

Kuro no Maou

- The Black Demon King -

- Volume 17 -
Fourteen Days

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CHAPTER 293

THE 13TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – NORTHWEST SPADA HIGHWAY

The 13th of the Month of Platinum (Hakkin), as the sun is about to set behind the steep ridgelines of the Galahad mountains.

At a point on the northwest highway that runs from Spada to Avalon, several hours' travel from the nearby Dakia village.

Considering the time and place, unless one were in a great hurry, stopping and resting for the night would be a reasonable decision.

There is a single party of adventurers here, making preparations to set up camp for the night.

There are four of them; a Mage, an Archer, a Warrior and a Swordsman. They are all male humans. A party set-up that is not unusual to see in Spada.

However, they are not ordinary adventurers. It would be more accurate to call them bandits.

Bandits have recently been kidnapping people and causing trouble in Fauren. In addition, there are also many opportunistic groups who attack merchants, travellers and even other bandits when the chance presents itself.

TLN: As mentioned in earlier chapters, Fauren is a small city-state neighboring Spada.

Though they do not kill their victims, they always plunder all available money, goods and equipment.

In short, these bandits call themselves adventurers, but in reality they are just criminals.

Because such bandits are common these days, adventurers have a negative reputation of being crude, vulgar and violent.

Adventurers whose faces are well-known in the small villages they operate around are an exception. However, adventurers who pass through populated urban areas are viewed as such.

The group of adventurers in question have cunningly established an outward reputation of being eloquent, respectable young men.

「Oi look, there's an amazing one!」

The Archer, who has been looking around for a suitable spot to set up camp, raises his voice in excitement.

His companions do not ask what he has seen.

The question they ask instead, is –

「What kind?」

「It's a woman!」

Their question is asking which kind of prey he has spotted – money, or women.

「Nice!」

「That's great, ain't it!」

「It's like the gods have blessed us!」

The Mage, Swordsman and Warrior's expressions turn into twisted smiles of delight.

「It's more than a gods' blessing. She's a real beauty!」

The four of them have abducted a sizable number of women in the past; they have a sharp eye for the beauty of women.

Their hopes, desires and the area between their legs are inadvertently roused.

「How many of them are there?」

The one who collects himself to ask this question calmly is the leader of the party, the Mage.

「One, no, two of them?」

「So which is it? Is there a man with her?」

「No, there's two of them, but one of them's a kid. A little girl.」

「A little girl, huh...」

The Mage frowns as he thinks about what to do.

Both the Archer who spotted them and the Swordsman also have similar, complicated expressions.

But only the Warrior's expression remains that of joy.

「The little girl is damn cute too. They're probably sisters!」

「I see. Then even if we can't use her, we can make money out of her.」

They have a close friend who is a slave trader; if they could sell them to him, their purses would be filled with a single transaction. It seems beyond stupid to try and be an honest adventurer when such opportunities are available.

Slaves are top-quality, luxury goods.

「Alright, let's go then!」

The Mage straddles his horse, and the other three send him off.

The title of party leader is not just for show; his looks and way with words that seduces women are second to none. He takes pride in those.

With his companions' expectations resting on his shoulders, he makes his way down the highway and quickly finds the silhouette of the "real beauty" that the Archer had referred to.

The direction they are travelling is opposite from the bandits' own direction; they seem to be coming from Spada and going to Avalon, passing through Dakia Village along the way.

It seemed the woman is sensible enough to not make such a journey on foot with such a young child; the silhouettes of the two are perched on the back of a strong-looking black horse.

The size of the horse is eye-catching enough, but –

「Wow, are you serious...」

The instant the Mage sees the beautiful face of the girl masterfully handling the horse's reins, he is captivated.

She is wearing a Mage apprentice's black robe that is unusual even for a student from Spada.

Though she is dressed in such an unfashionable way, it does not detract from her beauty.

The sunlight is reflecting from her mesmerizing black hair, cut short and swept back by a simple white hairband.

Her skin, so pale it is almost transparent, is in stark contrast to her black hair and robe.

Her sharp chin, peach-colored lips and straight nose bridge are all perfect, as if each feature of her face was carefully made by a god.

Above all else, the blue eyes that shine beneath her black-rimmed glasses have a laid-back look, giving off a mysterious feeling.

The bandit Mage himself wears order-made, fashionable glasses to maintain an intellectual appearance, but they look absurd and foolish in comparison to hers.

Her black-rimmed glasses are unfashionable, ordinary glasses that one might see being sold in some village shop. But even those are incredibly attractive on her, as if they were made only for her.

「Amazing...」

And so, he closes the distance enough to see her face clearly.

The Mage feels his heart throbbing in a way that it had a long time ago when he was just a young boy, infatuated with an older girl who lived in his village.

If love at first sight ever existed, this is it.

「I'll...」

But he is no longer an innocent virgin boy; he has taken plenty of women in the past.

He hardens his resolve.

「I'll definitely make you mine.」

And so he calls out to her with his usual perfect, eloquent smile.

「Getting a catch on the first day, this is a good sign, isn't it?」

On the night of the 13th of the Month of Platinum (Hakkin), in the Galahad mountain range, where the sun had long since set behind the mountains.

At a spot in the bushes a considerable distance away from the highway.

Even if anyone were to pass through the highway, they would never realize that there are people here.

It is far enough away that no matter how loud one was to shout, it would not be heard from the highway.

「The evil god must be giving us his blessings on our journey. Ahh, evil-god-sama, thank you very much!」

「We're about to offer him a sacrifice, so I don't think praising him randomly will do anything, you know?」

「Yeah, you're right.」

There are two silhouettes having this conversation in the bushes.

One of them is the girl wearing a Mage apprentice's black robe, a hairband tying her hair back and black rimmed glasses.

The other is a little girl with her hair in long twin-tails, wearing a Priest apprentice's white robe.

The two robed girls have the same black hair and blue eyes; on first glance they appear to be sisters.

However, these two are not related by blood. In fact, they are not even of the same race.

「I'm going to start the fire now, so stand back please, Lily-san.」

「Don't burn it too brightly, Fiona.」

Yes, though their appearances have changed, these two are the Fairy Lily and the Witch Fiona of the Rank 3 adventurer party, 『Element Masters.』

The two of them needed human bodies and souls, and those are not easy to obtain. But somehow, as Fiona said earlier, they managed to obtain these human bodies to use as sacrifices on their first day since leaving Spada.

The Mage in glasses who had approached them with a friendly manner and his three party members could be called handsome, nice-looking men. But the evil desires hiding behind their friendly appearance had been revealed by Lily's powerful telepathic abilities.

No doubt the bandits had thought Fiona and Lily to be helpless apprentices, and they even went out of their way to bring them to this perfect location where nobody would come to help even if they screamed.

Because of that, preparations for Lily's human experimentation went smoothly, and Fiona has no problems providing the fire for the sacrifice.

The four of them have been restrained and tied to a tree with ropes.

Lily has thoroughly messed with all four of their heads, so both their personalities and reasoning have gone out the window. They have been reduced to pathetic beings, drooling and moaning.

Looking on them emotionlessly with her usual sleepy, golden eyes – No, currently they have turned blue – with one hand holding the forbidden book, 『The Guide to the Palace of Ten Thousand Demons』, Fiona begins singing the forbidden song.

TLN: Previously translated as 『The Guide to Ten Thousand Demon Palace』

「I offer to you, the God of all evils –」

The moment her song ends, the four restrained bodies burst into flames.

Their bodies ignite instantly as if they had been drenched in oil beforehand, and the flames burn fiercely.

The fire spreads to the tree they were tied to, creating a huge torch.

And so, the four victims' bodies and souls are thrown into an evil god's hell, to become a source of power for Fiona.

CHAPTER 294

THE 13TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – OUTSKIRTS OF AVALON

On the outskirts of Avalon, which boasts a longer, more ancient history than any other city-state, there stands a lone mansion.

Like Spada, the Avalon royal castle at the center of the city is surrounded by the mansions of the higher nobles involved in the country's politics, or those who have amassed vast amounts of land and wealth. The fact that this mansion is on the city's outskirts indicates that its owner is neither enormously influential or wealthy.

And as one would expect, the one living in the mansion is not a noble, but a merchant who has had moderate business success in Avalon.

He and his wife are a happy Elf couple who married out of love, currently in the prime years of their lives.

Up until this year, they were very worried because they had been unable to conceive a child, but the large swelling that can now be seen in the wife's abdomen makes it evident that it is no longer a problem. Their heartfelt wish for the birth of their firstborn child is due to become reality before the end of this month.

A person appears before the mansion.

「I'm one of the people from the Church of the White Light. I'm here to ask for donations for needy children.」

It is a common sight in any large city, not just in Avalon.

In the modern age, countries have initiatives to aid the poor, and since ancient times, the temples that worship the Black Gods have always carried out charitable works.

However, this does not mean that all of the needy people can be saved.

Therefore, a suspicious, new religious organization that goes from door to door to introduce itself and ask for donations would be considered shady, even in old times.

「The Church of the White Light? If I recall, they're working in the orphanage in the slums... I haven't heard any good rumors about them. Could you please ask them to leave?」

If he had been approached by one of the traditional temples of Avalon, he might have talked further and even considered donating, but this seems like a typical shady religious organization.

The Elf merchant instructs his employed security to turn them away.

And the person from the Church of White Light left.

「I'm one of the people from the Church of the White Light. I'm here to ask for donations for needy children.」

After a while, he returns.

As expected, the merchant turns him away again.

「I'm one of the people from the Church of the White Light. I'm here to ask for donations for needy children.」

And a third visit.

This time it is in the middle of the night, past midnight, as the date changes from the 12th to the 13th of the Month of Platinum (Hakkin).

This time, the merchant does not turn him away – It has become a situation where he cannot turn him away.

「Wh-What the hell are you people... This can't even be called a joke!」

The Elf merchant has been tied up in the living room of his mansion. Next to him, his pregnant wife is lying on the floor, also tied up.

The ones who did this are none other than the 『People from the Church of White Light』, who forced their way into the mansion.

「Heretics that oppose the guidance of the White Light cannot be forgiven.」

A pale young man directs these words at the two. Though there is no particular tone in his voice, his words are full of contempt.

He has silver hair that sparkles and flows like threads of silver, and shining white skin.

Covering his short and slender body is a pure-white priest's robe, decorated with countless gold crosses.

On first glance, it is impossible to tell whether it is a young man or a young woman, but he is indeed a rosy-cheeked young man whose appearance is immediately recognizable as beautiful.

However, his blue eyes did not have the shine that a young man's eyes should. Instead, his eyes harbored no emotion at all.

「In other words, it's your fault for being stingy and not giving us money!」

A high-pitched voice comes from a girl in her mid-teens next to the young priest. Her looks are charming, with red hair and eyes burning with flame-colored magical energy.

She is wearing a black blazer with golden hemming, the uniform of the Avalon Imperial Academy.

But with a skirt of bare minimum length, and the way she wears her uniform so that the piercing on her belly button is visible, it is hard to imagine that she is a very serious student.

Her breasts are mostly uncovered, and a tattoo of a white wing is visible on one of them. One could say that her uniform is more like that of a young prostitute.

TLN: This tattoo could be of a pair of white wings; it's impossible to tell with the way it's worded in Japanese.

「So as divine punishment, we'll be taking everything here! Kyahaha!」

The ones who answer her laughing voice are the boys standing in the back.

「Alright! First come, first served!」

「We can thank the Holy Mother's blessing for this one!」

Though of similar age, these boys, unlike the other two, are all poor inhabitants of the slums.

But right now, they are just despicable robbers, taking from wherever they can.

The merchant is not particularly wealthy, but his living room is far more luxurious than the average Avalon family home, and the robbers spare no time in laying waste to it.

They search for gold and silver goods, sparkling gems and other precious metals.

The robbers, ignorant and uneducated, fail to see the artistic value in the paintings and sculptures decorating the room. Instead of being taken, they are destroyed for the amusement of the thieves.

Of course, the destruction does not stop at the living room. In fact, the valuable items they are searching for are more likely to be found in the bedrooms.

This plundering storm would blow through the house from end to end, not even leaving the basement untouched.

The merchant, watching his home that he had painstakingly built through diligence and hard work being trampled into the ground, could only beg them to stop their barbaric acts.

「P-please, don't destroy any more... I'll donate, I'll do anything!」

「We have no ears that can hear the words of heretics.」

The beautiful young priest, who seats himself comfortably on the sofa, denies the merchant's request.

「And y’know, saying stuff like that is pretty pointless, since we already killed everyone outside.」

The uniformed girl laughed while leaping onto the sofa to sit next to him.

She joins her legs with his and presses her underdeveloped body closer towards him, and oddly, it seems he is used to this behavior.

「Kuh...」

At the girl’s words, the Elf puts on an expression as if to say, 「I thought so.」

His wife, upon hearing that people have been murdered outside, begins trembling and her face goes pale.

「Ahaha, even though they were Rank 3, it was super easy thanks to our Guardian!」

In her hand is a red wand, presumably for casting fire magic. Even the merchant, who has little knowledge about fighting, can guess that she is of the Fire Mage Class.

He is unable to judge how her ability compares to that of a real academy student, but one would not immediately consider her to be dangerous just from her appearance.

He knows that she is telling the truth, not only because of the fact that they have broken into the mansion, but also because the one she called 『Guardian』 is right in front of him, radiating an aura of pressure.

The young men and the girl are not the only ones here. An enormous being, two meters tall, is here as their protector.

Wearing a white surcoat spotted with dark stains and the equipment of a soldier, he resembles the Undead that haunt ruined dungeons.

Considering that he has been silent the whole time and does not move an inch unless under the priest’s orders, he really may be an Undead.

His head is covered by a priest’s hood and his face is concealed behind a metal mask, so it is impossible to tell his race.

This large, ominous man stands near the priest as if he is really their guardian.

Though his body is paralyzed with fear, he knows that the only reason these people are able to carry out such actions is because they are accompanied by this enigmatic Guardian.

Knowing this does not help the situation. But his true fear is yet to come.

「The Holy Mother Aria does not grant her blessings to the birth of the children of heretics, who would become bearers of sin.」

「Wh-what are you...」

He does not know the exact meaning of the words that the priest suddenly mumbled. But the priest's eyes are directed at his beloved wife, and the unborn child who has yet to receive his love, resting in her abdomen. So, unconsciously, he assumes the worst.

「You must be judged.」

With those words, the priest pulls out a shining white jewel from his pocket.

It is small enough to fit in the priest's hand, but for a single diamond, its size is extraordinary.

As a merchant, he can immediately tell that it is not a fake jewel; it is a real gem. Not only that, but he knows it is a magical item that contains hidden magical energy.

Entranced by the gem's gleaming white sparkling that is beyond that of any genuine diamond, the merchant forgets the current situation and gazes at it.

「Obey my command, 『Diamond Heaven.』 」

In response to those words, the white gem emits a single dazzling flash of light.

The flash of light breaks the merchant's trance, and he regains his senses.

And he realizes that his life is in danger. The Guardian is approaching him with a large knife in his hand.

「U-uwaah!」

The merchant, unable to even beg for his life, simply lets out a scream. His body's only reaction to the violent pain that would surely come in the next moment is to become completely rigid.

「Ah... Ahh?」

A few seconds later, the merchant opens his eyes to see his situation.

He looks down to see that rather than stabbing him, the knife has cut the ropes that were restraining him.

He is unable to figure out why he has been released, but finds out in the next moment.

「Hey, what are you do –」

The merchant, whose body is now free, stands up and takes a step towards his pregnant wife who is still lying on the floor.

「Wha–」

He does not know what he is doing, and tries to voice his bewilderment. But his wife's screaming, like silk being torn, drowns out his voice.

His foot, as if he is stamping out pests in the garden, crushes his beloved wife's abdomen with all his strength.

She is just an ordinary Elf woman, and his attack penetrates through her intestines, and without a doubt, the baby in her belly.

The shock of being attacked by her husband who she thought would never direct any violence against her, her worry for the baby's safety, the excruciating pain that was spreading throughout her body – all of these feelings are combined to create an expression of absolute agony on his wife's face.

「U-uwaaahh! What the fuck is this, stop! Stop, STOOOOOP!」

His foot drives into her three times, four times – his violent assault continues endlessly as he finally realizes that his body is moving completely out of his control.

But realizing this does not stop his legs from continuing the attack on his loved one. Even if he were to stop now, blood is spurting from his unconscious wife's mouth and her eyes are rolled back, showing their whites. It is obvious that the damage is already irreversible.

「Ahaha, that was a bit too brutal!」

「The sins of heretics can be atoned for only through death.」

The priest and the girl are lying on the soft sofa, simply watching as the Elf couple experience the true meaning of hell.

The girl points and laughs, while the priest shows no emotion for what he has done; the empty look in his eyes remains unchanged.

「By the way, when's he gonna stop doing that?」

「I haven't made it so that he will stop.」

「Oh right, so he's just gonna keep going til I burn down the mansion. That's hilarious!」

But the Elf merchant would have to wait until the slum boys have taken everything from the mansion before death would finally release him from his anguish.

And the two people lying on the sofa already know from experience that this would take a considerable amount of time.

「Hey, are we gonna do it here?」

「Do as you please.」

「Eheheh, I love you!」

And so they join their bodies together, just to pass the time.

The Elves who had been bound by their true love for each other are given an excruciating death, while the young man and girl who are bound only by lust indulge in their desire for pleasure – This is truly hell.

CHAPTER 295

THE 14TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – SOUTHWEST SPADA HIGHWAY (1)

「FAAHAHAHA!」

As usual, the loud laughter of the Second Prince of Spada rings out.

It would be fine if he was outdoors while making such a loud noise, but currently he is in the interior of a Dragon carriage, packed full of students.

Their destination is the Rank 3 dungeon, 『Iskia Hill』, where the open-field exercise is to be held.

The students who have horses are riding them, but there are many who do not own horses. Therefore this Dragon carriage, an appropriate form of transport for such a large number of people, is being used.

The carriage, which is being pulled by a huge herbivorous Land Dragon, is several times larger than a normal horse-drawn carriage. But even so, the volume of this single person's voice is irritatingly loud in the confined space.

The reason nobody can say 「Shut up!」 to him is likely because he is a prince.

「You're being too loud, Will.」

No, there is one person who can voice his complaint to the prince of an entire country.

「Oops, my apologies, Simon. But this 『Buster Rifle』, said to have submerged the old world in a sea of flames, will not spread the flames of destruction to the world again. Kuku, it is such that even I cannot suppress my dark joy. Kukuku, FUHAHAHAHA!」

TLN: Wilhart talks in a very annoying, pompous tone.

Hearing his friend blurting out the fantasies in his head again, Simon looks at him with scornful eyes and speaks to him.

「The gun isn't that powerful, so you have to pick the right monsters to shoot carefully.」

「Hmph, to be chosen as my prey, such cursed fates they are born to.」

As if to say enough is enough, the small female – no, the respectable male student Simon lets out a small sigh.

Not enough time has passed to say he has become good friends with this loud prince, but enough time has passed that he has come to understand his deplorable personality.

Therefore, Simon could guess what was causing him to be in such high spirits.

Wilhart has previously accidentally let slip that he thought the weapon was plain, but now he is looking forward to using it in real battle.

As a man, Simon understands this feeling, so he does not make fun of him for it.

「With that said, don't go getting ahead of yourself and standing in the front just because you're the general, Will.」

The purpose of the open-field exercise is to act as a practice for military group operations, so a clear chain of command has been established.

The prince of Spada, Wilhart, has been chosen as the top of that chain of command; though this choice may not result in the optimum combat efficiency.

The other candidate was the First Prince of Avalon, Nero, but he refused. So it has been decided this way.

General Wilhart vehemently opposes this advice from Simon, his trusted subordinate.

「Whaaat?! A general of Spada should stand with his subordinates on the front lines with bravery and courage–」

「That only applies to strong people like your brother, or Ria-nee, or King Leonhart. Your physical strength is about as good as mine, so don't do anything reckless, you got it? If you rely on your gun too much, you'll die. If you run out of bullets, you'll die.」

「U-unuu...」

Upon receiving this sound argument from the developer of the guns himself, Wilhart finally falls silent.

But after a while, he starts fiddling with the prototype rifle on his shoulder, making more noise.

It has not been long since the rifle was completed, but in that time, Simon made sure to lecture Wilhart on the correct way to handle a rifle. So it was unlikely that he would accidentally break it.

Wilhart can already disassemble it for cleaning, and then reassemble it by himself.

「... Fuwaah~」

The rhythmic vibrations of the carriage bring on an early-afternoon drowsiness, causing Simon to inadvertently let out a small yawn.

「Will-sama, something is coming.」

Seria, who has been silent like a shadow in the seat on the opposite side of Wilhart from Simon, finally speaks.

「What, an enemy attack – Did you think I would panic in such an event, Seria? Kukuku, naïve. You are as naïve as the sugar-saturated green tea that Charlotte drinks*. If you are trying to deceive me, whose response is to make this Spadan joke, I suggest you try a more realistic approach. On a highway like this, no matter how clueless a monster could be, it would not dare to attack such a large group of armed academy students in broad daylight –」

*TLN**: Wilhart's Spadan joke plays on the fact that in Japanese, “naïve” and “sweet” are the same word, “甘い/amai”.

「It's an enemy attack!」

Wilhart's long speech is interrupted by a scream from outside – no, a voice warning of a monster attack.

「Wh-wh-WHAAT?!」

「Will, calm down.」

「Please stay calm, Will-sama.」

The same advice comes from both sides of Wilhart.

「Uh, mmm, yes, first I must calmly take a deep breath, suu, haa! Alright, I have calmed myself, what should I do next?」

「... How about you take another deep breath?」

Simon replies in a cold voice, and Wilhart has no choice but to take another deep breath as he suggests.

He breathes in deeply, then exhales.

After his second deep breath, Wilhart is quieter the next time he opens his mouth.

「My apologies, I seem to have panicked. First we must stop the Dragon carriage, and prepare to counterattack.」

After successfully regaining his composure, Wilhart gives out orders exactly according to the instructions of what to do in the event of a monster attack from the textbook, which he has been studying while traveling.

His first order of stopping the Dragon carriage is immediately carried out, and the intermittent vibrations of the carriage stop.

Next, he orders his subordinates, the team leaders and knights, to exit the carriage.

TLN: Knights, in this case, are not a class of fighter, but rather a rank. They are lower in rank than the team leaders.

Wilhart is not known for his leadership, but rather, his unpopularity. Thus, the teams under his command are just the “leftover” students, so they are of various races and studying different courses.

Also among them are students who are here because they lost their companions to bandit attacks and were unable to maintain their parties.

Even so, as expected from students of the highly renowned Spada Royal Academy, they move quickly, exactly as they have been trained. They make sure the area around the carriage is clear before spreading out to secure it.

The team leaders are wearing red capes that mark the elite students, while the knights are wearing their respective classes’ equipment.

The rattling sound of those dressed in metal armor moving quickly rings loudly through the small carriage.

The last one to step off the carriage is the general, Wilhart.

As he rises from his seat, he calls out to Simon in front of him, who is holding a prototype rifle identical to his.

「Simon, you are surprisingly fearless.」

With the dark blue coat he is wearing over his uniform fluttering in the wind, Simon looks back at him.

「Have you forgotten? Even though I look like this, I’m experienced with battles.」

Saying such a line with a slightly lonely expression, Simon jumps out of the carriage through the door.

「I must not show any more failure to a sworn friend of my soul.」

And so, Wilhart follows after his friend’s small back.

「A fight on our first day, we just don’t have any luck...」

Riding a unicorn that was pure white from the tip of its horn to the hairs of its tail, Nero Julius Elroad complains wearily.

Nero is standing at the front of the group of students. The cloud of dust kicked up by monsters charging this way is reflected in his red eyes.

The students make preparations to defend – in other words, pace back and forth holding their weapons.

「Alright! We get to fight so early, things are looking good for us!」

This shout comes from Kai Est Galbraith on Nero's right side, unsheathing his greatsword and riding a Bicorn, looking ready to charge forward with full speed.

He, too, has seen the enemies approaching from the front.

Their frames, larger than normal men's, are covered in thick muscles, and the brown color of their skin further adds to their huge appearance.

Their faces are distorted into evil expressions; their yellow, uneven teeth are visible in their wide open mouths and their eyes are completely bloodshot.

Their thick, log-like arms are waving their deadly weapons – bone clubs, rusty hammers and leftover swords – in the air.

They can immediately tell that their enemies are armed Orcs.

They likely came from the Rank 4 Dungeon, 『The Great Forest of Latifundia.』

There is a nearby forest with few trees near the highway, but everyone knows that deeper in that forest is the Latifundia forest.

Perhaps these monsters have been forced out of the forest by territorial conflicts. The true reason for their appearance is unknown.

Though, nobody cares about such a trivial thing in the first place.

「If it's just these enemies, you can go and have a rest, Nero. Anyway, you know, those subordinates need someone to give them commands, right?」

Riding on a rare scarlet-colored horse, with the same colored hair, is Charlotte Tristan Spada.

The Orcs' shouts, entirely devoid of intelligence, reach her ears.

There is absolutely no chance that they are somehow Orc citizens of Spada dressed like wild monsters.

This means that the students behind them can attack freely to show the results of their training.

「Well I'm going to go in first, since I want to test my new servant.」

Right behind Nero is Safiel Maya Hydra, riding an Undead imitation of the eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, created with 『Necromancy.』

There is still some time before the Orcs arrive.

「It's unusual for even you to be fired up, Safi. Fine, I'll leave it to you guys, and I'll be at the back giving orders to those guys. I'll tell them it's dangerous so they should stay away.」

Nero, who has a fearless smile on his face, is answered by his party members.

「Well then, time to go wild!」

「I, Charlotte-sama, will send them flying away with one blow, so leave it to me!」

「I don't need any materials from such weak creatures, but...」

The three of them are all different in their own ways, but they all have the same confidence in their words as they ride forward.

As the three horses let out high-pitched neighs, they strongly kick the ground and fly forward like the wind.

「Well, those three will be more than enough to take care of the monsters. I won't even have time to have a rest.」

CHAPTER 296

THE 14TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – SOUTHWEST SPADA HIGHWAY (2)

If faced with a group of over fifty Orcs, how would a normal party of adventurers respond?

Nine out of ten parties would simply run.

Orcs are classified as a Rank 2 threat, low on the danger scale. But if they form large groups, their combined strength is enough to even defeat large monsters.

Therefore, the only ones who can fight such a large group of Orcs in head-to-head combat and have a sure chance of winning are Rank 5 adventurers.

Even an ordinary Rank 4 party would avoid direct confrontation. Unless they freely use tactics such as surprise attacks, ambushes, traps and the like to separate their enemies, they would not be guaranteed to win.

So it is unlikely that this group of Orcs roaming the highway would come across a party of adventurers capable of stopping them. Even if they ran into ten different parties of adventurers, it would be unlikely for there to be a rank 4 party among them.

However, as if they had all been born under the full influence of the unluckiest star, their first encounter was with such a party.

A party that is unlikely for them to come across even if they were to run into a hundred different parties, a Rank 5 party.

「Doryaaaaaaaaah!」

A roar loud enough to drown out even the Orcs' shouts comes from Kai, wielding his double-edged greatsword.

His body dances through the air with full momentum, the tip of his weapon pointed down at the ground – no, at the Orcs' heads, and crashes right in the middle of them all like a falling meteor.

He had leapt from his Bicorn in mid-air, which had been charging forward at full speed, using its momentum to add to his.

In melee combat the mount is unnecessary; the only thing Kai, the swordsman of 『Wing Road』 needs, is his blade.

「Break Impact!」

The force of his landing is truly like that of a falling meteor.

The Orcs standing close to the landing point of Kai's greatsword's master-class martial art, 『Break Impact』, are split – no, completely pulverized into small fragments from head to toe.

The shockwave released by the impact spreads out, and the Orcs in the surrounding area are sent flying.

In response to the calamity that has fallen among them, the Orcs let out shouts of shock, alert and rage.

In the next moment, those shouts become their dying screams.

「Orah, what's wrong, you bastards! Orcs are known for being ferocious, right? So hurry up and come at me!」

It is unlikely that they understand human language, but Kai shouts at them in a way that they can understand they are being taunted as he finds new victims to put to his blade.

The greatsword sweeps sideways straight through the Orcs' bone clubs to send their bodies flying.

Not just one at a time, but two.

Letting out shouts of rage, the Orcs surround Kai and begin a counterattack.

The Orcs' already-bloodshot eyes are turning even more red. Raising their deadly weapons with the strength that they pride themselves in, they swarm towards Kai.

Though they have no coordination, they attack relentlessly in such numbers that they are not even concerned about killing each other by accident in the chaos. A normal swordsman would not even last thirty seconds against this.

「Yeah, yeah! That's what I'm talking about, don't make this boring!」

However, Kai does not even take a scratch from such an attack.

His blade simply sweeps through the Orcs in a one-sided battle.

This method of fighting cannot be said to follow the saying 「willows are weak, yet they bind other wood*」 . Kai just pushes forward with the same – no, even greater sheer power.

*TLN**: This is a Japanese idiomatic expression. To my best understanding, it means something along the lines of “there is strength within gentleness.”

He is fast enough to evade their attacks and strong enough to slay the Orcs with a single blow.

But this strength is the bare minimum requirement to be considered worthy to bear the family name of Galbraith, one of the Four Great Noble Houses of Spada.

「If it's a contest of strength, I'm not gonna lose!」

Kai, a genuine warrior of the human race, fights the Orcs head-on with sheer strength, not using martial arts, divine protection or protective magic. He clearly demonstrates the superhuman strength needed for the renowned swordsmanship of the Galbraith house.

With that said, he cannot use the superhuman swordsmanship itself with mere wild Orcs as his enemy.

Without activating his weapon to use the attack he used when he first charged into them, he simply swings his sword around as he pleases, cutting down Orc after Orc.

「Orah, orah, come on – ?!」

What surprises Kai, even while he was in the middle of combat, is –

GAAAAO00000000000ON!

Letting out a familiar roar, a black shadow descends from the sky in the same way Kai himself did earlier.

Crushing several Orcs as it lands is a huge monster with red fur on a black body, and long rabbit-like ears growing from its head.

「It's that something-Pun!」

It was the Rank 5 monster that had struck terror into the hearts of the princes of Spada one month ago in the northern Galahad mountain range, bearing the name of 『Wrath』 in the old language.

「It's Wrath-Pun. Your memory is really terrible, you musclehead.」

Safiel directs an exasperated, cold gaze at Kai as she sits on top of the false Sleipnir with the Spellbook 『Immortal Bind』 in her hand.

But right now, this raging demonic beast is obeying not its cruel instincts, but the commands of this single girl.

The renowned 『Necromancy』 of the Hydra house, another of the Four Great Noble Houses of Spada, has revived Wrath-Pun.

However, there are two differences from when it was alive.

The right arm it had lost in their first encounter has been restored, all the way to the tips of its paw.

The new arm is not Wrath-Pun's original arm, but a huge metal gauntlet made of a dark metal.

The ancient parts of a golem's right arm, excavated from old Avalonian ruins, were a precious part of Safiel's collection. But attaching them to this Rank 5 monster did not feel wasteful at all.

No, if these parts were not used, Wrath-Pun would not be able to unleash its full potential.

The other difference is its eyes.

Its cruel eyes that had been far redder than the bloodstained eyes of the Orcs have now changed to the same amethyst-tinted eyes as the girl behind it.

That color is the manifestation of the dark magical energy that acts as the source of the false life that is bestowed upon the Undead servants created by Necromancy.

With its eyes glowing an eerie purple, Wrath-Pun leaps towards the Orcs with the ferocity it had in its previous life.

With its ridiculously strong left arm and the replacement right arm, it tramples the Orcs with overwhelming physical strength.

「That was close! Oi Safi, you were aiming at me just now, weren't you?!」

「My control is still imperfect. Tch.」

「Don't "Tch" because you missed me!」

Occasionally, Wrath-Pun's strong arms brush against Kai, who is swinging his greatsword nearby, but they manage to avoid friendly fire by the narrowest of margins.

As expected of the teamwork of a Rank 5 party.

「Uooh! I'm more scared of you than the damn Orcs!」

Kai complains as Wrath-Pun's huge fist brushes past his nose for the second time, and at that moment –

「Line Force Blast!」

A bolt of lightning shoots down in front of Kai's eyes.

Its brightness is enough to blind one's eyes and the roaring thunder was enough to destroy one's eardrums, but the ones who take even more direct damage are the Orcs standing in the path of the lightning itself.

「Sharl, that was freaking close! If I took one more step, it would've hit me! Actually, it did hit me a bit!」

TLN: Sharl is short for Charlotte

「What? You should have just dodged it.」

That answer comes from Charlotte, the Third Princess of Spada, famous for her tomboyish personality and even more famous for her talent in magic. She is not concerned in the slightest for Kai's spiky blonde hair that got slightly singed by her attack.

Safiel is commanding Wrath-Pun around like a piece in a board game. Next to her is Charlotte, waving her favorite wand, 『Crimson Bolt』 and humming the chant for her next attack.

「Oi! If you're gonna shoot your Blast again, aim it somewhere further from me!」

Even though he is made fun of as a musclehead, he is attentive enough to notice the chanting coming from behind him.

He has inadvertently memorised her chants, and knows that her next spell will be an offensive one.

More specifically, she is once again casting her favourite wide-ranged lightning-element blast.

Both her wand that is as red as its name and the gaze of her sparkling golden eyes are directed at the area that Kai is fighting the Orcs.

「Line Force Blast!」

「I told you not to aim that at meeeeeee!」

Thus, the Orcs are cut down, trampled and struck by lightning until not a single one remains.

It has only been about ten minutes since the Orcs arrived.

Nero's prediction was spot on.

CHAPTER 297

THE 19TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – CAT’S TAIL

As the morning sun flows into the room through the curtains, the simple wooden bed creaks.

「Mmm...」

Letting out a small, cute moan, a girl kicks her thin blanket away and sits up.

Her pale water-colored hair is standing up in a mess, and her eyes clearly show that she is still half-asleep.

Her golden eyes waver as they look down to see the person sleeping next to her.

「It’s morning, Lily-san...」

「Mmm... Mu...」

The girl who is half-awake, Fiona, nudges the small shoulder of the one she had shared the bed with, Lily.

But Lily’s round, jewel-like pupils are still hidden beneath her eyelids, and she lets out a childish moan that sounds like she has no intention of waking up.

Such adorable behavior would melt the heart of any other person, but it is not enough to persuade Fiona to let her continue sleeping in peace.

So, she thinks of an idea that would wake Lily up immediately.

「Good morning, Kurono-san.」

「Kurono?!」

Lily’s eyes, which have been obstinately closed until now, open in an instant.

At the same time, she springs to her feet, as if preparing to take flight.

「... Ah.」

As she wakes up and grasps the situation, Lily frowns and her expression becomes sad.

But even though she has such a sad expression, Kurono is not here to pat her head and comfort her.

Only one part of his body is here.

Fiona's greeting was directed not to Kurono himself, but to a small bottle in front of her, in which an eyeball with a black pupil is floating in a Potion.

「Mu~ Kuronooo~!」

Lily snatches the 『Kurono』 in Fiona's hands, hugs it against her chest and rolls around on the bed as if she is throwing a tantrum.

Giving her a look of both understanding and exasperation, Fiona crawls out of the bed.

Though Lily's skin actually shines with light, Fiona's white, bare body looks just as beautiful as she steps off the bed.

She only wears a single piece of clothing when she sleeps, her black underwear. Her large breasts, which are normally covered by either her Witch's robe or her uniform's blouse, are completely exposed.

Of course, there are no eyes but Lily's here, so she has no reason to feel any shame.

Strictly speaking, there is also Kurono's left eye, but right now, Fiona prefers it that way.

「Mmm, my bra is getting a bit tight these days...」

While mumbling about a problem that has no application to Lily whatsoever, Fiona quickly finishes getting dressed.

Her skirt and blouse closely resembles the Academy's uniform; their design is plain and simple. On top of this, she wears the apprentice Witch's robe that Kurono complimented before.

Of course, Fiona has adjusted it to fit her. More specifically, she has enchanted her clothes with 『Fit』 magic to make them match her size.

This robe is a high-grade item that is so well made that it could even be sold in a high-class item shop, and she created it with her own hands, so such an enchantment is easy in comparison.

And then there is the thing she must not forget; the silver ring with memories of Kurono.

As usual, its silver sparkle can be seen on the ring finger of Fiona's left hand.

「Now, what is for breakfast today?」

Fixing her bed hair with a single stroke of the high-grade magical comb made in the Sinclair Republic, Fiona goes to leave, but –

「Fiona, don't forgee~et!」

With this cute warning, Lily grabs the hem of Fiona's pleated black skirt to stop her.

「Sorry, I almost forgot.」

Having remembered the thing she forgot, Fiona takes out two magical items from the spatial magic dimension within her pouch.

One of them is a white headband.

The moment she puts that headband on her head, her hair, which is normally the color of a clear blue sky, turns pitch-black as if night has fallen on that sky.

The other item she takes out is the ordinary-looking pair of black-rimmed glasses.

When she puts them on, the color of her sparkling golden eyes change to a clear blue.

「Tie up my hair too~」

Sitting up on the small bed, Fiona starts tying Lily's platinum-blond hair into two bundles.

「Yeeees~」

「Make me look cute, okay?」

「Yes, yes~」

Fiona willingly complies with Lily's request. Lily's hair flows over her small back like golden threads, and Fiona's hands work their way around it.

The movement of her hands was a little clumsy, but she ties Lily's hair into adorable twin-tails.

The magic hidden in the two white ribbons she used to tie Lily's hair changes its shining platinum-blond color into that of a deep darkness that seems to absorb all light.

「Okay, I'm done.」

「Thanks~」

Lily springs off the bed and in her hand is the item that would put the finishing touch – a pair of contact lenses.

Closing one eye while she does the other, she carefully puts the lenses in, changing the emerald-green color of her eyes into crystal-blue.

「We've finished preparing, haven't we?」

「Mhmm!」

The four items that changed both of their appearances to have black hair and blue eyes are magical items used for disguise, which they borrowed privately from Chairperson Sofia.

All of them utilize light magic, which feigns the appearance of black hair and blue eyes, rather than directly changing the colors themselves.

「Now, let's go eat breakfast for real this time.」

「I hope there's something good~」

The two of them are wearing the same simple blouses and skirts, with matching navy-blue socks and loafers.

On top of those clothes, Fiona is wearing an apprentice Witch's robe and Lily is wearing a fake apprentice Priest's robe to hide her fairy wings.

With one look at these two, with that hair and eye color, wearing these clothes and having a casual conversation, one can only assume that they are close sisters.

However, the reason these two left Spada and came to Avalon is to perform inhumane human experiments and sacrificial ceremonies.

Of course, neither of them feel even the tiniest amount of guilt over what they are doing; they have no hesitation in using the bandits of Fauren. On the way they had found many groups of people who had been attacked by the bandits and left only barely alive.

The only thing that the two of them are thinking about now is whether the breakfast service offered by the main store of 『Cat's Tail』 is better than that of the branch in Spada.

CHAPTER 298

THE 19TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ISKIA VILLAGE, ADVENTURERS' GUILD (1)

「Hmm, it seems that all the glory has been taken by Wing Road...」

「Isn't it fine to let them do what they want? Since this way we can just relax.」

「However, the problem is that the important purpose of this open-field exercise is to practise group military movements –」

「Stop sulking like that just because you didn't get to fire your gun. You're probably going to have to shoot stuff tomorrow anyway.」

The sun has already set, and the Adventurers' Guild in Iskia village is lively as adventurers share their meals and drinks.

In one corner of the Guild's dining floor, the Second Prince of Spada quietly sips his cheap alcohol and voices his complaints to his small friend.

His characteristically red hair is hidden by the thick hood of his apprentice Mage's robe, so nobody knows who he is.

Though, the adventurers here are already drunk, so even if he showed his face, nobody would notice.

「If you drink too much of this ale that you're not used to, you're going to be sick, you know.」

「Hmph, that is fine, Simon. At this moment, I am merely a petty person, allowing the depravity of alcohol take a hold of my body... Kuku, come, destruction...」

「W-wait, don't be throwing up in the toilet later, alright?!」

As Wilhart lets out a laugh that is higher pitched than usual, it is clear that he is definitely planning to have Simon take care of him afterwards.

「Haah... I shouldn't have come out with Wilhart...」

As he sighs heavily, Simon truly regrets his decision.

It has been several hours since they started drinking here.

「Faahahaha! Simon, let us break free of this prison world together, and go to taste the sacred spring water given to us by the gods!」

「Err, so basically, you want to sneak out of the camp and go drinking?」

「Indeed!」

Unfortunately for Simon, he had reluctantly agreed to this request.

No, even Simon, who often skips classes, is not some deluded kid thinking 「I'm so cool because I don't follow the rules of society.」

His answer was not a willing agreement, but –

「I beg you! It has always been my dream to make a friend who I could quietly sneak away with to drink alcohol~!」

Wilhart had completely thrown away his dignity as royalty and begged him, so he had no choice.

Thus, the two of them had secretly snuck out of the Academy students' camp on the outskirts of Iskia village and come to the bar of the Adventurers' Guild.

Of course, without telling Seria, the guard maid.

At least, Wilhart, who had thought he had managed to deceive her, did not tell her.

「Please moderate yourself, since we're going into the dungeon tomorrow.」

「Fuhaha, I can hear it, the calls of the evil demons. Very well, I shall let you taste them, my bullets of destruction!」

Today is the 14th of the month of Platinum (Hakkin); it has been five days since they left Spada. They are in Iskia village, just a short distance from their destination, the Rank 3 dungeon 『Iskia Hills』 where an old fortress stands.

If they depart from the village early tomorrow morning, they will be setting foot on the dungeon's hill before noon, and should have made their way into the fortress by evening.

Thus, this night at the village is the last night they will spend in a safe zone before entering the dungeon.

As far as open-field exercises go, sneaking out from the camp to drink alcohol like Will is basically a tradition among some of the Academy students.

Of course, doing so openly would result in being reprimanded.

「It's fine to get fired up about it, but I hope the monsters don't come out in large numbers. For that many Orcs to appear on the highway, I wonder if something's going on in Latifundia Forest.」

「Hmm, indeed.」

Will agrees with Simon's concerns.

「I thought the only noticeable changes in Latifundia Forest was the appearance of a large number of Slimes a month ago but, hmm, it might have had a big enough effect to influence the areas the Orcs live in.」

「Speaking of Slimes, I heard Lily-san hunted about three hundred of them in Latifundia Forest before.」

「Th-three hundred, isn't that an exaggeration-」

「No, that's easy for Lily-san.」

Simon has an absent-minded look in his eyes.

Will only knows of the adorable Fairy Lily, known at the Academy as the 『Happy Fairy-san.』 So, he cannot possibly imagine how strong she could be on a battlefield.

「That Lily-kun... You're joking, right?」

「Haha, no way, that person is the scariest of all the members of 『Element Masters.』」

Seeing Simon's completely serious expression, Will did not question him further.

Will understands very well that there are some things in this world that he is better off not knowing.

「Anyway, we won't know what the Iskia Hills will be like until we get there and see for ourselves, so we have to be careful.」

「Hmm, I will keep that in mind.」

And as Will says that.

「WHAT? What do you mean you can't prepare any more alcohol?!」

Drowning out the noise of the bar's patrons, a loud, angry shout reverberates through the Guild lobby.

「Uwah, what is that...」

「It seems someone is having an argument with the staff, but...」

Simon and Will are not the only ones whispering to each other; all attention in the guild building is now focused on the man who shouted.

「Oi bastard, do you know who's gonna be here soon, it's the head of the Rank 5 adventurer party, the 『Iron Demon Brigade.』 If you're outta booze, don't blame me for what'll happen to this middle-of-nowhere Guild!」

The one who is shouting appears to be a plump human male.

Judging from his physique and equipment, there is no way he is a Rank 5 adventurer.

He is probably a servant who does inn work, restocking items and other miscellaneous tasks.

But the plump man shouts at the staff brazenly over the lack of alcohol as if he is a Rank 5 adventurer himself and threatens them.

One could say that his complete disregard at the fact that he has the whole Guild's attention fixed on him is a talent.

「I think I've heard of the 『Iron Demon Brigade』, they're quite a famous party in Spada, aren't they?」

「Indeed; they are also known as the 『Demons of Blood and Iron』, led by the Orc Warrior Gustav. They are proud of their strength.」

The four members of the party are an Orc, a Cyclops, a Golem and a Minotaur – all races with outstanding physical strength.

Saying that magic is evil, they only use physical attacks. The only ranged attack that they have is a giant mechanical bow used by the Golem.

「But another famous thing about them is that there are quite a few people who borrow the title of the 『Iron Demon Brigade.』」

It seems that the man called Gustav has a very helpful personality, taking in those in need.

In other words, he accepts them even if they are low in Rank, which is pointless if one were to consider it from an adventurer's point of view.

Even so, not worrying about money or equipment, he takes care of those of lower Rank, giving them leadership in battles.

They can only formally call themselves Rank 5 when the four main party members of the physically strong races, including Gustav himself, are all together. Only then are they acknowledged as extraordinary.

In any case, because of their charitable actions, they are loved by their lower-ranked members, respected by other adventurers and labelled by the Guild as a outstanding, trustworthy party.

「Considering that, they seem to be causing some trouble here.」

「They've got as many members as a mercenary group, so it's not surprising if they have more than a few members who cause them trouble.」

While the two of them are discussing this, the plump man has become increasingly heated, and his loud, angry voice fills the bar like some kind of overly loud background music.

Eventually, everyone in the bar wants someone to stop him.

「Oi Mister, shut the hell up already, you're making my booze taste bad!」

With perfect timing, as everyone wanted, someone raises his complaint to the plump man.

「Ah, you know, we're a Rank 5 party –」

「Rank 5, so what?」

Now a young man is standing in front of the plump man.

His tall body is dressed in the uniform of the Royal Spada Academy, with a bright red cape flowing over his back.

He is a man with black hair and red eyes as legendary as his magic. His eyebrows are furrowed in an expression of intense displeasure.

「Uh, y-you, can't be...」

But what makes the plump man suddenly quiet is not his appearance, but the Guild Card shining around his neck.

With a shine whiter than silver and prettier than gold, it is unmistakably the mark of a Rank 5, the Mythril Plate.

And the name that is carved into it is –

「Nero Julius Elroad...」

The plump man and all the nearby adventurers watching the scene murmured the name.

「Oh, that guy came to drink as well!」

In the seat in the corner sits a completely different kind of prince.

CHAPTER 299

THE 19TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) - ISKIA VILLAGE, ADVENTURERS' GUILD (2)

「Well, this time you let me take it easy, so I'll treat you this time.」

「You're only treating me cheap booze, though.」

「That's rich coming from someone who's already drunk so much of it.」

「Excuse me, one more ale over here!」

The First Prince of Avalon glares at the blonde man, who is raising his tankard high and ordering another round.

But like he said, he acknowledges that this man, his party member and his close friend, Kai Est Galbraith, is largely responsible for suppressing the Orcs on the highway.

Incidentally, Sharl and Safi have now realized that he can survive their super-sadistic friendly fire.

One of Nero's hidden intentions was to not get caught up in that himself.

In any case, Nero has no qualms with paying for the drinks, even if Kai throws up or passes out on the toilet. He intends to let him drink as much as he wants.

With that said, he has no intentions of dealing with him once he does get overly drunk.

While thinking these things, takes a mouthful of his bitter, over-carbonated drink.

「Oh yeah, the Blue Rose of the Great Library. Whatever happened with that girl?」

After tensing for a fraction of a moment, Nero glares at his companion again.

「Nothing happened with her, and damn that Safi, going around telling people such unnecessary things.」

「Who cares? For you to get rejected is pretty rare. Actually, it was the first time I've heard about it happening.」

Kai only ever thinks about battle and swords, so it is rare for him to be bringing up the topic of women.

Even that time when Nero rescued the beautiful noblewomen of Fauren from a slave trader, riding in like a shining knight on a white horse, they had approached him with passion. But, as if thinking, 「this happens all the time」, he had shown no interest in them.

That is exactly why Kai's blue eyes gleam with curiosity; for Nero to be treated indifferently by women is very rare.

Nero is even under the influence of alcohol, so having this story of his unrequited love being repeated is not only traumatic, but Kai is being completely heartless by bringing it up.

But as a topic of conversation, he had no hesitation in discussing it.

「The Blue Rose is such an exaggerated nickname – No, I guess it's not an exaggeration. Anyhow, it's nothing to make a rumor about. I just showed her around the Great Library, and that's probably when the rumor started.」

「Oh, you showed her around!」

「Well yes, I did.」

He had also gotten ahead of himself and showed her the section with forbidden books, but he was not going to tell Kai that.

Though Kai is trustworthy and reliable in battle, he is still an idiot, so Nero has large doubts about his ability to keep secrets.

「Though, Blue Rose-chan seems like she'd completely ignore a guy calling out to her.」

「In my case she just wanted someone to show her around, so I was just lucky.」

Kai is looking at him like he wants to ask him more about it, so Nero continues talking.

「Those were the eyes of a woman who has no interest in men whatsoever.」

「Is she a lesbian?」

「I'm surprised you even know what that word means.」

「I heard it from Safi.」

「That girl... Seriously, I should do something about her already...」

「Nell probably knows what it means, too.」

「Okay, I'll have to give her a serious talk tomorrow.」

Nero makes a mental note to himself to get rid of the party member who has been tainting his pure, innocent younger sister.

「By the way, hasn't it been really noisy since just a while ago?」

When loud voice that was the source of the noise first started shouting, Nero had taken one look and decided not to get involved.

But the man's voice is becoming more heated and loud to the point it is impossible to ignore, even in this busy bar.

「Should I go and shut him up?」

Kai makes a suggestion with a mischievous smile on his face. He is probably happy that there is a convenient excuse to fight.

「I'd be glad to leave it to you, but...」

Nero looks again at the man arguing with the staff over something about drinks.

Nero instantly estimates how strong the man is based on his physique, equipment, behavior and the magical energy he can feel through his sixth sense.

「No way. If I let you do it, that guy's gonna die for sure.」

Unlike his sister Nell, Kai is the kind of person who never holds back, so a normal human would not stand a chance against a fist thrown with that superhuman strength.

「Looks like not bringing Sharl has its disadvantages, too.」

At times like these, the tomboyish Third Princess of Spada would have no problem in dealing with such a troublesome task – rather, she would gladly be rushing in to get herself involved.

And since she knows how to hold back, unlike Kai, there would be no worry that she would accidentally kill him.

Though, she would likely beat him to within an inch of death. Or, she would cause him to die in a different way – socially.

But it is too late to regret not bringing her now.

Well, something foolish like sneaking out of the camp to drink is something that only men would do.

So unless one had some ulterior motive, there would be no reason to invite the girls to an event like this.

「So what are you gonna do about it?」

「I've got no choice but to go myself, right.」

「Oh! Good luck!」

Nero stands up with a heavy sigh, wearing an expression that tells how much he does not want to have to do this. Kai raises his ale and goes into relaxed spectating mode as he sends his friend off to do the work.

「Oi Mister, shut the hell up already, you're making my booze taste bad!」

From his words and expression, it is clear to everyone why the First Prince of Avalon is so angry.

The reason is because he has to carry out the tiresome task of stepping up to stop this noisy man.

「Uh, y-you, can't be... Nero Julius Elroad...」

Indeed, Nero does not make the effort to introduce himself as the First Prince of Avalon, as a certain other prince would do.

But once people realize that he is of royal lineage, things become simpler.

「I don't care who's coming, but if you can't just drink quietly you should get out of here, you got it?」

Giving a command rather than a warning, he does not need to do something like introduce himself.

Faced with Nero's title, strength and the intimidating presence of his deep crimson eyes, the noisy plump man had no choice but to nod his head.

As he resolves the problem and begins walking back to his seat –

「GAHAHA! 'Scuse me!」

TLN: This character speaks with Kansai (I think) dialect, essentially something like a country accent. It's pretty hard to translate his dialogue for me, so bear with me.

The Guild's sturdy front door is blown off its hinges and a huge, red figure appears in the doorway.

He has a shaved head and his skin is a reddish-brown from head to toe, looking like polished copper.

With a height easily over two meters and covered in a layer of thick muscles, he has an overwhelming presence that towers over everyone like a burning castle wall.

With a horn thicker and more impressive than a Unicorn's, he looks like an evil, bare-footed demon that walked straight out of Hell.

He is a red Orc so fearsome that if he were to be encountered in a dungeon, even skilled adventurers would flee without hesitation. But fortunately, he is an adventurer himself.

As if he has just come back from a quest, the white monster fur of his light armor is slightly stained.

And the most fearsome thing is that in his right hand, he is holding a mace – no, an iron club, as thick as a man’s torso.

「Oh, it’s quiet as a funeral in here, what’s the matter?」

「Your errand boy here’s been causing a lot of trouble, so how about you give us an apology for not disciplining him properly, Gustav-san of the 『Iron Demon Brigade』?」

In the face of Gustav, the red Orc with overwhelming physique and strength who leads the Rank 5 party, the 『Iron Demon Brigade』, Nero says this with a completely cool face.

「Ah, what was that, kid? You complainin’ about my lot?」

「Kid, did you call me?」

The sound of Nero furrowing his eyebrows can almost be heard.

「I don’t think I need to introduce myself.」

「Gahaha, sorry kid, I can’t read the writin’ on those tiny Guild Cards.」

It is not a provocation or an insult; he is not concerned at all about trivial things about names, and he laughs it off.

Nero’s response to that is to give a small sigh, and his face returns to his original listless expression.

「Alright, who I am isn’t really important. Anyway, are you going to apologize for the trouble that guy’s caused, or not?」

「Oh, what's he talkin' about, Nachim? You said we'll be drinking.」

The servant called Nachim immediately answered his question.

「I'm sorry boss! I was trying to order an amount that you'd be satisfied with, but the Guild doesn't want to give out enough, and the negotiations got heated... And then this... Adventurer gentleman... Came and shouted at me for being too loud.」

Seeing Nachim pathetically getting on his knees and giving his boss a version of events that portrays himself as the victim, Nero gets a sudden urge to unsheathe his sword.

But he exercises the self-control that is expected of a prince that governs the people, and his right hand's fingers stop twitching.

「So it's this kid who started the argument after all, so shouldn't you be apologizin' instead?」

Gustav is wearing an expression that suggests that he would forgive everything if Nero were to simply say 「I'm sorry.」

Nero gave another small – no, deep sigh, then starts speaking.

「I see, I understand now –」

As he speaks, he detaches his sword and its sheath from his waist and throws it behind him without looking back.

「Oi Nero! It's unfair for only you to –」

His friend catches his sword for him.

「Looks like we'll have to settle this the adventurers' way to see who's right.」

「Gahaha, you can't swallow what you've already spat out, kid!」

TLN: Expression for “no taking your words back”, I suppose. The phrasing is... unintentional, I swear.

Nero is smiling fearlessly, while Gustav is wearing an expression of pure joy.

「I have'n managed to run into that "something-ago*," and I have'n even run into any normal monsters these days, so I've gotta lotta strength built up. I don' think I can hold back properly, y'know?」

*TLN**: My best guess is that he is referring to Greed-Gore; the "Gore" part is written "ゴア/go-a" in Japanese, and he mixed it up into アゴ/a-go.

With a loud sound as if the floor is being crushed, he rests the end of his iron club on the ground.

From that sound, it is clear that the iron club is just as heavy – no, heavier than it looks and he waves it around with just one arm. So everyone has some idea of just how strong Gustav is.

「Don't worry about it, I'm not good at holding back either.」

「GAHAHAHA! That's some good spirit you got there, kid!」

It seems Gustav is finally getting serious, but Nero does not flinch at all.

「Hold onto this」, Gustav tells Nachim as he pushes the club's handle towards him and takes a step forward.

The Orc is already full of fighting spirit, deaf to his servant's cries for help as he is crushed by the weight of the club.

He is also deaf to the excited voices of the adventurers waiting in anticipation of what comes next.

The 「Adventurer's way」 that Nero suggested to settle the dispute is basically –

「Here I go!」

「Bring it.」

A brawl.

「Uraah!」

With a roar terrifying enough to cause the weak-hearted to faint, Gustav throws his boulder-like fist at Nero.

It is common knowledge that Nero has any number of ways to overcome the difference in physical strength and size by using magic, but it is also common knowledge that it is not that simple.

Nero lacks physical strength, so everyone wonders how much magic he will use to deal with the Orc's straight punch.

Or perhaps his calm demeanor is nothing but a bluff, and he is about to be sent flying.

These thoughts briefly pass through the minds of the adventurers in the Guild, who have now become spectators.

But they were wrong on both guesses. Nero knows he does not need to use any magic, and he is about to demonstrate why.

「First technique – Flow –」

Facing a fist that would pulverize his skull in a single blow, Nero, thinking to practise his technique, calmly murmurs this.

「Ooh?!」

And in the next instant, the Orc's body is in mid-air.

As if he is doing a huge leap of his own will, he flies across the air in a parabola-shaped path.

But his flight through the air does not last even a second.

Gustav lands belly-first on a table full of food and bottles, his prized horn burying itself into the wood.

A deafening crash echoes through the bar, and afterwards, everyone is watching in complete silence.

Though, the silence is to be expected. They have just witnessed an unbelievable scene that nobody expected – Nero sending Gustav into the air with one hand.

「The Ancient Jujutsu... An interesting technique you got there.」

The one who breaks the silence is Gustav, the main cause of the silence itself.

Walking lightly and trying to act as if he had merely accidentally fallen over, he takes a guess at what technique Nero used.

「You're surprisingly knowledgeable, aren't you?」

Perhaps Gustav's title of Rank 5 is not just for show.

Nero's single throwing technique – no, he redirected his foe's strength, and it would not be accurate to call it a throwing technique. In any case, he is genuinely impressed that Gustav figured out what technique it is from just that.

The Ancient Jujutsu, as its name suggests, is a hand-to-hand martial art with a long history, passed on since ancient times.

Said to have been learned even by the ancient Demon Lord Mia Elroad, its name is famous, but the techniques can only be inherited by a certain few of Avalon royalty.

Nero only showed off a single, minor technique and Gustav guessed it correctly, so at the very least, he is definitely knowledgeable when it comes to fighting.

Though, Nero said this with a cool expression, not even raising an eyebrow, so it is unknown to everyone whether his praise is sarcastic.

「Ah, sorry, sorry, I underestimated you. I couldn't tell if your Guild Card was Silver or Mythril –」

The air of pressure given off by Gustav's towering figure increases even more.

It is not just Nero's imagination; it is the true manifestation of Gustav's fighting spirit.

「So it's the Mythril Plate after all...」

「So this time come at me properly, without holding back.」

Those words have no sarcasm in them; Nero is fully aware that Gustav held back a lot of his strength in his first attack.

It seems that contrary to his appearance, this Orc has the sense and kindness to hold back his strength when he needs to.

「GAHAHA, to meet such an interestin' kid, I'm so damn lucky!」

「To start off with, my name is Nero, make sure you remember it –」

And so, a true battle between two Rank 5 fighters with nothing held back begins.

CHAPTER 300

THE 20TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – THE BACK ALLEYS OF AVALON CITY

Once upon a time, the continent of Pandora was united by the Elroad Empire, and Avalon was named its capital city.

The city-state known as Avalon at the heart of present-day Pandora inherited its name from that ancient imperial capital city. This fact is known to anyone who has heard the legend of the Demon Lord.

As the nation of Avalon includes the land on which the ancient capital of the empire once stood, it could also be called the former realm of the Demon Lord.

However, the Avalonian imperial palace from which the current emperor of the Elroad Empire rules is at the northernmost portion of the city-state, some distance away from the original imperial capital city.

Currently, the ancient imperial capital city is designated as a Rank 5 dungeon, known as 『Avalon, Gods' Fall.*』 Nobody is allowed to enter the original imperial palace, known as the 『Palace of the Demon Lord』, the most dangerous dungeon in all of Pandora.

*TLN**: The Japanese for this is literally “The realm where the gods were destroyed.” That’s too long, so here’s what I’ve got.

The legendary Elroad Royal Guard now protect the palace as Undead, and a jet-black guardian dragon protects the skies above it.

But neither the legendary imperial capital, nor the palace known as the continent’s most dangerous dungeon, have anything to do with Lily, who is now walking alone through the back alleys of present-day Avalon.

「Fuwaah～」

The young, defenseless-looking Lily lets out a small yawn.

However, until just now, she has been gathering various pieces of complicated information about the current state of affairs, rumors and hidden quests at the information broker.

Lily's mind is tired from sorting out information in her juvenile form, so she has returned to her child form.

TLN: Lily has multiple forms – In Japanese, one is called “little girl” form, and one called “young girl” form. They are *separate* forms. Previous translations have been inconsistent with these, and even mixed these up and called both “child form.”

To avoid further confusion, “little girl” form (the youngest form) is now “child form”, and the “young girl” form is now “juvenile form”.

Her conversation at the information broker had gone smoothly.

The information broker was an eccentric male Goblin with stained clothes who could have been mistaken for a vagrant or a monster. But she had handed him the letter of introduction from Karen, the Fairy who ran the café-bar-information-broker, 『Fairy Tail』, in Spada. After that, he had willingly sold her the information that she wanted.

Normally, Lily should only have been asking about particularly important details, but she wanted to return to Kurono's side as soon as possible, so she had no intention of leisurely spending her time gathering information.

She had dropped a small mountain of gold on the counter and demanded that he tell her everything he knew, and the Goblin had indeed explained everything he knew in detail.

For the time being, the most important information for Lily and Fiona is regarding groups of humans that they could exterminate without causing any problems.

Lily's magical item, 『Angel Ring』, works exclusively on humans. Even the bandits that Fiona used as sacrifices had to be humans, or else it would not have worked.

In other words, the two of them are searching for prey similar to the bandits of Fauren.

Now, as to whether there are any conveniently available parties of humans like that in Avalon these days –

「Uoh, look out!」

With this shout, a small shadow passes in front of Lily.

Though Lily has the appearance of an absent-minded child, even in her child form, she is far from slow to react.

The person who suddenly barges in from the main street into the back alleyway is able to just barely dodge a collision with Lily. Having seen that this is the case, she stands completely still and waits for him while he avoids her.

As a result, it looks as if she froze out of fear.

「Oh, shit!」

This person, who seems to be in a hurry, appears to be a young boy.

He is around ten years old, and is dressed in shabby clothing typical of the inhabitants of the slum quarters. However, his arms and legs that can be seen from the short sleeves of his clothes are clean and tanned, and he is full of a childlike energy.

He was holding a large basket full of oranges, and a few of them fell and rolled on the ground when he avoided Lily.

With the agility of a mouse, the boy picks up the oranges that have fallen around the narrow alleyway.

Lily, noticing one of them has fallen around her own feet, picks it up with two hands.

「Hehe, you can keep that one!」

Showing his white, shiny teeth, he gives Lily a childish smile with those words.

Before Lily can respond, he turns his back on her and begins dashing further into the alleyway in a hurry.

「May the White Light guide your path – See ya!」

With those words, he waves behind him and disappears into the alleyway that leads to the slum quarters.

Still clutching the orange that has been given to her, Lily ponders the phrase that the boy said.

As her child-form mind slowly processes it and comes to a conclusion –

「HEY! Stop right there, you little brat!」

Another person appears in the alleyway that Lily is standing in.

This time it is not a boy, or even a human; it is a wide, large, oddly-shaped silhouette.

With the head of a pig, unless that head is a very elaborately-made mask, it is unmistakably a Boomer.

Judging from his angry snorting, the apron he is wearing and the words he just bellowed, even child-form Lily can immediately guess what has happened between the boy just now and this pig-man.

「Ah, that orange! That means you're one of that kid's friends –」

This huge creature closes in on Lily as if he is charging at her, then stops one step front of her.

「That can't be right, there's no way a slum kid would be dressed as nicely as you, huh.」

He murmurs this conclusion after inspecting Lily from head to toe.

There is no way a slum kid – in other words, a child who inhabits the slum quarter – would be dressed in this pristine, pure-white robe.

「Yes.」

Realizing that there is no longer a need to explain herself, Lily holds out the orange in her hands towards this pig-man, who appears to be its original owner.

「Oh, thanks there, little girl.」

With a bright smile vastly different from the initial scowl on his pig face, he takes the orange.

「Orange-shopkeeper-san?」

「Ah no, I run a fruit store.」

The child-form Lily's initial guess that he was running a limited special on oranges was not quite correct, but other than that, the situation is exactly as Lily imagined.

It seems this pig-man is a fruit store owner, and that the young boy just now boldly stole the oranges, along with the whole basket, from the front of the shop.

「He ran that way.」

Lily points her short finger in the direction the boy ran.

「Ah, it's too late now. If he's made it to the slums, I can't do anything about it.」

The pig-man says with a hopeless tone.

「Seriously, the slum kids have been up to no good these days... Oi, little girl, you shouldn't be walking these alleyways by yourself. Hurry and get home to your Mama, okay?」

「Mhmm!」

Well, Fairies do not have parents, but Lily's wings are covered by her robe, so right now, Lily looks like a human child.

So she gives him a short, bright reply and steps out of the alleyway into the bright main street.

Holding the single orange that he managed to recover, the pig-man heads back towards his store and disappears into the crowd of people.

Walking in the opposite direction, Lily has a sinister smile unlike that of a normal child's as she murmurs to herself.

「That's the 『Church of White Light』 , huh. It's just as the information said.」

The 『Church of White Light』 is the most convenient prey, as she learned from the information broker.

However, what is important for her right now is not the Church itself, but rather the orange-thief boy.

「I'm glad I remembered his face. To meet him in a place like this, fufu. This feels like fate –」

Lily has seen that boy's face, full of energy, somewhere before.

She does not know why he is in Avalon.

But that boy was definitely one of the fifty people who miraculously survived the attack of the 11th Apostle, Misa, in Daidalos.

He was the second one who blamed that tragic attack on Kurono.

「I still haven't forgiven you for throwing that stone at Kurono, you know.」

CHAPTER 301

THE 20TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – AVALON CITY, MAIN ROAD

Like Spada's streets, the city of Avalon's main road is crowded with people as usual.

They mainly consist of humans, but there are also Elves, Dwarves, Beast-Men and even Undead; the variety in the races is greater than in Spada.

With that said, this diversity is not rare to see on the continent of Pandora. It is a tiresome sight to Lily, who walks through this mixed crowd of people.

Incidentally, she is in her child form, and Fiona is pulling her forward by the hand, like her older sister. Even she has a displeased face as she looks at the crowd.

「Mmm, what is it? This is your onee-chan's, so I'm not going to give you even one bite.」

With her left hand holding Lily's hand, in Fiona's right hand is a skewer of fried Cockatrice meat that she bought just earlier.

Behind her glasses, her blue eyes are shining like those of a wild animal that does not want to give up the prey that it has caught.

「I don't want it!」

Lily is acting as Fiona's younger sister. So in order to not blow her cover, she sends her angry response straight into Fiona's head through telepathy.

「You don't need to get so angry, you'll make your onee-chan sad.」

Fiona pretends to be sad, and Lily begins berating her.

「Even I'll get angry if you do that, you know! What's up with you, you're doing nothing but eating and walking!」

「Well, we have come all this way to Avalon, after all.」

Lily knows of Fiona's gluttonous ways. Therefore, she shows some understanding as Fiona is lured into buying food by their delicious smells.

「I know how you feel. But including that fried bird, how many have you had?」

「Umm... It might be my ninth one.」

Nonetheless, there is nothing better than wandering around between food stands, indulging in the delicious cheap food of Avalon.

「Moderate yourself, we're making no progress.」

「Sorry, I couldn't help myself.」

By progress, Lily means progress on the important objective that they had made this trip for.

「Anyway, umm, the Church of White Light, was it?」

Having finished the light, tender Cockatrice meat, Fiona flicks the skewer into a narrow alleyway.

The skewer spontaneously bursts into flames in mid-air, and turns into ashes before it lands on the dirty stone pavement.

「Yes, it's a religious cult that got ahead of themselves and did a lot of evil things. No, it might be more accurate to call them a gang of boys.」

The ones like the orange thief boy Lily encountered earlier would still be considered cute compared to some of the others.

From what she has heard, they are behind several horrific cases of robbery, murder and arson here in Avalon.

「A recent case involving an Elf merchant couple seems to have been the final straw. I'm sure they were a good couple, loved by everyone. There has been a flood of requests demanding revenge for them.」

「Yes, the Guild was filled with conversations about that case.」

While Lily was at a shady information broker, Fiona was gathering information through more normal methods at the Adventurers' Guild.

Though, it is clear from her buying-and-eating spree that the main information that she has gathered is about Avalon's gourmet options.

「Soon, this will become a normal extermination quest, or the Knights' Order will have to move to apprehend them.」

「We arrived with perfect timing then, didn't we?」

If they were to run into adventurers acting after accepting this request, or the Knights' Order began their own movements to apprehend them, things would get complicated.

So it is fortunate that they are able to make a move before adventurers or the Knights' Order.

「But I have heard there are a lot of children among their followers.」

「Yes, enough to be considered unusual.」

The other thing that makes the Church of White Light infamous is the age of the members.

The majority of their members are children who inhabit the orphanage who are not adults.

The adult members that have been sighted are several large men who hid their faces, have been spotted a few times marching around the back alleys among the children.

The ones spreading the news of the Church of White Light are the children of the slums.

Their main activity seems to be to walk around and gather donations from people, but there are a lot of ill-bred followers who became adults and were employed as part of a criminal gang.

For some reason, those criminals are now being given the freedom to ignore their responsibilities as adults.

「It seems it was originally being run by one solitary old priest. After he passed away, a much more powerful person took over.」

Before the 『Church of White Light』 became known as an evil organization, which started last year, it seems to have been an ordinary orphanage.

Though they called themselves a religious organization, they did not have a single altar, let alone a temple. It had nothing but the name that the old priest gave it. They were not even zealous in their activities.

But its virtues allowed it to quickly build a connection with the people, and managed to maintain the orphanage through modest donations.

When the priest died of old age, the orphanage of the 『Church of White Light』 should have perished with him.

「At the very least, they have enough power that people would hesitate before interfering with them.」

Even if one were to say that is just what happens in the underside of society, in the end, power is everything in this world. Even if they are mostly children, since they have power, they will not be defeated easily.

In reality, the children stay in that orphanage that should have ceased to exist.

「I wonder if it's an adventurer?」

「The famous high-ranked adventurers are innocent.」

They have already confirmed that much with the information broker.

They have tried to find out what kind of influential person is backing the Church of White Light – and come to no conclusion.

「Maybe the young man they call 『Priest-sama』 is really strong.」

When they think about it properly, it might be one of the large men that have been witnessed with the Church, but they cannot rule out the possibility that he is not among them.

「I see, it's possible that one of the children is really strong.」

Fiona glances at the tiny Lily walking next to her, then looks away again.

「Well, what interests me more than that is this Church of White Light's doctrine –」

「Eh, that's definitely just the same as the teachings of the Cross.」

Thinking 「I thought so」, Lily is satisfied by Fiona's answer.

They found information from the information broker, and to some extent the Guild, about the god worshipped by the Church of White Light, its doctrine, their clothes and behaviour.

It was a minor religion under the old priest, but under the new, younger priest, they are undertaking zealous actions in the middle of the slums.

They reluctantly agreed that the characteristics of this organization matches the teachings of the cross.

「How can this be? Have the Crusaders already entered the city-state?」

The unmistakably powerful group of people who were mysterious even to the information broker could be none other than the Crusaders.

It is the worst case scenario, but it is also the most likely one.

「No, that's not possible.」

However, Fiona denies this scenario in a careless tone.

「Why?」

「The most important part of the doctrine of the Cross is to worship the 『White God』 as the one and only god. The Church of White Light worship the 『Holy Mother Aria.」

』 She is an important figure in the doctrine of the Cross, but they don't go as far as to call her a goddess.』

If the doctrine of the Cross were really being spread as the first step of an invasion, it would definitely be using the scriptures to spread the “correct teachings.”

Fiona knows that the Crusaders have used this method of invasion numerous times in the past. It is a well-known method of waging a religious war.

「It's not the worst case scenario, so that's good. So, who is this Holy Mother Aria?」

「She's a human woman who gave birth to the Child of God. According to the legend spread by the teachings of the Cross, this child became the First Apostle.」

However, it is impossible to distinguish such legends from actual history.

Of course, the followers of the Cross firmly believe that the miracle stories written in the scriptures are true stories.

「Historically, the Holy Mother Aria is the closest human to the White God. She is higher than an Apostle but below a god. In one chapter of the scriptures, the White God treats Aria preferentially. I guess she's the second most person in the doctrine of the Cross.」

Therefore, the image of the Holy Mother Aria is an established icon of the religion's teachings, along with the Cross itself.

Fiona takes a single gold coin from her bag and shows it to Lily. It is not a coin circulated on the continent of Pandora; it is from the Sinclair republic.

「The one engraved on this is the Holy Mother Aria.」

At the inn, Lily and Fiona showed each other their various belongings, and at that time Lily assumed that the woman's portrait on this coin was the Queen of Sinclair. Being told the truth, she looks at the coin with sincere interest.

「So, why is the story of an important figure of the Cross being spread in Avalon?」

「Since it started in the ancient times, the Cross is known as the oldest religion. In the prosperous age of the ancient civilization, it was spread in both Pandora and Ark, wasn't it?」

TLN: Ark was previously translated as Arc

The fact that it spread across both Pandora and Ark in the days of ancient civilization, the fact that similar ruins remain on both continents, and the fact that both continents use the same language to speak and write, are all proof of the Cross's influence.

It is likely that the civilizations on Pandora and Ark were isolated from each other with the passing of the Dark Ages.

Furthermore, in ancient times, the Cross controlled the continent of Ark as its greatest religion, while Pandora's history was buried in darkness.

The Church of White Light that is becoming infamous in Avalon is just one of the shady cults with no history or legends that are trying to revive that forgotten doctrine.

「It's normal for different sects to form based on the different courses of history they take and their different interpretations, even if they have the same origin. Even in Sinclair, there are as many new religions based on the Cross as there are stars in the sky.」

And the most powerful sect with the Pope seated above the twelve Apostles has probably also crushed as many of the rivaling sects as there are stars in the sky.

「I see. Well, as long as there's no relation to the Crusaders, it doesn't matter. We covered up the truth about Alzas village to keep Kurono from worrying, too.」

TLN: Alzas village was previously translated as Alsace village

He does not show it on his face, but they do not know when the Crusaders will attack next, and it adds some pressure to him.

If Kurono heard that a fortress was being constructed in Alzas in preparation for another possible attack, it is possible that he might head back there by himself.

Either way, with if he knew that a war was imminent, he would definitely become impatient. Lily wants to avoid leaving Kurono in such a state while they take their own actions.

「Anyway, when are we going to start dealing with this Church of White Light? Could it be that we're just going to go right now?」

They are in a hurry to return; in particular, Lily is displaying withdrawal symptoms for not seeing Kurono for so long.

She imagines fun conversations with Kurono in her mind, and she is happy that she should get to talk to him soon.

「No, we'll go tomorrow.」

「I see, I wouldn't mind going right now. Do you have a reason for waiting?」

In response to this question, a smile appears on Lily's childish face.

「Yes. Tomorrow night, there will be a full moon.」

CHAPTER 302

THE 20TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – AVALON SLUMS

When the young boy first came to Avalon, he had thought the sight of the weak and poor people gathered in the slums was the same as what you would find in any other city.

When some enemies called the Crusaders arrived, he had left the village of Kuar with his family – And after that, only hell awaited them.

His dependable father was crushed to death. His kind mother was torn to pieces. The older brother he idolized was shot, and he watched his adorable younger sister disappeared in a fiercely burning flame.

Even so, he has experienced even more painful things, and these tragedies of the past remain only as memories.

He has nothing that he can call a memento from his parents. If anything, the memento from his parents is his healthy body, where their blood runs through his veins.

But with no other relatives, that alone was insufficient for him to live a happy life again.

At least, that was the conclusion that he came to as a child in Spada, and it was not necessarily an incorrect conclusion.

The surviving refugees were busy living their own lives, and the important societal notion of mutual aid had been forgotten. Nobody had thought to help one powerless boy – no, it was financially impossible.

The leader of the refugees, the chief of Kuar village, had suddenly disappeared. So it was impossible for them to unite into a single group again.

Even so, the boy had left Spada holding onto a tiny bit of hope, and ended up wandering to Avalon.

Of course, even here, there was nowhere for an orphan to go but the slums.

The boy understood that no matter where he went, he was trapped in this dark, dirty, crumbling labyrinth that he could never break free of.

Spada, Avalon – Knowing the countries' names did not change anything; the slums were the same anywhere – This is what he first thought.

「Yo, what's up with those oranges?」

The boy is holding a basket full of oranges, missing only one, and another boy calls out to him. The other boy is turning fifteen next year, well on his way to adulthood.

He has spiky, dark blonde hair, odd pegs attached to his clothes, and a large, menacing dagger in his fist.

It is the usual clothing and weapon that one would see on a hoodlum around here.

Behind him are two more boys of similar age and appearance, with smiles on their faces.

Stealing and extorting from the weak is an everyday occurrence in the slums.

「I stole it from a heretic.」

「That's a good attitude you've got, priest-sama will be happy, too – Actually, he should be coming soon, follow us.」

「Really?!」

The boy was acquainted with these three young men.

They are his friends who live in the same orphanage, run by the Church of White Light.

The boy and the three young men are all wearing cross-shaped accessories on their bodies, showing that they are companions that share the same belief.

「There's preparations for tomorrow's ceremony, so don't get in the way.」

「I know that!」

The boy replies like a cute little brother, and the other three laugh.

The boy is not shy of them; he idolizes them and speaks openly with them.

「Well, we've got some other stuff to do, so see ya later.」

「Mhmm.」

As they part, the boy takes an orange from the basket and tosses it to them.

「Hehe, thanks.」

「Be grateful for the Holy Mother's Blessings!」

With that, the boy clutches his basket that has lost yet another orange, and runs into the dirty alleyway.

His expression is not that of someone who is tired of seeing the ever-unchanging slums.

The scene reflected in his eyes does not change, but to him, this filthy townscape feels bright, as if it was being bathed in a pure, white light.

This causes a ray of hope to shine in the boy's heart.

The one that gave him this light of hope is –

「Priest-sama!」

The boy reaches his destination.

This worn-down two-story apartment made of stone right in the middle of the slums is the Church of White Light's orphanage that he lives in.

At the entrance is a pair of large, half-rotten wooden double-doors. There was a small crowd in front of the gate.

The people gathered there are children living at the orphanage like the boy, but they are all very small children, younger than him.

In the middle of the children is a young man, shining with a pure white light, wearing a dazzling priest's robe.

「Ah, welcome home.」

The young priest's blue eyes turn their distant gaze towards him as he welcomes him.

Just that is enough to fill the boy's heart with an indescribable joy.

The priest is only a year or two older than him, but the boy holds greater respect and affection for him than he did his own parents.

TLN: In chapter 294 I assumed the priest is around 15 years old like the girl, but since the boy is around 10 years old, being one or two years older than the boy makes him 11-12 years old. The Japanese term “少年/shounen” means “young boy/man”, and it is used for boys anywhere from 7-18 years old, so it was really impossible to tell his age in the earlier chapter.

The priest saved him and guided him – Yes, guided him – along the true path of belief that all humans should walk. He is the great person who showed him the 「Guidance of the White Light.」

「Ah, that looks super-delicious! Where did you get those?」

The red-haired girl who is always by the priest's side raises her high-pitched voice as she points at the basket of oranges in the boy's hands.

「Ah, th-this...」

He inadvertently begins stuttering, not because of the girl's revealing clothes that would stimulate sexual desires even in a child, but because of the direct gaze of the priest's eyes.

「I can eat these, right? Well, I'm eating them!」

「Aah!」

Before he realizes it, she has taken the entire basket.

「Hey, it's time for a snack!」

She disappears into the orphanage, and the crowd of children gathered around follows her inside like a cheerful storm.

It is possible that the boy would not even get a taste of the oranges that he has obtained. The children of the orphanage are always hungry.

「Haah...」

He lets out a small sigh with a sad expression as he realizes this, but –

「You did the right thing.」

He raises his head at the sudden voice, and the beautiful, white face of the priest is right in front of him.

「Ah, ye-yes!」

「Blessings are upon us, the Children of God, while the Heretics must atone.」

The boy is still a child, ignorant of the true meaning of that phrase. He does not even know what some of the words mean. But he knows what he should say in response.

「May the White Light guide your path.」

As the boy recites the phrase, the young priest disappears into the orphanage.

CHAPTER 303

THE 20TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ISKIA FORTRESS

A line of students from the Royal Spada Academy climb the gentle slope of the hill, heading towards Iskia Fortress.

Leading this group of students are the members of Wing Road, who stand out even among hundreds of other students.

「Fuwah, I'm sleepy, and my hand hurts.」

Sitting atop his pure-white Unicorn, Nero voices such meaningless complaints.

No, they may not be completely meaningless.

The fact that the only part of Nero's body that hurts is the palm of his hand means that he did not take any punches anywhere else. It is also evidence of the power of the punch, since it was strong enough to make his hand hurt, even though he used the Ancient Jujutsu at an expert level.

From these facts, one can see that the power of those two is fitting of their Rank 5 titles.

「You're the one who went and had all the fun by himself, and that's what you're complaining about?」

With an even more dissatisfied face than Nero, Kai voices his own complaints.

「You should have let me fight him then, I don't get to fight guys as strong as that old man very often!」

But it is too late for such words. The ones who had beef with each other were Nero and Gustav, and in that situation –

「Now my friend will be your opponent instead of me!」

If he had said that, he would be pathetic, like some delusional bastard who thinks he can become stronger by hiring bodyguards.

Nero has at least a small amount of pride as a man, so he would never say that.

「Hey wait a minute, you guys, where'd you go last night and what trouble did you cause?」

Their conversation is interrupted by Charlotte, her long twin tails swinging around as she sits on her horse behind them.

「Huh? What are you talking about? We were sleeping soundly in our tents last night!」

「Right, right! We definitely weren't in the guild bar, starting a fight or anything!」

「You moron!」 Nero and Charlotte say the same line simultaneously, but directed at different people.

「Wow, I can't believe you guys! If you'd just gone out to drink some alcohol I'd have forgiven you, but starting a fight -」

「Your voice is too loud, Sharl. What will we do if a teacher finds out?」

「And whose fault do you think this situation is!」

「Kai's.」

「Oi, the one who started the fight was you, Nero!」

Continuing to ride a horse's length away from the conversation of those noisy three, Safiel says,

「Really, you're all morons.」

She murmurs quietly, sitting on the back of the false Sleipnir.

Wing Road is proceeding as usual today. Ahead of them, further up the hill, they can see the towering outline of Iskia Fortress.

Though it is an old fortress, its architecture is largely unchanged from current architecture, built as a roughly square-shaped, Spada-style castle.

There is a defensive tower in each corner, facing north, south, east and west, and the tops of the walls that join these towers have soldiers lined up along them. The walls are surrounded by a dry moat with no water, and the only entrance is a single drawbridge, which is currently raised. The castle gate across the drawbridge is firmly shut.

The ancient fortress on the country's border has retained its former defenses to this day, waiting for a challenge from the young knights who bear the weight of Spada's future on their shoulders.

Iskia Fortress was involved in the territorial wars that happened between Spada and Fauren over a hundred years ago, and is now an important historical site.

But it has now been over fifty years since the relation between the two countries changed from hostility to neutrality, then finally friendship. It is unlikely for the fortress to become a hellish battlefield once more.

TLN: This scene begins *inside* the fortress.

「Souls of the brave soldiers of the past, may you rest in the requiem of the peace that you so longed for, for all eternity –」

「What're you doing over there, Will, we didn't come here to go sightseeing.」

「I humbly apologize, Simon-sama. It is one of his usual fits, please forgive him.」

The fortress has been repaired and maintained to this day, so at the very least, there is no concern that the walls will collapse in on them. As the sun sinks over the walls of the fortress, Wilhart looks out at it and speaks words that make no sense. They are met with a merciless response from two sides.

「But what's with that pose! It's embarrassing, so stop it already!」

「This is why the dignity of the royal Spada family is looked down upon, is it not? It is rather pathetic.」

TLN: I think the second line is said by Seria, but it's hard to tell, given how the Japanese write their dialogue.

In the face of this brutal attack, even Wilhart's expression of wanting to pay his respects to a historic site crumbles.

「Tch, you boorish people who know nothing of the romance of history...」

He reluctantly steps down from the wooden box that he is standing on.

「Just because we entered the fortress without any problem, aren't we being a little too careless?」

「Hmm, you're make a good point.」

The students of the Royal Spada Academy arrived at Iskia Fortress ahead of schedule, even before sunset.

What Simon meant by 「without any problem」 is that even though they were traveling through a dungeon, there was not a single monster attack.

Sometimes humanoid monsters like Goblins and Orcs live in this fortress. In previous open-field exercises to the Iskia Hills, they had to clean up the monsters surrounding the fortress and lay partial siege to it before they could finally enter.

「It's good that we didn't run into anything yesterday, but for there to be nothing at all is actually a unsettling.」

「Mmm, we did not see even a single Centaur, let alone an attack, which is somewhat unusual.」

The most common monsters that populate the Iskia Hills are the half-human-half-beasts known as Centaurs. The top halves of their bodies are those of humans, while the bottom halves are those of horses.

The first monsters adventurers would normally encounter at this dungeon are Centaurs. In fact, it is common for the Centaurs to spot the adventurers first.

They hunt herds of Silent Sheep skillfully with their bows, and they are not a rare sight there.

「But even in past exercises, there were times where monsters weren't encountered for three whole days, so it's still possible that this exercise is like that.」

「You're right. Well, tomorrow's activities will depend on if we encounter any enemies –」

At that moment, they hear footsteps heading towards the two of them – no, the three of them, including Seria – and they reflexively look in the direction that they are coming from.

The one who appears is a young man wearing light armor, a knight cadet belonging to one of the groups that are under Wilhart's direct command.

「Excuse me, Prince Wilha–」

「I told you to call me “your Excellency”, did I not!」

「Ah, don't pay attention to that. Go on.」

Wilhart flips his red cape as if to show it off. Simon jabs him in the side with the stock of his rifle and gives a wry smile.

The brown-haired knight cadet has a bewildered look on his face, but opens his mouth to continue his report.

「The main headquarters has been established, please allow me to show you around!」

「Mmm, then I shall accept your offer, young knight Eddy.」

「Eh?」

Wilhart's response is bizarrely respectable, and the knight cadet is unable to hide the look of surprise on his face.

「Hmm, I thought your name is Eddy, am I mistaken?」

「N-no, my name is Eddy. I didn't expect you to remember my name -」

「How could a leader not know the names of his subordinates? Using this grey brain of mine, I memorized the names and faces of all three hundred people participating in this open-field exercise in a single night!」

Wilhart laughs boastfully with his usual “FAAHAHA!” But this time, unusually, it is actually something worth boasting about.

「Well then, shall we go?」

「Yes, Prince Wi – Your Excellency!」

「Indeed!」

Following Eddy's lead, Wilhart hums a tune, clearly in a good mood from being called “Your Excellency.”

Seeing his friend finally showing some respectable behavior, Simon relaxes and lets a cute smile appear on his face, showing no signs of caution.

CHAPTER 304

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ISKIA HILLS (1)

The next morning, the students of the Royal Spada Academy leave Iskia Fortress to look for large-scale battles with monsters, which is the whole reason they came out on this open-field exercise.

There are two hundred and fifty of them. With the leadership cadets in charge and the knight cadets as the soldiers under their command, they are the young elites that bear the future of Spada's military.

The other fifty students are studying courses such as magical engineering courses or civil official courses, and they remain garrisoned inside Iskia Fortress, on watch duty.

Normally, being stationed on watch duty is a tedious task, but the students who are currently marching across the gentle slopes are considerably envious of them at this moment.

「Tch, it's raining.」

Sitting on his beautiful, pure-white Unicorn, Nero has a look on his face that is three times worse than his usual displeased expression as he mutters these words.

The sky overhead is filled with ash-colored clouds, and even a small child would be able to tell that it could start pouring down at any moment.

Yesterday's weather was perfectly clear, and they were able to enjoy the red magnificence and splendor of the evening's sunset. But now it is as if a large army of thick rain clouds have invaded Spada overnight.

「Seriously, what rotten luck.」

So far on this open-field exercise, Nero had to deal with a group of Orcs and got into a fight with another Rank 5 adventurer, which you would normally be incredibly unlikely to encounter. He cannot help but feel that his stock of good luck has vanished.

As if the black gods themselves are trying to put the First Prince of Avalon through a trial, he has been constantly running into trouble.

With that said, this could be considered a more ordinary problem.

Considering everything else, a weather phenomenon like rain seems trivial.

「Nero.」

「What is it, Safi?」

As Nero wears a displeased expression at the light rain falling on his face, Safiel Maya Hydra calls out to him.

The false Sleipnir created through Necromancy is longer and taller than Nero's Unicorn, and Safiel is sitting in a position that is elevated above him.

Nero is not petty enough to say something as meaningless as "don't look down on me," and Safiel seems serious, so he pays attention to her as she speaks.

「I don't see any monsters nearby.」

The Summoner students have spread their servants around to look for an enemy, and Safiel's crow-servant is in the sky, searching the surroundings.

「I don't sense any presences either, it's just too quiet.」

The students are just passing across a hill with a great view, and from here, they can see all of the forests surrounding the hills.

Exactly as Nero and Safi have said, not even a single monster's shadow can be seen.

「It's a bit ominous, isn't it?」

「Yeah, there's no presence, but I have a bad feeling—」

Nero stops talking mid-sentence, and is suddenly fully concentrated on the surroundings with all of his senses.

「What?」

「Just as I say that... Looks like my instincts were spot-on.」

What he feels at first is just a small tremor.

「Wah, isn't the ground shaking a bit?!」

「Uoh, what is it, an earthquake?!」

Sharl and Kai feel the ground's movements, and let out shouts of surprise.

In Spada, earthquakes only happen perhaps once every ten years, and even when they do, they are considered large natural disasters. Therefore, when an earthquake does occur, most citizens of Spada would tremble in fear.

「O-oi, this an earthquake, isn't it?!」

「Wait, are you serious?!」

「Fu, fuhahaha~ The time of destruction has finally come! The black gods have abandoned us, and doom has come to the land of Pandoraaaaaaaaaa!」

The magnitude of the ground's movement increases at an alarming rate, and the students nearby have started to feel it. Among the sounds of the ground shaking and panicked voices, someone shouts these bizarre words.

TLN: I'm preeeeetty sure that's Wilhart.

「Calm down, it's not an earthquake. This is –」

The Unicorn and the man riding it remain calm despite the ground's shaking. Nero stops Sharl and Kai, who are panicking with the other nearby students.

Realizing that Nero has some idea of what is happening, Safi points her gaze in the same direction that his deep crimson eyes are facing.

As the ground's shaking continues to grow more violent, Nero continues his sentence.

「- a monster.」

GOGYAAAAAAAAAAH!

A deafening roar that could be mistaken for an explosion echoes across the Iskia Hills.

The thunderous roar crashes upon the eardrums of the students lined up at the top of the hill, but the huge explosion right in front of their eyes – No, at the bottom of the hill they are standing on – is a bigger concern for them.

The explosion tears the thick carpet of grass out completely, and a geyser of dirt sprays out into the air.

The size of its body is such that it kicks up an incredible amount of dirt into the surroundings, but fortunately, the dirt does not reach up to the top of the hill.

Even without hearing Nero's words, anyone can tell with a single glance that this is the cause of the earthquake.

「Greed-Gore...」

Its name is murmured by the two people among the students who are knowledgeable about special monsters, Safi and Nero.

「Greed-Gore, you mean the Rank 5 monster that's been said to have appeared around here recently?」

「It's a breed of Earth Dragon that uses its Characteristic Ability* of being able to move underground. It's my first time seeing it, but there's no mistaking it. But –」

*TLN**: In katakana, this term is simply “Extra.” Since this makes no sense whatsoever in English, I'm going with something close to its kanji meaning.

As Safi speaks, the rain of dirt from the sky stops, and in front of the two hundred and fifty students is the majestic sight of the Greed-Gore's enormous body.

With a length of thirty meters from the tip of its nose the end of its tail, and a height of ten meters, its sheer size is overwhelming.

Brilliant purple eyes that resemble the Safiel Maya Hydra's own Demon Eyes can be seen shining ferociously from its rectangular-shaped head.

The block-like carapace that covers its whole body makes it look like an Earth Dragon-type Golem, or as if a fortress has just come to life and started moving.

Even though Safi is seeing it for the first time, its appearance matches the description in her knowledge, and she is able to immediately identify it. However, she notices one definite difference.

「- it's black.」

「Black? It's not supposed to be that color?」

「Eh, it was a reddish-brown brick color in the pictures!」

But the Greed-Gore that has appeared before them is unmistakably black.

It was not that its body is covered in black dirt from having traveled underground. Its entire block-like carapace is looks as if it is made of pure darkness.

「Is it a subspecies?」

「I can't be sure.」

Subspecies of monsters that are a different color are rare, but they do exist.

The rarer the subspecies, the more likely it is to have powerful abilities, but going by that rule, that would make this Greed-Gore even more powerful than a regular one.

「Whatever, in any case, we can't fight this thing!」

It is a Rank 5 monster, which even the Knights' Order* of the army with all of their forces gathered together would avoid a direct engagement with.

*TLN**: Previously translated as the Chivalric Order.

With two hundred and fifty of them, they certainly have the numbers, but to fight such a dangerous monster is too large a task for an army of apprentices and students.

「It would be impossible for even me to fight it while protecting everyone else –」

Nero can say this because he's defeated a Rank 5 monster before. But as if to deny his confident words –

GOAAAAAAAAAH!

Once more, the air is filled with the Greed-Gore's deafening roar.

Its purple eyes are unmistakably fixed on the students standing on top of the hill.

It is declaring its intention to devour this “prey”, or perhaps it sees this group of people as a threat, and is trying to intimidate them.

The students' experience fighting monsters varies from individual to individual, but they all interpret the Greed-Gore's roar as such. The members of the Rank 5 party Wing Road also have similar suspicions.

However, they are all proven wrong.

「What, the forest –」

As if answering the Greed-Gore's call, the forests surrounding the hills begin to move.

It appears as if the trees of the forest have all started marching across the plains. But there is no way that could happen, even in this world of magic.

Monsters are emerging from the forest to advance onto the hill.

The monsters that are well known around the Iskia Hills, the Centaurs and their Silent Sheep with black wool, appear. Not only them, but there are also Slimes, Goblins, Orcs, Dagger Raptors, Windwolves*, Morjura – Every single monster that inhabits this area is here.

*TLN**: The katakana for this is “ウインドル/windoru”. They are Rank 1 monsters with wolf-like bodies whose name has previously been translated as “Windwolves” and also as “Vindol” by different translators. I'm going with Windwolves since they are wolves, after all.

「Oi oi, is this for real...」

Even Nero has a line of cold sweat running down his cheek as he opens his eyes in shock.

Monsters of different races, unlike humans, are unable to overcome their differences to work together. They are truly wild creatures of nature.

So, what is this phenomenon occurring in front of their eyes?

The wolf-like Windwolves are being used as mounts by Goblins, whose green skin shares the same color as their fur. A land dragon, normally known for pulling dragon carriages, is carrying a number of large Orcs as it stomps its way forward with its powerful four legs.

The Silent Sheep are normally just a source of food for the Centuars, but the Centaurs are using them like hunting dogs as they advance. Running beside them are the fierce, boar-like Dortoths.

The monsters' forward march shakes the ground, though not as the Greed-Gore did. But not all of the monsters are approaching on the ground's surface.

The leaves in the forest sway as if in a storm as countless more shadows of all sizes appear in the trees.

Monsters ranging from the size of sparrows to medium-sized monsters like Pegasuses and Harpies fly through the rain clouds.

Above this flock of monsters is a Salamander* with both wings spread out, as if it were the ruler of the sky.

TLN: Salamanders are land reptiles in the real world, and even in a fantasy setting, I'd assume that they're some kind of land dragon. But the Kanji below this term reads "Fire Dragon" and apparently it's flying. So in Kuro no Maou, Salamanders are flying, fiery dragons.

Seeing the various monsters pouring non-stop from the forest, Nero knows what the Greed-Gore's roar was for.

It was an attack order to its own army.

「Retreat! All forces, retreat! We must fall back to the fortress!」

The order to retreat comes, and the students who are frozen in place by the sight of this overwhelming enemy army return to their senses.

「That's Will's voice, he's making a good call for once!」

The Second Prince of Spada, Wilhart, who is in command of this group of three hundred students, continues his shouts of "Move back!", ordering an immediate retreat – no, an evacuation.

In the next moment, he rings the bell that signals a retreat order, and the order reaches everyone in the group.

Nero praises Will's judgment here, as the decision to order an immediate retreat is an excellent one for avoiding everyone's doom.

The army of monsters overflowing from the forests has started moving to surround this hill.

If they remained unable to move out of fear any longer, they would definitely be swallowed up by this tsunami of monsters and be wiped out.

「Kai, Sharl, Safi, we're the rear guard!」

「You got it!」

「Of course we are!」

「Affirmative.」

The members of Wing Road, led by Nero, are aware that they have the strongest combat capability out of everyone. They answer immediately, and take up the role of the rear guard without hesitation.

As the wave of students retreats back down the hill, these four distinct, mounted individuals proudly turn their red capes around as they remain in place.

As they look down and ready their weapons to challenge the army of monsters that are crawling towards the bottom of the hill –

「Wait, we'll be the rear guard!」

One large, mounted person appears in front of them, standing in their way.

Sitting on a huge Bicorn like Kai's, it is an Orc with a single-edged greatsword on his back.

His burly head has a single horn and also a large lump, which has caused unfortunate rumors about how he took a punch from some newcomer adventurer student.

He is the Orc teacher in charge of the swordsmanship part of the adventurers' course, participating in this open-field exercise to observe the students.

「Oi, what are you saying, it would definitely be better if we –」

「No! No matter how strong you act, you're just students. The more dangerous roles should be taken up by us teachers.」

The current emergency situation is enough to overturn the rule that teachers are not to participate actively in the open-field exercise, and there is no time to argue.

And since they have fallen into such a critical situation, the ones who must go head first into certain death – as their guardian, as adults, and as educators – are the teachers.

「There's no time to argue, you guys have to be the vanguard and break through the monsters' surround!」

As the Orc orders this battle formation, his eyes are full of determination and resolution to face battle like a true warrior of Spada.

It is more than clear that there is nothing more to be said.

If Wing Road goes to the front line as the vanguard, even if the monsters block their path, they can definitely break through. No matter how strong the rear guard is, there is no point if the path ahead remains blocked.

「Tch, there's no other choice.」

Nero pulls the reins in his hands and the Unicorn quickly turns around, and the others follow him.

As Nero's red eyes turn to look back one last time, he sees the backs of the teachers, ready to defend the students to the death. In front of them, he can see the monsters advancing.

「A black Greed-Gore...」

The Greed-Gore simply watches calmly, leaving the attack to its army of monsters.

It is an Earth Dragon that is supposed avariciously devour its prey, but it seems to Nero that its eyes have a sadistic look as it plays around with its food.

「I don't like that thing's huge head. I'll make sure to cut it off.」

Nero swears to defeat the Greed-Gore, the general of this monster army. But right now, he must go forward to cut a retreat path, so he spurs his Unicorn onward.

CHAPTER 305

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ISKIA HILLS (2)

「A-a black Greed-Gore...」

Seeing the huge monster that split the earth open as it appeared, Wilhart trembles in fear with a terrified expression on his face as he utters its name.

Sitting on top of the horse he was given as the general, his brain processed the monster's appearance and immediately found a match with his knowledge Rank 5 monsters. Naturally, his body began shaking.

Its species, shape and its known attributes are all different, but his fear of Rank 5 Monsters has been burned into his mind.

He realizes that the rifle he is holding, the one that he is so proud of – that he has thoroughly practised with, becoming familiar with it to the point that he could truly be proud of his skill – is now just a useless stick.

But even as he trembles in fear, the situation deteriorates further. It is as if some evil god has decided to drop them into deeper horror.

GOAAAAAAAAAH!

The monster's second roar is terrifying enough to pierce one's body and strike fear directly into the soul. As if being summoned by an evil call, monsters begin to pour out of the forest.

This sight is such that Will and all of the other students are plunged into an abyss of despair.

They have at least some experience fighting monsters. But that only makes this phenomenon of monsters of different races grouping together and advancing on them as a single army even more difficult to comprehend.

「H-hyii... It's hopeless...」

As Will's eyes are filled with tears and these pathetic words come from his mouth –

「Get a hold of yourself, Will!」

Accompanying this brave, lovely voice is an attack that digs into his side.

「Goha?!」

TLN: Sound of pain

As he looks towards where the attack came from, he sees his friend Simon, who has shoved the stock of his rifle into him with all his might.

「Hurry up and give the retreat order, or it'll be too late!」

Will is not so slow-minded as to ask, “What are you talking about?”

He processes the meaning and intention of Simon's words in an instant, and begins to show the results of his training.

「Retreat! All forces, retreat! We must fall back to the fortress!」

Before he knows it, he is shouting these words loudly.

All of the laughing and boastful talk that he does with his obnoxiously loud voice is paying off in this critical moment; his voice carries well and the order to immediately retreat reaches the group.

「FALL BAAAAAAACK!」

Turning his horse around, he faces the direction of the Iskia Fortress and leads the retreat.

Being unable to see the Greed-Gore and its army of monsters when he turns his back towards them, Will retains some sense of calm in his mind.

「To me, my knights! We will lead the group, and be at the front of the retreat back to Iskia Fortress!」

The knights, or rather, the knight cadets under Will's direct command have already drawn their weapons in preparation for battle. They understand his orders immediately and begin moving.

Among them is Eddy, the knight cadet who called out to Will on the fortress walls yesterday, and beside him is the green-haired girl with glasses that Kurono rescued from the bandits in Fauren.

Including those two, the majority of the two hundred and fifty students are on foot. Therefore, the ones who are mounted like Will cannot retreat at full speed.

The retreat begins at a slow pace.

Fortunately, Will and the knights under his direct command are near the back of the column of students, and they are able to quickly get to the front to act as the vanguard.

「Don't break formation! Prepare your mobility skills* and Speed Boosts, we're going to descend the hill all at once before we get surrounded!」

*TLN**: Previously translated as “movement-type martial skills”

Desperately remembering the orders he learned in class that must be given in a retreat, Will shouts out instructions one after another in rapid succession.

In this state of emergency, even the teachers who are not supposed to participate in battle have started moving, but they know that Will's orders are appropriate in this situation, so they do not need to voice out their own instructions.

As if they already know the best course of action, the teachers move to take up the role of the rear guard without being told. They are certainly going to have to fight a hellish battle in that role.

Will is relieved that the harshest role for the retreat is being taken on by the teachers. But he also feels pain in his heart as he realizes that there is no way to escape this situation without casualties.

The reason he is prepared for the fact that there has to be sacrifices is because he previously experienced it the time he was chased by Wrath-Pun in the Galahad mountain range.

The thought of having to sacrifice some people does not affect the actions and judgment of the current Wilhart, who previously made the choice to sacrifice the most important person to him outside of his own family.

With that said, he has not experienced any battles where he actually had to sacrifice anyone. But such a battle is about to begin now. The bodyguard-maid who was supposed to throw away her own life for him is still next to him, carrying out her duty.

「Simon, sworn friend of my soul. Thanks to thy counsel, I have returned to my senses. I thank you from the bottom of my heart; your assessment of the situation was excellent.」

From on top of his horse, Will directs his words of thanks at Simon, trying to hide his embarrassment.

「Onii-san's retreat order was quick, too. I was just following his example.」

When they had heard about the arrival of the heavy knight squad behind Alzas village, the one who gave the immediate order to retreat was Kurono. The only ones who know this other than Kurono himself are the three of them here.

Despite the outcome, Simon understands that Kurono's decision to give that order was correct.

This is a similarly terrible situation where they are being attacked by an overwhelming enemy force.

「More importantly, Will, is your rifle loaded?」

「Fuhaha, of course!」

「You're not allowed to put your finger on the trigger yet!」

「... I know.」

Will is in high spirits, and Simon warns him of this possible accident.

His finger should not be on the trigger unless he is shooting. It could cause an accidental discharge, which is especially dangerous in situations where there are a lot of allies nearby.

Furthermore, an accidental discharge is even more likely to occur when riding on horseback.

「The Centaurs and Windwolves are fast; they'll make it just in time to cut us off!」

The reason Simon mentioned Will's gun, in other words, his weapon for fighting, is because he had a feeling that they would not be able to avoid battle.

「It's the critical moment, isn't it.」

「The wall of enemies is not so thick that we can't break through, it's alright!」

The monsters with fast movement have broken off from the swarm of monsters that appeared from the forests to go ahead and block their path.

As Simon said, the Centaurs armed with spears and bows are charging through the hills that are their home ground.

The black, fluffy Silent Sheep are running alongside them, keeping up with their speed. They're sheep, but they're still monsters.

The Windwolves that the Goblins are riding are lagging behind. But the ones that are moving without riders are putting their wolf-like running speed and their Wind-type Characteristic Ability to use, making their way through the hills like the wind.

The Dortoths are well-known for their ability to charge forward and are quite fast, but they do not seem to have the sense to go around the hills, so they are struggling to climb over them.

Whether the retreating students will run into them or not is likely dependent on their luck.

Fortunately, the bird monsters in the sky and the Salamander that possesses tremendous firepower are just flying around, and do not seem to be directly headed this way.

「Prepare our long-ranged attacks! First group, ready your Blasts, second group, ready the Sagittas and bows! Concentrate our attacks at the front!」

TLN: Sagittas seem to be a class of ranged magical attack. It was implied in previous translations, but I'll emphasize that here.

The distance between the students descending the hill and the monsters moving to cut them off is growing shorter.

Will is wearing a tense, strained expression. Even Simon, who is experienced in battle, knows that he is not a strong fighter, and is desperately trying not to show his anxiety on his face.

「Will-sama.」

「Eei, Seria! Don't suddenly call out to me in a tense moment like this!」

Will replies to his bodyguard, Seria, who is riding next to him with a calm expression. His voice sounds impatient, rather than angry.

「I apologize. However, there is one thing I must warn you about.」

「What is it?」

「You are aware of the Characteristic Ability of Silent Sheep, are you not?」

「Fuhaha, that is information that was on the front page of the book in the guild at Iskia Village, there is no way that I do not –」

Will begins to talk with his usual confident voice, but in the next moment, his face turns pale.

The reason why the Silent Sheep are called silent.

And, assuming the monsters have some degree of intelligence, the reason why the Centaurs have gone out of their way to bring them to battle.

As he remembers, it is already too late.

「What is the Characteristic Ability of Silent Sheep?」

Simon, who is not particularly knowledgeable about monsters, asks Will this question.

「Now I understand... Eei, we can't turn back now –」

Will's expression quickly changes from resignation to determination and raises his voice to give the order to commence the long-ranged attacks.

「First group, fiiiiire!」

At his signal, the Mage-class students finish the last words of their incantation to unleash their attacks.

But the Silent Sheep closing in on them are faster to open their mouths.

MEEVIIIIIII~

TLN: I don't know what kind of sheep sounds like that, but okay.

As this strangely calming cry fills the air, the students release their completed long-ranged attacks.

「Ignis Overblast!」

「Tera Blast!」

Etcetera, etcetera. The low-level and intermediate-level Blasts, each with their own individual properties, are cast –

「What, it's not coming out?!」

「Why?!」

Half of them end up misfiring.

Most of attacks that *are* successfully fired either miss or fail to explode.

As a result, only a few of the mixed cavalry of Centaurs and Windwolves charging into battle are blown away. They continue to charge with full force.

The Goblins that have fallen off the backs of Windwolves are trampled by the Centaurs.

「The cry of the Silent Sheep has a Silencing effect! Everyone but the Mages who don't need an incantation or have a way to counter it, fall back!」

That is Will's answer to Simon's question.

Silence is one of the magical Status Effects* that can be inflicted.

*TLN**: The katakana reads “bad status” but that sounds really bad, so I'm going with this.

Silence is divided into two kinds. The first is an effect that prevents any speaking; the other nullifies the sound of incantations and counters their effects.

The one inflicted by the Silent Sheep is the latter; in other words, because the last parts of the incantations were Silenced, most of the magical attacks cast ended up misfiring.

This is a critical Status Effect for those of the Mage class; however, there have been methods used to counter it since ancient times. But the number of students that would be capable of using these methods right at this moment is questionable.

Therefore, most of the Mage-class fighters have been rendered useless by the presence of the Silent Sheep.

On the other hand, the Centaurs who fight with physical attacks without using any magic are completely unaffected in this Silence-filled battlefield.

「Second group, even if it's only the archers! The ones at the front, prepare for the Centaurs' charge!」

Physical long-ranged attackers include not only archers but also himself, since he is wielding a gun, so Will raises his rifle as he gives these desperate orders.

Breaking through these sparse attacks, the charging monsters are getting closer.

There are already Centaurs with bows raised and arrows nocked, and some have begun to fire.

Their accuracy is low, but it is enough to make the students who are not used to battle tremble with fear.

「Kuh...」

It seems to Will that the battle is clearly taking a turn for the worse.

It is unlikely that the second group of ranged attackers alone can stop the monsters that are charging in.

His morale is crushed by the Silence nullifying their initial attack, and he is very anxious about engaging in close combat.

Will he be able to keep the first ranged attack squad out of harm's way? No, to be more honest, he is more worried about whether he will be able to fire his rifle properly as he has practised in the face of a Centaur raising its spear at him.

He has a hard time fighting a single Goblin, a Rank 1 monster. Fighting a large Rank 2 monster in close-quarter combat... The thought alone is enough to make him wet himself.

Once they enter the melee, which will be in less than a minute, the situation may fall apart beyond repair.

「There's no other choice... I... I... have to do it.」

TLN: He uses two different pronouns for “I” here. The first is “我/ware”, which is the pompous one he uses when going into his delusions and being pompous in general. The second one is the more normally used “俺/ore”. This subtly indicates that he is becoming more serious.

He wonders whether his rifle's sight is shaking because of his horse's movement.

He cannot help but feel that it is because the hand that is holding the grip, the shoulder against which the stock is resting, and his back that is supposed to be in an upright position, are all trembling.

The Centaurs charge directly onward, showing no signs of fear. Will gets the feeling that his eyes have met with the purple eyes of the grim-looking face of the Centaur through his rifle's sight.

「– You can do it, Will. This is where you say, “I* am the glorious Second Prince of Spada”, right?」

*TLN**: This one is back to the pompous “我/ware”

Right next to him, holding up his own rifle, his friend speaks to him.

「Fu... Kuku... Fuhaha...」

Strangely enough, his trembling has stopped.

「FAAHAHAHA! Yes, indeed, I am the glorious Second Prince of Spada, Wilhart Tristan Spaaaaaaaada! Monsters, you shall perish in the face of the true power of my 『Buster Rifle!』 」

As his body is filled with a strange, uplifting feeling coming from his heart, from the depths of his soul, Will puts his finger on the trigger.

「Second group, ready your weapons!」

As he inhales deeply before shouting the order to attack, ready to fire his own self-named “bullet of destruction” –

「... Step aside, Will.」

A small, calm voice reaches his ears.

He looks up to see a white shadow flying lightly over him.

It is a Unicorn that leapt high into the air, momentarily resembling a Pegasus. And the person riding it is –

「NERO?!」

Nero's crimson-red eyes do not give even a single glance towards his childhood friend, the Second Prince; they are fixed on the enemies that are closing in from the front.

His eyes are filled with deadly intent, and his already-drawn sword is in his right hand, prepared to carry out that intent.

「- Instant Flash.」

To Will, who has no knowledge of battle techniques like swordsmanship or martial arts, it looks as if Nero is just swinging his sword sideways.

But its blade releases a blinding light, which becomes a white light that flies forward, cutting through the air.

If one were to use the Wind magic attack 『Air Sagita』 and made it larger and brighter, it may appear something like this.

The slashing attack resembles a straight line made of light. It passes through the Centaurs like an illusion, cutting all of them in half.

It makes no difference whether the human half of their bodies are naked, covered in Silent Sheep wool or wearing metal armor that they undoubtedly robbed from adventurers. The attack effortlessly cuts through their chests.

It is as if they ran through a steel wire suspended in the air at full speed – the far side of where the attack landed is now a sea of blood.

「Don't be so reckless, Will, it makes me nervous just watching.」

With the Centaurs that he cut down so mercilessly in the background, Nero leaps lightly from his Unicorn in mid-air.

Nero lands in front of Will, wearing a fearless smile on his face.

「Yeah, you're weak, baka-aniki*, so make sure you stand back!」

*TLN**: Stupid older brother

His younger sister Charlotte has suddenly appeared, waving the red wand in her hand, 『Crimson Bolt. 』

「Line Force Blast!」

She has already finished her incantation. As she speaks the name of her spell, a roaring thunder is released and a wide streak of lightning passes over the Centaurs' corpses, striking down the Goblin-Windwolf cavalry.

「Well, that's how it is. 『Wing Road』 will open the escape path, so follow us without falling behind.」

As Nero swings his red cape* around and looks once more at the enemies ahead, two more people appear on either side of him. Both are members of the Four Great Noble Houses of Spada: Kai Est Galbraith and Safiel Maya Hydra.

*TLN**: Here's where I've made a mistake. I've been translating these as "red mantle". Makes more sense if it's a cape. I'm applying the change to previous chapters, too.

「You saved us, Nero. I'll leave it in your hands.」

Will has mixed feelings about Nero's timing, but his chest drops in relief at the arrival of his most dependable ally.

「Yeah, leave it to us.」

Nero answers without even looking back at him. With his best friend Kai as his partner on the front lines, and the Undead Wrath-Pun with a metal arm created by Safiel, he faces the wall of gathering monsters and begins the attack.

CHAPTER 306

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – AVALON SLUMS

The cloudless sky is dyed with the color of a brilliant sunset, bathing the city of Avalon in a scarlet light.

Traditional steeples and tall buildings with different architecture to those of Spada line the main street. The air is filled with the red light of the sunset and the emotions of the crowd walking through. But if one were to go in a certain direction to a place a short distance from the street, they would immediately notice that the atmosphere sharply turns unpleasant.

The stone houses and apartments are built haphazardly, and seem more like dungeons where monsters lurk than places where people live.

In fact, some of the inhabitants of these slums are gathered here, baring their fangs at intruders from outside.

This beautiful young woman and a little girl who appear to be sisters are clearly prey.

The girls, both with black hair and blue eyes, are wearing apprentices' robes. But to describe the air around them would them as elegant would not be an exaggeration. Even in such attires, their appearance is very attractive.

The young woman holds in her hand a long staff made of metal. It is simple yet somehow exquisite at the same time, decorated with countless small ornaments. Even an untrained eye can tell that it is probably more valuable than the average staff.

「Hehe, what are you doing in a place like this, little girl?」

Therefore, it is clear why the sisters have been interrupted, not even ten minutes after beginning to walk through these back alleys.

A middle-aged man blocks their path, and a faint smile appears on his face.

「It's not a good idea to be wandering around here, you might get attacked by some dangerous people.」

「Yeah. Like us!」

Two more men appear behind them, blocking off their escape route.

The man standing in front of them has no notable bodily characteristics, so it is clear that he is a human. One of the men at the back has the pointy ears of an Elf, and the other's head is that of a wolf, which makes him a Werewolf.

As if he has discarded the pride of his race, the Elf has allowed his body to become wide and fat; he could even be mistaken for a Dwarf.

The Werewolf, in contrast, is very thin, and looks more like a starving hound than a proud wolf.

It goes without saying that these three, with very different races and characteristics, are all disgraceful hoodlums and thugs.

Just listening to them speak, one could laugh and think of them as low-class idiots, but most people who actually encounter them would only tremble in fear.

They are not holding any weapons, but they still have an intimidating presence to them.

It is a situation where it would not be strange for this young woman and little girl to cry for help.

「We want to get to the orphanage of the Church of White Light, do you know where it is?」

However, the intellectual-looking young woman wearing glasses who must be the older sister calmly asks a question with a sleepy, expressionless face.

「Tch, you bitches are with that gang of shitty kids?」

The young woman's words were not an insult or a provocation, but for some reason, they seem to hold some meaning that angers the man in front of her.

「Oi, what're we going to do?」

「Grr, they'll never know if we just eat them both!」

It seems the part that angered the men was the mention of the Church of White Light, but fortunately, they are in a place where the Church would not be able to find out what happened.

As proof that the Werewolf's suggestion is not a joke, he springs forward with astounding force, fangs exposed.

The man at the front and the fat Elf have no intention of letting these sisters leave alive; they have a threatening air about them.

「You evil little girls, if you're part of those evil cultists then I can't hold back!」

As the man places his hand on the dagger at his hip, ready to attack with no mercy as he has said –

「Oi, stop right there Mist'ers, what do you think you're doing?」

A voice comes from the other side of the man at the front.

Three boys have appeared, wearing stained, white clothes and cross-shaped emblems around their necks. Judging from their faces and physiques, they are not of age.

There are three boys, but they are facing three men who are all adults, including the Werewolf who is very powerful despite his thin body. Meanwhile, the boys do not look like they are hiding any particular special abilities, and it seems reckless for them to interfere.

「Shit!」

However, the three men take one look at the boys before cursing and fleeing down the far side of the alleyway.

「Look, they're pathetic!」

「Haha, don't you dare touch humans, you heretics!」

TLN: It's just occurred to me the members of the Church of White Light have been referring to non-humans as "heretics". The term used would also be more commonly translated as "demons", but "demons" didn't make sense to me when they first appeared in chapter 294. I'm going to keep it as heretics for now, though.

The boys happily jeer at the retreating backs of the three men.

The bespectacled young woman continued watching with the same expressionless face, and around her legs, the small younger sister snuggles closer to her, as if hiding behind her.

「Are you from the Church of White Light?」

The question comes from the young woman.

The blonde boy at the front of the three answers with a happy, proud look on his face.

「Yeah, we're followers of the Church of White Light. You saw that just now, right? We're in charge around here!」

One cannot say that they are getting ahead of themselves and speaking rashly, because of what they just achieved.

They made three grown men, who should definitely be stronger than themselves, scatter just by shouting at them. There is a remarkable kind of "authority" at work here.

「Is that so? It's very fortunate that we were able to meet such great people.」

Her eyes are relaxed and the tone of her voice is flat, as if she does not think that it is a fortunate situation at all.

However, being directly stared at by the beautiful blue eyes shining behind the glasses, a feeling rises in the boy's chest, turning his cheeks red.

「Y-yeah, I'm awesome, so even if guys like them come after you, I'll protect you!」

「Thank you very much for that.」

Her voice is even more monotonous and mechanical, but the boy seems to be focused only on the meaning of her words.

The boy's friends on either side of him interjected with 「Hey, it's unfair that only you get to act cool!」 but he took no notice of them.

「By the way, we're looking for the Church of White Light's orphanage –」

「Yeah, leave it to us, we'll take you there! Follow us!」

In high spirits, the boys take up the role of being her guide and begin leading her to the orphanage.

「Thank you very much.」

The young woman remains expressionless and emotionless as she thanks them.

「Fufu...」

Her younger sister, who is standing behind her as if she is hiding, is wearing an expression twisted with an evil smile.

Lily and Fiona have successfully met with followers of the Church of White Light.

Though, the fact that there are boys running freely in the slums, openly identifying themselves as the church's followers, was commonly known information that they heard at the Adventurers' Guild.

In other words, it was not very difficult to make contact with them if they tried.

「Eh, going on a pilgrimage with your sister, isn't that amazing!」

Seeing the boys walking through the alleyways as if they owned them, Lily and Fiona can understand the situation.

The inhabitants of the slums avoid the boys, and even grown men move out of their way for them.

The rumors overheard at the guild as well as what Lily learned from the information broker were true.

「No, no, everything is thanks to the guidance of the White Light.」

The boys, completely entranced by Fiona's beauty, do not doubt her words despite her monotonous tone. Things are going well.

Of course, the setting of being a 「nun on a pilgrimage with her sister」 is a complete lie.

Not taking her acting ability into account, the reason that this cover is working is likely because Fiona was born and raised in the Sinclair Republic, and is familiar with the teachings of the Cross.

In any case, even though the boys call themselves believers, there is no way that they have a deep knowledge of the true meaning behind the teachings of the Cross, so it is easy to deceive them.

In summary, Fiona's disguise as a believer is flawless.

At this rate, they will be able to infiltrate the orphanage easily and they might be able to meet with their leader, the so-called 「Priest-sama.」

Everything is going smoothly according to Lily's plan.

「Hey, that ring, could that be a present from your boyfriend?」

Until the blonde boy asks this question.

The ring that he is talking about is, of course, the one on her left hand's fourth finger, the sparkling silver ring full of her memories.

The fact that she has been walking while holding the staff 『Ainz Bloom*』 in her left hand likely made it even easier to spot the ring.

*TLN**: Previously translated as “Ainz Broom”

Regardless of the intent of the question, Fiona has no intention of answering with the truth, and Lily also tugs at her robe to warn her silently.

「... No.」

She cannot say anything other than the single word to immediately deny it.

However, perhaps Fiona should have at least told him that it is her most important, prized possession.

「Yeah, there's no way that there's an idiot in this day and age who'd give such a cheap, ugly ring as a present!」

If she had told him that, even this brainless thug would not dare speak ill of the ring, even as a joke.

However, it is too late now.

「Actually, I have an awesome ring that'd suit you perfectly, Hehe, we hoisted it from this stingy merchant who refused to donate, but -」

At the moment the boy proudly reaches into his breast pocket to pull out a ring with a large diamond embedded into it.

「Ah?」

Reflected in his eyes is the sight of Fiona raising her staff – no, already swinging it down with all her strength.

「Fugeh~」

TLN: Sound of getting rekt.

The staff sinks into his face with such force that he cannot even let out a scream.

The dull sound of flesh being struck. A hoarse groan. With a thud, the boy's body crashes onto the dirty, broken stone pavement. These sounds echo into the dark alleyway.

None of them are able to raise their voice.

「Kurono-san chose this for me... What kind of nonsense are you saying...?」

Murmuring these words at the boy who has already lost consciousness from the attack to his head, she continues her merciless attack.

This time she attacks not with the upper end of the staff, but the lower end. This lower end is the one that rests against the ground as she walks, and also doubles as an edge that she uses to carve magic circles into the ground. The boy's face is already covered with tears as well as blood gushing from his broken nose, and Fiona stabs the staff straight down into it.

The chisel-like end of the staff is as sharp as a pick, and stabs the boy's right eye perfectly. With the wet sound of flesh and blood being pierced, his eyeball begins to overflow and spill out of its socket.

Her next target is certainly his left eye – she will continue attacking, two more times, three more times, until she is satisfied.

「O-oi! What are you doing?!」

「Stop it!」

His two friends finally raise their voices.

But faced with the all-too-sudden violence and Fiona's overwhelming forcefulness that borders at insanity, they do not dare try to stop her with their own lives at risk.

Even so, Fiona's hands eventually stop, the boy's face already having been stabbed by the staff over ten times.

「Don't get in my way, please.」

As Fiona looks at the two remaining boys, the “survivors”, her blue eyes are spotted with gold. The color of her eyes looks ominous.

The eyes behind the lenses of her glasses are definitely blue. However, as if holding the golden color of pure bloodthirst, her eyes are shining brilliantly.

Right now, her eyes could be described as chaotic rather than beautiful, and her gaze is more than enough to make the boys tremble in fear.

「H-hyii!」

Without showing a single sign of the spirit of self-sacrifice taught in the scriptures, the boys scramble to abandon their friend and flee.

「Ah, what a waste, Fiona.」

The one who does not allow their escape is Lily, who has been silent this whole time.

With an expression that looks as if she is about to say 「Ah, shit」, her face and behavior are enchanting. Her unusual state is probably because her consciousness is currently that of an adult.

She waves her hand lightly and balls of light appear in the air, and in the next instant they soar towards the backs of the fleeing boys like arrows.

They travel possibly even faster than arrows as they fly past the boys in an instant, wrapping around them before exploding.

「Gyah!」

The two boys let out a short scream as they fall onto the ground, clutching their eyes as they writhe in pain.

It is not a gentle flash of light like the one she used to deal with the academy students who had insolently dared to pat her head. It is bright enough to blind anyone who looks at it directly, and it emits a searing heat that would still burn the eyelids of those who do not.

It is not a pain that the likes of these young thugs can withstand. It is impossible for them to stand up and continue to try to escape.

「Leave it at that, Fiona, it would be problematic if someone came here.」

「But this person is still alive, you know?」

Giving a small sigh, Lily creates light in her hand once more.

This time it is not a ball of light, nor a beam. It is a Force Edge, made of searing white light.

The blonde boy's face is already caved in to the point that even the miracle medicine of the Fairies* would not restore it to normal, and Lily's blade of light now sinks into his neck.

*TLN**: Previously translated as "fairy's miracle drug"

The sound and smell of burning flesh fill the air. Like a hot knife cutting through butter, Lily easily removes his head.

He was originally a garbage-like human being, but he is now literally garbage that is fit to be discarded in this dirty alleyway.

「He's dead. Now, let us hurry onward.」

「... Alright. I apologize for making such a mess.」

「It's okay. Anyone who speaks badly of Kurono should die, after all.」

Fiona reluctantly admits her mistake, but Lily gives her a gentle, understanding smile. They have a wonderful friendship.

「By the way, Lily-san. Though it is silly for me ask, we no longer have a guide, do we?」

Fiona seems to have regained her sanity; her glasses have begun to work again to disguise her eyes with a blue color.

In reply to Fiona's question,

「It's alright, things will work out –」

Lily, wearing the wonderful smile of a little girl, points her tiny finger up at the sky.

「– because the full moon has risen already.」

And with that, she removes her apprentice Priest's robe with a single movement, revealing a black one-piece dress covering her young body and two pairs of Fairy wings.

In the next instant, the light of her Oracle Field wraps around her like a cocoon – before she realizes it, Fiona sees that Lily is now a beautiful young woman.

She is still wearing her magic items of disguise, the ribbons and contact lenses, so her twin-tails remain black and her eyes are still blue.

「Well then, I'll be relying on you.」

「Yes, leave it to me.」

A needle of light, Lily's nightmarish Characteristic Ability that allows her to tamper with the minds of others as she pleases, forms in her hand. The two boys are still writhing in pain on the ground as she approaches them with a sweet smile.

CHAPTER 307

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ISKIA FORTRESS COMMAND ROOM (1)

The academy students of Spada are using the command room located at the center of the Iskia Fortress for its originally intended purpose.

Currently, there is a map of the Iskia Hills spread out on the large desk. The room is filled with chairs as well as the personal data of all three hundred students participating in the open-field exercise, squad compositions and other information.

Unlike battles where there is a clear opposing army to fight, it is just an exercise where there should be no shortage of monsters to fight – or at least, it was supposed to be.

「Just what the hell is happening in the Iskia Hills...」

Wilhart is sitting on the general's chair at the head of the table, and seems extremely exhausted as he mutters those words.

However, not a single person is able to criticize the pathetic-looking Second Prince. Not because of the difference in their social status, but because everyone is feeling the same way.

There is a heavy atmosphere in the command room right now.

It is a result of the mixture of various emotions such as unease, agitation and fear, yet the biggest factor is definitely fatigue.

「For now the monsters have fallen back, so we have room to breathe.」

The one speaking is Nero, and his tone is even more listless than usual. He is almost certainly being tormented by his considerable exhaustion.

No matter how much he is praised as a genius, he is still only one man. If he continues to fight, the fatigue to his body and mind accumulate, and eventually he reaches the limit of his magical energy.

Battle – Yes, the battle with the monster army that appeared suddenly in the Iskia Hills has been continuing until just a short while ago.

In the beginning, it was the battle to retreat.

Wing Road lived up to their Rank 5 title, forcefully creating an opening to retreat through, and though the teachers valiantly fulfilled their role as the rear guard, they were almost completely wiped out. Thanks to them, not a single life was lost out of the two hundred and fifty students, and they made it to the fortress safely.

However, that was not the end of the battle.

After midday, the fight turned towards defending the fortress from the army of monsters that had persistently chased them.

They would normally rely on the teachers in such a situation, but as over half of them perished in the earlier skirmish, the students themselves had to engage in this full-scale battle.

In the end, their defense succeeded.

Their losses were insignificant. In addition, the outside of the fortress is now littered with the corpses of the monsters they faced.

However, it was just one battle, so it was far from saying that they exterminated this monster army that contains every single monster in this dungeon.

In other words, the true battle has only just begun.

「So, what are we going to do now, general?」

Nero asks this question with his elbows on the desk, resting his face in his hands. This is indeed an important question.

On paper, Wilhart is officially the general. The few dozen management cadets gathered in the command room are awaiting his response.

「Hmm, no, give me a moment, I'm still think –」

Wilhart gives quite a pathetic answer as he sits in a troubled pose, repeatedly tapping his right fist against his forehead.

「Ah, jeez. Onii-chan, you're really stupid!」

Like the roaring of thunder, this high-pitched abuse echoes throughout the command room.

If one were to search the entire world, they would only find a single person who calls Wilhart their older brother – none other than his younger sister, Charlotte Tristan Spada.

Charlotte, who has risen from her seat in anger, starts announcing their strategy in Wilhart's place.

「What we're going to do is obvious, isn't it? We're going to defeat those monsters!」

In that moment, a collective sigh of 「haah」 filled the command room.

But the one who looks like he wants go let out the greatest sigh of them all, Nero, makes eye contact with Charlotte, telling her, 「keep talking.」

Charlotte clears her throat in a self-important manner, as if to say, 「leave it to me!」 and then begins her explanation.

「Everyone remembers it right, the huge monster that appeared at the start. Its name is Greed...ago?」

TLN: Gustav made the same error in chapter 299 – the “Gore” part in “Greed-Gore” is written “ゴア/go-a” in Japanese, and she mixed it up into アゴ/a-go.

「Gore.」

「Greed-Gore!」

Nero with the perfect assist – As expected of the teamwork of a Rank 5 party.

But Charlotte's cheeks turn as red as her hair; she seems slightly embarrassed.

「Yes, this Greed-Gore guy is the general of those monsters! If we just defeat it, we'll wipe out the whole monster army!」

Her over-confident words cause a stir in the command room.

As if representing the surprised leadership cadets, Wilhart asks.

「How can you be sure?」

「Who knows.」

Charlotte answers coldly, as if it is Wilhart's fault for asking her the question.

It seems she really hates her older brother. Even though he is looking at her seriously in this situation where they have to work together, she is looking the other way.

「... Nero.」

Quickly realizing that they are making no progress, Wilhart subtly appoints the prince who is his childhood friend to be a mediator between him and Charlotte.

「That's what Safi's analysis came up with.」

The room stirs again at the news of the reliable source of this information, but the person they want an explanation from, Safiel Maya Hydra, is not here.

There are only two members of Wing Road sitting here in this command room, Nero and Charlotte. Kai and Safiel are on guard duty.

Their enemies are not humans, but monsters, and there are many nocturnal species among them.

Though the monsters probably do not have the intelligence to perform surprise attacks at night or in the early morning, it is still possible that they might commence a large-scale assault during the night.

Either way, Wing Road forms the core of their combat potential, so at least one member is on the lookout at all times.

「Would you please explain in more detail?」

Setting that aside, the important thing is Safiel's analysis regarding the Greed-Gore.

Without hesitation, Nero fluently begins his explanation.

「Those monsters are under the effects of a parasite.」

「A parasite, you say?!」

As expected, the first to voice is surprise is Wilhart.

But, upon consideration, it is an explanation that makes sense.

Parasites are a magical Status Effect, though it falls under a rather special category.

The effects are self-explanatory; they infest the host and causes abnormalities.

A typical example of a parasite would be the Draining Seeds, used by many plant-type monsters.

If one is infested by those seeds, the body's nutrients and magical power is drained away.

Other parasites that cause other Status Effects in the host such as Confusion, Sleep or Paralysis also exist.

It would not be unusual for a parasite that controls the minds of its host to exist.

「It's been confirmed that it's of the lightning-type.」

「Confirmed, you say?」

「Using Wrath-Pun's arm, the Centaurs' skulls were –」

「No, that is not what I meant. What I'm trying to ask is, how did you confirm the parasite and its type? I didn't want to hear the gruesome details of your method!」

Wilhart seems to have returned mostly to normal, and adds a retort that is rare to hear from him.

It is not clear whether Nero was playing dumb or is just not thinking clearly, but he continues his explanation.

「There were lightning-type snakes in their heads.」

「Lightning-type snakes?」

「They're probably the body segments originating from the main body of a magical creature.」

The leadership cadets with good academic grades, including Wilhart, show their understanding of this explanation.

「If the host body is damaged enough that it is killed, they seem to also disappear. When we split a head open, I saw it as well, but the snake was only there for a moment before it disappeared.」

Everyone nods, thinking, "It's a good thing that they're weak."

Of course, it is easy to imagine the dangerous scenario where the parasite lives after being seemingly defeated, only to come after them and take them as a host next.

If that were to happen, it would be more accurate to call it a curse rather than a parasite.

「If Nell was here, we'd be able to take care of them easily... What rotten luck.」

Will hears Nero's muttering with his sharp ears, but he can understand how he feels.

「If it is parasites we're dealing with, we can use Dispel on the Status Effects to attack. Let us make sure our Priests know this.」

If Status Effects exist, of course, there is magic to counter them.

The magic that removes various abnormalities and curses, returning the target to a normal condition is called Dispel, and the ones who specialize in using such magic are Priests, who take on the role of Healers.

Of course, even Wilhart, who is not a member of Wing Road, is well aware of the talent and ability of Nell Julius Elroad.

In other words, it would be more effective for her to perform incantations for Dispels to silence the army of infested monsters rather than wide-ranged area attack magic.

However, it is meaningless to discuss a person who is not here, and the important thing is to discuss measures that can be taken realistically, as Wilhart is doing.

「I understand that the monsters are being controlled by a lightning-type parasite. But how can you say for sure that the Greed-Gore is the main body? Is it not possible that the main body could be disguised as an inconspicuous monster?」

The huge dragon that leads the monsters has overwhelming power, so it has no reason to run or hide.

A monster that has an underhanded ability like parasites could be considered weaker than those with pure battle strength.

Therefore, it would be expected for a monster with such an ability to avoid direct combat. Wilhart's line of thinking is reasonable, and nobody can ridicule him for overthinking things.

「She figured it out through reverse detection.」

「To go that far, even in the middle of combat...」

Unlike Wilhart, who clearly shows his surprise, Nero continues explaining in a plain, matter-of-fact tone.

「The segmented bodies are connected to the main body by 『electromagnetic waves』 characteristic of the lightning-type. Safi's servant confirmed with its search that the Greed-Gore is at the center of the network before being swallowed up by the swarm of bird monsters.」

The Characteristic Ability possessed by lightning-type monsters is 『electromagnetic waves』 which allow them to communicate with distant allies without the use of Telepathy. This fact is not particularly well-known, but should be common knowledge for those who are diligent in their studies.

Summoners who use lightning-type monsters and Mages who are skilled with lightning magic can also use electromagnetic waves as a means of communication.

However, it is not a major technique, and it is doubtful that there is even a single person who can use it among the three hundred students here.

「I see... But the Greed-Gore is supposed to be only of the earth-type in the first place. It is hard to imagine that it would use a lightning-type Characteristic Ability. It could be that it is also simply being infested.」

「Safi also said there was something strange about that. Its color seems different, so it's possible that it has a mutation granting it this other ability.」

Mutations in monsters are not a particularly rare phenomenon.

A simple change in its body color, its body size, physical abilities, changes to its element type, additional Characteristic Abilities, etcetera. There is a huge variety of possible changes.

That is the reason that a mutation can cause even a small, comical Punpun to undergo a terrifying transformation into a Rank 5 monster.

One cannot rule out any possible variations in a monster.

「In any case, there's no mistaking that the Greed-Gore is at the center of it.」

「Hmm, you are right.」

For now, the enemy general's identity alone is valuable information.

「With that, I would like that you continue your explanation on the communication ability of the electromagnetic waves.」

Wilhart has returned to a state where words can clearly reach him, and Nero answers.

「Unlike Telepathy, electromagnetic waves are blocked by terrain and can only travel in straight lines. Normally, the communication to and from the Greed-Gore should have been impossible in this field of hills, but that problem is cleared by one of the monsters in the sky, which it's using as a relay.」

「I see, that is the reason the flying monsters did not participate in the attack!」

This is the real disguise.

The best place to hide a tree is a forest – To conceal which monster is the one with the ability to relay the electromagnetic waves, the swarm of bird monsters stayed in the air.

「I guess the Salamander is there as a guard, just in case.」

If a monster as powerful as the Salamander was the one with the relaying ability, there would be no need to disguise itself among the other monsters.

「Conversely, if it is going so far as to disguise the relay monster, it's likely that the monsters would be unable to act if we could interrupt the communications with the main body. Or at least, the majority of the monster army's combat ability would be lost. Am I wrong?」

「You're sharp, Will, but it's smart enough to go through all that trouble. You think it'll just let us interrupt it that easily?」

It is also not guaranteed that there is only one monster with the relaying ability.

「And if the Greed-Gore gets in range for the electromagnetic waves to just travel directly, it's over.」

「Hmm, indeed... No, in the first place, why did the Greed-Gore not participate in the battle itself?」

Thinking back, the Greed-Gore appeared with an intense demonstration of its own power, but it left the attack to the monsters under its control while disappearing somewhere else.

No, they were the ones who retreated and lost sight of the Greed-Gore as they ran down the hill.

The only thing that they are certain of is that it did not take part in the battle. However, its presence was not lurking nearby.

「It took its monster army and went somewhere – wait, could it be?!」

「You’ve finally realized? They’re probably marching down the highway right now.」

Nero spits out his words with a serious tone.

Marching down the highway, in other words, they are heading for places where humans live, the various villages in Spada. More specifically –

「Iskia Village!」

「If they’re quick, won’t they make it there by tomorrow morning?」

「Is this the time to be saying that so carelessly! If we do not let them know quickly, it will to be a huge problem!」

Wilhart inadvertently rises from the chair as he shouts.

A huge army including a Rank 5 monster are about to attack a village where people live.

It would be much worse than some poorly-executed invasion. If they do not evacuate in time, the whole village could be annihilated.

「Calm down, Will, have you forgotten our situation here? We’re the ones who need help right now.」

「Ugu...」

The impending crisis of his own country’s people being massacred causes great impatience in Wilhart, but he desperately forces himself to face reality as he accepts Nero’s words.

For now, he sits down once more.

「Like I said, if we just defeat the Greed-Gore, everything is solved!」

Charlotte's voice rings out in the command room again.

This time, her opinion is more persuasive and seems to be accepted; most of the leadership cadets seem to be in agreement.

Indeed, if they could just defeat the Greed-Gore in control of the monster army, that would be a way out of this critical situation. However.

「How on earth are we going to defeat the Greed-Gore?」

The method, on which everything is hinged, is asked.

How could they defeat the Greed-Gore that leads this huge monster army? The Greed-Gore itself is a Rank 5 monster that possesses the highest grade of combat strength.

Without even thinking, one would know that it is impossible – Or that should be the case, but Charlotte's golden eyes are blazing and shining as she speaks.

「Of course, we of Wing Road will go to defeat it!」

With a completely exasperated look on his face, Will sighs.

If he says this, he would definitely face his little sister's lightning* – no, perhaps literally, her lightning-type magical attack would explode over his head.

TLN: “Someone's lightning” is a Japanese figure of speech that means someone's wrath or anger.

Even so, he has to say it. Even if it's just a formality, Wilhart is the general responsible for the lives of these three hundred students.

「... I cannot permit the use of this strategy.」

「Wha –」

Wilhart explains, stopping Charlotte's storm of abusive words for now.

「Charlotte, I do not take Wing Road's abilities lightly.」

「Then –」

「If Wing Road left the fortress, who would defend it?」

The Iskia Fortress is indeed a strong fortress, its ancient defensive capabilities intact. However, the ones defending it now would not be veteran knights of Spada, but a mere three hundred students who are still apprentices.

Their enemy is an army of monsters, with the parasites granting them a leadership even stronger than that of the Knights' Order.

They can fight without feeling fear, simply continuing to fight as ordered; they could even be called the ideal soldiers.

Would the students alone be able to continue holding the fortress against such a fearsome army of monsters?

「I have no reason to doubt the Wing Road's ability as a Rank 5 party. I saw enough from your actions until now and from the battle during the day. If you were not there, we would have likely perished on the hill.

That is the reason Wing Road is the core of our army. Because you are here, the students still have hope and are able to fight. Hope that things will work out because Wing Road is here, we will not be defeated by these monsters – However, even if you were to leave only temporarily, if the monsters went on the offensive after you left, what would happen... Surely you know the answer to that?」

「But, just because of that, at this rate –」

「We will call for reinforcements!」

Will's brain finally comes up with a plan to overcome this critical situation.

Based on the information about the Greed-Gore and its monster army that Nero has provided, he is sure that there is no other option.

「Whether it is the Knights' Order of Spada or a rescue team of adventurers, it does not matter. We will seek reinforcements and continue to defend the fortress until they arrive.」

Wilhart's suggested strategy follows the textbook down to the letter, but that is also why it is the most solid, realistic plan.

Even the leadership cadets who normally ridicule him as the 「deluded prince」 show their understanding as they express their opinions.

In the end, opinions are split roughly evenly between which of the two plans is better – to exterminate the Greed-Gore, or to continue defending the fortress.

To gather more approval for his own plan, Wilhart continues speaking.

「Fortunately, we have enough provisions and weapons to last us the planned duration of the open-field exercise. Even if we waited for reinforcements from the heavily-armored infantry of the 『Braveheart』 from Spada, we would not run out of supplies before they arrive.」

They originally planned to be here for a considerable amount of time, engaging in battle with an unknown number of enemies. There was no oversight in the preparations of adequate supplies.

Therefore, one of the conditions for carrying out a defense where resupplying is impossible has already been met.

「Hold on a minute, if we go to defeat the Greed-Gore right now, that –」

Realizing that more people are agreeing with the fortress defense plan, Charlotte panics as she tries to offer a rebuttal, but Nero raises a hand to stop her.

「I think you know this already, Will, but if we're to defeat the Greed-Gore, now is the best time for it.」

「I am aware of that; if we defend the fortress you will be exhausted, especially since Princess Nell is not present.」

「Even so, you want to defend the fortress?」

「Of course. This is the best strategy to ensure everyone's survival. Let me ask you in return; if Wing Road were to face the Greed-Gore, could you win?」

「Of course we could!」

「Well, we could if we were to face it now.」

「In that case, what if the Greed-Gore were to open a hole in the earth and escape?」

「!」

「Well, we wouldn't be able to do anything about that.」

Charlotte stiffens in frustration, while Nero speaks as if he already knew that this would be the answer from the beginning.

It is definitely feasible for Wing Road to defeat the Greed-Gore. But that would only happen if the Greed-Gore keeps fighting until the end.

They have no way to prevent it from escaping, and if their foe was cunning, it could even use its army as a distraction while it does so. In fact, this is the most likely scenario.

Exterminating the Greed-Gore could succeed. However, 「could」 means that it is not certain.

「Now then, I do not think it needs to be asked, but anyone who is against defending the iron wall of the Iskia Fortress should raise their hands now.」

Thus, the plan of defending the fortress becomes the strategy that will determine the fates of the three hundred students.

CHAPTER 308

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ISKIA FORTRESS COMMAND ROOM (2)

After it is decided that they will hold the fortress, Wilhart requests the other students, including his sister Charlotte, to leave the command room. Though even if he had not done so, there are a mountain of tasks to perform; they cannot afford to continue to talk at leisure in the command room.

It is supposed to be a command room for the general of an army, but when one is in this solid, well-defended room alone, it feels like a prison.

However, right now, Wilhart does not have the time for such sentimental thoughts.

In his mind, he is making predictions about the current situation as well as what is yet to come.

First, the monster army led by the Greed-Gore is about to attack the nearby Iskia Village.

「We don't have any hard evidence for that, but we can only assume that will be the case...」

It is unknown how long Iskia village will be able to hold out, but even in the worst case scenario of being completely wiped out in a single day, the news of the large invading monster army would be spread to nearby areas. Of course, it would not take long for this information to reach even as far as Spada.

「I'm sure Father would come rushing over here.」

It took them five days to reach Iskia Village from Spada, but the elite Knights' Order of Spada would be able to cut that time in half.

And then the problem would be what happens after the Knights' Order reach Iskia Village.

「But once they see that huge army, our chances of survival would be viewed as hopeless.」

There is no way the fact that students of the Royal Spada Academy including Spada's Second Prince and Third Princess, Avalon's First Prince and the famous young nobles of the Four Great Houses came to the Iskia Fortress for the open-field exercise would be forgotten.

Since they have this many students, it is hard to imagine that they would be abandoned so easily. Not to mention the fact that Leonhart would march onward to Iskia Fortress to rescue his own son and daughter at all costs.

However, there would be an unprecedented army of monsters standing in the way.

To begin with, Iskia Village would become the frontline of hell. Would they split off a rescue force heading for the Iskia Fortress?

If Leonhart is there, as the king, he may prioritize the safety of the people even above his own beloved family.

Even if his father made such a decision, Wilhart would bear no grudge against him, as he still has the pride of being a part of the royal family.

「Either way, we need to relay accurate information to them –」

He reaches an obvious conclusion. But coming to such a realization, he cannot help but letting out a heavy sigh.

「A messenger... No, that person might as well be on a suicide mission.」

There are various ways to relay the information, but the method that is the most realistic and has the highest chance of succeeding is to simply send a person to deliver the message.

But the reason they are defending the castle in the first place is none other than the fact that they are surrounded by enemies in all directions.

Wing Road might be able to easily get through the enemies, but they cannot leave the fortress as they are absolutely vital to its defense.

Therefore, he would have to give someone else the task of passing through the countless monsters lying in wait.

It does not even need to be said that this is extraordinarily dangerous. It really is a suicide mission.

「- Sorry, Seria. I have to give you another dangerous task.」

「No, please do not concern yourself with that, Will-sama, because I am your guard maid.」

As Wilhart whispers to himself, Seria replies. He does not know when she entered the command room.

Without any movement of her maid uniform's long skirt or her light green hair, quite naturally, she stands next to her master as if waiting for him.

And as if it is a natural thing, Wilhart shows no surprise.

「If I had to say, I have to question an order to leave your side, considering that I am supposed to be your guard.」

「Do not say that; there is nobody more suited for this task than you, Seria, even among the teachers. In any case, you are the dark one who maneuvers around the underworld of Spada -」

「I was merely an assassin for the Spada's secret intelligence; please refrain from adding unnecessary settings to my background.」

Wilhart is wearing a disappointed expression, while Seria has a cold look in her eyes.

This is a daily event for this master-and-servant pair, but this time, it feels a little forced.

「You do not seem too worried.」

「Are you dissatisfied?」

「No, I am expressing my delight at your growth.」

Seria's words could be sarcastic, but from the expression on her face that is unlike her usual cold indifference, he knows that she sincerely means those words.

「Avoid enemies to the best of your ability. The only one with the ability to escape from them is you, Seria, with the divine protection of 『Shadow Walker - Hanzoma.』」

『Shadow Walker - Hanzoma』 was not famous enough to be known to the average person, but it is among the best divine protection for those of the assassin-class.

Wilhart has heard from Seria herself that this divine protection granted her abilities suited for covert actions, such as being able to conceal her own presence, silent movement and increased speed.

Seria often has harsh comments to say towards her master, but she is the reserved type that does not talk about herself often.

Wilhart remembers her divine blessing of Hanzoma well, as it was the only thing she proudly told him about herself.

「- I learned it directly from my senpai. She was a Slime who loved freedom, so she has quit secret intelligence and become an adventurer, but -」

She once told him this.

「We don't have the time to hesitate. We didn't that time we were chased by the Wrath-Pun, and we don't now. No, even if I am a general only in name, the fact that the lives of others have been entrusted to me, this responsibility is even heavier.」

He knows this logically, but whether he can execute the order now depends on his nature as a person.

Wilhart acquired the determination to give orders without hesitation in the Galahad mountain range.

Although the circumstances that brought about this change were produced by sheer misfortune.

「May I voice one insecurity that I have?」

「What is it?」

「If I go to deliver the message, there will be nobody who would put their lives on the line to protect Will-sama's body.」

This is not the royal palace of Spada. Therefore, there is nobody who would display their honorable spirit for him just because he is the prince. There are definitely some who would do so for Princess Charlotte, but as for the famously unpopular Prince Wilhart...

「I do not care; in fact, is that not what I want? Now I can say that I am fighting with my life on the line, just like everyone else is doing, can I not?」

「I did not want you to put on a brave appearance in this situation.」

Wilhart deceives her with a light laugh. However, surprisingly, those words might be what he truly feels.

And there is no doubt that Seria knows this. She knows her master at least this well.

「The situation is indeed dire, but I am not in despair. The ones here are the elite students who bear Spada's future on their shoulders, including Wing Road. We will definitely be able to endure the monsters' attacks.」

「If I end up losing strength partway through my mission, the arrival of reinforcements will be delayed considerably.」

「Hmph, I believe that this will not happen. I believe this because I have faith in you, Seria.」

「... Thank you very much. I will risk my own life and I will definitely fulfil my role.」

As if to hide her faintly red cheeks, Seria lowers her head in a deep bow.

「Indeed!」

With this, Wilhart gives a satisfied nod.

「Seria, I have already prepared the rescue request documents for the Knights' Order and adventurers' guild. Take them with you.」

Struggling to return to her normal, cool expression, Seria gracefully accepts the documents that Wilhart has quickly finished writing.

Wilhart's royal crest of Spada and Nero's royal crest of Avalon are included on both of these documents.

This is not simply for the purpose of identification; they serve as official evidence that it is a royal order.

If these are presented within their countries, the Knights' Order and adventurers' guild would make these orders their highest priority.

「And I have one more personal request; I would like you to hear it.」

There is one more document.

It is a written request that is normally handled by the adventurers' guild.

This one does not have the royal crest of Avalon; only the royal crest of Spada is stamped on it. It is a quest contract, making a request to a certain adventurer.

As if Seria knows who it is addressed to, she answers without letting him finish.

「Yes, I will deliver this to Kurono-sama.」

「Why are you acting so important, baka-aniki!」

TLN: Probably don't even need a *TLN* for this but baka = idiot and aniki = older brother

With both her red twin tails and her cape fluttering behind her, Charlotte walks angrily through the corridors of the Iskia Fortress, not making any effort to hide her dissatisfaction.

She is upset because she firmly believes that the best plan that would definitely get them out of the situation would be to exterminate the Greed-Gore; however, that plan was quickly rejected.

「Acting like that, does he really want to stop us from doing our roles that badly...」

Even if it is just in name, it was a mistake to appoint Wilhart as the general.

If Nero had become the general as everyone had wanted, Wilhart would be nothing more than an ordinary soldier with no say in the plan. Then they would already be on their way to defeat the Greed-Gore, leaving the fortress's defense to the students.

If they did that, the situation would be resolved before sunrise, the students and Iskia Village would both be safe and everyone would live happily ever after – At least, Charlotte truly believes this.

This is why she can only think that defending the fortress and prolonging the battle would be completely meaningless, and that this is a poor plan that would only increase the number of casualties.

And her rage is only increased further by the fact that the one who had pressed for this plan was her baka-aniki who normally does nothing but spout delusions from his mouth.

「I'm not going to blindly follow the orders from a guy like that, you know.」

Letting out an unpleasant mutter, Charlotte reaches the door that she was heading for. In her bad mood, she violently throws it open.

「Safi, are you here?」

「... What is it?」

Before Charlotte even heard her listless response, the sight of her party member and best friend, Safiel Maya Hydra, appeared before her glittering golden eyes.

They are currently in one of the towers at the corners of the fortress. Until Charlotte entered the room, Safiel was in here alone.

She is sitting elegantly in a chair, holding her spell book that is as thick as an encyclopedia, 『Immortal Bind』 in one hand.

It looks like she is reading without a care, but she is currently on duty watching the fortress. In other words, she is using her servants.

Her newest servant, the undead Wrath-Pun with a metal arm, is likely now guarding the front gate and getting along well with Kai.

In other important places, she may have placed crows for observation and skeleton soldiers to patrol. But Charlotte, not being an expert, has no way of telling where or how many servants she has set up.

「I have something I want you to do.」

「Finding the Greed-Gore?」

Safiel has a cynical, slightly ill-natured smile on her face.

「Have you heard already?」

Charlotte glares at her, as if she wants to tell her that her that listening to others is a bad habit.

「I know even without hearing it. Your plan of exterminating it was rejected by your delusional prince onii-chan, right?」

「Yes, you're right! That's exactly what happened!」

Charlotte raises her voice as her anger returns. Safiel simply watches her with her shining purple Demon Eyes from behind her glasses.

「Well, I don't mind if we're defending the castle or anything.」

「Eh, even you're saying that, Safi?!」

「However, if Sharl asks me in a cute way, then I might change my mind.」

Saying this, Safiel's ill-natured smile increases three-fold. Charlotte forgets her anger and steps back a little.

「A-ask in a cute way, what do you mean by that?」

「For example, how about something like this?」

Safiel passes Charlotte the open spell book in her hand – no, another book that was open and hidden on top of the spell book.

“You really were just reading a book?” Charlotte thinks, but the words will not come out of her mouth.

「W-w-what is this...」

With clearly blushing cheeks, she glares at Safiel again.

On the page that Charlotte is looking at, there is an illustration of a half-naked young girl with long, black hair in maid's clothes, who is in agony as she is entangled by tentacles that are being sent forth by a tall, evil-looking man with sharp eyes standing next to her.

「"What", you say, it's a porn boo –」

「That's not what I meant!」

It seems that this book is an obscene novel, the kind that is restricted for underage readers.

「I thought this might be a good reference for you to ask me in a cute way.」

「Haah, haah... Are you an idiot?」

As Charlotte says this, her eyes are diligently reading the sentences of the book.

She does not notice that Safiel is observing her closely with an expression that has turned from an ill-natured smile into a lewd one.

「See, if you ask me like that, I might get the motivation to look for the Greed-Gore.」

She is in a dilemma because she cannot simply say, “I’d rather not ask you than do something so embarrassing.”

Charlotte is an extraordinarily talented Mage, but she specializes in offensive magic and therefore does not have special abilities outside of direct combat to do something like searching for an enemy.

Without the help of the genius Necromancer and the countless servants under her command, Charlotte would not be able to find the Greed-Gore.

「Uu, gununu...」

TLN: The sound she makes while making a hard decision, I guess.

Charlotte needs to find the Greed-Gore’s location as the first part of her plan to defeat it, so she is unable to refuse.

「I-I’ll do it.」

With a face as red as if all the blood in her body has rushed into her head, she makes up her mind.

「I see.」

Safiel responds with a cool expression, hiding her smile.

To trick the princess who is her best friend into doing something like this. This is the cunning of the Hydra family.

「Go-goshujin-sama...」

TLN: Master

Charlotte is facing the ground and her shoulders are shaking.

「Goshujin-sama, please hear Charl’s shameless request –」

And so, Charlotte vigorously shouts a line that is filled with words that would never be allowed to be printed in normal books in Spada.

「Haah... Haah...」

The embarrassment that Charlotte is enduring is so great that it looks like steam will come out of her head. Safiel speaks to her with a gentle smile on her face.

「I didn't think that you'd actually do it.」

「UGAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!」

A flash of lightning appears alongside her scream.

Safiel's 『Black-haired Maid's Tentacle Training Diary』 (Circle Morjura Volume – Retail Price 820 Klans) is pierced by a chant-less Line Sagita and turns into a pile of ash.

After a while, her anger and embarrassment has subsided and her reasoning has returned, so Safiel returns the conversation to its original subject with no signs of regret for what she did.

「I want materials from that black Greed-Gore myself, so have no intention of letting the Knights' Order and adventurers have it.」

「If that's the case you should have told me that from the start!」

「I'm sure Kai would rather fight a Rank 5 monster than be stuck here in the fortress, too.」

Ignoring Charlotte's complaint, Safiel continues talking.

「The problem is Nero. He has some ideas about the merits of defending the fortress, but above all, going out to defeat the Greed-Gore would be troublesome.」

「Ugh, you're right...」

Seeing Nero's behavior in the command room earlier, one can guess that he would not be interested in going to exterminate it.

Charlotte is thinking that perhaps Nero was insincere in his agreement with Wilhart and might actually want to do it.

The reason he will not do it is because he wants to follow Wilhart's plan.

「Maybe if you ask him in a cute way, Nero will change his mind as well –」

「Don't say such stupid things!」

「But Nero will be fine, it'll work out.」

As Safiel says this confidently, Charlotte gives her a doubtful look.

「Really?」

「Yes. After all, you're cute even when you're not making a request, Charlotte.」

In response to these words of questionable meaning, Charlotte could only return a bewildered expression.

CHAPTER 309

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – THE CHURCH OF WHITE LIGHT ORPHANAGE (1)

「– May the White Light guide your path.」

This passage is recited in chorus by the voices of the underage boys and girls.

Wearing matching white robes, they are of course the inhabitants of the orphanage and followers of the Church of White Light.

They are in a chapel in the orphanage – though it is not something that was constructed solely for this use; it is merely another abandoned room of the orphanage that has been reorganized by hand.

It is a shabby room, but it is the result of the hard work done by these young believers of god.

One could say this is the form that religions should have. A large temple is not necessary to worship god.

They are offering their prayers to the large cross that has been erected here. They did this yesterday, they are doing it today and they will do it tomorrow.

「The rebirth ceremony for the new Guardians will now begin.」

On the stage facing the thirty believers, truly guiding them, is the young, blonde priest.

The uniformed girl, the red mage is waiting nearby. But this time, she appears to be able to read the atmosphere in the room, and stays quiet.

Standing on either side of them is a pair of masked giants known as Guardians. They are standing there like statues, not making even the slightest movement.

The darkness of night has already fallen on them, and in these slums that are filled with shadows, it is especially dark.

The inside of the chapel is lit only by the flames of some candles spread out around the room, creating a solemn atmosphere.

The vast presence of the young priest is even more mysterious here.

His white face is of unparalleled beauty. He produces the pure white jewel, 『Diamond Heaven』, from his breast pocket.

「Tonight, nine new Guardians will be reborn, now let us pray as their miraculous resurrection begins –」

A loud bang echoes out, interrupting his quiet speech.

The double-doors of the chapel open violently and the gaze of the boys and girls gathered here, including the priest, are drawn to it.

And the one who is making the noise that blasphemously interrupts this holy ceremony is –

「Ugh... Hel... Help me...」

It is the face of a well-known boy.

There are less than fifty children living at the orphanage. All of them are more than well-acquainted with each other; they are companions in their belief, with a strong sense of community.

This boy is a senior among them, and from his appearance, he looks to be nothing more than a juvenile delinquent. Even so, he is a good leader among the younger children of the orphanage; he takes care of them and loves them as his own brothers and sisters.

Now, he has been reduced to pathetically, frantically begging for someone to save him using a manner of speech that is difficult to understand.

But even more pitiful are the countless needles piercing his skull.

「Ah... Aah...」

The needles embedded deep into his skull are releasing a white light fitting for a believer of the Church of White Light.

However, there is nobody who would be thankful for this.

In such an unusual situation, it would be normal for someone would rush over to help him. Yet everyone is holding their breath, unable to move.

And they are right to be staying right where they are.

「Ah, ah, AAAAAHHH NOOOOOOOOOOOO –」

As he screams, his head flies off his shoulders.

The needles of light exploded. The only one who is calm enough to realize this is probably the young priest.

The children who are unfortunate enough to be standing too close have their robes stained with black-red blood and spinal fluid.

In the next moment, panic and screaming begins in the chapel – or at least, it is supposed to.

「Good evening.」

The voice of a young girl even sweeter than the singing of a bird and a pale green light gentler than the morning sun enters the chapel. Their attention is once more focused on the door.

A single young girl stands there.

She is as beautiful as one would expect of the owner of such a voice – no, even more beautiful than one would expect; her beautiful face has a captivating charm.

She must be an angel, sent by the Goddess Aria herself to answer their prayers – or so they might have believed, if the boy's head had not flown off.

Indeed; even the young children know that this girl surrounded in beautiful light is the one who killed him.

In short, she is an enemy.

「That appearance, you are a Fairy... What business does a heretic have in such a holy place?」

The first one to speak to her is their leader, the young priest.

His tone is flat as usual, but the red mage girl may have noticed that there is just a hint of hatred in his voice.

「I've come to punish the naughty children.」

「... An adventurer.」

The Fairy gives a joke-like response with a beautiful smile. But from just that, the young priest is able to get a good idea of the situation.

「Hmm, it seems that you have enough self-awareness to know that you're a naughty child.」

Rather than calling him sharp for noticing so quickly, the Fairy speaks through her small mouth as if she is mocking him.

In short, even if he called it a religion or whatever, he knew himself that his actions were so criminal that it would warrant his extermination by adventurers.

In fact, every member involved in the extreme attack on the Elf merchant couple's mansion the other day are all gathered here.

However, the young followers do not realize the meaning behind this conversation, nor do they notice the priest's thin eyebrows twitch in displeasure.

「Heretics that oppose the guidance of the White Light must be judged –」

As if realizing that he does not have time to be exchanging words with the abominable Fairy, he holds the jewel in his hand up in the air.

Proving that it is not merely a precious stone, the huge, pure-white jewel releases a faint, flickering light from within.

「Obey my command, 『Diamond Heaven.』 」

The moment he recites the phrase needed to release the magic hidden inside the jewel, there is a blinding flash of light.

Bright enough that it could be believed to be the miraculous magic bestowed upon him by the by the Holy Mother Aria herself, the white light fills the chapel.

This light passes away after just a moment.

The chapel returns to its original dark state, lit only by the flames of the candles – no, now the sphere of light around the Fairy adds to the light in the room.

However, the room is definitely different now compared to how it was a moment ago.

The Fairy that killed their companion in such a cruel way is now under the young priest's control, just like the Elf merchant who refused to donate to them.

Her consciousness is still intact, but she is completely unable to control her body.

It is his first time seeing such a beautiful girl – No, it is unlikely that a normal person would ever see such a beautiful girl in their entire lifetime. But now it would be interesting to see how long this beautiful girl could keep up her cocky tone from earlier.

Changing places with the priest, the mage girl does not even try to hide the warped smile on her face.

「Ah, I see, you're able to invoke 『Domination.』 A troublesome ability; you would be able to turn the tables on most adventurers with that, but –」

As the Fairy speaks, she produces a small ball of light in front of her eyes.

「– It won't work on me, you know?」

Along with her captivating, beautiful smile, the ball – no, bullet of light flies out in a straight line and –

「!」

As the young priest opens his eyes wide in surprise, it flies horizontally past his face and hits the cross that is positioned in a high place at the back of the chapel.

As if in a direct act of sacrilege against god, the white light explodes, causing the cross to crumble into pieces onto the floor.

「W-why...」

As she sees emotion finally appear on the young priest's face, the Fairy gives him a satisfied reply.

「Ufufu, it's a secret.」

But he at least understands that the magic of 『Diamond Heaven』 that applies the Status Effect 『Domination』 is meaningless against this enemy.

「Destroy this evil heretic!」

Raising his voice, he lifts 『Diamond Heaven』 into the air once more.

The chapel is again bathed in a flash of white light, and this time the Fairy does not ridicule him.

「Kill the heretic.」

「Bring judgment to the heretic.」

「May the White Light guide your path...」

The young believers who were unable to do anything but watch this strange chain of events are now muttering lines from the scriptures and dangerous words while pointing their hostile gazes towards the Fairy.

「Making these children do such horrible things, you're not a decent religious organization at all.」

「Silence. Detestable heretics must receive their judgment. This is the duty of the believers – Now, go and fight, warriors of god!」

As if answering this command, the children produce weapons from beneath their robes.

There are large knives like the one the dead boy was holding as well as smaller ones.

Other than knives, there are hatchets, hand axes, meat cleavers and the particularly small children are armed with scissors and forks.

As the Fairy sees the blades pointed at her, she realizes that these children have been ordered to have these deadly weapons on them at all times, in case an event like this were to occur.

「Because you're a child, I was thinking I would let you go if you cried and apologized... But if you're using child soldiers, I can't have mercy on you, you know?」

CHAPTER 310

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – THE CHURCH OF WHITE LIGHT ORPHANAGE (2)

「KILL THE HERETIIIIIIIC!」

As the battle begins, the young believers let out voices that sound as if they have gone mad as they fiercely close in on Lily.

They are not all running in straight lines across the floor; some are jumping over benches while others run across the walls like agile bandit-class fighters.

Their physical ability is clearly abnormal for human children. The thin arms holding their deadly weapons are also likely to have increased strength.

「『Domination』 can release their limits as well, how amazing.」

Lily casually voices her thoughts; she feels no threat in the current situation.

The restrictions placed on their bodies by their brains, known as limits, have been released, enabling them to exhibit 100% of their physical ability. There are thirty small opponents in such a state – However, Lily would have no difficulty defeating this number of enemies.

The believers close in on the young Fairy in front of them; the blades in their hands will reach Lily's body in a moment.

However, Lily is already prepared to make a counterattack. She produces not one, but countless bullets of light in the area around her Oracle Field, the same bullets as the one she used to destroy the cross.

In the same way as her beloved Kurono, she sends all of her bullets of light out simultaneously in a full burst.

「Gyii –」

Drowning out both the children's outlines and their voices, a storm of white flashes blows through the room.

It is the simultaneous firing of multiple Lux Sagita, but rather than merely piercing their targets, they explode on impact.

She just showed how powerful the explosions are; if one of these were to strike the head, that person would immediately become a headless corpse.

The white flashes and hot wind in the room caused by the explosions settle down. Pieces of children's corpses are scattered around the chapel – or so she thought, but –

「Hmm, nobody is dead yet, right? Fufu, the children of the slums are nice and sturdy, aren't they?」

They are indeed still alive.

However, all of them have a leg or two missing. There are more than a few with all of four limbs missing, barely able to breathe.

Lily is superior to Kurono and Fiona in that she possesses the precise control to have her attacks automatically follow their targets.

Large destructive power is not required to destroy the small, thin, soft limbs of children. Therefore, Lily focused her attention on the accuracy of her attacks rather than the power. Though they were not fatal, it was easy for her to aim at their limbs with multiple attacks at the same time.

Thus, with just one burst of attacks, the majority of the children are now sinking into a hellish sea of their own blood.

Seeing these children with limbs missing rolling on the ground on the verge of death, anyone would wonder what kind of demon would do such a thing.

Fortunately, the children do not fill the room with the background music of their agonized screams, thanks to the effects of the 『Domination.』

The only thing reaching Lily's ears are their animal-like moans and their broken recital of lines from the scripture.

「They got away, huh... Well, I suppose you wouldn't want to die with these guys.」

Wearing a twisted smile on her face, Lily looks towards the stage where the young priest had been standing arrogantly just a moment ago, but he is no longer there.

As he sent his believers forward, he escaped with the girl and the bodyguards called Guardians.

Lily, with her Oracle Field in full effect, has been blocking the front entrance this whole time. So they must have escaped through a back exit.

However, Lily does not move to give chase; she faces the children, of which about ten are still alive.

There is no need to hurry; these small-fries are not even effective as a way to buy time.

「KYIEEEEEII!」

In spite of the overwhelming magical attack that they faced, the children who are still alive continue to hold their weapons and scream with murderous intent.

And then they charge forward to make another hopeless attack.

They remind her of the Crusaders who closed in on Alzas Village, charging into the deadly crossfire to meet their unsightly ends.

The moment before she is about to unleash her full burst of white light to put an end to this –

「Oh, are you perhaps not actually under the effect of 『Domination』 ?」

Among the children that are closing in on her while letting out twisted screams, she sees one boy who still has the light of reasoning in his eyes.

He is none other than the orange thief, the boy who had thrown the rock at Kurono.

He does not have any signs of having high resistance. It is likely that he simply has a high mental defense.

Lily was protected from the light of 『Domination』 by the defensive power of the Oracle Field alone.

The Fairy's shining defense is even more effective against these kinds of magical, mental attacks than against physical attacks.

For the young priest who is reliant on the jewel's magic, breaking through her spiritual defense would be impossible. No, even if he was a skilled mage, he would not be able to apply 『Domination』 to Lily through her Characteristic Ability that is unique even among fairies.

Still, this boy who resisted it through nothing but the mental defense that he was born with could be said to have incredible talent.

However, it is difficult to say that this special ability is good for him in this situation.

「Fufu, fine, I'll spare just you.」

If he obediently allows himself to be controlled, Lily will not need to pay him any more attention.

As Lily looks at the boy, the children – no, child soldiers, whose physical ability is drawn out to its absolute limits, and whose speed is faster than if they were affected by a Speed Burst, approach. She does not have the time she needs to use her Lux Sagita.

In battle, even a moment's hesitation or carelessness can be the difference between life and death – of course, this is not relevant to Lily in the slightest.

「Force Edge.」

Such an idea would only apply if she had a different Characteristic Ability.

It is Lily's offensive magic, the same white light, but it has been changed in shape from bullets to a blade. But the result is the same.

She has produced two Force Edges.

The blades of light glide across the round surface of the Oracle Field, accurately intercepting the enemies closing in on her.

The deadly weapons in the children's hands look like toys in comparison to Lily's Twin Sabers as they effortlessly cut their arms and legs off with overwhelming reach, power and heat.

Rather than being blown off by an explosion, this time their limbs are severed by a searing light, causing no blood spurts from the wounds to dirty the floor. Yet the result is the same as when she used her bullets of light.

Either way, Lily is already paying no further attention to the few dozen enemies that are now on the verge of death, unable to move.

Right now, her blue eyes are focused on the one boy who is unaffected by 『Domination.』

He has not lost his senses, but he also does not have his physical abilities strengthened. Quite slowly, he finally approaches Lily.

How could he oppose these Force Edges with the tiny knife in his hand?

Even if he were to miraculously slip in between the two hot blades, would his knife be able to pierce the Oracle Field covering her whole body?

It is absurd and reckless, but even so, the young believer carries out this suicidal attack for the sake of his religion –

「For now, I'll forgive you.」

God would never reach a hand out to save him.

「Uwaaaaah!」

Lily creates weakened balls of light in her hand and sends them forth to explode on the boy's chest at point-blank range.

Lily, protected by the Oracle Field, simply stands there. The shock wave from the explosion does not even move a single hair on her head. But the boy's small, unprotected body is sent flying.

The boy flies through the air like a ragdoll and is unable to even brace for the impact as his body crashes onto the bloodstained floor.

「Gu... Shit... You heretic...」

Despite being the only one who has retained his senses, he spouts a line similar to the other insane followers. Lily casually approaches him.

Their gazes meet. The boy looks up; Lily looks down.

The distance between them is close and yet far, just like the distance between man and god.

「Shit, shit! It's your fault again! If only you didn't exist –」

「You've remembered me, I'm so happy.」

This makes the conversation much easier.

Though her words must sound like sarcasm to him.

To this pitiful boy who was once a farmer's child born in Kuar Village and then became a refugee in Spada before being caught up in this false religion.

「Hey, if you promise to apologize to Kurono, I'll save you.」

Perhaps this is the whim of a devil or the truth, or perhaps she holds pity for this child; Lily offers a suggestion.

「Ku... rono... That black guy... Don't fuck with me, it's all that guy's fault, isn't it?!」

「That's just a misunderstanding, Kurono led the adventurers and fought well. It unfortunately wasn't enough because the enemies were just too strong.」

「You're lying! You're lying, you're lying, it's that guy's fault, everything turned out this way because he tempted everyone to abandon the village!」

With a small sigh, Lily begins murmuring.

「I thought Kurono would be happy, but...」

Even if it was a great lie.

She was willing to let go of her anger if it would make Kurono happy, but it seems that these feelings have not reached this boy.

No, with Lily's magical telepathy ability, it is impossible for her to be unaware that the boy's heart holds an irreversible grudge towards Kurono.

In short, she is just confirming that nothing she says would make any difference.

「Well then, goodbye. Ah, if you happen to meet that fake priest in hell, ask him this –」

With the hem of her black one-piece dress fluttering, Lily turns her back on him.

As several bullets of light appear in mid-air, she leaves him some final words before he dies.

「How dare he trick you all?」

「Geez, what's with that girl!」

「To think that she would attack tonight, how unfortunate.」

After successfully escaping the chapel through the rear exit, the priest and the girl are having this conversation as they continue running at a fast pace.

There is a large full moon suspended in the sky, but the back garden of the orphanage that they are running through is endlessly dark.

「Was it okay to leave just those children there?」

「As long as they last five minutes, it is enough.」

There is no sign of regret or guilt in his words for making the children attack the dangerous Fairy.

「The preparations have already been made for the new Guardians to move, we just need to make it to the sanctuary –」

As he says that, the shadow of a person appears in front of them, as if to block their path.

「You used your believers as sacrifices and are escaping by yourselves? All founders of religions are the same, aren't they.」

The one who is making this cynical remark is a girl wearing a black robe and black three-cornered hat while holding a staff in her hand.

A torch floating in mid-air illuminates her beautiful, bespectacled face.

「This time it's a witch; it seems that only the wicked have gathered here tonight.」

The priest probably expected that the Fairy is not alone, but rather that she is part of an adventurer party.

Unperturbed by the appearance of this new enemy, his words are fitting for a priest.

「There is also a Berserker who can use black magic, but he is doing something else today. I apologize for not being able to meet your expectations.」

The girl in witch's clothing mentions a meaningless internal circumstance as she approaches.

「I'm going to leave two Guardians with you, can I trust you to deal with her?」

「Of course, I'm going to burn the witch to death with my flames!」

With a spirited reply, the mage girl happily steps forward to buy some time.

Seeing her red hair and the wand with a crimson crystal embedded in it, any adventurer would guess that she would use offensive fire magic as she said.

If the imperial uniform she is wearing is real, it can be expected that her magical ability is above average.

Additionally, the two giant fighters with metal masks, the ones called Guardians, step forward silently to act as her front guard.

Whether she is confident in her own ability, the Guardians are just that reliable, or perhaps both, there is no sign of fear in the girl's face; in fact, her expression is full of joy.

「I'm trusting you.」

「Mhmm.」

The witch is likely able to see that the boy and girl are sharing a farewell kiss behind the guards.

However, it seems that she is not unsophisticated enough to interrupt the two youngsters' love; the witch stands there silently until their kiss has finished and the priest has left.

「Are you already lovers at such an age?」

「Yeah, are you jealous? You're jealous, aren't you? There's no way such a gloomy witch wearing those lame glasses could ever get a boyfriend! Kyahaha!」

Though the girl is looking down on her as a woman, the witch's face is still expressionless; not even an eyebrow moves.

「... I will make you explode.」

Yet her murmured words have a clear bitterness to them.

CHAPTER 311

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – THE CHURCH OF WHITE LIGHT ORPHANAGE (3)

Under the full moon, as if it were a second sun – though this would be an exaggerated description, the fire from the torch illuminates the back garden where the witch, the girl and the two iron-masked giants are facing each other.

The one to make the first move is the red girl.

「There's no way I'll let you perform any incantations!」

Considering the distance between them, there is no way that she can hear Fiona's whispered incantations unless she belongs to a race with exceptional hearing, such as the beast-men.

Still, the movement of her mouth is obvious, even with a human's eyesight. In fact, not paying attention to the mouth of an opponent who is known to be a magic-user is a mistake that only a terrible amateur would make.

「Ignis Sagita!」

The girl waves the wand with the red, ruby-like jewel embedded at the tip.

She has not performed an incantation. Which means that her 『Ignis Sagita』 is invoked with just the name of the spell; no incantation is necessary.

Casting low-level spells without an incantation is a skill that any intermediate-level mage should know, but due to her talent at magic, she has learned it at this age.

What is even more surprising is that there are not one, but three fireballs in her hand.

Each individual fireball is distinctly larger than an ordinary 『Ignis Sagita.』

Three simultaneously-created, incantation-less, large fireballs – She has shown three different skills as a mage with one spell. It is unclear whether it is her own talent or whether it is the power of the wand in her hand.

Either way, it does not change the fact that there are now three fireballs flying at Fiona, who is still slowly performing her incantation.

The 『Ignis Sagita』 soar through the air to fulfil their purpose of incinerating the enemy, leaving red trails behind them.

The three fireballs strike perfectly, illuminating the back garden in red light with a thunderous explosion.

「Kyahaha! That's what happens when you're a magic-user and you come to a fight without a front guard, ba~ka!」

Fiona had simply stood there, completely defenseless, unable to dodge or block the attack. Facing the spot where she disappeared in the smoke of the explosion, the girl sneers in a high pitched voice.

「واسعة ك بيرة ل حماية جدار ال صخور لم نع ب حزم」

However, in the next instant, the flowing melody of an incantation reaches her ears.

Cutting through the curtain of rising smoke, the pitch-black witch appears.

There is not a single burn on her soft, white skin and not a single one of her silky black hairs is shaken. In short, she is completely unharmed.

The blue eyes shining behind her glasses look incessantly sleepy; her expression shows no acknowledgement of the fact that she just received an attack.

「Guardians!」

Rather than panicking because the fire-element attack that she specializes in is not working, she seems annoyed at the fact that the witch has no reaction whatsoever.

She raises her eyebrows in hatred as she gives the command for the two giant warriors to charge forward. It is a simple but effective tactic against a magic user.

With their dirty, white surcoats fluttering, the two Guardians begin sprinting at a high speed that is unfitting for their huge bodies.

They have matching simple, ancient longswords made of iron in their hands, but this equipment is more than enough to kill a lone witch. In fact, even a single one of their boulder-like fists would be deadly enough to kill a human.

The fact that their charge is silent and not accompanied by a war cry makes it all the more ominous, but Fiona is already not even looking at the sturdy Guardians that are closing in on her.

She simply stares at the girl with a listless gaze as she takes a step forward through the black smoke.

It is because her method of dealing with these warriors is already prepared. Right now, at this very moment, the incantation that has been coming from her mouth is complete.

「- Terra Wall Defan.」

The magic invoked was an intermediate-level earth-element defensive spell, but because of Fiona's overwhelming ability, what comes forth is a protective stone wall, solid enough to be called a high-level spell.

The place it appears is the surface of the ground in the back garden, where the dirt has been hardened by the footsteps of the Guardians' boots.

From there, two stone towers appear, completely covering the Guardians' tall bodies, extending upwards as if to pierce the heavens.

「W-what the hell is this!」

The only one to let out a voice of surprise is the girl; indeed, there is not a single word from her two guards who are now trapped inside these stone prisons.

Loud knocking against the stone walls echoes out as they try to remove the obstacle and continue their attack.

Of course, even the powerful Minotaur zombies would take a considerable amount of time to escape from such a prison. The Guardians are huge, but they are still humanoid; there is no way for them to break free faster than a monster could.

Thus, having successfully sealed these bodyguards, Fiona's gaze does not waver from the girl as she leisurely closes the distance between them.

「Kuh, Ignis –」

With her vanguard gone, the girl has no choice but to rely on her attack magic once more, though it is doubtful that it will have any more effect when cast a second time.

The incantation earlier was for the spell used to seal the Guardians; therefore, the witch needs to begin another incantation for her next attack.

As the girl raises her wand overhead, the witch raises her staff at the same time – however, the one to fire first is Fiona's 『Ainz Bloom.』

「No way?!」

Fiona did not even recite the spell's name.

No, the more surprising thing is the overwhelming size of her fireball.

The girl's own fireballs were larger than average, but the fireball that is drawing closer before her eyes is easily half a meter in diameter.

They are incomparable in the first place; the girl's attacks were mere fireballs, but this is definitely a magical attack that is well above intermediate level – As she thinks this, her body is thrown into the air by the explosion and heatwave.

「To not even be able to block an incantation-less Ignis Sagita. And you call yourself a fire mage?」

As a user of fire magic herself, Fiona cannot help but to speak without thinking when confronted with the pathetic sight before her.

However, the girl should be praised for not becoming an incinerated corpse after being hit by Fiona's super-Ignis Sagita, escaping with only some burns.

The color of fiery magical power reflected in her eyes and hair is not only for the sake of her appearance; her body has resistance against high temperatures.

However, this is not a situation where she can take pride in that fact.

The girl has landed face-down against the earth after flying several meters through the air. Her face that was colored with strong makeup is now covered in dirt, mud and scorch-marks, perfectly representing her broken pride.

「Hyii, ah...」

As she moans in pain and raises her face from the ground –

「بـ يرس سد بـ يرز الـ شـعلة عصام تـقـدة نار ثـ لا ثـاء」

The witch is standing right next to her, humming a new incantation.

The girl already has some idea regarding the extent of Fiona's magical ability – at the very least, she is aware that her own ability is completely unable to compete.

She is reduced to this state after one incantation-less fireball attack; it goes without saying what would happen if she received an attack with a complete incantation.

「S-stop, wait –」

Looking down at the girl rolling around at her feet, Fiona casually waves her staff and recites:

「– 『Ignis Kris Sagita.』」

Two tornadoes of flame suddenly rise up.

The stone prisons that Fiona created are behind her, and the tornadoes engulf them.

In short, it is not an attack aimed at the girl, but to finish the Guardians.

There is no need to confirm their deaths. In the past, the only human made of flesh and blood who would have been able to survive that is the monster Apostle, Ai.

Thus the unidentified Guardians perish, without their identities ever being revealed.

In any case, it is not Fiona's work to figure out their secret, so she pays them no attention.

「الحارقة قاسية ضربية مديتز، سحقت، أعداءنا حرق」

This time, the incantation is definitely for a spell that will bury the girl that is prostrating herself in an unsightly manner – no, to be more accurate, it is an enchantment.

If she swings 『Ainz Bloom』, it is nothing more than a blunt weapon; this spell is an intermediate-level fire enchantment which changes the staff into an explosive, deadly weapon.

「Ignis Breaker.」

「– Wait! I'm carrying a baby!」

The moment she shouts this confession, the staff that has its end lit by a fireball stops moving.

Fiona sees the girl cowering with her arms tightly wrapped around her abdomen, a sight that begs for compassion.

「Is that priest the father?」

「Yeah... It's our child.」

She is facing the ground, so Fiona cannot tell what kind of expression she is wearing.

Looking at her slim waist, there is no sign of any pregnancy; there is a chance that she is lying.

However, strangely enough, Fiona believes her.

And she can sympathize with her feelings. Because Fiona herself is a girl who is in love.

「I think that a pregnancy at that age is a questionable decision, though.」

「It doesn't matter, because we're in love!」

「Are you in love? I thought it was merely a physical relationship.」

「Don't make fun of me! My love for him is real!」

Though her face is not visible, Fiona can hear the tears in the girl's voice as she yells her confession of love.

Fiona unconsciously smiles at the surprising revelation of the pure love between the young priest and the fire mage girl.

She has managed to get a good idea of the girl's passionate feelings through this short conversation. She begins to speak in a satisfied voice.

「That is suitable for a sacrifice, isn't it?」

Thus, the deadly Ignis Breaker explodes on the girl.

Employing a full golf swing with such perfect form that Kurono would surely say 「nice shot!」 if he were here to see it, Fiona swings the blazing end of 『Ainz Bloom.』

Her target is the side of the girl's body, whose arms are desperately trying to protect her beloved child.

The girl flies through the air once more, scattering burnt-smelling flesh across the ground.

Her eyes, wide open with genuine shock, meet Fiona's cool gaze.

Perhaps she had been holding onto a naïve hope that Fiona would spare her.

In reality, the girl's body, which is now held together only by a single sheet of skin across her abdomen, crashes with full force into the wall of the orphanage.

A flower is drawn on the canvas of the dirty, white wall in the red paint of blood, entrails and the child who had yet to take form.

However, there is nobody observing this art. Fiona, who is now the only living person in this place, has her eyes closed.

「... What is it, Lily-san? I'm in the middle of something right now.」

Though it appears that she has suddenly begun talking to herself, the fact that she mentions Lily's name means she has been contacted through telepathy.

As long as they are both within the orphanage grounds, there is no need for disposable crystal communication devices; direct communication is possible through Lily's telepathy.

「Eh, I can start the fire already? But the experimental – we don't need them? Haah, I see, then I'll go ahead.」

Ending her conversation, Fiona indifferently moves on to perform her next task.

Her opponent was not even worthy to be called an enemy, but in any case, the nuisance has been taken care of. Her weapon, 『Ainz Bloom』, has already carried out its required purpose.

She replaces it with something she takes from her three-cornered hat. It is, of course, the object she borrowed from the academy's great library... The forbidden book, 『The Guide to the Palace of Ten Thousand Demons.』

By reciting a line written in it, the sacrifices – in other words, the believers who have barely escaped death thanks to Lily holding back – are to be sent to an evil god in the unknown reaches of hell.

The preparations are complete.

In short, ambushing whoever came out was not the only reason Fiona came to the back garden. She has been drawing a wide-area magic circle to engulf the sacrifices, along with all of the buildings in the orphanage including the chapel, in flames.

It is equivalent to pouring tons of oil over all of the buildings, so to speak. With a spark, these shabby old buildings would be destroyed by the red-hot hand of a demon.

「Evil-god-sama, please grant us your divine protection tonight. I wish to return to Kurono's side quickly.」

As she makes a request that is so self-centered that it cannot even be thought of as a prayer, Fiona receives the signal from Lily and sets the orphanage on fire.

「I offer to you, the God of all evils –」

CHAPTER 312

THE 21ST OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – THE CHURCH OF WHITE LIGHT ORPHANAGE (4)

He found this place purely by chance.

The back garden is quite spacious but not maintained at all; weeds are growing everywhere.

In the corner of this garden is an old well that dried up decades ago – this is the entrance to the “sanctuary”.

「I have to gather believers from scratch... It does not matter, everything will work out as long as I have the Guardians.」

While murmuring these words, the young priest quickly slides down the ladder used for entering and exiting and stands up at the bottom of the old well.

The times when water rose from the sand here were long before he was born. Now it is just a dry hole in the ground with not a single drop of moisture.

At the bottom of this dark well, the lamp in his hand illuminates a crack in the wall that a child can narrowly fit through.

Not worrying about his pure-white robe getting caught against the edges, the priest slips his slim body through it.

Through the crack is a small cave-like space in the rock that was originally filled with underground water.

It is a completely natural structure – however, as he continues through the cave without hesitation, a single gate is perfectly set into the passage.

Any veteran Rank 4 adventurer from Avalon would immediately recognise this as the kind of gate that leads to an ancient underground ruin dungeon.

The delicate patterns carved into the gate have weathered and crumbled over time; only the large cross drawn in the center is still clearly visible.

It does not even have a lock; a light push is all it takes for the door to open and allow entry into the room within.

As he enters, white light sources in the ceiling turn on; the ancient magic here seems to still be functioning normally.

The white room that he has become familiar with is reflected in his eyes.

It is perhaps as large and as tall as the chapel in the orphanage; it is quite spacious for a single person. However, there is a heavy, oppressive feeling due to the magic within this place.

The most distinctive feature of this room are the enormous beds – no, perhaps they should be called coffins. They contain the bodies of the two-meter-tall Guardians.

There are a dozen of them, six on each side, lined up to form a path from the door.

There are two Guardians that are already functioning, and lying in the coffins of white stone are nine more Guardians that are about to awaken.

There are twelve coffins, but by the time the boy had discovered this place, one of them was already empty, so there are eleven Guardians in total.

They have been sleeping here for what could be an eternity; even the boy himself does not know what exactly they are.

All he needs to know is that they have overwhelming physical strength, and that he can make them obey his will.

「I need to hurry and start... I still need to reset the summoning coordinates... How troublesome.」

What he needs to do and how he needs to do it, the boy puts it all together in his head.

Crossing the room where the Guardians are sleeping, the boy goes through yet another gate that leads to another room further inside.

This room is much narrower than the previous room; with one glance it is obvious that it is the disorganized laboratory of a careless magic-user or alchemist.

Ancient, worn books with contents of questionable use, mysterious parts made of gold and tools of unknown purpose are piled up all over the place.

These are also a sight that the boy is used to; he pays no attention to them, heading straight for the installation in the middle of the room that he calls an altar.

On the surface of black rock similar to that of the 『Zero Chronicle』 obelisks scattered around Avalon, indecipherable ancient letters appear, glowing white.

He cannot read them, and does not need to worry about them. The important thing here is the pedestal beneath the black surface.

「Obey my command, 『Diamond Heaven.』」

When he first discovered this place, this 『Diamond Heaven』 was here on the middle of the pedestal.

It is an artifact that holds the menacing power of 『Domination』, the ability to control others according to one's will. However, its true value appears to lie in its existence as a key item to activate the ancient altar.

He has no way of knowing the exact, correct method of using it. But he can use it because if he holds his intent in his mind, as if transferring them to 『Diamond Heaven』 via telepathy, it more or less functions as he desires.

However, it does not grant all of his wishes.

In order to awaken the Guardians, he needs to provide a supply of magical power as an energy source, and to have them leave this sanctuary, he needs to use summoning magic.

Tonight's ritual was planned in order to summon the awakened Guardians into the chapel.

It would have been an easy-to-understand demonstration for the believers.

However, that has all gone to waste. There is no longer any reason to summon them there; in this situation where the enemy has arrived at the doorstep, it would be ideal to summon them right next to the well.

If the enemy is unaffected by Domination, it is too dangerous for the boy to show himself at the front.

However, changing the target location of the summoning will take a considerable amount of time.

He has found through trial and error that the summoning magic does not work correctly unless he holds a clear, distinct image of the place he is summoning them to.

Therefore, the boy clutches 『Diamond Heaven』 in his hand and makes an earnest, silent prayer.

He is wholeheartedly offering a prayer to god, something that a real priest would do.

How much time has he spent in prayer?

As he finally feels something like a correct response –

「Good evening. This is a wonderful hiding place, isn't it?」

An elegant voice reaches his ears through the gate behind him.

He has only heard it once before, but he cannot forget who this voice belongs to.

It is unmistakably that of the heretic adventurer, the Fairy girl surrounded in light.

「Fu...」

However, his expression is not that of someone who has been cornered.

He is sneering, as if she is prey that has been caught in his trap.

She is a foolish heretic who has carelessly come to this place where he can surround her easily with the nine Guardians without needing to summon them.

「Good evening. This is a wonderful hiding place, isn't it?」

Lily, having stepped into the center of this sanctuary, calls out to the young priest who appears to have secluded himself on the other side of a gate.

「I am surprised you found this place.」

The boy opens the gate and steps out to face Lily.

Has he finally accepted his fate – no, his face still has the same expressionless look that he had when he was standing in front of his believers during the ritual. In other words, he is not acknowledging that he has been cornered.

She knows this even without using her telepathy, but instead of getting irritated at his foolishness, she gives him a gentle smile filled with kindness as she replies.

「Yes, I knew about this place right away; after all, it's very clearly suspicious.」

In reality, she guessed this place's location after searching the mind of the boy she forced to guide her to the orphanage, but there is no need to tell the priest this. It is the usual 「Ufufu, it's a secret.」

「Was it alright for you to come here without bringing that witch?」

「Well, she seemed busy disposing of that trashy girl.」

The boy's thin eyebrows twitch. This is the second time today that he shows this displeased reaction.

At this moment, Lily guesses that he has feelings for that exhibitionist girl.

Although this is truly unimportant information.

「I should not have exchanged words with a heretic; it is as if my body is being polluted –」

The young priest, unable to remain expressionless, shows a touch of hatred in his face as he raises 『Diamond Heaven』 at Lily once more, giving a command.

「– Now, awaken, Guardians!」

As if answering him, the sound of water fills the room.

The Guardians are submerged in a transparent liquid that fills the coffins. From the fact that they are being preserved rather than decomposing, it is reasonable to assume that it is not ordinary water, but a magical potion with powerful preservation properties.

Reflected in Lily's eyes are the nine Guardians vigorously standing, causing this fluid to splash everywhere.

They are impressive, muscular men, but their skin is unusually pale and their short, evenly-cut hair is a brilliant white. There are no signs of spirit in their blood-red pupils.

They are in fact "puppets"; it is very obvious from one look at their faces.

This is because they all possess the same face.

They do not simply look alike due to the style and color of their hair; they are completely identical.

Their long noses and finely-chiseled features are reasonably handsome, but seeing nine of the same face is nothing if not strange.

However, Lily's smile does not falter as she presumes their true identity.

「As I thought; they are Homunculi, aren't they?」

The priest is not particularly surprised at her correct guess.

Homunculi are famous beings that people in urban areas will have heard of.

They are artificially created humans, but the technology to create them does not exist in modern magical theory. In other words, creating them is beyond the limitations of modern magic and only possible through ancient magic.

There have been many cases of adventurers discovering Homunculi in ancient ruins, though the majority of them were merely corpses.

However, it is not unheard of for Homunculi to be resurrected in the modern age after surviving the trials of time.

And one of these rare occurrences is happening right before Lily's eyes.

「This place is more like a single mage's laboratory rather than an ancient ruin, isn't it?」

「That is not relevant for someone like you, who is about to receive the punishment of death.」

「That's not true at all; I'm going to use this place from now on.」

「What nonsense –」

With nothing more to say, the priest raises 『Diamond Heaven』 into the air once more and gives a command.

The nine giants are already surrounding Lily's position.

Though they are completely naked and unequipped, their bodies are as powerful as those of well-trained warriors, strong enough to fight monsters with their bare hands.

The priest now understands that Lily is using a Characteristic Ability consisting of powerful light.

However, its nature is suited to long-ranged attacks, similar to a mage. In other words, if it becomes a close-range battle in this room with nowhere to run, the warrior-like Homunculi have the advantage.

He likely believes that their physical strength is more than enough to crush this slender, weak-looking Fairy.

「– Go, Guardians, slaughter that filthy heretic!」

Believing in his certain victory, he gives the order to attack.

In that moment, the Guardians should utilize their coordination function to attack together in perfect synchronization –

「- Sit.」

But with this single word from Lily, they immediately fall to their hands and knees on the floor.

All nine of them, at the exact same moment.

「... Huh?」

The enormous, muscular Guardians are all prostrating themselves before the single girl. In the nude.

At this ridiculously idiotic sight, the young priest has no response other than to let out an idiotic voice.

Standing in the middle of the naked, kneeling Guardians is Lily with a satisfied smile on her face. Meanwhile, the young priest has his eyes wide open in astonishment.

Several seconds pass in silence during this profoundly mysterious situation.

「W-what are you doing, Guardians! Listen to my command! Kill that heretiiiiic!」

Completely casting aside the expressionless mask that he has maintained until now, the boy raises his voice in anger as he repeats his order.

However, the command that these newly-awakened Guardians obey is...

「Your hand.」

For some reason, they obey only Lily's words.

As Lily lightly extends her palm out to one of the Guardians, he places his own huge palm on top of it.

The other Guardians do not make a single movement, continuing their naked kneeling. Perhaps it is just the boy's imagination, but they seem to be jealous towards the one that is offering his hand to Lily.

「Why, why, why! Why aren't you listening to what I'm saying?! You, what have you done to my Guardiaaaaaans?!」

Anger, impatience and, of course, fear and anxiety – the boy, betrayed by the “power” that he believed in the most, has tears in his eyes as he shouts at the unfairness of the situation.

「Fu, fufufu... Ufufufu, AHAHAHAHA!」

Lily's smile finally turns into laughter.

Is it laughter of contempt at the priest who is displaying his unsightly anger – No.

「Ahahaha, should I tell you, then? Fufu, I figured it out.」

It is simple, pure happiness. It is nothing but the sense of accomplishment at having arrived at the answer that she has been seeking.

Lily's shining fingertips dance through the air.

There is a round, magic circle drawn in the air from which a ring appears..

「I figured out a way to use this, you see.」

It is the brainwashing magic item called the 『Angel Ring』, but there is no way that the young priest would know this.

At first glance it appears to be a simple, white circlet, just a decorative item. Nobody would expect it to hold a demon's ability.

But it is a different story when witnessing its use directly.

「I-it can't be... With that, with such an object... You can control my Guardians...」

「Mhmm, right now, they're my Guardians.」

The Guardians have only just awoken; they are naked and possess no equipment – or at least, that should be the case, yet looking carefully, there are rings hidden in their white hair, identical to the one in Lily's hand.

In short, Lily put these rings on all nine Guardians as she entered the room before calling out to the young priest.

And from Lily's words, it can be assumed that she only just figured out how to use them; in other words, she has been unable to use them until now.

However, it would be unreasonable to expect the boy to have thought this far.

He is in a desperate situation where the power that he has been relying on has been completely snatched away by his enemy. What he is thinking right now is likely being read by Lily.

「Ah, w-wait, I –」

「Seize him.」

She does not even let him beg for his life.

Three of the Homunculi move to obey Lily's command. Their movements are similar to Kurono's; they proceed with superhuman agility despite their previous condition.

Lightly leaping over the coffins that they were sleeping in, they restrain the boy, whose expression has now changed into one of fear.

「Stop, help me, Mama, gu?!」

Two of them seize an arm each while the other covers the boy's mouth from behind with a large, gauntlet-like hand.

He is restrained but still standing; the Guardians' grip is so tight that even his shoulders cannot move, causing him to let out muffled groans of anguish.

The sight of a handsome boy being seized by naked giants is enough to be condemned by anyone as a horrendously criminal act. But of course, the person who ordered it, Lily, is not bothered by this at all.

What she is most interested in is the ability of the Homunculi, and also–

「Fufu, I'm sure it'll succeed if I try it now.」

Spinning around her slender fingers is a white ring.

With the other six Guardians still kneeling, Lily calmly takes a step towards the boy.

As if understanding her intent even without being directly ordered, the Guardian covering the boy's mouth uses his other hand to firmly grasp the boy's neck and offer his silver-haired head towards Lily.

「Mmm, MMMPH - !」

With his mouth covered even in this situation, the boy desperately struggles and tries to scream.

He sees Lily run her index finger around the outer surface of the ring, after which seven needles appear on the inner surface with a sharp sound. No, to be more precise, Lily deliberately does it in front of the boy's eyes so that he can see, even though he is being held face-down.

The boy's fears are confirmed.

「Congratulations, now you can join the Guardians that you love so much.」

Lily speaks with a smile that would enchant anyone who sees it.

She runs her finger against the ring in her hand once more, and the needles withdraw.

「MMMh, MMMMH, MMMMMMMH!」

As if placing a laurel wreath on a glorious victor, she applies the 『Angel Ring.』

At that moment, a metallic sound can be heard from inside the boy's head.

「Mmm, the inside of a human's head is complicated after all. Even though the Homunculi were so simple... But with this...」

And so, using all the experience she has gained in her human experiments up until now, Lily finally begins brainwashing the boy.

Perhaps because the Homunculi are artificially created beings, their brain structure is much simpler than that of humans.

With the ring and her telepathy, Lily can intuitively discern this, but their simplified brain structure has helped her figure out the complicated and mysterious structure of humans' brains.

Lily contemplates. It is likely that the ancient civilization figured out all of the mysteries behind a human's brain.

That is how they took only the parts necessary for processing information and created the artificial brains of the Homunculi.

One other thing that she has noticed is that the structure of the 『Angel Rings』 themselves appear to be a perfect fit for Homunculus brains.

This is something that she has not been able to notice until now because she has only been using them on humans.

Lily is now guessing that the organization known as the 『White Sacrament』 excavated the Homunculi and the brainwashing rings together, used them as the basis of their research and improved them for use on human brains.

Whether her guess is correct or not, she has finally arrived at the method of using the 『Angel Rings』 to successfully control a person, which she has been pursuing for so long.

Now she just has to put it into practice.

It will take Lily several hours to complete the process after she activates the 『Angel Ring.』

Exhaling as she wipes a drop of sweat from her forehead, Lily speaks.

「... I messed up, tehe~」

CHAPTER 313

THE 22ND OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ISKIA VILLAGE

「Fua~ah」

Opening his mouth wide, Gustav lets out an impressive yawn.

The leader of the Rank 5 party, the 『Iron Demon Brigade』 is currently in Iskia village. To be more precise, he is reclining on a seat in the Adventurers' Guild bar.

Adventurers are rolling around on the floor near his feet. The stench of alcohol and their moans of pain fill the room – in other words, they have drunk themselves unconscious.

The other seats of the guild bar are all empty and the whole room is covered from end to end in the remains of food and snacks. Glasses are scattered all over the floor.

「What, it's already mornin'...?」

Gustav murmurs as the piercing, bright light of the morning sun reaches him from the window.

「Normally, they'd be openin' for business around now.」

It is clear to see from this disastrous scene that Gustav held a large party here last night.

A day passed since he picked a fight with the First Prince of Avalon who was rumored to be a Rank 5 adventurer. A large amount of alcohol finally arrived so they began drinking to forget about their failure in hunting the Greed-Gore.

It was a lavish feast where even the other adventurers in the bar were showered in ale. Gustav was as bold as he was rumored to be. And now things are in this state.

「Mmm, nobody is listening to you, boss.」

TLN: All dialogue spoken by this character is in a very feminine tone.

Gustav, the only one in his seat, is vastly outnumbered by the amount of patrons lying on the floor. The one who replied to his meaningless remark about opening for business is the captivating voice of a woman – no, the deep voice of a man.

「In these kinda situations, appearances're import'nt.」

「You sure are honest when it comes to the weirdest things. But I don't dislike that part about you, you know that boss?」

In response to the giggle and wink, Gustav's ogre-like face is twisted in an expression of disgust.

「Don't be showin' me somethin' so disgustin' when I have'n had any sleep all night...」

It is unsurprising that he is feeling a nausea that is not caused by the alcohol.

Anyone would feel the same, hearing a feminine tone and receiving a wink from the muscular, two-meter-tall Minotaur (♂).

「I do dislike how you don't have any delicacy. You'll hurt my maiden's heart!」

It is questionable whether there is this “maiden's heart” buried behind the huge chest muscles covered in reddish-brown bristles.

His body is covered in an armor of muscle even more solid than those of a wild Minotaur and two masculine horns sprout from his head, which is exactly like a bull's.

If he was as kind and masculine as Gustav, he would have been popular among the Minotaurs (♀).

However, what he is wearing is not clumsy armor or plain clothes, but a dazzling, shocking-pink, frilled dress. It is obvious that he is one of *those* types.

He has been this way for as long as Gustav has known him. It is his inborn nature.

「Ah~ sorry, I'm sorry, s'all my fault, forgive me, Douglalas.」

「If you're really sorry, call me "Lala", please.」

「Can't do that, I'd feel sorry for all the "Lala-chans" across Pandora.」

「Boss, you baka!」

It could easily be assumed that the name written on his guild card, "Douglalas", is a spelling error. But his true name is, in fact, Douglalas. Nobody calls him by the nickname "Lala", so that is nothing more than a self-chosen nickname.

Like a typical female, he walks angrily away. But as he leaves the bar, his movements have the force of a raging bull. He is likely heading to the room in the guild that he is staying in.

Deciding to leave the maiden whose feelings he hurt alone for now, Gustav turns his gaze towards another one of his party members.

「Oh, Gon, ya awake?」

The huge body with gray skin lying on the opposite table looks like a statue.

However, he is certainly a living creature. He is in fact a person, which he proves by suddenly opening his eyes wide and beginning to speak through his large mouth.

「I-I, want to, eat, breakfast.」

TLN: This character's speech is a bit odd with commas after every part of the sentence. He also mispronounces "俺/ore", the pronoun for "I", as "オラ/ora" (could also be a slurring of "俺は/ore wa").

「We can't order it yet, so you should wait in your room as well. I'll order some for us later.」

「Hey, boss, thank you.」

And so the Cyclops Gon stands up. His body is even larger than Gustav's, particularly in width. He moves it sluggishly towards his room.

Even Douglaas would have his mind taken off things if he is tending to Gon. Douglaas is as helpful a man as Gustav is, though he would rather call himself a woman.

「Now then, I guess I'll go an' walk my drunkenness off with a little mornin' stroll.」

With a loud creak, Gustav raises his large, red body off the chair.

「Zedra, if yer awake, help out with the cleanin' up. If yer too drunk, I don't mind sharin' a potion with ya.」

「Roger that, Head.」

An immediate reply comes from behind Gustav.

Gustav turns to see a Golem with a single, shining red eye.

There are large rabbit-like ears attached to his head; this fact combined with his short, wide frame causes him to resemble a Punpun. His steel body is painted black and white. From his appearance, someone who is knowledgeable about monsters would notice that he is designed after the rare black-and-white subspecies of Punpun.

Until now, the Golem called Zedra has been sitting like an inanimate object in the corner of the bar, but at his boss's command he has now booted up.

「Well then, I'm countin' on ya.」

Patting Zedra's wine-barrel-shaped body, Gustav leaves his party member behind as he begins his walk.

As he steps outside, he is met with a peaceful sight that one would see in any countryside farm village.

Thin white clouds float across the sky while a dazzling sun shines down on the villagers of Iskia that are walking about.

「Ah, the Greed-Gore, what'll I do about it...」

As Gustav lumbers around Iskia village on this refreshing morning, he frowns as he voices his concerns regarding the Greed-Gore.

The reason Gustav has not returned to his base in Spada is the monster that he mentioned.

Should he stock up on food supplies and head out to the Iskia Hills once more? Or give up completely and return to Spada? He is worrying while trying to decide.

Gustav is not good at worrying, or that is to say, thinking. He is the type to rely on his instinct to make quick decisions.

During important moments, that decisiveness is always a benefit. However; careful consideration, comparing the advantages and disadvantages of an option, thoroughly taking into account other various factors and deriving the best outcome – Doing this is not just difficult for Gustav, but impossible.

An idiot's ideas may as well be coming from someone who is asleep*. Douglas and Gon are even more muscle-headed than Gustav, so it is meaningless to consult them.

TLN: A weird Japanese phrase.

As Gustav reaches the conclusion that it is best to leave the decision to Zedra, the most intellectual of them –

DING DONG

The loud ringing of a bell echoes throughout the village.

「An emergency evacuation?!」

It is the sound that signals an emergency situation. Any citizen of Spada would recognize it, and Gustav is no exception.

The peaceful morning abruptly becomes noisy.

The villagers who were heading out to work in the fields, farming tools in their hands, are now running around in chaos. The merchants who were beginning to prepare for the opening of their stores have now dashed inside them. A pair of young brothers who were carrying goods under their arms, perhaps helping their parents, hold hands and begin sprinting.

The sound of the bell continues to echo, as if signaling the end of their peaceful lifestyle.

「Whatever, I don't care what kinda monster or person's arrived, I'm gonna smash 'em!」

Gustav has no way of knowing what exactly is going on, but his expectations are simple.

The most common reason for the bell that signals an emergency evacuation would be an unexpected monster attack; this fact is common sense across the entire continent of Pandora.

Iskia Village is on the Fauren-side of Spada, the neighboring allied country, while Daidalos is on the opposite side of Spada. Considering the village's location, it is hard to imagine that this is the beginning of an invasion.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the threat closing in on the village is a group of monsters.

It can also be assumed that the monsters are invading from the nearby dungeon, the Iskia Hills.

Gustav uses his intuition to figure this out and moves his huge, red body quickly towards the village's west gate, his loud footsteps echoing behind him.

「Hmm, what kinda monsters would come here? Centaurs? Orcs, Goblins?」

At the west gate, a knight of Spada wearing armor and a helmet as well as all of the members of the vigilante corps have already assembled.

Several adventurers who made the same guess about the situation as Gustav have also gathered here.

Gustav opens his mouth and asks the knight of Spada what is going on in a loud voice.

Their answer –

「It's all of them.」

「Huh?」

The knights of Spada are normally fearlessly brave, but his face is pale as he gives such a reply.

「What d'you mean by “all of them”?」

Gustav was thinking that perhaps this knight is a new member and is simply nervous at the prospect of facing his first real battle. However, seeing the face of a man well into the prime years of his life, Gustav can quickly tell that this is not the case.

「The monsters living in the Iskia Hills, all of them are heading for the village!」

“What kind of nonsense is –?” wonder the ones here who do not know the situation.

「Ugh, you're kiddin' me...」

However, beyond the gate, on the highway that continues towards Fauren, Gustav sees the shadow of a large army, kicking up a dense cloud of dust as it approaches.

CHAPTER 314

THE 22ND OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ??? (1)

There is a field of flowers that stretches out as far as the eye can see.

Flowers of every color are in full bloom, as if glorifying this world's spring.

There is an enormous lake of crystal-clear water nearby, reflecting the light of the large full moon on its surface.

The silhouette of a series of tall mountains can be seen in the distance, their summits covered in blankets of snow.

This scene is illuminated by the beautiful light from the large moon and the countless stars that share its sky.

「This place is...」

When Lily comes to her senses, she finds herself in such a place.

When she consults her memory, she clearly remembers that she and Fiona returned straight to the inn and crawled into bed after attacking the Church of White Light.

Then, this impossible scenery, this field of flowers with the blossoms of spring, summer and autumn all blooming together with no regard for the seasons. The bright light that clearly illuminates the scene despite the darkness of the night. The snow swirling about in the wind around the mountain range.

It is completely impossible for the snow, moon and flowers to be admired simultaneously. Then, this must be not the real world, but merely a dream –

「Welcome to my Fairy Garden.」

Lily hears a voice from behind her.

It is an elegant, unforgettable voice; its owner is surely a woman who would appear in one's dreams every night after seeing her once.

As Lily turns, she sees a woman just as beautiful as she expected – no, even more so.

「Please have a seat. Let us have some tea and discuss matters leisurely.」

The woman, wearing a pure-white garment that looks almost like a wedding dress, sits in an antique-style chair and faces Lily.

There is a nearby table that matches the design of the chair she is sitting on, and a tea set is resting on the table's surface.

However, there is something that draws the eye far, far more than that.

It is the three pairs of wings made of light emerging from her back – she has one pair of wings too many, but they are the unmistakable proof that she is a Fairy.

Lily has likely noticed that this other Fairy has the same blonde hair and green eyes as herself, but she is unable to observe that something about the unrivalled beauty of the Fairy's face also closely resembles her own beauty.

Lily is currently in her true form, and anyone seeing these two together would make the assumption – that the two of them are mother and daughter.

Though unaware of their resemblance, the wise girl Lily understands who the other Fairy is and what kind of situation they are in.

「It is an honor to meet you, Queen Iris.」

One of the black gods of Pandora, the one that all Fairies believe in. Yes, she is the 『Fairy Queen Iris.』

「Ufufu, you don't need to be so formal; Fairies are meant to be free and unbound, after all. I will not take offense at trivial things like humans do.」

Under Iris's gentle expression that seemed to pay attention to her every move, Lily's movements seem a little nervous as she takes her seat.

Lily had thought for certain that some mysterious light would appear and the tea would be immediately prepared. But to her surprise, with well practised movements, Iris personally pours her a cup of tea.

As the sweet aroma of the tea tickles her nose, the smallest amount of Lily's nervousness disappears.

「The reason I invited you here, Lily, is to grant you a divine protection.」

Lily had guessed that this was the case the moment she realized that the person in front of her was Iris.

This is an assumption that any inhabitant of Pandora would make if they saw a goddess appear in their dreams.

For Lily, the more surprising thing is that Iris said her name, as if it were perfectly natural for her to know it.

「Thank you very much. But I have not particularly overcome any trials?」

Indeed; she has not been actively seeking to gain a divine protection like Kurono and Fiona have, nor has she been praying.

If Lily has not been undergoing trials, prayer or training, just what has the goddess judged to be worthy of being granted her divine protection? This question is a matter of great interest to Lily.

「Because you have arrived at a truth.」

Iris elegantly raises her teacup to her lips to moisten her thin, white neck before continuing to speak.

「A prohibited area that must not be touched upon. You shed light on one part of it admirably. With no hesitation, restraint or even regret, only for the sake of love –」

Balls of light rise all around Lily – no, they are visions of scenes from the past.

Lily brings a needle of light down into the head of a brown-haired man who is leaning against a tree in a thicket.

Lily looks to be deep in thought about one thing or another, with a white ring in her hand.

In a dim basement, Lily applies the ring to dozens of men, one after another, with a serious expression.

Four men are tied to trees; Lily takes no notice of their desperate begging for their own lives as she indifferently places the rings on their heads.

And lastly, she places the rings on the nine giants with identical faces sleeping in coffins and finally arrives at the truth – the correct way to manipulate people’s minds.

Even the scene of her smiling at the honest mistake she made right afterwards appears.

The visions show a Fairy who made many sacrifices for the sole purpose of being useful to the man that she loves.

「Wonderful. I have been eagerly awaiting someone like you. Someone with the wisdom to arrive at a truth and the determination to accomplish this in the name of pure love. Ah, how truly wonderful.」

「Thank you very much.」

With a smile just as sweet as Iris’s, Lily bows her head a little.

「As long as you live for love, I will grant you my divine protection. Serve him well from now on, the beloved man that you yearn for.」

「I will!」

Lily realizes that she was right to believe in this goddess, the Fairy Queen Iris.

Until now, she thought that gods were nothing but natural phenomena, a system for bestowing power to people. These thoughts are confirmed as she is touched by what can only be called the love of a goddess.

From the beginning, this has always been the correct relationship between people and gods.

People believe in gods, and the gods answer that belief.

And now Iris is answering Lily with the power that she desires.

「Lily, I shall bestow upon you a power that I often used myself.」

Iris's fingertips swim elegantly through the air like thin, white fish.

She draws a magic circle in the air that expands to become the same dimensional magic that Lily uses.

As expected, what comes from within is –

「Kuro-no's...」

A single eyeball with a pupil as pitch-black as the overhead night sky.

Kuro-no's left eye that was supposed to be preserved forever in the potion bottle has been summoned in front of Lily's eyes.

「Ufufu, the man you love is also answering your efforts. Therefore, this is no longer something for you to merely enjoy gazing upon; its new name is –」

Kuro-no's pupil begins to overflow with a black light.

It is not a shadow or darkness; it can only be described as a black-colored light. In an instant, this ominous light covers the entire eyeball.

The black light flashes strongly two, three times before subsiding.

What is left in the end is a transparent crystal resembling a black diamond.

The portion of it that was once the pupil is dyed in darkness that contrasts with the rest of the black crystal, as if it were some kind of hell that absorbs all light. It no longer resembles an eyeball at all.

「– 『Evil Eye.』 」

「This is... an Artifact?」

Just like that, this eyeball has become a black jewel that strongly radiates magical power; even Lily is unable to hide her surprise.

「Precisely; it is also possible for Artifacts to be created like this. Even the 『Queen Beryl』 you use is something I created in the past myself. As for how I created it... Ufufu, that is a secret.」

Iris presses her index finger against her lips with a wink even more masterfully than Lily does; this behavior is incredibly suitable for her.

「『Evil Eye』 ... Ah, to think that a part of Kurono has become my own power... I'm so happy.」

With a spellbound expression, Lily takes the eyeball-jewel that is exuding an overwhelming presence from the table and clutches it to her chest.

Looking upon her with an expression of affection, Iris continues speaking.

「The power that it grants is 『the power to become one with the person you love.』 What do you think? Lovely, isn't it?」

CHAPTER 315

THE 22ND OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – ??? (2)

The heavens are dyed with the ominous color of blood. A series of red-brown mountains line the landscape; there are flames billowing everywhere and rivers of lava flow in all directions.

Hell – No, this place that is overflowing with scorching heat should be called a purgatory. When Fiona comes to her senses, she finds herself in such a place.

「This place is...」

Looking around, she cannot detect any signs of life at all, let alone the shadow of a person.

Her surroundings remind her vividly of the volcanic zone dungeon that she visited when she was a student.

It was so dangerous that one should bring at least a party of four and exercise great caution, but she remembers that she had explored all the way into its depths by herself.

She is not sure whether such a destructive volcano exists on the continent of Pandora, and as she gazes at the strangely burning skies, she gets the feeling that this is not the real world.

With this doubt in mind, she quickly arrives at the conclusion that this is a dream.

Thinking back, she remembers getting into bed with Lily but has no recollection of waking up. Considering the chronological order of things, it makes sense that this is a dream.

As she feels disappointment that her dream is not a more pleasant one –

「Welcome, young witch. It has been a long time since I had a visitor; I welcome you to this place.」

A woman's voice echoes out from no direction in particular.

It is a bewitching voice that sounds as if it is melting; however, it lingers in the ears like a sweet poison.

The owner of this voice could surely apply Charm to a man with a single world, if she so desired.

Its existence itself is a danger. Fiona feels this intuitively, and her body takes a defensive stance even before she processes the meaning of the words that are spoken.

Fortunately, she is currently fully equipped with her three-cornered hat, her witch's robe and 『Ainz Bloom』 ; even if a battle were to occur, she would be prepared.

「Kukuku, you do not need to be so cautious. You are the one who wished to come to this place, are you not?」

The sweet voice echoes out again, yet Fiona still has no idea where it is coming from.

But she finally realizes the meaning of its words.

「Could it be... You're a god?」

Despite it being an absurd question to ask, the voice answers her earnestly.

「Indeed; I am one of the black gods, answering your prayers. Though you are before a god, you do not need to be so reserved. Now, come closer.」

The god's tone is pompous and yet overly friendly. Since it is a female's voice, perhaps she should be referred to as a goddess. In any case, Fiona cannot disobey her command.

Fiona already understands. She knows that this is not a mere dream; she is now in a sanctuary where gods invite those that they wish to grant their divine protection.

If it were a good god that is full of compassion, they would forgive any impoliteness shown towards them, but this is an evil god that Fiona sought of her own accord.

If she were to anger the god, her death would be certain. Even if she does not, the god might cause her harm on a whim.

But Fiona is not an airhead; she is able to keep her words and actions in check.

With the resolve to risk her life here, she responds to the goddess's invitation by stepping forward.

Looking closely, she can see that she is not walking up the slope of a rocky mountain. She is climbing a stone staircase that looks to be artificially made.

She has a clear view of the burning earth and mountains spitting fire in the background; this volcano whose summit she is approaching appears to be the tallest, towering above the others.

It is likely that the evil goddess is waiting for her on the top of the mountain in this purgatory.

As Fiona reaches the summit, what is reflected in her eyes is –

「I'm familiar with temples of this structure.」

It is a white-walled cathedral – or it might have been called that once, but now it is a crumbling ruin of a temple.

A veteran adventurer would be able to tell from its deteriorating condition and architecture that it is one of numerous ancient ruins.

「It looks exactly like the Elyson Cathedral.」

But Fiona has spent time as a student in the Elyson Cathedral, the main temple for the believers of the Cross, in the holy city of the Sinclair Republic. That is why she has an accurate knowledge of what this ruin is.

「This was the former Elyson Cathedral.」

Fiona shows considerable fright as the voice unexpectedly gives a reply to her murmurs.

「What do you mean by “former”？」

「That is a story of a time that has long since passed. One that is not worth telling.」

「... I see.」

Fiona feels a little disappointment as she passes through the enormous, crumbling archway, but is in agreement that telling stories of the past is not important.

The statue of the Holy Mother Aria that is enshrined here has had its head cleanly broken off; there is no trace of holiness left in this place.

Fiona is not a devout follower of the Cross; she does not even have a shred of belief in the white god. This sight does not bother her in the slightest.

She disinterestedly continues walking straight through the giant ruins of the former Elysion Cathedral.

There are no obstacles blocking her path. Unlike the cathedral in the real world, there is not a single Temple Knight on guard duty, nor are there the twenty wide-area barriers made using Ancient Magic.

Before long, she reaches the innermost depths of the cathedral.

The enormous double-doors made of Mythril open on their own, inviting Fiona within.

There is nothing here. It is a spacious room enclosed by white walls, but it feels more like a prison than a holy place.

A single black silhouette is standing there.

「Well then, I suppose I will introduce myself. I would like to think I am quite famous, but you have come across the sea from the distant land of Ark.」

A large, black, three-cornered hat and a pitch-black robe.

These are not Fiona's own clothes, but what the goddess before her eyes is wearing.

Those are the only features that immediately draw attention, but in the next instant, it becomes apparent that her witch's clothing is completely different from Fiona's.

Because the goddess's white body is completely exposed.

The robe covers her back like a cloak but is open at the front. The goddess's body that is freely exposed through the open robe is alluring and sensual enough that it would make any man its slave, and become an object of envy for any woman.

Her breasts resemble the mountains of this purgatory, with a deep valley in between whose bottom cannot be seen.

These are tightly contained by a piece of clothing that is similar to the top half of a bikini, made out of an unknown black material that absorbs all light.

As Fiona manages to lower her gaze away from this irresistible sight, what enters her view is not a thin waist, but the toned abdomen of a warrior – no, of an ancient hero.

Lowering her gaze further still, she sees the bottom half of the goddess's body, which a small piece of clothing barely covers.

The goddess's hip lines are drawn with an incredibly attractive curve and her legs are as tight as her hips, giving off an appearance of strength, beauty and obscenity.

High-laced boots made of black leather extend up to her knees. Her already long legs, when combined with the heels of these boots serve to further increase her height above even that of the taller-than-average Kurono.

The beauty of this goddess's body ridicules even those of popular dancers and high-class prostitutes. The only one whose body could rival this is perhaps the Succubus Queen of legends, who was said to have seduced the demon king Mia – no; Fiona earnestly believes that this person must be the Succubus Queen herself.

「How rude; her body is far more vulgar and dirty than mine. Do not compare me to her.」

「I apologize.」

It is not surprising that her mind has been read. Even Lily could do so if she wanted to; it is to be expected that a goddess is capable of doing it.

「So, umm, goddess-sama. What is your name?」

Even though she is in the presence of a goddess, Fiona does not show any restraint as she asks her name. With her usual expression, she tries to look into the goddess's eyes - but she cannot.

The goddess's hat is seated firmly on her head, so her eyes are not clearly visible.

No, her eyes are unnaturally difficult to see. It is likely that she is using magic that obstructs others from perceiving them.

Even so, Fiona can tell from the bottom half of the goddess's face that she can see – the tall nose bridge, the thin jawline and erotic, soft lips – the goddess possesses a beautiful face.

The goddess's lips, which are a deep crimson as if she has used fresh blood in place of lipstick, twist in an amused smile as she opens her mouth to speak.

「Oh, I remember now, fufu. I have no intentions of pretending that my name is of any importance. It is a false name, anyway.」

「Eh?」

「My name is –」

Fiona has a feeling that the goddess just casually said something outrageous. No, she has definitely noticed. The goddess shows an incredible lack of respect for other gods as she introduces herself with a false name.

「Endymion, a black witch formerly in the service of the demon king.」

Her long, beautiful black hair flows behind her, sparkling like the night sky.

And Fiona sees, only for an instant, the crimson glow of the eyes hidden beneath the goddess's hat.

CHAPTER 316

THE 22ND OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – THE GREAT GATES OF AVALON

「We're going back to Spada, right now.」

「Let's go back to Spada immediately.」

As Fiona and Lily rise from the bed, they simultaneously speak words with the exact same meaning.

With this, they realize that they have both managed to achieve the goal of their journey.

Leaving the detailed explanations for later, the two of them rush out of 『Cat's Tail』 into the city of Avalon like the wind.

「- 『Speed Boost』 , 『Rapid movement (Air Walker)!』 」

「Oracle Field, full power!」

And so they run. Combining strengthening magic with martial arts and using all of the limited time of the transformation that can only be used for thirty minutes a day, they run with everything they have.

Their ability to reason calmly has been blown away completely by the thought that they can finally return to Kurono's side; their bodies are simply moving entirely by instinct.

They have been rational and logical in their actions until yesterday; no, even up until their dreams in the night. But their lifestyle in Avalon in Kurono's absence has caused them to bottle up their feelings, which are now gushing out.

Perhaps they are suffering withdrawal symptoms; they sprint as fast as they possibly can through the city of Avalon, whose streets are mostly empty at these early hours of the morning.

As they are about to pass through the great gates of Avalon, ignoring the guards on duty –

「Ah, we forgot Marie.」

TLN: As in the horse. Previously translated as Mary.

Their feet finally come to a halt.

Like Spada, Avalon is surrounded by a defensive wall that is both physically and magically sturdy.

These white-painted walls have existed since ancient times but show no signs of their age; they are much more elegant in appearance than the bare, plain walls of Spada.

Their white color is not the city's only attractive feature. In front of the great gates is a beautifully created plaza that brings no shame to the name of the legendary imperial city of Avalon.

The jet-black, towering object that stands magnificently at its center is an obelisk that bears the words of the ancient demon king Mia Elroad, the 『Zero Chronicle.』

It is surrounded by crystal statues of the strongest knights of the demon king's army who were his beloved wives, the seven goddesses of war.

Their bodies sparkle solemnly as they reflect the morning sun.

Lily gazes at this sight with a melancholic expression unbecoming of such a small girl.

「... It's Fiona's fault for being hasty and running out like that.」

It appears that she has calmed herself by blaming their previous failure on her partner.

They would have taken less time if they had prepared everything carefully and proceeded at a normal pace, rather than rushing.

Forgetting the basics of being on a journey in their desperation could only be called a failure.

Lily swings her legs back and forth on a bench in the plaza with words of criticism coming from her mouth. Anyone who sees her would assume that she is a child who has had an argument with a friend.

Incidentally, the witch who is being blamed for all of this is currently on her way to the stables to retrieve the transport necessary to reach Spada – the beloved horse, Marie. In other words, she is not here right now.

Naturally, the stables where travelling horses are kept are not far from the great gates.

Even so, Fiona has taken quite some time. As Lily considers this, it occurs to her that Fiona is likely stocking up on large quantities of food for breakfast from the food carts that have already opened for business.

Lily has also just finished a sandwich (with dressing) that she received from one of the salespeople that are calling out to customers who are traveling to work.

And so, as both her head and her stomach are now calm, she is capable of rational thought.

The thing drawing her attention right now is a single newspaper that has been left on the bench.

This newspaper that is printed by the government is a valuable source of information for the citizens. With that said, no country's government expects all citizens to believe everything that is written in such newspapers. No matter the time period or region, there are always those who voice their dissatisfaction with the government.

Of course, the newspapers do contain some things that are undoubtedly true information – the most obvious of these being the current date printed on the front.

The date printed on the newspaper in Lily's hand is the 22nd of the Month of Platinum (Hakkin).

「I suppose if you act so conspicuously, you appear in news articles right away.」

The top news article of today's morning newspaper is –

『Orphanage up in flames! The young founder of the Church of White Light has gone mad?!』

The article has such a headline.

It is a national newspaper, but it is written in a sensational tone. Lily remembers that the one in Spada at least uses more serious-sounding headlines.

Nevertheless, it is still the most credible source of information in Avalon.

Lily is interested to see how many details of the incident that she herself caused have been leaked, so she spreads the pages of the newspaper with her small hands and runs her eyes across the text.

Unlike the suspicious-sounding headline, the article itself is written concisely and is easy to understand; it details the tragic events that occurred the night before.

The orphanage managed by the religious organization known as the Church of White Light has been burned down, and all of the children living there lost their lives.

The young founder of the organization who calls himself a priest has had his name suppressed due to the fact that he is underage. But he has confessed to burning down the orphanage with the intent to kill those who lived there.

However, the investigation has met difficulty as he is not in a stable mental condition.

The rest of the article contains explanations of what the Church of White Light was and the problem of orphans in the slums; things that are not directly related to the incident. Lily stops reading.

「That's good, we're not suspected of anything.」

Even though the Church of White Light were soon to be rounded up and arrested, they were all children. The Knights' Order aside, it is standard practice for adventurers to capture targets alive.

Knowing that, Fiona and Lily had treated them no differently to how they would treat atrocious bandit groups, with no hesitation to slaughter them – no; to be precise, they had offered them as sacrifices. In any case, it is clear that things would become troublesome if it became known that they had acted with the intent to kill.

In the worst case scenario, Lily and Fiona would both be handed prison sentences.

That is the reason that they are disguising themselves, and even during yesterday's attack, they had taken meticulous caution – well, as a witch, Fiona had used intermediate-level magic with the power of high-level magic in spectacular fashion.

「But to think that we would not be suspected in the slightest. It seems that it was right to leave him behind.」

Even Lily had not predicted this conclusion to this incident.

In fact, she had planned to have the young priest join the other children in being sacrificed.

In the end, she had made a mistake in her experiments and essentially turned him into a vegetable for life. However, she had immediately realized that versions of events such as the one written in the newspaper would be formed, so she had left him there.

That boy is likely being questioned by the Law Guardians of Avalon in an interrogation room right now.

「Haha... Ahaha... I did it... Everyshing, I did all of it...」

He is surely giving such replies with a hollow look in his eyes.

It would not be long before he is put under the guillotine and vanishes from this world.

「Haah, Fiona is late... So late, mmh~」

Abandoning her ability to think with her adult mind, Lily leaps from the bench onto her feet and throws the newspaper into a nearby bin in impatience.

For the child-form Lily, the burning of the orphanage and the fate of the young priest are of no importance. She pays them no more attention than the newspaper she has thrown away.

The only thing on her mind right now is her resentment towards her partner, who is almost certainly on a morning tour of Avalon's gourmet options.

Lily pouts as she returns to the bench – However, at that moment, while she is completely distracted –

「Ah?!」

Lily lets out a heartbreakingly adorable cry as she falls onto her back. Her mind had been wandering as she went to sit back down on the bench.

She has bumped into something – no, someone.

「Sorry about that, are you alright?」

A man's smooth voice comes from above Lily's head.

It is Lily's fault for walking into this person, but it seems that this person is a respectable adult showing concern towards this child.

「Uu~」

Lily seems to have managed to throw out a hand to prevent the back of her head from hitting the ground. But the soft, child-sized palm that she used to stop her fall is grazed slightly; a little blood is visible on its surface.

The child-form Lily experiences a stinging pain; the man she bumped into is asking for too much if he is expecting her to give him a reply.

The cute, round eyes that have been turned blue by the magic contact lenses are filled with tears; it is taking all of her effort just to endure the pain.

「How terrible, you're hurt!」

The man, having guessed the situation from Lily's behavior, crouches to examine her wound.

Through her teary eyes, she sees the man she has bumped into for the first time.

He is wearing something that resembles the Priest's robe that Lily wears. It is a gray robe of simple design that can be found anywhere.

The hood is pulled low over his head, but Lily can see his face clearly as she looks up at him from below.

She sees one black eye and one blue eye.

「Ah...」

His left eye is the same as Kurono's, the color of the hell's darkness itself. His right eye is the same shade of sky-blue as that of her own eyes.

Lily is unable to take her view off these odd-colored eyes.

Of course, the man has also noticed that she is staring rather than averting her gaze.

「It's alright, I'll fix it for you right away.」

Perhaps he has interpreted her staring as a sign of a child's uneasiness; he gives a gentle smile with these reassuring words.

He has both masculinity and beauty and smiles with an expression similar to that of that of ancient, famous heroes. Being unsure of his gender, Lily is completely fascinated with him.

It is a wonderful smile that even Kurono could not possibly replicate, though Lily would never acknowledge this.

Her mind is filled with an indescribable sense of discomfort.

The man's appearance is such a perfect polar opposite to Kurono's that one would think that this is some kind of conspiracy.

His blonde hair is in contrast to Kurono's black and his eyes are a reflection of Kurono's – Kurono's right eye is black while his is blue, and he has a black left eye in place of the red one that Kurono received from the god Mia.

「Hold out your hand.」

In the short time that Lily's thoughts regarding this mysterious man have gone in a circular pattern, it seems that he has finished his preparations to heal her as he said he would.

In his hand is bottle full of a transparent, water-like fluid.

However, despite its colorless, transparent appearance, Lily can guess this is a potion because of the sparkling particles of light dissolved in it.

No, even the child-form Lily immediately knows exactly what it is.

Because she has used the same potion herself in the past.

「How is it? It doesn't hurt anymore, right?」

As several drops of the potion are poured onto Lily's palm, which resembles a red autumn leaf, the wound disappears completely.

It is not on the level of the wound being repaired or closed – the wound has simply vanished in the blink of an eye.

Even though it was just a small graze from falling over, the sheer speed of the regeneration demonstrated by the potion proves that it is one of exceptionally high quality.

No; it cannot be called high-grade or superior. Fiona had said this about it in the past -

「It is the most amazing potion in existence, at least in the continent of Ark.」

Indeed; in conclusion, this is unmistakably the highest-grade potion, known as –

「... Elixir.」

「Quite knowledgeable, aren't you? Even though you're small, you're still a Priest.」

This man should have no idea what Lily is thinking, but he pats the top of her head, which is currently black, as if praising her.

Lily cannot tell if he is intending to be rude; in fact, she cannot read any of his emotions with her telepathy.

Is it a strong Protection? No, it is something else. Something different to Fiona's defense, which Lily pictures to be like a solid wall. This is more like a fog that does not allow any of his true feelings to be detected, some abstract shield with no form.

Lily has never felt this sensation of her telepathy being eluded before, causing her confusion to deepen.

「Next time, make sure you look in front of you as you walk.」

It has taken less than a minute for him to heal her wound and pat her head.

Having accomplished what he wanted to, the man stands up and turns to leave.

「See you then, cute Fairy-san.」

And with a wave of his gray robe, he passes through the great gates of Avalon, departing for an unknown destination.

Lily stares blankly as he leaves, and then suddenly whispers to herself.

「Huh, Lily... I have a feeling someone was talking to you just now...」

As she looks restlessly around at her surroundings, she sees only an increased amount of pedestrian traffic in the plaza; the everyday sight of a morning in Avalon.

Something just happened, someone was here – but for some reason, Lily is unable to recall the events that happened just a few moments earlier.

No, did something happen here? Nothing should have happened.

「Hmm, huh~?」

Lily lets out confused noises as she tilts her head.

「Sorry for keeping you waiting, Lily-san. Shall we get going, then?」

Fiona appears at that moment, riding their cherished large, black horse with a paper bag full of food in her hands.

She is riding without holding the reins.

「Ah! Fiona, you're late!」

「We're still in disguise, so you have to call me onee-chan.」

「Muki~!」

TLN: Noise of discontent.

Lily has already forgotten her confusion over her vague memories and throws herself at her completely unapologetic, childish “onee-chan”.

However, they have finally assembled the transport they need to leave Avalon, so they pass through the great gates to head towards Spada, where their beloved person awaits.

CHAPTER 317

THE 26TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – THE ROYAL CASTLE OF SPADA

There is no conclusion in sight for the war council taking place in the assembly hall of Spada's royal palace, even as the sun begins to set.

The topic of discussion is the force that has suddenly appeared and taken control over the neighboring country of Daidalos, the ones that call themselves the 『Crusaders.』

There is critically important concern to be had regarding the nation's security, so it is not unexpected for heated arguments to be occurring.

「– We should make the first move.」

The one advocating for a pre-emptive strike is Emilia Friedrich Bardiel, who commands the second battalion of Spada's army, known as the 『Tempest.』

The many brave women of the Bardiel house, one of the Four Great Houses of Spada, have a fierce, intimidating presence. Even veteran knights would be unable to speak any words other than “yes” if she were to glare at them.

「And how many times do I have to tell you that it's too difficult... Ah, jeez, the discussion's just going in a circle, isn't it...」

However, a young man reluctantly gives her this reply, with an expression showing more fatigue than direct opposition to her suggestion.

He is none other than Aisenhart Tristan Spada, the first prince of Spada, vice-captain of the first battalion of Spada's army, known as 『Braveheart.』

Scratching the head of red hair that he inherited from his father as if in defeat, he glances towards the council leader's seat. Sitting there is the silent figure of his father, the King of Spada, Leonhart Tristan Spada.

Casting a sharp gaze over the assembly hall with a grim expression in his golden eyes, it appears that he has the dignity that one would expect of a country's king. But in his mind, he is surely feeling frustration at this seemingly endless argument.

Aisenhart half-jokingly imagines that if the king is not allowed some practice swings with his sword to distract himself, he is simply going to use his authority to announce, 「Depart for the frontlines at once!」 and leave.

In other words, the son knows very well that his father is not very good at using his brain.

「... Haah.」

King Leonhart is not the only one to be fed up with this situation. Aisenhart is also frustrated, and there is no doubt that the same is true for the generals of the Spada army gathered here, as well as the high-ranked officers in attendance.

General Emilia, whose opinion is in opposition to his, is surely feeling fatigue in both her mind and body, even if she is not showing it on her face.

Though they are unable to decide on a plan, they need to at least reach some kind of compromise at this war council.

Letting out another small sigh, Aisenhart expresses his viewpoint.

「General Emilia, I understand how effective a pre-emptive strike can be, but surely these circumstances are not suitable for that?」

Aisenhart believes that they should focus on defense rather than on attacking.

「I wondered whether I should say this here, but it seems we won't get anywhere if I don't, so I will speak my mind. You're trying to say that the problem lies not with us, the army of Spada, but with the other countries, right?」

「... You're saying that we should wait to hear the opinions of our allies?」

Emilia is not in a military position just for show. Though she possesses overwhelming power, she also has intelligence to match her cool, beautiful looks.

She already understands the point that is being made. No, like Aisenhart, she has been avoiding mentioning it directly, but she had imagined that this would be the case from the start.

「Aneki* is in Fauren, and in any case, they owe us for the slave trader incident. I'm sure it will go well.」

*TLN**: Older sister

Spada and Fauren were once engaged in fierce territorial battles over the land in the Iskia region, but now they are known as the two city-states with the deepest mutual understanding of each other.

The 「Aneki」 Aisenhart speaks of is none other than Spada's first princess. She married the first prince of Fauren, strengthening the relationship between the two countries during the earlier days of Leonhart's reign.

If Spada required the help of allied countries, without a doubt, the first to offer their assistance would be Fauren.

But at the same time, there is no other country that can be relied on apart from Fauren. The next best candidate would be the country that lies in the opposite direction.

「It has to be Avalon after all, but that's probably going to be a bit difficult.」

In response to Aisenhart's words, Emilia's beautiful eyebrows twist into a frown, as if to say that she already knows that.

「To think that the Demon King's territory is occupied by peace-loving fools now. How sad.」

The city-states at the center of the continent of Pandora have enjoyed a long period of peace.

It is not the result of the people's virtuous hearts and desire to avoid conflict, but that of constant diplomatic efforts and incredible balance of military power.

Of course, during such an extended era of peace, the fundamental desire to avoid war takes root in the heart of the citizens, but if a large shift in the balance of power were to occur, the flames of war would undoubtedly be rekindled.

That is why, up until now, Spada has adopted a defensive policy against Daidalos.

The Dragon King Garvinal's ambition to unite all of Pandora is a famous tale. Therefore, if it came to a defensive battle, it would be simple to gain the cooperation of allied countries, starting with Avalon.

*TLN**: Previously translated as Gaevinal.

There is no need to worry about the future consequences of a battle in self-defense. This is one of the major reasons that Spada has been able to repel the armies of Daidalos.

However, Daidalos, which every allied nation unanimously designated as an enemy, has fallen and been replaced by another military force. With that being the case, the allied nations may not agree that this new force is an enemy.

In short, the other countries must make a new decision from scratch as to whether they wish to support Spada now.

「We need to be even more cautious of the Crusaders than we were of Daidalos. They are barbarians who do not understand the etiquette of combat.」

The messenger they sent earlier, as Leonhart suspected, never returned.

Perhaps Garvinal really revered the legend of the old Demon King; he paid strong attention to the rules of battle.

A proper declaration of war was a given, but he even went as far as to set a time and date for decisive battles. On top of that, he even issued challenges for one-on-one combat between the heads of countries, a custom that is very out-of-date among the modern city-states.

Strangely, King Leonhart accepted the challenge every time; his actions and strength are abnormal.

In any case, when messengers from Spada arrived, Garnival would definitely not kill them. On the contrary, he would welcome them with warm hospitality, carefully listen to the message and send them back with a handwritten reply.

Showing no response to a messenger is not only rude, but downright ominous.

At least sending the messenger's severed head back would deliver a clear message of hostility. But Aisenhart is not foolish enough to say this out loud.

「The Galahad mountain range was certainly in a terrible state –」

「Calling it terrible would be an understatement; that was clearly a bloodbath.」

The reason that Emilia knows the threat that the Crusaders pose better than anyone else she has seen the remnants of their battles with her own eyes.

It was about three months ago, at the start of the Month of New Flames (Hatsuhi). A messenger arrived in Spada bringing a request for aid, bearing a signature from every village in Daidalos.

At the time, Spada was already aware that there were signs of war in Daidalos, but they were unsure of what exactly was going on.

They were only able to get decisive information regarding the situation when this messenger arrived.

King Leonhart quickly decided to dispatch reinforcements. On the same day, the second battalion, 『Tempest』, which has the mobility of its cavalry, was given this royal command.

And so, the group of knights led by Emilia arrived at the highway in the Galahad mountain range to witness the aftermath of a gruesome massacre.

「Well, calm down. I know your precious younger brother was in danger, so I understand that you had no choice –」

「Aik!」

TLN: This is a nickname for Aisenhart

「My apologies, Emilia-senpai. That was a slip of the tongue.」

A little of the tension in the room is released.

It is well-known that Emilia is Aisenhart's senpai, having been one year above him at the Royal Spada Academy. To be more specific, the tales of their heroic deeds that they performed while enrolled at the academy are well-known.

Above all, it is well-known that Aisenhart would be no match for his senpai Emilia. Therefore, he cannot raise any complaints when she uses her nickname for him with no honorific.

「In any case, we're taking maximum precautions against the Crusaders. That huge old man, Baphomet, isn't here. Isn't that enough proof for you?」

「... Certainly, I have heard that General Gezenbool has entered Galahad Fort.」

Just half a month ago, King Leonhart returned from his inspection of Galahad Fort and made another quick decision, this time to strengthen its defenses.

The one who was selected to fulfil this duty is General Gezenbool of the Baphomet family, which is renowned as a family of high-class demons.

「On top of that, we've gathered airborne forces like Dragons, Pegasuses and Griffons from all over Spada. Of course, we'll be able to keep an eye on things and respond in time in an emergency situation.」

The fact that they have gathered the valuable airborne forces is a sign that the nation is in a state of alert, as if war might break out the very next day.

It is proof that King Leonhart will never underestimate the threat posed by the Crusaders.

「But looking at it another way, you could say that this is all that Spada is capable of right now.」

「Yeah. A pre-emptive strike is not an option.」

Emilia speaks bluntly, but Aisenhart does not deny her statement or make any excuses. He confirms that it is true. There is no meaning in trying to deceive her in regards to this; it is a simple fact that is not even worth arguing over.

If Spada were to make a pre-emptive strike now, other countries would see it as an invasion of Daidalos's territory.

The problem is not that this would be criticized as some unwarranted act of aggression. In fact, it is likely that it would be viewed as such. But the real problem is the potential expansion of Spada's territory.

It is clear to everyone that if the vast lands of Daidalos were to be annexed by Spada, it would destroy the balance of power between the nations.

Spada has no intention of doing so, as this would be a truly troublesome outcome. Even if Daidalos properly surrendered its lands to Spada, it would undoubtedly cause conflict.

「I know that it seems foolish to just sit here and make preparations for the enemy's attack, but we have no choice, you see?」

In other words, there is no option but to focus on Spada's defense.

The Crusaders' occupation of Daidalos is a recent event. With that being the case, it is difficult to say if all of their defense plans are already in place. Whether they would focus on defense, attack or even on ruling over the occupied lands, each of these options would require time and preparation.

「There is also information that there have been signs of rebellion within Daidalos's territory.」

「Yeah. We don't know whether it's a rebel army formed from the remains of the country's army that was defeated or just a group of bandits, but there's no doubt that there's chaos everywhere.」

That is why if an attack was made with this timing, there is a high chance that they would be able to completely annihilate the Crusaders. They could even possibly fly the national flag of Spada on the royal castle of Daidalos by the end of the year.

However, the consequences of such a large victory for Spada are something that nobody wishes for.

「But in the end, we won't change what we've been doing up until now, because we can't.」

After all, the Crusaders would eventually be seen as the second Daidalos.

Spada would just need to adopt a defense plan and act as a shield for all of the city-states.

At the very least, this would result in the long-term preservation of Pandora's peace. Even Spada does not wish for the current situation to change.

「We have no choice, huh... However, in any case, there will be a war with the Crusaders. The enemy's forward base was in Alzas, if I'm not mistaken? We should at least make the first move there – no, at least lay the groundwork for it, just enough that we would not have the blame put on us when the time comes.」

「I agree with that. Let's have our diplomat do his best to make Avalon's imperial courts tremble!」

An agreement of opinions is finally in sight.

And then, as the time comes for King Leonhart, who has been listening to the various arguments in silence, to fulfil his role as the leading authority in the council –

「Your Majesty, there has been an emergency report.」

A royal guard quietly appears beside the king and whispers into his ear.

The sight of the king receiving a report is visible to the whole assembly hall, even if the others cannot hear what is being reported. The officers begin to murmur quietly amongst themselves, wondering what this could be.

They wait in tension, but the report is over in less than a minute.

The king suddenly stands up from his seat and raises his voice in a commanding tone, as if he were on a battlefield.

「Depart for the frontlines at once!」

CHAPTER 318

THE 26TH OF THE MONTH OF PLATINUM (HAKKIN) – SPADA

Five days after departing from Iskia Fortress, Seria finally arrives in Spada.

She is not wearing her usual maid uniform, but rather equipment suited to her original class, the Assassin.

The black, full-body suit that increases her physical ability and grants resistance against all elements is torn, with dark stains in various places where her blood had flowed over it. A wristband is all that remains of her left gauntlet.

She has administered first-aid treatment to herself, but it does not change the fact that she is in a terrible state.

With one glance, even the citizens of Spada simply walking around can clearly see that she has just lived through a battle; an extraordinarily difficult one at that.

However, the trials that she faced on the way here are already a thing of the past, and she has just finished carrying out the tasks her master had given her.

In other words, she has delivered an emergency quest to the adventurers' guild and just a moment ago, she made a request for reinforcements directly to His Majesty, King Leonhart, in the royal palace.

From here on, it would be the work of the King, who commands the armies of Spada.

Seria's mission as a messenger is complete. The King himself has expressed his gratitude and asked her to rest.

But it was not an order, so Seria decides to postpone her rest in order to carry out her master's "request".

「Now then, it would be good if Kurono-sama were at the Academy...」

Seria, who has left the royal palace still dressed in her bloodstained Assassin's clothes, guesses where Kurono, the person she is looking for, might be.

The sun has long since set, and the veil of darkness has descended upon Spada.

Thinking about it properly, school hours are over so Kurono should be at the place he sleeps, the Academy's dormitories.

However, it is not as if he has promised to be in the dormitories; it cannot be said for certain that he is there. Perhaps he had other things to do today.

There is the possibility that, while the female members of his party are not present, he has taken the opportunity to visit Spada's red-light district.

If he is not in the dormitories, it will be impossible to find him in the enormous downtown area within a single night, even for Seria, the all-purpose maid capable of housework, battle, secret intelligence services and messenger duties.

Preparing herself for the worst case scenario, having to wait for Kurono to return in the morning, Seria proceeds along the straight main road leading away from the royal palace.

But as she takes her first step, a voice calling the name 「Kurono」, the one she is searching for, echoes out.

She immediately eliminates the possibility that she has misheard due to the fact that his name is repeated, twice, three times.

「This is... coming from the Grand Coliseum?」

Before her is the enormous, circular arena that is Spada's most famous building. Although it is in the middle of the night, light is coming from the building.

The wildly enthusiastic cheering echoing out from the Coliseum is unmistakably calling out Kurono's name.

「Ah, I see. The Curse Carnival, is it?」

Rather than being surprised, understanding and emotion surface to her mind first.

She already knows that Kurono likes to use cursed weapons. She also knows that their power is strong enough to face a Rank 5 monster head-on.

With that being the case, it would not be at all out of character for Kurono to participate in the Curse Carnival, nor is it unexpected for him to be performing well.

「Kurono-sama is a person who generally stands out, after all.」

Whispering this, Seria runs like the wind, heading directly for the lively Grand Coliseum.

Lily and Fiona have finally completed their four-day journey back to Spada.

As expected of a big city, its large main gates are still wide open despite it being the middle of the night, with people coming and going.

The two of them easily pass through the well-lit gates with one flash of their Guild Cards.

There is no point in disguising themselves any longer; they returned to their original appearances after passing Dakia Village.

They are no longer pilgrim sisters; they are now a witch and a Fairy, members of the Rank 3 party, 『Element Masters』 – the exact identities engraved on their Guild Cards.

And so, they step into the city of Spada for the first time in two weeks.

「Well then, shall we go to the dormitories right away?」

「Yeah~ Kurono~!」

With their emotional reunion finally within their reach, the two of them are in soaring spirits.

In the middle of the main road, which is still crowded with people, Fiona raises the whip to strike Marie with all her strength, fully intent on proceeding at maximum speed. Lily does not stop her; in fact, she is cheering Fiona on.

If they are not careful, they will be arrested for reckless driving, but they are already past the state where they are capable of showing concern over such matters. They have exceeded their limits of being able to hold themselves back.

And as they are about to begin moving at a rocket-like speed –

「Hey, that's dangerous!」

「You morons! How fast do you think you're going!」

The voices of the angry citizens of Spada rise from in front of them.

「Jeez, to think that someone would have their horse run at full speed on such a crowded road. I suppose there are troublesome people like that out there, after all.」

「There are, aren't there?」

Ignoring their original intention to do the exact same thing, Lily and Fiona make dry remarks about this reckless person.

The main road is divided into a road for carriages and such and a footpath for pedestrians, but at night, the traffic consists almost entirely of people on foot.

Therefore, a horse or carriage moving at full speed would create a situation such as this one, where they are barely managing to avoid a collision.

Lily and Fiona are not interested enough to try to see the face of this reckless person who is either in a big hurry or simply a fool. It appears that their destination is the great main gates behind Lily and Fiona.

The black body of a horse emerges from the crowd, somehow not running down a single pedestrian, either through incredible horse-handling technique or pure luck.

But as it draws close, Lily and Fiona glance in its direction.

The horse, moving like a gust of black wind, passes within several meters of their side. As their paths cross –

「We're going to get through the main gates in one movement, hold tight, Nell!」

「Yes, Kurono-kun!」

The two of them hear that unmistakable voice, the figure of the one spurring on the large black horse.

「Eh...?」

「... Kurono?」

The fluttering black clothes, black hair and the single shining, crimson eye.

The two of them would normally be overjoyed at this unexpected meeting with Kurono, but what they feel instead is a seething discomfort from the pits of their stomachs.

「Just who might that woman be?」

「Who is that woman?」

As the two of them confirmed that the person they saw was Kurono, they saw her. Even if they didn't want to see her, they did. Unfortunately, they have seen her.

The woman clinging to Kurono's sturdy back with a spellbound, happy expression.

Everyone's ideal princess, with her sweet, tidy appearance and a pair of pure-white wings protruding from her back.

「We shouldn't have left Kurono's side for so long, after all.」

Yes, that was –

「See, there was an undesirable insect attached to him.」

An enemy.

An enemy, even more unforgivable than the Crusaders or Apostles.

But simply killing her would not solve the problem. She as the most difficult kind of enemy in this world – a romantic rival.

「Yes, you are right.」

As if reflecting the black, muddy emotions swirling around inside their hearts, the light in their eyes begin to dim.

Their feelings of discomfort have already proceeded to become unpleasant feelings of hatred.

They only saw her, Nell Julius Elroad, for a single moment. But that image of her is burned into their eyes.

Nell, who was wrapping her arms around Kurono's waist as if hugging him, and pressing her large chest against Kurono's back with an enchanted look in her eyes.

That was not the pure look of a princess, but that of a vulgar woman with a sexual urge –

「... She is my enemy, isn't she?」

On the day of her date with Kurono, the unforgettable 13th of the Month of Red Flame (Kouen), Fiona had sat in that exact spot.

But there is no way she can realize that at that time, she had the exact same expression that Nell was wearing.

「– Fiona.」

As Fiona's anger was reaching the point that her vision was about to become completely red with rage, Lily calls her name in a cold voice.

「Yes, I know, Lily-san.」

Fiona is calm only on the outside as she pulls the reins, knowing what must be done next.

Marie's body shudders, as if she can sense the dangerous aura floating from her master. And then she turns around hastily, as if her life depended on it.

With a 180-degree turn, they rotate away from the royal palace of Spada looming in the distance to face the great main gates that they just passed through.

「Go after Kurono, right now!」

