

Dragoon

Arc 6

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Chapter 114: The Knight Brigade and the Outskirts

The unveiling display over, the new knight recruits were officially recognized by the knight brigades they were enlisted in.

Even if they had left the academy, the work environment wasn't kind enough to fully recognize new hires. That held the same for knights who had piled up experience. The knights who were stationed to elite units had to train themselves up from square one once more.

From brigade to brigade, the necessary skills differed.

As a dragoon, Rudel had to learn how to handle a dragon. There were some things he could never obtain from Mystith's partial wisdom. No, perhaps it was more accurate to say what she couldn't teach him was the majority.

A man specialized in techniques no longer necessary in the modern era, that was the dragoon called Rudel.

But Rudel had the fundamental techniques pounded into him by his superior officers, and now he stood in the training ground, before the captain and vice-captain of the brigade

Around, the term's newbies and a few veterans took part.

Before the new recruits, Oldart mixed in some jokes with his usual smile as he explained.

"I see you're making some nice faces. With this, you're a member of our oddball squad. But this charmer in his prime is a separate story, so don't group us together!"

"... Oldart, no one cares, just get on with it."

Alejandro's forehead twitched at his captain's joke as he offered some words of caution. Rudel and the other recruits had already been informed what they had been called for.

One on one battle with a veteran dragoon.

This was largely to have the recruits feel upfront what their current selves

were lacking. What's more, the veterans who kept close to the king consisted of nothing but competent ones.

Those newbies would suddenly be put against those with top-class abilities.

"This is why people who don't get jokes are... well then, we'll go ahead and announce your opponents! But first off, Rudel!"

"Yes sir!"

As Rudel replied, taking one step forward, Oldart continued on with an unpleasant look on his face.

"I really, really can't stand it, but your opponent is me. I don't want to fight that giant girly and a battle junky like you, but this is part of my job description, so I'll reluctantly take it on. Follow me! ... Everyone else, confirm your opponents with the vice-captain."

Ordering Rudel to follow, Oldart walked out of the training grounds.

Chasing after his back, Rudel started to question it, and seeing his expression, Oldart breathed out a sigh.

"Why am I the only one fighting in a separate place? That's the face you're making. Listen here, you and your girly are special, so we'll fight in a place where the collateral damage doesn't matter."

"Is that true? Then I can fight seriously without paying mind to my surround—" "Idiot! Are you trying to kill me!?"

Seeing Oldart seriously reluctant, Rudel made a regretful face. He had been given the chance to fight the active captain of the dragoon knight brigade. Surely Rudel wanted to have a serious match.

"I'm already at that age. If I was just a little younger, I'd be able to give it my all."

"That's unfortunate. I wanted to fight a serious captain."

"... Why do you look so disappointed? It's that, you know. In my golden days, I really was amazing, you hear. I was ridiculously strong; around the time I first enlisted, my superior told me I'd be the next captain. Even if I can't go all out, I'm not going to lose to you."

“Is that true?”

“No doubt about it. You really should be thankful I’m a charmer in his prime. If I was a little younger, in my energetic, popular days, I’d be sending you right to the hospital.”

“I’m already used to be carted off to hospital rooms, so I’ll be fine!”

“... T-that so.”

Rudel took his lie as fact, but if he was chosen as next chief when he enlisted, then Oldart would have to have been appointed captain much, much earlier.

“Hey, I might joke around a bit, but you really are easy to fool. You should learn to doubt others.”

“About what?”

“Look! Like if I was selected as the next captain, then the previous captain must have been in service for a long, LONG time! I’m waiting for you to say something out. It’s an obvious lie!”

“Lie... so you were deceiving me!”

“You’re late to the party! Ah, I don’t like this guy.”

In that case, perhaps his strength is also a lie, Rudel began to doubt. You couldn’t say Oldart was high in stature. And rather than Alejandro, who gave off the air of a seasoned warrior at a glance, his face was well in order, and he was usually joking around.

The captain was required to be apt in negotiations with the higher-ups and to have an affinity for paperwork. For that sake, there were rumors that he might fall short in ability, that the vice-captain was the real power behind the organization, and the captain was to be a dragoon skilled in governmental affairs.

Considering that possibility, Rudel felt he would have preferred to fight the vice-captain.



A few hours later, Rudel was being chased by Oldart over the backwoods

distanced from human habitation.

“Hey, what’s wrong.”

Straddling his grey dragon, even in aerial combat, Oldart gave off an air of leisure. The giant Sakuya was unaccustomed to flying. If she was on the run, she’d be easily caught up to.

“Kuh!”

Turning towards Oldart and his dragon approaching close behind, Rudel stuck out his left hand and produced his shields of light. Their numbers climbed to several dozens, impeding Oldart’s path.

But that didn’t change the speed he gave chase.

He followed, avoiding them as if it were only natural. The shields in his way were destroyed by a small consecutive firing of his dragon’s breath. He closed in using only the minimum necessary movements.

“Those are some convenient shields, but humans aside... they’re less than paper before a dragon. And that’s no good. You’ve taken your mind off your dragon. The way you’re going...”

Cautioned by Oldart, Rudel noticed and shouted orders to Sakuya.

“Sakuya, ascend!”

‘Wowowhoah, I-I can’t!’

Rudel had been too mindful of his rear, and through the link that connected their minds, Sakuya had grown negligent of what was in front of her as well. By Rudel’s mind being too taken by the rear, Sakuya had been unable to discern where her own consciousness was directed.

As a result, Sakuya was just about to collide with the slope of a mountain. Noticing just in the nick of time, she got off with just her scales scraped along the mountain crags, but because of that, Sakuya’s speed had fallen as she swayed unsteadily in the air.

Before Rudel and Sakuya full of openings, Oldart went on the offense.

“No good. No good at all.”

Flying as if to draw a circle with Sakuya at the center, Oldart's dragon finely tuned its altitude as if made sport of Rudel and Sakuya.

"Sakuya, steady and brace yourself. You can brush off a few attacks, right?"

'Yeah!'

The two had decided to wait for Oldart's dragon to make a move, but unlike his past fight with Enora, this felt faster. They were surely going slower than a wind dragon, and in truth, the captain's dragon boasted relatively average abilities as a gray dragon.

But ever since the fight with Oldart began, Rudel had been unable to go on the offense.

(He isn't fast. This person... the captain is skillful.)

While Rudel prepared all the techniques he had to cope with the onslaught, Oldart showed a smile from atop his dragon.

"No good. The way you're going, I can't even give you a fifty."

Evaluating Rudel's actions, Oldart issued orders for his dragon to begin its attacks. All the attacks that hit Sakuya were low in output, but they were pinpointed at her vitals.

Unable to properly beat her wings, her stance was easily crumbled.

As Sakuya fell, squirming through the air, Rudel leapt down. There, Oldart descended with his dragon.

While the match had been settled, it seems they were going to continue. But it wasn't dragon on dragon. This would be a land battle between Rudel and Oldart.

"Back there, you should've used the mountain to protect your rear. And the narrowness of your field of vision when you're being chased... looks like you're not ready for real battle yet."

Oldart laughed as he pulled the sword at his waist, so Rudel pulled his blade as well. Both of them had been wearing the robes of the dragoon brigade, but thinking it would be a hindrance, Rudel threw his robe down.

“Let’s go.”

Watched over by Sakuya, dizzy from her fall, Rudel challenged the captain to a match. He swiftly circled around to the captain’s back, but perhaps his movements had been read, as Oldart lightly stepped to the side to dodge him.

Growing irritated, Rudel used his instant movement, but Oldart hummed a tune as he dealt with those blows.

“Your emergency stops are still unpolished. When you get used to it, they’re too easy to deal with. Well, I guess this is what you can expect from a student’s level.”

Catching Rudel’s sword with the one handed sword in his right hand, he instantly stepped in to seal off his movements. From his left hand concealed in his robe, he thrust out a dagger, stopping it just short of Rudel’s throat.

“I-I admit defeat.”

Rudel, who had been a bit in doubt over his opponent’s abilities, shed a cold sweat as he looked at the laughing captain.

“Oy, oy, don’t look at me like that. You’re making me blush.”

“Honestly, I never thought you’d be this strong. As a member of the brigade, I deeply apologize for doubting my captain.”

“Uwah... he ignores my jokes and hits in with pure honesty. That’s the sort of thing you’re not supposed to say even if you think it. A charmer in his prime is weak to stabs at the heart, you should treat him with care.”

The two of them conversed as they sheathed their swords, and even now Oldart looked full of openings. Rudel still seemed perplexed over his own loss, so Oldart took a seat on a rock that went about up to his knees. Stroking his chin, he began answering what Rudel was probably questioning.

“Now then, about your evaluation... to be totally honest, spec-wise, it would be easier to count your ranking in the dragoon brigade starting from the top. You’ve surpassed me as well.”

As Rudel corrected his posture where he stood, Oldart told him to take a seat as well before continuing on. In order to find out what he was lacking, Rudel

was directing him with serious eyes.

“However! ... Your performance is lower-middle class, at best. Do you know the reason?”

“No idea!”

On Rudel’s words without any fabrication, Oldart nodded.

“Alright! I want to caution you on not giving it any thought, but I’m sure you’d have done better if you already knew. Why don’t you try thinking over it yourself fo... no, wait, you really should stop using your head after all.”

Covering his face with his right hand, Oldart breathed a sigh as he informed Rudel of what he was lacking.

“It’s simply that your combat techniques are shoddy. And your field of vision is too narrow. Those two points. You were so focused on yourself you hadn’t the mind to spare for your little girly. While you’d usually be fine, when backed into a corner, the cracks start to spread. You instantly try to do something about it yourself and fail as a result.”

Oldart used the shields of light he put up to impede his path as an example. Those were pretty much useless before a dragon. If he wanted to, he could have rammed straight through them and proceeded on.

And it wasn’t as if everything ranked lower than taking on dragoons. If he took on troublesome monsters, then there were enemies who were fearsome in their pure bulk.

“You’ve no leisure in battle. Sure enough, the girly has plenty of things she’s no good at, but if a mid-tier dragoon was controlling her, I’d have no choice but to change my approach. That’s just how powerful that girl’s weapons are. You should trust in your partner a bit more.”

‘... Rudel, Sakuya is working hard too.’

Seeing Sakuya worry for him, Rudel recalled he had definitely tried to do it all on his own.

Oldart informed, not using the terrain, and having Sakuya, who wasn’t good at flying, be on the run was a mistake. Rudel nodded as he listened to those

words.

“For your field of vision, just try to have a bit more leisure. There’s no point in panicking. There’s a possibility you might mistake your decisions. Look around a bit more, and think of the power difference between you and your foe.”

Unlike his usual attitude, Oldart was saying some earnest things, and to Rudel, he looked like a true charmer in his prime.

Patting off his robe as he stood, while it was still early, Oldart proposed for them to return.

“Now then, let’s end the lecture there and go back. It’s been a while since I last trained, and my hip is...”

“Please fight me again!”

“... Eh?”

When Rudel pleaded for another fight, Oldart’s face stiffened.

“I understand that I have things I am lacking. But rather than understanding it in my head, I think it would be better for my body to remember it. If I fight you again, I’m sure I can climb to greater...”

“Ah~, no, I really am tired, or rather... eh? You’re serious?”

“Yes!”

‘Sakuya will do her best too!’

Having recovered, Sakuya stood and roared to answer Rudel’s expectations. Oldart and his partner gray dragon were making truly reluctant faces.

It had already grown dark when an exhausted Oldart returned to the training ground, leading along a tattered Sakuya and Rudel.



Having been informed by the veterans on their areas to work on, the new dragoon recruits were conversing over the stations they would be appointed to the following day.

They were comrades who had trained together, and while their ages differed, they spoke with the smiles of colleagues.

“Saas, you were stationed in the trade city?”

On Luxheidt’s question, Saas nodded cynically.

“I’ve no complaints I was stationed at such an important point. Besides the fact my job’s mainly hauling cargo.”

Dragons were able to fly through the sky, and due to their high maintenance cost, they would have to take on jobs like these. The more were sent to the outskirts, the more terrible their financial circumstances became.

It was laughed that the reason dragoons were stationed in trade cities with plenty of people and adventurers was to scrape together spare change. But it was also true there was no safer transport of goods than by dragon.

“It’s us dragoons’ greatest worry, after all. By the way, Enora is... from how depressed she looks, I doubt it’s the outskirts.”

Everyone looked at Enora, who had grown dark, before shifting their gaze towards Rudel, who rejoiced over being sent to the far off reaches of the kingdom. While it was all and well for him, Luxheidt knew Enora had proposed she would follow Rudel.

(So her old man declined.)

“I’m going to be stationed right in the capital... hah.”

By the problems Enora had caused, at this point, it seemed her relationship with her father had improved a bit. But even so, Enora’s trip to the outskirts wasn’t granted.

With a wild dragon obeying her, Enora was a valuable addition to the dragoon brigade. Thinking of her future, they wanted to nurture her in the capital with care.

And yet, Rudel was making a perplexed face.

“Enora, you don’t like your station? Well, there will be a transfer in a few years, so just place your hopes on the next one.”

It was natural if they hadn’t gotten the positions they wanted, but with the man in question not noticing the underlying problem, the air grew awkward. Those around looked at Luxheidt, so he shrugged and sent out a lifeboat.

“But Enora, you have it hard, making a contract with a wind dragon. You’ll be flying all over the place, carrying messages and doing urgent missions... you might have to send some messages to the outskirts as well.”

But Enora didn’t perk up. Her main problem was the new position that had been created. From the high knight brigade on the verge of dismantlement, an officer had been sent to keep watch over Rudel. She would follow Rudel to the outskirts. What’s more, she was a classmate, a girl who got along well with him at the academy.

It would be stranger if no problems occurred.

“Right, I might go from time to time. But if the two who are always together become lovers... I don’t think I’ll be able to recover.”

(This girl is a pain. Well, she’s easier to talk to than before, but the gap with her appearance is amazing.)

While she gave off an air as if she might play around, Enora’s wholeheartedness left her surroundings perplexed.

“So Rudel, where exactly on the outskirts are you headed?”

Giving up on cheering Enora up, Luxheidt smacked the question into the person he was most curious about. The only one he was interested was Rudel, who had determined to be interesting.

“It’s a recently set up post. They started constructing a port there a few years ago... The town’s called Beretta.”

“Beretta, eh... as I recall, the place is dangerous, so they have other dragoons dispatched as well. It’s a port town, so two water dragons, and one gray dragon.”

Rudel looked through the documents on his new workstation and offered a correction to Luxheidt’s explanation.

“No, since I’m being stationed, one of them’s being taken off. It’s just two water dragons now.”

The area’s development wasn’t getting anywhere, so to put it all in order, the kingdom had invested its valuable water dragons into it.

Luxheidt thought the empire's current state of affairs was dangerous. The information coming in was scarce, but still, he felt a sense of danger.

However...

(Is being stationed in a place like that a condition to be a hero?)

While he felt sorry for him, he also found Rudel's deployment to be interesting.

"They say it's a pretty place, so if I ever get a day off, I might go and see."

As Saas called over, Rudel rejoiced and said he would show him around at that time. Luxheidt tactfully turned that talk towards Enora, giving her a chance to go to the outskirts to see Rudel.

Seeing Enora's delight, Luxheidt thought.

(She really is easy to please.)

Chapter 115: The Outer Reaches and the Academy

“I’m sorry, you even carried my luggage.”

High in the sky, Izumi rode aboard Sakuya’s back, calling out to Rudel’s back.

They were on the way to Beretta, in the outer reaches of the kingdom, and Izumi was accompanying Rudel to his station as a special inspector.

“Don’t worry about it. A weight increase of this extent is meaningless to Sakuya.”

‘I-it’s easy.’

Izumi’s heart ached, seeing Sakuya let out a considerably pained voice. As a subspecies of gaia dragon, Sakuya had a merit of being able to carry large loads of cargo. Even a normal gaia dragon’s loading capacity was incomparable to the other dragons.

For that reason, when they flew from the capital, they were ordered to take a large load of supplies with them.

They were headed to a land that had only begun to be set up, and the town’s present state was one where more goods were insufficient than not.

A blue sky spread far and wide to bless their departure, but Sakuya was pained by the luggage fastened onto her. They had to put in a number of breaks on the way, and Izumi wondered whether the load was simply too great.

(A number of custom tailored bags on her back, two shoulder bags per side... those bags look custom made as well...)

By the way, Izumi and Rudel’s personal bags were strapped to her neck. It was pitiful to look at her, but Rudel was constantly calling out to Sakuya.

“Do you want to rest, Sakuya?”

‘S-still fine.’

“Don’t force yourself. We still have time before I take up my post, so you can take it easy.”

‘Sakuya will do her best.’

Watching Sakuya desperately move her wings, Izumi stroked her back.

“..... I apologize for ruining the mood, but I’m here too.”

Izumi and Rudel turned to find Millia sitting with an irritated look on her face. Right, Millia had been scouted into becoming Izumi’s subordinate.

From the start, it was impossible for one person to fulfill the inspector role, and she had to choose someone. So Izumi had called out to all her acquaintances. But once they learned the job was keeping watch over Rudel, her friend and acquaintances all declined.

(No, I know the real reason, but...)

What’s more, they were declining out of good will. In order to leave Izumi alone with Rudel, they had acted out of virtuous intent.

Only one...

Only Aleist volunteered and pleaded to be her subordinate. That was probably because of Millia.

(We’re really not like that.)

Breathing a sigh, Izumi felt a little worried that the subordinate she finally managed to obtain was Millia. She thought she would decline, but contrary to her expectations, Millia promptly accepted the position. While Izumi knew she hadn’t given up on Rudel, it wasn’t her place to caution her on that matter.

(I hope nothing goes wrong... no, I guess that’s not happening.)

Aleist already wanted to run away from the palace... she recalled his face when his subordinates, the female knights, forcefully dragged him back.

Whether he wanted to become a special inspector because he hated cleaning duty, or if he wanted to chase after Millia. Izumi noticed he was acting on both reasons.

(That Aleist is definitely causing a problem.)

“Do your best! Do your best, Sakuya!”

‘Aaaah! My wing is cramping!!’

In contrast, this side was somewhat heartwarming, thought Izumi. Even when there was a woman behind them who followed through conflicted emotions, Rudel and Sakuya were the same as ever.

... Wing is cramping.

“Wait! That’s bad, you should land at... nwaaaaaaaah!”

Izumi’s cry resounded across the sky.



In the end, they arrived at port town Beretta the next day.

Arriving just barely in time, Rudel left the unloading of the luggage to Izumi, hurrying to the knight station alone.

Even if it was called a port town, it was originally a place without anything. Migrants who volunteered from the capital and major cities were working hard to establish a port.

In such a situation, it was impossible to prepare a station for each individual brigade. In that land where everything was held in insufficiency, defense was left to a platoon of knights from the outer reaches, and two dragoons.

Walking down the path lined with brick-lain houses, Rudel gazed at the mismatched townscape as he made for the station.

On top of the simple-made houses, the paths were exceedingly bad. The people he passed by were making somewhat enervated faces.

(Is the situation worse than I thought?)

Both the Kingdom of Courtois and the Gaia Empire were countries you could say were based around magic. That meant that if you used magic, the work that a single person could do grew immensely. The craftsmen all made use of some sort of magic, spreading its grace.

But at the same time, the cities that had existed for ages had their hands full with simply maintaining their side. Magic was convenient, cities would grow with ease. But thinking of maintaining them, each city had come to its limit.

It was for that purpose that new lands were being claimed, and a port town

was set up to obtain marine products.

But from what Rudel could see, it didn't look like it was going so well. This wasn't simply due to the difficulty of land cultivation. While they could use magic, in the end, that was naught but the power of man. And this was a land that had been uninhabited to that point.

There were monsters that saw it as their home, and the mana reserves of the people would be chipped down in combat. Unlike the tempered knights, even if a layman could use magic, that had its limits. Despite that, if an enemy came out, they had no choice but to fight for their lives, and looking at the result, their plans weren't going through.

After arriving at the station, Rudel presented his identification papers to the soldier on watch.

It seems he was someone recruited on site, his service was sloppy.

"U-umm... You're a knight, are you? What business have you come for today?"

"I'm supposed to be stationed here, starting today. For now, could you let me meet the person in charge of the area's dragoons?"

"No, um..."

Rudel grew anxious over whether this nervous soldier would be alright, but from the back of the station, the soldier's superior came out. He was probably the leader of the knight platoon.

His body was on the plump side, but his eyes were considerably sharp.

"You didn't hear!? My apologies. Bennet is off overseeing construction at the harbor, so if you want to see her, you better head down there. Ah, and I'll take your paperwork."

"... Is that alright?"

Rudel had some resistance to handing his forms to a knight of a different jurisdiction.

But the other side laughed.

“Those sorts of regulations don’t pass through over here. We’re in charge of all paperwork.”

Handing his forms to the knight giving a dry laugh, Rudel made for the harbor. Even without a guide, he decided he’d be able to speak as long as he went towards the spots under construction.

The town itself wasn’t too big, and he wanted to get a good look over it.



“Master should have arrived around now.”

Now a fifth year, Fina looked out the corridor as she muttered.

Her guard Sophina sought confirmation on the dragoon matter.

“This is just as you’ve planned, isn’t it? Did you station those water dragons beforehand in preparation for this?”

Before it was decided Rudel would go to Beretta, Fina had shuffled around the jobs of two water dragons. Officially, it was for the sake of the settlement that wasn’t growing as planned.

“Perish the thought. Even I can’t read that far ahead. If I could, my Fluff-fluff Land would already be under construction... master, if only master would move according to my plans.”

Only Sophina could understand she was truly vexed.

(If only she wasn’t like this.)

“Well, I did change their positions, but if you ask how much meaning that action held...”

Fina had prepared numerous anti-empire measures, and the dragoon dispatchment changes was only one of them. She stationed the proficient ones close to the empire’s border.

With no authority of her own, Fina could only use her father Albach. But even Sophina could keenly sense the weakening of Albach’s political power.

When she wanted to prepare for the empire as soon as possible, Albach was unable to move. If Fina didn’t move herself, it seems they wouldn’t even get

any decent information. The kingdom was done for, the fact she occasionally thought so was Sophina's secret.

"I was sure you simply intended to send a female knight of the wolf tribe over to Rudel."

The individual Sophina brought up in jest was a woman of the wolf tribe contracted to a water dragon, 'Bennet'. While there were numerous feline demi-humans around Fina, there weren't any of the dog or wolf tribes. That's why Sophina said it as a joke.

Honestly, she never thought such a thing. It was certain that woman was a proficient dragoon... however.

"O-of course not. There's no way that could be true. Now let us hurry to my next class."

"... Princess."

"What is it? Do you intend to make me late, Sophina?"

"Your next class is that way."

As Fina turned right at the T-shaped hallway, Sophina pointed towards the left passage. Expressionlessly and silently, Fina walked down the path Sophina instructed.

Confirming her surroundings, and seeing there was no one around, Sophina ordered her subordinates to fortify the area. Those female knights surrounded their guard target Fina.

And... Sophina grasped both Fina's shoulders to ask.

"So how is it really?"

"... Hmm, looks like I can't lie to you."

Giving up, Fina began reciting the truth. It was just as Sophina had considered as a joke.

"Female knights of the wolf tribe are exceedingly valuable. There are few to be found among all the knights of Courtois... without getting her in his hands, do you think master could ever become the king of fluff? No, that's impossible.

In order to make my master the fluffmeister, liaaaaiaa!”

Around the end, Sophina started shaking Fina back and forth, her subordinates didn't stop her. What irritated her was largely Fina's use of the term fluffmeister.

(This girl definitely thought it was clever the moment it came out of her mouth.)

Her glasses misaligned, her breaths short, Sophina shook Fina. It was a scene to make one's blood curdle.

“Do you think this is a fluffing joke!? The one who said we're in an important period was you, princess. Get a grip already!”

Once the shaking stopped, Fina remained expressionless, but to Sophina, it looked like her face was more prim than usual. When she thought she was going to make an excuse...

“You must change that way of thought, Sophina. It isn't that I am handing a fluffy to the fluffmeister, the fluffies are leaping into my master's hands. I never really thought he would be going to the wolf tribe's place, but this must be fate. Fluffadise is telling my master to become the fluffmeisteeeeeeEEer!”

Sophina shook her back and forth once more, she continued shaking her until just before class was to begin.



Meanwhile, the teachers who surrounded the headmaster in the staffroom held bouquets of flowers in their hands as they directed smiles.

“Put a stop to it, people! What you are trying to do is a violation of school regulation!”

But only for the headmaster putting up resistance, his face was pale as he refused their proposal. Of course he would, the banner draped over the staffroom read:

‘Congratulations on Your Third Term as Headmaster’

Normally, headmasters would swap out after two terms, at longest. And yet, his surroundings were informing him his third one was set in stone. The

headmaster couldn't understand.

(Why? They were normal up to yesterday, were they not! I was already preparing to pass it on!)

He recalled his preparations to hand over the role, the preparations he had carried out thinking these would be his final days. By the graduation of the generation of super problem children, he had returned to those nostalgic school days of times passed.

A minor problem was the fact Fina was a surprising problem child herself. In the dead of the night, she would let out strange sounds as she did paperwork, and she would skip class to wander outside the academy. Apart from that, it was the same as before... no, thinking of how there were fewer intruders in the girls' dorm, it could even be said it was more decent than before.

And yet...

"Hahaha, what might you be talking about, headmaster! There is no such regulation in the academy."

"All our staff have been deeply moved, working under such a wonderful headmaster."

"It was a unanimous decision."

While everyone was laughing, their eyes were not.

"There's such a thing as a tacit agreement! And I told you I was ready to retire! (These guys are lying. Why. What exactly happened to them!?)"

The headmaster looked at his aid, the deputy headmaster. The man was at an age where, if he didn't become the next headmaster, he wouldn't have another chance. The headmaster knew, when his own second term was decided, the man had been quite vexed. But now, "I'll do my best to support you," he muttered with a smile.

"... Did something happen?"

The headmaster looked at a weak-willed teacher. That teacher had caused a problem before, and he had stuck up for her. So he knew she wouldn't lie to him.

As the surroundings returned to silence, the truth the headmaster's stare drew from that teacher was a dreadful one indeed.

"T-the list of next year's freshmen has come in."

"I'm sure it has. For young nobles, they get their enrollment forms done nice and early. It shouldn't be a problem for it to finish up around this...! It couldn't be."

"My deepest apologies! I... I saw it. Rudel-dono's sister of another mother, I saw the devil... I saw the Rudel-dono in her!"

The staff members spoke of their memories from when Lena once came to the academy. The form of a brother doting on his sister was heartwarming, but the problem lay in her statements.

'I want to fight Eunius-san.'

'The academy is a place to pick fights.'

'Do you think I'll be able to destroy a facility too?'

The teachers' dramatized memories spread along with her finalized enrolment. The appearance of Rudel-female-version had brought a complete change to the peaceful staff room.

As a result of the urgent discussion that followed, talks came to the idea the headmaster would do something about it. It was a result of the headmaster's ability to handle things needlessly well.

"Ah, it's impossible for me," The deputy headmaster went as far as to say, refusing the headmaster seat in its early stages.

"D-don't mess around with me, people. No matter how you look at it, you shouldn't put your guard up before you even meet her. She might actually be an honest and good kid."

"Even if she's an honest and good kid, I don't want another problem child. And I could tell! That child gave off the same feeling as Rudel-dono and the others."

Everyone nodded.

Driven to the brink, the headmaster looked at the papers spread across his

desk. There was a document permitting his continued service; it had already received the palace's seal, and all he had to do was sign.

“Calm down! First, let's sit down and talk!”

“We've received the palace's approval. All that's left is your decision. Our will is unchanging!”

A few hours later, an exhausted headmaster signed the forms. In that staff room where his was the only dark face, the other staff members rejoiced and blessed him.

In the academy, Fina's graduation and Lena's enrollment were drawing near.

Chapter 116: The Academy and the Superior

At the port of Beretta stood a woman loosely wearing the knight clothing of a dragoon.

Issuing orders to her water dragon, she was having it carry construction materials.

The female knight's gray hair was conspicuous, but more than that, her standing form was dignified. Her eyes were sharp, and her gold pupils almost looked as if they were radiating light.

To add to that, the ears twitching atop her head were adorable. And as she stood a head lower than all the people working around her, dignified as she stood, she looked adorable herself. An additional problem lay in her tail. That thick, fluffy tail was swaying left and right. It was truly adorable.

Right... the female knight pretty much looked like a young child.

“Are you Major Bennet?”

Rudel had been informed of her appearance, so he was able to find her without hesitation. The documents spelled out that she was an adorable female knight.

“And you are?”

“Ma'am! Today forth, I have been stationed in this town, my name is Rudel Arses!”

Looking over Rudel, she walked up to him. While her air was imposing, the closer she got, the more Rudel had to tilt his head downwards to look at her.

“I've received the report. It seems you've perpetuated quite some foolishness at the capital. I was wondering what sort of face someone stupid enough to be suddenly flown off to the outskirts would carry about, but you're quite the looker... I hold a firm belief that my subordinates' failures are to be corrected by my fist. If you want to maintain that pretty face of yours, then you'd best off not anger me.”

With Bennet glaring at him, Rudel answered without fear. Confirming his salute, “At least your salute is first rate,” she praised him.

For some reason, her tail was moving happily from left to right.

“While our mission here is important, more than that, you will learn to adapt to the environment. If the construction doesn’t go anywhere, we will bring trouble to all the brigade members who sent us here. You dragon was a gaia, was it?”

“Yes ma’am! She’s a gaia subspecies. Her name is Sakuya!”

Keeping a firm expression, Bennet hummed.

“I didn’t ask for her name. But I’ll commit it to memory. I’ll have you lot carrying cargo... and so? Where are your inspectors?”

Looking at the Major and her wagging tail, Rudel explained that they were unfastening the cargo. As a new settlement, there were many materials and tools Beretta was lacking in. Being able to carry such a large load of goods, Sakuya was a valuable means of transportation.

“Put Sakuya on standby outside the town. Don’t let her dig holes outside the designated spaces. For now, me and Elrond will be doing the work. I can’t leave detailed work to your dragon.”

After saying only that, she ordered him to return to the lodging house and rest for the day. Rudel recognized her as a captain who looked deeply into her subordinates.

(Looks like it’s going to be rough, but I’m sure this person will be alright.)

He recalled how Luxheidt told him to pray he wasn’t given a no-good superior. Even if they were strong as knights, there were plenty of dragoons who couldn’t take command. It was a gathering of strong-willed knights. Rudel felt relieved his superior didn’t seem to be the hopeless type.



Returning to her work, Bennet finished carrying materials before straddling her water dragon ‘Heleene’ to patrol the area.

Alone in the sky, she pressed her forehead to Heleene’s back, shaking a little.

Her tail was moving exceedingly violently.

‘What’s wrong, Bennet?’

“Listen to this! They finally sent me a decent subordinate! When everyone asks if I’m pushing myself, or tells me I’m cute, today’s grunt was all prim and proper, he’s the ideal subordinate!”

Unlike how she acted before Rudel, Bennet raised her face in delight. Short in stature and youthful in appearance, Bennet’s greatest worry was being made light of by her men. In truth, they simply recognized her as a cute commanding officer, but the leader the girl idealized was an existence held in fear and awe by those under them.

And yet, when she did her best to become a commanding officer, no one feared her.

Let alone fear, she bit into the upper ranks of the dragoon brigade popularity contest and was treated as a mascot. While she was adored by her subordinates, she ended up giving off an unreliable impression. She thought that was why her subordinates never stayed long.

Truth be told, since she led along a valuable water dragon, she was issued a number of special missions, making it hard to affix set subordinates to her. While she knew about that, Bennet was sure it was because she was unreliable.

“Alright! I’ll do my best tomorrow!”

‘... That’s all well and good, but you’d best not get too enthusiastic and fail. Around three times back, that made them call you hopelessly cute for a while, right?’

“T-that was just because I slipped up and broke a plate, but for some reason, they kept treating me like that all the way after...”

As Bennet failed to be honest, her tail powerlessly drooped limply over Heleene’s back.

‘B-but now I’m a splendid commanding officer! From tomorrow, I’ll become his dignified commander!’

‘Yeah, yeah.’

Feeling Heleene's disbelief, Bennet strengthened her own resolve to do her best.



Elsewhere, in the Arses House mansion, while it was a little early, a package came in from the Halbades House.

Eselica had the servants break the seal on those gifts sent to commemorate her matriculation and present them to her. The sent goods were high-class-looking tools that would be necessary at the academy.

“Luecke-dono of the Halbades House, was it? I heard he got along well with Rudel.”

On her mutter, the surrounding servants seemed to have difficulty answering. Eselica was quite displeased with those servants' attitudes.

When her beloved Chlust was chased to the outskirts as if to drive him away, a majority of them had stopped speaking ill of Rudel in the shadows, turning their tongue to Chlust instead. A portion of them even started coming out to say they thought Rudel-sama was the more worthy heir from the start.

Eselica couldn't forgive those servants.

Many of the servants who looked after Eselica urged her to write letters to Rudel, and even if she wrote up a letter to Chlust, it wouldn't be sent.

(Will I be able to become a good actress for their comedy?)

Rudel-who she had mocked-was now so famous there wasn't a soul in Courtois who didn't know his name. On the streets, they were calling him the demon lord.

The Arses House that had oppressed such a man was now ruled by quite a dubious air. Within all of that, a package from the Halbades House had been delivered. The atmosphere of the mansion lightened up a bit.

“Oh! This one's for me.”

As she untied the goods sent to her, before she noticed it, her stepsister Lena was there. That girl who usually wore around the clothing of a man, Eselica looked on her enviously. Honest to herself, and it looked as if she was living free

as could be.

While they would never even talk in the past, at this point, they would exchange a few words if they met on the premises.

“You look happy. Even so, isn’t that box a bit too big? What did you get?”

She folded her arms as she interrogated Lena. Lena tore off the wrapping and opened the wood crate to find a spear inside. For something sent to a lady, it was an item that made one question the sender’s sense.

However...

“Whoooooh! A new spear! What’s more, it’s perfect for me!”

Handing the box off to the servants, Lena started swinging the spear she took in her hands. Erselica could feel the wind raised as she spun it around.

“L-Lena-sama! It would be troublesome if you swung that around in a place like this!”

Apologizing to the panicking servants, Lena looked at the spear. Erselica didn’t have the skills to tell if a spear was good or not, but it looked to be better than the ones held by the soldiers protecting the mansion.

“To be so happy after receiving a weapon, what does that make you as a lady?”

“The one I’ve always used’s been growing old, and it’s short so this one is just right. I’m sure my brother had some input.”

Saying Luecke-san was easy to understand, Lena read through the letter inside the box. The craftsmen who prepared the spear had a shop near the academy, so go there with it, the letter read.

(Are they going to fine tune it for Lena? This is surprisingly troublesome.)

To Erselica who had never held a weapon in her life, it was a talk that made her head hurt. To that point, she had polished herself to be beautiful. And that was in order to find a good family to marry into. But the Arses House had begun to wane even more than before.

When the surroundings would no longer draw close to her, it was decided

Eselica would attend the academy. She was told to go and seduce a rich nobleman.

Otherwise, the house wouldn't hold up, her mother said.

(If you stopped wasting money, we would recover in no time.)

While she had much she wanted to say to her mother, she was still a daughter of the Arses House. Eselica had never even considered marrying someone she actually liked. No, she did her best not to think about it.

“You're going to the academy too, right? And yet, that Luecke-dono of the Halbades House is a little strange to send you a spear. Or could it be he thought that was more than enough for the child of a mistress?”

Even she knew she was saying something terrible. But Eselica wasn't skillful enough to suddenly change the attitude she had always taken towards another.

Stroking back her straight, blond hair, she focused her emerald eyes on Lena.

But Lena didn't seem particularly mindful of her cynicism.

“Perhaps. And brother told me that I can get all the necessary writing implements for cheap around the academy, so that's enough for me.”

Seeing Lena's smile, Eselica felt she had lost again. These feelings had become a daily occurrence.

One of the servants cautioned her.

“Eselica-sama, Lena-sama is also the master's daughter. I'm not sure you should be taking that attitude...”

“You're right. I'm sorry, Lena (What's with this. You all used to mock her for being the child of a mistress.)”

Eselica understood the servants' true intent; they didn't want to invite in the rage of Rudel, who doted on Lena. For both Eselica and Lena who were to be married off, to the servants as well, they were tools to bring money into the Arses House.

If they were both tools, then offering favorable treatment to the one most liked by the next head was only natural. Just as Eselica once was...

(This really is miserable, Chlust.)



Arriving at the lodging house of Beretta, Rudel and co. were confused to find it wasn't a lodging house at all.

The young soldier who led them gave an explanation before Rudel, Izumi and Millia.

"My apologies. The construction isn't making any progress, so the buildings for the knight brigade end up being something like this..."

What stood before them was clearly a private house. The ones who used to live there moved to another house for various reasons, and it was abandoned as a vacant building. That house on the slightly larger side was granted when they heard three people were coming. For knights living alone, they would be given smaller houses.

".. I'm a man, and these are two ladies. Isn't there anything you could do?"

Rudel felt this was going too far, but the young soldier indirectly told them to deal with it. The nervous man would only say it was impossible.

"An official lodging house will only be prepared after the knight brigade main headquarters are constructed, so... and it's far from most of the houses of the other knights, so there shouldn't be a problem if you make a ruckus."

"That's nothing but problems. No, in the first place, why are you averting your eyes?"

After looking at Izumi and Millia, the young soldier's face turned red as he averted his eyes, Rudel thought the man was making some sort of misunderstanding and ordered him to look up so he could correct it.

But the day was reaching its end, and worn out from a long and tense voyage, Millia said the place would be fine.

"Even if we make a ruckus at this hour, I doubt anyone'll be able to solve the problem. In that case, we'll put up with it a few days. I want to sleep soon."

"You're right. Today was quite tiring."

It wasn't just riding by dragon back, on that trip that was almost like a constant roller coaster, the two women made bitter smiles through their pale faces.

Hearing that from the female camp, Rudel reluctantly accepted. After accepting the keys, he entered the house. Finally, the young soldier said something important as he ran away.

"They said to clean it, but we've been busy and... the tools are there, so you're better off cleaning before you sleep. Then see you tomorrow."

"He fled."

Rudel stared over the room dumbfounded. Expanding before him was a room layered in dust. While it was minimalistically furnished, those pieces were also smeared in dust.

"T-this is a bit..."

The disastrous state of all the rooms left Izumi bewildered. It seems there had been an order to clean up, but if the order wasn't carried out, it was meaningless.

"... The worst."

With scornful eyes, Millia prepared a cloth and mask before breathing out a sigh. Unable to forgive this filth, it seems she was up for cleaning.

A former member of Aleist's cleaning platoon, Millia was a valuable fighting force on this front. Izumi also went outside to prepare the cleaning utensils.

"They did say the inn was full. So this was the reason."

When the knight at the station told them there were no openings at the inn, they had tilted their heads. But at this point, the reason had become clear, and Rudel was cleaning as well.

"We should've taken Aleist along."

While half in jest, Rudel was also half serious.



"Achoo!"

Finishing up work (cleaning) for the day, Aleist was surrounded by female knights as he returned to the lodging house.

“Captain, do you have a cold? In that case, do you want to drop by my room?”

“Hey, why are you inviting him so naturally?”

“Ah, then should I go over to your room?”

On that scramble over Aleist among the female camp, the man in question gave a bitter smile as he denied it, saying it wasn't a cold.

(Is someone gossiping about me or something?)

If gossip really could make him sneeze, then Aleist would be sneezing nonstop throughout the day. Even if he hadn't the intent, he was called the number one playboy in the capital.

No matter how he denied it, no one would believe him. His fiancés were on the verge of surpassing seven, and his platoon was made up of all women. What's more, at the very least, they looked at him favorably.

It wasn't a mistake.

(Hah, even so...)

Looking around, the Millia he loved most wasn't there. Under Izumi's request, she had become Rudel's special inspector. Whatever the case, even if he rejected the proposal, someone higher up the chain of command had permitted it.

(Even when the paperwork said she needed her direct superior's permission.)

Aleist couldn't understand why, but Millia was going further and further away. Looking up at the sky, he prayed for her safety.

(I hope we meet again.)

“Captain, are you listening?”

“Eh? Y-yeah, I'm listening. I think so too. (What were they talking about? Well, I'm sure it's the usual complaints about the job.)”

Aleist's cleaning duty platoon was building up frustration that they didn't have any missions as knights. From the point of view of Aleist, who had

nonchalantly devoted himself to cleaning, he had begun to believe that if he didn't have to fight, then maybe this was for the best. He had no complaints.

In order to match his subordinate's conversation, he merely showed sympathy.

"In that case, today's the day you make it clear who you like most in the platoon!"

"It's me, isn't it, captain!"

"Stay out of this, washboard! It's me, right Aleist?"

"..."

Aleist was holding a rom-com of his own in the capital.

Chapter 117: The Superior and the Mission

Failing asleep from their fatigue after the major cleanup, the three dropped by Bennet on the next day.

It was decided that either Izumi or Millia would clean up that house that hadn't been properly prepared. Based on how their meeting with Bennet went, one of them would go back.

The Beretta townscape the three of them walked down was lined with hurriedly constructed buildings of brick. But they couldn't see any buildings that extended passed two stories.

The same held true for the inns.

(This is a puzzler. I have to secure a place to sleep soon.)

She knew that staying with Rudel for too long would surely cause him trouble. Izumi mulled over who she should consult.

It was there that a building that could be classified as splendid for the town came into sight. At the sight of young soldiers having a friendly chat, Izumi felt like holding her head.

"Oh, good morning. Did you sleep well last night."

"Yeah, more importantly, where's Major Bennet?"

On Izumi's reply, the young soldiers looked at Rudel, Millia and herself, discussing something amongst themselves. While she could guess the contents of their discussion, she didn't have the time to worry about that now.

"She's doing paperwork at the desk in the back."

After giving thanks to a young soldier with a reddened face, the three of them made for Bennet.

In the station, there was one desk put aside for the dragoons to use on rotation. Normally, that would never come to pass, in a settlement without anything, granting the dragoons an exclusive desk was plenty.

The knights on duty at the capital would never be able to bear this sort of

treatment, thought Izumi.

Izumi looked at Rudel's superior before her eyes and submitted her forms. But more than that, looking at the female knight before her, she thought.

(She's... kinda cute.)

Taking the paperwork, Bennet tucked it away in her file before confirming their future course.

"So you two are this man's inspector. I don't mind if you keep watching, but there are times we'll be flying around on duty. And you should think that doing work is normal around here."

"Would that work be outside of our mission?"

As Millia looked down and asked, Bennet hummed a note.

"A new recruit who's only ever sat back and done their duty at the capital need not stick their mouth into the way of the outskirts. While I haven't the authority to issue you orders, if you do nothing but keep watch over that guy, that alone will buy you a bad rep in these parts."

Millia saw how busy Beretta was, and perhaps she realized just watching would definitely make her unpopular as she shut her mouth.

When Izumi proposed they would participate in work on rotation, Bennet said, 'That so,' before handing Rudel a comprehensive schedule.

(She's surprisingly attentive and good at looking after others. And she's cute.)

Izumi noticed she was being mindful of them.

"Well, just do your best out here. You should take this opportunity to learn that the same way of doing things doesn't work everywhere you go... Rudel, I'll be having you break rocks with Sakuya. I'm going out of my way to personally supervise a newbie like you. Give me results."

"Yes ma'am."

Seeing Rudel taking his job seriously, Izumi felt relieved. It seems even Rudel wouldn't suddenly go on a petting spree. No, while Izumi herself was relieved that she had sealed Rudel's petting, she felt uneasy whenever she thought he

might unveil a new technique.

Starting with petting, onto massages, embrace, and lotion... even when she sealed all of them, Rudel brought forth his magic eyes out of nowhere. So while she was wary, it couldn't be said she was going too far.

More importantly...

Izumi looked at Bennet's tail when she talked to Rudel. Running contrary to her expression it was delightedly waving about. That gap looked cute as well.

(The way it feels like she's pushing herself is also cute.)

Sure that Millia was holding the same impression, she looked to the side, only to receive a mildly irritated impression. Millia was staring intently at Rudel and Bennet.

Every time Rudel gave an earnest reply, Bennet's tail would wave. Even if they were told the titles of superior and subordinate were swapped, surely no one would hold any doubt.

(She really is cute, though.)

For a while longer, Izumi watched over the girl doing her best to play the part of a superior.



Outside town, in the rockface opposite the harbor, Rudel was smashing rocks with Sakuya.

They would be used as materials for the port, but after being smashed, the stone would have to be processed. For that sake, it was necessary to break them down to an adequate size.

As Rudel issued Sakuya orders, Sakuya punched the rocks with her large arms and destroyed them.

“Fool! Do it like that, and they'll end up too small. Having them too big is no good, but if they're too small, then it takes an unnecessary amount of mana to mend them!”

Under Bennet's orders, Rudel was learning his job in Beretta. Carrying

materials, patrol of the area around the port city, and helping out with construction, there was much to be done. As long as you ignored their consumption, the convenient dragons were indispensable lifeforms for construction.

“This is hard. The work’s too detailed for Sakuya.”

Taking Sakuya’s large build into account, it was definitely a difficult job. But Bennet hummed a note.

“Oh, then will you choose your own work? It is only natural for us to be able to carry out whatever mission need be done. The way you are, you’re not even half a dragon.”

“That is...!”

While he tried to say something, Rudel swallowed his words. Sure enough, being particular about his missions was usually something he should never do.

Bennet called her own dragon and had it smash rocks to the right size to set an example. After the destruction, unlike with Sakuya, the leftover fragments didn’t scatter about much.

“If the development goes steady, then this place will also become a part of town. If you cause too much destruction and spread debris around, it will make our jobs more troublesome in times to come. I do believe the development plans were included in the documents I gave you.”

“My deepest apologies.”

Having not thought that far ahead, Rudel apologized to Bennet. Certainly, the plan included the port’s construction, and a description of the town’s expansion.

“... Well, so be it. Right now, Elrond is off buying supplies, so I’ll be teaching you for a while. Know that training is also part of your duty, and don’t lose focus.”

“Yes ma’am!”



While Rudel continued his work, to the side, Izumi watched his exchange with

his cute superior officer.

As a special inspector, Izumi's duty was to make sure her eyes never left Rudel, if possible. While the two of them were earnestly doing their job, from a watcher's perspective, it couldn't help but look like a pleasant scene.

Bennet's tail was happily waving left and right, and on top of that, Sakuya was learning how to chop rocks from the water dragon. A dragon opening up its palms to chop stone into blocks was a peculiar sight indeed.

(They look like they're having fun.)

While the two of them had their dragons smashing stone, they carried out training themselves. When Bennet told Rudel to come at her, Rudel cut forward with all his might.

Izumi thought that looked bad, but Bennet lightly responded, throwing Rudel into the ground. Despite her small body, the way she handled it could only make one say, as expected of a dragoon.

But after she had won, when Rudel sent her eyes of admiration, "Get to your feet already, fool!" the girl in question said, her tail violently wagging.

Next to that, Sakuya-who was unable to skillfully smash stone-tried to break it apart with her breath only to be smacked on the head by Bennet's dragon.

(I do feel sorry to say it, but...)

"Your attacks are following a pattern. You won't even be able to scratch me that way."

"Kuh!"

Accelerating with wind magic, Rudel desperately rushed in to capture Bennet, but dodging by a paper-thin margin...

'I mean, I can't do it! Hey, that hurts!'

Her chops still not going well, this time, Sakuya tried to strike it with her tail...

(I wonder what it is. It just looks like they're enjoying themselves.)



Driven off to an area close to the border, Chlust grimaced as he received a

report from his subordinate.

“Captain, are we in hot water?”

What the unshaven man reported to Chlust was a meeting between high officials of the countries of Courtois and Gaia. Even if it was diplomacy under the veil of secrecy, Courtois was a noble society, and it was often the case that its high officials were of nobility. They disliked rough treatment, and it was difficult to think they would go all the way to the outskirts just to put on airs.

The man who was Chlust’s subordinate reported what he heard from his trusted men.

... It was information Chlust wanted to think was impossible.

“When I thought they had quieted down, it couldn’t be...”

The black ogre incidents were no longer breaking out. But as long as he stayed on the border, he could tell the enemies was growing more active whether he liked it or not.

The air was one thing, and it had been so quiet it was contrarily creepy.

And about the contents of the high official’s discussion, the unshaven man was making a pale face. Chlust thought his own complexion was also leaving him, but as he was before his subordinate, he changed his train of thought.

“... Could you tell the official’s face? Or their characteristics?”

“Nothing. Everyone was wearing robes and hiding their faces. If the way they talked and their documents didn’t prove their status, we would have moved to take them in as suspicious individuals.”

But his subordinate seemed relieved they hadn’t done so from the depths of his heart. This was home ground, and there were plenty who were used to concealing their bodies, it could be called a spot of good luck that their foe didn’t know the area.

That was just how powerful their guards had been.

If he knew their names, then Chlust was the second son of an archduke. He thought he would be able to find out their faction, but it didn’t seem it would go so easily.

“Whatever the case, we have no connections to the center right now.”

“What do we do, captain? Won’t it blow sky high, the way things are going?”

The reason his subordinate-usually so lively-panicked to such an extent was simple. A high official of Courtois had exchanged documents with a high official of the Gaia Empire. What’s more, they seemed used to it.

The few words they exchanged were clearly bizarre.

‘The princess is on board.’

‘As long as you accept our conditions, we’ll play along with you farce.’

‘Hmm, making a hero of a commoner, the thought makes me want to vomit. I’d rather he became a hero post mortem.’

‘... I pray you come to a decision before our preparations are complete. Tell them to understand, it’s too late once it’s all begun.’

Princess, hero, commoner, and too late once it began... on these words, Chlust couldn’t help but remember those two.

The fact he was in a place like this, at the very least, he thought those two were involved. In a good sense, of course.

Chlust was aware that if he had continued to hate Rudel, his current self wouldn’t exist. He could recall well the faces of the two who had created the opportunity.

(Is this for certain... but at this rate...)

Even if he noticed, he understood it was futile to report the fact to the higher-ups. For better or worse, they lived in noble society, and having been once oppressed, Chlust could understand. If it was a truth, it would be hushed up, if it was a lie, they would boldly punish him.

No, it was more probable they would erase him the moment he reported it.

His stay in the outskirts was a long one, and it plagued him that his information on the palace factions was outdated.

To add onto that, the outskirts were optimistic. No matter how the empire invaded, they were certain that with its dragons, Courtois would never lose.

“... Don’t tell anyone about this matter. Order your men not to leak the

information.”

“Then what will we do!?”

“I’ll look into it. If I report to the wrong man, then it wouldn’t be strange if the entire unit is erased.”

The man fell silent. He realized he had stuck his head into a troublesome matter, but Chlust felt an even greater sense of crisis than his subordinate.

(Who do I rely on? My house is... I can’t even get in touch with Erselica, so that’s not happening.)

Once his subordinate left the room, Chlust scratched his head and thought.

(I’ve always reported the suspicious movements on the Empire’s side. I can’t think the higher-ups don’t know. Then did they know and plan to abandon us from the start?)

From the reinforcement of war potential around the border, Chlust had felt relief, but now he had a bad premonition.

(Our forces are being reinforced. But...)

The map of the area affixed to one of the room’s wall had memo sheets stuck all over it. It was a map that collected all the incidents on the border over the past few years.

He confirmed the war potential on Courtois’ side.

(There won’t be a problem if it’s a skirmish? No, the empire’s been tormented by our dragons for many years. It’s unthinkable that they’re not taking the dragons into account so late in the game. Our side is looking down on our foe too much.)

Getting together the reports on the black ogre, he had found one that suspected they might be an experiment from the empire. But his superior had laughed it off.

Even if that was true, Courtois had dragons, so they knew it wouldn’t be a problem.

(I can only gather info for now. And I have to inform someone of this fact...)

While his brother's face came to mind, recalling Rudel's present situation, he shook his head. As the white knight, Rudel stood out too much. And he wasn't in a position of power.

"First, I have to establish casual contact with Erselica. I need as much information on the palace as possible."

Looking at the map, Chlust scanned for the name of a port town. On a memo next to it, the town's fighting force was listed out.

When there were three powerful dragoons stationed there, there were no other decent reinforcements. On that mismatched treatment, Chlust feared for the safety of his brother who had likewise been flown off to the outskirts.

"I hope I'm just thinking too much."

Feeling the calm before the storm, Chlust felt something contrived in his brother being sent to the outskirts during such a period.

Chapter 118: The Mission and Hostility

“I can’t stand this anymore!”

Expressionlessly tidying up her paperwork, Fina ruffled up her blond hair as she cried out. But even still, she hadn’t the slightest emotion on her face. On the contrary, the made it scarier.

But already used to it, Mii looked at Fina as she prepared some tea and snacks. It tasted worse than when Sophina prepared it, but Fina more readily accepted tea brewed by Mii.

“When you have both an elf and a wolf by his side, why haven’t you lain hands on them, master! And you call yourself the lord of fluff? Or could it be you’re teasing and playing around with me?”

“Rudel-sama doesn’t have any fixation on fluffies, after all.”

“Right, even if you didn’t force him to choose, he’s for dragons and dragons alone.”

Helping out in Fina’s work, Sophina and Mii processed documents. Perhaps they had built a resistance to Fina’s conduct and speech up to now, as they were calm as could be.

“Dammit... I put such a cute wolf tribe girl by his side! And because I forcefully pulled out that clutzy commanding officer, my workload’s increased! What’s more, that Aleist guy keeps saying, ‘I don’t want to be away from Millia’ or something... it was irritating, so I recommended her for special inspector! Yeah, it was me, whatcha gonna do about it!”

“Princess, I think that’s terrible.”

With much to think about love and marriageable ages, Sophina glared at Fina. Mii also pitied Aleist, so she didn’t send Fina an affirmative look.

Noticing that, Fina hurriedly followed through.

“I-it’s alright Mii. Aleist will soon have his eighth fiancé, and he really will dry up.”

“Isn’t that no good? Do you have some sort of grudge against him, princess?”

Thinking of a dried up black knight, Sophina brought up her memories of his fiancés that were still at the academy. One of them was a female knight who excelled in the sword, and it was already decided she would skip grades.

She had surely done her best for Aleist’s sake, but Sophina had felt something terrifying from her, so she could foresee something terrible happening.

For the other one, a girl of the tiger tribe, Fina had done everything in her power to pull her into the defenders. It was only at times like these that Sophina had to tip her hat to Fina’s abilities. Though she held a flaw of only ever working for her own desires.

“Hah, for the princess of a country to spend her school life buried in paperwork...”

While Sophina pitied Fina’s present situation just a little, Fina expressionlessly embraced Mii and started fondling various things. The one in question looked happy enough.

“Well whatever.”

Before that usual scene, Sophina returned to work.

... Doing paperwork that wasn’t even part of her job, her absolute lack of resistance was also a problem. The two of them had been corrupted.



In the port town of Beretta, Millia was watching over Rudel

Separated from Rudel, who had work at the port, Izumi was discussing matters with Bennet at the knight brigade station.

“Do something about your living conditions?”

“Yes.”

The topic of their consultation was the fact they slept under the same roof as Rudel. While it was a problem that Millia didn’t see it as much of a problem, Izumi generally wasn’t fond of this situation.

Thinking of his future, she thought this might become trouble for Rudel.

“Why is that? While simultaneously observing him, the two of you were allotted to the future archduke Rudel, were you not? That’s how I and the others understood it.”

Bennet had no ill intent. It would be stranger if the future archduke Rudel didn’t have anyone by his side to look after him. Young and beautiful, Izumi and Millia were seen as Rudel’s mistress candidates, or perhaps his servants or convenient women. To Bennet and the rest who didn’t know the happenings of the capital, they thought the top brass had even gone as far as to tack on a reason and give them a post as, ‘Special Inspectors’.

“... There is no ulterior motive behind our directive. We really are just here to watch Rudel.”

“I see.”

Once Izumi corrected the misunderstanding, Bennet started to think. She looked tiny behind the large desk and chair that were prepared because the dragoon called Elrond used them as well.

“Then this really is a problem. Not only Rudel, it will bring about an influence to your futures as well. I do want to do something on my side, but...”

As Bennet made a difficult expression, her tail apologetically drooped down from her chair.

But perhaps she had a good idea, as her tail suddenly regained its vigor, swaying to and fro.

“Then the two of you can come over to my place.”

“Is that alright? And I don’t think it’s wise to keep too far from him.”

There was no telling what Rudel might do, and even if it was knight, there was no meaning to their inspector posts if they were too far away.

“I know it’s only been a few days since you’ve taken your post, and there’s no helping it if you haven’t been able to make rounds, but you should at least learn who lives next to you.”

“And that would be... you, Major Bennet?”

On Izumi’s words, Bennet’s tail violently wagged. She must have been greatly

pleased, as it even showed on her face.

“I’ll return early today. The two of you should come around to my house today. Luckily, our lodgings are next to one another, so I don’t mind if you leave your belongings at Rudel’s place.”

“While you have a point, won’t it be a bother?”

“I was the one under a misunderstanding. And when my subordinates cause a problem, it’s my responsibility as well. I plan to deal with it as a superior officer.”

While Bennet made a stern expression, in contrast, her tail was lashing out as if she couldn’t endure her delight.

(What’s she so happy about?)

Izumi couldn’t help but be curious about the individual called Bennet.



Within the day, Izumi explained the situation to Millia and took her belongings to the civilian house that Bennet used as a dwelling.

“Wasn’t that fine as it was?”

While Millia didn’t particularly see a need to change houses, Izumi was greatly opposed. She went as far as to give an order to dragon Millia to Bennet’s house.

“There’s something called the eyes of society. You should be more aware that me and you are both unmarried women.”

“Yeah, yeah...”

Due to being raised in a closed elf village, it did seem Millia minded not the eyes of society. No, she was raised in a closed environment where she would have to mind it, but from her special position, she ended up quite dim on the matter.

Having heard about Lilim from Rudel, Izumi thought she might develop a headache. Even if recognized a differing sense of values, Izumi wanted to avoid Rudel being put at a loss over something like this.

Even if she might be paying undue worry, Rudel was even denser to his

surroundings than Millia. At least someone had to care about it.

The neighboring house was of the same construction as the one afforded to Rudel. As they stepped through the threshold, Bennet came out to greet them in her apron.

“So you’re here. Leave your luggage in an empty room.”

The scent of a seafood soup, and the smell of roasting meat filled the area. Perhaps she had gone out of her way to prepare it for them, as three plates were already prepared in the kitchen.

“When you’re already letting us stay, you’re even cooking for us... my deepest apologies.”

“Don’t mind it. While there is always left over with one, if we have three people, then nothing will be left to rot. You haven’t been stationed long, so think of it as your celebration. Eat without restraint.”

The food was the same, but the room was casually put in order. Even Millia, who was fussy over cleaning, looked over the room and mortifyingly conceded...

“N-not bad.”

... She muttered.

Even from her eyes, it was clean. After spending more than half a year cleaning the palace, Millia had developed a fixation for cleanliness. Izumi, who had only spent a few days with her, found herself cautioned time and again.

(Bennet-san is amazing... and she can even cook.)

But there was one thing that bothered Izumi.

Perhaps she didn’t want it to wag while she was cooking, as she had her tail tucked away in her apron. That was also cute, but the problem was the apron. Fitting with her appearance, the frilled apron was fine in itself, but the character embroidered on it was definitely a simplified cat.

Looking like she’d start humming at any moment, Bennet bestowed the finishing touches onto the food.

(When she’s a wolf, she has a thing for cats?)

Izumi was bothered by quite a trivial thing.



“Now then, this is a bother.”

In the house Izumi had left, Rudel thought aloud.

The fact Izumi and Millia had left was one that was a deep relief to him. Living with a man before marriage would definitely invite needless trouble to their futures.

But there was a problem.

“I have no idea what I’m supposed to do.”

... Right, Rudel had never lived alone before. Even when he was endeavoring through his training and studies, at the dorm, the servants would look after his room.

While the girls might not have been aware, the young nobles had their cleaning and laundry taken care of by the servants attached to the dormitory. To add to that, Rudel generally couldn’t cook.

For argument’s sake, he could make the sort of food he’d prepare in the wild, but he had no idea what he was supposed to do alone.

As he had become a dragoon right after graduation, he had skipped right over the cleaning and house work that would be assigned to the low-level grunts. To the elite dragoons, even if they may clean the dragon stables, they were never troubled with the necessities of life.

“It would be rude to go ask them at this point.”

Standing from his chair, for now, Rudel decided to heat up yesterday’s leftovers. Before the stove, he lit a fire with magic and placed the pot over it.

He still had the soup Izumi made, he would likely hold out a day or two.

But what would happen after that?

“Well, I’m sure it’ll work out.”

More than twenty years old, Rudel lived by himself for the first time in his life.



Three days later...

Three women looked over Rudel's house with stiff faces.

On top of the dirty table, the kitchen was heaped with unwashed dishes. Apart from that, perhaps the laundry wasn't being done, as there were dirty garments left here and there.

"Rudel, what is the meaning of this?"

As Bennet glared at Rudel, the man in question made a troubled face.

"Even if you ask me... how did it come to this?"

After hitting Rudel's head with her palm, Bennet breathed out a sigh. She thought a man might be bad at this sort of thing, but even so, wasn't this a bit too terrible? She looked over the room once more. When she thought of the state of spaces she couldn't see, her heart sank.

It began during the day's work, when Izumi had grown worried and asked Rudel if he was properly eating.

Early to bed, early to rise, there was also a problem in how Rudel was never home to begin with.

(There's no helping what's been done, but this is too terrible, oh subordinate of mine!)

On the question of whether or not he was eating properly, Rudel said this.

'I still have takeout, so I'm fine.'

Just what part of that is fine, Izumi and Millia teamed up to cross-examine him. Then Bennet had begun to worry and joined in.

"Good grief... before your mission comes into question, you can't even properly live your life?"

"M-my deepest apologies."

Leaving a noble like Rudel alone was a problem, but neither Izumi nor Millia thought it would be this bad. It was the weak point of the top-scoring Rudel.

The sun was already going down so they couldn't do laundry now. If they started cleaning, it would carry on to midnight.

“Hah, I'll prepare food for you today. Izumi, Millia, come over once you've cleaned up the kitchen.”

Heading off to her own house, Bennet had concluded that rather than making anything in Rudel's ingredient-less house, making a large portion in her own place would be faster.

(What sort of thing would a man like to eat? It has to be meat, right?)

Swiftly equipping her apron, she tucked her tail into it so it wouldn't swing around. The box loaded with ingredients was filled with magic-made ice alongside seafood and various meats.

(Yeah~, what should I make...)

As she thought that, she heard a scream. The voice belonged to Millia.

‘Why can't you do something as simple as this!? And wait, how are you able to live in a room like this? I can't believe it!’

‘S-sorry.’

(Oh no, they're getting mad at my subordinate. I really don't think there's any helping it, but Millia-chan is scary.)

Hurriedly making arrangements, Bennet looked over the three who appeared once the food was done. Millia was letting off a prickly air, while Rudel lowered his shoulders. Izumi was trying to cheer him up, saying she would teach him how to do laundry the next morning.

“You really are hopeless. Today's special, don't expect me to do this again.”

Before the food lining the table, Rudel delighted at his first decent meal in a while. Seeing his face, while she didn't let it show on her expression, Bennet rejoiced as well.

(Yay! It doesn't look like he hates it.)

The four of them sat around the dinner table, and as expected, talks went towards Rudel's lifestyle. Even if they told him to do better starting tomorrow, there was no way Rudel could do that. For the time being, Izumi and Millia

would do something about it.

And the topic changed to the food.

“Is it good?”

Bennet asked Rudel, happily chowing down, and the man in question gave an energetic reply. He was already on his third plate.

“Yes! Major, you are an amazing cook.”

“You can skip the flattery. With a house of your stature, I’m sure you’ve eaten the food of top-class chefs from before you could walk. I can at least understand that much.”

“Is that so? I was never too fixated over the taste.”

Unfamiliar about Rudel’s early childhood, Millia seemed to be curious over what Rudel ate. Izumi knew he had been treated terribly, but she had never asked about the contents of his meals.

“So what sort of things did you eat?”

“... First off, vegetables and things with high nutritional value.”

“Being able to eat something nutritional is something to be thankful for. So how was it prepared? (Maybe I’ll try it out next time.)”

Bennet had some interest in a noble’s cooking as she awaited Rudel’s answer.

But the answer that came back crossed was more than she could handle.

“No, just normally. Raw, I mean.”

“R-raw?”

Millia was surprised.

“Is that strange?”

Izumi looked around, perplexed by Bennet and Millia’s reactions. She was sure he meant some sort of food prepared raw, showing little surprise.

“... You mean a salad?”

“No, we just kinda ate it whole. They were bitter, so my little sister would always swallow without chewing. Generally speaking, there were a lot of cold

dishes, I guess? I think the bread was on the harder side, and I get the feeling the meat was lightly seasoned...”

Rudel was the only one able to smile.

After hearing the specifics, they wouldn't imagine that as the meal of a future archduke.

“So that's why you always said the dining hall food was the best...”

“Hey, no matter how you look at it, that's not normal.”

“... Do you want another?”

“With pleasure!”

As Bennet held out her own meat dish, Rudel ate it with delight. Seeing him like that, Bennet was on the verge of tears within.

(Poor subordinate of mine... I'll have to do my best in cooking from tomorrow onwards.)

“Maor, your food is the best!”

When he happily praised her, Bennet grew happy as well.

“For the time being, I'll provide your meals. It will be troublesome if you collapse, after all... what's wrong, you two?”

There, Izumi and Millia looked at Bennet.

“U-um, would it be possible for you to teach us how to cook as well?”

“Hmm? I don't mind.”

“Really!?”

As the faces of the two women approached, Bennet felt something dreadful.

(Eh? What's this? Hey, you're scaring me.)



The next morning, Izumi taught Rudel how to do laundry as promised.

(Come to think of it, Millia was doing everyone's laundry for the past few days.)

It was curious how she had no resistance to washing a man's undergarments.

No, as the sight of her gleefully doing laundry floated in her mind, Izumi shook her head. She was reading too far into it.

Before the tub, Rudel hesitated as he washed his own clothing.

“The water’s grown murky.”

“When your clothes are so dirty, of course it would. Don’t change out the water, just keep washing.”

“I could use magic and...”

“It’s not like you couldn’t, but you know that clothing is valuable out here, right? If you make a mistake, you really will have nothing to wear.”

He had proposed resolving the problem with magic, but after that was declined, he got back to work. Watching his back, Izumi was filled with an inexplicable urge to help out.

But Bennet had told her to make him do it on his own.

Once he finished the washing in the house’s yard, he hung the clothes up to dry. Looking over the large load of drying laundry, it was clear he still had a way to go, but for argument’s sake, Izumi concluded he would be alright.

Inside the house, Millia was doing the minimum amount of cleaning she could bear.

“It’s meal time. Come over.”

Once Bennet called across the yard, taking Millia along, the three of them headed for Bennet’s house. There, around the entranceway stood a man with his blue hair tied at the back. He was talking about something with Bennet.

“You sure took your time.”

“Don’t ask for the impossible. Even like this, I made haste.”

The male knight who looked older than them had the robe of a dragoon draped over their shoulder. Once Izumi and the others came out, Bennet introduced them to the male knight.

“This is my subordinate Rudel, and his two inspectors. The one with the black hair’s called Izumi, and the green haired one is Millia. Remember that.”

“Hmm... My name’s Keith. Keith Elrond. Pleasure to meet you.”

The male knight gave a splendid smile as he approached Izumi and the others; along with his introduction, he reached out and took a hand. But the way he gripped it wasn’t one that they could come to like. He was acting overly familiar, or so was Izumi’s frank opinion.

The way he touched it was a little indecent.

“U-um.”

During that space, Keith had reached out his left hand and wrapped it around a shoulder as well. It was nothing more than a handshake, but it was almost as if his ulterior motives were on show for all to see.

“What is it, umm~...”

“I’m Izumi. Could you let go of that hand?”

“And why’s that?”

Keith flippantly resisted with a smile. On his expression, dark emotions on a level she had never experienced before began to well up in Izumi.

... Hatred, detestation.

A sensation similar to that ruled over Izumi as she simultaneously recognized Keith as an enemy. Izumi glared at him with a straight face.

It was the moment that within Izumi, a person she couldn’t like no matter how hard she tried had been born.

And she spoke.

“Listen, just release Rudel’s hand and shoulder already.”

Chapter 119: Hostility and Form

“Release Rudel already.”

Izumi reached her left hand towards the sheath of the katana hung at her waist, preparing herself to draw it at a moment's notice. Pushing up the hilt with her thumb, she intimidated her enemy, Keith Elrond.

However...

“My name is Keith Elrond. My partner Spinnith is a water dragon. Would you like to go flying with me next time, Rudel?”

He ignored Izumi.

“A getaway? I do want to try riding other dragons, but right now, I have Sakuya, so...”

The man of whose eyes the women didn't even seem to enter was of high stature and pleasant appearance. But his chest area was strangely laid bare.

As Izumi extended her right hand to the scabbard, Millia frantically stepped in to stop her.

“S-stupid! You're dealing with a dragoon. That's no normal man.”

Right. Dragoons were humans chosen by the dragons. No one could imagine a normal knight winning out. In essence, a majority of the dragoons were proficient when looked at as single knights.

Rudel was shaking Keith's hand with a smile, and it seemed he hadn't the slightest understanding of his partner's ulterior motives. That only made Izumi needlessly more anxious. Her foe was definitely handsome, he didn't look all too strong. But Izumi parted her right hand that trembled as it gripped her hilt tight.

He looked weak, but he was a dragoon, of all things. If he was hiding his abilities, then Izumi would never be able to compete.

Mortified, Izumi managed to endure it.

“Elrond-dono, please step away from Rudel (Dammit, he's taking glances this

way and laughing!)”

“Oh, what’s this? I don’t know who you might be, but you look quite angry.”

“I named myself not a moment ago.”

Releasing Rudel from his grasp, Keith overreacted, covering his face with his right hand and gazing up at the sky.

“Then I must apologize! I’ve little interest in a woman’s name, see. I’m of the belief that as long as I remember my mother and grandmother, the rest is unnecessary, and I can never work up the mind to commit any to memory.”

“... And you’re the same as always.”

Bennet sounded tired, but she had long since given up. After breathing out a sigh, she didn’t make any further remarks.

(I really don’t like this man.)

Izumi contained the emotions welling up as she glared at Keith. Noticing her gaze, Keith looked over her expression with a grin. He further rubbed Izumi’s nerves the wrong way.



“... Rudel.”

“What is it, Major?”

Her tail waving around, Bennet looked over the glaring Izumi and Keith as she pulled Rudel over. Her motions were practically that of a little sister badgering her brother. Millia had nervously separated from the glaring two, and in front of the entranceway, the three of them discussed the next day’s plans.

“Starting tomorrow morning, we’ll be carrying out your training. Let’s see... let’s start out with a one-on-one mock battle with me. And then we’ll use our dragons to fight.”

“Really!?”

Looking at Rudel’s delighted face, while she spoke with a stern expression, Bennet’s tail was happily wagging.

“Fool, now is the last time you’ll be able to rejoice. And I’ll have you fight

Keith as well.”

“The lieutenant? Isn’t he worn out, having only just returned?”

“Do you think a dragoon can shirk duty simply because they’re worn out? It seems you’ve asked the captain what it is you’re lacking, but you haven’t fully comprehended it.”

“M-my apologies.”

Seeing a depressed Rudel, Bennet thought.

(T-that was a failure! I-I have to cheer him up somehow.)

From Rudel, she had heard about how Oldarts had informed him of the things he was lacking in combat. But Rudel wasn’t having a good time coming up with a resolution. Even if he was told to rely on his partner, he didn’t understand exactly what he was supposed to do.

Even if he was told to expand his field of vision, he could only pack in experience.

In order to become a dragoon, talent was necessary, and in order to aim for number one among them, one would have to polish themselves more than anyone.

Bennet didn’t think Rudel had no talent. More so, she praised him for believing in a talent he might not even have and polishing himself to such an extent. While she had become a dragoon because she had been granted the opportunity, he had bet his life to become a dragoon, and that was something she would never be able to do.

“Don’t look so down. If you fight me and Keith, you might find your answer.”

“I will?”

“That depends on you.”

Bennet headed off towards Izumi’s glaring match.

She was trying to get Rudel to notice that the answer wasn’t something set in stone. If the individual didn’t accept it, it held no meaning. Like that, both Bennet and Keith had polished their form as dragoons...

Human life was short. No matter how much talent one may have, mastering everything was impossible. Cattleya was treated as an exception to that rule, but that very Cattleya had committed a large blunder when it came to Rudel...

And even if one was selected by a dragon, the partner dragon's abilities weren't uniform. Even the gray dragons had variance in their individual abilities.

He would have no choice but to choose what he wanted to become.

(I'm sorry, my little subordinate. But this is a path you have to grasp on your own.)

Having him fight her, and Keith, a different type of dragoon, Bennet wanted to show Rudel examples of the forms a dragoon could take.



Early the next day, they made for a site far from the port town of Beretta.

In that separated space, protected by Keith's dragon, Izumi and Millia watched over Rudel and Bennet.

It was a rough land of nothing but rocks, but Sakuya had taken a liking to it, so there was a hole she had dug out nearby.

In that space without grass or tree, Rudel and Bennet faced one another.

"Is that wooden sword your only weapon?"

"Yes, it's the weapon I've used most."

"I see... I use two daggers, three boomerangs, and a whip."

As Bennet showed him her two wooden daggers and boomerangs, Rudel seemed perplexed over how she could use so many weapons. He was certain that polishing a single weapon one specialized in would hold the highest efficiency.

Sensing Rudel's thoughts, Bennet let out a sigh.

"I know what you're thinking, but this is my style. Come at me without restraint."

Tucking her daggers into her belt, she readied a boomerang in her hand. Putting the other two away in a pouch in her back, she lowered her hips and

took a peculiar stance. The boomerang in her right hand against her shoulder, she directed the left side of her body towards Rudel.

Rudel took a stance with his wooden sword, adjusting his posture just a little. Sensing the movement of her eyes, and the minute movements of her body, Rudel's body reacted and started to motion as well.

Unable to endure it anymore, Rudel launched a charge on Bennet, approaching her with his high-speed movement. But swiftly leaping to the left, Bennet cut at Rudel with her boomerang. By the time Rudel had parried and corrected his stance, there was already another boomerang in Bennet's left hand.

(This is bad!)

While Rudel immediately moved from the spot to dodge, to the place he transferred, a boomerang flew. From the projectile that spun as it flew after him, he could sense a faint hint of mana.

Concentrating his attention on the two boomerangs that chased him as he ran, Rudel knocked one out of the air. The moment he returned his eyes to Bennet, controlling them remotely, he felt an impact on his back.

Collapsing right onto the back, he managed to endure, left in a state supporting his body with his left hand.

(She controls three at once? To think that was possible...!)

It was here Rudel regretted taking his eyes off her for even a moment. Demi humans of the beast tribe never boasted much magic. That put them at an overwhelming disadvantage, but as if to make up, they boasted extraordinary physical prowess not held by the other races.

As he held his wood sword horizontally, bringing it up over his head, Bennet fell towards him, equipped with both daggers, the force of all her body's weight behind her blow.

Unable to endure the impact, he diverted the force and escaped, but Bennet was able to follow his movements.

"That truly is an astounding way to get around. But if that's all you can do

with it, then even I can keep up.”

Skillfully handling her daggers, she changed from forehand to backhand, launching a series of attacks. If he used his full speed, he might have been able to escape, but as Bennet made sure he had no escape, Rudel was pressed into a hard fight.

(She’s fast! At this speed, I can’t put out my shield of light or light bolts.)

“What’s wrong? Is that all it takes to be academy number one?”

But Rudel had a bit of confidence in his swordplay. As he hit aside one of Bennet’s daggers, she threw the other one at him to take distance. Lowering down his sword, the deflected dagger made a dull sound as it rolled across the ground.

By the time he noticed it, Rudel’s breath had grown rough.

That sensation of all his movements being sealed, it was practically what he felt when he was going up against the captain.

(This person’s also strong, after all.)

As vexing as it was, Rudel couldn’t withstand the smile spreading across his face. While he couldn’t confirm that expression himself, according to Aleist, it was the face of a ‘battle junkie’.

(Even so, I don’t mind. I’m going to become stronger. If I fight this person, I’ll be able to rise even higher.)

“... You’re putting your all into every movement. Think about your own stamina a bit more before you make a move. Finally, you’d do best not to show that face to anyone else.”

Bennet was a little amazed.

Taking out the whip at her waist, she hit it once against the ground. As a sound rang out that made it clear that would hurt if it hit, Rudel took a stance with his wood sword.

Looking at Bennet’s whip, he recalled Eunius’ magic sword. That one made movements like a whip, but here he was dealing with a real whip. As he mulled over how he should handle it, Bennet’s whip came at him as if it were a living

being.

“But at this level!”

His wood sword became a magic sword, letting off light. But the blade was easily entangled by the whip, destroyed just so easily as well.

“You should’ve put up the magic sword sooner. Well if you did, I’d have taken some countermeasures, but... do you want to continue?”

On Bennet’s voice, Rudel stepped in to respond.

If the sword was no good, then magic. If magic was no good, then his bare hands...

That was Rudel’s style.

“You’ve got spirit, but your movements are too straightforward.”

Bennet tossed aside her whip, shifting her body just a little to avoid Rudel’s fist. In that moment, a few strands of her hair were severed, carried off by the wind, and Bennet opened her eyes wide.

In the next instant, her knee had found its place in Rudel’s solar plexus. On that knee hammered in with his own forward momentum, Rudel was instantly grasping for breath. Even so, he didn’t fall to his knees, so Rudel was quite outside the norm himself.

“Even if I held back, it’s usual to collapse there, but... this is the end.”

With Bennet tripping him up, Rudel found himself collapsed face-up on the ground.



“For Rudel to be played with like that...”

Making an unbelieving expression, it seemed Millia didn’t want to believe there was that great of a gap in ability. The usually adorable Bennet’s abilities were certainly worthy of a dragoon.

While Izumi really didn’t want to, she struck up a conversation with Keith to ask about Bennet.

“How is Major Bennet ability-wise? Is she high up in the dragoons, or...”

On Izumi's query, Keith looked over the collapsed Rudel as he answered. It was blatantly obvious he was begrudgingly answering, but Izumi held it in.

"Yeah, you'd find her faster, counting from the top. Of course, when it comes to comprehensive score, I'm higher than her."

"You're stronger than the Major?"

While Izumi thought it strange for the lieutenant to be stronger, the individual sounded certain, so she decided to believe. She didn't think he'd lie about something like that.

"Is that not what I just said? Do you have ears on that head? That woman over there was personally trained by the current captain and vice-captain... how envious. When they only ever took me on once."

Irritated, Izumi sent her eyes back towards Rudel to find Bennet nursing him. To be honest, she never thought there would be such a gap in abilities. At this point, Bennet looked much more Major-like than ever before.

"Next is the aerial battle."

The two of them called their dragons and began a battle in the sky.

But the match was over in no time.

"... He lost."

"That he did."

Confirming Sakuya falling towards the ground, the two thought over that previous battle. The only impression they got was that Sakuya had completely lost an upfront confrontation.

"Dammit! If the captain and vice-captain were closing in on me, just who am I supposed to choose!? That charmer in his prime, or the vice-captain and his villainous face... ah, I!... I'm!"

Watching Keith make a ruckus all on his own, Izumi's eyes had turned considerably cold.

"Izumi, what's wrong? You've been a bit scary since yesterday."

Seeing Millia, who didn't think anything, even looking at Keith, Izumi

hardened her resolve. She had to do something about it herself.



As Rudel looked after Sakuya, Bennet descended to the ground. She didn't ask him anything about that previous fight.

"Get in some rest. Your dragon shouldn't have suffered any major damage."

'Well, I did hold back.'

"Sakuya. Are you alright, Sakuya!"

'My head hurts! A tail straight to the face!'

While Rudel frantically stroked Sakuya's head, to Bennet, for some reason it looked like he was depressed. Not over the loss, it felt like it was coming from something else entirely.

"How is that, Sakuya, does it feel good?"

'Not at all. It tickles.'

"... I-I see."

(... He looks kinda depressed, but how am I supposed to cheer him up?)

A troubled Bennet called out to Keith. There, he rushed over with speed he had never shown before.

"You called?"

On his light tone, Bennet's tail slumped powerlessly to the ground.

She wanted him to treat her just a bit more like a superior. Despite being from a noble household, he happily worked shirtless in the dirt, alongside the town residents, and he even went out drinking with the men. While Keith was always spreading smiles around, he didn't seem to hold particularly favorable emotions towards her.

The battalions they were affiliated with were different, so to be more precise, she was not his superior officer. But they were among the few dragoons who possessed water dragons, so they were often together on missions.

"After they get some rest, I'll leave it to you. First off, have a one-on-one with Rudel and—"

“I don’t want to. I want him to see me at my most beautiful. Therefore, I’ll start with the aerial battle.”

Seeing Keith’s glare that showed he definitely wouldn’t yield, Bennet fell into a slump, consenting without letting it show on her face.

“... Got it. Do what you want. Rudel, next you’ll be having an aerial battle with Keith.”

“... Understood.”

On his knees, with both hands against the ground, Rudel stood and corrected his posture before giving an orderly reply. Bennet was deeply moved, her tail wagging left and right.

Chapter 120: Form and the Wall

Putting in a midday break, Rudel leapt onto Sakuya's back and rose into the air.

The wide, blue sky spread out, noon had just gone by, and the light of the sun was strong. But as he looked at his foe, something like the measly sun flew out of his head.

"We're taking on a water dragon again."

'I won't lose this time.'

As Sakuya thrust her fist towards her opponent a few times, the dragon laughed. For some reason, he called out towards Rudel.

'So that kid's the aunty of the lake's favorite. I've got some hopes for you, but be careful not to get hurt. My partner's quite a troublesome one, after all.'

"Hahaha! How terrible, Spinnith."

'... And you should be especially careful.'

"I don't understand the reason, but I'll be careful."

Rudel didn't understand what Spinnith was trying to say. But thinking it would be rude to ask here, for now, he concentrated on the match. On a match with his superior, his heart was dancing. This was a world he didn't know, and there were plenty of strong people rolling around.

That only made Rudel irresistibly delighted. Delighted that there was still a higher level he could reach for.

"Then let's have some fun with it."

'You're going to aim for the rear after all.'

"He's coming, Sakuya!"

'I'll teach you a lesson for calling Mystith aunty!'

'No, I mean seriously, she's my aunt. She's my mother's sister.'

"Is that true?"

While Rudel learned an unexpected truth in the sky, with that as the signal, Keith began moving.

“Let’s leave the talks at that. From here on, you need only be intoxicated by my beautiful dance!”



Looking up at the sky, the three girls and a dragon were enraptured by the movements of Keith’s water dragon.

“No matter how many times I see it, he flies beautifully.”

The water dragon’s glassy scales caught the light and glimmered in the air. That form was one thing, but unlike Bennet’s performance before, he had a sense of sharpness.

He wasn’t leaving it to brute force, it was as if he was reading his opponent’s every move. Reading Sakuya’s movements, and easily slipping around Rudel’s shields of light. While he could surely destroy them, he purposely avoided them as he slipped around to the back each time.

“Is the Lieutenant’s dragon strong?”

As Millia called out to Bennet, she answered without moving her face. She wanted to watch those movements, to steal as much of that technique as she could.

“No, there’s barely any difference. More so, I’m sure my partner Heleene is stronger.”

‘I won’t lost to the young ones, and I’m mama’s girl.’

As Heleene stuck out her chest, “That’s right,” Bennet answered. The movements of the water dragon that left behind afterimages in the air were making sport of Sakuya.

Was Keith’s magic preparing doubles of water, or was it the dragon? Perhaps it wasn’t either.

(Talent truly is a scary thing.)

It wasn’t as if Bennet didn’t have talent. But the gap was evident.

“Major, is Rudel actually weak? I can’t believe it. I’ve never seen Rudel played with to such an extent.”

On Izumi’s worried voice, Bennet knew it was a misunderstanding. She worried over how she was supposed to convey it, and worried over whether she could get the point across well.

(Yeah~, teaching people really is difficult...)

So there, Bennet tried to compare her and Keith.

“Rudel is strong. To be blunt, he’s stronger than me. His fighting style is still young, but if he trains, he’ll surpass me in no time.”

“He can even win against you?”

“Yeah. But you see, defeating Elrond in an aerial battle will be difficult. That dragon called Sakuya is unsuited to the air. And just like me, Elrond’s dragon is a water dragon. Among the four variants, it’s the one with the best balance.”

While wild dragons were all usually stronger than gray dragons, the answer to which of the four was strongest had yet to come out. The dragoons would all argue by emotion, and the strongest could never be determined. Of course, one’s own dragon was always the strongest.

Everyone thought so. And Bennet was the same.

If she fought Keith Elrond in an aerial battle, she would lose, but she was certain her partner was stronger than Spinnith, and she thought it wouldn’t lose out to any of the other species.

That was because water dragons had very few weaknesses.

As they could operate in the water, they were thought to be dragons specialized for the water. But that wasn’t so.

They were simply also good in the water, that was water dragons. Slower than a wind dragon, but they could take second place in speed. Less firepower than a red dragon, but even so, second place. Less physical strength than a gaia dragon, but even there, they were second.

Therefore, even if they didn’t have anything special, they excelled in balance. And from Heleene, she had heard there was a dragon who specialized in every

single field.

“But he lost so easily.”

Bennet answered Izumi’s question as if it were only natural. But inside, she couldn’t help but be anxious over whether she was properly getting the message across.

“The reason it looked like he lost so easily was because I made it look so. Don’t let your opponent do what they want. Don’t let them bring it to their preferred way of fighting. It’s a way of fighting you can only do if you have information.”

As Izumi and Millia didn’t seem to get it at all, Bennet breathed out a sigh and looked at their faces. In truth, she wanted to see Keith’s fighting techniques, but it was clear that teaching her two juniors was more important.

“Don’t misunderstand. We dragoons are the country’s elite brigade. It’s downright strange for Rudel—who just graduated the academy—to be able to fight us. Graduated within the top ten of the academy. Had barely anyone who could stand against them. This is a unit filled with people like that.”

“E-even so, the difference in skill is way too intense.”

“Let’s see. If you’ll let me have my say, there’s barely any difference between Rudel and me. No, if it just comes down to power, swordplay and magic, that guy clearly has the upper hand. In that sense, I’m weaker.”

Seeing the two still couldn’t understand, Bennet was starting to panic. Just being stronger means victory, explaining it wasn’t so simple was quite difficult.

“What that guy lacks is experience... something more technical.”



Out of breath, Rudel sent a sidelong glance to Keith and Spinnith encroaching from behind as he produced his shields. While their numbers climbed to a few dozen, as if slipping straight through, his foe kept chase with barely the slightest movements.

The most detestable thing was how he always maintained a set distance as he followed behind.

“You should never show your dragon’s rear. Otherwise, it’s an easy target.”
‘When you say it, it takes on a whole new meaning.’

“Hahaha! Now try putting up some more resistance!”

“Kuh! (I never thought he could be so strong. What makes us so different!)”

On top of the fact his attacks showed no sign of hitting, his opponent didn’t even try to make use of the terrain. It was as if he was taunting Rudel.

Before an overwhelming gap in abilities, Rudel felt a different sense of crisis from when he faces the captain.

While Rudel was delighted if his abilities even put him at the bottom, when Sakuya was involved, that changed things. His heart was starting to panic, would he be unable to protect Sakuya? He was treasuring her too much.

‘Quit following us from behind!’

Sakuya turned all the way around, but in that instant, Spinnith had transferred behind her. Before Sakuya could turn, he had already started moving.

(We’re being read?)

Played around with in the air, Rudel and Sakuya were unable to raise a hand to Keith and Spinnith.

With Heleene, Sakuya had the slight hope that something would happen if only her attacks would connect, but now she began holding fear towards their opponents.

‘Don’t get close to meeee!’

‘Now that’s just a mean thing to say.’

Against an opponent with leisure, Rudel and Sakuya were being manipulated in their own desperation.



“They’re starting to panic. Their movements are growing worse, so they’re only falling further into Elrond’s traps.”

“Is that some sort of magic?”

Millia directed her eyes at the fight in the sky as she asked the question. Bennet saw that even an amateur's eyes could see that gap in strength as she continued on the previous explanation.

"You could call it individual difference if you want. When you call it talent, don't you think it always comes off as mean?"

"... You mean to say Rudel has no talent?"

On Izumi's thoughtful face, Bennet shook her head.

"Like hell someone who became a dragoon could go at it without any talent. What I'm trying to say is that individual differences definitely exist. It's the same with the races. Us beast type demi-humans have especially high physical abilities. But we have low magic. That elf has below-average physical abilities, but her mana is clearly higher than a human's right?"

"W-well, yeah."

When Millia conceded that her race was indeed like that, Bennet continued on with the conversation.

"You have a sister in the dragoons, right? Major Lilim."

"Yes."

When talks turned to her sister, Millia's expression became serious. Izumi also listened in with deep intrigue.

"If you asked whether or not Lilim has talent, a majority of people would say yes. And if you ask about Cattleya, everyone will chime in to say she's a genius. I don't think that's mistaken. Especially Cattleya, her abilities have been growing amazingly lately."

Bennet recalled how the unmotivated Cattleya had shown some considerable mettle as a dragoon. It was a good thing that she had grown earnest these past few years, as her abilities had grown alongside it.

From the start, even if she wasn't the slightest bit motivated, if you taught her, she'd be able to do it. What a human would spend a few years to learn, in a month, or even a day she'd acquire it. That could be called nothing short of genius.

“Um... how is that related to Rudel?”

“Yeah, let’s see. Meaning, what I’m trying to say is that he’s the same, and from the eyes of those around him, he’s got talent. It’s only natural. It would be strange for someone without talent to be among the elites. If you don’t have talent, then even before it comes to that, no dragon would recognize you.”

“But Rudel’s circumstances are a bit differ—”

“Right. But if you ask me, that’s something you can only say in hindsight. Before someone strong, everyone will always look back and say they have talent. (Ah, no! This talk is proceeding in a strange directionnnn! What I’m trying to say is that it isn’t talent, it’s form!)”

While she was sure she had failed, Bennet still tried to convey it to the two.

“What I’m trying to say is that Rudel is plenty a monster himself. Just by putting in a bit of experience, that guy will run straight passed me in no time. To be blunt, just be teaching him the knack and a few techniques, he’ll already be on another level. That’s the sort of strength he needs.”

Bennet forcefully dragged the conversation back on topic and said was she was trying to say.

“Talent has no meaning if it isn’t polished. And the time we have to polish it is limited.”

“You mean you don’t have the time to train?”

Bennet felt like bursting into laughter at Izumi’s question, but she endured it and recovered.

“No, I’m saying we don’t have the time to aim to be the best. Life is short, after all. So I, and Elrond, and Lilim and Cattleya... we dragoons all have to search for our own form.”

Just as Bennet had polished her own strength, Keith had polished his aerial prowess. If you asked which was better, it depended on time and situation. It wasn’t as if there weren’t missions where she’d be acting alone, so you couldn’t say Bennet’s decision was wrong.

Many dragoons would choose the same route as Keith. That was simply how

powerful a dragon was. To control them as best as possible, a large number of training hours were required. As a result, one would need to make a choice.

... About their path, and the path they would take as a dragoon.

“The dragoons are the knights who, by possessing a dragon, have expanded their options. But in exchange, there are things they have no choice but to throw away. In this match, I hoped Rudel might see what he wanted to become. It isn't something to be told by another, I want him to choose his own form.”

The three and one dragon looked up into the sky to see a number of water orbs exploding, and Sakuya plummeting. Once the match ended, the area was flooded out.

(Everyone looks up to the competent knights strong even up in the sky, but that's impossible. Cattleya-chan wasted a few years, so I don't know if she'll be able to do both.)

Seeing a soaked Rudel and Sakuya collide with the ground, Bennet held a bit of hope. Without talent Cattleya held, or the magical prowess or time gifted to Lilim. Such was Rudel, but...

Unable to stand up to her feeble self, and unable to stand up to Elrond, but...

(If he does manage to do it, I guess you can't call it talent anymore.)

... He somehow looked like he could surmount it all.



While the party wanted to return already, Rudel's match with Keith still remained.

But Keith didn't seem up to it.

“It's already late, so can't we return? The sun's already going down”

“What are you talking about? We still have plenty of time left. And it'll be over in an instant, so time is irrelevant.”

(So that's how big the gap is between me and the Lieutenant... but I have no choice but to accept it.)

Rudel hit both hands against his face to psyche himself up, and a worried

Izumi and Millia called over to him. Perhaps they couldn't stand to see a beaten Rudel any longer.

“Now let's do this, Lieutenant!”

When Rudel wrung out his voice, Izumi and Millia reluctantly took distance. And before Bennet could say anything, Keith stood before Rudel. In his hand, he gripped a wooden sword.

“Hmm, when you've said that much, I can't quite keep silent myself.”

Keith's partner dragon looked worried for some reason. Bennet also took distance with a tired face. But for some reason, everyone was closer than they had been in the match with Bennet.

‘Don't go too crazy.’

(Is there really that much of a gap? He definitely is famous...)

While looking into the dragoons, information on Keith had entered Rudel's ears a number of times. He was feared by his own squad members, so he was surely strong.

Taking a stance with his wood sword, he concentrated and gazed at Keith.

“Now! Come at me however you like!”

“Here I come!”



“LIIIEEEUUUTEEENNAAAANNTTT!”

Rudel had taken Keith out in the first blow. Izumi and the others could only watch as Rudel held him up in his arms and cried out.

“See, it ended in no time, didn't it?”

“... Um, Major Bennet. Is Lieutenant Elrond, um...”

Izumi seemed troubled with her words, but Bennet said it plainly.

“Yeah, he's ridiculously weak. When it comes to one-on-one fights, he's the absolute lowest rank among the dragoons.”

There, Millia stepped into their conversation. Perhaps she couldn't believe the

sight before her eyes as she drew closer to Bennet.

“But just a moment ago, he said his comprehensive rank was higher than yours.”

Bennet crossed her arms and tilted her head. It was Izumi’s little secret that those gestures healed her soul.

“Yeah, sure enough, in the comprehensive ranking, I think he was higher. I mean, in aerial battles, he’s in the top five, so I’m sure his rank is higher than me. About one or two spots higher.”

Seeing the collapsed Keith, Izumi’s gaze turned cold.

Completely specialized towards piloting a dragon, Keith definitely carried a higher ranking than Bennet. But compared to Bennet who could pull off both land and air combat, Izumi couldn’t help but hold Keith’s placing in doubt.

(I hate myself for ever fearing him.)

From that day forth, Izumi swore to protect Rudel from Keith through the use of physical means.

“Izumi, you’ve been acting strange lately.”

“Y-yes, she’s definitely scary.”

Seeing Millia and Bennet fearful of her, Izumi mulled over just how she was to convey Keith’s level of danger.



A few days later, Rudel stopped by Bennet.

It was already late into the night, but he had eaten through all his takeout. He dropped by at a time where he thought Izumi and Millia would already be asleep.

“Is it good?”

“Yes!”

Chowing down on the leftovers of dinner, Rudel cut into the main reason he came over. While it was true he had run out of takeout, if he felt like it, he could dive into the sea and take another fish out.

There was a reason he came to Bennet without doing that.

“Major, I want to become stronger.”

At Rudel’s words, Bennet folded her arms in her pajamas and sat in her chair. Today, she was wearing bear-print sleeping garments. She even had a hat.

“You’re already plenty strong. And there’s little I’ll be able to teach you. The knack for battle, and the techniques are something you need to pick up in real combat.”

“I don’t mind! If that’s what will make me stronger, I’ll learn any technique.”

Bennet took Rudel’s empty bowl, poured in the leftover soup from the saucepan, and handed it over to Rudel.

“I don’t mind teaching you. But are you sure? Rather than my techniques, if you simply train yourself, you’ll be able to become strong.”

There, Rudel downed another bowl of soup before answering.

“I don’t mind. I’ll just be training more. I’ll learn the techniques and train myself as well.”

Bennet rubbed the corners of her eyes, a tired look on her face. But after letting out a sigh, she looked just a little down and laughed.

Seeing that expression, Rudel was surprised that his strict leader had smiled.

“What a greedy noble. Well, that’s just about right for you noble lot... you better prepare yourself for tomorrow. And Elrond!”

“What?”

Casually appearing, Keith opened the door and entered Bennet’s kitchen. While Rudel was also surprised, Bennet who called for him was holding her head.

Perhaps she never thought he would be there, or she hated how it was exactly what she expected. Rudel was unable to tell.

“I never thought you would actually come, but... well, whatever. From tomorrow onwards, you’re accompanying Rudel’s training. You have no right to de—”

“I’ll be harsh starting tomorrow. Why don’t you go to sleep early, Rudel?”

While Bennet was in the middle of talking, Keith still followed her orders, so while Bennet seemed a little unsatisfied, she nodded.

Once Rudel learned the two of them would be training him, he brightened up and stood. And he lowered his head.

“I’ll be in your care!”

“Leave it to me.”

“Yeah, in that case, lead the way to the bed...”

The moment Keith made a pass, the door to the kitchen was violently opened. Wearing her sleep-wear pajama, Izumi appeared with her katana in hand. Three sets of eyes gathered; Bennet was a little surprised, while Keith took a step back at her expression.

Her neck a little tilted, Izumi who appeared expressionlessly, alongside the darkness of the room, it was exceedingly terrifying.

But Rudel alone was...

“Listen to this, Izumi! From tomorrow onwards My commanding officers will be helping me train. With this, I can become stronger again.”

As Rudel delightedly reported, Izumi smiled. Unlike her prior expressionlessness, and the slight hair stuck fast to her skin, right now, she joined Rudel in his celebration.

“Good for you, Rudel. And could you wait a minute? I need to have a talk with that illegal trespasser.”

Her smile reverted to an expressionless state, and while Rudel and Bennet frantically stopped Izumi as she pulled her blade from her sheath, Keith made an irritated face as he retreated.

Chapter 121: The Wall and Light

In the port town of Beretta, a tattered Rudel crawled out of the sea.

A rough breath, and large movements seemed painful on his body. But Rudel's face was smiling.

"It was a harsh battle... but I won the match!"

Holding a spear up high, he hoisted his spoils high to the heavens. There, a fish much larger than Rudel's body-still very much alive-was thrashing about.

While they could see the young man holding up a fish that surpassed four meters in size, those around were putting out an atmosphere as if to say, 'He's at it again'. The town residents who had suspended their work for a meal were beginning to return their eyes to their lunch.

What Rudel saw was Bennet and Millia, lunch boxes spread out before them as they ate their meal. From how the contents were the same, he inferred they were both made by Bennet.

Rudel had once eaten Millia's homemade food, but from the nice appearance of the lunch boxes' contents, he determined they had to come from Bennet. Millia's cooking was, according to Keith, 'biodegradable waste', apparently. To Rudel who could eat anything, he thought that was a bit too cruel, but he did remember it didn't taste very good.

"... What are you doing?"

As Bennet stared at him blankly, still in his undergarments, Rudel began using his sword to disembowel the fish. He answered normally.

"I ran out of take out, so I've switched to local sourcing."

As Rudel replied with a straight face, Bennet could only say, "I see." While she sent him a bit of a pitying look, Rudel returned to preparing his meal.

"It never occurred to me that someone would locally source their lunch. And isn't the water cold this time of year?"

Having lately grown accustomed to Rudel's eccentric actions, Millia was taking

some fleeting glances at Rudel's body. But when he suddenly jumped into the sea during lunch break, she never thought that would actually be to secure lunch. She was a little fed-up.

Raising a fire with magic, he began roasting the fish when Sakuya and the dragons took notice of it.

'That fish is a tasty one, right?'

'It's delicious, right?'

'There aren't too many of them around, right?'

"... There's no helping it."

As a result, only a meager portion remained in Rudel's hand. Even so, it was more than enough for a single person to eat.

Biting down grandly over the red flesh of the fish that looked practically like a high-class steak, Rudel looked over the construction of the port.

The birds swooped down to clean up the intestines he had discarded. Under the blue sky that expanded over the port town, the piercing light of the sun was blinding.

"It's getting along quite well."

Bennet answered Rudel's muttering. While he hadn't said what he was referring to, as one who had helped out in the work, she understood what he was trying to say.

"If you use a dragon, the work goes forward. While we're behind schedule, it shouldn't take too long at this rate. If the plan proceeds favorably, the port's construction will be complete, and we'll take over the work of some other brigade member and head to the site of our next mission."

"Major, you're moving away?"

At Millia's fluster, Bennet wagers her tail. Rudel wanted her to teach him many more things, and that would be troubling. He headed off towards Bennet.

"Don't misunderstand. A port isn't something constructed so quickly. There's at least another year left to go."

While both Rudel and Millia were relieved, Rudel was delighted over the

training he received. Meanwhile, Millia was more relieved about the food.

Neither Izumi nor Millia were able to cook like Bennet. When looked upon from the side, they were completely being led along with food. The only who didn't notice that were the three being baited and Bennet.

“Hah, after this break, Elrond should be coming to help out with the work. You'll be training with me in the afternoon, Rudel.”

“Yes, Major!”

As Rudel rejoiced, Millia whispered under her breath.

“That's all well and good, but put on some clothes already.”



The training was generally carried out near Sakuya's den.

The fact there were no people around, and they wouldn't be a hindrance to the port's development had already been confirmed, so they made use of that fact.

At the same time, Bennet was calculating to try and make this wasteland as habitable for humans as possible. When the scale of the town increased, there was nothing lost in having as much exploitable land as possible.

(Is it about time to have her make a den somewhere else?)

By having Sakuya live there, what was once a desolate landscape of rocks was now starting to sprout weeds. While the gaia subspecies was generally thought of as useless, when it came to transporting large cargo and mending the soil, they were way too capable.

And their armoring and power were top class among the dragons.

“Major... I finished running.”

A sweat-stained Rudel returned to Bennet. Running along the terrible footing of the crags and mountains had been added to his basic training.

That was the beast tribe's standard training, but with his high physical abilities, Rudel was able to carry it out with a bit of pain.

“I see. Then today, let's work on your special skills.”

“My specials?”

“Now bring out that shield of light thing of yours.”

When Bennet issued her orders, Rudel stored power in his left hand. A little later, a shield of light manifested in the air.

(... That really is convenient. Moving a shield around by his will.)

If Bennet simply wanted to make Rudel stronger, she had determined there wouldn't be a problem if he continued firmly training his foundation as he always had. Eventually, he would be able to beat her even if he just brute forced his way through. But it was true if he polished some technical skills, he would be able to aim higher.

“Is concentrating power in that left hand your hobby? In that case, you should stop at once. You create too large a gap, and you're merely informing your opponent of your next move.”

In essence, Bennet was able to prevent Rudel from using his shield and light bolts by keeping it so he couldn't focus his attention on his left hand. It was too easy to cancel out.

“... I think that's possible, but with my style, I can't help but focus my power on my left hand.”

Seeing Rudel lost in thought as he looked at his left hand, Bennet nodded a, sure enough, in her heart. As he generally held a sword in his right hand, Rudel had a habit of invoking magic in his open left.

“If you can substitute something else, then do it. At the very least, make it so you can focus your attention on anywhere in your body.”

To test it out, Rudel started with his right hand, and with a slightly greater lag than his left hand, a shield of light took shape. Throwing one of her boomerangs at it and seeing how easily it was destroyed, Bennet was convinced.

(The quality's fallen much further than the ones he makes with his left. But I should see this as room for improvement.)

After thinking a while, Bennet issued Rudel an order.

“Rudel, henceforth, we'll be training every day so you can make a shield from

anywhere. What's more, a small, strengthened one. After that, we'll make it so you can move them freely."

Rudel tilted his head.

"I can already move them well enough."

Seeing Rudel rotate the shield he made, amazing, Bennet thought as she let out a sigh, and did her best to create a mocking air.

"Are you an idiot? I'm telling you that you have to be able to produce stronger shields. Try making them the size of the palm of your hand. It would be even better if you can discard the shield shape entirely."

"Discard the shape?"

"Even if you call them shields, based on how you use them, they can be weapons as well. You've used them like that a number of times, right?"

"You're right."

(If he can raise the quality of his shields, that would be plenty, but it would be even better if he can give them a new form.)

Seeing Rudel recall something, Bennet thought back over Rudel's data. While he was using them as shields, from the eyes of those around, at the very point they floated without him having to hold them, it could only be said they were exceedingly versatile.

What's more, Cattleya had witnessed Rudel riding his shield over the water's surface. There was no need to fixate on the shape of a shield. When he could think up a use for it like that, Bennet couldn't understand why he would fixate on that form.

(Hah, the captain's pushed a tough one onto me... but for the sake of my cute subordinate, I have to do my best!)

Bennet recalled what she felt when she first looked over Rudel's data. Even since Rudel awakened as the white knight, he had devoted an exceedingly large amount of time towards controlling that power. While the forceful parts stood out a bit, he had changed from his early days where he had focused on technique.

(The reason he's so mismatched is surely because he awakened.)

When he had always been worried over his lack of power, when that was bettered, this time he was on the verge of becoming a power type. The individual himself couldn't keep up with those changes.

(In that case, what he needs right now is... a change of style? No, if we raise his base and give him enough control over it, that should be best.)

From Bennet's point of view, Rudel was full of pointless action. That abundant pointlessness was the cause of his loss.

(The captain definitely pushed him onto me because it was a pain, right?)

Recalling the captain who trained her, Bennet offered the struggling Rudel some advice.

"Rudel, when a powerful attack is coming towards you, what do you do if you can't dodge?"

"... I'd block it."

"Let's say you can't block it with your power. I'm not taking any objections."

While Rudel was about to say something, he dropped his shoulders.

"You parried my attacks a number of times. Why was that?"

"Because rather than catching the blow, that would lessen the...!"

Noticing something, Rudel began changing the shape of his shield.

"It's only natural to strengthen it, but there is no need to block every single attack. Just changing the direction of force is a considerable strength. Try using your head a bit."

"Yes!" Rudel delightfully responded, while Bennet crossed her arms and wagged her tail.



Seeing Rudel borrow Bennet's shoulder as returned, Izumi, who had taken the day off, made a face as if to say, 'this again?'

But her face was just a bit happy as she scolded him.

“He’s all beaten up again.”

“Pretty much. He has way too much stamina, so he always pushes it too far. It makes me tense just watching him.”

Handing Rudel off to Izumi, Bennet headed to a back room to change out of her dirty garments. Lending Rudel a shoulder, Izumi sat him down in a chair,

“I-I did my best today.”

“I see, good work.”

“I’ll get stronger tomorrow.”

Looking at Rudel who was unable to stand, Izumi began preparing the meal she had cooked. The sun was setting, and thinking that Millia would be back soon as well, she put the pot over the fire.

He moved his body until it moved no more, and once he got back, he would eat and then sleep. Sleep soundly until morning came, only to leap up the next day and get back to training. It wasn’t something the normal person could imitate.

Within all that, he also had to carry out paperwork and development work, so the burden on Rudel was in no ways light.

“Tomorrow, I’m training with Lieutenant Keith.”

Rudel informed Izumi with a smile, and the one in question listened in with a smile as well. She already knew from the start, and she had arranged her schedule for it. Izumi was working hard not to leave Rudel and Keith along together.

(If only those two had the slightest sense of danger.)

Bennet and Millia both seemed estranged from that sort of thing, and they felt no danger at all. Izumi mulled over whether or not to tell them, but she hesitated to say such a thing to the innocent Bennet.

If she told only Millia, that would bring about the problem of making Bennet feel mindful and left out. She was strangely sensitive to that sort of thing. In a situation where she was the only one who didn’t know, the way she held her anxiety was also cute, and Izumi had watched it all the way.

(... No, that's no good, me!)

Somehow crawling up from that train of thought, Izumi listened to Rudel's story as she sensed a presence. Right after that, Millia returned to Bennet's house, but Izumi had reached a hand for her nearby katana.

"I'm back... wait, what's this!"

While Millia was surprised to see Izumi holding her sword, after following her line of sight, she came to an understanding.

"Hey there, Rudel. Let's take it nice and easy with tomorrow's rendezvous."

Raising his left hand, directing a smile at Rudel, the amiable young man in appearance alone received a scary smile from Izumi.

"So you've come again, Lieutenant Elrond."

"Hahaha, it's not like this is your house, right? The owner told me to drop by now and again."

"You've casually told another lie. How many times does that make this? I confirmed it with Major Bennet, and she never said such a thing. In the first place, you only come here with eyes on Rudel, right?"

"And what of it?"

At Keith's face, completely devoid of any wrongdoing, Izumi's smile stiffened up.

"He's out of your league."

"Foolish woman, let me teach you my true strength. I'm not a dragoon for nothing! Spinnittthh!"

As Keith called for his dragon in a loud voice, Izumi braced herself. While the notion of seriously cutting him down before his dragon came crossed her mind, Keith was acting strange.

"... Eh? Eating, so you can't? I-I see."

It was a dragon's voice that Izumi couldn't hear, but she could tell what was going on. The dragon had prioritized his meal over Keith. Or perhaps it was precisely because it understood the circumstance that it refused.

It was a dragon much more decent than its contractor.

“ ... ”

As Izumi silently stared at him, Keith averted his eyes. There, Millia lightly hit Izumi on the head.

“Quiet down.”

There, Izumi noticed Rudel giving a sleeper’s breath from his chair. Keith also felt sorry and decided to withdraw.

“What a wonderful sleeping face. By the grace of that face, I’ll let you off tod—”

“Get going already.”

Under Izumi’s glare, Keith ran straight out of Bennet’s house.



Meanwhile...

In the royal palace, Aleist let out a sigh as he cleaned. The room was beautifully polished, but somewhat lacking in motivation, Aleist looked out the window.

“Millia...”

The form of Aleist’s powerless mutter, the members of his platoon looked at their commanding officer mulling over something. The fact he didn’t look like he was worrying over a single woman was surely because of his devilish appearance.

But all of Aleist’s worries came from how Millia had gone off with Rudel.

At this point, he couldn’t even put his all into training. When the war event was closing in, he just couldn’t work himself up. This was also largely because he didn’t understand his own strength.

Aleist wasn’t weak.

But as he had seen Rudel’s strength, lately, he had gotten around to wondering if Rudel would just bring an end to it. You could also say that was just how large Rudel’s existence was to Aleist.

But...

“Is Aleist here!?”

The one who heartily slammed open the door and entered was Eunius. Aleist worried that the dust he'd piled would fly away as he halted his window wiping and approached Eunius.

“What is it? I'm really busy right now. Today, the cleaning of the noble visitor room is...”

“Fool! You're fitting in way too well!”

Having completely developed a love for cleaning, at this point, Aleist's apron fit him like a glove. And Eunius yelling at him had removed the uniform he was usually supposed to wear. By palace rules, wearing his knight uniform was supposed to be an obligation.

“Anyways, what's up.”

“It's Luecke! The bastard went and did it!”

As Eunius threw a newspaper at him, Aleist wiped his hands off on his apron before reading the article. Under a large heading, a picture of Princess Aileen and Fritz had been painted.

“The Common Man's Hope, his Name is Fritz... did he always look that cool?”

As he complained the artist had made him too handsome, Eunius cried out.

“The small article under that! I told you I was talking about Luecke, you damn fool!”

Shifting his gaze below, he found an article about his former classmate Luecke Halbades.

The contents were short, but it was written that his thesis was accepted by the magic community. In the introductory statement, it was written that he was first rate as a knight as well.

“I don't really get it, but that bastard went and did something big, so I can't keep quiet anymore. Then it came to me. Have you... ever heard of the holy sword?”

“I know about it (That thing really dragged me all over the place in-game. But while I definitely would like a holy sword, the most practical thing for the current me is...)”

“Then that makes things fast! We’re off!”

“... Eh?”

“As I was saying, we’re going off to search for that holy sword thingy. There are rumors that the place with the holy sword is dangerous, right? Then it’ll be perfect training. Are you going to let yourself rot away here? I can’t bear the thought of being overtaken by those two.”

Those two were surely Rudel and Luecke.

But the current Aleist and Eunius had their duties. There’s no way they could get permission for arbitrary action so quickly.

“Wait! I’m the same, but don’t you have work to do? Eunius, let’s all calm down and...”

“I already got permission. Look.”

On the document tossed over, Aleist’s platoon was officially charged with the security of Archduke Heir Eunius Diade.

“Eh? Why...”

Despite Aleist’s surprise, Eunius didn’t really know the specifics either, so he scratched his head and answered.

“I don’t really get it, but the talk passed through. We’re setting out soon, so prepare yourself. Also, if we’re lucky, we might drop by Rudel’s place as well.”

“I’m going!”

As Aleist swiftly began to tidy up his tools, he issued orders to his subordinates and got them preparing for departure.

Looking over his nimble actions, Eunius laughed a bit, but he was so happy he didn’t mind being watched.

(I can see Millia.)

When their dreams are in sight, it is only human to work harder. Aleist was no exception and using the bait that was Millia, Eunius had hooked Aleist into his

trap.

Chapter 122: Light and the Two

'Sakuya can do it!'

"Definitely not!"

Rudel and Sakuya were having a rare quarrel. From the side, it only looked like he was trying to anger his dragon, but to Izumi who could hear her voice, it was a pleasant scene.

This all started when Bennet watched Rudel's treatment of Sakuya, and...

"Send Sakuya on an errand... Alone."

"That's not happening."

When Rudel denied it with a smile, Izumi recalled how pitifully Bennet's tail slumped.

"Listen, Sakuya. The outside world is full of dangers."

(No, you're talking to the strongest dragon on land, right?)

'Uuurh, but I can do an errand!'

(Yeah... rather than an errand, it's carrying cargo.)

Gazing over their quarrel Izumi leisurely sipped some tea as she listened to the somewhat mismatched conversation. They were on break at the moment, and Bennet also sat beside her, listening to the quarrel.

At times, she would ask Izumi to translate what was being said.

"Hah, what does he think his partner is supposed to be?"

While Izumi agreed with Bennet's sigh-mingled amazement, the fact she knew the circumstances too well meant that she couldn't say anything too strongly against Rudel.

To Bennet, no matter how she saw it, he was going too far.

"That's not how you raise a dragon. He's being too overprotective when she had to develop some self-confidence."

"Is that so? Sakuya is technically the boss of the dragon stables, it seems."

When she heard Sakuya had become the boss of the dragon stables, Bennet's bearing wasn't exactly the best. As she contracted a rare water dragon, she was always sent around, and she hadn't been to the stables in a long while.

She probably thought to do something about that distorted environment.

Sending her out on an errand was a form of education.

"If she has that much power only a few years from her birth, I'm a bit worried for her future. For now, she has Rudel, so it won't be a problem, but in a hundred years, it will be scary when there's no one left to hold her reigns. Worse comes to worst, this country is done for."

That's going too far, thought Izumi, but as she looked over the problematic duo of Rudel and Sakuya, she grew anxious.

"If we have an older dragon look after her..."

"A dragon's sense of values is different from a human's. That's why dragoons exist. If they would abide a human's values, we would need not be any more than normal knights."

Bennet gazed at Izumi. Perhaps she hit on something as her tail swung to the side.

"Is something the matter?"

"Very well. Special Inspector Izumi, is it not about time you went to the palace to report?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, it's about time I headed to the palace to report our present situation. I was thinking of leaving it to Millia..."

"No, special inspector, I do think you should go. I'll even arrange for your transport. With this, you'll be able to cut down on time."

Bennet was looking at Sakuya, so Izumi did have a vague idea. She planned to have her send Sakuya off.

But Izumi had a reason she couldn't leave this site.

... She had to protect Rudel from Keith.

"I understand your reasoning, but I cannot quite leave my po—"

“I’m sending Elrond out shopping as well.”

“... I’ll go.”

Learning that Keith was going away, Izumi resolved herself to make for the capital with Sakuya. Bennet entrusted her with a letter to Captain Oldart.



Seen off by a depressed Rudel, Izumi had Sakuya land in the designated site near the capital.

“I’ll finish my report quickly, so you have to wait quietly.”

‘Can I dig a hole?’

“You cannot. Once we get back, we’ll ask Major Bennet for the next spot to dig.”

‘... Come back soon.’

The area had become rowdy, so Izumi took her documents and headed for the palace. She was to give a regular report to the captain of the high knights, but she had come with bad timing, and both the captain and her superior officer were out.

As she stood troubled in the hallway, she noticed she couldn’t spot Aleist and his platoon, who were usually somewhere around, cleaning.

(Last time I was here, this was about the time they cleaned the hallways... were they given another mission?)

The way things were, she wouldn’t be able to return within the day. As she stood troubled, she spotted the dragoon captain and vice-captain coming from the opposite side of the hall, so she raised a hand and approached.

The captain Oldart smiled, raising his right hand in greeting, but Vice-Captain Alejandro made a troubled face.

“Hey there, little lady. You look like you’re doing well.”

“Yes. It has been a while, dragoon captain.”

“How stiff. Well whatever, Sakuya-chan’s here, right? I don’t see the future archduke around, but is he off somewhere?”

Wondering if they had been out looking for Rudel, Izumi answered normally.

“No this time, it’s just me and Sakuya. Rudel is keeping house.”

On Izumi’s joke-mingled response, the vice-captain covered his face with his right hand. Seeing Izumi’s face as she wondered what she had done wrong, Oldart informed her of the reason.

“You haven’t noticed? It’s not a good idea to show a dragon following someone besides their contractor. Who’s decision was it?”

“... M-my apologies.”

“From that look, it doesn’t look like it was you. In that case... it’s not Rudel, so probably Bennet-chan?”

Oldart called Bennet with an added –chan. There, Alejandro gave a reluctant mutter.

“That’s why I said I didn’t want to leave him with Bennet.”

“It’s not going to help anyone, saying something like that so late in the game. And when we discussed how we didn’t have anyone besides Bennet-chan we could leave him with, you couldn’t say a thing. You just nodded.”

The sight of the dragoon top dogs arguing was a troubling one. Izumi began to worry over whether the actions she had thought so little over would develop into a massive problem. But Oldart smiled and reassured her.

“Ah, you don’t have to worry. It’s just in bad taste, but these sorts of things happen quite a bit. You see, every time this happens, the folks who want to try taming a dragon start to make a ruckus.”

Unlike Oldart, Alejandro was making a tired face.

“And we’re the ones who have to deal with it.”

They sure are troublesome, said Oldart as he directed an eye to the documents in Izumi’s hands. Once he realized it was a report, he offered to hold onto them for her. While she wondered if she should really show them to someone who wasn’t her superior, once she heard her boss was on a long-term business trip, she decided to entrust them.

They were documents Oldart was supposed to look through anyway, and he said he would explain the situations surrounding them.

Relieved, Izumi asked about the two dragoons stationed in the port town of Beretta.

“Bennet-chan and Keith?”

“Yes. I don’t know much, or rather, I don’t know a thing about them.”

Exchanging a glance, Oldart and Alejandro exchanged a look as if wondering how they were supposed to explain it. Izumi did seem curious, so Oldart led her to the dragoons’ office in the palace.



Leading Izumi and Alejandro to that room in the palace, Oldart had a subordinate prepare tea and sat Izumi down on the sofa.

“Telling you about them would be easy, but before that, I guess I’ll ask. Young lady, how do those two look to you?”

While Oldart seemed to be testing Izumi before her eyes, Alejandro didn’t show any particular reaction. He reached a hand for the sweets the servants of the palace had prepared.

“Major Bennet is, um... a reliable one. But Lieutenant Elrond is...”

That was close to the answer he expected, and Oldart gave a grand laugh. There was definitely no mistake in their rankings. Their quirks were just too strong, that most people would always mistake them. It was always like that.

“A cute commanding officer, and a dangerous manlover, is the impression you got, right? That’s not a mistake, you don’t have to worry.”

“I-I see.”

Perhaps thinking she was being teased, he sensed Izumi put up her guard, so Oldart cut into the main topic.

“Well, this is a perfect opportunity. I wanted someone who knew the situation.”

“Is that really alright?”

When Alejandro entered the conversation, Oldart only nodded.

If Rudel and Sakuya opened their hearts to her, Oldart determined it wouldn't be a problem. What's more, he had looked into Rudel and Izumi.

When he sighted Sakuya today, Oldart had decided he would talk.

"This is something they themselves haven't been informed of, but you know how the area around the border's been noisy lately?"

"N-no."

Seeing Izumi surprised at the sudden change of topic, Oldart continued on.

"Well, it seems someone's wary, so we decided to station the strongest forces we had on hand. But there are quite a few folks who would grow noisy if we stationed so many around the border, so we decided to place our strongest dragoons in land and air at the port town of Beretta, where it's close enough to send reinforcements."

"And that's those two?"

"They don't look it, right? But they really are our trump card."

While Oldart gave a laugh, Alejandro made a somber face. While he didn't want to admit it, their capabilities were certain.

Extending a hand to the documents, he started to explain. Things were going largely as he had expected. If he wanted to train Rudel, then rather than sticking him under some half-baked instructor, he had decided to put him under the strongest dragoons in active service.

The fact he was blessed with an opportunity, he saw it as a true stroke of good luck. Those two that led around rare water dragons were exceedingly busy. Their mission sites were often close to the border, and they rarely ever returned to the capital.

This was coupled with his personal desire to not have Keith come back.

Having stepped down from active duty, the former captain and vice-captain didn't have the stamina left in them to train someone as out of the norm as Rudel. And those two were already training the members that had caught their eyes. They thought he would have no choice but to train on his own.

But there, among the active dragoons, the strongest on land Bennet, and the strongest air fighter Keith got together. When they were sending Rudel off to the outer reaches, Oldart even sensed a hint of fate.

“Bennet-chan is good at looking after people, so if anything happens, you should ask her. You should really avoid asking Keith anything.”

While Oldart laughed, Alejandro averted his face. Knowing what had happened, for the sake of the vice-captain’s honor, and the stability of his heart, Oldart decided not to touch on old wounds.

“Are they really that strong? Neither of them said anything of the sort.”

“They’re strong, or rather, they’re in another dimension. An idiot who’d try to pick a fight with Bennet-chan... doesn’t exist. Her appearance is that, but anyways, she’d doted on. If anyone tries to pick something with her, the defenders will come flying over. Ah, by that, I don’t mean the official one, Bennet-chan has her own personal defenders among the dragoons. They really will come flying, so watch yourself.”

“That’s nothing to laugh about. Good grief... I don’t know what your intention is, letting such a dangerous group be for so long.”

“No, Bennet-chan’s a former subordinate, and she’s a good girl. She’s not losing out on anything with her appearance, but the way she worries about it is cute. I’d really like a certain boomerang girl to learn from her.”

By the way, the captain of the defenders was Oldart. He was the ringleader who set up an assembly to protect Bennet from the shadows.

“I never noticed they were that strong.”

“Well, when it comes to demi-humans, you can’t really help it. Normally, it wouldn’t be strange if she stood out even more than Cattleya, but for better or worse... that girl has no talent in driving dragons.”

The reason Bennet specialized herself in land battles, it was because she was lacking in talent when it came to flying dragons. In contrast, Keith excelled in his dragon control.

Even so, she had made a contract with a water dragon. In a situation where

she could no longer say she had no talent, Bennet had chosen her own form.

“I put her in the Major spot left open for Cattleya, but if it’s troubling her, maybe I should think over it.”

Finishing his tea, Alejandro offered Oldart a warning.

“Whatever the case, it’s already been decided. She leads a valuable dragon. It would be troublesome if she doesn’t do her best as a Major.”

Looking over the report, Oldart sensed she was worried and ended up groaning. While things were fine as they were, he needed to prepare some subordinates for Bennet, and fast.

Perhaps after she had trained Rudel, he would place some new recruits under her.

“Um, did Rudel know they were both so...”

“That guy? He knew. Well, it seems he didn’t know their exact strength, but on the contrary, I’m the surprised one.”

Inside, he wondered how he found out, but thinking that he would be able to look into it with his status, he swallowed down the word, ‘creepy’.

Perhaps as revenge for being smacked, or because he couldn’t forgive the fact his daughter had fallen for him, or perhaps both at once, Alejandro spat some cynicism.

“Hmm. It’s best for him to learn of reality. In this world, there’s always someone higher.”

“Well, the two of us have already reached the summit, mind you.”

As Oldart laughed over his joke, Izumi seemed lost in thought.



On the way back to the port town of Beretta, Izumi looked up at the sky as she called out to Sakuya.

“Hey, Sakuya. Do you think I have the qualifications to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Rudel?”

‘I don’t really get it, but Izumi belongs with Rudel. And with Sakuya too!’

You're right, she muttered.

Izumi looked at the orange-dying sky as she thought over her current self.

(When everyone around is going ahead, is it really alright if I stay like this? Shouldn't I search out my own form...)

Once she had thought that far, she suddenly recalled Rudel's back. That back she had chased after from her student days, she was assailed by a sense of unease that it might fly far away once more.

Even when she knew it would never reach, Izumi looked at her right hand with a sorrowful look on her face.

(At the very least, I want enough strength to stand next to him.)

The place she should never wish for. It was by Rudel's side. But at the very least, in work, in her mission, she wanted to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him.

For that sake, she needed strength.

Once she returned, Izumi decided to consult with Bennet.

Chapter 123: Extra - Eunius and Aleist | Part 1

Climbing a mountain overgrown with trees was Eunius with Aleist's defender platoon as his guards.

They hadn't even gone halfway to their destination point, apart from the thick lines of foliage, there were numerous other problems.

Namely...

"Why are you lot so slow!? I'm short of training here too, and yet you're just that much slower? Are you messing with me?"

"W-wrong! It's just, we've been doing nothing but cleaning every day, so..."

The cave they were searching for had an entrance halfway up the mountain. While they were heading straight for it, Aleist's platoon was slow on their feet.

With all the beauties gathered together, Aleist's platoon emphasized appearance over capability. On a side note, the demihuman ration was strangely high.

"Give me a break. I want to go and revere that holy sword thingy already... oh, we've got company."

Eunius himself didn't believe in the holy sword. But in the place the sword was said to lie, for some reason, powerful monsters would make their homes.

Ogres were the least of their worries, and apart from them, large monkey-like monsters and monsters that seemed to have been made from numerous animal parts put together wandered the land. To Eunius, rather than the holy sword, he was after the monsters that almost seemed to be protecting it.

Taking a stance with his special made greatsword, he directed its tip towards the monster that came out.

The footing was bad, and be that as it may, the movements of the platoon was worse. If there was a single thing going in their favor, it had to be the fact there was only one foe.

"I don't believe those holy sword rumors, but it's nice to see these things

crawling all over the place. Looks like I can enjoy myself.”

“This is why you battle junkies are... everyone, get behind me.”

Aleist had his subordinates from his platoon step down as he drew the two swords at his waist and took a stance. They were both one-handed swords, but their hilts were fashioned a bit on the longer side. The blade portions were made just that much shorter.

“Why two swords again?”

“Cuz I’ve got more on my plate these days. Using magic like Rudel and Luecke just doesn’t suit me.”

As the two of them conversed without looking at one another, the large monkey before their eyes raised a war cry as it leapt towards them. Its jumping ability would have instantly sent it towards the women behind Aleist, but along the way, it extended an arm towards a nearby branch and clung fast to the tree.

While the enemy showed such a pitiful sight, in the next instant, from Aleist’s shadow, several dozens of spears pierced through a spot it would pass through.

If it had continued on, it would have been impaled.

“Hmm, this one’s clever. It’s stronger than the previous one... Aleist, this one’s mine.”

Eunius looked at the enemy’s movements and thought back to the monster of the same race he had beaten not a moment ago. While its power and speed seemed around the same, at a glance, he could feel the enemy before him was smarter.

His face changing to a ferocious smile, Eunius used his magic sword to cut at the monster in the trees. The warping blade extended towards the monster, but skillfully leaping from tree to tree, the monkey managed to dodge it. The terrain was on the enemy’s side.

“I could just blow the whole area away, but that wouldn’t be interesting.”

“That’s the reason you won’t blow it away? No, I don’t quite know what to think about blowing away the landscape.”

“... And you’re one to talk. In that wilderness training in the fundamental

curriculum, who was the first and last in academy history to blow the forest away with magic to clear a path?”

“Stop it! Don’t talk about that time!”

Leaving an embarrassed Aleist aside, Eunius pruned at the monster coming at him from above. With its long limbs and sturdy body, it was simply idiotic to try comparing it to a human.

Its fur was practically the monster’s armor. Even when cut by the magic sword, not only did the arm remained unsevered, it was barely even scratched. Perhaps it had grown its coat longer than the previous one, or perhaps this was a superior variant...

Eunius leapt back to take distance, changing his stance from slashes to one specialized in thrusts.

His face was the epitome of severity, and as if sensing that, the monster intimidated him, but it didn’t make any poor approaches.

A few seconds passed...

As both sides glared at one another, the first to move was the monster. After coiling up its large limbs, it used the recoil to spring towards Eunius. Seeing the monster that was practically flying parallel to the ground, Eunius’s mouth curved into a smile.

“Looks like you really weren’t any different from that last one. Just a little bit harder and a little more clever, but that’s about it.”

Eunius stepped in and lowered his stature to match the monster, thrusting out his sword at a range where its tip still wouldn’t reach.

A magic sword accompanied his blade, drawing the form of a sharp spiral as it enraptured the monster and caused it to spin while a large air hole opened up in its chest. After slamming into a large tree behind it, the monster slumped to the ground and Eunius put his sword away on his back.

“Alright... moving on, next!”

Aleist put his sword away, reverting his shadow to normal as he called over to his subordinates. His form was just a bit entertaining to Eunius.

(He's properly acting as their commanding officer, that Aleist. But...)

Aleist held no ulterior motives, he was only doing the actions he usually would, but Eunius understood how that looked to his female subordinates.

When he was the one who fought, they were directing favorable eyes towards Aleist, but he didn't notice anything of the sort.

(... It's interesting, so I'll keep quiet. It'll make a nice story to bring back to the boys.)

Without informing Aleist he was subconsciously raising his subordinates' affection points, Eunius set out for the next waypoint.



There were a number of places the holy sword was said to rest.

But those were along the same vein as buried treasure, and the people of this world did not hold them in high belief. A king of a few generations prior had once dispatched forces to a number of prominent points to try to find the holy sword, but the results were a disaster.

The sword was never found. Many people were invested, much funding was thrown down the drain. Therefore, the existence of the holy sword was thought of as something of a fairy tale.

Then came along Aleist with his knowledge of a game. He knew where exactly the item called the holy sword was supposed to be. He knew, and he led Eunius right to the site.

“Even so, who would've thought the holy sword was this deep in the mountains.”

“Isn't that precisely why it's so deep in the mountains?”

Eunius used a short sword to clear away the overgrown grass and tree branches as he made a path. Aleist similarly used a one-handed sword to move forward. Behind them, the women of the platoon walked with the supplies.

But Aleist was shouldering all the heavy luggage. In order to fight, Eunius was barely carrying anything.

More than that, they really couldn't have Eunius carry anything.

"They should just put the important things away in the treasury."

"Maybe they didn't want it to be misused? Even so, I never thought you'd want the holy sword, Eunius."

To be honest, Aleist didn't want the holy sword. Knowing the truth, Aleist knew what sort of thing the holy sword was.

It had long since accomplished its role and lost its power, it was an article barely able to maintain its own shape. Its rusted hilt had already rotted through. He had seen the scene in his game, and it was not the sort of thing that could be used as a weapon.

Aleist knew this place as little more than a place to farm EXP.

(Once Eunius learns the truth, I'm sure he'll accept it, and I have to hurry and get my own equipment together.)

From the depths of his memory, Aleist tried to recall the weapons he thought were necessary. But lately, that was starting to feel dubious.

The weapons he now held in his hands were the same, just because he possessed them, that didn't mean he'd be able to use them immediately. The more powerful they were, the more cautious he would have to be when handling them. As he started to hold a perception that things were different from a game, Aleist had gotten around to thinking the weapons he was most accustomed to using were the best ones for him.

"We should camp around here today."

After Eunius looked up at the sky and confirmed the position of the sun, he concluded any more would be dangerous and decided to search for a place to rest.

"It would be a real help if there was water around..."

Said Aleist as he directed a glance to one of his subordinates. The beast tribe female knight smiled as she pointed out the direction she smelled water.

"Captain, there's a pond in that direction."

After saying thanks to his subordinate who informed him with a smile, Aleist and co began moving in that direction. Normally, they would refrain from camping in such a dangerous place. But Aleist didn't think they would get too many of these chances.

To Aleist who had a mild urge to get stronger, it was the perfect opportunity. He even began to wonder if Eunius was trying to cheer him up after Millia had gone away.

But once he approached the pond, his subordinate started acting strange.

"H-huh?"

"What's wrong?"

As if she had suddenly lost confidence, his subordinate began to fidget. She said something quite intriguing.

"There's someone at the waterfront. No, that's not a person... huh? A person and a monster? But it's much too quiet for that."

Before his bewildered subordinate, Aleist explained the situation to Eunius.

"There's something there. Perhaps a person is being attacked."

"For real? Then I... no, that's impossible. In that case, isn't this your territory?"

"Leave it to me."

Eunius was their guard target. What's more, he wasn't strong in covert operations. Not only was Aleist able to deal with most enemies, if he used his characteristic shadow, he'd be able to overcome an extent of trouble.

Determining that sending everyone to scout was dangerous, Aleist took the lead and went out. He knew that having his subordinates acting individually in such a place was much too risky.

Running ahead, Aleist made a path with his shadow, erasing his footsteps and ignoring the forest road as he headed for the point he had heard from his subordinate.

The fact it was growing dark only worked to his advantage, and as if hiding in the shadows, he approached his destination point. Around the pond, he was

able to confirm the form of a large dragon drinking its water.

A dragon with blue, glassy scales, its beautiful wings were folded as it lapped at the pond. From the saddle and bag strapped to its back, he could instantly tell it belonged to a dragoon.

Aleist surveyed the area to find a single young man bathing in the cold. A young man of beautiful blue hair had stripped down to bask in the pond. His form was one that even Aleist had to admit looked cool.

... But it was there that Aleist was able to recall who it was he had discovered.

“It couldn’t be... Keith-san?”

The mutter that came from his lips was caught by his foe. As the dragon’s eyes fastened Aleist with its glare, Keith’s voice resounded through the trees.

“Who’s hiding over there?”

Showing his form, Aleist held up his hands to signal he had no hostile intent. He had never thought he would encounter Keith in a place like this.

As it was a romance-centric game, there were few male characters to be found, but Keith was undoubtedly an important individual. He wasn’t the type who would participate in battle, in the latter half of the game, he was a means of transportation across the land.

He was an individual who held the role of delivering the main cast to their destination.

That was Keith Elrond.

What’s more Keith was always kind to the main character, and a cool guy who never laid the slightest of hands on the women. Ever kind to the commoner main character, and if you asked him, he would transport you to any destination. Even with all he knew about the game, Aleist had no reason to be hostile.

“M-my apologies. I’m Aleist Hardie of the defenders. At present, I am in the area on a guard mission, and I have come to scout out the waterfront.”

“Aleist of the Hardie House... a pleasure to meet you, I’m Keith Elrond. Sorry, sorry. You surprised me a bit.”

Smiling as he rose from the pond, Keith was naked, but he didn't seem mindful of that. On the contrary, he apologized for acting so surprised. While he thought the man was a bit strange, Aleist felt relieved he was still the same kind of older brother character as he explained the situation.

He spoke of how he had come all the way here as Eunius' guard, and even explained up to how they would be heading to the port town of Beretta afterward. After hearing him out, Keith put on undergarments and trousers, keeping his upper half bare as he offered a proposal.

"In that case, let me tag along. I finished my mission a bit early, you see. And Beretta is where I've been stationed. Once you've finished your business here, I can fly you straight to town."

"That would be a huge help."

They had made it part-way by carriage, but as the way back was dangerous, they planned to return to a nearby village on foot before taking another carriage from there.

Keith's proposal was a spurt of good luck to Aleist.

"No, no, we've got to help each other out in our times of need. You can just call me Keith."



"... And that's how it is."

"It's a pleasure."

At the waterfront, Eunius was introduced to the dragon and Keith.

While those around were relieved at a dragoon's participation, they couldn't help but be curious of Keith's eyes.

His face was nice. His lineage splendid. But they couldn't help but feel anxious. While he hit it off well with Aleist, for a while now, he hadn't offered the slightest glance to any of the women.

With Aleist's platoon that even made Eunius jealous before his eyes, he didn't show any particular reaction.

(Doesn't he envy Aleist as a man? Well, he's from a Count House, so perhaps he has a fiancée, or he's the devoted type like Rudel.)

But for that, he really looks like he's having fun, thought Eunius.

"Even if I look like this, I'm unfit for battle. I've only got a bit of confidence in controlling my dragon. Well, as long as we have a dragon with us, most monsters should run away, so it shouldn't be a problem. Everyone, just take it easy."

Moving through an unfamiliar forest alone was difficult. Even if he had done wilderness training in his student days, that didn't mean Eunius wasn't tired. And since he had entered the forest, he had don't quite a bit of combat.

Thankful that a dragon was on watch, he decided to be pampered by Keith's words. But...

".. Spinnith, am I really that untrustworthy?"

"... I know. It's not like I'm some sort of wolf. I won't do anything like that."

"Yeah, we have to get to know each other better."

"I've gotten used to it from watching Rudel, but it really looks like he's just talking to himself."

Aleist gave a bitter smile as he watched Keith talk with his dragon. As he recalled Rudel, Aleist started to reminisce.

"... No, I'm kinda starting to become nervous here."

Feeling an anxiety he couldn't put into words, for some reason, Eunius' wild instinct was telling him this guy was dangerous. Eunius himself had a strong belief in his instinct.

He didn't feel any hostility. But for some reason, he felt danger.

(Even so, Elrond... I get the feeling I've heard that name somewhere before.)

"Oh, you know Rudel? He and I were both dispatched to the same point. If you're up to it, could you tell me some tales of the past?"

As Aleist brought up Rudel, Keith bit right on. But come so far, Keith placed a hand on Aleist's shoulder. The girls who witnessed that scene seemed to sense something. Even more than the demihumans, the human knights reacted.

“C-captain Aleist, it’s already late, so why don’t we rest in preparation for tomorrow...”

“Eh? Yeah, you’re right. Sorry, Keith-san, it’ll have to be another time.”

“... Yeah, don’t worry about it.”

One of his subordinates sensed something and called it a day. But Eunius didn’t overlook... the form of Keith clicking his tongue, making sure the female knight wouldn’t see.

For only a moment, he directed eyes thirsting for blood at that knight.

(Ah, this guy is dangerous.)

Eunius mulled over whether to inform Aleist or not, and in conclusion...

(But it’s interesting, so I’ll leave it be.)

He decided to watch it unfold.

Chapter 124: Extra - Eunius and Aleist | Part 2

“There, how’s that!”

Inside the cave, Eunius used nothing more than his sword to take on the humanoid monsters with reptilian heads.

Perhaps they had made that cave their lair, as they were beginning to surround him with their horde.

In their hands they held axes, and shields called bucklers. From the monsters’ sizes, they might look like small bucklers, but if Eunius held one, it would be bigger than a full sized shield.

In such a perilous situation, surrounded by monsters, Eunius was laughing. Even in the cave, there were in a space vast enough for monsters to attack in a group, and he was able to swing about his large sword freely.

Meanwhile, one of the knights of Aleist’s platoon was illuminating the cave with magic.

Behind Eunius, Aleist took a stance with his two swords and used his shadow to impale approaching monsters. However, the monsters’ movements seemed accustomed to battle, and things weren’t going as well as they had been in the forest.

Changing his grip on his sword, Eunius shrunk the swing of his sword to cut at the monster that had raised its large axe, but like that, all he could do was dig into his enemy’s skin.

However...

“Not yet!”

With his sword wedged in, he used brute force to cut the rest of the way through, making tatters of his sword’s blade. It was a result of a battle just that intense, but Eunius wasn’t satisfied. While he was wasting time here, he got the feeling Rudel and Luecke were proceeding ahead.

In all actuality, when he heard from Keith that there was an opponent Rudel

couldn't beat, he began to panic. He couldn't keep going like this.

(That guy will definitely surpass any opponent he's lost to. Then what about me? Do I just rot away like this? If I wasn't stationed to that blasted knight unit, would I have become stronger?)

He questioned himself as he swung his sword, but his movements had already begun to optimize themselves to his foes.



Focusing his attention on Eunius from behind, Aleist shouted out orders.

“Don't let it ever come to one-on one! At worst mark them down with two, and if that's impossible, send them around to me!”

Stopping a monster's axe with two swords, Aleist extended out his left hand's sword. The light scratch that would never inflict anything fatal spouted smoke... the monster spat a froth of blood as it collapsed.

“If it's no good from the outside, then go at it from within. That's how it usually works.”

As he retook his stance, the wary monsters took distance. It was disadvantageous that they couldn't use powerful magic in the cave, but even so, there were ways to go about it.

Growing accustomed to his enemies' movements, he freed some space for leisure as he moved to a point where he could keep an eye on Eunius.

(So genius really does exist.)

Looking at the man's movements, he was already fighting completely differently from how he started out. He was making the optimum movements to defeat his foe.

While Eunius had a strong image as a sword genius, Aleist felt something different.

One of his own fiancées, he knew a former noble girl called Seli. She was a character from the game Aleist was aware of and held the position of an underclassman. What's more, she possessed the established setting of being a genius with the sword.

But even to Aleist, who knew her wonderful talent when it came to blades, comparing her to Eunius, he was beginning to notice the difference.

While Seli was only a genius as far as swords went, he got the feeling Eunius held a fighting talent that went beyond that.

He learned proper swordplay, and be that as it may, he displayed flexible swordsmanship unimaginable from his appearance.

Just during this mission, when he fired blasts from his magic sword, he learned to add a spin to them to increase their output. When he thought up shooting thrusts, it only took a few days before it was possible. Even now, against an opponent where it was difficult to compare raw power, he was shortening his cuts to get in and tear them apart.

In regards to the monsters that leapt at him from both sides, Aleist kept his attention on Eunius as he dealt with them.

Putting out a few dozen black hands from his shadow, he captured both monsters in midair and fastened them down. After preparing a fire magic sword in both hands, he did a revolution on the spot and sent the slash waves toward the monsters. The monsters were cut through, black arms and all. Rather than shooting the waves, it felt more like the blades had extended.

As Aleist's flames strongly lit up the cave, Eunius had completed his battle as well.

Putting away his swords on his waist, Aleist looked at Eunius, raising and lowering his shoulders in breath as he thought.

(A future archduke has talent in the sword... but such a talent is pointless. So it's because the man himself understood it that he had such a resigned personality?)

The Eunius from the game gave off a different impression from the current one. Right now, not wanting to lose to his friends, he recklessly swung his sword. He had clearly lost that personality where he had given up on something.

“Let's rest a bit before we go on.”

As Aleist called over, Eunius sat on the spot and drank some water from the flask hung at his waist.

“Yeah, sorry for that. Making you mindful of me.”

“No, that’s fine. I can barely go on myself.”

Forwarding enemies onto Eunius and making sure he wasn’t attacked from behind was Aleist’s role.

“You got the knack for it around the end, right? That means I’ve caused you trouble. When you’re my guard, I’m sorry for giving out so many orders.”

Getting his breath in order, Eunius checked over his sword. He wanted to see if his weapon would hold out for the road ahead.

Aleist checked whether any of his subordinates were injured, and checked the luggage before looking deeper into the cave.

Saying he would just be a hindrance, Keith alone was on standby outside the cave. He had a dragon, so there was no need to worry about him, but as he was weak enough to declare it with such confidence, that was a reason for worry in itself.

“Even so, do you think Keith-san will be alright?”

It wasn’t just Eunius who looked at Aleist with worry. His subordinates, the human ones, in particular, looked anxiously over him.

“... I’m more worried for you, in various ways.”

“Eh?”



In the deepest depths of the cave was a room where light streamed in through the ceiling.

There remained traces that a human once lived there and the door had been locked. Beyond the lock a dexterous subordinate had picked lay the dust-caked furniture.

“This is terrible.”

“... That it is.”

The numerous fixtures... especially the wooden ones had collapsed in form. While the pots and the like remained, atop what seemed to have once been a bed were the white skeletal remains of a human.

“It’s a miracle anything remains at all.”

For argument’s sake, one of Aleist’s subordinate muttered as she invoked a purification magic. It was a magic effective against undead monsters, but there didn’t seem to be any regrets lingering around.

As everyone searched the room, they found the holy sword all too easily.

It was just as Aleist knew it, the rusted holy sword just barely managed to hold its form. Even in the game, it was just an item that took up an inventory slot, and it didn’t have any particular scenario prepared for it. There was no way to mend it or return it to its glory.

It ended as such a tale, a joke, a cruel lesson that nothing was ever so easy.

But as he looked over the room, Aleist couldn’t bring himself to say it.

“The end of a hero? And he lay here a few hundred years unbeknownst to man?”

As Eunius muttered, the expressions of the subordinates in the room darkened a bit. Aleist surveyed the area and spotted a few books written in old lettering.

He handed it to one of his subordinates and she began to read aloud.

“This is considerably old. There are some words I don’t know either... this might predate the founding of Courtois.”

In order to search out the holy sword, Aleist had assembled all those he thought would be necessary. It was no coincidence. Originally, the ones here were supposed to mainly consist of romance-target characters, but he had gathered people capable of fulfilling the necessary roles.

“There are very few legible portions, so I’ll try to give a simple explanation. Do you want to hear it?”

The woman prepared a light with magic and began flipping through a book. As confirmation had been sought from him, Aleist nodded. Eunius seemed to want

to hear as he folded his arms and took a seat.

“It seems the resident of this room lived in a country smaller than Courtois. It’s probably somewhere within Courtois’ current territory, but the name is too old for me to compare it to anything.”

According to her words, at the time, they were terribly afraid of giant monsters boasting four arms. In a situation where there weren’t any dragoons, they would always have heavy casualties each year.

In such an era, the lord of the room stood on his own.

The technical details of how he fought were either illegible or absent. And seeking out readable portions, the subordinate flipped to the final page.

“I think I can read... eh!?”

“What’s wrong?”

“N-no... it’s just, the name of the individual who wrote this book...”

As he looked at the surprised face of his subordinate, for some reason, she was looking between his own face and the skeletal master of the room.

“U-um... around the end, it’s written he entrusts the holy sword to whoever reaches this place, and apart from that, the only thing I can read is his name.”

“Hmm... so who is he? This lost hero?”

“... Hardie. It says right here, Aleist Hardie.”

“... Eh?”

“Hey, doesn’t that... creepy!”

A surprised Aleist, and as he suddenly stood in fear, he found Eunius and his subordinates looking back and forth between himself and the skeleton. Aleist had no idea either, but apparently, the lord of the room was named Aleist Hardie.

Just feeling the slightest tug of fate cause a shiver to instantly run through the room.

The conversations suddenly turned towards Aleist’s past and his past life.

“Captain, I’m sure you’re the reincarnation of this hero!”

While his subordinate spoke with such excitement, Aleist could say with certainty that wasn't the case as he thought over his next course of action.

"No, I was definitely not a hero in my past life, or rather, this is definitely a coincidence... (Sorry, my past life wasn't a hero, it was just a bullied little kid.)"

While he desperately tried to change the subject, Eunius alone was nodding to himself.

"... They do say great men have a fondness for women. Isn't it fine? It looks like Hero Aleist used two swords as well."

"Two swords? I'm definitely using two swords right now, but that has nothing to do with it!"

While everyone made faces as if to say, this guy just doesn't get it, Aleist tried his best to take control.

"A-anyways! Leaving him like this would be terrible, so let's make a grave. I think this spot where the light touches will be nice! We'll use the holy sword as a gravemar—"

"No, since you found it, then in accordance with his will, shouldn't you be the one carrying it, Captain Aleist?"

"...?"

"You're right. While it's rusty, his will says to entrust it to whoever visits this place. He has the same name, so I'm sure you were fated to inherit it from the start."

As Eunius laughed and pat him on the shoulder, Aleist looked at the holy sword his subordinates brought to him. Before that sword that looked unusable beyond a reasonable doubt, he mulled over what he was supposed to do.



A few days later, the party of Aleist and Eunius dropped by the port town of Beretta.

After making a grave for the lord of the room, they made an offering from the supplies they brought along and left the cave.

From there, they rode Keith's dragon on a journey through the sky.

"So this is the port town of Beretta."

Seeing the sea for the first in quite a while, Aleist felt a little disappointed it was too cold to take a dip.

"From here on, I'm going to go report to the Major, but are you going to tag along? I think Rudel will be there as well."

"Ah, then I'll go with you."

With Eunius linking arms with him, Aleist was forcibly pulled into accompanying them as well. He ordered his subordinate female knights to head to the inn they had planned for beforehand.

The place they made for was a spot that could be called the knight station. That station used by multiple brigades gave off a miscellaneous feel to Aleist, who worked in the capital. As Keith called out to the soldier on watch, the young soldier happily responded.

"Keith-san sure is the popular one."

"Good for him. I wonder if Rudel's alright."

While Eunius looked around, worried for Rudel, the first ones to enter his eyes were Izumi and Millia.

"Yo!"

The two of them approached Eunius, as he raised his right hand in greeting. They walked right up to Aleist and Eunius.

"I never thought you two would be coming. You look well."

As Izumi looked surprised, Eunius flexed his bicep to make an appeal to his good health.

"Righto! There was a dragoon at our destination point, so we had him deliver up. Even so, he's way too amazing and... huh? Where did that Keith guy go?"

"Oh? ... You're right. He's gone."

As no matter how hard they scanned the station, they couldn't spot him, Izumi's bearing took a sudden change. Her features that had been smiling to

that point turned expressionless all at once.

“Keith... so he’s already back, that pervert.”

Aleist grew frightened and decided to strike up a conversation with Millia, who he hadn’t met in a while. He did feel sorry to use Izumi as a pretext, but it was hard to talk to her.

“H-hey, did something happen?”

“Who knows? It’s been going on since we came here, she just doesn’t get along with Lieutenant Elrond. When she’s so friendly with Bennet-san, it really is strange.”

Happy to finally be able to talk, in order to continue on the conversation, Aleist bit onto the name Millia put out.

“Is Bennet-san... a man?”

“No, she’s not. She’s a Major in the dragoons, and Rudel’s superior officer. She’s really cute, but...”

While Aleist was relieved, for some reason, he felt some anxiety at the face she made, as if something was difficult to say whenever she brought up that superior she called cute.

“I’ve been with Rudel alone lately.”

(A-as I thought...)

Feeling down, Aleist slumped his shoulders.

“Look, they’re back.”

Millia pointed towards the entrance and there, they confirmed the forms of Rudel, and Keith, who had disappeared not too long ago. His form as he draped his jacket over his shoulder and reluctantly gave a report didn’t look like the usual Keith.

But it seemed as if there was no one at the point Rudel and Keith directed their eyes.

“So where’s this bennet-san fellow?”

Eunius also searched out Bennet, but he couldn’t find her. Izumi breathed out

a sigh and gestured to look down.

When he heard of a Dragoon Major, Aleist had imagined a considerably large female knight, but over the station desk and shelves, he could just barely make out the form of a small girl.

“... I didn’t see it coming.”

“Agreed.”

So that’s what a major in the dragoons looks like, thought Aleist. Her appearance was that of a young girl with long, silver hair, of small build and slender frame, giving off a fleeting impression. But the voice they could hear was a militaresque one.

“Why did you take up five whole days? It was a mission that was supposed to end in three.”

“No, no, I’ve got a real deep reason here... right! In order to wash away my daily fatigue, I was taking an extended bath. Because a certain someone pushed an unreasonable mission onto me, my stress’s been building up, you know.”

“How brazen. You should’ve been able to complete it in two days with ease. If you were my subordinate, I’d have smacked you.”

“I’ll watch myself hereon. More importantly, Rudel, have you been well?”

“Yes. No problems on my side.”

“You don’t have to be so stiff. With our relationship—”

“It’s been a while, Lieutenant Elrond.”

“... Oh, you. It really has been so long, I didn’t notice you. So who were you again?”

The one who came between the three of them was Izumi.

She entered in as if to cut off Rudel and Keith and while her mouth was smiling, her eyes were not. The way she nonchalantly reached for the katana hanging at her waist was terrifying.

“... What’s that supposed to be?”

While he sought confirmation with Millia, Millia shook her head. But Eunius

alone seemed relieved. After looking at Rudel, he sent Aleist a look of pity.

“Rudel will be fine as long as he has Izumi. That leaves you as the problem.”

Unable to understand, Aleist and Millia tilted their heads in sync.



Around dinner, the inn Aleist’s platoon stayed at... the abandoned house was visited by Bennet with the food she had prepared.

Due to the number of people, she prepared the ingredients and held a barbecue in the yard. Bennet took charge of the area, cooking up meat, fish and vegetables.

“Is Bennet-san really that strong?”

“That’s a surprise.”

Seeing Aleist and Eunius’ surprised figures, Rudel began praising Bennet, growing happy as if he was praising himself.

“I can’t even stand against her. I can’t stand against Lieutenant Keith in aerial battles, and it looks like I’ve got a ways ahead of me.”

“Despite that, you sure look happy.”

Eunius grinned as he brought meat to his mouth, and Rudel nodded.

“Yeah, I mean I’ve got myself a goal to aim for. First off, I have to beat Major Bennet in a land battle!”

While Rudel happily informed them, behind him stood Bennet in her apron.

“You sure sound confident, Rudel. Have you forgotten how many times I’ve held you against the ground today?”

“Major!”

As Rudel turned in surprise, Bennet handed over their next plate of food. It seemed to be a stir-fry of fish and vegetables, but it included shrimp and shellfish as well. With it being for three men, while it was just one plate, it contained a large quantity.

After skillfully distributing it to the three, Bennet collected up the empty

plates. While Rudel made a plea that he would clean them up, Bennet simply held up a hand.

“Talks with friends are important. I’ll overlook it for today.”

After saying just that, she returned to get back to cooking. With Izumi at the lead, the women were helping out, but they were frightened by her abilities.

“... That girl is perfect.”

“Right.”

“She’s usually a harsh and kind Major. I want to be like her someday.”

Reaching a hand for the new food, Rudel praised Bennet once more. There, Eunius asked him about Keith.

“Hey, putting that aside, what about Keith? Has he done anything to you?”

“The Lieutenant? No, nothing in particular. He’s a kind and reliable superior. Well, my direct superior is Major Bennet, but... ah!”

“So something happened!”

As Eunius made a worried face, Rudel began talking about what had happened before.

“No, he drops by the house an awful lot when I’m in the bath, and I feel sorry that I always seem to miss him, so I consulted with Izumi on the matter.”

“Hmm, timing is important, after all.”

“These idiots...”

Seeing Rudel agree with Aleist, Eunius put down his empty plate and rubbed his brow with a finger.

“And then Izumi came and told me I had to tell her whenever I’m going to take a bath. After that, Izumi was always keeping lookout in front of the bath. What do you think it means?”

“Isn’t she answering the door in your place? See, you can’t entertain a guest while you’re in the bath.”

“That’s wrong, dammit!”

Eunius' scream was completely lost on the two.