

盾の勇者の成り上がり¹⁰

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アネコユサギ



MF777

Fiancé

“I’m fine like always.” (Ren)

“I see.” (Naofumi)

I decided not to go peddling today.

This time, the one going was the Hero of the Sword.

I still don’t completely trust Ren yet, but since he was wasting time at the village, I decided to let him go peddle while being escorted by the Female Knight.

If he doesn’t return, I will definitely kill him.

“Well then, I’ll be heading out.” (Ren)

“Yeah.” (Naofumi)

Incidentally, Taniko is also going along to peddle.

She was reluctant, but I convinced her to leave the village.

It was quite the noisy struggle.

I also convinced Rat to watch over the monsters since she wasn’t that busy lately.

The reason being is thanks to Motoyasu and his army of Philorials.

“Don’t fight.” (Naofumi)

“But the Hero of the Sword is-” (Taniko)

Taniko immediately came to me to complain.

She didn't want to be near Ren. And of course I knew she had no interest in him either.

"I know that taking responsibility is useless. So I'm counting on you to watch over his feelings. Along with that arrogant and selfish Female Knight. It'll be just like a romantic comedy." (Naofumi) "...Romantic comedy?" (Taniko)

Well, Taniko wouldn't be affected, but it would be an amusing situation to throw her in-between Ren and the Female Knight.

Though I might wake up the next day to find out that it turned into a murder mystery.

"Hurry up, get going." (Naofumi)

"Kue~" (Philorial)

...In front of me was a Philorial that just cried out kue.

You do realize that I know you can talk.

The carriage vanished at a remarkable speed.

"Well then, I should get ready to make lunch." (Naofumi)

I began some small preparations in the kitchen.

Melty arrived while riding Firo.

"Do you want to eat something uncooked?" (Naofumi)

"How rude. We came with a request for the village. Whether you take it seriously or not, you are still an Earl and I am your subordinate." (Melty) "Well, I suppose you're right." (Naofumi)

"I guess it can't be helped, since you are the Hero of the Pot Lid." (Melty)

“Melty... I never expected you to say that too!” (Naofumi)

I thought it was only the soldiers who treated me as nothing but a cook, but it seems to have spread to the entire village.

Sometimes they try to make me cook for them, but I won't let them have a single bite now.

“Huh? Did it offend you? I was under the impression that the Shield wouldn't mind.” (Melty) “Firo, you two have exceeded the bounds of everyday friendship. That's why Firo, I leave Melty to you.” (Naofumi) “Stop bringing that up! It was an emergency situation-” (Melty)

While we were talking, I finished all my preparations.

By the way, the request that Melty mentioned was that the Queen was coming to visit in the near future.

That was the official reason... but.

It seems to be a trap to draw out all the revolutionaries.

Whether it is ally or foe, there seems to be various conspiracies going on.

And, finally Melty who had enough of my teasing, left the village.

Damn, treating me like a babysitter. I'll get my revenge later.

Speaking of which, the village is pretty quiet-

“Father-in-Law!” (Motoyasu)

It can't be.

“What is it, Motoyasu?” (Naofumi)

“What is it that you would like me to do?” (Motoyasu) “Go to Cal Mira and make a portal there.” (Naofumi)

Hmm? His three followers looked confused when I mentioned Cal Mira Island.

“Go visit the hot springs; you can bring those guys as well.” (Naofumi) “Yay!”
(Followers)

That reminds me, Firo said that the Philorials had begun losing interest in work.

While there are many reasons, I had no clue.

Just what kind of compounding did he make them do?

“Well then Father-in-Law, when will you accept the engagement between Firo and I?” (Motoyasu) “I already told you... wait until we achieve world peace!”
(Naofumi)

At least once a day, we will end up having this conversation.

I had enough of it already.

Do you really like Firo that much?

“So, Motoyasu, give up on Firo and settle for those three.” (Naofumi)
Upon my order, the three’s eyes started to sparkle.

Eh? What, is it really something that would make you guys that happy?

“Hahaha, Father-in-Law, that is a great joke.” (Motoyasu) “It is?” (Naofumi)

“After all, it’s a crime to lay hands on one’s own children!” (Motoyasu)
...What?

Huh? Does that mean he hasn’t done anything to them yet?

That lecherous pile of lust Motoyasu?

This is unbelievable.

“It is as Master said, that going into heat won’t bring us happiness.” (Midori)

“That is absolutely correct!” (Motoyasu)

“That’s right. We believe that Motoyasu-san is the one who can bring us true

happiness.” (Midori)

The three stated chirping away in an uproar

Too noisy.

And lastly, Green^[1], just what are you planning to do with Motoyasu?

“So Motoyasu, I take it that you haven’t laid a hand on any of the Philorials in the village?” (Naofumi) “Isn’t that obvious?” (Motoyasu)

“Ah...I see.” (Naofumi)

Huh?

I recall seeing the Philorials carrying around eggs from their stable.

....

“Kue-” (Philorial)

“Were those eggs Motoyasu’s?” (Naofumi)

“Kue! KUEKUE!” (Philorial)

To deny my accusations, the Philorial shakes it head.

Although its head’s motion is good, I still find it strange.

“Do their species lay edible eggs?” (Naofumi)

“I think so.” (Motoyasu)

“Kuekue.” (Philorial)

“As I thought, Serenity is fond of Master too. How popular.” (Midori) ^[2]

...Hang on.

“The Future Queen Firo said that if she wasn’t here, we should give Master lots

of love in her place.” (Midori)

I’m...I’m finished.

Calm down me, it’s just something a bird said.

“Hahaha, Father-in-Law sure is popular. But I won’t lose either.” (Motoyasu)

“Shut up!” (Naofumi)

I’m at my limit with this ridiculous situation!

How do I get rid of this idiot?

“Hurry up and leave already!” (Naofumi)

“Yes, the preparations are already done, but I still have some time left, right? So I want to spend it bonding with Father-in-Law.” (Motoyasu) “Get out!” (Naofumi)

“Hahaha. Father-in-Law, getting angry like that is bad for your blood pressure.” (Motoyasu)

Dammit. I want this to end already.

Then I made a realization.

Right now, I could have the best revenge on Melty for treating me like a babysitter.

“Motoyasu, I wanted to tell you earlier, but... the truth is that Firo already has a Fiancé.” (Naofumi) “Of course, Father-in-Law is referring to me.” (Motoyasu)

“You're wrong.” (Naofumi)

“Eh...?” (Motoyasu)

Motoyasu had an expression as if he was on the verge of collapse.

Fufufu...That’s the kind of face I wanted to see.

But then again, completely believing that you were already engaged is a

problem itself.

“Her name is Melty Melromark. She is the future Queen of this country.”
(Naofumi) “Wha...” (Motoyasu)

“Ah, incidentally don’t think about killing Melty. She is taking care of Firo’s heat. I believe Firo is with her right now. Of course you realize how bad it would be if you killed her and Firo found out, right?” (Naofumi) “Melty, if I remember right, she is the sister of Witch?” (Motoyasu) “Yes, she is the younger sister of Witch and the legitimate heir to the throne. And I believe that the right to choose belongs to Firo. But against those odds, do you think you can win?”
(Naofumi) “W-well...” (Motoyasu)

Oh? Is he starting to get jealous?

“Firo-tan’s Fiancé...I will make you recognize that it could only be me!”
(Motoyasu) “Okay?” (Naofumi)

“I will show you that the only one worthy enough to be Firo-tan’s Fiancé is me!” (Motoyasu)

Motoyasu declared as he held his spear to the sky.

With that, can you finally calm down?

It sounded nice, but it was going to end up a problem later.

“Everyone, let’s go!” (Motoyasu)

“Yes!” (Followers)

Motoyasu goes to the carriage that is pulled by those three.

“Please give us your orders.” (Followers)

“Isn’t it obvious!?” (Motoyasu)

With Motoyasu's reply, the three charge off to the town at an amazing speed.

"Did I see something amazing just now?" (Slave)

A slave came to ask me.

"Well, I guess so." (Naofumi)

With this, the village is once again peaceful.

I still have some time before I meet with Atla for her compounding lessons.

Later that day, Melty, in a fit of rage, came firing magic at my home.

Furthermore, she wouldn't stop until her magic was completely exhausted.

As a result, my house was completely demolished.

Well, it can't be helped since I did think that I went a bit too far.

But it was something that was unavoidable when dealing with Firo.

Also, it seems that Motoyasu was able to converse with Melty without treating her like a blue pig.

Motoyasu must have recognized Melty as someone he could respect.

"[I won't give Firo-chan to the likes of you!] I will make you accept it as fact! I will save Firo-tan from this impure relationship!" (Motoyasu) "How did you end up talking with Melty?" (Naofumi) "At first I thought that she was just a blue pig. But, since it was someone Firo wanted to get along with, I realized that it couldn't be a pig. Although it hurts to admit it, she was indeed the future Queen." (Motoyasu)

Hmm, it seems that Firo can affect whether he sees someone as a pig or a woman.

I should handle Motoyasu more carefully, or it could end up badly.

Then again, Firo flirting with a blue pig was not the story I had told him.

“...I see, hypnotism. But even so, I will not give up!” (Motoyasu)

Of course, the odds that Melty brainwashed Firo is zero.

Will Motoyasu ever grow out of that?

No, No. Motoyasu already has a complete monopoly on brainwashing.

I glad for you, Melty.

Motoyasu seems to have recognized you as the only human woman.

Not only that, the future Queen as well. And also as a rival in love.

“Now that everything is settled, hurry up and go make that portal at Cal Mira.”

(Naofumi) “I understand, Father-in-Law. Let my actions be testimony to my worth as her Fiancé!” (Motoyasu)

After hearing my words, Motoyasu left in earnest.

As a result of our experiments, I found out that it was possible for Heroes to use the portal of allies.

Although the system message said it wasn't possible.

Either way, the village is once again quiet.

That being said, I told his three followers to try and stay at Cal Mira Island for as long as possible, but given his last words, I shouldn't expect too much.

Crossing without Meeting

“Now then, today we’ll be going to the Weapon Shop to order Firo’s carriage, so get ready.” (Naofumi) “Carriage~?” (Firo)

Firo, who sent Melty back to the town, inclined her head and asked.

“Yeah, I want you to come, Firo, to choose the kind of carriage you want.” (Naofumi) “Okay! I got it~!” (Firo)

I don’t have anyone else I want to bring at the moment..... just Firo is fine.

Using the Portal, I jumped to the Castle Town with Firo.

And then we made an appearance at the Weapon Shop.

“Oh? So it’s Laddie. You have bad timing.” (Oyaji)

The Old Man looked at my face and muttered a little regrettably.

“What’s wrong?” (Naofumi)

“Ah, we finished your Shield and were waiting for you. But we didn’t know when you would be coming, so I took the opportunity and had that guy deliver it.” (Oyaji) ^[3]

“Is that so?” (Naofumi)

Well, I hadn’t asked when it would be completed and similarly, we hadn’t clarified when to come for the carriage commission either.

The Old Man took in the situation and did the smart thing, but it was bad timing indeed.

“I think it’ll be arriving any time now.” (Oyaji)

“Then I’ll be looking forward to it. Is it okay to pay you the money now?” (Naofumi) “It’s fine to pay after you’ve received the goods.” (Oyaji) “Hmmm... Then I’ll give you 5 gold now as a deposit and I’ll pay the rest after I’ve received it. Is that okay?” (Naofumi) “Laddie is stubborn like that. It’s fine to just pay me afterwards, but if it makes you feel at ease, then it’s alright.” (Oyaji)

The Old Man nods when I pass him the money.

His generosity is nice and really helps a lot.

“So? Today you’ve come for Miss Birdie’s carriage, right?” (Oyaji) “That’s right. You told me to bring her along last time, so I did.” (Naofumi) “Hm~? Yeah. Carriage~!” (Firo)

“Right then, Miss Birdie. What sort of carriage is good? An iron one like before?” (Oyaji) “How much would that cost?” (Naofumi)

“How much is your budget?” (Oyaji)

“For the time being... I can afford it. It’ll depend on its value.” (Naofumi) “Alright.” (Oyaji)

The Old Man showed Firo the blueprints and asked which was good.

“The last one was broken, right? Should I make it more resilient? Or should I make it lighter so it’s easier to move? Then it’ll be able to handle more unreasonable movements, to a certain extent.” (Oyaji) “Hmm... you know~ the heavy one is better.” (Firo)

“That is, well....” (Naofumi)

“Miss Birdie is strong so it might not satisfy you, but lightness is important for running quickly.” (Oyaji) “Is that so?” (Firo)

“Yeah, if the carriage is light and durable, then you can transport heavy items. It all depends on Miss Birdie though.” (Oyaji)

The Old Man also lets Firo take part in most of the discussion. Frankly, I’m afraid to ask because it seems like they’re realizing a child’s dream.

It seems that it’ll turn out to be a seriously weird carriage.

“If you want a heavy one, then it’s fine to just request that Laddie fill it up with items. That’s why I recommend a sturdy and light one.” (Oyaji) “Then that’s good.” (Firo)

“What will you do about the metal?” (Oyaji)

“Let me see~ I’d like something that will react when I charge it with power.” (Firo) “Alright. Do you want two wheels? Four?” (Oyaji)

“Four~” (Firo)

“With a canopy roof? Or enclosed?” (Oyaji)

“A big house-like one would be good~” (Firo)

“Haha, don’t go overboard with your dream.” (Oyaji)

I fear it may turn into something like a camper van.

“And then~ it’ll transform with a bang~” (Firo)

No such carriage exists. Or rather, we don’t need it.

If possible, I’d prefer a normal carriage. I seriously think so.

We don’t need a Robo! We really don’t need it!

I’d be troubled if a carriage-shaped Golem was made.

“Do you want it to be two-storied as well?” (Oyaji)

“Hmm...” (Firo)

The Old Man and Firo continued the conversation like that and in the end, they decided on a design that was slightly larger than the previous carriage.

I couldn't be as patient as the Old Man.

If he was less skilled, it would've turned into a house-like carriage.

Apparently the metal used would be an ore that would react to Firo's magic to become lighter and sturdier to a certain extent.

"If I remember correctly, Laddie will be supplying the ore, right?" (Oyaji) "Yeah, I can borrow a mine from the Queen. I should be able to tell them to lend it to me with precedence for you." (Naofumi) "That's right. A somewhat rare ore is mixed in, so if you can provide that afterwards, then the production cost will be cheaper." (Oyaji) "Understood. Please give me a memo with the materials. I'll bring them later." (Naofumi) "Thanks for your patronage. I'll also be taking some materials from Laddie's warehouse in the Castle." (Oyaji)

The Old Man wrote the memo while muttering, which I received and then proceeded to check the materials.

Yeah... there are some ores mixed in that I haven't really heard of. I'm doubtful as to whether I can supply them.

It seems it could be handled in Zeltbur, but can they be mined in Melromarc?

I'll try to ask the Queen later.

Well, it wouldn't be bad to take the Lumo slaves in the village and go mining either.

Imia's Uncle is now a blacksmith in the village, and he'll also need a large supply of materials.

"Then I'll come again after I've gathered the materials." (Naofumi) "Alright. I'll be looking forward to your next visit." (Oyaji) "Yeah, I'll come again." (Naofumi)

Well, I am a regular of this store. I can have him make a shield again if I collect

good materials.

If I think about it, it seems he can make it if I bring monster materials.

Anything apart from the Spirit Turtle would be fine.

It seems I can increase the efficiency if I also get Imia's Uncle to make them.

The problem is money though. I can manage to some extent.

"So how much will the production cost of the carriage be?" (Naofumi) "I'll be making various things so it won't break. For you, it'll be 20 gold coins." (Oyaji)
"It's rather high, but... I'll take a gambit." (Naofumi)

Because it's something that will counterbalance Firo's actions.

The expenses are quite severe, but I can probably manage with my current finances.

"Ah, also, there might be a disturbance in the Castle Town soon, so please be careful." (Naofumi) "I got it, Laddie." (Oyaji)

"Worst case scenario, there may be an incident with the reason being that I am a regular here. Please take care." (Naofumi) "You're too prone to worrying." (Oyaji)

"Because I wouldn't be able to survive if I wasn't." (Naofumi)
The Old Man nodded many times in reply to my response.

"Even so, this is a famous Weapon Store in this Castle Town. I'm accustomed to jealousy and harassment, and I used to fight a lot of bandits in the past. Don't worry, Laddie, I won't lose to such half-hearted things." (Oyaji) "....That's right."

One way or another, the Old Man appears to be strong, there's no need to worry.

"Well, soon I'll be away for a short while though." (Oyaji)

“Is that so?” (Naofumi)

“For material supplies. We might even meet in the mines, perhaps.” (Oyaji)
So he’s short on supplies.

The Spirit Turtle incident caused the facilitation of the arming of citizens all across the country.

As a result, many of the ores used as weapon materials were used up.

It’s not like I don’t understand, and that was also profitable.

Above all, everyone’s sense of danger grew and there’s a large number with strong interest in the waves as well.

Back in my world, even if there was a calamity somewhere in Japan, I had thought my own surroundings were fine as well, but I’ve probably improved my awareness by looking at this damage that I can see.

“It’s regrettable, but I should leave it as it is.” (Naofumi)

With that feeling, I exited the shop.

Ah, when I showed up at the Queen’s place to ask about the progress, I heard that the plan had been advancing in these few days.

It’s a dangerous state of affairs.

Come to think of it, I feel like the Castle Town was also a little tense.

For some reason, there were several adventurers directing their animosity at me and looking into the Weapon Shop.

...For preliminary arrangements, huh? I’ve already warned him, so I can’t help thinking it’ll be alright.

Just to be sure, I’ll leave a report for the Queen.

We returned from the Castle Town and I resumed my studies with Atla while waiting for Imia’s Uncle.

“He’s late.” (Naofumi)

The sun had set and dinner was over, and yet Imia's Uncle had still not turned up.

Speaking of which... the slaves who were supposed to return today haven't come back either.

Were they delayed?

Even if I'm worried, I can't do anything. They've probably been delayed by some other delivery.

I didn't really think too deeply about it.

That was until... there was a disturbance in the neighboring town the next day.

"Hero-sama!" (Imia)

When I was preparing lunch, Imia turned up with a change in her usual facial expression.

"What's the matter?" (Naofumi)

"U-um...Uncle is...." (Imia)

"What happened to your uncle?" (Naofumi)

"That is, he came to the town with a huge injury." (Imia) "What did you say!? I'm heading to the town immediately. Everyone is to suspend their work, arm themselves with weapons and armour, and remain vigilant until I return."

(Naofumi)

Leaving those words behind, I ran to the town with Imia.

Abnormality

Elena: "Oh, well if it isn't the Hero of Shield."

Naofumi: "You are-"

At the town's clinic was someone that I knew.

If I remember right, she was one of Motoyasu's companions, Elena.

Like before, she was attentive and calm, even as a clinic receptionist.

Her personality when she was a companion of Motoyasu seemed like a complete lie.

Naofumi: "Why are you here?"

Elena: "To help my parents."

Now that I think about it, her mother was a merchant.

And I recall her saying that she might come and visit my land soon.

Elena: "While I was going to your town, I somehow was attacked by bandits, but I was saved. I believe the one who helped me was the demi-human right next to you."

Elena: "Just as I thought, the nice man that saved me was you! You have my utmost gratitude!"

You already have gone under a class up, so fight them yourself.

Elena explained that while she was under attack by the bandits, Imia's uncle

protected her and let her escape, but he sustained pretty bad injuries in the process.

When we found Imia's uncle, he was covered in wounds and his carriage was nowhere to be found.

Even though Imia's uncle should be at the level where he can easily protect himself.

Imia's uncle: "You shouldn't worry about me. If anything, I should be more concerned about the sparks from the forge."

Naofumi: "I see."

Imia's Uncle: "Also...I was debating whether to tell the Hero of the Shield this, but the bandit was well-dressed despite being a bandit, though I could be mistaken. "

Hmmm...Right now, I am more concerned about the condition of Imia's Uncle.

Should I tell the Old Man of the Weapon store?

For now, I decided to wait and see what kind of state he was in.

Naofumi: "For now, I'll keep quiet about your condition."

Imia's Uncle: "Yes!"

Naofumi: "Elena, was it? It's a shame, but for the time being, please help out with the investigation."

Elena: "Ah, of course. I also recall a place that was very suspicious."

Naofumi: "To ascertain your innocence, we will go and investigate."

Melty had immediately sent her subordinates to investigate the incident, as to ensure that no false charges were made.

As we talked with the receptionist, we explained the situation.

Afterwards, she showed us the way to the healer.

At the examination room, Imia's uncle underwent a treatment of recovery magic.

Imia's uncle: "Ugh..."

Imia's uncle had lacerations covering his body; they were quite bloody.

Imia's uncle: "I'm fine...is what I would like to say."

To help with the treatment, I took out some medicine, as it can work in combination with the magic.

Imia's uncle: "Hey, Hero..."

Feebly, Imia's uncle tried to talk with me.

Imia's uncle: "I would like... to apologize... All the effort we put in...was stolen so easily."

Naofumi: "Don't worry about. It's fine that it was taken. More importantly, I am glad that you are still alive."

Imia's uncle: "I'm so sorry... ugh..."

Imia's uncle painfully grasped his head.

Would the old man be okay? The bandit's blade may have been coated with poison.

I use an antidote just in case.

When the treatment had finished, Imia's uncle's condition had stabilized.

Looking at his body, you could see the traces of a stab wound and the remainder of a cut.

It did not look like it could be fatal...but it still seemed strange.

Recovering from this would be rough.

There was a possibility of him being under a curse, if so we might need holy water or the dragon pulse to completely cure him.

Right now, Imia's uncle is fast asleep.

Naofumi: "Well then..."

Since he is nearby, I should inform the Old Man of the Weapon shop on the current situation.

Since I can't let them run free, I should go and immediately subjugate the bandits in the area.

Those who go against the shield would not be forgiven.

But for now, should I go report to the Old man of the Weapon shop?

Though I should refrain from saying too much.

Imia: "Uncle..."

Imia looks anxious while looking at her Uncle's sleeping face.

Naofumi: "Don't worry. His life isn't in danger. Once he wakes up, you can take him to the village to recover."

Imia: "Okay..."

Naofumi: "Well then, I'm going to do a little bandit hunting."

Imia: "Okay!"

I won't stand by and turn the other cheek.

I will hit back when hit.

To steal in my territory, you better be prepared to lose everything.

While Imia is looking after her uncle, I leave with Firo, Atla, and Rishia to the place that Elena informed us about.

It was near a forest at the edge of my territory.

It is along one of the routes I use to reach Castle town from my village.

Naofumi: "Firo, can you tell if there is anything here?"

Firo: "Hmm... There probably isn't anyone around, I suppose?"

Hmmm.

I guess that they won't be that easy to find.

Naofumi: "Their hideout might be nearby. Go look for it."

Rishia: "Yes."

Firo: "Yes~"

Naofumi: "Atla, can you sense anything?"

Atla: "Well... there seems to be some remnants of a malicious power."

Naofumi: "Malicious?"

Atla: "It is similar to the power that the Hero of the Spear had, as well as the Hero of the Sword..."

Naofumi: "Eh?"

It seems that Rishia noticed immediately.

As much as she tried to avoid it, she should have known that it was only a matter of time.

It seems like our encounter with Itsuki was swiftly approaching.

But what could he gain from using bandits to steal from Imia's uncle?

It is possible that it was Witch's influence that caused the attack on the Demi-Human.

But...for Elena not to notice would be strange.

Anyway, how did Imia's Uncle normally bring shields to me?

Though I was unable to ask him, it could have been with a push cart.

Also, Imia's uncle did not have anything else on him.

And Elena wasn't at the scene of the crime, so she didn't know where they fled.

I can't expand the search area.

Naofumi: "Anyway, I do not know what they are planning. So everyone be careful."

Rishia: "U-Understood."

Atla: "Yes."

Firo: "Yes~"

Well, ambushing Atla and Firo would be impossible.

Just in case, I activate Meteor Shield, on the off chance they do launch a surprise attack.

We spent the rest of the day searching, but we were unable to find a single thing.

Naofumi: "Was it a waste of time?"

I went back to the town to inform Melty of the situation.

For the time being, we will let everyone know that there are bandits in the area.

If I'm lucky, an adventurer will take care of the bandits.

Melty: "Ah, that's right. There is something I think Naofumi-san should know."

Naofumi: "What?"

Melty: "Lately, there have been less people visiting and leaving the town."

Naofumi: "Is something going on?"

Melty: "Now that you mention it...there is something strange going on...Some merchants have suddenly become rather unfriendly, and they seemed like different people."

Naofumi: "Hmmm..."

Somehow, I have a bad feeling about all these strange incidents, as if there were indirect attacks.

Is what I would want to believe.

Melty: "I have contacted Mother about it, but it is possible that we were infiltrated by a spy."

Naofumi: "Is security that bad?"

Melty: "It isn't bad; rather it seems strange. It is best to be careful."

Naofumi: "I know. But you should be careful too, since you are the next in-line Queen; it would be best to increase your guards."

You could tell that Melty was nervous.

I decided to part ways with Melty and Firo, and return to the village.

Naofumi: "I'll be going now."

Melty: "Oh, then take care."

I saw Ren unloading luggage from the carriage.

Since they were with a Hero, they all seemed safe.

Rather, I want to ask him if he saw anyone suspicious.

Naofumi: "There seems to be bandits in the area you were in; did you have any trouble with them?"

Ren: "No? There was nothing out of the ordinary."

It seems like Ren didn't encounter them.

Ren: "However, I was able to understand my curse a bit better."

Naofumi: "Ooh..."

Ren: "Apparently, I won't gain any experience points that I earned through fighting."

The Curse of Gluttony.

I believe the price paid was only a large drop in experience, but it seems that it may also stop any experience gain.

Naofumi: "Was I nearby when you fought?"

"Ah."

Before this, I tried investigating the penalties of the Four Saint Heroes with Motoyasu.

It turns out that experience would not be gained if another Hero was nearby, as they would interfere with each other's growth.

There may be other penalties, but the experience loss was the most concerning issue.

As long as there isn't another Hero within the range of one kilometer, the experience gained would be unaffected.

The area wasn't small, but quite large.

This area would not allow any experience gained by fighting.

Of course, to be that far away and be affected would not normally be possible.

But Ren was outside of that range, so the possibility it was his curse was quite high.

Really now, to be hit by the effects of two curses, Ren sure has it tough.

Well, as long as he puts in some serious effort, even with a little curse, he should have no difficulties.

Naofumi: "Did Female Knight and Taniko go in already?"

Ren: "Taniko? Is that what you call Windia?"

Ren that bastard, does he not know any of the nicknames I've given?

Well, I guess it's fine.

Naofumi: "Yeah. So, did they enter or not?"

Ren: "No, it was only me."

Naofumi: "I see."

Well, they would normally come back soon, since I can trust them to that extent.

Naofumi: "Ren, there are some guys trying to do something in my territory. One of my subordinates was attacked and suffered grievous wounds. Be cautious."

Ren: "What? I-I understand. I'll help out as much as possible. Just say the word."

Naofumi: "Is that so? Then I'll leave patrolling to you."

Ren: "You can count on me."

I gave the Hero of the Sword the duty to patrol. As it should be something that he can handle.

I should also be on guard.

Naofumi: "That reminds me, the others haven't returned yet."

I look around restlessly for the other group that went peddling today.

Now that I think about it, those guys that left two to three days ago still haven't come back.

Did they run away?

Just in case, I check on the status of the slaves.

...?

I both see it and don't... what's going on? It seems to be slightly flickering while being filled with static.

They are alive, and they haven't violated any orders, but...?

Naofumi: "That reminds me, Kiel isn't here either."

She should have gone peddling in the morning.

Rather than taking one of the many Philorials, she went out with a Caterpilland.

It's hard to imagine that loincloth-wearing dog, who would eat a fallen crepe off the ground, running away.

Though I can't deny the possibility that it was all an act, the reason for leaving the village was weak.

And it makes more sense to obey all my orders if you were a spy.

Taniko: "The Caterpilland has come back!"

Eh?

Looks like I was worried for no reason.

But as I turned around, I was left speechless by a scream.

Taniko: "What happened!?"

Taniko was screaming as she rushed over.

The Caterpilland came back, completely covered in wounds.

Poison

The rope that had connected the Caterpilland and the carriage had broken, and the carriage was gone.

Kiel and the others were nowhere to be seen.

“What happened!?” (Naofumi)

As soon as the Caterpilland saw me, it quickly rushed towards me.

It mumbled something while staring and clinging to me.

“I was attacked when I was peddling! The children who were riding in the carriage were kidnapped? Eh? That’s not it?” (Taniko)

Taniko tried to understand the Caterpilland, but she did not seem to understand its words well.

It was only being transmitted that something had happened.

“Where was the place!?” (Ren)

Ren asked Taniko.

“Well...” (Taniko)

“It should be in the direction where this fellow came from?” (Ren) “Probably.” (Taniko)

Ren traced back the Caterpilland’s foot prints and started running.

“Oh, wait! Don’t leave me!” (Female Knight)

The female knight chased after him.

But that wouldn’t be enough.

“Firo, go with Ren.” (Naofumi)

“Kue!” (Firo)

Firo, who was next to me, on my instruction started running to accompany them.

It would be best if the case was resolved with this, but....

I suppressed the uneasiness in my chest.

“First, we’re treating this guy. Call Rat.” (Naofumi)

While chanting recovery magic, I told Taniko to call Rat.

Recovery magic was not very effective on monsters. In this case, natural recovery or recovery by medicine would work better.

Taniko ran to Rat’s laboratory.

Suddenly, a problem started.

The Caterpilland started to behave violently and tried to return the way he came until Rat arrived.

It was hard to say, but he had a powerful desire to become strong. He grieved over his cowardliness for not going after Ren.

“Okay? What happened?” (Rat)

“Apparently, thieves attacked the carriage and kidnapped the slaves.”
(Naofumi)

After hearing the commotion, Gaelion came flying.

The Caterpilland began to tell something to Gaelion.

“Hmm... Hmm... What?” (Gaelion)

“Did you understand something?” (Naofumi)

“The fact is that there was a surprise attack that came from both the front and back.” (Gaelion) “What do you mean?” (Naofumi)

For a moment, I thought that the protection shields that the slaves received were rotten.

To be frank, they are much stronger than any ordinary adventurers.

I thought that Imia’s uncle’s class up was done and that they were defeated by smaller force, although it seems to have been different.

Still, I would like to investigate thoroughly.

Motoyasu, who was not here, came to my mind first, but I think it’s different.

Reasonably, this was Itsuki’s way of doing things.

However, a question still remained.

Itsuki, despite his selfishness, was all about his sense of justice.

This was my evaluation as a guy who investigates thoroughly.

However, even the possibility of Itsuki moving with the mystery theory like Ren and Motoyasu is conceivably sufficient, because the Itsuki that I saw in Zeltbur got broken in various ways.

Even though it remained the same and didn’t appear, I think it’s really insidious.

These events were extremely annoying.

This bad feeling was doubled because the former Motoyasu did not hide anything that did not seem pretty.

Well, I think isn’t it Perfect-Hidden-Justice.

Huh... Anyway, it was unfortunate that Itsuki did not get captured.

Through my work, the former Ren and Motoyasu have become better already.

They changed drastically, but the way they are now is much better.

“The Caterpilland also says he was attacked and fled for his life.” (Gaelion)
After conveying his message properly, the Caterpilland felt relieved and lost all his strength.

Dead! I thought and checked his pulse.

He was breathing and not dead. He probably pushed himself in the emergency.

Well, he reached me properly and lost consciousness in a reassuring place.

But... why did Ren go to such a dangerous place?

Is it dangerous?

I need to rush after them.

It can't be helped. I confirmed that Rat was coming, and got ready to go out.

“Filorials.” (Naofumi)

” ” “KUE!””” (Filorials)

“Also, Gaelion, Rishia, and Alta will go with me!” (Naofumi) “Yes.” (Gaelion)

“Okay!” (Rishia)

”””“KUE!?”””” (Filorials)

“What is it? Are you dissatisfied? The remaining members are to guard the village! Maintain the caution until I return!” (Naofumi)

I led the group while I rode on the back of Gaelion.

The Filorials and the others ran and followed me from the ground.

Though I caught up with Ren and the others before long from the sky, as expected, there was nothing in the spot where Kiel and the others were

attacked.

I let Gaelion track them by smell, but he was not able to track them even halfway.

The sun had set, and I was forced to abandon the search.

Ren was not done yet, but he finally resigned after I warned him to not let a second accident occur.

I returned to the village, counted both the number of monsters and slaves, and began to prepare for dinner.

Certainly, the numbers have been reduced little by little recently.

It's not that I didn't notice, but I thought that peddling took time.

Now's not the time to look away.

The Slave Crests were still functioning and have not been removed.

The numbers have not decreased, and they should be in range according to what I remember.

Yet, I do not know their whereabouts.

Because no conclusive evidence had been found today, I felt that the air in the village was heavier.

Will Raptalia be okay? Is she training well? I pray that nothing has happened.

But, I still need to issue her instructions to come back since a problem has occurred.

The problem is... whether the instructions will arrive.

I cut today's material with a kitchen knife and threw it into the pan.

Though I stewed it, it's being boiled. It doesn't stick to the hand so much.

Ren also seemed restless.

But the situation would not improve for the better even if we searched at night.

Because I could not calm down, I cooked.

Heroes are powerless at this time, and there's no chance for me to do anything.

For now, we can only wait for something to happen.

“Oh! What's with this?” (Naofumi)

I realized while trying the soup that I cooked today.

It's dangerous!

Alerts sound in my head.

“Huh...” (Naofumi)

What is it? Did I add something dangerous to the dish to make it a failure?

There were no such things so far, and the soup connoisseur within me did not object to the taste.

Toxic substance. Toxicity... middle degree. Breathing hindrance. Natural poison.

I used an antidote, and the detoxification magic cured me immediately.

What?

No, no one could make such a dangerous poison with the materials right here.

Did I mess up and make a dangerous thing with alchemy by mistake?

“Is it done?” The slave in charge of cooking asked while seeing the soup. (Slave)

“No, looks like I failed.” (Naofumi)

“Eh? When it smells so good?” (Slave)

“Indeed.” (Naofumi)

While saying so, I wash away the soup with a bottle of water.

Danger!

The same alerts from before were reflected in my field of vision.

What!?

Was it the water?

I carefully asked the connoisseur about the water.

“Hey, where was this water taken from?” (Naofumi)

“What? From the well that we always use...” (Slave)

Was the water mixed with something else, or was it...?

I had an unpleasant hunch.

“It’s useless!” (Naofumi)

“I don’t get it.” (Slave)

“Anyway, it’s no use and it’s painful.” (Naofumi)

When I looked outside at the dining room, a Filorial picked a quarrel with a slave and prevented him from drinking the well water.

Filorials have wild intuition. He is talking, since I’m not there, and interfering.

The Filorial did well. I will prepare a reward for him later.

“All members, do not drink the water!” (Naofumi)

I gave instructions in a loud voice.

“What happened?” (Slaves)

“There is a possibility that a poison was mixed into the well.” (Naofumi) “Is that true?” (Slaves)

“It is like that, and I will investigate it in a little bit.” (Naofumi)

I called for Rat, who had finished the treatment of caterpilland, to investigate the well and the nearby river.

The result was that poison was mixed in both.

Fortunately, the bio-plant was detoxifying, and the poison won't soak into the earth.

However, if you look closely, fish-type monsters were dead and floated in the river.

The sun had set, and in the dark, the search for the criminal who poisoned the river did not go well.

However, I found the corpse of a Demi-Human adventurer upstream.

“Is this fellow the culprit?” (Naofumi)

“I don't know.” (Rat)

Rat checked the corpse like a doctor.

Did this demi-human pour the poison into my village? Even if I'm mistaken, this person is certainly not from my village.

In the village which I command, for the time being, I seem to be their religion's God.

Could it be the people of the Schildwelt or Schildfrieden?

I cannot pinpoint it from the corpse, which won't speak.

“Earl, look over here.” (Rat)

Rat pointed at the corpse of the demi-human.

“There's a paper in his hand. Something is written on it.” (Rat) “Can you read it?” (Naofumi)

“It is the judgment of the person who calls himself a god.’ But, aren’t these letters from Melromarc’s official language?” (Rat) “What?” (Naofumi)

Wait a minute, did the radicals of the Religion of the Shield attack me?

No, that’s doubtful. It’s Melromarc’s official language.

The official language of Schildwelt or Schildfrieden should have been used if that was the case.

“Looks like you wrote and translated it well. It’s a feeling that you got used to by understanding the habit of the characters, right?” (Rat) “Such a thing?” (Naofumi)

“Yes, also...” (Rat)

Rat took out a medicine and dripped it onto the chest of the demi-human.

Then, on the chest of the body... A slave crest shined faintly.

It was a slave crest that disappears upon death. They intended to cover it, but they couldn’t deceive us.

“It’s a slave I... Oh, it is white.” (Naofumi)

“Well.” (Rat)

For a demi-human Schildwelt or Schildfrieden slave to poison the water and then commit suicide for a religious reason... would be impossible.

I heard in that in such countries, demi-human and human slaves have the same family/tribe crest.

Behind the possession of the paper and the mystery of the concealed slave crest, there must be a hidden, decisive reason.

Moreover, it was obvious that their wrath is aimed at me...

It seems that they want me to be suspected.

I will let you make a human slave if it is me.

What a childish trick.

The one which made the criminal demi-humans affiliates or gave a bad impression and stood up...

“Bury it carefully.” (Naofumi)

“Is that okay?” (Rat)

“He was a victim. He has gone through a lot of hardships so far. I will treat the dead politely at least.” (Naofumi)

Brainwash

Now, for the guy who put poison in the well

The water... might not have been from the river.

The water of the river is fundamentally different from the water of the well.

I think it would have taken time for the poison that flowed through the river to arrive at the well via the underground.

We can also consider if it went through the soil, but I think the poison was poured directly into the well.

Still...

A major problem remains.

My village isn't made so that anyone can come in easily.

Because I was wary, I placed a guard originally so that only slaves and people who I trust can enter.

Needless to say, Gaelion and the filorials would have said something to me if there was a stranger around.

Thus, the evidence suggests that the well was poisoned by an internal perpetrator.

I do not like to doubt.

I mean, I should have set it up so if a slave performed such an estranged act, they would pay with the price of life.

"Gaelion!" (Naofumi)

In accordance to my call, Gaelion came flying.

“What is it?” (Gaelion)

“You were in the village today.” (Naofumi)

“Yeah.”(Gaelion)

“Was there a fellow who did something to the well?” (Naofumi) “Even if you say that... There were not any particularly strange people.” (Gaelion) “What about soldiers and visitors from the castle?” (Naofumi) “No.” (Gaelion)

Identification of the criminal is getting difficult.

The slave crests aren't working.

Also, Gaelion said no soldier or magic person/seller came to the village.

Well, it could be that the precautionary ability of Gaelion can't be fully trusted.

Therefore, I went back to the village and gathered slaves to ask them.

“I want to identify the time when the poison was poured. Who was the last to drink the water and be safe?” (Naofumi)

To my question, a few slaves raised their hands and took their time to talk respectively.

I learned that the well water was moved to the water jars for cooking just a little while ago.

“I wonder who the culprit was?” (Naofumi)

“Excuse me, Naofumi-sama.” (Atla)

“Hmm, what happened?” (Naofumi)

Atla raised her hand and made a proposal.

Her face seemed tense or something.

Was there something that only Atla can sense?

Atla slowly returned to the clinic and pointed at Imia's uncle, who was resting in the corner of the dining room.

"Imia's uncle, something abominable is coiling itself around you." (Atla) "Huh?" (Naofumi)

Imia's uncle looked around in a perplexed expression after being confronted by Atlas.

"I'm, what are you saying? Please be careful while joking." (Imia's uncle) "Yeah Atla, no matter what, for uncle to do such a thing—" (Naofumi) "It's, so... No... actually, I remember causing something—" (Imia's uncle)

Imia's uncle was at his wit's end and began to groan.

He pushed Imia away toward the other slaves and staggered away unsteadily.

"Hero of the Shield, please, I..." (Imia's uncle)

Imia's uncle asked for help as he suffered.

No, wait...

"Please punish me... Before I commit a crime again!" (Imia's Uncle) "When the thieves caught you, did they put a curse on you!?" (Naofumi) "I understand, oh... Guu..."

I opened Imia's uncle's slave status.

To state the problem... It was different.

There's noise! <This kind of Noise>

It's apparent that something strange was going on.

If you thought about it calmly, he was found a day after he was supposed to arrive.

Basically, where he was attacked was uncertain.

What would have happened if Elena hadn't passed by, I don't know.

What would I do if I happened to pass by and had to escape from a strong adventurer?

Imia's uncle was taken to the clinic for treatment.

And there's no doubt that he specifically came back to the village to pour poison in the well as he was ordered.

The problem is that whatever was eroding Imia's uncle might escape the eye of treatment.

"Hero of the Shield!" (Slaves)

"Naofumi." (Ren)

The slaves, Ren, and Atla asked me for help.

'I am not almighty,' I want to say that, but I can't. I understand the feeling of wanting help.

"We,... oh, huh!" (Atla)

"It's no good!" (Rishia)

Rishia stepped forward and stood with Imia's uncle.

"Even though I know, how is it done!?! For me..... I can't hold out my hand!"
(Ren)

Even Ren, who's acquainted with the slaves, can't lend a hand?

Similarly, even the female knight cannot move.

I think this is an abnormal situation.

If she slays Imia's uncle, I'll have to banish Female Knight.

I've been called indecisive.

I can't follow the situation.

What should I do?

Well, if it was a game, persuasion would be the means to restore a former companion who was manipulated by someone, but it's quite difficult in reality to break free from brainwashing. This is not a game.

Still, I cannot deal with everyone

By no means is it easy. It's quite troublesome.

"Uncle! Please stop! 'I'd like to be of assistance to the Hero of the Shield,' wasn't it you who said that!?" (Imia) "Oh, that... GUU..." (Imia's uncle)

Imia's uncle's consciousness was becoming cloudy. This is not the situation for persuasion.

"Everything... Justice..." (Imia's uncle)

He began to chant in a strange tone.

"Please... Stop me—" (Imia's uncle)

Imia's uncle began to chant magic.

The Lemo species knew the appropriateness of the soil.

He used magic that manipulated the earth to make a hole and pushed out a rock using magic.

"I am one who commands the origin of power. I have read once again and

deciphered a law of nature, Earth. Slaughter these people! Zweit Earth Drive! [4]" (Imia's uncle) "I as the root of the power give an order. I have read once again and deciphered a law of nature, Earth. Hinder the magic of the person in front! Anti-Zweit Earth Drive! [5]" (Imia)

From the same species, Imia interfered with the magic that her uncle chanted, and there was simply a crack in the ground.

"Naofumi!" (Rat)

"What is it?" (Naofumi)

"Please confine Imia's uncle by creating a wall in four directions! Needless to say, the strongest one. Please." (Rat)

I see! Such a thing!

I started building magic power and mix SP into it.

"Uhh..." (Imia's uncle)

Imia grabbed her uncle and looked at me.

"Now! Hero!" (Imia)

"Are you sure?" (Naofumi)

"Stop me! Please! I request it!" (Imia's uncle) "Understood! Shield Prison!" (Naofumi)

The cage made with shields confined Imia's uncle together with Imia.

"Atla?" (Naofumi)

"Yes, the abominable power was interrupted by the cage, and its power was cut." (Atla) "So did it go elsewhere?" (Naofumi)

"No one amongst those here." (Atla)

“That’s fortunate.” (Naofumi)

It would be serious if someone began to behave violently like Imia’s uncle did.

Afterward...

“First of all, for now, let’s figure out the situation before the cage disappears.”
(Naofumi) “Oh.”

“Yes.”

It is certain that Imia’s uncle was the one who poured poison into the well.

Perhaps it’s a kind of curse.

Thinking about it, the same as back then with Motoyasu, it looks without a doubt like a Legendary Weapon skill.

Ren has not used his.

He’s been under tight watch from the start.

If he used it, he’d be noticed. Immediately.

Motoyasu is currently on Cal Mira Island.

He may be coming back soon, unfortunately for Firo, and it would be troublesome for me.

Also, there are Motoyasu’s beloved mass-produced Filorials among the victims.

If that ridiculous condition was an act, there would be no helping it, but probably not.

Above all—.

“Itsuki-sama.” (Rishia)

“The possibility is high.” (Naofumi)

From the fact that Imia’s uncle muttered justice.

To begin with, I am concerned with what kind of power was used to control Imia’s uncle.

When I think about it, the missing slaves may be related to this.

I cannot cover it anymore.

“Rishia. There are things I need to tell you.” (Naofumi) “Oh, what is it?” (Rishia)

“Actually, quite some time ago, I saw Itsuki.” (Naofumi) “FUE!?” (Rishia)

“Do you remember when we went to buy Atla?” (Naofumi) “Yes.” (Rishia)

“At that time, I found Itsuki in the Colosseum. Like some crippled person, he seemed to fight to receive people’s praise.” (Naofumi) “.....” (Rishia)

Rishia looked down.

Well... I knew this would happen, but it can’t be helped since I had reasons for hiding it.

“It looked like Itsuki was lost, and if Rishia were to see such a figure of Itsuki—” (Naofumi) “That’s enough. Thank you, Naofumi-sama.” (Rishia)

Even if Rishia became estranged here, I cannot stop her.

“It’s okay. So what happened to Itsuki-sama?” (Rishia) “The country’s Shadow was monitoring Itsuki but lost sight of him, so his whereabouts are unknown.”

(Naofumi) “Is... is that so.” (Rishia)

We may already consider this an attack by Itsuki.

Don’t come with nastier methods than Ren and Motoyasu.

Multiple Culprits

Ren: "Itsuki..."

Ren mutters his name bitterly.

I wonder how I should deal with this matter.

Atla will probably be able to find Itsuki's location.

Soldier: "There, there's trouble!"

A soldier from the castle burst into the dining room.

He was covered in wounds and his clothes were in tatters.

Naofumi: "What happened?"

Soldier: "Large scale riots have broken out at one of the towns! It's terrorism aimed at the populace!"

Naofumi: "What did you say?"

Soldier: "It's an emergency request from Melty-sama! Hero! We need your strength!"

There are more riots than Firo can take care of?

The scale of their attack must be massive.

Naofumi: "I understand!"

Ren: "Can I come with?"

Ren stepped forward with his request.

Hmmm.

It would be simple to let Ren accompany me.

And the Female Knight can also come along...

But, something is bothering me.

Imia's uncle was attacked by bandits, Kiel and the others were abducted, the village was targeted with poison, Imia's uncle was controlled, and a riot broke out in town.

Their timing is too good.

If this was a planned attack, then why?

The purpose behind the enemy's motive...

The Queen's story about the Church of the Three Heroes seems to be connected with Itsuki.

Perhaps the riot at the town is just a clever diversion.

Which means.

Naofumi: "It's possible that there will be an attack targeting Melromark castle."

Ren: "Wha-"

Ren looked pale.

Well, it's not too surprising.

I will not let the malicious acts that transpired here be repeated.

Now that I think about it, the people carrying out these acts could be manipulated just like Imia's Uncle.

What could be done to stop all of this?

For now, the only method for the brainwashing is to use Shield Prison to seal

them off; nothing else would work.

But, the problem is that the scale is too big.

I would have to take into account the magic consumption and the cool-down, as well as finding the ones that Itsuki was controlling.

Just like Ren, he could be corrupted by a curse, but someone must have given him the idea.

But, manipulating him would be difficult.

It could be similar to Ren, where he keeps on repeating what he believed in.

Just what kind of person is Itsuki?

He has an usually strong sense of justice, yet he is also conceited.

How would one manipulate such a guy?

Naofumi: "Ren, this is a hypothetical. But what would someone have to do to manipulate a Hero of Justice?"

Ren: "Eh? ...Wouldn't you just need a villain?"

It was such a simple textbook answer, but it is believable.

Furthermore, he targeted both my land and Castle town for his acts of turmoil.

Then his target would be either me...or the Queen.

Now, I try to think of his intention.

If he was in a place where he could see the messenger go out for help...then there is a good chance the enemy is in Castle town.

Motoyasu: "Father-in-Law. I have returned."

Oh? Motoyasu had returned just at the perfect time.

He suddenly appeared through the use of a portal.

Naofumi: “Oh! Motoyasu, I know it’s sudden, but can I ask you to do something?”

Motoyasu: “What would you like me to do, Father-in-Law? Even if it is an act of evil, I, Motoyasu, will gladly serve you.”

Naofumi: “...I need you to go to the castle in Melromark and check its situation. If a problem were to arise, crush it. Motoyasu, I also want you to go with your Philorials.”

Motoyasu: “Understood, Father-in-Law. I, Motoyasu, will stake his life to carry out this task! Let us go, my angels!”

Having just returned, his three followers obeyed Motoyasu’s order with slightly tired expressions.

I take it that you guys spent your time running around sightseeing.

The real problem is that we can’t identify the target of Itsuki’s attack.

Even with a large military force, our enemy would be able to advantage of it.

Motoyasu proved that one’s consciousness could be altered, and at worst Firo may end up in the hands of the enemy.

Ren: “So should I go too?”

Naofumi: “No, Ren should stay here. Just in case.”

Spreading my forces too much would be dangerous.

We would have walked into a trap if it wasn’t for my earlier foresight.

Motoyasu: “Then let us depart!”

Followers: “”””Yes!””””

Taking his Philorials, Motoyasu headed towards town.

The portal is not usable during its cool-down, but he should be fine since he runs fast.

With this I hope nothing happens, but...

Afterwards, I go to see if the Cage of Shields had dissipated.

Imia's Uncle: "My deepest apologies! Please forgive all the inconveniences I have caused!"

Having arrived, Imia's Uncle bowed his head down in apology.

Imia is also with him.

Naofumi: "Don't let it bother you. More importantly are you alright?"

Imia's Uncle: "Y-yes!"

Naofumi: "Can you explain to us what happened?"

Imia's Uncle: "Yes."

As I thought, Imia's Uncle was attacked the day before.

He recalled that there was a sudden attack from the bushes that he was unable to avoid.

Did it cause that scar I saw at the clinic?

Huh, it didn't look like an arrow mark...

From that point his memories became hazy, but he continued to fight until his mind became muddled.

He began having mixed thoughts that the bandit wanted to help him, even though he was an enemy.

He then escaped the fight, but he vaguely remembered protecting Elena.

Naofumi: "He escaped?"

Imia's Uncle: "...When he left, I felt relieved. Then on my way back with Imia... I recalled our arrangement to intentionally bump into a person."

Naofumi: "It was arranged?"

Imia's Uncle: "Yes. I believe it was at that time I was given the medicine."

Of course, what he gave you was really poison.

Brainwashed into using the poison, Imia's Uncle was tasked with poisoning the well with his own hands.

It would be quite troublesome to make these arrangements, but it avoided suspicion.

To have planned that elaborately ahead, it must have been difficult.

Imia's Uncle: "Then I was to put the entire village to sleep with sleeping pills, and during that time--"

Naofumi: "Wait...sleeping pills?"

If the poison wasn't discerning enough, there were also sleeping pills.

An appraisal of the poison showed that it was a moderate toxin, and when taken it would affect the repository system.

Most would die suffering upon taking it; it was truly a horrible thing.

It was quite a severe way to die. It would have caused them to suffocate to death.

Did you make a mistake in using the sleeping pills?

There is a large difference between the testimony and reality.

However, there was still something puzzling.

There was the Demi-Human slave whose death was disguised as a suicide.

If Itsuki is behind this, according to Imia's uncle's story, he would have

finished him with the brainwashing.

But even though he had a slave crest, he wasn't brainwashed. The reasoning behind this is something I don't know.

Was the slave crest placed simply because I used them as my subordinates?

Or was it for a completely different reason?

...What if there were multiple culprits?

If he isn't working with anyone, then it's likely Itsuki is being manipulated by someone.

That wouldn't be surprising. Itsuki is just a big lump of justice. He would hate such evil deeds.

Well, if it was for the sake of justice, he could probably do it.

The possibility that Itsuki is corrupted by the Curse series is also very high.

In fact, compared to Ren and Motoyasu, Itsuki's mental damage seems to be the highest.

It's probable that Itsuki can't suppress the feelings caused by the curse, since it consumes the user's will and is virtually impossible to control.

That would mean that those controlled by Itsuki's brainwashing couldn't be controlled by others.

He would probably say it was for the sake of justice or something.

Even though the use of the sleeping pills and poison would be unforgivable, for the sake of justice, he would allow it.

Let's think about the facts.

Itsuki and the three other groups... the remnants of the church, the revolutionaries, and the missing Witch and her companions; most likely one of these groups are acting separately.

It is unclear if they are in a cooperative relationship, but there is no doubt that they are involved in this turmoil.

Each of them work on different ideologies, which means the enemy wouldn't be under a united leadership.

In that case, Itsuki could have been given those sleeping pills and poison by another party.

While being corrupted by the curse, it wouldn't be strange for him to ally himself with one of the groups.

Assuming that there are four groups, including Itsuki, their targets would be our footholds.

My village, the Town, and Melromark Castle.

A considerable force would be needed to overwhelm the three at the same time.

Of course, it would be impossible for the Remnants of the Church and the Revolutionary Faction.

And there were people brainwashed by Itsuki at all three locations.

Me, Melty, and the Queen.

From these three, one will be targeted for death.

After some planning, Ren is going to head to the town, while I defend the village.

Since the power to brainwash is already well known, Ren will be careful.

Naofumi: "Please continue."

Imia's Uncle: "From them on...I'm not sure."

Naofumi: "Hmmm..."

The question is, after knocking out the villagers with the sleeping pills, what would be his next step?

They could attack using a force controlled by Itsuki.

Itsuki may have also thought the poison and the sleeping pills would be enough.

The group that is behind Itsuki uses poison as their main method of elimination, or am I wrong to assume so?

Otherwise their actions are just too random.

After all, the reason they used the poison on the village was to weaken our war potential.

Which would mean, Itsuki is a puppet.

Even if he isn't working with anyone, Itsuki would be unlikely to use the sleeping pills in the first place.

Actually, the poison used by Imia's Uncle when he was controlled, and the one the culprit used for the river was different.

After using the pills and forcing me to deal with the riots in town, just what was he going to do?

The answer was obvious. I wouldn't have to think hard to figure it out.

Naofumi: "What about the Philorials and monsters?"

Gaelion: "Most of the Philorials went with the Hero of the Spear, but there were some that stayed."

Naofumi: "The remaining Philorials, monsters, and Gaelion. Along with the slaves, go suppress the situation in town. If you succeed, please act under the orders of the future queen Melty who is at the location."

Gaelion: "Understood."

Philorial: "Kue!"

Gaelion: "And the others?"

...The truth is that it would be best for all forces to help out in town and leave the village empty.

Among my forces, there was one that could crush Itsuki and all his forces.

But if Itsuki were to come and capture this village, it would be a difficult situation.

Honestly, the Three Heroes Church and the revolutionary faction are not that big of threats.

If Itsuki was captured, we could undo the brainwashing.

Therefore, it would be best to solve this in the shortest manner possible.

In that case, walking into a trap wouldn't be too bad.

Naofumi: "The others-"

Contagion

The village was silent. Everyone was holding their breath. Dinner casually finished in silence without anyone lighting any lights. It was as if the entire village had already gone to sleep.

A large number of missing carriages arrived at once. The Filo Rials pulling them and the slaves riding them were probably being controlled. One by one, they stepped off of the carriages and began walking towards the village. And then, carrying off the slaves who were pretending to be asleep, they returned to the carriage parked farthest from us.

There...

“That’s enough!” (Naofumi)

I stepped out of my hiding place from a nearby house. At the same time, the slaves being taken away began to resist.

“Oh, Niichan. What’s wrong?” (Kiel)

Kiel stood in front of me, who responded as if nothing was wrong. I opened up Kiel’s slave management screen and tried to activate punishment. But... as if the battery had died, nothing happened.

“Kiel, I know that you can’t act. Tell me honestly. Is the mastermind controlling you inside of that carriage?” (Naofumi)

“Control? What are you saying, Niichan?” (Kiel)

Kiel’s eyes looked strange. She stared at the other controlled children, and they all tilted their heads in confusion.

“We were finally released from Niichan’s brainwashing. That’s why it is our duty to free the others as quickly as possible.” (Kiel)

I see... they were released. That’s the lie Itsuki implanted in their skulls to control them. With such a reason, it sounds like Itsuki is on the side of justice. At least, within his head. That is... If they were truly being released... It would be just as Rishia said.

A while ago, when I proposed the plan, Rishia said as such:

“Naofumi-san. Even after all that’s happened, I still love the legends of the Heroes. When I was little, I would read about them whenever I could.” (Rishia)

“What are you saying all of a sudden?” (Naofumi)

“Do you know of the enemy that appears in the Heroes’ tales... The Demon King with the power of control?” (Rishia)

“The Hero of the Shield, right?” (Naofumi)

Rishia slowly shook her head from side to side.

“At least, within the world of fiction, he was called as such. But according to history, there were many Heroes at the time, and along with the heroes, much death came.” (Rishia)

Was that why people kept saying I have a Shield that can brainwash?

That means that it didn’t have to be the Hero of the Shield. The people of this

world just arbitrarily developed a grudge and arbitrarily placed it on the Shield. As long as they could shift the blame, then any weapon would do.

I've heard about it in Manga. The Hero and the Demon King are just two sides of the same coin. Yet here, they are one and the same.

All the bad things are the fake's... The Demon King's fault. There's no way that someone with such dark power can be a hero. ... A Hero rejected by history.

"And... According to legend, everyone working under the Demon King was a victim bent to his will." (Rishia)

To summarize, it's like this: If I don't get rid of Itsuki quickly, it's going to get troublesome. Worse comes to worst, I'll have to capture each person in my Shield Prison one at a time. I wonder just how much magic that would take.

I guess I should tell about Ren as well. If Itsuki decides to show his face in the village, I want to capture him alive if possible. If that turns out to be impossible, we'll have to kill him. I'll take responsibility for it. That's what I told him.

But Ren was opposed to killing Itsuki. I feel that his emotions are getting deeper as of late.

Before, he tried to put up a... Cool, indifferent atmosphere. I guess this is better. By the way, if he tried to use his dark past to elicit sympathy, I planned on kicking him out. Though, it appears that there are no problems at this point in time.

No matter what happens, I don't think he will kill. Also, though I made him unlock the other reinforcement methods, his curse makes him unable to get materials or money, so he can't really use them. It will be difficult to crush Itsuki, who is currently being devoured by his own curse.

“I’m home~.”

A carefree voice came from the coast.

“Is it already sleeping time? I planned on getting Atlas-chan and heading over to Naofumi’s place, but what’s happening?” (Sadina)

Sadina had a relaxed expression as she stretched her arms and walked towards me.

“Why are you coming back so late anyways?” (Naofumi)

It’s obvious that she had no idea about the emergency situation. Why was this idiot waltzing in so easily?

“Why, you ask? ...Didn’t Naofumi-chan ask me to try my hand at Salvaging?” (Sadina)

Ah, right! Sadina told me that plenty of interesting treasures slept at the bottom of the sea, so I asked her to try her hand at them. Recently, she had been coming back with things like old coins. They were things that would drive collectors insane. We got a good price for them. That’s why I got happy and asked her to do it on the spur of the moment.

“Today, I found some nice wine and a good harpoon.” (Sadina)

Sadina held out an ornate harpoon that looked as if it were made out of coral. Is that really something that someone lost in the sea?

“It seemed like it’d been at the bottom of the sea for a while, but it still held its

shape. Its blade is quite a nice one.” (Sadina)

“Ah. Anyways... Can you step back a bit?” (Naofumi)

Sadina playfully spun the harpoon around her body before returning it to the bag on her back. She looked around her.

“Sadina-nee-chan. Niichan is being cruel.” (Kiel)

“Ara? What could be the problem?” (Sadina)

Kiel slowly stepped towards Sadina.

“No! Sadina-san! Get away from Kiel-kun!” (Rishia)

It happened the second Rishia shouted out her warning. Kiel changed into dog form and bit the space Sadina was in. But at that moment, Sadina backed off at a surprising speed and created some distance between her and the dog.

“Damn... I missed.” (Kiel)

“... What are you trying to do? Based on your answer, this Onee-chan may have to issue out some punishment.” (Sadina)

Sadina immediately readied herself for battle as she pointed the harpoon at Kiel. Kiel’s attack put her on high alert. I should have warned her quicker.

“Hypothetically... If like in the story, we slaves were just moving at the Demon King’s whim, then...”

Rishia’s words echo in my mind. I can imagine the worst possible outcome.

“I see. Itsuki isn’t directly issuing brainwashing. He’s made a status effect that can be spread... Atlas, what can you sense from Kiel and the others?” (Naofumi)

I asked Atlas who was in hiding. This is merely a single possibility, but I should have Atlas look into it.

“The dark energy that is wrapped around Kiel-kun has begun extending tentacles towards Sadina-san.” (Atlas)

Damn. This is troublesome. Kiel, the controlled Filo Rials, and the controlled Slaves took offensive stances.

Currently, Kiel’s level is 70. Just based on stats, she falls short of Raptalia, but that doesn’t mean she isn’t strong. Due to her race, Kiel can make quicker movements.

However, I can probably withstand her attacks. The problem is the infectious nature of this brainwashing.

It’s like a game where you have to defend single a point from countless enemy units. And there’s nothing we can do about it. Neither side will seriously try to hurt the other, but when any of my side gets infected, they’ll become enemies.

“Is there anything I can do here?” (Naofumi)

Ren should also be in quite some danger right now. I guess I should warn him.

“WAOOOOOOOOOOON!” (Kiel)

With Kiel’s battle cry, the slaves began their assault. ... The slaves I trained as soldiers have turned against me.

I had planned to end this by capturing Itsuki. Of course, I had considered the

possibility of fighting Kiel and the others. But what the hell is it with this contagion factor. It's even worse than a plague.

"The stories told of the Hero's companions having strong wills and being able to withstand the control. It was quite a touching tale..." (Rishia)

Rishia answered as she blocked Kiel's attack. The village has already been swallowed by battle. Though I shouted out a warning, the enemies' preemptive strike rendered quite a few of my combatants unconscious. We were doing worse than I predicted.

I stepped in front to protect the slaves to the best of my ability, but still, I can't handle everything.

"Are you alright!?" (Naofumi)

"S-somehow." (Slave)

"It seems that the effect isn't that contagious, but if we continue to take attacks, then it will definitely spread." (Naofumi)

I have confidence in my own defense, but when facing an army of Kiel-class enemies, there's no way either side will come out unscathed. If I want to use my Shield Prison trump card, I'll have to gather them in one place. Though, the quickest solution would just be to find and capture Itsuki.

"Atlas! Can you still not sense Itsuki anywhere?" (Naofumi)

"...It's no good. An ominous aura is filling the area, and I can't pinpoint anything." (Atlas)

"I see..." (Naofumi)

I guess I shouldn't get my hopes up. Damn. Everything is turning on me. I got the idea to defeat Itsuki and end everything from Motoyasu, but that seems to be impossible. If the brainwashing is infectious, then it will just spread naturally.

Itsuki doesn't even have to be anywhere near the village.

“Niichan, prepare yourself! How dare you use all of us!” (Kiel)

“Ha! Just go eat a crepe covered in dirt!” (Naofumi)

From my bad habits, an angry line escaped my mouth. The line of a cheap villain. I really shouldn't be provoking her right now.

Translator Notes

1. ↑ Midori, who is a male Philorial.
2. ↑ I have no idea what name this could be: ズリネタ For now I'll go with Serenity.
3. ↑ T/N: That guy = Imia's Uncle
4. ↑ ツヴァイト・アースドライブ
5. ↑ ツヴァイト・アースドライブ

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Miscalculations

Sparks fly as Kiel's claws brush lightly against my shield.

Though she can't overcome my Defense, it doesn't feel good to intercept the momentum from a full-body attack.

All of the attacking slaves' attacks seem to be centered on me.

I've narrowly managed to block everything without taking damage, but I wonder how much longer I can keep this up.

As I receive attacks, I feel the curse afflicting them dealing additional damage to me.

It feels like my internal organs are twisting around each other. I feel dizzy.

Damn. At this rate, my body isn't going to hold up.

"All is in the name of Justice. Niichan must be defeated!" (Kiel) "Kiel... you better remember this later. Even if you were brainwashed, that doesn't mean I'm lessening your punishment for this at all." (Naofumi)

... This justice crap is getting annoying!

Aren't they getting something wrong here?

I'm no saint. I'm no philanthropist.

Of course I would use all of you people.

I mean, aren't I always saying it?

'Get back to work,' and such.

No, the normal Kiel should be well aware of that.

I should think of the person in front of me as a separate entity controlling Kiel's body.

What should I do? Should I use Wrath and turn everything to ash?

"You're wrong! Naofumi-san is... definitely not evil!" (Rishia)

Rishia cautions Kiel with a strong tone of voice.

What?

I didn't know she could speak with such a tone.

"Naofumi-chan, should this Onee-san do something radical to gain control of the situation?" (Sadina) "What do you plan on doing?" (Naofumi)

Ah, by the way, Sadina is level 75. Her stats are also quite high.

Honestly, if you don't count Raphtalia and Firo, her stats are some of the highest I've seen. They're higher than Kiel's.

Her weak points are Speed and Attack Range.

But, when in the water, these weaknesses disappear.

"Just... a little." (Sadina)

"... I asked what you were going to do." (Naofumi)

"Let's see. The result of this plan will probably make you forgive Kiel and the others." (Sadina) "Oi! You couldn't be..." (Naofumi)

『I who has understood the source of power command. Let the truth once again manifest itself. Oh lightning, shoot down all that stand before me! All Dreifach Chain Lightning!』

From the tip of Sadina's harpoon, several streams of lightning bright enough to cause permanent eye damage shoot out towards the brainwashed children.

“GYAA!!!” (Children)
Kiel and the others fall to the ground.

The lightning continues for a while. I smell the scent of burnt hair.

“Sadina, you...” (Naofumi)

“It’s alright. I controlled the output. If I was serious, it would look even more amazing.” (Sadina)

I see. [1]

“Is everyone alive?” (Naofumi)

“We’re fine, but some people are beginning to spout words similar to Kiel-kun.” (Rishia)

Ah, so they awakened to the wonderful world of Justice.

Is this some sort of religious cult?

... The situation is quite unfavorable.

“Brother of the Shield, prepare yourself!” (Slave) [2]

So there were still some hiding around.

More of the missing children begin pouring into the village.

Dammit... They’re putting my subordinates to good use.

They’re definitely cutting their losses here.

Even if Itsuki was consumed by his curse, I doubt he would have enough power to beat me and my subordinates head on in battle.

But, the people standing before me are those I personally raised and gave stat growth increases to.

These children are already leagues above the average knights and adventurers.

And for many of them, like Raphtalia, this is their homeland.

Normally, this would be a group that even entire countries would hesitate to challenge.

I have to congratulate him for the brilliance of his idea, but it's quite inhumane.

He probably lured out the weakest of slaves, brainwashed them, sent them back, and had them bring their friends. In the end, everyone would happily try to kill me.

He probably spent a long time planning this.

Ah... This really is hitting below the belt.

Among the seven sins, I wonder which one would grant such an ability.

"Is this all of the slaves that went missing?" (Naofumi) "No... I think it's less than half." (Rishia)

As I thought.

Honestly, if he suddenly gained such an amazing fighting force, he would start off by spreading it out.

Also...

"That carriage is..." (Naofumi)

The slaves were carried off towards it, but the battle's been going on for a while, and I've seen no activity from it. Is Itsuki there?

Did he miss his chance to make a dramatic entrance?

I wonder. Something seems fundamentally wrong here. I have a bad feeling about this.

“How long do you think Kiel’s group will be knocked out for?” (Naofumi) “You shouldn’t expect too much. Kiel-chan’s become quite strong.” (Sadina) “Then we’d better investigate that carriage while we can. We may find the source.” (Naofumi) “Naofumi-san...” (Rishia)

“What is it, Rishia?” (Naofumi)

“...” (Rishia)

Is she going to ask me to spare Itsuki?

Female Knight did something like that as well.

Well it depends on the situation. If I find a way to free Itsuki of his curse, I may be able to use him later.

And from his ability to cause such chaos, I think the boy will be quite useful.

At least in battle.

I wait for Rishia’s question, but it doesn’t come.

“If you’ve got nothing to say, then we’re heading out.” (Naofumi) “... Okay.” (Rishia)

I guess she’s dealing with many conflicted emotions. I wonder what she’ll do when she meets Itsuki.

Anyways, I hope it doesn’t come to her betraying me.

That would really be a pain. I’ll have to use the slave seal to stop her then.

I open Rishia’s slave management screen just in case.

“Oi, whoever’s hiding in the carriage! Just get out already.” (Naofumi)

I shout out as I approach it.

... Is there really no one there?

That can’t be. From Kiel and the others’ movements, there’s got to be something here.

“Oi!” (Naofumi)

This isn't getting anywhere.

“Sadina, go cast your magic on that carriage.” (Naofumi) “Are you sure?”
(Sadina)

“I gave enough warning. Use your full power on this one.” (Naofumi) “I guess there's no helping it.” (Sadina)

Sadina approves my proposal to attack the carriage.

『I who has understood the source of power command. Let the truth once again manifest itself. Rain down thunder on my enemies! Dreifach Thunderbolt!』

Thunder sounds out as a bolt of electricity strikes the carriage.

And a human figure quickly scrambles out just in the nick of time.

“What!?” (Naofumi)

I-it's not Itsuki...

The figure held a cane in his hands and wore a long robe. On his head was a needlessly pointy hat. It was the stereotypical clothing of a mage you would find in a child's story book.

The robe had intricate embroidery stretched over the trim, and the cane gave off an expensive feeling.

I can tell from a glance that the hat was also made of good materials.

But the thing that surprised me the most was the fact that the man was not Itsuki.

He was clearly a mage of some sort. I have the feeling that I've seen him somewhere before, but I can't remember where.

And... he pulls out a dagger glowing with a strange light from the chest area of the robe.

"You bastard... Devil of the Shield! Treating your own subordinates and ours in such an inhumane manner!" (Mage)

Who was this guy again?

I'm pretty sure I've seen him... somewhere.

He seems to know me, but... is he the guy Ren mentioned as being Witch's companion?

That means that there's a possibility I may have met him before.

I have some familiarity, but... It's just not coming to me.

"Could it be..." (Rishia)

Rishia's face becomes increasingly pale.

What? Do you know him?

As I thought about it, I remembered.

I'm pretty sure this guy was the mage in Itsuki's party.

The time I spent with that party was short, but I think this guy may have been there.

I do feel a little guilty, but you can't expect me to remember every little stupid detail.

The reason Ren didn't remember clearly was because he went off and did Solo Play on Cal Mira. He probably only saw him for a few minutes.

I shouldn't be criticizing him for it though. Besides Armor, I don't remember any of them.

I mean, they all said pretty much the same things.

To put it bluntly, I don't remember anyone from Itsuki's party.

But... This is quite a miscalculation.

The contagious nature of the brainwashing was one thing, but Itsuki isn't even here.

And the wound Imya's uncle received was not by bow.

Kiel seemed to refer to more than one person when she spoke as well.

Did I think it was Itsuki due to the continued utterance of the word 'Justice'?

No, there's still a possibility he's involved in this.

Okay, I'll capture this guy and make him spill everything.

"Welst-san! Why are you in a place like this!?" (Rishia)

He had a name like that? First I'm hearing of it.

It's not like I care or anything.

Among the other heroes' companions, there are very few that I even remember.

And wasn't Itsuki abandoned by his companions?

I assumed as such when I saw him acting independently, but I guess I should have investigated further.

Ren's died, and Motoyasu's ran away.

I see. So Itsuki's companions survived.

Then, why was Itsuki mentally broken and fighting in Zeltburg?

"Why? That's what I should be saying. Rishia, to think you would be conspiring with the Devil of the Shield... What could you be thinking?"

Nonono, the ones who drove Rishia out were you people.

You were there—you saw everything.

You can't just conveniently forget that at this point in time.

Effort

“This is... the village Naofumi-san built from the ground up. I am merely here to assist him. Welst-san, so you survived?” (Rishia) “I find no joy in having found you like this. So you assisted in establishing this filthy Demi-Human village? That’s an insult. An act of rebellion towards all of the proud people of Melromark! I need to punish you!” (Welst)

The mage person begins chanting, and Kiel’s group’s injuries are healed.

Ah, he realized that his own half-assed magic would be useless against us.

Kiel and the others slowly pick themselves up off the ground like zombies.

... Perhaps because they’re not fully conscious yet, they sway back and forth as they walk.

But if we attack them anymore, I can’t guarantee the slaves’ safety.

“Where is Itsuki? Is this situation his doing?” (Naofumi) “That fake who pretended to preach justice? Why would I speak with such a demon?” (Welst)
Fake who pretended to preach justice?

So there’s been a shift in the hierarchy of the group.

It seems they didn’t get along as well as I thought.

The possibility that they were working with Itsuki has decreased.

Itsuki may even be completely unrelated.

Though he’s probably the instigator of much of it.

“Please tell me! What happened to everyone and Itsuki-sama?” (Rishia) “Why must I answer to evil!? Now then, my messengers of justice, rid this world of the source of evil!” (Welst)

In response to the mage's shout, the slaves begin swarming around me.

"Messengers of justice, we're going to chant Choral Magic!" (Welst)

「「「I who has understood the source...」」」 (Slave)

What?!? I feel the magic in the air gathering and solidifying.

I've heard a bit about Choral magic from Sadina and the Magic Shopkeeper, but it shouldn't be something with an output this high.

Perhaps it is because all of their minds are thinking the exact same thing or that their chants are in perfect sync.

I prepare myself for a large impact.

"Please stop it now!" (Rishia)

Rishia appears right in front of the Mage person.

"Wha-So fast!" (Welst)

It's a speed the past Rishia wouldn't even have dreamed of.

This mage must have been imagining the old Rishia and underestimating her.

"However, with this, you will become my follower!" (Welst)

The mage faces Rishia and thrusts a glowing dagger at her.

"Your movements are too easy to read!" (Rishia)

Rishia easily dodges the attack and uses her own rapier to knock the dagger into the air.

“Damn... 「I who has...」” (Welst)

“「Zveit Elemental Blow!」” (Rishia)

Elemental magic... I believe it's a synthesis of Fire, Water Earth and Wind magic. It's apparently hard to control, and there are few people with the necessary magic attributes to use it.

A rainbow mass of light slams into the mage's chest and sends him spinning into the ground.

It gives off a feeling like that Ninjutsu involving a sphere of wind. [3]

The Magic Shopkeeper tried hard to get Rishia to learn it. She said that there were very few people with the potential to use it.

But, it was the perfect magic for the Jack of All Trades, Rishia.

“How absurd... Could this be the extent of the Devil's power?” (Welst) “My power? No, this power is the accumulation of all of Rishia's effort.” (Naofumi)
It isn't Stats.

Of course, stats always help, but Rishia put all of her being into getting as strong as she is now.

I won't let you write it off as my power.

The mage who was the center of the Choral magic collapses, and the chant ends in failure.

However, that doesn't mean the slaves' attacks have stopped.

They begin attacking me with physical blows.

“If I use any more magic, Kiel and the others will be in trouble. What should I do?” (Sadina) “They've gathered in such a small area. I can just capture them now.” (Naofumi)

「Shield Prison!」

I activate Shield Prison with myself as the center.

“Ah... Uu...” (Naofumi)

I’m locked away in the dark cage with the slaves, but...

They’re still attacking me!

What’s the meaning of this?

That hurt! Don’t hit me there! Don’t stab me! It’s not piercing me, but the curse hurts!

...

And for the next 5 minutes, Kiel’s group treated me as a sandbag.

It seems that the Brainwashing Contagion doesn’t work on me.

At least that’s something to be happy about.

As the cage disappears, I find Atlas and the others watching us.

“Hm? Naofumi-sama, Kiel-san and the others aren’t returning to normal?”

(Atlas) “That seems to be the case. Can you identify the cause?” (Naofumi)

I cast healing magic on myself as I start dodging the attacks.

“The power influencing their actions from the outside was cut off by Naofumi-sama’s cage... but the second the cage disappeared...” (Atlas)

I see... So if it’s just one person like Imya’s uncle, I can save them, but it’s impossible for this large group.

If one of the candles goes out, the other ones will simply relight it. Something like that.

The sinister powers encircling the brainwashed form a spider-web like structure in between them while in the cage.

That's why I can't dispel the brainwashing on a group.

This is truly a pain.

I guess we'll have to deal with that guy first. He seems to be the cause anyways.

"Our first priority should be to draw information from that man. Can you get these guys off of me?" (Naofumi) "Yes~... Can I be a little rough?" (Sadina)

"No more lightning." (Naofumi)

"I know." (Sadina)

On Sadina's signal, the aquatic Demi-Human slaves rise from the water.

Now that I think about it, they were living in the ocean with her.

And they begin chanting Choral Magic. And... For some reason, the unaffected slaves begin backing off.

"Naofumi-chan." (Sadina)

"What?" (Naofumi)

"I'm sorry. Grit your teeth for a second." (Sadina) "Wai-" (Naofumi)

[[[Choral Magic! Daidal^[4] Wave!]]]

This is that. What Witch was trying to do while she was testing the limits of the Slave Seal.

The target of the attack isn't me, but the swarm of slaves surrounding me.

"Gyaaaaaaaaa!" (Naofumi)

Upon the chant's completion, a Tsunami rises and washes away everything in its path. Including me.

The world spins around me, and I can't breathe.

As I think about it, Sadina steps into the wave and drags me out.

"It's a bit like a defensive wall of water, but the duration has been shortened and the impact has been increased to make it an offensive magic." (Sadina)

"Won't they die?" (Naofumi)

"No, don't worry about that. I controlled the output." (Sadina)

Just as Sadina said, the water is only covering a limited area.

The village's buildings aren't damaged.

The effect time was probably around 90 seconds. After which, the large wave of water disappeared as if it had never existed.

The only things left were the bodies of the brainwashed slaves collapsed on the floor.

"Now then, everyone tie them up so they can't move." (Sadina)

'Why have you become the leader,' is what I wanted to say, but I don't have the energy to do so.

And then...

"Now spill everything." (Naofumi)

I speak to the tied-up former comrade of Itsuki.

"Why must I answer to Evil?" (Welst)

"You know... Do you know who you're directing your words at?" (Naofumi)
I have quite a bit of confidence in my psychological torture skills.

Firo isn't here, but there are still plenty of Filo Rials here.

“Even if I were to die here, that would just be a sacrifice for the sake of justice.”
(Welst) “Justice... is it?” (Naofumi)

Doesn't this man have anything else on his mind?

He's acting like those annoying knights of the Three Heroes' Church.

But I guess he's of a similar type.

“Rishia, what sort of person is he?” (Naofumi)

“Um, among the companions in service to Itsuki, he's been there the longest.”
(Rishia)

Ah, so he was there when no one wanted to be my companion.

I no longer feel any mercy.

Though I never really had any from the beginning.

“And I've heard that his family was nobility within Melromark.” (Rishia) “Were they related to your family?” (Naofumi)

“They were in different territories. There are quite a few noble families in Melromark.” (Rishia)

Well that sounds about right. As long as there wasn't a large-scale event, I guess they would never meet. What's more, Rishia's a fallen noble.

He must have used a few of his connections to get himself into the Heroes' starting party.

Just like the princess mixed in among them.

Does that mean some seditious nobles are backing him?

I turn my gaze to the suspicious dagger the mage held.

I can't appraise it. It's quite a suspicious item.

I wonder what it is.

“Rishia.” (Naofumi)

“What is it?” (Rishia)

“Use this to stab him.” (Naofumi)

“Fueee!?” (Rishia)

Rishia reveals a surprised face as I turn her on her former comrade.

However, the mage’s face is even paler.

He’s turning blue.

“Stop! Don’t turn that thing on me!” (Welst)

“So you can use it on others, but the reverse is forbidden? You’re quite a selfish fellow.” (Naofumi)

I should begin threatening him.

This weapon is definitely related to the brainwashing.

Looking at it closely, it has a strange gem embedded into it.

“Atlas, can you feel anything from this?” (Naofumi)

“Yes, from the weapon Naofumi-sama is holding, a sinister aura is being emitted.” (Atlas) “I see.” (Naofumi)

There’s no doubt.

If this stabs him, he will be corrupted by Justice.

“Well, Rishia? This is a good opportunity to get back at the guy who planted false charges on you and got you kicked out.” (Naofumi) “Fueee.....” (Rishia)

Rishia wears a troubled expression and shakes as she approaches the mage one step at a time, dagger in hand.

So she’s really going to do it.

“Stop it! Don’t get any closer! The hammer of justice will punish all evil!”
(Welst) “Yeah, that’s right. You’re evil, and I’m justice. And Rishia is the hammer
that’ll punish you.” (Naofumi) “Evil should stay silent!” (Welst)

“I’m fine with evil. But you will be the one yielding to such evil. How
unfortunate. Where is your justice now?” (Naofumi)

I wonder just how deeply the belief that he is justice is embedded in his head.

Even if we stab him, I’m not sure he’ll even change at all...

I guess I should at least dispel the brainwashing on Kiel.

I drink a mana potion and enclose Kiel in my Shield Prison.

“Fue...” (Rishia)

“If you don’t want that dagger in your ribs, then spill out your guts.”
(Naofumi)

The Dagger of JUSTICE

“...Rishia, weren't we comrades? Just defeat that devil behind you, and together, we can spread Justice throughout the world. I'll put in a word to Mald. I'll convince them to let you be our comrade. So let's come to an agreement here.” (Welst)

Who the hell is Mald?

An important member of the Itsuki party... Is it Armor?

I get the feeling that there were a few more, but I'm not sure they even told me their names.

I mean, they were selfish beyond reason.

“... Where is Itsuki-sama?” (Rishia)

“If you save me now, I'll tell you. So won't you offer your hand here?” (Welst)
Silence surrounds the two figures.

Eventually...

With the sound of the wind being cut, the ropes tying the mage fall to the ground.

“Good work! Now go die in a ditch with the Evil over there!” (Welst)
The mage picks up his cane and begins chanting magic at Rishia.

“Gah-” (Welst)

And then he suddenly stops moving.

“As I thought, it was a lie. You have deluded yourself into thinking that in the name of justice, everything you do will be forgiven...” (Rishia)

I witnessed it.

Rishia didn't just cut the ropes, but the Magic User's body as well.

Rishia didn't believe from the beginning.

“Justice... Purge the evil...” (Welst)

“I won't let you.” (Rishia)

Rishia picked up the ropes and quickly bound the mage once more.

“Naofumi-san, I apologize. I was unable to draw out any useful information.”

(Rishia) “No, just bring him to the prison. We'll just torture him until he confesses everything. Nothing has been lost.” (Naofumi)

Anyways, so this dagger is able to brainwash.

And Itsuki was not needed in this plan.

But then, why is everyone repeating the words of Justice?

Eventually, the magic user awoke in the prison, and I once again began the interrogation.

“W-what!? I am...” (Welst)

“Now then, as I said before, I'll have you spill everything.” (Naofumi) “Ku...” (Welst)

This man sure is stubborn.

But I have plenty of ways to make him talk. And there are plenty of things I want to experiment.

“Okay, now I'll have you drink this water.” (Naofumi)

“W-what are you trying to do!?” (Welst)

From that reaction, it seems he’s not the one who ordered the poisoning of the well... Or was he just not told?

If he plainly refused, then that would clarify it.

“Just drink it.” (Naofumi)

“Guha! Sto-” (Welst)

I order the slaves to make him drink it forcefully.

“Gaba... uguuuuuuu... hah... hah...” (Welst)

He violently grasps at his own throat. His eyes are bloodshot.

“If you speak, it’ll be easier for you.” (Naofumi)

I take out an antidote and hold it at the tip of his nose.

You can use poison like this as well.

I don’t know who set the poison, but he did me a favor.

“Hey, hey, messenger of justice. If you don’t confess soon, you’ll die.” (Naofumi)

“Naofumi-chan, you look like you’re having fun.” (Sadina) “I’ll bet it’s quite a refreshing smile. I can tell from his voice.” (Atlas)

The peanut gallery is getting loud.

Though if Raphtalia was here, she would get mad at me.

“I won’t help you until you confess... If I’m able to capture all of your comrades, the nobles should retreat.” (Rishia) “Ugu... I’ll speak... I’ll speak, so...” (Welst)

Ah, so he is afraid of death.

And he seems to be in a bit of pain.

“Then speak. Based on the contents, I may free you. If you lie, you’ll be drinking more poison.” (Naofumi)

And so, we drew out information from the mage-like person.

Backing him was this country’s revolutionary faction, and he confirmed that Witch was with them.

Mald was their leader, and though he was their comrade, the mage didn’t know too much about him.

“Then tell me. What happened during the Spirit Turtle incident?” (Naofumi)
I could see the whites of the mage’s eyes, so I fed him the antidote.

“I think you already understand, but if you stay silent, then you’ll be drinking poison again.” (Naofumi) “Ku...” (Welst)

The mention of poison makes the mage cough. He glares at me as if I were a piece of garbage.

And then he begins speaking,

Itsuki’s group arrived before Ren and Motoyasu’s. Half a day faster at that. And he destroyed one of the statues just like the others.

But nothing happened, and the group was captured by the soldiers of the country.

Armor pushed all of the blame onto Itsuki. Armor shouted at him, telling him that he was no hero of justice.

With their trust broken, the group was thrown into jail. They were set to have an audience with the king... but the Spirit Turtle revived, and Itsuki was forced

to challenge it.

But without lifting a finger... His comrades came to a silent agreement. They got together behind Itsuki's back. They ran away, leaving him as a sacrifice to the Turtle.

Later, Armor declared that Justice without power was no Justice. Since Itsuki was unable to stop the Spirit Turtle, he was no justice.

And that was the story, apparently.

Most of the story was the mage's biased opinion, so I omitted it.

But that's quite something. I think I've heard those words in my world as well.

I see, so his comrades told him that he was no justice. They left him behind to give themselves time to escape. I guess that was enough to break him.

His current state was brought about by him denying the reality he was facing.

And, it seems that Raphtalia's experience on Cal Mira was no coincidence.

His party had long since noticed his habit of lying and holding back.

To satisfy his sense of justice, he went off to challenge the Spirit Turtle, and his comrades had had enough.

"Next is this." (Naofumi)

I take out the dagger.

I have a pretty good idea already, but just to make sure.

"What is this?" (Naofumi)

"..." (Welst)

"Will you let your silence destroy you?" (Naofumi)

"I got it from the people supporting Princess Malty." (Welst)

Malty? Who the hell is that?

Ah, it's Witch.

That name should have been forbidden.

But, I guess it's natural for the revolutionary faction to call her as such.

I guess I'll ignore it for now. The dagger is more important.

It seems that all he knew was that anyone slashed by the dagger would awaken to the concept of justice.

This is quite a peculiar item.

It's not... A legendary artifact, or something, right?

"Atlas, can you sense anything?" (Naofumi)

"Let's see... Aside from its ominous Aura, there seems to be a strange power coming from the center." (Atlas)

Is it from the strange jewel?

Its design looks a little familiar.

Witch... so she really was involved in this case.

But she isn't here.

Is she in the Castle Town?

It'll probably be dangerous if I don't come to their aid soon.

I thought everything would be solved when I defeat Itsuki, but the situation is beyond my expectations.

Witch is backed by the Revolutionary faction and probably the Three Heroes Church, and the poisoning of the water supply was conducted by one of these parties.

Three Heroes Church... I recall the weapon the pope held.

This is just a hypothesis, but...

Could this be the same? A replica of a weapon wielded by a Hero? Or perhaps an item that merely replicates its effect?

“N...niichan.” (Kiel)

I had previously dispelled Kiel’s brainwashing with my Shield Prison. She unsteadily walks towards me with a hand on her shoulder.

I had left her outside of the prison.

It’s been a while since I started the interrogation, so I guess she came to her senses.

“Oh, loin-clothed dog. How do you feel?” (Naofumi)

“There’s no way I could feel good. What the hell happened, Niichan?” (Kiel)

“You were brainwashed. You acted as if I were some sort of grand villain.”

(Naofumi) “Haha. Niichan can’t be that great of a person. You’re minion class at best.” (Kiel) “What was that!?” (Naofumi)

Well, there are some things I want to say, but it seems that the brainwashing has been dispelled magnificently.

Though, there’s still a possibility that she’s just acting.

“Do you remember what happened while you were brainwashed?” (Naofumi)

“Not really. But, I do remember being taken to a strange cave somewhere.”

(Kiel) “Cave?” (Naofumi)

“Yeah, it seemed like everyone was gathered there... I had the feeling that someone told me to go there... I had a vague idea that a trustable person like Niichan was there for some reason.” (Kiel)

So the main justice is inside of that cave?

Wait.

If the dagger was a Replica, then where’s the original?

How was it even produced in the first place?

The infectious attribute on it was exceptionally high.

In Kiel and the others' case, they had to take quite a few hits before they became infected.

But, it seems this dagger only has to pierce you once.

That means...

Witch is directly reporting to the Three Heroes Church and is receiving funds from the nobles.

That's why their cooperation is all over the place.

The sleeping drug was from the nobles, but the revolutionaries themselves didn't want to use Demi-Humans so they switched it to poison.

This sort of ad-libbing... Perhaps they'll try to masquerade as one of my slaves next.

Anyways, I'll have to seal off this Dagger's ability for now.

Based on all of this justice, this replica may have been based on Itsuki.

I heard that they were researching into the field of making replicas. If I assume they had some success in it, then this may have been the result.

The situation is much worse than I thought.

I don't think I could have expected such a situation even in my dreams.

"Do you know where the cave is?" (Naofumi)

I can probably find out with some more interrogations, but Kiel may know already.

"I think I'll be able to go there by scent." (Kiel)

"Good! Then let's go slaughter... no I should go to the neighboring village and check the damages." (Naofumi) "Understood!" (Kiel)

And so, we left the tied up, brainwashed slaves in the hands of the free slaves

and set off for the neighboring village.

Of course, we took the magic user with us just in case.

If he tries to attack us again, he'll get what's coming to him.

“...” (Rishia)

Rishia seems to be lost in thought.

“Are you pondering over whether Itsuki is the culprit or not?” (Naofumi) “... Yes.” (Rishia)

“For now, we can assume it's only his comrades. This may be wishful thinking, but Itsuki may be innocent.” (Naofumi) “I understand. For now, I'll just fight as Naofumi-san orders.” (Rishia)

I wonder. Will she say the same if Itsuki steps onto the battlefield?

I think that Itsuki is definitely involved in this riot in one way or another.

We need to be prepared for when he chooses to show himself.

But, for now, I'm worried about what became of the village I left to Ren and Firo.

Mob Mentality

As I approach the city, I could see fires blazing even from afar.

The people were not evacuating. They were taking refuge in the mansion Melty was using as her residence on the outskirts of the village.

The Justice Zombies were attacking while shouting out negative propaganda about me and the country.

These brainwashed people would usually be difficult to distinguish at a glance.

However, if they took a sufficient amount of damage, and the host's consciousness faded, then the bodies would continue to walk around like typical zombies without wills.

Their behavior is also a problem.

The situation has devolved as such: The zombies would attempt to climb the stone walls surrounding the mansion, while the people inside would knock them down with wind magic or physical force.

And within the fire, Ren and Firo were taking the initiative, going around and knocking out the insurgents.

The others would then use rope to tie them up.

“Are you alright!?” (Naofumi)

“Ah, Master~! Well, you see...” (Firo)

“Naofumi, how did your side go? Did you find Itsuki?” (Ren) “No.” (Naofumi)

I summarize the events of the village while I step in front to act as the shield I am.

These brainwashed people should have a sense of priority instilled within them.

They should be prioritizing killing me or Melty.

“For the sake of Justice, Perish!” (Merchant)

A merchant who had been laughing and conversing with me just yesterday thrusts a dagger at me.

And without a word, I activated Erst Strike Shield and Change Shield, creating a combo that inflicted Paralysis.

“What about the people you’re supposed to be protecting?” (Naofumi) “Ah, this kid says that matter is fine.” (Ren)

“Well, you see. I somehow know.” (Firo)

I see, so Firo can sense it with her feral instincts.

She can sense the actions of the other Filo Rials and their support.

“And this is that dagger?” (Ren)

“Yeah.” (Naofumi)

I take out the dagger and present it to Ren.

Of course, in order for him to analyze it.

Trying to insert it into my shield seems dangerous, so I’ll have Ren make a Copy of it.

It’s a dangerous item, but if he makes it his own... It might be fine.

“Try holding it for a second.” (Naofumi)

“Okay.” (Ren)

Ren grasps the hilt of the dagger, and his sword shines for a moment.

“Curse Series... The Dagger of Mob Mentality?” (Ren)

So it comes down to that.

And wait, it's a Curse Series?

There's more than the 7 Deadly Sins?

I see, so this dagger makes one's mind a single part of a whole and prevents an individual from making decisions on their own.

“Wait a second... Let me check it for more details.” (Ren)

Ren opens his status screen and reads through it.

“I apologize, I don't really know what this is supposed to mean.” (Ren)
He answers as he knocks down several zombies with his sword.

“Does it have any strange effects?”

“Equipment Bonus... Release by Brainwashing; Mutual Understanding; Don't worry, I understand you.”

... That's seriously suspicious.

Ren probably thinks so as well. He has a complicated expression.

“This is Release? Mutual Understanding? Can you even call that understanding?” (Ren) “Does it mean your troubles will fade away?” (Naofumi)
So it stains you with the ideology of another...

Anyone who objects to that psychology is an enemy, and if you infect them, they'll be comrades once more.

This isn't a game...

This is quite a disgusting dagger.

“Where is Eclair-san?”

Rishia looks around and asks Ren.

Eclair... Is that Female Knight?

She's probably being useful around now.

I mean, the girl knows nothing but how to fight.

“Ah, she is...” (Ren)

Ren's face darkens.

And he points to the mansion.

“Is she defending from the mansion?” (Rishia)

“It seems that she received quite a shock upon seeing the strange actions and speech of the enemy.” (Ren) “What?” (Naofumi)

“How can I get them to understand me? The Justice I seek is nothing like this. She couldn't raise her hands against her former comrades.” (Ren)

Ah, Female Knight had a strong sense of justice.

If the enemy takes on the name of Justice and spouts incomprehensible nonsense, I guess she would get mad.

The citizens she vowed to protect were fighting her.

Though they were being controlled by others, they still maintained some of their selves. It would be impossible to attack at full power.

They may even pretend to be allies.

This possibility could lead to suspicion and infighting.

This really is an annoying ability.

“A world without Slavery or Discrimination. An equal world,’ she said as the amount of turned allies around her increased. It must have been tough.” (Ren) Well, she does have a point.

In this country’s eyes, it is impossible for humans and Demi-Humans to live side by side. If a Demi-Human is officially treated as an equal, then people accuse the government of giving them preferential treatment.

One side says that I’m doing the brainwashing, while they spread their argument through brainwashing. There’s no end to it.

This village had no one who could undo the brainwashing, so there’s no helping it.

Equal? No Discrimination? Those are some expressions that make me sick to my stomach.

Even in my ‘equal’ world, there’s been no one who’s been able to practice true equality.

Superiority exists in all worlds.

When someone is born, he’s already being judged. Equality is a laughable concept. [\[5\]](#)

The quest to make an impartial, equal world without war is merely a trigger to unleash more war.

It’s like when she beat up and minorly tortured Ren in order to teach him a lesson.

Anyways, what does the word Equality even mean?

The meaning I know has all humans treated equally without discrimination or favorable treatment.

It’s unattainable and merely something to be strived for.

But in a world with Slavery as a set system, if such things are preached, no one will lend their ears.

My world only got rid of slavery recently.

If anyone actually supported such a cause, they would have ulterior motives.

And the reason slavery became extinct in my world was largely due to the changing times; slaves were no longer needed. [6]

This world is still in need of some form of labor.

To try and preach such a concept that's realistically impossible, I can only see her as a child.

That's a concept that the Three Heroes Church and the Revolutionary faction would simply use to their advantage.

"I'll put lecturing Female Knight off to a later date. Do you think we'll be able to manage here?" (Naofumi) "The enemy numbers are too great. At this rate, we can tie all of them up, but it will take too long." (Ren) "I see..." (Naofumi)

Even if the people I brought along also fight, it will still take a long time.

"Naofumi-cha~n." (Sadina)

... Ah, right. Sadina was with us.

"Hey... Sadina. Do you have a way to take out the overflowing mass of brainwashed children and put out the fire all at once?" (Naofumi) "Leave it to me! Everyone!" (Sadina)

Sadina began swinging her harpoon like a conductor's baton.

Perhaps because she brought along more people this time, I can feel the magic in the air condensing to greater levels than before. It's already a large scale magic formation.

Ah, this person is comparable to Firo in useful abilities.

Hm? Firo?

“Firo, mobilize the other Filo Rials to cast Choral Magic as well!” (Naofumi) “Got it~! N... Nn...” (Firo)

Firo cleared her throat and began singing.

And in response to that, the other Filo Rials in the area began chirping.

“Naofumi-chan, go evacuate the children who aren’t brainwashed.” (Sadina)

“Understood.” (Naofumi)

By my orders, I evacuated everyone who was still sane.

I won’t let the situation devolve to the level it was before.

“Wait!”

“Submit to the will of justice!”

“Devil of the Shield!”

All the brainwashed people say the same things.

“Ren!” (Naofumi)

“Leave it to me! 「Hundred Sword!」” (Ren)

The pursuing slaves are blocked by countless strikes from Ren’s area of effect skill.

Heroes with offensive capabilities sure are useful.

「「「Tidal Wave!」」」

「『Sweet Song!』』』

Upon Sadina's magic, a large wave washes away the Justice Zombies in front of the mansion, and upon hearing Firo's song, other Zombies turn white-eyed and fall down on the spot.

It's probably a magic with a sleep effect.

It seems that Firo's singing ability has reached magical levels.

"I guess that we succeeded in the suppression for now." (Naofumi) "No, not yet." (Ren)

Ren points deeper into the city.

And from that direction, Brainwashed Zombies continue to pour in, one after the other.

Where the hell did these people come from anyways!?

They must have grown in number from the inhabitants of this village.

"... The person leading all of them probably isn't here." (Naofumi)

In a situation like this, the person leading the charge, like the Magic User in my village, probably retreated already.

"No, there's one suspicious place." (Ren)

Ren signals towards the village plaza.

Hm? For some reason, I see a Gaelion-like object breathing fire all over the place.

On its back is someone who looks like Taniko.

"Naofumi, there was a church built behind there, right?" (Ren) "Yeah."

(Naofumi)

“The Brainwashed army’s built up their defenses there. We can almost break through. Won’t you come with us?” (Ren) “I see.” (Naofumi)

Itsuki may be there. Maybe...

“We’re going over to the church. You guys should continue to bind the defeated enemies. Find a way to contain them all.” (Naofumi) “Understood, Naofumi-chan.” (Sadina)

Yeah, it’s best to leave the defenses to her.

It would be bad if we thinned our forces enough for them to break through.

And the constant battle has fatigued both sides.

Just raising one’s level doesn’t change sustained injury, fatigue, or hunger.

“Then Firo and the Filo Rials will go over to where Gaelion is fighting!” (Naofumi) “Eh?... I have to go to Gaelion?” (Firo)

Firo states her opinion.

It seems the other Filo Rials agree.

“Just shut up and go.” (Naofumi)

“Oka~y...” (Firo)

“Is Melty alright?” (Naofumi)

“Yeah. Melty-chan is strong, so she’s fine.” (Firo)

“I see. Well, she was strong enough to blow away my house.” (Naofumi)
A militaristic princess... It’s a common theme in literature, but it makes me see just how much Melty has changed.

Even though I’m the cause.

But that doesn't matter for now. I just need to find a way into the church.

I get on Firo's back and gallantly rush onto the battlefield.

Ren is with us.

On the way, we encounter attacks from brainwashed people, but they are no match for Firo's speed.

My place's Filo Rials sure are high class.

Though, besides Firo's first disciple, Motoyasu raised them all.

Is he going to become the Filo Rial Master?

What would I do if he actually becomes one...?

Remnants

“KYUA!” (Gaelion)

Aboard Firo, we assault the heavily fortified church.

People fly left and right in the face of Firo’s charge.

... They’re fine, right? I don’t think they’ll die from something like this.

I somehow feel invincible right now.

And we reach the area where Gaelion was fighting.

Firo and Gaelion lock eyes and begin intimidating one another.

They’ll still fight in a situation like this?

They stare at each other, fighting with their gazes for a while. Suddenly, Gaelion lets out a laugh.

“Mu-!” (Firo)

“This isn’t the time for that! By the way, what is supposed to be here?”

(Naofumi)

I pose the question to Rishia and Atlas, who are riding the same Filo Rial.

“A sinister aura is intertwined with the flow of energy here. I’m not exactly sure.” (Atlas) “Fumu.” (Naofumi)

It would be nice if we finally found Itsuki, but that’s just wishful thinking.

We step over the Church’s threshold.

Inside are several people I have never seen before, busy at work tampering with the arrangement of the building.

They are mainly scratching out the shield mark on the four saint symbol and destroying any shield-related objects of worship.

“Good job coming all the way here.” (???)

A slightly familiar face steps forward and boldly greets me.

Who is this again?

There are too many people who I’ve seen before but can never remember. It’s quite troubling.

All of these people are wearing work clothes.

They’re probably not the people who are supposed to be managing the church.

I have way too many enemies to remember them all.

“To the Devil of the Shield, let me inflict God’s Judgment.” (???) “... Ah, so it’s like that.” (Naofumi)

So the people who infiltrated the temple and began to desecrate it were the remnants of the Three Hero Church.

I think I saw some of these people when I tried to buy holy water and they tried to sell me low quality ones.

And, I remember the person in front of me.

It’s the Sister who drove us away from the Dragon Hourglass.

“So this is where the rebels went.” (Naofumi)

“No matter what the Devil says, the religion of Melromark is the Three Hero Church. We will follow the late pope’s wishes and govern the world.” (Sister)

Govern... the world.

It's a psychology that runs rampant in cults.

A united world would just be unnerving.

“And... You've fallen into our trap, Devil of the Shield!” (Sister)

A large magic circle lights up on the floor beneath my feet.

And at that moment, my body suddenly feels several times heavier.

“Ku...”

Ren, Rishia and the rest groan.

“Kyuaa!?” (Gaelion)

Gaelion covers Taniko with his wings as if to protect her. He readies himself to attack.

“What did you do?” (Naofumi)

“It would be troublesome if you moved, so we set up some magic to restrain you.” (Sister)

Hmm... So this magic circle can prevent movement.

“Hm? It's heavy?” (Firo)

Firo slowly lifts her feet and begins walking towards the Three Hero Church remnants.

I guess they're witnessing the overwhelming difference in power.

Firo received my stat corrections from birth, so I guess a normal level of restraint won't hold her.

“Raise the output!” (Sister)

The magic circle begins to glow brighter, and Ren slams onto the ground.

Where are they supplying the power from? I can't tell...

“Naofumi-sama, what should we do?” (Atlas)

... I wonder why Atlas is still fine.

She's standing next to Firo as if nothing happened to her.

I'm also able to handle it to some extent with my stats.

... If I think about it, isn't my situation still really advantageous right now?

As I thought that, brainwashed slaves begin pouring into the church.

It seems things just won't go my way today.

“Those who have awoken to our faith. Even if they be stupid, vulgar Demi-Humans, if they are willing to lay down their lives for us, then perhaps God will forgive them in heaven. Now, fight to repent for your existence!” (Sister)

That was a really dubious speech.

I really want to retort something now.

Why am I only ever surrounded by idiots?

Why are they sending them to fight with the assumption that they'll die?

Maybe it's because they're people of the Devil's village.

... And what does she mean by 'perhaps'? She really left it open ended.

But, this is kinda bad. Rishia might be able to move, but Ren and the Filo Rials are immobile.

I think Gaelion and Taniko are fine as well.

Besides Ren, it seems that everyone above Class-Up level is alright.

“Kyua!” (Gaelion)

Gaelion lashes his tail out at the approaching slaves’ faces, but the magic circle makes his movement too slow.

Ah... It seems that this magic is only affecting us.

What should I do? With Firo’s help, these guys won’t be a problem.

But if we leave Ren and the others behind, they’ll be in danger.

I’ll have to fight anyways, but I get the feeling there’s a better strategy here.

And then, I suddenly remember something.

I put my hand on the shield and change its form.

The shield I select is the Spirit Turtle Carapace Shield.

I’ve strengthened it to some extent.

It’s not as strong as the Soul Eater Shield, but its defense is considerable.

And its Equipment Bonus is Gravity Field.

“Oh? My body is lighter?” (Firo)

“Yeah, a little bit.” (Ren)

Everyone affected by the magic begins to rise up.

Right, the Gravity Field ability allows me to manipulate Gravitational force to some extent. This restraint magic simply made one’s body heavier. If they used something like magical rope to bind us, then we would be in trouble.

Imagining the feeling of becoming lighter, I deployed a field.

Of course, it’s an ability I’ve tested before by myself.

Its weakness is that once one becomes lighter, they are unable to put the same amount of force into their attacks.

Contrarily, by increasing gravity, it becomes harder to move, but you can put

more force into your attacks.

Another disadvantage is that it can't differentiate between friend and foe. An interesting use is that if an enemy is sent flying, it can increase their impact, and if you are sent flying, it can decrease yours.

There's no question why this was such a difficult material for the Old Man to make a weapon out of.

"This should let you move a little. Please endure it until we can dispel this trap."

(Naofumi) "Ah, like this, I can fight." (Ren)

"I'll also try hard." (Atlas)

"Yes." (Rishia)

Rishia and Atlas nod

"Let's go!" (Rishia)

Rishia throws her knife, and it rapidly blocks the escape of the Sister who deployed the trap.

As I thought. She's moving well under these conditions. Atlas follows her lead and thrusts at the brainwashed slaves.

"Ugu-" (Slave)

The slaves that take on Atlas's strike cry out.

"I'll have you sleep for a bit." (Atlas)

"I apologize! 「Meteor Sword」!"

Ren apologizes as he uses Meteor Sword to send Shockwaves at the Slaves and

Remnants.

“What are you doing!? Increase the radius and output further!” (Sister)

As the enemy formation is thrown into disarray, some of us are able to step out of the circle.

I sit on Firo’s back as I direct the battle.

Well, the difference in power is quite evident. They’re all pretty much small fries.

The representative, annoying Sister continues to scream out orders.

“Rain down your spells on the Demon!” (Sister)

Finally!

I’ve been waiting for this.

I bring out the Spirit Turtle Heart Shield.

Equipment Bonus: C Magic Snatch, C Gravity Shot, Tenacity Enhancement.

C is short for counter. I need to be attacked to use them.

I’ll finally be able to test out Magic Snatch and Gravity Shot.

The Three Hero Church faces me and begins to cast Choral Magic.

「Choral Magic! Lightning Judgement!」

An electrified mass of magical energy in the shape of a cross flies towards me and Firo.

I lift up my shield and take it head on.

“Naofumi!?” (Ren)

“Naofumi-sama?” (Atlas)

“Naofumi-san!” (Rishia)

I feel some static coursing around my body, but I don't feel any pain.

“Waaaaaah... Firo's feathers are standing on end, master!” (Firo)

The static electricity seems to have made Firo ecstatic. Ignoring her, I look at the enemy. [7]

I even needed to protect the brainwashed slaves from the large scale magic assault.

Aren't they supposed to be allies now? These guys are scum as always.

“There's no problems.” (Naofumi)

“As expected of Naofumi-sama!” (Atlas)

“Amazing...” (Taniko)

“Yes.” (Rishia)

“KYUA!” (Gaelion)

Taniko and Gaelion also chime in as they prepare their magic.

Both of them specialize in the same magic system, so they can do joint spells.

『I order of thee to guide Gaelion's power, and to request for it to materialize. Earth Pulse, give me power.』 (Taniko) 『KyuaKyuaKyua!』 (Gaelion)

『High Fire Blaze! 』(Taniko)

As Taniko finishes the chant, a large ball of fire appears from Gaelion's mouth and flies towards the Remnants of the Three Hero Church.

Oh, it's got quite a bit of power to it. It also gives off a joint attack-like vibe, which is cool.

Not that I really care or anything...

Anyways, while Gaelion and Taniko were busy showing off, I had just been hit with Choral Magic.

My shield shines blue, and the Counter Effect begins to activate.

And from the shield, several Blue and White balls fly back out at the casters.

“Wha-” (Sister)

It must have been an unexpected attack. Quite a few people are unable to avoid it.

Well, the balls are quite fast. Besides people who have classed-up and people that are hiding special powers, most will find them difficult to dodge.

“W-what!? Nothing’s happening isn’t it? Devil of the Shield, don’t surprise us like that!” (Sister) “The surprise comes later.” (Naofumi)

I give a wide smile.

These people have no idea just what sort of attack they just took.

“Gu... My body is!?” (Sister)

All of a sudden, she puts her hand on the floor. She desperately struggles to lift herself, but it’s not working.

Oh? The restraint circle is fading. I guess the casters lost their concentration.

And the blue and white lights leave their targets and return to me.

I check my status and find that my Mana has recovered.

Right, Magic Snatch and Gravity Shot fulfilled their duties.

These two will be a useful counters against mages.

Magic Snatch, as its name suggests, steals magic from its target. Gravity Shot immobilizes them with Gravity Magic while Magic Snatch does its work.

But, as expected, it doesn't do any damage.

“Attack!” (Naofumi)

On my orders, my comrades nod.

“Okay!” (Atlas)

“Leave it to me!” (Ren)

“KYUA!” (Gaelion)

The Three Hero Church remnants use the brainwashed people as shields to retreat further into the church, and we eventually lose sight of them.

Of course, we tried to pursue, but there were too many enemies.

“Damn... Running is all they're good at.” (Naofumi)

The Demon Lord of the Shield

The shouts of justice from the brainwashed slaves fill the air, and I can no longer hear anything else.

I am getting the urge to burn them all with my Wrath, but I can't really be inflicting damage on these people.

I'll have to pay them compensation when all of this is resolved, and if they ask for medical fees... Should I just play dumb?

"Firo." (Naofumi)

"What~?" (Firo)

"Throw them off! With enough force to kill!" (Naofumi)

"They're people Firo knows, so no!" (Firo)

Ku... she's fine with leaving them on the brink of death, but she won't kill.

It may be because she spends much more time in this town than me.

Her memory isn't to be underestimated, so she can probably recognize the villagers.

But this swarm is making it hard to proceed.

"Naofumi sometimes makes some dark jokes, doesn't he?" (Ren) "Everyone usually understands when he does." (Rishia)

"Right, we all know of Naofumi-sama's kindness." (Atlas) "KYUA!" (Gaelion)

"No idea what you're talking about. I just want to end this and go home."
(Taniko)

The one who wanted to return was Taniko. She seemed to be fed up.

I don't know what sort of misunderstanding everyone was making, but I was pretty serious there.

But correcting them would be a pain.

Fighting is also getting to be a pain, so I gather my comrades into a single area and deploy a magically strengthened Meteor Shield.

It seems that if I charge it with magic, I can increase its range.

I expand it to a radius of 5 meters.

With the barrier deployed, we drive all the enemies out of it.

Ren and Co. protect the barrier while we walk forward. But this is also a pain.

The slaves keep on breaching my defenses.

When that happens, the infiltrator gets knocked out and tied up.

It's a common setting in Zombie franchises, but having to deal with it in a fantasy setting is annoying.

If the culprit was a vampire or something, then I might look forward to fighting them, but this setting isn't fun at all.

And we reach and open a large door in the depths of the church.

Inside is...

The room looks quite important. It has multiple platforms of raising elevation.

In the center is a ceremonial altar, or perhaps I should call it a ritual altar.

I think that I remember being told that that point had geographic significance or something.

It seems we've fallen into a trap once more. The remaining remnants of the church and Itsuki's former companion, Armor, are sitting on a high place, looking down on us.

“So you finally arrived, Devil of the Shield. I was getting tired of waiting.”
(Armor) “... Does the fact that you’re here mean that Witch is here too?”
(Naofumi) “Are you referring to our comrade, Princess Malty? Unfortunately, she is not present.” (Armor) “Damn! By the way, am I right in assuming that you’re the primary culprit in inciting this ruckus?” (Naofumi) “Ruckus? You call our crusade in the name of Justice a simple Ruckus!?” (Armor) “Crusade? You sure love to joke, you terrorist.” (Naofumi)

I laugh as I provoke him.

Armor’s face dyes red as he visibly gets increasingly angry.

It’s because this guy has a needless amount of pride.

It’ll be easier to make him self-destruct with words.

“What was that!?” (Armor)

“Could it be that you’re a believer of the Three Hero Church sect? That heretical one?” (Naofumi) “No, the Three Hero Church sympathizes with our Justice. They are merely our kindred souls.” (Armor) “Is that so.” (Naofumi)

As always, he’s carrying a self-centered sense of Justice.

This Armor always had a stuck up attitude. Perhaps that came from his status as a noble.

Even so, he answered quite naturally.

I guess using his compatriots to provoke him won’t work.

“And, like, did I even do anything to make you mad at me?” (Naofumi)
Though the Three Hero Church has its own reasons, I don’t remember offending Armor or the rest of the Itsuki Party to that extent.

I’m sure that they do dislike me, but only to the extent where cooperation would be impossible.

I didn’t even interact with them much.

We were only in the same party for an hour or two on Cal Mira.

“Don’t play dumb. You use your power of brainwashing to obstruct our Justice!”
(Armor)

... The hell?

Um... You’ve lost me, mate.

Let’s put aside the fact that they’re the ones brainwashing for now.

What exactly is his justice supposed to be doing?

“Let me ask for argument’s sake. What is your Justice?” (Naofumi)

He probably won’t say anything good.

“Our Justice is one where evil does not exist. It is to make a peaceful world based on our glorious ideals. And as such, we must Judge all evil with our power!” (Armor)

Totally self-righteous.

The thing that shocks me the most is that people with such a dictatorial mindset actually exist in this world.

Isn’t there something they find strange about calling themselves Justice in the first place?

I guess the result of Itsuki’s loss is starting to take root in them.

“And? What exactly did I do to get in your way?” (Naofumi)

“You... No, the Fake Heroes caused our party’s prestige to drop, and caused us to be pursued by the country. You all destroyed our status! Atone for your sins!” (Armor)

... So because of Itsuki’s loss, their prestige from being of a Hero’s party fell, and they were unable to reform the world and convince others to follow them as they pleased. And all fault lied with the Four Heroes?

What’s more, the fact that my peddling within Melromark helped raise the

morale of the populace and was looked on as an act of good simply pissed them off further.

Oh, I think I've received requests from villages to send peddling carts over.

Because I made sure to regulate the pricing, I didn't really pay attention to the orders themselves.

Because of my work, they were unable to gain ground, so they came to resent me.

Please just get over it. These people with broken thought processes are gathering against me.

I'm getting the urge to punch them into silence. And that will take a while with my attack.

"Devil of the Shield... No, Demon Lord of the Shield! We, the new Heroes, will defeat you!" (Armor)

With a flash, he takes a familiar sword out of his scabbard and takes the shield off of his back. He gets into a battle position.

So I've finally surpassed the stage of Devil, and evolved into the Demon Lord.

For a Hero's enemy, a Demon Lord is standard fare, but no matter how I look at it, this situation is a bit off.

And why does he get to be the New Hero?

Just proclaiming it yourself doesn't make it so.

If I lose here, will all the fault of this incident fall to me?

Now that I think about it, there's no need for them to use my slaves in their rebellion.

They could simply have them rampage and then kill them in the name of Justice to earn fame.

Something similar will probably happen here as well.

They'll kill all the Demi-Humans and sweet talk the Humans into silence and eventually abandon them.

Just how self-righteous of an organization are you making here?

“Evil, is it... Naofumi, what should we do?” (Ren)

“Justice and Evil are idiotic concepts. The reason we were summoned was to prevent as many casualties as possible from the wave. We can’t really choose the means.” (Naofumi) “That sounds like something you would say. No, now I think you’re actually in the right. Next is... Ah, the person who was with Witch was that person.” (Ren)

Ren holds out his sword and glares at Armor.

Ah, so I was right.

Why couldn’t he remember until now anyways?

Well, the Ren back then thought Solo Play was cool, so he didn’t put anyone besides his own comrades to memory.

Not that I should be talking, but I bet he never looked at their faces more than once.

“Someone who would do things like this, even if they were deluded, even if they were seen as Heroes, will never be Justice.” (Ren) “Yes, I think so as well!” (Rishia)

Rishia seems motivated.

For her to give such a definite response with her former comrade, Armor, as the enemy... Rishia sure has changed.

She would have trembled before him if it was the Rishia I first picked up.

“What course of action should we take, Naofumi-sama?” (Atlas) “KYUA!” (Gaelion)

“Should we just take them out?” (Taniko)

Atlas, Gaelion, and Taniko are also quite motivated.

“Mu... Is the one standing there Rishia? As I thought, you were a filthy traitor!”

(Armor) “What do you mean traitor? You were the ones who drove her out.”

(Naofumi) “...I ... can’t accept anyone who would lead things such as this!”

(Rishia)

Rishia boldly declares at Armor.

Did she just nonchalantly ignore me?

Don’t just treat me as a background character. I’ll smack you.

“There’s no way this is Justice!” (Rishia)

Ah, and the thing that caught my attention, Armor’s sword and shield...

I remember the sword quite clearly.

It’s the one I saw at the Zeltburg auction, the Spirit Turtle Sword.

It was an item so expensive, I would never dream of holding it. Why does Armor have it?

He probably used the influence of the nobles backing him.

Or perhaps it was stolen.

Steal... Now that I think about it, there are plenty of Heroes who break into houses and look through the drawers and chests.

This is magnificent. He’s definitely a Hero.

But that doesn’t really matter. It’s not like that sword is mine.

But that Shield that looks like the counterpart of the sword.

Could that be...

“Oy! Is that Shield stolen goods?” (Naofumi)

“Surely you jest. I merely purified a wicked item manufactured by the Demon King.” (Armor)

Oy, that’s the Shield the Old Man and Imya’s uncle worked hard to make. The

Shield made just for me.

I won't forgive this! It's time for judgment!

What do you mean purify, you thieves!?

“That Shield is mine!” (Naofumi)

If it's used carelessly and gets scratched, its value will drop.

“That Armor is my prey. You guys go deal with the rest. There's no need to keep them alive, so fight with all your strength, but don't kill the brainwashed ones.”

(Naofumi)

Spirit Turtle Armor

I'm reaching my limit here.

I don't plan on letting these people live. My stress has reached its peak.

"Understood! But... They're Itsuki's former comrades, right? Will you be alright?" (Ren) "They're no one's comrades right now. They're the scum of this country... no, of this world. We need to deal with them as soon as possible. There's no merit in leaving the Three Hero Church alive either." (Naofumi)
"Understood." (Ren)

With Ren's reply, the other members run forward.

I get off Firo and begin walking towards Armor.

I left Firo to deal with the others. If I let anyone else fight this one, then the shield I've been waiting so long for would get damaged.

"Die!" (Armor)

Sure of his victory, Armor swings down the Spirit Turtle Sword at me with all his might.

It seems that the remnants of the Three Hero Church are continuously casting support magic on him as well.

They don't have any time to discuss the matter. They're unorganized 'til the end.

However... I use one hand to catch the blade just before it reaches me.

Sparks fly everywhere as the metal collides.

“Gunu!? He stopped it unarmed!? What is this farce!?” (Armor)

Armor’s expression is colored with surprise.

I apply pressure to my hand as Armor puts all of his weight into withdrawing the blade. Did he think that someone who never received any growth corrections would be able to defeat a fully-strengthened Hero?

I’ve never seen his stats, but the only thing I can compare him to is the Rishia of the past.

The support magic doesn’t seem to be helping much.

“Nuo! Unhand me, Demon King! Don’t dirty me with your foul presence, you fiend!” (Armor) [8]

Even though he was the one who rushed at me...

Since when were counterattacks off limits? Are you a child?

Should I feed you a poison mushroom?

... I don’t think that I’m bullying him, but I’m getting a strange feeling.

“How absurd! The Hero of the Sword is only at that level... I guess the true Demon Lord can’t be dealt with using such half-hearted measures...” (Armor)

“Shut up.” (Naofumi)

I use the principle of leverage to steal his sword.

Without taking any damage, I managed to take my opponent’s weapon. I think I’ve seen this scene in a game before...

I didn’t think I would be able to do such a thing in real life, but it was surprisingly easy.

Though, it’s probably due to the defense I’m getting from the Shield.

This sword was quite valuable, right? I bet I could sell it for quite a bit.

Though I could also let Raphtalia or the other slaves use it.

But first, I better let Ren copy it.

“Ren!” (Naofumi)

Before the system rejects it, I throw the sword at Ren.

And Ren catches it by reflex.

“Wow... This is quite a sword.” (Ren)

I’m not sure if the Weapon Copy is working, but it looks like he’s reading its stats.

As a result... The sword suddenly became worn out beyond recognition.

“Ah! The Sword I was going to put to good use!” (Naofumi) ^[9]

“Um... Sorry.” (Ren)

I had completely forgotten about his curse!

Dammit.

I have to move on. It’s not like losing it hurt me.

It wasn’t mine to begin with.

“Wha... The Holy Sword Rusted... You Monsters!” (Armor)

Yes, it is quite a spectacle when you’re seeing it for the first time.

Just as surprising as when I first witnessed the brainwashing dagger.

No, for now, I have to think of how to get the Shield away from him.

The shield the Old Man made is special.

I can't let Ren touch it.

"Ren, no matter what, you can't touch the Shield he's holding." (Naofumi) "G-got it. So please don't glare at me with such bloodlust." (Ren)

Ren changes his sword to the Spirit Turtle Sword.

"Now then, I'll have you return that shield." (Naofumi)

As I step forwards, it seems evident that Armor lost all of the momentum he had before. He draws back, as if to retreat.

Did he lose his confidence from having his prided weapon destroyed?

"You seem to be the ringleader here. I'll have you spill everything. It may be a bit messy, but I'll have you pay the tab for picking a fight with me as well."

(Naofumi)

Without a moment's delay, I grab Armor's collar and drag him towards me.

Armor immediately puts the shield in front to protect himself, but it's too late.

This guy's been pissing me off for a while. I'll take the opportunity to inflict a bit of torture.

His Justice is a nuisance.

"There's no choice. Mald, I won't forget your sacrifice!" (Three Hero Church Member) "What!? Are you betraying me!?" (Armor)

One of the Three Hero Church followers takes out a bomb-like item and throws it towards us.

"There!" (Rishia)

Rishia throws her dagger at the projectile, causing it to explode in midair.

And the explosion encompassed the thrower as well.

“GYAAAAAA!?” (Three Hero Church)

Did he plan to take everyone out, enemy and ally?

There should be a limit to idiocy! ^[10]

As soon as he was at a disadvantage, he cut off all his comrades. As expected of the people Witch sided with.

Now then, how do I take this shield...

“Atlas!” (Naofumi)

“Yes, coming!” (Atlas)

“What about Firo?” (Firo)

“You’re overkill. Go play with the slaves.” (Naofumi) “Got it!” (Firo)

“Can you to render them unconscious?” (Naofumi)

“I’ll try.” (Firo)

Now then, as per my order, Atlas comes running over.

I push Armor in her direction and issue orders.

“Keep pricking his vital points until he can’t feel anything anymore.”^[11]

“Yes, as Naofumi-sama commands.” (Atlas)

“Guru... Uge... Sto...” (Armor)

Atlas circles the man while thrusting at him. He desperately lifts the shield to defend, but Atlas is too fast.

Every time she hits, his facial expression changes. It’s quite interesting.

And after a while, he drops the Shield, and I lift it up.

As soon as I touch it, a light goes off, and Weapon Copy begins to activate.

You have activated Weapon Copy.

You have unlocked the conditions to use Spirit Turtle Armor.

Spirit Turtle Shell^[12] 0/70 C

Ability Bonus

...

Equipment Bonus

Skill:

「S Float Shield」,「Reflect Shield」

Special Bonus:

Gravity Field, C Soul Recovery, C Magic Snatch, C Gravity Shot, Tenacity Enhancement, Magic Defense (Large), Lightning Resistance, SP Drain Block, Growing Power Weapon Proficiency 0

Amazing... It has all of the best bonuses from the other Spirit Turtle Shields.

Excluding Wrath, its base stats are the highest of any Shield in my possession.

I wonder what sort of effect Growing Power has.

Can this Shield Evolve like Wrath?

S Float Shield is probably an extension of E Float Shield and a Semi-Passive Skill.

It'll probably let me extend beyond 'Second Shield.'

What could Reflect Shield do?

From its name, I expect it to reflect received damage to some extent, but I guess that makes it useless against small fries.

I'll have fun unlocking more powers by awakening it.

But, I don't think it can get much better than this.

This is the best part. I probably already have many of the needed materials in order to strengthen this shield.

It's made of the same materials as the other Spirit Turtle Shields I have, so I'll assume that's the case.

It's unfortunate that I don't have the free time to strengthen it right away.

"Let's go!" (Atlas)

""Pii!"" (Filo Rial)

Matching Atlas's timing, a Filo Rial chick joins and kicks Armor.

"Guhaaaa!" (Armor)

Armor twirls in the air as he flies several meters.

You reap what you sow.

Remember kids, stealing is bad.

This man's thought process sure is strange.

Could it be that? He thought he could win against a stronger opponent through resourcefulness and skills?

Their group is unorganized through and through.

If he won, he would claim that it was because I was foolish.

And saying those lines would make his side seem like the righteous one.

Throughout history, most tacticians can be seen as cowards if you change your perspective.

... I don't mean to criticize; I'm a fan of Manga and Light Novels, so I get it.

From the enemy's side, I'm most definitely a heinous villain.

“Now then, have you finally understood the difference in power, self-proclaimed ‘New Hero?’” (Naofumi) “Gu...” (Armor)

Looking around, it seems that all but the brainwashed slaves have been pretty much taken care of.

Seeing the annoying Three Hero Church that put me through such agony in such a state puts my heart at ease.

“Take them all in. Everyone who resists gets a death sentence.” (Naofumi) “You sound just like a villain, Naofumi...” (Ren)

Ren retorts. How annoying.

I won't say I'm not one.

I glare at Ren, and he shifts his gaze back to the enemy.

“Running also warrants death.” (Ren)

Says Ren in a yakuza-esque voice, pointing his newly copied weapon at the Three Hero Church remnants and threatening them.

“G-god... Please deliver us from the Demon Lord's curse...” (Sister)

A sister of the church pleads.

Aren't the people before you supposed to be fake heroes who go against God?

Begging for one's life now is unsightly.

“I don't think I'm wrong, and I don't believe you're right. Even without the brainwashing.” (Ren) “That's just because you've been brainwashed!” (Sister)

“... This isn't getting anywhere. You people only believe whatever's convenient at the time. Because I've been wrong many times, I'll say this. You people are

wrong! If you want to make amends, now is the time. I'll plead for everyone here to keep their heads. Surrender." (Ren)

How soft. I doubt these people have any hope of rehabilitation.

... Looking at it from Ren's perspective, he made many mistakes, and Female Knight was the one who preached to him and woke him up. He probably wants to do the same for another, but he's picking the wrong group.

Just as I thought. Ren's words fall on deaf ears, and the Sister pulls a dagger from the inside of her robe.

"Submit to our Justice, you fake!" (Sister)

She stabbed at him.

But that was a meaningless action.

Firo is already behind her.

"Hup! (Firo)

"Gyah!" (Sister)

Firo lightly drops her heel on the sister's head, and the sister falls onto the floor.

... Is she dead? I hope so.

The other remnants are pretty much the same. Besides the brainwashed slaves, they pose no threat whatsoever.

Gaelion starts making a game of lightly tossing them at one another.

There is no need to hold back against the ones who acted of their own volition.

More and more Zombies are pouring in, making escape impossible.

Annihilating all of the forces here should be enough to set back their plans.

"Damn..." (Armor)

Armor slowly rises to his feet.

He's surprisingly tough.

"I guess it's about time to finish this. There's no need to keep you alive. Shall I make you regret baring your fangs at me?" (Naofumi)

Chasing Too Far

Ren and Motoyasu are Heroes, so I can't kill them, and there are some things I need to make Witch do, so I'd like to leave her (barely) alive if possible.

But these guys are different.

In fact, in order to prevent them from harming more people, it's best to make them leave the stage early. For the sake of the world.

“And, like, did you seriously think you could beat me with such low power?”
(Naofumi)

A possibility is that Armor challenged Ren when he was a bandit and thought he could beat me if that was my power level. But, the Ren of that time had not yet learned strengthening methods.

To face me, he kept himself in perfect condition and got his hands on the strongest equipment he could find.

He used brainwashing to amass an army to wear me down so he could strike the finishing blow.

But those assaults had pretty much no effect on me.

He seriously underestimated his enemy. I should use this as reference. [\[13\]](#)

Though, I have no idea if an enemy with that large of a gap in strength will ever appear before me. I have no idea how strong Houou is supposed to be.

I should do what I can for now.

My current mission is to take care of this ridiculous farce.

“You're cowardly otherworlder who does nothing but rely on the strength of your Legendary Weapon! This World will be saved by its own people!” (Armor)

“Cowardly... You’re in no position to tell me that!” (Naofumi)
You people arbitrarily summoned me. I don’t need your complaints.

What is this person even trying to say?

It doesn’t seem that words are getting through.

Though I get the feeling they weren’t getting through from the start.

“This world’s people will save themselves? That’s quite a noble thought, but it was those very same people who decided to rely on the heroes and perform a summoning ritual. Your argument lacks persuasive power.” (Naofumi)
And just because you happened to summon someone you didn’t like, why must you abandon him?

I should direct those words at Trash.

The Queen supported me to the best of her ability, but it seems the country has lost some economic power.

When I see her tackling a mountain of paperwork, I find it hard to ask for funding.

I acknowledge that I may be a devil, but at least I have a conscience.

I’m surprised she hasn’t ruined her body from stress yet.

No, perhaps she has.

I’ve seen her swallowing medicine before.

She’s also been patting her stomach. She’s definitely acquired stress ulcers.

Now that I think about it, how’s the Castle Town doing?

I think Motoyasu and his Filo Rials will be able to suppress any uprisings.

I also sent a messenger to Raphtalia’s group when this mess started, so I wonder what happened to them.

... It’s been around half a day since this mess started.

If Raphtalia immediately came running back, I would suspect her of being brainwashed.

“Anyways, it’s best for your sake if you honestly tell the whole story.” (Naofumi)
From the Magic User’s testimony, this guy’s the ringleader. Perhaps I can wring Witch’s location out of him.

“If you don’t, my subordinates will torture you until you wish you were dead.”
(Naofumi) “Naofumi-sama, leave it to me.” (Atlas)

Atlas happily starts shadowboxing. She punches the air in front of her.

What’s with her movements?

“Yeah, Firo wants to do it too.” (Firo)

Firo begins imitating her.

Is that the new fad? Not on my watch.

When I turn around, I find that the others of my group have driven the brainwashed people outside and are in the process of setting up a barricade.

And just like I’m doing, Taniko borrowed a dagger from Ren, and began threatening the Three Hero Church remnants.

Ren cautions her that she shouldn’t be doing such things, but she shouts at him to shut up.

Gaelion has a delicate expression on his face.

I wonder who the girl takes after.

Rishia has just finished binding all of the remnants.

In the confusion created from throwing the bomb, they had scattered all over the place inside of the spacious church.

Rishia’s quite skilled.

She even ran on the walls... though I don’t know the logistics behind it.

Could she be concentrating magic on her feet to temporarily bind them or

something?

Perhaps she'll be able to run on water as well.

Hey, I told you people to kill them...

"Hey... just talk. You'll lengthen your lifespan by a bit." (Naofumi)

As I declare this, Armor retreats a few steps and catches his breath.

Has he finally gotten a grasp of the situation he's in?

His face is blue.

He assured himself that he would win and that his enemies were all evil, and now it's come to this.

Caught up in Itsuki's justice, he began to believe that he was justice itself.

"I'm waiting." (Naofumi)

"Ku... If I have to talk to you, then I'd rather di-" (Armor)

Just as he was speaking...

The roof of the church caves in, and three brainwashed Filo Rials rain down from the sky.

"Wha-" (Armor)

"KUEEEEEEEE!" (Filo Rial)

"You're in the way!" (Firo)

"Please, Move!" (Atlas)

Two of them grapple with Firo and Atlas while the last one forcefully throws Armor on its back and starts running.

"Like I'd let that happen!" (Naofumi)

Just as I'm about to deploy Shield Prison, I remember something.

Where are they running to?

I thought I would leave Itsuki up to Kiel, but if I follow them there, I may find Witch and her compatriots. I can capture them all at once.

And it seems that Armor would rather commit suicide than be captured.

There's no point in capturing a dead man.

So I should use him as much as I can while he lives.

"Move!" (Firo)

Firo kicks away the Filo Rial blocking her and begins to give chase.

With her speed, catching up will be easy, but the destination is the important part.

The situation is this dire. It's probably not a trap.

If we just manage to find the enemy stronghold, then no matter the situation, we'll be able to apprehend them sooner or later.

Of course, if they run towards Castle Town, I have no intention of letting them get far because I'll probably find Witch and Itsuki there.

"Wait, let's chase them too far!" (Naofumi) ^[14]

What's with that line?

It's something I said myself, but I have no idea what it means.

Aren't you usually supposed to say 'Don't chase them too far'?

Well, I do plan on pursuing them until the end.

"What's wrong Master? You don't want to capture them?" (Firo) "If they're going to run... then we'll just use that. Haha. It's hunting time." (Naofumi) "As

expected of Naofumi-sama. You let one escape to capture them all, right?"
(Atlas) "You can see through everything, can't you?" (Naofumi)

Atlas's comprehension ability is scary.

Could this be an instinct of the militaristic Hakuko tribe?

She can cut off her anxiety and calmly view the situation.

For now, I should get the Filo Rials on our side. They're Motoyasu's, so their stats aren't bad.

I lock the one Firo kicked away in my Prison.

"Good. Now, you guys will be bringing the Three Hero Church Remnants to Melty's estate! I'm leaving Gaelion's group in charge." (Naofumi) "Understood!"

As if they were expecting the order, Rishia and Taniko were already holding a net which they use to hold the Three Hero Church Remnants together after gathering them in one place.

The situation reminds me of a large haul of fish on a fishing boat.

All of the Remnants are directing foul language at my group.

It's truly a stupid sight. I'll apply some torture later.

If I don't let them suffer a bit, I won't be able to calm down.

... For this to be a possible stress-reliever... I've changed as well.

In a bad way.

Though, I have no intentions of correcting myself.

"Gaelion, you catch up with us later. And Taniko, I'll leave the command of the people at the mansion to you." (Naofumi) "Taniko!? Do you mean me?"
(Taniko)

"I told you before, right? Why are you so surprised?" (Naofumi) "No, I knew! But hearing it directly is..." (Taniko)

“I’ll pursue the cause of this ruckus. You guys should focus on suppressing the violence in this village. Tell Kiel, who’s supposed to be good at tracking, to follow me.” (Naofumi) “Understood.” (Taniko)

“And after you deliver that message, send Gaelion over. Decide whether you’ll come or not based on the situation.” (Naofumi)

Taniko nods at all of my orders.

“Then everyone else is following that Armor with me. Get on a Filo Rial.” (Naofumi) “Understood.” (Rishiua)

“Let’s go!” (Naofumi)

“Ya~y!” (Firo)

With Firo at the head, Rishia, Atlas, and Ren all board Filo Rials and follow to chase Armor.

“Are you sure they went this way?” (Naofumi)

“Yeah, I thought that if we were too close, they’d notice, so Firo is keeping some distance.” (Firo)

...

Without any lights, we rely on Firo’s instinct to give chase. It’s already been two hours.

All of the Filo Rials from my place are quite fast.

Without a cart, their normal running gait is around the max speed of a wild Filo Rial.

And such an amazing Filo Rial is running at full speed with Armor. They’re already outside of my territory and on the mountain roads.

I wonder where they’re running to.

But, I’m not about to waste time. Atop Firo’s back, I begin Reinforcing the Spirit Turtle Shell.

It will take a while before it awakens, but I've already managed to raise its abilities beyond Soul Eater Shield.

What's more, it has a Growing Power ability, so I can't wait to see what happens next.

As expected of the Shield the Old Man made.

Ah, right. About the non-copy one, I had it carefully packaged and sent to the Mansion with Taniko.

It may get taken again, but taking it with me here would provide the highest chance of it getting scratched.

I won't let anyone touch it.

I don't think it will be able to get any more skills, but it's still an amazing Shield.

By the way, I tested out Reflect Shield to find out its ability.

When I shouted out the skill name, a list of the Shields I had with offensive power popped up.

There are a few I can't choose, but it seems this ability can temporarily give my Shield some offensive features.

It will be useful for attacking when using shields with high defense.

E Float Shield → Change Shield → Reflect Shield is also a possible combination.

Then, the manifested shield can have greater durability.

My possibilities have increased.

"Master, it seems they've entered a building." (Firo)

There's a building out here?

I see a mountain fortress with some traces of light leaking out of it.

We've finally discovered their base.

I'll make this a splendid massacre.

"Is that their stronghold?" (Ren)

"Seems like it." (Naofumi)

I nod at Ren's question.

Though it could just be a resting spot, it's a fortress built in the middle of the mountains.

There's a high probability that it's an important point.

They're probably recycling a fortress abandoned by the country.

It would be nice if Witch were somewhere here, but...

"Itsuki-sama..." (Rishia)

He may be there.

Either way, we'll have to apprehend them.

But, Armor sure is a fool. Did he think he had outrun us?

That Filo Rial used to be mine, you know.

But I guess he had no choice but to run.

'It was all a trap, now die Demon Lord!' is also a possibility.

But I have confidence I'll win. He's a small fry.

I don't know his level, but he wasn't even able to scratch me when his blade was in direct contact with my skin.

At this rate, whether it be the Three Hero Church, the Nobles, Witch, the Rebels, or Armor, I don't think any of them can hurt me.

It would be strange for them to have someone with such capabilities.

... Now that I think about it, can the current me only be hurt with attacks on Curse-Series-level strength?

Then, my first objective should be to defeat Itsuki.

And with me are Firo, Atlas, Rishia, Ren, and the other Filo Rials. A perfect Battle Party.

With this party, it will be easy to capture him alive.

... The only problem would be if Rishia betrays us, but I have an idea for that.

“What’s wrong, Master?” (Firo)

But, I can be certain that some of my own brainwashed subordinates are there as well.

I’m also taking that into account.

Firo and Ren can only inflict fatal blows, so I’ll save them for enemy management and Itsuki.

Atlas and Rishia can manipulate the invisible force of Chi, so I should send them to deal with the brainwashed slaves.

Anyways, to stop two Heroes, a Filo Rial Queen, and an awakened Rishia, is probably impossible.

All that’s left is to trample them.

“Now then, Itsuki or Witch... Who’s hiding here?” (Naofumi)

Opportunity

“Anyways, the only thing we have to do is infiltrate the fortress and take out the leader.” (Naofumi) “Um, about that...” (Rishia)

After hearing my order, Rishia timidly raises her hand.

Though I have a general idea of what she’s going to say.

“What?” (Naofumi)

“Hypothetically, only hypothetically, if we encountered Itsuki-sama... If we ended up fighting him, could you leave it to me?” (Rishia) “Hmm... what’s the reason? Like Female Knight... Eclair, do you plan on trying to persuade him?” (Naofumi) “Um, yes. Could you leave that mission to me?” (Rishia) “Well, if we did encounter Itsuki, I planned on detaining him. I want to avoid killing him if possible. But if he resists, it may escalate beyond that.” (Naofumi) “I know. I... still want to try talking to him.” (Rishia)

Rishia has been working hard for the sake of my village.

“Rishia, will you let me participate as well?” (Ren)

For some reason, Ren begins pleading to me as well.

“Just like I was offered a second chance, I want to try offering one to Itsuki. And for that purpose, I wish to lend my power.” (Ren)

It’s not that I don’t see where he’s coming from...

I don’t know how his situation is, but it may be similar to Ren’s.

And this is where we establish their relation.

I do plan on harassing him a bit, but if he can become a convenient piece like Ren and Motoyasu, I should consider it.

And it seems that killing Heroes is bad. It's probably best to leave persuading him to others.

Even if he ends up dying, we can say something like, 'We tried to persuade him, but he showed great resistance' or something like that.

"Understood... But Rishia, if you and Ren end up cornered, you need to abandon that mission. Is that alright with you?" (Naofumi) "Yes." (Rishia)

"Thank you, Naofumi." (Ren)

"Don't say such disgusting things." (Naofumi)

Ren's dedication sends shivers down my spine.

If he were broken like Motoyasu, I could just keep my distance, but he seems to have developed a strange sense of justice. I don't have a good compatibility with him.

And wait, was Ren always this hot-blooded?

He was supposed to be a cold-blooded cool person. Though he wasn't a bad person from the start.

"Kyua!" (Gaelion)

I hear a voice from above, and when I look up, I see Gaelion with Taniko aboard his back.

I'm surprised they were able to track us.

"So you're finally here." (Naofumi)

"Did you manage to turn over the remnants?" (Ren) "Yeah. I handed them to the princess." (Taniko) "I see." (Naofumi)

“And I told them the situation, and was sent to bring a message. She said it was something the heroes probably didn’t know.” (Taniko)

An order from Melty?

She seems to be well informed about the Heroes.

The Queen also seems to love the legends.

But the only part of it that shows normally is her love of Filo Rials.

“Um... what was it again? It was something she found out from an old book in Faublely...” (Taniko)

Taniko tried hard to remember.

Why didn’t she just bring Melty along?

Though Melty’s probably busy with dealing with the rebellion.

Is it okay over there? Sadina’s there too, so it should work out.

“According to the children’s books, after the Demon Lord was defeated, the people had their brainwashing dispelled, and everyone lived happily ever after. But according to the old book, the brainwashing persisted even after he was defeated.” (Taniko) “What?”

Then What?

Even if Itsuki is the mastermind, if we defeat him the brainwashing won’t be dispelled, and the only cure for the infectious pandemic is my Shield Prison?

My head hurts.

So to save everyone, I have to take them one by one and put them into a magically reinforced shield?

Just how tedious is that supposed to be?

Though it’s eventually something I’ll have to do.

“I didn’t need to know that.” (Naofumi)

I had considered the possibility, but I wanted to believe there was some other way.

“Fueeeeee...” (Rishia)

“That sounds... rough.” (Ren)

“Then we must simply quell the fire by killing everyone who opposes us.”
(Atlas)

Ah, then there's no helping it. Atlas's heartless words draw me back to reality.

She truly is from a violent race.

The amount of people potentially saved, and the amount of victims don't balance out.

In a situation where the vaccine itself is limited, it's just a dream to be able to save every patient.

“Anyways, for now our mission is to charge their base and bring out the ringleader! Let's go!” (Naofumi) “Yeah! We can figure out the details later. Perhaps we may even find the solution in there.” (Ren) “Let's go! No matter what happens, I won't give up!” (Rishia)

Rishia has grown...

She still goes 'Fueee', but she's started complaining a lot less.

She's been obediently following my orders, and I've given her an opportunity to face Itsuki.

Though I have no idea whether she'll be able to convince him or not.

And so, we stormed the fortress. Armor retreated into from the front.

Inside the fortress were some remnants of the Three Hero Church, and some brainwashed soldiers and Adventurers protecting them.

But none of them were particularly strong.

There are none of my former slaves here.

Perhaps it's because they're right in the middle of an opportunity to take down the country. They've dispersed their forces away from the base.

The Filo Rial Armor was on was collapsed, exhausted, near the entrance, so I quickly put it in a Shield Prison.

“For the sake of Justice, Die!”

“Demon Lord! Prepare yourself!”

“All is for the Three Hero Church!”

The remnants shout to incite the Justice zombies. But they're the smallest of small fries.

Ren and Rishia knock them out in an instant.

They are victims, after all.

These two can't bring themselves to kill them.

“Tah!”

It doesn't seem that they're holding back against the remnants, though.

Rishia embedded her throwing knife into the arm of a priest-like person, cancelling out the Choral Magic he was preparing.

“Guaaaah! You Bastard!” (Priest)

「Gravity Sword!」 (Ren)

Ren's sword changes to a dark transparent material as he slashes his enemy.

And the enemy collapses as if a force was pushing them towards the ground.

“Ugu...”

“A new move?” (Naofumi)

“Yeah, it came with the Spirit Turtle Sword.” (Ren) “I see...” (Naofumi)

This was the perfect time to test it.

I’m also testing out my S Float Shield.

As I thought, it was a skill to increase the amount of Float Shield.

And it works in tandem with E Float Shield.

Its maintenance cost is low, so it feels like my E Float Shield has powered up.

“Naofumi, that floating shield is kinda cool.” (Ren) “Really? It moves as I wish, so it’s quite convenient.” (Naofumi)

In the past, there was a protagonist who fought with two floating shields. It was a game where girls crossed blades. If only I could use swords and bows like that protagonist... My life would be much easier.^[15]

“And Ren, what sort of skill does your blade have?” (Naofumi) “It seems to use Gravity to obstruct an enemy’s movement. It also has a skill called Soul Steal.” (Ren)

... That’s an ominous sounding skill.

I’ve seen a protagonist take an attack of the same name, and die instantly.

Though that was just an Event Battle.

The game didn’t end there, and some bosses who could use that skill popped up later.^[16]

「Soul Steal!」 (Ren)

As I’m lost in thought, Ren uses the skill without restraint.

His target is a Three Hero Church follower, so I guess there’s no problem with an insta-kill skill.

“Gufu!”

Ren slices the opponent he had immobilized with Gravity.

A blue light flies out of his target, and assimilates into him.

I check the follower he defeated.^[17]

... He’s not dead.

But his face is pale.

“Gu... My magic is... Gu...” (Follower)

Ren’s blade robs targets of their ability to move, and he follows up with this skill.

And it seems it was no Zantestuken.

But insta-kills sound way too convenient... probably.

“Ah, this is... an SP recovery drain skill.” (Ren)

“It seems that this one has no magic left.” (Naofumi)

There seems to be a difference between SP and Magic, but I still can’t understand it.

“Its cooldown time is long, so I can’t use it consecutively.” (Ren) “I see, but it seems convenient.” (Naofumi)

Atlas pokes me in the side.

“What is it?” (Naofumi)

“The magic that entered Ren-san resonated with his weapon, and changed in

nature.” (Atlas) “Hmm...” (Naofumi)

So Atlas can sense that sort of thing as well.

She’s quite convenient.

Should I nickname her Convenient Woman... No, that’s dangerous. In multiple ways.

“Ei!” (Firo)

Firo lightly kicks the leftover enemies, and we proceed forward.

The Gaelion+Taniko Pair seems to be competing with the Firo+Filo Rial group in taking down enemies.

“This building is larger than I thought it would be.” (Naofumi)

The building had an arena-like institution, and was littered with strange statues. I can’t figure out its purpose.

Another surprising thing was that the entrance was an ornate Western-Style door.

It rivaled the Melromark palace door in construction.

Eventually, we reached a door that was locked.

Though I just order Firo and Gaelion to break it down.

What are these strange items that are littered all over the floor?

It’s like a game I used to play, where fiddling with the needle of an old clock would make a key appear.

Just what was the maker of this building trying to accomplish?

Research Material

“Is this supposed to be an old RPG Dungeon...?” (Naofumi)

There were plenty of traps, but we managed to destroy them through physical means.

Rocks chased us, and the ceiling fell on us, but Firo and Gaelion dealt with these one way or another.

The rocks were kicked to oblivion.

The ceiling? I acted as a pillar of support while Firo and Gaelion competed in destroying it.

How should I put this? The Justice Zombies and traps made a certain post-apocalyptic game play back in my head.

We’ve been scouting for around 30 minutes, and we’ve managed to proceed quite far.

At one point, we found a passage that led outside. The exit was a cave-like structure.

Could this have been the one that Kiel was talking about?

There were also prison-like rooms arranged in a grid formation. ‘The Devil of the Shield’s Subordinate Asylum’ was scribbled on them.

Finally, we emerge in a room that seems to be a research lab. Looking over the documents scattered around, a certain one catches my eye.

“We did an analysis of their combat strength, but it seems that was all based on secondhand information. Their actual strength is estimated to be much lower.”

Various plans to harass my territory, such as the commandeering of my Bioplant Field, are written, but it seems they've been put on hiatus.

There are plenty of test tubes like the ones in Rat's lab, so it seems that an alchemist has been here.

Also...

"Just how large is this building?" (Naofumi)

"There's a document about me here too." (Ren)

Ren begins flipping through a document with his name on the cover.

The problem is that his reading skills are not that high, so he doesn't seem to understand what's written.

"Estimated level: 75, but actual level estimated to be higher.

Skill level allows for him to take out a group of twenty level 80 enemies.

Danger level: (Average)"

... How sad.

"According to Mald, his swordsmanship isn't very high.

According to the Princess's testimony, the possibility that he will help our cause is low. And as such, we will decrease his power by taking any useful equipment or funding he may hold."

Well, you know... Ren wasn't really fighting for real, so it's not like you can estimate his strength from that.

And the Ren of that time really wasn't particularly strong.

However, just by relying on the power of the legendary weapon, he was

without a doubt stronger than Armor.

“It seems that the reason for Witch abandoning you is documented here.”

(Naofumi) “Really?” (Ren)

“Apparently, ‘the possibility that he will help our cause is low’.” (Naofumi) “Of course... Naofumi is one thing, but if a group wanted to take over the country, I’d probably refuse... I think.” (Ren) “No, that’s where you should be certain.”

(Naofumi) “Yeah, the me of that time was a little messed up, so I don’t really have confidence that-” (Ren) “The old you was supposed to be a (self-

proclaimed) cool, analytical character, right? You’d probably have left them without saying anything.” (Naofumi) “Don’t put it so bluntly... but you’re probably right.” (Ren)

My document is next to his. It’s quite thick.

“Estimated level: Impossible to Determine.

Danger Level: (Maximum).

God Class.

Reports indicate that he was able to block the Spirit Turtle’s attacks, but the truth is unclear.

Still, it can be concluded that he has very high defense.

His weak point would be his low attack, but he has been starting to build up forces.

Urgent countermeasures are required.

Without careful planning and resources, defeating him will probably be impossible...”

Within my forces, the most detailed reports are ones about Raphtalia and Firo.

“My forces had planned to have their subordinates dress up as robbers, and attack Raphtalia when she was out training, or Firo when she was peddling.

They were to awaken them to the notion of「Justice」. But the plan failed, and their agents' whereabouts have yet to be determined.”

I don't know where, but it seems we've already had a victory against them.

Raphtalia's group probably apprehended them and turned them in to the nearest town.

Only people like Atlas would be able to see anything special about that dagger anyways.

There's also a report of using the Sword Hero to test my ability.

This one seems to be quite recent.

“Estimated Level 100.

If we send a large amount of disposable pawns trained in dealing with his Shield, victory may be possible.

We will send our Trump Card, Mald, to finish him with the strongest equipment.

This is theoretically the most effective measure.”

“This... is...” (Naofumi)

A grave mistake! The work of a fool.

I'm sorry, but it seems your expectations have betrayed you.

I was already able to stop their strongest equipment. I guess that's something they weren't expecting.

The next few documents about me seem to be a little older.

They're things like learning Hengen Musou in order to break through my defense. Apparently, acquisition of the techniques proved to be too difficult, and the plan was put on hiatus.

Well, that martial art required quite a bit of talent and a lot of experience.

They didn't have that much time, so it was impossible to learn for people who only wanted strength to inflate their own egos.

Besides, the current me can negate a weak defense-breaching attack.

There were many other plans proposed, but in the end, they shifted towards infecting my subordinates with「Justice」.

How troublesome.

Put your useless efforts toward something more productive.

“Master, there's something strange about this wall.” (Firo) “For reals? Destroy it!” (Naofumi)

What about solving puzzles? Don't care.

There's probably a key somewhere around here, but searching for it is a pain.

An officer of the Three Hero Church is probably holding it, and I don't need it.

“Ye~s!” (Firo)

“Kyua!” (Gaelion)

Firo and Gaelion competitively reduce the wall to rubble.

It seems there was a secret door somewhere in it, and behind it is a single room.

“It's more research data.” (Naofumi)

Upon entering the room, I found many more documents piled up.

“What is this? Reproducing... the Heroes' weapons?” (Naofumi)

I read the document from the start.

... It's a report on the weapon the pope used.

It spoke of maintenance cost and how to imbue it with magic. They looked at the problem from quite a few angles.

Apparently, these weapons were items of a lost civilization, and reproducing them with modern alchemy was difficult.

Yet, they planned to aim for mass production.

In the end... It ended in failure.

However...

“If we can capture a Hero test subject... Research will advance leaps and bounds?” (Naofumi)

After that was a sketch of... something labeled as a fragment of a weapon.

A sketch of a fragment of the Demon Lord’s weapon.

I’m pretty sure that Legendary Weapons couldn’t be damaged.

So there was something like that?

Also, where the hell did Armor run off to?

He probably proceeded smoothly with a key.

I’m fed up already.

I’ll have the Queen send people to look over this research later.

There’s no end to these stacks of paper.

And, continuing our pursuit, we end up going deeper and deeper into the lab.

We pass by a test tube. It is filled with a strange liquid, and a dagger is suspended in it.

This seems to be the origin of those weapons.

“Atlas, can you see anything?” (Naofumi)

“Yes. The evil aura... is coming from over there.” (Atlas)

Atlas points to the source of the pipeline connected to the test tube.

Well that’s obvious.

“It’s gotten stronger than before.” (Atlas)

“Then the origin may be over there.” (Naofumi)

Should we go over and do some collection?

I think Rat would be delighted here.

I wasn’t able to procure that much funding, so maybe I’ll repossess some of these facilities and recycle them.

“Kyua!” (Gaelion)

Gaelion looks ahead as he tugs on my cuff.

“What is it?” (Naofumi)

“I smell the scent of treasure from over there.” (Gaelion) “Leave it.” (Naofumi)

In the end, he’s still a dragon.

Later, I’ll repossess that too.

Though I have no idea where they got their treasure from.

“Yay. You got him mad.” (Firo)

And Firo is Firo.

Anyways, while we were messing around as such, we arrive in a wide room.

There, Armor is tapping on a stone tablet as if it were a keyboard.

“So this is where you went. Thanks for leading us here. As a reward, I’ll send you to the other world.” (Naofumi) [\[18\]](#)

“Ku... So you’re already here, Demon Lord of the Shield!” (Armor) “There were quite a few interesting gadgets set up, but we destroyed them all. Didn’t you hear us get here?” (Naofumi)

What is he doing, anyways?

Armor gives a wide smile as he places his finger on the stone tablet.

“But you’re too late. We’ve already fulfilled our purpose!” (Armor)
By this pattern, something’s going to pop out, right?

As I think that, the ground behind Armor splits in two, and something rises out of it.

From the looks of it, it’s another test tube.

“Naofumi-sama.” (Atlas)

“What?” (Naofumi)

“There’s a fearsome, ominous aura emanating from over there. I assume it to be the progenitor of this incident.” (Atlas) “I see.” (Naofumi)

What’s going to come out?

Usually in these situations, a large monster is summoned.

And then Armor would become a sacrifice and get killed by it.

“Ha ha ha!!” (Armor)

I ignore the laughing Armor and gaze into the test tube.

“Wha-” (Naofumi)

The Hero of the Bow, Itsuki, was lying down inside of it.

But he seems a little strange.

“Bufu!” (Itsuki)

His eyes are covered, and a Gag ball is in his mouth, preventing him from speaking.

What sort of joke is this?

He’s probably been forcefully apprehended. The fact that I’m imagining S&M scenarios makes me question my own psyche.

Anyways, it’s not a pretty scene.

I want to laugh.

Just when I was wondering where he had gone, I find him confined here.

“I-Itsuki!? What happened to you!?” (Ren)

“FUEEEEEEEEEEE!?” (Rishia)

In a contrast to my amusement, Ren and Rishia seem highly troubled.

But, I guess their reactions are the correct ones here.

I feel that if Raphtalia were here, she would put pressure on me.

“Is that your trump card?” (Naofumi)

Isn’t Itsuki supposed to be a false prophet to this guy?

Did he lose hope and come crying to Itsuki for help?

Then why is Itsuki in a test tube?

“Now awaken! It’s time to annihilate the Demon Lord of the Shield!” (Armor)

The Bow of Justice

A glugging sound fills the room as the liquid drains from the tube containing Itsuki. Eventually, the tube opens.

Armor lifts Itsuki up and removes the blindfold and gag ball.

It's quite a scene.

I... kinda want to run away.

His appearance is a gag in and of itself. I find myself holding back laughter.

"..." (Itsuki)

Itsuki slowly opens his eyes and drowsily looks around the room.

"Now! Awakened Hero of the Bow! The evil who defies our justice has infiltrated our base all the way up to here! Use your power of Justice to slay him!" (Armor) "What the hell are you saying, you bastard!?" (Naofumi)

You infiltrated my base and ran back here with your tail between your legs!

"And to start with, didn't you guys have a fight with Itsuki!?" (Naofumi)

From the Magic User's testimony, they cut off their connections.

"How foolish. In order for the Hero of the Bow to discover even greater power, we merely let him experience some difficulty." (Armor)

I guess it's all a matter of phrasing. But, the truth is leaking out.

This man hasn't called Itsuki by his real name once.

I can assume that he still does not place any trust in Itsuki.

The reason he ran all the way back here was because Itsuki was all he had left.

Itsuki looks at me with a dazed expression, and he begins releasing a dark aura so thick that even I can see it.

That's the aura that surrounds a Hero devoured by their Curse.

So what is it? What curse is eating at Itsuki's mind?

"Naofumi..." (Itsuki)

This is amazing bloodlust.

Out of all the people I've faced, it's top class. It makes my blood go cold.

"Your actions are unforgivable! You've done things that I will never forgive!"

(Itsuki) "What are you saying all of a sudden? Keep your sleep talk to when you're asleep." (Naofumi)

He's a troublesome fellow even right after he wakes up.

Is it due to his curse, or was he like this from the beginning? It's a delicate line.

"Itsuki-sama! You can't believe Mald's words!" (Rishia)

"Right! That man's a criminal!" (Ren)

Rishia and Ren try to persuade him.

But Itsuki's gaze remains fixed on me, and he doesn't even glance at the two.

"Then let me say it. You gather slaves, put them through heavy labor, and keep all of the profits to yourself!" (Itsuki) "Isn't that just common sense?" (Naofumi)

This man... I think I've heard him say similar things before.

Isn't that what slaves are supposed to be?

Of course, manual labor requires appropriate compensation, but slaves are supposed to work without one, right?

If you ask whether there's a problem with buying and selling humans, I'd say there is one, but that's just the sort of world this is.

If you want an extreme analogy, then perhaps slaves can be compared to vacuum cleaners.

Do you feel sorry for a vacuum cleaner for having to deal with the garbage on the floor every day?

Slaves are like appliances. Convenient means to an end.

Wait, something's popping up in my head.

"Niichan! Make me dinner! Crepes~, Crepes~!"

"Food!"

"Crepes are tasty!"

"Make some good food, please!"

"Play with me!"

Don't mind it. Don't mind it.

Get out of my mind!

"That is nothing but evil! I heard! In exchange for giving a girl high quality medicine, you forced her brother into heavy labor! One of the slaves Malty-san saved told me the story!" (Itsuki) "There's no way that Witch would help someone!" (Naofumi) "Who is this Witch...? Oh, and as expected of Naofumi-sama. You saved a pair of siblings besides us?" (Atlas) "No, that's you." (Naofumi)

He's most likely talking about the girl tilting her head towards me and her older

brother.

I don't know how much info he's got, but he's clearly cherry picking here.

And for Witch to help a Demi-Human is more unlikely than a girl falling from the sky.

“And you sell medicine to rich nobles without doing anything for the poor!” (Itsuki) “I'm no philanthropist. If you're running a business, you can't just give things away to those without money. It's common sense to take something as compensation.” (Naofumi)

Those nobles just barged into my place and demanded medicine, all while looking down on me.

Also, I do have memories of giving medicine to the poor. After they pleaded to me with the few copper coins they could scrape together, the least I could do was give them some.

“Just when I thought the Evil Nobles would die from illness, the Hero of the Shield stepped in and hindered our plans!” (Itsuki) “You're pointing fingers at the wrong person there. I merely sold medicine to the people who paid money for it. What they did afterwards is of no concern to me. It's stranger to think that just because they had done something bad, I would refuse to sell them medicine and leave them to die.” (Naofumi)

And what is this? When did selling medicine to rich buyers become a crime?

If I didn't sell it to them, would you be shouting at me for denying medicine to those who asked?

No matter what I do, it's a crime. Stop screwing with me!

“Even though you were granted the power to help people as a Hero, I've heard a person shouting that you couldn't save their daughter!” (Itsuki) “... I have no idea who you're talking about here.” (Naofumi)

Nope, nothing's coming to mind.

Couldn't save? If it was illness, I would at least do what I could do.

Though, I would demand some compensation, as little as it may be.

Of course, people have tried to run away without paying.

But, I simply asked around for their destination and apprehended them anyways.

“A girl came crying to me saying she would never forgive you!” (Itsuki)
Do people hate me that much?

...

“Is the daughter... dead?” (Naofumi)

“Yes! Naofumi’s shield can bring about such miracles, and yet, you deny people its power!” (Itsuki)

Itsuki isn’t using any honorifics with me.

But, I guess I’ll leave that as it is.

“Surely you jest... Even the Legendary Shield doesn’t have a power that can revive the dead.” (Naofumi)

I think I have an idea of who it is.

Occasionally, when I go to villages, some people come to me asking me to bring their loved ones back to life. They come crying, carrying the dead bodies.

There are people who come to me after hearing rumors of the Saint or the Hero of the Shield.

Logic does not get through to those people.

When I say I can’t do it, they continue pleading in tears.

Some even transfer their anger onto me.

I’ve had some corpses abandoned in front of my village.

If I tried to give them proper burials, the culprits would come out and shout at me. I’ve had the soldiers send them out a few times.

That’s why the sign on the village’s entrance says as such. The dead can never

come back.

Because of this, I've made it so that I only personally treat patients in the special clinic building.

"That's just unjust resentment. You just want to label me as evil no matter what. Why don't you bring them back? You're a Hero too." (Naofumi) "No, princess Malty told me. It's a special power only granted to the Shield!" (Itsuki) That Witch. She's left me with an outrageous parting gift.

Itsuki has no way of logically proving that statement to be false.

What's more, with Itsuki as he is, I don't think that anything I say will be able to persuade him.

"Itsuki, that sounds wrong. With Naofumi and Motoyasu, I've gone over the weapon systems. The effects differ slightly, but each legendary weapon generally has a corresponding weapon with the same effects. If Naofumi has such a power, then my Sword should have an equivalent one. Or, does your bow have a power that our weapons do not?" (Ren)

Ren offers a plausible argument.

There's definitely a difference in defensive and offensive capabilities between weapons, but the effects themselves are generally the same.

It's something I learned from talking with Ren and Motoyasu.

The only one who doesn't know is the lonely Itsuki.

But, perhaps I've just yet to find it. I can't deny the possibility of there being a weapon that can bring the dead to life.

And, if there were a single weapon that would have it, I guess it would be the Shield.

But if I could use it, then I would.

Who knows just how much I could rake in if I advertised that I could revive the dead?

“And there are still many other sins you have to answer to! I definitely won’t let you off!” (Itsuki) “And I don’t need you to forgive me. The true evil here is probably that Armor behind you. He assaulted my subordinates and launched several attacks. He provoked much needless violence. Is your justice merely a word? He even conspired with the Three Hero Church you know so well.”

(Naofumi)

Upon my word, Itsuki turns his gaze to Armor.

“Those are merely the Demon Lord of the Shield’s lies! You mustn’t be swayed by them!” (Armor) “Whether that’s the truth or not is something I’ll determine with my own power.” (Itsuki) “A-Ah, wait... Stop!” (Armor)

Itsuki sprouts white wings. Though they’re supposed to appear divine, they somehow give off a sinister feeling. He takes out a highly ornamental bow and shoots an arrow at Armor.

“Guha!” (Armor)

Is he dead?

“Naofumi-sama, the ominous aura gathered at one point and pierced through the person we were pursuing.” (Atlas)

And the Armor in front of me collapses forward.

Did he dispose of a foolish subordinate?

As I thought that, Armor suddenly rises from the floor.

“Itsuki-sama, it is as the Demon Lord of the Shield said. In order to satisfy my selfish desires, I engaged him in battle and lost. I ask for your forgiveness.”

(Armor)

... What?

Armor’s behavior is clearly strange.

What is that bow's ability?

It's without a doubt the foundation for those daggers.

"I accept your apology. From now on, let's work together to lead this world towards peace!" (Itsuki) "Yes! Itsuki-sama!" (Armor)

His eyes are weird.

His face is not one led by his own ambition. It's not the one that only strived for self-satisfaction. Just like the brainwashed people, he carries an abnormal expression filled only with a lust for Justice.

"Itsuki... That bow..." (Ren)

As Ren points his finger at the Bow, Itsuki answers with a bright smile.

"Isn't it amazing? It's an amazing bow that I just got my hands on. Its name is the Justice Bow! It's clearly a weapon meant for me. One shot from this bow dispels brainwashing and lets others understand me." (Itsuki)

Denial of Justice

Justice Bow?

It dispels brainwashing and lets others understand you...?

There's no way that others would sympathize with you so easily.

And Itsuki, you aren't even trying to come to an understanding with me right now.

You're the one who's doing the brainwashing.

What do you mean, Justice?

"Princess Malty told me that this bow was too much for me to handle. She told me to rest here until my power stabilized, but it seems that things won't go as planned." (Itsuki)

I see... I skimmed through the data on the way here.

There was an important piece of information among them.

And from it, I can come to a simple conclusion.

Itsuki is... their Hero Research sample. In order for him to act as a power source for those daggers, he's been put to sleep here.

Most likely, Witch tempted him with sweet words and got him to feed a strange weapon fragment into his bow. They then analyzed the resulting bow.

And, because the effect was useful, they put him to sleep so he could assist in their mass production.

They probably were able to advance their ability to replicate Legendary Weapons as well.

Let's consider it from Itsuki's perspective.

After losing to the Spirit Turtle, Witch's influence allowed him to unlock the new power known as the Curse Series.

It's a plot right out of Mecha Anime, and, out of those same Anime, he would have to rest until the power of his Bow settled within him.

Even so, there's no doubt that Itsuki has been devoured by some form of curse.

Though, that seemed apparent from the start of the incident.

"Itsuki, let me tell you something. There's no Justice in that bow. It's a sinister weapon with the power of brainwashing." (Naofumi) "You're wrong! This Bow is without a doubt my Justice! How else would Mald, who I was at odds with, come to an understanding with me so quickly?" (Itsuki)

He's acting like he's some sort of protagonist throwing out an irrational argument. Like in Manga and Anime, he thinks that everything's fine as long as he can get his enemies to understand his cause.

It may appear to make sense at first, but there's no way an enemy can come to understand you just because you beat them.

That just means they didn't have enough willpower to stand up to violence from the start.

"Now, everyone, fight with me! I'll make you understand what's right and what's wrong!" (Itsuki)

This is a different matter altogether from Ren's case.

Ren knew in the depths of his mind that what he was doing was wrong. Itsuki is different.

He honestly believes in his idiotic Justice, and he feels obligated to force it onto others.

If I were to equate it to a deadly sin, I guess it would be pride... But that's also a delicate line.

It could also be Vainglory. But there's something about that that feels off.

With his Chuuni imagination, he could have created his own, new sin altogether.

If he did create an eighth sin, I guess there are two possibilities.

The first is Justice.

When Justice goes too far, it can be crueler than any sin.

No small sin will be forgiven. Everyone has to atone with death.

Another possibility is... Fanaticism.

Believing too much in a single idea and forcing it onto others, continuing even when you know that what awaits is nothing but destruction.

There's also the chance that his power could be a mix of the four.

Motoyasu got the Lust and Envy Spears or something.

And Ren was simultaneously devoured by Greed and Gluttony.

I've only confirmed that having two at once is possible. But, I can't deny the possibility of three, or even four.

Anyways, I've once again confirmed my belief that Justice is a disgusting existence.

I've caught a glimpse of just how twisted the Justice that Itsuki wants to enforce on the world truly is.

"You're wrong!" (Rishia)

In a very loud voice, Rishia denies Itsuki's words.

"Itsuki-sama is misunderstanding Naofumi-san's actions!" (Rishia) "Is that you, Rishia-san? You are merely one of the many who are being brainwashed by that man." (Itsuki) "Itsuki-sama, you said it, right? That Naofumi-san put slaves

through hard labor and reaped all the profits, right?” (Rishia)

Itsuki nods with an unpleasant face.

“Then why are all the people working at Naofumi’s place always healthy? Did you ever hear of a slave he abandoned? Have you ever heard of any slave he’s worked to death? Have you ever heard of any slave he’s even shown cruelty towards?” (Rishia) “That’s none of my concern. The information I have comes from the many people who live in this base.” (Itsuki) “Then, that’s nothing but hearsay! Itsuki-sama, I’m asking whether you, yourself, have witnessed any of this man’s misdeeds!” (Rishia)

What’s this? Rishia’s acting much more outgoing than usual as she’s conversing with Itsuki.

At least, in the time I’ve known her, I’ve never seen Rishia this angry before.

Wasn’t Rishia supposed to be a childish girl who said ‘Fueee’ whenever she was troubled and trembled when faced with hardships?

“I’ve been watching Naofumi-san for a long time. I saw him extend his hand to the slaves and build them a home from scratch. The slaves... the Demi-humans who work at Naofumi’s village are always working happily as they earnestly try to make the village a better place! Itsuki-sama, for the people who had lost their status as human beings and dropped into slavery, do you know just how much of a savior Naofumi-san was to them!? And he... put them through hard labor and reaped all the profits? Please don’t make a fool of him!” (Rishia)

“Right! I’ve never seen a single child unwilling to do the work given to them there!” (Ren)

Ren hops on board the bandwagon and tries to persuade Itsuki.

For some reason, Taniko is being especially quiet. I hear her whisper under her breath to Gaelion, ‘Are all the Heroes like this?’

I think the current Gaelion will only respond with ‘Kyua’s though.

“No matter what happens, until the culprit confesses to his sins, my resolve will not be shaken!” (Itsuki) “Confess? About working my slaves hard? Yeah, I do

that.” (Naofumi) “... The people at Naofumi’s place are a bit different. Classifying them as slaves is difficult.” (Ren)

... Are they different?

From society’s perspective, as long as they have slave crests, aren’t they slaves?

“It’s more like Naofumi-san is the one being treated as a slave there.” (Rishia)

“Wha...!” (Naofumi)

“Yeah, every day he works late into the night assisting everyone in their work! After that, he works on compounding medicine by himself! I can’t tell who’s the slave here!” (Ren) “What are you... What the hell are you people saying!?”

(Naofumi)

Rishia, are you asking me to activate your slave crest?

I’m definitely no one’s slave.

“Naofumi’s pretty much a parent to the children in the village!” (Ren) “Wrong!”

(Naofumi)

What are these people misunderstanding?

Is it that they’re acting out of desperation and saying whatever comes into their heads?

Hm? Taniko pokes me in the side.

“Are they wrong? Everyone says you’re like a mother.” (Taniko)

“They’re wrong! I work all of you hard as slaves.” (Naofumi)

“That was your intention? I think you’re failing.” (Taniko)

“You know-” (Naofumi)

“Master may have a bad mouth, but he’s really kind. The only time he scolds us is when we actually do something really bad.” (Firo)

Even Firo hops on board.

Isn't it stranger to scold people when they haven't done anything?

That would impact morale.

In the past, I remember my neighborhood convenience store's manager had a bad personality. The employees would constantly change.

After a few years, when the manager changed, the nostalgic, help-wanted sign disappeared from the window.

And of course, when you have a good leader, you can work people beyond their own limits.

My thoughts may be going astray here. Anyways, the point is that there's no reason to unnecessarily drop troop morale. It's clearly not kindness at work here.

"You're all definitely wrong!" (Naofumi)

"Naofumi-sama, I believe." (Atlas)

Believe in what!?

These people... Along with the other villagers, they're going to get a lecture.

"No matter what you say, the truth is as it is! Naofumi is definitely evil!" (Itsuki)
Itsuki won't step down.

But Rishia continues speaking.

"Itsuki-sama? Does that mean you're a perfect, honest, and upright person? Right now, it doesn't seem that way to me." (Rishia) "Please quit it with your trite performance. It makes me want to vomit. Your evil is making me nauseous!" (Itsuki)

Itsuki has a bitter expression as he stares at Rishia.

He's giving off quite an oppressing aura.

Should he really be saying such things?

“Yes, I have committed sins. I can’t deny the fact that my actions have led to many deaths.” (Itsuki) “Itsuki-sama...” (Rishia)

“That means there is one thing I must do. I must destroy all of the evil in this world. I must destroy it personally. For eternity!” (Itsuki) “That’s not happening.” (Naofumi)

As long as humans exist, there will be conflict. Itsuki will never be satisfied until the end of the world.

And so, based on Itsuki’s criteria, Ren, Motoyasu, and I have been labeled as evil.

Perhaps everyone who does not bow down to his ideals will be labeled as Evil.

That means that the only time Itsuki will be able to end all evil is when all life comes to an end.

“...My powers may be insignificant. Even so, I... I can’t forgive this unfairness!” (Itsuki)

Itsuki shouts a line from some main character as he points his bow at me and draws it back.

And on it, an arrow appears.

“Naofumi! Let me pierce through your unfair existence!” (Itsuki)

I hear the air being cut as the arrow Itsuki releases flies towards me.

I use my Float Shield to redirect it.

“Unfair... is it?” (Naofumi)

That’s my line.

I wondered what the man ruining the country with his brainwashing bow was going to say.

Oh, but I'm not allowed to kill heroes.

"...Itsuki-sama, no matter what, you won't try to understand?" (Rishia)
Rishia draws her sword and enters a fighting stance.

"Itsuki-sama, I deny your justice. My own justice prevents me from accepting you!" (Rishia) "Itsuki! Return to normal! If you lose yourself to that cursed power, there will be nothing left of you in the end!" (Ren) "Don't get in my way!" (Itsuki)

Itsuki raises his bow once more.

Another arrow comes flying.

The target is... Me again.

This time, I just grab the arrow out of the air.

「Shining Arrow!」

Itsuki pulls back his bow once more, and an arrow made of light manifests.

But it seems it will take a while before he can shoot it.

"I understand that nothing will change your opinion. So I will step forward as your enemy and fight you with all of my might!" (Rishia)

The Conditions for a Duel

Rishia holds her blade out as if to challenge him.

What's this? I can feel Chi gathering en masse with her at the center.

It's not coming from within her body.

Chi is collecting from the outside and lending her power.

「Musou Kassei^[19]!」

I hear a loud snapping sound, but perhaps it's just my imagination.

However, as soon as I heard it, I suddenly felt Rishia's strength increasing.

The current Rishia's Chi rivals Firo's... no, it exceeds her's.

Amazing... Is this how Rishia is when she's serious?

Hengen Musou. The style that was born out of the desire to save the world without having to rely on Heroes.

Rishia has grasped the essence of it and is utilizing it to increase her power level.

Right now, I cannot measure just how high her basic strength is.

I'm not sure if she can breach my defenses, but she's at least an opponent I would have to be wary of.

The anxiety I had when Female Knight challenged the cursed Ren isn't present here.

“I see... So you can gather Chi like that. How interesting.” (Atlas)

Right.

I'm in agreement with Atlas's words.

Like that, she can fight using an outside energy source and without expending any of her own Chi.

It looks easy, but I bet actually putting it into practice is ridiculously difficult.

"Hmm?" (Firo)

And wait, I think I've seen those movements used by someone else before.

That bird who's tilting her head right now.

Those movements are exactly like Firo's when she's recovering her magic.

"Hah!" (Rishia)

Rishia takes off at an amazing speed and rushes right at Itsuki.

"Hengen Musou Rapier Skill! 「Spiral Slash」!" (Rishia)

Chi begins gathering around her blade in a spiral pattern.

"Ku!" (Itsuki)

Perhaps he sensed that he wouldn't get off lightly from such a blow. Itsuki dodges by a paper-thin margin and releases his arrow.

... For some reason, it draws an arc in the air and heads towards me again!

「Meteor Shield!」

I promptly activate Meteor Shield and strengthen it to take on Itsuki's arrow.

The glowing arrow splits and multiplies, and countless blasts rain down on my shield.

I angle the Shield on my arm upwards just in case.

With the sound of breaking glass, my Meteor Shield crumbles, and the leftover arrows come down on me.

By the way, I take no damage.

When he's fighting Rishia and the others, why must he focus on me!?

"I won't let you escape!" (Itsuki)

With her first attack dodged, Rishia continues her assault on Itsuki.

It seems the only skill she's using is that one called Spiral Slash.

It's amazing that she can fire it off so consecutively.

Unlike Female Knight's barrage of light blows, I feel that each and every one of Rishia's attacks are at full power. I can tell just by looking.

"Don't forget about me! 「Gravity Blade」!" (Ren)

"Gu..." (Itsuki)

However, perhaps because his weapon had high specs, Rishia's and Ren's attacks are unable to inflict any deep wounds on him.

And it seems that the wounds he received are regenerating.

Perhaps that damn Witch went as far as to perform Body Modifications on him.

"Just this much... Isn't enough to stop me!" (Itsuki)

The Curse Miasma around Itsuki explodes and knocks down his enemies.

"How troublesome... Eclair beat me when I was using this kind of power!?"
(Ren) "Itsuki-sama, you can't lose yourself to that power! You'll definitely regret

it!” (Rishia) “You’re the ones who will regret it! Just awaken to Justice already!
「Arrow Squall」!” (Itsuki) “Like I’d let you! I’m sorry you two!” (Naofumi)

Before Itsuki can use his skill, I gather my magic and release it.

「Shield Prison!」

My prison manifests with Itsuki at the center.

Rishia and Ren wanted to persuade him, but I need to get the situation under control.

Our first priority is to seal the cause, Itsuki.

“Wha-No matter what attack you throw at me, I-” (Itsuki)

Luckily, I manage to lock him up before he could dodge.

“Itsuki-sama! You bastard! What did you do to Itsuki-sama!?” (Armor)

Armor rushes at me unarmed, baring his fists.

“Tei!” (Atlas)

“Deyrah!” (Firo)

“Ugu-” (Armor)

Atlas and Firo’s kicks and strikes land on him simultaneously, sending him flying. He crashes into a wall and faints.

I wish you sweet dreams. For the rest of your life.

“Atlas, how is it?” (Naofumi)

“... It’s no good. Even though you sealed the source of the ominous aura, the people infected with it are connected like a spider web. They’re sending power

to each other, and the power isn't dispelling. The person we chased hasn't changed at all." (Atlas) "Damn." (Naofumi)

There's no doubt about it. Even if we defeat Itsuki here, the brainwashing won't be dispelled.

The prison shakes violently, and cracks begin to spread across it.

His Curse weapon seems to have high abilities.

"Rishia, Ren. The cage is going to break now. Prepare for battle immediately."
(Naofumi) "Yes!" (Rishia)

"Got it!" (Ren)

"I'll help out a bit. 「Zveit Aura」!" (Naofumi)

I start casting various support magic on the two while I wait for the Prison to shatter.

The cage should have lasted 5 minutes, but it broke apart just after I finished casting.

I can assume that it was destroyed through physical means.

"Is that all you have? Then it's my turn! 「Frozen Rain」!" (Itsuki)
Arrows made of ice multiply in the air and fly towards me.

Again, why me!?

"Itsuki-sama, stop messing around! Your opponents are over here!" (Rishia)
"Gaelion! 「High Fire Blaze」!" (Taniko)

"KYUAAAAAAAAA!" (Gaelion)

The ice arrows melt and evaporate in the flames Gaelion release.

But mixed in was an ominous white arrow. The arrow was undeterred by the

inferno as it flew straight at me.

“Master, get down!” (Firo)

“I won’t let you!” (Atlas)

Firo and Atlas knock the arrow out of the sky.

“Even if I may be outnumbered, as long as I take you out, it’s my victory.”

(Itsuki)

So Itsuki’s actually aware that he’s at a disadvantage?

Sometimes, Television Heroes fight alone against many.

He may be basing his character on someone like that.

But to reach the king, you have to actually get through the castle.

Is Itsuki’s only objective my defeat?

I think I’ll be able to grab the arrows or use my Float Shield even if it does get through.

“Atlas and Firo. Gaelion as well. Please listen. It seems Itsuki’s only aiming for me, so back off a bit.” (Naofumi) “But Master...” (Firo)

“Firo-chan, Naofumi-sama is just trying to protect us from injury. Perhaps we are only in his way at the moment. It’s alright. Naofumi-sama will never lose to a lowlife like that. Please believe in him.” (Atlas) “Uu... I got it.” (Firo)

“Naofumi-sama, I wish you luck!” (Atlas)

Atlas quickly takes some distance, and Firo reluctantly follows her.

And I walk forward to distance myself from Gaelion and Taniko.

“Itsuki-sama, do you realize what you are trying to do?” (Rishia) ...「Blaze Arrow」! (Itsuki)

Rishia and Ren narrowly avoid the rain of attacks, sometimes taking blows. In the end, all of them end up heading towards me.

“Since I’ve met you, I’ve always been thinking about what Justice was supposed to be.” (Rishia) “I have no tongue to converse with evil!” (Itsuki) “Evil... What is evil? What is Justice? To Itsuki-sama, is Justice not but whatever makes you satisfied!? Without talking, without understanding, and without thinking about the purpose behind people’s actions, you simply take down your enemies. Is holding everyone down with violence truly your justice!?” (Rishia) “I’ve heard that power without justice is violence, and justice without power is pointless. Itsuki, didn’t you look up to Heroes of Justice? You never spoke about yourself, and the me of the past never bothered to learn about you. However, I want to know more about you now. What is your goal? What do you seek? Why are you sad? I want to know. I am... We are not your enemy. So please speak to us!” (Ren) [20]

Despite running off his mouth, Ren’s still fighting him at full force.

I’d like you to consider me too. His attacks are all centered on me, here.

But there is a bit of sense in Ren’s words.

I have no idea what sort of person Itsuki is supposed to be.

I can see his personality, but I have absolutely no idea who he was or what sort of life he lived.

“Justice is power. It’s the proof of righteousness. It’s to save the weak and crush the strong!” (Itsuki)

That again.

Those were the words Armor acted on when he abandoned him.

... Hmm?

I think I’m getting something here.

Let's reverse engineer Itsuki's actions.

Perhaps this man is acting based on the depressed life he lived in the other world?

Itsuki wishes to be a Hero.

Quite a few commercialized heroes were normal kids or bullied kids. They would transform and take out the bad guys. They would become the main character.

Famous heroes like Superman and Spidey were like that, right?

Was his Shogun-sama play based on that?

When inflicting his Justice, Itsuki acted undercover a lot.

Was that his Hero complex?

I see. Heroes of Justice are strong. They save people.

The stories can be summarized as 'Good deeds are rewarded, and Evil is always punished.'

Justice wins. Evil loses.

It would be nice if reality was that simple.

"Even if people call me evil, I am a Hero of Justice!" (Itsuki)

He desired praise and worshiped heroes... The conclusion he arrived at was...

"Itsuki, what happened to you was exactly what you did to Rishia. That's why you don't want to face her. That's why you don't want to fight her." (Naofumi)

"What!?" (Itsuki)

"If you want to fight me, you'll have to beat Rishia first. Otherwise, there's no way you're worthy of being my opponent." (Naofumi)

If I don't offer up some conditions, Itsuki will never pull back.

Then, I just have to confront Itsuki as the Evil he wants.

Scenes like this are common in TV shows.

It's what Motoyasu did to me when I got to this world.

When one side has an absolute advantage, they make some conditions for the battle.

This time, I have no reason to offer these conditions, but... I promised I would leave this to Rishia.

"If you won't do such a simple thing, then you're not worthy of challenging me."
(Naofumi) "Ku!" (Itsuki)

As I say this with an expression looking down upon him, he clenches his teeth.

So I was right.

This is just my guess, but Itsuki was probably bullied in his past world.

And when Rishia held Itsuki as the center of her life, they drove her out with severe bullying.

Because looking at the timid Rishia reminded him of the past he wanted to bury.

She was an existence that he never thought would rise to stand in his way.

There's no turning back for a Hero.

"I see. If I have to defeat this girl who's being controlled by evil, then I guess I have no choice." (Itsuki)

While keeping his eyes locked on me, Itsuki turns his bow towards Rishia.

And Rishia deeply bows towards me with gratitude.

Justice vs. Justice

“Naofumi-san, thank you. Please leave the rest to me. I’ll definitely persuade Itsuki-sama.” (Rishia) “Yeah, I’ll wait expectantly. Just like Female Knight, the current you should be able to do it.” (Naofumi)

Understanding the situation, Ren backs off.

Perhaps he believed that two on one was unfair for a duel, or perhaps he was moved by Rishia’s resolve.

I don’t know the reason. Whatever the case, he understands that he shouldn’t get involved in this case.

It seems that Itsuki has finally recognized Rishia as an enemy.

The problem would be if Rishia lost, but we’d be able to kill him with my Wrath Shield combined with Gaelion’s flames.

Luckily, Firo’s also here. We can definitely win.

Anyways, it’s quite a development for Rishia to be fighting Itsuki.

She was always talking about her devotion to him.

It must be hard on her to fight to the death with her beloved.

“I’m coming! Haaaaaaaaaah!” (Rishia)

Rishia closes in on Itsuki at quite a high speed.

“Damn! 「Saint Arrow Rain」! 「Spread Strafing」!” (Itsuki)

Itsuki steps back as he continuously fires off arrows at Rishia.

The arrows he fires straight and the ones he curves are timed perfectly to strike multiple locations simultaneously.

Evading seems to be difficult.

“Hengen Musou Rapier Skill,「Circle」!” (Rishia)

But Rishia twirls her rapier in a full circle, and her blade makes a high shriek as it passes through the air. All of the arrows fired at her are mowed down.

I thought Rishia wouldn't go all out, but it seems she's fighting toe to toe with this Hero.

Could I be witnessing the true Hengen Musou style?

Female Knight said that Rishia was able to master the difficult skills.

It may be due to the influence of her natural talent, but Rishia has gotten strong.

Having all his arrows knocked down, Itsuki glares at her with an irritated expression.

“Itsuki-sama? I'm your opponent right now. Please pay more attention.” (Rishia)
Even now, Itsuki occasionally glances over at me.

He must be seeing the person in front of him as merely an obstacle to reach me.

There's no way he can beat Rishia like that.

The current Rishia's stats, techniques, and determination are among the highest of all of my subordinates.

“Fu... It seems that you've learned how to talk, Rishia-san. But my true power is higher than this!” (Itsuki)

The dark aura envelops him, and Itsuki readies his bow.

「Rechtsfanatiker^[21]!」

I feel a barrier-like thing being erected.

It feels similar to Firo's and Gaelion's sanctuaries.

“UOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” (Itsuki)

Itsuki's eyes turn red and begin to give off a suspicious light.

Then the miasma envelops his body, forming a sort of armor.

It's a winged, full-body armor, reminiscent of an angel... but some parts here and there seem demonic in design.

It's definitely a status buffing skill.

What's more, it even created a set of armor.

The armor reminds me of the combat suits for those Rider and Ranger people.

Rishia is silently waiting for Itsuki to initiate an attack.

Her expression is exceedingly serious.

If we step in here, I don't think she'll forgive us.

Ren tries to step forwards, but I hold my arm out to stop him.

I won't let anything happen like that time with Ren.

I'm a man who keeps my promises. Be it for better or for worse.

“I'm coming, Rishia-san. With this, I'll make you understand me and assist in defeating Naofumi!” (Itsuki) “No, I definitely won't approve of the current Itsuki-sama. Even if it costs me my life!” (Rishia)

Rishia sticks her sword into the ground and bends down.

She extracts Chi out of the ground and coats the entire body of her weapon with it.

It's like what Female Knight does the moment she hits a target, but the amount is clearly different.

“Hengen Musou Style... Special attack. First Stance...”

『Let this foolish sinner experience the retribution of God’s justice! With my belief as compensation, carve this punishment upon your body!』

「Gerechtigkeit-」

Before Itsuki can finish chanting his skill, Rishia pulls the blade out and begins running.

「Alleinherrschaft^[22]!」

「Sun!」 (Rishia)

Rishia begins emitting light as she thrusts her rapier at Itsuki.

I wonder why. I get the feeling she just got some Super-Divine power up.

And what’s Itsuki’s skill doing!?

Countless orbs of light are scattering from his body. They destroy the ceiling and take on lion-like shapes in the sky. They then begin raining down endlessly upon Rishia.

... This is bad.

No matter how I look at it, that’s a Curse Skill rivalling Blutopfer.

Even a Super-enhanced Rishia will have trouble dealing with it.

“Second Stance, 「Moon!」” (Rishia)

The light emitting from Rishia grows brighter, and the lions shatter into crescent shaped fragments.

Amazing... This is the first time I’ve seen someone take a Curse Skill head on.

I don’t know what its effect is supposed to be, but Itsuki seems to have a shocked expression at finding his skill nullified.

“There’s still more! I haven’t used my trump cards yet!” (Itsuki) “Third Stance, 「Star」!” (Rishia)

Without any hesitation, Rishia appears in front of Itsuki and begins thrusting at him.

It’s a consecutive stream of attacks rivaling Female Knight’s multilayered attacks.

Each successful hit destroys part of Itsuki’s armor and causes it to disperse into nothingness.

“Gu...” (Itsuki)

The rain of blows continues to pour down on Itsuki, and I can feel that each and every one has Chi imbued in it.

That’s no joke.

Since I’ve trained, I may be able to withstand it, but it would probably breach the defenses of a Cursed Ren or Motoyasu.

It’s an attack with that much power.

“Quit messing with me!” (Itsuki)

Itsuki’s aura explodes again, sending Rishia flying backwards.

“Fuee... There’s still more!” (Rishia)

Rishia rolls as she hits the ground and gets up. She takes a deep breath and prepares for battle.

“Justice is not something that can be stopped by the likes of Rishia-san! Don’t

go around destroying my special attacks!” (Itsuki)

And why should we listen to you?

This isn't a turn-based RPG.

If this were a real-time action game, you would try to destroy special attacks when you saw them.

... Ah, in Hero Media, the opponent waits for the Hero to finish his attack.

Those high powered beams and kicks and those things where five weapons unite into one.

“Itsuki-sama, please stop it already. For the current you, it is impossible to stop me.” (Rishia)

Rishia shouts with a voice filled with emotion.

It does look like she's the one with an overwhelming advantage here.

“Itsuki-sama, your justice is misled! Please release that dark power at once.”

(Rishia) “Wrong! With this power that I've gotten my hands on, I will save the world! I will save the people!” (Itsuki)

The shape of the bow distorts...

And in response to that, his aura changes in color as well.

... Most likely, he's awakened to another curse series as well.

If he strengthens himself with the effects of multiple curses, will Rishia be at a disadvantage?

Besides Motoyasu, the other Heroes haven't used strengthening methods, I think...

“Are you alright, Rishia?” (Naofumi)

“Yes. I don't need any help.” (Rishia)

“... I see. Then do what you will.” (Naofumi)

The situation seems to be taking a bad turn, but if Rishia says that, then I guess I'll continue observing.

I won't help until she asks for it.

Whether she wins or not is a separate matter.

If persuading him proves impossible, we'll have to knock him out.

But even if he's rotten, he's still a Hero.

We'll need a decisive blow.

“Take this! 「Shadow Bind」!” (Itsuki)

Itsuki begins moving. He shoots an arrow at Rishia's feet.

I get an ominous feeling from the ground.

“Rishia-” (Naofumi)

But it didn't hit.

The arrow lands in the ground behind her.

“M-my body is...! (Rishia)

Before I could warn her, Rishia's movement was sealed.

It's as I thought.

It's a skill that can block enemy movement by hitting their shadow.

「Bind Arrow」!

Itsuki fires off another restraint skill at the immobile Rishia.

The Arrow pins her to the wall behind her.

“I-I can still fight!” (Rishia)

“No! This is the end!” (Itsuki)

『Let this foolish sinner be burned to death by the Brass Bull. Writhe and scream in anguish under the wrath of the raging bull!』

「Phalaris Bull」^[23]

Like my Iron Maiden... A statue of a giant Bull opens up and locks Rishia within.

Then the statue glows as it fills with fire.

“Rishia!” (Naofumi)

Itsuki smiles as he confirms his victory.

It’s a skill that rivals my Iron Maiden.

“With this, it is my victory. Naofumi, prepare yourself.” (Itsuki)

Ku... I thought victory was assured. Was I too naive?

But first, I have to save Rishia.

Ren’s already running towards her.

But just when I was contemplating this...

Cracks begin to surface on the bull Itsuki summoned.

“What?” (Itsuki)

Itsuki’s face is once again colored by surprise.

And with a loud sound, the Bull crumbles to pieces, and Rishia jumps out.

“Fourth Stance! 「Devil」!” (Rishia)

Rishia walks towards Itsuki, swinging her rapier in wide arcs.

What is this? The tip of Rishia's sword is glowing, leaving black tracks in the air.

"Gu... M-my eyes!?" (Itsuki)

Itsuki covers his face with both hands and cries out.

Is it an attack that inflicts Blind?

That's quite an efficient attack.

"Don't just go about claiming victory on your own." (Rishia)

Rishia says as she holds her shoulder and breathes deeply.

She even managed to thwart an execution device... Rishia's growth is beginning to surprise even me.

Excluding Motoyasu, She's probably the strongest out of all my subordinates right now.

But, perhaps Raphtalia can enhance herself this much as well.

Awakening

“Again, and again. Do you plan on standing in my way until the very end!?”
(Itsuki)

Itsuki rubs his eyes as he shouts at Rishia.

“I definitely won’t forgive you! For you to mess with me! For you to mess with Justice! You are but the opening act, and I will have you get off the stage!”

(Itsuki)

Itsuki’s bow starts warping again.

It loses its pure white ornaments, and takes on a darker, bat-like design.^[24]

“Die... Those who rise against me... deserve death!” (Itsuki)

“Itsuki-sama, I’ll say it as many times as you want. Please abandon that power, and return to normal. That dark power isn’t something you need to rely on.” (Rishia)

... Rishia is crying.

Is she weeping at seeing her beloved falling into darkness?

But I believe the current Rishia has enough power to stop him. She once again swings her sword.

Itsuki can only see Rishia with eyes of Hatred.

“For Justice! Die! You are. This World’s. EVIL!” (Itsuki)

He desperately draws back his bow again and again.

All of his arrows fly directly at Rishia.

And she is able to knock all of them down. But I hear an unwanted sound as she hits them.

“Master!” (Firo)

“Yeah...” (Naofumi)

That was the sound of Rishia’s weapon, the Speckle Rapier, breaking.

Rishia... Reinforces the broken parts with Chi as she continues swinging it.

But it’s probably quite hard to send Chi into an object without a definite shape.

Her face is getting paler and paler.

And while she seems to be getting weaker, Itsuki is diving deeper and deeper into madness.

“Why are you laughing? Itsuki-sama, I have not lost yet.” (Rishia) “What are you saying? You have already been defeated.” (Itsuki) “No... Itsuki-sama said it before, didn’t he? Justice never gives up until the end.” (Rishia) “Kukuku... How foolish. From the start, you were nothing but evil.” (Itsuki) “... Itsuki-sama, no matter how much pain you put me through; no matter how much despair you make me experience, I will not give up. That’s what Itsuki-sama taught me when he saved me from despair.” (Rishia)

Her breathing settles down, and she assumes a stance to cast magic.

Since her sword is gone, she’ll resort to magic, I guess.

A will to never give up.

I... somehow feel kind of proud of her right now.

For that no-good girl to grow up this much is shocking.

Rishia was a fallen noble, who even had to sell herself into slavery for the sake of money.

And the one who saved her from such despair was Itsuki. He became her goal.

Her aspiration.

That's why she can overcome the despair before her right now.

Though she did lose to it once, and jumped into the ocean.

You can also say that she had enough willpower to do such a thing.

There are plenty of things that humans can do only if they have the resolve to die.

"I'll say it again, Itsuki-sama. Please release that power. And once more, in order to regain your lost trust, fight for the people of this world." (Rishia) "This power is something I will never let go of. I. I. I will use this power to Save the World!" (Itsuki) "Itsuki-sama! I declare that your justice is wrong! I saw what became of the Spear and the Sword, so I can say as such." (Rishia) "Evil should shut up!" (Itsuki)

At the same time, Itsuki built up his power again.

It was enough power to shock everyone watching.

It was nothing human like Rishia's growth, or Hengen Musou, or anything like that. It was nothing of such a low level.

Itsuki's bow began shining brightly. Itsuki himself had to close his eyes.

I could only see it because I was watching from afar.

... The light flies out of his bow, and flies right at Rishia.

Rishia has no time to dodge. She meets the light head on.

But she comes out without a single injury.

The light from the bow quietly settles down in her hand.

And I see Rishia's Slave Seal crumble and disappear into nothingness.

"Too bright..." (Firo)

"Kyuaa..." (Gaelion)

“My eyes hurt.” (Taniko)

Firo, Gaelion and the others squint their eyes as they observe the mysterious phenomenon.

“W-what was that?” (Naofumi)

“Naofumi-sama.” (Atlas)

Atlas approaches me and begins speaking.

“From the midst of the sinister aura... a single, pure, power flew towards Rishia-san.” (Atlas) “... Pure? Do the legendary weapons have even more hidden functions?” (Naofumi)

So Itsuki’s bow sent power to Rishia?

Is it lending its power to her...? Is that how I should rationalize it?

“Rishia?” (Ren)

Ren calls out to Rishia.

“This is...” (Naofumi)

I was also surprised.

Within Rishia’s hand was a single knife.

Its blade seemed normal in every way, but the hilt had a strange gem embedded into it.

The entire item is semi-transparent. Its existence itself seems to hang in the balance.

Is it an item made with magic?

What exactly is it supposed to be?

Rishia clenches her hand, and it changes to a Kunai used by Ninjas.

And then it turned into a boomerang.

Does it have the power to change shape like the legendary weapons?

What does this mean?

“Wha-What the hell is happening!?” (Itsuki)

Even Itsuki is afraid.

At the very least, it doesn't seem that he's scheming something.

“Is that so?... I understand.” (Rishia)

Rishia speaks quietly. Eventually she holds the boomerang out towards Itsuki and shouts.

“Itsuki-sama, even the Bow of Heroes refuses to accept your justice. In order to put a stop to your madness, it has lent me some power!” (Rishia) “That's a lie! Like I'd let that happen! There's no way my bow would betray me!” (Itsuki)

“Now I will use this power to stop you!” (Rishia)

“Shut the hell up!” (Itsuki)

More black miasma pours out of his bow.

It's gathered so thickly that I doubt Itsuki himself can see through it. And with such a demonic form, Itsuki rushes at Rishia.

『Let this foolish sinner experience god's wrath for the sake of never ending peace! With my heart as the sacrifice, let the executioner send you to eternal sleep!』

『Heldenkaiser Reich^[25]!』

Itsuki pulls back his bow with all of his strength.

The bow multiplies, and sprouts many wings imitating those of angels and devils. And all the bows fire at Rishia.

The shots come together and form the shape of a bear-like beast as they fly at Rishia.

“Hengen Musou Throwing style, 「Rolling Spin」!” (Rishia)

After pouring Chi into it, Rishia throws her weapon at Itsuki.

The shining boomerang beheads the bear, and its body falls to pieces.

“Wha... You bitch! Just how much more do you plan to resist my absolute justice!?” (Itsuki) “You’re wrong. Because you stepped on the wrong path, your bow is merely trying to correct you.” (Rishia)

Rishia raises her right hand, and the boomerang returns to it.

And Rishia changes it to a Chakram.

Her eyes flicker for a moment. They seem to change color in my eyes.

She’s concentrating chi on her eyes.

“Right now, I can see everything. I can see the flow of the energy tying Itsuki-sama down. I can see the power taking over your bow... with this...” (Rishia)

Rishia faces Itsuki and tosses her weapon

「Erst Throw」! 「Zweite Throw」! 「Dritte Throw」!

Erst?

I thought that naming convention only existed with the legendary weapons.

Is that a legendary weapon?

One of the Seven Star ones?

The three weapons Rishia threw each take on different shapes.

A knife, a hatchet, and a short spear.

What sort of weapon is that?

Even if it is a Seven Star Weapon, I can't tell what sort of weapon it is. The Spear is supposed to be Motoyasu.

And each of the three weapons thrown seem to fall into a different category.

「Tornado Throw」!

The weapons circle Itsuki at a high speed, starting a whirlwind. It blows away the black aura.

“GUAAAAAAAAaAA!” (Itsuki)

A Chakram appears in her hand again, and she tosses it at Itsuki's bow.

“Itsuki-sama, by your word, I have proven that you are not justice... please, won't you start over?” (Rishia)

The chakram come into contact with Itsuki's bow, and returns to Rishia's hands.

And... Itsuki's bow... makes a loud sound, and begins crumbling.

“GUAAAAA... My... my new power... my salvation...” (Itsuki)

“I'll say it once more, but you're wrong. And Itsuki-sama, please remember this. There are as many forms of justice as there are people in the world. One's Justice is... always evil in another's eye's. My justice is the same. Because from the start, the opposite of Justice wasn't evil. It was justice. Evil is merely the label for the loser's justice.” (Rishia) “Wrong... I am... I am... not evil. I'm not

bad. I'm not wrong. Everyone is... He is...!?" (Itsuki) "Even without justice, it is easy to judge and condemn others. But I think that accepting them is important as well. I'd like to believe that any person, no matter how bad, has a chance of rehabilitation." (Rishia) "U...uuuu..." (Itsuki)

The bow that had taken on a weird shape crumbles, and reverts to the one I first saw when I came to this world.

And as if his plug was pulled out, Itsuki falls to the ground.

From what I can see, it seems that the sinister aura has vanished.

"Atlas, how is it?" (Naofumi)

"Yes. Rishia has completely destroyed the source of the bad aura with her new power." (Atlas) "I see. Rishia, what is that weapon?" (Naofumi)

"Um... I have no idea." (Rishia)

Oy, you swung it around without knowing anything?

You even shouted out skill names!

"Gu... Justice!" (Armor)

Damn. Armor's waking up.

He sure is tough.

And for him to be screaming out 『Justice』as soon as he wakes up...

The justice cult is amazing.

So even though we beat up Itsuki, the Justice Virus will continue to circulate.

No, but, could the mysterious weapon in Rishia's hands possibly be...

"Mu... There!" (Rishia)

Rishia throws her chakram.

They twirl around armor in a strange trajectory, cutting off the dark power flowing into him before returning to her hand.

“Ah... This... is^[26]!?” (Armor)

Armors eyes return to those of a man overcome by desire.

“Hero of the Bow! How could you be defeated!? How pitiful.” (Armor) “You’re in no place to say that. What sort of king are you supposed to be!?” (Naofumi)
[27]

He’s not dead or anything.

He’s not going to be dragged to that annoying save point inside of the castle.

Dammit! You’re making me remember Trash!

“Ah, right! I definitely won’t forgive you for using Itsuki-sama when he was injured!” (Rishia)

Changing her weapon to the boomerang, Rishia throws it at Armor.

It gives a nice sound as it collides.

Torment him more.

“Ugu...” (Armor)

Two more collide with his face and stomach. Armor faints.

Next time, I’ll be the one to beat the living daylights out of you.

“I’ve been wondering for a while, but what did you do?” (Naofumi) “Eh? It seems that if I throw it, I can cut off the dark power surrounding the controlled people.” (Rishia)

So that means we can undo the Justice Zombie's brainwashing!?

There's no need for me to use Shield Prison on each and every one of them.

This situation got quite out of hand, but the result isn't as bad as I thought it would be.

"Good job, Rishia!" (Naofumi)

"Fuee!?" (Rishia)

"And like Atlas, you can now see Chi, right? Though it looks like you have to concentrate to do it." (Naofumi) "Ah, yes. I can see it for some reason." (Rishia)

Rishia, you've grown.

Continue doing your part as my convenient pawn.

"Then Rishia, you understand what we have to do now, right?" (Naofumi)

"Fuee... I know. We have to solve the mess Itsuki-sama made, right?" (Rishia)

"Yeah. And for your sake, let's just say that Itsuki was being used, and that the fault lies with the people who manufactured those daggers." (Naofumi)

Is it a legendary weapon? Is it one of the Seven Star Weapons? Its abilities seem to be high.

And Rishia owes me quite a few favors.

Revolution

“And like that, Itsuki’s out of the picture. Just in case, we should check out the castle town too.” (Naofumi) “Firo is sleepy.” (Firo)

“Kyuaa...” (Gaelion)

The monsters yawn drowsily.

“It’s definitely late, but this is the time where we should be working hard!”
(Atlas)

Though Atlas gave such a declaration, Firo and the others continuously relay their fatigue.

They’ve been constantly fighting for a while, and it’s long past bed time.

“Don’t worry about it. Everyone gather here.” (Naofumi)

Let’s see. I think the maximum for the Portal Shield was 7 people... but if I think about it, Ren has his Transfer Sword as well, so we can move even more.

It may be best to check the castle before returning home...

“Ren, can you teleport to the castle town?” (Naofumi)

“No.” (Ren)

Well he is supposed to be under house arrest at my place. It’s only been recently that I’ve been giving him the right to move around freely.

And the only ones who can undo the brainwashing are me and Rishia. What

should we do?

“We also need someone to look over Itsuki. Rishia, you’re one of the keys to resolving this incident, so I have to put you to work.” (Naofumi) “Fue...” (Rishia)

“Just think of it as if for Itsuki’s sake.” (Naofumi)

“I know.” (Rishia)

“Now then, for now... Let’s go to the Castle Town. Witch’s probably there.” (Naofumi) “Naofumi, want me to look after Itsuki?” (Ren) [28]

Ren volunteers for the job.

I guess that’s not a bad idea.

The Castle Town has Motoyasu, so they should be okay to some extent.

Instead of keeping all of the Heroes in one place, it’s probably best for me to leave one here.

That means, including me, I need seven, so... Me, Atlas, Firo, Rishia, Gaelion, and Taniko?

The Filo Rials we used to get here should stay to help hold down Itsuki when he gets up.

They haven’t class upped yet, so their levels are stuck in the 30s though.

It’s best not to move him around too much... But taking him with us seems dangerous.

I want to leave some people who can block teleportation with him as well.

“Then Ren, Gaelion, and Taniko will be turning Itsuki in with the Three Hero Church remnants.” (Naofumi) “Got it.” (Ren)

“KYUA!” (Gaelion)

“We just have to take these people to the village, right?” (Taniko) “Yeah. Ren has a transfer skill, so you should be fine. Now the people left are...” (Naofumi) The Filo Rials’ eyes are shining. They’re signaling for me to choose them.

It's good that they're motivated, but don't stare at me like that.

"You all..." (Naofumi)

"KUE!" (Filo Rials)

They cry out happily.

For the love of...

"I guess it should work out fine." (Naofumi)

"Yeah..." (Ren)

And like that, Me and Ren divided into two groups, and activated our transfer skills.

The point I teleport to in Melromark's Castle Town is the same one I always use.

The space I set is inside of the Castle, so that works out perfectly.

But as always, this spot reeks of dust.

I peer out of the door from the room I appeared in, and check the situation.

I hear the sound of multiple footsteps scampering all around the place.

"Bring down the Evil Queen who discriminates against her own people!"

Words like that echo through the hallways.

So they were here as well.

"Atlas and Rishia, can you feel anything?" (Naofumi)

Let Rishia look outside.

“Yes, there is some negative aura coming from that direction.” (Rishia) “Right.” (Atlas)

Yeah, as I thought.

“Ah, right, Naofumi-sama?” (Atlas)

“What is it?” (Naofumi)

“The nature of the dark Chi seems to have changed.” (Atlas) “Changed? What do you mean?” (Naofumi)

“How should I put this? Since Rishia defeated that person, it seems to be losing a sense of order.” (Atlas) “I see.” (Naofumi)

I think Itsuki called it the Justice Bow or something.

That bow had some sort of controlling effect.

I don't really know what changed. We'll have to find out through battle.

“Alright, Rishia. You go around dispelling brainwashing with that weapon.” (Naofumi) “Okay.” (Rishia)

As I issue orders, I throw open the door and run out.

“W-who are you!?”

A group of eight soldiers with strange eyes turn towards us and get into battle formation.

“Tei!” (Rishia)

But before they can do anything, Rishia throws her chakram, and they circle each soldier individually.

Long range projectiles sure are nice.

I can only take attacks and counter to some extent.

My weapon is supposed to be a defensive armament. It has a good affinity with long range magic and weapons.

“Gaha...” (Soldiers)

As if they were marionettes who had had their strings cut, the soldiers all fall to the ground. But they get up soon after.

“What? Where... is this?” (Soldier)

“Are you up yet?” (Naofumi)

“The Hero of the Shield...” (Soldier)

“Are you guys part of the Three Hero Church?” (Naofumi) “N-no... but for you to be an ally is... a bit...” (Soldier)

There are still quite a few soldiers who hate me.

But, work being work, they do follow the Queen’s orders without complaint. That doesn’t change their opinion of me, though.

But it’s not something I have to worry about. I don’t really care what they think.

The soldiers are avoiding eye contact as they speak.

“Did something happen? What’s the situation?” (Naofumi)

“My consciousness was vague...” (Soldier)

“Just tell me what you know. Speak already.” (Naofumi)

“Yes.” (Soldier)

The soldiers’ story went as such.

This evening, various groups rose up, and started to perform revolutionary action.

They called for the death of the Discriminatory Queen.

The soldiers rushed out to suppress this rebellion.

But after a while, the soldiers that were supposed to suppress the enemy forces ended up joining them, and the situation went out of hand.

And by the time the sun had set, the rebellious faction succeeded in occupying part of the city, and various nobles began supporting them.

That’s around the time we had begun our action.

The representative of the Rebellious Faction was Witch.

Quite a few people had anticipated that the nobles would rise up in protest at some point. A few people even tried to instigate them to get rid of them. But they never thought it would escalate to this level.

I can’t really say anything here.

Well, you know... If I had the ability to predict that they would invent a weapon with brainwashing powers to try and usurp the country’s royalty, I would be a prophet by now.

They do have the Shadow information system, but I guess they never managed to dig as far as their scientific research projects.

I didn’t expect them at all until I encountered them myself.

And unless a random passerby casually took a stab at you, you wouldn’t realize they were brainwashed.

And more than anything else, the existence of a weapon with such abilities would usually be denied by the general public.

Even if it were to be reported, there’s a high chance the report would not be

taken seriously.

But that doesn't matter for now. I can ask all the questions I want later.

The Shadows work as this country's secret spy service, but it's not good to rely on them too much.

Their numbers seem to have dropped during the Spirit Turtle incident, so there's no helping it.

And if I think about it, there are some shadows in the Three Hero Church as well.

Could members like that still be running rampant in their ranks?

They're not just limited to working in this country, so they're definitely short on personnel. ^[29]

... Since the start of this incident, I haven't seen a single one. They may be doing something important.

"And? Why are you walking around brainwashed here?" (Naofumi) "That is... When we were trying to evacuate people... A person began attacking from within our midst and... I can't remember anything else." (Soldier)
So it was a Zombie Outbreak after that.

When even a single infected person gets in, a safe building becomes a prison with no escape.

In hindsight, I'd say that their organization was bad.

However, only criminals would be able to immediately assume that their allies were suddenly being brainwashed.

Even though Melty told tales of the brainwashing Demon Lord, stories are stories. Jumping to a conclusion based on them is a tad bit hasty.

Even if I remembered the tale, I'd collect a bit more information first.

In that situation, perhaps the best course of action would be to hold down a fort, and wait for reinforcements.

At least at this point in time.

Or perhaps there is meaning in holding down a fort in itself.

Causing this incident in itself... probably isn't their final goal.

Even if the Revolutionary faction gets taken out, various problems will remain, and outside countries will take advantage of those.

Even if the Queen was only pretending to be my ally, based on her position, she wouldn't take such risks.

I don't have enough information. I need to gather some more.

"Then Witch is waiting for you guys to open up the castle?" (Naofumi)

"Unfortunately..." (Soldier)

I have no idea what state the castle is in. I guess I have no choice but to drag these guys along.

Looking at it from a different perspective, the fact that we... The fact that Rishia is here means that we're able to destroy the foundations of their plan.

If we keep dispelling the brainwashing, their forces will be lower than expected.

"Okay. First, we'll need a full grasp of the situation. We'll need to confirm the Queen's safety." (Naofumi) "Yes!" (Soldier)

"Do you know where she is?" (Naofumi)

"I think she's holed up at the top of the castle." (Soldier) "Then we'll head there." (Naofumi)

Taking the soldiers with us, we headed towards the Queen.

The Castle Town Riot

On our way to the top of the castle, we meet multiple brainwashed parties, but each time, Rishia throws her weapon and dispels the brainwashing. The higher we climb, the more we encounter, and through our dispelling of the brainwashing, our forces increase.

While we climbed, I was able to look out of the windows at the situation below.

Many fires have broken out, and smoke rises from parts of the city.

Hmm?

Is it my imagination? I see dust clouds racing across the scenery.

That... It's best not to think about it.

I give up on the outside, and begin searching the castle itself.

Eventually, I run into a wall made out of a thick layer of ice.

It's most likely a barricade the Queen and her magicians made.

She did say her specialty was ice.

The brainwashed people are slamming their weapons into the wall or casting magic on it in an attempt to break it.

Since we can easily bring them to our side, there's no problem.

"What should we do? Should we break through here?" (Naofumi) "You're smashing it?" (Firo)

"There doesn't seem to be another path..." (Naofumi)

We could scale the walls outside, but they probably have defenses set up there.

“Firo will try.” (Firo)

“Okay.” (Rishia)

“I’ll also help.” (Atlas)

Firo and Atlas begin running towards the ice.

“Ah, oy!” (Naofumi)

If I just leave it to Rishia, we may be able to break it from afar.

“Deryaaaaah!” (Firo)

“Tei!” (Atlas)

Firo and the Filo Rial’s kicks, on top of Atlas’s... vital thrust... cause the wall to crumble easily.

“It was quite hard. Was that because of the magic?” (Firo) “Probably.” (Atlas)

In the end, they’re all muscle-heads.

The guards we saved seem to be surprised.

Now that I think about it, I haven’t encountered anyone from my village here yet.

We proceed, and run into a door sealed with ice.

I put my ear to it, and hear a familiar voice.

It’s probably one of my slaves.

I see. So they’ve pushed the Queen back all the way here.

I’ll be able to increase my fighting force.

“Firo and Atlas!” (Naofumi)

“Yes~.” (Firo)

“As you command!” (Atlas)

We break down the door, and peer inside.

And for some reason, we find the slaves tied up lying on the floor.

I ask Rishia to dispel their brainwashing.

It’s always nice to increase ally count.

But why are these slaves here? They don’t seem to know either.

Were they defeated? Were they taken as prisoners of war?

The inside of the castle has been locked down.

So how did Witch slip them in this far?

“Oy, what did Witch declare, anyways?” (Naofumi)

I direct the question to the soldiers.

“Yes, she said that by giving preferential treatment to Demi-Humans, the Queen was trampling on the traditions the proud country of Melromark had carried out for generations. And that’s why their position was the logical one.” (Soldier)

That means that using Demi-Human slaves to defeat the Queen...

Wouldn’t be a possible measure.

They need to have the Queen captured by Human hands...

But they could just order my slaves to kill the Queen.

And then declare that they would never forgive the Demi-Humans who would cause such unrest.

Or that she would never forgive the Demi-Humans who killed her mother. She could cause the public to harbor even greater resentment against them.

That's possible.

In the end, that means that they would turn their forces against me, and once again wage war with Silt Welt.

And like that, Witch, the Three Hero Church, and the Revolutionary Faction would all gain power.

That seems like a possible plan for that Bitch.

"Anyways, we have to march forwards." (Naofumi)

Taking the slaves with us, we proceed forwards by destroying more walls of ice.

We finally reached the top.

"... There's no one here." (Naofumi)

The room the Queen had apparently barricaded herself in was empty.

"What happened?" (Naofumi)

I search the rest of the castle. But there's nothing.

But some of the brainwashed soldiers we found after that claimed that they were helping the Queen before they were attacked.

It seems that these soldiers lured the enemy out, and sealed them behind walls of ice. Everyone was getting desperate.

"Is there some sort of emergency exit or something?" (Naofumi)

Though such an exit holds no meaning if one's own forces are brainwashed.

For even Witch not to know is beyond wishful thinking.

I should have brought Melty along.

She would probably be knowledgeable.

“So the only thing we can do is to check the outside.” (Naofumi) “Yes.” (Atlas)

“Fue... Where’s the Queen?” (Rishia)

The most important person here lets out a pitiful voice.

She looks really unreliable.

No one would believe that she shouted such powerful words at Itsuki, and defeated a Hero devoured by multiple curses.

“Ah, right Rishia. So in the end, is your weapon a Hero’s weapon or not?”

(Naofumi) “Well... I have no idea.” (Rishia)

“Then why can it change form?” (Naofumi)

“A large selection of weapon options appeared in my field of vision, so I picked some.” (Rishia)

Is it different from my Shield?

I still don’t know if it’s a Seven Star Weapon or not.

“Can you see reinforcement menus or help screens?” (Naofumi)

“Reinforcement? Help? I don’t see anything like that...” (Rishia)

None?

Just what could it be, this transparent changing weapon?

It has quite a bit of power.

“But something called SP did appear on my status.” (Rishia) “Fumu.” (Naofumi)

Let’s just say she’s a Hero for now. I can investigate it after this incident is resolved.

We talk as we go back down the path we came. We arrive at the Castle’s gates.

The gates were wide open.

We walk to the plaza.

And there was a painting of hell. Corpses were piled all around... or not.

“Uu... J-justice...”

“Our cause...”

Justice Zombies were tied up and lying all over the place.

They all are either unconscious or immobile.

Even so, they continue to preach out their Justice.

I keep all of this to myself. I say nothing to Rishia.

These people who were forced to use justice to judge people ended up being judged.

“What the hell happened here?” (Naofumi)

At the same time the words escaped my lips...

“Ha HA! Angels! Onward we march!” (Motoyasu)

“”Yes!”” (Angel Army)

Standing on a cart pulled by many Filo Rials, Motoyasu kicks up a large cloud of dust as he passes me.

“ ... ”

And they simply run over everyone that looks like a Justice Zombie in their path.

Humans are being thrown into the air like garbage. I may get traumatized

from this.

So Motoyasu is behind this terrifying spectacle.

...What is he even trying to do?

“T-thank you.”

“Don’t worry about it! My Father-in-Law, the Hero of the Shield asked me to protect this town!” (Motoyasu)

An Adventurer who had escaped brainwashing goes up to Motoyasu.

Um... Yeah. It seems that the Castle Town’s problems have all been solved through violence.

They sure are fast. Ah, right. I think Motoyasu’s Three have class upped.

“Oy, Motoyasu!” (Naofumi)

“Ah!? Could the person there be Firo-tan and Father-in-Law!? As you asked, I have been working hard to quell the Riot in the Castle Town!” (Motoyasu)
As I call out to him, he shows off his white teeth and approaches us at an amazing speed.

Now I really want to run away.

“Mu! Go away!” (Firo)

Ah, my hand instinctively went to my Shield.

I almost unintentionally used my Portal Shield.

It’s a good thing it’s still cooling down.

“Are you sure you haven’t become the cause of a disaster yet?” (Naofumi)

“What are you saying, Father-in-Law!? I’m working this hard for you. Won’t you offer some praise to the Angels?” (Motoyasu) “”KUE!”” (Angels)

“...” (Naofumi)

My head hurts.

It's a pain, so I pat a random Filo Rial's head.

"Where's Witch? I think she was making a base somewhere around here."

(Naofumi) "Witch? Who is that?" (Motoyasu)

Is he denying her very existence?

In reality, he only sees Firo anyways.

And like this, he does listen to my orders. I won't complain... though I want him to change how he calls me.

"It's the name of the woman who threw you away." (Naofumi) "Ah, now that I think about it, there was a pig like that. Though she wasn't here when I came."

(Motoyasu) "I see..." (Naofumi)

Which means there's nothing but Justice Zombies in this town. And Motoyasu is offering relief to the survivors.

What's happening?

"Master." (Firo)

"What's up?" (Naofumi)

"Well, you see, I smell Raphtalia onee-chan's scent." (Firo) "Raphtalia's?" (Naofumi)

"Yeah. Over there." (Firo)

The direction she pointed was outside the city. Towards Ryuut Village.

But it's finally come to tracking scent... Her monster abilities come out here.

Or is that common sense for animals?

“For now, Rishia, you need to go around the Castle Town returning the Zombies to their senses. We’ll look for the Queen, Witch, and apparently Raphtalia. Everyone else should help out with Rishia’s work.” (Naofumi) “Understood.” (Rishia)

“Father-in-Law! What do you want me to do?” (Motoyasu) “Continue taking down the Zombies, and gather them in one place. Help anyone who hasn’t been brainwashed.” (Naofumi) “Understood, Father! Now, my Angels, onwards!” (Motoyasu) “KUE!” (Filo Rials)

“Ya~y!” (Filo Rials)

Later, this incident came to be known as the Witch’s Rebellion, or not. It actually came to be known as the Melromark Holy Bird Riot.

But that doesn’t really matter to me.

I get on Firo, and she begins running.

“Ah, Naofumi-sama, don’t leave me behind!” (Atlas)

With Atlas.

“Alright, Firo. If Raphtalia is here, we should go find her!” (Naofumi)

I shout out as we barrel down the main road.

The Weapon Shop enters my field of vision.

... Is the Old Man alright? I don’t want to find him as an enemy later.

I want to believe he’s okay. I’ll check quickly.

“Firo, stop by the Weapon shop.” (Naofumi)

“Oka~y.” (Firo)

I carefully scan the inside of the dark store.

The shelves... have been cleared of all weapons.

“Old Man... Are you here?” (Naofumi)

...There's no response.

I cautiously enter the store.

I put my hand on the handle to the only door inside of it, and open it.

“You thief! For the sake of Justice, die!”

“Uwah!” (Naofumi)

The Old Man? No, it's an adventurer I've never seen before.

Firo and Atlas make him faint immediately.

Who's a thief? Isn't that you?

“Ah, that surprised me.” (Naofumi)

I thought it was the old man, and my heart skipped a beat.

“Naofumi-sama, it seems that besides this person, there is no one else in the building.” (Atlas) “Yeah, there's no one.” (Firo)

“I see.” (Naofumi)

Atlas can see with Chi, so she can search the area to some extent.

And Firo has her feral instincts, so I guess there's no doubt about it.

I hope that the Old Man was able to escape safely.

He may be loitering around somewhere.

Anyways, why was this adventurer here?

I'll leave it as one of the mysteries of Zombies.

“Okay, we’re starting again.” (Naofumi)

“Ye~s!” (Firo)

And so we passed through the Castle Town gate that was supposed to be barred during the night. We run across the plains, barely illuminated by the rising sun.

Raising an Army

It's been a few minutes after that.

As we were heading towards Ryuuto Village, we encountered people who appeared to be seeking refuge.

It seems a soldier was keeping a lookout so everyone could evacuate smoothly.

“Ah, Hero of the Shield-sama!” (Soldier)

The soldier saw me and began to speak with a relieved expression.

“Let me just ask. What are you guys doing?” (Naofumi)

“We're in the middle of evacuating citizens because of the violent revolutionaries in the Castle Town. We were able to rescue everyone safely, thanks to the Hero of the Spear-sama.” (Soldier) “I see. Now, let me release the brainwashing being caused by the revolutionaries in the Castle Town Plaza. I should probably also resolve this conflict personally.” (Naofumi) “I-is that so!” (Soldier)

Starting with the soldier, the refugees' faces brightened at my words.

“Where's the Queen?” (Naofumi)

“She has been directing the evacuation until just then, but she's taking a break now.” (Soldier)

And with that, the soldier pointed to a carriage residing near the refugees.

“Shall I call for her?” (Soldier)

“No, I’ll go directly so there’s no problem.” (Naofumi)

I get off Firo and approach the carriage.

There, Raphtalia and the Old Hag, as well as Fohl and some of the slaves, were resting.

“Naofumi-sama!” (Raphtalia)

“Atla!” (Fohl)

Raphtalia rushed over joyfully while looking at my face.

Futhermore, Fohl was running over to Atla in the same manner.

Over there is... it’s inconsequential.

“It’s been a while.” (Naofumi)

“Yeah... I really... missed you.” (Raphtalia)

“Well, there’s a mountain of stuff to catch up on, but why are you guys here?” (Naofumi) “Ah, right. We were coming to ask for Naofumi-sama’s permission to

Class Up and were just passing by some meadows when we saw smoke rising from the castle unexpectedly, so we came rushing over in a hurry.” (Raphtalia)

“That’s right. We never thought that we’d encounter such a strange situation.” (Old Hag)

The Old Hag added.

You haven’t heard, but.....

Honestly, I’m not good with this old woman.

“Atla! Atla~! Nii-chan missed you!” (Fohl)

“Hang on Onii-sama, don’t come so close, please. Naofumi-sama is watching!”

(Atla)

Atla pushed Fohl away, looking like she really disliked him rubbing their cheeks together.

I haven't seen Fohl in a while, but he's grown somewhat.

Atla still seems like a child, but Fohl seems to be approaching adulthood already.

That's the reality when comparing visually.

Compared to Atla who is around ten years old, Fohl is probably around 16 ~ 17 years.

Speaking of which, his looks are somewhat reminiscent of Trash....

It's what the Queen said, so it's better not to worry about it.

"So the ones who helped the Queen were Raphtalia and your group?"

(Naofumi) "Yes. We rode in front of those who were trying to start a revolution." (Raphtalia) "It's Iwatani-sama...." (Queen)

While I was talking to Raphtalia, the door of the carriage opened and out came the Queen.

"Right now I'm learning about the situation." (Naofumi)

"Is that so. Shall I report as well then?" (Queen)

"Where's Trash?" (Naofumi)

The Queen silently points to within the carriage.

Trash was absentmindedly loitering inside the carriage with an extremely complicated expression on his face.

"Our beloved daughter started the revolution. It should be alright for him to

utter his complaints freely.” (Queen) “You also have it quite tough.” (Naofumi)

“I did try to comfort him though?” (Queen)

Really? I can only see a disheartened couple-like relationship though.

I really don't understand the relationship of these two.

“That sort of thing is fine. Tell me about the incident from start to end. I heard some of it from the unbrainwashed soldiers in the castle, but.... it's probably better for me to tell you the good news on my end first.” (Naofumi)

I reported to the Queen about the unaccounted Itsuki, the castle soldiers' tale, my land and the stronghold of the revolutionaries, and that Rishia became able to release the brainwashing.

I also spoke of the mysterious weapon obtained by my companion, Rishia.

I suspect that it's most likely a Seven Star Weapon, but I wonder how it is really.

“Is this the Hero's Weapon-like thing that came from the Hero of the Bow-sama's Bow?” (Queen) “Yeah, you can see it seems to belong to the projectile weapon category.” (Naofumi)

There were throwing knives and throwing axes, spears, slings, boomerangs, arrows, as well as shuriken.

To summarize the characteristics, there were a lot of projectile weapons. There shouldn't be any mistake.

“That's strange. There should already be a Seven Star Projectile Hero but.....” (Queen) “What about them dying and the title becoming Rishia's?” (Naofumi) “Just like the existence of the Four Saint Heroes are known, the Seven Star Heroes also have their existence known, so that shouldn't be.” (Queen) “I see...” (Naofumi)

What kind of reasoning was that?

“Well let’s leave that decision for later. Tell me about the other thing.”

(Naofumi) “Then—” (Queen)

The Queen talked about the events in the castle.

With Raphtalia supplementing some things in the middle.

A riot was caused in the Castle Town due to the Justice Zombies, and Witch hoisted a flag in the plaza in front of the castle as a representative of the revolutionaries.

“I, Malty Melromarc, look down on Melromarc’s traditions and I pledge to overthrow the racist Queen Mirelia Q Melromarc for the sake of governing this country!” (Witch)

Witch raised her sword and declared loudly, as if there had been no change in her name.

Surrounding her were the remnants of the Three Hero Sect and the revolutionary nobles, and it seemed the brainwashed citizens were also drawn along.

“”Yeah~!”” (Justice Zombies)

The Justice Zombies raised their voices in agreement with Witch’s declaration.

Apparently, the castle gates were closed for the time being and the Queen’s preparations for ambushing were progressing.

Dragon Knights tried penetrating the castle walls at times, but it seemed counterattacks were made in time.

However, there were justice zombies inside the castle as well, and the preparations were at an inadequate level, so the soldiers opened the castle gates.

“Go!” (Witch)

At Witch’s order, a suspicious robed person charged ahead and entered the castle.

Of course, this robed guy was one of my slaves who had been brainwashed.

As I expected, it seems that the plot that Witch thought of was a plan which involved marching into the castle and having one of the slaves I raised kill the Queen.

“Wait right there!” (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia’s party arrived to calmly clear away the Justice Zombies immediately afterwards.

“Just what are you doing!?” (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia proclaimed with her sword pointing towards Witch.

“Oh? Well if it isn't the 'Right Hand' of the Demon King of the Shield?” (Witch)
[30]

Witch quietly scowled at Raphtalia and replied.

“That speech of yours really..... can’t be called a surprise. To cause such damage while conducting a revolution!” (Raphtalia)

Sensing the situation, Raphtalia glared back at Witch and proclaimed.

“Such damage? I am a victim. Of the spear-wielding impostor, of the sword-wielding impostor, and.... well, let’s leave this to later.” (Witch)

Witch probably thought of Raphtalia as a summer bug flying in the flames.

She laughed.

“So who is correct? Let us verify it here.” (Witch)

Holding an unknown strange dagger in her free hand, Witch pointed her sword at Raphtalia.

“Two sword style...?” (Raphtalia)

“I’ll let you watch me personally reform the Right Hand of the Demon King of the Shield!” (Witch)

Cheers broke out in the vicinity.

If she refused the match, then everyone there would probably attack.

It didn't look to be a foe that couldn't be handled, but that suspicious dagger remained on Raphtalia's mind, and she didn't understand why those in agreement with Witch were raging there either.

“.....I understand. Teacher and everyone else, please watch quietly.” (Raphtalia)
Rather than using her power to settle the problem of being outnumbered, Raphtalia chose to accept Witch’s proposal.

Witch is also an idiot~

Did she really think she could beat Raphtalia?

....Come to think of it, Witch and Raphtalia have fought once before.

Back then was before Raphtalia had her Class Up and Witch pushed through with the difference in levels.

Witch hadn’t seen Raphtalia since then and even with my sudden growth in strength, she probably didn’t expect Raphtalia to have become as strong.

I wonder if she looked over the documents gathered by the revolutionaries and remnants of the Three Heroes Sect?

...Nah. Witch is only concerned with knowledge about using others; she wouldn't think to make such calculations herself.

She probably intended to lure Raphtalia into a trap while calling it a 1 vs 1 battle this time as well.

Or rather, she intended to brainwash Raphtalia using the dagger.

She would win with if she got a single hit in, so even if her ability was inferior, she could end it with one shot.

“Then as usual...” (Revolutionary noble)

A revolutionary noble raised his hand.

“Fight!” (Revolutionary noble)

He signaled the start of the match.

“Teryaaaaaaa!” (Witch)

Witch faced Raphtalia and brandished her sword with a large swing.

“Ha!” (Raphtalia)

With a small exchange, she stuck Witch's abdomen with the hilt of her sword.

“Ugu—” (Witch)

“This is for luring Naofumi-sama into a trap.” (Raphtalia) ^[31]

Incidentally, she made a kick.

“This is for framing Naofumi-sama.” (Raphtalia) [32]

And then she struck the top of Witch’s shoulder with the sword.

“Gyaaaa!” (Witch)

“And this is for instigating the 1-on-1 fight between the Hero of the Spear and Naofumi-sama and then using an underhanded trick in the end.” (Raphtalia) [33]

She extracted the sword and this time cut at the legs.

“There’s still more to come. This is for putting a bounty on Naofumi-sama and trying to kill Melty-chan.” (Raphtalia) “Eep!” (Witch)

Witch inhaled, after undergoing a torturous barrage of attacks during which she couldn’t help but scream.

However, Raphtalia didn’t loosen her hand.

Well, she did cause a lot of severe hardships, even if it wasn’t to me.

Complete Victory

“Did you know? Melty-chan still thinks of you as her own sister. And for such a simple reason, she will always believe in you. Do you want to betray her feelings?” (Raphtalia)

Witch’s movements dulled for a second, and Raphtalia launched a powerful slash at her.

Wait. I’m pretty sure Melty never really believed in Witch from the start...

She may have talked about it with Firo and Raphtalia when I wasn’t listening.

“Wai-” (Witch)

“I won’t wait. Naofumi-sama is the same. Naofumi-sama believed in you as his only companion, and swore to himself that he would treat you dearly. He thought of you so highly, yet... you trampled on his emotions. You broke him.”

(Raphtalia)

Even as she says this, Raphtalia’s movements are so calm and collected that even I am shocked.

It must be because Witch isn’t deserving of any mercy.

The only thing I can say is, ‘Good Job.’

“Do you know just how many people have grieved, suffered, and fallen into despair because of your actions? ... What I’m currently doing to you is less than ten percent of the pain Naofumi-sama suffered.” (Raphtalia)

Eventually, Witch emerged beat up, with several cuts on her body. Raphtalia stepped backwards to create distance.

“And now you’re going to resort to underhand tricks, right? Go have your

people cast their healing magic on you. I'll just beat you up more to compensate." (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia confidently provoked her.

In response, Witch's face turned red, and she screamed out.

"You bitch! Who do you think you're facing right now!? You turned your blade on the person who's going to become this Country's Queen!" (Witch) "Like I care. Also, this country's future Queen is Melty. There's no space for you. Right now, you're just a normal adventurer... no, a traitor." (Raphtalia)

Cool headed 'til the end, Raphtalia glared at Witch with cruel eyes.

"Now then, whether it be support or healing magic, have them cast whatever you want. I'll still destroy you all the same." (Raphtalia)

As if she was trying to kill her with just her eyes, Witch glared at Raphtalia and clicked her tongue.

"Or are you perhaps going to cheat already?" (Raphtalia)

"YYOOUUU BAAASSTTAARRDDD!" (Witch)

Recovery magic was cast, and Witch's wounds healed. She swung her sword around violently as she came at Raphtalia.

But Raphtalia saw through her sword, and dodged her attacks easily. Even in the eyes of her brainwashed followers, Witch looked like nothing but a fool.

But she didn't know when to give up.

Pretending that she was overcome by rage, she began casting magic.

「Dreifach Hellfire」!

She quickly cast her magic. While Raphtalia was occupied dodging one of her thrusts, she slammed it at her.

“Hengen Musou Sword Skill, 「Circle」!” (Raphtalia)

But Witch’s last ditch magic was calmly destroyed.

Witch was taken aback for a moment, but she immediately recovered and threw her dagger.

Her decisiveness and her ability to look down on people were her specialties.

Raphtalia bent backwards to dodge the projectile and Witch lost her trump card.

But it didn’t end there. That’s one of Raphtalia’s good points.

Just as she dodged the thrown dagger, Raphtalia extended one of her hands to grasp it out of mid-air.

She pointed it towards Witch.

“... What is this? I realized that you were unfamiliar with fighting with such a weapon, yet you still kept trying to hit me with it. It was quite obvious, you know.” (Raphtalia) “Damn!!” (Witch)

Without answering Raphtalia’s question, Witch raised her hand in the air and loudly declared.

“Everyone! Kill this follower of the accursed Demon Lord of the Shield!” (Witch)

“... I knew it would come to this.” (Raphtalia)

But Witch never noticed it.

Raphtalia had been chanting magic for a while. Her tail was slightly puffed up.

『I, who has understood the origin of strength command. Let the truth once more be read forth. Let all mistake theirs for mine.』

「All Trick Mirage」! (Raphtalia)

“Ho ho ho! As if I would go all out on a follower of the Demon Lord!” (Witch)
With a victorious smile, Witch backs off to leave Raphtalia to her minions.

But that’s where her plan collapsed.

All magic support fire suddenly turned on her.

Magic rained down on her relentlessly, and Raphtalia began receiving support magic. She began receiving healing even though she hadn’t received a scratch.

“... You people! Why are you attacking me!? Don’t come, stay away! Why!? You idddiiooots!” (Witch)

It seems having her own brainwashed followers turn against her was completely unforeseen.

“Why? There’s no helping it. Everyone here simply sees the two of us reversed at the moment.” (Raphtalia) “Y-you! GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!” (Witch)

Witch’s screams were erased by the legions of people swarming around her.

Her plans were completely destroyed by Raphtalia alone.

What a pitiful state she’s in.

It’s a fitting end for the ugly witch.^[34]

My heart is filled with joy.

The only regret I have is that she was not dealt with by my hand.

Though I have doubts whether or not I would be able to do that much damage.

“I don’t know exactly what you were planning, but the show ends here.”
(Raphtalia)

The brainwashed legions shouted out their victory.

It seemed they had yet to realize their own folly.

Raphtalia seemed slightly shocked. She impersonated Witch, and stepped forwards.

“I will personally send the Queen to the underworld. Everyone, please bind the Shield conspirator! Seal her mouth and torture her. After that, you can wait on standby in the castle. This is—” (Raphtalia)

The legions answered with what they thought she was about to say.

“Our rebellion of Justice!” (Brainwashed followers)

The applause ended, and Raphtalia led the Justice Zombies in infiltrating the castle.

Inside, she undid the magic, and returned to the Queen. Apparently, she tied up my followers, and sealed the rest behind walls of ice.

She had no idea how to undo the brainwashing, so she just sealed them for now.

And so, the chain of command fell into disorder. Escape was difficult, and quite a few of them misunderstood the situation, thinking that they had barricaded themselves with walls of ice to protect themselves.

“After that, with Raphtalia-san’s help, we escaped from the castle, and took whoever wasn’t brainwashed with us.” (Queen) “I see...” (Naofumi)

Witch’s last days. I wanted to see them.

If I just used my portal to jump here instead of chasing Armor, would I have faced them?

I get the feeling I made the wrong choices.

But we did manage to capture Itsuki, so I think that may have been the best option.

“After that, we don’t really know what happened.” (Raphtalia) “Raphtalia, can you tell apart who’s brainwashed and who’s not?” (Naofumi) “I can only tell if I look in their eyes, but it’s possible.” (Raphtalia)

I see. So her eyes are better than those who came back early from training.

Ah, perhaps Rishia could tell as well. I never asked.

She never really speaks up, and perhaps she was afraid of me cross-examining her.

But it seems the current Rishia can see them clearly.

“Ah, right. Did you see the Old Man from the Weapon Shop?” (Naofumi) “I met him. I left the evacuations to him. They’ve probably arrived at Ryuut village by now.” (Raphtalia)

I see. So he’s safe.

“Now that I think about it, I saw a cloud of dust enter the city right after we left it...” (Raphtalia) “Ah, don’t worry about that. That matter will be resolved soon.” (Naofumi)

Witch may have even turned into a zombie and gotten run over by him.

That would be quite an amusing scene.

Rishia may find her as well.

“Naofumi-sama, you’re laughing again.” (Raphtalia)

“How nostalgic, that phrase.” (Naofumi)

“It’s been a while, but you haven’t changed at all.” (Raphtalia) “Humans don’t change that easily... No, that’s probably wrong.” (Naofumi)

Looking at Raphtalia and Fohl, I see that’s not true.

She was just a small girl when I found her, but now she’s practically an adult.

Fohl was just a cheeky brat, but he’s grown up well.

I guess we can change.

And not just in appearance.

“Firo is sleepy.” (Firo)

“Right. I’m also getting a bit sleepy. Raphtalia, do you think you’ll be out training for much longer?” (Naofumi)

Seeing the situation resolve itself, the fatigue is starting to set in.

But now that I think about it, the matters at the village aren’t resolved at all.

Do I have to interrupt Rishia’s work?

“It’s about time to end it. One more week should be enough.” (Granny) “Ah, I see. We’re going to go pick up Rishia, then go dispel the brainwashing in my village. What will you guys do?” (Naofumi) “Are you sure the castle is okay?” (Raphtalia)

“Let’s see... We’ve managed to stop the zombies, so it should be fine if we leave them for a bit. Can I leave this place to you?” (Naofumi) “As you wish.” (Raphtalia)

“Understood. Then is it fine for me to borrow Raphtalia-san for a few days?” (Queen)

The Queen interjects.

I turn my eyes to the Granny, and she nods.

“Got it. After we’ve taken care of the village, we’ll rest for a while, and send Rishia over again. I trust you to hold on until then.” (Naofumi) “Leave it to us.” (Queen)

“Then Firo, go grab Rishia. We’re going home.” (Naofumi) “Ye~s.” (Firo)

“Onii-sama, please go away.” (Atlas)

“Aah, Atlas! Atlas!” (Fohl)

Atlas shakes Fohl off, and jumps on Firo’s back.

I also hop on and she gallantly runs off.

I see. So Raptalia will only be gone for a little while longer.

And when we returned to the Castle Town...

“Fueeeeeeeeeeee! Why is even Witch-san heeere!?” (Rishia)

We hear a loud cry resound through the city.

And so, the curtain suddenly closed on the brainwashing incident.

I can't say I didn't gain anything from it.

Kukuku... We even managed to capture that bitch.

I feel happier than I was at the birthday party my parents threw me after I put a stop to my brother's delinquency. [\[35\]](#)

That metaphor was a bit questionable...

Now then what will the Queen do?

Will she execute her when this all calms down? I pray for the day her head falls from her neck.

Promotion

It's been three days.

Me and Rishia endlessly worked towards putting an end to this incident.

After we dealt with all the zombies in my land, we finally got some time to rest.

These people know how to act normal, so we have to have Atlas or Rishia search for them.

In the Castle Town, Raphtalia and Granny had to look them in the eye to find them. But, they somehow managed.

Luckily, dispelling the brainwashing turned out to be surprisingly easy.

All Rishia had to do was throw her weapon.

Though, I still have to use a reinforced prison.

We've roughly dispelled all traces of the brainwashing, and after we look over the people again, we can bring this incident to a close.

The amount of brainwashed people has severely decreased, and it has been decreed across the country that anyone who spouts messed up logic and criticizes me will have to be apprehended.

Though, some may find this quite oppressing.

Whenever someone criticizes me, they get suspected of being brainwashed.

The people who truly hated me regardless have quieted down.

That's the big difference between them and the brainwashed party.

Anyways, this and that happened, and the incident headed toward resolution.

And on the morning of the fourth day.

The Queen invited all of us to come to the castle.

Ren and Motoyasu as well.

About Itsuki... I'll tell you later.

He's on house arrest in my village.

"I sincerely thank you for resolving this country's internal conflict." (Queen)
When we were called in for an audience, we found that Raphtalia and the others stayed in the castle and waited for us.

Trash was quietly sitting in a corner.

It seemed that Witch's revolutionary movement has caused him to age a bit.
He's also lost his confident atmosphere.

I guess I should call him pitiful.

This look really suits him.

"And? What did you need?" (Naofumi)

"I don't think Iwatani-sama will be pleased with it, but this is a sort of ceremony to reward you for driving out this country's filth." (Queen) "Ah, so it's like that." (Naofumi)

"There are a few other things as well, but this comes first." (Queen) "Fumu..." (Naofumi)

I did put a stop to the revolution trying to overturn the government. I guess the royalty has to give a large reward or they'll lose face.

Though, I think there's an inherent problem with Witch spearheading the rebellion.

I'll ask about that later.

"First, is the person who poured in his aid and led this conflict to a swift resolution. Hero of the Shield, Iwatani-sama." (Queen) "Yes." (Naofumi)

I'm handed a ceremonial sword again. I stand before the Queen and lower my back. I unsheathe the sword and hand it to her.

The Queen takes it, touches it to both of my shoulders and declares, "For your efforts, I hereby award you the title of Marquis." (Queen)
Uwaa... I really don't want it.

So I'm promoted from Count to Marquis. It is a step up, I guess.

There are way too many ranks in my world.

I wonder if this one is the same.

"The rewards for your subordinates will also be bestowed through Iwatani-sama. If you want anything specific, please ask him. The other heroes are also included in this." (Queen) "Yes." (Naofumi)

So I'll be accepting praise for Raphtalia's efforts as a representative.

Ren is also nodding.

Motoyasu... Please stop staring at Firo. She hates you.

Though Ren and Motoyasu are Heroes, they're currently working under the pretense of making up for their sins. Even if they work hard, I don't think they'll be promoted.

Perhaps because she realizes that I find this to be a pain, the Queen makes it short.

And... Can a title be bestowed on Raphtalia as well?

I glance at Raphtalia, and she shakes her head.

It would be a pain. Though, I'll make her get one in the end.

"You did it, Naofumi!" (Ren)

"No, it's not like I'm happy or anything." (Naofumi)

"I-I see." (Ren)

My response renders Ren silent.

I'm honestly not happy at all.

And were Ren and I even close enough to quarrel about this?

"Father-in-Law, for my efforts this time around, I would like you to let me expand my Filo Rial Ranch." (Motoyasu) "Motoyasu, shut up." (Naofumi)

I thought he couldn't understand the Queen's words.

Is he just saying whatever he wants?

"Now then, there is another here who is deserving of a reward." (Queen)
Hmm?

The Queen gestures towards Rishia.

"Rishia Ivyred." (Queen)

"Fuee!? W-what could it be?" (Rishia)

The Queen beckons her to come forwards.

Rishia timidly walks forward, observing the fixtures of the room as she comes in front of the Queen.

"Rishia Ivyred. During this incident, you have contributed greatly to the resolution of this incident and to the prosperity of this country. You have been highly evaluated by me, Queen Remillia Q. Melromark. This is a separate matter from Iwatani-sama's work." (Queen) "Y-yes!" (Rishia)

That's true.

The one going around and undoing the brainwashing was Rishia, and she may

be considered the most important contributor.

What's more, though we don't know if it's a hero's weapon, she did obtain some form of 『Mysterious Projectile Weapon』.

“The Ivyred House will receive a financial reward, and Rishia and her parents will both receive the title of Baron separately.” (Queen)

Wow. Rishia's also promoted.

Is she going to receive land as well?

She probably won't leave because she has to look after Itsuki though.

Even so, I can't call her a Fallen Noble anymore.

“Pick whatever land you want from the plots I'm handing over to Iwatani-sama.” (Queen) “I'm getting land?” (Naofumi)

“Yes... In this incident, a large amount of nobles were taken into custody, so there's quite a bit of unattended land.” (Queen)

I really, really don't need it.

“The fact that you don't want it is written all over your face, Iwatani-sama.” (Queen) “I mean...” (Naofumi)

I just wanted some land to raise my army. If I have to take responsibility for the disputes of a larger area, I think I'll collapse.

I'm leaving this world anyways, so getting land or status doesn't really mean anything...

“Don't worry. A portion of the items and taxes collected from that land will be presented unto Iwatani-sama.” (Queen) “I see!” (Naofumi)

It's not like the lord is the only one who does the managing, anyways.

I'll have to send people there to govern.

I'll just leave it all to Melty!

And if you suspect it's going to turn out that way, then just leave it to your daughter from the start.

Since most of the rebellious nobles have been sentenced to execution, there are many vacant territories.

Also, if I get more land, my actions will be more restricted, but it will be easier to take greater action.

Since there will be at least two waves after Houou, I'd like to reinforce my forces.

In that sense, the resources and money derived from greater plots of land may prove to be invaluable.

And it seems that I'll have to cover the equipment enhancement costs for Ren and Motoyasu, who've glued themselves to my village...

Itsuki's case... depends on Rishia.

"... About that, Queen-sama." (Rishia)

Rishia has an apologetic face, but her voice has a firm tone.

"What is it?" (Queen)

"I am very grateful for the honor you have bestowed on me. However, I have one favor that I wish to ask of you." (Rishia) "... I'll hear it out." (Queen)

"Please make it so that the status, land, and honors I've received never happened. Instead, could you forgive the crimes of the Hero of the Bow, Itsuki-sama?" (Rishia)

The Queen's aides and knights begin talking amongst themselves.

Itsuki himself was greatly involved in this event, though it was officially proclaimed that the entire fault lay with Witch and the Three Hero Church Remnants.

It seems Rishia's been thinking as well.

This is the only chance she has.

"I understand your request. Rishia Ivyred, I shall discard all the awards bestowed onto you and exempt the Hero, Kawasaki Itsuki, from his crimes. Of course, with some conditions." (Queen) "Conditions?" (Rishia)

"Yes, he must continue to risk his life fighting the waves that threaten this world, no matter how long they last. Also, the next time he brings harm to this world or its people, he will be sentenced to death without question. I'll leave his management to you, Rishia Ivyred. Please bear this in mind and do a splendid job." (Queen) "T-thank you very much!" (Rishia)

That's quite a judgment.

It seems that they have decided to keep Itsuki alive. They vied for the safest option.

I also had a promise with Rishia. If she didn't speak up, I would have asked the Queen myself.

Just how much does that girl like Itsuki?

"Now, let's leave the discussions of rewards there and discuss who the responsibility for this event falls upon." (Queen)

I feel the atmosphere getting heavier.

But we all knew this would come up.

"Can I ask something?" (Naofumi)

"What could it be?" (Queen)

"The Three Hero Church remnants were able to flee during the Spirit Turtle incident, right? Why were they not executed on their capture?" (Naofumi)

"Quite a few of them never laid hands on Iwatani-sama directly, so they avoided execution. Also, many were citizens of this country and many of them

were of noble birth.” (Queen)

Ah... So that’s it.

Even if they wanted to execute them, the noble families stepped in.

If they were executed without question, this revolution would have grown even greater in scale.

What I can’t understand are these 『Nobles』. Are they really that important, to be this respected?

In my world, I believe the Guillotine was a device reserved for noble criminals.

Is there a troublesome procedure to execute them here?

“Some were waiting for their execution dates, and some were still being interrogated. When we were in the middle of taking control of their facilities... the Spirit Turtle began to advance.” (Queen)

Would it be like this in my world? A criminal was being held in a criminal cell, but an earthquake destroyed the prison and sent the country into chaos?

I’ve heard that in foreign countries, prisoners were held in detention for a while before their trials, so they have a chance to escape before it.

I didn’t think it was even that long between us defeating the pope and the Spirit Turtle attack.

With the nobles involved... I guess it’d take around two weeks to argue for execution.

I can understand why they were still alive.

“And? What happened in the end?” (Naofumi)

“With an incident this large, I don’t think it’s possible for a noble to step forward to defend them. At the moment, it’s impossible to even speak against Iwatani-sama, so their executions have been decided.” (Queen) “Hmm...” (Naofumi)

“I’ve also heard about the actions of the Hero of the Bow’s former subordinates. It’s been decided that they will be executed in Iwatani-sama’s

presence.” (Queen)

So Armor and the others are being executed as well.

I can't wait.

And they're going to show the entire event to me?

I don't think that's good on the eyes. Is there really a need for me to be there?

“For crimes this large, we hold large scale public executions in the Castle Town plaza.” (Queen) “Heh...” (Naofumi)

“Even though we may seem peaceful, executions used to be really common here. Most of the criminals were the generals of enemy countries though.” (Queen)

Was that how it was?

Since I was born in the modern era, it's difficult for me to imagine such a scene.

For some reason, I'm getting an uneasy feeling. But enemies are enemies.

You reap what you sow. It's a bit of a pity. My emotions are a mix of these two.

“The people who will be given a public execution are the people who led this revolt, the nobles of the revolutionary faction and the Three Hero Church officials. The others will be executed through other means.” (Queen) “What's the method?” (Naofumi)

“We have quite a few ways, but do you have a preference?” (Queen) “No, I have no idea what you have.” (Naofumi)

And why would you ask me to choose it...

“For the nobles, it's the Guillotine. For the Three Hero Church, the Iron Maiden. For the former subordinates of the bow, the Brass Bull.” (Queen)

... Those are the Curse Series arms, aren't they?

Did the former heroes use them, and they took them as reference? Still...

Ren has a bitter face like mine.

If we watched, we would get the feeling that our own skills were killing them.

"We also have impalement and using magic to make beehives out of them. Our repertoire is quite vast, so is there anything you would like?" (Queen)

Hearing the Queen calmly list execution methods scares me.

No, this may be normal here.

Trash and the Queen were at war with Shild Freiden for a long time, so things like that happen.

I had grown somewhat accustomed to this world's values, but I guess I'm still fundamentally different

"We also have electrocution by lightning magic. It's apparently great as a torture method." (Queen)

... Sadina's magic comes to mind.

She's quite skilled with lightning.

Hmm? Why is the Orca-ish Demi-Human good with electricity?

Not that it matters.

"Father-in-Law! What are you guys talking about?" (Motoyasu) "You shut up! Ah, Midori, was it? Go interpret the words of women for Motoyasu." (Naofumi)

"Okay, got it." (Midori)

Motoyasu's Filo Rial, Midori, begins talking with Motoyasu in private.

Motoyasu starts nodding. Eventually, he speaks up.

"Then let me offer a suggestion." (Motoyasu)

"What is it?" (Queen)

“Sky Burial.” (Motoyasu)

Sky Burial!?

I believe that was... Where the criminal was left out for birds to pick at.

Wait a second. For the criminals to undergo a sky burial...

“Rejected!” (Naofumi)

What do you think will happen if you teach these birds the taste of human flesh?

They may begin eying other things.

And if they began to enjoy it, we would have created some troublesome monsters.

“Master, what’s a Sky Burial?” (Firo)

“You don’t need to know!” (Naofumi)

“Eh...” (Firo)

Motoyasu... If you’re in charge of these birds, why is it fine for you?

He’s become a bit... no, he’s become quite scary.

This topic is dangerous. We must change it immediately.

“Next, I don’t really want to hear about it, but what’s going to happen to Witch?” (Naofumi) “Ah, that matter. Bring the Witch in.” (Queen)

The Queen issues orders to her aides.

Witch was presented to the crowd. She had a gag on to prevent speech, and she was wearing magical restraints to prevent movement.

“Mu-! N-!” (Witch)

From the look in her eyes, she hasn't given up on life just yet. She's glaring at me as her sworn enemy.

Based on the direction of her glare, it seems that Raphtalia is also included on her enemy list.

The Bloodline of Heroes

“Now let’s talk for a bit. Take off the gag.” (Queen)

“... Puhah.” (Witch)

Even though she was captured, Witch looks down at everyone gathered with conceit.

She must have confidence that she won’t be executed no matter what.

“Now then, Witch. Do you have anything you wish to say?” (Queen) “Mama, I was being brainwashed. There’s no way I would take part in a rebellion against you.” (Witch)

Ku... Now that she’s here, she mouthing off some convenient lip service!

Even if she failed, she could simply say that she was one of the many that they had brainwashed to escape.

Though Rishia and Atlas would be able to see through this, she would probably claim they were acting out of personal prejudice.

Just how much of a Bitch is this Witch?

“Witch, did you seriously believe such an excuse would pass?” (Queen) “Hmph! Mama, so how do you plan on executing me? I’m your daughter, you know. If you were to execute me, how would the country look at you, Mama?” (Witch) “... I understand what you’re trying to say.” (Queen)

“And? How shall I be killed off? Or will you marry me off to another country? Perhaps you plan on cutting off my limbs?” (Witch)
You Witch!

She knows the situation she's in, yet she's using that fact as a provocation.
Just how rotten is she?

The Queen also seems to have seen through her intentions. I haven't raised a hand yet, though.

"No matter what you may do to me... I have no plans of yielding to you."
(Witch) "Death! I demand Capital Punishment!" (Naofumi)

I shout out.

And no one stands up to object to my words.

Even the now-hot-blooded Ren doesn't raise a finger.

"And didn't I just say it? How will the people react to a cruel Queen who raises her hand to her own daughter?" (Witch)

I understand that she has confidence that her eloquence will at least spare her life.

I feel the blood rising to my head.

"... No." (Queen)

"Wha?" (Witch)

The Queen shakes her head with a fed-up expression.

"I'll have you become the bride of the king of a certain country." (Queen)

Witch's face becomes red for a moment.

"You're too soft! You need to kill her after force-feeding her all of the horrors of the world!" (Naofumi)

I raise my voice high enough to shock even me.

But I have the right to say such a thing.

I was framed. Again and again, I was faced with disgrace. Sometimes people would come to kill me.

Every day was a living hell. I withstood it. I bore the pain and crawled the way here.

The simple fact that that woman is alive and well is enough to piss me off. And yet you arrange a political marriage!?! Cut the crap!

“Is that so? Mama, that means I’m heading off to somewhere around Silt Welt, correct?” (Bitch)

That possibility is quite high.

The area worships the Hero of the Shield, and there are plenty of people angry with this bitch’s harassment of me.

It may be a good place for Witch’s final days.

Perhaps it would be nice to send her as a sacrifice.

But still my grudge won’t subside.

“No.” (Queen)

“Eh?” (Witch)

Witch lets out a surprised voice.

The Queen expands the fan in her hand, and covers her mouth... She continues in a manner-of-fact tone.

“The place you’re going... is Faubley.” (Queen)

“Hah?”

Both me and Ren raise our voices together.

Motoyasu? He’s staring at Firo. Do you think he cares?

“What are you talking about? Isn’t Faubley supposed to be the biggest country? Marrying her off to somewhere like that is more of a favor than an-” (Naofumi)
“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” (Witch)

As I try to raise an objection, Witch begins shaking and her face turns blue. She screams out.

“Wha...?” (Naofumi)

My words are interrupted, and I turn to Witch.

I’m at a loss for words... I guess that’s the term to describe my emotions.

She was fine with Executions, and even being married off to her enemies, so why does Faubley scare her this much?

I don’t get it. What does it mean?

“Mama! No matter the crime, that’s too much!” (Witch)

“You’ve been bad. I told you before you set out for Cal Mira, didn’t I? If you continue to perpetuate intolerable acts, I would marry you off for the sake of peace. I told you that if you didn’t want that, you would have to work with the Heroes for world peace. If you did that, I wouldn’t have gone this far.” (Queen)

“Even so! Why must it be Faubley!?” (Witch)

“They said they would forgive us for monopolizing the Four Hero summon, so there’s no helping it.” (Queen) “What do you mean?” (Naofumi)

“Ah, I never explained it to Iwatani-sama and the others, did I?” (Queen)
Hmm? Rishia’s fainted with bubbles coming out of her mouth!

Really? Is it that bad of a place!?

“The current King of Faubley is a man who’s drowned himself in carnal pleasures. When he looks at women, he sees... I’d I’m quoting here... simple toys of pleasure.” (Queen) “I-is that so...” (Naofumi)

“He cares not for appearance, and takes on beauties and uglies. Everyone. When I was younger, I dreaded the day my parents would try to marry me off there.” (Queen)

Trash is also down for the count!

What’s with you people!? Is this sentence really that bad!?

“And just how old is that king!?” (Naofumi)

“He’s Trash’s brother... I think it was 13 years his senior.” (Queen)

Um, I believe Trash was the prince with the lowest status.

Doesn’t that make this incest?

“He’s ugly and stupid, but he at least has the wisdom needed to keep his own power. Even though he’s rotten, it isn’t luck that he’s managed to hold the throne for so long in a country plagued by power struggles.” (Queen) “But still... I can’t understand why everyone here hates it so much...” (Naofumi)

I still don’t understand what makes marrying there worse than marrying into Silt Welt.

Since Witch is caught up in physical appearance, could she just hate his looks?

“Let me give some explanations. Faubley has had a long tradition of marrying the Four Summoned, the Seven Stars, and their children into their family. Because of that, they’re known world-wide as the bloodline of Heroes.”

(Queen) “Hmm...” (Naofumi)

Well, heroes are said to be an existence close to God. It’s natural for a country to hold such beliefs.

The people summoned are treated nicely, so they’re alright with it, and it seems quite safe.

If their children perform well, they’re once again favored, and they carry on the line.

“And please understand that those children are usually divided into categories.”
(Queen) “Divided?” (Naofumi)

“Yes. First, if they’re male, many of them are born with exceptional looks. These people would play around a lot, and make their own harems. They would try to surpass others, and would fight often. Contrarily, quite a few become reclusive. These people are the targets of many foreign countries. Because whimsical princesses think they can get married to handsome foreign princes, and they happily give their hands. Ah, sometimes Heroes personally marry in as well.” (Queen)

Um... By heroes, do you mean otherworlders like us?

I don’t know the conditions required for a summon, but looking at the current heroes... We’re all gamers.

When we first got here, even I had a dream of making a Harem.

That means these skirt chasers would mass produce children, and carry on the bloodline. Plenty of unfortunate children would probably be born as well.

I may not be in the position to say this, but the Heroes probably got through this new world with cunningness and crafts.

Their bloodline would have amazing power struggles.

And if I think about it, Trash is one of their descendants.

Is that why he’s supposed to be wise? I don’t know if that’s true. I don’t want to know.

“In the case of females, they are also usually blessed with good looks. There are some that even make reverse harems. I wonder if this is the grace awarded by the blood of heroes. The Heroes’ descendants seem to be blessed with looks over knowledge.” (Queen) “Is there a greater chance of Heroes being male?” (Naofumi) “There are also females, but their blood doesn’t get spread as much as men.” (Queen)

The fate of a harem.

Stallions and mares have different production rates, so there’s no helping it.

... How lively these people are.

And wait, the Heroes may work hard, but if you look closely, they're a collection of failed human beings.

This may be limited to the summoned ones, though.

Wait. Are the Seven Stars summoned as well? I don't know the criterion, but I believe they were chosen from the people of this world.

Anyways, that means otherworlders like us get the idea in their heads to build a build a harem in another world. And their bloodlines mixed and brought forth the Fauble Royal Family.

"People with such blood get into power struggles with one another, win, become king, make more children... and prosper. The current king is more skilled at power struggles than Witch. What's more, he's a long-lived king."

(Queen) "Ah, and..." (Naofumi)

He's more manipulative than Witch... I don't want to meet him.

"Let's see. His appearance is... one that one would hesitate to call human."

(Queen)

What sort of person is that?

Is he like one of those frog-like disgusting otaku characters that appear in anime?

"The closest description I could give would be an overgrown pig." (Queen)

Oh, really?

That's supposed to be the king? Of the biggest country?

And our Queen is getting hostile here.

"Rejoice, Witch. It seems the other party has been waiting months for your arrival. If you go, it seems that they'll turn a blind eye to our crimes." (Queen)

“Hii!?” (Witch)

Witch steps back with a pale face.

But it’s not like I can’t understand where she’s coming from.

Still, is this a fate worse than death?

Shadow appears and whispers in the Queen’s ear. I haven’t seen her in a while

“Ah, Witch. It seems you’re going to be proudly welcomed as the 10000th toy.”

(Queen) “Ten Thousandth!?” (Everyone)

Wait a second... so he’s had 9999 female toys before this?

No matter how I look at it, that’s impossible.

Even absurd Eroge don’t use such high numbers as a setting.

No, he’s supposed to be older than Trash, right?

I have no idea how many days are in a year in this world, but if I take a girl a day, and assume 365 girls per year, then times that by his approximate age... I guess it’s scarce.

... Even so, it’s shocking.

“Ah, please bring that item to make it easier for Iwatani-sama to understand.”

(Queen)

The door behind me opens, and soldiers rush in, two items covered by cloth.

“When you Heroes were off on Cal Mira island, this is the item we presented to the king to stall for time. A life sized Witch Doll.” (Queen)

The first cloth is pulled off.

What’s revealed is a doll that looks exactly like Witch.

I already want to make it my punching bag.

Anyhow, it’s an exact replica. It’s as if I’m looking at a mirror.

And isn't this what my world would call a Love Doll?

"Next is the item that we retrieved from a compost heap in Faubley, two days later." (Queen)

S-seeing the next item made me doubt my eyes.

Um.. This is Witch... right?

The hair has been pulled out, the eyes are out of their sockets, both arms have been cut off, and the legs have been cleanly sheared off as well.

Are those burn marks? There are a few places that have swelled up from soaking too long as well.

The mouth, and another place have strange holes cut into them.

The lopped off stumps of the arms and legs are the same.

Um... I'm definitely not looking into the holes...

"Those holes were made for the exact reason Iwatani-sama is imagining, you know." (Queen) "Geh!?" (Naofumi)

"The King of Faubley's motto is 『Toys that have gone through enough pain that they wished they were dead feel much better』. This is a good representation of that." (Queen)

Wow... If you take sadicism to an extreme, do you become like this?

These aren't dolls.

He's dealing with live women here.

"For girls of good birth that have caused problems, Faubley is the answer. Upon having such a sentence, most commit suicide on the spot. It's that famous of an execution method in this world. It seems that his favorites are kept alive for as long as three months through magic, Yggdrasil medicine, and other things. Apparently, he wouldn't permit them to die..." (Queen)

This marriage has already turned into an execution method.

And for him to be so famous, yet still keep his position, Faubley is a

mysterious country.

I believe it was the start of the legend of the Seven Star Heroes, the Four Summoned Heroes, and this world's largest country.

They're the first people who received the right to perform the Four Heroes summon.

And from Rat's words, they apparently have several Seven Star Heroes as well.

From the previous conversation... from repeated breeding, a bad hybrid popped up.

It's a country with massive land and military might.

It's the birthplace of Heroes, so it must have a long history.

It may become troublesome in the future.

And for that famous fiend to hold the throne... Don't uprisings happen?

9999 Women are dead here. Isn't he really hated?

Ah... Does he oppress them through money and might?

He's already something like a criminal, so slapping more crimes on him doesn't really do anything.

Some people may sell themselves to him for the sakes of their families as well.

Like Rishia.

Starting with Melromark, going to Silt Welt, Zeltburg, and now Faubley.

Does this world have no decent countries at all?

It seems that no matter where I go... I'll have my share of trouble...

Even after the wave, I'm seriously worried about the fate of this world itself.

No, it's not like I care what happens to it.

It's a shitty world. And I'm tired of it.

“It seems the other party is very pleased with you, Witch. He plans to use you as his toy every night. My heart aches as I wonder what will happen to you. Now how many days will you last?” (Queen)

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” (Witch)

Witch’s voice resounds through the castle.

Pleading for Life

“They’ll back us up with medical facilities and military power if Witch agrees to attend to their king.” (Queen)

The Queen continues speaking in a calm tone.

Even though the restrictive clothes she’s wearing prevents her from moving her hands, she desperately struggles to use them to cover her ears.

I unintentionally let out a smile.

And this is the first time Raphtalia doesn’t raise her voice at me.

Though she’s probably just overwhelmed by the situation right now.

“In reality, it’s a crueller sentence than death. The woman who lived her life bewitching men will die by a man’s hand.” (Queen) “Even so...” (Naofumi)

From what I’ve heard, he’s an evil scum of a man, but the fact that he’s male bothers me.

What do we do if Witch works her wiles on him as well?

The only thing she’s good at is deceiving people.

She may abuse her needlessly good appearance to twist the King of Faubley around her fingers.

If that happens, then we’ll get a situation direr than any we’ve faced previously.

“Is there any chance that Witch is the exception? That she’ll be able to make use of the King?” (Naofumi) “I won’t say the chance of conciliation is zero, but up until now, the countries apart from ours have tried countless times. Because

he rules the world's largest empire. Getting him under your thumb is the same as taking control of the world. However, there's no precedent of him ever listening to the words of a woman." (Queen)

So he's like the current Motoyasu. In a bad way.

The current Motoyasu isn't a scumbag like the previous one. He's more like a broken madman.

And if you think about it, that king's a condensation of the blood of otherworlders. He may be like the past Motoyasu.

But Motoyasu was kinda a Feminist.

"Even Witch should be able to tell whether or not her words are getting through. Right? When she studied abroad, she was chosen by him after a single glance, and she almost fainted. Perhaps this matter has been decided since that point in time." (Queen) "Mama! I beg you! This is the only thing I'll ask of you in my life! Please! Please defer your decision!" (Witch) "Let's see... It is a matter that strains my heart as well. But even if you claim to be brainwashed, society won't forgive you so easily... Alright. Then how about I entrust your fate to the heroes?" (Queen) "What!?" (Witch)

The Queen closes her fan, and smiles at us.

What does she plan on doing? It's probably nothing good.

"If there's a single hero here who wishes to take Witch under their wing, then I'll defer my decision to Faubley." (Queen) "Cut the cra-" (Naofumi)

Before I can finish, Witch uses all of her strength to get away from the soldiers holding her, and prostrates herself on the ground before me.

"Hero of the Shield-sama! I'll do anything! Please... please take me up as your comrade once more!" (Witch) "... " (Naofumi)

She's really desperate.

She's hanging her head, while throwing teary side glances to everyone in the room.

I silently step on her head.

"Thank you! Trample on me as much as you wish! I'll do anything. If you ask me to act as your pig, I will do it for the rest of my life!" (Witch)

The fact that this makes me really happy makes me once again realize that I'm a scumbag.

Raphtalia stares at me with a complicated expression.

But I'm not swayed.

"Get violated by that pig, and die!" (Naofumi)

I push her away with all my might.

She stares daggers into me once more, but realizing she doesn't have the time, she moves over to Ren.

"Hero of the Sword-sama-" (Witch)

"Go to hell!" (Ren)

Ren's eyes are dead!

He's not going to forgive Witch here.

Though if he did, I would beat him to death.

"Hero of the Spear! Please offer me forgiveness!" (Witch) "Firo-tan, do you want to go for a scenic drive after this?" (Motoyasu) "No!" (Firo)

Witch finally kneels before Motoyasu, but he's flirting with Firo, and doesn't

hear her.

Firo seems terrified.

And for a drive... Where do you plan on going?

Is riding a Filo Rial even considered driving?

Anyways, Motoyasu doesn't react to Witch at all. Because she is a woman.

But Witch refuses to give up.

She desperately appeases to Motoyasu.

They've known each other for a while, and he may be the only one here who would willingly save her.

... The past Motoyasu, that is.

"What is this ugly Red Pig? Firo-tan is finally looking my way, you know. Go away, pig." (Motoyasu) "Motoyasu, if you don't deny her, she'll follow you home." (Naofumi) "Then disappear!" (Motoyasu)

Motoyasu swiftly pushes Witch away.

Amazing. He completely ignored his beloved witch when she was pleading to him with teary eyes.

Humans sure do change.

And Itsuki is absent.

"Mama! The Hero of the Bow isn't present! This isn't a fair trial." (Witch)

"Should you really be saying that!?" (Naofumi)

"Right! Whose fault do you think it was that Itsuki ended up like that!?" (Ren)
Ren accuses her loudly.

Itsuki's absent because of you!

Even if it's wrong... Well, I'll explain it to him later, but once he calms down,

he'll surely reject you!

"Damn you all! Rather going to Faubley, I'd rather die here and now!" (Witch)
A snapping sound resounds through the room.

Witch bit her own tongue with a lot of force.

Blood starts flowing from her mouth.

Did she commit suicide? Is this sentence really that bad!?

"Don't let her die! Take her alive!" (Naofumi)

Why the hell am I saying such lines?

The soldiers run over to Witch and the healers began desperately casting healing magic on her.

A cloth is shoved into her mouth, and her life is saved.

"And that's the result. What should we do for Witch's trial?" (Queen)

"Nothing's been decided, but I'm a little satisfied... or perhaps I should say bewildered." (Naofumi)

I got to abuse Witch when she was desperately lowering her head to me. I guess I've calmed down a bit.

Perhaps Ren is the same. A cold smile floats on his face.

The current Ren is a person who would sacrifice his own body for his allies, yet...

Motayasu is... Stop chasing Firo around already.

"Then we'll reset Witch's level to 1 and ship her to Faubley... I'm a little worried with just the castle's soldiers, so could Iwatani-sama personally escort her?" (Queen) "Rejected. For what reason would I ever have to spend a long time with that Bitch?" (Naofumi)

But the Queen's opinion is sound.

With just this country's soldiers, there's too great a risk.

Even so, if I leave, then that would mean setting both my land and the matter of dealing with Itsuki aside.

Though with my Portal Shield, I would be able to jump back and forth. It would be a pain, but it's possible...

... Ah, right.

"Fumu... We don't know when or where Witch's conspirators will try and recover her. Could we put Motoyasu on transportation duty?" (Naofumi) "Leave it to me!" (Motoyasu)

Before the Queen can speak, Motoyasu steps forward with pride.

"Then I'll leave it to you." (Queen)

The Queen's words don't reach him, though.

Motoyasu can't hear any female voices.

"Motoyasu, when you're in the middle of transportation... if the pig ever tries to run, kill it without hesitation. Also, keep it under your watch until you confirm that it gets violated by the King of Faubley, and return after you have a magic crystal record the scene." (Naofumi) ^[36]

"Yes! Understood!" (Motoyasu)

With this, I probably have nothing to worry.

Well, if Motoyasu gets taken out, there's nothing we would have been able to do in the first place.

Even if the Queen turns out to be lying, I can order him to kill Witch.

“The ride of the Filo Rials at my place is said to be a living hell. And after that, an even greater hell awaits.” (Naofumi)

Kukuku... I look at Witch collapsed on the floor and laugh to myself.

After that, I watched over Witch’s treatment, and her Level Reset. I left her in the care of Motoyasu and his Filo Rials.

In order to prevent her from biting her tongue again, her mouth was stuffed. And the tied up Witch glares at us menacingly from the carriage’s window.

This time, her eyes are colored with tears and despair.

Even if she tries to rebel, she can do nothing at level 1.

“Mu-!” (Witch)

“Enjoy your final trip to its fullest.” (Naofumi)

And like this, Witch tumbled down the one way road to hell.

But she got what she deserved.

Ah, let me offer a description.

The crystal Motoyasu was to use as evidence... It was that Camera-like crystal that my wanted poster was displayed on... I received the recorded footage of Witch being tortured by the pig... no, the King of Faubley.

By the way, it also recorded sound.

Honestly, there’s nothing more disgusting in this world. But I have to see Witch’s last days through to the end.

It seems that The King himself graciously let it be recorded.

Something about driving Witch into further despair... He’s really human filth.

I want to avoid meeting him at all costs, but the King of Faubley personally invited me over to hear my opinion on the evidence footage.

Please leave me alone...

I have a lot to say, but for numerous reasons, I politely declined.

By the way, it seems that it's very rare for Faubley's King to send out invitations like that.

Even the Queen was surprised at the message.

And after Motoyasu transported Witch to Faubley, we received news of her death two weeks later.

Her body was sent back as evidence, preserved with Ice Magic.

It was not a pretty sight.

And it seems the King developed an attachment to using those Crystals to record. He sent numerous ones to me after that.

I never looked through them. When I saw the first one, it recorded all the way to the subject's death.

Does he think sending such things will earn my friendship?

Don't send footage of any woman besides Witch...^[37]

I'm still soft. I've only caught a glimpse of this world's darkness.

I want to stay out of it if possible.

I engraved these words onto my heart.

Like this, I finally cut my long ties with Witch... It was so sudden that it seemed anti-climactic.

Yes Man

And like that, I saw Witch off and return to the throne.

The matter concerning rewards ended, so everyone went off to rest inside the castle.

The only people left here are the Queen, the Country's higher ups, and me.

"Now then, should I begin my report?" (Queen) "That sounds good. There are plenty things I have to ask." (Naofumi) "Let's see... First, would be just how Witch was able to escape and cross national borders to start up her rebellion." (Queen) "How was it done?" (Naofumi)

"It seems that she salvaged a disguise magic tool from the corpse of a Shadow that died in the Spirit Turtle assault." (Queen)

Oh, right. The Shadows had that ability.

I'm surprised she learned how to use it.

After Witch separated from Motoyasu, she apparently crossed borders.

She didn't plan on returning. She grasped for ways to live the easy life elsewhere.

"Ah, besides Elena, didn't Witch have another companion? Where is she?" (Naofumi) "She's already been captured. She's going to be sent off much like Witch." (Queen) "So she's also a noble?" (Naofumi)

"Yes." (Queen)

Hmm... So she'll face a fate similar to Witch's.

Take that.

Even so, I never learned her name in the end.

I'm sorry, but I'll be forgetting you soon... Um... Woman 2.

"Next is about her slave seal. That matter's already been settled." (Queen)

"Why didn't it work?" (Naofumi)

"It seems that the Spirit Turtle's presence caused some sort of bug, and after that, she stayed in an area with devices made to jam the signal." (Queen) "Oh, right. You investigated the building I reported about. Did you find the device there?" (Naofumi) "Correct. During this incident, it seems that the aura causing the brainwashing had an interference effect as well. The seal's now in working order, and we plan on turning her slave rights over to Faubrey's King." (Queen) So there was a jamming effect. What a pain.

Hmm? I can hear some noise from the castle's yard.

I peek out of the window.

And I see Fohl holding Atlas while stepping away from Trash.

Atlas is frowning.

Trash is... holding his hand into the air as if to cut the sky.

In his hand... is that food?

Is he trying to bait Atlas?

Trash fainted when he heard Witch's sentence.

Is he searching out Atlas to fill the void in his soul?

I guess it's fine. I'll leave them be.

"Next is..."

The slave release ceremony that's become a famous rumor on the streets was apparently done by the Three Hero Church." (Queen) "Ah, I see." (Naofumi)

I heard it from the slaves when Taniko first came to the village.

Something about a charitable organization that granted slaves their freedom.

“The Three Hero Church is charitable? That’s suspicious beyond doubt.”

(Naofumi) “Yes... It seems that in order to procure subjects for their experiments, they would lure slaves in with the pretense of breaking their slave seals.” (Queen)

So that’s it.

They were those sorts of people.

“When we took them in, we heard something along the lines of, 『Sure, we released them... from this world!』 and 『They became sacrifices towards our noble cause』.” (Queen)

Those are quite some lines.

But the time those people will be released from this world as well is swiftly approaching.

If there’s anything I’m unsatisfied with, it’s that there’s no repose for the victims.

“They were being held in a section of the facility Iwatani-sama reported.” (Queen) “Fumu...” (Naofumi)

“Many died from experimentation. However, there are just as many survivors.” (Queen) “... Are they alright?” (Naofumi)

The Queen quietly averts her eyes.

Ah, I see. So the situation isn’t that good.

“Many of them will need treatment. However...” (Queen) “I got it. I’ll look at them at my place. Having a few more doesn’t change much at this point in time. As long as they weren’t directly related to the incident, I won’t do them harm.”

(Naofumi) “I give you my sincerest thanks.” (Queen)

... I’ll put my order to the Slave Dealer on hold.

It seems I'll be getting an influx of slaves soon.

My place has an alchemist, and if I give them the medicine, they should get better.

I hope.

“Do you know their home towns?” (Naofumi)

“About one third of the captives have homes. The others have had their villages destroyed by slave hunting long ago.” (Queen)

So the same pattern as Raphtalia.

Why must this country detest Demi-Humans to this extent?

They may have their differences, but if you try to talk to them, it's not like they won't understand you.

Rather, it's the people that do the discrimination that refuse to understand.

Ah, right. I procured the research equipment from the facility and gave it to Rat. She was quite happy.

There were some machines she wanted, and some documents she wanted to use as reference.

However, she discarded all the information about replicating Heroes' Weapons after a quick glance.

She said it wasn't worth it.

Currently, the castle soldiers are rushing to perform a full investigation on the building.

“Iwatani-sama, what has become of the Hero of the Bow?” (Queen) “I've entrusted him to Rishia... but he's not looking so well.” (Naofumi)

It was the noon after we had finished resolving the brainwashing incident.

We heard the report from the slave we put on watch that Itsuki had opened his eyes. Rishia and I rushed to the Camping Plant where he was being held.

“Itsuki-sama!” (Rishia)

Itsuki had gotten himself off of the bed.

I crossed my arms and watched over the worried Rishia. Just in case Itsuki went out of control, I had Firo, Atlas, and Ren on standby outside.

“How do you feel, Itsuki?” (Naofumi)

“...” (Itsuki)

With an expressionless face and sleepy eyes, Itsuki slowly turned towards me and replied with silence.

“...” (Itsuki)

The silence continued.

Rishia seemed to be waiting for him to say something, but there were no signs of that happening soon.

“Oy, say something.” (Naofumi)

“... Something.” (Itsuki)

...!?

He’s got quite some courage to pickin’ a fight with me so soon!

“I’m sorry Rishia. It seems I’ll be breaking my promise to you.” (Naofumi)

There was no point in keeping someone who wouldn’t repent in the slightest.

“Fueeee! Wait a second. Itsuki-sama, just honestly apologize here.” (Rishia) “...”

I'm sorry." (Itsuki)

Expressionlessly and monotonically, Itsuki lowered his head.

What was this? Was Itsuki this sort of person?

"Itsuki, what happened?" (Naofumi)

"... I don't know." (Itsuki)

"Are you hiding something again? You sure like doing things like that."

(Naofumi) "... Am I hiding something?" (Itsuki)

"Umm... Itsuki, have you possibly forgotten just who you are?" (Naofumi)

I hope his curse cost wasn't something like amnesia.

From what I've seen, it wasn't strange for such a thing to happen.

But if that happened, it would truly be a pain.

"No, I am Kawasumi Itsuki, the Hero of the Bow. I had intentions of Justice, but I lost." (Itsuki) "It isn't amnesia, right?" (Naofumi)

"I don't know." (Itsuki)

What didn't you know?

"Don't hide anything here. What are you planning?" (Naofumi) "... What am I planning?" (Itsuki)

"Like I know! I'm asking you! Don't answer questions with questions!"

(Naofumi)

What was this?

Itsuki was still expressionless, and he seemed to be spacing out.

His ambition seemed non-existent.

He was not disabled... I think.

When I asked him to say something, he honestly said, 'Something.'

...

"Itsuki, do a handstand while taking off your clothes." (Naofumi) "Yes..." (Itsuki)

Itsuki followed my orders and stood on one hand. He used the other to slowly undo his buttons.

"Itsuki-sama! Please stop." (Rishia)

"Yes." (Itsuki)

Upon Rishia's words, Itsuki stopped and stood upright.

Wait a second. He was just performing whatever people asked him to do.

"Itsuki, kill yourself." (Naofumi)

"Yes..." (Itsuki)

Itsuki pulled a rope out of his bow and began searching for a place to hang it.

He was not acting of his own will. If it was Motoyasu, it would be like that anime.

I mean, the weapon fits. [\[38\]](#)

"FUEEEEEEE! Please stop, Itsuki-sama!" (Rishia) "Yes..." (Itsuki)

"Itsuki, what do you want to do?" (Naofumi) "What do I want to do?" (Itsuki)

... Oy, could it be?

I had the feeling that he shouted out that he was offering his belief and his heart, or something.

Without his own belief... he was unable to use his will to decide anything.

Inside his head, he's become unable to tell what was right and what was wrong.

"Why are you expressionless? What do you think of me?" (Naofumi) "Am I... Expressionless? I don't really think anything of Naofumi-san..." (Itsuki) [39]

"Then what do you think about evil?" (Naofumi) "Nothing really... If it exists, then it exists..." (Itsuki) "You don't get angry?" (Naofumi)

"I don't feel anything..." (Itsuki)

Expressionless and emotionless?

And, it was weird for the secretive Itsuki to be talking this much in the first place.

"For now, you have lost to us. You are our prisoner. Rishia is in charge of you, so stay put and listen to her." (Naofumi) "Understood." (Itsuki)

Itsuki stared at Rishia... and turned to me again.

"Is there anything I should be doing?" (Itsuki) "What will you do?" (Naofumi)

"Um, what should I do? Should I just stay put? If I move..." (Itsuki)

His decision making power was null.

The curse took away his will in itself.

And, why are all the Heroes that come to my place cursed?

"Itsuki, what are you going to do from here on out? Think about it." (Naofumi)

"That is... I don't know." (Itsuki)

"That's because of your curse. You'll eventually recover. At that point, I'm not sure if you'll oppose me, but if we do end up fighting, I won't hold back.

Remember that.” (Naofumi) “... Understood.” (Itsuki)

“Itsuki-sama, I will fight with you so you can make up for your crimes.”
(Rishia)

As Rishia faced Itsuki with these words, he nodded.

“I look forward to working with you. Rishia... san.” (Itsuki) “Yes.” (Rishia)

For some reason, Rishia was crying.

Well, this was pretty much someone else in Itsuki’s form.

And he did whatever someone asked him to do.

With him like that, it was exceptionally dangerous to bring him to Witch’s trial.

If he were there, he would have immediately forgiven Witch when asked.

Vol. 1

“Then I’ll move to the next question.” (Naofumi) “... Yes?” (Itsuki)

The current Itsuki seems to be incapable of lying.

I should take this opportunity to thoroughly interrogate him.

This way, it’ll be too late for him to lie when his curse clears.

“What nickname did you go by in the Coliseum?” (Naofumi) “Perfect Hidden Justice.” (Itsuki)

“Fu-” (Naofumi)

Ah, I almost started laughing.

He said it expressionlessly without any tone in his voice.

“And why did you go with that name?” (Naofumi)

“Because Justice helps people even when they don’t realize it.” (Itsuki) “Are you an idiot?” (Naofumi)

“Perhaps I’m an idiot to you. To you.” (Itsuki) “... What was that?” (Naofumi)

Wait, this guy is just saying whatever pops into his head.

He’d usually refrain from making such comments.

But the fact that he thought such a thing pisses me off in itself.

... It’s fine. I’ll find out why he’s so fixated on justice later.

Or else I’ll run out of patience.

I have quite a short temper.

And I don't care about this one's sense of justice whatsoever.

"... You said that this world was ridiculously close to a game you knew of, correct?" (Naofumi) "Yes. I thought this world worked in a similar fashion to the game Dimension Wave." (Itsuki)

Past tense?

That implies that he thinks differently now.

So his game sense has weakened from the curse?

"Then here's the question. Why did you challenge the Spirit Turtle?" (Naofumi) "Because if you don't defeat it quickly, you'll have to fight it anyways in a Story Mission. But that is..." (Itsuki)

I'll omit the rest.

Most of his explanation overlapped with Ren's.

The conversation's pretty much going as expected.

"Next is Houou, right?" (Naofumi)

"Yes." (Itsuki)

"Fumu...next question. For this Dimension Wave game you played... What was the ending?" (Naofumi)

This is the fundamental difference between the games Ren, Motoyasu, and Itsuki played.

Ren played VRMMOs, and Motoyasu MMOs. Itsuki was on console.

Itsuki's the only one who could play the game to the ending.

"After you beat Ouryuu, the first part comes to an end. After that, it's a free world, and you can do side quests." (Itsuki) "What!?" (Naofumi)

This is bad! Itsuki's info has proven itself to be useless.

And what does he mean by 'first part'?

There are games that come in multiple parts to make you have to buy the sequel.

Was it something like that?

Cut me some slack here. Finish the damn game before you get sent to another world.

"What sort of game was it, anyways?" (Naofumi)

"If I were to categorize it, it would be Hack and Slash. The game itself was made about 30 years ago in my world. An unnamed demo version was packaged with an Ero Doujin Game. It required 2TB of hard drive space to run, but it instantly became a sensation." (Itsuki) "Hah?" (Naofumi)

He suddenly starts speaking eloquently.

In the first place, Itsuki's world had 2 Terra Bite hard drives 30 years ago?

I thought his world was the normal one here. Even if he's not as technologically advanced as Ren, he's still from the future.

No wonder I wasn't able to get across to him.

Does that mean Motoyasu is the one whose world is closest to mine?

No, he must come from a world straight out of a Galge. Definitely.

Though it might just be a Galge for him.

"And?" (Naofumi)

"This game was released without a known manufacturer. Eventually, the rights to manufacture and sell it were bought by a single millionaire under house arrest, who gave up all his assets to obtain ownership of it. It was quite a famous event, and was all over the news." (Itsuki) "... Please say it in a way I can understand." (Naofumi) "It happened before I was born, so I only have info

from the internet. The rights to sell and manufacture it were bought at a very high price, it seems.” (Itsuki) “Hmm... And?” (Naofumi)

“As soon as he obtained the rights, that millionaire went missing. Though he did leave behind his name in the history books. The items he left behind were investigated.” (Itsuki) “O-okay. What does that have to do with this Dimension Wave?” (Naofumi) “It’s greatly connected. As a result of the analysis of the unnamed, unfinished gaming platform he left, the game Dimension Wave was born.” (Itsuki)

According to Itsuki, Dimension Wave was a game where anything was possible if you tried it.

Hero, Villain, Saint, Merchant, King, Lord of the Night. [\[40\]](#)

The amount of characters that could be created were endless. That was the game’s main appeal.

But all classes were connected in that they had to complete the World Quests. They had to combat the waves of disaster.

This aspect was different from the original, in that the map wasn’t as large. Not that I really needed that information.

Most quests could be redone besides these ones.

Anyways, it was pretty much a free form game.

And Itsuki came to this world after completing Volume 1. He convinced himself that he was a Hero playing a game.

In his game, you were able to finish off the Spirit Turtle quickly in order to prevent casualties down the road.

“So you don’t know what comes after Ouryuu?” (Naofumi) “No.” (Itsuki)

This is useless...

“... Next question. There was a blue hourglass inside of the turtle. Do you know anything about it?” (Naofumi) “There was one in the game, but it was in a

different location to the one Naofumi-san found.” (Itsuki) “Where was it?”
(Naofumi)

“It was in the center of the town where it was sealed.” (Itsuki) “Fumu...”
(Naofumi)

Was it treated as a background object?

It has to mean something, but the mystery will probably clear itself up next time.

Since it was only volume one, there must have been some sort of level cap.

“What was the max level?” (Naofumi)

“100.” (Itsuki)

Uwah. This isn't helping me at all...

And how dare he call me a cheat when he only had this much info on the game.

“I'm surprised you went off to fight the Spirit Turtle like that.” (Naofumi) “It was supposed to be an easy enemy at level 60.” (Itsuki) “What about Houou?”
(Naofumi)

“70.” (Itsuki)

“... Kirin?” (Naofumi)

“75.” (Itsuki)

Again... it seems I can't expect much from this.

This guy lost easily at level 80.

“Is Houou strong?” (Naofumi)

“He's not particularly strong. You have to deal with two of them, and the fact

that they fly is annoying. But I always used a bow to take them out easily.”
(Itsuki) “Is that why you got the illusion that you were the strongest?”
(Naofumi) “Yes. Dimension Wave was a Hack and Slash on the surface, so most people didn’t realize how powerful the long range weapons and skills were.”
(Itsuki) “What do you think now?” (Naofumi)

“The Bow has some pros and cons.” (Itsuki)

Well I guess he would realize it after we continuously beat him up.

Or perhaps he had realized it, but he was simply denying it.

Right now he can’t lie, so he’s saying whatever he thinks.

“Fue... What are Itsuki-sama and Naofumi-san talking about? I can’t follow the conversation at all.” (Rishia)

He never even told his comrades about his world?

Just how secretive does he have to be?

“I still have more to ask you. What led to you being held in that building?”
(Naofumi) “I was bounty hunting in the Zeltburg Coliseum, and princess Maly invited me over saying she wished to grant me power.” (Itsuki)

Princess Maly... is it?

It seems Itsuki actually doesn’t know.

“From here on, you are forbidden from calling the first princess by anything other than Witch. Of course, without honorifics.” (Naofumi) “Yes. Then Witch explained all of Naofumi-san’s wrong doings, and I... agreed to assist her. When I followed her, she brought me to that building where I found Mald and all the others who used to work with me. They were all plotting schemes against Naofumi-san.” (Itsuki) “I see. Continue.” (Naofumi)

“Mald and his companions explained to me that their previous treatment of me was in order to grant me an opportunity to mature. Witch and some researchers handed me some sort of weapon fragment. I inserted it into my

bow, and I got a new power.” (Itsuki)

Fumu... up ‘til this point, the story shares some similarities with mand Robot and Battle animes.

Upon receiving a strange power, one obtains a duty to fight for world peace. Unbeknownst to the public, they must destroy evil. After losing to a strong enemy, the group dissolves for a while.

But the leader continues to fight his own battle. Eventually his old comrades join him again and he teams up with the princess driven out of her own country. Together, they defeat a great evil.

What’s more, the former princess led him to discover greater power.

With a situation like that, I guess I can understand why he came to believe he was the main character... or can I?

The new power placed too much of a strain on his body, so he had to sleep in a test tube until the right time came.

I might actually watch an anime like that.

“Let me say this first. Those people were only using you. I’ll show you the evidence later.” (Naofumi) “... Is that so?” (Itsuki)

When the curse clears, he’ll go back to normal. I better clear this up while I can.

It’s not like he lost his memory; if his curse starts weakening, he’ll be able to think for himself.

“Do you still think that what you’ve done isn’t wrong?” (Naofumi) “... I don’t know.” (Itsuki)

He really has lost his power to make decisions.

Though he does answer questions honestly.

What do you think about...? Which is right?

He can't answer questions like that.

"Itsuki-sama..." (Rishia)

"Then you don't know what sort of item the Heroes' weapons are, do you?"

(Naofumi) "No." (Itsuki)

He really isn't useful.

It's not like my expectations were that high for the people who lost to the Spirit Turtle, though.

Even so, the fact that I can't get any useful information is depressing me.

"... Is there anything else? Anything that changed?" (Naofumi) "Now that you mention it..." (Itsuki)

"What?" (Naofumi)

"For a while, my SP and Mana haven't been recovering." (Itsuki)

Oy, does that mean he has a curse preventing him from using Magic and Skills as well?

This is the worst.

Ren can't get any EXP, nor can he hold anything worth any money.

Motoyasu... doesn't really have any problems. But he sees women as pigs, and can't understand their words.

And Itsuki complies to any order you give, he's expressionless and emotionless. His sense of Justice is gone, and it seems he has no pride either.

But Itsuki used even more curse-like skills than Ren, so he's being affected by more curses.

"Is there anything else? Will you ask me anything more?" (Itsuki) "Hmm? What's wrong, Itsuki?" (Naofumi)

"About what?" (Itsuki)

“Itsuki-sama?” (Rishia)

“Did I say something strange? What should I do? Naofumi-san is glaring at me.” (Itsuki)

Itsuki starts exhibiting suspicious behavior.

... Something is strange.

For now, I'll try issuing an order.

“Itsuki, try lying. Tell me this room looks like a palace suite.” (Naofumi) “No, it's a strange house made of peculiar plants.” (Itsuki)

Ah... so it's a curse that affects thought.

Even so, it seems he can't lie at all.

This room truly is a strange one made of strange plants.

“Itsuki, what do you think of Rishia?” (Naofumi)

“She was weak, but she somehow got much stronger. It has to be a cheat.” (Itsuki) “Fuee!?! What is a cheat!?” (Rishia)

“The word means that you broke the rules to abuse the system. I guess that means he thinks you're weird.” (Naofumi) “Fueeeeeee...” (Rishia)

I can't confirm it with just this test, but I think it's like this.

The current Itsuki just says the first thing that pops into his head. He can't make up lies.

Probably.

I can't let this guy into the outside world...

Even if he's a Hero with high combat abilities, he only listens to orders. He's like a doll.

I have no choice but to watch over him at my village.

Starting Point

“And like that, it doesn’t seem that Itsuki will pose a problem. We’ll need to monitor him, but as long as Rishia’s there, it’ll work out. He can’t really run, nor does he seem to have the intention of doing so.” (Naofumi) “I see, then I’ll leave him to you.” (Queen)

“Well, if he does end up running away again, then I’m really going to dispose of him.” (Naofumi) “... That’s something I would like to avoid.” (Queen)

“Alright. Next, we can use Motoyasu’s teleportation to make use of Cal Mira’s healing onsen.” (Naofumi) “The heroes all seem to have an overly convenient warping ability. Please make use of it to recuperate yourselves.” (Queen)
Before Motoyasu left for Faubley, I ordered him to take Ren there once to make sure we could open a portal if necessary.

We negotiated with the Count there, and got permission to use the onsen that cures curses every night.

With this, the curses should pass faster.

“... We suffered quite some heavy damage during this incident.” (Queen)

“Yeah.” (Naofumi)

It’s the same at my place.

Though it’s still within levels that we can recover from, and my Filo Rials are helping in procuring materials. It seems recovery will be faster than expected.

I didn’t want to spread the Camping Plants too much, but I’ve had to distribute them to the village.

I also brought some here to use as temporary relief. We’ll all be able to manage somehow.

Though I dread what's become of this nation's finances.

Ah, right. The base the Three Hero Church used had some treasure piled up. Apparently, it came from the nobles.

The Queen decided that all of it would go towards financing the recovery effort.

Still, this country's trash has finally been driven out.

"Again... and again, I kept telling her to correct her personality. Even from when she was little." (Queen) "Like I care." (Naofumi)

"That's right... this is all due to my negligence." (Queen) "You're also slacking on Trash duty." (Naofumi)

"... He was an extraordinary person at the start, but he's changed. He was swallowed by the power and authority he obtained." (Queen)

I peer out the window again. Fohl and Atlas are questioning Trash.

Trash is absentmindedly staring in the direction Witch was taken while he talks.

Hmm?

Fohl seems speechless.

What could they be talking about?

"The executions will start up tomorrow, but what will you do, Iwatani-sama?" (Queen) "I'll stay for some closure. After the primary offenders are taken care of, I'll take my leave. I have to deal with Itsuki and prepare for the next wave. I can't really afford to waste my time here." (Naofumi) "I see. Then we'll get into contact with you later." (Queen)

I can finally give the Wave my undivided attention.

I get the feeling that I've finally gotten to the starting point.

"Then I guess we should be off." (Naofumi)

After I finish my talks with the Queen, I prepare to head back.

“Ah, we’ll be continuing our journey for a little longer.” (Raphtalia) “I see.”
(Naofumi)

So we’ll be separating from Raphtalia... I feel a bit of regret, but it seems that she will be done soon.

“Atlas! Atlaaaaaas!” (Fohl)

“Onii-sama, just go on your trip already.” (Atlas)

Ah, right. Fohl also completed his Class Up.

I sent Firo with him to the Dragon Hourglass, but it seems he couldn’t perform a special Class Up.

There was no choice, so I sent Gaelion over.

Just what standards does that Ahoge operate on??

With this, Atlas has taken the Firo route, and Fohl, the Gaelion route.

Even now, I can’t tell just what makes them different.

Since their races are the same, perhaps I will be able to witness the difference between the two Class Ups.

“Because of Fohl-san, our journey is taking longer than it should. Please be obedient here.” (Raphtalia)

With a fed up voice, Raphtalia reluctantly lifts up her hand and embeds it in Fohl’s solar plexus.

“Ugu... I can still go on!” (Fohl)

“Then me too.” (Atlas)

Atlas chops the back of Fohl's head.

"Guha! A-Atlaa..." (Fohl)

Hey!

Why are you following up?

"Your training is running late?" (Naofumi)

"Yeah. If we give him the chance, he tries to run home. It's quite troublesome." (Raphtalia) "Right. The instructor always leave's Fohl-san under Raphtalia-san's watch." (Rishia) "Is that so?" (Naofumi)

Dammit, just how much of a Sis-con does he have to be?

He runs away from his own journey.

"I'm currently the strongest of master's disciples, so it naturally turned out like that... I can understand that he treats Atlas-chan dearly, but I think he should put his effort towards getting stronger for her." (Raphtalia) "But that's going to last for only a little longer, right?" (Naofumi) "Yes. I look forward to coming home." (Raphtalia)

"Then let me walk you to the outside of the Castle Town." (Naofumi) "Thank you." (Raphtalia)

My group accompanies Raphtalia's to the edge of town.

"Look forward to the souvenirs." (Raphtalia)

"You got some?" (Naofumi)

"Yes. We brought a large variety." (Raphtalia)

Are they materials she got while training? If so, I'd definitely want them.

Raphtalia has values similar to mine. She probably knows what would make me happy.

"Well then." (Raphtalia)

"Cya soon." (Naofumi)

I wave my hand as I watch Raphtalia set out.

"Then should we be off as well?" (Atlas)

"Yeah, we already sent Ren and Rishia home ahead of time. We should..."
(Naofumi) "Carriage..." (Firo)

Firo suddenly lets out a questioning voice.

For some reason she looks like she's going to cry.

"Ah, yes, yes. I haven't stopped by the Old Man's place yet, so I better go ask him." (Naofumi)

Does not having a carriage bother her that much?

But I was also worried about the Old man, so it's not a bad idea to check.

Though I did talk with him a bit after the incident.

Apparently the Three Hero Church remnants raided his shop, and tried to stab him with the Dagger of Mob Mentality.

He could tell it was a strange weapon at a glance, so he immediately knocked them senseless, closed shop, and locked them up in an acquaintance's house.

I did warn him, so this was to be expected.

After the incident began escalating, he helped evacuate the populace.

He truly is a reliable person

More importantly, just what level is that Old Man?

Level isn't related to combat experience and technique, so perhaps it's a rude thing to ask.

But he seems to have a lot of experience for some reason.

"Oh, if it isn't the young lad." (Old Man)

"How's your store been faring?" (Naofumi)

"Quite a bit's been stolen, but it seems that my money is still safe." (Old Man)

"I see. So do you plan on reopening soon?" (Naofumi)

"I can open at any time. Though my variety won't be the best." (Old Man)

"Then won't you come over to my village this time?" (Naofumi) "Again, laddy? I have no intentions of answering you at this point in time." (Old Man)

Imya's Uncle has just returned, so I shouldn't be too insistent with my invitation.

"And what are you here for today?" (Old Man)

"My bird is begging for her new carriage." (Naofumi)

"Ah, that matter. I'm sorry, young lady, it's not done yet." (Old Man) "I see... Firo is sad." (Firo)

"As compensation, I'll use some techniques from Faubley to improve it. Don't worry." (Old Man) "What do you plan on doing?" (Naofumi)

"They have something that lifts the wheels and body to lessen impact, apparently." (Old Man)

... Suspension?

I see. This world has such things as well.

The old man unrolls a blueprint and shows it to me.

It involved attaching simple springs to the Wheel's couplings.

"Then..." (Naofumi)

I supplement the design by sketching a damper on it.

Even so, it only used simple pipes, water, and air pressure.

It's not like I'm that knowledgeable on the matter.

I'm only reiterating information that one of my friends who liked cars lectured to me about, long ago.

However, even with that, the Old Man's eyes shine with admiration. He nods a few times.

"Boy, you know some interesting things. I'll test it out." (Old Man) "My world was one without magic. If you try using magic with this design, I think you may get a good effect." (Naofumi) "I understand, boy. You don't need to sketch it all out, I have the inspiration." (Old Man) "I see. I'll look forward to it." (Naofumi)

"Yeah! Firo will look forward!" (Firo)

After looking over the blueprints with the old man, we warped back to the village.

Translator note

1. ↑ TL: Naofumi uses sarcastic slang here.
2. ↑ TL: This is not Kiel.
3. ↑ TL: Rasengan from Naruto.
4. ↑ TL: This is a pun. Dai is big in Japanese, so they mixed Dai with Tidal Wave
5. ↑ TL Note: Yoraikun does not endorse any views offered by our protagonist.
6. ↑ TL: He's talking about Japan here.
7. ↑ TL:... Are those Crickets I hear?
8. ↑ TL: This is more of a literal translation. If you didn't get it, he's saying he doesn't want to be near him.
9. ↑ TL: Literally recycle.
10. ↑ TL: And then came the internet.
11. ↑ TL: The phrase used here is *これでもか*, which means, 'And still more!?' This pretty much means do it so that onlookers will say, you're still going to hit him after that 10000 hit combo!?
12. ↑ TL: Yes, it says Shell, not Shield
13. ↑ TL: Learn from his mistakes.
14. ↑ TL: I can't think of an English alternative. Pretty much, the term means to pursue a goal too far, and is usually used with a negative connotation, but Naofumi means to chase them to the end.
15. ↑ TL: Apparently the Game is Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth. I can't vouch for it, as I only played covenant.
16. ↑ TL: I think this is Romancing Saga 2.
17. ↑ TL: There's no response... It's just a corpse.
18. ↑ TL: As in the afterlife.
19. ↑ TL: Peerless Activity. I didn't change Hengen Musou, so I'm keeping this as is.

20. ↑ TL: ... The ship has sailed...
21. ↑ TL: レヒトファナティッカー
22. ↑ TL: ゲレティヒカイトアラインヘルシャフト
23. ↑ TL: The Brazen Bull Torture method was created for Phalaris, the Tyrant of Acragas in the 5th century BC.
24. ↑ TL: Itsuki is now randomly switching between Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji.
25. ↑ ED: Meaning: Helden(Hero)-Kaiser(Emperor)-Reich(Realm/Domain/Kingdom)
26. ↑ TL: SPARTA!?
27. ↑ TL: Watch the Vocaloid song Shinde shimau no wa nasakenai! It's not really referencing that, but it's referencing the same line from old RPGs.
28. ↑ TL: THE SHIP HAS SAILED
29. ↑ TL: Apply to be a Shadow now
30. ↑ T/N: Naofumi has been promoted from devil 悪魔 to demon king 魔王 XD
31. ↑ T/N: Refers to Malty joining Naofumi's party in the very beginning and then betraying him (stealing the chainmail and funds).
32. ↑ T/N: The false rape incident.
33. ↑ T/N: Refers to the fight after the banquet where Raphtalia's slave status is revealed and Witch cheating with wind magic.
34. ↑ TL: This time, witch is in Japanese. He means witch, not Witch.
35. ↑ TL: Read Chapter 1.
36. ↑ TL:
37. ↑ TL: And now, Naofumi's traumatized for life.
38. ↑ TL: I think he's talking about Lancer (Fate/Stay Night) always being ordered to suicide.
39. ↑ TL: The ship hath sunk.
40. ↑ TL: Yes, in that sense.