

# The Storm King

## Chapter 9: The Vision

Leon felt like he had just been shaken up and thrown away by a rock giant. His head spun, and he felt like he was about to vomit. Most of all, though, he felt absolutely drained. He couldn't even muster the energy to open his eyes, let alone do anything else.

He wondered why he was awake if he was so devoid of energy. No answers came to him, so he simply decided to perform some breathing exercises. It took a little while, but he eventually managed to muster up the energy to crack open his eyelids.

He saw very little when he did, however. The sky was filled with mist, with a pale golden light permeating through it. This light was bright enough for Leon to look around, but it seemed there was nothing around to see. He was on a small grassy island, floating in a vast sea of endless mist. There was no wind, no sound, no anything out there. Leon had no idea how long he remained lying down, but it took him a while to begin to move.

It was a struggle to sit up, but when he did, he got a better look around. There were no buildings or plants on the island, apart from grass, but he noticed something behind him he hadn't before. The island was only about one hundred feet in diameter, and in the very center was a white marble slab, perfectly square, about ten feet to a side, and completely flush with the ground surrounding it. Set within the center of that slab was another square, this one made of black granite, sparkling with tiny lights like the night sky, and only taking up one square foot.

There was nothing else around, and Leon was unable to ascertain the purpose of the marble slab, so he simply paced around near the edge of the island. He calmly walked in circles, trying to think of a way out, but nothing occurred to him. He was still a beginner mage, and whatever or wherever this place was, was far beyond his meager knowledge.

Time passed slowly here. Or was it quickly? Leon couldn't tell. The light remained consistent, and he didn't feel the need to eat or drink, so there was no way to tell the time. It could have been days he was pacing around the island, or simply a few hours, but there was nothing else to do, so he just kept leisurely walking and staring out into the mist.

After what felt like a long time, he finally noticed a change, and it was a very subtle change at first. It started as a gentle breeze. Leon hardly thought anything of it, until he realized that it was the first time he had felt the wind since waking up. He quickly put

some distance between himself and the edge of the island and began to look around, trying to notice any other changes to this strange space.

And notice something he did. It looked like a rapidly approaching clump of darkness. He saw it when it was still just a speck in the distance, but in less than ten seconds it had doubled in size. As it came closer and closer, he saw brief flashes of bright light within, and seconds later he heard the sound of distant thunder. This was actually an approaching storm!

The dark clouds were upon him in minutes. Rain poured down on this little island, washing away much of the grass and dirt, revealing stone tiles beneath. Lightning arced through the sky, and Leon was deafened by the thunder. The wind turned into a howling gale and buffeted him ceaselessly.

There was little he could do, there was no shelter around and he was too weak to make any, so all Leon could do was try and keep his head down, brace himself against the wind, and try to keep away from the edge of the island.

Eventually, Leon just hit the deck, laying down on his stomach with his arms covering his head and ears. He felt the island rumble and shake, but he kept his head down.

The storm raged for fifteen minutes until the wind began to let up and the rain slowed considerably. Once he felt secure enough to do so, Leon lifted his head and saw that much of the grass had been swept away, leaving only a small amount around the perimeter of the island. This revealed numerous white and red stone tiles that had been beneath the grass, arranged in a checkerboard pattern.

The island's surface was covered in this tile until about five feet away from the edge, which was the only part of the island that still had grass. He took a look back at the marble slab, but nothing about it had changed that he could tell.

Leon couldn't see any other changes to the island, so he turned his eyes upwards. The thick mists were still present, but the golden light that had shone through it was gone, blocked by the storm clouds. The rain had slowed to a light shower, but there were still quite a few arcs of lightning crossing the sky, and they all seemed to be concentrated in a single direction.

As Leon looked that way, he heard a noise through the thunder. It sounded like an eagle's cry, but he doubted it at first, thinking it was just some kind of auditory hallucination from all the thunder that was still ringing in his ears. But only at first.

In the distance, amidst the deep black storm clouds and arcs of lightning, he saw a large pair of feathered wings. It was hard to tell from where he was, but he estimated the bird to be at least three times taller than he was. But even from that distance, he could tell that its golden beak and talons were razor sharp, and its matching golden

eyes pierced through him, seeing everything as if he were a naked mortal under the eyes of a god.

He felt a tightness in his chest, and his legs began to shake. His blood felt like it was boiling, and he instinctively knew that it was in response to this bird's presence.

The bird opened its beak and cried. Instantly, all the lightning in the area ceased, the winds quieted down, and the rain stopped falling.

The bird circled the island a few times, staring at Leon, before deciding to land directly in the middle, right over the granite square. Now that it was this close, Leon could see that his estimate was off, it was at least five times his own height, maybe six, and its feathers were flecked with gold. But now, Leon's blood and mana were resonating with the bird so much that his legs gave out and he fell to his knees. He looked up and made eye contact with the bird. He immediately felt a sharp pain in his mind, and the island trembled.

It didn't take much for Leon to figure out who this was. This bird was his ancestor, the founder of his clan, and the progenitor of his bloodline.

He tried to look up one more time, and the bird spread its wings and screeched one more time, staring down at Leon. When Leon's eyes met the bird's, his vision blurred and faded away. His mind grew hazy, and he began to slip back into unconsciousness. His thoughts went foggy, and he had a bad feeling that allowing himself to let go would be a very bad thing, but he didn't quite know why. His last coherent thought was to follow his instinct and fight back, somehow.

He slowly brought his right index finger up to his mouth and bit down hard. His teeth went so deep that the finger almost came off, but clarity returned to Leon's mind. He glared back up at the bird, enduring the pressure it exerted with its presence.

The bird glared back, its golden eyes burning with resplendent light, but it slowly retracted its wings. It screeched again, for the last time, and the storm clouds dissolved away in seconds. There was no more rain, lightning, or thunder, and the winds died down entirely.

The bird looked down at the marble and granite slab, and the light from its eyes seemed to melt it down and reshape it. The marble slab grew until it became a raised platform five or six steps high, and the granite rose and became a simple black chair in the middle. It almost looked like a throne, but one for a decidedly humble monarch.

With one last glance towards Leon, the bird flapped its wings once and disappeared into the distance. Leon took a few moments to collect himself and struggled to his feet. He hobbled over to the platform, up the steps, and stood before the throne.

He felt it was pretty obvious what he needed to do now but took one more look around. The surroundings had returned to their previous serene state, there was no hint that there ever was a storm here, and the bird had disappeared into the mists.

With that one last look, Leon smiled, sat down in the chair, and closed his eyes.

---

Leon felt himself lying down on hard rock. The air was cool, and he felt the heat of the sun on his skin. His body felt both drained of magical power but also filled with great strength. His eyes were closed, and he couldn't quite summon the willpower to open them.

He lay there for quite a while, an hour or two, he guessed. All he did was enjoy the feeling of the sun and quietly breathe. When his eyes finally opened, he found himself back at the top of the Storm Titan's Mountain. The peak next to the platform had been shattered, leaving it half as tall as it had been before, and there were more than a few burns around him. All signs of the magic array were gone, save for a few blackened lines, and there were puddles in the shallow pits of the stone.

Artorias was sitting on the edge of the platform, looking out over the forest, when he noticed that Leon had finally woken up. He breathed a sigh of relief, allowing his tension of the past night to dissipate. He got up, as calmly as he could, and walked over to his son.

"How do you feel, little lion?"

It took Leon a few moments to really process what he was asking, before giving an uncertain reply. "All right, I guess. Very tired."

"That's understandable. Your body was just flooded with foreign magic, nearly torn apart from both inside and out, and had to awaken its own dormant power in order to not completely break."

"So, I've awakened? The ritual worked?"

Artorias smiled with pride. "Of course it did, you need only examine your own physical condition to see it."

Leon did just that, letting what little mana he had accumulated this far flow through his body. He felt small amounts of energy return to his muscles, he felt the absence of his previous injuries, but the biggest thing he noticed was that every time magic flowed into his heart, not that much would be turned into mana. Most seemed to simply disappear.

"I can feel magic vanishing into my heart, does that mean it's being stored? Have I achieved the second-tier of magic?" Leon asked with excitement.

“Yes, you have. It’s an easy enough thing to sense when you get stronger but trust me when I say that you are now counted among the ranks of second-tier mages.” Artorias beamed down at Leon, every word bursting with pride in his son.

Leon fought the urge to burst out into laughter, but an enormous smile still appeared on his face.

He was about to continue his excited questioning when his stomach gave a huge growl.

“I suppose you would be a little hungry, you’ve spent almost an entire day unconscious,” Artorias said, looking at the setting sun.

“More than a little.”

Artorias whipped up some of the lion meat into small steaks and threw together the last of the herbs he’d brought into a pick-me-up for Leon, before serving them to the young man. Leon tore into the food as if he hadn’t eaten in years, and all the meat was gone in minutes. The bread soon followed, as did all the dried fruit they’d brought along. It was truly a feast for the young man, and he had much to celebrate.