

There was once an ancient dragon in the shape of a man who lived amidst the mountains. By the dragon's side was a young girl who tended to his needs. One day, the girl said to the dragon, "I want you to tell me about yourself."

The dragon replied, "I don't mind, but it will be a long story." The girl nodded, and the dragon began to speak.

He spoke of tales from the distant past, from the age of myth...

Dragon and girl

On the continent, there exist mountain ranges that stretch across the land. And at the heart of one such range stands a particularly massive mountain known as the Dragon Roar Mountain.

This mountain, located deep within the range, is the tallest peak in the world. Though trees cling to its rocky face, its sheer cliffs block the entrance of all who try to invade its heights. Moreover, at the high altitude of the mountain, red dragons made their home. It was no place for human habitation.

High-level adventurers may venture as far as the mountain's base, but none dare to make the treacherous journey to its interior.

Yet, if a powerful adventurer were to scale the mountain, they would bear witness to a sight beyond imagination: a house nestled within the mountain's slopes.

It was a strange sight - for here was a house where no man should live.

Approaching the house, they would be met with yet another surprise: a young girl.

A girl who seemed out of place in these deep mountains. One with golden hair and long ears was walking towards the front of the house, her movements sluggish and laboured from the weight of the pail she carried with her.

The girl would carry the bucket to the back of the house, disappear inside, and then reemerge with the bucket again, repeating this behaviour. She seemed to be transporting water or some other substance to the back of the house.

It appears she is bringing water or some other substance to the back of the house.

If they followed the girl to the back of the house, the adventurer would discover a large cave shrouded in an eerie atmosphere.

Undaunted, the girl disappears into the cave, venturing ever deeper into its depths.

A reptile with a long neck, red scales, sharp teeth, and claws waits for her within the cave.

A Red Dragon.

The girl poured the contents of the bucket into the pail next to the Red Dragon. The dragon appeared to have no hostility towards her and watched her with a tired gaze that seemed to urge her to hurry on.

The amount of water the girl could carry in her bucket was far too small to fill up the pail, she would have had to make multiple trips back and forth to finish her task.

Nevertheless, it seemed that this was the final time.

The girl placed the bucket beside the pail and stretched out.

"Phew, I'm done fetching water!" she declared cheerfully, and bowed to the dragon, which likewise bowed its head sniffed her in acknowledgement of her hard work.

Her spirits raised, the girl returned back to her house.

In appearance it was a plain wooden house but careful observation would reveal that a powerful magical ward was protecting it.

"Master, master, I'm done fetching water!" the girl shouted as she entered the house. She was met with a cluttered room. There were chairs, tables, potted plants, stacks of paper, and other miscellaneous objects that she did not know what to do with.

Not receiving a response she weaved her way through the mess like a needle threading the eye of tightly packed fabric.

She soon reached her destination: the large room at the back of the house, where the master of the house usually stayed.

"Master?" she called out as she opened the door and entered.

Inside, bookshelves several times taller than the girl were lined up in rows.

Almost like a library.

The girl went deeper into the section lined with bookshelves.

There are only a few libraries in the world.

But this environment full of books was a familiar sight to her.

In the midst of this book-filled realm, a man with his back to the entrance. He was writing something absentmindedly at his desk.

His hair was a mottled mixture of silver and green, forming a peculiar pattern that was unsettling to most but familiar to the girl.

"Master!" she called out again, and the man snapped his head up as if startled.

The wings on his back slowly spread apart and he turned around.

He recognized the girl.

"Oh, Rostelina. Are you still awake at this late an hour? You have a lot of work to do tomorrow. You must go to bed early" he said.

"What do you mean up so late? The sun has already risen! I've already finished watering the dragon."

"Oh my, is that so?"

The man rose to his feet, towering over the girl with a height that exceeded two metres, forcing her to look up at him.

"I see...already finished with watering have you? Thank you for your hard work. Nonetheless, has it really been another day?"

"Master, please get some proper sleep!"

"Ah, I know, I know."

Despite the girl's cries the man's reply was dismissive.

"No you don't! You haven't slept at all, not yesterday, nor the day before!"

"Well, unlike you and your kin I do not in fact require sleep every single day."

"Is that really so?"

"Yes, my race is one with a long lifespan. Sleeping once every few years is enough for us."

The girl looked stunned by the man's response, but then puffed up her cheeks in irritation.

"Master, I know nothing about you at all!"

"Well, you did follow after me without asking any questions after all"

"I want you to tell me about yourself."

"Well, I do not mind. However, my life has been long, as will be its telling."

The man narrowed his eyes and looked around. Even with his tall stature, the bookshelves around him were taller still, filled with books he himself had written.

It was his record, his life.

"I don't mind. Rather are you sure it's alright with you, Master? Aren't you busy?"

"Not at all. For one with a life as long as mine, there is little need to conserve every second. I have enough time to talk to you."

The man gestured to a nearby chair, encouraging the girl to sit down. He sat down as well and rested his chin on his hand.

"But on the subject of stories, I believe you might be more pleased by ones aside from mine. How about a tale of a boy who travelled alone to defeat the demon emperor, or the story of a hero who slew a great monster and won the heart of a princess, or maybe the story of a saint who was manipulated by an evil god and forced into a battle he could not win.... I suppose the last one wouldn't be a very pleasant one, now, would it?"

"No! Rather, I want to know about you, Master!"

The girl's interruption snapped him out of his maze of thoughts, she knew well that once lost she could never pull him back to the start.

"Very well. But what exactly do you want to know about me?"

"...Everything."

"Everything?"

"From how you've lived your life until now, to why you do what you do now, everything. "

"I see....but I'm afraid it doesn't make for a very pleasant story. It may be interesting in parts, but it all leads to an unfortunate end. It's awful, my life. If you listen, you'll surely end up saddened."

"I don't mind!"

As if giving up at the girl's forceful interjections, the man removed his hand from his chin.

Then, he looked up at the ceiling, his unfocused eyes searching for his former self, as he had once been.

"I see. Alright, I'll tell you. But where shall I start? I don't often have occasion to talk about the past, so I'm a bit confused."

"Then start from the very beginning. From when you were born and started to understand things."

"From the very beginning? Hmm...I'll do my best to tell it well. But if you don't find it too interesting, I don't mind if you fall asleep. You might find sleep more interesting than my story."

"I don't fall asleep when someone's talking to me, unlike Master!"

"Hahaha, you're a good girl, aren't you. Now then, let's start."

The man closed his eyes, and the girl leaned forward, listening closely.

"First of all, before I speak of my birth, let us begin with how the world itself was born."

The man began to speak.

A story from the distant, distant past, from the age of myths.

Birth of the Dragon Demon

Once upon a time, there was a lone deity.

Let's call him the Creator.

He was ancient and weary.

Having lived for an unfathomable span of time, he had crafted countless worlds, but now, both his body and spirit had reached their limits.

He knew that his end was near.

For his final act, the Creator decided to make one more world.

But it had been a long time since he last created one.

Was it the long break, or perhaps his growing senility?

The resulting world was warped, poorly balanced.

His ability to create a world had diminished.

However, he had the experience of creating many worlds.

He tried again, crafting another world.

This, too, was a distorted world like the first.

Undaunted, he continued making worlds, one after another.

In this manner, he crafted six worlds.

A world of reversed heavens and earth, inhabited by a powerful race.

A demonic world swirling with poison and miasma, populated by a resilient race.

A bountiful oceanic world, home to a race bearing gills, fins, and scales.

A sky world with floating boulders, where winged beings freely soared.
A human world of plains and grasslands, where a frail but intelligent race resided.

Each one was a twisted world.
Each world was imbalanced, prone to collapse on its own.
So, he connected the worlds.
He closely interlinked the six worlds to achieve balance.
Thus, a single, united world was born.

Yet, the Creator was not satisfied.
Although the six worlds barely maintained balance by being connected, they needed supervision to ensure their stability.
Mustering the last of his strength, the Creator divided his body.

From the divided pieces, he created beings to manage the fragile balance of the connected worlds and placed them in each world.
Then, the Creator died.
What happened to him after death is unknown to anyone.
Perhaps, there was never a Creator to begin with.
No one has ever seen him, after all.

Now, all that remained were the various worlds, races, and six beings.
Being fragments of the Creator, let's call them gods.
The gods descended upon their respective worlds.
Finding their kin within the vast worlds, they endeavored to ensure their races would prosper.

However, not every race in each world thrived without issue.
Particularly the worlds of the powerful race and the resilient race remained primitive for a long time.
With their long lives, incredible strength, and endurance, they managed to survive without developing advanced cultures.

Yet, the worlds of the dragons and the demons were both harsh in their own ways. It wasn't so simple to assert dominion in a world where malevolent dragons and monstrous beasts roamed freely. The dragon and demon clans, though possessed of formidable power, smoldered in their potential, unable to fully claim their rightful place as rulers of these worlds.

A certain god, whether out of pity for their plight or simply out of frustration, proposed an idea: "Why don't we gather regularly and hold a council? We could exchange information about our worlds and use it for our mutual prosperity." This god was the God of Humans, the deity of the human world.

The humans, though short-lived and physically weaker than other races, managed to thrive the fastest. Most wouldn't live past ten years due to illness or injuries. Yet, their world wasn't harsh; it was filled with nature's bounty, overflowing with sustenance. Thus, humans flourished faster than any other race. An appropriate level of hardship birthed wisdom, and their rapid generational turnover enriched their collective knowledge.

And the faster a race prospered, the quicker it accumulated necessary knowledge and wisdom. The God of Humans decided to share this wealth of knowledge with the other gods. Thanks to this, both dragon and demon clans could learn various things, from language and writing to the know-how of community living and the establishment of order. These insights illuminated the lives of these clans, who had been living barely better than beasts, with the light of civilization.

But the exchange was not one-sided. These clans shared their formidable power with the humans as well. The dragon clan taught them how to harness the power within their bodies. The beast clan taught them how to tame and coexist with savage beasts. The sea clan taught them how to filter water and maintain its purity. The sky clan taught them how to interpret the winds and manipulate the weather.

These six worlds helped each other to aim for prosperity. Despite the human world thriving the most due to its high rate of rejuvenation, all worlds were faring well. Every god believed their respective worlds would continue to prosper for tens of thousands of years.

But at that time, no one knew... not the six gods, and likely not even the creator god. An existence had been quietly born on the other side of the world.

The world had been born this way, and tens of thousands of years had passed. But if you look at it now, that era would seem a distant past, like a time of myths from your perspective. During that era, I was in a corner of the demon world. I didn't have a name nor anything else. I was supposed to be a newborn, yet in size I was not so different from now, perhaps slightly smaller. I had a single head, a pair of arms and legs, skin as translucent as white porcelain, and wings on my back.

This corner of the demon world was a deadly land, shrouded in a thick miasma where monstrous beasts lurked. I didn't know it then, but to the demon clan, it was called the edge of the world. And there, in a cave within this desolate corner, I made my nest.

No one knows when I first appeared there.

Not even I do.

By the time I came to awareness, I was in a cave, surviving by feasting on monstrous beasts.

You might think it odd, appearing in such a place out of the blue.

But even if it were so, I have no memory of it, and neither does anyone else, so it can't be helped.

Perhaps I was born in a demon's settlement and was abandoned.

Or perhaps I was born in another world and was transported here.

Strange things had begun to occur within the six sided world at the time, after all.

Regardless of the cause, it wouldn't be odd.

However, when my conscious mind emerged, there was no one nearby.

I did not particularly question this fact.

Because I knew nothing.

I didn't know if there were other people, how they lived, how they talked, how they studied, about magic, anything.

I now fancy myself a bit more knowledgeable than most, but without someone to teach me, that's all I was.

Each day, I would crawl out of the cave with the rising sun, hunt the monstrous beasts, and when my belly was full, I would return to the cave to sleep. Such was the cycle of my life.

These monstrous beasts, they were vicious creatures.

Each one was so large it could be mistaken for a small mountain. They were strong, agile, and they moved in herds.

The pinnacle of the demon world was the demon race.

Yet, even they, when not grouped together, were no match for the monstrous beasts.

But unlike them, I found it easy to prey upon these monstrous beasts.

I would silently stalk them, pounce, wrestle them down, bite and tear into them until they were dead.

All on my own.

Indeed, even then, I had great power.

Power enough to subdue one or two of the monstrous beasts.

But strength alone wouldn't conquer them, I also had cunning.

The cunning to deceive the beasts, to trap them.

Thus, I had no trouble surviving in a corner of the demon world.

I followed my instincts, hunting and eating monstrous beasts, and thought without a doubt that this would be my life until I died.

However, there is a turning point to everything.

One day, I stumbled upon something.

What do you think it was?

It was a family of monstrous beasts.

Lying in wait, preparing to strike, I observed the beasts huddled together, licking each other, frolicking, and playfully nuzzling each other.

It's hard to describe what I felt in that moment.

It was a sensation as though the world had suddenly left me behind, a sense of anxiety and urgency tightening around my heart.

Well, if I were to express it in a single word, it would be loneliness.

I killed and ate that beasts, but my loneliness was not healed.

Even when I returned to my den and lay down, the loneliness didn't fade.

Rather, the more time I spent in the dark cave, the stronger the sense of loneliness grew.

In the darkness, I looked at my own hands and feet.

Hands and feet that were entirely different from those of the beasts.

I was a different creature from the beasts.

But, I had never seen any creature that looked like me.

When I reconfirmed that fact, my sense of loneliness breached its limits.

Restless, I couldn't bear to stay and I rushed outside.

I left my territory and aimlessly wandered.

Along the way, I killed numerous beasts.

There were many types of beasts.

Some had eight limbs, some had three faces, some were composed of small insects gathered together to form a single entity.

But, none of them were like me.

I killed the beasts and continued to wander.

Then, I found it.

A collection of square buildings, surrounded by high walls.

Yes, it was a town.

A demon town.

In that town, there were creatures that looked just like me.

One head, two arms, two legs.

Not everything was exactly the same, there were some differences among individuals, but compared to any of the beasts I had seen so far, these creatures were strikingly similar to me.

There were many of them.

They were living together in groups.

I was delighted.

There were others like me.

I thought this would finally alleviate my unbearable sense of loneliness.

With heart pounding, I approached the town.

But, the first person who noticed me screamed out in alarm.

"Monster!"

In front of a perplexed me, people quickly gathered.

Each of them was armed.

Why, upon seeing me, did they react that way?

At that time, I didn't understand anything.

After all, I had never seen my own appearance.

I didn't realize.

There was something clearly different about my appearance compared to the townspeople.

Claws and fangs?

No, that's not it. There are many demons with claws, with fangs.

These golden eyes?

No, that's not it either. There are no demons with golden eyes, but there are those with a variety of other eye colors.

What they found most malevolent was, in fact, my hair.

Look, you see.

My hair is a mottled pattern of white and green.

Moreover, if you look closely, the pattern appears to move.

You might be accustomed to seeing it, but apparently it unsettles the heart, stirring up ominous and anxious feelings.

That alone was reason enough for them to think of me as a monster.

The people held their weapons, surrounding me with clear hostility and rage.

In response, I tried my best to demonstrate that I was harmless.

I should have run.

But somewhere in my heart, I probably thought it would be okay even if I were attacked.

Them surrounding me with hostility meant they acknowledged that I was stronger.

In fact, I probably could have won if we fought, right?

But such composure only lasted until a certain man appeared.

He was noticeably gigantic, with black skin and six arms.

Yes, he was the Demon King.

He suddenly launched an attack at me.

He was extraordinarily powerful.

I fought back desperately, but was knocked down, my claws shattered, and my wings broken.

No matter how fiercely I resisted, I stood no chance.

Facing an opponent stronger than myself for the first time, I had no option but to flee.

Dragging my injured body, I ran as fast as I could.

There was fear of death.

The thought of being killed, not wanting to die, overwhelmed me.

But there was also sadness.

Sadness that people who looked like me could not accept me.

I dragged my battered body back to my nest.

In the dark, quiet, and damp cave, the sense of loneliness lingered.

Pain, sadness, loneliness.

That was all there was to me.

There was no anger.

Just a single question of 'why?'.

This question swelled, and I found myself repeatedly questioning myself.

But I could not find an answer.

Maybe it was because I couldn't find an answer.

When my wounds healed, I found myself heading back to the settlement.

I knew.

Most likely, the same thing would happen again.

But I couldn't help myself from going.

The loneliness was much more painful than the physical pain.

So, I approached the settlement, gazing at it with longing, then, unable to resist, I drew closer, only to be driven away.

That became a repeating cycle.

At that time, I didn't know, but it seemed I was feared by the demons as the "beast that looks like a human".

It came from my tenacious vitality, which wouldn't let even the Demon King deliver the finishing blow, and the persistence of showing up no matter how many times I was chased away.

And so, tormented by loneliness, I lived for hundreds of years.

But everything comes to an end.

One day, I was mortally wounded.

Not because I had been defeated by the Demon King.

I had lost a battle against a beast.

The opponent was a creature unlike any I had seen before.

Its body was thrice the size of an ordinary beast, yet it moved several times faster, with numerous heads spewing fire and toxic mist. Its power was incomparably greater than any beast I had encountered before.

I say beast, but in truth, it wasn't a demonic beast.

It was a monster.

The monsters of the demon world were far more powerful than the monsters that live around us today.

I was burnt, pierced, beaten down, and barely managed to escape

Usually, returning to my nest, eating something, and sleeping would heal my wounds. But this time, my wounds didn't fully heal, and the blood kept flowing.

It must have been because of the demon's poison.

As I lay my body down in my nest, I came to the realization that I was going to die.

Although I knew nothing, I had a reasonable understanding of death.

I had killed and eaten many beasts so far.

Having witnessed tens of thousands of deaths, I understood what it was.

I knew that when my consciousness faded away and completely ceased, I would die.

And I also that moment was not far away.

I wanted to survive somehow, but there was nothing I could do now.

If it was now, I would have used a detoxification spell, but at that time I knew nothing.

That's when he appeared.

"Hmm. I heard there was a beast in the shape of a man... Very interesting indeed."

From my perspective, it was like I had found a man in my nest.

Without my knowledge, he was standing beside me as I lay there bleeding, looking down at me.

"A mixture of demon and dragon blood. I wonder where and how you were born."

With my fading consciousness, I looked up at him.

He looked just like me.

One head, two arms, two legs.

Wings on his back.

Golden eyes.

Long and sharp fangs and claws.

Indeed, he looked just like me.

The only differences were his silver hair and the fact that his skin was covered in silver scales.

"Is this also due to the influence of the monster?"

Lacking the strength to rise, I just looked at him.

Then, our eyes met.

His gaze was sharp, but strangely warm. I remember it because no one had ever looked at me like that before.

"Well, if the demon god had ignored you until now, I don't think he'll complain if I take you in. There's plenty of use for you..."

Of course, I didn't remember the contents of his words at the time.

But, I remembered the sound of his voice.

I couldn't forget it.

So, when I learned the language later, I realized that's what he had said.

He stood over me, tightly clenching his fist.

Sharp claws pierced the palm of his hand, and red blood began to flow.

The red blood turned into droplets, which fell onto my wounds.

Then, the wounds that had shown no signs of healing quickly closed up.

Once he confirmed that the wounds had disappeared, he took off the cloak he was wearing and wrapped it around me.

As I opened my eyes wide in surprise at the disappearance of the wounds and the pain, he picked me up under his arm and started walking out of the den.

At the entrance of the den, there was the carcass of something huge.

This surprised me once more.

I recognized it.

The creature that had almost killed me.

Now it was lying there, a gruesome corpse.

Presumably, it had followed me here, having inflicted a fatal wound... and then he killed it.

"A monster... It's a relief that they're not so prevalent in my world."

As he said that, my consciousness faded away.

When I awoke again, my surroundings had changed completely.

The poisonous marshes I was accustomed to, the miasma-filled fog, the cracked reddish-brown ground — none of it was there.

What I saw was a mountain.

And it wasn't an ordinary mountain.

It was upside down.

The mountain was growing from the sky.

"!"

For a moment, I thought I was being held upside down.

Or that the being holding me was moving upside down.

But it wasn't like that.

The gravity pulling on me was definitely directed downwards.

Without a doubt, there was a mountain above me.

Looking down, I saw the sky.

A clear, blue sky and white clouds stretched out endlessly.

Of course, I didn't realize it was the sky at first.

The sky in the demon world was always grey.

Then I realized that I was flying through this sky.

No, it was not me.

It was the person who was holding me.

Yes, the man who had wrapped me in his cloak and taken me away was holding me as he flew.

"Awake, are you? Don't flail about."

As he noticed that I had awakened, the man said this.

As someone who had never spoken, I didn't understand what he meant.

But I do remember feeling terrified by the expanse of sky beneath me.

I huddled myself up tightly.

Satisfied, the man increased his speed.

And so we flew through the sky for a while.

It was a monotonous sight of mountains and sky, but to me, it was all new and fascinating to me.

The man offered no explanations, and I myself had no knowledge to draw from.

Still, I had a vague sense that I had come to a place different from the world I had been living in until now. Not a lonely world where I was driven away even when I ventured into the settlement, but a different world entirely.

Probably, I could never go back.

With this thought, my dark, damp den of the past seemed slightly nostalgic, but I quickly painted over that memory with the sight surrounding me. It wasn't a place worth being nostalgic about, after all.

After a while, an exceptionally large mountain came into view.

A mountain so high...its peak was out of sight.

As we got close enough for that mountain to fill my entire field of vision, the man silently flapped his wings, lowering our altitude.

Was there something below?

As I wondered and looked down, I could see something halfway up the mountain.

It was something I couldn't describe with my limited knowledge, but if I had known, I would have probably called it a "landing platform".

A stone slab protruded from the mountain's flank, leading into a large, open-mouthed entrance to the mountain.

The scaffold made of rock and timber was clearly artificial.

As we got even closer, I could see that there were several people on the scaffold.

They looked exactly like the man.

They were creatures with wings, scales, fangs, claws, and golden eyes.

"It's the Dragon God!"

"The Dragon God has returned!"

"Everyone, prepare for the welcoming!"

...Yes, his true identity was the Dragon God.

He was the king of the dragon tribe, ruling over the world of dragons.

As soon as they spotted the figure of the Dragon God, they erupted into a flurry of activity.

In no time, they lined up on the large central platform, awaiting the Dragon God's descent.

A crowd of beings.

At their sight, I huddled up again.

Memories of being driven away by the Demon King in the Demon World resurfaced.

I thought I might be attacked again.

"Welcome back!"

But, contrary to my expectations, they didn't attack.

When the Dragon God alighted, the individuals gathered in line, crossed their fists in front of their chests and folded their wings tightly.

Their faces were filled with pride, and joy.

It was a look I had never seen before, but I could tell that there was no hostility in it.

"Welcome back, Dragon God."

Among such people, there was one man who stood out a little.

He was slightly larger than those who had lined up, and the aura he exuded was different.

His scales had a hint of green to them, lending him a calm demeanor.

However, his eyes were the true reflection of his spirit.

In his golden eyes, like those around him, a fleeting fragility flickered, harboring a firm resolve to see something through to the end.

At a glance, I knew he was the leader of this flock.

But of course he was not the apex there, the Dragon God was.

As the Dragon God approached, he crossed his fists in front of his chest and folded his wings.

It was the dragon tribe's highest salute.

"How was the council this time?"

"Szilard, eh? There's been no progress. How was it here in my absence?"

"Nothing has changed here either. However, there have been two incidents involving demons."

"How many died?"

"Three. Two in the first incident, one in the second. Minor losses... What is that?"

The man called Szilard noticed me in the Dragon God's arms.

"I picked it up on the outskirts of the Demon World. It's a half-blood of the demon and dragon tribes."

"I've heard no stories of a dragon crossing into the Demon World?"

"The monster incidents might be related."

"I see. What do you plan to do?"

"I'll raise it."

As the Dragon God declared so, Szilard glared intently at me.

He must have been wary of a child with such ominous hair. However, he didn't speak against the Dragon God's decision.

Among the dragon tribe, he revered and trusted the Dragon God especially. He would not find fault with his actions.

He stepped back, as if to show his understanding, and uncrossed his fists.

Without saying anything more, the Dragon God entered the interior of the mountain from the landing.

With me in his arms, of course.

We walked through a dimly lit square passageway.

My common sense said the deeper one ventured into a cave, the darker and narrower it would become.

But contrary to my expectations, the end of the passage opened up to a great cavity.

This hollow was supported by several thick columns, and various round buildings clung to the floor, ceiling, and columns.

Moreover, there was a strong source of light in the middle of the columns, making the inside of the cave as bright as day.

And between the round buildings, people with wings were fluttering about.

Yes, it was a town.

The heart of the mountain had been hollowed out and turned into a town.

The Dragon God spread his wings and took off.

People were flying around in the town, but when they spotted the Dragon God, they stopped in their tracks and crossed their arms in front of their chests.

Without acknowledging them, the Dragon God kept flying.

It was soon clear where he was heading.

It was the largest building at the very back of the town.

From a distance, it looked like a simple round structure, but as we got closer, it became clear that intricate reliefs were carved all over the building.

The Dragon God alighted on a platform that protruded slightly near the center of the building.

He then walked unhesitatingly inside.

The inside was as spacious as it appeared from the outside.

A large hall, a bedroom, a corridor.

All of them were more luxurious than anything I had ever seen.

The Dragon God descended the stairs in silence.

There was no hesitation in his movements.

He seemed to have a destination in mind.

Eventually, he stopped in front of a certain room.

He stopped, but only for a few seconds.

After a moment's hesitation, as if remembering something, The Dragon God tapped on the door.

Two light knocks.

Then he opened the door.

"I'm back."

"Welcome home, husband."

Into my sight came a soft-looking bed, a wooden table, a leather-covered chair, and a human sitting on the chair.

It was a woman.

She looked nothing like the people at the landing or those flying around the town.

Her skin was white with a slight flush, and without scales, it looked soft.

She had no wings and no tail.

She had neither sharp teeth nor claws.

And her belly was slightly swollen.

She was of a race i did not recognize.

"Um, who's this child?"

"A child between a dragon and a demon. I found him dying on the edge of the demon realm."

"Oh, is that so... Are you going to raise him?"

"That's the plan."

"Then, he will be your adopted child."

"Is there a problem with that?"

"No, everything is as per the Dragon God's will."

The Dragon God placed me in the room and turned on his heel.

But the woman immediately called out to him.

"Um, Master, does this child have a name?"

At her words, the Dragon God turned around, shook his head with a troubled look.

"No."

"You can't do that. You should give him a proper name. It's customary for the father to name the child."

"Even one I found?"

"Yes."

At her words, the man looked down at me.

I looked up at the Dragon God, waiting for his next words.

"...Laplace. Your name is Laplace."

Of course, I didn't understand him then.

It was the first time I had a genuine exchange of words with someone.

But I could understand that a very important word for me had just been spoken by the man in front of me.

"A, Ap... La, P, La, Ce"

That's why I repeated it desperately.

I repeated the word, my name, so that I would never forget it.

And thus, I—Laplace was born.

Member of the Flock

Laplace.

That's the name I was given.

The place I was brought to was the dragon realm.

It was a world as harsh as the demon realm, if not more so.

In this world, mountains soared to the heavens, and skies sprawled across the earth.

At the foot of these skyward mountains, countless enormous dragons who couldn't fly inhabited the land.

Yet, the sky wasn't safe either - the sky was teeming with gargantuan dragons soaring about.

Small wingless creatures have no choice but to live in slender little groups on the mountainsides where they hang like icicles.

However, even in such a world, a race of men were the rulers.

They were a race called the Dragon Race.

They had wings and sharp claws, flew freely through the sky, wielded formidable power, and hunted dragons in packs.

That was their way.

Nevertheless, they weren't rulers from the beginning.

Once, they too were weak.

They were nothing more than creatures living furtively in the caves halfway up the mountains, hiding from the giant dragons.

What changed their fate was a single man.

Yes, it was the Dragon God.

One day, the Dragon God appeared before the dragon clan who lived in fear of the dragons.

And he demonstrated his power, showing them how to harness the strength sleeping within the Dragon Clan.

The Dragon Clan harbored a potent force known as Dragon Touki.

By using Dragon Touki, the Dragon Clan could greatly enhance their physical abilities and harden their skin.

With it they could pierce through even the sturdy body of a dragon with a single strike.

While other species also possessed similar powers, the power of the Dragon Clan surpassed them all.

It was the ultimate strength.

Once the Dragon God taught them how to draw out and use this power, the Dragon Clan became the rulers.

They joined forces, increased their numbers, and began to hunt dragons.

They stood at the top of the food chain.

And then they built a town centered around the Dragon God, exchanged information with other worlds, developed various cultures, and flourished.

However, in terms of civilization level, it was similar to the Demon Tribe... compared to this world now, it was not very advanced.

They were so strong that they could survive without advancing their civilization.

A world where there was no need to worry about external threats.

A world where someone would always provide food, so there was no need to feel the urgency of hunger.

For me at that time, the notion of peace was an entirely unknown world.

■

I was given a room in the Dragon God's mansion.

The mansion was particularly opulent, even within the Dragon Realm.

It had numerous rooms, with many servants working there.

I was given a small, simple room.

But it was much more comfortable than the cave I had previously inhabited.

After all, it was equipped with everything I needed: bedding, food, clothing.

The mansion was spacious, and there were many servants.

However, there weren't many humans to serve.

Only the Dragon God and his wife, Lunaria.

Perhaps due to her pregnancy, Lunaria hardly ever left the house.

The Dragon God was often away, only returning once every few days. But whenever he returned, he always made sure to appear before her.

She was treasured as if she were a precious gem.

Many others in the Dragon Clan seemed to admire this treasured lady, for she had many visitors.

Every day, someone would visit, converse with her, share a meal, and then depart.

That said, the time when there were no guests was longer than the time when there were.

During such times, Lunaria would often stay by my side.

"If the Dragon God has adopted you, then you are my child, and this is your home. Please make yourself comfortable," she would say.

She decided to raise me, following the Dragon God's words.

However, she didn't really do anything for me.

She would simply visit my room, sit next to me in the corner of the room, and look at me with an expression full of love.

As a demi-goddess and of noble birth, she had no concept of "educating" someone.

Mostly, it was the servants who took care of me.

The servants, following Lunaria's words, treated me like a prince.

They served meals, bathed and cleaned me, and helped me change my clothes.

However, unfortunately, whether it was the manners of eating, bathing, or wearing clothes, all of these were completely new to me.

I was scolded to use tableware at meal times, shrieked when my skin was scrubbed with a hard brush intended for the Dragon Clan during baths, and I would move so vigorously in clothes that I'd tear them apart almost immediately.

Upon seeing me struggle with these unfamiliar customs, the servants furrowed their brows and scolded me, as if they were training a dog. But Lady Lunaria was different.

"No, you should not get angry. Despite his large body, he is akin to a baby. Let us raise him slowly, step by step."

Upon saying this to the servants, she had them provide me with easier-to-use utensils, arrange for a softer brush suitable for my scale-less skin, and replace my clothes with those made of a more stretchable material.

Such consideration made it clear that Lady Lunaria welcomed me. Just as the Dragon God had told her, she treated me as if I were her own child. Even though she was soon to give birth to her own child, she welcomed me, a stranger from who knows where, as if I were her own. Even now, thinking back, I am almost moved to tears by the breadth of Lady Lunaria's kindness and the magnitude of her love.

"Even though the Dragon God brought him here, he is just..."

"He is no better than a beast..."

However, the servants couldn't quite see it that way. They weren't happy about my presence. My hair was more ominous than any creature they had ever seen, and it was clear that my body harbored a violent power. They probably thought that I would eventually reveal my true nature and attack Lady Lunaria.

But the servants were also part of the Dragon Clan. They could not go against the wishes of the Dragon God or Lady Lunaria. Even if they weren't pleased, they obediently followed

orders. They were ready to become a shield and protect Lady Lunaria from me if the situation arose. I think they served Lady Lunaria and watched over me with such strong determination.

Hmm? What did I do? Well, I thought I was doing quite a lot in my own way. Fundamentally, I spent my time watching Lady Lunaria closely. Of course, it wasn't with the intention of attacking her; rather, I was intent on protecting her.

I might not have had knowledge, but I had wisdom. I clearly understood who had healed my fatal injuries and rescued me from my lonely existence. I knew that this was the nest of the person who had saved me, that the people around me were his flock, and that I had become a part of that flock. And I had sworn in my heart that I had to protect this woman, his mate.

However, becoming part of a flock was a first for me.

As a member of the flock, I did what I could. Every day, I would walk around the mansion, making sure everything was in order. I would check each room and look out of every window. In this way, I ensured over and over again that there was no intrusion from outside enemies. This was wisdom I had acquired back when I was a "demon in the shape of a man," when I had fought against demons. If you check your territory daily for anomalies, you naturally become aware of any dangers.

When I say "outside enemies," of course, I do not mean guests. I understood that the master of my flock was also the master of this whole region. The most respected ones showed respect. If they were capable of that, they were not an enemy.

In this way, I protected Lady Lunaria and the mansion. I never left the mansion. As if to say that the mission of someone who had been picked up like me was to protect this nest, I devoted myself to my work.

Do I sound like a watchdog? Please don't say that. While I understood what a flock was, I didn't know what I should do. But honestly, around this time, I might have thought of myself as some sort of pet.

There was Lunaria, there was me, and while the servants were wary of me, they never neglected their duties and faithfully continued their work. Occasionally, the Dragon God would return, speak to Lunaria, and observe my situation. These scenes became commonplace.

And like that, a year went by in the blink of an eye.

A year.

It may seem like a long time, but for us, who have lived for tens of thousands of years, it is as fleeting as two or three days. It wouldn't have been strange if hundreds of years passed like this.

But that did not happen.

Perhaps the Dragon God pitied me, loyally acting like a watchdog, or maybe he thought I wouldn't be useful as I was...

The Dragon God decided to assign me an educator.

"Ho, so you're the child the Dragon God brought back, I've heard rumors about your ominous hair!"

The one who arrived was quite a fiery character. One day, they stomped right into the Dragon God's mansion, and upon reaching me, quietly tucked away in a corner of the mansion, they began hounding me with words.

"I was ordered by the Dragon God to be in charge of your education, and I plan to fulfill this responsibility. I won't discriminate against you for being a mixed-blood with the demon clan. I will treat you as a mere dragon without scales."

The educator was a woman, a dragonkin with remarkably large wings and beautiful white scales. She continued to bombard me with words without caring about my bewilderment.

Of course, her words didn't get through to me, who didn't understand them. After all, I still couldn't comprehend the dragonkin language. Lady Lunaria had raised me, but she didn't teach me anything. It might seem repetitive, but she was akin to a royal; she probably never considered doing such a thing herself. The servants were the same. Teaching words to someone who couldn't understand them wasn't included in their duties.

"Uuu..."

I let out a growl and tried to intimidate the woman. I thought she was an enemy because she intruded brazenly into the mansion and was spreading hostility towards me, who was, though a lower-ranking one, a member of the flock.

"Ha-ha! A good face indeed! But you must obey me absolutely! I will not allow defiance!"

Nevertheless, I did not attack her.

"Uaaaaaa!"

At first, I only let out a loud yell. If I raised my voice, I could alert the entire flock to danger. If the flock decided to fight upon receiving the alert, good; if they decided to flee, I would hold back the enemy. I believed it was my duty as the lowest in the flock to do so.

"Come on, let's do this! First, I will knock you down to make you understand your position!"

"Guuuuu..."

Against the woman's continuous provocation, I remained still. That's because there was a movement inside the mansion after hearing my voice. The members of the flock were coming closer. Lady Lunaria and the servants. I decided to wait for them first.

"Ah, you won't attack? A sign of wisdom or timidity...?"

"What's going on!?"

The first ones to arrive were the servants. Upon seeing them, I thought my comrades had come, preparations for battle were complete, and I was ready to strike first. The chances of winning would increase if everyone attacked one person at once. It was wisdom from my days in the demon world, a universal law that still holds true today.

"So... you've finally revealed your true nature!"

However, the servants did not move as I had anticipated. Instead of surrounding the woman, they surrounded me, rejecting me who had bared my claws and fangs with hostility.

"Uuu...?"

I didn't understand why. I was supposed to be a member of the servant's flock. After all, they had given me food. Yet, they directed their hostility not at the external enemy we should be fighting but at me.

Well, they were wary of me from the start, so it was only natural, I suppose.

Anyway, as I was struck with a strong shock, I remembered the loneliness I once felt. I felt saddened, thinking, am I to be alone even here?

"What are you all doing?"

A calm, clear voice echoed in the room. It was Lady Lunaria. As she entered the room with slow, graceful strides and saw me baring my teeth and claws surrounded by the servants, she frowned. Honestly, I thought she would react the same way as the servants.

"Lady Lunaria, it's dangerous. Please step back."

"What's so dangerous?"

Lady Lunaria slipped through the servants and came running towards me. The servants didn't have time to stop her. No, they tried to stop her, but Lunaria slipped through them like a mirage.

Truth be told, I didn't know the extent of her powers... but she wasn't the wife of the Dragon God for nothing.

She gently embraced my frightened self and, while sending accusatory glances at the surrounding crowd, she spoke,

"Seems like you've all forgotten the words of the Dragon God who asked you to take care of this child?"

"We... apologize!"

The servants immediately crossed their fists over their chests and folded their wings.

I remember this moment well, because I had never been shielded by anyone in this manner before.

But this was exactly what I had been longing for. I yearned for help, to be helped, to live a life where we protect each other. Hence, even after I learned about Lunaria's origins later, my anger and resentment never turned towards her. Even now, I respect and revere her.

Well, let's put that aside. Seeing the servants in their subdued state, Lunaria let out a sigh of relief and turned her gaze towards the woman.

"Dragon General, what are you doing here? What business do you have at my estate?"

The one referred to as Dragon General also crossed her fists and folded her wings in front of Lunaria. However, unlike the servants, she did not seem subdued.

"I have been appointed by the Dragon God to be Laplace's mentor!"

At her words, Lady Lunaria was momentarily taken aback. But she must have heard about it; her attitude softened almost immediately.

"I apologize for my earlier comment. So, all this commotion is because Laplace wouldn't listen to you?"

"That's correct. But there's no issue. I am used to handling unruly charges."

As she unabashedly stated this, Lady Lunaria let out a sigh of relief. Then, she gently stroked my confused wings and rose to her feet.

"Laplace, make sure you learn properly."

With those words, Lady Lunaria left the room with her light, airy steps. The servants followed her. And then, only I and the woman were left in the room.

"Now, let's continue, you coward."

...

As if to pick up from where we had left off, she taunted me. She directed her fingers towards me, wiggling them enticingly. A literal invitation to attack.

I later learned that when she was tasked with teaching someone, she always started by establishing a hierarchy. She would brazenly talk down to them, and if they retaliated, she'd knock them down into submission. If she did that, they would listen. It was particularly effective with creatures and children who couldn't understand things. In fact, she had tamed a Red Dragon using this method.

In hindsight, it's probably why she was chosen to be my mentor. There was likely no one else who could educate a wild child from the Demon Realm like her.

But, did I play into her hands as she expected? Not exactly. I didn't bear my fangs or unsheathe my claws, I simply stared at her. I didn't growl or raise my voice. I silently kept listening to her.

"What's wrong? Got scared by what just happened? Stand up!"

She got impatient and roughly grabbed my arm to get me to stand. But I didn't change. I didn't even resist. I just got up and kept staring up at her, as if waiting for her next instruction.

You see, I had already understood from the previous exchange that she wasn't an enemy. And I had also guessed that she held a pretty high rank within the group. So, when I, being a low-ranking member, raised my voice and threatened her, it made sense that the others got angry. I was even remorseful.

"Hmph, you've got a pathetic look on your face."

Usually, she would have beaten me for being as feckless as I was, but this time, perhaps she understood that doing so would have the opposite effect. With a sigh, she released my arm.

"Show me respect and obedience. I will not teach you lies. Consider everything I say as the truth and strive to understand it from the bottom of your heart. I will not tolerate complaints, and I won't let you say you can't do it. That's a waste of time. But I won't cut corners. I will definitely raise you to be a full-fledged dragon knight."

Crossing her arms, her wings flapping, she looked down at me and declared this proudly. It was indeed haughty, but that was her. She made grandiose declarations, but she always fulfilled them. She was an amazing woman.

"I'll have you know, being able to learn from one of the Five Dragon Generals, such as myself, is an honor. You may not understand the concept of honor, but someday you'll appreciate learning the ways of the world from me."

She paused for a few seconds after saying this. At that time, I didn't understand, but it seems she intended to introduce herself that day, and only apply the bare minimum discipline before leaving.

Minimum discipline for her, of course, was to hurt you until you couldn't move anymore. Beasts don't comprehend from being beaten just once or twice. They must be hurt

repeatedly, so that when they see you, they reflexively understand that resistance is futile, and they're in for pain.

So if I was obedient from the start, there was probably nothing for her to do.

"I'll come again tomorrow. Keep up this attitude, understand!"

With that, she turned on her heel to leave. But there was something I had to convey to her. I made a certain gesture towards her turned back.

And then, she moved at an astonishing speed. By the time my brain registered that she had moved, her piercing strike had already stopped short of my temple.

Perhaps she had assumed I was a cunning creature, only pretending to be obedient, ready to strike as soon as she turned her back. As you know, there are many demons like that. She must have intended to deflect my attack the moment she turned around and counter with a full-powered blow to my face.

But it stopped just short.

"...?"

A pose with crossed fists and folded wings. Yes, it was the utmost form of respect among the dragonkind.

"Ah, Ap... La... Laplace."

That was all I could muster. There were no other words I knew how to say. Oh, by the way, I barely understood what she had been saying either.

"...Dora. I am Dora, a Dragon General of the Shell Dragons. Remember it well."

Dora.

That was the name she gave.

As if she just realized that she hadn't introduced herself before.

"Do-ra."

So, I remembered it.

The first thing I learned from her, my appointed tutor, was her name.

And so, from the next day, my education under Dragon General Dora began.

Dragon Clan Training

For the first year, Lady Dora taught me nothing but language. Without it, I would not have been able to learn anything else. According to her estimate, it would take about ten years to fully master the language. This was based on the time it generally took to train a wild Red Dragon to understand the language of the Dragon Tribe. Having grown up in a world estranged from language, I was expected to take about the same time.

But contrary to Lady Dora's estimation, my ability to learn was exceptional. Rather than learning ability, perhaps it was more accurate to say I had an innate eagerness to learn. I memorized every single word from Lady Dora, repeated them in practice, and strived to understand their meanings. Like a sponge starved for water, I absorbed knowledge, mastering the language of the Dragon Clan in less than a year.

Once that was accomplished, everything else moved swiftly. Lady Dora taught me the common knowledge necessary for any member of the Dragon Clan: writing, history, the world, status, hierarchy, manners, industry.

"—There are mountains up above, and sky down below. At the foot of these mountains, Earth Dragons dwell, while Red and Blue Dragons make their nests near the peak and inhabit them."

"Yes."

"The difference between the habitats of the Red and Blue Dragons lies in whether they are above or below the clouds. Blues fly lower. They descend to the mountains only once every few centuries, during the mating season. Red Dragons are more ferocious and territorial. They are the ones we, who live midway up the mountain, fight and prey upon."

"Yes, but that's an old story."

"Right. The 'fight' with the Red Dragons was a thing of the past. Now, they are merely hunted and eaten. Some are even domesticated."

"And you, Lady Dora, are in charge of that domestication."

"That's right. You remember well. Do you have any questions up to this point?"

"Yes. What's below the sky?"

"There's said to be a gigantic black serpent down there, feasting on fallen corpses. I've never seen it myself."

Lady Dora would teach me anything I asked. If she didn't know or hadn't seen something, she would say so, but would always provide detailed explanations within her scope of knowledge. Sometimes, for things she didn't know but felt I should, she would learn them herself to teach me.

Usually, Lady Dora probably wouldn't have been so diligent in her teaching. However, she was the most loyal among the Five Dragon Generals. To her, cutting corners on a task directly assigned by the Dragon God was unacceptable.

As a tutor, she was without peer. Looking back now, being taught by Lady Dora was an honor in itself. The Dragon God must have had high expectations of me.

Thanks to her, I was able to acquire a complete knowledge of the Dragon Realm.

What kind of knowledge did I gain, you ask? Well, there's a lot, and it's difficult to explain it all at once...

First, where we were.

It's the most colossal mountain, situated right in the center of the Dragon Realm, named Dragon Roar Mountain.

Hmm? You say it shares the same name as the mountain we inhabit?

Well, indeed, for I was the one who named this mountain. But let's set that aside for now.

The city in the hollowed-out center of Dragon Roar Mountain was called Kayos.

It was basically the capital of the Dragon Race.

All of my tribe lived there, so it was heavily populated.

Starting with the Dragon God's residence, it also holds numerous important establishments, including administrative and postal offices, a library, a research institute, stables, food stores, and a base for dragon knights.

Of course, the Dragon Clan doesn't reside solely on Ryumei Mountain. There are 122 towns scattered across the world, each home to members of the Dragon Clan. Compared to Keioos of Ryumei Mountain, every other town is a small settlement. However, in the Dragon Realm, teeming with dangerous dragons, the concept of a "small settlement" does not exist. Every settlement holds enough force to annihilate a nest of Red Dragons; if they didn't, they would be destroyed by a coordinated attack from the Red Dragons.

Hmm?

Does it not sound mythological?

From what you've heard, it doesn't seem to differ much from the towns of today?

Even so, by the time I arrived, this was already the way things were. The way these towns were constructed was mostly drawn from the knowledge of humans. Even before the council of the gods took place, all parts of the world were probably similar. But let's leave that for now.

The Dragon God bestows boundless love upon all of the Dragon Clan and aims to protect them. However, with 122 towns, it's impossible to protect them all. The Dragon God is all-loving, but not omniscient nor omnipotent. There are places that escape His gaze.

Therefore, the Dragon God appointed five individuals, each possessing significant power within the Dragon Clan, as Dragon Generals, and tasked them with the protection of the entire world. These are the Five Dragon Generals.

From the Saint Dragon Tribe, Dragon General Szilard.

From the Dark Dragon Tribe, Dragon General Maxwell.

From the Mad Dragon Tribe, Dragon General Chaos.

From the Sturdy Dragon Tribe, Dragon General Crystal.

From the Armored Dragon Tribe, Dragon General Dora.

They, on behalf of the busy Dragon God, protected the Dragon Clan.

The Five Dragon Generals pledged absolute loyalty to the Dragon God, and in return, the Dragon God trusted them and assigned them important tasks. Even as the Dragon Clan had grown in numbers and their protection was not as necessary, this structure remained unchanged. In fact, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say their bonds had deepened even further.

Among the Five Dragon Generals, Lady Dora was said to be particularly dedicated in her loyalty. Lady Dora herself took great pride in this reputation. She wished that not only her own clan but all Dragon Clans would possess the same level of loyalty as her. There was no reason for it. It was simply an imposition of her own preferences. But she believed, with absolute certainty, that it was the right thing.

"If you too have had your life saved by the Dragon God, you should devote your entire life, without reservation, for his sake."

And so, she taught me the same. Every time the opportunity presented itself, she reiterated this lesson.

"Yes, Lady Dora. We exist for the sake of the Dragon God."

Of course, I readily agreed. Even if her teachings bordered on indoctrination, I was already committed to that path. I haven't forgotten the loneliness in the Demon Realm, the despair when I was on the brink of death, and the day I was saved from it.

"Hehe, you are by far the best student I've ever had."

Lady Dora was satisfied seeing the overflowing loyalty within me. Most would grow irritated at Lady Dora's repeated emphasis on this point, eventually responding with "I get it already, why repeat it so often?" Of course, they too weren't neglecting the Dragon God. Every member of the Dragon Clan revered the Dragon God and pledged loyalty.

But for Lady Dora, "stop repeating yourself" was a sign of disloyalty. If true loyalty exists, one should be able to express it verbally, anytime, anywhere. Just like me.

Oh yes, it was then that I was also taught about Lady Lunaria.

Yes, it was then that I was taught about Lady Lunaria as well.

"Lady Lunaria is the wife of the Dragon God. I've heard she's the daughter of a God from another world called the Human God. But I don't know the details."

Lady Lunaria was a woman brought by the Dragon God, about a thousand years ago by human reckoning. For Lady Dora and her contemporaries, it doesn't feel so long ago. One day, the Dragon God suddenly arrived with Lady Lunaria and declared that she would become his wife. Why the Dragon God chose a wife from a different race, rather than from the Dragon Clan, is unknown. He never explained himself.

Of course, there were those who were dissatisfied. They wondered why he didn't choose one from among them. There were many women within the Dragon Clan who would be a suitable bride for the Dragon God. Lady Dora herself was probably one of them.

However, Lady Dora did not dispute her not being chosen. She said this:

"The Dragon God must have his own reasons. The Dragon God always acts in consideration of the welfare of the Dragon Clan. Even if there are things we don't understand, they are for the future of the Dragon Clan. It's not for us to question."

Do you think that's blind faith? If so, that's because you don't understand the nature of her loyalty.

Let's get back to Lady Lunaria.

Of course, the period when Lady Lunaria was estranged from the Dragon Clan is long past. Voices of discontent had simmered down after about a hundred years since her arrival. That's because Lady Lunaria was a being full of love, akin to a goddess. Somehow, anyone who conversed with her would feel a sense of warmth. Somehow, it felt as if everything could be forgiven. Upon talking to her, everyone seemed able to accept her as the Dragon God's wife.

I also held a distinct fondness for Lady Lunaria, quite apart from my loyalty. I hadn't forgotten how she had protected me a year ago. She had indeed welcomed me. It might have been on the Dragon God's orders, and her words might have been few, but she didn't think ill of me and took care of me. Because of her, I decided not only to become attached to the Dragon God but also wished to protect the flock and the house they inhabit. I never managed to say it, and to say it out loud might be disrespectful... but she was like a mother to me.

...Regardless, in such manner, I absorbed more and more knowledge about the dragon realm. By the time about five years had passed, there was hardly anything I didn't know. Of course, there were many things I hadn't actually seen, so it might not be accurate to say I truly knew everything.

As I learned the language and amassed knowledge, Lady Dora began to take me outside.

The town bustling with many dragon folk was vibrant, and it excited me. Stepping into the heart of the town was a dream I'd had many times while living in the underworld.

The expansive spaces, numerous homes, bustling shops, and squares with various events – all were a novelty to me.

Of course, the dragons passing by on the streets did not exactly welcome me. They frowned at the sight of my ominous hair, never approaching.

However, no one ever harbored animosity towards me, encircled me, or tried to drive me out of town.

The information that I was a child brought by the Dragon God had already spread, but above all, it was because Lady Dora was with me. Whenever they saw Lady Dora, they uniformly clenched their fists and crossed them in front of their chests.

I would not be expelled. Knowing this, I was overwhelmed with a desire to explore my surroundings. What was that large building visible in the distance? What was inside? Although I had just been taught in words and thus had some knowledge, everything was unfamiliar to me in reality. My curiosity was insatiable.

Guided by my curiosity, I looked around restlessly and asked various questions.

"Lady Dora! What is that?"

"That's a clothing store."

"Lady Dora, what about that?"

"That's the East Square. It seems they're performing a play today."

"Lady Dora, there are people flying with weapons."

"Those are Dragon Knights. The weapons are made by Chaos."

Lady Dora answered all of them carefully. Even for things that were self-evident, she responded to every question. If it were me, I would have silenced it midway.

"Lady Dora, I'd like to see inside that building!"

"I can't allow that now. We've arrived."

Lady Dora halted her wings at a certain spot and descended to the ground. It was a vast square, over a hundred meters in radius.

In the square, large dragon-kin were grappling in pairs. Some of them noticed Lady Dora and saluted her respectfully. In response, Lady Dora elegantly acknowledged them, set me down, and faced me.

Lady Dora, this is a training ground, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

A training ground. A place where the Dragon Clan's soldiers honed their bodies.

"Dragons must be strong. Especially you, who were picked up by the Dragon God, must triumph over any entity that threatens the Dragon God. Is this not true?"

"It's true!"

"A good answer! Then you must understand what needs to be done here!"

"Yes!"

Following the acquisition of knowledge was combat training. For the dragon-tribe, who were faced with fierce dragons as soon as they set foot outside the town, knowing how to fight was of paramount importance, second only to language. Hence, both males and females of the Dragon Clan, upon reaching a certain age, learn to fight.

...Well, to tell the truth, there is one more important thing between language and fighting, and normal dragon-kin children learn that first.

Let's put that aside for now.

"Alright, come at me! I'll teach you how dragons fight!"

Lady Dora took a stance in front of me. She lowered her waist, turned to her side, positioned her arms to hide her waist and centerline, drew her wings back and aligned them to be ready to fly at any moment.

I, in turn, imitated her posture.

Suddenly, a reprimand flew from Lady Dora, making me shudder in response.

"Who asked you to get into a stance! I said come at me! If I say come at me, you must bare your fangs and try to kill me!"

Ah... even now when I remember, those were harsh words.

She taught fighting by first training the fighting spirit.

At first, she would never teach the finer points of technique.

The most important thing in a battle is the will to kill the opponent...

Most dragons, when faced with such a statement from Lady Dora, would be perplexed. The thought of killing Lady Dora would seem impossible.

However, I was fortunate to be different. At her words, I let go of my stance and dropped to all fours, the same style I adopted when living in the Demon World. My eyes, focused on Lady Dora my instructor, decided she was the enemy before me, an opponent to be killed and eaten.

Was there any doubt? None at all. I knew what fighting was. On top of that, Lady Dora had commanded it. Therefore, I only had to obey.

"That's right, come."

Lady Dora faced my murderous intent head on.

"Hmph...!"

Bending my limbs, I launched myself at Lady Dora. I aimed for her throat, the shortest distance. However, between my body and Lady Dora's throat was her arm. If I charged straight ahead, Lady Dora would thrust her penetrating hand towards me. My defeat would be inevitable.

So I moved my wings, making a sharp turn that seemingly defied the laws of inertia—a feint.

I had been fighting fierce beasts that dwelled in the Demon World. I had been constantly battling opponents who couldn't be won against by just charging straight on. Therefore, these maneuvers were second nature to me.

Maintaining my orientation towards Lady Dora while sharply turning, I kicked the ground and attacked Lady Dora again. This time, I charged from the flank. The throat I aimed for laid exposed, absent the shield of an arm. My fangs would rip Lady Dora's throat apart, ending her life.

"Gahh!"

But by the time I realized it, I was yelping like a dog and flying through the air. I tumbled and rolled on the ground, and although I instantly got up, my shoulder was throbbing with intense pain. Looking, I saw a hole in my shoulder from which red blood was flowing.

And there was Lady Dora, continuing her stance, facing me. Me, who should have circled around to her side, was now straight ahead of her. I couldn't understand what had happened, and as I confusedly dealt with the pain in my shoulder, Lady Dora declared.

"What's wrong! Are you finished?! Move or I'll kill you!"

I bared my teeth. I didn't know what had happened, but the fight wasn't over yet. Suddenly, I felt an impact, and I was thrown backwards.

As I rolled and lifted my face, I saw Lady Dora in the place where I had just been. The moment I confirmed this, the sand at her feet swirled up into the air. She had moved with impossible speed and thrust me away.

Honestly, I knew at this point that I had no chance of winning. But I didn't let my spirit wane and got on all fours, ready to attack. I had to attack.

".....!"

I steadied my breath and silently attacked. There were no battle cries. Being always alone, I had no habit of intimidating my opponent. All I did was silently pounce and silently devour my enemies. That was my only strength.

"Gah!"

However, this one strength of mine was being crushed by Lady Dora. She was facing me. As always, she had not let go of her stance and pointed her penetrating hand at me. She seemed to be doing nothing. That's how it appeared to me. But in reality, it was different. Lady Dora was reacting to my movements. She didn't fall for my feint, used her wings to change direction in an instant, and with that penetrating hand, she had pierced me.

"What's the matter?! Fight! Keep Fighting! Fight until you die! I'm going to kill you!"

As she cursed foully, Lady Dora's attacks continued. Each time I got up, some part of my limbs were gouged, and blood spurted out.

"Alright, come on! When a dragon's scales are peeled off, they just grow back stronger! You may not have scales, but it's the same! Become stronger!"

I didn't give up. Every time I was pierced, every time I was blown away, I got up and faced Lady Dora. Why did I do that? Because Lady Dora told me to. I was merely being obedient, doing as my instructor said.

This combat training continued until I passed out.

The next lesson came a few days after the combat training began. That day, as usual, I was beaten and left unconscious. Usually, when I woke up, I was in my room in the mansion of the Dragon God.

"Wake up, hey, wake up!"

However, the place I woke up that day was slightly different.

"From this day forth, after training for battle, you will be doing something else until nightfall."

It was neither the circular training ground covered with sand nor my room with only a place to sleep.

It was a gentle slope.

On the slope there were several scaffolds that looked like jumping platforms, where children much smaller than me jumped up with a little help, flapped their wings, and fell to the ground.

They were falling from a height that seemed to be about four or five meters, but they too were from the dragon tribe. They got up quickly, though grazed, and climbed back up the slope.

".....What is this place?"

"This is the flight training ground."

As Lady Dora spoke, several children ran up to us.

"Lady Dora!"

"General Dora!"

"I adore you! Please teach us how to fly!"

"Who's that? Strange hair!"

Once they arrived in front of Lady Dora, the children crossed their fists in a gesture of utmost respect. One of them pointed at me without saluting, but Lady Dora didn't mind. That's quite common with children.

"Today, I brought this one here because he can't fly, so I'm giving him some training. I don't have the time to teach you how to fly. But flying is fundamental for the dragon tribe. You must master it. It serves the Dragon God!"

"That guy can't fly yet!"

"How lame! He's bigger than me!"

"I even managed to fly up to the yellow line today!"

"I made it to the blue line!"

"Fools! Don't mock others!"

"Yes, ma'am." "Yes." "Yes."

After handling the children, Lady Dora took me to the top.

"Laplace, where are we? Tell me."

"This is the flight training ground. A place where children of the dragon tribe practice flying."

Yes, that's it. It was one of many training facilities on the Dragon Roar Mountain, a place where children practice flying. It doesn't have a formal name, but I think the children called it the Jumping Ground.

The dragon tribe has a long lifespan, but they only have children once every few thousand years. Therefore, the number of children is never large. That's why the education of children is considered important in the dragon tribe. Those who can become teachers end up dedicating all their time to teaching.

However, there are no teachers at this flight training facility. That's because learning to fly takes time. Children spend a hundred years falling countless times until they eventually learn to fly.

What is needed here is not instruction. What is needed is an unfathomable amount of repetition.

Of course, for the first few times, the ones in charge of education provide guidance, but afterwards, the children learn on their own.

Until they can fly.

They continue for ten years, hundreds of years, persisting through countless falls, until they can fly. And thus, most of the dragon tribe learns to fly. Like there are no birds that can't fly, so do all dragon tribe members eventually learn.

That's what I would like to say, but there are exceptions everywhere. There are very few, but there do exist dragons who cannot fly to the end. What happens to them, you ask?

Regrettably, they are branded as failures and end up doing the jobs no one wants to do. The children are desperate because they know this, and they mercilessly look down on those who can't fly. Even though everyone is under the Dragon God.

"What will you learn here?"

"I will learn to fly."

"Good, give it a try."

"Yes."

In accordance with Lady Dora's words, I ascended the scaffold. Below spread the open field and the town of the dragon tribe. It doesn't seem that high when viewed from below, but it is reasonably high from above. Looking at that, I spread my wings. I moved the muscles in my back, checking the range of movement of my wings.

Then, I crouched low and jumped up without hesitation. I flapped my wings two, three times, heading diagonally upwards. But I lost speed almost immediately and fell downwards in a spin. Just as I was about to fall headfirst, I skillfully changed my direction in mid-air and landed on all fours. As if nothing had happened, I climbed up to the scaffold again.

And so, I repeated the cycle of jumping and falling several times. I was skilled at falling, and so unlike the other children, I didn't get injured. My experience from living in the demon world had proven useful. But in the demon world, I had never flown before. I didn't even know I could fly. Hence, I couldn't fly.

"Stop."

After failing for the umpteenth time, Lady Dora stopped me.

"Do you know how to fly?"

I shook my head. In response, Lady Dora explained patiently.

"Channel the 'Dragon Touki' into your wings and generate a force field. Control this field to levitate, and use the wind to glide. Understand?"

Of course, just having it explained so simply didn't mean I could grasp it. This might be one of the reasons why no instructors are needed for flight training.

The wings of the dragon tribe are not like those of birds. They are organs for flying, but not for riding the wind. They generate a kind of anti-gravity field, and it is by this force that they fly. Of course, once they're in the sky, they experience air resistance. When this happens, they have to tilt their wings, convert the wind they encounter into lift, and glide. But fundamentally, the flight of the dragon tribe is due to this force field. Lift is just an auxiliary. By the way, the wings of the Red Dragons and Blue Dragons work on a similar principle.

"I understand."

That was my response. It's not that I can't infuse my wings with touki. When I was in the demon world, I did use my wings to maneuver. However, flying is a little different. It's hard to explain in words. But it is challenging enough that the children of the dragon tribe have to practice it for a hundred years.

"If you understand, then that's good. Keep repeating until you can fly."

"Yes."

"I'll come again."

With those words, Lady Dora left me behind and flew off. The way Lady Dora flew was a demonstration in elegance. Her movements were not wasteful, her ascent was smooth, and her flight was swift. The children tried to follow Lady Dora one after another, but none of them could keep up with her and eventually they all fell.

After bidding Lady Dora farewell, I climbed up to the scaffold again.

■

Thus, the days of lectures, combat, and flight training continued.

The lectures and the fighting went smoothly. There's not much particularly noteworthy to mention about the former. As for combat, at first I was simply attacked and beaten, but gradually I began to receive guidance on the tricks of fighting and how to stand ready. By squaring off with Lady Dora nearly every day, my foundational skills gradually improved.

But the flying didn't go so well.

After combat training, from the afternoon through to the night, I repeated the cycle of leaping and falling. When night fell, Lady Dora would return and ask if I had managed to fly yet. Upon hearing that I still could not, she would mutter a simple, "I see," then carry me back to the mansion.

Lady Dora never interfered in the process. She had declared that she would not be lenient, but perhaps there was simply nothing for her to say. It is in the nature of the dragon tribe to learn to fly of their own accord through sheer repetition.

Such was the common sense. Of course I didn't complain.

Ten times more than other children I climbed the jumping platform in silence, and ten times more I fell.

While I continued to fall, some of the many children began to grasp how to generate the force field from their wings. Some began to understand how to control their posture in the air. One child managed to fly.

I, too, got a little impatient.

I had the best teacher in the world, Lady Dora, and yet I could not produce any results.

Truth be told, I knew how to generate the force field and control my posture, and I could do both. But, these were only possible when my feet were firmly on the ground. With my feet on

the ground, I was quicker and faster than even the beasts of the Demon World. So fast that even back then, no dragon warrior would have been able to take me lightly.

But, it seemed that these habits were interfering with my ability to fly. Walking on the ground and flying in the sky are fundamentally different. The body must be kept vertical to gravity, and the direction of the force field I produced differed from what I had assumed. Flying couldn't be mastered overnight. That's why my anxiety grew stronger. Despite knowing that I should be able to do it, I couldn't.

However, I never complained. Lady Dora had forbidden it. Both whining and the words "I can't do it."

The days went by without any progress.

Lady Dora would appear almost daily to check if I could fly yet.

My answer was always the same, "Not yet," and she would nod in acknowledgment before leaving.

After the training was over and I returned exhausted, Lady Lunaria would welcome me. The servants, too, began to acknowledge me as one of their own when they saw I had learned their language and spoke about my gratitude and debt to the Dragon God. However, I was still not viewed as the child of the Dragon God. It's understandable, even I considered myself more like a pet than an adopted son.

Ah, that must be why. On days when I returned particularly battered, they would secretly give me food. saying it wasn't allowed outside of meal They would do this while saying things like, "It's not allowed outside of designated meal times." Reflecting on it now, it was indeed treatment akin to how one would treat a dog. Ha, perhaps back then, their feelings and mine were one and the same. Thinking back on it now, it's a fond memory.

Lady Lunaria, her belly gradually growing with each passing year, treated me like a mother. Whether it was Lady Lunaria's unfamiliarity with motherhood or my own ignorance about mothers, to me, she was simply a goddess. There was something transcendent about her. Just her presence made me feel secure. In retrospect, I suppose that sense of security was a sign of her divinity.

It was the perfect environment.

The rigorous training, the warm family.

Encased in such a world, over the course of many decades, I grew into a fully-fledged member of the dragon tribe.

■ ■ ■

"Well, after that, I...oh?"

The man—Laplace—looked towards the chair and found the young girl dozing off, nodding her head.

Was she so bored that she fell asleep?

No, it didn't seem to be the case.

"Is it already night time..."

When Laplace looked out the window, a starry sky stretched out before him.

Unlike the Dragon Realm, it was a sky that existed directly above.

In Laplace's perception, it felt like it had only been a few hours.

But for Rostelina, it must have been a whole day.

"It's been so nostalgic that I ended up telling the story quite leisurely. I didn't mean to consume your short day, Rostelina."

As he gazed out the window, a massive figure obscured the view.

A Red Dragon.

Recognizing Laplace, the Red Dragon cleared its throat in a circular motion, seemingly demanding something.

"Ah, my apologies. I didn't realize how long it had taken. But you, being a part of the dragon lineage, should be able to fetch your own food."

"Goruruu..."

"Don't be like that. I, too, didn't expect time to pass so quickly. They say time flies faster as one ages, and it seems to be the case even for one of mixed blood like me."

Saying this, Laplace carefully picked up Rostelina in his arms.

Walking quietly, he stepped out of the room.

He made his way down the narrow corridor, stopping before a certain door.

"Well, I at least wanted to hear some of your thoughts..."

He gently opened the door.

The room was impeccably organized, almost empty in comparison to the clutter found in the rest of the house.

Laplace gently placed Rostelina on the bed inside, covering her with a blanket.

There was no need to turn off the lights. There weren't any to begin with.

Laplace's eyes could see everything, even in the darkness.

"Goodnight, Rostelina. See you tomorrow."

With those words, Laplace closed the door and returned to his room.

The End of Training

Deep in the central part of the continent lies a mountain known as Dragon Roar Mountain.

There, as usual, a young girl was toiling away, carrying something heavy.

Her name was Rostelina.

The large bucket she carried was filled with a heaping piles of meat.

What kind of meat, the girl did not know.

It was something Laplace had brought back, instructing her to feed it to the dragon.

There was a cave behind their house.

Inside it resided a gigantic dragon.

The dragon had its eyes closed, softly snoring as it slept.

"Mr. Dragon, Mr. Dragon, it's mealtime!"

Rostelina called out loudly to the dragon, and it slowly opened its eyes.

After letting out a big yawn, it dipped its head into the bucket placed in front of it, and began to nibble at the meat inside.

Though 'nibble' is somewhat misleading, considering each mouthful would've served as a rather full meal for Rostelina.

Rostelina watched, and then, perhaps out of boredom, she began to shuffle her hands in front of her.

"Mr. Dragon, listen up. The master told me about the dragon tribe's fighting methods! We fight like this. We assume this stance, and then move sideways like this, and strike like this! Here! Then like this with a fist! Hai!"

As she spoke, Rostelina took an inelegant, clumsy step, started tapping on the tip of the dragon's claw, which was busy eating meat.

The dragon, for its part, paid her no mind, her taps less consequential than the sting of a mosquito.

However, perhaps finding the small playful creature bothersome, or thinking he should entertain her a little, he slightly moved the tip of his claw.

It was a gigantic dragon.

The tip of its claw alone was about the size of Rostelina's torso.

"Ahg!"

Rostelina was sent flying by the claw, tumbling down the ground.

"Ouch... that wasn't very nice..."

Rostelina wasn't hurt.

Rubbing the back of her head as she got up, she suddenly noticed something.

"...Mr. Dragon, you're larger than other dragons, aren't you?"

Rostelina had seen red dragons before.

Rather, she saw them quite regularly.

Red Dragon's nest in the high reaches of Dragon's Roar Mountain, so if you look up in the sky, you can easily spot them.

It also sometimes circled around their house, giving her occasion to see them up close sometimes.

However, any Red Dragon circling their house would promptly be chased off by the dragons behind the house.

Compared to such Red Dragons, the dragon before her eyes was quite a bit larger.

Its trunk alone was twice the size of an average Red Dragon, and when it spread its wings, it would be at least three times as large.

"Your scales are a beautiful red, the fangs are long, the tail is lithe, and there is intellect in his eyes."

When Rostelina said this, the dragon snorted with amusement.

It seemed to say, "You seem to understand, don't you?"

"Are you, Mr. Dragon, from the Dragon Realm, just like Master?"

She tried asking this, but the dragon didn't provide an answer.

It simply continued to munch on its meat.

In the first place, dragons cannot speak.

Though it did seem to understand Rostelina's words...

"Ah, that's right!"

At that moment, Rostelina remembered something.

It was about the other day, when she had fallen asleep in the middle of a conversation.

If she could hear the rest of that story, she might be able to learn more about the dragons.

Without wasting a moment, Rostelina sprinted towards the house.

She entered the house and headed straight for the usual study.

There, just like always, Laplace was sitting at his desk, engrossed in writing something.

"Master! Master!"

"Hm? Oh, Rostelina. What is it? You just woke up, didn't you? Did you have a scary dream?"

"No, it was a fun dream about freely flying in the sky! But that's not the point, Master!"

"What is it?"

At Rostelina's behaviour, Laplace looked at her with a surprised expression.

"Please tell me the rest of the story from the other day!"

"The story from the other day?"

"The one about when you, Master Laplace, arrived in the Dragon Realm! Your life is so long, and yet you've barely told me anything about it!"

Laplace looked troubled by her words.

"Ah, the story from before... but it's not very interesting. After that, I became a full-fledged dragon warrior, got a job, did some great things and earned some renown, and ultimately lost everything. That's all there is to it."

"But that doesn't tell me anything!"

"Is that so...?"

"Ah, then tell me about how you first met Dragon-san. You've known him for a long time, haven't you?"

Hearing that, Laplace smacked his hand.

It seemed like he remembered something.

"Come to think of it, I first met Saleyakut when I was assigned my initial job. It ties in quite neatly with the continuation of the previous story."

"See, I knew it!"

"Do you want to hear it?"

"I want to hear it!"

At Rostellina's pleading, Laplace shook his head in exasperation.

Then, with a sigh of resignation, he sat back down in his chair.

"Well then, sit down Rostelina. I'll continue the story from the other day."

"Yes!"

"Now, where should I start? Hmm... I think it'd be easiest to start from the day my training period ended. Alright, let's do that."

And so, Laplace began his his tale once again.

A story from the far-off era of myth.

■ ■ ■

Decades had passed since I was picked up by the Dragon God and my education had begun.

My days consisted only of academic studies, combat, and flight training.

Unchanging, day in and day out.

The only noticeable difference was that Lady Lunaria's belly had grown ever so slightly bigger.

On that day, I was flying around the training grounds.

As always, I was learning how to fly.

However, the way I flew was clearly different from the other dragon-kin.

Dragons typically fly with their bodies held horizontally.

First, they generate a force field to float in the air, then generate lift by catching the wind, and glide through the sky.

When they need to change direction or regain altitude, they generate the force field again.

That is the most efficient way to fly.

However, back then, I was flying with my body held vertically to the ground.

In that state, I repeated rapid accelerations, sudden stops, and sharp turns, defying the laws of inertia.

It was a sight that anyone familiar with the dragon flight would find hard to believe.

In fact, there were many on the training ground slopes looking up at me.

Not just children. There were also dragon warriors - Dragon Knights, possessing bodies one or two times larger than mine.

Not only were they watching, but some of them tried to imitate me, lost control, and fell.

I didn't pay it any mind.

I was just mindlessly repeating, over and over, the trajectory I needed to fly.

This way of flying was extremely unstable and consumed too much dragon energy.

Almost everyone who tried to imitate me failed.

It was terribly inefficient compared to the traditional flight of dragons.

However, it did have its advantages.

This way of flying, which hardly used lift, allowed for tight turns in the air.

Maxwell, one of the Five Dragon Generals, is said to have the second-best flight performance after the Dragon God, but my method of changing direction at sharp angles in the air is clearly smaller than his turning radius.

This becomes a huge advantage in aerial combat.

"....!"

Now, as I was flying in such a manner, a certain individual on the slope leaped up towards me.

A dragonkin woman with particularly large wings and silvery scales.

Yes, Lady Dora.

With a graceful rapid ascent that could be described as artistic, she suddenly lunged at me.

It was not unusual.

Lady Dora occasionally attacked me in this way to instill aerial combat skills.

She was fast.

Unlike me, her way of flying did not deviate from the common sense of the dragon tribe, but its speed and technique far surpassed mine.

She ascended at an incredible speed, making frequent turns.

Then she caught up with me who tried to escape with a sharp turn.

Under normal circumstances, she would have easily gotten behind me.

However, there was another advantage to my way of flying.

You can keep flying while facing your opponent.

"Laplace, start!"

"Yes!"

Lady Dora shouted and I answered. The fight began.

The basis of Dragon Race fighting consists of three elements.

Cover one's claws with Dragon Touki, the claw technique for cutting the enemy.

Cover one's fists with Dragon Touki, the fang technique to chew through the enemy.

Cover one's wings with Dragon Touki, the wing technique for rapidly accelerating or decelerating to change one's positioning.

Take the opponent's back with the wing technique, weaken the opponent with the claw technique, and cause fatal injury to the opponent with the fang technique.

Hone your claws, fangs, and wings, and turn your body into a sturdy weapon.

These were the fundamental lessons of the Dragon Race, "Teaching of Claws, Fangs, and Wings".

Of course, I had mastered the basics.

In particular, I was very proficient in the fang techniques.

My fang techniques held such destructive power that even Lady Dora would call them "lethal."

On the other hand, Lady Dora was skilled in claw techniques.

She would never clench her fists.

That is to say, she specialized in a fighting style that focused on claw techniques.

Lady Dora kept making turns, targeting my wings with her claws.

In response, I continued my unique flight, alternating between ascending and descending rapidly, aiming for a counter with my fangs against her.

With my claws, fangs, and wings all full of dragon energy, I kept a sharp eye out for any openings in Lady Dora's maneuvers.

Even if it was Lady Dora, if she attacked recklessly, she would likely fall prey to my fangs.

Therefore, Lady Dora couldn't launch a full attack either and had no choice but to gradually whittle down my strength with her claw techniques.

What? Was I really strong enough to compete with a Dragon General back then?

No, it was just training. If Lady Dora had been serious, I think it would have been over in an instant.

Even while she was holding back, Lady Dora was employing techniques with the intent of taking me down that were far beyond me.

The fight was one-sided.

Lady Dora's attacks, swift as flashes of light released in our crossing moments, bypassed my pierced my body.

My claws and fangs were blocked and deflected, failing to even graze Lady Dora's skin.

There was a substantial disparity of strength between Lady Dora and me.

Even as I narrowly weathered Lady Dora's relentless assault, I was careful to prevent any fatal blow.

Once or twice, I could withstand her attacks.

But after the fifth or sixth time, it was impossible to keep defending my wings.

As my strength was worn down, I took more hits, and it was only a matter of time before I would fall.

In fact, that was how I always lost.

But even I was not always helplessly defeated.

I was always thinking and trying out various strategies.

That day too, I bet on a new strategy.

I moved my wings, escaping upwards.

Naturally, Lady Dora gave chase.

From her silently pursuing form, I felt a rage I had never felt before.

She must have thought I was trying to run away.

After all, turning my back and fleeing was not something she had taught me.

Lady Dora rapidly closed in on me.

Because I was fleeing with my back turned to her, she must have had a clear view of my wings, my weakness.

With a single blow, my wings would have been broken and I would plummet.

What awaited me afterward was a chastisement from Lady Dora.

But that didn't happen.

Just before Lady Dora caught up with me, I abruptly inverted near the apex, attacking Lady Dora instead.

Lady Dora ascending, and I, descending.

The difference in speed was evident, and with the sudden change in relative velocity, Lady Dora's judgement faltered for just an instant.

I swung my claw to bypass her from behind.

There was indeed a feedback in my hand.

But at the same time, I felt a burning sensation near the base of my wing.

I lost control and tumbled down the slope.

The fight was over.

I looked up from the slope.

Lady Dora was flying through the sky, tracing an arc.

In the dragons' code of courtesy, the winner of a mock battle would circle in the sky a few times.

Although it was part of the strategy, I wondered how Lady Dora would perceive me showing my back to her.

Perhaps she might reprimand me.

But I was prepared to humbly accept it.

After all, I had lost due to my shallow thinking.

That's what I had believed, but when Lady Dora descended, she wasn't angry.

"I was taken aback when you suddenly ran away... but that last move was excellent!"

With a satisfied smile, so spoke Lady Dora, blood trickling down from her forehead.

My strike had split Lady Dora's brow.

I aimed for her wings, but she had changed her body's direction at the last moment, and I must have stuck her head instead.

While our wings could be called a weakness, us dragonfolk also being in the shape of men, must also protect our vulnerable heads.

"In aerial combat, no one, barring the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals, has ever landed a blow on me! As for the art of flight and combat, I'd say you've passed!"

I was elated.

Lady Dora rarely gives compliments.

Those words could arguably be her highest praise.

As I basked in my modest joy, Lady Dora spoke rapidly.

"Furthermore, regarding your education, there's nothing more I can teach you. The knowledge you possess about the Dragon Realm is far deeper than that of any ordinary dragonkin!"

As Lady Dora looked down at me, her expression softened.

The always stern-faced Lady Dora smiled.

"You have grown into a fully-fledged dragonkin. With this, your education ends."

Lady Dora muttered "Well done," and extended her hand to me.

I took her hand to stand up, crossed my fists before Lady Dora, and folded my wings.

At that moment, I felt an indescribable sense of accomplishment and a trace of anxiety.

Honestly, I thought the training would continue until my death.

But if there is a beginning, then there must also be an end.

"Thank you for everything, Lady Dora."

"There's no need for gratitude towards me. But don't forget to give thanks to the Dragon God."

"Yes, Ma'am!"

"Then, wait at your home for a while! Your future will be decided by the Dragon God!"

And so, my training came to an end.

■

I returned home and reported to Lady Lunaria about the completion of my training.

Upon hearing this, she wore a loving smile and expressed her joy.

"We must celebrate today."

Saying this, she ordered the servants to prepare a feast.

The staple diet of our dragon kind is dragon meat.

While we used to feed on small lizards clinging to rocks and fruits from trees, this changed once we gained hegemony over the dragons.

Red dragons, blue dragons, and earth dragons became our usual fare. And when we celebrate, meat, of course, takes center stage. The meat of special dragons is served. Meat from King Dragons, Black Dragons, White Dragons, somewhat rare dragons.

That day too, an abundance of delicacies we usually don't get to eat was served.

The taste of that day is unforgettable.

However, there's something I can't forget even more than the taste of the dishes.

The servants, from that day on, began to look at me differently.

To put it specifically, their view of me transitioned from a dog to a man.

Perhaps the completion of Lady Dora's training made them see me as a fully-fledged dragon.

This change was reflected within me as well. I lost the feeling of being a pet. I transitioned from being the Dragon God's dog to the Dragon God's loyal servant... Well, not much of a change when put that way.

Nevertheless, I began to develop a sense of my own position, or perhaps a heightened self-consciousness.

After that, I awaited the return of the Dragon God.

The Dragon God returned to the mansion only once every few months.

Upon his return, he would always check on Lady Lunaria, greet her, and confirm her safety.

As for me, it's not that he would leave me alone.

The Dragon God would always ask Lady Dora about my development.

Lady Dora would report on what she taught me and how much I was able to understand.

There were times when no growth at all was acknowledged, but Lady Dora never lied.

The Dragon God did not comment on her answers; he simply nodded calmly and ordered her to continue.

Moreover, once I became capable of speaking, he started to ask me questions.

Although they were questions, their content was remarkably mundane.

Primarily, they were about what I did that day, what I desired, and what I had learned.

I answered those questions honestly.

I had no reason to lie.

Even though there were days when I couldn't produce any tangible results, and it was bitter to report that I hadn't learned anything, I didn't lie.

I had learned from Lady Dora's words and actions that lying was disrespectful.

However, even though I had no intention of lying, there were questions I couldn't answer.

Where was I born?

Who and where were my parents?

Why was I in a corner of the demon world...?

I could not answer these.

I simply did not know.

In response to my downcast admission of ignorance, the Dragon God only responded with a simple "I see."

I felt a little ashamed.

I knew that I was some sort of special existence, and this peculiarity seemed to be related to what the Dragon God desired... but I didn't know about it myself, and so I couldn't be of help.

Also, the Dragon God occasionally examined my body.

My skin, wings, fangs, claws, and hair.

The Dragon God explained nothing, and I did not resist but offered my body for inspection.

There was a debt of gratitude for saving my life and bringing me to the world of dragons, and I was prepared to accept it even if it meant harm to myself.

Of course, the Dragon God never caused any harm to me.

Such reporting and examination came to an end that day.

"Dora, how is Laplace doing?"

"The training has been completed. Laplace is now a dragon knight who would not embarrass us anywhere."

I was delighted when Lady Dora told the Dragon God that.

I couldn't help but tense the fist I held in front of my chest, straightening my back.

I wanted to appear unashamed in front of the Dragon God.

"I see. You have done well. How is Laplace doing?"

"Sir! He is extremely excellent! I propose that it would be best to assign him some work!"

"Work?"

The Dragon God murmured that and turned towards the window.

Although wise, he probably hadn't even thought about putting me to work.

Of course, I hadn't thought about it either.

It makes sense.

Would you ask a trained dog to do the work of a man?

I certainly wouldn't.

No matter how much training you give, a dog is still a dog.

However, I was beginning to change my way of thinking at that time.

If offered a job, I thought I must gratefully accept it.

"Well, let's see..."

What kind of work would it be?

As I was anxiously awaiting his next words, the Dragon God took a few moments to contemplate.

Just a few minutes, really.

To me, though, it felt more like two or three hours.

"Hmm"

It seemed like the Dragon God hadn't yet settled his thoughts, he shifted his gaze from the window and turned to me, asking:

"Laplace, what do you think of the dragon world?"

It was a question unrelated to work, but I answered with confidence.

"It's a paradise. There can be no better place."

At these words, the Dragon God's cheeks relaxed.

He was amused.

"I see."

I wasn't trying to flatter him at all.

For me, this place was truly a paradise.

Food was provided even without me saying a word, and I was taught so many things.

Lady Dora was strict, but as long as everything was seen as contributing to my future, there couldn't be greater happiness for me.

Seeing the Dragon God's smile might have loosened my tension.

Before I knew it, my mouth was open.

"Um, why did you save me?"

It's rude to question the Dragon God.

That's what Dora had taught me, but my mouth had probably lost to my curiosity.

Or perhaps, whether I was about to work or not, I wanted something like a solid answer.

Why do I work?

...It's for the Dragon God, of course, but I wanted to know a little more detail, you see.

"..."

When the Dragon God looked at me, he was frighteningly expressionless.

Strength entered Lady Dora's shoulders, and his wings slowly spread.

Seeing the two of them, I immediately realized I had been rude.

So I immediately crossed my fists and folded my wings.

I was about to apologize, hoping he would forget what I had asked.

But before that, the Dragon God had opened his mouth.

"Look."

The Dragon God's gaze was once again directed outside the window.

Outside the window, the town of Kaos spread out.

Despite being in a cave, it was bright, wide, and bustling with many dragons flying around.

"Once, this place was a nest of Red Dragons."

"...Is that so?"

"Yes, Red Dragons were creatures that lived on the mountainside, just like the dragon-folk. The dragon-folk were weak, existing only to be preyed upon by the Red Dragons."

What the Dragon God spoke of was a past of the dragon world that I didn't know.

The Dragon God descended before the dragon-folk, who could not yet use words.

He stepped in front of the people living in fear of the Red Dragons, showed his power, and trained them as a leader.

He identified the Five Dragon Generals, organized the clans, and raised them to be an existence that would not lose to anything in this world.

All that took an unimaginably long time.

Creating hundreds, thousands of corpses.

But he steadily moved forward, making the dragon-folk the conquerors of the world.

"—And so, I consider all the dragons as my children."

Then the Dragon God turned to me, squinting his eyes.

"The reason I saved you boils down to the fact that you are a hybrid of dragon and demon. If even half of your blood is that of a dragon, you are as good as my child."

Even though it was only half, I had never been so proud that dragon blood flowed within me.

However, that answer was not what I desired.

I wanted to know how I could be useful.

I wanted to know how I, who only have half the blood, can be of use, or have been of use.

Of course, asking that would be indeed rude, so I remained silent.

...But then again.

Perhaps someone as noble as the Dragon God could see through my anxieties.

"Well, that would have been enough... but recently, there have been disappearances in all worlds, including the Dragon Realm. We don't know why, or where they've gone. If someone among them had moved to the Demon Realm and, due to some circumstances, given birth to you, you might be some clue."

"Has my existence provided any clues?"

"No, there's much we don't understand at the moment."

"...I see."

"It's okay. Either way, I wasn't expecting much."

The dragon god, who seemed to be a little amused as he began to speak, kept looking out the window and continued.

"The second reason is to improve our deteriorating relationship with the demon race. That race has been antagonizing us dragons in various ways for the past few millennia. Baseless rumors even circulate that the Dragon God is trying to annihilate the demon tribe."

"..."

"By raising you, a hybrid of demon and dragon, you could also serve as proof that those are misunderstandings."

I wondered if that would really serve as proof.

I, who had been persecuted by the demons in the Demon Realm, couldn't quite see it that way.

Rather, I even thought there might be a chance that I'd hinder things.

Even so, I certainly didn't have the courage to voice that.

If I were to be cast out from here, I would have nowhere to go.

The Dragon God, Lady Lunaria, the servants, Lady Dora.

Now that I've met and spoken with so many people, I couldn't bear to return to such isolation.

"The third reason is for my child who will soon be born."

The Dragon God turned towards me then.

No, to be precise, he looked beyond me.

He was looking towards Lady Lunaria, who would be somewhere deep within the mansion.

"My wife Lunaria is a human. Thus, our child will be a hybrid of human and dragon."

"..."

"As I said earlier, I consider anyone with dragon's blood to be my child. My dragon kin revere me as a god and pledge their loyalty to me."

I nodded in agreement with his words.

From the overtly loyal Dora to Lady Lunaria's servants, the Dragon Knights at the training ground, and the children at the training facility, no one despised the Dragon God.

Everyone showed respect and admiration towards the Dragon God and worshipped him.

"However, a child born between a human and a dragon may be viewed with unfamiliar eyes."

I remembered the gaze directed at me when I went outside.

Alien eyes.

It was the same even among dragons.

I no longer cared about it, but a newborn child might be disturbed by it.

"Therefore, I wanted you to acclimatize them. If I adopt you, a hybrid of a demon, it might make the dragons a bit more accustomed."

He intended to make the surroundings accustomed by letting me, a hybrid, walk around freely.

Because there was a precedent of me, a hybrid wouldn't be seen as something so rare, terrifying, or something to avoid.

"Also, I hope you, being a hybrid yourself, would become a good confidant for my child."

This third expectation, and his final words, were exactly the answers I wanted.

I was deeply moved.

The one who picked up the lonely me, who wasn't needed by anyone, didn't do it out of mere sympathy.

There was a meaningful reason.

Moreover, the god in front of me was having expectations from me.

He expected me to understand his child.

There couldn't have been anything happier.

"All these are calculative reasons. Are you disappointed?"

"No, quite the opposite."

I had made up my mind.

I must become a person who can be of help for the child of the Dragon God.

I must strive to create a world where the child of mixed blood can live in peace.

It has only been a few decades since I started living in dragon society.

There are countless things I don't know.

However, I understand that if I prove useless and the dragons look down upon me, the same could happen to the child.

I need to learn from Lady Dora, improve myself, and produce results.

"I will certainly become source of strength to you, Dragon God!"

"I look forward to it."

At that moment, my desire to "repay the Dragon God" took a definitive form.

My path was clear.

I felt a renewed determination to work harder.

Of course, I thought I had been doing my best until then.

But from this day, things changed clearly.

Having a clear goal within me, I felt less lost.

Knowing that I was working for a specific purpose, as opposed to my relative aimlessness thus far, gave direction and variety to my efforts.

"As for Laplace's work...do you have any suggestions?"

"I think it would be best if he were to serve under me!"

"Isn't that just your desire?"

"No, not at all, but if there is such a noble purpose, my place is comparatively-"

Thinking back on this exchange now, it makes me smile.

Even the Dragon God couldn't come up with a job for me, and Lady Dora, who was usually so composed, was flustered when her selfishness was called out...

But, the Dragon God is the father of all dragons.

Including Lady Dora.

So, he is willing to indulge a little selfishness.

"Very well, if you insist so strongly, then it shall be so."

"Thank you so much!"

And so, I came to serve under Lady Dora.

Have I mentioned what Lady Dora's job was?

It was training dragons.

The Red Dragon Training

A few days later, Lady Dora took me to a new location.

The place where Lady Dora led me was at the edge of town.

There existed a dome-shaped building enclosed within walls, an area where dwellings were scant. There were several long vertical entrances on the wall, and Lady Dora entered through one of them.

Naturally, I followed suit.

"!"

Instantly, an unfamiliar beastly odor assaulted my nostrils.

While I didn't go so far as to cover my nose, I couldn't help but scrunch my face. Not because it was foul.

It smelled just like the lair I had back in the Demon Realm.

Moreover, the racket of some sort could be heard from the depths of the building.

Creepy?

No, I remember feeling more nostalgic than anything.

"..."

Should I ask where this is, or should I voice my own conjecture?

As I was contemplating, Lady Dora looked at me and opened her mouth.

"This is the dragon training ground."

Upon hearing those words, I exclaimed "oh" and scanned my surroundings.

I knew this much from the knowledge I'd acquired.

Dragons can fly with their own wings, but because they utilize force fields to fly, they can move quickly in an instant, While they could fly quickly in short bursts, their cruising speed wasn't particularly fast. There's a limit to Dragon Touki, hence sustained flight isn't their forte, and it tires them out.

When the Dragonkin needed to travel long distances, they would ride Red Dragons. Red Dragons are relatively small among the dragons, but their range is incomparably longer than that of dragon-kin.

However, Red Dragons are naturally aggressive. They were once considered mortal enemies, and their usual behavior is to attack and devour Dragonkin on sight.

That's where the subjugation and training come in.

That's where taming and subjugating come in. They capture Red Dragons, make them recognize that Dragonkin are superior, and train them not to rebel. In this way, they are turned into a means of transportation.

"Starting today, you'll work under me. In other words, this will be your workplace."

"Yes, ma'am!"

"Even if you hadn't become my subordinate, I had planned to bring you here at least once. As long as we live in the Dragon Realm, interactions with dragons are inevitable. There's no harm in learning about their behaviors."

With those words, Lady Dora began to move deeper into the building. The structure was more expansive on the inside than it appeared from the outside. As we walked, I asked her a question.

"Lady Dora, why did you request me to be your subordinate?"

"Having heard your story, I thought that my line of work would be most suitable for you."

"Most suitable, you say?"

"Our work is appreciated by many Dragonkin, without bearing any resentment."

Dragon taming might sound like an unglamorous job, but in reality, many dragons in the Dragon Realm exist as livestock. Dragon warriors always ride dragons and fight alongside them. They're livestock, but also partners and comrades. It's akin to the relationship between knights and horses in our world.

Although it's called a training ground, the activities in this building aren't limited to training. They range widely, from treating wounded or sick dragons to assisting birthing dragons. For Dragon warriors, it's a place that takes care of their partners.

The Dragon Realm is a harsh world. In battle, even Red Dragons may be near death. Consequently, there are many who are indebted to Lady Dora and her team, with countless Dragonkin deeply appreciative.

Of course, not all dragons with fatal wounds can be saved. However, there's nobody who directs resentment at Lady Dora and her team when a dragon doesn't survive. There's no one among the Dragonkin who would blame those who did their best.

Therefore, the job of dragon taming was perfect for me. Although it would take time, my name would gradually become known throughout the world. Being humble work, it also attracts no envy.

"Besides, you're excellent. When one cultivates something of excellence, one wants to keep it close."

"...I am honored to be praised."

Perhaps feeling a bit embarrassed by her compliment, Lady Dora averted her gaze from me and continued down the corridor.

After walking along the narrow passage for a while, we entered a larger corridor.

The corridor was wide enough for a fully grown Red Dragon to pass through. Along this passage, there were numerous cages, within which hulking, red reptiles were curled up and lying low.

"This is a Red Dragon."

"They seem surprisingly docile..."

When one thinks of Red Dragons, they imagine a beast known for its ferocity. Creatures that can't help but attack any living thing in their field of vision, creatures that are gluttonous, devouring anything and everything. Yet the Red Dragon in front of me was merely lying down, gazing at Lady Dora and me with its faintly glimmering eyes. It was my first time seeing a Red Dragon up close, and it was quite different from what I had imagined.

"The ones here have already been tamed. If you go deeper, you'll see some more unruly dragons."

"I see... So, what should I do first?"

"The task for newcomers has been the same for centuries. Follow me."

I followed Lady Dora deeper down the corridor. As we moved, the noise from the dragons grew louder, as she had said. There was a rustling sound, like the flapping of wings.

The cages became sturdier-looking, and there were more dragons with heavy breathing. Some growled when they saw me, perhaps surprised by an unfamiliar visitor. When Lady Dora glared at them, they immediately became docile.

"This area houses dragons that have been in training for several years. They're still quite wild. Once they've come to accept all Dragonkin as allies, they'll be moved to the cages we saw earlier. There's a lot of traffic from other Dragonkin in that area."

It seemed that the dragons were moved gradually closer to the town of Keious.

"At the farthest end, there are cages with dragons that have just started training. They're not much different from wild ones."

"So, my job is to tame those dragons."

I said that because I thought we had nearly reached the end. But Lady Dora scolded me.

"You fool. You can't possibly think we'd entrust such a significant and dangerous task to a newcomer. This way."

Lady Dora led me down a side path located between two cages. As we moved down this path, we heard a tremendous roar. It was probably the cry of a wild dragon yet to be tamed. The roar of a massive reptile hits you right in the gut. If you heard it up close, it might make your knees buckle from fear.

Even I, who used to feast on magical beasts in the demon world, found myself almost rooted to the spot for a moment. I suppose dragons must be a cut above magical beasts after all. If Lady Dora had not been leading the way, I might have been too paralyzed to move.

And Lady Dora seemed to see right through me. She looked back and gave me her usual piercing stare.

"What's the matter, got cold feet?"

"No, I was just taken aback, that's all."

"Good. If you lost your nerve over something like this, you'd never get the job done."

I steeled myself, too. The task that lay ahead was certainly no ordinary one. It's not that I had underestimated it. I just thought it would be safer than fighting against something.

■

The place where I was taken was a cage for a single Red Dragon. This Red Dragon was considerably smaller compared to others. At the time, I thought it must be a child or an immature specimen.

This dragon seemed agitated, growling and snorting fiercely. Yet it also seemed wary, keeping its back against the wall and staying low to the ground. It looked ready to bite at any moment. The idea of it flying through the sky with a rider seemed like a distant dream.

"First, I want you to take care of training this one."

"Huh?!"

"I won't tell you anything at the start. I want you to feel, in your skin, what a dragon is."

I thought it was unusual for Lady Dora, who had taught me everything from the basics, to hold back. I felt a sense of being thrown to the wolves. However, the time of teacher and student was over. Now that I had become her subordinate, it was natural to think that the time had come for me to find my own way of doing things.

"If you feel you really can't handle it, you're free to kill it."

"Even to kill it, you say?"

"I'll come to check on you again in about a year."

With that, Lady Dora quickly departed, leaving me alone with the growling dragon.

"Gr-r-r-r... Grraow!"

"..."

A dragon growling at me right in front of my eyes. Faced with him, I spent some time thinking.

How could I make this dragon submit to me? Should I beat him down? No, this dragon may be small, but it's likely that someone from the dragon tribe already defeated and captured him, bringing him here. The fact that he hasn't submitted yet means that he's a foolish dragon who doesn't understand the difference in power. My intervention would probably be futile.

"....."

After thinking for a while, I left the spot. I returned to the corridor from earlier and approached a dragon tribesman who happened to be passing by. As he gave me a suspicious look, I greeted him with the utmost respect.

"I've been assigned under Lady Dora as of today. My name is Laplace."

"...A newcomer, huh? I'm Gaara."

"Lord Gaara, may I ask you something?"

After some thought, I sought help from my senior? No, that's not it. Lady Dora told me to feel the dragon in my skin. If I sought help from my senior, I would be going against her instructions. But to do it my way, I thought I'd prepare something.

"Where can I find the feed for the dragons?"

"Oh, that? Just go straight ahead from here—"

Yes, it was feed. It might be a simplistic idea, but above all, I believed food was the most important. For wild creatures, food is of utmost importance. I knew this firsthand, my own days having revolved around meals.

So, my first step was to procure food.

Following Gara's directions, I moved to the food storage area and obtained a portion of feed from the person in charge there. It was the meat of a massive Red Dragon.

Making a dragon cannibalize its own kind. It may be due to the fact that dragon meat is a staple food for dragonkin, but perhaps they wanted to impart the understanding that the Red Dragon was already prey.

So, armed with the feed, I returned to the Red Dragon.

The first priority was to satisfy its hunger. That was crucial.

"Grrraaagh!"

However, the dragon glared at me holding the massive chunk of meat and roared, as if to say it didn't want it and wished for me to be gone.

Even when I placed the meat in front of it, it would not look at it. It didn't look like it would eat anything from me. It might have been suspicious that the meat was poisoned.

"... I'm at a loss."

At this point, I felt like I had exhausted all my options.

You might think, "Hey, you've only tried one thing!"

But that's how it was with me back then. Living as a wild child in the demon world for so long and having only recently studied and trained in the dragon world, how could I possibly come up with a clever plan in the face of a dragon?

"Ah, yes."

But there was one thing. Among my brief and limited experiences, one event that had left a deep and lasting impression.

"I will give it a name."

A name.

Yes, a name.

I thought it was important to give it a name in order to establish a hierarchy.

When I was named, I felt like I'd been granted something significant. It fueled a strong resolve in me to live for the Dragon God.

That's why a name was crucial.

At that time, it was uncommon to give dragons individual names.

Though distinctions like Red Dragon or Black Dragon were made, there were hardly any names to identify individual dragons.

"Your name is..."

However, this was also my first time naming something.

Caught off guard, I had to think for a moment before the growling dragon.

"Growl!"

Maybe it perceived my hesitation as a sign of weakness. Suddenly, the dragon lunged at me.

"...Wait a minute."

I effortlessly grabbed its upper jaw. Compared to Lady Dora's decisive actions, the scared Red Dragon's movements seemed almost frozen in time.

The same could be said about its strength.

By then, thanks to my training, I was starting to understand how to handle my dragon energy.

Although I had not yet realized the powerful force that lay dormant within me, it was enough to completely immobilize a smaller dragon.

No matter how much the dragon tried to move, its upper jaw remained as if fixed in the air.

Even when it tried to free itself by putting strength into its lower jaw, it couldn't even get its teeth around my hand, let alone bite it off.

Perhaps the dragon remembered the countless times it had nearly been killed for rebelling against the dragonkin during its training. The dragon, afraid of enduring pain, flapped its wings trying to escape, but it couldn't move. Regardless of how much it flapped its wings or twisted its body, its upper jaw remained fixed and motionless.

It probably thought of spewing its breath, but in its frenzied state, the dragon was incapable of the deep inhalation required for that. Eventually, the dragon exhausted itself from struggling and stopped moving.

At the same time, a name came to me.

"Saleyakto... Yes, your name is Saleyakto."

As I said this, the dragon slowly lifted its gaze. Its eye reflected a Dragon Race different from the rest, with violent, tabooed hair. That being repeatedly uttered "Saleyakto" while looking at the dragon.

Of course, the name had no inherent meaning. I chose it simply because I liked how it sounded.

"Grrr..."

Red Dragons are savage but intelligent creature. Thus, it seemed to quickly comprehend that the name was meant for it. It also realized that it couldn't overpower me.

When I let go, Saleyakt immediately moved to a corner of the room. It retreated with its tail against the wall, glaring at me with frightened eyes.

"Saleyakt, here's your food. Eat."

I placed the food in front of the now quiet Saleyakt again. It was a huge chunk of dragon meat.

"Grrr...Grrrr...Roar!"

Saleyakt glared at the meat, then at me, and roared again. Even though it knew it couldn't win, it still showed no intention of submitting. Well, if it were the kind to submit easily, it wouldn't be here in the first place.

That day, the meat remained uneaten.

However, I didn't leave either. I understood what Lady Dora meant by 'feeling the dragon through the skin'. Dragons are a difficult lot; they don't readily open their hearts to the dragonkin. Dragons ridden by the dragon knights are different. First, one needs to understand this fact...

I continued to glare at Saleyakt.

FOne day passed, then two days passed, until the meat started to rot and emit an unpleasant smell.

Once I realized the meat was inedible, I removed it from in front of Saleyakt. I carried the meat to the disposal site and discarded it.

What do you think I did next?

I brought fresh meat and placed it again in front of Saleyakt. Even I thought my actions were foolish, obstinate, and repetitive. But what choice did I have?

This was a task assigned to me by Lady Dora. I had no intention of giving up until it was completed.

But I had no knowledge of other methods. I had planned to consider and try other ways only after Saleyakt had eaten.

I was convinced it would eat eventually. I knew how hard it was to be hungry.

Yet, Saleyakt did not eat.

Three days, four days, five days passed, and it still did not eat. Of course, I also didn't eat. While repeatedly changing the meat, I continued my standoff with Saleyakt.

It was as if we were competing in a fast.

■

I can't recall how many days had passed when Saleyakt finally broke.

But it didn't give in and devour the meat. No, it was starving.

Its hunger had reached a critical point. Instead of simply lowering its posture, it laid flat on its belly, collapsed and worn out. But still, its vibrant eyes were directed at me, even though there was likely no strength left for intimidation.

As for me, I was still fine. Whether due to the dragonkin's blood or the demon blood, I could go without food for about a hundred days.

Still, I was surprised. I hadn't expected it would refuse to eat until it was on the brink of starvation. Knowing the pain of hunger, I couldn't believe it.

At the same time, I gained a sense of respect for him. Why did he so vehemently resist submission? Was his pride more important to him?

However, if I were in a position where I was forced to betray the Dragon God, told that eating meat would be considered such a betrayal, I might have done the same. He was someone who thought it better to die. There aren't many who could carry through with such a principle in practice.

I decided to stand vigil over his death.

I was entrusted by Lady Dora with his training. Her orders were tantamount to those of the Dragon God's. It wasn't something to be abandoned. That said, I was given permission to kill him.

So, I thought to let him die while retaining his dignity.

"Farewell, Saleyakt. I won't forget your pride. Let me at least keep watch over you in your final moments."

With these words, I sat down beside Saleyakt. I didn't touch him, but I was closer than I had been before. From here, I met Saleyakt's gaze head-on.

An hour passed, perhaps two. For a while, I simply stared at Saleyakt, and he continued to glare back at me.

I believed this time would go on indefinitely, until death visited Saleyakt, until the moment his eyes lost their power.

"Guu..."

But then, at a certain moment, Saleyakt suddenly averted his gaze, as if he couldn't withstand my gaze any longer. And beyond his diverted gaze lay the meat. He moved his weakened neck and brought his mouth closer to the meat, intending to eat.

I can't know what sort of conflict occurred within him. But I did understand that he had decided to discard his pride and choose life. He wanted to live.

But he didn't have the strength left. With his remaining strength, the most he could do was to make a mark on the meat with his teeth. He couldn't chew.

I immediately rose to my feet.

Taking up the hunk of meat, I bit into it. It was tough, full of sinew, but I tore it with my strong jaws and sharp fangs, chewed it, and tossed the softened piece into Saleyakt's mouth.

With a feeble effort, Saleyakt chewed and swallowed the meat I had tenderized. I confirmed this and continued to masticate chunks of meat, feeding them to him. As I chewed the meat, I could feel my own hunger as well, so I occasionally swallowed a bite for myself.

After repeating this process several times, the first piece of meat was gone. I immediately ran to the larder and brought back additional meat.

By then, Saleyakt had regained some of his strength. He was not yet strong enough to stand on his own, but some power had returned to his body. His eyes regained their gleam, glaring at me. I marveled at his rapid digestion; dragons are robust creatures after all, so perhaps such things are to be expected.

Unfazed, I bit into the meat in my hand, chewed it, swallowed it, and pushed the remaining portion towards Saleyakt. The gesture suggested, 'This is how you eat, try it yourself.'

Surely, Saleyakt knew how to eat meat. Timidly, he stretched out his neck and tentatively licked the dragon meat. The taste of good meat and my saliva hit his tongue. It seemed to remind him of his hunger, and he couldn't resist biting into the meat. He used his forepaws to hold the meat down, his sharp fangs tore through the tough fibers and crushed the bones, and he chewed and swallowed.

Saleyakt devoured the dragon meat with abandon.

However, he seemed to come back to himself for a moment. Across the meat, he saw me, sitting and intently watching him eat.

Saleyakt gently offered the meat back to me with his forepaw.

Seeing this, I froze for a moment before biting into the meat and chewing it. I didn't know why I should do this, but I felt we should eat together. As I chewed, I returned the meat to Saleyakt. He let out a happy growl as he ate, and after a few bites, he returned the meat to me.

After a few exchanges, the meat was gone. Then, I put my hand on Saleyakt's head and opened my mouth.

"Saleyakt, I'll raise you."

Back then, Saleyakt didn't understand the dragon language, but he seemed to understand the intent behind my words.

From that day on, Saleyakt no longer feared me.

This was a big step for me, the first of many.

Do you know?

One grows from failure, but not failure alone.

But success, even if just once, can push one forward.

The Dragon Tamer

It was a year later when Lady Dora came to visit.

On that day, I was sitting nestled against Saleyakt, who was lying down. We were eating meat together, and I was teaching him words.

"This is... quite surprising."

Lady Dora looked at me with a surprised expression. Or perhaps, it might have been astonishment. She is someone who doesn't often show her emotions on her face.

"Lady Dora... I apologize for my...!"

Thinking that I must not be rude to Lady Dora, I quickly stood up, preparing to bow deeply in respect.

"No, stay as you are."

Lady Dora stopped me and stared intently at Saleyakt. Her eyes were filled with curiosity.

"So, the young dragon has become this obedient..."

"Grrr..."

Under Lady Dora's intrusive gaze, Saleyakt arched his back, lowered his head, and let out an intimidating growl.

"Stop it, Saleyakt. It's Lady Dora."

At my command, Saleyakt immediately became quiet. However, the wariness didn't leave his eyes.

I had become friends with Saleyakt. But it wasn't because Saleyakt had grown into a respectable dragon worthy of the dragon race. It was simply that Saleyakt was no longer afraid of me. This timid and cautious dragon had deemed me safe, but he remained unchanged towards other dragons. This puzzled even Lady Dora's subordinates. Typically, if a dragon obeys one member of the dragon race, they grow accustomed to the others as well.

"I apologize, Lady Dora. He is still wary of others besides me..."

"It's fine. Rather, I'm impressed you've managed to tame him this far in just a year. How did you do it?"

"We ate meals together. We slept side by side."

"I can hardly believe he improved so much from just that..."

Lady Dora looked at Saleyakt with a perplexed expression.

Before Lady Dora, Saleyakt was quite tense. I could tell because we were lying side by side. He was frightened.

"They're just scared. By giving them names and eating together, we can remove their fear and they will naturally open their hearts to us."

"I see... so that's your method."

"Yes, and it has been effective."

In truth, by that time, not only Saleyakt but also two other dragons had been pacified. They were the two dragons next to Saleyakt. Both of them were larger than Saleyakt. When they were treated the same way as Saleyakt, they trusted me, got used to the dragon race, and quickly moved to different cages.

Only Saleyakt did not get used to the dragon race. He was the most difficult one among the red dragons.

"I have heard about your achievements, but... hmm..."

Upon hearing my report, Lady Dora pondered a bit. She must have been wondering whether what this newcomer was saying was true or not.

If my words were true, it wouldn't be odd for Lady Dora and her companions to feel that the work they had been doing for thousands of years was being negated. That too, by a young upstart whom she had been teaching for a few decades. Of course, I didn't mean to imply that... But I did what they believed to be impossible.

What was thought to be impossible?

That would be the "retraining of individuals who failed to be tamed."

Saleyakt was such an individual.

Yes, Saleyakt was a dragon that couldn't be trained.

Lady Dora's method of taming starts with provoking the dragon, letting it attack, and then beating it into submission. It's to teach them the hierarchy. Most dragons learn through this method that they must not defy the dragon race.

However, there are rare cases where certain individuals do not fall into this way of thinking. Such individuals just try to escape from what they perceive as a threat. In other words, they perceive the dragon race as an unbeatable and terrifying enemy.

Once this happens, the red dragon will absolutely never submit to the dragon race. The living creatures aren't as simple as to obey all who overpower them.

Such dragons who won't obey the dragon race are put down.

You think it's cruel?

That's because you're living a peaceful life now.

Red dragons inevitably become enemies if they escape.

Letting one go may result in a companion getting killed.

So, if they won't obey, we kill them. We kill them and eat their meat.

It's brutally simple.

Giving them the initial choice to obey or not is more than fair.

Nevertheless, killing a dragon that has failed to be trained is the most disheartening task. It's the moment when all the time and effort put in so far is returned to nothingness.

Therefore, we let newcomers take care of dragons that have failed training.

We allow them to experiment, to learn that there are dragons that won't obey.

During this learning process, the newcomers realize that disobedient dragons are dangerous and that they could be devoured during training.

After that, we make them kill an unyielding dragon.

By doing so, the newcomers learn a lesson.

They come to understand that the dragons they usually see are different from wild dragons.

However, I was quite compatible with such dragons.

Perhaps my experience of living wild in the demon world was useful.

I understood that the dragons were simply frightened.

So, I could adopt methods other than overpowering them.

Therefore, regretfully, I didn't know.

I didn't know about the existence of unyielding dragons.

In fact, I still believe that.

I think that if done correctly, you can communicate with any dragon.

"Alright."

Lady Dora was troubled, but after a while, she slapped her hands together decisively.

"You will take care of the dragons sent here for a while."

However, that's what Lady Dora told me.

Isn't she wonderful?

Pushing aside her own pride.

That was also a sign of her loyalty to Dragon God.

Her criterion for judgment is based on whether it benefits the Dragon God, and consequently, the dragon realm.

There aren't many who can discard their pride, even in the old dragon realm.

"Use that kindness to prepare as many dragons as you can for training."

In the end, she never referred to this room as the "room for individuals who failed to be tamed and are waiting to be put down."

Perhaps she was being considerate to me.

But knowing her astuteness,

She probably already sensed that this room was no longer what it used to be.

■

From that day on, my work became busier.

There weren't many dragons that failed to be tamed, but Lady Dora made arrangements to have such dragons sent from taming facilities all over the Dragon World.

Each individual would cower at my sight, threaten me, and attempt to flee.

Some were gravely injured, teetering on the brink of death, revealing the harshness of the Dragon Tribe's taming methods.

I couldn't make friends with all the individuals either.

No matter how hard I tried, there were those who would not open their hearts to me.

Saleyakt proved helpful in winning over such dragons.

Whenever Saleyakt found such individuals, he would approach them and say something.

What he said, I couldn't understand.

Although I taught him the language of the Dragon God, I didn't learn the dragon language from him.

But indeed, he would speak something to the dragons.

Sometimes, he would gently tap the other dragon with his tail or wrap it around them, not only with words.

A sign of trust and reassurance.

Red dragons use their tails to comfort and calm others.

Of course, I didn't know this at the time.

At first, I thought it was some sort of courting gesture.

Saleyakt was much better at winning hearts than I was.

Well, in this case, winning dragon hearts to be precise.

Either way.

After spending a few days with Saleyakt, the dragons soon became docile.

Even when they left my care and transitioned to regular training, they became excellent specimens, more obedient than others, and very courageous in battle.

It seemed those individuals who would not submit even when beaten probably had some inherent qualities to begin with.

Saleyakt and I successfully tamed such creatures and shipped them out one after the other.

Ironically, Saleyakt himself only took to me.

As this continued, my reputation started to rise.

I was able to tame dragons that other training grounds couldn't.

Moreover, it became known that such individuals tended to be superior to those that initially submitted.

Not only that, but it became apparent that these dragons were superior to those that obeyed from the start.

Rumors spread of me being an excellent trainer who produced superior dragons.

Even the newcomers who came in after me would come to me for advice.

Of course, I told them what I was doing.

I didn't feel I was doing anything special worth hiding.

Most couldn't do as well as me.

However, the number of dragons to be put down decreased, and the number of superior dragons increased.

This led to a slight change in the taming method.

My method started to be incorporated into the standard manual.

And then, I wonder how long it was.

Around a hundred years or so.

Before I knew it, I had taken on the role of leader for the re-training of dragons that had failed their initial training, and even had subordinates of my own.

Not that I held any official title, mind you.

In any case, I had come to be held in high regard among those who trained dragons.

A formidable man had emerged.

A half-breed of the demon tribe, adopted by the Dragon God and apprenticed under Lady Dora.

The youngsters should observe his methods, there's much to learn and imitate.

So it was said.

Around this time, it felt good to return to the mansion of the Dragon God.

I felt that I was genuinely able to contribute to the Dragon God's work.

Every day, I would tell the Dragon God, Lady Lunaria, and the servants about the dragons I had trained that day.

These were truly prosperous days.

Joyful days.

Truly joyful days.

I loved many dragons, and I was loved by dragons in return.

Lady Lunaria and the Dragon God had accepted me as well.

If there were days that I could describe as the happiest and most fulfilling in my life, I would probably be referring to those times.

■ ■ ■

It was then that Laplace noticed that Rostelina's expression had changed.

Not just her complexion or expression, but rather a physical change.

Rostelina had puffed out her cheeks.

"What's the matter?"

"Does 'most happy and fulfilling' mean that things are different now?"

Now, Laplace was living a simple life.

For a certain purpose, he descended from the mountain a few times a year, but basically, he stayed in his room, continuously writing books.

In other words, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he was living with Rostelina.

"Well... yes, Rostelina. I'm sorry to say, but things are different from then. I have a mission now. The feelings of joy or happiness are a bit different."

"..."

Rostelina felt very sad.

If Laplace didn't enjoy being with her, why was she there?

Should she pack up and leave tomorrow...?

"But, Rostelina."

"Yes..."

"As you know, I'm not good at being alone. My current life is filled with anxiety and impatience, and I might be overwhelmed if I were alone."

"!"

"Thanks to you, I'm getting by, Rostelina."

"Yes! Master!"

Rostelina's expression brightened.

Even she, feeling useless, was doing something for Laplace.

The fact that she heard this from Laplace himself made her very happy.

"But Master, I have a question."

"What is it, Rostelina?"

"I learned about how you came to train dragons, but I haven't heard the important bit about how you met Dragon-san."

"Oh?"

At that, Laplace inserted his hand into his mottled hair, scratching his head vigorously.

"What are you talking about, Rostelina? He has indeed made an appearance."

"?"

"It's Saleyakt. The Red Dragon living behind our house, ruling over this mountain, is the very first dragon I met."

"What?!"

Rostelina raised her voice in surprise.

At the same time, she felt embarrassed.

Now that he mentioned it, it made sense.

Yet, why did she think the dragon in the story was a different one?

Perhaps it was because the two didn't seem connected.

The lazy Red Dragon who only eats and seldom flies, submissive not only to Laplace but also to Rostelina, could not be the fierce and stubborn Saleyakt.

"The dragon is Saleyakt?!"

"That's correct."

However, thinking back, Laplace had occasionally referred to the dragon as Saleyakt.

Rostelina, who had never paid much attention to the dragon's name, couldn't hide her surprise.

"That Saleyakt is now the leader of the Red Dragons, the Red Dragon King Saleyakt. Seems like he's getting a bit senile though."

As Laplace said this, a disgruntled growl resonated from the back of the house.

It seemed to have heard.

"Hahaha, he's angry."

"I had no idea the dragon was such an esteemed individual."

"That's right, Rostelina. That's why we must show proper respect to him."

"Yes, Master!"

Rostelina responded loudly.

If the dragon she's always taking care of was such a prestigious being, then she was filled with a renewed determination.

"Hmm?"

At that moment, Laplace looked up at the outside window.

There, a large full moon had risen.

Apparently, night had fallen without them noticing.

"Sorry, Rostelina, I need to step out for a bit. We'll continue our talk next time."

"Yes, Master!"

Rostelina didn't object, but saw Laplace off.

After all, she was from the Long-ear tribe.

Not as long-lived as Laplace, but still blessed with longevity.

Even if they were apart for a few days, she would be able to hear the rest of the story eventually.

She had to keep the house clean for when Laplace returned.

"But I think I'll sleep for today..."

Yet, she couldn't overcome her sleepiness.

So, to rejuvenate for the following day, Rostelina decided to return to her sleeping quarters.

The Incident

A house on the Dragon Roar Mountain, an unassuming place.

A girl was carrying something, as she did every day.

Water or meat, one might think.

However, if you look closely, you would notice that she was carrying something different today.

"Heave-ho..."

Books.

She was moving books from the study to another room, arranging them in order.

Was it mischief?

No, it was different.

She was airing them.

The paper Laplace used was made from dragon skin, and was highly durable..

Even without any special care, it would last tens of thousands of years.

However, if continuously exposed to humidity and insects, its degradation would inevitably accelerate.

Hence, she was airing them regularly like this.

"Hmm, maybe this is enough for today?"

However, the number of books in the study was enormous.

It wasn't possible to air out all the books in a single day.

She had to do it in stages, a bookshelf worth of books once a month.

"Phew! I'm tired..."

Rostelina stretched mightily, patting her waist.

Before her now lay a full bookshelf's worth of books, all neatly arranged.

They were all old books.

Today, she brought out some from a particularly old bookshelf in the study.

"..."

Then, Rostelina suddenly became interested in something.

"I wonder what's written in these?"

As far as Rostelina knew, Laplace's actions were mainly threefold.

Going out, telling Rostelina stories, and writing something.

Rostelina wasn't always asking for stories.

So, when he was home, he spent most of his time writing.

As far as Rostelina knew, Laplace was always writing something.

He continued to write without eating or sleeping.

So, it must be something very, very important.

"Hmm."

Rostelina was never told not to read the books in the house.

Rather, she had been told that as long as she promised not to damage, discard, or burn them, she was free to read them.

"..But I can't read them."

The script Laplace wrote in were vastly different from those Rostelina knew.

The characters Rostelina knew were in human language.

It was a language widely used on the continent, also used by Rostelina's race.

However, the language this old book was written in was different.

Laplace had indeed said it was in Ancient Dragon God language.

Hence, she could not read it.

She could read the more recent books.

Because Laplace wrote those in human language.

Presumably, he thought it would be easier for future readers to understand if he wrote in human language rather than a language that had already been lost.

Even so, why didn't he translate these earliest books into human language?

Was it too much of a hassle?

"Hmm?"

Just as she pondered this, Rostelina spotted a particular book at the end of the ones she had arranged.

Written in human language, it stated:

"Ancient Dragon God Language, Translation Guide..."

For a sage like Laplace, rather than correcting each book he had written so far, creating a dictionary would have been less of a hassle.

"If I use this, maybe I could read them too!"

Rostelina, her breath heavy with excitement, picked up the guidebook and a dilapidated volume that was likely one of the first written.

Then, while painstakingly navigating the guidebook, she began to slowly read out the title of the book.

"Ma...ka...ri. Dragon... General. Yes, The... Dragon General's... Mission, Number Thirty-Two."

After a struggle that lasted several minutes, Rostelina managed to make sense of the book.

"The Dragon General's Mission: Number Thirty-Two."

That was indeed what was written on the cover of the book.

Rostelina knew the term "Dragon General."

Rather, it had come up in Laplace's stories.

It referred to the five Dragon Kings, the inner circle of the Dragon God.

Laplace had served under one of them, the Armored Dragon King, Dora.

"Huh?"

But then, a question surfaced in Rostelina's mind.

Laplace was a subordinate of Dora.

Why would Laplace write a book titled "The Mission" and such?

Had he been given such an order?

Perhaps, somewhere in the yet-to-be-found "Volume 1," the reason could be written...

"But at this rate, it will be nightfall before I find it," Rostelina sighed.

Just reading the title alone had taken quite a while.

With such an effort, she had managed to decipher about ten characters.

Spread out before her were more than a hundred books.

Finding, let alone reading them, proved to be quite a challenge.

"Ah!"

ust then, Rostelina's ears detected the sound of large wings.

There was only one creature that would approach this house with such a fluttering noise.

Yes, it was Saleyakt, the Red Dragon with a den at the back of the house.

And riding him would be Rostelina's beloved master.

Like a spring uncoiling, Rostelina dashed out of the airing room.

As she rushed towards the entrance, Laplace was just walking in.

"Welcome back, Master!"

"I'm back, Rostelina. Did you finish airing the books?"

"Yes!"

"Well done, you've done a great job."

"Ehehe!"

With a pat on her head, Rostelina beamed with joy.

But then she remembered the question she had earlier.

"Master, I was wondering about something earlier," she began.

"Hmm? What is it?"

As Laplace tilted his head in confusion, Rostelina recounted her earlier conundrum.

"Master, you wrote all the books in the bookshelf, right?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Even though you were a subordinate of Lord Dora, why did you write a book about the Dragon General's mission? Was it under Lord Dora's orders?"

"My, aren't you impressive, Rostelina? You can read the Ancient Dragon God Language."

"Hehe, even I can grow a little each day!"

Keeping the guidebook a secret, Rostelina puffed out her chest with pride.

"However, if you can read it, don't you know the answer? It's all written in the books."

But the façade of a shallow lie can easily be torn away.

"Um... I'm sorry. The truth is, I could only read the title with the help of a translation guide."

"Hahaha, I thought as much."

Laughing, Laplace started to walk deeper into the house.

Presumably carrying a hodgepodge of items from the lower world, he placed them on the floor and sat in a chair, gesturing for Rostelina to do the same.

"Let's share a meal together for a change. I find myself feeling hungry after a long time."

"Of course, Master! Leave it to me!"

Elated, Rostelina began preparing the meal. Serving Laplace, who rarely ate, was one of Rostelina's secret joys. After all, Laplace, always hungry when he ate, savored the food in such a gratifying way.

From behind Rostelina, who was putting her all into preparing the food, Laplace's voice came.

"I'll answer your question while we eat."

It was a voice reminiscent of distant memories. A voice filled with joy, regret, and an overwhelming sense of melancholy. Proud and boastful, yet shadowed, Laplace said,

"I write because I, too, was one of the Dragon Generals."

And thus began Laplace's story. A story from the distant, mythical past.

■ ■ ■

Now, where should I start? Perhaps from that point...

"Laplace"

One day, when everything was running smoothly, I was summoned by Lady Dora. She was always busy fluttering about, so it was rare for her to visit the training ground at Dragon Roar Mountain, Keiaus. However, whenever she did, she would invariably call for me and carry out combat training.

She said she needed to make sure I wasn't neglecting my daily training, but the fact that there weren't many who could spar with her might have been a reason too. Fortunately, I was strong enough to keep up with her.

"Is it training again?"

"Yes, it is. I appreciate your cooperation."

On such days, I would delegate my tasks to my subordinates and head to the training ground with Lady Dora. And there, I would let her beat me into a pulp. I was always left bruised and battered.

...Even though I could keep up with her, I was never strong enough to win against the Five Dragon Generals. However, through these daily bouts with Lady Dora, my skills were improving remarkably. It may sound boastful, but I had become so skilled that your average Dragon Knight wouldn't stand a chance against me.

"...I have something to discuss."

The training would typically end when I was thoroughly defeated. However, on that day, Lady Dora, with an unusually solemn look, suggested that we talk.

Of course, I had no reason to refuse.

We decided to head to the flying training field and talk there. The choice of location was more or less a coincidence. The usual places for our conversations were either the abode of the Dragon God or here. This location, from where one could get a panoramic view of Keiaus, was perhaps the more fitting choice.

"Your recent progress has been remarkable," she said.

"It is all due to your teachings, Lady Dora."

"No, you are doing things I have not taught you. The other day, even Maxwell said to me, 'Well done.' That is quite an honor."

"If you continue with your current work, you will be able to fulfill your duties."

The 'duties' referred to here were the two reasons out of the three that the Dragon God had spoken of: reducing hostility towards the mixed-blood of the Dragon Tribe, and appealing to the Demon Tribe.

Indeed, my job, re-training, was becoming increasingly important. The methods of training were advancing, and it was even said that the term 're-training' would become obsolete. The work I had done held such significance.

"I have a favor to ask of you."

I was surprised at her words, as she had never asked me for anything.

"Anything at all," I responded.

Of course, I live to serve the Dragon God, but I also owe a lot to Lady Dora. And I couldn't imagine a request from Lady Dora not benefiting the Dragon God. So, I was more than willing to hear her request.

"For a while, I'd like you to step away from your current job and stand in for me."

"Stand in for you?"

"Yes. I'd like you to oversee all the training grounds in the Dragon Realm."

"May I ask why?"

"Because soon, I'll be entering my mating period. I will be laying an egg."

The Dragon Tribe has a long lifespan. It's so long that you could call it immortal. However, their breeding period is short, occurring only once every few thousand years. As such, it was the duty of any Dragon Tribe member entering this period to prioritize reproduction.

"Congratulations," I offered.

"Thank you."

"May I ask who the partner is?"

In order for humans to have children, they need a partner. This might be an exciting tale for Rostelina.

"It's Crystal of the Five Dragon Generals. Our mating periods happen to coincide... The Dragon God has high hopes for a strong child."

I've heard that there are several children of the Dragon Generals, but unfortunately, I did not know any of them personally. In the Dragon Tribe, the concept of family is weak.

There are a few children from Dragon Generals, but I unfortunately had no acquaintances among them. In the Dragon Tribe, the concept of a family is rather faint. Once laid, the eggs are not incubated by the parents but by the hatching matrons at the hatchery. While it seems they know who their parents are, being a child of a Dragon General does not lead to special treatment. It seems that Lady Dora had already had several children, all of whom had reached adulthood, fought as dragon knights, worked in the training grounds, or already died in battles with dragons.

However, a child from two Dragon Generals is apparently a first. Just as it is now, strong parents beget strong children. A child from two Dragon Generals – it's a situation ripe with expectations.

"So, I would like to entrust the training grounds to you during my egg-laying period. Will you accept this?"

I would be stepping in for the tasks given to the Dragon General by the Dragon God. There was no greater honor.

I was nearly moved to tears on the spot. To think that Lady Dora valued me so highly.

"I am honored to have been chosen."

Of course, I immediately saluted deeply on the spot, accepting the assignment.

■

Around 30 years had passed since then.

Lady Dora successfully conceived and moved to the hatchery located about several tens of kilometers south of Keiaus. I accompanied her during the journey, and it was quite an interesting place. It resembled a beehive, lined with individual rooms where the expecting mothers would lay their eggs. These rooms maintain a consistent temperature and humidity, and the eggs hatch almost autonomously. Then, the same rooms become the children's quarters.

However, the gestation period for the Dragon Tribe is extremely long. After all, they are a race that lives for hundreds of thousands of years. The period of carrying the egg in the belly lasts 50 years, and it takes another 50 years for the egg to hatch.

And as common to all races, pregnant females tend to be extremely sensitive. Female dragons, especially during pregnancy, can become rather violent. This is why they have a dedicated facility set apart from the regular residential areas where they can focus on giving birth.

The change was particularly dramatic during fertilization.

By the time Lady Dora entered the facility, she had become completely ferocious. While she didn't lash out at everything in sight, she was quick to anger and take it out on those around her. It wasn't unusual for me to get hurt by Lady Dora, but seeing her violently irrational was a first. I spent these 30 years continually nursing fresh wounds.

Still, I was able to successfully take over Lady Dora's duties. The job involved overseeing and managing all the training grounds in the Dragon World.

During these travels, I rode Saleyakt. That irascible red dragon remained attached only to me until the end.

For me, traveling with Saleyakt to visit various training grounds wasn't unpleasant. Saleyakt communicates with other dragons. He's the type who can skillfully subdue dragons that don't listen. Hence, wherever we went, he was a big help. Honestly, I owe much of my appointment as the head of the training grounds to him.

Becoming a person in charge made my name known throughout the Dragon World. I was hailed as a genius at raising quality dragons.

As my name spread, those who bore ill will towards me decreased. Even on my way back to the Dragon God's mansion, there were those who saluted me with respect. Of course, there were probably those who resented me for being a half-demon. But more and more people were beginning to recognize my abilities.

Every morning, I would wake up and fly to the training ground. I would patrol the grounds with Saleyakt and take care of any dragons causing trouble. Occasionally, I would mount Saleyakt and travel to other towns. The work was the same in other towns. However, the faces changed, and my existence became even more well-known.

Upon returning to the mansion, Lady Lunaria would be there, and the servants would serve me a warm meal. Sometimes, the Dragon God himself would be there. I would report the day's events to them. In today's terms, we had what you could call a family gathering.

Those thirty years were truly peaceful days. Without battles or training, without any urgency, they were slow-paced days where I simply did what needed to be done while attending to the passage of time.

However, such tranquility would not last forever. There comes a turning point in everything. There are few who can keep walking the same path forever. This applied to me... no, perhaps to the whole Dragon World. Such a turning point arrived, marking a significant day.

It was around the time when I received a report that Lady Dora's hatching was imminent. The Dragon World was struck by a certain piece of tragic news.

One of the Five Dragon Generals, the Sturdy Dragon King, Crystal, had died.

General Crystal, of the Dragon Realm, was found at the far north end, near the nest of the Gold Dragons. He was in a gruesome state, with his limbs torn off and his skull drained. No matter how strong the dragon race may be, there's no way one could survive such a state. By the time he was found, he had already perished.

Around him were the bodies of his dragon knight guards and the Gold Dragon. At first glance, it looked like he had fought the Gold Dragon and either they had killed each other or he had been defeated. However, General Crystal was not so weak as to be defeated by a Gold Dragon, not by a long shot. The incident was shrouded in mystery.

The death of one of the Five Dragon Generals. It's difficult to explain how significant this was for the Dragon World.

The Five Dragon Generals were the most formidable dragon knights, possessing powers comparable to the Dragon God's. Their power was unfathomable compared to regular dragons. They were so powerful that they could easily bring down a mountain or two if they exerted themselves. I must have already had considerable power at the time, but even so, I

was no match for them. I was often used as a training partner for Lady Dora, but if she were serious, I would have been killed in an instant.

There aren't many who can kill one of the Five Dragon Generals. If we're talking about the Dragon World specifically, the only ones who could do it are the other Five Dragon Generals or the Dragon God himself.

There was also the theory of a sudden mutation in the monsters...

However powerful and vicious these monsters are, it was hard to believe that they could kill one of the Five Dragon Generals.

First of all, if such a dangerous monster existed, it was strange that we had not received any information about it. Monsters tend to gravitate towards places teeming with life, after all.

In any case, with the occurrence of this great incident, the Dragon God called for a council. The remaining Dragon Generals were summoned by him. When I heard this, I found it slightly unusual. To my eyes, the Dragon God was one who could decide everything on his own. However, it seemed that when a significant incident occurred in the Dragon World, it had always been customary to hold a council.

The council took place in the Dragon God's mansion. I was also present, as a proxy for Lady Dora, who was heavy with her impending hatching.

I knew that there was a massive stone table and six chairs in one room of the Dragon God's mansion... Seeing all the Five Dragon Generals gathered there was truly a spectacular sight. Even though, in fact, two were missing.

There was General Shirard, with his green-silver scales and ephemeral eyes. General Chaos, with his black-silver scales and deep-set eyes. General Maxwell, with his blue-silver scales and strong gaze. And the great Dragon God, with his uncolored silver scales and eyes that encompassed everything. My presence there felt truly out of place.

"I can't believe that Crystal is dead..." Chaos was the one who broke the silence. I barely knew him, but I'd heard that he was a gruff man.

He was tasked by the Dragon God to make weapons for the Dragon Tribe. Back then, weapons were generally crude. Swords and spears carved from dragon teeth, and armor made by piecing together dragon scales. Can't imagine them being crude? Well, they may not seem so in today's terms. But back then, our own claws and scales, imbued with dragon energy, were far more reliable than such things.

"I can't believe he was killed by a Gold Dragon, or a monster for that matter. It feels like there's something more to it." The one who said this was Maxwell.

Short and flippant. Many people get that first impression of Maxwell. In fact, even compared to the average Dragon Tribe member, Maxwell has a distinctly small stature. On top of that, he always smiles and speaks in a coarse manner.

"Why is someone like him one of the Five Dragon Generals?" Some people would grumble in this way, but Lady Dora had said: "At least those who know him would not mock him." Because, despite his appearance, he is competent, diligent, hardworking, and full of loyalty.

He was in charge of exterminating the monsters that cropped up across the entirety of the Dragon Realm. The fact that the general populace of dragons have barely suffered any casualties due to monsters is largely due to his efforts.

This Maxwell had actually visited the site of the corpse for inspection. While other squad members concluded the deed was the work of monsters, Maxwell alone had kept shaking his head, insisting, "That's impossible." Having firsthand knowledge of the power of the Dragon Generals, he found it inconceivable that they could be slain by monsters.

"Which leaves us with the Demon Clan,"

The last to speak was Szilard. As the leader of the Dragon Generals, he essentially played the role of consolidator for all the dragons. His responsibilities were diverse, but primarily pertained to the town's affairs. Essentially, when the Dragon God was absent, it was he who kept the Dragon Realm in order. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he was second in command.

Szilard was always cool and collected, possessing strong judgment. At times, he would collate the opinions of the Dragon Generals and present the optimal solution to the Dragon God.

"Ridiculous!"

"Impossible!"

However, this time he had committed a faux pas. Maxwell flew into a rage at Szilard's words, and Chaos clearly expressed his displeasure. Yet, without a hint of panic, Szilard calmly surveyed the two of them and continued speaking.

"A Gold Dragon is out of the question. If there were a monster capable of killing Crystal, it would have already shown itself and started wreaking more havoc. Within the Dragon Realm, the only beings capable of killing Crystal are the Dragon God and us, the five Dragon Generals."

At this point, Szilard glanced towards the Dragon God. He did not verbalize it, but his gaze carried the intent - 'If by any chance, you had some reason to kill Crystal, regardless of what that reason might be, we will follow your decision and action.'

The Dragon God shook his head solemnly. The Dragon God would never kill Crystal, who was like his own child. Even Szilard, being the leader of the Dragon Generals, would have been called out for rudeness by Chaos or Maxwell had he verbalized such an assumption. Of course, I wouldn't have stayed quiet either, but unfortunately, I did not have the right to speak in that council. My role was to listen as a proxy, and relay the conversation, word for

word, to Lady Dora. I couldn't stir the pot with reckless remarks, as I had the honor of Lady Dora to uphold.

"The only ones left are we, the five Dragon Generals, but we would never betray the Dragon God's trust. If one of us had done such a thing, they would have to rip their own limbs off, crush their heart, and offer it to the Dragon God as an apology. Hence, it's only logical to consider an outsider as the perpetrator."

"So, you're saying it's the Demon Clan?"

"The Demon Clan has always viewed us as enemies. What's strange about considering that they could have used some trick to kill Crystal?"

"We, the Dragon Generals, getting taken out by the likes of the Demon Clan!"

"Chaos, we Dragon Generals indeed pride ourselves as the strongest. But the Eight Great Demon Lords are formidable and powerful in their own right. If we get arrogant, our downfall is possible. Or are you unable to even gauge the strength of our adversary?"

At that, even Chaos fell silent.

The Eight Great Demon Kings, so to speak, were the equivalent of the Five Dragon Generals among the demon tribe.

Coincidentally, one of those had once beaten me into a pulp and driven me away.

The Demon Tribe did not possess as much power as the Dragon Tribe.

Compared to the Dragon Tribe, their movements were clumsy and they didn't possess sturdy scales.

However, they had an almost immortal level of endurance and could use magical powers more skilfully than us.

They were the second most potent beings in the six worlds.

Ordinary demons would stand no chance against Crystal.

But if it were one of the Eight Great Demon Lords, even the Five Dragon Generals would not likely emerge victorious unscathed.

That was the general consensus.

"However, if that were the case, it would mean that the Demon Tribe has completed a method to surpass the 'Boundary' and used it without permission," Shirard said.

"..."

The 'Boundary' is a wall, so to speak, that separates one world from another.

Surpassing the Boundary meant, in essence, moving to a different world.

I didn't understand what it meant back then.

At that time, people were researching the phenomena of people disappearing without a trace.

Yes, research on teleportation magic. Of course, no one had succeeded in mastering teleportation magic yet. If they had, they would certainly need the permission of the gods to use it. That would apply to both the destination world and the originating world.

"If they have indeed mastered the technique of crossing the boundary, it would be a serious issue. But as of now, we have no way to confirm it, nor to find the one who killed Crystal and retaliate..."

Shirard said with a grim expression.

After all, whatever entity it was, it had killed a Five Dragon General, worth a thousand soldiers.

Whether it was a monster or a member of the Demon Tribe, arranging a half-hearted search would likely only result in them being annihilated.

"Please leave it to me, Chaos, to avenge Crystal!"

"It's my responsibility when it comes to such tasks."

The two dragon generals declared their resolve, but it wasn't for Szilard to decide.

The final decision in this council was always in the hands of one man.

"Dragon God, what should we do? Of course, if you entrust it to me, I will find the murderer and demonstrate the glory of our dragon clan, but..."

At this point, Shirard turned to look at me. Until now, I had remained silent, diligently recording the proceedings.

"Perhaps we should let Laplace handle this."

At his words, the conference room erupted into a murmur.

"Are you mad! Let a half-breed of a demon handle this, instead of Dora!?"

It was Chaos who raised his voice in anger.

Gazing at me with his deep eyes, he bared his teeth and shouted at Shirard.

Chaos was, how should I put it... a stubborn man.

Once he got the idea that the Demon Tribe were villains, he would hold onto his animosity towards them forevermore.

"Enough with your jokes! Even if he is the adopted child of the Dragon God, can a man like him be of use in hunting down the killer of the Five Dragon Generals?"

"We won't know until we try," Shirard replied.

He took Chaos's angry outburst like a gentle breeze.

Being shouted at by Chaos was probably an everyday occurrence for him.

I was terrified.

The Mad Dragon King, Chaos, was indeed a terrifying person.

"Dora has told me that although this man is still immature, he has a power comparable to us, the Five Dragon Generals. Rather than wasting our time, and more importantly the Dragon God's time, hunting for a perpetrator whose existence is uncertain, it would be more appropriate to dispatch someone with similar power."

Matching the Five Dragon Generals, I thought that was quite an overestimate.

At the time, I still lacked confidence in myself.

"Even if he finds the perpetrator, he'll just die a pointless death!"

"Even so, he is a member of the Dragon Tribe, at the very least he could bring back some information."

"Enough, this is getting nowhere! Maxwell! Say something!"

Chaos, his anger blazing like fire from his mouth, turned the conversation to Maxwell.

Perhaps he thought Maxwell would oppose the idea like he did.

However, Maxwell maintained a nonchalant expression.

"...Well, why not? Let him give it a shot."

That's all he said.

"What! What are you saying? This isn't like you!"

Maxwell was even more militant than Chaos.

In situations like these, he was always the first to charge into the forefront. That was his role.

So, I thought he would never relinquish that position.

Being at the forefront was a matter of honor, after all.

"Do you know how serious things are?! We've been together since ancient times, and now one of us is dead!"

"Yeah, that's right. Chaos, who do you think will be the next one missing?"

"Next...?"

"I've been thinking about why Shirard would suggest such a thing. If the perpetrator is moving with a plan, and if that plan targets the Five Dragon Generals, they will aim to eliminate us one by one."

Upon hearing this, Chaos seemed to understand what Maxwell was trying to say.

Chaos may be a militant, but he isn't stupid.

If the perpetrator's aim is to exterminate the Five Dragon Generals, then they would likely set a trap for us.

A trap that could kill Crystal, one of the Five Dragon Generals.

I don't know what kind of trap it could be, but it would certainly be effective against the other Generals.

"If the Five Dragon Generals are to act, it would be best for more than one of us to move together.

However, in Dora's absence, we cannot afford to have two of us absent.

It is absolutely out of the question to put the Dragon God in the line of fire."

Maxwell proudly unveiled his own line of reasoning.

Whether he was right or wrong was clear as day from Shirard's bitter smile.

So, it seems I was the expendable one.

Well, by then I already had my fair share of duties, so I wasn't exactly expendable.

At the very least, it was better than losing one of the Five Dragon Generals.

"I see. The question is whether this brat has the power to accomplish the mission..."

"All we can do is trust Dora's words."

At Maxwell's conclusion, Chaos nodded deeply.

Their trust in Lady Dora's words went without saying.

"So, what shall we do?"

However, the decision-making power in this place was not with Shirard.

He deferred the decision to another person who had been silent all this while.

The Dragon God maintained his silence in response to that question.

He scanned the surroundings with an expressionless face.

He looked over Chaos, Maxwell, Shirard in turn, and finally turned his gaze to me.

"Laplace. Can you do it?"

"If it is your command!"

When asked by Dragon God-sama, I could never say no.

Truth be told, I was not confident at all.

The Search

After the council concluded, I hastened to the dragon landing.

My destination was the breeding ground.

The purpose was to communicate the contents and conclusion of the council... The fact that I had undertaken the mission to search for Crystal's murderer, to Lady Dora.

Given my position as Lady Dora's proxy, I had subordinates.

Someone else could have been sent.

But, I wanted to go.

The breeding ground was situated on a small mountain, a little away from Dragon Roar Mountain.

Small as it was, it was higher than any other mountain in this world.

Naturally, it was heavily guarded.

It was one of the most important places in the Dragon Realm.

Lady Dora was in one of the private rooms.

Her belly was heavily swollen, and it was clear to anyone's eyes that she was close to term.

And also, that she was at the peak of her anger.

The private room granted to her was more splendid than those of other expecting mothers.

However, everything in it - from the desk and table, right down to the bed - had been thoroughly destroyed.

The traces left by her claws resembled the aftermath of a violent storm.

The Dragon Tribe has the concept of male and female, but unlike the Human Tribe, they do not have the concept of marriage.

Just temporary relations for the sake of having children.

However, once they have a child, they tend to regard their partner as something special.

Lady Dora and Crystal.

Regrettably, I don't know much about Crystal... but I understood that she had lost her lover and comrade at the same time.

Empathising with her feelings was challenging.

"Laplace? What brings you here?"

"I have been entrusted with the task of finding the one who killed Lord Crystal."

Upon saying that, Dora glared at me with fierce eyes.

"...When you find them, inform me first."

To that statement, I wanted to say 'yes'.

But, I couldn't.

She was exhausted due to the effects of the egg-laying process.

If I were to bring her the murderer in such a state, I could not predict what would happen to the egg in her belly.

No one desired such an outcome.

"In Lady Dora's stead, I will kill them."

That's why I said so.

"I see... then, bring me the head."

Perhaps Lady Dora didn't get angry because she trusted me.

It might be vanity, but I believe if it were anyone else, she would have raged in fury, insisting on going herself.

In reality, Lady Dora was indeed terribly angry.

As one of the Five Dragon Generals and as her chosen mate, she must have loved Crystal deeply.

"Without fail."

And so, I set off in search of the one who killed Crystal.

■

Well, even if I say 'search', the Dragon Realm is vast.

Incredibly vast.

And to say I have the ability to command subordinates would be incorrect.

After all, the subordinates I had at that time were actually Lady Dora's.

They were trainers who had received the position of "Dragon Training" from the Dragon God.

Naturally, they would not possess knowledge or experience in searching for a murderer.

It was impossible for me to utilise them in such a task.

And, not only my subordinates, but I myself also lacked the know-how.

The initial search was completely groping in the dark.

Riding on Saleyakt, I searched suspicious locations.

There were no landmarks, nothing.

I merely relied on intuition, assuming the perpetrator would be around these areas.

This method of searching was somewhat akin to my actions in the Demon World when looking for magical beasts that could serve as food.

From the outside, it probably looked frustratingly inefficient.

After a few days, I was approached by a certain individual at the Keious landing site.

"Laplace!"

Turning around, I found one of the Five Dragon Generals, Maxwell, standing there.

I immediately gave him a respectful bow and greeted him.

"Lord Maxwell! What brings you here?"

"It seems you're having trouble."

"Yes, sir!"

I tightened my expression upon his remark.

I had realised over the past few days that I had made no progress whatsoever.

If things continued as they were, I would likely keep doing meaningless tasks without achieving any results.

"From my point of view, your searching method is crude. You won't find anything this way."

Faced with these words, all I could do was bow my head.

Despite having been aware of my limitations, I didn't know the proper method.

"Don't worry, I'm not blaming you. Take these guys with you on your mission."

Behind Maxwell were two robust Dragon Knights.

Their height and breadth both surpassed mine.

They were the very embodiment of the dragon tribe's warriors.

Maxwell, being on the smaller side, made them appear even more formidable.

"Among the Dark Dragon Squad, these two are particularly good at finding things. Gora, Sklava, greet him."

At those words, the two shrunk slightly and performed a deep bow.

"It's an honor to meet you, Lord Laplace."

"Please use us as your hands and feet."

I remember their eyes well.

Their eyes were aflame with revenge.

I would come to learn later that they were from the Sturdy Dragon Tribe.

Yes, Crystal's tribe.

They had once been part of Crystal's squad, handpicked by Maxwell.

"Are you sure?"

I couldn't hide my surprise at Maxwell's offer.

At the time, I hardly knew Maxwell.

The Five Dragon Generals were all so high up the hierarchy, I couldn't see why one of them would help someone like me.

No, perhaps there was a reason.

"Yes, just find the culprit quickly with them."

With that, Maxwell turned on his heel and started to leave the landing site.

Before I knew it, I found myself calling out to his retreating figure.

"Excuse me...!"

"What is it?"

"Why did you recommend that I take on this task?"

It was something from the council.

Maxwell had agreed with Szilard's proposal, suggesting that I should do it.

"I mentioned it during the council, didn't I?"

"Even within the Dark Dragon Squad, I believe there are more suitable candidates than myself..."

But upon reflection, it was a strange thing.

At the time, no matter how up-and-coming a youngster I was, Maxwell's subordinates were primarily tasked with hunting monsters.

They should have been proficient not only in search but also in combat.

There must have been someone stronger than I was.

To my question, Maxwell chuckled and answered.

"...We of the Dark Dragon Squad use several of the dragons you've raised.

They are rough and unruly, but all of them are brave and valiant.

Honestly, they've helped us out a lot. Typically, tamed dragons have lost their fangs.

Considering that, I can vouch for the quality of your work."

Maxwell continued, "Furthermore..."

"The one who was attacked this time is Crystal, Dora's mate. More than anyone, Dora would want revenge. You are the one Dora trusts the most. So, if the five of us Dragon Generals can't do it, it makes sense for you to be the one to do it."

These Five Dragon Generals have a long-standing relationship with Dragon General Crystal.

They should be willing to lend their power for revenge.

Unlike the current human world, there was no power struggle among the Five Dragon Generals.

"You must find Crystal's killer. The Five Dragon Generals have been fighting together for tens of thousands of years. We cannot forgive those who have taken one of us."

"Sir, yes, sir!"

I nodded, but my feelings were complicated.

A feeling similar to jealousy was swirling within me.

It was a sentiment that I could never catch up to, something between the Dragon Generals and the Dragon God.

"If you encounter an enemy you cannot handle, let me know. I will fly in and finish them off myself."

"Yes, sir!"

"I'm counting on you."

And so, I was assigned two companions.

Gora and Scrava.

■

I took the two of them and began to search for the one who killed Crystal.

The addition of these two greatly improved our efficiency.

After all, they had the know-how to find someone in the vast Dragon Realm.

Even though we call it know-how, the methods of searching for something haven't changed much with time.

First, we go to the crime scene and investigate.

Based on the clues discovered there, sometimes with the help of eyewitness testimonies, we gradually pursue the perpetrator's tracks, cornering them.

However, it's not as simple as it sounds.

If it were, Maxwell, who had performed the initial examination, would have found the perpetrator long ago.

Maxwell, as the leader of a unit that seeks out and eliminates demons, is skilled in these matters.

The two who became my subordinates had received investigation materials from Maxwell.

And, having participated in the examination, they knew what was left behind.

But when their opinions were combined, the resulting conclusion was singular.

We don't know.

I had to find an entity that even Maxwell could not find.

The hurdle was quite high.

I divided the tasks with my two subordinates, and we conducted investigations and inquiries into the traces.

It's not that I didn't trust Maxwell's investigation.

It's just that I thought we might find something else by conducting our own investigation.

As expected, we found nothing.

There was no reason we should.

The being capable of killing Crystal should be conspicuous, yet it remains elusive.

Truly, there was nothing there, as if Crystal really had been in a mutually destructive clash with the Gold Dragon.

That's when I changed my approach.

I began to believe that this wasn't the act of a monster, but a calculated crime committed by someone.

I reasoned that because someone had carefully planned this and then erased their own traces, we couldn't find anything.

What? You say it's not something to brag about?

That I should have noticed it?

Please don't say that. After all, this was my first experience with investigation.

Anyway, I decided to change my approach slightly.

Instead of the perpetrator, I decided to follow Crystal's footprints.

I thoroughly investigated what he had been doing until then, what his intentions were in going to the Gold Dragon's nest, what he was trying to do there, and whether there was a reason for him to be targeted.

Then, I found out one interesting thing.

He had been researching teleportation magic on the orders of the Dragon God.

Teleportation magic is the technique that allows one to cross the boundaries of worlds...in other words, it's the technique to move to other worlds.

At that time, it was believed that ordinary people in any world could not cross worlds.

Moving to another world requires an enormous amount of energy.

Only gods possess such immense energy.

The ability to move between worlds was a privilege granted only to the gods.

Even so, the gods of each world had their subordinates conduct research on teleportation magic.

Because, at that time, there were many examples of incidents where people had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

...Did I already mention this?

The results of the research showed that the true nature of the disappearances was "teleportation" to another world.

Therefore, the gods had ordered their subordinates to research teleportation magic.

They needed to figure out the cause of these spontaneous teleportations.

And in the Dragon Realm, that task was given to Crystal.

However, for some reason, this wasn't commonly known.

It was withheld to prevent people from worrying unnecessarily.

Perhaps there was also a fear that if made public, the research might be misused.

The Mad Dragons, led by Chaos, detested the Demon Tribe.

If they knew there was a way to invade, they might even start a war with the demons.

And with that thought, it hit me.

Perhaps Chaos was the one who had killed Crystal.

Crystal, who was researching teleportation magic.

Chaos, intending to attack the demons via teleportation, might have tried to acquire the teleportation magic from Crystal.

But Crystal resisted.

An argument ensued, and Chaos ended up killing Crystal...

A story like that unfolded in my mind, and I found myself flying off to see Chaos.

■

Chaos' workshop was located at the western edge.

Close to the volcanic region, I remember it being considerably hotter than Chaos.

In the workshop, they were making weapons using high-quality materials from dragons and high-quality ores from the mountains.

Swords, spears, shields, armor.

While Dragons fight with their own claws, they don't always fight barehanded.

Sometimes they use such weapons to challenge formidable enemies.

Presumably, Chaos' weaponry was crafted with the anticipation of combating other races.

Yes, like the demons, for example.

"Laplace... did you find something?"

"I'm currently investigating."

"I see... well, rest is important too. Take your time."

Chaos welcomed me warmly, despite my strong suspicions.

Even though he had glared at me, a half-demon half-dragon, during the council.

Far from treating me poorly, Chaos allowed me to see every corner of his workshop.

"Lord Chaos, may I ask you a few questions?"

In response to him, I started asking questions candidly.

It might even be called an interrogation.

In retrospect, I blush at the thought of how rude I was to one of the Five Dragon Generals.

"What is it?"

"Where were you and what were you doing when Lord Crystal was killed?"

"I was here. I was making a weapon to present to the Dragon God. Look, that's it. I named it the Dragon God Sword. It's a sword that can withstand the immense power of the Dragon God. While it may not be needed by the Dragon God, I plan to offer it when the His child is born."

"I see..."

"Is there anything else you want to ask?"

Looking back, my actions were clearly suspicious of Chaos.

Yet, Chaos did not complain at all.

He didn't show a hint of displeasure.

As if to say he wouldn't hesitate to cooperate if it was necessary for the investigation, he told me everything openly.

Even though there were likely confidential matters among them.

And finally, he said this.

"Laplace, feel free to say anything you need. I spoke out of emotion at the council, but I didn't doubt your loyalty to the Dragon God. Forgive me."

In the end, Chaos said this and patted me on the shoulder.

"We must avenge Crystal. If it's too much for you, you can tell me. I'll help you even if it has to be in secret."

I was ashamed of myself.

I had forgotten the anger that Chaos had shown in that council.

What I had doubted was the pride and friendship of one of the Five Dragon Generals.

"I will certainly do so."

Lastly, I said this, gave him the deepest bow, and left the scene.

■

After that, I flew around various places.

North to south, west to east.

I followed the footsteps of Crystal's last few decades, searching for clues.

But I found nothing.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in Crystal's tracks.

Like the other Five Dragon Generals, he was respected and reciprocated the respect with his actions.

He was a model dragon.

Who could have killed him?

Could it be that he was killed by demons from another world?

However, even if it were demons, it would be extremely difficult to live in this dragon realm.

Even if they had killed him and then immediately returned, it would be difficult to leave without a trace.

I was at my wit's end.

I hadn't expected to obtain no information at all.

At the same time, I felt a sense of urgency.

Once a year, I returned to Kaios to report to the Dragon God and Shilard, but the news was not good.

If there was even one clue, I might have been able to remain calm.

But if there were repeated reports of finding nothing, it would make anyone feel anxious.

I was entrusted with this task by the Dragon God.

I also replied to Lady Dora that I would definitely solve it.

Despite that, I wasn't able to do anything and just kept pacing around. How could I remain calm?

I scoured the entire Dragon Realm like a madman.

I stepped into highly dangerous places, looking for any clues.

The nests of Red Dragons, Blue Dragons, Black Dragons, Gold Dragons, Earth Dragons.

I went to all these places and investigated.

I killed all the dragons that got in the way.

I rode on Saleyakt, flying around the Dragon Realm with my two subordinates.

I must have seemed possessed.

About ten years into the investigation, there was no one in the Dragon Realm who did not know my name.

I was known as the half-blood incompetent who, despite being adept at taming dragons, was unable to meet the expectations of the Dragon God.

It was a humiliating way to be remembered, but I accepted it.

Because it was true.

I couldn't meet the expectations of the Dragon God, nor could I clear the regrets of the Five Dragon Generals.

However, I didn't care about my own humiliation.

I wanted to meet the expectations of the Dragon God, to clear the regrets of the Five Dragon Generals.

That was all.

I kept flying, searching, and investigating without rest for days.

For many, many days.

I think Saleyakt also did well.

However, one day, we finally collapsed from exhaustion and decided to rest in one of the many caves in the Dragon Realm.

That day, I was wrapped in Saleyakt's tail, watching the fire.

I stared at the flickering fire, not moving at all.

I was tired.

Both my subordinates and I were.

Although we didn't utter words of resignation, we were dominated by the feeling that we wouldn't find anything more.

Even Saleyakt, who couldn't speak, seemed mentally exhausted.

That's when it happened.

Ah, I remember it well.

There's no way I could forget.

There's no way I could forget that moment.

It was then.

When my two subordinates had fallen asleep and I was dozing off wrapped in Saleyakt's tail.

That was our first encounter.

Ah, if only I had had the power then.

If I could go back to that moment...

No, even so, nothing would change.

At that time, he was quite careless, but he was also cautious.

Even if I had suddenly bared my fangs, he would have surely evaded them with ease.

But it's frustrating.

He was within my reach...

Ah, it's frustrating...

I'm sorry.

It seems I got a little excited.

Let's calm down.

This is a tale from the past, no matter how much I think about it, the past can't be changed.

Yes, he appeared at the entrance of the cave.

I still remember his first words well.

"Hey."

With an almost too casual demeanor, he raised one hand and said,

"It looks like you're in trouble. Shall I give you a hand?"

With a seemingly benevolent smile on his face.

The Man God's Counsel

What kind of figure was he?

I can't recall.

I remember the smile, but I can't remember the face.

I can never remember his face...

But he was certainly there.

A man with a forgettable face was standing right there.

I was startled.

I hadn't felt anyone's approach.

Even Saleyakt, with his colossal size, stood up and showed aggression towards him.

My two subordinates too, were looking at him with startled faces.

"Who are you...?"

"Me? I am the Man God. The god of the human world."

That was how he introduced himself.

The God of the human world.

Of course, I knew about the existence of the six gods in this world.

I had also heard about the Man God from the Dragon God.

The first appearance of the Man God in the Dragon World was a mythical age even for me.

It was a time when the Dragon God and the Dragon Tribe were attempting to seize world domination from the Dragons.

The Man God appeared in the Dragon World and proposed an idea to the Dragon God.

He suggested holding a council with the gods and exchanging information.

The human world was more advanced in civilization than any other world.

Humans, among the inhabitants of the six worlds, were the shortest-lived race, and hence their civilization developed more rapidly.

It was easier for superior individuals and innovative ideas to emerge.

Hence, the information provided by the Human God at the council was very valuable to each world.

At the first council held in the human world, the Dragon God learned about the existence of "language" and "writing".

The introduction of something akin to civilization to the Dragon Tribe, who knew neither words nor characters, was undoubtedly thanks to the Man God.

Not only that.

The Man God generously taught what had been useful in his own world.

How to build a city, how to manage large gatherings of people, how to fight in groups, and the concept of livestock.

None of these would have likely occurred to the Dragon Tribe on their own.

Hence, the Dragon God had a lot of trust in the Man God.

He revered him as the leader of the gods.

"My apologies for the oversight!"

Therefore, I immediately corrected my posture.

I stood up, preparing to bow deeply.

I believed I mustn't be disrespectful to an entity on par with, if not superior to, the Dragon God.

"No, no, it's fine, stay as you are."

Against my awkwardness, the Human God casually put his hand on my shoulder and sat me down.

"I just dropped by because I had a little business with the Dragon God."

I wondered what this man was here for. To my thoughts, as if he could read my mind, he continued speaking.

"You, you are apparently looking for the one who killed one among the Five Dragon Generals, aren't you?"

"Why would you know that!?"

"Just now, didn't I say? I had a little business with the Dragon God. It came up in our conversation. He is very, very worried about you."

"..."

Those words pierced through my heart.

For years, I had been agonizing over not making any progress.

I felt as if my heart was about to burst upon hearing that he was not angry, but worried.

How powerless and insignificant I must be, I thought.

I felt like crying.

"We've known each other for a long time, and if you're in trouble, I thought I'd lend a hand."

"! Do you perhaps know the whereabouts of the culprit?"

At my eager response, the Human God chuckled.

"No. Just like the Dragon God, I am not omniscient. I don't know that much. But, I have knowledge acquired from the gods of each world. For instance, about the power you possess."

"Power...?"

"Yes. You, being a half-breed of the Demon Race and the Dragon Race, possess a certain power."

The Human God, with an air of importance, moved in front of me.

His face was smiling.

A reassuring smile.

But those who smile reassuringly are not necessarily trying to reassure others.

Remember this.

Deceptive people, too, smile reassuringly.

Of course, at the time, I didn't know that.

I just felt relieved.

I trusted him.

"Have you ever had an experience where you were aware of the actions of an enemy behind you, or sensed the presence of an enemy not present in the vicinity?"

To tell the truth, I did have such memories.

There were times when I could see the movements of opponents behind me when I rode Saleact into battle with dragons.

But that's not all.

Even when I was in the Demon World, I had traces of such ability.

Otherwise, it would have been difficult for me, a lone individual, to survive in the Demon World, where ferocious beasts roam.

Human God was still laughing as he slowly disappeared.

Perhaps in reality, he simply walked out of the cave, but it somehow felt as though he had vanished.

I was frozen in place, able only to watch as the Human God disappeared.

"..."

Before I knew it, he was gone.

Saleact and my two subordinates were curled up, sound asleep.

As if nothing had happened at all.

I felt as if I had just woken from a dream.

However, I knew that the gods sometimes use strange powers.

I figured such things could happen.

So, I didn't dismiss the recent events as just a dream, but decided to try out this so-called "Demon Eye."

■

There's no doubt that I was skeptical.

Ordinarily, I would have been even more doubtful.

I would never have wasted my time believing in an improbable power.

But, I was desperate.

I felt like I had to do something.

I was grasping at straws.

I headed straight to the Gold Dragon's nest.

The place where Crystal had died had already been cleaned out and was reverting back to being just a Gold Dragon nest.

It was a reddish-brown cave with many ferns hanging from the ceiling.

Gold Dragons are carnivorous, but when they can't find prey, they stave off their hunger by eating these ferns.

In such a place, I consciously tried to tap into the power at the back of my eyes.

"...What is this?"

Then, as the Human God had said, I could clearly perceive something.

Something that I usually use unconsciously was definitely there.

Explaining this sensation is difficult.

Well, think of it like an internal organ.

We don't usually consciously feel our heartbeat, but we can if we try, right?

However, unlike my internal organs, I could control my Demon Eye with my will.

Even though I hadn't even been aware of its existence until now.

It was as if what the Human God had told me in the cave was some kind of catalyst, and the power that I had been using unconsciously until now was laid bare.

Within the depths of my eyes, the Demon Eye existed.

A Demon Eye slightly different from the ones that are rampant in this world now... but if I were to name it, it would undoubtedly be a Demon Eye.

Clear traces were left in its sight.

The spot where Crystal's body had lain, where the Gold Dragon's corpse had been.

The presence of Maxwell, and that of his subordinates.

And then, completely different from all of these, the presence of someone else seemed to float in the air.

Clearly, I could see it.

It wasn't just my imagination.

With strong conviction, I pursued that presence.

I jumped onto Saleact, slicing through the wind as we flew over the vast Dragon realm.

We crossed six mountains and seven valleys.

The trace was going straight, there was no room for misdirection.

Without questioning it, I thought, 'That's the culprit, no doubt.'

It might seem hasty, but it can't be helped.

After all, I've finally obtained a clue where there were absolutely none before.

Every man wants to believe that what they've got in hand, the place they've reached, is special.

I flew like an arrow.

■

And so, I arrived at a certain mountain.

A nameless mountain, lacking any noteworthy features.

The altitude wasn't particularly high, it wasn't home to any particular dragon. There were no conspicuous caves halfway up the mountain.

Just another mountain commonly seen in the Dragon realm.

In the middle of such a mountain, there was a cave.

Where one wasn't supposed to exist.

Was it there from the beginning, or had someone dug it out?

I assumed the latter.

After all, there were traces at the entrance of the cave, as if something sharp had carved it out.

An artificial presence.

"..."

I hesitated for a few seconds.

Inside might be the perpetrator of one of the Five Dragon Generals' murder.

But, is that an opponent I can handle?

It might be impossible.

Perhaps it would be better to return right away and ask for assistance from one of the Five Dragon Generals.

However, I quickly shook my head.

At this point, I felt I had already failed.

The failure of having achieved "no results at all."

To make up for this failure, I had no choice but to take the criminal's head and bring it back.

Those were my thoughts at the time.

"Gora, Sklava... let's go."

"Yes, sir!"

"We're counting on you to watch our backs."

So, leaving Saleact at the entrance, I plunged into the cave with my two subordinates.

Looking back, perhaps I should have sent one of my men back to Keious, to call for one of the Five Dragon Generals.

But my subordinates must have had the same thoughts as me.

Without hesitation, they followed me.

The inside of the cave was narrow and damp.

The hard green stones were covered in moss, giving the illusion that no creature had been there for a long time.

But, unmistakably, someone had been there.

There were traces.

No, to call them traces might be an overstatement.

There was a makeshift bed of twigs and small lizard bones scattered about.

"It's here. Don't let your guard down."

"Aye!"

I was convinced that the culprit was here.

The presence felt from the bed was the same as what was found at the Gold Dragon's nest.

However, although there was a presence, there was no sight of anyone.

Are they not here now?

Or...

"...!"

"Gah!"

At that moment, I heard a voice from behind me.

I turned around instantly to find Skrava collapsing, his neck twisted and vomiting blood.

It was too sudden.

I can't deny I was careless, I assumed the power of the Demon Eye would warn me.

"What the hell is this...!"

It darted around in the darkness, attacking Gorla.

I wouldn't overlook that.

Instantly I threw myself between Gorla and it, grabbed its arm, threw it aside, and slammed it against the hard rock wall.

Then, silhouetted against light shining in from the entrance, its figure became clear.

Without a doubt, it was not a dragonkin.

It was a demon.

I recognized it immediately.

After all, it was a being I had seen many times and long admired.

However, my surprise wasn't because it was a demon.

It was because it didn't appear in my Demon Eye.

Whether due to some power or its nature.

Fortunately, I could see its traces... its footprints and scent, but I couldn't see the demon itself.

"-----!"

The demon cried something at me.

It was in the demon tongue.

But I didn't understand the words.

I had never learned the demon tongue.

Still, I felt its hostility.

"This is the enemy who killed Crystal and Skrava! Gorla, cover me!"

"Yes!"

I concluded that this demon was the perpetrator who had killed Crystal.

I extended my claws, gathered my dragon energy, and took my stance.

Right hand forward, left hand near my chest.

The same stance as Lady Dora.

"-----!"

The demon was shouting something, but it must have understood my intent to fight.

It quickly regained its posture and glared at me.

I closed the distance gradually, with Gorla covering my blind spots.

The exit was behind us.

The demon had nowhere to run.

"-----!"

The demon cried out and kicked the ground.

The fight had begun.

■

It turned into a fierce battle.

The demon was strong.

Even if I slashed at it with my claws or punctured its body with my fangs, it would regenerate, move again, and attack me.

Of course, I was not overwhelming it.

I was knocked down many times and spat blood more than once.

I didn't feel like I could win.

At one point, I even thought about retreating for a moment and calling for help from the Five Dragon Generals.

It would have been the safe and smart choice.

Turning my back and running away is not something Lady Dora taught me... but it would have been a temporary retreat for the sake of completing the mission.

But perhaps it was because I had such a hesitant thought that things went wrong.

Gorla was killed.

His heart was pierced and he died.

It was a momentary lapse in attention.

It happened just as I was about to suggest a temporary retreat.

I can't forget Gorla's regretful face when his heart was pierced.

Having lost both of my subordinates, I could no longer retreat.

I continued to fight.

I was filled with resentment.

Gorla and Skrava were only acquaintances for a short while, but we had journeyed together, shared meals and beds.

I had to avenge both of them.

There was also stubbornness.

If I was to retreat here, for what purpose I had flown all these past years?

However, I was gradually being cornered.

Well, why wouldn't I be?

How was I supposed to defeat a being that seemed immortal?

No matter how much I attacked, it would regenerate.

As for me, I wouldn't regenerate.

Of course, I was cornered.

Even if I had a greater power than it, I would still be cornered.

It was fortunate that I didn't lose immediately, because it had what seemed like an infinite amount of stamina.

Our battle lasted for ten days.

The cave collapsed due to the aftermath of the battle, and the mountain crumbled, but still, there was no conclusion.

Both I and it were at the brink.

Yes, surprisingly, it was also on the brink.

Probably, it hadn't had anything to eat in a very long time.

It had wings on its back and could fly, but it did not have the same capabilities for flight as the Dragon Tribe.

So, it couldn't go far to hunt for prey.

Even the most powerful beings would weaken if they kept fighting in such a condition for ten days.

On the tenth day, I noticed that its regeneration power was diminishing.

And it probably understood this better than anyone.

In its eyes, I could see the sheer will not to die.

However, I was even more battered, full of wounds, and on the verge of collapsing.

I had almost no strength left.

If I continued to fight like this, I believed I would be defeated.

The difference was small, but I would be the first to fall.

And if I lost, it would eat me, Gorla and Skrava and recover its strength.

I would let Crystal's murderer escape and, worse, I would even give it strength.

I could not accept that.

I had to clear Lady Dora's regrets.

I couldn't let the efforts of the Five Dragon Generals go to waste.

I had to live up to the expectations of the Dragon God.

"Uaaaaaaaaah!"

So, I mustered my last bit of strength.

Something welled up from the depths of my abdomen.

Something surged up from the pit of my stomach.

From deep within my belly, just below my heart.

There, I felt a bubbling mass, like a glob of boiling magma, a something harboring overwhelming energy.

This, too, might be thanks to my awakening to the Demon Eye.

I unleashed it.

To be specific, I don't remember well how I unleashed it.

If I were asked to do it again, I probably couldn't.

However, a sense of capability and an urge not to lose mingled together, and I let it loose.

And then, the mountain disappeared.

■

When I came to, both I and it were unconscious, laid side by side on a rock shelf of the neighboring mountain.

I caused an explosion of my dragon energy.

Like a self-destruction.

But the main stream of energy not only blew away the mountain, it also knocked down the creature.

It was a draw.

And then, Saleyakt must have picked us up, as we lost consciousness as well as our footing and started falling.

Saleyakt saved my life.

As soon as I woke up, I restrained its arms and legs with ropes made of dragon bones and leather.

Honestly, it can only be said that it was fortunate that I woke up before it...

Nevertheless, I had captured the murderer of Crystal.

I had accomplished my mission.

The Demon Dragon King

I shackled the assassin and took him to the Dragon Roar Mountain.

He woke up on the way, but escape was impossible.

After all, these were handcuffs made to bind a member of the dragon tribe.

They have the effect of suppressing and dispersing power.

Even for a demon tribe, having such handcuffs put on meant he had no choice but to stay put.

Perhaps he had given up, or perhaps other emotions were swirling inside him.

Having completed the mission, filled with joy, I couldn't tell.

In any case, it was a triumph.

"Laplace!"

The one to greet my triumphant return was Szilard.

There are eight entrances to the Dragon Roar Mountain, and Szilard, along with many Dragon Knights, greeted me as I tried to enter from the particularly large entrance.

Well, to put it that way would be a bit misleading.

Whenever someone without notice approached the entrance, he would go out to guard it with the Dragon Knights.

Protecting the Dragon Roar Mountain is one of his duties, after all.

I was out on a raid and hadn't notified them of my return.

Just like the Dragon God, when he first brought me into this world.

"Did you do it!?"

Upon seeing me, Saleyakt, and the one I brought with me, he was greatly surprised.

"Yes!"

"Well done!"

And with an expression of joy, he greeted me.

It was truly a welcome.

The other Dragon Knights, upon hearing that the enemy of the Five Dragon Generals had been captured, erupted in joy.

It's rare to remember a time when so many Dragon Knights cheered with such delight.

"Laplace, you've done well."

"Thank you, Lord Szilard. However, how this creature came to the Dragon Realm and how it killed Lady Crystal..."

I was convinced that this creature had done it.

But upon thinking, I realized I didn't have tangible evidence.

There's no proof that it did it.

Realizing this, my words started to wilt.

I returned in high spirits, but I began to wonder if I had mistakenly brought back a completely unrelated entity.

Although rare, displacement incidents occur not only in the Dragon Realm but also in other worlds.

The one I attacked could just be a victim of such an incident...

"Is that so... Ah, right. You only speak the language of the Dragon God. Alright, then I will interrogate him."

"Please do so."

With my heart pounding, I handed him over.

After all the time and hardship it took, and the spectacle of blowing up an entire mountain to make the arrest.

All that effort, and the thought of him being someone else was gnawing at me.

But I was also tired.

Though without concrete evidence, I had conviction about this creature, and handing it over to someone trustworthy also relieved me.

Embarrassingly, I wanted to return home and rest as soon as possible.

For the time being, my mission was complete.

It didn't matter if it turned out to be a failure. All I wanted then was to sleep.

And so, he was taken away by the Dragon Knights.

There was nothing but anxiety on his face as he was being taken away.

Perhaps he felt a bond had formed between us in the midst of our battle.

It wasn't something i could understand, but it seems this is not something uncommon amongst demons.

That was the last time I saw him.

■

For three days and three nights, I slept.

After waking up, I ate.

The food tasted good, eating next to Lady Lunaria.

Perhaps it was because it was the meal after accomplishing a mission.

Afterwards, I first headed to Maxwell.

He was at the Dragon Roar Mountain training facility, in the midst of searching for outstanding individuals among the young ones.

I told him about the capture of the assassin.

And at the same time, about losing a valuable comrade.

To this, he patted my shoulder and said, "I see, but if the mission was accomplished, they too will be at peace."

Afterwards, I went to Lady Dora.

Honestly, I thought I would be scolded and yelled at.

Lady Dora told me to bring the head, but I wasn't able to fulfill that promise.

I handed over the culprit, with his head still attached, to Szilard.

With apprehension and resolve in my heart, I entered Lady Dora's room.

To my surprise, her belly had remarkably shrunk.

She had successfully finished laying her eggs.

She was as serene as a calm sea.

I walked up to her and gave my deepest bow.

"The aftershocks of your battle reached here," she said.

Lady Dora said this with a serene expression.

"I knew right away that you were fighting. Maybe that's why I suddenly went into labor."

She said, stroking the egg placed beside her.

A dragon's egg is about the size of a human baby.

The pain of giving birth probably isn't much different.

"It was born safely, but it was premature. It might be a little immature."

She said this, but her hand stroking the egg was gentle.

I never thought the harsh Lady Dora could make such an expression.

It's incredibly impolite to think this way.

Until now, I've only seen the strong and loyal Lady Dora.

Well, one could argue that is the gentle side of Lady Dora...

Let's put that aside for now.

"So, how did it go?"

"Ah, I managed to find and capture the suspect after a battle."

"I see... Well done. Although someone already reported that before you came."

Perhaps Maxwell had also heard it in advance as well.

No matter how much Dragon Race disregards the passage of time, I had slept for three days straight.

Maxwell was probably humoring me with his response, if only Dora-sama could do the same.

But that obtuseness was part of her charm.

"I apologize for the delay in reporting."

"Don't worry about it. I heard you fell asleep. Anyone would after using up all their dragon energy. It must've been an intense battle."

"...Also, I couldn't bring his head."

At that, Lady Dora gave a wry smile.

"It's okay. There's no point in bringing the head of someone who can regenerate."

Lady Dora said this and began to stroke the egg again.

Then, as if she had just thought of something, she looked up.

"Laplace."

"What is it?"

Lady Dora lifted the egg she was holding and offered it to me.

The egg, wrapped in soft cloth, felt incredibly fragile, as if it would break at any moment.

"If you don't mind," she said, "could you name it for me?"

"Eh... You mean, your child, Lady Dora?"

"Who else?"

"But I...?"

"Who else is here?"

Lady Dora repeated herself and heaved the egg to me.

I thought that rather than asking me, it would be better to have one of the other Five Dragon Generals or the Dragon God name it.

I hesitated to hold it.

My hand trembled.

"Rest assured, a Dragonkin's egg doesn't break so easily."

With Lady Dora's reassurance, I was finally able to hold the egg.

The egg was warm.

When I cradled it in my arms, something akin to a heartbeat could be felt.

I've eaten a few dragon eggs before, but they were all cold.

This was an entirely different sensation.

I was astonished. So this is what life feels like.

"Now, decide."

"...Don't we usually decide after seeing the face? We don't even know if it's a boy or a girl."

"Then it's a boy. A boy will be born."

"Are we allowed to decide that just like that...?"

"How certain...?"

I tried to think through my confusion.

A name.

I had it.

I was a man who could do as asked.

"Perugius."

That was the name that came to my mind.

Perugius.

Yes, Perugius.

"That's a good name. It sounds like he'll grow up to be strong, wise, and generous."

His name would be Pergius.

That was decided on that day.

■

After that, a few uneventful days passed.

I would wake up in the morning, go to Szilard to hear about progress, feed Saleyakt, and then just sleep.

There was no proper work to be done.

Depending on the results of Szilard's interrogation, my future would be decided.

If he truly was the culprit behind the Crystal killings, my mission would be accomplished.

I would likely return to my other duties... probably as Lady Dora's proxy.

Otherwise, I would continue the search.

Well, if it turns out to be the latter, I might be deemed incompetent and relieved of my duties.

But, I was commanded by the Dragon God and asked by Lady Dora.

I intended to carry out my task until the end.

No matter what anyone says, I'll see it through to the end.

With solemnity, I awaited that time.

It was a dispassionate period.

Occasionally, I'd visit the training ground, but I didn't work.

My state of mind at the time was akin to that of a prisoner awaiting his death.

I had nothing but ominous feelings.

I wasn't used to a life of just waiting.

In my long life, those days of waiting might have been the first and the last.

Well, there might have been others... I wonder...

Essentially, I was always on a mission, always active.

Waiting for instructions, that's what I was, after all.

Contrary to my state of mind, time passed slowly.

A year.

About a year after I had captured the guy, the moment arrived.

The Dragon God, who had gone to another world, had returned.

■

A council was held.

The subject, of course, was the Crystal's murderer.

She had already finished laying her egg.

She was not responsible for hatching the egg.

Although she did want to guard the egg until it safely hatched...

If there was an important council for the Five Dragon Generals, she was loyal enough to attend it.

I was made to sit in Crystal's chair, and all the chairs were filled.

"Report."

At the words of the Dragon God, I rose to my feet and gave a deep bow.

Of course, what came out of my mouth was an account of my actions thus far.

"—In the course of my travels, Human God appeared before me and granted me wise counsel. There's a demon eye within me, and I could trace the suspect with it. Using the demon eye, I was able to find a trail and after a long battle, capture the suspect."

As concisely as possible, I relayed what I had done.

I thought that every unnecessary word I spoke would just waste everyone's precious time.

"I see, you received advice from Human God?"

Dragon God-sama had a broad smile when he heard those words.

Showing how high regard he held for Human God.

"I transported him to Dragon Roar Mountain, and left the rest to Lord Szilard."

As I finished, Szilard rose to his feet.

"My investigation is complete."

Szilard picked up a piece of dragonskin parchment and began reciting from it.

"According to my investigation, the suspect is Necrolia Nacroliia, a blood relative of Immortal Demon King Necross Lacross and one of the Eight Great Demon Kings."

The assembly was abuzz with chatter.

"According to the findings, he was transported to the Dragon Realm by the command of the Demon God in order to halt the development of our realm's teleportation techniques. However, due to a flaw in his method of return, he was forced to remain in this world. Thus, he had to erase his own traces and continue hiding."

The one who was most outraged at these words was Chaos.

"Unforgivable!"

Chaos rose to his feet and slammed his fist down on the table.

The table made a tremendous noise but did not shatter.

He must have held back.

"How dare the Demons! What have we, the dragon race, done to deserve this? If they had any greivances, they should fight us openly, the gall of ordering an assassination...!"

Chaos's anger was plain as day.

A boiling rage.

I was the same.

Although not as overt as Chaos, I was burning with rage.

"War! We will hit the demons where they live and show those Demon Kings their true colors!"

Chaos advocated this, but the other three were surprisingly calm.

"...Szilard, is he still alive?"

The one who asked this was Maxwell.

He also had a stern look in his eyes, but he didn't seem as hot-headed as Chaos.

"I killed him. He was so brazen that even I couldn't stand him."

"I see, well, that makes sense."

Maxwell's tone was light.

But I understood.

Behind his words was the implication, "If he was alive, I would be the one to finish him off."

"..."

Lady Dora remained silent.

However, the rage emanating from her entire body was no less than that of Chaos.

It was an anger that seemed to threaten death to anyone who approached.

"Dora, you must be seething too, it was the demons who did this!"

"Chaos. Keep quiet... I feel the same way as you."

"...No, I'm sure your anger is even greater than mine."

At that, Chaos fell silent. Lady Dora's anger at the time was such that even Chaos conceded to it. It was so intense it felt like it could explode at the slightest touch.

Looking at them, Szilard spoke.

"Lord Dragon God. Our will is one. Let us go to the Demon Realm at once and let them receive the just reward for what Five Dragon Generals have suffered."

"..."

However, Dragon God-sama was wise.

No, even he was troubled by the situation.

He placed his hand on his mouth, thinking deeply.

"..."

There must have been something in the conversation that caught his attention.

Something I, as a fool, could not understand...

No, whether I am a fool or not might be irrelevant.

We, the Five Dragon Generals, knew too little about the Demon Tribe.

And, the Dragon God knew a lot more than us.

And the Dragon God knew a lot about the Demon Tribe.

And about their god, the Demon God.

That's why the Dragon God must have had a different opinion.

After a long silence, the Dragon God said,

"...We will not fight."

At this conclusion, the Five Dragon Generals were shocked.

"What?"

"Why are you hesitating?"

"If we combine our powers, they..."

With a raise of his hand, the Dragon God silenced their words.

Then he spoke in a solemn tone.

"The loss is shared between one of the Five Dragon Generals and one of the Eight Great Demon Kings."

Shared pain.

It was impossible to accept.

In the first place, it was because the Demon Tribe attacked that Crystal died.

And if I hadn't found him, or if there hadn't been a flaw in his magic, the current situation wouldn't have even arisen.

The Dragon Tribe would have grieved, and the Demon Tribe would have merely laughed.

How can we consider that as sharing the pain?

"If war breaks out, we will not go unscathed. The Demon Race is not an easy opponent, wait. Practice patience."

"But..."

"I will handle this matter by speaking with the Demon God."

But we are the Dragon God's servants.

If the Dragon God says so, we have no choice but to obey.

"...Understood."

Everyone seemed reluctant.

Even Lady Dora, who is the embodiment of loyalty, seemed dissatisfied with the decision.

Though she didn't openly object.

"Lord Dragon God."

"What is it, Szilard? Are you dissatisfied?"

"No, I have no dissatisfaction. If the Dragon God says so, we will obey. This is about Laplace, who had exerted great efforts to bring the criminal to justice. He deserves to be rewarded for his effort"

Upon hearing these words, I, who had been silently listening, was surprised.

This was unexpected.

I didn't need such a thing.

For me, working for the Dragon God was a matter of course.

Rather, I wanted to apologize for taking so long.

But when I heard the other Dragon Generals muttering that it was "reasonable," I kept my mouth shut.

It took time, but I was able to expose the Demon Tribe's conspiracy.

There was no reason to refuse.

"Indeed."

The Dragon God thought for a moment.

And then he quickly came up with an answer.

"Then Laplace. I grant you the title of Demon Dragon King and a position among the Five Dragon Generals. From now on, you will accompany me and assist in negotiations with the Demon Tribe."

What?!"

That decision gave the Dragon Generals another shock.

No, there was someone who was shocked beyond the Five Dragon Generals.

It was me.

I was to be added to the ranks of the Five Dragon Generals.

It was unbelievable.

It was not a joke.

I had no idea why the Dragon God would say such a thing.

"I... I object!"

The one who ended up saying that was not me.

It was Chaos.

To object to the Dragon God was an unthinkable act for the Five Dragon Generals.

But even Chaos, it seems, had reached his limit.

I understand his feelings very well.

But I didn't concur with his objection.

Even though if I could do it again, I certainly would.

"There are others more suitable!"

Chaos despised the Demon Tribe.

Yet, he didn't doubt my loyalty.

He must have thought that if I were to work for the Dragon God, he could bear it, even if I was part of the Demon Tribe.

However, the fact that I, a half-breed of the Demon Tribe, was to become one of the Five Dragon Generals, was probably unbearable for him.

Even if at this very moment, by me becoming one of the Five Dragon Generals, it would assist in negotiating peace with the Demon Tribe.

Yet, he probably despised the idea of treating someone with the blood of the Demon Tribe, the killers of Crystal, as a special existence amongst the Dragon Tribe.

"...Please."

Chaos looked at the other Five Dragon Generals as if seeking agreement.

However, their reactions were unexpectedly favorable, contrary to both Chaos's and my own expectations.

"Why not? He is indeed young, but his loyalty to the Dragon God is stronger than anyone else's, and he has the power to carry out his duties."

"He even has the power to defeat the Eight Great Demon Kings."

That's what Szilard and Maxwell said.

Chaos then looked at Lady Dora, as if pleading for her to disagree.

"...I have been watching him for a long time.

"For a long time, I had watched him develop... While he still lacks the strength to be worthy of the title Dragon General... we were once inadequate as well. It's through continuous service under the Dragon God's banner that we've gained our current strength."

Lady Dora said that and looked at me.

"Laplace. This is an honor. Work harder now, more than ever."

Having been told that, I couldn't say no.

No, there was no reason to say no in the first place.

Just as Lady Dora said, this was an immensely honorable matter.

My hard work and dedication were being recognized, and at the same time, it was connected to the 'improvement of relations with the Demon Tribe' as stated by the Dragon God.

Of course, becoming a Dragon General would benefit Dragon God's unborn child as well.

The reason why the Dragon God brought me along, everything would be accomplished.

"...It's more than I deserve, but I will perform my duties."

I stood up, crossed my fists in front of my chest, and said so.

After all, there was no way I could refuse.

■ ■ ■

"And thus, I became one of the Five Dragon Generals... The Demon Dragon King, Laplace."

At that point, Laplace let out a small sigh.

His face showed something like lingering affection, or perhaps regret - it was difficult to tell.

Rostelina, seeing that expression, felt a sense of unease.

She had wanted to know more about Laplace, and had asked him to share his story casually, but she now wondered if perhaps she was asking about something she shouldn't. Maybe she was making Laplace talk about something he didn't want to discuss.

"Master Laplace... did you... not want to become one of the Five Dragon Generals?"

"Hm? No, it wasn't like that. If I truly didn't want to, I would have refused, even if it meant incurring the Dragon God's displeasure... But thinking back, I do believe that it was a status too lofty for who I was back then. It was indeed an honor, but..."

"Why is that? Master Laplace, you defeated the one who killed the other Dragon Generals, didn't you? And your strength was recognized because of it."

"That's right. But being a Dragon General is not just about strength. It should not be so."

Laplace's words were vague, and Rostelina didn't quite understand.

To Rostelina, Laplace was a being akin to a god.

He was not a being of mere strength.

Rather, she thought of him as a person fit to stand above others.

"Master Laplace, you are a great person. You saved me."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I was saved by you, master. Despite being a cursed child, I'm able to live this life because of you. I do not know much about the other Dragon Generals, but there cannot be anyone more fitting of the title of Dragon General than you, master. I'm sure of it."

Rostelina was born in an ordinary Elven village.

That power had run rampant countless times since she was small, destroying the village and killing villagers.

As a result, she was cast out of the village.

Abandoned in a corner of the great forest, she cried alone.

She didn't have the power to survive on her own.

All that awaited her was a fate of being attacked and killed by monsters.

He uncovered the secret of Rostelina's body, implanted magical circles in her, and neutralized her overflowing magical power.

Thanks to him, Rostelina was able to lead a peaceful life.

Laplace said, his eyes distant and wistful.

The last remaining Dragon General.

Rostelina pondered the meaning of those words, but of course, she could not understand.

She didn't know.

And when you don't know something, all you can do is ask.

"....Master..."

However, Rostelina couldn't bring herself to ask.

Whenever Laplace told a story from his past, he always ended up with a pained expression.

Up until now, the story had been going very smoothly.

A wild child of the demon realm, receiving education, working, being recognized, and becoming one of the dragon tribe's leaders.

There was hardly any pain.

Then surely, a much more painful conclusion awaited ahead.

Rostelina wanted to know.

Even if it was a painful conclusion, if it was about Laplace, she wanted to know.

But, if it meant causing Laplace pain, she could endure not knowing.

"Master... if there is anything you wish for me to do, please don't hesitate to ask. I promise to be of assistance to you."

"Well, then... no."

At Rostelina's words, Laplace started to say something but then closed his mouth.

He gave a bitter smile and shook his head.

"Well then, there is one thing I ask of you."

"What is it?"

Laplace wore a gentle smile and patted Rostelina's head.

"Go to bed for today. I need you to work tomorrow as well."

Before they realized, it had become late into the night.

Rostelina had forgotten about her sleepiness, engrossed in the conversation.

"...Yes, master."

Perhaps she could not be of help after all.

With this lonely thought in her heart, Rostelina rose from her chair and left the room.

She would leave the room as she was, return to her own room, and sleep.

"..."

After seeing her off, Laplace turned to his desk.

While telling the story, he had remembered something he had forgotten to write down.

He decided to put it in a book.

A book that summarized the most important things.

It was a book that summarized the most important things.

While writing everything down to know everything would be ideal, there was no need to know everything.

Creating a book that gathered the most important things was necessary.

Laplace added a page to that book, and wrote:

Pergius."

It was a name that had to be recorded.

As he wrote, Laplace murmured softly.

He voiced the words he could not say because he knew that saying them would likely make Rostelina sad.

"To the reader of this book, I have a request.

There will come a child of the dragon tribe to this world, one who does not know his own name.

That child must be taught his name.

I had carelessly forgotten, but it is also one of my duties.

The child will have silver-white hair. He should be a nameless boy.

I want you to tell him.

Please tell him,

Your real true name is Perugius.

Perugius, son of Lady Dora, the Great Armored Dragon King Dora.

In case I die before my aspirations are fulfilled, I record it here."

With those words, Laplace finished writing on a page of the book.

Then, he placed the book in the middle of his desk, in the most conspicuous place.

Even if he should lose his life, if anyone comes here, they would surely look at it.

While it is Laplace's mission to pass on the name, there is no reason why Laplace himself has to do it directly.

Of course, his true desire would be to personally deliver the name as the one who named him.

"Dora..."

As he murmured the name, the image of Dora surfaced in Laplace's mind.

The figure of Dora, who was a teacher, a superior, and also like a mother.

And the moment of her regrettable end...

Just remembering that moment makes his heart clench.

What surges from the depths of his heart is hatred.

An impulse to kill, an urge to rampage.

To clear that regret, Laplace had to live.

He had to fulfill his mission.

"Hmm..."

As Laplace closed the book, he sat back deeply in the chair.

Whether it was from moving around in the lower world, or remembering the battles when he became one of the five dragon generals, he felt fatigue in his body.

It looked like he would be able to sleep properly for the first time in a while.

"Good night, Rostelina."

Laplace said, closing his eyes.

It was the first time in decades where all the members of the household fell asleep together, atop Dragon Roar Mountain.

The Dragon and the Woman

Centuries have passed.

On the Dragon Roar Mountain, the peaceful days continued unabated.

For the human race, centuries are an exceedingly long time, but for Rostelina, an elf, it wasn't such a long period.

No, perhaps it was still enough time to raise a small girl into a proper lady.

Rostelina had grown from a lovely girl into a splendid beauty.

However, as for what was inside Rostelina, it had hardly changed from the past.

She remained the same innocent girl.

Living without interacting with anyone other than Laplace and Sareyakuto, it was only natural.

However, her innermost feelings were far from peaceful.

Her smile faded, and a melancholic feeling occupied most of her heart.

And no wonder.

Since hearing that story... about Laplace becoming one of the Five Dragon Generals, he had often shown a dark and stern expression.

On the surface, everything seemed as before, but Rostelina could tell.

It wasn't anger or displeasure, it was not a direct emotion like that.

Yet, she was certain that negative emotions were accumulating within him.

Moreover, Laplace had recently been away from home more often.

He had always occasionally been away, but recently, he was only home about once a month.

She knew the reason.

He was trying to verify the truth of the rumors about the resurrection of the Great Demon Emperor, Kishirika Kishirisu.

The Great Demon Emperor was famous enough that even Rostelina was aware of her.

She led the demons to war with the human race thousands of years ago.
It was a war many centuries before Rostelina's time.

A tremendous war that engulfed the entire world.

The war ended in the Great Demon Emperor's defeat.

But if she was resurrected, then the flames of war would start anew.

She doesn't know how Laplace would act.

She didn't know how Laplace would respond to that.

Whether he would side with the human race or the demon race.

Or whether he would observe from the sidelines, taking on the role of a spectator.

But no matter what he decided, he would undoubtedly be busy preparing.

Now, he seemed to be only trying to confirm whether the rumors of the resurrection of the Great Demon Emperor were true...

"Haa..."

While bringing in the laundry, Rostelina sighed.

She understood that Laplace was busy.

He was always driven by a strong sense of duty. It's only natural that he'd be too occupied to pay attention to Rostelina if a major event was occurring in this world.

But a knot remained in her heart.

She couldn't help but wonder if he was avoiding her.

Did that conversation make him feel uncomfortable?

Laplace had said it at the very beginning.

The end of this story was a bad one.

No matter how positive the development seemed along the way, the final result was a tragic one.

From what she had heard so far, it didn't seem to be a tragic ending.

A man who was half-dragon, half-demon, once all alone, was found, educated, and gained status.

It was a success story.

If the story ended here, it could be called not a bad ending but a happy one.

But, the story didn't end there.

If it had ended, Laplace wouldn't be setting up a home in such a remote place, flying around the world alone, and writing books.

Something drastic must have happened.

Something decidedly tragic happened to Laplace... but what?

Maybe Laplace doesn't want to talk about it.

Could it be that Laplace dislikes talking about that 'something'?

That he avoids coming home because he dislikes being pestered for more of the story?

If so, Rostelina won't pursue it further.

It's fine.

Certainly, Rostelina wanted to know.

She wanted to know the reason behind Laplace's occasional sorrowful and pained expressions.

She wanted to know the reason.

Having known, she wanted to be of help.

She wanted to be a support for his heart.

However, if speaking to Rostelina caused Laplace pain, she would rather not know.

Even without knowing, she could still be a help to Laplace.

She could do laundry, cleaning.

Her cooking had improved considerably over the past hundred years.

While it was hard to tell if she had truly improved since Laplace would always say it was delicious, at the very least Sareyakuto tapped his tongue at Rostelina's cooking and praised her.

Well, that was only because Rostelina couldn't understand Sareyakuto's words, so it was through messages conveyed by Laplace.

In any case, she could be helpful in other ways.

She thought it would be a breach of manners to know something that Laplace didn't want to talk about, and although she hadn't learned the ancient dragon god language, if she tried hard to study, she should be able to read it and even organize the bookshelves.

Therefore, at least when he returned home, she wanted him to pay attention to her.

Lately, even when he occasionally came home, he would hole up in his study and write for a long time.

He lamented that because he was away for so long, he couldn't write everything down.

Rostelina hardly gets to have a conversation with Laplace, only a few words a month.

She wanted him to pay more attention to her.

She was ready to put in the effort for that.

She wasn't a child anymore.

"Ah, I wish my master would come home soon..."

Laundry was done, and the house was clean.

After eating lunch, she also cleaned Sareyakuto's bedding.

She didn't forget to spread Sareyakuto's scales and droppings around the house, which were found in Sareyakuto's bed.

This was to ensure that the house wasn't ransacked by other dragons when Sareyakuto returned, staking a clear claim on their territory.

Of course, even without such measures, things were generally okay.

"... Ah."

Soon, it would be time for dinner.

But Rostelina could only sigh.

She had no appetite at all.

"...Ah!"

At that moment, Rostelina's long ears picked up a sound.

The noise of large wings flapping.

Much more powerful and nostalgic than that of the red dragons living nearby.

It was Sareyakuto.

Laplace had returned.

"Master!"

Unable to stand still, Rostelina dashed outside.

As expected, there was Laplace riding on Sareyakuto's back.

Recognizing Rostelina, Laplace raised one hand and landed in the square in front of the house, while Sareyakuto flapped his wings.

It was a landing so graceful it was hard to believe he was a red dragon.

As soon as he landed, Laplace jumped off Sareyakuto.

Sareyakuto yawned, seemingly exhausted, and slowly headed to the back of the house.

In fact, he must have been quite tired from all the flying.

"I'm home, Rostelina. What's the matter? It's rare for you to welcome me outside the house."

"It's not rare! I've been welcoming you home recently."

"Is that so...? I'm sorry about that."

"No, it's okay! So, Master... um, would you like something to eat?"

Rostelina asked cautiously.

Laplace often declined when asked if he would like a meal.

Laplace didn't eat much.

"Ah, yes, I think I would. I've been flying around without eating or drinking anything, so I'm quite hungry. I'll count on you."

"Yes!"

But it seemed today was different.

Rostelina cheerfully responded and ran to the kitchen.

She didn't extinguish the stove's fire.

She poured water from the jug into the pot, boiled the water, and started preparations immediately.

"Rostelina."

"Yes! What is it, Master?"

Called from behind, Rostelina was ready to turn on a dime and run to Laplace.

"Ah, no, you can listen while you're preparing."

But she stopped on Laplace's command.

With her lips tight, she returned to prepping dinner.

"Today, I confirmed it. The Demon Emperor Kishirika Kishirisu had indeed resurrected.

Or rather, saying resurrected might be incorrect.

She probably resurrected five hundred years ago. She was in her complete form.

And just like the time of the previous war, she had become a puppet of a warlike demon king.

...A war is going to happen."

Rostelina's hand paused for a moment.

But then she began moving again.

Even if she was told that a war would happen, Rostelina didn't quite understand.

She had never experienced a war before.

In the large war known as the Human-Demon Great War, an extraordinary number of casualties were reported.

She has never experienced war.

In the grand conflict known as the Human-Demon War, an extraordinary number of casualties was reported.

Yet, for Rostelina, leading a hermit's life in Dragon Roar Mountain, such an event would seem distant.

No matter how great the war, it was hard to imagine the damage reaching this far.

"And it appears that he's the one pulling the strings behind this war."

"He?"

"The one I've been pursuing, who I consider... my enemy."

Rostelina's hand stopped.

"I don't know what his aim is.

But, I have the obligation to investigate and thwart it.

He always sets his pieces on the board.

If we determine that a piece has been placed, we must remove it, or we'll certainly be cornered."

"..."

"So, I'll participate in this war. Which side I'll end up on, I still don't know."

In front of Rostelina, the water began to bubble and boil.

Yet, Rostelina couldn't help but turn back.

Laplace is powerful.

But, he's alone.

The other dragon generals are no more.

And the enemy is probably the one who killed those generals.

He might die.

Laplace might lose.

"Master..."

Rostelina, with her anxious feelings, peeked out towards the dining area.

Laplace, as always, sat calmly in his chair.

But on his face, somehow, she felt a shadow was cast.

Perhaps, she might not see him again.

She even had such a premonition.

"Oh, don't worry, Rostellina.

It will be a while before the war begins.

Until then, I'll be with you."

Whether he knew of Rostelina's anxiety or not, Laplace smiled and spoke.

"So come on, could you make me something to eat? I've been famished for a while now."

"Yes..."

Prompted, Rostelina returned to the kitchen and resumed her cooking.

She made soup, roasted meat, and served it with vegetables.

It was ready in no time.

But even when she tasted it, she couldn't discern the flavors.

"Ah, it's delicious today as well."

Laplace ate his meal and praised it.

But was it really that delicious...?

"What's the matter, Rostelina? You're unusually quiet today."

"Master..."

"Hmm?"

"Do you really have to go to that war?"

At her question, Laplace looked momentarily taken aback.

But then he quickly turned serious and nodded.

"Yes, I must go. Especially if he's involved."

"Why...?"

Why.

That word had slipped out of Rostelina, coming from a place separate from her will.

She shouldn't have asked.

That's what she thought, but she had asked anyway.

"I see... I forgot. I suppose the story was left unfinished. You didn't know."

"Huh?"

"I'll tell you. You'll surely understand once you hear.

What happened in the Dragon World... no, in the world after that.

What my mission is. Why I must fight him."

At those words, Rostelina hesitantly asked.

"Don't you... not want to talk about it?"

"That's not true. It's a painful and sad story, but it's a past that should not be forgotten. If I don't talk about it, I may eventually come to forget it."

Laplace spoke as if making a decision.

"Sit down, Rostelina. Or perhaps you don't want to hear it?"

Upon those words, Rostelina swallowed nervously.

She wanted to hear it.

What happened in Laplace's life?

What happened to Laplace, who became one of the Five Dragon Generals?

She was the one who brought it up.

There was no way she wouldn't want to hear it, no way she wouldn't want to know.

"Please, tell me."

And so, she took her seat.

Next to Laplace, in her usual spot.

"Alright, then let's begin. The conclusion of the Dragon Realm's story."

And thus, Laplace began the tale.

The final story of the Demon Dragon King, Laplace.

■ ■ ■

The Dragon's Diplomat

Before we delve into the main topic, let's first discuss the roles of the Five Dragon Generals.

As I mentioned earlier, each of the Five Dragon Generals has been assigned a task by the Dragon God.

Dora is in charge of dragon taming.

Maxwell handles monster eradication.

Chaos is responsible for weapon forging.

And Szilard is tasked with overseeing the Dragon Knights.

Interestingly, aside from these official duties, there were also some clandestine tasks, but let's put that aside for now.

As one of the newly appointed Five Dragon Generals, I was given a particular duty.

It was to assist the Dragon God.

It could be referred to as a bodyguard... but perhaps the term 'attendant' is more fitting.

I was to stand by the Dragon God, who travels all over, providing protection, advice, and even delivering drinks.

I was granted the role of managing these miscellaneous tasks.

Being charged with miscellaneous tasks may seem fitting for a greenhorn like me, but there is no greater honor than being able to be by the Dragon God's side at all times.

The other Five Dragon Generals probably didn't appreciate this.

Every one of the Five Dragon Generals respects, fears, and venerates the Dragon God.

They wouldn't have been pleased that a newbie like me was given such an honorable duty.

Of course, even though they didn't like it, they didn't complain.

From my stand point, being an attendant was just the right role for me.

There was no reason to oppose it.

Thus, I was to accompany the Dragon God to other worlds.

Though the teleportation spell was not yet complete, there was a method to travel between worlds.

In every world, there is always an altar somewhere.

When the Dragon God visits, the altar activates, leading us to a completely white, empty space.

Flying through there would take us to the altar in another world.

The first place I was brought to was a world swirling with poison and miasma... yes, the Demon World.

■

"Is this..."

Stepping one foot off the altar, I stopped in my tracks, taken aback by the sight before me.

The Demon World, a place that left me with nothing but bitter memories.

Naturally, I thought that returning would evoke sour emotions.

"What's wrong?"

"No, it's nothing."

However, coming back after growing up, I saw things differently.

Perhaps it's because I have matured, but I didn't feel any interest in the Demon World's town that I had once longed for.

There was no hatred either.

Even seeing a demon beast striding in the distance, I only felt a sense of nostalgia.

Perhaps it meant that I held no lingering attachments.

"Let's go."

"Yes, sir!"

Without specifying where, the Dragon God took off into the sky.

I, too, followed suit without foolishly asking where we were headed.

The Dragon God led the way to the center of the Demon World.

From afar, it looked like a mountain range but was actually an enormous crater.

Numerous houses were erected within, and at the very center of the crater stood a massive, black-iron castle.

The heart of the Demon World, the Demon God city, Dailek, and the Demon God Castle, Gailek.

As we approached the castle, it became evident that bonfires were arranged in a circular pattern near the rooftop.

Without hesitation, the Dragon God descended to the center of this circle.

Around the perimeter of the circle stood countless demons.

There were various kinds of demons.

Some had multiple arms, others had beast-like legs, some emitted phosphorescence, and some lacked eyes.

It didn't seem like they were particularly fond of the Dragon God and me.

Though it didn't show in their demeanor, the tension was palpable.

"Gahahaha! Welcome, Dragon God!"

Amidst the tension, one demon stepped forward.

He alone stood out in the tense atmosphere.

Laughing heartily, he approached us with a friendly demeanor.

"Hmm..."

However, upon seeing me, he halted.

His smile disappeared, and his face became serious.

"..."

Likewise, upon seeing him, I was lost for words.

I recognized him.

Black skin, six arms, long purple hair, and a bare upper body.

Upon seeing him, I shivered.

It was a long time ago, even considering those days.

When I still lived in the Demon World.

He was the one who kept pushing me away every time I tried to enter the town...

Indeed, it was him.

The Demon King who had beaten me down time and again in the Demon World.

"This is my guard. One of the Five Dragon Generals, known as the Demon Dragon King Laplace."

These words from the Dragon God broke the sudden silence between me and the Demon King.

With that reminder, I recalled the reason I'd been promoted to the Five Dragon Generals and brought to this place.

Without delay, I saluted and greeted the Demon King.

"I am Demon Dragon King Laplace. I look forward to our acquaintance!"

"Hmm..."

As I spoke, the Demon King exhibited a brief moment of contemplation, then boomed,

"Gahahaha! I am one of the Eight Great Demon Kings, Necroslakross! Remember that well!"

■

One thing to do when visiting other worlds is attending councils.

The gods of each world regularly hold councils—I think I've mentioned this before. This practice, of course, is still ongoing.

The venue changes each time, but it rarely falls on the Dragon World, Heaven, or Sea World.

Other gods also bring attendants with them, and some of them couldn't fly or swim.

Probably being considerate of that.

Setting that aside, the councils of gods mainly concerns recent issues arising in each world.

Indeed, topics such as the appearance of monsters or sudden teleportation are common.

Every world is striving to resolve these issues, but no solution has been proposed yet.

In fact, by the time I joined the councils and stood erect behind the Dragon God as an observer, the gods' relationships had already grown strained.

"Again with the monsters! One of our towns has been destroyed!"

"One of our leaders disappeared due to teleportation. It caused a war, and thousands have died!"

"Hmph, aren't there rumors that you've already finished researching teleportation? Isn't this all a charade of your own making?"

"What...? Are you going to believe baseless rumors? If so, I might just start believing the rumors that you are the ones spawning these monsters!"

A man with numerous tentacles spewing from his mouth, skin slick like a squid—the Sea God.

A man with the heads of a dog and a cat, striding upon a white wolf—the Beast God.

A beautiful man with two eyes on his forehead, and six wings sprouting from his back—the Sky God.

A man more than three meters tall with eight arms and six horns—the Demon God.

Especially the relationships among these four were tense.

Every time their paths crossed at the councils, they would throw insults, their words threatening to spark a violent conflict at any moment.

They carried the dignity of gods, but their anger and overflowing power were real, and terrifying.

"Now, now, everyone, let's calm down. It's not beneficial for us to fight. Don't worry. The research is progressing smoothly; we'll surely find the cause. Let's not be deceived by baseless rumors."

"That's right. There's no point in us fighting. Even if we did, only our people would suffer."

Amidst all this, only two individuals were striving to stop the bickering.

The great Dragon God we revere.

And then there was the Human God, whose image was difficult to remember, as if shrouded in an all-encompassing mosaic.

If not for these two, the various worlds would have long since rejected each other, and it wouldn't have been strange if wars had already broken out.

"..."

Upon hearing the words of the Human God, all the gods fell silent.

The Human God was widely respected.

After all, he was the initiator of these councils, and with the rapid growth of the human race, he often offered advice to the other gods.

In other words, he had contributed far more than he had received from the others.

That's why everyone held the Human God in high regard.

The Dragon God was no exception.

"Humph, you seem quite pleased with yourself, Dragon God."

However, the Demon God didn't remain silent.

The following words were enough to send chills down my spine.

"I've heard rumors that you kidnapped and tortured my son, Necrolianakrolianakroli, to death."

At those words, I trembled inwardly.

Such a statement could ignite a war with the Demon World at any moment.

And I knew full well that the rumor was true.

The Dragon race had their side of the story, but if they were to answer honestly, war was inevitable.

"...That's merely a rumor. I know nothing of this individual."

The Dragon God lied.

I was taken aback, as I had always considered him incapable of falsehoods.

But of course, it was only natural.

If he were to speak honestly, he would also have to address the matter of Necrolianakrolianakroli killing Crystal.

The destination would be an argument, and then war.

Perhaps the Demon God intended to provoke this reaction, but we could not allow it.

The Dragon God chose a different path.

"Rather than focusing on that, look at this man, Demon God."

The Dragon God drew attention to me, standing right behind him.

I immediately saluted with the utmost respect.

I had to ensure that I did not embarrass the Dragon God.

"A half-dragon, half-demon, huh? You did mention before that you took him from my world. What about it?"

"I have made this one a senior figure among the dragon race. He serves as living proof that we have no intention of being antagonistic towards the demon race."

"Hmm..."

The Demon God looked at me and snorted.

He stared at me intently, his eyes glowing.

Actually, his eyes literally glowed.

They must have been some sort of demon eyes.

And upon seeing through his demon eye, the Demon God sank back into his chair.

"I see. I shall believe you."

Originally, I was picked up for this purpose, but this was the first time I really served a role.

With this, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that we'd managed to avoid a direct confrontation between the Dragon and Demon realms.

"...I don't particularly want a war either."

At the very least, the Demon God did not seem inclined to engage in conflict with the Dragon realm.

Indeed, it wasn't just the Demon God.

No gods truly desired a major war.

They were frustrated, they seemed eager to identify the cause, they were suspicious of each other, but...

That's how these gatherings usually went.

They used to be more harmonious, but in those days, everyone was irritable, openly showing their aggression.

These councils were supposed to be for exchanging information, but hardly anything of value shared.

Perhaps they didn't want to hand over useful information to the potential culprit of an unresolved incident.

It was a discomfoting atmosphere.

■

Well, improving this uncomfortable atmosphere can be said to be the mission assigned to me.

My responsibility was diplomacy.

Of course, not to make nice with the other gods.

I was to form good relationships with the subordinates of the other gods.

In other words, folks like me, those doing the odds and ends.

Even if they were just doing menial jobs, like me, they held positions of some standing in their own worlds.

If I could build a relationship of trust with them, we could avoid the worst-case scenario in a moment of crisis.

That was the plan.

The first ones I made contact with were the residents of the Demon World, with whom relations had been tense recently.

The people of the Dragon World were growing more hostile towards the Demon World.

From what I could gather from the day's council, it seemed to be mutual.

Therefore, I thought establishing a connection with the Demon World was the pathway to peace.

"Lord Necroslacross."

After the council ended, I approached a prominently large man.

"Indeed, I am one of the Eight Great Demon Lords, the Immortal Demon King Necroslacross."

Necroslacross turned around with a hearty laugh, but upon seeing me, his face became serious.

"You are..."

With a stern look on his face, he furrowed his brows in confusion, glaring at me.

It wouldn't be surprising if he thought I was here for revenge.

So I introduced myself again.

"Allow me to introduce myself once more. I am Laplace, one of the Five Dragon Generals, the Demon Dragon King. Not some nameless humanoid demon beast. I am Laplace."

"Hmm."

Upon hearing this, Necroslacross revealed his expression as a Demon King.

It was something I would learn later, but at that moment, he had decided not to mention the past.

I didn't intend to bear a grudge against him either.

It was pointless.

Things were different now compared to the past.

"Recently, there have been rampant rumors spreading within the Dragon Realm about the Demon Realm. I thought I could help clear up these misunderstandings."

"Ho, I have no objection to that. But I have heard that the dragons despise the demons, no?"

"The fact that I, who am both dragon and demon, have been selected as one of the Five Dragon Generals, should serve as proof that the rumors are just that—rumors."

"..."

"The Dragon God desires peace. If the Demon God doesn't wish for conflict either, then I would appreciate your cooperation."

As I said this, Necroslacross crossed his six arms and looked down at me.

I met his impudent gaze, that seemed to be assessing me, without flinching.

He was probably trying to see through any deception on my part.

In a way, my appointment could be interpreted as a camouflage, to lower the dragons' guard against the demons.

"Hmm."

After a while, Necroslacross nodded dramatically.

"The Demon God does not wish for war either! There have been too many inexplicable occurrences recently, which seem to have caused some irritation!"

"So?"

"Fine. I will cooperate with you!"

And so, Necroslacross and I joined hands.

From then on, I worked with Necroslacross to recruit collaborators in each world.

Because we followed along with the gods' conferences, it took quite some time... but we managed to visit all the worlds.

The sea world, where there was no land, and the people had gills, fins, and scales.

That was a shock.

After all, I had never seen the sea before.

There's hardly any water, let alone the sea, in the Demon Realm, and while the Dragon Realm has waterfalls and lakes, there's nothing that could be called a sea.

In front of me, who knew nothing of such things, was an endless expanse of sea.

I even felt a sense of fear in that world that seemed so unchanging.

Nevertheless, the emptiness was only on the surface; inside the sea was a bustling world.

A world of beasts, where dense forests and mountains stretch endlessly.

This was also surprising.

There were mountains and trees in the Dragon Realm too.

But here, everything was green, and the forest was teeming with life.

The density was incredible.

With each step, I would encounter insects, reptiles, and other small creatures.

Compared to other worlds where the emptiness stood out, the bustling life here was extraordinary.

Ah, but as you are from the great forest, you might not fully appreciate this.

Next, there was the sky world, where rock masses floated and only flying creatures resided.

This world was very similar to the Dragon World.

Finally, Human World was an endless grassland.

Rolling hills covered in grass spreading endlessly.

Groves of trees not big enough to be called forests, hills not tall enough to be called mountains.

While the Dragon World had its surface above, this world's surface was below.

However, the surface was covered with a layer of salt, with a thin layer of water atop it. The water was about ankle-deep. Tasting it, it had the flavor of salt, so it might not be an exaggeration to call it a sea. Salt was dissolved in it to its maximum capacity.

Regardless, it was not a place where life could live.

All the creatures lived in the sky, and most were covered in feathers.

Thinking back now, it was a beautiful world, but having only seen scaled creatures, these appeared rather eerie to me.

In any case, it was an environment perfectly suited for human habitation.

The people there were so incredibly frail.

At the time, I wondered how such poor creatures could really live.

They're weaker than when I was first found by the Dragon God.

Compared to the species of other worlds, they were like infants.

However, the world was clearly more civilized than others.

Tall buildings, wide roads, well-armed troops.

Even if weak, without natural predators, they could still rule the world.

In such worlds, I gradually increased the number of allies.

It took time, but once others knew about Necroslacross's agreement, it was easy.

Probably none of them wanted to provoke the Dragon World or the Demon World.

After all, the inhabitants of the Dragon World and the Demon World had overwhelming battle power compared to the other worlds.

The representatives of these two worlds loudly proclaimed a path to peace.

Though some were skeptical, no one said no.

The residents of other worlds, despite being influenced by strange rumors, desired peace too.

Whenever the gods gathered for a council, I called the guards together and held our own.

What should we do going forward?

What should we do for enduring peace?

We voiced as many concrete ideas as possible, and continued constructive discussions.

That being said, not everything went smoothly.

Why?

Because the attendants brought in as guards for the councils kept changing.

This was particularly the case for the beast and human tribes.

Compared to the dragon and demon tribes, they have a very short lifespan.

Their lives are brief.

The sky tribe had somewhat longer lives, but they still changed frequently.

The sea tribe apparently had significant lifespan variations among individuals, so they changed unpredictably.

When people change, so do their minds.

Among them, there were those who made their hostility toward other races clear.

But, I didn't give up.

Working with Necroslacross, we tried hard to bring them together.

The gods have no intention of fighting.

We should follow suit and explore the path to peace.

As those closest to the gods, we must lead by example.

There were those who changed their minds, and those who didn't.

However, there were moments when the intentions of all were unified, and during those times, progress was made.

Of course, it wasn't just about the councils.

In reality, we did various things for the sake of peace.

We tried a multitude of approaches, some effective, others not.

Among these, personnel exchanges proved to be particularly effective.

People living in two different worlds were exchanged and allowed to stay in each other's worlds.

If they excelled there, it helped improve the image of the other world.

Just like I had done.

While there were worlds like the Sea World, where only a limited number could go, it wasn't impossible with the gods' assistance.

The Dragon World incorporated craftsmen from other worlds.

The Dragon World had many robust individuals, but their technological advancement lagged one, if not two, steps behind other worlds.

Preservation technology, papermaking, agriculture...

Rather than the Dragon God bringing back knowledge verbally, bringing in the craftsmen was faster, and more effective.

Not that it was the Dragon God's fault.

The Dragon God had been faithfully bringing back knowledge from other worlds to the Dragon World.

However, technology advances daily.

By the time we dragons mastered a technology, it often became obsolete.

The long lifespan of dragons and the leisurely pace of our development probably played a role.

But with the craftsmen present, this issue was mitigated.

Conversely, dragon knights were sent from the Dragon World to other worlds.

Dragons are strong.

They are so overwhelmingly strong that it would not be an exaggeration to say they possess powers equivalent to gods, from the perspective of beings from other worlds.

Such powerful beings would go to other worlds and fight against monsters.

I learned around this time that the power of monsters varied from world to world.

The stronger the inhabitants of a world, the stronger its monsters.

The monsters of the Dragon World were the strongest of all worlds.

Our dragon knights, who can stand up against such the most formidable creatures, performed brilliantly in other worlds.

At the same time, they seemed to be feared.

Well, let's leave that aside.

Many craftsmen came to the Dragon World.

Among them, the woman who came from the Demon World was quite notable.

The Demon Empress Kirisis Karisis.

The wife of the Demon God.

She was more worried than anyone about the growing animosity between the Demon Realm and the Dragon Realm.

That's why she took the initiative and came to the Dragon Realm.

She could use advanced magic.

Not sorcery, but magic.

Explaining the difference between magic and sorcery is difficult.

Both involve freely manipulating magical power to create supernatural phenomena.

Let's see, magic can do more advanced things without the use of incantations or magic circles.

Truth be told, she was the one who first created these magic circles.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say her influence lies at the root of various kinds of sorcery we know today.

She devoted herself to the Dragon Realm.

While the Dragon Realm had been doing some research into "power," all of it dramatically progressed because of her.

In the Dragon Realm, demons were seen as barbaric and foolish.

But after seeing her, many changed their perceptions.

She was intellectual, capable, and peace-loving.

She somewhat reminded them of Lunaria.

Though their personalities were not at all similar.

Perhaps it's not just because of that, but she got along especially well with Lunaria.

Being wives of gods, they probably found common ground.

Kirisia Karisia and I, two from the Demon Realm, worked hard, and thanks to that, the hostility towards the Demon Realm gradually diminished within the Dragon Realm.

Even Chaos, who had been openly hostile towards the Demon Realm, stopped showing it on the surface.

My hard work was bearing fruit.

Things were going smoothly.

The Councils with the other worlds gradually became more relaxed.

Although the problems of teleportation incidents and monster appearances were still happening... the situation where one did not have to suspect their neighbors probably worked in our favor.

The Dragon God praised my efforts.

Now, good things tend to happen all at once.

On top of that, a piece of joyous news came in.

Lunaria gave birth.

To the Dragon God's child.

The Birth Festival, and Then...

To tell you the truth, until then, the Dragon Realm had no tradition of festivals.

Maybe it was due to their longevity, but the sense of celebrating something in a large group had become diluted over time.

However, this time was different.

The entire Dragon Realm was in a festive state.

It's only natural. The child of the revered Dragon God and the universally beloved Lunaria was finally born.

Szilard issued the order, and a parade was held on the Dragon Roar Mountain.

Maxwell traveled throughout the Dragon Realm, collecting dragon meat.

The dragons being trained at Lady Dora's were treated to a feast every day.

Chaos created "fireworks," a product of the human world, adding excitement to the parade.

People from all over the Dragon Realm gathered to catch even a glimpse of the Dragon God's child.

And it wasn't just for a day or two.

The festival continued for ten, twenty years.

The lifespan of the dragon kind is long, so their joy also lasts for a long time.

Everyone seemed delighted.

That was the only time I saw the Dragon Realm in such a merry mood.

The Dragon God and I were a bit late to join the festival.

We were at a council of the gods.

That being said, of course, when the Dragon God returned, the populace welcomed him with cries of joy.

It was all so sudden that I had no idea what was happening, but it seemed the Dragon God quickly understood.

The Dragon God went straight home without a glance elsewhere.

Of course, I went along with him.

When we got home, our family was there to welcome us.

"Welcome home, my lord, and Laplace."

Lunaria, her servants.

And the child, cradled in Lunaria's arms, radiant as a gem.

"Danna-sama, it has been born."

"So it seems."

Even the Dragon God seemed a little bewildered by his own child.

He was not one to smile much, so he looked a little stern.

But somehow, I could tell he was delighted.

"Please, hold it."

"...Ah."

The Dragon God received the child from Lunaria.

His touch wasn't clumsy, but his hands were trembling a little.

"It's a curious thing. Everyone in the Dragon Realm is considered as my child, but this feels a little special."

"Hehe. My lord, please give a name to our child."

Upon hearing those words, the Dragon God stared at Lunaria intently.

"Me?"

"Yes."

Watching this, I was hit with a wave of nostalgia.

Yes, a similar conversation took place when I was brought in...

"I see... Hmm..."

However, the Dragon God paused.

This was rare for him, who usually found answers quickly after careful thought.

"What's the matter?"

"I can't think of anything."

"That won't do. It's decided that the child's name shall be given by you."

"I understand. But I can't do it now. I will think about it."

"Yes."

The name of the child was not decided immediately after birth.

It's not that the Dragon God was indecisive.

On the contrary, he was known for his swift decisions.

However, it's different to name a being like me and a being who could be called his own avatar.

Afterward, he seemed to struggle with it considerably.

He even asked me for my opinion at times.

Of course, I couldn't give a satisfactory answer.

It's presumptuous of me to even think, I'm sorry, but I cannot offer an opinion.

Can't be helped, right?

After all, it's the child of the Dragon God.

If, hypothetically, by any chance, the name I came up with was chosen...

Just thinking about it is so overwhelming that it turns my mind blank.

Now, let's leave that aside for a moment.

After holding the baby for a while, the Dragon God handed it back to Lunaria.

Upon receiving the child, Lunaria approached me, who had been watching from a corner of the room.

"Laplace, you should also hold the child."

Watching the troubled Dragon God, Lunaria said that.

I was taken aback.

Was I allowed to do such a daunting task?

"... Me? Is it alright?"

"Of course, he is your younger brother, after all."

In a formal sense, I was indeed considered an adopted child.

Still, I believed I knew my place.

I was not the Dragon God's child.

I no longer considered myself a mere pet, but I thought I understood my position.

If I forgot the grace he had shown me, behaving recklessly, I would end my own life.

But Lunaria insisted that I hold the child.

She even said the child was like a little brother to me.

I was not so stubborn or inflexible as to refuse this.

"Y-Yes."

I held the child in my arms.

The baby's body temperature was considerably higher than that of other dragons. No, perhaps it was because the child was still an infant.

I stared intently at the child, anxiously hoping I wouldn't make him uncomfortable.

The baby greatly resembled the Dragon God.

He had the Dragon God's identical silver hair, the Dragon God's identical stern face, and his scales were the same color as the Dragon God's. However, perhaps because he was half human, he didn't have as many scales as other dragons.

In particular, there were almost no scales in prominent places like his face.

Thinking back, as a fellow hybrid, our scale patterns might have been somewhat similar.

Though it would be impertinent to say that I resembled the child...

As I held the child, I felt a spontaneous sense of deep respect.

This person would surely bear the weight of the Dragon Realm in the future.

There's no doubt that my role would be to support this person. I must certainly protect him.

That's how I felt.

■

Afterwards, the Five Dragon Generals came one after another.

Szilard, Maxwell, Chaos, and even Lady Dora.

Everyone was moved when they saw the child.

And when it was time to leave, everyone had a resolute expression.

Perhaps they felt the same way as I did.

Not just the Five Dragon Generals.

Gods from other realms also came.

Normally, the gods of other realms do not appear in other worlds.

But that day was different.

The Human God, Demon God, Sky God, Sea God, Beast God, each came and offered their blessings.

It was a magnificent sight.

Of course, gods from other worlds who rarely show themselves came to celebrate the birth of the child.

It was truly a show of prestige.

Everyone in the Dragon Realm would have recognized that this birth was indeed a wonderful event.

And when the festival was coming to an end.

When the buoyant mood across the entire Dragon Realm began to settle.

She arrived.

A demoness with dark purple skin and white hair.

That was the Demon Empress, Kirisis Kalisis.

"Lunaria, congratulations."

"Kirisis! I thought you wouldn't come."

As I mentioned before, Kirisis and Lunaria were close.

Upon seeing her, Lunaria beamed.

I wasn't entirely sure how intimate they were.

At that time, I was often away from home.

However, seeing them laugh together, it was clear they were close.

"If you've given birth, I must come."

"You were rather late."

"My research has been going well lately. I kept thinking I should visit you, but when things are going smoothly, you just want to keep going, right?"

"So, your research was going that well?"

"Yes. It seems Dragonkin researchers excel at examining things in detail. At first, I thought they were slow, but once they understand one thing, they use their accumulated knowledge to quickly uncover a plethora of other things. It's exhilarating."

"But I heard the researchers in the Demon Realm are also excellent?"

"Fahahahaha! Lunaria, you do say the funniest things! Demons are all broad-brushed fools! There's no such thing as a talented researcher who is a fool!"

Kiris is was a woman who laughed a lot.

Well, not just Kiris is, all the demons, especially those who rank as Demon Kings, laughed often.

After laughing heartily, Kiris is turned her attention to the child Lunaria was holding.

"Now, won't you show me the baby? Let me see how wise the child of the great Dragon God and my best friend, Lunaria, is."

"Hehe, sure, here you go."

"Oh, this is impressive! Tremendously wise! A true prince of the Dragonkin. I can feel an immense wisdom! I can see he's getting wiser even as I look at him! He'll certainly be a sage in the future!"

Her words could be taken as mockery, but in her own way, Kiris is was praising him.

Among the demons, Kiris is was wise and filled with kindness, but alas, she was not so skilled with words.

"Will this child really become that wise?"

"Yes, my eyes do not deceive. All my sons are the epitome of fools. Each and every one of them has a stupid look on their faces. This child is completely different!"

"Hehe, is that so?"

What?

Even though Kirisis is the wife of the Demon God, is it okay for her to insult her sons?

Isn't it disrespectful to insult the sons of the Demon God?

Hmm. Indeed, no matter how casual the relationship, it seems blasphemous to speak ill of a god's child.

However, for demons, "being foolish and boisterous" is not a bad thing.

A person who is foolish and boisterous is an honest and good person.

That's what they often say.

Of course, it doesn't mean that being smart and delicate is a bad thing.

Being smart is good, and being foolish is also good, at least in the Demon Realm.

So, Kirisis didn't utter a single bad word.

She was trying to say that our child would be an excellent person, slightly different from her own sons.

It's just a slight difference in values, you see.

"Well, Lunaria! I will visit again! I'm not sure how long I'll be here, but as long as I am, I look forward to seeing the child grow!"

"Yes, please come again."

"Of course I will! So, farewell! Fahahahaha!"

With a laugh, Kirisis left.

She was quite a character indeed.

■

That's how the esteemed one was born.

Blessed by all.

Loved by all.

Which is why I...

No, let's save that story for later.

If we don't stick to the sequence, it'll cause confusion.

Regardless, the Dragon Realm was filled with happiness.

Relations with the Demon Realm were steadily improving.

There were no signs of conflict with other worlds.

Thanks to Kirisis Kalisis, our research on demons and teleportation had progressed dramatically.

It was a peaceful time.

Until that day.

Yes, that peaceful era came to an abrupt end one day.

Yes, that day.

A nightmarish day.

I remember it clearly.

That day, I went to the Demon Realm with the Dragon God.

As usual, we attended council, and afterwards, Necroslacros guided us around the Demon Realm and we discussed future plans.

The conversation revolved around the exchange of more personnel and the nearly completed teleportation magic circle.

If the teleportation magic circle was completed, we might understand the cause of the teleportation incidents...or not. But at least, it would enable people who had been teleported to other worlds to easily return to their original world.

Although it was not a fundamental solution, it could be said that a major problem was being resolved.

There was light at the end of the tunnel.

When I reported this to the Dragon God, that stern figure flashed a relieved smile and praised me.

"Well done, Laplace. Without you, this would have taken much longer. You are truly my son."

I felt as if I had been lifted up to the heavens.

I must have exuded immense confidence then.

I puffed my chest out proudly, spread my wings wide, as if to say, 'I am one of the Five Dragon Generals'.

But, oh...

I was brought crashing down.

I returned to the Dragon Realm with the Dragon God.

Headed home to report to Lady Lunaria.

Ah, my dear home.

Heh, back then, I no longer felt like a lodger.

I considered myself a part of this household.

That's why I said, "I'm home."

Ah, but...

Oh...

That sight still haunts my dreams.

Each time I sleep, I see it.

Yes, I said it. I'm home.

But, there was no reply from within.

Instead, a voice sounded.

The crying of an infant.

A cry so loud it could be called a shriek.

Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't have questioned such a sound.

Babies cry, after all.

Even the young master often cried.

But that time, I had a foreboding feeling.

It didn't sound like the usual crying.

I hurried to Lady Lunaria's room... and what I saw...

The bloody room.

The mutilated remains.

A scene of tragedy.

And at the very back of the scene, I found the last thing I wanted to see.

It was Lady Lunaria.

Lady Lunaria was dead, covered in blood.

Curled up in the center of the room.

Still clutching to protect the wailing child.

The Funeral

Upon witnessing Lady Lunaria's death, the Dragon God let out a voiceless cry.

"Oh... ohh... ohhh..."

His eyes wide open, mouth agape, disbelief mirrored in his eyes as they scanned the room.

I was the same.

I, too, couldn't believe the sight before my eyes.

Lady Lunaria, covered in blood, was dead.

She, who had welcomed me so warmly, was no more.

Who? Why?

I didn't understand.

She wasn't the kind of person to hold grudges.

Everyone living in the Dragon Realm loved her.

The thought of killing her was unthinkable.

Yet, the child was crying.

Crying in a voice like a scream.

A cry echoing the loss of someone irreplaceable.

The child of the Dragon God was crying.

That alone brought me back to reality.

"Oohhh..."

I looked at the Dragon God.

He wore an expression I had never seen before.

He let out a cry I had never heard before.

A face mixed with anger, sorrow, and resentment.

A groan mixed with confusion, unease, and surprise.

Never before had I seen the Dragon God express such a range of emotions.

The Dragon God knelt down, cradling Lady Lunaria with his right hand and the child with his left.

Lady Lunaria probably hadn't died instantly.

She was covered with wounds all over her body.

Wounds that seemed fatal were on her neck, three on her chest, two on her abdomen, and eight on her back.

It was dreadful.

They had attacked her vital points over and over again, even though a lesser attack would have been enough to kill a person.

Lady Lunaria, though of human lineage, was descended from gods, a person filled with kindness and compassion, untouched by conflict.

Yet such a gentle creature resisted so fiercely.

Despite the fatal wounds, she must have stood up again and again, unyielding in the face of the enemy.

Why?

The answer is clear.

The reason she was curled up like a turtle was to protect a certain someone.

To protect the divine child of the Dragon God, her own son.

For this purpose, Lady Lunaria fought back and was mercilessly killed.

But surely, she had succeeded in her protection.

The numerous wounds on her back and the living child were proof of this.

The culprit, failing to kill Lady Lunaria completely, must have fled.

"Why..."

The Dragon God muttered in a hushed voice.

Then, with his own words, he confirmed what he saw before him.

Perhaps, he thought the same as I did.

That there existed one who cruelly killed Lady Lunaria.

"Whyyyyy!"

With the Dragon God's scream, the house shook, the whole town trembled, the mountains vibrated.

"Who killed her!"

That murderous rage reached all corners of the Dragon Realm.

All living beings were terrified.

Feeling the wrath of a god, they trembled in fear.

From the smallest lizard to the largest dragons, and even the Dragon Race.

I was no exception.

My body shook, and I collapsed on the spot.

Although I knew I wasn't the culprit, I couldn't suppress the fear.

"AARRGGH!"

A beam of light extended from the Dragon God.

To me, it was just light.

But it was a fist.

A fist filled with the Dragon God's directionless fury shot past my side.

When I turned around, a gigantic hole had been blown open in the house.

I could see the town of Chaos stretching out endlessly.

There was a round void in the distance of the townscape.

It was a hole.

The blow unleashed from the Dragon God's fist had pierced the rocks of the Dragon Roar Mountain and had flown out into the open.

Embarrassingly enough... I almost wet myself.

In that moment, it wouldn't have been strange if I had been killed.

Then, the Dragon God flew out of the house as he was, and it would not have been strange if he had destroyed everything in his path, driven by his impulsive rage.

"....."

However, that did not happen.

Because in that moment, there was only one who did not feel fear.

The divine child.

From the moment the Dragon God lifted him with his left hand, he had stopped crying.

Sniffing, he looked up at the Dragon God.

As if to say, 'You're finally here, now I can rest.'

"....."

Looking at the child, the Dragon God seemed to regain a little bit of calm.

Perhaps he realized that he still had someone to protect... at least one thing was still left.

"Laplace."

He called my name.

"Sir, I am here!"

"Summon the Five Dragon Generals. Find the perpetrator."

"Yes, sir!"

I couldn't ask what he would do once the perpetrator was found.

I couldn't suggest that we should investigate why this happened.

The Dragon God was angry.

He was more furious than I had ever seen him before.

And he ordered me to summon the Five Dragon Generals and to search.

So I had to follow that command.

■

The Five Dragon Generals assembled immediately.

Of course, they would. It was a direct order from the Dragon God.

I couldn't ask what he planned to do when we found the perpetrator.

Nor could I suggest that we should investigate why such a thing had happened.

The Dragon God was angry.

More angry than he had ever been.

And he ordered me to summon the Five Dragon Generals and find the culprit.

All I had to do was obey.

■

The Five Dragon Generals assembled immediately.

Of course they did. It was a direct assembly from the Dragon God himself.

No matter what else was happening, they would come. That is what the Five Dragon Generals are.

Especially when Lady Lunaria had been murdered, it would be strange if they didn't gather.

"What... Lady Lunaria..."

As the Five Dragon Generals heard the circumstances, they all lowered their heads with somber expressions.

There wasn't a soul in the Dragon Realm who disliked Lady Lunaria.

And thinking of the Dragon God's heart, having lost such a person, they couldn't help but feel grief.

"There were countless wounds on Lady Lunaria's body. Clearly, they were inflicted by someone."

I gave the explanation.

The Dragon God remained silent until the Five Dragon Generals gathered.

Though he seemed a bit more composed than he had been in the house, an ominous aura radiated from his presence.

Once my explanation concluded, the Dragon God spoke.

"Find the culprit and drag them before me."

Every one of the Five Dragon Generals felt fear upon hearing that voice.

They shuddered at those words.

The Dragon God was radiating an aura of fury.

Such a Dragon God, they had never seen before.

Even when one of the Five Dragon Generals, Crystal, had died, he hadn't been this furious.

"We will, without fail!"

The faces of the Five Dragon Generals shifted at those words.

When it was an order from the Dragon God, they would even travel to the depths of hell.

The Dragon God's anger was also their anger.

They had decided to find the murderer of Lady Lunaria at all costs.

"Go."

"Yes, sir!"

Under the Dragon God's command, the Five Dragon Generals scattered throughout the Dragon Realm.

Each of them would search for the culprit in their own ways.

I too, intended to search in my own way.

"Laplace, you stay."

But I was held back by the Dragon God.

I was surprised.

After all, I have a magical eye.

I can clearly see the traces at the scene.

These traces don't disappear quickly, but as time passes, the culprit might flee further away.

There shouldn't have been a better candidate than me.

After all, I have the track record of capturing the killer of Crystal.

"Why? I also want to avenge Lady Lunaria...!"

However, there was a more important role for me.

"Mourn Lunaria."

At that moment, I finally understood that the Dragon God was not just angry.

He was grieving.

Thinking about it, it was obvious.

But to tell the truth, I hardly knew anything about the Dragon God's feelings.

I thought he didn't love Lady Lunaria that much.

The Dragon God had always been indifferent.

He seemed to maintain a moderate distance from Lady Lunaria.

But that wasn't the case.

The Dragon God had loved Lady Lunaria.

The form of that love might have been a little different from others.

"As you wish."

With the deepest of bows, I heard the Dragon God whisper, "I'm counting on you."

■

The funeral customs in the Dragon Realm are somewhat unique.

Firstly, the person closest to the deceased lifts them up. Usually, it would be a spouse, a sibling, or a parent. But for those without family, a friend, colleague, or superior may take on the responsibility.

The deceased is lifted from their home, or from where they died, and carried to the center of the town.

There, in the town center, is an altar.

An altar for the deceased to be reborn in peace.

There, a benediction is recited by the close ones. I don't remember the exact words, but it's a blessing that wishes for their rebirth under the grace of the Dragon God in their next life.

After the benediction, they move towards the edge of the town.

Then, following the left edge, they circumnavigate the town.

Without exception to this custom, the Dragon God cradled Lady Lunaria, and I held the young master, as we made our way around the town.

Upon seeing someone carrying the deceased, everyone would extend their palm and cross it over their chest.

When honoring the living, a fist is made, but when honoring the dead, the hand is open.

That is the Dragon Clan's way of saluting.

Normally, this is done only when one sees the deceased.

However, at Lady Lunaria's funeral, almost all of the Dragon Clan living in the town had gathered near the inner circuit.

Everyone loved Lady Lunaria.

Everyone wanted to see Lady Lunaria, even if just for a moment.

After making the round, we entered a small circular building.

A building made of stone.

On the walls of this building, countless names were engraved.

Inside the building, there were several stone monuments, also inscribed with names.

All were the names of those who had died in the Dragon Realm.

When the Dragon God entered the building holding Lady Lunaria, an elderly Dragon Clan member approached immediately.

He had tattered wings, and scales were peeling off all over his body.

An old man.

The Dragon Clan has a long lifespan, but they are not immortal.

Once born, they will eventually die.

He confirmed Lady Lunaria's face, his expression pained.

"What a... what a... Lady Lunaria has passed, what a..."

He muttered this, weeping, and carved her name on a stone monument with a dragonbone peg.

Ordinarily, names would be carved sequentially along the wall, but for someone special like Lady Lunaria, their name is etched onto a stone monument.

Of course, Crystal's name was also engraved on one such monument.

This was a graveyard.

The Dragon Clan's graveyard.

A place to ensure that those who have died are not forgotten.

The old man took Lady Lunaria from the Dragon God and ventured deeper into the building.

I followed the Dragon God, trailing behind the old man.

Then, we came upon a dark abyss.

It was so deep, it felt as if it could lead to another world.

But, of course, it did not lead to another realm.

This abyss connected to the peak of Dragon Roar Mountain... that is, it led to the sky.

"May the departed soul find peace, may fortune grace their next life. May they return to the mountain, and hasten under the Dragon God's benevolence once more, let us pray..."

The elderly man chanted a long blessing. I don't remember the exact wording, but it was lengthier than the benediction I had recited at the town center.

After finishing the incantation, the old man gently placed Lady Lunaria's body beside the chasm.

Normally, the body would be dropped into the abyss, marking the end of the funeral. The abyss leads to the sky, and from there, whether a Red Dragon, a Blue Dragon, or perhaps the massive black serpent said to dwell beneath would consume the body.

The Dragon Clan has no typical lifespan, but they do die from causes other than battle.

Once upon a time, that was considered disgraceful.

Dying in battle for the Dragon God was thought to be the ultimate honor.

But the Dragon God did not think so. He believed that all Dragon Clan members should be equal under him.

That's why he devised this method of funerary rites. He wished to provide those who died of age or disease the same honorable death as the warriors.

And so, their names were engraved as great warriors. They lived and died for the Dragon Clan.

However, this ceremony was not suitable for Lady Lunaria. That's why a human funeral was conducted afterwards.

The Dragon God lifted Lady Lunaria and returned to the mansion.

There, in the garden next to the mansion, he laid Lady Lunaria's remains to rest.

With a pained expression, the Dragon God produced flames from his hand, engulfing Lady Lunaria's body.

In an instant, Lady Lunaria's body was reduced to pure white bones and ashes.

Alongside the Dragon God, I buried these bones and ashes into the ground, and we planted a small sapling on top.

This was a human funeral.

Perhaps it's a bit different now?

But back then, this was how human funerals were understood in the Dragon Realm.

Dead bodies of living things can turn into monsters where they lie.

Therefore, it must be burned and buried.

With a sapling planted above.

The sapling will grow with the power of the dead.

And while the tree yet lives, the living would never forget the dead.

This was how the human race, whose lives was shorter than even trees, mourn their dead.

"Lunaria and I met through the introduction of the Human God."

While digging the hole to bury Lady Lunaria, the Dragon God told me how he met her.

I simply listened in silence to the Dragon God's words.

"At first, it was merely an experiment. Could children be produced between different species, and if so, what kind of power would they have? It was all for the people of the world."

"The experiment was conducted several times... but one day, the Human God suggested something. What if a child was born from two gods?"

"That's when Lunaria was brought to me. She was the daughter of the Human God. Every god was male and unable to bear children."

"I didn't love Lunaria, not in the beginning. However, she devoted herself to the Dragon Realm. She fully utilized her power as a god's scion, enriching the Dragon Realm."

"To me, all the members of the Dragon Clan were like children. I treasured each and every one of them. I wished for every single one of them to be happy."

"I started seeing Lunaria as more special when our child was born."

"At that time, I didn't realize it... but I had unknowingly fallen in love with Lunaria."

The Dragon God narrated with a nostalgic expression.

Lady Lunaria must have been the same, always full of love.

She was a loving being.

And that love was directed at the Dragon God too.

"Laplace."

"Yes?"

"I can't seem to forgive the one who killed Lunaria. My body trembles with an anger I have never experienced before."

"Ah."

Even if we were to make an enemy of another world, would you follow me?"

"It goes without saying. Not just me, but all of the Five Dragon Generals would follow you to the end, Dragon God. Even if it were to shatter our very beings."

The Dragon God stood in silence.

His eyes were sharply narrowed, his body radiating a murderous rage.

There was no more sadness.

I thought it was terrifying.

Even if it was not directed at me.

No creature in any world would not find it fearsome.

And thus, the quest for revenge began.

It had irrevocably begun.

■ ■ ■

"Master..."

Suddenly, Laplace noticed Rostelina standing right before him.

She was looking at Laplace with a worried expression.

"Hm? What's the matter, Rostelina? The story is just about to start, can't you bear to listen further?"

"No, that's not it. Please continue with your story... But, perhaps you should take a little break, Lord Laplace?"

"Why do you think so?"

"Because..."

Rostelina pulled a handkerchief from her pocket, reaching out to touch Laplace's face.

The handkerchief absorbed the moisture trickling down Laplace's cheeks, darkening in colour.

Yes, at some point Laplace had begun to cry.

Tears were streaming down his face, sobs occasionally escaping his lips.

His words turned into incomprehensible murmurs towards the end of the story.

"Ah, I apologize. When I think back to that time, I can't help but become like this."

"You loved Lady Lunaria, didn't you, Lord Laplace?"

"Indeed. She was my mother. Even though we were not bound by blood, she was always by my side when I knew nothing. She would always be there when I returned home, listening to my stories with a smile. She was a goddess brimming with compassion. The fact that such a person was brutally murdered... The thought that those days will never return... Even now, remembering... Ugh... Ugh..."

Laplace wept.

With a hand covering his eyes, he bent down, his shoulders trembling as he sobbed quietly.

Rostelina quietly watched the large man, twice her size, crying.

She was confused.

It was her first time seeing Laplace cry.

However, after a moment she ran to the kitchen, filled a glass with water and returned.

She then patted Laplace's back and handed him the glass.

"Heh, thank you, Rostelina. Thinking back, you've given me a great deal of comfort. It's been a while since I lived with someone else in the house, so I was happy..."

"No, it's okay, Master. No need for thanks. After all, you've helped me as well."

"I see. Let's call it a mutual kindness then."

Saying so, Laplace sat back down on his chair.

His eyes were bloodshot, but his tears had already stopped.

His sobs ceased, and a clear voice came from his mouth.

"Well, let's continue the story. I apologize, but from here on, I may cry again."

"Yes, I'll keep the water ready."

"Haha, you're very thoughtful... Now then..."

Rubbing his eyes, Laplace again gazed into the distance.

Remembering a distant past, a past he didn't want to recall.

■ ■ ■

The Wrath of the Dragon God

The search for the culprit had begun.

For me, any significant event always begins with the pursuit of the perpetrator.

Albeit, this is only the second time.

So, an entity that snuck into the dragon realm, slipped past the gaze of the dragon clan to reach the dragon god's mansion, and tried to kill Lady Lunaria, and by extension, the divine child.

Do you think it's hard to find such an entity?

It's much easier than searching for a lone demon lurking somewhere in the dragon realm.

After all, the situation is very specific.

Unlike the incident with Crystal, this was a brazen act committed in broad daylight, in the middle of town.

Moreover, I have the power of the demon eye.

There's no way evidence wouldn't amass.

And evidence did pile up, surprisingly fast.

It came together so easily that it's hard to believe this individual could harm Lady Lunaria, the most revered in the dragon realm.

So effortlessly that it's almost baffling they left no traces at the scene.

While there was some attempt at concealment, the effort was so sloppy that if you looked deliberately, you'd easily find it.

The power of the demon eye was hardly necessary.

I should have been a little suspicious about that.

Regrettably, when things are going well, humans rarely question why.

I should have questioned the ease of it all.

Unfortunately, when things go smoothly, people often don't question the reasons behind it.

Since I proceeded with the correct procedures, it seemed only natural that it worked out.

Now, having gathered the evidence, I was able to narrow down the list of suspects.

But as I narrowed it down, I was left dumbstruck.

I checked the evidence over and over again.

However, no matter how many times I looked, the list of suspects didn't change.

And just as the information gathering and the sifting of suspects were almost complete, an assembly was convened.

■

"So, these are the suspects?"

The Five Dragon Generals gathered in the conference room where the Dragon God awaited, each presenting the results of their investigations.

Each of the Five Dragon Generals had the same suspects on their list.

Yes, everyone had arrived at the same conclusion as me.

There were four names written on that list.

Poodria Dordia.

Nartakiel.

Enupadon Ballard.

Kirishis Karisis.

The first three names might be unfamiliar to you.

But perhaps the last name might have given you a hint?

Indeed, they are all inhabitants of other worlds.

And they were also the craftsmen that I had painstakingly recruited and invited into the dragon realm over the years.

"They had been congregating in a certain building for several days prior to the murder of Lady Lunaria. On the day that Lady Lunaria was presumed to have been killed, a suspect was spotted acting suspiciously, moving around town. Furthermore, after that day, they disappeared."

"..."

Szilard's explanation mirrored my own findings.

But I wanted to deny it.

There was no way they could do such a thing.

They had come for the sake of dragon realm.

They had come in the name of peace... Or so I believed.

Was the fact that Kirishiskarishis was close with Lady Lunaria not evidence enough?

No, quite the contrary.

One could argue that she got close to Lady Lunaria precisely so this incident could come to pass.

At Szilard's words, my wings trembled.

If indeed they were the perpetrators, it would not be surprising if I too were suspected.

That I had planned Lady Lunaria's assassination, that I had brought them into the dragon realm for this purpose.

And I had not a single word to deny it.

Even if I had no intention of doing so, the fact that I invited them remains.

As I shuddered, Shirard spoke.

"Laplace, we're not suspecting you."

It was a reassuring statement.

Looking around, I saw the other Dragon Generals watching me with similar eyes.

Reassuring gazes.

"You owe more to Lady Lunaria than anyone else, and everyone acknowledges your loyalty to the Dragon God. There's no way you could cause such a tragedy."

"...Thank you."

At the same time as I felt relieved, I also felt proud.

To be treated as a comrade beyond suspicion by these honorable Dragon Generals...

"It's likely you were used. The criminal knew what you were doing, got close to you, and intended to pin the entire responsibility on you while targeting Lady Lunaria."

"But why target Lady Lunaria?"

Above all, I wanted to know the reason.

Who killed Lady Lunaria, and for what purpose?

Who wanted to kill the divine child?

I wanted to know the reason.

"...This is only speculation, but perhaps the inhabitants of the other world don't want the dragon realm to grow stronger. In particular, the Dragon God has married a human deity and fathered a child. This may have been seen as a threat."

"What is threatening about that?"

"Don't you understand? The humans may be the weakest, but in terms of the progress of their civilization, they are second to none. And while our dragon race may be slow to change, we are the strongest race individually. If the bond between humans and dragons strengthens, we could overpower other worlds and seize control."

"Are you implying the Dragon God is conspiring with the Human God to take over all the worlds?"

"It wouldn't be strange if some believed so."

I found it hard to accept Szilard's speculation.

At the very least, the gods I've encountered so far only ever seemed to care about their own worlds.

While they could be slightly uneasy about potential attacks from other worlds, none were genuinely inclined to engage in conflict.

The wise gods should have understood that we wouldn't remain silent if such an event occurred.

However, that's exactly why there was part of me that found it plausible.

As long as all worlds were equal, things were fine.

But if a distinct disparity were to form, the current situation wouldn't continue.

The ones above might look down on the ones below and treat them like slaves.

"But if that was their aim, it was a poor strategy. Killing Lady Lunaria... it serves no purpose!"

"You're right... in that case, perhaps their real intention wasn't to kill Lady Lunaria, but to kill the child."

"What do you mean?"

"The young master is the prince of both the dragon clan and the human clan... it would not be false to say he's poised to be the next generation's god."

The title of the Dragon God's son ensures the loyalty of the dragons.

The title of Lady Lunaria's child ensures the loyalty of the humans.

The possibility exists that the Dragons and Humans could join forces under the child.

And so, they attempted to kill the child.

However, Lady Lunaria put up more resistance than they had anticipated... and they couldn't kill her.

Of course, killing Lady Lunaria must have been in their plans from the start.

Even if they managed to kill the child, if a second one were to be born, it would be meaningless.

"The reason doesn't matter."

The one to interrupt me and Szilard was the Dragon God.

After glancing at the list, he looked at Szilard with a seated gaze and asked, "Szilard, what is this?"

"Huh? ...Ah, it's a list of suspects?"

"What did I command you to do?"

"What you com... Ah."

Szilard realized his mistake.

The Dragon God did not ask us to compile a list of suspects. He asked us to find the perpetrator. In other words, we hadn't completed our mission.

Ordinarily he would not have made such a remark.

But that time, the Dragon God was different.

Emanating from him a murderous rage that threatened to tear apart any who failed to fulfill his demands.

"I apologize!"

Szilard immediately bowed deeply.

With a look of resolve on his face, he offered a suggestion to the Dragon God.

"We'll leave at once to find the criminal and bring them back here!"

"Wait."

Just as Szilard was about to storm out of the room, the Dragon God cast him a sharp glance.

Szilard was trembling.

The Dragon God had been genuinely furious all along.

No one could possibly remain unfazed under the direct onslaught of such a gaze.

Even if it were the Five Dragon Generals.

"Szilard, is the culprit on this list?"

"Yes! It's highly likely!"

The Dragon God seemed lost in thought.

Perhaps pondering another reason why the criminal might have killed Lady Lunaria.

Or maybe, a method to find the culprit...

However, an answer did not seem to be forthcoming.

For a while, he surveyed the list with cold and all consuming eyes.

Almost as if vowing never to forget the names listed there, even in death.

"Hmm."

Eventually, the Dragon God lifted his face as if he had noticed something.

Had he figured something out?

We, who thought so, looked at the Dragon God's face.

However, his sharp gaze was focused behind us.

"What brings you here?"

That's when the Dragon God said this, and we finally noticed.

A man stood in the room.

His presence was so faint, it was difficult to determine whether he was there or not.

Only the space he occupied seemed slightly distorted.

As if he were constantly standing in a blind spot.

"Is my arrival really so strange?"

He had changed his demeanor a bit since we last met.

He seemed, in a word, angry.

It was only natural for him to be so.

"Did you think I would stay quiet after my daughter was killed?"

Indeed, it was the Human God.

Lady Lunaria's father.

"Do you plan on avenging her? I would like to participate as well. We humans may not have strength, but we do have wisdom."

"..."

"I beg you. Let me help. Is that unacceptable?"

"...No, your help is appreciated."

"Could you show me the list?"

Without waiting for permission, Human God reached for the list on the table and began to study it.

"Hmm... As I thought, these four worlds..."

"Do you have any leads?"

I asked reflexively.

Human God turned to me as if grateful for my inquiry.

"Yes, I do. You know that these four worlds have been at each other's throats, do you not?"

"Yes"

"But for some time now, these same four worlds have been curiously at peace."

"That is..."

"Yes, thanks to you, Laplace. Thanks to your courageous efforts at building bridges between worlds, a path between them had opened up."

I couldn't help but puff up my chest at his praise.

However, the words that followed from Human God negated that pride.

"However, this caused our research on monsters and teleportation to become known."

At those words, several of the Five Dragon Generals twitched their shoulders.

I had no idea what he was talking about.

Every world had been studying monsters and teleportation.

I knew that much.

I had even observed the demon race's research a few times.

Their research was more focused on monsters, and teleportation was not as advanced.

Even so, saying it was a 'focus' doesn't mean they had achieved anything significant.

As a by-product, some special magic had been developed.

However, in truth, I was ignorant about the extent of the dragon world's research at the time.

Honestly, I thought the dragon world was in a similar state.

I heard occasional reports of "research results," but I had no idea about the actual achievements.

Looking back now, I think those reports were somewhat concealed...

Well, I'll talk more about that later.

I didn't know about it at the time.

"They must have been surprised. To think the Dragon Tribe, whom they thought only had brute strength, had obtained such capabilities... Perhaps they thought that it was the dragon race who were the masterminds behind the monsters and the teleportations."

"What in the world are you talking about?!"

No one answered my question.

But the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals all wore frightened expressions on their faces.

They looked as if they had received a satisfactory answer.

"Why was Lunaria killed?"

"Lunaria must have found out. What 'they had discovered.' And at the same time, she was 'discovered' by them."

"..."

She discovered a secret and was discovered for it.

When considering the future that awaited them, the thought of killing the one who found them out, seemed plausible.

At that time, I didn't understand what they were talking about.

Of course, I never even considered the possibility that the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals were truly the masterminds behind the demons and the teleportation.

However, I was not entirely convinced.

"I see. So they spied on our research, inferred from its progress that it was inciting the monsters and teleportation, went so far as to kill Lunaria, and even tried to lay hands on my child."

The Dragon God said, calmly.

It was a terrifying statement.

It felt as if the Dragon God's anger was leaking out through his words.

"What a joke."

The Dragon God finally said that and stood up.

With his shoulders stiff, he headed towards the exit.

"Where are you going?"

"Above."

No one could understand the meaning behind those words.

Not me, not Shilard.

Not Dora, Maxwell, or Chaos.

No one understood.

No one understood the state the Dragon God was in.

The Dragon God, who had advocated peace even after the crystal was killed by the demon clan, who humbled himself before the other gods.

"At the time, no one doubted that the Dragon God, even amidst waves of anger that seemed to consume the very air around him, still possessed a prescient vision of the future."

If we could have cautioned the Dragon God at that moment, if we could have stopped him, perhaps a slightly different future might have awaited us.

However, that was impossible.

To us, the Five Dragon Generals, the words and actions of the Dragon God are absolute.

Do you understand the meaning of absolute?

It means that the words and actions of the Dragon God are always right.

He has always done what is right for the future of the Dragon Realm.

So it's no wonder that the other members of the Five Dragon Generals didn't realize.

That's why it should have been me who noticed.

Being closest to the Dragon God, even though our time together was short.

That in anger even the Dragon God can lose his sound judgment.

The Day of One World's End

The world of beasts.

A world where colossal forests grew unendingly, where mountain ranges spanned vast distances.

People resembling various animals inhabited this world.

Into this world, the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals ventured.

".....Oh?"

Upon our arrival in the beast realm, what greeted us was an army exceeding tens of thousands.

It was night.

The beast tribes' army, their eyes blazing in the forest, lay in wait.

They surrounded a shrine located on the summit of a mountain..

As if they had been expecting us.

"....."

At that time, we did not fully comprehend the situation.

Why they had gathered around the mountain.

Why they faced us with such hostility.

We had no idea.

We were dragonkind.

A warrior race.

We were the Dragon Tribe.

A tribe of warriors.

We could only accept the hostility and aggression aimed towards us exactly as it was.

They are our enemies.

They killed Lady Lunaria.

That's why they were here, prepared to strike back at us, who had come for revenge.

Perhaps, if we had observed more closely, we might have noticed the faces of the beast tribe members were painted with surprise.

Astonishment, as if an unexpected adversary had appeared.

But, such details were nothing more than minor discrepancies in retrospect.

"Bring forth the one who killed Lunaria!"

The Dragon God bellowed at the astonished beast tribes.

A voice filled with rage.

Even we, the Five Dragon Generals, trembled at the sound that echoed across the entire beast realm.

Every beast tribe member trembled in fear.

They knew they were being stared down by a grand, formidable, and absolute adversary.

"I know not!"

However, there were those who did not tremble at the voice of the Dragon God.

"We know not!"

However, there were those who did not tremble at the Dragon God's voice.

One on par with the Dragon God.

Yes, it was the Beast God.

His appearance had changed since the last time I saw him.

No doubt, he was still the two-headed beast.

Yet, he was not mounted on a white wolf.

He stood on his own two feet.

Even though whenever I saw him at the council, he was always atop his white wolf.

"I'm here for Poodria!"

Upon hearing the name, the Beast God made a puzzled face.

"Pudoria is supposed to be with you!"

"He's missing!"

"Then I don't know where he is either!"

"Are you sheltering him!"

"Are you accusing us!"

"If you won't give him up, I'll destroy your world along with you!"

"Try it if you think you can!"

A meaningless conversation.

Indeed, the phrase 'there's no reasoning with them' applied here.

In retrospect, it seemed that a more calm and collected conversation might have prevented the ensuing conflict.

But neither the Dragon God nor the Beast God desired dialogue at that time.

Find their enemy and kill them.

That was all that occupied their minds.

"Very well!"

The Dragon God spread his wings, the Beast God bared his fangs, both of them ready for battle.

The battle had begun.

For three days and nights, the battle raged between the Five Dragon Generals and the beast tribes' army.

Though it's hard to say if it could be properly called a battle.

For three days and three nights, the battle between the Five Dragon Generals and the beast tribe's army continued.

But, it's questionable if it can even be called a battle...

The Dragon God dueled the Beast God one-on-one, and we, the Five Dragon Generals, crushed those who tried to interfere.

The beast tribe is a formidable race.

They have keen senses of smell, eyes that can see clearly even in the night, and the ability to traverse rough terrain without slowing down.

Furthermore, they utilized magic through their voices.

Their spells could shake an enemy's ears, even leading to death in some instances.

However, they were no match for us, the Five Dragon Generals.

Neither their claws nor their fangs nor their weapons could pierce the bodies of the Five Dragon Generals, and our bodies repelled their voice magic.

When we struck the ground, mountains flew apart; when we swung our claws, forests were mowed down.

With each blow, a hundred beastmen were blown away and killed.

It was slaughter.

Five dragonkind slaughtered hundreds of thousands of the beast tribes.

Perhaps, had their numbers been greater and they possessed strength as a group, they could have made a stand.

Not a single beast was able to inflict even the slightest wound on any of the Five Dragon Generals.

The difference in strength was simply overwhelming.

The beast tribe too had warriors akin to the Five Dragon Generals, guardians of the gods... but they were no match.

While we were busy crushing the beastfolk, a battle raged between the Dragon God and the Beast God.

With regards to the strength between the races, the Dragon God was overwhelmingly superior. However, in their status as gods, they were equals. The Beast God never once yielded to the Dragon God.

Their movements were so swift that it would be difficult to provide a detailed account of their battle. The sheer speed of their exchanges generated constant shockwaves, creating winds that in turn gave birth to numerous tornadoes.

These whirlwinds swept up everything from the blood-soaked earth, raining down a tempest of tree debris and blood over the beast realm.

The primary weapons of the Beast God were his fangs and claws. With a mighty roar, he lashed out at the Dragon God with a speed that was almost too fast for the eye to follow. But his efforts fell short of piercing the Dragon God's scales.

The Dragon God, too, relied on fangs and claws. It intercepted the Beast God, slicing with his claws and striking with his fists. But, this was also insufficient to cut through the Beast God's fur or tear through his flesh.

On the morning of the fourth day, the outcome was decided. For a battle between gods, it was a swift conclusion.

When I looked, the Beast God had sunk its teeth firmly into the shoulder of the Dragon God. Its fangs had pierced the Dragon God's scales, causing blood to spurt out. It was a moment when the Beast God finally dealt what could be called a decisive blow to the Dragon God.

However, this decisive blow was exactly what the Dragon God had wished for. The Dragon God seized the Beast God's right and left heads as they bit into him, wrapped his body in his full dragon energy, and tore it apart... ripped it in two.

The Dragon God then hurled the two torn halves of the Beast God to the ground.

A tremendous shock and flash of light. A torrent of overwhelming energy swept over the Beast Realm. I was flung backward, a force strong enough to blow all the Five Dragon Generals away.

"!"

Blown away and slammed into the ground, I quickly got up and leaped into the air. What I saw before me was a gigantic crater.

"..."

From the midst of that, the Dragon God slowly emerged.

He spread his wings and ascended to the sky. And then, in a voice that echoed throughout the world, he let out a roar—an inarticulate howl of rage.

"Grrraaaahhh!"

On that day, every living creature in the beast realm was indelibly marked with fear and loathing for the dragon race.

■

The Dragon God raged.

He raged and raged until he had exhausted his fury. "If he won't come out," he had declared, "I'll destroy this world." There was not a trace of deception in his words.

Nine-tenths of the beast realm was annihilated, triggering a chain reaction of self-destruction. The majority of the creatures living in the beast realm were wiped out.

Given the level of destruction, one could only assume that Poodria could not have survived.

"...Laplace, I leave the rest to you."

Having surveyed the crumbling beast realm, the Dragon God, seemingly satisfied, returned to the dragon realm.

He left me a single gem. A gem smeared in blood. The moment I held it, I understood that it was a gem imbued with divine power, capable of breaching the "boundary." Let's call it the Divine Gem. It was likely extracted when the Dragon God killed the Beast God.

"..."

Holding the God Gem, I was perplexed. Even though I was given the responsibility and told to bear witness, I had no idea what I should do.

The survivors were in a state of chaos, scrambling for safety. But where could they possibly escape to when the world was on the brink of destruction? The sight was nothing short of pitiful.

As a result of the Dragon God's rampage, the beast realm was doomed to perish. Was I to exterminate the survivors? No, I hadn't been ordered to do that.

Among the beastfolk fleeing in a world facing its end, their feelings were palpable. They didn't want to die. They wanted to survive.

However, the world was inexorably fading.

There was no need for me to act, their annihilation was inevitable.

All I could do was watch, swallowed up by the collapsing world, as people scrambled in confusion. My mind, however, was filled with questions.

Was all this truly necessary?

Was there a need to obliterate everything?

The battle should have been settled when the Beast God was defeated.

We never did find out where Poodria had vanished to, but was there a need for a massacre? Could there not have been a different way? Not all of the beast race were evil, after all.

I forcefully dismissed those thoughts. Surely, what the Dragon God had done bore some deeper significance. I felt as though it would be a sin even to question him.

"Good grief..."

Suddenly, I was addressed by someone. He had, unbeknownst to me, taken a position behind me. I had no idea when he had arrived or when he had drawn so near. Turning around, I found a god with a face I didn't remember seeing before. Yes, it was the Human God.

"How tragic," he remarked, as if he had seen right through me. Or perhaps he really had. The extent of his power remains a mystery even now.

"Even if there was suspicion that Lunaria was killed, it doesn't make every single one of them guilty," he noted.

I remained silent.

"Most of them probably don't even understand what happened. One moment, their god is dead, and the next, their world is ending. They are left with nothing but despair, despite having done nothing, knowing nothing..."

The Human God stood behind me, his gaze on the beastfolk as he whispered these words. I thought he was blaming me. For merely standing here, watching. For being unable to prevent this catastrophe.

However, it was a bit different. After a brief pause, the Human God uttered a single phrase.

"But indeed, this is too pitiful..."

When I turned around, the Human God greeted me with a serene smile.

"Keep this a secret from the Dragon God, will you?"

With that, the Human God vanished from my sight. I was left wondering what he intended to do, where he had gone. However, soon enough, I noticed something. The scattered, fleeing people were moving in a specific direction.

A certain direction, the same one the Dragon God had disappeared towards. Were they intending to seek revenge on the Dragon God? But the Dragon God had returned to the Dragon Realm long ago. The boundary of the world was insurmountable.

Yet, they were undeniably heading there. To the place we came from. Towards the shrine used for crossing the world's boundary.

And then, they vanished into the shrine. A shrine supposedly only usable by gods.

No, with the Divine Gem, even I could use it.

In any case, the Human God moved.

He saved the remaining beastfolk.

He transported them from the crumbling world to his own realm, the Human Realm.

"..."

Perhaps the Dragon God intended to obliterate all the beastfolk. Perhaps, as one of the Five Dragon Generals, I should have complied. Perhaps I should have condemned the Human God's actions. But, I couldn't.

All I wanted was vengeance for Lady Lunaria. I had no intention of causing such devastation to the Beast Realm. That's why I merely stood there, watching what the Human God was doing, until the very moment when the last of the beastfolk was transported to the Human Realm...

To tell you the truth, at that moment, I was deeply moved. How merciful this god was. He must have his hands full in his own world, and yet he extends his mercy to the Beast Tribe.

This despite the fact that The beast tribe very well could have killed Lady Lunaria in a premeditated manner.

I don't mean to speak ill of the Dragon God. I, too, felt deep sorrow and anger at Lunaria's death. But at the same time, I wished he had demonstrated more magnanimity and compassion.

Of course, I had no intention of making such a request to the Dragon God directly. Even now, considering the Dragon God's disposition at that time, I feel that it was somewhat inevitable.

But even so, I wished for a glimmer of salvation for the beastfolk.

I had built a modicum of rapport with them, even facilitated an exchange of craftsmen and dragon knights. I held sympathy for them. That's why I wished, just a bit of mercy, for them.

And it was not the Dragon God who granted this, but the Human God. As I watched his actions, I couldn't help but think that he truly was a deity to be trusted, without a shadow of a doubt.

Little did I know, it was all his doing.

In any case, this is how the Beast Realm perished.

The small remainder of beastfolk was accepted into the Human Realm. Those who survived were merely a few percent, but it was a few percent of the entire world's population. I didn't know the exact number, but it was not a trifling amount. Yet, the Human God took them in as refugees.

Inversely, this meant that more than 90% of the beastfolk, including the Beast God, had perished.

It was a catastrophe unlike any since the dawn of the six worlds. However, this disaster was nothing more than the prologue to the tragedies that would follow.

Teleportation Research

The Dragon God continued to decimate the worlds, one after the other: the Sea Realm, the Sky Realm...

No discussion was entertained in either of these worlds. The annihilation of the Beast Realm had stirred up a sentiment of 'intolerable the Dragon Realm' throughout the other worlds. Unknown to me at the time, they too had their reasons to fight. In fact, they had no reason not to.

Both the Sea Realm and the Sky Realm had armies ready and waiting by the time we arrived. The sea people had amassed an army so vast it dyed the sea black, and the sky people had a force so numerous it blocked out the sun. But such things held no meaning for us, the Five Dragon Generals.

The battles were a repetition of the carnage we had wrought in the Beast Realm. We, the Five Dragon Generals, cleared the path, the Dragon God annihilated their gods, unleashed his wrath upon the world, and the world crumbled. The handful of survivors trickled into the Human Realm, thanks to the goodwill of the God of Humans.

It was victory after victory.

That said, we were not unscathed. The repeated battles had damaged us and depleted our strength.

The Dragon God's body, in particular, was badly battered. He bled incessantly from a bite wound received from the Beast God. Poison from the Sea God continuously corroded one of his legs, and a radiant beam from the Sky God had plunged one of his eyes into darkness.

The Dragon Clan is the strongest race. That is undeniably true. But the six gods are, ultimately, peers. Even though some differences in growth may have emerged among us, their progeny, the gods have been equals since birth.

Although the Five Dragon Generals were riddled with injuries, we were not incapacitated. There were still other worlds to contend with. Notably, the world inhabited by a species said to be equivalent to the dragon race: the Demon Realm.

I was plagued with worry. If we went to war with the Demon Realm, it wouldn't end without incident. Next, one of the Five Dragon Generals might be lost. Or the Dragon God himself could die. Should we keep fighting like this? Should we annihilate the Demon Realm? Should we fight the Demon Realm?

Of course, it's not that I had any particular affection for the Demon Realm. Quite the opposite; I could even say I detested it. After all, that world had rejected me.

However, having witnessed the ruin of the Beast Realm, Ocean Realm, and Heaven Realm, a strong sense of repulsion was burgeoning within me.

Should we go this far?

Worlds collapsing.

People in panic.

Their faces of despair.

If we were to lose, the Dragon Realm would likely meet the same fate.

No, it would probably be even worse.

The Dragon Clan would scramble, trying to flee from a crumbling world.

But, would there be a world that would accept the Dragon Clan?

The Human Realm?

Ah, perhaps the God of Humans might be willing to accept the Dragon Clan.

He had always been supportive of us, the Dragon Clan.

Even if the Dragon Clan were defeated, they would likely protect and aid the survivors.

But the Human Realm already houses the three races we've annihilated.

They've been given land, they've increased their numbers, and I've heard they've even established their own territories.

They will never forget their own suffering, pain, and humiliation.

Even if the refugees from the Dragon Realm were to flow into the Human Realm, it was clear they would be eradicated by these races.

Of course, I had no intention of losing.

I didn't intend to allow the Dragon Realm to suffer such a fate.

But, our adversary was the Demon Race.

There was a possibility we could lose.

I was torn.

Should I stop the Dragon God, or not?

Honestly, I believed the Dragon God should swallow his pride and ask the God of Humans to mediate.

After all, we still didn't know who killed Lunaria.

I thought it was essential to calm down first and investigate that matter.

I should have just stopped overthinking and put a stop to it?

Do you think so too?

Yes, I thought the same.

I should have done so.

But at the time, I blindly worshiped the Dragon God. I really, truly did.

I still revere him now... but back then, I couldn't believe, didn't even consider, that the Dragon God could do something wrong.

Also, there was my position as one of the Five Dragon Generals.

The Five Dragon Generals are expected to be utterly faithful to the Dragon God.

We had to affirm everything about the Dragon God.

It was unimaginable that the Five Dragon Generals could question the Dragon God's actions.

That's what I thought.

So, I was uncertain.

As I watched the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals preparing for the next battle, I hesitated.

I couldn't consult anyone.

Who could I possibly turn to?

Lady Lunaria were still alive, perhaps she would have bestowed some wisdom upon us.

After all, she was the only one in the Dragon Realm who could voice her opinion to the Dragon God.

Had she been alive, we would probably not be on the brink of war.

...Her death, after all, was the catalyst for this impending conflict.

But she's no longer here.

I am at my wit's end.

My days were spent in a cycle of ups and downs, with Sareyakuto providing solace.

But there was someone who noticed my state.

Lady Dora.

■

One day, she invited me to her home.

As I remember, it was the first time I'd ever set foot in her house.

Her home was surprisingly modest, uncharacteristic of one of the Five Dragon Generals.

The number of her servants could be counted on one hand, and her possessions were minimal.

Seeing those servants stirred a bitter emotion within me.

In the shadow of Lady Lunaria's death, which had all but consumed our thoughts, we had nearly forgotten that Lady Lunaria's personal servants too had been murdered.

At the far end of the house was the still-young Pergius.

He was so young his eyes were yet to open.

With no claws or fangs, sparse scales, and small wings on his back, his fragile appearance stirred a strong sense of protectiveness within me.

I don't think he had a conscious understanding of the world around him yet.

While I was observing such a Pergius, Lady Dora spoke to me.

"You seem to have something troubling you?"

Her voice was kind.

It wasn't an attempt to interrogate me.

There was a soothing gentleness in it.

For a moment, we had returned to the relationship of a former teacher and her student.

I felt like crying.

After being chosen as one of the Five Dragon Generals, I hadn't really talked to Lady Dora much.

But she had been watching over me all along.

"The truth is——"

Before I knew it, I had poured out all of my inner thoughts.

Fully prepared for reproach, and even punishment, right there and then.

"....."

Lady Dora listened in silence.

No matter how harsh my voice became, her expression remained unchanged.

When I finished, she said in a soft voice,

"It's not surprising that you can't understand the will of the Dragon God..."

There was no sense of dismissal in her tone.

Instead, there was something akin to regret in her voice.

"Come. I will show you something."

As Lady Dora said this, she stood up and left the house.

Without a word of protest, I followed her.

Silently, Lady Dora began to move out of town.

Without asking where we were going, I continued to follow her.

After a while, perhaps about an hour of flying, Lady Dora finally landed on a mountain.

It was an ordinary, nameless mountain.

Lady Dora folded her wings and spoke for the first time since we had set off.

"Here."

"Here?"

I responded foolishly.

All I saw was a mountain.

Perhaps Lady Dora immediately realized that it wasn't clear what this place was.

Instead of answering my question, she strode toward a rock and began to mutter a spell.

"What is this..."

When the spell was completed, the rock disappeared as if melting into the air.

Where the rock had stood, a cave big enough for a person to pass through had opened its mouth.

It was a secret passage.

Still silent, Lady Dora stepped into the cave, and I followed her.

The inside of the cave was a narrow corridor.

Although it was dimly lit, the passage appeared to be well maintained.

At the end of the passage was a room.

It was a low-ceilinged room, seemingly carved out and expanded from the originally narrow cave, not even high enough to allow for flight.

Still, it was about the same size as her house.

Desks were lined up in the room, and various pieces of equipment and bundles of papers were placed on them.

And there were many members of the Dragon Tribe.

Some sat at desks, some sat on the ground, others stood while working.

All were deeply focused on the tasks at their fingertips.

"What is this place?"

"It's a teleportation research facility."

"Teleportation..."

I knew that the Dragon Realm had been conducting research on teleportation.

But I didn't know where, how, or to what extent this research was being conducted.

And that's even when I was one of the Five Dragon Generals.

"If you understand what's going on here, your troubles might be cleared."

With that, Lady Dora began walking through the room.

"Everyone here is a researcher."

"Really?"

As I looked at them in awe, I noticed something.

Everyone had faded scales.

There were many with no membranes on their wings, or who had lost their fangs.

Indeed, to my surprise, all the researchers there were elderly.

"So it's all elderly people."

"Yes... Only dragons nearing the end of their lifespan gather here."

I didn't ask why at the time, but I could guess the reason.

Teleportation magic is dangerous.

A single failure in an experiment could potentially wipe out a mountain.

That's why the elderly, who could die at any time, were doing the research.

Of course, there were other reasons.

It was probably thought that calm elders were better suited to research than hot-blooded youngsters.

In fact, this was the case in other worlds as well.

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In fact, this was the case in other worlds as well.

In places like the Demon Realm, species that lived long tended to be less intelligent, so species with shorter lifespans were used for research.

"Gentlemen! Thank you for your hard work! Today one of the Five Dragon Generals, the Dragon King Laplace, is inspecting! Don't be nervous, continue your research as usual!"

When Lady Dora made this announcement, everyone greeted me with their highest salutes.

Despite their age, their salutes were strong, a clear sign that they were all dragon warriors.

"Welcome young one, we don't have much, but please make yourself comfortable."

"...I will, thank you."

I responded hesitantly, with formal language.

I might be one of the Five Dragon Generals, but they are those who have served the Dragon God far longer than I have lived.

I thought I should show respect.

"Come, let me show you around."

As I followed Lady Dora, I looked around the research facility.

Lady Dora briefly explained the research being conducted there.

But to be honest, I had no idea what they were doing at that time.

Though I'm now well-versed in magic, at that time I didn't even know the first thing about it.

The elders were developing what we now call magic circles, but to me, they looked as though they were simply doodling peculiar patterns.

But still, I tried to remember their principles.

It was kind of a habit.

Whenever I saw something new, I would try to remember it. That's what I had been doing since I came to the Dragon Realm.

I tried to understand what they were doing.

I knew the goal, so I thought I should be able to do it too.

I looked at the vast amount of past research data, trying to catch up with them.

Well, I didn't get very far.

"You don't understand, do you?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. If you understood it in just a few minutes, it would render the thousands of years of research they've conducted pointless."

Looking back now, it was a nest of out-of-place artifacts.

What was being researched there were mainly techniques to control space, like teleportation and summoning.

The great magic of the early days was more magic than magical technique.

Much was still undiscovered.

Only a few things were understood at a practical level.
A mountain of wisdom written on those dragonhide parchments.

If even one bundle of it had survived, the current system of magic would be drastically different.

If there was even one person who could understand it, that is.

After that, Lady Dora demonstrated summoning magic.

It was the earliest form of summoning magic.

The earliest... although it hasn't changed much from now.

It's a technique to call forth creatures from other worlds.

What she summoned was a small fish that lived in the Sea Realm.

A powerless, ordinary fish.

The Sea Realm has already collapsed and is no longer habitable for humans, but it seems that such small creatures still exist.

At the same time, I remembered the first time I went to the Sea Realm.

Though I'm used to it now, when I saw a fish for the first time, I was quite excited.

Such creatures exist in other worlds, I thought.

You see, fish have a unique shape, right?

A strange form that can only live in water.

Don't you think so? You can catch fish in the pond at the back?

I see...

Well, I've spent a long time in a world without seas...

But even you, if you see a Blue Dragon, would think it has a strange shape.

They have a form that can only live in the sky.

"The Dragon God decided not to reveal the results of the teleportation research to the general dragon populace. Do you know why?"

"...No."

"Out of consideration. There is no countermeasure for teleportation unlike with monster. Hence, he believed that disclosing it would only cause unnecessary confusion."

Perhaps they could foresee that immediate results would not come from the research.

If results did not improve and the damage increased, it was predictable that blame would be directed towards the research team.

If results were not forthcoming and damage increased, it was foreseeable that the research team would face stronger criticism.

"Why... was I not informed?"

"Because you were appointed as one of the Five Dragon Generals with the premise of contact with other worlds."

I was shocked.

I thought I was standing shoulder to shoulder with the other four as one of the Five Dragon Generals.

Only I was not informed about this secret task.

That made me think that perhaps, until this very moment, I was feared as a potential traitor.

"Don't make such a face. It's not that I didn't tell you because I thought you would betray us."

"Then, why?"

"In case the 'culprit' behind the teleportation incidents and the emergence of monsters was revealed as a result of the teleportation research, it could hinder your job."

There are things better left unknown.

I understood that very well at the time.

There were even some among the demon race who could read minds.

"Don't be disheartened. Let's explain things in order."

Lady Dora patted my shoulder and talked about the research.

Each of the Five Dragon Generals was conducting research on teleportation, summoning, demons, and barriers, it seemed.

Crystal's research was on teleportation.

Lady Dora inherited that.

She was an expert on summoning and teleportation.

"Summoning magic is about calling forth creatures from other worlds. Conversely, teleportation magic is about sending creatures to other worlds. As you may have noticed from this explanation, these two are essentially the same."

"Creatures... can't we summon people?"

"We can."

Lady Dora stated that clearly.

"That's probably why the craftsmen from other worlds misunderstood. They believed that we used summoning and teleportation magic to plunge the Six Realms into chaos. In fact, it wouldn't be impossible if we intended to do something that seemed to be the case."

"..."

"Therefore, the Dragon God completely forbade the summoning and teleportation of people."

Yes, the Dragon God had forbidden the summoning of people.

Of course.

Summoning people from other worlds and teleporting them to another would result in the artificial creation of mysterious disappearances.

Therefore, the basic formula for summoning magic had many restrictions attached to prevent the summoning of people.

And it was deeply hidden and turned into a black box within the formula.

Even now, I can't analyze it.

Even though I can use summoning magic, I can't tamper with its root.

Probably, the only one who can unlock that black box is Lady Dora herself.

"Moreover, he hid the very existence of the method of teleportation and summoning. Do you know why?"

"Because if there are means, we would end up using them?"

"Is it because if the means exist, they will end up being used?"

"That's right. We, the dragon race, would take rash actions intending to bear all the responsibility afterwards, if it was for the Dragon God."

At that statement, I nodded.

To put it simply, if there were those who hindered the Dragon God and he couldn't kill them due to some constraint, I would kill them myself.

I would deal with all the problems that would arise afterwards as the result of my sole decision.

If it would save the Dragon God, I wouldn't hesitate to take on all the blame myself.

Therefore, Dora-sama refused to share the arts of summoning and teleportation with the Five Dragon Generals.

Conversely, she also didn't know much about barriers and magical beasts.

By creating magical beasts and teleporting them to other worlds, it was possible to cause disturbances.

That is, if one of the Five Dragon Generals were to break the Dragon God's command.

Of course, it's unthinkable that the Five Dragon Generals would do such a thing.

"But if it's possible, does that mean the monsters and teleportation events were caused by someone?"

"No... results of the research showed that the incidents weren't caused by magical techniques. Its fundamental principles are different."

"What do you mean?"

"We use magic circles to induce such phenomena, but there's no trace of such use in the monster and teleportation incidents that appear in the world."

The research progressed.

We became able to perform teleportations and summonings.

We even understood the true nature of the appearance of monsters and the disappearances caused by teleportation.

"And what is this true nature?"

"It's what we call Dragon Power."

According to Lady Dora's explanation, there's a certain power permeating the Six Worlds.

A power called Dragon Power in the Dragon World, and Magic Power in the Demon World.

Every being living in the Six Worlds possesses this power.

People, beasts, fish, birds, and even dragons.

And the emergence of monsters and teleportation were caused by this power.

When a creature absorbs a large amount of power, it transforms into a magical beast.

The given power remakes the creature's body into something more robust.

This applies to people as well, although their appearance does not change much. However, they do gain tremendous or special powers.

My magic eye and the overwhelming power of the Five Dragon Generals could be seen as the byproduct of this power.

Furthermore, this power has a tendency to maintain balance within the Six Worlds.

If the power decreases significantly in one world, it will draw from other worlds to replenish itself.

This absorption includes trees, animals, and even humans.

The result of this is teleportation.

In a word, disappearances.

"However, our understanding only goes so far."

We knew the essence of the matter.

But why did these occurrences start happening frequently after a certain period?

Our understanding had not yet advanced to that point.

According to researchers' hypotheses, it's said that from a certain period forward, this power within the entire world significantly decreased and imbalances started to occur.

The worlds absorb power from each other more to compensate, causing teleportation incidents.

Moreover, this led to the appearance of power gradients, places with high and low power concentrations, with the former becoming nests for these new monsters.

Such is the theory.

Currently, it is the most plausible one.

However, it was not yet understood why the world's power had significantly decreased.

There must be some cause for it to happen.

"We've only recently come to understand this much. It was before the war started. The right time to tell you had already passed, but there hasn't been a good opportunity."

And it's possible that this was carried out by other worlds.

"Laplace. Do you understand why the Dragon God entrusted you with the negotiations with the other worlds, and permitted the craftsmen to be invited into the Dragon Realm?"

"No."

"The Dragon God planned to disclose this knowledge to all of the Six Worlds once research had progressed a bit further. This includes the causes, countermeasures, and precautions to prevent the same thing from happening again."

Once again, I was touched by the Dragon God's grace.

He was not only considering the Dragon World.

He wished to save all the worlds.

"The Dragon God was truly gracious, yet they spite his efforts and even repay his kindness with spite. What is there to hesitate about?"

"...There's none."

The Dragon God was betrayed by other worlds.

More than betrayal, they robbed him of his beloved.
His wrath was justified.

It's a justified retribution.

My hesitation vanished.

To tell the truth, I understood but half of the explanation about summoning at that time, but my concern had dissipated.

In the next battle, I decided to take the lead.

After an utmost salute to Dora-sama, I left the research lab and flew away satisfied and resolute.

Re-energized for the coming battle with the demons.

But I was a fool.

If the me of that time had been a little wiser, if my knowledge about summoning and teleportation had been richer, I would have asked Lady Dora this:

"If what you say is true, wouldn't the destruction of other worlds further disrupt the balance of power, leading to an increase in such incidents?"

If I had asked that, perhaps things wouldn't have ended the way they did.

The wise Lady Dora would have, surely, at least slightly reconsidered her thoughts.

In hindsight, I was utterly foolish back then.

And so, the battle with the Demon Realm began.

The Demise of the Demon Realm

The struggle against the Demon Realm was fraught with extreme ferocity.

The forces of the Eight Great Demon Lords and the Five Dragon Generals were evenly matched.

The power of the Dragon God and the Demon God were also on par.

But we, including the Dragon God, were injured, far from being at our peak.

Hence, this time, the six of us could not annihilate the world.

Under normal circumstances, there might have been a path to peace...

But the Dragon God chose to plunge us into war.

He called upon all the dragons throughout the Dragon Realm, deploying every dragon knight into battle.

And they were met by the warriors of the demon race.

While the Dragon Tribe had power over the Demon Tribe, the Demon Tribe held the advantage in numbers.

The fight was evenly matched.

The Dragon Tribe invaded and attacked the Demon Realm.

We managed to inflict significant damage on several towns, but the demons were numerous and resilient.

Unable to press on, we had to retreat.

In turn, the Demon Tribe attacked the Dragon Realm.

Despite the unique geography of the Dragon Realm thwarting their invasion, we too suffered losses.

Such back-and-forth exchanges of attacks continued for many years.

I also led the dragon warriors into battle.

I clashed with the eight great demon kings time and again.

However, curiously enough, Necroslacros was nowhere to be seen.

The eight great demon kings were always one short.

Were they conserving his power, or was he too ashamed to face me?

The details remained unknown.

The war went on for decades.

War propels technological advancement.

Between battles, we five dragon generals perfected numerous technologies and magical arts.

The spirits that Lady Dora summoned through her conjuring magic.

The magical sword Chaos created from the bones of monsters.

The barrier created by Shirard to counter the demon clan's offensive spells.

The dragon gate that Maxwell created to diminish the power of the demons.

Unprecedented magical arts, which could not have been developed without conflict, were created and ruthlessly employed in war.

Of course, the demon clan weren't fools.

Well, there were many fools among them, but there were also some who were wise, I suppose.

In order to counter the dragon clan, new forms of magic were developed.

Spells of blinding light that obliterated dragons, demon spears that amplified the wielder's power, poisons that tormented victims until their deaths...

Even now, I don't fully understand the methods they used to create these.

It was, to my knowledge, an all-out war employing the pinnacle of technology and magic in recorded history.

Although, it isn't recorded in any history.

The seemingly endless battle, much like a bottomless swamp, felt as though it would continue indefinitely.

Yet, inevitably perhaps, even such a conflict reaches a turning point.

Can you guess what happened as technology advanced?

Both sides began to dwindle in number.

Ah, of course, you might think that's natural in war.

However, both the demon clan and the dragon clan were stubborn and robust.

In the early stages of the conflict, almost no fatalities occurred in our clashes.

When two armies of a hundred thousand clashed, only one or two soldiers would die; that was the extent of the fatalities. Remarkable, isn't it?

But as our technology progressed, the death toll steadily increased.

So much so that the dragon clan's tombstones filled our cemeteries.

After such loss, one might expect either side to cry, "Enough of this fighting!"

In a human war, this would be the case. But in a war between the dragon clan and the demon clan, no one uttered such words.

The turning point I speak of pertains to something else.

The reduction in our soldiers became a problem for us, the dragon clan.

Initially, we had chosen total warfare due to the injuries of the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals.

As the number of dragon knights dwindled, we found ourselves at a disadvantage.

Then the Human God appeared.

As always, he stood behind me and said,

"It seems the eight great demon lords are appearing more frequently on the front lines. If you can defeat them and reduce their numbers, perhaps you could win this war."

"If it were that simple, we wouldn't be in such a predicament."

"You should all take them on together, the Five Dragon Generals. Just like when you battle monsters, bring down one with superior numbers."

The Five Dragon Generals are the strongest warriors of the dragon clan.

We always fought alone.

But that wasn't because we took pride in doing so.

There was simply no need.

Each of the Five Dragon Generals was capable of defeating all enemies single-handedly.

It was an oversight.

When I actually proposed this idea to the other Dragon Generals, they grimaced.

However, it seems that everyone had a vague sense that to win this war, we had to do something a bit... unconventional.

So they accepted my suggestion.

We provoked one of the Eight Great Generals, lured and isolated him... Then all five of us attacked at once.

No enemy that could withstood the full might of the Five Dragon Generals.

Wearing expressions of shock and despair, the demon lords fell one by one.

One by one, we took down the Eight Great Demon Lords.

The demon clan, having lost the Eight Great Demon Lords, lost its momentum and started being driven back by the dragon clan.

But until the very end, Nekroslacross never showed up....

Instead, the Demon God came to the frontlines.

Upon recognizing us, the Demon God grew in size at an astonishing rate.

Five meters, ten meters.

Even exceeding a hundred meters, a thousand meters, his growth didn't stop.

His head piercing the heavens, his feet appearing like walls, his enlargement finally came to a halt.

Simultaneously, eyes appeared all over his body.

The eyes locked onto us, the five dragon generals...and the Demon God started moving.

One might assume that the larger he became, the slower he would move.

Indeed, the giants from human folklore are always depicted as slow and heavy.

However, the Demon God was different.

He continued to move with his usual swiftness.

He fell upon us, with punches the size of mountains and kicks like falling meteorites.

It was too much evenf for the Five Dragon Generals.

A mere close passage of his fists would send us flying tens of kilometers away, crashing violently into the ground.

The difference in strength between a god and a dragon general cannot be understated.

It was then that I fully realized the magnitude of the powers that beings called gods possess.

If I had been fighting gods like the Beast God, the Sea God, or the Sky God, I would have been torn to pieces in an instant.

However, when the demon god made his move, the Dragon God would not remain silent.

Until then, the Dragon God had been preserving his strength, and he finally made his grand entrance to the demon world.

A one-on-one showdown.

Still, I couldn't help but worry.

Even the mighty Dragon God might not be able to defeat the mountainous Demon God.

Especially since his wounds from battling the gods of other worlds hadn't yet healed...

However, my worries proved unfounded.

As a golden light spilled from the Dragon God's body, he began to move at a speed surpassing even that of light.

The Demon God lashed out with fists and feet, yet they scarcely hit their mark.

When they did, it was the Demon God's body that was blown away.

The Dragon God was dominating.

But the Demon God would regenerate any parts of his body that were blown away and continue to attack the Dragon God, so it didn't exactly look like a clear advantage.

Each of their blows was accompanied by a deafening roar, causing our distant bodies to tremble.

Shockwaves assaulted us late, attempting to blow us away.

Still, I was watching the Dragon God's fight closely.

I couldn't take my eyes off it.

This was the fourth time I had seen a battle between gods.

Each time, they provoked horrific cataclysms and unleashed impacts that threatened to annihilate the world.

But, this fight was unusually protracted.

Even the overwhelming destructive power of the Dragon God's attacks couldn't annihilate the Demon God.

Neither could Demon God strike a decisive blow against the Dragon God.

The back and forth between them continued for ten, twenty days.

No one could approach.

We, like everyone else, could only watch from a distance.

It was a fight where either could have won.

But the one who triumphed was the Dragon God.

On the hundredth day, precisely.

From under the giant Demon God's feet, a divine light began to overflow.

At first, I didn't understand what it was.

But as the particles of light ascended, I understood.

A magic circle.

A magic circle, so huge it could be as large as a continent, was forming under the feet of the Demon God.

It was too far away to see the Demon God's expression.

However, from his behavior, I understood that even the Demon God hadn't expected this.

To think that the Dragon God would use magic...

The Demon God's body began to disintegrate rapidly from his feet.

Because of his size, the disintegration seemed slow, but an object the size of a mountain was disappearing.

What else could one call it but rapid?

And so, after the light subsided, the Dragon God returned.

In his hand, he held a small jewel.

"Dragon God!"

We ran towards the Dragon God.

He was gravely wounded.

In addition to the injuries he'd received from other gods, the battle with the Demon God had drained nearly all of the dragon energy from his body.

I couldn't even feel the usual divine aura around him; all I could sense was his weakened state.

The sight of him on the verge of collapse sent chills down the spines of all five dragon generals.

"We must act! Dragon God, come with us! Let's return to the dragon realm for now!"
"Hmm..."

With a groan that sounded like a reply, we helped the Dragon God and took flight.

But then, Lady Dora looked back.

At the end of her gaze were the demon clansmen, dumbstruck by the Demon God's death.

And the world beginning to crumble.

Yes, the world itself couldn't withstand the battle between the Dragon God and the Demon God.

Upon seeing this, Lady Dora threw the jewel at me.

"Laplace. You stay here and bear witness to the end."
"...Yes!"

Witness the end of a world.

Could it have been a matter of courtesy toward other worlds?

Both the Sea World and the Sky World had someone to witness their end.

Of course, it wasn't just about courtesy. One of our duties was to use the final hours before the world collapsed to find the one who killed Lady Lunaria.

The destruction of Beast World was an unprecedented event, and we were so disoriented that we could barely do anything.

But I suppose that's to be expected.

If you too witnessed the collapse of a world, you would be immobilized by the spectacle.

That was a truly shocking sight.

A world, an entity so vast and seemingly immutable, crumbling away.

It is similar to the flow of a great river. It cannot be stopped under any circumstances, and all we can do is simply watch.

And it can also never return to its original state.

The Demon Race is a formidable species, but when faced with a world's collapse, they are as helpless as anyone.

Like the inhabitants of other worlds, they were in a state of confusion and disarray.

But after a while, they began to move in a certain direction.

It was a ruin that led to another world.

It seemed the Human God had once again made his move.

...It's a shocking sight, but after seeing it a few times, one becomes accustomed to it. While turning a blind eye to the collapsing world, I flew around the Demon Realm.

Amidst all this, I was searching for someone.

Necros Lacross.

One of the Eight Great Demon Kings, the one who never showed his face in battle until the end.

Was he somewhere out there, or was he already dead?

He had a close relation with Kirisis Carisis.

If we could meet and talk, I thought perhaps I could gather some information.

Why didn't I try to meet him sooner?

If we met, maybe I could learn something useful.

Why wait until now to find him?

Because there was no way for me to come to Demon World.

I had long returned Beast God's jewel to the Dragon God.

I couldn't even think to petition him.

Because I already bore the responsibility of inviting those criminals into the Dragon World.

Even if I suggested it, the Dragon God probably wouldn't permit me to go.

As a result, I never had a chance to meet Necro Lacrosse again.

"Hmm?"

After flying for a while, I spotted something.

The largest city of the world, the Demon Capital Daileck.

The biggest castle, Demon God Castle Gaileck.

The castle was ablaze.

Though it looked indestructible, it was being burned by a peculiar black flame.

In any case, setting fire to a castle where a god resides, even if it is the act of rioters fleeing in panic, would be greatly aberrant.

With my suspicions, I approached the castle.

However, the smoke was thick, and I couldn't find the usual entrance.

Therefore, I landed on the ground.

Usually I entered from the rooftop, so standing at the front gate was a novel experience.

The guards were fleeing from the castle.

They screamed in terror and scattered as soon as they saw me.

Inside the castle, there was an intense heat, and there were charred bodies of many demons.

But they weren't strong enough to penetrate my dragon energy.

Amidst the flames, I looked around inside the castle.

Naturally, there was no one left inside.

The once glorious Demon Castle Gaireek was quite desolate.

I don't know who set fire to this castle, but they are probably no longer here.

As I turned to leave, we came face to face.

Emerging from the stairs leading to the underground was a six-armed, black giant.

"Mwah!"

Necros Lacross.

The person I had been searching for was right there before me.

"So, it's you!"

His face, which I hadn't seen for a long time, seemed to have grown thinner.

Could immortal demons lose weight?

In his many arms, he was holding an infant.

"Laplace! Please, spare me...!"

Before I could say anything, Necros lacros pleaded, hiding the infant behind him.

"I understand why you betrayed us! But this child knows nothing! Surely, he is innocent even before your eyes!"

For a moment, I couldn't comprehend his words.

Me, betray?

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? Laplace, you killed Kirisis Calisis and started this war, did you not?"

"Wait, Kirisis Calisis was killed?! What's going on?"

"...Don't act like you know nothing. You're the one responsible for all of this!"

"I don't understand what you're talking about! Tell me, Necros Lacross, how did Kirisis Calisis die?"

I calmed down the agitated Necros lacros and listened to his story.

Everything started the day Kirisis Calisis returned to Demon World.

Necro Lacrosse didn't know the precise reason, only that she was allowed to return for a while.

Demon God nodded at his wife's words and did not inquire further.

Kiris Calis was near childbirth at the time, so everyone assumed the Dragon Race had allowed her return in consideration.

Kirisscaris gave birth and brought a child into the world.

The birth of an immortal demon is somewhat peculiar, with no physical changes such as a swelling belly... Well, that's neither here nor there.

Not long after giving birth, Kirisscaris was found dead.

The Demon God went into a rage and searched for the culprit.

Fortunately, the culprit left behind evidence.

Silver hair and scales.

Yes, those of the dragon tribe.

Furthermore, the dragon knights I had dispatched had disappeared since the night of Kirisscaris's death.

It's a story you may have heard somewhere before.

And the outcome of this familiar tale is the same.

The dragon tribe was to blame.

That Laplace, one of the Five Dragon Generals, had sought revenge on the demons.

But here the tale diverges a bit.

Upon hearing this story, Necroslacros vehemently dissuaded the incensed Eight Great Demon Lords.

Laplace is not the kind of man who would do such a thing.

Most likely, it was the work of someone from another world, disguised to look like the Dragon Clan's doing.

We need to remain calm and conduct a more thorough investigation, he said.

The demon lords agreed to calm down for the moment and decided to consult with the dragon tribe for further clarification.

It was shortly after this.

The news that the beast world had been destroyed by the dragon tribe had arrived.

At the same time, a member of the dragon tribe, who appeared to be the murderer of Kirisiscaris, was captured.

After intense torture, the man confessed, "I was ordered by Laplace. Necros Lacross is also an accomplice."

Necroslacros was quickly apprehended and confined to a prison.

Necroslacros was completely dispirited.

He must have believed in me so much.

However, he thought that if he considered what he had done in the past, it was only natural for Laplace to seek revenge.

After that, Necroslacros didn't know much about the situation in the demon world...

Well, the outcome is the same.

The demons chose to fight and faced off against the dragon tribe.

Necroslacros waited in the pitch-black dungeon for the inevitable sentence.

But when the Demon God died and the world started to collapse, he knew something was amiss.

Necros Lacross managed to broke free from his cell and made his way outside.

And when he wondered what had happened among the fleeing people and pondered what he should do, he saw flames rising from the castle.

Black flames.

Seeing those strange flames, Necros Lacross remembered the newborn child of the Demon God.

Thinking that it might be possible, he hurried to the castle and, as expected, found the child abandoned.

And while holding the child, he escaped the castle, which is when he encountered me.

"..."

"I had thought that you were the root of all this, but judging by your expression, it seems otherwise."

"Y-yes."

Overwhelmed by the events, my mind went completely blank.

If this is true, it means we have been manipulated by someone.

But who could it be?

And for what purpose?

At the very least, Necros Lacross's words are unlikely to be lies.

He is not a man who would tell lies.

In fact, he lacks the intellect to even come up with lies.

"I would like to hear the details, but I must ensure the safety of this child no matter what. If you have no ill intentions towards me... please step aside."

"..."

"..."

Slowly, I shifted my body and let them pass.

The child of the Demon God.

Anyone could understand that if this child is raised, it will undoubtedly become an enemy of the Dragon God.

However, I couldn't stop him.

After hearing Necros Lacross's story, it would be unthinkable to take the life of an innocent child.

We already destroyed their world under false pretenses, to kill the child in fear of revenge was nothing but villainous.

"Head to the teleportation shrine. The path to the human realm is open now."

"Understood! I'm grateful for your kindness...!"

Necros Lacross left.

Holding the child with its still-unopened eyes against his chest.

And I, too, returned to the Dragon Realm.

Carrying the knowledge I had obtained from Necros Lacross deep in my heart.

And thus, the Demon Realm collapsed.

Departure

When I returned, the Dragon God lay prostrate on the floor.

It was a terrible sight.

Blood was flowing from his shoulder, one eye closed, and one leg withered.

Furthermore, he had received a large wound on his arm from the battle with the Demon God.

He was utterly devastated.

Such was the his state.

The wounds inflicted by one god upon another do not heal quickly.

It would take a long time, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years, to slowly recover.

"Laplace, you've had a difficult time."

However, the Dragon God had a calm expression.

Though his injuries were severe, it seemed he was relieved that the retribution had ended.

Whoever the criminal was, whether he still lives, now that their worlds were all destroyed, those questions had all become moot.

"Demon World fell silent as expected." I reported.

"Is that so...? You should rest as well. You must be tired," he said.

There was a slight color of anxiety and regret amidst the calmness.

He must have regretted that he had gone too far.

It wasn't something Lunaria-sama would have wanted, after all.

If time were to pass without incident, after tens of thousands of years, the Dragon God's temper would cool, and he would be able to deal with the aftermath of this incident.

"No, there's something I need to tell you first."

"Hmm... what is it?"

But, that opportunity was lost forever.

Because I imparted the knowledge I gained from Necroslacross to the Dragon God.

"In the collapsing demon world, I found Necroslacross. According to him, Kirishis-Karishis is—"

The Dragon God listened to my story expressionlessly.

As if saying, "What's the point of telling me now?"

But as the story progressed, the Dragon God's expression changed.

There was severity, curiosity, and contemplation.

By the end, the Dragon God was deep in thought, a troubled look on his face.

"That's all."

"..."

"...Uh, Dragon God?"

The Dragon God did not respond to my voice.

However, I had finished my report.

For now, I would follow orders and step back, and I would rest as well.

Just as I thought this...

"...I see, it's him," the Dragon God murmured, rising to his feet.

He emerged from his resting place, intending to leave the room.

"Wh-where are you going!?"

In my haste, I asked. The Dragon God answered, "To attack the human realm."

I thought it was absurd. I wondered why.

The humans should have been the victims in this incident.

They were the ones who had to deal with the aftermath of our tyranny, a presence to be appreciated.

Could it be that the humans were the source of everything?

Did the humans instigate the conflict between the dragon tribe and the other races?

But why?

There was no reason.

If Lady Lunaria were alive, the humans would have stood at the pinnacle of all races alongside the dragons.

After all, the human god accepted those from a world that was annihilated.

Perhaps that was somehow beneficial to the human race.

But then, they could have helped with my work... as a diplomat.

That way, various races would eventually flourish in every world. There would be no need for annihilation.

If the humans were the culprits, their actions were incoherent.

That's why I was confused.

The Dragon God's actions and thoughts, I simply couldn't understand their meaning.

...Looking back now, the wise Dragon God probably understood everything just by listening to my words.

With just a little information, a slight clue.

That alone allowed him to perceive who was truly to blame, who should truly be defeated.

Of course, I think it was only possible because he possessed information that I couldn't know.

Anyway, at that time, I couldn't comprehend it.

You can call me foolish and laugh if you want.

However, I simply couldn't believe that the Human race was scheming behind the series of events.

Now, it seems like something I should have realized, but...

At that time, I simply didn't understand.

I lacked wisdom.

No, perhaps he had outmaneuvered me, several steps ahead.

"Gather the Five Dragon Generals. The battle is not yet over..."

And with that, the Dragon God left, as if he had no more to say.

Up until that point, we had always followed the Dragon God's lead. If he said turn right, we turned right.

Therefore, he must have thought that a detailed explanation was unnecessary.

Of course, his thinking wasn't wrong.

That's how we were supposed to be.

But, just this once, I wanted an explanation.

It was necessary.

Just this once...

■

"That's all. Everyone, begin preparations."

When the Five Dragon Generals gathered, the Dragon God immediately gave the command to attack the human realm.

Only an order. No explanation.

Then, as though dragging his wounded body, he swiftly exited the meeting room.

The Dragon God seemed rushed.

But there was no room to question his urgency.

The received order was shocking enough.

"Preposterous..."

"Wasn't this war to honor Lunaria-sama? For what purpose would invading her homeland serve?"

"I don't know, the Dragon God must have his considerations, but..."

The Five Dragon Generals were all astonished.

Naturally so.

They believed the battle was already over.

It was time to heal their wounded bodies, rebuild the collapsed towns, mourn the dead, and start anew for the future.

And yet, they were told to fight again.

Moreover, against former allies.

Against opponents who had no reason to fight.

"In that case, what kind of thoughts does he have?"

"The Human Realm has always been our ally."

"Do you mean there's a reason to attack and destroy it...?"

A meeting without the presence of the Dragon God was unusual.

Normally, when we received orders from the Dragon God, the Five Dragon Generals would immediately act upon them.

But on that day, we continued the conversation for a long time.

There were several reasons for that.

The fact that the Human Realm is Lunaria-sama's homeland.

The Human god had always been any ally of the Dragon race and had helped us on multiple occasions, as evident in my own case... In fact, the other Four Dragon Generals had also received assistance from the Human god on several occasions.

Destroying Human World should be trivial compared to the other worlds.

All our previous battles had been in remembrance of Lady Lunaria.

These factors had put a brake on our actions.

The discussions became intense, and reached a deadlock.

Because we couldn't understand the Dragon God's intent at all.

"Laplace. What on earth did you whisper into the Dragon God's ears?"

After a while, Szilard questioned me.

So, I answered honestly.

I told him what I heard in the Demon Realm.

What might have happened in the Demon Realm.

Upon hearing that, Shilard's face showed a look of understanding, and he said:

"You were probably deceived."

"Deceived? Me?"

"Yes. Necroslacross, to escape from you, to let the demon god's daughter escape, and to set us dragons and humans against each other, probably fed you lies."

I hadn't thought that Necroslacross could lie.

However, if his words were lies, everything seemed to make sense.

But if his words were lies, everything would make sense.

When Shilard said that, foolish as I was, I thought that even in that dire situation, Necros Lacroix would have worked hard to come up with a single lie.

Though I had believed he was not a man who would lie.

Well, even though he always talked about peace between the worlds, when it came to his beloved world being destroyed, it was only natural that he would do such things.

It was natural for him to incite conflict between the Dragon race, whom he considered enemies, and the Human race.

Perhaps he hadn't participated in the war because he was secretly manipulating events behind the scenes. I even considered the possibility that his usual foolish attitude was an act to betray us in the end.

When people's thoughts are in turmoil, they would rather trust an outsider's opinion than their own intuition.

Necros Lacrosse never lies.

But that fact faltered against the thought that "he may lie."

Because there was no certainty.

"Perhaps... it's possible..."

However, something...

Something was bothering me.

"The Dragon God wouldn't have been deceived under normal circumstances... but it was none other than your report. He simply believed it without question."

But once it was said, I couldn't respond.

The Dragon God believed my report without hesitation because he trusted me.

If it turned out that I had given false information to the Dragon God, it was my responsibility.

"We are the Five Dragon Generals, the hands and feet of the Dragon God. Normally we don't question, we only follow His command... But,"

The next words forced us to make a decision unprecedented since the inception of the Five Dragon Generals.

"Shouldn't we stop it this time?"

Everyone among the Five Dragon Generals held their breath.

Even if my misinformation was the root cause, the order had already been issued.

If an order has been issued, it means the Dragon God has decided.

To stop that would be to deny the Dragon God.

It was different from expressing an opinion before a decision was made.

Denying a god.

Denying what you believe deep in your heart.

That takes a great deal of courage.

Have you tried to go against the will of god?

That was the first time for me.

"...I understand."

The first to agree was Chaos.

He grieved the death of his comrades more than anyone else.

He mourned the deaths of his brethren more than anyone else.

As someone who was most inclined towards war, he was also the most relieved when it was over.

If it was a necessary fight, he wouldn't have objected.

Rather, he would have been more eager than anyone else.

But if it was an unnecessary....

"That's right. Even if the Human race is the weakest, the Human god is still a god. The Dragon God is deeply injured. We must show concern for his well-being..."

Maxwell also agreed.

He also had feelings of care for the Dragon God.

If the war continued, the Dragon God might die.

I don't think the Dragon God would lose.

But if he were to sustain irreparable injuries, it could be a matter of life and death.

...

Dora-sama was at a loss.

As the most loyal among us, it was the most difficult for her to disobey a direct order from the Dragon God.

"If it's for the sake of the Dragon God."

She consented eventually.

Because her loyalty was stronger than anyone.

If it was for the Dragon God's own sake, even with great reluctance we must stop him.

That was her will.

...

And so, we ran to the Dragon God's side.

At first, we tried to persuade him with words.

The Human race had always been an ally.

This incident must have been a desperate lie concocted by the Demon race.

We were worried about the Dragon God's well-being.

So, we asked him to stop.

However, it was futile.

The Dragon God didn't lend us his ear.

Even when asked for an explanation, the Dragon God only uttered incomprehensible things.

"The human god has already become something that is and is not a human god. I don't know his purpose, but he must be killed."

I didn't appreciate the meaning of those words then.

The human god hadn't changed at all since I first saw him.

Rather, it was the Dragon God who had changed.

The Dragon God we knew, filled with compassion and reverence for peace, had become a manifestation of war.

"We have no desire to fight against the Human race. We beg you, Dragon God, won't you put lower your spear?"

We had decided to abandon the war.

We wouldn't fight.

So the Dragon God mustn't either.

"It doesn't matter. You can stay. I will go alone."

However, the Dragon God wouldn't listen.

Strongly asserting that he would go alone, he took off towards the Human realm.

"Please wait! Please, reconsider!"

"I can't."

"Why not? The Human God has always been on our side. The Dragon God himself said so! Our current prosperity is thanks to the efforts of the Human race!"

"The cause of this war lies entirely with the human god."

"Where is the evidence for that?"

"It's in the human world."

Do you know the term "impasse"?

That's exactly what it was.

We presented various arguments to persuade him.

We didn't want to fight the Dragon God either.

But the result was the same.

The Dragon God wouldn't listen, insisting on invading the human world.

At least, why do we have to invade the human world?

Why do we have to kill the human god?

I can't help but think... if only he had explained it in more detail, if only he had been more careful in explaining his thought process that led to this answer...

But I still think it was unavoidable.

We, the Five Dragon Generals, followed the Dragon God's words too faithfully.

No matter how capable the Dragon God was, it's not easy to respond when someone who has obediently followed for over a hundred thousand years suddenly raises objections.

Explaining himself would not come naturally to him.

Imagine if the broom you use every day said, "I don't want to clean anymore." What would you do?

Do you explain to the broom why cleaning is necessary, or that the purpose of a broom is to clean?

Or would you forcibly use the broom to clean anyway?

Perhaps you would use a different tool to replace it?

In the end, it was the same situation, I believe.

The Dragon God might have taken advantage of our loyalty, the loyalty of us five Dragon Generals... but I don't like to put it that way.

The Dragon God, you see, trusted us.

Believed that we would never turn our fangs against him.

And that if he persisted in his obstinacy, we would eventually comply, albeit reluctantly.

But we betrayed that trust.

"If you won't listen, then we must stop you, Dragon God, even by force."

The look on the Dragon God's face when Szilard said that still pains me to recall.

I had never seen the Dragon God so shocked.

We thought we had done something irreversible.

But even if we lost the Dragon God's trust, we were fine with that.

We were that resolved.

Even if we lost our status as the Five Dragon Generals, even if we were banished from the Dragon Realm.

As long as the Dragon God lived, that was all that mattered.

That's what we believed.

"....Try if you must."

But even so, the Dragon God did not change his mind.

It was too important for him to change.

Only we were unaware of that.

Just a little bit more.

Even if it's clumsy, even if it takes time.

If only there were a more detailed explanation for why we had to invade the Human realm and why we had to kill the Human god.

And if even one of us had the wisdom to understand it.

I can't help but think that way.

No, even if he had, this fight could not have been avoided.

I know this.

He had meticulously planned and orchestrated it over many long years to lead to this outcome.

Still, I can't help but think that if just one thing had been different, it wouldn't have ended like this.

It's foolish.

In any case, that's how the fight began.

To my knowledge, the most tragic, most foolish, most meaningless, last battle had begun...

The Betrayal of the Five Dragon Generals

The betrayal of the Five Dragon Generals.

It seems that's how this battle is recorded in history.

Well, it's not entirely wrong.

Even if it was done for the sake of the Dragon God, it was still betrayal in the end.

That is undeniable.

But there's one error.

To be precise, only four of the Five Dragon Generals participated in the battle.

Because I did not fight.

Someone was needed to tidy up after the battle.

It was a battle between the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals.

Some, or perhaps all, of the generals might have died.

If that happened, the Dragon Realm would remain short-handed afterwards.

Who would oversee the Dragon Knights, who would slay the monsters, who would conduct research on magic, and who would assist the Dragon God...

I was given that role.

It was a very important role, but also a shameful one.

Why do I think it's shameful?

Listen.

The Five Dragon Generals go against the commands of the Dragon God.

We even try to restrain him by piercing him with our claws and fangs.

Even if the Dragon God reconsiders and halts the invasion of the human realm, the fact that we defied him doesn't change.

Even if no one died, the punishment for the Five Dragon Generals would be inevitable.

Perhaps only death could make up for such a crime.

I am the only one who escapes that fate.

But even if I don't fight, the fact remains that I went against the Dragon God's commands and tried to stop him.

And yet, I continue to hold the position of one of the Five Dragon Generals without consequence.

There is no greater shame than that.

Even if there is a pretext of it being for the future of the Dragon realm.

But well, I held the lowest standing among them.

I accepted that role.

Now, speaking of the battle, it didn't start immediately on the spot.

The Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals.

If they fought, mountains would easily crumble and vanish.

Even in battle, preparation was necessary beforehand.

To stop the Dragon God.

It sounds easy to say it with words.

To weaken him by hitting or kicking, to restrain him and lock him away somewhere.

You probably imagined something like that.

However, if we were to unleash enough power to stop the Dragon God's movements, mountains would easily crumble and vanish.

There is no place to confine the Dragon God, so appropriately grand magic must be used.

In the first place, it's like an infant challenging an adult.

You might not understand since you don't have much interaction with children, but even if they are sick or injured, a toddler who is just learning to walk would never be able to defeat an adult.

There was indeed such a significant difference between the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals.

That's why the Four Dragon Generals joined forces and earnestly confronted the Dragon God.

With even greater force than when we defeated the Demon Kings.

No, even more than that.

Preparations took some time.

The Dragon God agreed to wait.

You might find it strange, but each of the Five Dragon Generals had to handle the transfer of their respective duties and ensure the evacuation of the Dragon folk.

In any case, he gave his consent.

Perhaps the Dragon God foresaw that he couldn't secure victory in the human realm alone, or perhaps he thought that given time, the heads of the Five Dragon Generals might cool.

Who knows?

While the Five Dragon Generals prepared, I, at the Dragon God's side, was evacuating the dragon folk from the town of Keious to other regions.

We didn't know where the battle would take place, but Keious was at the center of the world.

There was a significant possibility that it could get caught in the crossfire.

I spent several days leading this operation.

Everyone had a bewildered look on their faces.

Even when they heard that four of the Five Dragon Generals had rebelled against the Dragon God, they couldn't believe it.

Some even stood up to fight on the side of the Dragon God.

But those individuals were gently restrained by the Dragon God.

Ordinary Dragon Race wouldn't have a chance in a fight between The Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals.

He must have thought it better to avoid pointless deaths.

After the evacuation was over, I stayed by the Dragon God's side.

By doing so, I showed my intention to remain a close aide to the Dragon God, and at the same time, I also played a role in restraining him from prematurely flying off to the human realm.

The Dragon God simply remained silent.

He neither addressed me nor treated me harshly; he just quietly contemplated something.

If he had so desired, he could have easily ignored my restraint and gone to the human realm.

All I could do was guess what he was thinking.

But the Dragon God is wise.

By this point, he seemed to have a clue about the identity of the mastermind, and he might have been contemplating their motive.

Or perhaps even then, he had already foreseen the calamity that was to come.

Regardless, the end of those days came.

I received notice from the Five Dragon Generals that they were ready.

Upon receiving this news, the Dragon God looked at me.

"What do you intend to do?"

"I... I will fight by your side, Dragon God."

I felt a sense of obligation.

To carry on the will of the Five Dragon Generals and to not leave the Dragon God's heart in solitude.

As the last standing of the Five Dragon Generals, I had the duty to fulfill various tasks...

"..."

The Dragon God looked at me and slowly shook his head.

"I will not allow you to fight."

"!"

For a moment, I thought that even standing by his side would no longer be permitted since I had once opposed him.

"Prepare for the worst and serve as the protector of my child."

However, the Dragon God entrusted me with such a crucial mission.

To protect his child.

Until then, the task of guarding the child had been assigned to sturdy Dragon Knights, but it seemed that the Dragon God found it inadequate.

Perhaps the Dragon God was worried that his child might be targeted while he was engaged in battle.

"Do not let him sustain even a scratch."

"Yes!"

At that time, I didn't realize the extent of the importance of the child.

I merely saw it as the precious legacy of Lunaria and the most cherished thing entrusted to the Dragon God.

I must protect them without fail... that was the extent of my understanding.

Thus, I rode Saleyakt and escaped far away with the child.

Soon after... Kayose disappeared.

■

Keios was destroyed by the long-range bombardment of the Dragon Cannon Gate created by Maxwell.

Multiple beams of light traveled through the sky and struck Keios.

Upon impact, each beam turned into a sphere of light and, quite literally, caused an entire mountain to disappear.

The tallest mountain in the dragon world.

The oldest town in the dragon world.

I was shocked.

I wasn't sure how the Five Dragon Generals would fight.

I never imagined that they would so easily destroy Keios, a town that had been protected for so long, a town with such a distinguished history.

I was so disoriented that I even wondered if the Five Dragon Generals had truly betrayed the Dragon God.

However, a bit of reflection made it clear.

It goes without saying, but the goal of the Five Dragon Generals was not to slay the Dragon God.

They were determined to make the Dragon God reconsider.

Their objective was to have him remain in the dragon world and not venture into the human realm.

The destruction of Keious would necessitate time for recovery.

How much effort it would take for the residents to return to their former lives was unknown.

If the Dragon God thought, "I must prioritize the dragon world over the human world," regardless of the outcome of this battle, it would be a victory for the Five Dragon Generals.

This might be a simplistic notion...

But the Five Dragon Generals had also considered what would happen if they lost.

If the Dragon God went to the human world alone after their defeat, their efforts would be meaningless.

Now, Keious had vanished, and the dust was clearing.

What remained there was a single entity.

The Dragon God.

He was without a scratch.

I couldn't discern his expression from so far away, but I could see that he was looking in the direction from which the light had come.

At the end of his gaze.

From a break in the clouds, something gigantic revealed itself.

A colossal rock mass, covered in dragon scales.

From the rock mass sprouted several iron stakes, wrapped in purple lightning.

A floating rocky mass common in the Heaven World.

A nucleus of concentrated magic energy, its movement powered by layers of magic circles.

Among them, this one possessed exceptionally high magical power. It had a core embedded within it, multiple layers of magical circles, dragon scales covering it, and was equipped with the magical artillery towers once used by the Demon tribe. It had transformed into an impregnable airborne fortress.

A name?

It doesn't have a name.

But if I had to give it one...

Keious Breaker.

That's what I would call it.

For the scene of Keious' destruction is forever seared into the back of my eyelids.

On that fortress were four large beings and forty-four smaller ones.

Four of the Five Dragon Generals and the spirits they had summoned.

This spirit summoning was a technique developed during the war with the demons.

While the Dragon tribe possessed power, they were not particularly skilled in intricate spells. Their versatility was limited.

The spirit summoning technique was created to overcome that weakness.

Those created to counter the Dragon God were even more formidable than during the war, showcasing a variety of abilities.

When they recognized the presence of the Dragon God, they took flight around the fortress and deployed themselves.

However, before they could fully deploy, the Dragon God made a move.

He slowly raised his arm and pointed at the fortress with his fingertip.

In that moment, something invisible emitted from the Dragon God's fingertip and flew towards the fortress.

It was an overwhelming surge of power.

If caught in its wake, even the Five Dragon Generals would be swept away.

But before it reached its destination, the form of the fortress distorted.

A massive distortion field was generated.

The torrent of power was twisted by the distortion field and obliterated a distant mountain.

The forty-four spirits joined forces and intercepted the Dragon God's attack.

The Dragon God hurled torrents of power, one after another.

However, the spirits' distortion field deflected every surge of force.

Did you think they deflected the Dragon God's attacks with unusual ease?

I thought so too.

No matter how much the Dragon God's power had been whittled down in the fight with the gods, it was astonishing.

Could it be that just forty-four spirits could ward off his assault?

But that wasn't the case.

As the fortress approached the Dragon God, the spirits' light began to fade.

And then, just one more step...

Well, calling it a step might not be quite right...

Regardless, when the fortress was just about to reach the Dragon God, the spirits lost their power and vanished one after another.

The distortion field disappeared, leaving the fortress exposed.

Though exposed, it was still covered in hard dragon scales.

At this point, the Dragon God reached for the sword at his hip.

A divine blade, forged by the hand of Chaos, one of the Five Dragon Generals, was slowly drawn.

A genuine blade of a god, possessing enough strength to withstand the Dragon God's power.

The blade was slowly poised at waist level.

And then, it was swung.

I thought I had seen the power of gods vividly before.

But that was only in the context of gods opposing gods.

If the recipient of such power also holds strength, it would appear relatively normal.

The slash seemed to distort the world.

Everything felt shifted.

And indeed, things had shifted.

The sky, the clouds, the dragons flying in the distance, and the fortress that was looming before my eyes.

All displaced, and falling.

Split right in two.

What are dragon scales against a god?

What's the point of defenses on a wooden stump?

The massive fortress was displaced, lost its power, and the upper half fell into the sky.

Perhaps the lower half remained due to a separate core made apart from the rock.

The Five Dragon Generals were atop the rock.

The Five Dragon Generals, who were on top of the rock mass, quickly took flight from the dislodging mass.

Their figures were significantly different from what I remembered.

Their bodies were roughly three times larger.

Thick scales covered them entirely, from their faces down to their bodies.

Their noses and mouths protruded, and horns grew from the back of their heads, they were transformed almost like dragons.

It was a secret technique developed by the Demon tribe, using their demonic powers to transform their bodies.

The Dragon tribe adapted and evolved it to suit their own purposes.

Their bodies morphed into more primitive forms, obtaining explosive power.

In return, their lifespan was greatly shortened.

These four, with such bodies, carried unfamiliar weapons.

Spears.

The Five Dragon Generals were armed with divine spears crafted by Chaos.

Normally, the Five Dragon Generals would not need to use weapons.

But not when the opponent was the Dragon God himself.

Without weapons, they could not inflict even a scratch.

The four flew through the air at an incredible speed, charging at the Dragon God.

Close combat was their primary intention from the start.

The fortress and spirits were but means to fend off the Dragon God's long-range attacks and close the distance.

With the secret technique, they enhanced their physical abilities, increased their offensive power with spears, and exploited every method developed during the war against the demons to wear down the Dragon God's power.

The culmination of the Five Dragon Generals' wisdom and training made it possible to inflict wounds upon the divine body.

The ferocity of the Five Dragon Generals' onslaught was immense.

With each of their movements, shockwaves rippled, flashes burst forth, and the entire Dragon realm trembled.

If even a small part of the aftershock escaped out, it would destroy mountains, annihilate swarms of dragons, and engulf tens of thousands of dragon clansmen.

The Five Dragon Generals had obtained the power to harm the divine body.

However, it was merely the power to wound, nothing more.

Despite possessing such power, they could not overwhelm the Dragon God.

They managed to hold their ground against the odds of four against one, but if it were a one-on-one battle, they would have been annihilated in an instant.

Nevertheless.

Nevertheless, their power reached the Dragon God, even though they were clearly at a disadvantage.

It reached the god.

Even if it was just their fingertips, they had definitely reached him.

They proved that the works of man could reach a god.

That proof was why I... no, let's put that aside.

In any case, the Dragon God and the Dragon Generals battled for a long time.

The Dragon God, battered and on the verge of death..

The Dragon Generals who finally had him in their grasp.

The battles between those five continued ceaselessly.

I kept watching.

I felt it was my duty to bear witness.

How many days did they continue to fight?

Yes, it wasn't a long period.

When it comes to battles between gods, it's not uncommon for them to last for years, but this time it wasn't that long.

Yes, it was exactly six days.

Only a few days.

Yes, six days.

The Dragon Generals probably intended for the battle to be decided quickly.

That was to be expected.

No matter how meticulous the Five Dragon Generals were in their preparations, there was a significant gap in the strength they housed within themselves.

In a battle of attrition, there was not a chance in ten thousand that they would win.

That's why it had to be a short-term decisive battle.

With all their strength, they aimed for that one chance in ten thousand.

A single possibility in ten thousand attempts.

And unfortunately, this wasn't that possibility.

The seventh day.

The light and impact of the battle subsided.

The resolution came above the split sky fortress.

I approached the fortress to witness the outcome of the battle.

What I saw there was a sight to behold.

Four men and one woman had fallen.

Needless to say, they were the Five Dragon Generals.

Each of them was on the verge of death.

Szilard had lost his left arm, half his face burned away.

Chaos had lost an eye and had a large hole in his abdomen.

Maxwell had all his claws smashed, wings torn off, and was on his knees.

And Lady Dora was the worst off.

She had lost her right arm and the lower half of her body, barely clinging to life.

It was the Dragon God's victory.

However, there was one strange thing.

There was an arm growing from the Dragon God's chest.

Was it the lost arm of Szilard or Lady Dora?

No, it was different.

There were no scales on that arm.

It was a flesh-colored, featureless arm.

It was an arm that did not linger in memory, as if it were shrouded in fog.

Including the Dragon God, everyone was staring blankly at the arm.

More precisely, the owner of the arm.

The existence of a god who had delivered a fatal blow from behind the Dragon God.

"Human God..."

The Human God was pulling out the divine gem from the Dragon God's chest.

The End of the Dragon World

I wondered why.

I thought it was foolish.

We had thought until this very moment, that the Human God was on our side.

Or should I say, even at this juncture.

"Lord Human God... why?"

I murmured those words, filled with a variety of emotions.

Certainly, the Dragon God had tried to invade the Human World.

From the perspective of the Human God, he might have been an enemy.

However, he was supposed to have been an ally all along.

He gave us advice and helped us.

He lent his power to avenge Lady Lunaria.

The Human God should have been working with all the worlds in mind.

Then, the Human God turned his eyes towards me.

He brought a repulsive, hateful smile to his lips.

"Well... ha-ha, this is... he-he"

The Human God must have tried to say something plausible at first.

He might have wanted to utter words befitting the God of the Human World, something that sounded suitable and would leave no lingering bitterness.

However, he couldn't hold back.

The situation was probably too pleasurable for him.

Everything had gone too well, and he couldn't help but mock us.

"He-he... hu-hu-hu..."

Laughter spilled out.

A laughter that clung to my ears and wouldn't leave.

"No, no... everyone, you all did well. Thanks to you, I was able to fulfill my purpose like this..."

The Human God said to us, who were standing there stunned.

I heard him for the first time then, and I haven't listened to him since...

But if you look at the words and actions of those who were deceived and led to ruin by him, you can understand.

In such situations, he chatters away.

And while patting our shoulders, saying we did a good job, he would say,

"Thank you."

"W-what are you talking about..."

I responded like a fool.

Even though a little thought would have made it clear that the words of the Dragon God were the right ones.

"What are you talking about? It's obvious, isn't it? It's the story of how I manipulated the gods, causing the destruction of the world."

Yes, he was the mastermind.

Everything, everything was his doing.

The tension between the gods, the deaths of Lady Lunaria and the other worlds.

Everything was orchestrated by him.

Perhaps even the emergence of monsters and the onset of teleportations were all his doing.

No, those were likely incidental.

But he surely took advantage of them too.

"Oh no, I've been sowing the seeds little by little for a long time, but the Dragon God was always so cautious. But never did I imagine that everything would go so smoothly."

"..."

"Especially you, Shirard. You truly did an excellent job. Without questioning a single thing, you moved exactly as I wanted."

Shirard's eyes widened, and his body trembled.

"If it weren't for your actions, the Dragon Realm and the other worlds wouldn't have ended up destroying each other. You easily believed the convenient words, just saying it was for the 'sake of the Dragon God.' But to think that you loyal ones would turn against the Dragon God and bare your fangs... hehe."

"Preposterous... then, those words... those words that asked us to stop the Dragon God...!"

"Ah, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The Human God laughed.

"Indeed, wasn't my act splendid? Well, at best, I thought it would just be the Dragon God invading the Human World, but, he-he, he-he-he, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

He laughed, looking at Szilard with face full of amusement.

"Thanks to you, I found a decisive opening in the Dragon God! I was able to kill the most troublesome Dragon God without a scratch!"

"To think you would prepare such an elaborate scheme and go against your master! How foolish of you! What's the matter with all of you? Just a little provocation and you went this far!?"

"Now, now... I must say, you all make me laugh, considering how you were screaming about loyalty! I've never seen such loyal subjects as you!"

"Ah... ah... ah..."

Come to think of it, Shirard's words and actions were strange.

I didn't notice anything particularly unnatural, but it was Shirard who proposed the war in the first place.

It was Shirard who suggested stopping the Dragon God.

And long ago, it was Shirard who killed the Demon King without orders from the Dragon God.

Shirard, who was considered the sharpest among the Five Dragon Generals.

He had been deceived.

He had been easily swayed by the words of the Human God, causing a war between worlds and driving the Dragon God towards death.

Confronted with this truth, Shirard screamed.

"Dragon God.....!"

With his remaining arm, he cut off both of his legs.

Plucked out what remained of his fangs and gorged out his eyes.

And finally, thrust a fist into his chest and pulled out his heart.

"Forgive me!"

And holding up his heart, he crushed it in his hand.

With a sound like a crack, the heart burst... and Shirard's arm fell weakly to the ground.

Szilard followed Crystal.

The Second Dragon General to die.

A dragon general with emerald-silver scales and fleeting eyes.

The man who earned his name as the Holy Dragon Emperor through his achievements in the war against the demon race.

He ended his own life with his own hands, just as he had once said.

It was his final act of loyalty.

The last display of loyalty from him who, deceived by the enemy, led the Dragon God to his death.

It was the only thing he could do.

"Oh my, driven to suicide by the disgust of his own foolishness. How truly pitiful and pathetic... Hehe, haha!"

Such loyalty, the Human God laughed at.

Remembering it still made me grind my molars.

He laughed.

At Szilard's loyalty to the Dragon God. At the pride of the Five Dragon Generals.

But we couldn't say anything.

Indeed, we were foolish, pathetic, pitiable.

Deceived by the words of the Human God, blindly following Szilard's words, we drove the Dragon God to death.

The truth was too heavy.

Far too heavy.

Despite our regret, we were unable to retort.

"Stop laughing."

"Hm?"

The one who silenced the Human God's laughter was not one of the Five Dragon Generals.

"Szilard was a loyal vassal. I will not allow you to laugh at him."

"Oh, you're still alive? Lizards sure are tough, huh?"

It was the Dragon God.

The Dragon God, despite his divine gem being gouged out, was still alive.

"Even so, 'you will not alloww', you say. Do you think yourself in any position to be ordering me around?"

"... There was no mistake in Szilard's judgment. If I were in his position, I would have done the same. All of this is due to my failings. If you wish to laugh at Szilard, laugh at me."

"What are you talking about? I've been laughing at you the whole... time..."

Dragon God swelled with murderous rage.

Even on the brink of death, the Dragon God still radiated an overwhelming sense of intimidation.

Anger compelled him.

In response, a cold sweat dropped from Human God's forehead.

"Human god. No, the thing in the shape of Human God, answer this."

"Y-you are in no-no position to ask me questions..."

"Who are you? Why did you desire war? What do you intend to accomplish by killing the gods... and why did you kill Lunaria?"

It wasn't a question.

It was a command to answer.

If it were the Five Dragon Generals, they would have stood motionless and revealed their shallow thoughts. It was a command.

"...!"

The Human God didn't answer.

He did not obey.

Instead, he... crushed the Dragon God's divine gem.

With a small, pitiful sound, the divine gem shattered.

"Guh!"

In the next moment, a large amount of blood spewed forth from the Dragon God's mouth.

Every time he defeated a god, he also took out their divine gem.

It had the power to cross between worlds, but it was also the source of a god's divine power.

"How long do you plan to act superior! Enough of this! You lost! To me!"

As the Human God yelled, he trampled on the Dragon God, who had fallen to the ground.

Again and again, he trampled him.

"Why did you kill Lunaria? Why did you want war?"

It's obvious, it was to kill you!

More powerful than anyone yet wary of war!

You, who were more cautious and without any weaknesses!

Ha! And just as planned, this is your end!"

There was no power left in the Dragon God's body.

But his breath had yet to fade.

Rather, that feeling of intimation only increased.

"Uh...! What the hell are you! Damn it!"

Even Human God felt intimidated.

The collapsed, dying Dragon God still intimidated Human God.

He poured out all his anger and killing intent.

His most beloved was killed, he was forced to fight against the gods he had walked alongside, and he was even manipulated to turn his fangs against his subordinates.

All his anger.

"Ha! It's useless to glare. You're going to die! And I will be the one and only God!"

The Human God stepped back while uttering those words, rising up into the sky.

And then, he turned his palms upward.

Power converged in his palms, creating a sphere of intense radiance.

"Perish, Dragon Realm."

There was no time to stop him.

No, even if there was time, it would have been impossible to stop him.

A sphere of light was emitted from his hands.

The sphere flew far above, as if being drawn into the land of the Dragon Realm...

And then, an explosion, light, and shockwave swept the world.

By the time the light had settled, the world had begun to collapse.

The land was cracking and falling, and darkness was crawling up from the sky.

It was a sight I had witnessed many times before, albeit slightly different.

It was the sight of a world ending.

"Well, well, farewell, Dragon God. May you perish here disgracefully."

Mocking in such a manner, the Human God slowly moved away.

All I could do was watch the sequence of events unfold.

If I were there again at that moment, I would surely attack the Human God.

I would not have allowed such brutality, trampling upon the Dragon God.

I would not have allowed the insult to the Five Dragon Generals.

But at that time, I didn't understand.

Neither I, Chaos, nor Maxwell did.

What had happened.

What had gone terribly wrong.

Among the Five Dragon Generals, the only one who could accurately grasp what happened was Szilard, who was dead.

Only one thing was clear: something irrevocable and terrifying had occurred.

"Laplace."

The words of the Dragon God, of all things, brought me back to my senses.

"Lo, Lord Dragon... I, I'm here."

With trembling legs, I mustered the energy to walk to the Dragon God.

The Dragon God was still alive.

Despite his divine gem being shattered, his body full of wounds, some inflicted by other gods, he was still alive.

"Chaos, Maxwell."

Yet, they didn't hesitate at their final orders.

"...Ha!"

Chaos and Maxwell took off, and the Dragon God turned his head.

"Where is Dora?"

"Lord Dragon... We..."

"It's alright."

"But, if we had just obeyed your words... Please forgive us, no, you don't have to forgive us, just command us to die. Order us to chase the Human God and strike him down."

"I forgive you. Everything happened because my words were insufficient."

The Dragon God granted forgiveness to Chaos and Maxwell.

So easily.

To us, who betrayed him.

"I shall bestow upon you a mission."

"Hah!" "Hah!"

"There is no time until the collapse of the Dragon Realm... I need time to devise a plan to kill the Human God. Earn that time for me with your lives."

To "buy time", we weren't sure exactly what we should do.

Perhaps now I might be able to come up with some ideas, but even then, a way to halt the collapse of the world...

Yet, they didn't hesitate at his final orders.

Yet, they didn't hesitate at their final orders.

"...Ha!"

Chaos and Maxwell took off, and the Dragon God turned his head.

"Where is Dora?"

The Dragon God called out Lady Dora's name.

But Lady Dora... it was hopeless.

She could no longer move her body.

"Laplace."

"Hah."

I didn't let them say anything further.

I moved closer to Lady Dora's side to witness her final moments.

"Lady Dora."

"...ha... ha... that voice... Laplace, is it... What happened? I can no longer see."

Lady Dora was dying.

She barely had any strength left to think.

However, she must have understood that something terrible had happened.

Amidst her blurred consciousness, she desperately asked me.

"The Human God..."

I recounted everything I had witnessed, all the events that had unfolded.

It was all a plot by the Human God.

The war was instigated by the manipulation of the Human God, and Shard, who took responsibility, died.

The Dragon God dying by the hands of the Human God.

The collapse of the Dragon Realm.

Everything.

"I see... In that case, I must atone through death... But I am already on the brink of death..."

Dora gazed into the empty sky with vacant eyes and spoke to me.

"Laplace... I have a request."

"Please, command me as you wish."

"It's not an order... it's a request... It's unavoidable I'll be judged as a traitor, but my son... Perugius... please help him escape... I beg you!"

"Escape? Where to?"

"To the future... The method is in the Teleportation Research Facility... Please, let the Dragon God know as well..."

I didn't understand the meaning of Lady Dora's words.

But soon, I would come to understand.

Well, let's leave that aside.

"But still, the words of the Dragon God were indeed right... We were the ones who were wrong... At least... that's good. That our fight against the Dragon God was a mistake, I'm truly... relieved..."

That was what Lady Dora said in the end.

She must have been questioning it all along.

To stop the Dragon God by force.

Upon hearing everything, she must have felt relieved.

And then, she died.

Following Szilard, she was the third to die.

Consideration for her loyalty to the Dragon God over her own death, over her son's whereabouts, she died.

She was loyal to the very end.

"..."

After seeing Lady Dora to her end, I returned to the Dragon God.

And then, I conveyed the last words Lady Dora had left to the Dragon God.

After a brief consideration, he commanded:

"Laplace. Carry my body to the teleportation lab."

"Ha."

With one hand, I held the body of the Dragon God and leapt into the air.

Of course, in my other hand, I held the body of his child.

■

Avoiding the crumbling mountains, I flew for several minutes.

I arrived at a certain location.

A secret place where I had been taken only once before.

The Transference Magic Research Facility.

"Here, Dragon God."

"How pitiful..."

The aged researchers were all still present at the location.

The elderly, who had already sensed their impending deaths, showed no signs of panic about the world's collapse.

However, seeing the wounded Dragon God, they voiced their concerns in unison, questioning what had happened and whether everything was alright.

Without responding to their words, the Dragon God said only, "The time has come."

The old men cleared the way with heavy hearts, allowing us through to the deepest part of the laboratory.

In the depths, there was a single altar and a stele.

In a corner of the world.

An altar similar to the gates of other worlds.

On the stele, complex spell patterns were intricately engraved.

And on the altar, three divine gems were placed.

"Laplace, place the child here."

The Dragon God, staggering away from me, stood leaning on the altar.

As I wondered what he was about to do, he began to draw a magical circle around the child.

At that time, the complexity of it overwhelmed me, yet I managed to grasp that it was complementing the spell on the stele, albeit barely.

The Dragon God on the other hand was able to understand it just by observing it for a few seconds.

"The collapse of the Dragon Realm can't be stopped, I will die. We have lost."

The Dragon God spoke as if simply confirming the facts.

"Even so, he must be killed."

The Human God had killed Lady Lunaria.

He had made us dance in the palm of his hand and destroyed other worlds.

He made the five Dragon Generals and the Dragon God fight, leading us to self-destruction.

He could not be forgiven.

"He is not the Human God. The Human God is not like that man... Let's call him Hitogami, a pseudonym. I don't know why Hitogami is impersonating the Human God, or where the Human God has gone, but it is certain that he maliciously tried to destroy us and possesses the power of the gods."

"..."

"To defeat him, we will likely need the power of the gods as well."

The Dragon God looked straight at me.

"I will cross over to the human world after this, and challenge him to a final battle."

"But with your condition, it's impossible."

"I know. My body can no longer avoid death. There may be no chance of victory. But, I can at least strike him once."

Saying so, the Dragon God took one of the divine jewels and pressed it into his own chest.

Blood flowed, and the Dragon God's body emitted a bright light.

It seemed a little strength returned to his dying body.

"But that one strike must lead to victory. Therefore—"

With those words, the Dragon God took one of the divine orbs and placed it next to the child... a place slightly indented, almost a perfect circle.

"I will reincarnate my child."

The child carries the blood of the Dragon God and the Human God.

A demigod with divine blood.

He held the power of a God.

"To the best of my ability, I will bestow upon the child the necessary techniques and implement mechanisms to keep them hidden from the enemy until they acquire the power to defeat him... However, the chances of victory are slim. We do not know why he takes the form of the Human God and possesses the power of the gods. We must unravel that mystery, or defeat is inevitable."

With that, the Dragon God looked at me and took the final divine jewel into his hands... and handed it to me.

"I bestow upon you a task."

"Yes!"

I received it and performed the deepest bow.

The most respectful bow that I had learned for the sake of the Dragon God...

It became my final bow to him.

I received it and performed the deepest bow.

The most respectful bow that I had learned for the sake of the Dragon God...

It became the final, most respectful bow to the Dragon God.

"Yes!"

While issuing commands to me, the Dragon God continued to bestow numerous enhancements upon the child.

Complex incantations.

I still haven't fully understood what kind of techniques were applied.

However, I understood that they were abilities to counter the 'Hito-gami.'

Amidst the sound of collapse echoing from outside, I patiently waited for him to finish.

The way he smoothly drew the magical circles on the child's body and embedded them...

Perhaps the Dragon God had already foreseen this.

The outcome that would come to this.

Likely, when the Five Dragon Generals betrayed us.

If you think about it, he could have ignored our efforts to hold him back and went to the human world.

But, perhaps the Dragon God estimated that he could not win in such a scenario.

If the five Dragon Generals turned against him, he may not be able to avoid the traps that would likely be set in the human world, or reach Hitogami.

That's why he was searching for a different path to victory.

While the Five Dragon Generals were preparing means to counter the Dragon God, all along.

"Is there anything you want to ask me before we finish?"

After applying the final magic circle, the Dragon God asked me that.

I slowly shook my head, raised my face, and replied, "No."

But there was something else I absolutely had to ask.

"His name."

"Name?"

"The name of the child."

This was the end.

So, I had to ask.

This was not something I could decide on my own.

After all, it was Lady Lunaria's wish that the Dragon God should name him.

The Dragon God pondered for a moment.

However, it seemed he had already decided.

"Orsted."

Simply,

"The child's name is Orsted."

So it was pronounced.

■

Thus, the child...

Orsted was sent into the future.

The Dragon God and I leaped out from the collapsing facility, and then headed directly to the human world.

The Dragon God left me behind and went ahead.

The last thing I said to him was "May fortune favor you", to which he replied, "I've run out of both luck and life."

That was the last phrase I heard from him.

I jumped onto Sareyakuto, dodging falling rocks one after another as I flew towards the altar.

In mid-flight, I felt something - a large presence - disappear behind me.

Two of them.

Chaos and Maxwell.

The two, who had literally staked their lives to prevent the collapse, had died.

Chaos, the fourth dragon to die.

Maxwell, the last dragon to die.

The order might have been different, but that's how I remembered it.

Thanks to their efforts, I managed to escape from the collapsing dragon world.

When I arrived in the human world, the battle had already begun.

Due to the clash between gods, cataclysms were occurring in the human world.

Tornadoes, heavy rain, tsunamis, earthquakes, thunder.

And the fear and hatred swirling throughout the world...

Every living creature in this world had come to fear the Dragon Tribe.

However, what surprised me even more was the drastic transformation of the human realm.

It had changed so much since the last time I was here, a time I couldn't even remember...

The human world was supposed to be nothing but endless flat grasslands and rivers.

Yet, there were mountains. There were forests. There was an ocean. There were wildernesses. There were deserts.

A world that seemed to condense the six worlds into one was there.

Perhaps the influx of magic from the collapse of other realms had invaded the human realm, gradually reshaping it into an unbalanced, yet now seemingly balanced world.

I mounted Saleyakuto and landed on one of the mountains.

It was the tallest mountain in this world.

There, I watched over the outcome of the battle.

I didn't know where the Dragon God and the "Hito-gami" were fighting.

But I wished for the Dragon God's victory.

The possibility was remote but I couldn't help but hope.

Eventually, the battle came to an end.

The thunder and tornadoes subsided, and the deafening sounds quieted down.

Only the rain continued to fall silently.

For seven days and nights.

On the eighth day, the sky cleared to a blue expanse.

There was no wind, and there was no sea.

The overwhelming presence of the gods was nowhere to be found.

Neither the Dragon God nor the "Hito-gami" could be seen.

But I realized it.

The Dragon God was no longer anywhere.

And thus, the Dragon Realm perished.

■ ■ ■

And onto a New Story

"That's... the end of the story," said Laplace, exhaling deeply.

The tension left his shoulders, and the clenched teeth relaxed. However, his face remained pale, and a hint of severity lingered. The anger, frustration, and helplessness hadn't disappeared. Merely recalling those events must have been painful for him.

"So... what happened afterward?" Rostelina asked cautiously, her voice tinged with fear.

"Hmm? What happened afterward?"

"After you descended to the human realm. What about the other beings from the Dragon Realm? And what about your master? What happened to them?"

"Oh, my, Rostelina, you should ask one question at a time," Laplace replied, weakly laughing, but he still answered her questions.

"Most of the dragonfolk perished. However, there were a few who managed to escape from the Dragon Realm and descended to this human realm. The collapse of the Dragon Realm was much swifter than that of other worlds, so the number of survivors is extremely small."

Rostelina felt a slight relief upon hearing his words, but she quickly sensed an underlying implication.

"Then... why... why are there so few dragonfolk now?"

"... They were killed."

"W-Why?"

"Don't you see? Even if Hitogami was the orchestrator, we, the Dragons, have caused too much devastation."

The hatred, anger, and fear towards the dragonfolk were deeply ingrained in the other races. What would happen if the dragonfolk arrived in the human realm? The fear that the Five Dragon Generals had anticipated became a reality.

"Well, there's also the fact that the number of surviving Dragon Tribe members was far too small."

"Didn't you, Lord Laplace, help them?"

"Ah... I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I had something else I needed to do."

Laplace was burdened with a critical task.

On the brink of death, the Dragon God had given him a significant mission. It wasn't to save the dragonfolk, who were already greatly diminished in numbers and struggling for survival.

"After the battle between the Dragon God and Hitogami, I searched for Hitogami.

But I couldn't find him. The Dragon God, even in a battle where defeat was certain, likely managed to land a severe blow on Hitogami or possibly even seal him."

"Did you never consider the possibility of them killing each other?"

"There was a time when I thought so.

But after a while, Hitogami started indirectly interfering with my actions.

That was proof that he was alive."

Laplace, having traversed to the human world as the last survivor of the Five Dragon Generals, began his operations. He probed for the whereabouts and identity of the vanished Hitogami, sought out his weaknesses and methods to kill him, all with the intention of eventually handing this knowledge to the divine dragon child, Orsted, who would arrive in the future.

"What is the true identity of the Hito-gami? What was their purpose in doing such terrible things?" Rostelina asked, her voice filled with curiosity and concern.

"Hahaha, unfortunately, we still haven't grasped their true identity. As for their purpose, we can make some guesses, but it remains mostly a mystery... However, I think I have an idea," Laplace replied.

"What is it?" Rostelina asked, intrigued.

"When I arrived in the human realm, I was astonished by what I saw. The human realm was supposed to be a world of nothing but flat plains. EA world stretching out with flat earth as far as the eye could see. However, there were forests, mountains, and seas."

"And the inhabitants of each of those worlds were living there. It was as if all six worlds had been integrated... Yes, the world you are familiar with now."

"Furthermore, the words of Hitogami when he killed the Dragon God... he said, 'I am the one and only God.'"

Thus Laplace came to a conclusion.

"He must have wanted to become the one-and-only god, for the one-and-only world. The sole god of a single world. So he caused the collapse of each world, absorbing them into one and killing all the gods. But this question yet remains: how did the Hito-gami acquire power equal to that of the gods?"

Laplace then rested his chin in his hand for a moment to ponder, then looked at Rostelina.

"I mentioned it first.

Initially, there was one god... the Creator God.

He died. What happened after his death, nobody knows... was it the Dragon God who told me, or Lunaria...

Anyway, this Creator God... where do you think... he went?"

"You don't mean..."

"I believe he might have died in the world of nothingness."

"The world of nothingness?"

"The empty space one passes through when moving from one world to another.

The Creator God died in the center of it... and one day, he found it.

And he claimed that corpse as his own.

Using the power of the dead god's body, he either took on the guise of the weakest Hito-gami or assimilated him.

The rest unfolded as I've told you."

"Ah..."

"Of course, this is merely speculation.

As for his true objective, ultimately, it remains unknown."

For Laplace, the origins and objectives of Hitogami no longer mattered.

Even if he were the actual Human God and had a justifiable reason to kill the Dragon God, it didn't matter.

He had investigated and formed various hypotheses, but his objective was always just one.

To kill Hitogami, who had trampled on the pride of the Dragon God and the Five Dragon Generals.

"So... where is Hitogami now?"

"Hm? Well, of course, he's in the world of nothingness."

"How do you know it's there?"

"Well, he's not anywhere in the human world..."

There was a seal, or maybe a barrier? Something like that was spread out there in the world of nothingness."

"Well, for one, he was nowhere to be found in the human world..."

In that world of nothingness, a seal, no, a barrier of sorts was established. Likely a work of the last strength of the Dragon God. Hitogami might have created it out of fear as well... Regardless, there would be no need to set up such an elaborate measure if there were nothing there."

"Does that mean we can't reach Hitogami as long as that barrier exists?"

"I've already found a way to lift the barrier, but it requires an immense amount of magical power and a highly complex mechanism. Even if I were to go there, if I were to lose, the Hito-gami would be released. If that happens, everything we've done so far would be in vain. It's not something that can easily be done."

Laplace spoke with a slightly bitter expression. He likely wanted to break the seal and confront the Hito-gami as soon as possible. He wanted to avenge the Dragon God and fulfill the regrets of the Five Dragon Generals. However, he would never act rashly. He proceeded slowly and steadily, preparing step by step to kill the Hito-gami.

"Laplace-sama, it must be tough for you, isn't it?"

"When I recall the past, it is painful.

But when I think about the future, it's not so bad.

Lord Orsted will descend, and he will use everything I have prepared to battle against Hitogami.

The martial arts, magic, technology, weapons, knowledge I have crafted. He will utilize them all.

No, not just Lord Orsted. The surviving dragon tribes and Pergius will likely join the fight as well.

When I think of the moment we will confront Hitogami with everything the dragon tribes have, my heart races uncontrollably."

Laplace said with a smile.

He had been preparing.

It must have been hard at first.

To prepare everything from scratch with nothing but the aim of defeating Hitogami.

But the span of thousands of years made it possible.

He did many things.

He imparted the technology and magic of the dragon tribe to the rapidly growing human tribe while studying the secret arts used by the Five Dragon Generals and the Dragon God himself. After a while, he collected the technology and magic that the human tribe had independently improved, refined it himself, and passed it back to the human tribe.

He prepared methods to eliminate the negative effects that would likely occur to Orsted due to the spell possibly cast upon him, inferred from a magic circle he had only caught a glimpse of once.

But that wasn't all.

Anticipating the eventuality of his death at the hands of Hitogami, he set up several safeguards. He granted relics made from fragments of the Dragon God's sacred orbs to the descendants of the Five Dragon Generals he found in various places and left his research results in ruins around the world.

Doing everything he can.

Not just now, but for the long term.

Preparing for every hypothetical.

It was no longer so painful.

He's overcome the dark past and has started to see a brighter future.

"....."

That's why Rostelina felt it.

A sense of alienation.

In Laplace's battle.

In the battle against Hitogami waged by the dragon tribes, she was absent.

And that made her feel incredibly sad.

"Um, Lord Laplace!"

"What is it?"

"Is there... isn't there anything I can do too?"

At Rostelina's words, Laplace seemed momentarily nonplussed.

However, he quickly wore a gentle smile, and patted her on the head.

"You've always been of great help. The cleaning, the laundry. It's not just that, your presence soothes my heart that's been lonely ever since I came to the human world. It's enough that you're just here."

Laplace picking her up was just a whim. Of course, there was also the calculation that she might be useful in some way. The enormous magical power dormant within her body was a rare find. However, he didn't initially have a specific purpose in mind for her. And Laplace was also person. When you live together for a long time, it is natural for feelings to develop. Now, she was becoming the sole source of comfort for Laplace.

"I don't want that! I want to be of use to you, Lord Laplace! Even if I can't fight alongside you, is there something, anything I can do? Something that will benefit the future for Orsted-sama?"

Even so, it's not like Rostelina would simply accept his answer.

She's been doing nothing all this while.

Merely waiting for Laplace's return.

Even if that provided solace for Laplace's heart, it doesn't satisfy her.

In any era, it's hard to be kept waiting.

"Hmm..."

Laplace, too, was well aware of this particular agony.

He had been waiting all this while. For the Dragon Prince Orsted.

Since Laplace had a plethora of tasks to keep himself busy, his mind was distracted. But without those, if he were only to keep waiting, he might have been driven to insanity.

"Alright, I understand. If you insist, then I'll let you help."

"Really? Is there something I can do?"

"Yes, but it might be tough for you."

"What is it? I'll do anything!"

"I'll need to remove those magic circles I placed on you and restore the curse in your body."

"Ughh..."

Rostelina's face turned a little pale, hearing that her curse would return.

What once had thrown her into the abyss was coming back.

An instinctual fear arose at the thought of it.

"After that, I'll use the secret arts of the Demon Tribe to gradually change your body. We'll store that vast magical power of yours, and make it transferable to others."

"To others...?"

"Yes. Lord Orsted has numerous spells cast upon him for the purpose of overthrowing Hitogami. As long as those spells continue, Lord Orsted's magical power will continuously diminish. It's possible that the magic consumption of those spells is far greater than we think, even exceeding Lord Orsted's ability to recover his magical power."

"Ah, so my magical power can be useful in that case."

"That's right. However, it will require multiple adjustments until the secret techniques are fully executed and your body is transformed into its ideal form.

It will take time. It could be a hundred years, two hundred years, or even a thousand to two thousand years.

During that time, you will have to enter a long slumber. You won't be able to live your life as you have before."

"If everything is completed while I'm asleep, then it's okay."

"Also, the changes in your body will have some influence on your mind, and the flow of time will blur your memories."

"You mean... my personality and memories with... um, my master will be lost?"

"Yes. Of course, we'll adjust it many times along the way to retain your memories as much as possible."

"...If you say so, Master, then it's okay."

"So, you're saying you can endure it, is that it?"

"Yes."

At Rostelina's response, Laplace's face darkened a little.

He knew that their current way of life was about to end.

He knew that her voice would disappear from the house.

He knew that the presence of Rostelina, reminiscent of the warm life back in the Dragon World, would be gone from the house.

And therefore, he felt a slight hesitation.

However, if Rostelina wishes to act for Laplace's sake, and even more for the sake of the Dragon God, Laplace does not have the words to stop her.

That's because Laplace is one of the Five Dragon Generals.

Even though he is a general in name only, he is still one of the Five Dragon Generals.

How could he thwart someone willing to work for the Dragon God?

"I see... then, come along. Let's prepare."

With a forced smile, Laplace said so.

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In an underground cave far from Dragon Roar Mountain.

A place that Laplace uses as one of his research facilities.

It was constructed with stones etched with numerous gigantic magical circles.

The entire cave was a colossal magical tool.

In the deepest part, she was there.

Submerged in softly glowing water, her eyes closed, she was sleeping.

“--- Then the saint overthrew the Demon King and returned to his beloved.”

Laplace sat before her, quietly telling a story.

It was an ancient tale.

A heroic saga from the human world that Laplace had witnessed.

"Well, that's where we'll end today's story."

After he finished telling the story, Laplace slowly rose to his feet.

"I'm heading back into battle.

I can't possibly understand what Hitogami is thinking, but I must stop him.

After all, there's no instance where what he's done can be considered good."

As Laplace said this, he extended his hand over Rostelina. Slowly, a translucent lid descended upon the platform where she slept.

Once the lid completely covered her and the inside was filled with softly glowing water, Laplace caressed the cover.

"When it's all over, I'll continue the story for you. Don't worry. None of the tales are as tragic as those from the Dragon World."

With that said, Laplace turned on his heel.

"Now, you wait patiently."

Tap, tap - the sound echoed as footsteps retreated from the bedside.

As Laplace moved away, the light in the room started to fade.

Eventually, the footsteps vanished entirely, and the room was shrouded in darkness.

Rostelina had no consciousness.

But Laplace's words, they surely reached the depths of her unconscious mind.

She was waiting.

Waiting for the day when the adjustments of the secret arts would be completed, and she could be of help to Laplace.

In the darkness, all the while.

Always waiting...

THE END