

Great Mage 381

Season 2 Chapter 81

“Fr-, Frey!! What the hell are you doing?!”

Joanna looked up at the sky with shock. Despite being rescued by him earlier, Elijah’s expression was the same as hers this time.

Of course, he knew how strong this man who was facing the Vampire Duke at that moment was.

He was very strong. No, calling him strong was still an understatement.

Elijah pondered for a moment, but he couldn’t think of a better expression than ‘on a completely different level’.

Nevertheless, he had seen the fighting style of Wizards numerous times before.

The Gray Sun was hated by humans as well as the Demons, so they had clashed with the hunters from the Hunter Association numerous times.

Naturally, this meant that he had the experience of fighting a Wizard.

They were tricky, annoying, and dangerous beings.

Usually, the first one that they aimed for when a fight started was the Wizard.

In Elijah's opinion, they were much more annoying than Priests, who were in charge of healing.

Nevertheless, they had one fatal weakness.

And that was that they had an inherent disadvantage when it came to close-quarters combat.

Their skills could only be truly displayed when they had a front line to stand in front of them.

But the fight that he'd seen between this man and the Vampire Duke's alter ego had caused this thought to shift slightly.

It was a fight that had unfolded in very close proximity.

This scene had caused his common sense to take a hit.

Wizards were weak in close combat?

No.

Elijah shook his head.

'It's just very, very difficult for them to fight close-ranged battles.'

An ordinary Wizard had to perform calculations at every moment, to the point that their brain felt like it was on fire.

When performing simple actions like 'retreating first', a Warrior or a Swordsman would simply have to kick off from the ground to propel themselves backward.

But that wasn't the case for Wizards. They had to decide whether they would shoot an Energy Bullet to the ground and use the force generated, use a movement spell like Fly or Blink, or create some kind of opening with a feint or a restraining spell.

As a result, the amount of concentration they expended was much more than simply moving one's body.

The conclusion that was reached was 'concentration'.

The ability to maintain one's composure regardless of the circumstances.

He wasn't sure exactly how strong this man was, but he at least had the ability to maintain his composure under any circumstances. Even when the Vampire Duke was right in front of him, he didn't seem to be affected at all.

He had trained the skills required to be a good Wizard to the peak.

'However...'

In the end, his opponent was a Duke. He didn't think that he could win just with his composure.

After all, Gullard wasn't the only enemy.

Jurk-

Lee Jong-hak wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead while looking at the army of hybrids in front of him.

He'd fought many hybrids since coming to Africa.

The average strength of any one of them was comparable to a low-ranked Demon Noble, but there were cases where they had power comparable to Counts. Their powers were also extremely varied.

In any case, there was one reason why they were much more dangerous than normal Demons.

'Tenacity.'

The hybrids had a fierce tenacity that could not be found in the Demons.

It didn't need to be said just how terrible this one fact was.

As most hunters knew, the only reason humanity still existed was because of the Demons' arrogance.

They never kept their guards up. And they rarely cared about the humans.

And when they met an opponent who was stronger than them, they were willing to submit. Even Dukes were not an exception to this rule.

However, hybrids didn't have that arrogance. And even if they were barely alive, they would still try their very best to take down their opponent.

The danger that these beings posed was not small.

Lee Jong-hak was confident that he could defeat a Demon Baron on his own. Without any major injuries, too.

But he would have to risk his life against a hybrid who had the power of a Baron. The difference in mindset was extremely important.

'There are hundreds of hybrids.'

Dealing with hundreds of enemies was not something that they could do.

Lee Jong-hak could only think of one solution.

Nodiesop.

Could they overcome this desperate situation by praying to him as Kim Go-hyuk had?

“Half.”

Elijah stepped forward as he said that word. He turned to look at Lee Jong-hak and smiled.

“Let’s get rid of at least half of them. But I don’t think we’ll be able to kill them all.”

Lee Jong-hak wasn’t sure what he was thinking. On the surface, however, it seemed that he hadn’t given up despite this desperate situation.

He couldn’t tell what Elijah was thinking, but this alone was enough to let him know that he was a great man.

“Well, something like that. It’s like weight training. If you set a ridiculous goal, then you’ll be exhausted before you even start. So I’m just setting a realistic goal.”

“Pfft...”

Lee Jong-hak let out a light snort.

Killing half of the hybrids. They both knew that such a task was impossible. Nevertheless, Elijah was still able to joke in the situation.

Just to relieve the tension of the situation a little.

'He's a great man. Really.'

To boost the morale of the troops in response to the rapidly changing situation.

This wasn't something that could be taught or learned through training. It was innate charisma and leadership ability. The fighting ability that Elijah had displayed was incredible, but he might have been even more talented when it came to commanding troops.

"Let's pray to God. So that we can take down a few more."

"...pray."

Lee Jong-hak rolled this word over in his mouth a bit before slowly speaking.

"Do you believe in God?"

“I do.”

“Then are you praying because you want God to solve this crisis?”

Elijah looked at Lee Jong-hak’s eyes for a moment before he burst into laughter.

“Hahaha. Is the Human Dragon, Lee Jong-hak, asking me about theology?”

“It’s not like that.”

Lee Jong-hak shook his head as he said that. Right, that wasn’t the case.

He couldn’t help but recall the past. The miserable death of his mother and the fact that his young self was forced to witness it had caused hatred to be etched directly into his brain.

And... Lukas and Nodiesop.

They were beings whose power surpassed Lee Jong-hak’s imagination. They were probably the same kind of being. But their values were completely different.

Lee Jong-hak had met both of them, and that had allowed him to indirectly learn their thoughts.

And in all honesty, he didn't like either of them. However, the one whom he was most uncomfortable with was... Nodiesop.

Unlike Lukas, who had chosen to save humanity and hid in the shadows despite his overwhelming power.

Nodiesop revealed his power without hesitation, and a lot of humans had been saved by him.

Or, at least, that was what he'd thought at first. But it didn't take very long for that image to become cracked.

'Nodiesop pitted humans against each other.'

As a result, there was now a gaping void between Europe and Asia that could never be filled. This was something that he had never thought could happen.

In addition, the fact that Nodiesop used his power without restraint filled him with a strange sense of unease.

It was a feeling that didn't have a logical explanation, which, in turn, made it even more pronounced.

"I'm not praying for our troubles to disappear."

“Huh?”

“Because life can’t always go smoothly. It is natural for there to be curves and bumps and for us to encounter large and small hardships as we go. Sometimes, we will even be left with indelible scars. But those are what make us who we are.”

“Do you have such scars?”

“I lost my son seven years ago.”

“...!!”

Elijah’s voice remained calm as he spoke.

“At first, I couldn’t accept it, and for a while, I was like a cripple. But that changed nothing. So I decided to look for a reason. A reason why my child died while I survived.”

Those words created a strong stir in Lee Jong-hak’s heart.

Was there a reason why his mother died that day while he survived?

He’d never thought of it that way. He’d only taken out his negative emotions on the Demons.

Hatred and anger was a good driving force, but in the end, all he was left with was a pile of black ashes.

“I give a brief prayer before every crisis. I ask God to lend me the strength to overcome whatever hardships I encounter.”

Joanna wasn't paying attention to the conversation Lee Jong-hak and Elijah were having.

Instead, her eyes were locked onto the figures of Frey and Gullard high in the sky. It was faint, but she could feel something from the palm that Frey was pointing downward.

He was gathering his mana.

What the hell was he going to do?

As Joanna looked up with a worried expression, she slowly became filled with a different emotion.

Her eyes grew wider, and her mouth opened bigger.

“Tha-... Tha-...”

It was a storm of mana.

This wasn't a spell of some kind. Rather, the mana that was simply being released from his hand had created a storm.

How dense and powerful was this magic power?

And what kind of spell did he intend to cast with that much mana?

Bang!

The spell that appeared was something that Joanna was familiar with. Nevertheless, it still took her a moment before she realised what it was.

This was because the spell that appeared was on a completely different level from what she knew.

'Hyper bolt.'

A 6 star spell.

Although it was a spell that only required the condensing and firing of a mass of energy formed from mana and had a relatively simple formula, it required a large amount of power to cast.

But this Hyper Bolt was different from the ones Joanna knew.

If she had the authority to give this spell a new name, she would have given it as many strong-sounding modifiers as she could, such as 'King', 'God', 'Emperor', 'General', 'Majesty', and so on.

Even a top-tier classification, like 'Hyper', felt like it wasn't enough to describe its strength.

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"Huh..."

Only a soft sound managed to escape his open mouth.

Gullard looked down at the scene below him, his eyes wide open. It was truly an unbelievable sight.

Dozens of hybrids had been swept away by a single spell.

The fruit of decades of hard work and research had amounted to nothing, dying like weak worms.

Bang!

Lukas fired another Hyper Bolt, once again killing dozens of hybrids. Then, he glanced over to Gullard.

As if he was mocking him...

With that nonchalant expression.

Crunch-

Gullard's calm demeanour was broken for the first time.

"How... Dare... You!!!"

The hybrids.

The invincible army he'd created with great care and effort. It was Gullard's long-treasured dream and - desire to show their strength to the Demon King one day.

But that dream had now been completely destroyed.

His great army had been injured or killed before he had even gotten the chance to show them to the Demon King.

Gullard's rage at that moment reached a level that it had never reached before.

His huge wings swung towards Lukas, but he wasn't able to hit him.

Clang!

Just in the nick of time, Kran, who had jumped into the air, managed to block Gullard's attack.

He couldn't withstand the full force of the attack, but he was still able to block it.

'So annoying.'

Ignoring the screams of his muscles and joints, he pushed the wings to the side. Then, he borrowed some of the remaining momentum to kick Gullard in the face.

Paak!

"Roar!"

Gullard let out a loud roar as he was sent crashing to the ground. The damage of the attack might have been minimal, but it was wise to create distance from an opponent who had lost their rationality.

Kran looked down at where Gullard landed for a moment before he turned to Lukas with an expression of disbelief.

"Who the hell are you?"

"What are you talking about?"

“Why did you bring me to Zinga if you’re that powerful? Can’t you just kill Gullard on your own?”

He’d just killed hundreds of hybrids.

Kran probably had the most knowledge about their true identities.

‘7th generation... No, they were probably at least 8th generation.’

8th generation hybrids.

The most perfect specimens were created after countless experiments.

Of course, this wasn’t to say that they were more powerful than the previous generations. In fact, the Demon blood would have been much thinner at this point, so in terms of combat power, they would be weaker.

However, this allowed for a balance between the human and Demon parts, which made up for the loss of combat power.

Those were the hybrids whom Gullard was making use of now.

“Roar!”

“Roar!”

It was at that time when several of the hybrids who were capable of flight started flying towards them, their enraged expressions reminiscent of Gullard’s.

Lukas turned to look at Kran.

“Can you handle Gullard for a while?”

Kran looked a bit offended, but in the end, he had to admit that he needed this man’s help.

“10 minutes. I don’t think I can give you more than that.”

“That’s enough.”

After saying those words, Lukas dropped down to where the Gray Sun group was standing.

He would have to deal with the rushing hybrids with magic. There were no signs of reason in their eyes, and it seemed the only things left were their instincts.

They were artificial beings who had been created by experiments. And at birth, they were deprived of their right to think and reason.

This was done to create puppets who would only follow orders faithfully.

Taht.

Lukas landed in front of the Gray Sun members, and immediately, everyone's eyes locked onto him. It was like they were looking at their saviour.

He turned to the woman closest to him, Joanna Goldberg. She was staring at him with disbelieving eyes.

"Have you used Medusa?"

"...uhhh... Huh?"

"The spell I deciphered. In your notebook."

"Ah, yeah. Uh. I... I did. I used it."

Joanna nodded and mumbled blankly for a moment, but Lukas felt it wasn't the time to mention it.

"You probably used it against the Vampire Duke. But it didn't work since you are not on the same level as Gullard."

He was right.

When she used the spell, she was only able to stop Gullard for a short time. Of course, even that was still enough to twist the battle in their favor.

“Increase your mana. Don’t neglect your training just because you’re an Archmage. You need to have a mindset of meditation. To the point where you’ll do it even in your sleep. Then, you will be able to display a sight like this.”

“What are you...”

“This is what would happen if you had 10 times the mana you do now.”

Lukas took a step forward.

The Hyper Bolts had reduced their numbers by a lot, but there were still many of them left. And there weren’t many spells that he could use to deal with all of them.

They were much too fast and durable.

So the most effective method was to suppress them with overwhelming power.

“Medusa.”

Juk-

It was as if time stopped.

No, it was right to say it stopped. Or, at least, the hundreds of hybrids had been stopped in time and would never move again.

Their entire bodies had been petrified, and they were unable to lift even a single finger. The only thing they were allowed to do was look around.

Their eyes rolled around in their sockets, their gazes containing only fear and confusion at the unreal situation. (TL: So they regained rationality?)

Pshk-

Then, the hundreds of frozen hybrids began to crumble like old stone statues.

“The 7 star spell, Medusa.”

Lukas continued to explain in a quiet voice.

“As long as you have enough mana, the spell can become a large-scale attack spell instead of a simple restraint.”

Although he said all of this...

No one really heard his voice at that moment.

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Kran continued to fight Gullard.

Throughout the fight, Gullard gained a lot of injuries and bled constantly. In fact, just from looking at his appearance, it wouldn't be strange if he collapsed at that very moment.

But Kran knew that that wasn't the case.

As one of the Five Dukes, his regenerative ability must have been beyond imagination.

As long as his brain wasn't destroyed, he would survive even if he lost the rest of his body and he would be able to regenerate.

'It's impossible to defeat him unless his energy is exhausted.'

Paht.

Suddenly, Gullard split into four beings who then moved to surround Kran from four directions. Four was the best number when one needed to encircle a single person.

If he left them alone, the situation would become annoying.

Kran noticed this fact quickly and tried to break through the point closest to him.

But Gullard was one step ahead of him.

Puruk-

The four Gullards spread their wings at the same time and wrapped them around Kran. Then, as though thick curtains had completely blocked all the light, a pitch-black space was created in an instant.

His night vision wasn't bad. In fact, it was quite good. For example, even if it was the middle of the night without a hint of moonlight, he would still be able to distinguish the features of someone standing a few kilometers away.

But this artificially created darkness was different.

It wasn't that it was dark but that it was as if black walls had been erected around him.

Shik!

Something flew forward. Gullard had finally started his attack.

Kran sensed it purely by using his hearing and feeling the flow of air. He swung his sword.

He wasn't sure what it was, so he couldn't afford to hold back.

Shuk-

His sword easily cut through the thing that had been flying towards him.

It was much softer than he expected it to be, and it fell to the ground with a scream.

'A vampire bat.'

It was just as Kran had guessed.

Dozens of bats shot towards him ferociously. Kran could feel all of them, but his vision was limited, and he wasn't able to defend himself completely.

Soon afterward, a vampire bat clung to his thigh. Then, he felt its sharp fangs pierce his flesh, followed by the unpleasant feeling of his blood being sucked out.

'This is dangerous.'

Kran grabbed the head of the bat with his left hand. Then, he popped its head with a simple squeeze.

Crack!

Nevertheless, the blood that had been sucked out couldn't return.

'I can't let this continue.'

In this space, just standing there and defending consumed a lot of his stamina.

Kran hesitated for a moment.

There were a lot of humans around at the moment.

Would it be okay for him to go all out in this situation?

"...!"

It was at that moment when his instincts screamed at him. Such warnings could not be ignored.

Kran forcibly twisted his body and spread his cloak out in front of him as the bats rushed forward madly.

The fluttering cloak hardened in the air, becoming a solid shield in front of him.

Boom!

Immediately afterward, a powerful force shook the cloak. If it had been a normal cloak, it would've been torn to shreds in an instant. However, this cloak was a special magic item that had defense and shock absorption stronger than steel walls and even some magical engineering techniques.

Nevertheless, this cloak, which could even withstand anti-tank weapons, could not completely block the explosion. And Kran, who was standing behind it, was forced back a few steps by the shockwave.

'Is this the explosion ability he used earlier?'

So it could be used at a distance.

The destructive power was only half as much as the previous time, but even that was still tremendous.

It seemed that he did it by grouping the vampire bats together before forcing them to explode by overstimulating the veins in their bodies, turning them into biological bombs.

Boom! Boom!

And seeing that the attacks continued without any signs of stopping, the technique was less troublesome than he expected.

Kran's cloak, on the other hand, was slowly being torn to shreds.

'It won't be able to last much longer.'

So he had to think of something before the cloak was completely destroyed.

Kran took a deep breath before changing to the place where the bombardment was the strongest.

Boom! Boom!

As he expected, the attacks from this area were the fiercest.

Running to the place with the strongest attack was something that no rational person would dare to do. Nevertheless, there was a reason for this seemingly suicidal behaviour.

The cloak could only truly defend attacks that came from the front. So heading towards the area with the strongest attack allowed him to pay less attention to it while increasing the attention he paid to his sides and back.

In fact, as he forged ahead at full speed, he found that it was much easier to withstand Gullard's attacks than before.

Before long, he realised he'd reached the end of the space, Gullard's wing. As soon as he saw this black wall, Kran thrust his sword forward without any hesitation.

Crack!

Naturally, that alone wouldn't be enough. He couldn't escape through a hole this small.

Kran forcibly twisted the sword that was stuck in the wing.

The blade became twisted in an instant.

This was a barbaric move that Swordsmen, who treasured swords, would never do. However, for Kran, the most important thing was efficiency.

The blade was damaged? It lost its edge?

That was fine. It was better to rip through the wings this way.

Crack crack-!

The hole in the wing became larger, and he could finally see the outside. Kran forced his body through the hole.

Blood gushing from the hole in the wing turned his entire body red.

“Roar!”

With a roar, Kran finally managed to escape.

Kran, who had finally emerged outside, looked like a demon from the pits of hell.

Paht.

Gullard recalled his alter egos.

‘I didn’t think he could escape from the Black Wing Annihilation World.’

Gullard had a record of annihilating thousands of humans with this one technique.

Of course, this one was smaller than that time, but he never would have thought that it wasn’t enough to deal with a single being.

Even if that being wasn’t a human.

Gullard, who was looking at Kran, finally opened his mouth.

“I don’t understand.”

“I don’t need your understanding.’

Looking at Kran, who answered coldly, Gullard asked with genuine curiosity.

“Why are you baring your fangs at me? Why is your hatred directed at me? If you think about it, in a way, I am your parent.”

As he said that, Gullard looked over Kran’s shoulder.

The hybrids had almost all been wiped out. There were only a few of them remaining, but they were close to death.

In less than ten minutes, the invincible army that he’d dedicated decades to create had been wiped out.

At that moment, the rage that filled Gullard’s head cooled down as if cold water had been poured on him.

He looked at Kran with a cold expression.

“Those dead creatures are the perfect result of my hybrid experiment. There could be no better soldiers. Because they would never doubt an order that was given to them. However... I’m very disappointed in their combat power.”

It was true.

His idea was similar to what Kran had thought when he first saw the hybrids.

“The king always reminded us of the disadvantages we Demons have. Our innate strength. He said that it was the innate strength we received at birth that hindered our evolution. And he’s right. There is hardly any precedent of Demonic Humans becoming Demon Nobles, and even if they did, they never became more than a Count.”

In Gullard’s eyes, it didn’t matter if a high-ranking Demon Noble was arrogant.

But the Demons below that level shouldn’t.

For example, he didn’t believe a Baron had the right to show off in front of the Demonic Humans, or even the humans.

That’s why Gullard created beings like the hybrids.

Or to be precise, it was the King who had given him the order to do so.

He'd said that they needed the fighting spirit that humans were known for and the tenacity to fight against opponents who were stronger than them without backing down.

When he'd heard it at that time, Gullard hadn't paid much attention to it.

If it hadn't been for the Demon King's orders, he wouldn't have even bothered to do it.

But it was his king who gave him the order. Even if he had been told to murder his own kind, Gullard would have done it without hesitation.

The experiments he did were difficult and time-consuming, but Gullard didn't give up. And eventually, he was finally able to achieve weak results.

It was only then when the 1st-generation hybrids were born. Unfortunately, they were out of control and almost indistinguishable from Demon Beasts. In other words, they were more like beasts and monsters than trainable soldiers.

So he continued to experiment.

As more and more generations were created, they gradually became more stable. With just a little more effort, he was certain that the result he wanted could be reached.

But it was at that time the Demon King said to him.

'There's no need to experiment anymore.'

'He must have been disappointed in me.'

He must have made a mistake.

Because of this thought, which plagued him day and night, Gullard disobeyed the Demon King's orders for the first time.

He continued to experiment in secret.

"Those guys were the 9th generation. Their stability was the highest, and their Demon blood was the thinnest. But when it came to pure combat power, the 3rd generation was stronger than any other generation."

Gullard's gaze turned to Kran.

"Unfortunately, the 3rd generation hybrids... couldn't suppress their innate ferocity, and they escaped after destroying the lab. At that time, I didn't bother tracking them down. I felt that it wouldn't be worth the effort because I could always make stronger ones. But it seems I was wrong."

The 3rd generation were more unstable and dangerous than walking time bombs. At that time, their intelligence was on par with beasts at best.

But what about Kran now?

He could speak fluently. He had a good understanding of civilisation, and he was skilled at using all manners of tools.

This meant that they had evolved.

Kran just snorted coldly.

“Don’t you feel anything from the death of your brothers?”

“Brothers? Enough of your shit.”

Anger was clear on Kran’s face. He pointed his sword at Gullard with a fiery gaze.

“Where I came from doesn’t matter. There is only one thing that you need to pay attention to right now. And that’s that you will die here today.”

Gullard chuckled.

“By your hand? Or will you borrow that man’s power?”

“...”

It was obvious which man Gullard was talking about.

“He is strong, unreasonably strong. That’s why you also have your doubts. Could a human really have such power?”

“...do you know who he is?”

“Huhu, are you curious?”

“Right. However, I don’t need to ask you.”

After saying that, Kran drew his gun and fired.

Bang!

Gullard avoided the magic bullet fired from the gun. There was a fierce killing intent in his eyes.

“Because I can ask him directly after I kill you.”

“You speak really well. You must be trying to buy time.”

Did he notice?

Kran didn't express his worry on his face.

There was no need for him to take risks and fight arbitrarily. After witnessing Lukas' power, he realised that the most efficient method would be to fight with his support.

That was the only reason why he continued this meaningless conversation.

"Well, it's fine. Because I was able to make plans as well."

"Plans?"

Gullard turned to look at Lukas.

"I can't defeat that man. If I fight you, I'll probably die."

While it might not have been the case for other Demons, that wasn't something that one of the Five Dukes would say.

Realising this, Kran couldn't help but feel a bit suspicious.

It was true that Lukas was strong. However... he still wouldn't be enough to completely overpower Gullard.

The scene of him annihilating the hundreds of hybrids in an instant was truly frightening, but in truth, it was something that the Vampire Duke, who was standing in front of him, was also capable of.

In his head, Kran also added.

'If no one was around to see it, I could also do something similar, even if it would take longer.'

Most importantly, Lukas hadn't dealt with Gullard on his own. Instead, he'd brought him from over a thousand kilometers away.

Of course, it might have just been because he wanted to defeat Gullard perfectly, but Kran couldn't help but have a strange feeling at some of Lukas' behaviour, which didn't have a logical explanation.

He looked at Gullard and said.

"So? Since you think you will die, do you plan to run away?"

"Right."

"What?"

At the same time as Kran said that, Gullard's figure suddenly appeared in front of him.

Even Kran was a bit too slow to react to the sudden move.

He swung his sword hurriedly, but he hadn't had time to fix his posture, and the sword's edge had already been damaged.

Crack!

The blade stopped without being able to cut through even half of Gullard's arm.

Not caring about the blood that dripped from his forearm, Gullard grinned.

"I'm running away, but I'm gonna take you with me. Let's go together."

"You son of a bit-"

Shuk-

Before Kran could finish his curse, he and Gullard disappeared from the spot as if they had evaporated.

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Although he had been dealing with the hybrids, Lukas' attention remained on Kran and Gullard.

At first glance, it seemed that they were both fighting a fierce battle, but Lukas could tell that they were both still hiding trump cards.

Kran was definitely strong.

Lukas had the vague impression that he might be a hybrid, but something about him was different when compared to the other hybrids he'd just exterminated.

Perhaps Kran was truly an important clue to how he could trick the world's laws.

As he had that thought, Kran disappeared.

'His wings.'

At the last moment, Gullard's wings had flapped with a strange sound. Then, he moved at a speed that even Lukas had not been able to react to before disappearing with Kran.

Lukas didn't panic when this happened. Instead, he just looked for any traces that Gullard left behind.

They were faint, but traces of his demonic energy were still there.

And Lukas concluded that it was enough to track him down.

* * *

“Kuk...”

Kran staggered to his feet. His entire body felt sore at that moment.

It was strange. His condition hadn't been that bad just a moment ago.

‘We traveled to a really distant place.’

He had been brought there by Gullard's mysterious [teleportation].

It was a dark, humid room, which made it feel like a giant cave.

Suddenly, Kran felt someone behind him. Drawing his sword, he quickly spun around.

“...huh?”

There were huge statues. If it wasn't for his excellent night vision, the low lighting would have caused him to mistake them for giants simply because of the pressure that each of them exerted.

There were a total of five statues. However, despite their enormous size, each of them was delicately and elaborately sculpted.

Every detail made him feel like the best artists of the century collaborated to make these masterpieces.

Their clothing was unique. They looked like they came from the middle ages or like they were heroes from a fantasy novel.

It was only then when Kran, who had been transfixed by the statues, realised something strange.

“Worship them.”

Gullard emerged from the dark.

* * *

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, North America.

Canada’s largest city and economical hub was now in ruins. The buildings had collapsed, acrid smoke polluting the air.

The streets were filled with overturned vehicles and corpses.

For the Canadians, who had been living peacefully for a long time, this was a horrifying sight, but for the Rose Duke, this scene was as familiar as the air she breathed. (TL: I wished to not call her the Rose Duke, but I have no other alternatives...)

She sipped on scarlet whiskey while calmly looking down at the ruined city.

With her glass in hand, she enjoyed the feast of slaughter that was progressing beneath her. The more clearly she remembered the original appearance of this place, the more stimulating this destruction was.

Just thinking about it made a shiver of pleasure roll down her spine.

“You really are like cockroaches, aren’t you?”

She wasn’t talking to herself.

As she glanced back, her eyes fell upon a young boy who was completely bound and shivering slightly.

Leo Freeman remained completely silent, showing no reaction to Rose’s alluring voice.

Pursing her lips slightly, Rose walked over to Leo, her high heels clicking softly on the ground.

“Is my analogy too outdated? I heard that humans described persistent opponents as cockroaches.”

That wasn't the case. The expression was very much still in use.

However, the 'cockroaches' whom this Demon was talking about were the humans in the city who had been desperately trying to survive.

Leo would never agree to those words.

"Why... Why won't you kill me?"

Leo bit his lip as he said those words.

He cursed inwardly as he tried to stop his shivering. This was because the massacre that she had unleashed was clearly inscribed in his mind.

This woman, this Demon Duke who suddenly appeared in Toronto, had wiped out almost everyone in the area as soon as she appeared. Blood red vines erupted from the ground and quickly drained the blood from anyone who had been unlucky enough to be near them.

The victims also included the person who was meant to be Leo's teacher. He was an outstanding Master who would not have been at a disadvantage when compared to those famed Warriors from the East. Unfortunately, his opponent was a Duke.

With her transcendent powers, she simply wrapped a vine around the man's body before bursting him like a water balloon.

In less than a second, the strongest hunter in the entire city had become a puddle of blood.

This woman was probably one of the Five Dukes.

Leo instinctively realised this fact. He'd only ever heard of them from rumours. Beings who could be called Grand Dukes. Beings who were a level higher than Dukes.

He hadn't thought they truly existed, but every cell in his body screamed the moment he saw this woman.

This woman was one of the Five Dukes.

In a short period, she annihilated every hunter in the Canadian Branch before subsequently wiping out every other person in the city.

Except for one person.

Leo was the only one left.

'Pathetic.'

He thought he'd changed.

After meeting his Master, meeting Min Ha-rin, and defeating Gerard.

But Leo knew what he'd done when Rose began her slaughter.

He'd frozen, just like every other time in the past, and had only managed to move his body at the end.

Even now, Rose had not released any kind of intimidating aura or pressure.

And yet, Leo knew that he would faint if he relaxed for even a moment.

However, in a way, this was natural.

After all, this was Leo Freeman, someone who froze even if his opponent was a Demon Beast. And the one who stood before him now was someone who stood at the peak of the Demons in this world.

He hadn't fainted instantly. That was a great improvement.

Of course, this knowledge did nothing to comfort Leo.

"...why the hell are you doing this? Do you know just how many people you killed?"

Leo's voice shook slightly as he spoke.

Rose tilted her head to the side at his question, as though she was unsure what he meant.

"What are you talking about? I didn't kill that many. At best, I only killed a few hunters here."

Those words made Leo speechless for a moment.

What did she mean by not many?

Leo had personally witnessed hundreds of people dying to the vines. And if he counted those he hadn't seen, he knew there would be at least a few thousand.

Toronto was a densely populated city whose residents were unfamiliar with evacuation measures to take in case of emergencies.

This was a sad sight for Leo, who had spent most of his life in Europe.

They had enjoyed peace for far too long.

When Rose appeared, fear was not the greatest emotion that appeared in the eyes of the people in the city. Instead, the disbelief in their eyes was greater.

Their expressions said the same thing, concurrently.

'Why was a Demon here?'

"Then why haven't you killed me yet?"

"Because there is something I want to ask you."

"...what is it?"

"You."

Rose's eyes shined with a bloody light.

"Where did you learn the Warrior King Fist?"

Season 2 Chapter 85

"Cut the crap."

Kran glared at Gullard.

"Why are we here? Is this the place you chose to be your grave?"

“Hahaha. As expected. Even when you’re in a situation like this one, you won’t shut that mouth of yours. I wonder if you’ll go quiet if I pull out your tongue.”

Gullard spoke in a cheerful voice. He even put his wings away.

“Is it a hobby of yours to stand here and admire these crappy statues? You really are a pitiful man.”

It was a rough response, but this time, he got a response.

“Take that back.”

Gullard’s expression had become solemn.

There was no way that Kran would stop after seeing this. Instead, his lips twisted into the most irritating smile he was able to form.

The statues. It seemed that he had some kind of connection to them.

‘And maybe they are the key to his anger...’

Kran drew a pistol and twirled it around his finger for a moment.

Bang!

A Demon Slaying Bullet pierced one of the statues. The statue that stood in the middle.

This was intentional. After all, it was this statue in the middle that gave him the strangest feeling.

“Uh-, ah-, ah...”

It was truly possible to get so angry that your mind went blank and you forgot how to speak.

Gullard’s twisted face was proof of that.

“Y-, you...! Dare...! You trash who doesn’t know anything...! You dare to damage the King’s statue!”

His twisted expression slowly morphed into something that was distinctly inhuman.

The impression of a proper, middle-aged gentleman slowly disappeared, turning into a terrible visage that was a mixture between a human and a bat.

No, in the first place, he had never been human. This was his true appearance.

“I will tear you to shreds...! I will kill you in the worst ways imaginable...! I will rip you apart and feed you to my bats!”

“Are you saying you want to eat me, Batman?”(TL: I legitimately snorted)

Kran’s sarcastic and completely unapologetic voice raised Gullard’s anger to even greater heights.

Gullard no longer tried to converse with him. Instead, he rushed towards Kran with a roar.

And shortly after, his entire body collapsed to the ground.

Crack!

“...?!”

In an instant, Gullard was half buried into the ground with a bewildered expression on his face. Then, he realised that he couldn’t move.

“Don’t move a muscle.”

“...!”

Kran turned his head to this sudden voice.

On the shoulder of one of the statues, a man stood calmly.

Lukas.

At that moment, he had a strange feeling.

‘What the hell...’

The gray-haired man and the statue had completely different features and characteristics.

But somehow, they felt similar. No, they weren’t similar.

—It was like they were the same person.

“Roar!”

Gullard screamed and struggled. But he couldn’t shake the pressure that held his entire body down.

Then Lukas came down.

Suspicion appeared in Kran’s eyes.

'What's going on?'

What the hell was the power that man was using now?

It was not magic.

"You... What the hell did you do to..."

Kran closed his mouth mid-sentence. This was because he felt power from Lukas that he hadn't felt before.

Ignoring Kran, Lukas walked up to Gullard and stepped on his back.

"Kuk!"

"I want to ask. That statue in the middle, is that your King?"

Lukas spoke in a cold voice.

Kran looked on from the side with a tense expression. He'd thought that this man was someone who didn't show his emotions easily. He believed it. After all, in all the time that he'd known him, he'd never seen his expression change even once.

And yet, it was the same man who was practically oozing with emotion now.

He looked calm, but Kran could tell. This man was already on the brink of exploding.

Then he pointed at a statue.

Was it because it was the statue that Kran had just put a bullet into?

‘There is only one [Demon Statue].’

It was true.

Of the five statues that stood there, only the one in the center was a Demon while the other four were humans.

“Ku-, Kuh...!”

“Tell me.”

Lukas applied more strength to his foot.

Gullard screamed.

“Ahhh!”

“Tell me.”

Kran grabbed Lukas’ shoulder.

“Aren’t you trying to extract information from him?”

“...”

“He’s dying.”

Those words seemed to get through to him.

Lukas stopped applying pressure, and Gullard, who was in pain, couldn’t help but look at him with a blank expression.

“This, this power... As expected... I couldn’t defeat you. Right. That woman called you Lukas. You’re not really ‘Lukas Trowman’... Are you?”

Trowman.

Lukas had never revealed his last name in this world.

In order to know that...

Lukas nodded silently.

“I am the Great Mage.”

“...!”

Gullard’s eyes widened, and Kran also stared deeply at Lukas’ back.

‘This guy is the Great Mage?’

He’d heard it from Ringo.

About the divine being, the God of Magic, or the Great Mage, or whatever. He’d thought that it was just a rumour among the Wizards, but not only was he apparently real; he was standing right in front of him.

“How is that pos-”

“Tell me who that is.”

This time, Gullard doesn't hesitate to answer. Instead, he does so in a low voice.

“He is... our King.”

“Nonsense. That guy can't be your king.”

“Ku, kuku... Are you trying to insult me before I die?”

Gullard chuckles, his vision beginning to fade.

“King. He is our King... The one and only ruler of the Demon World... who will never stop training even when he runs out of rivals...”

Those words reverberated in Lukas' head, but they were followed by someone's name.

No. It couldn't. It couldn't be true.

He was dead.

However...

Lukas stumbled backward, unable to withstand the shock.

All the questions and suspicions he'd had in this universe seemed to converge together in his head before the answer revealed himself.

Someone who never gave up on their training even when they no longer had any rivals.

A man who liked the word King more than anyone else.

That's why he called himself the Warrior King and claimed that his martial art was the best amongst all martial arts.

'There is someone from your homeworld in this universe.'

Just as Lukas remembered God's words, Gullard spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Long live... the Demon King Kasajin..."

* * *

At the same time.

Back in Northern Ireland, Sedi felt ill at ease.

“Come out.”

As soon as she spoke with a frown, a pale person appeared in front of her.

Sedi immediately felt the obnoxiously strong demonic energy circling his body.

“Who the hell are you?”

“You killed the Demons and Demon Beasts in this place.”

“So?”

“This is the end for you.”

“You want to kill me? Hmm. It would be impossible for you alone.”

The man laughed at those words.

“Of course, I’m no match for you. I can tell the difference between us.”

Suddenly, the man bowed politely.

Then, another being appeared.

“...!”

No.

He had been standing there from the start. It was just that he'd only 'revealed his presence' now.

In other words, Sedi hadn't realised he was there until he revealed himself.

Despite her overwhelming fighting spirit, and unyielding personality, Sedi was left speechless for a moment.

“You...”

[Sedi Glaston.]

“How do you know my name...?”

[You will die today.]

Paak!

“Kuh, huk?!”

Her heart was destroyed.

It was funny. This was the first thing that Sedi realised instead of the fact that she was sent flying, her blood splattering in every direction.

She released her full power. This universe would not be able to handle the strength contained within her body, but she didn't care.

Her deal with Lukas? That wasn't as important as her life.

Sedi gasped and raised her head.

'You will die, Sedi Glaston.'

“Dammit.”

That annoying voice sounded in her head once again.

Did Letip predict this?

Sedi got to her feet, stumbling slightly. Then, she took out her soul weapon and pointed it at the giant being, who was almost as tall as a building.

“Demon King.”

Right. This being was probably the Demon King.

This was what her instincts were telling her.

...Demon King.

It had pretentiously taken on such a name.

She couldn't understand.

Wiping the blood from her lips, Sedi murmured.

“I understand now that I've seen you for myself. You're one of *his* men.”

[...]

Him, The Black Horned Demon God.

Sedi was referring to the Ruler she followed.

Moreover, he was a higher rank than she was.

A Lord?

No... he felt different from any Lord she'd ever met. But he was certainly not a Ruler.

Right. She could see now why Gullard hadn't submitted to her before. In the first place, he served someone who was a 'higher rank' than she was.

'But is he really a Demon?'

She had many questions to which she could not find the answers.

But there was one that stood above all of the others.

"You... are also his subordinate... So why do you dare to claim the title, Demon King? You are too arrogant."

[Are those your last words?]

“Hahaha...! Do you really think that you can kill Sedi Glaston this easily?”

[Of course I do.]

Demon King Kasajin clenched his fist.

[Because I am currently the strongest being in this universe.]

* * *

“Hahaha!”

Letip let out a cheerful laugh.

He could feel the aura of transcendent beings releasing their power all over the world at the same time. Nodiesop could probably feel it too.

“Right. It was impossible from the start.”

Putting a large number of transcendent beings into a universe and expecting them to not unleash their power?

That was impossible.

It was like putting several predators in a small cage.

Lukas and Sedi's agreement was pointless from the start.

Well, poor, vulnerable Sedi would die tonight anyway.

"I'm looking forward to it."

How would Lukas react when he learned the truth?

How would Nodiesop respond?

What would the Demon King do next?

Letip shivered in excitement.

"Finally... It finally begins...!"

The Great Game, the prelude to the final battle.

Season 2 Chapter 86

Jurk.

Blood spilled from every orifice on Gullard's hideous face. The bright red liquid poured from his eyes, nose, ears, and mouth.

Covering his nose and mouth with his sleeve, Kran took several steps backward.

There were many Demons whose blood was extremely toxic. But Gullard's seemed to be even stronger than the ones he'd encountered before.

"...long live... the Demon King."

Bang!

After muttering those words again, Gullard's entire body exploded.

Kran retreated instinctively as he remembered the destructive force Gullard had displayed earlier, but the strength of this explosion wasn't that large.

Moreover, Lukas erected a barrier around Gullard's body, which contained the explosion.

Realising that he wasn't in danger, Kran emerged from his hasty cover. Then, he looked over to where Gullard had been.

Now, all that was left of him was a pile of burnt, bloody flesh that oozed a very disgusting smell.

"...is he dead?"

"Almost."

"What?"

Kran turned to look at Lukas, not quite understanding what he meant.

Lukas didn't elaborate any further. Instead, he simply sat on the ground with a complicated expression before covering his face with both hands.

'...I used Endtongue.'

And against a scapegoat.

This was, without a doubt, Lukas' fault. He'd allowed his emotions to take control. In all honesty, he still hadn't calmed down. His head still felt dizzy.

There were few events that could shock Lukas, who had become an Absolute, to this extent.

As he tried to clear his thoughts, Kran, who had been observing him for a while, asked again.

"What do you mean by 'almost'?"

"Did you forget his ability?"

Kran's eyebrows furrowed.

"...division. I see. Was that just a decoy?"

"A decoy that was stronger than his true body. He left 90% of his power in an alter ego before escaping with the other 10%."

"He assigned most of his power to an alter ego? I didn't think he would do something like that."

"Generally, it is probably not something that he would do."

Lukas had a rough idea of what Gullard was up to.

He'd avoided fighting him head-on.

When he saw Lukas annihilating the hybrids in quick succession, he'd probably realised that he couldn't defeat him on his own.

'...no. Perhaps...'

He might have heard about him from Kasajin.

Gullard knew about him. He didn't know about Lukas, the God of Magic of this world. Instead, he knew about Lukas Trowman, the Great Mage, who fought against the Demigods a long time ago.

Looking up at the statue of him, Lukas couldn't help but wonder.

Now that he looked at it closely, he realised that the statue's appearance had a few minor differences from his true appearance. This was probably because it was created based on Kasajin's memories. Or maybe there was another reason.

Once again, he looked down at what was left of Gullard's body, or, to be precise, the body of the alter ego.

In terms of efficiency, putting 90% of his power into a single alter ego was the worst choice he could make. The alter ego, which received more power than the main body, would be unable to fully utilise it, which meant that it would be easier to defeat than if he were to use the power himself.

The main body, which only had 10% of its power left, would also be in danger. After all, losing most of his power meant that Gullard was slowly dying.

He never would have expected a being like Gullard to try to escape at the expense of his life. It was even clearer now that he had a mentality that differed greatly from other demons.

Why was he so bent on self-preservation?

The answer was obvious.

He probably wanted to announce Lukas' existence.

“...”

He still couldn't believe it.

No, he wouldn't believe it until he saw it with his own eyes.

Lukas looked up at the statues once again.

Five statues, each one with a familiar appearance. They were faces that filled Lukas with nostalgia but also sorrow.

Standing between the Black Witch, the Great Sage, the Sword King, and the Great Mage was a person who no longer had the appearance of a human being.

The Magic Warrior King.

No, the Demon King.

A huge physique, gray skin, sharp, protruding fangs, and large red horns on both temples.

Indeed, this was a being who suited the title Demon King, but there was no denying that he looked like Kasajin.

'Kasajin.'

Why did he create these statues?

Why did he give their last names to Demons?

Was he really the Demon King? And if he was, did that mean he was willing to kill the humans in this universe? To treat them like bugs?

'...what the hell are you doing?'

What could he possibly have been thinking?

Just as this question seemed to fill his entire mind, Lukas suddenly raised his head. He felt something.

Something that only an Absolute could feel.

The 'universe' was creaking.

He knew what this phenomenon meant. It was something that only occurred when someone exerted more force than the universe was able to withstand. In other words, when an Absolute decided to release their true power.

At first, Lukas thought that it was because of him. After all, his Endtongue was a power that far surpassed the limits of this world.

But it wasn't him.

The start of the 'wave' hadn't come from Africa.

Instead, it was from Northern Ireland.

The place that Sedi had claimed as her territory.

Lukas realised that a fight between Absolutes was happening there.

‘She broke the agreement.’

In the first place, it was only a weak agreement that had no penalties even if it was broken immediately.

Nevertheless, it had to be noted that they had met each other only a few hours ago. And yet, within such a short time, she broke the agreement...

This meant that it was a truly dire situation. And in this case, it could only mean that her life had been threatened.

‘Nodiesop or Letip.’

He could only think of two beings that could possibly threaten Sedi’s life. The other Absolutes who had entered this universe.

However, Lukas’ eyes were unconsciously drawn to Kasajin’s Demon statue.

Sss...

The universe, which had started to creak, suddenly calmed down once again.

The meaning behind this was tremendous.

It meant that the match between the fighting Absolutes had already been decided.

* * *

“I am Lukas.”

This is what he said to Kran, who asked about his identity.

But Kran frowned at those words.

“I wasn’t asking for your name.”

It seemed he hadn’t let down his guard around Lukas yet.

“You said you were the Great Mage. Is that true?”

“It is.”

Lukas didn’t have any reason to hide it, so he simply nodded.

After a moment of silence, Kran spoke in a conflicted voice.

“A being who advised Wizards stuck at a certain level and unable to progress... I always thought it was a legend that the Wizards spread to make themselves sound more impressive.”

The Top Three.

It was a bit strange for Kran, who was something of a legend for most hunters, to say.

“Why have I never heard of you before?”

Kran was genuinely curious when he asked this question.

If this man had decided to act, the Top Three wouldn't have been called the Top Three. This guy was just as strong as himself, the Black Witch, and the Saint of Salvation.

No, he was many times stronger than them.

At least for Kran, this man standing in front of him was stronger than any Wizard he'd ever seen before.

“What was that power that you just used? Was it magic?”

He was talking about the power Lukas had used to force Gullard into the ground. Even if it had only been an alter ego, it was clear to Kran that it was a power strong enough to overpower most Dukes.

And yet, such a being had been forced to the ground without a way to resist.

He didn't think that it was a powerful spell because the casting time was much too short for something so powerful. More importantly, he hadn't felt any mana fluctuations, something that foreshadowed every spell.

Gullard didn't even have a chance to realise what was happening before his body had been crushed to the ground.

Lukas turned to look at Kran.

'3rd-generation hybrid.'

There was a high probability that this was the man's true identity.

He supposedly had the clue to deceiving the laws of this world.

But Lukas could not see anything despite meeting him in person.

Kran was a being who had been artificially created through biological experiments. Nevertheless, he couldn't be considered to have been created from nothing like the Golems Lukas knew about.

This man had a soul.

He was a being who was created by mixing two different species, Demons and humans, together.

In a way... he was similar to 'Frey Blake', whose body Lukas had occupied in the past. Just like his body had been able to hold both mana and divine power at the same time, Kran's body was able to contain ki and demonic energy.

However, he couldn't see more than that. This was the same even if he used Clairvoyance.

Of course, Kran was strong. He'd managed to reach a level of strength that was rare for mortals to achieve. If he had to compare, Lukas would say that he was as strong if not stronger than he was before he was imprisoned in the Abyss.

However, what did that have to do with the 'clue'?

"..."

Lukas couldn't tell, and he felt that he couldn't figure it out even if he continued to mull over the problem in his head.

Lukas decided to put that aside for now.

At least, there was one thing that he could be certain of...

“The Strongest, Kran.”

“What is it?”

“Would you like to defeat the Demons with me?”

For the time being, he would have to work with this man.

Season 2 Chapter 87

Gullard traveled so fast that his wings tore.

This was also a power of his wings, but it was something that only the Demon King and the Five Dukes knew about.

Nevertheless, he couldn't use this power freely with only 10% of his power.

Already, his entire body looked like a torn rag, his flesh and blood falling like rain as he was unable to overcome the strong wind pressure.

Nevertheless, Gullard didn't stop nor did he slow down. At that point, he could no longer feel anything but pain, and he knew that his death was inevitable. But his sense of duty overpowered the fear of death.

Taht!

Then, finally, he arrived at his destination.

As soon as his feet touched the ground, Gullard felt an intense demonic energy piercing into his skin. This demonic energy was so powerful that even Demons would be overwhelmed with fear, but that wasn't the case for Gullard. Instead, he felt comfortable as if he had returned home after a long time.

"...Gullard?"

He heard Azazel's voice. By that point, Gullard could no longer see, but luckily, his tongue could still move.

"Aza... zel."

"What the hell is going on? Who did this to yo-...?"

"The King... is he in front of me?"

Gullard cut Azazel off. He couldn't afford to waste any time. He could feel his tongue gradually stiffening. This meant that his time was running out.

Azazel seemed to realise this. His head lowered sorrowfully as he said.

“Yes, he’s looking at you.”

Gullard knelt. No, it was more like he collapsed to his knees.

“...My... King.”

[Gullard Phisfounder.]

The King’s voice sounded.

When he heard it, Gullard felt the pain wracking his body gradually begin to subside.

“Please forgive me for greeting you in such a shameful manner.”

[It seems you have something to tell me. Say it.]

The King spoke in a blunt tone.

A faint smile blossomed on Gullard's lips. Right, this was the King. The King was stronger and more straightforward than anyone else. Even the death of one of his most favoured subjects wouldn't faze him much.

Gullard smiled brightly for a moment before speaking.

"...a man suddenly appeared. He called himself the Great Mage."

"...!"

It was Azazel, not the Demon King Kasajin, who appeared stunned at those words.

[...]

Kasajin just remained silent. He looked at Gullard with an unfathomable emotion hidden in his eyes.

"He's strong. He seemed to be holding back... but he was still too much for me."

[I see.]

"Yes. However..."

Gullard continued confidently.

“He’s weaker than the King.”

[...]

Kurk.

Gullard coughed slightly, followed by the sound of him swallowing his blood back down.

Unfortunately, that was the deciding factor. After doing that, he knew that he wouldn’t last much longer.

“P-... please forgive... this weak servant. I’m sorry I will not be able to achieve the great cause together with you, my King...”

After saying that last word, Gullard fell silent. He died on his knees, bowing before his king.

Azazel looked at his corpse with a solemn expression.

‘You did a great job. Rest well, comrade.’

Then he turned to Kasajin.

“I remember what you said... about Lukas Trowman...”

[Stop.]

The King interrupted him.

[That is a thing of the past. A very, very long time ago. Now, those memories are nothing but a blur.]

There was a brief flash on Azazel Trowman’s face when he heard those words, but that was it. Azazel didn’t react more than that.

He didn’t dare show rudeness by refuting the King’s words to his face. Even if he thought he was lying.

“Then, if I meet Lukas Trowman...”

[Tell me. You wouldn’t be able to take him on.]

Kasajin continued in a low voice.

[I will kill him myself.]

* * *

The spell that man had just displayed was amazing.

Because that single spell had completely wiped out the hybrid army, which had caused everyone to feel the threat of death.

Joanna couldn't help but recall the Medusa he'd just shown. Was that the real Medusa? Compared to the spell she'd used, the range and power were on completely different levels.

Why hadn't he shown his power before if he was so strong?

Joanna couldn't help but think about this.

There were still Demons and Demon Beasts in Zinga, and a few hybrids had managed to survive.

Of course, they weren't in good condition, and they wouldn't be able to display much of their strength in the fights to come. Nevertheless, they were still a formidable force for Joanna and the rest of the Gray Sun to face.

Ba-ba-bang!

Fire spells constantly exploded on the ground. However, the Demon Beasts whom they were facing now were different from the Demon Beasts they'd faced before. Even when hit by 5 star spells, their skin was only slightly singed.

Joanna's face became pale once again.

She was in a hyper-focused state.

At the same time, she felt free.

'This... is a real battle.'

She could feel it.

The amount of experience she would gain in just a few seconds on this battlefield was something she wouldn't be able to learn in her previous, sheltered environment even if she spent ten years.

She didn't have the time to think. But that was exactly why she couldn't stop thinking and planning. She couldn't give up thinking just because she didn't have the time to.

What she had to look at wasn't one of them but the entire horde.

Instead of the single Demon Beast in front of her, she had to see the movements of the enemies as a whole. Instead of just herself, she had to pay attention to all of her allies.

In other words, she had to see the entire battlefield. She had to constantly collect information and use the right spells in the right place at the right time without making any mistakes.

Of course, if she was an ordinary Wizard, she wouldn't have to go that far.

'However.'

She wasn't an ordinary Wizard.

She was Joanna the Archmage.

No.

She was the Great Mage's Chosen.

This meant that she had to endure such hardships.

"..."

A pair of red eyes stared at her.

It was a Demon, the second-in-command of Zinga.

Count Perado.

None of the humans there had noticed his presence yet, but it couldn't be helped.

Even now, Perado hadn't released any demonic energy and, instead, was calmly observing the situation from a distance.

He hadn't revealed himself.

Perado was a Demon to the core. This meant that he valued his own survival more than anything else.

There were only two moments when he would make his move.

Either when his safety was guaranteed or when he found the key to victory.

Perado looked around the battlefield thoughtfully.

The humans were clearly at a disadvantage. Be it in terms of individual strength, numbers, or geographical location, nothing was in their favor.

And yet, it was the Demons who were dying one-sidedly.

Of course, this wasn't too surprising. It was common knowledge that humans on the verge of death were the most annoying.

But even when that was taken into account, this situation didn't make much sense.

After thinking about it for a while, Perado finally realised what the problem was.

It was the presence of characters who played a key role in maintaining the line of defense.

'Three.'

Lee Jong-hak slaughtered Demon Beasts at the front.

Elijah commanded and encouraged their troops from the middle.

And, lastly, Joanna, who paid attention to the entire battlefield from the rear and bombarded the enemy with spells.

All three of them were annoying, but it was clear who the most annoying one among them was.

'That woman.'

The Wizard.

Even Perado couldn't help but admire her wide field of view. If that woman didn't constantly use the right spells at the right times to help her allies while also providing them with vital information, the humans would have already been wiped out by now.

'In other words, if that woman dies, we'll win.'

After coming to this conclusion, Perado's gaze suddenly grew cold.

Suppressing his presence, he quickly closed the distance to Joanna. Two guards stood on either side of Joanna, but they weren't a problem.

Shurk.

With a purple glow surrounding them, Perado's nails became abnormally long and sharp. As soon as he appeared, he tore the two guards apart in an instant, his claws ripping them to pieces at the slightest touch. The guards became scattered pieces of meat before they were even able to scream.

It was only then when Joanna sensed Perado's presence and gasped in shock. She was already exhausted from her constant stream of spells. She had very little mana left, and her mental strength was as thin as a thread.

And just when she reached her limit, a high-ranking Demon Noble made his appearance.

Clang!

The bright purple claws that were heading directly for her were inexplicably blocked. Then, Joanna felt the presence of someone standing behind her.

“Frey...?”

“Good job.”

“Ah...”

With just two words, all the tension in her body was relieved. Joanna stumbled slightly, but Lukas caught her by the shoulders.

“It’s over. You can rest now.”

“...”

This was a lot to ask, but Joanna nodded and closed her eyes without hesitation.

‘Great.’

Lukas had acknowledged her.

She could tell even without looking at him.

Up until she fell unconscious, Joanna was the one who had been in control of the battlefield. She had faithfully performed her role far beyond Lukas' expectations.

The battle wasn't over yet, but she had earned the right to rest.

"You...!"

Perado's eyes widened.

He knew that this man in front of him was a powerful Wizard who had driven even Duke Gullard away.

Should he run, or should he fight? More importantly, where was Duke Gullard?

He was indecisive, and this indecision created a small opening.

Crack!

And Kran would never miss such an opening.

The tip of his sword pierced through Perado's chin before slicing up through his brain.

Perado died before he could even make a sound.

This was a futile death unbecoming of a Count, but it was a natural result when his opponent was one of the Top Three.

“Hmph.”

Kran wiped the blood off of his sword with a snort. Then, he turned to the battlefield and clicked his tongue.

“You all haven’t managed to get rid of this trash yet? How pathetic.”

Killing intent surged within his eyes.

Then, he jumped into the battle without hesitation.

“Kiieek!”

“Kuk!”

It was as though a huge gust of wind had appeared on the battlefield. With nothing but his sword, Kran slaughtered Demon and Demon Beast alike as he easily moved forward. Most of the Demon Beasts could not handle even a single strike from his sword, and even the stronger Demons did not last much longer in front of him.

When they noticed his presence, the members of the Gray Sun froze almost subconsciously.

Kran looked over to them and shook his head.

“You’re all in the way. Fall back. I’ll take care of this on my own.”

After those short words, Kran resumed his slaughter.

Lee Jong-hak watched this scene unfold with a blank gaze.

Season 2 Chapter 88

Kran’s appearance quickly brought the confrontation to a close. He once again proved why he was one of the Top Three.

It was hard to believe that a single human was able to reverse the tide of the battle. But Elijah was thankful that such a human existed.

“Thanks for the help.”

Elijah approached Lukas, his tone much more polite than when they first met. This was natural. After all, he’d just seen Lukas single-handedly annihilate hundreds of hybrids.

He continued in a cautious voice.

“What about... Gullard?”

“Dead.”

Lukas covered Joanna, who had fainted, with his coat as he answered. The answer was short, but the effect that it had was by no means small.

“De-, dead?”

“The Vampire Duke...?!”

The survivors of the Gray Sun were shocked speechless. Even Elijah could not hide his surprise. The same went for Lee Jong-hak, who was resting a short distance away.

“You killed him?”

“To be precise, I helped Kran kill him.”

It was around that time when Kran returned, covered in blood. He shot Lukas a dissatisfied glare for a moment before turning away, not bothering to correct him.

“No way. To defeat one of the Five Dukes...”

“T-, Top Three...!”

Slowly, the heat of enthusiasm began spreading through all the people gathered there. It was so strong that they could practically feel it in the air.

Elijah couldn't help but look at Lukas differently.

“Who the hell are you?”

Lukas looked at him for a moment before giving the answer that he'd thought of a while ago.

“I'm a member of Argento Spell.”

The value or fame of a name.

He knew just how important it was to humans.

So Lukas decided to increase his fame as well. It was a necessary process in order to eliminate the differences between the humans and unite the world into one.

The defeat of the Vampire Duke, Gullard Phisfounder, one of the Five Dukes, was an achievement that would become a cornerstone for this process.

Sooner or later, this achievement would spread throughout the world.

Not just to humans but to Demons as well.

And...

To the Demon King.

* * *

The Vampire Duke, one of the Five Dukes, the worst calamities for mankind, and the de facto ruler of Africa, had died.

Nevertheless, no large or significant changes happened right away.

“There are still many problems to deal with. For one, there are still countless Demons left on this continent.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“We’ll continue doing what we’ve been doing from the start. Only, it’ll be a lot better than it was before. First, we will get rid of the Demons and Demon Beasts still in Zinga and use this place as our base of operations to confront those bastards from the association.”

“What about the humans here?”

Elijah couldn’t help but fall silent for a moment at Lukas’ words.

The humans living in Zinga were practically traitors who had colluded and submitted to the Demons. And now, their masters had been defeated by the Gray Sun.

“...we’ll try to persuade them. But if they won’t listen to us, then we’ll have no choice.”

“...”

We’ll have no choice.

Lukas didn’t say anything for a moment because he understood the weight behind those words.

“I will let the North American and European Branches know that the Gray Sun isn’t a criminal organisation and that it is the African Branch that has become rotten.”

“...is that possible?”

“I will make it possible.”

It wouldn't be easy.

It was highly likely that Neil Prand already knew the situation in Africa. And yet, he had done nothing about it.

Nevertheless, Lukas spoke in a clear voice.

Elijah couldn't help but smile slightly at those words.

“Thank you. I owe... Argento Spell, as you said, a great deal. If you ever need our assistance, just tell me. Even if we can't afford to, we will definitely come to your assistance.”

This created an allied force for the newly launched Argento Spell. Of course, they would be busy dealing with their own situation, but it wasn't a bad thing to have this relationship.

Lukas nodded to Elijah before going to look for Kran.

He found him in the middle of the deserted street, scavenging through the bodies of the Demons. Lukas could guess what he was doing. He was looking for their soul crystals.

While carrying out his task with robotic efficiency, Kran raised his eyes to meet Lukas'.

Then, he spoke in a blunt tone.

“Is Frey an alias?”

“It is.”

“Looks like you’ve got a lot to hide. It’s my opinion that guys with a lot of secrets are the ones you should never trust.”

Kran looked down at the soul crystal that he’d just taken from a body. The crystal glowed resplendently in the dark.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t share these with you. I used too much against that guy, Gullard. Even if I harvest all of these, I’ll still be in the red.”

“I don’t need it.”

“Ah, right.”

“You never answered the question I asked earlier.”

“The one about joining your Argento Spell or whatever and working together to defeat the Demons?”

Kran said it as though it was not worth thinking about.

“I refuse.”

“Why?”

“Because I prefer to fight alone.”

“You’re lying.”

Lukas said these words in a low voice. Then, he continued before Kran could say anything to refute him.

“Did you think so during the fight with Gullard?”

Kran froze for a moment.

He hadn’t.

“You are strong. There’s probably no human stronger than you. Only Demons.”

Kran let out a soft chuckle.

“Did I say something funny?”

“You did. You just compared me to humans.”

Why was that funny?

When he saw this question in Lukas’ eyes, Kran shook his head.

“You saw me regenerate my limbs and destroyed skull in an instant. Do you think humans could do something like that?”

“There’s nothing wrong with that. There are all kinds of unusual abilities in the world.”

“Bullshit...”

Kran couldn’t help the swear word that escaped from his mouth. This was because Lukas said those words with a straight face.

Lukas’ words came from experience. He had seen at least a few thousand humans who had even stranger abilities than Kran.

“...”

Kran could also faintly sense that he was serious. Of course, he couldn't actually tell what Lukas was thinking. He just realised that this being in front of him was not saying those words just to comfort him.

He opened his mouth and spoke in a soft voice.

"Could you still say that if you saw my real appearance?"

"..."

"At first, I also thought of myself as a human. There wasn't any real reason for it. It was just that I had an innate disgust for Demons, so I thought my essence was closer to that of humans. But it isn't."

Tuduk...

Kran's face began to change.

Lukas silently looked on.

The small changes on Kran's face slowly began spreading to the rest of his body.

His skin turned black, and his eyes turned golden. Fangs protruded from his lips, and large horns sprouted from his forehead.

After his transformation was complete, his appearance seemed similar to a human's, but it wasn't *human*.

"Now, do you still think I'm a human?"

A soft wind blew through the street.

Lukas looked at those strangely colored eyes. Unlike his devilish appearance, his golden eyes shined brilliantly in the darkness.

"You are."

After a short moment, Lukas finally spoke in a calm voice.

"You're human."

When he heard that declaration, Kran became speechless for some reason.

Season 2 Chapter 89

"Why do you hunt Demons? Where does your hatred for them come from?"

Why?

Kran shook his head.

“I never thought about stuff like that. I just don’t like the thought of Demons.”

It wasn’t for moral reasons or justice.

Kran never thought of himself as a good person. He was an extremely selfish and self-centered man. The reason why he’d started hunting the Demons was simple.

He didn’t like them.

To him, their thoughts and behaviour were disgusting.

So he killed them. He killed them because he didn’t like them. Even a little child would probably be able to think of a better reason, but it was the truth.

As he kept killing them, stronger and stronger opponents kept appearing. And as a result, Kran’s life became more and more hazardous. But every time he managed to overcome the struggle, he grew stronger.

He faced bloody battles day after day after day, and before long, his vision felt like it was constantly enshrouded by a red veil.

Then, when he finally awoke from his blood-fueled haze, Kran realised that he was suddenly being called one of the 'Top Three' by everyone. Humans and Demons alike.

"I suppose that's why you always hid your true identity. So that you would be able to use it as a trump card when faced off against strong enemies."

"Why did you bother saying it if you knew already?"

Kran spat those words in an irritated tone. The way this man spoke as if he knew everything was really annoying.

Lukas looked at him for a moment before opening his mouth.

"Let me express my respect."

"What?"

"I would like to express my respect and admiration to you for becoming the master of your life, your actions, and your beliefs."

"You... Did you not understand what I just told you? I just did as I pleased without caring about anyone else. I've never done anything to deserve anyone's respect."

"You said you didn't like the Demons."

“Right. So?”

“You were able to instinctually tell that their thoughts and actions were wrong. This shows that you are a good person in nature.”

Kran had probably been ostracised by humans in the past.

No. Lukas was certain that was the case.

When he was more innocent than he was now when he thought that he was more human than Demon.

He wasn't sure how that memory affected Kran.

But the important thing was that despite having those memories, he still chose to walk the path that he thought was right.

But the strong would always stand out from a crowd. Especially if they didn't have any discretion about standing above others like Neil Prand.

Kran didn't have the talent nor the charisma to be a leader.

Nevertheless, it couldn't be denied that he could be living a much better life than he was right now. Gullard's attitude was the best evidence of this. He could have become the Demons' subordinate, spending his days slaughtering humans without fear.

In fact, it wasn't even just the Demons.

For example, North America would gladly welcome Kran with both arms wide open if he chose to join them.

There was no organisation in the world that would refuse The Strongest, Kran.

But Kran didn't join any of them.

He still stayed on the frontlines, the most dangerous place in the world, on his own.

He still continued to fight for his life every day.

He did something so troublesome and dangerous simply because he didn't like them.

Or, in other words, because he couldn't tolerate what they were doing.

It was clear that Kran had lost a lot over the years, but one thing he didn't lose was his pride.

“ ... ”

For a while, Kran didn't say anything. Instead, he just quietly stared at Lukas. Then, he looked away from him and turned around.

Seeing this, Lukas was also about to turn around. After all, there were still a lot of things for him to do. But something suddenly flew towards him.

Tak.

Lukas caught it and looked at it.

“That's your cut. For helping me with Gullard.”

“ ... ”

It was a soul crystal. Moreover, the energy within it was pretty dense. This meant that it was at least a Count's soul crystal.

Lukas turned around again. But Kran had already disappeared.

* * *

The process of occupying the city of Zinga took exactly half a day.

After all, Gullard had made use of all of his means in the previous battle. The Demon Beasts, Demons, and Hybrids, or, in other words, the troops who usually guarded the city, were already dead.

The Gray Sun was also not in the best condition, but they still had the presence of strong individuals like Kran, Lee Jong-hak, and Elijah.

Thanks to that, they were able to recapture the city rather quickly.

The residents of Zinga, who lived with the Demons, and the Africa Branch's hunters were unwilling at first and ran wild. But this uprising quickly subsided when they were overpowered with brute force and their leaders were made an example.

In the first place, that was the type of people they were. Leech-like individuals who latched onto whichever side was stronger. This trait of theirs was remarkably similar to the Demons.

This made Elijah even more disgusted with them, and he had the urge to just kill all of them, but if he did that, he would be no better than the Demons.

So instead, he suppressed his dark desires, pulled himself together, and focused on organising the newly acquired Zinga.

The next day.

Lukas was told that Joanna had woken up. Now, they had to get ready to return to North America. Of course, there was no reason to rush since their mission hadn't taken as long as they anticipated.

With an unhurried gait, Lukas headed towards the room that Joanna had been placed in.

And in front of the door that he soon arrived at was a man with a familiar face.

Lee Jong-hak.

"This is the second time we're facing each other like this."

His eyes were serious, and it seemed he had something important to talk about.

Although Lukas had an idea of what he wanted, it was still hard to ignore him.

He stopped and looked at him.

After hesitating for a while, Lee Jong-hak finally spoke with a determined expression.

"Are you Lukas?"

"..."

“Please answer me. I don’t think the ability to use magic like that is common.”

This was only an assumption based on a logical analysis at best. However, as he said those words, Lee Jong-hak’s voice was filled with conviction.

After thinking about it for a moment, Lukas nodded.

Lee Jong-hak let out a small breath.

“...as I thought.”

“You look like you have something to say to me.”

Something to say.

Of course, he did.

Lee Jong-hak was still stunned by that incredible scene.

He knew just how tricky and troublesome the hybrids were in battle. And yet, hundreds of those beings were wiped out in the blink of an eye. Without much effort.

The transcendent power of that scene reminded him of the man he'd met not so long ago.

"...do you have any idea about what's happening in the Asia Headquarters right now?"

"No."

"It has become a kingdom, in which one man decides everything."

There was no need to ask who that man was.

"Nodiesop... revealed his power and took control of the Asia Headquarters. And he also took the loyalty of the hunters in the process."

Lee Jong-hak couldn't find a better word to use than 'take'. From the start, he showed off his overwhelming power without giving anyone a chance to think. And anyone who disobeyed him was killed.

It was a reign that was built purely on fear.

"What kind of power did he reveal?"

“...his power can extend anywhere in the world. For example, in a desperate situation like the one we were in yesterday, if I had said his name and prayed for his help, he would have helped us. With his miracle-like power.”

“...”

Lukas’s expression became serious with those words.

He wasn’t sure what power Nodiesop had, but Africa and China were thousands of kilometers apart. If he wanted to use his power across such a large distance, then he would have to use his powers as an Absolute.

In other words, Nodiesop...

‘Doesn’t care what happens in this universe.’

It was irresponsible. Nodiesop alone had probably shortened the lifespan of the universe, pushing it closer to destruction.

However, this concept wasn’t something that mortals could understand.

Lee Jong-hak continued.

“When I saw that, I couldn’t help but feel that something was wrong.”

Lukas' eyes shined slightly when he heard this, but Lee Jong-hak didn't notice.

"I'm not saying that it's wrong to kill the Demon Beasts, Demonic Humans, or Demons. I just wonder whether he could use such great power so freely."

He might have been just overthinking.

However, Lee Jong-hak couldn't help but feel as though Nodiesop's actions were breaking some fundamental rule of nature.

After all, he'd displayed the ability to kill thousands of Demons with a single finger.

Lee Jong-hak looked at such power with awe. But at the same time, he felt fear.

"Nodiesop wants you to search for me."

"...I could go back to the Asia Headquarters and report your location. Will you kill me here?"

"No."

When Lukas answered with a firm tone, Lee Jong-hak couldn't help but ask.

“Why? Do you want a confrontation?”

“It’s not that either.”

He didn’t seek a confrontation.

It had been so in his days as a human, and it continued to be so after he became an Absolute.

Lee Jong-hak bit his lip slightly before speaking.

“...then why did you kill all of the Asian hunters in Europe?”

This was probably the question he wanted to ask the most.

“They attacked me first. Many more lives were lost on the European side.”

“But that caused the relationship between Europe and Asia to reach a boiling point.” (TL: isn’t this victim blaming?)

Among the Asian hunters, the hardliners who were adamant that they raze the European Headquarters to the ground were gaining support.

Asia's distrust and hatred towards Europe was growing by the day. But this was funny. After all, they were the ones who attacked first.

And yet, no one thought about that. Instead of reflecting on their actions, they continued to declare their hatred as if they had all been possessed.

All of this was a mark of Nodiesop's demonic charisma.

Now, even Lee Jong-hak wasn't able to stop their momentum.

"That might be the case if everyone died."

"...what are you trying to say?"

"What if I told you they're still alive?"

"...!"

Lee Jong-hak's eyes widened.

"I knew that they had been incited to do what they did and that if I killed them, the regional feud would only deepen."

“...are they still alive?”

“Not all of them.”

Those like Kim Go-hyuk had to die.

However, those who questioned their actions and stopped themselves from killing others despite their orders to do so were spared.

This referred to people like the Sword Saint.

“Where are they now...?”

“I sent them to the Korean Peninsula in Asia. They should be wandering around there somewhere.”

“...”

“I asked them about you.”

Lee Jong-hak's eyebrows furrowed.

“What role do you want me to play?”

“I don’t want anything. Think for yourself, and act in whatever way you think is right. Just like you have done all your life.”

“...”

That was all Lukas had to say. After that, he walked past Lee Jong-hak.

“...thank you.”

It was a soft whisper.

When Lukas turned around, he saw that Lee Jong-hak was bowing deeply to him. Then, he raised his head and met his eyes before straightening up, turning around, and walking away.

As he left, Lee Jong-hak’s footsteps appeared more determined and powerful.

Lukas turned around again and grabbed the doorknob to Joanna’s room.

Season 2 Chapter 90

“...!!”

When Lukas started turning the doorknob, he suddenly heard tumbling inside the room. He paused for a moment, the doorknob in his hand, before opening the door slightly.

“A-, ah. Y-, yo-, you’re here.”

Joanna called out to him with an awkward expression. She was sitting on the bed and seemed a bit nervous.

Lukas pretended not to notice.

“How are you feeling?”

“I, I’m fine. Uh. But, my mana room seems to have become a bit larger.”

“Yesterday’s experience must have caused your mana room to expand. That’s a good sign.”

It would probably pay off sooner or later. When he said that, Joanna responded with a bright expression.

“Yeah!”

“...”

“Ah...”

Then, her expression became nervous once again.

She kept glancing at Lukas out of the corner of her eye before taking a deep breath and turning to him with a determined expression.

“Hey, is there a chance- ”

“Frey, are you there?”

The door opened, and Elijah walked in.

If looks could kill, Elijah would be dead thousands of times over as Joanna glared at him with a hand on her pounding heart. His timing couldn't have been worse.

But Elijah didn't notice her reaction as he approached Frey with a serious expression.

“There you are.”

“What's the matter?”

“We finally restored the communications equipment here in Zinga. Using the channels that you told us, we established communication lines with Europe and North America.”

“I see.”

Elijah hadn't come here just to report that. Lukas' gaze told him to continue.

“And we immediately received an emergency call from North America.”

“...from North America?”

“From the Association President, Neil Prand.”

Elijah spoke with a serious expression.

“He's urgently looking for you.”

* * *

“ ... ”

After giving his explanation, Elijah didn't say anything for a while. Instead, he looked at Lukas before speaking in a cautious voice.

"There is warp equipment in Zinga as well. It's an old and outdated model, but it should still be functional. If you want to leave now, we will start maintenance right away... What do you intend to do?"

The North America Headquarters had already given their approval. They hadn't truly acknowledged the existence of the Gray Sun yet, but under the orders of the Association President, they did not express any resistance to opening a portal between the two sides.

In Elijah's opinion, this could already be considered quite beneficial. Even if it was only temporary, they had managed to form a connection with North America.

He still didn't like their attitude and behaviour, but he didn't deny the strength of the North America Headquarters.

He couldn't. He had to put his reason in front of his emotions.

'Use whatever is available.'

In order to bring peace to the African Continent, he was willing to throw away his pride a thousand times.

Lukas bowed to him and spoke.

“I will have to ask for your help.”

“I will forever be indebted to you. This is nothing.”

Elijah chuckled softly before leaving the room.

“...”

After he left, a heavy silence befell the room. Lukas seemed to be lost in serious thought.

Joanna looked at him for a moment before speaking cautiously.

“Leo is the boy who came with you, isn’t he?”

“Yeah.”

Lukas replied with a nod.

Joanna fell silent after that because she didn’t know what else to say.

No. In truth, she was also quite shocked.

'The Canadian Branch has fallen.'

Of course, it was just Toronto, Canada, and not the entirety of the Canadian territory that had been occupied.

Nevertheless, that news was no less shocking. After all, Joanna knew who the Branch Manager of the Toronto Branch was.

Marcel Morgan.

A Master rank Warrior and the President of the Canadian Branch. He was also one of the most influential members of the council who actually controlled North America.

She'd only ever met him once during a meeting at the North America Headquarters. At that time, he refuted Neil Prand's words directly and shared his thoughts without backing down. It also seemed that Neil was reluctant to openly go against him. But it was clear that the relationship between the two of them wasn't good.

The fact that he could directly oppose the Association President showed that he was not a weak man. He was not a man who would die easily.

...Or, at least, that would have been the case if his opponent hadn't been one of the Five Dukes.

Joanna shuddered.

It had only been for a moment, but she had felt the power Gullard released when he became serious.

The only expression she could think of to describe it was 'natural disaster'. To be honest, Joanna still couldn't believe that monster was dead.

After fainting, she had a terrible nightmare. She dreamt that she'd become a shriveled corpse after all her blood had been sucked out by Gullard.

'That's why I wanted to return to America as soon as possible.'

After having that thought, Joanna couldn't help but feel a bit depressed at how cowardly she was.

'...the Five Dukes.'

The highest ranking Demons, who had been moving in the shadows before their existence was finally revealed not so long ago.

Was it a good sign? Or was it bad?

She turned to look at Lukas once again.

"..."

Unlike Joanna, who was terrified, there were no changes in Lukas' expression. Even though he'd heard everything that Elijah said.

His expression made her feel strange.

She couldn't tell if he was shocked, upset, or if he didn't care at all.

Lukas then turned his eyes to look at Joanna. But as soon as their gazes met, Joanna looked away, her heart pounding. As she was now, she didn't dare to meet Lukas' gaze.

After coughing slightly to regain her composure, she opened her mouth.

"...first, we should head back to America."

Lukas nodded.

* * *

"What?"

Rose, the Rose Duke, asked as she looked at the shadowy figure of a man before her.

Her pupils had dilated because of the shocking news she'd just heard.

Azazel, the blurry figure in front of her, repeated his words.

[Gullard is dead.]

“That...”

Was he serious?

Rose restrained herself before she could ask this question. Because she knew the man in front of her would never lie or joke around. Especially about something as serious as the death of one of the Five Dukes.

Rose bit her lip before asking.

“Who the hell did it?”

[Lukas Trowman.]

Rose froze slightly when she heard that name. She stared at Azazel with an incredulous expression.

“What did you say?”

[Lukas Trowman killed Gullard. Rose, if you find out that man's location, don't try to face him alone. We are no match for him.]

"..."

[This is a direct order from the King himself. Killing that man is the King's job.]

Nevertheless, Rose's expression didn't change much. She bit her nail and appeared lost in thought.

Lukas Trowman. That was a familiar name.

She knew who he was. Of course she would.

That man was someone who held a position that Rose greatly desired.

'But why does the King want to kill him?'

She couldn't help but have a strange feeling at that, but it was swiftly followed by a deep sense of pleasure.

What if...

What if she killed that man?

Not only would she be able to satisfy her own desire but even the King's favor...

She cut that thought off before it could go any further.

[...you've been with us for a long time.]

Rose shuddered slightly when she heard Azazel's deep voice.

[And there have been many times when you didn't follow the King's orders.]

When she lifted her head, his cold eyes made her freeze.

[In this case, such an attitude cannot be dismissed as individuality or deviation. It will be considered as outright disobedience. Understood? This matter is very sensitive for the King, so don't do anything stupid. This is my first and last warning to you.]

Rose gulped before forcing a small smile.

"You didn't have to say all of that. I know."

[I hope so.]

After saying those words, Azazel's blurry figure began fading.

"Azazel, wait. Are you with His Majesty right now?"

[The King isn't here right now.]

Again?

"Did he enter seclusion again...?"

"That's not it. I don't know the details. Just that he went to Asia. What is it? Is there something you need to report to the King?"

"...that..."

Rose suddenly closed her mouth before shaking her head.

"No. It's nothing."

[...]

She grimaced slightly when Azazel gave her a silent look.

“I will tell him in person later. Is that a problem, Lord Grand Duke?”

[Of course not. You are also a Duke. You naturally have the right to an audience.]

Azazel had probably realised that Rose was hiding something, but he didn't try to pressure her for it. He'd already told her. This was her first and last warning. The consequences of whatever Rose did would be hers to bear.

Sss...

It wasn't until Azazel had completely left when Rose turned around.

There, she saw Leo, who was covered by vines.

“...”

This situation.

She might be able to make use of it.

A pleasant smile stretched across Rose's lips.

* * *

In the underground facilities beneath the Pilsky Tower.

This was no ordinary underground space. It was a space that extended several kilometers below the surface.

Very few people knew about this place. Several of the builders who constructed this place had been deliberately selected, and they even had their memories altered afterwards.

Of course, Neil Prand, the President of the Association, knew about this space as well as its purpose.

This underground facility even had a special elevator that connected directly to the President's quarters on the 177th floor.

And that elevator was currently in use.

Ding-

The elevator stopped, and the door opened.

A rough hallway with dim lighting was revealed. Neil's destination was the communication room, which was at the end of this hallway.

But he stopped walking before he got very far. This was because he found someone standing in the middle of the hallway.

Unperturbed, Neil simply looked at him before finally opening his mouth as the elevator doors closed.

"What do you want?"

"I'm just curious. Why are you here?"

After saying that, Letip stepped forward.

"You have a question? I thought you were all-knowing."

"Omniscience is not a concept that mortals should talk about carelessly."

"..."

Letip smiled for a moment before pointing towards the communication room.

“You haven’t been to this [Communications Room] where you contact Demons for a while. What brings you here now?”

“Do you expect me to answer?”

“No. But from what I know, you told Lukas you wouldn’t contact the Demons anymore.”

“...”

This wasn’t something that he’d spoken about in Letip’s presence.

But Neil wasn’t surprised. Instead, he spoke with a sour expression.

“You eavesdropped.”

“I didn’t mean to hear it. Your voices just leaked out and I happened to be nearby.”

“In this world, that’s called eavesdropping.”

“I see.”

“And this isn’t something you have to worry about.”

Neil’s voice was cold.

“If you have nothing else to say, can you leave? I’m in a hurry.”

“Sure.”

Not caring about his attitude, Letip smiled before mockingly stepping to the side and disappearing.

Neil couldn’t be sure if he had truly left or if he was still hanging around.

If Letip wanted to conceal himself, then Neil Prand would have no way of finding him.

So he decided to stop worrying about it.

Letip, as always, was someone who was driven only by his personal interest. Trying to understand his intentions would only give him a headache. It was better to just let him do what he wanted without caring about it.

Fortunately, he never seemed to be too interested in what Neil was doing.

After a fingerprint scan, iris scan, and password, the door opened.

Inside this room was a small computer. The monitor was a type of CRT(1) monitor that had been phased out as science advanced.

Click.

When he clicked a button, the monitor lit up. As if they had been waiting, the figure of a person appeared on the screen.

[It's been a while since I last contacted you. You're late.]

The quality of the video was very bad and the image was blurry. Nevertheless, the figure's features allowed him to immediately recognise who they were. It was none other than Rose, the Rose Duke, who appeared on the screen.

"Did you forget the situation?"

[I did kill a few but not that many.]

"..."

Neil's gaze sank slightly. Then, he spoke curtly, getting to the point.

"Tell me what you want."

[Do you see this boy?]

The image turned slightly and he saw Leo hanging from vines.

[I want you to find the person who taught him the Warrior King Fist and send them here.]

Neil didn't know what the Warrior King Fist was.

But he knew who Leo's Master was.

"He's not someone you can handle."

[Did I ask you that?]

Rose's voice became unpleasant.

[You just need to answer. Just like before. Will you do it or not?]

Neil thought for a moment.

"He's not in America right now. It'll be a bit hard, but I'll send him as soon as possible."

[Good boy, Neil Prand.]

Rose smiled brightly at Neil.

[Our deal will continue for the time being.]

“...”

Neil didn't answer, and the monitor went blank once again. He sat there in the darkness for a while.

“Everything for America.”

After solidifying his resolve, Neil got up from his seat.