



スレイヤーズすぺしゃる⑨

# イリーズの旅路

神坂 一



富士見ファンタジア文庫

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# Slayers Special - Volume 09 Chapter 01-02

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# Wrongfully Accused, part 1

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*Slayers Special: Wrongfully Accused (Part One),*

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“Are you Lina Inverse?”

Naga and I were seated on the terrace of a local café that bright and sunny afternoon, shoveling their special teatime platter down our throats in a fierce eating competition like the dainty little flowers that we were when I heard a man's voice calling out to me. I glanced up to see an older man, probably past his forties, walking purposefully in our direction. He didn't seem to be a man of wealthy means, but he was neat and sharply dressed, which was enough to tell me that he had class nonetheless.

“Mm-hmm,” I mumbled at him around the wad of half-chewed cake in my mouth. Don't get me wrong; under normal circumstances I would have tried to wave him off or change the subject, or told him he had the wrong person to avoid any trouble, but this was one contest I couldn't afford to lose—and I mean that literally, since the bill we'd racked up at the café was riding on the loser. Every second I was wasting talking to this guy was another second I could be shoving another bite of food into my mouth, and I wasn't about to waste precious time or money making up excuses. Hey, it was a *big* bill.

The man rummaged around in his breast pocket while we continued our furious feeding frenzy and after a moment produced an item that he held up in his hand. Clearly he meant for me to see it, but seriously, he wasn't pulling me away for anything at that point. That is, until he introduced himself.

“Inspector Wizer Freion, of the Ruvinalgald Special Investigations Bureau,” he said.

My jaw froze and I choked down what was left in my mouth. Now, *that* got my

attention. I glanced over to see a pendant inscribed with something that looked for all intents and purposes to be a royal crest of arms dangling from his proffered hand.

The Kingdom of Ruvinagald... You would think it's a grand and glorious country from the name, but truth be told, the name is the only part of it that really fits the bill. In actuality, it's a little-known country only notable for its inclusion in the Alliance of Coastal States, despite being small enough to rival a large city in size and not being anywhere *close* to a large body of water. It's a generally forgettable plot of land whose only real worth lies in its production of Ruvina Cedar, used mostly in the construction of boats (which it does *very* well, in all fairness); otherwise, people usually wave it off as "one of those countries in the alliance." Heck, the only reason Naga and I were even there to begin with was because it happened to come up in conversation and we figured it'd be fun to drop by just to say we did.

The question was, though, what did one of the royal inspectors want with the one and only Lina Inverse? I was drawing a blank, but whatever the case, he didn't seem to want my autograph.

"The Sorcerers' Guild was kind enough to inform me you were in the area," he continued in a crisp, business-like tone of voice as he carefully replaced the pendant in his pocket. "Lina Inverse," he said, "I am investigating you on suspicion of your involvement in a series of kidnappings."

I think I stopped breathing.

"You're *what?!?*" I cried out in disbelief before I could stop myself. "W-Wait a minute! I don't know about any kidnappings!"

Wizer barked a laugh. "Don't play innocent with me, Lina Inverse. I know for a fact that you are the culprit behind the disappearance of children everywhere in Ruvinagald, and the sooner you admit to your crimes, the better off you will be!"

"Like hell I am!" I spat. "We only just got here a couple of days ago! Tell him, Naga!" I spun to face my traveling companion, but let's just say *she* wasn't any



help.

Naga's fork never slowed as she relentlessly continued her assault on the plates of cake in front of her, a small smile playing on her lips all the while. "Oh, *tell* him, Lina," she cooed. "You might even convince him to go easier on your sentencing."

"Come *on*," I growled. "You know I didn't—!"

"That settles it, then!" Wizer cried triumphantly, cutting *me* off before I could cut *Naga* off. He jabbed a finger into my face and proceeded to proclaim in a voice loud enough for every patron in the restaurant to hear, "My deduction was correct! You are, indeed, the culprit!"

"I told you, I didn't do it!" I insisted, and then narrowed my eyes. "What are you basing this on, anyway?"

Wizer proudly puffed out his chest. "My gut!"

"Your *gut*?!" I leapt to my feet, accidentally kicking over my chair in the process. "You mean to tell me you're accusing me of a crime that you think I committed because of your *gut*?! Where in the *world* are you going to find a judicial system that accepts that kind of logic? Is everyone even remotely suspicious to you automatically a criminal?!"

"Precisely!"

"This can't be happening," I groaned as my head dropped into my hands. I was stunned. Flabbergasted, even. Never in my wildest dreams did I believe that people who relied exclusively on their gut instinct actually existed; yet standing here before my eyes was the irrefutable proof that they *did*.

On that note, I'm sure this was all a *riot* to anyone looking on from the sidelines, but if the quite frankly *stupid* idea of giving a guy like this power in any

kind of system crosses your mind, do us all a favor and ignore the impulse, because the guy's going to be a liability to himself, the system, and everyone else around him. Case in point: The geezer standing right in front of me. Back to the story.

"Listen," I snapped, "If you go around arresting every shady character you see on the street, your inspector pals would be outnumbered two to one! Do you even have any *proof* to say I did this crime of yours?"

Wizer scoffed. "If I did, you'd have been apprehended long ago. However, several related cases clearly suggest that only you could have been the one behind them!"

"Really." I snorted in disbelief. "Okay. Let's hear about these *cases* of yours, then."

"Surely you must know it's too late to feign ignorance by now," he said with a laugh. "But I would be more than happy to remind you of the countless heinous crimes you've committed." I wasn't sure what he meant by "too late," but, boy, did this Wizer guy seem proud of himself. Before my eyes, he produced a small memo pad from his pocket and began to read.

"Approximately one month ago in the village of Medelt, a little boy named Tom, five years old at the time goes missing, and there was found the colossal footprint of what appeared to be a lesser demon in a cornfield nearby!"

"Okay, and?"

"Clearly this could only have been done by Lina Inverse!"

I couldn't say anything at first. How was I supposed to respond to a statement like that? I mean, I've heard of jumping to conclusions, but this was just ridiculous. In the end, I settled for the most intelligent reply I could muster at the time.

"*Huh?*"

"Several days afterward," Wizer continued, "little Jessie, three years of age, goes missing in the town of Farlit, where soon thereafter a witness claims to see a mammoth beast rear its head from the depths of the nearby lake! Once again, this could only have been accomplished by Lina Inverse!"

“...You’re kidding, right?”

“At the same time in the village of Rumafik, Bob is taking his son Rick, just shy of five years old at the time, home in his wagon at dusk, when suddenly an orange light appears in the night sky, and...”

“Hold it, Mister,” I said as I drew myself very close to Wizer. “Are you implying that every single strange event in the world is somehow my fault?”

“Naturally!” Wizer replied without hesitation. “Surely you don’t mean to suggest you are not familiar with your own reputation?”

I jerked back with a grunt. Well... Yeah, sure, people say things about me. Some call me the Robbers’ Killer, some say a dragon would step off to the side to avoid me, and they say other things that I’d rather not go into right now. The point is, I’ve got what you might call a *reputation*, and between all the nicknames I’d been given, most of which may or may not have been grounded in actual fact, not to mention the exaggerations and the rumors that were out-and-out *false*, it wasn’t hard for me to see where he was coming from.

“To wit, your so-called ability to project a mysterious light from your mouth, capable of annihilating a group of bandits in mere seconds, not to mention your ability to shoot tentacles from your forehead, with which you capture and devour flies!”



“Enough!” I bellowed.

“Now, I ask you,” Wizer continued, “Can this Lina Inverse, to whom so many strange and unnatural feats are attributed, truly be considered human? The answer is nay! Nay, she cannot! Then I can find no reason not to believe that every strange and unnatural incident which takes place in this world is, in fact, the nefarious doing of Lina Inverse herself! Thus has my intuition as a Special Investigator spoken to me, and thus do I know it to be true!”

“You’re just pinning this on me, dammit!” I screamed in frustration and

without thinking, I lashed at him with a mighty screw kick that sent Wizer crashing into the table next to us. But no, the inspector wasn't dissuaded. An unsettling smile spread across his face and he slowly raised himself from the wreckage of the dining set with a low chuckle.

“So now that you've failed to convince me of your 'innocence' with words, you resort to physical violence, instead. Your guilt is clearly evident!”

“A girl can only take so much abuse before you cross the line, pal!” I bellowed. “Anybody else would have done the same thing!”

“Oh, I beg to differ! As I understand it, you unconsciously lashed out because your crimes had been laid bare for the world to see, and you could not withstand the guilt. Your excuses are no match for this Inspector!”

“You're no inspector! You think some fancy title gives you the authority to declare that everything you say is right?! 'Cause if you do, I suggest you clear out whatever sorry excuse for a brain you have stuffed between your ears and come back when you get something better to fill the void!”

Wizer laughed. “Strong words, from a criminal!”

“I'm not a criminal!” I shot back. “And at least I'm not half as bad as the guy trying to pin a crime on the innocent girl with nothing better to go on than his *gut!*” Wizer and I stood face-to-face, and for a brief moment, you could feel the flashes of lightning spark between our eyes, the tension was so thick. But then...

“*Ho, ho, ho!* It seems I've won this battle, Lina Inverse!” And who should leap to her feet with absolutely no consideration for the situation or the flabbergasted people around us with her patented and absolutely ridiculous laugh but the one, the only, Naga the Serpent!

“Naga!” I turned to her in surprise. “I forgot you were here.”

“You... forgot?” Naga deflated. “Oh, Lina... You've been so distant lately...”

I sighed. “I'm kind of in the middle of something, Naga. What's up?”

She chuckled. “Oh, you can't talk your way out of this one, Lina. You remember the end of the deal, now pay up.”

...Oh, for the love of—! Between Wizer here showing up and having to deal with

the insane charges he was thrusting on me one after the other, I completely forgot about my eating contest with Naga over who was going to pay the bill! My eyes shot to her side of the table and sure enough, there were the demolished remains of what *used* to be all ten portions of the teatime platter. I'd lost! I, of all people, had lost an *eating contest*! And as if that weren't insulting enough, now I had to pay the bill on top of it! I inwardly groaned. The shame would follow me for generations.

"I'm being accused of a crime over here!" I snapped. "I think this is just a *little* more important!"

"*Hooo, ho, ho, ho!* If you think a piddling trifle like that is enough to varnish over the fact that *you're* paying, then you are sadly mistaken!"

*Damn.* She saw right through me... But instead of letting my inner disappointment show on my face, I just rolled my eyes and turned back to Wizer. "Look!" I said to him. "If you don't have any basis for these accusations and if you don't even have any proof, then you have no right to talk to me this way!"

"Lina, the bill!"

"I mean, why would I want to kidnap a bunch of kids in the first place?!"

"Kidnapping children is included in every criminal's dastardly repertoire!"

"On what planet?!"

"Don't ignore me, Lina!"

"I don't know what your problem is, but at least find some proof and establish a motive before you go around calling people criminals!"

"What a foolish notion! Can you not see that the very reason I've come here is because I have neither proof of your guilt nor motivation?!"

"And you're *proud* of this?!"

"Pay the bill!"

***Yeeeeek!***

The shrill scream of a woman suddenly pierced the air, and the fight between me, Wizer, and Naga came to a screeching halt.

“What was that?!” cried Wizer.

“It came from outside,” I said. “Let’s check it out!”

“Lina! The bill!” Naga’s voice called after me as Wizer and I flew out of the restaurant, but before she was able to follow, I saw the staff rush out to stop her and collect our payment before she left. Yes! That meant Naga was stuck with the bill after all!

That meant all I had to worry about at that point was dispelling Wizer’s suspicions about my criminal activity. On second thought, maybe it would have been easier to handle the bill, instead...

“Inspector Wizer Freyon of the Royal Special Investigations Bureau!” barked Wizer. “What’s the problem?” Maybe that overblown title of his was useful after all, because the folks around us practically fell over themselves to explain the situation.

“...I don’t know what it was, sir... But it flew off and took a child with it!”

“Which way did they go?” Wizer demanded.

“The waterfront!” yelled another bystander, and Wizer and I simultaneously took off at a run as fast as we could go.

Unlike most of the country, this town actually was facing a body of water – a lake, to be precise. From where Wizer and I were running, I could see the mist rising from the glimmering blue surface in the distance.

“Lina! Wait!” cried a faint voice from behind us. “I paid the bill, but don’t you dare forget to pay me back!” Oh, perfect! Naga! Just the person I *DIDN’T* want to deal with right now! Couldn’t she take the hint?!

“Now’s not the time, Naga! Someone’s been kidnapped!”

She laughed. “And I suppose you’d like to try and get me to forget about the bill in all the confusion!” I missed a step. *Jeez, she can be sharp when it comes to money...!*

“We’ll talk about it later! The kid is more—“

“There!” Wizer cut me off in mid-speech. My eyes snapped back to the front and after scanning the horizon, I managed to make out the quickly moving form

of a creature against the blue sky.

“A lesser demon?!” I cried out before I could stop myself. Flying with its back to an all-too-clear blue sky and moving quickly toward the body of water was, indeed, a lesser demon. And in its arms was a child, no more than three or four years old.

I’d heard stories that lesser demons, a low-class branch of mazoku, were able to sprout wings and fly as the situation called for it, but that was the first I’d ever seen it with my own eyes. I quickly shook my head. Now wasn’t the time for casual observation. I turned to Wizer who was easily keeping pace alongside me as we trailed after the demon.

“You see that?” I shot at him. “There’s your culprit right there, not me!”

“And you could just as easily be controlling it, yourself!” returned Wizer. “For all I know, you could have used some sort of trick to cause the incident while you were being interviewed by an inspector to keep from drawing attention to yourself. Just the sort of thing a common criminal would stoop to!”

I stumbled forward another step. O-Of all the hare-brained, stupid ideas....! He’s hell-bent and determined to pin this all on me!

“Lina! Quit changing the subject!”

“Not now, Naga!” I snapped. Just as the words left my mouth (with a backup-chorus of the same echoing in my head), we reached the edge of the lake. I bit my lip. At this rate, the demon would make off with the kid and there wouldn’t be a damn thing we could do to stop it. I did have a spell in my arsenal that allowed for high-speed flight, but the drawback was that even if I did manage to catch up with the demon, I wouldn’t be able to use any other decent spells while the spell was activated. Worse, if it noticed that I was hot on its trail, it could launch an aerial attack at me, and I wouldn’t have a prayer of deflecting or counterattacking.

I could attack the demon from the shore, but if my aim was even slightly off, I could hit the kid in the process. And even if I did hit just the demon, well, the kid would probably fall and drown in the lake. Which meant....

“Linaaaa,” whined Naga, “The bill!”

“Dammit, Naga!” I roared. “DROP IT!”

“Hah! Fine!” I guess it took me losing my cool for Naga to finally get the hint. She casually flipped her long, black hair over her shoulder. “First, we do something about the current situation, and THEN we’ll talk about the bill!” As soon as the words left her mouth, I heard her begin to recite a spell. And not just any spell...

Hold on, was that an *attack spell*? Did she want to blow the lesser demon out of the sky?! At first I considered delivering a nice, quick kick to her solar plexus to interrupt the spell, but another idea quickly formed in my mind and I began chanting a spell of my own. Naga finished hers, first.

“Gaav Flare!” An attack spell extremely well-suited to delivering fatal wounds to nearly any mazoku. Naga held out her hand, and a blast of red light shot from her palm into the sky, heading straight for the demon. Almost at the same time, I activated the spell I’d finished chanting:

“Ray Wing!” I soared into the air and flew parallel to the red light of Naga’s spell. My plan was to wait until her spell hit the lesser demon, and then snatch the kid out of the air as he fell. The only problem was, as long as the spell was active, it would cast a barrier of wind around the caster, which meant that if the kid got close enough, I wouldn’t save him—I’d more than likely blast him away with the same air surrounding me. In that case, there was only one thing I could do.

As Naga’s Gaav Flare blasted into the lesser demon’s back and vaporized it back to nothing, I twisted myself to fly underneath the falling boy, and then...

I dropped the spell. I held out my arms as the child spiraled downward and caught him as we both plummeted down toward the open lake. The wind howled in my ears as it zoomed past and the surface of the lake loomed bigger and bigger before us—and just before we plummeted into its icy depths, I finished chanting the spell I had begun as soon as I’d canceled the Ray Wing.

“*Levitation!*” I cried, and our speed rapidly decreased to a gentle descent. With the child still in my arms, I corrected myself as we gently floated lower and lower, until it seemed as though I was standing on the surface of the water, hovering in mid-air.

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“You saved the day!”

“That was awesome, lady!”

When I returned to the shore, I was greeted by a mob of cheering onlookers. While not too far away, a mob of a different kind was throwing in their two-cents as well...

“What were you thinking?! That was dangerous!”

“What if you hit my little baby?!”

“Eeek?!”

Naga had been cornered by a couple that looked to be the child’s parents plus a crowd of unsympathetic onlookers. I decided to stick with my side of the party and basked in the praise of the onlookers for a while.

“That was quite the show, Lina Inverse.”

Sometime after the crowd had thinned out, I was approached by Wizer who was wearing an ironic smile on his features. I stared silently at him for several moments before I finally opened my mouth.

“Something tells me none of this changed your mind.”

He chuckled. “Of course it didn’t. But I can surmise your intentions: cause a small incident, resolve it in a way that I, the Inspector, could witness in order to gain my trust and absolve yourself of any suspicion. Another common trick, but the eyes of an Inspector cannot be fooled!”

“Then get ‘em checked for cataracts!” I snapped. “And for that matter—” I jabbed my finger out toward the open water— “if a NORMAL person saw a lesser demon flying that-a-way with a kid in tow, ORDINARILY they’d think, ‘Well gee, maybe it means there’s something out there!’”

“An ordinary way of thinking is ill-suited to an Inspector!”

“Just because your way of thinking isn’t normal that doesn’t mean it’s right!” I snapped. “Heck, look out at the water! Has it occurred to you to wonder WHY there’s all that fog in the middle of the lake even though there’s not a cloud in

the sky and it's the middle of the day?" I demanded. "Don't you think that's just a *little* strange? Why are you investigating me, and not *that*?"

"Trying to dodge the question again, are you?" Wizer chuckled. "I suppose you assumed you would be caught at some point, and caused the incidents in the villages and towns around the lake to instigate a pointless investigation!"

*Wait a minute.*

"Hey..."

"What is it?"

"These... *incidents*," I began slowly, "Are you telling me they've only been in towns and villages facing the water...?"

"Indeed they have," said Wizer. "And what of it?"

I suppressed a groan. *I don't like where this is going*, I thought. "You... *have* investigated the lake... haven't you?"

"Certainly not," he scoffed. "I would never waste my time on such a fruitless search."

As soon as the words left Wizer's lips, I let out a deep breath that seemed to extend from the very bottom of my core. The place practically screams suspicious... and he waves it off...?

"How can you be so incompetent?" I groaned.

"*How dare you?!*" Wizer bellowed. "I'll have you know that even among



the most respected of inspectors, all the local wives agree that I am the sharpest and most able of them all!"

If he was sharpest of the bunch... I shuddered to imagine how the rest of them stacked up. But that was irrelevant. One thing was clear in my mind: Until Wizer

found his imaginary proof for whatever crime I *didn't* commit, I wasn't going to get him off my tail anytime soon. I hated the thought of sticking with him a minute longer than I absolutely had to, but there was literally nothing else I could do.

"Fine," I sighed at last, turning to Wizer.

"Finally willing to confess to your crimes?"

"I'm not confessing to a crime I didn't commit!" I snapped. "But If I prove to you that I'm not the culprit here, then will you finally leave me alone?"

Wizer chuckled. "And how can you find proof that doesn't exist?"

"*Watch* me," I said. "All I have to do is find out whoever really is kidnapping all those children."

"Oh, yes," he laughed. "I'm sure you'd like to make your grand escape by running off to who-knows-where on some wild goose-chase to find this 'real culprit' of yours and disappear just like that, wouldn't you? Oh no, you won't fool me that easily!"

"Oh, for the love of-! If you can't trust me, then feel free to come along for the ride!" I cried. "If it's proof you want, I'll find it. Heck, I'll even throw in some testimonials while I'm at it! Either way, if I find the guy who's really responsible for this, *then* will you be satisfied?!"

"What, this so-called culprit of yours?" He barked a laugh. "Very well. As you wish, I'll play along with this farce of yours. If nothing else, I'm sure you'll slip and give yourself away at some point."

I rolled my eyes. "You'll choke on those words by the time this is over, pal."

"Linaaa," whined a voice next to my ear, "the bill..." But I blew Naga off (really though, how long was she going to keep hanging on to a little thing like that?) as Wizer and I continued to stare daggers at one another.

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Now, as for the actual investigation... Honestly, everything was pretty clear-cut as soon as that *ridiculously* suspicious lake was brought to my attention. I knew that as long as I kept my questions limited to that, we'd get all the answers we

needed. That's not to say we could go around asking questions in every single town and village dotting the countryside in the area, of course; that would be a waste of time, and I wanted this done and over with as quickly as possible. Instead, I needed to narrow my area of investigation to a settlement where none of the kidnappings had taken place, while still being on the lakefront. And there was only one place that fit the bill.

The lake was still covered with fog the day the three of us came to town, appropriately enough.

I kept my line of questioning simple and to the point: First, I needed to know if there were any points of interest inside the fog on the lake, and second, if any ships went into or out from there in fixed intervals. The answers I found were... interesting, to say the least.

According to the townsfolk, there was, in fact, a small island in the middle of the lake, and it'd been several months since the fog had gotten too thick for the fishermen to go out far enough from the shore to fish. As for the ships, well, no one paid enough attention to notice.

On the other hand, the fishermen who lived on the beach couldn't tell me anything; nothing at all, in fact.

"Something is definitely wrong here," I said pensively as I brainstormed with Naga and Wizer around the table of the restaurant on the first floor of the inn we were staying at, some ways away from the lakefront. "They were practically *screaming* it."

Wizer laughed and added sarcastically, "Oh, I'm sure. Leave it to an opportunist to twist a testimony to suit their own means."

"Like *you're* in any position talk about people twisting stories..." I muttered.

Naga cleared her throat. "Lina, if we could return to the subject of that bill? Need I remind you, you still have yet to reimburse me...?"

I'm sorry, did I say brainstorming? Because that would have implied a certain amount of brain activity, which was sadly absent in my present company.

"When in doubt," I said with a glare to shut Naga up about that *damn* bill, "it never hurts to turn to good ol' fashioned footwork! Tomorrow we're renting a

boat, and we're going to that island in the lake to take a look around ourselves!"

"A waste of time," Wizer scoffed. "But I suppose it wouldn't hurt to go along. I am a man of my word, after all."

"Lina, really," Naga persisted. "The bill...?"

I slammed my hands on the table and howled. "For the love of all that is good and *holy*, Naga, can't you give it a rest?! I get it, all right? Look, when we figure out whoever's behind this, I'll give you some of my share of his loot, okay? Would that make it better?"

"Would you, Lina?" Naga exclaimed. "You wouldn't hoard any of it to keep for yourself while I'm not looking, would you?"

"Course not."

All the while, Wizer was looking on with consternation evident on his face. "Ladies," he sighed, "kindly refrain from discussing your dastardly pillaging schemes in front of an Inspector, would you?"

Oops. Time to change the subject!

I cleared my throat. "Well, we're setting sail pretty early tomorrow, so let's hit the sack and get some rest."

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I had a sneaking suspicion that someone wasn't about to let everything go according to plan for us. Turned out I was right.

***KA-BOOOOM!***

Later that night, one of the rooms on the third floor of the inn we were staying at exploded in a furious ball of flame. *My* room. From the darkness of an alleyway near the inn emerged two shadowy figures, whose eager eyes were directed toward the burning wreckage of what was once my room.

The first chuckled darkly. "An easy kill," he said.

"I don't know who you are or where you came from," said the second, "but poke your nose where it don't belong, and this is what's gonna happen to you..."

"Gee, fellas. Sorry I couldn't have put up more of a fight for you."

The men cried out in surprise as their heads snapped up in unison toward the voice above their heads to see the silhouette of a lone figure floating in midair, backed by the crescent moon hanging high in the night sky; the form of the one and only Lina Inverse!

“Now, stop me if I’m wrong,” I said, “but in my experience, nothing shuts a few fishermen up like a threat from some big-time organization. If I made no secret of the fact that I was looking for answers, I figured I wouldn’t have any trouble drawing them out into the open.” Here I paused for emphasis, then smirked. “Glad to see I was right.”

“But you were supposed to be in there!” one of the men cried out in shock. “How did you know we were going to—?!”

“Easy. While I was sitting down with my companions, I couldn’t help but notice the two shady-looking characters eavesdropping from the table next to us. I suspected they might be planning something for later tonight, so I pretended to go back to my room while I kept watch from a safe distance up here.” I grimaced. “In all fairness, though, I wasn’t expecting you to blow it up with a *Fireball*.”

The men cursed under their breath and quickly began to mutter incantations; at the same moment, I dropped my levitation spell to land on a roof nearby, and began to incant an attack of my own. But they were faster.

“Freeze Arrow!”

“Damu Brass!”

Two attack spells simultaneously fired off at me from under the cloak of darkness, both of which I was easily able to dodge thanks to the position of the roof. That’s not to say I was at a complete advantage, of course. From my position I wasn’t able to make out the men clearly, and even if I managed to draw them out far enough to see their faces, I was only giving them that much more of an opportunity to blast me with spells in the meantime.

What they *didn’t* know was that I knew a spell tailor-made for situations like these: the Van Rail. The spell works by extending a vine of ice from the caster’s palm which edges along the ground and over or around walls, freezing anything it comes in contact with. If I used that spell to freeze the men in place, I could jump down, beat the information I needed out of them, and that would be the

end of everything. Everyone lives happily ever after, yadda, yadda, yadda.

I finished chanting the spell and thrust my hand down against the rooftop, when—

“I’ve been looking for you, Lina Inverse!” bellowed a voice in my ear.

“Nwwwhaaa?!” The shriek was out of my mouth before I could stop myself. I whipped around, and don’t ask me how he knew where I was or how he got up there without me noticing, but staring me right back in the face was everyone’s favorite bumbling Inspector—you guessed it—Wizer.

“Wh... What are you doing here?!” I blurted out.

“It is an Inspector’s most sacred right to show up where he is least expected!” he declared.

Of course it was. “Oh, whatever!” I cried, and jabbed my finger down at the alleyway. “Those are the guys who lobbed that Fireball into the inn earlier!”

“Again with your transparent lies,” Wizer scoffed. “I’m more willing to believe you blasted your own room with a Fireball in some scheme to make it seem as though you were murdered by some mysterious outsider, but you cannot cloud this Inspector’s eyes with your petty tricks!”

I let out a wordless cry of frustration. “Would you just LISTEN to me, already?! I’m telling the truth! If you don’t believe me just look down—” I hadn’t even finished my thought before my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth as I was hammered by a sudden realization. The spells had stopped.

The two assassins had vanished.

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“The case’d be closed by now if you hadn’t gotten in my way last night,” I grumbled. “And we wouldn’t have to go out on some stupid boat at this stupid time of morning either.”

“Hah. Still defending that ridiculous display from last night, I see.”

“...Hmph...! That aside, you WILL be paying for breakfast at least, won’t you, Lina?”

The dew was still fresh on the ground as we marched along the lakeside early in the morning after the attack. I wish I could say we'd decided to go on an early-morning stroll, but no; at this unholy hour when every eye in the town was still shut in blissful slumber, we were on a mission to find a boat to ride out to the island in the center of the lake.

"I'm still concerned about this boat-renting business," said Wizer as he kept pace alongside me. "If the local fishermen haven't been going out to fish in the morning, surely they must still be asleep. Given those circumstances, how in the world do you propose we rent one of their craft?"

I closed my eyes and heaved a sigh. "Let me guess. Nothing seems *strange* to you about the fact that they won't go out fishing anymore, does it?"

He sniffed. "I'm offended you would think that. Indeed, I have my own theory on the reason behind it: that Lina Inverse is to blame!"

...Of course he'd say that.

"At any rate, we should get some clear answers once we get to that island. Now, about that boat..." I trailed off as we reached a plethora of ships anchored to the dock, and I made my way to a random craft in their midst. "How's one of these work for you?" I asked as I clapped my hand on the side.

"N... Now wait just a minute!" Wizer cried out, aghast. "Are you suggesting we take one without the owner's permission?!"

"Yeah," I nodded like it was no big deal.

But it made sense. It was obvious at that point that someone was putting pressure on the townsfolk, which made it pretty unlikely that anyone would lend us a boat if we came up to them and asked. Our hands were tied.

"But... But this is theft!"

I snorted. "Of course it isn't. We're temporarily appropriating it to aid in an investigation." If you read between the lines, you could easily see the other meaning of my words: "If anything goes wrong, It's all on you!♥" Luckily for me, Wizer didn't seem very well-versed in the art of double-talk.

"B... But..."

“Look, I know it’s not exactly something an upstanding citizen would do, but the longer it takes us to get this investigation underway, the higher the likelihood that something would happen to those kidnapped children because of it. Are you willing to put them in even more danger?”

“C...Certainly not. By all means...” Wizer gestured his consent with his hand.

“Great. Now let’s set sail!”

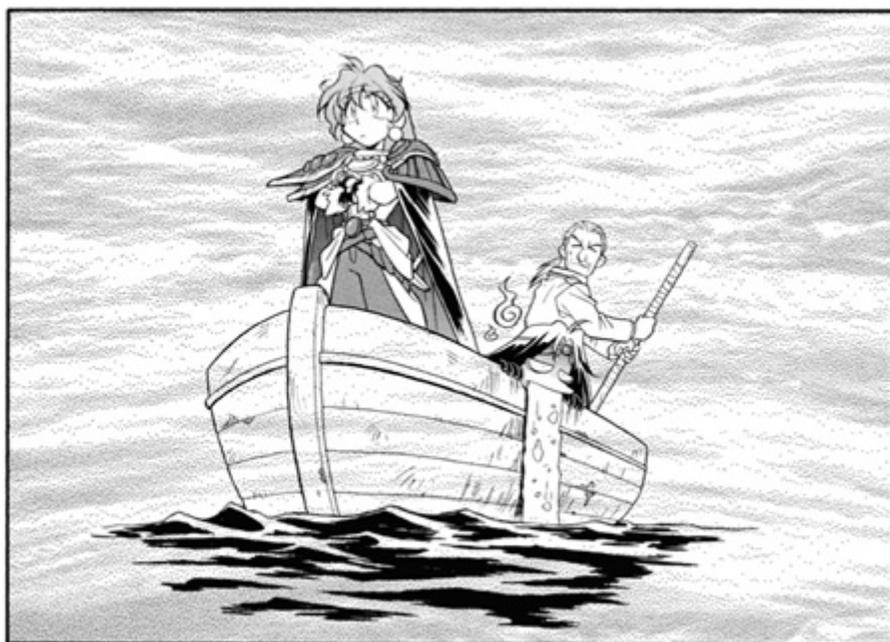
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*Creak...*

*Splash...*

Only the the creaking of the oars and the gentle lapping of waves against the side of the boat broke the silence around us as we continued our journey further into the lake. Every so often you could make out the sound of what I guessed were fish leaping out of the water and splashing back in. Meanwhile, the pure white of the fog remained impenetrably thick all around us.

We were completely cut off from the rest of the world.



The boat we’d appropriated was average, at best. As long as it wasn’t loaded with fish, I suppose it could have handled four people; maybe five, if you were willing to get friendly with your fellow passengers. At the helm of the boat was, of course, Inspector Wizer; if anyone should be doing the muscle-work in this situation, I figured it was fair to leave it to the only guy in the party.

“How much farther is this island...?”

“Dunno. Fog’s too thick to tell,” I said in reply to Wizer as he relentlessly continued to work the oar. Even as I looked around the boat, all I could make out around us was the rippling surface of the water and the white of the fog.

“Hmph! I’m warning you, Lina Inverse, if it turns out you’ve dragged Naga the Serpent all this way for nothing, then I—Aiiieee?!” Naga’s voice pitched as the sound of water splashed around us.

I turned around expecting to see Naga hanging from the side of the boat, but all I saw was the rippling surface of the lake, instead.

I rolled my eyes. “I knew that overblown chest of hers was bound to set her off-balance again at some point...”

***KER-SPLASH!***

No sooner were the words out of my mouth, when suddenly the lake split apart to reveal a sight I wasn’t about to forget anytime soon!

**(Wrongfully Accused: To be continued!)**

**Next chapter Preview**

What was the strange sight that greeted our eyes as soon as the lake split?

Wait awaited us on the island in the middle of the lake?

Will I EVER get Wizer to drop his charges against me?!

And more importantly, am I ever going to make any money on this adventure?!

You might get all the answers you’re looking for in the next chapter—and then again, maybe you won’t! Either way, please stay tuned for Wrongfully Accused: Part 2!

*Slayers Special: Wrongfully Accused (Part One), Written by Hajime Kanzaka  
Translated by rebmastu@gmail.com (9/25/12), commissioned by Anonymous*

# Wrongfully Accused, part 2 (end)

## [Slayers Special: Wrongfully Accused \(Part 2\)](#)

*Slayers Special: Wrongfully Accused (Part Two, end),  
Written by Hajime Kanzaka, Illustrated by Rui Araizumi*

*Published in Slayers Special Volume 9: Elize's Journey*

*Translated by rebmastu@gmail.com (10/22/12), commissioned by Anonymous*

### The Story Thus Far...

***Where we last left off, yours truly, Lina Inverse had been wrongly accused by The Insipid Inspector Wizer Freion of perpetrating a series of kidnappings I didn't commit! Nothing I could say was going to convince him of my innocence, so I set out to clear my name and find the guy who was really responsible in my own full-scale investigation—and I dragged Wizer and Naga both along for the ride. But it turned out somebody thought I was getting too close to the truth for my own good, and set a couple of assassins out for my head! And then later as we made our way to the island where the true culprit lay in wait, the lake split apart to reveal a sight I wasn't about to forget anytime soon!***



**“HIYAAAAA-!** Glurble burble...

***“What in blazes is that?” Wizer cried out at the exact moment Naga let out a cross between a blood-curdling scream and a strange gurgling noise.***

*The “that” in question was probably the enormous tentacle protruding from the surface of the water. I couldn’t have said whether it belonged to a squid or an octopus, but I guess it didn’t matter as much as the fact that wrapped up tightly inside the slimy appendage was Naga’s wriggling body.*

*That was when I realized she hadn’t fallen into the lake—she’d been dragged into it.*

*“It’s a kraken!” Wizer breathed, his voice mixed with shock and awe. To explain, a kraken is a kind of monster that resembles something like a cross between an octopus and a squid, typically found in large bodies of water—seas and large lakes, mainly. Granted, a giant “Octo-Squid” doesn’t seem to be the kind of thing to strike fear into the hearts of even the hardest of seafarers, but the most terrifying part about these creatures isn’t just their mammoth size; it’s the colossal potential for catastrophic destruction that comes with it. Needless to say, it could easily reach over with one of its tentacles, pluck our teeny-tiny fishing boat out of the water and crush it in an instant, and all we could do was roll over and take it.*

*The kraken swung the tentacle that held Naga’s flailing body in its grasp and whipped it forward, sending her soaring through the air—straight at us! What was it trying to do, sink us with a glorified cannonball!?*

*“What are you doing?!” I shrieked. “Diem Wind!” I let loose with the windy spell and sent Naga flying off... well, not where we were, that’s for sure. And really, that’s about all I was concerned with.*

***“EAAAAAAAAAGH...!”***

*Splash.*

*The sound of her body hitting the water was like music to my ears. I chuckled under my breath as a sinister grin spread across my face. Rest in peace, Naga.*



*“Wh-what have you done?!” Wizer cried out, aghast. “That is no way to treat*

***your companions!”***

***“Who, Naga? She’ll be fine,” I said, waving him off. “I’d be more worried about us, if I were you.” The words were barely out of my mouth before the fishing vessel suddenly bucked. The sound of the water splitting apart burst into my ears as another tentacle pierced the surface of the undulating water. Another splash as another tentacle surfaced. Then, another. And another. By the time the lake had stilled, our boat was surrounded by at least ten of the appendages, each standing erect in the water like the bars to a fleshy cage. Then, all of a sudden, they charged toward us as one!***

***My eyes quickly took in the advancing appendages. I couldn’t pick them off one by one; there just wasn’t enough time. I didn’t have any spells in my arsenal that could deal direct damage to the kraken’s main body deep underneath the water, either. What I did have, however, was an idea.***

***“They’re coming right for us!” Wizer exclaimed panic beginning to rise in his voice, and as I cast a glance at him out of the corner of my eye, I began to incant my spell. With a “slap!” of flesh hitting the water, I thrust the palm of my hand down onto the surface of the lake.***

***“Sea Blast!” I bellowed, and the surface of the lake erupted as waves heaved and crested in response to the Power Words. Since the spell was generally used to create just such an effect, I couldn’t expect it to deal any direct damage against the kraken under the lake; however, I could use it to create an opening. Remember, kids! Attack spells aren’t just for attacking!***

***With the water chopping all around us, our ship effortlessly rode the waves and broke through the barrier the tentacles had formed with them powerless to stop us. We’d escaped! Well, for the time being, anyway. The kraken underneath wouldn’t have felt a thing. I know I’d have to face off with its main body at some point, but the question was: How?***

***As I rolled that question around inside my mind, I heard the sound of water rushing from behind us. I looked to see the kraken’s tentacles had recovered and were quickly gaining ground.***

***“They’re coming again!” Wizer hollered over the crashing of the waves. “Do something!” He didn’t have to tell me twice—I was already halfway through***

*incanting my next spell.*

*“Levitation!” As soon as the words left my mouth, our boat began its ascent into the air, carrying us with it.*

*“This is insanity!”*

*“Shut up and hold on to something if you don’t want to fall overboard!” I barked at Wizer’s panicked outburst. We rose ever higher into the air as the tentacles shot after us in pursuit, barely brushing the bottom of the boat as one last push sent us higher than their arms could reach.*

*Wizer looked first to the kraken’s tentacles and then back to me with consternation clearly written on his face. “You’re running away? This is your plan?”*

*“Yeah, well, we didn’t come here to go kraken-hunting,” I answered shortly. “We’re here to investigate that island.”*

*“But surely... No.” Wizer halted, and then met my eyes with a firm gaze and a set jaw. “You cannot let it roam free like this! Imagine the danger it poses for the fishermen back on shore! Tell me, even knowing that you could be putting their lives in danger, will you still stand here and do nothing?” he demanded.*

*“You could always fight it yourself if you wanted, inspector.”*

*Inspector Wizer snapped forward and jabbed his finger toward the island. “Full speed ahead!” he barked.*

*The status quo for humanity, I guess.*

*I rolled my eyes. “Glad we straightened that out. Now let’s talk about—” The roar of water drowned out what I was about to say next. I jerked my head over the side of the ship to search for the source of the noise. “What in the world?” I muttered.*

*Down below us, the tentacles were surging quickly in our direction.*

*“The kraken is surfacing!” Wizer called out. To his credit, he was half right. As the tentacles rose upward, the dark shadow at their root cut along underneath the surface of the water, and with a great splash it leapt from the depths of the lake! But in place of the kraken we’d expected to see was a different beast*

entirely.

**GROAAAAR!**

*The mighty roar of the beast rebounded throughout the lake as a sea serpent burst forth from the water. Attached to its trunk was a number of wriggling tentacles—the ones that had been giving us hell up until that point—it even had a pair of wings sprouting from its back. Needless to say, something that weird doesn't happen without a little helping hand.*

*“Wh-What in-!” Wizer sputtered. Apparently the shock had robbed him of his typical eloquence.*

*“It's a chimera,” I responded to the question he obviously didn't have the facility to ask. “And I'll bet you anything the people on the island are the ones who created it.”*

**RAAAAAAH!**

*With another deafening roar, the chimera reared back, spread its wings wide and began to flap them with earnest. It was... I almost didn't believe my eyes. The thing was flying! Higher and higher it soared, and lower and lower my stomach sank. It was headed straight toward us, and it looked like I would be left with no choice but to fight the thing after all. I fought for control over the floating spell and began to incant another under my breath.*

*“Dolf Zoke!”*

*A spout of water burst forth from the lake, and formed itself into a peerless blade. As soon as it gained speed on the soaring serpent, it lashed out and sliced the beast in two, all in the span of a single heartbeat. The strike was deadly... But the spell wasn't mine. As what remained of the chimera's body deafeningly splashed into the water, an unmistakably, painfully familiar and painfully irritating laugh rang out above the sound of the waves.*

*“Oooh-ho-ho-ho! No one lays hands on Naga the White Serpent and lives, especially not a cretin of a chimera! Reflect on that in the afterworld!”*

*I looked over in the voice's direction, and sure enough, there was Naga, hands on her hips and proud as could be, standing... Wait a minute. On the*

water?

*“Naga, how the hell are you standing on the water?” I asked.*



*“Oooh-ho-ho!” she laughed. “Why, how funny you should ask! You see, after a certain someone blasted me away with a Diem Wind, a passing jellyfish happened to come along and save me from an uncomfortably soggy grave.”*

*Now that she mentioned it, I could barely make out a giant, halfway transparent mass gently undulating with the water under her feet. Well, I’ll be damned... She was telling the truth.*

*Naga chuckled. “Yet another proof of my natural powers of persuasion, I suppose,” she bragged, chest puffed out with pride.*

*I had to stop and think about that one. If she could get a passing jellyfish to come by and rescue her, then what the hell kind of powers of persuasion were we talking about...? I’d come to the conclusion that Naga wasn’t just some ordinary person, in more ways than one, but... well, whatever.*

*“Whatever you say,” I said with a resigned sigh. “But that freak of nature is all the proof I need that there’s some weird stuff going on on that island, and someone doesn’t want us getting close enough to find out what it is.” I thrust my finger forth and pointed to the hazy shape barely visible through the hanging fog. “Now let’s go find out what it is! Land, ho!”*

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*“Oh, yeah. There’s definitely something here...”*

*Strangely enough, we’d managed to make landfall on the island with virtually zero incidents, previous chimera attack notwithstanding. When I first heard about the island, I figured it’d be some Podunk little square of land, so*

*you can imagine my surprise when we landed to see it was bigger than most of the villages we'd visited recently. The point we'd landed on was home to both a wharf and a very sizable number of boats.*

*"Something, surely," said Wizer slowly, looking at me with doubt in his eyes, "But these boats, couldn't they belong to the fishermen back on the shore?"*

*I sighed deeply. Where do I start? "Everyone in town said the fishermen hadn't been here in months. Aside from that, these barely look used, and, hey! Here's a good one! They aren't even fishing boats!"*

*"Indeed..." Wizer murmured as he scrutinized the boats moored to the dock. "Indeed," he repeated, "between the chimera and these boats... I must say, you're very thorough with your diversionary tactics, Lina Inverse."*

*"For crying out loud!" I screamed. "Are you going to warp all of this into my fault?!"*

*"Of course! As I have clearly stated from the very beginning, the piercing intuition and work experience of yours truly has clearly indicated that you, Lina Inverse, are the culprit in this case!"*

*"Your intuition is about as sharp as a rusty hammer! As sharp as..." I trailed off. You know, I was tired of fighting with him. "Oh, whatever," I sighed. "If you didn't believe me before, I doubt you're going to start now. I'm gonna love hearing what you have to say about that once we'll turn this island upside-down, though."*

*He snorted. "And I can hardly wait to hear the excuses you will undoubtedly make once our search turns up nothing at all."*

*"Oh, we'll see who's laughing once this is done and over with! And once we have this culprit under lock and key, I want to see you come crawling back on hands and knees to beg for my forgiveness!"*

*Naga cleared her throat. "More importantly, Lina, I'm expecting a raise on my cut of whatever treasure we find in return for that stunt you pulled in the lake."*

*The three of us continued to bicker back and forth as we made our way toward the center of the island. To be honest, I didn't have the first clue where*

*the criminals' hideout was, but since they didn't bother trying to lead us away from the boats or the wharf, I had a sneaking suspicion that they already had something else in place further up the way to stop us. Sure, it sounds like trouble, but at least we wouldn't have to wander the entire island trying to find the place.*

*"Alright, alright! Let's get back on topic," I finally said. "The entrance to their hideout has to be somewhere around here. I know the fog's not going to make it easy, but keep your eyes peeled for anything—" The words froze in my throat. Something was here, alright. And it was out for blood. I could feel it. I whipped around with a strangled gasp to see several red dots of light form out of the fog. Was that—?*

**ROOOOAR!**

*As soon as the beastly howl reached my ears, the red dots burst forth and started speeding straight for us! I leapt to the side without a moment's hesitation, and not a second too soon. The hairs bristled on the back of my neck as I watched a team of Flare Arrows blast through the space we had occupied just a fraction of a second before with a shrill whistle. Any slower and I wouldn't have gotten away with just a singed hair.*

**"YEEEEK?!"**

*...Alright, so one of us wasn't so lucky. Oh well, not my problem! I pushed that niggling little thought aside and I began to incant my counter-spell. But before I could finish, I was interrupted.*

*"What business do you have here?" asked the disembodied voice of a man from where the flaming arrows had shot.*

*"Oh, I think you know what we're here for," I said. "Nothing says 'guilty conscience' like sending a couple of assassins to kill me in my sleep, or setting that guard-dog you call a chimera on the lake to keep us out of here."*

*The voice was silent for a moment before it spoke again. "Fair enough... But what concern is it of yours what we do here?"*

*"We've come to take the children you kidnapped home to their parents, of course!" Wizer spat in the voice's direction before I had a chance to open my*

**mouth. Well, I'll be damned. It looked like he'd finally opened himself to reason. "Even if you are Lina Inverse's cohorts!"**

**So much for that idea.**

**"I don't know what you're talking about... But now that you're here, I'm afraid I can't let you leave." At the voice's words, a lone figure slowly emerged from the white shroud around us. It was a lesser demon. It dawned on me that the thing was probably responsible for the arrows, but why was he sending out just one? What kind of joke did this guy take me for? I mean, sure, a lesser demon would pose a threat to any average swordsman or sorcerer, but to a master swordswoman and gifted sorceress such as the one and only Lina Inverse, it offered a woefully weak foil.**

**"Just one?" I scoffed. "Are you sure that's all it's gonna take to handle me?"**

**The voice chuckled. "I'm sure it would pose no threat for you," it agreed, shockingly enough. "That is, if it were an ordinary lesser demon..."**

**I rolled my eyes. "Bluffing's not going to help your case," I said. "It looks like an ordinary lesser demon from here."**

**"Oh, certainly it looks like one... In terms of ability, it's identical."**

**"Are we getting a point here?"**

**"My point is that its existence is what sets it apart. A typical lesser demon would be summoned from another plane via spell, but this... this was a product of painstaking research. It was created using something else as its base... Why else would you think we were kidnapping those children...?"**

**"...What?"**

**"You heartless scoundrels!" cried Wizer at the same time. "How could you do such a thing?!"**

**But the voice only continued. "Indeed... Using children who had not yet developed their own sense of self as base upon which we built, we were able to transform them into lesser demons. That is the basis of the research we have conducted here, the fruit of which is standing right before you."**

**"I've heard some shaky bluffs in my time, but that takes the cake," I said with**

**a grimace. The guy had to be lying.**

**“...How do you figure?”**

**“You don’t need to create them, for one thing. If you used lesser demons directly to kidnap the children, which you did, then that tells me that either you or one of your friends can use demon-summoning spells. That means this research you’re talking about wouldn’t be worth the time and money it would take to not only kidnap a child, but to conduct the research in the first place.”**

**“Demons will obey no one but the sorcerer who summoned them,” the voice answered immediately, completely unfazed. “Ultimately they are useful only in the way that a tradesman might use his tools. However, say certain conditions were fulfilled that would create a demon which obeyed any command given to it? Couldn’t a group of such creatures be applied as the ultimate fighting force? What we are doing here is creating weapons of warfare from demons. Simply put, the most efficient means of creating said weapons happens to be human children. Call it a bluff if you will, but all you will find when you kill that demon before you is the body of a dead child.”**

**I gritted my teeth, and next to me I could hear Wizer doing the same. Well, at least we agreed on something.**

**“If we’re finished talking now,” the voice continued in an almost bored voice, “I think it’s time for you to die. Kill them!”**

**The demon answered with a roar and summoned another round of the Flare Arrows. Wizer and I leapt off to avoid the oncoming hail, but every time we managed to dodge one barrage, another followed straight on its tail as the demon relentlessly hammered at us.**

**It had us cornered. I could have obliterated the demon three times over under normal circumstances, but if there was any truth at all to what the disembodied voice was claiming, this demon used to be a scared little boy or girl. I might not be what you call a paragon of morality, but I’d never sleep again with a child’s blood on my hands.**

**“What’s the matter?” The voice cackled as we struggled to outmaneuver the constant barrage. “You’ll never get anywhere with all that running around! But of course, you’d never be able to defeat that demon, anyway!”**

*I heard a soft chuckle. “Oh, are you sure about that?” said the last voice I ever wanted to hear under the circumstances. Before Wizer or I could say a thing to stop it—*

*“Dynast Breath!” In the blink of an eye, and with a crackling sound that turned my stomach, the demon’s body had frozen into a block of ice. In the next... it shattered into a million pieces, and a shower of white dust fell to the ground.*

*My stomach dropped to my feet.*

*“What have you done?!” Wizer cried out, his voice pitched high with fury.*

*Naga being Naga, it was impossible to tell whether she had heard either of us or not. She lifted her hand to her mouth and infuriatingly began to laugh. “Oooh-ho-ho-ho! There! I defeated your demon for you! Better people than you have tried to challenge Naga the White Serpent, and better than you have failed! Try again in ten years’ time!”*

*“Th... That’s impossible! How did you know I was lying?” the voice cried out in ... Wait.... Lying?!*

*“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” I hollered. “Do you mean to tell me that was a bluff?!”*

*The voice made a strangled, irritated growl, and that was the last he spoke.*

*“Oooh-ho-ho-ho!” Naga laughed. “He must have realized the folly of his ways and run in shame!”*

*Wizer harrumphed appreciatively. “Truth be told, I’d had you written you off as extra baggage until this point, but after how quickly you saw through his ruse, I must say you’ve forced me to reevaluate my opinion of you!”*

*Naga puffed out her chest even more at Wizer’s praise. “Oh ho-ho-ho!” she laughed for a few more moments, and then trailed off. “...What lie would that be, again?”*

*Wizer and I were shocked into silence.*

*“The story about the kidnapped children being used to create the demons...” Wizer slowly explained. Naga drew her eyebrows together in confusion.*

*Wait a minute. Don’t tell me...*

***“...Just asking, Naga, but when that demon first attacked us and you took the hit, did you get... knocked out, by any chance?”***

***She chuckled softly. “Well, yes. When I came to, you were both running around like your lives depended on it. I heard someone saying ‘You can’t defeat this demon,’ or some absurd thing like that, so I decided to handle the job myself.”***

***“So that’s what they mean by ‘a lucky hit,’” I mused.***

***“At least it was only a bluff,” Wizer added with a resigned sigh.***

***“At any rate,” I said after we all had a moment to absorb our astounding good fortune, “at least now we know their base of operations is somewhere nearby, and that means the children probably are, too. I know the guy was bluffing about the demons, but I’m willing to bet he wasn’t lying when he told us what they were really up to. Now let’s get moving and rescue those kids before they turn ‘em into lab rats!”***

***\*\*\*\*\****

***KA-BOOM!***

***The wreckage of what used to be the door to the enemy lair exploded around me after I blasted it to pieces with a well-placed attack spell. The second-rate camouflage hiding it never stood a chance. I peered down a stairway leading underground, and saw a long, white corridor lit by the luminescent moss lining its walls at the bottom. Not a soul was around.***

***“Coast is clear. Let’s go!” I called over my shoulder to Naga and Wizer as I quickly descended the staircase.***

***As I ran headlong down the corridor, there was one niggling thought I couldn’t get out of the back of my mind. Normally you’d expect hideouts like this to be outfitted with all sorts of traps—arrows flying out of the walls, trap doors opening through the floor, that kind of thing, right? Yet for some reason, this place didn’t seem to have anything like that. Maybe the people running the joint didn’t care to set it up that way, or maybe they never dreamed that anyone would have made it this far to begin with, I didn’t know. Then again, if Wizer was the status quo for inspectors in this country, I couldn’t imagine any***

*of the local criminals felt particularly threatened enough to think that far ahead. Not that I blame them...*

*The three of us continued down the corridor in silence for several minutes until a familiar voice stopped us in our tracks.*

*“Somehow I knew you stubborn people would find your way here,” said the same disembodied voice that spoke to us from the fog, seemingly out of thin air.*

*“Where are you? Show yourself!” Wizer demanded as we screeched to a halt in the middle of the hallway.*

*“Calm down,” I said. “He’s probably using some kind of speaking tube.”*

*“Well deduced,” said the voice. “But since you’ve made it this far, you leave me with no choice but to make a stand myself.”*

*“Really? Now that’s thinking with your head,” I said.*

*“I say enough with the tricks,” said the voice. “We settle this here and now; me and my people against you and yours. Go straight down this hallway and enter the first stone door on your right. We finish things there. I’ll be waiting.”*

*“Sounds like a plan to me. I’ll go.”*

*“It could be a trap,” Wizer warned. “In fact, I have a very good idea that it is.”*

*“Oh, I know it is,” I responded with a grin. “And that’s why we’re going.”*

*Wizer just looked at me, brows furrowed. “But it’s ludicrous...”*

*“Oooh-ho-ho-ho! Well done, Lina! You’ve finally learned the meaning of ‘aesthetics!’” Naga spread her cape with a flourish and posed dramatically. “To burst into your enemy’s stronghold, even knowing a trap lies on the other side! To claim victory against all odds! That is the way of... Oh, Lina! Don’t leave me behind!” Naga called after me as I walked off on my own. What, you thought I was going to sit around listening to her stupid speeches while I could be getting things done? Wizer and Naga quickened their pace to catch up with me, and before long, our merry little party stumbled upon the door the voice had directed us to earlier.*

***“Wait! Surely you don’t mean to go through with this?” Wizer demanded. Jeeze. Guy can’t take a hint, can he? I ignored his protests, and concentrated on casting a spell.***

***“Vu Vraimer.” Sure enough, a low rumbling issued forth from the stone walls of the corridor as they began to twist and warp in response to my spell, giving birth to a single, good-sized golem, almost wide enough to fill out the hallway. I stood it in front of the doorway, and shoved the door open from the side. Instantly—***

***VWOOOSH!***

***Countless – a hundred, maybe more—Flare Arrows shot out from inside the room and exploded against the golem’s body!***

***They tried to ambush us! I stayed my position until there was a momentary lull in the barrage and quickly shot my head around the corner to take a look around. Inside was a huge room that may or may not have been a storehouse at some point, and stationed right in the center were about ten sorcerers, plus just as many of those twisted chimera creatures to go along with them. So the plan was to concentrate the heavy artillery here, lure us in, and then take us down without breaking a sweat. And how well that worked out for them. I noted that the doorway I was standing in was the only way in or out of the room.***

***As soon as I was satisfied with my split-second surveillance, I quickly shut the door and turned to the golem. “Sit with your back against the door and don’t let anyone out for any reason,” I ordered. Just another one of my favorite techniques: Pretend to take up a challenge, then use it as an excuse to hunt down the big guns and lock ‘em away!***

***“Oh, come on!” hollered a familiar voice from a hidden pipe stashed who-knows-where. “I thought we agreed to settle things!”***

***“Who’s ‘we’? I said I’d go, and that was it. But if we’re talking about people not keeping their word here, I noticed you weren’t in there. What’s up with that, huh? Content to leave the dirty work to your lackeys while you take the high ground and watch from afar?”***

***“W-What makes you think I wasn’t there?!” the voice sputtered.***



***“Easy. There weren’t any demons.” The voice said nothing, so I continued. “See, if we put together all of the pieces, it’s obvious by now that you were the one who summoned and was controlling the demon during our run-in earlier. Now, if you were in this room, I think your major concern would be with fortifying your offensive power, so you would have summoned at least one, if not two demons to tip the odds in your favor. But since there wasn’t even one in there, I’d say that makes it pretty clear you weren’t, either. Oh, and by the way? Adding that to the fact that you wanted us killed right here, well, it wouldn’t take a genius to figure out that you’re somewhere down this hallway, too. So sit tight and get ready, ‘cause I’m comin’ to getcha!♥” I turned to my companions with a wide grin. “Let’s knock on some doors, gang!”***

***“Indeed!”***

***“Lina, wait! What about the treasure?!”***

***“We’ll ask about it once we find him!”***

***Naga barked a laugh. “The sooner the better then!”***

***We left the golem where it sat and raced down the hallway. Starting on one side, we started bashing in every door we came across in sequence. If there was nothing inside, we moved on to the next door, and so on. Just as I opened the door to the last room—***

***VRRRN!***

***“Whoa?!” I involuntarily cried out as a cluster of Flare Arrows blazed just a hair’s breadth from my nose, close enough to feel the heat. Half a step further and that would have been a direct hit right to the side of my face... I shuddered. I’d barely had time to consider a life bereft of one of my most prized assets when a voice cried out. But this time, he wasn’t speaking through a pipe***

system.

***“Don’t move!”***

***I glanced around the room and quickly spied a heavy iron door to the side. Standing before it was a gangly stick of a sorcerer, and with him was the stock-still form of a lesser demon.***

***“Aah. At last we come face-to-face, boss-man.”***

***“I said, don’t move!” the sorcerer squeaked. His face was ashen pale and his eyes bulged with terror as he thrust his hand back against the iron door with a jerky motion, fumbling for some kind of lever installed in the side. “The children you’re looking for are just behind this door! Do you have any idea what will happen if I pull this lever? Do you?!”***

***“Ragna Blast.”***

***SHOOO-KOOM!***

***I waited for the sorcerer to finish his spiel before I cast my attack and blasted the lesser demon back to the darkness from whence it came. “I’ll tell you what will happen once you pull that lever: Not a damn thing. It’s just another one of your stupid bluffs.”***

***“Wha... But...” The sorcerer sputtered. Clearly, he wasn’t expecting me to see through it so easily.***

***“See, from your point of view, those children are essential to your research. Given the fact that you don’t have this place outfitted with a single, solitary trap—a dead giveaway that you’ve never even considered the possibility of anyone breaking in here, by the way—that only tells me you wouldn’t dream of outfitting the room you use to hold the kids with any crazy traps, either.”***

***The sorcerer looked at me silently for several heartbeats. He was quietly measuring me, I felt. “That settles that, I suppose,” he simply said. “You win.” I obviously had backed him into both a literal and proverbial corner, but strangely enough, he didn’t seem so terrified anymore. In fact, he almost seemed a little... relieved. Was it something I said? “But remember this,” he added. “You haven’t heard the last from us.”***

***“Oh, I think we have.” Wizer barged in the room with all the office he could muster, and moved past me to stand in front of the man and his iron door. “I, Inspector Wizer Freion, have born witness to the details of your wrongdoings, to which the traveling sorceress Lina Inverse here will surely attest, having heard your confessions of guilt as well.”***

***“What?!” The sorcerer’s eyes bulged. “I-Inspector?! But that’s impossible! No Inspector would come here!”***

***...How do you figure?***

***“Impossible or not, here I stand. Concoct all the lies you can muster, and please, feel free to corroborate your story with your co-conspirators. Now that your heinous operation has been revealed, help will never come to save you. That, I guarantee.”***

***...Wait, what?***

***At Wizer’s accusation, the color drained completely from the sorcerer’s face as he slumped to the ground in despair.***

***—So in the end, we foiled the villains’ plot, and the children were safely taken into custody.***

***And the treasure? Well... there wasn’t any.***

***\*\*\*\*\****

***“Well, you had me fooled,” I admitted to Wizer several days after the case was solved as we sat together in a cramped corner of the restaurant he’d come to visit us at.***

***“Hm? I’m not sure I know what you mean,” Wizer innocently remarked as he sipped at a fragrant cup of tea, content, as always, to play the fool.***

***“The Kingdom of Ruvinagald itself was behind this incident, wasn’t it?” I asked flippantly. Wizer froze with the cup to his mouth, and Naga seemed to be holding her breath. “Well, that or someone of high rank within the kingdom,” I added. “But judging by the way the fishermen were walking on eggshells, it had to be someone with a tremendous amount of clout. I mean, if you just look at the whole ‘incompetent detective’ act, plus the facility itself, and add the***

***way the sorcerer said there was no way an inspector could be there... It sounds weird, doesn't it? You don't say 'there's no way' unless you've got some facts backing that up. What that told me was that whoever was backing the operation, man, woman, or organization, they had to have strong ties to the kingdom's Special Investigations Bureau, too."***

***"Hold on, Lina. If, and I stress if, the country itself was behind it, then why in the world would they do something so foolish as to use their own children as fodder for those demons?"***

***"Think about it, Naga. They have no center of commerce, and there's nothing to draw in tourists, either. That equates to no foreign source of income. The only natural resource they have to barter with is the Ruvina Cedar for boat-building, and even that isn't all that profitable, nor is it inexhaustible. If they don't find a different source of income, and fast, then the country of Ruvinagald's got a one-way ticket to bankruptcy.***

***"My thought is that the solution they came up with was the artificial production of demons that just about anyone could control. Now, whether they wanted to sell them as a commodity to other countries, use them within their own borders, or use them as an instrument to wage war themselves, I don't know.***

***"Sure, they could have used children from other countries, but then they'd risk attracting attention from local authorities, and they wouldn't be able to avoid inquiries forever. Then it explodes into international conflict. So instead, it was in their best interests to steal children from the common folk instead, since it would be easier to cover up, and even if the investigations bureau was to launch an inquiry, there wouldn't be much they could do about it once the country started putting pressure on them to cease and desist. Does that sound about right, inspector?"***

***"Hm?" Wizer averted his eyes innocently.***

***"You said it, yourself. 'Help will never come to save you.' In short, you knew, or at the very least suspected, he was receiving funding at the national level, which meant that if you wanted to continue the investigation, you would more than likely face strong opposition from people with a lot of influence. And***

*when you heard that I'd stopped in the country, you latched on to the smallest excuse you could find and accused me of perpetrating the crime myself. That way, the higher-ups would write it off as some wild goose chase, and you'd be free from worry that the people at the top would catch wind. Instead, that would create a situation where I was the one doing the investigative work, and you were simply tagging along. The reason you held me off when I had those assassins cornered at the inn was because you didn't want me to jeopardize the operation by cutting off the proverbial tail of the lizard for a couple of underling assassins. Looking at it that way, a lot of other things start to make sense, too. So basically, you pretended to be an incompetent oaf while you played me like a fiddle. I guess that stuff about you being the sharpest inspector on the force wasn't a complete lie, was it?"*



*"H... Hold on, Lina," Naga said slowly. "Wouldn't that mean we...?"*

*I simply shrugged. "You got it," I said. "We got worked for free. Isn't that right, Mr. Wizer?"*

*"Hm. Well, I'm still not sure what you're talking about," said Wizer, but I could see just the faintest twinkle of a smile in his eyes. I couldn't help but grin.*

*"Oh, alright. If you're so bent on playing the fool, I'll let you. But I'll tell you what: You cover our tab here, and we'll call ourselves even for helping you with your investigation. Deal?"*

*"Oh," said Wizer, "if that's all you want, then by all means..." At Wizer's go-ahead, Naga and I looked at each other and shared a wide grin.*

*Needless to say, between me and Naga, we ate and drank until Wizer finally*

***leapt from his seat with tears in his eyes, begging us to stop.***

**\*\*\*\*\***

***Oh, right. I guess I should mention that sometime later during a dispute with another country, the whole incident with Ruvinagald came to light and the royal family was dethroned, so that ended well, at least.***

***...Even if I didn't make a single, solitary coin from it...***

***(Wrongfully Accused: The End)***

***Slayers Special: Wrongfully Accused (Part Two), Written by Hajime Kanzaka  
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