?

More importantly, didn’t he call her the Seven Fanged Dragon God? What kind of Ruler would be put in such a state in the first place?

For now, she decided to suppress the questions that arose within her.

Nodiesop was looking at her.

He still looked relaxed, his expression similar to someone who had an overwhelming advantage and knew it.

But...

'...he dodged my attack.'

That fact gave her a bit of hope. He had chosen to avoid her attack instead of blocking it.

While it might seem minor, this fact was actually important.

If he had enough external force at his disposal, there would be no need for him to do such a thing. If he were to simply cover his body with external force, it would cause his defenses to surpass Kaz.

'This might be a better matchup for me than Kaz.'

At least demonic energy, which was Sedi's main attack force, would not be completely neutralised.

However, where were the others? How far away had they been swept for there to still not be any news from them?

Splash!

As if in response to her thoughts, two figures shot out of the water at the same time.

Taht.

Min Ha-rin and Leo.

Without even bothering to shake the water from their bodies, they stared at Nodiesop with fierce expressions.

Sedi glanced at them.

“Do you need me to explain the situation?”

“No.”

“...”

Leo answered indifferently, but Min Ha-rin remained silent while looking at Nodiesop with a murderous gaze.

‘This is the man.’

The Absolute who dared to kill Lukas.

Just thinking about it caused her mind to go blank. Her heart began to pound so heavily in her chest that it became hard to breathe.

“Tch.”

Sedi couldn't help but click her tongue when she saw this.

As she expected, this girl would be dangerous. Emotions like anger could sometimes change the outcome of a fight, but that was only the case when the opponent was as strong as you were or only a bit stronger.

In a situation where the chances of winning were as low as they were now, losing your cool was akin to suicide.

It was annoying, but she would have to give her some advice.

“You, don't act on your own. If we don't work together, then our low chances of winning will disappear.”

“...”

“Hey, are you listening to me?”

“...I'm listening.”

She wasn't listening.

Sedi's expression became one of extreme annoyance. This was the biggest problem. Sedi's voice would never reach Min Ha-rin. No. At that point, she doubted Min Ha-rin would listen to anyone.

And in the first place, words like consolation and encouragement would only be found on the exact opposite side of the universe from Sedi.

It couldn't be helped. She couldn't afford to pay attention to Min Ha-rin now. She couldn't help her, so she could only hope that she didn't do anything stupid.

'The most important thing is how strong these guys were.'

She had a rough idea from looking at them. But their exact power level could only be learned after watching them fight.

Sedi decided to ask a quick question.

"Hey you, attack or defense. Which one are you more suited for?"

"Attack."

"Me too."

"..."

Son of a bitch. She wanted to hit someone.

Nevertheless, all three of them couldn't focus on attacking. One of them needed to stay back in order to protect the Priestess.

Sedi sighed.

"Then you guys take the front. I'll protect the Priestess and aim for any gaps I find. Understand? Don't face him head on. Imagine that you're fighting someone with full-body armor and a glass sword."

Nodiesop's external power was not something these brats could afford to take on.

Leo nodded, but Min Ha-rin didn't answer.

Sedi seriously considered smacking her across the head, but she knew that now wasn't the time to do so.

Nodiesop watched all of this with a slight smile on his face.

'...he said that he didn't want to waste time.'

But that didn't seem to be the case.

That was a fatal weakness that most Absolutes tended to have. When fighting against mortals, they rarely went all out. As long as they weren't forced into a corner, they wouldn't abandon their relaxed attitudes.

'It's no different from when I fought Kaz.'

As this thought passed through her mind, Sedi knew that she was just being optimistic. Nevertheless, she was unable to hide the bead of sweat that rolled down her jawline.

'Nodiesop doesn't know how strong I am.'

She had raised her level even further after digesting the large amounts of demonic energy that she'd absorbed on Death Island. If she were to attack an opening with all her might, she might be able to defeat him.

But she would only get one chance.

If that failed, Nodiesop would lose his relaxed attitude and become alert.

At that point, he would stop treating the mortals in front of him as toys or bugs, and would instead start treating them as 'enemies'.

'That would be the end.'

So she would need to slowly build up her power.

It would have to be slow enough that Nodiesop wouldn't notice, slow enough to make even snails cry.

Fortunately, she had a good excuse. Even if Sedi were to stay back on her own, Nodiesop wouldn't find it strange. He would simply think that she was protecting the Priestess.

Therefore, the success of this operation would depend on Min Ha-rin and Leo.

'Can those brats really hold on long enough for me to build up enough power to blow Nodiesop away?'

She didn't know. She didn't even want to think too deeply about it.

Sedi bit her lower lip.

But she couldn't think of a better plan.

'They have to hold on somehow.'

Otherwise, they would all die.

* * *

He'd once dreamed of something like this.

Fighting against a powerful enemy side by side with those closest to him.

It was one of the delusions of his younger, immature self, but Leo was only able to realise his dream at that moment.

Nevertheless, he wasn't as happy as he thought he would be. Maybe it was because he'd already become more mature. Or maybe it was because this situation was a bit different from his dream.

There were two differences between the current situation and the one in his dreams.

Firstly, the condition of his teammate was not normal. It was in a mental sense, not a physical one. Seeing Min Ha-rin draw her sword with a dead look in her eyes made his heart ache. This was because he was more familiar with her warm, kind side.

The second difference was that their opponent wasn't simply at the level of 'powerful enemy'.

Taht.

As he rushed towards Nodiesop, he observed his posture. He stood in an unprotected manner, filled with openings and flaws, but Leo knew that he shouldn't let that fool him.

After all, this man was a monster who had created a tsunami large enough to overturn the entirety of Dragon God Island.

'Imagine that you're fighting someone with full-body armor and a glass sword.'

Less than a minute after the battle began, he realised how apt Sedi's analogy was.

His punches were always blocked by 'something'. He wasn't sure what it was, but it prevented his fists from going any further.

An invisible membrane?

It felt a bit different from that.

Leo's expression was terrible. Since he didn't know how his attacks were being blocked, he was forced to be more cautious, which also meant that the power and momentum of his attacks were bound to drop.

Clang!

Min Ha-rin's sword was also blocked, but she didn't panic. Instead, she raised her left hand in front of Nodiesop's face with her fingers spread out.

“Hyper Bolt.”

Boom!

The bolt of energy shot out and struck Nodiesop directly in the face.

His ears tingled from the explosion, and vision being obscured by the smoke from the explosion didn't stop Leo from jumping forward without hesitation.

He already knew where Nodiesop was, and he could still sense his presence in the smoke. His presence could be sensed from hundreds of meters away.

Since he couldn't hit him with his fist, he tried to use his foot this time.

Paak!

But just like before, his attacks were stopped. It felt like he had kicked a wall, and his foot began to throb.

Whoosh!

A powerful tornado suddenly appeared around Nodiesop. The tornado was so strong that it blew away not only the smoke around him but Min Ha-rin and Leo as well.

Looking like a wet mouse, Leo looked up at Nodiesop. Even though he'd taken the Hyper Bolt directly to the face, he hadn't even suffered a single scratch.

Looking at them, Nodiesop gave a kind smile.

"Are you curious about my power?"

"..."

"Showing you might be better than telling you. This is the identity of my power."

As he said that, Nodiesop extended a single index finger.