

鋼殻のレギオス VIII

ミキシング・ノート

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「ご注文はお決まりですか？」

鋼殻のレギオス Ⅳ
ミネシグノート



宿命の戦いが今、幕を開ける——!?



レイフォン vs. ニーナ!!



「『週刊ルックン』の取材できました。
一般教養科一年ミイファイ・ロツテンとその連ねです」

Prologue

Hmm?

Something seemed amiss. Layfon was confused as to why he felt that way. He felt uncomfortable.

This was the hospital section of the academy.

It was at the end of their inter-city battle with Myath, after his left arm received treatment. Surgery to repair his muscles and nervous system that were injured had been completed on that day as well.

"It's all because you act like an idiot and continually return to hospital that we've compiled a complete image of your body, and our thorough understanding of it allowed surgery to commence immediately" said his long-time surgeon Wakudi-senpai.

Two hours later, the surgery finished. Afterwards, he received treatment from Jinmaike-senpai. Layfon had only stayed in the hospital for one night. Right now, his left arm was covered by a simple plaster cast to keep his arm in place, and the veins in his lower back looked like a pincushion, being filled with so many needles. "If you want to sleep, sleep facing down" and Layfon, being so instructed, had sat upright in an attempt to avoid touching his back.

Leerin was beside the bed.

She was wearing the same clothes as when they had met outside the city, with her travelling case by her side. She probably hadn't returned to the hotel at all, and still retained the appearance of arriving recently.

She wore an angry expression.

That was the cause of Layfon's discomfort.

(Strange...)

Layfon felt perplexed at that expression.

No, this wasn't the first time he had provoked Leerin's anger. In fact, he had done it so often that he had lost count long ago.

Tearing his clothes after training, making too many snacks for his younger brothers and sisters, and playing around too recklessly and covering his

clothes in mud, he had always seen this scary expression. And when he covered the rest of the clothes that were about to be washed with mud as well, she looked all the more terrifying.

But Leerin would immediately return to her kind self after scolding them. It was very rare for her to actually be angry. It seemed that Leerin was trying to avoid looking Layfon in the eye, lowering her head, gazing furiously at the sheets which covered Layfon's legs.

So Layfon couldn't see Leerin's face clearly either, so he could do nothing else but stare at her hair instead. It seemed a little different from when he had departed Grendan. Her hair had grown longer, making it impossible to keep the same hairstyle. Even though they hadn't been apart for more than a year, there was still a difference.

He didn't recognize the clothes that Leerin was wearing, so she probably bought them in anticipation of entering senior school. "That's great" thought Layfon. Leerin valued her possessions a lot, so she wouldn't buy new clothes. She knew how to tailor her clothes, so if they didn't fit, she would patch them up.

Seeing her wearing new clothes probably meant that they had a bit of money to spare now, allowing Layfon to breathe a sigh of relief.

"How's your health?"

"Really good, thanks."

Layfon gingerly attempted a start to the conversation and Leerin replied sincerely.

"You aren't really well, are you, Layfon?"

"Well I did get injured."

In between the scattered fragments of conversation Layfon smiled bitterly. That numbness of his hands that he felt during his battle with Haia returned.

"Don't you think you've had too many injuries?"

"Huh?"

"Didn't the doctor say so as well? You're getting hospitalized continuously like an idiot."

Ah, so she had overheard their conversation.

"It's not that bad."

"You were never injured as badly as this in Grendan, right?"

That was completely true. The worst injury he had ever sustained during training was when he became a Heaven's Blade Successor and was practicing with the steel wires. When his adoptive father was training him, his father would take every care to avoid pointless injury. When it was necessary, he would not hesitate to hit or hack at Layfon, inflicting on him bruises, burns or even fractures. Yet he would never injure Layfon unless it was really essential to training. His adoptive father was very good at teaching.

But Lintence was different. He wasn't good at teaching other people Military Arts, and it was no exception with teaching Layfon. So he often sustained preventable injuries. He nearly died once. But rather than saying it was Lintence's fault, that time was Layfon's own fault.

"I have been injured pretty badly when I was training."

"But you've never been injured as badly as this before, have you?"

As badly as today...Only in this battle.

It wasn't wrong to put it that way. On the other hand, when he battled against the filth monster, if he couldn't win and was forced to retreat, dying from the pollutants in the air would have been perfectly normal.

(Ah, but...an excuse like that...)

Leerin didn't participate in the battle, so she wouldn't understand.

It wasn't her fault either. It was a difference in perception between normal citizens and Military Artists.

It was also true that Layfon was repeatedly in the care of the hospital since his arrival at Zuellni.

(Even though unpredictable events had occurred one after another, they failed to surprise anyone.)

(Is it because I have gotten weaker?)

Layfon thought about this. His senses weren't as sharp as they used to be at Grendan, but that was inevitable.

"Well it was different this time."

He was hit over the head with a hollow "dong" sound.

"That's not a reason" said Leerin in a reprimanding tone.

Her eyes...She looked as if she was about to cry.

"I'm sorry."

"You have to be careful next time."

"Ok."

The atmosphere suddenly turned very serious, and Layfon obediently lowered his head.

"I guess I'll let it pass this time."

Leerin revealed a comparatively more relaxed and less worried expression.

There were tears in the corner of her eyes, but she quickly wiped them away.

(Oh, it was that. I haven't shown any signs of repenting for my actions.)

Understanding Leerin's reasons for being angry at him, Layfon sighed in relief.

This was the ritual he performed as a symbol of reconciliation with her.

If he correctly put on a regretful expression, her anger would cease and that would ease Layfon's heart.

"It is really fortunate that you could arrive here safely."

Taking roaming buses to other cities was extremely dangerous. If filth monsters attacked them while they were on the roaming bus, they wouldn't last very long.

"We didn't run into any filth monsters."

"That's great."

"But it was really uncomfortable being cramped in the bus for so long."

"At first the bus seems really spacious, but after you consider how much time you'll spend in the vehicle it starts to seem really cramped. Even though there is ventilation, there is still a really bad smell and you can't even wash yourself properly. It's really uncomfortable."

Layfon silently listened to Leerin's complaints. Sitting here, listening to her, it sounded like she wanted some sort of compensation. She was still the same old self. Maybe something happened after her arrival, so as she was sorting out everything that happened she kept up her usual air.

Because Layfon had also experienced a drastic change like this, he understood what was going on.

He had also been sorting out the changes that had occurred up till now, as well as his feeling on living together with Leerin in the past. As he sorted his thoughts out, he also observed the changes. Again, he reaffirmed his changes to himself.

"...It seems after arriving at Zuellni there are many girls near Layfon, taking care of you."

"Erm...Ah..."

"I haven't seen you for only a short time and you've changed already. When did you learn to woo so many girls?"

"Wai- Wait a second. Didn't I tell you about my captain in my letters?"

"True, but it's still suspicious. There are things that you can't write in a letter, such as things like 'I'm being happily chased and sought after.' What did you come here to do? To study, right?"

"Yeah, that's right, but... you've got it all wrong. Those people really have helped me a lot, but there wasn't any other meaning to it." Without knowing what happened, Layfon nervously attempted to explain the situation.

"They aren't really my lovers or anything... and they shouldn't have those kinds of thoughts about me anyway."

"Is it really like that?"

"What?"

Leerin had mumbled something under her breath. It was really quietly whispered and Layfon couldn't quite catch it.

"Then, you had better explain your relationship with them right now." With that Leerin suddenly leaned in closely.

"Then... Ok?"

Layfon had no choice but to begin his explanation.

(Well... the explanation right now probably isn't too reliable)

Leerin considered it knowingly, thinking of how her slow-witted childhood friend couldn't possibly guess what other people felt deep down in their hearts. So in reality, what Layfon was saying only fit in with what was on the surface, and wouldn't be of too much use.

Even considering its unreliability, she could still find some things out from his explanation.

For example, his feelings and thoughts towards the ring of girls who had surrounded him upon his arrival at Zuellni.

(Haaa...What exactly...what exactly did I come here for?)

Feeling a little annoyed with herself, Leerin listened to Layfon's explanation.

"Then... Who started the friendship?"

"That, it was..."

Layfon could only tell Leerin what was happening on the surface.

If it was like that, then figuring out what was going on beneath the surface would be Leerin's job.

Interlude 01

"Who's that pretty girl? That girl who gave me the directions."

"Ah, are you talking about Felli-senpai?"

"Senpai? You're joking, right?"

"Yeah, she's a second year student."

"Yeah, you're right. Layfon's a first year, right? But she looks pretty young. Maybe I did something bad?"

"What did you do?"

"Eh? Nothing. I didn't do anything."

"Then, you shouldn't care about it too much."

"Yeah, you're right...well, she seems a bit like a person who attracts attention."

"Ah, you're right about that. Felli-senpai seems to be a bit neurotic."

"She didn't do anything, and she just suddenly starts apologizing to me, placing me in a difficult position."

"Well, just be wary in the future, and think about how to improve your relationship."

"Is that all? According to that letter, that person is a Psychokinesist, right?"

"Yeah, that person is a prodigy. It's the first time I've heard of a psychokinesist whose hair glows when they use their powers. I wonder if that happens with Delbone-sama as well. I've never seen it, so I wouldn't know."

"Delbone-sama is that Heaven's blade successor, right? Wasn't she standing beside her majesty in the new year's ceremony?"

"Ah, that was just an acting Heaven's blade successor. That's because the twelve Heaven's Blades have to be complete."

"Really? I've never heard of that."

"Yeah, so anyway, that's why Felli-senpai is a psychokinesist."

"Ah, I've seen her hair glowing before as well; it really is a beautiful sight."

"She doubts her destiny as a psychokinesist and so she came to Zuellni in hope of learning something else, yet she was forced by her brother, the Student Council president to transfer to the Military arts department."

"Didn't he force you as well? He's so overboard and extreme."

"I reckon. But with the way that person does things, I think he puts many things into consideration."

"Maybe it's like that, but even so it seems a bit overboard. As a brother, shouldn't he be supporting his sister in every way he can?"

"I agree, that's what he should be doing."

Cool in the cafe

That day, Layfon lived out a perfectly ordinary day of his life without anything abnormal.

After getting out of bed in the morning, he went to school and stayed there, attending classes and absorbing all the information from his lectures without delay until dusk. Afterward, he went to his platoon training session. To the Zuellni Military Arts department first year Layfon, it was a day which was devoid of anything worth mentioning - just another normal day.

His platoon training was the same as always; with Captain Nina filled with enthusiasm, Sharnid, who didn't know what enthusiasm meant, Felli, who was perpetually observing from the sidelines with absolutely zero enthusiasm, and Layfon, who always obediently completed all the exercises.

Felli's immediate departure at the end of training was another part of daily life.

But today, Sharnid, who normally disappeared right after Felli did, was staying behind and waiting for Layfon with a somewhat sinister smile.

"Hey, you don't have work today, right? You couldn't possibly."

This happened after Layfon took a relaxing shower after working up a rare sweat during training.

Nina had already returned, and Sharnid, who had already packed up and was ready to leave, was waiting outside the door of the training rooms in high spirits.

"If you had to go to your part time job on a day like this, I'd probably end up rolling around on the floor laughing at you."

"Stop acting talking about strange things sempai, I don't have any work today."

"Good, you really are a lucky guy. Let's go and share the joys of a day like this together. It's not often that I invite another guy." As he said this, he tightly grasped Layfon's shoulders and, like that, forced Layfon out of the training area with him.

"Just what are we doing?"

"You'll just have to calm down and wait and see."

Releasing a struggling Layfon from his grip, Sharnid lead the way with an extremely happy look on his face. Layfon quickly caught up to him, completely lost as to what was going on.

The Regios. They were the whole world.

Since the world was covered by pollutants, it was extremely difficult for normal life forms to survive on the earth. The people who lived in the world before it was polluted had the Alchemists create and pass on the Regios and continued to live the same way they did before, paying no attention to their drastic change in environment and returning to their everyday lives.

Living in the wandering cities, they fought with the real inhabitants and menaces of the earth; the filth monsters.

"It's here."

He was brought in front of a coffee store by a confident Sharnid. Calling the store a restaurant wouldn't be an exaggeration, with a sign at the doorway listing all the kinds of dishes that were available and the store sign reading "Coffee Mira". Layfon remembered his classmate Mifi saying something about the selling point of this cafe being the beautifully dressed cute waitresses who served the food and drinks.

"Ah... Do you like this sort of stuff, senpai?"

Supposedly this was a very popular place among male customers, in comparison to its relative unpopularity among females. The mood of the café was flirtatious, filled with handsome young men. It suited Sharnid, who always liked to hit on girls.

"Cute girls are the heritage of the world, even though they aren't really part of our cultural heritage." As he laughed at his own words, Sharnid walked into the store.

"Welcome."

Layfon was greeted by a young girl and it really surprised him. At the door, a whole line of girls who wore cute pink uniforms greeted Layfon and Sharnid.

"Whoa..."

"Table for two? Come with me."

Layfon was still spaced out, and before he recovered he was already lead to his seat.

After Layfon sat down, Sharnid said something quietly to that girl, who smiled and nodded. She then placed the menu in front of them and left.

"What's happening?"

"We're leaving the best till last right? Anyway, today is my treat, so just choose anything you like."

"Ha..."

Layfon felt puzzled at Sharnid's cheerful mood as he searched through the menu.

"You really are a hard worker, aren't you? Even if you didn't do that everyday you would be just as strong." As Sharnid looked at his menu, he started talking about their platoon training.

"It's not that I want to do the training seriously, it's that instead of wasting my efforts thinking about it, I might as well train instead."

"I can understand that kind of thinking. Well...when you compare the inter-platoon matches to the actual inter-city battle, it still seems like a kind of game."

"Did senpai participate in the last inter-city battle?"

"I guess you could say that. But at the time, I hadn't gotten into a platoon yet, so I was just a normal member of the infantry. But because of that I could just relax and do all the support work from behind the front lines.

"Next time will be the real thing, and if we don't win, there will be no future for Zuellni. Seeing the other platoons training seriously, and even organizing all these inter-platoon matches, I really am moved."

"It's more like you're trying your luck, senpai."

"If you're too serious about everything then you won't be able to experience the joys that this world has to offer. A normal Military Artist would never leave victory for luck to decide. I guess I'm the only one who can do such a thing without worries."

Layfon pretended he didn't hear anything at all and closed the menu.

"Oh! Have you finished choosing what you want? Then...Hey!"

Sharnid motioned to a nearby waitress.

"So what did we really come here for?"

"You'll find out in a sec."

Ignoring the silently smiling Sharnid who wouldn't answer any of his questions, Layfon shifted his gaze into the scenery outside the window.

It wasn't too long before somebody came over.

"What would you like?"

Her air was totally different from the girls who had welcomed Layfon at the door...it seemed like she was angry?

"Ah..."

"....."

As Layfon turned his head around, he found a very familiar person standing before him.

Outside of training, her long hair was usually worn over flowing her shoulders but right now it was tied in a high ponytail with a bright red ribbon. On that delicate face you could say that her features were all very well proportioned. Her long eyelashes were quivering; needless to say, she was very angry.

"Felli...Senpai?"

"What would you like?"

Before he was cut off, his voice was barely audible from the shock, the tone of his words revealing much of his underlying thoughts.

It was Felli, without a doubt.

Speaking of which, there couldn't possibly be another beauty such as this in Zuellni anyway. Also a Military Artist of the 17th platoon, this senpai was older than Layfon by a year, and she was also the sister of the president of the Student Council. A psychokinesist prodigy. To think that Felli, who was expressionless no matter where she went, that Felli who seemed like she

was unhappy, a synonym for indifference, was wearing such a cute, pink costume working in this store, was hard to believe.

But she was standing before him regardless.

And even her name card clipped to her chest read: "Felli Loss"

"What are you doing here...?"

"Have you decided what you would like?" The second time she asked that question she cut him off yet again in deathly cold manner.

Sharnid, who was shaking all over, could take it no longer and finally burst out laughing.

Even with this, Felli continued to fume as she kept her cheeks drawn.

"Have you decided what you would like?"

What on earth is happening...Am I having a nightmare?

In reality, her biggest failure was to be found out by Sharnid-senpai while she was looking for a job. That thought wouldn't leave Felli's head as she angrily picked up the curved plates in the kitchen.

Girls wearing the same cute uniforms as Felli as if their looks were their only redeeming quality bustled all around her. Girls with larger chests specifically wore clothing which emphasized that point and the rest of them chose to wear chest pads to wear such clothing as well. Someone else had also suggested that Felli do the same, but the offer was immediately rejected.

Thinking back, she could only blame herself for not thinking that this kind of thing would happen. Felli continued to hide in that corner cursing Sharnid with a furious look in her eyes.

"Are you looking for a job?"

After she had finished eating during her lunch break and was enjoying a cup of tea as she read through an info-magazine, Sharnid came over and asked that question.

"Ahh..."

Noticing Sharnid peeking at her careers magazine over her shoulder Felli nervously closed it. But in doing so, she revealed the cover of the

magazine instead, and she ended up not hiding anything at all. Even if she put the magazine into her bag the moment she noticed someone else reading it, there was no way she could have deceived the vision of a Military Artist.

It was even more impossible when you considered the fact that Sharnid was a sniper in the team, and his vision was several times better than a normal Military Artists in the first place.

"Do you have a problem?"

"Ah, no, no...But to see Felli-chan looking for a job is not something you see every day. What's wrong? I thought your parents were sending you money for living expenses, unless for some reason this month they're experiencing some sort of financial crisis?"

"That's..."

...impossible. As she thought this, Felli decided to keep her cool and play along. She had already received the money from her parents, and although she wasn't too sure of its exact value, she knew it was far beyond what a normal student got. And that money was perfectly managed by her brother so that there would be no unnecessary waste. So getting a job had nothing to do with earning more money.

But...

"No, you're exactly right. My brother went overboard and bought too many books. "

In short, she was trying to push all the blame onto her brother.

"Oh? That Student Council President-sama? There shouldn't be any problems with the city's budget right?"

As Sharnid said this, he had a look of indifference on his face but he was stroking his chin as if thinking intently about something.

"In other words, you want to get some money as quickly as possible?"

"As long as it isn't anything shady."

"It's legal! It's legal! It's definitely legal! All you're doing is delivering the completed dishes to the customers."

It wasn't that she trusted that smiling Sharnid.

It's only that she accepted the offer, considering the circumstances that she was in.

That was how she had gotten into a situation like this.

"You bastard, I'll remember this!"

Sharnid hadn't actually lied to her. All she really did was ask what people wanted to eat, and then serve those dishes to the customers. But she never thought that she would be brought to a shop where you had to wear costumes like this.

"Ok, new girl. Are you used to the job now?"

"I'm memorizing the menu right now."

Hearing someone shouting, Felli turned around. And it was something like...

"Really~~? Felli-Chan really is a brilliant child. You could probably remember it immediately, right~~?"

To think she was being hired by a man like this.

This man was wearing a cute pink uniform and is talking in a feminine voice, happily waving at all the waitresses.

"Everyone, do your best to show off your cute points, ok? What's our mission?"

"To make cuteness reign supreme!"

"That's right!"

Seeing the shop owner happily nodding at the waitresses' replies, Felli's head felt like it hurt even more.

"And it's all thanks to Sharnid, too."

His nightmare got even worse. As he thought this, Layfon pretended to not notice the man in the strange uniform and continued to eat.

"You guys are the best, right?"

"Yeah. Ever since I started the store, we've been making uniforms like this, so we always pick girls who could bring out that feeling on the chest part of

the uniform So that's why I'm considering making a new type of uniform which can bring out Felli-chan's loli aspect."

"Layfon, this here is my classmate from my first year here, and right now he's going into the clothing industry."

"I'm James~~ Please take care of me, and please use a light tone and call me James~~"

"Haaa... Nice to meet you."

"I decided that opening a normal clothing store would be too boring, so I opened this instead. However, it actually turned out to be a huge success."

"A couple of normal stores also use this sort of uniform as the basis for their designs."

"Those guys are a bit miserable, aren't they?"

"Yeah, there isn't a single girl in the world who would understand the cuteness of those uniforms."

Listening to words that seemed logical and incomprehensible at the same time, Layfon decided to not make any judgments and remain as a listener for the entirety of the conversation.

"So in order for us to maintain our customers who live in that area, we have to do much better and we're working very hard to improve. We have many more competitors than before. It's because there are fewer and fewer kids willing to work here, and some are even taken away to work at other places.....It's thanks to Sharnid that we have pulled through this tough time."

"So what you guys were talking about for that whole time, it was all about Felli-Senpai wasn't it?" Layfon started to understand a little of what they were really talking about.

But no matter how he thought about it, he couldn't imagine Felli coming to work at a place like this by herself.

"Yeah, we were. She was looking for a job, so I introduced her here."

"Haa..."

Sharnid obviously didn't make it very clear to Felli as to the nature of her job before she arrived...Layfon began to feel sorry for Felli.

But still, it seemed strange that Felli, who had never had a job, suddenly needed one. "Anyway, it's all thanks to her that it seems that we've gotten the upper hand over our competitors. I heard that many people are secretly her fans. This time the store with the highest sales is ours."

"What are you guys talking about?"

"Eh? Ah, recently there have been many shops which have opened up nearby which are very similar to ours. Everyone is competing for customers, causing income for each store to drop quite a bit."

"Seriously. It's because the things we sell in our store originally couldn't be found anywhere else, and since we've become well known, immediately many other people tried to enter the market. If they wanted to copy us, it would have been fine if they opened up somewhere different, but they had to cramp up here with us. All they are doing is causing trouble for other people."

"Well...the thing is, not many people like this sort of stuff in the first place, so if you think about it from an business standpoint opening here is actually not a bad choice. Regardless of what happens though, if this continues on, at this rate everyone is going to go broke."

"If the competition gets too fierce it won't be good for the economy either."

"That's why the economic scientists stepped out and tried reconciliation, and made this decision. Next week, there will be a turnover competition, and the shop with the most turnovers will be accepted by the Economic Sciences department."

"We are putting the honor of the store on the line here, so no matter what we must come first. But at the rate we are going now, it's not enough to overcome our opponents. Because the other stores used us as a blueprint of sorts and have worked out some sorts of marketing strategies, they don't have anything that is key to their victory. Our strategy of changing uniforms every month has allowed us to pull away from them a little, so next week we have decided to change our uniforms every day in order to attract more customers. But what we can't have a shortage of in battle is man-power."

"So you decided to hire Felli-Senpai."

"That's exactly right."

It seemed like he understood but then looked like he didn't, showing an expression which was difficult to describe.

"Then...does Senpai know about this?"

"Of course she knows, I have already given her the pay for next week."

"Ah...I see."

A week eh...If it was spent doing a job you didn't like, the week would probably pass by very slowly.

And it was a job which was in complete contrast with her image.

(It should be OK, right?)

She would definitely make a mistake somewhere down the line.

"What would you like?"

"Uhh...A hamburger meal please."

"What drink would you like?"

"Uhh, red iced tea please."

"Would you like me to bring it up together, or do you want to wait until you've finished eating for me to bring it over."

"Together please."

"Ok, it'll be ready in a moment."

Faintly, a feeling of cold indifference rose up over that cute atmosphere which the pink uniform created, making the customers flinch. Felli looked as if she didn't see them at all, and left the table. After she left the table, the customers let out a sigh, released from that tension.

As Felli gave the orders to the kitchen, the store owner said "Felli-chan~ you have to keep smiling, smiling."

"Smiling...is it?"

"Yes, you have to show our customers your most beautiful expression."

"To smile."

"Yes. It doesn't have to be heartfelt, ok? But forcefully smiling isn't ok either. It's ok to act like you're happy, and if you think you can do it you should welcome the customers as they enter and feel their smiles. Have a look at how the other girls do it."

He looked at the busy waitresses in the other stores.

Felli looked over at the girls who were standing there, all of them with bright, clear smiles on their faces.

At the same time, she noticed all the males in there had a lusty look on all their faces.

"....." Perhaps he followed Felli's line of sight, as the store owner immediately followed up with a couple of lines.

"You don't need to be too conscious of how the customers are looking at you. If you can't go to the door and welcome the customers, then please try and display the cutest aspect of yourself."

That's hard too.

"We aren't trying to greet the customers with an overbearing air. If I had to describe it, then it would be a frank expression. Let them feel that they are being welcomed like friends in a relaxed manner."

"Frank..."

"Can't do it?"

The store owner was also starting to feel a little insecure.

"I've never tried smiling before."

"That's strange, your brother is a professional when it comes to smiling. His fake smile really is brilliant."

"It confuses people into not knowing what to think."

"Even if you are thinking about something else, it's ok. If you smile, you leave a very good impression upon other people. Knowing that, your brother is always showing a smiling expression."

"Haa..."

"Then practice your smile please. You can have a look at those girls, and say something like 'welcome'"

"...Welcome."

"Noo~~ooo! You weren't smiling. Try again."

"Welcome."

"Your eyes don't have a very welcoming feel to them."

"Welcome."

"You're too stiff."

"Welcome."

"No! No! This won't do!"

"Welcome."

"Try again."

"I think you can do it."

...Just like this, they continued to do this for a length of time.

About an hour had passed.

"...Have a bit of a rest."

The store owner showed his weakness first.

"Oh, you really are quite stubborn."

"That wasn't my original intention."

"It seems she really hasn't ever smiled before."

Felli decided that she would put on an innocent look, but there was practically no way for her to communicate that.

It was always like that. Felli had trouble with expressing her feeling to anyone other than her family members.

"She pretty much failed."

So that's all they could say.

The store owner wiped the sweat off his forehead, and thought it over a little before continuing.

"Ok, seeing as it's come to this, then we just have to prepare our store to match your expression instead."

"Haa..."

"Just show us your unique expression. That cool loli feeling. Next week we'll prepare a special uniform just for you. Aaaah~~ It's been a while since I've felt this excited."

"No, that's..."

"I've already decided. I will not change my decisions. We will change our uniforms daily – Uwaahh! It's going to be difficult. Uwaahh!"

The store owner pranced away with impossibly tiny footsteps, and Felli couldn't stop him.

It wasn't because she was worried about what he was thinking that she couldn't properly communicate with him. She didn't really care what he thought of her.

How other people perceived her, wasn't a problem for Felli at all.

Right now the issue was...

To tell the truth, she wanted to resign.

She didn't need any money at all.

And she didn't think that this job was very interesting either.

And it wasn't like she had no option other than to do the job.

Indeed, she really wanted to throw the week's worth of pay she was given in advance right in the store owner's face and just leg it out of there.

"AAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

No, this was serious.

"AAHHH! Genius! I'm a genius! A prodigy! Kami-Sama has gifted me with my superior abilities. Perhaps you'd better just call me Kami-Sama? Once again, I have gathered the conviction that I had lost by my side."

If she could run away from that shop owner who was constantly making these weird noises, Felli would definitely do that.

"That's..."

"Yes, it's Kami-Sama. I am Kami-Sama. That's why I have to say this. What is cuteness? Cuteness is justice. That's why all those who are cute are gathered to my side."

"It doesn't matter how you do it, but please give me a more normal response."

"Ah, I'm sorry. I accidentally got caught up in the moment; there's no need for you to worry as it happens all the time."

"...All the time?"



Keeping a constant distance between herself and the shop owner who was still shaking from his recent excitement, Felli looked at the uniform she was wearing again. It should have been...changed a little. The design of the uniform was definitely different from the others. The uniform doubtlessly still retained its cute feel, having kept its pink color

They had started from pink, and finally returned to pink. She felt that if they were going to use that uniform emphasize her selling points it would be a little forced.

"It seems blue and black really do suit you the most. But if we just obediently followed that train of thought, we wouldn't have a chance to dig deeper into your potential, and I can't further make use of my genius. Regardless as to how it goes, as long as it is confined by some sort of trend, then that would be a defeat; one which I cannot accept. You have to make cuteness your objective, you must make that pink color your objective!"

"Please don't just casually put out a motto like that."

"But no matter what, it's one which I must always adhere to. It's difficult, oh, it's difficult."

He didn't look troubled at all; instead, seeing the shop owner revealing an expression of utmost satisfaction at the new uniform, Felli couldn't say anything.

"Well then, everybody! From now on for the next week, we must all work hard, ok? You are warriors which have been chosen to protect the cute-ism ideals. In order to protect the cuteness in the world, you must show the customers your heartfelt smiles filled with bravery and hope... It's also in order to protect what's dear to you! What's dear to you?"

"Of course, our pay!"

Just like this, with the dropping of the shop owner's tears, the sales wars began.



"Ok, ok, let me have a look at what the uniform has turned into."

"Why did we have to come to a place like this?"

After training ended, Layfon was dragged here by Sharnid again.

This was the roof of some tall building. Layfon listlessly asked Sharnid who was lying on the water tank enhancing his vision with Internal-type Kei and looking toward the store.

"If I peeped at her from close up I'd probably piss Felli off, yeah?"

"So they say..."

"Even if it's her, she probably wouldn't be using psychokinesis while she's at work."

"No, that's not what I'm trying to say."

"If anything diverges from the plan, then I'll lose all the money I put into the bet."

"You bet on something again?"

"Of course, that's why I prepared the ultimate weapon."

"And the ultimate weapon refers to...?"

"Well, you'll see."

Sharnid dragged Layfon over by the neck, and Layfon used his Kei unwillingly and looked across to the Cafe.



The store was filled with people.

In the midst of it all, girls wearing pink uniforms rushed back and forth.

Of the people who were sitting in the cafe, the majority of them were pretty much male students in uniform. Their eyes were glowing as they looked towards the girls in the pink uniforms.

And out of all the girls, the male students were all looking towards Felli.

Felli, wearing a custom uniform, wore the same cold expression on her face as she carried the plates back and forth. After placing their meals in front of the stunned customers, she left without a shred of warmth in her expression.

Even so, all the male customers in the store were completely satisfied.

"How is it?"

"That..."

"I have no idea how to describe this situation" thought Layfon.

Felli was the same as always with a cold, featureless expression. What was more striking was an annoyed look as if she had been forced to do this reflected on her doll-like face. Even though she should be very nervous at carrying all those dishes around, yet...

"It seems like you still don't get it" said Sharnid as he shook his head.

"It doesn't matter that she doesn't provide a very welcome service. Look, see all those girls around her who are attending to the customers' every need? Look at them all, all smiling the same smile, and even the girls who are an even a little cute just get buried under the whole group. No matter how much prettier Felli is she would probably be the same, buried by the rest of the girls. That's the result of the uniforms. Wearing the same uniforms, doing the same things and saying the same words, it will always bury a person's individuality to an extent. The only people who could tell all those waitresses apart would be the waitresses themselves. But Felli is different. She's definitely wearing the same systematic uniform, but the impression she makes is different to the rest of them. And on top of that the other girls are obviously treating the guests enthusiastically. 'What's wrong with her?' is probably what most of the people are thinking when they see her. As long as you give them this kind of an impression, you've won. She's already a lot prettier than the rest, making other people wish

they could see her smile. Not the smile she uses to greet the customers. Her real smile."

Her real smile.

Speaking of which, Layfon hasn't ever seen it either.

"Senpai, you...have you seen Felli-Senpai smiling before?"

"No. She already has a fan club, and the people there haven't caught her honestly smiling either. But there are heaps of people who are willing to pay a lot of money for a picture of her smiling."

"Speaking of which, what's in that box?"

Besides Sharnid, there was a box which he could carry over his shoulder.

"That's a telescopic camera which I borrowed from the people in the Newspaper Club."

"You're trying to get pictures too."

"Naturally" said Sharnid confidently, leaving Layfon sighing in resignation.

Just like that, he unconsciously probed the area around him.

"How do I say it, there seems to be a lot of people around here."

"They are the members of the fan club. Damn, they really are quick. If it's like this, even if it's a smile out of professional duty, it'll have to do."

Sharnid anxiously got the camera out of the box and proceeded to get into position. In that position, he looked like a sniper who had already locked onto his target.

"No matter what, I must take a photo of her smiling."

Seeing Sharnid erase his presence completely with his external-type Kei right in front of him, Layfon tilted his head, using internal-type Kei to boost his aural sensory organ, or more commonly known as an ear, and listened for any changes.

With a clang, the dishes that were originally on the tray fell out in front of Felli. The spaghetti bolognese was tipped all over the floor, and the sauce spilt out with it. The empty tray fell onto the floor spinning, going sha-ra sha-ra.

The waitresses who saw this immediately began to apologize successively, and Felli turned her head looking over her shoulder behind her.

Somebody had pushed Felli from behind her, making her lose her balance and drop the meal.

But as she turned her head to look back, there wasn't anyone near her.

(She must have been set up)

The person who pushed Felli from behind vanished just like that, during the instant when Felli's concentration was broken by the fallen dishes.

(Was it on purpose? Who?)

"Hey, aren't you even going to apologize?"

While she was looking for some person who had already vanished, an angry voice cut in. It came from a guest who was on the table beside Felli whose uniform was splattered with oily dots from the sauce.

"You don't even check if you had splattered that on anyone, how the hell are you treating customers?"

The waitress who was holding onto the mop froze in confusion.

That person was wearing a Military Artist's uniform, and the expression on his face was doubtlessly one of fury.

The store suddenly quieted down.

"My most sincere apologies."

Felli lowered her head.

"If you want to apologize, then get rid of this filth on me."

Felli lowered her head, listening to that person's words, and she immediately realized that that person wasn't really angry.

It was all an act.

As she noticed this, Felli immediately checked the feelings on her hips. The sword belt wasn't there. Of course, she didn't have her Dite rod hidden anywhere either. Realizing that she was about to teach that person a lesson, Felli remembered what she was here to do.

(Since she was taking care of a customer, she couldn't do that)

"Hey, say something."

"I'm extremely sorry."

Just like that, she lowered her head and repeated those same words. She couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Aiyayaya, we're very sorry Customer-san."

The store owner spoke in an extremely high pitched voice as if to ward off the awkwardness of the situation and quickly appeared in front of Felli.

"We are very sorry. We'll pay for the cleaning. The dishes will be free as well, so please forgive us."

"I don't want to hear this."

"Eh?! Aiya, then what?"

The customer moved in front of Felli with difficulty as she had been pushed aside by the store manager who was acting as if he were lamenting.

"As soon as I came in here I felt unsatisfied. Everyone is pretentiously doing work in front of the customers and there isn't a single sincere smile here. It really pisses me off."

That was actually a very appropriate statement. However, she didn't lose her calm but instead felt a cutting pain on her skin.

Felli was also very self-conscious about the fact that she couldn't smile properly. When she was practicing with the store owner, she felt that even if she didn't smile very often, she should still be able to do it. She was quite shocked herself.

"I'm extremely sorry."

But, right now, the problem wouldn't just go away after laughing a little. And she couldn't even put on a smiling expression anyway.

Felli just kept her head lowered for the whole time.

"I'm sorry."

In the resting room Felli lowered her head as she apologized to the store owner.

"It's okay~~this kind of thing is pretty common in this business" said the store owner, light-heartedly dismissing the apology with a wave of his hand.

That customer had left after taking the money for cleaning his clothes. Felli was allowed to have a short break, which is why she was in this resting room, which doubled as a change room for the girls that worked here.

Felli stared at the spiraling pattern that spread across the tea cup in the store owner's hand.

"...I really wasn't suited to do things like serving customers."

There wasn't a single time where she revealed her true smile. All she did the whole time was listen to the customers' conversations closely. "In that kind of a situation, what would Karian have done?" thought Felli. He would probably deal with it perfectly. No, her brother would never let the customer get angry in the first place.

But Felli couldn't do it. And she was completely lost on what to do.

"Well...I had thought that dealing with the customers would have been the easiest job, but I hadn't considered suitability for the role."

"Then..."

"But, I don't think you're not suited to the role."

"Eh??"

"You quickly memorized the entire menu and when you deliver the dishes there aren't any excess movements. And it's not like you're completely unable to treat the customer nicely, so there's no way anyone could tell you were a newbie."

She never thought that she would be praised, and Felli started feeling dazed about all this.

"But it's a pity, we still can't increase the number of customers that way."

When he put it like that, for some reason Felli suddenly felt calm again.

"Well, if you went to the other stores, there are probably some waitresses who aren't too friendly either. The issue here isn't whether or not you're suited to the job, this is the customer service business. There aren't any

real qualifications required, and in a job like this, screwing up is part of the business as well."

"Ha...."

"But you're not really getting stressed over this right?" The store owner continued "I've got many military artist friends, and most of the psychokinesists are all people who aren't very good at expressing themselves, right? Even though us commoners don't really understand, but those friends told me, that when the psychokinesists are using their powers, in order to sharpen their senses, they will normally cut off their responses from their physical body."

She kind of understood the meaning behind these words. While using psychokinesists to gather enormous amounts of information, if their bodies reacted to all of the information they received it would waste a large amount of time. So in order to prevent this kind of reaction, the brain limited the amount of information sent to the nervous system in the body.

If that repeated continuously over time, the result would be the same as how Felli was now.

Whether it be shock, anger or grief...and even laughter, all of those emotions are processed within the brain, and thus Felli became an emotionless doll.

"But that's something that must be fixed. In reality, right now, my friend can finally begin to smile again. I think that if you want to express yourself properly, it's definitely not impossible."

"Is...that true?"

"Of course, I guarantee you."

"... The store owner's promise seems somewhat unreliable."

"Hey, that was too far."

"But, I'm extremely grateful to you."

"Ara? What's wrong?"

"I don't know if I've figured out where my goal is. I was just thinking that a person already assigned to the Military Arts department who is unable to read the atmosphere and who regretted it might exist."

The store owner tilted his head, looking at Felli, and Felli felt that the gloomy atmosphere had gotten somewhat more relaxed, and her facial expressions recovered likewise. After bidding the store owner good day, Felli left the resting room.

"...That really scared me," muttered the store owner to himself as he spaced out in the resting room. "Really, that child can smile too. If she practiced a little more, she could do a professional smile as well...ah...but it'll be impossible by this week. And I don't know if that child will still work here after this."

The store owner's inner musings never reached Felli's ears.





"Was that ok?"

A little distance away from the store in a nearby alleyway stood the man from before. He was looking uncomfortably at his surroundings as he flattened out his tie.

"You did it very well," said a girl, wearing a bright pink Café Mira costume. "If a perfect girl with such a noble air to her resigned, Café Mira's customers would definitely be reduced. Even if she doesn't resign, it would take away a lot of her enthusiasm. If we do this another two, three times, then that Onee-san will definitely not be able to take it anymore."

"But is this ok? Isn't that where you work?"

"Yeah, it's fine. I'm starting to get annoyed with that boring shop owner cause of how long I've been here. And I hate how he has us wear these idiotic clothes. If you can do it well, you'll get paid for your acting fees."

This waitress had accepted the bribe of a rival to Café Mira. In today's competitive market, buying people out was perfectly natural, but amidst all that, transactions such as these occur quietly in the background.

This is also something which the Commerce Department was worried might happen.

"Anyway, it's about time to get these clothes off. It wouldn't be good if other people recognized me."

"What? Cause it'll make other people think you enjoy cosplaying?"

At this moment, they heard a new voice.

"So that's how it is, huh? Well, I knew it would be like this anyway..."

"Who is it..."

"Who cares who I am. To appear in a situation like this, I must be a hero of justice, right? Do you understand your position?"

Sharnid stood there, looking like he was blocking the way to the exit of the lane.

"Che. Seventeenth Platoon."

"That's how it is."

Sharnid snickered at the slowly retreating boy.

"What're you doing? What do you want with us?" shouted the waitress.

Sharnid shrugged his shoulders. "Well...if it was just me, it wouldn't really be a problem. But there's someone else who wants to have a little chat with you guys."

"Huh?" After hearing Sharnid's words, the other two finally noticed.

"You should be feeling your backs getting cold about now. I was surprised at how relaxed you guys were, but how do you feel now?"

It was as if there was a gale behind them.

They gingerly turned around, and standing there was...

"....."

Stunned to silence, the two just stood there rigidly like corpses.

Layfon was standing behind them.

Gazing at them, silently.

He wasn't holding anything in his hands, but his dite was clearly hung on his hip-belt for all to see. It felt like he could whip it out in an instant.

"Speaking of which...you guys were talking about some very interesting things. That it wouldn't be good for people who knew you to recognize you. Can you tell us why you would be troubled by that?"

"What...What do you want? It's got nothing to do with you."

"Well... it doesn't have anything to do with us, but..."

There was a very quiet knocking sound. It was the sound of Layfon tapping the Dite with his fingers.

Da... Da... Da... The sounds reverberated through the small alleyway with rhythm.

"Did you know? There's a rule, specifically dealing with duels between Military Artists in the student handbook. Well, if we did this in public, we would break the rule, but if you reject others' challenges, it's a sort of disgrace to a Military Artist. It's not easy to reject another's challenge."

As he said this, Sharnid slowly pulled out the student handbook.

"Let me see, ok? Let's, see... Let's see...If there's to be a duel between Military Artists on school grounds, you must first apply to the student council for permission, and after verification of the two student's identities, the duel is to take place at a specified arena. The weapons must comply with the Academy City's regulations...etc. etc."

He closed the student handbook with a slap.

"So, you'll have to wait until our trump card decides to apply for a duel before this can proceed. If you piss him off, even just a little, then you'll no longer get to speak reason to him. So let me tell him."

Da. Da. Da. The sound was continuing.

Seeing the paling boy, Sharnid continued.

"So, what do you say?"

"W-w-w-wait a sec, I, I'm not really a Military Artist, I've only just worn this uniform for a little while. Duels or whatever, just spare me!"

"Then that makes it very difficult for us. That's obviously against the rules. Then... about the uniform, it's the proof of what kind of student you are, and if there's no valid reason to be wearing another type of uniform then you'll have to receive punishment. It says here."

"It's much better than a duel."

As the male student lamented he took off his Military Artist's uniform and threw it onto the floor.

Da...The sound stopped.

The boy looked relieved as he collapsed in a heap onto the floor.

"Hmm... I guess it's ok like that as well. Then we're done over here, but not quite yet over there, eh?"

"What are you going to do?"

The blanching waitress looked down upon Sharnid with a belittling expression.

"This guy wearing a Military Artist's uniform has absolutely nothing to do with me."

"Woah, acting like you don't know him already?"

"What are you talking about, acting? I obviously don't know him."

"Well, if you want to take this approach it's fine as well. Then how did she drop all those dishes and spill it over a customer's trousers?"

"It was her mistake, I suppose."

It seems she was going to pretend she didn't hear what the other boy had said previously... No, she was insisting that she didn't even speak to the boy.

Of course, Layfon and Sharnid both knew Felli, so you could say they were protecting one of their own people and lying.

"No, that's not such a simple problem."

As he said this, he took out the camera.

"I prepared this baby to catch a Kodak moment, but instead it caught a different moment instead"

"Che..."

"I got the decisive shot. We haven't broken the student rules by doing this...at least we shouldn't have. Anyway, if the Commerce Department catches wind of some bad rumors, it might be pretty difficult to find any jobs in the future."

"....."

Looking at the silent waitress, Sharnid gave Layfon a signal with his eyes, telling him what to do.

But Layfon didn't reply either.

The blood rushing to his head was genuine; him getting pissed off wasn't an act either, but to pressure a girl in a dilemma to make a choice still seemed low.

And it wasn't their place to deal with this girl either.

If he still forced her to make a decision, it would seem a little excessive.

If they were officially questioned, it would actually be Layfon and Sharnid who wouldn't be able to answer.

"...Really, what the hell are you guys doing?"

Hearing a tired, sigh, Layfon and Sharnid's bodies both shivered from the surprise.

"Oh, Felli-Chan. Are you well?"

"Of course. I'm having a wonderful time working at some brilliant store somebody recommended to me."

"Wahh... but isn't that obviously displeasure in your voice?"

"And on top of that, you make someone your money tree?"

As she said this, Felli walked up to Sharnid and pulling the camera off him and took out the memory card in an instant.

"I'm confiscating this."

"That memory card has a huge storage capacity, and it was pretty expensive. Can you return it to me afterwards?"

"Denied."

Hearing this, Sharnid powerlessly lowered his head.

Ignoring Sharnid's reaction, Felli stood in front of the waitress.

"What are you doing?" The girl looked at Felli with contempt and provocation.

Felli brought down her palm with a lot of force.

The sound didn't seem to match with the small alley...or rather, it was a huge noise you would expect to find on busy highways, reverberating in that tiny side street.

"Hmph."

"Ah...."

The sound was so loud it left Layfon and Sharnid stunned for a moment.

"Well, with that, your debt to me has gone away quite easily; I'll just leave you to the store owner and let him deal with you."

Saying that, Felli stared steadily at her and walked past Sharnid, quickly returning to the store.

The four people behind her watched her leave, stunned.



It was already deep into the night.

The shift was over, and Felli came out from the store.

When she looked up, she saw a familiar person standing in front of her.

"You were here."

Layfon stood under a lamppost near the store.

"Yeah, well..."

"...Could it be that you've been waiting here for the whole time?"

"No, even for me that would be too..."

"No willpower?"

"Eeehh?"

As Felli finished speaking, she didn't even stop and left, and Layfon chased after her.

"I'll walk you home."

"Of course you will. You've been waiting for so long, so of course you would."

And just like that, they continued to walk silently. But she still felt conscious about Layfon, who was walking behind her just out of her peripheral vision.

His expression at that time was the exact opposite of that when he was fighting Filth Monsters; it really made people want to sigh. It was like a child throwing a fit... Felli sighed.

"Really, thanks for before."

"No...I'm sorry, I just went ahead and did something unnecessary."

"You were really pissed off, weren't you? I could feel your killing intent from all the way inside the store." At that time, as Felli was repenting on her actions, she had already felt Layfon's killing intent. "Looking at you threatening those two people, you seemed pretty happy to me."

"No, that was all Sharnid-senpai's idea."

"Why were you so angry?"

"That...It seems I really can't bear to see my friends being bullied."

She had guessed it was probably something like this much earlier, and her expectations for any other reasons were disappointing.

"Well...that's just how you are."

"And besides..." As if countering Felli's words, Layfon began to say something. "I also wanted to help senpai...Felli trying out things other than being a psychokinesist."

He whispered this at a barely audible volume to himself, surprising Felli so much that she couldn't catch her breath.

(This person really is...)

She wanted to live a life outside that of a psychokinesist.

Her brother knew that Felli had this dream. Other than him there was only Layfon.

(He really is...He really is...He really is...!)

Nobody else knew; only Layfon. She never even told her captain, Nina, and this man she did tell didn't even understand the meaning behind it. But at that time, she didn't know what kind of expression to put on.

He was cheering for me, worrying about me, it really makes me happy...

But Layfon, who knew of her dream, didn't recognize the deeper meaning to this dream at all, and his slowness really made Felli angry.

Now, how was she going to show both those expressions at once...

(Right now, she was completely lost on what expression to use.)

"Fine, I'm going home!" Felli loudly ended the conversation, and continued on forward and as she confirmed the sounds of Layfon's chasing footsteps. She walked a little bit faster.



Interlude 02

"....."

"What's wrong?"

"Speaking of which, there aren't any Heaven's Blade Successors who use metal whips, are there?"

"I think you should know more about these things than I do."

"I guess I should. Well, including me, there're three people who use swords, and if you exclude Delbone, there's a person using his fists, a long sword, a shield, a gun, a staff, a bow and metal spheres. There isn't anyone who uses metal whips."

"What's the matter, bringing up these things now."

"Well, it's about my captain, Nina-senpai."

"Yeah, I know, you're always talking about this person in your letters, and she seems to be very hardworking."

"Yeah, it was just teaching her some moves. But I've taught her a lot of different moves before..."

"Because Layfon isn't used to teaching others, that person must be having a hard time learning, right?"

"Hmm, maybe it's like that. So that's why, I suddenly thought of a move at that moment. It's a move that couldn't be more suitable for her. But I can't remember where I picked up that move from."

"...You've gotten dementia?"

"Hmm...Maybe it's like that. But as long as I've seen a move once, I can immediately recognize the direction of its Kei flow, so maybe it wasn't a Heaven's Blade successor's move. I should be able to remember a person who used such an elegant move, even if I've only seen him once."

"But to make Layfon so eager to teach her that move, that person must be really talented."

"Yeah, she's really hardworking as well."

"Oh...?"

"Not only that, she's also very frank. I doubt there's anyone else who's as direct as she is. But then again, she's a little bit of a klutz at times."

"You don't have the right to say that about others."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"But I'm a little bit envious. Even though she's clumsy, she's still very straightforward about everything. It really makes me envious."

"Yeah, maybe."

Diamond Passion

To Layfon Alseif, Nina Antalk was someone who held many secrets.

In the Academy City of Zuellni, as a Military Artist elite, she was allowed to enter a platoon as only a 3rd year, making her a very accomplished girl. At the same time, she was a person who was involved with the dilemma Zuellni was facing and was very passionate about doing something for the city.

But where did this passion come from?

He felt that if he went and asked her, he might be able to understand her feelings completely, but then again he might never be able to understand.

"Is it really okay?" Nina asked Layfon in an unsettled manner.

"It's okay."

A completely spiritless Layfon nodded his head.

They were in a training area that was especially reserved for the 17th platoon of Zuellni. Soundproof and shockproof materials were used to isolate this huge space, and in it, stood the Captain of the seventeenth squad, Nina and her platoon member Layfon. Only platoons with the bare minimum of four fighting members, such as the seventeenth squad, felt that the training area was extremely spacious. And in a situation like today when there were only two people, it felt even more spacious.

It was also an unavoidable reality.

Today was a rest day with lessons only before lunch, so most of the platoons had finished training by dusk. Even if the sounds of training came through the neighboring walls, it would be probably be some hardworking individual practicing by himself.

"Is it really okay?" Asked Nina almost naggingly, as she confirmed the sensation of the two restored Dites she held in each of her hands. The whips that she wielded were weapons designed to emphasize offensive capabilities.

"Anytime is fine."

Again, he nodded as if unaware of anything.

"I can't say how this'll turn out."

Facing Layfon's attitude, Nina felt a little annoyed. She felt that she was being underestimated. Considering their strength, that would be understandable as well. The problem was that he wasn't even holding a Dite in his hands, and not only that, he had loosened his sword strap as well while still standing around with a complacent look on his face, which made Nina feel like he had seriously insulted her dignity.

She wouldn't ask him again.

She immediately got her internal-type Kei flowing. Using the internal-type Kei generated from within her to reinforce her entire body, she immediately cut down the distance between herself and Layfon.

Following up on her charge, she brought out her right-hand metal whip.

Nina locked onto Layfon's left shoulder.

Layfon was in the center of her vision as she charged at him, and showing no signs of moving just caught Nina's strike just like that.

The force in that strike was more than enough to rend flesh; to smash bone into little pieces.

Even though the strike was that powerful, it was as if it had fallen upon a steel wall, and her wrist received a jarring impact instead.

"Ugh..."

Even though she didn't let go of the steel whip, Nina was caught completely off guard, and kept her distance from Layfon.

"Do it more seriously."

Layfon turned to face Nina, whose wrist was wracked with pain and spoke to her in a critical manner.

"That attack was nothing like Senpai's usual attacks. You have to attack even more seriously, and make it so that I'm forced to evade it. If you can't do that, then there's no meaning to what I'm going to show you next."

She's had been training with Layfon for a long time now, and it wasn't only after the platoon training sessions, but also with him during their rest days, but she had never seen Layfon like this before.

"What's wrong?"

She didn't ask him like that.

A part of it was because she knew now wasn't the time to ask something like that, but she knew the real reason was her curiosity for what Layfon was going to show her next.

"....."

Nina quietly increased the density of her Internal type Kei. Being able to do this in a blink of an eye was thanks to Layfon's training as well. The unique breathing method she used when using Internal type Kei was also the result of taking Layfon's advice. He told her to keep her breath the same as it normally was, and as a result she managed to master Internal type Kei.

When she first started, she would get exhausted very quickly. It felt like she couldn't properly control the Kei which burned within her, but now she could stabilize her Kei easily.

She could feel her muscles expanding beneath her skin. It wasn't just her muscles, even the bones which held up her body was filling with Kei, making them harder.

Her body was like a spring, coiling up and gathering energy, and then releasing it all.

The target that she had locked on to hadn't changed; it was still the left shoulder.

She brought her arm down in a direct stroke from up high.

She released all her Kei at the moment of impact.

"Wu..."

Again, her wrist sent out a signal of pain as Nina looked at an unperturbed Layfon.

This time Layfon moved. Grabbing Nina's right arm which was targeting his left shoulder, he punched her with the other hand in the stomach. The Kei which he released from his fist caused Nina to be flung against the opposing wall.

Her back rammed into the wall, then Nina fell onto the ground with a crash.

"What the hell's going on..."

Layfon didn't hold back with his strike at all. Nina stood up quickly.

Layfon stood there showing no signs of being injured, completely still.

"Do you understand what I just did?"

"No, other than filling your whole body up with Kei, I have no idea what you did" replied Nina, shaking her head.

It was true; that's all she had figured out from all that.

Her right wrist was aching. It was the evidence that all the power in her strike had been deflected back easily. If she hadn't loosened her grip at the moment of impact, the recoil would probably have been even greater.

Layfon carried the first aid kit over, deftly treating Nina's wrist.

"Ah, I'm sorry."

"...It's ok."

He sprayed her wrist with a cooling mist to ease the pain, then used a bandage to wrap it up and secure it. Nina concentrated her Internal-type Kei near her wrist. Even though she didn't expect any real results, at least it would speed up her recovery.

"What was that you did back there?"

Compared to the pain in her wrist, she cared about that more.

That move was probably what Layfon was going to show Nina.

Even if it was like that, she couldn't understand it at all.

"It didn't feel like striking a person at all, it felt as if I was hitting something very hard."

"That was the Heaven's Blade Successor Reverse's move."

"It was a Heaven's Blade Successor's move?"

The Heaven's Blade Successors of Lance Shelled City Grendan were really powerful Military Artists who could single-handedly take on Filth Monsters.

And standing in front of her, Layfon was also a Heaven's Blade Successor before he came to Zuellni.

"This technique is the only reason Reverse became a Heaven's Blade Successor, and it's no surprise."

"Is it really that powerful of a technique?"

No doubt it was; deflecting Nina's technique so easily.

But relying on just that technique to become a Heaven's Blade Successor seemed a little surprising.

Layfon is very strong.

He warded off two attacks on Zuellni from the Filth Monsters by himself.

But during those battles, Nina was standing aside and watching.

That stunning scene made you forget to breathe.

And the second time, fighting that mature form Filth Monster, Layfon performed moves which were impossible for Nina.

But most importantly of all, when he was facing such a huge existence, he didn't show any signs of fear.

To be able to do all that by himself, that was the definition of strong.

And that's why Nina started harboring thoughts of not being able to do anything by herself...

"Kongoukei...(Diamond Kei)That's what this technique is called. It defends against all attacks and then causes them to rebound; the strongest shield. And then there is the strongest Guan Dao (halberd) wielded by Cauntia, which can cut through anything. This pair's combination attacks have massacred large numbers of Filth monsters."

"...So that's why."

She understood that reasoning. A team, which was made up of two people who had reached a genius level in their offense and defense, would surely be a formidable combination.

But Layfon shook his head as Nina thought of this explanation.

"There's Cauntia who only attacks and completely disregards defense, and there's Reverse, who only defends and never bothers with offense. Think about it carefully, and imagine the situation."

"With that body, she takes on the relentless attacks of the filth monsters with such concentration that she barely blinks. Can you imagine that, Captain?"

Nina didn't reply and was frozen on the spot.

When they were battling the mature form of filth monster, Nina acted as the bait.

At that time the filth beast was coming closer and closer, pressuring her, and Nina was so scared that she couldn't move at all. She thought it was going to be the same as a battle, so she didn't think that there would be any problems. At that time, she never even imagined she might be torn into shreds by those gigantic teeth.

She decided that she would imagine herself in such a situation more often.

What kind of people would be there...

"The basic idea of Kongoukei is to use Internal type Kei to reinforce your body and simultaneously follow the Kei of an attack and reflect it. It's actually very simple in theory. But the hard part is getting the timing right and to always be staring at the opponent with a persistent glare, and to do that you have to have a very strong will. You have to do those two things."

As he said 'To always be staring at the opponent with a persistent glare' she already thought that it was possible for her to master this technique.

But, if it was as he said, then it shouldn't be that easy to learn. After all the training, Nina finally understood this from her experience.



"Owowowow...."

Nina woke up to excruciating pain in her muscles. How long had it been?

Even before, she hadn't ever been like this before.

Now she thought about it, recently every time she had forgotten her restraint and pushed herself too much, she had done something that made her whole body sore with pain.

But self-training alone all the time to the point of being hospitalized ended up as the catalyst for Layfon to start training her, providing Nina with very valuable training sessions.

Ignoring the pain, she sat up with that blank look of having just woken up, adjusting her Kei breathing. This was her latest daily routine she had to go through.

Her ultimate goal was to be able to maintain her Kei breathing even when she was sleeping, but right now, she still couldn't do it.

It wasn't actually to flood her lungs with Kei, but it was to stabilize the flow of Kei coming from her Kei vein in her back...that was called Kei breathing.

As she proceeded with her Kei breathing, she unconsciously looked around her room.

Looking at her bed, her study desk, and her wardrobe, you could immediately tell it was a private room; it was Nina's living space. The toilet, the showers, and the kitchen were all shared.

Nina lived in the girl's dorms.

This was built a few years ago as practice for the Architecture Students for their graduation. The designer had called it a work of art, and you could see this clearly from the outside of the building. It was built in an archaic wooden house style, and on the inside, everywhere you looked you could see carefully designed ornaments. The three shared rooms were also very spacious and luxurious, making people who lived in other apartments and dormitories feel envious.

But the thing was, that place wasn't very popular.

The main reason was that it was too far away from school.

And another reason was the noise pollution.

Originally, the land nearby was prepared for Architecture Students to undergo training, so they would build many different structures, or knock down the older buildings. The reason that the girl's dorm that Nina lived in hadn't been knocked down was that the person who designed this returned

to his home city after graduating and won an award for the design, so they kept this building as a memorial of sorts.

A house without people living in it would quickly fall into disrepair, so they turned it into a so-called girl's dorm and rented it out. But when it got dark, the lack of people felt creepy to many residents, so there were very few people who lived in that dorm.

Because of all the terrible conditions, the rent was low, so Nina decided to live here.

"Hoo..."

Nina had finished adjusting her Kei breathing, and now fully awake, she used her Internal type Kei to ease the pain in her muscles. This level of muscle soreness only needed some sort of Kei to be maintained in the area, and the pain would be gone by around noon.

Internal type Kei, or Katsukei, could be used to reinforce the body and remove fatigue. If in an emergency one fully released all their Internal type Kei and continually reinforced their body, afterward there would be very scary side consequences waiting for the user. Nina had experienced this period of aftershock herself. However, if it was used appropriately, one could achieve accelerated recovery.

Feeling a lot more comfortable, Nina placed a panda plushie that she had been hugging all that time onto the jutting windowsill beside her bed. The plushie had been mended in several places, and gave an overall appearance of being very old and worn.

That plushie was one few things that Nina had brought here from her hometown. It was a present from her grandfather when she was little, and she wouldn't be able to sleep peacefully if she wasn't hugging it.

Wearing a set of light pink pajamas, Nina walked out of her room, going to wash her face.

As soon as she walked into the hallway the mouth-watering smell of melted butter assaulted her.

Nina hurriedly looked at the clock hung on the wall beside the stairs. It was an ancient clock that had to be wound, telling Nina that breakfast was about to start. Nina quickly walked towards the washing basin, washed her face, and then returned to her room to change.

Just as she finished changing...

The clock sounded out with a ring and simultaneously, a voice called out "Breakfast is starting~~~~". At the same time a clanging sound reverberated with the other noises around the dorm at a level far beyond ear splitting.

Put simply, it was the sound of metal hitting metal, but to call it a weapon created solely for pissing people off wasn't excessive at all. No alarm clock in existence could possibly create a sound as annoying as this.

"Woah!"

After a while, she heard the ringing again. Normally, she got up well before the sound went off, but she had overexerted herself in yesterday's training session, so she slept in a little.

Even if she lived this irregular life, the only schedule she strictly followed was her mealtimes. That was one of the rules of the girls dorm.

"I'm up! I'm up already!"

Shouting at the top of her lungs from her room loudly, Nina scrambled out of her room.

The girl beside the stairs was holding a soup spoon and was beating a pan. The noise this made was known as the most effective weapon designed to wake people up in the morning.

"Hehee... Nina you lazy sloth".

As she said this, she stopped hitting the frying pan and pulled out her earplugs.

"Haa...I'm sorry."

Seeing that the noise had stopped, Nina apologized in a relieved manner.

This girl's name was Selina Vin. She was a fourth year Alchemy student, and she was also the dorm manager.

The reason that she was the dorm manager was because of all the people who lived here, she was the only one who could cook. People who could control food were the greatest people in the world, as decreed by the last dorm manager who graduated last year.

"But it's been a long time since I've whacked the frying pan like this, so I'm a little happy." Saying this, Selina went downstairs first.

Nina helplessly chased after her.

All of the people who lived in the dorm were already seated at the table in the dining room.

"Morning, Nina."

"Morning, Leu"

The person who called out to Nina was another person who lived in this dorm, and after replying, Nina also took her place at the table.

Today's breakfast was toast fried in butter and dipped in milk, along with salad and tea.

On a table which could seat ten people, there was only enough food for three.

That is to say, these three people were all of the people who lived in this all girls dorm.

"It's been such a long time since I've heard that sound she uses to wake people up."

"Yeah, sorry about that."

Selina also put on a expression which said 'can't help it' and sighed.

"The others who used to live here have all graduated, so now it really feels a little lonely."

"No, that's not it. Only two people graduated from here" said Nina calmly as she spread honey across the toast.

"But it's because nobody new came to live here."

"Anyway, it's not a problem that has just started. It started ages ago" muttered Leu, staring into the distance.

"Part of it's also because of the way Selina wakes people up; it leaves most of the new people here traumatized and they all leave this dorm."

"But isn't that because it was really hard to wake that girl up?"

Looking at Selina frowning with displeasure, Nina shook her head helplessly.

"Well...even if she wasn't scared away, there would only be four people. In this dorm for ten people there isn't even half that."

At least she had to reassure her first.

"But isn't having only three people manage this huge dorm too much work? We can't clean the empty rooms up properly, and we can't clean up the lawn outside properly... and recently there's been more mice, so don't you guys think it'd be better if we called in some more people?"

"No." Facing Selina who was whining, Leu cut in "I don't think the mice have anything to do with the number of people living here, but there have been some pretty annoying sounds coming from the ceiling."

"...Eh?"

Nina moved her feet under the table slightly, and her toes touched something. It was a something that was quite hard.

"That's why I have a proposal. Ah, you can't reject this proposal. No matter what you say, I'm the dorm manager. Ahem!"

Listening to Selina who had probably puffed up her chest, Nina looked under the table.

"That's why I want to increase the number of people in this dorm."

"...you don't even know how you're going to do that, and we all know we can't just increase the number of people so easily just because we wanted to."

"That'll never happen, yeah?"

"This dorm has a pretty unfortunate environment, so I doubt many students would be willing to come here."

"Hem hem hem~"

Pretending to listen to what Leu and Selina were saying, Nina had put all her attention into looking for the something under the table.

(...What is that thing?)

There was a normal plate placed there.

On the plate, there were the dishes leftover from last night. There wasn't any problem, seeing as plates were made for dishes to be placed on them. There wasn't any problem with that.

The question was, what was a plate doing on the floor? And next to the plate, there was a chipped soup bowl, with some milk inside. Why was this.

"Then, I'll introduce it to everyone."

"Introduce?" Asked Leu in surprise. The talk across the table was still continuing.

"Is there already someone coming to live in our dorm?"

"That's exactly right~~~Steven-chan, welcome~~~"

As Selina held extended her 'welcome' there was a creepy noise.

"Shu~~~"

"...What is this?"

Leu looked at the thing that flew out from under the table with a surprised expression. It must have been ordered to stay under the table until this moment. Under the table, there were many plates with all the leftovers from last night. She obviously heard Selina's introduction, but that was a completely inadequate explanation of the phenomenon in front of her.

"Steven-chan."

"No, that's not what i mean."

"That is something my friend from the Cultivation Department sent me from another city. Originally they bought a squirrel-type egg which was meant to exterminate mice for us, but they made a mistake and they got a pet instead."

"Haha, and you can't return stuff you bought from other cities as well."

"Yeah, but it's a bit too cruel to just throw this thing out, so they looked for people who were willing to keep him."

"Then it's him who's going to live here from now on?"

"Yeah, he's really cute, isn't he?"

"Well, I don't really hate pets. I'm not afraid of them either. But still, if we were going to get a pet, we should have just gotten a guard dog to look after the house."

"Arah, there's no point in keeping a guard dog. We don't have any criminals or delinquents in this area."

"I think the fact that a person like you who has no sense of urgency managed to live peacefully up till today is the real mystery...If it can't catch any mice, then there's no point at all in having it as an extra member of the dorm. He isn't even a person."

"Eh~~~~~? I can't?"

"Well, I guess you can, but have you figured out a solution for his litter?"

"No problem."

"Really. Then it's up to Nina then? Is it ok?"

As for Selina's question, Nina couldn't answer it.

She was drenched in cold sweat, and it wasn't stopping.

Below her feet, there was a terrifying creature.

It was a creature she could grab with one hand, eating the leftovers in the dish like a wild beast. It looked like it was pretty hungry.

Aah, it's slender body gave out a feeling of immaturity.

It had grown long claws in order to run around the ground more easily.

In its mouth, there were small, sharp teeth tearing at the leftover food.

...It was a ferret.

"Aaah! Waaah!!!!"

"Nina?"

That creature lifted its head and licked its mouth, its front legs rubbing its face before it stood up, looking about at its surroundings.



Looking at Nina.

Those glossy, round eyes were filled with curiosity.

"Shu~"

It was a very weak sound.

"Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Nina let out a deafening cry and jumped onto the table.

"Ni-Nina?"

"What's wrong?"

The two of them stared stunned at Nina, who was shaking on the table.

The ferret was frightened by Nina's cry and hugged Selina's leg, hiding behind it.

"...Nina, do you hate animals?"

"...No, it's only those that I can't stand"

"Arah..."

Seeing Nina holding her head and shrinking away, the two looked at each other.

In the end, they took Steven the ferret back to Selina's room and continued their breakfast.

"Though I never thought that Nina would be afraid of ferrets."

"It's pretty surprising."

"...If you two want to laugh, then laugh."

Seeing her shoulders still quivering slightly, the two couldn't help not laughing but didn't make a noise, and Nina just sat there pretending to calmly eat breakfast. But her veins near her temples were still throbbing.

"But why is it that you're only afraid of ferrets? I mean, in the inter-city matches, you've met far scarier people than that little creature."

"Is it a physiological reason?"

In response to Leu's question, Nina said definitely "It was that thing's fault in the first place."

"It's fault...Nina, what exactly did the ferret do?"

"Aah, just thinking about it scares me. It was when I was five. Because my uncle loved animals, he kept a lot of pets and livestock at his house. At that time, I often went to that uncle's house to play..."

"Uhh...if it's like that, why are you afraid of ferrets?"

"On my fifth birthday, everyone in my extended family came to wish me a happy birthday. My uncle also came. He told me there was a surprise waiting for me in my bedroom. Even though I wanted to see what it was immediately, he told me to wait until the birthday party was over. So I had no choice but to be patient and wait."

Nina shivered as she recalled it.

"Well...what happened?"

"Yeah, what next?"

"My uncle prepared a ferret for me. Originally, it was meant to be safely housed inside its cage, I don't know if it had something to do with the metal lock being broken, but somehow that ferret got out of its cage."

"So that's why you're afraid of ferrets?"

"If would be great if that were all. That thing ... my precious plushie..."

"Plushie? You mean the one in your room?"

"Yeah. It was chewing my precious Mitessha with tearing noises."

Recalling the scene, Nina continued to quiver.

What the young Nina saw when she returned to her room was an evil monster using its vicious teeth and tearing a hole in Mitessha's stomach and was pulling out the cotton stuffing within into long thin strands.

"Aiya."

"To me, Mitessha isn't just a precious plushie I got from my grandfather. It's a precious friend who keeps me company through the night. Even though it was so important, that thing... that thing..."

With her mother's help, Mitessha was restored to his former glory, but on his body there was an irrevocable scar.

From then on, every time she saw a ferret, she would remember what happened back then and she would be so terrified that she would start shaking.

"Then, can't I keep him?"

After breakfast, the three of them were drinking tea together.

"Wuu..."

Looking at a very sad Selina, Nina was speechless.

"Nina, that's a trick she uses all the time" reminded Leu quietly.

She knew this as well. As soon as Selina was in a situation that was disadvantageous to her, she would put on a childlike appearance. It was her solution to everything.

Even though Nina knew this...

"I can't...?"

"Wuu..."

She couldn't do anything against this expression of Selina's. And her everyday meals were always made by this person who they always wanted to thank. When it came to any of her requests, they always felt that it was hard to deny her.

(No, quickly remember, Nina Antalk. Selina wants to keep a ferret. That horrific beast. Have you forgotten Mitessha's tragedy?)

Nina continually shook her head, reminding herself in her heart.

Okay, I'm going to refuse...as she thought this, she looked up at Selina.

"If that child doesn't find an owner he's going to be disposed. He's very pitiful...am I still not allowed to keep him?"

It was completely unfair to be saying this sort of thing with an expression as if she were going to cry.

"Okay, okay...I understand."

As she said this in a tiny voice, Leu who was sitting beside her quietly said "Idiot."

"Really? Really? Thank you so much!"

"On one condition! Quickly tell him to never get close to me!"

"Okay, I got it."

Seeing Selina happily make her promise, Nina showed a trace of glumness.



Noon that day.

Layfon was startled to see a languished Nina come into the training area.

Could it be because of yesterday's training? Aware of the possibility, Layfon was worried. Nina showed an exhausted smile and shook her head.

"It has nothing to do with yesterday's training. It's just, this morning...it was like that."

In response to a vague reply like that, Layfon cast a confounded look over to Nina, but she didn't attempt to explain it any further.

"Let's just train for now. What are we doing today? Are we continuing what we did yesterday?"

Nina thought that she would need that kind of strong defense.

"Today we're doing basic training."

"Why? I want to get the essentials of that move."

"I think you've already got the basics of that move. I said it yesterday too, Kongoukei is a very simple Kei technique. If you just memorize the technique, you'll be able to do it very quickly. But to use it correctly is a different thing."

"That's why we have to..."

"That's why, just by memorizing you cannot understand the true nature of Kongoukei" asserted Layfon, and Nina closed her mouth.

"Concentration isn't something which will be easily trained, and if you want to be able to bring out Kongoukei's original use, raising your basic abilities is very important. And if your foundations are very strong, then your overall abilities will be raised as well. No matter how you look at it, isn't it very good?"

As he said this, Layfon walked towards one side of the room, and started to prepare for training.

Nina watched Layfon's back quietly.

Layfon seemed even further from Nina. Nina only saw the platoon match before her...and a bit further away, the inter-city battle.

But Layfon looked even further, thinking of doing battle with filth monsters.

This was the original purpose of Military Artists, right? She knew that it was the Military Artist's job to fight the filth monsters that attacked the city.

But the inter-city battles with other Academy cities... the battle with other Military Artists from other cities was unavoidable.

"Then, what am I supposed to do about that area...Waah!"

Halfway in her sentence, Nina fell backwards to the floor, and frowned.

On the ground, many balls the size of fists rolled around. These were things that Nina had bought with the platoon's budget according to Layfon's request.

"But that sort of thing is perfectly normal for Military Artists."

The two were practicing their stances on top of the rolling balls.

As they practiced the basics of being aware of Kei within their weapons, they had to be careful of the balls they were stepping on and insert Kei into the balls to stop them from rolling. If it was just standing on the balls, even Nina could do it as she was right now. But to do it as she was practicing her stances was very hard. As she continued to step on the balls and adjust her stances, she had to use her nerves to adjust the direction of the Kei flow.

"Indeed, battling with filth monsters is different from fighting other military artists, but the only difference is the fighting methods, as the essence of the Kei technique hasn't changed."

Nina moved about slowly, while Layfon leisurely stepped between poses. The balls he stepped on didn't move at all. Seeing this, Nina realized just how great the gap between herself and Layfon was.



"Let's just use Kongoukei as an example. You don't know how strong your opponent's attack will be. You don't know how much power you need to defend against the attack. For argument's sake, you don't even know who your opponent is. Even with your standards now, you might still run into some trouble. But in order to get the greatest result, isn't it better to be working hard for that? You'll never waste hard work. "

"...Speaking of which, are you practicing properly right now?"

"I am, wouldn't you say that I am doing training very seriously?"

"You're actually holding back to coordinate with me, right?"

"I haven't actually thought about that..."

Being asked that question all of a sudden by Nina, Layfon scratched his face uneasily.

"Well, I certainly wouldn't do this in individual training, and this place isn't a specialized facility, so I can't do it properly, so doing this seems a lot more appropriate" said Layfon, balancing on a ball with a single leg.

Seeing this change, Nina observed Layfon's feet.

Thick Kei rotated around Layfon in a whirl.

The first thing that Layfon had taught Nina was how to observe an opponent's Kei. As she observes the movements of the body, she also has to capture the flow of her opponent's Kei. If she did that, before her opponent used any moves she would be able to detect any changes in the flow of his Kei.

She could nearly...do it. But she didn't understand it. If she could see the flow of the Kei, then as her opponent used any techniques she would also be able to see the change in the flow.

Even though she understood this, that's all she could do. If she reproduced the flow of Kei, in theory she could use the same technique, but she couldn't do it in reality.

(Ah...it's true.)

Layfon was full of unbelievable aspects to him. Geniuses were hard to understand in the first place. And Nina herself was a rare student who was made a platoon member as a first year, so many people around her might

think she was a genius as well, but she wanted to deny it. She didn't actually think that she was a genius, all she did was work harder than people expected her to. Even though she always felt that no matter how much she did she was always short of something, she still kept on working hard.

Layfon easily reached a level she could never reach no matter how hard she worked.

Even if that was the case, when people praised him, he accepted it unenthusiastically. He thought that it was something that was perfectly normal. He was a little proud.

After Layfon had taught her the basics to Kei, she felt it even more. Layfon was filled with an even greater aura that made everything he did seem perfectly natural for everyone else. Of course he would be like that.

Of course, he could do it all.

He never thought that he wouldn't be able to achieve anything.

If someone did point out a problem, he wouldn't accept it, as if he lost to someone else.

Perhaps Layfon was also aware that things that he told others to do were a little difficult for them. That's what Nina felt. She couldn't complete the exercises Layfon had set for her, but she wouldn't feel impatient; she wouldn't start yelling curses at herself.

Even though he was proud, he wasn't indifferent.

(Ah, it really is...)

Nina mumbled again to herself in her heart, and then she renewed her training with the stances.

He was a hopeless genius,

hopelessly proud,

and hopelessly gentle.

When that bit of gentleness wasn't seen in his Military Arts, his whole being would seem completely unreliable, but when he did show it, it made one's chest feel tight just like that.

That sort of change was completely unbelievable, it seemed difficult to accept.

(Why...is it like this...)

Inadvertently thinking of this, Nina shook her head trying to chase the thought out of her head.

Now wasn't the time to be thinking about those things.

Why did Layfon make others think like this...it really is unbelievable, and

(It really does make people angry.)

I guess I'll try and see...thought Nina. No matter what, she wanted to try it out. No matter what it was that she could learn from him, she would try and learn it.

In order for her to protect this city, she had to turn his power into her own.

"Shu~~"

Remembering the cries of the evil beast, Nina was so terrified she nearly lost it.

"Ah, Nina."



After leaving the training area, Nina and Layfon walked towards the nearby shopping street. They had agreed earlier that they would go to a Military Arts specialist store and have a look around. They needed to resupply on the anti-slip perishables, as well as look at some other methods of training.

They were nearly at the large store when she was stopped by a call from Selina.

And then, there was that evil monster's cry.

"Wh-Why did you bring that to this kind of place?"

Nina protested with an expression of terror. The Devil's spawn named Steven was running around Selina in circles.

"Because I need to buy a leash for this child when we go out for walks, and I have to buy some other things that he needs" replied Selina awkwardly as she stood in front of a pet store.

"But in comparison...Nina, you..."

Selina smiled at Nina teasingly.

"Nina, you guys are getting pretty heated up over there, right?"

As she said this, Nina finally realized the situation that she was in.

"That..."

Layfon's awkward face was just in front of her.

"...Eh? Eh? Waa Waaaa!"

Noticing that she was tightly holding onto Layfon, she suddenly let go with a shriek. Her cheeks were burning hot. She knew that right now her face was probably beet red.

"No need to be shy."

"It's totally not what you think!"

Even as she said that with a red face, Selina pretended not to hear.

"Ah, Nina, I'm going to take Steven for a walk, so I'll leave these things for you to take home."

She forced the large paper bags she was holding onto Nina, and then leading Steven along she walked away.

"When we get back, I'm going to tell you all about what Steven did today."

"Wait..."

Eh, we have to buy things as well...Even though she wanted to say this, she knew that Selina wouldn't listen to what others say, and she was also slightly afraid of Steven, so she was unable to put up a more demanding front.

"...Do you hate animals?"

Layfon asked Nina as her extended hand dropped powerlessly to her side.

"It's not like that."

Looking at Selina's gradually shrinking shadow, her shoulders dropped powerlessly as well. Other than shake her head in helplessly, Nina couldn't do anything.

As a result, they had so many things that she was forced to ask for Layfon's help to carry it. No, it wasn't that Nina bought a lot of things, but it was Selina who actually bought too much.

"She didn't think of the consequences at all, geez."

Nina complained quietly, walking towards her dorm.

Even though this sort of thing happened, she still felt a little annoyed.

Today was really way to strange. She felt like she couldn't control her mood properly.

Layfon followed silently behind her. Layfon was holding what Selina bought for Steven. They didn't know what was inside, but it was surprising that to keep Steven that she would need such a large thing.

Layfon noticed where Nina was looking, she was looking his way. The thing wasn't really heavy for a Military Artist, but it was still pretty big. Before she had seen through the thin gap in the paper bag, Layfon looked over and she turned around immediately.

After they arrived at the dorm, she placed the stuff they bought in the kitchen while Layfon sat in the drawing room waiting. Nina returned to her own room.

As she changed into her casual clothes, she thought about making some tea for Layfon. The snacks Selina had baked a couple of days ago still had many left over.

As she was changing, she couldn't help it and she started humming. She looked beside her bed.

Her bed was placed beside the wall, and next to it there was a windowsill. On the windowsill, Nina had left some miscellaneous items she had as a girl there as a decoration.

In the middle, there was something that felt different from normal. It was a blank, white space, there was a strange feeling.

"...Why?"

She stopped humming.

Something that was meant to be there was gone. She realized instantly that something was gone, that she was missing something. Thinking this... She calmly organized her memories again, and she looked around her room with a tense expression.

It really was gone.

Mitessha was gone.

Nina was feeling slightly dizzy, and she held onto the side of her desk to stop herself from falling over.

"Why...?"

Still carrying a feeling of uncertainty, Nina put on a serious expression as she went through her memories again.

This morning, her day had been completely messed up by that devil Steven, but before that, as Nina woke up she had placed Mitessha in his special place.

After that...What happened after that. Even though she wasn't too sure, but she couldn't remember moving Mitessha. She still remembered that to escape Steven she ran out of the room and quickly changed and left the dorm.

What did she do at that time? No, Mitessha should still be in the same spot.

She couldn't answer that question with her memories.

Which meant that something happened when Nina wasn't in the room. It was impossible for her to have moved Mitessha, so something or someone had moved her poor panda plushie.

As Nina was thinking about this, there was a light knocking sound at the door.

"Umm... senpai?"

On the other side of the door, was Layfon's voice. Right now Nina didn't have any time to spare to worry about Layfon.

"Ahhhh...I really am an idiot."

Making a cold sound that surprised even herself, Nina looked up. Layfon had opened the door and was looking over at her with surprise.

"Poor Mitessha, I just left him there and went out, I bet he hates me now."

"That...senpai?"

She understood that Layfon was calling to her, but if she didn't get her conclusion of her chest, she couldn't calm down.

"I really am an idiot. At that time, how horrified must he have been, as he saw his own death nearing. Even if it was like that, I still fell to my own fear, and left him behind and ran away myself. It's perfectly normal for me to be hated now."

"Senpai? Hello?"

"Mitessha couldn't move, so he lost his life and departed. I have to do everything in my power. If I don't correct my mistakes...yes, if I don't do that then..."

"Senpai? Please return to earth now..."

As he said this, Layfon gradually got further away from Nina. Nina was probably blaming herself for not taking responsibility.

"But Mitessha hasn't returned, has he?"

"Who is this Mitessha you're talking about?"

"I have to do it."

"Do what?"

Letting out a miserable cry, Nina had already lost all signs of answering Layfon.

"I'm home~"

A completely carefree voice came from downstairs.

It was Selina

That means, if Salina was here, that was here as well.

"Coming."

As Nina muttered to herself, she pushed Layfon out of the way and ran towards the front door.

"Wuu...isn't anyone home?"

At the front door, Selina was carrying Steven who was testing his claws and looking around the room. There was nobody on the first floor.

"And I thought Nina had come back."

Selina had already forgotten that Nina was afraid of Steven.

No, she actually thought that because of how cute the little thing was, that they definitely could make it up to each other and have a good relationship.

Selina thought of this as she heard footsteps upstairs.

"Ah, Nina thanks for carrying..."

Smiling like always, Selina was waving at Nina, then she froze.

Nina walked out with a scary expression on her face.

For some reason she was holding a pair of restored Dites...Metal whips.

"Nina...?"



While she was still mumbling to herself, stunned, Nina had already walked over in front of her.

She didn't have time to be afraid. She stood up immediately, but as soon as she did, she got knocked over by a strong blast of wind.

"What are you doing?"

This time the person crying out was Layfon.

Why are you getting in my way?

Nina's eyes were shining fiercely.

Using his sword, he pushed back the metal whips, Layfon's back shaking slightly.

Nina's whole body was overflowing with Kei. Like a broken pipe. Even her breathing was mingled with Kei, as if she was fighting some monstrous being from a nightmare.

"Saying that I'm in your way..."

Layfon was shaking slightly as he replied.

"If I don't do this, Mitessha won't return."

"So that's why I'm asking, who is he?"

"Shut up!"

Nina roared as she rushed and pushed Layfon out of the way getting closer to Selina yet again.

The target was the ferret Selina was holding on to.

"I'm going to take you down! I'm going to take back Mitessha!"

"Ah, I can't take it anymore."

Layfon went and whacked Nina's completely open back. He wanted to knock her out with that blow, so he adjusted his power accordingly. Nina was sent flying by this Kei-filled attack and she landed outside in the front garden.

Seeing Nina down, Layfon frowned. A Military Artist should be fine after that, but being forced to hit his senpai left a bad aftertaste in his mouth.

"What's wrong...?"

Asked Selina who stood there stunned, staring at the fallen Nina. The ferret she was holding in her arms was fidgeting a lot.

"I don't know what's going on either...what's Mitessha?"

"Eh? Mitessha? Mitessha is..."

Just as Selina is about to answer, Layfon felt a killing intent bubbling out from Nina.

"Is it..."

It really is.

"Mwahahahaha..."

Nina, who was supposed to be knocked out, stood up again and she was still releasing Kei like before.

"I'm sure I hit you with my Kei."

Why...as he was thinking, Layfon realized something.

"...Kongoukei?"

Is it? Successful? At this sort of time? In these circumstances?

"Mwahahahaha..."

"Eh~ No way!"

Facing Nina who was releasing a bestial killing intent and slowly closing in, Layfon felt somewhat powerless instead of nervous. How to say it, he wasn't exactly happy with the fact that Nina had grasped a technique he had taught her. Layfon had also experienced times where he couldn't use a technique but suddenly used it under pressure, but never in a situation like this.

"Return him."

Nina spoke in a human language, her two eyes drilling into the ferret.

"Ah."

Steven leaped out of Selina's arms.

"Trying to run!"

Nina started to run chasing after Steven who escaped from the front door into the front yard.

"Ah, ah...could it be...wai-wait!"

Looking like she suddenly remembered something, Selina went to chase after Nina and the ferret whose traces had since disappeared.

"I am going to take back Mitessha!"

"That's why I'm asking who the hell is he?"

There weren't many people about at dusk so Nina and Layfon's shouts reverberated in the air.

As the sun began to set Leu returned from the library, saw the front door wide open, and scowled.

"They really make people worry."

Leu went into the dorm shouting, "be a bit more careful next time" but nobody replied.

Such a worrisome thing as this must have been caused by Selina. She probably got carried away since Nina agreed to let her keep the ferret. If she didn't remind her properly...As she grumbled away to herself he walked up to her room.

"That's right..."

Remembering something, Leu went downstairs, into the drawing room. Both their common room and their drawing room were filled with piles of magazines the three bought.

Leu picked up the plushie which was placed in the corner of the sofa.

"If I don't put you back, Nina's probably going to go crazy."

Saying this to the panda plushie, she walked upstairs.

After Nina left, Selina and Leu wanted to see if Steven could actually catch mice, and placed him up in a place where there might be a nest in the ceiling. Even though he was surprisingly successful, Steven was treating catching mice like a game. With the ferret showing off his live catches to

Leu in a self-satisfied manner, Leu could only sigh in resignation. Well, he did manage to catch the mice. Selina also said happily "Like this, I'm sure Nina will accept Steven now." But what would the final result be?

Well, why was Mitessha in the drawing room?

As they were looking for a way to get up into the ceiling from the second floor, they found that they could only go up to the ceiling from Nina's room. Even though Selina had the master key to all the rooms in the dorm, but she was still a bit guilty about just going into someone else's room. And she was going to bring a ferret which Nina hated into her room. Remembering Mitessha, and Nina's tragic past, they didn't want to put Mitessha with the ferret even for a second. That's why, Leu placed Mitessha into the drawing room with good intentions. But she ended up forgetting him there.

"But where did those guys disappear to?"

For some reason, the door to Nina's room was wide open, and placing Mitessha back into the room, Leu could only respond to her stomach's complaint with a sigh.

"Ahahahahah, what's wrong Layfon?"

"Ah! I can't take it anymore! Why did I have to teach you this move!"

As he fought Nina with his sword in the air, Layfon complained with remorse.

"Nina~~Listen to me~~" said Selina on the verge of tears.

By the time her words reached Nina's ears, it was because Nina was down on the ground with fatigue from using too much Kei, and night had long fallen.

From then on, whenever Steven saw Nina he would escape at lightning speed. Speaking objectively, this was a very strange occurrence.

Interlude 03

"Speaking of which, there are normally a lot of people who take care of us."

"Huh? Oh, you mean Meishen and them, right?"

"Yeah, what kind of people are they?"

"The three of them seem like childhood friends. They were all born in the transport city...You've been there too right?"

"Oh, yes. But I stayed for just under three days."

"Yeah, and the lodging facilities are the best."

"That's right."

"Still, what kind of people are they?"

"You might have already seen Naruki because she's in one of the platoons."

"That person with the tanned skin?"

"Yeah, that's her. She's also part of the City Police. Mifi is a very open girl, and she works at the journalism department. As for Meishen, even though I know her pretty well..." he sighed, "Well, cooking. If it's one thing I've to say about her cooking, it's her dessert. She's very good at making sweets."

"Oh? Then all your desserts and snacks were made by her?"

"Yeah, but it's just that I don't really like eating sweets."

"Same. I don't eat too much stuff with a lot of sugar in it. But you're licking a lollipop right now."

"But still, I need my sugar."

"Yeah, yeah. Father used to say that if two people licked a lollipop at the same time it would bring about hatred."

"Why would he say that..."

"Then, do you refuse to eat her sweets?"

"No, sometimes I eat them as well. I'm eating a controlled amount of sugar."

"Huh?"

"Meishen is a really nice person, and when I was really busy she made me bento for lunch."

"...Wait for me!"

Innocence Wander

The bell that signaled the end of classes was also a signal for the start of yet another battle. The start of the lunch break was also the starting pistol of the race between military artists for lunch. The ordinary students who didn't want to go to the cafeteria could easily buy lunch by asking students in the Military Arts department to buy it for them. Thus, the military artists charged out of the classroom simultaneously as the classes ended, flying towards the canteen. Occasionally even the older students who were teaching those classes would also join the fray, so naturally nobody tried to stop them. Of course, if public property was damaged, or if people started fighting and were caught by the city guards they would be punished. Having nothing to do with that storm-like event, Layfon leisurely walked to the nearest park. Inside the park there was a small pavilion with a table, and it was a very suitable place for lunch.

".....Is there anything special going on today?" Layfon stared at the food on the table. Although he already thought the bento he was carrying in the basket today was excessively large, he never thought that what it contained was also incredibly luxurious, and the effort put into making it was different from normal as well.

".....It's not like that" quietly replied Meishen as she lowered her head, blushing.

"Hey, as long as I can eat great food it's all good."

"Ok..."

Although Naruki and Mifi were with Meishen all the time, they didn't know why Meishen put in so much effort today.

For some reason, Meishen seemed a little strange today.

But right now the atmosphere made it seem hardly appropriate to ask "what's wrong", so Layfon began to eat silently.



"Heaven's Blade Successor"

Recently, this phrase had continually appeared in Meishen's mind. She knew that it was a phrase whose meaning represented something superior. That was why she was so concerned with it. To a passerby who had no idea of what was going on, the easiest solution would be to ask the person directly. But no matter what she did, Meishen couldn't bring herself to ask Layfon. That was because it was a phrase that appeared in a letter privately addressed to Layfon. That letter was accidentally placed together with other letters for Meishen, which explained why she had it. Although she immediately realized that this letter was delivered to the wrong place, why did it have to be delivered to her mailbox? ... Meishen thought silently, resenting this fact. Of course, Meishen couldn't just go and ask Layfon about a word appearing in a letter addressed to him that she couldn't have ever heard of or seen before. Moreover, Meishen hadn't apologized to Layfon for peeking at the letter and had completely missed the best chance to ask him about it. And who was the person who wrote the letter to Layfon, a girl named Leerin? Although she wanted to find out, it was difficult for Meishen to open her mouth and ask. She was afraid of asking. The only thing that was clear was that this girl named Leerin knew the Layfon from before Zuellni very well.

Without knowing why, Meishen felt very discontent.

"Have you heard of the phrase 'Heaven's Blade Successor'?" Instead, Meishen decided to ask the people who were beside her in the dormitory's shared kitchen. In order to live together in the student dormitory, Meishen, Naruki and Mifi shared this 3 bedroom and 1 dining room dorm. Because they had been best friends since childhood, they were comfortable with each other. Meishen really liked this sense of spaciousness in the kitchen.

"Heaven's Blade Successor?" Mifi was stuffing her face with Meishen's cake as she tilted her head asking, "What's that?"

"I think it's a phrase referring to a Military Artist....." said Meishen without much confidence. She then imitated Mifi and together they began to stare silently at Naruki. Layfon was a Military Artist, so this phrase must be specifically referring to something about them. Naruki, who was also a Military Artist, was the most likely out of them to know what the term meant.

"Heaven's Blade.....I haven't heard of it before."

Seeing Naruki shaking her head, Meishen lowered her head in disappointment. However, Naruki seemed to have remembered something.

"A person who received the Heaven's Blade...right? It really is a pretentious name but at least it isn't as absurd as the Joeldem's Knights of the Crossroad. Well, every City has its own customs when referring to military artists, so I think Heaven's Blade something is just another nickname for them."

Mifi nodded her head in agreement.

"Oh yeah, if we went to the library and researched the phrase in the Database of Cities I'm sure we'll understand what it is. So, where did this phrase originate from?"

"Ah.....That's...."

"Well, the only one that could catch your interest would be that one."

"Yeah, and plus the phrase is about Military Artists."

"Ah, that's ... that's not it."

"There really is only one, we can't be wrong."

"Well, ah ~~ let's go to the library tomorrow."

"Yeah, I was going to go there for work anyway to interview all the people in each Platoon and I wanted to research some topics about Cities that could become articles."

"Oh, it sounds interesting."

"Then do you want to go to the library together?"

"If there is time."

"Mi-chan is a bit of a workaholic."

Looking at the two people who had made a decision on their own and ignored her, Meishen sighed in silence as their conversation drifted further and further away from their original discussion.

The next day, after lessons had ended, the three took the monorail to the library. After showing their student ID's at the reception area, they entered the library. They sat down at the designated window, and the computer terminal booted up immediately. All the information in the academy city was relayed across organized lanes like fast moving traffic. After all of that

information is entered into the library centre, students are able to search for information at a library terminal, and can also download data that they need onto USB drives. Although they also kept physical books, the majority of them took the form of data that Zuellni published.

"Then let me search for information on Grendan." Mifi typed the keyboard with practiced ease. Lance Shelled Regios Grendan was Layfon's home city, and was strong in military arts. Many powerful individuals were born in Grendan's many training grounds. There was a reason for Grendan's fame among other Cities, and this was the Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang. This gang travelled from city to city via free roaming buses, hired by cities to fight against Filth Monsters or to participate in battles. The number of Filth monsters slain by their hands was innumerable, and in many victorious battles they had made a major contribution. Moreover, they taught the cities fighting skills and battle tactics. The Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang was made up of an overwhelming number of Military Artists from Grendan. Originally, Grendan was just another autonomous City, but its reputation for fierce fighters made it well known across the globe. Therefore, almost all the citizens of Cities knew of the word "Grendan". They had all heard of that city which produced large amounts of military fighters, yet any other details about Grendan were unclear to them. That's why it could be possible for Joeldem, Zuellni and Grendan to have completely different customs and for Meishen to have no way of knowing. The phrase "Heaven's Blade Successor" she obviously didn't know either. "How's it going?" asked Meishen as Mifi stared at the screen, humming.

"I still haven't found it."

"Really?" Naruki, who was standing behind them, leaned over for a closer look.

"There are no matches in Grendan's dictionary, and after searching I didn't find any related content at all."

"Then what about places other than Grendan?"

"I thought about this too, so I tried it as well, but there were no results either."

"Sigh~~"

"Naruki scratched her head, thinking."

"How about asking Layfon himself?"

".....That, that's..."

"We can't? I think that's the easiest way to find out."

"Um... It's best if we don't. "

Although Meishen was a shy girl who didn't talk to others very much, it was rare for her to keep her best friends Naruki and Mifi in the dark. Meishen was concealing the truth from her friends, yet at the same time she had to rely on those friends whom she was hiding things from, and this made her feel terrible. She was on the verge of tears.

"Well, if that's the case, then we can only try and find out from other Military Artists. We are going to the Military Arts department for the interviews anyway, so why don't you come along?"

Although their search was futile, Mifi's face didn't show the slightest sign of discouragement. For Mifi, not being able to find information was something that happened regularly.

"...Well" Since Meishen knew Mifi was trying to help, she just silently nodded.



After classes on the next day, the three friends began their journey towards the Military Arts department. The moment Meishen stepped into the entrance, a painful memory surfaced in her mind and she stopped moving.

"Eh? What's wrong?"

"... Nothing." Shaking her head, Meishen recalled the time when she stood here agonizing over whether or not she should give Layfon the letter that was accidentally sent to her. If she hadn't met Felli here, what might have happened...? She still wouldn't have had the confidence to give it back to him as if nothing had happened. Anyway, recently she had been incessantly gloomy about the contents of the letter. Meishen felt that the consequences of her mistakes have begun to get out of hand.

"Let's go." Naruki held out her hand to an anguished Meishen.

"Even though I don't know exactly what you are thinking about, if you want to find out, we have to get moving. Just like how you decided to work at the bakery store before. " Naruki held out her hand sincerely, and that look in her eyes reflected the same warmth and sincerity.

"...Ok." Quietly nodding, Meishen grasped the offered hand.

"We have to interview four Platoons today, and the first is the 1st Platoon."

Although the Military Artists' grounds seemed very large from the outside, it was in reality divided up by various screens into a multitude of small areas on the inside. The streets were very narrow and some seemed like they were squashed in a gap between buildings. Meishen and her friends lost their way several times before finally arriving at their destination.

"Hello everyone," Mifi said. Meishen became nervous when she felt Mifi's voice penetrate the soundproof walls that divided the area. The walls vibrated at her voice.

As soon as the door was open, sound waves even louder than before hit Meishen's eardrums. This noise subsided with Mifi's continued greeting. The sudden silence frightened Meishen and she gradually edged her body behind Naruki. Meishen thought that her weakness was lamentable but Mifi stood there without wavering in the slightest.

"I'm a reporter from the Weekly Look'n Magazine here for the interview, first year General Arts Student Mifi Rotten and these are my friends."

"Yeah, I've heard." Taking a towel from a woman who seemed to be supervising, the tall student wiped his sweat and made his way over. He was the commander of the first Platoon, Vance Haldi. As he stroked his beard his penetrating gaze examined Meishen and her friends.

"Let's go to the lounge outside for the interview; you guys, continue training," he directed the second half of his sentence to the platoon members. After they replied in unison, the platoon members continued with their training. Meishen and the others followed this tall man who exuded dignity completely unlike any other student into the lounge room.

"I have read some of Weekly Lookn's reports."

Reddish bronze skin, two wriggling silkworm eyebrows, his clearly delineated face and his sloppy beard... it seemed like he embodied both

good and evil with his outward appearance, although it didn't seem like he was an evil person.

"But, I felt that the content of some of the reports encouraged gambling."

That's because Vance had the role of representing all of the students in the Military Arts department. He was the head of Military Arts.

"Ahahaha! There is nothing like that. "

"The journalist's name was different from yours, so it couldn't have been you. Well, you should pass on what I just said to your superiors."

"Ok."

Just like that, under intense scrutiny even the brave Mifi couldn't help but cringe a little.

"Oh, then I'll begin the interview. The inter-platoon matches have gone on for nearly half a year. Up to now, how do you feel about them?"

"How do I feel about what?"

"For example, how you felt about some of the more difficult opponents, or if the 1st Platoon is currently in its peak condition, or things like that..."

"Platoon matches are just sideshows; the key problem is the formal inter-city battles that we have afterwards."

"Really? Okay then, how do good do you think your platoon is?"

"We can't assert that we have already reached our limits and achieved peak condition but we can only try to improve ourselves as much as we can in the limited time that we have."

"Hehe, it really is tough. Then how do you see the other platoons, and are there any platoons that seem strong to you?"

"Mmm... They all have their strengths and weaknesses. The third platoon's average strength is very strong yet they have few other skills. My first platoon is the same. The fifth and sixteenth platoons are suited for surprise attacks, but if the opponent realizes their plan before it can be executed it's all over for them. The important thing is to see through the opponents' plan and what has currently appeared....."

"The fifth, tenth, and seventeenth platoons are the ones which have won multiple times."

"The tenth eh? Last year in the inter-platoon match they had impressive results. Even though they changed many members this year they aren't short of wonders. Also, the combo between the captain and vice-captain of the platoon is exceptional. When it comes to combos, the fifth platoon isn't bad either, even though the way they work together is not quite the same."

"What do you think of the seventeenth squad?"

Hearing Mifi ask that question, Meishen immediately became perturbed and couldn't stay calm. It was the platoon Layfon was in. Meishen was very concerned with how others viewed Layfon and she wanted to know what the first squad commander thought.

"Captain Nina Antalk's command is brilliant. Because she has a small platoon she thinks very carefully about what to do and how to do it. However, the platoon's greatest weakness is that they lack numbers. Even though their offensive ability is highly ranked among the platoons, their defense is far too weak. When they are on the offensive they are very strong, but if they are defending, they are always passive."

"On the topic of the seventeenth platoon, how good is that well known attacker Layfon?"

"The seventeenth platoon's offensive force relies mainly on him. Even though you can't overlook Sharnid's sniping ability, Layfon's ability to kill with one strike makes him a fearful existence."

Hearing Layfon being praised by the strongest person in the Military Arts department, Meishen felt very happy.

"But the fourteenth squad did come up with an idea to go against that terrifying sword with a shield of their own. Although it was quite significant, the plan failed. That is the power of the seventeenth platoon."

"Is that so... Then I wish you the best of luck in your inter-platoon matches."

"I want to graduate from this school, so no matter what happens, I will give my all to protecting this city. That is all."

"Thank you for accepting our interview." Mifi hurriedly nodded and bowed; Meishen and Naruki quickly following suit. Vance nodded, preparing to

leave the lounge room. "Oh yeah, that's right," Mifi spoke as if suddenly remembering something. "Yes?"

"I want to ask you something, is that ok?"

"What is it?"

"Have you heard of the phrase Heaven's Blade Successor?"

"...What is that?"

"Oh, it's a rarely used term that I don't understand. I think maybe that as the head of Military Arts, you might know something about it. "

"I don't know. Then, I'll be leaving first." Seeing hope radiating from the look on Mifi's face, Vance answered with a stiff expression, turned and left without looking back.

"It seems like he knew something eh?"

"Yeah, even though he knew he hid it from us."

After Vance left, Mifi started talking to Naruki.

Why? Meishen felt a little insecure. Why did Vance not tell them what he knew but hid it instead? Doesn't that mean he didn't want anybody to know what a Heaven's Blade Successor was?

"Well, it seems things have gotten interesting." Completely different from Meishen's reaction, Mifi's eyes lit up, showing a look of curiosity.

"Trying to hide it from me only made me want to know it more."

"No comment."

"Huhuhu. If it's like this, then we'll go and ask some other people. Okay, let's go." What Naruki said to Mifi obviously didn't register as she stood up with her face full of determination. Meishen was beginning to feel less and less secure.

The next place Mifi had to go to was the tenth platoon. As before, Mifi knocked the door with uncertainty, and the person who welcomed them was filled with the grace of three people; woman of great beauty. After being lead to the lounge room yet again, Mifi began her interview. This beauty's name was Dalshena Che Matelna and it seems that she was the

vice-captain of the tenth platoon. Her golden, long curls of hair overshadowed the lights in the room, dulling them. Wearing altered fighting gear and a cloak with red texture matching its white lining, she was clothed like a knight.

"I'm very sorry, but please be brief."

"Ah, ok." Against her icy-cold demeanor, Mifi couldn't hold her ground.

"Um... After successfully qualifying for the inter-platoon matches, how do you see your position right now?"

"Obviously I have things I am dissatisfied with, but it's true that the platoon is in great condition when they battle. I hope that we can maintain this state for the proper battle."

"Out of all the platoons, which one do you think is the strongest?"

"The first platoon. The head of Military Arts, Vance's strong and indestructible fighting style is truly fearsome. The members of the platoon are well suited to that fighting style and aren't bad either."

"The other platoons who have qualified include the fifth and the seventeenth platoon. What do you think of them?"

"The fifth platoon's main strength lies in Gorneo and Shante's Carrying Attack. Gorneo's alchemy attacks aren't as easy to use as you make them out to be. Gorneo's rational thinking and Shante's use of her instincts form a fearsome combination. The thing is, you could probably estimate the limit of their combat powers."

"Then what about the seventeenth platoon?"

"As for their main offensive force Layfon, the limit to his power is unfathomable. Even strong individuals like the head of Military Arts, Vance could be no match for him. But that's all there is to that platoon. Even if he took on the whole of the opposing platoon alone, that won't change the fact that he is only one person. The only reason for their recent victories is because he has been able to smooth out results with his individual performance. Other than that, there is nothing noteworthy about that platoon."

"Thank you very much for your co-operation. Then, I still have one last question which is unrelated to this interview..."

"Have you heard of the phrase Heaven's Blade Successor?"

"Heaven's Blade? No, no I haven't. Where did the term originate?"

"I think it came from Grendan."

"Then I think you'd better find Gorneo, because that's where his hometown was."

"Really? Thank you so much."

"Don't worry about it you guys are working hard as well. The Military Artists are doing it in their own way, and so are you guys, doing the best to make sure our city can keep on existing."

After the interview, Dalshena's cold expression was like frost that had finally melted, revealing a warm smile. Watching her pure and radiant smile, Meishen and the others couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief, gazing at Dalshena's back as it receded into the distance.

"Uwah, she was so cool."

"Yeah, how do I describe her, she's such a noble person."

"...Yeah."

The three girls stood there in a dreamlike trance looking in the direction in which Dalshena left.

"I heard that Dalshena-san was the eldest daughter of Iahaimu. He is the Head of The City of Hourin."

"...Really?"

"So that's why. It seems to explain her grandeur."

"I can't put my finger on it, but she really is cool."

"Yeah, she is."

"Ah, but I didn't know you knew that kind of stuff as well."

"I know a little about her. Dalshena-san even has her own fan club. The amount of detail in those fan club reports of hers almost goes overboard."

"It might not be a good idea, but I feel like reading the contents of that report."

"Do you want me to bring it next time?"

"No, no thanks, I'll give that a pass."

The three continued with their conversation, they couldn't get over their uncontrollable emotion. It was overwhelming.

Next up was the fifth platoon. The three girls who were wrapped up by Dalshena's graceful air floated to their next destination, and were lead to the same lounge room for the interview. This time they chatted to more than one person. The Captain of the fifth platoon, Gorneo Luckens was a tall man with a bulky stature comparable to that of the Head of Military Arts, Vance. His body was completely bound with muscle, and his robust neck supported a large head, which he held with a serious manner. Instead, the face reflected an affable expression, leaving a cute impression of the giant. That impression was further reinforced by the presence of a young girl tightly holding onto his shoulders. The red-haired girl distinctly contrasted with Gorneo. With a staunch little face, a petite frame, and her headstrong personality and inability to shoulder any responsibility, she gave off the impression of childishness. Nevertheless, this young girl was actually a fifth year student at Zuellni and she was about twenty years old. Her name was Shante Laite and she was the vice-captain of the fifth platoon.

"Are you okay with that?" Shante was in a bad mood and was swiping at Gorneo's head continually.

"It's okay, it happens all the time." Gorneo calmly answered Mifi's question.

Meishen timidly glanced at Shante and Shante immediately growled at her with a "Grr!"

"Ah!"

"Grr!"

"...Uwah..."

"Still not going to stop?"

Even though she was trapped by Gorneo's huge knuckles, Shante had no intention of stopping. However, she suddenly stopped.

"Huhu..." After wriggling her nose several times, Shante used her legs and, clinging onto Gorneo's head, she leant closer to Meishen.

"That... that's..."

"You, you smell nice."

"...Huh?"

"Ah, that's because Meishen likes cooking."

"Yeah, there's a nice smell on her body."

"...Ah"

Seeing Shante rapidly sniffing the air, Meishen took out a paper bag from her school bag, and that was the leftover cookies.

"Uh, there's only these left....."

"Is it for me?"

"If you want them..."

Meishen put the cookies on the table. Shante leapt off Gorneo's shoulders and went to Meishen. She then started eating the cookies without a word.

"I'm sorry." Gorneo lowered his head in apology.

"Ah... No, not at all."

"She's lived in the wild for too long."

"...Ah." Even though she didn't know what was going on.

"Then, can we start now?" Shante was eating the cookies voraciously next to Meishen. Mifi felt at a loss for what to do but decided to push on with the interview.

"After qualifying in the inter-platoon matches, as a captain, are you pleased with your team's performance?"

"If I were pleased so easily, then everything would be finished by now. It's because we know what we are lacking that we feel unsatisfied."

"Are there any platoons that you are especially concerned about?"

"I want to learn the first platoon's stable command that can react to any scenario with creative versatility and the individual strengths of each member. They are the role models my platoon is striving for."

"Which platoons do you think you should watch out for in the future?"

"All of them, but the most dangerous is still the first platoon. If we can't beat the first platoon then it signifies that we cannot beat the previous generation of Zuellni. If there is no change from two years ago then the results will be the same as two years ago as well." Gorneo's words carried a somber tone through his gloomy speech.

Two years ago, before Meishen arrived at Zuellni, Zuellni suffered a heavy defeat in the Inter-City battle. Now, Zuellni had only one Selenium mine left, leaving them no choice of retreat. They must not lose! In Gorneo's words one could hear this determination resounding firmly along with his beliefs the same conviction echoed in Vance and Dalshena's words.

At this moment, that was what Meishen felt. Normal students could never feel that heavy burden. Whether it was studying, working at night or playing around, female students following fashion trends while male students played various ball sports, or movie stars and singers that were common interests of both sexes, they made up everything in a normal student's life. Even Meishen, who could live happily as long as Naruki and Mifi were by her side, felt that the peaceful classroom atmosphere was very interesting as she looked from afar.

On the other side, the world was like that. This was also Zuellni, Academy city Zuellni! A city with only students, it was a gathering ground for people to grow, and they had to use their own abilities to make the information they gathered into their knowledge. There were no adults acting as protectors. If it was your world, you had to protect it on your own. This city was a place like that. Right now, she felt that heavy burden; even within the resting rooms you could hear it, and echoing along the dividing walls of the Military Arts area the striking sounds of each platoon let the world feel that heavy burden. As long as you understood the true meaning of that heavy, heavy sound, you would never forget it. This resolution and will to fight rang out as thunderous crashes in the Training Complex for Zuellni to see.

"Thank you for accepting our interview."

Mifi continued the interview and seemed to have finished it as Meishen sat there blankly, swallowed up by the sound of training.

"Before you go, can I ask a question?"

Shante was licking the crumbs off the biscuit wrapper. "Yes?" Gorneo picked her up in one movement and held that position as he replied to Mifi.

"Have you heard of the phrase Heaven's Blade Successor?"

"...Where did you hear this?"

"We heard it by chance...And other people we asked said it was a phrase originating from Grendan, so I thought that Gorneo-Senpai, since you were born in Grendan, would know what it means."

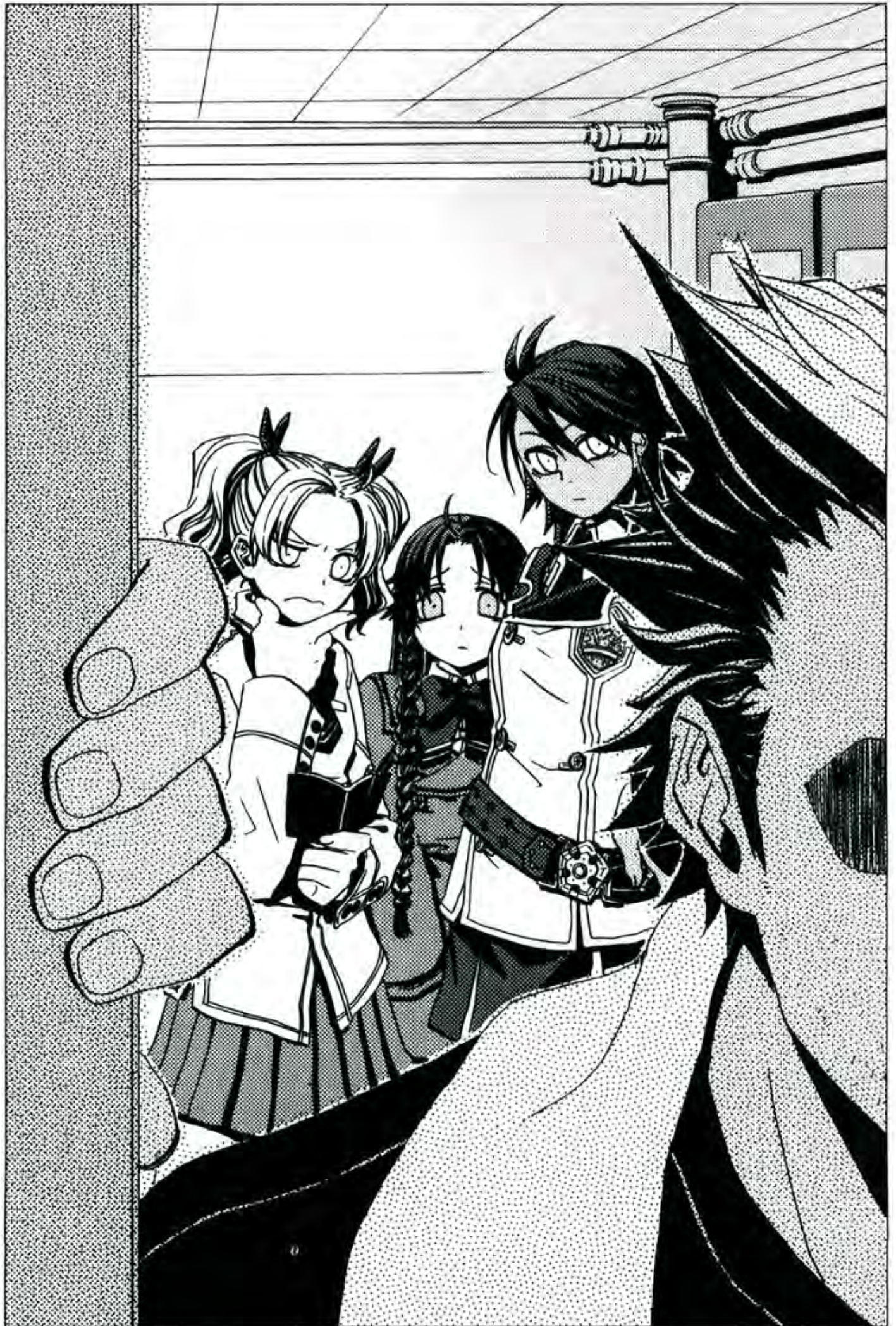
"It's a journey and a goal."

"...Huh?"

"Almost everything in the world is like that. Some are driven by what they want but do not have, and for others it is necessity that leads them to their goal. Only by achieving those goals can we continue to move forward, and if we do not continue to do so then we have reached the destination, the summit of the peak. The Heaven's Blade Successor is one of those peaks. Perhaps people who know of that phrase wish to attain that rank, or perhaps they must. Yet if they do not know of it at all, then they can never aim for it in the beginning."

"...Uh huh."

"If you don't really want it, if you don't really believe that you need it, then your lack of interest will hold you back and where you are standing will be your final destination."



Finishing his speech, Gorneo turned his back to Meishen and the others. Shante climbed up along his arm settling down onto his shoulders, but she continued to stare at Meishen.

"What's your name?"

"Huh? Oh... Meishen."

"Meishen, is it? Thank you, you really are a nice person. Come play next time!"

"Don't swindle anyone else out of their cookies!"

"Bye bye!" Shante pretended not to understand what Gorneo was saying, and waved. A glowing smile spread across Meishen's face as she weakly waved back.

"Uwah! That was terrifying." Mifi released the breath that she had been holding for the whole time in a large sigh.

"Jeez, it felt like I stepped on a Filth monster's tail!"

"Yeah, and we can't ask Gorneo-senpai about it anymore seeing as how he's already sealed his lips."

"Yeah, that means the only person left is..."

The two of them turned and looked at Meishen and she knew what they wanted to say. Compared to asking any other people born in Grendan, there was another, much easier way to find out, but Meishen couldn't do it. It was only because she couldn't do it that Gorneo thought they were nuisances. Vance looked like he didn't want to tell anyone either. Just what is going on? Meishen felt very uneasy. Just what did the phrase Heaven's Blade Successor entail?

Mifi looked at the annoyed expression on Meishen's face and found it hard for her to open her mouth. "Uhh... Well, the last platoon we are supposed to be interviewing is the seventeenth platoon..."

Meishen's expression instantly stiffened.

"There's no way out! The magazine had planned to make an article about all the platoons that performed well in the inter-platoon matches," Meishen

murmured quietly like she would an apology. She knocked on the door of the seventeenth platoon and held onto the door handle at the same time.

"Hello everyone!" In response to Mifi's cheery greeting, the door swung open. Her voice echoed within the room. This room was originally very quiet but shouts from within that could match those yelling in training exploded across it, making it seem a little out of place. Embarrassed by this unexpected situation, even Mifi couldn't stop her face turning red as she turned into a statue.

"Aiyaya... Mifi? And why did you guys come?" From inside the room came Layfon's voice.

"...Uhh... What exactly are you guys doing?" Mifi asked, puzzled. Since she was standing in the doorway, Meishen, who couldn't see what was going on, stood on her toes to look inside. Inside the room, hard metallic balls were rolling all over the floor.

"Oh, we're training."

"Is that so?"



Layfon, Nina and Sharnid were standing on the metallic balls which were rolling all over the place, while Felli expressed no interest as she sat aside on a seat reading a book. Although standing on continually rolling balls was by no means an easy feat...

"Wow, that's amazing. Is that for practicing balance?"

"You're partially correct. This is a kei exercise, and through controlling the flow of the internal-type kei we aim to control the body's balance, and at the same time we try to use external-type kei to keep the balls stationary." As Layfon answered Mifi's question, he waved his Dite downwards at his feet a couple of times. Naruki's eyes widened as she saw the ease with which Layfon moved about on the balls while waving his Dite around.

"So the interviewers are you guys?" Nina, who was also standing on the metallic balls asked in surprise.

"Ah, Yes, that's me. I'm the reporter from Weekly Look'n."

"It must have been a busy day. Then, shall we begin?"

"Ah, don't we need to go somewhere else?"

"No, just here is fine."

"That's right. An interview with me, the most handsome man in Zuellni, is something that happens once in a lifetime, so I should treat you guys to a drink. Layfon, quick, go get some drinks for these ladies." Sharnid leapt off the metallic balls lightly, landing in front of Mifi and her friends.

"I think they didn't come here just to interview you. Well, where you conduct the interview doesn't really matter, so let's just talk here." As Nina pointed to the chairs, Felli wordlessly got up and left the seat continuing to read as she leaned on the opposite wall.

Sharnid tossed a coin. Sighing, Layfon caught it in one hand and was about to go to the vending machine when...

".....Ahh, let me help." Meishen followed Layfon to the vending machine.

"I'm sorry." The soft drink cans dropped from the vending machine with a bump.

"Eh?" Layfon picked up the soft drink cans. The finger that selected the fruit juices did not hesitate and it seemed that Layfon had already figured out the tastes of everyone in the platoon. This was proven by how he asked what flavor Meishen wanted (he still didn't know what flavors we like) and she felt a little disappointed.

"I came without asking for your permission."

"That's nothing to be worrying about, since we were going to have a break anyway." Layfon carried the cans for everyone and stood up, and after Meishen asked that she carry half, Layfon gave her the cans that she, Mifi and Naruki had asked for. It was a rare opportunity for the two of them to be together without anyone else... yet she couldn't think of anything to say, so she could only follow Layfon in silence. She gazed at the back of Layfon as he walked ahead of her. It was his back, the back that had protected her at the opening ceremony of the school. At the time in that long line of people, a disturbance suddenly caused everyone to start pushing and shoving, and in the mess of it all a surprised Meishen had slipped and fallen over. If she had stayed like that any longer she would have been injured by the stampede of the crowd. It was at that time that Layfon had saved her, brushing aside the swarms of people and pulled her back to her feet, stopping her from being trampled to death. That might have just been a coincidence; even so, she could not forget the back that had protected her. Heaven's Blade Successor... That was Layfon's past and she wanted to know what it meant. If she were asked why she wanted to know so badly, then her only reason would be that she wanted to understand more about Layfon. Meishen couldn't think of any other reasons as to why she wanted to know. After she looked at his letter without his permission she had felt guilty, and as for the fragments of his past mentioned in the letter, did her simple desire to know merit her attempt at digging out all the information she could? Meishen didn't know how to answer. She was also guilty about not asking Layfon directly but instead asking others to gather information about him. Meishen didn't know whether what she was doing was right or wrong. (But...) She really wanted to know. Losing her chance for apologies, she decided to remain silent and stop thinking about the person named Leerin. The person who wrote that letter. Leerin was in Grendan, and Layfon was in Zuellni. If he could successfully graduate from here, then Meishen would have six whole years with him.

"...Mei?" Layfon turned his head in surprise, staring at Meishen who was standing rooted to the floor.

"...Ah, sorry about that."

"What's wrong?"

"...Nothing." She replied, shaking her head. Meishen didn't want Layfon to see her expression right now, so she lowered her head. She suddenly understood what she really wanted to do. No, that wasn't it; she already knew what it was. In fact, she should have found out a long time ago. Even though she realized, she tried to not think about it, because that was the only way she could avoid reality. She really was a terrible person. Meishen had six years, and those six years was time that Leerin would never have with Layfon. She turned this into an advantage and accepted it. 'Advantage'... This word was suggestive of a scheme. It was perfunctory, ugly, and terrible beyond comparison. Her self that thought to take advantage of that was too ugly. Why would Meishen think like that? That left her disappointed and anxious. She was attracted by that back, attracted by that back which had once protected her and was now in front of her eyes. There was a person who knew that back a long time ago; there was a girl who understood the Layfon from before Zuellni very well. Every time she thought of that, she couldn't bear it. The 'advantage' that Meishen had thought of was just something that she had come up with after intense thought about this issue. Even though she did have an advantage time-wise, when Meishen thought about what she would be able to achieve in these six years she felt insecure. When she realized that her world was one limited to a world always with Mifi and Naruki she wondered how much she could do. When she realized that she had very little choice over her actions, she felt a deep horror welling up inside of her. In order to dispel those fears, in order to keep herself from feeling the anxiety caused by Leerin, an existence that she couldn't see, and in order to take herself out of a state of ignorance of his past, she decided that she needed to know. (I really am serious.) Meishen sat there thinking to herself resolutely.

When Layfon opened the door, sounds of laughter came out from within.

"This really is difficult," Naruki muttered to herself, scattering the metallic balls everywhere as she fell to the floor in embarrassment.

"That wasn't bad for your first try," Sharnid said as he continued to stand on the metallic balls. He switched to one foot balancing on the balls and

moved about with ease. Beside him, Mifi and Naruki "oohed" in amazement.

"I definitely started practicing before you did," Nina said quietly with indignation.

"That's because I normally move about carefully without others noticing," Sharnid smugly replied and jumped off the balls.

"Well... that means that your technique will continually improve."

"I see." Mifi nodded her head with an "Oh" as she wrote in her notebook. The extension to the interview was almost completely about carrying out different types of training.

"Then, are there any platoons that catch your attention?"

"All of them. Our platoon's weakness is extremely obvious. All the teams will probably pick up on it. In order to become victorious we can only try to find a way to overcome the weakness. There is no point in saying which platoons are strong because no matter which platoon it is they are all stronger than we are. All of us recognize that point very clearly. "

"But your battle records are very good."

"That battle record might not represent our actual strength, but our constant good luck is an irrefutable truth. I hope that our luck will be effective only when we are in an unforeseen pinch, like when we are seen through by the enemy and they begin to hinder our attacks, or when we are ambushed by the opponent's traps. If we rely on luck like that, then defeat won't be far away. That's why we're working hard to prevent that kind of stuff happening."

"Keke. Then, would you please say some final words for the readers?"

"I like this place, so that is why I joined the Military arts department. That is all."

"Thank you very much for accepting our interview."

Ending the interview, everyone started drinking the juice as they chatted about anything that came to their minds. Sharnid made innocuous jokes as Nina sat aside laughing bitterly, and seeing them, Mifi joined in too. Naruki was still sulking over what happened before, and dragged Layfon to help her continue her challenge against the metallic balls. Felli kept an

expression saying "this has nothing to do with me" on the whole time. Meishen enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere that had spread across the room as well. Without knowing why, she felt anxious. Meishen thought that if she could fit in with everyone here, then she felt that the world that she was experiencing got a little bigger.

But...

"Oh yeah, have you guys heard of the phrase 'Heaven's Blade successor'?" With this sentence, Mifi tore apart the serene mood.



Meishen didn't blame Mifi, as her strong sense of curiosity was without malice. Meishen knew a long time ago that Mifi would be unable to resist the enticement of unfamiliar things. Even though she clearly knew this, she still went and discussed her problem with Mifi, so she had no right to blame her. After class, Meishen had arrived at the park near the Alchemy Complex, alone. Not long before, she and Meishen had been eating ice cream together. At that time, she tried to open her mouth and ask, but she could only think about it and never act. As she reminisced, she stepped into the garden where night would soon arrive.

There was a guest who had arrived already, and even though there was clearly a seat next to her, she was still standing. Seemingly hearing Meishen's footsteps, that person turned her head.

It was Felli.

Her silver-white hair swayed with her body, contrasting against the mood of the falling sun.

"You really came by yourself."

"...Yes." Meishen stood in front of Felli, so nervous that she thought her heart would leap out of her chest. After arriving at school, she found a note on her desk. On it said 'there is something I would like to discuss with you alone', and it specified the time and place. Meishen came alone, because the person who had asked her to come was the Psychokinesist Felli, and it would be impossible to trick her. If a psychokinesist wished, then they

could even count the number of bugs that were in the garden. It was impossible for Naruki and Mifi to hide from her.

"... I thought you wouldn't come."

"I thought you wouldn't come either."

When she picked up the letter from the desk, she was seen by two other people. The letter had been read by all three people, and they decided together that Meishen should go alone. Although Mifi held onto the idea of going together until the end, she met fierce resistance from Naruki.

"This is a critical moment, and I think that if we do not obey this condition, then Meishen will have no way of intervening in any matter." Even though the Layfon they met in the classroom seemed calm and no different from normal, Meishen felt that something deep within him was forcing him to put up that kind of expression, and it seemed very wearing. Meishen hated that feeling when she was helpless and couldn't do anything. She wanted to see his back.

"Without beating around the bush, please forget that phrase from yesterday."

Heaven's Blade Successor.

When Mifi said that word, Meishen felt that the temperature in the entire room had fallen. Mifi's question was like detonating a bomb, and the cracks created from the explosion separated Meishen and the others from the seventeenth platoon.

Felli and the others knew what 'Heaven's Blade Successor' really meant, and they knew what that phrase had to do with Layfon and his past. Meishen didn't know. At that moment, she clearly felt the difference.

"...Why?"

"It has nothing to do with you, and I don't want an excessive burden on him."

"...But" She wanted to know. She wanted to get closer to Layfon. Would forgetting this phrase allow her to get close to Layfon? No, it could only divide them further apart.

Just as Meishen was about to open her mouth, Felli said "Just to satisfy your own curiosity, does revealing another person's past make you happy?"

"...That's not it."

"But that's exactly what you guys are doing. You are unnecessarily digging up the past of another person, in order to please yourself. And then, what are you going to do afterwards?" Of course she knew, she knew just how despicable her actions were. Just because she was afraid of that person in Grendan called Leerin, and in order to patch up the difference between them, Meishen wanted to know what that word meant, and at the same time she realized how inferior her actions were.

"...I didn't think that doing so would please myself."

But... But...

"But, I still want to know. Even though I don't know what will happen if I do know ...but when I think about it, I feel afraid. Why must it be kept a secret? When I think about that fact, I feel afraid. "

"Why?"

Because if she knew, then perhaps her regard for Layfon might change a little. In Meishen's heart, her feelings for Layfon might change. She was afraid of that, and she was so afraid she was trembling. If her feeling changed like the flipping of a palm, then Meishen felt that she would definitely see herself as low and despicable. Even now, she was extremely jealous; jealous of the people in the seventeenth platoon who understood what she did not. She was jealous of the fact that even though they knew the truth about Layfon they still regarded him as a comrade. Layfon said that he would not return to Grendan. Was it that he wanted to return, but couldn't? In the phrase "Heaven's Blade successor" was there hidden the reason that prevented his return? Was it because of that reason that Layfon had given up the path of the Military Arts? If it was the case, then what Meishen was doing now was undoubtedly poking into Layfon's unhealed wounds.

"Then why do you want to know?" Felli asked Meishen for a reason.

"I..." Even if she knew the reason hidden within the phrase, the people in the seventeenth squad still saw Layfon as a comrade.

She wanted to protect.

She was very regretful.

It was as if she had been cast out of Layfon's world that she was regretful.

"|..."

The sound quivered.

"... Because I like Layfon... Because I like him."

That's why she wanted to know, but she was afraid that if she knew, her current relationship with Layfon might collapse. She didn't wish for her feelings to be trapped within herself. She wanted Layfon to understand. Even if it was only one sided to Layfon. She wanted to know about Layfon's past, even if she didn't really want to dig out everything about Layfon, but instead she wanted to verify, that even if she knew of Layfon's past, that her feelings for him would not change.

"If you don't verify it, will you have no confidence in your feelings?"

"...Yes"

Felli's voice was reproachful, but Meishen nodded without disguise.

"...Gingerly using your paws to test out the ground as you proceed. You only think about the step ahead, but think nothing of what the consequences are after. That isn't a very smart method."

"..."



After she knew, how would Layfon see Meishen... That's what Felli was trying to say. Was it possible for everything to stay the same...?

"Well..." Facing Meishen, whose expression was beginning to stiffen from fear, Felli continued to speak. "If that is how you do things, then there isn't much left for me to say."

After she said this, Felli turned away and left.

"That..."

"I have nothing to say to you anymore, and the last thing is a piece of advice." Felli said this as she was leaving. "I don't know if you still want to know or not, but either way it's very difficult."

Meishen noticed that after saying this, Felli sighed.

(Ahh... I see...) Watching Felli's shadow leaving the garden, Meishen felt ignorant. (There are many people who like Layfon.) And she, she was definitely...

"Hu..." Accompanying her nervousness, loneliness, and weariness, finally recognizing this problem, Meishen laid on the ground, exhausted.

Deep within herself, she felt that... there were a lot of hardships ahead of her.

Epilogue

She seriously couldn't stand him...

On her way back to her accommodations at Zuellni, Leerin repeated this silently to herself again and again. Because it was going to be a long time before the next roaming bus arrived, there was nearly nobody staying here, and the hotel had a very empty feel to it.

"What are you talking about, 'very cheap'? No matter how slow you are, there's gotta be a limit. Do you want to participate in the Slowness World Series?"

Leerin angrily grumbled to herself as she placed her luggage beside the bed and just lay like that on the bed.

She was alone now.

It wasn't because she hadn't lived alone for a long time, it was just that it felt like she had been suddenly thrown into a silent world, and it brought Leerin an empty feeling.

It really had been a hectic day. With the help of Savaris she had managed to cross two fighting cities and reunite with Layfon.

If she were to describe it with words like that, it would only take a sentence or two, but she had experienced a really long day. On her way here on the roaming bus she had crossed paths with filth monsters, realizing for the first time how terrifying their existence was.

There was no other way that any other city had a group of Military Artists such as the Heaven's Blade Successors with such immense power. Nor were they blessed with the leader of the Heaven's Blade Successors: the Queen. That's why, in comparison to other cities, filth monsters weren't really a big issue. That's why, destruction was more likely for the other cities; at least that's what people who lived in cities without Heaven's Blade Successors said.

But as she thought about Layfon standing on the battlefield, her feelings suddenly became complicated.

But as she had never seen Layfon being injured as much as this time before, perhaps it was true that other cities were even more dangerous than Grendan.

Leerin continually pondered this question. Was it more dangerous in other cities or in Grendan... Whichever one was actually more dangerous was of little consequence, as this question swirling through Leerin's head was unimportant.

That was just a buffer of sorts.

A necessary buffer for her to accept reality.

"....."

Wriggling silently on her bed, she reached into her luggage bag with one hand.

As she touched what she wanted, she tugged it out of the bag. It was a wooden box wrapped up in a cloth. It was something very important that her adoptive father had entrusted to her.

It was to be given to the Psyharden successor, a katana Dite.

It was the proof of her adoptive father's forgiveness, the proof of her adoptive father's apology.

It was also the proof of the bond between them.

"I still haven't given it to him yet."

It wasn't that she was too busy and forgot to give it to him. But Leerin couldn't just give it to Layfon like that.

Maybe he would be so happy that he would start crying.

If Layfon started crying, what would she do? Would she be happy as well? Of course. But, that's not the only thing she would feel...

"It really is a mess, eh?"

Her eyes turned a little warm. There was something rising up from her throat.

They would probably start crying together.

But, she didn't want to start crying with him. She couldn't say to him, "Isn't this great?"

Because, before that, there were other things that she wanted to say.

"I'm so happy that Layfon's safe."

She was alone in this room. A place where nobody could hear anything, where Layfon couldn't hear her, where nobody else could hear her.

And so, she couldn't bear it any more.

"I'm so happy..." said Leerin openly, her wrists covering up eyes that were overflowing with tears.

Post Epilogue - Ordinary Days

That night, Minse Eutnohl violently threw the thing beside him into the wall.

That happened to be a wooden table, which exuded extravagance and technology in both material and design. But with Minse's strength, the table collided with the sliding door with loud noise before it fell to the ground in pieces.

Even that wasn't enough to suppress the rage in his heart, but at least it was enough to temporarily quell his impulses. If he didn't do that, he definitely would have stormed into the palace and completely destroyed the ceremonial banquet which should be going on over there right now.

Not only that, he would also personally gouge out the pair of sleepy eyes which belonged to that poor looking brat who would be there.

The center of tonight's celebration was that child.

Minse was still very young—somewhere in his mid-teens.

But he was even younger.

That's why Minse was so angry.

Tonight, they were commemorating the birth of the twelfth Heaven's Blade Receiver.

That kid's name was Layfon Alseif. Since he became a Heaven's Blade, his name became Layfon Wolfstein Alseif.

"Why isn't it me?" complained Minse piteously. His long black hair grew in a featureless messy tangle.

The Eutnohl was one of the three Royal families in Grendan. The current Queen Alsheyra was of the Almonise family. The family that the King or Queen originated from was known as the current ruling house.

There were to be twelve Heaven's Blade Receivers, as there were only twelve blades made from the mysterious Grendan White Dite, known as the Heaven's Blades.

Before Alsheyra's reign, there were five Heaven's Blades Receivers. But now, all twelve had been gathered.

Minse believed that he would be the twelfth. The people also held such hopes for him. The last member of the three royal families, Ronsmier's Tigris had already taken the title of a Heaven's Blade Receiver. Queen Alsheyra was regarded as the strongest royalty in history, with the purest blood running through her veins in the Royal Families, one whose existence itself demanded it be shown off proudly. Naturally, it was expected that Minse, the head of the Eutnohl family, would take the twelfth Heaven's blade title. In fact, calling it his inheritance wouldn't have been an exaggeration.

But, reality wasn't like that.

Layfon Wolfstein Alseif. A member of the small school of Psyharden, an adoptive child, became the twelfth Heaven's Blade.

What's more was that Minse wasn't even given a chance to challenge Layfon.

"This is a conspiracy," moaned Minse.

What he said wasn't actually nonsense.

There was no doubt that the Almonise family and the Eutnohl family were the current ruling houses. More accurately, it was between the Eutnohl and Almonise families.

The three Royal Families wanted to protect the bloodline of the first King, and they wanted to make sure that any marriages would give birth to more Military Artists. The minimal requirement for a suitor was being a Military Artist. And from the aspect of retaining the purity of the blood from the first king, the suitor had to also be of royal lineage from one of the three Royal families. But purifying the bloodline too much could also lead to the passing on of inherent defects in the genes.

After much argument between the three families, they came to an agreement that every three generations, there would be an intermarriage between the three Royal families.

The current Queen Alsheyra was born of the Almonise and the Ronsmier families.

And her husband was supposed to be of the Eutnohl family.

He was Minse's brother.

No, he was originally supposed to act as a brotherly figure.

Currently, that brother no longer existed.

He had eloped with some ordinary woman.

Alsheyra had just smiled bitterly at the news, and her next suitor had yet to be decided.

If they went in order, then in theory Minse would have been offered to take the position. There were rumors among the citizens that Alsheyra couldn't forget about Minse's brother, and thus was delaying her decision.

And privately, she hated him who had thrown her away, which led to her hate of the Eutnohl family.

Minse had believed those rumors.

Unfortunately, his bad luck didn't end with the rumors. His parents were also successively unlucky. His father died in a battle with a filth monster, and his mother died of sickness not long after.

And Minse became the head of the Eutnohl Family. Even though he still had many uncles, according to the laws of the three Royal Families, they were very far down the list as heirs. If the situation arose where Minse died, the person who would inherit the position as head of the family wouldn't be his uncles but a child of the current head of another royal family. And if Alsheyra didn't have any children, then the place would be taken by some child of the Ronsmier family.

Minse firmly believed that Alsheyra wanted to use some legitimate way to annihilate the Eutnohl family.

In order to prevent that from happening, it was imperative that he become a Heaven's Blade. It wasn't only to spread his name as a protector but to also show off his abilities as a descendant of the bloodline.

And when there was a Royal Family marriage where the suitor was not of the royal family, then the next suitors would be chosen from the Heaven's Blade Receivers. This way it was possible for him to reclaim the right as a suitor to the Queen and recover the status of the Eutnohl family.

However, he didn't get chosen for the twelfth spot. Alsheyra had taken away even the chance to show his strength.

This was a conspiracy.

Minse believed this without a shred of doubt.

"If it's like this, I also have my own means."

Sooner or later, Alsheyra was going to come to eliminate Minse. But he wouldn't be sitting, waiting for his demise.

".....It's not like you can't attack the royalty no matter what."

Things like the law have no power over people who have been driven into a corner. In order to live on, they will bare their fangs at anyone.

Minse had changed his mood for the better, but looking at his face from the side there was a miserable expression unfitting of his age upon his face.



She would only be happy on that day.

The following days, she was as busy as a bee.

"I really can't take this!"

The Psyharden dojo was not far from the orphanage and Leerin stood outside with her hands on her hips.

Only ten years old, she was a mid-level student in elementary school. She had a steady personality and could usually be found cooking in the kitchen. She wore clothes designed for work and ease of movement. Her hair was also appropriately tied up in a bun. Following the latest trends, the hair in front of her bun curled to one side.

Leerin was standing in the makeshift reception area of the dojo.

The second day since Layfon had become a Heaven's Blade Receiver, which was today, the dojo had become unusually busy. Psyharden Katana School's dojo was only an old small-scale dojo.

The number of students in the dojo was as small as the dojo itself. There were countless dojos like this in Grendan. All those that taught the katana couldn't be counted with two hands.

Of course, there weren't many that continued existing for a long time. Sometimes it was because the owner of the dojo died in a fight with a filth monster, and there weren't any successors. Some of the dojos fell into ruin after losing in fights with other dojos.

However, despite its size, the Psyharden Katana School dojo had a long history.

But it wasn't an exaggeration to say that the size of a dojo in Grendan represented its status.

A youth, who had been winning in official matches for two years straight, claimed victory yesterday in the Heaven's Blade Receiver selection matches and officially became the twelfth Heaven's Blade Receiver.

That youth belonged to the Psyharden School.

That is, this dojo located at the edge of the residence areas which was barely struggling by.

In the morning, before the doors of the dojo had even opened, there was already a long line of people outside the dojo hoping to get in. Leerin busily responded to them, and even though it was already past noon, there were no signs of there being an end to all this.

"Leerin, take this chance and have lunch."

"Ok~"

In an attempt to take her mind off the annoying problem, a nearby person went behind the reception area, brought a pot and started cooking.

It looked like that there was no end to the people who wanted to join the dojo, and they weren't about to wait obediently in line either. They had obviously already gotten an admission slip but they still couldn't line up properly.

Looking at the scene, Leerin was stumped.

"I can't take this! I really want to just stay here instead," complained Leerin. She was drinking some warm milk, and had recovered somewhat.

Beside the reception area there were tables prepared by the street's residents.

It's just as it appeared; it's a small dojo, without many hands. The kitchen didn't have many staff either.

Seeing Leerin complaining, the person who was helping with the cooking started laughing. She was also a Nee-chan who grew up at the orphanage, and she had married recently, living the life of a newlywed.

"Well, it's not like you can do anything about this, with Layfon doing all that."

A Heaven's Blade Receiver. For the military artists of Grendan, that title held great meaning.

It was equivalent to being called the strongest.

Wanting to study at the same school that trained one of the strongest is perfectly logical.

Some famous examples would be the Luckens School, created by a Heaven's Blade, and Rivanes, the school for the successors of the three royal families. And there was also the dojo currently regarded as the most prosperous, Midknot.

Those three Military Arts schools all had current Heaven's Blades Receivers as students.

Although Grendan has twelve Heaven's Blades, it doesn't actually have twelve prosperous Military Arts Schools.

For example, the psychokinesists. The only psychokinesis user of all the twelve Heaven's Blades, Delbone, was the oldest of them all. There were legends that said that she had already been a Heaven's Blade for several decades, and that perhaps she would have to step down from her position soon. For psychokinesis, the abilities required far outstripped those demanded of a normal Military Artist, thus there was no dojo which was open to take in disciples and teach them.

Another example would be Karen Kei. Troyatte represents this school in the Heaven's Blades. As it is also very hard to grasp, there are very few Military Artists who are willing to learn it.

Including these two, with the three mentioned above, and excluding Layfon, there were still six others.

Of the six, the one known as the strongest of the current Heaven's Blades, Lintence, wasn't born in Grendan. He was a military artist who was visiting from another city, and under the Queen's recommendation entered the selection tournament and became a Heaven's Blade Receiver. So if he did not found a dojo, then there was no way for him to pass on his techniques to anyone else, and he had no intentions of doing so.

As for the other five, none of them fitted into any specific dojo in Grendan, and like Lintence, none of them had any intention of starting their own dojos either.

Putting all this into perspective, Layfon is the only Heaven's Blade Receiver to become one having learned only the Psyharden Katana techniques.

So, if one was part of the Psyharden dojo, one could become a Heaven's Blade Receiver.

Of course, that's what everyone thought.

"But the thing is....."

Leerin gazed across at the people who were hoping to gain entry after lunch break with mixed feelings.

Wasn't there anyone who felt suspicious?

Perhaps nobody had noticed the Dite that Layfon was holding in tournament?

That was a sword.

Psyharden was clearly a school which taught the Katana, not the sword.

Thinking back, it was the day before the decisive battle.

Inside the dojo, other than the caretaker, the two who had grown under the shelter of the Psyharden dojo; Derek and Layfon were completely alone.

The two were holding restored Dites. In Layfon's hand, was a sword.

"I'm sorry," said Layfon to a completely silent Derek. He then stored his Dite away and placed it in its sheath.

Leerin quickly realized the meaning behind it.

That was Layfon making it clear to Derek that he was giving up the way of the Katana.

And then, Layfon became a Heaven's Blade Receiver.

"Why would Layfon....."

Even now, she still hasn't asked him about it.

Until now, Leerin always thought that she knew everything about Layfon. They were the same age, and thus they were placed into the orphanage at almost the same time. And at the time, they were both infants.

Leerin was an abandoned child.

So was Layfon.

The two had been together since before they understood anything. At that time, they didn't know that they shared circumstances with the other. They also had many other siblings unrelated by blood in the orphanage. Some were abandoned as well. Others had both their parents die, and nobody adopted the children who were sent here. There were various circumstances.

She only recently found out that Military Artists very rarely gave up their children.

Perhaps there was some sort of relationship like that, but the chances weren't high.

Layfon treated Derek like his real father. And likewise, Derek treated Layfon like his own son. Of course, the other children in the orphanage also treated this kindly old Military Artist of few words as their own father.

But, Layfon was a Military Artist.

Everyone in the orphanage had their own surnames.

The ones who had last names kept them. Those who didn't know had Derek give them one. All the children were siblings who had grown up in the same circumstances together, but they wished that they could share their surname with someone else.

This felt somewhat lonely.

But it was also something they could do nothing about. Derek's last name was the same as the dojo that he was part of. Even though it was very small, even if a normal person carried the name of the dojo, it showed a deep connection with a Military Artist generations back.

Not knowing her two parents, Leerin obviously didn't know her surname either.

This also meant that Layfon might not have his own surname. Layfon Psyharden. This name wasn't too shabby.

As they continued on with their ordinary lives, perhaps it had also become reality.

Derek adopted Layfon officially, and was originally meant to be the heir to the Psyharden techniques.

But in his hands, Layfon was holding a sword.

(Why?)

She couldn't think of any reasons. She couldn't understand why Layfon would do this at all.

Leerin was very surprised that when it came to Layfon there were things about him that even she didn't know about.

"Excuse me."

"Ah, yes."

Leerin turned around after suddenly being spoken to.

In front of the reception area was a youth who was slightly older than Leerin. He stood there with a very amiable smile, with very thin eyes framed by a pair of glasses, and a head of long silver hair.

"Excuse me, is this the Psyharden dojo?"

From his manner, it was obvious he came from a family of status.

"Yes, I'm sorry, if you want to enter the dojo please get out your entry ticket..."

"Ah, it's not like that." The youth simultaneously cut Leerin short and spoke to those who were lining up, showing he knew what was going on.

"The thing is, I'm a foreigner."

Foreigner here referred to those who came by roaming buses from other cities.

"I saw yesterday's match by chance, and I was very impressed, so I wanted to meet that Military Artist personally, and came here."

"Ha....."

Leerin nodded her head and at the same time became slightly more alert.

"Of course, I am an ordinary person; I'm not seeking to get into the dojo through meeting him. I just want to meet him."

Again, the youth expressed his plans loudly. The hopefuls who were lining up to gain entry to the dojo realized that he wasn't there to cut in front of them and stopped caring about what he was trying to do.

Dealing with a person younger than him by about five years, he was always very courteous. And Leerin who was always praised by others for her maturity felt that this youth in front of her seemed even more like an adult than she was.

The second day after the banquet, they started preparations in order for Layfon to have the same uniform as the rest of the Heaven's Blade Receivers.

It seemed that the adjustments to the Heaven's Blade, the measurements to his special combat suit for use outside a city, etc. all needed confirmation.

Layfon said he had to temporarily stay in the palace for all those things.

They didn't know when the filth monsters would come and ambush them. And Grendan had much more run ins with filth monsters than normal. For a newly appointed Heaven's Blade Receiver, there wasn't any time for rest.

Hearing this, the youth nodded his head with some comprehension.

"It really is a pity, it seems I won't be able to meet him before my roaming bus leaves."

"I'm sorry."

"It's ok, it's ok, not like you're at fault..... And anyway, this place is very welcoming to us foreigners. In the city I live in, any foreigners who wanted to leave their accommodations had to undergo a relatively thorough inspection, and it's been the same for almost every other city I've visited as well. This treatment really surprised me."

Perhaps this youth was talking to himself, or perhaps he was simply trying to tell someone else his surprising experience here.

That's why Leerin wasn't about to answer his query.

"I think it's because very few Roaming Buses come by here."

The youth reacted with a look of surprise in response to Leerin's answer.

"Eh? But, that can't be the only reason can it?"

"That..... We have to treat our guests with hospitality, hoping that maybe we'll get some sort of gift from the guests."

"If you put it like that, then I'm a complete cheapskate of a guest who doesn't remember any favors."

"Ah, that's not what I meant," Leerin explained hurriedly and stopped what she was doing, facing the laughing youth.

"Don't mind me, I was just joking."

"Eh?"

"Thank you, even though it's a pity that I can't meet that person, I still met someone very interesting."

He was referring to Leerin.

The serious youth revealed another smile, making Leerin's face burn with redness. But this time, the youth took no notice to her reaction, and left after saying goodbye.

".....A strange person."

Reflecting on her judgment of the youth, Leerin returned her attention to her meal. There were still many people who wished to enter the dojo, and recording their names and addresses was something that Leerin didn't have a choice in doing right now.



As he smoked a cigarette, Lintence responded, "I refuse" to this completely uninteresting topic of conversation.

"Go tell them that this is what I said."

Lintence lived in the district in Grendan reserved for receivers of the Heaven's Blade.

The letter he was holding left his hand. The letter itself and the envelope it came in were in the same state as when he had received them: they were defying physics and were floating horizontally in the air.

As they reached the rubbish bin, they were shredded. They were shredded so finely that even those who were used to putting together jigsaw puzzles would have trouble reassembling it, his paranoia making it nearly impossible to restore.

The floorboard was creaking. The robust male who had brought the message shrank back and retreated a few steps in the face of Lintence's attitude, making the noise. It was the fate of an apartment that was built with cheap materials, and this was the sound of the floorboards aging.

With a pair of spiritless, unfriendly eyes coupled with messy, long, uncut hair and that lazy beard covering his chin, Lintence laid on the sofa. He wasn't looking at the messenger at all, instead staring at the smoke floating about in the room like mist.

"Go back."

Lintence uttered the short sentence as he exhaled more smoke. The messenger escaped out the door, the floorboards he stepped upon making more creaking noises.

The ashes descended towards a shirt full of wrinkles.

But before they could land on the shirt, they were sent to the ashtray in clumps.

The door was just left open like that, and outside the door near the stairs were sounds of people bumping into each other. The anguished cries of

women, the panicked sounds of men, the sounds of people falling from the stairs, as well as the laughter which echoed from upstairs.

"So noisy."

As Lintence mumbled to himself, the door moved to close itself.

At the same time, a hand stopped it.

And from behind it, came a surprised sound.

"Wow, the pathetic state you're in really is surprising. It's only been a week, so how the hell did you manage to make this room so messy? That's amazing in its own way."

Pulling open the closing door, the woman walked in without reserve as she looked about the room in a dazed manner.

The woman, dressed in a maid uniform, took out a vacuum cleaner and stood in front of Lintence in a proud pose.



She didn't look to be older than twenty.

But nobody knew her real age. Regardless, this woman often used her leftover Kei for an internal-type Kei to control her body at will. Changing her skeleton was a little difficult, so she couldn't change her height, but she could limit her own growth. At least since the many years ago he had first met her; her height and her visage hadn't changed at all.

"What? You can't take it if there isn't that much smoke in the air? You smoking addict."

Saying this presumptuously, that woman strode past Lintence and opened the windows. Fresh air rushed passed the woman and blew in, but Lintence's sharp sense of smell still detected the stink of the rubbish dump placed next door in the construction room.

"...I believe I told you sixty four thousand eight hundred seconds ago to leave me alone, Your Crappiness."

Lintence was still lazing on the sofa as before, but the window closed by itself, and the breeze stopped.

"If you've got a problem, then go find somewhere else to live. It's not like that will damage that icy attitude of yours. All the maids I assigned to work here all came to me one after another crying, pleading me to let them work somewhere else."

"So just leave me alone. We've already had this conversation thirty eight times."

"If a Heaven's Blade Receiver lives in a place like this, then the Almonise ruling house will be questioned by others. I wish you could at least make it a little tidier."

The woman dressed as a maid..... Her Crappiness..... Alsheyra Almonise opened the window yet again. This time it wouldn't be closed again. She removed all the steel threads wrapped around the window.

Seen from outside, a pair of hands darted about grasping at empty air. Alsheyra tossed the steel threads in her palm beside her. Those discarded steel threads silently returned to their owner.

"Where are the clothes I gave you? I think they should suit your tastes."

"You've watched too many yakuza movies."

"Look at that mean glare in your eyes. I'd like to see what kind of malicious being you are if you aren't some hoodlum."

As she said these rough words, she laughed gracelessly. Laughing, she kicked the accumulating pile of magazines with a well-rehearsed action and after finding the power cord, she connected the cleaner into the hidden socket and proceeded to turn it on. The unique noise of the vacuum cleaner filled the room.

"I want to kill you, you know."

Lintence muttered this quietly in the midst of the chaotic noise the vacuum cleaner was making.

"I know that" replied Alsheyra calmly. "You idiot, you really piss me off. You don't even know your place."

"For that, I became a Heaven's Blade Receiver."

"That's why I'm saying, an idiot really is stupid. You've already revealed your real self. Just like that, you've leaked the information."

"Surely there must be some Heaven's Blade Receivers who aren't satisfied with you?"

When Lintence became a Heaven's Blade Receiver, there were some who expressed their disapproval.

Lintence wasn't actually the first foreign Military Artist who became a Heaven's Blade Receiver in Grendan.

However, such Military Artists usually appeared about once in every King or Queen's rule.

There had never been a person like Alsheyra who gave Heaven's Blades en masse to foreigners.

Of course, it was natural for the higher ups of the traditional Military Artists in Grendan to be offended by these actions.

As for the isolated city, information from outside cities took relatively high priority. Technology too, took high priority, along with expansion of the gene pool. They welcomed everything other than illnesses. But all these things needed time to fit together, and this was the new problem which this city was facing.

First was Lintence, then it was Cauntia and Reverse's combination. Suddenly three foreign Military Artists had become Heaven's Blade Receivers. Even though survival of the fittest was the Military Artists' motto, they weren't very pleased about this.

But.....

"So what." Showing no signs of wavering, Alsheyra continued to ponder, calmly went on.

"There's no problem with them harboring discontent. If they don't like it, there's no problem either. If they have any problems then it's good if they tell me and don't hold back. Even if I am royalty, I'm merely the descendant of the bloodline of one of the strongest families in Grendan. If you think you're strong, then do your best to do something. Keeping them all in line is my job. As for any disobedient little dogs, giving them the punishing whip is the job of the master. That's all there is to it, is it not?" declared Alsheyra as she cleaned the room with the vacuum cleaner.

It didn't fit her maid uniform. As he thought that, Lintence cracked a smile, looking at her face from the side.

She was a Queen at birth. She was the strongest at birth. This woman's behavior gave off an aura of splendor, totally out of tune with the obedient feel of her maid uniform.

"Well, just let me look forward to what sort of a song an idiot can sing. It's been really boring recently. I wanted to bully the new gentleman, but it seems he's not strong enough yet. Lin, can you go train him?"

"Well, I guess that'll be interesting."

Lintence had also watched yesterday's finals. But he only watched the opening ceremony and the participants before returning. For him, that was more than enough to predict the results.

And he didn't guess wrong.

"Oh? That was really unexpected. I thought you would decline."

"That's because he's very good at learning from others. I just want to know if he really has such a talent, so I'm going to go test him."

"Ah, I see. That will be very interesting," whispered Alsheyra interestedly, laughing. "There have been many like him. Children who sealed their

weapon of choice and techniques while still becoming a Heaven's Blade Receiver."

"Anybody could do that."

"But they wouldn't do it like this. This is the nature of Military Artists, is it not?" replied Alsheyra quickly.

She revealed an expression as if Lintence had fallen for her tricks, and Lintence responded by closing his two eyes, as if an attempt to isolate himself from the noise of the vacuum cleaner.

A luxurious selection of cuisines were placed on the round table.

Facing master Minse sat three other people.

"We really couldn't get Lintence, eh?"

Washing down a mouthful of food with some wine, Minse revealed a pained expression.

He had already predicted this result. But, if possible, he didn't want to make an enemy out of him. Minse couldn't understand him using steel threads, and that ability scared him.

"Isn't that what I said? That guy is a foreigner. He's a pawn under Her Majesty."

The speaker was the one who was sitting in the middle of the three.

Kalvan Geordeus Midknot.

A fifty year old male. He kept a head short hair, some of which had turned grey. A portion of that had turned completely white, which was kept long and tied up. Maybe it was because he had been working too hard, but the wrinkles on his face were deeply etched.

"Lock it up, I'm afraid information here may reach her majesty's ears."

"There's no need for such worries. For the next mission, the new guy and Lintence are being paired up as a team and being sent out. You think she will know about that event?"

"That's how it should be in theory, but what I'm worried about is Her Majesty taking some sort of precautionary actions."

"That's another needless worry. I understand that woman's personality very well. If she figures out our intentions, she'll face us head on for sure."

"That's true. I think that's how she'd react as well."

The youth who replied smiled expectantly while nodding. He sat to the left of Kalvan, who was pulling a long face.

"Savaris. You speak as if you could win in a fight against Her Majesty."

"Oh? Isn't it because I've harbored such a thought that I'm sitting here right now?"

Savaris replied to Kalvan's question in a relaxed manner.

"I'm just trying to say that Grendan's current situation isn't very good."

"If that's the case, then what things can we tell Her Majesty directly? Isn't it the special privilege of the Heaven's Blade Receivers to be able to see Her Majesty at any time?"

"No thanks."

Kalvan glared at that young Heaven's Blade Receiver extremely unhappily.

"But Her Majesty won't listen. It's true that Her Majesty can't just hand out the Heaven's Blades. But Her Majesty can choose to hold those tournaments to decide the Heaven's Blades. It's worth celebrating the gathering of all twelve Heaven's Blades, but bestowing it upon a ten year old child..."

"I became a Heaven's Blade Receiver at thirteen."

Savaris couldn't understand why Kalvan thought this was a crisis.

"Didn't Kanaris become a Heaven's Blade Receiver at fifteen? Just because he's young, he can't be a Heaven's Blade Receiver? An argument like that is baseless."

The last person...Kanaris, just watched the scene silently. She was a woman with a very ordinary visage. All the parts attached to her face seemed as if they were made to give off an impression of a total lack of personality, and if one's eyes left her for just a moment, you wouldn't know she was there anymore.

"There really are too many young people" complained Kalvan in a painful manner.

Just as he said, among the current Heaven's Blade Receivers, those who were relatively young took up a large proportion. There were four Heaven's Blade Receivers military artists who had served before Alsheyra's reign. Excluding Delbone who was an exceptional case, the other three had all been bestowed with their Heaven's Blades in their late twenties or early thirties.

Compared to that, starting with Alsheyra's reign, the oldest any Heaven's Blade Receiver had been given his or her position was Lintence, in his late twenties. The rest were usually made Heaven's Blade Receivers in their teens, with some just over twenty.

And then there was the ten year old Layfon.

"It's as if Her Majesty was attempting to crush the record of 'Youngest Heaven's Blade Receiver' eh?" said Savaris, laughing.

He had held that record just a few days ago.

"Following the record back, following that is Tigris-sama or Delbone-sama. It seems getting a ten or so year-old kid to carry such a burden will be very hard on him."

"This isn't a joke!"

Annoyed by Savaris' tone, Kalvan slammed his hand down on the round table.

The dish on the table shook. Kanaris looked at the spilt sauce spread across the tablecloth with displeasure.

"Well...cool down for a moment."

Minse reproached Kalvan mildly.

"I know what both of you are trying to say, and anyway, since we're all comrades with the same goals please treat each other more cordially."

The people who were gathered there were all Military Artists who came from Grendan's dojos.

For example, Kalvan Geordeus Midknot is one who had opened his own dojo.

And on his left, the ever smiling Savaris Qaulafin Luckens. He was a part of the Luckens dojo which had helped an early Grendan ruler create the Heaven's Blades, and he was also a descendant of those people.

And sitting on the right, Kanaris Aerifos Rivin. She was the successor of the three royal families...that is, she was a part of the dojo Rivanes, which gathered members of the royal family who hadn't inherited any positions among royalty. Among these three the one with the closest blood ties would have to be her.

"We can't let anyone look down upon a Heaven's Blade Receiver's authority again. Isn't that why everyone has gathered here today?"

Such direct words; who would dare say such a thing?

The Queen's assassination, the passing on of the crown.

The one who would step up to the place of king would be Minse. Going by age, it should actually be Tigris, but even before Alsheyra became Queen he had a chance yet didn't concern himself with such things, letting Alsheyra inherit the position.

If that were the case, he would probably do the same again this time.

Minse didn't have the ability to become a Heaven's Blade Receiver. Perhaps he could wait to become betrothed to Alsheyra, but right now, Minse wasn't considering that option at all.

Even then, that was only a possibility and there was no guarantee he would become king.

"After I become king, I'll give your dojos repayment in kind."

Minse didn't forget making his promises.

He was very clear as to why those three were here.

They were afraid that the authority of their respective dojos would be diminished. All twelve Heaven's Blade Receivers were gathered. And few of them came from their dojos. This implied that even if one trained at another dojo one could still become a Heaven's Blade Receiver.

The Heaven's Blade was the ultimate goal of Military Artists in Grendan. There wasn't a better yardstick than that to measure one's own strength by. For that, young Military Artists went to open dojos to train and refine

their techniques. Purely fighting for survival really was a little tedious. Everyone also wished to calmly enjoy the pleasure of grandeur.

For that, they all yearned for that seat of the Heaven's Blade Receiver, won through a competition of pure strength.

Of course, only people who wanted to reach the sky in one go dreamed of that. To those who had already achieved something, these up and coming rookies were nothing more than nuisances.

Naturally, the increase in Heaven's Blade Receivers put them on guard and until today, perhaps because they were so young, the new Heaven's Blade Receivers never bothered to set up their own Dojo's and were never regarded as a threat.

But this time, Layfon was different.

Ten years old, a Heaven's Blade Receiver who was too young.

He was trained by the Psyharden dojo.

A dojo built in some corner of the city, it looked as if it would topple over if you just threw a pebble at it. Among the numerous small dojos, Psyharden was potentially dangerous to the larger dojos.

Those who had a burden, have to strive to continue carrying that burden. These people existed as Military Artists in order to survive in this city. Even though they knew that strength was paramount, there were few who were willing to throw away their burdens for that power.

Kalvan was the same, and even including the heads of the other two's dojos they were few among many.

As soon as they learned that Minse was unable to take part in the selection battle for the Heaven's Blade, they began to run back and forth for today.

Which is why they were able to so quickly assemble three Heaven's Blade Receivers before Minse now.

"Then, what should we do next?"

Savaris spoke first.

"For us, the greatest threat right now is Lintence. Wait until he leaves the palace and then do it."

"Then I guess we'll do it like that?"

Minse nodded in response to Kalvan's inquiry.

"Our chance comes the next time the Heaven's Blade Receivers need to move out for battle. When the time comes I won't give any special signal. As soon as they start fighting, our battle starts too, and I'll leave it to you guys."

In a normal filth monster attack, it isn't the Heaven's Blade Receivers but squads of normal military artists who were mobilized. Perhaps Layfon would also be dispatched, but Lintence would likely be left to support.

They were waiting for the Mature Phase filth monster to attack.

When that happens, they wouldn't order normal Military Artists to sortie. Heaven's Blades would be dispatched to welcome it in battle.

And if the Heaven's Blade Receivers were dispatched in order, then Layfon would be first. But being his first time fighting a Mature Phase filth monster, then it was almost certain that Lintence would be sent out for battle as well. In order for Layfon to quickly gain experience fighting Mature Phases, Layfon would definitely be picked in the next Mature Phase battle.

"That's why your turn to step onto the battlefield will come very soon" declared Minse.



A month passed.

A very boring month.

Alsheyra's weekly, quick, but ineffective cleaning visits made the room seem even more chaotic. Although Lintence had reservations about all this, all his resistance was useless. Because Alsheyra firmly believed that all that was involved in cleaning was using a vacuum cleaner.

It really hurt his head.

It was the same thing yesterday. Lintence could only watch as everything was messed up. Afterwards, Alsheyra walked out of his home with a pleased look on her face.

Today, Lintence arrived at the palace's flower garden. It was the spacious central garden. There weren't any railings or the like to prevent falls installed. Only the gardener and the Heaven's Blade Receivers had access to this garden. The gardener would never appear here outside of his work hours, and the Heaven's Blade Receivers wouldn't do anything as stupid as falling from the garden and dying. Put another way, this place forbade Heaven's Blade Receivers who did stupid things.

Because this was a private area for the ruling family within the palace.

Except that's exactly where Lintence was.

There was another person there.

"...Only your memory is far superior to anyone else's," said Lintence as he watched the child who sat on the ground before him, sweating profusely.

"Th-thanks for your guidance."

"But you're too used to having Kei flow through your hands. Make the Kei flow around your whole body. Before you can do that, I forbid you from holding your sword other than during battles."

"Understood."

He originally thought that the child wouldn't understand what he was doing, but he was unexpectedly obedient, which made Lintence feel a little despair. On that visage which terrified many people, there had to be something that makes it seem unfriendly.

But that child wasn't actually afraid of him.

After calmly adjusting his breathing, he got up immediately. He wasn't sweating at all anymore. The breeze which blew through across the garden had aired his body dry.

"That's it for today."

"Thank you for your guidance."

Facing Lintence's retreating back after he had finished speaking, the child lowered his head. Like other children, those clear eyes seemed to reflect absolutely nothing, but in reality they were unconsciously absorbing everything before him and adding them to his understanding.

To this child, training his body was merely a confirmation process through which he could reproduce what he saw before him.

Leaving behind the child to self-training, Lintence returned to the palace.

There was a youth standing there. He was watching what was going on in the garden.

"So that's the new guy?"

"Yeah."

That pair of hypnotic eyes that attracted womens' obsessions stared without reserve at the child's actions.

That child was Layfon.

"Why are you specially training him?"

"To kill time, I guess."

"It really is a great way to burn time, eh? I actually thought it was some game to protect this stupid kid who showed up out of nowhere."

The youth's name was Troyatte. One of the Heaven's Blades.

"The purpose is clearer than that."

"I know. But that child is the only person here that I didn't know before he became a Heaven's Blade Receiver. Only Ojou-chans who never leave their homes would think that that alone was enough to accomplish his goals. We're pretty annoyed by this as well, and even Ruimei-ossan is tired of him. What are you guys planning?"

"Nothing."

"Really? So none of us get to fight?"

"Uh-huh."

"That's brilliant! As long as I can sleep in a woman's bed its fine, nothing else could possibly better. I'm so happy I'm about to cry."

From his purposely opened palms he seemed unbiased and genuinely happy.

However in the next moment Troyatte's expression instantly darkened.

"Can't even be a bad guy, quite pitiful eh?"

The meaning of his words were very clear.

Minse had failed.

That wasn't to say that his attempt was exposed. If it was exposed, that pretty much meant failure. If it was a Heaven's Blade Receiver, surely he would understand that point.

Minse could only play the role of the pitiful clown.

Even though he understood...

"They're plotting something as well, right?"

The Heaven's Blade Receivers that were assisting Minse. And there were three.

"It was probably Kalvan-ossan's bad habit of meddling too much which caused this kind of result. If they just ignore that extra troublesome guy it'd probably be fine. But what's the status of the other two guys? Are they obstacles like Kalvan? Hey, this isn't good, you're not even that old and you're already being shackled down by all these conspiracies. Youths should just act like youths and live life passionately in order to get something out of it, shouldn't they?"

Having said this, Troyatte was after all, barely twenty years old.

"Compared to you who's only passionate about women, I think I'm a lot better."

"What? Boss is the type that prefers revolution?"

"How could I be, such a troublesome thing."

"I guess not. I guess Boss who left his previous city purely because it was too troublesome would never say something like that. Well, it's just that I can't tell how much of all this trouble Boss talks about is real, and how much is just you pretending."

"If you don't know then please shut that oily slick voice of yours up, otherwise I might actually leave, ne? And also, don't come too close; you have too much perfume on."

"Well, after all Boss is an ojii-san, so please don't infect me with your outdated tastes."

After having a go at each other, the two each went their own way. In the garden, Layfon was still doing his self-training. It's only been a month but he was already familiar with the basic usage of the steel threads. And adding on top of that his own abilities, there was no real problem using them in battle.

(Well, maybe not quite ready yet.)

Layfon was still not aware of the horror of the steel threads. Without tasting the effects of the weapon that he was using, he still couldn't say that his understanding of it was flawless.

Troyatte had already lost interest in Layfon and left.

Lintence also started moving away.

At this time, an announcement came echoing across the sky.

"The filth monster is currently getting closer. A Mature Phase Stage 2. It will come within the battle area in two days."

It was as if the sounds some obaa-san was making as she sat under the sun had been transmitted right to their ears.

Near the walkway's patio floated a Psychokinesis flake.

This was Delbone's voice.

Even though she was now an obaa-san who was lying in a hospital, her psychokinesis showed no sign of weakening.

"Yes, it'll arrive around midday."

Somebody probably asked a question. The voice in the flake answered the question casually. It was as if the flake let you see her pondering the problem.

"You have to eat lunch properly. You can't skip, ok? If you don't eat properly you won't grow."

The person asking the question was probably Cauntia or Barmelin.

"Uh, uh, there's no need to measure a woman's charm with a man's scale. That's obvious. But a woman with charm can't evade the looks of men. Hence, they can't evade mens' measuring gazes, right?"

"There it is again, getting talked down by Cauntia."

Behind, Troyatte revealed a bitter smile.

"Stop it guys. The battle area will be roughly ten kilomels north-west off the outer edge of the city. There's no need to use the land rollers. You don't need any travel time either. Is this ok?"

The question was directed towards Alsheyra.

"Yeah. I got it. Then, Lintence go backup, Layfon go attack. Lintence, you better support Layfon properly. And Layfon, even though you're a child, you are already an outstanding Heaven's Blade Receiver, so go do your best."

In the midair garden, Layfon nodded to the flake in front of him several times.

"Good. A very good answer. I like kids with spirit. When you grow a bit older, I'll introduce you to my granddaughter."

"Delbone-sama, if you happen to know a young and charming woman, please introduce her to me."

"Troyatte, if you could place all your attentions on one woman only, I would introduce you to an exceptional beauty."

"That really is a harsh request."

"Then please give up. Ayaya, Kalvan-sama, can you not show such a gloomy and unhappy face? You should live your life a little more leisurely."

"Then everyone, I hope it's a pleasant battlefield." After saying this, Delbone's voice could no longer be heard.

The flake left from above Lintence's head.

Leaving the palace's corridors, leaving the midair garden, probably returning to their surveillance of the city.

A pleasant battlefield, eh...

Lintence pondered as he walked.

As to the reason for throwing away the city he had grown up in, then it would be because the environment there didn't have anything that could equal his strength.

A city where nothing really happened, a peaceful city where nothing would happen. There was nothing that he needed to protect with his life there, and he didn't know how much time would pass by before the city ran into a mature phase filth monster. Just a second stage male would be great already. Just that would be a huge deal for his city, but for Lintence that kind of level couldn't even be considered any opposition, merely an enemy.

It definitely couldn't be considered a pleasant battle.

Deciding to leave the city for a while was also because he discovered his great desire for danger.

The thing known as greatness is very difficult to maintain with a relaxed frame of mind. Seeing his steel threads wire technique, which he had bet his life on training and mastering, gradually rusting from not having a place to be used made him deeply felt how hollow his current life was.

It was during his twentieth year that he felt this.

And so he left his city.

The following five years, he lived a wandering life.

He arrived at Grendan because he heard it to be a city that had gone mad. He heard rumors of a city which frequently ran into filth monsters, a city which roamed in the danger zone. It was as if that city was taking the initiative and actually wanted to battle with the filth monsters, continuously fighting all year round.

So he arrived here.

If the rumors were true, then he could probably fully unleash his strength.

And the result far exceeded his expectations.

Because in his first encounter, he had allowed his arrogant self to taste defeat.

"You're very strong, onii-san."

Yes, a girl roughly the same age as Layfon right now wove through all of the steel threads that Lintence had released. And not only that, even when the steel threads bound her up, shredded her skin and flesh, they failed to give her even a single trace of a wound, and like that well known phrase, the bridge of his nose was broken. [In Japanese culture, breaking the bridge of a person's nose is associated with the defeat of an arrogant person.]

"Do you want to prove that you are great? Then enter the competition, so that you're recognized here."

The girl said this in an aloof banter with her foot atop Lintence's stomach, as he lay there with blood steadily flowing out of his nose.

"If you do that, sooner or later I'll have you experience a battlefield that makes you sigh 'ah, I'm so glad I'm not there.'"

He hadn't been on such a battlefield yet.

There did exist a battlefield which satisfied him a little. At least it was a billion times better than staying in his hometown, rusting.

But could he be satisfied with just that?

Please stop joking.

"I won't rest until I see it with my own eyes."

Lintence mumbled, directing it towards Alsheyra, no longer standing before him. After, he returned to the palace.



The emergency alarm rang out across Grendan.

"Then let's go."

Layfon said this as he used an emergency use backpack to carry his younger brothers and sisters on his back.

The young children were running, revealing the urgent atmosphere. But that was just the mood of the bright children, excited by just leaving their front door.

It definitely wasn't the urgency of possible loss of life, that sort of sorrowful atmosphere.

"Ah, Layfon. Why are you wearing those clothes?"

Turning back, he saw his childhood friend standing there, her eyebrows creased.

"Isn't the new training uniform folded up nicely over there? Really."

"It's okay. I'm changing out of these pretty soon anyway."

"No. You're unpresentable."

Even though she said this, he obviously didn't have enough time to change clothes. As Leerin grumbled, she tried to make the wrinkles in his shirt less conspicuous, tugging on the collar and the sleeves. Layfon stood there uncomfortably, silently allowing Leerin to fix his attire.

"Make sure you do it properly next time."

"Ok~~~~"

Hearing Layfon's half-hearted answer, Leerin pinched Layfon's cheeks.

"Ouch~"

He was obviously acting.

"Um, Layfon."

"What?"

"Don't get injured."

"No problem. Didn't I safely return all those times before? I'll return safely this time as well."

Before Layfon had become a Heaven's Blade Receiver, Layfon had already fought on the battlefield. In Grendan, those who didn't achieve a certain amount of results in the competitions weren't allowed to fight on the battlefield, and they also couldn't receive the Military Artists' grants. And the young Military Artists' grants would only be given until fifteen.

Layfon had been participating in the competitions since two years ago.

After achieving his goal in the first competition, he started participating in every battle he was allowed to fight in.

If one went onto the battlefield, a Military Artist's grants would be more than others. Layfon gave all of that money to the orphanage.

"But today you're alone, right?"

Leerin looked at the Dite belt strung around her childhood friend's waist. On it hung a unique Dite.

Today was Layfon's first battle as a Heaven's Blade Receiver.

"Lintence-sama will be there as well. That person is very strong. So there's no problems."

Him saying this didn't lessen Leerin's worry at all.

"Then let's make a promise."

"A promise?"

Leerin was stunned by Layfon's proposal.

"A promise I'll definitely come back safely. So, you have to make me a week's worth of food without any green vegetables whatsoever."

"Three days."

"Eh~~~"

"Uh-uh. If you don't eat properly you won't grow. Isn't that what Lucia-neesan said?"

Lucia was a girl who was helping with the cooking recently, and was responsible working in the kitchen before Leerin. Also, she was the one who had taught Layfon and Leerin how to cook.

"So mean. Fine, I got it."

Layfon nodded his head very unwillingly, and after raising his hand and shouting goodbye he turned and left the orphanage. The younger brothers and sisters shouted towards his retreating back. Layfon waved back at them before leaping out.

Leerin sent Layfon off as she watched his shadow leaving, using his emergency high speed dash, flying across rooftops as she whispered.

"You clearly have nothing that you don't like eating."

But they had already made their promise.

Now she could only believe in him.



A late Layfon saw what the uniform he was going to wear outside of the city looked like.

It was a delicate grass-green-colored pollution isolation suit. Next to it was placed a helmet marked with 'Wolfstein.' The suit itself was labeled with Wolfstein, indicating the accessories were made especially for him. Although it didn't affect movement very much, it would still probably create a bit more wind resistance. But for Heaven's Blade Receivers, they had to carefully take into account that sort of minute detail as well.

But also, Heaven's Blade Receivers were a symbolic existence. Sometimes, when battling large numbers of filth monsters, their existence can improve the performance of other Military Artists, so they can't neglect the ornaments on their uniforms.

"Isn't sensei wearing a protective uniform?"

Even though he hadn't been ordered to be addressed as such, Layfon still called Lintence "sensei."

"You're the only one leaving the city."

Layfon had some doubts, as Lintence prevented the technical support members from getting close to him as he continued to wear his normal clothes.

"This is your battle. I'm just insurance. I'll deal with the guys you leave out. The next time there are orders it'll just be you by yourself. Don't embarrass yourself."

"I understand."

The obediently nodding child didn't have a look of fear at all. Because he was a child, his only reaction to anything in the world that he didn't

understand was indifference. That pair of eyes no longer had their usual look.

A very good expression.

He had gotten rid of any emotions. It was an expression reflecting Layfon concentrating all his thoughts into the upcoming battle.

(The young child made such an expression. Was this a lamentable occurrence...?)

Having once lived in a peaceful city when he was young, he considered it.

However, he didn't have too many feelings on that point. And he didn't really think it was lamentable.

If one really wanted to dig towards the roots in search of the person to blame, then that would be the adults who made this child make such an expression.

Taking it a step further, in the entirety of Grendan, how many children other than Layfon could make such an expression?

That is to say, Layfon was a unique example.

"You still don't know how to use the steel threads, you understand that, right?"

"Yes."

Wearing only equipment for traveling outside a city, Lintence made all the technical support members go away. Layfon lifted his head to look at the helmet, playing with the buckle, and walked up to Lintence.

"For a person who originally uses a Katana, this fight will be rather constrained. But this is a battle that you have chosen, so just fight as you like."

Layfon showed a moment of surprise, but it vanished immediately from his face.

"There's no problem, I've made a promise with her to get home safely. If I provoke her anger, she's terrifying."

"Really?"

Although he didn't know who Layfon had made this promise with, it was fine, seeing how he was speaking with such passion.

"Then go."

Layfon took the helmet, strapping it on properly. After checking the connectors for gaps, Lintence slapped him on his back.

After the stairs opened up leading below, Layfon jumped out.

"Then, I wonder if the comedy over there will be able to meet expectations?"

Moving towards the outer edge of the city, Lintence whispered silently, the words never carrying across to that midair garden within the palace.

At the same time, in the midair garden.

The emergency alert was already fading, and the city had sunk into silence. Strong winds were blowing roughly beyond the air filter. Someone experienced could detect the approach of filth monsters in that wind condition. However, in Grendan, there were few days when the wind was calm. That's why inversely, in Grendan, people who could detect filth monsters only from the outside were rare.

All most people know is that on calm days, roaming buses are more likely to arrive.

Alsheyra laid on a long bench in a corner of the midair garden.

Hands resting on the arm rests, sleeping. The emergency alert did not wake her up. For the sake of sleeping here, she purposely stayed up all night. She had no intention of simply waking up.

She slept so deeply that she wouldn't even have any dreams.

Strong wind from outside couldn't reach inside because of the air filter. A breeze stroked her cheek, hair blew gently. Warm sunshine bathed her whole body. The perfect conditions for basking in the sun and taking an afternoon nap had been met.

".....The hell?"

Yet Alsheyra's eyes were awake.

"What the hell is this?"

There was not even the hazy feeling one gets after waking up. The body was claiming lack of sleep. Her body stressed that it hadn't slept enough, but despite that, Alsheyra woke completely from her slumber.

"Jeez, I really wish you did it more simply, y'know. Even among the Heaven's Blades, You're the number one Sakkei user, right? Get a grip a little more, Kanaris!

At those words, the people standing at the entrance of the Royal Garden trembled.

"Or is this not your fault, I wonder? Ah, that's right, you didn't have any bloodthirst. If you had a moment more, you could've approached about another ten steps, I think? If that's the case, then who? Whose fault is this, I wonder? Kalvan? Savaris? Or is it Minse? All members come here for a moment!"

Alsheyra stood there with her hands on her hips, shouting.

Kanaris stood there, stunned, before hurriedly stepping forward, followed by Savaris and Kalvan. And lastly was Minse's silhouette.

"Your majesty....."

"I don't want to hear any excuses"

Alsheyra cut off Kalvan's explanation.

"What is this unsightly behavior? You came for an assassination didn't you? Show more backbone."

At Alsheyra's rebuke, everyone was unable to move.

"It is very like us to express objections with military might, however the fact that you can't even express the 'suc' in success is really lamentable. Especially for me. I've been really excited about this you know. Working through the night, I was filled with weariness as I waited here. Do you understand? The troubles that I went that far for has been made into nothing. Would you like some of my leftover anger as change?"

Her displeasure from sleep deprivation showed through as Alsheyra glared at the four of them.

"Ah, man. You wasted it all. What a bad feeling. I can't take this. I've got no more energy. Minse, you have to take responsibility. If you can't find something interesting that'll make me laugh, then I'll have to start the punishment game."

Facing the various responsibilities he had to take, Minse shuddered.

".....you, it was because you didn't let me participate in the competition that everything became like this!"

Unable to bear any more of Alsheyra's slow scolding, Minse shouted out.

"Why can a ten year old child participate, yet I cannot? I can only imagine this was the doing of some sort of Almonise family conspiracy."

"Hah, a conspiracy? Aren't you getting a bit too far ahead of yourself? You've never participated in an official competition, have you? Those with insufficient results aren't allowed to participate in the selection battles, right? You didn't think that you would get special treatment just because you're part of the three royal families, did you? Even Tig-jii followed the process step by step as well, didn't he?"

"Uuu....."

"Ok, that's that. Well? I'm sure the rest of you did something like this because you were displeased for one reason or another, right? Well, let's hear it in order, starting from Kalvan."

"Recently, Your Majesty's Heaven's Blade examination standards....."

"For those who have skills matching yours, and gain recognition in proper order in accordance with the laws, should I not give him a Heaven's Blade? It's what the Royal family is here to do. Ok, rejected. Next."

Kalvan powerlessly drooped his head. The next person to speak, Savaris was lightly smiling as he began weaving his speech.

"I want to fight Your Majesty."

"Is that all?"

"Uh-huh. I'm not like those other people who consider this world in such a complicated way. I only wanted to fight with Your Majesty, so I accepted Minse-sama's request is all."

"Sigh~ That's so damn boring. Next?"

"....."

Kanaris kept her head lowered and said nothing. However she quickly whipped out her Dite from her belt and restored it. The hilt of the sword had a decorated guard, and the sword was very slender..... it was a rapier.

"Oya? Kanaris had the same intentions? Really? Ah."

Looking at Kanaris' silent, intense, glare, Alsheyra revealed a confounded expression, but that quickly changed into a smile.

"Ok, then so be it. If you guys can beat me, perhaps I will take what you guys said into consideration."

"Then what about what I said?"

"As long as we battle, it'll all be good, won't it?"

"Well, I guess so."

Savaris stood up as well, restoring the Dite on his hands and feet.

"What will you do, Kalvan-sama?"

".....Since it's already gotten to this stage, I don't suppose I have any choice."

Saying this, Kalvan also restored his Dite. It was a great sword.

"For now, I want to make that 'perhaps' a certainty."

"Oya? Is it that you have confidence in beating me?"

"I've never gone into battle thinking that I would lose."

The Kei around Kalvan began to expand, making the flowers in the garden tremble, and even the trees were beginning to shiver. Kalvan's tall and solid body let out a golden aura. The high density Kei being gathered in tandem with his fighting style was also undergoing change. The golden Kei was almost like a viscous liquid, as it seethed around him, still floating around Kalvan.

"...You Majesty, before, you wanted to ask us, if we could ever hope to defeat you with just this kind of level, right?"

"Yeah."

"From the start, I never thought about assassination....."

What immediately followed these words no longer sounded like a spoken language.

The golden Kei which was revolving about Kalvan suddenly rushed towards Alsheyra.

".....but about fighting it out with you fair and square!"

".....!"

Alsheyra wanted to move her wrist, but she was blocked by something.

It was an External-type Burst Kei Variant, Armed Sword.

It was a move Kalvan created himself. It was normally used as an armor, with the half materialized kei surrounding his whole body. Although its defense wasn't as strong as Kongoukei, but it was like a liquid which could congeal instantly into blades the moment anything approached it.

It was different from creating Kei of the same hardness and defensive strength as Kongoukei. It was a sort of pre-emptive defensive measure.

"Ooo~~"

That thing was currently wrapped around Alsheyra's body, binding her with hardness and stickiness akin to industrial grade rubber.

But it couldn't hold for long.

They had no intention to wait for it to break.

At this moment, Savaris and Kanaris mobilized.

In the moment it took to shake off the Armed Sword Kei, the two had closed in on Alsheyra.

They didn't use any special techniques, but the fist and the sword were strikes charged with their respective owners' Kei.

If they couldn't break through with one point of attack, then they would break through with two. Two Heaven's Blade-level Kei energies came rushing from different directions.

The Midair Flower Garden shook intensely. The garden was filled with sounds of explosions and flashes of light. Evading with difficulty, Minse

was sent flying into the wall joining the Midair Flower Garden the outer walkway by a full body hit.

(Success!)

As Minse landed within the doorway, his whole body was wracked with pain, but as he untwisted his body he expressed his confidence.

(With that, I'm sure she's been gotten rid of.)

But Minse still didn't notice.

His own naive understanding.

As the last heir of the main branch to the Eutnohl family, one of the three Royal Families living a greenhouse life within the Grendan Military Arts world, he couldn't understand.

The force of their own strikes also blasted the three Heaven's Blade Receivers apart from the center.

The lawn in the flower garden had been torn up, the soil lining the flower garden was scattered about, and the stones beneath the soil could be seen. It was like a small scale meteorite crater.

The dust scattered about in the center gradually settled.

"Uwah~ Well, I guess you guys get a 'pass.' "

The voice range out from the center.

"To limit the damage around you to a minimum, you opened out two Armed Swords? Quite befitting your hardworking personality, Kalvan. But I'm quite fond of this place, so it's great that this place hasn't been wrecked."

Alsheyra was standing there.

On that beautiful face of hers, there wasn't a single speck of dust. She merely stood there, unperturbed.

"Impossible."

Minse's voice quivered, making incomprehensible noises.

That Alsheyra stood there without a single injury in that soil crater was an unbelievable sight for Minse.

A pained expression appeared on Kalvan's face, and even Savaris smiled bitterly. Only Kanaris stood there, expressionless, although her eyebrows were slightly furrowed.

"But I should take off points for not being able to restrain me just like that, right? Well, I can sympathize seeing how you guys made the decision to give up after understanding you were defeated."

"Thank you very much."

The only one obediently lowering his head was Savaris.

"As expected, teamwork you haphazardly created won't do very much, Kalvan-sama."

".....It seems that way."

Kalvan opened out his Armed Sword yet again. The golden Kei wrapped itself around his body anew.

"Then we'll just have to act according to the situation of the battle on our own."

"I suppose those are some good words."

"....."

Agreeing to Kalvan's suggestion, the three silently increased their Kei pressure. That's all they did, but it began to warp the airflow. The intense Kei flow expelled the air, created a strong gale.

It was as if the Midair Flower Garden was in the eye of a hurricane.

But in the center of that.....

"Didn't I say that I was kind of partial to this place? If you guys go all out, then it would be very troublesome, and you would break this place. Which – is – why....."

Alsheyra raised a finger.

Closing an eye, with a coquettish expression on her face, she quietly whispered.

"Let's end this here ☆~"

What happened in the next instant was something that Minse would probably never be able to explain.

Victory was decided just like that.



The wilderness was just as wild and rough as its name suggested.

Despite wearing shoes with strong soles made specifically to cater for this, he could still feel that intense feeling penetrate throughout his body. Layfon carefully stepped on the ground as he marched forward, finally arriving at the point ten kilometers out from the north-easternmost edge of the city.

His target had already entered his line of sight.

Layfon pulled out his Dite and restored it.

The Heaven's Blade.

A Platinum Dite appeared in his hands.

Even the weight of Grendan's mysterious platinum could be adjusted according to the user's wishes. Normally, one would have to compromise some aspect of density, hardness, viscosity, shape, or conductivity. But the Heaven's Blade had no such issues.

Regardless of the hardness of the Dite, it was possible to make it whatever weight was convenient for the user. It was hard to break, and it could change to any shape freely.

The only setting Layfon was particular about was weight. As for the others, he entrusted them to the special Heaven's Blade technicians.

"You're the first Heaven's Blade to say such a thing. Is it because you're young, that you underestimate the value of a weapon?"

Looking at Layfon silently listening to his criticism, the old technician finally revealed a defeated expression, giving up attempting to persuade him, and set the sword to match Layfon's physique.

(It's just a sword anyway.)

As long as it could be set to the same weight that his wrist was used to, than anything else would be fine. All he needed to remember was that part and forget everything else.

That's all the awareness he had for a sword. That weight he was so used to in his hands would quickly become a part of his body. The Kei spread out like the nervous system, making the inflow of Kei into the sword even more complete.

Was this the result of training under Lintence with the steel threads in the past month? Like being able to send Kei into his sword the same way his Kei would instinctively flow into his muscles. Even though his fighting stance was a little forced when he fought with the sword, it could still achieve what was desired.

This wasn't just a feeling.

With this sort of ability, couldn't he toss the blade into the air and manipulate it freely? Maybe he should try next time.

Even Layfon wasn't brave enough to just toss it into the midst of a battle.

The enemy was getting closer.

Layfon reached into a small pack on his waist and retrieved two small objects, and tossed them skyward. They two arced across in a parabola, and using his External Type Kei, Layfon shattered them.

The shattered objects turned into yellow dust and scattered about in all four directions.

It was a kind of dried animal fat. After other refining steps, it could be made into soap. But right now it wasn't like that. It was just to give the surroundings the smell of life.

Would the filth monsters react to the scent of living things? Naturally, people would ask such questions. But results were definitely produced. In terms of larvae moving in large herds, it could drastically change their movement routes.

But as for older filth monsters, the effect was minimal.

For Mature Phase filth monsters, it was impossible to tell if it even had any effect. The Technical Department had once told him that. But regardless,

this was the first time he had fought a Mature Phase. Everyone bestowed their experience upon Layfon.

As if it were cautious, the Mature Phase didn't change its bearing, but it noticed the existence of a tiny life form en route to Grendan. Although, it wasn't affected by the smell, but by Layfon's shadow.

A Mature Phase Stage 2, just as Delbone predicted.

As it got closer, the Mature Phase revealed that mysterious body shape. Like a bug in its larval state, when it shed, it would get rid of its legs, and specialize into a flying form. But the Mature Phase purged even its insect form, transforming into something akin to a reptile.

There was some doubt.

All of Grendan's filth monster researchers held doubts.

Because the lack of nutrition when growing up as filth monsters, they would attack cities. And when they transformed into Mature Phases, they would become extremely hungry.

Then why would there be some many Mature Phases in the area that Grendan wandered?

If cities in the same region were annihilated, it was impossible for the news to not spread to Grendan. But they didn't hear of such reports of other cities being destroyed.

Then, couldn't the Filth Monsters reproduce through the pollutants and cannibalism?

Then, why would they attack humans?

For Layfon, he couldn't understand this.

But Delbone gave this answer.

"If you're talking about diet, mankind can survive by only eating wild vegetation as well. Then why would they eat meat? And this is every kind of creature. Do we reproduce just to eat? That's not all, we've also created various kinds of dishes and desserts. Why is this? Because they give humankind a kind of enjoyment. Can we just assume that Filth Monsters don't know of this kind of enjoyment?"

Although he wasn't totally uninterested, he certainly wasn't able to understand the Filth Monsters' feelings.

The Filth Monster near him was exactly as Delbone described: it had just entered the Mature Stage a week ago.

"Arara..... I've made a little mistake."

From within the helmet came the voice of an obaa-san who seemed to be in a good mood.

"What is it?"

"At first I thought there were two, but it seems there's only one."

".....Eh?"

What Layfon saw before him were indeed two filth monsters. Some distance off, climbing below Grendan was a body far larger than those supporting pillars, sporting a pair of semi-transparent wings. Long and sharp teeth could be seen protruding from that long and strange mouth. Only the eyes were like those of a bug's, with a pair of dark green glass ball eyes.

Those two looked as if they were stacked atop each other and flying.

"No, no, please look carefully. They're linked together at their tail section, right? It's like when dragonflies mate. It's because there are two heads, so I got it wrong. I'm sorry."

"Ah..... No problem."

Compared to two, one was still a lot easier..... was what Layfon thought.

"The battlefield isn't somewhere you can get careless, okay?"

As if reading Layfon's mind, come those words of warning. Although obaa-san's words weren't actually severe, they were like water seeping into soil, irrefutable.

They no longer had any time to be having a conversation.

"Well, I hope you have an enjoyable fight."

Once again hearing those words he heard two days ago, Delbone's voice vanished, and following immediately, the Mature Phase opened its two huge mouths, and rushed towards Layfon with urgency.

Layfon jumped up, avoiding.

The Mature Phase's lower half smashed the hard ground apart. The upper half was chasing Layfon as he rapidly ascended. Tugging the lower half after it, the two halves eventually switched places.

It was as if they were twining around each other as they chased Layfon.

After adjusting his posture midair, Layfon engaged the Mature Phase in attack.

External-type burst Kei, Sendan.

The blade emitted brightly colored Kei. A paper-thin shockwave cut through a part of the Mature Phase's wing and sliced the tail section where the two were connected.

The Filth Monster's two halves let out a fierce wail. The scream itself had a lot of force behind it, completely sending Layfon's small body flying.

If you said a creature had two heads, then a ten-year-old child won't understand. Could you not kill it even if you cut off a head? As for the Mature Phases that came in all shapes and sizes, all that he had heard about them was that the scales on their heads were extremely hard.

Then, what about the section that connected the two bodies together? Although he had suspicions like a child's curiosity, it was a fact that that part moved the least and was the easiest to target.

The Sendan beautifully divided the tail portion into two. From the wound came spraying out a viscous liquid.

However, the two separated parts were both still moving individually.

"What're you talking about; this is clearly two Mature Phase filth monsters."

Although he was unable to kill the filth monster, Layfon was hardly depressed at all. At any rate, he should land before worrying about anything else. The enraged Mature Phase performed even more complex movements than when it was whole, in order to get closer to Layfon while preventing his escape.

Layfon didn't retreat or evade, and instead took a deep breath on the spot. His breath temporarily fogged up his line of sight through the helmet.

Layfon was filled with Kei. In that moment with the heat pressing down on his whole body –

He gathered it all on his blade.

External-type burst Kei, Gouken (Resounding Blade).

The blade of the sword became wider and longer, transforming into a huge sword taller than Layfon. A sword that had been infused with Kei. This was a technique that could be used by any Military Artist of a sword-using style. However, normal Dites were unable to withstand the highly concentrated Kei that Layfon emitted and would self-destruct. For normal Military Artists, they were unable to use the technique to such an extent as to cause the blade to self-destruct. That's why, for Layfon, if he didn't have the Heaven's Blade he was unable to use this technique.

Even at birth, Layfon possessed an enormous amount of Kei.

Was he adopted only because of that? He had also thought about this before. However, it was only because he had this power, that he could become a Heaven's Blade.

By becoming a Heaven's Blade he could even better help the orphanage.

When Layfon was very young, he realized that this was what life is all about. It was fortune and misfortune blended together. One moment of fortune was the result of overcoming many misfortunes, and a series of misfortunes laid the foundation for happiness to come.

Of course he wanted good fortune to come. It was because of his talent that allowed him to be adopted. However, it was thanks to this that he was able to meet Derek and Leerin. However, because they were in an orphanage, they experienced many tragedies as a result of the lack of food. But because he was a Military Artist, he could rely on his Military Artist grants to slightly ease the orphanage's suffering. And in order to never be in such a state again, he decided to fully utilize his own abilities to become a Heaven's Blade.

After becoming a Heaven's blade, there was definitely the happiness that he was awaiting for. Layfon firmly believed this.

And then, he became a Heaven's Blade.

The huge sword was one that even adult Military Artists couldn't properly grip, yet Layfon wielded it with ease. He aimed at the circling Mature Phase. Making a feint, he rushed towards the Mature Phase in front of him, stepping on its forehead and jumping once again, somersaulting in the air.

As Layfon twisted in the air, the two halves collided with each other before his eyes. There was a resounding boom. The vibrations from the sound shook the outside of the contamination suit, and the sound of small pebbles striking the helmet could be heard.

Layfon held the gigantic sword in a reverse grip and landed on the Mature Phase's back.

Then he plunged the sword into it.

And pulled out the Heaven's Blade.

All that was left was the Dite-infused blade of the sword.

He then jumped up.

The remaining Gouken was blasted apart. It transformed into numerous Sendan, and sliced the Mature Phase's body all over.

(Good)

Escaping from the chaos of the storm of scattered Sendan, Layfon mentally pumped his fist. He had always wanted to know if he could do this, and he had always trained in his mind. And the result made Layfon felt very satisfied.

(Is it possible to focus the direction of the explosions onto a single point? If he can immediately get to that level next time.....)

As he was thinking this, he landed and ran beside the Mature Phase's body.

The effective area of the Gouken explosion was even smaller than he had imagined. Even though this was something for him to improve on later, at least he had managed to dispatch a Mature Phase. As long as it was effective, it was ok..... thought Layfon as he ran.

Suddenly, the back of the Filth Monster cracked open.

".....Eh?"

It wasn't the result of the Gouken. From the vibrations he felt underfoot, it seemed that the cracking had come from within.

Something was surging out from within.

Before any sound from the cracking could be heard, Layfon had already jumped.

The scales and flesh of the Mature Phase burst open, and from it surged countless larvae.

This probably counted as his carelessness, right? In the prior lectures about Mature Phases he had heard that among filth monsters they were the ones who had given up the ability to reproduce. He had also heard that if filth monsters wanted to reproduce they had to molt into the Female form.

And he heard one more thing about Mature Phases.

There were strange Transforming types.

The pair in front of his eyes were exactly that.

The two in front of him looked to be a pair. They were clearly Mature Phase, but they hadn't given up the ability to reproduce. Or rather, they had become Mature Phases that had found some abnormal way to reproduce.

At any rate, in order to escape the larvae that were gushing out of the Mature Phases' body, Layfon jumped.

He was a fraction of a second too slow.

His shoe was caught on a larva. It reduced his jumping power by a lot. The silver lining in the cloud was the fact that only the sole of the shoe had been caught. It was just that the sole of the shoe was shaved away a little, and hadn't made a hole through which pollutants could seep through.

However, the momentum of his jump had been reduced, and it undeniably caused Layfon to lose his balance.

Without any threats to it, the Mature Phase did not fail to take advantage of that opening.

It opened its maw to swallow up Layfon.



"Ara ara, Layfon has been swallowed."

"Oh, is that so?"

Lintence was standing alone on the outskirts of the city and hearing Delbone's words allowed him to understand the situation. Although the sense of touch from the steel wires allowed a general understanding of the situation, the information it delivered couldn't be compared to the precision of psychokinesis.

The Mature Phase flew towards the sky. For the moment, Lintence took care of the Larvae that were overflowing.

"What are you going to do?"

"He's still alive, right?"

"His life signal is very clear."

"The protective suit should be able to resist the digestive fluids of the Filth Monster for a few hours."

"Yes, I've heard that it can."

"Then I'm sure he'll be able to solve the problem on his own."

"Ara, so harsh. Isn't he your disciple?"

From the way Delbone spoke it seemed she was extremely interested by Lintence's reaction.

"I never intended to take him as my disciple. I'm only teaching him a little. Also, if he's struggling at just this level of opponent, what is he going to do in the future?"

"Even if that is the case, regardless of what you say he's still just a child. He's like a grandchild to me. If he died in battle like this, wouldn't it be rather young?"

"If the city is destroyed, then there will be children even younger than him who will perish. Isn't it the Military Artist's duty to protect them? That they

would die in battle was something that they never put into consideration. Weak Military Artists don't have any value in their existence."

This was the cold blooded reality of the battlefield. However, Layfon understood these principles from a young age.

And like this, without any unnecessary reserve, without any unnecessary blame, he underwent the baptism of these principles.

"Although I don't have children, there's also a time to spoil children, is there not?"

"I love my grandson very much, though. His parents can take care of his education."

She clearly indicated that it had absolutely nothing to do with her, and passed the responsibility of education onto Lintence.

"Really, such careless words."

"Of course, if you asked why, it's because I've already experienced this sort of hard work. It's obvious that this sort of work should be done by those who've never experienced it..... ara."

Halfway through their conversation, Delbone's attention seemed to have wandered off elsewhere.

After a brief pause, she started talking to Lintence once more.

"A message from Her Majesty. Bring Layfon to the Palace Garden."

"Tell her we're in the middle of a battle."

"Her Majesty understands this."

"How disorganized. What reason is there to act upon a child's impulse?"

"You see, that child was orphaned very young, so Her Majesty has no choice but to take over the responsibilities of a parent, right?"

"I can't take this anymore....."

Lintence, moved his body a little, and the steel wires abided by their master's will and silently began to move.

After confirming that the steel wires had wrapped around the Mature Phase that was coming this way, Lintence had still not moved a finger and used the various rocky outcrops within a few kilometers of the Regios to restrain it.

"Tell her Majesty to increase the density of the air purification machine. At this rate the pollutants will get into the city."

"Even if you didn't say it, Her Majesty would have done it anyway."

Dispersing the strong resistance resulting from the extremely heavy weight among the various rocky outcrops, Lintence started his large scale fishing activity.



Going back in time a little.

Alsheyra was considering how to deal with the scene before her.

"In any case, your Majesty, please forgive us."

Kalvan was kneeling before Alsheyra. His clothes were tattered and dirty, and blood was oozing from all over his body. Although Savaris and Kanaris were able to stand up, after they did, they couldn't move a muscle.

The only one who couldn't move was Kalvan, so it probably had something to do with the fact that he was the oldest, right?

(Well, even if age was a factor, it shouldn't have that much of an effect, right?)

Alsheyra thought to herself. His physical body was already past its peak, and even now the downwards trend could be seen. However, being unable to match up to two young people just because of this is inexcusable.

Compared to those things, what she cared about most was Kalvan's attitude.

".....Was this your plan from the very start?"

Alsheyra furrowed her eyebrows, glaring at Kalvan who had lowered his head, kneeling.

"This incident this time is definitely disloyal behavior, and it's irreversible. But taking her Majesty's circumstances into consideration, we did this precisely for those who, for the sake of protecting the Bloodlines, could not be born."

"Then, are you saying that the fault lies with the system of the Three Royal Families?"

Kalvan had stood on Minse's side because he wanted to take up the role of a problem solver. Of course, he was also displeased by Alsheyra increasing the number of Heaven's Blade Successors, but he was really here so that he could appeal to Alsheyra directly.

Which was why Minse was able to propose such a hare-brained plan to him.

And Kalvan didn't reject the plan either, so it was probably that personality of his that led to a result like this.

"Rather than say you like to work too hard, it's better to say this situation was caused by that personality of yours. Go find a way to change it for me."

"And you say this only now..... Till today I've lived my whole life with this personality, and I have no intention of changing it."

Kalvan raised his head. His forehead was fractured, and blood was seeping out from the wound. Half his face was dyed crimson, and his eyes revealed a light that showed he wasn't afraid of death. This made Alsheyra lose interest.

".....The Psyharden Dojo has decided to expand. Although I was going to pay for the grants, I'll have all expenses paid by your three dojos."

"Your Majesty!"

"I don't want to break my sword over such a trivial matter."

Not responding to Kalvan's wishes, Alsheyra redirected her attention to the other two and looked at Savaris.

"Well, what about you? Are you satisfied?"

"Well, your Majesty is simply too strong."

Suppressing his already broken left hand, Savaris replied with a smile. A glance at the sweat dripping off his forehead made it obvious that the smile was a forced one.

"And I was hoping to have a bit of a competition to see who was stronger."

"That's a little naive of you, isn't it? Well, what about you, Kanaris?"

Kanaris knelt there, motionless. But everyone there noticed her quivering shoulders.

"You're crying?"

A trembling Kanaris gradually lifted her head. Her face was covered with dirt, and she spoke with faltering lips.

".....Your Majesty, you really don't need us anymore."

"Huh?"

Faced with such unexpected words, Alsheyra was also very taken aback. The tears that cut across Kanaris' cheeks as she raised her head looked like thin pieces of string being guided out from her eyes.

"Because.....I was raised for the sake of becoming her Majesty's shadow. And since her Majesty no longer needs me....."

"Ah....."

Alsheyra touched her head, realizing what Kanaris meant.

Kanaris came from the dojo that was set up by the descendants of the three royal families. One aspect of the dojo was to foster children from the three royal families that didn't become the heads of their respective families. At the same time members of this dojo were also responsible for the security of the Palace. These duties of course included the protection of her Royal Highness. And if they were protecting her Majesty during public ceremonies, then for Kanaris this also included the job of being a Kagemusha (protector in the shadows).

Kanaris' abilities had surpassed those of her peers a long time ago, so she was raised within the Rivanesu Dojo as Alsheyra's shadow. And Kanaris had responded to the Dojo's expectations, becoming a Heaven's Blade at just fifteen.

However, Alsheyra had denied Kanaris that post.

"That's because you don't look like me at all, right?"

"Something as trivial as that can be done with plastic surgery."

Kanaris appealed while wiping her tears away.

".....Huh? You'll get plastic surgery to match beauty such as mine?"

Alsheyra's incredulous manner left everyone present dumbstruck.

And then Kanaris began bawling loudly.

"Wahh, I'm better off dead!"

Kanaris was completely serious, as she held her rapier in a reverse grip and thrust it towards her throat. Seeing this, Alsheyra instantly snatched the rapier from her hand.

"I can't take this anymore, stop this right now!"

Even though she was deprived of her sword, Kanaris continued thrusting her empty hand towards her own throat. Alsheyra caught that hand with some difficulty, and after suppressing the suicidal Kanaris, the sound of someone's laughter came drifting over from the walkway.

"It's great to see that everyone is so lively."

"Tig-jii, is this really the time to be laughing?"

Carefully controlling the Heaven's Blade Successors who were rowdy like a bunch of little kids indeed needed some skill. It had made Alsheyra break out in sweat for the first time. Even if this had made the guest who had just arrived laugh aloud, she didn't find this situation amusing in the least.

Tigris Noiran Ronsmier. He was a Heaven's Blade Successor as well as the head of the last of the three Royal Families, the Ronsmier Family.

"Aren't you going to do anything else other than laugh?"

"Kalvan, about you....."

Alsheyra immediately realized why Tigris had appeared at this place at this moment.

If you were to choose someone to take the role of troubleshooter and problem solver, then the man who was a Heaven's Blade Successor, an

elder second only to Delbone, and Alsheyra's grandfather – Tigris – was ideal.

Although more than half his head had balded cleanly, the remaining hairs had also lost their luster. However, his face and body still radiated vitality.

"Even though the King holds absolute power, if he doesn't tell his own thoughts to his subordinates frequently, then they will become disobedient, right?"

"But things like a Kagemusha (protector in the shadows), I don't need that at all. Quite frankly, it's a role that's even more boring than being a Palace Guard. Other than Jii-jii and Minse, who else would try and assassinate me anyway?"

The fact is, when you compared the Palace Guards to the Heaven's Blade Successors, they were definitely doing a redundant job. But it's not like they were in anybody's way either. As for those Palace Guards who patrolled between the Palace and the city wearing those resplendent uniforms all the time, they were the children who were not the heirs to the Royal Families. It was a job that didn't bring shame to their respective Families, while acting as a buffer that allowed them to obediently become reborn as commoners.

Roles to protect the King from assassination were unnecessary as well. It wasn't because Alsheyra was too strong, but because there was no point in assassinating the King.

Interaction with other Cities was minimal, and in truth, controlling other Cities was physically impossible, so killing the rulers of other Cities didn't have any benefit at all. At the same time, in a political assassination situation like this, the only one who would plan an assassination would be those who benefitted most from it – those aligned with the Three Royal Families. And choosing the Palace Guards and Kagemusha from the Royal Families only increased the likelihood that they would become assassins.

It really was putting the cart before the horse.

And this job was one that was as idle as that of a palace guard, in other words, it was a decorative role borne out of the formality of official events.

"There isn't any need to make a Heaven's Blade serve that role, is there?"

"But there just happen to be people in this world who were raised for that specific purpose, and these people obviously hold strong convictions about the role they undertake. Please understand, your Majesty, that if you don't want them restrained like that, then you must do something for them."

"Ugh....."

"If you think it's a bother, you might as well give her your recognition. Wouldn't that solve all the problems?"

It was unclear when Kanaris had stopped crying, her eyes fixed upon Alsheyra.

The others were also waiting for what Alsheyra would say next.

"At any rate, I'll hold a test. I don't want my Kagemusha to be an idiot."

"Yes!"

Kanaris nodded her head happily. Alsheyra revealed an inexplicably bitter smile.

"Well then....."

Alsheyra turned her gaze past the happily smiling Kanaris, and looked at the last person.

In all, she had dealt with the problems of the three Heaven's Blades.

And after was.....

Alsheyra watched Minse. The youth who had blankly watched the scenario unfold, turned ashen when he caught Alsheyra's eyes.

"Tig-jii. What do you think we do?"

Hearing this, Minse cast a look begging for help towards Tigris. However, the elder stroked his proud beard, ignoring Minse's glances.

"After his brother left, only this child was left. It seems we've coddled him far too much. Punishing him will be a very appropriate decision."

Hearing Tigris' emotionless words, Minse's ashen face suddenly turned a tragic white.

"It looks like my family has no choice but to subsidize the Psyharden Dojo to smooth this event over."

"The continuous Heaven's Blade inauguration ceremonies have made the Royal Coffers a little lonely. Even though they weren't that extravagant anyway. At any rate, making me provide funds when the treasury is tight makes things very hard."

"Then, what does your Majesty intend to do."

"What should I do....."

Alsheyra pondered the problem briefly, and began conversing through some nearby Psychokinesis flakes with Delbone.

"It looks like that side hasn't gone well either. Why don't we have a punishment game?"

Minutes and seconds ticked by. But for Minse, that time was like waiting for the execution of his death penalty. No matter how much time passed, his facial expression didn't improve.

At this moment, a shadow appeared above the Palace Gardens.

The shadow, along with the noise, became rapidly larger.

The entire cast at the scene turned their eyes towards the sky.

Alsheyra, the Heaven's Blade Successors and the rest didn't let out any gasps of surprise. This was because they immediately knew whose masterpiece this was.

A Filth Monster descended from the sky.

But it was merely a part of it. The head and body had been sliced away, and only the abdomen landed in the middle of the Midair Garden.

"Ah..... it looks like I'll have to completely renovate this place."

As Alsheyra vented her complaints, she surveyed the remains of the Filth Monster. Looking at the wounds that were mutilated beyond recognition, it looked to have been cut up by Lintence's Steel Wires. However describing the wounds as pockmarks caused by explosions would be more appropriate.

The Filth Monster's fluids flowed out from various places, forming a puddle that gave off a stench.

Just as the entire cast had their attention on the Filth Monster, a sword suddenly stabbed out from the inside of the abdomen.

The sword first sliced the abdomen apart, before it traced a small circular opening. After pushing the cut flesh down from the inside, a child's figure wearing a contamination suit covered in fluids crawled out.

"Uu..... Such misfortune."

From within the helmet came a muffled voice that was shrill, befitting that stature.

That child was Layfon.

"I was way too naive. There's no way I can kill it like that."

As he said this, Layfon used his hands – slippery from the body fluids – to remove his helmet.

"Your Majesty, you called?"

"I did."

Looking at Layfon, who was unperturbed even in a circumstance like this, made Alsheyra feel that he was very uncute.

"The uniform was newly issued, yet you ruined it so quickly. It isn't very cheap either."

"Ahh, I'm sorry."

Looking at Layfon apologizing so obediently, Alsheyra stuck out her tongue.

"Bzzt – – This won't do. Therefore, we'll have a punishment game. You, go fight Minse over there."

"Eh?"

Even though he wasn't perturbed, Layfon didn't understand the situation at hand. Perhaps he hadn't given the situation around him any thought after climbing out from the inside of the Filth Monster.

Alsheyra cast the surprised Layfon aside, and looked towards Minse.

"Minse. If I just punished you like this you probably wouldn't accept it right? So I'll give you a chance. If you can beat Layfon, then I'll give this Heaven's

Blade to you. Of course, in return, if you lose, you'll have to bear the entire cost of renovating the garden."

That..... Alsheyra was pointing at where the Filth Monster that delivered Layfon had landed.

"Wha....."

After learning the contents of the so-called punishment, Minse was stunned.

"Is just that much ok?"

"Ara, this garden cost a lot of money."

"I wasn't talking about that, I was talking about those who started a rebellion....."

"You call something like this a rebellion?"

"Wuu....."

Minse was speechless, and just stood there, dumbstruck.

"If you want to start a rebellion, you have to use your brain properly. Frankly speaking, even if you're stupid, there has to be a limit, whether it's your brain, or your ability or your common sense. Suppose you were lacking all three, then you really have no hope."

And Minse was disregarded so easily by Alsheyra, just like that.

He silently drew the dite he carried on his belt, and restored it.

The excessively decorated blade of the sword reflected the rays of the sun.

Conversely, Layfon returned the Heaven's Blade to its basic state.

"Oj!"

Faced with such a flippant attitude, Minse shouted in rage. But Layfon paid him no heed at all and turned to Alsheyra.

"I can use any weapon at all, right?"

"Anything you like."

Hearing Alsheyra's answer, Layfon cracked a wide, happy smile. It was a smile befitting of his age, an innocent smile.

"Awesome. I've always wanted to try this."

Layfon squatted down on the spot, and picked up a small pebble from the ground. It was debris created because the stonemasonry was exposed to the sudden shock of battle.

"Then, I'll be using this."

That is to say, that rock was going to be Layfon's weapon.

"Don't look down on me!"

Minse screamed madly and charged at Layfon.

But Layfon threw the stone he held in his hand. There was no arc, and it raced straight towards Minse. Minse easily avoided it and caught Layfon within his attacking range.

He won.

Standing before a defenseless Layfon, Minse revealed a self-confident smirk.



"I'm back!"

Leerin hearing these words was something that happened two hours after she had come out from taking refuge.

Leerin was in the kitchen preparing dinner, and seeing Layfon walk in through the back door she was filled with relief.

"I'm starving to death."

"Ok, ok, just wait a little longer."

"As promised, I didn't get hurt at all, ok."

"I know that."

Leerin muttered helplessly. Among her prepared ingredients, green wild vegetables were nowhere to be seen, instead replaced by red and yellow veggies.

Of course, she had also prepared a lot of meat.

"This is great."

Leerin noticed that the happily smiling Layfon looked as if he was holding something in his hand.

"What's that?"

"Ah, you mean this?"

Layfon opened up his hand to show Leerin what he was holding.

"A rock?"

It was a rock that looked like it was a piece of shattered stonework.

"Watch this."

Layfon hadn't finished speaking, and he threw it towards the ceiling. He hadn't used any Military Arts, and had just thrown it normally.

"What's so good about that?"

As she said this, Leerin watched what happened next, stunned.

The stone that was slowly rising towards the ceiling had changed directions.

The stone that was shooting around left and right suddenly returned to Layfon's hand.

"This is what I thought up today. Great, isn't it?"

Looking at her self-satisfied childhood friend, Leerin's surprised expression turned into one of helplessness.

"Ok, ok. Stop messing with those tricks, go wash your hands. Oh yeah, why don't you go take a bath to get rid of your sweat. It feels like your body stinks a lot."

"Ok~~~~"

Looking at Layfon's face filled with wonder as he dove into the bath, Leerin couldn't help but smile.



Five years later, after Layfon's match with Gahard Baren had ended, his inappropriate behavior was exposed. The masses were astonished by his power, and in truth they were worried about the dangers of his powers going out of control. However, the ones that treated him most like a danger and spoke out against him the loudest was the Eutnohl family. This was something that a mere ten year old wouldn't consider.

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