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失格紋の最強賢者
～世界最強の賢者が更に強くなるために転生しました～
Shikkakumon no Saikyokenja
しっかくもんのさいきょうけんじゃ
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Arc 2

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Chapter 40: Strongest Sage, Has an Audience with the King

"...Is an audience with the king something that can be done so easily?"

Several days after I killed Devilis the demon.

I went to the Royal Palace with the principal.

He came out of nowhere, 『You're free today right? Come with me to the Royal Palace for a bit』, and dragged me.... Just what's going on here.

"Don't be foolish. There's no way you can meet the king that easy."

"Then who is it besides the king?"

"No well, we're meeting the king alright."

"I don't think merely beating one demon is worth...."

"Killing a demon solo is a great achievement unheard of since the dawn of

history. The Royal Palace's internal is even discussing about creating a new medal for your sake, though it isn't publicized yet."

"Eeh...."

"By the way, a medal was newly made solely for a party of six who killed a demon 100 years ago."

Something like that huh....

I guess this is unavoidable in an era where the demons have slipped in and thoroughly destroyed techniques to defeat them.

Apparently, the demons didn't slip in recently.

"....Oops, this is the room."

The principal stopped in front of a door inside the palace.

The door isn't that well decorated but it looks quite sturdier compared to other doors. The wall is likely thick too. I know, I can sense some difference in the mana reaction.

"It's Edward."

The sound of a key came from the inside and the door opened.

There are maids-san and a dignified-looking man inside the room.

I feel like I've seen a man with this kind of atmosphere in my past life.

It was of my acquaintance in my past life if I'm not mistaken.... He has the same atmosphere as the king of Manilia Magic Kingdom.

....The King!?

"It has been awhile, Edward."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Your Majesty."

Seeing the principal knelt down, I also did the same.

I'm not really familiar with formalities in the present era.... Well, I should just imitate other people.

"You and I are friends. No need to be that stiff as this isn't a formal audience."

"I'm honored to hear that, but Your Majesty is the king of this country...."

He really was the king.

And it seems principal Edward knows the king.

No wonder they let them in quite easily.

"And, is the boy over there the hero of the recent matter?"

"Yes. He is Mathias Hildesheimr, the one who killed a demon solo, and made a huge contribution to the progress of chantless magic at the Second Academy."

"I see. ...Indeed, he has quite a well tempered body for one so young. Ah. I will introduce myself just in case, I'm Eist Graya. I'm the king of this kingdom."

Some kings occasionally came to visit my house in my past life, but I had never thought that I would meet one in less than 20 years after my

reincarnation.

Still, he's quite friendly, is this alright? Normally a king shouldn't easily introduce himself like this....

"My name is Mathias Hildesheimr, I'm a first year student of the Second Academy."

I don't really know how to do this, but I tried to introduce myself for now.

If they demanded formal etiquette from me, they would have taught me some beforehand.

"Good work on the subjugation this time. Usually we would have done a grand announcement and give you a territory to govern....."

I don't need no territory! Nuh uh, nope!

After all the trouble of reincarnating myself for the sake of magic combats, why should I be forced to have a territory.

Well, it might not be that much of a burden if I just push the responsibility to someone who can manage a territory, but please at least wait for another 20 year first.

"However, if we were to announce that demons have slipped into humans, the whole kingdom would inevitably fall into a huge confusion. Moreover, frankly speaking, we would like to avoid having the hero who beat a demon alone be tied to a territory. Of course I promise to grant you the highest credit once this matter is settled. Would you wait until that."

"With pleasure!"

It'd be sad if I were forced to govern a territory.

"Much obliged. ...However, now the problem is your reward. Even with the circumstances, we ought to give you a reward.... Right. How about a magic sword?"

"Magic sword.... is it?"

"Indeed. We took hold of a powerful magic sword incomparable to other national treasure grade swords just recently. It has been augmented with two magic that have never been seen before. The owner of the shop where that sword was found said that the sword was augmented by a child who happened to pass by.... It sounds too unrealistic that some even hypothesize that that child is the incarnation of Magic God."

So there's such a magic sword around....

But I don't think there's any point in me getting a dual augmented sword.

I can make more powerful magic swords as many as I want once Ruli is able to augment properly and I teach her some trick to it.

"....Your face looks like you're saying that you don't need it. Well, I do not mind if you take other thing. We will open the treasury later, you can take anything you fancy there."

"I'm very grateful for your generosity."

Picking anything I want from the royal treasury huh. That's quite grand.

Hopefully there's something interesting inside.

"However, it's still too little of a reward for Mathias's achievement. We can give you multiple treasures, but.... Do you have any wish yourself?"

Wish huh.

I remember this formal etiquette, 『As you wish Your Majesty』 in my past life, but this isn't necessarily true in this era.

Guess I might as well take this chance to ask for something big.

"I would like to acquire the right to use the resources of all the dungeons in this kingdom."

"Dungeon resources.... Do you mean ores produced by monsters and veins?"

"Yes. Everything that can be taken inside the dungeons including those. Of course, I'm not asking to monopolize them. If my associates and I are allowed to take the resources inside dungeons...."

Dungeons hold the most supreme resources inside them, surpassing even the highest quality gold vein.

This condition would have been flat out rejected, like 『Inconceivable』, in my past life, it could never even be considered as a term in a negotiation.

However, the sense of value in the current era is quite off of the past one. It would be super great if they gave me the right to even a part of it.

"I will happily comply if you are fine with that. From hence on, Mathias

Hildesheimr as well as his associates will not be imposed with dungeon taxes, nor will they be restricted to enter a dungeon."

Yay! A huge success!

Now I can easily get my hand on monster's materials and magic metal.

"Also, if you want a dungeon, I'm considering giving you one along with a territory.... How about it? Of course, the kingdom will cover all the administrative expense. Dungeons are money loser after all."

The king let out this wonderful suggestion when he saw me doing a light triumphant pose.

"By all means, please!"

Resources get! They'd even cover the administrative expense for me, what heaven is this.

It's so favorable that I almost feel like I'm deceiving them here.

"You're quite unselfish, I thought you would ask for more."

Unselfish, no way. There's nothing more avaricious than this.

I almost replied that, but I kept my silence.

"Then let's proceed to the next issue. Regarding the demon in this matter.... There is no mistake that Devilis the Heaven-sent Child of Magic was a demon is there?"

"Yes. It's undoubtedly true. His crest was fake, and the magic he showed were chantless magic disguised as chant ones."

"So it's true.... As a matter of fact, the four Heaven-sent Children of Magic in this kingdom have all disappeared."

Ah. So all the Heaven-sent Children of Magic really are all demons....

"The Magic Division commander, Elhart is also included among them. Furthermore, it seems the existences thought to be Heaven-sent Children of Magic have existed for several hundreds years. ...In other words, our country had been secretly under control of the demons for several hundreds years. As Magic Division plays the most important role in coming up with

countermeasures against demons."

That means, there is no organization in this structure called country that can win against the demons now.

It seems the demons purposely didn't completely crush human forces since there was a possibility that some problem might arise for them if humans were excessively driven to the wall.

"What do you think I should do?"

<Author's Note below>

Dungeons were regarded like oil fields in Mathi's past life.

Chapter 41: Strongest Sage, Works Out a Plan

"Right then.... First, I think we need to fix our force."

"We wouldn't be in this difficult situation if it was that easy...."

"Let's spread chantless magic to as many magicians as possible. That alone should be enough for now."

Although humans probably can't win in a 1-on-1 fight against demons, their strength is in number.

That was probably the reason why the demons haven't destroyed humanity yet.

The fact that there were only five demons including one dead one in a country is quite indicative of that.

Which means, people wouldn't have much problem defending themselves as long as they have the power of chantless magic.

....Though well, it would be difficult if we were the one attacking due to the difference in mobility.

"I see. I have heard about chantless magic from Edward. Indeed, we would probably able to deal with demons if we spread that. However, that would also mean telling the demons that our kingdom has a way to go against them. Won't the demons come to destroy this kingdom then?"

"...They probably will."

The demons probably intended to slowly shave off humanity's strength little by little until they were sure that they could definitely destroy us.

However, if Eist Kingdom comes to know the way to deal with that, the demons also most definitely won't let it pass.

They will come to destroy Eist Kingdom for sure.

"If that's the case, wouldn't it be better for us if we strengthen our force secretively without giving it away?"

"That's what we should do were the Heaven-sent Children of Magic didn't escape...."

"It's only a matter of time before the demons know what's going on. Fortunately we noticed this before they completely destroyed us.... Do you

have any plan? If our force is centralized in Eist Kingdom, it would be harsh even with chantless magic wouldn't it?"

That's certainly true.

I could go myself but even I have my limit doing it alone, and even if there's a fewer demons now, protecting everyone won't be easy if the force to do it is concentrated in the Royal Capital.

However, of course, there is a way to break through this.

"We should have some time before the demons gathered themselves. They don't group together to form a large-scale organization like human's Knight Order. Even if several demons regarded this kingdom as a danger, the attacks will most likely be sporadic. At least for the next three months."

Demons fundamentally don't cooperate together.

They would of course escape all at once when their disguises were blown, but one human-hating demon good at intelligence would probably go around to spread the info.

Well, there is no demon that doesn't hate human, so there's no actually no need to specifically use『Human-hating』.

The magical structure of a demon is『made to hate humans』, thus, unless it's a mutant, there is no demon that doesn't hate humans.

"And after that three months?"

"I can't deny the possibility of a large-scale offensive. Therefore, let's shut out the demons before that happens."

"Do you have any way to realize that? Three months time with demons as the opponent looks to be equal to nil...."

"There is. We can simply create a huge barrier that surrounds the area we want to protect."

"Perpetual Barrier Magic.... Are you saying you intend to make a new God-borne Artifact?"

"God-borne Artifact.... I'm not familiar with that term, but I can probably manage if it's a perpetual mid-sized barrier to surround the royal capital. Since there's a dungeon at the Second Academy, we can use the mana from the Dragon Vein connected to that dungeon to fuel it."

"Is such a thing possible? Frankly, this all sounds like a tale from the Age of Myth...."

"I think that's inevitable, Your Majesty. Since it seems technology and such have been thoroughly destroyed by the demons. Well, it should be ready in one month time if we get students of Second Academy to help. That is as long as we can get all the materials needed...."

"The First Academy, Knight Order and Magic Division will cooperate too. Honestly speaking, I have no option but to bet on Mathias. So what materials do you need?"

The materials huh.

We wouldn't need much if the past me were the one who'd process them, however, this time, we'll tackle the problem using human-wave tactic by teaching processing magic to students who bear the First Crest. The quantity isn't something that Ruli can do alone, after all.

Which means, it's roughly--.

"One 60cm grade magic stone, and 10 kilograms of adamantite and orichalcum alloy. And also 1.5 tons of mithril."

"....Are you seriously saying that?"

"I'm very serious...."

Oh no. Wonder if I angered the king.

I could flee outside the kingdom if worse comes to worst, but I'd be alone again if I did.

"This kingdom has no 60cm magic stone. Dozens kilograms of mithril are most we could secure. We have a few orichalcum and adamantite from the national treasure's artifacts. They're currently being borrowed by people who know how to use them to fight demons, but even if we gather them all, I am not sure if it even reaches 3 kilograms."

I see.

True, considering the monster I beat in my trip to the Royal Capital was regarded as a『Strong Monster』, it should be no mystery they can't get a 60cm magic stone.

Getting orichalcum and adamantite need a bit of refinement techniques.

"...Then, let us gather them."

"Gather?"

"Fortunately, the dungeon under the Second Academy seems quite old. There's a high chance a monster that has a 60cm magic stone appearing in the deeper part. As for the mithril, well I should manage somehow. We've got three months of time after all. As for the orichalcum--adamantite alloy.... Could I think about it some more after looking at the treasury?"

"『Manage somehow』 for tons of mithril huh.... It sounds impossible with our, no, humanity's common sense.... Edward, can we trust this Mathias lad?"

The talk turned to the principal who has been keeping silent until now.

"Mathias has made every unbelievable stuff he said so far into reality. To begin with, the very existence of a 12 year old who beat a demon alone sounds like a joke in itself."

"...You're right. All right, I will entrust this matter to both Mathias Hildesheimr and Edward."

"I'm grateful."

The unofficial audience ended after this and that, and then I went to the treasury together with the treasury manager and Edward.

Chapter 42: Strongest Sage, Obtains a Sword He Made Himself

As one might expect of the royal treasury, it's quite wide and well tidied.

However, I don't see anything interesting from the entrance.

Well, let's try looking for it.

"First of all, dungeon's materials.... I would like something sturdy."

"Something sturdy is it?"

"Yes. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it's sturdy."

Perpetual-type barrier magic fundamentally transfers the damage on the barrier to the object used as its core to decrease burden on the barrier.

A magic stone can be used as the core if it's for a small-scale barrier, but if it's used on the barrier that will cover the entire royal capital, a slight burden would be enough to destroy it along with the entire barrier.

"...To be honest, I don't understand what kind of durability Mathias-san is looking for. I can understand if you mean something sturdier than mithril, however, if it's admantite and orichalcum, that is...."

Unfortunately the custodian doesn't seem to know which of the treasures are the sturdy ones.

There were lots of indestructible lab apparatus made with magic.... But they were most likely lost along with chantless maagic.

"Then, I guess I'll see for myself. I can pick anything I like as my reward right?"

"Y-yes! There are some exceptions, but you can basically pick anything."

This is an advance reward as the real one will be for later, so it's already quite lavish--.

Looking at the mana reaction, the things that piqued my curiosity are gathered together in one place.

I walk to that place while asking the custodian.

"Are the things around this part included in those exceptions?"

"No. I'm sure there are no things that can't be given around this part. These are most likely relics from an ancient civilization or the age of myth, we don't know how to even use most of them."

I see.

Most of the things in this part are certainly junks.

There's a lot of magic items created by the civilization in my past life, but most of them are boring things like kid toys, or stiff shoulder reliever.

However, I see something that looks usable among them.

"What about this sword?"

I raised the sword in question while saying that.

This is most likely a sword my past life made in an experiment. I don't remember when it was, but the mana pattern is familiar.

"That's an old sword excavated from an ancient ruin. It is sturdy, however, it's very heavy on top of being dull, thus I cannot recommend it. May I interest you with this sword instead. This was discovered very recently, but its performance

is mythical. This was going to be put as a prize in a contest were it wasn't going to be granted to Mathias-sama--"

The custodian took out another sword.

That sword also looks familiar--Or rather, this was the sword I augmented in Bass's blacksmith. This was bought for 1000 gold coins huh, what a massive rip-off.

Why is this sword even in the treasury.

"We're troubled how to store it since it can cut stones when one just lightly swings it. This is truly the appropriate sword for the hero that killed a demon--"

"I don't need that sword. If there's someone else who wants it, you should let that person have it."

I declined the rip-off sword and continued observing the other sword.

This sword needs a huge amount of mana to activates the magic put in it.

Once activated, it can erase this entire castle from the map, but I would need another 50 year to have enough mana to activate this sword.

However, the material of this sword is far stronger than orichalcum-adamantite alloy.

It's more than enough as a core for the barrier.

"Alright. Let's use this sword as the core."

"That sword? I heard it had to be of orichalcum...."

"This sword is far sturdier than orichalcum."

"Y-You know just by looking!?"

"There's many ways to do it."

Well, it's cause it's my own creation.

I made a lot of things with this kind of configuration, so I can know just by looking.

I don't remember when was it since I produced lots of stuff of similar kind

though.

"Also, I found something interesting. I'd like this as the reward."

I take a pendant on the nearby shelf.

The pendant has a small magic stone, loaded with a complex magic, inserted on it.

"...You picked another thing with unknown usage.... Are you sure you're fine with just that? There are many other powerful equipment here like that sword, or an armor that can be strengthened with mana...."

"No. I'm good with this one."

This pendant is also another thing my past life made.

It has the effect of increasing the experience point you get from killing a monster or an animal by collecting the mana that would have been scattered to the surroundings, by several times. Moreover, it affects your companions as long as they're nearby. Furthermore, the range is quite wide, it can cover the entire first layer of the school's dungeon.

It's the ideal magic item for me who wants to quickly bolster my force.

My mana and strength had reached their limit by the time I completed the pendant in my past life, so I threw it away without ever using it, who would have thought that it would be useful after I reincarnated myself.

"If Mathias-sama is fine with it, I don't have any objection...."

"I've got no objection either. Since Mathias has never taken an action we expected him to, not even once. He must have some kind of plan this time too. I hope you won't destroy the schoolyard again though--"

"Then. It's settled. And I've got to quickly prepare the barrier creation, let's go back to the academy!"

"What are you gonna do about the mithril?"

"We'll get the mithril in the school. ...Ah, you told me not to destroy the schoolyard, but that doesn't apply to the dungeon right?"

"....Huh?"

We went back to the Second Academy while having that talk.

Chapter 43: Strongest Sage, Refining the Dungeon

"Alright, are you two ready?"

A day after the audience.

Ruli, Alma and I went to the dungeon.

We need most of the students for the barrier creation, and those students need to be able to use chantless magic.

Even though the teachers have gotten used with chantless magic lesson, teaching all of them in one week will still be difficult.

Therefore, we agreed that we needed around three weeks before we could begin the barrier creation in earnest.

"Yes! I'm good anytime!"

"Me too, all perfect!"

"Then, let's go!"

Thus, I started the search for one of the materials needed to create the barrier; a 60cm magic stone.

Well clearing the dungeon would take some time, so today's main objective is teaching Ruli and Alma magic.

"Alma, you can shoot【Simple Mana Enchant】without a problem right?"

"I can do it with my eyes closed now! I mean I've shot like hundreds of it!"

"Then, the next one is【Wire-guided Enchant】. Alma, try using【Simple Mana Enchant】but stop before you shoot it."

"Un!"

Alma put her mana on the arrow she readied.

It's still a bit crude, but she got the passing mark. At this degree of completion, she should be able to learn the next enchant.

"You'll shoot that arrow.... but this time, try to concentrate your consciousness on the arrow before you do. Connect the arrow with a mana

thread and feel as if you hold the endpoint."

"Hm...Like this?"

I could sense mana coiling on the slight space between the shot arrow and Alma.

The range is only about 3 meters.... It's good enough to get the feel.

"Then, try to make the arrow curve to the right using that thread as an intermediately...."

"Oooh, it curved!"

Alma's arrow slightly turned right.

She really has a good sense.

"This is called guided enchant. Once you can make the arrow turn at your will, you don't need to worry about line of fire anymore. Also, that arrow can penetrate right?"

"It can easily penetrate a mere hermit crab..."

"Then, first you should practice shooting through two crabs at once."

Doing it on one crab is easy, but you need to have an unexpectedly good control to penetrate two crabs with differences in highs and lows.

It should be optimum for her practice.

And since I've hanged the pendant from yesterday on my neck, I should also get a bit of experience points from it.

"Okay, I'll give it a try!"

"Don't go to other floors for now okay."

"Got it!"

After she said that, Alma left us to hunt hermit crabs.

This means she'll be a bit away from us, but I can sense if she's in any danger

with【Passive Detection】as long as she's in the same floor, so there's no need to fret.

After confirming that Alma turned at a corner, I turned my line of sight to Ruli.

"Is it time for Augment magic at last!?"

Ruli raised her voice before I could say anything.

However, unfortunately, augment magic isn't the thing I'm going to teach her now.

"Augment magic.... Or rather, first we need to make the materials for it. You should make your own weapon if you want to do augmentation."

First of all, if a First Crest bearer needs to bring a sword whenever they want to practice, they will never have enough money on them. If they can create their own sword, they can practice anytime they want.

Moreover, if you want to master augment magic, you'll have to be able to concurrently use augment magic while you're creating a sword. Thus, blacksmithing is indispensable for it.

"Creating weapons....? But don't you need to train for years or even dozens of

years to become a blacksmith...."

"If you're going pro, yep that's about right."

Even if she took the shortest route using the knowledge of my past life, it would still likely take her several hundreds years to completely master blacksmithing.

However, it isn't that difficult if it's only to surpass the swords you can find in the present royal capital.

"Well, I'll teach you weapon creation later, first our problem is.... procuring the materials. In short, metal refinery."

"But first, we'd need ores to refine--"

"We have raw ores here. This."

While saying that, I take out a sword from storage magic, put【Mana Strike】, and【Brittle Fracture】on it and hit the dungeon wall with the sword.

Then a part of the dungeon's wall crumbled and fell to our direction.

By the way,【Brittle Fracture】is a magic to raise offensive power against hard brittle things like rocks.

"Dungeon's wall have a moderate amount of metal in them. There's many reasons for that.... Well, just keep that in mind for now."

"Eh, you're breaking that!? Or rather, you can break that!?"

"Hm? Isn't dungeon's wall a resource?"

"Let alone resources, it should have been the forefront of things that absolutely can't be broken...."

But it can be broken though.

The principal also already gave me his permission,『You can do anything you want with it if you can break it』anyway.

Well, no point thinking about it. It's probably another weird knowledge the demons spread. Those bunch really never do anything decent.

"I'll teach how to break the dungeon's wall later, for now let's focus on refinement. I'll show you how to do it right now, so watch closely and keep using【Passive Detection】."

"Yes!"

I pick up a huge lump from the crumbled wall while Ruli is watching.

There isn't much metal in it since we're in upper floor, but it's quite enough for training.

I diffuse my mana into the lump, and after my mana melted the metal, I pulled the mana out and recrystallized the metal portion.

And then I crushed it into pieces using the sword with【Brittle Fracture】.

"What do you think? Did you get it?"

"It felt like the mana melted the dungeon wall somehow.... Was that how to do refinement?"

"No, this is the second stage."

I activated magnetic magic and gathered black lumps from among the broken pieces.

"These are the dungeon's crude ores. Well, put simply, they're mix of metals contained within the dungeon wall."

Dungeon's crude ores contain iron within it so you can collect them using magnetism.

You can use your hands as well, but using magnetic magic is far quicker.

"Dungeon crude ores.... So we make a sword using these?"

"Nope. We collect these and then refine them."

I gathered the dungeon crude ores in one place, and melted them into one lump using flame magic.

The secret here is to put in a largish amount of mana right before they melt. The melting point will become lower if you do, making it easier to melt the lump.

I cooled it with water magic lastly, and recrystallized it using mana again by

the same method like earlier.

Afterward, the black lumps this time are mixed with gray and blue crystals, creating spotty patterns. I think it's 90% gray and 10% blue.

The blue is mithril, the gray is iron. It seems the metals mixed within the wall in this floor are mostly of these two variants.

"How about it?"

"Don't tell me that's.... Mithril!?"

After identifying the blue parts on the lump, Ruli asked me.

"Correct. The gray one is iron. ...But the purity is lacking, thus we need to raise it by repeating the process before."

Afterward, I broke the spotty lump, melted the blue pieces and the gray pieces separately and recrystallized them again with the method earlier.

Silicones, oxygens and other elements besides metal are mixed in dungeon crude ores.

Recrystallization is needed to remove those impurities.

Well, my Fourth Crest can't make it that pure even after repeated processes though.

"I, I see.... So you get mithril from dungeon walls...."

"This isn't really that complicated, you'll learn in no time."

"No time!? ....I'm not sure which part of it isn't complicated, but thank you in advance!"

--And then, about 30 minutes later.

"I did it!"

Ruli is holding mithril she refined herself, with a smile on her whole face.

To be honest, I thought it would have taken around two hours.

Should I say as expected of the school's runner-up, or maybe it was thanks to

her intense determination....

Chapter 44: Strongest Sage, Teaches Augmenting

Ruli mastered the way to refine dungeon wall in only 30 minutes.

The purity isn't that high, but it's good enough to make weapons.

"Then, let's secure enough iron to make one weapon for now."

The metal we have on hands are around 200 gram iron and 5 gram mithril combined. Iron has 10 times the volume of mithril but 40 times the weight. Mithril is light.

"One weapon.... Which means we'll need 10 times this amount?"

"That's about right. Well, I'll be helping you. Let's create a lot of dungeon crude ores and then refine them."

"I...I'll do my best!"

I smash the dungeon wall while saying that.

After smashing around 200 kilogram wall, we started the process to refine the

dungeon crude ores.

Ruli's refining speed is about half of mine.

It's partly because she's still inexperienced.... But also because she's a bit too careful.

"You can be more haphazard when creating the crude ores. Since raising the purity comes at a later stage."

"I, I understand!"

Her speed slightly increased.

And then, we finished turning all the dungeon wall we smashed into dungeon crude ores.

I solidified the soil and put it somewhere to prevent it from obstructing the way.

"And then, um.... Ei! This magic is a bit hard...."

"Well, that's cause it's not production-type magic."

Ruli gathers the dungeon crude ores using magnetic magic.

Her control is quite poor.... But output is all she needs to gather the ores anyway.

To begin with, magnetic magic isn't of production type, the First Crest isn't good with it.

"Next, we just need to refine all these.... Wanna try doing them all?"

"Yes!"

Ruli puts her mana into the ores, activates flame magic and turns the dungeon crude ores into a lump.

The flame magic I used is the normal attack magic, but the one I taught her is of production type.

It has a short range and it's hard to increase its power, but it's easy to manage and control precisely. And best of all, it's well suited for the First Crest.

"You're doing well, keep at it!"

"Yes!"

Ruli repeated the recrystallization process many times and eventually, she got 2kg of iron and 50gr of mithril on her hands.

Some of the metal seems to have been shaved off at every recrystallization, but they're enough to make a sword.

"Looks like you've learned how to handle most metal now."

"I can't believe I did all this...."

Ruli becomes teary eyed. Cute.

But today's coaching isn't over yet.

"You probably have guessed the way to create the sword right?"

"Creating swords.... Are we perhaps making the sword by molding it with mana?"

"Yep, exactly. ...Ah, you should mix some mithril with the iron rather than having it pure iron. Use about half of the mithril we have now."

"Mixing it with mithril? ...I'll give it a try!"

Ruli mixes the mithril and the iron and turns them into the shape of a sword.

"....Doesn't it look bent?"

"That's normal for the first try."

The sword Ruli made is slightly bent to the left. Well, turning metal into a precise shape using mana is a matter of experience.

"This should be already far stronger than a sword made from iron. Try using that sword to cut this. The sword has no blade though, so it's more like smashing than cutting."

Ruli slashes at a block of wood I took out.

The block of wood is cut in two along with a sharp sound.

"Huh? Is this maybe stronger than the swords they sell in the city....?"

"Yea. Metals are basically stronger when they're in alloyed form. There's other techniques to this.... But for now, try to augment that first."

"It's augmenting at last!"

"Aa. ...That said, augmenting isn't really hard once you understand the basic of chantless magic. For now, look at this."

I take out one piece of paper from Storage magic and give it to Ruli.

"Is this... Magic circle? I've never seen one this complex...."

"It's a magic circle for【Brittle Fracture】and【Toughening】. I'll teach you the way to compose magic circles once you've gotten accustomed to augment magic."

It's easier to learn the way to make magic circles once you've tried many different augments and grasped the feeling to do it.

I'm not saying that learning magic circle math beforehand is bad though.

"Dual augment right from the start!?"

"【Toughening】isn't that complex, and this is actually one of the simpler dual augment magic circles. First, make a space to put in a magic stone on the sword and carve the magic circle using your mana."

I give a hermit crab magic stone to Ruli.

It's the best material for practicing since we have a lot of it and it doesn't fetch a high price.

Also, it should be big enough for dual augment.

"Err, first you make a space...."

Ruli changed the sword shape a bit and put in the magic stone.

And then, her mana slowly and carefully moves as the magic circle is getting carved into the magic stone.

However....

"I finished the carving.... I think, but the magic sword won't activate...."

"There's some parts where they shouldn't be connected. Try to reduce the amount of mana you put into it a bit more. Put a lot of mana into the thick lines, and little mana into the thin ones."

"Yes!"

I take out a huge amount of hermit crab magic stones I stocked and give them to Ruli.

She succeeded this time.

The performance is quite low for an augmented sword, but magic dwells on it at least.

"I-It's done! But the atmosphere of this sword felt quite different...."

"That's because you skipped mana conditioning. You should put your own mana into the magic stone and the sword before the augment. And once the mana settles down, do the augment. The performance will be better if you do

just that."

Ruli completed a magic conditioned magic sword with the third hermit crab magic stone I gave her.

"This one feels similar somehow!"

"Try hitting the wall with it, you'll see how good it is."

"The wall.... Ei!"

Ruli's magic sword broke the dungeon wall.

This sword is augmented not for combat, but for mining the dungeon.

"I-it broke! And they said even the national treasures couldn't do it...."

You can't count on the national treasures.

We're in a world where that rip-off sword (the time needed to augment it; 5 seconds) is one after all.

"It's a success. Then, let's keep refining the dungeon at this pace!"

"Yes!"

--Later on, Alma came back carrying a huge amount of hermit crab magic stones, saw a part of the dungeon getting smashed and turned into swords, and shouted "What's happening here!?" in confusion.

Chapter 45: Strongest Sage, Finds Again

The day after Ruli and Alma acquired new magic.

We went to the labyrinth again.

"Let's try going to the next floor today."

The preparation for barrier magic will start tomorrow if chantless magic lessons by the teachers have gone well.

We need a lot of small magic stones for that.

I'd also like to raise my magic output and quantity. Beating monsters is the best way for that.

"The second floor at last..."

"Nope. We're gonna get to the 10th floor today. It's just going to be a day trip though."

"10!?"

"True, the second floor might not be enough with our strength now....?"

"Let alone 10, Mathi-kun will probably alright on even the last floor.... floor 20, but will Alma and I be alright too? "

"I think we can do it! And Ruli, you have those sword and armor with you!"

We made an armor from the leftover mithril during yesterday's practice.

To be frank, I don't think it's needed if we're just going to floor 10, but since it's not too heavy, Ruli has it with her today.

By the way, the armor's been augmented with【Lightening】, and【Toughening】, I made the magic circles but it was Ruli who augmented it.

"Well that's true.... But I'm afraid I'd be a drag...."

"It's just floor 10, you're nothing of that sort. Even Alma can probably go alone as long as she doesn't step into a Monster House."

Fundamentally, the strength of monsters that appear until floor 25 are mostly the same in most dungeons.

After floor 25, monsters with traits peculiar to a dungeon start to appear, and from floor 30 on, their traits become obviously specific.

And Alma's strength already surpasses floor 10 monsters.

"Magic bows are amazing...."

"Well, Ruli, you can also fight on floor 10 just fine. Even though Glory Crest isn't suited for combat, that doesn't mean it's useless in a fight."

It's normal for bearers of First Crest in my past life to be able to clear a dungeon up until floor 30.

Rather, it's stranger if they can't clear floor 30 as long as they train properly.

It's still too hard for Ruli though, since she's only been training properly for a month.

"Well, we'll be counting on Ruli not as a firepower but as a magic augmenter. Use this."

I take out a log small enough to carry from Storage magic.

The weight is around 3kg.

"....What is this?"

"That's just a log. Alma will probably run out of arrows halfway through. Ruli should create arrows and hand them over to Alma to prevent that. The way to do it is a bit different than with metal.... You can probably manage with your intuition. Since you've got the basic nailed down."

"No way, asking me to make arrows all of a sudden.... huh?!"

The dubious Ruli tried to stream her mana into the log, gradually shaving it off.

And after about 10 seconds, one part of the log turned into an arrow without feathers attached.

"I did it!"

"Processing magic has many uses. By the way, you can do more than making it one by one."

I took out another log and shaved it, turning it into 30 arrows in a few seconds.

"I, I don't think I can do that...."

Ruli tried to do it, but it doesn't seem to be going well.

Well, processing multiple things at once needs experience after all.

"No need to rush, you should do it little by little starting from one arrow. I've got a lot of logs in my Storage magic, just tell me if you need more."

"I understand!"

"That means, first we aim at floor 2."

We reached the stairway toward the next floor while we were talking.

By the way, according to the principal, this school has successfully cleared 20 floors of this dungeon, and it seems they were able to get down that deep through stairways.

Well, that was a long time ago and the present time graduates can't even clear floor 12 now.

"....Huh? It doesn't really feel that different?"

After engaging in a few battles on floor 2, Alma uttered that.

"There's more monsters, but it's still basically the same.... Ah, there's a different type of monster over there."

"Uwaah, gross..."

"But it's weak right?"

"....You're right."

An arrow Alma shot pierced through three slug monsters altogether, killing them.

They're just small fry weaker than even hermit crabs as they don't have a

shell.

Snail monsters came out on floor 4, and bivalve ones appeared starting from floor 6, but all of them were small fry and became victims of Alma's arrows.

The atmosphere changed on floor 8.

"....Is that, a dog over there?"

"Yeah. It's Killer Dog. The real thing starts here."

The new monsters that appeared among the bivalve monsters on floor 8 were of dog-type, Killer Dogs.

Unlike hermit crab and snail monsters, dog-type monsters are relatively fast and offensive.

They're not high ranked monsters at all, but they're unlike any other monsters we've encountered so far.

"For now, try to beat them. I'm sure Alma can manage a few of them."

"Let me try!"

The Killer Dog dodged the arrow Alma shot.

"GAAAA!"

The Killer Dog came running toward us while growling.

"Waa, it dodged!"

"You've still got time to shoot two arrows! Calm down and attach a guide on them!"

I wanted to help her a bit, but fighting alone is an experience too.

If they always fight in a safe environment, they might misunderstand that combat is a safe thing to do.

There were times when such a thing was practiced at Magic Academies in my past life, and as it turned out, the graduates were mostly useless in real combat.

--That said, I plan to intervene if they really get in danger.

"Guide... Ei!"

However, it appears that's unnecessary.

The second arrow Alma shot was almost dodged by the Killer Dog but it homed in deep into the dog's legs, stopping it on track.

"It's not over yet! Finish it well!"

"Got it!"

The third arrow pierced the Killer Dog's head, killing it.

"Yay!"

Subjugation complete.

She missed once, but I'm sure she could finish another with just an arrow soon at this rate.

"Alright, next let's go to that room."

"Room? ...Don't tell me..."

"Yea. It's a Monster House."

"Noo! We're gonna die if we step into a Monster House on this floor!"

Chapter 46: Strongest Sage, Uses Projectiles

"....Un. I think fighting a Monster House on this floor is still too much for you. But it should serve well as a reference."

"Reference?"

"Yea. A way to deal with multiple enemies with a bow and arrows. Well just regard this is only as a future reference.... Could I borrow the bow a bit?"

"Un. ...I mean this bow is yours Mathi-kun."

"Oh, right."

I forgot that I'm currently loaning this bow to Alma.

"And also, some arrows. 20 of them should be enough."

"Yes!"

After getting the bow from Alma and arrows from Ruli, I walked into the

room.

And then I throw a leftover chip from when I made arrows earlier.

"17 monsters huh. ...Well, guess that's that."

17 Killer Dogs appeared inside the Monster House.

After confirming that, I put an arrow on the bow.

"Hold on, using a bow at this range is...."

"No worries."

The gap between me and the Killer Dogs can is about the same as a slightly longish spear's length.

Normally, this isn't a distance to fight with a bow.

However, this is fine. If we're too far apart, my magic won't be as effective.

"*whimper*."

With a 'fwoosh' sound, a flying arrow pierced a Killer Dog's head, killing it in one blow.

16 remaining.

"Two."

While dodging the jumping Killer Dogs, I set up two arrows at once and shoot them together.

This isn't the way to use a bow, so of course the power isn't as strong.

In addition, the two arrows follow a straight orbit, thus it's hard to use it as a spread shot.

However, it's more than good enough if you revise them with magic.

The two homing arrows I shot hit two killer dogs following quite a weird orbit. One blow each too.

14 remaining.

"Three!"

Next, I shoot three arrows at once.

The power decreased quite a bit, but it's still good.

11 remaining.

"Four--no, 11 arrows!"

I put a bundle of 11 arrows on the bow. I can't set them up using just my hands, so I use magic to hold them.

Honestly, I'm being too forceful. The output of the bow isn't coming out at all, and the ones that hit can't even pierce through the dog's fur.

However, I've put【Simple Mana Enchant】and【Homing Enchant】on the arrows, raising their power through magic.

Yet it still wouldn't be enough to kill the monsters even if the arrows hit.... I predicted all of the Killer Dogs' movements and made all 11 arrows hit their targets.

After having their brains destroyed through their weaknesses, the eyes, the

Killer Dogs fell down all at once. Subjugation complete.

"...And there you go, you can defeat multiple enemies while only using enchant magic once like this. Not by raising the total sum, but by dispersing your firepower. It's quite useful if you learn how to do it."

I returned the bow to Alma while saying that.

However, Alma isn't taking the bow.... Or rather, she's not moving.

Troubled with her reaction, I sought help from Ruli, but she was also not moving, she didn't seem she could be of use here.

I don't see mind magic-like reaction through【Passive Detection】....

"...What's wrong?"

"No well, it's too amazing I don't think it can be used as a reference...."

"Beating a floor 8 Monster House alone is ridiculous enough already, and you did it with a bow.... I mean, what did you do in the end?"

"I merely put【Homing Enchant】and【Simple Mana Enchat】on the last 11 arrows. It's not that much different than with two or three arrows, you know."

"E-eleven..."

Alma was stunned.

"Well, to be frank there's actually no need for 11 arrows, you'd better off bombing the monsters with short-range magic instead. But two or three arrows are quite useful, let's practice how to do it from now on."

"I wonder if I can be like Mathi-kun if I practice...."

"Depending on the training, you should be more powerful at handling bows than me. Since your crest is the best possible crest for bows."

Or rather, I'll be in trouble if you don't.

Since Alma is a candidate for my Magic Combat Party member in the future.

It might take 300 years before that happens though.... well 300 years will pass

by in a blink of an eye with Immortality magic anyway. We should manage somehow.

"Let's see now, let's get to floor 10 and set up a camp there."

"...Camp?"

"We'll enclose one part of the dungeon and prevent monster from entering it. The two of you will be safe inside."

"S-something like that exists....."

"By the way, that means Ruli and I will stay right? What are you gonna do Mathi-kun?"

"....I'm gonna visit the lower floors to get my hand on some things."

Chapter 47: Strongest Sage, Establishes Camping Ground

We didn't encounter any new type of monsters on floor 10.

Still, compared to floor 7 and such where only a few Killer Dogs were mixed in with shellfish type monsters, floor 10 was all Killer Dogs, so the degree of difficulty was quite a bit higher.

"Ruli, I'm counting on you to the right!"

"Yes!"

Alma shot through two Killer Dogs out of a group of five from the left.

Even though the arrow didn't kill the monsters, they still got damaged enough they couldn't walk.

Putting【Guided Enchant】on two arrows at once huh, she's gotten quite used to it. She still can't do it on three arrows even once though.

And Ruli stopped the remaining three by firing flame magic in front of them.

Even if she has a crest with a low growth rate, it looks like her magic strength and control have improved thanks to the pendant that helps gaining exp and a long series of battles.

The flame didn't give much damage, but it succeeded robbing the dogs off their mobility.

Alma shot through another two dogs during that opportunity and Ruli stopped the last one.

Alma shot out an arrow with【Simple Mana Enchant】to finish off the last one altogether with the other four, subjugation complete.

Un. Safe.

"You two should be fine fighting on floor 10 now as long as you don't step into a Monster House."

"Monster House.... It really is hard to tell them apart with【Passive Detection】...."

"I do feel something that seems like that, but I can't really grasp it well... Just when I thought it was a Monster House room, it turned out to be a normal one..."

"Well, a Monster House's reaction is harder to see through compared to monster's. Once you're accustomed with【Passive Detection】, you'll be able to detect them without thinking."

It's hard to give an advice for this kind of thing since it's quite a 'feel' thing.

Even among magicians that excelled in【Passive Detection】, there were many opinions as to how to grasp mana reactions.

"...Now then. This place should be good enough."

I stopped at a room that was just the right size.

"This place... You mean for the camping practice?"

"Yeah. You absolutely need to learn Camping if you want to dive deep into a dungeon."

You can't take a break if you don't pitch a camp.

For sleeping and in some cases, even dining.

If you're diving for a long period of time, not being able to camp can be fatal.

"I-I understand! I'll do my best."

"Me too, will do my best!"

"I'm glad that you're motivated, but Alma, please keep watch on the surroundings. Since unfortunately, Camp is an augment magic. Any other crests besides Glory Crest can't use it."

I could pitch a camp alone since I did it countless times in my past life and had the magic control for it, but as the mana density thickens the deeper you go into a dungeon, doing it alone also gets harder.

The current me with Disqualified Crest can probably only go up to floor 20 at best.

"Gimme back my determination!"

"Looking out on the surroundings is an important duty too, you know. You can't use other magic while pitching a Camp, so you're basically defenseless."

"...Then I'm also practically doing it too! Got it! I'll be on the lookout."

Alma set up an arrow on her bow and began to watch the surroundings.

Actually, she'd better off concentrating on【Passive Detection】than doing it by eyes.... Well, I guess I'll give her a passing grade since she's technically keeping watch.

"Now then. Shall I explain about Camp.

Chapter 48: Strongest Sage, Going Solo

"First of all, the place for pitching a Camp.... Basically you want a place like this one. The best one is the site left from a suppressed Monster House. But if you can't find that, the corner of a small passage is also a good choice. You basically want a place with a few blind spots and is enclosed."

"You mean a place that's easy to defend right! But why Monster House?"

"When a Monster House summons monsters, the surrounding Magic Essence gets eaten up. Thus, it's easier to pitch a camp on the after-site of a Monster House by 2-7 floor than the current floor."

"Does that Magic Essence thing hinder camp pitching?"

"That's right. Explaining what Magic Essence is would take too long.... Well, just think of it as something similar to mana. Mana tends to be thick at a place with thick magic essence after all."

You'd have no problem using magic even without knowing those tidbits.、

『Something something that summons monsters』 is good enough.

"And so, we're setting up our Camp here. Are you ready to make magic items?"

"Yes! I can't win on speed against Mathi-kun, and I don't know how to make magic circles, but I'll go at it!"

"Then you'll be fine. First, try making this."

I take out an iron, turn it into a thin stake and put a magic stone on its tip.

"Yes!"

Ruli proceeded to make the same thing.

Since the shape is simple, she didn't have any trouble.

"This is called a Barrier Stake at its simplest form. Camp is a type of barrier magic so you basically use these for it."

"Is barrier magic capable of defending against floor 10 monsters? I heard it was only effective up to floor 7...."

"Is that barrier magic you talking about a type of chant magic?"

"I haven't learned it yet, but yes it should be chant magic!"

"....I think you'd better off forgetting common sense that involves chant magic."

The current common sense is basically useless. Or rather, it's harmful.

"True, the difference between chant magic and Mathi-kun's magic is too great, it's like they're completely different things...."

Mine's actually the common sense before I reincarnated myself though....

Well, judging from the state of the world, that might have been a story from thousand years in the past.

"Well, you'll see for yourself whether it's effective or not once you try it. For now, drive those stakes on the ground with regular spaces between them. It may differ depending on the floor, or the stake's quality.... But having them in four corners of the room, three at the entrance and one at the center should be fine here."

"We're putting the barrier on other places besides the entrance?"

"There are monsters who that can detect humans' mana through walls, it's a countermeasure for those type of monsters though there's probably nothing like that on this floor. Since Camp isn't a magic that shuts out monster's entry through the barrier force, but a type that prevent them from tracking you through the combination of detection and presence concealment."

By the way, most monsters can't break through the boundary between floors, thus there is no need to block the top and bottom. Mostly.

"I've finished setting all the stakes!"

"Then let's activate it. Carve this magic circle in places besides the center and this one in the center."

"It's not image, it's more like augmenting right."

Ruli begins to carve the magic circles while saying that.

The central magic circle is complex, but the others one are not, the current Ruli can do it while speaking, no problem.

"That one is complex and hard to maintain, though not impossible. With magic circles, you can just make it again and duplicate the old one. By the way, the magic circles used are always the same, so you can set it up quickly just by changing the stakes."

Barrier magic that isn't augment exists, and you can use that one even without Glory Crest, but it's not suited for Camp due to its stability and maintenance.

Camp's magic circles are quite special composite magic, making a new one from scratch is difficult even for magicians in my past life.

Well the ones I taught Ruli were the common ones with improvements on mana efficiency and concealment strength.

"I've finished carving the magic circles!"

"Now put your mana on the central Barrier Stake to activate it. The magic circle will take care of the rest like assembling the barrier and such."

"Yes!"

Ruli put her mana on the central magic item and the barrier was build in an instant.

The barrier is invisible to naked eyes, so it just looks like the magic stones are shining, but it's clear as day through【Passive Detection】. Easier to see than even a crowd of monsters.

"Ooh.... So this is Camp."

This isn't by chance, it's intended by design.

Make it harder for monsters, easier for humans. This is the concept of Camp magic.

"I can sense some kind of strange magic.... Is this Camp?"

It seems Alma's noticed Camp's reaction.

"Yeah. Let's give it a try. Alma, try to enter the camp."

After Alma entered the Camp, I got out of it a bit and invoked【Compulsion Detection】on a monster beyond the wall to lure it here.

A Killer Dog lured by【Compulsion Detection】came in front of the Camp.... It's confused since it has lost its target.

The Killer Dog looks around restlessly but it doesn't seem like it can find us.

"Wha, it looked at us!"

"We matched eyes just now...."

"But it didn't notice us right? This is the effect of Camp. By the way, Camp's magic circles have an effect that makes monsters consciously avoid going inside, so they can't enter by chance either. And seeing that the art is stable, this Camp will last half a day for sure."

Afterward, it will depend on luck, but there's quite a good chance for it to last a day.

There is absolutely no mistake that it will last as long as I'm gone.

"Camp is amazing...."

"Yeah. It's a very useful magic.... And now you two wait here. I've gotta go fetch some materials on the deeper floors."

Ruli and Alma would probably be at the level of『Better off being there with me』in another month, but unfortunately right now they'd just be a drag.

However, the resources on lower floors are useful, so I'd like to take them now.

I can't take much alone, but there are things that are useful in small quantity too.

"Well, you can't go too deep when you're with us...."

"By the way, Mathi-kun, how deep do you intend to dive?"

"Depending on the strength of the enemy needed for my need.... Think it'll be around floor 25."

"25!? Wasn't floor 23 the world record for dungeon diving!? And that was by a 30-people party who had received Magic God Gaias-sama's blessing! It's impossible!"

Chapter 49: Strongest Sage, Runs Through Dungeon

A god people believe in has the same name as the past me huh.

With how the swordsmanship god's name is also the same as a sword nerd I was acquainted with in my past life, these are sure some coincidences.

....It's a coincidence right?

"Even Mathi-kun shouldn't be able to get to floor 25.... That floor 23 record is in another dungeon, no one has gone past through floor 20 in this dungeon, so we don't know anything about it you know? If you went without preparation and something happened to you...."

"Nothing to worry about. I can probe floor 25's state by using the high magic version of【Passive Detection】. Though well, I'm planning to go back if it looks like it'll take too long."

By the way, half of that was a lie.

That magic does exist, but I currently can't use it now.

However, up to floor 25, there's not much difference in monster's strength in any dungeon, so I already know what to expect even without actually diving into one.

The world has largely changed during my reincarnation, but fortunately, the inside of dungeons don't change much.

You even can say that the knowledge I have about past dungeons are all applicable today.

Well, I'm still gonna withdraw if it looks dangerous though.

"Hi-high magic...."

"True, if it's Mathi-kun, I feel like he can comes back from floor 25 calmly.... Or rather, I feel like he'll come back after defeating a monster that doesn't usually appear...."

"Is that Alma's intuition?"

"Un."

That reminds me, Alma's intuition was said to be correct often.

There are people like that in my past life too. I don't understand the concept behind it though.

Well, I will come back for sure, but there's little chance of me meeting a strong monster.

Such monsters do exist, but you rarely ever encounter one.

The chance increases in a floor that hasn't been or never been treaded upon by people in a while.... I'd better keep my expectation in check.

"So then, could you lend me a sword we used for mining."

"Ha.... I understand. But you have to absolutely come back okay."

Ruli gave me a sword with【Brittle Fracture】made for mining from among the two swords on her waist while saying that.

The walls get harder as you go deeper in a dungeon, so I'd like to have an augmented sword with me.

Half of my objective this time is gathering metal.

"Yeah. I'll come back for sure. But I can't promise that it won't get prolonged. You two should go back ahead of me if I don't return in two hours. Well, I plan to come back in one hour though."

"No! I'm not going back without Mathi-kun...."

"If you don't, the Camp would lose its effect and my chance of returning alive would decrease instead."

This is the truth.

Since I can make a Camp up until floor 20 alone, I can make use of it to restore my stamina and mana if things get dangerous.

Well, me getting stuck in such a situation on a mere floor 20 isn't even in the equation though.

"....I understand. I'll go back."

Looks like she's assented.

"Then, I'm gonna head off for a bit! Take care not to leave the Camp okay!"

I checked the Camp's and the floor's mana once again and then left after

making sure that there would be no problem in the next two hours.

By relying on the flow of mana, I ran straight floor 10 down the stairs to floor 11.

I'm ignoring monsters I meet on the way. Fighting them would only waste my mana and time.

Rush Bulls are the new monsters on floor 11. It's a bull type demon.

It's stronger than a Killer Dog, but they're both small fry.

However I should beat one just in case.

Estimating from the memories of my past life and its mana reaction, I fire a magic with the least amount of mana to kill it in one blow.

One of Rush Bulls died just as expected.

I've no business with Rush Bulls anymore so I ignore the second one.

I can't move at maximum speed while erasing my presence but I've got no choice here.

In addition to Physical Reinforcement magic, I only invoked a mobility magic, 【Friction Reduction】 and ran past the monster.

The Rush Bull immediately ran after me when it saw me running past it, but it's slow.

I'm only running, but our distance gradually gets bigger.

It's impossible for a Rush Bull's speed to catch up to me and my 【Friction Reduction】.

Thus I reached floor 12.

The time needed to reach floor 12 from the moment I entered floor 11 was about 70 seconds.

That's about the average when you advance through a dungeon on the shortest route you get from measuring the flow of mana.

By the way. 【Friction Reduction】 is a magic that reduces air friction when you move about, speeding you up.

There's a lot more magic that can make me go faster and is easier to manage than 【Friction Reduction】, but this magic is overwhelmingly better at mana

consumption. Almost zero even.

Thus, I chose to use this magic since I wasn't particularly in a hurry.

I went down many floors, ignoring numerous monsters just like that.

"....This is floor 20 huh."

15 minutes after I went solo.

I arrived at floor 20, the deepest cleared floor of this dungeon in this age.

As I got deeper, the passages became narrower with many twists and turns, slowing my moving pace down.

Now that it's come to this, it's quicker to beat the monsters rather than trying to shake them off, so I continue the journey while doing just that.

However--.

"They're a bit better now but.... still weak as always."

I sighed while lopping off the head of a boar monster with a sword enchanted just with【Steel Slash】to save mana.

I mean, even Biffgel can defeat the monster if you bundle up 300 of him together.

Since a Killer Dog can probably be beaten by 10 Biffgel, I guess you can still call this a progress.

A gathering of 300 Biffgel is really really bad for my mental health though, so please no, just no.

It's not all bad since the monsters being weak means it's easier for me to progress on, but that also means weak materials.

I'd like for something less objectionable if possible.

--If this is the deepest cleared floor, the academy's battle force is really low.

The demons' plan to abate humanity power by way of chantless magic seems to be a huge success.

....Even while saying that, I'm stowing magic stones, hides, claws and light but usable materials into Storage magic.

Dismantling them is easy with magic anyway.

In that respect, the War Tiger I met in my trip to Royal Capital wasn't too bad.

It's at a level where I could beat it in one blow, but it's also not too weak.

It's a quite an efficient monster for scraping up exp and magic stones.

"Well, many more monsters of that level will probably come out as I go deeper."

I advance through the dungeon while talking to myself.

I'm paying attention to the mana reaction of the walls instead of monsters'.

Besides mithril and iron, adamantite starts to be found mixed in around this floor.

Mixing even a little adamantite with other metal to form an alloy will grant considerable strength to it.

I'd very much like to get my hand on it.

....Therefore, let's secure it.

I found a place with a good amount of adamantite from the mana reaction, put【Mana Slash】,【Brittle Fracture】, and【Toughening】on the mining sword, and broke the wall altogether.

And then I recrystallized the crumbled rocks, produced dungeon crude ores out of them and put them into Storage magic.

These will produce adamantite if we refine it seriously later.

That said, refining adamantite is quite tough, the current me can probably get around 3% out of these ores. Even Ruli can only get 2.5% currently.

Ruli can probably improve that percentage to 80% in one year, compared to me getting to 3.5% in that time. It's the so-called limit of the Fourth Crest.

Well, 3% is enough for now.

"....Now then. It's an unknown domain from here on...."

It appears that this is the end of easy path to next floors.

The route that seemingly goes to the next floor is simply a hole, unlike stairs up until now.

It's around 10 meter deep I think.

In cases like this, you'd want to use a rope or such, but--.

"Heave....ho."

The simplest way to do it is this. By jumping off.

You won't get hurt as long as you're careful when you jump off, it's quick, and there's no need to prepare anything.

And I've got a nice little cushion this time. Thanks to it, I can land safely.

"Ga...."

As I jumped down while erasing my presence, I used a monster below as a cushion by trampling down on its head.

I stabbed my sword on its throat while landing, killing it, afterward I got down on floor 21.

It's an extremely safe, and peaceful way to move about.

By the way, the monster I used as a foothold this time was called Flame Lizard.

Just as the name suggests, it's a lizard that spews out flames.

As always, it's a monster I can beat with a single stab of my sword on the vital spots, but since it's only a tad weaker than War Tiger, I guess it's gotten quite better now.

Even if you gather hundreds of Biffgel together, they won't be able to even make a scratch on it, and will only get roasted instead, so you can't use Biffgel as an exchange rate for Flame Lizard.

And it looks like I've got myself a hit here.

I found a reaction that was obviously bigger than anything else here in one corner of the floor when I used【Passive Detection】here on floor 21.

There's no mistaking it. It's a monster called『Floor Master』with strength imbalanced with the floor they're on.

The appearance of a『Floor Master』was the biggest cause of party getting wiped out in my past life, they were a symbol of menace for adventurers.

Once there was a report of its appearance, several hundreds people would form a party to subjugate it with many dead tolls.

That is『Floor Master』.

Then what should I do in this situation.

That's obvious of course.

--Charge on.

Chapter 50: Strongest Sage, Picks a Fight With Floor Master

Before challenging the『Floor Master』, I investigated the monsters and the terrain here with【Passive Detection】.

It's normally not possible to defeat a『Floor Master』alone.

If it was the past me, I could just shoot some random magic to evaporate the monster along with the dungeon from where I stand, but the current me has lower magic capability than even an average magician in my past life. I can't use that kind of brute force method.

Even with all of my knowledge and experience, I still need to plan a way to defeat it.

I'm going to pick a place to fight based on the flow of mana and terrain.

The battlefield has to satisfy two conditions.

First of all, there should be as few passages as possible that connect to that place.

One of the basic in challenging a『Floor Master』is to exterminate the whole

monsters that dwell on that particular floor to prevent them from barging in during the fight.

In addition, you want to break down the floor's walls to create a huge space for many people to fight at once.

However, I can't use that method this time.

The need to exterminate other monsters on a floor is applicable when it's a raid subjugation.

For me, doing that alone would waste too much mana and time. It's impossible.

Therefore, I'm going to narrow down a place with few passages that connect to it to decrease the possibility of monsters intruding in.

Even if other monsters barge in, I can just cope with it if I just anticipate them with【Passive Detection】.

Secondly, it has to be spacious.

The Fourth Crest is normally better in a narrow space, but when you're fighting a『Floor Master』, not having enough space to dodge its attack is out of question.

After all, the current me would die if even one of the『Floor Master』's attacks hit me.

--Fortunately, I immediately found a place that meets those conditions.

It's a huge room 80 meters away from the place the『Floor Master』is lurking.

I went into that room while cutting down all monsters I met along the way to reduce the chance of them intruding in even a bit.

The ground is flat, the ceiling is high, there are only two passages that connect to it. It's perfect.

And since I've gotten closer to the『Floor Master』, I've completely grasped the kind of monster it is.

It's a huge venomous snake monster called『Arch Serpent』in my past life.

It's hard to treat it as a source of material, but at least I've gotten ahold of its identity.

--And so.

"Now come!"

I invoked【Compulsion Detection】at the『Floor Master』while shouting out loud.

In order to make the Arch Serpent separated by several layers of walls, dozens of meter away notice me.

Then I heard roaring sounds from the direction of the Arch Serpent.

Using【Passive Detection】, I see that it's coming straight at me through the shortest route while ignoring walls.

And about two seconds later.

The wall in front of me suddenly dissolve as the Arch Serpent showed itself along with purple liquid.

The purple liquid is an Arch Serpent's most peculiar characteristic, it's a strong acidic venom.

The venom isn't stopping at only dissolving the wall as it begins to gradually dissolve the floor which should have been far resistant to acid.

"....Oy oy. There's a passage over there, use that instead of breaking things please...."

Now a terrain I've especially prepared for the battle is ruined.

I can't rely on the ground at least.

My shoes will melt if I step on the ground where the venom fell, and even if I have acid-proof shoes on me, those hollowed grounds are useless as footings. Even if the surface looks fine, it's not unusual for the inside to be hollowed out.

I can fight by putting up barrier magic under my feet for an instant as my footings.

And since the venom is volatile, it will pollute the air if it takes too long.

The air will only be safe for battle for at most 10 minutes.

Now then. It's the first tough-looking battle since I've obtained this Disqualified Crest.

Short it may be, let me enjoy this fight to the fullest.

Chapter 51: Strongest Sage, Has Learned

The Arch Serpent was fully focused on me as it came assaulting with its fangs on full display.

"KISHAAAAAA!"

While parrying the fangs of Arch Serpent that rushed in while screeching, I slash on it with my sword endowed with【Acid-Proof】,【Mana Strike】, and【Steel Slash】.

Its scales were extremely hard befitting of a『Floor Master』but I accurately aimed at a gap and cut off one piece of its scales.

The wound is just 50 cm big. For the Arch Serpent whose whole body is bigger than 10 meter, it's just a scratch.

However, it's enough.

The attack just now wasn't intended to decrease its health, but to make the Arch Serpent recognize me as an enemy and lose its cool.

Due to its strength as a『Floor Master』, the serpent is not used to getting

injured.

Truthfully, my sword only worked on it because I concentrated my mana to hit its weakest spot which I discovered by probing into its mana flow.

I'd need 10 times that power to destroy the Arch Serpent's scales through brute force.

Even the attack I used on the demon during the interpersonal match is likely still not enough.

"KISHA!"

Arch Serpent rushed at me in anger from its wound.

While dodging that using barrier as my footholds, I constructed a magic.

An extremely short-range flame magic the Fourth Crest is good at.

It hit the Arch Serpent's weakness, the inside of its throat.

"GAAAAAAA!"

The Arch Serpent retreats in agonizing cry.

Of course, a Floor Master isn't weak enough to be defeated by this level of magic.

However, it gets me time to construct my next magic.

I take out a magic stone from Storage magic and concentrate my mana into it.

Not delicate and small amount of mana like with augment magic. The augment I could do wouldn't be able to even scratch the Arch Serpent.

It's a magic not for turning magic stone into magic item, but one for destroying the inside of the magic stone.

A magic that I have never used before because it requires a great deal of mana and magic control.

The current me needs to concentrate all of my power on this one magic.

"KISHAAAAAAA!"

I crush the magic stone in front of the coming fangs.

A huge amount of mana and magic essence overflowed from the crushed magic stone.

I forcefully control that magic and clad my sword with flame elemental enchant.

【Special Mana Enchant】.

It's one of mystic arts for a sword-wielding magic combatant.

The Arch Serpent was about to bite me right when I completed the enchant.

I swing my sword down without trying to dodge it.

The Arch Serpent's fangs were smashed, blood spilled out of a big wound.

However, it still hasn't fallen.

"It sure is tough...."

However, the Arch Serpent has suffered a huge damage, its movement becomes quite dull.

The next one should do it.

I crushed another magic stone and cut it down with the clad sword.

It's still not downed. Then once again.

--After crushing three magic stones, I managed to cut off the Arch Serpent's neck.

Soon after, the venom scattered on the ground disappeared.

Arch Serpent's venom is composed of mana from the main body, so it will disappear if the main body is killed.

That said, the after effect of the venom remains.

--For example, like this.

"Oops."

When I put my feet down on the floor after the battle, it sunk about 30 centimeter deep along with a dull sound.

Looks like the inside of the floor has been quite dissolved.

Well, since the battle had ended, it only managed to surprise me a bit.

"Now then. What am I gonna do with this...."

I'm lost in thought before the Arch Serpent's body.

I can stow it whole in Storage magic with my current mana.

However, if I do that, most of my maximum mana will be taken by Storage magic and I'd be forced to return.

Right when I was thinking of just taking some of its fangs--I recalled the merchant who bought the War Tiger I beat in my trip to Royal Capital.

I have learned from that time.

Materials of monsters that I think aren't really valuable are highly prized in the world today.

These might fetch a good price if I brought them back and sold them on the guild or some material shop around. Yep. I'm sure of it.

While thinking what I'm going to do with all the cash I'm piling up, I put the Arch Serpent's body into Storage magic, and went back to floor 10.

The Camp magic is.... Yep. It seems to be working fine.

Chapter 52: Strongest Sage, Hasn't Learned

"Welcome back Mathi-kun!"

"Look, he really comes back right!"

Ruli and Alma welcomed me when I got back on the camp.

It seems Ruli was refining the dungeon wall, I could see broken pieces of rocks and dug soil on the ground.

"....But it's way quicker than an hour right? Did something happen?"

"My Storage magic ran out of space after I beat a slightly big monster. I turned around and went back at floor 21. So it's faster than the plan."

"Big monster huh...."

"Yeah. The materials you can get from the monster aren't really interesting, but I figure it might fetch a good price."

You can use Arch Serpent's materials for something but the handling is a bit difficult.

The venom is gone once it's killed, and it has no claws and few bones.

But the fangs are relatively usable, so I've taken several with me.

"Floor 21 monster... What's it name?"

"Arch Serpent."

Since it's a different era now, the monster's name might have changed too.

"Arch Serpent.... I'm not familiar with the name, but I'm sure it'd fetch a good price, being a floor 21 monster and all!"

"Or rather, materials from floor 21 monsters rarely circulate in the market.... Will it be alright?"

"The mob monsters on floor 21 were weaker than War Tiger y'know. The big one was relatively tough though."

People seeing from the sideline might think that the fight was easy since it ended with just three crushed magic stones.... But it was actually not that simple.

Because, the【Special Manaa Enchant】magic invoked by crushing magic stones isn't something that can be done continuously so nonchalantly.

It's an act of scattering half-baked mana union to the surroundings.

If you carelessly did it twice without thinking, the mana composition inside the dungeon could went astray and trigger a Mana Disaster.

A strange monster might occur in the dungeon because of it, but that's still good, worst case, monsters might overflow out of the dungeon instantly, destroying royal capital.

With my current control of mana, doing it four times is the limit before Mana Disaster occurs.

Furthermore, if I had to do it for the fourth time back then, I probably would have to stay in the dungeon for 3-4 days to adjust the mana inside the dungeon.

In that respect, it would have been bad if the fight didn't conclude in three shots.

"Must be quite a monster for Mathi-kun to call it tough...."

"I mean, stop using War Tiger as your standard. War Tiger is a calamity class you know?"

"But it's weaker than that demon."

"Using demon is even worse!"

We ascended the dungeon while having that conversation.

I see that both has gotten quite used to their roles, with Alma handling monsters and Ruli making arrows.

"Oh right, are we going to Adventurer Guild to sell the materials?"

"I think we still can't register on Adventurer Guild at our age...."

"Students should be able to register regardless of age. I haven't done it yet though."

"Then let's go register ourselves. Where's the guild again...."

"Ah, I know where it is."

After leaving the dungeon, Ruli led us walking in the city.

We could see a building with a huge signboard, written with『Adventurer Guild』before long.

"Are you academy students? Have you registered with us?"

An onee-san inside came talk to us the moment we went inside.

"Yes. We're Second Academy students. We haven't registered yet, but we'd like to sell some materials."

Ruli answered.

"Right then, please put the stuff you're selling on this purchasing counter to formalize the purchase.... But really, the students this year are quite

exceptional. That's quite the loot."

While pointing at the purchasing counter, onee-san said that when she saw the magic stones we were carrying.

Looks like she'll handle the purchasing. This onee-san seems to be the guild's receptionist or something.

By the way, the reason why we're carrying magic stones around is because I had no mana left to spare so I couldn't store the magic stones we got from the monsters we beat on the way back.

My loot are all inside the Storage magic so the ones we're carrying now are all Alma's and Ruli's without a doubt.

Since we collected magic stones of questionable quality too, the amount we're carrying right now is quite something.

"Then could the three of you show me your Student Cards? You can use those as Guild Cards."

"Yes!"

We handed over our student cards and then onee-san quickly filled the branch office name and some number on the cards' back and gave them back to

us.

"The registration is complete with this. Then, please put the materials on the purchasing counter. You may also keep the one you don't want to sell or only inquire the price...."

"What do you think, Mathi-kun?"

"Well, no harm in selling them all is there? I've got the ones needed for practices with me."

"Then, all of them please!"

"Understood."

Onee-san quickly appraises the magic stones.

Mainly for color and weight it seems.

There was no hesitation in her movement as she completed the procedure, and the magic stone's total price kept increasing.

"It's done. All of them would be 12 gold coins and 3 silver coins."

"T-twelve.... That's a lot of money!"

"There's really a lot of outstanding first year parties nowadays. And most are parties of three or four. I heard it had to do with a new lesson in the academy, but your party is at the top...."

"Oy oy, are they really students!"

"The students this year are seriously strong...."

People unrelated to the receptionist gathered around.

Judging from their appearances, they're probably adventurers.

"Of course! Cause we have Mathi-kun with us!"

Oy. Don't bring me into this.

"You're one to talk Alma...."

"But these magic stones are from the monsters we defeated!"

"Huh? Only two of you dealt with monsters? So then, the one over there is.... a baggage carrier?"

The onee-san said that while looking at my crest.

I see. So that's what people see when a Disqualified Crest is in a party.

"That can't be any farther from the truth! It's true that he's carrying a lot of baggage, but he's really our party's main force!"

"Main force.... and in a way, teacher? Anyway, these aren't all our loot today!"

The two look at me after saying that.

"Actually, we still have a lot more materials to sell...."

"There's more? You don't look like you're carrying a lot though...."

"No, it's here."

I took out some random magic stone from Storage magic.

The surrounding people's line of sight were gathered at the magic stone at that very moment--.

""""....Ha?""""

The guild's atmosphere froze.

Chapter 53: Strongest Sage, Is Doubted

"Hold on. That size.... Which floor and monster did you get it from?"

This magic stone.

It's probably a Flame Lizard from floor 21.

Judging from its size and atmosphere, I think it's from the Flame Lizard I made into a foothold when I went down to the floor.

"Floor 21."

"....And, Mathi-kun is it? From where did you take that magic stone just now?"

The onee-san asked another question after I replied her.

Her face is having a cramp, her eyebrows are twitching.

"Storage magic."

The receptionist looked perplexed when she heard that.

"The whole first grader this year were strange, but the real weird one finally came...."

"Maybe he bought that magic stone from somewhere and try to sell it here for fame?"

"But where can you even buy that kinda magic stone? Anyone buying that would attract attention."

"...Then he stole it?"

"Where'd he steal it. I mean, where can you even find one."

And I got treated like a thief before I knew it.

"Mathi-kun won't do something like that! What Mathi-kun did was only breaking the dungeon, breaking the school grounds, beating a demon alone and making a national treasure grade sword.... Huh? I did that one too?"

"That's right! Mathi-kun is weird alright, but he won't steal!"

"....Mathias-kun and you two, could you come here for a bit?"

As instructed by a guild staff, we went into a room inside the guild.

It looks like a common drawing room with a table in the middle.... However the walls and the ceiling are pointlessly sturdy, and there's a lock on both outside and inside the room.

They might try to lock us if anything happened.

Well, I can break them anytime I want to, there's no need to struggle.

I haven't done anything wrong after all.

"We're going to contact your academy, please wait a bit."

The onee-san left after saying that.

And then, a middle-aged man came inside the room after a while.

"Second Academy students again!"

The man shouted that when he saw our uniform.

"....I haven't introduced myself. I'm Gardo. The branch head of this guild. Sorry for shouting out loud. You probably aren't at fault here."

And then he apologized.

"Did anything happen?"

"First graders who should have been training with monsters in the forest brought in magic stones from the dungeon, had better results than some poor graduates, and brought in bodies of monsters that had traces of magic with unbelievable firepower, anyway lots of things...."

"Must have been tough...."

Just who did those things.... Actually, there's no need to guess, it must be because of chantless magic lessons.

Even at the current stage, there's already a lot of students who can shoot magic far more powerful than chant magic.

And Alma and Ruli are a cut above the rest.

"Well we've come to an agreement that the Second Academy this year is weird, no need to mind it. We're going to process this as is as long as it's nothing too much.... Just what did you do to get called to this room?"

"We were brought here when I took out this magic stone."

I took out a magic stone from Storage magic.

Gardo laughed in astonishment when he saw the magic stone.

"Ah. Ain't no wonder they're contacting your academy. Even if an adult adventurer brought that thing here, forget about questioning them, there'd be no end of angles to retort it. --Oh, looks like she's back."

Gardo pointed at the door.

And then, we could hear loud footsteps.

"Branch head! We've got a confirmation from the Second Academy!"

"Ou. How was it?"

"They said, 『The name of that student is Mathias right? If so, his oddity is just the usual, please leave him be』."

Looks like we're in the clear now.

I can't really agree with what's been said though.

"Just what did you do at the Second Academy?"

"Lots of things."

"...Looks like it's better for my sanity not to hear it. We just need to buy your magic stone right. With this size, it'd be--"

"Wait a minute. I've still got more."

Financially speaking, I have no problem just selling this one magic stone for now, but that means I'll have to keep that Arch Serpent in my Storage magic.

That's bad. And it's too big, there's no place to put it away.

"There's more huh. Then take them out too."

When I heard that, I lined up a large quantity of magic stones on the table.

I've left stuff we need for practices inside, but it's still a lot.

The branch head's and the onee-san were stunned when they saw them.

"I've got some monster bodies too."

"...I feel like I understand the Second Academy's feeling. Put the bodies here--"

"Unfortunately, the room isn't big enough."

The floor will probably give in if I forcefully put them here.

"....Did you ask the Second Academy in cases like this?"

"They basically leave me to my own devices in most cases. But I was asked to give them a report if I beat a demon...."

"T-the heck... Why'd you bring in demon there, and you talk like you'd beat it...."

The branch heard was at his wits' end.

Chapter 54: Strongest Sage, Confirms the Promise in Effect

"So, what kind of monster you killed?"

Several minutes after the notification from our school.

"It's a snake monster called Arch Serpent."

"...Never heard of it. Is that a floor 21 monster? Frankly, I can't believe anyone can clear floor 21 of that dungeon, even if the academy says so...."

"The monster is a bit special, but that's about right. Here's its magic stone..... By the way, I actually haven't cleared the floor yet. I went right back after beating this monster."

I took out the Arch Serpent's magic stone.

"....Hold up Mathi-kun, I haven't heard about that magic stone."

"Is that really a magic stone!? It looks more than 50 centimeter...."

"From what I'm seeing here.... doesn't seem there's a mistake that it's a magic stone. I don't think there's anything like that even in the national treasury though...."

The three seemed astonished when they saw the magic stone.

By the way, the receptionist onee-san was called by someone else and went out again so there were only me, Ruli, Alma and the Branch Head in the room.

"Mathi-kun has transformed into a national treasure mass production machine...."

"I think Mathi-kun has been that machine for a long time now."

"This magic stone is kinda half-assed though...."

This magic stone is about 55 cm. I'd have liked it to be 3 cm bigger.

It's half-assed to be used for the barrier core. Magic cores from『Floor Masters』have high performance relative to their size, and it affects the property of Dragon Vein used as a mana source and such.

Guess I can just hunt more if it's not enough.

"Half-assed? What the heck is lacking from that abnormally huge magic stone?"

"I'm currently in the need of a somewhat big magic stone, it needs to be a bit bigger than this. I think there will be an announcement regarding this matter in the coming days."

"Magic stone that's bigger than 55cm, somewhat big....? Apparently, the『Somewhat』in my dictionary was a mistake."

....Footsteps were coming again, when we were having such conversations.

And then the door opened soon after.

"We've received a directive!!"

The receptionist who was called out came back.

Looks like something happened.

Trouble again....

"What is it this time!"

"Mathias Hildesheimr and his companions are to be exempted of purchasing tax of anything that relates to dungeons. Therefore we have to raise the purchase price to match it...."

Looks like I've mistaken.

Apparently, it was about my reward for beating a demon. I thought it would take longer for the formalities to finish, but the principal who heard about me selling dungeon monsters probably urged the higher-ups to get it out faster.

But really, I'm exempted of tax even when I'm selling directly huh.

"That's not happening. The tax for purchasing at the guild is managed by the kingdom itself. Even if the academy asks for it--"

"About that, this directive came from Royal Palace, not the academy!"

"....From Royal Palace, directly? Even if he's strong and extraordinary, just for a first grader?"

"I haven't grasped the situation myself, but this has His Majesty the king's seal on it and the one that delivered this letter is a knight-sama, so I think it's most likely real...."

"...Aa. I thought it was strange, I got it now. This was a dream all along."

It's not y'know. It's real.

--Even with all the commotion, we somehow managed to complete the selling process (there were some uproar when I took out monster bodies, but I was able to sell them aside of the Arch Serpent. Looks they had never seen it before.)

We got 750 gold coins in total at the time. It was cheaper than the rip-off sword, but since they couldn't calculate the price for Arch Serpent's material (apparently they were going to investigate what kind of material they were first), afterward they're going to sell them in the auction, thus that amount will be added later on.

I'm planning to attend the the auction myself if I have time.

Chapter 55: Strongest Sage, Discovers Assailants

"Now then. Let's decide on our shares this time."

I declared that while we were walking outside the guild.

By the way, I've put up a small-scale soundproofing magic to prevent people from listening to our money talk.

"Un, the sooner we decide on it the better! So how much should we pass you on?"

"Umm, since we've received 11 gold coins and 3 silver coins.... Around 6 gold coins?"

"Don't you think that's too little? I mean we beat the monsters and all but it was Mathi-kun who helped us through dangerous stuff like Monster House...."

Huh. Why'd this become about me getting the money.

"Normally, I think I should be giving you two 250 gold coins each here."

Since we got 750 gold coins this time, each of us should get 250.

Though well since it's heavy to carry all those gold coins, I've asked the guild to keep them for us.

"Equal split!? Don't you think that's just too much!"

"Distributing rewards in accordance to contribution is the basic of party isn't it!"

"...Really?"

In my past life, if you divide rewards not by equal split, the ratio and sum would be determined by law.

Since it wasn't unusual for a party to dissolve because of trouble involving rewards.

....Though I mostly stopped acting in a party when I reached 120 year old back then, so I don't really know the rule after that.

"That's right! The reward this time was mostly earned by Mathi-kun! I've

never heard of someone getting 750 gold coins!"

"But you know, it's not like we agreed on it beforehand--mu."

I stopped my words.

【Passive Detection】caught some suspicious reaction.

"...Got it. Then I won't be handing the reward this time. Is that fine with you?"

This doesn't seem to be the time to discuss about our reward. We should end it for now.

I can just hand over the money if Ruli or Alma needs it later anyway.

"Well, in that case..."

"Then let's hurry on to the academy! Use your full power without using too much mana!"

I invoked an acceleration-type movement magic.

"Okay! ...But do we need to be in such a hurry--eh?"

Ruli was going to object while invoking the magic... then she suddenly looked up at the sky.

At the same direction my【Passsive Detection】showed.

"Looks like you've gotten quite familiar with【Passive Detection】."

"Is that a demon...?"

Alma asked me.

"Correct. Looks like two demons are coming to attack us."

Judging from their movement, they're most likely trying to destroy the Second Academy.

It's currently the sole base for teaching chantless magic after all.

The First Academy is also going to teach chantless magic to their students, but they're only about to begin right now.

I have expected one of such early attacks from the demons.

Demons are not good at moving in a group, but there are cases of them working together if it's just two who are colleagues. The three month limit is ultimately about an attack of massive scale.

Well, I guess we're fortunate that this happens when I'm above ground.

"I can only sense one though...."

"That's cause one of them is quite weak. While the other one is quite a bit stronger than Devilis."

When there are two reactions of different scales, it's not unusual for the weaker one to get overlooked.

Considering their practice period, being able to detect one at this distance is most satisfactory already.

"S-stronger than that Devilis.... Why are we heading there!? We've gotta escape--"

"Our prey are coming to us on their own volition you know? It's only courteous for us to hunt them down."

"What are you even being courteous to!"

"....The world?"

"The scale is too huge! ...I guess it does comply with God's teachings...."

God's teachings....?

I'm a bit curious about that but now's not the time. Let's prioritize explaining the strategy to them.

"Demons are fundamentally fast. Until we've grown enough to be faster than them, our biggest chance currently is when they're attacking. ...So, I'm counting on you to take care of the weak one."

"Yes, leave it to us... Eeeh!?"

"I'll let you have some magic stones that are just right for this, and some arrows. Use this magic circle to augment these arrows. Alma, use the arrows with【Wire-guided Enchant】to hit the demon."

And then I gave them a bag of magic stones and a paper with a magic circle drawn on it.

The magic circle is packed with jamming power instead of killing power.

"Fighting a demon with a new technique, it's all too sudden--"

"It's alright. It's not too different from what you've gone through so far. ...Well you probably can't defeat it, I'll do the rest once I'm done with the strong one, please buy some time until that."

I'd have liked those demons coming when I still had some mana remaining.

Currently my mana is around 10% of the maximum.

Fighting two demons at the same time in this condition, while not impossible, isn't something I'd like to do if possible.

"I got it! If Mathi-kun says so, I'm doing it!"

"....To be honest, I don't think I can really fight a demon... But if Mathi-kun says that it's okay, I'll do it!"

"Good, then let's go!"

Chapter 56: Strongest Sage, Counterattacks

"First I'll attack and lure them to lower their altitude. After that, shoot the weaker one with your arrows. The first demon I'm going to attack is the weaker one."

"Roger!"

"I understand! ....But Mathi-kun, are your mana alright?"

"Honestly, I don't have enough for frontal attack."

Even if I were in my top form, the demons' magical firepower would still be superior.

Thus, it isn't possible for me to defeat them in a straight fight with my mana being only at 10% of the usual.

"Then how are you...."

"If my mana isn't enough, then I just need to use the enemy's mana."

"Y-You can do that!?"

"It's a relatively complex magic, so you'll have to wait before I teach you it.... Well then, I'll be charging on them. Prepare the arrows and wait here."

I jumped off the ground, and kicked off barrier magic I continuously invoked mid-air, heading toward one of the demons.

"Enemy attack, Desiril!"

The stronger demon noticed me when I was several steps away from them.

"Impossible! How could he notice us at this distance!"

The weaker demon (seemed to be called Desiril) shouted out while blocking my sword.

Since I wouldn't deliver passable damage on them even if I used magic here, I surrendered my body to the gravity and fell down after exchanging blow once.

"You seem to be good at detection, and for a mere human to be flying in the sky.... Don't tell me, you're the human who killed Devilis?"

"What if I am?"

"Either way, you are still a human. --Die!"

The stronger demon shot a magic at me while saying that.

It's an orthodox flame magic, but the power is remarkably huge. The current me would instantly die if I got hit by that.

When I saw that, I constructed a magic using half of my remaining mana.

The magic is called【Control Sphere】, an original magic I created in my past life.

I didn't have many chances to use it in my past life, but making this was the correct answer.

If invoked the magic as is, it would have consumed too much mana, thus I had re-arranged the spell impromptu just now--looks like it went well.

"Mu!?"

Numerous【Control Spheres】that appeared around me twisted the direction of the flame magic, turning it toward the stronger demon.

The demon tried to evade, but I used the【Control Spheres】to turn the magic again, successfully hitting the demon.

"Gah...."

"Ashril-sama!"

Since it was a powerful magic, the demon suffered a huge damage.

Ashril's face warped, at the same time, I extinguished the next magic Ashril tried to shoot.

After returning the magic once, the【Control Spheres】went back to my side.

This is the strong point of【Control Sphere】. Once invoked, it will persist to control the enemy's magic until it's destroyed by a huge magic.

"To think it erased my magic--then!"

However, Ashril immediately fixed his stance and plunged at me with a drawn sword.

Apparently, he's way more experienced in fighting than Devilis.

Following after him, Desiril also headed toward me.

Against the coming demons, I invoked a barrier magic above me, kicked off it and accelerated below.

The demons pursued me.

After I've fallen enough, I point my sword at Desiril and declare.

"Now's your chance!"

"....Mu?"

The demons don't seem to understand the meaning of my shout.

They only looked bewildered for an instant before they continued rushing with their swords ready.

Pursuing after me, there is no shred of carelessness in their movement.

--Only toward me however.

"Nuo!?"

An arrow that came flying out of nowhere hit Desiril. Of course, Alma shot it.

Desiril who was hit by the arrow immediately fixed his stance and pursued me--not.

With a perplexed look on his face, Desiril fell below at once.

"What's wrong Desiril!"

"I have no idea! After a strange arrow hit me, my power is--uwa!"

A second arrow hit Desiril while he was trying too explain.

The magic circle I gave to Ruli contains an augment magic that causes a

disturbance on a demon's mana.

The potential damage isn't too big, but it's quite significant as an obstruction.

If Ashril wasn't here, I probably could kill Desiril during the chance just now.

"Tch.... Dealing with both at once seems bad. Desiril, kill those womens!"

"Understood!"

Desiril flied toward Alma and Ruli.

"Looks like you've got a few strange tricks up your sleeve.... But now there will be no more hindrance."

It appears we've succeeded separating them apart.

Our opponent probably wanted the same too though.

Chapter 57: Strongest Sage, Evades

"Now, die!"

Ashril rapidly fired the same magic he used the first time while floating in the air.

Looks like he understands the the Fourth Crest's trait well, he's keeping me from getting closer.

I reflect all the incoming magic without moving an inch from the barrier on my feet.

Ashril tried to evade and intercept them, but two managed to hit him.

"Guh... No good even with these number huh. Then how about this!"

Ashril began to construct a large-scale magic.

This is bad.

This is the reason why I didn't really use【Control Sphere】magic much in my past life despite it being powerful.

When up against a large-scale magic, all of the【Control Spheres】would be blown away before they could take control of it.

I can't let him shoot it.

I construct a small-scale magic and fire them on the weaker part of the spell to throw the mana flow out of order.

After a bit of lag, Ashril's magic disappeared.

"Wha..."

Even if he's a well-experienced demon in battlefield, looks like he's not used to having a magic that's under construction to suddenly disappear.

I cut the distance at once during the momentary chance.

And then I slash at Ashril with a sword loaded with【Steel Slash】.

However, he only suffered little damage.

--Tough as expected.

Ashril isn't a demon specialized in defense like Devilis, but they are of whole different classes altogether to begin with.

He's not a demon weak enough for my current mana could finish.

However, there is a way to overcome this.

"What's wrong, is this the first time you've had your magic erased?"

I keep slashing at Ashril while saying that.

I accurately keep slashing on the same wound. It's getting deeper.

"Don't tell me, that was--"

"Yeah, that was my... magic!"

While kindly explaining that, I extinguish another large-scale magic Ashril tried to construct and cut the wound at the same time.

"I see... But don't you get cocky! I'm still the stronger one in a close combat!"

Ashril readied his sword and plunged at me.

Looks like he gave up on keeping the distance and opted to close combat.

At this distance, his magic would land on me before the【Control Spheres】could catch it.

I'd be forced to attack while evading him--

"....Why!"

Nevertheless, Ashril never managed to hit me, while I always hit him without missing.

Of course.

Ashril might be well experienced in this world, but he's as good as a beginner compared to my accumulated experience from my past life.

It might be a different story if it was a long-distance combat, but he has no chance of winning in a close combat.

Ashril's wound got deeper and deeper.

"....Kuh."

Ashril shifted his policy to running away.

Although he's not fully committing to using flight, looks like he's judged that he can't show me any chance, he spreads his wings and flies up to the sky while filling them up with mana.

However, I'm not going to let him escape.

"Oy, where do you think you're going."

While saying that I interfered the flight magic with the【Control Spheres】.

Having his Flight disturbed, Ashril who should have been going above descended to right before me.

I slash at him again there.

"You monster!"

"I don't wanna hear that from a demon."

However, when two minutes have passed since the start of this fight. A change happened in this one-sided combat.

A huge magic circle suddenly unfolded under Ashril's feet.

--Concealment magic.

Ashril has constructed a magic with enough power to blow away my【Control Spheres】while fighting me in the close-quarter combat.

"Got you! Fool! You brought it upon yourself, virtually telling me that I shouldn't invoke my magic!"

Ashril put his mana on the magic circle while sneering.

The unfolded magic circle is activated slightly later.

I immediate got away, but the【Control Spheres】couldn't make it.

The【Control Spheres】were swallowed up by an explosive flame that instantly dyed the sky red.

There's no【Control Sphere】that managed to escape, and I have no mana left to invoke it again.

I muttered one thing in my mind in this situation.

--Got him.

Chapter 58: Strongest Sage, Seals

After getting away from the explosive flame, I used【Passive Detection】to surmise Ashril's state.

Ashril acted just like my prediction.

I've been hiding my remaining mana from Ashril.

He hasn't noticed that my mana has been dried off.

All of his attacks were evaded and he got hit one-sidedly.

He couldn't fly as he liked when【Control Spheres】were present. Furthermore,【Control Sphere】is magic that can be invoked instantly.

And he managed to destroy those【Control Spheres】at lasts.

In this situation, Ashril only has one choice.

Fly away with all his might.

And this is the chance I've been waiting for.

I invoked a magic I had prepared on the spot.

A completely meaningless mana wave similar to【Compulsion Detection】which has no power at all.

And then the activation command of the【Blocking Sphere】, which was mixed among the【Control Sphere】, that had been crammed into Ashril's wings got triggered.

"GU, GUAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!"

I could hear Ashril's scream from inside the flame.

【Blocking Sphere】is a magic that contracts the magic circuit for an instant to worsen the mana flow, originally it can only be used as a harassment.

But it's a different story when it's invoked during the activation of『Full Power Flight』where a vast amount of mana concentrates.

The path gets narrowed, the mana that lost its destination goes astray, it could even result in death in some cases.

Of course, I chose the right timing to make that happen.

【Control Spheres】reflecting magic was only a decoy for this.

"Guh, just, how...."

Ashril fell while getting roasted by the flame as he lost control of his own mana.

Just like I told Ruli and Alma before this battle.

If my mana isn't enough, I can just use the opponent's.

For that reason, I voluntarily told him about how I erased his magic, overlooked the hugely obvious concealment magic that was embarrassing to look at, and the activation of his magic circle that was so slow I yawned, waiting without doing anything to stop them.

However, I've got not obligation to answer Ashril's question anymore.

Since there's no need to give a finishing blow, I let my body to fall down naturally and turn my back on Ashril--and turn around again.

"....noticing even this, you monster."

Ashril spat out when he saw what I did.

Demons posses a magic that produces a huge amount of monsters in exchange of their life.

Ashril just activated that.

"Another annoying magic..."

I put a seal magic on that magic while grumbling.

Normally, I'd have greatly welcomed and gone to defeat the monsters here, but the time is not right. I can't start hunting monsters calmly before the barrier is set.

Since it's a unique magic, completely erasing it with my current pool of mana is difficult.... But this seal should buy us a few months time.

And there's one more problem.

"The flame just now caused a huge uproar on the ground, what to do here."

The people on ground are looking up at sky, fussing over something.

It seems those people are not courageous enough to get close to Alma and Ruli who are still fighting with the other demon, but that side has gained quite an attention too.

"....Hell if I know."

That was Ashril's last word.

I left the dead Ashril behind and went toward Alma and Ruli.

Chapter 59: Strongest Sage, Disappointed

"....Looks like they're doing well."

I muttered when I saw Alma and Ruli's battle progress.

Since the augment I gave them wasn't specialized in power, Desiril suffered little damage, but the two didn't seem like they got hit either.

It doesn't look like I need to get involved right away, guess I'll watch how it's going for a bit.

While I was doing that, Desiril filled his wings with mana and tried to get close to Ruli and Alma at a stretch.

Alma shouts out when she saw that.

"Ruli, next one!"

"Yes!"

Ruli gave Alma an arrow with an augmented magic stone on it.

Alma immediately put the arrow on her bow and shot Desiril with it.

"Kuh.... You pesky little!"

Desiril tried to evade the arrow, but【Wire-Guided Enchant】would get more effective the closer the user is to it.

Desiril who was trying to cut the distance got hit by the arrow, and lost his momentum since his mana was in disarray by the augmented magic.

Ruli and Alma invoked movement-type magic during that opportunity, gaining some distance away from Desiril.

Apparently, this is how the two managed to evade the demon's magic while maintaining the distance in this battle.

At this rate, they can probably keep fighting safely until they run out of mana.

Now that I've mostly grasped the battle flow, I decide to break the deadlock and kill Desiril.

That said, I don't have enough mana to do that upfront.

Thus, I showed myself before Desiril without using any magic.

And then I nonchalantly talk to him.

"Yo."

"W-why are you here! Ashril-sama's..."

"If you're looking for Ashril, he's down there."

Looks like Ashril fell on the stone pavement at the square.

It's easy to tell the place since there's a circle of people (at some distance away) around the body.

"Aa.... Ashril-sama was beaten!? That can't be--"

"Wanna see it for yourself then?"

I constructed a magic on my hand while saying that.

A large-scale attack magic--or an imitation of it using mana emission, it's actually just a light magic.

However, Desiril probably saw this as a light of death, capable of destroying demon in one blow.

Demons have better mana perception than monsters after all.

"Y...you monster!"

When Desiril spreads his wings to try to escape, I give an instruction to Alma.

"Alma, the arrow!"

"But, the range--"

"No problem!"

"Got it! Ruli!"

"Yes!"

Alma shot the arrow Ruli gave her.

I run after Desiril beside that arrow.

Accelerating with all my power without minding my remaining mana.

Even if demons are good at flying, he can't get away with just normal flight.

Full Power Flight isn't something that can be activated at this distance against a superior opponent.

"U-Uwaaaaa!"

Desiril flees while screaming as I chase him.

And then--

"Oh?"

I lost my footing on the edge of the barrier.

I'm falling while looking puzzled.

Desiril who saw that as a chance activates Full Power Flight.

The demons in my past life would have snorted at this extremely obvious feint.

However, Desiril easily fell for it.

While feeling a bit disappointed at how weak my opponent is, I get close to the arrow Alma shot and put a new guide on it.

"Like I'd miss my footing on my own magic...."

While grumbling, I make the arrow pierce at the weak point of the Full Power Flight spell.

And then, the interference power of the arrow activated.

"GU-GUAAAAAAAAA!"

This augment magic's effect is lower than that of【Blocking Sphere】, however, Desiril and Ashril are of different demonic stratum.

Desiril who had his magic circuit destroyed in an instant fell down in front of

me.

I can finish this demon with my remaining mana.

I stab Desiril's heart with a sword buffed with【Steel Slash】and【Sharpen】.

And then I put the body inside Storage magic.

One case closed--.

"H-he did it! That flying student killed the demon!"

"Doesn't this fallen demon look similar to Erishis-sama, the Magic Scholar!?"

"Now that you mention it, he has the same face as Erishis-sama!"

"I can't believe a lone student could defeat demons!?"

"No, there's two more on the ground!"

"Even three is weird!"

--Or not it seems.

What should I do about this uproar....

Chapter 60: Strongest Sage, Escapes

During the uproar, I descended and approached Ruli and Alma for now.

Even though the demons have been killed, no one seems to try to approach the two yet, the crowd of people is still a bit away from them.

"Good work. Was there any problem in the fight?"

"Yes! Mathi-kun, I beat a demon!"

"To think【Wire-guided Enchant】would be this useful...."

"Except for the one time when the demon got away, all the arrows hit!"

"Someone like me couldn't manage to even scratch a demon, the amazing one is Ruli's augment though."

"It was mostly thanks to the magic circle Mathi-kun created though...."

Discussing about a battle after it's done isn't a bad thing, but I can't say that's

a good thing in this situation either.

Because--

"...For now, let's save the reflection for later, take a look around us."

"...Ah."

We've been completely surrounded by around 100 spectators.

Most of them are trying to talk to us, heroes who defeated demons.

I also heard some odd voices, like how Ruli and Alma are cute. I can agree to that.

Most of the reaction was favorable to us, but having this many people gathered in one place is a menace.

We could get crushed under the overwhelming pressure if we got careless here.

If not that, my current communication power can't possibly cope with it.

If there's a human who's fine being surrounded by 100 strangers, I'd like to meet them by all means.

....I've got no problem blowing them away physically, but I can't exactly do that.

"What should we do in this situation?"

"There is only one thing you can do against an encirclement of enemy you can't defeat."

"Enemy.... So, what is that one thing?"

"First, you activate movement-type magic and look for a hole in the encirclement. In this case.... Up above."

Looks like there's no hole on the ground.

"Um, Mathi-kun, we can't fly in the sky though...."

"I can't fly too you know....?"

"Mu. Come to think of it, I haven't taught that yet."

What to do. This is troubling.

Well, I guess I can manage to carry the two with my remaining mana.

"Please excuse me."

I lift the two with the assistance of magic.

Our bodies get to stick together.... Well, it's an unavoidable byproduct. And also a side benefit.

"Wa-Mathi-kun!?"

"Eeh, even Mathi-kun shouldn't be able to fly while carrying us two right?"

"I should manage in a short haul."

It's true that my mana is running low, but these two aren't heavy in the first place.

Particularly Alma's breast, they're quite lightweight for a woman.

"B-but..."

"For now, we're escaping! Our destination, the Second Academy's principal office!"

While saying that, I jumped over the crowd and activated acceleration magic.

◇

--Several hours after the two demons' defeat.

We were led to the Royal Castle just like when I beat the demon the last time.

This time Alma and Ruli are also with me and the principal.

"You have done great. As for the reward.... Let me ask you straight. What do you want? If you're fine with another national treasure, we could prepare it...."

What do I want huh.

Honestly, there's nothing of interest left in the treasury.

I can find things whose usage is unknown at other places besides the treasury anyway, and they'd be better than the things in the treasury, to begin with, searching for them there is troublesome.

That means, the management right of the Second Academy.... Nah, don't need it.

It's not like I want to be a teacher, and I plan to leave the academy once the matter with the demons is settled.

Best to leave the academy to the principal.

Yep. I can't think of anything. For now, guess I should ask for something harmless.

"I want dungeons. I was promised a dungeon for the subjugation last time, I'd like to have a lot more."

"Understood. We will give you as many dungeons as we can. It isn't nearly enough for your reward however...."

"Then I will save it for later."

"Let's talk about it again when we're handing the territory over to you. And, Ruli and Alma was it. Although it was mainly Mathias, I heard that you two gave a considerable contribution in this subjugation. If you have any wish or hope, let me hear it."

"Um..."

Ruli looks troubled.

Well, I guess you'd be like that when a king suddenly asked for your wish.

Since I had experiences of meeting kings at times in my past life (apparently, meeting me was a part of succession ceremony for their kingdoms), I could keep my calm, but Ruli probably isn't the case.

Up against a king, even the brazen Alma--

"Yes! I'd like to get money! There's no harm in having lots of money, and you can always think about how to use it later!"

Alma is acting like the usual even against the king.

It's similar to when she asked me, a visitor, for the augment back in the blacksmith shop.

She's using polite language for once, but she has the nerve of steel alright...

"Hahahaa. Very well. We will take care of that."

"T-then, I'd like for that too!"

"Umu. Simple is nice. Calculating the sum would be difficult though.... For the time being, we will deliver the money once we've calculated the sum and added more in accordance to the valuation. We will not ask, 『We gave too much, give it back』 later, you don't have to worry."

Fortunately, the king accepted that while laughing.

Well it's not like they asked for a particular amount anyway, and the king's side probably has it easier in various ways if it's just money.

Alma might have made the right choice here.

Thus, the talk about reward ended.... not peacefully it seems.

"As for the matter about your fight with demons. The two demons you killed this time--"

"Your Majesty, please hold on."

While it might be rude, I interrupted the king.

And then I raise my voice at one corner of the room where nobody is.

"Oy, come out you."

I felt that too much information of this kingdom leaked to the demons....

Looks like the cause is clear now.

Chapter 61: Strongest Sage, Uses Up Mana

"...Keeping silent won't help you. Even if you're invisible with naked eyes, you're plain as day with that much mana emitting."

"...Mathias, could it be that there's a demon inside this castle?"

The king sounded surprised when he heard me.

"No, it's not the main body. It's a spell art unleashed by the demon."

"Spell art... Is that some kind of wiretapping?"

"Something like that. You cannot see it, however--"

I took out a wood chip as I said that and threw it at the corner of the room.

The chip drew a parabola and got repelled as if it hit something one meter before the wall.

"Looks like it has a substance. Though, the demon won't suffer any damage

even if that's physically destroyed."

Judging from the spell art, it's most likely a variant of magic called【Fixed-type Simple Mana Interference】.

It's a relatively simple spell art which can be used to monitor far-away places.

In addition to that, it can also be used to turn up documents and send voices.

Furthermore, it doesn't have enough power to kill but conversely, the user also won't receive any damage even if the spell art is attacked.

In a way, it's a magic with an extremely good cost/performance.

"I can't believe it...."

The other three beside me seem to be shocked.

And the demon ('s magic) doesn't look like it'll make a move either.

Well, that's probably the correct answer for the demon. You can't really tell it apart from simple barrier magic as long as it doesn't let out a sound.

--That's why I'll make it speak.

This spell art has two weaknesses in exchange for its low mana consumption.

First, it needs time to set up, and the range is quite narrow.

It's not very effective unless it's set in a room where extremely important conversations are carried off.

As for the other weakness, I use up all my remaining mana and construct a very small-scale magic.

"Guh, what the heck is this...."

Right after that, a perplexed voice resounded from the corner of the room.

You cannot damage the user of【Fixed-type Simple Mana Interference】through the spell art.

However, that only applies to physical damage and simple destruction through magic.

The information gotten from【Fixed-type Simple Mana Interference】is processed in the spell art user's brain.

In other words, if you forcefully send harmful info for a demon mixed in the actual info, it's possible to directly destroy the brain.

"GU, GUAAAAAAAAAA!"

The spell art broke along with anguished voice, and the space in the corner of the room warped. Apparently the spell art didn't have emergency cut-off function incorporated, however the magic itself is disintegrating as the demon loses control over its own mana.

I supported the spell art for half a second using my remaining mana before I ran out of it.

The spell art that lost its support disappeared with a clank sound.

"...Did you kill it?"

"No. It'll leave an aftereffect somewhat, but the demon probably hasn't died."

Even if I have my usual amount of mana, it probably won't still be enough to kill the demon.

The user would have been killed if it was a human, but a demon's brain is sturdier than that of a human.

"...I see. My gratitude for your help. To think they even slipped into this room...."

"About that matter, Your Majesty. Did the voice earlier sound familiar to you?"

"Now that you mention it, that voice was.... of the previous Magic Division Commander, Elhart!"

Thought so.

"Did Elhart ever come into this room?"

"Many times. He got us during those times huh...."

Then we can safely assume that the culprit is Elhart.

He probably could set up as many similar spell art as he wanted since he was against humans who couldn't even use【Passive Detection】.

"For the time being, I will set up barrier that can intercept wiretapping magic on important rooms like this one."

"You could do such a thing?"

"Some magic can't be intercepted, but it's better than nothing."

That said, such magic are all complex magic, the present demons highly likely can't use them.

If I just put a warning system for when the barrier is destroyed on it, I'm confident I can deal with it.

Ruli will be the one who does the augmenting though.

"By the way, 348 kilo to the west from here, and then 4425 kilo to the north. Do Your Majesty know what's located there?"

"...Hold on."

The king took out a map from a drawer.

"It's still inside our kingdom, but there is only a remnant of an abandoned village destroyed by demons in the past around that area. ...Don't tell me, Mathias..."

"Yes. Looks like we've found the demon's location."

Using such a poor monitoring magic in front of me would only result in getting traced back instead.

Now then. It's a bit far, wonder how should we go around to attack them.

Chapter 62: Strongest Sage, Makes Plans

"....So the demons are at that abandoned village?"

"Yes, it's not necessarily the village, but they should be around there. They're most likely inside a cave or a building like shelter."

I replied the king.

"How do you know that they're inside a building?"

"Because there was a strong echo in the sound transmitted through the magic earlier."

"...Knowing that much just from that.... I definitely don't want to make Mathias my enemy."

"Agreed."

The principal went along with the king.

To be this feared just from tracing, I'm not sure how to feel here.... For now, I'll consider it good news that the king and the principal likely won't be my enemy.

"However, it is far away."

"Right... Quickly killing them and coming back won't be possible... But I should be able to do something about it in one week."

The fact that the enemy is inside a building means that there's a high chance that place is their base.

They probably don't notice that they've been traced back, one week should be enough time for a surprise attack.

"One week!? Is there even a way to travel 4500 kilometer in just one week in this world? For your information, there's no road that goes to that abandoned village you know!?"

"...There's no road even though it was a village?"

"That whole area was destroyed a long time ago. The territory may be inside our kingdom, but you can say that it's actually ruled by demons. Roads that can

be traveled by horses are... only up to around this area."

The king pointed at a place about 900 kilometer away from the royal capital. Horses are only usable up to 1/3 of the way huh.

"If horses aren't usable, can it be traveled on foot?"

The territory is said to be ruled by demons, but judging from the situation so far, there shouldn't be many demons left in the present world.

I should be able to get past it without them noticing if I camouflage myself with magic and such.

I've never really considered using a horse in the first place. Since it's faster to run with magic.

It'd be a different story if there's a faster creature though.

"Since we've never surveyed the area, we don't know for sure.... But it's probably impossible with ordinary means. You'd likely have to go through virgin forests and wetlands."

I see....

Moving on those terrains isn't a problem, but it will be at a slower pace.

If we consider the possibility of attacks by other demons and the fact that the barrier hasn't been set up in the royal capital yet, leaving it for long isn't a good idea.

--I've got no choice.

"Then let's take another mean, although the certainty is slightly lower."

"Certainty?"

"I have an idea about our transportation, but I'm not exactly sure if it's usable."

"....I won't ask you about it since I won't understand the content of the magic anyway.... But how long would it take with that method?"

"Right.... Including one day for preparing things, if that method is possible, we'd get back the same day or the next day after defeating Elhart."

The transportation method is actually not really a magic, but since he told me not to explain anyway, I didn't say it.

Not asking the method huh, he sure really trusts me....or rather, the principal who referred me.

Well there were times when I felt like I was being watched so he had probably investigated me through another mean too.

By the way, since the observers were harmless, or rather I felt it could gain me some trust, I pretended not to notice them.

"The next day!?"

"It got even...shorter.... Don't tell me it's the legendary teleportation magic...."

"I can use teleportation magic for once...."

""You can!?""

"Eh! ...Mugu."

The king and the principal both interrupted me.

Alma was going to shout out something, but Ruli immediately blocked her mouth. I guess it's disrespectful to shout before the king.

"But I can't teleport to far away places due to my Crest. I'd have to use another method to use the magic, but I won't know whether it's effective or not before trying. That's why, I'd have preferred going on roads if they were usable."

"....The thing about teleport magic was brushed off like it was nothing great!?"

--The audience with the king ended after we talked about magic theory left by magic scholars, and a measure to review the assessment of crests, afterward, we went back to the academy.

By the way, reviewing the assessment that have been nailed down for so long will take a bit more time, it seems.

...Now then. Before we go to raid the demons, I've got to finish the stuff with academy.

Defeating Elhart before setting up the barrier is like putting the cart before the horse.

Chapter 63: Strongest Sage, Drafting

"I will now explain the outline of the Royal Capital Defence Plan."

Several days after the audience.

The principal declared loudly before the whole student body.

Ruli, Alma and me are standing behind the principal.

In order to procure the material needed to set up the barrier, we need the cooperation of the students.

The principal has created a special class in order to get those personnels.

"I'm sure you're aware that demons had appeared in the royal capital the other day.... Assessing from that, there's a possibility that demons would attack the capital.... No. They already did once."

"But Mathias beat the demons right? People talked about how a flying student wearing Second Academy uniform defeated the demons and all...."

"Even if other demons come, as long as Mathias is here...."

Apparently, the matter about the assault has been spread among the students.

Well, it'd have been stranger if it didn't after all that ruckus.

....However, I'm somewhat dissatisfied with how they knew that it was me just from 'a uniformed human'.

Alma and Ruli fought too you know.

"Indeed, it's probably safe as long as you're around Mathias. However, Mathias is only one person yet the capital is vast. It's not possible for him to defend all of it."

The school grounds became quiet at the principal's words.

"...Therefore, Mathias has proposed a plan to construct a great barrier around the capital! A huge barrier will cover the entire capital defending it from the demon's attacks!"

"But, sensei! Augment magic teacher, Beilkia-sensei said that 7 meter is the limit of barrier--"

"Fool! The planner is Mathias! Has common sense ever worked on Mathias so far!"

The principal said something unbelievable at the retorting student.

No well, it's true that 7 meter limit for a barrier is wrong, but『Because the planner is me』isn't an explanation at all.

There's no way the students would understand with that--

"I'm sorry! I've made a mistake!"

Oy. Don't get it you.

"As long as you get it. As for the actual plan, in order to absorb mana from a place with a lot of mana... Dragon Vein or something? we need this plank. This one is made of wood... but the real thing will be made of mithril."

The principal took out a 3mm thick and 50cm long plank .

In order to suck up mana from Dragon Vein, you need a metal with high mana

affinity with surface area that's as large as possible.

It can be made from less material if it's made by high precision processing, but for students who have just learned processing magic, this much strength is probably their limit.

"We need 1200 pieces of this. Which means 1.5 tonne of mithril! We will have you, students, to prepare these in one month! Starting from the material!"

The students who heard that looked at each others.

Their faces look like they're saying『Ain't that impossible?』.

The principal ignored that and continued on.

"Of course, I also don't think that you, students, as you are now can possibly procure 1.5 tonne of mithril! However, there is someone here who will make that happen!"

Right after the principal said that, the students' lines of sights are gathered at me. I haven't done anything, I'm merely standing here....

"....Looks like you know who that someone is. Correct! --At this time of

emergency, by His Majesty's order, we've created a new course to teach the techniques required to procure the barrier material. And it's called『Mathias's Special Lecture』."

Wait a minute.

I heard about the special lecture, but not that name. What's with that lame name.

Normally, it should have been『Magic Resource Engineering』or『Magic Engineering Primer』.

I'm sure the students would think twice to attend the lecture with such name.

With an expression like I can't believe it on my face, I look at the students.

--Their eyes are sparkling! Why!

"Mathias and our academy's teachers will teach you how to do the processing needed to procure 1.5 tonne of mithril. Therefore,『Mathias's Special Lecture』will most likely grant you power that's unthinkable before. You're free not to participate in this lecture, but I'm expecting you to muster your courage and attend it."

By the way, having it optional is my suggestion.

Forcing people who aren't motivated to participate would only lead to chaos at the actual spot.

"That is all! People who wish to attend『Mathias's Special Lecture』are to report to the receptionist over there. You're dismissed!"

The students rushed to the receptionist almost at the same time as it was finished.

I assumed there would be around 30% of students who'd participate in this, but no one went home.

All of these people will attend huh.

....Wonder if the dungeon is spacious enough.

Chapter 64: Strongest Sage, Leaving Everything to Others

--Several hours after the drafting.

We went to the dungeon with the participants--in other words, the whole student body.

Since the dungeon isn't that wide, I can't see all of them from where I stand.

Well this dungeon will probably become large enough for everyone to see each other's face during the time we're fighting the demons later.

"Then I'll be explaining the flow of mithril refinery."

"Yes!"

I call out to the students using loudspeaker magic.

I'm only going to demonstrate the rough flow, the teachers will take care of the tidbits.

"First, break dungeon walls into an easy-to-treat size."

While saying that, I used an ordinary iron pickaxe augmented with【Brittle Fracture】to hit and break the dungeon wall.

Unlike swords, pickaxes are specialized to break rocks and such.

It's partly due to the fact that the dungeon walls on the first floor is soft that even an exceedingly weak augment could break them.

--It could and all, but.

"W-what the heck is that pickaxe.... It shaved off the dungeon wall in one hit...."

"Weren't even the national treasure swords couldn't break dungeon walls?"

"A pickaxe from the national treasures?"

"No, the weird one here isn't the pickaxe, but the user, Mathi-kun isn't it? If it's Mathi-kun, I feel like he could even break dungeon walls using some random pickaxe lying around."

It turned into this commotion just from having the dungeon wall broken.

--Un. I'll leave them alone since explaining it each time would take all day.

I'll leave it to the teachers to explain the details and end my duty here quick.

"This is an ordinary pickaxe. I only used a little bit of magic when it hit the dungeon wall. The bulk of this work will be taken care of by the Fourth Crest--the Disqualified Crest."

Breaking walls by swinging swords augmented with magic will be a good training, it's also good for training muscles. It's an ideal basic training for the usage of Disqualified Crest.

"Next, it's about refining--"

I told them the abridged version of the explanation I told Ruli.

Refining is mainly done by the First Crest, while the Second and Third Crests are to use heating magic.

Even if it's mainly for the First Crest, the other crests will still have to maintain the magic right, it should be a good practice for them still.

And then I changed place with sensei once I had explained enough.

"--That is all from Mathias-kun. Everyone, do you get the mithril procurement process?"

"Sensei! I don't get it at all!"

"I get what he's saying, but I'm completely sure I can't do it!"

"Was this lecture intended for people who have stopped being humans!?"

--Looks like they don't really understand.

Rather, what does even 'stop being human' mean. You think this is for demons or something.

But now that I think about it, when I told the teachers about this process the first time, they had the same expressions.

Their expressions are similar to that of students currently learning

intermediate magic who suddenly get a lecture about nuclear fusion magic.

By the way, why is the figurative this concrete you ask, it's cause I actually did that in my past life.

That was when I was 120 if I'm not mistaken.... Well, it was what you call youthful indiscretion.

At that time, I noticed that my lecture was too difficult, similar to what happened here.

I was thinking that If I had another chance, I would make sure to teach about nuclear fusion magic in a way anyone could understand in one try.

--Well, in the end, that was the last time I was requested to hold a lecture.

Even though I'd gone the trouble of making, 『Nuclear Fusion Magic For Dummies』 and 『Immortality Magic Handbook』 text books and all, with a chance to rear my then potential party members.

"...Honestly, I understand what you guys feel. I really really do."

The teacher began to speak with a serious face in front of the students.

"Anyone would have the same reaction when they saw someone saying things like procuring mithril then proceeding to break and refine dungeon walls like it was just obvious. --However, this is real."

The teacher picked up fragments of broken dungeon walls and used several magic.

And then he raised the completed mithril before the students.

"During the teacher meeting just now, we've decided upon another name for『Mathias's Special Lecture』! And that name is『Common Sense Destroying Mathias's Lecture』!"

Stop it. Please don't pull out lame names like that without consulting me first.

At least leave out my name.

『Common Sense Destroying Lecture』. That should be good enough.

"OOH!"

"...Umu. It's a name well-suited for Mathias-kun's class."

However, it seems to be well-received by the students and teachers.

...Un. Let's do that.

"Alright, let's make a break for it when we still have the chance."

I talked to Ruli and Alma while moving with erased presence.

"OK!"

"I got it!"

I've told the teachers that I'll be going to beat the demons once I'm done explaining the rough outline.

We'll probably be back once the students have become fully-fledged--or not as I can't exactly do that, it's probably after they're able to refine the mithril to some extent.

Thus, we left the dungeon and began the journey to kill the demons.

It'll only be a three day trip at the longest if my plan goes well though.

Chapter 65: Strongest Sage, Forgotten

"I'd like to end this trip by noon if possible. Let's hurry."

After entrusting the lecture to the teachers and leaving the academy, I'm heading to the city's entrance while accelerating with magic.

I've already finished packing and putting all the necessities inside Storage Magic.

"Okay! ...So, where are we going?"

"To the mountain over there. It's a bit far, but well, we should arrive while it's still bright outside."

I pointed south as I said that.

We can't see the mountain cause it's hidden by the townscape from here, but I can tell from the mana reaction.

"Eh? But isn't that direction the opposite of where the demons are..."

"That's right. However, that's where our transport is."

Traveling a 4500 kilometer distance on land isn't easy.

Moreso on lands with unknown terrains.

Therefore, we need a transport that can ignore those terrains.

"There's a transport in the mountain? Is it some kind of weird magic?"

"It's not magic. It's a living thing."

I answered Ruli's question.

"Living thing?"

"Yea. The reaction is quite weak compared to the last time.... Let's hope that it's usable for transportation at least."

I upped my speed after confirming that the two were following me.

--Several hours later.

"...Our destination is in this mountain! Just a little more!"

I called out to the two at the base of a mountain about 100 kilometer away from the capital.

"What's 'a bit far' about this!? It's farther than our hometown!"

"This distance isn't anything to write home about for the us now. In fact, it didn't even take half a day did it!"

"Movement magic is amazing..."

We begin to climb the mountain while having that conversation.

The mountain has no road, but since there's no steep cliff or anything like that, climbing it isn't too hard.

"Is there a transport bird at the top of this mountain?"

"It's not exactly a bird though."

"...Not exactly?"

"You should be able to grasp its presence with【Passsive Detection】. We're still far away from it, but its reaction is big and all."

Ruli and Alma concentrated on using【Passive Detection】.

"...Is it perhaps at the summit?"

"Yeah."

"This reaction, it's quite huge..."

"It is yep. Well, it's gotten quite smaller compared to the last time I saw it though...."

I've been being vague since I've got a feeling that the two would run away if I

told them the details.

Even in my past life, there were lots of people who would flee just from hearing the thing.

Those creatures aren't really something to be feared of though in reality....

"It's fine. Well, you can stay at a viewing distance when we actually meet it."

We climb the mountain while talking about that--.

"That's our vehicle."

I stopped at a place where we could see its figure.

The two turned pale when they saw it.

"...Vehicle? This is weird. It looks like a super calamity class legendary creature to me...."

"No. That's a vehicle. A very fast vehicle that can even blow out flame you know."

"It looks clearly dangerous judging from the mana reaction.... Or rather, isn't that a dragon...."

"Some people do call it with that name. It's『Dark Dragon Iris』to be exact though."

I think it has other names too, but that's what I personally call it.

"『Dark Dragon Iris』. Just how is that a vehicle!? We'd be killed if we get close to it!"

"Forget vehicle, isn't that one of the dragons that destroyed a whole country from the myth! ...It's not the real thing is it?"

"I've no idea about the myth, so I'm not sure if it's the real thing or not.... But that's our perfect transportation."

Dark Dragon Iris is my acquaintance, though I don't know about it appearing in the myth.

It was one of the dragons that picked a fight with me, but since it immediately

surrendered unlike other dragons, I ended up not killing it.

I felt like it wasn't too tough, thus I wouldn't have fun beating it anyway.

I was expecting it to get stronger if I left it alone--but judging from its condition now, looks like it's gotten weaker instead.

"Well, I'll talk with it for a bit, you two wait over there."

""Talk!?""

I left the two and took a step toward the dragon.

"Wai!? It's too dangerous even for Mathi-kun...."

"Mathi-kun, you can talk with dragons...?"

I approach the dragon while hearing those voices.

Iris is an old friend of mine.

To celebrate our reunion, I've got to be friendly here--

《O intruders, you are within my domain. I do not remember giving you permission to tread upon it.》

Words that didn't have even a fragment of friendliness were hurled at me who got closer to talk with it.

"...Huh?"

《I do not wish for needless slaughter. Be obedient and retrace your path. However, if you take any more step forward, be prepared to part with your life.》

《Don't you remember me?》

Since Iris was speaking in dragon language, I replied in it too.

Dragon's memory is better than human's. Especially memory related to mana.

I'm currently using a small scale magic, and the mana reaction from it is similar to the past me.

There's no way Iris won't notice nor forget it.

It should be impossible for a dragon to mistake mana reaction since each one is unique.

《You will no stop, huh. I am not too keen of doing this, but I have no choice. -- Die.》

However, it didn't listen to me.

Iris ignored the perplexed me and opened its mouth.

And then, it activated a great magic peculiar to dragons, 『Dragon Breath』.

Chapter 66: Strongest Sage, Feared

The invoked【Dragon Breath】wasn't adjusted for a friend at all.

"Mathi-kun!"

I could hear Alma and Ruli's shout.

『Dragon Breath』is an assembly of extremely sophisticated and fine magic.

Even if it's not at full power, its destructive force is in a wholly different level than anything I've faced so far.

If it hit its target, it would probably blow me and even Ruli and Alma away. There won't even be an ash left.

However, that won't happen.

I instantly kneaded my mana while staring at the breath's mana, and then I trusted my mana into the breath when it got right before me.

--And then the『Dragon Breath』vanished almost at the same time my mana touched it.

『Dragon Breath』is a very fine spell art without any waste.

It's also why it's extremely fragile when the weak part of its spell art gets precisely shot.

""《....Eh?》""

Two humans and one dragon's overlapping voices.

《Erasing Dragon Breath with that kind of magic.... U-um...》

《What》

《Do you maybe know someone called Gaias? Several thousands years ago he passed away while leaving words that he'd reincarnate....》

《'Course I do, I'm that Gaias reincarnated.》

《Hiii!?》

Dark Dragon Iris took several steps back while shrinking its body when I said that.

《I'm sorry, I never thought that Gaias-sama would really get reincarnated, it was a mistake, so... Please don't killmeeeeee》

It vigorously threw its head and wings onto the ground and rapidly asked for forgiveness in dragon language.

The force was enough to form a crater on the ground where it hit its head.

Just where did the dignified speech this dragon used in the beginning go.

《...Don't worry. I'm not here to kill you. You'll keep your life if you can accept my term.》

《Is that true?》

《Yeah. It is. I'd have killed you already if I wanted to anyway.》

《Hii!?》

Dark Dragon Iris retreated several steps back while getting frightened.

Well, to tell you the truth, the me right now would have a hard time killing this dragon.... Being excessively feared is convenient in its own way.

For now, I'll just scare it a bit.

《And that term is....》

《A-are you going to... peel off my scales while I'm alive?》

《No. What do you think I am anyway?》

Even if I kill my enemy, I don't take a liking in uselessly torturing them.

《...The strongest dragon slayer in history who single-handedly slew most of the dragons?》

《You're not wrong, but the dragons were the one who picked a fight with me first weren't they.》

《That's true and all, but...》

The reason was... What was it again.

I already forgot about it, but it was quite asinine.

A great number of dragons attacked my house, then I attacked them back in response, and ultimately, most of the dragons were slain except for ones that were absent and surrendered.

That said, Dark Dragon Iris was unlike other dragons as it wasn't really hostile to me.

It acted alone among the dragons to begin with, and it didn't look like it had a grudge against me even in my past life.

《I've come here not for such a boorish reason. I want to go kill some annoying demons, but the destination is too far away you see. Just then, I found a mana reaction that seemed right for it.》

I showed Iris the crest on my hand.

《Aa. Fourth Crest is it. It's Gaias-san's favorite crest, or rather I feel like it's exactly the crest that shouldn't be given to Gaias-san, but it's not suited for teleport magic huh.》

《You got that right. By the way, my name is Mathias in this life, call me that. Keep the thing about my reincarnation a secret from other humans.》

《I understand!》

I feel like it'll just bring trouble if the thing about reincarnation gets found out.

Particularly, one of the religious sects in my past life forbade magic that's related to souls.

I don't know the current situation of sects today, but hiding it should be the right thing to do here.

"Mathi-kun! What's with this situation!?"

Alma's voice forced its way through while I was conversing with Iris.

Well, after all, just when the dragon suddenly shot a great magic which then vanished, it proceeded to prostrate itself. Of course, you'd want to retort that.

"We're still negotiating, but it's going well!"

《Um... I haven't said that I could do it though....》

Dark Dragon Iris said that it wasn't going to accept the term when it heard me.

It's speaking in dragon language right now, but dragons that are higher than a certain rank can understand human language.

By the way, this dragon can also assume human form. I haven't seen it though.

《Hn?》

Maybe I should threaten it more.

I knead my mana a bit while thinking that.

《Hii!? Noo, it's not that I won't do it, I can't do it! Look at my wings!》

When it saw me kneading mana, Dark Dragon Iris stepped back while spreading its wings for me to see.

Those wings are tattered in a way that has never been seen before.

--Magically and physically speaking.

Chapter 67: Strongest Sage, Learns the Cause of Decline

《Uwah. This is terrible....》

Looking closer, I see how awful Dark Dragon Iris's wings have become.

《It really is. I haven't been able to fly for 5000 years already....》

5000 years eh.

That much time has passed since my reincarnation huh.

"What happened to make your wings turn this bad? I don't think these could become like this unless something like a large Ether Fusion Reactor without safety devices had a meltdown."

Most of Iris's wings have been destroyed. Only the wingtips are left unhurt.

I could understand the physical damage. Something like a large-scale explosion-type magic should be able to destroy the entire surface of the wings.

However, you can't use that to magically damage those wings.

Dragon's wings are inherently very strong magically. Normally their magic circuit won't be broken unless the wings are cut off.

Yet, they got shredded this bad....

《...I think that's exactly what happened.》

《It did for real?》

《One of human kingdoms created an Ether Fusion Reactor that was 50 times bigger than the ones that existed when Gaias-san was alive....》

《And it went into a meltdown?》

《Yes...》

Sometimes, idiotic experiments were conducted in the past era.

One of them even resulted in a complete wipe out of a town.

Well, I personally understand the urge to test interesting magic myself, so I'm not going to pursue on that front.

However, it's a different story when it involves Ether Fusion Reactors without safety devices.

Even a simple mistake in controlling it would result in a magical disaster at a scope incomparable to some random stupid experiment.

《Those wounds are plausible if it's because of Ether Fusion Reactor's meltdown.... Don't tell me, was that the cause of civilization decline?》

《It seemed like Ether Fusion Reactors were exploding left and right, and all civilized countries were destroyed....》

I was bothered by how much civilization had declined even though I should have been reincarnated in the future, so it seems the old civilization destroyed themselves.

The fact that there are still humans surviving in this era might be the silver lining here.

《And so, could you cure these wings....?》

《Impossible.》

《Even Gaias-san can't do it!?》

《The past me should be able to, but my crest is the Fourth Crest now. I can't restore magic circuit back to its perfect state. ...Well, I should be able to at least make them fly.》

Healing magic should be good enough if it was a normal wound, but dragon's wings are special.

Since you need production-type magic in order to completely repair the magic circuit, it's impossible for me now, while Ruli isn't skilled enough yet.

《...Also, can't you speak in human language? The people over there seem like they don't get what's going on.》

I said that and looked toward Alma and Ruli.

Even though I already told them that they could get closer now, they're still far away from us even now.

"...Oh right, we were talking in dragon language. The two over there.... It can't be, are they Mathias-san's friends?"

"It talked!?"

"Uwaaaaaittalkeeeeeed!"

Alma and Ruli who saw Dark Dragon Iris suddenly speaking raised their voices in surprise.

I put my hands on Iris's wings while looking at them.

"Well, close enough. For now, I'll connect the circuit that supplies mana to『Dragon's Breath』with the path on the wing's circuits that are still alive. You should be able to fly then."

"P-please!"

After getting Iris's affirmation, I spread my mana into Iris's wings, connect the broken magic circuits that can be connected toward the wings' path.

It isn't enough to restore them to their original state, but it should be enough to carry us.

"...Alright, you're good to go now. Try to fly a little."

"Y-yes!"

Dark Dragon Iris pours its mana into its wings.

Then the dragon's body rose into the sky without a sound.

"How is it?"

"I'm flying! Mobility for combat.... doesn't seem possible...."

"Well, with how torn-out your wings were, there was no way to do a fine adjustment on them. Once Ruli gets better at augment magic, I'll have her restore them for real. Well, it should take 20 years at the longest."

"20 years is it! I'm looking forward to it already!"

Iris hadn't flown for 5000 years.

20 years are nothing.

"T-the dragon obeyed Mathi-kun..."

"Mathi-kun's amazing...."

"...Oy, you two! We've finished our talk, let's go and beat those demons now!"

"Un! We're coming!"

"I-I got it!"

I called out to the two who were still looking from a distance.

They should have realized that it's fine after seeing Dark Dragon Iris talking in human language and obeying me.

They're coming here albeit looking a bit hesitant still.

"...Eh? We're going now? 20 years would pass in a blink of an eye anyway, once my wings are cured...."

"That's a dragon's sense of time! The king would have been succeeded in 20 years time for humans!"

"I-I'm sorry! I understand! Please get on!"

Iris descended on the ground and lowered itself to make it easier for us to climb.

After some more convos, we got on Iris's back.

The preparation for the surprise attack is perfect now--.

"Still, Mathias-san making friends with humans huh.... I wonder if there will be another disaster coming...."

....Maybe I really should kill this dragon after all.

Chapter 68: Strongest Sage, Repairs

"I-is this really safe? We won't get thrown off right?"

"T-traveling on a dragon's back, I wonder if it's really safe..."

"No problem. You can hold on many things there after all."

Not limited to Iris, a dragon's back is rugged, so there are many places where you can hold on and sit down.

It'd get cold if we fly too high, but there should be no problem as long as Iris doesn't suddenly accelerate too fast.

"But, it must be hurt if we grip too strongly...."

Alma pointed at one of the protrusion on Iris's back.

However, a dragon's crust cannot be broken by just being gripped by humans normally.

"I'll be fine, please hold on without worrying about it! If you got thrown off by

some mistakes, Mathias-san would murder me...."

Un. If I have to say, that should be what you're worried about instead.

Killing our mean of transportation would lead to many problems later on, so I don't really have an intention to though.

"Th-...then, excuse me!"

Ruli said that as she grabbed an easy-to-hold protrusion on Iris's back.

By the way, Alma already did from the beginning without worrying about it.

"So, where should I go from here?"

"To the opposite side. The distance is about 4500 kilometers. Move at a speed humans can endure and remain at less than 1000 meter high."

"4500 kilometer, this will be quick! Well then, a speed that humans can endure is..."

Iris spreads its mana into its wings.

And, accelerates--

"Hold up."

When I saw the amount of mana Iris poured, I quickly constructed a spell and shot it at its wings.

The spell I shot was a magic to stop the acceleration by disturbing the mana movement on the wings.

"Au!"

"Kyaa!"

"Uwaa!"

Iris's wings instantly lost its buoyancy, its body shook.

The two riding on Iris back and Iris itself were surprised all at once.

"W-what are you doing!"

"That's my line! How fast were you trying to accelerate just now?"

"Err, to a speed that humans can endure...."

That didn't look like it no matter how.

That was a speed to make a mince meat out of the humans on its back.

....No, wait.

"...Hey Iris. Whose standard did you use for『a speed humans can endure』?"

"Err... Since Gaias-sama's would be too much after all, I based it off Loita-san's...."

"Isn't that practically your full speed?"

Loita was a sword nerd who lived in the same era as the past me.

The next strongest one after me amongst humans.

Of course, the standard for『a speed humans can endure』would be way off.

"Why did Magic God Gaias-sama and Sword God Loita-sama's names appear there?"

"It can't be, this dragon is really the Dark Dragon Iris that appeared in the myth...."

By the way, the names of gods people believe in the current world are the same as my past one and Loita's.

Whether this is a coincidence or not.... God only knows.

"But I have never met other humans...."

....Come to think of it, this dragon never interacted with other humans.

Everyone was afraid and dared not to come close to it.

"Listen here ok? A stone falls down if you throw it like this right?"

"It does."

"This much speed is enough. To begin with, your wings would be broken if you used that much mana at your current state. Only 1/500 of the circuits are connected compared to the past you, got it?"

Iris's treatment is ultimately a temporary repair.

It's not fit for full speed flight.

"I did think it was hard to fly, so my wings were in that bad of a state.... I'll comply and fly slowly...."

And then, Iris began to accelerate little by little.

....That said, it's still overwhelmingly faster compared to horse or human.

"Yea, you should never exceed 80% of the speed of sound. At the current state of your wings, more than that is dangerous."

"Yes!"

I'm using magic to nullify the air friction that assault us three, but Iris's body is

too big, I can't apply it on it.

--Several hours later.

"...Not long now. Reduce your speed."

We safely arrived at a place pinpointed from the trace.

"Um...."

"What's wrong."

"Will we be alright if we reduce our speed. I feel like we'll be detected somehow...."

Iris asked me back when I told it to reduce the speed as we got closer to our destination.

"Yeah. We will be. They probably haven't found us yet."

Just as Iris said, mana from【Active Detection】type of magic is being circulated in the vicinity of our destination.

It's a plain and obvious spell art without concealment or anything.

The past Iris should be able to point the exact location of the spell user, not just『Somehow』feel it.

As I thought, Iris's detection capability has considerably decreased because of how bad its magic circuits have become.

It's probably also the reason why Iris didn't notice my mana when we first met back then.

"...I can't move that agile right now, you know?"

"Well, I'll do something about that. Lend me the control of your wings."

"I-I understand! If it's Mathias-san, I'm sure we will slip pass them without getting detected."

The mana in the dragon's wings can be moved externally.

Normally, such an act is pointless, but the current Iris can't move its own wings that well after all.

Letting me do it should allow them to move better.

"....But, was Mathi-kun the type that would do that?"

"Far from slipping through, it feels like he will happily plunge into the demons instead...."

"...Ah."

At Alma and Ruli's words, Iris sounded like it was going to say, "Oh no!".

Chapter 69: Strongest Sage, Bisects

"Hey. Iris, you know that, unlike【Passive Detection】, it's hard to delude【Active Detection】right?"

"...Yes."

I ask a question to Iris while controlling its wings' mana en course toward the demons.

"Then, do you know how to deal with【Active Detection】?"

"I-If it's Mathias-san, you should be able to easily elude【Active Detection】...."

"Well, it's not impossible. But even if I did that, they'd easily find Iris with your size right. ...There's a simpler method for this."

"We beat them don't we. I understand."

Iris speaks as it's given up.

Having acquainted with my past life, it knows me well.

"That's right. ...Judging from the mana, it looks like the only one outside is a demon that's using【Active Detection】."

"Demon is still demon even if it's alone, you know? I'd prefer not to participate in the battle with how these wings right now..."

"Don't worry. That wasn't the plan."

I set the course high up.

Straight towards the sky right above the demon that's using【Active Detection】.

Right now being able to fly at all is Iris's utmost.

Even if it's against a weak demon, I don't want to let it get exposed to attacks. Cause going back home would be a pain then.

"...Huh? We're passing by?"

Alma muttered when she saw the situation.

However, unfortunately she's mistaken.

"There's no way Mathias-san would do that...."

And Iris gave the correct answer.

"Alright, I'll leave the rest to you! I'm going down to pulverize the demon!"

I jump off Iris's back while saying that.

I went the trouble of controlling Iris's flight circuit in order to fall down above the demon.

"I was right!"

"Mathi-kun!"

While hearing Alma's and Ruli's voices, I casted resistance reduction magic

and drew my sword.

The demon far below on the ground that was paying attention to Iris shifted its attention to me.

Looks like it's confused.

While looking at that, I took out a magic stone out of Storage magic and crushed it.

The sword augmented with【Special Mana Enchant】began to emit light.

"Wha...."

The demon casted defensive magic and held up its shield while taking an evasive action.

Judging from its desperate look and the fact that it pumped all of its mana into defensive magic, the demon seemed to realize the menace of【Special Mana Enchant】.

But it's too late.

"No matter how weird your sword...is?"

The defensive magic that touched the sword vanished without a moment of resistance.

And without losing my momentum, I bisected the demon along with its shield.

I didn't use any magic to break that defensive magic.

To begin with,【Special Mana Enchant】isn't something that can be blocked by that level of defense.

"Oy, it's safe now!"

I wave my hand at Iris in front of the demon's body.

Iris began to descend when it saw me.

--10 minutes later.

We've gathered in front of a rectangular building where Elhart is hiding.

It was probably built using earth magic. The building has no windows, but instead it's been carved with defensive and concealment magic circles.

The concealment seems to be a countermeasure against magical detection.... But the spell art is sloppily constructed.

For people who are used to mana detection, it would make them focus on the building instead.

"This is the demon's den?"

"No mistake about it. It's the same mana reaction that came out in the royal palace. There's... two in total inside."

"Two demons..."

"Since Elhart's reaction has become small, it's virtually one demon though."

Elhart's mana reaction is slightly smaller than Desiril.

Its reaction was bigger when I was tracing it, this was probably due to the aftereffect from that time.

The other one is bigger than Ashril.... But, unlike at that time, my mana is full now.

We should be able to win without relying on Iris.

"Alright. Hinder Elhart with arrows like before. This time.... use this spell art."

I gave a paper drawn with a new magic circle to Ruli.

It's a bit different than the one they used before.

"I-I got it!"

"I just need to hit 'em with my arrows like before right!"

"You got that right. Iris, break the wall and evacuate above afterward."

"Yes!"

I could also ask Iris to mow them down with『Dragon Breath』, but the burden

would be too big if Iris shot it at its current condition.

Dark Dragon Iris is ultimately a transport.

I declare loudly after making sure that the two people and one dragon are ready.

"Alright, commence the attack!"

Chapter 70: Strongest Sage, Sees Through

"Here I go!"

Iris thrust its claw on the demon's den while saying that.

The wall made from earth magic broke without any resistance.

"Well then, I'll be waiting above!"

Iris flew above after it said that.

"...Huh? There's no one inside?"

There's only one room in the demon's den.

And there is no one inside that room... or what it looks like.

Well, in short, it's a concealment magic.

The demon that was outside probably informed them somehow when it saw

Iris.

It was far away so I didn't catch communication-magic-kind of mana, but the【Active Detection】mana got disordered a bit after all.

『Can you hear me, you two?』

"Uwaa!"

"W-what's this!"

『It's a short-range telepathic magic to protect us against bugs. You can reply by thinking inside your head without letting out your voice.』

『Inside my head....』

『...L-Like this?』

『Ooh! I could hear Ruli's voice even though her mouth isn't moving!』

『Alma's voice too! Magic like this exists too....』

『With my crest, I can only use it at a short distance, like in this situation. To explain this, in short, you can't see the enemy because of concealment.』

『...Concealment?』

『Yeah. It's a magic to hide your form and make it hard to detect mana detection. That said.』

『Which means, with【Passive Detection】... Un?』

『I can't find it....』

The two immediately concentrated on detection, but they couldn't seem to find the enemy.

Well, these demons might be difficult for their first time.

Particularly the one besides Elhart, they wouldn't have known if I didn't tell them.

『Normally mana reactions are bigger than the surrounding mana.... But the concealment magic they're using is a type that completely erase their mana emission. Don't you feel a place where the mana is thinner instead? ...Ah, we shouldn't let them know that we find them, so don't point your finger if you do find one.』

『Hm.... Ah the corner over there!』

Alma looked toward a corner of the room.

『Correct.』

『True, the mana there feels thinner.... But I can't find the other one... there's two of them right?』

『Yeah. You don't have to worry about that one. It can't be found after all.』

That one must also think that no one can find it.

If we attack Elhart, I'm sure it'll choose to forsake Elhart and continue hiding.

Demons don't risk go out of their way to help another demon weaker than themselves unless doing so benefits them.

『And so, let's count you two as our firepower this time and have you defeat Elhart.』

『...Eh?』

『No no, that's impossible....』

Frankly speaking, I can instantly kill Elhart with【Special Mana Enchant】right now.

However, the other demon isn't that easy.

In a normal fight, I'd need quite a lot of mana to kill it.

In consideration of the possibility of surprise attacks on our way back, I'd like to reserve my mana as much as possible.

...Moreover, we have a target practice that's just right here. It's a waste for me to defeat it.

『It's alright. I've given you a new magic circle to make that happens.』

The magic circle I gave them this time is a bit more complex than the last one.

However, Ruli should be able to produce it now.

『Eeh, Mathi-kun knew this would happen before we went inside!?』

『I wasn't 100% sure. Well, I thought this would happen for 80%.』

『....By the way, what's the remaining 20%?』

『They would attack us the moment we stepped inside the room.』

When we see that there's no one inside and go to check it with our guard down, they'd attack us from behind.

It's an effective tactic when the concealment is working right.

『Surprise attack, how can you so calm....』

『It's fine. I planned to kill both of them if that happened.』

Or rather, that'd have made this easier.

There is nothing easier to deal with than an exposed surprise attack.

『Is there a situation where even Mathi-kun can't cope with?』

『There is.』

For example, if the nuclear fusion magic is activated in front of me right now, even I can't stop it.

I can probably barely survive at most.

『...Un. I could somehow sense that you were imagining some unthinkable situation...』

Alma sounded like she couldn't believe it.

There was no sound since it was through transmission magic though.

『There was no surprise attack anyway, all's well... And so, let's do this!』

『Eh, so sudden....』

『It's alright. You've never seen such an easy mark like this before right?』

As I said that, I slipped interference magic into Elharts's concealment magic, tearing it down it little by little.

In just two seconds, the concealment magic was completely torn down, and we could see Elhart with our naked eyes.

....Elhart itself doesn't notice that its concealment magic has been broken, exposing its foolish look to us.

Chapter 71: Strongest, Treated Like a Sham

『...Huh? The concealment's gone... Can I shoot him?』

Alma who received an arrow from Ruli asked me with a bewildered look when she saw Elhart's concealment magic getting completely removed.

『Yeah. And you'd better do it quick. He might find out that he has lost his concealment magic if you take too much time.』

As we're communicating through telepathy magic, we probably look like we're just standing around and clueless about the enemy from the demons' perspective.

It's only a matter of time before they notice the incongruity and realize their situation.

『Go...Got it!』

Alma set up the arrow and shot it at Elhart.

Seeing that, Elhart collapsed into a strange posture and barely evaded the arrow.

Looks like Alma didn't use the【Wire-guided Enchant】.

『Even if your enemy looks like a fool, you should always use guided enchant on your arrow. They could evade it like just now.』

『Sorry. I knew that but... What's that?』

Alma turned to look at Elhart with a perplexed expression on her face.

Elhart isn't attempting to attack back as he keeps the posture he took to evade the arrow.

It seems to be a hard posture to maintain, his neck is trembling.

Since his location would get found out by the unnatural movement of the arrow if he touched it.

He's far too late though.

『He's probably trying not to expose himself. Looks, he's being careful not to make a sound with his feet now.』

It appeared that Elhart had reached his limit, he slowly put his hands on the floor and returned his posture.

He probably didn't think in the slightest that his camouflage was already gone, and that Alma only shot the arrow randomly.

『That means, it's the second round!』

『I'll hit him this time!』

The arrow Alma shot homed in Elhart who tried to evade it, hitting him right in the face.

"...How foolish! My camouflage should have been perfect!"

Elhart who was hit by the arrow shouted with a face that looked like he couldn't believe it.

"You're the fool here."

That camouflage vanished around a minute ago.

If this was perfect, just how bad are these demons....

If all demons are all like this, I can understand why humanity hasn't gone extinct yet.

『Huh? It doesn't seem to be working at all...』

True, even though Elhart looked surprised, he didn't seem like the arrow hurt him.

Even with the support of magic, Alma currently lacks the strength needed to break through a demon's defense.

However, that is according to plan.

『There's no problem. It's working alright.』

It would be hard for Alma's arrow to directly shoot through a demon's defense.

We really have to rely on the power of the inserted magic.

"...Mu? Why aren't you attacking?"

Elhart had an inexplicable expression on his face as he looked at me.

And then, that expression suddenly turned into a grin.

"...Oh I see! That's how it is!"

"What're you going on about?"

"If you were the real Mathias I should have died already! However, I'm alive! This can only mean one thing! You aren't that monster Mathias! You're a sham!"

"...Ha?"

This time I'm the one who's bewildered.

What the heck is with that leap of logic.

"Kuku.... I thought it was strange. It's impossible for humans to reach our domain in such a short amount of time. The dragon we detected isn't attacking either, it must be just a sort of illusion magic."

No well, that dragon is currently flying right above this building though....

You can't see it with naked eyes since the ceiling obstructs, but you should know it as soon as you use【Passive Detection】.

"...There is no reason to hide now we know you're fake. Come out Arias, let's kill this faker together!"

Elhart called out toward thin air but there's no reaction.

Well, the other demon hiding here (apparently called Arias) doesn't seem to be that stupid.

It's exceptionally better at camouflaging than Elhart, and it has a high chance of escaping here without being found out.

"Arias won't show himself? ...I see. I alone is enough huh. That's exactly--true!"

Elhart rushed toward Alma.

I moved before him and blocked his sword.

--Heavy.

Even if he's injured, a demon is still a demon.

It doesn't seem like I can block him easily without Physical Reinforcement.

Well, if I were to completely overwhelm Elhart, this wouldn't serve as a field practice for Alma and Ruli, so this is fine.

『I'll be the vanguard. You two, keep shooting at the demon like earlier.』

『I-I got it!』

『Un!』

"...Tch, my sword got blocked huh. Looks like even a sham is strong enough to act as a substitute of a monster...."

I'm the real one though...

Chapter 72: Strongest Sage, Inserts Poison

"Alma, here's another arrow!"

"Un!"

I continue to parry Elhart's attack while Alma and Ruli shot him with arrows.

Fighting while using as little mana as possible, and being careful not to get shot and get pushed back is unexpectedly tough.

Apparently, being a vanguard in a practice battle isn't easy.

The sole consolation here is the fact that Elhart's brain has been damaged by the traceback, so his magic construction is very coarse and easy to nullify.

However, this tough fight is worth it as the two's prowess clearly rise in the midst of this fight.

Ruli's magic engraving speed becomes remarkably faster and Alma rarely misses her shot now.

The difference in running tension between fighting monsters in a dungeon and fighting a demon is big.

"Kuh... Why's my magic disappearing! My power shouldn't have fallen this much!"

Elhart doesn't notice that I'm nullifying his magic as he keeps trying to use them.

It's true that I've been doing stealthily.... But having it this unnoticed is a problem in itself.

If the situation becomes too stable, the tension decreases and the effectiveness of this battle training turns weak.

If we get another chance, I should get myself wounded on purpose and stir the situation a bit.

....Well, this fight is about to end soon.

『Looks like the effect is starting to manifest.』

I informed the two while continuing the fight.

『...Effect?』

『I feel like my arrows hit easier... or rather, he's slower?』

『Correct.』

The magic circle I gave to Ruli this time is an arrangement of poison magic called『Magic Poison』which interferes with demon's mana, stiffening them.

The effect is slow-acting, or rather it will demonstrate itself once the accumulated amount of poison passes a certain mark.

The fact that he's slower now means that the amount of poison Alma shot has passed that mark.

It's only a matter of time before the demon completely loses its ability to move.

"...Nu? Since when did you bastard became faster--No wait! It is I who turn slow!"

After a slight delay, Elhart himself noticed the effect of magic put on him.

However, the pattern he showed afterward is quite an unusual one amongst what I predicted.

"Me, beaten by a sham.... I won't allow thaaaaaaaaaaaat!"

"Mu? This is...."

Elhart's dull movement suddenly turned fierce unlike what he showed up until now, I immediately activated Physical Reinforcement magic.

However, Elhart's change didn't end with just that.

"Damn you--damnyoudamnyouuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!"

The moment Elhart's speech crumbled, his eyes shined red, and his whole body was wrapped in mana.

It's a phenomenon called『Evilize』.

"....『Evilize』huh. Been a while since I saw that."

When a demon is cornered, this situation may happen rarely.

The amount and intensity of mana of demons who have undergone『Evilize』increase tremendously, and their physical ability becomes incomparably higher than their usual state as a result.

Demons who undergo『Evilize』die at the same time the effect of『Evilize』ends.... However, that doesn't change the fact that demons who use『Evilize』is a force to be reckoned with.

I'd better stop the practice and deliver the finishing blow here.

"KILL!"

Looks like the『Evilized』Elhart is targeting the two behind me.

His evilized feet kicked the floor and he jumped above me.

Seeing that, I constructed a magic while giving order to the two and shot it at Elhart.

『You two, don't move from where you are.』

『I understand!』

『G-gotcha!』

They probably couldn't catch up with the sudden turn of event. The two remained in place as they nodded.

And the two--moved ahead, before the coming Elhart.

"DIE, DIEEEEEEEEEEE!"

Elhart easily caught up with the two who didn't act as ordered.

My magic also missed its target, destroying the ceiling.

And Elhart's sword reached the two--slipping through them.

"...Aa?"

Elhart looked surprised as his sword slipped through nothing.

I had expected this move.

The things Elhart cut just now were illusions I created with magic.

It was an impromptu illusion, I merely hid the two with an extremely simple magic.

If Elhart still retained his sanity, he would have immediately noticed the oddity.

However, Elhart didn't notice it.

Because his awareness was turned at my magic instead of the two slow-moving girls.

"This is how you use camouflage magic."

And it's not just an illusion.

I've put highly concentrated『Magic Poison』inside it.

With how much『Magic Poison』has accumulated inside his body, even an

『Evilized』 demon can do nothing about it.

As he swings his sword, Elhart hardens--and perish in that position.

Chapter 73: Strongest Sage, Jumps Off

"Well, there was a bit of happening... But you've got a passing mark. If you keep at it, you two should be able to beat the weakest demon after some training."

"Eh, without Mathi-kun!?"

"No no, that's impossible... We can't even do a thing if they shoot magic at us...."

It seems like the two aren't convinced they can defeat demons themselves.

I guess it's only natural.

In the fights against two demons they beat so far, they were only buying time as I fought in the front line.

And also, I haven't taught them the magic needed for it.

Well, all of them are magic circles simpler than the『Magic Poison』we used in this fight, I'm sure they'll learn it in no time.

"I'll teach you the knack for it next time. For now, let's go back."

I used faint『Compulsion Detection』at Iris flying above as I said that.

And then Iris began to descend.

I talk with the two with telepathy magic.

『About the other demon, pretend that you don't know it.』

『Pretend.... So there's really another demon here?』

『It was nowhere to be seen during the fight earlier and I can't detect it Passive Detection at all even now....』

『This demon is hard to detect, you don't have to worry about it at present. We should get on Iris for the time being.』

Because it's a demon that cannot normally be found unless it shows itself.

And its fighting prowess is incomparably higher than Elhart.

『T-that motivates me to find it with instead...』

『Mumu.... Ah over there!』

Alma was concentrating on something with closed eyes, then she suddenly opened her eyes and pointed above.

Toward Iris.

『...Wha, it's just Iris!』

『True, it'd have been a catastrophe if Iris was our enemy...』

"U-umm.... Everyone, did I do something?"

Iris looked perplexed as it was suddenly getting pointed at.

I talk to Iris with Dragon Language.

《Iris. Get only the two on your back and evacuate to the sky.》

《...What happened?》

Even Iris doesn't know huh.

Even if its detection capability has been lowered due to the broken magic circuit.... This demon really is incomparably better in hiding than other demons.

《There's another demon here.》

《Eh, I don't detect anything--is it a Mist Demon?》

《That's right.》

Mist demons.

Just as the name suggests, they can turn their body into mist-like substance, having the ability to melt into the surroundings.

When they turn into mist, they are bound by a some conditions and limitation, they can't move in that state.... But that doesn't change the fact that they're troublesome.

Because, the mist is invisible, and since it's scattered over a vast area, it can't be detected with normal『Passive Detection』.

With all of those characteristics, I felt that they should have been called『Air Demon』instead, but people called them『Mist Demon』in my past life.

《Umm, mist demons are best handled by burning them down with my breath....》

And even if you find them, they can't be defeated easily.

In order to do that, you need firepower equaling full power breath of the current Iris.

《No, with the way you are right now, it's dangerous for you to fire a high-powered breath. You wouldn't be able to fly for at least 30 days if you did.》

《30 days will pass by quickly if you just sleep....》

《For you that is, our school will be destroyed in the meantime.》

Forget 30 days, there's a high chance that we'd be out in half the time.

At present state, the Royal Capital can't afford to have us away from it.

《School!? Mathias-sama goes to school!? But there's nothing more you can learn in this world....》

《Yea. Enough about this, just escape with the two. Maintain your altitude at 700 to 800. I'll get on too at first, but I'm gonna jump off midway.》

《U-Understood!》

The two get on Iris.

I also followed afterward, showing many chances on purpose as I got on.... But the demon didn't make a move.

I thought that it would come out to do a surprise attack if I showed it obvious chances.

Apparently this demon Arias has quite the prudent character.

After confirming that I jump off Iris.

"Ah, Mathi-kun!"

"I'll take care of this guy alone! You two, wait in the sky with Iris!"

I got down on the ground as I said that.

I saw Ruli trying to do something, but since Iris raised its altitude at once, her voice couldn't reach me.

Usually, one needs a very high level magic in order to forcefully materialize a demon that has turned into mist.

The current me cannot construct such a magic, therefore I'm substituting it with another mean.

And since that mean brings in danger with it, I let the two get away ahead.

"...Now, shall we begin then."

Chapter 74: Strongest Sage, Regenerates

"...One."

I took a moderately sized magic stone out of Storage magic, put my mana on it and crushed it.

However, my objective this time isn't for【Special Mana Enchant】.

The mana contained within the magic stone gets released into the surroundings without being used at all.

"Two."

While controlling the mana a bit to hold it back from scattering away, I crushed another magic stone.

The mana flow in the surroundings has changed compared to the usual.

A sign that it's only a step away from Mana Disaster.

While monitoring that, I take out another magic stone and crush it.

"Three!"

Right after the magic stone in my hand was smashed, the surrounding air rolls up the mana and creates a whirlpool.

Afterward, the whirlpool that contained a vast amount of mana converged and started to emit light.

It's an occurrence of Mana Disater.

However, it's not like I failed.

On the other hand, I broke the magic stones to bring about this phenomenon.

"Who would have thought that you would forcefully make me materialize from my Mist form... Elhart called you monster... But even 'monster' is too lukewarm to call you."

"Nah, not really. I actually wanted to force you out of hiding with a proper method, but I couldn't use it."

Among the type of Mana Disaster, the most common one is monster outbreak.

Usually an outbreak of a large quantity of monsters would happen--however, there are cases where it doesn't happen depending on the surroundings.

One of those cases is when a『Mist Demon』is merged into the surroundings.

If the Mana Disaster is of a small scale, the『Mist Demon』will be materialized instead of monster outbreak occurring.

--Well it's quite the brute force of a method, and has a disadvantage.

"However, know that my rank differs from that of Elhart. Moreover, today I'm overflowing with power for some reason. Now that you've summoned me, are you ready to die?"

"I already know that you're of a different rank. I'm not gonna die though."

I probe into Arias's mana while talking to buy some time.

Looks like he really got stronger compared to before materializing.

Overflowing with power doesn't seem to be an exaggeration.

This is the side effect of forcing a『Mist Demon』to materialize through Mana

Disaster.

Monsters summoned by Mana Disaster are usually powered up by the huge amount of mana.

It's the same for demons.

"...I see. Then you can realize that by dying!"

Arias swung his sharp claws and kicked the ground.

Just as he said, his speed is incomparable to Elhart's.

That's why, I parried the attack without using Physical Reinforcement and【Mana Slash】, and attacked back.

At the same time, I analyze the enemy's habit, moves and battle style.

And after exchanging a few blows, I got the information I needed.

Now's the time to execute the plan.

"Mu!?"

As I exchanged blows with Arias, I used the recoil and movement magic to retreat close to the wall.

While watching Arias who was surprised at my sudden action, I constructed magic--kicked the wall and closed the distance between us at once, slashing at him with my sword as I passed by.

And right after that my left arm--fell to the ground.

This isn't illusion that I used in the fight against Elhart.

My arm really did get chopped off by Arias.

"This match is over. I'll let you choose how you'll die... How do you wanna die?"

Arias asked me while looking at my fallen arm.

Looks like he's convinced of his victory.

However, of course I don't plan to die.

"Sorry, but I don't plan to die again for at least 1000 years. Think it's too early to choose the way I'm gonna die."

I turn around at Arias while resetting my sword in my right hand.

Looks like the preparation for the real battle is complete.

"You're bluffing. Even if it wasn't your dominant arm, losing one is--"

As he said that while readying his sword, the left arm that Arias cut flew toward me --

The next moment, my arm is reattached back as if nothing happened.

"...You, are you really a human?"

Chapter 75: Strongest Sage, Nullifying

"How rude. I'm a human no matter how you look at it aren't I?"

I swung my left arm around to show him.

Even I couldn't have immediately reattached my arm if it was cut without any preparation.

I had already anticipated that my left arm would get cut in the exchange just now.

That was why I had put two magic into my arm.

One was a magic that made it easy to restore my arm back after getting chopped off.

And the other one was an analyze magic that took in a slight amount of enemy's mana when my arm got cut.

Since the range of the analyze was short, I had to read Arias's movement well and accurately positioned myself to get cut.

There would have been no need to take proper countermeasures if the

enemy were only at the same level as Elhart.... However I can't afford to be careless against this demon.

I've got to gather information well right from the start.

"You do look like a human outwardly... Nevertheless, you are still inferior compared to me! Haaaa!"

I parried the swinging sword while activating Physical Reinforcement and Mana Slash, and thrust my sword during that chance.

Since I've finished analyzing Arias, I can predict most of his moves from the mana, so the fight is considerably easier now.

However, demons are sturdy.

I couldn't give a telling blow while my mana kept decreasing.

And after exchanging dozens of slashes, with only half of my mana remaining--Arias suddenly fell on his knee.

"Mu!?"

Arias immediately tried to rebuild his posture, but it didn't go well.

He looks flustered and perplexed to see his body not moving as he wanted.

"...You bastard, what did you do?"

"Nothing?"

Of course it's a lie.

I used the developed version of the tactic Ruli and Alma used against Elhart.

The one used on Elhart is only effective against relatively weak demons.... But this magic works against Arias too.

In exchange, I need to precisely analyze the enemy's mana through methods like earlier.

"You think I'll believe you?"

"You don't have... to!"

I cut down the distance and swung my sword.

Arias blocked my sword.

"It appears you are using some odd magic... But it's nothing once you know it."

Arias attacked back as he said that.

Moving as well as he did in the start of battle.

Just as he said, the movement jamming magic I used on him isn't that special.

If it was Elhart, this magic alone could completely bind him, but against Arias, it can only disarray his sense for a moment at most.

However, the true merit of this magic will take a bit more time to manifest, so this is enough for now.

I just need to buy some time until it show its effect for real.... Doesn't seem like my opponent will quietly let me do that though.

I'm constructing a magic while thinking that.

"It's time to end this fight!"

Arias strengthens the control of the mana inside his body.

Next moment, Arias's mana increased all at once.

【Magic Circuit Overdrive】.

A type of reinforcement magic usable for demons higher than middle rank.

The effect is similar to【Evilize】with heavy recoils... But unlike with【Evilize】, the probability of dying from it is low.

Thus, it was known as one of demons' trump cards in my past life.

Just as I thought, he intends to end this quick.

Even if accumulation-type magic isn't well known in this era, it won't be strange for him to notice the fact that I've been using one.

...But there's no reason for me to play by his rule.

"Hey now, why don't you take it slowly?"

I shot the magic I constructed just now at Arias.

And then Arias's mana rapidly withers--to the level before he used 【Magic Circuit Overdrive】.

I've nullified the activation.

"H-how did you nullify it at this timing! There should be no general-purpose magic that could nullify【Magic Circuit Overdrive】even in myth!"

Arias started to get upset after his【Magic Circuit Overdrive】got destroyed.

It's only natural.

Because the magic I built looked like it nullified【Magic Circuit Overdrive】after it had been activated.

"Who knows? Maybe it was a coincidence?"

I began to construct the next magic as I said that.

Chapter 76: Strongest Sage, Answers Questions

"...Then how about this!"

Arias began to compress his mana on his hands.

【Mana Blast】.

Just like【Magic Circuit Overdrive】, this is one of trump cards demons often use.

I nullify it with a magic I've constructed earlier.

"Then, this one--"

Arias began to converge mana from his body into his palm.

Arias's hand starts to shine white.

I shot a magic I had prepared at that hand... But Arias's hand keeps on shining.

The mana inside it hasn't changed either.

"It appears your magic couldn't erase this one. ...Take this!"

Sure of his victory, Arias laughed and activated the magic in his hand--

My view turned white.

It's dazzling the eyes.

Using this chance, Arias invoked his next magic.

It's a magic called【Enforced Mistification】.

Normally, Mist Demons cannot turn anyone beside themselves into mist--but this magic can forcefully turn other people into mist.

Against someone who doesn't have the magic to materialize themselves, it's effectively instant death.

It's a magic that rarely emerges among Mist Demons.

There's probably no other Mist Demons besides Arias that can use this magic in this era.

--However, such a thing doesn't affect me.

I stealthily shot a magic I constructed at Arias and interrupted the invocation.

"Wh... How were you able to nullify this magic! Are you telling me you've been using specialized counter-demon magic!"

Ah. I see. That's how he interpreted it huh.

True, magic that demons use have limited pattern.

Therefore, thinking that specialized magic are created to counter them isn't wrong.

"What if I did?"

"I'm the only one that can use this magic in the whole world, furthermore, I have never shown this to anyone before! There's no way you could have created a way to cope with it! It can't be, is it really a general-purpose nullifying magic--"

"Nope, it's a specialized type magic alright. The magic I used to erase【Magic Circuit Overdrive】was a specialized one that only worked for it, as is the same with the magic I used to erase【Enforced Mistification】."

"But you constructed those magic before I used mine! There's no way you could've nullified them!"

"I can do that just fine if I simply guess what you're going to use, yeah?"

The nature of mana gradually changes every time they're used.

That's why it's possible to comprehend your opponent's battle style and magic by analyzing their mana.

It's simple once that's done.

I can easily gain time by readying counter magic for magic that are likely used by the opponent to be their trump cards, and suitably use one that can nullify their magic depending on the situation.

Apart from that, it's easy to predict what magic the opponent likely use from experience.

By the way, I didn't nullify the blinding light since it wouldn't have had any

effect on me anyway.

Thus, I'd better off letting the opponent went on with it and only thwarting him when he used his trump card.

"But how--"

"Who knows? Either way, you ran out of time to hear my explanation."

Kindly answering Arias's question was just to buy time.

And that was over just now, so I got no reason to answer him anymore.

"What does that... Guh!?"

Arias who was asking back groaned painfully while holding his chest.

Right after that, the surrounding mana began to converge into Arias at a tremendous speed.

The magic I've put on him has begun to show its true effect.

Chapter 77: Strongest Sage, Gives Present

"W-what is this..."

Arias asked me as the surrounding mana converged.

"It's your own body, you know without me telling right?"

"Imploding from mana overload..."

Correct.

The magic I've put inside Arias forces a demon's mana control to run amok and collect excess mana from the surroundings.

The demon that's forced to gather mana will lose control of their mana, running amok--in short, it will implode and die.

...However, looks like Arias is hanging on to it hard.

Were he a lower ranked demon, I wouldn't be surprised if he had already imploded by now.

"I see. A fitting magic for monster. ...But this isn't enough to defeat me see?"

Arias laughed painfully as he said that.

The converging mana began to rapidly decrease.

It's not like my magic is faulty.

The surrounding mana has simply dried up.

Since I had triggered Mana Disaster to materialize Arias, the mana in this vicinity had dried up.

"Right. Looks like it's not enough. Since you seem to be working hard to control your mana... I'll give you a present."

I took out a magic stone from Storage magic.

"Present... Magic stone?"

Arias shifted his attention toward me while controlling the excess mana,

looking dubious.

"Yeah. That said, I'm not giving this magic stone as is though."

I answered while putting my mana into the magic stone.

Arias probably realizes what's going to happen after seeing this.

After all, He has seen me crushing magic stones to trigger Mana Disaster.

"St... Stop it! Please stop!"

"Ah, sorry. Too late."

I crushed the magic stone in my hand.

All of the vast amount of mana released from it got sucked into Arias's body.

And, after a moment.

"U, UGAAAAAAAA!"

Arias imploded while screaming, blasting the surroundings.

I wait for the blast to recede while protecting myself with defend magic.

Several seconds later.

The ruined building has disappeared--there's only a crater around where Arias was left.

After confirming that there's a metal stake-like thing in that crater, I send【Enforced Detection】toward the sky.

Iris started to descend.

"Mathi-kun!"

Ruli got off Iris and hugged me.

"Why did you suddenly jump off! I was really worried you know!?"

"Aah. I did it to deceive the enemy. It didn't work though."

It's a lie.

I had asked Iris to fly off high above to prevent the two from following me down.

"But...."

"Well, he got off safe anyway, isn't it fine."

"Right right. Mathi-kun is Mathi-kun, of course he's coming back safely!"

Following after Ruli, Iris and Alma stopped.

"But Alma, you were also really anxious until you saw Mathi-kun weren't you!"

....Ruli talked back to Alma.

Having people worrying about me is quite a fresh experience.

There was no one who would do that before I reincarnated.

Setting that aside, Ruli was still hugging me while we were conversing.

Personally, I'm very glad about this, I'd like this to continue a bit more....

"I mean, Ruli, how long you're planning to cling on Mathi-kun!"

"Ah! I...I'm sorry!"

Right when I thought that, Alma pointed that out and Ruli separated herself.

Ruli is looking down with a reddened face.

...The mood turned odd somehow. I should change the topic.

We've got a new problem we need to deal with after all.

Chapter 78: Strongest Sage, Confirms

"Let's get back to about the demons for now."

"T-that's right! We saw some kinda huge explosion, what was that!?"

When I said that, Alma recalled something and asked me.

"That was the demon imploding. And of course, I've confirmed that he had died for sure."

Pretending to die in an explosion while actually secretly fleeing the scene is a relatively famous tactic.

You need to keep monitoring the enemy's mana reaction as they're exploding, to prevent yourself from getting tricked.

"Demon, imploding....?"

"Yeah. That's the kind of magic it was. ...But the problem isn't the demon. But what's left of it."

Alma and Ruli look at the surroundings.

"Left... Hm? There's some kind of weird rod sticking out, what's that?"

After a bit, Alma pointed at a broken stake.

Ruli and Iris shifted their glance there.

"It looks similar to the pillar used for making barriers.... It's very big though."

"It does look similar... But isn't that a Dragon Vein Pillar?"

Iris replied to Ruli.

"Iris is correct. That's a Dragon Vein Pillar. A tool to manipulate the mana flow in the Dragon Vein by sticking it into the vein. The problem is its purpose... We defeated a demon called Ashril recently right?"

"Rather than we, it was mostly Mathi-kun alone though."

"At that time, Ashril used a magic to cause a large outbreak of monsters."

"Outbreak of monsters... Is that the same magic that exists in myth? It's said to require your life as compensation..."

That magic was in myth huh.

It should have been a hardly usable minor magic.

"I don't know about myth, but it's true that it requires your life as compensation. I only managed to delay the magic since I had lost most of my mana at that time."

I probably would have been able to stop that magic if I had as much mana as I am now.

...However, even if the monsters are of questionable quality, it'd be a waste to stop them from coming.

I think I probably would've just delayed the activation to after the completion of the capital's barrier even if I had some mana remaining.

"You speak as if you stopped a myth-class magic...."

"It's Mathi-kun.... I mean, Iris is also a mythical creature if it's really the real one...."

"Hm? What about me?"

Iris replied with human language hearing its name got called.

"Ah. They're talking about myth and stuff. I'm not peculiar about myth at all... How about you Iris?"

"Un. Since I have never gone down that mountain, I don't know either...."

Looks like Iris isn't really useful for getting information.

Well, even if Iris is a mythical creature, the thing it has to do won't change.

...But I'm curious if Gods really exist.

I'd like to fight them eventually.

"...And that stake... Does that Dragon Vein Pillar have anything to do with monster outbreak?"

Alma returned to the point.

"Yeah. Judging from the magic carved on it, no mistake about it. Arias and the other demons stayed here in order to control the Dragon Vein below and shift the outbreak location."

I didn't defeat Arias normally and made him implode by using up large amount of mana because I noticed that.

The Dragon Vein Pillar had been set for quite a long time so its effect had solidified... But it should be shifted a bit after breaking it that bad.

"...I've got a bad feeling about this...."

"Me too. ...Mathi-kun. The location of that outbreak is...."

I reply the two's question.

It's probably the worst possible answer they could've guessed.

"--It's at the royal capital."

Chapter 79: Strongest Sage, Invites

"Swarm of monsters at the capital!? That'll be a catastrophe!"

"We've got to hurry back and evacuate everyone--"

"Hold it there. No need to panic. Its mana has fallen into disorder because of the explosion earlier, and the outbreak location has probably shifted 10 kilometer away from the capital."

I calmed the two who fell into panic when they heard that the outbreak would be at the capital.

"But it's a large swarm of monsters isn't it!? 10 kilometers are virtually nothing! Even if we've put defense around the capital...."

"It might be a swarm, but there won't be that many monsters."

The number of monster appearing from this magic depends on the user's affinity with summoning type magic.

The outbreak magic this time wasn't performed by a strong demon or one

with good affinity with summoning magic, thus the scale should be limited.

And I've added several damping on the seal magic I put on it.

"...Is it around 100 monsters?"

"No. That's too few. At the lowest... it'll be around 3000. Well, just think that there will be 5000 dungeon floor 10-class monsters. And also a few bosses."

"Floor 10, 5000! And what are bosses...."

"A boss is like the master of a floor in a dungeon. Their strength differs on a case by case basis, but even the weakest one is floor 20 class."

"And there will be several of that!? The capital is over! Things may be different if there are multiple Mathi-kun with us...."

"Well, there might be only one boss though."

Well, if there's one boss, that doesn't mean it'll be easy to beat.

Rather, if the mana that can be used to create multiple boss is concentrated on one, beating it will be exponentially more difficult.

"It still looks hopeless though... Mathi-kun, why are you so calm?"

"Don't tell me you can split yourselves!?"

"No, I can't do that but I know a way to deal with it."

"Way to deal with it?"

"Yeah. The academy students will have to help, doing so will almost guarantee us to succeed in intercepting the monsters. Rather, it's a chance to collect lots of magic stones."

The monster outbreak will probably happen after we've finished setting up the barrier.

Only the location of the outbreak has changed, the time of it happening is still the same.

"I don't think we can win even if we gather up all the students...."

"That's true for the students as they are now.... But they won't stay that way."

My barrier creation plan might look like it's just using the students as laborers, but in actuality, it's a highly effective method for training.

"I agree that everyone has become far stronger than they ever be ever since they learned through Mathi-kun's method.... But still, can they really win against 5000 floor 10 monsters?"

"They can. I will take care of the boss though."

I get on Iris's back while saying that.

"...Normally this would have sounded absurd, but hearing it from Mathi-kun makes me feel that this will really work, it's so mysterious...."

"I mean, Mathi-kun himself is a lump of absurdity...."

"Well, we'll talk about it again after the barrier is complete. For now, let's go back to the capital!"

"Yes!"

We left for home as we conversed.

Iris speaks out along the way.

"Um, what should I from now on...."

"Now that you mention it, I hadn't thought of it."

Climbing Iris's mountain every time we need to go somewhere far sounds quite troublesome.

Having Iris close to us for its treatment is convenient for Iris too.

But, there would be a huge uproar for sure if Iris landed in the middle of the city....

Right when I thought this far, I recalled a certain special magic that dragons have.

"Iris. If I'm not mistaken, dragons have a magic to turn themselves into a

human right? Can you use that at present?"

"I've barely ever used it, but I should be able to! That magic barely uses up mana too!"

"Then you should stay in the capital while pretending to be human by using that... no wait. There's a better way to this."

"...Better way?"

"Yeah. --Iris, won't you go to school?"

Chapter 80: Strongest Sage, Going to Check it Out

"School?"

"Yeah. You can learn things--though probably not much, but if you're in the school, you can be near us. Your treatment will be easier too."

"....I personally don't mind... But I have never assumed human form before, you see? Won't there be problems if I go to school?"

"Yeah. As for human common sense, well just tell them you've been living deep in the mountain."

"There's already someone who doesn't have common sense as a human in the school after all."

"Now that you mention it.... Recently, I've been worrying if I have joined the out of common sense club too before I knew it."

Alma and Ruli followed up to my opinion.

Looks like there's already one person who's like that.

I've never met that common-senseless person myself since my social network isn't that wide. Can't be helped.

"Then I'm gonna go to school!"

Alright. It's a deal.

I've acquired a convenient transport I can use anytime I want.

Though I'd have liked it if it was smaller so it could get close to the city.

"Alright! Then let's get to the school as soon as we arrive at the mountain!"

Distance-wise, going straight to the capital from here is shorter, but Iris's big body will stand out too much.

For now, we can get back to that mountain and run to the capital. Not like it'll take that long anyway.

"Iris-san, are you going to go to the academy right now? Putting aside the question about why you can turn into human, the academy isn't opening its entrance exam for a while is it..."

"Isn't there an exam for transfer students?"

I'm not too familiar with the current school system, but something like that existed in my past life

As for the age, even if Iris doesn't look the same age as us, we can just use magic to falsify the looks.

"That's... I think there is, but I never heard anyone passing that exam."

"I also heard that that that exam is impossible to pass!"

"...Is that right? Well, we'll know for sure once we ask the principal."

A dragon is a dragon even if they assume human form.

Their basic specs are different, though they can't use their unique magic like Breath of course.

Iris should be far stronger than the current students.

Considering the principal puts ability above all else, it won't be strange if he let Iris pass.

He probably won't particularly ask『Are you human?』at someone who's trying to enroll at the academy anyway.

I waited until we arrived at the mountain while thinking that.

--Several hours later.

We arrived at the mountain where Iris was.

"...Now then, Iris."

"Yes!"

"Your dragon figure stands out too much when we're moving. Turn into human here."

"I understand! Err, I'm sure it should be like.... this!"

Iris fired itself and then its mana flow suddenly changed.

The flow became closer to that of human than dragon.

Immediately following, Iris's body rapidly shrinks.

After a bit--Iris who's turned into a form that looks no difference than human is standing there.

The age and looks are mostly the same as us.

"...Fumu. Looks like there's no need to adjust the age."

But we can't let our guard down yet.

If there's a part that doesn't look human, though there's nothing that's as obvious as something like demons' horns, we will need too cover it.

For example, the tail--

"Wai-, Mathi-kun, what are you doing!"

For some reason, Ruli blocked my eyes just when I was going to check it.

Since I didn't feel any malicious intent, I didn't stop or counter it, but Ruli seemed to be upset about something.

"...? I can't check it out with my eyes closed."

"What's wrong Ruli-san?"

Ruli replies like she can't believe it at my and Iris's questions.

"Don't 'what's wrong' me! Isn't Iris-san a girl! And nude too!"

Now that she mentions it, the looks are that of a nude girl.

But Iris is a dragon anyway, I don't think there's any need to worry about that.

"Even if she looks human, Iris is a dragon you know? If I don't check her out, we won't know if there's anything that might expose her race."

But the two weren't going to take it.

"We will be the one doing that! Mathi-kun, you go over there!"

Alma turned me to the opposite side with my eyes still being blocked by Ruli.

Apparently, Alma was upset too, though not as bad as Ruli.

Even if dragons are to be treated like humans, I think the one that should be minding it is Iris, not Ruli and Alma.

I wonder what makes these two this upset.

...Umu.

I have no idea.

Chapter 81: Strongest Sage, Disguises

"Finished!"

"Mathi-kun, you can look now!"

I turned around as told, Iris was already wearing clothes there.

I didn't see them having spare clothes beforehand... Just where did they get it from.

Either way, now no one would get suspicious of Iris when we get to human dwellings.

...Oh, before that.

"Iris lend me your hands for a bit."

"My hands?"

Iris held out both her hands while saying that.

Just as I expected, I found one thing that separated her from humans.

"As I thought, you don't have a Crest."

"...Ah! True!"

"Let's make one. Something like this... okay. Done."

I used a magic and created a fake Magic Crest on the back of Iris's hand.

This kind of disguise magic should have been First Crest's forte, but this much is easy even for the current me.

"He completed a Crest in an instant..."

"He did it so calmly, but isn't that quite amazing...?"

"Even Ruli can do it right now as long as you know the spell. For now, let's leave for the capital."

The day will go down if we dawdle too long.

The capital is far from this mountain after all.

"Yes!"

"Gotcha!"

◇

--Around half a day later.

We arrived at the capital safely.

"I still can't get used to a body that can't fly.... It felt so far even though it really wasn't!"

"It IS far though."

Iris seemed a bit confused at her unfamiliar body.

Yet, she's still faster than Ruli and Alma.

The basic spec of her body is still originally that of a dragon.

The three of us went to the principal office.

To report and ask him about Iris's enrollment.

"Principal, are you in?"

"This voice... Mathias! You're back already, what happened to the demons!?"

"We've subjugated them. This is Elhart's horn."

I took Elhart's horn out of Storage magic while saying that.

It's an easily identifiable proof for when you kill a demon.

"Killing demons that were several thousand kilometers away in mere days.... I will have to report this matter to the king, sooner or later, won't you completely vacate the treasury at this rate?"

"There's not much I want from the treasury, so I'll be asking for something else before that happens.... And also, there was another demon besides Elhart, one that was several ranks higher--"

"Did you fail to kill that one?"

"No. It completely vanished in an explosion, so I couldn't bring back any proof of its defeat."

"...I see. I don't understand. It's true that I can't imagine Mathias failing to defeat his enemy...."

Having completely disintegrated is an unusual case indeed. Normally something will remain.

Since Mist Demons are special, this kind of things happen though.

"Let's put aside the matter about demons.... I'd like to consult to principal."

I cut to the chase about Iris after finishing the report.

If I tell him about the monster great outbreak now, it'll be hard to talk about other things.

It's not like we're particularly in a hurry about the great outbreak anyway.

"What? I don't think I can help you with most things--"

"Please allow this girl to enter the school."

"Wha!"

I pushed Iris, who was behind me, to the front.

When the principal saw her, his face turned complicated.

"...Admission huh. That's quite difficult..."

"Is it?"

"Yeah. It is. The content of the exam is the same as the entrance exam, but the passing mark is far higher. If it's by Mathias's proposal, she might be exempted of the exam by the king's order... but it would take time. If we consider that we also have to persuade people in charge, you'd better off waiting until the enrollment next year even."

"By the way, what's the passing mark?"

"47 point."

"That'd have been the top score if Mathi-kun wasn't present!"

"Mathi-kun is weird in many things after all..."

Alma was surprised to hear the passing mark.

If I'm not mistaken, 50 is the full score... In actuality, you can score higher than perfect in this exam.

In fact, my score is 257, and I think the current Ruli and Alma should be able to score higher than 50.

I have a feeling that Iris is completely clueless in the classroom lecture... But if we consider the power of dragon, she should be able to get 25 on each magic test (full score is 10) and swordsmanship test (full score is 10), thus acing the exam.

"No problem then. ...However, I suggest to either exempt her from target test, or change it to another test. That's too dangerous in Iris's case."

Currently, Iris's controlling ability can't catch up to her output.

If she did the aforementioned test at her condition, the destruction of school grounds wouldn't be comparable to what I did.

No, we'd be lucky if the school grounds are the only victims. Getting the school's walls blown away would be a disaster enough.

Just like how I was exempted from the test in the dungeon exam, they'd better prepare another test for Iris.

I made that proposal with that in mind--

"Changing the content of the exam needs similar procedures to that of exempting her from it. If she wants to enter now, doing that now isn't possible."

Dangit. It was in vain.

Whatever happens, I'm not responsible for it okay.

Chapter 82: Strongest Sage, Inspecting

Next day.

I went to the academy to accompany Iris for her transfer exam.

This might seem too sudden, but this was the schedule we got when I asked for『Someone as strong as possible』as the examiner for the swordsmanship test.

By the way, according to the principal, among his acquaintances, I was the strongest one... But since it wasn't right for someone related to Iris to be her examiner, they appointed the next strongest one.

The reason why I asked for someone strong as the examiner is simple.

They'd have died if they were weak.

....I'm also expecting Iris to net a higher score for defeating a strong guy though.

"Principal, I have some questions regarding the exam."

After the exam's explanation, I talked to the principal while Iris was doing the written exam.

Even if these exams aren't hard, it's still unreasonable for Iris who has never assumed human form to suddenly take them on.

Thus, we did a little test at a safe place--

The result of that test was absolutely horrible.

Her damaged magic circuit as a dragon might have an effect on her mana control as a human.

As a result, there needs to be another thing to consult.

"What?"

"Since all details about these exams have been set in the rules, they can't be changed right?"

"Yeah. If you give me some time, I might be able to do something about that by asking the king--"

Asking the king huh.

That's one option, but I'd like to let Iris enroll as soon as possible.

Well, for now, I'll ask the thing I need to ask.

"Does the rules state anything about defensive measures of the exam location--for example, protection from stray shots?"

"The rule doesn't cover that far, but we usually put several layers of barrier magic around the location as a protective wall. At least we did for the past several years."

I see. It's not set in stone huh.

That means...

"Can that barrier be replaced with something else?"

"It's possible. But what are you changing it into?"

"Me."

The only one who can protect the school from Iris's magic is me... or not exactly, but if I do it myself, there will be no need for some bothersome

preparations.

"...So Mathias, you're going to replace the barrier?"

"It's just an insurance."

If Iris does it well, I won't have to block her magic.

But there's a high chance of that not happening.

"...I got it. Let's do that. Can you deploy the same barrier we have?"

"No problem."

Looks like the school will get out of this in one piece.

After a bit, Iris's swordsmanship test began.

Giving advices is prohibited, but watching is not.

Since Ruli and Alma had something to do today, I'm here with the principal only.

"...Huh? That examiner seems familiar."

I asked the principal in low voice when I saw Iris's examiner.

Familiar, or rather--

"Yeah. He's your examiner, Knight Commander Gayle."

I thought so.

With his strength, he should be relatively safe against Iris.

If beating him nets 120 point, then Iris should pass with this test.

"Swordsmanship test, begin!"

"Here I go!"

With the examiner's declaration, Iris readied her sword, ran to Gayle and swung it.

It's neither technical nor random, it's simply a swing. You can say that she's a beginner.

Gayle blocks that sword--

"Guh!?"

Not.

Gayle's sword couldn't block Iris's sword and he got pushed back.

Gayle regained his stance as he evaded the sword, and managed to take some distance away.

Iris's sword hit the ground just like that and created a small crater.

"What strength.... Where's that power coming from with that body."

Gayle muttered while resetting his sword.

The sword in his hand is already half-bent.

"...Is that really a girl?"

"As you can see for yourself, she is a girl."

I answered the principal's question.

Well, she's not a human girl though.

While we were having that conversation, Iris hit the knight commander's sword, flinging him to the wall and ending the exam.

Since he was blown away in a way that diminished the damage, and broke his fall, the knight commander seemed fine.

....Thus Iris's swordsmanship test ended.

It's finally time for the magic test.

....I think it's more like the school's disaster than an exam though.

Chapter 83: Strongest Sage, Observes the Rightfulness of His Warning

"...Ee. We will now begin the magic test!"

The examiner for magic test declared that after a target mark had been set in front of Iris.

It seemed the principal had warned him beforehand, he sounded tense.

And then the examiner retreated 10 meter back.

"...Um, examiner-san."

"What's wrong? I won't answer questions concerning a way to tackle the test--"

"I think you should get back a bit more...."

"There should be no danger at this distance--well, I guess there's no harm in doing so."

While saying that the examiner retreated another 10 meter back.

"Is this fine?"

"No, please get back three times that distance."

"T-that's quite far...."

Even while saying that, the examiner retreated back again.

The examiner's location isn't written in the rule, it's probably why he can cope with it flexibly.

"You can't be trying to cheat by keeping the examiner away do you?"

The principal talked to me when he saw that.

I see. Cheating is another way to look at it huh.

However, unfortunately, wrong answer.

"No. This is necessary."

"...Can't the girl use magic when there's someone nearby?"

"Nothing like that. This is purely for the sake of the examiner's safety."

Having said that, I get ready to cast a magic.

I look at Iris who shouts out.

"Here I go!"

Iris developed a magic in her hand, pointed her palm at the target and shot it.

The magic Iris shot flew straight--toward us.

Not toward the prepared target.

"Right from the start!"

While shouting, I unfolded the defense magic I had prepared in front of me and the principal.

Iris's magic hit my defensive magic and exploded, creating a crater in front of me.

"I-I'm sorry!"

Iris deployed another magic while apologizing.

This time the magic flew to the sky. Not even a fragment of control.

I guess it's a good thing that it wasn't hitting a building.

In the end, the second magic Iris shot exploded in the air, and dozens of roasted birds fell from the sky.

By the way the target is unscathed.

Since none of Iris's magic has managed to hit it.

"...What is that. A calamity class monster or something?"

"Probably something similar to that."

Iris had a conflicted look on her face while we were being shocked.

And then, she looked determined about something and glared at the target.

"I've got no choice but to do that..."

Iris began to unfold her third magic.

However, this magic seems different than her magic so far.

Its power is higher than the two before.

"What is she trying to do?"

"You'll see."

I taught her to use this tactic in case she failed to do it with normal ones.

As a way to clear the exam for sure even if she has no control.

"Soi!"

Iris squatted down while shouting--and pushed the deployed magic onto the ground.

The next moment, explosions happened on Iris's hands.

""Wha...""

The principal and examiner were surprised when they saw Iris getting swallowed up in the explosions.

The principal froze for an instant, but he immediately pulled himself and tried to run toward Iris.

"This is bad! We have to rescue her quick--"

"There's no need for that."

I held the running principal back while saying that.

The dust of cloud caused by the explosion in front of us cleared--

And Iris showed up from inside of that, unhurt.

"...Wha?"

The principal beside me sounded dumbfounded.

"Finished destroying the target! How was it!"

Iris asked the examiner.

"H-how, you ask..."

The examiner was perplexed at Iris's question.

No surprise there.

The place where Iris was has turned into a crater, the target along with the ground it was on has completely disappeared.

You can't even tell where the target was now.

"No no, this is just weird..."

The principal muttered.

"Well, that's the kind of creature Iris is."

Even the current me would have a hard time firing a magic with that much power.

If we're just talking about firepower, you could even say that she's the school's strongest.

In overall strength, Iris should be right after me.

"...As for the exam result, we can't judge it right now. We'll grade it at a later date. But you most likely won't fail this. ...Ah. The schoolyard..."

The principal muttered listlessly.

I told you. You should have given up the magic exam.

Chapter 84: Strongest Sage, Mending

"....Iris."

"Yes!"

I spoke to Iris who was standing in the middle of the crater.

"The exams are over. And you're practically guaranteed to pass, no need to worry."

"Yay! ...By the way I broke it really bad... Is it okay?"

"Do you think it's okay?"

"I don't really mind this kind of environments...."

"Humans are a creature that minds this kind of things."

...Well to be honest, I don't really care if the schoolyard turned into a crater.

Cause even some random magic experiments will produce craters.

Or rather, you rarely ever stand on a flat surface in an actual fight, I feel that this environment is better for training.

"So, I'm gonna repair this."

"Err, should I help?"

"Fumu... No, let's not."

I felt like letting Iris to help would worsen the situation.

In the first place, there are only two craters that are 30 meter wide and 10 meter deep in the schoolyard.

Repairing it is easy even for me alone.

"For now, Iris, you're prohibited from using magic unless it's an emergency and you have no choice to or in a test."

"I...I understand! I'm sorry, it's my fault!"

...Un. Still, her condition is really bad.

For the time being, Iris is to be a physical-focused power fighter when she's in school.

The teachers probably won't let her join magic classes anyway.

However, humans can use this magic called Physical Reinforcement.

One can power up to a safe level using Physical Reinforcement as long they don't mind the efficiency.

Since Iris's mana is virtually almost limitless, she can ignore the efficiency factor and demonstrates overwhelming power with it.

While thinking about that, I walk around the schoolyard while mending it with earth magic.

I have to walk around because of the Fourth Crest's range.

The repair ended in five minutes.

"Principal. Any problem with the repair?"

"None. Of course there's no problem... But repairing it in five minutes after it got damaged that bad..."

"It wasn't really different than what I did in the entrance exams back then, just that the scale was bigger."

"Just how hard do you think magicians in this world struggle to increase that scale... Especially civil engineering magicians, I'm pretty sure they'd faint if they saw what you did just now."

"If they did, I'll rouse them up and teach them chantless magic."

Well, I can't be arsed to do that myself though, so I'd leave it to the teachers.

"...By the by, how's the progress with the barrier material procurement?"

"It's going well. ...Is what I'd like to say, unfortunately we're having a shortage of a certain thing."

As I thought.

I could guess what happened.

"We're lacking Glory Crest huh."

"...So you had it anticipated. Exactly. The processing cannot keep up."

To begin with, there aren't many Glory Crest bearers in the Second Academy.

Since we needed lots of them to refine and process the metal, I had guessed that gathering only beginner Glory Crest wouldn't be enough to keep up the pace.

I also had thought of a way to deal with it.

"What happened to that plan we talked about?"

"About the First Academy?"

"Yes."

That is, teach chantless magic to First Academy's students and split the burden.

Although they might not be as efficient as the Second Academy students, they should still be able to do refinery even if they've been just taught.

Above all, the numbers are too far apart.

The First Academy has as many students as Second Academy, however all of them are of Glory Crest.

"We're having some difficulties. The First Academy's principals and students are vehemently against it. They don't seem willing to admit that Glory Crest isn't suited for battle."

"But First Academy students saw how other crests instantly beat Glory Crests didn't they?"

"Their excuse is that Mathias was monstrous, so that had nothing to do with crests. I can somewhat agree with that... but apparently the other party can't stomach it. Just the other day, First Academy principal demanded to do the interpersonal match over again."

"Do over?"

"Yeah. They insisted that the match before was invalid because a demon intruded."

...I see. Doing the match over huh.

Alright.

I've come up with something good.

"

Alright.

...Let's do that match."

"...Normally we wouldn't mind doing so... But we're currently in an emergency. We've got no time to wastes with some idiots do we?"

"That's exactly why. We'll shut up all of them in one fell swoop by using that match."

Those guys seem like they really don't want to admit the weakness of Glory Crest.

It's not like I don't understand, after looking down on Disqualified Crest that much, they were suddenly told that the Glory Crest was the weak one instead.

That's why I'll make it so that those guys practice production-type magic without reserve.

"...Shutting them all up? Is that possible?"

"It is. ...But the term needs to be changed so that the other party is unable to make excuses."

Chapter 85: Strongest, Reminisces

--Evening of the same day.

I'm with the principal in the Second Academy principal room, waiting to meet the First Academy principal, Feycas.

He was ordered by the king to visit here in order to coordinate the match's date with us.

Because we need the cooperation of the First Academy students as soon as possible for procuring the barrier materials.

--But he's late.

"...He's not coming. Does that guy intend to defy the king's order?"

"It's 20 minutes late from the schedule... but it appears he's just arrived."

I pointed at the door as I said that.

The reason why I knew was easy. I could hear his footsteps.

I'm not familiar with the mana reaction too, so that's probably the guy alright.

"I do hear footsteps... you could tell who they are just from that?"

"That's not all... it's only about 70%. The rest is from their mana."

While I was saying that, the door was violently opened.

The person who did that had a raging look on his face.

"What does the like of Second Academy principal think, calling me, the First Academy principal here!"

And he said that while raging.

The one who called him wasn't the principal though....

"Wasn't it His Majesty who ordered you to come here."

"But the glorious First Academy principal had to come to this kind of place! The inferior one coming instead should have been the proper etiquette!"

"The First and Second Academies' principals are supposed to be equal though."

"That's only on paper! The tradition of this kingdom has the First Academy above the second! That's how it is! It should be obvious looking at the ratio of Glory Crest!"

Ah.

He somehow reminded me of Biffgel.

This is the type who can't be reasoned with.

"

...Now then.

Enough with the pointless talk, let's get down to business."

It seems the principal is thinking the same.

Cutting off the talk about school status and getting to the matter of interpersonal match.

"What do you mean by pointless!"

"Ah. Then, enough with the not pointless talk, let's get down to business."

Oh!

This is how one should handle an idiot!

As expected of the principal. I can use his interpersonal skill as a reference.

Let's use it the next time I meet Biffgel.

--Ideally, I hope that never happens though.

"You bastard... I will definitely report this insult to the king!"

"Do whatever you want. About the match--"

"Remove the monster over there from the team! And the other two monsters too!"

The moment the principal was going to talk about the interpersonal match, Biffgel... I mean. Feicas pointed his finger at me.

Feel like I get called monster a lot lately.

This time Ruli and Alma also got called monsters, so it was an unusual pattern.

Then I reply with the answer I have prepared beforehand.

"I don't mind. However, I demand the rules to be changed as a tradeoff."

While I was at it, I secretly deployed an attack magic and struck Feycas with it.

That said, the magic is nothing that directly damages or gives him pain.

【Hair Root Exinction】. --Just as the name suggests, it's a magic that kills hair root and completely turns someone bald.

The effect will probably shows itself overnight.

It's a revenge for treating Ruli like a monster. And for Alma too.

"You're speaking to the principal of the First Academy, what's with your tone-- well fine. It is very like the uncivilized and vulgar Second Academy students. ...Speak!"

I was going to use polite speech.... But I abandoned that thought after watching this guy.

The uncivilized vulgar one here is Feycas no matter how you look at it.

I tell him the term while thinking that.

"Let the participants be free."

"Do you mean not putting any limitation in people that can participate?"

"Yea. You can choose any number of students, from first to third year. However, Ruli, Alma and I won't participate."

By the way, I've consulted this term with the Second Academy principal and gotten his approval already.

Also, Iris probably won't take part. People would die if she did.

"Are you sure with--no, it's decided! We have a deal!"

Feycas was going to reconfirm, but he stopped midway and declared that it was a done deal.

Looks like he's trying to make this advantageous term (or what he think it is) affirmed by all means possible.

Ignoring the fact that the Second Academy students could exterminate demons in a siege were they train a bit as they're being forged in the mithril mining and refining even now.

"Also, the interpersonal match will be held the day after tomorrow. We've already had the arena scheduled."

"No problem with that. We have to overturn the groundless fact of First Academy losing as soon as humanly possible."

By the way, the reason why we got the arena scheduled this fast was due to the forceful intrusion of the king's order.

It was a chain show of royalty prerogative abuses.

I honestly thought it was useless during the transfer exams, but it appears to be quite effective in these kinds of things.

"It's the day after tomorrow! Wash your neck and wait!"

Feycas left the principal room after leaving that.

...Now then.

"What do you think of Feycas?"

"That's already beyond help."

"...Agreed. Then let's tell that to the king."

Chapter 86 Strongest Sage, Sees Through the Pretense

--Two days after the interpersonal match's date was decided.

The principal, Iris and I went to the arena along with the representatives who had been selected from applicants.

I was planning to replace our rep with Iris if our opponents look to be dangerous...

"Iris."

"Yes!"

"Looks like there's no need for Iris to come forth."

I've sensed mana reactions from what seemingly be the First Academy participants with【Passive Detection】and there is no demon among them.

They probably have no reason to disguise themselves as a human and participate in this.

"I understand!"

The principal looked obviously relieved when he heard her.

I understand how he feels.

The barrier here won't last even a second if Iris goes all out....

"Looks like you're not running away!"

Feycas came while we were talking.

"Yea. We don't really need to run away... Aren't you quite stressed about losing to Second Academy yourself. It shows on your head."

I pointed at Feyca's head.

It appears the【Hair Root Extinction】has worked its magic as Feycas's head glitters under the sun.

Feycas's face turned red to hear me.

"This isn't because of balding! I shaved it! Lowlifes like you don't understand this fashion!"

"...Hmph."

I snorted at Feycas's obvious pretense.

There's no point in lying. I'm the one who made you bald after all.

"Don't laugh! --Enough about my hair! Have you lowlifes prepared your representatives! Ours are already on standby!"

Feycas pointed at a crowd of First Academy students behind him.

152 students in total.

"...It seems you've prepared quite a lot of them."

"Hmph. I told them that we didn't need this many against the like of Second Academy, but there were many who applied. I brought all of them except the

disgraceful dunces. And what about yours--"

"Don't worry, we've brought them with us. Look, they're over there."

The principal showed our reps behind.

Our reps consist of one Disqualified Crest, two Common Magic Crests, and two Small Magic Crests.

The reason why there isn't a single Glory Crest is more because we severely lacked Glory Crest for the work so we couldn't even secure one for this match, not because it's unsuited for battles.

To begin with, we wouldn't need to seek First Academy's cooperation if we had enough Glory Crest.

"...Five people? Are you telling me Second Academy will only let five people fight?"

Feycas exclaimed like he couldn't believe it when he saw the number of our reps.

Un. I know how you feel.

I also can't really accept this number.

Five was decided after the principal negotiated with me.

"Yeah, five is too weird huh. This is the principal's will. It had to be this many, he wouldn't concede no matter what."

"No matter how you look at it, letting only two students fight like Mathias proposed isn't happening. Excluding the Glory Crest is sufficient enough, let this slide."

"It does suffice, but they'd better off doing other training than this match where the result has been set in stone anyway. It's a waste of time."

If it's 2 against 150 match, there's a chance it might serve as a training for fighting against a group of people, no matter how weak the opponents are.

However, a fight between five of the current Second Academy students against 150 First Academy students is nothing more than bullying the weak.

"How far are you going to make fun of--no. Enough of this! Start this match already! We'll see the result ourselves!"

"...Right. Let's start this."

We can talk again once the match is over.

--After a bit.

Students of both schools are facing each others in the center of the arena.

The First Academy students look like they're quite relaxed and negligent.

The severe ones were already talking about where to hold their victory celebrations.

The Second Academy students opposite of them aren't being careless even though their expressions look relaxed.

They've already decided and reserved where to hold their victory celebration, they have no need to discuss that anymore.

"Both sides, be silent!"

And then the male referee raises his voice.

"Match, start!"

Chapter 87: Strongest Sage, Pities the First Academy

"Alright! Crush 'em!"

A male student who seemed to be the First Academy rep leader gave an order at the same time as the referee's signal.

The other students nodded all at once...

"Fire mana that dwells in my body--"

And began to chant.

...Yup.

I have expected this somehow, it really comes to this huh.

Now I feel bad for them having to fight our academy's students.

"GYAAAAA!"

"C-Chantless magic?!"

And as expected, the Second Academy students unleashed their magic on the First Academy students before they could even complete their chant.

The ones attacking were four whose crests weren't the Disqualified Crest.

...That said, the four who are attacking aren't exactly magic prodigies even among Second Academy students.

The more capable students are all busy refining mithril after all.

Thus, even though they were quick to shoot magic, they were only able to incapacitate around 20 people.

Since the enemy is numbering at 150, they're mostly flawless.

Two of the Small Magic Crest students managed to shoot again before the First Academy finished their chant, but that only incapacitated nine people.

Then magic from the remaining 121 students, except ones that failed their chants, assaulted the Second Academy students all at once--

And disappeared right in front of them.

""""Wha....""""

The First Academy students were so shocked they lost their words when they saw that.

The reason why their magic disappeared is simple.

The student with Disqualified Crest, Esil, who isn't attacking so far has erected a barrier, in front of the Second Academy students, that blocked the magic unleashed by more than 100 people.

And the other Second Academy students shot out their magic from behind that barrier.

Their magic slipped through the barrier and rained incessantly on the First Academy students, creating panic among them.

"That barrier is truly nasty...."

"That kind of thing is only possible because the opponent's magic strength is low."

【Specific Permission-type Small Barrier】.

A barrier magic that blocks everything but magic unleashed by people the user recognizes as allies.

It's one of the magic I taught to the representatives for the sake of this match, looks like it's working well.

As a matter of fact, Disqualified Crest has a good compatibility with small-scale barrier magic besides with close-quarter ones.

The range of barrier magic is good enough if it can cover the allies.

People often rely on magic tools created by Glory Crest though when they need to set up large scale barriers.

"Don't panic! Our enemy is few! Their barrier is useless in close combat!"

It appears there are still some students with composure among the First Academy.

Although small in number, some First Academy students reorganized their ranks and began to rush toward the Second Academy students.

--Well, that's a bad move against a Disqualified Crest though.

"We're going with plan B!"

"Got it!"

Esil called out to the other four when he saw the First Academy students' move.

Then the four students besides Esil ran to outside the enemy's magic range.

And then Esil removed the barrier and took a metal bar out of his bosom pocket.

"Hmph!"

He swung it toward the coming students.

The First Academy students who were hit by the metal bar got blown away several meter back and had their protective barrier destroyed, eliminating them from the match.

They would have died if this was a real combat.

"W-what's with that strength...."

"It's a monster! They still have a monster with them!"

The First Academy students were shouting in surprise to see Esil who is of normal build flinging other students away.

But, it's nothing much. It's merely Physical Reinforcement.

This is because mining the dungeon wall makes for a good training, as you need to use magic while moving for a long period of time.

You will be able to do this much after doing that for a bit.

Most of the first grader right now are currently in the upper mid, I think.

It was a one-sided battle afterward.

The First Academy students got blown away by Esil without having the chance to even chant and got attacked by magic, forfeiting one after another.

And then, the First Academy students were completely eliminated before five minutes had passed--

"Match end! Winner, Second Academy!"

The referee's voice echoed in the arena wrapped in silence.

Chapter 88: Strongest Sage, Let Weapon be Destroyed

"L...Like I'd accept this result!"

Feycas immediately complained after the First Academy lost.

Yup. I had a feeling he'd do this.

"Why wouldn't you. The result comes from a match using terms that we all have agreed upon beforehand."

Principal Edward objected.

"No matter how you look at it, our opponents are monsters! I told you to exclude the monsters!"

So he said.

He actually only told us to exclude me, Ruli and Alma though.

And these three aren't monsters.

If there's someone who did call them monsters, that guy will go bald from the forehead.

It doesn't seem possible to make Feycas go any balder though.

"Our representatives this time are our school's excellent pupils, but they aren't that far apart from other students ability-wise, just you know. Calling them monsters is outrageous."

Principal Edward objected more.

In fact, our representatives aren't actually that strong.

He probably took our reps in consideration when he phrased that.

"...Then prove it! It must be a lie anyway!"

"Not sure how to do that, we only bring one other student besides the reps and Mathias for today."

"Then let that student fight!"

He's asking for something unreasonable.

I suspect that Biffgel would end up this bad had he continued to grow up as he did.

Personally, I don't mind if Iris participates in this match.

But I'd feel sorry for the students.

The First Academy students seemed to have quite a warped sense of values, but that's probably planted by Feycas.

Therefore, we're attempting to aim for a peaceful resolution.

"You heard the guy. Wanna fight? Iris."

I used Telepathy magic while saying that and taught Iris a simple plan.

"I don't mind! I'll fight! ...But I forgot to bring a weapon with me, could I borrow one?"

"Yeah. No problem. ...Do you mind if I lend her this? Of course there's no trick on it."

I held out a sword to Feycas.

Feycas took the sword, looked at it and violently returned it to me.

"Hmph. What an uncivilized sword befitting of Second Academy. If you think you can win with that, go on and try it!"

I hand over the sword to Iris.

Iris took it and--

"Hmm. Isn't this sword a bit too soft? If it isn't at least made of Adamantite..."

She crushed the sword after she said that.

And not the grip, but the blade part, with bare hands.

"Look. It broke. ...No choice then, I'm gonna fight with bare hands."

While saying that, Iris sorrowfully looked at the twisted blade.

The sword was something made in a production magic practice so it wasn't worth much, however, it's still a steel sword.

The impact was tremendous.

"Hiiiii!? Mo-Monster!"

Feycas shrunk away from Iris.

"Calling me monster is too cruel! I'm a genuine girl you know!"

While looking at Feycas, Iris crushed the sword, folded it and turned it into a steel ball.

With bare hands.

"U...UWAAAAAAAA!"

He probably felt terror after seeing that scene.

Feycas ran away from where he stood, twisted his legs on the auditorium and fell down unsightly.

Principal Edward called him there.

"You understand now? ...By the way."

"W-what!"

"First Academy students seemed quite surprised when they saw chantless magic.... Don't tell me that you haven't taught them chantless magic? I'm sure that spreading chantless magic was a direct order from his majesty the king."

Chapter 89: Strongest Sage, Schemes

"There was such a king's decree indeed."

"Then why haven't you taught them chantless magic?"

"Like I'd believe something like that! It is only right that chant magic is better with its proven result! No one told me about the way to teach it in the first place!"

"...I'm sure Second Academy has given you documents pertaining that and told you that we would dispatch a mentor if required?"

"You mean those illegitimate piles of paper that had『Glory Crest isn't suited for battle』as the preface!? I burned that thing as fast as I could! Let alone useless, they're harmful!"

When principal Edward heard that, his face looked like he couldn't believe it.

No, he really is.

"...I will say it, teaching chantless magic is his majesty's direct--"

"Even if it was the king's decree! I have a duty to protect this country's education from the lowly Disqualified Crest and the banal Common Magic Crest!"

Hearing that, principal Edward fell on his knee.

I too did that beside him.

Of course, we're not showing respect to Feycas at all.

There was someone whom we should pay our respect to on a VIP seat slightly apart from Feycas.

I don't know how these VIP seats were used for during its inception, but today, they serve only one purpose.

--When the royal family is watching the arena.

"Your majesty. It is as you can see, what should we do with him."

Principal Edward spoke respectfully while still on his knee.

Feycas's face turned pale when he heard, 'your majesty', and then he turned around and fell on his knee.

"Y-Your majesty! It was only a figure of speech, by no means--"

"Guards! Cut off this traitor's neck!"

"Yes sir!"

The king ignored Feycas who was going to make an excuse and mercilessly made an order.

To that, royal guards that have been standing by near Feycas immediately replied and drew their swords out.

Things are going quite fast, but there's a reason for this.

We have already arranged this execution beforehand.

Investigation about Feycas's traitorous act had already been done, it was just a matter of when he was going to be executed.

We consulted with the king and chose the best timing for it.

"Y-your majesty! Please listen to--"

Feycas's head flew off without being able to speak until the end.

The crucial part is after this.

"...Now then, students of our First Royal Academy."

After making sure of that, the king turned toward the arena.

All students of the First Academy are already on their knee.

"From here on, you are to receive education about chantless magic with the cooperation of Second Academy, and to help with the currently running operation. I believe there is no objection is there?"

"Yes sir!"

First Academy students replied all at once.

There was no shred of defiance in their voices.

This is exactly the reason we chose to execute Feycas at this timing.

If we suddenly told these students that Glory Crest isn't suited for battle, they would only be confused and revolting.

They probably wouldn't be as openly rebellious as Feycas, but teaching them would be hugely not as efficient.

But things would be different if they got beaten by a few students of Second Academy and saw their principal getting executed right before their eyes.

Human sense gets paralyzed when unexpected things happen in succession.

It might be a bit too rough, but we need the cooperation of the First Academy students as soon as possible in order to complete the capital's great barrier.

....It seems it all worked out.

Chapter 90: Strongest Sage, Restores

--A while after the match.

After getting the cooperation of First Academy students, the work to create materials for the great capital barrier is going well.

Their skill level isn't high at all, their strength lies in number.

The First Academy students are doing the simple parts like the initial phase of the refining while being supervised by the Second Academy, so the processed materials are piling up.

Students whose crests weren't of Glory Crest and had nothing to do until the match also became quite busy ever since the number of students with Glory Crest suddenly exploded.

"Yup. We're progressing nicely."

"I thought the First Academy's education would take some time, but they might become battle ready faster than expected."

Principal Edward nodded satisfyingly.

It's probably thanks to the teachers' guidance and the result of stir in the match back then.

Though, it might also partly because of Ruli demonstrating the merit of chantless magic by having to be their first opponent in their first lesson.

"By the by."

Principal Edward stopped there and stared at me with a serious look.

Did anything happen.

"What's the matter?"

"You remember how Feycas was when he appeared in the match day back then?"

Ah. About Feycas huh.

The principal might be suspecting that he was being brainwashed by the demons.

But that's just a needless fear. I had assumed that much and investigated him

with magic already.

"Ah. That Feycas was simply a fool. It's not like he was brainwashed--"

"I got that already. The problem is... Er... Not the inside of his head, but the surface."

The surface of... his head?

Was there something on Feycas's head.

...Ah.

"Are you talking about his hair."

That might have seemed odd indeed.

He went bald overnight because of【Hair Root Extinction】after all.

"Right. Mathias, you said that it was due to stress, but perhaps, his baldness was caused by your magic?"

"Who knows."

I dodged the question.

Even in my past life,【Hair Root Extinction】was treated as one of the forbidden magic at one time because of how inhuman it was.

It was liberated from being a forbidden magic since a magic that could easily reverse the effect got developed, but it's still not a magic with good image.

"No, I'm not going to pry into that point. ...But what if, just what if okay? If that was Mathias's magic... Doesn't that mean it's also possible to grow hair instead of losing?"

...Ah. That's it huh.

Principal Edward is getting long in the tooth after all.

"...You owe me one."

"Understood!"

I put【Root Hair Restoration】magic on principal Edward who instantly replied.

Since it has to wait for the hair to naturally grow, the effect won't be instant like【Hair Root Extinction】, but it should be obvious after a while.

It's possible to make his hair instantly grow with other magic, but that will look unnatural.

"I've put the magic on you. It should show its effect in a few months time."

"...My gratitude."

Perhaps this magic could bring me profit.

Well, I'm loaded with money so I'm not going to make a business out of this magic though.

Well, leaving aside the principal's hair, our problem is the barrier.

"...The pace has increased, but we still don't know whether we will make it in time or not..."

Chapter 91: Strongest Sage, Rallies

While overseeing the barrier material work, I ponder about the date of the demons raid.

At this pace, the barrier will probably be completed around the same time as the predicted date of their raid.

That said, increasing the number of people is out of question.

There is a limit to the number of people who can be the guide, adding more than this will only create problems and waste time.

Depending on the situation, we might be forced to have a skirmish with the demons once before the barrier could be erected.

For now, we need to put together the barrier as soon as possible.

Thus, I gathered my party members.

In other words, Iris, Alma and Ruli.

The principal also came along to see us though.

By the way, Iris passed the exams and was accepted to be a student here, she got the third best score after Ruli.

Iris probably should have gotten the second rank judging from the number of magic she shot and the degree of destruction, but they probably thought it would be bad to have her as the second rank after watching how her hopeless magic control was.

Honestly, that's what I think too.

"What are we going to do today?"

Ruli who got here first asked me when all members had gathered.

"We're gathering barrier material."

"Material? You mean mithril?"

"No. We're leaving that to other students. Today we're going to collect the magic stone part."

The quantity of the necessary mithril is too large, that even if we give our hands helping, the situation won't change much at all.

There's also the factor of mana quantity, strength in number.

If I were a Glory Crest, there would be something else I'd need to do though.

"Magic stone, which means... the main magic stone for the barrier? We needed a 60cm class for that didn't we?"

"Yeah. And we're going to fetch that today. Well, we should get back before dark."

I pointed at the dungeon while saying that.

The fastest way to obtain a magic stone here is the dungeon.

"...You're treating 60cm magic stone like it's some kind of medicinal herb..."

"I feel like I'd forget what even is common sense watching Mathi-kun..."

The principal and Alma sounded exhausted.

"Obtaining a 60cm magic stone means that we have to beat a really strong monster right? I think even finding that kind of monster will be difficult... Is there a way to easily get it?"

"There is. There are many ways to it, for example... Fumu."

I look at Iris as I say that.

"Umm, could you please not look here while discussing about magic stone..."

Iris inched back with a frightened expression when she noticed my line of sight.

True, Iris has a magic stone that's far bigger than 60cm.

However, I won't resort to that.

Iris is an important mean of transportation.

Besides, even like this, we've been acquainted since my past life.

Therefore, I propose another way.

"...For example, with something like monster summoning."

Chapter 92: Strongest Sages, Warns

"Summoning... monster? Is such a thing possible?"

"Yeah. But it has many requirements and is a relatively delicate technique, so I don't recommend doing one yourself. If it's small monsters then you should be alright, but big ones are dangerous."

A slight mistake during the monster summoning and it will fail.

You're still better off if it ends up with no monster coming out.

If you're unlucky, a monster that's far stronger than the intended one might appear.

There were times where I abused the phenomenon and summoned strong monsters to be my opponents.

They were reasonably strong, but they were nothing compared to monsters that got stronger naturally, so I stopped doing it halfway.

"You don't to have to worry about it, I'm not gonna summon a monster with bigger-than 60cm magic stone if I can help it!"

"If it's just for a 60cm monster, even if there was an accident, the one coming out would only be a 75cm one, I'm sure we can manage somehow."

"I don't think we can though...."

We're walking toward the dungeon while having that conversation.

Our destination has already been set.

I've marked places that looked usable when we were exploring the dungeon before.

◇

After about 10 minutes.

"Let's get to floor 17 for now."

We parted with the principal and this was the first thing I uttered when we went inside the dungeon.

"Your『for now』standard is weird!"

"17, isn't that a floor where no one has set foot into presently!"

"...Was floor 17 really that difficult? Gaia... My old acquaintance told me that floor 654 was lacking..."

Iris's remark seemed to be quite a bit less fervent than the two's.

Iris will die for certain if she gets onto floor 654 though.

Even for the current me, the most I can do is probably returning alive.

"The monsters there are weaker than demons, I don't think you'll have any problem."

"The standard..."

"Well, you won't really get it just by talking. Let's dive in for now."

I took the lead of the party as I said that.

--And after about an hour.

"We're on floor 17 now."

"Huh? ...I can, beat them?"

Alma who's walking while killing monsters with her bow spoke anticlimactically.

Ruli is acting as Alma support, but it appears she has no problem at all either.

Floor 17 is nothing once you've trained properly.

Of course, you should always be on your guard even if it's on floor 1.

"...Floor 17 is unexpectedly hard isn't it... I'd have beaten them if only I could hit them....

On the other hand, Iris was unable to demonstrate her power worse than imagined.

She has power, but her combat technique in human body is even worse than an amateur.

I've taught her the basic of swordsmanship at the very least, but it seems she lacks the tact.

I should teach her these things later.

Since casualties will surely appear if I let her have a mock battle with other students.

"Which means, let's begins. Ruli, engrave this magic circle on this magic stone."

I hand over a small magic stone to Ruli.

"I understand!"

It isn't possible to produce a monster out of nothing.

You summon them by using a magic stone as the core.

Ruli had already gotten used to making magic tools, she quickly finished the augmenting.

I thrust that into the ground.

This place is ideal for summoning with its mana flow and terrains.

"Alright. Let's get away a bit, a monster will appear from there."

"Eh! It's coming already!?"

Alma was surprised.

"Yeah. There's no special procedure for summoning a 60cm class monster. The most difficult part is the quantity of mana needed for the summoning."

Monster summoning demands a huge amount of mana.

However, we have a dragon who has an enormous amount of mana in our party now.

"So, Iris, put your mana into this thing.... Do it little by little since you'll cause

an accident if you put too much."

"I understand! Little by little right!"

Iris put her hand on the magic stone as she said that.

Chapter 93: Strongest Sage, Laments the Collapse of Common Sense

"Little by little, little by little..."

While saying that--Iris began to pour an enormous amount of mana into the magic stone.

"Hold it right there! You've got the amount wrong!"

I tried to stop Iris in a hurry.

"So you really think this isn't enough! Let me put more!"

I'm not sure what Iris is thinking as she puts more mana instead.

"Don't add it! Lower it! I mean, just stop!"

"I-I understand!"

Iris finally stopped pouring her mana after I told her to.

However, it's too late.

Far more mana than planned has been pumped into the magic stone as it begins to emit black light.

The monster hasn't appeared yet because the amount of mana put is too much, it will take time to form it.

However, it's probably only for around 30 seconds at this situation.

I took an immediate action after guessing the size of the monster appearing from the magic stone.

"This floor will collapse! We're retreating!"

The monster that will appear is undoubtedly at a size this floor can't hold.

Thus, the moment it appears, either the ceiling or the floor will be destroyed and floor 17 will be unified with an adjacent floor.

"Got it!"

"Where should we head to?"

"Over here!"

Small rooms have a lot of parts that become a kind of pillars, so they're relatively stable.

Hence, I went into the smallest room nearby.

The other three followed after a bit.

"Ruli, engrave this and stick it on the wall!"

I gave Ruli a magic stone and a paper drawn with a magic circle.

"I got it!"

I also engrave the magic circle on another magic stone.

The augment is for a simple reinforcement magic.

This is enough to prevent the area around us from caving in.

After a bit, we could hear roaring sounds of the labyrinth wall collapsing.

Judging from the direction of the sound, it's the ceiling that collapsed.

"Hey Iris, I told you to put mana little by little didn't I?"

"Yes! That's why I did it little by little..."

"You can't call that little by little."

She put a quantity of mana that worths as much as 100 average magicians in that short amount of time.

Moreover, she began to put more halfway through.

"R-really?"

"I'd like to know why you don't think it is instead."

Even if her standard is out of whack, there is a limit to it.

I'm pretty sure that isn't『Little by little』even by dragon's standard.

"An old acquaintance said this,『I'm gonna experiment a bit with some magic』and went on to blow three mountains away..."

"...So you knew such an absurd fellow."

"Yes. There was also this time when he summoned a monster stronger than the past me even though he said that he only wanted to see it for a bit."

Please don't lump me together with someone who doesn't have a speck of common sense like that--huh?

Now that I think about, those all sound familiar somewhat.

Don't tell me...

『...Are you talking about me?』

『Yes. It's Gaias-san in the past. 』

Iris replied back in dragon language when I asked her in it.

...Yup.

"Let's go and beat the monster for now."

I'll fix Iris's common sense later.

Chapter 94: Strongest Sage, Presses the Hate on

<TLN: Hate as in aggro.>

I stand before the exit to confirm that the collapse has died down.

The exit in this room isn't closed, but thanks to fallen debris, the monster hasn't found us yet.

Judging from the mana reaction... The monster that's appeared is a kind of dragon.

The size of its magic stone should reach 80cm.

When you're trying to produce a 60cm class monster, the resultant magic stone is 75cm at most.... that doesn't seem to be exactly true.

Something like this can possibly happen when someone who doesn't know how to regulate their mana pours a huge amount of it without thinking.

Just the fact that this doesn't end up becoming a Mana Disaster is the silver lining I guess.

"Iris, I'm counting on you to fight."

"I understand!"

Iris blew away a debris with her kick and jumped out.

"Alright! Come at---uwaaaaa!"

"I-Iris-san!"

The next moment, Iris got hit by the dragon's attack and blown away.

Ruli and Alma were surprised.

After confirming that, I shout out.

"Now! Let's get out of here! Use this magic circle this time!"

I hand over a paper drawn with a magic circle to Ruli.

I originally planned to use a different magic circle, but a 60cm class magic won't work on this guy.

"G-got it! ...But, Iris-san is!"

Ah. She's worried about Iris huh.

A dragon is extremely tough even when she's turned into human.

Especially since Iris is a relatively high rank dragon even though her magic circuit is in bad shape.

There is no way she can get hurt by a dragon summoned through this magic.

"Don't worry about Iris!"

Iris fell down while I was telling that to the girls.

There's not even a scratch on her.

"T-that surprised me... We're both dragons, why did you attack me all of a sudden!"

"That's cause you look 100% like human right now.... By the way Iris. Can you persuade that?"

I consulted to Iris.

"H-how should I go to persuade it?"

"Right. ...Repeat what I say in dragon language."

"Yes!"

"You winged lizard! Be quiet and drop dead!"

《You winged lizard! Be quiet and drop dead! ...Eh?》

The dragon is looking at the dumbfounded Iris with eyes full of killing intent.

《Bastard. ...I'll kill you!》

And it charged at Iris.

...Alright.

Successfully got ourselves a decoy.

By the way『winged lizard』is the greatest of insult for dragons.

"Nice going Iris! Attract that dragon's attention just like that!"

"A-are you making me to be a decoy?!"

"Decoy you are not! You're a shield!"

"But that's no different!"

Against an opponent with high firepower like this one, I'd be worried if its attack is ever directed to Ruli and Alma.

Iris will have no problem against that.

This level of dragon can't beat Iris even when she's sleeping.

....Well, the capital will be destroyed if this dragon ever comes to surface though.

I deploy a magic while thinking that.

Chapter 95: Strongest Sage, Hinders in the Meantime

"Do we just need to shoot this arrow?"

Ruli asked me while handing over an arrow that had been augmented.

"Right! For now, make and shoot more of it!"

"I got it!"

"Understood!"

I commence a magic on the ground while replying to them.

Originally, I planned to instantly kill the summoned monster by loping off its neck with【Special Mana Enchant】, but that's not applicable to this class of monster.

It's too sturdy that a Mana Disaster will happen long before it died.

And poison type magic like the ones we used on demons is also pointless.

To begin with, its skin being impenetrable to arrows, and even if it somehow gets through, its body is too big, we'll need an enormous amount of mana for the poison to work.

We'd probably run out of mana first.

That's why I'm using another magic.

The arrow Alma shoot won't pierce through it like all other arrows before, but it will adhere to the dragon.

That's the kind of magic augmented on those arrows.

"What about me, what should I do!"

"Hit and run as you see fit!"

This time I'm using an installation-type magic.

The hostile dragon probably won't notice it until it's been activated.

That's why Iris can safely fulfill his duty as a deco....shield.

"I-I understand! It surprised me at first, but this guy's attacks aren't that strong!"

While saying that, Iris hit the dragon hard and blocked its counterattack.

That's just cause you're too tough. Humans would have long died normally.

But it seems the enemy doesn't want to get hit by Iris either.

It's not paying attention to us thanks to that provocation earlier though.

"By the way, this guy isn't shooting『Dragon Breath』.... Is he a dunce or something?"

Iris asked while blocking the dragon's attacks.

"Ah. That's cause I've been erasing them."

I replied while still deploying the magic.

Unlike Iris's『Dragon Breath』, I can erase the breath of a dragon of this class before it comes out just by looking at its movement.

Since I was erasing those breaths whenever in my spare time, I don't blame Iris for not noticing.

"I'm not sure how I feel as a dragon myself, seeing『Dragon Breath』getting so easily erased... The part where Mathias-san is an ally is reassuring though."

While saying that, Iris is going to block the dragon's trample.

I'll give her a warning since it's not really the best way to deal with that.

"Iris, you'd better avoid any attack coming from above. If you block it--"

"Waa!"

"Iris-san!"

Looks like I was too late.

We lost sight of Iris as she got entirely crushed by the dragon's foot.

"That'd happen if you block."

"T-the ground on shallow floors are really fragile...."

Iris came out of the open hole on the ground.

She could defend against the trample but the ground couldn't.

"Leaving that aside, looks like it's about ready."

The preparation to clear this subjugation was finished while Iris was buying time.

The grounds are full of magic I have installed, and countless arrow are clinging on the dragon's body.

"All set! You two, get away from here a bit!"

"Yes!"

"Gotcha!"

Chapter 96: Strongest Sage, Shocked

After the two have evacuated, I ask Iris.

The magic this time will abuse the enemy's【Dragon Breath】and reverse its direction and property to make the enemy destroy itself.

Since it's using the dragon's own mana, it won't really be affected by its magic defense, but this magic takes a long time to activate compared to magic that use your own mana.

"Iris, how many second do you need to get away?"

"Around four seconds I think.... I'd like for five if possible!"

Five seconds huh.

Then, activating the magic at the same time as the enemy shooting【Dragon Breath】should pose no problem.

"Got it. I won't erase the next【Dragon Breath】, keep it company some and then get away from here."

"Yes!"

If Iris gets away too fast, the dragon might take its rampage to somewhere bad.

"I will lure it to use【Dragon Breath】!"

"I'll leave it to you!"

I regulate the constructed spell at a watching distance from Iris and the dragon.

Even though they're of different classes, Iris is still a dragon so she seemingly knows how one fights.

At this rate, it won't be long before she gets the dragon to shoot the【Dragon Breath】.

...By the way, I considered having Iris return to her dragon form and shoot her【Dragon Breath】but I gave up on it.

The burden from【Dragon Breath】is too big for the current Iris, in the first place, having Iris turn back to her dragon form on this floor will be overload the dungeon.

Dragon's mana is special in many ways.

And it's even worse for a dragon whose magic circuit is broken and can't control it.

Four or five floors collapsing is still preferable, in the worst case scenario, the whole upper floors from here up could collapse.

There's no need to take such a huge risk just to defeat this dragon.

I'd consider it as an option once she got better at controlling her mana a bit more though.

The hostile dragon's mana suddenly had a movement while I was thinking that.

It's a sign of【Dragon Breath】activation.

"It's coming!"

Right when the enemy's mana moved, I invoked the control spell for the installed magic, replacing the interference magic.

"I got it!"

The【Dragon Breath】activated right after Iris replied.

Iris easily evaded that and rush off to get away from here.

Almost at the same time, the magic set on the ground and on the dragon's body absorb the dragon's mana, and they begin to resonate.

After the pent-up from all the misfires, the power of this【Dragon Breath】is solid.

This should be enough to kill a dragon in one shot.

And then--

"...Auu!"

Iris, fell down.

A hole was opened on the ground when the dragon trampled on Iris.

She stumbled on that hole.

"Oy...."

True, she could just crush the entire bump if she were in her dragon form, so she had no need to mind it up until now, but....

This spell can't be stopped y'know.

Why'd you fell down now of all time.

I've put a spell to minimize the after-wave on where I am, but any other place is within the range of attack.

Sturdy as Iris is, she won't get out of this scale of magic unscathed.

Particularly since I've made this magic to be more effective against dragons.

If only she fell down sooner, I would have pulled her here, but that's not possible now.

....Well, I should manage somehow at this distance.

I constructed another magic while thinking about that.

Chapter 97: Strongest Sage, Solicits

"Iris, get down!"

"Y-Yes!"

I unfolded a kind of defensive magic in front of Iris who crouched down.

The magic won't completely block the damage, but it can nullify the dragon-damaging magic part, the rest should be fine with Iris's defensive prowess.

As for me, since I don't have the time to deploy a strong defensive magic, I make it to only slightly reduce the magic impact.

Thus, being helpless against the blast, I got blown away.

I slightly changed my trajectory while I was in the air, preventing me from hitting obstacles.

As a result--

"Mathi-kun!?"

"A-are you okay!?"

I got blown to where Ruli and Alma were.

I guess it's around 100 meter away.

"I'm fine. Humans won't die just from being blown 100 meter away."

I stood up while saying that.

Looks like I got off of this without any injury.

"No well, pretty sure they will though...."

"Even 10 meter will kill you right...?"

But the two don't seem to get it.

Well, there's a lot of knacks to get out of a blast after all.

"You'll be able to withstand it if you forge your body. The knack is to not let your mouth and nose inhale the blast. Once you've got that sorted out, the rest isn't any different from a 100 meter free fall... With that, don't you think it's possible to survive somehow?"

"No I don't!"

"That's using Iris-san and Mathi-kun as the standard isn't it--what is this sound!?"

Ruli suddenly cut her words.

We could hear a loud rumbling of something huge moving.

...Well, I can guess what sound is that from the mana reaction.

"Ah, no need to worry about this rumbling."

"But it sounds obviously dangerous!? We've got to hurry and run!"

The loud rumbling stopped right when Alma was going to run.

Soon after--

"I've brought the magic stone with me!"

Iris showed herself up from the dungeon's passage.

Body of the dragon we fought earlier was behind her.

The loud rumbling earlier was from Iris dragging the dragon.

"Ou. Are you hurt anywhere?"

"Nope! I'm saved thanks to Mathias-san! ...Humans really are small and inconvenient... You get buried in a dungeon, fall on a small hole..."

"This body is convenient once you get used to it though."

I check out Iris's body with magic while talking.

She seems to be unhurt. Looks like the defensive magic worked well.

"By the way, Iris."

After confirming that, I spoke to her.

I've decided on something just now.

"Yes, what is it."

"This might be a bit sudden, but I'd like to officially treat Iris as one of our party members from now on."

Up until now, I treated Iris only as a dragon.

But now, treating her like a dragon feels a bit wrong.

Her outward appearance is that of human after all, and she's also treated like human socially.

It makes me think that I should treat Iris like a human while she's in this form.

I spoke with that in mind.

"Me, becoming Mathias-san's party member...? Is that alright?"

"Of course. Alma and Ruli too... are you fine with it?"

"I'm in agreement!"

"Me too, I agree. Iris-san is such a great help for us!"

Everyone is unanimous in this.

"Iris is now officially our party member... Which means, there is something we should do."

"Something we should do?"

"Yeah. Now that you're our party member, I can't let you easily get hurt or die on us. I'm thinking of properly training you, Iris, so you get used to that body as soon as possible."

"To think the day Mathias-san worries about me would come.... Thank you very much! Please take care of me!"

Iris happily answered my suggestion.

Her dragon body won't easily get hurt, but there's no guarantee that something like earlier will never happen again.

I can't always protect her with magic like that.

"...Mathi-kun's proper training?"

"I-I've got a bad feeling about this somehow...."

Chapter 98: Strongest Sage, Services Training Site

"Can we borrow the schoolyard for a bit from now on?"

In the evening of the day we got the magic stone.

I've come to the principal office in order to borrow the place we're going to use for training.

"Schoolyard? What are you using it for?"

"Independent combat training of our party. We will have to break the schoolyard temporarily, but it'll be back to normal by morning."

"I don't mind. The school encourages promising students bettering themselves, and I owe you a mountain of debt."

The principal clapped his own head while saying that.

....The cultivation project of the principal's scalp looks to be progressing well.

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About ten minutes later.

All four members of our party have gathered in the courtyard.

"Did you get the permission?"

"Easily. Look."

I showed them the permit I got from the principal.

"T-there's even a permission to break the schoolyard.... Is it going to be that hard?"

Besides the permission to use the schoolyard, the permit also allows us to break the schoolyard as long as it's fixed before 7 AM in the next day.

"Yeah. It's an indispensable permission for training with limited time.... Now then, first of all I'll be setting the schoolyard."

"Setting? We can't use it as is?"

Alma looks at the schoolyard.

The schoolyard isn't that neatly maintained, but there is no obvious unevenness or obstacles, it looks fairly usable.

But of course, that's no good.

"The purpose of the training this time is different. ...That said, doing it manually will take too much time, I'll use magic. You three, back away a bit."

"U-un!"

"Got it!"

After making sure the three has backed away, I prepare the magic.

"...Umm, aren't you using too much mana?"

Ruli asked me when she saw the activated magic.

It seems Ruli is able to see mana well now.

"Yeah. It's a relatively mana-consuming magic. You use it like this."

After saying that, I ran to the center of the schoolyard--while rapidly shooting huge fireballs at the yard.

The fireballs immediately exploded when they hit the yard, gouging the ground, creating craters.

I repeated that for a bit more--and then the area around the middle of the schoolyard became a wasteland with nearly no even surfaces.

"T-the schoolyard!"

"An extremely effective way to make use of the permission to break the schoolyard...."

Several spots on the destroyed schoolyard have turned into glass and are breaking apart, it's become exceedingly difficult to walk on.

Also, since there were still burning fire on some spots, I sprinkled water to put them out.

Due to that, the area around them are filled in water.

...Yup. It's the optimum environment for training.

"Alright, looks good. Let's start our combat training."

I beckon the three who were waiting.

"D-don't tell me. ...We're going to train here!?"

"I thought for sure that you asked the permission so Iris could fight without worries...."

The point of this training would be lost if I did that.

Iris got into danger that time because of imperfect footing.

The footing on the school's training site is properly maintained, however, having easy-to-walk footing in an actual combat is rare.

Having it this bad is also rare, but if they get accustomed fighting here, they will be fine in most sites.

"Iris, use this sword."

I hand over a reasonably sturdy sword to Iris.

The blade isn't nicked off because I'm the one who's going to be her opponent, but it's a high performance sword that is okay to break.

It's also been augmented to increase its strength to the extreme.

....Ruli has become quite capable at augmenting.

We've got ourselves some dragon materials after all, I should ask her to make a reasonably good sword next time.

"I understand!"

After watching Iris receiving the sword, I turn toward Ruli and Alma.

"Ruli and Alma, you're going to practice shooting with this augment magic. The target is--"

Target marks used in the current world is too big, they're not good for practices.

To begin with, practices with non-moving targets will not amount to much in the actual battles.

That said, preparing a target that properly moves around will take time--oh right. There's a good target here.

"For the time being, you should aim to shoot this."

I put a shell from a hermit crab monster on top of my head.

Cause they probably will hesitate if I tell them to aim for my body.

I can fight with a shell on my head just fine if it's against the current Iris, so this should be fine.

"On top of Mathi-kun's head!?"

"It's too dangerous, we can't do that!"

But you know, I can't think of any other method that's as effective.

"Alma, try shooting an arrow over there."

I pointed at an area with nothing in it in the schoolyard.

"Eh, there? ...Like this?"

The arrow was shot with a swoosh sound.

And I--

"Whoops."

Approached it by running, shifted its trajectory with magic toward me and caught it in my hand.

If it's just light arrows, I can just divert them away.

Of course I have no problem coping with arrows flying toward me either.

"True, doesn't look like we need to worry...."

"But it's getting dark now... Won't an arrow enter your blind spot by chance?"

"No worries. Human's skin is an exceedingly high performance sensing organ. Even if I completely lose my sight, I can deal with arrows that aren't concealed fine."

"I-is that true! I thought things like having small legs was inconvenient, but humans are amazing!"

"No, I think people who can do that are already getting out of the realm of human...."

Iris was amazed, Alma sounded like she couldn't believe it.

True, dragon's skin has dull sense in exchange for its sturdiness.

The combat training began while we were having that conversation.

Chapter 99: Strongest Sage, Suggests Weapon Change

"Oo...ops!"

Iris swung her sword while shouting.

I block that with one hand and immediately parry it to the side.

At the same time, I catch an arrow coming from behind with my other hand and throw it away.

"The way you're swinging your sword is still the same as usual but your stance has gotten quite stable."

An hour passed since the start of training.

The way she swings her sword is still as bad as always, probably because the way to use a sword is different from dragon's claws, but it seems that she's gotten quite accustomed to human legs.

At the very least, she doesn't fall over small bumps now.

"Yes! I've figured out the trick not to fall down!"

Since Iris is originally a dragon that fights in mid-air at high speed, her reflexes are considerably excellent.

Once she knows how to regain her posture, there's no chance of her falling.

"Hold it there Mathi-kun! The arrows won't hit if you move around!"

Looks like Alma really has a hard time hitting her arrow on a moving target.

There's only three arrows stuck on the crab shell on top of my head.

"All of them will hit if I don't move, there's no point then!"

Most of the arrows didn't hit because I was moving around on this bumpy site, if I wasn't, Alma could hit even a target 1/20 of this size.

I see that she's gotten quite used to using【Guided Enchant】to hit moving targets, she should be fine now.

"But handling a sword is really difficult isn't it..."

Iris swings her sword once again.

Her control is questionable like usual, and the blade handling is bad, but the power is tremendous.

It might be a good idea to let Iris use another weapon besides a sword.

To begin with, swords can't take too strong of power, so even if Iris manages to swing a sword properly, I have a feeling that the sword won't be able to endure it.

...Let's try that for a bit.

"You two, stop for now! And gather here!"

"Gotcha!"

"What are we going to do?"

I gathered the three.

"I'm thinking of changing Iris's weapon. The material is... this should be fine."

I took out a huge lump of iron from Storage magic.

It's a by product of mithril mining in the dungeon. The weight is about 20kg.

I broke that apart, processed it with magic and stretched it into a long cylinder shape.

It doesn't need to be that precise, so I've done all the jobs besides the magic augmenting.

"Is that... a spear?"

Ruli looks at the metal bar I made.

"Yeah. It's a bit different from your usual spear though."

Unlike the common spear, the tip of the spear I created is blunt.

I've rounded it up since it won't be able to stand Iris's strength otherwise.

"Now then, I'm counting on you to augment this. Just【Toughening】will do."

"I understand. Please let me see it!"

Ruli put out her hands to receive the spear.

"...Since it's heavy, I think it's better if I stick it on the ground, and then you augment it."

I stick the spear's tip on the ground and hand it over to Ruli.

You don't normally treat a spear like this, but this spear was made with the assumption that it'd be treated roughly, so there's no problem here.

"Got it!"

Ruli quickly finished the augment while supporting the spear.

And then she tries to take it with one hand to give it to Iris--

"I-it's heavy! I can't lift it!"

And failed at it.

Well, it's impossible with one hand.

It's a lump of iron nearly 20 kg heavy.

"It's a condensed lump of iron to the inside.... What do you think Iris?"

"It doesn't really feel that heavy.... Or rather, I think it's easier to use than a sword!"

Iris lifted the spear and brandished it with one hand.

"Try to pierce this with that."

I molded a plank from the remaining iron ingot from earlier and stuck it on

the ground.

It's about 5 cm thick.

By the way, the thickness of an average shield in this world is 1 cm.

"Yes!"

Iris took a stance with the spear around her waist and thrust at the plank.

And then, boom! With that explosion-like sound, splinters of the plank that had been broken into pieces flew out far away.

....Looks like it's a success.

Chapter 100: Strongest Sage, Mends and Maintains

"I think Iris had use a spear than a sword."

"Yes! This thing is easy to handle! ...The shape is quite different from the spear I saw in the past though... Is this how recent spears look like?"

"No, this one is special. A normal spear has a blade on it, however common augmented iron won't be able to bear Iris's strength."

The weapon Iris has right now is more like a pile than spear with its strength.

It's ultimately a tool for training, I'd like to prepare another for real combat.

This spear.... or rather pile can demonstrate power incomparable to an average human though.

"You thought that far when you made my weapon... I'm really glad to be in this party!"

I just randomly molded some leftover iron I had though....

"Well, regardless, you still need to get used to it. Which means, it's time to train!"

"Yes!"

Thus we resumed our training.

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--Five hours after the training resumed.

We finished our training and gathered in the corner of the site.

The result of the training is quite something.

Iris has gotten quite used to the spear, Alma managed to hit around half of the arrows she shot on the crab shell on top of my head.

I should shrink the target if we have another chance.

while thinking that, I get ready to repair the schoolyard.

"Alright, I'm mending it."

After saying that, I quickly repaired the schoolyard that I destroyed in the beginning.

Due to characteristic of Disqualified crest, I had to run around all over, but the repair itself was done relatively quick.

Well, I had destroyed it in a way that would make it easy to repair later though.

"...Don't you think it looks better than before somewhat?"

Ruli said that when she saw the restored schoolyard.

--Correct.

It seems Ruli has gotten quite used to distinguishing various things too.

It's about time I entrust her to create some relatively proper weapon.

Along with the repair, I also have adjusted the underground water and mana balance of this schoolyard to make it easy to maintain.

Different from training in order to quickly gain experience in real combat, training in the basics are often better in a properly maintained location.

"I've touched it up a bit so it won't get dented easily. Even if we're quitting once the barrier is complete, it's still our alma mater after all."

"Yes! We belong to the school after all! Even if we're--quitting!?"

Ruli spoke while looking like she couldn't believe what I said.

"What do you mean by quitting!?"

Alma asked me with the same voice.

What are we quitting is obvious.

"Of course, we're quitting this school."

Chapter 101: Strongest Sage, Allotted

The air froze because of my remark.

"Wha... what do you mean by quitting school?"

"Exactly what it says."

Perhaps she couldn't process what I said, Alma asked the same thing.

Ruli went rigid too, it seems.

It might be a bit too sudden indeed.

In the first place, I originally planned to quit school once I registered at the guild.

However, the situation was such that the humanity would have gotten wiped out if I left them alone so I had to temporarily stay at the school.

But, once the barrier is going strong and stable, and an environment well suited for training chantless magic is established, that worry will be for naught.

"Umm... Skipping grades?"

"Nah, it'll probably be in the form of withdrawal. It's not like I went to this school with the intention of graduating from it."

Ruli and Alma ponder when they heard that.

"Come to think of it, I don't think I ever saw the teachers teaching Mathi-kun anything..."

"Or rather, it was the teachers who got the teaching...."

True, there weren't many things that I could learn.

Maybe they could have taught me some common sense of this present world, but I have grasped most of this world's common sense now, so there's nothing more I can learn from them.

I saw the principal while we were having that conversation.

It's just right, let's talk about it with the principal.

"Mu, Mathias huh. I see you're heading here... do you need something?"

The principal talked to me first when I approached him.

Straight to the point.

"Yes. I intend to--"

"Aa. About your withdrawal huh. You're going to leave the school once the barrier is finished right?"

...Really straight to the point.

Don't tell me he had predicted it.

I don't remember ever showing any behavior that would lead to that though.

The principal in front of me speaks while I'm thinking that.

"Judging from your look, it seems I hit the nail on the head.... I guess it's only natural. Our school teachers only ever got taught by Mathias and never be the on the side of giving the teaching. I'm a failure of a principal."

I don't think you need to belittle yourself that far.

....Let's support him a bit.

"That's not true at all. The teachers here taught me about common sense. Thanks to them, I've become a man with splendid common sense."

When heard what I said, the principal's face turned even severer.

"...I'm truly a failure who couldn't teach anything."

But why.

The teachers in this school truly taught me common sense well.

The school undoubtedly served its purpose.

The principal speaks again while I'm thinking that.

"But I don't intend to let Mathias drop out of the school. Since I've predicted this situation, I've thought up the best choice."

"...Are you saying you're going to detain me?"

It'll be a bit troublesome if it comes to that.

I've made a connection with this country to the point that I can easily meet the principal and the king.

If I forcefully took my way out of the school and antagonize them--

"Nope, I'm not gonna detain you. But I'd like you to formally remain in the school, in name only."

"Name?"

"Yea. If we do that, the academy can freely move to give effective educations using Mathias's achievements as a shield, and being treated as a student of the royal academy should be convenient for you if you need something from me or the country. I think it's a win-win choice for both of us."

In other words, they will back me up if I lend them my name huh.

Not a bad deal.

"I'll take that suggestion."

Chapter 102: Strongest Sage, Ponders About Composition

After talking with the principal about my withdrawal a bit, we have roughly decided how I'd be treated after leaving the school.

After leaving the school, I will be registered as one of the newly created【Special Scholarship Students】in the school.

My final exams and graduation exams are to be cleared from all my achievements so far, my grade will automatically increase each year, and I will automatically graduate in the end.

In other words, I don't need to go to the school ever, I'm only lending my name.

The production of barrier material was progressing smoothly while we were talking, and most of the fundamental parts were already done.

Soon, the barrier creation will start for real.

...One day.

I went into the dungeon with my party members.

Our objective isn't monster hunting but weapon creation.

Once the barrier creation begins in earnest, we will be too busy to even make weapons.

The chance of demons attacking during that period isn't low.

Therefore, we need to make them now while we have the opportunity.

"We're finally going to make weapons from the dragon material!"

"We're only using one part though. Nevertheless, they're harder to handle than with metal, so please take care while processing it."

"Yes! I'll give it my all!"

The easiest part to handle from the dragon material this time is the claw.

Even so, the current Ruli will have a hard time making something that's entirely made of dragon material.

Thus, the sword will be mostly composed of the easy-to-process mithril, and only one section will be made from dragon claw.

"For now, the easiest is... Let's start from my sword."

"I understand!"

Making multi-augment magic swords is a matter of practice, you get more precise with more practices.

One should start with something simple.

Since Alma's weapon is a bow, it's difficult, Ruli's and Iris's are either too light or too heavy, neither are fit as a starter weapon to make.

Thus, we start with my weapon.

"I'm sure Ruli, as you are now, can augment four magic if you just take your time. That's why...."

I ponder about the sword's composition while muttering.

If the spell art is too complex, the effect will be weaker instead because of the quality of the augment.

This one should be composed of relatively simple spell arts that are also highly practical.

Taking that into consideration--

"The magic you need to augment are, right... 『Steel Slash』, 『Sharpen』, 『Mana Strike』, 『Impact Blade』, 『Hardness Reinforcement』, 『Toughness Reinforcement』, 『Heatproof Reinforcement』, and 『Wear Proof』 I guess."

"...Eh?"

"Er... What magic do I need to augment again?"

"『Steel Slash』, 『Sharpen』, 『Mana Strike』, 『Impact Blade』, 『Hardness Reinforcement』, 『Toughness Reinforcement』, 『Heatproof Reinforcement』, and 『Wear-out Proof』"

"『Steel Slash』, 『Sharpen』, 『Mana Strike』...."

Ruli counted her fingers while saying that as she enumerated the magic.

And then she shouts out loud when she's done.

"....Aren't there eight of them! How could I even augment that many!"

Chapter 103: Strongest Sage, Gives Explanation

"It's true that augmenting eight magic with one board isn't feasible. Then you just need to fold them."

"F...fold? You mean the magic?"

"No, you physically fold them. A fivefold structure specifically."

As I said that I magically drew a picture on a paper I held on my hand.

It's a picture of sword made of five boards that have been stuck together.

The core is made up of one 2mm thick board made from a dragon fang, and the outer part consists of two mithril boards on each side, totaling at four.

<TLN: The raw states fang here.>

Ruli stares at the picture with a serious look on her face.

"...Are the augmented magic on each of these boards different?"

"That's right. They're symmetrical though, so you can put the same augment on them too if you wish."

Then I add information about the magic that will be augmented on the drawn paper.

The dragon claw used as the core gets,【Steel Slash】,【Sharpen】,【Impact Blade】, and【Wear Proof】.

The mithril boards on top of it get,【Mana Strike】,【Impact Blade】,【Toughness Reinforcement】, and【Heatproof Reinforcement】.

The outermost boards get【Hardness Reinforcement】,【Toughness Reinforcement】,【Heatproof Reinforcement】, and【Impact Blade】.

12 spell arts of eight types in total.

Each of them mutually strengthens one another, compensating their weakness and becoming one sword.

It's a composition I've come up with in order to create the strongest sword with augments that are available to Ruli right now.

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might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

"I-I see. ...So【Mana Strike】can be invoked even if it's not implanted on the blade part. ...Just where did Mathi-kun get the idea for this?"

"A long time ago, I thought up various ways to augment multiple number of spell arts on a weapon. This is one of those."

If I'm not mistaken, that was... when I was around 700 year old.

I came up with this method when I was singlemindedly searching for a way to reinforce my weapon to strengthen Glory crest.

The highest layered sword I made back then was a 2047-fold structure.

I added too many layers on the sword it ended up becoming too delicate, and difficult to use in an actual combat.

Nevertheless, it was a sword that could cut adamantite clean just by dropping it on the metal.

"I'm really intrigued by Mathi-kun's life before you came to this school....! But this means these five boards have to be stuck together? We'd need a terribly advanced processing method to ensure its strength as a sword..."

"We can do it by applying high pressure on the boards and then affix them together with magic.... but the surface has to be at least 1/1000 millimeter uniform, otherwise the effect won't be as good. Since this composition will only show its effectiveness when the structures of the sword support each other."

"1/1000 millimeter!? You can use magic that can do that!?"

"Nah, it's impossible. At least, I can't do it now."

I could easily use processing magic that's far more precise in my past life.

But the crest I have now isn't suited for processing.

Let alone 1/1000mm, I probably can't even get to 1/10mm.

Neither Ruli can reach that too with her current capability.

But there is a way to process them.

"Not with magic.... But we shave them with our hands and whetstones."

Chapter 104: Strongest Sage, Misuses Barrier Magic

"Wh... Whetstones?"

"Yep."

I took two whetstones out of Storage magic.

I had prepared them beforehand for this occasion.

"...It looks like an ordinary whetstone.... It's not a magic tool is it?"

"Yeah. It's an ordinary whetstone."

I handed over one whetstone to Ruli.

Ruli who received the whetstone stared at its surface--and her eyes rounded up.

"Umm, isn't this whetstone of an amazingly high quality? I've had experiences training in grinding cutlery in the past, but I've never seen something like this before! ....I really never saw this type of stone.... It doesn't seem to be an Iriast whetstone either..."

"Yeah of course you never saw it. I made it myself after all."

The ones being sold in the city weren't up to par, so I made them from the mineral left from the dungeon crude ore refinery.

If I get to excavate whetstones I made in my past life, those are better though.

Well, I'm planning to look for things I made in my past life whenever I find a clue about them.

"Y... You can make whetstones yourself!?"

"I can. And it's surprisingly easy.... Well let's put the matter about whetstones aside and talk about the main topic at hand, the sword."

"Yes!"

Normally, I wouldn't mind telling her about whetstone making process, but we're currently pressed for time in this barrier creation period.

We've got to conserve our time and mana.

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"Then first, roughly mold the material. I'll take care of the dragon claw, Ruli, please do the mithril."

I drew detailed measurements of the sword and such on the paper and gave it to Ruli.

Magic is enough to roughly mold the mithril.

"Yes!"

Ruli begans the molding process after reading it.

I'm in charge of processing the dragon claw.

Using the whetstones right from the start would take me all day, so I gradually shaved it using attack magic.

After a while, the shape roughly turned into that of a sword.

"And now the real thing. First, augment this magic circle on a magic stone and deploy a barrier."

"Barrier....? We're using barrier in a weapon making work?"

"Yeah. You use barrier when you need straight lines and level surfaces. It's a highly usable technique, so I'd recommend you to learn it."

Rectangular barrier is very useful when you need to measure the weapon.

Its surface is perfectly level, and its perimeter is a perfect straight line.

It won't get warped from heat and force, and it's very durable.

"So you can use barrier like that too...."

Ruli completed the augment and activated the barrier as she said that.

It was done in a jiffy since the spell art was the simplest she had done so far.

"Yeah. That said, matching it will be difficult just by watching.... This is how you do it."

I took out ink out of Storage magic and smeared it over the barrier.

"...Ee"

While Ruli was watching in blank amazement, I put the board made from the dragon claw on the barrier and immediately lift it off.

The ink is stuck on various parts of the board that's been pressed on the barrier.

"Look, there's some ink stuck on uneven places right. You shave them down with a whetstone and redo the procedure just now afterward. If you keep shaving down the rough places, it'll gradually flatten itself into a board."

"I-I see.... So this is how you use barrier...."

"Yeah.... That said, getting it perfectly level requires lots of experience under your belt though."

"I-I got it! I'll do my best!"

After saying that, Ruli starts the process of flattening the mithril board.

Her handwork looks quite good.... but the final accuracy remains to be seen.

I started shaving the dragon claw while thinking about that.

Chapter 105: Strongest Sage, Goes Through Exhumation of His Dark History

About 30 minutes after we started the grinding.

The dragon claw I ground formed into the shape faster than planned.

"I-It's really hard..."

Ruli is having a tough time.

She's looking at the ink-spotted board with a difficult expression.

"But it's gotten quite flat already."

"It is but you know.... I've gotten it to this state a bit ago, but it doesn't feel like it's getting flatter at all since..."

Well, even if one uses barrier as a support, they themselves are ultimately the one who does the grinding.

You have to train for years in order to be accurate with this method.

This is how it should be for one's first time.

"After getting that far, you only need to apply a bit more treatment afterward. Let me have it for a sec."

"Yes!"

I grind the mithril board I got from Ruli with a whetstone here and there.

Then I put the board on top of the barrier--the ink on the barrier stuck on the whole surface of the board.

A proof that there's no unevenness.

"I-In one try!?"

"It's because Ruli had taken care of the bigger bumps. As for the details like this.... Well, it's a matter of experience."

"I don't feel like I can do it even after a decade of training though...."

"I don't think it'll take that long just to shape these boards."

I've noticed so far that Ruli has a talent in production type of works.

Both in her magic and handiworks.

There's probably not a lot of people who can make the board as flat as the one that Ruli worked on earlier in their first try using this method.

Well, the difference in motivation probably also plays a big role.

I like fighting more than producing, so much that I even reincarnated myself.

Either way, things are going well.

"Then let's get on to the next board."

I took another mithril board.

We need to process five boards this time.

...That said, unlike with a dragon claw, handling mithril is simple.

Since Ruli has already formed the rough shapes, I only need to grind a bit here and there to get the shape I want.

"U-umm...."

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While I was grinding the mithril board, Ruli talked to me.

"Hm? Do you need something?"

I turn my sight at Ruli while still grinding the board.

Seeing that, Ruli's expression turned like she was watching something mystifying.

"It's been on my mind since awhile ago.... How is it that Mathi-kun able to grind the boards flat without using barrier? ...Did you use some kind of handy magic?"

Ruli shifted her glance from the board I ground, to the barrier that was set up

in the beginning.

Ah. That huh.

True enough, I only ground using the barrier once in the beginning to show Ruli how.

But I'm not using any particular magic.

Actually, there exists a more handy method.

That is--

"It's experience."

"T-that's experience too!? You can learn to do such minute details with experience!?"

"Yeah. I think Ruli too will get it before long."

"How many hundreds years would it take me...."

Right....

I'm sure it took me 30 years from the day I started doing this kind of processing before I could do it without an assistance.

But Ruli can probably achieve that faster.

I still don't know how long it'll actually take though.

"Alright, done."

I finished shaping five boards while conversing.

There's no chip or crack on the mithril and dragon claw-made boards.

Only after getting them this polished can these five boards function as a sword.

"It's the finishing touches next. Put this spell art first."

"Yes!"

Dragon Claw gets【Steel Slash】,【Sharpen】,【Impact Blade】, and【Wear

Proof】.

The interior mithril boards get【Mana Strike】,【Impact Blade】,【Hardness Reinforcement】, and【Heatproof Reinforcement】.

The outer ones get【Hardness Reinforcement】,【Toughness Reinforcement】,【Heatproof Reinforcement】, and【Impact Blade】.

In accordance to my instruction, the magic get augmented one after another.

And after the last augments,【Binding】and【Union】, five boards are united into one sword--the sword is completed.

"...Yup. It's quite well done."

I lifted and checked the sword out.

The degree of completion is such that you wouldn't have guessed it was the first time she made this kind of sword.

"So this is a sword augmented with 20 magic.... C-could you let me hold it for a bit!?"

"Sure."

Ruli took the sword and tried to cut a nearby body of dead monsters (which Alma and Iris beat in their free time while the sword was being made).

The monster gets cut in two in one swing--but Ruli's expression looks like she doesn't get something.

"....Huh? It's really sharp and all but.... It's more ordinary than I thought...."

I guess that's only natural with the way she cut just now.

You can't use this sword like an ordinary sword after all.

"Let me have it for a bit."

"Y-yes."

I received the sword from Ruli--and put my mana into it.

And then, the five magic stones embedded on the grip all shined together.

Then I shook the sword vertically just like that--and the dungeon wall in front of us got cut in two.

Yup. The performance exceeds my expectation.

"W-what did you do just now!?"

"Putting my mana into the sword."

"....Mana?"

"Yeah. The magic augmented in this sword can only demonstrate their true strength after the user supplied it with their mana. It won't have that much power in its bare form with the size of these magic stones."

I pointed at the magic stones embedded on the grip.

When you make a sword formed by several pieces of boards, you need the same number of magic stones as the boards.

Therefore, you can't use magic stones that are too big.

"D-don't tell me, that's.... A sword with the same mechanism as『Magic Spear Gae Bolg』!?"

"....Gei Bolk?"

Ruli became excited after hearing my explanation about the sword.

But still, Gei Bolk huh, I've no clue about that.

Wonder if someone made such a weapon while I wasn't aware.

"N... No way, you don't know about Gae Bolg!? It's that Gae Bolg you know?"

"Not sure what 'that' even means...."

"It's the strongest spear that transforms when you fill it with mana!"

That kinda thing exists huh.

I think having the spear transform is inefficient though.

....Hm? Wait a minute.

"By any chance, does that spear look like this?"

I moved sand on the ground turning it into spear shape.

An ineffectual inefficiently shaped spear, it's hard to even call it a spear.

"Yes, that's it! So you knew all along after all!"

Ruli pointed at it and sounded like she was relieved.

Aah. I know this spear.

It's a dud I made when I left myself to the tension of my hazy self after 30 days of sleepless nights.

Even though it's obvious just by thinking a bit that carrying two normal spears would be much stronger than needlessly augmenting one with spell arts that enable it to transform.

I thought I had disposed of that junk as one of my dark history.... Why is it still

existing.

No. The fact that it still exists is fine. I really don't want to admit it, but fine.

But there was a part that I can't let off in Ruli's words.

I ask Ruli back in order to ensure that I wasn't mishearing it.

"Ruli, it almost sounded like you said Gae Bolg was the strongest...."

"You didn't hear it wrong you know? The tale of great hero Iriast-sama finishing demons off with Gae Bolg.... Is famous isn't it?"

....Dang it.

Chapter 106: Strongest Sage, Determined to Erase His Dark History

"....Where is that Gae Bolg now?"

"Um... It's said that it suddenly disappeared from the treasury 50 years ago, and was discovered to be in possession of a demon."

"In other words, a demon like Elhart infiltrated and stole it huh."

"Most likely...."

Alright. I'll go and defeat that demon.

I'm gonna destroy it for sure the next time I find it.

That is something that cannot be allowed to exist in this world.

"...Okay, let's make Iris's spear next."

I have to end an era where that kind of thing is treated as the strongest spear

as quickly as possible.

For that to happen, creating a spear stronger than that is ideal.

Or rather, as long as you do the augmenting properly, it's difficult to make a spear weaker than that.

"I-I understand!"

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Several hours later.

We all have gathered to test the performance of our completed weapons, however....

"Then, here I go!"

Ruli swings her sword at the target.

The target is neither the one used in school or a monster.

It's a 10cm thick steel rod.

Contrasting that, the sword Ruli has in hand is just 5mm thick.

Ruli seems to be worried about it as she's swinging the sword timidly.

And then--the steel rod got soundlessly cut.

"W-we've made a fearsome thing...."

Ruli sounded dumbfounded when she saw the blade that was completely free of nicks.

It wouldn't have been possible with normal augment considering that thinness, so I made exclusive spell arts for it.

"You cut that with this sword...? Is this multi-augmented too?"

"Yeah. That sword has eight kinds of magic augmented on it. It's made of three boards with four magic on each board though."

"Eight kinds!? ...For reference, what kind of magic?"

"It goes from【Augment Magic for Ruli's Sword Number 1】to【Augment Magic for Ruli's Sword Number 8】. This sword is unique, so I've made new augments exclusively for it."

I showed Alma one of the spell arts I made, the magic circle number 8.

Because this was the first time I augmented a sword this thin.

General spell arts wouldn't work well, so I made them myself.

But augmenting them proved to be difficult, as even Ruli who usually succeeded in one try had to redo three times before it took form.

"You made augment magic!?　...How do I say this.... It's really Mathi-kun...."

"Really Mathi-kun isn't it."

Ruli agreed to Alma's incomprehensible adjective(?).

Why did my name become an adjective anyway.

"....Hold on. If Ruli's weapon is that powerful, that means my weapon is similar to it...?"

Alma said that and looked at the bow she just got.

However, unfortunately she's mistaken.

Ruli's sword stresses importance on lightness and portability, and is ultimately a sub-weapon for self-defense.

Contrary to that, Alma's bow is operated by both her and Ruli and the main long-distance firepower of our party.

Alma's is overwhelmingly higher in term of attack power.

"Similar... it is not. Well, you'll know if you try shooting with it.... Ah, be careful about the arrow line when you use it. Cause the flying distance is different from your usual arrows."

I said that as I gave an iron arrow exclusively made for Alma.

The arrow differs from common arrows in this world, it's made from iron.

The feathers are quite small to decrease air resistance.

"Again, that's one amazing looking arrow.... Then let me have a shoot. Where's my target?"

"This."

I took out another steel rod.

However, unlike the one for Ruli, this rod is about 40cm thick.

"Then, here I go!"

Alma pulls the arrow.

"Ooh, it's very light! Ei!"

The arrow that was shot along with that voice--pierced through the rod.

"....Huh? Where'd the arrow go?"

"Over here."

I pull out the arrow that has been half-buried inside dungeon wall.

...The arrow that hit dungeon wall with enough force to break it already lost its shape though.

"I...It's soo weird!? Can I really have this bow...?"

"Of course. That's the point of its creation."

By the way, Ruli only made the rough parts for this bow, I was the one who did the assembly and finishing.

Since the mechanism had to be quite complex for it to be this powerful.

If it's a sword, Ruli can do everything but the flattening, but it'll probably take some time before she can do a bow.

"Alright, then Iris is the last one."

"Yes! Which should be my target!?"

"I haven't prepared a target for Iris.... Rather, it's impossible. Just try it on that wall over there."

I pointed at the thickest wall nearby.

"I understand! Here I--"

"Hold it right there."

I stopped Iris who took up the spear.

And then I tell Ruli and Alma.

"You two, back away a bit. To around there."

I pointed 30 meter back.

"Y-yes!"

"Got it!"

Ruli and Alma ran to the place in a hurry.

Iris pierced the wall with her spear after confirming that.

The wall was blown away with a roaring sound.

The shockwave broke down a part of the ceiling, several monsters on the other side of the wall received the splinters and died.

"....Ooh! I feel like I can swing around without worry with this spear!"

Yup. Looking good.

Of course, it's incomparable to Gae Bolg thingy.

I probably can expect her to be a force to some extent in a fight against stronger demons and dragons with this.

--And then, several weeks after the weapon making.

Royal Capital Great Barrier Creation is finally coming to a close.

Chapter 107: Strongest Sage, Digs up

One morning.

All students of the Second Academy have been gathered in the widest room in the academy.

The room is full with tension.

It's quite cramped since quite a lot of people are crammed in one room.

The reason is to hide the info we're going to tell them as tight as possible.

As a proof, every nook and cranny of this room has been casted with soundproof magic.

Principal Edward who's standing in the center of the room before the students--announces.

"We will now begin the『Great Royal Capital Barrier Construction Operation』! Drive the stuff you have to do into your head!"

"""""YES!"""""

All the apparatuses needed for supplying the barrier with mana have been completed just yesterday, and we can now begin the construction of the barrier.

It won't be strange if the demons attack any time now.

Hence, this operation has been put together in order to quickly complete the barrier asap.

Similar spectacles are probably happening here and there in the royal capital at this very moment.

Everybody that can become a force like the other royal academy students, capital's knights and trustworthy adventurers are being informed of the operation.

Normally, protecting the royal capital are the knights and adventurers' job, but since the current Second Academy students have become an important force, they will be included in the defense network of the royal capital.

"Presently, our academy's... no, the capital's greatest force, Mathias-kun and his friends are currently constructing the barrier and can't leave it off! We will have to protect them as the『Barrier Construction Team』were demons or monsters to attack! All hands, don't lose your focus!"

"""""YES!"""""

"All members, get on your position as arranged beforehand! Operation start!"

After the principal gave the order, the room's door opened and the students went out from there.

They look like they're just going to class as usual outwardly.

In fact, many of the students are to lead their usual live until there is an enemy raid.

The only perceptible difference from their daily life is that they aren't doing magic and swords training.

Were all students to suddenly go to the city with their weapons ready, it's the same as telling that they're going to do something.

In that situation, we, the『Barrier Construction Team』went into the dungeon.

"These are all of them."

40 white boxes made of metal, a sword that will act as the core, and the main magic stone have been put in front of us.

These are all the materials used to build the barrier.

The metal boxes are made from the mithril produced back then, each of it weights about 40 kg.

They were brought here by the construction team from classrooms beforehand, but.... I think Iris carried like half of them.

We get the mana for the barrier by embedding these boxes inside the Dragon Vein.

"Let's dig up the wall then!"

""Yes!""

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As I declared that, I began to dig up the wall using a hammer exclusively made for me.

The Dragon's Vein is located less than 10 meter away from dungeon walls.

This would have been done in an instant if I could dig up randomly, but I have to think before digging and embed a magic tool inside the wall as necessary in order to control the Dragon Vein.

Worse, I absolutely have to match the chiseling timing with the state of the Dragon Vein.

The operation would instantly fail if I even made a little mistake in the way I dug.

Of course, I cannot take a rest halfway through.

Even if everything goes well, it will take the whole day to reach the Dragon Vein.

It would have been easier if we could dig up in advance, but a certain circumstance won't allow it.

If you leave a dug up Dragon Vein alone, it will stabilize itself.

You can only draw mana from Dragon's Vein if you insert the boxes when it's still unstable.

"Ruli, embed the fifth magic device here."

"Yes!"

I continue to dig the walls while Ruli is helping.

Rocks and such that are produced from the work are being carried away by Iris to not hinder us.

The students of Construction Team are keeping watch around us with weapons ready to keep monsters from entering the work area.

While we were doing that... one student ran up to us.

And then he speaks to us with a tense voice.

"Reporting in!"

Chapter 108: Strongest Sage, Be Unreasonable

"Tell us!"

A student in charge of information in the Barrier Construction Team replied.

Since I, as the leader of Construction Team, can't afford to look away from this work, other students are the ones processing any information and only bring me the necessary one.

Well, I ended up hearing it since he was reporting it nearby by chance.

"The 25th and 26thm mana detection sensors have detected some abnormal movements!"

"25th and 26th... The north forest huh."

We have spread out a surveillance network in order to monitor movements of monsters and such through their mana while the Barrier Construction Operation is being carried out.

By using the network, we can predict a raid and intercept it.

That said, we're merely using simple mana measurement magic tools.

The magic tools only record measurement data on papers, but people have to be the ones analyzing the data and communicating it.

Creating analysis and long-distance transmission magic devices are unexpectedly difficult.

"Yes! This is the record paper!"

"....Got it. Please wait for a bit until we're done analyzing it."

"Yes!"

After hearing the student in charge of data, the student who conveyed the report took a break on a nearby chair.

We have chosen people with fast legs among the applicants to be the ones in charge of reporting duty.... But looking again, most of them are Second Academy's students who bear the Disqualified Crest.

Looks like few knights and adventurers could beat the students who are now able to use Physical Reinforcement in leg strength.

"Mathias-san, could you please look at this paper when you can afford to!"

The student in charge of data analysis brought the record paper to me.

The mana measurement magic tools have simple mechanism and are easy to create, but in exchange, the taken data is scarce and hard to grasp.

Even if you know that there's『something wrong going on』, you still need a certain amount of experience to decipher what that abnormality is.

Unfortunately, there was no one with experience among the applicants so I have to be the one doing the job.

If possible, I'd have liked to avoid having the data carried to a hard to access underground like this just to be analyzed.

As I think that, I look over the record paper during the waiting time until the Dragon Vein can be chiseled.

First, I check the edge of the record paper which signifies that this record is authentic.

Neglecting it opens the possibility of getting fake data mixed in by the demons or their accomplices.

I scan the data after finishing that check.

And got the result in one glance.

"Demons."

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"Wha... They really came at this timing!?"

"Perhaps, the information leaked out...."

Ruli and the student in charge of data were surprised to hear me.

However, this isn't something to be particularly surprised about.

The demon raid was always a matter of time.

Today just happened to be the day.

Above all--

"If they really knew about the surveillance network, they wouldn't have chosen to show off such an easy to understand mana reaction like this. So the possibility of leak is low."

This is the reason I can conclude that there is no leak.

The magic used by the demon that got caught in the detection this time is especially easy to detect even among magic that demons can use.

If the enemy knew about the surveillance network, they wouldn't have used this spell art.

Even if those demons have declined, they're not stupid enough to use this magic inside a surveillance network.

....I think, maybe.

I can't really speak with confidence considering their track record so far....

"Th... Then what should we do about them!"

Hearing the data student's voice, I ponder as I continue to dig dungeon walls.

It would have been over in an instant if I left this place, but that's not an option...

...Right.

"Ruli, go out for a bit and shoot those demons down with Alma."

"Yes! ...Eh?"

Chapter 109: Strongest Sage, Sends Off

"The place is at the north forest... judging from this reaction, they're right by the highway. You should immediately find them simply by running there."

"Err.... We will be the one attacking?"

Ruli looked surprised when she heard me.

True, even though the barrier hasn't been installed yet, the capital still has some defenses.

Waiting patiently and ambushing them here is an option.

But that's too wasteful in this particular case.

"Yeah. This was recorded only around 30 minutes ago... It should be another 30 minutes before those demons to actually get here. The one that was caught in the magic tool wasn't the demon themselves but the magic they invoked."

Fullpower Flight has this side effect called『Recoil』which disturbs mana flow after being used, so it's not well suited for any movement but escaping.

Instead of using that, they use a magic called『Demon Road』.

『Demon Road』is a magic that enables a high-speed long-distance travel by creating a road of mana that goes to the point of destination in advance.

Compared to flying normally, using this magic can cut down travel time to 20% percent with no recoil.

Moreover, once someone has reached the destination, the second one onwards can move to it in less than five minutes each.

--That speed becomes its weakness if the mana gets detected in advance though.

"....I understand. If Mathi-kun says so, I believe in you."

"Me too, I believe too. So how should we go about shooting the demons down?"

Ruli and Alma said that and looked at me with faces full of determination.

Yup. Looks like the two have become quite aware of their own strength.

"I think you'll immediately notice a road made of magic once you arrive at the site. When the mana road begins to swell, that's the sign of the enemy coming. Once the flow of mana stops, a demon will come out in five seconds, just leave an arrow at the place you think it's coming and the other party will get stabbed by it on their own."

"On their own.... It really sounds simple when you put it that way!"

Yup.

It really is simple after all.

As long as you get the timing right, it's harder to miss even.

"How about the arrows, what should we do about them?"

"Use the exclusive metal arrows for Alma that I taught you the other day. The augment magic is... You should think it yourself."

"M-Myself!?"

"Yeah. This time there's no need for petty tricks like poison and such. Construct a magic circle that prioritizes only in power."

Ruli and the others had always been using magic circles I made for them.

However, in an actual combat, you need to judge what's best in accordance to the progress of battle and construct the magic circle yourself.

I've been teaching her how to construct a magic circle whenever we have time.

It's time for rehearsal now.

"B-but what if I fail...."

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"You won't fail as long you do it exactly like I've taught you so far. Carefully confirm the procedures one by one as you construct it."

"I-I understand!"

As a matter of fact, there should be no problem at all even if the augment has no effect in this case.

It's a matter of utmost importance to ensure the safety of the path when you use『Demon Road』.

If they neglect to ensure the safety and get attacked in the middle of moving, even a thrown stone will be fatal for demons.

That's why, this is the perfect rehearsal.

We have to thanks those demons for expressively giving us the chance to hold a worry-free practice that won't cause any problem even if they make a mistake, complete with tension.

Thank you demons-san.

You guys' sacrifice will not be in vain.

"We'll be off then!"

"See you later!"

"Ou. Don't focus all your attention above your head, and remember to properly use Passive Detection to avoid getting ambushed by monsters on the

ground."

I saw them off while saying that.

Now I just need to wait for the result while digging the wall.

"W-why are these people so willing to go and subjugate demons....?"

"Those two were people with common sense when they just enrolled.... They've been completely influenced by Mathias...."

....The students in the mining group were dumbfounded to see what just unfolded.

Looking at their states, it might take a while before they're aware that they've already become a force to be reckoned with already.

I'll be expecting Principal Edward and other instructors to work hard here.

Chapter 110: Team Mathias, Fights Without Mathias

The story is about Ruli and Alma in this.

A bit after Mathias sent the two off.

Ruli and Alma are heading to the north forest guided by a liaison, Lilia, who's familiar with the geography around the area.

"Over here!"

"Yes!"

Ruli and Alma aren't from the capital, but they can read map just fine and have experience going to the north forest.

Nevertheless, it'd be a problem if by any chance they lost their way, so they were given a guide.

"Lilia!"

Alma spoke out along the way.

"Yes!"

"You don't have to mind about us! We can follow you just fine!"

Alma raised her speed as she said that.

Seeing that, Ruli raised hers too.

"I can manage too!"

The liaison team is a group that consists of people with quick legs among the applicants.

And Lilia is especially famous to be the fastest in that group.

The two felt that following her was too easy despite her fame.

"G-got it! I'll run seriously!"

"Yes!"

In fact, Lilia really was holding back.

However, she probably judged that there was no need of that after seeing the two raising their paces.

Lilia raised her pace enough to barely maintain it till the north forest.

An average student won't be able to keep the same pace up for even 30 seconds.

Lilia maintained that pace for 10 minutes until they arrived at the north forest, however....

"Gasp wheeze.... Um... How are you two able to calmly follow me...? I'm losing my confidence here...."

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When Lilia was out of breath as they arrived at the north forest, Ruli and Alma began to prepare their bow without losing a breath.

Moreover, Alma was carrying her bow while Ruli was lugging a lump of metal for making the arrows.

"Even if you ask us that...."

"I mean, our everyday life is like that..."

You rarely have the opportunity to run with all your strength in school classes.

Thus, the running paces that Ruli and Alma know are all by Mathias's standard.

Iris was added along the way, but the standard of a dragon's leg strength where even a trivial misstep meant crushed bedrocks didn't manage to overturn the two's common sense (or what appears to be) that originated from Mathias.

"Putting that aside, is that the thing Mathi-kun told us about?"

"I don't think there's mistaking it. It really is obvious isn't it..."

The two said that as they looked at the sky above the forest.

There's a road made of a mass of mana at the place.

It's very much clearer than mana released by monsters, so there's no worry of losing sight of it.

"Looking at its state... Should be a little bit while before the demons come."

"Let's get ourselves ready while we can."

Ruli said that and made an arrow for Alma's bow from the lump of metal she brought.

She combines a magic stone with the arrow... then she takes out a quill and a paper.

And then she calculates this and that, draws lines.... and paints a magic circle.

"I wonder if this is good enough...."

Lastly, she augmented the magic stone with the magic circle, and she was done.

Ruli anxiously looked at the completed arrow.

"From what I'm seeing, my hunch tells me that it's fine! It somehow feels strong and all!"

Alma paired the arrow with her bow as she said that.

And then she carefully watches the mana road.

Ruli begins to make the second arrow.

After a while--the mana road swelled up.

"It's coming!"

"Ei!"

Seeing that, Alma shot out the enchanted arrow to the mana road.

Right after, a demon fell down.

The arrow Alma shot is stuck on its heart.

Looks like the demon died instantly without even having the chance to scream its last.

"Err... This means first one down?"

"It's over so quickly...."

Ruli handed the second arrow to Alma while saying that.

The mana road still hasn't disappeared.

A few minutes later.

"It's coming again--Ei!"

"GU-GUAAAAAAAA!"

This time a scream could be heard from the mana road--and then a demon fell with a thud.

The second demon got lucky with the arrow so it survived, however--

"Umm... Ei!"

Unfortunately for the demon, it fell right in front of Ruli.

And Ruli was holding a sword made with Mathias's guidance in her hand.

In the end, the second demon met the same fate as the first one.

"Ah, it's gone!"

And then the mana road disappeared with no third demon coming.

Chapter 111: Second Academy, Fights Demon

"The road disappeared.... Shall we go back then?"

"Yes, I think we should. The other demons don't seem like they'll come even if we wait here anyway."

Alma and Ruli decided to go back to the capital.

The two then noticed something.

"Eh? The demons, so easily... and making magic circle by herself... Eh?"

Lilia has been frozen.

Ruli waves her hand in front of her, but there is no response.

"...What to do?"

"We're in the forest with monsters roaming around.... I think we should go back together."

After saying that, Ruli pokes at Lilia.

Lilia restarted from that.

"...Ha! I'm sorry! It was just too unreal so... I've got to do my job as a liaison, please excuse me!"

Lilia ran on the highway after saying that.

"Being a liaison sure is hectic...."

"She has to cover so much area and gather all the info after--!?"

Ruli who was going to reply to Alma got surprised about something and stopped speaking.

And then Alma also stops moving like Ruli did and asks a question.

No. Rather than a question, it's more like a confirmation.

"Did you notice just now?"

"Un. A huge mana was... That's the capital isn't it!?"

"I think so."

They felt a huge surge of mana from the direction of the capital.

This would have been fine if it was from the barrier, but intuitions of Alma and Ruli who had been staying close to Mathias and even fought with demons several times told them that the mana was of demons.

"Looks like we'd better return quick."

"Yes! Let's hurry!"

Thus, the two began to run to the capital.

◇

A bit later.

Ruli and Alma went to the school and straight to the dungeon.

Of course they're heading to Mathias.

"Mathi-kun!"

"Good work, you two. Looks like it went well."

"Un! But, right after that, mana, a huge surge of mana...."

"Ah. It appears they've gone and done the last resort."

Mathias replied Alma.

"....Last resort?"

"Yeah. A magic to travel over a long distance by sacrificing a demon's life. ...Well, demons know no such a thing as self-sacrifice so they most likely ganged up on the weakest among them and made it to be the sacrifice."

There is no need for consent to be a sacrifice of the transfer magic.

Thus, something like this can happen.

"Th-their own comrades..."

"I guess you could call it's really like demons... so then what should we do..."

Ruli asked for a way to deal with this even while being surprised.

Apparently, Ruli has gotten accustomed to the thought process of a combatant.

"As you can see, I can't take my hands off these--please buy a bit of time. Use this spell art to augment the arrow. I've told the school and the kingdom about the situation already, they should be cooperating with you."

Mathias drew a magic circle on the ground that was twice as complex as spell arts Ruli had done so far.

Moreover, this time they aren't going to shoot down demons that are in the middle of a transfer but challenging them head-on.

If it was the Ruli and Alma from back then, they would likely say it's impossible.

However--the two reply at once.

"Got it!"

"Understood!"

Mathias nodded powerfully.

Alma and Ruli went out of the dungeon in a hurry.

When the two got above ground, they saw the academy's students and teachers gathered with their own specialized weapon ready.

At about the same time a teacher ran from outside the school toward Ruli and Alma while carrying a huge box.

"Please use these!"

The teacher who went back to his place left a box full of magic stones.

It seems that it was prepared in a hurry, as the box is full of scratches and there are some magic stones with price tags attached on them.

However, their quality is good.

"Thank you very much! ...Alma, use these until I've succeeded augmenting the arrow!"

"Gotcha!"

Ruli handed over the remaining arrows she made to shoot the transferring demons back then and immediately began to focus on the augmenting.

Before long--a demon showed up in the sky.

The demon that appeared acts like it knows where the barrier is being worked on as it's heading straight to the Second Academy.

While preparing to shoot an attack magic that's synonymous with calamity by demons,【Torrential Flameballs】.

"Teach! It's coming here!"

"All hands, assume anti-air formation! Our enemy is alone! 【Torrential Flameballs】are coming!"

"""""YES!"""""

The students took up the formation the teacher ordered.

The【Torrential Flameballs】are shot right in their center.

Just as the name suggests,【Torrential Flambealls】is a magic that shoots countless amount of flame balls down.

The magic requires some time to be prepared even for demons, but its firepower is tremendous.

It's even said that no human can survive getting hit by this magic.

"FUHAHAHAHA! DIE DIE DIE DIEEEEEE!"

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The demon threw down such magic at the gathered students while laughing.

Crowding themselves when they're up against【Torrential Flameballs】is sheer stupidity.

It will just result in more people inside the attacking range, inflating the damage.

--Or it should have been.

However, the demon's expression gradually changes to that of a bewilderment.

Screams that should have been heard with the usage of【Torrential Flameballs】were nowhere to be found.

"....Huuhh?"

The demon is dubiously looking at the black smoke from the aftermath of

【Torrential Flameballs】as it gradually clears up.

At the same time, voices could be heard from the schoolyard.

However, those voices were quite unlike the screams that the demon expected to hear.

"I-I thought I was a goner...."

"We really blocked【Torrential Flameballs】...."

"I-It's the barrier magic Mathias specifically made. O-Of course it'd block--"

"Oy, your legs are shaking."

The ones that showed up from inside the smoke along with pitiful voices were--unscathed students.

The demon became dumbfounded when it saw them.

"...Wha?"

True, looking closer, there are students with Disqualified Crests here and there setting up barriers.

However, the magic of these children couldn't have possibly blocked【Torrential Flameballs】.

The students began their counteroffensive against the demon while its thought process halted for a moment.

Common Magic Crest and Small Magic Crest students shot out their magic at the demons all at once while Disqualified Crest students are protecting them.

However, their attack didn't reach.

The distance is too far.

Only Alma's arrow reached the demon, but it was repelled by the demon's skin, unable to even scratch it.

"I-It's that hard....? Ruli how's the arrow?"

"...Please wait a bit more."

Ruli is fully focusing on a magic stone while barely moving in a corner of the schoolyard where the battle is ensuing.

Numerous amount of un-augmented magic stones and cracked magic stones from failed augmentation are lying around Ruli.

"Ruli, are you okay?"

She's failed ten times already.

Seeing that, Alma asked worryingly.

However.... Ruli wasn't fretting even though she was concentrating to her utmost.

Mathias who understands Ruli's capability more than Ruli herself have prepared this many magic stones.

He had already assumed that she would repeat many failures.

Nevertheless, she's getting closer to completion little by little.

Mathias entrusted this magic circle to Ruli exactly because he had anticipated that she would succeed in the end after repeating her failures.

Ruli believes that as she continues the augmenting.

--And then, at 21st one.

The augmented magic stone isn't cracking.

"...It's done."

She handed the arrow over to Alma while saying that.

The magic stone embedded within the arrow is carved with a complex magic circle unlike anything before seen.

Chapter 112: Second Academy, Defeats Demon

"Dammit, what's with you brats.... Just die alreadyyyyyy!"

The demon who encamped itself in the sky above the schoolyard shot out magic at the yard while looking irritated.

Not even one of the demon's attacks reached the students.

There is no hole in the formation the students have taken up.

Likewise, the students' attacks couldn't reach the demon.

However, unlike the demons, the students keep up the attack while fully knowing that it won't hit it.

In order to avert the demon's attention from Alma and Ruli.

"I can't miss now can I...."

Alma is aiming her bow at the demon slightly away from the students.

And then she unleashed the arrow after stopping breathing for an instant.

"Mu?"

The demon noticed the arrow Alma shot and seemingly realized that it could cause it harm unlike anything so far.

The demon moved slowly while still constructing a magic, to evade the arrow.

However, the arrow changed its direction as if it was pursuing the demon.

The demon seemed to judge that it had no choice, it canceled constructing a magic, unfolded its wings wide and accelerated.

Yet the arrow still attempted to pursue the demon, however, it eventually couldn't keep up and passed by the demon.

"The hell was that arrow--ha!? ....AGAAAAAAAA!"

The demon's question changed into a painful cry halfway through.

The arrow that it should have evaded changed direction midway and stabbed its back.

"【Guided Mana Enchant】.... I didn't know you could curve it like that now...."

Ruli commended Alma when she saw how the arrow moved.

However, Alma who shot the arrow looks perplexed too.

"I did guide it until halfway through... But, I have no idea about that last move too you know? I don't think an arrow could move like that."

"That wasn't guided by Alma? Which means, it's this... Mathi-kun is amazing as always..."

Ruli muttered as she looked at a paper where a magic circle was drawn.

Ruli has learned how to compose magic circle herself, but she can't even begin to imagine the way to augment spells that could pursue high-speed flight of a demon and even penetrate its defense.

"Mathi-kun is Mathi-kun and all, but I think Ruli is the only one who can do an augment like that! Look at how it stuck on the demon!"

Alma pointed at the fallen demon.

The arrow is stuck on its back--or to be more correct, its two wings like it's sewn them.

Even demons would be forced to give up flying after that.

And in front of the fallen demon--

"It fell! Rearrange the lines!"

"""""YES!"""""

Are the students who could only block the demon's attacks until now.

The students encircled the demon while maintaining a distance away and shoot out their magic all at once.

This time it reaches.

A solo attack magic from a student won't be effective against a demon.

However, it's a different story if you concentrate dozens of the same magic.

The attack magic that rained down incessantly without pause produces synergistic effect, mercilessly shaving down the demon's endurance.

Alma also backs them up with arrows specialized in firepower.

Realizing that it can't fly anymore, the demon counterattacked with attack magic, but all of them were blocked by the barrier Disqualified Crest students set up.

And when the demon tried to close their distance to slash at the students, Alma shot it with arrows embedded with interference magic, stopping it on its track.

Thus the students' encirclement is maintained without ever collapsing.

And the magic attacks continued for a while--

"We did it!"

The demon finally died.

Nevertheless, they carefully confirmed its death using magic before breaking

their formation.

"We beat it! We beat a demon!"

"I can't believe it, mere students defeating a demon...."

"We've got to hurry and report to various places!"

Students and teachers are rejoicing together.

They used this chance to toss Alma and Ruli up in the air.

A lot of people ran out of the school in order to convey what happened to the capital.

Their expressions were mixed with fatigue and also glee.

"I'm going to tell Mathi-kun!"

"Me too!"

Ruli and Alma ran toward the dungeon to tell Mathias their victory.

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--A voice resounded amidst the celebratory air.

From the direction of the sky where the demon that was defeated earlier came, sky that should have been empty.

"Huh? Berlias went and got done in."

"Yeah. And I told him. We were gonna have an all-you-can-kill anyway, so we should have prepared our formation first."

"Now now, don't say that. Thanks to him, we got more prey to kill no? Look at that. Our prey are rejoicing with stupid looks on their faces."

Appearing from thin air along with grating voices--were demons.

And it's not just one or two.

--14.

That's the number of demons floating in the capital's sky.

There isn't anyone left in the capital who's calm enough to count their number though.

"You're kidding me...."

"Just how many are them...."

"There's no way we can win this...."

Merely defeating a demon necessitated a total war.

And now it's 14.

In addition, the students are running out of mana by the battle earlier.

Their situation is hopeless no matter how you look at it.

The students have lost their fighting spirit, none is even holding their weapon straight.

There wasn't even anyone who got the idea to run.

"Then, let's get to--aa?"

In that situation, the demon who was going to shoot a magic at the defenseless students--suddenly stopped.

No, to be more correct, he was stopped.

Because that demon was cut in two by a sword that projected out of thin air.

The cut demon died without even being able to scream and fell on the ground.

"....Ha?"

Other demons had perplexed looks on their faces because of the unrealistic scene that played out in front of their eyes.

As if saying that it must be some kind of mistake.

However, a mistake it is not.

As if proving to them that it was real, a sword showed up again--and another demon's head fell down.

"U-UWAAAAAAAAA!"

Their thought finally caught up after the second demon died.

The demons who have been driven by fear begin to swing their swords around haphazardly.

It was meaningless.

The screaming demon who stood out became fodder of a sword that came out of thin air within five seconds.

Nobody saw the figure of the one who wielded the sword.

However, the students who saw the current situation are vaguely aware of the identity of the one behind it.

--Because there is only one person in the capital who can possibly do such a feat.

"...Fourteen huh. That's more than I expected."

Chapter 113: Strongest Sage, Vanishes

"...W-what the hell are you!"

A demon asked in surprise when I showed myself up while killing the third demon.

"T...This guy's Mathias! Spread out as planne--"

Looks like one of the demons know my face.

I activate【Shrinking Ground】when I see that demon trying to give an instruction.

"Wha, he disa--"

A demon shouted out in surprise when they saw me suddenly vanishing.

Looks like those demons lost sight of me just now.

It should have been easy to break through【Shrinking Ground】by simply looking at the mana reaction.... Present day demons really aren't used to combat.

Thus I kindly show myself up in front of the demon so they won't lose sight of me even by mistake.

"...Eh?"

I swing my sword horizontally at the demon who couldn't grasp what was going on and let out a stupid voice.

The demon couldn't react until its end as its head got lopped off in one slash and fell to the ground.

Ten remain.

It'll be troublesome if it took the group under control.

Defeating the one who looks like they could take lead is the basic of combat against groups.

"Th... this guy can vanish!"

"How'd you even fight something like--"

The demons shout out in fear after seeing my move just now.

They've completely lost their wits. They look like they're ready to run away anytime now.

....Letting them run will be annoying.

If this many demons use『Fullpower Flight』all at once, some could likely escape.

Since The『Great Barrier of Royal Capital』that can prevent demons from going in and out is not operational yet.

OK. Let's give them a hint.

When I think about it, it feels like I'm always doing sneak attacks whenever I'm fighting demons.

"It's useless. You have no way to fight back inside this barrier."

After saying that, I regulate my mana to make it look like an emission from barrier magic.

What a lame fake if I do say so myself.

"Barrier--I see! This guy makes himself disappears with control-type barrier! Destroy--"

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However it seems the demons are tricked just fine.

The demons shoot out a huge amount of mana toward a point.

It's a technique called『Mana Saturation』used for destroying simple barriers.

With a cracking sound, something seemed like it broke behind me.

Yup, an expected response.

It was worth purposely killing them in an impactful way to rob them off their ability to think calmly.

"Idiot! Combat-type barrier can be easily be broken off with mana!"

Of course the idiot here is the demons.

The barrier we set up isn't so small it could be broken by this level of demon's『Mana Saturation』.

The sound earlier was something I put out using magic in order to show these demons in an easy to understand way that the barrier had been broken.

"Eh? Why'd he disapp--"

While thinking that, I activated【Shrinking Ground】once again and killed the demon who was giving orders.

I also killed two other nearby demons while I was at it.

Seven remain now.

...Should be about time to make it look like they've dealt with【Shrinking Ground】.

Since they'll likely try to escape if they get too cornered.

And so, I run toward a demon without vanishing myself by kicking barrier magic on my foot.

"I can see him! I can see him! Now we--GUAAAAAA"

When the demon saw me rushing toward it, it shouted out in delight as it swung its magic augmented sword while also shooting a magic.

I put【Steel Slash】and【Mana Strike】on my sword and cut the demon along with the sword it was going to use to block my sword.

Yup. The new sword is nicely sharp.

This time it had the time to scream its last since I cut its body, not neck.

"Mo...Monster!"

The remaining demons who saw that backed off while shouting fearfully.

I mean I'm human, I don't think it's right for demons to call me monster....

Chapter 114: Strongest Sage, Annihilates

"You demons have no right to call me... monster!"

I cut a nearby demon as I said that.

"HII!"

Most of the demons have lost their will to fight, they could only huddle together in fear without even trying to block or counter as their heads roll.

While some of the demons are trying to escape.

It seems these demons don't want to show any chance in front of me as not even one of them attempt to use『Fullpower Flight』.

--However, the remaining five demons are all within the range of my magic.

I expand a small magic on the unfolded wings of the demons who try to fly away.

『Light Press』.

Just as the name suggests, it's just a very simple low-powered magic for lightly

pressing an object.

The effect time is also short, you can say that this spell art is useless in combats.

In actuality, these demons could probably fly away just fine if they just forced their way through it.

However, the demons who got hit by the magic had despaired looks on their faces.

"Wha, the barrier should have been destroyed already--"

That's right.

The demons mistook the『Light Press』for having hit the barrier.

--Of course I timed its activation and direction just right so they would misunderstood.

"U....UWAAAAAAA!"

The demon who got cornered and locked in the barrier (by misunderstanding) chose the sole path to escape; they flew toward me.

Some shot attack magic on me, some tried to use magic to dazzle me, there were even some who tried to cut me with swords.

However, these demons wouldn't have ended up in this situation if those sorta things could get them out of this.

"GYAAAAAAAA!"

"Help... HELPMEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

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Using my sword and magic, I thoroughly kill the demons who tried to beg for their life and screamed out loud.

I'm not sure who's the villain here now....

While thinking about that, I defeated the fourteen demons that were in the royal capital's sky.

"...Looks like this body can finally fight at a minimum now."

The fight was over far too quick.

Well, it's largely because of the sword.

The weapons I had been using up until now would be annoying to use if I had to defeat many of them after all.

"That many demon, in an instant...?"

"Didn't he vanish just now?"

"So Mathias can even turn himself invisible..."

I heard those voices when I canceled the barrier magic foothold and descended to the ground.

It appears the people on the ground couldn't figure out the sword trick I did in the air earlier.

The trick should have been very easy to see through seen from the ground though.

That was just an application of『Shrinking Ground』magic to hide your figure for a short while, I simply moved away from the enemy's line of sight right after I cut one, rinse and repeat.

That's why it's a kind of trick instead of magic.

Were the demons look around at the surroundings, they would have easily figured it out.

That's why I needed to purposely show only my sword to gather the attention.

Of the killed demons, not me.

The time it took to finish it was short but defeating 14 demons without letting anyone escape was quite a troublesome tightrope to walk on.

--And I've got a more troublesome work to do after this.

"Mathi-kun!"

『I've dug up the hole for the barrier, go and set up the magic tool inside it. Iris

is holding it up with her magic right now, but it won't last too long.』

I sent a message using short-range telepathic magic to Ruli and Alma who were rushing toward me on the ground.

『Yes! ...Huh? What about Mathi-kun...』

『I've got a bit of work to do.』

I slip through the crowd who's celebrating the victory using【Shrinking Ground】.

The demons in the capital sky have been annihilated... But that doesn't mean that the fight is over.

Or rather, judging from the gravity of the matter, you can even say that the real thing starts from here on.

Chapter 115: Strongest Sage, Releases

I left the center of royal capital where many people crowding and went toward a forest slightly away from the capital.

In order to finish a work as I told Ruli and Alma.

The problem is the other party in that work--

"For real.... Those guys went and got annihilated. Is that Mathias guy really a monster for real?"

"That bunch were of the weakest class even among us demons.... Nevertheless, instantly killing 14 of them is unusual.... We should regard him as quite a monster."

These demons are having such conversation in front of me while constructing some kind of magic.

It's true that they are a little stronger than the 14 demons I defeated, but.... How do I say it, it fits the phrase "Comparing heights between acorns."

I've hidden myself sure, but I've made the concealment weaker on purpose in order to investigate the opponent's detection capability.

They don't seem like they notice me at all though.

....Now that their magic is about to be finished, it's about time for me to show up.

This kind of specialized magic construction has a high chance of causing some weird phenomenon if you carelessly sabotage it halfway through, therefore, it's better to leave it alone until it's near completion.

"Yeah. But well, that thing is nothing but garbage compared to us. Doesn't look like he notices our presences either."

"Indeed. Either way, we won't ever have to fight that guy. Since this magic will kill him."

"Oh that sounds interesting. What magic you're gonna use to to kill me again?"

I joined in their conversation since the timing was just right to butt in.

Of course, there's no reply.

Confused and surprised words get thrown instead.

"Wha... Why are you here!"

"Anyone would notice when you're putting up a magic that interesting. I think you guys should be a bit more prudent and hide your mana when you're constructing a magic."

I pointed at the magic they were building.

Looks like it's completed but.... The composition of this magic is all wrong.

I mean, it's bad and all, but wrong.

By the way, I'm wasting time talking with them like this.... is because there is a peculiar situation in this fight.

It's the same reason why I didn't bring Ruli and the others with me.

The fight this time is delicate in many things.

"Humans, detecting mana? ....Oh I see now. You're planning to confuse us by saying some cryptic things. That's not happening!"

The demons said as they pointed their weapons at me.

The part about detecting mana is true though.

While feeling a bit murky for getting treated like a liar for using such an ordinary technique, I reply them back.

"Well, who cares about the reason. I found a distortion in the Dragon Vein earlier. Stop throwing the mana balance out of order with some weird magic."

Half of this is true.

Thanks to a distortion in the Dragon Vein, the Capital barrier construction work was finished slightly faster than planned.

However, this magic doesn't really have anything to do with the Dragon Vein.

These demons probably don't understand what magic they're building anyway from the way they're constructing it, so they'll probably get tricked by that remark.

"...O-of course we knew that! Hence we will kill you with this magic! With the

power of the Dragon Vein!"

See. They really don't get it, do they.

This magic has no capability to interfere with the Dragon Vein.

It's just a spell art--a badly made one at that--that will cause a huge monster outbreak by using the mana from demons that have died.

However, I've managed to put the two within my magic range during our talk.

Thus, I unfold the next magic.

"Wha... You bastard, what are you scheming!"

The demons let out their voices in surprise as they suddenly found that they couldn't move their body.

I've used a magic called『Mana Thread Binding』to bind them.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm gonna kill you demons."

While kindly telling that to the demons, I shoot an attack magic at the weak-looking demon to defeat it.

I'm using a showy magic instead of my sword to kill it in order to instigate the other demon's sense of impeding crisis.

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"GYAAAAAAA!"

Receiving my magic, the weak-looking demon died while suffering pointlessly.

"Kuh, you monster.... I've got no choice!"

After seeing that, the other demon released a huge amount of mana while looking vexed.

It's a magic to overload oneself and strengthen the body in a stretch to free the binding.

Good. He knew this much magic at least.

If he didn't, I planned to pretend that I made a mistake and loosened the

binding on purpose.

While I was thinking that, the demon flew into the forest, running away while trying to hide himself.

He sure is quick on his feet despite calling me, 『nothing but garbage』 before I got here.

The demon in question is seemingly trying to run away while hiding himself with magic--but the mana from his concealment magic is too flashy, it makes him easier to discover instead.

--It's like this demon hasn't learned anything at all.

And I just taught him to better hide his mana earlier....

It's easy to run after and kill the demon.

However, I didn't pursue the demon as it disappeared into the forest's horizon while flashily emitting its mana.

--Alright. Looks like it went well.

Chapter 116: Strongest Sage, Wait-and-See

"...I see. Over there huh."

Right after the demon went outside the capital's vicinity.

I observed the run-away demon's mana reaction.

Fundamentally speaking, demons do not form a group.

14 of them went to attack Second Academy, but that sort of unity is rare.

However, it's not unusual for demons to temporarily work together and build a small base.

Such situation almost happened in Ace Kingdom before I got here after all.

Thus, I've latched a magic on the demon that makes it emit a special kind of mana to tell me its location.

Of course, I didn't ask for the demon's consent.

From now on, that demon will have to work for me, to go around demon's bases in various places and tell me their locations.

The demon itself is probably going to report to other demons about my and Second Academy's menace anyway.

--Leaving that aside, the problem now is the monster outbreak magic those demons left behind.

It's most likely a magic that interferes the peculiar mana released by dead demons to cause a huge outbreak of monsters.... Looks like they made a mistake constructing it, the part for stabilizing the magic is damaged.

The success rate of summoning monsters with this composition is only 0.7% at best.

Nothing will be happening at more than 99% probability.

The problem is the remaining 0.3%.

The magic circle is broken just right for it to operate the surrounding mana, creating a possibility of it causing an unusual phenomenon instead of just summoning monsters.

I waited here to look after the magic until it disappeared while thinking that nothing would have happened anyway, however... this pattern, it seems we're quite unlucky--no, quite lucky.

The incomplete magic turned into something weird, as it combined the mana of demons that died this time with the monster outbreak magic (the one Ashril used right before his death.)

If this is left alone, a large scale monster summoning will happen near the capital.

After watching that far, I went back to the Second Academy.

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""Mathi-kun!""

Ruli, Alma and Iris were waiting for me in front of the school's gate.

It appears they managed to stabilize the barrier while I was absent.

I need to give a hand when the barrier is getting activated for real so they're probably standing by now.

I don't see many students... Judging from their mana reaction, apparently they've gathered inside the school.

Wonder if they're having a celebration party.

"You told us that you had a work to do... What happened!?"

"Ah. I just went to beat up some demon. And the work refers to the other demon."

I took out the horn of the demon I killed earlier from Storage magic while answering Ruli.

"Y-you said it like you just went shopping... By work, do you mean that horn?"

"Nope, that's from another demon. I latched a magic on the other one so I let it escape on purpose."

I search the reaction from the demon back then once again as I said that.

Apparently the demon is still in the middle of its flight toward a neighboring kingdom.

The magic I latched on it is working well.

"Letting a demon escape!?"

"Yeah. I just threatened it a little."

"T-that sounds dreadful... By the way what kind of magic did you put on it?"

I answer Ruli's question.

"One magic is to make detecting the demon easier, and the other one is to remotely explode it."

"E-Explode!?"

"Yeah. Well, it's impossible for Disqualified Crest to remotely control magic in the strictest sense, so it's a type of spell art that will automatically explode

when it reacts to a peculiar mana."

That was the most troublesome thing in the fight this time.

With other crests, it would have been over in an instant by simply inserting the magic, but here I had to go to the trouble of binding them.

Disqualified Crest is nice in a frontal combat, but it's not well suited for this kind of petty tricks.

"I-I see.... I mean, there's no way Mathias-san would have let a demon escape just like that...."

"Yeah. I can't let them slip for free no matter how weak those demons are."

Leaving them alone to a degree was fine in my past life, but the present time can't seem to afford that.

My traveling speed has slowed down considerably too, so directly beating them will take time.

I cut in to the next topic while thinking that.

"Oh and I have a good news."

"Good news! W-what is it!"

"The scale of monster outbreak that will happen near the capital has been greatly magnified!"

"...G-good news? Err, it sounded like nothing but bad news to me though..."

"Or rather, it's a catastrophe...."

Bad news? Catastrophe?

What are they saying.

Monsters that are just right strength-wise will appear in droves, and they're going to be our experience points.

Clearly, that's a good news.

Chapter 117: Strongest Sage, Observes

"Having monsters coming out in a place where it's easy to fight above ground is the best possible chance to gain experience points. It's no bad news at all."

"T-treating monsters like mere resources..."

"They *are*

resources though. Moreover, if we know where they will appear, we can prepare a trap. There's never been a better situation. ...and so let's go have a look at the Dragon's Vein while we're activating the barrier."

"Dragon's Vein?"

"Yeah. As Dragon's Vein is an enormous lump of mana. You can look at the Dragon's Vein if you need to observe magic, convenient stuff."

I know that the summoning magic has gone haywire, but observing from the surface only nets me a rough picture of the way the monsters will appear with my current detection capability.

We've got to go there to activate the barrier anyway, so might as well.

"I saw the Dragon's Vein when I installed the magic stone... But it only looked like a jumbled mix of mana inside the soil to me..."

"Me too, it doesn't feel like I can get anything from watching that stuff..."

Well, it's probably still a bit too hard for Ruli and Alma.

Dragon's Vein does look like a jumbled mess after all.

Once you get used to it, you can read things like its composition and such.

"It's alright! I don't understand either!"

"...Eh? Iris, you should know about it shouldn't you?"

Just as the name suggests, Dragon's Vein are used by dragons for stuff.

Like say, instead of using maps, they make use of Dragon's Vein, there's no way she doesn't know--

"I can understand its rough geography, but even dragons don't know how to distinguish a slight magic mixed in the vast Dragon's Vein! The only one who

could do that is Mathias-san and... no, only Mathias-san!"

She was going to say more just now.

Was she trying to hide something perhaps.

"Weren't you going to say someone else's name besides me there?"

"There was another person, but not anymore."

Iris replied to me.

So there was someone who could do it in the past.

Now that I think about it, I never met anyone who knew how in my past life, but I'm sure those people did exist and only didn't want to say it out loud.

It's not a particularly hard technique.

It can't be helped now since magic technology has declined, but there must have been a lot who could before the decline.

"By the way, that person said『I'm going to reincarnate. Please don't look for me』as his last before he passed away."

Such a guy--hm?

Isn't that the past me!

"And the one Iris knew was only that person?"

"Only Mathias-san and that person."

"...Well, Iris is a dragon. It's should come as no surprise that she doesn't know much human techniques."

"I think Mathias-san is worse here in the sense of not knowing the technique level of normal humans...."

We arrived at the Dragon's Vein while having that conversation.

The magic tool has been installed inside the dug Dragon'S Vein just like how I asked them before subduing the demons, and one part of the magic absorption installation is already in operation.

With this we can start the barrier anytime once the other devices are in places.

I checked the Dragon's Vein before starting it up--the situation has gotten quite interesting.

The magic that had been there fused together with mana of the dead demons, turning it into quite an extraordinary situation.

Looks like I can expect much, in many ways, from this.

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And also, judging from the Dragon's Vein state, the monsters will be summoned tomorrow noon.

Even the amount of mana I will have to use to activate the barrier won't be recovered by then.

--Which means, let's start the barrier for now.

It'd be troublesome if some demons were to infiltrate during this time.

"I'll go make the space to insert the barrier, wait a bit."

"Yes!"

"Got it!"

"I understand!"

After hearing the three, I start to dig the surrounding walls.

I could do it freely now since the parts needed for the Dragon's Vein were finished already.

Afterward, I put together the barrier composition with the help of the three.

Lastly, the main event is augmenting the magic device.

"Ruli, carve this magic circle into this magic stone."

I took out a magic stone and a paper drawn with a magic circle.

The subjugation back then was over by the time I arrived, but I knew that Ruli had succeeded augmenting the magic circle I gave her back then by looking at the dead prickled demon in the schoolyard.

This one is simple compared to that.

"Yes!"

Ruli quickly finished augmenting the magic device after saying that.

Her skill really has improved remarkably.

The Ruli before the fight against the demon couldn't have possibly augment that magic circle.

Yet, counting on her getting it right after repeating for many times, I still gave her the magic circle.

The weights of experience between augmenting in the heat of battle and peacefully augmenting with no penalty in failing greatly differ.

"Well then, here it goes!"

I started up the completed magic device as I said that.

The magic device vibrated with a dull sound and then it stopped before long.

The mana supply from the mana collecting device has stabilized.

Looks like the barrier has been activated safely.

Chapter 118: Strongest Sage, Sets up Traps

"Okay then. Now that the barrier is up and running... Let's go and set some stuff up."

"Stuff?"

"Yeah. We'll have an easier time if we set up some traps before the monsters come out."

I took a magic stone and a lump of iron out of Storage magic.

"We'll be using this as a trap."

"...Barrier magic?"

Ruli quickly guessed my intention when she saw those things.

However, her guess is only half right.

"It's similar but not really. We'll be setting detection-based guidance magic in

the ground."

"...Guidance magic?"

"Yeah. I'll teach you the magic circle later, there's this magic device that can draw magic toward it you see. The pulling force changes depending on the amount of mana filled into the magic device."

By the way, even though the device can pull magic in, the force isn't that great so it's hard to use it for defending.

And it's easy to counter it if you know someone is using it.

"Guidance.... And that will be the trap? ...Don't tell me Mathi-kun is going to plunge right in the middle of the monster swarm and become the target?"

"That's one of the possible means."

"So it is..."

Alma sounded like she couldn't believe it.

Well, defending against attacks from your average monster is easy if you know how to use defensive magic well.

I can also defend against attack magic shot by students if I want to.

Leaving it to Iris is probably a good idea if we're relying only on defensive prowess though.

"But we'll be using another mean this time. We recently made a magic device to measure mana didn't we? We will be directly using that as the guidance device."

"And what would happen if we did?"

"A place where there is a lot of monsters will contain a lot of mana, thus it will pull magic in. In other words, our magic will automatically fall right in the middle of the monster crowd simply by shooting them toward the sky."

Many magic will fall into a place where there's a lot of monsters.

If a place has a few monsters, only a few magic will fall on it.

When it comes to large-scale group battles, giving orders where to shoot to each and every one of your allies isn't really feasible, and it's difficult to get a straight line of fire.

Yet, letting the magicians to randomly shoot their magic by their own discretion is not the best way to demonstrate the strength of a group.

Thus, it's this magic device's turn.

Simply by scattering these devices in the battlefield will make the shot magic naturally get distributed nicely.

By the way, the guidance precision depends on the number of devices you set up.

More does not mean better, it's the hard part of this strategy... well, leaving it on instinct should do.

If some slipped out it, I could just deal with them myself.

"S-so that's how it works.... Huh? Which means, don't tell me, it's the students who will defeat the monsters?"

"Yeah. The first wave that is."

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"First wave?"

Ruli looked perplexed to hear what I said.

"To tell you the truth, the monsters summoned this time will likely come in two waves."

"...Two waves?"

"Yeah. The monsters coming in the first wave will excel in number, but are weak strength-wise. I'm thinking of leaving those monsters to the students, which should also act as their training."

They probably have grasped the basic of simple combat in the fight against demon this time.

Afterward, they just need to learn how group battles work and some strong guys should appear among them in times even if I leave them alone.

...Well, the purpose of leaving the first wave to the students is more about saving my mana.

If some unexpected situations were to occur, having or not having mana would make a great difference.

Exp from the monsters in the first wave should be fewer than the second wave ones anyways, no need for me to force myself getting them.

We arrived at the destination while having that conversation and set up around 30 magic devices.

We had put them inside metal cases before burying them in the ground, so they shouldn't get destroyed.

Now the problem is what monsters will appear in the second wave.

Would be cool if some strong nice monsters came out then.

Chapter 119: Strongest Sage, Leaves It to the Leader

"Looks like it's coming on schedule."

The day after we defeated the demons and set up the barrier.

We and the academy students went to a plain near the vicinity of the capital.

Needless to say, it's the place we buried the magic devices yesterday--in other words, we're near the site monsters will come out.

Judging from the mana flow, we have around 30 minutes before the monsters appear.

It's mostly just as I expected.

"I don't see any monster...."

"Will monsters really come out when it's this peaceful?"

"I mean Mathias-kun said they will, so they will right...."

The students form a formation while chattering about this and that.

Well, the formation this time is quite simple though.

On top of having the help of the guidance magic, there's no for need a complex formation.

"C... Can I really be the leader?"

While I was gazing the student, one of them approached and asked me anxiously.

He's Meirad, the leader of this operation.

"Yeah. Monsters will come to this plain, and Meirad will be the leader until there is no more of them here."

I'm going to quit the school after all, while Ruli and the others aren't suited to be a leader, thus I've selected some students who looked qualified to be a leader and made them into leader candidates.

Meirad is one among them.

"Yes! Mathias-sensei!"

By the way, for some reason Meirad treats me as a teacher.

Or rather, about half of the students seemed to have been influenced by Meirad as they've begun treating me as a teacher.

I'm a student through and through though....

I leave the students while thinking about that and watch over the monster outbreak site and the students' state.

Ruli, Alma, Iris and me are excluded in this operation as we're going to deal with the second wave.

I haven't told them about the second wave, though--

"Lastly, Meirad, recall again what you should do in case the unexpected happens?"

"Yes! I must promptly give the order to retreat back to the capital!"

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And this is the result.

Telling them about the second wave beforehand would ruin this rare chance of training.

Retreating as a group is quite difficult.

We will be handling all of battle involving the second wave, so the degree of difficulty will greatly drop for them, but it should be still a fine personal experience.

--The monsters began to appear while I was thinking that.

Un. These monsters look weak.

Defeating them won't net anything good for us.

However, the students don't see it as such.

"What's with their numbers!"

"There's so many of 'em!"

The students began to get flustered when they saw monsters that kept on appearing.

There's around 1200 monsters.

And there's around 150 students participating in this battle, one to eight, should be a good experience.

"Do not flinch! The number of monster is roughly the same as Mathias-sensei's prediction! Let's subjugate them according to plan!"

Meirad gave an order to the flustered students.

And then the students began to regain their composure and shoot out magic.

Disqualified crest students who aren't suited for long-range attack went forward to defeat monsters that escaped the bombardment.

Just as I thought, Meirad has the qualification to be a leader.

He's quite dependab--

"Mathias said we could beat them! So we'd beat them!"

"There's even magic devices set up by Mathias-sensei!"

"Everyone, let's do as Mathi.... Meirad says!"

"Alright, we're winning!"

...Huh?

It's different from what I imagined.

Well they carry out the order well anyway, guess it's all OK.

Thus, the monsters kept decreasing as they defeated them one after another.

--And then, the main event finally shows up.

Chapter 120: Strongest Sage, Assists the Retreat

"We did it... right?"

A while after the battle started.

The first wave monsters have all been annihilated.

Since the monsters were weak, no one had an injury.

The students also retained half of their mana.

"Oy, what the heck's that!?"

A bit after the subjugation ended.

A student in front of me pointed at the monster outbreak site and shouted out.

A boar monster showed up at the site where the monsters first appeared.

"Mo...Monster?"

"I-it's big!"

The first wave monsters were weak even though the aggregate amount of mana didn't change.

Which means, the second wave monsters have become even stronger,

This part is influenced by the state of mana in the area at the time, so it's hard to tell what will happens then.

I could predict that far if I was close to the Dragon Vein before the battle begun, but I needed to be around the summoning site this time.

Thus, what will happen from here on is an unknown territory.

One thing for sure, the second wave monsters are an order magnitude different than the first wave ones.

Five of them have showed up, yet they're probably stronger than the entirety of the first wave monsters.

"Calm down! The situation hasn't changed! The monsters only only showed

up a bit later! Pull yourself together and attack them!"

Meirad amplified his voice with magic and gave an order to the group.

The students calmly shot magic at the monsters in accordance to his order, however--

"Wha... They're unhurt!"

"This can't be real...."

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"What the hell's up with those monsters!"

The students' magic couldn't even make a scratch on the newly appeared monsters.

And it only took at most two shot to defeat a monster of the first wave.

--Not only that.

"T-they're increasing!"

Of course, the second wave monsters don't end with only five.

One after another, monsters gush out of the ground.

"W-we're retreating! Let's move back to the capital!"

Seeing that, Meirad immediately gave the order to retreat.

Looks like his training as a leader bore fruits.

A leader who can't make a decision quickly in this kind of situation will lead to the annihilation of their unit.

He seemingly lost a bit of his composure as his amplification magic got a bit unstable, but since it was still loud enough to reach the whole group, I guess I'll give him a pass.

"U-Understood!"

"Ruuuuuuuun!"

The students who had been looking like they wanted to run even before the order ran away the moment Meirad spoke.

They ran at full speed toward the capital.

"Ruli and Alma, you two fight from inside the barrier until something happens. Iris, keep these two safe okay."

"Yes!"

I went out of the previously set up barrier.

Most of the summoned monsters haven't taken any action to attack.

However, the monsters who showed up first were enraged by the students' attacks and charged toward them.

Being boars, the monsters aren't slow.

They'll probably catch up at this rate.

The retreat order would have been perfect if he instructed the students to

create obstacles with earth magic... but I shouldn't ask too much as this is his first time acting as a leader in a real combat, let's give them a hand.

I activated Physical Reinforcement, kicked the barrier on my feet and accelerated from zero to top speed.

I ran up to a boar and swung my sword.

The monster's head fell without a sound.

Then the monster itself fell down while not realizing its death.

I jumped up into the air while glancing at that boar monster, kicked the barrier in the air to launch myself into the ground, killed the second and third monsters together, kicked the air again to plunge into the remaining monsters and annihilated the leftover monsters.

--This is how to fight a group for a disqualified crest.

Once you've gained a certain degree of power as a Disqualified Crest, ground doesn't have much meaning.

There is a limit to the strength of ground no matter how hard it is, it's highly likely to deform if you kick it seriously.

Barrier you put yourself on your foot is far more reliable.

The biggest advantage of this battle style is mana consumption.

It's very efficient since I just need to use attack magic on sword at a minimum.

Otherwise, I wouldn't have gone on with the idea of fighting against the second wave with just us.

Because the number of monsters we will have to fight from now on isn't anything to scoff at.

Chapter 121: Strongest Sage, Finds Something Unusual

"There sure is a lot of them...."

I circled around the monster outbreak site and hunted any monster that went out of it.

I can't let even one of the second wave monsters outside.

Even that would end in a huge disaster with the current fighting prowess of the academy and the capital.

I guess the silver lining here is that there is no flying-type monster among them.

Even if I could leap around all over the places by kicking barriers, going up to the sky would take too much time.

Dealing with these numbers with just us four is already a huge burden, adding flying ones would be annoying.

I glance at Ruli and the others while thinking that.

Just like the usual, Ruli and Alma are fighting by having Alma shoot the arrows Ruli made.

I didn't tell her which magic circle to use, but she's using the most suitable circle among the ones I taught her for this situation.

"Ruli, the arrow!"

"Yes!"

Alma shot the arrow she got from Ruli, it homed in and hit a monster's leg as if it got sucked in.

A good aim that makes good use of her prowess well.

The skull of a monster is sturdy, it's difficult to shoot it in the head and expect the arrow to kill it outright.

However, by injuring the legs to rob the monster off its mobility, her next attack could end it.

There's a less chance of wounded monster attacking them too, it's a wise decision.

"Sooi!"

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Iris defeated monsters that came close to Ruli and Alma with her spear, and shifted to stone throwing when the monsters stopped their march.

I say stone throwing, but she's not throwing stones an average human could lift.

Cause the stones Iris throws aren't pebbles, but human head-sized rocks.

She's throwing those things with such force that the ground she stands on gets gouged, thus it's not a pretty sight on the monster side.

One after another got defeated with their heads smashed or blown off.

Since her throwing pace isn't that fast, the number of monsters she defeated isn't that much different than Alma's but it's really a show of strength.

I guess it's more like a catapult used to besiege a castle than a human throwing stone.

Well, even these monsters are nothing were Iris reverted to her original form.

By the way, this time Iris isn't going to fight in her original form.

After examining her, we found out that transforming back and forth between human and dragon puts an unexpected amount of burden on her magic circuit, so she has to refrain from transforming expect in an emergency.

While we were fighting like that, I sensed something odd from the monster outbreak site.

Monsters are still gushing forth like always.

However, the monster that showed up is the one that's different.

"Ooh. An unusual one show up too."

Void Eater.

It's a monster I rarely ever saw even before I reincarnated into Mathias.

However, I know its characteristic.

It's a type that absorbs monsters around it and takes their power for itself.

There are other monsters with similar power, but this one is special in that it has no discretion in its target.

If even one of this monster shows up, all other monsters in the surrounding will become its power.

It's just that wonderful of a monster.

"Ma-Mathi-kun! That thing is absorbing other monsters and getting bigger! We've got to hurry and stop it..."

Ruli seems to have noticed it absorbing other monsters.

She pointed and shouted at the Void Eater the moment she saw me.

However... I won't give an affirmative.

"No no, we shouldn't stop it. This is our chance instead."

Chapter 122: Strongest Sage, Helps the Evolution

"Chance... Is it?"

"Yeah. The biggest annoyance in this fight is fighting the enemy while not letting any get away."

Monsters are still gushing out, though not as vigorous as before.

Continuing to confine them here while our mana keeps decreasing is quite tiresome.

In such a situation, one monster is gathering them all up together while becoming stronger, stopping that monster is absolutely out of question.

"Umm... It feels like it's trying to suck me in too though..."

Iris said that while looking at the monster that's absorbing other monsters.

Iris's hair is fluttering toward the Void Eater.

"...Does it feel like you'll get absorbed?"

"Hnn. Nope, it doesn't feel like that at all. I can sense that it's doing its hardest trying to suck me in though...."

"Figures. That thing isn't strong enough to absorb Iris after all."

Even if she's transformed into human, Iris is still a dragon.

She's different from lesser dragons that sometimes appear in a dungeon, not many monsters have the capability to absorb her, and if one of those monsters were to appear here, all monsters around the capital would have long been gone.

And this country would probably perish by tomorrow.

"Oh looks like the other guy is mostly done while we were talking. We should make our move too."

I took a magic stone out of Storage magic.

"Magic stone... Would you like to augment something?"

Ruli asked me when she saw that.

Correct.

"Yeah. But before you do the augmenting, careful not to let it get taken away."

I handed over the magic stone and a paper drawn with a magic circle.

"Let it get taken away...?"

Ruli received the magic stone while looking confused--then she shouts out loud in surprises.

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"It's getting pulled by something!"

"It's because the thing that that monster pulls toward it is the magic stones monsters carry inside."

By the way, I don't know where the magic stone of a dragon that has transformed into a human is located.

Judging from the mana aura, I think the magic stone has lost its stone form and been dispersed throughout her whole body.

The augment completed while we were talking.

"It's finished but... What should I do with this?"

"Throw it."

"Throw... You mean to that?"

"Yeah. You can just throw anywhere."

Hearing that, Ruli holds out the magic stone and throws it to the front.

"Eiii!"

And then the magic stone flew straight to the Void Eater... and got absorbed just like that.

"It went and got absorbed... Should I make another?"

"No, it's good. If you leave an absorption type monster alone, it will evolve irregularly into an incomprehensible creature. I made that magic stone to fixate the direction of its evolution and make it so it can evolve stably."

I observe the monster after saying that.

Looks like it's evolving well.

Good good. Eat a lot and grow big.

"You don't get anything good if you beat that kind of monster the normal way. But you can obtain some good stuff if you stabilize it like that. ...That's better if we're going to beat it anyway right?"

Also, fighting it will be fun.

Beating a monster that has evolved into something weird and can't even fight properly is boring.

"Ah, we're doing this under the assumption that it will be defeated aren't we...."

"But of course. ...And on that note, let's add some more."

I took out numerous low quality magic stones that had no use and threw it all to the Void Eater.

The Void Eater took every piece of the magic stones and went on to evolve.

And two minutes after it showed up.

The Void Eater stopped its absorption, and began to solidify into a form.

Thanks to our magic stone help, it's evolved quite well done.

This looks quite promising.

Chapter 123: Strongest Sage, Earns Aggro

"W-what... is that?"

"D...Don't you think it's too big?"

Ruli and Alma sounded bewildered when they saw the completed Void Eater which had absorbed other monsters (and the magic stones I feed.)

"Since it's made of many things, it has no an exact model... but if I have to say it, guess it's similar to a tiger."

I observed the completed monster while saying that.

That monster has huge claws and fangs, shaped like a tiger.

However, its size can't even compare to your average monster.

It might be even bigger than Iris's real form.

It probably takes this form since there were a lot of four-legged type monsters it absorbed.

The magic stones I feed it also had a lot of said type.

...Yup.

"See? It's turned out nice right?"

I nodded satisfyingly as I saw the tiger-shaped Void Eater.

By the way, the monster itself doesn't look like it's going to attack us, probably because it's just finished its transformation.

I've put some concealment magic on us, there's no worries of getting found.

"Nice you say... Which part of it?"

"Right... for examples, its claws or fangs. They aren't inclined to any particular trait due to being a mix of many things, so they're easy to handle."

Its trait is a bit different than metal sword so it probably won't replace the sword we made the other day, but it has its own advantage.

It should prove quite effective depending on how you use it and the type of monster you fight.

"Talking about materials already even though we haven't beaten it!?"

"No no, that's not all. Like say, the mana flow in its arms, it's very stable. That is one fine monster. Should fetch a lot of experience points."

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"Getting happy that it's stronger.... Defeating it is completely a premeditated matter already..."

Alma sounded like she couldn't believe it.

True, talking about materials and exp before defeating it might be a bit too hasty.

...That means.

"Alright. I'll go and beat it."

I start to run forward after saying that.

"W-what about us, what should we do!"

"Alma and Ruli, you two maintain some distance away and shoot your arrows like usual! Iris, get close to it and attack its legs!"

While saying that, I kicked the barrier on my feet and gained altitude.

Randomly attacking an enemy of this size won't deal any decent damage.

And it's going to take time for Iris to get to its leg.

Thus, I've taken the quick and easy method.

I go above the Void Eater from its back.

And then I go straight to its face and drive my sword put with a huge quantity of reinforcement magic into its eye.

"GYAAAAAAAAAA!"

Void Eater who had one if its eyes crushed howled in anguish.

The voice of pain quickly changed into that of anger, it directed its eyes full of killing intent at me.

--Just as planned.

Void Eater is originally an amorphous monster.

It can't change its basis once it's taken a shape, however, regenerating an eye is a simple matter for it.

However, regeneration saps a Void Eater of its strength once it's taken a form.

The bigger the regenerated part, the greater.

Thus, I aim at big parts that are easy to cut off.

--Like the arm.

"GAAAAAAAAAAA!"

The Void Eater swings its arm at me who's standing in mid-air.

Its speed belies its huge size.

I think the fastest part of its arm, the tip, even reaches the speed of sound.

--The Void Eater is going to fully witness just how powerful its attacks are from here on.

Chapter 124: Strongest Sage, Counters

"This should do for now."

I thrust my sword at the swinging arm of Void Eater, smash a magic stone and augment it with【Special Mana Enchant】.

And then a relatively sturdy barrier unfolds near the back of the sword and I augment the sword with another enchant.

--Right afterward, Void Eater's arm plunges into the sword.

The barrier was destroyed instantly along with a loud roar, the Void Eater's arm passed through the space where the barrier was--and flew in the air.

"...Ga?"

Void Eater looks at its own arm while looking like it can't catch up what's going on.

There is no arm from elbow down.

"Maybe I should have strengthened it a bit more."

I checked the sword out while saying that.

No chips on the sword nor it is off center.

Looks like it's rigid enough.

"I-its arm, in one blow.... What happened just now!?"

While standing in mid-air, I could hear Alma's voice from far away.

"I fortified my sword with barrier for an instant. Countering gets easier the stronger the attack."

....That said, though it looks simple at a glance, this method is quite annoying with many adjustments necessary.

It's pointless if the barrier is too weak, but too strong and the sword will be damaged.

This technique isn't really usable unless the enemy is huge and sturdy.

"So you can use counter against monsters..."

"It's actually easier than against humans since their move set is simple. You need to pay attention since they excel in power though."

If my opponent is a human, I have to see through their way of fighting first before predicting the direction of their sword swing.

But in case of monsters, I get it somehow by reading their mana and muscles movement.

"No no, you can't normally deal with the strength of a monster just by paying attention okay!?"

"Besides, look at the size of the opponent...."

Ruli said that while looking up at the Void Eater who lost one of its arms.

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"Do you think so? If they only have strength then..."

"Yeah. There's countless way to deal with enemies that only excel in strength."

A truly strong opponent, one with a certain degree of intellect at least regardless if it's a monster, would be more trickier to fight.

Incidentally, those kind of enemies are way more fun to fight.

No matter how much strength it has, fighting something that has no intelligence will always end up being simple.

"These people are beyond help already. Their standard is broken..."

"Iris-san is a dragon rather than human though...."

While having that conversation, I cut the regenerated arm that came swinging at me again with my sword.

Guess it's more a front leg than an arm though.

Yup. It's really simple.

Even though I can safely use【Special Mana Enchant】up to five times in this open place, there's really no need to use it to the limit.

In fact, the Void Eater already looks exhausted from just losing two huge parts.

--And then.

"Iris, is it ready now?"

I glanced at Iris.

It's a confirmation rather than a question.

Judging from the mana reaction, I already know that Void Eater's back leg that Iris attacked earlier is at its limit.

Even though Iris's spear can't cut off a limb in one hit like with the sword counter, it still has quite the destructive power after all.

"Yes! I can make it fall anytime now! I think!"

"Alright, let's go at it right when this thing makes it move!"

"I understand!"

The Void Eater made its move right when our discussion ended.

"Here it comes, now!"

Chapter 125: Strongest Sage, Chain Strikes

"Yes!"

Iris pierced the Void Eater's leg right as I cut its arm with counter.

With a thunderous roar that didn't sound like a spear hitting flesh, the Void Eater's leg was destroyed and the monster fell on the ground.

"Let's finish it off!"

""""YES!""""

While the other three are launching their attacks on the Void Eater, I get close to its head and put magic on my sword.

【Steel Slash】【Sharpen】【Mana Strike】--

After putting around 10 magic on the sword, I swing it toward the Void Eater's neck.

With a splash sound, the Void Eater's neck was shallowly cut.

Of course I'm not done yet.

I invoke barrier magic as the sword passes through Void Eater's neck. I also activate Physical Reinforcement and Acceleration magic together, and push the sword while driving it back forcefully.

As a result, my sword bounced up at a speed higher than the downward swing and cut off the Void Eater's neck.

"GAAAAAAAAA!"

The Void Eater tried to counterattack while shouting agonizingly, but I evaded it by slightly swaying my upper half without moving an inch from where I stand.

I could easily avoid its limbs when it was still in top form.

There is no way a counterattack it launched in desperation while it was down could hit me.

And then my sword leaped again with magic and created a deep wound on the Void Eater's neck while rising in speed.

One of the true values of Disqualified Crest is this chain strikes.

Along with single powerful blow using【Special Mana Enchant】, but in this chain strikes case, I can keep doing it until either my mana ran out or the enemy died off.

I rapidly decrease the Void Eater's health while evading its attacks and adjusting the trajectory of my attacks and what magic to put on them.

Iris's spear, Ruli's and Alma's arrows also continue to pierce the enemy's weak points.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

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Finally, the Void Eater howled loudly--and stopped moving.

The battle has ended.

"...Did we... win?"

"Yeah. ...Look, they're some good material aren't they?"

I picked up the Void Eater's arm that fell nearby, plucked the claw and showed it to Ruli.

"I-It feels like there's an amazing power emanating from it somehow...."

"That's cause this contains lots of mana. Besides, its head was cleanly lopped off, so the materials are in prime state."

The monster could regenerate its arm by using mana so defeating it would have been easier by repeatedly cutting the arms off, but that would result in inferior materials.

Yet, cutting the arms off only for several times wouldn't degrade it, so refraining from doing so would have been wasteful too.

You need to regulate the frequency of cutting a Void Eater well to get the best of it.

By the way, the fur isn't worth that much, but I'm still taking it with me nonetheless.

Might be useful for something if we sell it at the guild.

"Leaving that aside, the fact that this monster showed up likely means that

the situation with the Dragon Vein might have turned interesti--dangerous. We should go take a look at the great dungeon while also taking the chance to train there."

I pointed at the Void Eater's remain.

Making this particular monster emerge doesn't need a lot of mana in itself, however, it's not a monster that would normally appear.

"Great dungeon...?"

"Yeah. Let's see, where's the map... It's around here."

I took a map out of Storage magic and pointed at a dot there.

I made the map myself using my knowledge of olden terrains, so there's no city names or anything like that written, but it should be geographically correct.

Ruli peeks at the map and replies, sounding like she gets it.

"Oh I see, you're talking about Melkia Dungeon. I'm sure we're free to come and go to that dungeon city!"

"...Wha?"

However, some unfamiliar words were mixed in it.

...Dungeon City?

"Is there anything wrong? ....Alma, this place is Melkia isn't it?"

"Un, I think it is...."

A city on top of... The Great Dungeon Babiel?

By the current civilization of this age?

"Hey, that city must possess quite the war force right?"

"Un. I think the capital's order of knights is still the strongest, but there's a lot of adventurers in dungeon city.... So the dungeon city might be a bit stronger!"

A bit stronger than the royal capital... Which means practically nonexistent.

They made a city with that kind of defense on that dungeon huh.

Yup. I'm surprised that this country managed to avoid getting destroyed so far.

Almost miraculous even.

Chapter 126: Strongest Sage, Dismantles Parts

"...Yup. We will definitely go to that dungeon."

The dungeon located there (looks like it's called Melkia now) was a relatively popular largish dungeon back in the past.

Its floors only went to three digit number but, apparently monsters often came out of the dungeon in that era and people formed a party to subjugate them.

If it was severe enough to make people form a subjugation party in that era, a city whose defensive force only amounts to equaling the royal capital's one wouldn't have last even half a day.

I'll see how it is there and report to the king if it seems dangerous.

Though our goal is ultimately to look at the Dragon's Vein and train in the dungeon.

We finished dismantling the monster while we were conversing about that.

"Now then, let's go and sell these materials for now."

After saying that, I gathered the randomly dismantled parts of the Void Eater that couldn't get inside Storage magic.

The amount is just about right for the four of us to carry.

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We had to select them since bringing them all wasn't possible, but we secured all of the relatively usable parts like fur and such with us.

"Huh? Are we going to sell them, not using them?"

Alma asked like she found it unexpected when I told them the plan.

However, of course we'll be making use of the parts we can use.

"We're keeping the best parts for us of course. But everything aside from those have no real usage. Putting them inside Storage magic also would only burden my mana, thus selling them is our best course of action here."

"But the guild can't possibly purchase these stuff...."

Ruli said that.

Ruli's doubt is reasonable.

However, I have acquired a wonderful new info regarding selling stuff on the guild beforehand.

"No worries about that. The principal told me that the guild branch near the Second Academy has greatly enhanced their purchasing capability recently. Apparently, they've got the best equipment amongst the guilds in this country."

In truth, this was because of the Second Academy.

Second Academy students who had grasped the way to properly fight brought with them a great many of materials from dungeon and such that the guild almost couldn't catch up with the purchasing.

Thanks to that I can sell stuff there worry-free now.

"So they upgraded while we were absent! There's no problem then!"

"Yeah. We can sell without worry. ...Now then, Ruli, Alma and Iris, please bring the materials that look sell-able with you."

""YES!""

"Got it!"

I've put all the parts that can be used for ourselves inside Storage magic, so everything here is for sell.

We carried them on our back and went back to the city.

The scenery of Second Academy students carrying loads of materials seemed to have become a daily occurrence in the city, we safely got the guild without anyone looking at us weirdly.

"Oh, it's really bigger now!"

The purchasing section of the guild has bigger counters now.

And there's an especially prominent one called『Counter for Purchasing Special Parts』among them.

The table is big and sturdy so you can put large materials on it, and the guild member waiting there looks like a veteran too.

That should be the counter for selling high-class materials the principal told me.

Since the Special Part Purchasing Counter is fortunately open, we go straight to it with the materials on our back.

"I'd like to sell these."

Chapter 127: Strongest Sage, Refused Transaction

"Wha...Whatever could these be?"

The guild employee at the purchasing counter sounded perplexed when he saw the materials we brought.

The materials we put on the counter are from second wave monsters and the lesser parts of Void Eater.

Bringing out the good ones right from the start would make the later assessment go south.

Since we're showing the mediocre ones instead of everything, it should be fine.

However, the assessment wasn't done immediately.

"I've never seen these materials before... Which floor's monsters did you get them from?"

Looks like he mistakenly thought that we got them from the dungeon.

Well, I guess it can't be helped since most of the materials circulating in this

guild probably come from the dungeon.

"These aren't from the dungeon. They're from monsters that showed up in the plain."

The Second Academy student went back to the capital once the monster outbreak was over.

Thus, the guild should have been contacted already... But apparently, this branch hasn't.

Well, if you exclude the Second Academy students, this guild's battle force leaves a lot to be desired, so it's probably postponed.

It's gonna be the main branch's responsibility anyway even if the guild needs to step in.

"Fumu... I'm not sure how to assess them since I've never seen these materials, but... Right then, let's use these."

The guild employee brought two big magic tools from inside as he said that.

I'm not familiar with these magic tools... But judging from their mana ambiance, one is probably for measuring mana quantity and the other is for

measuring hardness.

They don't seem to be of high performance.

One of the Void Eater's bones is getting measured first.

The guild employee puts the bone on the magic tool and operate it.

And then--.

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"...Wha?"

He sounded perplexed again.

Afterward he puts the bone on the hardness measuring tool, and operate it... and tells us while sounding sorry.

"Sorry. Our magic tools seem to have broken down. I'll get the replacement, if you'd please wait a moment."

The employee went inside once again and came out bringing a magic tool with him.

"This is the newest magic tool that has just been adjusted today. We don't have to worry about breakdown with this."

The guild employee, brimming with confidence, puts the bone on the magic tool.

And then he peeked on the result with a smile... And frowned.

"Huh? The value isn't any different from before...."

"Then that means the magic tool is correct?"

Alma gave an exceedingly obvious answer to the guild employee.

However, the guild employee denied that.

"No, that can't be right. If this value is true then that means this bone is almost as hard as adamantite."

Adamantite... Ah. That's about right.

Since the bone is hard and brittle, adamantite is actually higher in term of strength, but the hardness should be about the same.

"Not only that. The measured mana values of these materials... are even higher than the monsters spawning on floor 20!"

Yup. 'Course it's high.

Or rather, please don't liken this stuff with those.

"...I've got no choice but to check them manually... These materials might get some scratches but it should not affect their functionality. Is that alright with you?"

"I don't mind."

With my consent, the guild employee took out a rod with a needle attached.

And then the employee pricked the bone with the tip of the needle--and broke it along with a sharp sound.

The bone itself doesn't have a scratch on it.

"...Wha?"

The employee looks at the broken needle, dumbfounded.

And then he sighs once and declares.

"Sorry. This guild cannot purchase these materials. We don't have the slightest idea of their value, in the first place, we don't even know how to process them."

...I see.

In other words, they'll buy them if they can process them huh.

Chapter 128: Strongest Sage, Suggests Price

"I know a place that can process them."

"...Are you talking about Mathias-san of the Second Academy?"

"No, not him."

That Mathias is right over here though...

Well, it's not like I can't do it, but I have no reason to make equipment for sell.

There are more fitting people for this level of materials.

"Then you mean, his apprentice... Ruli-san?"

That Ruli is right in front of you too.

I mean. They thought of her as my apprentice huh.

Well, considering what we're doing, I guess it's not exactly wrong.

"No need to be particular to any one person, almost everyone in the Second Academy can do it. ...Which means, I'll be selling these to the second academy then."

"...Did Second Academy become the best workshop in the world while I wasn't looking?"

"No no, Second Academy is an educational institution you know."

"...It's way different than the educational institutions I know though..."

I stood, took our luggage from the counter and left the guild.

In the end, we couldn't sell the materials.

Even if the guild has a big counter, the one who's in charge of the purchasing is still a guild employee.

They can't really purchase stuff they can't process or be price-assessed.

"We couldn't sell the materials..."

"Should we ask the academy to do the processing before selling them?"

"That's one option.... But it sounds like it'll be annoying."

I'd have to wait for them if I entrusted the processing to them.

I want to get out of the school and go to the dungeon as soon as possible.

...Therefore, I'm gonna sell these to the second academy for a nice sum.

"Oh, Mathias. Not that I expected anything else... So you were safe."

The principal was present when I went into the principal office.

However, he looks busy somehow.

Wonder if I should leave it for later.

"Yes. I'm here to sell some materials... Are you busy now?"

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No point in reading too much into it myself, so I asked just in case.

If it's no good then I guess I should give up selling them today and hold them off as a reserve.

"I was until a bit ago. But that ended just now... Ayle, get in touch with the others. Tell 'em that the crisis is over."

"Yes."

The principal threw the documents in his arms onto his desk and issued an instruction to someone nearby.

The documents pertain a plan to hold off the monsters and evacuate the capital's citizen.... and there's『Mathias Rescue Operation』with a huge X mark on it.

Next to the X mark, there's『We can't possibly oppose enemy whom Mathias couldn't even run away from. Give up trying to intercept them and just run.』

It looks like the principal was busy preparing in case we failed the second wave subjugation.

"So... Are those the materials you're trying to sell? I can tell that they're tremendous just by looking, but I'm sure the guild should be the one in charge of dealing with materials."

The principal pointed at the materials we brought.

"The guild couldn't purchase them. They don't know how to process them. But since the students here should be capable to do that, I thought of selling these to the academy."

Not just processing them, but buying them too.

We can leave the materials here and go to the dungeon with this.

"...I see... Handling powerful materials are indeed difficult, but thanks to Mathias-style educations, our Glory Crest students have progressed remarkably technique-wise... However, this academy doesn't have the budget to purchase all those tremendous materials you know?"

"You can pay the money later when they've been sold. The price is... how about 30% of the sales."

The price rate of raw materials for these kind of special materials is 30% of the market price.

At least that's how it was in my past life, not sure how it is now.

"Th...30 percent!? Isn't that just too low no matter how you look at it!?"

...Huh? 30% is too low?

Chapter 129: Strongest Sage, Averts Dissolution

"Isn't 30% normal for this level of materials?"

It's true that the price is higher if the materials are powerful and easy to process.

However, these materials aren't extremely strong (if the guild employee is to be believed) and only the students here can process them.

If the materials are hard to process, it naturally gets less shares of the final product's price.

"These materials have never been circulated in the market before so they have no market price... Even so, 30% is way too off. I can understand that much even though I'm not a merchant."

"Then how much would you like?"

"Right... how about 80%. Considering what happened before, it's probably still too low, but I'm not really detailed in market price you see. I think it can go higher if you don't mind waiting for them to be assessed..."

80%!

That's quite the leap though... Since it comes from the principal who's had much experiences in this world, I guess that's just how much it is in the market.

Well, I have no problem getting more since I originally intended to sell them at 30% anyway.

Can't lug these baggage around everywhere after all.

"No, I'm fine with 80%. In exchange, please take them off my hand as quickly as possible."

"Got it. We'll carry them to the school's warehouse immediately. Do they need special handling we need to keep in mind?"

"You can keep them like normal monster materials."

It's probably easier than normal monster ones since they're sturdy though.

In the first place, the current students can't process materials that need special handling to keep.

"Is that so... I feel like we just struck gold somehow... Should we deliver the proceeds to you right away after they've been sold?"

"I think that will be difficult. I'm going to the dungeon city soon."

The interesting situation.... I mean the crisis in the capital is over anyway, and I've got the permission to quit school.

I have no more reason to remain in the capital.

Even without my business with the Dragon Vein, just knowing the fact that a city has been built on top of that dungeon compels me to go there.

It probably won't take long going there if I just ride on Iris or run, but I'm not in a hurry to earn money anyway.

No problem getting it whenever I get back to the capital.

"Dungeon city... I see. So you really are going to leave the capital. ...Got it. I'll deliver the money through the guild. I've already prepared the special scholarship document we talked about. The king has given his permission too."

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The principal took a document on his desk and stamped it.

The document is about my enrollment in the school as a『Special Scholarship Student』and that I'm not obliged to attend class.

"By the way, I have another three of this document here with me... Is there anyone else who want them? Although you might not compare to Mathias... I believe the other three people here have more than adequate ability to be『Special Scholarship Students』. Thus, I will write your name here if you wish so."

The principal took three pieces of document.

The content is the same as mine, but there's no name written.

He's quite well prepared.... Putting Iris aside, I wonder about the other two.

Either way, I shouldn't say anything here.

They should decide such important decision like this themselves.

"Yes!"

The one who spoke first was unexpectedly, Ruli.

"Ruli... Are you sure you want to quit school?"

"Yes! I'm sorry to principa for saying this, but I think I will learn about augment magic better if I'm by Mathias-kun's side than in the school!"

I see....

Come to think of it, Ruli came here for the sake of learning augment magic.

I can understand where she's coming from then.

"I am in agreement. To begin with, most of the stuff taught in this school are Mathias-style magic now."

The principal also agreed with her.

"I'm going too of course!"

"I just entered this school, is it alright if I go too?"

The two also declared their participation.

And consequently, the principal wrote their names on the documents.

"By the way, you're not required to attend, but you're also not prohibited. Come and show your face around here whenever you feel like it."

The principal stamped all the documents as he said that.

In the end, it seems like I'm gonna go to the dungeon city with this party.

Chapter 130: Strongest Sage, Departs

"Alright, is everyone ready?"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"No problem here!"

Several days after we gave the materials.

We completed our preparation and departed for Melkia.

This time we're traveling by foot.

Iris attracts too much attention and her wings haven't recovered yet, so I'd like to preserve her.

And above all, it takes less than a day to Melkia by running anyway.

There's no reason in using a method that shouldn't be seen by other people just for covering that much distance.

...Or so I thought.

"Umm... Shouldn't it take around one week to Melkia?"

"Yes, I think it was around that long too!"

Alma and Ruli said something intriguing.

...One week?

"Iris, was that dungeon that far? I thought we should arrive before it got dark if I we left first thing in the morning."

"I thought we would arrive before today is over too! I think it should be around evening with our pace right now."

Iris has the same opinion as me.

If ours differ from Ruli and Alma, that means... the route we have in mind differs.

Maybe the terrain changed when I wasn't aware.

Iris could survey the ground below by flying in the sky, but her wings were in bad shape until recently and she couldn't have flown.

I should ask them for now.

"...It's not even 100 kilometers from here to Melkia right?"

"I think it's less than 100 kilometers if we go straight to it, but normally--wait, don't tell me Mathi-kun, we're going to Melkia in a straight line?"

"There's a road until halfway through, so I plan to use it until then... and then we'll hit a forest there right."

I'm sure the forest had a name when I saw the map at the guild.

It was... Cikirisbia forest or something.

"Forest... If we're going from here straight to Melkia, we'll have to go through Cikirisbia forest don't we?"

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I got it right it seems.

"That's our route. ...Is there any problem if we go through Cikirisbia forest? Even if there's some wetlands there, we should manage with some magic..."

"Not wetlands, but monsters! It's a terrible forest said to make even veteran adventurers run away crying!"

"Not only they're strong, it's said that there are intelligent monsters there..."

I see.

Cikirisbia Forest is that kinda place huh.

That means... There's only one choice.

"Alright, we should arrive at Melkia City by today's end then."

I veered away from the road we're running on as I said that.

This should be around the area where we should stray off the road if we want

to go there straight.

"Prompt decision really!?"

"A...are we really going to have to cross Cikirisbia forest!?"

"Yeah. ...That said, we don't necessarily have to fight. We'll run away if it seems dangerous... Iris, can you do it?"

"Yes! I have absolutely no problem flying with three people on my back!"

I focus on the passive detection after hearing Iris.

I'm using it to probe around the surrounding mana.

I enjoy good fights, but thoughtlessly charging into an opponent of unknown strength is just reckless.

You'd meet your end quicker than getting stronger.

That's why you fight after confirming your safety.

"I see... Iris-san can fly if worse comes to worst..."

"I mean, feels like we've got nothing to worry about Cikirisbia forest when we have Mathi-kun...."

We went forward to the forest while having such conversations.

Chapter 131: Strongest, Kept at a Distance

"...I don't see a strong monster at all."

It has been some time since we departed for Melkia.

We should be in this Chikirisbia Forest already according to the map, but I don't see any strong monster.

They might be stronger compared to the ones in an average plain, but they're at a level where we don't even need to fight seriously.

"Maybe we're not in that forest yet?"

"But the map says that the forest should be here."

I replied Iris.

We should be traveling on the right direction too.

There's no mistake about it since I've been using magic to check direction through magnetism and stars in the sky while we're moving.

"Uun. They say that you'd reach Chikirisbia Forest after a little while if you go straight.... But I don't see any monster like in the story...."

"The atmosphere does get more authentic as we dive deep into the forest though!"

We're advancing through the forest while talking as such.

I noticed a strange reaction caught in the『Passive Detection』along the way.

No, strange might not be exactly correct.

This is a type I was used to in my past life although I haven't encountered it much after reincarnating.

"...You three, wait here a bit. I'll return real quick."

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I run into the forest after saying that.

While erasing my presence and mana reaction.

Heading toward the reaction earlier by relying on『Passive Detection』.

And there I found--a several meter tall huge ape.

"Ki!?"

When it saw me, the ape monster was going to attack me while looking like it was panicking.

But it's slow.

Before the ape could swing down its claw, I stepped in and cut its neck off.

Afterward.

"....Is this the intelligent monster in question?"

I went back to where Ruli and the others were, put the ape monster on the ground and asked them.

Seeing that, Ruli shouts out with a surprised look.

"That's... That's a Wizm Monkey isn't it!"

"...Wizm Monkey?"

"Yes! It's the strongest one among intelligent monsters that dwell in Chikirisbia Forest! It leads the monsters in the area--don't tell me you defeated it?!"

...I see. So that's what's going on huh.

I thought the monster could talk like Iris when I heard intelligent monster term... Looks like it's a miss.

"Yeah I beat it. And I know why the monsters didn't show themselves up."

"Show themselves up?"

"Yeah. They're.... avoiding us."

Chapter 132: Strongest Sage, Watches Over

"Avoiding us!?"

"Yea. I see with focused Passive Detection that monsters are moving like they're avoiding us. From what I tested earlier, looks like they were detecting our mana."

Afterward, I slightly moved forward and went back again.

I didn't move far at all, but I could sense the movement of monsters.

Not all of the monsters are like that though, sometimes the weaker ones showed themselves up before us.

"Well, it's true that monsters with intellect wouldn't voluntarily go and challenge Mathias...."

"Now that you mention it, keeping a distance itself is an act an intelligent monster would take... "

"If I have to say, I think it's Iris that they're detecting. Iris's mana reaction is the bigger one here right?"

The difference in mana quantity between a dragon and a human child is obvious.

On top of that, I normally control my mana so it won't leak out too much, thus it's only around the level of Alma and Ruli.

A monster with great detection ability might be able to see through the difference in mana quality, but I don't see any monster like that.

"...Our prey escape because my mana leaks out... Should I better suppress my mana too?"

"...Can you do it?"

Considering her track record so far, Iris's mana control is catastrophically bad.

A fireball she intended to go straight forward went right above instead.

And since the output is high, it's unnecessarily dangerous.

"Un. I don't understand, but I'll give it a try! ...Please back away a bit since we don't know what will happen!"

Apparently, she's aware of the danger herself.

Well, with how sturdy Iris is, her mana running slightly out of control probably won't hurt her.

Expecting that, I watch over Iris with Ruli and Alma from a place a bit farther away.

And then....

"Here I go!"

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With the yell, Iris's mana rapidly contracted--and right afterward, pokon! Iris flew up vertically along with that sound.

While leaving a small crater on the ground.

....Looks like the mana that was forcefully contracted exploded and launched Iris up.

"Uun. ...I failed. It felt like I managed to suppress it at first...."

Iris who landed without a scratch looked down on the crater while saying that dejectedly.

"Your mana reaction did get smaller for an instant... All the monsters around here scurried away the moment it exploded though."

I concentrated on Passive Detection after saying that.

The number of monsters who were just keeping some distance away from us have reduced to the level of an average plain one.

The remaining monsters are all moving like they're straight running away from us.

"I... I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare them away...."

"Well, everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses. I think you should be able to control your mana to a degree once you get used to that body too. ...And there's no point in beating monsters that would run away just from sensing Iris anyway."

A properly strong monster won't run away just from sensing the current Iris's mana reaction.

Some of them might run from the previous Iris, but the Iris right now isn't emitting as much mana as she did back then.

"I'm glad if that was the case, but...."

"Rather, a monster that's truly strong might come after Iris. And that'd be most welcome."

"I don't feel welcome about that at all..."

Ruli frowned when she heard me.

Well, judging from the mana reaction, there's fewer monsters coming here than expected.

For now, let's continue to press ahead without expecting much.

Chapter 133: Strongest Sage, Stands Still

"...It's kinda, peaceful..."

"Yeah. It's peaceful..."

A little while after we entered Cikirisbia Forest.

Monsters are running from us like always, so our journey has been exceedingly peaceful.

"Come to think of it, I understand that monsters run away from Iris-san, but where do they run off to? If they were to leave the forest and attack a town..."

"Ah, that won't happen."

I point at the direction we just passed.

Monsters who went away to avoid us have come back to the place.

"If you focus on the【Passive Detection】, you should see that those monsters came back to their positions after we had passed through. Monsters have this

turf-like area thing and they seldom leave it."

"Ah, I've heard about that before! If a strong monster appears, you estimate their rough turf and make sure not to enter that area...."

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"That's one way to use it. There's also a tactic to lure out a strong monster by purposely rampaging inside their turf."

The turf of a monster is generally larger the stronger that monster is.

And while they don't really cause harm to other monsters, they will attack any human that rampages inside their turf.

"T-that's, I'd rather not putting that into practice.... By the way, how will you go around doing that?"

"Right.... You do it by defeating monsters or cutting the surrounding trees down and such... oh and it can also be done just by walking around while sprinkling your mana around. We're doing that pattern this time."

"I see... Hm?"

Ruli stopped her words midway.

Looks like she noticed something.

"What do you mean by... 『This time』?"

"Right.... I think you'll understand if you focus【Passive Detection】over there."

I pointed diagonally as I said that.

And from that direction--a huge mana reaction is charging straight at us.

Looks like the lure by way of Iris works as intended.

"H...Hold on, this reaction, isn't it really really bad!?"

"We have to run away..."

"I don't think I can stop this one either you know!?"

The three who saw the coming monster began to panic.

Looks like the monster had come into view while were talking.

Well, it might be also because it's very easy to see the monster considering it's five meter tall.

I stood upright while watching that monster.

And declared the plan.

"No, you three, please don't move from there."

"""...Eh?"""

Chapter 134: Strongest Sage, Falls

"W-what do you mean by don't move!?"

"Exactly what I say. ...Look, it's not hitting, right."

I pointed at the monster as I said that--which passed by in front of us.

The monster that appeared was a boar-like monster.

The boar monster turns around and charges at us again even while looking puzzled as to why its rush missed.

--However, the next rush passed by behind us.

Even though we haven't moved even an inch.

"W...what's going on?"

Of course the monster isn't charging around randomly.

I make it so that happens.

"I'm using magic to induce Iris's mana and making it so the monster sees us in different positions... Well, our opponent should get used to it and get its attack right before long though."

Numerous monsters, mainly ones that can detect their opponent's mana, use their sight only as an assistance.

After all, they would lose their targets in darkness or if there's an obstacle if they rely on sight.

Thus, it's possible to shift their aim by manipulating the location of mana.

...Though well, the effect probably won't be this effective unless there's an extremely obvious mana reaction like Iris here.

"It doesn't feel like my mana is getting lead around though...."

"That's because mana outside of your body is not within the realm of control unless you concentrate on it. It's possible to manipulate them once you get yourself familiar to it... But Iris, your priority right now is controlling your normal mana."

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might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

I observe the monster while saying that.

Should be about time for it to notice that targeting the obvious mana will always result in a miss.

It will come attacking us for real anytime now.

We could defeat it like we usually do.... But since we're in a forest and all, let's fight in a way that can only be done inside a forest.

"It's coming to us soon! Spread out and attack!"

""YES!""

I attack the monster with my sword while watching over Alma shooting the monster with the arrows Ruli made and Iris attacking its legs.

The important thing here is to read the monster's target, and manipulate it in a way that will net you the advantage.

Doing a charge requires one to gain some distance.

Thus, you can seal the greatest weapon of a boar, its charge, if you keep its attention at someone who fights it in close quarter.

As the combat was unfolding... The moment the monster shifted its target to Iris, I left a delayed bomb magic on its body and then put some distance away from it.

A few second later, the delayed bomb magic activated and the monster turned its attention to me.

There is nothing in the path between me and the monster. There's enough distance to accelerate.

The monster fully makes use of its rushing power that had been blocked up until now, and charges straight at me.

A moment later--the ground below my feet collapsed.

Swallowing both the charging monster and me.

Chapter 135: Strongest Sage, Perplexed

""Mathi-kun!""

Ruli and the others were panicking when they saw me falling down.

Thus I reply to them.

"I'm fine!"

"Eh, that's--"

Ruli's voice was drowned out by the roaring sound of the collapsing ground.

I kick the side of the created hole and leap. ...Below.

Since the monster was simply falling, I reached the bottom of the hole faster with my acceleration.

Merely a second difference, but it was enough.

I moved to my destination during that time.

Arriving at a cavity that was only big enough for one person.

I went inside and held my sword upward.

Abdomen is one of the weakest point of a creature.

That doesn't change with monsters.

It's hard to directly attack the abdomen of a four-legged monster above ground--but I can do it as much as I want from here.

The monster's defenseless abdomen falls to where I am.

There I stabbed my sword strengthened with physical reinforcement.

"GAAAAAA"

The monster attempts to crush me with its foot while screaming in agony and rage.

However, the monster's attack never reaches me. I didn't even need to evade.

This hole is big enough to make the monster fall, but too small to have it freely move around.

Thus, the monster couldn't do anything but receive my attack and died in less than one minute.

"Alright, subjugation complete."

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"Mathi-kun!"

Ruli rushed to me when she saw me coming out of the hole.

It appears that they also joined the fight judging from the arrows stuck on the monster's back.

"Are you alright!? I was surprised when the ground suddenly caved in...."

"That was part of the plan. I was the one who made a hole on the ground

after all."

"...Eh? But didn't the hole opened when the monster ran on it...."

Ruli looked dumbfounded to hear my reply.

Looks like she didn't notice.

"Besides the little there was on the surface, the ground was hollowed out. So it would collapse right when the monster rushed on it."

"...A pitfall?"

"Yea. It's a practical version of the magic I usually use to restore the schoolyard. Disqualified Crest can only open a hole this big, but other crests can make bigger ones and even install magic tools inside."

"But how'd you make such a big hole that fast...."

"You just have to get used to it. Since the forest soil is soft, you can easily do it if you just know the trick. Ruli too, you can make a hole this big if you practice. ...Well, it's hardly usable against monsters that fly in the sky though."

By the way, putting magic tools inside a hole to make an instant death trap is an effective tactic for a solo Glory Crest.

I used it often too in my younger days in my past life.

I didn't use that tactic and plunged myself into hole to do the attacking this time though.

"I...I'll make sure to practice it next time!"

"Yeah. By the way, I recommend explosion-type magic for the installed magic. By locking the explosion inside that hole, you can concentrate the force on the monster and give way more damage than using it on level ground."

I dismantled the monster while talking about that and put the usable-looking parts into the storage magic.

I'm reluctant to have my maximum mana reduced so I didn't store the sell-able parts.

...We finally arrived at the dungeon city after that battle.

The time was roughly evening.

And this is the first thing I uttered when we arrived.

"...W-what's with this city...."

Chapter 136: Strongest Sage, Obtains Info

The dungeon city was terrible in various ways.

We're standing on the entrance of the city, so I have only seen a portion of it, but... I can already see what's wrong about it.

Or rather, it's choke full of things worth retorting.

"Um... I wonder what is the pillar over there? I can feel weird mana flowing in it...."

Looks like Ruli noticed one of the things I found weird.

Ruli pointed at a magic lamp... in other words, it's a pillar that enlightens the vicinity through magic... The problem is the source of its mana.

You usually use magic stones as the mana source of this kind of magic tools.

And since this place is a dungeon city, it should be easy to procure magic stones.

And yet... The magic lamps here are directly connected to the dungeon's mana.

And it's done quite sloppily.

True that you won't need magic stones by doing this, but it's an extremely reckless act.

Left alone, they'll probably explode in about three years time.

"Oy, you two over there. You'd better not get closer to that thing! That one sometime explodes on its own! It's killed 10 people this year alone!"

A food store's storekeeper nearby warned us when Ruli and I were observing the magic lamp.

It really does explode....

And there's already dead victims even.

"Why would they install such a dangerous thing?"

I tried asking the storekeeper since I really can't fathom the reason why anyone would put this thing.

And then the storekeeper beckoned me while covering his mouth with his hand.

Looks like he can't say it loudly.

I approached the storekeeper and then he started talking with a voice that was barely audible.

"...It's the order of this city's ruler. He went and told us to use the thing since he didn't want to decrease magic stone exports. We had been using magic stones until then. There's also stuff like heavy taxes... I miss his predecessor already."

...I see. It's used as a substitute by the new ruler's order huh.

If this ruler guy is someone like Biffgel, then I can see how this situation comes to.

Or rather, there's no other explanation to it.

"Also, did you notice that there's not a lot of people in this city today?"

"...Now that you mention it. Is this related to the ruler too?"

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This area should be the center of the dungeon city, which should be a huge city.

Judging from the land mass on the map, the states of the surrounding stores and the dense buildings, there's no mistake about it.

Yet, there's too few people here.

The sparse figures of people are obviously unbalanced with the number of stores.

Adventurers who should naturally be here in a dungeon city are mostly absent too.

"You got that right. Apparently they found a strong monster in dungeon floor 10, so most adventurers got mobilized to defeat that monster. And this is the result."

Most huh, just how many adventurers are mobilized.

It's true that more people is better if you want to beat a strong monster... but

only if all members have reached a certain level of magic combat competency.

Randomly grouping small fries together will only turn them into a drag.

And I don't believe that the adventurers of this dungeon city have reached that level.

I mean, the weapons they're selling in the nearby shops are all awful.

"Both strong and weak ones?"

"Yeah. Every adventurer in this city was made to roll a dice, anyone who rolled any other number than six had to participate. Volunteering was formally optional, but they pretty much are coerced to. The people who refused to participate last time were driven away from the city.... I wonder how many will die this time."

They decide by rolling a dice, not by the adventurer's strength huh. That's just way too much...

Perhaps the ruler of this dungeon city is even more inept than Biffgel.

"...I see. Thank you for the information. Let me purchase some of these."

I randomly bought several spices the store was selling.

I could buy food, but due to the matter with Storage magic, I wanted something light.

"Come again!"

However, if this ruler guy is this incompetent, we might get rolled up in some trouble here.

Demons also might something to do with it, but I don't feel any presence that points to that.

Well, let's just how things are while exploring the dungeon.

Chapter 137: Strongest Sage, Gets Called

"...The public order, doesn't seem so good...."

"Yeah. It's not that bad, but we can't let our guard down."

This public order must be one of the result of the adventurers being forced to enter the dungeon.

After all, public order is something that worsen just by having fewer people around.

And also, that ruler guy is very likely responsible for this too.

"True, it feels like the mood was brighter in the royal capital!"

We head to the guild while talking.

It seems like you need a permit from the guild in order to enter the dungeon.

That's what was written on a poster I saw nearby.

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"I-It's big..."

"Guess being a dungeon city isn't just for show..."

A few minutes later.

We arrived at a guild that was bigger than any guild in the royal capital.

However, there's not a lot of people relative to its size.

The adventurers who usually hang around here have probably been sent to the dungeon by the ruler's order.

"Excuse me. I'd like to procure a permit to enter the dungeon."

I immediately went to the nearby counter and told them our business.

And then, the guild receptionist frowned.

"Permit... Are you really sure? Will you not regret it?"

And she replied this.

The way she said it is as if the permit to enter the dungeon is a cursed item.

"...Is there any disadvantage in getting the permit? Or is it simply because it's expensive?"

"It is expensive, but... Dungeon permit isn't issued by the guild but by ruler-sama, so its holder is obliged to participate in special subjugation quest appointed by ruler-sama."

...I see.

The true coercion is through to the permit huh.

Avoiding it through rolling the dice is probably just to adjust the number of people.

"Is that subjugation quest dangerous?"

"Whether it's dangerous or not... depends on the quest. You're obliged to participate, however, it's usually only once a month, and the mortality rate has been suppressed to a few percent thanks to the cooperation of high level adventurers. However, even a few percent is quite a lot of people, and when they're still children...."

I see.

The mortality rate is low despite the party being a disorderly crowd huh.

...That said, even if that's the case so far, there's no guarantee that it will stay this safe.

Challenging a dungeon with a mess of a party while preventing anyone dying is a miracle in itself.

But well, we just need to protect ourselves, I guess I don't have to worry too much about that part.

I have the permit to enter dungeons from the king, but it's more convenient in many ways to move around without having someone troublesome watching over you.

"I don't mind. ...How about you three?"

I asked Ruli and the others while submitting my guild card.

I've had a hunch of their answers already, but I still need to ask.

"Me too, please!"

"If Mathi-kun is going, I'm going too!"

"Me too!"

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The three gave their answer promptly and submitted their guild cards.

The receptionist stared in wonder when she saw『Second Academy』written on the cards.

"Hm? This card, Second Academy... That rumored..."

Right after the guild receptionist muttered--the guild door flung open with a loud sound.

A guild staff member shouted out loud in fluster.

"Bad news! A giant monster breached during the special quest and left many victims! There's too many injured people, we can't handle them all!"

...It looks like the miracle didn't last long.

"I'm sorry! We'll talk about the permit later since we have an emergency!"

The guild staff began to move about in a hurry.

A correct response.

Acting fast can mean life in an emergency.

Postponing other less pressing businesses is an inviolable rule of it.

"We have an urgent quest! We're recruiting as many people who can use healing magic as possible!"

Well, and this quest would appear of course.

"I can't use healing magic... How about you Mathi-kun?"

"I can. And Ruli can too."

"M-me!? I have never used healing magic in my life before though...."

Ruli who got her name called had a look of puzzlement.

However, Ruli can use healing magic even without knowing healing magic.

"You can engrave this magic circle right?"

"I-I see.... You mean temporarily engraving it on magic stones right! I got it!"

I drew a magic circle on a paper I took out of Storage magic.

Having access to unfamiliar magic as long as you have magic stones is an advantage of augment magic.

Though well, its speed is inferior to normal magic and you need to build magic

formation.

"Everyone who can use healing magic, please gather here!"

A guild staff member shouted just when we finished consulting.

However, there were only few who responded to her.

...Now then. What will happen now.

Chapter 138: Strongest Sage, Heals

"Healing magicians recruited by the guild, we're here!"

A few minutes after the guild called for assembly.

We arrived at a wide building near the dungeon.

"T-this is terrible..."

"Did they not administer first-aid treatment..."

The inside was awful.

More than 200 wounded adventurers are lying on the floor, most without even having been treated with first-aid.

They have a sick ward in this city but it seems they don't have enough beds at all.

Nor recovery personnels.

Looking around, there are only around six people who can use healing magic here including me and Ruli.

Judging from the scale of this city, it needs at least three times that.

"We're in a dungeon city, even only by name, right? Aren't there more the healing magicians than these?"

"We have no more! Previously, we had people specialized in the field employed by the city, but last month, the ruler said that it was a waste of expenditure and let got most of them...."

"Are you serious...."

The situation was even more terrible than I thought.

I investigate the adventurers' mana while looking around.

I can't heal them all at once in a situation like this.

Thus, I need to set priorities.

If it seems like we don't have enough hands, we might have to give up on some of them to save as many life as possible, but....

"Okay, looks like we can heal them all."

Fortunately, healing magic that doesn't require range is one of the strongest point of Disqualified Crest.

For now, I should be able to at least save their life.

"Eh!? All of them!?"

The guild personnel was surprised to hear my statement.

Her tone sounded like such a thing was impossible.

If possible, I'd like to continue after getting her understanding, but... We don't have time.

We can only save them all if we start the healing right away.

"Yes. All of them! I'll do the complicated part, everyone, use healing magic on

the wooden tag I prepared one by one! We need to treat a lot of people, so just heal them enough to prevent them from dying!"

As I said that, I magically carved numbers on wooden tags I took out of storage magic and left them beside the patients.

Even Disqualified Crest can do it if it's just carving readable numbers.

"Yes!"

"I understand!"

Alma and Iris nodded when they heard me, and began to carry the magic tools Ruli created.

The other healing magicians aren't moving.... But I've got no time to care for them.

I have my own important work to do.

I use healing magic on patients whose injuries are especially bad to prevent them from losing any more blood.

Judging from the other healing magicians' quality of mana, they can only heal physical strength at most.

I need to heal people who are hemorrhaging myself.

Someone called me out from behind.

"Hold it right there! We're professionals! Why do we have to listen to a child!"

The one who called was one of the gathered healing magicians.

He's probably one of the remaining healing magicians in this city.

Seeing how the other healing magicians are following him, I guess this guy is the leader.

Well, as for his skill in healing magic... It's just as you've guessed, same with other magicians.

"Then can we save them all with your lead?"

I asked the healing magician while still continuing the healing process.

His reply is within my expectations.

"Of course not! However, we can minimize the victims by prioritizing people who can be saved! So you should abandon that hopeless patient and--"

I stand up and go to another patient while ignoring the healing magician.

It seems like this healing magician understands the procedure when you don't have enough hands.

However... It looks like he lacks the capability to grasp the situations.

"It really is impossible huh! So stop treating that hopeless patient--"

He probably thinks that I've given up after seeing me moving away from the patient.

The healing magician shouted out at me.

The other healing magicians behind him look at the patient I treated... and let out surprised voices.

"I-it's healed! That horrible injury is healed, look!"

Chapter 139: Strongest Sage, Made into the Leader

"I...It healed!? That wound!? You sure about that!?"

"I'm very sure!"

While listening to them, I stopped the second person's bleeding and went to the next patient.

It's important to be quick if you're stopping bleeding.

"L-let me see it!"

The healing magicians followed after me.

And then they're watching me doing the healing slightly away without saying anything.

You guys should use that time to heal the other patients instead....

While thinking about that, I coagulated the patient's blood with magic and closed the wound using magically made threads.

And then I put the finishing touch with healing magic and went to the next patient.

It all took 30 seconds.

I could have used healing magic right from the start, but the mana consumption would be too big.

Then I move on to the next patient.

"A-amazing...."

"I've never seen such a fast treatment before...."

"Didn't he just stop the bleeding with magic? I didn't know that kind of magic exist...."

The healing magicians sounded surprised to see my treatment.

....Think they'll obey me now.

I'll give it a try.

"Could you guys give a hand instead of just gawking there. Just as you can see, we don't have enough people for the healing."

"G-got it! We just need to use magic on the patients by those wooden tag's orders right!"

The healing magician leader nodded to my words.

And then he went to the patients with numbered tags.

The other healing magicians cooperated too when they saw their leader.

"Alma, no.23 is done! Go to the next one!"

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"Gotcha!"

"You can't manage no.27 alone! Cooperate with another!"

"Yes!"

I'm using【Passive Detection】while healing the patients and giving instructions while keeping tabs of the patients' mana reactions and the remaining mana of the healing magicians.

Many of the patients were unconscious so we couldn't get their names, therefore, we used the wooden tags as substitutes.

As expected of healing magicians who had stayed in this city until now, they were more usable than their early impression would suggest.

--And about an hour later.

"We've treated the last person!"

We're done treating everyone with Alma's announcement.

Now, no one will die at least.

In the end, the four of us were the only ones who could continue the treatment.

The city's healing magicians ran out of mana nearing the end and shifted to nursing the patients.

Well, they were downed when there were 20 patients remaining though, we were able to save all the patients in part due to their contributions.

"You really did save them all... You may look like a kid, but in reality you must be a veteran healer aren't you?"

The healing magician leader talked to me after seeing that it was over.

Let alone famous, I can count people I used healing magic on in my past life by hands.

There were also times when I healed monsters I defeated and returned them to the forest in hope of making them stronger, but it's not a popular method nowadays.

"Nope, I've never taken the role of a healer before."

"Are you saying that

this

was your first time!?"

"Well, I'm an adventurer. I've been through a lot."

Apparently, it's customary in this country not to probe into an adventurer's past.

They should stop pressing further if I say it like this.

"Your skills are still weird regardless of what you've been through.... Even your instructions felt like you had precisely grasped what everyone was capable of...."

"Well, that's a matter of experience. ...By the by, I've got a little question."

I stare at the healing magician.

"Question?"

"Yeah. I'd like to hear the details about the previous ruler's passing... I've heard that it was because of a rare disease...."

Of course the latter half was a lie.

I don't know how the previous ruler died.

The only reason why I pretended to have an interest in his disease is to avoid suspicion.

However, I have a reason to ask this.

From what I've heard so far, the previous ruler was a competent man.

In fact, the basic constructions of this city are well thought out despite traces of deterioration from the current ruler.

I can't believe a ruler like that would willingly appoint such an inept man like the current ruler is as his successor.

However, it could be a case of him not making it in time while he was trying to find a solution.

--Like say, if he suddenly passed away.

"That rumor is inaccurate. The previous ruler passed away from a wound he sustained from a monster. You might have been able to easily cure him, but

keeping his life for a week was the best we could do."

I see. Normal wound huh.

There are monsters that are poisonous after all.

Even if that wasn't the case, with the level of the healing magicians here, no one could probably heal a too serious injury.

As I thought this far, the healing magician spoke like he recalled something.

"Ah. There was one strange point. ...He lost his ability to speak early on. Due to that, ruler-sama wasn't able to leave a will."

...I see.

It came to that huh.

Chapter 140: Strongest Sage, Sends Letter

"He wasn't able to even leave a will.... Isn't that too quick?"

"Yeah. I thought it was strange that he was unable to speak considering his wounds and physical conditions at the time.... But he really couldn't speak a word."

"Couldn't he just write then?"

"Yeah. We tried that.... But when ruler-sama was going to write a will, his hand suddenly stopped moving. We tried all other possible means too... However, it was all in vain. I'm thinking that he might have contracted a different disease in addition to his wounds...."

Yup. He was being completely silenced alright.

There's no doubt that it was someone's handiworks to weaken the dungeon city.

Judging from the level of magic used, the perpetrator is probably a low class demon.

Since I don't sense any reaction from demons around the vicinity, the culprit is probably long gone.

If the current ruler is joining forces with demons, we might be able to squeeze their location from him, but.... It's very unlikely to be the case.

The current management of dungeon city is just too crude no matter how you slice it.

If the demons were behind it, they'd either adopt a swifter and more effective strategy or gradually sap the dungeon city's strength to prevent them from getting found out.

They could probably destroy this unstable city in 10 days if they were serious after all.

It's too half-baked for either short-term or long-term plan.

Which leads to the conclusion--the current ruler has nothing to do with

demons, and is simply an idiot.

The demons probably can't stop laughing at how stupid the management of the dungeon city has become after only killing the previous ruler.

"I have never heard a disease with those symptoms either. Well, I am not that well versed as a healer."

I think about what to do with the current ruler.

We need to do something about the guy for now.

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Evening of that day.

We've gathered in an inn room.

"This territory is really awful...."

"The mood of this city is far gloomier than what I heard...."

"Or rather, won't this city be in danger if we leave the current ruler alone?"

Looks like the three are well aware of this city's ruler's dreadfulness.

Alma is right, we can't let the guy run around free.

"Yeah. Thus, I'm going to send principal a letter."

I took a paper out of Storage magic.

The easiest way out of this is by secretly assassinating the guy but.... that will cause a chaos, so it'll be the last resort.

"Principal... Ah! Are you going to convey the situations to the king through the principal?"

"That's right. And here's the content..."

I write a message to the principal on the paper.

The letter was done in less than one minute.

『We have arrived at the dungeon city, but we still don't understand what our homework is about even after coming here. Would it be acceptable for us to be exempted from the homework along with classes?』

The three speak out when they see the sentences written on the letter.

"...What is this?"

"It reads like... a completely trivial letter...."

"What's a homework? Is that human's culture?"

Putting Iris aside, I've anticipated the two's reactions.

But that is fine.

"That's how it looks outwardly, this letter is a dummy, here's the real one."

I take another letter after saying that.

It details about the current ruler's behavior and that there's a high possibility of demon's intervention in the previous ruler's passing.

I put that letter and the dummy letter in a box that has a secret compartment in the bottom.

This secret compartment can't be easily opened as I've assimilated the material together using magic, the box is very good in being undetected.

It won't get find out unless the other party is a specialist. I've told the principal about this method, I'm sure he will notice.

"...Is it a countermeasure for inspections?"

"Yeah. There's no doubt that the letter will go through inspections. Otherwise, the royal capital would have been informed of this terrible situation long ago. We could go there ourselves, but a round trip takes more time than expected."

That said, there is a limit to information blockade, it's only a matter of time before this situation leaks out even without me doing anything.

The royal capital was probably late in their correspondence because they

were busy dealing with demons.

"I see.... So you can use production magic like this too...."

We sent the letter to the royal capital and went to take a rest in preparation for tomorrow.

Now we just need to wait for the king's response while exploring the dungeon.

The king is usually quick to act when it's about a matter related to demons, so it shouldn't take long.

Chapter 141: Strongest Sage, Follows Advice

The day after we sent the letter to the principal.

The four of us went into the dungeon.

To begin with, we came to the dungeon city to explore the dungeon.

It's going to take some time before the letter reaches the king anyway, we should wait for it while we engage in the dungeon exploring.

"So this is the dungeon's gate...."

"I've heard about the rumor, but this door looks really huge in person...."

Alma sounded astonished when we arrived at the closed gate that led to the dungeon.

True, the door installed on this gate is huge.

Besides being tall and wide, it seems to be more than one meter thick.

It probably weights several tons at least.

Looks like it's installed here to stop monsters from coming out of the dungeon in an emergency.

However....

"Huh? Is this door made of ordinary iron?"

"Yeah. It's just an ordinary iron. It breaks easily."

I replied to Iris.

Yes. This door is just a hunk of iron.

Dungeon Rampage isn't simple enough to be stopped by this stuff.

Iris in her dragon form could easily break it with a kick.

Thus, we went inside the dungeon while worrying more about the dungeon city.

"It's bigger than the dungeon in the academy... but you know, it's kinda ordinary..."

"Apparently, there should have been more people on the floors above...."

The inside of the dungeon really was ordinary.

The monsters aren't particularly strong and there aren't that many people around.

There are traces of many people having hunted here, however... looks like there's not a lot of them today.

It might have to do with people having been injured in the battle yesterday.

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Several adventurers show up as we advance on.

There are cases of adventurers attacking other party to plunder money and stuff in a dungeon, but.... Looks like there's no need to be wary here.

I don't feel any hostility from them.

"Ou, that's some young party you have there. What are you guys doing in the dungeon?"

The adventurers stopped slightly away from us and talked.

"Just as you can see, we're exploring the dungeon."

"...You'd better not and turn around today. That monster from before might have gone up the floor."

The monster from before.... He's talking about the monster the ruler failed to defeat huh.

It's a great news for me if that monster is still alive though.

"Are you talking about the monster from the failed subjugation?"

"Yeah. Last we checked, it was on floor 11. However, that type of monsters is hard to read. It's impossible to beat that thing in the first place anyway, so you'd better give up exploring the dungeon today."

Dungeon monsters usually don't move between floors.

However, special kind of monsters that are sometimes spawned can do it.

True, if you're not confident enough, you probably should not go into the dungeon today.

"...Thank you for your advice. We'll hunt for a bit on some shallow floor and go back early today."

"T-thank you very much!"

"Take care!"

We advance through the dungeon.

Let's follow their advice and go fight on shallow floors.

Or more specifically.... Until we got to a floor with strong monsters on it.

Chapter 142: Strongest Sage, Looks for Monster

A few minutes after we parted ways with the adventurers who warned us.

We entered the ninth floor of the dungeon.

So far, I didn't sense any reaction from a strong monster at all.

"Well, guess it's not on this floor."

"Looks like it hasn't gone up here...."

I shot magic at a nearby monster, defeating it.

Right now, Iris and of course Alma too, could easily defeat monsters in this area.

Ruli is acting as Alma's support like the usual, but since there wasn't much need of arrows, her role didn't come up much.

The ninth floor is already nothing for them.

"I'd prefer if it stays like this and the monster doesn't show up...."

"In that case... We'll keep going down until the monster does show up."

"Eeh! Then, monster-san, please come out quick!"

We've got enough leeway to have such conversations while fighting.

The fact that Ruli and Alma are watching the surrounding mana reaction even during that might be a testament of them getting used to fighting.

Iris's detection is very poor.... but that's due to the injury on her wings, and it's not like she'd get a scratch from surprise attacks anyway, thus it's not really a problem.

That said, from my observation, we probably can only descend this calmly until the floor 18.

Beyond that, we probably have to raise our battle experience and magical capability first.

Well, those stuff should go up by themselves as long as we keep fighting in the dungeon.

We kept descending the dungeon while I was thinking that, but....

"No strong monster in sight...."

"It's not showing up... I don't sense any through mana detection either."

The monster in question isn't showing itself.

Even if there are cases of monsters climbing up the floors, they rarely ever go down.

I thought there was 90% chance the monster was in floor 11 or 10... But I don't sense any presence that points to that at all even after coming to floor 11.

Of course there are differences in the mana size of each monsters... But there's no mana reaction strong enough to warrant a subjugation quest by the entire adventurers of the dungeon city.

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Ruli speaks up in that situation.

"Mathi-kun, don't you think the monster reaction over there seems big?"

Ruli pointed diagonally after saying that.

The direction where she pointed at... True, that mana reaction is the strongest on this floor.

However, it's not at a level that warrants a large-scale subjugation effort.

They should be able to defeat it without much preparation.

"True, it's the most decent monster around here. I don't think it's our target, but... wanna have a go at it?"

"Can we, don't we need to preserve our mana?"

Ruli asked a question.

However... It should be fine.

Not like we need to consume much mana nor prepare to fight this monster.

"No problem. We can beat a monster of this level with our usual style. That said, you still cannot let your guard down."

I calculate the dungeon structure with detection magic and proceed toward the monster through the shortest route.

And the one waiting there was... A huge bird monster two times larger than the monsters on this floor.

"I-it's huge...."

"It's about as big as a smallish dragon!"

"Huge... Can we really fight it?"

The girls gave their impressions of the monster.

However, the fact that none of them tried to run from it must mean that they knew by intuition that this monster isn't that strong.

"Hmm... It's big alright... but it doesn't look that strong."

It's on the bigger side of a monster.

However, judging from its mana reaction, it's neither sturdy or agile.

I should be able to kill it in one hit if I fight seriously.

....Okay, let's use this guy as a practice stand.

"Alright then, you three, try defeating this monster without me!"

"Without Mathi-kun!?"

"That's impossible... or not, I think. I kinda feel like we could if we gave it our all! Mind if we think up a plan for a bit?"

"How about we try punching it once!"

The three began their strategy meeting (Iris isn't really helping though).

...Now then. Show me what you've got, girls.

Chapter 143: Strongest Sage, Revises Magic Circle

"Uum... Since it's a bird monster... Fighting it will be hard if it takes flight..."

Ruli points at the monster's wings.

By the way, we haven't been found thanks to the effect of concealment barrier.

"Then what if we go about this while preventing it from flying? Like shooting arrows at its wings?"

"...I don't think arrows will be enough to break its wings considering its size... Iris-san, how damaged wings could be before they lose the ability to fly?"

"Hmm... For us dragons, we can fly even if most of our wings are destroyed as long as our mana is in perfect state, to begin with, our wings rarely ever get damaged... but I think ordinary monsters aren't that tough! I think it won't be able to freely fly if half of its wing is broken!"

Looks like Iris understands stuff about wings well since she can fly herself.

Just as she's said, that level of monster won't be able to fly if you smash half

of its wing.

"Then if we destroy it with a bow...."

Ruli said that and looked at the monster again.

And then she mutters.

"How many times should we attack to break a wing of that size...?"

"We will long run out of arrows first for sure...."

"Breaking it won't be hard if my spear can reach it...."

"Iris-san's spear... Ah!"

Due to its size, the bird monster's wings are located quite high up.

Since this floor has a high ceiling, Iris's spear won't be able to even reach the monster's feet once it flies.

Ruli sounded like she hit upon an idea.... And began to draw something on the ground.

"If we do this.... I think we can drop it down!"

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Ruli has drawn a magic circle that combines a spell to inhibit flight and a spell that increase attack power against big monsters.

Looks like she's planning to drop the monster down to the ground since it's not possible to break the wings by normal means and make use of Iris's offensive power.

The plan itself is good.

This kind of tricks works well when a bow user join hands with a Glory Crest.

Looks like my teaching of magic circle drawing has started to bear its fruits on Ruli.

However... There's a slight unfortunate part.

"Your idea of combining these two spells are nice... but the power increase

and flight inhibition will work separately if you do it like this. We don't really need the arrow power in this situation, and rather reinforce the flight inhibition effect, so... This is how you should combine them."

I erased several lines on the magic circle Ruli drew and added some.

With this drawing, the arrow won't have any power, but the flight inhibition effect will be raised to maximum.

A few arrows of this should be enough to drop down that level of monster.

"This combination... I understand! You two, do you have any objection about this plan?"

Ruli looked at Iris and Alma.

"I think this will work!"

"Yes! Leave the monster to me once it fell!"

Normally, you also should discuss how you are going to retreat in case of failure... but I guess I should teach them about it after we leave the dungeon.

I'm with them this time, and even without me, this party has Iris.

Even if they failed, they should have no problem dealing with it as long as they kept their calm.

The ability to keep calm and devise a plan in cases of sudden unexpected turn of events are ones of the important abilities to have.

Thus they finished the strategy meeting, Ruli augmented the arrows they had in hands--and then Ruli declares the start of the operation.

"Then, let's do it! Iris-san, please guard us until the monster fell down!"

"Understood!"

"Let's go!"

As she said that, Alma pulled her bow and shot an arrow at the monster.

The monster immediately noticed the arrow and attempted to evade it, but Alma guided the arrow and made it hit right on its wing.

Now, the battle begins.

Chapter 144: Strongest Sage, Gives Up

"Ruli, next arrow!"

"Yes!"

Alma shot the arrows Ruli augmented one after another, hitting the bird monster.

However, those arrows didn't have much, if any, power.

"KISHAAA!"

And the undamaged bird monster charges toward Ruli and the others.

However, Alma didn't loosen her attacks.

She steadily let loose more arrows while being ready to evade anytime.

Ruli also continued to make arrows and augment them.

Instead of creating arrows beforehand, doing it in the heat of battle will lessen the payload on the arrow maker and maintain constant quality.

Thus, besides the pre-made arrows you put aside in Storage magic used for the first strike, you always want to bring the raw materials with you.

And the monster's attack was--

"SOI!"

Blocked by the spear in Iris's hands.

Her foothold has been magically reinforced by Ruli beforehand, so it won't collapse easily.

"GII!?"

The monster regained its posture even while looking bewildered to have been flung back by Iris who was far smaller than it.

And it's also been slightly damaged. Were Iris could handle her spear better, it might have lost one of its legs already... but well, Iris has only started to adapt to human body after all.

Alma kept shooting arrows one after another while Iris was buying time.

...They're doing pretty good.

The flight inhibition should works its magic right about now.

Right when I thought that, the magic showed its effect.

The bird monster couldn't gain altitude no matter how much it flapped its wing.

This signals for Iris's turn now.

"I'm going!"

"Yes!"

"Un!"

Once Iris declared that, Alma and Ruli retreated from the frontline and hid behind a nearby cover, peeking with only their faces showing.

They're avoiding getting rolled up while also being ready to support Iris if anything happens.

...However, that worry seems to be unwarranted.

"SOI!"

Iris thrust her spear on the monster's body along with that shout.

"GYAAAAAA!"

The stake-sized spear pierced deep into the monster as if there was no resistance.

Normally, you have to pull a pierced spear right away to prevent it from getting stuck, but.... That's meaningless before Iris's power.

Iris swung the spear along with the pierced monster with both her hands and flung it onto the wall.

Being the center of gravity, Iris also ended up hitting the wall on the opposite side. Faster than the monster's crashing speed.

"Au! ....Ei!"

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However, Iris was mostly undamaged.

And then, Iris pierced the heart of the monster, ending the battle.

Or to be more exact, her pierce was slightly off from the heart, but since the power of Iris's spear thrust blew away all the surrounding parts, there was no particular problem.

One unfortunate point is that most of the monster materials have turned into a mess... but we can get this level of monster materials anytime we want anyway, guess it's fine.

I'll gather the usable-looking parts at least.

"You three really managed to defeat it without me."

"Rather than us three, it was mostly Iris-san..."

"Un. The two of us only brought that thing down to the ground..."

Alma points at the tragic remain of the monster.

"No, I alone, wouldn't be able to hit it, it wouldn't have worked! ...Mathias-

san, could you make this spear a bit longer?"

Iris asked me.

However, unfortunately, it can't be made longer than that.

"That's the maximum possible length for now. A long spear is hard to manage if you just swing it around, it's too heavy, and you'll just end up getting swung around by it instead."

"That's true... I also got swung to the wall when I was swinging that monster earlier... It hurt a bit..."

Iris looks at a narrow passage with reproachful eyes.

She doesn't seem to be hurt anywhere in particular, but I guess she did get swung with a force that would have turned an ordinary human to pieces.

It ended with just『Hurt a bit』because it was Iris.

"Once you get used to spear more, you can do many things even with that length. Your current way of fighting relies too much on brute force.... Also, I think Alma and Ruli's fighting style are fine the way you are. When you're with Iris, it's best to leave the main offensive to her and create a situation that allows

her to strike the enemy."

In actuality, there are ways for them to put out serious firepower too.

I should teach them about it to protect themselves when they're not with me or Iris, but an archer grows faster if you let them experiment with arrows in a variety of ways as a support at first.

A style that only relies on high-powered arrows is hard to put into application after all.

--We delved deeper in the dungeon afterward.

Unfortunately we never found the monster we were looking for.

Let alone finding one, there wasn't even any sign or traces of it.

The least bad one was the monster the three fought against... but there's no way they needed to form a subjugation party just for that weak monster.

"Hmm... Wonder if it disappeared?"

"Disappeared.... Can monsters suddenly disappear just like that?"

"It's unusual, but such cases happen sometimes. ...Guess we should turn back for today."

After descending to a certain floor, we had a discussion and decided to make our way out of the dungeon.

And we arrived at the exit safely.

Now then.... We should sell our spoils today at the guild for now.

Chapter 145: Strongest Sage, Explains the Situation

We immediately went to the guild after leaving the dungeon.

I put our baggage in the Storage magic since I knew that I didn't really need the mana right now, but my mana won't recover if I keep this on.

Fortunately, the guild is close by the dungeon.

"We'd like to sell some materials."

"...You guys went inside the dungeon at a time like this?"

The receptionist girl looked at us like she couldn't believe it.

I guess entering the dungeon after so many people fell victims makes us look rash.

The dungeon cities in my past life got it even worse at their worst though.... Well, I shouldn't judge this world using the same standard considering the current technology is underdeveloped.

And since we've returned safely, there should be no problem here.

"Yes. That said, we didn't encounter any strong monster though."

"Oh right, it shouldn't be that dangerous in the upper floors... You don't have a lot with you either."

Looks like she got it.

The part about not having a lot is a mistake on her part though.

Guess it's faster if I just show it.

"We don't have a lot because of Storage magic. ...See."

I took out the materials we brought.

Seeing that... the receptionist girl's expression froze halfway through.

"Anything wrong?"

"E-err.... What are those materials?"

The receptionist girl pointed at the materials we brought.

We only picked up the relatively better materials with us as we descended through the dungeon.... but the ones that remain in the end are the materials from that bird.

Even though it was beaten into a mess, the materials are still in a whole different class compared to other monsters, which were just too weak.

"They're from a bird monster we defeated in the dungeon. ...I didn't partake in the subjugation though, these three were the ones who did it."

I pointed at Ruli and the others.

"It was Mathi-kun who made that magic circle though...."

"I mean, I feel that Iris-san did most of the work."

While saying that, Ruli and the others brought the materials so they could be better looked at.

The receptionist girl had a perplexed look when she saw the materials... then she turns around and shouts out.

"Branch Head! Big news!"

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"What's wrong!"

"It's materials from the monster from yesterday!"

A middle aged man rushed out of the back to hear the receptionist's voice.

He's probably the branch head.

I don't remember us doing anything worth getting fussed over though....

Or rather... What does she mean by the monster from yesterday? This bird monster?

We delved into the dungeon for the sake of defeating the monster who annihilated adventurer joint party... but we couldn't find that monster y'know?

I wait for their reaction next while carrying that doubt.

And the branch head... Asks this question.

"Where did you get these materials?"

"It should be from floor 11."

"...Why did you go to floor 11 at this day?"

It kinda feels like he's suspecting us in his confusion.

Yeah, I guess going to floor 11 without any reason is suspicious.

As I'd also like to report about our failure in finding any strong monster, I should tell them the truth here.

"We heard that there was a strong monster in the dungeon, so we went to see how it was. Well, we didn't find that monster even after getting to floor 18 though."

"In the end, this guy was the strongest!"

"Right, most other monsters were done in one hit...."

Iris and Alma gave their own impressions after I explained the situation.

Seeing that, the branch head... put his hands on his head while looking like he wanted to say, 『The hell they're going on about』.

And then he muttered.

"W-what's with these guys... I heard that the Second Academy was bad news this year, but these kids are just too weird..."

What? Am I imagining things or did he just suddenly bad mouthed us.

I don't get what's going on, I should ask his story.

"...Is there any problem?"

"No, not problem, I mean... That thing is that monster..."

The branch head pointed at the bird materials we brought as he said that.

...Eh? This thing is?

Chapter 146: Strongest Sage, Tests it Out

"It must be a mistake. It's true that this monster was the most passable one up to floor 18, but it's not really that strong of a monster...."

"No well... The fact that it's the strongest up to floor 18 is already weird in itself okay? ...Did you really defeat this with just four people?"

"I didn't participate, so three people."

"Unbelievable... Are you guys monster.... By the way, Mathias, what were you doing at that time?"

The branch head asked.

He probably knew my name from the guild card.

"I wasn't doing anything. Just watching."

"...You didn't want to help them?"

"The three of them were enough. I fully planned to help them if it looked dangerous though."

The branch head took a pen and wrote something on the memo after hearing that.

I can't see what he's writing from here since he's obstructing it... but I can guess by his muscle movements.

The hidden memo is written with,『If the report is to be believed, the monstrous ones are Alma, Ruli and Iris. Mathias, the leader doesn't partake because he's a healer』.

Looks like they mistook me as a healer.

And then the branch head smiled.

"I understand the situation. ...I actually don't, but I understand. Either way, we're very grateful for having that monster killed. We can purchase the materials right away, however your reward for the subjugation will have to wait. It takes time to report the subjugation to the city ruler, and for the reward money to trickle down. Do you have any problem with that?"

"I don't."

We didn't defeat the monster because we took the quest, but it appears he wants to give us the reward regardless.

However, since the reward comes from the city ruler, we probably shouldn't expect much.

Thus, we managed to safely (?) sell the materials.

◇

Afterward, we had a meal in a random store, and headed back to the inn.

...On the way back.

My detection magic sensed suspicious presences.

Are we being tailed?

In order to ascertain that, I purposely took a back alley that we normally wouldn't have taken.

"Huh? Was our inn this way?"

Alma asked me who suddenly changed direction.

I reply her while taking care not to make it looks suspicious.

"Yeah. This route seems to be shorter."

While saying that I concentrated on the continuous detection.

It seems like both groups are following us. There's no doubt that they're tailing us then.

There are two groups of suspicious presences in total.

Both of them are trying to hide their presences.

....Their stalking skill's a mess. Walking out in the open at a place with a lot of people would have made them not look suspicious instead.

I activate telepathy magic while thinking that.

『You three, listen to me calmly.』

『...What's the matter?』

『Does this have something to do with the sudden turn?』

The three were surprised at the sudden telepathy but they quickly replied calmly.

And Alma is correct.

『We're being tailed. And by two groups at that.』

『Two groups?』

『Yeah. One of them is... no doubt, subordinates of the city ruler. And they don't seem friendly at all. They even carry equipment for capturing people with them.』

『...You know that much without seeing them?』

『Yeah. Once you're used to it, you can somewhat know the enemy's equipment and such with just Passive Detection. Particularly when they're carrying magic tools, it's quite easy.』

『No, I don't think that's easy at all...』

『First of all, even though I know there are human reactions, I don't know whether they're tailing us or not....』

Well, this stuff is a matter of experience.

Alma and Ruli should be able to do this much without focusing once they train a bit.

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As for Iris.... it's better left unsaid.

Every human has something they're good at. She's a dragon though.

『And, the other group, I'm not really sure, but.... There's not a lot of them, and they don't seem hostile. So I'm thinking of coming in contact with this one.』

『...We're meeting the people tailing us ourselves? Isn't that dangerous...』

『We simply need to respond in kind if they try to harm us. Moreover, we can decide the timing if we're the one going after them ...Letting them to decide the timing is way more dangerous instead.』

I activated concealment magic after saying that.

Both of the tailing groups have lost us with this.

Next is...

『Now! Follow after me while being careful about the sound from your footsteps!!』

『『『YES!』』』

I simply go to our target with the three following.

And we arrived at... the path the group who isn't with the city ruler is going to take.

Now that we're here, they should find us soon once I cancel the concealment magic.

And then....

『Let's stop here. Make it look like we're only walking naturally.』

『『『YES!』』』

I deactivated the concealment magic after their reply.

We probably look like we're casually walking from their point of view.

People who could see through this camouflage wouldn't have done such a poor stalking.

Now then, what's coming out.

If they're attacking, I'll consider them enemy....

"...Am I correct to assume that you're Mathias-san?"

Just as I thought, they went ahead and talked to us huh.

It appears that... they're not our enemy.

Chapter 147: Strongest Sage, Receives Advice

"...Isn't it only right to introduce yourself first when you ask someone their name?"

After saying that, I look at the pair that talked to me.

Judging from their equipment and clothes... they're probably adventurers.

It seems they're normally working as secret agents, as their equipment are geared toward minimizing sounds, unlike ordinary adventurers'.

Which means... they're probably the guild's secret agents.

"...Excuse me. We're adventurers who took an unofficial quest dispatched by the guild."

I guessed right huh.

Seeing that they're taking different actions from the city ruler's underlings... the guild and the city ruler probably have opposing views.

I should introduce myself first for now.

"Yeah you're right, I'm Mathias. And... what quest you took that required you to tail us in secret?"

"You knew that much huh. ...Our objective is to pass a message from the guild to Mathias and his party. The reason why we're concealing ourselves is to... avoid the city ruler's secret agents, rather than your party."

The adventurer looked at the direction of the city ruler's secret agents as he said that.

Looks like the adventurers have the upper hands in stalking skill.

The city ruler's secret agents seem like they completely have no clue where we are after all.

I guess we can trust these adventurers a bit for now.

"Got it. ...So what's the guild's message? Is it related to the fact that the guild's secret agents are looking for us?"

"...You've seen through everything huh. That's correct. Mathias and his party, all four of you are wanted by the city ruler."

"Wanted? Like with criminals?"

"Yeah. They don't have an excuse, so they won't do it in public. ...But there's a high chance of you getting ambushed in a night like this. They're targeting... Mathias in particular."

When the three girls who had been staying silent heard that... they had a dumbfounded look on their faces.

And then they ask the adventurers while looking like they can't believe it.

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"Eh? Mathi-kun?"

"...Of all the ones here, Mathi-kun?"

"Why would they purposely go for Mathias-san?"

The adventurer sighs and answers the three's questions.

"There are two reasons mainly. First, he's the leader of the party that defeated a monster whom the city ruler couldn't defeat even after gathering people. He's losing his face.... The second reason... apparently, he thinks that Mathias-kun is the easiest one to beat amongst his party members."

""""Wha?""""

The three let out a vapid voice.

"H-hold on. What do you mean by Mathi-kun being easiest to beat?"

"I think it'd still be easier to annihilate the three of us together than defeating Mathias-san...."

The adventurer answers that question.

"It seems like the city ruler... thinks that Mathias is just a mere healer. And he's a Disqualified Crest at that. Though I think even someone slightly skilled will immediately notice that Mathias is the most dangerous one among you guys...."

Ah. That kind of pattern huh.

"Which means, the city ruler is probably going to try to take Mathias hostage and put his party under his control. Since having Mathias's party under his control means he could save face... Thus, we'd suggest Mathias and his party to leave this city for a while."

"I refuse."

I immediately replied the adventurer's suggestion.

Why should we have to run away just to avoid one shitty city ruler.

He's not worth even that.

"...You might be confident with your skills, but you'd better off not staying in this city. They likely won't attack at places with many people around, but they will persistently come at you anywhere else."

"No problem. You three can hide somewhere if you don't like the idea though..."

"I think it's not a problem."

"Me too, nothing to worry about with Mathi-kun around! We can't let our guard down though..."

"I feel sorry for anyone who's going after Mathi-kun instead..."

The three are in agreement too it seems.

"For now, I've received your advice, so tell the guild that there's no problem. Well, you'll see the result in less than two weeks."

"Result... I probably shouldn't ask what you mean by that. I feel that it's for the best... I got it. I'll tell the guild that."

The adventurers left after saying that.

By result, of course, I mean the contact from the royal capital.

If the king gives his decree to execute the city ruler, dealing with the aftermath will be easier.

Well, I plan to assassinate the guy first if I deem that his adverse effect is too big.

...Now then.

For the time being, shall we go and deal with today's assailants.

Chapter 148: Strongest Sage, Acts Friendly

"Damn it! Where'd they go!"

About five minutes after the guild adventurers left.

We concealed ourselves again and came close to where the city ruler's underlings were.

They're still looking for us.

We could have ambushed and defeated them here... but it'd be bad if it was all a misunderstanding.

I should confirm their stance first.

"Alright, I'm gonna cancel the concealment. Don't bring out your weapon just yet, but don't let your guard down either!"

""""YES!""""

I showed myself up in front of the underlings.

And then....

"Excuse me. We seem to have gotten lost..."

I pretend to be lost and asked him the way.

With my guard up of course.

I can make a counterattack if they do attack me, I've positioned myself to lop off their heads all at once in less than three seconds if needed.

Now then, how will they react....

"Aa. Your inn is that way."

The city ruler's underlings looked a bit perplexed to see us suddenly showing up, but they immediately pointed to a direction.

The direction they gave is correct for sure.

We never said our inn's name out, so they probably have investigated our

lodging place.

...Well, simply knowing the location doesn't mean that raiding it will be a success.

"Thank you very much."

We thanked them, turn our back on the underlings and began to walk to the direction they told us.

I'm walking in the back most. I should look like an easy target from their perspective.

The next moment--

"Don't move."

The underling put his hands on my neck and pointed a knife on it.

It really comes to this huh.

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"Listen to what we say if you don't want this guy killed."

The underling who's caught me looks over the girls after saying that.

He really does not seem wary of me.

They really think I'm a healer huh....

Well, letting them operate with the misunderstanding is convenient for us, so let's let them keep it.

It'd make things far easier if they targeted me instead of the girls.

"Follow us."

Right when the underling said that and tried to drag me with him... I activated telepathy magic. And tell Iris.

『Iris, with bare hand, you hear me.』

『Yes!』

Iris readied her fist and thrust it at us.

"You..."

The underling swings a knife toward my hand.

He's probably not aiming for my neck to avoid killing me.

You can't take a corpse hostage after all.

Well--either way, it's pointless.

I enveloped my whole body with defensive magic right when the knife was swung down.

Putting up a magical defensive wall while taking care not to make them notice it is a bit troublesome.... But there's no need for that this time.

Because any shred of oddness they felt would be blown away by Iris's fist.

"You think you can win against us with a fist--wha?"

One of the underlings caught Iris's fist with a sword.

However, of course the blade couldn't get through it.

Thus, all of the city ruler's underlings got blown away just like that.

Well, I also got rolled up in it though.

"...Alright, now every one of them has been knocked out."

I slipped in during the confusion and shot Faint-inducing magic on all of them.

With this, we've evaded their ambush with the misunderstanding intact.

"You... knocked them out?"

"Yeah. It's a waste to kill them."

As I said that, I put several magic into the underlings' body.

We're going to let them go after putting these in.

"Alright, that'll do."

After I was done inserting the magic.

I said that as I stood up.

"A magic to detect their position... right?"

Ruli who saw the augmented magic said that.

She's generally correct.

"Yeah. Half of it."

"Half?"

"Yeah. This magic also has an effect to detect demons. If my guess is right, demons don't have anything to do with the matter this time, but... just in case."

I have surmised that demons only played a part in the previous city ruler's

demise.

But it's not a bad idea to check it out while also watching the current ruler's moves.

This kind of spell is plain but convenient.

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And then, about a week after we dealt with the underlings.

A messenger who carries a letter from the king has arrived at our place.

Chapter 149: Strongest Sage, Obtains Permission

"There's a letter!"

A certain evening.

There was a letter in the mailbox in our inn's room when we got back.

No sender is written.

"...Is this another harassment by the city ruler?"

"I wonder if they've given up trying to beat us upright?"

Alma and Ruli observed the letter as they said that.

The city ruler's underlings have been attacking us everyday in this past week indeed.

I don't blame them for getting suspicious at this letter in this situation, but... it's different this time.

"No, this isn't from the city ruler. It's the letter we've all been waiting for instead."

I unfold the letter after saying that.

I haven't put my guard down, but there should be nothing weird written on it.

The content is in line with my expectations too.

"Look, this."

I spread the letter.

————————————————————————————————

Need to pass you a letter. Will wait on the dungeon floor 2.

————————————————————————————————

This all that's written.

There's a dungeon map drawn below with sign marked on a location.

This is the place the sender is waiting at huh.

"...What does this mean?"

"I can't think of it as anything but a suspicious invitation by the city ruler... Maybe he's put a trap there...."

"If he wanted to pass a letter, he could just have put it in the mailbox like with this one...."

"No. This should be different. If they're going to attack us, they wouldn't purposely do it on floor 2 and they would have written the appointed time. And above all... the reason they gave is too suspicious to be a trap."

Basically, the higher the dungeon floor, the more people are there.

You'd find someone just by walking a bit on floor 2.

They would have chosen a deeper floor if they intended to ambush us.

And the reason for calling us would have been a bit less suspicious.

"Then just who..."

"This person probably came to meet us as ordered by the king. Pretending to be an adventurer make them less suspicious, and there's no way a letter from the king be dropped in this mailbox just like that."

"....I see! It's true that getting found out by the city ruler will be troublesome!"

"Which means, the king's messenger is waiting in the dungeon... We've got to hurry!"

"Yeah. We should hurry but still careful as to not raise suspicion."

We hurried to the dungeon.

◇

10 minutes after we found the letter.

We arrived at the location specified in the letter.

There's no one in the appointed place.

...Or so it looks it.

"We're here to receive the letter. Could you show yourself up?"

I said so and waved the letter toward the wall.

And then a part of the wall disappeared... and a man appeared out of thin air.

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"Please excuse me. I'm called Eiku. I was ordered to keep myself hidden until Mathias-sama found me as His Majesty believed you definitely would."

Eiku bowed in front of me as he said that.

His equipment look like that of an adventurer, but... his movements don't.

He's probably a secret agent employed by the royal family.

The magic he used to hide himself is also one of the less objectionable ones I saw in this world too.

"The reason you rigorously hid yourself that far.... is to avoid getting found out by the city ruler, am I correct?"

"Yes. My order is to deliver this letter without the city ruler's knowledge and to accompany you if necessary."

Eiku handed over a letter as he said that.

The letter is stamped with the royal family's crest.

I receive the letter and open it.

The content is... written with something that goes beyond my expectations.

————————————————————————————————

I have received your report regarding the current ruler of Melkia City, Dogiel Melkia.

We have carried out an investigation about his tyranny ourselves, and the situations are just as Mathias reported, it cannot be forgiven.

Thus, the instant this letter is delivered to Mathias, Melkia Household is to be abolished and Dogiel Melkia is to be executed.

In addition, if you wish for it, Mathias and his party, with Eiku as a representative of the royal family, can act as a proxy to arrest the current city ruler.

In that case, you are permitted to execute him on the spot if you deem it necessary to.

As we expect him to put on a resistance, be advised to prepare your force.

But that's probably not needed if Mathias agrees to take part.

———————————————————————————

"...Mathias-sama, would you like to act as a proxy for the arrest?"

"Yeah. I'd like to."

I immediately replied Eiku's inquiry.

With this, we can make our move now.

Chapter 150: Strongest Sage, Raids

"Acknowledged. Everyone, please take these."

Eiku distributed some paper to us four.

The paper contained permission for us to act as a proxy of the royal family.

"Are we allowed to arrest the city ruler anytime we want?"

"Yes. When are you planning to do it?"

"....Right now of course. You three don't mind right?"

"Yes!"

"Un!"

"Of course!"

The three immediately replied to me.

We're doing this raid because we've witnessed the awful state of this dungeon city in the past week.

We are in consensus that the city ruler must be replaced as soon as possible.

"...Understood. Our target is most likely located in the city ruler's mansion.... And that mansion is heavily guarded. Should we request cooperation from the knights?"

Eiku took a blueprint of the mansion.

Looks like the mansion is built with the possibility of attacks from outside in mind.

There's only one entrance and one back door, both of which are thick doors, and guarded by guard rooms.

...Well, that's irrelevant though.

"No, we can handle them. We'll be fighting in a confined space, so having more people around would make it more difficult instead. Also, it'd be annoying if the city ruler noticed and used some weird trick. We're breaking through directly from the front. Is there any problem?"

"...Understood. There is no problem. I have heard from people that know about Mathias-sama that taking the knights along would only drag you down."

Eiku began to guide us after saying that.

I'm not sure what kind of rumors are spreading about us.... but since it made things go smoother, guess I'll let it slide this time.

....We left the dungeon and arrived at the mansion.

However....

"...Something seems amiss...."

Eiku looked perplexed when he saw the mansion.

We have never come close to the mansion so we have no idea, but Eiku seems to think that there's something wrong with it right now.

"Is it?"

"Yes. The front door is usually open, and guards are standing by around it. But

there's no guards today... and it's eerily quiet."

Hearing that, I investigate mana reactions inside the mansion.

There are people inside it seems... But this is....

"The info about this probably got leaked."

"The info?"

"Yeah. Looks like they've strengthened the defense inside the building... When you think about it, don't you feel that there's a few guards in the city today? They've all been gathered here."

Usually, there are guards under direct control of the city ruler besides the knights in the city.

They're called guards but rather than suppressing crimes inside the city, they're taking part in the city ruler's crimes instead.

I'm sure that the people who regularly attacked us normally worked as guards.

"...What would you like to do?"

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Eiku asked us.

However, there's no change to the plan.

"Like I said in the beginning, we're breaking through from the front."

I walked forward, stopped before the steel door and gripped the doorknob.

There doesn't seem to be any trap around the door.

"Are you four ready?"

I look at Iris, Ruli, Alma and Eiku.

The four have readied their weapons and nodded.

"...I think it's locked... Would you like me to unlock it?"

I shake my head at Eiku's suggestion.

Lock picking is quiet, sure... but now's not the time to be secretive.

"No need for that. There's a better way to open this lock."

I grip and rotate the doorknob.

The door is locked indeed....

"This is how... you open it."

I used Physical Reinforcement magic as I said that and twisted the doorknob.

And then, SNAP! The lock was blown away with that sound.

Then I kick the door while throwing away the broken doorknob....

The door got blown off with a roaring sound.

"Alright, it's open!"

Chapter 151: Strongest Sage, Shows Up

"The front door has been breached! Get ready to attack!"

"Ha, they naively came from the front!"

"The prize money is mine!"

The mansion's guards have been gathered here due to the loud sound of the broken door.

Looks like the city ruler has put reward money on our heads.

However...

"What is this?"

"Are they going easy on us?"

"No... Looks like they're already doing their best."

Their attacks were really shoddy.

Arrows without magic enhanced on them, and chanted magic so weak you would have thought they weren't even trying.

We didn't even have to do anything as all of them were all repelled by the magic tool we had prepared beforehand.

"Dammit, why aren't our attack working!"

"Could it be.... Barrier magic!?"

"Impossible! There's no way a magic capable of blocking this many attacks be deployed so fast!"

Yup.

They're doing it seriously.

"Well since they're in the way, let's finish them off."

I plunge into the bunch after saying that.

I don't even need to use defensive magic. I can evade this level of attacks instinctively.

I activated lightning magic and paralyzed them all together.

Really helps that the lightning pass them easily since they've crowded themselves in formation.

Thus we continued to suppress the other guys and annihilated all the bunch on the first floor.

Some of them seem to have escaped, but there's no need to go after them.

"Err, the city ruler is in his office in the second floor.... Or that's what they'd like us to believe, but he's actually in a hidden room underground huh?"

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"...Judging from the enemy's formations, I think there is no mistaking it. I don't know the exact location, but my intuition tells me it's...."

"Here, right."

I pointed at a nearby wall as I said that.

There was an unnatural gap in the drawing we got earlier.

Judging from its width and the shape of mana reaction, it's probably a hidden stairway.

"Yes. Did Mathias-sama come to the same conclusion?"

"The one who set up this hidden room is most likely an amateur. It's so obviously unnatural."

Looks like Eiku noticed the oddity on the drawing too.

Well, it's only right that a proper secret agent would know this much oddity.

"The problem now is how to enter it...."

"That's a solved problem. It's open if you do this."

I kicked at the wall with Physical Reinforcement as I said that.

And the wall easily broke down.

The real mechanism to open this door is probably the magic tool in the corner of the hidden room, but this way is faster.

We don't need to follow how they do their key and hidden door stuff in particular anyway.

"...How do I say this, I feel like I understand what His Majesty and the Second Academy students were saying now...."

Eiku muttered when he saw the scene.

"What were they saying?"

"Do not antagonize Mathias-sama even by mistake."

"...I see."

They're saying such things huh.

Well, not having the royal family as an enemy is good for me too.

"Then let's get down the stairs. I'll be leading, Iris will be right behind me. You three follow us slightly away from behind."

""""YES!""""

Thus we got down the hidden stairs in a line.

And then we started to hear the commotion inside.

"It's so quiet on the first floor... Did they manage to suppress them?"

"No, we would have gotten the report if they did! Perhaps we should consider that they have been suppressed instead...."

"Fool! There's no way they could've beaten that many people this quick! ...But open the passage heading above just in case!"

"Yes!"

Ah. They have another hidden door that leads outside huh.

I'm interested in the location of that hidden door.

...Alright let's ask them.

"That sounds fun. May I join in too?"

I showed myself up in front of the city ruler and his underlings as I said that.

Chapter 152: Strongest Sage, Arrests

"Wha... Who are you?"

"Did we have this guy in the security?"

The city ruler was perplexed to see me who suddenly showed up.

Huh?

The reaction is not what I expected.

And I've gone all the trouble of coming here myself as a target of his attacks.

Don't tell me...

"...Don't tell me, you were sending assassins without even knowing my face?"

"Assassins? What are you--no wait, a brat wearing adventurer clothes with Disqualified Crest... Could it be, you're Mathias Hildesheimr!?"

...Seriously. He really didn't know how I look.

Yet he wanted to take me hostage huh.

"Yeah. You got that right."

"...Where's the women?"

"Ruli and the others are in the back. Oy, everyone, come on out."

The four showed up with Iris in the front.

I'm in the center of the room while the four are at the entrance.

Seeing that the city ruler sneers at us... and shouts out loud.

"Kuku... All hands, surround him! ...Fool! Straying away from the women on your own!"

With those words, hidden doors on the floors and ceilings opened and the city ruler's underlings came out of them.

...It's way too crude for an ambush.

At least try giving the signal without us noticing.

I threw out magic and fists at coming underlings while thinking that.

The attackers crumbled down without a sound.

Befitting of a bunch under this city ruler, their movements were also really crude.

The most difficult part was preventing myself from killing them by mistakes.

I'd like to squeeze info out of them after all.

"Soii!"

"GYAAAAAAAAA!"

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...Well, such consideration seems to be irrelevant to Iris as an underling who was going to get pass her got blown off into the wall.

The city ruler was watching that in blank amazement.

Thus, his underlings were annihilated in under 30 seconds.

"Ho... How are you fighting! Weren't you a healer, the weak point of the party!"

Ruli and the others are looking at the roaring reddened city ruler with pitying looks.

They've ceased recognizing him as a threat anymore.

"He really believed that Mathi-kun is in charge of healing..."

"He'd have known that it was a mistake simply by looking at his equipment and stuff...."

"...I mean, did we ever get hurt to need healing anyway?"

Now that you mention it... I don't think we ever did.

We should have some training to cope against injury to prevent inactions in

case of emergency... but it's been getting postponed.

Well, putting that aside for now.

"Dogiel Melkia, you're under arrest."

I took a rope out of Storage magic as I said that.

"Wha... Me, under arrest!? On what authority!"

Don't tell me, he really didn't know.

Then why would they hunker down in this place.

I made an eye signal at Eiku while thinking that.

Eiku took out the document from the king and thrust it before the city ruler.

"Your apprehension has been ordered by His Majesty the king's decree. With my presence, the executive proxy, Mathias has been endowed with the authority to arrest you."

"Wha, it's fake! This must be a mistake--gah"

I shot magic at the screaming city ruler and tied him with the rope.

"Now then... Now we can leave it to you right?"

I asked Eiku.

"Yes. Mathias-sama could also execute him if you wished so, however... The kingdom administration would be grateful if I could bring him back alive."

Well, I guess that's so.

Even this foolish city ruler might spit out some useful info with some tortures.

And he probably would get it easier if he died here.

However, I personally don't have any reason to let this guy die off so easily.

"I understand, I'll leave the rest to you... We've got something we ought to do

ourselves after all."

"Ought to do?"

"Yeah. ...I've got an idea about how our raid here got leaked."

Chapter 153: Strongest Sage, Hypothesizes

"The reason why this raid was found out...?"

Eiku seemed dumbfounded to hear me.

"Yes. Do you have anything in mind yourself?"

"I do not. I never even took the letter out of the mithril case until I met Mathias. The only possibility is if the information was leaked in the capital, and someone brought it here to the dungeon city faster than me..."

Eiku took the paper from the king to me in his hand.

"No, I don't think that was the case. The fact that this was sent through a secret agent means that this entire matter was treated as an absolute secrecy, right?"

"That's right."

"Then, if there was someone who stole this information, that someone must

have infiltrated quite deep into the kingdom's inner circle.... And I really don't think someone like that would take the risk for the sake of this small fry."

If that someone had enough intelligence gathering capability to know the inner workings of the kingdom, they would have known that that level of blockade was meaningless.

Thus, that capital mole would have told the city ruler to escape instead of barricading himself.

How would anyone profit from this fool after he lost all power.

"That's certainly true... Then, what did Mathias-sama think have happened?"

This room is very luxurious for a hidden room.

There's expensive looking chairs, desks and even a fireplace.

It must have been used for all secret meetings they had done so far.

"This."

I took a letter from the fireplace.

The corner is slightly burnt, but the content can still be read.

"Letter... Is it. The content is..."

"Looks like I guessed right."

I opened the letter I got from the fireplace.

The letter pertained to the matter of the city ruler's execution and that the executor would arrive either today or tomorrow.

And the last passage is an instruction to burn the letter once it's been read.

The sender probably wanted to hide the existence of this letter.

Unfortunately, looks like the city ruler wasn't even capable of burning things, the sender's consideration is in vain.

"I see... But where was it leaked..."

The sender's name isn't written on this letter.

However... there's enough other info to pinpoint the culprit.

"Rather than leaked, it'd be more correct to say that the letter had been spied on."

I observed the mana reaction--of the burnt letter.

Yup, no mistake about it.

"Spied on? Through the mithril case?"

"It's relatively easy to do that if the case isn't magically protected."

"...Is that true in Mathias-sama's case?"

"I can do it sure... but not this time. There's no doubt, it's demons. ...Since I can sense demon's mana from this letter."

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I activate detection magic once again.

...It really is demon's mana.

"...It can't be, demons were giving orders to the city ruler!?"

Eiku asked me in blank amazement.

He must know how the demons were lurking in the kingdom's inner circle considering he's a secret agent of the kingdom, he's probably worried that it might be the case too here.

However, fortunately or unfortunately, his conjecture is wrong.

My expectations of demons had all been betrayed so far, but I'm pretty confident this time.

I'm sure that demons aren't that stupid.

"They would have advised a better plan if that was the case."

"In other words...?"

"Demons were close by the dungeon city for other purposes, and they helped the city ruler as an extra while they were here. Of course that means they have a main objective... And there's only one reason anyone comes to a dungeon city."

I pointed at the ground as I said that.

To be more precise, at the dungeon below the ground.

"Looks like those demons have some business in the dungeon."

Chapter 154: Strongest Sage, Helps Escape

"...Demons, in the dungeon...? Could the demons' goal be magic stones?"

Eiku asked a question.

Oh right, the world in this age sees dungeons as magic stones.

It's true that dungeons are important resources, but that's all not there is to them.

"Their interest lies not in the magic stones... but the Dragon Vein."

"...Dragon Vein... is it?"

"If they want to cause a global level disaster, the most efficient method is by inserting magic to a large-scale Dragon Vein."

Eiku still doesn't look like he gets it.

Ruli and the other girls who knew about Dragon Vein from the matter with barrier seem like they've got it somewhat though.

"Do you mean that it's possible to cause a disaster by inserting magic to the Dragon Vein?"

"That's about right."

I predict that they've inserted the magic long before though.

And that was quite a while ago.

The movement of the Dragon Vein during the monster outbreak was inexplicably unnatural unless there was a trick behind it, yet the mana didn't look unstable.

It should have been more unstable if the magic was inserted in the Dragon Vein recently.

Those demons mostly came here probably to finish that magic.

For now... We need to contact the Royal Capital.

"Please bring this back to the capital."

I took a paper out of Storage magic, magically wrote something on it and gave it to Eiku.

Of course, I've secured it with magic too.

This letter would look like a reward to a demon trying to peek on it.

"...Understood. I will definitely deliver it!"

"Please do. ...And you might want to make it fast."

The demons must know about the city ruler's defeat.

Which means, the demons who are hiding here will naturally make their next move.

They'd probably try to shift our attentions elsewhere or erase the entire dungeon city--

--The ground shook right when I thought that far.

"...Earthquake? That's unusual..."

Iris sounded puzzled at the sudden shaking.

However, Ruli and Alma... in other words, people who can use【Passive Detection】reacted differently.

"W-what's with this mana reaction!?"

"...It's as if monsters have surrounded the city outside..."

I see. It comes to this huh.

Looks like our opponents made their move a bit quicker than us.

Judging from this reaction... They probably interfered with the Dragon Vein and summoned groups of monsters in the vicinity of the dungeon city.

They won't have to worry about us meddling if the entire dungeon city is destroyed after all.

And even if that were not the case, it'd still buy them time.

Those demons probably intend to finish the magic in the meantime.

They didn't make their move until now was probably because they were thoroughly preparing to win the game... it was difficult to act while the city ruler was in power here after all.

"...For now, you should flee from the dungeon city following this route and deliver the letter to the capital."

I drew a route on a paper and gave it to Eiku.

The dungeon city might be surrounded by monsters, but there are gaps in the formations summoned with mana.

The route I gave him will make it possible to slip through those gaps.

"Understood! Then please excuse me!"

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Eiku ran off after saying that.

I predict our enemy's moves while watching that.

It should be safe to assume that the time they'd gain from this would be enough to finish the magic they had inserted.

I've already gotten a rough idea of the type of the magic in question.

The problem is how to stop it.

Might as well shave down the effect of the lodged magic, not just simply stopping this.

That means, the right timing to put in the jamming is....

"...Two hours."

"Eh?"

I reply to Ruli who looked dumbfounded.

"We'll clean this outbreak up in two hours. Afterward... Let's pay those demons a visit."

Chapter 155: Strongest Sage, Meets Unusual Monsters

A few minutes after Eiku escaped.

"Huge crowds of monsters around the city!"

"The western road is done for! What about the east! If there's a few monsters, we'll force our way through--"

"The eastern highway is full of monsters too! Impossible to break through!"

The city is in uproar.

It's full of news about monsters that have occupied the area around the city.

There are some adventurers who are looking for escape routes, but it seems they can't find any.

Even if they do find one, only a few dozens of people could possibly escape.

We go out of the city while watching that.

"How are we going to end the outbreak in two hours!?"

"We'll gather them in one place and annihilate them all in one go! Once they're bundled together, we can blow them away with ranged magic!"

The biggest issue this time is the fact that the center of the outbreak is the city.

If we didn't have to worry about the city getting rolled up in it, we could just use ranged attack magic (or have Iris shoot her breath in dragon form if the firepower isn't enough) after the monsters had gathered in the center.

We ran past the city while thinking about that.

The place where the monsters gather has to be far away enough from the city.

However... there's something amiss.

I feel that the movements of normal monsters and these outbreak monsters... or rather, their actions seem too different.

Monsters basically attack humans whenever they see one.

However, the monsters in front of us now seem different.

Many of the monsters that obviously had us inside their vision ignored us.

"...Let's give it a try."

I tried using [Enforced Detection] after saying that.

My hunch was proven correct.

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"...[Enforced Detection] can't lure them. Or rather, they aren't even reacting at all."

[Enforced Detection] is a magic that pour hostile mana onto the monsters in order to lure them.

It consumes little mana and since it's not really a magic but a kind of mana

manipulation, even a Disqualified Crest can affect a wide area.

However, the monsters didn't show any reaction at all to [Enforced Detection].

I also tried hitting them with an amount of mana enough to make normal monsters running away in terror instead, yet they didn't even seem like they noticed.

"Then, how about..."

Ruli made a magic tool from a magic stone in her pocket and immediately activated it.

It's a spell I taught her before to lure monsters.

The range isn't that wide, but its strong point is the fact that it doesn't need mana to maintain the effect, being a magic tool.

However... The monsters don't look like they're coming together.

"There's no effect! Maybe I made a mistake somewhere!"

Ruli took out another magic stone after saying that.

However, from what I saw, Ruli didn't make any mistake.

"Perhaps..."

I went forward and used several types of magic on the monsters I encountered.

Mana, sound, light, infrared rays, temperature, carbon dioxide concentration....

All kind of stuff that normal monsters utilize to detect humans.

However, none of them had any effect.

Magic that physically pull them seemed to be effective, however none of the magic succeeded luring them voluntarily.

There were even monsters who completely ignored me and tried to slip pass me instead.

This is.... The problem lies not in Ruli's spell, it's something that's even more

fundamental.

"These monsters probably move with a different principle than normal..."

"Different principle!?"

"Yea. These monsters aren't seeing things through mana, sound or light! ...We have to look for another mean if we want to gather them..."

Chapter 156: Strongest Sage, Solidifies the Wall

"Another way?"

"Yeah. The quickest way to gather monsters is by tricking their perception... But that's not the only way. Fortunately, I've got a general idea what the monsters are chasing."

"Tendency?"

"Yeah. Simply put, they're heading to places where there's a lot of people."

I see one rule as the main driving force of these monsters actions.

These monsters are heading to places with many humans.

Lots of monsters area going to places with lots of people, but only a few are heading to places scarce of people.

It seems distances don't mean much, the monsters are prioritizing densely populated places even though they're a bit far away.

In fact, there's only 10 monsters at most heading toward us, the rest pass right by me.

Though well, considering they're not heading to the royal capital, the most populated place, that one must be too far.

"Places with many people... Doesn't that mean the monsters will ignore adventurers and rush to the city no matter how hard we try to get in their way!?"

"Yep. Moreover, not all the residents of the dungeon city are adventurers. Gathering people outside the city to lure these monster is not a realistic proposition."

"...If we reinforce part of the outer wall with magic, then rally people close by it, the monsters will gather on the other side of the wall right? We can clean them all up in one fell swoop by setting up traps there... Let's hurry!"

After saying that, I turn back to the dungeon city.

Fortunately, the majority of monsters can't go fast.

If we run back now, we should be able to prepare everything before the city's wall collapse.

After a bit while.

We've arrived at the dungeon city's outer wall.

Judging from the mana reaction, only a few monsters have reached the city, so the people are still holding out somehow.

"This is the easiest place to gather people. Let's set up the trap here! Alma and Iris, rout any monster that try to get near us!"

"Yes!"

"Gotcha!"

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"Trap... Which magic should we use!"

When I designated the place, Ruli took out a magic stone and threw a question.

Even though those monsters aren't really that strong, there's just too many of

them, thus ordinary attacks or magic can't possibly beat them all.

Guess we have to use that magic here.

"Right... Use this one. And not with that small magic stone, but these."

I gave several reasonably sized magic stones to Ruli while drawing a magic circle of a kind of barrier magic on the ground.

If you unleash an attack magic inside the space enclosed by this barrier, its firepower will be contained within, making it more fatal.

"I-I understand!"

I touch the nearby wall while Ruli is magic augmenting.

The city's outer wall is made of wooden frames, reinforced with hardened soil.

As it is now, it'll get easily broken through once the monsters gather.

I observe the monsters' mana reaction once again after thinking this far.

I'm estimating the load on the wall by looking at the state of their mana.

I could reinforce the wall haphazardly if I wanted to, but I'd like to preserve my mana as much as possible here.

"Well, this should do."

I finished reinforcing the wall right as Ruli was done with the magic tools.

I've melted the wall with earth magic once and bonded them together stronger.

This should be enough to withstand the monsters for the time being.

Its surface might be shaved a bit when the attack magic is fired though.

Now then... preparation complete.

Next, we just need to gather people here... Unfortunately, this area isn't spacious enough to hold the whole city.

Alright.

...Let's move these buildings out the way for now.

Chapter 157: Strongest Sage, Decorates

"Next, let's remove buildings that's on the way! This place should be big enough to hold the people if we remove the inn over there!"

I declared that after we had finished reinforcing the wall and setting up the trap.

And then, Ruli and the girls looked surprised.

"Remove... You mean by dismantling it?"

"Even if it's an emergency, demolishing buildings without permission isn't a good idea..."

"People will get mad at us if we do that!"

Ah. They think I'm going to destroy it huh.

However, there are ways to move buildings around without destroying them.

"We're not gonna destroy it! We're just gonna move it around a bit!"

I jump over the city's outer wall after saying that.

Ruli and the others follow after me even while voicing their doubt.

"M-moving a building that huge, without destroying it!?"

Ruli pointed at the inn I indicated.

Fortunately, there's no one inside, but it's still a very heavy three-story stone-made building.

Moving it by brute force will end up breaking it indeed....

"The inn is built on top of the ground right. There are many ways to go about doing this."

I went inside the inn and used several spells.

And then I turned around to the three.

"Alright, let's push it! To there!"

Hearing my instruction, the three put their hands on the wall and begin to push the building to the direction I pointed.

"I-I got it!"

"There's no way this huge building will move just by pushing--"

The three tried to move the building while seemingly half in doubt... It moved right when Iris began to push.

Traveling on the ground like it's sliding, without anything breaking.

"It moved!?"

"This heavy building, by pushing!?"

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"This is weird even with Iris-san here.... What did Mathi-kun do anyway!?"

Ruli asked me.

True, Iris's power plays a big role in moving the inn building... But the biggest contributor here is the magic I put on the ground.

"I've softened the ground while also supporting the inn with augment magic! It does consume a lot of mana, but we've got no time right now!"

I threw a stone on the ground near the inn's entrance.

Normally it should have rebounded and rolled on the ground, but the stone just sunk into the ground like it was on water.

You can move a building around without breaking it by softening the ground this much.

...That said, the inn is quite large, it barely fits within Disqualified Crest's range.

I might need to think of another way if the building was a bit bigger.

The inn was safely moved out of the way and we opened a space spacious enough to hold the dungeon city populace close to the wall.

We can induce the monsters for real now.

The situation with the monsters... It's about to get dangerous soon.

A lot more monsters have arrived at the dungeon city.

....It is easier to gather people if it gets a bit chaotic though.

"Alright, let's gather the people here!"

I canceled the ground softening augment magic, put another augment into a magic stone in my hand, and threw it in the center of the newly made space.

And then the magic stone developed a magic circle as large as the opened space while emitting blue light.

It's basically a barrier magic.

Its special characteristics is that it emits showy light and that light reaches far away places.

"That small magic stone for such a huge barrier... What kind of magic is this?"

Ruli looked at the magic stone I threw in astonishment.

...In actuality, this magic circle is the lowest level magic circle I've ever used.

I'd have asked Ruli with her Glory Crest instead of doing it myself if I wanted proper performance.

"It's effect is... decoration."

"...Decoration?"

"Yeah. There's no actual effect. It only shines prettily.... But this kind of magic has its use at the right time."

I activated the next magic as I said that.

There's not much time left, we've got to hurry and assemble the populace.

Chapter 158: Strongest Sage, Protects the Barrier

"..Now then, let's do this. You three, block your ears."

I put the magic I developed earlier on my mouth as I said that.

"Our... ears?"

"I don't really get it, but okay."

After confirming the three have blocked their ears right, I activate another magic and speak toward the magic.

[Citizens of Dungeon City!]

Then, my voice got amplified thousands of times, reverberating in the surroundings.

This should be loud enough to reach the entire city.

And... This magic has another trait to it.

"Uwaa! What a loud voice!"

"This voice... Is it Mathi-kun's?"

"But I've never heard this voice before..."

Yep.

It changes voice tone.

It's a synthesized voice of the kings and great magicians of the old.

Transformation magic is normally only useful for disguise... But this could have a huge effect depending on the cases.

I pause there, activate hearing magic and assess the reactions inside the city.

"What, what?"

"Don't tell me, it's a rescue party?"

"But this voice doesn't sound familiar..."

Yup. Expected responses.

While thinking that, I speak again toward the unfolded magic.

[A barrier has just been erected on the eastern side of the dungeon city! Though not absolute, it's sturdier than the city's wall! Those who cannot protect themselves, or those who want to help protect the barrier, please go to the barrier at the edge of the eastern street!]

My magic echoed in every nook and cranny of the dungeon city.

No one probably would believe a word from some unknown person like this in normal times.

However... The city is currently under attack of monsters and has fallen into panic.

Moreover, the city ruler who should have been taking command has been tied up because of his attempted rebellion, no one is giving directions.

At times like this, combining a flashy barrier (though it's actually just a decoration magic) with a dignified voice echoing in the city....

"So you're saying we're saved if we go there!"

"Dunno who, but he could erect that huge barrier! He must be a super high level magician!"

"We're saved! We're saved!"

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This happens.

Some people seem to have noticed the oddness with the magic, but they're outnumbered.

The populace who sought a place to go gathered at the barrier along with adventurers who wanted to protect them.

As a result...

"...There's a lot more than I predicted."

Most of the populace have gathered at the barrier we put up.

Some adventurers have remained on the city's entrances to prevent monsters from coming in... but since the monsters won't go to places with a few people, they should be fine without protection.

"Are we really safe here!?"

Looks like some are still suspicious.

Still a little while before the monsters gather... guess I should buy some time here.

[...Iris, I'm gonna hide, throw a rock at the barrier.]

This time I used telepathic magic instead of amplification to call Iris.

"I understand!"

Looks like Iris quickly got what I wanna do.

And then she casually break the ground and cut a rock that's just the right size--wait, isn't that a bit too big?

[Hey, this is just to show off the barrier, a bit smaller one should...]

[Sooi!]

She didn't listen.

Thus, a huge rock is fiercely flying toward the barrier (or what it looks like, it's actually just a decoration.)

....Well, I should manage somehow.

As Disqualified Crest is oriented towards close-quarter combat, it can easily switch control quickly.

I quickly conceal myself and go to the rock.

And then I activate an attack magic at the weak point of the rock.

I also activated some random electric magic to make it looks like the barrier

was protecting them.

Since the rock was unexpectedly big, its fragments scattered over a wide area... Well, it ended up looking showy.

And the reaction....

"Awesome! It went and repulsed that huge rock!"

"Where'd that boulder come from!?"

"Isn't it the monsters? Still, this is one amazing barrier magic...."

Yup. Nice reactions.

People who were outside the barrier went inside after seeing that.

And the lured monsters have also gathered on the other side of the wall.

...It's show time for the real barrier.

Chapter 159: Strongest Sage, Manipulates Wind

"Now then, let's annihilate these monsters!"

I proclaimed that to Ruli and the girls now that the monsters had gathered here.

The monsters are focusing solely at the people in the dungeon city, thus they're not straying far from the wall.

Normally, this would have been the perfect chance to attack... But there's too many of them right now, an ordinary attack won't be able to deal with them all.

So... It's time for the girl with almost inexhaustible mana to get on stage.

"Iris."

"Yes! ...Are we, going to do that?"

Iris who was called by me made a spreading wings gesture.

She's probably asking if I want her to turn into dragon and fire her breath... But that's not it.

Firing breath is too huge of a burden for the current Iris, and the city will get rolled up in it.

"Not that. I'd like you to use an ordinary flame magic. A type that scatters flame over."

I made a small flame as I said that.

Not the single-shot firing flame ball type, but a rapid continuous one.

"...Is that okay? I won't be able to control it, you know?"

"Yeah. Ruli, is that done yet?"

"Err, this one is quite complicated..."

Ruli muttered while putting her hand on a magic stone.

I'm asking Ruli to make a large-scale barrier.

The barrier isn't it that strong, but it covers over a wide area.

Even if it can't cover all the monsters, it has to for the majority of them at least.

"I did it!"

"Nice!"

I activated the magic stone Ruli gave me and threw it in the middle of the monsters.

The edge of the barrier barely touches the city's tip.

And... This barrier has another characteristic.

"Oy, there's another barrier outside!"

"Huh... Is that really a barrier?"

"The monsters are passing through it!"

The adventurers who were watching monsters that had climbed the outer

wall raised their voices when they saw the unfolded barrier.

Yep. This barrier doesn't affect the monsters at all.

"Um... Did I make a mistake?"

Ruli asked me worryingly when she saw the barrier.

But it's fine. This is just fine.

To begin with, we'd need a magic stone an order of magnitude bigger than the one we used here if we wanted the barrier to repel these monsters.

"It's all set. Iris, when I said, [Now!], fire flame magic at maximum output toward that side!"

"I got it! I just have to go at it with all my power right!?"

"Yeah. As an insurance... Please do it in that form."

Even if the barrier has been carefully adjusted not to break, it will be all for naught if Iris is in her dragon form.

The output difference between a magic stone of that size and a dragon is just too huge, regardless of the techniques involved.

Then I stand inside the barrier while Iris is positioning herself.

"Oy, are you gonna be alright plunging into that swarms of monsters!?"

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"I'm fine, I'm floating, see!"

An adventurer showed his concern when he saw me jumping into the barrier that held the monsters, I shouted back to reply that I was fine.

Now that I think about it, it's been awhile since I'm fighting in places with many people like this.

Well most of those people are soldiers, while only about 10 who aren't soldier are situated right to see the fight.

"He... He's flying!?"

"Is that, flying magic?"

"No, looks like he's floating mid-air."

"That Mathias is that healer with monstrous strength right? What's he doing there?"

These are the reactions just by standing in mid-air huh...

I've never asked anyone before, but it really does seem like there's no flight magic in this era.

I don't think it would garner this kind of reaction in the Royal Capital where many Second Royal Academy students gather... Looks like the plan to regress humanity by spreading Chant magic is a huge success huh.

I activate wind magic while thinking that.

The purpose of this barrier is to isolate wind.

I'm creating whirlpools of air inside the barrier by carefully regulating the winds.

I'm also scattering smashed woods and flour away while I'm at it.

"Now!"

And then I gave Iris the instruction while fleeing outside the barrier.

"Here I go!"

Iris said that and began to shoot fire magic into the barrier.

Chapter 160: Strongest Sage, Tells the Plan

"...Good, it went nicely."

Right after Iris shot her magic.

The inside of the barrier instantly blazed, turning it red.

It's burning not only in Iris's magic range, but in the entire barrier.

"Eh!? Was my magic this powerful!?"

"No, that might be the case in your dragon form, but this firepower isn't possible with that form. That's the flour and stuff burning."

"...Flour!? Not explosive or something similar, but flour!?"

"Yeah. When you mix flour in the air just right, it explodes like this."

Think it's called dust explosion in my past life.

Mixing flour with air just right is unexpectedly difficult, but since I practiced it in my past life, I managed somehow.

Or rather, controlling magic in close proximity is easy with Disqualified Crest, optimal for scattering flour in my hand into the air.

I don't think other crests could make it burn this nicely.

"...Now then, should be about time it's dispersing."

And the reason why I prepared this barrier is not only for confining the flame inside.

By also sealing the air inside, the flame will quickly disappear once the explosions recede, thus we can quickly ascertain the situation.

"Ah... There's still some surviving..."

Iris muttered when she saw the inside of the barrier after the flame went away.

There are some survivors indeed... but there aren't many that can still fight.

"I'm gonna clean up the troublesome ones! You too Alma, shoot any monster that looks like they can still fight with your bow!"

"Gotcha!"

After telling that to the three, I went inside the barrier and killed only the monsters that could still fight.

The work was over in less than 10 minutes.

"Alright, now only the dying small fry remain. Even an average adventurer could finish them off easily."

"I'm amazed you can tell with this many monsters... Those monsters all look the same to me..."

"Me too, I beat some, but I couldn't tell if I didn't look at one carefully..."

...Ah.

It's true that experiences are needed to distinguish the state of a monster.

Once you get used to it, you can immediately tell monsters that can still fight from their bloodlust and such.

"You girls should be able to get it in times as long as you keep fighting."

I stop talking there--and activate telepathy magic.

It'll be bad if the surroundings can hear our conversations from here on.

I don't feel demon's magic on the ground for the time being, but I won't be surprised if there are interception magic around.

[Now then... It's the real thing from here on.]

[...So we're going to fight the demons at last.]

[Me too, I'll work hard!]

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Ruli and the others sounded tense.

However, perhaps thanks to their experiences in combat so far, they don't seem to be stiffen in fear despite being tense.

Having them experience multiple actual combat was a correct answer.

And unlike anything before, the plan this time requires Ruli as the key piece.

[Alright, let's get into the dungeon! I'm gonna conceal ourselves with magic, come gather here!]

[[[YES!]]]

Once we were in one place, I used concealment magic on us four, hiding our figures.

And then we run to the dungeon.

[I'm gonna explain the plan while we're moving! Listen well!]

While Ruli, Iris, and Alma are looking tense--I tell them the plan this time.

[We will split into two groups! One group will descend to the floor where the demons are, and the other group will interfere with the dungeon's Dragon Vein to jam the demon's magic!]

Hearing that, Ruli ponders for a bit... and shouts with the telepathy magic.

[H-Hold on! Splitting into two groups, that means Mathi-kun is going alone right!?]

...That's right.

Up until now, Ruli usually acts as a backup near me whenever we have a magic fight.

But we can't do that this time.

In order to control the Dragon Vein well, you need to maintain your concentration and stay at one place, but there won't be anyone fighting the demon if I stay to control the Dragon Vein.

However--I've already taught Ruli the skill to handle the Dragon Vein.

Anything is possible... well, not that far, but sabotaging a demon opponent is very possible so long Ruli demonstrates her full ability.

[Yeah. ...I'm entrusting everything related to Dragon Vein magic to Ruli until I beat the demon. Alma and Iris, you two are her guards.]

[I...I got it!]

[Me too, I'll do my best to protect Ruli-san!!]

[I'm not letting a mouse in where Ruli is!]

Ruli didn't object to my plan.

Iris and Alma looks eager to do their missions.

--The dungeon's entrance came in sight while we were discussing.

[Alright, let's do this!]

Chapter 161: Strongest Sage, Digs Out Dragon Vein

"...It should be around here."

I stabbed the dungeon wall with a pickaxe as I said that.

It's the same magically enhanced pickaxe I used to gather mithril at the Second Academy.

Since we're not making barrier this time, I dig out the wall at a quick pace.

And then--a few minutes after I started digging.

Mana gushes out of the dug wall.

"Here it is. This is the great dungeon's Dragon Vein."

"W-what incredible mana..."

Ruli muttered while gazing at the huge amount of mana gushing out of the wall.

At a glance, it only looks like an ordinary rock wall.

But those who can detect mana to a degree will immediately notice that there's a vast amount of mana lurking inside this wall.

And those who have gotten a bit more used to detecting mana should also notice what lies inside.

"Umm... Don't you think this mana kinda feels like demons?"

Looks like Ruli noticed.

"It's cause the demons' mana is mixed in it. ...That said, the majority of it doesn't seem to have been from a recent interference."

"Not recent? ...You mean it's old?"

"Yeah. It's 100 year old at the very least. This amount of mana... It's probably the work of a powerful enough demon at the cost of its life. The demons in this time are only doing the finishing touch."

The reason why demons haven't destroyed mankind as soon as possible is

probably because they're waiting for this to activate, in addition to their power decline.

I mean simply activating this should cause a great disaster huge enough to wipe out the present humanity.

"More than 100 years ago... but since it needs a finishing touch, that means we can still stop it right?"

Ruli turns toward the Dragon Vein.

Looks like she's braced herself.

"That's right. For now put this magic circle for communication in the Dragon Vein... Afterward, interfere with the Dragon Vein while consulting with me! If you make a mistake in the control, it will explode and cause Mana Disaster, in the worst case scenario, this entire city could be destroyed, so be careful!"

"Y...Yes!"

Telepathy magic won't work with Disqualified Crest at a distance.

Thus, we're using the Dragon Vein as a medium for it.

If it's only for relaying info, I don't need to get too close to the Dragon Vein at its present state, thus it's an effective mean of communication inside the dungeon.

I've taught her how to make magic tools to control Dragon Vein after all.

"You two, I'm counting on you to guard Ruli!"

"Yup!"

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"I understand!"

After confirming Alma and Iris's reactions, I dive down the floors.

Due to the demons tampering the Dragon Vein, the floor structures seem to have have changed from yesterday.

[Ruli, any change in the Dragon Vein's fluctuation?]

While progressing through the dungeon, I touch the wall with my hand and communicate with Ruli.

[Yes! It kinda feels unnatural somehow!]

Just as I thought, the demons have started the finishing touch.

This is the perfect timing to interfere with it.

[Interfere their Dragon Vein control! Use any rank 2 Magic Tools you want!]

[I understand!]

Rank is a number that indicates the scale of the effect a magic gives to the Dragon Vein.

Magic doesn't have that kind of classification though, it's just me saying [This is rank 1, this is rank 2] on my own.

Since among the magic I taught her, there are some that could cause a great disaster if used carelessly.

Pointing out which magic to use or not to use at times like this will take too much time, thus classifying them into ranks would lessen the work.

While giving pointers like that--I reached a floor that's so obviously different from a natural dungeon.

Right now I'm on floor 31.

Normally, the dungeon should have been much deeper.

However--there is no path that leads beyond here on floor 31.

"Now then... The real thing starts now."

Chapter 162: Strongest Sage, Recycles

[Ruli, how's the jamming going?]

[I have stopped their moves for now... I think! How about your side, Mathi-kun?]

[I'm on floor 31 now, but there's no route going down. The demon probably made use of the Dragon Vein to change the internal structure to be that way. The skill level of the present humans can't reach floor 31.]

I check the mana on the wall as I said that.

...Judging from this state, the dungeon was probably tampered a few hours ago.

I think they've done the preparation quite a while before that though.

[Dungeon floor can't be broken right? Should I tinker with the Dragon Vein and create a path for you?]

Destroying dungeon walls is simple, but doing so to the dungeon floor to move between floors is unexpectedly difficult.

Because, even though the surface of the floor is soft enough that it sinks if Iris even steps on it, the floor gets harder after reaching a certain spot below the surface and going further beyond that is quite a task.

The first floor is already harder than mithril.

And it gets harder the deeper you go.

At this floor... I don't think diamond can even scratch it.

--However.

[No, I'll manage it myself this time. Ruli keep doing the interference.]

True, there is a magic that can do that just as Ruli said.

But I don't think the current Ruli can finish that fast enough.

Even if she were to give up on interfering the demons and concentrate on the magic, it probably would still take three days to finish.

...Therefore, I've got no choice but to break the floor.

[Manage it yourself... Are you going to destroy the floor!? Isn't it impossible!?]

[It's harder than breaking the walls sure but it's not impossible. We can break it with brute force if we have say, 10 times the power of Iris in her dragon form.]

[Isn't that practically impossible then!?]

Well, the current me can't put out 10 times the power of dragon Iris indeed.

However, that much power is only needed if we intend to break the floor with brute force.

[There's a trick to break dungeon floor you see. If you invoke a magic 200 times per second, the feat isn't really that far-fetched.]

First, I activate [Dig] magic.

This is a magic that simply digs the ground to make a hole like a drill.

At first [Dig] magic continued to dig the dungeon floor nicely, but after a few meters down, it suddenly stopped and didn't move even a milimeter more.

That means this is the true face of the dungeon floor.

[200 times per second!?]

I heard Alma's voice from the telepathy magic.

[Yeah. There's this phenomenon called resonance. Like when an explosion happens, the grounds shake for a bit right? If you match the timing of that vibration with the magic, you can break things that are usually unbreakable.]

[No well... Even if that was the case, even Mathi-kun can't possibly activate 200 magic in one second can you!? You're practically invoking all those magic at the same time!]

True, the brute force approach would be faster than trying to invoke that many magic the regular way.

However, there's actually a backdoor to invoke the same magic many times.

[Mixing different magic with it is certainly not possible, however...]

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I activate pressure magic as I said that.

Pressure magic will slightly shake the ground and disappear once it's done its job.

I put additional mana into that pressure magic--and forcefully rebuild the magic.

--This is the backdoor trick. Magic Recycling.

Of course, since this isn't how you usually use magic, it requires a very fine control of mana, but since you can invoke the magic simply by controlling mana in a very short amount of time, the magic activation rate has been raised by leaps and bounds.

...That said, with crests other than the Disqualified Crest, like say the next speediest one, the Small Magic Crest can only output 130 times per second at most.

The battle speeds between close quarter and ranged combat differ after all.

Other Crests cannot activate magic at high speed.

I raised the rate of mana supply while thinking about that.

The vibration that shook the ground gradually got stronger--and after a few seconds, the dungeon floor collapsed.

"...Well, guess this is just how it is on floor 31."

I slip out of the mountain of debris while protecting myself from the collapse and touch a nearby wall to connect with Ruli.

[Mathi-kun! The reaction on the Dragon Vein suddenly changed!]

[Yeah. That's because I broke a floor. There are mana paths on the dungeon floors too, thus breaking them will affect the Dragon Vein.]

I investigated the surrounding mana while saying that.

...It's close.

The demons are probably located two floor below here.

[I'm close to the floor where the demons are. Prepare to interfere with the Dragon Vein here!]

[I understand!]

The sounds from the digging just now probably told our actions to the other party, it won't be strange if a battle breaks out anytime.

Moreover, the fact that the demons could control Dragon Vein to block dungeon floor must mean that it's a reasonably powerful demon.

Looks like I can expect a proper fight this time, sure been awhile.

Chapter 163: Strongest Sage, Intercepts

"...I haven't been able to control the Dragon Vein since awhile ago... Is that your doing?"

The demon suddenly turned around when I was approaching him while concealing my presence.

Well, I already knew that surprise attacks wouldn't work against this level of demon, so it's not a problem.

Might be different if the opponent were defenseless, but they were in high alert after that cave in.

"And what if it is?"

I replied with a vague answer that neither deny or confirm it.

Letting your enemy keep holding their own misunderstanding is a basic of battle.

However...

The mana around the demon shook unnaturally before he showed a reaction.

This is... It's most likely a communication magic.

With that in mind, I see what the content is about by reading the surrounding mana.

[Don't be fooled. Mathias Hildesheimr might be capable of obstructing our attempt to control the Dragon Vein, but not when he's moving. Assume that someone is lurking near the Dragon Vein and doing the sabotage. Judging from the magic used, the one hindering us is most likely a Glory Crest. Each of the magic is likely not of high level, but it's skilfully used.]

[Understood. Then I will fight him while pretending to have been fooled.]

There's probably another demon who's giving instructions to this demon here.

Judging from the content, like the things with magic and Dragon Vein, that demon knows his stuff.

I can destroy their comm here, but... the fight might be easier if I intercept their communication while pretending to have no idea about it.

And I can find out the enemy's skill level with this too.

"...I see. That means, I can manipulate the Dragon Vein as much as I like once I've killed you."

The demon deployed a barrier as he said that.

However, unlike an ordinary barrier, the spell art is concentrated at the center.

A countermeasure against Disqualified Crest huh.

Since the spell art is located at the center, it's hard to destroy this type of barrier with Disqualified Crest.

....Well, at least that's how it is for those who don't know how to make us of Disqualified Crest.

I tampered only a part of the deployed barrier magic's spell art.

Breaking down the entire barrier is difficult if you don't destroy its spell art, however... It's not that hard to slip in by simply breaking a part of it.

"Wha..."

I quickly augment my sword while the demon was shocked.

Then I attempted to stab the demon, however...

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"...Sturdy as expected huh."

A demon with proper strength is sturdy.

Well other demons so far were all scouts after all.

But... That's not all.

Judging from the mana reaction, this demon has probably used a magic to defend against melee attacks on himself.

[Looks like the countermeasures against Mathias work well.]

[Yes. His strength is stronger than anticipated, however it doesn't seem like he can break through it.]

[Finish it before he could break it. Long term combat is disadvantageous against a stronger opponent.]

[...Yes.]

Just as I thought.

This demon is considerably more powerful than all other demons I've fought so far... And more than that, he's seemingly drawn up a plan to cope with Disqualified Crests.

However...

This demon only know Disqualified Crest that fights with magically enhanced swords.

And in fact, that was mostly how I fought against all demons I encountered so far.

However--the Disqualified Crest wouldn't have been praised as the strongest crest if that was all there is to it.

It's true that augmenting a sword with a huge quantity of attack magic makes for a powerful weapon, however that's not the only trick a Disqualified Crest has.

[Ruli, prepare the 14th magic circle.]

[Yes!]

I prepare to attack while giving instructions to Ruli.

At a glance, it might look like a defensive magic from the way it blocked my attack earlier... But it's actually not.

It's impossible to have the magic permanently active to protect against an attack magic that powerful.

There is gap you can breach here.

The question is where to create that opportunity... since they've prepared a nice material for it and all, allow me to use it.

Chapter 164: Strongest Sage, Predicts Moves

[The 14th is ready!]

[Roger! If you see a weird reaction from the Dragon Vein, immediately activate it!]

I resumed my attack after Ruli reported she was done preparing.

This time I'm not attacking with a sword, but hitting fast by using magic on myself and on the ground.

"...Kuh!"

The demon evaded it while sounding irritated.

--He's acting.

In fact, I'm attacking in accordance to this demon's plan.

As a proof--there's a trap that the demon has prepared beforehand on my feet now.

Since it's installed inside the Dragon Vein, the trap is hard to find and powerful.

Of course, I step on it because I've predicted it.

And then the demon attempts to activate the trap on my feet just as I predicted.

If the demon activates the trap, Ruli's magic will nullify it and I'll hit the demon with the real attack during that chance.

However...

[Hold it, don't be lured by his trick! Defense magic!]

The demon got a message through magic right before he activated the trap.

Hearing that, without hesitation, the demon immediately stopped the activation and deployed defense magic.

....I see.

Reading moves is the job of the demon giving the instructions huh.

[Lure, does that mean... He found out about the Dragon Vein magic?]

[No, I doubt he could find that skilfully hid spell art in the middle of this fight. ...He must have guessed something because you were acting suspiciously.]

I heard their conversation in the communication magic as I ceased attacking and jumped backward.

Looks like they haven't realized that I've detected the magic in the ground... The demon giving instructions seems to be well experienced in combat.

In fact, this demon did act suspiciously, thus even if I didn't directly find the trap, that was enough hint for the trap's existence.

[So the rumor that says Mathias Hildesheimr is the reincarnation of Gaias is true?]

[Impossible. The era is too far apart, and if he were really Gaias, you'd have long been dead, I'd have long been blown away by his magic too.]

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might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

Such a rumor is circulating among the demons huh...

Well, the part about Gaias reincarnation is correct though.

...Still, does that means the demon that's giving orders here knows the past me. He's quite ancient if he really does.

Well, every demon that met the past me should have all perished after all, so it's probably something he heard from his fellow demons.

Either way, that demon is giving quite the accurate instructions, and it seems this demon here has been trained to follow those instructions.

However, that fact can also be used in itself.

Jamming their comm at the right moment will create an opening.

The comm magic that they use is a type that's easy to intercept yet hard to jam... But the magic I taught Ruli should be enough to block it for 10 seconds by disturbing the environment mana.

And 10 seconds are more than enough time.

[Ruli, prepare the 17th magic along with the 14th magic. Use the 14th when there's a change on the Dragon Vein, and the 17th when I tell you to!]

The 14th magic is for annulling the activation of the trap in the Dragon Vein.

And the 17th is a magic to disturb the environment mana, obstructing long range magic... especially comm magic and such.

Those magic have their own names but assigning numbers to them makes things easier in coordinations like this.

These two supports will help me smash the demon's defense magic.

And a few seconds later.

[It's ready!]

Ruli contacted me.

Now then... Let's break apart this anti Disqualified Crest magic plan.

Chapter 165: Strongest Sage, Sees Through the Ploy

I position myself relative to the demon while readying my sword.

Positions are important for the success of this plan.

Right when our positions are such that the trap is straight ahead of me, I run forward.

And then...

[Now!]

The moment I stepped on the installed trap.

I gave Ruli the order through the Dragon Vein on my feet.

There's not enough time to wait for her reply, but I'm sure it will go well with Ruli.

[Quickly--]

And the moment the other demon contacted this demon.

The surrounding mana fell into disorder, cutting off the transmission.

--It's the best timing.

[Eh, what just!?]

The demon is bewildered that he couldn't catch the order.

Outwardly, he looks ready with his sword pointed at me, but it's obvious that he can't focus on the combat.

This demon probably never expected that their communication magic would be jammed.

I'll use all the attacks I can use on this huge opportunity.

[Magic Debuff], [Barrier Breaker], [Anti-explosive Reinforcement]——

I augment three magic on the sword and swing it toward the demon.

And here's the important part.

There would have been no need to create an opening if it were just for one blow.

Right before the sword hit--I deployed a small attack magic on my left hand and shot it at the demon.

And then an explosion that's too big for the magic I shot occurred at the place the magic hit.

"Wha..."

The demon sounded shocked.

That's right. This explosion is the ploy to block my sword.

--Explosive Reactive Magic Barrier.

This barrier will create an explosion at the place my sword hit it to push it away.

Because blowing the sword away is the same as blocking the magic

augmented on it.

However--

there's no way this large of an explosion can be triggered in succession without a time lag.

Once it blocked an attack, it should need at least half a second for the second explosion to trigger.

That's why I purposely triggered an explosion right before the true attack, the sword, hit it along with the augmented magic.

And the sword hit the demon--

The barrier that wrapped the demon's body broke with a glass-like breaking sound.

"You monster!"

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The demon who noticed the barrier's destruction activates the trap magic on my feet in a hurry.

My attack this time was for breaking the barrier, thus the demon could still

move freely even after getting hit.

However--

"...Why doesn't it activate?"

The demon activated the trap.

Ruli used the [14th] magic, nullifying the activation.

"Activate? What are talking about?"

I swing down the magically augmented sword at the demon as I said that.

This time it's a genuine attack stressing on firepower.

I didn't have much time to prepare so it's not powerful enough to defeat a demon of this class in one hit, however--.

"Gu-GUAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

However, it's enough to cut off the demon's wings, preventing it from flying.

Now the enemy can't run.

This demon will have to die here.

[Oy, what's happening!]

[I don't know, the comm suddenly got cut off--my barrier has been broken! He got my wings too, I can't fly anymore!]

[...Do not panic! Go with plan B!]

The comm magic was restored and the demon received a new order.

It appears that these demons have prepared a second plan.

--However, they don't have anymore chance to win now that the barrier has been destroyed.

Next, I just need to have them show their cards and beat them.

Chapter 166: Strongest Sage, Defeats

『Plan B... Close-quarter combats with random movements is it.』

『Yeah. I won't give you instructions anymore, fight like I taught you.』

『Understood!』

Looks like the demon plans to fight in close quarter combat.

Close quarter combat against a Disqualified Crest huh, they really underestimate me.

It's true that demons surpass me in pure magic deployment speed.

No matter how fast a Disqualified Crest in that regard, it hasn't even been 20 years since I reincarnated.

That's why they think that they have a winning chance by making random actions with some kind of tricks and remove all foresights, however--.

"This can't be, how are you able to cope with it!"

The actual fight is one sided.

The demon misses all his attacks, all of my attacks hit him.

It's not like I read the enemy movements ahead of time or something.

I simply deploy magic to deal with all possible patterns that can be predicted from the demon's actions and remove the unusable ones.

Of course that means always deploying four to five magics in any one time, but that much isn't that hard with the capability of short range magic control of the Disqualified Crest by decreasing the magic power.

"Guh..."

The demon who keeps missing his attack begins to fret.

My sword doesn't have that much power because of having to deploy many magic at once, yet I'm whittling down the demon's health and mana little by little.

Judging from the fact that he's not changing his battle style after all this, these demons probably don't have any hidden cards left.

And then... Dozens of seconds after the battle started, I make a bet.

I squeeze down the multi magic deployments I've been doing up until now to one attack magic on my sword.

The sword this time is an order of magnitude more powerful compared to all the slashes I gave the demon.

When the demon begun the close quarter combat, his attacks had this confidence to win the match.

However, the demon right now doesn't have that.

He's begun to abandon the idea of defeating me.

There's no way he can maintain his focus in such situation.

I evaded the dispirited sword by taking a half a step backward.

At the same time, I crush a magic stone on hand and augment my sword with the【Special Magic Enchant】.

『This is bad, evade that!』

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I could hear a flustered voice from the comm magic.

Looks like the commandeering demon noticed the power of this sword.

--However, it's pointless.

Giving orders through comm magic is too slow in this fast tempo combat.

That demon probably stopped doing so because he knew that.

"Ga... GAAAAAAAAAH!"

The demon immediately tried to use a barrier to block my sword, but that level of barrier is practically nonexistent before a sword augmented with【Special Magic Enchant】.

The sword easily penetrated the barrier and chopped off the demon's left arm from the shoulder down.

Of course, I don't have a reason to stop my attack with just this.

I crush a magic stone and augment the sword with the【Special Magic Enchant】again.

And then I swing horizontally, aiming at the demon's neck.

"Defensive magic--"

The demon tried to block it, but there's no way he can do that after losing his left arm when he couldn't in perfect state.

My sword easily lop off the demon's head.

Done.

『I killed the demon.』

『Yay!』

『Amazing! I believed that Mathi-kun would win, but for it to be this quick!』

『I could beat it this easily thanks to Ruli's supports on the Dragon Vein. And the two guarding Ruli. ...Alma and Iris, are they alright?』

『Yes! It was bad when the number of monsters suddenly increased, but not even one monster came to where I am! They're fighting right now, but the two are safe!』

Looks like there's a sudden increase of monsters on the floors above.

I guess it's not odd for that to happen after all the interferences on the Dragon Vein.

However--The two will have to guard Ruli for a bit more.

『Ruli, don't leave the Dragon Vein yet... There's still something to be done there.』

Chapter 167: Strongest Sage, Talks to the Enemy

『Something to be done... Are you going to look for the mastermind's location?』

Ruli got it when he heard what I said.

Exactly.

The most problematic demon this time wasn't the one on-site, but the demon that was giving orders from a distance.

Right now, I can grab his trails.

『That's right. Ruli, I'll spread out the mana myself, help me with the rectification magic.』

The Dragon Vein's mana continues to flow intensely.

We need to stop and fix the flow up in order to probe a magic that went through Dragon Vein.

『I understand! ...Here I go!』

A few sec afterward, the Dragon Vein's flow begins to stabilize.

After seeing that, I begin to grope around the Dragon Vein's mana.

--Right after.

『...Traceback huh. Useless.』

I heard a voice coming through the Dragon Vein.

It appears that the demon changed the object of his comm magic to me.

He probably noticed the rectification magic from a magic to monitor the Dragon Vein's flow that had been put inside.

『You're not gonna cut off the comm? That's some confidence over traceback you have there.』

I observe the state of the mana while saying that.

This magic seems to be coming from a place a few dozens kilometers away from where we are.

If I'm not mistaken, there should be a town called Elenia in that direction... but the demon is probably not there.

There should be a magic tool to relay comm magic placed in that town.

Camouflaging the source of the magic by using the relay.

It's the most basic of the basic to deal against traceback and the most effective method.

Traceback is still possible if we find the relay magic tool and go from there... but judging from the opponent's level of knowledge, the tool probably gonna self destruct once it's done with the job.

...Well, I've but expected this though.

『...And, have you found out where I am?』

The demon asked with confidence.

『I don't. I know that it's not Elenia at least. 』

『I was expecting you guys to go visit the relay only to be let down though.』

The demon really sounded disappointed.

『Well, we'll end up fighting before long, look forward to it.』

The demon this time is honestly lacking.

His magical capability wasn't too bad, but he lacked the combat experiences, very much so.

I feel like he'd have been a bit more tougher if he just had the capability to think through the orders given to him through the comm magic.

However--conversely speaking, the demon that was giving the directives might be worth something.

『...But I don't have any reason at all to fight a monster like you?』

『I do. ...You don't have to do anything and simply wait if you like, it'll just make your demise comes quicker.』

『That is only if you can find me.』

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He cut off the comm after leaving those words.

Judging from the mana movement, the relay magic tool seems to have been destroyed.

With this, it's impossible to trace the demon back using ordinary means.

He's really on a whole different level than any opponent I've faced so far.

This demon probably maintains the wisdom from before the decline of skill level.

He'll be a tough opponent to handle, it seems.

『Looks like the comm has been cut...』

『We've managed our sides somehow!』

『Successfully defeated the outbreak monsters! Zero casualty!』

I heard the three's voices.

It appears that they're done cleaning up the monsters above too.

『...Did we fail on the traceback?』

I see, Ruli heard the comm earlier.

Intercepting while at the same time, gaining control of the Dragon Vein huh, it seems her mana detection has powered up.

Well, her conclusion is a bit mistaken though.

『I wasn't trying to find out his location with the traceback this time, y'know.』

『Eh?』

『I knew that kind of stuff wouldn't work on the enemy the moment I heard the orders he gave through the comm magic.』

I check out the trace amount of mana left in the Dragon Vein.

The demon seems to think that the tracing path has been completely cut off with what he's done... but, too naive.

If it can't be found through an ordinary mean, then I just need to do it through an extraordinary mean.

『I'm going to search for that demon now. It's gonna be a bit troublesome... But would you help me?』

『『『Yes(un)!』』』

Chapter 168: Strongest Sage, Plans Campaign

A few minutes after the demon cut off the transmission.

We've safely left the dungeon and come back to the inn.

The city was still in uproar because of the monster raid earlier, but it seems like inns have resumed their operations.

Well, the damage is almost nil after all, it's probably more peaceful compared to when that city ruler was still in power.

"So... How do we look for those demons?"

"With this."

I took out a small magic stone as I replied Alma.

"...Magic stone?"

"It kinda feel like the demon's mana..."

Just as I thought, Ruli would notice.

"Yeah. This is that demon's mana transmitted through the comm magic.... It needs time to stabilize though, so it's still not complete yet. We'll use this to detect the demon."

It's true that you can camouflage the actual location of the transmission by using relay magic.

However, even with relay, your mana will always be transmitted through the magic no matter what.

It would be a different story if the demon had used a special comm method, but then there would have been a delay in the transmission.

To begin with, searching a wide area by using mana as the basis wasn't widely known even before the decline back then, normally one doesn't prepare for it.

"Detecting mana, you mean... with Passive Detection?"

"No, Passive Detection can't cover that wide of an area. It's true that you can widen its search area... but there's no way Passive Detection can find our

enemy unless they're very close."

Considering our enemy took precautions for our detection, they must be quite far from us.

Trying to detect them with the assumption that they're close by is a waste of time and labor.

"Which means, there's other methods? Like through Dragon Vein, maybe...?"

"You almost got it right. We're gonna use Dragon Vein indeed... But just that won't be enough. We'll use existing facilities."

Searching a wide area through mana is unusual even before the decline.

Of course, it's not simple to do... however, it can be made easier this time.

"...Facilities?"

"Yea. There are large-scale magic devices that can search things by using enemy mana. We'll be using that."

That's right.

The facilities I made in my past life still remain today.

By the way, they're facilities I employed to destroy demons, thus it's possible to thoroughly detect them all in times.

"I never heard of such facilities though...."

"I'm not surprised you didn't know. Those magic devices were created 3000 years ago at the very least, and no one would know how to use it even if they found one."

"But, Mathi-kun knows their locations and how to use it?"

"

That's right.

As for the reason why... well, it's a long story."

I can't exactly tell them that my past life created the devices, I've got to make some excuses.

Well, Iris seems like she noticed the reason, she's looking at me with a

meaningful glance.

"Well, Mathi-kun's weird knowledge is just like the usual anyway... And so, where are those magic devices at?"

"The nearest one is... Here."

I unrolled a map on the desk and pointed my finger at a spot 100 kilometer away from here.

Seeing that... Alma shouts out loud.

"So far!"

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"...But it's only about 100 kilo, isn't it? Shouldn't take long if we run."

"No well, I agree that we can run there, distance-wise... But that's in another country you know?"

"...Really?"

"Un."

Another country huh....

That'd make it hard to move around.

The magic device in question will produce considerably loud noise in the surroundings from the mana shockwave when used.

Thus, we can't exactly slip in and use it in secret either.

"How about this place?"

I pointed at a place on another direction, about 130 kilo away.

From the sensation I got touching the Dragon Vein, there are three facilities in question that are still usable today.

It'll make things easier if even one is located within Eis Kingdom...

"That's a foreign country."

"Then, how about here."

"Also a foreign country."

Looks like the magic devices are all in foreign countries.

Well, since there's only three of them in the entire world, the fact that we can reach them on foot is still a good thing though.

"...It'll take quite a while before this mana stone stabilizes to a practical level. We need to go to another country in the meantime."

It's turning into something bigger than I originally thought.

...For now, we should secure the king's cooperation.

Chapter 169: Strongest Sage, Returns to the Royal Capital

"...Ok then, let's obtain the king's cooperation."

"The king?"

"Yea. Going to another country after acquiring info and cooperation from the country will definitely make things go smoother than going without any information whatsoever."

However, asking for an audience with the king would take too much time.

He'd come for sure, but dealing with procedures and stuff is annoying.

Therefore...

"But we'll be using a back door."

"Back door?"

"Yea, the principal. If we bring the horn of the demon we beat earlier to him, things should proceed the quickest."

The principal knows the king personally after all.

I mean he went and brought me to the king quite easily back then, we should be able to get the king's help while bypassing annoying procedures.

We're not in that much of a hurry since the magic stone mana won't stabilize for a while... But going abroad feels like it's going to get troublesome. I'd like to have some free time with us if possible.

"I see, the principal huh.... Principal Edward is quite a mystery himself..."

"You're right, apparently he's friends with the king... I feel like my common sense is paralyzed with Mathi-kun around."

Well, whether we're meeting the principal or the king, we've got to go to the royal capital anyway.

"Let's return to the royal capital for now."

"I got it! ...Should I fly?"

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"No, let's just run. Looking for a place to land that won't cause uproar around the royal capital is too much work. Just running is safe and fast."

Besides, Iris's body seems to still have damages left on it, transforming back to her dragon form would put a large burden on her.

Her wings and magic circuit are recovering little by little, but it should take time until they go back to normal.

Even if she had no choice but to transform back, surely there will be a better time for it than just for returning to the capital.

"True, we'll be back in no time by running if it's just to the royal capital!"

"Now that you mention it, it does feel close by!"

"...Nearly 100 kilometer away shouldn't have been called 'close'... But it does feel like it's not that far."

The girls seem eager to run too.

Of course, that means we'll be passing through Cikirisbia forest, but no one is objecting unlike the time we departed.

Thus, we quickly got ready and began to run toward the capital.

"Cikirisbia forest has this scary image to it, but it's just a normal forest when you take a better look."

"It is, it might be a bit dark... But you can cover your vision with『Passive Detection』."

"I don't recommend relying only on Passive Detection since monsters may sometimes be attracted to it. ...You can use this time to practice investigating which monsters get attracted to Passive Detection and those that can't be detected by it."

"Gotcha!"

Passive Detection isn't almighty.

In order to avoid an ambush from opponents where Passive Detection doesn't work on, you need to secure your vision and perceive their presence.

...Well, there's no particularly strong monsters in this route, there's no need to worry about that now.

We smoothly advance toward the royal capital while practicing as such.

And, in the evening.

"Arrived!"

"Feels like it went by far quicker than when we left!"

We arrived at the capital.

And immediately went to the site where the second academy was located.

But what await us there was...

"...Huh? This was where the Second Academy was, right?"

"No mistake about it, it should be here. I can sense the barrier's core."

"It looks like they're constructing something...."

It's a construction site where a huge building is seemingly being built.

Just what the heck happened in the short while we were not in the capital.

Chapter 170: Strongest Sage, Gains Cooperation

"Second Royal Academy, new school building under construction...?"

That was written around the gate at the construction site.

Looks like they're erecting a new building.

"But why would they suddenly need a new building..."

"From what I can see, it seems they make use of new technology. The thickness of the walls and such make it look more like a small fortress than a school."

"You're right, it looks really sturdy... They've even put barrier in it..."

There was indeed information about construction type magic in the textbook I wrote to teach about production type magic.

They're putting it into practices here.

Even the layout, looks like they're using the textbook I created as a reference.

The original schoolhouse wasn't really well made.

I'm pretty sure it'd collapse the moment it got dragged in battle.

It was indeed unreliable for a building that houses the core of the Great Royal Capital Barrier.

However... They could make it this fast huh.

And the design looks relatively solid, the Royal Capital's technology level seems to be evolving rapidly.

"So, I wonder just where the principal is."

"It's written here."

I point at a spot next to the under construction sign.

The temporary location of Second Academy is written on a paper there.

...Or rather.

"Isn't this where the First Academy at."

"They took it over huh..."

Looks like Second Academy has taken over the First Academy's school building.

Looking closer, half of the people doing the construction seem to be First Academy students.

The poor First Academy students were driven out of their schoolhouse and somehow got stuck constructing Second Academy's one.

...Well, since creating structures is a specialty of the Glory Crest, this might also serve as their magic training.

We head to the First Academy location as I thought that.

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"That's the place huh."

"It's been completely taken over..."

There's a『Temporary Schoolhouse of Second Academy』at the place where the First Academy schoolhouse should have been located.

By the look of things, the principal office must have been hijacked too.

"Let's go to the principal office for now."

"Un!"

We went to visit the principal office.

And as expected, principal Edward was inside.

"...Mathias and co. huh. I heard that demons showed up at the dungeon city and herds of monsters besieged the city, but I just knew you'd be fine."

Principal Edward said that without looking perturbed when he saw us.

It appears that the letter I had Eiku delivered reached principal Edward's hand too.

"So, there must be a reason you're here, no?"

"You got it right. Actually, we found out that there was another demon that was giving instructions to the demon we killed at the dungeon city. And thus, we'd like to go to another country to beat that demon."

"Another country... Which one?"

"It's Raginia Federation. That demon isn't necessarily there, but we've got a clue of its whereabout. That country is on friendly terms with this kingdom isn't that right?"

The principal had a slightly difficult face when he heard that.

"Yeah. We are on friendly terms with Raginia Federation indeed. You should find it more accommodating than other countries... However, that country is a bit complex, you see."

"Complex?"

"Yeah. Raginia Federation doesn't have an absolute ruler like us with our king. Jurisdiction might differ from places to places even in the same country. ...By the way, where at Raginia you're going to?"

"Around this spot."

I pointed at the map.

It's not that I've checked directly, it's just the place where I sensed mana reaction from the device.

"...Mendoa territory huh. That place is shrouded in mystery."

"Mystery?"

Looks like Mendoa Territory is the name of the place where the device is located.

But what does he mean by shrouded in mystery.

"Yeah. Even though they're not hostile, we rarely have interactions with them. For the time being, I'll inform the king about this matter tonight and ask the guild over there to prepare your accommodation... However, keep in mind that Mendoa might not necessarily be our ally. Well, I don't think you'll let your guard down though, Mathias."

....I see, a territory that doesn't interact much huh.

"I understand. How long would it take by your estimate?"

"It should be quickly taken care of since it's related to demons. Should be five days at most. Is that too long for you?"

"That's good enough."

For now, seems like we'll get the king's cooperation.

And now we simply need to wait for them to contact us back.

Chapter 171: Strongest Sage, Helps Fortress Construction

"Ah, Mathias. Speaking of demons... We're rebuilding the Second Academy school building as a countermeasure against them, have you seen it?"

The principal spoke out just when the stuff about Raginia Federation was settled.

About the latter huh.

"I have. There sure were lots of First Academy students."

"That reconstruction was an initiative of the First Academy you see. They wanted to practice the construction techniques you left behind, and they were curious about how you think of it."

From what I've seen from afar, it doesn't seem so bad.

I've also put Scanning magic in the textbook, perhaps they make use of that in the construction.

The problem is the design itself.

"Since it's the First Academy's initiative, does that mean it was designed by the students too?"

"Teachers also had a hand in the design. It's mainly by First Academy's but there are volunteers from Second Academy joining in too."

Teachers also take part huh.

However, you need experience to design a fortress.

Building a fort is not the same as erecting an ordinary building.

I mean, normally there's no one who would go out of their way to destroy some random building, thus there's no need to plan ahead about getting attacked.

However, there is no point in building a fort without considering the possibility of it receiving enemy attack or getting shot by a powerful magic.

...And now I'm getting worried somewhat.

"Could I see the blueprint for a sec?"

"Aa. I've got it here."

The principal took out several drawings from his desk.

I scanned over them.

"Fumu..."

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...How do I say it, it's better than I thought.

The First Academy students might be quite talented themselves, maybe they were just channeling their efforts at the wrong direction and had an unfortunate principal.

This should be pretty solid after correcting one mistake.

"The pillars here and here should use mithril instead of iron. The other parts should be fine after you do that, but the entire building would risk collapsing in battle if you were to keep this up."

"Mithril huh. Gathering a large amount of it will be quite toilsome... Is it really alright with just this one?"

"The other parts could also break down depending on the flow of battle, but there is no risk of having the entire building collapsing. A fortress built without considering the possibility of getting destroyed is but a toy."

I look over the blueprint of the new Second Academy schoolhouse as I say that.

The anti-personnel defense isn't too strong, perhaps for maintaining its function as a school, but the anti-air raid defense is pretty well thought out.

It should hold out in the event of a raid as long as those pillars are reinforced.

"Possibility of getting destroyed huh. First time I heard that school of thought."

"...Is that so? How were all the forts up until now built?"

"We made it really sturdy. We give up on it if it breaks apart."

"That's so haphazard..."

They managed to make this design in such a terrible condition huh.

These First Academy students are truly talented as long as they properly train....

I return the blueprint to the principal.

"This should take care of it."

"You have my gratitudes. As for the matter with the Dungeon City including with the demon, the king will reward..."

"Nah, I'm good, that's too much trouble. I'm just gonna amass it and collect it all at once later."

Having an audience with the king and stuff take too much time.

And it's not like there's anything I want in the treasury anyway, I don't need any reward.

"It's scary to even think about the amount of money we'd be owing from incidents involving Mathias... or rather, the Royal Castle's coffers should have been long gone by now."

"Don't worry, I don't plan to ask for money. I've got no use for it anyway."

"That's terrifying in itself though... Well, it's the king's job to think about. Ruli and you girls too, I'm sure you'd get a handsome sum of money, you should start thinking what to use it for."

"Yes!"

"I'm not sure what I'd use human money for..."

"I mean, there's no harm in having it right, why not just get it for now?"

We left the principal room while having that conversation.

Now we just need to wait the kingdom to contact us back.

Chapter 172: Strongest Sage, Coming up with Strategy

"A delivery for you."

"Here it is. That was faster than expected."

A few days after I asked the cooperation of the kingdom.

A bulky envelope adorned with ornaments was delivered to us.

"Don't tell me, that's from the king?"

"Yeah. Here's the royal family seal."

I showed one of the papers inside the letter.

There's also a traveling permit, a letter of introduction for the Raginia Federation, and such.

And...

"That document looks really important...."

"Is that a decree directly from the king himself..."

One thing stands out among the papers inside the envelope.

It's a decree detailing the king's request to help us locating the demon.

Another letter also tells us that we shouldn't hesitate to use other papers beside the decree when needed.

It's not like there's going to be a change in plan even without the decree, but these documents might prove useful.

There's a chance that we might have to force our way through while saying that it's the king's order if anything happened.

Doing such acts in another country while holding onto these kind of documents might turn it into international problems, but the fact that they're letting us to have them while fully realizing that must means they trust us.

There's other documents of interests inside... but first thing first, we should take care of our exit formalities.

"Now then, we should head out."

We've finished our preparation already.

Looks like we should go to a town at the border to Raginia Federation called Granze Town.

"This is the first time I'm going outside Eis Kingdom, I can't calm down..."

"I've always wanted to sightsee Raginia Federation!"

We're traveling toward Granze while conversing.

While also holding a strategy meeting since there's no dangerous place along the way there.

"Was it about 130km to our destination?"

"Should be around that far!"

"Yeah. The problem isn't the distance, but this place here."

I point at the map I gave her.

"...Is that a, restricted area?"

"Yea. Details about it are written here."

Inferring from the mana reaction, it's where the facility to detect demons is located.

There, 『Category 1 Restricted-Entry Zone』 is written.

We have details pertaining Category 1 Restricted-Entry Zone among the documents we got... in short, traffic is limited because there is a possibility of disaster happening if one were to randomly poke their nose around inside.

"...Can't we just, like, slip in without anyone noticing?"

"Simply slipping in is no sweat. However... Activating that facility will throw the surrounding mana waves into disorder. I'd like to enter through the formal way unless in a case of emergency."

"Formal way?"

"Apparently, you'll be allowed to get in if you raise your rank at the Raginia Guild. Category 1 Restricted-Entry Zone is, A rank... looks like we need the second highest rank."

This would have been simple if Raginia were governed by one king.

We'd have been able to enter the restricted area just by talking to that supposed king.

"Second highest... Wouldn't that take a really long time?"

"Normally you'd never even dream of becoming one..."

"Fortunately, you can apparently raise your rank by completing quests at Raginia Guild. We should rise in rank quickly if we just take and complete all the available subjugation quests at some guild branches."

Since the quests are usually tied to rank and stuff, taking everything might prove difficult in reality.

However, we should manage somehow by going around several cities and completing the quests there.

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"A-all..."

"We won't take quests for monsters that our Passive Detection don't detect though."

"I don't think that's the problem here... but we really might be able to enter the restricted area pretty quick if we do that!"

Looks like Ruli got it.

"And if something came up that required us to immediately act along the way... Let's have the Dark Dragon to emerge above the sky of the restricted area, and make use of that chance to accomplish our objective."

"Isn't that Dark Dragon..."

Alma and Ruli turned their line of sight toward Iris.

Of course, they're right.

I mean, Iris is the Dark Dragon even though she looks like that.

"Yeah. I don't want to resort to that if possible since it'd cause many complications. And flying will put too much burden on the current Iris."

Granze has come into view while we were tallking.

For now let's take care of these exit formalities.

Chapter 173: Strongest Sage, Exits the Country

"Uwaa, that's quite a line..."

"Being the national border means it's the door to foreign trade after all. Must be lotsa merchants around."

"This looks like it'll take a whole day if we get in the line...."

I look around after saying that.

Wagons fully loaded with luggage are forming a long line.

They're probably checking the inside of those luggage, the line looks almost like it's not moving at all.

The town itself is quite different than your ordinary town.

There's only a few stores, and instead, warehouses are all over the place.

It's a true blue base of trade.

"Are you lots going to exit the country? Then line up here. You've got an exit permit with you, don't you?"

A nearby guard called to us as we were looking at the line.

It appears that we have no choice but to join the queue here.

"Yeah. We only need the exit permit right?"

I showed the permit to the guard.

And then... The guard suddenly became polite while turning pale.

"C... could that be a Category 2 exit permit?"

"That's what written here."

I look at the permit given by the king.

It's written with『Category 2 Exit Permit』,『Emergency』.

Category 2 huh, does that mean there's Category 1.

"P-please excuse me. There is no need line up, if you would please come this way!"

We look at each others.

Looks like the permit we got was special.

Thus, we were led to a small gate away from the huge national gate.

And there.

"Category 2, it's an emergency!"

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"Understood! ...excuse me, could you show me your ID."

We showed our guild cards.

Then the guard hurriedly stamped some documents and left with them somewhere.

"That is all for the procedures! Please take care!"

The guards opened the gate and sent us off afterward.

That was really simple, perhaps it was thanks to the 'Emergency' label.

"...That went off really easy, didn't it."

"Now I'm worried if we stood out too much..."

"We'd look more suspicious if we were sneaking about instead, might as well go at it with a bang right? It's not like we're doing anything wrong, and we'll be standing out when we quickly rise through the guild rank anyway."

"Ah, you were actually aware about that..."

We look around at the surroundings while talking.

There's a town on the other side of the gate.

Being a national border, it looks to be mainly used for trade warehouses.

However, since the atmosphere of the town is quite different than that of Eis Kingdom, it makes you feel like you're in a foreign country.

"Shall we head to the guild for now?"

"Nope, let's go to the next city and enter Fredia Territory. We'll comb-through the quests in the guild there."

"...Instead of a nearby city, we're going out of our way to some faraway one?"

"Yeah. Because apparently, Fredia's ruler is on good terms with Eis Kingdom. It'd be easier to talk with them."

Taking and completing all the quest will of course draw attentions to us.

There is a chance that some problem might occur that would result in us getting banned from taking more quests.

Thus, we're gonna raise our ranks in a territory governed by a ruler who's on friendly terms with Eis Kingdom.

Even though they most definitely won't make the requirements to raise our rank to go in our favor, simply having them not getting in our way will make a big difference.

And once we've ranked up, we'll get the permission to enter the restricted zones.

Guild rank is shared inside the country, thus it should be possible to enter a restricted zone in another territory even if we raise our rank in Fredia.

While having such conversations, we arrived at Fredia territory and immediately went to the guild.

"Could I use this here?"

I showed the Raginia Federation Guild Card inside the quild.

This card was kindly included in the letter the king delivered to us.

It's of the lowest rank (Rank G) since it's a new card, but it'd save us the trouble of registering anew if it's usable.

Guild registration and procedures are surprisingly bothersome.

"Yes, of course you can."

Fortunately, it is usable, as expected of a gift from the king.

Now then... the next question is the most important one.

Our efficiency will differ greatly depending on the answer to this.

"Is there a limit on how many quest you can take?"

"There is none. ...However, we do not recommend taking too many quests because you will be given penalty for breaching contract if you went past the quest deadline."

--Alright.

Chapter 174: Strongest Sage, Hunts Efficiently

"I see, so there's no limit to how many quests you can take huh. ...What's the highest ranked quest a Rank G can take?"

"It is one rank above, which means Rank F. ...If you're a newly registered adventurer, we recommend accepting simple quests first, however."

"...Gotcha. Thank you for the advices."

I turn around after saying that.

There, Alma carrying a huge amount of quest tags is standing.

"I've got the quest tags with me here! These should be all of the subjugation quests for Rank F!"

"Thanks."

I look over the quest tags.

There's around 50 of them in total.

We need to pick quests that can be cleared quickly among these.

Having to go around looking for monsters that aren't in the neighborhood will take too much time to rank up.

"This, and this..."

I probe the surrounding mana and remove quest tags with monsters that don't seem to be around.

Eventually, only 34 remain.

"We'll take these."

I collected them all, put it on the guild desk, and declared so.

"Er... Were you listening to what I said?"

"I was. That's exactly why I took out the quests that can't be cleared."

I point at the quest tags she's not processing.

"That's not the problem here... Well, I guess taking more than you can handle is also an experience in itself. The monetary penalty for failing Rank E and Rank F quests isn't that high anyway."

The receptionist stamped the quest tags as she said that.

Looks like things are going well.

◇

A dozen minutes later.

We went to a forest slightly away from the town.

"Uun. There's not a whole lot of monsters here..."

"It's just an ordinary forest after all. But we might be able to finish this by the end of the day if we split up!"

Befitting of a site where quests for the lowest Rank take place, the forest itself is peaceful.

It's true that we might not be able to finish it in one day if we go about killing the monsters with the orthodox way.

However, I never had that plan in mind to begin with.

"No, we're not splitting up."

"We're not? But the monsters here are all over the place, it'd take a loong time if we don't split up...."

Iris pointed at a monster in a distant as she said that.

She's right, the monsters here don't form herds, so most of them are scattered over a wide area.

Splitting up would have been the wise decision if we were to hunt normally.

"Even splitting up will take too much time. Gathering those monsters in one place is faster."

"Gathering monsters... How are we going to do that?"

"Like this."

I invoked『Enforced Detection』to our surroundings.

However, it's not the usual『Enforced Detection』pinpointed to one monster.

I've completely forgone the control and just spread hostility to the surrounding monsters haphazardly, it can't even be called magic anymore.

As a result...

"I can hear some really loud sounds...."

"A huge number of mana reactions are heading our way!"

All the monsters around the forest perimeter are heading straight to us.

Monsters have completely surrounded us from all sides.

"Wait wait, what're going to do about this!?"

"Of course, annihilate! Let's split up!"

I plunge into the herd of monsters, cutting them up while also shooting magic at any monster within range.

The monsters here aren't that strong, so dealing them is easy despite the number.

For now let's annihilate all these monsters regardless of types and look for the quest monsters afterward.

This is the trick behind completing a huge number of quests in one go.

"Hold on, isn't this just way too many!?"

"Making sure they don't get close is pretty hard..."

Ruli and Alma seem a bit overwhelmed with the enemy number but they're

smoothly defeating these monsters.

They're lacking firepower a bit, they likely get pushed back if left alone, so I'll be covering them.

As for Iris--.

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"Sooi!"

She's swinging her spear horizontally, mowing down any monster that dares to get close.

All monsters within Iris spear's range get blown away and land dozens of meter away, retaining none of their original shape.

...Yup. Doesn't look like I need to cover for Iris.

Thus, the battle continues.

We've been exterminating the monsters one after another, but the number of marching monsters isn't decreasing at all.

There seem to be more and more incoming monsters than in the beginning

instead.

--However, the end is in sight.

Since the monsters arrive in relation to their initial distance, it may look like their number isn't decreasing, but that's just an optical illusion.

As monsters are finite in number, the end will surely come.

Around 30 minutes since the start of battle.

The monster assault suddenly halted.

Just three minutes ago, nearly 100 new monsters rushed in every minute, but now sometimes not even a monster came in a minute.

"Umm... The monsters suddenly went away, is it over?"

Ruli who seemed a bit bewildered at the sudden disappearance of monsters asked me.

"Yeah. Since the range of『Enforced Detection』is not unlimited, once you beat the slowest and farthest monsters, it's over."

I pointed at the herd of monsters we beat last.

Most of them are slow-moving monsters.

"It's true, the last ones were mostly slow monsters! Shooting at 'em was a piece of cake!"

Alma pointed at the last monster she killed.

The arrows Alma let loose on the monster are precisely stuck on its vital points.

Same things with other monsters.

Looks like Alma's skill with bow and arrows have gotten considerably better.

Now quests over... which would have been nice, but unfortunately, that isn't happening.

"...Now then, let's collect the subjugation proof parts. You three, split up and check if the number is enough to clear the quests. Iris, help with carrying them."

"""I understand (got it)!"""

Hearing the three girls' reply, I began to collect subjugation parts of the monsters.

Apparently, in this country, you need to bring a part of the monster to the guild as a proof of subjugation.

That part is called subjugation proof, and differs by monsters.

Since I've taken a glance at the list of subjugation proof at the guild, I rely on that memory to cut up these monsters' subjugation proofs and stow them away into Storage magic.

The gathering ended in 30 minutes.

"That's quite a lot. So, do we have enough?"

I can grasp types of monsters somehow by looking at their mana reaction, but the accuracy cannot be said to be 100% the farther they are.

With that in mind, I took only the quests whose quota we could fill, and as a result--

"Yes! ...Or rather, there's way too much of them!"

Looks like it went well.

Chapter 175: Strongest Sage, Rank Up

A few tens of minute after we defeated a large amount of monsters.

We safely got back to the town and headed toward the guild we took the quests from.

"We kinda went and completed these quests really quickly... You think they'd doubt us...?"

"Don't even need to think about that, they're gonna doubt us for sure, you know?"

Alma gave an instant reply to the worried Ruli.

True, there's a high chance of that.

That's exactly why we're raising our ranks at a territory that's on friendly terms with Eis Kingdom.

Right about now, the lord here should be informed that my coming here is to fight a demon.

The guild in this country isn't under control of the ruling lords, so you can't get

them to raise your rank, but lowering possible obstructions is good enough.

...We arrived at the guild while thinking that.

"Huh, you're back already. We accept paying penalty by installments, although there's a slight interest, so...."

The quest receptionist spoke out the moment she saw my face.

Looks like she thinks I've failed the quests.

"No need for penalty. We've completed all the quests we took."

"Erm... You shouldn't lie, okay? Subjugation parts are needed to prove you've completed a quest, and considering you came into the guild empty-handed..."

I see.

Apparently, she thinks I failed the quests because I'm not holding the subjugation part in my hand.

"Are these acceptable?"

I took some random subjugation parts out of Storage magic and put it on the counter.

The counter can't fit too many, so I only took three out.

"These are... Wraith Scissor's shells! Beating this many so quick, is Mathias-san by any chance, actually not a rookie, but a veteran adventurer?"

"I'm not exactly a veteran, but I've done my fair share of adventuring in Eis Kingdom. My card even has the, Issued at: Eis Kingdom, on it."

I showed my guild card as I said that.

『Issued at: Eis Kingdom Embassy Branch of Raginia Federation Guild』 is written on the back of the card.

"Ah, you're right. How unusual! ...If you're this strong, you might just be able to complete that many quests before the deadline!"

"Or rather, we've managed to do it somehow."

"Managed to, somehow... Don't tell me, these aren't all, and you've defeated all the monsters in the quests you took!?"

"Yeah... Since the counter is full already, I think it's better if we go by them one by one."

I took more random subjugation parts from Storage magic.

However, what caught the receptionist's interest wasn't the parts.

"...Where did you take them from just now?"

"Storage Magic."

Huh, I've seen this flow of events somewhere before.

--Aah. It was at the Adventurer Guild after our first delving into a dungeon.

I can predict what's going to happen next.

"Storage Magic!?"

Yup.

Same reaction as Eis Kingdom's guild.

Explaining this is a pain, I've got make sure to bring my luggage out beforehand the next time I'm doing this.

◇

A few minutes later.

After we somehow managed to get past Storage magic explanation, we got back to the topic.

"Erm... All the subjugation quests are completed. Members participating in the quests are Mathias-san, Iris-san, Alma-san and Ruli-san, is it alright to attribute it to these four?"

"Will our ranks go up if we do that?"

"Yes. There's enough point needed for a party of up to six people to rank up."

"Then, please do so."

Looks like we won't need to do quests for each members.

That'll save us some trouble.

"Understood. Please wait for a moment."

The receptionist withdrew inside with our cards in her hand.

After a bit, she brought back cards with a different color than before.

They were blackish before, these ones are bluish.

"Since all of you have completed 10 rank G quests, and 15 rank F quests, all members have fulfilled the rank up quota. As there is no need for tests to rank up to Rank E, you're all already one now!"

The receptionist presented the guild cards to us.

Looks like the card's color changes with rank.

"By the way, this sets the record for the fastest rank up ever! Ordinarily, it takes one month at least no matter how fast you are..."

1 month just to complete 25 quests huh...

Well, since rank G and rank F are beginner ranks, people probably raise their rank as they train.

Coming here from abroad and raising rank in one stretch are probably a relatively rare case.

"By the way, since we're now Rank E and all, that means we can take Rank E quests right? Could you process the subjugation parts if there are rank D monsters among the monsters we beat earlier?"

"Erm, we can't do that if there is no subjugation quest issued for the particular monster, or if the monster is killed on another territory, otherwise, it will be treated as a quest completion."

"How do you even distinguish if a monster is killed on another territory?"

"From stuff like the material freshness. Bringing materials from a faraway place would spoil it after all... That's also why there are apparently quick-footed people who bring it to other guilds and such."

Freshness huh.

We can cheat all we want by using Storage magic with its time freeze.

Well, this time these are all legit from monsters we beat at a nearby forest.

"Got it. Then, something like that should be..."

I look for rank D like materials from among the ones I have in hand.

I only studied up monsters that appeared in the quests we took so I'm yet to know what kind of monsters are ranked D, but this should be easily remedied by looking up at the quest tags.

I turn my sight at rank D quest tags.

First thing that came into my sight was a subjugation quest for『Big Horn Turtle』.

Need to subjugate three of them.

Judging from its name, it should be a big sized turtle with a horn.

There were two kind of turtle monsters with horns on them, it's probably the bigger one.

There were only three of those big ones, just enough to complete the quest.

"First, Big Horn Turtle subjugation quest. The subjugation part is, the horn right?"

I haven't checked to see if it's really the horn, but it generally is the case with monsters that has horns.

Would be nice if it applies here too...

"Yes. That is correct."

"Then, here you go."

I took out the Big Horn Turtle's horn.

The turtle was about five meter long, and the horn alone is about one meter long.

It's big alright, but it's ultimately a turtle, hard to consider this monster as rank D... but so long as I can use it to raise our rank, it'll do.

By the way, the smaller turtles were even weaker than this one.

"Eh... Isn't this a bit too big?"

"...Well since it's called Big Horn Turtle, it has to be big right?"

"No, normally it should be around this big..."

The receptionist spreads out her arms to make about 30-cm wide space.

30 cm, then...

"This one?"

I took out the smaller horn.

"Yes! That's it! We have 10 batches of the same quest for Big Horn Turtle, how many do you have?"

The smaller ones seems to be the correct answer here.

I've got a lot of these horns, but is it really alright for this to be rank D.

You sure it's not a mistake.

"10 huh, then 30."

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"30!? How were you able to kill so many!?"

"How you ask, well."

I try to recall the battle that time.

But, those turtles didn't really leave a lasting impression on me.

"I just cut them with my sword..."

"Shot them with my bow..."

"Blew 'em away with my spear. I just swung my spear around randomly though, so I don't really remember what kind of monsters I beat..."

Looks like the three are under the same impression.

Rather, Iris doesn't even distinguish them.

"Its hardness is such that you can't normally kill it that way though..."

The receptionist muttered so when she heard us.

"Now that you mention it, they might be a bit tough. I mean sometimes my arrow could only pierce through two even though I was gunning for three."

"Ah. That's right, it did feel a bit tough when I cut them with my sword."

"Really? I thought they were all the same..."

Except for Iris, the girls nodded giving their consent when they heard about its hardness.

Indeed, they might be a tiny bit sturdy.

Putting that aside...

"Then whose horn is this?"

I point at the horn that was refused for being too big.

"Erm... Was the monster this horn from about three times as big as an ordinary Big Horn Turtle?"

"Yea. It might have been a bit bigger, but yeah, it was around that size."

"...That's a rank B Huge Horn Turtle! How did you beat it!?"

"I just swung my sword and shot magic haphazardly whenever they got

close."

That turtle... rank B?

Its sturdiness was its only merit, it didn't have a particularly strong attack or special ability.

The receptionist asks me a question while looking tired.

"I've heard rumors that there's a lot of students with monstrous strength at Eis Kingdom, perhaps those students are..."

Who the heck spread such rumors.

While I was looking for the culprit in my mind, the receptionist speaks as if she recalls something.

"C-come to think of it, what about the materials! Huge Horn Turtle materials!"

"You mean this one here."

I point at the horn.

"Not that, other parts besides the horn!"

"We threw them away... You're not telling me, there are other parts besides the horn as subjugation parts, are you?"

Storage magic is the kind of magic that decrease your maximum mana the more you store something in it.

Even though the maximum mana returns when you get the item out, I'd prefer not to lower mine too much.

Thus, we discarded everything but the subjugation parts.

"No, only the horn is needed for that... How wasteful..."

"You can have them if you want to. They should be around this area."

I draw a map on a paper with magic and put a marker on the location where we beat the monsters.

"Eh, what was that magic!? A blank paper turned into a map!"

"I've got to start from that huh..."

After several derailments as such, we proceeded with the quest reports.

About an hour later.

"This concludes the 100th quest completion for rank C! ...Which means, Mathias-san and his party are now qualified to take Rank B promotion test! Waa, amazing! Ah, by the by, needless to say, you've set record for the fastest rank up ever!"

The receptionist shouted out loud passionately, and we received the qualification to enter the rank B promotion test thingy.

Looks like we need to pass the test to qualify into rank B.

"What do we need to do for the rank B promotion test?"

"...You mean you got the qualification without knowing that!"

"Yeah."

"Erm... In short, it's a test where an examiner accompanies you to complete a quest. As you can clear ordinary quests with a party, sometimes there are people whose rank doesn't match their actual ability. Once you get to rank B and above, quests that come from the country itself and such begin to appear, therefore, this test is intended to prevent people without sufficient ability from becoming into rank B."

"...I see. So where can we take the test?"

"Erm, since only large branches are allowed to carry out rank B promotion test... The closest one from here is the central city of Fredia Territory, Frejia Branch!"

...The central city of Fredia territory huh.

Things should go smoothly there, convenient.

"Got it. Then let's get on to it and get our rank up."

"Yes!"

Chapter 176: Strongest Sage, Picks Quest

"So this is Frejia..."

The day after we were qualified to take on the Rank B promotion test.

We've arrived at the main city of Fredia territory, Frejia.

"Kinda looks like the capital doesn't it."

"It's rare to see a city this big..."

Frejia was more like a capital of a small country than just a city in a territory.

There's a huge castle in the center of the city, and the streets are well maintained too.

Lots of people around, overflowing with vigor.

Well, in a country without a king like Raginia here, the territory lord is practically one of the country' top echelons.

It shouldn't come as a surprise for the place where one of those lords resides to turn into a city resembling the capital.

We passed through the city and headed to the guild.

I'm not really sure how to proceed with the test but... I probably will find out at the counter.

"Is it possible to take the Rank B promotion test here?"

I submitted my guild card at the counter while saying that.

"This is... Please wait for a moment."

The receptionist took my guild card and then she compared the text written there with some kind of paper in her hand.

Afterward, she went inside the guild, taking my guild card with her.

A few minutes later.

The receptionist came back with a middle aged man.

The man has a tag written with『Branch Head Eirus』on his chest.

"So you guys are the Mathias Party I heard about."

"...Heard about?"

"The lord here asked me to help you raise your rank to A ASAP, y'see."

It already got circulated to the guild eh.

They probably used some kind of magical means of communication, but those stuff should be quite valuable with the current level of technology.

Guess that goes to show how strong the relationship between Eis Kingdom and Fredia Territory is.

"To that effect, we had prepared quests that would raise your rank to C in about 10 days so long you have skills to back.... but that seems to be unnecessary. Dunno what kinda tricks you used, but the rumors about you guys having monstrous strength might have some truth in it."

The branch head look over our guild cards.

There's『Rank C (eligible for promotion test)』on the ranking column.

"So can we take the Rank B promotion test now?"

"Yeah. We're constantly running Rank B promotion test here. For the test, you will need to finish a quest while being accompanied by an overseer, though... a relatively safe but time-consuming quest, or a dangerous quest that can be done quickly, which one you fancy?"

"...You're not gonna tell me that we aren't allowed to withdraw for the dangerous but quick quest, are you?"

"Of course you can withdraw. It will be treated like you've failed the quest, but depending on the situations for the withdrawal and the overseer's judgment, you may be able to take the test again."

Even if the quest is dangerous, as long as you are able to withdraw, the actual danger level isn't that high.

In truth, there aren't many situations where it's not possible to withdraw.

I've thoroughly drilled Alma and Ruli how to escape in an emergency as the most important subject anyway.

Also, we could fly away with Iris in the truest sense of emergency, there should be no problem if I just buy them time to take off.

Of course I'll never let my guard down in the first place, there's a very low probability of finding ourselves in a dangerous situation.

"Got it. The shorter one please. ...Any objection?"

"Nope! ...I'm gonna run with all I've got if it looks real dangerous tho'!"

Ruli and Iris nodded to Alma's words.

The three seem to be in agreement.

"...You're exactly like what I heard from Eis Kingdom. Seem like I can leave it to you easy."

...Just what did the principal and the king told them.

Well, it does make things easier at least.

"Are you gonna take the test today? Or do you need to prepare first?"

"That depends on the quest."

"Here's the quest tag."

The branch head hands over the quest tag to me.

————————————————————

Special Quest - Rank B

Subjugation of Testra Prairie

Presently, there is an abnormal outbreak of monsters at Testra Prairie.

Sightings of dangerous monsters have been confirmed, damage may extend to the surrounding towns.

Thus, we wish to dispatch adventurers who are capable of subjugating monsters, especially those that could become a threat, in the outbreak at Testra Prairie.

————————————————————

"...I don't see specific number for the subjugation."

"Nothing written about the reward either."

"...First I've seen a quest written like this...."

The quest doesn't have completion condition or reward.

This is... Can you even call this a quest.

"True, you're right to call it a peculiar quest. It's probably on top of the already difficult rank B quests there are. However, among the current quests for rank B promotion test, this one is undoubtedly the fastest to finish."

"...Are you sure this won't take long? Even if the targets are defined, annihilating monsters in the whole prairie sounds like it won't be quick."

We may be able to annihilate a huge amount of monsters if we use the trick we employed back then.

However, that's only applicable if the monsters are weak and there is no towns in their path. We can't always rely on the trick.

Although『Enforced Detection』makes monsters concentrate on us, in cases of strong monsters, them just passing through means a disaster.

"No worries about that. After all, Testra Prairie is quite small. If the information about the strength of your group from Eis Kingdom is to be believed, it should not even take three days to finish."

"Three days are short?"

"Yeah. Ordinarily, a Rank B promotion quest takes about half a month to finish. Thus, hunting monsters within the range of this much area should be done in three days.... For those with monstrous strength that is."

The Branch Head took out a map and pointed at Testra Prairie's location.

Testra Prairie is right next to this city.

It really is quite small. Depending on the monster number, I don't think this would even take three days.

Or rather, this shouldn't even take a day.

"And the condition for quest completion? Subjugation targets are monsters that could become a threat sure, but there are many standards to that."

"Those monsters are specifically... Rank B monsters. Like say Blade Shrimps, or Huge Horn Turtles. You're permitted to withdraw if you meet monsters that are stronger than those, and depending on the number of rank B monsters you beat, you might even still pass the test."

Huge Horn Turtles huh...

Well now, don't think there's any problem gathering them with『Enforced Detection』then.

I should not though, considering the possibility of monsters stronger than that at the prairie.

"Got it. We'll take it."

For the time being, we found out that Testra Prairie is small and close by to this city.

That this is a relatively short quest seems to be the truth.

"You will huh, thank you."

The Branch Head sounded like he was relieved to hear my reply.

Why are you thanking us for just taking the test.

...Don't tell me they pushed on us a quest that no one would take for the test?

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A few tens of minutes later.

My guess was proven correct.

We'll be accompanied by an examiner dispatched by the guild for the quest that doubles as Rank B promotion test, however...

This examiner obviously looks like he really doesn't want to do it.

"You sure you're taking this quest? Won't you take this one instead? I really don't want to go there you know."

He even advised me to take a different quest.

The examiner is a man at his prime, he looks well experienced in battle.

Even compared to the guild adventurers, he's definitely strong.

A quest that makes even such examiner to be this hesitant.

There's obviously something behind this.

...Let's ask him.

"Is there a problem with this quest?"

"Problem, problem huh... You didn't know?"

"...What is?"

"There's already been three strong parties that tried to take on Testra Prairie Subjugation Quest, but no one ever comes back! I heard the rumor about Team Mathias being strong, but taking on this quest is just mad! You should pick other quest!"

I see.

This is how quests no one's able to finish get around huh.

"By the way, when was the last party took this quest?"

"10 days ago."

"...I see, total annihilation huh."

This place isn't that far from Testra Prairie, so there's almost no doubt that the earlier party was annihilated if they took that long.

Opponents that not even one member of a high ranking party was able to

escape from huh...

"I got it."

"Are you going to reconsider then?"

The examiner looked relieved to hear me.

But of course, the answer is nay.

"No, of course we'll take it. No reason not to."

I handed over the quest tag to the examiner as I said that.

And then he received it while looking like he had resigned himself.

"...I'm gonna run away at the first hint of danger, you hear me?"

"We're doing the same if it looks dangerous."

Ruli and the girls nodded at my words.

Thus, we took on the Testra Prairie Subjugation Quest.

Chapter 177: Strongest Sage, Takes Armor Off

An hour after we took on the quest.

We've gathered near the gate, ready to depart to Testra Prairie.

But one problem occurred here.

"...What are you wearing."

I muttered so when I took a look at the examiner who came last.

He's wearing heavy iron armor.

"Do ya even have to ask... They're armor."

"No, that's gonna have the opposite effect... I think you'd better off not wearing them."

You could indeed gain considerable defensive power if you have armor reinforced with magic metal and the like.

But the ones this examiner is wearing are just plain iron armor.

He's not getting more protection with these.

On the contrary, he'd be an easy target due to the reduced mobility, it'd have the opposite effect.

And most importantly, thanks to the clank clank sounds these armor produce when he walks, we'll be immediately get found by the monsters.

"Where we're heading off to is a place that has claimed many casualties. I can't possibly survive with some half-assed equipment."

Aah, the type that thinks more defense means it's safer huh.

There's absolutely no point in poorly put together armor in a situation where high ranking parties found themselves wiped out.... but it's gonna be hard to convince him.

Guess I should suggest stronger and lighter equipment for this guy.

"Aa... Ruli, make some random armor reinforcement magic tool. Make it a type that can be attached to existing clothes."

"Erm... Like this?"

Ruli immediately got what I was trying to do.

After pondering for a few seconds, Ruli carved a magic circle on the magic stone in her palm.

The magic circle she carved was more nicely made than I expected.

I see, Ruli can do this level of magic circles herself already.

"I did it!"

"Ah yeah. Well done."

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I received the magic stone turned magic tool from Ruli, and activated it on some cloth I got nearby.

"Alma, try to shoot at some random tree over there."

"Gotcha! ...Wew, it's been a while since I last shot a magic-less arrow."

Alma shot at the tree while saying that.

The arrow pierced deeply into the trunk.

"What a powerful arrow... I can see why they call you lot monstrous."

The examiner looked at the stuck arrow as he said that.

I coiled the magic tool-enhanced cloth on another tree while taking a sidelong glance at that.

"Gotcha!"

Alma shot out another arrow with the same level of power as earlier to the cloth-coiled tree.

This time the arrow didn't get stuck in the tree.

It only managed to slightly damage the cloth before getting flicked away.

"Wha... Did she hold back just now?"

The examiner sounded surprised when he saw that.

"Did it look like she did?"

"...No, it didn't."

The examiner replied instantly.

He might be a bit cowardly, but he's still someone qualified to be an examiner of the guild's promotion test, seems like he's good enough to distinguish the arrows' power at least.

"Even ordinary clothes could be reinforced to that extent by using this magic tool here... with that in mind, I ask you this, is there any point in wearing those heavy armor now?"

"...There's none."

The examiner took off his armor.

Clothes reinforced with this defensive magic may be weaker than the protectors Ruli and Arma are wearing, but they're still far better than some plain iron armor.

There's no way a few millimeter thick iron could win against magic.

...Well it still doesn't change the fact that Alma's magically enhanced arrows would easily penetrate this level of protection, and I can make something far more durable than this if the aim were『Make something durable, doesn't matter if it's heavy』.

I reinforced the examiner's clothes with the magic tool Ruli made while thinking that.

"Alright, let's head off."

--Thus we departed to Testra Prairie.

Chapter 178: Strongest Sage, Finds Traces

"...We should arrive at Testra Prairie soon."

A while after we left the town.

We reached the vicinity of Testra Prairie's entrance.

"It's really quiet here..."

"Yeah, so quiet it's creeping me out..."

There is indeed something abnormal at Testra Prairie.

We would have heard sounds from various monsters and small animals at an ordinary plain, but there's barely any sound here.

Instead--.

"...Do you recognize that?"

I point at the thing on the ground.

A long sword made of mithril.

The sword is broken at the base, but it doesn't look old.

It's probably been there less than a month.

"That's... Blue Blade Jin's sword!"

"Is he an adventurer?"

"Yeah! He's one of the adventurers who never came back from Testra Prairie!"

I see.

He got ambushed right after he arrived at the prairie.

Equipment that appear to be of adventurers are scattered around the area.

There's no body to be found, but there's no doubt that they've been wiped out.

"Looks like the last adventurer party was attacked here."

"...Yea. I don't see any monster that could do that... but it might be a good idea to watch your surroundings."

The examiner surveys the vicinity as he says that.

Fortunately the visibility is good thanks to this place being a prairie.

You can see quite far away as there's not a lot of tall grass.

We won't get easily ambushed as long as we're alert of our surroundings... is probably what the last adventurer party had in mind.

And the reason for their demise.

"Alma, have you noticed?"

I tried asking Alma here since Ruli must have noticed the monster's mana reaction, no doubt.

Alma replies while looking unsure.

"Ground... I think?"

"Correct. ...Everyone, stay where you are!"

I took some distance away from the four and activated【Enforced Detection】.

A few seconds later.

The ground below me began to vibrate.

"Over here!"

I've expected this.

The shaking is turning more violence, and right when the ground cracks, I jump slightly backward.

The next moment, a huge head of a six meter long snake jumped out of the ground.

I evaded that by a hair's breadth.

"...HISSSS!"

The snake angrily hissed to have its attack evaded.

However, the serpent seems to be fully aware that its forte is burrowing in the ground.

It didn't pursue me, instead it immediately turned around and tried to get inside the ground.

"I won't let you!"

I activated a magic to harden the soil as I trample the ground.

The serpent couldn't burrow well into the hardened soil and slowed down.

I swung my sword right there.

The magically reinforced sword easily slice off the serpent.

...Befitting of a creature with strong life force, the snake still moved about for a while, but it ceased before long as it could do nothing after getting cleanly cut in half.

"This monster was most likely the one that wiped out the adventurer party."

I pointed at the dead monster.

The most troublesome aspect of this monster was that you only had about a few seconds chance before getting attacked from the moment you realized its sign.

For those experienced in fighting, those few seconds should be good enough to take proper countermeasures... But for adventurers who never fought anything like this before, they will eat the ambush for sure.

"Aah. Doesn't matter how experienced of an adventurer you are, no way you could do anything when such a monster suddenly sprung out of the ground.... Heck, how were you guys able to perceive this monster's attack anyway?"

"We just detected its mana. Once you've gotten used to it, you can even detect monsters lurking in the ground."

"Monster mana...? Is that even detectable?"

"Yeah. Identifying the type of monster and stuff is quite hard, but simply finding them is simple. So long the opponents aren't concealing their mana, you won't get ambushed, almost guaranteed."

How well mana transmit over the soil changes depending on the places... and you can detect up to 100 meter below with the soil here.

Plenty enough distance to cope with ambushes.

"...I see, now I get the reason why Branch Head-sama said Mathias Party was monstrous. I woulda let you guys pass the test if it weren't for the standards."

The examiner looked at the monster I beat as he said that.

And naturally, Rank B Promotion Test has standards for passing, it can't be decided by the examiner alone.

Well, since the quest is about Testra Prairie Subjugation, let's do so.

For that, first we need to understand the situations here.

"Do you recognize this monster?"

I pointed at the dead serpent.

If my hypothesis is correct, this monster did not originally live here at Testra Prairie....

"No, never seen a monster like that."

Just as I thought.

This is the first time I've seen this monster too.

However, I could somehow guess how this monster came into being from the aura of its mana.

"Then have you ever seen a monster that looks similar to this, but smaller?"

"...Now that you mention it, it does look similar to a Venom Serpent."

The examiner pointed at the dead serpent.

"Venom Serpent... What kind of monster is that?"

"Right... Outwardly it looks pretty similar to this thing, but it doesn't burrow in the ground, and at most it's only 2 meter long. Oh and its poison is also effective on monsters."

...Poison that's effective on monsters huh.

Monsters don't tend to fight against other monsters, so there's only a few species that have that kind of poison.

And the serpent I just beat most likely had that poison.

There's no mistake about it judging from the mana.

"Let's have a small test."

I pulled off the fang of the dead serpent while luring a nearby wolf monster with【Enforced Detection】.

And then I threw that fang on the wolf monster.

"Gyan!"

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

The fang shallowly graze the wolf and fell down on the ground.

Normally, such scratch would pose no problem to a monster.

However, the wolf plopped down and began to convulse.

The poison works as expected.

...There's no doubt.

"This thing is most likely a Venom Serpent."

I pointed at the dead serpent.

The examiner sent me a quizzical look when he heard that.

"Like I said before, Venom Serpents don't burrow, nor grow this big. It's clearly a different monster."

"Yeah. If they aren't strengthened."

"...Strengthened?"

There exist monsters that can strengthen other monsters.

Monsters strengthened by such monster may get bigger, or transform into something else.

"Umm... It kinda feels like there's a magic circle inside this monster... Maybe, that's the reason?"

"Well, that's the rough answer.... This is it."

I took out a magic stone from the serpent monster.

The magic stone is too small to be inside this huge serpent.

Magic stones this size are normally found on monsters that are just 1-2 meter big.

And something resembling a magic circle is carved inside the magic stone.

Unlike the magic circles humans used to create magic tools, the fact that this one made use of mana flow to alter the monster's state means that it's a type of natural magic circles.

"It really does look like a magic circle... But the formation is unlike anything we've been using, I can't read what it does..."

"Well, naturally occurring magic circles have peculiar constructions after all. I'll teach you about it if you're interested later.... From what I can gather, its effects are monster strengthening and behavioral pattern shift."

This magic circle seems to have overloaded the magic stone, it's been darkened with spreading cracks.

The serpent was probably going to die soon even without me doing anything.

"Behavioral pattern shift...?"

"Yeah. Like making monsters that don't ordinarily burrow to do so."

Monsters that's merely been strengthened should still be manageable with brute force.

But they could be hard to handle depending on the change of their behavioral pattern.

And the biggest problem of this kind of monsters is....

"This monster had a magic circle inside it, right? But then who put it inside?"

Iris muttered so before I could say it.

Yes. That's the problem here.

"The one who put a magic circle inside was... a monster. And most likely a parasite type at that."

"Parasite type?"

"Yea. Among parasite monsters, there are those who strengthen its host and the surrounding monsters to protect itself."

"Surrounding monsters, you mean the one just now wasn't the boss..."

"Yeah. It's just a small fry. These kinds of monsters should be crawling all over this prairie right now."

The monster I killed earlier was just the very tip of an iceberg.

For even a mere ordinary snake monster to turn this big.

Since the parasite monster must have latched itself onto the strongest monster among them.... Seems like I could enjoy fighting the boss here.

"Monsters like this, crawling all over..."

"Sorry but can I go home now?"

The examiner attempted to go back after hearing what I said.

Being able to quickly decide when to escape is an important quality for adventurers, and running away here is the correct answer for an adventurer who cannot use『Passive Detection』, but please try a bit harder for the sake of our rank up.

Let's try to amicably and peacefully persuade him here.

"I don't mind if you go back alone, but we can't save you if you get attacked along the way, yeah? By the way, there's another five serpent monsters like the one earlier around this area."

"...Okay. Let's push on."

Looks like he understands now.

Thus, we went deeper into the prairie.

Chapter 179: Strongest Sage, Goes Deeper Into the Prairie

"...More incoming monsters."

"Looks... like it!"

Alma shot an arrow at a boar monster coming from afar while saying that.

The arrow accurately pierced the monster's heart, killing it instantly.

Burrowing snakes aren't the only monster that pop up here.

There are of course flying and ground monsters around, and all of them have turned gigantic without exceptions.

Against these powered monsters, even Alma's arrow that usually pierced five monsters in one shot could only manage to kill one with an exact vital shot.

Since arrows don't work well against burrowing monsters, Alma is mostly in charge of flying and on-ground monsters.

"Umm... Over there!"

On the other hands, Ruli is beating these monsters with magic tools.

Normally Ruli would be in charge of creating arrows for Alma most of the time, but since a high powered arrow can't manage to beat two monsters at once this time around, they're acting independently now.

Ruli's strategy is similar to the strategy I used on that snake earlier on.

Whenever snake monsters come out of the ground, she hardens the soil to stop their movements.

One thing that's different is my strategy has myself as the decoy, while Ruli is using magic tools for both roles.

Thus, it's not as efficient as my way, but it enables her to safely beat monsters from a distance.

Even though she'd need to stock magic stones for this tactic, such is one of the strong points of Glory Crest.

Even the past me used a variety of schemes to fight monsters.

"Don't tell me, I'm the only one who can't locate monsters here?"

The examiner asked me in the heat of battle.

Indeed, this fight has us fully making use of Passive Detection.

Especially for monsters below the ground, you can't rely on most of your senses against them.

However... it's not like all of us can do it.

"I don't think Iris knows when underground monsters are going to attack either.... Well, not like there's any need to be on guard in Iris case though."

Iris got blown away while I was speaking.

The snake monster powered up by the parasite monster made a surprise attack on Iris from below.

Due to the damage on her magic circuit, Iris's mana control and detection are unreliable.

She can roughly know the location of monsters above grounds, but those under are just too much for the current Iris.

"Alright, got another one!"

However, Iris doesn't seem fazed at all by the ambush.

Rather, it feel more like『Prey found!』to her.

And she's not mistaken.

In fact, she didn't even have a scratch on her from the burrowing snake monster's ambush.

So long as Iris is impervious to its fang, the snake's mana-powered neurotoxin is useless against her, and even if the fang did go through her defense, mana-powered toxin would dilute itself inside Iris's enormous mana pool, it probably won't have any effect.

There's too large of a gap between a dragon and a snake, regardless of how powered it is.

"Sooi!"

While still being blown away, Iris readied her spear mid-air and threw it at the snake monster.

It's just a simple throw without magically enhanced strength or anything... but with Iris's brute strength, the thrown spear had practically turned into an iron stake for the snake.

The snake didn't get staked, it got torn asunder, crushed by the spear.

"What is that? Some kinda ace buff magician or something? I haven't seen her chanting even once though..."

"Nope, Iris is just awfully sturdy, she can't use magic."

Iris killed another monster while we were conversing.

Although it may not compare to [Enforced Detection], her simply moving around would flaunt her mana around to act as a bait to the surrounding monsters.

As a result, Iris beat the most monsters after me.

"...Can't use magic? Yer' kidddin' me?"

"It's true. ...Also, you don't need chanting to use magic. The reason why monsters have been appearing in front of me since awhile ago is thanks to a chantless spell too."

I took a half step back as I said that.

And then, a snake came out of the ground I was standing on, so I made use of its momentum to cut it in half with my sword.

I'm not using magic to converse my mana.

I only draw monsters here with [Passive Detection], and then kill them with the lowest amount of effort.

"Are there nothing but monsters in this party...."

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We got close to the center of the prairie as we battled on.

The incessant monster attacks suddenly stopped midway through.

"They're not attacking anymore."

"I don't detect mana reactions either, think it's finished?"

"...You really did it. Those monsters were ridiculous, but Mathias's party is beyond even them..."

Iris, Alma and the examiner spoke.

Indeed, there's no easy-to-detect mana reaction from monsters in the vicinity.

"Normally you'd think so... but I feel something odd in the surrounding mana... And that boss Mathias-san mentioned didn't come out either."

However, Ruli objected to the opinion that the subjugation was over.

Unfortunately enough for the examiner who looks really eager to go home... she's right.

"Ruli is correct, the boss hasn't shown itself up yet... Well then, which way do you think it is?"

"Unn, judging from the state of mana... Over there?"

Ruli pointed right.

Hmm, she managed to notice the oddness in the mana reaction, but I guess she still cannot grasp the mechanism behind it yet.

Well, just the fact that she could see through this camouflage without prior knowledge means that she's got quite the talent in mana detection.

It took the past me around 30 years to even notice it after all.

"Close but no cigar. The correct answer is over there."

I pointed left.

The exact opposite of Ruli's guess.

"It's not close at all! It's totally the opposite direction!"

"Nah, don't sell yourself short... How does the mana reaction over there feel to you?"

I pointed at the direction Ruli pointed at first.

"Unn, I don't see mana reaction that feels like of monsters... There's some really really small reactions though, but I think that's just bugs or something like that."

"Then how about over there?"

I pointed at the place where the boss is.

Ruli looked over there... and seemingly noticed the camouflage.

"Ah, there's a place without a single reaction, not even from bug!"

"That's the area where the boss monster lurks. It has set up a kind of barrier to stop its mana from leaking to the surroundings."

Some parasite type monsters remake the environment around them to suit themselves better.

The camouflage that prevents mana from leaking is a part of that.

For those monsters, the reason is probably not to prevent their mana from leaking, but simply because a place with dense mana is more comfortable to them.

"A mere monster constructing barrier...."

"Their barrier differs from the barrier we create with magic though."

We're heading to the barrier the monster put up.

Suddenly someone said halt.

"Hold it, you guys have already passed the test. There's no need for you to defeat that thing."

The examiner stopped us.

Looks like we've passed the Rank B Qualification Test.

It's nice that we were able to pass it easily, but...

"Didn't the quest I took ask for Testra Prairie Subjugation? It won't count as one if we don't defeat that."

I point at the barrier.

The barrier seems to be covered in grass and soil, it only looks like a mound from over here, but judging from the mana reaction, it's apparently a dome-shaped barrier.

Monsters that are shutting themselves inside the barrier are harmless, but in reality, those monsters probably dug underground where the barrier didn't reach and went outside the prairie.

"You're right, the quest is about Testra Prairie Subjugation... but the content was [Subjugating monsters, especially those that could become a threat, in the outbreak at Testra Prairie.]. The quest should be considered as complete even without you defeating monsters that shut themselves inside a barrier."

I see.

At the time being, that might be right.

Not like the monster inside is going to come out anytime soon after all.

Personally, I'd like to raise our rank as fast as possible, so it's easier if we don't have to beat that.

Ordinarily I would have gone to beat the monster regardless of quests or such, but I'd be wasting time to recover my mana then.

...However, since we've taken up on this quest, I can't exactly do that.

"If we leave that alone, that thing would break out of the barrier and attack towns. Time left until that happens... about two weeks I reckon."

Hearing that, the face of the examiner who looked like he was going back turned serious.

To the point that I doubted he was the same person.

"...Are you telling the truth?"

"Yeah."

"...Is Frejia included in those towns?"

"It's really hard to believe... But if Mathias says so, it's practically guaranteed..."

Saying that, the examiner ponders.

Afterward, he bowed deeply toward me.

"I ask you. Could you please defeat that monster? I don't wanna expose that town to danger. Of course, I'm gonna fight too."

...I see.

He'd like to avoid endangering himself, but he'll fight for real if the town is in danger huh.

Looks like this examiner isn't just a coward.

Well, I guess an adventurer that would run away at the prospect of going to a dangerous location wouldn't be entrusted to be a rank up test examiner.

"Got it. ...Are you fine with that, you three?"

That's always been my intention since we took this quest.

And I couldn't possibly forsake a territory friendly to Eis Kingdom.

It was one of the reasons we could took this quest so quickly after all.

...It might stand to reason if it were a hostile territory though.

"Of course! That's what we come here for!"

"Yes! ...I'm a bit curious about that monster-made barrier too!"

"I'm not really sure, but I just need to beat up monsters right?"

Looks like the three are in agreement.

Let's get on to the kill... is what I'd like to say, but I have something to ask them first.

Our moves would slightly change depending on the answers.

Chapter 180: Strongest Sage, Entrust Role

"Can I ask you one thing?"

"...What is it?"

"What are the requirements to be qualified as a Rank A? Is there a test?"

The examiner looked taken aback to hear my question.

Looks like he recalled something.

"...Test is the ordinary route. A rigorous test that would take one month to finish at least. The danger level can't be compared to Rank B test either. ...However, there is a case where someone became rank A without tests."

"Without tests?"

"Yeah. There was an adventurer who ranked up to Rank A after successfully subjugating an upper rank A monster.... There's only ever been one person who managed to do so with this method though."

...Glad I asked.

They'll allow it without a test so long we beat strong monsters huh.

We've got no time to dilly dallying for one month, I'd prefer to make use of this shortcut.

It'd be nice if the monster we're going to fight now is an upper rank A one.

"By the way, if the boss here is at that level of powers, can it be used to rank up?"

"If it fulfills the conditions, I could make a recommendation for you. But... I'd advise against it. Sure, it was an exception that had been applied once before, but things got quite hectic at that time."

"Was there any problem?"

"Yeah. When it gets to the point that such a strong monster needs to be killed, all ordinary people would have all long gone fleeing. There'd be only a few witnesses even after you beat it. Take this situation, I'm the only observer here, and the enemy is an unknown monster, first you'd have to make the guild recognize the monster's rank to be of upper rank A."

I see.

The aftermath sounds more troublesome than defeating the monster itself.

"Got it. We'll go with monster killing route."

"...You sure about that? I can't guarantee you're getting the rank up even if you succeeded with the subjugation, ya know?"

"No problem. We're gonna have to subjugate it either way."

Even if it didn't pan out, the monster had to be killed anyway.

I'd just chalk it out as good luck If it went well.

And there might be a way to take a short quest like this one even if it didn't go well.

"Once the barrier is dispelled, monsters will come out of it attacking. Their number can't be compared to anything before. Use this chance to prepare as many arrows usable in battle as you can."

Up until now, Alma and Ruli created arrows on the spot during battles.

When you can't use Storage magic, carrying the raw material means less luggage, and you can rapidly replenish only the arrows you need.

Especially magically enhanced arrows, it's pretty complicated to carry them due to magic stones related matters, thus you'd have no choice but to completely discard your mobility and fight near a practically arrow storehouse.

Since evading uses less mana than defending, you normally want to prioritize that, therefore this means she won't be able to use that strategy.

But we will bear those disadvantages.

"We're making arrows in advance? But then won't we be able to move..."

"Exactly. This time we'll stay 50 meter in front of the barrier and fight while defending against enemy attacks. You three will cover for me while I charge into the barrier alone."

"Cover for Mathi-kun... Since the arrows will be pre-made then, you want me to do something with magic tools?"

"Yeah. Ruli, make this magic tool. As magic stones that can be put in an arrow are limited in size, Iris will be throwing them at the battlefield instead."

I hand over a paper drawn with a magic circle to Ruli.

Come to think of it, been awhile since I did this.

Recently, Ruli has become capable enough to construct her own magic circle after all.

"...This magic circle looks incomplete to me though... Like the lines here, they're not connected."

Ruli muttered so within a glance.

Correct.

"You're going to decide on that when the battle starts."

"...Think up magic circles in the heat of battle?"

I answer Alma's question.

"Yeah. We won't know the boss's magic composition until the battle has been commenced. We will insert a magic circle imitating the main body's magic composition to the hollow part."

Magic circles carved in monsters might look the same, but they differ in details.

This magic circle is pointless if it doesn't imitate the parasite boss monster.

"Imitating magic composition... and, what would that accomplish?"

"Other monsters will mistake the magic tool for the boss, creating chaos. The effect will depend on the magic tool output, but if all goes well, it's possible to neutralize all monsters but the boss in one go."

"I-is that even possible..."

Monsters infected by the parasite monster will obey the parasite monster.

That binding force is far stronger than that of ordinary boss monster's.

And the boss uses its own mana to give orders.

We're making use of that fact.

Using the fake boss mana, we'll issue an order『Don't do anything』, neutralizing the subordinate monsters.

...The barrier came into view while we were talking.

The barrier has a green colored protective camouflage, but since it only takes color cue from its surroundings and nothing else, it's pretty obvious at a glance.

I can't probe the inside, but judging from the mana this barrier is made of, the boss is inside it no doubt.

We approach the barrier while thinking that.

"By the way, what should I do?"

The examiner asked me that after walking a bit more.

Come to think of it, I forgot to give this examiner an instruction.

This guy has his own important role.

"Please come up with a way to make the higher ups approve our rank up at some place away from the battle. And also, make sure whether the monster we're fighting is an upper Rank A or not."

"...Is that good enough?"

Hearing me telling him that extremely important role, the examiner had a let-down mixed with a relived expressions on his face.

Looks like the examiner was seriously thinking of fighting.

Despite looking eager to go home ever since the quest started, he drastically changed the moment the city was in danger huh.

However, his role really is important.

"Well, not like there's any other choice. This is the most important job there is for you."

"But, any little bit of help would... no. I'm just gonna drag you lot huh. I got it. I'll fulfill my own duty as an examiner... How far should I be to not get in your

way?"

"Stay at 500 meter away at first. Afterward, move on in accordance to your assessments while observing the situations."

"Got it."

The examiner nodded with a serious look.

This should ensure the examiner helping our rank up to rank A.

Considering the precedent, there's a very low chance of us getting it, but I hope it'd at least hasten our rank up.

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"This place is about 500 meter away from the barrier. I can confirm that there's no monster burrowing in the ground in the area, so you can collect proof for upper rank A stuff without worry here."

"I got it."

When we got 500 meter away from the barrier, then we left the examiner at the place after exchanging those words.

After parting with us, the examiner took a telescope-like item and began to observe us from a distance.

Do your best, the speed of our rank up rests on your shoulders.

Ruli asked me worryingly while we were walking.

"Umm... We still haven't make any preparation, would it be alright?"

"I don't think there's any problem, but what do you mean by alright?"

"Wouldn't the monster cancel the barrier and come out attacking us if we get too close..."

Ruli looked at the barrier as she said that.

We're about 200 meter away from it.

"Ah, that huh."

Come to think of it, I haven't explained.

This knowledge isn't really critical since you rarely ever get the chance to fight this kind of monsters, but I guess I'd better teach them anyway.

"These types of monsters don't fundamentally go out of their way to undo their own barrier. As that'd result in the mana they took much effort collecting to disperse away... It would be a different story were a huge amount of people attempted to shoot large-scale magic at the barrier, but not with our number here. No need to get that cautious."

"Umm, won't it attack me when it sees my mana...."

"It would if you were in your dragon form, but there should be no problem in your current form. It'd be different if there were three more Iris though."

"O-Oh good to hear!"

True, it's easier to attract monster's attention the larger pool of mana you

have.

But, since Iris's mana is quite condensed when she's in her human form, it should be fine.

We got close to the monster barrier.

The barrier is completely still even though we're only 50 meter away from it.

"Uwaa, so big... But there's no movement at all..."

The barrier's radius is about 80 meters.

It is unusually big compared to barrier humans make.

The reason this barrier looks stable is due to its strength, it's not flickering just from monsters moving inside.

"It has the opposite effect and makes it look creepy when it's this stable..."

"Are there really monsters inside this?"

"Yeah. There should be around 2000 monsters at the lateral sides of the barrier alone. All in all there's probably around 5000 including the ones at the center, I think?"

I replied so while we were getting ready to battle.

Regardless of how impermeable the barrier is to mana, that doesn't mean it's perfect.

Thus, once you've gotten close to the barrier surface, it's possible to probe inside.

...This seems quite troublesome.

The monsters inside posses both the number and strength.

I still can't see mana reaction of the main body, but it's probably in the dead center where my detection doesn't reach.

The fact that it's able to surround itself with this many monsters means that it has the strength to back.

Looks like I can expect much from this.

I don't know the standard of an upper rank A monster, but I hope this one exceeds it.

"Arrows and magic tools are all ready!"

"We can go anytime!"

"Yes! Let's fight!"

Looks like they're done with their preparations while I was thinking.

I looked the magic tools and arrows around the three girls to confirm that all the necessary stuff were present and then turned toward the barrier.

"...Shall we then."

Chapter 181: Strongest Sage, Plunges into the Herd

The battle this time will be a brief showdown.

We'd have run out of mana long before we could defeat all these small fry if it weren't.

Yet these monsters aren't so weak we could easily annihilate them all.

While the magic tool is in effect, I'll charge in at once and kill the boss.

Frankly speaking, that is our only chance of victory.

For that to happen, I need to slip through nearly 5000 monsters, grasp the boss's mana composition and impart that to Ruli.

"Okay, in five seconds I'll pry open the barrier and commence the attack!"

""""YES!""""

I pull my sword after hearing their response.

And just about five second later.

I erase the barrier by shooting a simple anti-magic on it, and activate『Enforced Detection』.

Drawing attentions of all these monsters isn't possible as long as the boss is giving orders, but it should considerably lessen the girls' burden.

In exchange, more monsters will be coming at me, but there's not much difference between 1000 and 5000 monsters.

In both scenarios, my surroundings will be completely full of monsters with attacks coming from all directions.

"HISSSSSS!"

"GAAAAAAAAAA!!"

There are several thousands of monsters inside the barrier as calculated.

Most of which are coming at me.

First, the monsters are shooting out their fangs at us.

As fangs are a necessary tool for monsters, normally they would never do such attacks... however, these monsters controlled by the parasite monster made use of their fangs as projectiles without a hint of hesitation.

It'd be nothing if there were only one monster that did that, but when so many monsters they look like a wall did it, it's practically a barrage.

"...It's taken complete control huh."

I probe the surrounding mana while backstepping the projectile fangs.

Just as I thought, the parasite monster seems to be in dead center.

The distance to there is only 40 meters.

However, those 40 meters are so far.

The monsters aren't just attacking, they're also positioning themselves to block the path to the boss.

...Alma and the others have started to provide support fires, but it won't make any difference.

A boss in an ordinary monster herd can only give extremely simple orders like『Fight』, or『Run』at best.

And the herd monsters will act autonomously while still following those orders.

Thus, no matter how many monsters there are in one such herds, you'll ever end up fighting 20 monsters at most.

--However, this herd isn't anything like that.

It's as if all of these monsters share the same view, moving in perfect unison.

As such, I ended up fighting more than 100 monsters at once.

The monsters should be moving in accordance to the actions I take, but I just need to misdirect them whenever I'm about to be read.

That's all it amounts to since we're near the entrance to the barrier now, however the number should increase the deeper I go.

Right afterward--I plunged into the herd.

"HISSSSSSS!"

All kinds of attack like fangs, rocks, venoms are pouring on me who went in solo.

I don't evade.

As I've plunged myself into the herd, there's no space to evade.

Instead, I activated multiple magic at the same time toward the incoming attacks.

They're super simple magic like reflection and small-scale explosions.

The firepower probably isn't even 1/10th of these monsters' assaults.

However--not even one of their attacks reached me.

"...It went well huh."

Of course, it wouldn't have gone this smooth if I used ordinary counter magic.

What enabled that is『Perfect Detection』.

It's one of the magic I newly developed after getting hold of Disqualified Crest as the past me never used it.

It's only recently that I've gotten the grasp of magic control good enough to be able to use this.

The detection range of『Perfect Detection』is only 3 meter around me even for the current me, but its capability is far above your average detection magic.

Other detection magic can only manage to grasp enemy's position, type and speed, but『Perfect Detection』adds projectile's weight and center of gravity, and everything from mana quality to magic composition on top of those.

Furthermore, once the target enters the range, there is no limit to its number.

Even if the targets are omnidirectional attacks of hundreds variety, everything will be instantly analyzed.

And then I activated the most efficient magic to obtain the end result from

that.

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"...Giiga?"

The monsters I attacked stopped for a moment, looking like they didn't know what just happened.

No wonder.

Ordinary attacks would have produced some forms of sounds or splinters after all.

However, true no nonsense attacks don't afford such things.

From these monsters' perspective, it must look like they suddenly fell down helplessly the moment they entered my range.

『Perfect Detection』 does not only give me info about enemy attacks.

But also info about the enemy itself incomparable to that gotten from ordinary detection magic.

With that info at hand, I defeat monsters that block the way to the boss and create enough space to tilt my body as I move forward toward the center.

In exchange for a limited range, I've got complete control over that range.

Truly the magic that embodies the Disqualified Crest.

"This is more convenient than I thought."

More than the the obvious utility like blocking attacks and killing enemy, it makes going forward a simple task.

Ordinarily, in a herd of monsters so dense you can't even move about, you'll have to move them out of the way.

Of course, that's while neutralizing attacks that are coming at you at a rate of around 100 shots per second.

But it has its drawbacks too.

It consumes a lot of mana.

The current me can only maintain this magic for 10 minutes at most.

It's only natural though as I'm doing many complex operations while basically performing rapid invocations of detection magic at hyper speed.

You might even say that it's low cost relative to the info you get.

A few minutes later.

I reached the center of the barrier.

"...There huh."

The boss's mana reaction is close by.

I slip into the slight gaps that『Perfect Detection』found in the ever-increasing density of monsters.

Then--『Perfect Detection』perceived the boss's magic stone.

"Gi-GYAAAAAAAAAA!!!"

The next moment, the boss monster shrieked out an unfamiliar sounding

scream.

Looks like it's not fond of『Perfect Detection』.

And then a magic circle was developed out of the boss monster, emitting a huge amount of mana.

It's a genuine attack magic, unusual for monsters.

This is... Even if we have its composition, we'll need a large amount of mana to negate it.

I'd better off letting itself to blow up.

Judging that in a moment notice, I diverted my mana from『Perfect Detection』to defensive magic.

Immediately after, an explosions blew away the surroundings, swallowing the monsters around me.

Moreover, the lackey monsters protecting the boss appear to be very dutiful, they're still trying to attack me even while suffering fatal injury from the explosion.

In addition, lots of those lackey monsters are flying type monsters, those will be coming for me too surely.

"Mathi-kun!"

I could hear Ruli's worried voice.

I can't see her among the blown monsters, but she must be looking here.

"No problem here! More importantly, here you go!"

While shouting that, I took a magic stone from Storage magic, and threw it at Ruli when a straight line toward her opened for an instant.

Disqualified Crest isn't suited for augment magic, but in truth, there is one augment-related thing that it's better than the Glory Crest at.

--And that is augmenting speed, where precision don't matter at all.

Thanks to that, I was able to throw the magic stone in that instant.

Of course, an augment that ignores precision serves no purpose at all... But

I'm sure Ruli will be able to understand the composition I wanted to make from that shabby magic circle and create a proper one from it.

Believing in that, I activated『Perfect Detection』and endured attacks from countless monsters.

This parasite boss monster isn't so weak that it could be beaten while blocking this many attacks.

--A few seconds later.

"Here I go!"

I could hear Iris from far away.

Looks like the magic tool is done.

Chapter 182: Strongest Sage, Guards Against Attack

"...Is it working?"

I look up at the sky as I say that.

And then I saw some magic stones falling from between the flying monsters swarming the sky.

A few seconds after the magic stones were hidden away from view by the monsters.

The surrounding monsters suddenly slowed down, right as the magic stones fell onto the ground.

Looks like the first volley went well.

"Make more of them and throw them at the monsters!"

"Got it!"

Ruli mass produced the magic tools while Iris threw them.

Then the monsters around us began to stop moving one after another.

Eventually... Only one monster still moves among all the immobile monsters.

"...Now then, we can finally fight for real now."

It's a gigantic lizard monster bigger than even other gigantified monsters.

It's probably a Flame Lizard originally, but there's not a trace left of its original form after the parasite monster's empowerment.

Limbs that have been strengthened to their utmost limit, stretched out fangs.

Its current form looks closer to a kind of dragons than anything else.

Judging from the degree of power up, its body's hardness scale should match that of a dragon too.

However, unlike dragons, there should be a strain from its forced power up, it must have a weak point.

I probe that weak point with『Perfect Detection』and cut it up with my sword that's been enhanced with multiple layers of reinforcement magic.

"GAAAAAAAA!"

Flame Lizard screamed out loud with a grating voice.

I cleanly cut off one of the Flame Lizard's leg with my sword.

However....

"I-its leg!"

Alma shouted out while looking at the cut monster.

The reason is obvious in a glance.

A new leg has grown back at the stump where the old leg was cut.

And it's coming to attack me.

The Flame Lizard only took half a second to counterattack.

I jump back to evade the new leg's assault.

"It regenerated!?"

"How'd you beat something like that...? It's invincible..."

The girls sounded surprised to see the situation.

The new leg is in no way inferior compared to the old one... No, it's gotten even more powered up.

when people see regenerating monsters for the first time, it's not uncommon for them to assume that those monsters are invincible.

However, monsters do not have unlimited regenerative power.

If they continue to regenerate their wounds forcefully, their magic stone will be overloaded and break.

Undoubtedly before I run out of mana.

However... looks like it won't be that easy.

"Ga... Ga...."

Flame Lizard slowly raises its head while letting out eerie sounds.

And a magic that the past me had witnessed many times before is being reproduced inside the monster.

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--『Raw Magic Flame』.

It's close to Dragon Breath, but a false one.

It's a magic that converts the entire life force and mana of the host monster into a destructive force, you may even say this is the true worth of parasitic monsters.

"...It's come to this huh."

『Raw Magic Flame』is basically a process of converting life force into mana and then transforming that mana into a flame which is then shot out, it's an extremely primitive spell art.

Thus, that spell art is not that sophisticated.

Due to that reason, it can't be neutralized just by slightly altering its spell art.

The『Raw Magic Flame』won't disappear even if you kill the monster, since it's a self-destruct attack to begin with.

Getting out of the harm's way is a simple task as there's still one second time till the firing... but the parasite monster is not only aiming at me, but also at Ruli and the girls behind me.

It's probably intentional, in order to block me from evading the attack.

If frontal attack isn't working, play out the trump card without hesitation.

And in the most effective way possible.

....Good grief, its capability to make judgment is way too good for a monster.

I don't seem to have any choice but to guard against it here.

"W-what's that thing!?"

"It looks like bad news!"

The girls seem to have noticed the unusual mana from the Flame Lizard too.

My remaining mana is about half of the maximum value.

Well, I should manage somehow.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

The Flame Lizard shot out a flame sphere about ten meters in diameter while wailing out its last.

This would have been easy if it were just a simple flame, but unfortunately it's not.

Humans won't even left any ash behind if they get hit by it.

Even『Perfect Detection』is meaningless in the face of such an attack.

"Everyone, do not move!"

I spread out a defensive magic while giving instructions to the girls.

There is no way to frontally negate a magic with such firepower.

I spread out the defensive magic while thinking so.

It's an anti-magic defensive spell that concentrates a huge amount of mana into a small area.

Then, the flame assaulted me.

I could tell that the surroundings' temperature had gone up in an instant.

A few seconds enduring it.

The flame finally receded and we got a good look of the surroundings.

The plain has turned into scorched earth as far as the eye can see.

The crowding monsters around us had been swallowed up in it too.

Only the place where I am with Ruli and the girls remain pristine among them.

Of course, I made an adjustment on the defensive spell to make this happen.

"Is everyone all right?"

"Yes!"

"It's really hot, but I'm fine!"

The Flame Lizard that had exhausted all of its strength slowly collapsed while I was checking everyone's well being.

Its head that shot out the『Raw Magic Flame』has turned into charred white bone, not a trace of its former shape remains.

"Err... I don't really get it, but did we beat it?"

"I think I saw an unbelievable amount of mana for a sec there... Don't tell me, it self destructed?"

"Yeah. It was a self-destruct attack. ...Well, the real body is safe though."

As I said that, I burned down a space near the lizard's leg that looked as if it was devoid of anything.

Once the flame subsided, a small 5-cm long scarab beetle shaped monster laid there.

Chapter 183: Strongest Sage, Watches Over Negotiation

"Wha... What is that thing? A bug?"

"Nah, that's the culprit behind all this, the parasite monster... First time I'm seeing this type."

On top of being small, parasite monsters put around 30 types of concealment magic on themselves so it's quite difficult to spot one.

Thus, these monsters can stage a come back no matter how many time you crush the host as long as there are other monsters around to be their next host.

It's gotten to the point that there were cases of countries getting dangerously close to fall by a single parasite monster in my past life.

"This little thing was the one behind everything?"

"Yeah. This size is actually on the bigger side among parasite monsters though."

"There's no way you could find this thing..."

I saw the examiner running here from afar while we were talking.

Looks like he noticed the end of battle too.

"I saw you guys getting swallowed up in the flame, are you guys okay!?"

"As you can see, everyone is fine... So, how's the outlook of the rank? Do you think the monster could be admitted as an upper rank A?"

"Of course! Everyone would give their approval were they saw that flame and the number of monsters!"

The examiner looked around at the scorched field.

And then he recalled something.

"You need monster material as a proof of your rank up, go collect some... And where's the boss's material?"

"Boss huh... Is this acceptable?"

I took out the parasite monster's body.

It's not usable for making weapons, but pretty good as a material for magic tools and magic potions... or rather, this material is an ingredient for a certain thing.

I would prefer to have it on hand since I might have a use of it in the future... but it can't be helped if it's for our rank up.

I showed the material with that thinking, however....

"W-what the heck is this? You're not telling me this thing shot that flame, are you?"

The examiner looked perplexed when he saw the monster's corpse.

Yep, I've anticipated this reaction.

You would definitely not believe this little thing was the one behind everything when you have no knowledge about parasite monsters...

"This is the monster that was behind the strengthened monsters

phenomenon... No good?"

"It's probably the truth if you say so, but it's not good enough. We'd just get laughed off if we brought this thing and said it was a rank S class monster."

Hmm, not good huh.

Well, parasite monsters all have extremely potent stealth magic after all, not just this one.

The current level of magic technology probably wasn't able to find those monsters and recorded them as unknown monsters that caused major monster outbreaks.

Rather, there's a high chance they don't have records about the concept of ordinary monsters getting buffed up.

"It doesn't have to be that thing, isn't there a more vicious looking one? Doesn't have to be the boss, any monster that can be claimed as rank A will do."

"Right... How about this one?"

I took out the former host of the parasite monster, Flame Lizard's material.

It was quite strong while it was alive, but since all of its lifeforce had been poured into the [Raw Magic Flame], it's now a shell of its former glory.

"It does look like a rank A monster... but not sure it fits upper rank A. Pretty obvious if they saw it in battle though."

No good too huh.

As long as the fact about parasite monsters isn't widely known, it will be hard to make people understand their strength.

The examiner who saw the battle may understand, but there's no way the guild's higher ups would let our rank up go through so long they don't get it.

"...However, we are indebted to Mathias for protecting our city. It won't be easy, but I'm gonna try my damnedest to negotiate with the guild. Even if I can't get you instant promotion, I might manage shortening the period until the test."

The examiner gazes at the material as he says that.

I'm not sure how influential this examiner is in the guild, but considering they trust him enough with Rank B promotion tests, surely he's got considerable credence there.

Let's leave this part to the examiner.

Not like we're gonna lose anything even if it fails.

"I'll be counting on you."

"Leave it to me. I'll be sure to make them compromise."

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A few hours later.

We've safely got back to the guild and are now meeting with the branch head to report.

"Examiner Yarud, reporting in. Confirmed subjugations of more than 86 rank B monsters and greater, as well as new kind of monsters, ensuring peace back at Testra Prairie, they passed the test."

"Very well. That's some terrifying amount... Congratulations for your rank up."

Our cards were then rewritten to Rank B.

Looks like the powered up snake monsters are treated as a new type of monster.

...So the examiner's name was Yarud.

Now then, we easily passed the Rank B test.

The real test starts now.

"And about the matter with Rank A promotion test."

"Aah. With these numbers, they should be able to quickly--"

"No, I recommend their immediate rank up by way of the subjugation of a super high rank monster."

He had told us beforehand to not expect this to succeed.

With it as a starting point, he's apparently aiming to fish out as much info as possible.

If all goes well, the test that would normally take a month at best to complete could get shortened to two weeks, however...

"...Are you serious?"

"The abnormal phenomena at the prairie were all orchestrated by one monster. That monster's strength was at the very least that of an upper rank A, but in reality it was most likely of a lower rank S."

"...And that was beaten by a mere group of four? Without prior preparations?"

The branch head looked at Yarud with doubting eyes as he said that.

"Yes. I have confirmed it myself."

"I heard they were strong, but this is just unbelievable... What about the material?"

"It's over here."

Examiner Yarud showed the strengthened Flame Lizard.

Presenting the parasite monster here would likely have the opposite effect, so we're not doing it for now.

"...Let alone rank S, this doesn't even look like an upper rank A. It's at best, middle Rank A."

"Looking only at the material may lead you to believe that... However I've witnessed with my own eyes that this monster fought like an rank S monster."

The branch head frowned to hear what the examiner Yarud said.

Rather than doubting him, it looks more like he's at a lost how to handle this.

"Considering Yarud's history, I incline to believe... but the proof is too scarce. Even if I gave my consent here, the guild's higher ups surely won't. Do you have other evidence with you?"

"There should be a scorched field with countless bodies of monsters at Testra Prairie."

"...I shall send out guild staff members to confirm it. However, that is still too lacking as a proof. It's not like there is an upper rank A monster among those, is it?"

"The number is out of this world, but there is indeed no upper rank A monster among them."

"Fumu... That's still too poor an ammunition for the persuasion..."

Thus, the negotiation was progressing not too smoothly, and ultimately got postponed to tomorrow.

Apparently, it will be decided at the tomorrow morning conference.

...I pray that the result will be favorable to us.

Chapter 184: Strongest Sage, Takes on Test

The next morning.

Examiner Yarud came out of the meeting room while we were waiting for the result.

Looks like it didn't go well judging from his expression.

Or rather, he looks really down.

"I'm sorry, it turned into the worst case scenario. You might even be better off if I didn't try to negotiate."

Yarud lowered his head to us after saying that.

Worst case scenario... Better off not negotiating, what does he mean by that.

"What kind of scenario?"

"The exam will only take a day... But that Giruas will be the examiner."

Yarud said that while looking grim.

Giruas... The name doesn't sound familiar.

Is he an infamous examiner or something?

"Who is this Giruas?"

"It can't be, you don't know? That Giruas?"

"I don't. ...Did you know?"

I look at Ruli, Alma and Iris.

But the three shake their head.

"Nope, no idea."

"I have no clue!"

"Un... I've heard the name a bit before, but I don't know what kind of person they are..."

The three don't seem to know.

But he must be a celebrity or something in this country judging from his tone.

"I can't believe you went and ranked up into rank B adventurers without even knowing the name Giruas..."

Yarud then begins to give explanations while looking troubled.

"...Giruas is a rank S adventurer whose infamy is widely known. His head is filled with only fighting, the guy basically doesn't do much else... There was this one time he took on as an examiner, and he failed all examinees the instant he saw them."

...In short, a battle junkie huh.

Just that alone actually makes for a favorable impression, but instantly failing people he saw is pretty bad...

Wait, why are they allowing such people to be an examiner again?

"So what happened to the those guys who failed?"

"They took on the test again after a while. Well, apparently they really did lack the capability and failed though... After all, Rank A Promotion Test's passing rate is only 3%."

I see. He's saying that since failing the test would bar us from taking another for a period of time, not negotiating here would have been a better idea.

However, there are ways to go about this if the other party is a battle junkie.

"No need to apologize. It's still better than the ordinary route."

"...Do you really think so? That guy rarely ever approves anyone y'know."

"I have ways to deal with battle junkies... So, when can we take the test?"

"It's today's noon. Cause that's the only time Giruas will be coming to this

city."

This is all so sudden.

Well, it's a good news for me though.

Guess we'll wait for it while hoping it'd go well.

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A few hours later.

The door of the guild we're waiting at was opened.

And then, a man enters together with the guild's branch head.

Soon after... The guild is wrapped in silence.

Most of the people in the guild are looking at the man.

In that situation, I saw the man's mana reaction.

His mana reaction is clearly different than that of the people of this era.

There are crude parts, but he's obviously more experienced in mana control than the people in this era.

That said, he's not a demon in disguise either.

If I have to say, he's similar to the elementary class battle mages in the past.

From the way he carries himself, I can feel a considerable sharpness.

His crest is the same as mine, Disqualified Crest.

Perhaps this man is Giruas.

"I had a hunch there was a strong monster around this area so I came here, but... Why do I have to be an examiner again?"

"Because we don't have anyone else capable to supervise rank A test. We'd never dream of entrusting it to you otherwise."

Looks like I guessed right.

I understand how he is rank S then.

In a world where magic has regressed so much, someone who could make use of their mana well would be a force to be reckoned with compared to the other people around.

And he said something about [hunch about strong monster], maybe he found out about the parasite monster we beat through some kind of detection magic.

Despite being capable of such level of magic, I feel something odd from him somehow.

"Well, whatever. It's rank A test 'fter all, most are gonna fail anyway. Me instantly failing them woulda save us the trouble."

Giruas looked at us after saying that... and went stiff while having a shocked look on his face.

And then he asks the branch head while suddenly turning cheerful.

"Oy, you ain't tellin' me the examinees are these four, are you?"

"...They are."

Giruas turned even more cheerful when he heard that.

"Then I'm gonna take back what I said 'bout instant fail. Let's hold the test for real... I'm free to decide what the test will be, yeah?"

"Yeah. As long as the method is not extremely dangerous, it's all up to you including the decision to fail or pass them."

"Gotcha... Grats."

Afterward, Giruas approached us.

And then he pointed at the three girls.

"First of all, you three over there."

"Err... What is it?"

"Did I do something...?"

"Am I gonna fail?"

Giruas speaks to the perplexed three.

"All of you passed. That's it for the test, you can go home now."

""""EEEH!?""""

The three were surprised to hear the sudden announcement.

Turned out it was an instant passing instead of instant failing.

Wonder if I was just hearing things when he said he'd do the test for real.

And the problem is the fact that I'm singled out here...

"I heard that Mathias was the strongest... You're Mathias, right?"

"Yea."

That's how it's being passed around huh.

I think there are other easier to understand expression for it though...

Giruas asks while I'm pondering that.

"Fight me. I have two reasons."

"Reasons?"

"Yeah. You're probably gonna pass anyway, but no one would complain if we showed them our fight, no?"

Huh? This guy is actually quite thoughtful.

Maybe his instant failing case was because he immediately saw through the examinees' lack of ability then.

"And what about the other reason?"

"Cuz I wanna fight ya."

Yup, this part is exactly like what we were told beforehand.

Guess this means I don't have to persuade him now he's challenging me.

By the way, I was going to challenge him in case the guy failed us in an instant.

When the other party is a battle junkie, talking through each other's fists is an extremely effective method.

"I got it. What about the place?"

"Right then... How large you want it be? I can only fight with a sword, so the guild's training ground is good enough for me... but if you need somewhere more spacious to fight for real, I can arrange for one."

Training ground.... 50 meter long on every side at the guild's back huh.

I can make use of somewhere larger, but that's good enough for a normal fight.

"I'm fine with the training ground myself."

"Okay. Let's get on to it then."

Then Giruas flings the guild's door open.

Feels like he's really excited to have this fight.

Chapter 185: Strongest Sage, Hand Over Book

"Ok then, are you ready?"

Giruas drew out his sword as he said that.

However... We probably should at least establish the rule considering this is a test.

"What about the rule?"

"The fight is decided when either side gets knocked out or gives up. I won't use magic, but you aren't disallowed to yerself."

"...You won't use magic? Are you going easy on me?"

Giruas's mana reaction is definitely that of a magic fighter.

If he's not fighting with magic, there is no other explanation than him going easy.

There's no point in this match as a test if he fights like such, but...

"Yeah nah, I've never used magic in my life. This guy is the only thing I use."

Giruas took a stance with his sword.

He also activated body reinforcement magic right at the same time.

Yet... It doesn't seem like Giruas is telling a lie at all.

Or to be more precise, he has no intention to lie.

--I understand the source of the odd feelings I got now.

"...I see, he did it unconsciously huh."

It appears that Giruas is not aware that he's using magic.

He's simply controlling his inner mana through his senses and reinforces his body through that.

Of course, it's not possible for an ordinary human to use magic without being

aware of it.

However, geniuses can be found every now and then.

"Unconsciously... What are you talking about? Meh whatever. Let's get it on already."

Giruas readied his sword.

I too drew mine out while checking the surroundings.

Several guild staff including the branch head have already positioned themselves around the training ground, observing us.

They're probably acting as the witnesses of this test.

I wonder if I should show a fight that's easy to digest for them.

"I'm ready. Come at me anytime."

"Gotcha, ya asked for it."

Giruas rushed up and thrust his sword at me.

His sword was buffed with a half-baked version of [Toughening] and [Steel Slash] as he thrust it.

I make a counter attack while parrying his sword to the wayside.

Frankly speaking, I could have ended the fight right here and now if I wanted to.

...And honestly, Giruas's way of fighting can't really be called that of magic fighter.

He's just fighting randomly while relying on his talent.

Alma is far better at technical level than him.

Well since Giruas never learned magic training in earnest, this should come as no surprise.

Rather I'm impressed that he could reach this level despite the fact he isn't even aware that he could use magic.

While thinking so, I swing my sword at Giruas, with just enough force not to end the match.

Seems like it took Giruas everything just to block the attack though... What surprises me is how he's quickly improvising mid battle.

This guy probably has never fought with someone stronger than him before.

After all, simply swinging a magically enhanced sword around would afford you victory unless the opponent is powerful.

And he used this opportunity of fighting someone that can't be beaten with brute force alone to learn how to fight against one such opponents.

Still, this is the first I've met someone who could improvise this quick.

"Oy, don't tell me, yer' holding back on me, aintcha?"

...I was being careful not to let him notice that, he's got good intuition.

Is this also thanks to his overwhelming talent that prevail over technique.

Trying to deceive this kind of opponents would net the opposite result.

"Yeah. I was... if you want to make me fight seriously, try doing it yourself first."

I kicked off a barrier I put mid-air and slashed at Giruas.

Giruas shouts out loud while guarding against my sword.

"...You said it! I ain't gonna hold back no more!"

His body reinforcement got strengthened with that shout.

"Eat this!"

Giruas slashed at me.

I was going to parry the sword like I did before--but this time Giruas took on a different path.

He jumped up right before our sword clashed.

Of course, jumping up is the height of folly for a fighter who can't use magic.

You're fully exposing yourself to attacks the moment you jump until you've landed.

The reason why part of the way of the sword puts importance on moving around with your legs on the ground is to shave off even a bit of instances you find yourself in such a situation.

And that also applies to Giruas who cannot use other magic besides body reinforcement.

At least that should have been at the beginning of this match.

--However, the current Giruas is not the same as before.

The jumping Giruas emitted mana from the sole of his feet, and then he made an air-kick-like move through the force generated from that.

Amateurish, technically speaking, but it's undoubtedly magic.

It's as if he was mimicking the maneuver I did before with a spell he made on the spot.

And Giruas swings down his sword at me while I'm taken aback.

It's a blow that takes advantage of gravity alongside body reinforcement.

An ideal sword art to push down your opponent with brute force.

--I face that sword from the front, and cut it down.

I'm not using any kind of special technique.

It's just a straight sword swing with body reinforcement magic.

Giruas was blown away without barely any resistance.

He probably never imagined that he would lose in a battle of brute force.

Since Giruas had always won through brute force up until now, he tried to create a situation where the clash would revolve around brute force.

I step forward toward him and put my sword on his neck.

"Now then... Still wanna go?"

"I give."

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Giruas muttered while looking vexed when he saw the sword pointed at him.

"Tch, my first lose since I was born. From the beginning to the end, it never felt like I could win... It's more frustrating than I thought."

Giruas stood up after saying that.

And then he asks me.

"Please tell me. How do you get so strong?"

I considered inviting Giruas to our party for an instant, but I immediately threw away the idea.

This type of person will grow better if you leave them to their own devices.

...That said, I guess I can at least give him some pointers.

I've got just the right thing with me after all.

"Read this book. Whether you could get stronger than me or not, it all depends on you... But I can guarantee that you have the talent."

I hand over a thick book to Giruas.

The title [Second Royal Academy Textbook - Magic Volume - Complete Version] is written on the cover.

This book may have second academy on its title, but it's not like it can't be used by anyone other than second academy's students.

Rather, it's better if the book is spread out in the entire country to fight off demons.

Though the one being employed at Second Royal Academy of Eis Kingdom is the [Simple Version], a greatly simplified version of this [Complete Version].

Apparently, the complete version is too complicated, only a few researchers were able to even read it.

"...You makin' fool outta me?"

"I'm dead serious."

"This is a magic book no? No way you can fight while making yerself full of openings by chanting and stuff... Even you Mathias can't use magic right?"

"I can. I even used some in our fight just now... True magic need not chanting."

I light up a flame on the tip of my finger without a chant.

Giruas opened his eye wide when he saw that.

"Giruas, you too casted body reinforcement magic on yourself unconsciously... Once you're able to master it consciously, you should get far stronger than you are now."

"...And the way to do that is written in this textbook thingy?"

"That's right."

Giruas opened the book when he heard that.

And immediately frowned.

"What the crap with this stupidly hard book. I feel depressed just looking at it... Is this thing seriously used as textbook?"

"Unfortunately, that book was rejected because it was too difficult. I've got a simpler version of the book with me here, do you want that instead?"

I took out the [Simple Version] as I said that.

"...This book ain't difficult just for the sake of it yea?"

"Yeah. The simpler version could get you stronger, but if you want to truly get strong, it's the complete version."

"Got it. I'm taking this book."

Giruas put the complete version into his pocket.

And then he asks me with a slightly hopeful face.

"...By the way, d'ya know a spell that makes you good at reading? I'm bad with studying y'see. I got headache every time I tried reading a book."

"Unfortunately, nope... By the way, the healing spell written on page 132 is effective for headache just so you know."

"I wanted to read this without getting one in the first place..."

Giruas opened the book while muttering... He grimaced in 10 seconds flat, and folded the book.

Yup. Looks like it'd take some time before this guy read through the entire book.

However, there is no doubt that he'd get stronger.

The desire to get stronger, fondness of battle, and most of all, talent.

There's no future where such a person doesn't get stronger when they're given the right magic theory.

"Oh yea, I forgot. You passed the test... Don't think anyone would complain after watching the fight just now."

Giruas looks at the branch head.

The branch head nodded like he consented.

This means we've ranked up to Rank A now.

Chapter 186: Strongest Sage, Receives the Pass

An hour later.

We were going to left Frejia after our Guild Cards got rewritten to Rank A without a hitch.

"Oy, you sure you don't want to be Rank S? Mathias, there's no doubt yer' the strongest in this country. If the guild's higher ups are against it, I'm gonna make 'em--"

"I respectfully decline. Rank A is enough... We only need it to enter the Category 1 Restricted-Entry Zone after all."

I refused Giruas's suggestion.

He insisted that I should become rank S after the test.

But it's not like I've come to this country to raise my adventurer rank.

A is enough for the rank.

"I see. I ain't gonna force you if you don't want to... By the way, which

restricted entry zone you're going to?"

"It was, right... Eteris Steppe at Folkia Territory. If I'm not mistaken, you can get into it if your rank is A and higher right? How long does it take for the permission to be issued?"

I don't really understand the system in Raginia, but a rank S adventurer Giruas would know.

I asked him with that in mind... But Giruas had a complicated look on his face after I said Folkia.

"It's gonna take five days at most for the permission... Still, Folkia huh..."

"Something's wrong with Folkia?"

"I've just got a bad feeling about the place, though not like I got a basis for it. But I heard the mood in that city had changed recently. The checkpoints on the roads around the area got stricter all of a sudden."

Afterward, Giruas pondered for a bit.

And then he speaks to me.

"Well, just talk to me if ya don't get yer' permission. I'mma do something 'bout it."

"...You can get the permission if you're Rank S?"

"Yea. Most things would go smoothly if ya just talk to 'em directly. If not, just tell 'em yer' gonna storm their higher ups, y'know, standard negotiation tricks and stuff."

"That kinda sounds like how Mathi-kun does negotiation..."

"Isn't that more like threatening than negotiating..."

I see, that's reassuring.

As Alma mentioned, this negotiation sounds kind of forceful, but well, it seems effective anyway.

"We may need your help if it comes to that."

"Ou, leave it to me."

We left the city while talking.

"Err... Folkia was 50 kilometers away from here, wasn't it?"

"Yeah. It should be around that far."

"I think we'll be entering Folkia 20 kilometers before that... Do you think there's a checkpoint around there?"

"That sounds likely... We should put our luggage inside storage magic just in case."

Checkpoints mean there's a high possibility of belonging check.

We're carrying some of our luggage normally as I'm preserving my mana in case of emergency, but it might be a good idea to store them all into the magic.

"Those checkpoints are probably only along the highways no? Can't we just not use the highways and go around through forests instead?"

Iris pointed at an off the beaten track as she said that.

She has a point indeed.

It's not like there are walls that separates territories after all.

We probably won't encounter any checkpoints if we don't use the highways.

However...

"No, let's pass through a checkpoint normally once, we'll use the chance to also check on the situation."

"Check the situation?"

"What Giruas said may not necessarily be true in reality. They might even let us pass easily without any check if we do it normally."

Besides, going off the highways because we believe in rumors would make us look like we're going against the territory.

Rather than doing that, purposely passing the checkpoint will let us get into the territory without alerting anyone.

And even if we end up fighting, settling it quickly while they're still not alert of us would make things easier.

"I guess we won't know how to deal with someone until we see how they act... Alright, let's go at it the honest way!"

Once we've decided on the plan, we step onward the highway.

Several hours later.

Several knights are standing, blocking the highway.

There's a building that looks to be recently been built nearby.

"Err... Is that the rumored checkpoint?"

"Seems so... It doesn't seem suspicious for now."

I tried to probe the inside of the building for mana reaction and stuff, but I didn't see anything that stood out much.

At most, there were just some magic tools inside.

Judging from the mana reaction, they're probably not intended for assaults.

We kept treading on the road while thinking so.

"Halt. Show me your IDs."

And as expected, the guards stopped us.

Looks like the rumor about stricter checks was true.

"Got it."

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We obediently showed our IDs.

The guard asks me while taking them.

"What's your purpose coming here?"

"We're looking for works as adventurers."

We're still not sure whether this territory can be trusted or not.

Thus, I'm hiding our real objective for now.

"...I see."

After hearing that, the guard operated a device with buttons in his hand.

And then, four boards written with [Pass] came out of it.

"Take these with you. One per person... These passes will be annulled if you go out of the highways, so keep that in mind."

The guard gave us the boards and made a "go along now" gesture to us.

It appears they're not going to check our belongings.

"We passed through without a hitch."

Alma said that in relief once the checkpoint was out of sight.

"Even if the checks are stricter than usual, it seems they let you pass without problem if you go about it normally."

"There was nothing to worry about!"

Ruli and Iris were relieved too.

However...

.

"It's too soon to let your guard down. These passes have magic codes carved within."

I cast a spell to decipher the magic code.

Deciphering it is simple since I've seen this type before in my past life.

"Code?"

"Yeah. I've deciphered it, and it reads... like this."

I put the content of the code on the paper in my hand.

[Take caution. A party of four high level adventurers. Some doubtful part on motives. 174517 First Checkpoint.]

"Caution... It's like they're suspicious of us..."

"Maybe it's unusual for adventurers to work at this city?"

Alma looked confused as she said that.

But her expression quickly turned bright.

"Ah but, just getting suspected should be easy to deal with later right? Just got to work on some quests to make us look like the real deal!"

True, the code itself doesn't sound urgent.

I don't know what the number 174517 means, but judging from the location, it's probably the time of our arrival there or something.

However, unfortunately, we can't relax just yet.

There's a bigger problem about this pass.

"The problem isn't the content of the code."

"Not the content... What do you mean?"

"This code, you see... is done in the same method the demons employed in the past... The technique used to carve the code in the pass is also not something possible with chant magic."

I show the pass to the girls.

Ruli asks me in surprise.

"But that... You mean the one who gave us these passes was a demon?"

"Nah, I've made sure that there were no demons at that checkpoint. I knew about the code the moment I saw the passes, so I went and analyzed their mana."

Demons who excel at camouflage magic can escape [Passive Detection]'s long distance detection.

However, the farthest person at the checkpoint back then was only 50 meter away from us.

That little distance would still have shown me all the unnatural part.

They might be able to slip through the detection if they concentrate, but doing so would be as good as exposing themselves.

"Oh that's good then... Wait, is it really?"

"It's not. The opposite even."

I look at the magic code again.

Yup. The composition of this magic is good enough that I don't think anyone is capable of reproducing it in this era where magic has declined so much.

"Think about it. You need to hold the authority of the entire territory to give orders to checkpoints. And since those checkpoints are equipped with these things..."

"No way, you mean this entire Folkia territory is controlled by demons!?"

Alma raised her voice in surprise.

"...That possibility exists. It's also possible that humans received only the tools from the demons, so we can't say for sure yet."

For the time being, let's see who we're going to meet at the second checkpoint.

Depending on the situation, we might need to do something about Folkia before we could accomplish our objective.

Especially in this case, if this is really the demon's doing, there's a high chance

we're up against a very unique type of demon.

Or rather, that's probably it.

Would be nice if it's the pattern that's easy to handle...

Chapter 187: Strongest Sage, Getting Tailed

A few hours after we departed the first checkpoint.

We arrived at the second checkpoint.

[How is it? Think there's a demon here?]

[Nah, every one of them is a human... There's some slightly suspicious response beneath the ground though.]

[Suspicious response?]

[Yea. They're undoubtedly humans, but they have body reinforcement magic tools equipped on them. Stuff that couldn't have possibly been made with chant magic.]

Of course, if there were someone who could use chantless magic besides us, these magic tools could possibly have been created by that someone.

I saw myself how Giruas developed his own version of chantless magic and fought using it.

However... These magic tools are too refined.

They're not really something special in the past era, but body reinforcement magic tools aren't something a self-taught amateur could just randomly make.

...Probably a good idea not to beat myself over the source of these magic tools.

[Wait, so you're saying there's magic tools for body reinforcement... Would we get stronger in fight if we used one?]

[You'd better not. All the minute adjustments are too complicated, and when they're changed, it makes fighting harder. It has its use if you want to bulldoze through things with brute force, but the load on your body is high.]

Judging from the mana reaction, the magic tools equipped on the people underground are the type that bulldoze things through brute force.

Most likely with a severe side effect.

[From what the code in this board said, we have no choice but to pass through this checkpoint, don't we...?]

[Yea. That's a good idea... Don't worry. We will simply attack back if they try to pull a fast one on us.]

I probe mana reaction on the checkpoint once again.

Yup. They're all spectacularly small fry. No demon either.

At this level, Iris alone can take them all.

As a matter of fact, I've already figured out a short cut that won't be found out by checkpoints, but we're not gonna use it.

We should go with the flow if it doesn't alert the other party, yet on the other hand, finding out whether Folkia Territory is hostile towards us or not is better for us.

The move we're taking when we enter the city will differ depending on that knowledge.

After all, if Folkia Territory turns out to be an ally of demons, we must not apply for permission to enter Eteris Steppe.

They'd know our destination if we did.

The demons probably have no idea what's in Eteris Steppe, but that still won't stop them from bolstering the defense there.

While thinking and walking on the road, we're stopped by a guard, similar with the first checkpoint.

"Halt. Show me your pass."

It'd be nice if we could smoothly pass through this one too...

We show him our passes while thinking so.

"...This is..."

The guard slid our passes through a machine.

And then he tells us.

"Sorry, it's gonna take half a day to ask for the approval. You'll have to wait here till then."

"...Got it."

Looks like it won't go like the first checkpoint.

Well, it's only half a day anyway, might as well wait.

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◇

[I wonder where they're getting the approval from? It doesn't look like they're doing anything resembling that though...]

At a place slightly apart from the checkpoint, Ruli asked me.

...Looks like she was attentive enough.

[You noticed huh. They're probably not asking for approval or anything.]

[...Then what is it about?]

[They're stalling for time. When our passes were slid through the machine, mana that resembled comm magic was emitted out of it. It probably takes half a day for the people at the receiving end of the magic to finish their preparations.]

[Receiving end... Who?]

[Ah. If the territory lord is our enemy, it's probably their underlings disguised as bandits or something along the line. Some demons might even pop up depending on the situation.]

[Disguised as bandits... You mean they're going to raid us?]

[Yea. The missing people that Giruas mentioned were probably their victims.]

Giruas said that there were a lot of adventurers that went missing near Folkia.

If they're really getting attacked by fake bandits, it explains a lot.

Ordinarily, they don't have any reason to attack adventurers who came to the territory... but the term [Ordinary] does not apply to people who employ magic tools demons made.

[What should we do if we get attacked?]

[We'll just turn the tables on them. While pretending not to notice anything.]

◇

A few hours later.

They finally [Got the Approval] and we were allowed to pass the checkpoint.

[I guess we're gonna meet some bandits soon?]

Alma asked me after we were far away from the checkpoint.

[I'm not sure if it's going to be bandits, but something is definitely there... Look.]

I deciphered the pass content and showed it to the two.

[Warning. High rank adventurers. Deploy B-class Disposal.]

There were codes written inside the passes.

[B-class Disposal...?]

[Yea. I'm not sure what that means, but it's definitely not good... I mean,We've got ourselves some guests tailing us already after all.]

I look far away.

Some place away from us, someone is tailing us.

The other party is relatively skilled at it, but even though their figure is hidden from sight, their mana response is completely bare laid open.

Behind the pursuer, there's around 30 bandits... or, people disguised as bandits, lurking.

Judging from the mana reaction, all of them have been equipped with physical reinforcement magic tools.

Now then... Where to begin.

Chapter 188: Strongest Sage, Creates Feint

"...How's the target?"

30 minutes after we started getting tailed.

The guy who was following behind our pursuer asked him.

We're only 300 meters apart from our pursuers now.

They seem to think we can't hear them due to the distance... But a conversation done without any concealment spell can be easily heard simply by using sense reinforcement magic.

"Doesn't seem like they're on guard... More importantly, don't get ahead of formation. We'd get found out since you guys don't know how to tail someone."

"...Got it. Make it quick. We Raid Unit don't got the whole day. And killing 'em quick woulda nab us some nice buck 'fter all."

Looks like the enemies are separated by two roles, scouts and assaults.

Judging from their conversation, killing adventurers who have come to Folkia

territory is a daily occurrence to them.

[Seems like they're trying to look for the right time to strike...]

[What should we do?]

Ruli and Alma who have also learned Sense Reinforcement noticed the enemy proceeding with their plan to attack.

Normally, you'd want to outflank your pursuers in this kind of situation and attack them in their confusion.

However... Considering our opponent is really weak this time, we can afford not to kill them.

[Let's put them to sleep with magic, look for something that could be a source of info and let them off.]

[We're not going to kill them? I don't think there's any worth in bandits other than their death though...]

Iris is correct indeed.

But it's not like I'm letting these bandits (or people disguised as one) go out of pity.

There's no doubt that there's a wire-puller behind these guys.

In order to defeat this wire-puller in the most efficient way, we've got to keep these guys alive.

Killing our attackers would bring unwanted attentions.

Besides, there's a high chance these bandits are carrying the thing I want the most with them.

That thing would be rendered unusable if we killed these guys.

[Yeah. Normally you'd do that. However, we don't want to alert Folkia. So let's just put them to sleep.]

[...Alert?]

[Yeah. High chance these Raid Unit is connected to Folkia. If we turn the table on them, they'll know our strength won't they? To prevent that, we'll get

through this by putting them to sleep.]

[I understand! ...Should we use Sleeping magic tool?]

[Yeah. Please take care of that while I and Iris act as a decoy. Make sure not to make it lethal. I'll cast a camouflage spell in 10 seconds, erase your presence with magic and go around the enemy.]

[Yes!]

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[Got it!]

After confirming their replies, I count to ten while walking with Iris.

And then I cast [Vision Illusion].

[Vision Illusion] is a magic that makes an illusion of someone that shouldn't be there.

As this can be used even without having a direct contact with your opponent, even Disqualified Crest is able to deceive faraway opponent with it... But it's easy to see through the magic if you just look closely.

However--whether you allow your enemy to have that chance or not depends on your skills.

[Now!]

Hearing my comm spell, Ruli and Alma go separate ways from us under stealth magic.

The level of stealth magic they're using is not high at all, but it's more than enough against these guys.

Right after Ruli and Alma went away, I turn around and shout out loud.

"It's an ambush! Get ready to attack!"

Then I run toward the assailants.

Iris followed behind.

Since they're focusing on us rushing to them, they won't pay close attention to the [Vision Illusion].

"Dammit, they found out!"

"You shittin' me! Did you really follow 'em right?"

"Of course! You know my tailing skills don't you!?"

The assailants that carry a bow let loose their arrows toward us.

Around half of them carry a bow.

All of them are equipped with the Strength Reinforcement magic tools mentioned before.

I strike down all of those arrows with my sword.

But looking at the fact that every one of these arrows accurately flew to me... These assailants are pretty skilled for the present world.

At the very least, they're not like your average bandits.

"Wha... That guy's a monster!"

"How the hell did he strike down arrows with a sword!"

On the other hand, Iris also attempted to mimic the feat with her spear, but it was in vain as all of the arrows ended up hitting her.

Well, mere arrows are no different from dandelion's fluff to Iris though.

"The girl's real bad news too! She's crap with spear, but arrows ain't working on her at all!"

"No one told me about magic to protect you against arrows!"

And these guys went and badmouthed Iris for some reason.

Well, they're right though, Iris is bad with spear.

"Hey, what do you mean by crap! Mathias-san is the weird one here! You normally can't strike down flying arrows mid-air!"

Iris swings her spear around while getting angry.

However, it's all in vain as the spear keeps missing its targets.

"Ooh, then how about..."

Iris takes a stance as she gets ready to throw her spear.

But I stop her a moment before she could.

[Oy, they're gonna die if you do that.]

[Ah... Oh right, I can't kill them...]

[Yeah. It's annoying, but it'd be better for us in the long run if no one died.]

Ordinarily, there's no need to endeavor so hard just to avoid one or two casualties.

But, I have a reason why I try not to kill even one.

I intend to erase the fact that [there was a battle here].

And that's only possible if the enemy suffers no casualty.

Because these assailants themselves wouldn't want to report to their boss, [We failed the ambush, everyone fell asleep before knew it].

By simply creating a situation that would prompt the assailants to insist on [there never was a clash in the first place] narrative, they would take care of the rest on their own.

...Well, even though we're not gonna kill them here, I've remembered their faces, thus once we've beaten the one behind all this, I will tell the proper lord about their deeds, practically sending them to the gallows.

"What the? They stopped movin'."

"Dunno what's goin' on, but here's our chance! Aim at the boy!"

Our opponents saw us being immobile, since I stopped her throwing spear, as a chance.

Unlike Iris who's impervious to arrows, they must see me as someone that could be killed by one since I kept striking down their arrows.

Well, it's all pointless though.

With how slow these arrows are, I've no problem dealing with even ten times the amount.

"Oy, do it seriously! These arrows are too slow they look like stop motion here!"

I struck down all the incoming arrows while provoking them on purpose.

"That ain't no human feat..."

"What do we do? Should we retreat back?"

"Fool, like we could do that, we're just up against just four peeps! We've just gotta get close and--"

Thus while we were buying time... Ruli and Alma were done with the preparations.

[We're ready! Activating now!]

Chapter 189: Strongest Sage, Curse

The moment Ruli declared the activation, wave of mana spreading out of the magic tool around her.

It's spreading evenly with enough range to cover all of our foes.

Quite excellent for something that was made impromptu.

But there's one thing that bothers me.

That is... the fact that Ruli and Alma are included in the magic tool's range.

There shouldn't be any problem if they have another magic tool to protect them from the sleeping magic tool though--.

[It's on! Huh? I kinda feel sleepy...]

[Oy, don't tell me...]

[Zz...Zz...]

...Looks like my fear was proven correct.

Ruli's voice turned to snoring midway through.

Apparently she forgot about their own protection in her quest to make a magic tool to drowse people in the surroundings.

It might not be a problem if the enemy fell asleep without fail, but if they were strong enough to withstand the sleep magic, it could spell disaster.

I've got to properly teach her how to use area-effect magic tools later on.

I approached the two while thinking that.

"...They're fast asleep..."

"Yeah. Glad that they didn't seem to hit their heads at least."

Sleep magic is a relatively dangerous magic in spite of the name.

Since you fall asleep from a standing position, there's a lot of cases where

your head hits something.

Although there's rarely a case where the practitioner died, many suffered injuries at least... But the two seem to be fortunate enough to avoid that, they're sleeping so peacefully.

Kind of makes it hard to wake them up... But unfortunately, we can't let them sleep here.

"Alright, let's wake them up."

I used some simple rousing magic on the two.

And they quickly opened their eyes.

[Munyamunya... Huh? Where am I?]

[...Why was I... Ah!]

Alma didn't seem to get what just happened, but Ruli quickly realized the reason why she fell asleep.

After looking at the magic tool she made herself, Ruli's expression turned awkward.

"You've gotta make sure to protect yourself the next time you're making area-effect magic tools, okay."

"I made a mistake... I'll be careful..."

Ruli stared at the magic tool she created reproachfully as she said that.

I could teach her how to protect herself from magic tools right here and now... But right now we need to focus dealing with our sleeping assailants.

"Well, since you've successfully drowsed our enemy, this plan was a success. And they've got the things I wanted with them to boot."

"Things you wanted?"

"Yeah. This."

I took out a plate from one of the assailants' pocket.

The plate is written with [Member's Badge].

"Member's Badge... of the bandit gang?"

"Yeah. A badge to prove you're a member of this bandit gang... or at least that's how it looks like."

I then began to decipher the Member's Badge.

Deciphering it is easy. After all, the code used is completely the identical as the one used on the Pass.

[Special Pass. Back Gate 174532.]

Those words showed up on the Member's Badge afterward.

Alma speaks up when she sees that.

"...Isn't this basically the same thing as the Pass?"

"That's right. I figured that these fake bandits employed by the territorial lord

should carry some with them, I was spot on."

I transcribed the magic code on the plate to a paper, and returned the plate back to the assailant's pocket.

I did the same routine four times and extracted four magic codes from four Member's Badges.

Afterward, I handed over four small magic stones to Ruli.

"Carve these magic codes using magic."

"Magic codes... I've never done it before, is it like this?"

Ruli carved the magic code into one of the magic stones.

It needs precisions since the magic stone is small, but it's not at a level problematic for Ruli.

She quickly finished carving all four magic stones.

"Excellent. Next you do this..."

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As I said that, I created plates from some wood with magic, to be used as the magic stone's plates.

The size and appearance is the same as the Member's Badge.

"Good, it's done."

I handed over the finished forged Member's Badges to Ruli.

There's four of them to make detection harder.

Having four completely identical Member's Badges would invite suspicion after all.

"Alright. Then let's head to the town... But before that, we should record all of these guys' mana reactions."

"Mana reactions?"

"Yeah. Once the hubbub at Folkia is over, we'll need to hand these criminals over. Recording their mana reaction is for that occasion."

I touched a nearby assailant, pretended to peer at his mana reaction--and then carved the spell【Curse of Death】on the assailant's heart.

【Curse of Death】has two effects.

First, when the target is trying to kill someone, the spell will make the target move slower regardless of their will.

Second, it will kill the target 30 days after the Curse is set.

With this spell bound on these guys, whenever they try to attack other adventurers, they will slow themselves down and have the table turned on them instead.

And even if they're lucky enough to survive, they will die in 30 days for sure.

--Even if killing them now is disadvantageous to me, I'm not going to let anyone who attacked me run free.

"Were you able to record their mana, Mathi-kun?"

"Yeah. It's perfect."

Looks like even Ruli didn't notice the【Curse of Death】.

It's only natural. On top of having simple effects,【Curse of Death】cannot be used unless the target is sleeping, but in exchange, it's a highly hidden spell.

And the fact that Ruli doesn't notice it means your average demons can't possibly do either.

I carved the【Curse of Death】on our assailants one after another while thinking that.

--My work was finished 10 minutes later.

"Alright, I'm done with all of them! Set the rousing magic tool to wake these guys in five minutes!"

"I got it!"

Then we ran out after Ruli had set the magic tool.

In five minutes, our assailants should wake up and try to conceal their huge failure of falling asleep in the middle of a pursuit.

Unless these guys are stupid, the battle this time should be [Nonexistent] at Folkia.

Thus, it'll be some time before they find out about us using the forged Member's Badges to enter the city.

As long as we get enough information in the meantime, planning our moves should be easier once the time comes.

We advanced toward Folkia while thinking that.

◇

Less than an hour later.

We've gotten close to Folkia... but I sensed some worrying presences there along the way.

It appears that Folkia is currently in the next most troublesome situation I could have guessed of.

[Umm... It feels like I could detect demons inside the town...]

Ruli asked me anxiously when we were about two kilometers away from the town.

Looks like she's noticed too.

[Yeah. It is demons. A type that's specialized in concealment at that. If one is hiding inside a building or something similar, even I wouldn't be able to find it with just【Passive Detection】.]

[It's really good at concealing... That's why I couldn't detect it until we're this close... Is that also why it's not possible to detect its location?]

[No, that's unrelated. Once you got one in your detection range, you could also pinpoint its location.]

I looked at Ruli as I said that.

Ruli looked like she was concentrating on detecting for a little while... Then she shook her head.

[Uun... It's full of weird reactions!]

Strange.

The demons in this town are indeed of a specialized type, but they should not have a special ability to hide their location...

[By the way, what do you mean by weird reactions?]

[Umm... The reactions are all over the place! Just in the range I could detect, there's like 30 of them...]

...Ah, I see.

I guess it's only natural for her to misunderstand.

I mean demons are ordinarily an organism that doesn't crowd together.

Unfortunately however--.

[You're not mistaken.]

[...Eh?]

Ruli and Alma were dumbfounded when they heard me.

That's right. Ruli has not made any mistake in her detection.

Folkia is presently choke full of demons.

Chapter 190: Strongest Sage, Sneaks In

Folkia is full of demons.

Alma and Ruli ask me in a panic when they hear that.

[More than 30 demons!? That, sounds really bad...]

[But aren't demons a creature that doesn't group together? Yet there's 30 of them here?]

[Yeah. Ordinary demons do not flock together. The demons here are a special type of subspecies that does. Their other peculiarities are they're hard to detect, and good at cooperating together... in exchange, each is weaker than an average demon though.]

In my past life, these types of demon are called [Demon Subspecies].

Since detection technology had progressed at the time, there were only a few cases of Demon Subspecies mingling with humans.

Even if they're weaker than an average demon, they still far surpass the humans of this era.

If this type of demons was the one that infiltrated Beisis Kingdom, it would have been tougher to deal with.

[Weaker than an average demon... How strong are they?]

[It depends on each individual, but Ruli and Alma should be able to defeat one if it's alone... However, the more of them, the tougher the fight will be. Try your best to avoid fighting more than five of them together.]

Demons fundamentally prefer to fight alone, they're bad at coordinating together with each other in a fight.

But Demon Subspecies is different.

Demon Subspecies fights by coordinating with their unique mana wavelength along with complex and specific interception and jamming comm magic, allowing them to perform a variety of coordinated attacks.

Their coordination is far above what humans could achieve with comm magic.

They could share their visions and hearing among each others, and even sometimes do linked magic casting.

The only saving grace is the fact that the mana used for their coordination has a short range, 50 meters at most.

If not, fighting even one of these Demon Subspecies would have meant fighting the subspecies in the entire world.

I walk toward the town while talking about that.

Alma hurriedly tried to stop me.

[Hang on, where are you going!?]

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[To the town gate. Though not the front gate, but the secret path used by the fake bandits.]

I point at a nearby ground while talking through comm magic.

There's a part where the ground is new over there.

I held up the forged pass over the ground, then it moved out, exposing the

entrance into the secret path.

[...Bingo. Tis' the secret path used by the fake bandits when they get out of town.]

[How'd you even find this path...?]

[With Mana Perception. This kind of secret paths uses a magic tool that detects passes to open the door.]

I point at a magic tool buried in the path.

This magic tool won't open the door unless it detects the pass.

It's a relatively orthodox way to seal a secret path.

I expected a type that scanned each person and prepared four forged passes for all of us, but that seems to be unnecessary.

[Mana Perception... Could such a tiny mana reaction like this be found?]

[Finding this simply by looking at the surrounding mana is impossible, yeah. But if you do it while assuming there would be this type of magic tool around, you should notice... Knowledge about magic tools isn't only useful for making one but also for planning countermeasures.]

I check the passage's wall for mana reaction.

This kind of passage is usually installed with traps that calls for guards or blocks intruders who have take possession of the pass... But neither seems to be present around the entrance.

It's not possible to look far ahead since the passage is curving, but judging from the atmosphere, we should be able to manage somehow.

[Looks clear. Girls, get down here... but be sure to take cautions while progressing ahead.]

[Understood!]

[Yes!]

[Got it!]

The girls also go down the passage.

Well then, shall we go infiltrate Folkia.

Our objective is of course; annihilate all demons.

Chapter 191: Strongest Sage, Slips Pass

[I've erased our sounds with soundproof magic, but be careful not to kick a stone. And it looks like there's a demon guarding the passage, we'll decide how to deal with it once we get closer.]

[Yes!]

[Got it!]

We stealthily progressed through the passage.

Then I saw the passage curving while probing the mana reaction as we walked.

And there's a demon at the end after the corner.

There's only a single demon on the lookout.

We should reach the city once we got pass it and reached the door at the end.

[...This is, slipping pass this demon would be a better idea here.]

A lone lookout like this usually performs safety checks regularly.

Killing this demon would be the same as telling other demons there's an intruder.

Let's save that as the last resort.

[Slip pass... There's only one passage here right? Wouldn't the demon find us just like that...]

[There's a way if the enemy is alone. I'll cast a spell for that, you girls, walk forward once I give you the signal.]

I approach the passage's corner.

A spell to make yourself invisible is enough if you merely needs to deceive a lookout.

Anything would do if it was humans, but we're up against a demon.

Demons with sharp perceptions tasked to stand watch could even detect those who have hidden their body and sounds with magic by slight vibrations on the ground.

I'll be fine on my own, but to let the girls pass here, I've got to meddle with this demon and temporarily cease the demon's perceptions.

And do that in a way that won't get me noticed.

[...This is quite far.]

From the passage's corner to the demon, it's 40 meters away. Unfortunately, Disqualified Crest cannot send magic through walls.

The passage probably has been structured like this to prevent magic attacks through the walls.

While thinking that, I made myself disappear with magic, and took a step into the section after the corner.

Then I set magic barriers slightly above the ground, and stand on it.

...The demon doesn't seem to notice me at all.

I stealthily approach the demon as such.

When you're in close proximity to a demon, their mana perception is the hardest ability to elude.

If you don't walk with a specific stepping to lower interference on the surrounding mana, simply standing around will expose yourself once you've gotten this close.

Once the demon is within my magic range... I cast a spell called [Disturbance].

It's a spell that dulls the target's perceptions for a duration of time.

Ruli and the girls should be able to slip pass the demon without getting found out now.

[Now's your chance! ...The demon would notice you if you tread on the ground so walk on the barrier I've put on the passage.]

[U-understand!]

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[Got it!]

The girls then walked toward me while stepping on the barrier.

Since they're just walking normally, the surrounding mana have been thrown into disorders (especially around Iris)... But the demon doesn't notice it.

The three passed by the demon just like that and got out of the passage.

[I-it really didn't notice us!]

[We were walking right beside it and yet it didn't notice us at all...]

We arrived at the town while conversing through comm magic.

By the way, once you're connected through the comm magic, its effect on the surroundings is pretty diminutive, thus there's no problem using it.

[...They'll suspect us if we're just standing around here. For now, let's look around the town while pretending to shop around.]

I walk toward the center of the town afterward.

But still, it's really...

[This town feels gloomy somehow...]

[And the adventurers aren't carrying weapon.]

Alma said the exact thing I thought.

This town's mood is obviously not normal.

The populace seems to be mostly humans, but they have gloomy expressions on their faces.

And the adventurers don't have any weapon with them.

Restrictions on arms... or not, doesn't seem like it, but ordinary adventurers would have never gone without one.

There must be a reason behind this.

[Let's put our weapon away. It would raise suspicion otherwise.]

[Gotcha!]

We put away all our weapons into Storage magic in a deserted place, and took another stroll.

Judging from the stock at the stores, distribution of goods seem to flow just fine.

If I had to say, medicine selections are not good... or rather, it feels more like they can't catch up with demands.

Most of the stores selling medicines have empty shelves.

The few remaining ones are rip-offs.

The guild came into view while I was thinking that.

[There's a guild here. Let's take a look at the quest board, I'm also intrigued about the no-weapon situation here.]

[Maybe there's a lot of quests that don't require you to carry a weapon? I mean, bringing one while doing such a quest would only be a bother.]

[That's a possibility... But normally, there's less than 10% of quests that don't need a weapon no?]

Adventurers' job is fighting.

Monsters could sneak on you even during gathering quests, it's unthinkable why an adventurer wouldn't carry a weapon.

There are quests for beginners where you don't need to fight (like carrying luggage), but the number should be extremely small.

[You're right... Perhaps there's a peculiar quest or something.]

We went inside the guild while having that conversation.

And over there was... a single quest tag for mining ores.

Chapter 192: Strongest Sage, Ordered

"...Was Folkia a mining town?"

"I don't think I've heard anything like that..."

The quest is about ore mining.

The name of the ore in question isn't mentioned, but apparently it's used to make a [Sturdy Building Material].

The reward is on the higher side for a quest that doesn't involve fighting monsters... but it's frankly pretty low for an adventurer's quest.

Since there's no other quest present, adventurers must have no choice but to take up this quest.

"Are you here to accept quests?"

A man came out of the guild's interior and approached us while we were looking at the quest form.

From his attires, apparently he's a receptionist, but...

『Um, this is...』

『Yep, a demon.』

The guild receptionist is a demon.

And the demon cast a spell chantlessly on us as he walked here.

『Thought Dampen』--In short, a spell to dull the target's judgment.

This spell seems to have been adjusted to work with general populace in this era, so it's not working on us... but in exchange, it's hard to detect.

Ordinary adventurers probably wouldn't have any clue when this demon cast the spell.

The reason why fake bandits are sent to raid on high-ranking adventurers is probably related to this magic.

As there might be high-ranking adventurers capable of noticing the spell being cast on them.

Adventurers who noticed it would flee, and spread the story about weird things happening at Folkia Guild.

『Did he just cast a spell?』

『Yea. A spell that's not working on us... no doubt about it now. This mining quest is connected to demons.』

I look at the demon while talking through comm magic.

We'd better... pretend that we've been affected by his spell here.

We'll infiltrate their inside in in the meantime and show everyone these sub-demons at the site.

"That's right. We're here to take a quest."

"Then I recommend this quest. You can complete it without fighting monsters, the reward is pretty bountiful too."

The receptionist (demon) gave us the mining quest form.

"I got it. We'll take it."

I immediately signed the form and handed it back.

"I also need your guild cards to process the form. Do you have them with you?"

"Yea."

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I fetched four... fake guild cards from my bosom pocket and handed them over to the demon.

Since the demons seemed to be cautious of high-ranking adventurers, I've camouflaged our cards to be of Rank E in the way here.

There's not many high-ranking adventurers in the world, disguising as one wouldn't last long once they looks at the guild register and such... but not even the guild note down every Rank E adventurer's names.

"Thank you."

As expected, the demon took the cards, and handed them back after nodding in satisfaction.

『Is it really okay for us to take this quest... oh, is this like an undercover investigation?』

『Exactly. Declining here would make him wary of us cause his spell didn't show any effect.』

While we were having a briefing, the demon completed the quest form processing and came back here.

"This quest has two stages of operation. Mining and refining. You're free to participate in either of them... which one?"

"The refining please."

"Okay. The refinery's location is marked on this map."

The demon handed me a map.

It shows locations of the refinery, first-aid station and other facilities.

Looking at the number of facilities, this mining operation looks to be quite a large scale project.

"Err... This way."

The refinery is right in the center of the town, very easy to spot.

It's a very sturdy building that's been reinforced with magic.

And there's a demon standing in front of it.

...This place is really full of demons.

"We're here for the ore refinery quest."

I gave the demon the quest form while saying that.

"Got it. I'll have you guys work immediately."

While saying that--the demon cast another [Thought Dampen] spell on us.

Most likely, these demons cast [Thought Dampen] on the adventurers every step of the way to make them work like robots for demons.

But demons are still demons despite being a subspecies.

They should be able to yield way more ore by doing it themselves rather than gathering a bunch of humans to do it for them, why would they out of their way to--.

I got the answer of that question when the demon opened the refinery door.

The ore gathered here looks familiar.

『...Rankine Ore huh.』

Chapter 193: Strongest Sage, Refines

『Rankine Magic Ore?』

『Yeah. It's a peculiar ore that can be made into『Rankine Magic Crystal』, a material to create powerful mana bombs... The stuff about it being a building material is, of course, a lie.』

It's clear now why demons went out of their way to employ humans.

Since Rankine Magic Ore would be polluted and turn useless if anything other than humans try to refine it.

Demons can get close to Rankine Magic Crystals produced from the refining of the ore, but the refining process itself absolutely needs humans' involvement.

This property isn't naturally inherent to Rankine Magic Ore, it's a result of the past me casting a large-scale spell that inserted such a property into the ore in the whole world.

If I didn't do that, demons would have completed mana bombs and the world would have been destroyed by now.

『Mana bomb... Is that dangerous?』

『Around one ton of 100% pure Rankine Magic Crystal would be enough to destroy an entire country.』

I looked around the refinery as I said that.

The purity seems to be nearly 100%, but at the rate this refinery is going, it probably produces only around 200 gram a day even when it's operating for 24 hours.

Since there are five refineries of this scale in this town according the the map, in around 1000 days they should acquire a ton worth of Rankine Magic Crystal--the amount needed to destroy a country.

『One ton, one country!?』

『...Since this ore is difficult to refine, it's not easy to pile collect a ton of it. It would take about 15 years to create one ton with this refinery alone... Even so, this facility is quite a high level one.』

Afterward, I look at the machines in this factory.

In order to refine nearly 100% pure Rankine Magic Crystal, one needs very

high level facilities.

『Y-you're right, the magic device over there looks really complex... I don't get how it works at all... Don't think I could make it...』

『I can guess its structure somewhat, but it's not something you'd want to make anyway. Tenfold enchanted magic swords are easier to make than that thing.』

Even if Ruli tried to make one with my design and under my supervision, she wouldn't be able to make this level of refinery machine at her current level.

And of course, it's also not something the subspecies demons here could have created.

Either they got a demon with higher level of technology understanding backing them, or they found a refinery machines created by the previous civilization somewhere.

Magic reactors that destroyed the previous civilization also used Rankine Magic Crystal as fuel, thus perhaps there's some refinery machines made for the reactors lying around somewhere.

Judging from the apparatus, it seems the demons have remodeled facilities

left from the previous civilization to refine high purity Rankine Magic Crystal.

That kind remodeling is several degrees easier than creating one from scratch.

"You must be new faces. Let me explain how you're going to do refinery here."

A man approached us when he saw us standing at the entrance.

His name tag has『Factory Manager』written on it.

The title is factory manager even though this place is a refinery huh.

...This guy is not a demon, he's a human.

I could detect faint traces of demon-like mana from his body, it's probably from a mind manipulation type of spell.

The underling adventurers are only under the effect of『Thought Dampen』, but apparently, the one guiding those adventurers are completely under mind control.

"Is refining difficult?"

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"It's heavy labor, but the process itself is simple. However, there's no change to the fact that it's dangerous. Listen well if you don't want to die."

Afterward, the factory manager walks to a nearby machine.

The machine is enclosed within a 5-meter wide barrier, looking heavily guarded.

"First, put ore into the tank on top of the machine and close the lid. Then push the button here and wait about five minutes for the crystal to come out, and then put it into the casket, that's it."

The manager points at the button. There's already an ore inside the machine.

The thing is quite polished as expected of a machine from the previous civilization.

There were probably other machine thats automatically inserted the ore during that civilization.

"What's so dangerous about this?"

"Well... This machine sometimes explodes when you push this button here. About once every 40 pushes. You've got about 10 seconds to get out of the barrier before the explosion, so you'll be fine if you manage to do that... But there's lots of guys who got used to it and were slow to get out in time. There's already four casualties this month alone. Still safer than the mining group though."

I see, explosions huh.

There's probably a problem in the remodeling of the magic device.

Since the machine itself is sturdy, it should be fine even after eating some small-scale explosions, but the people who get swallowed up in the explosion are helpless.

But still, that's a lot of casualties.

I can see why the town feels gloomy with that many death.

And the refinery group is apparently still safer than the mining group.

Yet the fact that there are still people around in the town must be because of a scheme of the demons. 『Thought Dampen』 is most likely included in it.

We could stave it off with defensive magic, but the demons would definitely find us out then.

Since the effect is supposed to stop you from running away due to『Thought Dampen』, no need to worry about getting influenced by it so long we don't let our guard down.

"That's it. You can go home once you're done refining all the ore piled up there. Should take around six hours."

The manager pointed at a heap of ore as he said that.

That's quite an amount... But it should be done in three hours if we take full advantage of this refinery machine.

However, they'll suspect us if we finish too fast.

For now, we should take it as long as the manager said.

Chapter 194: Strongest Sage, Mixes Fakes

"All right, let's get right to it."

"Yes!"

"Hear hear!"

The three of us begin to work together to put ore into the tank.

『...Should we do this seriously?』

『I don't think we should. They'd get suspicious of us...』

Ruli replied to Alma while looking around.

The factory manager said that it was a heavy labor, but we're used to this kind of work compared to our usual training.

The ore isn't that heavy, and there's no time constraint imposed on us.

Even Ruli, who's got the lowest stamina amongst us, could fill the tank full in

30 seconds.

However, it takes a group of four adventurers a few minutes to do that at other tanks.

They'd begin suspecting us if we didn't take that long.

....What an extremely dull job.

I speak to the three after finishing the batch.

"Let me be in charge of pushing the button, you three stay back."

"Got it!"

After confirming the three had gotten out of the barrier, I pushed the button and got out myself.

Afterward, the machine began to start with a dull sound--and a mana overdrive occurred inside it.

The mana overdrive is being forcefully stopped by the safety device installed

in the machine.

Normally, the machine should have stopped functioning the moment this situation happened, however, the machine's remodel must have been done to prevent that.

The mana overdrive ceased while we were looking.

...I see. Every once in 40 instances, the machine isn't able to stop the overdrive, causing an explosion huh.

『That was an amazing amount of mana...』

『Yeah. No wonder it explodes... Well, you can tell when it's gonna do so, as such there's no worry of getting caught in one so long we're careful.』

The machine stopped in about five minutes, then it cough up a very tiny crystal below it.

It weighs about one gram.

"One piece done."

I put the crystal into the casket.

But really, I can't believe they went around telling people this small crystal was used as a『building material』.

At least try harder to make up something more believable.

We continued the routine while I was thinking that.

Put the ore, wait for the machine to do its magic for five minutes, and then put the crystal into the casket.

Such a routine.

By the way, even though our employers are demons, I still do the job properly... or pretending to as I secretly mix in some fakes.

I've changed the crystal structure of these Rankine Magic Crystals, adding a function to prevent mana bomb from getting ignited.

With this, even if the demons managed to get their hands on refined Rankine Magic Crystal, they won't be able to complete the mana bomb.

It's possible to see through it if they used an extremely advanced analysis

equipment, but there's no way a technological level that let machines explode to do refining is capable of that.

And at the 29th time...

"Okay, on to the next one!"

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"Yes!"

I had the girls get out of the barrier before starting the magic tool as usual.

However... the machine reacted strangely this time.

First of all, the power-on sound was slightly higher pitched than usual.

Next, the mana overdrive happening inside was more intense.

...I see. So this is the rumored explosion huh.

I got out of the barrier while thinking that, then 2 seconds later.

The machine exploded with a shrill sound from the mana overdrive.

Hearing that sound, the factory manager came in to check the situation.

"That sounded like an explosion! Is anyone injured?"

"Nope! We're all fine!"

I immediately replied to the manager.

...The manager looks to be seriously concerned about our well beings.

"Very well! Keep at it, but don't let your guard down!"

The factory manager went back to his post with a relieved look after confirming our safety.

Even though he's being mind controlled by demons, the base must be a kind person.

Since this type of mind control does not erase emotions.

Magic that's able to erase emotions will make the target's facial expressions look unnatural, thus the demons must have purposely left it.

Minimizing the unnaturalness while binding his actions.

Quite a calculated way of mind control.

However, this too will end in a few days.

I wouldn't mind letting demons be were they kept it to themselves... but they went and tried to create mana bomb by manipulating humans.

...I guess it's only perfectly natural since demons do not carry any other emotions besides malice.

As such, I'll keep going with the total annihilation plan.

Chapter 195: Strongest Sage, Picks Chance

About six hours later.

We finished the quest smoothly and got the reward at the guild.

It was a boring but fruitful quest in term of intel gained.

We now know their technological level and the refineries' locations thanks to the map.

『So, what are we going to do now?』

『Right... Nothing good would come out of staying in this town anyway, let's get them quick. We've grasped our enemy positions after all.』

We were probing the surrounding mana reaction the whole time during the quest.

Result, found 32 sub-demons.

A standard amount for a group of sub-demons.

『But these sub-demons are good at acting in unison right? Wouldn't it better if we waited until they're scattered about?』

Alma looked at the surroundings as she said that.

The sub-demons have situated themselves around the center of the town indeed.

It's probably a good idea to wait for the sub-demons to disperse in order to neutralize their union.

However--.

『Nah, there's no point in waiting. These demons must be holding their current positions.』

I peeked at the mana reaction as I said that.

They've been making sure to absolutely stay in the center of the town.

This is probably done on purpose.

Since their sense-sharing is limited to 50 meter range.

And the sub-demons in this town are moving about while always maintaining their link together.

Thus, defeating even one of them would notify the rest of the sub-demons in the entire town.

This is most likely not a coincidence.

They must have willingly taken this kind of security measures to immediately detect any incident or attack from outside.

That all the refineries are located around the center of the town must be for this too.

『...You mean, we're gonna have to face these sub-demons all at once if we wanna beat them?』

『That would happen if we leisurely wait for them to join up with on another. However, if we attack sub-demons that are their on the way to join up with others and end the battle fast, we should end up only fighting a few.』

Even if these sub-demons are gathered together, it's not like they're all smack

dab crowding in one place.

These sub-demons are moving with a certain level of freedom within the 50 meter range limit.

『End it quick... The demons are all within a 50 meter range right? They'd join together in a blink of an eye when they're that close...』

『Not necessarily so. Because these demons won't be going in a straight line. Each one should take about 10 seconds.』

Well if there is a sub-demon acting as an intermediary in the center of the 50 meter range, they should be able to move farther than that, in fact, these demons are scattered about in a 200 meter range.

Even if all these demons were to rush here, it would still take a few dozens of seconds at least.

Ordinary demons would arrive in a few seconds by flying or breaking through walls, however, sub-demons don't have that kind of strength.

『T-ten seconds...』

『That much is enough when you're ambushing a sub-demon... Besides I'll be

employing a scheme that will stop them from banding together easily.』

『Scheme?』

『Yeah. Put a disguise magic that blurs your mana on yourself and beat them without having your face seen... In short, you want to prevent these demons from moving at their pace, that's the knack for defeating sub-demons.』

The past me went through some hard times defeating sub-demons in my youth.

Their individual strength is far away weaker than an ordinary demon, but it gets really troublesome when they band together.

『Beating a demon without having your face seen... I don't think I could do that though...』

『It is difficult... And that's why it will be me and Iris that's going to directly fight these demons. You two will pretend to be innocent passer by and disturb the demons. Hide yourselves in the spot I specify.』

Ruli and the girls are still not able to hide their presences while fighting.

There's the difference in our level of experience and crest after all.

And Disqualified Crest is the most qualified crest for stealth action after all.

However, the demons would surely overlook them if they just hide without participating in the fight.

However, I've been hiding Iris's mana with magic from the moment we came into this town.

I don't have the leeway to keep doing so while fighting the sub-demons for real.

And thus, Iris will be fighting too.

Iris's fighting prowess is a good match for the sub-demons.

Sub-demons are good at union, but in exchange they have fundamentally low offensive powers, therefore, they can't deal any damage on opponents with an extremely high defensive power like Iris.

Iris probably won't able to hit the sub-demons either, but by acting as bait with her conspicuous mana, it should make my battle considerably easier.

...While thinking that, the sub-demons got into positions that's easy to attack on.

I thought it would take another few hours before we got this chance, lucky us.

『Here's our chance. Alma, and Ruli, go hide over there.』

I pointed at a nearby shadow.

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

『I-I understand! Do we need to prepare anything?』

『I'll release Iris's mana later, use the confusion to make magic tools and slip them in. Make it a type of magic tool that will explode on ground contact. Something flashy would be good.』

『I got it! Should I augment it on arrows?』

Usually, when Ruli augment offensive magic, she does it by augmenting Alma's arrows.

Since simply putting offensive magic in a magic stone won't help in hitting the

target.

However, we won't use arrows this time.

『No, just make it ordinary magic tools... Alma, you've learned how to use Wired Homing Enchant right?』

『I've been using Wired Homing Enchant all this time... Huh? Are you telling me to use it on magic stones?』

『That's right. Throw them at the place the demon will step on when I tell you so... Can you do it?』

『Umm... No sweat!』

The『Wired Homing Enchant』that Alma usually uses on her arrows can actually also be used on things she throws.

Of course, using it with arrows is more powerful and effective, but this time we're doing a specific method.

This technique doesn't have many uses, but I was right to teach her just in case.

『Me, what about me?』

『Iris, you wait here and flail your spear around randomly at the demons!』

『S-so haphazard! ...I can just run wild?』

『Your role, Iris, is to be a decoy. Just be careful not to stray too far, and go on a rampage!』

I look at the demons' positions afterward.

We're currently right at the edge of the area where the demons are.

At this position, I can catch mana reaction of the entire group of demons there.

--Nice timing.

Chapter 196: Strongest Sage, Breaks Through Siege

『Everyone, are you ready?』

『Yes!』

『Ready when you are!』

After confirming their responds, I slightly loosen up the mana control spell I put on Iris.

『Got it. I've loosened up Iris's mana bind, so the demons should be coming here soon... Our comm magic may get disconnected in the middle of combat if we get separated, when that happens, move at your own discretions while making sure to stay hidden from the demons.』

Even though my comm magic's range is wider than ever before, I'm still a Disqualified Crest after all. It cannot reach that far.

If Ruli were in the charge of comm magic, she could likely cover the entire area, but then the demons might find out.

『Yes!』

『Gotcha!』

And while we were discussing with comm magic--the demons made their move.

Looks like they're coming here to check things up.

The sub-demons don't seem to deem Iris to be a threat for the time being, they've only dispatched two.

...Of course, I've adjusted the released mana to make this happen.

『Only two of them are coming here...』

『Yeah... Though it seems around five of them are observing the situation, they'll rush here if anything happens.』

I move to the demons' blind spot while hiding my mana.

Camouflaging here is easy thanks to Iris's flashy mana.

And then... The instant Iris came into the demons' view, I swung my sword.

"Wha?"

One of the demons' head flew off along with a confused voice.

The one saying that was the still living demon.

Sub-demon is quick to grasp the situation they're in.

Even while the demon was taken aback, it immediately understood what it needed to do and deployed defensive magic around itself

But--too late.

My sword was already inching closer to the demon's neck while it was developing the barrier.

The sword that slipped through the deployed barrier decapitated the demon like a butter.

『Now then... How much did they find out I wonder.』

Besides visions, these demons share various other senses.

With the speed just now, they shouldn't be able to specify my mana, but it's possible they have found out my magic sword's.

...Though they probably think the magic sword's mana reaction to be that of Iris.

The sub-demons began to move in fluster while I was thinking.

They sure move fast, not surprising considering their joint-senses.

『Wha... Aren't we getting surrounded?』

『Yeah. It's the basic tactic of sub-demons.』

Fundamentally, sub-demons prefer to encircle their enemies rather than waiting for them to move.

Because sub-demons are good at attacking from blind spots by working in group, yet it'll be hard to aim for blind spots if they're the ones getting attacked.

Their extermination encirclement should be complete in 20 seconds if this keeps up.

However, I'm not going to let it happen.

I continue to observe the mana reaction, unmoving.

And then--just as I've guessed, one sub-demon is going to take the path visible from Alma's location.

--Just as planned.

『Alma, throw the magic stone! Toward the feet of the passing demon!』

『Okay!』

The magic stone Alma threw fell unnaturally due to the effect of Guided Homing Enchant.

A moment later, the demon passed by the magic stone--as it exploded.

Of course, sub-demons aren't weak enough to be defeated by an explosion from such a small magic stone.

However, this is good.

That magic stone is something to make the demons think that they have been『caught in a trap』.

While looking at the demon's reaction, I enter its blind spot and cut it in half.

Now the demons must think that『Our cohort died after getting caught in an unusual trap』.

As a proof--.

『The demons are running away!』

Immediately after the third demon died, the sub-demons began to take a distance away from us all at once.

They must have thought that we knew about their encirclement.

That was my goal with giving Alma the order.

Were Alma and Ruli's position off by a meter, or it was late by three seconds, they would have seen through our tricks.

The demons have begun to move as predicted while I'm thinking that.

They're running away from us and joining up with other demons.

--This is how you do it.

No matter how good we're hiding and slipping into blind spots, there's no way to go around them when a bunch of 10 sub-demons crowd together.

And there's still 17 of them left.

We may have managed to kill three at the outset, but us four would have a hard time fighting against 14 sub-demons.

They'd easily kill us three, and Iris who survived thanks to her sturdiness would be gradually shaved down until they took her down.

We have no chance of winning if these demons group together.

--That's why I'll stop them from meeting up with each others.

『You three, stay where you are!』

After saying that, I accelerated up while squeezing my mana from leaking out, and went for the farthest demon from us.

And then, I made a fake explosion that used magic stone like earlier myself and severed the demon's head at the same time.

The disguise was far sloppier than when it used magic stone. They would instantly knew that this was a trap if they just think it through calmly.

However, I should be able to deceive them right now.

Since I'm away from Iris, her mana has been completely released to her normal level... in other words, a level of mana reaction that's far incomparable to an average human.

During such a turmoil, they should have no idea that the imperfect disguise earlier was a trap.

Or so I thought--but it appears that the demons are moving outside of my expectations.

『They found out huh.』

I muttered so while hurrying back to the girls' location.

Looks like they noticed that it was an assailant that had been killing their comrades, not the explosion.

The sub-demons had stopped moving, and begun to cast detection magic to cover each other's blind spots.

And now they're completely on alert for the assailant.

However, they don't seem to know that it's me judging from their movements.

The disguised attacks were probably effective, but a comparatively clever sub-demon probably told them, 『There's an assailant who disguised themselves behind the trap』.

--It'd be bad if they come together. Let's settle this quick.

"Ga..."

I'm hurrying up while cutting up a nearby sub-demon with my magic sword.

I'm heading to a certain junction.

I've already mastered this town's geography.

There are key points in the demons' paths to meet together.

If they can't get through those points, the routes these demons have to take will be limited.

So I'm going to camp there.

...By the way, Iris is currently standing at one of those points.

I thought this could happen, so I had Iris to stay there to slow down the demons as much as possible.

"Gaa!"

"W-where's the enemy... Guaaaaa!"

"Invisible enemy, that's just impossible... Gaha!"

Thanks to taking controls of the key points, the elimination is going well.

However... Hiding my presence is probably nearing the limit.

Even with these key points, there are other routes for demons to take.

I've cut down the demons to only 10, but those 10 have formed a group, eliminating the gaps in their formation.

Continuing my offense here would expose my location, turning it into a frontal assault.

Fighting against a group of 10 sub-demons is a dead wish.

...I could win if Ruli and Alma showed themselves and used that instant to kill several of those demons, but it's too risky.

Even if I'm attacking the demons, letting Ruli and Alma to face off against 10 demons is a bit too much.

If Iris and I immediately join the fray, there's a 80% chance Ruli and Alma to come out safe.

However, I can't bring myself to execute that plan with that 20% possibility up in the air.

We should meet up for now. Since our enemy has grouped together already,

there's no point in blocking the key points.

『Are you three all right?』

『I'm fine!』

『We're unhurt too! I mean, they don't even know we're here!』

I had Iris acting as a decoy but as expected, one or two sub-demons are incapable of harming her defense, she's unscathed.

Ruli and Alma have successfully kept their presence hidden as well.

The problem is our move from here on.

Since we've cut down their numbers to around half the original, it might be a good idea to retreat here for the time being and wait for our chance.

However, giving them time here could make them high on alert for several days, so I'd like to finish it here.

While I was thinking that--the demons suddenly made a weird move.

They suddenly turned their alertness to a different direction, moving away from us.

It's as if a new enemy of these demons has appeared.

It would have been about how they would move were I used a decoy here.

I'm completely clueless as to what's going on.

However, this is exactly the situation I wanted.

『Here's our chance! Let's attack now!』

I overlook not this chance and close our distance to the demons.

Of course, there's a chance these demons purposely created this situation to entrap me.

However, my instinct as a battle hardened combatant forged in my past life tells me that's not the case.

--The demons are focusing their detection to a completely different direction so they won't miss the enemy they finally found.

Probably as a countermeasure if this『Someone』could use stealth magic.

Thanks to it, it's really easy to attack their back.

Concealing my presence and instilling the belief that『The enemy is good at stealth』on these demons finally bore fruits.

And then--I caught up with the demons just when they had started their assault on this『Someone』.

"Guh!"

"Gaa!"

"A counterattack!?"

I cut down the wide open demons in an instant.

It's very easy since they're crowding together for the sake of doing union attacks.

The demons immediately attempted to fix their formation, but they had no chance for that.

"Sooi!"

Iris threw a huge spear at the center of the crowd of demons--or rather, it's coming straight at me.

The spear that struck the ground at an astounding speed blew away the area around its impact point.

Of course, the sub-demons who were dragged into it had their formation broken in pieces.

...I would have died if I didn't dodge that.

『Oy, Iris, watch it.』

『I thought Mathias-san would dodge even if one came flying at you, so I threw it without aiming! I'm sorry!』

...Yeah. I knew that was the case judging from her random way of throwing the spear.

To begin with, Iris is not delicate enough to precisely hit something with her spear.

I continue to beat the disordered demons one after another while thinking that.

The lower their numbers the easier it is to beat sub-demons, and once it's been lowered this much, this is now nothing but a routine work.

I annihilated all but one demon, and imprison it in a barrier.

There's a reason why I didn't exterminate them all.

Then, I head toward『Someone』who had become the demons' target.

...Well, I've had a rough idea of who that『Someone』is though.

"Oy, you okay."

I kicked the ground and got to where the demons' decoy is.

The person lying there is, as expected--Giruas.

Even though my interruption came quick, Giruas still ended up taking hits from 10 demons, he's been seriously wounded.

Yet is the fact that he didn't get hit on his vitals or hard-to-heal parts because of his genius sense of battle, I wonder.

He should get patched up quick with healing magic.

To the point that I'm wondering if he purposely took only hits that would make it easier to heal with magic later.

"You sure know how to get hit."

I healed Giruas with magic as I said that.

There's only one sub-demon left.

This demon has been confined inside a barrier I made.

I didn't kill this demon because I thought Giruas would be disappointed if I left no demon alive.

He's probably itching for a fight anyway, I'll let him have the last one if he

wishes for it.

It's thanks to him that we were able to easily beat these demons after all.

While thinking that... Giruas stood up.

"Ow oww.. Hm? Didn't some buncha' weird demons kill me or something?"

"Nope, you're not dead yet. Even healing magic can't revive the dead."

"...Mathias eh. Looks like you saved my ass... I owe you one."

Afterward, Giruas looks around.

And then--.

"...No more demons here?"

Giruas asked me with a disappointed look on his face.

It's just as expected and all, but he's already looking for more fight right after dying huh.

This guy is a honest-to-goodness battle junkie.

"I've left one for you since I knew you'd say that."

I point at the barrier where the sub-demon is confined.

The sub-demon is apparently trying to get away, but it's failing at it because Alma has been stopping it.

"...Man you're real prepared... Since it's you Mathias, you must have purposely left one for me, yeah?"

"Was it an unnecessary gesture?"

"Naw. True that I don't like fighting pre-arranged enemy, but it's thousands times better than not fighting a powerful one that's right in front of me."

Giruas immediately gave his reply and headed for the demon.

And then he slashed at the barrier with his sword... which bounced off.

"...That's a tough one."

Then Giruas enchanted his sword with reinforcement magic and hit the barrier again.

--His enchant level has gone up compared to our fight before.

It hasn't been yet a week since then.

Though even after his enchant has leveled up, his sword can't cut the barrier.

Of course, a low level barrier wouldn't have been enough to confine a demon, even if it's a sub-demon.

"...Oy, this thing ain't budging."

"Cause I made it like that. I'm opening it."

I release the barrier.

Normally speaking, he shouldn't have been fighting after suffering that much wounds, but it should be fine if he's this energetic.

Giruas is sturdy after all.

"Eat this!"

The sub-demon immediately slashed at Giruas when the barrier went down.

Though it's not like I did it on purpose, the surviving sub-demon seems to be good at swords.

"Come at me!"

Giruas blocked the demon's sword, flipped it back and counterattacked.

The sub-demon parried his attack with its sword.

Current prospects--they're almost even.

The sub-demon is clearly superior in both strength and techniques.

However, Giruas has this mysterious sense in his moves.

He's moving like a veteran swordsman at times, though it's probably in reflex.

Due to that, none is holding the advantage, it's a draw that could tip to one side at anytime.

However, that balance didn't last long.

Giruas's movements suddenly became faster in the middle of combat.

--『Body Reinforcement』.

It's the most fundamental most effective magic for a swordsman.

Especially during a stalemate, suddenly moving quicker when the enemy has gotten used to your speed, delaying their response, could prove fatal.

It was written in the very first chapter of the text book I gave him--so he did read it huh.

"Wha..."

The sub-demon couldn't cope with Giruas's sudden acceleration.

Giruas's swords is going straight at the demon's shoulder.

And when the sword was about to hit the demon--Giruas enchanted his sword without chanting.

I know this magic--I didn't expect him to use it.

"--Recoil Steel Slash!"

Giruas continues to slash at the demon while shouting.

『Recoil Steel Slash』 is a derivative magic of 『Steel Slash』 that raises your sword's sharpness.

It's more powerful than 『Steel Slash』 but in exchange, it gives back not insignificant damage to yourself.

That recoil runs through your entire body, even those who are used to fighting won't be able to move after three consecutive usages.

Not only that, your sword moves also get duller due to the recoil.

That's why, I hardly ever used this magic.

It's only mentioned very little at the text book I gave him.

...So despite saying he's bad at reading, he went and found this magic.

However, 『Recoil Steel Slash』 might be the best magic with the highest firepower for Giruas who's originally not that precise with a sword.

Assuming he can bear the recoil though.

"GAAAAAAA!"

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"Guh... That really stings."

The slashed demon screamed in agony, Giruas too looked at his arm with a look of agony.

And yet, he's not stopping.

Giruas swings his sword again without any hesitation, enchanted with Recoil Steel Slash.

And another Recoil Steel Slash when he's slashing back.

...That's the third.

It should be about time for an ordinary human to stop moving, yet Giruas isn't letting up.

Continuing to swing his sword even now.

Backlash from『Recoil Steel Slash』is not something that can be overcome with spirits or sense.

Enduring consecutive usages like this--don't tell me, he's had『Recoil Steel Slash』practices already.

That sure is reckless.

After three consecutive『Recoil Steel Slash』even the sub-demon is at its deathbed.

And, though it's not limited to demons--the most critical point in a combat is when the enemy is cornered.

Letting your guard down even a bit risks you getting killed by their do-or-die desperation attacks.

Giruas is too valuable to be lost here.

He will surely become a terrific war potential if he survives this and continues his training.

I planned to butt in before he got himself killed--but let's trust his battle sense here.

"You bastard--I'll kill you!"

The sub-demon unleashed the last of its strength, going all out to attack Giruas.

『Mana Strike』.

One of special magic that can only be used by demons.

It's a magic that grants tremendous strength and speed to your sword at the risk of one's life.

It's practically the upgraded version of『Recoil Steel Slash』.

A sword buffed by such magic is coming at Giruas.

The accelerated sword infused with a vast amount of mana could shred humans to piece just by touching.

Right dead at the center, unavoidable track.

At least, with Giruas's speed, it should be impossible for him to dodge that.

However, Giruas evaded it.

It's as if, he had foreseen the attack before the demon used

『Mana Strike』.

And then he counterattacked like flowing.

"--Recoil Steel Slash."

The demon who had exhausted the last of its strength was pierced by Giruas's finishing sword.

Flawless moves without any waste.

--Giruas fell down just as the demon died.

His live is not in danger, but it doesn't seem like he can get up.

His body probably can't endure it after using『Recoil Steel Slash』four times.

"You've gotten quite strong in just a few days."

Even two Giruas from back then probably can't win against this current Giruas.

He's gotten that much stronger in just a few days.

"Well yeah... Yet look at me, turned into this just by beating one demon when you beat like ten of them alone. I gotta train more."

Giruas moved his head to look at the dead demon.

Looks like he doesn't have the energy to even stand up.

"Was that book proven useful?"

"Yeah. I asked an acquaintance, a guild staff to read it fer' me coz I can't read."

He got it read for him huh...

I can't imagine a scene where this guy is having someone read to him.

That aside.

"Hey... What do you think we should do here?"

Right now we're in the center of the town.

Of course, people would gather around after that flashy battle.

Furthermore...

"Oy, landlord-sama has fallen over there!"

"Something's wrong with landlord-sama! What's with those demon horns!"

This town was ruled by demons.

In other words, the populace think the demons we defeated was the landlord and the higher ups of this town.

With all of them lost, this town will fall into chaos.

Thanks to the demon's horns, we might be able to explain that they were demons to them at least.

However, the problem is the aftermath.

There might be some human higher ups surviving, but there's a chance that they have been corrupted by the demons after all this time.

This town has no one who could act as its leader.

Even now, this town has a lot of ruffians like the bandits we fought.

The town would be in chaos without a leader.

No, you can say it's already starting.

And there's no one who could stop it in this town.

"...Isn't this bad?"

"Yeah. This is bad... We need someone who can rally them together, but this town doesn't have someone like that right now... And asking helps from other landlords would take time."

"Why not ask higher-ups from the guild... Ah, the guild was overran by demons wasn't it, guess not then..."

As a matter of fact, personally there's no problem for us even if this town falls into chaos now that the demons are no more.

As there's nothing that could obstruct us from accomplishing our goal here

anymore.

The reason why we came here was because the demons who were in this town could pose a problem when we're using the magic tool to look for demons.

And we'll be done with it if we just leave Folkia and activate the magic tool.

However... Since we're under the backing of Eis Kingdom to move in a foreign country, leaving Folkia here may turn into problems later on.

While I was thinking that... Giruas opened his mouth.

"...Hey. I don't really get it, but in short, this Folkia's ruler or something was a demon, and there's no one governing this town now that we beat 'em, that right?"

"That's right."

After hearing that Giruas tried to stand up.

And then he frowned.

"Hey. Can't ya make this body move with yer' magic?"

"Backlash from『Recoil Steel Slash』cannot be erased with healing magic... But I know a magic that『Spread』the backlash thin over a long time, is that okay?"

"Yea. That good."

Hearing that, I cast a magic called『Recoil Dilution』on Giruas.

This magic spreads what originally should take three days to six days and dilutes the recoil.

On someone who used『Recoil Steel Slash』four times, it won't be enough to make them good for battle.

"You've got my thanks... Leave the rest to me. I can't win against you in combat, but this sorta situation calls for me--a Rank S adventurer."

Giruas who received『Recoil Dilution』said that as he stood up.

And then he holds his guild card high up, and declares to the surrounding

people.

"I'm Giruas, Rank S adventurer of Ristia Guild. In accordance to Raginia Fedeal Law of State of Emergency Command, I shall now take command of Folkia."

"...State of Emergency Command?"

"Yeah. When there's no one that can take the command during a situation related to monsters and stuff, we have a system where Rank S adventurer assume the position. Since demons are treated as monsters, now's exactly that situation."

Alma and Ruli looked at each other with worried looks after hearing that.

It's probably『...Can someone who can't even read take the lord's place?』.

...I'm worried about that too.

"Giruas you say?"

"Giruas... That Giruas?"

"Judging from his guild card... He's the real one."

The people around are buzzing after hearing Giruas's name.

Giruas throws a question to those people.

"Oy, any guild folks here? I gotta ask something."

"I'm a guild staff member... What would it be?"

"Take me to the higher ups of this town's guild. I want personnels."

"I-I understand!"

The guild staff member guided Giruas to the guild.

Looks like this『Emergency Command』has the binding powers to make guild staff obey.

--About 10 minutes later.

Giruas got out of the guild along with a man.

Judging from his outfits, he looks to be a big-wig in the guild.

"This guy will give you orders in my stead. The citizens must obey this guy until the replacement lord comes. Imma knock the crap of those who disobey."

Hearing that, Alma speaks in doubt.

"...Passing the buck?"

"Yea. I dunno no politics. Best to pick someone's trustworthy, that is this guy."

Giruas replied to Alma's question.

"By the way, how did you know someone was trustworthy or not?"

"By instinct."

Giruas only lends his name as a Rank S, and leaves the politics to those who can do it.

I see, that's logical.

Now we can leave Folkia worry-free.

...Oh right, before that.

"Giruas, we'd like to enter the First Type Restricted Area nearby, can you give us the permit? The area's name should be『Folkia Territory Restricted Area』."

"You got a business at restricted area?"

"Yeah. We need to use something there."

"Got it. Hang on a bit."

Giruas took a paper nearby.

Then he wrote something on it and put his sign.

This is what's written there.

————————————————————

Permit

In order to deal with a state of emergency, the four people below have been given entry permit to『Folkia Territory Restricted Area』.

Permit Holders: Mathias, Iris, Ruli, Alma

Publisher: State of Emergency Commander Giruas

————————————————————

Giruas he, he wrote something formal.

Well, guess he wouldn't be a rank S adventurer if he couldn't write.

"Thanks."

"No need to thank me."

Giruas went inside the guild afterward.

Now then... preparation complete with this.

Now we just need to enter the restricted area and activate the magic tool.

...The real troublesome part comes after the machine has been activated.

Chapter 197: Strongest Sage, Adjusts

"Here huh... Looks like it's still in one piece."

A few hours after we obtained the permit from Giruas.

We arrived at around the vicinity of an ancient ruin in the center of the restricted area.

...It feels a bit weird calling something I made with my own hand a ruin though.

"It's bigger than I thought..."

"Th...this wall is amazing! Just what kind of technology could have made this..."

Alma and Ruli spoke out when they saw the ruin.

The ruin that's about 20 meter high has half of its structure buried underground, while the rest is above the ground.

It should have all been buried below the ground when I was reincarnating back then, the surrounding rocks must have been weathered down during the period.

I've put many kinds of anti-break magic on the ruin's walls, so they're fine even several thousands years later.

"So how do we get inside? It's buried in the ground and I don't see any door... Should I break it?"

Iris lowered her spear as she said that.

"...Sure go ahead and see if you could, I think it's impossible though. Actually, don't, you'd break your spear."

The walls here are made from extremely hard materials to prevent breakage.

The base material was orichalcum, but I had magically changed its structure and mixed it with rare metal into an alloy, making it hundreds times harder than pure orichalcum.

Of course, Iris's spear is no match for it.

It might manage to deal a scratch if it hit these walls at 300 times the speed of sound though.

We could make some nice weapons if we scrape some of this material and turn it into weapons... but unfortunately, we currently have no way to process this.

Too potent a material makes it all the more difficult to manage.

"If we can't break it... Should we dig up the entrance?"

"Even if we did, this entrance never existed to begin with... There's no single place for the door after all."

I put my hand on a nearby wall and pour it with mana of a specific wavelength.

And then, the wall moved soundlessly and turned into a door.

"Waa, it moved!"

"Wow! It turned into a door in an instant..."

"Good, it's working."

This mechanism from thousand years ago seems to be still working fine even now, sure worth the trouble of making it then.

We wouldn't be able to enter the ruin if it didn't move.

"Whoa wha, I almost fell!"

"There's no footholds... What should we do about this?"

Ruli said that while looking around inside the ruin.

The inside is a simple cube-shaped room with around 20 meters in length.

The device we're looking for is at the center of the ground below.

Since we came from above the ruin, it's 20 meter long down below.

"Unfortunately, there's no stairs here. We have to jump down while using defensive magic each."

The past me didn't make an apparatus to go up and down, so we've got to manage falling down 20 meters below ourselves.

A mere 20 meter fall was nothing for me when I created this ruin, so the thought of making stairs didn't even cross my mind.

Fortunately, Ruli and Alma have mastered magic enough that they should easily manage mere falls.

"Got it!"

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

Iris who could handle a fall without magic jumped out ahead.

We followed afterward and landed on the ground 20 meter down.

"All right, I'm gonna start preparing the activation, so Ruli and Alma, you girls should search around for stuff that looks usable."

I head to the facility in the center of the room and begin the work.

I need to adjust things since it's been quite a while since its last activation.

It should take about an hour at this rate.

"Usable stuff?"

"Yeah. There should be swords and stuff lying around in the corner of the room, I think... I have no clue what kind are there though."

For a period of time, I made these ruins as a room to do blacksmithing.

Afterward, I only brought with me things that came out well, and left the rest scattered around randomly.

Thus, those weapons should still remain in these ruins.

"Weapons from ancient ruins... That kinda pumps you up, doesn't it!"

"I feel like we'll get to see something amazing..."

I don't remember what kind of weapons I left here, but there should be some usable ones.

That said, since those weapons were originally intended to be used by the past me, most of those are probably unusable to us due to our current amount of mana or lack thereof.

As I continue the work while thinking such... Ruli ran up to me with a sword in hand and an excited look on her face.

...She went and brought an unusable one right from the get go.

"I don't really get it, but this sword feels amazing somehow! There's a really complex magic formula in..."

"It's a sword that disintegrates everything in its path if you provide it with mana as you swing it."

"Disintegrate, everything...?"

"Yeah. This sword can turn the royal capital into a wasteland with a single swing. We don't have enough mana to use it though."

"...Rather, I'm glad we can't..."

Ruli put away the sword afterward.

Well, these kinds of swords should be usable as a『stupidly sturdy lump of metal』at least though.

"How about this one for Iris? It's way heavy, I can't even lift it though..."

This time Alma dragged back a huge spear.

As a magic item... It's a spear that can evaporate everything it touches by generating super high temperature on its tip.

It consumes quite a bit less mana than the sword earlier, so Iris's mana should be enough.

But the mana control needed to operate this spear is extremely complex, it's ultimately unusable.

However... We can use it.

As this spear was designed to endure collisions while generating super high temperature, it's infinitely sturdier than Iris's current spear.

Chapter 198: Strongest Sage, Discerns

"Iris, wanna give this spear a try?"

"Sure, I'll do it!"

Iris began to swing her new spear afterward.

...and by new, I mean thousands of years old new.

"Un... It feels a bit heavier than my spear before, but I'm not sure about strength and stuff without any enemy..."

"Then, I'll act as one using this spear here."

I pick up the spear Iris was carrying earlier.

I'm done with the adjustment, we just need to wait for the magic device's mana to stabilize now.

It'll take about 30 minutes, I'll play along with Iris in the meantime.

"I understand! ...Should I go all out?"

"I don't want to use too much mana on defensive magic, so stop at about half of your full power. It should be still enough to demonstrate that spear's strength."

I took a stance with Iris's former spear.

...It really is heavy.

"Got it, about half then! ...Here I go!"

Iris swung down her spear.

I tried to block that while using Physical Reinforcement and defensive magic, but... The spear in my hand broke apart the moment they hit each other, scattering its splinters everywhere.

...This is the difference in strength between these spears.

"T-that lump of iron, so easily..."

Ruli looked at the cross section of the broken spear as she said that.

The spear Iris used before (or rather, the lump of iron) broke into pieces starting from the section where the new spear hit it.

"This is what happens when two weapons with an extremely huge gap in toughness clash. And your last spear didn't even have a blade since it prioritized toughness."

"A-amazing... Just how tough is this spear?"

"In term of material used, it's tougher than the walls here. You can fight worry free about it breaking."

While we were talking about that... Alma picked up something on the ground.

"Found me an arrow! I can use this one, can't I?"

It's a longish arrow made of metal.

...That one was lying around here huh. We might've hit a jackpot here.

Unfortunately that arrow seems to be badly preserved, it's lost its function as a magic item... But it's made of an excellent material.

It's got firepower, but better yet, this material has a high affinity as a magic item.

"Umm... Isn't the magic stone installed in it, broken?"

"Yeah. It's not usable as a magic tool anymore. But, you'd be hard pressed to find another arrow with better mana transmission. It should transform into a powerful arrow if we just replace the magic stone and have Ruli augment it... And we should probably sharpen the tip too."

I made this arrow to excel in mana transmission rather than toughness, so it's only a bit tougher than an arrow created with the current technological level.

That's exactly why it's easy to sharpen and process it.

...I'd love to use this arrow not as disposable, we should collect it once a battle is over.

"I'm in charge of augmenting it! ...I've got to find a magic stone that's just the

right size!"

Afterward, we went looking around but in the end, the spear and the arrow we found at the start were the only usable items we could find.

We also found some usable looking materials like orichalcum and stuff, of course we collected them.

Result-wise, I guess it's so-so.

I couldn't find the weapon I wanted the most, but since I'm sure I didn't make that many of that thing, I wasn't really excepting much.

In the meantime, the detector device's mana has stabilized.

...It'll still take about 5 minutes more before the wide-area search is usable, but it should be able to do some simple operation.

"Guess I'll try analyzing this as a test."

I took out a tiny piece of metal from Storage magic.

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might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

"What's that?"

"It's a fragment of the Rankine magic ore refinery machine that was in Folkia. We might be able to find out the culprit who gave the machine to Folkia sub-demons if this could be analyzed."

I explained to the girls while putting the piece of metal on the mana detector and operating the panel.

This magic device here is used for wide-area mana search, however, as it's loaded with highly advanced mana detection device, it should be capable of detecting trace amount of mana.

Ordinarily there's no way to detect the mana left in this piece of metal as it's too minuscule, , but with this magic device, it shouldn't be difficult to reveal the mana reaction of everyone who had ever touched this piece of metal.

It won't take long at all to infer mana reaction of those who remodeled the machine.

And if there's one from a demon amongst them, that must be the one who supplied the refinery machine.

"Now then... Let's see if it still works."

I put a small magic stone on the mana detector, and activate it.

Then, a huge amount of mana gets discharged from the magic device, the whole ruin begins to shake.

It's just how this mana detector works.

It's the reason why I made this ruin so sturdy, to minimize the influence this shockwave gives to its surroundings.

...A few seconds later.

The magic stone I put on top of the detector is emitting a faint light as the vibration stops.

"It stopped..."

"Yea. Looks like it went well."

I take the small magic stone in my hand.

The magic stone contains the mana of everyone who has ever touched that piece of metal.

I looked for a reaction originating from a demon... and immediately found a hit.

Rather--.

"This is the same demon who was giving orders in the dungeon city back then."

"The same... You mean the demon we're pursuing made that machine?"

"Not made, the demon only remodeled it... an incomplete remodel that caused the machine to regularly explode at that, but you still need a considerable amount of knowledge to even remodel that machine while still keeping it usable."

Of course, creating one from scratch is a whole different level of difficult.

"From dungeon city to mana bomb... And probably many more things..."

"Yea. The demon who was at the dungeon city and the sub-demons should have a few points of contact. A demon capable of controlling both must mean it's an incredibly powerful and well-known one... It might even be plotting to destroy every country in the world as we speak."

The demon who was acting as the mastermind in the dungeon city didn't strike me as a strong one. Its mana quality wasn't that big of a deal.

However, there are many ways to disguise mana quality.

Outside disguise, it's also possible to have your mana quality degraded from sickness or seals.

That's just how it is with mana reaction, so I never put too much trust in it in the first place... This might turn into a hard fight.

While thinking that, I put the magic stone we brought here on the mana detector device.

It's the magic stone where we put mana of the demon back then.

"...Okay then, time for the real thing."

Chapter 199: Strongest Sage, Probes

Afterward, I activate the detector magic device.

Maximum output. Judging from our enemy's capability, they'd probably know anyway even if we tried to detect them with minimal output.

So might as well end this in one go instead of taking half-baked measures.

"It's shaking quite hard."

At maximum output, the ruin has begun to shake violently.

The ground around this area was sturdier when I made this ruin in the past, so it never shook this much.

The ground here must have changed along with times.

...Thankfully the magic tool buried in Dragon Vein under ground for supplying mana is still working fine.

If that were broken we'd need to provide the device with a vast amount of mana ourselves.

"W-would this ruin be all right?"

"The construction seems really sturdy, I think it should be okay..."

Alma looked around anxiously as she said that.

On the other hand, Iris is staring at the magic device without taking any notice on the shaking.

This much shaking is probably nothing for Iris who originally lived in a volcano.

A few minutes later.

...The result is in.

The magic device here is excellent.

It makes clear of everything; the target demon's location, mana, name, current situation and even its original mana quality.

"I got the info about the demons... It's the worst. Well, I guess it's still better than not knowing until it's too late."

I put a red marker on the map.

The demon is located there... but honestly speaking, there's almost no point in knowing that.

"What do you mean by the worst?"

"The demon from before... The name's apparently Zaridias, that guy is currently sealed. Its original strength is... well, the me right now probably can't beat it."

It's true that I posses the magic techniques forged in my past life.

My crest now is also practically the strongest crest in battle, and I've raised my mana big times.

Judging from its amount of mana, this demon is probably relatively experienced in battle, but I'm far above it in term of battle experience and techniques.

However, there is simply no way to overturn the overwhelming gap in mana.

No matter how skillful someone is, they cannot cut orichalcum with a wooden sword, it's something like that.

I won't be able to beat the demon even if I use up all of my mana and deliver a perfect strike, while the demon is strong enough a single blow from the demon could kill me if it hit.

In such a situation, you have no chance of winning no matter what skills you have.

"But that demon is sealed right?"

"That seal has mostly been come undone. It's probably only gonna hold for another half a day... To begin with, considering that demon has been giving instructions to other demons, the seal probably hasn't been working correctly for a while."

It's impossible for other demons to interfere with the seal if it's still working as intended.

This demon probably made use of the chance when the seal was weakened during the past several years to spread its influence.

In order to make it as easy as possible for the demon to move around when the seal broke.

"True, it shouldn't have been able to move with a working seal..."

"What would this Zaridias do once it broke out of its seal?"

Ruli asked me the question.

However, she probably knew the answer already without asking.

Laying waste to the Dungeon City's Dragon Vein, manufacturing mana bombs in Folkia.

There's only one thing the mastermind of such plans want to do.

"Annihilate humans."

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

I gave an immediate reply.

In the first place, demons have no other behavioral principle than that.

"Annihilate... Like, right away?"

"That's right. With powers like Zaridias', there's no need to take roundabout ways like slipping in Eis Kingdom other demons did. It could just fly to the capital of a country somewhere, and rain down magic attacks from the sky. Repeat that until it's done."

The current humanity has practically zero chance of winning after its seal is broken.

Judging from the state of the seal, a civilization from my past era probably created th seal.

After the civilization was destroyed, no one maintained the seal, and now this is the result.

...Good grief, they sure left behind quite a mess.

They should just have killed this demon rather than sealing it in a half-baked seal.

And the past me even went the trouble of distributing magic devices to kill demons to various countries in order to prevent this kind of situations.

"That means... We're all done for?"

Alma asked in despair.

True, we're in the worst possible situation.

However, I have something in mind that could get us out of this conundrum.

"That's not necessarily the case. I know a way."

I replied while operating the detector magic device I used just now.

"How do you even deal with an undebatable opponent?"

"The simplest method is running away. In this world there are facilities with an even more sturdier defense than where we are now. We could use Immortal magic, train there for 200 years, then defeat Zaridias."

"T-two hundreds... You're joking right?"

"I'm dead serious. Since we don't have time, I would have brought us there to go into hiding if we had no chance of victory."

In that case, humanity would probably suffer catastrophic damages.

However, the number of demons is limited. Even if they destroyed all the big cities, they wouldn't be able to eliminate every single human.

After completing our training, we would defeat the demons, then humanity could rebuild slowly.

Guess, I'll fetch Giruas who's nearby if we go with that route. He'd turn into a valuable asset if I train him.

"But Mathi-kun hasn't gone into hiding yet... Which means, we have a chance of winning?"

"Yeah. Though, that depends on this result."

I activated mana detector at maximum output.

The target is a disposable magic sword the past me created.

The weapon can only be used once, but it's extremely powerful so I've been looking for it without avail.

However, this detector should be able to find it.

"...Isn't it taking too long?"

"Yeah. Cause it's looking for a magic sword. Looking for that takes time compared to a demon that's emitting a huge amount of mana by itself."

It's already been 10 minutes since the activation.

It only took about five minutes to find the demon, but unlike demons, magic items and magic swords only emit trace amount of mana, so it's quite hard to locate them.

And there's probably only around 10 of that sword left in this world.

There's a lot of reasons why there's only a few of them, well, let's not think about it for now.

The problem is where that sword is.

The magic device stopped while I was thinking.

"Alright, here's the res--ult?"

I froze for a second when I saw the result.

The magic sword is on a coordinate that I'm all too familiar with.

Chapter 200: Strongest Sage, Acts as Decoy

"What's the matter?"

"...I found the location of a weapon that could bring us victory against the demon. It's at a place we all are familiar with."

"Familiar place?"

I immediately replied back to Alma.

"Yeah. The capital of Eis Kingdom... Iris, can you fly?"

"Yes! My wings are fine now, going to the capital should be no problem at all!"

"Let's go now! Hurry! It's an emergency!"

I ran up the wall vertically after saying that and left the ruin behind.

The girls followed after.

And when we got to a space big enough to spread her wings, Iris transformed.

"Please get on!"

"Ou!"

We got on board and then Iris accelerated rapidly.

Since her wings have gotten a bit better, the acceleration is stable too.

"Can we make it in time?"

"...Hard to say. The time for the seal to get undone depends on Dragon Vein's movements, so we've got to go the place for a precise guess... Well, I think it's about 50-50 chance."

"Do you know where in the capital is the sword at?"

"Not to that extent... but it wasn't in the capital when we were there, so it must have been brought there recently. My guess is it's in the royal palace's treasury."

That treasury contains everything from useless toys to stuff that are too powerful to be usable unearthed from ancient ruins.

Since no one is able to tell apart those that are usable from those that aren't, they probably bring everything found in ancient ruins there indiscriminately.

I have no idea why that thing got brought to the capital at this timing... but it's probably a coincidence.

"Treasury... Looks like it won't be easy even after we get to the capital..."

"Yeah. And there's a chance it's not in the treasury, so we may be forced to look for it... That's why I'm giving these to you two."

I hand over small magic stones to Alma and Ruli.

"...What's this magic stone?"

"They're magic stones with mana reaction of our target magic sword infused inside. If the sword isn't in the treasury, look for mana reaction similar to it... If the sword is in the treasury, we'll have to talk directly to the king. In the worst case scenario, we might have to break our way into the treasury."

It's a fortunate coincidence for the sword to be at the capital.

As it's relatively close, and the great barrier in the royal capital should hold out for a while even against Zaridias, it's a good location to have a fight at.

Thanks to the great barrier, there's a slim chance of demons coming out from inside the city as reinforcement.

Weak demons might be able to deceive the barrier and slip inside the city, but the fact that no powerful demons would come to our enemy's aid is quite a big help already.

"B-break our way--wha!"

In the middle of her speech, suddenly, it was as if the two were pushed aside as they broke their posture.

In reality, nothing was pushing them. They were hit by a powerful mana wave, and mistook it for the sensation of getting pushed.

The mana wave just now was strong enough to be felt by ordinary people. It must have felt like a sudden gust of wind to these two who have trained their ability to detect mana.

"What... was that just now?"

"The seal has been broken. Will Zaridias get to us first or will we get the sword first... It's a fight against time from here on."

"Zaridias will be coming after us?"

"No mistake about it. Since we pose the biggest threat to Zaridias. He can do anything he wants once he killed us."

Full flight creates too much openings, so Zaridias is probably coming after us with normal flight.

However, normal flight of a high-ranked demon is faster than the current Iris.

Zaridias probably has started his pursuit.

Will he get to us in the middle of the way or not, now is really a critical timing.

"We'll jump off Iris once we arrive at the capital. You know how to defend yourself from the fall right?"

"Yes!"

"Just falling is a piece of cake!"

The capital would probably fall into panic when they saw Iris.

But that's good.

Of course, we're doing this to get there faster, but having it obvious how much of an emergency we're in should make it easier to secure the magic sword from the treasury also.

We can use fighting Iris as an excuse to get the magic sword after all.

"...It's about time."

The capital is still not in sight yet, but we've gotten quite close.

The fact that we still haven't got caught up must mean we're pretty lucky.

"Let's get ready to jump... Iris, slow down to about 50M/s right before you

pass the capital. Make sure to decelerate right before you did."

At Iris's current speed, we'd have passed over the capital in an instant.

And yet, slowing down too much would get us there late, that's problematic.

At the current situation, arriving even a few seconds late at the capital could change the end result.

"I got it! Please direct the timing for my deceleration!"

"All right. Ruli and Alma, get yourself ready to endure the deceleration."

I probe the surrounding mana.

Since I know the mana reaction in the vicinity of the capital well, I can get our exact location through it.

A few minutes later.

"Decelerate now!"

"Yes!"

I gave the instruction at the last second, and Iris began to decelerate.

And then, just when the capital came into view, Iris slowed down just enough for us to jump off.

"Let's get off!"

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"Yes!"

"Gotcha!"

Ruli and Alma jumped off when I gave the instruction.

Perfect timing. The two landed right in the center of the capital.

...However, I didn't jump off despite saying『Let's get off』myself.

Instead, I instruct the two through comm magic.

『You two, get the magic sword and throw it at me from inside the barrier!』

『Eh, Mathi-kun, you're not coming!?』

『Zaridias is coming here fast! I'll buy us time, so get the sword in the meantime!』

The two went outside the comm magic range right after I said that.

Zaridias's mana reaction is already inside our detection range.

He should get here anytime now.

"Now then, let's go buy some time."

True enough, the capital's great barrier is useful to prevent mana intrusion.

However, a demon of Zaridias's level would easily destroy it if he's allowed to attack it freely.

Even if I went myself with the intention of breaking our way to the treasury,

we still wouldn't make it in time.

And our plan would be obvious to him, he could even secure the sword ahead of us which would be the end.

Rather than taking on such a hopeless race, our chance of victory is bigger if I let the girls to get the sword while I buy them time.

Even Zaridias should have a hard time destroying the barrier while getting obstructed.

...Forget obstructing him, Zaridias would probably go after me when he saw me, so the barrier should be safe so long I'm alive.

『Iris can you shoot your breath?』

『I'm okay with one shot! As for the second one and later... I'm not sure unless I've shot the first one!』

『That's good enough. Fire your breath once when our opponent comes into view, then immediately transform back to human form and get inside the barrier.』

I told that to Iris while locating the mana reaction.

We're currently pretty close to the capital since Iris made a u-turn after arriving at the center.

It should be simple for her to go back there after transforming into her human form and got on the ground.

『Eh, I'm not going to fight?』

『Iris, it's difficult for you right now to go against Zaridias. I'd have an easier time with Iris inside the barrier than fighting while protecting Iris.』

Even if she's not in her top form, Iris is still a high-ranking dragon.

Her breath should be quite a menace even for Zaridias.

If she takes shelter inside the barrier after showing off the power of her breath once, our opponent would have a harder time in the fight.

Since if he were to stop moving near the capital, Iris in her dragon form could possibly poke her head out of the barrier and fire a breath at him.

The capital's great barrier is a barrier that only prevents demons from entering, and nothing else.

I'll make use of this convenient location to fight to the fullest.

『...I understand! Then, I'll run in a way that makes it obvious I'm inside the barrier!』

Zaridias showed itself up in the distant sky right when we were done discussing.

『All right, let's go buy some time!』

『Yes!』

I made a declaration at Zaridias who was charging straight at us.

--Now then, it's time to fight.

Chapter 201: Ruli and Alma, Run for Magic Sword

-------At the same time, at the sky overlooking the capital-------

About one kilometer above the capital.

Ruli and Alma are falling down toward the city.

"There should be a vacant lot over there. We should land there."

"Umm, how about there, I see some thicket over there so we won't stand out no? There's no one around too, it's safe all around."

The girls have learned magic to decelerate mid-air for situations like this.

And thus, they're able to adjust their drop point to a degree.

It should be doable for them to land at the vacant lot the size Ruli pointed.

...That said, the size is also nearing the upper limit they can handle, so it can be dangerous if they don't have good controls.

It's probably part of the reason Alma suggested to land at a thicket.

However, Ruli denies her suggestion.

"It would take too long if we land there. That vacant lot is the closest place to the royal palace."

Landing in front of the palace would have been the fastest, but there's a lot of people at the location, so they're not able to land safely there.

Among the locations that are spacious enough for them to land, the place Ruli chose is the closest to the palace.

"But, it shouldn't take more than a minute to close that distance if we run at full power right? We'd better land at the thicket, it's safer and..."

"Mathi-kun said that he's going to buy us time. One minute is too much for our bought time."

The weight of one second in a high level battle is not the same as one second in an ordinary one.

In a fight between students, 10 seconds would afford them at most three attacks.

Five attacks in that time would probably be the limit of swordsmen famed for their strength in this era.

And with chant magic, one shot might even be impossible in 10 seconds.

However, with Mathias, 10 seconds could mean dozens or maybe even hundreds attacks exchanged in a battle.

In such a fight, even a minute would be draining to both.

The higher the level of a battle, the quicker the conclusion is.

Ruli has come to understand that after all the fights they've been through.

That's why Ruli chose the place where they could move the quickest, even if it's one where it's nearing their control limit.

She cannot afford to fail even once, but she's been training magic every day. She has no intention in failing in the first place.

"...I got it. I'll land at the vacant lot too. Will we be heading straight to the palace once we're on ground?"

"Let's do so. The city must be in uproar thanks to Iris-san, so it should be easier for us to pass through instead."

"Even so, if we tried to run into the palace without permissions, they'd drive us away, or worst, detain us..."

"The royal palace's personnels should know that we're Mathi-kun's party members, so that shouldn't happen. I feel a bit bad, but let's use Mathi-kun's name and sort of threaten them. That's the fastest method."

Ruli stared at the royal palace as she said that.

These dangerous words are not something the usual Ruli would have said, she must be giving maximum priority to time-shortening.

"...And what if they didn't let us?"

"Me and Alma should be capable enough to break through the palace's defense. The problem is the lock at the treasury, but if it still hasn't changed from before, I'm confident we can break through it."

"Ruli, feels like your lines of thinking are getting more and more like Mathi-kun...."

Alma looked like she couldn't believe it for an instant, but she immediately put up a serious expression.

"You're serious right?"

"Of course."

"...Gotcha. I'll follow along too. I don't want to use this if possible though."

Alma looks at the bow in her hand.

If they failed to subjugate Zaridias, the people in this city would almost certainly be all slaughtered.

Success and failure of this subjugation rests on Mathias's shoulder--and Mathias needs the magic sword to win.

Even if she understands that, she still doesn't want to fight the capital's populace if she can help it.

Alma looks at the approaching ground while praying that they would succeed in persuading the palace's personnels.

"We're about to hit the ground."

"Let's do it calmly, but be sure to not slow down too much. The people nearby would probably come after we landed, so we'd better rush pass them with magic."

"Gotcha!"

After they're done discussing, they take the posture to land.

Defensive and strengthening magic to defend their body are important when landing, but landing posture is also immensely important.

The two have learned from Mathias, the landing posture to immediately be ready for battle right after they land.

That doesn't change even if they're falling from one kilometer above ground. The only difference is that they need to use more support magic.

...Even the two never imagined that they would end up using the techniques they learned to fall one kilometer down off a dragon.

--The two landed safely partly thanks to the training.

"What, what's going on!?"

"I swear I saw the dragon dropped something..."

"Aren't those human!?"

The sound of their landing was loud as expected of a 1-km fall, so people gathered round.

And since people went outside due to the dragon, lots of people came.

However, Ruli and Alma pay them no heed.

"We'll run pass them!"

"Yeah!"

The two use simple stealth magic and jump over the crowd toward the royal palace.

Ruli and Alma don't even have to try to simply evade ordinary people's eyes.

Only three people who are Second Academy's students that happened to be there noticed them, but they didn't attempt to chase the two.

They're in a situation where a dragon suddenly showed up, and then Ruli and Alma who had been away from the capital fell down.

The students have no idea about the big picture, but they understand very well that there's something big going on.

"Oy, the two that fell down were Ruli and Alma right? Did they come as reinforcement to fend off the dragon?"

"...I don't feel hostility from the dragon, but there's no doubt that they're related to it. I'm intrigued that Mathias isn't with them, but they look to be quite in a hurry, so there must be something going on... Should we help them?"

"Just us three would just drag them down instead. Shouldn't we gather more people first?"

"...You're quite right. I'll go inform the principal, you go get students who are still at the lodging house."

How to act in a state of emergency is in the second academy's curriculum.

The textbook Mathias left deal not only with fighting when a battle begins.

Ways to effectively demonstrate your powers before a battle begin is also included in the Second Academy's curriculum.

It hasn't been long since such lessons started so there's not a lot of students who have mastered the skill, but fortunately the three students here are amongst the best in the academy.

And thus, the Second Academy's students begun their preparations for the approaching fight.

◇

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--While the students were preparing, Ruli and Alma came closer to the palace by running on the roofs while avoiding the crowd.

"...Hey, is it just my imagination?"

"You mean demon's mana? ...Unfortunately, it's real. It's just as Mathi-kun predicted."

Ruli replied to Alma's question while they were running.

There's mana reaction from a different demon than Zaridias.

On their way to the capital, Mathis told them about this possibility.

The capital's great barrier does prevent demon's infiltration, however, demons with relatively weak magic power are able to slip through the barrier given enough time by camouflaging.

The demons in this era probably have no skill to do that, but it's a different story if Zaridias is involved.

It won't be strange for Zaridias to hide a demon in the royal capital in preparation for some kind of situations if it's to destroy humans.

Mathias might be the human whom demons are most wary with, but for a country, that applies to Eis Kingdom.

"...Should we run while hiding from the demon?"

"I think it's too late for that the moment we fell down the sky. If we have to fight anyway, let's make it quick."

"You're right yeah, they should know about us already. Guess no choice but to beat the demon somehow."

"I'd rather avoid fighting since it'd take time though..."

The two were running without breaking their pace even while discussing that.

After about a minute, the palace came into view.

--The king is standing in front of the palace guarded with heavy security.

Looks like he's come out to see the situation after receiving reports about a dragon.

"The king is here... but that's some security."

"We have no choice but to keep going there and hoping that he remembers us from Mathi-kun's matter. At worst, we might have to break through it..."

The two talked in whispers after using Hearing Strengthening, and drew closer to the king.

Without slowing down. Since they knew they would have been stopped by the people around, they intend to let the king notice they're here first.

The palace guards attempt to stop them, but there's no way ordinary guards could stop these two.

"Your majesty, please come over here!"

The guards who's pulling the king's arm urges the king to escape while shielding him.

In fact, it would be easy for the two assassinate the king if they wished so.

However, the king brushes off the guards and shouts out loud.

"Ruli Abendroht! Where is Mathias!"

Chapter 202: Ruli and Alma, Procure Magic Sword

"Wha..."

The king's noble aides who were outside with him were shocked at the sudden situation.

It wouldn't be strange at all if people who aren't even nobles approach the king with weapons in hands are executed.

The aides know that these two are Mathias's party members, but even if Mathias is powerful, they're just a party of adventurers at the end of the day.

The aides were going to send these insolent fellows to prison right away.

However, the real weirdness happened a moment later.

Because the king himself called out to those insolent fellows.

And thus, the aides cannot give the orders to imprison these insolent fellows.

Since the one who holds the highest authority here is the king.

"Mathi-kun is fighting a demon outside the barrier. We've come here to get a weapon that will help him win that fight. The outcome of the fight might change if we're even 10 seconds late... So please give us permission to enter the treasury as soon as possible."

The king was perplexed after he heard her.

There were cases where weapons inside the treasury got brought out in time of crisis indeed.

However, such event requires the necessary procedures.

There's never a precedence where someone goes to the royal palace and directly asks, 『Lend us weapons』.

When the king was pondering--a huge flame in a scale never seen before appeared to the south of the capital, painting the sky red.

It was a flame too gigantic even compared to large-scale magic that can be used in this era, and the large-scale flame magic Mathias used.

After a slight pause, roaring explosion-like sounds could be heard.

"Very well. Take everything you need."

The king looked at the sky for an instant and said that.

"Your majesty, doing that without going through the procedure..."

"Don't you see this critical situation! A dragon showed up in the sky and then a huge flame unlike anything before flared up! Anyone who fusses over procedures in this situation is unfit to be king!"

"However--"

"Just go and open the treasury! I give them permissions to take everything they need! This is an order!"

"B... By your will!"

The people around prostrated themselves before the king who put on a stern tone.

There is no one alive in this royal capital who dares to go against the king when he's made up his mind.

"Over here to the treasury!"

The king's authority is immense.

The guards who were ready to capture Ruli and Alma earlier are guiding them to the treasury now.

The treasury's door is quickly opened.

"This is it!"

There's no way Ruli could overlook a magic sword with mana that obvious.

The moment she got inside the treasury, she ran to the back and grabbed one sword.

Then she ran outside with it.

"Is that all you really need?"

"Yes!"

"Thank you very much!"

Afterward, Ruli and Alma went up the stairs leading above with the sword in hands.

Now they only need to get close to the barrier's edge at the southern end of the capital and throw the sword at Mathias from inside the barrier.

With Alma's Wired Homing Enchant, it should reach him just fine even if he's a bit afar.

However--.

"It came after all."

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

"Well, guess it would..."

Ruli and Alma get on guard even while running toward where Mathias is.

A demon's mana reaction is stealthily getting close to the two.

Ruli activates comm magic while confirming the reaction.

『Let's not fight it head-on here and keep going to Mathi-kun while hindering the demon. Even if we don't fight, it's our victory as long as we deliver the sword.』

『Gotcha!』

Alma shot out an arrow at the incoming demon.

It's an anti-demon mana jamming arrow enchanted with『Wired Homing Enchant』.

It's capable of hindering the demon. There's no way she could have missed against an opponent of this level.

A moment before the arrow hit the demon, it fired a spell.

"Eat this!"

The spell the demon used was just an ordinary explosion magic.

It's easy to evade it--or rather, the explosion was aimed right above the two, so it won't hit them if they just don't move.

However, the path to the south was blocked by explosions when they attempted to proceed there.

Ruli and Alma hesitated whether they could break through it with defensive magic for a second, and stopped moving.

Alma fired another arrow.

Right before that arrow hit, the demon shot out explosion magic again.

Its trajectory goes over Ruli and Alma again.

『This... might be bad.』

『...It feels like it knows our objective and here just to buy time.』

The distance to the southern end of the capital is about 500 meters.

They should be able to find an opening and throw the sword at Mathias if

they just get there.

However, that 500 meter distance is far away.

Even while getting attacked by jamming magic, the demon continued to fire magic that seemed to obstruct their ways.

Judging from the fact that it doesn't try to do anything when Ruli and Alma try to go to any other direction, it's clear that the demon's aim is to prevent the two from going south.

『This is troublesome...』

This demon is not that strong even among demons, otherwise it couldn't have slipped pass the barrier.

With Ruli and Alma's current strength, it should be possible for them to beat this demon given enough time.

However, the problem here is time.

Even if they won against this demon, it would be meaningless if they couldn't deliver the sword to Mathias and Zaridias's fight in time.

It's not possible for Mathias to come here and take the sword himself either. Showing your back to your enemy in a high-level battle is simply suicidal.

In that situation, Ruli suddenly noticed that there are other mana reactions beside them three coming closer.

...Moreover, it's not just one or two. The number is close to 50.

『It's like there's people coming here?』

『They're demon's allies... or not, doesn't seem like it. Rather, some of these mana reactions seem familiar.』

Ruli and Alma check on the mana reactions while continuing the offense and defense against the demon.

They're coming here while forming a familiar-looking formation with their mana reactions.

Or rather--.

『Isn't this the anti-demon formation of the second academy!』

Students of the Second Academy are taught ways to form an anti-demon formations that's effective in offense and defense against demons.

The shape of mana reaction they see right now is exactly like that formation.

Right as Alma shouted that, the anti-demon formation that had come close to the demon shot out a barrage of arrows at it.

Their faces could be seen now that they're close by--no mistake about it, they're students of the Second Academy.

"Guh..."

The demon who failed to evade the barrage of arrows lost its flight control while groaning.

The arrows unleashed by the Second Academy students were the same type of arrows Ruli and Alma used, the mana jammer arrows.

Its performance and power is lower than that of Ruli and Alma, but the students have strength in numbers.

The barrage of arrows systematically shot by them jammed the demon's

mana, hindering its movements.

"...Annoying fly! Disappear you!"

Even while getting hindered, the demon shot an explosion magic at the students.

However, the students with bows at the ready aren't moving an inch. Instead, students with Disqualified Crest step forward.

"Deploy the defensive formation!"

A man who seemed to be their leader gave an instruction, at the same time, the Disqualified Crest students deployed defensive magic.

Behind them, the archer students shot out mana jammer arrows.

"We've heard about the situation! Please leave this place to us!"

The leader man shouted to Ruli and Alma.

The two hesitated for an instant--but they immediately turned their back at

the demon and ran to the south.

What they need to do now is to deliver the magic sword to Mathias ASAP.

The result of Mathias's fight will greatly affects the fate of all residents of the capital--maybe even the entire world population.

Ruli and Alma hurry through the road to the capital's southern edge while praying for the students' safety.

Chapter 203: Strongest Sage, Waits for Time

---------Mathias's Point of View---------

『It's coming!』

In this kind of fights, the most critical juncture that could decide victory or defeat is a few seconds right after it starts.

Right after a battle start is when each has the opportunity to unleash the card both have prepared beforehand, clashing each other's powerful magic.

If either made even the slightest mistake, that could be the decisive moment of the battle.

However, in our current situation I'm at an overwhelming disadvantage.

I have no means to deal a decisive blow even if the enemy shows an opening.

The only thing I can do now is buying time.

--That's why, now is the time to deal as much damage as I could possibly do.

In order to make the enemy as wary as possible, and prevent him from trying to end this battle quick.

The problem here is the enemy's actions--

『Iris, it's the Destruction Flight! Dodge below while readying your breath!』

『Yes!』

I shouted that with comm magic when I saw Zaridias made a sudden acceleration in front of us.

--『Destruction Flight』.

Overcoming the flaws in『Fullpower Flight』by coating themselves in an enormous amount of mana, turning a simple flight into a weapon capable of felling a dragon in one hit, it's a magic that can only be used by high ranking demons.

This blow is probably aimed at Iris. There's no need for such firepower just to kill me, and for Zaridias himself, Iris's breaths possess the most obvious menace.

Thus, Zaridias closed the distance at once with Destruction Flight. To prevent the breath from getting discharged.

He's carrying two great swords whose heights exceed even his own in both hands.

His movements are an exemplary of anti-dragon combat.

Putting aside magic to neutralize Dragon Breaths like I used before, the best way to fight a dragon is to zero in at once and deliver the finishing blow quick.

Since even though Breaths can cover wide breadth, hitting something up close with it is difficult.

However, this move ignores my existence.

Naturally, I use the chance to jump off Iris and strike at Zaridias from the flank, however--

Black shields appeared in Zaridias's surroundings almost the same time I deployed my magic.

--『Instantaneous Absolute Shield』.

It's only effective for half a second, but even amongst the numerous defensive magic there are, it's close to the strongest possible.

And with『Destruction Flight』, half a second is enough to get away from me and reach Iris.

This magic's spell formation isn't so simple it could be deployed immediately in response to my actions.

Zaridias probably predicted that I would act at this timing and prepared the defensive magic accordingly beforehand.

--However, I have also predicted this.

The magic I deployed was『Limited Binding Barrier - Rev』.

It's not an attack spell, it's just used for binding target.

Of course, there's no way an ordinary binding magic is able to stop『Destruction Flight』.

By modifying『Limited Binding Barrier』spell formation, limiting its range to a few centimeter wide, and effective time to a few seconds, I've squeezed enough defensive power to even temporarily defend against『Destruction Flight』.

And a few seconds is enough for Iris to fire her breath.

『Iris, shoot him up along with me!』

『I understand!』

With my signal, Iris shot a breath into a path that would engulf Zaridias along with me.

She wasn't holding back at all with her attack.

To deal with that, I deploy a special kind of magic around me.

It's a magic without name I made especially to defend against Iris's breath.

It's principally similar to the magic that destroyed Iris's breath, but this one protects only me.

"Guh..."

Zaridias who had lost the effect of『Instantaneous Absolute Barrier』got roasted in Iris's breath.

He attempted to deploy a defensive magic, however, there's no way an impromptu made barrier is able to defend against a high ranking dragon's breath.

As expected of a battle hardened veteran like Zaridias, he didn't scream out loud like other demons would, but he couldn't hide the damage he suffered.

--A few seconds later.

After the flame cleared up, Zaridias showed up with burn marks, being ragged all over.

Within Zaridias's line of sight, Iris swooped down below, turned into her human form and went inside the barrier.

Quite an ideal retreat.

"...."

Zaridias isn't saying a word.

He's simply waiting for the moment to strike with his great swords at the ready.

He must be hiding the damage he suffered as much as possible, trying to make me believe that the breath wasn't really effective.

His posture is indeed stable, as if he hasn't suffered any damage.

His body has been restored back to its original state with magic, leaving no wounds outwardly.

But the sensation I've tempered through my past life tells me that the damage is still largely intact.

High-ranking demons have sturdier bodies than humans', but it's also harder to recover. It cannot be restored in just a few seconds.

And the fact that Zaridias is moving while wary of being bound again is all the evidence I need.

However--I'm still at an disadvantage here.

This much damage is not enough to overcome the gap in our fundamental mana amount and strength.

While hiding that, I should buy as much time as possible with my limited mana.

"...."

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Zaridias comes slashing at me without a word.

I parried his sword with my own.

At a glance, it must look like an ordinary cross between blades.

However, we exchanged dozens of magic in that span of time.

If I used even one wrong magic to deal with Zaridias's, the battle would end in that moment.

In order to gain more time in such a battle, I used Iris to become a deterrent from the start.

With the amount of mana I currently have, parrying one blow from Zaridias's sword charged with his full power attack magic requires nearly 10% of the amount.

Our blades need to cross at least several hundreds time before Ruli comes bringing me the sword. Consuming 10% with just one blow is completely out of question.

Thus, I'm using Iris to keep him in check.

I mix up spells to bind Zaridias among the defensive spells I use.

Depriving him the chance to use attack magic to block those.

Thus, Iris's breath is useful for that.

If Zaridias gets bound by my magic, there's a possibility of Iris shooting breath from the ground below.

Since our enemy is wary of that possibility, I'm able to keep using binding magic that uses little mana, and the enemy himself is preserving his strength to cast the magic needed to break him out of it.

Thus begins the fight to buy time for real.

--About a minute since the nerve-wrecking fight begun.

The flow of battle itself hasn't changed at all from the beginning. Zaridias comes slashing at me, and I parry him.

If there's a slight difference, it's that I've managed to grasp Zaridias's moves, bringing my mana consumption down.

Zaridias too attempts to read my moves, but I'm above him in term of foresight.

Rather, by outsmarting his attempts to read my moves, I end up consuming less mana than when dealing with normal attacks.

While repeating the ebb and flow, I single-mindedly wait for time.

Prolonging the battle even one second longer, preserving until the sword gets here.

◇

A few minutes after the fight to buy time unfolded.

I could sense Ruli and Alma's mana reactions becoming extremely small.

They've probably entered the capital's treasury. It shouldn't be long now until they brought the sword here.

However, at the same time, I can feel the bottom of my mana.

I've been repeatedly lowering my mana consumption that could have resulted

in an instant death if I made a single mistake, yet, fighting a prolonged battle against a stronger opponent simply consumes a significant amount of mana.

My remaining mana is probably not enough to even get me half the time Ruli and Alma need to get here.

There is a way to convert my own life force into mana.

However, it's a double-edged sword.

Life force is the root of all powers, it governs over everything, from martial arts to magic output.

The less life force I have, the weaker I get, and the more mana I need to maintain this battle's status quo.

The decreased life force will be restored in time, but it's not fast enough to get replenished in the middle of a fight.

In other words, the moment my life force is decreased, it will rapidly get depleted, until my life is consumed at the end.

If the magic sword didn't get here until then, I would die.

I can't reincarnate myself since I haven't made preparations for it.

However, it is possible to construct reincarnation magic if I convert the entirety of my remaining life force now.

If I did that, I might be able to master magic combat in my next life.

Zaridias would probably destroy the present civilization, but it should be possible to bounce back as long as humans don't go extinct.

Which one should I choose here.

I contemplated for a second, and made my decision.

--I'm betting on Ruli and Alma to get here in time, to win this fight.

Chapter 204: Strongest Sage, Whittles Down Life Force

There is no way I could master magic combat if I couldn't get out of this little predicament.

My goal, the space monsters, are incomparably way more powerful than this demon.

Even if my sword isn't good enough anymore, I shall make sure to survive somehow.

Steeling myself, I blocked Zaridias's sword while whittling down my life force.

Nothing has changed outwardly.

Feigning like this is one of many fields I'm good at.

I predict how Zaridias is thinking and move in a way that deceives him.

Even if he's well experienced in battle, he can't possibly notice my state right now.

--But that's only if he doesn't know『The objective of my fight』.

I've noticed the existence of one demon in the city from its mana reaction.

Once that demon realized Ruli and Alma's goal and reported it to Zaridias, that moment would be when he realized that I was buying time.

And it seems that time has come.

"...Mu?"

Zaridias turned his focus away from our fight for an instant.

It looked like he had just talked to someone who isn't here.

I deployed a barrier magic in that opportunity, but Zaridias broke it apart with his magic.

And then--the demon changed his stance.

Before, his stance was of that of one who sought victory while thwarting any

counterattacks for certain.

Right now, he's taking the stance of one that will try to end the fight quickly even while taking the risk of counterattack.

"...Haaa! Gu... Nunn!"

The fight became many times fiercer than ever before.

I'm losing my life force at a tremendous rate, my sword and magic are gradually losing their strength.

There is a limit on overcoming gaps with skills alone.

And that limit is coming fast.

It's taking me everything just to parry his sword, I can't even afford to check on mana reactions in the surroundings.

--Right at that time.

I could hear a voice from the direction of the capital's great barrier.

『Take it!』

--Alma's voice. Ruli must have used comm magic to make her voice reach me.

And then, Alma threw the magic sword as it flew off her hand.

These girls must be trying to throw the sword while hiding it from Zaridias.

However, there's no way the demon didn't notice comm magic that wasn't even magically disguised.

Zaridias concluded that I shouldn't be allowed to get the sword, took some distance away from me in an instant, spread his wings and began to supply them with mana.

He's trying to snatch the magic sword, to destroy my rope to victory for sure.

If I let him did it, my chance of victory would vanish in a puff.

In such a situation--I use amplification magic and shout out loud to Iris in dragon language.

『Iris, fire the second breath!』

Hearing that, Iris peeked her head out of the barrier.

"--!?"

Zaridias who noticed Iris's movement stopped trying to pursue me and made a u-turn.

Zaridias probably understands dragon language. Since I didn't use comm magic, in all likelihood he must have heard what I told Iris.

And that's the whole point.

I clearly saw Iris's state after she shot the first breath.

--Iris cannot shoot the second breath. This is a done deal.

However, Zaridias has no idea about that. Thus this bluff worked.

And using the chance, I accelerated toward the thrown magic sword.

Making use of the time I gained from the bluff, I accelerate using mana converted from my life force.

Zaridias who noticed that Iris wasn't going to shoot her breath, flew off toward the sword, but my acceleration that came at a price of my life force did not allow him to overtake me.

And I won the speed contest against Zaridias.

I tightly grasped the magic sword Alma threw in my hand.

--A moment later.

A huge sword went through my heart.

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

Zaridias had never set his sight on the magic sword.

He fully intended to get me the moment I took the sword.

"Fool. Showing your back on your opponent, you're just asking to get killed."

Even if the magic sword is needed to win the fight, showing your back on the enemy in this kind of fight is like asking to get killed.

--That's right. I was asking to get killed.

"Yea. You're exactly right."

I slashed Zaridias at point-blank range as I said that.

The strongest blow I've done so far, buffed with eight kinds of magic.

Zaridias who never in his wildest dreams imagined that he would be attacked couldn't manage to parry the slash.

Zaridias whose neck was shallowly cut looked absolutely shocked.

I took the sword that was lodged in my body and took a slight distance away from him.

"H... How are you moving with that wound! Humans cannot possibly manage that!"

Zaridias uttered intelligible words for the first time. That's just how much this shocked him.

Understandable.

"...Beats me."

This magic sword is disposable.

Among all magic swords I created in the past, this sword had been poured with the most advanced techniques I knew, yet at the same time, it can never be used again once it demonstrated its effect.

That's exactly why this sword makes the impossible possible.

The requirement for activation--its user's death.

Its effect is the user's revival, and a supply of enormous amount of mana.

That amount of mana is such that if I even make a slight mistake controlling it in my current state, an explosion that would instantly obliterate the entire region of the royal capital will occur.

However, there's no chance of me making any mistake in the control.

The experience from my past life and the mana control prowess of Disqualified Crest.

There's no way I would err in mana control with these two.

I'm especially well versed in managing a vast amount of mana in my experience of mana control.

"Tch..."

Zaridias tried to get away after seeing the enormous mana.

However, I won't allow him to.

I bind Zaridias with binding magic that makes use of my mana amount.

And then I slash at him with a sword buffed with multiple magic.

The amount of buff magic is not many, but the mana put into them is in a different league altogether.

This should manage to wound Zaridias even with the reduced strength of my sword due to the whittled down life force.

Zaridias attempts to stop the sword, but I've already foreseen his every moves.

The sword clad in an enormous amount of mana accurately hit the vital point on his neck.

"Guh...!"

Even while groaning painfully, Zaridias tried to counterattack without slowing down.

However, right now I'm faster than him.

I forcefully move my listless body using mana.

Then I slip through Zaridias's counter and strike another blow.

The battle is one sided now.

I've lost most of my life force, exhausted to the point that I can't move my body with my strength alone.

The only thing I'm still managing is mana control, converting the mana I got

from the sword into attacks on Zaridias.

On the other hand, Zaridias still hasn't given up trying to find a chance to kill me.

However, his attempts all end up in vain, and he's finally at the last of his strength.

"...This is it huh."

Zaridias muttered while looking at his left hand that was turning into ash by my magic.

Then he makes a declaration at me.

"I admit my defeat. However, I am not the only『Chaotic Demons』left in this world... Now then, I wonder if you're capable of eradicating every last one of them?"

To that, I ready my sword while keeping silent, and pour the highest amount of mana so far into it.

Normally, you'd think that this was a trap, but my intuition tells me that it isn't case.

--And then, my sword lop Zaridias's head off.

The fight is over now.

Chapter 205: Strongest Sage, Recovers

"Mathi-kun, are you all right!?"

"Didn't you get stabbed earlier!? Mathi-kun, don't die..."

Alma and Ruli rushed up to me when I got back to the ground after defeating Zaridias.

The two looked really worried, but when they saw me without a single wound, their expressions turned to confusion.

"Eh, didn't a really huge sword stab right through you...?"

"Is it recovery magic? But your clothes are perfectly fine too... Was Mathi-kun being stabbed, an illusion?"

The two curiously checked my body as they said that.

My body is completely flawless right now.

"No, I did almost get killed by Zaridias for real. I'm fine now thanks to this

sword though."

In fact, I did get killed once, but I kept silent since they would worry about me if I said it.

Ruli was observing my body closely with a serious expression while listening.

And after she's absolutely sure that I'm fine--she hugs me.

"Mathi-kun, you're really alright!"

"Ah yeah, I thought I said so..."

...It's bad for my heart when she's this close, but I can't get away since the sword in my hand is blocking my attempt to.

If I let go of this sword, the mana there will lose its stopping place and go explode.

After the side benefit--I mean, an inevitable happening was over, Ruli who separated from me, asked.

"...So what is that sword anyway?"

"This is a magic sword that revives its user when they die, and grants them a vast amount of mana. I reckon the mana will last for another five minutes now."

I point the sword sideward, and shoot out an attack magic with the mana at a nearby rock.

The girls look astounded and like they get it now after seeing the enormous mana.

"S-so that's how you did it..."

"But there's no way Mathi-kun could control such a huge amount of mana, couldn't you? Does it have a mana control unit installed too?"

"Naw, you can't fit a mana control unit that can manage this much mana in a sword, I'm doing the controlling myself... There's some knack in controlling a massive amount of mana indeed, but it's pretty easy to do once you're used to it, you know."

This sword is probably unusable to the girls, but they would still need to be able to control a large quantity of mana to use other magic items and such.

I should teach them how to do it until the opportunity presents itself.

...Several knights ran up to us from the city while we were talking.

From the crest carved on their armor, they're a unit under direct orders of the king.

"Mathias-sama! Are you safe!"

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

Looks like the king knew that I had defeated the demon.

Our fights with the demons should be seen from the capital after all.

"Yea, I'm fine. And there's no need to worry about the dragon."

"...We're truly grateful to you for defeating the demon."

Ruli asks the knights who bowed their heads at us.

"What happens to the demon inside the city?"

Now that she mentioned it, there was a demon inside the city.

I can't use mana detection right now due to the mana unleashed by the magic sword... How's it going I wonder.

"The Second Academy students are currently taking care of the demon's subjugation. According to principal Edward, there's no problem with it, the students should be able to defeat the demon!"

So the Second Academy is now strong enough to beat demons huh.

Seems like there's no need to worry about demons that slip past the barrier making a mess inside.

And now we can relax... or not. We can't.

The [Chaotic Demons] Zaridias uttered in his last moment.

Zaridias had already completely abandoned the idea of surviving when he said

the words.

It didn't sound like he was pleading for life.

If these [Chaotic Demons] really exist and are as powerful as Zaridias, this world might really be on the brink of destruction.

Looks like our training in a peaceful world won't be happening anytime soon.

....But that prospect too is interesting in itself.

Chapter 206: Strongest Sage, Inspects

The guards who were looking for us went back to the royal palace after telling us that there would be an audience with the king later.

"So in the end, that sword was in the treasury right? How did you get it out of there?"

"We found the king standing around in front of the palace, so we went to and asked him directly to get us into the treasury!"

Direct appeal to the king huh... They did something rash.

But the fact that it did get through means this country has gotten quite used to quickly deal with crises.

Though that also means they're likely to get tricked by demons in disguise... I'll go teach the second academy students how to deal with something like that.

"For now, let's go see how the students are doing with their fight."

"Even though they said it's okay, it still weighs your mind doesn't it... Over here!"

Ruli led the way for us.

Waiting for us were... Students inside the city driving the demon into a corner.

The students are totaling about 100 in number.

"Guh, bastards... How dare mere humans..."

The demon that was continuoing to receive lots of arrows muttered in disdain.

Its voice suggests that it hasn't taken any damage... or so it seems, in truth, I know that this demon has been quite cornered from its mana reaciton.

Looks like the students are using [Mana Poison] that greatly saps the demon's stamina.

Reaction from the [Mana Poison] is already mixed in the demon's mana.

The [Mana Poison] should show its effect after a little bit more. Won't be long til the demon stops moving now.

The demon could still get the chance to overturn this if it could defeat the students but that possibility seems to be nil.

A group of Glory Crest production magicians are producing arrows that obstruct the demon, and supply them to students with bows.

There wasn't anyone who could use a bow among the Second Academy Students before, they probably trained in archery knowing it would prove useful against demons.

Their skill with bows and arrows is still lacking, but since they seem to be using homing magic, about half of the arrows hit the target.

Thanks to their number, even if only half of the arrows hit, the demon's actions have been practically sealed.

Even when the demon managed to somehow launch a magic attack, the Disqualified Crest students among the ranks blocked it with defensive magic.

And the one commanding this flow is--

[Reiris, take two steps back!]

It's the student who just gave an instruction through comm magic.

I don't know the name but the face looks familiar, probably a student in the same school year as me.

He's been only using comm magic and information gathering magic.

Barely participating on the frontline, a commander specializing in giving orders.

Someone like him is an indispensable existence in a group battle where individual awareness is limited.

Rearing this kind of commander is not easy, but it looks like he's doing pretty well.

Faced with the students' harmonious cooperation, the demon is losing its stamina fast while unable to act.

--Thus, within 10 minutes after we arrived here, the demon stopped moving by the poison, and was finished off.

Without exposing yourself to danger, make use of strength in number to steadily cut down enemy's stamina.

The role model of group combat--not yet polished enough to be called one, but they've mastered the basic quite well.

Second Academy has gotten stronger huh.

"We've successfully defeated the demon! With zero casualty!"

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"Well done... So Mathias and you girls, what do you think about their performance?"

The principal who received the report asked us.

Looks like he knew all along that we were watching.

"I can't say it's perfect yet, but as a joint force put together in a short notice, they're at the highest level. The commanding student in particular, he's capable of leading a much larger army... If I had to say, since it seems like there's still some room for the suppression unit, you could have defeated the demon quicker by increasing the number of people who used the mana poison. The strategy this time isn't wrong for maximum safety however."

"Un, I think their bow shooting could be better... The enemy didn't move that fast after all, would be nice if all the arrows hit..."

"The augmentation magic was nicely done. They were steadily but surely creating arrows with good peformance."

We gave our honest impressions each.

Honestly, they should be praised to get this far with their training time, but if we don't point out areas for improvements here, they could go lax with their training.

...Though considering that commander, he's probably already aware of the current issues they're facing.

"I agree with you Mathias, we should give them praises for getting this good with that amount of training... but you're right, perhaps we ought to give our students more training time with bows."

Principal looks around after saying that.

Arrows that didn't hit the demon are stuck on the roofs of the houses in the area.

No one is injured by this since the residents have been evacuated, but this

isn't the accuracy you want when you're fighting in downtown.

"Oh right, Ruli, the guards were looking for you, have you seen them?"

Ruli's expression turned anxious after she heard that.

She made a direct appeal to the king after all...

I don't think it's about something ominous considering the guards' attitude, but I guess she can't help but be worried about it.

"Umm.... They were looking for me, not Mathi-kun?"

"Yeah. Of course they were looking for Mathias too, but they asked me about your location specifically. I heard you were a great help with the demon subjugation going as far as asking the king directly, he's probably gonna reward you handsomely, don't you think?"

"We ran up to the king and asked for the sword for the sake of this subjugation, I wonder if maybe we're getting a punishment instead..."

The principal looked dumbfounded for an instant when he heard Ruli's worry... but then he laughed out loud.

"Ku...Hahaha! Of course not, not a chance!"

"...Can you say that for certain?"

"Yea, I do. Punishing you girls is as good as picking a fight with Mathias. A country led by such a fool would have long been destroyed by now."

The principal nodded confidently.

It must be true coming from the principal who's a close friend with the king.

It'd be annoying if he tried to push another territory on me again, I should think up something else to get instead.

Chapter 207: Strongest Sage, Audience

Several hours later.

We were summoned to the royal castle for an audience with the king.

Normally, an audience involves a great number of people... But right now, there's only five people standing here.

Including the principal.

Officially it's because, [We're discussing about something greatly related to national security], but it's probably because the kingdom's top brass are still in chaos right now.

Taking out a weapon from the royal treasury through a direct appeal to the king is unprecedented after all.

Giving us reward in that kind of situation, we sure get the preferential treatment.

"You have done very well subjugating the demon. As a reward, I shall confer you with a rank among nobility and a territory... is what I'd like to say, but Mathias, you don't want a noble rank, do you?"

Looks like the king remembered me refusing when he offered a territory back then.

Thanks to it, I don't need to explain the reason why.

...Well in short, I don't need it since it's bothersome.

"Yes. I'd prefer to live as an adventurer than a noble who rules over a territory."

"I see."

The king looks slightly disappointed.

According to principal, the reason why the king is so eager to give me a territory is to forge a stronger bond between me and the kingdom.

Even without doing that, I intend to get along with this country anyway.

It's easier to move around with a country backing you after all.

"Then we shall think up another reward... that said, I have no idea what kind

of reward I should give considering all your achievements thus far... For now, the sword the girls took with them earlier will be given as a reward, but that alone won't be at all enough."

Oh nice, we don't have to give that sword back.

Or rather, that magic sword has turned into dust after its effect runs out, so we have no way to give back.

I would be stumped were he told us to return it.

"How about you look around the treasury? If you see anything you fancy, that shall be your reward. Though I hope you will not ask for items that are related to the royal family's root... but you can get most anything there. Like the magic item for flying we recently obtained, you could even build a castle with the money you can get from selling it."

The royal treasury huh...

I didn't find anything good when we inspected it back then.

[Items related to royal family's root] is probably important items for the royal family, but those things are more symbolic than anything, they're not strong in the sense as magic items.

Just like the magic sword we used to kill the demon, there might be new items that were brought to the royal capital... Fat chance there would be two lucky finds though.

And we can just use our magic to fly in the sky, no need to rely on magic items.

The king seems to perceive my face, he continues on.

"If you don't find something you want now, you can take it when you do find it later. I shall write a permit... Along with the rights for several dungeons to you."

"I'm ever so grateful."

I promptly replied to the king's suggestion.

Stuff found in ancient ruins get brought over to the royal treasury, they might find something nice one of these days.

Well, normally, you'd have to accept the king's offer and get your reward here, but we're probably given choices thanks to our effort in dealing with demons and helping the country.

...Afterward, Ruli and Alma received their reward.

As for the matter about them entering the treasury through a direct appeal, they weren't blamed just as the principal said.

The two were grateful for their reward, but apparently they had gotten used to it a bit after the audience before, they handled it more smoothly than before.

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"Please over here."

Dozens of minutes after the audience ended.

We're at the treasury under the royal palace.

I'm told that we can take the reward anytime, so I'm here just to look around a bit.

Just like the case with the magic sword, there's no guarantee that there is no super rare magic item here.

[Uun... Nothing's really caught my attention.]

[True... There's a lot of new stuff, but most of them are similar to the old stuff.]

These are our impressions the moment we entered the treasury.

...We used comm magic since constantly complaining about royal treasury would likely get treated as a lese majesty.

Just as I thought, apparently they're just bringing stuff randomly here.

There are weapons that can blow away the entire capital if properly used lying around, but since there's no one in this era can use them, those things are practically junk.

And literal junk are everywhere too. For example, a frog doll from an ancient civilization that will leap out if you provide it with mana.

...Well, I guess products of ancient civilizations must look valuable from the royal palace's point of view, so they get stored here.

Besides ancient civilization stuff, there are some weapons and magic items that appear to have been created in this era... but Ruli can easily create any of them herself.

Well, some could be difficult to make due to the material used though.

As I looked around while thinking that... Something caught my eyes.

An adamantite alloy bow which was apparently made by the past me.

[This thing, this one's interesting.]

[This bow? I think it's too heavy and too hard... I can't use it even we take it with us, you know?]

Alma immediately replied to me.

Indeed, the bow itself is just as Alma said.

However, I'm curious about the place where they found this.

"I'd like to ask about this bow."

"Yes. Would you like to take the bow?"

"No, I wasn't asking for the bow itself... did you find the arrows that came with the bow?"

These kinds of ancient civilization products were probably brought here collectively from ruin excavations.

If there is a bow, there's a high chance the arrows should be around too.

Normally, you'd leave a bow with its arrows after all.

Unlike bows, arrows, even the powerful ones, are easy to use.

That's why we took the arrows found in the mana detection ruin.

If we can get our hands on the arrows that came in set with this bow, I think Alma could get a considerable power up....

"We did find arrows in the location where the bow was found."

"Where are those arrows now? Are they in this treasury?"

"Unfortunately, those arrows had become rusty... Thus, they were deemed unfit to be stored at the royal treasury."

I see.

Arrows created from an alloy that had been optimized with mana, density and other attributes in mind are of no value in this treasury where you can find a jumping frog doll lying around huh.

...If some of the custodians of the treasury were students of the Second Academy, they could have realized the value of those arrows.

"By the way, where are those arrows now? You're not going to tell me they were thrown away, are you?"

"Rusted arrows would have no use, so they must be sold to the metal shop. It was probably sold for cheap since the metal was of unknown property, but the shop must have taken them nonetheless."

You guys, stop selling unknown metal found in ancient civilizations would you....

I give my thanks to the treasury custodian while swallowing those words.

"...Thanks. That was helpful. By the way, which metal shop bought the arrows again?"

"All metal from the royal palace should be sold to Ishisu Company."

Ishisu Company is a famous company in the capital. Even I know the name.

...Guess I'll go pay a visit to Ishisu Company later, they're probably treating all that usable metal as garbage after all.

While thinking that... The treasury custodian brought a magic item with him.

"This is the magic item for flying that his majesty the king mentioned."

The item he showed us was a magic item for flying that was apparently also excavated from the ruin of an ancient civilization.

Judging from the shape, it's probably something used in the army from the era of my past life.

The custodian begins to explain the magic item as I infer that.

"According to the result of the royal palace research team, this magic item has a maximum altitude of 300 meters, a maximum speed of 60 kilo, and a maximum usage time of 20 minutes. It might be useful in the fight with demons."

True, its performance is incomparably above flight magic item that can be created in this era.

This magic item is probably the most advanced flight magic item there is now.

Things that can be done with or without the help of flight or flying reconnaissances are dimensionally apart after all.

This magic item is fit to be a national treasure in this present world.

However...

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"Nah, I'll have to pass."

I turned down the offer.

As a matter of fact, the flight speed of this magic item isn't that much slower than what the current me is capable of.

It's pretty nice to be able to fly with the help of a magic item without using your mana.

However, this flight magic item has two fatal issues.

First, you're defenseless while in flight.

This flight magic item seems to be designed around transportation more than for combat, you can't make a sudden break or turn with it.

You'd be a good target for your enemy if you fly with it.

The other, the weight of this magic item.

It's about 40 kilograms, which is at a level that can be carried around without a magic item... but it's still too slow.

I don't feel like walking around with this on my back, and 40 kilogram is way too much to be put inside storage magic.

"You should let someone from the knights or adventurers make use of it, not me. I can fly on my own."

This is the truth.

Since the First and Second Academies have started to teach proper magic training, the average level of knights and adventurers should rise from now on.

Letting talented graduates to carry powerful magic items should help them greatly in the fight against demons.

"I understand. Thank you very much for your consideration!"

The custodian said his thanks when he heard me.

...I simply refused the thing offered to me since I had no use for it though.

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Thus, explanations about magic items continued for a while... eventually, we went back without taking anything from the treasury.

Chapter 208: Strongest Sage, Takes a Breather

"In the end, there was nothing of interest in the treasury."

"It'd be nice if there was another of that sword in there, but I guess it won't be that easy."

We took a good look at the treasury after the audience with the king, but we couldn't find anything we wanted after all.

The timing for that sword to be brought here was pretty miraculous, but an item of that level should be pretty rare after all.

...To begin with, I could only find that one magic sword using detection magic back then, so I never expected there would be another.

Amongst weapons capable of opposing a demon of that level, nothing else could be easily found with detector magic tool.

If there really are other demons as strong as Zaridias out there, we'd have to defeat them using other means.

That said, defeating a foe of that level without making use of special magic tools would be extremely difficult.

"So now that we beat the demons and all, what's the plan?"

"First thing first, I need to recover my strength. My life force had been depleted a lot to convert it into mana in my fight against Zaridias."

"Depleted life force!?"

Ruli was shocked when she heard me.

Well, I never told her about this method, it's only natural.

Even in my previous life, only I could use magic that convert life force into mana.

"Yeah. It requires quite a specific spell, and it'd instantly kill you if you make a mistake in the adjustment, so I won't teach how at this stage."

"A-a magic like that... But is life force something that can be recovered?"

"It should get back just fine if I take it easy for 10 days. Until that time, it's

probably a good idea to stay inside the great barrier of the royal capital for safety's sake."

Though it may seem short, 10 days are quite long.

What we're going to do next will be for when the time comes.

Until then, let's spend our days in the capital.

We might even be able to collect the arrows that Ishisu Company took over.

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"Mathias-san, we have an emergency!"

A week after we started our stay to recover my life force.

Several guards have come to the inn I'm staying at.

This time, it's an ordinary elite unit not the unit under the king's direct control.

Looks like there has been incident.

I can't sense any suspicious mana reaction around the capital though... Wonder what's going on.

"Are the demons attacking?"

"No it's not that, the national border is under attack by armed forces, but the circumstance surrounding it is quite abnormal, so we'd like to ask for your help, Mathias-san! ...We'll tell you the details in the soundproofed briefing room, could you come to the First Academy in 30 minutes?"

I see, war huh.

I'm curious about the abnormal circumstance part, so I'd at least go and have a listen.

That aside...

"We will be discussing wars in the First Academy instead of the royal palace?"

It's true that there's no safer place in the capital than the First Academy right

now.

And since Second Academy's students are using First Academy's building, the students walking around there are stronger than the elite forces under the king, the building is relatively sturdy too.

Once the Second Academy's building that's currently under construction is finished, that's going to the capital's strongest fort, but it won't be for a while.

It's sort of a military academy after all, lending a facility to the army is not a particularly strange thing to do.

But does this mean they're leaving the royal palace and turning the First Academy into the headquarters.

The palace should be quite safe itself, there's no reason to go out of their way and use the First Academy.

The guard answers my doubt.

"We would have held the meeting in the royal palace if it were a full scale war, but there's a possibility that it won't turn into one.... We have repurposed the First Academy's sixth conference room into a briefing command room."

The national border has been attacked, yet no full-scale war option is still on

the table huh.

Judging from the diplomacy in this era, the situation must be quite peculiar.

If another country has sent their army, it will instantly turn into a war after all.

That aside, was there even a sixth conference room in First Academy.

I'm sure it didn't exist when I went there before.

...I sent the guard off and called Ruli and the girls who were staying in the next room to my room.

"War... I'm not too enthusiastic to take part in one."

"From the guard's story, it seems like it's not going to turn into war for sure yet... But why are they calling us I wonder?"

The girls began their preparation to leave while discussing that.

True, it's quite weird for us to get called in this situation.

Even if we're a force that's currently staying at the capital, we're adventurers... and students, officially at least.

During war, the first thing to be mobilized should have been the troops.

Calling us before they did that means...

"Isn't it because of that abnormal circumstance thingy? Like say, the army that was attacking didn't belong to the neighboring country or something."

Well, we'll find out what's actually happening if we go.

Let's just hope that they won't involve us in something troublesome.

Chapter 209: Strongest Sage, In Strategy Meeting

30 minutes later.

We arrived in front of the Second Academy's gate.

When we were about to get in, a knight guarding the gate halted us.

"You must be Mathias-san's group, yes? Please come over here."

The knight then showed us the way.

He's wearing a Second Academy's insignia on his shoulder.

He's probably a Second Academy's graduate. Apparently, the royal capital's chivalric order is one of the main place of employments for Second Academy's graduates.

...This building originally belonged to First Academy though, they got it completely occupied huh.

While thinking that, we got inside the First Academy as led by the guard and

went down from there.

Looks like the sixth conference room is located in the basement.

It's the ideal location for the army's command room.

Seems like the First Academy has gotten quite all right while I was gone.

"We will now hold a strategy meeting to discuss countermeasures for the [Wooden Troops]!"

The meeting began not long after we arrived at the conference room.

Though it's called a meeting, there's only 10 people besides us.

There's Second Academy's Principal Edward, three Second Academy's teachers, and one First Academy's teacher.

All the teachers are related to augmentation magic.

The rest is probably the upper echelons of the kingdom's knights.

I've seen some of these faces in the audiences with the king.

Presiding over the meeting is the knight commander whom I defeated in the entrance exam, Gayle.

"Two days ago, we received a report that Relaia Barondom bordering on Saihill Kingdom had suffered an attack. The kingdom knights thus proceeded with the standard procedure and made the preparations to sortie out... but then we discovered some unusual situation from a report that came afterward. We'd like to borrow expertises from augmentation specialists and Mathias about this issue."

Afterward, the knight commander put what appeared to be a doll made of wood on top of the desk.

"What do you think this is?"

"...Is it the assailant's body."

"Correct. How did you come to that conclusion?"

The knight commander nodded at the answer given by a Second Academy's teacher.

I see, this is the reason why they're calling augmentation experts here.

"Complex magic circles have been carved in the entirety of this doll. It's impossible for chanted magic to create this, thus it's most likely created via chantless magic... I presume that there is no other reason why we were called here."

"I see... Do you get what this is?"

"I'm afraid to say that its complexity exceeds my present knowledge. Given time to research it, I shall try to analyze it... but it would take about five years. I think Mathias-kun or Ruli-san would likely know. After all, our augmentation is still nothing compared to these two."

The teacher looked at me.

I do have an idea about the mechanics behind this doll.

...In fact, I'm not sure if this thing can even be called a magic item.

"This doll moves with forces generated by a particular magic item located in its heart section. It's not remote controlled, it's an autonomous type. Judging from its output, it's only about a bit stronger than a warrior that's not buffed

with magic."

"...It's exactly like the report says... I heard you're good with magic tools, Mathias, but you could even comprehend something just by looking huh... Do you know who made it?"

"I do not know that far, but the augment magic on this doll is indeed considerably advanced. There is nobody in the neighboring countries with a skill this advanced, which means the culprit must be demons."

I don't feel mana specific to demons from this magic item.

But this doll is quite a peculiar type of magic items, it's exceedingly hard to distinguish its creator's mana.

Finding it out isn't really impossible if we go back to Folkia and use the Detector magic tool... but I've used up all the mana stored inside that magic tool to search for the magic sword.

It'd be faster for us to go to the location where the incident took place than going around looking for other detector magic tools.

"Demons huh... Those troublesome bunch again..."

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The Knight Commander paused after saying that.

And he continued after taking a breath.

"I get the picture about the doll... Well then, I shall now explain our current situation. After all, it's related to Mathias's hometown."

My hometown?

By that he means Hildesheimr right?

Wonder if the accident occurred near the territory.

Hildesheimr territory itself isn't located in the border of the kingdom, but now that I look again, there might be other territories where that apply nearby.

I wait for the Knight Commander to continue while thinking that.

"In conclusion, the national border army received an attack from about 300 dolls, however, they were able to annihilate the dolls without the help of the kingdom's main army. The parent and child pair from Hildesheimr who received

a call from a nearby town were of a tremendous help in particular."

I see, Hildesheimr household came as a reinforcement huh.

After all, my brother, Reich can use chantless magic, and my father Castor is good with sword.

These two should be quite a force to be reckoned with.

"That means there's no problem anymore, right? Then you should stop the knights right away. If this attack is really the demons' ploy, mobilizing the army away is exactly what they want."

The principal who had been keeping silence stated his opinion to the knight commander.

Augment magic is outside the principal's expertise, but he's the most experienced one amongst the people here about wars.

The principal is most likely worried about the possibility of demons planning this attack to instigate wars.

From demons' point of view, wars between humans would stave off both resources and be like killing two birds in one stone.

There's a high chance that the situation will progress just as the demons planned if the national army do get mobilized.

However...

"No, unfortunately, the attack is not over yet. Mathias's elder brother claimed that the enemy they defeated was only a very small part of a larger group... As we still occasionally received reports about wooden dolls that appeared to be scouts getting caught, we should consider that the battle is not over yet."

The knight commander denied the principal's request.

"Mathias's elder brother... You mean Biffgel of Glory Crest? I heard that guy is an idiot, sure you can believe him?"

"The one being a huge help is the eldest son, Reich, not Biffgel. I heard that Biffgel did participate but he wasn't much help on the battlefield."

The fact that Biffgel is an idiot has even reached the principal and the knight commander huh....

Well, since my father Castor and knight commander are apparently

acquaintances, he must be the source.

"Still, they made this huh..."

I look at the doll in question while muttering such.

Just as my brother has guessed, if they can make this doll, the number won't stop at just 300.

The demons would rather sortie out themselves rather than creating several hundreds dolls of this level, it'd be faster that way.

They must have made preparations to mass produce these things.

At the very least there should be thousands, or at worst, tens of thousands of this, no doubt.

If these dolls are the demons' handiwork... The situation is quite problematic.

Because the driving force of these dolls are human's life force.

It's one thing if there's only one or two dolls, but they must have the backing of quite a huge organization to handle so many dolls.

Or worst, the entire neighboring country might be ruled by the demons.

...Good grief, these incidents involving demons just won't stop coming, do they.

Well, it also means it never gets boring though.

Chapter 210: Strongest Sage, To be Going on Site

"...So how do you suppose we should deal with these dolls?"

The knight commander asked me while looking at the doll used in the attack on Relaia Barondom.

However, the solution to it isn't quite so simple.

These dolls are capable of autonomous actions, therefore just setting up magic tools to jam transmissions won't be enough to stop them.

However...

Instructions still need to be issued to these auto dolls to get them to act.

Thus, in order to wage war with a new set of dolls, there's a need to give them orders.

The attack on Relaia Barondom should abate if we could just crush the doll master that's giving these orders.

...However, even if that is the case, more attacks would probably occur in other locations right afterward.

These dolls and doll masters are disposable pieces after all.

If they really intend to simply give orders to these dolls, they could just use some magic items to do so.

In conclusion...

"As we destroy the doll masters... we also have to cut off its supply source of powers, the life force."

"Life force?"

"A power that every human posseses within them that is the source of many things such as mana. It's hard to control, so ordinarily life force is not usable... yet these dolls are using this power to move."

"A power humans posses huh... So in order to procure this life force stuff, these demons are murdering humans?"

"It is possible to collect life force by confining and killing them, but such method gives too little return for the effort expended. Rather than doing that... it's more efficient to collect if from a huge number of people little by little."

Life force is fundamentally made to be used inside the body, thus utilizing after taking it outside the body has a poor efficiency rate.

Killing and snatching life force away from 100 or 200 people won't get you that much power, while holding so many people restrained in a confinement is out of question.

"A huge number of people?"

"Collecting life force from hundreds of thousands of people little by little. Though that means, there is a need to spread magic tools that collect the life force in an entire nation."

"Tools to collect life force? Do such things exist?"

"It can be in the form of machines or even medicines if you just need a small amount from a person... But the side effect is severe, and you still need to spread it in a whole country."

I have no idea which kinds these demons are using.

However, regardless of which, taking life force from hundreds of thousands of people is not a simple task.

With the population rate of the current era, the scale might be as big as a whole country even.

Making something like that works with ordinary means would require an unrealistic amount of effort.

They're probably using some specific method to help accomplish the feat, nevertheless, it doesn't change the fact that it's affecting a country-wide level of population, thus requiring a large-scale operation.

"...These dolls are created by demons, right? Does this mean Saihill Empire is conspiring with demons?"

"I can't say for sure how far their involvements are, but there is a low chance they're not connected at all."

I don't know what kind of means these demons are employing.

But judging from the magic circles carved on this doll, our enemy is planning to utilize a large number of these dolls, no doubt.

It must be linked to [Something] lurking in the upper echelon of the country.

"...Demons made these dolls right? How about we just smash them?"

After contemplating a bit, the knight commander said it like he just realized it.

That's certainly an option.

"That's one option if the doll masters slip up on their disguise. However, as our opponent is demons, catching them when they're being wary won't be easy. They can freely fly around after all."

All the demons I defeated so far were either stuck in the place or coming for me themselves.

When demons attempt to run away using their speed, normally there is no way to defeat them.

And since they can create these dolls anywhere so long they have the materials, the demons don't have any reason to stay in one place.

"Indeed, defeating fleeing demons won't be an easy task... But how are you planning to cut off the life force supply, concretely speaking?"

"As this affects the entire country, there must humans who work together with the demons involved in this. Unlike demons, organizations made up of people cannot be relocated around as easily, so destroying these organizations

should be easier."

Of course the demons are 100% aware that these humans are their weak link.

There's quite a high chance that the demons would get in our way if we make a move on these organizations.

We just need to fight and defeat those demons right there, then.

"

...I see.

Then, what do you suppose we should do?"

"First of all, put watchmen on the national borders and see if there's any other suspicious movements. Afterward, it depends on the situation after going and seeing it first hand at Relaia Barondom. I think you should limit the number of personnels you sent to prevent the campaign from getting mistaken as a declaration of war."

"Got it. We will arrange the watchmen immediately. As for Relaia Barondom... Would your party participate in the investigation, Mathias? Unfortunately, our kingdom has no one else that's as knowledgeable on the subject of these dolls. Of course we shall prepare fitting rewards, and we will do everything we can on our side too."

Hearing that, I look at the three girls sitting beside me.

The three immediately nodded.

"I understand. We will lend our cooperation."

I can't abandon this matter since it's related to demons.

There would have been no need if it were just for fighting the dolls, but the situation would deteriorate if we left it alone.

"We are in your debt."

After hearing my reply, the knight commander turned his line of sight toward a knight at the prime of his life who was also attending the meeting.

"Regido, arrange a unit to go for Relaia Barondom at once."

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

"What about personnels selection?"

"We need to avoid getting it mistaken as a declaration of war, yet, getting looked down by the local authority would negatively impact the investigation. So how about one trustworthy viscount, and their guards?"

Viscount... is a rank above baron huh.

From the lesson I learned in Second Academy's class, apparently the higher your position in the knight order, the higher your court rank.

Since means of communication in the current world are undeveloped, having commanding officers with influence should make things easier.

Like in this case, they must be sending people with higher rank than the local baron to smooth things out when we get there.

"...I shall go. That should be acceptable right?"

The knight replied.

That knight was a viscount huh. Quite high on the ladder.

"Of course. Regido is one of the most trustworthy viscount knights that I

know... However, as you will be taking a limited number of personnels, do not overestimate your force. If the situation turns for the worse, Regido is to abandon the mission and return immediately. Mathias, is that fine with you?"

I don't know how is this Regido knight like, but judging from the knight commander's words, he seems trustworthy enough.

And the fact that he orders Regido to quickly return if it looks dangerous must mean that he's that important.

Since I don't know any other knight I can trust anyway, having someone that credible going with us would be a welcome addition.

We can't probably hope for his participation in battle... but he should be a considerable help in gathering info from the local people.

"There's no problem here."

"I will be counting on you... When are you going to depart?"

"I am ready to go anytime."

Viscount Regido replied to the knight commander.

I can go anytime too, but it depends on the girls.

Thinking that, I activated comm magic.

[Anyone need to make preparations?]

[I personally don't really need to.]

[Me too, I'm ready to go anytime!]

[Same here, I can go.]

Looks like there's no problem.

The viscount is probably prepared to go on a campaign whenever an order comes down, and since we have Storage magic, we basically have no need to prepare for anything.

Though my life force has not fully recovered yet, I've gotten back the majority of it already. It should finish recovering while we're moving and investigating.

"I can go anytime as well."

"Good to hear you can move right away... That means, Mathias, you need a temporary court rank."

"Temporary court rank...?"

"Yeah. When someone is required to lead the army in case of emergency and such, a temporary court rank may be granted to that person. It's quite rare for anyone but a noble to lead a detachment though."

I see. And that's where temporary court rank comes in huh.

Looks like I'm stuck to be the commander of this investigation.

However...

"Army huh, but I'm only going to give instructions to these four you know? Is there really any need for temporary rank?"

"It would not be necessary if the objective of this campaign were to wage war, but it's an investigation. If you don't have a rank, the local nobles may not look on you favorably and unnecessarily give you a hard time... Besides, your

current position is one where you can be a noble if you really want to, Mathias. No one would object over you having a temporary court rank."

...I see.

Come to think of it, the king is still persistently trying to [grant me a territory] even now.

Apparently in this kingdom, anyone who's given a territory becomes a noble... or rather, only nobles can have a territory.

In other words, giving me a territory is the same as giving a peerage, turning me into a noble.

...Well, territories are bothersome and I don't need one right now, even if it comes with a peerage rank.

"I believe that receiving a temporary rank takes time."

One of the knights in the meeting voiced his objection to the knight commander.

The knight commander shook his head.

"That is indeed the case in normal times. We have an an emergency now, the rank should be granted without even the conferring ceremony with a written decree by the king. Normally, there would be a hearing to see whether a person is fit to be granted a rank even during emergency, however, for Mathias, there is no--"

The meeting room's door was opened, interrupting the knight commander.

And then a knight came in through the open door.

Holding a piece of paper with ornaments in his hand.

Chapter 211: Strongest Sage, Obtains Peerage

"The king has issued his decree!"

"Good work."

The knight commander took the paper while thanking the knight.

And then he turned around to face me.

"To tell you the truth, I had requested for this in advance because I predicted we would most likely need it. Though I never imagined it would come this quick."

The knight commander showed me the delivered paper.

Here's what written on it.

———————————

Temporary Peerage (Baron)

By the king's decree, Mathias Hildesheimr has been granted the rank of temporary baron in order to help him in his duty as ordered by the king.

Effective Start Date: The moment this letter has been delivered to Mathias Hildesheimr.

Effective End Date: Until the king has declared the cessation.

———————————

Due to the fact that it's an emergency, only the minimum is written.

Apparently, I'll be treated as a baron temporarily if I take this.

"...Will my action be restricted if I accept this?"

"If the temporary peerage comes with the conditions and duty attached to it, something to that effect would have been written in that document. This is the first time I've seen a Temporary Peerage that's completely absent of any of that though... however, the fact that it's not must mean there is no restriction. It's a proof of trust his majesty has placed on you."

Looks like there's no disadvantage in accepting this.

Well, I can just give up on it if it brings problems later on, so I'll just take it for now.

With that in mind, I took the document from the knight commander.

With this, I'm temporarily a noble now.

...Afterward, the meeting was over after the date of departure was set.

The departure will be in three hours from now. No problem for us, but I'm surprised Viscount Regido could finish his preparations in such a short notice.

◇

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"But really, indefinite, unconditional temporary peerage huh. His Majesty sure took some drastic measures."

Principal Edward talked to me when we left the academy.

What does he mean by indefinite.

"It's written here that the temporary peerage will last until the king has declared its cessation though."

It's true that there is no condition attached to the temporary peerage, but there's a time limit written for sure, [Until the king has declared the cessation].

I mean this temp peerage is for the sake of the investigation, surely it's gonna end when the investigation is finished.

Or so I thought...

"It's written there alright, but he's never going to make the declaration. The king most likely intends to let you keep the temporary peerage forever."

"...Is there any point in doing that?"

"Even if it's temporary, being a noble of Eis Kingdom means that you have a connection to the kingdom. Preventing you getting taken in by another country must have been one of the topmost things the king wanted to avoid."

...I see.

The past me never noticed because I distanced myself from those in powers, so it's like that huh.

It's probably the same reason why the king persisted on giving me a territory.

Still, I hope they won't use this as an excuse to drag me into troubles...

The principal opened his mouth while I was thinking that.

"That you have nothing to lose getting the temporary peerage is the truth, don't worry in that regard. After all, we will be coming to you to discuss matters related to demons whether you have a peerage or not either way."

Now that he mentions it.

Regardless of peerage, stuff about demons will revolve around me anyway.

I'm in the midst of that in fact.

...For now, I should thank the king for allowing me to go on this campaign with a peerage higher than Biffgel.

I really don't feel like looking at Biffgel's face, but eh, I'm sure even that guy would think twice before trying to pick a fight with someone of higher rank.

Chapter 212: Strongest Sage, River Crossing

Two hours after the meeting.

<TLN: Sorry guys, mistranslated 'three hours' as 'three days' in the previous chapter. Fixed.>

We're currently at knight garrison along with Viscount Regido.

Our departure is to be an absolute secrecy to prevent this expedition be known outside the kingdom.

"I am very pleased to see you all are here answering to my call... May the fortunes of war be with you. Take care of the border."

The king said so in front of us.

According to the principal, the king postponed his original scheduled plan and came here instead to send us off.

"By your command!"

Viscount Regido answered the king and off we went.

Our destination is Relaia Barondom.

◇

"We should arrive before sunset at this pace. It would be nice if every military campaigns could be this fast."

Viscount Regido spoke as we hurried on the road toward Relaia Barondom.

It's been five hours since we departed and our pace hasn't slowed down at all.

"It's one thing with 10 people, but an army that can move at this pace for a sustained amount of time only exists in legend."

"That may be so right now. However it may very well change once the students who are studying at Second Academy have entered the army."

Viscount Regido is only brining 10 knights as our escorts.

Apparently, they're elites of the elites among the army unit the viscount commands.

And Viscount Regido himself is counted among these chosen elites.

Befitting of chosen elites, they're quick with their feet, we're blazing through a route that would have taken a normal army four days in just a day.

Horses cannot follow us at this pace, so everyone is running on foot.

The escorts are one thing, but to think even Viscount Regideo himself could maintain this pace...

They're still slower compared to the Second Academy students running at full speed, but if they have this much stamina even before Second Academy-style training permeated through them, I can see why they're called elites of the elites.

As such I thought our journey would go unhindered... but then the knight who was in charge of guiding us suddenly stopped running.

Looks like there's something wrong.

"It appears that the bridge here has collapsed."

The knight pointed at the wreckage of a bridge.

The wreckage looks very old, there isn't any trace of it having been artificially destroyed.

It must be broken due to degradation over time.

We're taking a route less traveled in order to shorten time.

It did succeed shortening our travel time, but we also encounter setbacks like this.

"This path is rarely ever used after all... Is there another route around?"

"If we turn about 30 kilometers back, we will find another bridge. That bridge was constructed 48 years ago, but it should be intact since it's still being regularly used. Due to this alteration, our total travel distance will increase by about 80 kilometers."

The knight replied to Viscount Regido without even consulting the map.

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[That person is incredible...]

[I wonder if he's memorized maps of the whole kingdom...]

Alma and Ruli murmured in comm magic.

As one you'd expect from someone entrusted to guide these chosen elites, he seems to be a map specialist.

Judging from the fact that he knew how long ago that bridge was built off the top of his head, it seems maps aren't the only thing he has memorized.

"80 kilometers huh... That means we'll be behind the schedule by half a day. Should we swim pass the river?"

"That's a good idea. Mathias-san and you girls, can you swim?"

The distance to the opposite bank is about 30 meters.

Swimming is a simple matter... though there's no need for that either way.

"I will proceed forward while setting barriers up, please follow my lead."

I walk on the place where the bridge was while putting up barriers on the sole of my feet.

I'm sure this level of magic is normally usable by Second Academy students, yet it looks like the knight elites can't use it.

"...I never knew barrier magic could be used this way... I'm quite sure our knights have started training in chantless magic too, can they use barrier magic?"

"We cannot. We have been training in chantless magic, but the training is specialized in magic for battle."

"Indeed, magic usable in battle should be prioritized... But it might be a good idea to let some of the knights learn these kinds of magic."

Viscount Regido consulted with the escort knight when he saw the barrier magic.

Apparently, the knights have started training in chantless magic themselves.

Prioritizing magic for battle is not a mistake.

As it's battle magic that will decide whether you live or die through a critical moment, so putting all other magic in the back burner is one option.

...Maybe I should write a textbook concerning chantless magic that are practical for the military, with knights as the intended audience.

We crossed the site where the bridge was while I was thinking such.

"Can you employ the magic you used just now multiple times in a day?"

The escort knight asked me after we got to the opposite bank.

I get what this knight is trying to do here. He probably wants to take shortcuts in our route.

"Of course. And it only consumes a tiny amount of mana to boot."

"Well then, please afford me some time to think up a new route under the assumption we cross valleys and rivers using that magic."

The knight got lost in thought where he was standing.

Five seconds later, he looked up.

"We can cut two hours off the travel time. What a wonderful magic."

He managed to recalculate a long-distance route in just five seconds huh....

This knight truly is amazingly good with topography.

Even if they've still got a long way to go on chantless magic, these guys really are chosen elites of the knights after all is said and done.

Chapter 213: Strongest Sage, Gets in Quarrel with Glory Crest Idiot

Several hours later.

We arrived at Relaia Barondom's central town, Relaial, without a problem.

...Well territory of a baron isn't that big though, so this central town is more like a village.

"...It's heavily guarded."

The escort knight muttered when he saw Relaial's gate.

Indeed, soldiers who appear to be guards are standing in front of the gate.

Normally, you don't place guards on the gate of a small town like this.

Security gets stricter only when it's one step away from full blown war.

"Allow me to inform them our arrival."

"Very well."

Viscount Regido halted afterward.

Looks like we still need to inform our coming before we could enter the town.

Guess you can't just stroll right through the gate without saying anything even if you're a noble.

...Right now I'm a noble, albeit temporary, though, so I can't say like it's none of my business.

While I was thinking that, a middle-aged man who appeared to be a noble rushed out of the town gate in a big hurry.

It's probably cause he can't let nobles who are of higher ranks to wait for him.

"Viscount Regido, Baron Hildesheimr! I bid you my warmest welcome!"

Looks like I'm getting called Baron even though it's just temporary.

...This might be the first time someone called me Baron Hildesheimr.

I mean, I rarely ever used my family name and usually introduced myself as just Mathias.

Viscount Regido opens his mouth.

"You must be Baron Relaia. Have you heard the details from His Majesty?"

"We received a letter a few hours ago. We have arranged the information for you."

"Good work. Lead the way."

...Looks like the local army will lend us their cooperation.

Having a viscount in the investigation team is already showing its effect.

As I walk while thinking that... a familiar-looking human walk up here from afar.

--It's Biffgel.

Frankly speaking, I'd like to avoid meeting this guy.

I don't care about Biffgel himself, but it'll be a waste of our time if he causes troubles here.

And that'd result in more troubles for my father Castor, and my brother Reich, I'd like to avoid that.

...However, as I'm currently going along with other nobles, I cannot hide my figure here.

I walked while hoping that he wouldn't notice me, but...

"Mathias, you bastard! What're you doing trotting back home without a care in the world huh! You Disqualified Crest trash, a disgrace of Hildesheimr house!"

...Looks like he found me out.

"What do you mean 'back home', we're not in Hildesheimr Baronet's territory here."

"Same difference! I'm asking why'd you show your mug in front of me now! You already left our territory!"

No, it's not 'same difference'.

It's another noble's.

...I can't even begin to figure out where to quip here.

"Oy, who is this guy?"

Viscount Regideo asked the escort knights when he saw our conversation.

"That is the second son of Castor Hildesheimr, Biffgel Hildesheimr."

The one who replied to Viscount Regido was the escort knight who had guided us all the way here.

This knight is not only knowledgeable about roads, but also other nobles huh...

"Second son... That means he's not a nobleman?"

"That's right."

"So you're telling me, a commoner just called a noble, however temporary it may be, 'trash' and 'disgrace', not to mention the lack of honorifics..."

"That will be correct."

"On top of that, did he really say that other noble's territory is [same difference with his household's own]?"

"Amazingly enough, that's exactly right."

Viscount Regido looked amazed as he asked the escort knight.

He then turned at Biffgel with a look of pity.

Looks like he can't even work up anger.

Yep, I know that feeling.

"Biffgel Hildesheimr... I've heard rumors about you, but to think it was all true... Will Hildesheimr house be alright with this guy as their heir?"

"No, the heir is the eldest son Reich, not Biffgel."

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"...Really now? I heard the eldest son didn't have Glory Crest, and only a year older though."

In this country, heirs are usually the eldest sons.

However, the situation changes slightly if only the second son has Glory Crest and the age difference is less than three years.

The law states that [The one better at magic] is to be the heir in a case like such.

And as chant magic is the mainstream in this country, Glory Crest holds the advantage.

Thus, heirs are usually Glory Crest bearers.

And Hildesheimr household is exactly one of such cases.

Biffgel has Glory Crest, my brother Reich has Common Magic Crest.

However...

"That would normally be the case, however, it appears that the elder brother Reich is exceedingly talented and better than Biffgel at magic. As such, the heir is the eldest son."

"Common Magic Crest surpassing Glory Crest at a place where chantless magic hasn't been popularized yet...? No wait, Baronet Hildesheimr territory was Mathias's hometown huh. I can hazard a guess as to what happened."

"Your hypothesis is most likely correct, Viscount Regido."

Viscount Regido had a 'no wonder' look on his face after hearing me.

...Biffgel's face reddened as he watched the conversation unfolded.

However, Biffgel must have realized that the other party was viscount from it.

He has no way to talk back.

And Viscount Regido further twists the knife in.

"We have come to Baronet Relaia territory under order of His Majesty. Mathias and his party is included in our entourage. Denying Mathias here would mean the same as denying His Majesty's order... Did you say that while fully aware of that implication?"

"N-no, I didn't mean to..."

Biffgel gradually inched back as he said that.

And then he scurried away just like that.

Biffgel, how pitiful...

[That Biffgel really is like the rumors say...]

[Worse than that even... He's lucky to escape with his life.]

Ruli and Alma who had been keeping silent had that conversation.

Though rather than keeping silent, it was more like they couldn't believe what happened, not a word would come out.

Ruli is right, Viscount Regido could have Biffgel offed just on the basis of earlier matter.

But that would be a waste our time.

The viscount must have surmised that Biffgel couldn't do anything more than complaining anyway and thus let him get away.

...The guy is not even worth his execution.

Chapter 214: Strongest Sage, Astonished

"We've prepared documents detailing the present situation on the desk over here. If you'd please."

Five minutes after Biffgel came looking for trouble.

We've all gathered at Baron Relaia's residence.

Apparently, it's normal to use the lord's residence as a council room for low ranked nobles who don't have a public office.

Progress of battle, supply situation and combatants are written in minute details in the documents.

It's very well done for a combat report.

However... This isn't the kind of info I need.

What we need now is a clue that will lead us to the one pulling the strings of these dolls.

"Were there any human in the enemy rank?"

"We did not find even a single soul. We have defeated 320 dolls and zero human so far."

"...I see. That's a problem."

If there's no human among the enemy, these dolls are most likely moving autonomously.

In cases like this, dealing with the dolls itself is relatively simple.

If there's a problem in the magic circle that governs the dolls' autonomous actions, focusing on it should make the dolls easier to deal with.

One famous method is by dropping the automaton dolls in water.

If the action of [Swimming] does not exist in its set autonomous actions, the dolls will attempt to move their legs pointlessly even if they don't touch the grounds.

If there were humans among the enemy rank, they could have revised it on spot, but if the dolls are completely automatic, the act of destroying them itself

is pretty simple.

Though I don't think they've made such an obvious mistake, however, it still means the tide is in our favor.

Yet, what's easier is strictly the battle.

If we want to look for the mastermind, it's of course easier if there's a human among the enemy.

If there is a human among the dolls, that would mean they're connected to the dollmaster, thus going from there would make things easier for us to find out the dollmaster's identity.

...Well, considering the situation, we'd be better off infiltrating Saihill Empire than investigating the domestics.

Now that Viscount Regido is here, he should be able to handle protecting and dealing with things inside the kingdom.

We'll leave all the bothersome stuff to the viscount and concentrate on gathering information ourselves.

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That aside...

"Are you sure this chart is not a mistake?"

I pointed at one document on desk.

The document details about today's locations of battle, victims, number of defeated dolls and those who did that.

The problem is the chart that lists those with excellent combat records.

First place is Castor, second place is Reich, third is Irijis, fourth is Dezaia.

So far so good.

The first place, my father is as strong as the knight commander, second place, my brother has learned chantless magic, so of course they'd take those spots.

I don't know the third and fourth places, so I have nothing to complain about.

The problem is the fifth place.

Fifth Place: Biffgel Hildesheimr.

That's what written there.

What kind of joke is this.

"...A mistake? The document has been double checked by multiple supervisors, I'd like to think that there is no mistake..."

"Which means, Biffgel took the fifth place in doll subjugation?"

According to the chart, Biffgel defeated four dolls.

Far less than Castor with 50 dolls, and Reich with 32 dolls... but that Biffgel, fifth place?

Since there were around 120 people who participated in the battle, I thought Biffgel would get around 110th place or something though.

While thinking that... Baron Relaia replies.

"Biffgel Hildesheimr indeed defeated four dolls. He was quite a force for he is

a Glory Crest bearer capable of using [Heat Ball]."

This [Heat Ball]... if I'm not mistaken, it's one of chant magic spells.

In Second Academy, it was categorized as a mid-class spell before I introduced chantless magic there.

[H-Heat Ball? I don't think that spell has any practical use in real combat... [Heat Ball] is that spell that needs a long chant and consumes a moderate amount of mana yet is only as strong as weaker spells right?]

[That spell might have completely fallen out of fashion in Second Academy, but it was one of the better spells with chant magic. There's a world of difference between chant and chantless magic though...]

Just as Ruli and Alma pointed out, [Heat Ball] is ultimately a chant magic.

It's not even as strong as beginner level chantless magic even though it consumes moderately lot, as a result, there's no one in Second Academy that's still using it.

You'd get treated as a potential force just for being able to use such spell huh...

This kinda takes me back.

...Well, it has only been a year since the people in this era started to use chantless magic, so it's not that long back.

Even today, Glory Crest is still hailed as the strongest except in a few places like the Royal Capital.

"Still, Castor is as monstrous as always."

"Are the two of you acquainted?"

"Yeah. Actually, there's no one in the Knight Order's top

brass who doesn't know Castor."

Looks like Viscount Regido knows my father Castor.

Castor, so you were famous...

Viscount Regido speaks while I'm still thinking.

"So long Castor is here, we should be able to hold off the dolls... the problem now is how to go about doing our counterattack... Baron Mathias, have you got an idea?"

Viscount Regido asked for my opinion without hesitation.

Responding to that, I give him an answer that I've got in stock after consulting with the girls.

"How does having just us infiltrate the empire sound to you?"

Chapter 215: Strongest Sage, Dodges Party

"By 'us' here... You mean Mathias, Iris, Ruli and Alma, the four of you?"

"Exactly."

Hearing my answer, Viscount Regido pondered for a bit.

And then he speaks.

"...And do you think that's for the best, Mathias?"

"I do. The more people going the higher we risk the infiltration getting found out."

"Certainly, you want only a select few if you're going to infiltrate enemy's base... But aren't four too few to go up against that many dolls?"

"Those dolls only have numbers with them, so slipping through them is a simple matter. Besides, our target is only one, the doll master, there's no need for many personnels to defeat it."

These are dolls whom Biffgel managed to take four down, bring on 100, 1000 of them, it makes no difference.

Besides, all of those dolls will cease functioning once we defeat the dollmaster.

The knights would be a nice help in group battles, but they're only going to get in the way in an infiltration mission.

Even though these elite knights probably are also good at infiltrating, I'm sure their anti magic detection ability isn't up for the task.

And we're not so lacking in power to be in need of the knights covering for us.

...Might be a different story if they're as strong as Iris though.

Conversely, protecting Relaia Barondom from the dolls' assault is these knights' forte.

The job of knights is to protect lord's territory, their training revolves around it.

Leaving our back to Viscount Regido and his knights, while we're going infiltrating is a good plan.

"If that's what you believe Mathias, we're going with it. After all, you're obviously more experienced in fighting demons than me. In exchange, I shall accomplish what I am good at."

"Good at?"

"Yeah. Relaia Barondom has suffered some damage in this battle. There should be spots where they need assistance to defend as well, and it looks like the defense here hangs mostly on Castor's powers... It's my job to reassemble the territory and the army from such a situation."

I see, he's fulfilling his duty as a commanding officer of the knights.

The viscount is truly fit to take care of our back.

Looks like everyone will nicely get their role here.

"I understand. If you find anything that could be a clue along the way, please contact me."

"Very well... When do you plan to depart?"

"I can go tomorrow morning... The earlier the better as the enemy might run away if they notice us here."

That was my entire purpose coming here in the first place.

We don't need to be here for them to gather intelligence from the populace and local knights.

"...Understood. Then let's take care of things so you can depart tomorrow morning... Baron Relaia, are there things Mathias need to take care of before leaving the territory?"

"Considering Baron Mathias holds great powers, it might be a good idea for him to go meet the allied forces' commander-in-chief just in case."

"Allied forces' commander-in-chief... Is that not Baron Relaia?"

Other nobles in the surrounding area are participating in the defense of Relaia Barondom besides the baron himself.

Though the scale of these allied forces is small at only 150 people.

The highest ranked noble who's come to help is at most a baronet.

Nobles that are of the same rank and higher than Baron Relaia won't participate... Or rather, there's no high ranked nobles around this area, so there's no one that can come.

If nobles band up together to form allied forces, the highest ranked noble will act as the commander-in-chief, so I thought Baron Relaia is one, but...

"No, the allied forces' commander-in-chief is Baronet Castor. At first, I did take command but midway through I believed Baronet Castor was more fit for the role, thus I relinquished the position to him."

Looks like the commander-in-chief is my father Castor.

As expected of someone connected to the knights.

"...Good decision. Then Mathias, you should go see Baronet Castor."

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

"Yes."

Looks like our reunion will be with my father as the allied forces' commander-

in-chief.

...But, wonder what kind of face should I make.

I'm in good terms with my father, but the problem here is our positions.

Even if it's temporary, my rank is higher than him in the nobility ladders.

Not sure on which mindset should I go see him.

Seeing me putting up a difficult expression, Ruli and the girls started talking through comm magic.

[Baronet Castor is Mathi-kun's father right? I never heard you talking about him at all... Do you two not get along?]

[If he's Mathi-kun's father, that means he's also Biffgel's father right... Maybe he's like Biffgel?]

...My father took quite an insult.

Well, I guess they can't help it after seeing that Biffgel.

[My family lineage are all normal except Biffgel. I mean, father's strength must have played a role for his fame among knights.]

I only understand now that my father is abnormally strong for a human in this era.

He's likely the strongest human who cannot use chantless magic I've ever met yet.

He even put a clear lead on numbers of defeated dolls against my brother Reich who had learned chantless magic, simple it may be.

You cannot win against chantless magic using a sword with half-baked strength.

[Normal... normal?]

[Can't you really call that normal.]

Ruli and Alma look at me, and then at the report.

In the report, while ordinary soldiers defeated one doll each, Castor and Reich managed 50 and 30 respectively.

I guess normal is not quite correct.

There's a chance that no other family of nobles is as strong as house of Hildesheimr if we're talking about raw strength.

While we were having that conversation, Viscount Regido and Baron Relaia had their own pertaining supply of goods for the army, defense network reorganization, steps for the future and stuff.

It's outside our expertise, so we're leaving that to these two.

And lastly, it's about tonight's schedule.

"Tonight, we plan to hold a party for all nobles who are participating, will Baron Mathias come too?"

...Apparently they're holding a party to introduce Viscount Regido.

As he's going to be the top commanding officer here from now on, the party also doubles as an announcement.

[Nobles' party... wonder if they're gonna serve good food there.]

[Unfortunately, you probably won't find anything extravagance. In the first place, they're having supply shortages, and they only knew about Viscount Regido's coming right before his arrival.]

Alma was looking forward to food, but I'm not sure there's going to be anything she wants.

Relaia barondom is situated in the boondocks, and they're in the middle of war, can't expect anything luxurious in this situation.

If they were notified of Viscount Regido's coming a week before, they might have been able to prepare a party that would meet Alma's expectations.

And more importantly...

[Nobles' party... that kinda sounds strict and annoying!]

Alma said so in my behalf. <TLN: Not sure if the author actually meant Iris here.>

Exactly correct. Nobles' parties are strict and annoying.

I haven't actually participated in one, but we had classes about etiquette for when we attended such a party at Second Academy.

The lesson itself was extremely boring, and it claimed the spot of [The most disliked class at Second Academy] in questionnaires.

It's not at all difficult compared to handling magic, but it's just annoying.

Furthermore, I'm on this weird spot as a temporary noble, so it's extra awkward for me.

...And the food isn't even good on top of all that, we'd be better off having a meal by ourselves.

I give my reply to Viscount Regido after thinking through that.

"If we attend the party then disappear the day after, some might find it unusual. It'd be better if we do not participate."

"Indeed, we should limit the number of people who know about your

infiltration. I don't necessarily distrust other nobles, but the less people who know the less chance it gets leaked."

Looks like he got it.

Vicount Regido continues as I feel relieved.

"Besides, nobles' party is just a lot of trouble. If you don't need to come, you might as well not."

"Quite."

Baron Relaia nodded at Viscount Regido's assessment.

Is that really OK, hey party's sponsor and leading actor...

Well, since Viscount Regido is more a military man than a noble, he probably finds these parties annoying just like me.

After having these conversations, the meeting was closed.

Chapter 216: Strongest Sage, Had Inaccurate Rumors Spread

An hour later.

Us three went to meet my father, Castor, in Baron Relaia's pavilion.

"Mathi, long time no see!"

"It's been so long, Mathi! You coming back as a Baron sure was a surprise. Would it be better if I add honorifics to call you?"

"Eh no need for that. This noble stuff is just temporary anyway."

I exchanged such conversation with my father Castor whom I hadn't seen in a while.

The two of them seem to be doing well.

"Not only you became a noble, you even got yourselves three girls..."

My brother Reich said so as he looked at the girls.

It's as if he's alluding these three to be my lovers or something.

"There's no getting or the likes... These three are my party members."

"Really?"

"Yeah. We formed a party at the Second Academy and this was the result."

"...I see."

Ruli looked disappointed when I said party members... I must be imagining things.

Oh right, wonder what's the news on my hometown.

"That aside, how's it going at Hildesheimr recently? Biffgel seemed to be same as always at least..."

"It's been pretty peaceful with nothing truly eventful occurring. The only worrying element was Biffgel, but since I've been formally accepted as the heir now, there's really nothing to worry about."

I see.

This means there is no chance at all for Biffgel to become the territory lord.

It must have been the best of news for the populace there.

"And back at you Mathi, you have been doing great, right. Rumors about you even spread in the backwaters we're in."

"...What kind of rumors?"

"Like how you defeated a demon by yourself, and how you turned Second Royal Academy's curriculum upside down... And the latest rumor said you killed a huge darkness dragon that showed up at the capital."

...Looks like the commotions at the capital have reached even my brother.

Well I figure changing the curriculum of a royal academy would become rumors.

There's one wrong rumor in it though.

[That darkness dragon that showed up at the capital refers to me right? But I haven't been killed...]

[These rumors seem quite inaccurate...]

This darkness dragon is probably referring to Iris.

Which means, forget killed, she's right in front of my brother now...

I cut to the chase while thinking that.

"So, the reason I come here today... Have you heard about the details?"

"Yeah. The four of you gonna infiltrate the empire and beat the dollmaster right? ...You got any lead on this dollmaster's location?"

"We'll be working on it, but I don't think finding them will be too hard once we get in. No matter what, you'd stand out controlling that amount of dolls."

Even if the dolls can move automatically, they still need to be given orders

when they get dispatched.

Once we're inside the empire, finding the location where that takes place won't be hard.

We wouldn't have needed to infiltrate were the dollmaster went along with the dolls though.

"...Regardless of how strong you are, you will still be sneaking into the empire. Be sure to pay attention to your surroundings."

"Yeah. Our opponents include demons after all."

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

I've got a feeling that the dollmaster isn't a demon though.

Judging from the dolls' scale and movement, the group that collects life forces for these dolls doesn't seem to care much about the attack on Relaia Barondom.

The demons probably ordered some sacrificial pawn humans to asses the usefulness of life forces or something along the lines.

...We'd have it easy if the demons show themselves up around the group though. Then we simply need to defeat them.

"Even if you're gonna be fine Mathias, how about these three? I've heard that this year's Second Academy students are pretty strong, but you need a different kind of skillet to perform infiltrations, you know?"

Reich's worry is justified.

After all, these girls look like ordinary girls if we're only talking about their outward appearances.

In reality, these three are stronger than Castor, and Iris herself is immeasurably sturdier than any human.

"We'll be fine! We've fought demons before, and we have some experiences doing infiltrations!"

"About a week ago, we sneaked into a town with 20 demons hiding inside and exterminated every last one of them!"

"We only lent a bit of hand though, Mathi-kun took care most of the demons

himself."

Hearing the girls, Reich and Castor looked surprised.

"...I thought they'd be strong when I heard they're Mathia's party members... but not to this point..."

"Don't tell me, are all Second Academy's students this strong nowadays? I can see why they're calling Second Academy students this year monstrous."

"No, these three in my party are especially strong compared to other Second Academy's students. Ordinary Second Academy's students need to work together in a group of dozens or so to beat one lesser demon."

If those students were as strong as Ruli and Alma, they would have defeated the demon back then before we got there.

That said, these students have only started their training in chantless magic, I won't be surprised if they're even stronger than current Ruli and Alma by the time they're graduating.

...By then, Ruli and Alma will be even stronger though.

"Dozens, defeating a demon... That's quite fearsome already..."

"A few years ago, the kingdom knights managed to defeat a demon, but they only barely accomplished that after bringing around 500 adventurers and elite knights together. The opponent was apparently the weakest ranking demon, yet our side lost around 100 lives. I didn't take part in it due to a certain circumstances on my side though."

500 knights managed to defeat a demon huh... That's actually amazing.

Their weapons would be those low performance magic swords created with chant magic, and their magic itself would be the weak and hard to use chant magic.

Under such conditions, I don't think even an army of 10,000 could defeat a demon.

"How exactly did they pull it off?"

"All members shot magic on it, the rest was an all-out war. I don't quite understand just how they managed to do it even now... Apparently, an awfully strong adventurer from a foreign country who had gone out of his way to join the subjugation unit landed the finishing strike on the demon."

"An adventurer from a foreign country?"

An awfully strong adventurer.

...And the guy went out of his way to join a subjugation mission in another country.

...I probably know the guy.

"Yeah. The name was... Girusomething fellow. Thanks to him going home without even joining the celebration party, there was a bit of uproar."

It's Giruas...

He didn't join the party probably because he simply had no interest in it.

Once there's no more battle to be had, he's done, that's probably it.

"But I think Mathi is even stronger than that Girusomething chap."

"That's for sure. I mean, Mathi beat all these demons by himself after all."

Reich agreed with Castor.

It's certainly true that I am stronger than Giruas.

We even had a match to prove that.

My father Castor suddenly paused.

Afterward, he speaks again after pondering a bit.

"...Mathias, you're strong. Hence, I won't stop you sneaking into the empire... but make sure you come back alive, every one of you. Don't ever let your guard down."

"I promise."

Thus our reunion ended.

Next we just need to infiltrate the empire and defeat the dollmaster, then the

demons behind the dollmaster.

...Since these demons appear to have connections with the empire itself, this sure is going to be quite a big job... Here's hoping there will be a surprising development.

If there were only one weakling demon after this much uproars, I'm gonna be disappointed.

Chapter 217: Strongest Sage, Deactivates Trap

Dawn of the next day.

The four of us went to a forest outside the town.

We're going to sneak into enemy territory now.

[We're finally starting the infiltration.]

[This is better than when we were infiltrating Folkia that was full of demons, but it's still unnerving isn't it...]

[When pushes comes to shoves, you all can get on me, I'll take us away!]

We check on the infiltration route while conversing.

All conversations are through comm magic. We can't let anyone overheard us after all.

Ruli and Alma appear to be a bit tense, but they're not being overwhelmed by it. That's a good disposition to have.

Iris doesn't look concerned at all... Well, it's Iris after all, she's going to be fine.

Infiltrating is best done at dawn like this.

This is the time when everyone drops their guard down the most.

Once we get in, things would go smoothly from there.

After all, no one would walk up to you and ask, [Are you really from this country?] if you're just randomly walking around.

And that's exactly why the empire's national borders must have stricter security right about now.

[Mathi-kun, do you think we could go from the front?]

[...At present, I don't see any problem. We'll be retreating if it looks like they'll find us out.]

[Yes!]

[Got it!]

I asked Alma as I probed for mana around the border.

Among detection magic, there are some that are hard to elude.

If I find a reaction of such magic in my search, I plan to take a detour around the area to enter the empire.

The empire's border around this area probably has the strictest security considering battles take place here.

...But ideally we'd want to go through here if we want to find the dollmaster.

That's why it's worth an attempt even with the strict security.

As we progressed the forest while thinking that, I found a large amount of footprints on the ground.

The shape of shoe soles and sizes are all identical.

Shoes being identical isn't that weird in military, but when they're all the same size, these are probably not of humans.

These footprints must have been left behind by dolls.

[It's dolls' footprints... Alright, we're going after these.]

[...Won't these footprints lead to a trap, you sure we can just follow them?]

[I'm aware of that. There must be a trap somewhere, but the surer you are about a trap's existence, the easier avoiding it be.]

I follow after the footprints.

Since the dolls are heavier than humans, their footprints also last longer thus tracing these is a simple matter.

[These footprints keep going on...]

[Why aren't these hidden at all? If you put barrier on top of the ground as you walk, it would greatly reduce the traces wouldn't it? I think you'd usually want to do that much at least...]

Indeed, it's strange for the footprints to be this defined.

It's as if they're telling us to follow the track.

When it's this obvious, it makes you more wary of traps instead.

The reason why these footprints still got left behind despite that risk...

[It's probably because they're incapable of doing that.]

[Incapable of... You mean camouflaging? They only need to put barrier on the ground right?]

[Considering these dolls' heavy weight, even putting up barriers that could be stepped on by them would require a certain level of magic usable by these dolls.]

[...Shouldn't the person who could control so many dolls also have enough mana to do that much...?]

[That's only if that person controls these dolls themselves. With magic items, it's not hard at all to do stuff like controlling dolls. If the orders are limited to simple stuff like [Charge ahead], even ordinary people can do it.]

I continue following the footprint.

About 10 minutes later.

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[Isn't there a magic item buried over there?]

Ruli pointed at the ground dozens meter ahead.

...Correct.

[Yea, that's a trap. You three, wait there.]

I approached the trap afterward.

There's a magic item buried in the ground Ruli pointed out.

The magic item is buried 1 meter deep so it's not visible with naked eyes, but its mana reaction is quite obvious.

[Mathi-kun, is it ok to get that close? It's a trap right?]

[Wonder how big is the trap's range...]

[I'm already in the activation range. The detonator is using a modified version of [Passive Detection] so it won't be activated if I don't let my mana out.]

It's probably a trap that combines [Passive Detection] and explosion magic.

It's difficult to detect with the commonly used magic, yet has a relatively high performance, thus even in my previous life, this type of trap often got deployed.

I dug out a hole in the location of the magic item and took it out.

And then I covered it with another magic item that blocks out mana.

This type of magic items can be taken out without the risk of it exploding if you hold down your mana emission so it won't be detected by the [Passive Detection] set inside the item.

[Alright, it's clear now.]

[Got it! ...Is that the trap the enemy set up there?]

[...This mana feels demon-ish somehow...]

Ruli who got close after I told them that, murmured her impression once she saw the magic item.

She's correct, this mana comes from a demon.

[Yea. A demon made this trap no doubt... If you push the button inside this hole, [Passive Detection] will activate after a bit of time has passed.]

I point at the hole where the magic item was.

There's a small button inside, a magic circle is engraved on its surface.

Judging from the magic item's configuration, the [Passive Detection] probably gets activated about only 10 minutes after the button is pressed.

[...Why would they go out of their way to make such a mechanism? Wouldn't it be quicker to just activate the magic item by putting mana into it rather than making this button?]

[That applies to the one who creates this magic item sure. This magic item has been kindly designed so anyone with a stick or something could set up the trap by poking the button... This also means the dollmaster is almost definitely a sacrificial pawn.]

I put the magic item into Storage magic.

Looking at this, the dollmaster probably doesn't know have much info with them if at all.

Chapter 218: Strongest Sage, Discovers Box

As we pressed onward while thinking that... mana reaction of humans came approaching.

Looks like there's an empire's patrol nearby.

[They're really patrolling the area...]

[Guess there would be one even this early in the morning...]

[Relaia Barondom has gathered enough forces to rout their dolls after all. It's only natural for them to be cautious.]

I look for a hole in the patrolling network.

Even if the network is spread wide, the other party are humans who cannot even use [Passive Detection].

And the patrol is intended to alert them about possible enemy army's advance, not to prevent intrusion.

Outsmarting this degree of network is no big deal.

If I'm to be brutally honest, we could even go pass under the lookout's nose if we just concealed ourselves with stealth magic.

But in order to minimize the risk of getting found, I opt for going through a hole in the surveillance network instead.

I mean our opponent has kindly provided a network full of holes themselves, it'd be rude not to make use of those.

And the easiest hole to exploit among those is...

[This here.]

I point at a spot on the map I brought with us.

The spot is part of a river that separates Eis Kingdom from Saihill Empire.

[River... Won't we get easily found out since it's gonna have a good visibility. There's nothing for us to hide behind on top of the river right?]

[That would have been the case had the enemy done their homework, but it seems this place is outside their patrolling range. No one would see us even if we openly cross the river.]

[T-this network is quite haphazard...]

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[Yeah. It's an evidence that the demons haven't been focusing on this territory.]

Crossing a river is a simple matter for us, but for some reason, chant magic has no mean to accomplish the feat.

Thus, rivers are principally being excluded when putting up a surveillance network in this world.

Saihill Empire apparently abides by that principle, there's barely any guards around rivers.

Of course, there are some mana reactions of what appear to be lookouts around shallow rivers that can be crossed on foot, but deeper rivers are mostly unguarded.

The way you go about setting up surveillance network is even influenced by whether chantless magic exists or not.

The demons would have taught these soldiers at least that much if they put any value on this region... but the demons must feel that this land is not that important enough to defend.

I don't find large-scale traps for intercepting an army either, those demons must be fully intending to discard this region when it comes to that point.

We headed to the river all the while.

[Uwah, there's really no one here...]

[I tried searching for mana reactions within one kilometer radius, and I couldn't find a soul...]

[Makes crossing all the easier... but this river looks usable in many ways.]

The river that separates Eis Kingdom and Saihill Empire is about 10 meter deep.

Even a mere river can be used in many ways when it's this deep.

[Many ways?]

[Yeah... Say, like this.]

I conjured up a spell and dived into the river.

And then I pulled the thing that was in the riverbed out of the water.

[What's... that thing? There's some kind of magic item attached to it...]

I pulled out a huge metallic box from the riverbed.

It's big enough to put 10 humans inside.

It's sturdy and relatively newly made, and though it's mostly undamaged, it's missing one of its corner.

[It's most definitely a box used to transport the dolls.]

[Transport the dolls?]

[Yea. They must have crammed around 10 dolls inside this box and floated it down the river. The magic item on this box is to prevent it from veering out of its set course.]

I took out the magic item attached on the box's side and showed it to Ruli.

Ruli has learned a lot about magic items, she's able to understand the content of this level of spell art just by looking.

[...Its basic configuration is that of an ordinary propulsion engine, isn't it... Its course correction procedure is peculiar. Is it getting instructions from another magic tool?]

[Yeah. The magic wiring over there is connected here. That part probably got blown away by a small explosion magic or something the moment this box arrived at its destination.]

I point at the missing corner of the box.

This part is probably missing not by coincidence.

It's possible to pinpoint where the dolls were shipped out if we could figure out instructions in the magic tool used for course correction.

Conversely, there is no way to find out where the box is from as long as that magic tool is properly taken care of.

This river has many branches so there are many possible locations where the boxes could be set afloat.

Finding exactly where the dolls from is not as simple as simply going upstream.

[Ah... Could that be?]

While I was observing the box, Ruli said that and dived into the river.

And then she came back with something she picked up in the riverbed.

[Found it!]

Ruli shouted cheerfully while drying her wet clothes with magic.

She's gripping a small splinter of magic stone in her hand.

Chapter 219: Strongest Sage, Successfully Snuck In

[This is a piece of magic tool, isn't it? Maybe it's a piece from the one attached to that box?]

[...Looks like it.]

I analyze the magic circle inside the piece.

Only a few parts could be read as it's only a fragment... but this was a part of the box's magic tool no doubt about it.

[Which means, we can find out where the dolls come from if we collect this right?]

[Yeah. We might find out where in the river were the dolls set afloat... but even if we did find the location, there's a high chance that place is also a disposable one, so no guarantee we would find the demons there.]

[Disposable... How can you be so sure?]

[The size of this box. At most, there would be 10 dolls inside. Weighed at

around 1 ton... Just enough to be carried on a wagon, there's even the clasp.]

I point at metal fittings on the edge of the box.

These are fasteners to prevent something falling out of a wagon.

These things wouldn't be needed if the demons carried the boxes themselves.

In the current world, carrying 1 ton of luggage per wagon is optimal.

Any more and the wheels would sink in, making it harder to transport, any less and it would be a waste to not carry more.

[You figured out that much just from looking at the box.... Then there'd be no point in collecting these pieces.]

Ruli looks at the piece in disappointment.

However, it's not completely meaningless.

[No, we can use it as a last resort. Even if the people who transported the dolls are disposable, we can still ask them where they got the dolls from and go

from there to trace the demons.]

[Last resort... You mean, there's a more efficient way to find the demons?]

Alma asked me.

Nice deduction.

[Exactly... Specifically, the source of life forces. There's not many ways to collect mana from tens thousands of people. I've got an idea about it already... But let's save that until after we get in the empire. We're on top of a river separating national borders right now.]

[I forgot!]

Alma started to run toward the other side of the river bank in a hurry.

Even if this place lacks surveillance, stopping for a long time on top of a river with a good view would still risk us getting discovered by the enemy.

If a soldier simply passed by the path next to the river, they'd see us.

...Well, I'm constantly looking out for any suspicious mana reaction close to us, so it's not actually a problem.

Thus we managed to slip through the imperial soldier's surveillance network, and arrived at Saihill Empire.

[I can see a town... But I don't see anything like an outer wall around it?]

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[It's a town in a rural area after all. I think it's called Ecial or something.]

I approach the town.

Currently, we're using magic to trick people's eyes, so they won't find us.

...If we're up against demons, they would instantly see through this level of camouflage... but they're probably not around these parts.

After all, it feels like this entire town is treated like a disposable tool.

While thinking that, we managed to get into the town.

[Will this camouflage do the job all right?]

[Considering the atmosphere here, no one would notice us unless we open the door to their house.]

The magic we're using erased our presence, but it did not apply to the presence of things around us.

Thus, if we open a door or something, it would look like the door opened by itself without anyone around.

Aside from that, vibrations and air flows produced from us stepping the ground and moving would still be there, so someone skilled enough could still notice us... but well, I don't sense anyone that good around here.

The stuff about war seem to not have been circulated among the civilians, atmosphere in the town feels laid-back.

...If Eis Kingdom launched a counteroffensive, this town would be the very first to fall victim, and the people here probably are not informed even that.

[Monster Outbreak Warning?]

While we were walking around the town, Alma looked at a paper posted on a private house and made a puzzled voice.

Here's what written on the paper.

———————————

Presently we have acquired information about outbreak of monsters around Ecial.

Knights of Kinisis House have been dispatched to exterminate these monsters, civilians are to refrain from going outside the town as much as possible.

The parts around Eis Kingdom are especially highly dangerous, citizens are barred from entering.

———————————

[...Wait, were there monsters in the area around Eis Kingdom?]

[There were, but not in great numbers... It's undoubtedly a pretext to deploy this [Knights of Kinisis House].]

Looks like the ploy even extends to the knights.

I have no idea about this [Knights of Kinisis House], but judging from the name, it's probably a band of knights that belongs to an empire's noble.

That noble must be cooperating with the demons.

Not sure if they're being used unknowingly or knowingly, either way, we should assume that this Kinisis House is hostile.

While thinking such, the four of us walked around the town while collected information (mainly mana reactions and stuff).

The dollmaster seems to be quite careless, we gathered some interesting important magical info.

And about 30 minutes after we entered the town.

[We've got enough. Let's go storming in there.]

[Err, to the blue warehouse in the suburbs right?]

[I think that was way too obvious, maybe it's a trap?]

Alma and Ruli asked me when I said that.

This blue warehouse is exactly the place we're going to raid, but I never actually mentioned anything about it while we were walking around the town.

Ruli is one thing, but the mana camouflage on this blue warehouse is so bad that even Alma who's not that familiar with magic tools noticed.

...Or rather, feels like they never have any intention to hide it.

Chapter 220: Strongest Sage, Extracts Info

[Of course, there would be a trap. Probably the instant the lock at the entrance was broken, the entire warehouse would go up in an huge explosion magic.]

[But then, the dollmaster would also die if they did that...]

[The dollmaster is a sacrificial pawn anyway. Blowing them all away would erase both those who could damage the dolls and evidence along.]

In fact, mana reaction that feels exactly that is leaking out of this warehouse.

The dollmaster was probably told that the magic tool was for eliminating intruders in time of emergency.

The dollmaster who cannot read magic circles probably set up the magic tool themselves without knowing that it would kill them along with the enemy.

There's a high chance that they're under a high level of mind control that bars them from even questioning what the magic tool is even.

[Uwaah, they're really treated like a disposable...]

[Because they are. To the point that you feel sorry for them.]

Well, that doesn't mean I'm going to hold back though.

Even the demons must have picked humans that were easy to control.

Those who are virtuous steer clear of demons, so they're usually hard to manipulate.

Folkia had a great number of citizens controlled, but that was because the sub-demons were staying nearby.

Strong mind control that persists long after the demons have gone away requires willingness from the person put under the control.

The dollmaster must have allowed the demons to control them due to some kind of reasons.

With that in mind, there's no need for sympathy.

[...Here it is.]

We're standing in front of a warehouse with blue walls.

It's quite old, but the door has a newish lock installed.

[Entry off-limit for non-personnel.]

[Managed by: Waterworks Administration Bureau - Ecial Branch.]

That's what written on the door.

Looks like this building belongs to the so-called Waterworks Administration Bureau.

Mana reactions of one human and the dolls could be sensed inside the building.

The human's mana reaction is very small.

[Waterworks Administration Bureau.... I've heard that Saihill has a large-scale water service, is it being managed here I wonder?]

[Doesn't seem like there's flowing water inside, this place is probably a mere warehouse... Anyway, that lock is a trap, so don't touch it.]

The lock looks like a simple padlock, but the inside seems to be fitted with a transmission-type magic tool.

It's probably connected to a magic tool inside that will blow up if it gets broken.

Well, the fact that it won't go off without breaking the lock is proof this trap is third-rate.

[Will it explode if you touch it?]

[It won't explode as long as it's not broken, but there's a possibility some kind of alarm will go off if you touch it... Not like we need to politely go from the front anyway, we can just do it this way.]

I invoke soundproofing magic and put my hand on a wall next to the door.

Afterward, I invoke attack magic the size of a human.

<TLN: If you're reading this novel at any other site than Sousetsuka .com you might be reading an unedited, uncorrected version of the novel.>

[Ah, you're going to break it...]

[Wouldn't it be quicker if you just let me go ahead and break everything then? I mean, I'd be all right even if the whole building go under.]

[That would badly mess up the inside. Something that could be a clue might be there, so I'd like to preserve it as much as possible.]

I don't really have much expectations, but there might be something that could be a hint inside.

And even if there isn't, causing too much uproars could lead them to us.

Well, punching a hole on the wall isn't any better though.

[...Then it might be better if I don't go in...]

[Yeah. You three, please be on the lookout here to stop anyone coming. Our enemy is alone, I'm gonna capture them real quick.]

[Got it!]

After we're done consulting, I destroy the wall with the attack magic.

There's no sound due to the soundproof magic, the hole is just enough for me to pass.

I jump inside through that hole.

Just as the mana reactions tell me, there's a huge number of dolls and one man inside.

"...Ah?"

As the man sounded confused to see me coming through a suddenly collapsing wall, he threw a sword in his hand at the same time.

It's like attack first, question later, before confirming the situation.

He looks to be very adept at it, there's absolutely no awkwardness in the way he moves.

It's probably not something from the demons' control, but originally his.

...I figure it out after seeing his movement and atmosphere.

This guy had killed dozens of people even before the demons came into the picture.

Well, it's not like he's strong though.

Not like he could use chantless magic like Giruas after all.

"Wha... The hell are you!"

The man pulled out another sword while sounding surprised to see me swatting down the thrown sword with my hand.

He even had a spare sword ready huh.

Of course, I'm not obliged to answer.

I zeroed in on the man and restrained him with magic.

...Right then, I felt something strange.

The mana on the man's his body isn't that of a normal human.

Unrelated to the fact that this man's a murderer.

His heart isn't pulsing.

Dead man... Or rather, it looks like the man got revived after purposely being killed off.

I didn't notice until after I got this close since the camouflaged spell art used life force instead of mana as a base.

And the reason the enemy went out of way to do all this must be for silencing the guy.

Sure enough, the moment my restraining spell was cast, the magic that maintained his life force was canceled.

To extract info, I attempted to cast a new spell to maintain life force, however...

"...Been dealt with huh."

My spell was blocked off.

Looks like it's been made so that only spell that makes use of life force can work.

...Guess I'll confirm one thing before this guy dies.

There's probably nothing much I could get out, just a hint should be enough.

Simple questions with either yes or no answers can be done with a certain magic.

The magic has a heap of side effects, but there's no need to worry about that on someone that's about to die.

"Are the people backing you related to Waterworks Bureau?"

I cast【Magic Interrogation】as I asked.

It's called interrogation, but in actuality, this magic practically reads your thoughts.

It causes a huge load on target's brain, so it can probably only used once on this guy.

Even if the target is of healthy body and mind, using this magic five times would make them practically dead after all.

However, it fits well in situations like this.

You simply need to cast the magic as you ask a question, and the answer will come out soon.

--Then, the magic returned a response.

I immediately analyze the mana and derive an answer.

The answer is yes.

Just as I thought.

...With this information alone, I ascertained which places should we raid to trace the people who are collecting life force.

Next, we just need to cross check with the info we got from observing this village, and whether we should raid the place or not.

I got out of the warehouse while thinking that.