



20-4
470 ©

SLAYERS SPECIAL ①

The Prince of Sallune

By Hajime Kanzaka

THE PRINCE OF SALLUNE

Hajime Kanzaka



Fujimi Fantasia Books

Illustrations by Rui Araisumi

Fujimi Fantasia Books

Slayers Special - Book 1 The Prince Of Saillune

“Evildoers have no human rights!”
Even dragons run away in terror when they cross paths with the genius sorceress, Lina Inverse.
A weak female warrior, the most peace-loving in the world, points Lina in the direction of her arch enemy...
Everyone Lina meets is one of a kind.
There’s no such thing as “smooth waters” in Lina’s life!

And today, again, new adventures and new encounters await her...

The monthly magazine, Dragon Magazine has continued this ever popular series into the original, un-serialized “Slayers Excellent” to bring us more of the humorous fantasy. Send a Dragon Slave into your heart!

SLAYERS SPECIAL ①

The Prince of Sallune

The frightening Prince Philionel,
Crushing the peace!!



Haaaahahaha...
Lina's arch rival, Naga,
The Serpent.



My daughter, long time no see.
So once again, appearing before
Lina is (a man with a fake name).
What is your real name?



Table Of Contents

The Prince Of Saillune...Page 5

Avenger... Page 43

Robbers, Killers...Page 77

Naga's Challenge.. Page 113

Elsia's Palace...Page 149

Slayers Excellent Bad Guy Fight!... Page 187

Afterword... Page 262

The Prince Of Sallune

“Could you possibly be a sorceress?” the man asked in the tiny village.

This was after he had asked for another helping of the missus’s “Dinner Special” in this tiny hut with only one room.

I looked at the man and nodded slightly. While I realize that this “nodding silently” thing is usually something a cool person does to make a statement, I only did this because my mouth was full and I didn’t want to talk.

I was clothed in a black robe, a bandana, a necklace, and a jeweled amulet around the short sword at my belt. If I wasn’t a sorceress, dressed like that I’d have to be either an entertainer or a lunatic.

The man stared at me critically, he was dressed as a priest, though he still looked like a young man – and handsome, to boot. After many years, he would certainly age into a handsome older man.

“What a relief...I’ve been searching for you. After all, we are a very small village. None of us is really able to fight...”

“Able to fight?” While swallowing the remaining food in my mouth, I repeat his words. Apparently, I’m not just being hit on.

“If you’re willing, there is a job we would like your assistance with...”

“Well, go ahead. I’ll listen to your story,” I say in an overly calm and deep voice. It is not the sort of voice one would expect from a female, but I have had many requests taken away from me on the spot if I don’t show enough perceivable strength. The world is all about putting on a show.

“Then, please, come with me to the back table...”

“Before that...” I stop the man’s raised arms with my words. “Hey, Missus, I’ll take the rest of my dinner at the back table, please!”

...Before I realize it, the man has been staring at me suspiciously. This isn’t good.

“Well then, let’s go,” I said calmly, though panicking a little inside. Naturally, the man was still staring in suspicion.

There was a customer already seated at the table.

Bearded and stocky, he was a strong looking man with a bastard sword at his back. If he had been a few inches shorter, he could have been a dwarf, but the way he was, no one would be surprised if he was the henchman of someone up to no good.

I was nervous.

Even though I can use magic, I am still just a pretty girl (yes, I'm referring to myself. I'm serious.) How could I take on a henchman like this in a place like this...

"I have been searching for you," The man who brought me to the table greeted the henchman with a little bow.

"Hurrumph," the henchman nodded simply.

A lady was in his presence, yet there was not even the slightest effort to rise from his chair. He's a bandit. This guy has got to be a bandit.

Ever since the day I first took a request from their sort, I could pick out the type from a mile away.

"Anyway...have a seat."

The man indicated that I sit down across from the bandit. Not saying anything, I sat down. Naturally, I lack a little valiance.

“First, before we talk, I would like to show you my mark of who I am,” The bandit said while glaring at me with unearthly eyes.

“Please, don’t bother showing me your “mark”...”

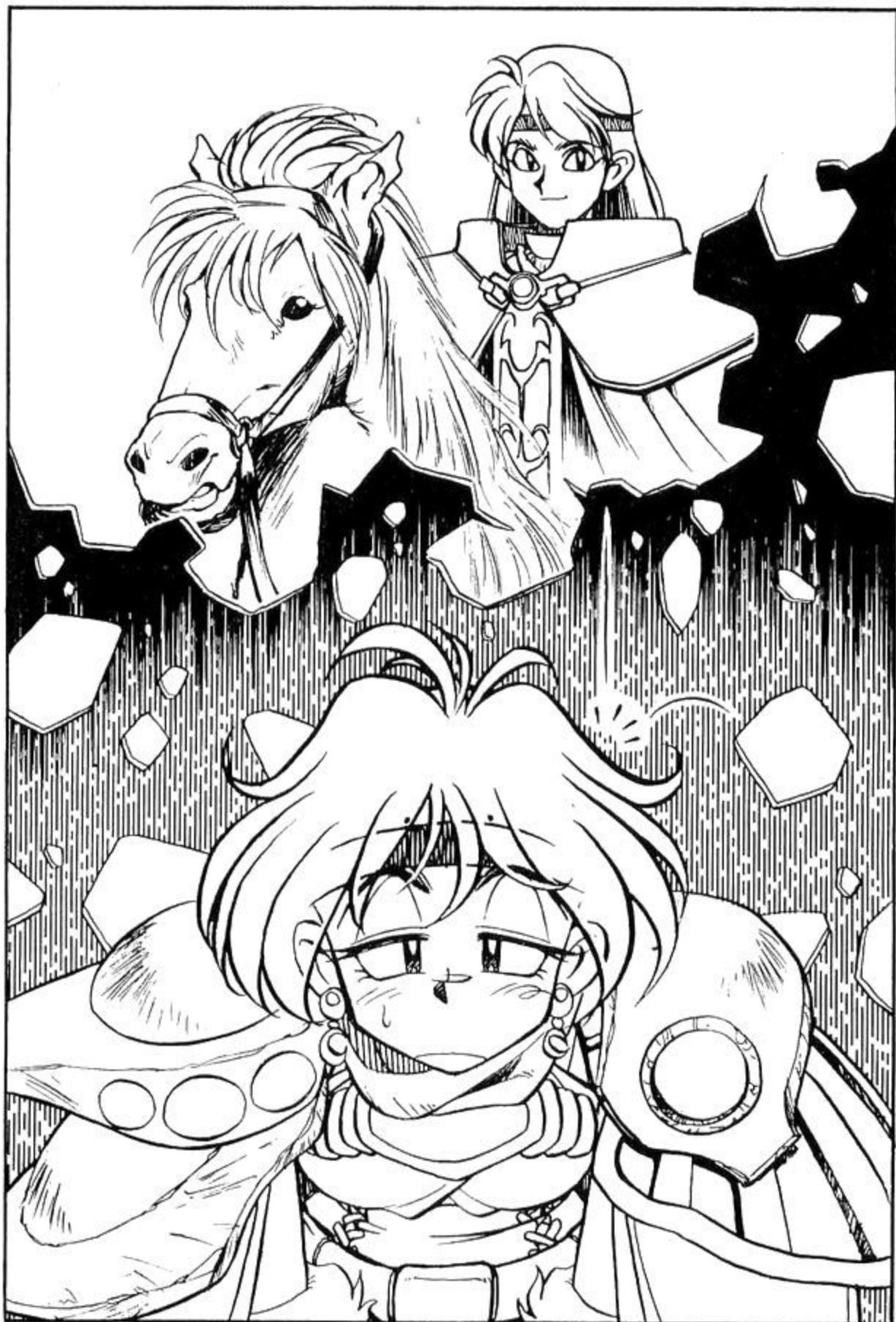
Suddenly, he thrust a dagger into my face. But not the blade side, the handle side instead. It was gaudy, but not evil-looking. Inside the mark on the handle, a very familiar symbol was etched...

“Oh? This symbol looks like...”

“You’re correct,” I don’t know what he meant by me being correct, but the man who led me to the table said this with great pride. “This honorable man is the first royal successor of Saillune. He is Prince Philionel El Di Saillune.

RIP, RIP, RIP...

While hearing the sounds of my cloak ripping as it was trapped between my bottom and my chair, I slowly fell to the floor in a kneel.



For an instant, my eyes really did black out!

If you prompted someone to imagine a “prince”, most people would imagine a handsome man on a white steed, while the rest would probably scramble in their imaginations for something else dignified under the moonlight. In either case, the word “prince” brings the words “graceful,” “manly”, and definitely “handsome.” And in all honesty, that was the sort of image I had had in my mind all these years as to what a prince might look like.

I had definitely heard rumors that Prince Philionel el di Saillune was on a journey alone in disguise around these parts. And honestly, I had been embracing a little fantasy that we would cross paths on the way and that he would be entranced by my beauty and not afraid of my magic... In other words, the handsome prince would fall head over heels for me and propose to me then and there, bringing me the wealth and happiness every girl dreams of.

But that fantasy had just crumbled before my very eyes. Because there was no mistaking it, this man was the real thing.

No one would be foolish enough to try to deceive a sorceress into thinking he’s a prince. Besides, if anyone caught someone not of royal blood with the royal seal, he would be executed without trial.

Most certainly...

If the current king is in reign, a prince is a prince whether he be twelve or forty years old. And come to think of it, I'd never exactly heard about how old the Prince of Saillune was. In other words, I had jumped to many false conclusions about the Prince of Saillune, just by his title.

“Are you all right?”

“Of course I'm not all right,” talking back to the man who did not sound at all concerned about my wellbeing, I somehow managed to scramble back up onto my chair.

“I am currently in disguise at the moment, so please don't be so formal around me.”

That's NOT the issue here, Prince...

“Oh, and I am his priest, Randy. May we please have your name?”

“...Lina. Lina Inverse.”

It was just when I told them my name that...

“Ohh!” The pirate (I still just feel so weird calling him “prince”...it's so wrong...) and Randy said in unison.

I may not seem it, but I actually am pretty famous.

“So you are that magical girl everyone’s talking about!”

“Lina, the Bandit-killer!”

SLIP, SLIP, SLIP, SLIP....

Once again, I fell off my chair. This made my cloak beyond repair. What the hell are people saying about me behind my back!

“Hmm, we have heard many rumors of you.”

“We have heard that you have returned the stolen goods of thousands of bandits back to their rightful owners and made these bandits unable to ever pillage again.”

Lies! All lies!

I mean, the content is pretty accurate, but it was not quite that many bandits...

But I didn’t want to correct them. After all, what Randy said was partly true. I never target anyone who isn’t a robber. I take no pride or joy in depriving the innocent of their wealth and freedom... Although I do enjoy the occasional brawl with the not-entirely-innocent.

...A-hem.

And besides, being a sorceress, I need to stay ahead of my reputation. If you don't believe me, take a good look at yourself, you lazy dweller of Saillune with a debt to pay, who still somehow manages to eat. Just try going into a magic shop and asking for a plateful of Plaudia fruit. Starting tomorrow, you'll get a plate with just one piece of fruit on it and you will be lost.

There was even an annoying episode a while ago when I had just left my hometown and I had enough money to buy even a small castle with a handful of soldiers. When I went to buy some Bamun herbs, the shopkeep's cat was playing nearby and accidentally knocked it over so I had to go overthrow about five bandit groups,

...Or maybe I'm wrong.

But anyway, I don't think that people really know me by two completely contrasting names... I hope.

“What do you mean by “magic girl” and “bandit-killer”...?”

When I asked this, Randy quickly replied, “According to rumor, you call yourself by those names...”

“I most certainly do not call myself that!”

“Well, it doesn’t matter,” the bandit-prince cut in.

It doesn’t matter?

“You may call me Phil. After all, I am in disguise at the moment and I’m sure Philionelis a bit of a mouthful for you to say,” he said with a little grin.

I supposed I was a bit thankful for that request. If he had demanded that I call him “My Prince” or some craziness, running away would have been my only choice.

“And now, let’s get down to business...Randy.”

“Aye.”

And the priest began to describe the job request. It was actually a rather ordinary matter. A monster had taken residence in a nearby cave and the crops have been disrupted, houses have been thieved, and the important healing orb belonging to this village’s only priest had also been stolen... It was the kind of tale that would bring a tear to the eye.

And Phil-san just happened upon this tragic village during his travels. He got riled up, declaring, “I cannot let my subjects suffer like this!” and decided to get someone to exorcise the monster, even though the practice was considered a little archaic by today’s standards.

“And what’s more, it seems rather pitiful that Randy is the only man in this village who is able to fight. It is a tiny village with not even one soldier on a horse. I was worried that the villagers were losing their faith and hope...until I heard about you, “ Phil-san added, after Randy finished the story.

“Randy is the only one...won’t you fight?” I asked him without thinking

“Shh!” Randy tried to stop me.

....Oops, I get it. I had forgotten there for a moment, but Phil-san was the future King (though I still refuse to call him a “prince”). It’s just that rather than royally sitting on a throne, he looked like he was more suited to be out in the field waving his sword around...

“Well... Ordinarily, it is not customary for the future king to take up arms and fight amongst his subjects for their wellbeing...” Phil-san said with a slightly perplexed face.

He seemed to just be a pass-for-noble (excuse me) man who wasn't willing to get his hands dirty. At the very least.

“Or rather...I may not look it, but I am against violence...”

“You bloody liar!” – Before I realized it, I had screamed that out loud.

“Well, let's overlook that for now,” Phil-san said with a sort of casual grace that no ordinary man would be able to have after an outburst like mine.

I suppose this was proof of his uniqueness. Though maybe it was merely proof of his stupidity.

“Naturally, it's not as if I'm entrusting this task to just the two of you while I sit back and enjoy watching.”

“I will accompany the both of you in some way. After all, unless the orb from the magic healer’s house is retrieved... many more sick people may emerge. So I ask you to help on their behalf. What do you say...”

It actually didn’t sound like a bad deal...And I had nothing better to do anyway. So I decided to accept his request.

“Good! So you’ll accept?!” Pushed by Phil-san’s power, even the meek mannered Randy piped up in a loud voice.

“Then let us make immediate preparations for the task at hand...”

“But before we do, you mentioned there were many sick people. Randy, if you’re a priest, you must know some sort of White Magic to cast on them. If you do know of such a spell, please give it to the villagers before we head out...”

“Well, I would, but...” Randy began, scratching his head with an uncomfortable face. “But my title of “priest” is more just a title... And while I can perform the White Magic spell Recovery, it doesn’t work too well...what about you?”

“Same here.”

Phil-san had a strange look on his face as we conversed.

“Can’t ‘Recovery’ cure them?”

Hey, with that attitude, how can you call yourself the First Royal Successor to the Throne!... I was this close to screaming that out at him.

Saillune was also called the “White Magic Capital,” and this was merely because it coincidentally tended to have many White Magic practitioners. But not all White Magic users can use healing spells. I suppose in the end, this was another blind assumption I’d made.

All living beings do have the power within them to heal their own wounds and illnesses. The Recovery spell merely brought out the natural potential within the people for an instant so they can heal themselves.

If the sickness was so severe that the Recovery spell couldn’t cure them, that means that the illness has taken over the body itself. We sorcerers tend to refer to this colloquially as “bacteria”. If an unskilled Sorcerer were to attempt the Recovery spell, the potential of the bacteria itself would be intensified and it could mutate and multiply itself into an even more gruesome disease.

Before I departed on my quest, just when I had learned about Recovery, but not its full nature, I was itching to use it. Just then, a lady from my village caught a summer cold. So to show off, I confidently blessed her with Recovery and changed her simple cold into pneumonia – that was a funny story.

--Though after she got better, she beat the crap out of me—

But I didn't have the patience to tell that story and explain it all to the prince. Probably just my prejudice again, but I got the feeling that even if I did try to explain it to him, he wouldn't understand.

"Well, that's just how the world works," I said.

"I see. That makes sense," Phil-san said with surprising understanding.

We arrived on the scene very quickly. It wasn't that far away from the village.

"...So this is the place," Phil-san, with his torn armor, told Randy, in his torn cloak.

Why were the two dressed like that? you may ask. I suppose it wasn't a big deal. On our way there, I'd come across a huge waterfall so I wanted to stop and take a dip. I strongly dislike being sticky with sweat...Though I suppose there aren't many people on this planet who actually LIKE being sticky with sweat...

Anyway, I thought I'd use a Fireball spell to turn it into an instant hot tub.

But hearing the noise of my spell, they came running to me. And to thank them for my embarrassment, I cast a Mega-brand spell on them.

It wasn't exactly an epic battle, but the fact that it happened along the way before we'd even reached our destination was a bit disheartening... But I healed their wounds, okay? So it's fine!

And anyway, before our three pairs of eyes now stood a big, black entrance. Rather than an ordinary cave, it seemed more like an ancient dwelling...or catacombs.

“We're going in!”

“All right!” I raised a cheerful voice.

And the inconspicuous Randy merely nodded.

But only now that I think about it.

Inside, the cave was actually rather large. But it was only a temporary area.

And that was because I could not use my indiscriminate large area attack spells like Fireball or Mega Brand or Dragon Slave – and those were the ones I was good at.

Since I don't want to be misunderstood, I'll clarify something right here: the notion that I like attack spells just as much as three meals a day is just wrong. I think that would be what is called "prejudice"...probably.

Anyway, if I tried to use such destructive spells in such an enclosed space, they'd either backfire onto me, or they'd crumble the cave and we'd be smashed under it.

So while it wouldn't look too impressive, I figured I had to go with a simple spell.

I cast a Lighting spell on my short sword and held it as a torch as we walked inside. A smell much like rotten bread wafted through the walls.

"I strongly dislike places like this!" Phil-san said. "It's just so dark and gloomy! I just can't forgive it! I don't understand why a monster would choose to live in a place like this!"

Arrrrgh! Shut up!

He was standing directly behind me. He was a couple heads taller than me as well. Having his annoying voice boom through the cave was a little too much to take.

“Shhh! Be quiet!” I whispered as I stopped walking. And it wasn’t because I could no longer deal with the annoyance of his cries. It was because I had caught the movement of something ahead of us in our path.

“Something’s out there!”

“Ohh!” For some reason, Phil-san sounded excited.

At our rear, Randy, who had steadily been losing a sense of presence throughout the journey, didn’t even say a word. I muttered a simple spell under my breath and threw the little ball of light in my left palm up to the ceiling.

The light ball illuminated the wall ahead of us. And right by it was a squad of ten orcs.

“Ahhh, how cute, how cute,” I said, taking a step forward. “If it’s just you I’m up against, a Flare Arrow spell ought to do the trick. Just leave it to me.”

I suppose it needs no explanation, but a Flare Arrow spell does just what the name says. And at different levels, you can release many arrows at once – which I like to call a Flare Shower and I'm very good at it. Of course, this is just my opinion...

And I was also at the ideal distance for the spell at the moment. Ten or twenty orcs would be no problem at all.

“Not so fast!” Phil-san's loud voice stopped me. “I will reason with them! I don't like senseless killing!”

I unthinkingly lost my footing a little. Not noticing, Phil-san stepped in front of me to talk to the orcs.

“Listen well, you orcs!” Phil-san began his “reasoning.” In “human speech.”

“We have come here only to retrieve the mystic Orb! If you are the ones guarding it, then kindly hand it over! And if you have nothing to do with it, then please clear the path for us! I am a peace-loving king and I do not wish to see bloodshed! However, if you refuse to obey, then the malicious sorceress behind me would be more than happy to make you pay!”

Who're you callin' "Malicious Sorceress"!

"Now! What is your answer?" Phil-san asked with a strong step forward. And from the impact of the step, the orcs shuffled back a few paces.

Even though they couldn't understand human speech, from the powerful aura emitting from Phil-san's body, the orcs could distinguish that they were being threatened.

"Answer!" Just when he took another step forward...

The orcs, realizing they were no match for us, turned around and fled.

"There, did you see anything like that before?!" Phil-san laughed while congratulating himself. "Even if the enemy does not speak your tongue, if you speak your case with a strong resolve and with as much empathy as possible, they will understand you! Wasn't that a great example of that concept just now? Let peace and justice prevail!"

...I don't think that's quite entirely correct, Sire...

Randy's presence was dropping even lower. Though I suppose that was unavoidable seeing as how the king had such a strong presence.

And so, the three of us continued to walk on.

Our next encounter was with a large ogre. Not even Phil-san's "diplomacy" would work against this guy.

"Looks like it's my turn then," I said, handing my short sword over to Phil-san. Chanting the spell, I placed both hands in front of me.

"Burst Rondo!"

A large ribbon of light emitted from my hands. I had the ability to control the speed and direction of this light-ribbon.

"Call me Queen!" While letting out my cheesy, nonsensical line, I demolished the ogre in one hit. Applause.

"Now it's trolls this time!"

The regenerative power of trolls was out of the ordinary. If you hit them with a small blade, they would practically heal before your very eyes.

“Dam Brass!”

My spell pulverized the head trolls into dust.

“Oh! And here we have Minotaurs!”

“Dig Volt!”

“It’s a Salamander!”

“Lybrim!”

“Vampi...”

“Assher Dist!”

“...Is it just me, or does there seem to be no end to this?” Phil-san asked in a rather dragging tone.

“Really?” I asked



We still hadn't found the Orb. It was probably deeper into the cave.

“Anyway, let's proceed forward.”

And we proceeded down the long, downward sloping path. We must have sunk pretty deep beneath the earth's surface.

“Ahhh, how tiring...” I complained while batting at the spider web or thin rope that had tangled itself around my feet.

....Wait, thin ROPE?!

K-Klunk.

From far behind, I heard a very heavy sound.

Rumble, rumble...

It sounded like something was rolling. In fear and trepidation, I slowly turned my head.

...Ah, should have guessed.

An insanely huge boulder was rolling our way. It was a rather ordinary sort of dungeon trap and minstrels had sung of it often.

...But now's no time to be reminiscing about that!

“YARRRRRRGH!” I took off running. Phil-san joined my side. The slope we ran down seemed like it would have no end. And the boulder was gaining in speed. It wasn't exactly a very hopeful sort of situation.

“Can't you do anything about it?! Use a spell!”

But if I used a spell powerful enough to break apart that boulder, I would also cause a quake to the surrounding cave walls. We would be buried alive.

I can't do that! – while thinking that, I suddenly remembered something.

“Just leave it to me!” Giving him a wink and a thumb's up, I started to chant. Though my breaths were a bit choppy between the words since I was running.

“Hah!” I whirled to face the boulder and let the spell fly. It was Flare Lance. It had the same precision as Flare Arrow,

But also the same fire power as Fireball.

And my spell splendidly absorbed itself into the boulder.

“You fool!”

Chased by the boulder which had now been transformed into a lava block, Phil-san yelled at me, our shoulders nearly touching. The air surrounding us was insanely hot.

“Just leave it to me!’ my foot! It might just be me, but I think our situation just got much worse!”

I was already preparing for my next spell.

“The final blow!” whirling around, I faced the flaming boulder and unleashed an Icicle Lance. Yes, the spell that works well against a Fire Dragon.

“Yet another useless offer...” Phil-san’s grumbles cut off my moment of glory.

GLUMP!

The clumsy sound of the dying boulder.

“That’s how it’s done,” I said, smiling pleasantly.

“How did you do it?” he asked, puzzled.

“I simply took advantage of the coefficient of thermal expansion.”

“.”

Seeing Phil-san’s blank face, I amended my explanation slightly. “In other words, it’s like when you toss cold water into a hot clay pot and it cracks. Same thing.”

“Ohhhh, now I see!”

So he finally got it. But anyway, I’m glad we’re safe!

“Huh?!” That was the first time I noticed.

“What’s wrong?”

“Randy is gone!”

“Oh, now that you mention it!”

It should have been an obvious observation. That the priest who had such a faint physical presence to begin with would finally up and leave us!

“...Well, never mind. We can just look for him on the way back,” Phil-san said, summing up our plight in a casual sentence.

“I guess you’re right,” I found myself agreeing with just as much ease.

Brace yourself for the big one!

A lone sorcerer had been waiting for us in a room deep within the dungeon’s caverns. And if he wasn’t “the big one,” what else was he?

“I have been expecting you, Prince Philionel.”

“Stop it!!” I yelped out unexpectedly at the sound of his voice.

õ?ö

õDon't you dare call this guy a prince!ö I was still unable to cross over the gap between my ideals and reality. The reason I hadn't burst out like that before must be that I was stuck in reality escape syndrome. Hearing him called õprinceö was much more violent a shock to me than being hit by my own Fireball spell.

ó I don't quite understandí ö the black robed sorcerer puzzled, his rhythm thrown off by my outburst.

õAnyway, your journey ends here. Prepare to die.ö

How dare he say that. Does he know who the hell I am?

õDamn you! There is not a soul more warm and peace-loving than I!ö

Who the hell're you?

õI hired him to do this.ö Along with this voice, a man popped out from the darkness.

õYou bastard! Randy, why?!ö

Yes. There was no mistaking it. It was Randy, the priest with very little presence.

Phil-san raised his voice in shock. Well, his voice is usually raised anyway, so that wasn't saying much. In contrast, I took a deep, cool breath, and rested my hands on my hips.

"I figured you were behind this."

"Wh-what?!" the shocked eyes of all in the cave shot at me.

"You bitch, when did you notice?!" Randy (I don't suppose I'll ever end his name with a -san again) shook with nerve.

"Actually I was just winging it. I hadn't really considered it until just now, but I've always wanted to say a cool line like that. So I just took advantage of this situation to say it."

"Well, never mind," he said. "I am third in line for the throne, but your god-awful loud demeanor has always upstaged me!"

Now I get it. Those feelings! huh?!

“Wait, you’re third in line for the throne?!” I gasped, glancing at Phil-san. They looked nothing alike. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am sure.” Phil-san nodded curtly.

Wait a minute! This is a perfect example of a family dispute!

“And what’s more, you don’t fit the image of a man suited to rule Saillune!”

I agree!

But trying to imagine Randy being king also made me tilt my head in confusion.

“I see!” Phil-san said in a troubled voice. “I had thought it rather strange that during the past year all the assassination attempts have been directed only at me!” So it was all your doing!”

You should notice these things sooner, man.

“I suppose I was right in having my subordinate sorcerer set a trap beforehand.”

“So you mean to say, the monster who lives here is!”

Naturally, it's something I planted here.ö

öSo I was just a dummy along for the ride, eh? Randy, you were just going to kill me and then blame it on Phil-san, weren't you?ö

öExactly as you say.ö

í He's so unusual. But now I can faintly understand why he would lack such presence ó being compared to Phil-san all the time.

öSo, what will you do after you take over the kingdom?ö

öHuh?ö

When I butt in with that little question, Randy looked confused.

öWhat will Ií do? Wellí Have fun, I suppose!ö

Oh my god! Someone like this actually exists!

People who want to become king with no real plans on mind, or people who want to take over the world just because! What a troubled world we live in.

öDamn you, you won't get away with this!ö Phil-san suddenly got angry.

öNevertheless, this place will be your tomb. Kill them!ö

At Randy's order, the sorcerer began to move. Limbs flailing without meaning, he let out a roaring voice.

...I suppose people like this actually exist too.

“Come forth, my friend, Brass Demon Garundia!”

The floor glowed from the symbol he drew with his staff. It was a little too dark to tell, but it was probably a Summoning Circle.

A giant shadow was born in the faint light. Brass Demon.

I said, “Your only friends are monsters...what a sad fellow.”

“Silence, fool!” The Sorcerer yelled, truly angry.

Brass Demons were not major mazoku, but they were known to be stronger than the lesser demons. Naturally, low level magic was no use against them. Naturally, I had plenty of magic points stocked to kill this one, but in a scene like this, a girl wants to really look cool when she settles things.

Well then, how shall I handle this?

Just as I was thinking that, the demon started walking closer to me with a creepy gait.

And thenô

ōWe will not hold back!ö Phil-san snapped next to me.

He was pointing fiercely at the Brass Demon before us.

ōJust to assassinate me, you made the villagers suffer so much and you befriended this foul beast?! As much as I am a peace-loving man, I cannot let this go unpunished! I will make you see reason, so stay right there!ö

Then he started charging at him.

ōHey, hold it, man!ö Just as I was trying to stop himô

ōPacifist Cruuuuush!ö While yelling out a silly excuse for a death cry, the man's fist made sharp contact with the demon's ribs.

You've gotta be kidding me!

ōKindness To All Creatures Kick!ö

The demon's large body was hurled up again into the air, collided with Randy and his sorcerer, and slammed into the wall. Nobody moved.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

“Did you see that? The mighty powers of peace?!”

At the unbelievable scene, my eyes had reduced themselves to dots. Hey, man, there's a time and a place for everything, but I don't think your peace speeches are quite right for this place.

“Looks like we somehow got that cleaned up.”

We had successfully returned and given the Orb back to the village healer. Phil-san handed me more money than had been promised.

“I suppose I caused more trouble to you than I'd anticipated.”

You're the trouble, man.

“And we will probably meet again someday.”

Not if I can help it.

“Well then, bye.”

Yeah, bye.

He turned his back on me and left without looking back once. And I gazed after his disappearing figure for a long time.

And it wasn't because I was trying to look cool. I honestly hadn't recovered from my shock yet. And I didn't suppose I would for a while.

--Peace-loving nature: a force to be feared!

And as I watched his body become a small dot and then disappear into the distance, I thought to myself

This kingdom won't last much longer!

(The Prince Of Saillune ó fin)

Avenger

It was the definition of suddenness.

“Lina Inverse, brace yourself!”

“Ehhhh?!”

As my body lurched backwards, the tip of a spear was pointing at my nose.

“Wh-wha...wha...”

I barely saved myself from falling over, regained my balance, and rose from my chair to face my opponent.

I was in a small eatery in the trading community of Talis City. A potential client had brought me there to discuss the job over lunch, but when I gave my name, I was suddenly attacked. Looking up, I saw that it was a girl who had been sitting to the right of me. If you’re wondering what happened to the man that was with me, by the way, he scuffled out of his chair and bolted out the door – not wanting to get caught up in a possibly deadly brawl.

“What the hell is your problem, girl!”

“Be silent!” Her blue eyes glared at me.

And I could have sworn I could see little balls of fire in her pupils...It didn't look like I was in much of a position to try to reason with her...

“I do this to avenge my brother!”

“Wait...what?!”

While dodging her flying attacks, I ran out of the shop. Damn it! I was only halfway through my lunch!... Is what I cursed under my breath until I realized that I at least had got to skip out on paying. Putting it that way, I'm luckyyyyy.

.... But I got the feeling that no matter how I looked at things, this was not exactly a “lucky” situation. I was on a big street under the midday sun. I was in clear sight of many people. I don't suppose witnessing a street fight was that unusual for the villagers, but to see a young girl with a raised spear chase such a beautiful young lady (yours truly, of course...in case there was any confusion) down the street was probably a rare occurrence.

Naturally, an accomplished warrior and sorceress such as myself could put down such a girl in a flash with little to no effort. And to be realistic, there have been several people I've encountered who wanted to defeat me just to raise their own name values.



But not many of them lasted in battle any longer than it takes to make a piece of toast. (Braaaaag!)

These are not the words of just any sorceress, but, “I’m gonna kill all the bad guys with attack spells!!” ...yeah, kind of like that feeling.

...Hey, I see you, humanitarians. Stop making that face. Just FYI, there’s no such thing as basic human rights if you’re a criminal!

Like devious old men who take innocent people or possessions through force, or devious men who get off more from the sight of blood than from having three meals a day, the robbers, the berserkers – why, it’s not even beneath them to team up with the filthy goblins and kobolds. What more proof do you need!

However, this time was different. We were in an open space in view of people, and this girl seemed to have a virtuous task of “avenging her brother.” My mind was stuck on my beloved attack spells that I wished I could use, but couldn’t. I was surprised by my good will power!

Any ordinary sorceress, once barely missing an attack to her nose, would panic and send a counter-attack spell. She would probably even send a wild Fire Ball flying.

.....Or maybe she wouldn’t do that after all.

But anyway, since I wasn't fighting back, the girl kept cockily jabbing at me.

“Stop running and meet your doom!”

“That's crazy talk!”

I ran. She followed. The tip of her spear cut the air, old men fell in shock, cows bucked and panicked – I suppose to a third party, this was a very amusing spectacle, the likes of which they weren't likely to see again.

However, unfortunately, I was the cause of this panic. I was in no place to enjoy it.

In front of an antiques shop, I murmured an incantation. Gripping the little knife in my pack, I headed for the next corner to the right! When the girl chased after me around the corner, her feet stopped suddenly. That was because I was there waiting for her. My right hand was raised, ready to take the opportunity!

I aimed my knife carefully towards its intended target...so as not to misfire. I did not want to hit her.

age as my sister back home. Her hair was short and blond and she was too beautiful to be a fighter. With a white and gold breast plate, and a long spear, she was dressed formally for battle.

“What happened half a year ago...don’t tell me you’ve forgotten!”

Even though her body couldn’t move, her mouth could. That’s only expected, since this spell was originally developed for interrogations.

“Half a year ago...you say...” I tried to draw up old memories.

Indiscriminately crushing down on bandit groups, getting bored, blaming Blue Dragon, missing my hometown and casting Dragon Slave for no reason to make me feel better...All I could remember were peaceful, monotonous days...

But someone wanting to avenge me? I could see no...well, it’s not that I could see NO reason for it...

But I doubt that I’d ever harmed anyone who would have a respectable person who would want to avenge him.

“Ah, wait, was this brother of yours a bandit or something?”

“No, he wasn’t! He’s a farmer!”

“...Well then, this must be some misunderstanding...”

“It is most certainly not a misunderstanding! It was very clear what...”

“Move it, move it, move it!” without even a pause, the sound of the yelling voice clamored through the square along with a lot of clinking and clunking. Looking around me, I saw numerous soldiers on horse-carriages coming for me. Perhaps they were carrying precious cargo.

“Don’t loiter in the middle of the village square! You’re in the way, you’re in the way! open a path!”

Now that he’d mentioned it, I realized we were indeed right in the middle of a big road. And just as I was noticing this, the carriages flew past me with incredible speed. Boy, they sure were in a hurry.

“Just a minute!” The girl yelled at the same time.

Ohhh, that reminds me, did I still have Shadow Snap on her? In a panic I turned and looked at her.

...But I guess my timing wasn’t quick enough.

WHACK!!

Yep, just as I thought. I got whacked.

“Ngh...nnnn....”

By the time she finally woke up, it was night. I ordered a room for two at the lodge, carried her in, and dressed her wounds. Naturally, I didn't want to risk her waking up and going berserk on me again, so even though it was a bit redundant, I had turned the lamp light up and cast Shadow Snap on her again.

“So you're awake, I see,” I said, in as gentle a voice as I could manage. As much as I wanted to be more like, “ohhhh, so the mighty widdle warrior awakes from her nappy-wappy? mwahahaha,”...but that would make me no better than those evil sorceresses out there.

For an instant it seemed as though she would cry out, but perhaps she got wise and realized the situation she was in. She merely glared at me in response.

“So about what happened earlier today... I think you're somehow mistaken. And I think we can come to an understanding if we just talk...so please. Trust me and tell me what exactly happened.”

I looked firmly into her eyes. A strong gaze was the best way to put significance into what one was saying. No matter how important the contents, if you look down,

mmmm

whatever you say ends up seeming very insignificant.

A straight expression and a strong gaze... that is the very way to make someone listen to you!

“Ohhhhh.”

However, she responded with cold eyes.

“You tie a person up, hang her from the ceiling, then put some crazy spell on her...and then you dare ask her to ‘trust’ you?”

Ah.

...She had a point there. No matter how virtuous my intentions, treating her like this did make me lose some credibility.

“Don’t worry about all of the fighting,” I said. “It didn’t bother me...”

“Ohhhhh.”

For some reason, her face looked evil when I tried to cover myself.

According to her side of the story, one half year ago, the sorceress who killed her older brother

used my name. Naturally, I'd never remembered doing such a thing. I mean, the scene of the crime, for starters – her village. I'd never even been there. I'd never even heard her name before.

It was a SET UP.

If someone with my name ever does something, it's usually someone who's A, not me, and B, up to no good.

The “revenge” that she wanted was probably yet another case of identity theft.

....This was perfectly clear to me, but it was not so easy explaining to her.

“You can say whatever you want! But you already told me your message quite clearly! While you were standing over my brother's dead body! You said, ‘my name is Lina Inverse. If you wish to avenge your brother then chase after me. Or else you may suffer the same fate as he!’ – you said that.”

“Again, I never said that! It wasn't me! ... Wait, if you say ‘I told you all of that directly, didn't you see the person who killed your brother?’”

“Of course I did!”

She glared at me from directly across.

“She had long, black hair.”

Yes, my hair is long...but it's also brown.

“She wore a black cloak...”

Well, all sorcerers wear black cloaks...

“And she had a ram’s skull on her head...”

Yeah, that’s totally not me. Though I do wear a bandana.

“She was also a really big man...”

“...Wait a minute, sweetie,” I stared at her hard.

“Wait, now that I think about it...” she stared back.

“You don’t resemble him at all!”

“What the hell were you thinking! Seriously!”

“...I was thinking various things...” she murmured.

I clutched my head in my hands. “Arrrrrrgh!... First that strange peace-loving dude and now you. Why do I always attract these sorts of whackos?!”

“Birds of a feather...”

“Shut up!... Jeez... Anyway! Things should be cleared up now. I’m not the one who killed your brother!”

“...Yeah, guess not...sorry.”

Her apology was surprisingly vulnerable.

“Come to think of it...”

Now that she solved the mysteries, she flopped onto what could not be called much of a luxurious bed, and made perplexed clicking noises with her tongue while waving around her wrists.

“I actually saw a sorcerer with a ram skull helmet in this very town. I saw him yesterday.”

“In this very town?!”

“Yes. I thought it was a little strange – what was his name again?...Rown... or something like that. Oh, wait, I’m probably wrong again... but thinking about it now that I know what I know, that man certainly was suspicious.”

Even without knowing what you know now, that man would have still been plenty suspicious! (...is what I wanted to scream at her.)

Especially that “ram skull helmet” crap! What’s up with that?!

Hmmm, thinking about famous people who wear ram skulls as helmets, the evil High Priest of legend is the only person who comes to mind... Dressing like that is basically the same thing as standing on a podium and yelling, “Suspicious guy right here, folks!”

“Anyway...” I said, clutching my throbbing head. “Let’s leave searching for him to tomorrow. Let’s turn in for the night.”

“Good idea.”

However...

At that time I stupidly didn’t notice...that I’d gotten completely wrapped up in something.... Please don’t laugh.

The next day...

I found the man in question right away.

After asking around with the question, “Hey, did you see a strange looking guy with a ram’s skull helmet wandering around?” the second person I asked had an answer.

“Looks like you’ll finally be able to avenge your brother. Let’s see... wait, what was your name again?”

We walked along a rundown path with white stone, dusty houses as I asked her. Yesterday things were a little hectic and I’d forgotten to get her name.

“I’m Canny,” she said, automatically stretching out her right hand.

Wait, isn’t she supposed to be a Fighter?

While wondering this, I still shook her hand.

Even a beginner Fighter wouldn’t easily offer her dominant hand to a potential enemy.... Or does she just really trust me or something?

Even though I’m technically a “Fighter-Sorcerer,” I would have to say that I lean more towards the sorcerer side – so I don’t feel threatened much by a simple handshake.

“There he is! It’s him!” Canny suddenly raised her voice.

Glancing over, I saw our man in question round the corner and disappear.

“We’re going in!” Even before I said this, she had already rushed ahead of me.

“Hold it right there! You strange man!”

He stopped at the sound of her voice and turned around. He looked a bit familiar to me.

He was in his early thirties, perhaps. And while he certainly did look strange, he was thin with dark eyebrows – a rather handsome fellow.

“...Are you talking to me?”

“...Do you see any other strange men in this village?”

It was then that I finally caught up to them. The man looked a little untrustworthy.

“Never mind that, you!” Canny said as she poked her finger at the man.

“You! You’re Lina Inverse, aren’t you?!”

Smack!

I toppled over on the spot.

This chick isn’t thinking at all!

“No...My name is Dilt...”

“Oh...my mistake...or is it...?!”

“Are you an idiot?!.... Hey, didn't you duel this girl's big brother half a year ago?!”

“In the northern village of Vorune!”

“Ohhhh...”

His handsome black eyes narrowed to slits under his ram skull helmet.

“...Now I remember. I see. So you're the girl from back then. I didn't recognize you dressed as a Fighter.”

“So it WAS you – I knew it!” Canny yelled... (“She knew it,” my ass!)

“So you chased after me to avenge him, just like I'd suggested. If only you'd stayed home and cried like a good girl – then maybe you'd have survived... I never thought that you would dare find me, the great Sart Prazer...”

“...Wait a minute, didn't you just say your name was 'Dilt'?”

“Ridiculous!” the confusing sorcerer What's-his-name said with a laugh and a puffed out chest.

“Only I, the great Balf Luquas would know that is just a pseudonym.”

...Wait, now he's forgetting his own name?...

But I really wish he'd stop boasting over stuff that didn't amount to anything and made no sense. I started to feel sorry for myself – taking him on seriously in battle.

And what's more, we had started to attract a crowd of people who were whispering, “Oh, look, it's those girls from yesterday,” and “Oh, dear. It's like this every day...”

“Anyway, I'm here to avenge my brother! Prepare to die!” Canny howled.

The sorcerer...moved!

SLAP!

The sole of the man's shoe easily made direct contact with her face.

The crowd exploded in laughter. I pretended to be a tree. But Canny still tried to fight him.

“Ahh! Tahhh!”

Whoosh, whoosh! Kick! Fall! Step, step!

“Eeeep! Eeeep!”

...Maybe she should have stayed home crying? Just sayin'...

“Be careful!” Canny said, suddenly becoming serious. “He’s really strong!”

“You’re really weak!”

“Please don’t remind me!”

As the two of us squabbled, the sorcerer forced a carriage to stop in the road.

“Hey! I don’t really care what’s going on – just let me get on and step on it! If you do my bidding I will give you money! And if you refuse I’ll kill you on the spot!”

The terrified carriage driver let out a whimper and whipped his horse.

“Mwhahahaha! If you wish to defeat me, come catch me!” The sorcerer yelled from the top of the carriage, standing tall with his hands on his hips. Naturally, he didn’t exactly look cool.

“We’re not letting you escape!” Canny dashed off after the carriage, not stopping to consider how she compared to a horse.

I chased after her while muttering an incantation under my breath.

That sorcerer, while he realized Canny was no threat, probably realized that I did have some powers even if I was just a helper. Otherwise he would not have sped away like that. His plan was probably to run the carriage through the village several times to tire me sufficiently and then defeat me in combat...

But I won't let him!

I took Canny's hand.

"Let's go!"

"...Huh?"

"Ray Wing!"

And then we both flew into the sky!

"Yarrrrrgh!" The sorcerer on the cart cried out. The people in the crowd also began to gasp and yelp as he passed. And I don't blame them for that. It's not every day you see a sorcerer and a soldier flying by at top speed hand in hand.

Not many use Raywing anymore these days – it's a dying magic. When taking the difficulty of acquiring the skill into account, it's just not worth using. Except in emergencies, like for example, if you're falling from a high place.

It's not as fast as a teleportation spell, but the easy to perform and adequately powerful "Levitation" spell is more than sufficient. After all, you don't hear many stories of a sorcerer casting a high level flying spell to have a mid-air brawl with a griffon.

But in all honesty, I learned this spell for a much simpler reason. I wanted my big sis back at home to be impressed.

And she was impressed. ImPRESSED right into a food seller's cart in the market square when I messed up the incantation. Two days of washing dishes to pay him back caused a lot of grief for everyone. Ever since then, I haven't used the spell...

"Yahhh!" The sorcerer yelled at the cart driver, making him go faster.

"You're not getting away!" I cried out, also accelerating. He lowered slightly. He had a barrier of wind set around him – this is how the spell worked to move its subjects along. The weight, altitude, and speed of the subject all required synchronization by the magic user to maintain balance. Unable to remove his "baggage" called Canny, if he wished to increase his speed, his altitude would need to lower. The delicate balance of the spell would threaten to be thrown off.

And now we were flying at the height of a person. Raising altitude was just too dangerous.

...Now that I thought about it, I'd been hearing all sorts of interesting crashing, smashing, and dragging noises coming from my hand that had been dragging Canny along... I hope she's still alive...

“Damn youuuuu!” While rustling around in the bag with his right hand, the sorcerer started to mumble an incantation under his breath. Due to the wind barrier, the wind was whistling in my ears – well, not exactly – it's just that the winds were extra strong and loud where the barrier was so it was difficult to hear the incantation. The mysteriously unnamed evil sorcerer didn't seem inconsiderate enough that he would simply cause a violent spell to happen in the middle of a town square.

Or so I thought...

The earth began to shake.

The “something” that the sorcerer had been summoning was the cause of the quakes. It looked like a large human.

... A Mud Golem?!

What an amusing spell he used. He probably used it reasoning that my hands were tied as long as I was using my Raywing spell. If I couldn't dodge the golem, I'd be on a fast collision course with it. However...

Smack!

The golem crumbled to dust by my spell.

“How is that possible?!” The sorcerer let out an indignant cry.

It's true, as long as I'm using the Ray Wing spell, I am unable to concentrate enough spiritually to use an attack spell.

But there's always a “but”.

I could always manage to pull out a “Befhisu Bring.”

Befisu Bring is exactly how it sounds – it's a spell that gets an earth spirit to work for you. In layman's terms, it's a hole digging spell.

In other words, the Mud Golem that our little enemy made instantly without permission from the Befimos (earth spirit) meddles with the earth spirit, it's true creator, you might say, and the earth spirit can open holes in the Mud Golem.

Naturally, if his magic points – if his ability to intervene with the earth spirit had surpassed mine,

the results would have been different.

A sorcerer's worth is all in his or her application. Even the most seemingly ineffective spell can be very powerful if used correctly. There are instances in which a sorcerer armed with the highest of attack spells is overthrown by a sorcerer who doesn't even know a single attack spell. And this is why.

“Yahhhh!” The sorcerer cried, stopping the cart and jumping off. If running wasn't going to work, facing off head on was his only course of action.

The nearby man at the fruit stand and old lady at the dried goods store noticed what was happening and ran for it.

But as much as the sorcerer wanted to fight me, he was still technically Canny's target to avenge her brother.

“Canny! I'm gonna make you fly!”

“Sure!” she answered sharply, understanding my meaning.

While summoning my energy and raising altitude, I faced the sorcerer and got closer and closer...

And sending “wind” to Canny, I let go of her hand.

I swished my black cloak like a raven flaps his wings, and fell quietly to the earth.

Canny continued to fly. Spear in hand. It looked more like a solitary unleashed arrow.

She faced off against the sorcerer! “Prepare to die. For my brotherrrr!”

In that instant!

The sorcerer dodged quickly sideways.

Damn it!! That’s right, he can dodge things!

“Ahhhhh!” Canny screamed!

Calm down! Go for it, you can do it, Canny! Move forward on sheer willpower!

CRUNCHHHHHHHYYYYAAAAAA!!

...Oh. Guess it was a lost cause.

She unromantically fell headfirst into the pile of fruit. Her bottom half was wiggling from within the oranges.

I glared at the sorcerer.

“How utterly cruel of you!”

“YOU were the one who did it, not me!”

“It’s all in the past! Anyway!”

I like to use the word “anyway” to nullify all problems so I can move on.

“Looks like I’ll have to avenge Canny’s brother for her!”

Just when I thought he’d butt in with a, “don’t kill unprovoked!” he started to chant a spell.

And that spell was... Fireball!

The tiny ball of light that the sorcerer released would explode like a bomb on contact and send walls of flames around its immediate surroundings – it’s a large area death spell. If it came in contact with a human, she’d be fried to rare at least.

Is he insane?! If he used that spell here, countless townfolk would die. I tried to give him the benefit of the doubt at first, but I stopped when I saw his eyes. There were flames of insanity in them.

...Defeating him was my only choice.

I began to chant my own spell. The sorcerer's lips twisted upward into a slight smile.

He's onto me. He knows something about the spell I'm about to cast.

Dill Brand – a spell that is the base for Mega Brand. It works around the immediate area of its caster, sending an explosive burst inward to the nucleus above where the sorcerer stands. It's like releasing the ground from below into a protective dirt barrier.

It's easier to control than a Fireball spell and the incantation doesn't take as long to chant either. However...

It's lower than a level 2 attack spell. It's meant to protect you from an attack spell as long as you're wearing a decent robe. It's supposed to be a spell that you'd use against a weak opponent or one whom you didn't want to kill. While you're chanting the spell, a weak protective barrier is formed around you, making it easy for an opponent to counter your spell. It really is an amateur sort of spell.

And I suppose it need not be mentioned that I am an all-powerful sorcerer to whom others cannot compare. I have plenty of magic stock left to unleash another Fireball or two while I'm chanting this spell. The day I use it is the day my very magic will fly away.

Clap!

The sorcerer clapped his hands loudly in front of his chest. Then he slowly moved them apart to the sides. In between the palms, a glowing ball of light had formed.

“Go forth, Fireball!”

“Dill Brand!”

The ball of light was released.

Around the same time, the earth split and raised beneath him. With not a very large circumference, with my *opponent* sorcerer at its center.

The dirt circle that raised to the sky covered the sorcerer’s body.

A crashing noise and then a scream.

The pillar of dirt was dyed in red.

The witnesses nearby were shocked.

That was the final moment of the evil sorcerer – whose name I still never caught.

I’d caused the dirt pillar to shoot into his Fireball spell, trapping him inside with it.

“Victory!”

I faced the horizon and made a peace sign.

“It’s over...at last...” The soft voice sounded in my ear.

I whirled around in surprise. Canny, who had revived herself at some point, was standing next to me with distant eyes.

“Nii-san... I have splendidly avenged you...”

“You didn’t do a stinking thing!”

“Ah! Don’t say that!”

“I’m sorry... I know you helped me out in so many ways...”

Canny came to the edge of town to see me off. She said these words of good will as she extended her right hand to me.

When she did the same thing at first, I was a bit surprised, but it turned out to be nothing. She was just a perfect amateur. And now, she’s abandoned her weapons and armor and is instead wearing an ordinary dress. I think it suits her much better.

This job had been done completely for free, but I guess it’s okay to do that sometimes. If I just think of making the world a better place one person and one good deed at a time...

“What are you going to do now?”

She smiled peacefully back at my question. “I’m going back home. I think I’ll set up a farm again with my little brothers.”

I smiled softly. “I guess that way of life isn’t a bad thing either... Well, take care...”

“You too.”

With a whoosh of my cloak as I turned to walk away, I suddenly remembered something.

“Pardon me if I’m intruding, but... why did that sorcerer kill your brother to begin with?”

“Well...” with a sad smile on her face, she answered with distant eyes, “One night, my brother was drunk carrying a club in a dark alley. The sorcerer walked by and...”

“S-stop it right there!” I broke into her sentence. “I...I think I’d rather not know after all...”

The girl made a puzzled face at me.

Ahhhhhhhh, don't tell me that was a *worthy vengeance*...

No! There's no way that a sorcerer who dresses so strangely could be a good guy! After all, the villagers all decided he was evil! And so did I! Just now!

"...What are you so troubled over?"

"Noooo, nothing!"

"Then, take care, Lina."

"Y-you too!...ha...haha... Well, see ya later!"

Forcing a smile on my face, I left that town behind me in a flash.

--The world is very deep and meaningful --

--Lina Inverse

Let's try not to judge a book solely by its cover.

(The end)

Robbers, Killers

The black shadows danced in the dark.

The men dashed toward the bed in unison. Countless blackened blades were raised high...

“Flare Arrow!”

With the sound of my voice, countless flaming arrows appeared before the men’s eyes.

The men were stiff in place.

“Go!”

...It ended instantaneously.

And it was their fault for underestimating the powers of I, the great Lina Inverse: the soldier and sorceress. I have been the subject of many nighttime raids – I could never let my guard down.

Usually, if someone were to attack a person in her sleep, even if she was a much higher level opponent, he could defeat her easily. And if said attacker has a blade on his side, one can only imagine just how much at an advantage he is against a sleeping woman.

...But the whole game changes if she’s a sorceress.

As long as she has enough magic points to spare, she can easily mutter a counter spell powerful enough to deflect a night attack – even in her sleep.

The trick I used against the assassins just then was an example of this. I woke, sensing murderous intent on the other side of my door, then immediately began my spell chant.

But I was surprised that the men could move so swiftly... *That means Elena in the room next door is in danger!*

I sat up in bed, put on my cloak, swooped up my sword and belongings and ran out into the hallway. And right before me stood a man in a black cloak. And behind the door to Elena's room, I could hear the sounds of swords clanking against each other.

"Take this and run!" I yelled at the assassin as I threw my still sheathed sword at him.

"...huh...?!" With a stunned voice, he absentmindedly caught the sword. And then...

In the next instant, my knee flew into the man's solar plexus. As our little assassin friend fell unconscious, I retrieved my sword. If you're going to get in the first move in a fight, it's best to disorient him. Even if he knows I'm his enemy, if I speak to him like that he's sure to catch whatever I throw him.

I rushed into Elena's room. *Thank goodness, she's safe.* I wasn't sure how she'd managed to escape, but she was still in bed as the two men's swords had tangled themselves around each other. It was a trick one normally didn't see.

I think I'd like to get a look at this...

Is what I thought for a moment, but I didn't have the time. After all, she was my client.

"Digvolt!" I sent lightning through my sword and sent it flying at the men. The two assassins fell to the ground with light scrapes – nothing close to mortal wounds.

"Thank you so much, Lina-chan!"

"Never mind that! Get your belongings! We need to leave this place!"

Both of the doors on our rooms had been locked. Unless one of the assassins was also a skilled thief, that would have to mean that one of the lodge's staff had been a secret conspirator with them...

In either case, this lodge was no longer safe.

We ran out into the hall. Countless men in black cloaks were in the dining hall past the lobby. I would estimate there were tens of them.

“Close your eyes!” I yelled to Elena. Without waiting for her response, I began my spell.

“O, light!” I closed my eyes and released the incantation. The spell for “Lighting” can send a blast of light for a particular duration and strength. The shorter the duration, the more powerful. What I had released just then was a flash of light with a duration of zero in three consecutive blasts!

The assassins screamed.

A crushing flash of light burned their eyes.

Just as the light disappeared, we lost our vision and slipped out between the assassins all around us and out the door to the lodge. Perhaps they’d never thought we’d escape the building – there were no guards out front.

The dawn was nearing as we ran down the main road. After we made it to the seashore, we finally were able to catch our breaths.

The lighthouse fire went out and the sea line was dyed in red.

And dawn broke over Raurua, the harbor town.

“Look!” Elena’s voice brought me harshly back to reality as I was starting to lose myself in the beautiful sunrise.

I looked where she was pointing and gasped. In the middle of the town, arms of fire were rising to the sky.

They came from the lodge where we had stayed.

Acccccck!

Ah....ahhhhhhhhhh! Oo-oops, I probably shouldn't have used my Flare Arrows...

I need to cover myself!

“What horrible bastards!” I yelled. “How dare they set fire to the lodge after attacking us!”

Okaaaaay! Now that means the bad guy in all of this mess was the “Dark Wolf” guys!

My job this time is to destroy the bandits of “Dark Wolf.” It wasn’t exactly a glamorous gig, but I decided to take on the job, for two humanitarian reasons of my own.

My first reason: I love defeating bad guys without giving them a chance to beg for mercy.

My second reason: I couldn't forgive "Dark Wolf" for giving themselves such a cliché name. Not even the former popular saga had such a silly name like that!

... Now that I see my reasons lined up like that, I guess I can't say they're exactly "humanitarian," but I have no time to waste muddling over my reasons. I'll never become a star that way!

Besides, I came to this town yesterday at noon to find their secret base that my employer, Elena, had told me about. I didn't know exactly where in this town the base was so I asked around here and there... which probably explains why I was attacked by assassins in the night.

It seems like the bandits have more supporters hidden in this town than I'd expected.

Elena, a twenty-something girl with beautiful black hair, reminded me of my big sis back where I come from. The long sword hanging at her waist sort of ruined the image, but for all I knew, she might actually be a rather skilled fighter.

I am a little concerned as to why she requested I disband the bandits – I'm sure she has some sort of personal reason behind it – I'm just a little wary to ask. Everyone has a secret or two they'd rather not reveal. I'm sure she'll tell me if she feels like it.

“But... I’d really like to get this matter settled as soon as possible...”

I swallowed the words that threatened to crawl up out of my mouth.

...How many more lodges will be burned to the ground? I can’t say that out loud.

The sun peeked up slightly from the horizon as a cold breeze flew by in the early morning.

It was then that I noticed something for the first time: I was acting all cool and saying these awesome lines... while wearing my cloak over my pajamas.

“Welllll, what a lovely day it is today,” I said in a forced loud voice as we walked through the main street of the town. Elena’s face, the epitome of serious, kept her eyes out at our surroundings, ready to spring at any minute.

We get back to the tedious task of asking about Dark Wolf’s hideout. When asked about Dark Wolf, people had to give me some sort of answer, even if they knew we were out to destroy them. And if I could tell I was interrogating someone who didn’t want to reveal information, I could beat it out of him.

We walked side by side through the bright streets: a sorceress wearing a long black cloak (and no pajamas underneath, in case you were wondering), and a nervous female soldier with a long sword at her hip. This was a rather unusual sight for the town. I was expecting some sort of suspicious reaction from the villagers... But instead...

“Heyyyy there, gals. You come here often?”

...We got a rather unexpected sort of reaction. Two tan-skinned young men suddenly called out to us. They might have thought we were tourists. While getting a date wasn't on the day's schedule, I decided to take advantage of the situation and get some information from them.

“Ohhhh, no, we're here for the first time. And oh dearrrr, but we're lost,” I said in a forced high-pitched voice, striking a ditzy cute girl pose.

“Well, we'd be glad to show you girls around. Come on.”

“Ohhh, thank you! You big, strong men, you saved us. We just can't find our way. We need to find where Dark Wolf is, pleeeeeease?”

Just as I said this... the scenery froze for an instant. The old man walking by us, the lady selling flowers on the corner, everything suddenly went deadly silent. Even the tan-skinned men's faces turned an impressive bluish-white, as they stiffly turned their backs on us.

“Uh... I don't know where that is...” one of them finally muttered in a strained voice.

“I don't know nothin', okaaaaay!!”

The men bolted away, saying nothing more. Everyone around us followed suit and shuffled anxiously away.

“Ahhhh, Lina, it looks like we scared everyone away.”

“Hmmm... Well, isn't that a good thing?”

With this, I'm sure word will get back to Dark Wolf. Now all we need to do is wait. If we go to a place where other people aren't around, I'm sure Dark Wolf will come to us.

Yes, very soon...

...the time to use my beloved attack spells will arrive!

...Though I got the feeling I might be wrong.

We ran along a white stoned road parallel to the blue sea. The luxurious houses lined up along the road were probably vacation homes of some important, rich people. There were no people on this road in the afternoon.

It was an ideal place for a lovely, romantic walk.... Or it would have been if we didn't have to deal with our unromantic problem.

Yes, waiting for us at the end of the road were five men, cloaked in black.

"Word is you're trying to find Dark Wolf's stronghold," one of the men said. He looked like the leader of the assassin group, though I couldn't tell from his covered face.

"Yes, we are," I answered with a pleasant smile. "Could you please direct us there?"

"...Sorry," the leader said as all five drew their swords.

“We do know where the stronghold is.... But we, the Zores Brothers, can only guide you to one place... To Hell.”

Now naturally, I could have just unleashed a simple Fireball spell and taken care of them in one fell swoop, but then I'd never find the bandit stronghold. To carry out my plan I had to go along with them.

“Attack!”

The men all charged towards us. Elena and I drew our swords. The assassins scrambled to form a circle around us. Elena and I stood in the center of the circle, back to back.

“Get a good look at this while you die, the Zores Brothers' signature move, Rondo of Death!”

Their circle rotated clockwise, fast around us. We took a couple steps apart from each other, swords raised. Whenever we moved, the circle of running men would move with us.

The running men increased their speed. Since they all wore the same clothes,

They ended up looking like a big blur of one man. It would be difficult to judge when one of them was going to slash out with his sword.

But, I knew a spell that suited this situation well. I began to chant quietly behind closed lips.

But then...

“Ngh!” One of the men shook and fell to the floor.

“What’s wrong?!”

“Brother! Stand up!”

The other four men rushed to him in a panic. All we could do was stand blankly and stare.

“It’s no use... He’s gone...”

“No! How?!”

“...It was a heart attack.”

Smack!

Elena and I were pushed heavily away.



“Hmmm... Now that you mention it, he did have a weak heart...”

“He probably pushed himself too far with work.”

H...he had a heart condition? No assassin should have a heart condition!

“But he really did push himself too far.”

Of course he did.

The four men shrugged their shoulders, stepped away from their fallen brother, and turned glaring eyes back at us.

“...How dare you kill our brother, little witches!”

“We didn’t do anything.”

“Impudent brats! We will avenge our brother – brace yourselves!”

...Regardless of who killed whom or who’s being impudent to whom, one thing was rather clear: trying to reason logically with idiots who automatically assume they’re the supreme authority on everything... is futile.

The now four brothers began to whirl around in their circle again. They showed no sign of letting up.

“Arrrrgh! Mega Brand!”

A ripple of dust danced over the ground where Elena and I stood, protecting us from the men’s grasp,

As this ripple of dust rose around us towards the sky.

No single man was spared.

“Yarrrrgheeeee!”

Unleashing this strange-sounding scream, the men were carried on this dirt whirlpool for a while until they all crashed to the ground.

I was trying to conserve my magic powers, so they hadn't been killed, but they were sure to have lost a lot of their attack power.

...Well, that matter is closed now.

“Did you really think we'd just tell you everything?”

The men, tied up with rope, all grinned menacingly at us.

“You'll have to tell us eventually. Or else...”

Not even Elena's threats worked.

Teasing grins on their faces, another man piped up, “Or else... what? Or else two cute girls are gonna torture us? ...Fat chance. I know your type. You're two *champions of justice* who came here to banish the bandits.”

“You could never torture anyone.”

The four men laughed in unison.

“...Oh, I do believe we have a misunderstanding here,” I said, scratching my head. “I don’t know about my companion here, but I’m not one of those glorified ‘champions of justice’ you mentioned. I’m just an enemy of evil, that’s all.”

“Hmph. This silly girl thinks she can scare us by dressing up like a sorcerer and talking big.”

“Hmmm...” I decided to change tactics and use my name-power.

...I usually don't like going with this tactic, unfortunately...

“Well, let me ask you this, then. Have you heard of Lina Inverse?”

The men looked surprised at the sudden change of topic, but one answered, “Yeah, just rumors, though. We hear she’s out to get bandits and she’s cold-blooded. I heard her family was killed by bandits. Also, she’s supposed to be kind of young... I... heard...”

The man's voice trailed off, his eyes slowly clouding over with fear.

He's probably realized who I am now... But why must rumors always have such lies to them? Last time I checked, my family wasn't killed by bandits. Who would even come from such a lame family like that?! But, this misunderstanding is just too sweet not to take advantage of.

“...You do look like him... the one who killed my brother....” I said coldly. (Incidentally, I have no brother... But this had the affect I'd hoped for.)

The four men all cried out at once.

“W... wait, does this mean you're...”

“Lina, the dragon crossing Robber-Killer!”

“W-wait! We'll talk! We'll tell you everything you need to know, just please don't use us for chimera food!”

“Please! Do with me what you will, just please spare my family! Leave my wife and daughter out of this!”

“I beg of you! You, lovely lady! Please, stop! Or else... or else...”

.... Sniff, sniff, ohhh, what a sweet display. I wonder what other fanciful rumors they've heard about me.... Well, maybe I'd rather not know. I'm a big, scary sorceress!

“There, now you should have cooperated like this in the first place.”

I didn't feel really proud of that moment, but getting them to talk was what I'd wanted. So I decided to go with the big, scary sorceress façade.

“By the way... The Robber-Killer thing is fine and all, but where did this ‘dragon crossing’ thing come from?”

“B...” the man stuttered. “Because even the dragons think you stink...”

CRACKLE.

My elbow connected sharply with the top of the man's head.

“I see...surely anyone would think this is an entrance.”

Elena and I were looking up at a lofty white dignified appearance.

Lighthouse of the cape-

There is an inner wall inside of entrance door, and there are spiral stairs continuing between exterior walls to an observatory. And inside of this inner wall, which seems to be leading to the underground base of Dark Wolf.

The place is totally out of character with the image of a thieves base. Besides, it has the use of watchtower as you can look over the city at first glance.

“Well then-I let you vanish together with a lighthouse by the strong attack incantation, and leave all the gang members buried alive...”

“Don't-“

I said it with more than half seriousness, but she answered it clearly in a quiet tone. This was while continuing to look up at the lighthouse as always.

“With their boss-I should bring it to an end by me-“
After all there is a reason. Oh, this is dreadful! I took a small breath.
“Anyway-We’ve got no chance but to break in!”

The long passageway was dimly illuminated by densely packed luminous moss on the walls and ceiling. The cold, damp air gave off a smell like rusted iron. Throughout its surfaces, graffiti was thrown in like you'd find in the middle of a city. Somehow according to the brothers' story, and from the signs, this underground cave had been used as a vault. Above one remodeled section, it was like the tunnel had been especially dug out to connect it to the basement of the lighthouse. That's extremely troublesome.

“Hm?”

Elena-san and I stopped, completely in synch.

“The air is...”

“Moving.”

As we said it, the two of us began inspecting the walls.

“There!” I cried. There were black streaks extending into one portion of the walls hidden by luminous moss. It was just big enough to be the size of a door. With a little more investigation, there was something like a camouflaged switch just a little ways away on the ground. Nothing original, but it helps move the story along faster. By operating the switch, the door slowly receded into the room. The two of us pressed against the walls on either side of the door, feeling for the faintest presence inside. I peered in. Within the small room there was a single door on the right wall.

“It doesn't seem like there are any people but...” I spoke as I stepped into the room. Elena-san continued after me. “We don't know what kind of traps there could be. Be careful coming in.” Just as I said that--

guooo...nnn...

There was a dull sound.

One section of the wall came out, and was slowly moving in my direction, but-- Originally the flying wall segment would have crushed any intruders. That's the kind of trap it was. But either it was made faulty or it had deteriorated with age, because you could walk through it without any impediment at all. However this time--

“Look out, Lina-chan!”

There was a trap. That is, it was to frighten Elena-san into attacking me.

“Dwaahh! You...!”

I stumbled a few steps trying to stop myself. There, beneath my feet, a gaping hole appeared.

“Oops.”

I watched Elena standing at the edge of the hole, not knowing what to do with her hands and therefore striking a cute pose, as I fell into the abyss.

“Oops' nothing! You stupid eggplaaant!!” My screams disappeared into the darkness.

“Hey. Sorry to keep you waiting!”

Going against all expectations, as if falling hadn't been a problem at all, I managed to return to the front lines. Just at that time, Elena was in the middle of repelling the slime that was being used as a watchdog.

“Lina-chan! You're safe?!”

“Of course!” I said with a grin and a wink.

Swords won't work against slimes, but maybe some kind of magic drug would. As soon as they touched the powder she had spread around, the seemingly countless slimes panicked and moved out of the way. It's working, it's working...

“That's amazing... What on earth is that powder?”

“Salt.” She said casually.

Blackout.

“This is a port town. I bought it because it was cheap and I just instinctively thought... What's wrong, Lina-chan?”

Listening to her speech, which completely undermines the idea of facing a slime, I crouched down and grabbed my head.

With great vigor. Those are the words we need right now. For the multitudes of average robbers, I'm the raiding, kicking, knocking down, destroying, slaughtering, and still going strong Lina Inverse! ...on the other hand, it's because I'm always doing things like that that there are so many extreme rumors sprouting up. I have some self-awareness. Then again, 'Never dwell on self-awareness' is my motto!

Setting that aside, the time to put Dark Wolf in check had come. Before us stood a large door and the tension was rising high.

“So it's this room, huh?” at my affirmation, Elena-san nodded silently.

“I'm opening it.”

“Before that, Lina-chan, there's one thing I want to make sure of. I'm going to defeat the boss. I'm earnestly asking you not to interfere.”

“...I understand.”

Slowly, I pushed on the door.

And easier than I thought, it opened inward.

“So, you came...”

Just as I thought, it was just one man waiting inside a wide, tasteless room. He was tall and blond, which was a common association, but he recalled the image of a tiger, flexible in his ferocious demeanor. His naked scimitar was raised, giving off a silent light.

“We meet again, Teeth”

“...huh?” with that line from Elena-san, I immediately looked her way.

“So that was you... I thought I heard a woman sniffing around here...” The man known as Teeth smiled mysteriously.

um... If at all possible, I'd like it if we skipped the stories since there's only two of us...

“I wouldn't have said you were a good, obedient child back then but... I never thought you would kick back and become the head of a bandit gang.” I realized that the enraged Elena spoke words with sadness hidden within them.

“Why would you...”

“It's just how things turned out. I had no control over it. It started forming in my head when I was just a brat, a selfish life as some pretentious outlaw... Before I knew it, I had risen up to be the head of a bandit gang. Well, you really can't help that it turned out like this.”

...Well, this guy's sure had a taste of the world. But least this way I can read the whole composition: Two childhood friends, girl and boy. The boy takes a misguided path and is now a bandit boss. The girl doesn't know what to do and comes to the boy's side. And so, not being able to persuade him, you can draw your own conclusion.

“Won't you go back to being an honest man?”

“...it's impossible at this point.” Teeth gave a self-deprecating smile. Hearing his answer, Elena-san took a deep breath.

“Then there's no choice... but to end this.”

“Seems so...”

The two took off running at the same time,

sparks flying from their swords.

Catching Teeth's overhead strike, Elena-san brandished her right leg. Teeth jumped out of the way to avoid being tripped.

He followed her with a lunge, but she repelled his scimitar. The long, drawn out attack and defense continued.

While taking care of the bandits, who occasionally came down here as if they suddenly remembered something, I watched over the fight between the two.

Their skills were practically equal, though neither of them were very sharp in their technique.

Hesitation was dulling their swords but neither of them seemed to realize that.

...Hm. But if it does go on like this there may be some hope.

They're probably equal in guts, however, when it comes to physical strength and stamina, Teeth surpassed her by far.

Each and every time their swords met, slowly but surely, the amount of speed and power behind Elena-san's sword decreased.

Even her movements to catch her opponent's blows were thick with a shade of fatigue. Before long, this fight will become an endless circle of defensive moves.

Beads of sweat are forming on her forehead

She's starting to lose her footing.

Clang!

The sword flew far from her hand. At the same time, her feet slipped and she went scuttling to the floor.

A victor was decided.

Teeth held his scimitar high-
and there, his hand stopped.

Time passed as if it were falling within a small hourglass.

He must have realized his true feelings.

He couldn't kill her.

It was too much.

“Okay, okay, that's far enough.”

I said clapping my hands.

Teeth-san glared at me but I knew he was breathing a sigh of relief.

“In the end, this is the result because even a bandit boss like you doesn't want to do it. Right?”

“...Ah...well, if I do it like this I can't really give her a noble death...”

He said with a wry smile. Elena-san stood up and watched in stupor.

“Then stop. Being the boss, that is.”

“Don't say that so lightly. Even if I said it all stops here, that doesn't mean my friends upstairs are going to come down here and say 'sure! Understood!’”

I beat my chest.

“It'll be alright. We'll do it somehow!”

“...how?”

Instead of answering, I cast a spell.

“Elmekia Lance!”

A lance of light tore through the air and pierced Teeth-san directly in the chest.

“Gwaah!”

He flew through the air, struck a wall, and stopped moving.

“Ahhh! What did you do to my Teeth?!”

Elena-san grabbed me by the back of the neck and shook me around.

“Cough... pain... hold... Ele...zan...hol...”

Just as I was able to shake free of her hands, I began coughing violently. Ah... that hurt.

But now she should have realized my true intentions.

I didn't want to get rid of him.

“He's not dead, he's not dead.”

I said.

“That spell was an Elmekia Lance. From the Astral Plane, it takes the opponents energy based on their own will to live and-- Wait, that's a bit too complicated. Basically, Teeth-san suffers a sudden onset of weakness temporarily, and then just passes out. Now, if someone were to give him constant supervision and care for him with all of their heart, he'd be fine within a month.”

I said to the girl who just stared like she didn't understand why I'd say that.

“Listen up. You came here in order to save your childhood friend who had been captured by the bandits. He was actually being controlled by the real boss behind the scenes, so you rescued him and I defeated the boss.

While he was passed out, we then refused to join the bandit gang because their angry boss didn't treat us to dinner.

Yeah, let's stick with that story. If Teeth-san comes to, we'll tell him to make sure no one contradicts anyone else.

And of course there will be people who don't believe you, but when those times come, just say 'I think that Lina Inverse just took pity on him as a bandit head' or something.”

“But if they can't find the boss' body and the guy I rescued happens to look just like him, no matter what anyone sees...”

To Elena-san's comment I just struck my chest. “What are you saying? Everything will be fine as long as we just create a situation where it wouldn't be strange for the boss' corpse to be missing. Easy, easy.”

“Suddenly, Dragon Slave!”

There was a giant explosion in the hillside. All of the trees were blown away and a giant hole opened up in the earth.

Naturally, this was done very carefully.

Dirt and sand surged forward, completely swallowing the base that had been built into the underground cave.

And thus the stronghold of the evil bandit gang Dark Wolf was wiped out.

“Well then, Elena-san,”

I said to the girl who stood while supporting Teeth-san's body.

“I have a message for Teeth-san if he isn't already completely aware of it. Tell him I said that if he makes stupid Elena-san worry again, I'll make it so there isn't even a hair left in his ashes.”

“You say that, but it's strangely realistic...”

she said with a bitter smile, and then her face turned serious again as she lowered her head.

“Lina-chan... Thank you. Really.”

“Huh?”

Her eyes were beginning to tear up.

...hearing this kind of formal appreciation feels kind of awkward.

“Oh, right, right. Take this.”

I quickly averted my eyes and handed over a small leather pouch from my breast pocket. Inside it was filled with gold coins.

“...uh...?” Elena-san's eyes grew round.

“Congratulations. To a new start for the both of you. Well, I kinda pulled your deferred commission fee from it though.”

To hide my embarrassment I spoke quickly, without stopping.

But... This is so... This is no good. Isn't this a complete loss for you?”

“It's fine, it's fine. Look at it this way, I'm already pretty well off. And no matter what you say, if you're going to be giving him constant care for the next month, you're going to need money and stuff. Now, can you give me a smile?”

She was silent and once again hung her head deeply.

Hm. Yeah, she's just shy.

Rumors of Dark Wolf's destruction spread in a flash. The details of those rumors I heard later, in a post town about ten days outside of Raurua.

The lords of the cities who had been afraid of the bandits until then, at that time started focusing on hunting down the remaining bandits. The buried hideout was dug up, and the bandits stockpile of treasures was “confiscated.”

Rumors of Dark Wolf's destruction spread in a flash. The details of those rumors I heard later, in a post town about ten days outside of Raurua.

The lords of the cities who had been afraid of the bandits until then, at that time started focusing on hunting down the remaining bandits. The buried hideout was dug up, and the bandits stockpile of treasures was “confiscated.”

Of course, the treasures that were found were only a portion of them and the really valuable things would be stashed away somewhere else, completely unaccounted for.

I talk like I'm waiting to see what turns up, but well, that's what great people do.

I didn't hear any rumors from those two.

If things got so serious to the point where the truth would leak out, there's no doubt people would talk about it. But there weren't any rumors like that...

I'm probably doing things too carefully.

...but Elena-san probably won't realize anything. Until we meet again, probably because those two have gotten into some pitfall, I wonder where I'll go and what I'll do...

From my single room at the inn, I let various thoughts turn over. All while I sorted through the treasures that I had stolen from Dark Wolf's secret treasure depository.

Naga's Challenge

I'd liked to have given a quick thank you for reading, but...

As I was returning from dinner, my inn suddenly burst into flames.

“Hyooooooooo!”

I screamed and started crying.

....It's nothing to laugh about!

All of my luggage is within that blaze!

I say “luggage” that wasn't just any old luggage.

Among the many magic items were various precious gems!

A fortune doesn't even cover it. Basically, it was worth enough to buy an entire town.

That means...! That means...!!!

Aaaahhh I've suddenly become poor!

A large crowd formed in the streets.

Some people formed a fireman's line, passing sorcerers cast Extbl, but against the growing flames, it didn't have much effect.

And then--

“A person!”

someone yelled.

“There's still someone in there!”

I looked into the flames.

There--

On the third floor veranda, which had yet to be touched by flames, she struck her pose.

Long black hair. Her thin, deep eyes housed her intellect. She was a considerable beauty. But.

She was wearing a tiny skull around her neck! Her chest and crotch were covered as an excuse, and she was wearing this ridiculously gaudy costume!

Like this, she stood in the hot wind with her cape fluttering!

If it were to come into fashion some hundreds of years in the future, they would call it The Evil Sorceress look-- And if you wore it in the winter, you would definitely catch a cold. Anyway, that was her.

What kind of taste does this girl have?!

...then again I have met one other person whose bad taste resembled hers.

Ch!



She looked in my direction-- rather, it was clear that she was staring directly at me.

Ughh... I thought it couldn't be, but...

Bam! She pointed at me and spoke in a voice that wouldn't lose to the flames.

“Lina Inverse!”

Auuugh! I knew it!

Whisper, whisper.

The crowd stirred.

“Who? Hey, who is that?”

I frantically looked around, immediately pretending to be someone else.

“I mean you! You! Stop looking around! I mean the tiny little sorceress in the black cape with brown hair!”

“Sorry for being so short!”

I automatically shot back. The crowd's eyes all turned toward me at once.

Shiiiiit!

...I have no choice but to get serious now. I glared at the girl straight in front of me.

“What are you planning?!”

“A fine question! In short, today the curtain shall be drawn on the Legend of the Invincible Dark Lord, a title which you are so proud to own, by none other than I, Naga the Serpent!”

D-Dark Lord...

Who the hell is that?!

The crowds' eyes turned cold...

Actually, among sorcerers my name is fairly well known.

By carrying on modestly, earning travel expenses by annihilating bandit gangs wherever I go, for some completely incomprehensible reason I get labeled as some invincible fiend.

However, with humans, when rumors pop up about someone being needlessly strong, for some reason they decide to gain fame by defeating them. All sorts of people who think like that show up.

Actually, up til now I've fought who knows how many groups like that.

But if this Naga person is the same, I wonder if she'll just do it alone...

“At any rate, in place of a greeting I have turned your lodging and belongings into ash. Ho—hohoho. So? How does it feel?”

“Hohohoooo... You...”

My temple twitched.

“If that's how it is, it'd be great if I could take out my anger out on you!”

“If you can still even feel anger!”

“Alllll right! I accept your challenge! Now get down here!”

Just as I said that...

pop pop pop

Naga's mouth twitched.

She muttered something as she looked around.

...that must mean, she hadn't thought about it.

The way down, that is.

That's rare. That's something to think about even if you want to stage a play properly, and she's someone who doesn't think about that until after the fact.

“Kyaa! Somebody!” Naga screamed.

“Auuugh! Are you stupid?!”

Letting my anger get the better of me, I released a flare arrow, but while Naga was running every which way, the flames just pierced the bottom of the Veranda.

As the flames spread, her figure disappeared into the fire.

And with that...

I really didn't know her true character, but those were the last moments of the self-proclaimed Naga the Serpent.

“Oh belongings, I have taken care of your enemy.”

I made a V sign toward the sky.

Just then.

I could feel a lust for blood lurking in my surroundings.

“...hey...”

I was suddenly surrounded by a group of men, one of which pressed toward me with a threatening look.

Th-These guys can't be...

“What are you thinking using a fire spell?! You're just causing problems!”

Fire fighters!

“W-Well...”

I grinned as sweat formed on my forehead.

The men glared at me sternly.

Of course, no matter what I did, it was useless to gloss over it with a smile.

In that case...

“Heh... Eheh~ My mistake... Sorry! ♡”

I put my fists near my mouth and wiggled a bit.
...of course that didn't change their expressions.
But there should have been no doubting that...

“Ah... aha.... Ahahahaha... Ray Wing!”

Using my high-speed flight spell, my body floated over their heads and took off flying due west!

“Ah! She ran!”

Someone yelled behind me. Secretly, I was just dodging responsibility!

...which is something good kids don't do.

“Oooohohoho. We meet again, Lina Inverse!”

On a beachfront highway, I encountered 'that.'

The sea breeze tickled my nose pleasantly.

The sun was warm and comforting.

It was already early summer.

I was holding my cape together with a light chill spell inside, but this weather would still make one sweat a little.

In this weather with her body battered and wrapped in bandages, both arms holding sticks to support her weight, she stood in the shadow of a roadside tree.

Of course she probably wasn't appearing like this by choice. But just looking at her made me feel hot.

Of course I just stood still. The way she called my name and said "meet again" she must have been an acquaintance but... since her face was also wrapped in bandages, I had no recollection of her. From her voice she seemed like an adult woman but...

"...who are you?"

CRAASH

There was a sound off in the distance.

"Heh."

A bit later she revealed a small smile.

She pointed at me, but promptly stopped when she started to lose her balance.

...let me think, with this pattern of movements straight out of a professional play, she's gotta be....

You're good at feigning ignorance, little girl. Don't tell me you've forgotten! Your lifelong greatest and final rival, Naga the Serpent!”

...

I tilted my head.

“Who are you...?”

CRAAASHASHASH

The sound of the waves resounded to no avail.

Of course, that was a joke.

Naga the Serpent.

I can't just forget someone that I've personally set on fire like that.

It makes for good joke material when I'm visiting my sister back home.

But... surviving that...

I don't know if she somehow anticipated what I would do, but it was a good effort.

However-- I don't remember having a lifelong rival like this!

Anyway, that joke just now must have come as quite a shock for this Naga. She was completely petrified.

It was amusing, so I watched for a little while.

Ah...

She eventually awoke from her petrified state, only after I had finished off a bento as a late lunch.

It seemed like she was going through some kind of deep internal conflict...

“U-Under these circumstances, my identity has nothing to do with whether you remember me or not.

However, from now on I will defeat you. Even if you have taken on the title of 'invincible'-- it only holds any meaning if it's true!”

I see... so that's what was going through her head...

“Let's go!”

She said as she began chanting a spell.

This spell is--

Dynast Brass!

But certainly this is...

Didn't you have to strike a pose....?

For attack spells, if it's something on the level of a Fireball, you don't really need to make a specific movement.

At the sorcerer's guild they taught us the precise motions to make, but this was just to amplify the power of the spell. More than just lowering the destructive power of the spell, in worst cases it can put you in bed.

However, slowly but surely there come to be strong-powered spells that you can't tell anyone about, and this is where the story changes.

It doesn't mean it's always the case, but generally, you need to make a few gestures.

From her mouth, I thought that this spell should have...

Sleeping deep within the Earth

Dynast, who possesses a frozen soul

Naga's spell came to an end there.

--I knew it.

You have to pose for that part.

Frantically raising her right hand, she lost half her balance and an intense struggle unfolded.

Hah... huff...haaow!

Too much.

She suddenly fell over.

Struggle, struggle.

Somehow no matter what she did, her crutches were getting in the way of helping her get up.

Suddenly, she stopped moving.

Hm?

And again...

struggle struggle struggle!

And somehow we ended up with a one-hour intermission.

...And just for emphasis, I absolutely, positively do not remember ever having a lifelong rival like this!

Suddenly.

Naga stopped moving again.

“...Lina-chan, help me...”

Uggghh! A girl her age should not be using such a pathetic voice!

Ah... my head hurts...

I'm fine abandoning her, but if she dries out and dies because she couldn't get up (is she a cockroach?) then I might have trouble sleeping sometime in the future.

While Naga is definitely the enemy of Luggage, I've already forgotten about that.

After dissolving four bandit gangs, my finances were a little better. And it might have been the stress relief, but my heart had foolishly opened.

“I guess there's no helping it.”

I helped up the wriggling girl, and with her crutches she was somehow able to stand again.

“Heheheheh...”

a chuckle immediately leaked out of Naga.

“Hooohohoho, That's very sweet of you, Lina Inverse! Showing such sympathy to the enemy!”

...hey... lady...

“This time I will show you my true power!”

She began reciting a spell.

This time of course, it was one without any motion.

However, even though she says 'her true power,' I feel like she already showed that a long time ago... The girl's a shallow well..

crack

I tripped her with her own cane.

splat

Once again I had easily defeated Naga.

It's like she wasn't even aware of my position.

Struggle struggle.

Naga began thrashing around again.

I wasn't even at the point of shedding a tear for the sorceress.

hoooooooooooo

The wind blew.

Naga stopped moving.

“...Help me, Lina-chan...”

“I don't care!”

I left her behind me, where she continued yelling at me for some reason, and headed for the next post town.

And that was the last time I saw the self-titled sorceress, Naga the Serpent.

Well, it would be nice if I could say that.

“Hooohoho! We meet again, again, Lina Inverse!”

Pffft

I spat out the Panon juice that I just bought at this street stall all at once.

“...gross...”

Naga said with a scowl.

“Don't criticize me! Who's fault do you think that was?!”

Uggghhh, of course, she healed up.

I reluctantly fulfilled my third encounter with her, in this town more than ten days later.

In the middle of the main street in broad daylight, this over-exposed woman randomly let out this bizarre, loud, laugh.

No matter what kind of look was on their faces, it wasn't hard to guess what people in the street were thinking.

“H-Hold on! I don't really care, but you can't say showy things like that in the middle of the day like this!”

I blushed and spoke in a low voice.

“This some kind of show?”

“Check out that sexy lady!”

“She's not wearing anything!”

Without paying any mind to the various hootings of the crowd, Naga grinned.

...could it be, maybe she's the only one who doesn't notice...

“Oh? Are we scared, little girl? Of what the one before you has come to do? Well now that my wounds have fully healed, those filthy hands won't work on me a second time!”

Uhhhh, I'm sick of thiiiiis.

I don't wanna be invoolved....

I just wanted to cry.

Is there no place where I can find a decent enemy?!

Fine! In that case, we'll settle this all in one go, otherwise my unwanted relationship with her will never end!

But in reality, I'm not very motivated to fight seriously...

“Fine. I get it. Let's settle this once and for all.”

“Oh...”

Naga's eyes narrowed with satisfaction.

As her second name implies, she reminded me of a snake.

“You've finally made your resolve then...”

I didn't resolve anything.

For a short while, the two of us faced each other.

While this girl is surely dumber than a sea slug. She has considerable capacity. The Dynast Breath she once used to no avail, isn't a spell that just anyone can cast.

I can't afford to get caught up in something like that.

'...then... that's when...'

The whispers of the onlooking crowd flew to my ears.

“Hey hey, is that girl friends with 'that?’”

“She's still so young... poor thing...”

“I wonder what kind of training she's giving her...”

.....

Instantly I was blushing.

Th-Think positive.... I definitely don't plan on losing to her at full power, but out of shame it'd be better to do this far from here.

“Th-the place will be outside of this city, we'll set the time for tonight at sunset. How do these terms sound?”

I said, flustered.

In that case, there should be less people around, in the situation that Naga pulls any more embarrassing behavior, surrounded by eyes... Of course I don't want that...

And well, rather than doing the same thing here, farther away would be preferable.

Naga chuckled with a grin.

“What makes you say such things? Just as I thought, you're afraid to fight me, aren't you?”

If by afraid you mean fighting someone with such a serious face like this, then you could say I was afraid but...

“If you say something like that, you must have been planning to run away after all!”

Well, I certainly did think about that for a moment.

But even if I did, my tenacious pursuer would appear before my eyes again some other day.

“You think you could get away successfully?! We settle this here and now!”

As she finished, she recited a spell.

Freeze Arrow!

“W-Wait!”

“Quiet!”

A number of cold arrows appeared before Naga's eyes.

The crowd worked itself into a panic and ran.

Screams and yells entangled, vendor's carts collapsed, children cried.

...an inconvenience for the entire neighborhood.

Flare arrow, is a kind of opposite to this spell. While not as intimidating as Flare arrow, anything hit by Freeze Arrow will be fixed with ice. A shot to the hand or foot would make you unable to move, and a direct hit to the body at best would completely cover you in frostbite, and at worst, you'd be frozen in place.

I don't have time to cast a counterspell!

I pulled my short-sword from my waist and dove to the side.

“Running away?!”

The majority of the freeze arrows she released either flew past me, froze the fruit in the street stalls, or formed icicles standing up from the ground.

Still, I knew there were some coming toward me.

The one I couldn't dodge, I caught with my sword.

The ice arrow shattered, its fragments melting in the summer air.

The chill traveled through the grip of my sword to the palm of my hand.

It wasn't a big deal because of my gloves and the leather bound around the grip of the sword, but with the cold just now, my hand was stuck to the hilt of my sword.

“Well, well, weeeell! Oooohohoho! How was that, little girl?! Fleeing was a mistake, now wasn't it?”

Feeling enthusiastic, Naga fired off her freeze arrows indiscriminately in rapid succession.

It's not funny!

It'd be easy to counter with a series of fire spells, but the town would definitely get caught up in it.

The cold eyes around me, only a few days ago in the town where I first encountered Naga, was enough to teach me a lesson.

Yeah, not a good experience.

For now, I have no choice but to lure her somewhere with less people...

But--

“Ahh!”

I clumsily slipped in a puddle that had formed and fell.

Damn!

The water was probably from one of Naga's melted ice arrows...

“Oooohohoho. It seems even with your bad luck, you managed to make it this far.”

Basking in her triumph, she calmly drew toward me.

Maybe it was because she was drunk in her own victory, but while Naga's bloodlust swelled up and consumed her, she didn't notice anything at all.

I had plenty chance to escape. For someone watching these events pan out, it must have been entertaining.

Me stumbling to the ground, Naga glaring down at me.

“And like this, today I shall put it to rest. The title of strongest sorceress on earth shall be transferred from Lina Inverse, to I, Na--”

GOOSH

“Blegh!”

Without knowing the reason for the outcry, She collapsed to the ground.

Naga had been smacked in the back of her head by a frozen watermelon.

Needless to say, Victim A in all this was the old fruit vendor, whose goods had been frozen.

“What the hell are you doing?!”

She cried clutching her head. There, pressing toward her, were those who had suffered from Naga's spells: a number of townsfolk.

“Hee...heeeee...”

Now overpowered, Naga automatically stepped backward. The most overbearing, was the old fruit vendor.

“Look what you did to my business! How do you expect to fix this?!”

The victims surrounded her, all silently nodding in agreement.

...Well, that's creepy...

“But---”

“To hell with 'but!' For now you're gonna be working in the kitchen until you can pay us back!”

“But... I just...”

Now on the verge of tears, she threw a fleeting glimpse my way.

Don't care. Don't care.

I stood up and brushed the dust off my trousers.

“Thank you so much for watching over such a troubled place. And with that, I'll be off.”

I said with a grin. Without giving anyone a chance to object, I turned and walked away.

“Well! Work hard while you're here! Anyway-”

“Hwaa! Forgive me!”

With Naga screaming at my back, I quickly put the town behind me.

I wonder if she'll come after me again..

“Oooohohoho! We meet again, Naga the Serpent! The time has come for us to finally settle this battle!”

Round 4 with Naga the Serpent.

This time, as soon as I saw her face I was the one who called out to her.

After stealing her usual line, Naga stood there, mouth agape.

This time we were in a grove of trees a little ways away from the next town.

Here, even if we were firing off blasts, we wouldn't have to worry about bothering anyone else.

“H-Hmph!”

Naga regained her footing and snorted to feign confidence.

“Right. That's what I would've said. Me. You may have successfully run away for a third time, but this time I won't let that happen!”

She calls that running away..? Where on earth...

“But you caught up pretty quickly. Did you properly reimburse them for wrecking their town?”

I asked.

“Oh, that. Of course I reimbursed them. As soon as they got some oranges in stock, I froze them with an ice spell and sold it as sherbert. That's how it was, the idiots!”

“Ohoho! I see! So you had skills like that, huh?”

I was thoroughly impressed.

“That would certainly sell well... That's not what we should be focusing on!”

“I know, but...”

Naga said timidly.

Actually, at my home back in the country, I ran a sort of business. Ever since I was little, because I was driven by commercial motives, my head was always unintentionally turning in the way of trade.

“I should give that a try. Well, tell me if you come up with any more new business ideas.”

I waved and turned my back to her.

“Sure thing.”

Naga waved in return.

.....

Her mouth twitched.

“Just a minute! That's not right!”

Ah, she noticed.

“Hmph. As expected of Lina Inverse, you almost got away again.”

“...as expected of anything, you'd usually try and get out of something like this...”

“Silence! Anyway, the time has come for us to settle things!”

Phew.

I let out a little sigh.

“I guess so. In that case...”

Lightly scraping the ground, I widened my stance.

“Are you ready? To settle this?”

“Hngh.”

Naga groaned a little. The mood was probably putting some pressure on her.

However, with things like this, neither of us could pull back.

“Freeze Arrow!”

Naga released several arrows of ice!

All of them were flying right toward me.

They were repelled by the wind barrier wrapped around me.

Naga's face twitched.

“Well then...”

I said with a smile welling up.

“Now it's my turn.”

“Mega Brand!”

“Hwaaa!”

Stone came bursting up from directly beneath her, and sent Naga whirling into the air.

whump

She fell to the ground right below her, limbs spread out.

...Huh. She's not moving.

...Is it over so suddenly? Could it be...?

Twitch...

Naga's body convulsed.

Ohhh, still alive, still alive.

Somehow she was able to raise the upper half of her body and glare at me.

“Heh... now you've done it, Lina... that's something I could only expect of someone who calls herself my rival... but it's not over yet!”

“Gaaah! Don't say that while you're lying there refusing to admit you lost! And first of all, you're the one calling me your rival!”

“You have an excuse for everything, don't you?”

“Who does?!”

“Well if that's how it is... Dam Brass!”

“How what is?! Ray Wing!”

Riding on the wind, I weaved my way between the trees.

Still sitting on the ground, Naga indiscriminately began firing off spells.

If I were to accidentally get hit by one, it could easily tear through my human body.

However, with her stance how it is, there are spells that would be impossible for her to cast.

Even if I allowed her to recite a few,

it's unlikely that any of them would hit.

Leaves scattered, tree trunks smashed apart.

...but under these circumstances, I couldn't get a hit from this end.

But just then...

Naga's attack stopped suddenly.

“Hm?”

I touched down on the ground within the overgrowth, peering in the direction where Naga was.

Of course I didn't let my guard down. This could be a trap.

If I let my face peek out, she could hit me with a rain of attack spells, or plenty of other things.

And then-- I saw it.

She was right under a tree that she had downed with her own spell.

“Hey, you alive?”

I crouched down beside her.

Oh, she's twitching.

With me egging her on, she raised her head pathetically.

“T...T...”

Now that she was practically dying, she somehow gasped back in a soft, thin voice.

“What are you trying to say?”

I brought my ear close to Naga's mouth.

She spoke in a voice that I just barely managed to hear.

“Just for today... I'll let this slide...”

And then I smacked her across her head.

“...n...mph...”

When Naga regained consciousness, we were in a village made up of a single house. Within this doctor's house, she slept upon a white bed.

“You awake?”

I said from the chair beside her.

“...Lina? Why...?”

She asked, mystified.

Which would make sense.

Up until she lost consciousness, my opponent had been keeping a close watch on her life force, but somehow it appeared she had been saved. How could she not be confused?

...Well, at the time I had just smacked a dying girl so hard that she stopped moving, so I panicked and carried her here without thinking... of course I wasn't gonna tell her that.

“I lost to you. That's why I saved you.”

I spoke seriously, keeping a straight face.

“...Huh?”

Naga was completely dumbfounded.

“You... lost?”

“Yeah. I was defeated by your will to keep fighting.”

Just like you'd hear in some kind of epic, I used a line that a hero's rival would use.

To someone listening in, it sounded completely unnatural, but the lightheaded girl didn't notice a thing.

“So... in other words...”

“Yeah...”

I gave her a nod.

“From today on, the title of Strongest Sorceress in History belongs to you.”

“Lina...”

With her eyes blurry, she offered her right hand to me.

I gripped it tightly.

...Heheheh. Now then...

“I've found you at last, Naga the Serpent!”

The next time I saw her was in a different town, only a few days later.

If this is how it's going to be, I allowed her to leave the previous village, but that's when it really started.

“L-Lina?!”

She stood up from her chair in the dining hall, her face bewildered.

I flashed a smile.

“The day has come for me to steal back the title of 'Strongest!' Now, I challenge you!”

Twitch.

Naga's face was stiff.

“W-Wait a minute! But that was... I already learned my lesson!”

“Heheheh. No. Use. Arguing.”

I raised my middle finger.

I've always wanted to do this! A role where I just persistently follow someone around!

But of course in order to have a reason for me to chase her, I had to say all that stuff about losing.

“Hwaaa! Forgive me!”

I chased Naga as she ran away.

Now let's make sure to tease each other as much as possible~

(Naga's Challenge, End.)

Elsia's Castle

The Dragon Slave I released has blown away the evil sorcerer and the army of “Undead Monsters” following him, along with the white castle on the shore of the lake where they were hiding.

— Fuu. This job is so easy.

“That just about does it. ♡”

I turn around proudly and wink.

Duchess Elsia and her Knights, as well as that girl must’ve been surprised by my powerful magic. They’re just standing there, rooted to in place, with their mouths down.

The duchess’ wrongly-sized-to-begin-with crown slid partway off her head.

The castle had crumbled away and drowned in the lake without a trace along with the cliff on which it stood, so I turn that way and sharply make a "V" sign.

“Fu, fu, fu, for I, Lina Inverse, knight and sorceress, this is a piece of cake! All’s well that ends well! Victory!”

“Like hell it is!”

I received a hard kick from Duchess Elsia behind me.

“Aah! Why is this world so irrational!? Poor me! I just did my job!”

I hit the table with the large beer mug I had just emptied in one go.

“Don’t swap your own lack of common sense for the irrationality of the world.”

The girl sitting on the other side gulped down her mug just like I did, raised it to the sky and then put it down on the table.

We both ordered refills at the same moment.

— Just so you know, what I drink is just a plain juice. However the contents of her mug are a fairly expensive alcohol. And even though she’s drinking it at the same pace as I, the color of her face hasn’t changed a bit.

“What do you mean by lack of common sense, huh?”

“What do you have in common with common sense?”

“I think someone wearing absurd clothes like yours has no right to call me on that.”

I told her, looking at her unnecessarily-revealing costume.

“You have quite a sharp tongue, shrimp.”

“I’m not like someone who sent all the nutrients from her brains to her boobs.”

“Oh dear. Don’t you think the case is not that I have big boobs, but that you have **too little**?”

Twitchy-twitch.

My eyebrow twitches slightly.

“You’re quite witty yourself.”

“...Ho-ho-ho.”

“...Fu, fu, fu.”

Our eyes clash over the table. Another client who wasn’t able to withstand the strange atmosphere left the bar as if running away.

The owner held his head in his hands.

I just happened to team up with that woman for this job by chance, however we’ve been acquaintances for a long time.

Her name is “Naga the Serpent”

She's my biggest and strongest, lifelong rival.

— At least that's what she claims.

I will never acknowledge that. (...I sure am blunt...)

There is only one person I perceive as my rival and it's that girl from my hometown.

Though she may not even notice me to begin with...

However, I've fought Naga a few times in the past and I've even admitted that I lost once.

What we're disagreeing about this time is our current job.

It's been a month since a lone sorcerer brought a group of undead and attacked Duchess Elsia's castle - the small, but famous-for-its-beauty Lantus Castle.

— It was a typical job.

Having had no real military preparedness to begin with, the castle easily fell into the sorcerer's hands.

Having somehow escaped, Duchess Elsia and the remaining knights burned with passion to bring down the sorcerer, but they couldn't do anything about their lack of power. If she looked for help from the king, he'd lend her his army, but it would be the same as announcing her powerlessness across the country.

If unlucky, she might even have her lordship revoked.

That's why she asked two sorcerers, who happened to be passing by, for help.

Simply put— Naga and me.

The job we were entrusted with was “Defeating the undead army and the sorcerer manipulating it,” however...

“Where the heck is the common sense in blowing away the enemy along with the castle?”

“But isn't it efficient!?”

I puff my cheeks.

“... Duchess Elsia didn't say anything like “Don't blow away the castle.” when signing the contract...”

“Nobody would say anything like that, normally! That's not even a case of common sense!”

She shouted, hitting the wooden table.

“And because of that lord got mad and said we won't get paid until we provide her with a new castle... You have any idea how much trouble it is for me!? I did hear I would be having a partner when I was accepting the job, but... If I'd known it was you, I never would have accepted it!”

“Me neither!”

The atmosphere became strained again.

— I was the one who broke it off.

I let out a big sigh and looked aside.

“...Anyhow, the only certain thing is that sitting here won’t get us anywhere. The problem is the *new castle*, we can’t go and build a new one... So, we can either look for an old, unused one, or swipe one being used by someone...”

“...*swipe*... You’re impossible...”

“There’s no problem if we take one from some evil person, right? In every country, the law states that evil people have no human rights.”

“No it’s not.”

...It’s not, isn’t it... But I don’t think we should recognize the human rights of people who don’t recognize the human rights of others...

However, it’s pointless to dispute that with her right here.

“— That said, I haven’t heard any stories about clever bandit groups making any old castles their hideouts around here...”

“Ah, I have a clue regarding that.”

“Really!?”

Naga nods in confirmation.

“Though— It’s not bandits, it’s a sorcerer.”

“This is it.”

Said Naga and stopped.

“...You mean that...?”

Duchess Elsia said with dissatisfaction in her voice, holding with her hand the crown that had started to slide down. The faces of the knights accompanying her don’t look too well either.

—Well, I suppose there’s no helping it.

An old, black castle surrounded in thicket and located deep in the mountains a short distance from the city. It’s perfect as a hideout for criminals, however it doesn’t look too appropriate for a castle of a lord and knights.

According to Naga, the sorcerer living here had conducted some suspicious tests on living people in a certain country ten years ago and has become wanted. He drifted around until he got here and stayed.

I have no idea how she knows all that, but it's certain she has an information network I don't know of.

"...For the person who received territory from the king and even the title of a lord to live in a castle like this..."

"Oh well... It does look quite different from your previous castle.... That's for sure."

I said.

"However, when it comes to a castle you could use within your territory, this is the only one. And if you tell us to build you a new one because you don't like this one here, we're really gonna get angry."

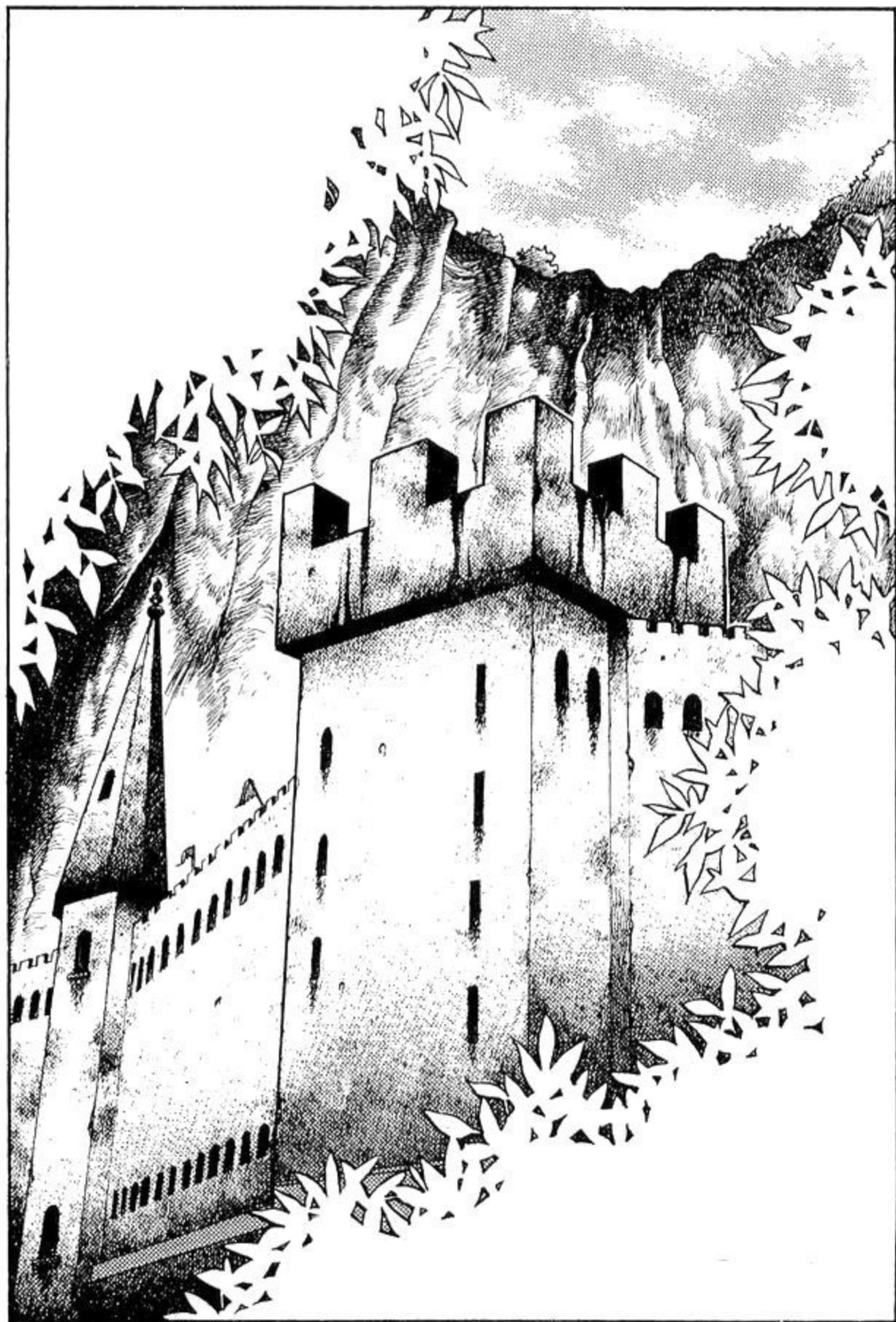
"Boo..."

The duchess takes a peek at the faces of her knights.

Dissatisfaction was written clearly on their faces.

"Well... We don't have much choice if there's nothing else... Once we remodel it, it should look so-so..."

She says, as if trying to convince herself while she fixes the crown that slid off.



I nodded in agreement.

“It’s settled, then. Okay, let’s go, Naga.”

“Right.”

She nods, gets by my side and we set off.

Duchess Elsia and her knights follow behind us.

We stop, surrounded by a strong “grassy” smell.

Naturally, the castle has gatekeepers. Five skeletons and three ghouls.

“...Oh dear, undead...”

Spat out Duchess Elsia while concealing her body in a thicket.

“I can’t stand them. Zombies stink of rotten flesh in summer, ghouls are filthy and skeletons are just unappealing...”

Naga glares in irritation at Duchess Elsia, who started grumbling about something again.

...Well, I don’t blame the duchess for hating undead monsters, but it’s really irritating to continuously hear complaints behind one’s back.

It's off the subject, but there's a legitimate reason sorcerers use the undead to protect their residences or anything at all.

It's pretty obvious if you give it a thought - it's pretty much free.

You can find heaps of dead bodies lying around on cemeteries and battlefields. You attach a low-grade ghost to them or infest it with "Death Worm" and there you have a zombie.

Needless to say, they don't require food, maintenance or a salary. The only cost is production and then you can use them until their flesh rots away and they're unable to move (Don't imagine that). Though they stink.

Once that happens, you can just attach a low-class ghost to the bones they left behind and use them as skeletons. You can literally work them to the bone, it's so economical!

However, no matter if they're zombies or skeletons, the downside is that they accept only simple orders because of their lack of abilities. They're useless if someone messes up the orders.

Quite famous amongst sorcerers is the sorry episode of a sorcerer who attacks a castle with over hundred of skeletons. Because he'd ordered them to "kill everything that moves inside the castle", the skeletons started fighting each other moment they passed the gates, and they were all annihilated without causing any damage to the castle.

...That stupid sorcerer wasn't me.

And for a bit more flexible jobs, you keep ghouls.

If you feed them with zombies, who rotted and can't walk so well anymore, they will become quite loyal.

—Though, it's not really a good thing when they get too attached to you...

Once, when I visited the home of a sorcerer, I showed an insincere smile to a ghoul who worked there as a servant and was almost hit with an offensive spell.

“However... These guards are gonna be a bit troublesome... A setup where skeletons meet the intruders while ghouls go call reinforcements, huh? ... How are we gonna go about that?”

Hearing Duchess Elsia's words, Naga and I look at each other and nod.

“Right... Since we're on the same side, there's only one tactic we can use.”

“You mean... **that**, right?”

Saying that, Naga grinned.

And that is—A simple brute force approach!

...Though it's not something I could tell outsiders.

A ghoul grips on the spear in his hand.

Skeletons raise the swords in their right hands to the height of their chests.

It means they're vigilant against two girls approaching the castle head-on.

Naturally, that's Naga and I. I don't know about the skeletons with their lack of discernment, but seen from the ghouls' perspective, we should look like two human women walking towards them, while having a friendly chat.

Sure, we look at each other as we walk along laughing, but what's coming out of our mouths isn't recent gossip.

We chant offensive spells in quiet voices.

"...Well then, shall we?"

"Yeah, let's do it."

We both stop and release the spells we chanted in exactly the same moment.

"Fireball!"

"Freeze Brid!"

...Huh?

The red ball of light I fired and the blue ball of light Naga fired must have caused some weird mutual interference because they changed trajectories drastically, as if attracting each other, and crashed long before they reached the skeletons at the gates.

Cling!

Leaving behind a “clean” sound, the lights annihilated each other.

“...”

“...”

The two of us froze.

I get it, that’s what happens when fire and ice magic collide.

—It’s not the time to be admiring that effect!

“It’s your fault for chanting some weird spell!”

Shouted Naga.

“What’s that supposed to mean!? That’s my line! Why did you chant some cheap spells like ice!”

Undaunted, I talk back to her.

“What are you thinking!? Cold ice spells are better during the summer! It’s not all about using flashy spells!”

“Stop it, fools!”

Along with Duchess Elsia’s voice, I felt her kick from behind.

Stomp.

Both Naga and I fell and hit the ground face-first.

“Ouch... Why did you do that...?”

“Don’t give me that! More importantly, do something about them!”

I look towards the castle as she said that. The ghouls have already disappeared inside the castle and five skeletons head our way making dragging sounds and wielding swords.

Right. It’s not the time to quarrel.

Naga and I confront the skeletons head on.

“It’s because of you and your complaints, okay?”

I murmur to her, facing forward.

“You were shouting too.”

I wanted to talk back, but I changed my mind.

“Let’s stop this. Or the lord is gonna kick us again.”

“...You have a point.”

Both of us starts chanting spells.

“Dam Brass!”

This time, our voices perfectly harmonize.

Two skeletons are smashed with a single shot. However, the remaining three come at us without flinching (They have no emotions, so it’s only natural).

“Leave this place to us!”

Saying that, Duchess Elsia’s knights rush forth.

“Get lost! It’s hard to beat them up with swords!”

I shouted but it was already too late. The knights were already crossing swords with their enemies. One of the knights cut off the head of a skeleton with a broadsword. Its skull only tilted at an unnatural angle for a second—and that’s all.

Then, the skull sprang back to its original position and the skeleton attacked us as if nothing had happened.

“Uwooh! Our swords don’t work!”

“Uwooh! Our swords don’t work!”

“It’s the same as the other time!”

Daaaaamn! Have those knights never heard of learning from one’s mistakes!?

I think I see the reason why the previous castle was so easily taken away from them.

However, if I use magic now, it’ll result in casualties among the knights as well.

“Leave this to us!”

Said Naga and started to chant a spell.

...I’m sure it’s not the case, but she’s not thinking of blasting them away along with the knights, is she...?

“Megido Flare!”

No way!

The moment Naga chanted the spell, crimson flames engulfed the knights and skeletons.

The skeletons crumble in an instant.

The knights burst out shouting.

“Uwaaaa... Huh? It’s not hot.”

Megido Flare—

It’s a white-magic spell used by top-rank Bishops. It mitigates evil will and hostility and repels low-class ghosts with malicious intents.

Needless to say, it has no effect on flesh and blood knights. Actually, it reduces killing intentions and ill thoughts, so it makes one feel refreshed.

I had no idea that that woman wearing the clothes of an evil sorceress was capable of using a spell like that...

“Nicely done, Naga.”

“It was nothing.”

She raises her thumb and winks at me. And at that moment—

“Don’t scare us! Idiot!”

Duchess Elsia’s kick hits Naga once again.

...She’s such a quick-tempered lord. The knights must have a really hard time with her.

“Sorceress-dono! Look at that!”

One of the knights shouted.

Ten-odd skeletons and zombies come through the gates one after another.

Damn! So annoying!

I spread my hands to the sides while chanting a spell, then I pointed my right hand at the undead.

“Dis Fang!”

My shadow on the ground takes an unnatural shape and stretches.

—Well, to be precise—

A shadow of a big dragon came to life from inside my shadow.

In a blink of an eye, it moved across the ground, spread its enormous jaws and bit at the shadows of the undead.

That instant—

Crack. Break.

The skeletons' bones break and zombies' flesh falls off.

The exact places that were bitten by the shadow of the dragon are being crushed.

There is a vivid mark left by a fang on the skin of one of the zombies.

“Come back, shadow dragon.”

With the order, the shape of my shadow returns to normal.

“You're quite something too. As expected of my rival.”

Said Naga.

Goddammit... I may be repeating myself, but I'm not your rival...

Our group broke into the castle.

After defeating the group of undead in front of the door, we observed the situation for a bit, but there was no sign of movement. Most likely he realized the battle on the outside was a waste of resources and decided to lure us inside the castle and defeat us there.

However!

No matter what scheme you use, defeating me, Lina Inverse, is impossible!

If it comes down to that, I will win even if I have to blow him away along with the castle... Oops, no good! I was forbidden from doing that.

One way or another—

There is a main hall in front of us right now.

On the opposite side of it are stairs leading to another floor.

As soon as we entered the hall, a door under the stairs opened and zombies showed themselves.

Naga takes a step forward, puts her hand to her hip and speaks out loud.

“Ho-ho-ho-ho! Do you think you have chance with me, Naga of the Serpent, using these!? No matter how many you have, five or ten zombies are...”

Swarm, swarm, swarm...

“Ten or twenty of...”

Swarm, swarm, swarm... Hey, hey.

“Thirty of forty of...”

They keep coming.

“...Fuh.”

She laughs quietly and turns around to us, then she pats my shoulder.

“I’ll leave this to you, Lina.”

...What the heck is this...

But, even if they’re just zombies, unlike outside, I can’t use powerful offensive spells indiscriminately, so fighting so many of them will be tiring. If they bet on sheer numbers and charge at me while I chant a spell, it’s gonna be seriously difficult.

“Fuh... I guess I have no choice.”

I raise my right hand above my head while chanting the spell.

“Dam Brass!”

A part of the ceiling crumbles and falls to the ground as rubble.

As I chant another spell, I grab Naga.

It’s a “Levitation” spell.

Embracing Naga, I float in the air and call out to Elsia-kou.

“Leave the enemies from the second floor on up to us!”

The color of the lord’s face suddenly changes.

“J-Just a minute! Shouldn’t you say something like “Leave us and go ahead”!?”

“Nope.”

I said bluntly.

He who has the last word wins. That’s how this world works.

We ignored Duchess Elsia, who was still shouting something and moved to the second floor through the hole in the ceiling I opened with “Dam Brass”.

Fifth, the top floor.

That's where the sorcerer's room was that we were aiming for. We've had our share of hardships getting here from the second floor.

We expected the zombies that came out on the first floor to be the main force, but that wasn't the case.

Zombies, ghouls and skeletons kept swarming without end. I'm really amazed he created that number of undead. That sorcerer really must've had nothing else to do.

His goal, most likely, was exhausting our forces.

Indeed, they were just zombies, but if we acted like fools and diligently took down all of them, by the time we reached the all-important master of the castle, the necromancer, neither of us would have the power to fire even a little fire ball.

Using the same trick we used to break through the first floor, we knocked down walls and broke through ceilings to get past all the undead and finally arrived here.

“Well then—”

“Let's do it!”

Naga and I kicked the door open at the same time.

Four big human silhouettes in a huge gloomy area without a ray of light.

We release our spells at the same moment.

I cast “Flare Arrow”, Naga “Freeze Arrow”. We aimed at different shadows.

My spell makes a direct hit and the fire instantly lights up the shadows.

A Stone Golem!

Which means, naturally, that this spell had almost no effect.

In that flash of light, I noticed a person’s silhouette on a throne deep in the room.

That’s most likely the sorcerer in question.

For now, I have no intention of defeating that sorcerer. Even if I fired an offensive spell towards that throne I saw and took him out, the zombies who’ve already received orders wouldn’t stop.

We need the evil sorcerer to take back the order he’s given to his undead minions. But most importantly, even though he’s an evil sorcerer, to come and raise hell, and then take him out on top of that for just our own personal gain would be too cruel.

...You there, who just thought “Oh, but it’s fine to kick them

down without hearing them out if they're bandits?"

Of course it is. (Ah, I had the final word again.)

Of course, Naga is filled in on that as well.

"Lina! You attract the attention of the golems! Leave this to me!"

After saying that, Naga starts chanting a spell. It seems like she has some kind of idea. I fire Dam Brass at the golems coming my way with heavy strides. However, since their bodies are not only big, but hard as well, I can't simply bring them down with one hit.

What I aim at are their legs.

Stopping them from moving is the first priority.

In the meantime, Naga's chant continues.

—It seems to be some kind of summoning, but I don't know that technique too well.

She makes all kinds of symbolic charm signs using her fingers with both hands stretched out in front of her chest.

A faint drop of sweat emerges on her forehead.

And then—

Her spell is completed.

“Gu Ru Dooga!”

It appeared in response to her “Words of Power”!

A dimos dragon—

They’re almost legendary dragons that live only in the Kataart Mountains where, ruling over all of the darkness of the world, “The Demon King of the North” resides. Their black scales absorb light, their breath spreads nothingness.

Forget about golems, even golden dragons, also known as “Dragon Lords”, have to give way before their power.

To put it bluntly, when someone summons something like that, you have no other choice than to use magic that borrows the power of the Demon King himself, or make a run for it.

It’s truly an invincible dragon.

It’s more than enough of a trump card to startle the enemy and bring him to capitulation.

—That is, if you’re able to properly summon it.

I’ll admit Naga’s powerful, as she was able to summon something like that with just finger symbols and spell, without even drawing a summoning circle, however...

What the heck was she thinking when she summoned a dragon inside a room!?

With its body stuck between an unexpectedly strong ceiling and floor and only waving its tail, it's nothing more than an obstacle.

“Think before you use magic!”

“Buzz off! Why don't YOU do something, then!?”

“Awright! I'll show you how it's done!”

I come up with a plan in an instant.

—However, that sorcerer is bugging me. Even after seeing our fight, he still remains seated on his throne. Is he so confident of himself, or did his hips give out...?

It's better to assume he's hiding some kind of trump card...

But it's no use thinking about it! I just gotta do it!

“Dam Brass!”

My spell bores a hole in the chest of one of the golems. It's one of those that I broke the legs of earlier with a spell. It uses its hands to support his body despite that, but it can't move freely any longer.

It conceals my sight and I can't see the sorcerer's throne from where I stand.

I pointed my finger at the golem.

“Naga! Fire “Dam Brass” at the exact spot my spell landed on my sign! Make it precise!”

“It's a piece of cake!”

She smiled at me after responding.

I nodded emphatically and ran at the golem.

“Don't hit me!”

“It should be fine!”

...In her case, that “should” is really uncertain...

In my case too.

When the golem noticed me running straight at him, it roared with an earth-shattering voice.

Its giant body closes in on me.

—Now!

I swing my right hand. That's a sign for Naga, of course.

The golem swings his hand in my direction in an unnatural position. If it connected, it would result in a fatal wound without a doubt, but it's an extremely obvious, wide swing. I dodge it easily by bending over. I get up to his chest and put my hands to its side.

It was exactly at the same time.

The moment Naga's "Dam Brass" hit the mark on the golem's chest and smashed it—

And the moment I cast the spell I finished chanting.

"Dill Brand!"

Originally, it's a spell that blows rocks straight up, but I changed its purpose a little bit this time.

Hit by her spell, the golem crumbled, and the instant it turned into rubble, my spell sent those fragments flying straight behind it!

In other words—right at the throne where the sorcerer sits.

And I jump up from the floor again.

I join the flow of the stones.

In case those stones don't knock him out, I will kick him point-blank myself. No matter who he is, it's impossible to see through our plan in this situation. And on another side, it's enough if one of us just lands a hit on his chin. Just that will give him a concussion and render him unable to fight.

The throne is closer and closer.

Is he planning not to dodge it? Or is it that he's unable to dodge it? Even now, the figure sitting over there hasn't shown a sign of movement.

“You're mine!”

I raise my fist to my chest—

“Dwaaah! Aaaaaaargh!”

I stopped in a panic.

“Cheers!”

Naga and I made a toast at a bar with the reward money we received from Duchess Elsia.

Naturally though, she has strong alcohol and I have juice.

We empty our cups in one gulp and order refills at the exact same time.



I stretched out my hand for the food lined up on the table.

“...But that was one strange job, wasn’t it?”

“...Yeah.”

Naga nodded at my words while biting into the chicken.

“What in the world were we fighting with, I wonder...”

I put the piece of lamb I was about to eat back on a plate, absent-mindedly.

I remember the figure sitting on the throne in that castle.

It was merely the rotten corpse of a sorcerer.

He probably died due to some kind of sickness.

It’s pretty obvious if you think about it. It can’t be healthy to live with the rotting undead. He probably caught some strange sickness from the zombies he created himself.

He couldn’t order the zombies, ghouls or skeletons to go buy him some medicine when he became unable to move.

His last moments must’ve been quite tragic.

To all the evil sorcerers in the country! It’s not a good idea to fortify your hideouts with only the undead. It may be somewhat costly, but it’s better to hire some living company as well.

The undead and ghouls created by that sorcerer were just loyally following orders they were given, not being able to understand their master was dead.

After the showdown at the throne, we defeated the remaining golems, Naga sent the dragon back and we temporarily withdrew outside the castle. After consultation with Duchess Elsia, who had run away, we spent ten days exterminating the undead inside the castle.

And today we handed over the castle. In this way, we somehow managed to receive the promised reward from the lord.

“...But Duchess Elsia was really happy, wasn’t she?”

She nodded in response to my words.

“She’s a bad-tempered, eccentric, middle-aged woman, but after seeing her happy like that, I don’t think she was all that bad.”

The door to the eating house was kicked open.

Naga and I look that way in confusion.

There stood Duchess Elsia, just as we talked about her.

She has bloodshot eyes and her shoulders are heaving up and down as she pants heavily.

She’s not even trying to fix up her crown that’s about to fall down.

“Duchess E-Elsia ...”

The ghastly atmosphere makes us unconsciously hold our breath.

“D-Do you enjoy living in your new castle?”

I said, trying to loosen up the atmosphere and Duchess Elsia responded with a grand smile.

“Oh, yes... It was extremely comfortable... Up until a moment ago when it crumbled down, that is.”

...

“Whaaaa!?”

Naga’s voice and mine sounded in harmony.

“I-It was quite old.”

“P-Probably so... No, I’m sure.”

“Yeah! And it must’ve become quite fragile... since a certain someone create huge holes all over the castle using magic for no reason at all...!”

We looked at each other with pained expressions.

“...Run for it.”

“...Let’s run.”

We both take off at the same time.

“Wait! You won’t get away!”

And...

And once again, Duchess Elsia’s kicks fly at us.

(Elsia’s Castle, The End)

Slayers Excellent
Villain Fight!

“Don’t move!”

Lina froze at the sudden shout.

The man puts a broadsword to the throat of a short girl wearing a priestess's clothes, while holding her hands behind her back.

“Don’t even budge! If you value her life, then do as I say!”

“Kh...”

Lina spontaneously grit her teeth.

“Let me go! Let me go, I say!” screams the girl while wriggling around in the man’s arms.

“Do you think you will get away with doing something like this to a member of the clergy!?! Let me go this instant or I’ll send your soul to hell!”

“Shut up! Is that something a priestess should say!?!”

“It doesn’t matter if I’m a priestess or not right now! How can you ignore me when I tried to reason with you!?! It can’t be helped, then. I’ll make you remember me! Lina-san!”

She turns her eyes to Lina, who was holding a sword and looking for her chance.

“I don’t care what happens to you, just help me!”

Bfu!

Both Lina and the man blurt at the same time, “Are you... really a priestess...?”

The man looks at the girl in his arms with a surprised look on his face.

“Before a priestess, I’m a human being and I’m a number one,” she declared from the bottom of her heart.

“...Ufu... Ufufufufufu...” Lina started laughing.

Sensing something really ominous in her laughter, both the girl and the man look at her.

“That’s precisely so, Mina-san. Firstly, I’m also a human being, before being the person who agreed to escort you, so I’m number one too, right?”

“W-Wait a second, Lina-san! Don’t do anything hasty! Kindness, helping each other and self-sacrifice is important to humans!”

Of course, she didn’t listen to those words the girl said in haste.

“Don’t worry, I won’t kill you. ♡”

As soon as she said that, she started chanting a spell.

“W-Wait! You don’t care what happens to the hostage!?”

A shower of offensive spells was the only response Miina’s despairing shouts.

Before long, the Sun sets on the desert. Folding her arms for no reason whatsoever, Lina stands at the edge of a cliff, for no reason whatsoever.

Her black cloak flutters in the wind, and at her feet Mina lies covered with bandages, looking like a caterpillar’s cocoon.

A leisurely narration starts without notice.

“Thus, the evil organization Hellmaster disappeared thanks to Lina Inverse’s efforts. However, as long as there’s evil in the world, a second and third Hellmaster will surely appear one day. Don’t lose, Lina! Fight, Lina, until the day you crush all of the evil of the world with your love, courage and truth!”

And then, a quiet BGM melody starts playing and the names of the staff starts scrolling up the large, glass screen that displayed the movie.

The hall filled with the storm of applause.

The now well-lit-up hall is crowded with roughly a few dozen or so strange men.

They look respectable, but the ‘feeling’ around them is not.

“Oh man, that was awesome.”

“Especially the last scene when Mina, the client, shouts and attacks the head of the organization without a care for her own life. I know it’s unbecoming to my age, but I cried.”

“...Was there a scene like that, again...?”

“Heeey! Stop the clappiiiiing!”

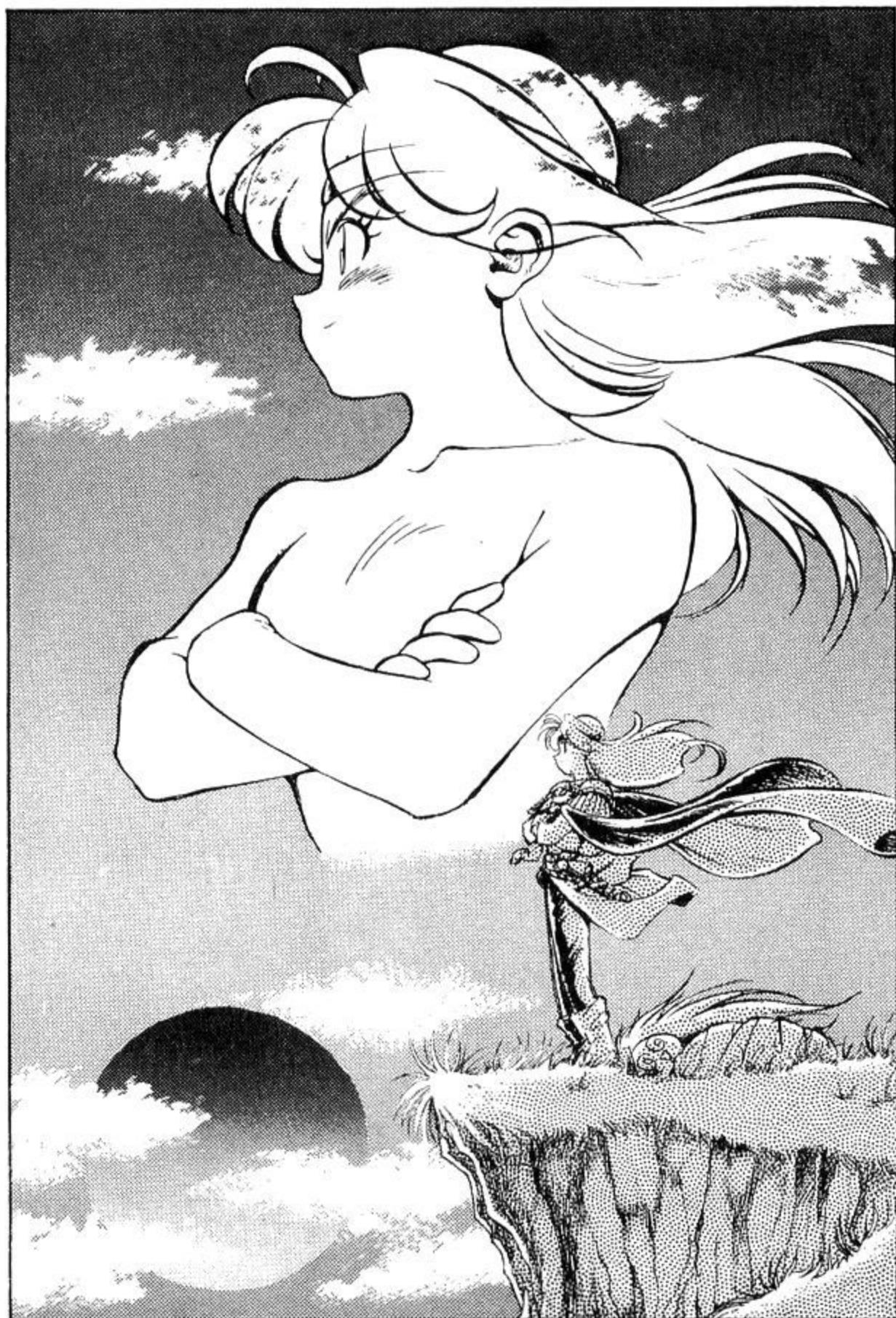
Screaming and hitting the glass panel was a tough man with red hair, the one who’d put a broadsword to Mina’s neck in the movie just now, and the former head of the evil organization Hellmaster, Galls Blader himself.

Silence...

The hall went silent in an instant.

A board lettered “The 38th Periodical Gathering of the Federation of Coast Countries Evil Organizations” sways under the ceiling.

“Listen up, guys! Our theme is not a “Fun Movies Contest”! It’s a meeting in response to that wicked sorcerer who’s a threat to our ties! How about you think earnestly how to deal with her a little!?”



“...Even if you say that...,” says a white-haired old man in a deeply displeased tone. He’s obviously also a boss of some evil organization.

“She’s second-to-none, pays no heed to anything, and doesn’t hold back even if we take hostages. If we take someone like that head-on, we won’t last. Well, I think it would be wiser if we consider her an earthquake or a typhoon and let her go past quietly...”

“I agree, though I feel sorry for you, Galls. But you’re still young. It’s not too late for you. You can start over as many times as you need. Put your back into it and show us how you rebuild the ties. As for this time— Well, I sympathize with you, but just think about it as like getting bitten by a stray dog... just forget about it.”

“That’s one weird way to console a person! You can say that only because it’s got nothing to do with you. Just how much hardship do you think I’ve gone through to build those ties!? I used up every last asset I had while enduring my parents’ cold treatment, and took care of the Caron flowers in wind and rain without missing a day and not a word of complaint

... And then they finally bore fruit and I was able to produce a fine drug, which brought sudden tears to my eyes at the time. Just when I thought I would steadily and honestly work every day in prostitution, theft, blackmail and robbery and then, make my underlings work for me and be able to spend the rest of my life playing around from now on, and then— Khuuu! Isn't it just too vexing...!?"

Galls indulged himself in extremely selfish memories and before he knew it, the hall filled with the sound of crying.

“Khuuu, such a tearjerker... “

“It was the same when I was a kid...”

“—Then, it's simple,” said a clear voice that concealed a strong will.

It was Dulhan Balzack, the young, black-haired leader of Duos Connections with sharp eyes looking like a falcon's.

He was also responsible for the order of the meeting.

“One way or another, we can't turn a blind eye to her. If we leave this be, we'll lose our face and if we leave her at large, there's no telling when a second or third Lina Inverse will be born.

In any case, we have to send her to oblivion by any means possible.”

“About those ‘means’...,” spoke up Galls. “No matter how many hostages we take, it won’t work, but what if her own family was taken hostage?”

“Hmm, frankly speaking—” Dulhan said reluctantly, with his hands behind his back. “Once before, an organization from Saillune came up with the same plan to erase Lina and sent some capable men to her birthplace.”

“—And how did it go?”

“None of them came back, and when the local organization was asked about the situation or about her family, nothing was said.”

“...Her whole family is like a walking psychic phenomenon...”

“All in all, the organization from Saillune was crushed by Lina and she’s alive to this day. And first of all, even if we sent someone to Zephilia, they will never make it in time. That’s why - are you ready to deal out revenge with your own two hands?”

He nodded decisively. “Of course.”

Frankly speaking, he’s unwilling, but he can’t just say “I don’t wanna, I’m scared.” in front of all the bosses of neighboring organizations.

Dulhan nods with satisfaction... “That makes it easy. Out of everyone present, you’re the only one who’s fought with her. We will leave the plan of assassination of Lina Inverse to Galls, and each and every organization will do what’s in their power to assist him. What do you think?”

Having no other choice, everyone present approved of Dulhan’s words.

They don’t like the idea of assisting Galls, but it would be unwise to oppose him by carelessly saying something like “Then, get done with her at your place.”

And so, that day, Galls Blader got the shortest end of the stick in his whole life.

“So? What are we gonna do, Lina-san?” asked Mina scornfully as they sat in the first-floor dining room of a small sea-side inn.

There are many customers, but it's a calm, quiet place.

An open window lets the night air fill the room with a salty smell and the sound of waves.

“What do you mean?” Lina said indifferently, while sipping Beio Shark Stew.

“Didn't you crush a whole organization, dragging me completely into it the other day?” Mina said with a complaint in her eyes.

Lina gets a clearly displeased look on her face and says, “...You still hold it against me that I blasted you with my spell along with that guy...?”

“Of course I do! I put it in my diary, including a picture, and read it out loud in private every night before going to sleep!”

“...”

She's a depressing one.

“Do you want to take a look at my diary?”

“No! Thank you! You've showed it to me a million times by now!”

In a panic, Lina stops Mina, who had started going through the contents of her bag.

The diligently written down complaints, that are pretty much like a black list, are hard to take in themselves, but the thing drawn on top of them is a “picture” only in name.

Lina got dizzy the moment she first saw that drawing. What might be a drawing of a Poison Crawler (or something completely different) had been drawn in a horribly unskilled manner with a little annotation below it reading “Lina-san”.

“...That aside, the organization here has an unusually strong sense of comradeship and formed some weird alliance.” declared Mina, tilting her head and leaning forward, as if peering into Lina with her big, reddish-brown eyes.

Her long golden hair sways.

She looks younger than Lina, but her attitude is strangely dominant.

“...So what?”

“That’s why there’s a chance the entire local organization will come to take revenge! What if something like that happens!?”

“—Mina-san—” Lina looks at the girl with serious eyes. “In life, you will always encounter the unavoidable sooner or later. Our trouble with the organization now is one of those things.”

“Your job was just to escort me to Roll City, how did you get into the inevitable trouble with a criminal organization!?”

“I had no other choice in that situation. Just understand it already.”

Lina takes Mina’s hand and squeezes.

She might’ve been a bit more convincing if her other hand hadn’t been tightly holding the claws of a fried crab.

“What the heck do you mean by ‘you had no other choice’, when without a word you kicked down a thug who spoke to you, and robbed him off his money and goods!?”

“Well, about that... I simply shortened the whole process. In either case, it would have ended like that...”

The thugs she knocked down were the organization’s pupils and after that, the higher-ups attacked Imojiru Castle and that was the outcome of that.

“Besides, brooding over the past won’t change anything...”

“Why are you saying it like it had nothing to do with you!? It’s all your fault!”

Mina suddenly grabs Lina by the scruff of the neck and starts shaking her back and forth.



“Whai-Whaith... M-Mina-san...!”

“You barely ever get to do errands for the temple, y’know! I finally managed to round one up for myself! I got out of that deformed, colorless society and pretended to be an ordinary person because I wanted to play men false and make them buy stuff for me, get myself dead-drunk and babble. I wanted to do those things regular girls do! And you destroyed that! **YOU DID IT!**”

“...Whatever... just... lemme... go... afuh...”

“I can’t spread my wings now! And I had so many things I wanted to do, too! Like go to a casino, eat tasty food all over the country, go to the hot springs...!”

They attracted the attention of the other customers, but Mina continued to shout and shake Lina with her eyes spinning.

Dulhan was hesitating.

Should I make a move, or not?

As the result of the afternoon assembly, quite a lot of goods have arrived for Galls. At the moment, he had enough arms to start a war with a small country, had he felt like it.

However—

“Galls Blader... Will he be able to defeat Lina Inverse...?” he sighed to himself.

It’s not that he doesn’t trust his skills. In fact, even amongst all the neighbouring organizations, he’s the most powerful person.

However, the enemy is the problem.

According to rumors, Lina Inverse’s real age is a few hundreds years, and she’s able to rain down spells strong enough to demolish a big castle in one try.

There are other rumors as well, like the one that one of the five trusted retainers of “Ruby Eye”(who controls all of the chaos of this world), Chaos Dragon took a human form to hunt for human souls, and once it receives a certain level of damage, it turns into a giant dragon (laugh). Or, that the being called Lina Inverse is actually a grand sorcerer from The Principality of Letidius that fell five hundred years ago. The sorcerer is dead, but the black bandanna with his lingering will sealed in it is controlling its wearer (hey, hey...).

They’re all highly probable rumors.

He doesn't have a duty or the responsibility to help Galls, however yesterday's early-morning announcement of Lina Inverse's predicted route indicated that she's not too far away and she will be passing close to the headquarters of Dulhan's organization.

If everything goes well, Galls may get rid of her even if he doesn't do anything, however that hope is extremely slim.

Since it's certain we can't avoid the showdown, it's better to team up with Galls to strike her with more power. However, there's a chance that as long as they keep their heads low, Lina may pass by without noticing Dulhan's organization. That would be the best.

One way or another, he wants to pick the option that will be the least painful for himself, but...

Should he fight—Or pretend he's dead—

It was truly a fateful choice.

The blue light of the full moon illuminates a wharf.

The only thing disturbing the night was the sound of waves.

No one aside from the owners knew that this whole block of the warehouses standing next to another belonged to a federation of criminal organizations.

And in one of them, was Galls.

It's filled with the various goods he received from other organizations.

There are twenty stone-throwing mechanisms for attacking fortifications. Would a grand sorcerer be able to dodge countless rocks suddenly flying at him from a distance?

Seventy pieces of plate armor and mail. —There are the same number of warhorses, but they're elsewhere. Long spears, darts and swords enough for a few hundred men. Of course, there is armor and throwing weapons alike.

There is even enough food to sustain a whole city for half a month.

As long as he's able to come up with an elaborate plan and make the most of those goods, sending Lina Inverse to oblivion is surely not impossible.

“...This is perfect...”

Even so, his tiredness showed on Galls' face as he said that.

“...That is, if I had men...”

As he stands by himself, the moon he sees through a skylight feels strangely distant these days. It was a listless summer night for a twenty-seven-year-old Galls Blader.

Plan number one: Pretend he's a passer-by, ask Lina Inverse for directions, get her to let her guard down, and attack her.

However, she's seen his face once before, so he will have to hide his face behind some kind of a mask. Flaws - Asking for directions wearing a mask is way too suspicious.

There's a high probability she will see through it.

Plan number two: Wait for Lina Inverse to fall asleep and set fire to the inn.

Flaws - High probability that she will easily run away using magic. On top of that, this is Dulhan's turf, it would be bad if it turned into a huge fire.

Plan number three: It's too scary after all, don't do anything to Lina. Apologize to everyone later.

Flaws - This is not the kind of a problem he can get away from by apologizing.

“Daaaaah! Not good, not good, not good!”

Galls scattered the mountain of papers with various plans all over.

In the dim light of a lamp and holding a feather pen in his hand, he slaps his face.

As he was writing up plans, he started to get faint-hearted. While at the beginning his projects were “How I can repel

Lina Inverse by myself.” around the tenth plan, the contents turned to “How I can spend the rest of my life quietly.” As he was calculating how much it would take to buy a field around Atlas or Crimson that was big enough that he wouldn’t have to worry about food, he suddenly came to his senses.

“That’s not good! I can’t defeat Lina Inverse like that!”

There is a bigger problem than if he will defeat her or not, but he promised himself not to mention it.

“Calm down, Galls. Think. Once she chants a spell, it’s over. So the only option is a surprise attack... Crap! If she was an ordinary, dumb sorcerer, I would be able to hit her with a shot from a bow gun while she was chanting a spell and it would be all settled... But she’s skilled as a warrior as well...,” he mutters to himself. It’s easier for him to gather his thoughts that way.

Around the time the Moon went down and the sky started to brighten up, his plans have settled.

“All right!”

He looks at the piled up mountain of goods.

“Let’s get rid of these and hire some men!”

...That's all he came up with after a night of pondering. You might as well say that his final days were decided at that moment in time.

“What is that? You don't want to get rich quick?”

Gotton had started a conversation with a man in a certain bar on the outskirts.

It's an abnormal and dark shop doing business with stray mercenaries and handymen.

“—You talking to me?” The man turns sidewise.

He looks strange, but had that certain vibe to him.

“Does a name Dulhan ring a bell?”

“I heard he's a boss controlling this area.”

“Exactly.”

Gotton sits down next to the man with an over-familiar smile on his face.

In the end, Galls asked Dulhan to help him with gathering men. All the expenses related to that will go to Galls.

What they're looking for are stray sorcerers.

It's an extremely clear and concise way of thinking; to fight a sorcerer, you need a sorcerer, and it's also right.

“By the way, how good of a sorcerer are you?”

“Fuh... There is no one who can match me, Zelgadis, when it comes to magic.”

“Ohh, that's quite something.”

Galls lowers his voice. “There's someone I want to get rid of. This is all I can pay in advance. If you kill the target, you will get this much in addition.”

He sticks his fingers under the table.

“Ooh... that's quite a deal... Someone strong?”

“A sorcerer... who defied our organization. Frankly speaking, we've already employed assassins besides you. It's arranged so that if they kill the target before you, they will receive the rest of money.”

“I see... Who's the target?”

“A little girl.”

Saying that, Gotton pulls a folded piece of paper from his pocket.

“Hmmm!?”

The sorcerer calmly unfolded the paper, then his face contorted uneasily.

—It goes without saying, but drawn on it was Lina Inverse’s portrait—

“What’s the matter? Someone you know?”

“Of course!”

He fixed his eyes, gleaming with hatred, upon the portrait.

“She’s the little wench who once humiliated me, Galmut Hannibal!”

“G-Gal...?” Gotton frowned. “Didn’t you introduce yourself as Zel-something earlier?”

“It doesn’t matter how I’m called! More importantly, I’m accepting this job!”

“Y-You do...? Either way, here’s the advance money.”

He didn’t really understand the thing with his name, but he didn’t care for that. The main point is whether he will accomplish his job or not.

—And besides, it won’t be all that hard to find him later if something happens—

Is what Gotton muttered to himself in his mind.

That's right. If he asks anyone, "Have you seen a sorcerer wearing a ram's skull?" he'll get the answer right away.

"I'm not interested," said the woman bluntly.

"Hehe, Nee-san, don't be like that... You won't get such a great deal 'nywhere else."

The man pulls a piece of paper from his pocket with a half-flattering, half-lustful smile.

"All ya have to do is get rid of one little girl, ya get all this money. Hmm?"

"—I don't accept this kind of work on principle."

Losing his temper at the woman who wouldn't even think about taking the paper, he unfolded it and showed to her.

"Look, she doesn't look all that fearful, does she?"

"Ooh..."

She squinted after running her eyes across the paper.

“Right, she **does** look like an ordinary girl. Indeed, it **sounds** like a nice deal.”

The man doesn't notice the “thorns” all over her words.

“See?”

“—So, what's her name?”

The woman's words made the look on his face change completely.

“Well... 'Bout the name...”

“Hoo! Ho-ho-ho! If it's hard for you to say - I, Naga the Serpent - will say it in your place! This “little girl's” name is Lina Inverse. A sorcerer also known as “Robber Killer”! Picking a fight with her for that little money is indeed a great deal... but only for you.”

“Y-Ya know her!?! Lina Inverse!?”

“Fuh... I fought with her once and even though I received heavy damage, I made her admit her loss.”

“Wh-What did'ya just say!?” he asked, unintentionally raising his voice.

“Is that true!?”

“Of course it is.”

What she said wasn't all truthful, but it certainly wasn't a lie.

After thinking for a moment, Naga says, “...If she's the target, it's a different deal. I don't mind accepting this offer, but— it goes without saying that it's out of question for this amount of money.”

“I... I get it...” The man stands up, looking like he's lost the mental battle. “In that case, sorry, but could ya come with me?”

Naga quietly stood up with a faint smile.

Lina stopped abruptly in the middle of a crowd.

“Hey, why are you suddenly stopping in the middle of the road?” asks Mina, destroying the mood and everything.

Regardless of that, without a word, Lina strikes a daunting pose in the middle of the street.

She looks like she's waiting for something.

“Listen to me...”

Just as Mina was starting to complain again—

“It’s been a while, girls.” It was the familiar voice of a man.

Sensing trouble, the crowd spontaneously split apart, letting them see the owner of the voice.

He’s alone, striking a daunting pose and glaring at them arrogantly.

He’s close enough to get in range if he draws his sword and take a few steps.

He’s a red-haired man of fairly regular features with a firm constitution and a long sword slung from his hip.

But, there’s a different light in his eyes.

It was no other than the man called Galls Blader.

“You know him!?” asks Lina.

...Shooooooooosshhh... blows a wind quietly.

“...Hey.”

After a moment, Galls finally starts speaking. “Lina Inverse, don’t tell me you’ve forgotten me!?”

“It’s not that I forgot you, I never knew you from the start!” she declares bluntly.

Galls is at a loss for words.

—It’s not a joke.

It’s not a strategy to dampen the enemy’s spirit either.

She hadn’t been exaggerating... she’d honestly forgotten him without a trace.

Or more like, Lina - who had annihilated at least a hundred groups of robbers by now - didn’t think the faces of robbers was something worth bothering about. In her mind, they were being separated into three groups - bearded face, bold face and hackneyed. It would be strange for her to remember the face of the boss of a robber gang she’d defeated before.

If there was as much as a shred of a memory left somewhere in the corner of her mind, she would probably say something like “I don’t really remember you” or “I forgot about you”.

“Lina-san, Lina-san.”

Mina is poking Lina repeatedly.

“Come on, he’s the boss of an organization you destroyed a

while ago. You sent him flying along with me, when he put his sword to my neck. It's even in my diary.”

Mina persistently held her grudge.

Being fully aware of the sarcasm, Lina pretended not to notice it.

“...I don't really get it, but it's that guy, right?”

“...You really don't remember at all?”

“Yes.” Lina nodded readily.

He had carved on his heart the desire to revenge his organization, but when he confronted the enemy, she didn't even remember his face.

...H-How can she not take notice of him...?

Anyway, he cheered his almost-crushed heart and spoke the line he'd prepared earlier, “I... I came to warn you today!”

“Warn?” Lina frowned slightly.

However, that reaction went exactly according to the scenario Galls came up with, however...

“That’s right. This is a warning. You’ve surely treated me well the other da- Hey... H-Hold up!?”

Lina steadily closed in on Galls without lending an ear to his words.

“W-Wait! Listen to...”

Whack!

And thus—

Galls’ scenario has been forced to change drastically beyond his control.

...It wasn’t supposed to go like that...

That’s what Galls was thinking to himself, tied up in the middle of the city street.

His plan was to inform Lina that the federation had hired sorcerers that are after her life and then leave that spot light-heartedly. And then, Lina being on guard for the sorcerers’ attack and not being able to sleep, would get beaten mentally...

He never had the slightest idea that he’d get knocked down without a word.

“So? Since you mentioned something about a warning, I’m sure you had some stupid idea. What did you want to tell us?”

“Fuh... You wanna know?”

“You little, you really arrogant...,” said Lina with a stunned expression, blind to her own shortcomings.

Seems like she doesn’t have something called “self-consciousness.”

Lina continues, ignoring his teasing. “You want to say it, don’t you?”

“And what if I... I don’t?”

“I’ll use *that*.”

Lina points to the side of the street, while Galls smiles fearlessly..

It’s a small black shape on the street.

It’s horse crap.

“I get it! I’m sorry! I’ll tell you anything! I’ll say everything!”

“Well? What are you scheming?”

“Th-There was a gathering of organizations around here and they decided to defeat you at all costs. They hired sorcerers and made them attack you!”

Of course, the one in the command is no other than himself, but saying that right now would be asking for death.

“And why did you go out of your way to come and tell us that?”

“I-In other words, this is a retaliation from the organization to make an example to the world!”

“Huhn...”

“It’s not the time to hum!” Mina screamed hysterically, grabbing hold of the still tied-up Galls and shakes him back and forth by his shoulders. “I’ve nothing to do with that! I was just one-sidedly dragged into the trouble Lina-san caused! Get it!? You get it, riiiiight!?”

“Calm down, Mina-san! Your shaking gets to him quite a lot!”

Lina stops her in haste. There still was some consciousness left in Galls.

“There’s nothing to worry about, Mina-san. We have a trump card.”

“A-A trump card, you say?” Galls slightly shakes his still-hazy head and with a faint smile,

says, “Don’t make me laugh. What kind of counter-measures are you telling me you have against an army of sorcerers?”

“Fufufufuhn.”

Lina makes smiles strangely and, happy from the bottom of her heart, says, “A hos-tage. ♡”

...

“Shooooooooot!” Galls’ bitter scream sounded through the noontime hour.

“Fuhahahaha! I’ve finally found you, girl! I have nothing against you, but I’ll kill you right here and no—”

“Mega Brand”

Kabooooooooom!

“Yeah, yeah. That’s the second today... Just like the first time, he was hit with a spell point-blank in the middle of introductions. If that’s not a brutal attack, I don’t know what is...”

Also, what’s the name of that spell, Lina-san?” asks Mina-san while scribbling in the notebook she’d taken from her pocket.

“‘Mega Brand’. Wait, you’re writing that in your diary as well?”

Answers Lina with a somewhat fed-up look on her face.

“The finishing move was Mega Brand. Of course I am.”

...*Uuh... Please no...*, Lina muttered to herself in her mind.

Not being able to spread her wings now, Mina devotedly fills the pages of her diary with her gloomy desires.

It would be fine if that was all, but she’s reading them aloud in the middle of the night at Lina’s bedside. Because of that, Lina is being haunted by nightmares these days.

To be honest, it’s a torture to her.

“Okay, let’s hurry.”

Mina puts her notebook in a pocket and pulls lightly on the rope in her left hand.

There’s no need to mention that at the end of it, tied round and round, is Galls.

“However, you sure are lucky,” says Lina to Galls. “It’s just lousy sorcerers attacking us sporadically, so it’s just fine. If they weren’t this weak, you’d be our shield.”

“Uuuuh...God damn... It’s almost as if I’m being put on public display...”

“Don’t get the wrong idea. It’s not “as if”, you *are* being put on public display. Have some self-awareness and confidence in yourself.”

“She’s right. I put you in my diary, so cheer up and walk.”

Their crazy way of cheering him up made him feel better... well, it didn’t, but he started walking unwillingly.

“Hold it right there.”

Just as they set off, a man’s voice from behind stopped them.

Lina nonchalantly looked back and then shock spread over her face.

“Y-You’re—!?”

Their eyes moved to a man standing alone.

A slender, handsome, sorcerer-type of man with a black beard, but the skull of a ram on his head made him look strange.

Lina had met him when she was helping a girl revenge her older brother.

But, hadn't he gotten engulfed by a Fire Ball and died back then?

Naturally, Mina and Galls don't know about the encounter between Lina and the man, but perhaps because they were struck by his bizarre appearance, they watched in silence to see how the situation unfolded.

“Long time no see, girl,” said the man to Lina with a low voice and the fire of hatred flickering in his eyes.

“You sure made a fool of me, Zelos, in the past...”

“You were alive!?”

“Don't make me laugh!” He waved his black cape for no reason at all. “Did you really think you could kill this Graham Brandala, the sorcerer known under a thousand names, with a little Fire Ball like that!?”

Mina, taking notes behind Lina, frowns at the different names the man called himself, but it seems like, for now, she doesn't have the guts to ask him.

“What do you mean by “a little”? It was you who made that Fire Ball!”

“Fuh, you always have to have the last word! Don't you know I'm no good at using Fire Balls?”

“Why are you proud about that!? ...Well then, I bet you want to settle the score from back then, right?”

“You have quite good judgement. That saves time!”

“Hold up! We can't start raining spells in the middle of a city in broad daylight. Are you paying attention!? Listen to me!” Lina swiftly raises her index finger. “Tonight, when the Sun sinks in the ocean, come to this city's wharf, okay!? Make sure you do!”

Sparks flew as their glances clashed.

“...Fuh... So be it...”

“The Thousand” smiled fearlessly and turned back as the wind played with his cape.

Without turning, he declared, “Make your peace, girl,” and disappeared in the crowd.

“Y-You were so cool, Lina-san!” Mina raised her shrill voice Mina after a moment. “That moved me! Uuh, I haven’t been so fired up in quite a while! I’m going to witness a duel in the evening. That’s right! That’s the thrill I’ve been longing for!”

Lina lets out a little sigh and puts her hands on the girl’s shoulders.

“Listen carefully, Mina-san...”

“I know. This is not a game. Well, it’s a battle with your life at stake, so having it turn into an entertainment...”

“I didn’t say I’m going there.”

“However, that’s exactly why...”

...

“...Huh?” Mina is utterly surprised.

“Like I said, I just told him to come to the wharf, I didn’t say that I’d be waiting there, or that we’d settle our score.”

Mina and Galls turn and look at each other.

“B-But... Right...?”

“When you say something like that, you normally...”

“One way or another, I’m not going there! There would be no end to it if I took each and every one like him seriously.”

She cuts off the conversation and sets off without a care.

“Heeeey! What the heck!? Here I thought I’d found something amusing and now, of all the things, you say you’re not going to fight!? What the heck are you...”

Mina pulled on Galls’ rope while shouting at her, however, having no other choice, she followed Lina.

“We meet again, girl!”

The next day the sorcerer stood in their way once again.

It’s a sea-side street. A few kids can be seen frolicking about on the beach.

The hoarse voice of “The Thousand” resounds under the clear blue sky and in the sea breeze.

“What’s the matter? Your face is red, you know?”

“Shut up!”

Lina’s joke made the sorcerer turn even redder.

“Because you didn’t show up in that place, the mob gathered there threw trash at me, and I caught a cold, too! Making a fool out of Vine Streiser will cost you plenty!”

After saying what he had to say, he starts chanting a spell.

“Stand back, Mina-san!” shouted Lina in an, unusual for her, tense voice.

The spell “The Thousand” started chanting is one Lina doesn’t know. What’s going to come at her?

Lina starts chanting her spell as well.

Completely out of place in the setting of blue skies and the sea, the strange sound of a spell flows from her lips.

Lina’s spell was completed just a second faster!

“Elmekia Lance!”

The lance of light she released should critically damage his astral side and knock him out with ease.

However— There was a black figure blocking the way, as if protecting “The Thousand”.

The Elmekia Lance made a direct hit to the figure that shielded the sorcerer and made it crumble.

But there was more than one figure... Ten, no, twenty humanoid figures arise from the ground one after another.

“Did you see that, girl!?” “The Thousand” says with great joy in his voice.

“Golems!” shouted Lina and started to chant another spell.

“Dug Break!”

It’s a kind of defensive spell. If Lina’s magical capacity is greater than “The Thousand’s,” the power of Bephimos, the earth spirit, should disappear from this whole area and the golems made out of earth should crumble right away.

However—

Oooh... Ooooh...

Making sounds that are either the shattering of earth or the deep-rooted voices of resentment, the figures that rose up from the ground are approaching her slowly-but-surely.

—*Impossible!*—

Lina is shaken.

In the past, she crushed the instant golems made by “The Thousand” using the same spell that influences Bephimos. And for that not to work this time—

This isn’t the time to contemplate that. Unlike herself, she panics and starts chanting another spell.

Actually, what “The Thousand” used wasn’t a spell to create a golem, but a zombie.

To create a zombie, you either implant a Disworm into a dead body and control it, or you make a wandering ghost possess a body. What “The Thousand” used this time, was the latter technique.

But he used earth, and not a body. He made ghosts think their bodies are earth and when they take human forms, he controls them. And what’s more, quite a few of them.

It probably goes without saying that it requires a lot of skill.

If the figures are controlled by wandering ghosts, then no matter how many times Lina cuts off the influence of Bephimos, it’s only natural that it won’t work.

“The Thousand”— the power of his Fire Balls is less than nonsensical, but his skill as a necromancer is top-tier.

The human shapes close in awkwardly, but Lina completed her spell. “Blam Blazer!”

The shock wave of blue light breaks the humanoids into pieces, but it doesn’t reach the sorcerer.

The earth and sand material is soft and unstable, but it absorbs shocks well.

What’s more, after crumbling into clods, the humanoids soon started regaining their forms.

—*There’s no end to it!*

She quickly steps back and grabs Galls by the scruff of his neck.

“Hey, you! What’d you say your name was!?”

“G-Galls Blader,” he responds in confusion.

“Right. Mina, let the rope go!” Saying that, she binds his arms behind his back.

The humanoids close in to them.

A stiff smile shows on Galls’ face. “Don’t make me laugh! There’s no use using me as a shield!”

“Here it comes! My newest special attack, “Galls Crash”!” Lina said that and starts chanting a spell.

Galls has a premonition and feels a chill run down his back, “The Thousand” became certain of his win and smiles, Mina keeps taking notes in the back, mumbling to herself.

“Ray Wing!”

Lina and Galls’ bodies floated in the air, surrounded by a barrier of wind.

It’s a high-speed flight spell. They accelerate, moving in the direction of the group of humanoids!

“Udyawroooooeh!”

Galls suddenly realized for the first time that he’s literally being used as a shield.

Clash! Crash! Thub!

The wind barrier and Galls’ body smash the humanoids and then the two of them— Or more like Galls, crashes into “The Thousand” head-on!

Crash!

And then—Lina landed on the ground.

Galls twitches as he lies all beat up at her feet. His name had been used in a special attack but he doesn’t look too happy about it.

The sorcerer was sent flying and got knocked out as well. As he's no longer concentrating on the spell, the humanoids turned into just piles of dirt.

Judging that the battle is over, Mina runs up to Lina.

Of course, with her notebook in her hands.

Lina takes away the short sword hanging at the sorcerer's hip and then slaps him.

“Mh... Unh...”

“The Thousand” sits up with his head spinning. Not wasting a second, Lina puts her short sword against his throat.

“—Seems like it's my win.”

The sorcerer turns his face away with a bitter expression.

“You were really awesome, Lina-san. That was the first time I ever saw anything like that. I even drew a picture in my notebook without thinking... wanna see?”

In a panic, Lina turns her eyes away from the notepad Mina presented to her.

But, just for an instant, she saw the drawing of what looks like a Lesser Demon wrapped up in toilet paper and turned into a sphere. It was supposed to be the sorcerer, wasn't it? Or maybe...

She decides not to think too deeply about it...

“Y-You said... Lina?”

“The Thousand” groans quietly. “Don’t tell me you’re... Lina Inverse!?”

“...What are you asking about at this point...?”

That said, she never actually gave “The Thousand” her name.

“Daaaaarn...” The man grinds his teeth. “Damn you... If I had known that... I’d have apologized at the start!”

He’s a man with no guts.

“W-Well, I don’t mind, really... At any rate, you have no intention of fighting me any longer, right?”

“Forget about fighting... Actually, my wife is a huge fan of yours...”

“Y-You have a wife!?” Lina asked without thinking.

(...H-His wife is unlucky... No, no, maybe they have similar tastes...)

As she had that thought, suddenly an image of Naga crossed Lina's mind for a second.

Certainly, her taste in clothing is similar to his.

"I... I hope I'm wrong, but - your wife, does she wear excessively revealing clothes, a necklace of skulls and pointy shoulder guards?"

"Don't you talk about another person being an oddball. She doesn't look weird like that," he says in a somewhat offended tone.

He seems to be aware that he has no right to say anything about others' clothes, but he's unaware of the fact that he looks the same.

"Actually, about that—" He pulls parchment and a pen out of his pocket, while getting a bit red on the face. "I was asked to get a signature from you if I ever ran into you on my way. I'm really sorry, but could you do it?"

"R-Right..." Baffled, she takes his pen. "Err...
"Lina Inverse"..."

“My wife’s name is Milienne. And please write today’s date as well.”

“Yeah, yeah... “for Milienne-san”... And...”

“If you have a favorite saying...”

“Evildoers have... no human rights... Well, I guess this will do.”

“The Thousand” looks at the parchment with a handwritten autograph, nods with satisfaction and, after confirming that the ink has dried, hides it with religious zeal.

“Sorry and thank you.” Having said that, the sorcerer turns around.

“N-No problem... Best wishes to your wife...”

Still confused, Lina stares at the back of the departing sorcerer in blank amazement.

“Huh, you’re surprising famous,” says Mina in an admiring tone, while staring hard at Lina.

“...W-Well, yeah...” answered Lina not sounding very happy.

“But this now... Didn’t he just confuse you to get away?”

Twitch! Lina's body shivers slightly.

She then says with a stiff smile, "O-Oh come on, that's not how it is." and gives a hollow laugh for no reason.

"...Huhn... Ah. Huh?"

"What's the matter?"

Mina looks around. "He's gone!"

"What did you say!?" Lina looks around her in a hurry, but Galls, who was supposed to be lying there tied up, is nowhere to be seen.

"He got away while I was signing my autograph for that guy." As she said that, Mina grabbed Lina's shoulders from behind.

Whoops!

She turns around timidly and stares into Mina's scornful face right before her.

"Don't you give me a "he got away"!"

“Wa-Wait, Mina-san. Calm dow- Caaaalm... dooo....”

“Why did you let him get away, WHY...!? How are we going to escape the assassins now that you let our h-o-s-t-a-g-e get away!? Answer me! A-n-s-w-e-r m-e!”

Mina’s shaking continued that day until Lina was completely unconscious.

Galls! You’re alive!”

Galls showed a feeble smile to Dulhan, who had come to welcome him.

They were inside the headquarters of an organization controlled by Dulhan, Duos Connections, camouflaged as a multi-tenant building in a certain port city.

The sea can be seen through an open window.

It may seem careless, but ever since the creation of the Federation, there hasn’t been a single instance of strife between organizations and besides, if you shut the windows at this time of the year and in this weather, not even passers-by would suspect a thing.

“Truly, that was terrible... I was totally put on display for those last few days... There goes my honor...”

“Now, don’t get so down,” Dulhan pats his shoulder lightly.

—Of course, he’s not saying that out of kindness and it’s definitely not a case of men’s friendship either... it’s a calculated move.

Because Galls lost his organization, that territory is now available. And now that Lina’s made a mockery of him, it’s going to be impossible for him to make a comeback. No bandit would say something like: “You’re Galls, the one who was put on public display by Lina Inverse, right!? I’ve been your fan ever since then!”

In that case, the unclaimed territory will be divided during the negotiations of the Federation. However, even if he fell from favor, one word from Galls, the former boss, can change that division greatly.

Buying Galls’ gratitude while Dulhan has the chance will definitely pay off.

And—

Galls saw through Dulhan’s maneuverings.

However, he couldn’t care less about that right now.

In any event, he'll never be able to stand at the top of an organization, so he couldn't care less about the territory he's lost.

Galls' head was filled with nothing but vengeful thoughts towards Lina Inverse right now. And to achieve that, it's better to have a partner, someone like Dulhan with the power of an organization behind him.

Both sides are scheming!

That's about the highest level of mutual trust this occupation enjoys.

“However, I'm glad you're alright. I'm really sorry to bring this up right after you came back, but that sorcerer called Naga wanted to consult with you about a plan to defeat Lina. —But if you're tired, I'll make her save it for later.”

“No—Let's get over with it right now. Call her.”

Galls lets his body sink into the sofa and waits for Naga.

He'd met with the woman one of Dulhan's men had found and heard out the story of how she defeated Lina once before — Well, it's a fact that there were some misunderstandings regarding a few nuances — that built up his confidence, he made a proclamation of war to Lina, and that's why it all ended like that.

The first time he heard she'd defeated Lina, he suspected it was a lie, but knowing she had fought her, he figured that she wasn't the kind of person who bluffs like that.

Naga is his trump card. He didn't reveal her existence when he was caught by Lina.

"...Lina Inverse... You'll see the next time..." as he mumbled that, the door to the room opened wide.

"Ho! Ho-Ho-Ho! So you managed to make your way back alive, Galls-san. What I want to discuss with you is nothing other than the plan of obliterating Lina Inverse."

"...I'll hear you out."

Naga turns over her cape and sits in front of Galls.

"I want you to get in touch with all the sorcerers you hired to defeat Lina ASAP."

"Let it be," he nods in agreement.

The list of the sorcerers is in a safe in the room Dulhan gave him and he always holds the key to it on his body.

"So, what's your strategy? Care to explain?"

“Sure,” said Naga and smiled slightly.

“Boy, such nice weather,” Lina stretches her hands up.

They’re on a road cutting through a forest by a seashore. The unusual blend of clear sky, smell of salt air, and green shades of trees is incredibly comfortable.

“Nobody’s attacked us ever since that thing yesterday... I like when it’s so peaceful... though there’s nothing worth putting in my diary,” said Mina. “But, seeing how it’s so quiet, don’t you think that group has given up on revenge against you, Lina-san?”

“Probably... not,” says Lina with a sigh. “That guy, Galls, we let get away yesterday is definitely gonna try something. Regardless of their strength, guys like him have a lot of pride, so if someone shames them once, they never forget it, no matter the reason.”

“Huh... He’s twisted.”

“Yeah. Otherwise, he’d go straight... Though, that’s a matter of a character as well. Either way, since nothing’s happened up ‘til now, we should expect that something full-blown is going to happen.”

Loud laughter resounded through the air, just as Lina finished!

“Hoo! Ho-Ho-Ho! I’ve finally found you, Lina Inverse!”

“Gueh! That voice!”

Just as she expected, the person who appeared from the shade of the trees was, of course, Naga the Serpent!

“Y-You showed yourself... finally...” said Lina in a most displeased voice, with sweat on her forehead.

“L-Lina-san! Who’s this weirdo!?” Mina instinctively hid herself in Lina’s shadow and stared cautiously at Naga.

“Everything is okay, Mina-san. She may look extremely suspicious, but despite her looks, she’s still a human.”

“I... I can’t believe it! I’m gonna put her in my diary!” and saying that, Mina pulled her notebook from her pocket and started to draw a picture of Naga in it.

“...How dare you... say that about me...”

“However, there sure are a lot of people wearing weird clothes amongst your acquaintances, Lina-san. Do you suppose that’s because of your conduct?”

“...Buzz off...”

“Hey, Lina, who’s that goddamn insolent priestess?”

“...I work as her bodyguard right now...” answered Lina in a depressed tone.

“...Ummm... I was suddenly called “goddamn insolent” by Lina-san’s friend - an older woman in weird clothes who looks like nobody would want her for wife. I’m going to hold it against her for the rest of my life...”

Hearing Mina mumbling while taking notes, Naga’s face stiffened, but she probably decided it was better not to get involved with her, because she turned back to Lina.

“On another note, I have an interesting piece of info for you today,” said Naga and smiled a little.

A bit East of the seashore road, there are the remains of a quarry.

In the past, it was a place where people collected black marbles, but now, it's just a large crater.

The instant Lina reached the center of it—
The air starts buzzing.

The sorcerers hidden in the shadows of the trees, in thickets or behind the rocks started chanting offensive spells all at once.

A weak defensive spell won't work on that many sorcerers. It would be possible to get rid of all your surrounding enemies in one clean sweep with a powerful offensive spell, however, no matter how you think about it, the sorcerers are going to finish chanting their spells earlier.

As expected, even the great Lina Inverse stands no chance against that many enemies.

The only option left is to run away.

She uses the levitation spell and raises up in the air in panic—

She gets knocked back and falls to the ground in an unsightly manner due to the wind barrier that Naga extended over the whole area.

Faster than Lina could get to her feet—

Came the first wave of attacks.

The “Flame Arrow” that half the sorcerers cast comes at Lina like a rain of fire.

—Even though the wind barrier Lina cast protected her body from the heat of the flames, right after that came a barrage of “Fire Balls” cast by the other half of the sorcerers.

Even if she tries to defend herself from a direct hit with a wind barrier, there’s no way to isolate herself from the thousands of degrees of blazing heat.

She faints soon after and her concentration on the spell is lost.

The moment the wind barrier breaks off, the tongues of flame cover Lina’s body.

Galls snickered to himself as he imagined Lina being turned into charcoal, and not even having the time to scream in agony.

—It’s perfect! The strategy that the woman called Naga came up with is just perfect!—

He’s been living in that fantasy all day.

An old man sitting alone in a corner of a gloomy room, sunk deep in doubtful fantasies and grinning to himself, is in no way a comfortable sight.

“B-Boss... Please do something about that guy...”

Dulhan looks troubled when the man he'd told to bring Galls food clung to him in tears.

“Y-Yeah... It does look bizarre...”

B-But, well, I understand him too. We gotta endure it until that Naga sorceress comes with a report.”

The truth is, Galls wanted to see Lina's final moments with his two own eyes, but when Naga asked him if he wants to become a hostage again, he decided to stay put and wait.

Naga left in the morning. If she found her fast, right about now, for sure...

“Ufu... Ufufu... Ufuiha...” Galls smiled openly.

He's an unsteady person.

“...Th-That does look scary enough...” Dulhan involuntarily turns his eyes away. He was afraid it'd show up in his dreams if he stared for too long.

“I hope that sorceress Naga returns soon...”

SLAM!

The door crashed open and a panting man ran into the room.

“What’s going on!?”

“Th-This is bad, Boss! Naga, that sorceress...”

“Did she lose!?”

“N-No! She’s here!”

“Then what’s the big deal!?”

“She’s with Lina Inverse!”

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaat!?”

Everyone in the headquarters fell into a panic.

It was already like an offensive magic exhibit.

“Elmekia Lance!”, “Freeze Brid!”, “Flare Arrow”, “Dam Brass!”, “Blam Blazer!”

Because it’s inside the building, they can’t use really impressive spells, but Lina and Naga chant spells as if they’re competing on the types they can use, and each spell raises fires and scatters blasts. Mina takes notes behind them.

“...Lina-san’s spell sends men flying... Right, right! That’s it! This is the thrill I longed for! I have to read it to everyone in the temple once I’m back!” Mina screams to herself, right in the midst of the battle.

She shouldn’t have, but she tagged along with them saying she wants the thrills.

She calls it something different every time, but simply put - she's being selfish.

"...Hey, Lina..." says Naga quietly, so Mina won't hear her. "Let's take advantage of the confusion and blast her a little with a spell just this once."

"...I did it once already. She put it down in her diary and reads it to me every night..."

At that moment a man yelled, "Y-Y-Y-Ya bitch! Wuzza big idea!?"

The man who appeared in front of them was the same one that had scouted-out Naga.

His eyes are bloodshot, and he somehow manages to hold a sword in his hands, but he's ready to run away any second now.

"Oh, my. That's simple." replied Naga with a dominant attitude. "Actually, I hate bandits and evil organizations just like Lina!"

"Y-You fooled meeeee! In that case, what about the other sorcerers...?"

"Once I leveled with them that your target was Lina Inverse, they fled with their tails between their legs."

"Yaaaa weench!"

Lina easily sends the man flying as he charges at them in desperation.

“The bosses are above!”

“OK!”

They run up the stairs.

Most of the men lost the will to fight and ran away, however there are some guys who charged at them every now and then, as if they just remembered their duty. Beating them down, they reach the top floor.

“They’re not here!”

“Lina-san, over there!”

The large mirror Mina points at looks odd, as if it hangs in the air by the wall.

It shatters with a clean sound under Naga’s kick.

There’s a dark hole behind the cracked mirror.

“An escape route!? That’s classic!”

Naga throws “Lighting” down the hole and Lina slides into it.

“Let’s go!”

“I-I’m good, you go without me. It looks kinda scary, I’ll wait here...”

“Don’t be selfish. Just go in!”

It’s a mystery what part of it was “selfish,” but Naga kicked the backing-off Mina without hesitation.

“N-n-n-n-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!”

This is the first time that Mina’s regretted tagging along with them.

Galls and Dulhan were running frantically.

The escape route from the headquarters leads to an underground cave. Only Dulhan and a few of his most trusted men know about it. The entrance is dark, but the passageway is unobstructed and a luminous moss grows thickly on the walls around here.

For now, there’s no other choice than to make escape, get help from the Federation and plan a comeback.

That’s an opinion of both of them.

—*However, who’d think they would have to use this route—*

Dulhan mentally grit his teeth.

If he knew this was gonna happen, he wouldn’t have helped Galls...

Once we get out of the cave, I'm gonna feed him a big one...

—Of course, the fact that out of his own interest, he'd happily helped Galls, or that it was his man who'd scouted-out Naga has already been buried beyond the depths of Hades in his mind.

...However, even Galls has thoughts like: "...It's all because of his man... I'm gonna knock him down once we get out of this cave!", so deserve each other.

Had they been able to simply leave the cave, it would inevitably have turned into a kids fight, however Fate decreed otherwise.

"...Hold it right theeeeeere...!" came a voice from far behind them.

"Geh!" sounded their voices in a perfect harmony.

"What now, Dulhan!? They found this route!"

"I-Impossible! That camouflage was perfect...! Somebody must've spilled the beans!"

Of course, it didn't occur to Dulhan that the reason was that he forgot to close it off.

“Don’t worry! It may be a single passageway, but there are traps set up here and there! Though, you’re gonna be fine as long as you’re with me! Besides, I still have a trump card!” said Dulhan and a fearless smile showed on his face.

They ran along the twisty tunnel for a little while and then Dulhan stopped.

There was an enormous cage against the wall, shrouded in darkness, that not even luminous moss grew on. And there was something in that darkness.

Their noses were attacked by the offensive smells of corpse and monsters mixed together.

When Dulhan fiddled with a switch on the wall, the cell opened slowly.

And from there—

“!” Galls froze with terror.

It appeared in its full glory in the light, breathing out a raw stench.

...Fuuu... Fuuu...

“Go, Vusebam! Tear to pieces all the fools who’re chasing us!”

It gave off a war cry as if in agreement to Dulhan’s joyful shout and dashed in the direction the men came from.

“—What’s the matter? You look pale, Galls.”

Dulhan sends a creepy smile in the direction of Galls, who’s standing still, overcome with surprise.

“...Th-That now, what in the Hell... what was that...!?”

“Fuh... I had a sorcerer make one for me at some point... It’s a war chimera... It’s a ferocious one and it only listens to me. I kept it just in case and it seems like it’s finally come in handy.”

“...You really are... a scary guy...”

Galls stares at Dulhan with a scared look and a pale face.

After a little while, they hear screams and howls alike back down in the tunnel.

...Rgwoooo... Ghoauuu!

“Eeek! Ack!”

“Wh-What is this thing!? It’s gross!”

“Ah, damn! There’s no other way than fight it!”

WHAPP, WHUDD, BIFF, THHUD! WHUMP, SQUASH, SKRAAM! THOMP, THOMP!

...

“...WAAAAAAAAIT...!”

“Aaah! Weak! It’s terribly weak!”

“AAAACK! Could it be it lacks exercise!?”

“Damn you, Dulhan! It was all looks!”

“Keep your complaints for the later! Let’s get away from here!”

And they resumed their dash.

All three women left the cave which was close to the large mouth of a river leading to the seashore.

After defeating the terribly weak chimera, and ignoring the fact that Mina fell into every single trap there was, they reached the mouth of the cave without a problem (laugh).

“Over there!” said Mina and pointed.

The two men had just disappeared into the shadow of a building by the riverbank.

“After them!” said Naga and started chanting a spell.

“Th-That’s...!?”

Lina's eyes bulged open for a second, but she also started chanting a spell in panic.

They each grab one of Mina's hands—

“Raywing!” their voices sounded in unison.

“But, how do you know that move!?” asked Lina inside a wind barrier.

They must've grabbed Mina's hands wrong because she's panicking, laying face up as they pull her, but they don't care about her at all.

“You used it in front of me once before! It looked interesting, so I learned it!”

Lina was astonished by Naga's answer.

It's not like “Sleeping” or some other simple spell. It's not the kind of move you can master with ease after hearing and seeing it once and finding it interesting.

—*Could it be that Naga has greater talent than me...?* wondered Lina

“There they are, Lina!”

When she looked ahead, the two men were just starting to head different directions right in front of them.

“I’ll go right! You take care of the left, Naga!”

“OK!”

“Eek! Nooo!”

Her scream made them remember of the existence of the other girl.

“Mina-san!?”

Their voices sounded in harmony and they both released their hands.

THOK.

“Oops.”

“That sound just now... Do you think she’s alive...? She slammed right into a log...”

“It’s okay! She’s alive!”

“Wow! She’s quite tough for an amateur!”

“I’ll take Mina-san and go to the right, you go to the left, Naga!”

“Roger!”

They float back in the air again. Following Galls and Dulhan, they flew past a road, travel a back lane and eventually reached the riverbank again.

There are countless logs tied with ropes drifting towards the mouth of the river. The men jump on some of them.

“They’re planning to cross the river!”

Lina landed, left the unconscious Mina on the ground and ran towards the river.

“I won’t let you!”

So did Naga.

They touch the surface of the water with the palms of their hands at the same moment, look at each other and exchange smiles.

They just knew the other one was going to use the same spell.

The spell coming from Lina and Naga’s mouths was in such perfect harmony that it could be called beautiful.

“Sea Blast!”

The waves turned furious and pursued Galls and Dulhan. Then the stormy waves bared white fangs and swallowed them!

“...We did it...” said Naga, standing up and smiling gently at Lina.

Lina’s face turned red for some reason and she turned her eyes away involuntarily.

It was the first time Lina’s had seen Naga smiling like that.

“...Y-Yeah...”

“...What’s the matter?”

“No... Nothing, really... Hm?”

She looks around in confusion and suddenly realizes something.

“...Mina-san... Isn’t here...”

“Could she have been hit with a by-blow and swept away...?”

“Eeep! Look for her!”

The Sun sinks in the sea—

Lina folds her arms and pointlessly stares at the sea.

A single beat of sweat runs down her cheek.



Behind her, Naga performs CPR on a senseless Mina.

“...Now...that... I think... about... it... Lina...”

“...What?”

“We should... have left... her... behind... when we... got out... of that... cave.”

“...I was just thinking the same thing...”

And a leisurely narration starts flowing!

“Thus, the evil organization, Deus Connections, disappeared thanks to Lina and Naga’s efforts. However, as long as there’s evil in the world, a third or fourth evil organization will surely appear one day. Good luck, Lina... fight, Naga... until the day you crush all of the evil of the world with your justice, love and unity!”

The usual BGM and ending credits brought forth a storm of applause in the Hall.

“Oh man, it was fun.”

“Especially at the end, when the client ETC”

“Dhaaaaaa! Stop clapping! This time! This time for sure - we’re gonna bring death to Lina Inverse and Naga the Serpent with the power of our federation!”

No matter how much he screamed and cried, the hearts of all the present in the hall were one.

—We don't want to repeat Dulhan's mistakes all over again—

They ignored Dulhan kicking up a fuss next to the screen as the applause wasn't subsiding at all.

And they lived happily ever after.

(Slayers Excellent Villain Fight! The End)

Afterword

Author's Representative: "L"

There are some dynamic incidents going on one after another in the public arena, but how are you spending your days now?

Hello again! And thank you for waiting!

I bring you Slayer's Special ① - "The Prince of Saillune"!

The explanations will introduce me - L, who poisoned the artist and took over the afterword corner (defiant).

Now, since this is a collection of short stories, let's do the usual explanation of each work.

“The Prince Of Saillune”

This one is technically the artist’s debut in magazine work.

“Avenger”

As it says.

“Robbers, Killers”

As it says.

“Naga’s Challenge”

You’ll know when you read it.

“Elsia’s Castle”

As it says.

“Slayers Excellent Villain Fight!”

It’s a newly-written story and it’s not a story about villains appearing and fighting for five minutes for no reason at all.

It’s a rare work written in the third-person.

...Well, I believe that mostly concludes the outlines of each of the stories.

What!? You don’t understand it even though I explained it so wholeheartedly!?

You’re terrible! You’re always like that! You don’t listen to me at all!

...Let’s put aside this silly talk.

First of all, please read one of these works. As long as it won't cause trouble in your bookstore, you can even read it standing by the shelf. Even if the artist won't permit it, I will.

Well then.

This is the "L's Challenge to the Readers" corner that's said to generate 90% of the interest in the books, but I'm going to take a break from it in the short stories compilation book. Furthermore, we're holding the "They-Probably-Don't-Look-Like-This Portrait Contest" announced in the third volume. Depending on the month, the intensity of the competitiveness changes quite a lot, so if you're lucky, you may even receive some lousy handmade prize from the author.

By the way, in March (since it hadn't been that many days since the February release, we considered them as March entries) the first place prize for "*Zanaffar*" went to Tamiki Yui-san from Wakayama, the April one for "*That-Hometown-Girl*" went to Kagura Kazumi-san from Shizuoka, and the May one for "*Zolf's Real Face*" went to Nakata Atsushi-san from Nara. (I'm writing this in June).

The future announcements will be made only to the winners. If you don't receive anything within two months of your submission, you should take it that you didn't win.

There were many portraits of "*The Artist*" and "*Actually-Ugly-L*" (grimace) made by people hoping for a lucky break.

...Just one surprise like that would've been enough—.

Actually, there are still many poor characters whose portraits we haven't received yet, despite the fact that they were mentioned by name, but we did receive some of the chimera made by Daymia or even the weird bug Lina used for fishing! Aah! Give some love to those guys who are lower than bugs! (Laugh)

Also, in the third volume, we asked for “Characters who were never drawn or weren’t drawn clearly in *Dragon Magazine* or *The Novels*”, but there’s more readers who haven’t read the first issues of *Dragon Magazine*, so we want to change the rules to “Characters who weren’t clearly (or were never) drawn in *Novels*”.

Oh right, I received a question from a person, who drew “Underling S” asking if it’s a man or a woman - now that I think about it, I never wrote it. I would like to ask the character in question about that.

“...M-Me? I’m a man. The other one was a man too, but I don’t know about the remaining five. They still act dead.”

And there you have it.

He’s pretty much exposed his identity by now.

However, his true version has the exact same appearance as the one already drawn, so if you want to draw him, draw his human version. By the way, he’s been frozen in his human form (he looks like he’s around 20 years old).

Here's a question for you - whose representation is he?

...It's an easy question if you follow the rule of elimination.

And since it's easy, there's no reward.

We've received suggestions to put the winning pictures along with scores in the afterword, however, due to many of them being in color (...or more like, most of the black and white ones were drawn just for laughs), we have no plan of doing that at this point. I'm sorry.

As for the future prizes, things like "So-what L-sama Wind Chime" or "What-are-you-gonna-do-with-it-Nee-chan Mask" are being considered. By the artist, that is.

There was a suggestion to give one of "The Treasures of the Four Elementals with L-mark" each month, however if you think of earth, water, fire, wind - while for "wind" it could be a wind chime or a fan, and for "water", a teacup or a mug, for "earth" it couldn't be anything other than a flowerpot at best, and for "fire" a match, so that was given up on.

...I mean, getting a match as a prize for a picture with your heart and soul in it would be just too sad—

...Though, there's room for argument about whether getting a wind chime or a mask would make anyone happy...

On another topic, we've received a number of questions about "Slayers" doujinshi, so I will answer them now.

There are currently two licensed authors... one of which was publicly announced in Dragon Magazine, so I assume it's okay to interpret it as public information and write down the contact information right here. (Is it okay, Kikimaru-san?)

Postal Code 070 Asahikawa Kagura Shijou 7
Chou-me

Mrs. Yamada Yoko-sama, Kikimaru-sama

In case of an inquiry, it goes without saying, but it's advisable to include a stamped and self-addressed envelope or a return postcard with your letter.

...Well, that would be all.

Let's meet again in a full-length book.

Stay well, everyone!

First Appearances:

The Prince Of Saillune	Dragon Magazine	October 1989
Avenger	Dragon Magazine	February 1990
Robbers, Killers	Dragon Magazine	May 1990
Naga's Challenge	Dragon Magazine	August 1990
Elsia's Castle	Dragon Magazine	October 1990
Slayers Excellent Fight!	Newly Written Story	