922 Episode 52 Light Sword Emperor (7)

As expected, Hermit was the first to react.

【One of the three is a trap? What do you mean?】

【Exactly.】

Sullen red eyes floated over Hermit's monitor.

【You're ridiculous. Do you think I'd make a deal like this?】

【If you don't like it, then don't.】

【What?】

【Honestly, I don't care if I don't listen to your information.】

The information Hermit had was about the 'large fragment of the Oldest Dream'. It was information I was curious about, but in a way, it wasn't information I 'needed to hear immediately'.

He was furious, perhaps hurt by the fact that his information was so daringly judged.

【Do you think you'll get away with something like this? You don't think I'll find out who you are? As soon as I leave this room, I'll find your contract partner and...】

【Yes, yes. You seem curious about my butt. Look carefully.】

Moral chuckled at my words.

I turned to Moral and Cloud Mountain and asked.

【What will the other two do?】

【I'll make a deal.】

Cloud Mountain was the first to answer.

Since Cloud Mountain is looking for the 'Returner of the Fear Realm', I thought they'd naturally agree to my deal.

【I will do it.】

Moral also accepted the deal.

Perhaps it was only natural.

The information he possessed regarding the 'time of Ragnarok's occurrence' wasn't very valuable at this point, and its value would soon expire.

【Then let's just make a deal between you two...】

【Wait. I'll make a deal too.】

【You said you wouldn't?】

Hermit answered after two seconds.

【I've changed my mind.】

【I've changed my mind too. I won't make a deal with you. You threatened me.】

【That—】

A silence that seemed a mixture of bewilderment and anger. After a moment of hesitation, Hermit opened his mouth.

【That was a slip of the tongue. I apologize.】

As expected, even the most proud 'Recorder of Fear' is a recorder. He wouldn't miss an opportunity to gain an interpretation of the 'Fear Realm'.

Moral and Cloud Mountain, who had been watching our conversation from the side, murmured in admiration.

【Just words?】

A disgruntled emoticon appeared on Hermit's monitor.

【Then?】

Besides the spatiotemporal coordinates of the 'Large Fragment of the Oldest Dream', you need to give me one more piece of information."

【Didn't you say that was enough earlier?】

【Shouldn't we make a deal?】

A sound like a monitor component breaking came from somewhere, and Hermit asked.

【What information do you want?】

【You said something interesting when you were talking to Cloud Mountain. You said the Light Sword Emperor had figured out the purpose of the city called 'New Murim District'.】

【So?】

【I'd also like to hear the purpose of the city called 'New Murim District'.】

Hermit hesitated for a moment before answering.

【You're a peculiar fellow. If you know about the 'Fear Realm', you must be a recorder of a higher-level scenario, but you don't know that information.】

I felt a pang of disappointment, but I shamelessly shrugged my shoulders.

【I wasn't particularly interested in that area.】

【Understood. Then let's make a deal by telling you those two pieces of information. However, I'll go first among the three of us. You don't mind, do you?】

【As long as everyone else is okay with it.】

The other recorders didn't seem to want to clash with Hermit, so they didn't particularly complain about the order.

While Hermit carefully considered his options, Moral asked,

【Hermit, which one will you choose? He told us there's a trap, didn't he?】

【It's obvious. Number 1 is a trap.】

The 'number 1' they were talking about was 'the adventures of the great disaster-level fear: Kim Anna'.

Moral objected.

【Doesn't number 1 seem too blatantly like a trap?】

【If that guy isn't an idiot, he'd obviously have us twist our minds several times to make us choose.】

【So you're saying he's twisting our minds to make us choose number 1 instead?】

I nodded, listening to their logic with fascination.

【Have you chosen?】

【I'll listen to number 3.】

Number 3.

You made a good choice.

【Good. Then, please give me your information first.】

Something printed on the secluded monitor, and a small hologram document appeared before me.

I furrowed my brow and began reading.

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There are three 'large fragments of the Oldest Dream' identified so far.

1. Object name: 'Demon King of Salvation'. A fragment that went missing with the closing of the 'Recycling Center'. It likely belonged to the incarnation that battled it at the 'Recycling Center'.

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Honestly, I was surprised by the information, which was more valuable than I expected.

This document served as a sort of indicator of how much the 'Recorders of Fear', including the 'Unchanging One', understood about the 'Oldest Dream'.

2. Object Name: 'King of Fear'.

A fragment torn off when the 'Fear Realm' met its end. It's believed that some of it was absorbed by ■■■■■■ at that time.

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Is this how they know about the King of Fear?

Perhaps that ■■■■■■ represents Asmodeus.

I continued reading the document.

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3. ■■■.

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Unfortunately, the information on the third fragment was filtered. This likely means that even the recorder in front of me doesn't have a proper understanding of it. The story didn't end there.

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In addition, the location of the 'fourth giant fragment' was observed.

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The fourth fragment.

Finally, this was the information I was looking for.

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At this point, it's determined that the fragment in question does not exist within that worldline.

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I read and reread that passage with blank eyes.

I knew it instinctively.

This was a clue to the 'third Kim Dokja'. These damned bastards had discovered the location of the 'third Kim Dokja' before I did.

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The spatiotemporal coordinates of the fragment in question could not be precisely determined.

However, the 'context of certain constellations' was observed. The keywords extracted from the context were as follows:

Emperor. Monkey. Sword and shield.

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Emperor? Monkey? Sword and shield?

I mulled over the keywords several times before asking,

【Is this the answer? I thought you meant 'spatiotemporal coordinates'.】

【I didn't understand that far. However, we can make some inferences with the keywords attached. This should be valuable information, right?】

Listening to the Hermit's bittersweet laughter, I wanted to smack him in the back of the head.

【Please send me other information, too.】

【Just sent it.】

The second piece of information I requested from Hermit was about the 'purpose of the creation of the New Murim District'.

I quickly skimmed through the second document and licked my lips.

I see. I expected it, but that's really how this city was created.

【Confirmed. Now, I'll give you the information. You said you'd choose the third option, correct?】

The Hermit's third option was 'the secret of the 'Oldest Dream' that the recorder 'Bicheonhori' was curious about'.

I wrote a sentence in the air and sent it to him.

「The secret of the 'Oldest Dream' that Bicheonhori was curious about is...」

As I wrote the sentence, old memories flooded back. That day, I had shared a secret at the inn in Bicheonhori.

「It’s about 'the food the Oldest Dream hates the most'.」

The Hermit’s head throbbed as he read the sentence.

【What is this…】

I could feel his emotions fluctuating in real time. Confusion, shock, and…

【That… what kind of food is it?】

Curiosity. The excited boy’s words were slowly intensifying.

【Tell me. What kind of story is that?】

【It’s not a story, it’s food.】

【What?】

Since there seemed to be some misunderstanding, I thought it was a good thing and wrote the next sentence for him.

「The food the Oldest Dream hates the most is 'tomatoes'.」

The Hermit remained silent for a long time after reading the sentence. He seemed to be analyzing my sentence, or perhaps ruminating and savoring it. Or perhaps he didn’t understand it at all.

Moral, watching from the side, asked,

【Hermit, what information did you receive?】

Instead of answering, Hermit trembled convulsively and suddenly began emitting a wave of energy toward me.

【Are you trying to deceive me?】

【I expected you to get angry. But I only gave you a choice; you were the one who chose.】

【This doesn't make sense. This can't be all—】

【This is the whole story.】

[Someone is activating 'Lie Detection'!]

['Lie Detection' has confirmed your words.]

【There's no way! The 'Oldest Dream' is nothing more than that. The great 'Bicheonhori' couldn't possibly be curious about such information—】

【This is all.】

【Explain properly. What does tomato mean? What interpretation did Bicheonhori obtain?】

Since he seemed to be having trouble understanding me, I decided to be a little more friendly.

「Now, I'll explain briefly, so listen carefully. You know the prototype of the 'Oldest Dream' is Kim Dokja, right? Kim Dokja of Planet 8612, who has mastered the 'Ways of Survival'. This isn't a metaphor, it's just a fact. Tomatoes are a food Kim Dokja hates. Tomatoes! Literally, tomatoes!」

And then something strange happened.

「■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■...」

All the messages I had sent began to be filtered.

【Gasp.】

I heard a pop, and then I saw something flowing out of Hermit's head. Something like bloody juice was dripping onto the floor.

【You... What on earth did you send me?】

Hermit's body, who had been glaring at me as if je couldn't understand, dispersed. It was unexpected. Kim Dokja's name wasn't exactly a secret anymore, and I thought this level of information would be okay since even Bicheonhori and Asmodeus would share it without a second thought... or was I wrong?

As Hermit's figure vanished in an instant, Moral, who was standing nearby, exclaimed in admiration.

【Wow... That's surprising. Information that could force the expulsion of a red-ranked Hermit. That's extremely dangerous information.】

I felt there was some misunderstanding, but since it wasn't important, I didn't point it out.

【Cloud Mountain. May I take my turn next?】

【Please continue.】

Immediately, the information Moral had sent flashed before my eyes.

It was a brief description of the approximate timing of Ragnarok and the movements of the Great Gate.

It wasn't much information, but it was essential for me right now.

【Confirmed. Which option will you choose?】

【I'm also very curious about the third piece of information.】

【Then shall I tell you the third one?】

【No, I...】

Surprisingly, Moral chose the first option.

「The story of 'Kim Anna-ssi', catastrophic fear.」

Honestly, I never thought he'd choose that. Perhaps he was afraid that choosing the third option would lead to ending up like the Hermit.

I briefly relayed to Moral my interpretation of 'Anna Croft', whom I witnessed in the Fear Realm.

Kim Anna, who escaped from <Asgard> and chose to become a transcendent.

Kim Anna, who nearly died from talking on the subway on her way home from work.

Kim Anna, who ran away in panic after encountering a catastrophic fear.

Kim Anna, who made me coffee...

As I recited the memories, a feeling of longing arose.

I wonder if Kim Anna is doing well.

【This is...】

Moral seemed to be reading the sentences I gave him with interest.

It made sense. Even though it was merely a series of disconnected memories, a mere record of observing a single incarnation—

【This is truly remarkable. You truly witnessed the 'Fear Realm'.】

At least this record clearly depicted the 'Fear Realm'.

【Honestly, I thought I'd picked a dud, but the interpretation you gave me seems far too extreme.】

Moral, who had been watching me for a moment, hesitated as if he had something to say. It was then that his form shook with a 'tsutsutsu' sound.

【Oh, I have a summons, so I must go.】

At that moment, a sentence flashed before his eyes.

「I don't know which scenario you're a recorder for, but—」

The sentences continued above Moral, who slightly bowed his head.

「Whenever necessary, summon this 'Moral'. I'll help you.」

It was an unexpected favor. Contrary to his actions, perhaps he's more morally sound than I thought?

I nodded in gratitude.

The two quickly left, leaving only Cloud Mountain and I in the subspace.

Cloud Mountain, who had been watching me, spoke first.

【I've also been summoned. If it's alright, let's start the deal right away.】

Considering the group summons, something must have happened in their scenario.

【Understood.】

We immediately exchanged information.

The information he gave me was about the current status of the 'Light Sword Emperor'. As I read it, I couldn't help but feel my face harden. If this was true, I needed to get out of here immediately.

Fortunately, Cloud Mountain also seemed to be in a hurry.

【I'll choose the second option.】

As expected, Cloud Mountain chose the second option.

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Additional survivor information for the 'Fear Realm'.

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I wrote down the names of the survivors I remembered and sent them. It was a list of those who escaped aboard the 'train' on the day the Fear Realm ended.

Cloud Mountain read and reread the list for a long time, then asked,

【Is this all?】

【As far as I know, that's all there is to it. And the Fear Realm has ended.】

Because he was covered by a mask, I couldn't see Cloud Mountain's expression. However, judging by the slight downward tilt of his head, I could tell he was disappointed.

(TL: I used the pronoun 'he' by default for these recorders, but we don’t necessarily know their gender since they’re hiding their identities—and it was too confusing to individually call them ‘they’ when there were many in the room. Cloud Mountain could be a woman.)

【Should I go now?】

Cloud Mountain's body nodded, and slowly began to disperse from below.

When their body disappeared up to their knees, I asked,

【Cloud Mountain, what is the name of the being you seek?】

【Is it a deal?】

【You can think of it as you wish.】

Cloud Mountain looked at me for a moment before answering.

【It's a name I can't pronounce.】

【Why can't you pronounce it?】

【If I say that name, someone else will notice.】

I nodded silently.

Cloud Mountain, watching me, asked.

【I have a question, too.】

【Go ahead.】

Now, more than half of Cloud Mountain's body had vanished. Dispersing like a mountain collapsing, Cloud Mountain asked.

【What number was the 'trap'?】

The dispersing Cloud Mountain was looking at me. I, too, saw the Cloud Mountain.

The masks we wore were tagged with the story of 'recognition blocking', and because of that, we couldn't recognize each other. And yet.

【The trap.】

Even though eight years had passed between us.

【It was the second piece of information.】

Beyond Cloud Mountain's mask dissipating in the light, I thought I glimpsed their face. I thought I could see their eyes slowly dilating.

【Wait a minute, then—】

Perhaps this was just an elaborate optical illusion we created. We might have been endlessly repeating the name of the one we were seeking, in front of a completely different person. And yet, in that moment, in front of each other's masks, we reached a common interpretation.

【Smack...!】

With a ray of light, Cloud Mountain vanished.

I stared blankly down at the spot where they had vanished. I wanted to call their name right away.

Are they truly who I thought they were? If so, why, by what path did they become a 'Recorder of Fear', or why did they have to become so?

I couldn't ask. Perhaps because eight years lay before us, and—

【It seems you've enjoyed it enough. If you've seen it all, please leave.】

Because the one who knows those eight years is here with us now.

I glared into the air and said,

【The King of the Flying Tiger, Weilong】

(TL: So that’s what 'Bicheonhori' meant.)

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