

S H I N W A D E N S E T S U N O

神話伝説

奉 TATEMATSURI
イラスト/ミュキルリア

英雄の

異世界譚

I S E K A I T A N

E I Y U N O

1

OVERLAP



Shinwa Densetsu no Eiyuu no Isekaitan

– Otherworldly Tales of a Mythological, Legendary Hero –

- Volume 1 -

The Hero's Return

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– SYNOPSIS –

Once upon a time, a boy was referred to as a “War Hero.”

In another world called Aletia, the boy who had saved the Lost Kingdom, conquered their neighbouring countries, and led to the rise of a grand empire decided to throw everything away, returning to the modern era at the cost of his memories.

As three years passed, the boy who was happily enjoying his daily life was once again called back to the other world.

However, what awaited him was the Aletia of 1000 years in the future.

As his past glories became a “myth,” the legend of the youth referred to as the, “Twin Black Hero King,” begins.



神話伝説の
英雄の
異世界譚 ①

奉 / イラスト ミュキルリア



ストライア



アウラ



アルティウス



リズ



奥黒比呂
おうぐろひろ



Prologue

The beginning was sudden, and the end was inevitable.

Even if we were to part, even if we would never see each other again, we were connected.

A world without you.

A world without me.

What kind of daily life am I sending you to, I wonder.

Will those days be joyous, I wonder.

Will those days be bitter, I wonder.

If possible, I hope for you to live out your days fulfilled and unceasingly smiling.

If you're also thinking the same thing,

-I have this to say to you.

Please be at ease.

Please do not concern yourself.

I'm living joyously-.



Shouts of joy enveloped the young boy.

Any and all voices were overflowing with joy as words of blessings were exchanged.

The faces of the people that flooded the Palace Plaza held large grins, completely free of unfounded anxiety.

What monopolized the populace's gazes was a boy, standing on the balcony.

The once cornered country that was on the verge of extinction, now rose to being called the champion of the central continent.

Standing beside the king and supporting them, overcoming situations of despair and difficulty, and leading the victory of many wars. All of these achievements could be said to belong to this young boy.

Even when the boy departed, the cheers directed towards the deserted balcony never ceased.

In this state, the city would be unable to sleep for a while.

Even if the repairs of the ramparts collapsed by war were delayed, even if there were destroyed houses, it would seem that the tireless festival would still continue.

The undertaking of the boy was just that grand-.

-Castle.

To the sides were unstained white walls. On the floor was a crimson carpet, boasting elasticity.

Between the balcony and the throne was a long, connecting passage.

Before the young boy that walked there, a single adolescent appeared, as if to intercept him.

“.....are you really going back?”

Towards the adolescent who displayed a melancholic voice, the boy nodded after a moment of hesitation.

“.....yup. I’m a little reluctant, but I’ve gotta go back.”

To use such a manner of speech with the adolescent–this country’s king, from meeting till parting, this boy was the only one.

If others were to talk to the king in such a manner, they would surely receive capital punishment on the grounds of blasphemy. Or, at the very least, they would undoubtedly receive a similar charge.

However, the king did not fault the young boy.

“I thought that you would want to stay here forever.....you are this country’s hero, after all. I was even prepared to bestow upon you appropriate status. From here on, this country will most likely head towards an era of peace and stability. There is no reason for us to fall into ruin.....even so, are you going back?”

“In that case, it would be better for me to leave. This country needs to focus on internal affairs, right? Then from here on, it is no longer the era of military officers like me. Talented Civil servants will become a necessity. It’s better if good for nothings were quickly thrown out.”

The boy shrugged his shoulders as he declined.

“No matter what, huh?”

“Yup.....”

“.....I see.”

The two of them had even drunk from the same pool of filth. The humiliation that they endured was not something commonly received.

Even so, he was the obstinate one that followed him.

He was the one who followed the country that was on the brink of destruction to its end.

He was a comrade-in-arms, a close friend, and family.

It was precisely because of this that they were very familiar each other's' personalities.

No matter what happened, it was unlikely to change.

Realizing this, the king faintly shook his head from side-to-side and-

“Then take this with you.”

What the king had casually thrown was a single, plain, thick card.

Towards the boy who gazed at the gift with a dubious expression, the king spoke.

“If you say you don't want it, you can just leave it here.”

“Haha-.....I'll take it graciously, but what is it? I've never seen this before.....”

“You'll find out one day. Well, as long as they listen to your story, I don't think you'll be needing it in that world.”

Finishing his spiel, the king's back turned before he departed.

“This is farewell. You already know that I dislike depressing things, right? I won't be seeing you off. Take care.”

“Sure. You too. Goodbye.....it was fun.”

“Yeah.....too fun.”

It was there that the story of the hero met its end-.

Episode 1

Another World

“——was the dream I saw.”

The one who said thus with a serious face was Ouguro Hiro.

Turning 17 this year, he was a second year high schooler you could find just about anywhere.

“I-I see.....good for you.”

Hearing Hiro’s story, although feeling slightly withdrawn, was his childhood friend Seijou Fukutarou.

Although he was also a sophomore, his blessed physique was about two times greater the size of Hiro.

“You don’t believe me?”

“I believe you. It’s good that it was a dream. If you said it was reality, I wouldn’t know what kind of face to make.”

“But it was such a realistic dream, you know. Also, the King was an amazing Ikemen. Even idols would be put to shame.”

Hearing Hiro’s words, Fukutarou backed away as his cheeks twitched.

In the face of the atmosphere, transformed by oozing disgust, Hiro tilted his head to the side.

“What’s wrong?”

Fukutarou opened his mouth.

“I’ll just say this.....I don’t have *those* kind of hobbies, ok?”

“Just what kind of misunderstanding did you have!? I don’t have those hobbies either!”

“Y-Yeah, you’re right. It’ll make things worse if it becomes a rumor so stop telling me weird stories.”

“I only said that he was an Ikemen, didn’t I.....”

Infamously, Hiro and Fukutarou had become the material of girls during school. As their houses are right next to each other, they go to and from school together, and play together on their days off.

However, what spurred the rumors on was that a muscular man was hanging out together with a slender man.

Perhaps it aroused their imaginations.

As a result, all the girls sent gazes filled with interest towards their BL-like relationship.

“They’ll probably think that I’ve got an interest in men, but I really do believe what I said from the bottom of my heart. He was a true Ikemen.”

“Aren’t you jumping to conclusions?”

“Shaddup. The reason why I’m not popular is because of the existence of Ikemen! Don’t you know that everyone in the class keeps saying that I’m on the bottom or something like that?”

“It’s cause you’re a gorilla” – Hiro murmured within his heart.

A height of 180 cm, and a weight of over 90 kg.

Even though he had a soft name like Fukutarou, the physique that he was blessed with was completely different from that of a normal person.

A warm chest, and well-trained biceps. Together with steel-like abs.

His mature face, which one wouldn’t think would belong to a high school student, was one that, to high school girls, could only be seen as an object of fear.

If he wore his uniform and walked around the town, then he’d be taking in for questioning by the police, and told things like, “What about your family?” “Your parents would cry if they knew.”

He was quite the unfortunate man.

While it might be good to be honest about it, Hiro quickly decided to forget about it.

“Who knows.....maybe it’s cause of your biceps——Pu-san?”

“Are you looking for a fight!?”

Although Hiro thought that the name was cute, it seemed to have irritated Fukutarou somehow.

But, he knew how kind Fukutarou really was. He wouldn’t needlessly swing his fists around.

Well, if he did swing them around, then he (Hiro) would probably end up dying.

“Gorilla! Right now, in my most important second year of high school, it’s gorilla!”

Though Hiro wanted to say that Fukutarou was joking around again about his aged face, his words had already been proven by an old album.

Intending to comfort his friend, Hiro gently pat Fukutarou’s back.

“Lots of nicknames like that exist. I’m sure that Fukutarou isn’t the only one. The only high school gorilla in the world, that is.”

“Huh, so you *are* picking a fight after all!?”

Fukutarou’s biceps swelled to the point where it seemed they would rip his uniform.

He was probably born in the wrong era.

It was likely that, if he were born in the Sengoku Era, then his life would be very different.

He would have been a peasant who’d rise through the ranks to become a successful man, the likes of which being worth no less than a chief retainer.

“Calm down. We’re already quite close to school after all. You’ll end up spawning more weird rumors.”

If you surveyed the surroundings, the figures of many high school girls could be seen nervously trembling while looking their way.

As their timing to head to school overlapped, there were plenty of students the closer they got to the school grounds.

“.....guu, don’t you dare forget this.”

“I’ll remember it properly. Cause with this, it’s the 874th time I’ve made Fukutarou angry.”

“Aren’t you angering me way too much!?”

Even so, because he had never resorted to violence, Fukutarou really was a good-natured friend.

Even though he was this kind, he wasn’t popular. The world truly was a strange place.

While they conversed happily, they arrived in front of the school gates.

Hiro then circled in front of Fukutarou and placed a knee on the ground as he bowed his head.

Seeing Fukutarou's dubious expression as he looked down at him, the corners of Hiro's mouth rose into a grin.

"Now, Shibata Katsuie-dono, let us depart."

"I'm not a musclehead though!?"

He fell for it way too easily. This was why Hiro couldn't stop teasing Fukutarou. After Hiro finished laughing and had brushed the dirt off his knees, he and Fukutarou passed through the school gates together.

"You've got club activities today?"

"Yeah, since the tournament's coming up soon."

"You're the Hope of the Judo Club, after all. You've already got a recommendation from a university, right? I heard it from Oba-san."

"I guess so....."

"Wait, aren't you happy?"

"I've only just become a high school sophomore, you know? I'm too busy to be happy, and even if you talk about uni, it's not like time's just gonna fly by. Besides, now's the time when we should be thinking about our courses."

"Is that how it is?"

"That's how it is. But enough about me. What about you? Have you still not joined a club yet?"

"You already know that the doctor told me to not do strenuous exercises."

In the face of Hiro's words, Fukutarou displayed a slightly hesitant practice swing before opening his mouth.

"Yeah, but it's been 3 years since then. Don't you think it's fine now? Yesterday was the anniversary of that diagnosis, right?"

3 years ago, Hiro was involved in a strange incident.

The day before the incident occurred, everything appeared normal, without a hint of anything out-of-the-ordinary.

Yet, the very next day, Hiro's mother apparently screamed when she came to wake him up.

The reason for this being that her skinny son was lying down, completely naked. If this was all, there might not have been any real problem.

However, his entire body was covered in mud and wounds. His previously short hair also appeared to have become quite long. Seeing such a sight, Hiro's mother immediately called an ambulance.

Fortunately, the wounds had already been treated. Due to the sloppy way in which they had been stitched, however, they were told that he would remain scarred for life.

Muscles were ruptured in several places. A couple of ribs were cracked and broken. Verifying that various infectious diseases were riddled within his body, Hiro was urgently admitted and hospitalized.

As those at the hospital grew skeptical, the police were called and Hiro was seemingly suspected of being subject to maltreatment.

Furthermore, the son who should have pleaded not guilty had, unfortunately, lost his memories of the time when he had sustained those injuries.

Their son's abnormalities. The police's hearing. It was apparent that the parents' anxiety was quite tremendous.

"Hmm~.....seems like it's still no good."

Although his memory had yet to return, truthfully, the boy was healed.

Currently, his body was the picture of health. Hiro even received an approval from his physician, essentially declaring that his body could withstand strenuous physical activity.

However, Hiro had a secret.

A symptom that even his physician didn't know. One that remained to this day, even after 3 years.

Ever since he stumbled upon this side effect, Hiro gave up on club activities.

Obviously, he had no intention of disclosing this to his physician, nor his close friends and family.

After all, he didn't want to cause them any needless worry.

"I see. I asked you something I shouldn't have....."

Fukutarou casted his gaze towards the ground.

Reflecting on his own rude behavior, the boy fell silent for a few seconds.

However, when he next raised his head, Fukutarou flashed a huge grin as he spoke teasingly.

"But you know, I was really surprised back then. It was like you had become a completely different person. Your hair was so long, you looked like a fugitive."

“It fell down to my waist, after all. Kaa-san was also really surprised.”

Hiro and Fukutarou, who had just entered the school building, began to head for class, their shoulders lined up side-by-side.

“On top of that, your body was quite firm. How the hell did you get to such a level in a single day?”

“I have this special ability, you see. If I sleep for one day, my level gets raised until it reaches Cheat Class.”

“Lies!”

Fukutarou laughed as he tried to nudge Hiro.

And yet, Fukutarou’s fist never touched Hiro’s shoulder.

——after all, time had skidded to a halt.

“.....eh-?”

At this time, Hiro made a face so unsightly that he couldn’t possibly show it to other people.

However, this was unavoidable. After all, the surrounding students had stopped in a similar manner.

“E-Everyone.....what happened, all of a sudden? D-Don’t tell me this is a prank?”

He tried to shake Fukutarou, but to no avail.

Stuck in mid-laugh, he didn’t budge a single inch.

He tried to approach the nearby girls.

Yet, with their hands over their mouths, the girls had also been petrified, their eyes locked on Fukutarou as their gazes held contempt and disgust.

With this, Hiro tried to call out to each and every person. However, not a single one responded.

He exited the school building, passing the gates before running down the road.

Looking towards the garbage dump, he could see a crow. Glancing towards the roadside, he could see a cat intimidating an elementary school student.

Raising his gaze towards the sky, he could see the dazzling sun, still floating around in the sky as if it owned the place.

As if trying to run away from this majesty, white clouds colored the blue sky.

It was the landscape of daily life.....but even so, the fact that time had stopped would not change.

“Haha-.....what the hell”

There was no reason to launch such a large scale prank on a high school student that one could find just about anywhere.

Hiro could grasp that his head was becoming blank.

His feet staggered. The throbs in his chest accelerated.

Even though Hiro knew that he had to take some sort of action, he could not do a single thing.

As anxiety began to surge within him, tears bled through the corner of his eyes.

——at a time like this, what would *you* do, I wonder?

My heart——seeks help from the *you* who ran with me through the battlefield.

(If you saw such a pathetic me, I wonder what *you* would say?)

Would you console me while smiling, I wonder.

Would you scold me for being so miserable, I wonder.

(Wait, who is this *you*? Who am I even talking about? Argh, I don't have a clue. I can't make heads nor tails of it.)

Hiro's vision gradually began to fade away.....it was almost as if the boy was suddenly struck by a spell of drowsiness.

——when lost, depend on me. I shall also depend on you. We are brothers, are we not?

Your words from long ago rapidly revived in my mind.

Your voice. Your face. I soon became able to clearly recall them.

——I am both your older and younger brother. No matter what happens, I will always be your family.

The person who resided in that world, my one and only family.

——Seeking salvation. Seeking help. There is no shame in that.

(But *you* aren't in this world. How am I supposed to ask for your help?)

Leaving behind my one and only family, I returned to this world.
That sin continues to weigh heavily on my heart.

——now, let us depart. What lies before us may be countless difficulties, Yet,
there is none who can break our bond.

As the figure of an adolescent appeared, Hiro lost consciousness.



A dazzling glare penetrated the boy's eyelids, stimulating his pupils.
Using his hand to create a shadow, the boy's eyes slowly opened.
What first jumped into Hiro's eyes was a large tree, from which a grand and
ancient presence could be felt.
Halfway up the tree, which extended up to the heavens, were countless branches
that grew casually to the side. At the tips of these branches were an infinite
number of leaves. These leaves, which seemed to crown the branches, made it so
that neither the tree's summit, nor the sky, could be seen through the dense
foliage.
What reached his ears was the gentle sound of leaves dancing as they were
rocked about by the wind.
The light of day spilled through the gaps between the trees, causing a faint glow
to surround the forest.
Looking further in, one could see the darkness spreading about, making it
impossible to see any further than that.

“.....haha, this is a dream, right?”

Until just a moment ago, he should've been at school.
At that time, it felt like he had met a nostalgic someone, but he couldn't
remember.

The feeling of touching grass.
The pleasantly cool feeling of the earth.
The wind blowing against his face.

The smell of nature that tickled his nostrils.

All of these sensations had a feeling of realness that one couldn't possibly mistake for being a dream.

"If it's a dream, then I'll wake up eventually..."

Hiro muttered, as though he were trying to comfort himself.

That like always, he'd wake up in his usual room.

He'd likely remember how fearful he was within his dream and end up rolling around in embarrassment.

After forcefully convincing himself with that, he left the big tree and went forward into the forest.

But no matter how far he went, he couldn't get out of the forest.

The scenery didn't change.

As always, he was unable to look into its depths.

The trees simply continued endlessly into his surroundings

Just as walking began to become troublesome, and Hiro's heart was about to crumble, *that* appeared from the within the lush grass.

[Gururururururu-!]

Rising from the darkness were two golden eyes, as drool dripped from the long, bared fangs.

It was about as big as a medium-sized dog, and as the claws on its four muscular legs gouged at the ground, Hiro backed away.

As the sunlight illuminated the beast, he came to see the beautiful white fur that it possessed.

"A wolf.....?"

Episode 2

Meeting

The wolf-like beast maintained its distance without attempting to come any closer.

(Is it on-guard?)

If that's the case.....then it might be possible to run away.

If I'm not mistaken, then wild animals should be afraid of fire, but.....there's no way I'd have anything like that on me.

All that's left is to back off without averting my eyes and running away.

I've heard of similar stories on TV before.

Hiro decided to put that knowledge into practice.

As Hiro maintained eye contact, he took one step back, and the wolf, too, took one step forward.

If he took two steps backward, it took two steps forward. And if he took three steps backwards, it took three steps forward.

Ahh.....this is pointless, isn't it?

Because he didn't know where the exit was, Hiro didn't even know how far back he'd have to walk.

(In the first place, will this wolf really keep following me forever?)

As Hiro remained bewildered, the wolf in front of him sat down onto the ground. It opened its large mouth and yawned. Scratching its neck with a hind leg, the wolf appeared to be bored.

Keeping its eyes on Hiro, the wolf stretched out its body like a cat and laid down at its location.

The wolf wouldn't lower its guard, and if he moved, it'd bite.

That was what the beast's golden eyes told Hiro.

Just how much time has passed, I wonder.

As Hiro noticed its ears twitch abruptly, the wolf, who had remained completely still, suddenly began to move.

Around the same time, the lush grass began to make rustling noises.

What emerged from there was a beautiful girl.



“Hm? Who.....are you?”

Wiping her wet hair with a cloth, the girl approached the wolf and stopped. Her gaze locked on Hiro, the girl placed her hand atop the wolf’s head and began stroking it.

Towards Hiro, who had witnessed the chain of events unfold before his very eyes, the girl simply tilted her head to the side.

“Hey.....I’m asking you a question, you know?”

“Eh-, ah-, aah, , are you talking to me!?”

“Who else is here besides you.....?”

There’s no way Hiro could say that he had been completely captivated by her. Possessing a silky shine was crimson hair which evoked images of scorching flames.

Her blazing pupils burned brightly like a pair of scarlet gems that were even more beautiful than rubies. From them, a strong will could be felt.

Blue veins could be seen running underneath her transparent, porcelain-white skin.

While her neat features appeared to be immature, they would undoubtedly make men cry in the future.

Even though the girl’s chest could only be described as disappointing, this didn’t mean that her charm was halved because of it.

As she seemed to be younger than Hiro, it just meant that the girl had more time to grow from here on out.

Lowering his head to hide his embarrassment, Hiro spoke.

“Ahaha.....I’m Hiro Ouguro.”

“Hiro Ouguro?”

“Ahh....if it’s hard to say, then just ‘Hiro’ is fine.”

“Got it. Then, I’ll call you Hiro, but.....what are you doing here?”

“I was looking for the exit, but.....”

“Hmm.....”

Her eyes examined Hiro’s body.

“Well, fine. You don’t seem to be a suspicious person, so.....you were looking for the exit, right?”

Saying, "This way", the girl began to walk away.

Hiro began to follow after the girl's back.

As though it were protecting the girl, the wolf walked in front of Hiro while wagging its tail.

After walking for about 10 metres, Hiro and company discovered a large light within the thickets of the forest up ahead.

The fact that the exit which he had walked so much to find was so easily found made Hiro feel as though he had been bewitched by a fox.

After passing through the light, the scenery which unfolded before him caused Hiro to gasp.

Within the blue sky, not a single cloud could be seen. A pleasant wind blew gently against his face, causing the blades of grass growing on the ground to sway back and forth.

However, just as the boy was being overwhelmed by how far the grassy plains extended around him, Hiro noticed *their* nearby presence within his field of vision.

Spread out in a single horizontal line was a cavalry troop.

Heavy-looking armour, well-maintained spears, with swords hanging at their waists.

And lastly, their clearly unfriendly glances that were aimed at Hiro.

A single horse marched forward from within the group.

Sitting on the horse was a burly man with evenly-cut short hair.

With a large wound on his face and sharp, lion-like eyes, the man glanced at Hiro before opening his mouth.

"Ojou.....were you bathing again?"

"I just finished training, so it was hot."

"At least bring a guard with you."

"Oh, but I did have a guard. Right? Cerberus."

"Woof"

As the girl petted Cerberus's head, it barked in apparent agreement.

The man sighed in a fed up manner.

The boy couldn't just keep staring at the two people and the animal.

So, Hiro raised a hand and timidly tried asking.

"Um~.....is it alright if I leave now?"

He then made a forced smile, but as a light vein appeared on the man's forehead, it seemed that he had failed in making an amiable impression.

"Who are you, brat?"

"Hiro."

The girl approached, placing her hand on Hiro's shoulder.

"We just met over there. We're already kind of like friends, I suppose? Right!"

The girl peered at Hiro's face, seemingly trying to obtain confirmation.

His face instantly turned red.

Hiro had never talked to a female at such close proximity, and considering what a beauty the girl was, it could be said that his reaction was only natural.

In an attempt to hide his unrest, however, Hiro began to talk rapidly.

"W-We're probably something like friends. Though I don't really know when one can really say that they've become friends....."

"Woof"

Cerberus barked at Hiro. It was possible that the wolf was approving of Hiro's words.

It was only natural, but the scar-faced man stared at the suspicious-looking Hiro.

"Friends.....? Those are quite the unusual garments. And——"

The man's face didn't even try to hide his displeasure as he looked down on Hiro. However, just that gaze alone made Hiro's back completely give out.

Certainly, Hiro was the one and only person wearing a school uniform here.

In the first place, Hiro was hardly used to seeing people wearing armour with a sword at their waists.

"Those features and hair colour don't belong to one of the empire.....which country are you from?"

Upon being told that, Hiro realized that none of them had features resembling that of a Japanese person.

Blonde, and brown hair could be seen all over the place. Yet, there was not one whose hair possessed a dark tint like Hiro.

Their cheekbones were also prominent, their noses high, their shoulders wide, and if you compared their bodies, no two were the same.

The young girl next to Hiro lightly tapped his shoulder.

When he turned his head, her lovely and beautiful face came just up to the tip of his nose.

“You’ve got a kind face, and your eyes are also big and round, kind of like when Cerberus was little. I like it, you know?”

“Eh, ahh.....th-thanks.”

Just when I was wondering what she was going to say.....it made my heart beat violently.

“That makes it even more suspicious. Do you know where this is?”

“Dios. Don’t be so intimidating towards a child like this. He’s terrified!”

“.....but you know, Ojou. Even if he is a child, it doesn’t change the fact that he’s a suspicious character.”

For Hiro, these were words that he couldn’t simply ignore.

If it was the man called Dios, Hiro didn’t mind being called a child.

However, for the young girl.....for a girl who was clearly younger than him to call him a child was odd.

“Why? Even though he’s cute.....“

“It’s not a matter of being cute or not.....”

As the corners of Dios’ mouth twitched, Hiro interrupted the man by raising his hand.

“U-Um~.....”

“What’s wrong?”

The young girl responded to Hiro with an attitude full of affection.

Once he understood that it was a way in which one might treat a child, Hiro couldn’t help but feel that it was extremely unfortunate.

“Even though I look like this, I’m 16, but.....this year I’m turning 17.”

“...you’re lying, right? You’re older than me?”

Just as Hiro wondered why she was making a face as though he had swindled her, Dios, who was still on horseback, also had his mouth half-open in shock.

“Aren’t you actually around 10 years old?”

Even if Japanese people appear younger than they actually are, come on. My height’s even.....165cm. Though it’s kinda short for a high school sophomore. Incidentally, it (my height) wasn’t too different from the young girl’s.

“Could you be a kind of spirit?”

Dios looked at Hiro with a serious face.

“Ahh, I see! That’s why he was in the forest. But do spirits get lost, I wonder.....”

Just as it seemed she had come to a conclusion, the girl immediately tilted her head and began to groan, “Hmm”.

She was a girl whose expressions changed often.

“.....for now, we’ll take that guy with us.”

“Eh? We can’t. His parents might be looking for him. We have to properly bring him back home.”

“Ojou.....he’s 16, you know? If he was a child, I might’ve let him go, but he’s a full adult. He intruded on royal property without permission. We have to at least investigate it.”

“Eh, I don’t think there’s anything to worry about though? Let’s return him.”

“He could be an enemy spy.”

“I don’t think that’s the case though.....”

“No.”

“Then, I’ll have him ride in my carriage. Is that alright?”

After a short period of time, the wrinkle on Dios’ forehead smoothed out and he spoke.

“.....haa, very well. Then, let us return to the fortress.”

Turning the horse around, Dios left.

As though it had switched places with Dios, an extravagant carriage came in front of Hiro.

“Please, jump in. The inside is wide, so it shouldn’t feel too tight.”

Before Hiro could go in, Cerberus jumped on-board.

When he followed and went in, he found that it was wide enough for 6 people to sit.

Avoiding Cerberus, who was lying sprawled on the floor, Hiro sat on one of the installed seats.

The young girl, who got in afterwards, sat across from him.

“Sorry for frightening you and everything.”

“No, it’s a dream, so it can’t be helped.”

Having endured up until this moment, Hiro didn’t want to admit that this was reality.

The girl tilted her head.

“.....a dream?”

“Yup. Otherwise there’s just too much stuff that can’t be explained.”

“What can’t be explained?”

“Just a little while ago, I was at school. But before I realized it, I was here. If this is a dream, then the scenery can completely change suddenly, and people that I’ve never seen before could appear, right?”

“.....I suppose. But, you’re right there, are you not? I do believe that this is reality.”

Suddenly, the girl rose to her feet and approached Hiro.

As she placed her warm hands on Hiro’s face, a soft sensation was transmitted to Hiro’s cheeks. However, at that moment, an intense pain assaulted him.

“Owwwww!?”

The girl was pinching Hiro’s cheek with all her might.

After doing that for a bit, she released her hold and returned to her previous seat. Apparently startled by Hiro’s scream, Cerberus’ eyes became round.

“See? It’s not a dream, right?”

“Even if that’s the case, you don’t just go and suddenly pinch people like that.”

While Hiro stroked his cheek as it throbbed with pain, one of the windows that the carriage was furnished with was knocked on.

“What happened?”

Dios peered into the carriage with a dubious face.

“It’s nothing. Hiro was saying that this was a dream, so I just pinched his cheek”

“Hmph, so he’s escaping reality.....as I thought, he might be a spy.”

After throwing that out, Dios went away from the window.

Once he made sure of that, Hiro held down his injured cheek and sighed.

“Haa.....”

Episode 3

The Beginning of the Journey

Although he had already admitted it somewhere in the corner of his mind, Hiro had yet to abandon the hope that this was all but a dream somewhere in his heart.

“What should I do from now on.....”

Hiro cradled his head as his gaze fell to his feet.

As the pain in his cheeks affirmed that this was another world, one would think that he'd be in a miserable state.....

However, it was more important to find out whether there was a method of returning to his original world; to confirm whether or not there was a way to get out of this situation.

In addition, he had to worry about how he should proceed. The boy's worries came surging at him one after another.

Tapping the shoulder of Hiro who had to deal with such concerns was the girl sitting right in front of him.

“Don't get so depressed. It'll be fine. You're not going to be charged with treason after all.”

“No, I'm not really depressed by something like that.....-wait, treason?”

As if she didn't hear Hiro's feeble voice, the girl abruptly brought one hand to her chest as an elegant smile surfaced on her face.

“I guess introductions would be a good place to start. I am Celia.Estreya.Elizabeth.Von.Grantz. The 6th Imperial Princess of the Grantz Grand Empire. I've just turned 15. Everyone calls me Liz. It's fine for you to call me that as well, Hiro.”

“.....”

If I were to address an Imperial Princess by her nickname, certainly that would be considered blasphemy, wouldn't it?

In the first place, it's probably best for me to stop using this sort of language.

I'd rather not be beheaded at such a young age.

“What’s wrong?”

“If I call you Liz, that wouldn’t that be disrespectful?”

“It’s fine. I said I’m alright with it, after all. I mean, even that Dios hasn’t been charged with treason.”

“Aah, now that you mention it.....then I’ll be calling you Liz as well.”

Seeing how she was so amicable during their first meeting, this girl might just simply be an approachable princess.

“Yup, it’s good that you’re obedient. But as expected, even Dios doesn’t call me by my nickname.”

“Uooooooooo, I was tricked!? Then as I thought, it’s blasphemy!?”

“Ahahahaha, it’s fine, don’t worry about it. But I think it’s best if you don’t use my nickname in front of others. Leaving Dios aside, you might upset the guys at the fort if they found out.”

——how does it feel to be messed with by someone younger than you?

Although the girl was holding her belly in a joyous uproar, I really want her to stop playing around when it comes to matters of life and death.

But I wonder. Why she was treating me so kindly, to the point of even letting me use her nickname?

“I have something I wanna ask, but.....”

“What is it~?”

“Why are you being so nice to me?”

“I mean, you’re alive, right?”

“Huh?”

Unable to comprehend the meaning behind her words, Hiro tilted his neck to the side.

“I mean, Cerberus didn’t bite you, and the spirits weren’t making a fuss either.”

“Err.....if Cerberus bit me, or the spirits were making a fuss, what would’ve happen?”

“Well, you’d’ve died. The woods from earlier.....Anfang Forest is what they call it, by the way. A lot of spirits make that place their habitat. Though the First Emperor contracted them to act like guardians in exchange for living there, the spirits have continued to dutifully guard the area, even after 1000 years. So those who aren’t royalty can’t enter, nor can they leave the forest alive.”

“So I was in such a dangerous place.....”

Having been told such a disturbing tale, Hiro felt a chill run down his spine. Perhaps because Hiro’s face (contorted by fear) was so strange, Liz endured her laughter as she spoke.

“So as I said, I saved you. Are you convinced?”

“Yup. I understand that I was in a really treacherous position. However, why am I alive? I’m not part of the royal family, you know?”

“I know, right? It’s such a mystery, isn’t it? That’s why Dios suspected that you were a type of spirit.”

“Aah, then.....that’s why he gave such a reaction.”

“That’s how it is. Then, since I’ve convinced you, how about you tell me your story? Why were you there? Or are you actually a spirit?”

“If I knew, I wouldn’t be so troubled.....”

“Amnesia?”

“No, nothing like that. I’m a simple civilian, a 16-year-old high school student.”

“What’s a hai skool schudent?”

“.....hmm? I’m talking about students who go to school, you know.”

“Aah.....you mean a Training School Student?”

Though the words themselves appeared to be Japanese, they didn’t make sense, given the current context.....suddenly, Hiro had an epiphany.

“Hang on.....am I not speaking Japanese?”

“Jyapaniisu? Did such a language exist.....hm~”

Liz groaned as she tilted her neck to the side.

“Err.....the language that I’m speaking right now is.....”

“It’s Grantzian?”

“.....what’s the meaning of this?”

“Eh, what’s wrong?”

“No, I was wondering why I’m able to speak Grantzian.”

“Even if you ask me, I don’t have a clue! More importantly, what’s a hai skool schudent!?”

To her, speaking Grantzian must be a matter of course.

When compared with the issue of having arrived in another world, it might be a rather trivial matter.

In any case, Hiro decided to put this matter aside for now and answer the girl's question.

Another reason being that it seemed like he'd just get confused if he were to contemplate the matter.

"It's something similar to that Training School Student thing that you said earlier."

"Heeh.....they call it hai skool schudent in the spirit world, right?"

"Hang on, I'm not a spirit. Like you, I'm human."

"I've said this before, but your features are young. Besides, your voice seems a bit too high for an adult."

"In my world, 16 are still minors, you know.....More importantly, do those spirits that you mentioned also look like me?"

"They're completely different. Spirits don't have such things like a form or a voice. But it seems like the First Emperor was capable of understanding their intentions."

"So then why are you saying I'm a spirit?"

Tilting her head to the side, Liz placed her index finger on her narrow chin.

"Hmm.....just because? Besides, if you were a spirit, a lot of things start to make sense."

This girl was really the type who would bloom like a flower, no matter what gesture or pose she made.

Although Hiro wanted to ask a lot of other questions, his desire was left unfulfilled.

Because Liz's gaze had turned towards the view on the other side of the window.

"We'll be arriving at the fort soon. It's been kind of rattly, but I want to properly entertain my guest so be at ease."

Hiro similarly directed his line of sight towards the window.

A sunset of blazing crimson began to sink on the other side of the horizon.



Ruler of the Central Continent, Grantz Grand Empire.

About two days on foot to the east of the Grand Imperial Capital Cladius lied Taoen Fort.

To the First Emperor, Taoen Fort was the most important stronghold, or so was written in the annals of history.

It was from here that the country on the verge of collapse had made its counterattack.

The person who was entrusted with commanding the base of such historical importance was a girl who had, as of this year, just reached adulthood at the age of 15.

Her name was Celia.Estreya.Elizabeth.Von.Grantz.

The 6th Imperial Princess of the Grantz Grand Empire.

Currently, the girl was holding a meeting in the Operations Command room, her aides in tow.

Knight Commander Dios.Von.Michael.

Infantry Commander Tris.Von.Tarmie.

And three other Imperial Princesses were also present.

“All of the luggage has been loaded onto the carriages. All that’s left is to discuss about when we depart for Belk Fortress, but.....”

“We cannot completely abandon the possibility of an attack.”

Taking over in the face of Dios’s words was Infantry Commander Tris.

“The Princess’s recent demotion has been relayed throughout the entire empire. There is no guarantee that those with insolent intentions will not appear.”

“As expected, 100 cavalry and 200 infantry makes me feel uneasy.”

“It can’t be helped. Most soldiers of the Taoen Fort belong to the First Imperial Army. There is no way we can bring them along with us. Furthermore, if we go to Belk Fortress.....no, if we enter Margrave Grinda’s territory, then we should be safe.”

To the south of Grantz Grand Empire was the Principality of Lichtein.

Sitting on the border was the critical Belk Fortress, currently under Margrave Ruzen.Kiolk.Von.Grinda’s territory and command.

Being the older brother of Liz’s mother, Margrave Grinda was the girl’s uncle.

However, as the Lichtein Principality was under the Grantz Grand Empire's strong influence, the area had been considered peaceful for the last few decades as not a single outbreak of military conflict has occurred.

Being relegated to the single fortress stationed there was basically cutting someone's path to success.

".....we can do naught but pray that we arrive safely."

"Is this not a matter of us protecting the princess?"

Leering at the always optimistic Tris was Dios with a furrowed brow.

Although he pondered whether or not he should voice his complaints, Dios simply sighed, seemingly spitting out his anger before changing the subject.

"However, why does the princess cower before those of the royal family?"

"Well, isn't coz of that.....she was bestowed one of the 5 Imperial Spirit Swords, right?"

"What does such a thing matter? Is it not just a sword?"

"Oh dear, if you asked your dear father such a thing, then you'd surely be sentenced to death for blasphemy. You might even be cursed by the Spirit King."

"H-Hmph. If I was afraid of spirits, there's no way I could wage war."

Although his declaration was delivered strongly, Dios's face had fear smeared all over it.

Seeing such an appearance, Tris burst into a hearty laugh.

"Gahhahahahaha, you better apologise properly. Before you go to bed, I mean~"

The 5 Imperial Spirit Swords.

They were the 5 blades purified by the First Emperor, blessed with power obtained from the Spirit King.

It is said that the will of a spirit with the blade's exact name dwells within the Spirit Sword.

Not daring to show their appearance without accepting their owner. If one were to attempt to forcefully bring them out, a curse would befall them.

However, if one was recognised, they would be bestowed with tremendous power.

Spirit Sword.Imperial Flame Laevateinn. A blade which holds a spirit of fire.

Spirit Sword.Imperial Water Gae Bulg. A spear which contains an ice spirit.

Spirit Sword.Imperial Thunder Mjolnir. An axe that houses a spirit of thunder.

Spirit Sword.Imperial Wind Gandiva. A bow hosting a spirit of the wind.

The remaining Spirit Sword was lost in the midst of the empire's long history. Without any idea of what kind of weapon it was, nor any material documenting said treasure's details, legends dictate that the Second Emperor was fond of it. Within this series of weapons, the Imperial Flame Laevateinn was the most prized by the First Emperor.

And yet, none of the emperors following him were ever selected by this weapon.

However, a long period of 1000 years flowed by. The owner of the Spirit Sword.Imperial Flame Laevateinn has finally appeared.

The 6th Imperial Princess, Celia.Estreya.Elizabeth.Von.Grantz.

A Princess who holds the Imperial Flame Laevateinn could never be simply married off to another country. Her father, the Emperor, bestowed the rank of Major General upon the 6th Imperial Princess, in addition to appointing her as the commander of Taoen fort (which was under the First Imperial Army's jurisdiction).

However, there were those who could not stay quiet and accept this decision.

——they were the successors to the throne.

As the centripetal force of the 6th Princess being chosen by Imperial Flame Laevateinn livened up the day, she began to receive support from the people, claiming that this was the second coming of the First Emperor.

Deciding that it would be dangerous to leave the surroundings of the Imperial Capital alone, the Commander of the First Imperial Army: 1st Imperial Prince Rein.Hart.Schtobel.Von.Grantz, relegated the 6th Princess to a remote location.

Normally, when other successors used their military forces privately, they would receive strong criticism. However, this was the one and only time when such a thing did not happen.

The reason for this was because the others in line to succeed the throne shared the feelings of the First Prince.

Rather, they cooperated in placing pressure on the nobles who sided with Liz. Before Liz, who ended up losing her supporters, was the commander of this frontier fortress.

If lives were lost along the way, it was not necessarily a guarantee that the Schtobel faction would send troops to their aid.

It was also possible that another successor to the imperial throne may dispatch troops.

Passing through the dangers that they were presented with, it was absolutely crucial for Liz's group to make it to Belk Fortress.

Episode 4

Encounter

Dios scratched his head, pointing at the map lying on the long table before opening his mouth.

“There are two roads leading to Belk Fortress. The road heading directly south, I’m sure, is okay to think of as definitely being a trap. Assassins, army corps, thieves, and bandits are there aplenty. The other path is to the east, running through a mountain within the Grauzarm mountain range. All that’s left after crossing through Mount Himmel, right next to the small country of Baum, is to enter Margrave Grinda’s territory.”

“We’ve also got cavalry. We can’t possibly cross over Mount Himmel.”

“Even if we choose to go south, we won’t be able to escape annihilation. That being the case, in order to increase the chances of saving at least a few more lives, we have no choice but to climb Mount Himmel.”

Tris, who was at Dios’s side, also nodded.

“Let’s split into two groups. As would be expected, there’s no way that all the soldiers can go via Mount Himmel. Because a diversion is necessary after all. Dios, take 50 infantrymen and lead them towards Belk Fortress. If you meet enemies along the way, abandon the wagon and do everything you can to get help from Margrave Grinda. Is that acceptable, Hime-sama?”

Liz had a disagreeable expression, but after a while, she gave a small nod.

“What’re you gonna do, Ossan?”

“I’ll cross the mountain with Hime-sama.”

“You’re already pretty old, so you shouldn’t overdo it....”

“Hmph, I still won’t lose to some greenhorn.”

“That so? Lately, your arms have been getting thinner.”

“What!? Is that true!?”

With Liz’s joke, the Operations Command Room became just a little bit more cheerful.



After being served a luxurious meal, a satisfied Hiro, having eaten his fill, sat down on his bed.

Like Liz said, he was received as a guest.

They hadn't questioned him, but in front of his door stood a soldier on lookout. Though the other side had one-sidedly raised their guard against him, to Hiro, this was a world that he knew absolutely nothing about.

He wouldn't wander around recklessly. So he could tell them that what they were doing was completely pointless.

But if Hiro were to say that, it was possible that they'd end up treating him even more cautiously. If that were the only thing to happen, then it'd be fine, but there was a possibility that Hiro could end up in a more dangerous position.

Which was why he was sitting so obediently like this, thinking about what he should do from now on.

However, just as he was getting sleepy, having yet to come up with a good idea, the door suddenly opened as someone entered crassly.

—it was Liz.

“Sorry. A kind of urgent matter came up.....”

“What happened?”

“We need to change locations, and it turns out that we'll be departing tonight.”

“.....in other words?”

“We'll have to return this place to the 1st Imperial Army, so Hiro won't be able to stay here anymore.”

“That's.....a problem.”

In an unknown land, he'd be thrown out into a place where he didn't even know left from right.

Furthermore, in the middle of the night. There likely wasn't anything scarier than this.

Though he wanted to think about what to do from hereon out, Liz began to make a rather impatient face.

There probably wasn't any time to think.

Therefore.....Hiro made his decision.

“Is it alright if I follow you?”

“Eh-?”

“Is that.....a no?”

“You can but.....it’ll be a pretty harsh journey. If it goes badly, you could die. Even so, do you still want to?”

“I don’t mind. Either way, if I’m thrown out alone in the middle of the night, I’ll probably wind up dead.”

“We wouldn’t leave you completely out to dry, you know. If it’s just a little, then we could lend you some money, and even for food.....”

“I owe you a meal after all. There’s a possibility that I could backstab you, but.....if there’s no problem with me following along, I’ll go with you.”

“Hiro, you’re a pretty strange guy.”

“Guess so. I get that a lot.”

—though it’s usually only Fukutarou saying so.

Upon exiting into the fortress’s central plaza, we found bonfires casting light onto the surroundings.

The full moon peeked out from behind the clouds, overlooking the area.

I followed behind Liz, and when we arrived in front of the fortress’s main gate, Cerberus came running up to Liz.

A large number of soldiers remained on standby next to the entrance.

Next to the vanguard, Dios, stood a man in his early 40s, muscles flourishing all over his body.

This man handed Liz a horse with chestnut hair.

“Tris, thanks for the hard work.”

“Ma’am!”

Extending her gratitude, Liz mounted the horse without delay.

Instantly, a roar of cheers erupted from behind her.

Turning around in surprise, Hiro saw that, before he had realized it, a large crowd of fort soldiers had gathered to send them off.

“Please take care, Celia.Estrea-sama!”

“Celia.Estrea-sama, banzai!”

“Grantz Grand Empire, banzai!”

“May you be blessed by the Spirit King!”

“May you be blessed by the 12 Grantz Gods!”

Smiling, Liz returned a grandiose wave.

As the light of the full moon shone down upon her, the young girl's charm grew exponentially, making her figure appear as beautiful as a fairy.

In this face of this, the cheers flared up once more.

So as to ensure that he did not stray too far away, Hiro followed after Liz's horse.

"Once we can't see the fort.....we'll be splitting up into two groups. Make sure you follow so we don't get separated."

Liz's voice rang out from above.

"Ok."

After walking in silence for about two hours, one could see the fort disappearing behind them, shrouded by darkness.

The first one to take action was Liz.

Jumping off of her horse, she turned towards Tris and shouted.

"Tris! You better guide everyone properly!"

"Hime-sama's the one that I'm worried won't be able to keep up with this old man!"

Tris dashed ahead of Liz.

"Let's go, Hiro!"

Liz grabbed Hiro's left hand, forcefully dragging him along.

Behind them were soldiers who broke out of their ranks, as well as the split-off soldiers who continued to advance without incident.

Worries such as, 'exactly how far do I have to run?' and, 'will my body be able to keep up?', naturally began to fill Hiro's head.

Looking to his side, a sprinting Cerberus could be seen wearing a cool, calm face. –as expected of a wolf. A little bit is fine, so would it kill you to give me some of that stamina.....

As Hiro's limit grew near, Liz began to walk.

Hiro repeatedly sucked in air with wild, ragged gasps. On the other hand, though drops of sweat glimmered on her forehead, her breathing was not disturbed at all.

“Are you ok?”

“I-I’m, I’m fine.”

“Are you sure? Tell me if it’s too hard, ok? If it’s only for a little bit, we can take a break.....”

“That’s no good, Hime-sama. If you spoil boys, they will unavoidably become weak. Those who strive to become men are the type who grow from being thrown off of a cliff.”

Though Hiro wanted to interject, seeing how his mouth was dominated by oxygen, his wish to do so was left unfulfilled.

As if ridiculing Hiro, Cerberus ran around merrily.

“Hiro is still a kid. If you were to throw him off a cliff, he would die.”

“Mm? Is that brat not 16 years old? I heard this from Dios, but.....”

“But his appearance is childish, right? We need to treat him gently.”

“Mm? Certainly, his appearance is quite young.....but 16.....furthermore, a child? Hmm, I’m not too sure.”

Turning his gaze away from Tris, who began to laugh uproariously, Hiro looked behind him.

He could see the large number of soldiers who had followed them.

Whilst wearing heavy armour, it appeared that their breathing was not disturbed, nor had any of them fallen behind.

Even the senior, Tris, had yet to break a sweat.

–this old man’s definitely a monster.

“Were there any that withdrew?”

“We don’t have such weaklings.”

“I see, thank goodness.....”

“Right now things are going alright. It should be possible to start walking into the mountains by sunrise. Looks like it’ll end without anyone catching a glimpse of us.”

“I wonder if everything’s alright on Dios’s end?”

“There’s no need to worry. Because he’s strong.”

After walking for a while, the sky began to brighten, exposing a large mountain before them.

As always, Hiro’s hand was being gripped by Liz.

Whether he had gotten used to it.....or had forgotten about it, Hiro was no longer as embarrassed about it compared to when he had first held her hand.

As soon as they had stepped into the mountain's entrance, Liz brought her face close to Hiro's.

Hiro's face turned red as he waited for Liz to speak. This alone was something that he couldn't get used to.

"Once we cross over this mountain, we'll reach the Country of Baum. It's pretty peaceful, and there's a beautiful town overflowing with nature. Though there's not enough time right now, so we won't be able to visit it."

I really wanted to show him around-Liz muttered in a disappointed manner as Tris spoke up.

"Hasn't your Onii-sama's reach extended to the Country of Baum?"

"There's no need to worry about that.....or so I would like to say, but I can't be so sure of that. It's still possible that they've seen through our strategy."

Tris made a difficult face before opening his mouth once again.

"Additionally, this time I didn't give Baum any prior warning, so to avoid giving the country any unnecessary stimuli, we should head to Margrave Grinda's territory as fast as possible."

".....that's true. Our group is about the size of a squadron, so I feel like we'll be exposed rather quickly though."

"Even if we're noticed, they can't do anything against the Empire. Though they'll probably be swearing at us under their breath."

"It feels like we're taking advantage of their weakness. Can't help but feel a bit guilty."

"Once things calm down a bit at Margrave Grinda's territory, there shouldn't be any problems so long as we send a letter of apology."

"Either way, it'll still become a story of our impoliteness."

As he listened to the two's conversation, Hiro scaled the gentle hill road.

Though he had heard that it'd be a hard journey, in reality, it was a mountain that was extremely suitable for a picnic.

Along the roadside, numerous flowers bloomed, and cute animals could occasionally be seen.

“You look like you’re having a lot of fun, Hiro.”

“Yeah. Because I heard it’d be rough, I had prepared myself, but.....it’s a nice mountain. Feels like the perfect place to have an afternoon nap.”

“Fufu, I agree. This Mount Himmel is the easiest mountain to climb amongst all of the Grauzarm mountain range. But since a lot of monsters live here, it’s dangerous enough that not even peddlers can pass through it. Well, this area’s still safe, though.”

“Mo-Monsters?”

“Yup. The closer to the summit you get, the more ferocious they become. This time we have to cross over that area in order to get to the other side, so it’ll be a hard journey, you know?”

It was a word that I’ve only heard within games, but hearing it from this beautiful girl made me feel a sense of fear.

Because her features had remained entirely neutral throughout her delivery, there was a strange intensity behind her words.

“Don’t worry, I’ll protect you, so it’s fine for you to walk proudly in the back.”

“Woof-!”

Cerberus barked.

‘I’ll protect you’—is what the wolf’s gallant figure expressed.

Leaving time for a short break in between, we set out for the summit within 4 hours.

The sun had completely risen, and the surroundings became completely clear.

At this time, we had already travelled a distance where, if you raised your head, you could directly see the mountain’s summit.

But then—*that* appeared.

Its two large, bloodshot eyes moved around, staring at Hiro and co. as if it were trying to evaluate them.

Peeking out of its torn mouth was a row of yellow teeth, several of which having fallen out.

Its neck was thicker than Hiro’s waist, and as it rose up, its exposed belly swelled up like a balloon.

It was a hideous, humanoid monster.

“An ogre. It was originally a human, but it’s been said that because of a spirit’s curse, it was transformed into such a hideous form. After being driven out from

human lands, it inhabits mountains like these and attacks travellers. It's a monster that lusts for human flesh."

Liz calmly delivered an explanation.

"Also, even though it's strong, because its intelligence is low, it's not that hard to take down."

Just as Liz spoke, Cerberus ran forward.

"Guruaaaaaa!"

Cerberus brandished his sharp fangs towards the ogre's neck, and then—he landed on the ground with a light noise.

Together with an eerie splurting noise, the ogre's head disappeared as blood came gushing out.

Grotesque.....Hiro averted his eyes.

However, what appeared before him was a scene that made him want to cover his eyes.

The sight of the ogre's head rolling gently down the hill road.

Watching over him, Liz's side profile suddenly bloomed like a flower as she smiled.

"See!"

".....yeah."

"As expected of Cerberus-dono. An unseeable execution! We've been given the honour of being shown quite a wonderful thing."

"Woof-!"

After being praised by Tris, Cerberus's tail wagged in response.

"There're more things even stronger than that."

Upon seeing Liz's cheerful expression as she said that, Hiro had absolutely no idea what kind of face he should make in return.

Episode 5

Crimson Blade

The road, which was lush with greenery, had changed into one of gravel and large rocks strewn about.

With each step, pain shot up his legs.

If he tried to focus on avoiding the large rocks, he would needlessly exhaust himself.

Hiro thought he would be sore tomorrow for sure.

“Hiro, are you okay? I can carry you on my back if it hurts.”

“No, I can’t possible have a girl carry me... I am a guy too, you know.”

While feeling grateful towards her, Hiro kept his eyes on the summit.

Although it felt close, it was still far. But he could tell he was moving forward with the change in scenery.

Also, Liz would intermittently call for a short break.

I’m sure it’s for my sake.

Because no one else expressed their fatigue on their face as much as Hiro.

He knows he’s being a hindrance, but he isn’t allowed to complain.

The soldiers didn’t complain about Hiro’s hindrance either.

With each break, they would say things like, “You got some guts there,” or “Just hang in there a little longer.”

Hiro was moved by the good-natured soldiers.

“This is where it gets hard. There are many monsters ahead, so you absolutely have to stick close to me.”

“Are more monsters like ogles* going to show up?”

(TL note: This was previously translated as “ogre”, but you’ll see why I changed this later.)

“Yeah. Or actually, groups of ogles.”

“Are you serious...?”

“I’m serious...”

And as Liz mimicked Hiro, a large group of rocks came tumbling down from in front of them.

“Hide in the shadows of the boulders!”

As Tris yelled out, the soldiers moved with swiftness.

Hiro didn’t move at that instant, but Liz held his hand and didn’t show any signs of moving either.

The ground shook violently, and it was difficult just to stand upright.

One of the rocks crashed into the boulders Tris was hiding behind and shattered with a bang.

The swarm of rocks fell from above like shooting stars.

A large rock flew out and was approaching Hiro to crush him. Hiro closed his eyes as he thought it was over for him.

But no matter how much time passed, he didn’t feel any pain.

Hiro timidly opened his eyes, and he saw before him, the large rock which was split in two and beginning to melt.

“Eh, what is this...?”

Hiro looked on, noticeably confounded.

But it wasn't just one rock.

Using the melted rocks as a foothold, she flew overhead with a heavy thunk.

As a large shadow enveloped Hiro and the others, that's when it happened.

Suddenly, the rocks were engulfed in flames and exploded.

The fragments avoided Hiro's group and scattered near them.

As Hiro stood there dumbfounded, Liz called out to him.

“Hiro! Don't move from that spot!”

As he looked in her direction, Liz was running towards the cluster of rocks.

The soldiers hiding in the shadows appeared calm.

Cerberus yawned beside Hiro.

BOOM!

The sound of an explosion shook the eardrums of a dazed Hiro.

In his peripherals, Liz kicked the ground, and landed in front of a rock.

BOOM!

Another rock exploded.

The fragments melted in the air, and fused to the ground with a zwoop sound.

Hiro finally realized that Liz was holding something in her hand.

“Oh, is this your first time seeing that, boy?”

A soldier said as he pat Hiro's shoulder.

Hiro replied as he kept his gaze.

"Eh, what do you mean?"

"I mean the Spirit Sword, Laevateinn."

Hearing the soldier's words, his heart pounded hard.

"Ah, yes... I think it's my first time."

He held his chest back while staying locked on to the dancing girl.

She held a crimson sword in her hand.

A clear, crimson blade, as beautiful as pigeon blood ruby.

(TL note: Apparently "pigeon blood" is a type of ruby that's more valuable than regular rubies.)

The golden grip shined brilliantly with the sun bathing it.

She cut the last rock to clear them away, and after finishing her disposal, she looked towards Hiro and waved her hand.

Her whole face lit up with a charming smile, and her glossy, red hair swayed in the wind.

Hiro couldn't turn his eyes away from her as she walked with Laevateinn's blade pointed to the ground.

It was an image that wouldn't lose in beauty to any painting.

Again, his chest pumped hard.

Hiro clutched his chest and exhaled intensely.

“What is this...? What’s...”

His heart starts racing, and he can tell something’s raging inside.

But as the fair maiden looked at him and asked, “Are you okay?”, he regains consciousness.

“Huh?!”

“Hyah?!”

He let out a strange cry as he was startled, but that also surprised Liz and her eyes grew wide.

“S-Sorry. You were just really cool! That’s all!”

Hiro said, as he waved his hands in front of his face looking excited.

Liz’s face drew nearer, and she grabbed him by the shoulders as if to keep him from escaping.

“Really?! I was that cool?”

“Eh, well, how should I put it...? My chest got hot...? It was really pretty.”

“Come on, embarrassing me like that! Tell me again!”

Liz slapped Hiro’s shoulders over and over as she scratched her head.

“Now, let’s go, guys~”

“Got it. Carry my stuff, kid.”

“Mine, too.”

“Me, too.”

“If you would.”

“Can you carry mine, too?”

The soldiers who were so kind suddenly changed their attitudes out of nowhere.

A mountain of swords, spears, bows, and shields piled up in front of Hiro.

Aren't these important items to save your lives? And Tris, why are you getting on board too?

As Hiro was about to voice his refusal, he was interrupted by the scream of a soldier.

“It’s a group of ogles!”

Everyone turned their gaze to where the soldier pointed all at once.

An unsightly ogle was forming a group and looking down on Hiro and the others.

In the center was one especially large ogle, and 7 others surrounding him.

“There’s an ogre there, too. Dios would’ve been happy if he were here.”

Liz gazed upon the group of ogles and showed a composed smile.

All the soldiers swiftly retrieved the weapons that were piled in front of Hiro.

“An ogre?”

“That’s right. There’s that one really big, gross looking one, right? They appear to be mutated. They’re more violent and more intelligent than the others, so they create groups and attack humans.”

“Could it be that the falling rocks earlier were caused by...”

“Correct. It was his doing. Maybe he wanted to enjoy some human flesh...”

“... Are we going to be okay?”

“This isn’t our first or second time taking down an ogre.... Dios has taken down so many that people call him “Ogre*”.”

“Wow~...”

Apparently, the soldiers finished preparing for the battle while Hiro spoke.

The heavy infantry stood in front of Hiro and the others and created a wall, thrusting their shields into the ground.

The archery unit waits for the signal in the back, arrows nocked, and strings taut.

Liz looked at them satisfied, raised Laevateinn in the air, and flung it straight down.

“Archery unit, fire!”

A countless number of arrows flew straight toward the group of ogles.

The arrows pierced the large bodies in a flash.

Although they took down four of them in fell swoop, two of the enraged ogles came rushing down.

“Archery unit, aim for the legs!”

As Liz ordered, they accurately hit the ogles’ legs, and they vigorously tumbled down.

The wall of shields stopped the crashing ogles and the spears extending out between the open gaps put an end to them.

As if choosing to escape, the remaining ogre and the one ogle tried to climb the slope.

“Cerberus!”

“Woof!”

Cerberus jumps over the wall and rushes forward.

“Heavy infantry! Open the frontline! Light infantry, let’s do this!”

“Yeah!”

The wall of shields opened to each side, and the one leading the vanguard was Liz.

Tris and the light infantry followed behind.

Around this time, Cerberus had taken down the ogle, and was beginning to make sport of the ogre.

Around 10 minutes thereafter, the battle was decided.

As Hiro tried to regroup with Liz and the others, the ogre’s head rolled by his feet.

After seeing something he didn’t want to, Hiro looked up at the sky to try not to think about it.

The sun is high in the sky. Maybe it’s still around noon.

Liz said they would reach the summit around evening time.

Another 3~5 hours. They must climb this mountain.



During that same time–

If you head 100 sels (300 km) southeast of the Imperial Capital Gladius, there is Clevelen, the 2nd capital.

East of there, you can find Zegen village.

Because it is near the 2nd capital, there are hardly any bandits or monsters, and there is public order. But at this moment, an air of bloodlust envelops the area.

The village is surrounded by pitched tents, and the villagers are locked up in their houses out of fear.

There were 10 heavy infantrymen standing security near the village chief's house.

In front of the door, there stood a flag with a crest of purple land and a sword and shield, flapping in the wind.

When you enter, you're welcomed by a scrupulously well maintained hallway. Continuing left leads you to the guest room.

There sat a beautiful young girl, and a masculine young man.

"Lady Aura, is it all right for us to be loitering about here?"

The young man's name Lawrence Alfred von Spitz.

His gaze was aimed towards his superior, who he worshipped as a goddess.

Trea Luzandi Aura von Bunadara.

Chief of Staff of the 3rd Imperial Army, and also known as "Mars, the God of War".

She is currently spellbound in a chair, left elbow resting on a desk, holding an open book in her right hand.



“ ... ”

In the silent room, only the sound of pages turning would ring out.

Unsure of whether she hadn't heard him, or if she was ignoring him, Spitz didn't give up and called out to her again.

“Lady Aura, rather than just reading that book, I wish you would lend an ear to me as well.”

Bunadara had the habit of reading a book whenever she had free time.

What's more, it was always the same book she would read.

It was a book which chronicled the life of the 2nd Emperor, who shared her name of “Mars”.

It's likely that if you searched the entire empire, you would not find anyone who had as thorough a knowledge of the 2nd Emperor as she.

“Lady Aura... please listen to me.”

Maybe his voice finally reached her. Buranada closes her book and looks towards Spitz.

Ahh... says Spitz, as he gets on his knees and prostrates himself from being so moved.

“Viscount Spitz... I am not trying to insult the 1st Emperor.”

“... Yes, m'lady...”

Spitz thought in his mind that it had begun again.

She always speaks of this after reading the legend.

“You cannot describe the reign of 1st Emperor Altius as anything other than magnificent. However, the one who laid the foundation for that reign... Was

Second Emperor Schwarz*, who attained victory for this country immediately before its downfall, and conquered the surrounding countries.”

(TL note: German for “black”.)

“That is true indeed.”

“His majesty Schwarz took the throne past the age of 70 when his elder brother passed away. I wonder how he must have felt taking the throne at such an advanced age... He didn’t have much time left, and in reality, he left this world after just one year of his reign. If he had been the first emperor, he would surely have been able to unite this world. I’m sure he regretted that.”

Spitz hung his head low as his superior spoke passionately.

What she spoke of, was a matter 1,000 years in the past.

As of now, those two were deified and worshipped as the two great gods of Grantz.

Because the Grantz Grand Empire exists, those two surely must have existed in real life, but there is no doubt that that certain aspects have been dramatized.

For example, it is said that the 2nd Emperor Schwarz had defeated an army of 10,000 troops by himself in his final battle.

They say he had multiple muscle tears, broken ribs, that he sewed his own wounds closed, all while continuing and ultimately winning his battle.

Even with one of the 5 Spirit Swords, that would be impossible.

At best, Spitz thought it was probably 1,000.

Although that would have also been impressive in it of itself... he wanted her try concentrate on what was before them now, rather than the past.

“Lady Aura... How long will you remain here?”

“... I still have so many things I want to say.”

“A letter has arrived from Lord Brutar.”

“... What does it say?”

“I have not read it.”

“Why not?”

“Why not...? Someone as lowly as I couldn't possibly break the seal of a letter from the Imperial family.”

“I wish to enjoy this elation from having just read the legend of Emperor Schwarz, I will allow it.”

“... Understood. Then I shall read it.”

Spitz took out the gaudily decorated envelope.

On one piece of paper, it was written thusly.

My Dear "Mars",

I cannot help but feel astounded that I have yet to hear good news from you, when it has been 10 days since you left the castle.

There is no reason to restrain yourself because your opponent is of the Imperial family.

Fell the hammer of death on that impertinent little girl.

I am sure this is needless concern, but if you so wish, I will send as many troops as you want. Just say the word.

May the Twelve Great Gods of Grantz be with you, my dear "Mars".

Grand Grantz Empire, Third Prince, Brutar.

“-That is what it says.”

“What an impatient person.”

Bunadara said with an annoyed expression, as Spitz smiled wryly towards her.

“There is no helping it. Even though he is 3rd in line for the throne, if something were to happen to the 1st Prince, there is a possibility of the 6th Princess taking the throne, see as how she has the divine protection of a Spirit Sword.”

“None of the past emperors have received the divine protection of the 5 Spirit Swords. The 28th and 36th emperors did not even know how to handle a sword. What’s important is whether or not you have the qualities to become emperor.”

“... It would be nice if Lord Brutar would realize that.”

“If he did, he wouldn’t do anything to incite the wrath of the emperor.”

“Yes...”

“Burn the letter. It is nothing but unpleasant.”

“Understood.”

Spitz threw the letter into a nearby hearth, and took out a small, red talisman.

When he threw that in as well, a pillar of fire rose up, and the letter turned to ash without leaving a single trace behind.

As if to question him, Bunadara looked towards Spitz.

“A spirit talisman to burn a letter...? Isn’t that wasteful?”

“I burned a letter from the Imperial family. Even if a shred were left behind, you would be in danger, Lady Aura. We do not know what might happen unless we are thorough.”

“... That does make sense. I will send a letter to the Spirit King’s Mausoleum later. Shall we buy about 20? It should be fine to bill it to Lord Brutar.”

“No, one spirit talisman is not much of an expense.”

So said Spitz, but one spirit talisman costs 3 Grantz golden coins.

A commoner makes 3 Dratz silver coins in one day.

10 Dratz silvers coins is worth 1 Grantz silver coin, and 10 Grantz silver coins is worth 1 Grantz gold coin.

Although it is a price which is difficult for commoners to afford, because spirit talismans are precious items which can even cure illnesses, many people head to the Spirit King’s Mausoleum to seek them, regardless of social status.

However, the chances of commoners purchasing them are low.

This is because 80~100 talismans are purified each day, and they are all bought up by the Imperial family or great nobles.

Although they do appear in the market, they are mostly sold for twice the price.

“We also have reserves, so we should have enough for this next battle.”

Because of a scarcity of goods from high prices as of late, talismans are mainly used against spirit weapons. There are none who would use them to burn a letter like this.

Even if it were the Imperial family, such usage would cause a decline in finances, and ruin is what would await them.

Spitz’s is not a poor house, but neither is it rich. Spirit charms should be valuable to him.

Seeing her zealous subordinate, Bunadara lets out a sigh and puts on a serious face.

“It’s not that I’m just playing around here. Margrave Grinda’s territory is immediately before us.”

“... Do you plan to invade?”

“Whether we battle or not depends on their mood... But afterwards, we wait for the 6th Princess. After convincing her to comply, we send her to Lord Brutar.”

“But Lord Burtar wishes for the death of the 6th Princess.”

“Do you not know what will happen if the life of the 6th Princess is taken?”

“... The emperor will be enraged, and if we are not careful, Lord Brutar will be beheaded, yes?”

“She is the possessor of Laevateinn. Because it is such a rarity, the emperor surely will not forgive his son’s barbarism.”

“But if I disobey Lord Brutar’s order, I would be in danger.”

“The opinions of people change. If Lord Brutar’s calms himself, I’m sure he will not make the wrong decision.”

“Understood. Then, what will we do now?”

“First, shall we send a letter? As for the contents... Tell them, we wish for them to hand over the 6th Princess. This is an order from the commander of the 3rd Imperial army. If they do not acknowledge this, I am prepared to use force. I await an agreeable reply. Something to that effect please.”

After saying that, her gaze went down and she returned to her entertaining book.

Spitz could not help but open his eyes wide in response to such provocative words.

This is as if she were suggesting a war.

He hears that Margrave Grinda is a gentle person, and by no means belligerent.

He might have acknowledged this normally, but their target is the 6th Princess, who is also his niece.

Spitz closed the door to the guest room and let out a heavy sigh.

Episode 6

Clash

Dios ran into some trouble as he was heading south.

The reason being the troops before him.

A line of heavy infantrymen were spread out impeding his advance.

Behind them were archery units standing at the ready, and behind them, even more heavy infantrymen on standby.

“Here already are you?! And you bring 2,000 against less than 200 on top of that?”

“The crest of purple land and a sword and shield... So, you’re that child prodigy.”

She graduated top of the Imperial training school.

She is the youngest to be promoted to commanding officer of the 3rd Imperial Army, and is also chief of staff at the ripe age of 17.

Her name is Trea Luzandi Aura von Bunadara.

She became Chief of Staff at 15, and that was the same year in which the Third Prince clashed daily with the great country of Ferzen in the west. He was trying to invade them, in the hopes of earning some sort of achievement.

However, the battle was harder than the Third Prince had anticipated, and he had suffered enough of a loss to lose the emperor’s trust.

Cornered, the prince gathered his officers and spoke.

“If you can devise a strategy for victory in this battle, step forward. If you suggest a poor plan, it will be off with your head.”

All the officers stood silent, and the Third Prince’s ire was about to reach its peak.

“Your highness, I would be able to lead us to victory in this war.”

Curiously, a young girl stepped forward from the end of the line of officers.

Impressed by her bravery, the Third Prince appointed her Chief of Staff.

And being disappointed in the other officers, they were all beheaded, save for the young, influential nobles.

The rare ingenuity of the young girl who was promoted to chief of staff would immediately be demonstrated.

She devised ingenious and cunning strategies, one after another, and whittled away at Ferzen’s territory in the blink of an eye.

Meanwhile, the great county of Ferzen would lose battle after battle, losing many lives in the war and seeing a drastic decline in their national power.

Arriving at the conclusion that further battles would bring about the fall of their country, Ferzen requested a truce, and the war came to an end.

For having offered a victory to the empire, the Third Prince gave her a new name.

“*Mars*”, the alias of the Second Emperor of the Grantz Grand Empire.

“... Why is the Third Prince’s favored pet here?”

The two sides glared at each other for a while. Then, Bunarada’s messenger came before Dios.

The messenger’s head was covered in a hood with an expression that could not be seen.

A pair of barely visible lips slowly moved.

“I have brought a letter from Lady Bunadara. Where is her highness Celia Estreya?”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to do here. You think I would tell you that?”

“... And you are?”

“Dios von Michael.”

“Ahh... so you’re the “*Ogre*”.”

Hearing his own alias, Dios extended his arm with a displeased look.

“Hmph. I’ll take that letter.”

“No, there is no need now.”

“What?”

The messenger’s hand rose.

The line of infantrymen in the rear broke their formation, and cavalry started pouring out from between the gaps.

Dios’s sharp gaze tore through the messenger.

“What’s the meaning of this?”

Dios’s irritation grew, and his body overflowed with bloodlust.

Not cowering one bit, the messenger’s lips formed a slight smile.

“We will be restraining you.”

“What?! You say that regardless of knowing I am part of the Sixth Princess’s private army?!”

“Oh, do you not understand unless I tell you the reason? I believe you all know better than I.”

“... You aren’t a mere messenger, are you? Blathering on like that.”

“Ahh... I haven’t introduced myself yet-”

As the messenger lifted their hood, a woman appeared from under it.

“I am Trea Luzandi Aura von Bunadara.”

“... Tch. So “*Mars*” came here personally.”

“Yes. I thought it would surprise you.”

Dios takes his eyes away from Bunadara and looks at the charging cavalry.

-There's still some distance.

He returned his gaze to where it once was, and Dios made a decision.

“If I can capture you here, we can escape from this situation.”

He vigorously swings his spear down.

The tip stopped right before hitting Bunadara's shoulder.

“Are you prepared?”

“What should I prepared myself for?”

“To become a hostage!”

He couldn't possibly kill her.

So he struck her flank with the handle portion of his spear.

However, Dios's attack did not work.

“Wh-What?!”

Bunadara easily stopped the attack.

In her hand was a beautiful sword of gold and silver.

“This sword was made with spirit stones. Isn’t it beautiful?”

Spirits favor beautiful waterfronts, and very rarely produce crystals infused with their essence.

These crystals are by no means inferior in brilliance to jewels, and people respectfully call them spirit stones.

3~7 spirit stones are found within the empire’s territory each year.

Even an empire owning such large amounts of land only takes in that much. There are countries which do not get any spirit stones at all.

And so, their value keeps going up with each year due to their rarity.

You can even build enough of a fortune to relax for the rest of your life with one spirit stone.

Even now, the only ones who possess them are the royal family and their extension.

“Where did you get something like that?!”

“His excellency granted it unto me. He is magnanimous.”

Pop, pop-

Dios heard a strange sound, so he turned to look at his spear.

His spear was quickly freezing from the tip.

“Tch!”

He quickly tosses his spear aside and draws the sword from his waist.

Cavalrymen are behind him with their spears at the ready, and infantrymen with their swords drawn.

But even if they did attempt to battle, they were no match against a spirit weapon.

Although her fighting abilities are originally high, her physical abilities were likely drastically raised by the divine protection of a spirit.

Otherwise, she wouldn't have been able to stop Dios's spear so easily.

Dios lets out a deep breath as he thinks.

If they made a desperate attempt at capturing Bunadara, it would give the enemy's cavalry unit enough time to make contact with them.

In which case, the ones to get captured will be Dios's side. Total annihilation would be inevitable.

Dios raised his sword and let out a shout which rang through the plains.

"Alright boys! Even if your comrades are about to fall, don't stop to help them! Look forward and keep running without looking back!"

"Yeah!"

"Charge!!!"

Dios swung his sword down, kicked the side of his horse, and dashed straight towards the plains.

"Oooooooooohhh!"

He raised a rousing warcry, and following behind him, were 100 cavalymen and 50 infantrymen. All the wagons were abandoned.

Immediately, Dios and his cavalry unit clashed with the enemy's heavy cavalry unit.

"Come on!"

Dios steals a spear from an enemy, and knocks the heavy cavalryman from atop his horse.

Soon, his aide riding by his side yelled out.

“Captain Dios! We’ve been separated from the units behind us!”

The cavalry and infantry units behind were trampled down by the enemy’s heavy cavalry.

Their daily training is not half hearted. Neither does their experience fall behind the 1st Imperial Army’s.

However, numbers aside, they were simply at a disadvantage against the heavy cavalry.

This was because they were lightly equipped for the sake of mobility.

“Leave them!”

Dios had no other choice but to make such a decision.

They were overwhelmingly outnumbered. There was no way they could be saved.

Regardless, as if he couldn’t completely throw away the hope to save them, the aide could not look away.

“We can still make it in time!”

“Do you not understand the situation?!”

“B-But, they are valuable private soldiers given to us from her highness!”

“They’re also my subordinates! I’m not repeating myself!”

The aide did not press the matter further.

No, maybe it’s more accurate to say that he couldn’t.

This was because Dios’s face was steeped in rage.

With an expression of an ogre, he thrust at the oncoming enemies and smashed his spear into them.

Each time he did this, he would steal their spears as he ended their lives.

“Move it! You weaklings shouldn’t be blocking my path!”

“Are you the “*Ogre*”, you bastard?! You’re rather skilled! I can test my mettle against you!”

An enemy joyfully yelled out to Dios as he approached him.

He was a heavy cavalryman with a purple cloth wrapped around his arm- It was the sign of a captain.

“Shut up!”

Dios changed his grip to hold the spear horizontally and tossed it with all his might.

“Guoh!”

The spear pierced his helmet, disfiguring it. A large amount of blood flew out from the cracks.

“Th-The captain was-?!”

Before the heavy cavalryman could finish his sentence, his head went flying.

As blood sprayed up, Dios pointed his sword to his right, completely dyed in red.

“We’re cutting across the enemy’s left flank! I’ll open a path! Ignore the weaklings and follow me!”

Even if they got past the heavy cavalry, what lied in wait were the heavy infantrymen.

There was the archery unit as well. Plunging towards them on purpose was a foolish choice.

Dios chose to break through the left flank to avoid that.

He was not mistaken. When they broke away from the battlefield, their cavalry unit had dwindled to 20 units.



Bunadara sighed at the soldiers avoiding her.

“Really now... Such a poor plan...”

Bunadara turned back, and what she saw, was the moment the heavy cavalry and light cavalry clashed.

The fallen cavalry units were trampled, and the following infantry units were crushed to death.

Her aide would constantly give her a status report, so she was not worried at all.

This would likely end soon with few casualties on her side.

More importantly, her mind was full with thoughts of the Sixth Princess.

Three cavalymen approached her. They dismounted their horses, touched their hands to their chest and knelt on one knee.

“Approximately 20 units broke away. We captured 60 units and the rest are dead. We cannot confirm her highness among the dead. Furthermore, we have confirmed the captain’s death, and the death of 12 heavy cavalymen on our side. We are currently hurrying to confirm the number of heavy and light wounds.”

“I see. There are more casualties than I predicted. Also, treat the 60 captured private soldiers of the Sixth Princess kindly. Any who abuse or treat them harshly will be severely punished. Also, be sure to respectfully bury the dead.”

“Understood. Will we pursue them?”

“No, leave them be.”

“But, the Sixth Princess... It was his highness’s order to kill her.”

“Even if we chased after and captured them, the Sixth Princess is not among them. I confirmed earlier that there were no women in their group.”

“Is it not possible she was in disguise?”

“I did think of the possibility, but considering the 6th Princess’s personality, I doubt that’s likely. She is not one to quietly stand by in the rear... Also, the number of infantrymen does not match the report. We should assume they split into two groups.”

“I see. Then where is her highness?”

Bunadara contemplates.

No doubt she’s thinking of the empire’s territory in her head.

After a short while, her mouth immediately formed into a smile.

“The small country of Baum. Did she cross over Himmel mountain?”

“Why would she go there...?”

“They likely split into two groups thinking the successor to the Imperial throne would dispatch an army. That decision was not mistaken.”

“Will we go to Baum as well?”

“A poor move. If we entered a country without notice or permission with this many soldiers, it would lead to a diplomatic issue. Regardless of it being a domestic issue, we’d likely receive criticism, and it would give an opening for the other successors to take advantage of the situation, and Third Prince Brutar’s position would be in danger.”

“Then, what will you do?”

“As we first planned, let us head for Margrave Grinda’s territory.”

“As you wish.”

Bunadara turned away from the soldier whose head was lowered, and looked towards the Grauzarm mountain range with the look of a lion chasing its prey.

Episode 7

Rest

Imperial Year 1023, May 7th.

Normally, they would already have entered the small country of Baum by now.

However, Hiro was with them, and they were encountering more groups of ogles than they had anticipated.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, they were delayed significantly, and so they set up camp as the sun set.

The tent in which the princess slept was noticeably larger than the others. The other tents were gathered around hers, like a small village.

Many fires were lit in the vicinity. There were groups of 4 heavy infantrymen securing the area in all directions so that they would be able to deal with monsters no matter where they came from.

You could see Hiro's white breath in the cold as he gazed up at the night sky.

Liz comes out from the tent behind him.

"What's wrong? We have to get up early tomorrow, too. You need to sleep... Are you perhaps hungry?"

Hiro shakes his head side to side.

"No, I was looking at the stars."

Though, he had another reason as well...

"Do you like stars, Hiro?"

"That's not it. But I've never seen them from so close before, so I was thinking it was

interesting.”

“I see.”

She stands close enough to hear his breathing.

Hiro looked up at the sky once again in order to hide his embarrassment and shaking.

Maybe it was because they were near the peak, but the air was crisp and clean, and the stars were sparkling in the night sky.

It was an overwhelming brilliance that almost seemed to be within arm’s reach.

Though their breaths were dyed white, strangely enough, they didn’t feel the cold.

“I heard this from my mother a long time ago.”

Liz’s sweet, clear, transparent voice felt nice on the ears.

“When people die, they become spirits, and the souls which become spirits turn into stars, and together with the spirit king, they continue to watch over the world. Whenever you’re scared, whenever you’re sad, whenever you’re lonely, look up at the sky. If you do, you’ll know that you’re not alone.”

“That’s nice.”

“It’s a lullaby any citizen of the Empire knows.”

Liz’s white teeth peek out from her lips as she laughs sheepishly.

Then, Liz grasped Hiro’s left hand tightly.

“Now, let’s go back to the tent and go to sleep before you catch a cold.”

Hiro was dragged away before he even had time to be embarrassed.

“W-Wait! Wait! We can’t!”

“Why not?”

“Wh-What do you mean why not...? A grown man and woman can't sleep together in the same tent... “

Yes, that was the reason he was outside.

After they finished pitching the tent, Liz uttered these words: “You sleep here too, Hiro.”

After coming to the conclusion that he wanted to avoid that, he came up with the plan to kill time outside and wait until she fell asleep first.

But it seems that ended in vain.

“Cerberus is here, too.”

“Well, he is, but...”

Cerberus is already asleep in the tent.

“Come on, get in, get in!”

She pushed Hiro from behind, and he stumbled inside.

There is a lantern hanging from the top of the tent with a candle burning in it.

It's enough to see everything inside, so it isn't completely dark, but it was just the right amount of illumination to set a romantic mood to get the heart pounding.

An extremely thick blanket is lain on the ground to prevent the pebbles from hurting them.

Cerberus was camped out in the middle, and a bedcover-like blanket was prepared to his left.

“It would've been nice if we could've taken a bath... Sorry if I reek of sweat.”

“You know, I can't sleep with you after all.”

“Eh, do I stink that much...?”

Sniff, sniff. Liz takes a whiff of her body odor with her finely shaped nose.

-That's not it... Actually, I'm the one who reeks of sweat.

“You can't really smell anything on yourself, huh? So let's not worry about it and just go to sleep.”

“No, I'll just sleep somewhere else... I really can't sleep with-”

“Stop complaining already! I told you we have to get up early tomorrow, too!”

“Gah!”

Hiro felt an intense shock to his back and let out a gasp.

In an instant, his vision went black. When he opened his eyes, he was on his side.

He can see Liz's face in his peripheral.

Though, there was no need for him to check with his eyes because he could feel her warmth all over his body.

“Cerberus doesn't like me holding him when he sleeps.”

-Can you not use me for a substitute for something like that?

“Ahh... I feel like I can fall asleep right away today...”

On the other hand, Hiro couldn't sleep because his heart was pounding so hard.

“Zzz-... Mm...”

“... She falls asleep really quickly.”

-Okay, what do I do now...?

It would be nice if he could hurry and count some sheep, but all he sees are demons.

He gets the feeling he'll get evil thoughts if he looks to his side, even though he's already in a dangerous predicament.

Hiro took on demon after demon as he fell into darkness...

Nothing feels longer than the time you're awake.

Nothing feels shorter than the time you're asleep.

Even when everyone was awake and putting away their tents, one man was still sleeping.

It was Hiro.

"Cerberus. Don't you think he's sleeping really soundly?"

[Woof.]

"I feel bad, but I have to wake him up."

[Woof.]

Though his eyelids were heavy, Hiro's consciousness was drawn out from the darkness after hearing that exchange.

As if to say he wanted to enjoy the warmth and happiness a bit longer, he pulled the blanket over his head.

As he did-

"Guooooohh!"

Hiro's eyes popped out as a shock spread from his stomach to his entire body.

"Oh...? That's not the reaction I was expecting."

He rolls over as he holds back the pain from his stomach. He wants to hide his pain, but his body won't move.

Hiro could do nothing but gasp for breath, as if he were a fish that had washed ashore.

“Hehe. Ahahah. Hahahahaha.”

Her laughs sounded like a quivering bell. Hiro looked towards her tear-filled eyes.

“H-Hiro... what's with that look? What are you doing making me laugh first thing in the

morning?”

Liz held her stomach and looked like she was enjoying herself.

“Th-That's my line... What are you doing?”

She was straddled over Hiro's stomach.

It was where he was throbbing with pain.

It's pretty much a given that she's the cause of that pain.

He wanted to ask her why she was so violent.

“W-Well, I wanted to wake you up.”

“No, but still, there's a gentler way of waking some-”

Hiro was unable to finish his sentence.

This was because there was an ogre standing at the entrance of the tent.

“... K-Kid. What are you doing...?”

It was Tris, with his muscular body built like a bear.

“N-No, you’ve got it all wrong!”

Though the situation looked fishy, the truth is that it was nothing sexual.

Liz looked at Hiro, puzzled.

“What does he have wrong?”

“Can you just stay quiet?! You’re going to complicate things!”

This was a matter in which Hiro’s life was on the line.

Tris approached closer as he stomped his feet like a bear.

“To think that you were a beast with such a face... Princess, please get away from him. I must cut this one to pieces.”

The blade which came out smoothly from his waist gave off a dull light.

Unable to read the atmosphere, Liz tilted her head to the side.

“I don’t really understand what’s going on... but are we ready to depart?”

“... Well, we are, but...”

“Then let’s leave as soon as we eat breakfast.”

The weight above Hiro disappeared, and Liz stood up.

“Hiro, we have bread and soup for breakfast. Can you eat?”

“Ah, yeah... I’m fine.”

“Then let’s eat up and enter Baum! You too, Tris! Don’t just stand there in a daze, go eat your breakfast!”

“B-But, grr- Boy, I’ll let this pass for the Princess’s sake...”

Tris completely released his tension, dropped his shoulders, and left the tent.

As Hiro stroked his chest, Liz carried over his breakfast, which he began to eat.

He took a sip of his soup and bit into a slightly hard piece of bread. The soup had chicken meat and was well seasoned with salt.

Cerberus sat right in front of him as if he wanted some.

Then, as he turned away, Liz was there changing.

“Huh? You’re cha- whoa!”

He spit up his breakfast all over Cerberus’s face, but that was the least of his worries.

“Wha, cough, what, cough cough, what are... you doing?!”

“What do you mean? I’m changing.”

“Why are you changing?!”

“I can’t take a bath, but I want to change my underwear at least.”

“Well, that’s true, but I’m in here.”

“Is there a problem?”

Liz tilted her head and looked at him, puzzled.

Considering the incident last night as well, rather than saying she’s unfamiliar, it would be more accurate to say that she’s completely lacking in knowledge in that department.

Maybe she can’t help it because she’s an Imperial princess.

But that’s really dangerous.

-For my life, mainly...

I'm sure Tris would kill me if he saw this situation.

"Listen closely to what I'm about to say."

"Can it wait until I change?"

"W-Wait, wait! Just hold on a second!"

"Come on, what is it?!"

"I'll turn around, so can you change during that time?"

"I don't really mind... But why?"

"There isn't any deep meaning to it. I'm going to turn around! Okay?!"

"... I don't really understand, but okay."

After Hiro turned around, the tent was overrun with the sound of cloth rubbing.

It was as if the sounds were reverberating like a water drop falling into a pool of water.

Each second felt extremely long, and Hiro just waited quietly as the torturous time passed by.

"I'm done."

"Phew..."

He suddenly started sweating profusely. He felt fatigued, as if he had been running for a long period of time.

Liz, who was oblivious to the atmosphere around Hiro, began to eat her breakfast right in front of him.

"... Anyway, I should eat, too."

Though Hiro thought he would finally be able to eat some food, Cerberus had already eaten everything without leaving a single scrap.

Episode 8

Glimpse

Hiro was welcomed by a ray of blinding light as he went outside with Liz.

He takes in the brisk air, and as he looks around, he notices all the tents the soldiers slept in have been put away neatly.

The only tent left was the one Hiro and Liz were in until now, and the one who stole his breakfast was sunbathing on a rock nearby.

After everyone worked together to put away the last tent, they were finally off.

Their goal was the small country of Baum. They would head south along the mountain after they made their descent.

It would take 16 days by foot for them to reach their destination of Margrave Grinda's territory.

He was prepared for the journey, but he didn't think it would have been such a long one.

But he wasn't necessarily regretting it.

Every joint in his body hurt, but he just had to bear with it.

Somewhere deep in his heart, he was enjoying the journey. That much was certain.

As they descended Mt. Himmel, about halfway down, they encountered a new monster.

Neither ogle nor ogre, a large giant with an even greater physique appeared before them.

"... It's huge."

“... A gigas. It’s said that they were originally spirits, but they were banished to Aletia after they rebelled against the Spirit King.”

“So is it as strong as it looks?”

It was three times Hiro’s height, and its torso was covered in rusty armor.

Its lower body was long and slender, and twisted like a snake.

“Even if it’s corrupted, it used to be a spirit, so it’s strong. Compared to an ogre, it has intelligence, and-?!”

An enormous tail came swinging down at Liz who was in the middle of her explanation.

BOOM!

A cloud of dust rose up, and debris came falling down.

Liz stepped to the side and evaded them.

“It’s a hostile monster!”

Crimson sword in hand, she sped off.

Following behind her was a unit of light infantry, while Tris was yelling out orders to the soldiers on standby.

“Archery unit! Once the formation’s set, cover the Princess! Heavy infantry, create a wall and advance!”

Immediately, the heavy infantry unit created a two files of shield walls and began to advance.

Behind them was the archery unit, stepping forward with bows drawn.

Hiro would stay behind them and watch the fight.

“I’ll draw its attention! Use that time to ready the javelins!”

Liz yelled at the light infantry troop and swung Laevateinn towards the gigas.

A cloud-like mass of fire began to burn and spread in front of the gigas.

[GOYA?!]*

**TL note: The cries of the gigas were written in English, so they're left as is.*

“Now! Throw them!”

The light infantry unit let their spears fly towards the gigas who was recoiling.

Then, Liz’s voice rings out.

“Archery unit, fire!”

Whoosh. Whoosh.

The arrows tore through the air and fanned out in the sky.

In an instant, a scream could be heard from the gigas who became a bed of needles.

[GURYAUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!]

“?! “

“Retreat!”

As Liz shouted sensing danger, a tail came swinging down at the light infantry unit.

“Gah!”

“?!”

A number of light infantrymen who were late in escaping disappeared into a cloud of dust.

Liz went slashing at the gigas with Laevateinn, but it immediately shifted its body and evaded her attacks.

Rumble-

The gigas swung its arm towards the young girl with such force, you could hear the wind roar.

“Haa!”

Liz flipped Laevateinn around and swung upward!

[UGYOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!]

Blood gushed out of the gigas’s arms and was sprayed all around, while the flames burned its arm off.

The gigas goes on a rampage, as if to distract itself from the pain. The surrounding light infantry unit gets caught up in it and gets blown away.

Hiro’s face is full of despair as he pictures the light infantrymen being trampled as they roll down the slope.

“Princess! This way!”

The heavy infantry unit led by Tris had made it in time. They thrust their shields into the ground and instantly created an iron wall.

“Put your strength in your core, all of you! Dig your feet into the ground! You won’t be able to call yourselves heavy infantrymen if you’re blow away!”

The archery unit provided cover fire as the light infantry unit withdrew.

The gigas evaded the rain of arrows and took pursuit with a fearsome expression, but it simply ended up ramming into the iron wall with its tail.

“Hurry and take the injured to the rear!”

Liz, who had escaped into the wall, yelled out orders, and the injured soldiers were taken to the rear.

The heavy infantry unit's wall of shields shook violently from the gigas's fierce attacks.

The iron wall began to change shape after taking just two attacks from the gigas.

It's likely that it's only a matter of time before the wall of shields crumbles.

"Princess! We must first do something about these attacks!"

Tris yelled out.

"I'll draw its attention, so can you take that chance to cut off its tail?"

"You speak of such recklessness! Attacking with the heavy infantry first and creating an opening is the wise thing to do!"

"But that'll result in a lot of casualties. It's a sounder plan for me to draw its attention in this situation."

"We can not risk having anything happening to you, Princess. That will be our last- Wait, b-boy?!"

Liz shifted her gaze after hearing Tris's surprised voice.

There was one space in the wall of shields big enough for a person to pass through, and in front of it, stood Hiro.

"Hiro?! What are you doing?! Get back here!"

Liz tried to race after him, but Hiro had disappeared to the other side.

"You idiot! Wait!"

Liz's angry voice came flying in from behind.

-It's not like... I want to do something this scary, either.

But I can't call myself a man if I don't take action here.

I haven't done a single thing to repay my debt.

"... I see it."

The gigas's tail shakes the wind as it passes by its nose.

The earth beneath its feet is gouged out, and an infinite number of debris comes flying in.

But surprisingly, Hiro evades it all.

He moved his head, feet, hands, and shoulders, only slightly to literally sidestep all of it.

If he had made one mistake, he would've have gotten off with a simple wound.

Hiro's legs were shaking, but he hit his thighs as if to scold himself.

"Liz! I'll draw its attention, so you defeat it!"

He picked up one of the javelins that were thrown by the light infantry and glared at the gigas.

"What are you saying?!"

[GURUAAAAA!]

Liz's voice was drowned out by the gigas's roar.

The gigas began its attack, but it was in vain.

Hiro dodged everything.

"No way..."

Liz watched the spectacle carefully with a look of disbelief.

“I don’t believe this. Is that really something a person can do?”

Tris was the same. His mouth was gaping wide open from surprise.

-After effects from 3 years ago.

Hiro sees the movements of his opponents as if they’re at a standstill.

A martial artist would say that that is an ultimate goal.

Even among those who train for their entire lives, only a handful are capable of this.

Because they are able to see the small particles of breath, they can take in the movement of the air and perceive everything.

Hiro kept this from his doctor because he didn’t want to worry his family.

But having said that, Hiro was no doubt clueless as to the cause of his condition.

And so, Hiro was unaware of its name.

But the people of Aletia knew it.

“Uranus...”

Liz muttered, dumbfounded.

“Over here!”

The gigas effortlessly swats away the javelin thrown by Hiro and turns towards him.

The gigas’s powerful arm roars by Hiro, but it doesn’t even graze him.

If a master of a martial art had seen this, there’s no doubt they would have gasped in admiration.

His movements were that polished. However, he had a frantic expression.

Even if he were hit just once, he would probably be smashed to pieces, and his flesh, strewn about.

While holding back that fear, Hiro continued to evade the gigas's attacks.

Maybe it was because he went insane from the overwhelming fear, but his lips were forming into a smile.

Hiro spoke as the corners of his mouth shook.

"We have a ferocious wolf on our side too you know?"

[GURUA?]

"Gahh!"

Cerberus, who had been bating his breath and waiting for a good opportunity, leapt out from beside Hiro.

His dashing figure looked like a speeding bullet, and his sharp fangs tore through the air and crossed over the gigas.

As Cerberus landing on the ground, blood gushed out from the gigas's neck like water flooding out of a faucet.

The gigas's movements slowed, and she was not one to let that chance slip by.

Laevateinn was clad in flames and scorched the air.

When the heat wave reached the gigas, Liz completely disappeared from the monster's field of vision.

Poof-

The air behind the gigas explodes.

Sensing something, Hiro picks up a spear and throws it. He picks up yet another spear and hurls it.

This time, without being batted away, the two spear pierced through the gigas's chest, as if they were being absorbed.

[GORRYUGOHOL?!]

The gigas threw up blood everywhere, unaware of what happened.

But the monster would soon realize as it was looking around its surroundings.

-That only its head was moving.

Seeing it's lower half engulfed in flames, it screams.

[GKUIRAIIAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!]

It began to feel the pain.

The burnt smell gets carried by the wind and reaches Hiro.

It was such an intensely foul stench, it made him want to vomit.

"Ugh..."

As he was holding his nose without thinking, he sees her.

Liz leapt up with the sun to her back, and was ready to swing Laevateinn down.

"I'll put you to rest now!"

Laevateinn's blade easily cut through the gigas

The blood from the body that was cut in half evaporated, and its entire body was wrapped in white smoke.

Maybe it was because it was already dead, but the monster's enormous body fell quietly to the ground without so much as a scream. And as it hit the ground, the body was wrapped in flames.

"Hiro!"

He noticed her rushing towards him.

He tried to hold the girl who was running towards him with arms wide open, but his body wouldn't listen to him.

Even Hiro wasn't sure if it was because all his tension was released at once, or if it was because his fatigue had built up.

As if a marionette who had its strings cut off, Hiro's knees gave out, and he crumbled to the ground.

Liz's expression changed.

"Hiro! Get a hold of yourself! Tris, get over here, now!"

Hiro sank into the darkness as he enjoyed the sensation of having his head being held.

Episode 9

Ally

Imperial Year 1023, May 12th.

Margrave Grinda's Territory, border town of Links.

A unique town where a grassland and desert come together.

The town's citizens are divided with the upper class living in the grassland area in the northern district, and the lower class living in the desert area in the southern district.

In the northern district, is the mansion of Margrave Ruzen Kiolk von Grinda.

The walls have a white theme, and in the center is an octagon tower, with a sloping rooftop all around.

The two story wooden mansion built atop a plateau to look down on the town, had an oppressive feeling to it.

Surrounding the mansion was a tall fence, and in the center, there was a man who had collapsed in front of the iron gate.

The soldiers standing guard on each side of the gate rushed to him, flustered.

"H-Hey. What's wrong?"

"Those are some serious wound there!"

The soldiers turned pale after turning the man over, face up.

There were wounds all over his body. There was even a large wound on his face.

The man grabbed hold of one of the soldiers.

"C-Convey this message to Margrave Grinda immediately."

“... H-Hey! I don't know what happened, but let go of me!”

“You're wounded! Settle down!”

The strength coming from his thoroughly trained arm was beyond normal.

Even though the two soldiers tried to pull him away, he desperately clung on.

“P-Please! My name is Dios von Michael... I serve Lady Celia Estreya... Please, my message!”

“A-Alright, just let go already! I'll deliver it right now!”

“Please... there's no time...”

They didn't have the leisure of confirming the validity of his story.

Dios's grip continues to grow stronger, and if they make a wrong move, their lives would be in danger.

But having said that, they weren't able to harm him either. If what he was saying was true, there'd be no telling what sort of punishment they would receive if they caused him harm.

“Hey! Notify the garrison captain!”

One of the soldiers nodded and ran towards the mansion.

Sensing something out of the ordinary, the garrison captain immediately came out from the gate.

“Margrave Grinda will be here soon, so can you let him go?”

He gently put his hand on Dios's shoulder as he tried to persuade him.

The two glared at each other. This lasted a few seconds.

Dios nods, loses his strength, and crumbles to the ground.

“So he lost consciousness, huh. Call a doctor immediately. If he really is Lady Celia Estreya’s subordinate, Margrave Grinda will reprimand us.”

“Yes, sir!”

After the garrison captain watched the soldier run off, he looked down on Dios.

“Regardless of whether he’s telling the truth or not, it’s certainly not going to be good news...”

The garrison captain’s sighs became small, dark clouds.

Dios awakened two days thereafter.

He came to in one of the rooms of the mansion.

“There were 150 men... I was the only one who survived.”

Dios’s words were steeped in chagrin.

After they withdrew from the battlefield, the wounded soldiers died atop their horses, one after another.

Next, there were bandits. You could hardly expect such fatigued humans to fight well.

By the time he escaped death’s doorsteps and his vision started to blur, he was the only one remaining.

Looking down on him with with a heartbroken expression, was Margrave Ruzen Kielk von Grinda.

“I see. That was quite an ordeal. I’d like to tell you to take your time and rest, but...”

Margrave Grinda seemed to be at a loss for words, but after shaking his head to the side a few times, he handed a single piece of paper to Dios.

“This arrived immediately after you were carried in here.”

He took it with a puzzled look on his face and opened the letter.

“This is...!”

Dios looked to Margrave Grinda with imploring eyes.

“Be at ease. I will not do anything to betray my niece.”

“But... with this...”

“I know the alias of *“Mars”*. Even if this is a remote area, we hear that name often. I doubt I could hold a candle to her, if we fought. And even if I wanted to petition the Emperor, he is currently on a military expedition.”

“Then, will you hand over the princess?”

“I told you, I will not betray my niece. Because she a memento of my younger sister.”

“Your opponent is 2,000 strong. How many soldiers are you able to assemble here?”

“... It would be a different story if we were in wartimes, but you could say this place knows not of war. The Grinda territory keeps 3,000 at the ready. But that doesn't mean we're able to assemble them all, nor do we have the time to... Gathering even 1,000 would be questionable.”

“Their commander is *“Mars”*. That would not suffice...”

Even against a small force, it's not likely that that female panther would let her guard down.

She'll come with everything she has to crush us. I knew this first hand.

“We'll try to await the Emperor's return, even if our opponent is the one feared as *“Mars, God of War”*.”

“When is the Emperor returning?”

“Word of his victory reached us 5 days ago. He should be on his way back with the First Imperial Prince right about now. Maybe 1 week... 3 days at least. I’ve already sent a messenger. We will not lose this battle until then.”

“Not lose this battle you say...”

“That’s right. According to my scout, the enemy army is currently heading south from Zegen Village to the Grole Plains.”

“So the decisive battle will be on the Grole Plains.”

Margrave Grinda nods in response to Dios’s words.

“The enemy is likely aiming for the borders of the small country of Baum... But I won’t allow that. First, we stop them at Grole Plains.”

“Then I will go as well.”

“No, I want you to remain here to welcome Elizabeth. Although it’s not exactly well fortified, can I have you take refuge in Fort Alt? For now, I want you to stay there and do whatever you can to buy some time.”

Fort Alt is a stronghold built near the border of Baum.

However, because they are never at war, there are less than 100 soldiers stationed there.

Not only that, because equipment is old, it wasn’t sturdy enough to be considered a stronghold.

It was too late to regret their excessive celebration of peace come now, but Margrave Grinda lowered his head.

“I do feel sorry. If only I were a better leader... The situation would not have fallen to this.”

“No, I am the one who brought this here. I am the one who is sorry.”

Dios was the one who had brought this troublesome ember with him.

If he wanted to protect his current position, all he would have to do is present the princess.

But regardless, Margrave Grinda is willing to fight.

Just the fact that he would lend his strength in this hopeless battle meant a lot.

“I’m sorry...”

“The princess says the same thing. Please raise your head.”

“Such kind words... You have my thanks.”

Dios thought the Margrave had raised his head, but it lowered once more.

No matter how much time passed, it didn’t seem like he would raise his head again, so Dios changed the subject.

“So, what do we do now?”

“We head out as soon as the soldiers assemble.”

“Then I leave that to you. I must go welcome the princess...”

“I will send a messenger to Fort Alt. I leave Elizabeth to you.”

“Understood. Until next time—”

Dios extended his hand.

Margrave Grinda smiled and grasped it.

“Yes. Let us meet again, together with Elizabeth.”

“Yes. Surely.”

And so, the two vowed to meet again and began to take action for their respective roles.



Five days later, Imperial Year 1023, May 17th.

Margrave Grinda is 8 sels (24km) away from the border town of Links.

Heavy cavalrymen were beginning to spread out on Grole Plains.

Behind the line of heavy cavalry was the enemy's headquarters protected by 500 cavalrymen and a number of flags with crests of purple land and sword and shield planted into the ground.

In the center were a man and woman on horseback.

The man tilted his head and looked to the woman beside him.

"Uranus?"

"Yes, do you know of it, Viscount Spitz?"

"Of course I do. It's one of the 3 Great Hidden Eyes of this world. Is it not true that not even a single elf possesses them currently, even with their extended lives?"

Spitz recalled something and opened his mouth to speak again.

"Ahh, that's right. Speaking of elves, there was one among Prince Schtobel's staff of officers."

"Yes, I've had many chances to exchange words with him, and so I asked about Uranus."

"Well they live long lives and have a wealth of knowledge, so I'm sure they know about many things."

“Yes, it was a very worthwhile conversation. According to him, Uranus is apparently capable of reading and understanding all things in heaven, earth, and man, and is able to manipulate the battlefield. He said those eyes would give an absurdly unfair advantage.”

“Was he not joking? I can hardly imagine eyes having such powers...”

Spitz shrugs his shoulders in disbelief.

But he immediately changes his expression.

This was because Bunadara’s face showed she was serious.

“It is certain that it truly existed. And it was an elf, whose people hate jokes, that said this.

I believe it’s credible. Do you not think so, Viscount Spitz?”

“I’m unable to believe it so suddenly. That would render strategy and tactics meaningless. Furthermore, victory is achieved through the hands of people. It is not something you can obtain simply by seeing it with your eyes.”

“Precisely. Those who will seize the heavens, is man. Those who walk the land, is man. Those who manipulate man, is man. Simply seeing would mean you’re no different from a bystander. But regardless, I still wish for it. A heart pounding battle of wits with one who possesses

Uranus!”

Bunadara spreads open both arms and looks down.

There, stood a military formation of 1,500 soldiers standing by.

And glaring at them from a distance, were 900 men led by Margrave Grinda.

From the headquarters built atop a small hill, Bunadara spoke as she gazed at the enemy troops spread across the plains.

“Until then, I suppose I’ll enjoy the sideshows.”

The lives of those who oppose her, the lives of those who resist, and the lives of those who are to be trampled...

They are all sacrifices offered unto “Mars”.

“In order to give reason to the lives you’ve led—”

The roaring of horse hooves, the war cries of the soldiers, and the screams of the hordes of men were all a requiem to Second Emperor Schwarz.

“—Annihilate the enemy.”

She gently whispered, with a smile on her lips.

The drums rang out, the hooves of the horses beat on the land, and 500 cavalymen began their advance from the right flank.

As Aura prepares to advance for her next move, a messenger comes rushing before her.

“An urgent message! The Principality of Lichtein is approaching the southern border with an army of approximately 15,000!”

Those words forebode great troubles to come.

Episode 10

God of War

It was a battlefield.

No matter where the eyes would turn, there were corpses everywhere.

There were ten thousand soldiers clashing, amassing an infinite number of dead bodies as a result of deeply held resentment.

Blood dyes the great pond red, and tiny raindrops fell from the heavens, as if it were crying.

That youth was at the center of it all, where it had become a melee.

His black clothes flutter in the wind, and his arms moved about, as if in sync.

A silver sword cuts through the air. It was a gentle swing, as if to brush off an insect.

With just that movement, the head of 5 soldiers went flying.

The youth kicked the great pond and went off running.

He was after the general's head.

That is the most effective and soundest way of ending the war.

But the enemy won't allow him to pass through easily. A thousand burly, elite soldiers stand in his way.

Before him, is a tightly packed wall with no openings.

Surely, the general's head must feel like an infinite distance away.

– But that would be for an ordinary person.

The youth rushes across as he cuts down the heads of the enemy soldiers without colliding into a single one.

All paths have a final destination. The only difference is the distance.

One can only imagine what the enemy Commander in Chief was feeling when he saw the youth.

“R-Ridiculous! How did you get here?!”

“...”

The enemy general gasped as he saw the youth’s face bathed in the blood of his victims.

He had extremely deep, cold eyes that could freeze you to your very soul.

Almost as if a jet black void had taken hold of the enemy general, he was being swallowed whole by a darkness.

“... Those obsidian-like eyes. I’ve heard of them.”

There was a man among the soldiers of a ruined country that was growing stronger at an unstoppable rate.

It was the talk of the countries in the area, that there was a man able to read and understand all things in heaven, earth, and man.

One upon whom regalo* was bestowed by the spirit king.

(TL note: Spanish for gift/present.)

The general had scoffed and brushed it off as an outrageous story...

“Is that “Uranus”?!”

“No... Black eyes are normal in my world. But it’s interpreted as strange here because it doesn’t exist in yours...”

The enemy general takes a step towards the perplexed youth.

He held in his hand a giant axe.

“I’ll kill you here and keep those eyes as a war trophy.”

The enemy general’s face warps with joy.

It couldn’t be helped that he let his guard down, seeing as how there was only one enemy before him.

He raises his boorish hand. As he does, enemy soldiers surround the youth and point their spears at him.

“Suffer and die an unsightly death—!”

Thump—

The enemy general’s head rolled across on the ground, covered in mud.

The surrounding soldiers are dumbfounded.

Only the Twin Black youth was aware of what happened.

Tap—

The youth lightly kicked the ground and began to dance.

The spear tips of the soldiers who regained their senses passed by the youth’s eyes.

Many spears were thrust upon him, but he leapt and dodged them as he cut off the heads of the enemy soldiers.

As he moved his sword in a gentle caressing manner, the heads of the enemy soldiers fell to the ground one and after another, as if ripened fruit falling from a tree.

The enemy soldiers shudder in fear— All this happened in the blink of an eye.

This was clearly not the work of a human being.

“So fast!”

The silver blade, flicking away the rain drops wetting the great pond, split the enemies in two, armor and all.

Splash—

The dead bodies fell into puddles.

In an instant, blood was spurting out all around the area like fountains.

A disgusting smell of a mix of fresh blood and rain was heavy in the air.

“Y, Y—!”

They weren't even given time to cry out.

Although it was a mountain of dead bodies that was amassing, it did not take much time.

From this point on, the enemy would be routed.

As if a louse had been crushed, the enemy army was trampled by one man.

The battle cries of that one man ring throughout the plains and chase down the running enemies.

The youth who left the pandemonic battlefield arrived at headquarters.

“Mars!”

It's unsure who said it first, but steadily, all the soldiers started to utter the name.

Eventually, the cheers were enough to cause the air tremble.

““““Mars! Mars! Mars! Mars!”“““

Thousands of soldiers were shouting. It rang to your very core.

As if a great pond rippling, with each step the youth took, the sea of soldiers split open.

People refer to that as the path of the king.

Two long lines formed on both sides, and the youth walked through the middle without hesitation.

““““Mars! Mars! Mars! Mars!”““““

A young man appeared before the youth.

As the young man raised one hand, silence— It suddenly became quiet around him.

He stepped quietly and approached the youth.

His expression somehow seemed angry.

“Really now, what is the meaning of my tactician heading to the frontline...?”

“I can’t allow this stalemate to drag on any longer. The battlefield has spread too much. We won’t have to move it even further west if this ends here!”

He pokes the youth in the head after his rebuttal.

The young man’s lips formed into a grin, and he looked as if he had just told an offensive joke.

“Next time, notify me, too. We can go rampaging together on the frontline.”

“That would upset the chain of command. You should just stay at the ready at headquarters.”

“But that would be a bore... Well, at any rate, no use in talking about matters that have passed.”

The young man patted the youth on both shoulders.

“Schwarz... You did well to return safely. I lost 100 years of my life when I heard you went out to the battlefield. Though, I gained 100 years when I heard that you defeated the enemy general.”

“You blow things out of proportion, Altius— That’s right, I brought back the general’s head. What do you want to do with it?”

Schwarz pointed behind him with his thumb, and there was an infantryman standing there with a white box.

“A guy who used to vomit just from seeing a dead body brought back a head? It sure can be scary when people get used to things.”

“Haha... I’m not used to it yet. Not with killing people, or people dying... But if I worry about that, I’d be on the other end.”

“Precisely.”

Nodding as if he were satisfied with Schwarz’s answer, Altius spoke to the soldier carrying the white box.

“No need to verify his identity. Carefully deliver him to his fatherland. Even if he was an enemy, if we forget to respect the dead, we are no different from mere animals.”

“Yes, sir!”

The soldier got on one knee and lowered his head.

Altius moved his gaze and patted Schwarz on the back.

“Now, let’s toast to our victory. Let’s notify the spirit king of this victory of our brethren.”

“I’m still underage so I can’t drink.”

“Don’t worry! I had some grape juice wrung out and brought for you!”

“... You’re thoroughly prepared.”

I can’t help but laugh at you sarcastically— You who never change.

(Ahh... this is a dream. Because there’s no way you’d be here.)

A dream which stirs a distant, nostalgic memory.

It was also a miraculous moment which allowed for a chance meeting.

A brilliant memory which never dulls.

However, all dreams eventually come to an end—

“Hiro! How long are you going to sleep! Wake up!”

Hiro, who was stripped of his blanket, pried open his heavy eyelids.

The image of a young girl with crimson hair flew into sight.

She has her hands at her hips and looks sullen.

No matter her expression, she always looks beautiful and charms those who see her.

“What are you doing spacing out? Get a grip. Are you fine with Cerberus eating your breakfast again?”

Hiro absentmindedly ignores her words, raises his upper body, and looks around his surroundings.

The room had an atmosphere of not having been used in a long time.

But it didn’t look like it was unattended to.

Near the window was a neatly arranged desk that had seen many years.

There were two flags on the wall behind it.

One flag had a crest with white soil and scales.

The other had a crest with black soil and a dragon holding a silver sword.

Looking at a bookshelf nearby, the books were old and turning yellow, but there was not a speck of dust.

Hiro was sleeping on a bed that was along the wall near the entrance.

Beside him, was a young girl, and at his feet, was Cerberus.

A young girl with crimson eyes— Liz pulled Hiro's arm.

“Come on, get up, get up.”

Imperial Year 1023, May 23rd.

The 18th days since they began their journey.

A location 66 sels away (198km) from the border between Margrave Grinda's territory and Baum.

Baum has only one town— Natur.

East of there, is the ocean. If you cross that ocean, you reach the eastern continent of Shaytan.

The town of Natur coexists with nature. It is a beautiful town which spreads across a gentle basin.

It experiences all the seasons, and at the center of the lovely townscape, was a white, box-shaped temple called <>.

Here, the spirit king is worshipped, and almost every day, not only the citizens of that country, but others as well, come to pay homage.

The small country of Baum has no king. The princess maiden of <> acts as their representative.

Currently, Hiro and his group are under the care of <>.

They arrived two days ago. When they crossed Mt. Himmel, they tried to stop by a nearby village to treat the wounded soldiers and nurse Hiro, but this was a bad idea.

Baum had noticed their presence.

Nine days after they finish treating the wounded and leave the village, they end up being surrounded by a small unit of knights.

The knight captain, who introduced himself as the princess maiden's representative, stepped forward and spoke.

[Is it not inconvenient here? If you don't mind, won't you come to <>?]

Thinking of the injured, Liz consents.

This is why they are here.

"Are you still sleepy? You're kind of weird lately, Hiro. You sort of seem dazed all the time."

"Hmm~... am I? I don't know."

"Woof!"

Hiro and Liz open the door, and...

"Hyah!"

"Wah!"

There was a woman with both hands on the floor and her head lowered.

“Good morning. Were you able to sleep well?”

Episode 11

Baptism

The princess maiden wore plain, white clothes, with a black skirt.

It gives off a sense of open-mindedness which naturally attracts men, and by adding her own charm to that, she enhances her allure.

The healing fragrance exuding from her was enough to carry your senses away.

Her beauty was enough to enrapture you, and her soft, gentle skin was glistening in the sun's rays.

And there was something even more intriguing about her.

Her ears were oddly long and pointed.

Perhaps because she noticed Hiro's impolite gaze, the princess maiden displayed a smile as beautiful as a garden in full bloom.

"Did my ears catch your eyes?"

"Ah, umm... well, they're an unusual shape."

"Hehe, that's true. They must be unusual to humans."

Unoffended, she laughs while touching her own ears.

Liz, who was standing next to him, dug her elbow into Hiro's side.

As he turns to face to her, she brings her mouth to his ear.

"She's an elf. They have a trait of long life, but what people envy about them is that they're all just so beautiful~"

"I-I see. It's true that her face looks otherworldly..."

You're just as beautiful. There's no way Hiro was capable of saying anything quick like that.

The princess maiden watched the two whisper as she maintained her smile.

"Also, they're really smart. There's an elf in my oldest brother's staff of officers, and—"

"Princess! What are you doing in a place like— wait, you again! Boy!"

"Uh, uh, I didn't do anything!"

The bear-like Tris looks furious as he approaches.

But he loses momentum midway.

There was a woman standing between him and Hiro.

"Master Tris, I ask that you please keep your voice down while inside Frieden."

"M-Mm... My apologies."

Tris gets on one knee and lowers his head.

"I'm glad you understand."

As the princess maiden once again turned towards the two, Tris turned to the side and opened a path.

"Please, breakfast has been prepared. We can converse at leisure there."

"Ah, yes, please."

"I was hungry. Thanks!"

The princess maiden led the way, and as the two followed...

"N-Not just once, but twice... I'll remember this, boy."

Is what could clearly be heard as they passed by Tris.

Hiro pretends he doesn't hear him and picks up his pace.

He senses a bloodlust shooting towards him from behind, but it must be his imagination.

The interior of Frieden is divided into 4 areas.

The central area is the site of baptism, where the spirit king is worshipped.

This is where newborn babies or first-time visitors of Frieden are invited to.

The eastern area is where maiden apprentices perform their training, and is closed off to outsiders.

The western area is the residential quarters for the maidens and maiden apprentices, and the southern area is used for pilgrims. An inn and dining hall can be found there.

Hiro and Liz had been invited to the residential quarters.

Tris and Liz's private soldiers were up all night at the inn.

While on their way to the western area, the princess maiden stops in her tracks and looks to Hiro.

"If I remember correctly... you haven't been baptized yet, have you, Master Hiro?"

"Baptized?"

"Oh, you haven't, Hiro?"

He doesn't recall receiving any baptism since he came from his world.

"Yes, I don't recall receiving one..."

"Then, would you come with me to the site of baptism, Master Hiro?"

“Guess there’s no choice. Hiro, make sure the spirit king takes a liking to you.”

“Hmph, I hope the boy gets cursed.”

The princess maiden shifts her gaze to Liz.

“Please go on ahead and enjoy your breakfast, Lady Celia Estreya. Do you know the way to the dining hall?”

“Don’t worry. I’ve been here a few times so I won’t get lost.”

“Then I shall take Master Hiro to the site of baptism. Is that all right with you?”

“Yeah. Hiro, there’s nothing to be afraid of, so relax and receive your baptism.”

Liz takes Tris and disappears into the hallway.

The princess maiden watches her go, then suddenly grasps Hiro’s hand.

“Now then, this way. Ahh, I’m holding your hand so you don’t get separated.”

“I-Is that why?! Y-You scared me.”

Hearing those words through her smile, overflowing with a mature charm, made Hiro’s heart pound hard enough to explode.

For a while thereafter, they walked silently along a passageway surrounded by white walls.

They turned so many times, and all the passageways looked so similar, that Hiro could no longer tell the way back.

Gradually, it started to get dimmer and dimmer, and finally, they came to a stop...

“We’re here. This is the site of baptism.”

“... This is...”

Hiro was taken aback.

The princess maiden lets go of his hand and disappears somewhere.

Hiro doesn't notice though. That is the extent of how overwhelmed he is.

The passageway stops abruptly, as if cut by a sharp blade, and before Hiro, stretched out a forest.

Hiro's feet moved forward on their own.

An icy blue stream of wind flows by, and a cool sensation brushes against his skin.

The chirps and tweets of small birds spread throughout the air.

As he comes out the other side of the forest, Hiro walks out to an open area and arrives at a spring.

Lined pillars surround the glittering spring.

Behind it, are two giant bronze statues.

Between them, was a floating white orb which gave off a divine light.

When he lowered himself and extended his hand to try to touch the water, the grass behind him rustled.

Hiro gasped and turned around.

"I apologize for the wait. I would like to begin the baptism now."

There, stood the princess maiden, wearing a piece of cloth so thin he could see her snow-white skin...

Her breasts were slightly visible, and below those overwhelmingly seductive tips, was her narrow waist.

He looks further down, where there is a shadow cast between her feet.

Before Hiro, stood a brilliant, white female body with a keenly honed beauty.

He could see her entire body. It would rather have been better if she weren't wearing anything at all.

“Is something the matter?”

“Umm... uhh, what is a baptism?”

“It is to receive the blessing of the spirit king.”

“Is that something you can't do alone?”

“This is a special case.”

“Wh-Why is it special?”

He tries to hide his face so as not to see her, but he hears the sound of grass rustling from her footsteps.

He could tell the princess maiden is closing the gap between them.

“I am not able to say. However, I am able to provide you with an impetus.”

He could tell the princess maiden was crouching.

Her thigh came flying into view, with its vibrant, white skin.

A hand was placed gently on his shoulder, and it moved slowly to touch Hiro's cheek.

She urged him to look up, and he was unable to resist.

They lock eyes from a distance close enough to touch each other's noses.

“... I am genuinely joyful about your safe return.”

A trailed of tears ran down her cheeks, and gently caressed her damp lips.



“Tris! Hiro wasn’t there!”

“Please be calm. The Sixth Imperial Princess should not be running around so.”

“B-But he wasn’t at the site of baptism! He might’ve gotten lost...”

“I don’t think that is possible with the princess maiden accompanying him...”

“Then where did he go...? I bet he’s crying right now.”

Liz readjusted herself in her seat and covered her face with her hands.

The table before her was lined with empty plates.

At her feet was Cerberus, who seemed to look content.

Sitting across from her is Tris.

“He is already a man of 16. I don’t see that happening. Maybe—”

A certain person came into view, and Tris cut himself off.

“Princess, it looks like he’s returned.”

“Huh?”

When she turned around, there was Hiro.

Perhaps it was due to the baptism, but he seemed a bit tired.

“Hiro! Over here!”

As she waved her hand and called to him, he looked towards her and started walking.

Maybe it was because she couldn’t stand Hiro’s sluggish walking, but Liz ran towards him, and pulled him to the seat next to her.

“Hiro... you look kind of tired. Was the baptism that exhausting?”

“Yeah, it was really exhausting mentally.”

“Really?”

“I didn’t know where to look, and I came in contact with so many things.”

“Well, it looks like there were a lot of people. You have a fairly cute face Hiro, so there’s no helping it if the the old men got strange ideas.”

“What? Old men?”

“They were old men, right?”

“Huh?”

“Huh?”

As they both tilted their heads at each other, a shadow fell between them.

“– Lady Celia Estreya, how was breakfast?”

She turned around, and there was the princess maiden standing behind her.

“Ah, it was very delicious. Just what I’d expect from Frieden’s dining hall.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Will you be staying tonight as well?”

“Umm~ it’s a tempting offer, but we have to depart soon.”

“That’s too bad. I’m sure you’re busy with numerous matters, but please do stop by again.”

“We’ll be back soon. We have to come back for my wounded subordinates anyway.”

They have no choice but to leave the soldiers with broken arms and legs.

This is because they have no idea what will happen from here on out. If they were to battle, they would be unable to protect them.

“That’s true. When you return, I’d love to see you again as well, Master Hiro. I’d very much enjoy another chance to talk to you about various things.”

“Ah, umm, okay. I’ll be back...”

“Hiro? Your face is completely red. Did you catch a cold or something?”

“No, I-I’m alright.”

“Hehe, then, I shall excuse myself now.”

“Ah, thank for you for everything. I’ll never forget this debt.”

“It is the duty of those who serve the spirit king to save those in trouble. If you don’t mind, please lean on me whenever you’d like.”

“Thank you so much!”

“Also, we have prepared horses for you outside. Please use them as you please.”

And so, the princess maiden bent at the waist to give a bow and took her leave.

After watching her leave, Liz sat down once more and looked at Hiro.

“Hey, your face really is red.”

Episode 12

The End of the Journey

The northern section of Frieden.

An area in which the princess maiden alone is allowed entrance— The Palace of Baptism.

There, in that area, stood a person staring motionlessly at an orb with a brilliant shine.

Though she is a beauty known for her constant smile, it was missing from her expression at the moment.

“What are you planning...? Why is it that you summoned the Hero King once more? Our heavenly father, spirit king, please give me an answer.”

An ominous silence falls on her, as if she were at the very edge of the world.

“So you will not answer me, as expected...”

The princess maiden sighs and looks at the two bronze statues on either side of the orb.

The two pillars of the 12 great gods of Grantz, known to all who reside in this world.

One of the bronze statues was a handsome young man with a sword thrust into the great pond.

He was the founder of the Grantz Grand Empire, the Lionhearted King, Leon Welt Altius von Grantz.

The other bronze statue had a sword in its right hand raised to the heavens.

He was the one who built up the Grantz Grand Empire, the Hero King, Halt Rey Schwarz von Grantz.

“Your Majesty Altius, please watch over his Majesty Schwarz.”



Imperial Year 1023, May 26th.

Hiro and his group were near Baum’s borders.

There were less than 100 infantrymen straddled to the horses provided by the princess maiden.

It was a rather small army, with a wolf accompanying them.

But the sounds of the horses’ hooves ringing through the air was still enough to make one uneasy.

Liz rides at the head of the group. Her beautiful crimson hair flutters behind her.

And clinging to her with his arms wrapped around her waist, was Hiro.

“We’ll continue like this and enter Margrave Grinda’s territory.”

Tris, who was riding parallel to her, made an uncomfortable expression.

“The advance party hasn’t returned. We don’t know the situation there. Let us leave the horses after about another sel (3km) and go by foot.”

“... Do you think my brother’s influence has reached there after all?”

“We can’t say it hasn’t for sure. There is no loss in proceeding with care here.”

“Alright...”

Liz nods in agreement and looks ahead.

The road which connected Baum and Margrave Grinda’s territory was a vast wilderness.

A third of Margrave Grinda's territory was a desolate land lacking in water, and perhaps because of its influence, Baum's side of that border was also an arid region which experienced sandstorms.

There were small hills built of sand and sandstones which fell from collapsed cliffs.

It was a desert-like land where neither trees nor grass grew.

As Liz left her horse and gave a silent signal to her soldiers, they began to walk the wilderness.

At this pace, they would enter Margrave Grinda's territory in half an hour.

So as not to draw attention, Liz and the others walk carefully in the shadows of the cliffs.

"Princess, seeing as how the advance team hasn't returned yet, should we assume something happened to them?"

"Yes... It may be dangerous to continue like this. Let's take a bit of a detour."

She puts her hand on a rock and climbs it. She moves to a location where she can have a better view of the border.

Perhaps because Tris came to the same conclusion, he silently follows after her.

Liz smiles, as if to reassure the seemingly anxious Hiro.

"It's alright. It's my uncle's territory."

She said this as if to hear those words herself as well.

A vague anxiety spreads through Hiro's mind.

When they climb to the top of the cliff where they can survey the border, Tris crawls to the edge.

After a while, he gives Liz a signal.

The fact that he called for her rather than returning probably meant he saw something.

Liz approached Tris with a puzzled look on her face.

“—?!”

Liz covered her mouth in a panic as she was about to cry out without thinking.

The sight before her was nothing but despair.

As if she couldn't believe her own eyes, Liz kept rubbing them.

But the cruel scene remained unchanged.

Tears formed at the corners of Liz's eyes.

“My God...”

At the entrance to Margrave Grinda's territory, were the unsightly corpses of ten of the men from the advance party, exposed for all to see.

Perhaps it was because they were tortured, but all of them were missing a part of their bodies.

Behind them, were 3,000 dark-skinned soldiers.

They had a brown cloth wrapped around their heads, and wore leather armor which covered half their torsos.

They had swords with reverse blades hanging from their waists. There were spears and elliptical shields thrust into the ground.

A violent wind blew across the wilderness and the soldiers. At the head of the group, a flag with a crest of brown soil and a tiger was planted into the earth and flying in the wind.

“What are Lichtein's soldiers doing here?!”

The desert principality of Lichtein.

A nation that could be summed up as inhuman.

The people of any nation that shows them hostility end up with just two options: become slaves, or be killed.

For that reason, it is one of the countries in which slavery still exists.

For a long time, because they were under the influence of the Grand Grantz Empire, there weren't even the slightest of skirmishes.

The reason for that was slavery.

Because the Grand Grantz Empire had abolished slavery, any officers they took in as prisoners of war from enemy nations, but could not get ransom money for, well sold off to Lichtein. Regular citizen of enemy nations were also sold off.

Also, Lichtein wouldn't be so foolish as to attack the Grand Grantz Empire, seeing as how Grantz apparently excelled in wars with large fronts, and above all else, because they were so powerful. At least that's what they thought.

"The fact that they deployed troops here most likely means that their target is you, Princess."

Tris pointed his sharp gaze at the enemy army.

"But it's a mystery as to how they knew you would pass through here. Let us return to Baum for now."

"No. We can't get the princess maiden involved in this."

"I can't imagine they would invade Baum. If they did, they would incur the wrath of various countries."

"This is a brazen invasion of territory. And against the Grand Grantz Empire even. I hardly believe a group like that would hesitate to destroy the spirit king's mausoleum."

“That’s...”

Liz glances to the side at Tris hesitating, then speaks.

“If need be, we should force our way through to join with Uncle.”

“The fact that they’re here means they broke through Fort Belk.”

To get this far, they had to have passed through Fort Belk and Fort Alt.

Considering that they advanced this far, it was a huge possibility that the forts fell.

“Besides, they can’t stay within the empire’s territory forever. After enough time passes, the Fourth Imperial army will rush over as reinforcement.”

“If I don’t show myself, they might attack the villages in the area. They might invade Baum.”

As she pictures villages and towns being burned down and its people trampled, Liz clenches her fist and strikes the ground. She then glares at the enemy army below her.

“I can’t stand the thought of innocent people getting hurt because of me.”

“We can’t possibly win. If something were to happen to you, Princess—”

“It’s the role of the Imperial family to fight for its people. No matter the situation.”

“... Will you not yield?”

“Of course not. I am Celia Estreya Elizabeth von Grantz. I am the Sixth Imperial Princess of the Grand Grantz Empire.”

You could see the resignation in Tris’s face as he sighed.

“... So be it. Then I shall accompany you.”

“I’m counting on you.”

The two finish their conversation and regroup with her subordinates hiding in the shadows of the rocks behind them.

Liz stood up and went straight to Hiro, forgetting to even dust herself off.

“We’re going to enter an intense battle now. You return to Baum, Hiro.”

“Huh?”

“It’s going to be too much for you to handle... It’s for your benefit that you not stay with us.”

“No, I’m going to fight with you.”

Hiro’s determination was resolute.

It was true that he had no experience in war, and that his legs were shaking in fear.

But, he couldn’t possibly leave her and run away with such a grim air about her.

“No, You go back on the road we took and escape, Hiro.”

You could feel Liz’s strong will in her eyes.

Without thinking, Hiro flinched, but he held fast.

“I was useful with the ogre, wasn’t it? This time, too—”

Hiro implores with a heartrending look on his face.

In an instant, Liz’s expression went from one of joy, to bewilderment, to determination.

Then, she painfully furrowed her brows, and spewed these words.

“... I’ll be frank. When you’re around, I get distracted. That’s why I don’t want you to come with us.”

Wham—

A shock ran through his head as if he were hit by a heavy object.

He couldn’t fix his sight on one point. His thoughts just froze.

Even still, Hiro clenches his fists, and desperately tries to speak.

Even though he had plenty to say, nothing would come out.

If he doesn’t hurry, the more he thinks, the more he’ll be in a panic and his lips won’t move.

Liz’s hand touches the cheek of the confused Hiro.

“Thank you for coming this far with me.”

Liz smiled as her eyes welled with tears.

“Our journey ends here. It was really fun.”

Episode 13

Execution

A black mass rose to the heavens. Like a thick fog, it filled the entire sky.

It peaked at its arch, then fell with great force, almost like torrential rain.

“Here it comes! Stay low and raise your shields!”

[[Ohh!]]

In an instant, thousands of arrows hit the ground.

CRASH—

The sound of a thunderous roar, like a storm of hail raining down, took over the battlefield as the onslaught of arrows pierced the shields of the infantrymen.

After waiting for the sound to stop, Liz shouted.

“Create a wall!”

A group of large soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, about 6 men wide.

There, the heavy infantry unit thrust their shields into the ground and stand ready against the oncoming enemy soldiers before them.

Liz and her men chose a narrow path with cliffs on either side as the location in which to engage the enemy.

—Invalidate the enemy’s strength in numbers by taking advantage of the land.

Even if they number 3,000 men, there’s no way they can destroy the cliffs to advance.

And so, naturally, it become a battle between groups of small numbers.

Liz threw a spear at the charging enemy.

“Gah!”

She does an impressive job of hitting her target, but a new enemy climbs over the corpse and approaches.

“Archery unit! Fire!”

As soon as she swung Laevateinn up, a flurry of arrows flew above head from behind.

All the arrows shot from the close range hit their targets.

The front line of enemies become corpses. They hinder the advance of the soldiers behind them, who end up falling with great force.

However, more soldiers simply trample over them and continue their advance without losing their momentum.

[[Ohh!]]

A war cry loud enough to shake the air jolts their ears.

“Princess, to the rear!”

The heavy infantry units flex their arms and grit their teeth.

The winds change direction and a cloud of sand envelops them.

BOOM—

As the sound of a collision rings out, the sound of metal clanging can be heard as well.

“Haa!”

As the cloud of dust gets pushed aside by the wind pressure, Liz thrust out Laevateinn.

Liz feels contact. She then pulls her sword out and continues to swing to the side.

While feeling out the presence of her enemies, Liz continued her attacks without pause.

When a gust of wind blew through the spaces between the wall and cleared everyone's view, Liz was surrounded by a mountain of corpses.

A short distance away from her, Tris mows down his enemies with a spear.

“Princess! You're pressing too far out! Come back!”

“Not yet! I'm going to finish off as many enemies as I can here!”

The enemies jostle through the narrow path as they reach Liz.

[Urahh!]

“There's no way an attack like that would hit me!”

[Goh!]

She cuts down each of the the rushing enemy soldiers with a stroke of her sword.

“Grahh!”

[Gahh!]

Cerberus jumped out and gouged out the flesh of another soldier's neck with his fangs.

He jumped from soldier to soldier reaping lives as his white coat began to turn red.

Liz pivots on her right leg and swings Laevateinn down.

“Hah!”

She lops off the arm of an enemy soldier that was trying to take her rear.

[Gaaaaahh!]

She ignores the scream of the insignificant soldier and pierces an enemy who appears in the corner of her peripherals, taking his life.

Using that momentum, she twists her body and lops off the head of an enemy to the left of the previous one.

[Goh!]

Finally, she severs the head of one last insignificant soldier who had lost both arms.

“I’ll buy us some time.”

A mass of flames spews out from her crimson blade and an explosion envelops the area.

[Gah!]

[R-Retreat!]

It would be no simple task to stop the impetus of the long procession pushing through narrow passage.

Most of the enemies crying out in agony become burnt corpses, and the smell of burning flesh begins to waft throughout the battlefield.

Liz runs off, cutting down and pushing aside the enemies between her and her allies who have been cut off from the rest of their army.

By the time she rejoined with Tris, she had created a path of dead bodies.

“Princess! Are you hurt?!”

“I’m okay. More importantly, there are still more enemies. We have to get ready for the next wave.”

Now that she had some time to think, Liz's thoughts went to Hiro.

They separated in a horrible way. As she recalled Hiro's hurt face, she started to feel regretful.

If by chance she were able to see him again, she would lower her head and apologize in all sincerity.

Though that was what she planned to do, it was meaningless to think about that before the battle was over.

(The battle's only just begun...)

Liz forces a strained smile as she pets Cerberus's head.

She firmly decides to carry out her plan if she manages to survive.

"The enemy approaches!"

"You really know how to spoil my mood! Archery unit, fire! Heavy infantry unit, advance!"

As they receive covering fire from the archery unit, the first row of heavy infantry units immediately ready their shields and advance.

You could see the shock in every single enemy soldier before them, but they didn't have the luxury of stopping.

If they did, they would be trampled by their allies behind them.

They soon clashed, and the heavy infantrymen were able to withstand the blow. The enemies began to be swallowed by the soldiers behind them and lost their strength.

Spearheads went flying out through the open spaces between the shields as the heavy infantrymen began to take the lives of the fallen enemy soldiers.

Seeing the enemy ranks had crumbled, the heavy infantrymen opened their wall.

Liz, Tris, and the light infantrymen weave through the openings and charge.

They take down the injured enemies who lost their will to fight.

During that time, the second row of heavy infantry units who had been on standby regroup with them.

“We’ll keep up this pace and push them back!”

There is little doubt that nothing is more inspiring than a commander fighting on the very front line.

Truly, rather than fear, the faces of the soldiers showed nothing but a desire to protect their master.

Despite their situation of being outnumbered, their zeal overpowered their fear.

From the enemy’s point of view, there was nothing more difficult to deal with, and accordingly, they fell with ease.

However, the scary thing about getting caught up in the moment, is that you become unaware of your surroundings.

“... No.”

Liz whispered as she looked up to the sky and saw it.

Her face is pale. Not noticing this, the light infantrymen move forward, leaving their master behind.

Tris looked back with a puzzled face.

“Princess, are you wounded?!”

“Tris! Look up!”

Her distressed cry almost sounded like a shriek.

“Hurry, your shields! Cerberus, come here!”

She draws in Cerberus with her left hand, and gives a signal to her allies with her right, but it was already too late.

The light infantrymen who looked up at the sky dumbfounded were frozen in thought.

A few moments thereafter, an arching clustering of arrowheads completely filling the sky came flying down.

The enemy attack, which even hit their own allies, turned the battlefield into chaos.

The ground was completely covered in arrows. Small pincushions dotted places here and there. You could barely tell they used to be people, let alone discern whether they were friend or foe.

Not a single person was moving. It was likely that the light infantry unit had been completely annihilated.

“Princess, are you all right?!”

Tris had a number of arrows pierced into his back, but based on his movements, it didn't seem to be fatal.

The tide of the battle completely changed. Having grasped the current situation, the heavy infantry unit is crestfallen.

In an attempt to restore morale, Tris yelled out.

“Heavy infantry unit, reset your formation, immediately! Fortify the entrance and stop the enemy's advance!”

“Yes, sir!”

As he gives out orders, he forgets his own pain and rushes over to Liz.

“Looks like we were a bit careless...”

As Liz's face twists in pain, she pulls out an arrow lodged into her left arm with her right one.

Cerberus licks the blood pouring out as if worried. Liz pets his head to reassure him.

Next to her, a number of heavy infantrymen pass by and immediately erect an iron wall.

"We have to treat that wound right away..."

"It'll be fine if I tie it up. More importantly, the status of injured..."

"We'll leave that to someone else. For now we need to—"

"Infantry Captain Tris!"

The one who interrupted the old soldier as he was about to scold Liz was a heavy infantryman.

For someone to call out to him during a state of emergency like this, Tris turned to him with rage in his expression.

"What is it?!"

"There is a change in the enemy's movements!"

Tris's veins began to bulge on his forehead as he heard the vague report, and Liz furrowed her brows.

"Give me a detailed report!"

Tris lends his shoulder to Liz, then approaches the iron wall and rebuke the soldier.

"B-But... please, look over there!"

An inexplicable scene unfolded in the area to which the soldier pointed.

Around 200 Imperial soldiers were lined up with their arms tied behind their backs.

A man from the enemy army passed through an opening and came forward.

“What are they planning to do...?”

As the man drew his reverse blade sword from his waist, he placed his foot on an Imperial soldier’s shoulder and forced his head down.

Immediately, his assassin’s dagger swings down and sends the Imperial soldier’s head flying.

After a spray of blood flies out, the man kicks the dead body away and looks toward Liz as he smiles.

[Hear me, Sixth Imperial Princess! If you surrender quietly, I will stop the executions. If you continue to resist, I will cut off the heads of all the Imperial soldiers here!]

“How absurd!”

Tris’s face flushes red in anger.

Quietly and intently, Liz listens on, at the brink of tears.

[I don’t care which you choose, because either way, you will be captured, and you will become a slave. We won’t let you lead a lonely life! You will be well taken care of each and every day! Every single day!]

He begins to cut the heads off of the Imperial soldiers in an unconcerned way, as if it were some tedious work.

It was an attempt to break their will to fight.

[Now, decide, Sixth Imperial Princess Celia Estreya!]

His blood-smearred sword glittered in the sunlight.

Episode 14

Massacre

The commander led an army of 3,000 which was spread across the national border.

His name, is Bail Narmer Lichtein. Third son of the duke family who holds the title of viscount at the age of 27.

He had an extravagant tent set up at headquarters, and was enjoying some wine inside.

However, after receiving a report from a subordinate, he came out from the tent and looked towards the cliffs.

“Ohh... I can't make out the face clearly, but I definitely see the crimson hair.”

His toned upper body was bare, and his lowered body was dressed in gaudy silk adorned with gold and silver.

He had the same dark skin as the other soldiers, but had a well endowed physique and a clearly distinguished atmosphere compared to the others.

“As long as she's as beautiful as they say, I don't need ransom money. I'll make her my slave.”

Seeing the soldiers with their shields readied on the path between the cliffs, he snickers, wine in hand.

“Haha, look. They're going to fight against these numbers.”

“Is that not a problem? We are not able to exploit our advantage in numbers with that.”

“I don't care how many rank and file soldiers we lose. We can replace them as soon as we regroup with our main forces. Pay no mind and charge.”

“Understood.”

As the aide sent orders to the 1st division, they began their advance as they kicked up a cloud of dust.

Then, he sent orders to the archery unit waiting behind them, and in the blink of an eye, arrows filled the sky. They were ineffective though.

Immediately, the 1st division clashes with the enemy. The angry voices shake the air and reach the commander.

“Hmm. So ordinary methods won’t work, will they...?”

His opponent is the Sixth Imperial Princess, and protecting her, are elite Imperial forces.

Even their morale is likely beyond average.

After a bit of thought, Viscount Lichtein raised his hand. Noticing this, his aide ran to him.

After taking a sip of his wine, he opened his mouth with an air of superiority.

“We obtained a map when we defeated that run down fort, right?”

“Yes, though it isn’t the most up to date...”

“Then use that to take the enemy’s rear.”

“Understood. I will form a unit from the 3rd division.”

“No... take 500 from headquarters. Split them into groups of about 100 so the enemy doesn’t take notice.”

“That would cause our headquarters to be short handed.”

“That’s fine. Either way, our opponents are holed up over there. We’ll be at a loss if they pick up on the 3rd division’s movements and escape.”

“As you wish.”

The aide salutes by striking his left shoulder with his right hand, and immediately begins to take action.

After breaking his gaze, Viscount Lichtein turns his attention to the crimson-haired girl.

“So, position, vigor, morale, they’re superior in all those aspects... But, we have more hands to play, Sixth Imperial Princess. How should I crush you to make you suffer?”

Viscount Lichtein silently watched the battlefield for a while, but he snorted in displeasure as he saw the 1st division dwindle in numbers.

“How unsightly. Maybe I should have attacked some towns or villages to raise our morale...”

He waved his hand to brush away a cloud of dust and called for his aide.

“Fire the arrows. I don’t care if they hit our men.”

“Yes, my lord!”

“Also, we have 200 Imperial soldiers as prisoners, right? Line them up on the frontline.”

“I shall prepare them right away!”

Viscount Lichtein executes the prisoners who were lined up as instructed.

He indifferently cuts off their heads to shake the Sixth Imperial Princess’s heart, but he is unable to suppress his shock at the fact that the soldiers die without so much as letting out a scream.

“Hah, as expected of soldiers of the Empire which reigns supreme in this world. So they won’t let out a single scream even when faced with the fear of death. Though admirable... this is one thing I cannot tolerate.”

He waits for the enemy to come charging in with rage.

He would've preferred them to cry out, but because they were bearing with it, all it did was raise the morale of his opponents and rendered his plan meaningless.

He was hoping for her surrender, but he saw no such signs from the Sixth Imperial Princess.

“How dull. Kill them all, and bring her here.”

Unable to even resist, the 200 soldiers were slowly killed by having their chests pierced through, throats gouged out, and limbs cut off. The blood flowing from the dead bodies began to quench the great pond's thirst.

Then, a man with a large scar on his face was brought before Viscount Lichtein.

[Dios?!]

The crimson-haired young girl held her arm back as she gazed in bewilderment.

Viscount Lichtein's face warps in joy.

He was so sincerely enjoying himself that he couldn't help but grab his sides and laugh out loud.

“Hehe, hahahaha, ahh... good! What a splendid voice. So you finally cry out for me!”

Viscount Lichtein stepped on Dios's head as he was gritting his teeth in frustration. He was now certain of his victory.



Hiro was sitting atop a rock and staring at the ground.

His head was racing with thoughts of his own foolishness for being a hindrance.

For what purpose did he come to this world? Why was he so powerless?

He isn't even able to fight for her with his one and only skill of being able to see well.

(I wonder... Why did I come here?)

He was told to escape to Baum, but he didn't feel like moving at all.

Maybe it was because his feelings were leaning towards the girl who was in a separate place.

The image of her sad smile floats in the back of his mind. He wanted to hear her say that she wanted him to fight with her.

Even if it was an unwinnable fight, he hadn't been able to repay her for taking care of him in this world.

(But... if we ended up fighting, I'm sure I would've been frozen in fear.)

That alone would be fine, but she might get hurt trying to protect him.

Hiro shook his head and looked up at the sky. Intense rays of light beat down on the thirsty pond.

The humid air made him irritated, and he became so uncomfortable he couldn't speak.

(... What should I do now?)

He comes down from the rock, and regretfully looks over his shoulder. She's at the end of the this road.

The battle's probably begun right about now.

Facing 3,000 with less than 100 is hopeless.

But Liz is strong. Even from a layman's eyes, that is certain.

Hiro prayed to the Spirit King that she would be able to safely meet with Margrave Grinda.

He closed his eyes, as if to abandon his feelings of regret, and quickly left that place.

But he soon came to a stop.

(... What's this? People?)

He heard the footsteps of a large group of people, and at the same time, the wind carried over the sound of voices.

As he hides himself in the shadows of rocks, he sees a group of people he recognizes coming out from the space between the cliffs.

[Is this right?]

[Yeah. This side is Baum territory. We should be able to take the Sixth Imperial Princess's rear if we continue south along this wall.]

[Isn't there a village around here?]

[Bear with it.]

[We picked a fight with that Empire. This won't be worth it if we can't capture at least three slaves.]

He couldn't get a grasp of how many there were, but a large number of soldiers came bustling out from the shadows.

They were Lichtein soldiers. They all had well trained bodies, and while shamelessly displaying their dark skin, they continued along the road which Hiro came from with smug looks on their faces.

[After we capture the Sixth Imperial Princess, we'll just burn down the villages in the area. You can look forward to that.]

[The Sixth Imperial Princess, huh... So, you think we'd get in trouble if we had a taste?]

[Well, our heads would probably go flying no doubt.]

[I hope she's really worth all this.]

Hiro jumped out from the shadows of the rocks and blocked the path of the group who was walking along laughing boorishly.

The enemy soldiers showed signs of tension for a bit, but they quickly let their guard down.

One can only image the absurd terror in the young boy who appeared before them, legs shaking in fear.

[... A lost kid?]

[What the hell, it's a guy. I would've made him cry if he was a girl.]

The crass soldier blatantly dropped his shoulders in disappointment.

However, he put his hand on his chin and stared at Hiro.

[But, he's got a pretty nice face on him. He might do well with people with that preference. Should we capture him?]

[No, he'll just get in our way. Let's kill him and go.]

It would be troublesome if they were reported to Baum, too. The serious soldier muttered as he drew his reverse blade sword.

[Alright, alright. Then I'll take care of it real quick, so you guys watch. Or do you guys want to make a bet?]

The soldiers in the rear immediately shouted with joy.

[We're not making any bets.]

[The brat will die and that's that. Let's go already.]

[Don't take too long. His Excellency will kill us.]

[I know. Give me a second.]

The crass man grabbed Hiro's left shoulder.

He thrust the spear he had in his right hand into the ground, unsheathed and drew his reverse blade sword in its place, and pressed it firmly against Hiro's nape.

[Are you so scared you can't even make a sound? Don't worry, you probably won't feel a thing. I'll cut through this thin neck no problem.]

The crass man begins to pull his right arm back. He was trying to create a distance to swing down with force.

Maybe it was out of fear, but Hiro's body was trembling in small bursts.

Looking down on him and seeing that, the crass man's smile widened as he imagined what sort of scream he would hear from Hiro.

"... I'm sorry."

Hiro muttered.

[It's too late to beg for your life now.]

The crass man patted Hiro on the shoulders to comfort him, then tried to brandish his sword, full of strength— But, his arm didn't move.

The crass man looks in bewilderment to where his arm used to be and realizes there is nothing there past his right shoulder.

[Ahh! Wh-Why?! MY AAAAARM!]

Psh—

He places his hand over the wound to try to stop the gushing blood, but the blood pours out from between his fingers and doesn't stop.

[AaaaAAAHHHhhhhhh—!]

The head of the man suffering intense pain tumbled across the ground.

The young boy looks down on him with ice cold eyes.

Hiro was holding the man's arm, and in the hand of that man's arm was a reverse blade sword smeared in blood.

The blood dripping from the arm is absorbed by the ground.

“... Ahh.”

Hiro was certain he heard a sound within himself.

“... I see.”

An ominous sound, like something breaking, echos within his body.

There was no turning back now. It was likely completely broken.

“I...”

It feels as if every inch of his mind is starting to clear. It feels good.

He pulls out the spear which was pierced into the ground.

[Damn brat!]

He pierced through the chest of the approaching enemy.

He steals the sword off the enemy's hip as he's about to fall.

[Huh—?!]

He severs the head of the next enemy.

He feels strength spreading to every joint in his body.

[Who are you, bastard?! Surround him!]

Again, he butchers an enemy and steals his spear, mowing down the enemies to his side.

Three of the enemy soldiers' heads danced in the air.

The wall which was suppressing the young boy had completely disappeared.

He can tell his mind is clearing.

He can tell his body is getting lighter.

He can tell his five senses are sharpening.

The young boy— He realized he had returned to his former self.

He clenched his fists 2, 3 times to make sure.

“ ... ”

There were no emotions in the abyss of those eyes. There was only a void.

Just a dark...

Deep...

Cold void.

—The curtains to a massacre had risen.

Episode 15

Despair

(Where did I go wrong? What did I do wrong?)

The man's thoughts were awash with those words.

He was full of confidence just a while ago, but that was all gone now.

It took all he had to run from the enemy that was chasing him from behind.

The man's name is Karelis. He will turn 34 this year.

He is a staff officer in Bail Narmer Lichtein's army.

He was once a slave, but he improved himself by developing his knowledge and was set free.

His life was finally on the right track, but he just happened to run into trouble.

And he had so many comrades, too. Where did they all go?

(There were 500 of us. What's going on?!)

Without so much as landing a single strike, the 500 soldiers were all killed.

If this isn't a dream, the only monster capable of that would be some sort of spirit.

As soon as he came to that conclusion, the man's feet stopped.

(... Could it be that he was a spirit?)

He hides in the shadows of the rocks to catch his breathe. It would probably be best that he go report this to Viscount Lichtein after he does so.

While looking around his surroundings, he holds his breath and gathers his thoughts.

(That's right. There's no way Dagner would die an unnatural death like that unless that was some sort of spirit.)

Thinking back on it, his body trembles even now.

A young boy had appeared to stop their advance. Dagner tried to get rid of him, but he ended up having his arm torn off.

After that, a massacre began. It could not be described in words.

Everyone who went against him was butchered, and those who tried to escape had their heads severed from behind.

There was no expression on the young boy's face as he effortlessly killed them.

There was nothing there. Not a speck of any emotion at all.

(Why did it turn out like this...? It should have been a simple job. We were just supposed to take the Sixth Imperial Princess's rear!)

Tremble, tremble—

Even though it wasn't cold, his body was shaking, and his teeth chattering.

Karelis held his tongue. He mustn't make a noise, lest the young boy takes notice of him.

Clunk—

He heard the sound of a stone being kicked.

Karelis closes his eyes. The humid air brushes against his cheeks.

He felt he was going to go insane from the intense fear.

(I don't want to die. I don't want to die. I don't want to die. I don't want to die.)

However— Despair was not about to let him go.

“... I will give you two choices. Either take your own life, or I take it for you.”

[Eek, p-please, spare me! I don't know what I did, but I was wrong. So please, let me go!]

The young boy looks down on Karelis with cold eyes as he lowers his head.

[Please. What are you saying I did?! I didn't do anything! I even lost my comrades! What else do you want me to— gah!]

Karelis was grabbed by his neck and hoisted up.

Wondering where these skinny arms found the strength to do this, this was the point in which Karelis's mind completely broke.

[Please, I haven't done anything! Don't kill me! I don't want to die yet!]

“You haven't done anything “yet”. But if I let you go, you might. That alone merits your death. Letting you go might lead to someone's misfortune. I can't stand the thought of that.”

[Wh-What the hell is that...? You're going to kill me with that sort of reasoning?! Do you think you've become a god or something?!

“Yeah... Maybe I am a god right now.”

[Gah— Mmph!]

The young boy's glistening blade slashed Karelis's chest and made him spit up blood.

As Karelis's consciousness began to fade, he recalled a certain folktale.

It is a very common story which parents read to their children when they are up late.

If you stay up too late into the night—

—*“Desperation”* comes to take you away.*



“What, so you were “*Ogre*” after all?”

Viscount Lichtein’s smile widens as he steps on the head of the man with the scar on his face.

This man showed a level of strength that was different from the other Imperial soldiers when they attacked Fort Alt.

He captured the man alive thinking he would be useful as a slave for a long period of time with his well endowed physique. He was glad he did.

To think that he was that “*Ogre*”. It seems fortune is on his side.

“Thanks to you, it seems I’ll be able to capture the Sixth Imperial Princess. Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of her in front of you.”

[Gah!]

Viscount Lichtein shouted at the crimson haired girl as he kicked Dios’s face.

“If you wish for me to return this man unharmed, surrender quietly!”

They couldn’t tell from her expression, but seeing as how she had stopped moving, the soldiers knew she was stirred.

Just one more push... Thinking this, Viscount Lichtein swung his sword down on Dios’s arm.

[Ugh!]

The severed arm flies high into the air and spins around before it hits the ground.

[Gaaaaaah!]

Dios grit his teeth and endured the pain.

He had lost his arm. It wouldn't have been strange for him to have lost consciousness from the pain.

Fresh blood gushes out. Viscount Lichtein nods his chin at a subordinate.

“Stop the bleeding.”

“Yes, sir!”

Immediately, the subordinate takes out a piece of cloth and wraps it around Dios's shoulder.

He stabs the fallen arm, swings it up vigorously, and throws it before the crimson haired girl's feet.

“Sixth Imperial Princess, your precious subordinate is going to die if you don't hurry and treat him! Ahaha, hahahahaha!”

Now, I don't care whether you charge or surrender. Let me see you take some sort of action.

Viscount Lichtein saw the image of the Sixth Imperial Princess crying out in his head.

He feels a sense of pleasure from the thought alone.

I'll torment you, violate you, and treat you like trash. I'll show the entire Empire your crying figure.

Viscount Lichtein is unable to hold back his smile as he imagines that near future.

But that soon came to an end.

[Your highness, Celia Estreya Elizabeth von Grantz!]

Dios shouted.

“Hmm?”

Viscount Lichtein looks down on Dios puzzled.

[Fight on! Even if I am to die, my soul is with the Grand Grantz Empire! It is with you! Fulfill your dream! Fulfill the grand dream you once spoke of!]

“You bastard, what are you saying?”

[I will offer my soul to the twelve gods of Grantz if that dream will come true!]

“Shut his mouth!”

[Mmph!]

He kicked Dios’s face, but he didn’t so much as flinch.

Viscount Lichtein draws back, overpowered by the sharp glint in Dios’s eyes.

Dios spits out a mass of blood and continues.

[The road you will take is grim, and there are likely many hardships awaiting you! But you absolutely must not stop! Cross over the mounds of corpses and reach your goal! Push through with your mighty rule!]

“Enough with your useless prattle!”

[Gah!]

Dios is kicked in the shoulder where his arm use to be, and falls to the ground.

After looking down on him with indignation, Viscount Lichtein immediately looks toward the Sixth Imperial Princess.

She was moving behind the iron wall.

“Wait! Do you not care what happens to this guy?!”

He grabbed Dios’s hair and lifted his face in a panic.

But she had disappeared into the shadows of the cliffs and could no longer be seen.

[Hehe, that's too bad. Go ahead and kill me already. The princess will not become your slave.]

"... I see. Then I'll just take her by force. I'll make sure of her downfall."

He slams Dios's face to the ground and vigorously stomps down on him over and over again.

He continues to relentlessly swing his heel down to let out his frustration at the fact that Dios didn't so much as groan.

"Hmph, you can watch in silence from the other world as your dear princess is defiled."

Viscount Lichtein cuts off Dios's head which had completely stopped moving, and tosses it before his subordinate's feet.

"Put it on display. Make sure they have a good view of it."

As if he had lost all interest, Viscount Lichtein doesn't even glance at the head. He raised his blood soaked sword and shouted out toward the battlefield.

"All troops, attack!"



"Let's show them what we're made of! Protect the princess at all costs!"

Tris's angry voice pierces through the cliffs and rings throughout.

Without saying a word, the heavy infantrymen bang their shields.

Without any instructions, the archery unit begins to fire their arrows and take the lives of their enemies.

Behind them, was Liz with her head hung low.

Beside her was Cerberus, lying down quietly

Her eyes are red and swollen with pain.

There were no traces of the once vivacious young girl.

(Hiro...)

She recalls the young boy with the kind face.

It was doubtful that Hiro knew how reassuring his existence was on this journey.

The mysterious young boy who came along without even knowing the situation.

The kind hearted young boy who stuck with them until the end, without so much as complaining.

When he said he would fight together with her, she almost embraced him from sheer joy.

(... I wish I could have apologized.)

She no longer has any will to fight.

She can't bear the thought of anyone else dying.

She could count on her fingers the number of surviving personal soldiers who had accompanied her.

And even they would likely be annihilated in short time.

(Hiro... I'm tired.)

She hugs her knees, buries her face between them, and rejects the world.

With her tears already dried up, she closes her eyes to fall asleep.

Her consciousness begins to fade so much that she doesn't even care about the tumult of the battlefield.

This is why she didn't notice.

—A change had occurred in the raging battle.

On the wasteland where sunlight was glaring down, within a cloud of dust of hot air and blood, a mass of a deep darkness swoops down onto the surface of the battlefield like a drop of rain.

“That” which fell from the sky succeeded in opening a distance between both sides.

Everyone stops fighting and looks suspiciously at “that”.

His lacquer like and charming black hair was dancing in the wind.

His eyes had a cold truth to them, and was letting off a clear, black light.

The young boy who wore clothes that seemed to be an embodiment of darkness itself, stood silently surveying the enemies.



“ ... ”

The young boy lightly swings the silver sword in his hand.

A gentle wind slipped through the enemy forces of the dark skinned soldiers.

In the blink of an eye, a spray of blood rises from a large number of troops.

It didn't take long for it to envelop the entire field.

All the soldiers who were bathed in the blood of their comrades looked baffled.

Even after seeing their fellow soldiers fall, their thoughts were frozen. They couldn't comprehend what had happened.

Why is there blood falling on me? What's going on here? I don't understand.

Although time had stopped for everyone on the battlefield, the young boy was the only exception. He slowly began to walk.

Without even looking, the young boy swings his sword to the side, and the head of an enemy soldier, who was looking on dumbfounded, went flying.

He twists his body, and using that force, his sword brings down the skulls of two enemy soldiers.

Before the blood sprays out, he took one step forward and cut down an enemy. He then took another step and slayed three more.

He switches his silver sword to his left hand, picks up a spear, and casually throws it.

As if shooting through an apple, it effortlessly pierces through the necks of four enemies.

He stabs the throat of a bewildered enemy with the sword in his left hand, then cuts off the head of another one next to him as he gently swings his sword.

At this point, any human would return to their senses.

The enemy troops let out a roar.

It was loud enough to blow away the young boy's body.

[Wh-Who are you, bastard?!]

“Sh...!”

The shining blade slices through the air, severing the torso of the enemy soldier. He falls to the ground with a rasping sound.

[Urah!]

“Ah!”

He leaps towards the enemy who was swinging his spear down, and stabbed him with his sword.

Using the momentum as he pulls his sword out, the young boy reaps the life of two enemies. He then kicks the ground and leaps into the air.

Thump, thump—

A number of javelins were thrown back to the soldiers who threw them.

The young boy somersaults and dances back to the midst of the throng of enemies.

“Haa!”

He swings his arm multiple times and carves cross figures.

He produces a number of white lines in the air, and without even having the time to feel pain, the enemies around him all turn into corpses.

As if crushing ants, he indifferently and quite effortlessly trampled over the enemy army.

Episode 16

Resurrection

Tris is unable to utter a sound in the midst of the battle which is turning into chaos.

He wasn't the only one in silence. His fellow soldiers were also focusing on the young boy so as not to lose sight of him.

A strange atmosphere envelops the battlefield.

The black mass slowly encroaches on the field, like water soaking throughout a piece of cloth.

The enemy's frontline has completely collapsed. It is likely next to impossible for them to regroup at this point.

The faces of all the enemy troops on the very front lines are warped in fear, and their expressions convey their desire to escape as quickly as possible.

However, the order to charge was handed down. They were being pushed by their allies behind them, and they were not allowed to withdraw.

In the present situation, they were merely left with falling prey to the darkness.

"Is that... the boy?"

He finally squeezed out those words.

He tilted his head as he watched Hiro trample over the enemy's formation with a silver sword in hand.

He doesn't sense the frail atmosphere about him from when they first met.

He had changed in a way to suggest that he had been possessed by something.

"And what is that sword?"

No matter how many enemies he slaughtered, there was no clotting of blood to be seen on the sword.

The beautifully glittering silver sword was giving off the same fiery light as it did when it first appeared.

In the past, it was called the hero's sword.

It is a ruler's sword, which saved a country that was on the verge of ruin, and conquered surrounding nations.

As 1,000 years passed, the legendary sword was buried in history, and is said to have been lost.

The Second Emperor of the Grand Grantz Empire, Halt Rey Schwarz von Grantz.

His legend is remembered thusly...

[The Twin Black King possesses a sword which manipulates all of heaven, earth, and man. It is an undefeated sword which brings about certain victory.]

There are none here who experienced that period of time.

However, if there were, they would surely be trembling in awe.

Even the guard and handle were pure white. There was not one speck of impurity. It looked as if it were decorated with a coat of snow.

The blade glistened as if an infinite number of glittering stars were scattered throughout. It gave off a certain brilliance, and it boasted razor sharpness.

When the young Twin Black boy holds the sword while clad in black, it impresses the image of stars floating in the night sky.

The 5th Imperial spirit sword.

The final sword, which is also said to be the most beautiful—

—<Excalibur>

This was the moment in which it manifested itself into this world once more.

A change was approaching the battlefield in which a one sided massacre was taking place.

“The enemy... is withdrawing?”

One of the heavy infantrymen muttered.

Maybe word had finally reached the enemy general.

The foe slowly retreats from the warfront as they keep an eye on Hiro.

The young boy gazed at the retreating enemies for a while, but perhaps he lost interest, as he turned his back on them.

At that moment, Tris’s expression changed as he yelled out.

“B-Boy! Behind you!”

A countless number of arrows came flying in from behind the retreating enemies.

But perhaps Hiro didn’t hear him, because he didn’t so much as look back.

No, even if he had heard, Hiro likely wouldn’t have been able to defend himself without a shield.

Believing this to be the end, Tris closed his eyes without thinking.

But when he next opened his eyes, Tris would be unable to differentiate between reality and fantasy.

This was because the arrows had split like a waterfall and were pierced into the ground while avoiding the young boy.

Looking on in amazement, Tris looks into the eyes of the young boy and speaks.

“Is that *“Uranus”*...?”

There was no time to be relieved. The young boy ran off.

“What is it?”

It’s understandable that he was puzzled, seeing as how Hiro ran towards Tris and his group at full speed.

His face was not the same one with the expression of a dark abyss until just earlier.

It had become that same seemingly frail and unreliable one from when they met.

“T-Tris!”

“Ohh! What is it?!”

Although he was surprised from Hiro suddenly holding him, he returned his embrace.

“L-Liz! Where’s Liz?! Is she alright?!”

“C-Calm down! We have the princess resting in the back! More importantly, are you hurt?!”

It was pointless to worry, seeing how energetic he was, but Tris couldn’t keep from asking.

The young boy checked his body and spoke.

“Looks like I’m fine! I’m going to go to Liz!”

“N-No, wait, boy! Right now, you should—”

He reached out his arm, but the young boy kept running in.



Stuffy, hot air and the putrid smell of corpses fills the space between the cliffs.

So many soldiers had died, that Hiro had to carefully avoid stepping on them as he continued further in.

“Ah, Liz...”

When he found the young girl he was looking for, he started to smile, but his expression quickly turned grim.

This was due to the fact that the crimson haired young girl was surrounded by corpses as she sat atop a rock.

She was enveloped by an atmosphere that seemed to suggest she would break at any moment. His chest tightened as he saw her current state.

“...”

As Hiro climbed the rock, Cerberus, who was sitting beside Liz, looked at him.

After patting Cerberus’s head, he placed his hand on the shoulder of the girl with her head down.

“Liz...”

The young girl who rejected the world didn’t so much as realize that there was a hand on her shoulder.

“Liz!”

Hiro yelled out and shook her shoulders.

“...”

“?!”

Seeing Liz’s face as she finally lifted it, Hiro gasped from an intense shock.

Having lost their brilliance, her eyes were simply open, not focusing on any single point, and her eyelids were pitifully swollen red.

(Ahh... Who's the guy who hurt you like this?)

Hiro gently wrapped his arms around her head as he pulled her in.

She looked so haggard, he couldn't think of anything to say to her.

"Liz... I'm sorry."

Even Hiro wasn't sure if he was apologizing for not knowing what to say, or for not making it in time.

The crimson haired young girl's fingers twitched.

She grasped Hiro's arms and pull her face away from his chest.

"... Hiro?"

"Yeah. It might make you mad, but... I came back."

Hiro awkwardly nodded his head.

Liz's hands touch his cheeks.

Despite being humid like summer, her hands were cold enough to give him a chill.

"Why did you come?"

"Because I figured out what I can do."

Hiro gently grasped the hands on his cheeks to warm them.

The light returns to her eyes. Perhaps she realized he wasn't an illusion.

But she made a sad expression and lowered her eyes.

“Dios died...”

“... Yeah.”

“He was more of an older brother to me than my actual brother. I thought of him as my real brother.”

“Yeah.”

“And yet... I wasn’t able to save him.”

“...”

“He told me... to fulfill my dream.”

As her voice shook, her eyes moistened with tears.

“I... ugh, ahh—”

She buried her face into Hiro’s chest and began to sob.

Hiro wrapped his arms around her back and held her.

Even if she is a wielder of a spirit sword, she is still a girl who had only just turned 15.

A person whom she adored as family had died before her eyes.

She was likely feeling like her heart had been torn apart.

(Ahh... that’s right. This girl is just like you.)

The color of her hair and her facial features aren’t alike, but her disposition is exactly the same.

You assumed the throne at a young age, with much expected of you. And because of your situation, you were unable to do anything.

You were only able to watch silently as your country slowly fell to ruin.

(Is that why you summoned me back here?)

Was it to save the Sixth Imperial Princess who is just like you?

As he caressed Liz's head, Hiro realized why he had come to this world.

It's possible that he was mistaken, but Hiro was fine with that reason.

Tris and the heavy infantrymen looked on, heartbroken, as the Sixth Imperial Princess quietly sobbed atop the rock.

Tears were flowing down from the eyes of the brawny men. They cried quietly while gritting their teeth.

Tris did not shed a single tear.

A single stream of blood flowed down from the corner of his mouth as he shook with rage.

Dios von Michael. He was a young man who should have turned 28 this year.

He was originally a mercenary, but he drifted into the empire after being heavily wounded. Tris then treated and took charge of him.

He trained every single day, amassed many accomplishments on the battlefield, and became a close aide to the Sixth Imperial Princess after having his abilities recognized. Tris was as happy for him as if these had all been his own achievements.

If Liz were his daughter, Dios was his son.

Tris cut loose his memories of the past and forcefully pounded his chest.

The loud noise from his armor broke the silence. He then put his knee to the ground and shouted.

“Your highness, Celia Estreya Elizabeth von Grantz!”

Everyone turned their eyes to the loud, ringing voice.

“We do not have time to be sad. I doubt Dios would wish for that either! The sun will soon set. Let us think of a plan to break through the enemy!”

The one who responded to those words was Hiro.

“I have an idea for that.”

“What?”

“The enemy numbers roughly 2,000. Even if we’re able to break through them, that would lead to victims in the surrounding villages. I doubt Liz would be fine with innocent citizens getting hurt.”

“H-Hiro?”

Liz muttered with confusion in her voice.

It’s understandable that she was confused, because to her, he is just a normal young boy.

Hiro smiled wryly at her and continued to speak.

“In which case, it doesn’t have to be a complete annihilation, but we must decrease their numbers as much as possible so that they’re unable to do any pillaging.”

“We only have 20 men left here. What are we going to do against 2,000 opponents? Are you telling us each to kill 100 enemies?”

“I’m not saying that. You’re all exhausted.”

As his smile widening, the young boy lent a hand to Liz and came down from the rock.

“It’s a plan so simple even a child could think of it.”

The man who was once feared as “Mars” was about to resurrect.

Episode 17

Torture

The Lichtein army's encampment was set up 2 sels (6km) away from the cliffs. Within a surrounding fence, were hundreds of tents. In the middle, was one extravagant tent which stood out.

Inside that tent, splitting from the middle, staff officers and their commanding officers were lined up to the left and right.

Sitting atop a large chair inside, Viscount Lichtein listened to his staff officer's damage report while looking enraged.

"... 6 officers, 812 infantrymen, 219 casualties. That is all."

Having finished his report, the chief of staff returned to the line.

The 500 soldiers that were sent out for a surprise attack from behind were also completely annihilated.

Many soldiers were lost due to more resistance than expected from the Sixth Imperial Princess. And thanks to the man in black who barged onto the battlefield, the first battle ended in a loss.

Viscount Lichtein threw his wine glass on the ground and it shattered into tiny pieces.

"Are you telling me we lost around 1,000 soldiers against less than 100 enemies?!"

The faces of his subordinates become tense.

"How am I supposed to face my brother?! Are you telling me to report to him that I lost 1,000 men for no reason, without even capturing the Sixth Imperial Princess?!"

The chief of staff came forward once more.

"There is also the unforeseen incident. I'm sure your Excellency saw as well. That thing could hardly be called human!"

"Hah! Do you want me to report to my brother that 1,000 men were killed by one person? If I told him something like that, my head would go flying!"

Unable to hide his irritation, Viscount Lichtein kicked his chair away. The chair crashed into a desk with a loud bang and broke into pieces. Still not satisfied, Viscount Lichtein grabbed one of the officers.

“... It’s true that he had astounding abilities, but who’s the one that let him have his way? It was you officers!”

“... Plainly witnessing such powers, we had no choice but to withdraw due to the fear it instilled!”

“There’s a limit to how pathetic you can be! And you still call yourselves soldiers of Lichtein?!”

After he thrust the officer away, he glared at each of the men inside the tent, one at a time.

“When day breaks, we will launch a general offensive. Retreat will not be allowed. Step forward if you have a problem with that.”

It was supposed to be an easy war. By all means, it was supposed to end in a few hours.

Because of this, they were unprepared for a night battle, and so ended up allowing their enemies time to rest.

“None. Then this war council is over. Hurry up and assign replacements for the officers that died. None of you have any time for sleep. Think of a good plan by daybreak. I’ll make slaves of any of you who are useless.”

His subordinates to the left and right struck their left shoulders, put a knee to the ground, and all spoke.

“““As you wish.”““

Immediately after, a flushed messenger came tumbling into the tent.

“An enemy attack! Their numbers are unknown! We are currently under attack!”

Everyone was dumbfounded.

It couldn’t be helped. The enemy was nearly annihilated. It was impossible to imagine that they would come to attack.

Doubting his own ears, Viscount Lichtein questioned the messenger.

“... What did you say?”

“I repeat! An enemy attack! Their numbers are unknown! We are currently under attack!”

“Ridiculous... The enemy’s already taking their last gasp of air!”

Flustered, Viscount Lichtein exited the tent. Following him, the staff officers and commanding officers also came flying out. There was angry yelling, screaming, and the roaring of hooves. The soldiers who were resting had fallen into a panic.

“What’s going on?! Could it be that enemy reinforcements have arrived?!”

The enemy should be centered around foot soldiers and archers.

They don’t have any cavalry. If they do, then it’s possible they have reinforcements.

But, that’s impossible.

“Could it be... that my brother lost?”

He ponders.

“No, impossible.”

Viscount Lichtein immediately denied the thought.

The main force of 12,000 men should be attacking Fort Belk.

In other words, as long as they don’t lose, reinforcements will not come.

“I heard the opponent was “*Mars*”, but...”

It was two day ago he had arrived here as a detached unit to capture the Sixth Imperial Princess.

Even if she is one known as “*Mars*”, it’s not likely that she is capable of defeating 12,000 troops so easily.

But if there aren’t reinforcements, what is he to make of this situation?

To the side of the confused Viscount Lichtein, a staff officer was yelling out orders to commanding officers.

“Return and take command of each of your units! Gather here once you regain your

composure!”

“Yes, sir!”

An officer tried to run off, but he crumbled and fell on the spot.

A young boy crosses over the dead body and approaches a worn out spear with one hand out.

“Good... I was wondering what I’d do if you didn’t have your war council.”

The staff officer sees the relieved young boy.

“Eek!”

He let out a scream and fell on his back.

Having tossed aside the old spear, the young boy took a sword from the dead officer.

“Yup. It’s well maintained. I can tell this person was zealous about their work.”

With a swift swing of his sword to the side, the head of the staff officer who had fallen in fear came falling down.

You cannot so easily remove a fear that has been instilled on the battlefield.

The staff officers and commanding officers drew back as their faces stiffened.

“I can’t allow you to escape. Because if I let you escaped, there will be people who will be met with misfortune.”

He changes his grip on the sword to hold it horizontally and throws it.

Thump—

It pierces the forehead of a staff officer who had tears in his eyes.

Seeing the blood spray out from their comrade, the others tried to escape.

However, they turn to mere lumps of flesh and blood as they pray for salvation.

The soldiers in the surrounding area realized something was unusual at headquarters, but because they had no commander, they ran around in a panic as they fell prey to the horseback rider.

The only one left was Viscount Lichtein. He quickly runs to his tent.

When the young boy picked up a reverse blade sword and entered the tent, Viscount Lichtein was there with a bejeweled sword in hand and a smile on his face.

“Hehe, I don’t know who you are, but before this sword, you’re no different from a baby.”

“... A spirit weapon, huh.”

As the young boy shrugs his shoulders, he swings his sword down on the remains of a chair nearby him.

He swings down over and over again, and the blade starts to nick.

“... What are you doing?”

Viscount Lichtein furrowed his brow and looked on puzzled at the young boy’s inexplicable actions.

In the hand of the young boy who turned around, was an item which no longer held the form of a sword and was ought to have been disposed of.

“Did you know? It’s because people have reason that they’re able to be cruel. It’s something I learned from my brother in law, and oddly, I understand.”

“Wh-What are you saying?”

“I’m going to ask you a number of questions now, and I’d like you to answer them.”

“L-Like I said, what are you talking about?!”

He yelled out, growing impatient that his words seemed to fall on deaf ears.

“First, I want to go with a finger, but since I don’t have that much time... I guess I’ll go with an arm.”

The young boy disappears from view.

When he reappeared, there was an abyss staring into Viscount Lichtein.

The next moment, he is assailed by an intense pain and he looks at his arm. The now jagged saw-like sword was digging into his upper arm.

“Gahh!”

“Question. Did you kill Dios?”

“Gah!”

He’s kicked in the face and his big frame goes flying.

“Ugh, s-someone... I need a medic!”

Viscount Lichtein lets go of his spirit weapon and places his hand on his arm as he is agonizing in the intense pain.

“Maybe I’ll go for your ankle next. I would really like it if you’d answer me before you died.”

Viscount Lichtein lifts his face to look up. There was a void there.

There was no emotion whatsoever. There stood one who was so cold, that it was questionable whether or not they were even human.

He recalls the word that was repeated by the soldiers who had lost their minds on the frontline.

—*“Desperation”*

Viscount Lichtein’s mind breaks and he digs his head into the ground.

“P-Please, stop... I’ll surrender... It’s my loss.”

“Why?”

“The rules regarding prisoners of war in the bilateral agreement. Excessive cruelty, as well as mortally wounding those who surrender are—”

The black-haired young boy interrupted Viscount Lichtein while he was explaining.

“I don’t know anything about that. I’m not a soldier of the Empire. That doesn’t concern me.”

“... Huh?”

“More importantly, you haven’t answered my question. I don’t have time. Would you talk for me if I took off a leg?”

The young boy approaches as he continues to speak indifferently.

“Ah, gah!”

The young boy dug the blade into Viscount Lichtein’s leg and exhaled an ice cold breath of air.

“—Did you kill Dios?”

Episode 18

Crimson Flower

A dim light began to color the sky to the east, and the surrounding area became slightly visible.

However, there was one area in the wasteland which giving off such overwhelming light that it was unnecessary.

That area was the Lichtein army's encampment.

Though now, it was tragically destroyed and engulfed in flames. It no longer had any semblance of an encampment.

A large number of soldiers were dead and charred, and an offensive odor permeated the air to the point of of crawling through your nose.

A horse without its rider was wandering about the area, and a black-haired young boy was in the hellish center staring at the remains of a camp.

Then, a horse came running over and came to a stop by Hiro's side. The straddled young girl jumped down with her crimson hair flying behind her.

"Hiro!"

Liz jumped towards Hiro looking somewhat flustered and touched his body while examining him.

"Do you have any wounds? Does it hurt anywhere?"

As his cheeks turned red, Hiro strained a smile at the girl who was even touching his face now.

"I'm okay. As you can see, I'm fine."

He raised both arms and twisted them around to proof that he was fine.

The corners of her eyes softened, and she took in a deep breath as if she were relieved.

“I’m so glad– but why are you rushing off by yourself?!”

Bam! Her hand comes flying in so quickly that he doesn’t see it.

“Mmgh!”

She grabbed both his cheeks with one hand.

“Wah ah haa oh hois.”*

(TL note: This is more jumbled than I’m used to. I THINK he’s saying something like, “Well I had no choice.”)

“I have no idea what you’re saying! I demand an apology!”

Through the power transmitted from her slender fingers, she began to shout with a shaky voice.

But to begin with, Hiro is unable to explain anything or properly apologize in his current state.

“In the future, say something if you’re going to charge into the enemy’s encampment. I can fight with you, too.”

“Oay.”

Seeing Hiro obediently nod over and over, Liz finally releases her grip.

As she brushes his hurting cheeks, Liz let out a gasp as if she had remembered something.

“That reminds me... so you’re able to wield a sword, Hiro.”

As if to evaluate it, Liz crouches down and looks at “Excalibur”, which is fastened to Hiro’s belt.

“Wow~ Now that I take a good look at it, it’s a pretty sword. My “Laevateinn” is cute too, but this one’s a beauty.”

Liz unsheathed “Laevateinn”, which was fastened to her waist, and began to compare them as if to appraise them.

Cold sweat begins to form on Hiro’s forehead. He doesn’t know how to explain this to her.

No– there’s no way he could. This lost sword, which has become something so grand, was the sword of the hero from 1,000 years ago. There’s no way he can explain this.

Ahh, screw it– Hiro screams inside his head as he decides to make up a lie.

“After I separated from you, I found it on the side of a road.”

“Eh... this was on the ground?”

“Y-Yeah. It was kind of pretty so I picked it up.”

“Wow~, I can’t believe something like this was on the ground. I wonder if it’s because it was near Baum.”

“Y-Yeah, maybe!”

Anyone who heard that would know it was a lie, but whether it’s because she’s pure or an airhead, she seemed to believe him.

She even began to ponder in all seriousness. “I feel the powers of a strong spirit... There’s a special something...no, maybe the Spirit King’s influence is strong.So-“

Hiro began to worry about the fact that Liz’s chest was in plain view through the opening in her armor.

Maybe this is what you call out of the frying pan and into the fire.

Because she was swinging her body around to look at “Excalibur”, no matter how small her breasts may have been, you could see the softness in the way the shape changed.

The arousal from the sweat falling from her fair, white skin made it difficult to keep his composure and restrain himself from expressing his desires.

He felt he couldn't take anymore, so he removed Liz from his view and looked at the large figure behind her.

“B-Boy... you seem to be enjoying the view.”

In an instant, he felt his enthusiasm die out.

Now all he could see was a bear-like, muscular man on horseback.

In his hand was a shining sword, and his body was shaking. This was possibly because his reason was desperately restraining his intent to kill.

“N-No, that's not it.”

“What's not? You're an insolent man, making the princess get on her knees and gawking at

her!”

“I didn't make her get on her knees!”

“Quiet! You were after the princess's chastity since the beginning of our journey, weren't you, you bastard?!”

“We're getting way off topic here! Please wait a second! Listen to me!”

Then, Liz stood up and turned back to Tris.

“I get that you two get along, so calm down now. More importantly, how is the battle going?”

“Wh-Wh... get along? Princess, that's not—”

“Give me the report already. We’re behind enemy lines you know.”

“Grr! Th-Thanks to that boy, as you can see, we can almost certainly claim this our victory.”

Hiro first instructed for the retrieval of the horses that were left in the middle of the road.

It was impossible to gather them all, so they only gathered 60 horses, divided them into 3 groups, and attacked from 3 different directions.

The only horses with riders were the few in the lead. Because the other horses had no master, some of them escaped along the way.

If this happened during the daytime, one would be met with laughter and scorn, but that would not happen in the dark of night.

The thunderous ringing of the horses’ hooves in the quiet wasteland wrapped in darkness gave the illusion of a large horde of people.

The enemy soldiers were exhausted from the battle in the daytime. This surprise attack was aimed to hit them while they were unable to think rationally.

There were likely few foot soldiers with the courage to stand up against horseshoes that would smash their skulls.

“Also, there are only a handful of soldiers who escaped friendly fire.”

Hiro had a number of infantrymen dress as enemy troops, and used the confusion to instruct them to sneak into enemy lines and attack.

It would soon show its results. Because their commanders were at the war council and not present, the rank and file soldiers were in a panic.

No one wanted to die. They wanted to survive somehow.

This is why the enemy started to doubt everything out of fear and began to kill each other.

And so, as to keep the officers from restoring any order to the chaos, Hiro raided the main camp.

“I see... nice work. Don't let your guard down. It's possible there are enemy soldiers in hiding. After you search the area once over, gather everyone here.”

“Yes!”

Tris put his hand to his chest, wrapped himself around his horse's neck, and raced to the encampment.

After watching him go, Liz turned to Hiro.

“How did it go for you, Hiro?”

“...”

Hiro silently pointed to the charred camp.

“Did he die?”

“Yeah.”

“I see...”

Silence fell between the two for several seconds. Liz made a troubled face and opened her mouth.

“You know, I don't understand. A part of me is happy that the enemy I held a grudge against is dead, and there's another part that feels that it's meaningless. I don't understand what to do with these emotions...”

“One day... the time will come when you understand.”

‘Just like me,’ Hiro muttered in his heart.

Whether it's a good thing or not, she's too pure.

In time, this is going to bring about a cruel end.

If Liz had been there, she probably would have accepted his surrender.

Because of her heavy shackles of being the Sixth Imperial Princess, she likely would have suppressed her own feelings.

That's what Hiro thought. It's not that he asked her.

Thinking of things in a way that's convenient for yourself and making decisions based on that, that may be what people call hubris.

But he doesn't think it was wrong to raid the main camp by himself.

(I have to pick the seeds of misfortune as quickly as possible.)

While bright rays of light in the eastern sky come pouring down, a loud ringing sound tears through the sad atmosphere.

Hiro opens his eyes wide and looks at the source of the sound— He puts both hands on his face and looks at the young girl.

With her eyes closed and enduring her pain, Liz said,

“Yup! I'm done worrying!”

She said it with a refreshed look on her face.

“Hiro, we're going to go meet with my uncle!”

The one red flower blooming in the wasteland, more precious and more beautiful than any jewel.

(Maybe there was no need to worry... She really is your descendent.)

A wry smile formed on Hiro's face.

“But first, some thanks are in order!”

She suddenly jumped towards him which caused him to panic.

“Eh? Eh?”

“Hiro, thanks to you, I’m able to live on. I will never forget this debt!”

Something soft touched his face. By the time he realized what it was, she had moved away.



“I hope I can count on you again in the future!”

“Haha... Yeah, sure.”

—A smile really does suit you better.

Episode 19

Premonition

Two days after the nameless battle on the wasteland.

Imperial Year 1023, May 28.

Liz, Hiro, Tris, and 8 heavy infantrymen were straddles on horses, and Cerberus was running on all fours alongside them. They were riding their horses 8 sels (24 km) away from the border town of Links.

Though there were 150 soldiers at the beginning of the journey, frequent encounters with monsters, and the battle with Lichtein had dwindled their numbers.

But Liz's hips keep moving forward, and Hiro had his arms around them.

"When we reach Fort Belk, we have to train you in horseback riding."

"No... I can't ride them."

He trained day and night with the first Emperor Altius as his teacher 1,000 years ago. Though he was able to straddle a horse, he couldn't even make it walk. He didn't improve any further from that point.

Because wagons were constantly used on the battlefield, he didn't think it would be inconvenient, but maybe he needed to consider it more proactively than that.

There were two reasons for him arriving to that thought.

One, was that Tris's face was extremely scary.

The other, was that her soft chest occasionally touched him.

The latter was the thornier problem for Hiro.

He sat behind the first Emperor 1,000 years ago as well, but because he was man, it didn't particularly arouse any strange feelings in him.

But the one before him now is female.

Though he got the feeling the bulge in her chest left a bit to be desired, she would likely be known around the world as an unequaled beauty in the future.

(Why is she so soft...? Is it because she's an Imperial princess?)

As he had such ridiculous thoughts, the ever vigilant Tris approached with his horse.

Of course, he doesn't forget to glare at Hiro. Typical Tris.

"Princess, let us rest a while after going a little farther."

"Right. I want to know the situation in Links, and Cerberus looks like he's having a hard time, too... Plus I'd like to let the horses rest."

Cerberus is running quickly alongside them with his tongue hanging out loosely.

"I will send about 2 men to take a look at the situation in Links. We can afford to wait for the report before heading into town."

By all means, they should have reached Fort Belk by now.

But because they continuously ran into unforeseen incidences, there is probably no harm in being too careful.

"Let's rest after about another 2 sels (6 km). Is that okay with you, Hiro?"

"I wouldn't mind taking a break right now."

It's not really that he's tired. His behind simply hurts.

Compared to Hiro, Liz looks refreshed, like she's not having a hard time at all.

Even though her behind looked soft, as he was about to come to the conclusion that it was actually hard, he caught something in the corner of his eyes and shouted.

“Liz, stop!”

She responded immediately and her horse came to a sudden stop.

Tris and the trailing soldiers were slow in noticing and they stopped after overpassing them.

“What’s wrong? Did you bite your tongue or something?”

“That’s not it! There’s a kid over there being attacked!”

She responded with urgency in her voice.

“Oh no! Where! By who?!”

Liz turned her head around in a panic.

“Over there!”

After looking where Hiro was pointing, the tension from Liz released all at once.

“That’s not a kid.”

“Eh? They look human though...”

‘Was I mistaken?’ Hiro thinks as he rubs his eyes. In his eyes, he saw a child-like something being attacked by a bird that was two times the size of vultures.

“Tris, it’s a bit soon, but let’s take a break.”

“Yes!”

Liz came down from the horse first and extended her hand towards Hiro.

“That thing that looks like a bird is called a geldem. The one that looks like a kid is a goblin.”

After he came down with the help of Liz's hand, he tilted his head and looked at the goblin.

Although there were also monsters 1,000 years ago, there weren't any small ones like that.

It had horns growing out of its head, was flesh colored, had big round eyes, and a child-like face that gave off a certain charm.

It wore green clothes which was a one piece outer garment and skirt, and it had a twig in its hand which it was swinging at the geldem.

"We don't have to help it? I don't think I can just sit here and watch."

Even from afar, you could tell it was desperate.

It's doubtful that it can repel an attack from the sky which it can't even reach.

As he looked on worried, he began to feel like a father the moment his child stood up for the first time.

But Liz shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

"If you get too close, you'll get dragged in. You don't have to worry about it."

"Well if I'm going to help, of course I'll get dragged in."

"No, no. If you watch for a bit, you'll see."

After saying that, Liz sat cross legged on the ground.

Tris was instructing soldiers to check the situation in town.

Two horses kicked up a cloud of dust and ran across the sparse wasteland.

Hiro was watching the goblin on edge, but in an instant, his face turned pale.

A group of goblins had bustled out from the ground.

One goblin got on its friend's back, then another one jumped on that goblin.

And so, they created a pillar and knocked the geldem down with the twig.

“What is that...?”

“Goblins were originally earth spirits. The spirit king apparently got mad at them for causing too much mischief, and made them earth sprites on Aletia. They get along well with dwarves. I often seen them help out with blacksmithing.”

The sight of the goblins standing up against an opponent two times their size was impressive. They were toying with the geldem with quick movements, not giving it a chance to counterattack.

But because it was just being tapped by a twig, it was likely annoying at best. Actually, the geldem did just look annoyed and didn't seem to be in pain.

At any rate, Hiro thought the goblins were cute.

“If you did jump in to help them, you probably would've been struck along with the geldem.”

“... Good thing I didn't go. That looks like an annoying attack.”

“Hehe, it does. But goblins are scary when they're unable to use a twig.”

“What does that mean exactly?”

“Mm, Tris almost died. There are some people who call the goblins' attack “Death of Meteor”*. It's as powerful as you'd expect from a former spirit.”

(TL note: Kanji is actually “Meteor of Death”...)

An attack that can almost take Tris's life. Amazing.

The moment he felt a chill down his spine, the goblins threw their twig away and began striking with their fists.

However, the image of the geldem enduring it was all the more scary.

As the two were watching the goblins' battle and talking about trifling things...

“By the way, there are only doe* goblins.”

(TL note: She uses a word for female that's specifically for animals. Since there's no general word for female regarding animals in English, I just arbitrarily went with a rabbit.)

He's curious about the word she uses, but just then, the soldiers who went to check on the town return.

They were accompanied by a neatly dressed man who looked to be in his prime.

As soon as the man dismounted his horse, he touched his hand to his chest and put a knee to the ground without concern for getting dirty.

“Your highness Celia Estreya, it is an honor to meet you. My name is Kurt von Tarmie. I am currently acting as Margrave Grinda's deputy during his absence.”

Liz stands up, touches her hand to her chest, and returns his greeting.

“I am Celia Estreya Elizabeth von Grantz. I have been granted the position of Major General from his highness the Emperor.”

Her elegance and dignified expression befitting the Sixth Imperial Princess was becoming of her.

“Deputy Margrave Tarmie, where did my Uncle go?”

“To Fort Belk. The Lichtein dukedom crossed our borders and closed in on us for an attack 4 days ago. According to reports, they number 12,000. However, thanks to the presence of

“Mars”, we are still in a stalemate.”

Tarmie handed her an envelope.

“I was told to hand this to you should you come by here.”

Liz took the envelope, opened it, and glanced through the piece of paper.

She nodded her head many times, as if agreeing, then stared at Tris.

“... Tris!”

“Yes!”

Tris, as well as the 8 heavy infantrymen, placed their knees on the ground.

“We’re heading to Fort Belk. But let’s get some rest in Links first.”

After multiple battles, they had come this far on horseback without any sleep.

No matter how well trained these soldier are, they’re fatigue had likely accumulated, even if you couldn’t tell one bit from Tris and the others’ faces.

“You want to read it too, Hiro?”

“Is it okay for you to let me read it just like that?”

He looks at Liz, a bit surprised.

Although it depends on the content, a letter meant for a specific individual like this probably shouldn’t been shown to just anyone.

At least, that’s how Hiro looked at it.

But she lightly nods and hands the letter to Hiro.

This is what was written on the letter.

My dear Elizabeth.

I am glad that you safely arrived to Links.

However, let us exchange words at length once we meet again.

I will be waiting at Fort Belk.

Ruzen Kiolk von Grinda.

“Deputy Margrave Tarmie, how many forces do you have at Fort Belk?”

“... Including *“Mars’s”* army, about 3,000.”

“That’s big difference again.”

After dealing with 3,000, now it’s 12,000. It was understandable that Liz looked crestfallen.

Hiro was thinking about the situation and sighed.

When he thought about it, He had no status whatsoever in this world.

One false step and he would’ve been less than a commoner. If he hadn’t met Liz, he would’ve been out on the streets.

Even if someone like that came up with a plan, it wouldn’t be employed.

Also, it’s doubtful anyone would believe him if he said he was the hero from 1,000 years ago.

(Although, it’s possible that Liz might believe me...)

Anyway, he decides to put a pin in it until he gets a grasp of the situation.

He can think of about it once he does. It won’t be too late to decide on the best course of action after that.

Hiro looked overhead. The ultramarine sky continued on endlessly, unaware of anyone’s feelings.

Episode 20

Lie

Border town Links. A mysterious town where a desert and grassland coexist. The southern district lies on a desert area.

Normally, the main street would be bustling with stalls, but due to signs of war, no one opened their stores. The lower class citizens were holed up in their homes. There were only a few people in the inn and the bar.

In the northern district's grasslands, the merchants there have stagecoaches set up, and the nobles have their luggage packed so as not to get involved in the war. There's confusion and an air of savagery.

If you continue along the road, you can find the mansion in which Margrave Grinda resides.

The mansion is surrounded by a tall fence, and in the center, is an iron gate. When you pass through that gate, visitors are greeted by a line of well maintained trees.

Once you walk by that area for a bit, a beautiful mansion leaps into view.

The walls have a white theme, and there is an octagonal roof which slopes on all sides.

The mansion was a wooden, two story building built atop a plateau so as to look down on the town.

On the second floor of that building, there is a room full of history books about the town and the Empire.

There are bookshelves all around the square room, lined with books both old and new, and any books that don't fit there are placed on the floor.

In the center of the room which could be called a library, was long, rustic table lacking any unnecessary decorations. It's presence seems to suggest that it is the master of the room.

Below that table was Cerberus. At the moment, he was not a white wolf full of majesty, but a puppy that was drenched in the rain, hiding and trembling.

The top of the table was piled with books, and to the side of it, was a lone male reading a book on the floor.

He was a young boy with black hair and black eyes who looked both pitiful and gentle.

“Phew... This is embarrassing.”

Hiro placed the book he was reading on the table and pinched his brows to relax them.

He felt as if he was being shown a dark past about his time in middle school. All the books mentioned the first Emperor, and if he was mentioned, the Hiro that was once known as Schwarz was surely mentioned as well. For Hiro, it was 3 years ago. For this world, it was 1,000. Just thinking about the fact that he was even deified gave him a headache.

“But it’s weird...”

He should have returned to “Earth” from Aletia three years ago when he was 14. But all the books say that Hiro lived out his life as the second Emperor.

(I wonder who this Schwarz is exactly.)

There was a possibility in Hiro’s mind, but he immediately shook the thought out of his head.

—This all happened 1,000 years ago. No matter what he says now, it won’t change a thing.

He looks towards the window on the other side of the room for a change of pace. In the western sky, the violet clouds had the sun to their backs, as if they were playing a prank on it.

Relying on the light coming from that window, he grabs a different book and pulls out a card from an inner pocket of his uniform.

It was an item given to him by the first Emperor Altius before he returned to his own world.

“... It resembles a spirit charm.”

There are similar charms cited in the book he opened, but they weren’t as plain or as thick as his.

He doesn’t know what it is or how he should use it.

“And it doesn’t just work, like with “Excalibur”...”

The spirit king’s divine protection. It’s an <outside> power which goes beyond the limits of human intelligence.

Hiro stares into a blank space. There is a snapping sound, and then a tear in space.

And that which creeps out from that tear, is a white handle.

When he looks down, “Excalibur’s” handle is gone, as if it had been cut clean off. When he grabs the handle that’s floating in space and pulls it out, “Excalibur” disappears from his waist and appears in Hiro’s hand.

–You have received “Excalibur’s” favor.

He recalled those words Altius said to him when he showed this to him.

(... Spirit swords have a will.)

When he wishes for it, “Excalibur” materialize by means of a “gate” which connects Aletia and the spirit world.

Once Hiro let’s go, the moment it hits the ground, it vanishes as if it had disappeared into air.

The room falls silent, and that silence ripples out.

Darkness slowly creeps up onto the room.

Outside, sounds of loud footsteps ring out as they start to get closer.

After a while, the door violently swung open and a seemingly angry, crimson-haired girl entered.

“Cerberus! Are you in here?!”

“Hfft!”

Hiro, who was facing that way, was so surprised he almost spit up.

Cerberus pricks his pointy ears and hides behind Hiro.

“Hey! Come here!”

Liz approached him and stretched her hand out, but the wolf just growled in an attempt to intimidate her.

His eyes were burning as if he had met with a sworn enemy.
He looked resolute in his decision not to take a single step.

“Come on! Why do you hate baths so much!”

“Ah—... Excuse me Liz, I’m sorry to bother you while you’re busy, but do you have a second?”

“What is it?!”

“Umm... wh-why aren’t you wearing any clothes?”

“I’m covering myself, aren’t I?”

“No, umm... that’s not good enough.”

Well, it was true that she was hiding the important parts with a towel.

It was an impossibly difficult decision, but Hiro squinted his eyes so as not to look below, and focused only on her face.

In a way, that wasn’t a good idea either, but he had no choice this time.

“Cerberus, for my sake too, won’t you go take a bath?”

He has to do something before Tris comes.

It would be impossible to talk himself out of this situation.

Hiro forces his arms around the torso of the wolf that was deftly shaking his head in refusal and hands him over to Liz.

“Hey! Stop fighting!”

Because of the stubborn Cerberus, the towel flutters down to the ground.

She kept her back to Hiro as if she hadn’t noticed.

And so, Liz left the room with her secret garden exposed.



“ ... ”

Hiro wasn't able to tell her. His narrowed eyes were now open.

He could tell a torrent of power that he never even felt from his spirit sword was swelling in the lower half of his body.

At the same time, he had forgotten to breathe and his face was quickly turning red.

–*Oxygen.*

It can be said that it is extremely important to humans. You could even say it is indispensable in living.

“Puah!”

Hiro finally remembered how to breathe and was able to regain his senses.

Then, Hiro noticed there was someone at the door which still open, staring at him.

–It's Tris.

His face didn't appear angry or sad. It was very strange.

As Tris slowly approached, Hiro made a quick decision to get on his hands and knees.

“Please, spare my life at least.”

“Boy, there's something I'd like to ask you.”

“Anything you want... so please, my life...”

“I don't understand why you keep acting so frightened... Are you listening to me?”

“ ... ”

The man once called “Mars” 1,000 years ago racked his brain at full power. After a few seconds of scrutinizing Tris's words, he answered.

“Do you have a question for me?”

He forces a stiff smile to try to look composed.

Though Tris looked puzzled, he seemed to decide to brush it aside.

“A lot happened the other day and I'm a bit unsettled.”

It didn't seem to be about Liz after all.

He breathes a sigh of relief in his mind, and concentrates on listening to Tris.

“Boy, who are you exactly?”

“What do you mean...?”

A slight ray of light glitters, and a cold blade is placed on the nape of his neck.

“Depending on your answer, I may cut off your head.”

“...”

Looking into Tris’s eyes, Hiro gathers that he is serious.

“I trust you, boy. I also owe you a debt for saving us from that battlefield which reeked of death. However, after witnessing such powers, I cannot play the fool.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“If anyone would bring harm to the princess, I will personally take care of them, even if I am indebted to them. So don’t try to deceive me.”

Hiro gulped and cleared his throat.

If he said that he was the second Emperor, his head would likely tumble across the floor.

But if he said he came from “Earth”, his head would still fall.

–*What do I do?*

As Hiro hesitates...

“Tris, what are you doing?!”

Liz enters the room in a panic.

She clings to Hiro’s neck and pushes him down. She then lifts her face and sternly glares at Tris.

“I don’t know what happened, but this going too far!”

“Princess...”

“Quiet. And sheathe your sword.”

Without a word, Tris sheathes his sword and takes a knee.

Liz removes her body while leaving the hint of a sweet smell.

“Tris, tell me what happened exactly.”

“Actually, this is perfect. There’s something I want you to hear too, Liz.”

Hiro gets up and stands between the two.

“What is it?”

“—My true identity. I’m sure you were wondering about it, too.”

“... You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to. I don’t really mind.”

Seeing her eyes trembling, Hiro hesitated a bit, then stroked her face.

Hiro forced a smile at Liz who looked like a lonely child that had been separated from her parents.

“It’s okay. I want to tell you now.”

“... All right. If you want to tell me, I’ll listen.”

“It’s not that complicated though—”

After a brief pause, Hiro quietly spoke.

“I’m a descendant of the second Emperor.”

“... Huh?”

“... Hmm?”

If he were to tell the whole truth, he would have to tell them about 1,000 years ago as well.

They had to depart tomorrow, and he couldn’t explain everything in half a day.

So he decided to simply tell a lie.

“If you want proof, I guess it would be the color of my hair and eyes. They’re atavisms.”

“... ”

“... ”

While he thinks their silence is odd, Hiro continues.

“By the way, I think the reason I was able to enter the Anfang forest was because I’m part of the second Emperor’s lineage.”

“... Hiro, do you know what that means?”

Hiro tilted his head in response to Liz's serious question.

"Eh, what does that means?"

"If what you say is true, that means you're a successor to the throne."

"That's not true. I'm just a descendant."

"Of that "Mars", right?"

"... Yeah, that's right."

"Then that puts you at the bottom of the Imperial family. Probably."

"Wh-Why?"

"Well, there's the first Emperor's last testament."

"Last testament?"

"Yeah. It's a strange last testament."

Liz looks at the silent Tris.

"If one who calls himself a descendant of Schwarz appears, confirm it at the spirit mausoleum. If it be true, grant unto him a befitting status. Those who do not adhere to this last testament will fall to the spirit king's curse."

—Altius... what are you doing?

He's a smart man. He might have had some sort of premonition.

He may have done that so that no matter which era Hiro returned to, he would have no inconveniences.

But to think that he predicted that Hiro would claim to be a descendant. What a scary man.

"So, you might able to enter the Imperial family. Are you happy?"

There was a smile on Liz's face as she approached to grab his arms.

If Hiro wasn't thickheaded, he might have sensed her feelings of love.

He might have realized it wasn't a love which arose from different social standings.

But Hiro managed a stiff smile in response to the unexpected development, and looked towards Cerberus, as if to request any form of assistance.

It might have been because he held a grudge for the incident earlier, but Cerberus turned his back in a huff and ignored Hiro.

"... Hmm. I suppose that's fine for now."

Tris says reluctantly as he gets up with an unconvinced look on his face. It was only natural, because even though Hiro had answered the question about his origins, the mystery of his powers was left unexplained. Tris was likely holding himself back in the presence of Liz.

“I can’t believe that you were a descendant of the second Emperor. But I think I’m a little disappointed that you weren’t a spirit.”

He wanted to poke fun at her about bringing up that topic again, but there was a more important matter.

“Umm, do you think you can keep quiet about my being a descendant of the second Emperor?”

“I know. We’re in no situation for that right now. And there’s something bothering me, too...”

“Yeah... thanks.”

Though he brought this on himself, his lie had made things even more complicated.

This may be what they mean by a crafty schemer drowning in their own scheme. He sighs at the fact that nothing goes his way with his life in this alternate world. Hiro’s mind raced desperately with thoughts of the future.

Episode 21

Child Prodigy

Grantz Grand Empire, Margrave Grinda's Territory.

South of there, you will find the dukedom of Lichtein, whose economy revolves around their slave trade.

Fort Belk, which lies at their border, is surrounded by a wasteland full of rocks and dirt.

The closest village is a day's journey by foot, and the border town of Links is a two days' journey by horse.

Although it is said to be the frontline of the south, the dukedom of Lichtein and the Grantz Grand Empire, which makes use of Lichtein's slave system, had not so much as had any skirmishes in many years.

Which is why, although Fort Belk was kept maintained, it was nothing but useless in terms of a drawn out war.

Imperial year 1023, June 1.

The Sixth Imperial Princess had arrived at Fort Belk.

Unsure of what they would do should they be surrounded by the enemy, Hiro was feeling uneasy.

The enemy army was setting up camp at a distance, and the two foes were glaring at each other.

Tris signs at a guard, and when he walks through an iron gate, a large central plaza jumps into view.

It is mainly used as a training ground for the soldiers. To the east is lodging for the officers, and to the west are rows of tenements for the troops.

On the north side is a tower with facilities like the war room, a large bath, and a dining hall. A soldier guides Hiro and the others up a set of spiral stairs to the war room.

The wall on the right had a map of the central continent, and next to it was one of the world.

In the middle of the room was a long table with 10 seats lined alongside it.

Near a window overlooking the central plaza was a flag with a crest of white soil and a golden lion, and another with brown soil and a rose.

Other than that, it was a simple room.

As Hiro and the others enter the room, 3 people notice their entrance and get up from their seats to salute them.

The first one to step forward was a bearded gentleman who was overflowing with elegance.

With his scrupulously maintained armor, he approached Liz with a clatter and embraced her.

“I’m glad you arrived here safely. You’ve grown so much in the short while I haven’t seen you.”

“Uncle Grinda, it’s been so long!”

As he watched the two who were rejoicing in their reunion, Hiro felt a gaze boring into him.

When he looked in the direction of where the gaze was coming from, there stood a beautiful young girl.

Her thin, smooth, silver hair was glittering from the light shining in through the window.

She had a small face and big, round eyes. She reminded you of a small animal, inciting a desire to care for her.

Her bangs were long enough to hide her eyebrows, which made her look all the younger.

It might have been due to her lead colored eyes, or her expressionless face, but she gives off a cold impression.

She was even shorter than Hiro, who was aware of his small stature.

She had on a black themed military uniform. Her sleeves were extremely long and her hands were hidden from view.

Her clothes were so big that you could call them baggy.

(Is she a soldier? I feel like she might be too young though.)

She had in her left hand a book which he remembered seeing before.

He tried to recall where, but having grown impatient, the young girl approaches him and interrupts his thoughts.

“... Who are you?”

She asks expressionlessly and seemingly in a daze.

She seemed to be both looking at Hiro and not. She gave off a mysterious air.

“I-Impossible...”

Someone muttered.

Next to the spot where the young girl originally was, a handsome man with brown hair was staring in their direction surprised.

Hiro tilted his head and thought it was odd.

He felt a tug on the sleeve of his uniform so he looks to the young girl once more.

“... Who are you?”

“My name’s Hiro. Oh, and I’m a commoner.”

“Hiro... Hiro... Hiro? Hiro Hiro Hiro Hiro.”

Hiro forces a smile at the young girl who began to mumble his name repeatedly.

The way she was saying his name sounded like the cry of an animal. He wished she would stop.

“... I see.”

The young girl nods her head, rummages through her long sleeves, and extends a pair of white hands.

There was something wrapped in paper atop her hands.

“This is for you. It’s a Second Emperor bun.”

“... Th-Thanks.”

He accepted the buns while being surprised that buns existed in this world, too.

He felt the bun would be a bit awkward to eat, seeing as how it was warmed by her body heat.

This might be considered a reward to a certain type of people though.

Actually, there was a handsome, brown haired man who looked like he was about to cry tears of blood.

That man was looking at Hiro with a mix of frustration and jealousy in his eyes.

The girl who was standing in front of the confused Hiro touched her hand to her chest while her sleeves dangled.

“Trea Luzandi Aura von Bunadara. My rank is brigadier general. I will allow you to call me Aura.”

“How courteous of you...”

Hiro lowered his head while thinking this girl was quite mature. Then, he lifts his head confused, and stares intently at the young girl.

“... Is something the matter?”

“Umm, may I ask you a question?”

“I don’t mind. What might your question be?”

She tilted her head slightly to the side with a blank expression. Even though she was expressionless, it was an adorable gesture.

“Are you the “Mars” from the rumors?”

“That’s right.”

She replied immediately without hesitation.

And after being called “Mars”, it was just a slight change, but it looked like her face softened a bit with pride.

This young girl took the name of “Mars”, which he was once known by.

She was the youngest ever to be selected as one of the Third Imperial Prince’s staff officers, and a child prodigy who serves as his chief of staff at just 17.

To think that she was this small... To begin with, Hiro is surprised at the fact that she is the same age as him.

(So this is the girl... Hmm?)

Hiro sensed that something was wrong.

As he wonders what it is...

“Oomph!”

He groans like a middle aged man and Aura disappears from his field of view.

In his confusion, he tried to see what happened and saw that he was knocked over by Liz and that she was rubbing her cheek against Aura's.

“Ahh~ so cute! Oh my goodness! You're so soft!”

“ ... ”

“So this is “Mars”. Wow! It's true... I don't think I stand a chance against this overwhelmingly destructive power!”

“ ... ”

With an irritated face, Aura lets the Imperial Princess do as she pleases.

He wasn't sure if she didn't resist because Liz was an Imperial Princess, even if she was depraved, or because it was a hassle, but Hiro decided to stop Liz since Aura didn't seem to like like the situation.

“Liz, it doesn't look like she likes that. Why don't you stop?”

“But she's so soft!”

“Ahh, I guess there's not helping it...” Hiro muttered and retreated back.

It's not that he was scared because her eyes became bloodshot. Not at all.

—Sorry. Please don't look at me like that.

After he apologized in his heart to Aura, who was looking at him with a bitter look on her face, he decided to leave her be until Liz grew tired. Incidentally, the gentlemanly Uncle had approached Hiro.

“Hello. I believe you've heard about me from Liz, but let me introduce myself.”

The old man extends his hand, which Hiro grasps.

He appears to be thin, but his hands are rugged. It's apparent that he does not slack in his training.

"Ruzen Kiolk von Grinda. I am the Margrave of the Grinda territory. You can casually call me Old Man Kiolk."

"I'm Hiro. It's nice to meet you, Mr. Kiolk."

There's no way he can call someone so aesthete "old man".

"I guess it's too soon..." Kiolk muttered, but Hiro didn't hear him.

"Excuse me."

Kiolk walked toward Tris and Cerberus after he excused himself.

As if he had taken the old man's place, the handsome, brown haired man appears before Hiro.

"... The tension in here went flying out the window because of you guys. Well, since there are 12,000 opponents, this might be better than getting all worked up. But still, what a waste."

The handsome, brown haired man snorted and extended his hand.

Hiro grasped the hand of the man who seemed to be making a conscious effort to be cold.

"Lawrence Alfred von Spitz is the name. A viscount and a second class enlisted officer. I'm currently acting as Lady Aura's aide. Call me Lord Alfred."

In the Grantz Grand Empire, enlisted officers mostly serve in positions in the field of military affairs. There are also administrative officers who serve in governmental positions.

First, second, and third class officers are high grade officers. Fourth, fifth, and sixth class officers are low grade officers.

Incidentally, Tris is a third class enlisted officer.

“... I’ll call you Alfred.”

“Well, that’s fine, too.”

“Yeah... okay.”

He thought he was the type to frantically snap back, but apparently, he was not.

Though Hiro thought he was a bit childish.

“There’s no way a commoner like you would enrage a noble like me.”

He ended up taking back his previous thoughts after being told that in such a disagreeable manner.

“I see... there’s something I’d like to say to you as an aide.”

“What is it?”

“Is it okay for you not to help Aura?”

“I told you, I’m a noble. Commoners aside... I can’t possibly give orders to her Highness.”

He says pathetically as he crosses his arm proudly.

“Besides, look at that image of two beautiful maidens intertwined. I’m satisfied with that alone.”

This guy doesn’t have a ounce of tension in him, Hiro thought.

Episode 22

Dark Clouds

It was difficult to peel Liz away from Aura, but now, everyone was calmly seated in the chairs lined along the long table.

“So why is “Mars” of the Third Imperial Army here?”

Liz asks with her head tilted to the side, to which Alfred responds by stiffening up, and his eyes darting, making him seem nervous.

Hiro narrows his eyes at Alfred, who had become suspicious, and watches his every move carefully.

He bit his lips as if he were troubled, and fear and anxiety began to show on his slender face.

However, in an instant, you could tell from Alfred’s expression that he had come to some sort of decision.

“I-I will explain that—”

He stood up quickly, but a long sleeve smacked him on his face.

It was Aura with her drooping sleeves.

“I don’t mind. You stay seated.”

“Y-Yes...”

Alfred’s knees gave out and he fell to his seat after getting hit by the daunting presence.

Aura, who was next to him, stands up, takes a few short breaths, and looks at Liz.

“I came here to capture your Highness.”

At least one person had to have heard the snapping sound in the room.

It was an off sound in a room filled with silence.

It was sure to have rung out intensely, but maybe was passed off as just some random noise.

But, there is just one person who did notice.

It was the young boy who carried an abyss with him.

A crack opens in the space before his hand, and a pommel flies out, giving off a small light.

Depending on how the other side acts, he is ready to draw “Excalibur”.

Which is what was expressed on Hiro’s face, but the chance didn’t come.

“I fought against a unit led by “Ogre”, and killed many of your soldiers during that battle, your Highness.”

The sounds that were expelled from the small mouth stopped the flow of time for everyone in the room except for Aura.

“No matter what I say at this point, it will be nothing more than an excuse.”

Liz’s sharp glint pierced through Aura, but without running from it, she meets her gaze and continues her piece.

“Having said that, I also don’t want to give you a superficial apology. If I did, that battle would lose all meaning, and I wouldn’t be able to face my scattered subordinates.”

Rage, sorrow, resentment, she accepts everything with sincerity.

“So— I will not apologize.”

After finishing her monologue, Aura let’s out a small exhale, touches her hand to her chest, and closes her eyes like a priestess with an oracle.

“... If you had apologized, I would have cut you down with “Laevateinn”.”

Hiro felt like he could hear the screaming in her heart. Not able to bear it, he lifts his face toward the ceiling and closes his eyes.

Unable to just stand there and watch, Tris exhales.

“... They had their resolve. A resolve to face death which you do not find in conscripted soldiers. Having said that, I doubt that they were wishing for death, either. But even if we cut you down, that’s not what the dead want. The only thing to remain would be the emptiness of having carried out our own desire. All that would be, is the living desecrating the dead.”

What were they embracing? What did they wish for? What were they thinking? The living cannot presume what is in the hearts of those who die.

What must they have felt, with the Imperial Princess, the one who they looked up to as their master, not present.

This is why she wants to know.

No— As the Imperial Princess, she must know.

“Hey, Aura... tell me, were they brave?”

Like a cloud that was ready to cry at any moment, a dark shadow was cast upon Liz’s face.

Aura nods expressionlessly, and begins to speak in all honesty.

“They were fine, brave warriors. No less so than the “Black Heaven’s Five Generals”.”

“I see... That’s—”

Liz held her lips back in an effort to resist her tears.

That is the greatest praise to a soldier of the empire. You could say there is no greater honor.

As a militaristic Empire, there are many who admire the Second Emperor, regardless of social status. This was even more so for soldiers.

And the “Black Heaven’s Five Generals” who supported “Mars” were popular to no end.

Liz wiped a tear from the corner of her eye and smiled.

“... Then I’m sure they were guided to the Twelve Great Gods of Grantz.”

In the Empire, it is believed that those who fight bravely and die are guided to the Twelve Great Gods of Grantz.

They who become warrior spirits run about the battlefields once more with the gods.

For a while, it was as if everyone were offering a silent prayer. Not a single person uttered a word, and only the sound of breathing echoed throughout the room.

The one who broke that silence was Liz’s uncle.

“... That’s when the battle between Count Bunadara and myself began. But that promptly turned into a truce. The reason being, as you know, was that the dukedom of Lichtein had attacked... It’s shameful, but the reason we came to know that was thanks to Count Bunadara reporting it to

us.”

After he takes a pause, Kiolk continues.

“I was surprised. She flew a white flag to stop the fighting. As I was thinking it to be dubious, a messenger came almost immediately. He told me that the dukedom of Lichtein had crossed the border.”

“There was a foreign invader. It was not the time to be fighting between fellow countrymen.”

Aura interjected.

“Of course... Even if there is discord between us, when the Grantz Grand Empire has a foreign invader, we must stand together as one strong unit. Though there are those who are unsettled within these boundaries.”

“Also, I won one over on “Mars”“, Kiolk added proudly.

Aura spoke with her brows furrowed, looking displeased.

“There was no other choice this time around.”

Liz put a finger to her jaw and tilted her head, as if something were bothering her.

“Wait. Uncle, what happened to the Fourth Imperial Army?”

“... I’ve sent letters many times over, but I’ve yet to receive a response. It doesn’t seem like we can expect any reinforcements.”

After responding to Liz’s words, Kiolk looks around the room and mutters.

“By the way, I don’t see Sir Dios...”

Despite sensing a change in the air after saying that, he still continues.

“He should’ve have gone to Fort Alt to meet with you, Liz... Did you perhaps not meet with him?”

After seeing Liz’s grave expression, Kiolk realized that he had made a gaffe.

But you cannot take back that which has been said.

Tris raised his brows and jumped in in an attempt to break the awkward atmosphere.

“Lichtein’s army was lying in wait near Baum. That’s when...”

“... I see.”

Kiolk, who was leaning on his chair, dropped his shoulders.

Although Kiolk should have been aware that a detached force of 3,000 Lichtein troops had headed for Fort Alt, because he saw that Liz was safe, it may have been that he assumed Dios was safe as well.

“And we vowed to meet again, too.”

When Hiro looked at Aura’s face, her eyes were wide open as if she were surprised, too.

“That “Ogre” was...” Hiro heard Aura mutter.

In the corner of his eyes, Kiolk was seeping with remorse.

“If only we hadn’t ignored the detached force...”

Aura’s aide, Alfred, responded to Kiolk’s words.

“This isn’t the time to be talking about “what ifs”. It’s true that we let the detached force slip by, but turning our backs to 12,000 men to chase after them would have been nothing but suicide.”

Not a single person could disagree with him.

Had they abandoned the fort and chased after them, they would have either been taken from the rear, or perhaps received a pincer attack.

They would have had to defeat the 12,000 first, but they were not ready to take on those numbers.

“Also, I’m sure they saw your Highness enter the fort, so we may not have any time left. If your Highness is their objective, the enemy will most likely come in for an attack.”

Hiro thought of a number of ideas... but he was lost as to how to go about conveying them.

But his hesitation disappeared immediately.

The reason being that Aura spoke up full of fighting spirit.

“... It is our turn now.”

There were small flames lit in her lead colored eyes.

Kiolk straightens his posture and questions the young girl.

“Do you have some sort of plan?”

“Yes, we will launch an attack from Fort Belk.”

“I think that’s reckless... we only have 3,000 on our side. We probably won’t be able to win fighting them head on.”

“Which is why, just in case, I’d like her Highness and Margrave Grinda to remain in Fort Belk with 1,000 men under your command.”

Her aide Alfred nodded with pride in response to her words, but the others had their eyes wide open in surprise.

“Starting now, please bear witness to a strategy that will not bring shame to the name of

“Mars”.”



At the very top of the tower in the center of Fort Belk, one can get a view of the entire battlefield.

Everyone is sweating profusely from the sun’s hot rays, and humid winds weave in and out between Hiro and the others.

In the fort’s plaza, are 300 cavalrymen and 700 infantrymen on standby.

They are ready to rush out as reinforcement should something happen.

On the other side of the iron gate, was a force of 2,000 led by Aura set in a strange formation.

Looking down on them worried, Liz puts a hand to the wall, lifts her body, and voices her concern.

“Hey, do you think they’ll be okay...? Wouldn’t it be best to hold down the fort?”

“No, that would be a poor move. Looking at the fort from the outside, it’s hard to say that it’s solid. If it comes under enemy attack for a long period of time, it’ll easily fall.”

“Then, shouldn’t we fight with them after all?”

“Maybe. But the skill level between Margrave Grinda’s soldiers and Aura’s soldiers are different. If they fought together, there’s a chance Aura’s soldiers will be dragged down. But having said that, if they fought separately, that would only lead to each of them getting crushed separately.”

“This is so hard.”

“It would be a different story if we had the same numbers as them, but that’s not the case this time.”

But to defeat 12,000 men with only 2,000 is impossibly difficult.

Should the commander be unskilled, it would be an instant annihilation.

But looking down on Aura’s strange formation, the corners of Hiro’s mouth lift up to form a smile.

All 2,000 troops were heavy cavalrymen.

There were 5 rows of 100 men, and behind them, where three 3 groups of 500, one of which was the main unit.

One would think charging in like this would be the epitome of stupidity, but...

(I see... She’s going to make a “trident” .)

Seeing the nostalgic formation, Hiro realized that he was truly back in Aletia.

With the vanguard commencing their operation, the battlefield begins to come alive.

The western sky is dyed in black, swelling with dark clouds.

That scene, which would instill anxiety in any who saw, was steadily approaching the battlefield.

No one had yet to realize what was to occur or what would come about from it.

Episode 23

Ill Omen

The battle had begun.

From the north, 2,000 cavalymen slowly make their advance southward.

Aura leads the group which is looked up to as the elite, even within the Third Imperial Army. They are the “Imperial Black Knights”.

The horses wrapped in armor kick up dust. They are completely covered in sturdy iron, all the way to their heads.

And all the knights straddled atop them were burly soldiers clad in heavy black armor.

A flag with a crest of purple soil and a sword and shield flutters in the wind.

From the enemy encampment, a war cry swelling with tension can be heard.

It is to be expected. At this point, there was not a single person on the central continent who does not know of her.

Reason being, she is the chief of staff of the Third Imperial Army at just 17. Some also say she is a sweet young girl. She is Aura, also known as “Mars”.

The enemy army placed their archers on the frontline. They now await Aura’s approach.

It is obvious that they were sneering, and they could hardly be blamed for it.

Aura had cavalymen. And they were heavy cavalymen at that, with low mobility.

The enemy archers unleashed a swarm of arrows, and in an instant, it covered their entire field of view.

Who knows what sort of scene the enemy imagined in their heads? Maybe it was the sight of Aura’s army dying. Maybe it was the sight of the arrows being

stopped by armor and shields and tragically breaking apart. There is no way of telling.

But then, Aura smiled.

As she thrusts her left hand up, drums ring out and the entire army comes to a halt.

The arrows poured down right before the advance guard. Surprisingly, not a single arrow hit them.

“Now. Advance guard, move out.”

She lifts her right hand into the sky and swings it down.

The drums ring out 3 times and the men of advance guard raise their steel shields, kick the bellies of their horses, and race out onto the wasteland.

There were 5 units arranged in 5 lines, and they began to move side to side. The enemies releases their arrows, but without fixed targets, they mostly pierce the ground. Even if they do hit their targets, they are blocked by the shields.

So they decide to shoot the horses, but the horses are covered in armor as well.

In which case, their only option was to aim for the eyes or legs, but perhaps because their commanding officer was bewildered, the enemy’s attack lacked any vigor.

Alfred approaches Aura’s side with his horse as he listens closely to the roaring of the hooves.

“Lady Aura, I have conveyed the orders to each commanding officer.”

“Then we will advance without letting the enemy take notice.”

“Yes!”

Alfred lifts two fingers and swings his arm to the side.

After each commanding officer confirmed the sign, the rear guard began their advance.

Just because the horses and the soldiers are clad in armor, it does not necessarily mean the arrows will not hit them.

If enough arrows are shot, they will hit their marks.

A number of soldiers in the advance guard fell to the ground and became targets for the enemy's arrows.

Seeing this, Aura snorted displeased.

“We will move on to the next step. Prepare the drums.”

“Yes!”

As Alfred raised his right arm, the cavalymen in the rear prepare to beat their drums.

“We will seize this opportunity before the enemy has a chance to regain their composure!”

Aura extended her right arm to the side.

The drums are beat twice, and two flags go up.

As they do, two units joined and ran towards the edge of the enemy's left flank in a circular formation.

The enemy soldiers are distracted by Aura's men on the right flank.

Then, in order to agitate the bewildered enemy...

“Next.”

Aura extended her left arm to her side.

The drums were beat twice and four flags were raised.

Two more units joined together and headed for the edge of the enemy's right flank.

"This is it."

Aura brought her hands together, and her dangling cuffs swam in the wind.

The drums were beat 5 times, and 5 flags were raised.

"Take this."

The last unit charges the enemy's center.

Attacks also begin simultaneously on the left and right.

The enemy army tried to pull their archers back, but they were late in doing so. The archers fell victim to the spears of the heavy cavalry units.

Aura saw a perfect opportunity in the enemy formation's confusion.

"All units, attack."

She drew her sword and raised it high in the sky. Her spirit weapon reflects the light shining down on it from the sun.

It was an extremely beautiful sight.

Seeing the beautiful goddess, Alfred psyched himself up, drew his sword and yelled out.

"All units, attack! Victory to our "Mars"!"

[[Ohh!]]

Clang—

The heavy cavalrymen respond by banging their spear handles against their shields.

Hearing that, Alfred races to the head of the group, and 500 riders following behind him while giving off an overwhelming sense of intimidation.

In order to execute a pincer attack in tandem with the advance guard, the rear guard and the troops on both flanks kept their distance from them and surrounded the enemy in a circular formation.

The advance guard converges inside the enemy formation and pushes towards their headquarters like a spear.

Fifteen hundred cavalymen approach. The enemy soldiers on the frontline notice this, but in a large army of 12,000, the transmission of information ends up being delayed.

—They collide.

The main unit of 500 aim for the exposed backs of the enemy troops.

The enemy soldiers let out sprays of blood and meet their end as they are run over. The wall of humans is easily destroyed, like a mudslide washing away a forest of trees.

Only left with having to push through the path opened by the advance guard, the units on both flanks disperse the enemies around them to join with the main unit.

“Keep pushing forward to the enemy headquarters—!”

Alfred yelled, then look to his side with a surprised look on his face.

“Count Spitz, you’ll end up dying with a face like that.”

He was surprised because Aura, who was supposed to be at headquarters, was riding calmly beside him.

Aura was moving farther ahead as she lightly swung her spirit weapon and massacred her enemies.

“What are you doing?! It’s dangerous here!”

“I have a spirit weapon. I am currently stronger than even you, Count Spitz.”

“Well, that is true, but we do not know what might happen! Please return imme—”

Alfred turned back and realized that they were already surrounded by the enemy. Though not impossible, it was a number which Aura would not be able to break through easily.

The units from the flanks had already joined them, and all that was left for them now was to join with the advance guard and overrun the enemy’s headquarters.

“Please do not separate from me at any cost!”

At this point, their only option was to cut through.

However, their morale was raised at least. “Mars” was with them. There was no way they could lose now. It was apparent that the soldiers were uplifted.

At that time, a drop of moisture fell on Aura’s cheek. She looked up at the sky and furrowed her brows.

“... This is bad.”

The sky was dyed black. It was even beginning to encroach on the sun which was shining so brightly earlier.

The lukewarm air carried the smell of the enemy’s death and the sign of rain.



The winds had grown strong atop the central tower of Fort Belk.

Liz looked to Hiro while holding her hair down with one hand.

“Amazing... Do you think they’ll reach the enemy headquarters?”

Liz was pointing at the “trident” which was penetrating the enemy formation.

Hiro nods in agreement.

“Yeah. It’s different from the original method, but I think they did well.”

“Really?”

“Actually, infantrymen are supposed to pry open a hole in the enemy formation first, but Aura did that with cavalymen. That’s pretty hard to think up, because if you made a mistake, it’s total annihilation.”

Especially because their side is overwhelmingly outnumbered.

In this situation, rather than praising her, her well trained soldiers probably deserve the credit.

This explosive power is thanks to the calculated way which they joined together, and the lack of hesitation in their assault.

Thereafter, they attacked the exposed backs of the enemies who were distracted by the advance guard. You could say Aura’s command of her troops was magnificent.

It was truly an admirable sight.

Her allies would obviously think so, but even her enemies found it difficult not to.

“Do you think they can win?”

“I think they can win if they keep moving forward like this.”

He doesn’t voice his anxiety. At least it’s going well right now.

They need to keep pushing through, raid the enemy headquarters, defeat their general, then withdraw.

After that, all they had to do was trample down the rank and file soldiers once they fall into a panic. But something was making Hiro uneasy.

(It all comes down to how strong the enemy general is...)

Long ago, when Hiro used this strategy himself, he had the “Black Heaven’s Five Generals” with him.

It was because he had them fighting in the lead that this strategy succeeded.

Does Aura have such stalwart men in her camp?

(Also...)

Looking up at the sky, he feels even more unease.

The sky will likely start weeping and moisten the earth in less than an hour.

The heavy cavalymen already have low mobility. If the rain should wet the surface, they’ll end up losing half their destructive force.

Hiro looks down on the battlefield.

The enemy’s formation was cut through along their center by the “Imperial Black Knights” led by Aura.

It impressed the image of a black dragon rising into the heavens and enchanted those who saw it.

“Liz, can you ask Mr. Kiolk to get ready, just in case?”

They must be ready to race off as reinforcement if something should happen.

You never know what might happen on a battlefield.

No matter the situation, humans are bound to create an opening.

If something unforeseen were to happen, it would likely occur in a striking way.

There's no way the enemy would let that slip by. No one wants to die.

"Alright."

Liz consents immediately without saying a word. In her current position, that's all she can do.

"Thanks."

After he mutters his appreciation, he watches her back as she goes to find Kiolk.

He looked overhead. A gloomy shadow was spreading, and there were violent clouds hanging low.

Episode 24

Chaos

The battlefield is the epitome of chaos.

Though it is still morning, the sun rising high into the sky is covered by clouds and cannot be seen.

Below, there is an army formation being pushed back by a group of black cavalymen who are far inferior in numbers.

The loud beating of the hooves against the earth drowns out the screams of the enemy. A single black line is closing in on enemy headquarters.

However, small drops were pouring down from the cloud filled sky, and so their speed had dropped.

In no time at all, those small drops begin to grow larger and the rain begins to pour down even harder.

The rain soaked into the ground and completely thwarted the momentum of the “Imperial Black Knights”.

The brown haired aide, Alfred, spoke to his superior who was riding alongside him.

“Lady Aura! What do we do?!”

“The enemy general is right before us. We will take his head and withdraw. We will escape all the way to the fort.”

“Is that our only option...?”

“I will not fixate on it. If it seems impossible, we will withdraw immediately.”

“Yes!”

Aura gazes at the enemy’s headquarters in order to search for their general’s location.

The rain is obstructing her field of vision, but she desperately strains her eyes in order to secure a victory.

She doesn’t even take notice of the enemies being knocked down by her horse’s armor. She simply keeps her eyes fixed on the enemy’s headquarters.

There are soldiers pointing her way looking panicked.

There are others whose faces are twisted in fear.

There are more still who lie in wait with animal like expressions.

None of them are the one she is looking for. She removes them all from her field of view—

Then, as if guided by a ray of light, she successfully captures her target with her eyes.

“I’ve found him. Viscount Spitz, follow me!!”

In a rare display, Aura raised her voice.

And that wasn’t all. She valiantly raised her spirit weapon and kicked her horse’s belly.

Alfred gulped while frozen in amazement.

However, he quickly gathers himself and runs after Aura at full speed.

He switches from his sword to his spear.

“Imperial Black Knights! Follow our “Mars’s” lead!”

He yelled out in a thunderous voice that shook the heart.

Without saying a word, the knights replied with a spirit driven offensive.

They begin to slaughter the enemies around them, spraying the blood of their enemies high into the sky as they send them to their graves, one after another.

Aura could feel their fighting spirit from behind her. She could tell there was a burning passion in their hands which were chilled from the rain.

Aura, with the divine protection of her spirit weapon, begins to cut down the enemy troops who stood protecting their commander.

The enemy began to keep their distance so as not to be trampled by the hooves.

In the end, they are simply conscripted soldiers. Savages who came to a foreign nation in search of slaves.

If there is no great cause, there is no ambition. It is unforgivable for such men to trample over the territory of the Great Empire.

“Let us offer this victory to his Majesty, Schwarz.”

Aura stood right before the enemy commander. There was shock and despair in his face.

The blade of Aura’s spirit weapon dug into his neck. As an eerie sensation travels to her hand, she uses the momentum of her racing horse to complete her swing.

The enemy general’s head rolls along the ground as it is covered in mud.

The large, lifeless body falls. After seeing that it was all over, Aura thrust her spirit weapon high into the sky.

“The enemy general has been defeated!”

Cheers erupt from her allies behind her, and unrest seeps out from the enemies around them.

She suppresses her sense of elation and stiffens up her loosening expression.

“Viscount Spitz! Retrieve the head immediately!”

Killing the enemy general himself is meaningless in ending this battle.

If the fact of his death is kept secret, they will have to continue to face almost 10,000 enemies.

They must quickly retrieve the general’s head and display it to the entire battlefield.

“What—?!”

Aura, who had turned back, was wide eyed in shock.

What leapt into view, was an image of the headless enemy general calmly getting up and picking up his own head.

A sense of dread travels all throughout Aura’s body. How is he moving after having lost his head? This is no human.

Aura’s decision was quick. The only word that came to her mind was “withdraw”. She stiffened her throat and yelled out, almost in a shriek.

“Viscount Spitz! Withd—!”

She was unable to finish her sentence.

Having reattached his head, the enemy general lunged at Aura with weapon in hand.

She immediately brought her spirit weapon in front of her and repelled his attack creating a high pitched sound. The young girl’s small body floated gently in the air.

Then, with great force, she tumbled across the ground as she was covered in mud. Her horse lost its head, armor and all. A spray of blood rose up from where the head was severed, and the body collapsed to the side.

While glaring at Aura, who was perfectly still, the man spoke without setting his sight on any one spot.

[Get off your high horse, little girl.]

He placed a flashy, jewel encrusted spear on his shoulder, and approached the young girl in long strides.

“Lady Aura!”

Alfred races towards her, pulls out a spear from atop his horse, but it gets lodged into the side of the large man.

“What?!”

Alfred is raised up, then slammed into the ground.

As he hits the ground, a spray of water splashes all around, but you can hardly tell with the downpour of the rain.

“—?!”

While he is suffering, unable to breathe, he is struck with the spear handle. It comes down on him over and over as he spits up large amounts of blood. One heavy cavalryman riles himself up and charges in to save his dying adjutant.

“Urahh—!”

A spear quite effortlessly pierces through his face, and the now lifeless soldier falls off from atop his horse.

Alfred was saved by the death of one valiant soldier.

But, perhaps because he had lost consciousness, his head points toward the sky, and the rain beating down on it spreads his blood all across his face.

Then, Aura finally staggers up to her feet.

She holds her left arm with her right hand as it dangles. Mud drips down from her sleeves.

It's broken. The fact that her expression is taken over by the pain is proof of it.

“... A spirit weapon?”

With her unsteady eyes, Aura looked at the spear which the large man grabbed.

(But even if it is... how does that explain the change in this man?)

Spirit weapons have no such divine protection which heals the wound of a beheaded man.

If such a miracle were to occur, it would be the work of a spirit sword with a spirit dwelling within it, or—

(It's possible that it's one of the Five Great Treasured Swords... But no matter how you look at it, that's a spirit weapon.)

While she was lost in thought, the enemy troops were slowly surrounding her. In order to intimidate them, the “Imperial Black Knights” circle around them and kept them in check.

However, it does not hold for long. No matter how skilled one may be in riding a horse, they would be much too slow footed in the rain.

Furthermore, they're overwhelmingly at a disadvantage in terms of numbers. And now that the enemy is gathered in one spot, it is difficult to pick at them individually. They had completely lost the advantage which they had until just earlier.

The eyes of the enemy general move independently from each other as they scan the area.

Aura felt like throwing up at the eerie display.

[Seeing as how your soldiers are not abandoning you, you must be “Mars”, little girl.]

The enemy's general's teeth were peering out from purple, crescent shaped lips.

[Hmm... It's too bad that you're not my type. I'll still be capturing you though. But I'm not a demon. I'll release you when we receive a large ransom.]

As the enemy general swings his spirit weapon, the blade tore through the air and the raindrops were flicked away.

“Ugh!”

A soldier who stood against the enemy general to protect Aura is slaughtered.

[After the troops use you as a plaything that is!]

A small unit of the “Imperial Black Knights” approach in order to rescue their master.

They rush towards the enemy general with a great surge of force, giving off the impression that they do not intend to let him lay one finger on Aura.

“Your Excellency, please wait just a moment! We will carve open a path for you no matter what it takes!”

[Ahaha, how courageous. Those with a deathwish can step forward first. I’m rather strong now that I have a spirit weapon..]

Aura could not believe the words coming from the enemy general.

It’s true that a spirit weapon does indeed bestow great divine protection, but the power felt from the man was by no means something received from a spirit weapon.

Then, an unbelievable scene unfolds before Aura’s eyes.

Despite having his hand cut off, his chest pierced and losing a leg, without faltering, the enemy general begins to murder the “Imperial Black Knights”.

[Come on! Who’s next?! Bring more soldiers! I won’t lose to anyone!]

“Do not retreat! We will save her Excellency at any cost!”

Even though Aura’s subordinates were tragically being slaughtered, they did not falter in the least. They continued to fight as they raised their voices.

[Haa!]

“Gah!”

The last soldier is pierced in the chest and falls from his horse.

[Phew– Haa... Haa... This is rather exhausting.]

The enemy general looks overhead, shakes his shoulders wildly, and begins to inhale.

All the soldiers from each unit of the “Imperial Black Knights” have created a mountain of corpses around the area.

Every single one of the wounds on the enemy general were *fatal*, but they all closed up in the blink of an eye.

Aura pointed her spirit weapon at the enemy general and voiced her suspicion.

“... What is that strange power you possess?”

[You mean my spirit weapon?]

The Dukedom of Lichtein has never found a spirit stone.

One reason for this is being that they have nothing but desert.

But, they do have beautiful oases, and many places in which a spirit could possibly inhabit.

However, people gather in those places and live there.

For spirits, who prefer quiet places, living in such areas would be nothing but agony for them.

Also, it's unlikely that spirits would appreciate the savage atmosphere flowing throughout the slave trade nation.

There is the possibility that they purchased it from another country, but the Dukedom of Lichtein shouldn't have such funds.

This is because one must sacrifice enough of a fortune for a commoner to enjoy an -entire life- of idleness.

And unlike a “spirit sword” in which a spirit dwells, it is a consumable item which eventually breaks.

There are times in which they fracture after a number of strikes., and if you make a mistake in forging it, it becomes an ordinary stone.

Although the powers of a spirit stone are alluring, it would be better advised to spend national funds on improving soldiers' equipment instead.

And so, even in the powerful Grantz Grand Empire, the only ones who possess a spirit weapon are members of the Imperial family and extensions thereof.

“No. Though I'm curious as to how you obtained a spirit weapon, I'm more concerned about that “power” of yours.”

[You prattle on about nonsense. What's the point in buying time like this?]

“You really don't understand your own state, do you...? No, even if you do, perhaps you don't think it to be abnormal.”

[I can't have a proper conversation with you, can I? Don't say any more. It'll make me want to kill you. Besides, look around you. We've begun to capture your precious soldiers!]

The surrounding area had turned into a state of chaos. The “Imperial Black Knights” were starting to be pulled down from their horses.

They immediately stand up and resist, but they are are outnumbered.

One after another, they are surrounded and reduced in number.

The blood flowing from the wounds of the fallen heavy infantrymen begin to mix with the mud and change color.

[It's almost time for you to gasp in pleasure. I'll keep you company until then!]

Whoosh—

The enemy general swings his spear to clear it off.

Aura stopped it with her spirit weapon, but her small body was easily blown away. With her shoulders making contact first, she falls to the ground. Then, a kick from the enemy general stabs into her side.

Her mouth is filled with mud before she can groan. She continues to roll, one, two, three times across the ground.

By the time she came to a stop, she had lost her vitality.

“Ah, ugh...”

Her subordinates are fighting. As their commander, she cannot possibly give up. That thought stirred her.

But even as she puts her hand on the ground and tries to get up, the strength escapes from her elbow.

Aura noticed something flowing out from her eyes on her water drenched face. She wonders if she's crying, but she cannot tell because of the rain pouring down mercilessly.

The enemy general approaches. He grabs her hair roughly and lifts her face.

[What, are you about to lose consciousness? That may be better for you, though, because you'll be keeping countless men company after this.]

“...”

[No need to worry. We'll treat you well so we can get a ransom. We'll play with you just enough so you don't die.]

“...”

Aura doesn't say a word. She simply points her lead colored eyes at him.

After the enemy general releases his grip, Aura's head slams into the mud.

Then, as if he had lost interest, he looks away and picks up Aura spirit weapon which had fallen nearby.

[I've captured “Mars” and obtained two spirit weapons. My foolish brother made waste of one spirit weapon, but this will more than make up for that..]

He didn't notice. No— There was no way he could have.

[I have to thank that person.]

The enemy general spreads his arms open as if to express his delight.
At the same time, Aura's spirit weapon fell to the ground, along with his hand.

[Hmm? What's this?]

A large amount of blood gushes out from where his hand was cut off, but he pays it no mind.

He was captivated by the spirit weapon which had appeared before him.

[... Is this the spirit weapon... I gave my foolish brother?]

Something unusual is taking place behind the enemy general who is puzzled and staring out blankly.

There was a white light meandering through the large army which occupied the entirety of the battlefield.

"It" drew nearer to the enemy general as if it were running across the sky unhindered.

[Why is it here?]

You could call it lightning fast swiftness. No other words would be appropriate. The brilliance of a drawn sword which tore through despair stagnated in darkness—

—A "white lightning" surged across the earth.

Episode 25

Lightning Swift

Going back in time—

Violent winds blow and large drops of rain beat down on the skin.

A few dozen people stand atop the central tower of Fort Belk in silence.

It feels like an overwhelming pressure is oppressing everyone there.

The crimson haired young girl beside Hiro who was gazing at the battlefield furrowed her neat eyebrows.

“Hiro, doesn’t this look bad...?”

“No, we still have momentum...”

The enemy’s formation is in disarray. Now, as long as they can defeat the enemy general, the enemy will completely collapse.

Although the sudden rain slowed the movement of the “Imperial Black Knights” led by Aura, they didn’t necessarily lose their momentum.

(So, about 8,000 enemies left...)

This is a good opportunity to deliver the final blow.

They only have about 1,000 men on their side, but the enemy is completely distracted by the

“Imperial Black Knights”.

Hiding in the torrential rain, they should be able to delay the enemy from noticing their presence.

Even if they do take notice, being in such disarray, the chain of command should be in a state of chaos as well.

–This is the time to move out.

As he came to that conclusion, Hiro looked to Liz, but she wasn't by his side.

She had already run over to Kiolk.

She was desperately talking to him about something. Perhaps she felt the same way as Hiro.

After seeing Kiolk nod and throw out orders to the soldiers, Hiro looked towards the battlefield once again.

“Did we get him?!”

His “Uranus” perceives signs of victory from the battlefield.

However, the black dragon split in two as if it had hit a wall, and began to circle around the enemy headquarters.

“Why aren't they withdrawing?”

Hiro puts his hands on the wall, raises himself up, and strains his eyes.

He can tell a change has occurred, but there is a lot of jumbled information coming in, and he's unable to grasp anything accurately.

(I guess I have no choice but to go.)

This is not the time to hesitate. Hiro climbs the wall and reaches the edge.

In the distance, he can see that the the soldiers are in a panic.

He stands at a height that could easily kill him if he fell.

“Phew...”

After a short breath, Hiro steels himself.

He stepped out onto the empty space and,

–fell.

“Hiro?!”

Seeing the young boy fall from the top of the tower, Liz screamed out in shock.

But her voice was soon drowned out by the sound of the rain and Hiro did not hear her.

(... I won't make it if I go down each and every step.)

Gravity pulls him closer to the ground.

He's hit with the sensation of his entrails being pushed to the top of his body.

While in midair, Hiro summoned “Excalibur”.

As the pommel appeared below his feet, he used it as a foothold to leap forward.

Again, he summons it below his feet and leaps across the sky.

Looking down, he's able to confirm that the soldiers below are rushing out the gate and heading for the battlefield.

Liz and the others are likely going down the stairs right about now, too.

After jumping over the gate ahead of everyone else, Hiro landed on the ground.

There is a stir among his ally soldiers who had come out from the gate.

No one could believe their eyes. After seeing a person come down from the sky, they weren't sure if it was a dream or an illusion. They were understandable in shock.

With silver sword in hand, Hiro kicked the ground beneath him.

With great ease, he ran off without being held down by the mud, almost as if he were running across a clear grassland.

After reaching the battlefield littered with enemy soldiers, he looks around for an opening.

He finds the path which the “Imperial Black Knights” had paved through painstaking effort.

Having found the large opening, Hiro charges.

“Quickly!”

A silver light closes in on the backs of the soldiers blocking the path.

Even before the spray of each soldier’s blood can rise up, the light reaps the life of the next soldier as it cuts through its path.

The low ranking soldiers don’t realize what is happening. By the time the flash passes them, their heads are flying.

The soldiers take their last breath before they’re able to take notice of the white, furious, shining sword.

[Who are you, bastard?!]

An enemy officer notices the light and swings his sword down.

“Hmph!”

Hiro dodges and takes a swing to his side.

The enemy officer’s sword breaks in two at the center and the blade falls to the ground.

Almost simultaneously, the silent officer became a corpse and is buried in the mud. The surrounding enemies become confused.

Hiro rushes off once more, leaving the enemies shaken.

This speed, which would be impossible for the average person, is made possible by the divine protection of “Excalibur”.

Racing through the enemy while weaving through the openings, Hiro was finally able to get a visual on Aura.

Seeing the young girl covered in mud, a quiet rage fills his eyes.

As Hiro makes a plea within his heart, the space before him splits open in response.

The spirit sword which appeared from the rift is encrusted with jewels.

Without hesitation, he grabs the handle and throws it. The sharp blade cuts off the enemy general’s hand.

Hiro closes the gap between himself and the shaken enemy general in an instant and appears right before him.

Without giving the general a chance to notice him, he brandishes “Excalibur” to the side.

[Guoh–?!]

The sensation of severing his head, bones and all, remains in his hand.

This should surely have meant the death of the enemy general.

“So why... are you still alive?”

Hiro stopped in his tracks and turned around to question the enemy general.

[Who are you... you bastard?]

A sudden intruder. It’s understandable that the enemy general looks at him with a puzzled expression.

Hiro ignores him and looks at his neck. He confirms that his head is reattached.

“... Maybe I’ll figure it out if I cut you one more time.”

Hiro points the tip of “Excalibur” towards the enemy general.

[So you don’t plan to give me your name, do you? I’ll give you mine, though. I’m sure you’d at least like to know the name of the person who killed you once you’re dead.]

The enemy general snarled like a ferocious carnivore.

[I am Leihil Lumeire Lichtein, the next duke of Lichtein!]

After stating his name, Leihil swung his spirit weapon upward.

Hiro stops it with “Excalibur” and repels it.

A flash of fireworks spark between the two for just a moment.

After being outmatched in strength, Leihil drew back. He cocked his head to the side puzzled, took a look at his hand, then looked at Hiro.

[... What is that sword? Is it a spirit weapon?]

“I have no obligation to answer that.”

Inside, Hiro was surprised.

His opponent’s strength was beyond his expectations.

Although he was able to repel him, Hiro had taken about two steps back from where he originally stood.

[Hehe, hahaha, that’s fine. You don’t have to tell me a thing! I’ll exam it carefully after I kill you.]

Leihil swung his spear around above his head as he approached Hiro.

Hiro kicks the ground beneath him. He leaps toward Leihil's chest and takes a mighty horizontal swing with "Excalibur".

It feels like his hand is going numb. The sword was stopped.

There is joy on Leihil's face.

[You are indeed formidable. But all you have is speed.]

The corners of Leihil's lips curl up smugly and he swings his spear down with all his might.

Hiro tried to force him back with "Excalibur", but his body lightly fell off balance.

(He's stronger than before?!)

If anyone were watching this death match, they would assume the young boy would go flying off no doubt.

But Hiro turns his blade to the side, averts the force, and jumps backwards to open a gap between them.

He was trying to take control of the situation, but when he looked forward, Leihil had chased him down.

[Grah!]

"Ugh!"

A few moments after he stoops down, a storm passes by above his head from right to left.

After dodging the attack, Hiro thrusts "Excalibur" forward, but Leihil kicks the sword up to point to the sky.

Hiro was wide open with his arm lifted up.

[This is the end, boy!]

Ripping through the air like thunder, the spear was locked onto Hiro's head.

However, it is stopped by two swords which appear from a rift in space.

[Wh-What the hell?!]

The two swords were spirit weapons which were stored away in the "spirit world" 1,000 years ago by means of "Excalibur".

After finishing their roles, the spirit weapons disappeared from this world, and nothing stood between the two.

[What was that?!]

Not understanding what had happened, Leihil looked perplexed.

"Now!"

Hiro thrust "Excalibur" forward, but all it did was lightly cut Leihil's side.

(His reaction time is faster, too.)

If it was the Leihil from a little while ago, he wouldn't have been able to dodge it... He gets the feeling something is off.

(And what's with this abnormal healing ability...?)

His hand which was cut off, is now restored, and the wound he just received on his side is already closed up.

(There shouldn't be such divine protection from a spirit weapon.)

It is possible that the spirit weapons of this age have evolved, but at least in Hiro's memories, no such divine protection exists.

(Maybe...)

Hiro recalled something, but Leihil interrupts his thoughts.

[Do you think it strange? Did you think you killed me for certain? You fool!]

Leihil placed his spear on his shoulder and pointed at “Excalibur”.

[I don’t know what that sword is, but I’m certain it’s either a “spirit weapon” or one of the “Five Great Treasured Swords”. Either way, their divine protection increases one’s physical abilities to a fearsome level. But you know, that change depends on the strength of the individual. So—]

After a pause, Leihil continues.

[Don’t get bigheaded after killing some lowly soldiers, boy! When someone strong like me appears, weaklings like you will be exposed! If your original powers are weak, then “that” is just “pearls before swine”!]

After he finishes talking, Leihil’s body begins to transform. His back swells up and his arms get thicker.

Hiro finally figures out the “source” of the enemy general’s strength and quietly mutters.

“So that’s what it is...”

[Ah?]

Hiro strikes the enemy general’s shoulder with “Excalibur” and cuts his arm off.

[Ahaha, that won’t work!]

Perhaps because he didn’t feel pain, Leihil’s face was warped in ecstasy as he swung his spear down.

Hiro stops it with his silver blade, and glares at Leihil as they struggle.

“What you said earlier is correct. But you know, the powers you have right now—”

[Urahh!]

“Gah!”

Leihil’s kick sinks into Hiro’s solar plexus, and his body goes flying.

Hiro is assailed by a pain so intense it leaves him breathless as he tumbles across the ground.

After crashing into a rampaging enemy soldier in the midst of the chaotic skirmish and finally coming to a stop, Hiro slowly got back on his feet.

He no longer had the cold expression which was on his face until a moment ago. He now wore an expression of human weakness, one more appropriate for his age.

“... I don’t want to know the reason you took in *.”

(TL note: Kanji is “demon/evil”.)

A number of the enemy soldiers were pointed their spearheads towards Hiro in a menacing way as they approached him.

After looking around, he spoke as if this didn’t concern him.

“But you know, if you understood how to you use your powers, there would have been no reason for you to rely on that.”

As Hiro waves his left hand to the side, swords pierce the chest of *every* soldier that was surrounding him.

Every single soldier looked dumbfounded. They coughed up clots of blood as they took their last breathe and flopped to the ground.

Episode 26

Poison

Three sels (9 km) west of where Hiro is fighting on the battlefield, there are several large cliffs, and filling the wastelands within their shadows is an army of 20,000 strong.

They are the Fourth Imperial Army of the Grantz Grand Empire, the nation which reigns supreme on the central continent.

At the head of the army was a male commanding officer straddled atop a horse with a long, white mane.

His name is Trye Frien von Loring, general rank.

He has a long history of service as a valiant general for the Grantz Grand Empire, and is one of the Five Great Generals.

General Loring glances behind him.

There is an extravagant carriage wobbling on the rough surface.

An important person, to both the officer and the Empire, is riding in it.

A horse races to the carriage from ahead of them.

Noticing this, General Loring turned forward.

It's one of the scouts.

“General! Reporting! Margrave Grinda has commenced battle near the border and the situation does not look to be in his favor.”

“Of course not. Lichtein's army should have 15,000 men. I don't know how capable Margrave Grinda is, but there's no way he can win. No, maybe I should rather praise him for holding out this long.”

This area hasn't seen so much as skirmishes in many years.

There's no way to gauge his abilities.

However, even if he were skilled, Margrave Grinda's territory normally has 3,000 soldiers at the ready.

It's 3,000 if he assembles them all. And there are units that cannot be mobilized because they are needed to maintain public order.

General Loring estimates he has about a 1,000 men.

He thinks it strange that they were able to stand up against 15,000 opponents with those numbers until now.

"It seems *"Mars"* is there."

After hearing the scout report this, the general finally understands.

"Ohh. She came all the way to the southern border from the distant west?"

"However, I was not able to confirm whether she was alive or not. It looked as though she was defeated by the enemy general."

"That little girl went out onto the frontline? Really now, when she could have quietly stayed in the rear."

He thought she was a bright young girl, but it seems he was wrong. This is an example of there being a difference between bravery and foolhardiness.

The name of "Mars" is too heavy a burden for one like her.

It was troublesome to have Third Imperial Prince Brutar grant that title to her on a whim.

'The name of "Mars" is befitting of that person,' he thinks as he turns to the carriage once more.

As he does, an overpowering voice came out from within the carriage.

“Loring.”

The general, who was simply called by his name, slowed his horse down and approached the carriage window.

It was a bit dim inside, and sitting within was a man surrounded by women in the nude.

That man was Schtobel, the First Imperial Prince who accompanied the Emperor during his military expedition.

Just the other day, along with the Emperor, First Imperial Prince Schtobel overthrew Ferzen, a large nation which held influence over various other nations until its defeat to Aura two years ago.

Without returning to the Imperial capital to celebrate his victory, First Imperial Prince Schtobel had come to the south with his elite guards. He also brought along with him the princesses of Ferzen whom he took as spoils of war.

Perhaps because they had no hope for their future, or because they had witnessed hell, the eyes of the princesses had lost their light. They looked like the eyes of the dead.

If the First Imperial Prince grew tired of them, they would likely be sold off as slaves right away.

While sympathizing for their future, General Loring replied.

“Yes?”

“Call the scout over. I want to ask him something.”

“Right away!”

General Loring immediately exchanges looks with the scout who had come to report what he had seen.

The scout rides towards the carriage.

General Loring tilts his chin to signal him to head to the window.

With a nervous look, the scout approaches as instructed.

“... What about Leihil?”

The scout stares blankly in response to Schtobel’s question.

Loring immediately comprehends the meaning behind those words, and whispers into the scout’s ear that he was ordered to check on Leihil.

The scout gasps and opens his mouth in a panic.

“Yes... It looks like a mysterious young boy barged onto the battlefield and General Leihil seemed surprised. But the boy was no match for the enemy general with his spirit weapon—”

“A mysterious young boy?”

“Yes, he appeared in enemy headquarters with an imperceivable swiftness.”

As soon as he said that, the window was smashed into pieces, and the fragments pierced the scout’s face.

The scout was about to yell from the intense pain, but a thick arm stretched out from where the window used to be and covered his face.

“Agh! Ugh, ugh!”

The horse ran away from the scout who was now unable to breath.

However, the scout’s legs remained where they were and flailed about midair.

After letting out a sigh, Loring grabs the scout’s waist and speaks out to Schtobel.

“Imperial Prince Schtobel... I’d like to ask that you desist with your games. Please remove your—”

Before Loring finishes his sentence, there is a snapping sound, and the scout's body goes limp.

The princesses inside the carriage let out a scream. Perhaps they heard the snap.

It was possible that the scout might have been able to say something if he recalled more, but now that his neck was broken, it was too late. Loring thought he had lost all his emotions, but he let go of the soldier's waist thinking it to be unfortunate. The dead body which fell to the ground disappeared into the rear.

"... Was there perhaps something that did not sit well with you?"

"His report wasn't concise, so I executed him. Do you have a problem with that?"

He sounded irritated, and there was enough bloodlust in his voice to send chills down your spine.

But Loring simply shrugs his shoulders. Apparently, he has nerves of steel.

"I don't think you would listen even if I did."

"Then don't say anything. But that so called imperceivable speed concerns me. And he said it was a young boy at that."

"If he wasn't mistaken, then there's a chance that that boy might possess one of the "Five Great Treasured Swords". If that is the case, it might be too much for Leihil to handle, even if we did give him a spirit weapon."

"That's not necessarily true. Because we had him drink "that"."

"Hmm... Then, we can't predict the outcome, can we?"

Once, when he heard Schtobel's ambition, Loring remembers being so shocked that he simply stood there, mouth agape.

But he also happened to see that ambition in his dreams. He ended up wanting to see where this man would end up.

Loring laughs at how he still gets fraught with emotion every time he thinks about it, even though he should know better at his age.

Then, he voices his unwarranted anxiety.

“The spirit king’s curse may befall us one day.”

“... What are you saying the current spirit king is capable of?”

Loring couldn’t say anything in response to Schtobel’s disheartened words.

“I will become <_____> no matter what.”

The word muttered by Schtobel was shot down by the violent rain and went unheard.



The battlefield was in a state of chaos.

The soldiers led by Margrave Grinda were struggling on the frontline.

In the center of enemy headquarters, Hiro had begun a fierce battle with the enemy general.

No— You could say that Hiro was completely on the offensive.

A tear in space rips open and a spirit weapon appears. Hiro grabs the handle and cuts down Leihil.

He moves to his opponent’s blind spot using his . The space before his hand splits open and a new spirit weapon appears.

Using that, he slashes away, then casually thrusts at his opponent.

As he moves to Leihil’s rear, a new spirit weapon appears, and he pierces through Leihil’s back.

If someone were watching this battle, all of this would have appeared to have happened in the blink of an eye.

All you could see was a network of silver lines drawn in all directions, almost like a spiderweb.

With a great surge of force, spirit weapons pierce the large body over and over.

Specks of blood scatter about on the earth, and Leihil lets out a scream as he writhes in agony.

[Ohh! Guuooohhh!]

His arms, his legs, his chest, every visible part of him is covered in fatal wounds.

And yet, Leihil was alive.

A black, sinister aura wraps around Leihil, and his wounds begin to heal instantaneously.

The spirit weapons which were piercing him fall to the ground and disappear.

Something felt out of place from the very beginning, and Hiro remembered encountering that feeling before.

“... So you’ve become a *.”

This is the “true name” used to refer to “fools” who attempt to take in the powers of a spirit.

Over a 1,000 years ago, the king of a certain country smashed a spirit stone and ground it into dust, simply out of curiosity.

He then had a man drink it, but nothing happened when he did.

The king was disappointed. But then, in the middle of the night when everyone was sound asleep, the man began to suffer.

The man, whose appearance had changed, lost his reason and was reduced to becoming a monster.

A patrol soldier who noticed the unusual phenomenon was his first victim. Next, the monster ate the king, and then went on to kill everyone in the castle, regardless of age or gender.

Other countries took advantage of the mayhem to take them over, and Hiro had participated in that battle.

“So foolish... You can never go back once you’re affected by a spirit’s .”

It’s true that the divine protection of a spirit is alluring.

But having said that, if you take that into your body, it doesn’t mean that it will be all the more effective.

It is not a power to be contained in the vessel of man. They would soon lose their humanity.

But Hiro remembers that the appearance of didn’t stop there.

The kings of countries which were about to fall to ruin drank in hopes of landing at least one blow to their attacker.

It was a dark age in which there were those who would even make use of .

However, this does not mean that everyone lost their reason. A very rare few were able to hold onto it.

Those who maintained their reason obtained physical abilities far surpassing human beings.

Humans who withstand poison—

—Are known as “warlocks”.

[UGOOOHHH!!]

A roar loud enough to tear the eardrums can be heard.

The body, which was already twice the size of Hiro's, had swollen right before his eyes to now stand at three times his size.

He can no longer be called human. He was more an ogre or a gigas. He was a .

(But this is a failure.)

As Hiro readies "Excalibur", he begins to move at the same time.

But instead of heading for Hiro, he begins to attack the Lichtein soldiers.

[Eek— Gyah!]

With a swing of his arm, five Lichtein soldiers were blown away from the arising wind, and those who were trampled had their spinal fluid sprayed across the ground.

[What is this thing?!]

[Attack! There's a monster here!]

[Gyah!]

[Where's his Excellency?]

While falling into a state of mayhem, the Lichtein soldiers commence their attack.

[GURAAHHH!!]

As if throwing a tantrum, the raging monster begins to flail about, sending all the Lichtein soldiers to oblivion.

Furthermore, they don't realize that the monster is .

And it's no wonder that they don't. There isn't a single trace of Leihil's former self left in him.

Those who grabbed their bows to shoot off arrows, those who stood bravely against him, those who had their backs to him with tears in their eyes, all of them were buried by the monster's hands.

They were all dying so easily, as if they were ants beings effortlessly crushed underfoot.

Then, another situation arose which disheartened Lichtein's soldiers.

A blaze rose up from behind their headquarters.

[N-No.]

[Hey, are you serious...? Isn't that...]

[The supply train...]

[It's burning despite this rain?!]

Screams rise up from the enemy soldiers.

As Hiro gazes at the blazing flames, he instantly realized that it was Liz's doing.

The only thing capable of that in this heavy rain is "Laevateinn".

You could say the outcome of this battle was decided at this point.

With the loss of their commander and their supply train, the only thing left for them is retreat or surrender.

But they are in no position to surrender quietly. They still have Leihil to deal with.

If their commander were present, they might have been able to recover from the situation, but he had turned into a monster.

As such, their only choice was to drop their weapons and frantically try to escape.

[Retreat! Run away! I can't do this anymore!]

[I-I'm running for it, too!]

[Damn it, wait for me! I'm going, too!]

No one wants to die. No one wants to fight a reckless battle.

They immediately point their feet towards their own country and begin to run.

If one were to look down from overhead, it would look like an avalanche was racing full force towards the Dukedom of Lichtein.

Hiro did not chase after them.

This was because there was another opponent he had to face.

Hiro quietly settles his breathing. He holds the handle of "Excalibur" with both hands and raises it up, invoking the image of the Second Emperor's statue.

[GURYUAAHHH!!!]

"Uohh!"

Hiro kicked the ground beneath him and leapt forward.

—A battle surpassing the realms of human intelligence had begun.

Episode 27

Return of the Hero

With the Lichtein army now withdrawn, the battlefield was covered in a strange silence.

The surrounding area is in a gruesome state. There are enough corpses scattered about to fill the earth.

In the hellish place which would make one's hairs stand on end, the victorious people of the Empire were captivated breathlessly by a spectacle in a certain area.

They were so enraptured by the sight that they didn't even pay mind to the wafting smell of death that was enough to make one vomit.

A monster five times the size of a human suddenly appeared on the battlefield. Its skin is a ghastly pale blue.

Around it, danced an eerie darkness.

"Monsters" are not rare in Aletia.

Though they vary in strength, large monsters require a group of men to suppress.

If someone were to challenge one alone, there's no doubt that people would surely sneer at their recklessness. Probably all the more so if it were a soldier who had received various forms of training.

However, no one was laughing now. No one made a fool of the young boy who stood resolutely against the monster.

A young boy alternating from offense to defense and back.

—Held* Rey Schwarz von Grantz.

He is a who was praised as "Mars" a 1,000 years ago.

Now, he is a who has become a.

After conquering neighboring countries, he returned to his original world, but he has come back once more to this .

The young boy who leapt out from legend held a silver sword in his hands.

It is a sword which was lost, not even passed down in the legends.

Imperial Spirit Sword– “Excalibur”.

It is a beautiful sword with a pure white guard and handle, as if coated in a blanket of snow.

The blade glitters as if an infinite number of stars twinkle across it.

An enormous fist passes by the nose of the young boy– Hiro.

A few strands of his bangs dance in the air from the air pressure. Hiro twisted his body and casually swung “Excalibur”.

A spray of blood shoots up from the monster’s arm.

However, the wound instantly snapped closed.

Let’s say there was a life form which would not die no matter how much it was cut.

What course of action would one take against such a creature?

There’s no doubt that most would try to run. But there are surely a rare few who would fight it.

Hiro is the latter. The option of escape does not exist in his mind.

There was no fear or panic on his face, but there was vexation.

(Still too slow! I’m still lacking!)

He wants more.

He is still a far cry from his former self.

This isn't enough to finish the monster off.

“Vortex!”

He swings “Excalibur” irritated. An enormous arm floats up into the air.

Had his opponent been human, it would probably have been a fatal wound.

However, though imperfect, the opponent is a monster which has taken in a spirit's .

[GUOOHHH!!!]

Though the monster's blood painted Hiro's face red, he increased his speed without so much as flinching.

“Damn it!”

It's been three years since he returned to his original world.

You could say that Hiro had most definitely become weaker having enjoyed peace.

But having said that, he doesn't want to use this as an excuse.

Reason being, the experience and other important things he's cultivated until then still remain.

(I don't want all that to go to waste.)

Every joint in his body screams. Hiro grit his teeth and endured the pain.

After a number of battles, the young boy's body had reached its limit.

Regardless, Hiro continued to slash away at his opponent.

The silver flashes are absorbed by the monster and disappear.

Each time it does, the earth is dyed in the monster's blood, and a roar of pain shakes the air.

(You were there. Everyone was there. That's why I was able to continue on winning.)

He kneels on the ground and slams his hands onto the earth.

(But... everyone's gone now.)

A countless number of spirit weapons appear around the monster.

[GUOH?!]

As the monster glances side to side, he threw "Excalibur" high above its head.

—Not only for myself, but for the sake of the <pride> all of you left behind too, I'll seize hold of victory, no matter what.*

Hiro closes his eyes and exhales softly.

The monster lunged forward to attack the young boy who was wide open.

If it made contact, a single blow would mean instant death. The monster swung his fist down from above the young boy's head over and over again.

But amazingly, not one blow landed on its target.

Hiro opens his eyes, and in those eyes, was not an abyss, but a pure light.

Raindrops wash away the splattered blood as if to soothe him.

Small particles that mix into the atmosphere grow brighter and brighter, as if to offer their blessing.

Having seen the breath of the world, the young boy was all smiles.

(Altius... Although you're not here in this world...)

Behind him, a crimson haired young girl watches over him worried.

(Your will still remains. The past and the future are connected.)

Beginnings are sudden, and endings are inevitable.

Even if we're apart, even if we can never meet again, we're connected.

A world without you. A world without me.

I wonder how you're spending your days.

Are you living happy days?

Are you living sad days?

If possible, I want you to live fulfilling days, with never ending smiles.

If you're thinking the same thing...

—This is what I have to tell you.

(I want you to rest easy.)

He focuses on the monster.

(I don't want you to worry.)

Every inch of his body begins to fill with the powers of a spirit.

(I'm having fun.)

(TL note: This is the first part of the prologue. Went with my own translation though.)

Kicking the earth beneath him—

–The young boy leaves the sounds of the world behind him.

One sword, three swords, eight swords, fourteen swords. The spirit weapons floating around the monster begin to disappear at a fearsome speed.

A sound that rips through the air spreads throughout the battlefield where rain is pouring down incessantly.

[UGOOHHH!!]

The monster is assailed by lightning fast slash attacks as its flesh is cut to pieces.

[AOGAOH–?!]

A white flash envelops the monster, and even swallows up the sounds of its groans.

But still, the fierce and intense attacks don't stop.

This is a privilege only allowed to the one who possesses “Excalibur”.

Now that the young boy had lost all hesitation, “Excalibur's” divine protection of displayed its true abilities.

–Invisible slash attacks.

When all the spirit weapons disappeared, what fell from the sky, was one beautiful sword.

As Hiro kicks the ground below and leaps forward, he grabs “Excalibur's” handle.

“Haa!”

He tore through the monster's head, and as he finished his swing, the tip of the sword pierced into the ground.

A thunderous roar shakes the air, and at the same time, it smashes the earth and the ground trembles.

The monster's body is blown to pieces as if it had exploded. The pieces scatter in all directions and sink into the mud.

At the center of it all, a young boy is fighting for breath as he looks up to sky and takes in oxygen.

The rain stopped. From the spaces between the eerily squirming grey clouds, the sun shines warmly on Hiro as if to bless his return.

“Hiro!”

The crimson haired young girl— Liz rushes over to the young boy and embraces him.

Having spent all his strength, Hiro is unable to catch her and falls onto his back.

Although he wants to say something to her, his priority right now is oxygen and he's unable to move his mouth freely.

“There's a lot I want to say to you... but I'm glad you're okay.”

While she grabs Hiro's face with both hands and plays with it, Liz let's out a sigh of relief.

As always, the young boy is unable to say anything while she has her way.

As she does, Cerberus comes to Hiro and rubs his head against his shoulder.

In the corner of his eyes, Aura was staring at him while being supported by her soldiers.

Alfred was yet to regain consciousness and was receiving treatment from the medics.

Tris and Margrave Grinda approached with signs of excitement still lingering on their faces.

“Y-You're amazing. To think you would exterminate a monster like that all by yourself...”

Margrave Grinda pinches his own cheek to see if he had seen a dream.

And next to him...

“Hmm... Boy, just who are you exactly?”

Tris mumbles.

As if that were a starting signal, a explosion of joyous screams rang out from behind.

[Amazing... That attack... Were you able to see it?!]

[Eh, y-yeah, of course I could.]

[Don't lie. There's no way you'd be a private if you could see that.]

[H-Hey... huh?]

[What the hell-?!]

The excitement of the boisterous soldiers soon came to an end.

A ground shaking, thunderous roar of hooves shook the air and inundated everyone's eardrums.

There is a feeling of oppression which tightens their chests each time the gap closes.

[The Fourth Imperial Army...?!]

They might have run away if they weren't allies.

While letting off such enormous aura of intimidation, the entire army, which stretched out as far as the eyes could see, came to a uniform stop.

Two horses at the head of the large army approach Hiro.



The Sixth Imperial Princess and three others stood before General Loring.

They were all looking at the general with cautious eyes.

The general can guess why. They probably want to question him as to why they appeared at this particular time.

No matter how they press him, he just needs to dodge their questions evasively.

Loring gallantly dismounts his horse and put his hand to his chest. He then knelt before the Sixth Imperial Princess.

“Your Highness Celia Estreya, I truly apologize for our late arrival. The rain which fell until a while ago slowed our army’s advance and it seems we did not make it in time.”

As he lifts his face, he looks at the young boy being held by the Sixth Imperial Princess.

Even if he was a failure, to think he would defeat a ...

If there was one capable of defeating him, he thought it would have been the Sixth Imperial Princess, the possessor of “Laevateinn”.

But that’s only if it were a group effort.

He never would have imagined anyone could destroy the monster alone...

And the young boy looked about the same age as the Sixth Imperial Princess at that.

(This is... interesting.)

The young boy’s battle lit a fire within the commander in chief.

He wants to test him. He wants to see just how strong he is with his own two hands.

But Loring squeezes his hands tightly enough for blood to seep out and he resists his urge.

It wouldn't be any fun to defeat a weakened opponent.

Defeating the young boy right now would be as simple as taking care of a chore.

(I'll save the fun for a later time. That isn't my objective right now.)

And then, he noticed it. There was a bloodlust emanating from beside him.

"... You're a dangerous one."

The one who quietly muttered was First Imperial Prince Schtobel.

He looked like a supreme ruler atop his horse as he gave off an overwhelming presence.

His ruffled golden hair resembled a crown.

Without hiding any of his intent to kill, the sharp glint in his eyes pierced through the young boy.

(This is bad...)

Loring's face stiffens.

"... He might become a nuisance."

"Please wait. In this current situation—"

A lightning strike surged out from Schtobel's hand.

It was impossible to follow it with the eyes.

By the time he realized what happened, the young boy's body was thrown into the air.

Everyone looked on dumbfounded at the young boy who flew up like a scrap of paper.

“Hiro...!!”

The first one to scream out was Liz.

She rushes after the young boy who came slamming down onto the ground.

Schtobel jumps down from his horse and approaches in long strides. In his hand is one of the Five Imperial Spirit Swords, the battleaxe “Mjölfnir”.

“Elizabeth. Get out of the way.”

“Don’t be ridiculous! Why did you do this?!”

As if resonating with Liz’s anger, flames spiral up from “Laevateinn’s” blade.

“Mjölfnir” rages with electric shocks in response to a worthy opponent.

“... To think you would point your blade at me. You don’t actually think you can beat me, do you?”

“I don’t care if I can’t win. I won’t let you lay a hand on Hiro!”

This is what you call an explosive situation. A fight to the death could begin at any moment.

No— Liz would likely be one sidedly made sport of and killed.

There is that much of a gap between the strength of the two.

“All I’m doing is trying to exterminate a pest following my dear little sister around.”

“You’re saying Hiro is a pest?”

Although Loring thinks this to be a bad situation, he’s unable to think of a way to stop them.

If he ends up killing Liz here, it would be impossible to hide it from the Emperor.

There are too many witnesses.

If the possessor of “Laevateinn” were to die here, the throne would surely move further away.

He should be aware of this. So why?

(Does this mean he sensed that much of a threat from him?!)

Schtobel opened his mouth annoyed.

“Is that man that important to you...? Or is there a reason he has to be so desperately protected?”

“Yeah, there is. If you kill him, I doubt father will forgive you.”

“What did you say?”

It may have been a difficult decision for her.

After glancing at the young boy lying on the ground, Liz’s face was dyed in a deep sadness.

“He— is a descendant of the Second Emperor.”

—The die was cast.

—The world begins to move centering around the young boy.

Epilogue

After losing consciousness from Schtobel's lightning attack, Hiro awoke in a strange place.

A pure white space. A world where color was lost.

Hiro had no idea what happened, and his confusion clearly showed on his face.

Then, someone came from behind Hiro as they called out to him.

"You're here. So that means... you've returned to Aletia."

Hiro turned around surprised, and in front of him was a golden haired, golden eyed young man.

"It's been a while. Or, maybe that's not necessarily the case. I don't know how much time has passed since you returned to that "Earth" place, Held*."

(TL note: His name is written "Hiro", but the reading above it is "Held".)



Hiro was speechless, eyes wide open in shock.

There was a golden throne made of jewels. You could say it was in bad taste.

The young man was sitting there.

He looked sharp and well put together, as if he had leapt out from a painting. If a girl saw him, she would probably let out a shrill scream in adoration.

He is such an adonis that even a man would be captivated without realizing it.

He crossed his long, slender legs, and thanks to his overflowing elegance, even the throne with its bad taste looked befitting of him.

After finally regaining his senses, Hiro began to speak to the golden eyed young man who gave off a gallant impression.

“Altius... right?”

When he asked, the young man displayed an impish smile.

Hiro wants to knock him down, but he resists the urge. He persuades himself that he's not that short tempered.

He tried to look around to distract himself from his irritation. It really was a space with neverending white everywhere he looked.

He returns his gaze, wondering if Altius disappeared, but there he was, as pompous as ever.

“Yeah. This is a dream.”

It's only natural that Hiro makes this assertion.

For starters, he was supposed to be on a battlefield.

Also, this is a person from a 1,000 years ago. Altius is among the departed now.

It's possible that he himself died.

If so, it would make sense that Altius is here.

Altius smiled wryly at Hiro, who began to be distressed.

“Held. It’s not like I don’t understand your confusion. I also understand your desire to believe this to be a dream. But, you know—”

Altius pointed to Hiro’s chest after he cut himself off.

When Hiro looked down to where he was pointing, there was a faint, transparent light escaping from his chest.

“What is this...?”

He undoes the buttons on his uniform and rummages around his inner pocket. What he pulls out, is a single card.

It’s the plain white card he received from Altius a 1,000 years ago.

Hiro tilted his head and spoke.

“... It’s kind of weird asking you this in my dream, but this really is a spirit charm, right?”

“Exactly. It’s a spirit charm.”

“But, I looked through a bunch of books and I didn’t see any spirit charms like this.”

“That’s something I made with a spirit I received from the spirit king. It’s only natural you don’t know about it.”

“The fact that I’m seeing this weird dream... does it have something to do with this?”

“I put traces of my thoughts into that spirit charm, too. So these are memories from that time. I only have my memories up until the moment you returned to “Earth”. The fact that you’ve come here, means that the condition for invoking

that charm was met. I'm sure some sort of trouble occurred, and that means I'm not there."

Altius looked sad for just a moment, and then his voice sprang up with joy.

"Which era were you summoned to? I'm sure there were many things that surprised you."

"There were. I was summoned back a 1,000 years in the future..."

"Hahaha! Amazing! That's an overwhelming amount of time!"

"Overwhelming doesn't begin to describe it. I still can't believe it."

"I see... So a "turning point" has arrived in that era."

"Huh? A "turning point"?"

Hiro replies with a question, but Altius ignores him.

"Seems like it'll become a fun era. I'd like to go too, but unlike you whose "soul" isn't tied down, I cannot."

"Don't ignore me... And, I don't really understand. What are you talking about?"

"... Don't worry about it. I'm sure you'll understand eventually."

"You're always like that."

"Well, that's my nature. Anyway, what I can say to you— is to live as you want. That's all!"

Altius stood from his throne, looked up into the white space, and spread his arms.

"The world is wide! Which is why there are an infinite number of possibilities! Walk the path you so choose! Don't limit your own world! Live freely. Give in to all your desires!"

Altius approaches Hiro, then presses his fist to his chest.

“My blood brother, you are not a man of low calibre. Don’t underestimate yourself. It’s a bad habit of yours. Be stronger than any king. Become more prideful than any king. Become mightier than any king. For that purpose, I have prepared many possibilities, many choices for you.”

After Altius cheerfully gives his speech, he pats Hiro’s shoulders.

“I will watch carefully. The end to which my blood brother will go, the future which my blood brother will walk.”

Looking satisfied after saying all he had to say, Altius plopped down on his throne looking proud of himself.

He slowly extends his right arm, and points his palm towards Hiro.

“Now, it’s time to wake up.”

“... So abrupt. You say what you want, and then it’s goodbye?”

“Do you understand a bit of how I felt?”

Hiro shrugs his shoulders at Altius, who holds back his laughter.

He hit him where it hurt. He had nothing to say in response to that.

A 1,000 years ago, Hiro abruptly decided to return to “Earth”.

Hiro shook off Altius, who desperately tried to hold him back, and went back without giving any reasons.

Having done that, there was no way Hiro could blame him now.

There were a number of things that bothered him, but if this was his revenge, even if he asked his questions, they would probably just be evaded.

And so, he decided to ask a harmless question. The one that was most on his mind.

“Is this really goodbye?”

“For starters, I’m not even sure if this can be considered a reunion. Because the me standing here right now is just residual thoughts.”

“... I see.”

“Yeah. I doubt we’ll be meeting again. But—”

Altius cuts himself short and sighed as if he was disappointed.

“It looks like we’re out of time.”

He pointed to the heavens, so Hiro looked overhead.

A black darkness had appeared in the white space.

It slowly started to pick up speed as it began to paint everything in the empty world black.

Altius smiled and spoke to Hiro.

“That—which you—will create—. —I can’t—wait to—”

He couldn’t understand him very well because of the pauses.

Hiro’s vision is quickly engulfed in darkness.

Altius’s figure grows hazy as it disappears.

(Goodbye... my blood brother.)

—When he opened his eyes once more, an unfamiliar ceiling came flying into view.

The scent of medicine enters his nose and he regains consciousness.

He felt something soft covering his body. Though reluctant, he sat himself up.

As he looks around his surroundings, the colors of the world return. There is moonlight shining in through a window onto some medicine sitting on shelves.

After he gathers that he's in some sort of medical office, he notices Liz is sleeping by the side of his bed looking happy.

He smiles wryly and places the blanket that was over him across her shoulders.

As Hiro realizes that he's awakened from his dream, he tries to get down from the bed.

But the moment his foot touched the ground, the world around him swayed violently.

His vision went mad, as if his eyes were spinning.

His back slams hard onto the floor with a loud thud.

“Agh!”

He groans, unable to breath, but he senses something coming up from his chest and he holds his mouth.

“Urgh...!”

He wasn't able to hold his vomit back.

Hiro's breathing becomes irregular and his face starts to go pale.

(What's wrong with my eye...? What is this...?)

A giant flood of information violently rushes into his left eye and is transmitted to his brain.

Unable to block it, it starts to crush his mind as he unwillingly takes it all in.

Even with his eyes closed, he feels like he “can see”. He's never experienced this before.

Despite it being his own body, he has no idea what's going on.

“Hiro?!”

It seems Liz woke up noticing something unusual was occurring.

But Hiro didn't have the freedom to reply.



Liz rushed to the suffering Hiro and pat his back.

“Get a hold of yourself! Someone, get in here!”

“Did something happen?!”

Tris, who was waiting outside, entered the room in response to her voice.

He looks at Liz, then Hiro. He immediately realizes something is wrong and goes back outside.

“I will hurry and call for a doctor!”

“Please! Bring him quickly!”

Liz, who was holding Hiro's head, has vomit smeared all over her upper body.

But she didn't pay it any mind and placed Hiro's head on her lap.

Liz takes out a piece of cloth and begins to gently wipe Hiro's mouth.

“It's okay. Calm down and breathe...”

Hiro heaves, but nothing comes out. Maybe it was because he threw up all the food that was in his stomach.

“Hiro, will you listen to what I have to say?”

She probably wanted to distract Hiro.

Actually, Hiro showed a reaction to her clear, affectionate, mother-like voice.

His bloodshot eyes pierce through Liz.

His left pupil was oddly dilated and clotted with blood.

“?!”

Liz was about to scream without thinking, but she held her mouth.

She felt a chill down her spine at the sensation of having her heart peered into.

But she can't possibly flinch. Even if only a little, she wants to take away Hiro's pain.

Liz speaks as cheerfully as possible.

“You know, when I first met you, I was really surprised.”

She's referring to the time they first met in Anfang Forest.

When she came back from bathing, there was a young boy being threatened by Cerberus.

A black eyed, black haired young boy. It was as if—

“You looked just like the image I had in my head— Of the Second Emperor”

The Second Emperor. The one and only emperor in history of whose portrait does not exist.

There is no way to know how he looked. One can only imagine his appearance from what is written in the legends.

Even the bronze statue of the Second Emperor is a product which was created based on the legends.

“The Second Emperor is my aspiration.”

She, who was always strong willed, showed more interest in swords rather than dolls.

During bedtime, she would convince her mother to tell her, not fairy tales, but stories of the Twelve Great Gods of Grantz as she fell asleep.

And among them, in the militaristic nation of the Grantz Grand Empire, the Second Emperor always held a fearsome level of popularity.

Having been aiming to be a soldier, it was natural providence that she held interest in the Second Emperor.

“No matter what the people around me said, I trained hard. Though, no one acknowledged me because I was a girl.”

At first, it was her dream to be a soldier.

Next, it was a general, then, a commander in chief.

Each time she grew, her dreams grew with her.

Everyone laughed at Liz and ignored her. But that situation would change completely.

–This was due to her receiving the favor of [Laevateinn].

The first one to approach her was the head of the Kelheit house, one of the Five Great Nobles of Grantz.

After he, who held influence in the eastern region, expressed his support of Liz, all the lower and middle class nobles expressed their support for her as well.

She became a power which could not be ignored by the other successors of the throne, but that all collapsed the moment the head of the Kelheit house was assassinated by an unknown culprit.

By the time she realized, only Tris and Dios were still with her.

“Then, I got word of my demotion, so I went to take a bath in Anfang Forest to take my mind of things.”

That’s where she met the young boy. A young boy who looked exactly like the Second Emperor, her aspiration.

Liz touches her hand to Hiro’s cheek and smiles.

Though he’s still breathing hard, it looks like he may have calmed down a bit.

The corners of Hiro’s eyes had softened a bit as he was looking up at Liz.

“You know, I have a dream.”

At that moment, noisy footsteps could be heard from outside.

“Move it! The boy is going to die!”

“Don’t make an old man run!”

“Then I’ll carry you on my back!”

“Eek!”

Liz forced a smile, then put her mouth near Hiro’s ear so he wouldn’t miss what she said.

She whispers. Maybe it was because Hiro had already predicted what she would said, but he didn’t look surprised.

Her dream is an extraordinary one. It will not be an easy journey by any means.

–I will become the Empress.

She moved her face away from Hiro, and with the moonlight shining down on her face, she looked even more beautiful than usual.



Imperial Year 1023, July 11th.

Ten days after the battle with Lichtein's army.

Fort Belk, central tower.

Hiro was in the room which was provided to him.

It was a dreary room, with nothing but a bed by the window, and a full length mirror to its right.

It's a given, but he had no personal items. He never had the time to purchase such things.

As for items he brought from Earth, it was pretty much just his clothes.

Hiro stood in front of the mirror and stared at his own figure.

Or rather, he was stroking a part of his face. He is yet to grow accustomed to this uncomfortable feeling.

The left half of his face in the mirror was covered with an eyepatch.

It is a special eyepatch which was purified with a spirit charm.

With it, he no longer senses the slip in the world and is able to live as he had until now.

If he removes it, the world will spin like before. He'll end up taking in enough information to rupture his brain.

"Well... guess I need to get used to it. I just have to get used to it."

Right. He just needs to be able to master [Uranus].

Since it is his own eye, he should be able to master it in the near future.

And it's not bad. He somehow has a grown up feel to him with the eyepatch on.

Without thinking, Hiro crossed his arms, lifted his chin, and tried to make a cool pose.

As he was getting carried away and debating whether or not to summon [Excalibur]...

"Hiro~! I'm coming in."

A crimson haired girl came in without even knocking.

He had the urge to say something about privacy and some other things, but more importantly, this was a bad situation.

"What are you doing?"

Liz stopped in her tracks in front of the door surprised.

Hiro's face instantly flushed red. She saw him.

His pounding heart starts to beat faster. He can tell he's getting hotter from his neck up.

This is embarrassing... He thrust his hands out and waved them flustered.

"N-No! You've got it all wrong!"

"Got what all wrong?"

Liz tilts her head and swings her crimson hair.

Ahh, Hiro thinks it's such a cute gesture, but doesn't voice his thought.

If he could, he wanted to escape from that spot that instant, but Liz was blocking the exit.

"Uhh... How should I put this...?"

It would have been so easy if he could say his body was taken over by a moment of vanity*.

Silence falls. It's an extremely awkward atmosphere.

While Hiro was lost as to what to do, Liz was the one to act first.

“Come on, what are you trying to tell me?! Anyway, come with me!”

She grabs his arm in a way to suggest that she doesn't care about Hiro feeling shaken.

He's dragged off by a monstrous strength and flies out the room. They head towards the spiral staircase leading downstairs.

“And where might we be going—?!”

He wasn't able to tell her that he was ill until just the other day.

This was because they started going down the stairs at full speed. He would bite his tongue if he spoke in this situation.

They basically flew down the stairs. When they rushed out the central tower, they were met by the plaza.

The brilliant sun was beating down and broiling the surface. They could feel sweat building on their skin.

“Aura said she's returning to the west. We have to see her off, right?”

“W-We still have time! We don't have to rush like this!”

In order to bury the soldiers who had died in the previous fight, she stayed at Fort Belk while receiving treatment.

Unfortunately, there were also many soldiers who could not be found. Some corpses were so severely injured and covered in mud that it was difficult to discern whether they were friend or foe.

Despite being injured herself, she had been going around looking for the bodies of her subordinates until the sun set.

They gathered all the corpses of Lichtein's troops in one spot and burned them.

Because there was also the fear of disease spreading, they had the Fourth Imperial Army assist them to dispose of the bodies quickly.

The Fourth Imperial Army was also dispersed in various areas of Margrave Grinda's territory.

This was due to the possibility of survivors of the Lichtein army remaining in Margrave Grinda's territory and disturbing the public order.

It seems First Imperial Prince Schtobel took his imperial guards and returned to the Imperial capital.

(Someday... I have to pay him back.)

He decides to live his life the way he wants as Altius told him to that day.

For now, he puts aside his revenge on the First Imperial Prince for another day and keeps his anger inside.

Reason being, there was someone he had to see off with a smile on his face.

"Did you come here just to see me off?"

There was a young girl straddled atop a warhorse with her right arm dangling— It was Aura, with that usual glum look on her face.

There was also Alfred next to her with his entire body wrapped in bandages.

Although he looks to be in pain, in a way, it was comical and made you want to laugh.

"Your highness, and... Sir Descendant. Thank you for seeing us off."

Alfred sounded thoroughly displeased the moment he said "Sir Descendant".

You couldn't see his expression through the bandages, but you could tell what it looked like.

Liz puts her hands to her hips and speaks.

"Yes, a lot happened, but I'm glad we're all alive."

"Yes. The outcome was terrible, but I believe we gained various things from this battle."

Aura kept staring after speaking.

Hiro forces a smile at those lead colored eyes that seem to be probing for something.

"How is your eye?"

"Well, it seems like it'll take some time for it to heal."

The only ones who know about his eye's abnormality are Liz, Tris, and three doctors.

Everyone else was told that it was a wound from the battle.

So there was no way Aura would know, but for some reason, Hiro felt she would figure out the truth about his eye if she kept observing him.

"I see. As long as you haven't lost your sight. But still, that's a large eyepatch."

"Eh, w-well..."

They had no choice but to use a large eyepatch to hide the spirit charm.

But he couldn't possibly explain that to her.

As Hiro was thinking of an excuse, Liz threw him a lifeline.

"It's a huge wound! It's a... a really horrible wound!"

“I see... Do you think it will leave a scar?”

“Ah, no, I think it’ll be okay.”

Hiro said, as he was shaking inside.

“... That’s good to hear.”

Then— can you please stop staring at me?

No matter how much time passed, Aura’s gaze was fixed on Hiro, piercing through him.

Liz stood in front of him to intercept her gaze.

“We’ll send you a letter or something.”

“I will also write you a letter once things settle down.”

“Lady Aura, it’s almost time.”

Alfred interrupted the conversation.

Lined up behind him were the [Imperial Black Knights], though their numbers had diminished.

Perhaps because of the heat, they were wearing light armor rather than heavy, and the warhorses had their armor removed as well.

They were stored along with their food provisions and water in the wagons.

“Then, shall we depart? Take care.”

Aura wraps her arms around her horse’s neck as the sleeves of her military uniform flutter about, and heads for the main gate.

She looked back after moving forward a bit. Her gaze lands on Hiro.

“Held*, let us meet again somewhere.”

(TL note: Aura calls Hiro the same way Altius did at the beginning of the chapter.)

After that, she didn't look back again.

With her at the lead, the group of warhorses slowly goes out the gate.

Despite the heat, his heart is assailed by chills and he feels frozen stiff.

Liz patted Hiro's stiffened back.

“Hiro, I know this is sudden, but we're going to practice riding horses.”

Those words froze his heart even more.

Hiro ended up getting many, many scratches while exposed to the blazing sun.

—Two days thereafter.

An Imperial command was delivered to Hiro from the current Emperor.

