

戦司書 神の石剣

Tatakau Sisho to Kami no Sekiken

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スーパーダッシュ

Tatakau Shisho

vol.4 - Fighting Librarians And The God's
Stone Sword

by Yamagata Ishio

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Characters

Cigal
シガル

神溺教団の一員。



Lascall
ラスコール

謎の「本」屋。神溺教団に関わっているようだが、その正体は不明。



Alma
アルマ

神溺教団の一員。シガルの敵を討つために、ラスコール＝オセロを探している。

Parney
パーニー

世界的な女優。八年前、何者かに殺害された。



Lascall

A mysterious Book seller. Seems to be involved with the Indulging God Cult, but his identity is unknown.

Cigal

A member of the Indulging God Cult.

Alme

A member of the Indulging God Cult. She is looking for Lascall Othello in order to avenge Cigal.

Parney

A world-famous actress. She was murdered by someone eight years ago.

戦司書 神の石剣

Tatakau Jisho to Kami no Sekiken

characters

Mattalast
マツアラスト

武装司書。二丁拳銃と
予知能力の使い手。
ミレポックに何かを隠
しているようだが……

武装司書

Hamyuts
ハミユツツ

バンツーラ図書館館長
代行。投石器を操る。
極めて好戦的で、冷酷
な女性。

Mirepock
ミレポック

武装司書。思考共有能
力を持つ真面目な少女。
ラスコール＝オゼロの
調査に出向く。



Mattalast

Armed Librarian. Proficient in using two guns and his Predictive ability. He seems to be hiding something from Mirepoc, but...

Hamyuts

Acting Director of Bantorra Library. Controls a sling. She is aggressive and extremely ruthless.

Mirepoc

Armed Librarian. A serious girl with the ability of Thought Sharing. She is investigating Lascall Othello.

Prologue: Corpse On A Rainy Night

“The newspapers are going to make a fuss over this.”

A man said. He seemed to be around fifty years old. He had a firm, barrel-like body.

“Well, it is astounding. Even I find this hard to believe.”

A voice answered him. It belonged to a man about half the age of the other one. They both wore grey hats of the same type. The hat of the middle-aged man was fittingly worn out, and the hat of the young man was brand-new. They were the kind of hats worn by the sheriffs of Ismo Republic.

The two men were sheriffs working in Fullbeck City, Ismo Republic.

The middle-aged man was called Moody. The young man was called Kalon.

It wasn't yet night-time. Since they were standing in street corner while it was drizzling and had no umbrellas, droplets of water trickled down the brim of their hats.

“It's quite horrible.”

Moody said. His eyes were unmoving from the corpse at his feet.

It was a woman. How long had she been left in the rain? Her soft silken slip-dress was as wet as if it had fallen into a river. Her flowing blood mixed with rainwater, dyeing the surroundings in a thin red.

The corpse had no head.

“It’s my first time... seeing a headless body. It’s just like some suspense movie.”

Kalon said. He saw the severed head at the edge of his vision. It was lying about three meters away. He stared at the face which became deathly pale.

“If this were a movie, we would be the leading actors, right?”

Kalon cracked a joke with a twisted voice.

“Stupid, we would obviously have only minor roles.”

Moodly retorted, his voice calm.

They both knew that corpse. They have seen her face countless of times. Sometimes she was an Armed Librarian. Sometimes she was an ancient queen. Sometimes she was a detective. Sometimes she was a thoughtless cheating wife. They have seen her displayed on the white screen among the hustle and bustle of the cinema countless of times.

Her name was Parney Parlmanta. There were none who didn’t know her name in the movie capital of Fullbeck.

“Come here.”

Said Moodly.

“Take a look at that wound.”

The two crouched down and looked into it.

“Do you see?”

“What am I supposed to see?”

Moodly pointed at the cut surface.

“Both flesh and bones were sliced off in a straight line.”

“...Right.”

“The neck has some pretty hard bones. Even if someone tries to decapitate a person, they would have to use a saw or some heavy blade. In both cases, there would be some unevenness in the lines of the wound.”

“What does that mean?”

“Whoever killed her wasn’t a normal person. It was someone who can use Magic.”

“...So, does that mean some big organization is on the move?”

“Either some big-shots of the underworld or some national organization.”

“Perhaps... an Armed Librarian?”

The two locked gazes. Either way, it was not at a level they could handle. They had no training in Magic; they were normal people.

“Let us preserve the scene and leave it for Central Security.”

“I agree.”

The two took sheets out of their government-sanctioned hopper car and covered the corpse. One for the body and one for the head.

When they finished preserving the site, Kalon went back to contact the authorities. Moodly stayed behind.

The middle-aged man stepped into the building’s shadow and took out a moist cigarette. Both cigarette and his matchsticks became wet in the rain and

were thus useless.

Almost every murder case can be solved by excavating the corresponding Book. If they were able to find Parney's Book they would probably immediately solve it all. Just as Moody thought about this, he heard someone's footsteps coming from behind.

"...Who is it!"

Moody pulled out a pistol. He regretted his decision to stay behind.

If the criminal had also remained behind, he would become a target for them. Startled, he went closer for cover.

"Are you also looking for Lascall Othello?"

The person in front of him spoke. It was a man's voice.

"Don't move!"

As he turned the gun's muzzle to the man, Moody saw him.

He had no face. The man wore a mask. The mask had no eyes or mouth. He couldn't see in front of him... He shouldn't be able to see.

The faceless man carefully looked at Moody. Moody could feel that he was looking at him from beneath the mask.

“...A sheriff, huh. You arrived faster than I thought.”

“Don’t move!”

The faceless man didn’t hold anything. However, Moodly could understand – he was on a different level. Even if he were to fight that man using a tank, it wouldn’t help at all.

“Don’t move...”

But he was still a sheriff who served for many years. As such, he couldn’t do anything but try to apprehend the criminal. Moodly kept saying the same words although he knew it was meaningless.

“Don’t move.”

“The sheriffs of this city are excellent. Worthy of praise.”

“...Don’t move.”

“Oh excellent sheriff. Unfortunately, this case will not be solved.”

Moodly instinctively replied.

“Why?”

“Because the case was just now solved. The death of this pitiful actress is the end of the incident.”

“...What do you mean?”

“She went searching in the darkness. She touched on things that mustn't be touched upon. That pitiful woman received her punishment and lost her life.”

“...I don't get it.”

“You mustn't.”

The faceless man said.

“Oh excellent sheriff. You are tasked with protecting this city. You mustn't explore the darkness. You should stay in the light.”

Saying this, the man departed.

“Good-bye. I pray for your good health.”

“Wait!”

The faceless man turned around.

“Who is Lascall Othello?”

“...I will now give you a chance to take back your words.”

“I didn’t hear anything. I don’t know anything.”

As expected, the day after, newspapers were filled with articles about the murder of Parney Parlmenta. However, no matter where Moodly looked, he couldn’t find any information pertaining to the man known as Lascall Othello.

Eight years passed since then – enough time for the incident to be forgotten.

There was the smell of coffee in the air. Freshly brewed, hot, thin coffee. It helped awaken his body that became heavy with alcohol the previous day.

Who’s making it? Mattalast Ballory opened his eyes while thinking this. His daily routine was to boil water as soon as he woke up.

Holding his slightly aching head, Mattalast raised his body. Just as he did so, he heard the voice of a woman coming from the kitchen.

“Oh, are you awake, Matt?”

Oh, thought Mattalast. The voice he heard was well-known to him.

“Did you stay here, Hammy?”

Mattalast got off the bed as he scratched his head. He slipped his bare feet into shoes and headed for the kitchen.

“Sorry for intruding. Do you remember yesterday?”

Hamyuts said while tilting the pot of coffee. She tied her long hair in a ponytail so it wouldn't interrupt with her work and wore an apron she pulled out of somewhere. She didn't look like the world's strongest warrior at all. She seemed nothing more than a sloppily-dressed housewife.

“Mmm, not really.”

Mattalast answered.

“Didn't we drink a bit after work yesterday? Your house was closer. Since it was troublesome going back, I stayed overnight.”

So that's it, Mattalast thought as he reached the table. Hamyuts placed the steaming mug in front of him.

They were in Mattalast's house at Bantorra Library's downtown. In this unglamorous apartment made of white bricks, there were a slightly narrow kitchen, a study, a bedroom, a storage room and a living room. It was more or

less of the size for one person to live in.

Generally speaking, Armed Librarians were highly paid. With someone near the top like Mattalast, he could afford a house ten times bigger, but he had no interest in it. He only thought about how bothersome it would be to clean it up.

The preparations for breakfast were mostly done. A pan was steaming on top of the gas stove and bread was heating up in the toaster. On the table was a salad made out of fresh vegetables with only vinegar and salt. Next to it were walnut butter and chocolate sauce.

“How much for the eggs?”

“Four minutes for two eggs.”

Staring at the clock’s second hand, Hamyuts put three eggs into the pan.

It’s been a long time since someone made breakfast for me, Mattalast thought.

“Oh?”

Looking at Hamyuts’s chest, Mattalast raised his voice.

“What is it?”

“You don’t have your usual bunny.”

“It’s your shirt.”

Saying this, she laid a spoon and a butter knife in front of him. Now that she mentioned it, the shirt did seem bigger than her usual clothes.

“Hammy, wash it and return it to me later.”

“Of course.”

Then, the toaster made a clank, and the slightly burned bread jumped out vigorously.

“The eggs are not done yet, but eat.”

Saying so, Hamyuts sat in front of Mattalast.

It has been two months since Mokkaia’s revolt. It was a morning that was more boring than peaceful on Bantorra’s island.

“Come to think of it, what about her?”

Hamyuts started talking while stabbing her spoon in the soft-boiled eggs.

“Who do you mean?”

Several women rose to Mattalast’s mind.

“I don’t know her name, but she’s a normal librarian with blonde hair. Isn’t it bad if I’m here?”



Mattalast answered along with a sigh.

“We broke up. A long time ago.”

“So as usual you can’t last long.”

“Can’t be helped. I’m a liar after all.”

Mattalast smiled wryly.

“So you don’t have anyone right now?”

“I’ve hurt enough girls by now.”

“Stop screwing around.”

Hamyuts said with a fed-up expression.

After that, they haven’t conversed for a while. In that time, Mattalast ate one egg and a toast and finished half his coffee. Hamyuts was carefully eating around the shells stuck to the white of the egg.

Then, suddenly, Mattalast spoke in a low voice.

“Director.”

Hamyuts raised her face. He switched from “Hammy” to “Director”. That was not the name he gave to his old friend who was also his past lover. When he called her like that, their relationship became that of Bantorra Library’s Acting Director and her confidant.

“What?”

Just a slight tinge of tension was mixed in her lazy-sounding voice.

“Did you think about Mirepoc?”

Hamyuts sighed as she placed the egg shells on top of the plate.

“You should eat slowly during breakfast.”

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten about it just because I’m so easygoing.”

Hamyuts took a sip of coffee.

“I told you to think about it overnight.”

“...That’s true.”

Hamyuts’s relaxed facial expression changed. A cold light gleamed in her eyes and she gave off a ferocious feeling. It was her expression as an Acting Director

that was normally seen by other Armed Librarians. The smells of the toast and coffee mixing together gave Mattalast the illusion of a smell drifting along to a carnivorous animal.

“Are you still hesitating?”

“Yeah.”

Hamyuts sighed with the coffee cup in her hand. That was also unusual – a predator hesitating.

Mattalast lowered his cup on the table and stood up, interrupting the meal. He headed for the terrace and looked outside the window.

“You know this, Director. Right now, Mirepoc is essential for us.”

Mattalast said. The face of that junior Armed Librarian rose to his mind.

“She probably hasn’t noticed her importance to us. She doesn’t know about it so she wouldn’t be in a position to direct our strategies.”

“Right. That girl seems to worry about the fact she isn’t really strong.”

Hamyuts mumbled.

“Really, she should leave those kinds of jobs to us.”

“You’re still young. Her, too.”

Mirepoc Finedell. She was a novice Armed Librarian who became nineteen this year. Hamyuts pulled her out from being an officer cadet of the Guinbex Imperial Army. She was a far too serious girl with a military temperament.

Her ability was that of Thought Sharing. If she knew the name and face of a person, she could freely send her thoughts to them. If the other party was also in possession of a Magic Right, they were also able to send back their thoughts like a telegraph. While that ability had no use in direct combat, it was extremely useful, just as Mattalast had said.

She had contributed from behind the scenes to the Dragon Pneumonia incident, the Monster incident, as well as Mokkania’s revolt.

“Director. There’s no way you’re not aware of how much we need her Thought Sharing ability. We cannot afford to lack Mirepoc in the upcoming battles.”

“...I’m well aware of that.”

Mattalast tried to keep talking, but Hamyuts took over the conversation.

“I know that ability is precious. And she’s one of the very few who have reached that level. Moreover, if she would acquire a battle strength that could be relied upon she would have no equals in this world.”

Mattalast nodded.

“Yeah. If we were talking about me, either you or Ireia would be able to replace me. We could probably find about two people of my class that could replace you. However, right now we can find no person to replace Mirepoc among the Armed Librarians.

We must never lose her.”

“I know all that.”

“I don’t want to let Mirepoc die like that. Order me, Director. Allow me to save her.”

Hamyuts replied,

“What you’re saying is true. We can’t afford to lose Mirepoc.

But if I have to choose...

I already gave up on Mirepoc.”

“ ... ”

Hamyuts spoke in a cold, unwavering tone.

“The situation had already progressed to the point of no return. I think it would be fine if we had acted earlier, but it’s too late now.”

No rebuttal came from Mattalast.

“Lascall Othello...”

Hamyuts said as if in condemnation.

“Since that girl approached this name, she can only die.”

Mattalast tired of looking for words of rebuttal. He already knew of the existence known as Lascall Othello. He completely understood the weight of Hamyuts’s words.

“I said that Mirepoc is a piece that we shouldn’t lose. But, Mattalast... for me, you are also a piece I don’t want to lose.”

“...You overestimate me, Director.”

“You don’t have to be humble. I also don’t want to lose Mirepoc. But if you were to fail in this mission...”

The atmosphere of a carnivore once again strengthened.

“I will have to kill you. I can’t do that.”

“...Are you abandoning Mirepoc?”

“Isn’t it fine? We’ve talked enough about this. It’s about time to give up.”

“This wasn’t really a discussion.”

Mattalast turned to face Hamyuts.

“I understand your position and your thoughts, Director. I understand but I’m still asking you.”

Hamyuts sighed.

“Mirepoc’s my subordinate. Although you have brought her to us, I had my eyes on her and I trained her. Protecting her is my duty.”

“...”

Hamyuts scratched her head.

“Right, when you get stuck on something, you become completely stubborn. I got it. Go.”

“Thank you.”

Mattalast smiled.

“What is Mirepoc going to do?”

“She’s leaving in three days.”

“Her destination?”

“Fullbeck. She’s going to investigate the murder of Parney Parlmanta.”

Chapter 1: Searching For The False Book-seller

Part 1

“A vacation?”

In a certain room at Bantorra Library, Noloty Malche raised her voice. This happened during the day she returned after recovering from her injuries gotten during the Mokkaia incident.

“You’re taking a vacation, Mirepoc-san?”

“Yes. Is that so surprising?”

Mirepoc Finedell answered. Why are everyone so surprised, she wondered. One takes a vacation when they have things to do. It’s normal.

“It is surprising... because it’s you.”

“Yes, but... why?”

Noloty tilted her head. What a strange girl as always, Mirepoc thought.

The two of them were in the Armed Librarian offices. The wide rooms were divided by large screens, and half of them looked like a private room that had an Armed Librarian desk in it. Everyone's desk was here, with the exception of Hamyuts.

However, the majority of people were diving into the Labyrinth or out of Bantorra on some mission. Only Mirepoc, Noloty and Minth were in the offices then.

“Why are you so surprised?”

Mirepoc asked again. Instead of Noloty, it was Minth who answered after hearing their conversation from the side.

“Yeah, it's surprising. It's because you're a workaholic who didn't take any days off in three months.”

“Right. Even at lunch break you always take exactly fifteen minutes, Mirepoc-san.”

“Really...”

Everyone told her the same. Mirepoc became increasingly sullen at seeing them so surprised.

“Anyway, Minth-san. While I'm gone, I'm leaving Noloty's supervision for you. Is that fine with you, Noloty?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Got it.”

The two nodded.

With this, she finished passing over her work. All that remained was gathering her luggage and leaving Bantorra Library.

“So, where are you going, Mirepoc-san? Back to your hometown?”

Noloty started talking with her. Explaining it would be bothersome, but I should probably just tell her.

Mirepoc answered,

“Fullbeck. Fullbeck in the Ismo Republic.”

“So you’re going to have fun?”

“No.”

Mirepoc shook her head.

“I’m going to search for Lascall Othello.”

Lascall Othello.

Mirepoc first heard that name about a year ago. She heard about him in her hospital bed after the Dragon Pneumonia incident at Toatt Mining Town was over.

Lascall Othello was a fairytale character quietly passed between girls around the world. Somewhere around the world, a strange Book-seller goes around selling Books. He gathers those Books with an unknown power, and flies around the world with some mysterious power. He is said to take the Books of girls who died without confessing their feelings and deliver them to the person of their affection.

Ireia told her there is such a rumor.

She also said that perhaps it was the person who chose to give the Book of the Ever-Laughing Witch to her lover across time, Colio Tonies.

Mirepoc departed Bantorra Library and went for the harbor. The ticket for the flying boat bound for Fullbeck was already in her pocket.

“Why are you searching for that Lascall or whatever now?”

Noloty came to her later and asked. She came to the harbor to see her off.

“Wasn’t this investigated some years ago and found out to be just a rumor?”

“The investigation was called off in the middle. So it’s not yet sure he doesn’t exist.”

“The man who sold Books to Colio Tonies was just a plain, unrelated Book-seller.”

“That seems to be the case for now.”

Mirepoc said in a cold voice.

“You don’t believe it?”

Noloty asked. Mirepoc nodded.

“Thinking rationally, there’s no way a simple Book-seller would have the Book of the Ever-Laughing Witch. He’s undoubtedly not an ordinary person.”

“...So you think he’s Lascall Othello?”

Mirepoc nodded.

“That’s not all. There’s also the incident with Mokkania. The Indulging God Cult tried taking Haiza’s Book.”

“And what about it?”

“Haiza was tasked with the mission of looking for Lascall Othello.”

“...But, he didn't manage to find him, right?”

“Right. But perhaps he came close to him.”

“...Hmm.”

Noloty titled her head.

“In other words, Lascall Othello exists and has some connection to the Indulging God Cult. Lascall Othello had Shiron-san's Book, and the Indulging God Cult attempted to hide information about him by stealing Haiza's Book.”

“Yes, that is my reasoning.”

Noloty thought for a while as she walked.

“Aren't you overthinking this?”

Mirepoc instinctively sighed.

“Ah, sorry!”

“...It’s fine, Noloty. I’m already used to people telling me that.”

Mirepoc held the same conversation with Minth, Mattalast, Enlike and the Director. However, no one agreed with her.

“Lascall Othello doesn’t exist.”

Everyone unanimously told her so with a smile.

Therefore, Mirepoc took a vacation. Since no-one agreed with her, she will search by herself.

“Well, we part here, Noloty.”

Noloty stopped walking, and Mirepoc got on the flying boat. Ever after they parted, Noloty stood there for a while, tilting her head and thinking.

That was ten hours ago.

Mirepoc got off the flying boat that brought her from Bantorra to Fullbeck and got into town.

“Wow.”

She exclaimed without thinking. She hastily closed her mouth. Raising a voice

of surprise at seeing the city's streets made her sound like some hillbilly.

Visible from the harbors were overwhelming lines of skyscrapers. All the buildings that were the size as Bantorra Library were crowded together.

The amount of cars was incredible as well. Only those who had high-paying jobs like Armed Librarians should have these, and yet they were running all around the city.

The getup of people walking around was also different from that of other cities. The men wore good suits of the kind that only someone like Mattalast wore at Bantorra Library. Women wore things like gorgeous dresses or new designer suits as if competing with each other.

Fullbeck was one of the most prosperous cities in the world. It was true not only for their economics and industry, but they were among the world's best in art and culture as well. It didn't seem like Toatt Mining Town which she went into some time ago was in the same country at all. They appeared to be a whole century apart.

“ ... ”

It wasn't the time to be amazed. Mirepoc pulled herself together and started walking. While pacing around the streets, she noticed that she looked horribly out of place in her attire. She had a military uniform. Moreover, it wasn't one of Ismo's army.

Passersby all shot glances at her. She's shouldn't worry about public gaze so much, but it was hard for her to bear such staring directed at her.

“Oh dear me!”

While walking, she suddenly heard a voice from behind. It was a middle-aged woman dressed luxuriously. She had a ridiculous amount of jewelry on her neck and fingers. She looked like someone covered in insects.

“Such a lovely attire! Where did you find it?”

“...Lovely?”

Mirepoc reflexively replied.

“Tight clothes are actually quite sexy. This androgynous look really fits you. Where did you find this?”

The woman talked in an over-familiar manner. Mirepoc wondered if this was the norm here.

“...This is the uniform of the Guinbex Imperial Army.”

Mirepoc honestly answered.

“Well now, isn't that amazing! Butler! I have decided, I will wear this for the next party!”

“Understood, madam.”

Her butler calmly bowed.

“So, where did you get it?”

“It was once supplied from the army.”

“I see. Butler! Arrange this immediately!”

Saying that, the woman walked away while shaking around her jewelry. She seemed to be misunderstanding something, but did not bother to ask again.

She seems to be living in a different world, Mirepoc thought.

Mirepoc came to this town because Haiza’s Book focused on a certain woman. She was one of the people he met while investigating the rumor of Lascall Othello.

Her name was Parney Parlmanta. Her real name seemed to be different, but Mirepoc didn’t know it.

She was an actress. A big actress who started a new era in this Cinema City of Fullbeck. She remembered that, eight years ago, the news of her murder shook the entire world.

Mirepoc recalled her appearance as documented in Haiza's Book.

The Book's owner was called Haiza Meeken. He served as an Armed Librarian for a long time, but his abilities weren't of a high level. Although he was slightly stronger than Mirepoc, he was probably weaker than Minth. Since both she and Minth have support abilities, their overall evaluation can be said to be low. Later on he sold himself to the Guinbex Imperial Army and was punished for it, but this event had nothing to do with it.

The problem was his job.

Half a year before getting killed by Hamyuts, he came to Fullbeck. Haiza did so in order to investigate the rumors about Lascall Othello spreading around during that time.

Haiza looked at the map in the sheriff's office. It was the map of the Ismo Republic spread on a full desk. A large amount of red dots were scattered on top of it.

"Lascall Othello, huh..."

Haiza mumbled. He was looking for the source of the rumors for more than a year. The map on the desk was the fruits of his labor.

The red dots pointed the places of people who knew about the rumor. They

were mostly concentrated in the gulf coast of the northern continent. It was close to the central city, Fullbeck. This was undoubtedly the source of the rumor.

“Good grief, isn’t this work supposed to be for normal librarians or trainees...? Why do I have to take care of this?”

While smoking a cigarette in a hurry, Haiza threw his legs on top of the desk.

At that moment, the door opened and a lone man came inside. He was the trainee Armed Librarian Feekiee. At that time Haiza was his supervisor.

“Haiza-san. We seem to have gotten hold of Parney Parlmanta.”

“Is that so.”

Haiza lowered his legs and then rose up.

“Good grief, since when does an actress have more authority than us Armed Librarians?”

They inquired people who knew Lascall’s name and asked where they have heard it. Then, by asking those who told them of the rumor, they explored its source. Haiza repeated this process again and again.

While repeating this work, Haiza made a single hypothesis. Wasn’t the rumor’s source actually Parney Parlmanta? Needless to say, she was a huge actress. She was extremely busy. Haiza requested a meeting with her many

times, and today it was finally about to come true.

“But, even meeting her might not help.”

Feekee said while walking behind Haiza.

“What do you mean?”

“She is drunk.”

Haiza laid his eyes on Parney for the first time inside her mansion. He saw her several times on screen, but seeing her directly like this had a completely different effect.

Parney wore a dress revealing her chest and sat listlessly on a sofa.

She wasn't short or tall. She had a slightly curly and dull golden hair. It was short, just as women liked to wear their hair during these days. Her facial features were distinct, her body seemed to be overly thin, and she probably looked more attractive while on screen. Her lips, red as blood, etched themselves into Haiza's eyes. Her slightly discolored makeup, her sleepy-looking eyes, and her drunk, uncertain hand movements were horribly captivating.

However, Haiza still felt that he wasn't expecting this. She would seem beautiful while around ordinary people, but it wasn't enough for her to be called “The most beautiful woman in history” or “A miracle of the Creator

Deity”.

Even Mirepoc thought the same while reading the Book. She wondered if the figure reflected in the cinema screen was that of the same person.

“Who are you?”

Parney said. Although it was midday, she was completely drunk.

“Armed Librarian Haiza. For the last years, I’ve been investigating the rumors about Lascall Othello that are widespread around this area.”

“Armed Librarian?”

She laughed noisily. Haiza began to feel discomfort, but kept his expression calm.

“My, aren’t you dull.”

Parney extended her shaking hand and grabbed a cigarette. After some failures she lit the match and then smoked restlessly.

“Armed Librarians... are supposed to work with things already done... so I’m all fine, right?”

Saying so, Parney convulsed with laughter.

“Did you watch it? I’m in the leading role there. “The Duel at Tanieze Plains”. I’m an Armed Librarian. I’m fighting the Ever-Laughing Witch one on one, and I’m dragging her out to her execution. You’ve seen it, right?”

Haiza shook his head.

“You diiidn’t?!”

She threw the still-lit cigarette at Haiza.

“What’s the matter with you. I don’t know anymore.”

Sick of it all, Haiza cut to the chase.

“Umm, so you must know about the rumors of Lascall Othello spread around here. It’s spreading all around the Ismo Republic with Fullbeck as the center, but we’re unable to find the source.”

“I don’t want to hear about that anymore. Go away.”

“According to our investigation, we believe that you’re the source of the rumors.”

“What source?”

Her mood ruined further, Parney became angry.

“Aren’t you the one spreading the rumors about Lascall Othello?”

“What’re you saying? Are you stupid?”

“So, you don’t know anything about Lascall?”

“I’m really not going to discuss that.”

Parney drank some liquor straight from the bottle.

“Hey, since you’re so stupid, I’ll tell you. Lascall actually, does exist.”

“...Where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why?”

“If you try to find him, you won’t be able to. If you don’t try to find him, you will. That’s the kind of person Lascall Othello is.

That’s why I wasn’t able to meet him. I don’t really want to see Lascall. I don’t know him at all. If I think that way, I will be able to meet him. So, I don’t know anything about Lascall.”

“...Why do you want to meet Lascall?”

“Why are you Armed Librarians looking for him!”

Parney suddenly started yelling.

“You lot refused to show me a Book you claimed to be sealed, so aren’t you the bad ones?!”

You’re the ones hiding Lascall, aren’t you?! So why did you come and ask me about him?

I can’t get it at all. Just what are you doing?!”

Haiza waited for her to calm down, and then asked her again.

“When did you come to know of Lascall?”

“Long ago.”

“Where did you find out about him?”

“I’ve met him.”

“You’ve met him?”

“I did. I also talked to him. I’ve even made a promise that he would take my

Book.”

“...Where? When? What kind of a person is he?”

“I don’t know. I’ve forgotten it all!”

“ ...”

Haiza felt like this whole thing was pointless.

“It seems I’m going crazy. I have to meet Lascall again, but he wouldn’t come to me. If I die right now, what would happen to my Book? Huh? What would happen to it?”

“ ...”

“If I won’t meet Lascall again, I will become no good at all. Everything will end.”

It already ended enough, thought Haiza.

They finished the conversation at that point and he left. Haiza thought it was a complete waste of time.

A man looking like some attendant was waiting outside the room and Haiza

struck conversation with him.

“Completely useless. Since when is she like that?”

“It’s been like this for a while.”

“Do you know anything about Lascall Othello?”

The manager shook his head.

“She speaks about him once in a while, yet I cannot understand the meaning of it all.”

Haiza left the room behind him with a tired expression.

Part 2

Eventually, Haiza simply forgot the story and dismissed it as the nonsense of a drunkard.

However, Mirepoc who was reading his Book didn't share this notion. Parney had clearly stated that she met Lascall Othello. Mirepoc, who never drank didn't really understand it, but she probably wouldn't repeat again and again that she met someone if she didn't actually know him.

Eventually, the investigation on Lascall Othello continued without bearing any fruit. Even after Haiza's death, several Armed Librarians and trainees took over it, but they were no longer investigating seriously. Three years into the investigation and Hamyuts aborted it.

However, Mirepoc was thinking – if she were to investigate Parney right now, won't she find a different result?

Also, if Lascall Othello had anything to do with the Indulging God Cult, wouldn't it mean that Parney knew some tremendous secret?

Mirepoc was pacing along the road, hearing the never-ceasing sounds of car engines and horns. A little sick of it all, she walked through Fullbeck's city

center.

She found a signboard in front of a stone-made five-story building. She set her foot inside this building that was designated as “Fullbeck Central Security”.

“An Armed Librarian? Why so suddenly?”

The answering sheriff made no effort to hide his surprise at her visit.

“It’s an unofficial visit.”

“On what business?”

“I came here to check documents pertaining to the Parney Parlmanta murder case.”

“Why only now?”

“I’m sorry, but this is a confidential matter.”

Mirepoc was brought by the confused sheriff to the reference room.

Materials about Parney Parlmanta were buried in one shelf of that room. In addition to the dossier, there were also newspaper clippings and papers such as articles from gossip magazines stored there.

Mirepoc thanked the sheriff and began reading the materials.

Parney was murdered one year after meeting with Haiza. The shocking killing method of decapitation and the mysterious criminal all drew the attention of the world.

The culprit was as of yet uncaught. Even the most important clue, Parney's Book, had not been stored in Bantorra Library. Although the Armed Librarians have embarked on the search of the Book, it was obviously not yet found.

“Are these the only investigation documents?”

Mirepoc muttered and closed the notebook she was holding. There wasn't anything important there.

She scanned through the newspaper clippings and gossip magazines just in case. Sensational amounts of theories and evidence decorated the pages. There was an amazing amount of articles. And yet, none of them had any credibility.

Was the crime made by a fanatical fan? An assassin hired by a movie company? A resentful actress who did not receive any roles? Was she killed by a Book-stealing organization for her Book? Theories of a criminal from the government, theories of a criminal from the Armed Librarians, and even theories of it being punishment from the gods were floating around.

Mirepoc's head hurt. It was impossible finding the truth in the vast amount of information. Closing the scrap notebook, she returned it to the shelf.

“Lies are the best way to conceal the truth, aren't they...”

She tried recalling who once said these words.

At that moment, she heard a knock and a man came inside the room. He was a firm-built man that could already be called old.

“I am sheriff Moody. Is there any way I can help you?”

The man introduced himself with a small bow. The name Moody sounded familiar. She often saw it in the investigation materials. He was the person at the center of the investigation.

“That is generous of you to offer. However, since this is an unofficial visit, I did not request for any help.”

“Is that so.”

Moody readily withdrew. Mirepoc was thankful for that. She didn't want a sheriff that had no combat abilities hanging around.

“Why are you checking this incident now?”

Mirepoc answered,

“That incident is not my goal. I am investigating a different case, but I suspect this one to have some connection to it.”

“...I see.”

Moodly thought for a while. She noticed a tinge of fear in his facial expression.

“Is something the matter?”

“No, it is nothing.”

Moodly shook his head to the side. And then he began grumbling while recalling the old days.

“We really don’t know anything about the Parney murder. It’s as if all evidence was gone without a trace. If, at that time, we had an Armed Librarian with us we might have solved it.”

Mirepoc denied it.

“That’s unreasonable. You can’t just leave anything and everything for us Armed Librarians.”

The job of the Armed Librarians was to protect the peaceful death of people. For that, they protected the mines, the Books, the Library, and fought against those who disturbed the order of the world.

No matter how much of a famous actress she was, if it was a mere murder case it wasn’t a job for Armed Librarians.

“More importantly, Parney’s Book is said to be somewhere in this city.”

“Indeed. There is some information that a Book stealing organization possesses it, but we couldn’t find any evidence of that.”

“We have also been trying to look for it, but regrettably we cannot do anything about it.”

There were countless criminal organizations that were involved in the buying and selling of Books around the world. Since Fullbeck was such a large city, none of the sheriffs could easily lay their hands on them.

“It was a horrible incident.”

The two of them sighed at the same time.

Mirepoc left Central Security and started walking around the city again.

As she walked she was thinking. Were there really any clues about Lascall Othello in this city?

It was possible. On top of Lascall Othello and the Indulging God Cult having a connection with one another, did Parney Parlmenta also have something to do with the Cult?

Thinking this far, she smiled wryly at the low possibility. It seemed almost impossible. But while impossible, the probability was not zero. As long as it

wasn't zero, she couldn't just leave it alone.

Mirepoc felt as if she was trying to find a needle in a haystack. The needle was Lascall Othello and the haystack was the vast sea of information.

She didn't know if there was an actual needle inside the haystack. And was the thing inside an actual needle? It could also be a harmless wire. However, if she just leaves it there, it might prick someone one day. She wasn't able to find it, but she couldn't stop looking for it.

She was looking for a mysterious man in this vast city. It was extremely exhausting.

“...Good grief.”

Mirepoc flew from the Library full of energy, but the road ahead seemed more difficult than she anticipated.

Thinking about it, her ability was used for her to transfer her thoughts to other people. That meant her ability was useless if she was by herself. She was powerless while having no allies. She once again fully realized this.

“Oh, I was looking for you.”

A person came to speak with Mirepoc. It was a woman clothed in a blue evening dress who seemed to be in her thirties. She was quite different from

the woman she met before.

“Excuse me, but who might you be?”

Mirepoc gently reached for the gun in her clothes. However, she immediately ceased. No matter how she looked at it, the woman didn't appear likely to do her any harm.

“I'm from Falluin Women's Department Store. We have been told to assist your work today and come to pick you up, Mirepoc-sama. You talked with that lady earlier, right? We have heard about you from her.”

“I didn't hear anything about this.”

Mirepoc instantly answered. In the first place, can the owner of a clothing store even help her?

“Yes yes. Don't be concerned about that and follow me.”

A car already appeared next to them. The woman guided Mirepoc into the car without waiting for her answer.

The car parked in front of the department store. Mirepoc was dragged inside.

“What are you trying to do?”

“Isn't it obvious? You're going to choose clothes. What you're wearing is also

lovely, but when in Fullbeck you have to dress like Fullbeckers do.”

That didn't have anything to do with her.

“Everyone, Mirepoc Finedell-sama has come as per her reservation.”

She tried breaking off. However, before she could run away, she was surrounded by the female clerks gushing all around her. Flustered, she was pushed into the dressing room.

An hour passed since then.

“How is it now?”

One after the other, the clerks came inside carrying dresses. Mirepoc did as she told, took off her clothes to try new ones, and then took off those as well. How much clothes had she tried on by now? They were all far from Mirepoc's tastes.

“It fits you.”

The female clerk put a mirror in front of the dress-up doll named Mirepoc.

“How is it? How is it?”

“ ... ”

This time she wore a walking dress. Having gotten used to military uniforms, Mirepoc felt the soft fabric was terribly unreliable. The area around the neck was wide open, and the gathered skirt would probably be easily lifted by any gust of wind.

“It’s this year’s latest fashion. You wouldn’t be able to walk around the city without wearing at least something of that level.”

What does she mean by that, wasn’t I walking around just fine before? But Mirepoc already didn’t have the energy to make any rebuttal. She never knew changing clothes was so tiring. She truly underestimated the normal women of the world.

“How is it? How is it?”

Frankly, she didn’t care at all. But, if she were to say this, the next clerk would bring her more clothes. Mirepoc was already fed up with this.

“This is fine.”

She said and left the fitting room.

“So you’re buying this...”

The face of the clerk was stuck with a smile as she said this.

Mirepoc wore a thick gun belt on top of the white dress. She put her rapier on the left side and on her right side a gun and a spare magazine. She fastened the boorish emblem of an Armed Librarian on her chest in place of a pendant.

“Umm, it would be more elegant if you wouldn’t do that.”

The clerk tried stopping her.

“I know.”

In place of the sandals prepared for her, she wore thick, sturdy boots. Then, she looked at her appearance in the mirror once again.

No matter how she looked it all seemed wrong. She never thought a dress and a gun belt would be so unfitting for each other.

“...Are you about to walk the city like this?”

“Clothes are good enough as long as I’m not cold.”

Mirepoc answered, half desperate.

“By the way, how much is this?”

“We have already received payment.”

The clerk said. Mirepoc was surprised. This is just like some man buying a gift

for his mistress. Who told them to take me here in the first place?

“Excuse me, but why did you bring me here?”

“We have been told that if we were to find a military uniform-wearing woman walking around the city, we need to bring her here and find her a decent-looking outfit.

Since you were walking around in that military uniform you were far too conspicuous.”

“And who told you that?”

“I did.”

A man’s voice came from behind. Mirepoc turned around, startled.

“Mattalast-san!”

Mattalast approached. He then closely looked at Mirepoc’s getup.

“You look weird.”

Mirepoc once again confirmed the strength of her patience.

She placed her fingers between her eyebrows and took two deep breaths. He did something kind for her. There's no point in being angry.

“What's wrong?”

“It's nothing.”

The two of them walked out of the department store and down the road. Mattalast walked several paces ahead and Mirepoc tried keeping up with him.

“Mattalast-san, why are you here?”

“I'm also on vacation.”

“To pursue Lascall Othello?”

“Of course not. I'm on vacation.”

Mirepoc thought it was a lie.

Mattalast lowered the trombone case from his back. This was the case of his rifle known as the Tenor. That gun wasn't used even in the Monster incident or during Mokkania's revolt. Having to use it meant Mattalast was serious.

He had the habit of behaving as if he wasn't going to cooperate. He was a person whose thoughts couldn't be understood.

“Where are we headed?”

“There’s a place I want to show you.”

“Okay.”

No matter what she thought, he was a most reassuring ally. Mirepoc boarded the tram together with Mattalast.

The tram ran through Fullbeck in a web-like pattern. The complex twisting railway tracks slipped through the gaps of cars and pedestrians. A single woman was sitting in the very back.

Her age was perhaps in her twenties. She had rust-like red hair and greenish-blue eyes.

Despite it already being warm, she wore a men’s black frock-coat. Below it were a tight red dress and black leather shoes. That black and red attire should have stood out, yet inconspicuously blended into the scenery. This was because of the dark atmosphere surrounding her and her natural ability to erase her presence.

The woman was pretending to look at the scenery outside her window.

Wondering if her disarrayed breathing and throbbing heart could be heard,

the woman noticed she was nervous. Although her line of sight was outside the window, her attention was directed towards the seat in front of her. Mattalast Ballory and Mirepoc Finedell were seating there.

The woman's name was Alme Norton.

Alme was thoroughly analyzing the two people in front of her. If they were to have a fight with her she would have no chance of victory. When push comes to shove, she would have to make her escape through the window.

However, they didn't act like they noticed her at all.

They probably only boarded the same train by mere coincidence.

She thought that they would suspect her since she instinctively stared at them, but it seemed she had no reason to worry. Since Mirepoc Finedell was wearing a strange attire, most passengers were looking at them. It seems that Alme's peek fell into the same category in their minds.

“ ... ”

She could faintly hear sounds of conversation from ahead. Alme invoked her Magic Right. She emitted invisible and intangible threads from her body. Several threads were stretched forward, attaching themselves to the two people's bodies.

Her ability was called Sensory Threads. Alme possessed the same ability as that of the Indulging God Cult's mortal enemy, Hamyuts Meseta.

Their conversation was transmitted through the threads.

“...Thinking about it, have you seen Parney Parlmenta’s movies?”

“No, not at all.”

“Have you ever been to a movie?”

“No.”

Mattalast shrugged.

“How harsh. From now it will be the era of cinema instead of the opera or stage. I think of movies as the art of the new age.”

“I have no interest in art in the first place.”

“Is that so...”

What a boring conversation, Alme thought.

“Do you know anything about the cinema?”



“Somewhat.”

“And about Parney Parlmanta?”

“I’ve seen her enough to get sick of it.”

“So what do you think about her?”

“I don’t really like her. “The Duel at Tanieze Plains” was good, but it was probably because of Louise’s dazzling performance as Shiron.”

“I wasn’t asking about that.”

“Louise’s acting was really good. Seeing how she devoted herself to evil with all of her heart was part of her charm. Well, after knowing the real Shiron I have some mixed feelings, though.”

“Like I said, I wasn’t asking about that.”

Boring indeed. Alme retracted her Sensory Threads.

But, as could be inferred from their conversation, they probably came looking for Parney Parlmanta’s Book. To pursue Lascall.

Alme ridiculed them in her mind.

These bastards are looking for Lascall, huh. Thinking this, she got off the tram. The two people didn't even look at her as she passed next to them.

Part 3

The tram carrying Mirepoc and Mattalast gently advanced through the city. As the sun started sinking and the sunset could be seen clearly outside the window.

After a while, the tram reached the station close to its final one. Mattalast got off and Mirepoc followed him.

“...Where to?”

“You’ll see soon enough.”

Mattalast said. It truly was soon enough. He entered the pub next to the station.

When he opened the door, Mirepoc heard music that made her want to frown.

The place was a standing pub where one couldn’t sit while drinking. At the center was a stage five or six people could perform on. A plump beauty was singing loudly in the center. She was accompanied by a saxophone, a piano, a bass and a mandolin. What’s going on here, Mirepoc was about to ask.

But at that moment, a man approached Mattalast.

“Mattalast. So you’re still alive.”

Mirepoc put herself on guard.

“Unfortunately, I’ve failed to die.”

As Mattalast answered, the man struck his back while laughing.

“This bastard hasn’t shown himself for who knows how long. We thought he died so we started a memorial service for him.”

“That’s too soon. Wait another five years.”

The two smiled at each other. Mattalast reached a table at the back, and Mirepoc followed him.

“Give me some bourbon. And lime juice for the kid.”

Saying this, Mattalast lowered the trombone case from his shoulder.

Mirepoc instinctively leaned over.

Mattalast opened the lid... and a trombone was inside.

“...”

Mirepoc stared at the case's contents for a while. A trombone was inside the trombone case. That was actually to be expected.

“Are you going to play it?”

“Soon.”

Mattalast quickly assembled the trombone and got up the stage at the center.

“Mattalast, can you play ‘Oh nostalgic Lumanta’?”

The singing lady spoke to him.

“Leave it to me. I haven't lost my skill.”

He started with the trombone's quiet prelude. The bass and piano joined together with the mandolin and the woman started singing. Mirepoc stared at their performance.

After completing one song, Mattalast got off the stage.

“Mattalast-san, what does that mean?”

“People who love music gather here. This pub's gimmick is that customers can freely perform, so skilled people come here to have fun every day.”

“I see. So why did you come here?”

“I told you. I’m on vacation.”

Mirepoc silently pulled out her purse and left small change on the table.

“We haven’t gotten our order yet.”

“I’ll give you my lime juice, so drink it.”

Mirepoc pushed aside the crowd of customers as she headed for the exit.

“Wait, Mirepoc.”

She turned around. Mattalast’s expression became that of when in the midst of battle.

“So you can call me if anything happens, keep our thoughts linked together at all times.”

Mirepoc slightly smiled and invoked her Magic Right.

‘Understood.’

‘That’s good.’

Mattalast waved his hand.

‘And another thing. You should try inquiring the man called Kalon Kay.’”

‘Who is he?’

‘A sheriff. He lives in house number 23 of the 5th Avenue. Apartment number 5. He is familiar with Lascall Othello.’

‘Why does he know about Lascall?’

‘You’ll understand if you meet him.’

Since they became suddenly silent, the people around were confused.

‘I’ll call you if anything happens. Until then, please take it easy.’

“Understood.”

Mattalast spoke aloud.

During that time, Alme was behind the pub Mattalast and Mirepoc were in. She extended her Sensory Threads into the pub and touched them both. Alme

felt Mirepoc leaving the place.

“Why did Mirepoc come here...”

She mumbled. She hesitated on which of them to monitor, but reached a decision in less than a second. Alme began tailing Mirepoc.

The true value of the Sensory Threads was in tailing a person. When it comes to keeping track of someone, even a person of Mattalast’s caliber couldn’t best her. She was confident that the only person she couldn’t tail was the one who possessed the same ability, Hamyuts.

The apartment Mirepoc reached was terribly old and cramped.

“Mattalast?”

The sheriff called Kalon Kay was puzzled at Mirepoc’s words. He was a dull man dressed in a wrinkled shirt and pants with worn-out knees.

“Yes. I came here because he told me to. Do you know him?”

“Yeah, he came here yesterday.”

Saying so, Kalon guided Mirepoc inside the room.

“So you came here to ask about Lascall Othello, right?”

“Yes. But first, shall I introduce myself?”

“Well, there’s no real need for that, but I’m Kalon Kay. I’m a novice sheriff. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m the Armed Librarian Mirepoc Finedell. I came here to investigate Lascall Othello.”

She could tell by his atmosphere – that man had nothing to do with the Indulging God Cult.

She could see him acting surprised when an Armed Librarian came to visit him, but could feel no bloodlust, hostility or caution.

The two talked at the same time.

“About Lascall, how-”

“About Lascall, why-”

Mirepoc said,

“Please go first.”

“Umm... To tell you the truth, I was in charge of the Parney Parlmenta case.”

“ ... ”

“Parney was looking for that Lascall, so I thought there was some connection between them.”

Kalon pointed at a bookshelf. Items such as ancient documents, picture books and fairy tales were tightly gathered there.

“It was interesting to gradually examine all of them. It seems like I became obsessed with it.”

Mirepoc admired his considerable lineup. It looked somewhat like the library of a literary researcher. Since he was doing it as a hobby, it was laudable. Kalon then inquired her.

“Do you know about Lascall Othello?”

“Yes. He is a mysterious Book-seller who conveys girls’ Books to their loved ones. That’s the kind of story I’ve heard.”

Mirepoc answered. Kalon pulled off several books from the shelf.

“It’s commonly like that. However, when researching further, it seemed like that rumor wasn’t made up recently.”

He opened an old picture book.

“According to my investigation, the legend of Lascall Othello existed at least five hundred years ago.”

He showed Mirepoc the picture book with its old-fashioned design and decorative print.

“For example, this was written around three hundred years ago. This is a collection of fairy tales passed down during the generations, but Lascall Othello makes an appearance here.”

Mirepoc started flipping through the picture book.

“In a certain kingdom, there were a bad king and a kind-hearted prince. The prince was pained by the king’s doings... Let’s skip a little... This story is about how, after a lot has happened, the king reforms when he saw the prince’s Book. The Magician who gave the king that Book was known as Lascall Othello.”

“I see.”

She found the illustration of a witch who looked like an old woman holding a cane with a three-cornered hat propped up on it. That person, who talked with a man who seemed like a king, was probably Lascall Othello.

“The rumors of Lascall carrying around the Books of maidens in love is a bit different.”

“That’s right. There’s no mention of any maidens in love in the old tradition.

There's also another story. This time it's a hero who sets out on a journey in order to defeat a monster, and is bestowed with a Book in which the way of defeating that monster was written inside."

Mirepoc peeked inside the book. This time, Lascall was in form of a small boy.

She read it. A scene where the monster-slaying hero speaks with Lascall caught her attention.

"Great Magician Lascall. Please lend me your powers."

"O Hero, that is impossible. If this world is but a story, I will be the one to read it."

That sentence left a strange impression on her.

"...I see."

"There are other various stories. They come in different forms, but their common point is that they all feature Book-carrying Magicians."

Mirepoc thought for a while.

"A while ago, Lascall Othello became a rumor in this city."

"Originally, only a select few have known of it, but now it's an old legend. I

wonder why that is. I think that someone spread the rumor around, but...”

“You don’t know who spread it around?”

“No.”

Kalon smiled. Well, since he’s investigated something that even us Armed Librarians don’t know, it’s causing us to lose face.

“There’s also a slightly different story.”

He brought yet another picture book.

“In a certain Books mine, there was a bad person who sold those Books for gold. And there was a certain Magician who ended picking up Books from the mine with his Magic. That Magician was Lascall Othello.”

Mirepoc looked at the book. This time, Lascall was an aristocratic-looking young man.

“A strange tale. It is impossible for any kind of Magician to dig out Books.”

“Well, it’s a fairy tale.”

“It’s a little absurd even for a fairytale. A magician that can perform the technique of the Past God...”

Mirepoc said.

“There still more... huh? Where is it?”

Kalon started looking for some book. Mirepoc interrupting him by keeping talking.

“So, do you believe that Lascall Othello is real?”

“If we’re talking about whether he’s real... I’d say he isn’t.”

It was an unexpected answer. Since he was zealously researching Lascall, Mirepoc was sure that he’d answer her that he believes him to be real.

“So what do you think about Lascall?”

Kalon began thinking.

“It’s... all a coincidence.”

It was an interesting answer.

“There was probably some person that, by sheer chance, had his Book read by his loved one. Only by chance.”

“I see.”

“While the first time had been a coincidence, perhaps the person this happened to asked themselves ‘Did someone bring this Book to me?’, and thus the rumor of the Book-carrying Magician was born. The rumor became a legend and finally stood up on its own.

I think that explains Lascall Othello.”

Mirepoc was impressed. It was a truly reasonable and easy-to understand idea.

“And what about Parney Parlmenta’s case?”

“It’s also irrelevant. It’s probably just that during that time the rumors of Lascall Othello were spreading around.”

“I understand. Thank you very much.”

Finally, Mirepoc asked a final question,

“If Lascall Othello was real, what sort of existence would he be?”

“I really can’t say anything. But, if he were to exist, he would probably be above human understanding. Yes, he would be someone close to God.”

Kalon said in a joking tone. Neither he nor Mirepoc thought that something like that could ever exist.

Mirepoc left Kalon's apartment. She found out a lot more than she had expected. He knew even more than what the Armed Librarians investigated before. He might be the most knowledgeable person on Lascall Othello in present time.

"Haiza wasn't doing his job properly."

Mirepoc murmured.

But still, what about Lascall? The things she heard from Kalon didn't have anything to do with the Indulging God Cult. And neither with Parney Parlmenta.

Thinking about it, she was the one who thought Lascall existed. She might have been worked up for nothing. Although it was a bit late, she now reconsidered it.

'Mirepoc.'

At that time, she received a thought from Mattalast.

'Did you find out anything?'

'No, nothing at all.'

‘What are you going to do now?’

‘Since I took a long vacation, I thought about settling down for a while.’

‘...Is that so.’

Mattalast’s thought felt a bit uncomfortable.

‘To tell you the truth, Mirepoc... I’m somewhat angry.’

‘Huh?’

‘I don’t mind you taking a vacation. You can take a vacation if you want to rest. But that’s not what you want, right?’

‘...’

‘The problem isn’t you taking a vacation and then doing as you please. Acting on some vague idea is just asking for trouble. Regardless of that idea being correct or not.’

‘...’

‘I’m not necessarily telling you to stop. You can spend your vacation however you’d like to. But I’ll just let you know that I’m angry.’

Leaving behind these words, Mattalast cut off his thoughts.

Mirepoc stopped in place without thinking. It was her first time being scolded in this fashion.

During that time, Alme followed Mirepoc. She was talking to someone in her thoughts, but the Sensory Threads couldn't transmit that back.

Alme still went after Mirepoc even as she started walking again after a short while.

She made sure Mirepoc entered her hotel, and then stopped her monitoring. She retracted her Sensory Threads. As soon as she did, she was suddenly flooded by fatigue.

Alme stood quietly in an alley about three hundred meters away from Mirepoc's hotel.

"I didn't find out anything."

Muttering so, Alme left the spot.

Although she was using the same ability as Hamyuts, she couldn't use it to the same extent. If she was Hamyuts, Alme would monitor Mirepoc from several kilometers away, but it was strictly impossible for her.

The longest her Sensory Threads could be stretched was 500 meters. And she

could pull out only less than ten at a time. She couldn't cover the entire city in her Sensory Threads like Hamyuts could.

Sensory Threads weren't the strongest ability – it was Hamyuts herself who was the strongest. Alme's existence was paradoxically a proof of that.

“...But anyway, what are those guys doing?”

Alme muttered.

She thought they came to this city in order to pursue Lascall Othello, but Mirepoc was looking in the wrong places and Mattalast was just having fun. They didn't seem aligned at all.

That said, the fact they were fooling around was convenient for her. She could set out on finding Parney's Book.

Staying wary of her surroundings, Alme went into a back alley.

Deviating just a single road from the city's center, the atmosphere became radically different. The dim light of the gas lamps illuminated the figures of sleeping vagrants and drunkards here and there on the street. Sporadically passing in front of them were tired manual laborers. This road, where all the rejects of the main street were gathered, was the second face of Fullbeck.

Alme found a dirty tenement in one of the city's corners. She didn't enter through the front door. She kicked at the collapsing wall and ran up to the roof.

After hanging a single Sensory Thread down from the roof she peeped inside.

“...Is it here?”

Beneath Alme’s feet was a single room. Several men and women were conversing with one another inside that cluttered room.

“You’ve made the wrong decision.”

She could hear the voice of a person. She only used one Sensory Threads, so hearing voices was the best she could do. Listening to the different voices, Alme counted the number of people in the room.

Just like Alme, they were False Men who belonged to the Indulging God Cult. They were gossiping among themselves. Everyone around will hear you talking with so loud a voice, Alme thought.

“What do you mean?”

“Mattalast isn’t the only one in the city. Even Mirepoc Finedell came here. I could only imagine we’ve been found out.”

“No, there’s no way they found us.”

“But since they’re here it cannot be helped!”

While listening to their conversation, Alme kept counting their numbers. Until

now she heard the voices of four people.

“Well, wait. Let’s think about what we’re going to do now.”

She didn’t remember hearing this voice. This was the fifth person then.

“That’s why I’m asking, what are we going to do?”

“The guys at the top are at fault. Why did they have to try killing that Hamyuts Meseta? If Cigal and Ganbanzel hadn’t done anything we could have lived in peace.”

This was the sixth person.

“Are you criticizing the True Men?!”

“...Even if they defeated Hamyuts Meseta we’d still have Ireia, Mokkania, Mattalast and Bonbo, all of them monsters. We can’t beat them in the first place.”

“...Anyways, what are we going to do?”

“We’ll call some warriors from the Main Branch and fight them. We’ve got no other choice.”

Hearing that, Alme retracted her Sensory Thread. Six people were inside the room. All of them were normal people without any combat capabilities.

Knowing this was enough for her.

Alme leapt from the roof to the window. She nimbly slipped into the room through the narrow window.

“If you’re asking for warriors, I’m already here.”

The False Men were surprised by her sudden appearance. After a moment of confusion, they gave cries of joy.

“...Ooh!”

The body of the woman who just came running to embrace her collapsed on the floor.

Alme held in her hand a rusty red sword. Its blade was covered in blood.

After piercing her stomach, the red blade severed the hand of the woman trying to cling to Alme and blew it away. The sword, its blade not very keen, made a dull impact sound. The woman’s wrist was sent flying and hit the wall.

“...W...hy...”

She exterminated all of them in less than twenty seconds.

Alme’s blade danced in the cramped room. The sword, made more to crush than to kill, broke through meat and bones. Far from a splendid slaughter play,

it was a terribly realistic and gloom scene.

After five of them became lumps of meat, Alme stopped her sword.

“Who, are you...”

The remaining man asked. Alme replied,

“Alme Norton.”

Hearing that name, the man’s pale face paled even further.

Interesting, thought Alme. Is this the face of a person who understands they won’t be saved?

“The traitor... Alme...”

“Exactly. So you know well about me, huh.”

“...Why are you here?”

“You can’t tell without asking?”

“I don’t know...”

“To search for Lascall Othello.”

“W...hy?”

Alme didn't answer. The man then spoke as if relying on her.

“Save me. I'll quit the Cult. It's fine if I won't go the Heaven. I'll live normally, so please save me...”

She pierced the man's chest with her sword.

“Can't do. You've insulted Cigal-sama.”

The dull blade broke his ribs. The broken bones pierced his lungs.

And, swinging the sword in a large motion, she knocked off the man's collarbone. He had been dissected into two as if she was chopping logs.

Alme overlooked the several corpses strewn on the floor.

“Well then... who of you insulted Cigal-sama earlier?”

She swung down the sword on one of the corpses.

“Was it you?”

She cut another corpse.

“Or perhaps you?”

She crushed a woman’s corpse.

“Probably not you.”

For several dozens of minutes afterwards, Alme kept tormenting the dead bodies.

A skyscraper overlooked Fullbeck City. The figures of two people were on the top. They didn’t even notice the far-away ground. One of the two started talking.

“Well now, seems like the stage is in good order. What do you think, Lascall?”

The other man – Lascall Othello – answered.

“Alme and Mirepoc. The two of them are girls as splendid as gems. Their possibility to reach my true identity is not necessarily zero.”

“Is that so?”

“Overseer of Paradise. You seem to feel the same way, sir.”

The man – the Overseer of Paradise – nodded. Incoming wind blew up the two men's hair.

“Well then, will you begin your move, Lascall?”

“It seems premature. I will remain a spectator for a while.”

Saying so, Lascall turned his heels. He walked towards the entrance to the roof.

“And what about you, sir?”

“I will also spectate for a while. Seeing how Mattalast is going to act should be fine.”

“Understood.”

Lascall's figure gradually disappeared as he was walking.

“Those who pursue you will die. Mattalast should understand this.”

Chapter 2: Rusty Frivolous Woman

Part 1

Lascall Othello.

Everyone in the Indulging God Cult, including Alme, knew that name.

So who was Lascall Othello? Almost everyone in the Cult did not know.

Was Lascall a man or a woman? Was it their name or their title? What did they do, or were they doing anything at all? Were they an individual or several people? Did they exist or not?

Everyone knew and didn't know. That was Lascall Othello.

When she was a member of the Indulging God Cult, Alme asked her allies about Lascall.

There was the man named Winkeney. He was a warrior, but didn't have any battle power. He was an odd man who shaved his head with a razor every day.

“Lascall Othello?”

“Yeah. Know about him?”

Winkeney crossed his arms and thought for a while.

“I heard that name when I got into the Cult. I remember the Overseer of Paradise telling me to give my best efforts so I would be recognized by Lascall Othello.”

There was the man named Locolo. He had a considerable fighting ability, but his thoughts were shallow. He was a man often sneered upon by his peers.

“Lascall Othello, huh? I know about him.”

“Who is he?”

“Someone told me that Lascall Othello protects the Indulging God Cult.”

“How does he protect it?”

“As for that, I have no clue.”

She tried asking the man called Boramot. He was the servant of Ganbanzel, the True Man who raised a monster. He once also served as Alme and Winkeney’s instructor.

“I don’t really know about him. And I have no reason to answer you.”

“Why?”

“Because Ganbanzel-sama said so. Everyone who chases after Lascall Othello dies.”

“What does that mean?”

“Don’t ask that either. If I’ll become involved in that I will probably not live.”

Everyone knew, but no-one knew. That was Lascall Othello.

Was he the Cult’s ally? If he was, why did nobody know of his identity? Did he actually exist in the first place? Alme didn’t understand anything.

But, one thing she did know. He was undoubtedly her enemy.

That was because Cigal Crukessa was killed by Lascall.

Alme walked through a back alley. It wasn’t raining, but she could see muddy puddles of water here and there. It was overflowing sewage leaking to the surface. With each step, more water soaked into her shoes.

Alme left the False Men from the Indulging God Cult she killed earlier as they were.

Let alone hiding the murder, she didn’t even throw away the bodies. She of course knew it would turn into quite the fuss after a while.

Alme suddenly stopped walking.

“ ... ”

She looked up above. She could faintly hear the sounds of a violin. She took notice of a light coming from an apartment on a building's second floor.

She kicked the ground and leaped. By kicking the wall, she jumped yet again. Smashing the apartment's window with a kick, she broke inside.

“Wh, wh...”

Inside the apartment, a man was holding a violin. The cheap-looking apartment didn't seem like it belonged to some artist with a name. He was probably a street performer or part of an orchestra.

The man rolled off his chair at the sudden situation.

Alme pulled out her sword before the man could yell. She didn't even wipe the blood off of it after having just killed some people. It was covered in hair, skin and pieces of meat.

Having seen the sword, the man's face became frozen.

“M-my money is at the bottom cupboard...”

He pointed towards his cupboard. He probably thought Alme was a robber. Without even looking at the cupboard, she pointed her sword at the man.

“Play.”

“W-wh...”

“Play.”

“...Play?”

The violin player picked up his bowstring, shaking. He re-sat on his chair and inquired Alme.

“What do I...?”

“Play whatever you like.”

Saying so, she brought the sword closer to the man.

“...Then I'll play 'The Wharf'.”

The violinist began playing the theme song of an old silent movie. Alme quietly listened to it.

The man caught glimpses of Alme's face as he continued playing. Around the time he finished the song's climax for the first time, Alme moved.

The man couldn't even react. Her sword swept sideways and cut through the bones of his neck.

"A rotten tone that was."

Alme said while looking down the man's body as it sprayed water like a fountain.

This murder had no meaning. She only killed because she wanted to.

The Indulging God Cult was said to be an abhorrent, evil cult. Even in it, the number of people who senselessly killed people like Alme was small. Certainly they would kill countless of people for their goals; but there were almost none that would make killing people itself their goal. The exceptions were Alme and once also Enlike.

"I'll show you how it's done."

Telling so to the man's corpse, Alme picked up the violin and bowstring. The hand that held the sword earlier used completely different, elegant hand movements as the bowstring touched the violin.

"...'The Wharf'."

The tone of the violin was now clearly more beautiful than that of its previous owner. Her technique was probably above that of the murdered man. However, there was still something different in the music itself.

The tone was repulsive and sad to the extent it didn't seem like it was the same melody. If there was an audience there, they would undoubtedly shiver.

“ ... ”

Tears came to Alme's eyes.

She once played this music for Cigal. It was one of the few songs he liked.

“Your music is as beautiful as it is evil.”

The Cigal of days past thus praised Alme's violin playing.

The instant the melody ended, her accumulated tears fell at once along her cheeks and down the floor. Cigal was the only person who understood her.

He was no longer in this world. This meant there was no longer anyone in the world that could understand Alme's heart.

The unforgettable September of 1914. Alme was inside one hideout at the Ismo Republic. A modest feast was held inside.

The ones attending were the executives who managed the False Men. Their lineup was varied – famed businessmen, bosses of the underworld, associates from the Present Management Agency, famous politicians and even Zatoh, the man who called himself Ganbanzel's Monster.

This feast, hidden from the public, was held to commemorate the anticipated death of Hamyuts Meseta.

“Cigal-sama killing our mortal enemy Hamyuts will bring us no honor.”

Said the commander of the combat forces.

“I do not mind. If Hamyuts kicks the bucket, I only need to kill the rest.”

The Monster Zatoh answered.

“Really, we should be grateful for Cigal. Not only for killing Hamyuts, but because we can also use the power of Dragon Pneumonia to hold the world in our hands.”

Alme didn't join their conversation. Since she was low-ranking, her job was guarding the area with her Sensory Threads.

Everyone was convinced of Cigal's victory. His plan was flawless.

“Soon the typhoon will pass.”

One man said.

At that time, a subordinate came rushing inside.

“Cigal-sama has... lost.”

The banquet was wrapped in silence as if time had stopped. The liquor bottle held by Alme fell to the floor and was smashed.

“There’s no way he lost... Who, who did he lose to? Mattalast? Ireia?”

“...To a Meat. A Meat that Cigal-sama turned into a bomb killed him.”

Alme’s scream cut off the silence.

“What have we been doing?! If we’ve only backed up Cigal this wouldn’t have...”

“But Cigal-sama was the one to say he didn’t need any help, right?”

“Right, Cigal-sama’s plan was too naïve.”

“However, defeated by a Meat... is such a thing possible?”

In an instant, the drunken executives started yelling at each other, spit flying from their mouths.

Their words went past Alme’s ears. She sank to the floor and sat stunned.

“...Haa, how stupid.”

Zatoh rose up.

“After all that it comes to me.”

Hearing those words, Alme lost all reason.

Alme wielded her sword and stabbed the table. She didn't care who or what she hit. She just couldn't stand it.

In the sudden confusion, the executives started moving. They kicked their chairs and ran away. Alme's sword, swung around recklessly, followed them.

“What's that woman doing?”

At the same time as those words, cloth wrapped around Alme's sword. It was a sleeve extending up to 10 meters, coming from Zatoh. What's that ability?

“Did something happen to you with Cigal?”

Saying this, Zatoh touched Alme's forehead with his fingers. At the same time, an impact ran through her brain. Before she could even think about what was done to her, the world became dark.

When she opened her eyes, she was in an unknown room.

“...That girl's been sleeping for three days. Isn't it about time she woke up?”

“As if I know. I just want to eat her if she dies.”

“Well then.”

“More importantly, it seemed that ability was helpful.”

Zatoh and an old man were discussing these words next to Alme.

Who’s that old man? While thinking this, Alme raised her body. Her whole body ached, perhaps because she was lying down for so long.

“Ah, she woke up. How boring.”

Zatoh said. At that moment, she recalled the name of the old man. With a thud, Alme’s hands came down the floor.

“F-for earlier... please forgive me...”

The man’s name was Ganbanzel – one of the True Men.

“A strange woman. Just when I thought she was going to rampage she ends up prostrating in front of you.”

“That’s the girl she is. She’s famous for being obedient.”

Ganbanzel pointed at the floor. Alme once again rubbed her head against the floor. Ganbanzel watched it with pleasure while Zatoh seemed bored.

“Oho, ohohoho. That’s good, obedient girl.”

Ganbanzel laughed. She heard his laughter while her teeth shook in humiliation. The old man was looking down on her. Even if he was a True Man, she couldn’t forgive him for that.

However, right now Alme couldn’t do anything. The difference between them was absolute.

“Oh right, I wanted to speak with you. I thought I’d tell you about when Cigal died. Do you want to know?”

“Thank you very much.”

Alme said while prostrating herself.

“Is there any point to that?”

“Be silent, Zatoh. I am generous.”

“How stupid.”

Leaving those words behind, Zatoh left the room.

“Let’s leave Zatoh alone. More importantly, about Cigal. Oh no, it’s so amusing. This is a much too amusing sight to see.”

Ganbanzel received the report detailing the circumstances of the incident. Alme heard it while prostrating herself to him.

“...And that’s it. Did you understand?”

“Yes sir.”

The battle strategy was perfect just as everyone thought it were – except for the uncertain element named Colio Tonies. Why did it come to that? It was obvious. It was only because that Meat received Shiron’s Books.

“Ganbanzel-sama. Why did that Meat have Shiron’s Books?”

“Hmm, are you asking me?”

“Lascall Othello was supposed to have these Books. Why did a Meat get them?”

“Lascall probably gave them to him.”

“Wasn’t this Lascall Othello supposed to be our ally?”

Ganbanzel smiled.

“We’re separate in the first place. We don’t share our thoughts and knowledge with him.”

“This can’t...”

Alme became speechless. Ganbanzel flung his words at her.

“Or perhaps Cigal threw them away.”

“...Threw them away? But why would he...”

The moment she wanted to continue the conversation, Alme’s head was trampled.

“Oh my, you’ve talked too much. It’s important to keep our chatter to moderation.”

“...”

“Girl. You are one of the Indulging God Cult. Don’t try poking your nose in too far. If you want to get into Heaven, you mustn’t look for Lascall. You want to ascend to Heaven, right?”

Alme did not nod her head – and not because it was stepped on. It was because she had a thing far more important than going to Heaven.

To her confusion, Alme was demoted to a messenger. This was the lowest

position among False Men. While serving the Cult just as she did before outwardly, Alme's hatred kept burning. It did not dim even in times of tedium. Just like heated steel, it only became hotter.

Alme thought to herself,

Hamyuts Meseta.

I'll kill you, of course. You are the ringleader who killed Cigal-sama.

Colio Tonies. Shiron Booyacornish.

Regrettably you are already dead. If only I could revive you, I would have killed you again.

Mirepoc Finedell and Mattalast Ballory.

Both of you were useless, but you're on league with Hamyuts. I'll kill you.

Finally, Lascall Othello.

Why did you let Cigal-sama die? You are also guilty. No, your crimes are the worst. I'll kill you. I will definitely find and kill you.

Part 2

While working as a contact, Alme began investigating confidential information of the Cult. She decrypted their cipher, wiretapped the executives, looking for clues about Lascall Othello.

She couldn't find classified information easily. At the end of her hardships, Alme managed to get her hand on a single clue.

After Ganbanzel died, in a correspondence about the measures to be taken after his death, she found that hated name.

“What should we do about Haiza's Book we left behind on the Monster's island? He met with Parney Parlmenta.”

The Overseer of Paradise answered that message thus,

“Leave it be. Reaching Lascall Othello from Haiza's Book is exceedingly improbable.”

After Alme read this, she abandoned her job in the Indulging God Cult and went to one of its laboratories.

“What is it, Alme?”

Winkeny was there. Luckily, he was her acquaintance.

“I have a message from the Overseer of Paradise. When you assault Bantorra Library, steal Haiza’s Book.”

“A strange order... I wanted to devote myself to defeating Hamyuts, but...”

Winkeny looked suspicious.

“Hamyuts is the main priority. You can get Haiza’s Book if you have some leeway.”

“Understood. It would probably be possible.”

“If you manage to bring it, I will come to you. Pass it to me.”

Those were her preparations. She didn’t know what was written inside that Armed Librarian Haiza’s Book, but it probably wasn’t much of a clue.

Her goal was getting another source of information – Parney Parlmanta’s Book.

She determined the Book was in Fullbeck City. She won’t give it up to Mirepoc and the rest. And also not to the Indulging God Cult.

If Lascall was such an absolute secret, she will expose it. It would be his retribution for letting Cigal die.

The next day, Mirepoc chartered a car and headed for Fullbeck's suburbs. A luxurious residential area had been expanded in it. The people who set up vast mansions lived away from the complex and cramped city center.

'I'm somewhat angry.'

While sitting in the back seat, Mirepoc recalled Mattalast's words.

What he said was obvious. She was shocked that she didn't notice it was so obvious.

But she put off thinking about it for later. He didn't tell her to return to Bantorra. Since she could do something, she would do it. That was all.

The car parked in one corner in front of a mansion. The size of the large gates rivaled those of the underground labyrinth in Bantorra. Mirepoc got off the car and walked to the gate.

"...State your business."

A gatekeeper was standing ahead of it. From his demeanor, she could see that he would be able to match her. Well, at least for a normal person who couldn't use Magic.

"State your business!"

Mirepoc was silent.

“Do you know whose house this is?”

“Isn’t this the residence of Keith Clin, boss of a Book-stealing organization?”

Mirepoc said. The man’s hostility rose.

“And as for you, do you know who I am?”

She showed him a glance of the lock emblem attached to her chest.

“...An Armed Librarian?”

The gatekeeper faltered.

“Let me pass through.”

The gatekeeper’s high-handed attitude was changed in an instant.

“Keith-sama will not be able to meet you due to a sudden illness.”

“I only told you to let me pass through. Didn’t you hear me?”

Mirepoc took a step closer. The gatekeeper promptly reached for the gun at

his waist. Mirepoc watched him with cold eyes.

“What is it? Are you not going to shoot?”

Lured by her words, the gatekeeper pulled out his gun. Mirepoc’s hand moved.

Her hand pulling out the sword was invisible to the man. The bullet he shot was repelled by the hilt of the rapier grasped lightly in her hand. The man became speechless while holding the gun.

“This is a normal gun, right? It won’t be able to hit an Armed Librarian.”

Mirepoc stepped up.

“Once you realize it’s useless, I will make you let me pass through.”

Jumping while holding her skirt, she went past the gate and landed in the garden.

“...Umm, us stealing and selling Books is a complete misunderstanding.”

The unbelievably fat man spoke while restlessly wiping off his sweat. He was the boss of the Book-stealing organization, the man called Keith Clin.

He was dealing with Mirepoc as if nothing has happened. He was probably trying to send her away without stirring up trouble.

“We, lovers of Books as pure works of art, have received permission from the government of the Ismo Republic to cooperate with you Armed Librarians and manage Books.”

The boss kept throwing his excuses on and on. A pure form of art? Mirepoc felt angry.

They only gathered Books because of their interest in sex. Meaning, porn.

Even the Book of an ordinary woman can get a good value from some weirdoes. Normal people couldn't get the Books of some high-level prostitute or a famous beauty even if they were to work for their entire lives. If it's a world-renowned beauty, one Book would be worth enough to buy an entire castle.

Slipping away from the law – and at times using it as a shield, they conducted their filthy business. If it were the Armed Librarians of the old days, they would attack them with no questions asked. But since lately people have been advocating for human rights, they couldn't do so.

Mirepoc felt sick thinking of her Book sold for such purposes. Should I burn the entire house down? She wondered.

“Enough self-advertisement. Where's Parney Parlmenta's Book?”

Mirepoc skipped ahead to the real issue at hand. Keith started sweating a

little more.

“Even if you ask such a thing of me...”

“It’s not in Bantorra Library. We already know it’s been excavated and kept somewhere in this city.”

“That is nothing but a rumor... more importantly, I have some valued wine, so let us commemorate our acquaintance.”

What are we supposed to commemorate?

“Enough!”

Mirepoc kept adding more pressure on Keith.

But he didn’t easily break in. He kept evading the subject. He kept telling Mirepoc he wanted to cooperate with her, but it was obvious he didn’t really mean it.

“Is that so. I’m glad to have heard your input on it.”

Mirepoc, feeling numb, rose from her seat. Keith, thinking he got away, was all smiles.

“Hey, call a car for miss Armed Librarian here. I’ll also send her off.”

“That will not be necessary!”

Mirepoc exited the room as if trying to break the door.

The car that took her there had already returned. Although walking back to the city took some time, it was far better than borrowing a car from those guys. She walked for about an hour. A car suddenly parked up next to Mirepoc. The gatekeeper from earlier was inside.

“I said I don’t need seeing off!”

Mirepoc started telling, but she then realized something was wrong.

“Please... no, I beg you. Save us please...”

The gatekeeper was shaking in fear.

“What?”

“They’re killing them. A monster attacked...”

Mirepoc thrust the gatekeeper from the driver’s seat and got inside. She drove back to Keith’s mansion while barely avoiding accidents.

After parking the car next to the gate while smoke rose from the tires,

Mirepoc rushed inside.

“...What is, that...”

A woman servant was crying in front of the mansion. Another servant was besides her, crouching and shaking. One shed blood and the other was covered in that spurt of blood – everyone would be scared of that.

“What’s going on inside?”

She asked them. However, they only shook their heads to the side, so it remained unsettled. Mirepoc grabbed her sword and ran into the mansion.

The interior was quiet. She found several fresh corpses. They were probably the murdered servants. They were wounded by one blow of a blade – which seemed quite skillful. All corpses lying around were killed using the same weapon.

They were people she thought about killing, but she wasn’t actually happy about the fact they were killed. While looking around carefully, Mirepoc headed for the room Keith was in.

“...Keith! Are you alive?”

She walked in the corridor that was covered by a carpet of red. She could hear a sound coming from her side – a sound like dripping water. She instinctively turned her head.

At that moment, she heard a voice in her head.

‘Mirepo, evade!’

In an instant, Mirepoc’s body got on the floor. A sharp object went above her head, scattering dancing blood in front of her.

Mirepoc rose on her legs and looked above as she jumped to the side.

A woman was clinging to the ceiling. With one hand and both legs catching on to a protuberance, she used her free hand to wield a sword. The rusty-red sword was stained in blood, sporadically letting down droplets of it.

“How did you dodge?”

The woman kicked at the ceiling and landed on the floor.

‘...Are you alive, Mirepoc?’

Mirepoc answered to the oncoming thoughts,

‘Yes, thank you very much.’

The voice talking to her was that of Mattalast. They didn’t talk in a long time, but she kept the connection just as he told her. He kept predicting two seconds ahead for Mirepoc.

“You... who are you?”

Mirepoc inquired.

“Die.”

It was a straightforward reply. Mirepoc blocked the oncoming mowing attack with her rapier. It became slightly distorted.

She shook off her opponent with a kick. Mirepoc also flew back from that and the space between them became about ten meters. Her enemy immediately came chasing her. She avoided the attack while falling backwards.

Mirepoc thought it would be hard to move with her fluttering dress, but she noticed it wasn't so. When you have to fight in an emergency, you have no time to worry about such things as the skirt's hem.

“The Indulging God Cult?”

Even now Mirepoc inquired her. No reply came. She carefully observed Mirepoc. Mirepoc once again checked her opponent's appearance.

She wore a black men's frock-coat. Beneath that coat she could see a tight red dress on a dark skin. Her hair was a rust-like red. She had strangely young facial features, and she coldly gazed at Mirepoc.

“What a strange sword.”

Mirepoc murmured. It was a short yet bulky straight sword. The blade was covered in rust. In that state, it was probably almost only used as a bludgeoning weapon.

No, that's wrong. Looking at her warped rapier, Mirepoc noticed – it was used as a bludgeoning weapon, but with her brute strength, she didn't need the blade to be sharp. She probably increased the durability of the weapon at the expense of its sharpness. That was reasonable.

She had no time for admiration. The woman wielding the rusty sword kicked at the floor.

The danger wasn't the sword dropping from overhead; it was the kick coming from below. Mirepoc threw her head back to avoid the sword and received the kick using her knee. Her kneecap creaked.

'Mattalast-san. Where are you now?'

'I'll be there in 15 minutes. Enemies?'

'A woman. Her ability is still unknown.'

Fifteen minutes. Difficult, she thought while evading her enemy's swordplay. It would pass in the blink of an eye if she were to preserve the stalemate, but not if she were dragged into a decisive battle.

Standing against Mirepoc's sword meant for stabbing was the rusty woman's sword wielded for bludgeoning. In an arc or a straight line Mirepoc was slightly faster. But if she were to take a killing stance, they would both be killed.

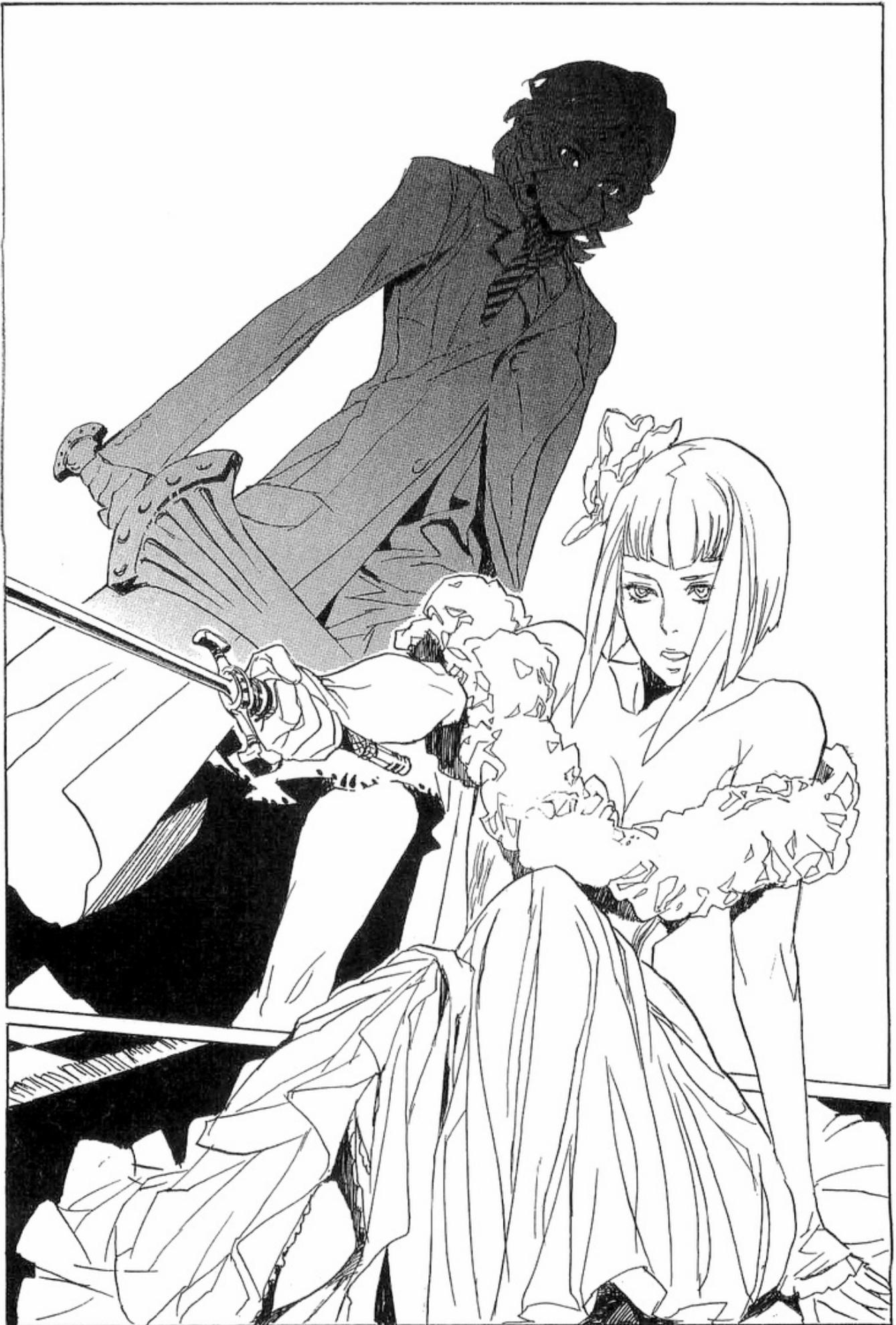
They were tied even in their skill and physical abilities. But she still didn't know her special abilities. What should she do?

Slowly but surely the rusty woman grew closer. Mirepoc slowly retreated so that she would not create an opening.

And then, the woman suddenly stopped her advance.

“That’s no good at all, girl.”

“...No good?”



“You can’t win like that. Come at me.”

The rusty woman approached, acting defenselessly on purpose. The cautious Mirepoc made no move. It wasn’t a good opportunity. She’ll fall for her trick if she attacks.

“Eh, so that’s how it is?”

The rusty woman laughed. What’s so funny?

“You’ve probably never killed a person.”

Mirepoc’s eyes widened. The rusty woman could see she was disturbed. At that moment, she suddenly turned her body around. Mirepoc dispensed her gun and shot. The other woman lightly dodged.

“ ... ”

She escaped. Mirepoc bit her lips in regret.

She didn’t manage to escape because she was in shock.

Although she was sent day after day for long battles, Mirepoc never killed a person by her own hands.

She was probably seen through with a single glance.

After the fight was over, Mirepoc found Keith hiding under his bed. His legs and behind peeked out. He looked just like an ostrich burying its head in the sand.

“There are no longer any enemies. Please come out.”

“N-no. They will definitely come again.”

Mirepoc sighed. Then, Mattalast finally arrived and came rushing inside.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. I was just about to ask myself.”

She pointed at Keith while saying so.

“Even I have no idea. She suddenly came and started swinging her sword around.”

“And afterwards?”

“That’s...”

“Answer.”

Mattalast lightly kicked the bed. They could hear a frightened sound come from within.

“You’d better not be hiding anything.”

“I understand. Please save me.”

Keith started telling them about the time when the rusty woman attacked.

It was about three hours ago. Alme assaulted Keith’s mansion. She wasn’t like Mirepoc who cared about her opponents. She started killing people one by one so she could be found by Keith.

Keith was ungracefully hiding under the bed. Alme thrust her sword at it.

“...Where’s Parney Parlmanta’s Book?”

“I don’t know. I honestly don’t know!”

“Even you don’t know?”

“Everyone thinks I have it. But I really don’t. I heard the rumor, but I’ve never seen the Book.”

“And you didn’t search for it?”

“I did. But every person who searched for Parney’s Book died.”

“I see.”

Hearing this was enough for Alme. She prepared for her battle with Mirepoc.

After this, the battle went just as planned. As she didn’t manage to kill her in one blow, she planned to escape. She easily succeeded at that.

It wasn’t Mirepoc she ran away from – but Mattalast. She could tell by Mirepoc’s expression that she called him with her Thought Sharing.

And she understood when fighting her – Mirepoc wasn’t her enemy. She could deal with her whenever.

She had some skill. However, her spirit was decisively weak. She didn’t have the drive for inflicting a fatal blow.

“...You’ve probably never killed a person.”

She was disturbed by these words to the extent Alme wanted to laugh. She endured laughing as she recalled this.

Keith finished speaking of the rusty woman.

“This is everything. I’m not lying.”

Leaving the trembling Keith behind, the two have left the room.

“Hey, aren’t you going to save me?”

Keith panicked, but they ignored him.

“Now it’s clear.”

Mirepoc said.

“The enemy attacks us, and looks for Parney Parlmanta’s Book. There’s no doubt that the Indulging God Cult and Lascall Othello are connected.”

“...So that means you were right.”

Mirepoc nodded heavily.

“But, just who is Lascall Othello?”

Mattalast replied,

“I don’t know. I can’t even make a guess.”

Mirepoc couldn’t tell that Mattalast lied. Neither then nor later.

The man who called himself a liar and the girl who was proud of herself being honest – there was an insurmountable gap between the two.

Chapter 3: Memories Of Heaven

Part 1

The two returned to the hotel. They talked in Mirepoc's room while drinking coffee.

A story book she got from Kalon was in front of her eyes. While Mirepoc was somewhat excited, Mattalast looked terribly glum. He smoked his pipe in silence, looking at the book.

“This fairy tale and the Indulging God Cult – do they have any connection?”

Mirepoc waited for a reply, but Mattalast didn't say anything. She reluctantly had to answer herself.

“I believe that the fact we can't excavate the Books of the Indulging God Cult's followers is probably due to this Lascall Othello.”

“I see.”

Mattalast made an indifferent reply.

“Which means that Lascall Othello is an existence that can be said to be close to the core of the Indulging God Cult. This also explains their reason to risk

themselves so far to take their Books.”

“Looks like we’ve reeled up some big fish.”

Why does Mattalast look so gloomy? We might be approaching the core of the Indulging God Cult’s mysteries here.

“I don’t want to be beaten to the punch by that rusty woman. We must find Parney Parlmanta’s Book before her.”

“Right.”

Mattalast’s voice still sounded depressed.

“What’s wrong, Mattalast-san?”

“Nothing.”

He smiled. However, it was a terribly forced smile.

“Alright.”

Mattalast started talking.

“Our enemy also looks for Parney Parlmanta’s Book. It seems to be the only thing that could be a hint of Lascall Othello at present. We need to consider finding that Book our highest priority.”

“Yes.”

“Let’s split. You’ll investigate Parney Parlmenta using surviving material and people who’ve known her. I’ll look for her Book together with Keith.”

It was a somewhat half-hearted strategy, but she didn’t say anything against it.

Mattalast then stood up.

“Are you going already?”

“Yeah. You start tomorrow. Watch out for that rusty woman.”

Saying this, he left.

Mirepoc stayed at the hotel. He told her to start tomorrow, but she couldn’t sleep. She looked through the picture book she got from Kalon and ruminated. Just who is Lascall Othello?

Mirepoc closed her eyes and invoked her Magic Right.

‘Noloty.’

The destination of her thoughts was Noloty at Bantorra Library. Thinking of the time difference, she should still be at the Library at this time.

‘Mirepoc-san, is that you?’

‘Noloty. Do you have some time?’

‘I just thought of heading back home, but...’

How convenient, Mirepoc thought. She would feel awkward to make her junior work during her off hours, but since the timing was good Noloty would have to endure her a bit.

‘I have something to ask of you, is that fine?’

‘Yes.’

Unhesitatingly answering ‘yes’ at times like these was part of Noloty’s charm.

‘I want you to go and read Haiza’s Book.’

‘...Yes ma’am.’

Haiza’s Book should have been stored under strict security in the Acting Director’s room. However, just viewing it shouldn’t be too much of a problem.

‘Since I’m trying to get permission from the Director, please wait a bit.’

The thoughts sent from Noloty were interrupted. She was probably negotiating with the Director.

‘Permission received. I will now view the Book.’

‘I see. Wait a bit.’

Mirepoc concentrated her consciousness so she could share the memories of the Book Noloty was reading.

‘...Alright, go ahead, Noloty.’

She confirmed the connection was stronger than usual.

‘What do I need to read?’

‘The part where he investigates Lascall Othello.’

Mirepoc could feel the memories from Haiza’s Book flowing into Noloty. And then she read them from her mind.

During his investigation of Lascall Othello, Haiza didn’t talk to just Parney Parlmanta. He also met various other people.

Most of them were people who said that someone told them of the rumors. However, Noloty and Mirepoc found out there was a person who wasn't like that.

“Lascall Othello?”

The one replying so was a young newspaper reporter.

“Yeah, I've heard of that. Who told me about it? I can't remember...”

The reporter said bluntly. However, he tilted his head and thought.

“There's one point of interest though.”

“What?”

“See this.”

The newspaper reporter showed Haiza an article.

“Serial Bank Robbers Arrested”

“I've created the opportunity for this arrest. When I was interviewing people at the mines, I found the Book of one of the incident's victims by chance.”

The reporter smiled.

“Thanks to that incident my value surged. Maybe it will help you find Lascall Othello.”

While reading the Book, Noloty inquired Mirepoc.

‘Mirepoc-san, does this mean anything?’

‘Sorry, please keep going a little.’

A youth quietly drank beer in front of a single Book.

“This Book belongs to my old friend.”

The youth said.

“I didn’t know... that she loved me. We haven’t met in a long time, so I thought she forgot me already.”

“Where did you get this?”

“A Book-seller told me something like, ‘this is your acquaintance’, and sold it to me.”

“...Where is that Book-seller?”

“He was caught by you Armed Librarians and quit his job.”

“Is that so...”

“I don’t know if Lascall Othello exists, but that Book-seller was Lascall for me, at least.”

An old woman was talking.

“I really don’t know anything. One day I woke up early and the Book was inside my house.”

While saying this, the old woman showed a single Book.

“It was my son’s Book. He left home long ago... and returned like this.”

She started shedding tears.

“He was a devoted son. Even though he turned into this form, he still came back.”

The woman said while holding out the Book.

“Sorry. I am aware the Book must be taken to the Library. I also thought about sending it there countless times, but I just couldn’t do it...”

The old woman was crying again. Haiza received the Book.

“...Where did you find it in the house?”

“It was in the mailbox. It was sent here in an envelope.”

Haiza looked at the envelope. The forwarding address was Toatt Mining Town. The sender’s name had not been written down.

‘That’s enough. Thank you, Noloty.’

Being told this, Noloty exited the Book.

‘You’re looking for Lascall Othello, right, Mirepoc-san?’

Noloty sent a worried thought.

'...Yeah, that's right.'

'So he's connected to the Indulging God Cult like you've thought?'

'I'm investigating it. I still can't say anything.'

'I see...'

Noloty seemed to be thinking about something.

'But, Lascall Othello somehow seems like a good person.'

'Perhaps.'

'He delivered a Book to that old lady, and to that man, so he did good things.'

'Books need to be in the Library.'

'O-oh, sorry.'

Mirepoc instinctually laughed at Noloty's cute flustered thoughts.

She cut the connection.

“A good person, huh...”

Mumbled Mirepoc. She thought of Lascall Othello. That didn't seem right.

She thought of the conversations Haiza had with people.

And of the legends she heard about from Kalon.

Noloty's words that he seemed like a good person were certainly on mark. If he really was a member of the Indulging God Cult Mirepoc thought there were some unexplained things.

As she thought, the most important were Parney Parlmanta's Book and Lascall Othello's identity.

She didn't think of the rusty woman as that important. She was about evenly matched with Mirepoc with a slight disadvantage for Mirepoc. For Mattalast this kind of opponent wouldn't give any trouble at all.

She suddenly recalled their battle.

“...I never killed anyone, huh.”

The rusty woman saw through that fact with a single glance and sneered at her.

But what of it? Mirepoc's ability was that of logistical support. She would obviously not come to fight in the front line. If a time comes where she has to kill, she will definitely be able to do so. When the moment comes, she will not hesitate.

However, Mirepoc still felt something like defeat at the woman's words.

A while ago, Mirepoc spoke with Enlike. He was once the Indulging God Cult's Meat but took over the body of the Monster Zatoh. Now he collaborated with the Armed Librarians.

Mirepoc slightly hesitated while talking with him. She once ordered Noloty to kill him.

However, Enlike said that he didn't mind.

"At that point in time, it was the proper decision."

Mirepoc felt relieved.

"I also think that way. Noloty's judgment was right in the result, but that's based on hindsight."

"That's right."

Enlike looked at Mirepoc with cold, gloomy eyes.

In fact, there was some anxiety. Perhaps Noloty's decision wasn't correct?

"But I respect Noloty."

"Huh?"

"It doesn't matter if she's right or wrong. She's doing what she wants to.

She's different from me, and probably from you as well."

"That is the wrong way to act as an Armed Librarian."

"Probably."

That was everything she spoke with Enlike about.

Thinking about it, she also felt like she lost to Noloty in something hard to put in words. She wasn't wrong – but while she thought so, what was that sense of defeat she felt?

They were similar. The sense of defeat against that rusty woman was like that against Noloty.

What was that feeling?

While thinking of this, Mirepoc went to sleep.

“Mattalast began moving. Is Mirepoc resting?”

Alme monitored the hotel the two were staying in. She saw the lights in Mirepoc’s room turn off. Mattalast went outside the front door a while ago.

Should I kill Mirepoc immediately? She thought.

But she determined it wasn’t efficient.

Currently, it was a three-way struggle between her, the Armed Librarians and the Indulging God Cult. The Cult hasn’t made a move yet, but they will soon come to attack Alme and the Armed Librarians.

For Alme, who was severely lacking in power, this situation was favorable.

Alme was burning with the urge to kill, but her thinking was always composed.

“I should look for Parney’s Book.”

Alme flipped her body and jumped into the nighttime city.

For a few days afterwards, Fullbeck City was at peace. The massacre at Keith's mansion wasn't reported in the newspapers. He probably used his power to silence them.

Mirepoc and Mattalast started going around the city. Mattalast started exhaustively scouring places that had Books and Mirepoc tried following Parney's footsteps.

They kept in touch from time to time and continued their research.

The rusty woman was ominously silent as the investigation advanced.

At night, they rejoined in the hotel.

"Did you find Parney's Book?"

Mattalast shook his head.

"I didn't find any clues either."

It was understandable. They have been searching for Parney Parlmanta's Book from before they suspected her connection with the Indulging God Cult. There's no way it would be found so easily.

“Is it really in this city?”

“We have no choice but to look for it. More importantly, how’s your side?”

Mirepoc thought for a while.

“I heard testimony from several related persons. Unfortunately I found no evidence Parney was involved with the Indulging God Cult, but I have found plenty of points of suspicion.”

“What do you mean?”

“Some say that Parney Parlmenta’s popularity had been fabricated.”

“Interesting.”

Mattalast leaned forward.

“Parney was a mediocre actress who made no money for a long time. From those who knew her at the time, no one had praised her acting skills. However, starting from a certain point her evaluation completely changed.”

“Her talent bloomed, didn’t it?”

“It seemingly became so. But there are also those who claim that it’s wrong. She had no soul in her acting – just the technique. She was completely a third-

rate actress. Many people claimed this here and there.

There were those who praised her and those who criticized her. I don't know enough so I don't really understand, but they seem incredibly divided in opinion.

Furthermore, when people have criticized her, there were countless testimonies of them being put under pressure. You've also said this, Mattalast-san. Parney's acting wasn't a big deal."

"...I did."

"I haven't been able to confirm this, but there's also talk about people who consistently badmouthed Parney getting erased. Alternatively, there were also many cases of actresses who seemed like they could become her rivals that suddenly quit or resigned their parts."

"...So what do you think about that?"

"I have one guess about Parney."

"What do you mean?"

"Parney probably belonged to the Indulging God Cult. I believe the Cult made secret maneuvers from behind the scenes for her success."

Mirepoc continued.

“I believe that Parney was one of the Indulging God Cult’s leaders – the people referred to as True Men.”

They knew the fact that there were several different ranks inside the Cult.

The lowest were Meats. The bombs from Toatt Mining Town, Enlike and the rest who were eaten by the Monster, the woman who became Renas Fleur during the Mokkaia incident, and more. They were cattle with the shape of a human that existed only to be used.

Above them were regular members. From Enlike’s story they found out that they were called False Men. From what the Armed Librarians side had been able to confirm so far, they were men such as Winkeney and Locolo from the Mokkaia incident as well as the cloth-user Boramot from Enlike’s island. The Ever-Laughing Witch Shiron and the Monster Zatoh probably also belonged to that category.

The position above it was that of True Men. Thus far they only managed to confirm Cigal Crukessa and Ganbanzel Grof.

Do what your heart desires. The only teaching of the Indulging God Cult applied just for the True Men. Everyone else existed only to serve as the True Men’s arms and legs.

“Do all that your heart desires. This is the teaching of the Indulging God Cult and the only principle behind those who are called True Men.

Parney wished to become a famous actress. So she became a member of the Indulging God Cult and used underhanded methods to achieve that position.”

Mattalast thought for a while.

“You’re only guessing, but that guess seems right.”

Mirepoc felt relieved at this approval.

“But Parney was erased. That was probably also the Indulging God Cult’s doing.”

“Perhaps the reason for her erasure was her connection with Lascall Othello.”

“Perhaps.”

The conversation ended there. Their entire conversation was made of speculation. Since they couldn’t find Parney’s Book at present, they couldn’t know anything else.

“Besides, we don’t really understand the Indulging God Cult.”

Mirepoc looked outside the window.

“Do what your heart desires. This is a natural idea at some level. Everyone in this world follows their desires.”

She looked at the city's lights through the window and at the various people living underneath those lights.

“There are countless women who want to become actresses just like Parney in this city. There are many people in the world who desire money just like Cigal. Even Ganbanzel who desires power is just like us Armed Librarians.”

“...They're different. Normal people fulfill their desires in accordance to law and justice. The Indulging God Cult commits evil for their cause.”

“But there are also plenty of people who commit evil for their cause in the world.”

Mirepoc recalled Keith's fat face.

“If the True Men had no subordinates to follow them, people like Cigal would be mere criminals. Ganbanzel would be a powerless man. Parney would be an unsuccessful actress.

What makes them the Armed Librarians' enemies are the False Men and Meats accompanying them.”

“...I see.”

“Why do the False Men serve the True Men? They're all readily submissive for the True Men, at time even going as far as throwing away their lives for them.

I don't believe Cigal and Ganbanzel have had that sort of charisma.

I wonder just what False Men think about when they join the Cult?”

“Well, never mind that. Every person has their own beliefs.”

“Right.”

This might have been a useless talk. Mirepoc changed the subject.

“Speaking of which, what about the rusty woman?”

“Seems like she’s still in the city. There were several eyewitnesses. She even showed herself to the one I introduced you to, Kalon-kun.”

Mirepoc was startled.

“Is he fine?”

“It would be more of a fuss if he was killed. Seems like she just asked him about Lascall and went off.”

“Why did she go to Kalon’s?”

“Inspecting the enemy’s movements, probably. She’s probably investigating how far we’ve reached.”

That woman was probably also looking for Parney Parlmanta's Book – so that she could conceal the truth about Lascall Othello.

“How about we try to capture her before moving on?”

“I have been looking for her. But it didn't go well. I can't seem to find her.”

“You can't?”

“She probably has some ability. She seems to be able to perceive my approach and run away.”

“An ability like that of the Director's, isn't it...”

“It might be the same. Sensory Threads aren't that difficult and rare of an ability.”

The two sighed at the same time.

“I'll go look for her now. Be cautious. We can't tell where that rusty woman will attack from.”

“Right.”

Should they stop investigating Parney Parlmanta? Mirepoc decided to look for

her Book with Mattalast starting from tomorrow. Drinking a cup of tea before heading to bed, she thought about such things.

But, while she understood about Parney to a certain extent, there were still plenty of mysteries.

She could especially say that she didn't know a single thing about Lascall Othello's identity.

He was the man who gave Books to Colio. An existence that passed Books to people. A strange legend passed from old times.

Was he good? Was he evil? Was he an enemy? Was he an ally?

And just what kind of a being was he?

Part 2

Alme stopped clinging to Mirepoc and Mattalast. She was now at an apartment. She was searching through the house.

Parney's Book, as one who belonged to the Indulging God Cult, wouldn't be at any man's place. It should be with one of the Cult's followers – thus Alme thought.

After massacring False Men, she looked for their hiding places and carefully searched around them. She even looked inside the walls and below the floor.

However, she couldn't find Parney Parlmanta's Book.

“Why... These should be all False Men in this city.”

Alme started thinking – was there perhaps another False Man in the city she was unaware of?

Or was the rumor of the Book being in this city a hoax in the first place?

Even so, she couldn't leave the city. She had no clues about Lascall's identity other than Parney's Book.

Stroking Cigal's picture hanging at her breast, Alme rose up again.

"This city is strange."

Alme muttered as she looked at the streets. She thought that the Fullbeck she knew grew uglier the more it seemed splendid.

This city was deeply nostalgic. This was because here she met Cigal.

She recalled it for no reason – the day she met Cigal and obtained a new way of living.

Alme hated one thing for as long as she could remember.

Being pitied.

In a corner of downtown, between small buildings lined up disorderly, underneath a leaking roof in front of a shop window, Alme was playing her violin. The people coming and going there occasionally threw coins inside her hat without stopping by.

At that time Alme made her living with the violin. She had to earn money from the small change of people wandering from and to the city. She had that violin for as long as she knew. She knew no other way of living, and thought she will probably know no other.

That day it was raining. There were few people who walked around and even less who stopped by.

A woman came near. Without listening to Alme's music, she threw a paper note inside the hat.

"You're not listening, so why are you giving this to me?"

Alme asked that woman.

"Isn't it fine? You're so young but having it so hard."

"...I'm not really..."

"Please accept it. I can't bear staying around kids like you."

After the woman left, Alme threw the money away.

She hated being pitied. Being pitied meant being looked down at. She couldn't forgive anyone who looked down at her.

After a while, another man stopped by.

He was dressed in expensive clothing, not unlike the previous woman. He was a man of neat features and long hair. Thinking that he might act like that woman, Alme started playing. In her irritation the sound was rough.

When she finished playing one song, the man wasn't looking at her. If you don't feel like listening then get outta here, Alme thought. When she thought of

playing another song, a black car suddenly parked in front of the man.

“You’re late.”

The man said.

“I’m sorry, Cigal-sama.”

Oh, he was waiting for a car. Just as she felt disappointed, a single paper bill was thrown into her hat.

And the man looked at Alme for the first time.

“I’ll come to listen again.”

Even after the car left, Alme stared vacantly at empty air.

“You came back already?”

As Alme returned home, her father murmured this.

“Because it’s raining.”

Alme replied.

“You have to treasure the customers that will listen to you even in rain.”

“...I see.”

Both her father and mother worked as street performers like her. She was taken by her parents around the world, and they’ve earned their money by performing.

“It’s no good. Everyone goes to the playhouse lately. They can also listen to music on the radio so there’s nothing to do.”

Her father complained to her mother.

All the family planned on stopping their work as street performers and getting employed by the playhouse. However, no place in Fullbeck hired them. Since the family was self-taught, they have been ignored in the city. Only those who received formal musical education could play there.

“We have no choice but go to the countryside.”

“But, we’ve been travelling performers out whole lives.”

“What can we do? No one wants to hire us. We can’t earn our living in this city.”

Alme was silent, listening to her parents’ conversation.

Moving away from the city meant losing their chances to be hired by the playhouse or the orchestra forever. They would have to continue earning their

income on the streets until the day they die.

To her childlike mind, this was unbearable. Living the same way all of her life made her feel entrapped.

Alme went to bed. Suddenly, she heard her mother and father talking about her.

“We’ve made our child suffer. If we only didn’t have any children...”

“Don’t say that. It can’t be helped.”

Alme’s stomach boiled at hearing those words. She hated being pitied even by her parents.

Don’t look down on me. Don’t pity me.

Even if they’re my parents, I will never forgive them.

After a while, Alme met that man again. She remembered that his name seemed to be Cigal. On that day the sky was cloudy, and occasionally a thunder resounded between these clouds. She had no customers on this rainy day, so her hat was empty.

The man stood quietly and listened to her violin play.

“Why don’t you go to the music hall? There are many people much better

there.”

When Alme finished playing, she asked the man.

“I cannot bear listening to their performance. Their technique is boring and they’re only trying to compete with each other.”

He said those mysterious words.

“Is that not good?”

“Their music doesn’t resonate in my heart.”

Cigal kept explaining.

“Your violin is filled with your anger and frustration. If I were to play the violin my music would perhaps sound the same as yours.”

Saying this, Cigal threw a paper note.

At that moment, a boy appeared from the side, grabbed it and ran away.

Why didn’t you stop him? Alme stared at Cigal with protesting eyes.

“Is something the matter?”

“Why don’t you chase him...”

“Me, chase him? Please don’t say silly things. You’re the one who should chase him.”

Even if she was told this, it was troublesome. Even if she chased him she wouldn’t be able to catch him. Even if she did catch him, the next time he would just use violence.

“That’s why you are useless. No, it’s not just you. Most people in this world are useless.”

Saying this, Cigal put a small handgun inside the hat.

“You’re all waiting for it – for someone to bring you happiness. So you never obtain anything.”

Alme slowly put her violin down. Then, she reached her hand for the handgun and held it.

“That is fine. Grasp it with your own hands.”

Alme was surprised at two things:

The gun was much heavier than she thought.

Also, that she grabbed that gun without any hesitation.

Alme started looking for the boy. Cigal gave her advices from behind.

“Here. That kind of opponent will run to somewhere hidden.”

Following Cigal’s words, Alme kept walking. The gun she held with both hands was heavy.

“They probably have some meeting place. Are there any unpopular vacant lots around here?”

Alme nodded and started walking there.

“Found it.”

In a vacant lot, two boys have hanged out together.

“How convenient. If it’s only those two you can easily kill them.”

After chasing them down so far, Alme suddenly became scared. Both of holding a gun and of killing. Killing people. Until now, that kind of act was supposed to be far away from her. Was she going to do it now?

Was she taken by the devil? No, that’s wrong. Alme came here by her own will.

She slowly approached the two boys.

“Hold it with both hands.”

Cigal said.

“Aim at the stomach. Align the target with the muzzle’s aim in a straight line.”

She arranged the targeting as she was told, walking slowly. She aimed at the boys in the back alley. They were laughing, thinking it was a bluff.

“Shoot.”

The first boy was hit in the stomach. The second one who tried getting away was shot in the head. Both of them died easily. Cigal picked up the money they were holding and handed it to Alme. Despite that for him this amount of money was worth about as much as a pebble on the side of the road, he looked extremely happy while handing it over.

“Congrats. This is the first thing you’ve grasped with your own hands.”

Alme looked at the crumpled bill.

“How do you feel?”

“...I don’t know.”

“Why?”

Cigal asked. Why didn't she feel anything? She couldn't believe what she's done. She didn't think of herself today as the same girl she was yesterday.

However, she wasn't just scared. She could also feel something welling up inside her chest.

If she kills she will not be pitied. This might be a really good method to avoid being looked down upon.

"...Are you scared?"

Alme nodded.

"Everyone feels that way at first. However, it will soon change."

Cigal patted Alme's head.

"You are right. As you are now, you are right."

She could see his face through the gaps of her bangs. It was as refreshing as someone who helped a puppy from drowning in a river.

Alme kept playing her violin. She knew no other way of meeting Cigal.

Cigal seemed to come at days when she had no customers, so Alme quit playing as soon as she saw there were many people. They quickly went past the

strange street-performing girl.

A while passed. Cigal then appeared in a place different from Alme's expectations.

"Go hide!"

One day, she was woken by her mother with these words. The sleepy Alme was shoved inside the closet.

"So you're here. Aah, how scary."

Her mother stood in front of the closet to protect Alme. Slightly opening the closet's door and peeking out, Alme could see several black-wearing men at the front door. Just by looking she could tell they were not decent people. Her father was dealing with them while his back was shaking. She couldn't hear their voices, but they seemed to be quarreling.

"They're from the underworld... please hide. Don't make any voice."

Her mother's words didn't reach her ears. The man in the far back... there was no mistaking it. It was Cigal. Without any hesitation Alme left the closet. Her mother screamed.

"Alme, were you in this kind of place? Are you playing hide-and-seek?"

Cigal raised his voice while smiling. He turned his hand gently to Alme's back as she approached.

“So, shall we go?”

Cigal laughed and brought Alme out of her house.

As she left, Alme suddenly turned back. Her father seemed to be crying and her mother was too scared to come out. She thought that perhaps this would be the last time she would see them. She thought of saying some words of farewell, but couldn't think of any.

The car carrying Alme was going somewhere. Cigal said nothing about where he was taking her. She sat in silence next to him in the back seat.

She started talking to him.

“Why did you take me?”

He didn't look like a kidnapper or a man with strange hobbies.

“Right... let's say I see something promising in you.”

Cigal said while lighting a cigar.

“Where are you taking me?”

Cigal smiled but didn't answer.

“This is a sudden question, but have you ever been to Bantorra Library?”

It really was sudden. It was completely irrelevant to the conversation thus far.

“No.”

“Do you want to go there?”

Alme slightly tilted her head and answered.

“Not especially.”

Cigal smiled sweetly.

“If you had answered ‘yes’, I would have brought you back as a corpse.”

He spoke cheerfully and with a jesting tone, but it probably wasn't a joke. However, strangely she felt no fear.

“Bantorra Library is in fact a worthless place. Look outside the window a bit.”

She saw the herd of people passing by. Alme usually stared at them going away, but this time she was the one going away.

“Almost all the Books of the people you can see from here will be stored and preserved at the Library.

But, Alme. Do you think their Books have any value? No matter the Book, it will be buried without anyone seeing it. What will that sort of thing become?"

Even if he told her this, she didn't know. She couldn't imagine anything else.

"Both Armed Librarians and Bantorra Library are meaningless. The only Books that should remain are those that have value. Don't you think so?"

Thinking about it, it might be so. Alme nodded.

"I think so."

"That is good, Alme. If there were more people like you, the world would have become a slightly better place."

Cigal seemed satisfied at Alme's response. He gently put his hand around Alme's shoulder and kept talking.

"So, what do you think a valuable Book is?"

"I don't know."

"It is the Book of a man who lived a meaningful life. The Book of a person who lived his life correctly. And, the Book of a person who lived in happiness. Just like me. Am I wrong?"

Thinking rationally, it was an absurdly self-centered sort of thinking. But Alme was convinced. Cigal's voice had no arrogance or deception mixed in it. It was the same as if he just spoke of the sky being beautiful.

"You are perceptive.

You would surely understand the truth – that the only valuable thing in the world is my truth. That the only valuable thing in the world is to understand and serve me.

Do you understand? Alme. You should be able to understand this."

She couldn't answer immediately. For a short while she stared at the crowd of people outside the window. A certain pleasure was born in Alme's chest – the pleasure of looking down at people. In this world, only Cigal was precious and only Alme knew this.

None of the people passing by them knew. Only Alme did.

"I understand."

Alme was told so by the pleasure lighting up within her. Cigal smiled in satisfaction.

"Well then, it's time to introduce myself.

My name is Cigal Crukessa. I am a member of the Indulging God Cult, and one of the most valuable people in this world."

“The Indulging God Cult?”

“Yes. The Indulging God Cult. The only ones who serve the true God in this world.

On behalf of the Indulging God Cult, I welcome you as a comrade, Alme.”

It was then that Alme noticed – the car was approaching the city’s exit. At this rate, it would leave the city. When it does, she would probably not be able to return.

“Are you worried about your family?”

Cigal asked Alme as she thoughtlessly turned around.

“Do you want to get off?”

Alme understood that this was the time for decision. Will she follow Cigal or leave here?

She had two choices.

Alme firmly shook her head to the side.

“No, I won’t get off.”

Alme opened her mouth as she watched the city becoming more and more distant. She naturally started talking in a polite manner before she even noticed it.

“Umm, what is the True God?”

She thought it was a strange part in Cigal’s story. There should have only been three Gods in the world.

The overseer of Books, Past God Bantorra. He was now sealed in the Library’s depths.

The governor of the world’s people, Present God Toitorra*. He should now be sleeping at the Great Bronze Mountain of Toi.

Finally, the one who determines the future of people, Orntorra*. He passed away from the world at the end of the Paradise Era.

There should have been only these three Gods in the world. Just who was the True God among these?

Alme spoke about this, but Cigal resolutely denied it.

“A truly foolish question. They were mere overseers. Although people revered them, they are in fact not valuable beings at all. They are mere components used to maintain this world.”

“Then what is the True God?”

“Our God. The one who rules all of our happiness. Rather than anyone in this filthy, imperfect world, it is the one who sits at the world’s heights in Heaven, the one who seeks for the perfect happiness. That is God.”

“What is Heaven?”

The word sounded unfamiliar.

“The place holding the Books of those who had valuable lives. That is Heaven.”

“Not the Library?”

“Yes, not the Library. The Library houses worthless Books. Heaven houses valuable Books.”

“ ... ”

She never heard about such a place. All Books should have been at the Library. This was the absolute law of the world such as the sun rising from the east.

“Well then, I’m getting off at the neighboring city.”

“...Huh?”

Their conversation wasn't yet over. I have more things to ask, thought Alme.

"I'm busy. To tell you the truth, I came to pick you up on my way moving to the next city. I could meet with you only now."

"You were so busy and yet you came to listen to my violin?"

"Yeah. When I looked at you I just thought... I want that. Although it was a modest meeting, for you it was probably the single most shining moment of your life."

"Cigal-sama. We have arrived."

The driver opened the door and Cigal got off. He told him directions as to where to take Alme to.

"Goodbye, Cigal-sama."

"See you, Alme."

These were the words of farewell.

The car started moving again. While driving, the driver spoke to her.

"Do you also want to ascend to Heaven?"

She didn't really know.

“I’m also like that. I don’t have any lingering regrets in this world. My only life is that of going to Heaven.”

She still didn’t know anything. Neither about the Indulging God Cult, nor the place known as Heaven, nor about Cigal. The only thing that made Alme move was her meeting with Cigal and her wanting to go with him.

However, she threw away everything that she had obtained until now. Thinking about it, Alme’s life was something that could easily be discarded away from the beginning.

Until now she had nothing. That was fine. She was going to get things in her grasp now.

The place she was brought to was a hotel in a small town quite far from Fullbeck.

A man that introduced himself as the Overseer of Paradise welcomed Alme. She could see him but couldn’t remember his appearance. He was a strange man that she’s never seen before.

“I have received contact from Cigal. Normally, to join us you must partake in an ordeal, but since Cigal certified you it is not necessary.”

The Overseer of Paradise happily said.

“What can you do?”

“Play the violin.”

“...I see.”

The Overseer of Paradise said, sounding worried. She became anxious that he was disappointed.

“Well, it’s fine. You’re young. You seem to be healthy and able-bodied. If you undergo Magic Deliberation you will surely grow to be a fine warrior. So that you may ascend to Heaven, give it your best.”

“...Umm, what is Heaven?”

The Overseer of Paradise looked disappointed.

“So you came here without knowing anything.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, that is fine. I shall now explain it to you.”

Saying so, the Overseer of Paradise brought out something from his desk.

“There are things hard to understand even after hearing about them a hundred times but can be understood by seeing them just once. Please read this.”

He placed a Book fragment on top of the desk.

“This is the Book of a Magician who lived 1500 years ago. He was the one and only who managed to possess an extremely unusual ability – the ability to see the place that only dead people can reach, Heaven.”

Alme extended her hand. Her fingertip touched the Book fragment.

*In the original text the names of the two gods are mixed up, but this is in contradiction to information from earlier volumes. There doesn't seem to be any indication that this is Alme who's making a mistake, and the mountain the Present God sleeps in seems to fit Toitorra's name, so I decided to correct this for the time being.

Part 3

That man held the ability which allowed him to cross the border between the living and the dead. He managed to change his soul into a Book while still living, in order to reach Heaven. Why and how did he go to Heaven? The answers to this weren't recorded in the fragment.

The man's Book entered Heaven.

"...What is this..."

He could see. He should have been dead but was able to see. And he could feel. He felt the surrounding landscape and in the far distance, a tremendous being.

At first he had seen a vast desert. The man walked along it and his feet sank. He didn't know why, but he had to walk. He could understand something magnificent was in front of him. There was no reason for this. He only felt so.

In the meantime, it started raining. The man murmured as he got wet.

"...It's raining. A rain of souls."

The man basked in it. Inside the rain he felt joy like never before. The joy of

loving. The joy of being loved. Joy he could obtain. Joy contained in him.

While smelling lovely flowers, he overlooked a splendid sea of clouds. Conquering various countries on horseback, days of peace have arrived. Feeling the sublime souls of saints, his heart fluttered in wicked bliss, and while admiring lovely women, the loving man's body shivered in their embrace.

While struck by this rain of souls, the man felt all the kinds of happiness in the world.

Before long, the rain ceased. The man started walking again.

The man noticed that the sand was made of people's souls. Those who ascended to Heaven become sand like this. And he also noticed at the same time that the rain was also made of people's souls. The happiness evaporated from the sands, turned into rain and poured down again.

"Oh, right. These are True Men."

He was drenched in the happiness of True Men. He had been reliving the happiness that True Men have tasted until now.

I want more happiness, the man thought. However, he approached the limits of his ability. The man's soul left Heaven and came back to this world.

In his final moments the man had seen the huge presence that sat in the middle of Heaven. Both Heaven and that grand being were...

“O God!”

The man shouted.

The Book ended there.

“This is... Heaven.”

Alme muttered. Her face was sweating. Her heart beat like a prancing horse.

“How was it? Although it was only inside this Book, you felt happiness that probably surpassed all you have felt until now. If you go to Heaven, you can taste even more happiness forever.

Do you understand what Heaven is?”

“...Amazing.”

“The Books of the believers of the Indulging God Cult go not to Bantorra Library, but are stored in Heaven. We protect this Heaven and fight so we could ascend to it.”

While putting away the Book showing Heaven, the Overseer of Paradise continued his explanation.

“What you have seen, that rain of souls, is a collection of people’s joy.

This happiness is extracted from the Books of dead people housed in Heaven and becomes a rain. Those who ascend to Heaven are basked in it and taste the ultimate happiness.

By collecting the Books of those who reached happiness, Heaven becomes an even more wonderful place. God wishes it and we also aim for that.”

Alme nodded, her face flushed.

“We must send the Books of people in bliss to Heaven. However, there is no meaning in sending people with only a small joy to Heaven.

Therefore, we produce happy people. We select people who should be happy, and we lend them our power so that their happiness will grow stronger. That is the mission of the Indulging God Cult.”

“...Umm, is Cigal one of the chosen people?”

“You truly are quick to understand.”

The Overseer of Paradise pointed at Alme with his index finger.

“We call those who were chosen, like Cigal, True Men.

The conditions to become a True Men are the size and purity of one’s desire.

The greater the desire is, the purer the desire is, the greater their achieved happiness.

Cigal's desire is immensely vast and truly pure. If he were to achieve his desire and become able to ascend to Heaven, it will make it a much more splendid place."

The Overseer of Paradise kept talking.

"People like me and you, who don't possess a pure desire, cannot become True Men. Therefore, we serve the happiness of those True Men. We are called False Men.

And, for our service to True Men and the Cult, we go to Heaven as a reward.

True Men exist for God. And False Men exist for True Men. We exert our efforts so that God, and those of us who serve God, will be able to taste all the happiness of this world in Heaven."

The Overseer of Paradise spoke while looking into Alme's eyes.

"Will you become our ally?"

Alme answered "yes" without any hesitation.

That surely was the sort of happiness she will not be able to know without joining the Cult. The joy of touching and devoting oneself to that sublime being.

She will offer herself for Cigal, for Heaven. This was something she couldn't know if she played her violin her whole life.

Alme swore her loyalty to Cigal who wasn't there.

Alme was headed for an island. There was a training facility of the Indulging God Cult on it. It was lonely for her to not see Cigal, but if she was useless for him she wouldn't be able to be at his side. She had to master Magic and become a warrior.

On the ship were Alme and a boy close to her in age. He was a boy who wore glasses and looked serious. His name was Winkeny.

“Why did you join the Indulging God Cult?”

Winkeny started talking to her.

“In order to serve Cigal-sama. And you?”

Winkeny seemed troubled for a short while.

“Since my mother joined the Cult... I came with her.”

“Do you know Cigal-sama?”

“I heard about him.”

Alme spoke to Winkeny about how wonderful of a person Cigal was. He listened to her with a cold expression.

“I’m not really sure since I also just joined, but I think people like you are rare.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll see when we get there.”

Alme and the rest who’ve gathered on this solitary island at some distant sea withstood severe training. Those who gave up were discarded. Seeing dead people or those whose spirits were affected go out was a daily occurrence.

The morale of Alme’s group was high. Everyone became desperate to reach Heaven.

While living that sort of life, she started understanding the meaning of Winkeny’s words.

“No-one honors the True Men.”

She talked to Winkeny in between training. The two have become friends.

“Yeah. That’s true.”

“They’re all just thinking about themselves going to Heaven. They only think of True Men as tools that allow them to reach Heaven.”

“Right. Everyone’s objective is self-interest. These are False Men.”

Alme scorned her comrades. They’re so stupid.

“It just doesn’t fit them... they’re like pigs – they just greedily devour the bait known as happiness.”

“That is the Indulging God Cult.”

“Are you also like that?”

“I just happened to join the Cult. I have no place to go and nothing else to do. I only do my job.”

Winkeny was thoughtful and serious, but she didn’t like the way he spoke.

“Are you different, Alme?”

“I am. I am connected to Cigal-sama. Only I am different.”

She was different. This was Alme's favorite phrase.

Once, an airplane came to the island. The False Men began clamoring. Winkeny came to call Alme who was resting in her room.

"Alme, Cigal-sama came to visit. He called for you."

True Men never came to visit. And it was even the one she admired, Cigal. All of Alme's comrades focused their attention on her.

"It's been a while, Alme."

She faced Cigal with her cheeks blushing. She had so much she wanted to say to him, but now that she actually met him she couldn't form any words.

Cigal smiled as if telling her it's fine, I understand.

"You seem to have gotten an interesting ability."

"Huh?"

"It's the same ability as Hamyuts Meseta... our mortal enemy. Ha-ha, seems like it would become useful."

The False Men looking at them from a distance started murmuring amongst

themselves. Many of them wanted to work under Cigal. With just some brief words, Alme seemed to be the one to achieve a position close to him.

Alme looked around her and snorted. What're you making a fuss about. It's only natural.

It was a dark expression unlike that she had while facing Cigal. Looking at him she had the face of a simple girl, while looking down the people around her she had an expression of arrogance. Alme possessed these two expressions. Which one of them was the real Alme?

“Did you make any friends?”

“One. His name is Winkeney.”

“And why are you friends with him?”

Alme thought for a while. She simply talked with him, but she thought that kind of mundane answer will disappoint Cigal. What answer will make him happy?

“Because he appears to be useful.”

“That's a good answer.”

Cigal smiled. Yes! She cheered in her heart.

“What about the other guys?”

Alme thought again. How could she answer to make Cigal happy...

“They only look like stupid pigs to me. I can’t make friends with them.”

“Indeed. They are pigs. As I thought you’re the kind of human I’ve imagined you to be.”

Cigal asked her about various topics. Alme thought and answered as to fulfill his expectations.

Before long, she could naturally answer in ways that made Cigal happy, and thought of what would make him happy.

Her way of thinking could be called wicked, and Alme also knew it. However, even acting wicked was fine if it made Cigal happy.

In this world, only Cigal and I are correct. Everyone else is but pigs. Alme reaffirmed this while talking to Cigal.

Cigal then told her he wanted to listen to her violin. Alme was surprised. She hadn’t practiced her violin in a while.

Although she was confused, she desperately played her violin. Cigal listened to it quietly.

“...A good sound. Much better than when we first met. Just as I anticipated.”

“Why?”

“It is a cruel sound.”

Alme finally understood. This man hadn't listened to the violin's sound. He listened to Alme's heart. He could feel with his excellent hearing that he raised Alme into a cruel girl.

“Please become a full-fledged warrior soon. Then I could always listen to your violin.”

Alme was joyed. Cigal was waiting for her.

Afterwards, Winkeney had said to her,

“Cigal-sama seems to gain pleasure by making money.”

“Yeah.”

“...Frankly speaking, I don't like him very much. Money being his entire happiness feels somewhat wrong.”

“You're so stupid, Winkeney. You don't know anything.”

Alme said and sneered at him.

After having grown strong and brutal, Alme left the training facility. Obviously she went to be at Cigal's side.

Cigal had already dominated the top of the underworld. Not only the underworld, but he also had control on the public business world.

His assets have already become comparable to those of an entire country. If he kept going like this, it was thought that he would surpass the Ever-Laughing Witch in 10 years.

Even then Cigal wasn't satisfied. He ordered everyone to find new ways of making money.

Drugs, gambling, extortion, exploitation.

Alme received orders that deviated from the proper course of men and gleefully conducted them.

The city was, in fact, under Cigal's control. The citizens were drowning in drugs, and as for the security forces that were supposed to be cracking it down, Cigal had the government and bureaucrats that supervised them under his control as well.

The industry and commerce were also ruined, so the city became quiet. Everyone always clearly heard gunshots and cries of children.

Alme stopped a certain person in the city.

“Where are you going?”

The man turned around. Alme wasn't Cigal's only subordinate. This man, who worked as both Cigal's secretary and chief of staff, was another close aide.

“...I'm leaving. I can't follow Cigal-sama anymore.”

“Hmph, why?”

Alme asked with her hand on her sword hilt.

“I can't follow Cigal-sama anymore.”

Alme, look at this city. If we continue like that, the Armed Librarians will make some move.

We can handle the government or the Present Management Agency, but there's nothing we can do against the Armed Librarians.”

“So what?”

“Also, I can't understand how Cigal-sama thinks. He seems to be happy at

people's misfortune rather than at making money. Does he really desire money?

What is that guy thinking?"

"You can't understand it because you're trash."

While saying so, Alme pulled out her sword.

"You can't understand Cigal-sama's noble feelings."

Alme hammered the sword's hilt into the man's stomach while saying so. He collapsed while spewing out blood and vomit.

"You have no value in being a False Man. You should be a Meat."

She made contact with the Indulging God Cult's headquarters and told them she had a new Meat. The tied-up man had been deprived of his memories using the water of Argax and became cattle.

An errand man came from the headquarters. The one who came to recover the new Meat was Alme's friend, Winkeny.

"Hello, useless."

Alme thus greeted the friend she didn't see for a long time. Cigal looked happily at this.

“Why did you turn this man to a Meat?”

“This bastard couldn't understand Cigal-sama's ideals.”

Alme kicked the tied-up man while saying so. He groaned. Winkeny looked at him, frowning.

“Alme. I ask this while being ashamed of my ignorance. I also don't understand Cigal-sama's ideals.”

“Since you're useless explaining it to you would be a waste of a time.”

Cigal tilted his glass and put in between his lips.

“Hey Alme. Even if he's useless, is he not your friend? Please explain it to him.”

“Understood, Cigal-sama.”

Alme started talking. During this she trampled the man under her foot.

“This man – no, all of the trash in this world – made a misunderstanding.

They think that happiness is something to be shared. That everyone in the

world can become happy. You are probably also like that.”

“I won’t deny this for now.”

“That is wrong. There is only a limited amount of happiness in the world. As all people in the world are struggling for their own share, they are competing for the happiness of the world. The world’s trash doesn’t know this.

Happiness should only belong to those that have value. Trash must not possess happiness.”

This was a word for word reproduction of what Cigal had once told her. The one talking now wasn’t Alme. It was Cigal, who sat behind, that talked while borrowing her mouth.

“...So that’s why people are unhappy.”

“You have always been one to quickly understand, Winkeny.”

Alme put more strength to her trampling foot.

“It is exactly so. If someone becomes unhappy, then another person receives only that portion of happiness. If everyone but Cigal-sama becomes unhappy, at that moment he will reach the perfect happiness.”

Winkeny hid the feelings in his chest and stared at Alme.

“You’ve changed, Alme.”

He muttered.

“No, nothing changed.”

Alme snorted and kicked the man at her feet. Winkeny grabbed his body.

“I have another question.”

“Yes?”

“Can you make everyone in the world unhappy? Not only a single country. For this you have to destroy the Armed Librarians.”

“A good question, Winkeny-kun.”

This wasn’t Alme but Cigal who opened his mouth.

“There is a method. I have the means to defeat our nemesis, Hamyuts Meseta.”

A small Book fragment was in Cigal’s hands. Winkeny probably didn’t know the Book’s owner, but Alme of course did.

It was the Book fragment of the Ever-Laughing Witch, Shiron Booyacornish.

After Winkeny left, Alme and Cigal conversed. Alme snuggled up next to him, gently leaning on him.

“You’re the only one. The only one to understand my ideals. No-one else can understand them.”

Cigal said.

“You don’t need this city anymore.”

Alme said.

“The time of Shiron’s prediction approaches. I must soon hasten my preparations in earnest.”

“Do you still need anything? We already have the bombs and the pathogens.”

“It’s still not enough. I must have the strength to kill Hamyuts.”

“Maybe add Ganbanzel’s Monster?”

“Alme. Don’t you want to see it? That arrogant woman, prostrating on the ground.”

“I see, I now understand, Cigal-sama.”

After saying this, he pulled out another Book fragment.

“I have received this Book from Lascall Othello yesterday. Recorded inside is the location of the Magic Blade hidden by the Ever-Laughing Witch.”

Alme understood even without being told. Going to get it was her job.

“Oh, Alme, it’s about time. Please detonate the Meats.”

Saying so, Cigal pointed out of the window.

They have been holding an experiment to confirm the power and efficiency of human bombs. Looking outside the window at the city, many explosions occurred here and there. From where Alme was it looked just like if gray flowers bloomed inside the city.

“Cigal-sama.”

She muttered. She started walking towards the city that was filled with the dead and injured.

“Alme is happy. I wonder if it’s fine for someone of this position to be so happy.”

Even if it was evil, even if it was twisted, even if it was like an illness, she could

probably call it nothing other than love.

Even Alme had to make a desperate effort to reach the depths of the mountains. Shiron hid her weapon there.

The Ever-Laughing Magic Blade Shlamuffen. It was known to be the most fierce and brutal among the Memorial Weapons. The spider legs happily attached themselves to Alme who liked fresh blood.

When she returned she showed this to Cigal.

Even while she wasn't around the preparation kept steadily progressing. The bombs that would be used as a distraction; Dragon Pneumonia that would be spread in Toatt Mining Town; the intelligence about the movements of the Armed Librarians. The preparations to kill Hamyuts were getting completed.

"I shall use that Magic Blade."

Alme said. Cigal himself was also quite good, but Alme would beat him. In order to not risk Cigal it would be better for her to challenge that woman one on one.

However, Cigal shook his head.

"No, this is mine."

“Then I will stay around to assist.”

“Assist? That will not be necessary now.”

His voice sounded somewhat anxious. It was different than usual.

“Then what should I do?”

“Just go somewhere.”

“...Huh?”

Alme instinctively asked back. Cigal looked at himself. This was the look he once gave to Winkeny and his aide. It was the face of disdain he showed to everyone except Alme.

There was no reason for him to look at her like this. Alme was supposed to be the only one who understood him.

“Why?”



“So noisy. I told you to go somewhere.”

Alme tried clinging to him. However, Cigal no longer looked at her.

“Aah! Why doesn’t anyone understand my ideals!”

He threw his wine at the floor. And then he spit.

“You worthless trash. Why did I have such an idiot by my side? How could I think you understood me? Don’t be so conceited. I can’t even stand seeing you.”

Cigal kept cursing her for several hours. His handsome face was distorted in anger.

Alme pathetically withstood that. No matter how much she was abused by him, she couldn’t even think about talking back to him.

Why, she only kept asking this in her mind.

Part 4

Alme wasn't demoted to a Meat. The Overseer of Paradise decided this.

After leaving Cigal's side, Alme became sorrowed.

Why did Cigal-sama discard me? Am I missing something?

"Are you still yearning for Cigal?"

Winkeny asked her when they met again.

"Of course."

Alme answered.

"I think I've said it before, but I frankly don't like Cigal-sama. I think he doesn't possess the heart that people should have."

"So what."

"I think that you'd better forget about him already."

She stared at Winkeny with hatred.

“What do you even understand? He is a noble being. I’m the only one able to understand this.”

“You just want to believe that.”

“...What do you understand.”

Alme clenched her teeth. She thought of killing that man.

“I’m uneasy. You are far too single-minded. You don’t move according to your selfish desires like other False Men.

As you adore Cigal-sama, I feel like you’re going to end up doing something irreversible.”

“ ... ”

Alme had no reply.

“Even if you chase after Cigal-sama’s vestiges you will gain nothing.”

“...That can’t be.”

Winkeny looked away from Alme and lowered his gaze.

“No, trying to persuade you is pointless.

We’re too single-minded to the point that we look foolish to each other.

Although our ways of thinking will never fit, that single-mindedness was probably the reason we became friends.”

Afterward, Cigal died and Alme began her revenge. She tricked Winkeny, betrayed the Indulging God Cult and even challenged the Armed Librarians.

Just as Winkeny said, she was armed with just her single-mindedness as a weapon.

After that, Alme started thinking.

Perhaps Winkeny knew of her underlying motives. Perhaps he knew and even assisted her.

She couldn’t tell by now, but she also couldn’t turn back anymore.

A knock resounded on the room Mattalast left. Mirepoc raised her face.

“Come in.”

A bellboy came inside. He held an envelope.

“A delivery.”

“From who?”

“They didn’t give their name.”

I’d like a little more security, thought Mirepoc. After all, the enemies are ones to use such things as bombs and pathogens.

Mirepoc received the package. She tried touching it but it felt like nothing other than paper. She boldly opened it.

Inside were two old-looking pieces of paper. The following had been written in dirty letters that could barely be deciphered:

“I was wrong. Maybe Zackie is dead. I wonder how Olt is doing. Those who pursue Lascall die. There are no exceptions. Both Armed Librarians and the Indulging God Cult, there are no exceptions.”

Affixed to this memo was another piece of paper. It was new.

“This was Parney Parlmanta’s last note.”

Mirepoc dashed out of her room and caught the bellboy who went down the stairs.

“Who brought this?”

“A man who appeared to be around sixty.”

“Is he still in the hotel?”

“No, he left immediately.”

Mirepoc looked out the window. She found a man walking in a fast pace among the sparse figures down the street.

She held the hem of her skirt and jumped down. Her feet numbed by the impact on the ground.

“Please wait!”

She called at the leaving man. The man stopped for a second and started running away. Mirepoc chased after him. As far as she could see from the fleeing man’s back, he was a normal person. She soon caught up to him.

Mirepoc stood in the man’s way. She knew him. He was Moodly, the man involved in Parney’s incident.

“What’s that?”

Moodly diverted his eyes from Mirepoc and tried finding a way to escape. When he gave up, he started talking in a low voice.

“That is Parney Parlmanta’s last note. I found it a long time ago.”

“Did you conceal it until now?”

Moodly nodded. Mirepoc took one step closer.

“Please tell me the reason you’ve concealed in until now and brought it out now.”

She said and got closer.

“...Give me a break. I don’t want to be killed.”

“What?”

“It should’ve been written in there. Those who pursue Lascall Othello die.

I don’t want to turn out like Parney. So I hid it.

Since you came here, I thought leaving it to you would be fine.”

“Do you really believe that all those who pursue Lascall Othello die?”

“Because it is so. It’s written there.”

Mirepoc sighed.

“Moody-san. That is a misunderstanding. There’s no way that everyone who pursues Lascall dies.”

“...But...”

“I know a guy called Kalon. He at least is still alive. There’s also me and you.”

“Even so, you can’t know. We might be erased someday.”

Moody stiffly shook his head. Mirepoc decided to give up.

“...Please. Just leave me alone. I have nothing to do with this anymore.”

“Understood. I won’t go after you.”

Moody turned his back and went away. Finally, he turned around and said,

“You’re also probably considerably strong. You’re an Armed Librarian after all. But you’ll understand if you come face to face with him. No-one can be compared with the guy I met that day. He truly is in a different league.”

Who are you talking about? Mirepoc thought that she would probably not receive an answer to that.

After seeing Moody off, she returned to the hotel and looked at the note again.

“I was wrong. Maybe Zackie is dead. I wonder how Olt is doing. Those who pursue Lascall die. There are no exceptions. Both Armed Librarians and the Indulging God Cult, there are no exceptions.”

Were those Zackie and Olt her allies? She had to investigate this later.

“All those who pursue Lascall die, even Armed Librarians and the Indulging God Cult without any exceptions, huh...”

It was a strange way of writing. Was Lascall Othello a confidential topic for the Indulging God Cult as well?

Also, it was ridiculous to have no exceptions.

Practically it couldn't be so, right? She was alive. Mattalast was also alive. Kalon and Moody were also alive. It certainly seemed like the rusty woman aimed for their lives, but that was all. That was a far cry from “dying without exception”.

“ ... ”

However, Mirepoc felt uneasy. Was that truly all?

She thought of the people who pursued Lascall so far.

First there was Haiza. He was killed by the Director. But that shouldn't have been related to Lascall Othello.

What about the other Armed Librarians? Mirepoc sent her thoughts to Mattalast.

‘Mattalast-san. Who investigated Lascall Othello after Haiza?’

Mattalast thought for a while and then answered.

‘Mostly Feekiee and Ireia-san.’

Feekiee died during the battle against Mokkaia. Ireia had her time stopped ever since the end of the fight. In front of her statue they left a notice saying that “Mokkaia had been defeated”.

There was also Mokkaia. Perhaps he could be said to be pursuing after Lascall as well based on the result.

Mirepoc felt a shiver run up her spine.

It wasn't just the Armed Librarians. There were also Winkeny and Locolo of the Indulging God Cult. They could also be thought as dying for trying to pursue Lascall Othello.

And finally, there was Parney Parlmanta.

All of them have lost their lives. Those who pursue Lascall die. It was just like that.

Or rather, those who remained alive were few.

"...It's just a coincidence."

Mirepoc muttered aloud. It was irrelevant to their deaths anyway.

Haiza had been punished because he was corrupt.

Feekiee died because of his own mistake. Mokkania was defeated by the Director.

Ireia was still alive. She should be resurrected before long.

As for Winkeny and Locolo, it was obvious the Armed Librarians would defeat them.

However... what if they were all a part of Lascall Othello's plans? What if he controlled everything from the shadows, inciting them to die?

“Impossible.”

No-one could do such a thing. There's no way he could have made Haiza betray them or Feekiee look down on Mokkaia and make a mistake.

The only one capable of doing that would be one who controls fate, a god-like being. No, someone above god.

“There's no way.”

It was a coincidence. All of it.

At that moment, she heard a sound coming from the back.

“...!”

Mirepoc stood up and turned around. However, it was only the window moved by the wind.

During that time, Mattalast waited in the nighttime city. Standing on the rooftop of the city's highest building, the wind made the hem of his suit flutter. His gaze was directed to the entire city. From the never-ending human traffic even at night, he looked for a single person.

He was looking for the rusty woman.

For the time being, Mirepoc wouldn't arrive at Lascall Othello's identity. However, he didn't know how she would act from now on. He mustn't allow her to find the truth about Lascall Othello. It was fine for just him and Hamyuts to know it.

Mattalast took his gun and set it on his left arm. However, while he found a woman that looked like the rusty woman, she was another person.

"...That rusty woman... just more trouble for us."

Initially, he was going to turn Mirepoc away from this city. He made her meet with Kalon so she would think Lascall Othello was nothing more than a legend. He would make Mirepoc return and take care of everything himself. That was his plan.

The rusty woman had upset that plan.

Her existence made everything more complex. He had to make her disappear as soon as possible.

His strained eyes became blurred. Mattalast was tired. Normally he wouldn't be tired if he stayed up all night even a week or ten days, but this time was different.

At that moment, he found the rusty woman.

She was walking alone at a location far away from the building.

He was lucky. His location was probably beyond her range.

The distance was roughly 900 meters. Her range was probably about 800 meters.

Mattalast took out his guns.

Rather than using the rifle for sniping, he chose his pistols and used his naked eye.

For a normal person it would unmistakably be an impossible distance. Even for a gunner who acquired Magic it would almost be impossible. However, Mattalast was different.

Making full use of his Prediction ability, he looked for the moment he would hit after two seconds. When he will predict the moment of a hit he would fire. No matter how small the possibility for him to hit is, as long as there was a chance, he would definitely hit.

Using his Prediction ability, he got the vision of a hit. Mattalast applied strength to his finger on the trigger that was supported by his left arm.

However, at that same moment he made another Prediction. A bullet would come flying from behind the moment he shot.

While shooting, he pointed one pistol at his back. He shot twice. He couldn't

predict as far as hitting the enemy behind. He was just shooting for intimidation.

Without checking the enemy at his back, he looked at the rusty woman.

He missed. Without even looking back, the rusty woman ran away.

Should he defeat the enemy behind him or pursue the rusty woman? It was obvious. He had to chase after the rusty woman. If he'll let her escape there will be no next time.

He left the enemy behind. Kicking at the rooftop, Mattalast jumped into the night sky.

Alme was running away. She made a blunder. She was too focused within the range of her Sensory Threads that she didn't look beyond it.

That the first bullet missed her was close to a miracle. She wouldn't possibly be able to defend against a second shot.

To escape from Mattalast's field of vision, she entered a cramped alley and ran with her body low. If she enters Mattalast's sight for even a second it will all be over.

"Shit!"

Mattalast entered the range of her Sensory Threads. The distance between them was getting shortened. She had to escape or hide herself. She hid in a corner of a garbage dump.

“...Shit.”

At present she was at her wits' end. No, she had no ways of defeating Mattalast in the first place.

Mattalast stopped. He was probably searching for Alme who disappeared from his sight. While praying that he will somehow not find her, she laid down her body inside the garbage dump's corner.

Mattalast kept looking for her. At that moment, a skinny dog appeared at the garbage dump. He growled when he saw Alme.

Go away, thought Alme. If you howl like that, he will hear you. Alme pulled out her sword and swung it so it would not make any sound. The dog died with a low growl.

At that moment, Mattalast came running. She was already heard. Alme ran away at full speed.

However...

“Stop.”

The enemy was much faster than her. Mattalast jumped in Alme's path.

“...Who are you? If you’re from the Indulging God Cult, you have no reason to look for Lascall.”

Mattalast asked while pointing his gun’s muzzle at Alme’s forehead.

“Do you know about Lascall, bastard?”



A bullet came flying at Alme's feet.

"Just answer the question."

She thought of ways to defeat Mattalast. However, she couldn't find any. No matter what she was going to do, Mattalast would predict it beforehand. There was a large gap in their power.

Don't give up. I knew about our gap in the first place. Think. Find a way to escape this place...

"Don't get into such a reckless battle. You should use your head a little bit more before fighting."

Something changed. Did he give up trying to get information and was going to kill her without getting any answer?

At that moment, she felt a human presence behind Mattalast.

"Good grief, Alme."

Mattalast's expression changed. She could feel him mutter damn under his breath with her Sensory Threads.

"That bravery is your virtue, but your recklessness is a weakness."

The man who stood behind slowly approached Mattalast's back. Alme knew him. There was no way she wouldn't.

"Well then, now that it became a pincer attack what will you do, Mattalast?"

"You're probably aiming for the moment I shoot Alme."

"Exactly. Even you will leave an opening when you attack."

Mattalast didn't look back. The muzzle pointed at Alme didn't move.

"Alme, you can use this opening to escape. It should be possible with this opening."

The man said.

"..."

Alme slowly retreated. Mattalast didn't move. If he were to shoot the man behind him would use that opening. As soon as she got away from his line of sight, she ran away.

Alme murmured while running away.

"What are you doing, Overseer of Paradise?"

After seeing Alme off, Mattalast turned around.

“You seem to have it hard, Mattalast.”

The man behind him – the Overseer of Paradise – said.

“You let Alme escape. Mirepoc will become deeply involved in the matter. Aren’t you at your wits’ end?”

“...I won’t deny that.”

“Stop acting unreasonable, what will you do when Mirepoc uncovers Lascall’s identity?”

Mattalast pointed his gun at the Overseer of Paradise.

“Don’t be foolish. There’s no way she would be able to.”

Mattalast answered while staring at the man. A single man was definitely in front of him; that he could understand. However, he couldn’t understand anything else. Not his age, nor his face, nor his clothes. He couldn’t perceive anything. He could look at him but not see him.

“What kind of an ability is that?”

Mattalast asked. The man didn't attack. He didn't predict any future attack from him. The man was standing silently.

"An ability to manipulate the perception of people. I can freely control how other people perceive me. You can only recognize me as a single man – that is the current state of what you can see."

The man readily revealed his own ability. There was no problem even if he were to reveal it.

"So you're not necessarily even really there."

"Exactly. You are correct."

Mattalast predicted the next two seconds while gripping his pistol. He understood that he couldn't kill him. Even if he were to shoot, the bullet would pass through the man's body and fly behind him.

"I've heard about you but this is the first time we've met. Is Hamyuts well?"

"She's having fun every day thanks to you lot. For only this I am thankful for you, Overseer of Paradise."

Mattalast put strength into his finger.

Alme kept running for a long time. Did she manage to get away? She couldn't feel Mattalast with her Sensory Threads. Alme lay her exhausted body on the road.

She couldn't move for a while. She remained at place for about thirty minutes. She then noticed an approaching figure. There was no one around until then, but that man suddenly appeared.

“Are you fine, Alme?”

Alme answered with a question.

“Overseer of Paradise. What happened with Mattalast?”

“Who knows.”

The Overseer of Paradise shrugged. He couldn't have possibly defeated that man, right? Since she couldn't perceive his expression, she couldn't read through him.

“What are you planning?”

“I saved you. You are a precious human resource. Even you know the Cult has a shortage of personnel.”

Alme smiled wryly.

“Do you have amnesia? I’m a traitor. Have you forgotten what I’ve done to the Indulging God Cult?”

The Overseer of Paradise put his hand to his chin.

“So, what have you done, I wonder?”

“...I Massacred the False Men.”

“We don’t need them anymore. This was actually good of you to kill them.”

“I deceived Winkeny in order to steal a Book.”

“It was a trivial matter.”

Alme instinctively grasped her sword lightly.

“It’s also my fault that the Armed Librarians are about to reach Lascall Othello’s identity.”

“There is no need to worry. Mirepoc will not be able to find the truth about Lascall.”

“And I’m also chasing after Lascall! It should be an act of treason against the Cult!”

The Overseer of Paradise raised a laughter that killed all tension.

“It’s also impossible for you. There’s no way for you to find out the truth about Lascall.”

Alme lost all words for a while. Were all of her actions that insignificant for this man?

“But even if we put all this together, there should be no reason to let me live! I’m no longer part of the Cult! Why are you letting me live?!”

The Overseer of Paradise said in a gentle voice,

“Because you are pitiful.”

“What?”

“If a kitten were to fight a wolf, you would think of the kitten as pitiful. Even more so if that kitten believed it could win.”

Alme could not deny it. Not after the battle just now.

“...Don’t pity me.”

She still couldn’t forgive being pitied. Alme’s pride throbbed violently.

“That is a useless discussion. You are chasing after a foolish ideal and challenging a fight you have no chance to win. You are reckless, stupid, and

pitiful beyond pity as a matter of course.”

“Shut up. Don’t sympathize with me.”

“Indeed, your figure when refusing sympathy can be nothing short of pitiful.”

The Overseer of Paradise said and then walked away. Alme saw him go while trembling in anger.

The Overseer of Paradise said I was reckless.

Certainly it would seem that way for an outsider. But what of it?

I don’t mind being reckless. I don’t need any allies. I don’t need anyone to understand me, I’ll just throw all of that to the dogs.

I will keep on fighting. I’ll keep on hating, killing, and scorning.

I won’t allow anyone to pity me. I will prove it by killing.

Around that time, Mattalast went back to Mirepoc’s place. She noticed that he acted a little strange, as if he was worried about something.

“Did something happen?”

“...No, it’s nothing.”

Mattalast averted his eyes from Mirepoc. Is there anything he can’t tell me?
Thought Mirepoc.

Chapter 4: Life Of A Certain Livestock

Part 1

Bantorra Library, Fifth Level of the Underground Labyrinth. In one of its corners were Noloty and Minth.

They were conducting special training as close as possible to actual combat. The two have continued fighting for several hours. They were going to keep fighting until both of them decide to resign due to their wounds. Noloty was the one who received the most damage, though.

She kicked the wall and jumped. She headed for the head by dropping her heel from a high place. Minth's shooting attack easily intercepted her. His bullets were only light wooden blanks, but they still hurt.

"You're lacking variations in engaging the enemy by close combat. Try to come up with more ways."

He grabbed Noloty's scruff after she collapsed and raised her. But when he removed his hand she fell down with a flop. Let's leave it at that, thought Minth.

He carried Noloty and headed for the Labyrinth's exit. Suddenly, he felt someone approaching from behind.

“...Aah, it’s you, Minth.”

“Old lady?”

Minth said. Ireia, whose time had been stopped, was revived.

“Seems like it’s been a long time.”

“Yeah. You’ve made us worry.”

Minth and Ireia began walking side-by-side. He made a general explanation of how the incident ended. Ireia was shocked at hearing about the loss of Feekiee and Mokkania.

“Did anything happen afterwards?”

“No, it’s been peaceful ever since that. More or less the only thing that’s changed is Mirepoc having gone to look for the guy called Lascall Othello.”

“Lascall Othello?”

Ireia stopped in place.

“Old lady, do you know anything?”

The color of confusion filled Ireia’s face.

When Mirepoc went to the Central Security offices, Kalon talked to her while he was on duty.

A message came from Bantorra Library. It was addressed for Mirepoc and came from Ireia. It only said to “please contact me in your thoughts”. She immediately connected to her with Thought Sharing.

‘So you’re back. I’ve been worried.’

Ireia immediately cut to the chase. Something about her seemed desperate.

‘I’ve heard about it. You’re looking for Lascall Othello.’

‘Yes.’

‘I will also come to assist you. I’ll be heading there right away.’

Mirepoc was surprised at the sudden offer.

‘That isn’t needed. Didn’t you hear the Director’s decision? She left it for the two of us.’

‘Is that really fine?’

'We have only one enemy at the moment. Because I'm about evenly matched with her, there is no need for reinforcement.'

Mirepoc didn't say she was worried about Lascall's identity. Ireia seemed troubled.

'...If that's what the Director decided, we have no choice but to follow her orders.'

How strange, thought Mirepoc.

'Did you find out anything about Lascall?'

'No, almost nothing.'

'...I see.'

'Do you know anything about Lascall?'

'There's something that bothers me.'

'What is it?'

'Don't you find it strange? Hamyuts-san had been very involved with Lascall Othello.'

'...'

Thinking about it, it might have been so. Hamyuts was the one who shelved both the investigation of Lascall and Mirepoc's proposal.

'Perhaps Hamyuts-san knows something about Lascall. If she does, I wonder if she isn't trying to intentionally not become involved with it.'

'There's no way. You're overthinking this.'

'Perhaps Lascall Othello is a matter that mustn't be touched upon.'

'...There's no way.'

'A thing that mustn't be touched upon even with battle strength on par with Hamyuts's... what can that be?'

'...You're overthinking this, Ireia-san.'

'I might be.'

Mirepoc cut off her Thought Sharing. The bad feeling she had since yesterday became even worse.

Mirepoc started talking to Kalon while he was taking care of paperwork in the Central Security station. Seeing it, the other carefree sheriffs whistled at him.

“What is it?”

“This isn’t terribly important, but... when you were investigating Lascall Othello, have you ever felt some sense of danger?”

Kalon stared at her in puzzlement.

“What kind of danger?”

“...No, it isn’t really important...”

“Thinking about it, plenty of people came to ask about Lascall lately. I wonder if that’s some new fad.”

“...It might be.”

“You, Mattalast-san, that ginger and a weird boy. Four people in such a short amount of time.”

Kalon said something that caught her attention. The ginger must’ve been the rusty woman. But who was the strange boy?

“A boy came to you?”

“Yeah. I told him the same I told you and sent him home.”

Why was he silent about such an important matter? Mirepoc sent her thoughts to Mattalast.

'...How strange. Is there someone who looks for Lascall other than us and the Cult?'

'Should we look for him?'

'As soon as possible.'

After inquiring the boy's appearance from Kalon, Mirepoc left the Central Security station.

She walked throughout the city looking for the boy. The children in schools around said they didn't know him. So is he a tourist? Mirepoc scoured the lodging houses around.

Just who is that boy? Is he from the Cult? No, the rusty woman already met Kalon. He should be unrelated to them.

Just as Mirepoc was about to board the tram, a voice came from behind.

"Wait."

She turned around and was astonished. The rusty woman stood there.

Mirepoc instinctively brought her hand to the sword at her side.

“Stop, we can’t battle here. Besides, I’m not in that kind of mood.”

It was just as the rusty woman said. Mirepoc let go of her sword. Also, in contrast to their last meeting, Mirepoc could feel that the woman was disheartened.

The tram she was supposed to ride left without her.

“Hey, you, what have you been doing all this time? You didn’t seem to be doing anything since coming here.”

“...You know already. I’ve been pursuing Lascall.”

“Huh, I think it’s a waste though.”

The rusty woman said in an indifferent voice. Mirepoc recalled that she had something she wanted to try and ask.

“I have a weird question.”

“What is it?”

“Lascall Othello might be a being that mustn’t be touched upon.”

At that moment Mirepoc saw – the rusty woman looked upset.

“What’re you saying?”

The rusty woman shook her head. But even Mirepoc was able to see she was just trying to bluff.

Just as I thought. Lascall is forbidden even for the Indulging God Cult.

“Is the conversation over? See ya.”

The rusty woman went away. While she gazed at her back, Mirepoc was thinking.

Just what am I searching for?

For the first time, Mirepoc thought... that Lascall Othello was scary.

It became night.

Mirepoc visited Kalon’s apartment one more time. She tried looking for clues about the boy, but even when looking for threads about Lascall, there was no one to go to other than Kalon right now.

He warmly welcomed her.

Just as she set foot into his apartment, Mirepoc was startled.

There were no piles of materials in the room. There were no piles of ancient documents and books on the floor. Even the bookshelves were empty. The room had nothing in it.

“Kalon-san, what happened to all your material about Lascall Othello?”

“What are you talking about?”

He turned his face to Mirepoc in puzzlement.

“You were investigating Lascall Othello.”

“...Lascall Othello?”

Kalon’s expression and the state of his room couldn’t have been a joke. It was probably the Fiction Obliterating Cup Argax. Mirepoc recalled its existence.

“Well, but I’m happy to see an Armed Librarian up close though. It’s just like I’m inside a movie.”

Kalon spoke in an easygoing manner. Was he thinking Mirepoc came to visit him? He excitedly started looking for some tea-cakes.

“Anyway, when did I meet you? My recent memories are fuzzy.”

Mirepoc walked out of the place without a single word.

The enemy was on the move. They were erasing all those who had a connection to Lascall. First was Kalon, so who was next? Moodly? Or her? She couldn't grasp their actions nor their identity.

Just what are we looking for?

Mirepoc stood still at a street corner and kept thinking. She had to keep looking for the boy, but her feet wouldn't move.

She ran the information she heard about Lascall in this city inside her head.

A being that the Indulging God Cult have hidden. Even their believers weren't allowed to know its identity.

A being that took control of the Cult's Books and prevented them from falling into the hands of the Armed Librarians.

A being that existed for hundreds of years, carrying around the Books of people.

A being that erased all those who pursued its identity.

And a being that even Hamyuts didn't want to get involved with.

If all the above information was true, it couldn't have been human. Mirepoc didn't have the power to battle a non-human opponent.

Was she going to challenge an opponent she had no chances to win against?

'Mirepoc, what are you thinking about?'

At that moment, she received Mattalast's thoughts.

'Mattalast-san. Should we really continue this fight?'

'What're you saying?'

'...Right. Even you tried sending me away, Mattalast-san.'

'What are you thinking about?'

'We shouldn't know about Lascall Othello, right? I've seen it written that all those who pursue Lascall Othello die.'

'...'

'That's right. If someone who can control Books actually exists, he would be in the domain of a God. There's no way the power of an Armed Librarian would be able to reach that.'

Lascall Othello is a being far beyond the reach of us Armed Librarians.'

Mattalast was thinking about something for a while. He then sent further thoughts.

'Mirepoc. Wait there for a bit. I'll be right there.'

After transmitting this, Mattalast cut the connection.

Mattalast came after a short while. He suddenly hit Mirepoc's head. He only used his palm, but it was quite a powerful blow. She held her dizzy head.

"Hey now, Mirepoc."

Mirepoc remembered. When she was a trainee he used to smack her head like this while scolding her.

"Relax."

"...Yes sir."

"You are free to imagine the enemy and fear them. It's fine to investigate the enemy, but stop having stupid thoughts."

When she was told so, she became a little calmer. The anxiety in her heart didn't disappear, but her head cooled down.

“Mirepoc. Think well. What is that whole nonsense about everyone who pursues Lascall dying?”

Who died? Neither I, you nor Kalon-kun were killed.”

“...Right.”

“I’ll say this clearly, you fell right into the enemy’s trap.”

“The enemy’s trap?”

Mirepoc asked back. However, Mattalast didn’t explain to her what he meant by that,

“It’s useless with your current state. Rest for a while. You can also keep looking for that boy later.”

“What do you mean by rest?”

“Just what it sounds like. You can just take it easy at some café or anywhere, just do something to cool off your head.”

Mirepoc hung her head. This was the first time she received such an order.

“Mattalast-san... what did you mean by me falling into the enemy’s trap?”

“You will understand once you cool off your head.”

After saying so, Mattalast went up and left.

Starting the next day, just as she was told, Mirepoc lay off her work.

How pathetic, she thought.

Perhaps the enemy was strong – this much had caused her to lose her temper. She couldn't face Mattalast or her allies after that.

Nothing happened in the first place. The city was peaceful. It's not like anyone was killed. She just overestimated Lascall by her own accord and was afraid of his non-existing shadow.

Mirepoc walked around the city while at her wits' end. She drank coffee, went around shops without buying anything, and cooled off her head.

In fact, she was practically discharged. It came as a shock to her.

Suddenly her feet stopped. There was a violin-playing girl at the street's corner.

Not again, Mirepoc thought.

The one playing the violin was the rusty woman.

She seemed to have noticed Mirepoc since a while ago. She silently lowered her violin and looked at Mirepoc.

“So we meet again.”

The rusty woman said.

“Seems so.”

She thought so yesterday as well, but the woman sounded listless. Did something happen?

While fiddling with the violin's strings, the rusty woman said,

“So you're also not going to fight me now? I don't really mind fighting here.”

“I'm on a day-off.”

“Yeah, you said so yesterday. I laughed. You're quite something, lady.”

The rusty woman grinned.

“Do you not fight me because you're off duty?”

“Isn't that how it's supposed to be? Fighting I mean. I only fight because that's

my job.”

Fuun, the rusty woman snorted.

“Eh, well. I also said that yesterday, but I’m not in a mood to fight.”

“So you won’t fight me because you don’t feel like it?”

“Isn’t that how it’s supposed to be? Fighting I mean. I only fight because I want to.”

She showed Mirepoc a broad grin.

That woman was difficult to deal with.

Ever since she first met her, she felt like she lost the mental battle against her. Why was that? It wasn’t an issue of the power gap between them. It was something on a more spiritual level beyond that.

“Are you going to listen?”

The rusty woman said as she lifted the violin’s string.

“...Perhaps I will.”

“Watch now and pay later.”

The rusty woman closed her eyes and quietly began playing. Mirepoc was thinking as she listened to the violin.

That's quite foolish of me to do.

However, I feel suitably foolish right now.

What am I doing? Although I came this far trying to pursue Lascall, I only ended up relying on Mattalast.

I've never felt my own powerlessness until now.

Alme was also thinking.

Was she pathetic? She could at least kill the woman in front of her. However, that was all she could do.

She was absolutely beaten by Mattalast, and then saved by the one supposed to be her enemy – the Overseer of Paradise. She wasn't even able to grasp any clues about Lascall whom she was chasing after.

She was weak. That fact became increasingly heavy on her mind.

Both Alme and Mirepoc thought of the same things at the same time.

Just what were they doing? In order to not admit they were powerless, weren't they just involving themselves in a useless struggle?

After she finished listening to the violin, Mirepoc took small change from her wallet and threw it. She wasn't sure of the melody's quality, but she felt the musical performance was sad.

"Let me tell you one thing."

The rusty woman said as she received the small change thrown at her.

"I can somehow tell why you're weak."

"What do you mean?"

"You fight while looking for a right answer. Should you kill? Shouldn't you kill? You fight while thinking about that sort of thing. And that's why you're weak. I noticed this when I fought you for the first time."

Now that she mentioned it, it might have been so. However, it shouldn't be something wrong.

“That’s what being an Armed Librarian is. We’re fighting for order, after all.”

“Then that’s no good at all, young lady.”

Alme used her same lines from when they fought for the first time.

“I’m not like you. Whether it is right or wrong, I simply kill. You can’t do that.”

For a split second Mirepoc was convinced, but then she pulled herself together.

“Do you think I am the kind of fool to take advice from my enemy?”

“...Right, no fool would take advice from their enemy.”

Their conversation was probably over. Thinking about the fact that she had foolishly wasted her time, Mirepoc started walking away.

“Hey, Mirepoc.”

“What?”

“We’re weak.”

She didn’t question the intention behind those words. Because she could hear these words came from the bottom of her heart.

“What’re you going to do from now on?”

“I will do whatever I must do. That is all.”

After answering so, the rusty woman laughed.

“You’re right. There’s nothing to do but that.”

After parting from the rusty woman, Mirepoc started thinking.

It seems like she was encouraged. And it also seemed like she herself had encouraged the rusty woman.

She will probably fight to the death with her once again. When that time comes, will their conversation right now have any meaning?

I should be grateful to Mirepoc. Thinking this, Alme walked around the city.

She found a single clue. There was a piece of paper inside Mirepoc’s clothes. She probed it with her Sensory Threads while playing the violin.

Alme knew a single name that was written in Parney’s last note.

Olt. This was the name of a man who was an executive of the Indulging God Cult. He was supposed to have left the Cult due to his advanced age.

Could he possibly be in this city? Alme spread her Sensory Threads to search around.

The False Man Olt Gowla was responsible for managing information. He either eliminated or manipulated information that seemed like it might connect to the Indulging God Cult. For that purpose he supposedly managed newspaper companies and in addition to that even film studios, theatres and other entertainment companies were under his control.

Does that mean this man once worked for Parney? It's certainly possible.

After half a day, Alme found an old man who lived in one of the city's corners. Just as expected, Olt was in Fullbeck City. He lived in a desolate place that Alme had neglected to search.

Alme set her foot inside his modest... no, poor-looking house.

"...How careless."

Alme said. Only one lock protected the house's door.

A man sat in a rocking chair. After a long time of not seeing him, he became an old man that was so withered to the extent that it seemed strange he was

still living.

“Were you not even able to arrange a single person to protect you?”

Alme asked.

“What will a few troops help against an opponent that can find me?”

Olt answered with a hoarse voice.

“So, are you from the Indulging God Cult? Or perhaps the Armed Librarians?”

Olt turned his face to Alme. It seemed his eyesight was also lost to old age.

“...The Cult. Or more precisely, a traitor to the Cult.”

“I see.”

Saying this, Olt slowly rose up.

“The one holding Parney Parlmanta’s Book is you.”

“Indeed.”

“It is admirable how you’ve hidden it till now.”

“I cut off connections from both the light and the darkness. Since no one knew me, no one knew to reach me.”

“Why do you have Parney’s Book?”

“Lascall Othello gave it to me. She could not ascend to Heaven. Because of this, at the very least she wished to stay by the side of someone who knew her.”

“Lascall...”

Alme murmured without thinking. Olt questioned her.

“Are you perhaps Alme?”

“Yeah.”

“I remember you well.”

“Why?”

“There are but few False Men that yearn for True Men like me and you. So I felt sympathy for you in that sense.”

“...Were you also like that?”

“Yes. Parney was a pitiful person. She destroyed the happiness she wished for

with her own hands.”

“I have no interest in Parney. What I wish to know is only about Lascall.”

“Lascall?”

“I came here to find his identity.”

Olt smiled faintly. And he pointed to a Book left in one corner of the room.

“You will probably understand when you read it. You see, Lascall exists in a different plane than us.”

Alme stared at the Book. This is her goal, for which she came here. For this she betrayed the Cult, manipulated Winkeny and killed the False Men.

So why did she hesitate now?

“Are you not going to read it? That should be your goal.”

She recalled the Overseer of Paradise’s words. She shouldn’t be able to reach the truth about Lascall.

That being the case, perhaps this Book will not yield any results. Is that why she hesitated?

Or was it a trap?

“Will you not read it?”

Or was he just confident that Alme could not reach Lascall’s identity?

“...You can also stop if that is what you wish.”

What did she hesitate about? She would understand if she saw it.

Alme extended her hand. Her fingers touched the Book and the memories came flowing in. They were the memories of a pitiful woman who had once belonged to the Cult

Part 2

Parney Parlmanta.

Alme found out for the first time that her real name was Lisa Panice.

She lived in a small dirty apartment in Fullbeck, making her living by washing dishes. No one had called her Parney. At the time she was a mere woman who couldn't be called an actress.

Returning home after her work of dishwashing, Parney opened the mailbox at her door. There was nothing inside.

She was supposed to have received a notification today. It was supposed to tell her the result of an audition.

Was I rejected again? Parney muttered. She wasn't able to grasp even the role of an extra.

In the middle of her narrow apartment was a big mirror. Parney practiced her acting in front of it. She read out aloud of a worn-out script, changed her facial expressions, and sometimes mixed it with gestures.

This was the only place where she could act out the main role.

“You’re so good, Parney-chan.”

A girl was talking to her. She was her housemate, who also dreamt of becoming an actress like her, a girl called Mel.

“Yes, thank you.”

She wiped off her sweat with the towel passed to her.

“Now look at my performance.”

This time Mel stood in front of the mirror and read the words of love written in the scenario.

She wasn’t bad, but Parney was better. No, when talking about pure acting ability, Parney was better than most actresses in the city.

However, she never got any work.

What she lacked was an opportunity. She didn’t have enough chances. That was what Parney believed.

She was born as an ordinary farmer’s daughter, and came to Fullbeck when she was sixteen. Seven years passed since then. Only her belief kept her going through these years. She already stopped correspondence with her family, and Mel was her only friend. She didn’t have a lover. She only had her dreams and needed nothing more.

Mel's practice ended. She spoke while wiping off her sweat.

"Parney-chan, let's someday play both of the leading roles together."

"Yeah."

"If I have the chance I will definitely recommend you, so call me if you get the chance, Parney-chan."

"Yeah."

Parney strongly nodded.

It was a small promise. But even that was far away for Parney right now.

Even Alme couldn't imagine that woman becoming an enemy of the world later despite already knowing it as fact. She probably had some hidden skills.

No, she was the same as Alme once was. Winken and Boramot were also like that. Perhaps even Cigal-sama and Ganbanzel were like that.

Everyone was ordinary until meeting the Cult.

Parney practiced a role with only two lines for two whole months. She then headed for the audition.

“I am Parney Parlmenta.”

“Your age?”

“23.”

After saying that, the director, scriptwriter and the rest whispered into each other's ears. Then, they said,

“23 years old... I see. The audition is over. We will announce the results by mail.”

At least watch my performance, she wanted to say but didn't. 23 years old... she knew that relative to a starting actress she wasn't young.

On her way back home that day, she bought a hotdog at a booth. She chewed it while leisurely walking back home. She came back to the cheap apartment complex.

Suddenly, she found a cat at her feet. Parney dropped her hotdog's sausage in front of it. The cat sniffed it, but it apparently didn't like something about it since it ran away without eating a single bite.

“What a spoiled child.”

Parney sat down on the stairs and munched on her bread that now had only onions in it.

Maybe it's useless already. These crushing words floated into Parney's mind.

At that time, a man came walking from the other side of the road. He held the cat from earlier in his arms.

"Is this your cat?"

"No, I don't know it."

"Oh."

Saying so, the man released the cat. With a bothered expression, the cat ran away at full speed.

"...Are you Parney Parlmanta-san?"

"Who are you?"

Parney glanced at the man.

"My name isn't important."

It sounds like the script from some drama, Parney thought.

"So what do you want?"

The man scratched his head and spoke.

“Right, so essentially, I’m your fan.”

Parney burst into laughter.

“What a great joke. Do you like women who are eating empty hotdogs?”

The man also laughed.

“No, I really am your fan. Parney Parlmanta-san. Everyone else in the cinema seems so dull after seeing you.”

After the jokes come the pick-up lines, Parney thought. But she didn’t feel like keeping it up.

“That’s enough.”

“...Enough?”

“I’m mediocre. I understand it, so stop.”

“Are you giving up?”

“I don’t want to. But I’m mediocre. Hopelessly so.”

A piece of the hotdog fell from Parney's hands. She sat on the stairs and cast her eyes down so she wouldn't show her face to the man.

"The people in this world may think this way. But I know. You possess something extraordinary."

"Where is it? That sorta thing."

"...Right there."

Saying this, the man pointed to Parney's chest.

"No-one else possesses the purity of your feelings. You mustn't give them up. Your dream is this world's treasure. You mustn't lose it with such a foolish misstep."

After saying so, the man went away.

The next day a letter arrived. It came from the director of the auditions held the previous day.

He said that he wanted to see Parney perform. Moreover, this wasn't as the minor role she auditioned to, but as the leading role. He said that he was taking off the actress that was supposed to become the leading figure and wanted to use Parney instead.

"Parney-chan, woow, that's amazing!"

Her friend Mel was as happy as if it happened to her. But Parney's legs were shaking.

She immediately recalled the man she had met the previous day. Was this his doing?

She didn't know him. She knew no powerful people in the city that could do this.

Parney took out her best dress, and adorned with every possible accessory she could find, she made her way to the movie company. She didn't feel happy at all. She was only scared.

It's too strange. It's impossible.

What was going to happen to her from now on? If she woke up in the morning to find out it was a dream she would be happy.

She was getting close. She wanted to turn back her heels and go home.

But...

"She came! That person came!"

Dozens of reporters gathered in front of the movie company. Camera flashes rained down on her.

Showered by that light, Parney forgot all about her fears and confusion.

Several dream-like days passed along. During that time, Parney hadn't seen that man who held the cat and came to her even once.

For some reason, the situation turned out as if Parney was a genius actress that suddenly appeared like a comet. It seemed that everyone forgot about the countless auditions she failed till then.

No, those became her forbidden past. They were all forbidden from saying it by someone.

A terrifying power was working for Parney's sake.

Several months passed. Parney's busy days came to a break and she returned to her apartment. She found that man squatting at the roadside.

Parney grew closer. He pinched a thin piece of ham with his fingers and fed it to a cat. Although it was a stray cat it didn't seem alarmed at all and purred at the ham dangled by the man.

"Hi."

The man raised his face and said.

"Is that the cat from then?"

“Yeah. We get along.”

The cat noticed Parney, stopped eating and ran away. It hates me, huh? She thought.

Alme, who was reading the Book, knew that man. He was someone she couldn't possibly forget.

“Who are you?”

Parney asked.

“I cannot name myself. Since I am normally called by my official position, I would like for you to do so as well.

Overseer of Paradise. Please call me like that.”

She couldn't tell it when she had previously met the man, but she noticed the strange reality around him. She couldn't remember his face. Parney could only understand he was a Magician.

“How do you feel now?”

The Overseer of Paradise asked. Parney answered frankly.

“I feel the best.”

“There aren’t a lot of people who would answer that. Most of them will... no, everyone except you will probably only feel confusion and fear.”

“...Is that so.”

“That is why I’ve chosen you.”

Parney once again asked the same question as before.

“Just who are you?”

“We are... the Indulging God Cult. Those who aim for Heaven.”

The Indulging God Cult. She heard about its existence in her apartment that didn’t have Mel in it.

She couldn’t just suddenly believe in the Overseer of Paradise’s story. Even when he showed her a Book in which Heaven was depicted, it was too soon.

“Why me? Do I really have enough value to go to Heaven?”

“You do. You have a clear form of happiness within your heart. You have no hesitations or doubts.

You are qualified enough to become a True Man.”

“Really?”

“Try and ask your own heart. You desire acting more than anything. You wish for everyone to applaud you and die within that applause.

These feelings of yours are unyielding.”

He was right. That had always been Parney’s dream. It was everything in her life. She had nothing else, but these feelings alone were unshakeable.

“Right. You should understand now. You have the qualifications to become a True Man.”

Saying this, the Overseer of Paradise pointed behind him.

“Look.”

When she turned around, several people entered her narrow apartment. Were they waiting outside?

“Let me introduce them. They are the False Men who will serve you.”

Amongst them, a man with eyes like a hound stepped forward and kneeled.

“Parney Parlmenta-sama, please tell us everything that you desire. No matter how petty that wish would be, we would throw away our lives to grant it.

My name is Zackie Mylon.”

He put his mouth to Parney's feet. Even a princess would probably not receive that sort of treatment.

"He is a loyal warrior of the Indulging God Cult. His mission is to protect you."

Next, an old man walking with a cane also kissed her feet.

"He is Olt Gowla. He will market you around the world."

The Overseer of Paradise said. One after the other, the False Men kissed Parney's feet and pledged allegiance to her.

Finally, an old woman came up.

"...Parney-sama. I might not be able to be of use to you like everyone else. But please, keep even someone like me in some part of your mind."

"Are you also from the Indulging God Cult?"

"Yes ma'am."

Saying this, she prostrated herself before Parney.

"Parney. You are not alone. The happiness in your heart shall become that of everyone in Heaven."

Right. Her happiness was to be shared with others. It wasn't hers alone.

"Everyone..."

Parney talked to the False Men.

"I can do nothing but act. So I think I would need you all to help me in many things. Since I'm going to do my best to become happy, please come with me to Heaven."

Everyone raised passionate voices. The Overseer of Paradise watched them in satisfaction.

Parney continued working without rest. She read scripts until late at night, and when it became morning she would fly to the film studio and perform. She happily lived the sort of life that would make a normal person give up in a week.

"Parney-sama, take care of yourself."

The warrior Zackie, who became her close aide, said so to her.

"I suffer more when I rest. I can act. The audience is waiting for me. I anxiously wait for that every single day."

Those were Parney's true feelings. That's why she was a True Man.

Her fame grew day by day. It was hard to find critic articles that did not praise

her. She cut those off one by one and then shredded them. She would do so every day she found the time to.

“It’s a big hit again.”

Zackie said.

“Won’t you soon grow tired of being praised?”

“What are you saying? Don’t say such stupid things.”

“Please forgive me. That is why you are a True Man.”

Parney moved away from the cheap apartment she used to live in to a large mansion. She was also happy about that, but compared to just being able to act, it was a trifle bit of happiness.

“Is there anything else you want other than acting?”

“Nothing at all.”

“But it is our mission to meet all of your desires. No matter how small they are, we must grant them.”

“Well then, that’s troubling.”

Parney thought for a while, and then spoke lightly.

“I know. I want to meet my family.”

“...Eh?”

“I haven’t seen them in a long while. They didn’t even send me letters. I want us to live together. Then, I’ll bring father and mother along to Heaven.”

That much of a wish should be grantable. All of her wishes could be granted because she was a True Man. However, Zackie’s reply came in a voice that sounded like he bared his fangs on her.

“...We cannot grant that.”

This was the first time he defied her.

“Huh?”

“Even for you True Men who can do anything there are things that you mustn’t do. You cannot leak the existence of the Indulging God Cult.”

“...Why?”

“If the populace will come to know of the existence of Heaven, everyone will want to ascend to it. Heaven will then become sullied, and lose its meaning as Heaven.”

“...”

“Only people chosen by Lascall Othello can ascend to Heaven.”

Parney gave up on her wish. She soon forgot of that conversation, but Zackie’s fanged voice remained engraved in her mind.

One day, she questioned the Overseer of Paradise when he came to visit.

“By the way, I’ve wanted to ask this for a long time, but don’t you have any wishes?”

“Wishes?”

“Aren’t you the leader of the Indulging God Cult? Don’t you have anything that you want to do like me?”

“No, I’m but a False Man. True Men produce happiness for the sake of God, and I’m the one who gathers those to aid them. It’s a different role.”

“Hmm, is that so.”

He was a mysterious man, but gave an overall favorable impression. It also wasn’t bad that he liked cats. Thinking about it, she didn’t know his name.

She recalled the name that Zackie said some time ago.

“By the way, Lascall Othello.”

“...?”

The Overseer of Paradise looked around.

“Did Lascall come here?”

“Isn't your name Lascall?”

“That is a misunderstanding. Lascall is a different person.”

“Oh. So, who's Lascall?”

“Have you not met with Lascall yet?”

“No. I don't know him.”

“Because he only comes on a whim.”

“Who is he?”

“He is one with the duty to bring Books to God. He is the one who carries the happiness we produce to Heaven. That is Lascall.”

While reading the Book, Alme was thinking. I finally found out his goal. Is that

his true identity?

Parney spoke to the Overseer of Paradise.

“Is Lascall more important than you?”

“Rather than him being more important, he’s a different kind of being in the first place. You shouldn’t ask about him more than that.”

“Why?”

“The ones who know the location of Heaven are me and Lascall alone. If it would become known to our followers, people who want to cheat and go directly to Heaven will appear. If people who are not followers will know the location of Heaven, the Cult will be finished. That is why we must keep Lascall a secret.”

“I see. So I’ll stop.”

Parney was obedient. The Overseer of Paradise glanced around.

“Perhaps Lascall is somewhere around here. He occasionally appears when people are talking about him.”

“That is indeed so.”

At that instant, a voice came out of the floor. A man suddenly appeared as if

gushing out below.

He seemed to be around forty years old. Parney saw that he was half bald and had a hook nose.

His moderate build body was wrapped in a black suit, and he held a strange dagger made of stone in his right hand.

This was the first time Alme has seen Lascall. She burned his appearance into her mind.

“That was somewhat anticlimactic.”

Parney said while smiling.

“He’s somewhat shabby. Like a normal person. I was expecting someone like a dashing young man or an amazing old man.”

“How harsh of you.”

The Overseer of Paradise smiled.

“I am terribly sorry.”

Lascall Othello said with a serious expression.

“Parney-sama, when you obtain a satisfying life and a satisfying death, let us

bring your Book to Heaven. I shall look forward to that.”

“I also asked the Overseer of Paradise about this, but don’t you want to be satisfied as well?”

Lascall shook his head.

“If this world is like a movie, then I am someone like that movie’s audience. I merely observe and at times lend a hand.”

After saying so, his greeting ended, and Lascall disappeared.

Did he omit anything? Thought Alme while reading the Book.

After that the happy days kept going without any change.

One day, however, a clear crack appeared in Parney’s happiness. It was caused by an abrupt visit.

“Parney-chan.”

It was in the room where actors read their scripts for a certain movie. Parney found an unexpected face there.

“Mel?”

She was the friend who shared an apartment with her before she joined the

Indulging God Cult.

“It’s our first time working together.”

Mel innocently came to speak with her. It’s been a long time, but her smile remained as it always was. But what about Parney herself? Did she change?

“I was looking forward to this.”

“Yeah.”

If one of them ever became a star, she would recommend the other one – they once had this sort of promise. However, Parney hadn’t remembered Mel at all.

Mel didn’t seem bothered by that. Did she forget? Or did she not mind? Parney couldn’t say.

“I’ll start reading the script. Do you remember it, Parney-chan?”

“Yeah.”

“Wow, you beat me. Even though you have more lines than me...”

Parney was acting the lead part of a queen. Mel was playing a minor role – the lover of the king. However, during the filming, Parney only followed Mel with her eyes.

When the filming started, her innocent face changed. Her eyes became sharp as a leopard's and her mouth hid a strong and silent ambition.

At the instant the camera started rolling, her expression changed to that of a vulgar and voluptuous woman.

Eventually, Parney noticed she wasn't just following her with her gaze. She was simply captivated by her performance.

Was that her natural talent? No, that's wrong. She had been polishing it for a long time. After Parney left that cheap apartment, Mel polished herself to crawl up to her.

But what about Parney herself?

Just as she thought so, she suddenly lost strength in her legs.

"...Parney-sama!"

Zackie supported her body. After seeing her condition, he spoke to everyone around.

"Excuse me, she seems to be unwell. We shall leave for now!"

Parney returned to the dressing room while supported by Zackie. There, when no one other than Zackie could see her, tears started rolling on her cheeks.

“...Did Mel not come here?”

After a while, as she calmed down, Parney asked.

“She came to visit earlier, but I drove her away.”

“Thank you.”

Parney wiped off her makeup and tears.

“Is she hindering you?”

She read his intention from his way of speaking. Parney spoke while glaring at him.

“Zackie, if you kill her I’ll quit being a True Man.”

“...Parney-sama.”

“I really mean it.”

Parney now understood. She wasn’t special because she was a particularly good actress. She was special because she was happy.

If she were to lose that happiness, everything will end. If she wouldn’t be a

True Man she will have nothing left.

Ever since then, her acting ability began to deteriorate. Together with the collapse of her confidence, she developed a fear of being abandoned.

Part 3

“Why did you take a break?”

A while after her reunion with Mel, the False Man Olt came to visit Parney in her mansion. She had canceled her scheduled job at the last minute.

“Isn’t it fine that I want to take a break?”

Parney said while drinking liquor.

“You can’t do that. You must pursue your acting.”

“Stop. I’m tired of it.”

Olt responded in anger.

“Wasn’t acting your happiness? Aren’t you an ordinary woman then?”

“ ... ”

“If you are a True Man, devote yourself to happiness.”

Parney answered with some hesitation.

“Right, that’s how it was...”

She continued acting. The high praise she received ever since joining the Cult was the same. But even that didn’t encourage her. Parney spoke to the Overseer of Paradise when he visited her.

“Hey, I’d like to go to Heaven soon. It’s been enough, right?”

“No, you cannot. Your quantity of happiness is not yet sufficient.”

“Do I have to continue?”

“Are you perhaps not happy anymore?”

Parney immediately showed him a smile.

“Did you really think it could happen? I’m a True Man after all.”

However, she was acting. Parney ended up acting even when the camera wasn’t rolling – acting out her happiness.

Only Zackie understood her true intentions.

“Hey, will I be able to ascend to Heaven?”

Parney often asked him. Zackie shook his head to the side.

“I don’t know. We should ask Lascall.”

“But Lascall wouldn’t come. How can I meet him?”

Even Zackie didn’t have any answer. Lascall was an unreachable being for him.

“If I remember correctly... it’s been said that Lascall would appear when you speak of him.”

Parney ordered-

“Search for Lascall.”

“Was it you? The one who’s been spreading rumors on Lascall Othello.”

The Overseer of Paradise and the executive leaders came to reprimand

Parney.

“What do you mean that you want to meet Lascall? Aren't you a True Man? Have you forgotten your duty?”

“Shut up.”

Ever since then she drowned herself in alcohol. She asked Zackie for things even enjoyable fun than liquor and he brought them.

“There's no way we've been sniffed out by the Armed Librarians, right?”

“Didn't that Haiza or something came?”

“...You haven't talked to him about Lascall, right?”

“Who knows... I forgot.”

Parney laughed. It was a masochistic kind of laugh.

“What shall we do about her, Overseer of Paradise?”

“There is no problem at all. I will take some measures.”

“Hmm... If that's what you say.”

Parney spoke to the Overseer of Paradise after calming down.

“Hey, let me meet Lascall. I’m a True Man and I’m telling you I want to meet Lascall. Aren’t you all False Men? Let me meet him already.”

“We cannot allow that.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“If we unnecessarily let you meet with Lascall, you might learn the location of Heaven. Therefore, we cannot allow even a member of the Indulging God Cult to know about him.”

“What’s all this bullshit about Heaven! I’m a True Man. Obey me!”

The Overseer of Paradise and the executives looked at her with cold eyes. She was clearly completely drunk.

“We’ve made a mistake, Overseer of Paradise.”

“...It seems so.”

“We should have plucked her off sooner. When she was at the peak of her happiness.”

“What are you talking about?”

Parney started shaking.

“We have no need for True Men who have lost their happiness. We don’t mind killing you.”

“Perhaps we can still squeeze out some happiness from her. Let us wait a little. Her desire seems weak though.”

“What do you mean, what do you mean!”

After the Overseer of Paradise and the rest left, only Parney and Zackie remained.

“Zackie. Am I going to be killed?”

There was no reply.

“What’s a True Man? What’s the Indulging God Cult?”

No reply.

“Zackie. Please. Look for Lascall. I have nothing more than that.”

“Do you want me to conduct treason?”

He will probably not comply. Zackie was also a believer of the Indulging God Cult. He had no reason to listen to someone like Parney who's already been thrown away.

However, his answer was different.

“Parney-sama. I've been always looking at you.”

She could hear the frustration and anger in his words.

“I will say this clearly. Right now you are at your lowest. Even so, I thought that you were once fit to go to Heaven. I've sworn my loyalty to the you of those days. And that loyalty does not waver.”

Just like in the day they've first met, Zackie kissed Parney's feet.

Parney cancelled all of her work plans and did nothing but wait for contact from Zackie. She met no-one. No contact came. No-one came to visit her. In her boredom, she left memos to pass the time.

If I were to die, this will become my last will. Parney thought so and laughed.

One night, she woke with a start. She found a letter near her pillow. Zackie was inside a storehouse in the harbor – thus was written inside.

She could trust no-one but Zackie. Parney went to the storehouse alone. There were no people around, but only a single Book was left there.

With that alone she understood everything. Who was that Book's owner?

Parney extended her fingers. She touched the Book of the one who was faithful to her, Zackie.

Having received the secret orders from Parney, Zackie slipped through the watchful eyes of the Cult and searched for Lascall. Parney saw him fight for the first time.

Zackie was an excellent warrior. His only weapon was his body. His battle style was lurking in the darkness and finally pouncing and breaking his opponent's neck in an instant, just like a leopard.

Seeking clues about Lascall Othello, he sneaked into a mansion belonging to an executive False Man. The executive he found called out to him.

"Zackie. I have a nice story for you."

Zackie stopped his attack, and listened to the man's story.

"You seem to be looking for Lascall Othello. I actually also think I want to meet him. I've had enough of being a subordinate. That's why I plan on killing

the Overseer of Paradise and Lascall and snatch Heaven.”

Parney’s plan was just appealing for Lascall, but the executive had a much more daring idea in mind.

“Can you do it?”

“The Overseer of Paradise should have no fighting ability. If we kill him I can control the Cult. Then you and Parney could go to Heaven.”

Zackie joined that executive’s attack plan.

And just when they were about to attack the hotel the Overseer of Paradise stayed in, Zackie withdrew.

“Why, Zackie?”

The attackers asked.

“Sorry, but I’m not going to help you.”

Saying so, after he hid himself within the darkness, another man appeared of that darkness.

He was a man who wore a flat mask with no eyes or mouth. He held an iron bar in his hands.

“Who are you?”

The executive asked. The reply came in the form of slaughter.

Even Zackie wasn't able to see the movement of that iron bar. That bladeless rod tore into the body of the men like a sickle. They hadn't the slight idea over what his Magic Right was.

“...Wha-”

But that strength... Zackie involuntarily let out a voice as he lurked. The trivial difference in their abilities became overwhelming. Was there such a warrior in the Cult? Someone like that should be in the caliber of the Armed Librarian Acting Director.

In the blink of an eye he erased the executive and his group.

Zackie was the one to inform the Overseer of Paradise of the attack plan. Parney's orders were to let her meet Lascall. He had a different goal in the first place.

The faceless man spoke as Zackie looked in front of him.

“It's about time for you to come out, Lascall.”

Lascall Othello appeared. He stabbed his stone sword in the ground and withdrew the False Men's Books.

How convenient, thought Zackie. He planned on exchanging the information about the attack with the right to meet Lascall. Unexpectedly, he became able to appeal to Lascall directly. The lurking Zackie showed himself.

“Oh my, and who might you be, sir?”

“I’m the informer who stopped this plot. There is something I’d like to request for this achievement.”

Zackie prostrated himself.

“I know that I won’t get rewarded on this achievement. But please take Parney-sama’s Book to Heaven.”

However, Lascall’s reply was ruthless. With a soft, cold smile he said the following.

“It is an impossible request. Those who have lost their happiness will not go to Heaven.”

“I know that. But please have some mercy...”

At the exact moment he said this and tried getting closer to Lascall... the faceless man stood behind him.

“I will kill all those who pursue Lascall.”

Along with the sounds of air being cut, Zackie felt his body being split into two.

“...Zackie...”

Having finished reading the Book, Parney sank down to the ground.

It was then that Lascall Othello appeared. He stood in front of Parney as if he had grown from the ground.

“At his final moments he wished to be with you. Although he was a traitor to the Indulging God Cult, those feelings were genuine.”

Saying that, he took Zackie’s Book away from Parney.

“Showing you this Book was my last act of mercy.”

Furthermore, the faceless man appeared from hiding.

“Those who pursue Lascall will die. There are no exceptions.”

The faceless man raised a wooden stick fallen on the ground. Parney realized her fate.

“Just what is a True Man?”

Parney said.

“Although you said that we were for Heaven, for God, if we’re unneeded we just become trash?”

Lascall thought for a while and answered.

“What are the True Men... Let us liken them to clowns. Clowns that exist to entertain God. Aren’t clowns who can’t dance anymore unnecessary?”

Parney felt her vision darkening.

“No, that’s wrong, Lascall.”

The faceless man interjected.

“True Men are livestock. Livestock that produces happiness for God.”

“...Then...”

The faceless man raised the wooden stick.

“Then, who is God?”

Parney’s head rolled off.

“What if...”

Olt spoke to Alme who finished reading the Book.

“What if she did not become a True Man and earnestly kept acting. She wouldn’t stand on the top. She wouldn’t shine on the stage. Nevertheless, wouldn’t she still be able to make a performance that would resonate in a person’s heart?”

Olt quietly shed tears.

“We are the ones who have nipped off her soul. We were fools.”

Alme made no voice. She also had a True Man die because of her failure. Therefore, she had nothing to say.

“Seems like you’ve been looking for Lascall.”

“...Yes.”

At the end she wasn’t able to find out the truth about Lascall Othello. Zackie tried reaching his identity, but got no answer. This would certainly be something important were it handed to an Armed Librarian, but Alme had no use for it.

Perhaps if it was Mirepoc she would be able to get closer to Lascall's identity.

However, that was fine. Her goal wasn't to know anything. It was to kill Lascall.

"You should understand now. Please give up. You cannot touch the truth of the Cult."

"No, I understood one thing. I found out a way to meet Lascall Othello."

"What?"

"When a follower of the Indulging God Cult dies, Lascall comes to collect their Book."

Alme raised her sword. Olt's head flew off surprisingly easy.

While looking down at the corpse, she started thinking. That was quite the detour. I'm glad that's it. If I wait here, Lascall Othello will come.

Come on, Lascall Othello.

I don't know your identity. I don't even know if I can win. But at least I was able to make my revenge.

Mirepoc sat by her own in a café with few people inside it. She was aimlessly waiting for contact from Mattalast.

She was fighting while looking for the correct answer. Alme's words still echoed in her ears. Her doubts were deep and the exit was far away. As long as she didn't clear her doubts, she will probably not return to the fight.

Having finished her coffee, Mirepoc thought of moving to another place. But even if she switched places she will continue to worry anyway.

At that time, a boy started talking to her.

"Umm, are you an Armed Librarian?"

Mirepoc noticed – that boy's appearance matched the features Kalon told her about.

"You were looking for me."

Mirepoc nodded. She prompted the boy to sit down. The boy hesitatingly sat to her opposite. He appeared to be around 13 or 14 years old. He was a pretty boy with a slender, young body.

"I'm just confirming, but are you the one who came to ask Kalon about Lascall Othello?"

"...Yes."

“I’d like to ask you some things. Can we speak?”

As if realizing Mirepoc had no malicious intent, the boy sighed in relief. She relayed to Mattalast about having found the boy. She then listened to his story.

“My name is Rully Strite. I am a student.”

“Why do you want to know about Lascall?”

Rully looked away, apparently finding it difficult to speak. Why did he want to know if an Armed Librarian was looking for him?

“Umm... I’m interested in him.”

It was obviously a lie.

“I’d like you to speak honestly with me.”

“Umm...”

“It’s hard to speak of, right?”

“...”

“I’m sorry, but if you don’t want to talk we should finish this here.”

Mirepoc said and waited for him to speak.

After the steam from the boy's milk coffee disappeared, he opened his mouth.

"I had a father. His name was Charl Strite. My dad said that he's Lascall Othello."

In order not to interrupt the boy's story, Mirepoc stayed silent and listened.

"I don't know much about my dad. He was a travelling merchant, but he sometimes brought great sums of money. Thinking about it he was suspicious starting from then. At that time dad used to collect ancient documents. It seemed to be his hobby. I heard the legend of Lascall Othello then."

"What did your father say about Lascall?"

"He said something like, 'doesn't he resemble what your dad's doing?'"

Mirepoc listened even more attentively.

"As I grew older, my dad disappeared. He sent me enough money to live with once in a while, but other than that made no contact.

I searched for my dad. I visited many towns, advertised in newspapers, and things like that. But one day, dad appeared in front of me. He brought along with him a lot of scary people. Dad told me to forget him. I promised I wouldn't

look for him anymore. I thought I was going to be killed.”

Rully spoke while trembling.

“At that time, my dad’s subordinates have called him Lascall Othello...”

“ ... ”

“At the end I asked him – why did he take Lascall Othello’s name? And he answered – that it was “convenient”, he said.”

“ ... ”

“I promised I wouldn’t look for him, but... I wanted to know about dad no matter what.”

The boy finished his tale.

Mirepoc felt laughter rising up from her. It was funny because of how afraid of Lascall she was until now.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, that’s on me. So that’s how it was...”

Mirepoc thought of herself as a fool. She was dancing to her own tune.

She was caught in the enemy's trap. She now understood Mattalast's words. Lascall Othello – no, Charl Strite imitated the legend.

Using that legend as a front, he concealed his identity. Mirepoc was absolutely tricked by this.

Once she understood, it all amounted to nothing. Lascall Othello was merely a man.

During that time, Alme waited for Lascall Othello.

What will happen once she kills Lascall? Cigal was already dead. Those who have died can never return. It was all in vain. This was her first time at revenge, but did everyone feel this way before conducting it?

Why had she continued to fight? For Cigal? But he wasn't in this world anymore.

“Stop!”

Alme shouted at herself.

What will it help her to think about that? If she were to regret everything at this point, she would be nothing but a fool.

At that moment, the ground began to dribble as if it was water and rose up. It then became the shape of a person.

It was a bit similar to Winkeny, but a different ability altogether. That man appeared out of nothing. She knew his identity without him saying anything. He was the same as when he appeared in Parney's Book – it was Lascall Othello.

“Oh my, it is you.”

Lascall said. Alme pulled out her sword.

“Well then, I came here to collect Olt-sama's Book. I have no intention of fighting with you. Or rather, I am not made able to fight in the first place.”

Alme gathered strength into her feet. So she could break Lascall's head in one hit.

“If you want the Book then do it. In the meantime I'll smash your head.”

“Hmm...”

Lascall thought for a while.

“Seems like this work would take a bit of time. Seems like I had better finish

up a simple job first.”

“Work, you say?”

Immediately after Alme asking, Lascall disappeared. She was left behind with her sword drawn.

Lascall talked about some work. Did he not even plan on fighting her?

Alme clenched her teeth and waited for him to return.

Mirepoc conveyed Rully’s story to Mattalast. He told her to protect the boy.

Rully spoke to her.

“Are you planning on fighting my dad?”

He was a smart boy. Mirepoc answered.

“If your father is a good person we will settle this without fighting.”

It was a cruel reply. The boy must’ve known what his father was like.

In order to leave him with Security, the two started walking around the city.

Suddenly, Rully started running in an opposite direction from Mirepoc.

“What’s wrong?!”

Mirepoc asked while running.

“Dad’s over there!”

A single man entered a building’s shadow from the main street. Mirepoc grabbed and stopped Rully who tried rushing forward.

“Wait... that man...”

While reaching for her sword, Mirepoc looked at the man. His expression seemed to be laughing, seeing through everything around him, and yet not thinking about anything.

“...It’s fine. After all, he’s my dad.”

Saying so, Rully approached him. How dangerous, Mirepoc thought.

“Dad, it’s me. I’m sorry for breaking my promise.”

Lascall and Mirepoc looked at him from the two sides. She needs to protect him. And she must catch Lascall. How could she do both at the same time?

Mirepoc hesitated.

Where was the correct answer? What actions should she take?

“I’m really sorry. But I had no choice.”

Lascall smiled.

“My son.”

Just as Rully approached, Lascall took out his dagger.

“Watch out!”

Mirepoc charged and thrust Rully away at almost the same time Lascall swung the sword with his right hand. It was supposed to be a deadly hit, but the blade’s tip hadn’t touched her.

Did they avoid him? No. There was no-one in Mirepoc’s sight.

“How truly lenient of you.”

She heard the voice coming from another direction. To Mirepoc’s right. Just before she threw Rully away.

After being thrust by Mirepoc, Rully rolled on the ground. Lascall was next to where he collapsed.

The stone blade pierced his chest.

“Which of the two is better, I wonder. Will you kill me, or will you save Rully?”

Mirepoc reflexively pulled out her gun and shot. However, the bullet slipped through his body and hit the wall behind him. He disappeared again.

“It is probably futile to give advice, but please take care of yourself.”

Hearing the voice from behind her, Mirepoc turned around. However, there was no-one there.

“Why did you kill him!”

Mirepoc shouted. Lascall appeared somewhere far.

“Isn't it basic to finish up business starting from the most simple ones? Rully first. After that Alme. Then you and Mattalast. That is the order.”

Who asked about that?! Why did you kill your own son who came looking for you!

“Have you no heart?”

Lascall smiled and sunk into the ground.

“If the world is a story, then I am an existence like its reader. I am merely

watching it.”

“Don’t make fun of me!”

Mirepoc’s bullets struck in vain as Lascall disappeared. Only the collapsed Rully remained in front of her. Even the stone blade piercing his chest was gone at some point.

“...Y...es, I’ve broken... my promise...”

Rully muttered. Mirepoc held him and tried applying first-aid. Even though she knew it was useless.

Rully weakly grabbed her hand.

“Stop...”

“Don’t talk!”

“Dad...”

Rully’s words were cut in the middle. Feebly grasping Mirepoc’s hand, he coughed violently as if his chest ruptured.

Even when he stopped breathing, Rully didn’t release Mirepoc’s hand.

Chapter 5: Decisive Battle Of The Weak

Part 1

Mirepoc stared at Rully's pale face in the gloomy morgue.

"You were still here?"

"..."

"Don't stay alone so much. Based on what you told me Lascall Othello can appear wherever he wants to, right?"

Mirepoc didn't answer. She gently grasped Rully's cold hand.

What was I doing until now? She triumphantly left Bantorra, just relied on Mattalast's powers, but hasn't done anything.

"Let's call the Director from Bantorra. I feel like it's too late, but... we have no choice. I never thought Lascall Othello would be such an opponent."

"I..."

“You go back to Bantorra. There’s a danger you’ll be attacked by Lascall Othello, but Bantorra should be much safer.”

Will she just fly back again? Without being of any use?

“Mattalast-san, what am I?”

“...”

“Am I just a slightly useful telegraph?”

“Mirepoc. You are useful enough. I cannot lose you.”

No, that’s not what I’m asking about.

Mirepoc looked at her own hand. Why did she thrust him away? It was as if she was the one to kill him.

The day she has to kill a person will come. When she became an Armed Librarian she had that resolution. But was that what killing a person felt like?

The sensation of Rully’s hand still remained in her palm.

“Alme... what you said was right. I was a fool.”

It’s been a year and a half since she became an Armed Librarian. And an additional year and a half before that she became a trainee.

Previously, Mirepoc had been an officer cadet in the Guinbex Imperial Army. She will never forget the day of the decisive battle between the Guinbex Imperial Army and the Armed Librarians. Since Mirepoc was young she wasn't allowed to serve, and kept her studies at the military academy.

A new world order managed not by the intentions of the Overseer of the Present, but by humans – Carrying this idea as their banner, the Guinbex Imperial Army challenged the entire world to a war.

The result was already known. Hamyuts, Mattalast, Ireia, Bonbo, Yukizona, Mokkania. The armies who invested their entire power in modern science were all annihilated by mere six Armed Librarians.

Receiving word that their army had been destroyed, the military academy became something like a lawless zone.

The high ranking officers who realized their loss ran off to other countries in order to avoid being treated as war criminals. The other teachers panicked and the cadets, after losing their chain of command, became like children.

Hamyuts Meseta and Mattalast Ballory were coming. Will they fight them? Will they surrender? The campus became chaotic.

Mirepoc was the only one among them to go to the academic advisor.

“We are helpless.”

The advisor weakly mumbled after Mirepoc spoke to him. She told him to come to the auditorium.

“What are you going to do?”

Mirepoc used her acquired Thought Sharing ability to call everyone who remained in the school building.

‘Everyone, gather in the auditorium!’

Since the officer cadets lost those who would give them commands, they followed Mirepoc’s orders.

“What are you planning on doing, Mirepoc-kun?”

Mirepoc quietly spoke in front of the cadets and instructors that assembled in the auditorium.

“Well then, just as planned we will begin the second semester’s course on operation of modern weapons. Please open your textbooks on page 53.”

After saying so, she got off the podium. She urged the instructor to start the lecture.

Although their army was destroyed and the enemy was approaching, a usual lecture took place.

Or was this possibly an abnormal situation beyond just defeat? Among everyone Mirepoc was calmly listening to the lecture. Among the confused cadets and instructors, she simply took notes with neat handwriting.

In the middle of the lecture the door opened. The Armed Librarian Mattalast Ballory stood there alone. He watched Mirepoc and the others while smoking a pipe, and then opened his mouth to speak.

“Can you please explain what you are doing?”

Mirepoc rose from her seat.

“We are receiving a lecture on the development of modern weapons and the changes in war tactics that accompanied them.”

“Who’s lecturing?”

“No-one. If I must give an answer, it would be the person who created the curriculum.”

“I see.”

Mattalast’s eyes focused on Mirepoc from the entire auditorium.

“Excuse me, but since we’re in the middle of the lecture, could I ask you to leave?”

“...Can’t outsiders attend?”

“Please go through the formal procedures to attend classes through the army headquarters secretariat. Also...”

Mirepoc stretched her hand and took Mattalast’s pipe. Although he should have been able to predict this happening, it was taken without any resistance.

“No smoking allowed.”

She dropped the smoking leaves to the ground and stomped them with her boots. Mattalast held down his hat, shook his shoulders and laughed.

The order to transfer Mirepoc to the Armed Librarians came when the war officially ended. Her instructor said this was requested by Hamyuts Meseta.

She had no mental resistance to the fact that her affiliation changed.

Mirepoc believed in order, functionality and rationality. These were the things needed to lead people.

She was disillusioned. The Guinbex Imperial Army started a foolish war and put its people and itself in danger. She sought a new place for herself amongst the Armed Librarians.

“Hey, Mirepo. Why did you have that lecture during that time?”

Mattalast asked her after a while.

“Since I am an officer cadet, I did what was expected of me.”

“Didn’t you think of fighting? Something like firing one shot for Guinbex’s pride.”

“I didn’t. I believe that acting according to emotions is wrong.”

She did what was expected of her. She thought that was justice.

But she was wrong.

When she hastily recalled what she did until now, Mirepoc thought so.

While she was aiming for justice, what she has done was no justice at all. She was just trying to fit in an organization that carried out justice.

Right. She was just trying to fit in. She was just trying to fit herself and become part of the system. She never even once judged anything using her own will.

“ ... ”

She closely looked at the face of the boy she saw die in front of her. If she was Noloty, wouldn’t she have risked her life in order to protect this boy? If she was Alme, she would abandon Rully but wouldn’t she at least try to kill Lascall?

She held neither of those feelings in herself.

Mattalast spoke to Mirepoc.

“Mirepoc. Go back. I’ll take care of the rest.”

Alme was waiting. She didn’t move even one step away from where Olt died.

Lascall Othello. What are you doing? It’s been near a full day since he left her.

She glared at the setting sun. He couldn’t have possibly run away, right? At the exact instant she thought of this, a chill ran through her spine.

“Kh...”

It was just a coincidence. Before she knew it, Lascall Othello was standing behind her.

“What have you been doing until now!”

Alme readied her sword while closing the gap between them. In contrast to her, Lascall gripped his stone blade while creating some space.

“Since I have finished one task I took a respite.”

Saying so, Lascall disappeared again.

Will Alme be kept waiting again? Wasn't she the one chasing him? Why was she the one waiting for the enemy's attack?

She couldn't allow him to use a surprise attack against her like he did just now. Alme sent her Sensory Threads fluttering around. The sensations were transmitted to her through them. Alme jumped forward.

While she avoided the attack, she also sent a counter-blow at behind her. However, the figure of Lascall wasn't behind her but about five meters ahead of her.

"Even though Armed Librarians are also scared of you, your weapon is a single knife?"

"Indeed. Even I will not be able to match people like Hamyuts or Mattalast were I to fight them."

He disappeared. And simultaneously, the next attack came.

"Meaning, this is no fight."

And he said it again.

"It is merely a boring job."

“What will you do from now?”

Mirepoc asked Mattalast.

“Based on what you told me, it seems that the rusty woman and Lascall Othello are hostile towards each other. I will make my move when their score is settled.”

“Rully-kun told me to stop Lascall Othello. I don’t want to pile any more sins.”

“I see...”

Mattalast answered bluntly.

“Is that it?”

“Yeah.”

Mirepoc kept speaking.

“Lascall Othello was hiding behind the legend... you knew this from before?”

“From a long time ago. I had no proof, so I didn’t say anything.”

“ ... ”

“Go already. Your plane is waiting.”

Mirepoc stood up.

A few minutes passed. An airplane flew above Mirepoc’s head. It was the plane Mattalast prepared for her.

I’m doing a foolish thing, Mirepoc thought. But if I go back now that will be the end of me.

She connected to Mattalast in her thoughts.

‘Why have you stayed behind, Mirepoc?’

‘I will be the one to defeat Lascall. And also Alme.’

‘What are you doing?!’

“I’m doing something foolish.”

Mirepoc muttered and severed the connection. She then began her preparations. There was probably only one way for her to defeat Lascall.

For that, she will probably have to pass the verge of death. Readying her resolve, Mirepoc ran.

She once again stood waiting. Such an annoying tactic. It was a slow, sluggish,

and boring fight. Was it really fine to fight like this? Alme was tired. Her spirit wore down.

Lascall spoke to her.

“Alme. Have you no intention of forgetting Cigal and devoting yourself to the Indulging God Cult again?”

“What?”

“Cigal was but a foolish man.”

“...You bastard.”

“Also, he did not love you. Please stop clinging to your memories of him.”

“Not like you can understand, bastard.”

“I truly do. I have read Cigal’s Book.

You will gain nothing from this fight.”

“Nevertheless I will fight.”

Lascall smiled.

“Then have my best regards.”

Alme slashed with her sword. It hit only air. She stumbled forward and Lascall Othello’s attack came from behind. She was barely able to defend against it.

It truly was an annoying fight. She was the only one impatient while he was calm. Also, neither of them was wounded yet.

“If you’re that strong, how come you never did anything until now? With that ability aren’t you like a natural enemy for Hamyuts and Mokkaia?”

Alme said.

“I do not kill people. I was not made to do so.”

“...What are you saying?”

At that instant, Lascall disappeared.

“How about we make it easier for ourselves? Do you understand now that you cannot beat me?”

Alme didn’t answer.

There is a way to defeat him.

However, Alme hesitated. Should she really do that?

“You seem to be thinking of something.”

Lascall said as he stopped his attack.

“How scary. I shall run away.”

He vanished.

Then, Alme heard Olt’s door being kicked open. She knew who it was.

“Found you.”

Mirepoc Finedell pointed her rapier at Alme. She pondered for a second whether she should turn her sword on Lascall who disappeared or on Mirepoc who was there.

As Mirepoc saw Alme’s hesitation, her sword point swayed. Just before she was stabbed, Alme directed her sword to Mirepoc. Will Lascall come? I don’t know if I can handle an attack from behind right now.

“You’ve fooled me well. It was quite a well-made lie.”

Mirepoc said.

“...What are you talking about?”

Alme asked back. She truly didn't understand. She had no recollection of deceiving her.

"It won't work this late in the game. Lascall Othello's disguise has already fallen apart."

What do you mean? Just as she was about to ask this...

Mirepoc leapt. The point of her rapier aimed at Alme's solar plexus in a straight line. She barely managed to repel the attack. The sword grazed Alme's thighs.

"Wait, now's not a good time!"

Alme shouted as she fell behind.

"Then it's good for me!"

Mirepoc chased after the escaping Alme. She charged ahead as if crawling on the ground and targeted her vitals.

While defending herself, Alme was thinking. This is bad. This woman is serious.

Lascall Othello didn't show himself. He was probably looking for a good opportunity. He will probably aim at striking a finishing blow when his opponent provides the best opening. Alme and Mirepoc... No matter who of them won, the result would be the same.

Even so, Mirepoc's sword attacks were fast. What the hell happened to this woman? Alme kept concentrating on her desperate efforts to protect herself against Mirepoc's assault.

She couldn't see Lascall nor feel his presence. However, she could feel him watching. Alme restrained Mirepoc with her hands and shouted.

"Rather than me defeat Lascall first! He's somewhere close!"

"Begging for your life is unsightly!"

Lascall was watching. Alme spoke deliberately while knowing this.

"I'm fighting Lascall!"

"Who would believe that?"

"It's true. Believe me..."

"Don't be ridiculous. Look at yourself."

She pointed at Alme with her sword.

"You're unscathed. This is not what a person who's been fighting looks like."

Alme clicked her tongue. She broke the window and escape outside. Mirepoc's left hand pulled out her gun. Bullets shot after the escaping Alme.

Barely avoiding the bullets, Alme rolled on the ground.

I have no choice. After coming this far. Alme readied her resolve. She took a stance. She set the sword on her shoulder while bending extremely forward. It was an offensive stance that specialized in rushing forward and beating down.

"It's finally gotten serious."

Mirepoc took a stance too. She stretched her back and aimed the tip of the sword held in her right hand to her opponent's heart. The fingers of her left hand gently propped up the rapier's blade.

Both parties readied themselves for an attack. Their clash will determine the victor.

Lascall will not make a move. Alme could tell that.

"..."

He will be aiming for the battle's conclusion. No matter who wins, he will probably kill the victor.

Alme clenched her teeth.

Will Lascall come? And will Mirepoc...

Mirepoc moved first. Just a split second behind her, Alme kicked the ground.

Mirepoc's sword came thrusting down from above. Alme's eyes finally got used to her speed.

Against the straight line drawn by Mirepoc's trajectory, Alme's sword drew an arc. Mirepoc was slightly, ever so slightly faster.

However, Alme...

Sacrificed one hand. The back of her left hand got pierced. The blade stopped just three centimeters short of her heart. And she then raised the sword in her right hand overhead.

Mirepoc tried dodging. However, it was too late.

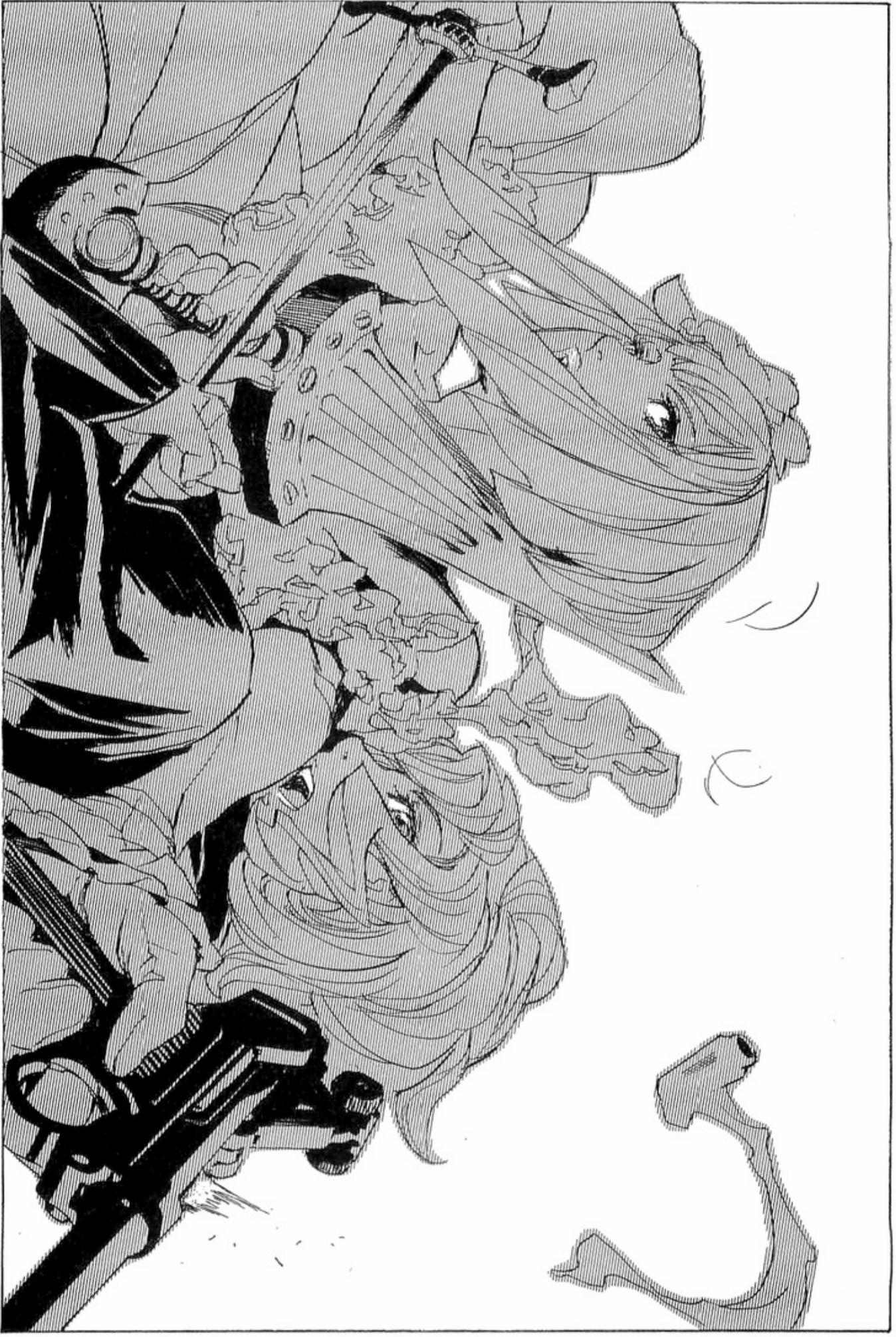
Just before the rusty sword hit Mirepoc's neck... Alme felt Lascall's presence from behind her.

Part 2

Two gunshots resounded. Behind Alme, Lascall – who raised his stone dagger – stopped all movement. Mirepoc saw him stagger.

She drew her gun. Setting her wrist on Alme's body, she aimed at him over the shoulder. The moment his body was about to disappear, she fired a second shot.

Alme's sword was supposed to have cut off Mirepoc's head... But stopped at the point where it barely bit into her skin.



“...Why?”

Lascall tottered.

Mirepoc pulled out the sword stuck in Alme’s hand. She then invoked her Magic Right.

‘Have you forgotten my ability?’

Lascall wore an astonished expression.

‘My Thought Sharing, that allows me to connect to anyone I know the face and name of.’

Mirepoc threw her rapier. It penetrated the center of Lascall’s chest.

‘We’ve already made a promise... me and Alme. This was the only opportunity to kill you.’

“Since when?”

Lascall said. Alme was the one to answer his question.

“When you’ve killed your own son. Since you arrogantly told her my name.”

“I see, so that is how it was.”

Lascall laughed. The stone-made dagger fell from his hand.

His body sank down. It did not disappear in the ground. He just collapsed face up.

Leaving Lascall’s body behind, it was only the stone dagger sinking into the ground.

“Well done.”

Saying this, Lascall closed his eyelids using his own hand. He soon stopped breathing.

Alme was surprised when she was approached using Thought Sharing. They would lure out Lascall by pretending to fight. They will then aim for the moment he comes for a finishing blow.

What a bold plan. If Alme hadn’t stopped her sword right then, Mirepoc would have died.

As for the result, Lascall fell into their trap, but if Alme had a secret agreement with Lascall then Mirepoc would be the one to fall into a trap.

She trusted the one she fought to the death with a few days ago and carried out their plan. This kind of decision didn't seem possible for Mirepoc who was so indecisive until now.

“Something's changed in you.”

“Who knows, I have no idea.”

Mirepoc bluntly answered and recovered the sword stabbed into Lascall. Alme then called out.

“Now that I'm done with it, it seemed too quick.”

Mirepoc checked out Lascall's body and confirmed that he was undoubtedly dead.

“I was afraid of Lascall's disguise until now. However, when I unmasked him I understood... that he was weak.”

“Why?”

“The strong ones don't try to act tough.”

“I see.”

Alme asked another question.

“How did it feel? Killing someone.”

“Full of regrets.”

Alme smiled wryly. As I’ve thought, no matter how far she goes it seems we can’t come to an understanding.

“You’ve really trusted me. Even though you might have been killed.”

“No. You are strong. Saying that you could have killed me at any time wasn’t a lie.”

Right. She certainly said this.

“Besides...”

Mirepoc looked at Alme’s face. She stopped herself from saying something.

“What?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

Mirepoc left Lascall’s corpse and stood up. She then started walking. Alme joined at her side.

While walking, Alme was thinking. I've finally defeated Lascall.

She felt nothing special. She thought that it would be a bit more enjoyable.

She didn't think of it as avenging Cigal. It was just defeating another enemy.

Winkeney once told her to forget Cigal. But, even without being told, perhaps his existence has already been growing dull inside her without even noticing.

Then why was she fighting?

"You've fought against the Indulging God Cult."

Mirepoc asked her.

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"I don't feel like saying."

"And you probably don't feel like cooperating with us like Enlike does either."

"Obviously."

Right. She had no reason. She simply wanted to keep hating and killing.

That was all.

In a sense, that was the same as Cigal. His happiness was to hate other people and steal from them. Alme and Cigal have probably shared the same feelings.

She will continue fighting and killing. She couldn't be happy otherwise. That was her.

While walking, Mirepoc was thinking. I wonder why she's fought Lascall. Why would she oppose the Armed Librarians, betray the Indulging God Cult and keep on fighting?

No matter her reason, could she really have started a fight she had no chances of winning by herself?

Could Mirepoc have done it? Of course not. No matter the reason, she didn't possess the courage to fight by herself.

Mirepoc had noticed.

The words she was about to say before... why she was able to trust Alme?

She felt drawn to her somewhere deep inside her.

Mirepoc couldn't fight by herself so she was drawn to Alme who possessed the strength she did not have.

Mirepoc and Alme walked together for a while. They headed for a desolate place, perfect for them to kill each other.

It's about time to start. Mirepoc was about to say so. But she couldn't find an opportunity. She thought of talking to her a little bit more.

"Hey, what do you think happiness is?"

Alme suddenly asked.

"Who knows?"

Mirepoc answered. She hasn't thought of this.

"You probably haven't read her Book, but Parney wanted to become happy. Her only happiness was in appearing on the silver screen."

"..."

"That geezer Ganbanzel wanted to become stronger than anyone, but that didn't come true. He entrusted his dream to another person, but that failed too."

“ ... ”

“And Cigal-sama was also like that. He wanted to steal all happiness that people other than him had. But, that also failed.”

Mirepoc noticed that she used an honorific only for Cigal. Did Alme serve him?

“Even if I were to throw everything away and chase it with all of my might I would not reach it. How long do you think I need until I reach it?”

Mirepoc answered.

“You will never reach it. Because we Armed Librarians are here.”

“ ... ”

“We are fighting in order to deny it. There’s no way it would be fine to make other people unhappy for your own happiness.”

“But even so we wanted to become happy. All of us.”

“You too?”

“Yes.”

She had a feeling their fight will start soon. They were setting the field. She could speak to her only a little longer.

“Say, Alme. Where does your happiness lie?”

Alme stopped in place and thought. She thought for a long time.

“...I don't know.”

This seems to be the end, thought Mirepoc. Let us fight.

“It's about time to begin.”

They both drew out their sword simultaneously.

While fighting, Mirepoc thought. I cannot win. I cannot defeat her conviction.

With Rully's death and the fight against Lascall she's changed a bit. However, it wasn't anything definitive.

She will probably not be able to smash Alme's will to fight alone to the end.

After several clashes were over, Mirepoc started speaking.

“Alme, I fully understand. I am weak.”

Alme stopped.

“At the end of the day, no matter how far I go I cannot fight by myself. Even when I fought Lascall I needed an ally like you.”

“ ... ”

“I admit it. I can't beat you. I can't beat you when you can fight to the end by yourself.”

She slashed at Alme.

At the same time, Alme started thinking... that she couldn't beat Mirepoc.

At the end of the day, she was just running around in circles.

She looked down on people, hated people, killed people and took from them. She could affirm herself only at that moment. That was all.

Even if she fought again and again, she couldn't create anything. And that is why she could never win against Mirepoc.

The pair kept clashing. Both their swords ripped their clothes, cut their skin, gouged their flesh and grazed their vitals.

The four legs leapt around as if dancing, separated after colliding and then once again clashed.

Alme was thinking.

The opponent in front of me told me I was strong.

I wonder how long it's been since someone acknowledged me. Truly, for the first time in a long while, I was recognized by someone.

If I were slightly weaker I might have cried.

Alme was both too strong and too weak to do that.

That was why she had no choice but to fight. Against the opponent that had acknowledged her.

Both of their breathing rose and their movements grew dull. Mirepoc looked at Alme with sorrowful eyes.

“I respect you, Alme. I will not forget you.”

Mirepoc lowered her sword. She felt sad.

“But... I am going to win.”

She felt the sadness of defeating an opponent she was drawn to. The emptiness of smashing the strength she was attracted to.

However, it was an unavoidable victory. Mirepoc’s victory was decided from the very beginning.

“Because...”

Mirepoc looked up to the heavens.

“You are alone.”

A gunshot echoed from behind Mirepoc.

This bullet was shot by the one who Mirepoc had called and finally arrived – Mattalast. It punched through Alme’s chest with unmatched accuracy.

“Since when?”

Alme asked. When did she call Mattalast?

“When I was talking with you.”

No finishing blow came from him. He was staring at the pair.

“How cowardly...”

Blood welled up from her throat. She wasn't able to speak further.

Don't call it cowardly. I cannot fight by myself. That is your strength.

Alme's body fell to the ground. Reflected in her pupils were Mirepoc's sad eyes.

Ah. That's fine, young lady.

Haven't you become a little bit stronger?

Mirepoc turned around and spoke.

“I'm sorry, Mattalast-san.”

“I’ll overlook that you took independent acts without consulting me. The process doesn’t matter as you’ve gotten results. Besides...”

Mattalast lowered his gun.

“I should be the one to apologize.”

“Do you have anything to apologize about?”

“...”

Mattalast didn’t answer.

“Let’s go back.”

Is this... death? Alme thought. She understood that Mirepoc had already left.

She couldn’t see anything anymore. Her consciousness slowly sank into darkness and would soon vanish. But she had no regrets. She’s already done what she had to.

If I have any regrets, it’s about how I don’t know why Cigal-sama threw me away.

Her field of vision was suddenly opened inside the darkness.

I'm reading a Book. Why am I being read a Book?

She read only an instant. This was the Book of the one she admired and chased after, Cigal.

It was shortly before their parting. It was when Alme went to retrieve the Magic Blade.

It was in one of the city's corners, where the echoes of explosive sounds coming from afar could be heard. It was there that Alme and Cigal have said their farewells.

"Alme is happy. Is it really fine for a False Man to be this happy?"

When Alme said so, Cigal found out for the first time that Alme was happy.

"...Happy?"

He was disgusted.

Until that moment, Cigal had certainly loved Alme. She was someone who was supposed to understand him.

However, that love turned into hatred in an instant.

The reason for that was simple. It was because Alme was happy.

Only he was allowed to be happy. He couldn't forgive the mere existence of other people that were happy.

“Why does she not know?”

Why does the person who understands him never got the most important thing of all?

What will he do with Alme happy? He was the only one who was supposed to be happy...

“Why! Doesn't she know!”

Cigal stood up, grabbed the chair and threw it away.

“Ah, why! Why does no-one! Understand! Even though I yearn for it... For someone who doesn't care about their own happiness!”

He kept muttering.

“All these trash... these trash...”

Cigal kept muttering to himself alone in the room while hearing the explosive

echoes from afar.

The Book ended.

How could he... Was I thrown for such a stupid reason? I'm...

Winkeny and the Overseer of Paradise were right. I was a foolish and pitiful woman.

As if I'd admit it. As if. I've lived my life in my own way. So I will not be pitied by anyone.

“ ... ”

She knew. No-one wanted to admit such things. She was merely a foolish woman.

Ever since she was born she hated one thing.

Being pitied by someone.

But she had one more thing she hated even more.

Pitying herself.

As if I'd cry. I'll die while laughing. I will never pity myself.

It was the battlefield that Mirepoc and Mattalast left behind. A single girl was next to the lying Alme. She stowed away a small, small Book fragment inside her skirt's pocket.

She didn't look much older than ten. She had blue eyes and beautiful chestnut-colored long hair. Wearing a fresh blue one-piece dress, she was an elegant girl.

She held in her hand a blade made of stone.



The girl said,

“You threw away your family, your friends, kept serving a foolish man without gaining anything, and was finally betrayed by the one you devoted yourself to, dying without accomplishing anything.”

The girl looked at Alme’s face. Her expression was insufficient to be a smile, so it was something halfway there.

“But if you were to sing aloud of it as being happy...”

The girl reached for Alme’s face.

“Wouldn’t that be your happiness in and of itself?”

Her thin fingers moved Alme’s face. She calmly closed her eyelids, distorted her cheeks and moved her lips. Alme’s face at death became that of a smile.

“The Passed Stone Blade Yor.”

The girl removed her hands from the face. She then thrust the blade into the ground. A single Book was created on the sword’s tip.

The girl picked it up, stowed it into her pocket, and then her body sank into the ground and vanished.

Chapter 6: Mastermind Lurking In The Backstage

It was a while after the incident ended.

Mirepoc was writing a report. It detailed about them defeating the man calling himself Lascall Othello. Also about them not being able to recover the stone sword that was thought to be creating Books. The report was then conveyed to Hamyuts.

“Well then, you’ve worked hard. But now it’s over.”

“Yes. Thank you.”

Mirepoc said.

“Those who pursue Lascall will die... With this that legend will also be over.”

Right, it’s over. With this it ends. Mattalast blew smoke while thinking. It was a good smoke the likes of which he didn’t have in a long time.

Let us go back in time, to a few minutes after Mirepoc settled the score with Lascall. A girl appeared in front of Mattalast. She seemed to be older than ten. She wore a fresh blue one-piece dress.

“The match has been safely concluded.”

Without being perturbed at all, Mattalast smoked his pipe.

“What about Mirepoc?”

“She is in good health.”

The girl grinned widely.

“She is probably not suspecting anything.”

“Yes. Nevertheless, losing on purpose is quite the difficult thing to do. I have no such function.”

Mattalast spoke to the girl.

“Seems like I’ve put you through a lot of trouble... Lascall Othello.”

The girl – Lascall Othello – smiled. During the fight Mirepoc said that she had unmasked Lascall. However, she was mistaken. Lascall was the one to put a disguise – the disguise of a man who took the name of Lascall.

“You’ve shrunken quite a lot, Lascall Othello.”

“Yes. Since I have taken a liking to that form, it is a pity. However, since that was your intention, it could not be helped.”

Lascall bowed.

“Well then, farewell to you. Until the time we shall meet again.”

There was no need to speak of this to Mirepoc. Everything ended just as Mattalast had planned.

Mattalast went outside and left Mirepoc to write her report. His destination was the morgue in the basement of the Central Security Bureau, where Rully's corpse laid.

When Mattalast stepped inside the silent room, he heard a sound.

“Is it over, Mattalast?”

Inside were only the boy's remains.

“Yeah. It's over.”

He replied.

“A single man who adorned the name of Lascall Othello... is how it was concluded.”

“That is good. It means we have protected the secret.”

Saying so, Rully's corpse rose.

"You did a good job... Overseer of Paradise."

Rully grew taller and became a man. Just as before, Mattalast could see the man but not remember his appearance.

"It was a splendid performance. You are certain to get this year's best supporting actor award."

"Well, I'm not bad at acting. I'm quite confident in my performance this time."

The Overseer of Paradise laughed and got off the cold bed.

"There were also some parts you overdid. Especially when you adlibbed your dying words."

The Overseer of Paradise shrugged as if saying 'give me a break'.

"However, the most wonderful of all was your script. It was truly well-thought."

He said. But Mattalast wasn't happy at being praised at all.

"When I've first heard your story I was about to burst into laughter.

Lascall Othello's identity was that of a mere man. And his tender son was

looking for him. Where did such a fabrication come from?”

“It’s all talent. I am a liar, after all.”

“Thanks to that, Mirepoc was completely deceived. That lie was bold enough.”

“...The truth is hidden within the lie. This is how you usually do it.”

The Overseer of Paradise passed by Mattalast as he headed for the exit.

“Well then, our pleasant drama is now ended. From now on we are once again enemies.”

“Yeah. We will never do such a thing again.”

He liked to think so. He never thought that to save Mirepoc he would borrow the help of the enemy leader.

“This incident had a wonderful happy end. You did not have to lose Mirepoc and we erased a traitor.

And the truth about Lascall Othello is once again buried in the darkness. All will agree it was flawless.”

“ ... ”

“Farewell, Mattalast.”

As he said so, Mattalast drew his gun. A dry gunshot resounded in the silent morgue. The bullet that was supposed to hit slipped through the Overseer of Paradise and destroyed the wall behind him.

“But don’t forget, Mattalast. While we are hostile, in a certain sense we will always be collaborators.”

“ ... ”

“To conceal the location of Heaven. On this one point, we shall continue to cooperate with you.”

It was as he said. The Cult and the Armed Librarians have always protected a certain secret.

It was that day seven years ago.

There were two men besides Parney’s corpse. They were the Overseer of Paradise and the faceless man. Lascall Othello had recovered her Book and disappeared.

“So it’s over now. She was a pitiful woman.”

The faceless man said.

“What will you do from now?”

Said the Overseer of Paradise.

“We’ve gotten rid of Haiza. We will continue the investigation of Lascall Othello for a bit longer.”

“Is that fine? They might reach the truth about him.”

“The possibility is low. Besides, suddenly ending the investigation might cause suspicions later.”

“I see.”

“It would be fine to let Mattalast or Hamyuts terminate the investigation when one of them becomes Acting Director.”

“If you think so then that is good.”

“With this, Lascall should once again fade into a legend.”

The faceless man said so and left. The Overseer of Paradise spoke to his back.

“If something happens again we shall ask you for help. We just have a shortage of manpower.”

“It’s a promise. As long as you bastards don’t challenge us to a fight, that is.”

The Overseer of Paradise also left.

The faceless man took off his mask. The face underneath it was that of a boy around seventeen years old.

However, his hair was as gray as if he was eighty, and his expression was as sharp as that of an old lion.

He was Bantorra Library's Acting Director, Photona Bardgamon. In two years from that time he will concede his position to Hamyuts.

When Mattalast returned, Mirepoc already turned off the lights in her room. He opened a bottle of whiskey in his room and drank a glassful straight from the bottle.

“Those who search for Lascall die, huh...”

Mattalast was thinking. It is no lie, Mirepoc.

Because if you were able to reach the truth you would have died.

I had no other means.

My mission is to conceal the truth about Lascall. And also to erase all those who know of it.

Hamyuts had decided to kill you. She said that you have an unbelievably sharp intuition. That you should be able to reach the truth about him someday.

I objected to it. I said that I would deceive you in order to save you. If I failed my duty I would have been killed as well. Hamyuts is a woman who is able to do that.

It was a difficult task.

I borrowed the help of the Overseer of Paradise and even that of Lascall Othello and tricked you. Was I able to fully deceive you? I'd like to think so.

To save a single girl. I could only accomplish that mission by deceiving you. I truly am a man unfitting to be a hero.

While thinking so, as he poured whiskey into a glass, Lascall Othello appeared.

"Hello, Mattalast-sama."

Lascall pinched the hem of her skirt and bowed. A girl that suddenly appears in the darkness wasn't very pleasant for him.

"What's wrong?"

"Have you not been thinking that you would like to meet me?"

She was sharp. He certainly did want to meet with her. There was something

he wanted to ask.

“I have one last question. Just who are you?”

“Hasn’t she told you about me? Hamyuts-sama, I mean.”

“But I still want to ask. I want to hear everything clearly from your mouth.”

Lascall started speaking.

“My identity is an easy matter. It is this.”

Saying so, Lascall showed him the stone sword.

“The Memorial Weapon, Passed Stone Blade Yor. I am this tiny sword.

I have the strongest will amongst the Memorial Weapons. My function is to grant continuation to the stories of people. To bring forth a future for those stories that have ceased by death.

I am to allow stories to continue without distinguishing between good or evil, the wise or the foolish. That is my function.

The story of the girl who loved a bomb. The story of a boy who wanted to become a monster. The story of the girl whom the boys have protected. The story of the warriors who swore their allegiance to a foolish master. The stories of foolish people who wished for happiness.

I bring a conclusion to these tales. That is my function.”

“Does that mean everything is in your hands?”

“Surely not. I am a mere blade. I cannot create stories.

Comedies and tragedies are all created by humans.

Exceeding their predetermined fate, or breaking under the misfortune given to them, the only ones capable of spinning tales are humans.”

“Why did you become a subordinate of the Indulging God Cult?”

“I am somewhat reluctant to be called a subordinate. I merely assist them.

The people who wish for the perfect happiness, and the man who assembles all of the world’s happiness... I want to watch the conclusion to their story.

Good, evil, order or chaos are but trivial things to me.”

“ ... ”

“Those who pursue Lascall Othello will die. That legend was entirely made by humans. It is a pretense created by those who wish to conceal the Indulging God Cult and its members.

Mirepoc danced to the tune of that pretense, Alme was deceived by it, and you control it.

People create pretenses and people are set in motion by these pretenses. Then, what these people bring forth are tales.

Yes, since the very beginning stories could only have been created by humans.”

Just as when she did as she came, Lascall bowed gracefully.

“Goodbye, Mattalast. I wish for your story to end in happiness.”

She vanished.

One person was left in the darkness.

Only the smoke rising from his pipe was slowly, slowly swaying.

Fragment: In The Bedroom Of The God Awaiting Happiness

In some unknown place of the world a lone girl was standing.

Several Books were in front of her.

Cigal Crukessa. Ganbanzel Grof. Parney Parlmanta.

Those who have aimed for the perfect happiness. They abandoned all of their doubts, shook off their worldly thoughts, and kept seeking happiness.

Winkeney. Locolo. Alme. Zackie. Olt.

Those who, in order to reach Heaven – or perhaps for their own convictions – have served the Indulging God Cult. They devoted their utmost efforts so that their True Men would be able to achieve the perfect happiness.

It was all for the Cult. And for Heaven.

“Well then.”

Lascall started speaking.

Towards what was there.

Towards the absolute secret that only those at the top of the Armed Librarians and those at the top of the Cult knew of.

Towards the root of the conflict that made the Armed Librarians and the Indulging God Cult kill each other.

Towards the place that even in this world – where dead people became Books and were then stored in the Library – none may enter.

Lascall spoke towards Heaven.

“Now then, o God. O foolish person who arrogantly uses the name of God.”

God did not reply.

“Until you obtain the perfect happiness, your story shall not have an ending.”

God did not reply.

“However, do you not think that a perfect happiness does not exist in this world?”

God did not reply.

“Will the day come when your story will reach its end?”

God did not reply. God simply waited in silence. Waited for the moment that a perfect happiness will be brought forth.

“I will be looking forward for the ending of your story.”

Lascall Othello bowed, vanished and went away.

Afterword

Hello everyone. This is Yamagata Ishio.

We quickly arrived at the fourth installment of the Tatakau Shisho series.

I hope you will enjoy “Tatakau Shisho to Kami no Sekken”.

Compared to my previous works so far, this one was a bit harder to write.

About why it was hard, it's because I have a relatively short little finger since I was born.

Because of that, when I need to hit the “P” or “-” keys on my keyboard, my little finger can't quite reach them. By the way, when I need to use backspace, square brackets or the enter key I move my hand and use my middle finger.

So, because of the main characters of this work – Mirepoc, Lascall and Parney – there are now a lot of names with “P” or “-” in them.* I also somewhat had this problem with Winken.

At first it was only at the level of “this is somewhat hard to do”, but after writing about 100 pages the base of my little finger began to feel

unconformable, and after surpassing 200 pages I felt pain every time I typed with it. Apparently I've hurt my muscle, as it felt hot to the touch. Using water to cool it relieved me, but the pain relapsed whenever I moved the finger again.

For a while I hit the problematic keys with my ring finger and after letting my pinky rest for four or five days, the pain faded. For now I am relieved since the sense of discomfort and pain are gone.

In the future, I think that people whose pinkies should refrain from working. While I think so, this would probably intrude on these people's lives.

Since I never had exercise in neither high school nor university, my body is not very robust.

It's not only my pinky, but my head also hurts, my body is languid, and my condition is bad in many other areas.

Thinking that it's better to move my body on a daily basis, I recently started doing warm-ups when I wake up in the morning.

Since there's no music, I sing while doing this. Rather than starting by taking a deep breath, I sing from the very beginning of songs, as when I get excited I also get motivated.

Although when I reflect on myself upon getting calm again, enough energy to last a whole day of work seems to leave my body.

This time I was also able to complete the volume thanks to the help of various people. The illustrator Maeshima Shigeki-sama, people of the Editorial Department, designers, and proofreaders, I take this opportunity to humbly thank you.

This time I have also received words of encouragement on the book's wrapper from Araki Hirohiko-sama**.

I've been his fan even before I aspired to become a novelist, and he's one of the people who had a large influence on me when I started creating stories, so he's been one of my goals as a writer.

For him to have read my work was an unexpected pleasure as a writer. I thought from the bottom of my heart that I'm glad I became a novelist. Thank you so very much.

Finally, to those of you who've read this work. I pray that you will enjoy it and that we shall meet again in my next work.

Well then.

Yamagata Ishio

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*In Japanese, a vowel lengthening is represented by —, which is made with the “—” key. The names of the last two characters are thus typed (when using the most common input method, which converts Latin letters to Japanese) like this: pa-ni and rasuko-ru. Mirepoc only has a P in her name, while Parney has both.

**Creator of the famous manga Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure.

This is the aforementioned text:

“Ishio. I am your ally!” Araki Hirohiko supports this talent!

Araki apparently also made a similar comment on Yamagata’s later series “Rokka no Yuusha”, but I haven’t been able to find an image of that.