



琥珀之劍
Heroes of Amber

破曉之刻

緋炎

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緋炎 | AUTHOR
SADON | ARTIST

可歌可泣的故事，不在於英雄式的犧牲，
而在人們舉劍反抗的決心！

繁花與夏葉之年，第一次黑玫瑰戰爭爆發……
初生之犢的劍士、未來的王國女武神、嬌憨的商人小姐，
面對無情亡靈引燃的烽煙，孱弱的蝶翼緩緩振動……

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The Amber Sword

— 琥珀之劍 —

- Volume 2 - The Dust Laden Kingdom (I)

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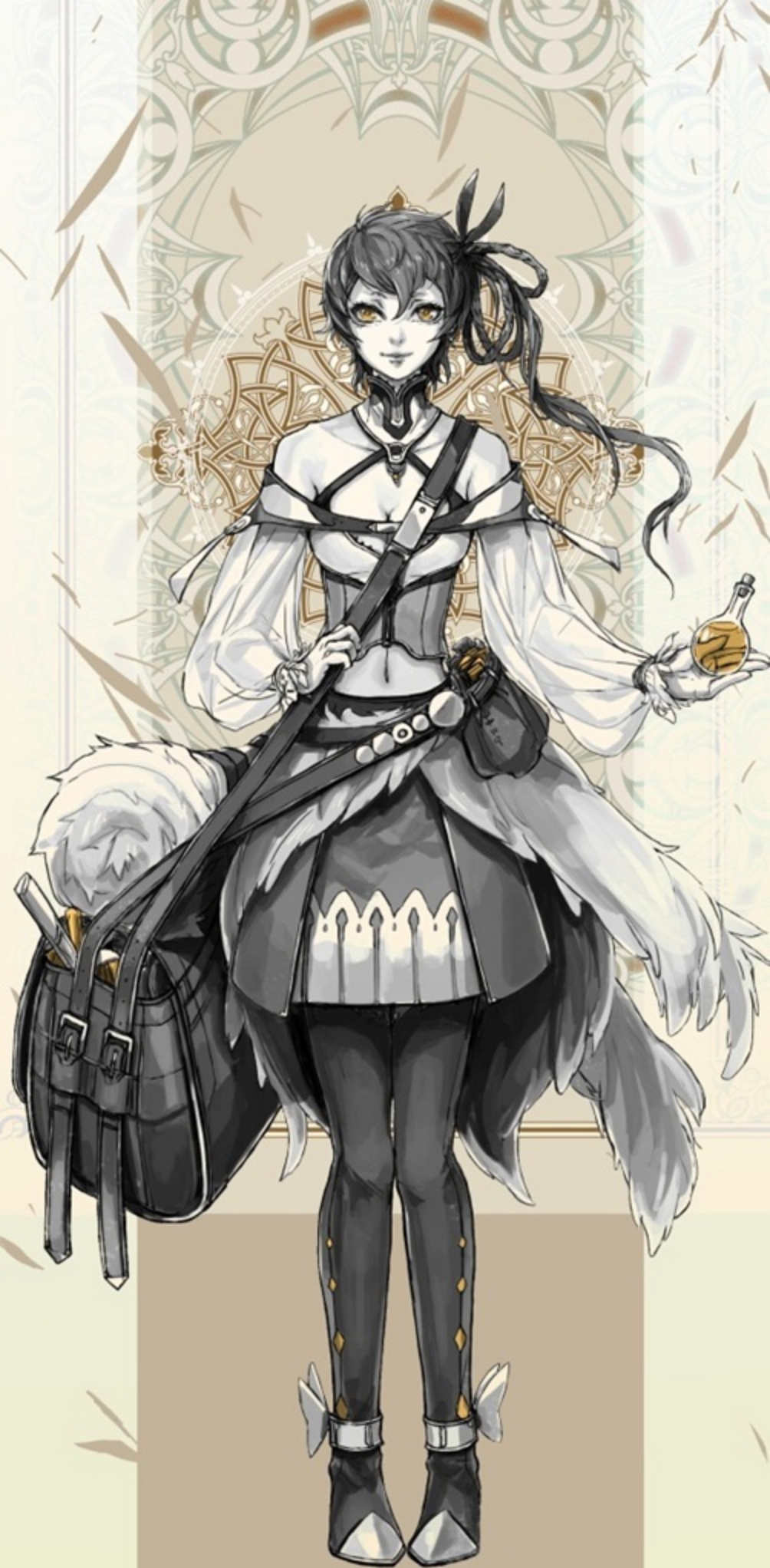
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Brendel



Romaine



Freya



Ciel



Tarkus



Princess Gryphine



Ebdon



Rauze



Amandina



Tulman

Chapter 1

The burning city

The time was the year of bustling flowers and summer leaves, the morning of the second day of the sixth month.

Freya quickly reached 'number 51' at the market with the assistance of Sue, the bar's owner's daughter. She took a look at the Ponoa's market area. Even though it was morning, there were a decent amount of people in this place. Torches were lit everywhere, and the brightness more or less made people feel safe—

She prepared to move, but Sue suddenly grabbed her arm: "Stop, there's someone hidden in the alley."

The young girl with braids stood between the edges of the shadow and light in the street's corner, her hand against the wall and observing the outside area in alertness.

"Are they soldiers?" Freya's heart jumped.

"I don't know. But these faces are unfamiliar, they are definitely not people from this city's region." Sue shook her head and answered quietly.

Freya brought a clenched fist to her lips, pondering anxiously. If they appeared in the Ponoa market now, they were most likely the soldiers of the White-Mane army.

[Brendel have predicted this would happen. They really went to find hood. Have they talked to him? Should I still continue to meet with him?] Freya furrowed her brows.

[...Wait, Brendel said that it was okay even if I discovered the soldiers. Without knowing our relationship, they won't act immediately as they want to capture all of us.]

Freya took a deep breath. She turned her head and asked: "Sue, can you answer me a question?"

"What is it?"

“How do you know when someone is lying?”

The dark-skinned girl laughed: “Did you ask this question because I help out at the bar?”

Freya flushed a little, she was indeed eyeing Sue’s vastly superior experience compared to hers. Most of the citizens and her naively thought that the nobles would act and save them if anything happened, but Sue pointed out the truth within a couple of lines during their conversation.

In Freya’s heart, this slightly cold girl was very sharp and assertive.

“No problem. I help people everyone out once in a while,” Sue smiled: “Freya, look at me.”

“Huh?”

“Your friend that says that Fortress Riedon will be conquered, what is his name?”

Freya was momentarily taken aback as she did not know why she asked this question. She panicked a little in her heart, and her eyes darted about: “B-Brendel.”

Sue’s eyes glinted: “You like him, right?”

“N-no, Brendel, he, likes Romaine.”

“Eyes, Freya, look at me.” Sue’s deep brown eyes was a pool of still water as it reflected Freya: “And who is Romaine?”

Freya’s face looked like it has been set ablaze by fire. Her eyes swam about and did not dare to look at Sue, and tried to explain with stuttering in her words, but she did not where to begin with. She suddenly felt she was the biggest fool under the sky, and wanted to find a crevice and hide in there.

“Understand?” Sue asked.

“Y-yes.” Freya lowered her head, while nodding hard.

She took another deep breath to calm herself, her fingers on the sword’s hilt and ready to move out, but she suddenly turned back and grabbed Sue’s arm. “Sue, can you wait

for me for a while?”

Sue paused for a while, but she nodded her head. Freya felt a little mystified by her actions, but she kept feeling Sue was like Brendel, and it gave her a little more confidence.

She walked out of the alley and acted like there was no one around her and did not pay attention to her surroundings, like she always came to Ponoa’s number 51. She hesitated a little when she felt two pair of eyes on her back, but quickly knocked on the door.

The bangs on the door felt like they came from her heart. Freya waited for a while and the door opened with a creak, showing a man who was hunched over and bald, and it was difficult to ascertain his age. When he saw Freya, he stopped moving for an instant, then retreated a step back as he recognized her.

(Freya, look at me.)

Freya noted the miniscule change in his expression. A somber, icy feeling rose from her heart.

[Brendel said I should note his reactions and decide...]

“Who are you, what is your matter with me?” The hunched man asked after a while. Freya stood there in silence for a minute, and stared him coldly. Just when the man wanted to retreat, she suddenly pulled out her sword with a singing flourish and placed it on his neck.

At that moment where the unexpected happened, Sue saw a few people on the streets jerked visibly, but they soon resumed what they were doing. Their actions were subtle, but the girl hiding in the alley saw everything.

Freya did not know what happened behind her at all. She merely tried to hold her sword calmly and spoke steadily: “Are you the witch’s ally?”

“Don’t kill me, they forced, for—, witch?” The hunched man was terrified over the sudden change, fell onto his butt, before finally understood what the stoic girl said.

[Ciel also said something about her Romaine’s aunt having to do something with witches... I didn’t think I was able to come up with something—] Her mind was

actually blank when she drew out her sword. She continued to speak: "Her name should be 'Jennie', but never mind..... It doesn't matter since it seems I need to give you a lesson first."

She raised her sword as she spoke, and Hood immediately shrieked in pitiful sobs: "Wait, wait, ser, I-I have nothing to do with her..... Ah, no, I mean, to say, I'm not her ally or anything, I'm just a relative to her, no, no, I mean distant relative!"

"Oh?"

"It's true, it's true! Please believe me, believe me, she's just an occult who comes to the fortress occasionally to buy stuff! And she just buys some weird things! She lives with her niece in Buccel!"

Freya glared at the man while repressing her hate for him. She hoisted him up in the air: "But my informant told me that she entered the city a few days ago. You better not be lying, as a... wizard, I can rip out your memories!"

Hood was delirious from the sword on his neck, and could not pick out what was wrong with Freya's words: "I'll tell you, I'll tell you everything! She left two days ago and went to the north of here."

Freya looked at his eyes and threw him away in disgust. She sighed a little when she heard Sue's whistle.

[Damn it. How much time did I waste here, the men outside must have noticed something when I drew my sword. Maybe I overdid things when I raised him up... I need to leave.]

She ran outside.

[Aunt Jennie isn't here. The north of Fortress Riedon is Bruglas, what is she doing there? This man doesn't seem he's lying.]

She gritted her teeth as she hesitated what she should do next.

.....

(TL: Timeline changes to the seventh month, in case people are going to get confused.)

The afternoon's sunlight poured through the room's arched-shaped windows, and it was decorated with care was lit up brightly. The youthful princess who was dressed entirely in silver sat down in a chair with a high back support next to a dainty round table.

She sat down in a proper posture with her hand holding on to a cup of red tea, while her other hand was holding on to a spoon. She did not move at all, and her silver eyes looked straight ahead as if she was lost in thought while listening to the story.

Her hair was a pretty silver color with ringlets. Her half pointy ears peeked out amongst her hair with pale tips. She was Oberg's the seventh's favorite daughter, and recognized as the most beautiful lady in Aouine.

If she was in Brendel's era, no matter if it's a NPC or player, they would call her the 'Regent Princess'. If there was anyone who could compare to the fame of the Goddess of War, it would be her, except her age was a little tender now. *(TL: Regent = a person appointed to administer a state because the monarch is a minor or is absent or incapacitated.)*

"The little girl is quite smart. Everyone in the Everton family is indeed capable." After a while, the princess placed her teacup down, and asked: "And what happened next, Lord Oberbeck?"

Standing in front of her was a stern looking middle-aged man, and if Brendel was here, he would have recognized him. This man's appearance was the true 'Earl Dunn'. There were not many who recognized this man even within the nobles' circle, but there was a famed nickname that was more recognized:

'The Wolf Lord' Oberbeck. *(TL: How exciting. Anyway, that Earl Dunn in Fortress Riedon is a fake. Read on.)*

He was a close aide to the king, and one of the key members in the royal faction, and had a good relationship with the Everton family.

Oberbeck observed the princess. He knew that she was not simple and could not casually end things, especially when she was the king's favorite.

This time he borrowed the family name of 'Lais Bruman' Dunn to go to Fortress Riedon as an antiquarian. The two men were similar because they loved to collect antiques. Even though they were quite different in appearance, there was not too much of a

problem because not many could identify him. It was especially true since he had to do a secret mission for Oberg the seventh.

He paused for a while to recollect his thoughts, then suddenly realized that the princess had asked him a question: "Of course, the daughter of Lord Everton, it looks like she is as brilliant as her father, but it's a pity....."

He wanted to say 'it's a pity she's a woman', but he realized he was speaking to the princess, and quickly swallowed the later half of his words.

(TL: At the beginning of the next chapter, it states that Freya is the daughter of that Lord Everton. I kind of had to check things up because things are becoming complicated and wanted to make sure for sure. I'm like, 'what? has the earl has come back to life?', 'and who is that daughter, exactly', yup.)

The girl before him obviously knew what he wanted to say, but did not pursue it. She merely asked another question: "But Lord Oberbeck, I am puzzled about your story. It's strange that you created trouble for that young man."

Oberbeck's mind thought she was asking a rhetoric question, but he still replied politely: "I was merely worried about his actions. He is a highland knight, and together with his wizard squire, with Everton's daughter at his side. My lady, you do know that Karsuk's white knights do not stand on the same path—"

"I do, but they do not object his actions."

"Precisely because of that, I thought of testing him. Since that person is only my double, I thought it was more important to make sure of the Karsuk's knight's intentions. I will even do it myself for the sake of the king." Oberbeck answered

(TL: Okay, so in case it's not clear enough. The real Dunn went along with fake Dunn, ordered him to test out Brendel's intentions, Fake Dunn died, Real Dunn went back and is speaking to the princess. So right now it's not Freya's timeline now, but somewhere in the seventh month. I think. Does real Dunn know about fake Dunn's connection to the big bad faction? I have no idea.)

"I will thank you in my father's place, Lord Oberbeck." The princess knew that his father and Oberbeck was planning to do something to Karsuk, but she did not think it would succeed. She had guessed what they were planning and it was just bound to fail.

She continued to ponder for a while and thought that there were a few more names that had to be added to the royal family's 'Basta Calvary Academy'. She wanted to hint something to Oberbeck, then stopped herself as she thought of her current status.

Finally she changed the topic: "What happened next Lord Oberbeck? I wish to listen to the story next. I still have a couple of hours before my history lesson starts."

"It would be my pleasure."

TL: Future chapters will jump between Freya/Brendel's timeline and princess's timeline.

Chapter 2

Mercenary

(TL: We are still at the princess timeline.)

Oberbeck took out an ordinary polished brass necklace with a crystal in the center. There was a word engraved on the crystal, 'Freya'. He presented the necklace to the princess and spoke: "She wore this with her. Her name supposedly came from this, but the truth is, this was her mother's necklace, my lady."

"Her mother?" The princess examined the necklace without changing her expression.

"Indeed, she was the same Lord Everton's wife, who died in that chaos seventeen years ago."

"Then you mean to say that girl is the last of the Evertons?"

"Yes."

"Since Lord Oberbeck is already here, that would mean that girl had successfully escaped from danger?"

"You can indeed put it that way, but the entire process was a little bizarre." The middle-aged man nodded at first, then suddenly raised his brow as though he had thought of something interesting.

"Oh?"

"Actually, the main cause was still that young man."

"He is the cause of everything again?"

"No, it's just that young man kept doing some strangely amazing actions in the entire journey. While I put it lightly, the entire journey was filled with unpredictable danger, to the point that I cannot change the outcome. There were many people who were prepared for the very worst, but he managed to turn the dire event entirely—"

Oberbeck could not resist a cold laugh: "If I am to be direct, then compared to the worthless trash inside that fortress, this young man was the only person who made Madara suffer losses repeatedly."

"Hmm?" The princess's silver eyes brightened a little.

"He even got something wonderful out of this journey," The middle-aged man frowned, in order to recall the prior events: "But let this minister temporarily hold on to this mystery a little longer as to what it is."

"I am even more interested in listening now. This young man actually made Lord Oberbeck praise him to the skies. Time grows short for me, so please start telling me the story and who he is, Lord Oberbeck."

He nodded and began to narrate the events that happened.

.....

(TL: Time goes back to Freya.)

Freya heard Sue whistle with clarity to alert her. She had ran towards the street, and discovered there were five strangers that started to surround her. She knew that her consecutive actions were taken too far and finally forced her enemies to act.

She did not even take the time to think and dashed back to the house, pushing away Hood in the process. The people behind her immediately sped up to catch her, but Freya had already fallen back to a room and locked it and blocked it with a cupboard.

There were loud bangs that happened next against the door, and Freya thought her heart was going to jump out of her. She looked at the wooden window and gritted her teeth, covered her head with both of her hands and hurled herself against it.

Even though she had the armor plate to protect her, she broke it with enough impact to numb her arms and forehead. She rolled against the ground a few times and then crawled up. She found herself in the other side of the alley, and saw Sue coming from another path who ran towards her.

But her face was void of color, as if she saw something frightening.

"S—" Freya wanted to beckon to her but she froze.

She spotted blue lights flying across the air, moving towards the central area. It was as if the sky was filled with stars, and she was momentarily confused, but realized that they were arrows.

“Be careful!” Freya shouted as she recalled that night in Bucce, dashing towards Sue and knocked her onto the ground. She covered Sue’s body.

The torrent of arrows soon fell onto the vicinity. Countless arrows rained against the thin roof tiles, and Madara’s heavy cone-shaped arrows penetrated the buildings, and shrieks could be heard from the house.

Multiple arrows struck against Freya’s armor but they were deflected away. She thought she was going to die the next moment, and she closed her eyes in fear but she did not move at all to protect Sue.

The assault lasted approximately a minute Two volleys were unleashed before it finally ended. Freya got up and pulled Sue’s trembling arm. They looked at each other, noting each other lingering fear.

“S-S-Skeletons, outside” Sue’s breath was uneven, and she felt like her heart was going to stop any moment.

Freya’s heart grew cold. She knew that Madara’s army were already in the fortress when the arrows were fired. She never suspected that Brendel would lie to her, but she did not think it would be this fast. She realized why he wanted to choose such a specific timing now.

She dragged Sue’s arm again: “Sue, let’s go now!”

“Where?” Sue asked in confusion.

“We need to escape from here! We have to leave this area now!” Freya’s mind was swirling in anxiety. She finally understood what sort of pressure Brendel was facing at this moment. She thought about for a little and decided to take one step at a time until she met up with Brendel.

“I have to go back to the bar, my father’s still there.”

“Then I’ll go with you.”

Sue nodded.

The Ponoa's market was in the west of Fortress Riedon and close to the Pine River, while the bar was situated in between the Ponoa's market and the Traveler's bridge that was situated in the north. The distance was not very far, but when Freya and Sue reached there, there was a huge burning fire in the west. The streets and the bar's exterior were filled with people.

First it was the huge fire in the noble's parliament, then it was the guards' active movements. The night was filled with great unrest and everyone huddled together and whispered, asking what happened exactly.

Opinions were divided, some thought Madara's army was already at the city gates, some thought it was caused by nobles, but no one knew Madara had already entered the city. Freya and Sue parted the crowd and discovered that the bar's owner and the other patrons were already outside on the street. They were pointing at the raging fire in the west.

Sue immediately dashed into her father's arms. He was slightly confused but patted her back to calm her down. The latter whispered something to him and his expression darkened. He looked at Freya and nodded to express his thanks, then faced the bunch of mercenaries behind him.

He clapped loudly to gather their attention, and someone even quipped: "What's wrong, Leto, are you going to treat us to some beer because of this huge fireworks?"

Everyone cheered loudly in agreement.

But Leto answered gravely: "Treating you to alcohol is certainly possible, but today is not the day. Listen up gentlemen, Madara is already in the city."

Some people did not understand what he meant and took a few seconds before the meaning sank in. Leto repeated again, and the thirty odd people was silenced

'Are you serious?' This question was written on everyone's face.

"Sue told me that. She wouldn't lie to me." Leto said earnestly.

Freya's brows furrowed slightly. Normally people would not discuss this in the open, because even she knew that it might cause a panic to break out. But either Leto did

not consider this or he had his own plans.

[It's more likely to be the latter...]

The crowd took some time to take in the information, and finally someone asked with some difficulty.

“What should we do?”

Everyone was thinking of the same thing. They did not flee immediately or yelled out in panic. Freya carefully observed their reactions, and understood that these regular guests had a particular relationship with the bar's owner.

“We should take the fight to them and escape.”

“Everyone, let's do that.”

“But how are we going to do that?”

If Madara attacked from the west, a normal person would think that the east would be the safest. But these mercenaries had fought in the battlefield and knew something about basic strategy. There was the option of doing a sudden raid on a single Aouine's gate, or surrounding Aouine's gates.

Especially when it came to the motive of Madara's strategy. Were the undead here to merely kill people, to take this city, or to advance even further than this city?

This was a problem for the kingdoms in this continent. They did not understand what the undead wanted to do and what strategy they had in mind.

Everyone put in their input for a while, but no one could find a way to convince everyone. Freya waited anxiously, raising her sword up and down, then finally threw in a sentence carelessly into the fray: “I-I know of someone, who could bring everyone out—”

Her words silenced the entire crowd. They cast their gaze on her, and one of them who recognized her, whistled and said: “Isn't this the lass from just now?”

Freya's face blushed a little from their stares.

[Ahhh, what did I just do?... Will Brendel blame me for this?]

She suddenly realized she was afraid of that, but she calmed down and thought of Brendel's point of view.

[He's always trying to find additional help. If these people are gathered, then it is going to be a source of power that he can use. But how am I supposed to convince them? I can't command these veteran mercenaries as a mere militia captain. These people put their lives on the line in the battlefield everyday... No, it's worth a try no matter what.]

Freya recomposed herself. She grabbed her sword and put it horizontally across her chest. Her appearance looked like like she was a reserved person, and everyone looked at Leto.

"This lass saved my girl a while ago."

"Well then, my lady, why should we trust you?" Someone from the back asked.

[It's here.]

Freya took a deep breath.

"You can definitely trust me. Do you know why the guards wanted to catch me and my companions?"

"Why?"

"Because we're Bucc'e's militia and we were attacked by Madara's undead. We escaped from Madara's army just to inform Fortress Riedon, but the nobles' reactions disappointed us—"

She paused for a while. "I think all of you here don't expect these selfish nobles to save you, right?"

"Of course, they are a bunch of maggots."

"Maggots. That is a great description, Cheers to that."

"Cheers." Everyone echoed that.

“Then you mean to say you have a way to avoid Madara’s detection?” Leto looked at her and asked.

Freya nodded.

Chapter 3

Freya's cavalry army

The bar owner fell into silence after hearing Freya's answer, and she saw an unconvinced expression on his face. She looked around the street and discovered that the people had the same attitude as the bar's owner. Her heart tightened and she gripped her sword hilt, wanting to and swing it onto the ground to release the tension in her.

"Freya's friend had said that Fortress Riedon was going to fall, and everyone here would not believe something like this before tonight. I don't believe it either, but the truth is right before us. Freya is Buccie's militia and I think she has a way out of this." Sue suddenly spoke at this moment.

Everyone paused, and even Freya looked at the girl. Freya cast a grateful glance at her.

"...I actually don't have the means to avoid Madara." Freya thought for a while and spoke honestly, but everyone was momentarily stunned from her words. She continued speaking.

"But, I know someone who might have this ability."

"You mean you are not even sure whether that person can avoid Madara?" Someone asked.

Freya nodded, and immediately saw many of them shrugged. These mercenaries did not put their hope onto a girl like her, even adopting a joking attitude towards her response, as they found her to be considerably charming.

"Wait, please! I know, as a stranger, it must look ridiculous to ask everyone to trust me," She struck the sword against the ground, and composed herself. Her voice became clearer and louder "I'm just offering you a possibility—

She thought for a while: "It's like a b-bet, I, I..."

She struggled for a long time, but could not find an appropriate description to use. She

started to regret her choice to try and explain in a manner that only mercenaries would be familiar with.

“Like setting our bets down on gambling dice right? If we get it right, we will win big?” One of the gigantic mercenary soldier laughed: “That’s a good explanation, Call me Mano, yeah? So missy, I just need to lay down my bets right?”

He turned back to the others, and a few people laughed kindly.

“Mano, you damned gambler, you’re going to throw your life away one day!”

“Gahahaha!!!”

Freya blushed a little, but she nodded quickly: “Yes, something like that. If you think you can trust in my words, why not take a further look at whether the plan is feasible? I think if you see my friend, you will be able to judge for yourself. At the very least, I trust in him.”

The mercenaries fell into silence once again. They felt that her proposal had merit to it, and Sue had guaranteed Freya as a reliable person. There was also the fact where they were going nowhere with their own debate, and could go their separate ways if things did not turn out well later on.

However, no one wanted to be the first to volunteer, and the atmosphere was growing colder by the minute. Freya was becoming more and more anxious.

“I believe in Freya.”

Sue was the first to walk out, and she looked at her father. Leto scratched his head. If she already made up her mind, he had to do it too. He sighed, and everyone laughed.

“Alright, stop laughing at me already. I’m going as well, so everyone should take a look. I’m sure everyone will acquiesce to my daughter’s choice this one time right?”

“That’s really shameless, Leto.”

“How can you use Miss Sue as your shield?”

“Where has your dignity gone to!”

Everyone started making a din, but they basically agreed with Leto's words. The bar owner shrugged off the pointed criticism and looked smug. A few moments later, they made a head count on the number of people who did not want to go. The twenty odd people that remained behind was somewhat interested in her proposal, but their pride refused to go along with a young girl like her and act under her orders.

"Well then lass, the ones who are going with you are here. Now tell us what requests you have for us." Leto folded his arms and asked.

The mercenaries understood there were no free meals in this world. They typically saw this as a transaction, and would decide whether to continue joining her depending on her demands.

Freya did not understand this notion but she responded with a tense voice: "My request is actually very simple. I just want all of us to escape from this place. If you choose to trust and join me, I hope..... that you will listen to my orders and commands, otherwise our agreement will lose its meaning. I know this is a little offending, but I have to insist on this issue. If you have any problems with it, I will not enforce this."

"This is certainly the basic thing that we need to do." The mercenaries murmured, but they might not choose to follow an order that might send them to their deaths. Still, they agreed to do so.

"Is there anything else? What else can you do?"

"I'm not sure as to what extent I can do, but I will definitely fight together with everyone. We are allies in this battle, and I think this issue wouldn't affect our agreement." Freya answered after thinking for a while.

"That's more than enough missy. I'll recognize you as the leader as long as you can do it!" Mano answered along with a few nods from the crowd. A few people, changed their minds at the last moment, and in the end there were seventeen people left. This was beyond Freya's expectations as she thought she might not even get even one person.

Before they could proceed with further discussions, the news of Madara entering from the west area had already reached the people here, and the people in the street started to make a commotion. Leto immediately gathered everyone and asked to follow him to take as much as they can from the bar. At this moment they could only try to gather

food resource as much as possible before the street became utter chaos.

There was a difference between the mercenaries and the militia, with the former always thinking ahead of the future and nothing else.

“What should we do now, Commander Freya?” Mano asked.

“There’s no need to call me commander, my status is no different from yours.” Freya spoke with a tinge of red in her face. She nearly could not breathe during her entire speech from the tension.

[I feel like I’m dreaming... But I can definitely do this and help Brendel. I can’t continue being a burden. Hmm...]

“Does everyone know how to ride a horse?”

“Of course.”

“Then we’re going to steal some horses.” Freya replied.

.....

(TL: Princess POV)

“Steal horses?” The princess played with a metal soup spoon.

“Fortress Riedon has a horse market where the nobles exchanged war horses, slaves and serfs. This is public knowledge. And the truth is when some of the ministers come here to this region, these nobles are the ones who provide them with this news.” Oberbeck explained.

“These wretched people.” The princess calmly placed her teacup down. “But how did that girl know?”

“This has something to do with her status. During that fateful year, our men placed her at Fortress Riedon when she was three years old, and she most likely had a deep impression there.

“You lot are merciless, you left a small little girl at that tender age all alone in that unfamiliar place?”

“We had no choice. That year, the commotion was too big, and even Everton’s wife did not make it. Besides that, we had a plan to ensure her safety.”

“She knows how to ride?”

“How could a member of the Evertons not know about horse-riding? We arranged an elite knight from the Silver Wing Legion to adopt her. The only thing that we don’t know is why the family moved out of Fortress Riedon to go to such a remote location like Bucca.”

“Did she succeed?” Even though she guess Freya succeeded because of Oberbeck’s tone, she could not help but to confirm it.

“Yes. I did already say that all the nobles’ attentions were taken away by that young man. The market basically had no defense and they easily succeeded in the task. These mercenaries are considerably formidable, able to become soldiers of the kingdom’s frontline army.”

The princess nodded. Aouine’s frontline armies were different from the others. There were a few designated armies such as the Imperial Guards, Silver Wing Legion, as well as Seifer’s 11th cavalry corps. The regular soldiers maintained its strength at the Iron-ranked status, and were a few cuts above the White-mane army.

As for the other regular regiments, their abilities were even lesser, and their battle prowess were no different from the nobles’ private army.

With Oberbeck’s description, the half-elf princess understood the strength of the mercenaries who were with Freya.

“What happened next?”

“The things that happened next is the most interesting portion. After Miss Freya lead the cavalry to rejoin that amazing young man..... It’s a story where they vanquished Madara’s army wherever they went.” Oberbeck was usually stoic, but when he recalled the memory of Brendel led the army charging into Madara’s troops, his eyebrows danced.

“That amazing young man.” The princess said.

Oberbeck coughed twice as he noted his mistake.

But the girl did not mind and she looked at the time. “I still have a little time left, Lord Oberbeck, please continue with the next section of your story.”

“It would be my pleasure.”

Chapter 4

Chaos

(TL: We're now going back to Brendel.)

The news of Madara's grand army inside the fortress spread throughout the entire place like a plague.

The pine forest within this mountain region was described as the blighted land of evil, due to the undead and thieves existing in there for centuries. It was as if Aouine's misfortune grew from there, and so the citizens trained themselves to prepare themselves for the fight, while the nobles pledged themselves to lead them when there were any invasions.

This fairy-tale like legend that seemed to exist forever in the minds of the citizens had came to life, baring their fangs and ready to devour them, but that was when the citizens realized that the nobles and the army of Fortress Riedon were nowhere to be seen.

As Brendel ran through the area, he saw more and more people rushing in and out of their houses. The people who still did not know what was happening quickly asked the people in the street, then hurriedly went inside to the house and brought some luggage and their family members out, then proceeded to the north gate.

More and more people gathered, until it finally formed a large throng in the streets. This scenery was like an oil painting in his eyes.

Children grabbed the adults' hands with their faces full of curiosity, while the wives held on to their husband, their faces full of anxiety. The massively packed crowd of people were nearly quiet with hardly anyone speaking, and there was only the sound of shuffling footsteps that moved forward.

But this silence did not last. Because there was no one to lead them, there were horse carriages which eventually crashed into each other and blocked the road. The crowd's progress slowed down which led to quarrels. A brawl started with the people at the back cursing at them, and there was a sort of fear that infected the crowd.

This event happened right at the moment where Brendel and Ciel found Romaine, and so Brendel instructed the carriage driver to drive to the sides after they got in.

“Brendel, you’re finally here. I was really worried.” Romaine sighed with great relief. She had waited a little nervously as she rubbed her shoes against the carriage’s wooden board constantly.

Brendel and Ciel sat at the left and right side of the carriage in order to guard, and looked at the growing chaos in the street.

“There were a lot of people along the way which delayed us a little.” Brendel pulled out his sword and answered.

“Where’s Freya?”

“I don’t know, let’s wait and see.”

Ciel who was watching the chaos quietly suddenly whispered to Brendel: “My lord, someone is inciting the crowd.”

“What sort of advantage will they have if they do this?” Brendel was surprised. He did not understand it. He had never paid attention what the NPCs did in the game and he was certainly not a psychologist.

“They are afraid that it’s not chaotic enough.”

“Why is that?”

“Because these people knew subconsciously that only chaos will bring them advantage. Ambitious people will not stay silent, my lord. Some of them even hope that something like this will happen in order to exploit them.” Ciel glared at the people outside as he replied coldly.

“What? They are doing this even though this is such a dire situation. Do they value their own lives?”

Brendel understood that there were such human traits in society, but it was the first time he saw it happening before his very own eyes.

The scene became even more chaotic as the people near the overturned horse carriage

started shoving each other and crying children could be heard. That was not the end of it, as someone yelled out the news of Madara's army nearby in this vicinity, and everyone started panicking.

"This is the moment, my lord. My teacher taught me that such madness is derived from the boldness of ambitious people and they would act as one." Ciel pointed at the people responsible for the chaos. "When I was learning magic in Karsuk, my teacher showed me and other disciples not only the method of deciphering magic words in a tall dark rock tower, he also taught us how to manipulate someone's heart."

Brendel nodded.

The archmagi in Karsuk taught differently from Buga's Archmagi. The latter wore white robes and walked across the white marble floor in their academy, and they appeared more as sage-like leaders amongst their more mysterious counterparts.

"What are they doing?" Romaine asked curiously with her eyes open wide.

"Stealing, robbing, using violence to get the things they want, which they normally don't dare to dream of owning, just like you, my beautiful lady."

"D, don't praise me, I won't thank you." Romaine blushed and her eyebrows raised high up.

The dreaded fight finally happened. No one knew who threw the first punch, but many people started hitting each other. People started to force their through and family members were torn apart as they rushed through. The ones who fell onto the ground were trampled on and they never stood up again.

Yells and shrieks, along with wailing echoed throughout the street.

Brendel silently watched the events unfold. He could not stop it and could only ask the driver to move towards the side. However, this action drew attention, and some of the people who started the riot noticed him. When they saw Romaine, their eyes displayed greed.

These men were comprised of ruffians who did nothing everyday, or disgraced mercenaries or adventurers who did illegal things. They had planned signs and after communicating with each other silently, they pushed away the people who were blocking them and went closer to Brendel.

Brendel frowned and he placed one hand on his sword. Ciel and Romaine became tense.

“Hey you lot, it’s not good if you have one whole carriage to yourself, especially during this difficult times. Let me take a seat too.” A mercenary with dirty leather armor grabbed onto the rails without asking for permission.

“Scram.” Brendel placed his sword and place it on his neck.

“Kid, I just want to take a ride, are you really going to murder someone over that?” The mercenary did not expect Brendel to be so unyielding and was surprised. He stopped moving, placed one foot onto the platform, looked at Brendel with ill intentions, then shouted: “You lordly nobles, when it comes to the critical moment you lot abandon us and escape. I simply just want to take a free ride, you nitwit selfish fuckers. If you have the guts, kill me—”

The men started to crowd around the mercenary and looked at Brendel with taunting eyes. But their gazes were more on Romaine with lust.

“Brendel.....” Romaine was a little frightened and she grabbed his arm with her slim fingers...

Brendel turned around and patted her hand. He then swiveled his head back and spoke to the mercenary with full of disdain: Did you see that? There’s a lady in this carriage. She doesn’t welcome any of you and you can fuck off right now.

Brendel’s brusque attitude apparently angered him. The mercenary hurled curses at him and tried to board the carriage. The men beside him also attempted to overrun him, as if they were convinced he was a noble youth who would not fight back when shove comes to push.

“M-my lord, d-don’t—” Before Ciel finished speaking, his mouth unhinged as he watched Brendel thrust deeply into the mercenary’s chest and kicked him backwards, knocking the crowd backwards.

The mercenary had an expression of utter disbelief. Brendel felt a little disgusted when he felt the blade penetrate into the mercenary’s chest, but there was no hesitation in what he did.

[I might feel no differently from the average person, my heart cries for the people who

are suffering from Madara's invasion, but I have no mercy for you fucking trash!]

The other men took a few steps back when Brendel murdered the mercenary in cold blood, but they quickly realized they were the side with an overwhelming advantage in numbers.

"You fucking noble, you killed a human in plain sight!" Someone immediately shouted.

"That's right, we just wanted to get a ride!"

"You bloody animal!"

"These nobles have never seen us as humans at all!" The men slowly stepped forward while they incited the surrounding crowd with slanderous words.

"Drag him down out from the carriage now!"

"Beat him to death!" The crowd around the horse carriage grew larger. They only believed in what they just saw and heard. Ciel and Romaine were deeply worried as they could see things were turning into a terrible direction.

Brendel sheathed his sword and looked coldly at the crowd and sat down at the edge of the carriage's platform. Very soon, another man rushed up as he thought the this 'noble youth' would rein in his attitude.

But he was wrong.

Brendel did not say anything and simply thrust his sword straight into that man's throat with lightning speed. The man clutched at his throat with terror and stumbled backwards, before crumpling down slowly. The sword not only shocked the inciting men, it also caused the crowd to go up in an uproar.

But Brendel stood up and jumped down from the carriage. His jump made everyone retreat into a circle. He walked forward into their center as he continued to glare coldly at them. His sword suddenly swung over the top of the crowd.

A gust of wind flew across their heads, and besides a few strands of cut hair, the roof of a house nearby exploded loudly with a bang, and a meter long crack could be seen visibly.

Everyone stared at the crack in amazement.

“Take care of yourselves.”

Brendel spat the words out in an austere manner, sheathed his sword and climbed back into the carriage. He was more concerned about Freya’s side rather than wasting time with the mastermind.

[Why is she still not here?]

On the other hand Romaine was looking at Brendel with starry eyes.

“You’re amazing Brendel.” Romaine praised him.

“There’s nothing glorious about killing a man, especially when these people are mere citizens.” Brendel shook his head.

“But you’re the only one who can protect me.”

Brendel paused for a while before giving a faint smile.

Chapter 5

Confrontation

Brendel's sword swing shook everyone's heart, stopping their feet after he slew the second man. Even though there were still people blocking the street and surrounding their carriage, everyone knew that he was not someone to be trifled with, and kept at a delicate distance.

The two corpses were simply left there in the open. Without the youth's answer on what they could do, they did not have the bravery to do anything and could only pretend not to see them. These two bodies were also a deterrent to the new influx of people who came to see what the commotion was about.

Brendel sat in the carriage as he continued to wait for Freya with worry, but he did not display any of his emotions on his face. Suddenly a new batch of fearsome looking men came up from behind, forcing their way through the crowd and pushing them to the sides, even striking people who resisted a little.

"Trouble never seems to stop." Brendel was alert and he frowned again.

"Who are they?" Ciel asked.

"They are merchants from the city." The driver was terribly frightened in the beginning, almost wanting to abandon the carriage when Brendel killed the men, but suddenly realized that the stronger this noble was, the better the chance to survive this ordeal.

"They also look like they are bullies in the city." Brendel observed their actions, then glanced at the driver's face. The driver seemed to hesitate, as if he wanted to say something more, but Brendel knew that it did not mean anything well.

"Your peers doesn't seem like good people, Romaine."

"No problem, " She sat beside him with a confident face, feeling very safe.

The group of men came near to the carriage, intending to pull the inhabitants off from

it, but they suddenly spotted the two corpses on the ground and their expressions changed. The merchants and their guards exchanged glances, as they knew who to bully and who to leave alone.

They wavered for a while, then decided to push their through instead of picking a fight with the people inside the carriage. However, the guards who accompanied the merchants were used to bullying and they used more force than usual, and their numbers were big enough to push the people around near to the carriage. Because of that, a middle-aged man lost his footing after someone shoved him, and his head knocked onto the carriage's wheel, bleeding profusely from the long gash that he sustained upon contact.

"Father!" A young panicked voice rang out amidst the crowd. A boy was getting pushed further away.

The middle-aged man grunted as he used the carriage as a support to get up. He went straight up and charged angrily towards the guard who knocked him down. The guard who did not expect resistance was thrown into the crowd. Everyone went into a chaotic uproar, but the middle-aged man quickly ran towards the boy.

Just before he reached his son, the other guards already swarmed him like angry bees and struck him to the ground.

"Let go of my father!" The boy managed to slip past the packed crowd and ran straight to his father in tears. He tried to pull off the guards who were forcing his father down, but one of them simply flung his arm and the boy fell backwards. The guard who was knocked down by the middle-aged man cursed loudly as he got up, pulling his sword out as he cursed. He grabbed the middle-aged man's hair and twisted his head.

"You fucking cockstain, are you tired of living? I'll grant your wish today."

The middle-aged man struggled futilely as the other guards pushed him down. The crowd who saw this scene turned their heads away. Even though they were angry and sad over this outcome, none of them dared to step out.

The guard continued to hurl insults at him as he raised his sword over his head, but before it swung down, a blast of wind came from the carriage. This visible wind blade not only went struck the sword, it also went past the hand that carried it. The guard suddenly screamed as he held a bloody stump; his hand was completely severed.

This sudden incident shocked the rest of the guards, and they pulled out their swords immediately, causing a metallic song to sound out as Brendel jumped down from the carriage again.

“Who are you?” The merchant yelled out after a moment. Even though Brendel’s attack awed him, he saw that Brendel was a young man and his attire did not look like he was a local noble. However, the merchant had never left Fortress Riedon his entire life and did not experience much of the world. If he was a noble from the capital, then he would at least recognize how big a threat Brendel’s attack was.

The youth merely glanced at the merchant and did not bother to talk any further.

But with this attack, Brendel’s situation changed immediately. There were many people in the crowd who experienced the guards’ oppression and were furious over their actions, but they did not have the power nor the courage to stand up to them. Now that someone with the ability to do so stood out, everyone subconsciously rallied to him.

Brendel suddenly became their natural leader and the atmosphere changed subtly. The merchants wanted to rely on numbers to suppress Brendel, but they hesitated when they saw the crowd gathering behind him.

A herd of sheep was not frightening, but a lion leading them was a different story, and Brendel had become that lion.

But the merchant who shouted at Brendel did not know that he could slay all of them two or three times all by himself. The merchant got increasingly irritated with the guard’s shrieks with his severed hand.

At this time, another group of men came to this area. Brendel took a look at their attire and recognized them as the Fortress Riedon’s cavalry who dealt with the public order.

Fortress Riedon was protected by the white-mane army, so there were no formal kingdom guards here. The local public order was maintained by forces belonging to the nobles. These forces were comprised of cavalry and infantry, and were more of a representation of the nobles’ powers than a true policing force.

Most of these forces were even more corrupt than the merchants, and the most laughable thing was how the infantry and cavalry viewed each other as enemies. In

Brendel's memories, they even hired players to steal each other's territory.

However, after completing the series of missions he thoroughly despised them. He furrowed his brows as he watched them come nearer.

"What are all of you doing, fighting in the streets like there's no law here." The leader of the squadron spoke with an air of superiority. He glanced sideways at the merchant, then relaxed his expression: "Ah, isn't this messere Markov, how is your business recently?"

"Not too bad, Captain Gaspard. But there's a man here who killed openly in the street and injured my men, what do you think you should do about this?"

The leader frowned. If it was an ordinary day, he would have the mood to extort from the youth in front of him, but now that Fortress Riedon was about to fall and everyone was about to be killed, he did not have the mood to do something like that. However, he was used to a dominating attitude and he subconsciously spoke to the youth with a condescending attitude.

"Who are you?"

Brendel lied after eyeing him. "Dunn."

The leader looked suspiciously at Brendel, but suddenly there was a commotion behind them. Two yells with full of fright rang out loudly: "Monsters, monsters! They are a lot of monsters coming here!"

"It's the undead, everyone run!"

Madara's vanguard was coming.

People started to move even faster and started to push towards Gaspard's and Markov's guards, but they immediately hit back the swords in their sheaths, forcing them to halt in their advance, and cries could be heard all over the place.

Gaspard rubbed his forehead. He was different from Markov who had never been outside Fortress Riedon, and knew that this situation could not be contained. He had to think of another way, and his eyes went back at Brendel.

"You, bring your carriage over and block the road." He pointed at Brendel: "You lot,

block the road! The rest of you, stand to one side and let us pass!"

The citizens behind Brendel were in a dazed stupor once he said that. Gaspard's usual actions in the day already displeased the citizens and for them to brandish their swords to stop them from blocking the road was the last straw.

"Why should we!" Someone yelled angrily.

"What a fucking stupid question." Gaspard motioned his men to move away, and he pulled out his sword. "As a citizen of Fortress Riedon, helping the Public Order's Cavalry to maintain the public order is your duty. What of it, do you want to resist?"

Everyone looked at the parted cavalry with their bared swords, and looked at the raging blue flames that were burning behind them, and amidst these ghastly flames, they could see shadows of skeletons appearing. For a moment, they did not know what to reply.

Many eyes fell back on Brendel.

[Damn it. Standing out was indeed a problem.]

Brendel felt uncomfortable all over, but once he looked at the despair in the citizens' eyes after being threatened by Gaspard and his cavalry, he sighed and lamented at this situation.

His soul came from the modern era, his bones were mired and steeped in a civilized, peaceful and prosperous society. He was proud of the place he came from, and it was a sanctuary that he would never let anyone trample upon.

He leaned forward slightly and entered into the most common Aouine's military swordmanship attacking stance.

"I'm counting to ten," Brendel's voice spoke clearly, and Gaspard turned around. "If you don't scam after ten counts, don't blame me for being ruthless."

Everyone stopped moving, and fell into silence.

Gaspard and Markov were especially surprised, and they almost felt as if their hearing had problems. The cavalry leader felt like he had been given a slap on the face, and the muscles in his neck bulged and tensed as he roared out.

“Kill this fucking bastard!”

The cavalry raised his swords and charged at his command.

Chapter 6

A natural Lord

A miracle had happened before the citizen's eyes.

The cavalry who charged towards the youth were crumpled like a piece of paper. Each time the youth moved, swords would either break or bend backwards, and steel splinters flew all over the place. The force carried behind the youth's sword even hurled the rider's horse upwards, before the rider flew off from the impact.

One, two, three, the citizens behind Brendel whispered, until seven of the riders were dismounted forcefully. The remaining three riders were already frightened to the point where they held the reins tightly and did not advance any further.

Gaspard stared at Brendel as if he was a devil, while Markov and his guards were frightened to the point where they forgot what they were holding in his hands. The refugees broke past their lines and ran to Brendel.

"Who are you?" Gaspard felt that the blood draining from his limbs. He had seen the captains in the White Mane's squadrons training fights, and he felt they were elite fighters, but compared to the youth in front of him, they were amateurs.

[Who exactly is this person?!]

Brendel sheathed his sword and exhaled lightly. He used Power Break seven times, and he drained a fifth of his stamina, and he felt his hands were starting to go a little numb.

"I have already said my name. I'm Dunn." Brendel pointed his sword at Gaspard and Markov. "Now, are all of you calm enough to listen to my words?"

The two leaders exchanged looks. How could they not listen? The riders who charged at him were not exactly amazing, but they were well trained and charged at their opponent with a horse. Even the soldiers of the White Mane army would avoid their direct attacks.

But he merely struck seven times with his sword, and each single blow knocked off a rider off his horse, and at the end of the fight he looked like he was not even tired, and even the captains under Luc Beson could not compare to him.

[He looks like he's at least a intermediate Iron-ranked fighter, but he's so young...] Gaspard swallowed. The captains under Luc Beson were veterans who were thirty to forty years old.

"Very good. It looks like you're ready to listen." Brendel nodded at the tongue-tied duo. "I regret asking you to scram, so I'm taking back my words. I want all of you to block the road. I don't care how many undead comes here, your mission is to block them."

"Ciel." He continued speaking.

"Yes." Ciel jumped down when he saw Brendel beckoning to him, and took out his pocket watch and passed it to him.

Brendel looked at the time. There was still a minute left to 4 PM, but Freya was still nowhere to be seen. After rubbing his forehead he raised his head up and said clearly: "All of you here are respected members of Fortress Riedon's cavalry, helping out the refugees to gain time is a duty that you have. I am sure that none of you needs me to remind what you need to do, and will stand out with bravery to rush to the frontlines."

"My lord, I am a merchant." Markov did not dare to act smugly anymore and spoke carefully.

Brendel looked at him with an exasperated sigh. "You're now under conscription."

Markov's mouth moved up and down wordlessly.

"Of course," Brendel looked at the riders who got up from the ground. "I will be here personally to oversee everyone of you. Anyone who wants to flee as a deserted soldier, you can come back over here and try my steel. Whether you want to test me or fight against these damned skeletons, choose one."

The citizens behind him had already started to move out to the north. People were pushing each other and trampled onto hapless people who stumbled onto the ground. The crowd was in a frenzied chaos as shrieks, curses and wails continued to poured forth from them, as if they were painting a picture of the world ending.

Amidst this chaotic scene, the only place of calmness stemmed from Brendel alone.

“The rest of you, grasp this opportunity and leave now. Do not waste this chance that the cavalry gets for you by risking their lives.” Brendel tried to motion some of the remaining people who did not move. He was not a messiah, but he did not want to see more lives thrown away.

But he did not expect the majority of them to stay behind. The people had seen the unfortunate victims trampled to death by the frightened crowd, and even if they got out they were not certain that they could flee from Madara’s pursuit later on. They would rather place their hopes on Brendel, hoping that the incredible youth before them was able to lead them out.

There were many people with power in this world, but there were few who protected the weak. Brendel’s actions had left a deep impression to them, and the last sentence seemed to make them trust in him.

“You’re unwilling to leave?” Brendel looked shocked, suddenly guessing the thoughts of the people before him. He scratched his head and turned around, and saw Ciel with a face full of admiration. Brendel blurted out.

“What now?”

“In the era of the holy saints, the knights had eight virtues. Mercy was one of them. Every year in this era, there are many knights who swore to uphold the eight virtues in the Holy Cathedral of fire, but who amongst them are able to do something like this?”

The young man continued to speak. “To let the weak depend on you is the charm of the strong. But my lord, how are we going to achieve this?”

“I’ll think of something. Just let them stay.” He went to Markov and Gaspard. “Have you considered carefully?”

“Definitely, yes, we will fight against the skeletons.” Markov nodded as hard as he could.

Gaspard said nothing, but ordered his men to gather. He had talked with Markov and agreed that they had better odds fighting against the skeletons. If they went against the youth they would be killed instantly, while they had a better chance to fight

Madara's army. Furthermore, Brendel had said that he would stay behind, and it was likely he would help out in fighting the undead.

Gaspard was the leader of the cavalry, and was at least considered as a capable man who would submit when the time called for it. He was even better at doing it more naturally than Markov, since he had to watch himself in front of Luc Beson and Lord Esebar. In the end he still watched himself in front of the youth.

Brendel, on the other hand, admired his decisive personality to be 'flexible'. He stood there waiting for the riders whose weapons he broke to change to short swords, and at least for the time being he did not have to consider that the men had no weapons.

The guards and riders' faces were uneasy, with the exception of Gaspard.

These men might have been dominating bullies during the normal times, but they were no different from a common man when they faced the fearless undead. Once they thought they were going to face such a frightening existence in the legends, they felt their limbs tremble. The merchant Markov took a long spear and stood beside Brendel, trembling like a leaf without saying anything, and it was apparent that even standing there was difficult for him.

The citizens behind them looked at Brendel and wondered why the youth did not escape. Because of the words Ciel used to address Brendel, they thought he was at least a knight of some title. Since they decided to follow Brendel, they did not dare to leave if he did not.

A prolonged silence between them happened.

Finally, the first skeleton soldier appeared from the other end of a burning street, with two more behind it.

[Scouts.]

Brendel immediately recognized them. They came over with the sounds of bones striking against the hard ground. Their speed were not too fast or slow. He checked the pocket watch again. If Freya still did not come, he would let Ciel and Romaine move ahead first, while he would go out to find her. He would still see her as a comrade even if she did not manage to succeed, even if he was disappointed at her results.

He put down the watch as he saw the skeletons approaching the guards. There were

seven of them, and if they divide themselves into three groups, they would easily destroy the low level skeletons, but they actually crumpled right there onto the ground, not even able to turn and flee—

The three skeletons killed the seven of them.

The eleven riders were so shocked and frightened they did not even have the courage to go up and fight back. Brendel was dumbfounded and surprised at the outcome that he could not react in time to save the guards. For one moment, he wanted to just cut the useless riders in front of him and be done with it, before checking himself as he still needed more bodies to cut a path through Madara's army to save the citizens.

"What are you bunch of morons doing?! Where did your bravery go after bullying the citizens for so long!" Brendel shook his head and yelled at Gaspard: "You, show them how it's done."

"Me?" Gaspard might looked like he was calm, but his hands were turning into jelly.

Brendel said nothing more and just looked at him.

Gaspard clenched his teeth. He knew that he was most likely going to end up dead. He normally drank and feasted while sleeping with some wench during the normal times, and had already discarded his swordsmanship a long time ago. He glared at his subordinates, but they quickly averted their faces away and pretended not to meet his eyes.

"You bunch of bastards raised by prostitutes!" The rider cursed out loudly as he charged forward with his long sword, half trembling. One against three, and the youth appeared as if he had not intention to fight. He closed his eyes as he galloped closer to the skeletons, almost certain that he was going to be dead.

But right at this moment, there were rumbling noises that felt like horses galloping. Gaspard was a rider himself, and was familiar with the noises. That was the sound of a vanguard cavalry charging together. The rumbling noises got louder, as if it was thunder that came from a distance away. The earth seemed to tremble, and the skeletons turned their heads around, noticing the oddity of Lifeforce gathered together.

Three horses suddenly jumped out from the burning flames, and sword flashes could be seen as the skeletons were struck down into pieces. The riders on them pulled the

horses' reins, and galloped towards Brendel before stopping a slight distance away from him—

Brendel looked up and saw the figure of a person wearing sky blue armor, with one hand holding a sword, while the other hand pulling the reins. The long ponytail was illuminated by the flames in the street, and Brendel saw an elegant rider on top of a horse.

Behind her, more and more riders came out from the flames and gathered behind her, the majority of them wearing outfits that belonged to mercenaries.

[The majority of them looks like they are at least of an Iron-ranked fighter, and quite a few of them are at least intermediate ranks...] Brendel was surprised.

[Where did this group of mercenaries come from? There are at least ten over people here that are as good as Luc Beson's captains! Wait— Could this be the private army of Freya's father?] Brendel knew of Freya's true birth, and took a wild guess.

"Brendel, where's Romaine?" Freya looked curiously at the people in front of her.

Chapter 7

Leader

The densely packed refugees successfully escaped from the north gate. They were spread out in the Pine River's region and marched towards the valley plains, appearing like a trail of ants under the moonlight.

The misty lands ahead was the very south of the Hunting Deer mountainous range. In this area, there was a small mountain called the Silver Sparrow. There were beautiful Grinores fir trees growing in it, and these trees were shaped like a tower that point straight at the sky. Bears and bristling wolves frequently appeared in this area, and players tend to party in the game to handle any sudden dangers that occur suddenly.

Brendel believed the first step was to enter this area to avoid any dangers that would come from the valley plains. Madara's forces had been completely unleashed, and they would absorb raise even more undead from the people they killed.

[The greatest nightmare would be seeing an endless sea of skeletons in the valley plains... Fortunately that has not come to pass.]

But under the foggy night, there were signs of skeleton riders appearing in and out of the shadows, signifying a terrible omen. These skeletons came directly from the heart of Madara's land, and it was difficult to create them during this era. However, these creatures were common in the game world's era where magic and swordsmanship became increasingly complicated with repeated wars.

Brendel stared at the quick shadows that darted in and out of the fog. They spied at the masses and disappeared after a short while, only to reappear somewhere closer to the throng of refugees. Brendel became a little worried and instructed Freya to check on the refugees behind them, as well as to protect the flanks. He soon went to check on the refugees himself.

Freya's suggestion to steal the nobles' horses appeared as a great suggestion to the mercenaries, proving that she was willing to risk everything to fight alongside with the mercenaries. If Brendel had not taught her various things, she would not have managed to pull this off.

She was the first to charge into the market which was still being pelted with arrows, then cleanly severed the rope that raised the bridge to allowed the citizens to escape. From then on, Leto and the other mercenaries decided to stay behind and bet on her.

In comparison, the youth who was constantly praised by that young girl appeared to be meek in their eyes. He merely traveled quietly in the horse carriage beside the driver with his hand on his sword, brooding quietly while Ciel, a young man who wore a long robe was dozing off in the carriage. Romaine was peering out curiously at the environment, while taking care some of the children who sat in there.

She did not feel tired at all, only feeling her heart beating quickly. It was exciting and thrilling to escape from the undead with such a mysterious night. It was the adventure that she had been waiting all along.

Mano's mouth curled and twisted. He stamped a 'useless weakling' on Brendel's forehead in his eyes once he saw that Brendel did not know how to ride a horse.

[This noble brat must be some sort fake strategist who has never been in a war. How do you even command an army when you can't even ride?!... No, this cannot do. I can't let a naive girl like Freya fall prey to his lies.]

He poked at his companion beside him and gestured at him, then to two horses. The companion looked at his eyes and immediately understood. The truth was the group of mercenaries had the same mindset. Furthermore, Brendel even let Freya order them to protect the refugees. Even though they were silent on the issue, their hearts were displeased. Why were they bringing this burden along with them? Now that all the mercenaries had a horse, they should actually dash straight away to safety and stay far away from the undead blight.

In fact, some of them had already suggested this thought to Leto, but the bar owner dismissed their grumblings and sent them straight off to Freya instead. There was a code of honor amongst the mercenaries. Freya was the one who led them to steal horses successfully, and they had an agreement prior to this, and thus they could not simply just leave.

The mercenaries continued to wait since they agreed to see if Brendel had a strategy in mind, but if he did not fulfill that agreement...

The skeleton riders appeared thirty seconds faster than the previous time, before

disappearing quietly into the night. The huge crescent moon was somewhere to the east, and it illuminated the fang-shaped mountains that were shrouded in fog. Brendel looked at the pocket watch after the skeleton rider disappeared, with the edge of the pocket watch casting a cold glint on his face.

“Why are you quiet?” He turned his head towards Freya who rode beside him. She looked uneasy ever since she rejoined him, and constantly kept her head down.

He had not expected to encounter so many refugees who were willing to follow him, but Freya’s timely arrival with so many mercenaries had helped him out, and he wanted to praise her for that.

[Originally there were just a few dozens, but the refugees have grown to two or three hundred. Since there is a herd mentality, they would be more and more people joining me... Hmm...]

On the other hand, Freya was afraid that her independent action would cause Brendel to be unhappy, but she was afraid to voice out her opinion. She originally wanted to simply surpass him, but now she only wanted to perform as favorably as she could in Brendel’s heart. This change in mentality was too subtle for her to notice it.

“Y-you’re not blaming me?” She raised up her head with wild eyes after noticing there was nothing odd in Brendel’s voice. Her light brown eyes were clear and reflected the moonlight greatly, showing off the evident surprise in her eyes.

“Is there something I should blame you for? You did really well.”

“But I was late.”

“Any plans will have their moments where things don’t go right. As long as you don’t cross the limit it’s fine. I’m a little late myself.”

“Erm, I.....”

The two of them suddenly went quiet as they noticed a mercenary approaching them. He greeted Brendel politely like a commoner would greet a noble. He then raised the two horses’ reins up. “My lord, please choose a horse and ride. It will be easier for you if a fight breaks out.”

Brendel observed him for a few seconds, before guessing what he had in mind. He

jumped down the carriage, raised his head towards him and asked: “What are the vital points for riding a horse?”

The mercenary was momentarily surprised when he got down, but immediately showed deep condescension in his eyes when he heard his words.

[Mother Marsha above, this silly halfwit is making me laugh. If you don't know how to ride one, don't act as if you know how to. Do you really think you can learn how to ride one in a day? Heavens, there are only a few nobles who can't ride a horse!]

It was especially shameful in the eyes of a soldier who fought in battles for not knowing how to ride.

However, in order to let him make a fool out of himself in front of Freya, he still taught him in detail.

[Even if I tell you everything, you would never be able to ride one so quickly, otherwise we riders should just knock our heads onto a wall.]

“First, you should go the side of the horse, see that stirop? Since you're doing it for the first time, you should place your feet slowly onto it before –”

The moment he opened his mouth to instruct him, Brendel already received the notification on whether he would like to spend 15 AP to learn riding. He appeared to be unfamiliar on mounting the horse when he placed his foot on the stirop, but when he lifted himself up over the horse, he pulled the reins and started trotting around, as if he had rode for years.

[Well, level 3 horse riding is sufficient to do combat on a horse. I spent 45 AP in total.]

Brendel wanted to learn the skill a long time ago, but he did not know that Freya knew how to ride one, otherwise he would have asked her a long time ago. He could not help but long for the ‘Probe’ ability.

When he turned towards the mercenary, he saw him glaring back with a face full of humiliation and anger.

“Wait,” The princess interrupted Oberbeck’s narration. “Did you say he was an amateur when he climbed up the horse?”

“Indeed so, my lady. If I am not wrong, he was very unused to the action of climbing a horse, similar to many beginners. Oberbeck answered politely.”

“Can a person really learn a skill like this in moments?” The girl could not believe it. Even though that she thought herself as smart, she still spent half a month in doing so.

“Unless he wanted to intentionally deceive that man, I am afraid the truth is simply that.” Oberbeck felt that it was unbelievable as well, but he did not believe the young man was able to fool him.

“Surely he did that on purpose. This man is really a master at manipulating hearts.” The princess murmured to herself.

[That might not be true.] Oberbeck answered in his heart, but he did not say it out loud and merely continued the story.

————— Back to Brendel —————

Ciel who watched the encounter between them, also jumped down from the carriage, cast a glance at the mercenary and took over the reins. He mounted the horse elegantly. He was a squire and riding was a necessary skill for him. Even though he was not considered as an elite rider, he was considerably experienced in it.

Freya watched the two of them, thinking that he was good in everything but was just too fond of deceiving people. The girl felt a little flushed when she remembered the incident where he taught her first aid.

The mercenary looked the lord and his squire showing off their riding skills, and he felt he was played a fool and had a deep shade of purple in his face. Mano who was behind them noticed that his companion was in a disadvantage, so he quickly rode up and came to their sides.

“Young man, how long more do we need to protect these men?” He was quite straightforward, and asked Brendel directly.

“From here to the Valley of Sharp Boulders. If we can bring them to the other side, we can basically ensure their safety.”

Brendel started urging his horse forward so that he could catch up with Freya.

“Perhaps you can’t do it, but I can.”

Mano also followed him, while he asked curiously.

“How are you going to do that?”

Brendel pulled out his sword and pointed at an area high up.

“There are skeleton riders up there and they are the elite scouts of Madara’s army, and they come directly from Madara’s core lands. Bring some men and chase them away. The refugees need at least half an hour more before they are able to reach the Silver Sparrow Mountain, and I want to ensure there is no threat to the flanks.”

Mano looked blankly at Brendel as he did not expect that his question was the excuse for Brendel to give him a command. He looked at Freya as their agreement was with her, not Brendel.

“Brendel?” Freya was willing to believe his words, but she found his attitude to be too demanding.

Brendel sheathed his sword and replied: “I say, most of you, or perhaps everyone of you, is just thinking for yourself on how to escape here safely. There’s no need for me to say any more since you’re unwilling to bring these refugees out with me. You have an agreement with Freya, right? Speak up. If you are able to convince me, I’ll let everyone leave with a horse.”

Mano straightened his back up. He finally realized this ‘Noble youth’ was not a simple man. He had dictated the flow of the conversation with just a few sentences. As a leader who had led a group of mercenaries back then, he was employed by various nobles, but he had never seen one with such an impressive air about him.

“Since we’re mercenaries, we’re willing to work for you if you can pay us. However, under such extraordinary circumstances, we have to consider ourselves first, there’s nothing shameful about it.” The veteran mercenary replied naturally.

“Indeed. But I have to refute your point of view. Do you truly believe that you would be able to escape from here just because you have a horse? Madara’s army also consist of aerial units. Have you seen spirits and bone eagles? These creatures, which are the eyes of the undead wizards, fly and patrol the area. Do you know how to avoid them?”

Brendel patted his sword. He did not believe these mercenaries understood the frightening aspects of the undead army. Just because they killed a few skeletons and vampires, they understood Madara’s army system? In that case he undead wizards should just take a hammer and destroy themselves.

Leto and his daughter had followed Mano closely when they saw him approaching Brendel. He frowned at Brendel’s words.

“Then you have a plan?”

“I am uncertain of the outcome. I doubt anyone has a perfect plan for this. But my chances in the forest are much higher, so I have to consider how to stop the skeleton riders from following us. If they attack our flanks, the refugees will not be able to move quickly.”

Mano and Leto went into a silent deliberation. They felt that his words were true.

Brendel suddenly urged his forward forward, climbing up onto a high spot. He turned back to the mercenary and took a ruby out from his pocket: “If you truly want to have a chance at surviving, then follow me. If you choose to run away, then only those who are blessed by the gods would be able to make it out. My order is very simple.

Listen to my commands, and protect Freya so that she can lead these refugees out of the valley of the other end. All of you are mercenaries, so this ruby is my initial deposit. If you succeed in my request, they would be more where it comes from.”

He threw the ruby up and it landed in an arc beside Leto’s feet. Freya pointed at herself in confusion, and she asked loudly: “Me? Brendel why is it me?” She looked at the refugees in confusion. They were obviously brought by Brendel, so she simply could not understand why she was the one to lead the refugees out.

It was not that she was unwilling, but she did not know if she could do it if there were so many people. She was starting to become uneasy.

[I’m just a small militia captain. Now I’m leading dozens of experienced mercenaries,

which suddenly jumped up to hundreds and might even reach a thousand??!]

Brendel merely smiled as he had already planned things out. He rode back to Leto and Mano, beckoning them.

“Go now. Gather your men and choose how you want to die. Go your separate ways and encounter the Madara’s army and become an undead as well, or take my money and become a real mercenary who chooses to protect the weak, cutting a bloody pathway for them.”

He turned his head back again. The skeleton riders once again appeared under the moonlight. This time they were faster by ten seconds.

(TL: Stirop, Middle English, = stirrup. It’s the foot platform that a rider will step on before lifting himself and placing himself over the horse.)

Chapter 8

Cavalry, charge forward!

Leto and Mano chose to believe in Brendel's words. There was conviction in his voice, and even if he was lying to them, he at least had the confidence and ability to lead. In addition, he had a great reason for them to follow him.

Money.

This word was closely tied to mercenaries, and it was a bridge that made the unreasonable things into reasonable logic.

There was no need to gather ten odd veteran mercenaries. They communicated by hand gestures, and they gathered quickly from the crowd in mere moments.

[These men are not common soldiers, not bad at all.] Brendel thought to himself.

He also made the riders from Fortress Riedon's Public Order Cavalry gather up as well. He needed the men at hand to be split up into two groups. Even though this was a shabby lot, but they could be used if they were trained.

He urged his horse round this group once, then stopped at one side. He checked the pocket watch again and estimated.

A number of the long snaking crowd of refugees who progressed slowly looked at the gathered riders. They wondered what this group of twenty odd riders was going to do. The majority of them who joined in later did not know who Brendel was, but had a deep impression of the female rider who maintained order.

They kept asking each other who the girl was, and for some reason Freya's status kept rising. From the captain of a militia to the captain of the Public Order Cavalry, a member of the White-Mane swordsman army and even the captain of the Aouine Kingdom's guards. In any case, they recognized her as the leader and they simply needed to follow her and they would be led to safety.

The needle moved to the final second that Brendel planned, and he started to move.

He raised the Elven sword and pointed forward. The riders immediately followed him, and under his instruction, they dashed towards a road leading to the higher ground.

“What the hell is he doing?”

“Won’t we look like fools if we just rush up like this if the group of skeleton riders appear in the other direction?” Mano blurted out.

“Fuck! If these monsters appear on the other side and charged into the refugees, they would be disorganized even if we run back in time. This bloody brat doesn’t know how to fight at all, I can’t believe you fell for his damned lies!” Another man fumed.

“Didn’t you believe in him just now?”

“...I’m just out for the money.” That man paused slightly before refuting.

Brendel ordered them to move even faster. The riders charged forth, creating a thunderous sound.

[Two seconds. Almost... There!]

The group of riders took to the high ground first, but they were immediately surprised by the scene before them. *(TL: High ground offers a wider FOV, and troops tend to tire less when fighting uphill and move faster. For more info, go wikipedia it.)*

Forty odd skeleton riders were retreating backwards. This proved that Brendel chose the right location, stole the higher ground and surprised the enemy, and everyone glanced at the youth for a moment, wondering how he managed to know the enemy’s location.

Brendel waved his sword twice after determining the undead’s formation, and charged forth towards the skeleton riders, ordering the mercenaries to charge along with him.

[What?! Now is not the time to charge at them, you’re too impatient! What if these undead move into a direction? Furthermore we don’t know how fast they can retreat, we might lose our advantage if we just rush blindly!] Mano thought to himself.

The other mercenaries were also of the same opinion. They should wait a little longer, since they held the high ground and will always have the advantage. Even the riders

from Fortress Riedon who had a little more faith from him after he stole the high ground, hesitated and did not want to let go of this advantage.

But Brendel did not seemed to notice and merely pointed at the direction, which merely meant that everyone was to charge forth!

After a second, when he realized they did not not follow him, he turned his head and roared.

“Are you all chickenshit cowards! Charge! Even if we don’t have the advantage of the high ground, they will not be able to occupy the high ground if we attack them!”

Brendel seemed to inject a form of energy into the men after they heard the roar. The fact that he was to charge in the fray instilled a sense of confidence in them. In Aouine’s strongest era, the cavalry and nobles who fought with them, became the emblem of unstoppable bravery that was recognized throughout the continent, and now in this place, they were about to become the same emblem of—

Unstoppable bravery.

No one had seen this happen in this kingdom for many decades. It was as if it had become a glorious memory of the past, and these memories were slowly fading into darkness and disappear.

But right now, there was a figure in this high ground outside Fortress Riedon, that was a lightning streaking across the dark chasm, as if to cut through a hidden curtain to signify the start of a new era.

Ciel watched the back of his lord with gleaming eyes, his heart overwhelmed with emotions. He urged his horse forward, and whistled with his fingers.

The mercenaries unsheathed their weapons and roared, rushing forward like a broken dam. Even the most timid soldier in the riders felt his blood was boiling too every part in his body, feeling as if he unstoppable and unbreakable.

A mercenary watched Brendel ride on the horse with precise control as if he was one with the horse.

“Mano, did you say he didn’t know how to ride at all?”

“He didn’t know how to do it in the beginning.”

“You must be fooled by him, haha.”

“Oh fuck off!” He blustered angrily.

Everyone believed that they would be victorious.

————— Princess POV —————

The princess froze with a teacup in her hand. The tea was already cold, but she was so engrossed in the story that she did not realized that. When Oberbeck started describing the cavalry’s charge, her silver eyes shone brightly.

After a long moment, she asked in a daze: “He led the charge?”

Then she started to murmur as she rearranged her thoughts. “That’s incredible. It feels like we have gone back to our brightest era. Aouine’s knights who held war horns and fluttering capes with the squires holding on to the flags. When the war horns are blown, the riders would charge forth and create a sea of our cities’ emblems, Corvado, Grinoires, Ankries that represented our kingdom. They were unstoppable...”

Oberbeck coughed once. He knew that the princess had great ambition for the royal family, but he sighed as she was not a boy. Compared to the Oberg the seventh’s son who had a weak personality, the princess was a better leader...

[This is fate laughing at us.]

The girl finally realized her blunder, but she naturally diverted the topic. “And then, did they win?”

————— Brendel POV —————

Their charge was faster than the skeletons’ retreat. In the mercenaries eyes, a miracle seemed to happen. No matter how the skeleton riders twisted and turn, their path was always predicted by Brendel. Each time Brendel’s sword point out into a direction, the mercenaries would move in that direction and become closer to the skeletons.

Finally, the riders collided into the weak formation of the skeleton riders like a giant hammer. Brendel swung his sword with a roar, and the sword arte smashed into four

riders, bending and shattering the bones into the air and raining onto the ground. The mercenaries struck and charged ahead onto the flanks, creating a giant hole in their defense.

Brendel continued forward, pulling his sword back to prepare for a strike, then smashed the skeleton rider that was in front of him with the ability 'Power Break'. The rider was immediately hurled backwards onto another skeleton. Two veteran mercenaries coordinated perfectly and destroyed the skeletons easily.

Brendel then urged his horse forward towards the commanding necromancer. Before it managed to recite the second spellword, Brendel thrust the Thorn of Light into its skull, immediately hoisting it up into the air before he threw it to the ground. White flames burned from the pierced area and it turned into ashes.

Each time Brendel charged in and out, countless golden lights would fly up into the sky and then flew into his chest. The mercenaries would work together with him and shatter another skeleton quickly.

However, once the skeleton riders lost their commanding leader, they started to gather together and prepare for their own charge due to their instinct to destroy living creatures. However, Brendel commanded the mercenaries to get to the higher ground and prepare for another charge.

After a moment, they clashed into each other again, but the skeleton riders were completely defeated.

Brendel had aimed for this outcome. If the necromancer was not defeated, they would gradually be able to pull away from them as their horses had unlimited stamina. He then ordered the mercenaries to stop and rest on the spot, while ordering Ciel to come along with him so he could gather the loot.

Everyone could not believe it. They actually won, and only two of their men were injured.

But they did not know that Brendel was incredibly familiar with the skeleton riders' strategy, even more so than the commanding necromancer that led them. His lips curled for a while. Madara was a like a cursed rival. He had never defeated them during this era in the game, but it was different now.

After looking through the loot, he asked Gaspard to gather up all the swords as there

was nothing particular valuable on them. Madara's obsidian swords were better than what the mercenaries had, as they used Soul Fire to forge the steel.

Brendel went up to Leto and Mano, and pointed to a place far away. "Do you hear that?"

Leto and Mano looked differently at Brendel. He not only proved his commanding abilities in the battle, his terrifying sword skills and prowess deeply shocked everyone present.

The skeletons that crossed swords with him either had their shoulders or whole body twisted off, and their swords even bend or broke from the Elven Sword's strike.

The greatest impression on him, however, was the unbelievable confidence they had when they charged alongside with him, and everyone fell in love with the thrilling excitement.

As Leto and Mano listened carefully, they heard clacking sounds.

"A skeleton army... No, a sea of skeletons."

Brendel was surprised. He did not expect it was Leto who first answered, and his judgment was accurate. He had thought that he was merely a bar owner, but his identity seemed that it was not as simple as he thought.

[Strange. Where did this bunch of mercenaries come from. Their abilities are just too good to be some common mercenaries.]

Mano's expression also changed. The number within the fog were most likely thousands. He scrutinized Brendel again.

[This youth... how did he know the skeletons are there. Even the timing to attack the scouts was just too good, even to the point of choosing the best timing to do so. If these scouts were not removed, then it would truly be disastrous. Unless we abandoned these refugees we won't be able to escape from that army...]

"Do we need to check their progress" Leto's face was grave.

"No, there's no need to. Their scouts are not here anymore and they won't be able to catch up with us." Brendel waved his hand. "I only want the both of you to know this, there's no need to say it out loud. I'm familiar with Madara's tactics, so if you just

follow me, I have the confidence to bring you out–”

“But there’s one thing. The battles ahead cannot be avoided, and everyone of us might perish here. You have to be prepared, because the battles would only intensify and will not be so simple like the one we had just now.”

“Prepared,” Mano laughed. “Kid, we’re mercenaries. We’re definitely better than you in this regard. Let me tell you something, Leto experienced the ‘Roanoke’s Valley blood Battle.”

[A veteran of ‘The November War’?] Brendel smiled as he looked at Leto and sheathed his sword without saying anything.

He looked up at the moon. The sky was becoming brighter, hinting at dawn’s arrival. At least they were not going to meet Spirits in this night.

He exhaled.

Chapter 9

The first day

It was just as Brendel had predicted, after the mercenaries defeated the scouting group of skeleton riders, the undead army did not find them. Brendel successfully led the refugees into the Silver Sparrow Mountain.

[The low level undead and vampires' strength will drastically go down during the daytime. Until they completely vanquish the White-Mane army, they would not let the skeletons to advance all over the mountainous region. But at the same time, once they take hold of the graveyards in Fortress Riedon, their army will drastically increase. Based on the game, when Tarkus reached the northern area, Dragos, their army had already grown to a hundred thousand, 5 times the number of the entire Grinoires forces...]

Brendel pondered as he watched the refugees. The number of the refugees that joined them had grown to approximately five hundred, and along with them were horse carriages and mules carrying heavy luggage, and the entire length of the people was even half a kilometer long. Some of these refugees were even fortunate enough to find their lost relatives, and for a moment they felt there was hope.

Romaine had sneaked off during the daytime and moved off with her precious backpack. She was sitting on another carriage which was filled with luggage. A few kids were sitting there and listening to her story with wild eyes about how brilliant Brendel was throughout the whole journey.

She suddenly saw a man and woman riding towards her, and she lowered her head in fright.

Brendel only slept for three hours. That was the first time in these few days that he slept, but because of his constant worrying over the Madara's army, he did not sleep well. Despite that, he quickly spotted someone familiar, and realized that the girl who was acting strangely was Romaine. He laughed and shook his head:

"Why did you sneak out?"

"I'm bored." Romaine answered with a lowered head.

"It's dangerous outside," Freya frowned and glared at her best friend, her voice full of worry: "If there's something that happened to you, how am I going to explain to aunt Jennie?"

"There's nothing really dangerous here, I'm just telling them a story." When Romaine said that, her eyebrows went up.

The brats nodded.

"I'm not talking about what you're doing right now," Freya sighed. "Do you know how bad things are right now?"

Brendel found it a little funny and asked: "What story are you telling them?"

"It's about you."

Brendel beckoned to her and asked her to come closer. The merchant girl paused slightly, but went to the edge of the carriage without suspecting him. However the youth grabbed her face with both of his palms and pinched both her cheeks firmly: You must listen to Freya and take care of yourself, okay?

Romaine was frightened to the point that she whined pitifully, trying to pry his hands off and raised both of her short eyebrows: "I. mmmf..... got it, l-let gooo!"

Then she ducked to the other corner of the carriage and watched him warily.

Brendel smiled inwardly as he felt the warmth remained in his fingers. But when he looked at Freya, she was full of envy. After she met his eyes, she immediately blushed and turned her head angrily and said: "S-shameless, I don't care anymore....."

She threw down this line and left, leaving a speechless Brendel behind and wondering what he did to offend that girl. As he stood there scratching his head, Leto and Mano came to find him.

They came to find him because they wanted to choose some men to make a militia group. The truth was, after entering the Silver Sparrow mountain, the surroundings had become increasingly complicated. There were many fir trees that blocked their vision, and besides the need to spot for Madara's scouts, they also had to be alert

against the bears and bristling wolves in this forest.

With the increasing number of refugees joining them, even if Brendel throw in all the riders to guard them, there might not be enough to defend them.

Furthermore, they had to send a few riders in a fan shaped direction to scout for the way ahead, their numbers were just too tight.

Fortunately, there were many who done militia training and they were willing to fight. With the distribution of the skeleton's swords and their personal stock of weapons, they were able to equip fifty odd men. Leto and Mano arranged them to guard the flanks and rear, as well as having them to patrol the refugees to maintain order. However, even though it was easy on paper, implementing was actually troublesome. They spent the entire morning doing this. Leto wanted to report the outcome to Brendel.

But Mano wanted to talk about something else. He had gathered the armor pieces from the skeleton riders with Ciel, and wanted Brendel to take a look at the fragments.

Brendel inspected the broken fragments individually under the sun, then felt the inner layer, finally turning the fragments all around. He found the familiar sigil, an eye.

He placed the armor back onto Mano's hand and said: "Looks like the scouts are from the [Undead Maggot]'s army, just like the history log—"

He suddenly realized Mano was looking at him in confusion, and he immediately coughed: "The Undead Maggot, Medes, is half zombie. As a leader of Madara's army, he's especially good at gathering numbers, but he likes to move in the night. If that time comes, you would be able to see a zombie army crawling all over the mountains."

Leto and Mano looked at each other. They did not understand why Brendel knew so much about Madara, but he did not look like he was bragging, especially when there was no need to. He had already impressed them with yesterday's night battle.

Suddenly Brendel stopped talking and looked at the sky. There were several black dots in the south-eastern skies, and he was uncertain they were mountain birds or Madara's bone eagles. But he soon abandoned that thought.

They were under the cover of thick trees which severely limited their vision.

At the remaining years of the final era, between 421st and 426th years, the bone eagles filled the skies, and even when the players used flying dragons, they were unable to drive them back. That was when Madara was at its height, using overwhelming numbers as a strategy to the limits.

However with such few eagles, once they reach Hunting Deer Mountains with even thicker forests, even if they had one or two thousand refugees, they would not be discovered. This was why Brendel chose to go to the Silver Sparrow Mountain's path instead of the river area which was far easier to move. He did not mention this alternate path as he was afraid of divided opinions amongst the mercenaries.

Even though he believed they wanted to help out the refugees, mentioning this was not a good idea—

Brendel thought for a while and continued. "Even though Medes likes to move in the night, he wouldn't slack off in the day either. He would get elite ghouls and wights to hound the refugees. Their priorities however, should be on the White-Mane army, except they probably don't know where Luc Beson is."

[The worst outcome is we get discovered by the Bone Dragons. There should be three of them under Tarkus. If we moved towards a stretch of open area like a river valley or something... But Tarkus would most likely stay in Fortress Riedon for a few days, since that place is the greatest obstacle while the area towards Dragos is unprotected...]

Brendel spoke as he looked into the direction of the river valley.

At this point, Brendel had become a rising star or a future leader amongst his peers in Leto and Mano's eyes. Even the way how they looked at him as a noble was different from the usual ones they met.

Brendel had actually once tried to change Ciel's way of addressing him, but after hearing the charming youth's way of addressing him with a serious 'My master', he suddenly shivered, and silently acknowledged the title of 'My lord' instead.

After considering the issue, he could only attribute this problem as a 'Default Factory Settings'.

No additional problems occurred after the security issue was settled in the morning. However, the number of refugees became bigger and bigger. Groups of refugees

escaped from the river valley's direction, and brought about news of the Madara's army.

Brendel had predicted correctly. Medes army of ghouls and wights combined their forces along with Kabias's skeletal army and fought intensely with the White-Mane army, and Brendel estimated that they would have an outcome only in the evening.

The number of refugees had expanded to approximately a thousand. In the middle of their journey, Brendel had allowed them to stop and make a meal. It was fortunate that these refugees that escaped from the north of Fortress Riedon had sufficient time to gather necessities and food as Madara's army concentrated their forces in the other three directions, and Brendel did not need to think about the lack of food.

But even so, he had also considered his choice properly. The forest in the Hunting Deer Mountain was a place filled with resources. The different types of animals were plentiful and there was an abundance of fruits and mushrooms. If they tried to gather these resources, even though it might be difficult to support one or two thousand people, they would not starve.

In the afternoon around three pm or so, the scouts ahead brought news for Brendel, however, this was not about Madara—

Someone requested to see him.

Chapter 10

Alchemy

Brendel was basking in the warm sun in between two fir trees, when he saw the riders bringing one person —

[Hmm? There's one whole group of people behind that man.]

The man and his group followed the mercenaries and slid down from a slope and walked towards Brendel. Two of them took the long way and led their horses down the slope. They either wore thick leather armor, or had chain mails on them, and a few of them were bandaged. With a painted shield and long sword, they looked like they were mercenaries just like Mano.

They were not far from Brendel, and he could see a gigantic man beside Gaspard, which appeared to be the leader.

[Probably a man from Arreck in the north, or at least he has that lineage from that area.]

That man had an eye-catching crimson beard, a squarish face, and a sword scar across his brow. He wore a shirt with a broad opening in the center, showcasing incredible muscles with apparent striations on them, and his sleeves were folded back to his elbow.

[This man must be confident in his own prowess, otherwise he wouldn't have worn only a leather shoulder guard... Other than a row of axes on his belt, there's no other weapons on him. That's an Arreck weapon used by the native warriors, sometimes used as a throwing weapon.]

That barbarian-like giant took off his head and bowed respectfully. "I greet you, respected lord knight, I represent the Crimson Wolves Mercenaries, and I am their leader, Batum."

[Batum? That's certainly Arreck's word for red or crimson.]

His hand lowered closer to his sword, but it was subtle enough that Batum did not notice it. Brendel merely nodded and wait for his response.

Right at this moment, the refugees had spread rumors about Brendel's identity. At this point of time, holding the status of a noble had an advantage, so Brendel did not deny or admit that he was one, instead displaying an ambiguous response to create a mysterious air about him.

Batum's heart grew conflicted as Brendel did not say anything. He inquired carefully.

"Respected Lord knight, are you bringing these refugees to escape from Madara's army?"

Brendel took a look at him and nodded.

"If I may be so bold, do you still lack men?"

"Why, do you intend to join us?" Brendel was surprised, but he immediately realized these mercenaries were most likely chased all the way from the River of Sharp Rocks. Their group must be completely exhausted and needed someone to offer them protection.

[Just as expected, Luc Beson was defeated. The White-Mane army and Medes, Kabias has just ended.]

Brendel looked up and check the mountains that were in a distance away.

[It seems that even more refugees and the White-Mane army will join us... The scale of our size is going to become bigger.]

Batum saw that the young noble was holding on to his sword, and he stared ahead in a daze. His heart was becoming anxious. He quickly nodded: "Yes, respected Lord Knight, we just need a little food and medicine and a bit of rest, and we can fight for you."

"What happened there?" Brendel suddenly said.

Batum looked at him in confusion.

"I'm talking about the River of Sharp Rocks. How many Madara undead did you see."

“Countless, Lord Knight, there were countless troops of skeleton riders, and they kept chasing endlessly during the night time. They forced the refugees to flee constantly, and that fucking son of a whore Luc Beson did not even managed to defend against them even once. He had lost battle after battle, then finally they got ambushed by a large group of fucking monsters, and the entire army was nearly wiped out!”

Brendel was not surprised at this outcome. Even though the ‘tiger’ Luc Beson was indeed a considerably impressive leader, he was unable to escape from this tragedy, and failure was a given.

“— Wait, a group of monsters? What kind of monsters?”

“These creatures are as tall as humans, their skin was completely smooth and their bodies are of a dark green color. They wore long steel claws and there was a terrible rotting smell on them. They climbed up the boulders around the river and suddenly ambushed us. We did not prepare ourselves for their attacks and the survivors were only two or three out of ten men.”

[Ghouls. Were there wights that appeared as well? These ghouls are one rank higher than the skeleton riders, and one rank lower than the black warriors and pale knights, but their numbers are great... How many are there? One hundred? Two hundred? They are level 20 creatures and each of them has the strength of a low Iron-ranked fighter... It’s not surprising that the White-Mane army would lose, especially when they ambushed them.]

“Lord knight?” Batum once again troubled when Brendel fell into silence.

Brendel finally nodded. “If you want to join my group, you have to observe my rules. I will hire you, and besides the money, I will also give you a place to rest. Gaspard, bring them some food, medicine and bandages.”

He patted Batum’s shoulder. “Rest well. You have to prepare yourself for the upcoming battles.”

“Thank you for your generosity, Lord Knight!” Batum bowed deeply. Brendel’s terms were beyond his expectations. He had been to many places, but he had never such a kind noble.

Another mercenary rider who escorted Batum asked: “What about you, my lord?”

“The rest of you return to your posts. I need to be alone and rest for a while.” Brendel answered while he looked at his surroundings.

[This place is suitable.]

Brendel did not need to rest, but he wanted to use alchemy. Alchemy in Vaunte was not a mysterious art, and the people in most workshops knew at least a little of it. But to raise it a level where it was of use, required a vast experience and knowledge.

In game terms, there were two set of different usage before level 5 and after level 5. Artisans used this technique to gather different materials, and before level 5 it appeared like chemistry.

After level 5, it becomes a mysterious art. Wizards would use alchemy to extract pure crystals and magical reagents. They would then use it to transmute things and even create magical potions.

By combining them with blacksmithing, technology and enchantment, they would be able to create the legendary magic armor. There were many blacksmiths and apprentices working in a workshop, and Brendel was able to obtain ‘Basic Alchemy’ after asking a few questions.

Raising the alchemy skill set required 122 AP, but this did not prove to be a problem for him, as he had leveled up enough to get 164 AP.

[The ideal situation for me is to get level 6 Alchemy so I can make magic potions, but my true status is a ‘Commoner’. As a NPC commoner, I can only learn up to level 5 Alchemy, a noble – level 7, an alchemist specialist – level 15. If I want to go up any higher, I need to change my status. The same goes for learning side skills from other professions...]

After waiting for Batum and the other riders have left, he continued to wait a while and confirming there was no one else, he came to an empty area, and carefully swept away the leaves. He drew out his sword and draw a simple magic circle.

[Energy Transmutation. Blood Transmutation.]

Magic circles came from level 4 alchemy, with artisans using them to extract energy and crystalize them. However, the Blood Transmutation was the true reason why he wanted to avoid everyone. This technique actually came from Madara, and the Holy

Cathedral of Fire strictly forbade the usage of this spell. This was because it harmed the user and went against their basic rules.

However, this was incredibly useful as a skill because it ignored the need for materials, and under any circumstances, the user would be able to transmute simple materials into something useful.

But the players in Aouine, Kirrlutz used it freely as they only wanted effectiveness. The price for using it was merely dropping a level if they were discovered.

However, Brendel was a little anxious here. It was a scenario of 'Off with his head!' instead of just dropping a level, since doing it in the open was challenging the authority of the Holy Cathedral of Fire. Even though he had Ciel as a lookout, he really did not want to do this in the open.

He sighed and took out the teeth that was taken from the lich, then pierce his thumb with the sword. A blood of drop formed and he turned it over the center of the magic circle. A flash of red light appeared, and the teeth had became grey crystals with the size of a thumb.

When it was completed, Brendel felt his heart jump once. He had received -1 damage.

He wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead, then picked up the crystals. These crystals were made from spirit energy, and were different from soul gems. If someone tried to absorb the these impure crystals, they would immediately become poisoned and die.

[These things are going to become the most important tools tonight...]

But he did not stop there. He took out 32 teeth and 4 fingers, and a Number 5 potion.

However, after transmuting half of them and around 5 minutes later, Ciel's voice could be heard. "Who's there?"

Brendel's heart jumped. He quickly wiped away the magic circles and kept all ingredients, picked up the Thorn of Light and ran out.

As he walked out of towards the Fir trees, he saw a middle-aged man standing in front of Ciel. He furrowed his brows for a moment, before recalling that he was the man who was knocked onto the carriage's wheel.

[Why is he here?]

In Brendel's memory, this man was quite brave as he fought back against Markov's men, except it was not a wise thing.

But he did not expect the words that came from his lips.

"My lord, are you using Blood Transmutation circles? Please take care of your body—"

Brendel and Ciel's minds went completely blank.

[How did he know? He stood here for a long time? That's not possible!] Ciel did not believe that he could not even detect this commoner. The squire was ready to use magic.

But the middle-aged man saw that their puzzled faces and he bowed. "My lord, I have not had the opportunity to thank you for saving me. My name is Tamar", an alchemist.

"Tamar...? Y-you're Tamar!?"

Brendel felt the name was familiar at first, but he suddenly recalled the name of Madara's Grandmaster alchemist who was prominent in the 380th year. His mouth fell open, then carefully observed him. He looked at him carefully to ensure if it was that Tamar, and he definitely appeared to be like him.

[Shit... It's because of that fucking bastard Markov. Tamar must have been turned into an undead after Madara occupied this place. And his hatred must be due to his son's death... Shit, that makes fucking sense.]

But Brendel believed he was that person because of his familiarity with alchemy. Tamar was able to see there was a backlash on Brendel and determined the exact alchemy circle, and this was not any alchemist can do.

The Tamar in history was an incredibly powerful undead. Majority of the high level undead was because of him, Mesut and Serylen. The famous ability of Tamar was to convert a corpse directly into a skeleton, which practically doubled Madara's forces.

[Mother Marsha above, hahaha, looks like it would be pretty difficult for Madara to use that ability.] Brendel beamed when he looked at the human Tamar.

“M-my lord?” His smile frightened Tamar. He had heard dirty rumors about nobles acquiring a ‘different taste’, but he was confused since he was already old. He was a little fretful.

It was Ciel who had to cough loudly to wake Brendel, who quickly explained: “Are you the Grandmaster alchemist Tamar in Fortress Riedon?”

[Grandmaster Alchemist? But that’s a title reserved for the best, when did I become so famous?] Tamar was confused and quickly shook his head. “My lord, I’m just an unknown alchemist working for some nobles, and I have no successful inventions at all—”

[You’re still unknown? Hahaha, I picked up a great treasure!] Brendel was delighted.

Chapter 11

Into the night

As they rejoined the refugees, Brendel got to know that Tamar was searching for him ever since he woke up from his coma, so that he could thank Brendel. When he saw Brendel and Ciel leaving away from the refugees, he followed them and waited till they were alone.

But Brendel was not too worried that Tamar would whistleblow to the Holy Cathedral of Fire because he did not appear to be that sort of person.

While Brendel was surprised at Tamar's identity, the latter felt he was mysterious. The middle-aged man had only seen the descriptions of the Blood Transmutation circle, and even he did not know how to use it. However, he could feel the negative feedback within Brendel's body and guessed that he was using this forbidden magic.

But this talent of detecting negative magic did not come to many people.

Tamar did not have any opinions on this particular magic. To him, many nobles did illegal things. The Holy Cathedral of Fire forbade the black markets and illegal slavery, but the market for it in this area was just as prosperous, and the irony was even some members of the holy church participated in these dirty businesses.

The truth was, Tamar actually hoped to discuss the techniques of alchemy with him. He thought for a while before asking.

"My lord, what exactly are you trying to create?"

When Brendel heard the future Grandmaster call him 'My Lord, he actually felt smug about it.

"I need a batch of spirit crystals. I have some higher undead bones, and I need it to make a Soul Statue."

He needed a Soul Statue (White Deer). This was a simpler type amongst the soul statues. It was able to summon a white colored male deer's spirit that was able to

detect undead Shades. In Vaunte's old legend, the white deer resided in place where souls went for their eternal rest, thus they were particularly sensitive to them.

[This is one of the mid-ranked undead types that we might encounter, and one of the most terrifying units that an undead necromancer can employ against us.]

"Soul Statue?" Tamar felt that it was unthinkable. That was nothing more than a simple alchemy tool, and the only difficulty was getting the materials for it. He found it hard to accept that Brendel would use a forbidden magic to make such a simple item.

"Sir Tamar, there's really no need to be suspicious. It's because I lack alchemy tools to do it....."

Tamar nearly tripped and fall to the ground after hearing his words.

The reason why Blood Transmutation was powerful was because of the incredible speed and clean execution in the battlefield, something that normal alchemy could not compete with. But the price for transmuting a high level item was also an incredible burden on the user.

In the past, where the holy faction fought with the undead faction, there were many who sacrificed themselves to summon powerful creatures for the sake of victory. Ultimately, this went against the teachings of the church, and forbidden to be used.

But now this noble youth actually used this as a substitute for magic tools... Any alchemist would bring their tools along with them, even if they had to risk their lives...

"...Errr, my lord. Actually, I have magical tools with me. If you don't mind, you are free to use them. Blood Transmutation magic is a forbidden magic that damages your body greatly, it's best not to use it." Tamar finally reacted to his words after a long time.

"Of course I wouldn't mind, please let me use them." Brendel was not silly enough to use his own blood if there was a set of magical tools at hand. He saved his own HP and obtained a future Grandmaster alchemist. His mood rapidly improved and he discussed alchemy techniques with Ciel and Tamar leisurely.

As a wizard apprentice in Karsuk, Ciel had seen a lot of archmagi who were as proficient as a grandmaster alchemist. Even if he himself was not proficient in it, he had a natural disposition for alchemy.

As for Brendel who had level 5 alchemy, he would easily be able to obtain a professional first-grade alchemist rank if he went to Aouine's formal alchemy exam. At this point of time, he was more like a genius compared to Tamar who was still knocking on the door leading to 'genius'.

The more Brendel discussed with Tamar, the more shocked he was. Some of the ideas that Tamar had were extraordinary, and Brendel was certain that he would become that legendary Grandmaster someday.

Alchemy was something that was incredibly expensive. In the black market or wizard's market, a lich's tooth cost more than three hundred coins, and a simple White Deer Statue required thirty teeth.

They continued to the refugees's camp, and Brendel suddenly spotted Freya walking around in a daze. He walked up towards her and waved his hand in front of her, but there was no response, so he had no choice but to tap on her head—

Freya jumped up and looked for the person who did that: "W-what the hell are you doing!" After realizing it was Brendel, she showed a furious expression: "Brendel! Where did you run off to, there are so many people that came over that I can't handle it anymore!"

Her voice became softer and softer, as if she was suffering from great injustice rather than complaining. She had tried her best in leading the refugees, but with the increasing numbers, she felt she was completely exhausted. Just like Brendel, she had never not slept for days, and she was under more stress than Brendel did because she had to constantly settle the problems that the refugees had.

Ciel and Tamar stepped away when they saw Brendel and Freya talking together, and they continued discussing about the topic they had. As for the things that were happening to this pair of youths in front of them, they pretended like they have not seen anything.

It was evident to the others that Freya relied on Brendel, but the latter was not aware of it at all. Ciel watched them like it was an interesting story, while Tamar thought the young lady was the noble's fiancée.

"You didn't sleep at all?"

"There's no time to do so when so many people are coming in to join us. I had to assign

a place for them and distribute the rations... Brendel, did you know that the White-Mane army was defeated? We just received a lot of soldiers that came from the River of Sharp Rocks, I heard that many people died.....” Freya rubbed her eyes that were as red as a rabbit and grumbled unhappily.

Brendel looked at her with a slack jaw. He rubbed his forehead as he realized that this silly girl actually took care of everything all by herself. “Did you really take everything on by yourself?”

“T-then what was I supposed to do?” Freya looked at him in bewilderment.

“Aren’t the veterans Leto and Mano there? Even if they are unable to do it, you should choose a few reliable people from the refugees and give them the authority so that they could assist you.” Brendel felt that this girl had a great lack of common sense.

“Wha–, Y-you should have told me this earlier!”

Brendel knocked on her head: “This has nothing to do with me, you’re just too silly.”

Freya’s face turned bright red and pushed his hand away. “I-I’ll talk to you later.”

She ran away as if her skirt had caught on fire, leaving behind a swinging ponytail behind her. Brendel shook his head as he laughed a little

“So how is she?” Ciel grinned and walked up to Brendel once Freya left.

Brendel raised his water tumbler and asked puzzledly “What do you mean by that?”

“Freya, she’s a pretty good girl. She’s kind and serious till the point of being adorable. Can’t you tell, my lord, she actually likes you.”

Brendel had poured water into his mouth and he spat it out with a ‘pfff’.

“What did you say?”

“I say, Miss Romaine and Miss Freya are in serious trouble, my lord...”

.....

Brendel spent the entire afternoon trying to carve a suitable statue. Because it was the

first alchemy tool he made, he wanted to create the statue all by himself, but after ruining a few blocks of fir wood, he realized there was a great difference in reality and dreams.

His best product looked like a carrot of stick and not a deer, and had no choice but to leave it to Tamar to finish it. Most of the alchemists were actually accomplished in sewing, painting and even blacksmithing, unlike Brendel who was cheating his way through.

When he got out of his carriage, it was nearly evening. The sun was setting into the western mountains, and it painted them with a copper color. The tip of the fir trees seemed to glitter, as if there was gold dust scattered onto them.

He looked at the evening sky and could not resist thinking of going into the western region. If he did, he would be able to reach an island in the Fallen Moon Sea if he traveled far enough. It was also the first time that he traveled a long journey in the game.

[This world is really right before my eyes...]

After a while, Brendel tried to spend time to find Romaine, but after searching for a long time, he still could not find her. It was impossible to find her most of the time. That girl seemed to have endless energy, and her warm heart must have gathered considerable fame for her, since he overheard the refugees discussing about her when he searched for her.

He looked at the sky again. It was already turning dark. At about 7.30 pm, Brendel ordered the refugees to stop in between a deep valley. The lack of light made things look dark. The two sides of the wall seemed to brighten and darken from time to time. The fog started to settle and they could not hear the night birds warbling, making them feel exceedingly uneasy.

[This is the only place that can avoid the bone eagles. But when it comes to night time, it's when the Shades would appear...]

After settling the refugees, he commanded the defensive team to cut down wood. He wanted to make a badge of spears to equip the newcomers.

His true force was still the mercenaries and the cavalry from Fortress Riedon, but he planned to add additional personnel like the mercenaries that he accepted early, as

well as the White-Mane army's infantry. By enlisting even more civilians, their numbers might possibly grow to two hundred.

Right now he did not lack manpower, he lacked weapons.

He had told Ciel to gather the leaders of the patrol Leto, Mano, Gaspard and Batum. He had to talk about the plan in the evening otherwise there might be repercussion.

8 PM, the final ray of sunlight made its exit, and the first star of the Witch-king appeared in the sky.

Brendel and the leaders stood on top of a hill. He looked at the refugees who were busy setting up a tent. He spoke.

"I think everyone knows what happened. You have most likely heard about the outcome of the White-Mane army. Madara's strategy is not merely about pursuing us, they want to destroy us completely, and allow the news of the Fortress Riedon's fall spread to Vermiere"

"Then what should we do, my lord. At this time, the number of the undead army far surpassed us. Our scouts said that there were a sea of skeletons. They might have been slow in the daytime, but once evening sets in, they would be all over the place."

"And there are zombies." Someone added on.

"There's definitely a way, but it's impossible to avoid them. Because of Luc Beson's failure, [Undead Maggot] Medes and Kabias's army is right in front of us, and we need to consider taking a shortcut. Has anyone heard of the [Land of the Holy Saint's remains]?"

Chapter 12

Holy Saint's remains

————— Princess POV —————

“Land of the Holy Saint's remains?”

Legend stated that the natives in the mountainous valley built a sanctuary during the Era of the Holy Saints. A statue of the king was placed at the entrance of the valley, and all manners of dark creatures that tried to enter would be struck by lightning, and all forms of dark energy would be suppressed to the limits.

In the Era of Darkness, humans, elves and dwarves went out of this protected land, and the gathered knights formed under one banner and defeated the [Dragon of Twilight], ‘Calamity’, bringing about the new era: ‘Year of Chaos’.

“It's the blessed land that is protected by the king, my lady.” Oberbeck answered.

“He actually found that fabled land?” Her tea had been replaced, but the princess did not even noticed that. She merely played with the silver spoon as she listened to Oberbeck's tale.

“That youth probably knew how to get to this mystical place, but he didn't know the exact location.” Oberbeck said. “But his method of searching for that area is quite unique. My lady, I am sure you have heard the Witch King in Bunoxone who inherited the power of the stars. The archmagi in various factions believe that this lifeforce from the stars, comes directly from the Blind Goddess, Elaine.”

“I thought this is just a myth.”

“That might not entirely so.”

“Can I continue to listen to the story?”

“My lady, your teacher, Lord Panos is probably waiting for you.”

The princess laughed and said slyly: "I'm already late, Lord Oberbeck. Please continue your story, I want to know what happened during the night."

Lord Oberbeck smiled as he had predicted this outcome, so he continued: "Then our story have to start from a legend concerning a king and a white male dear."

—————Brendel POV—————

The night had gone dark completely. Strong winds blew across the land, causing the fir trees to rustle loudly against the wind, and the refugees felt like they were listening to ocean waves.

Freya stared at the gloomy sky with great worry as the wind caused her hair stands to dance across her face. She grabbed her best friend's hand and whispered: "Does that idiot Brendel have any confidence in what he said? He talked about some land of the holy saint's remains, but Leto and Mano never heard of it before. They are natives too—"

"Calm down, there's absolutely no problems when it comes to Brendel." Romaine sat down and stared at the starry sky, answering as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

"You didn't think about it all, right?"

"There's no need to in the first place."

Freya was exasperated at the girl whose mind was filled with blank space, but at least she felt that she was more relaxed than before. She wondered if Brendel and Romaine had the same quality to make people feel at ease.

[Brendel's way of making people feel at ease comes from his steady confidence, while Romaine is her natural disposition not to worry about things...] She suddenly wondered what would happen if both of them were not at her side when she meet an obstacle.

Suddenly there were voices of loud gasps that came from the refugees. Romaine and Freya turned their heads, and they could not believe their eyes:

There was an ethereal creature of beauty, a white deer with a translucent body, lighting up the area around it with soft light. It appeared elegant and noble, with long

slim limbs and a sturdy body, its antlers on its head sharp as blades.

This creature seemed like it did not belong in this world as it jumped onto a body, leaving behind a trail of light similar to fireflies behind it.

The leaders, Leto, Mano and Batum stood up at the same time as they stared at it. Brendel, who was holding onto a statue, was somewhere further away with Tamar at his side. The deer jumped up higher onto the boulders in the mountain, turned around and nodded to them, then ran further ahead.

“The finished product is a little imperfect, but it’s quite impressive since our conditions are limited.” Brendel said. He was very pleased at his first result in making an alchemy tool.

Tamar and Ciel gave the same opinion, but the young squire still asked: “My lord, how true is that blessed land that you talked about?”

“You heard of that before?” Brendel was surprised.

“Certainly. Knowledge about the ancient history is something a wizard must study. Many different forms of magic came from the Era of the Holy Saints.”

“I can guarantee that the land is real, but that area is always covered in fog, and I am not sure exactly where it is. I can only pray that the Goddess Elaine can lend us some help, so that my precious deer can find the way.”

[Except that countless players visited that place and got nothing. I didn’t get anything out from it either. It’s famous as heck in the game, and everyone speculated that there was something amazing in it... but no one has ever discovered what secret there is—]

“Lend us some help?” Tamar asked.

“I mean I hope that Goddess Elaine is going to bless us.” Brendel answered.

“What happens if she doesn’t?” Ciel turned his head towards Brendel and asked.

Brendel did not reply. There was at least three thousand skeletons and ghouls right behind them, and Medes and Kabias elite forces in front. With the shades in this forest, this night was going to be very dangerous for them.

The white deer caused the refugees to exclaim in wonder as it ran to the other side of the mountain valley before stopping. Brendel knew that the night's adventure was about to start. He looked at the pocket watch.

[11 PM. Time to move out.]

He gave the order to get the refugees to break the camp and move. The conscripted militia which were armed with long spears, marched together with the refugees, and two long snaking group of people started walking out of the valley, with fifty riders guarding the rear. The stars and moon were bright enough for them to see the road without lighting torches.

Brendel and Ciel rode together with the riders, with the former pulling out the Thorn of Light. The sword did not glow, proving that there were no undead nearby.

"Get the refugees to follow the white deer. It will lead us to safety." Brendel turned and instructed the riders.

A man beside Mano suddenly rode up and asked loudly: "My lord, are we really able to cross that something valley and be ahead of the Madara's army?"

"Definitely."

"I'm not suspecting you, my lord, but all of these things you say sound unbelievable."

"It is true. But all of you simply have to trust me at this point of time. I'm not going to risk my life over some false information."

"But how we are going to move to the north when there's a large undead army in front? There are at least three other groups of Madara's undead patrolling this region, with them surrounding the nearby area. Each of them came from different directions, one is from the River of Sharp Rocks, the other comes from the side Hunting Deer Mountain's forest. These are most likely comprised of Pale Knights and Ghouls." An officer from the White Mane army came up.

Brendel suddenly recognized the two of them. He had fought against the two men once in Fortress Riedon and disarmed both of them, even sending them flying backwards. It seemed that they had deep prejudice against his judgment.

"If we fight against Medes's troops directly, we're all going to be killed."

Brendel looked at him. He needed someone to keep the White-Mane army's soldiers in line, so he did not get angry and replied politely. "What is your name?"

"Please call me Taron, my lord."

"Then Ser Taron, there's no need to worry, their armies are bound to have openings we can exploit."

"What openings are you talking about?"

Brendel did not want to reveal the gargoyle's secret to them.

"We're going to go to the rear of Medes's army, and they will pass through here in half an hour."

Everyone was silenced at that moment, and even the ones who were starting to believe in him started questioning his sanity for following Medes's army.

But Leto suddenly said: "That is a good idea, if we are able to grasp the right timing."

Brendel looked at him in astonishment.

[This plan is just a random fib... To even make it work, we have to get the right timing to cut across their weakest link of segmented troops, while suppressing their runners so they can't alert the other patrolling units. This requires a great command of the situation during a battle... I have only done this once in the game and simply used this as an excuse to shut this Taron up—]

Brendel did not expect Leto to guess what he had done before, and even dared to go along with what he said. Everyone was stunned, but Mano was the next to recover and understand Leto's intentions. "Alright, I'll bet on it as well—"

The rest of them gradually understood what his intentions were. But even after understanding what he had in mind, everyone wondered if the three of them were crazy. Brendel looked at the gargoyle which was a speck of black in the sky.

[But the odds are much better than the last time since I have the gargoyle to survey the surroundings...]

The [Undead Maggot] Medes knew there was a group of refugees that escaped into the direction of the Silver Sparrow Mountain. The group had even defeated his squadron of undead skeletons.

But he did not place too much importance on chasing after that batch of refugees, as his attention was on working together with Kabias to deal with the White-Mane army.

[The humans are weak.]

It was just as easy as he had predicted. Aouine's formal army was completely defeated by them. They had chased them all the way from morning and delivered a final blow by ambushing them. When the sun had set, the battle had ended. Even though their vanguard forces were heavily damaged, they were mostly cannon fodder. The ghouls and Kabias's skeleton cavalry did not suffer much losses.

In comparison, the forty odd skeleton riders hurt his scouting forces greatly. To regain this forces required a long time.

It was at this point that Medes turned his attention on this group of refugees. Lord Tarkus had given an order to seal the pathway to the River of Sharp rocks with their lives, and everyone who participated in this war did not dare be careless.

[Something is amissed...]

The leader who led the group of refugees appeared to be skilled at avoiding the bone eagles that were spying on them. Ever since morning, they had only caught glimpses of the refugees five times, and at the end of the night, they lost their presence entirely.

[This is a bad omen.]

Under the weak soul fire, Medes opened the goatskin map. He drew several circles on the Silver Sparrow Mountain.

Chapter 13

The calm before the storm

The refugees kept moving to the east after they exited the mountain valley. The group formed a long serpentine shape when the path got narrower, progressing slower because they did not lit up torches and traveled in the dark. Even though the stars and moon offered a certain degree of brightness, they were hindered by the fir trees. Shadows seemed to dart about when the refugees marched through, and they shivered with trepidation.

Under Brendel's orders, Freya had separated the refugees into different sections, with two guards maintaining order at every section. Freya told them what they needed to do so that they would not impede the progress, while Brendel told them what would happen if they failed to follow orders, and with this coaxing and threatening approach, they managed to achieve a balance to maintain speed and order.

The veterans Mano and Leto were not too worried about their movements as noises were easily muffled because of the thick forest, becoming nothing more than a whisper within a short distance. The reason for this was because of the strong wind that caused the fir trees to rustle constantly and loudly.

Brendel strained his ears to listen to the wind while he led the horse forward on foot. There seemed to be all sorts of noises in it: There was the rustling of Fir trees, groups of birds singing together, but there seemed to be some strange music and whispers in them, as if they were speaking another language.

Aouine's southern region described this whispers as the witches trying to bewitch travelers as there were many who did not return after traveling to this part of the forest.

Brendel did not believe in them, but now that he had experienced it, he felt there was indeed a certain air of mystery.

The other mercenaries also led their horses on foot as they wanted to reserve the horses' stamina to prepare for the upcoming battle. Even though these specially bred war horses' stamina were approximately twenty percent better than a normal horse,

the cavalry riders did not want to ride on them to maintain their charging prowess.

They had advanced to the east for approximately five kilometers, and was considered to have left the Silver Sparrow Mountain's area.

[This area should be considered the area of the Hunting Deer forest... Only seasonal hunters would appear here.]

Brendel had already sent out the gargoyle to survey the west and southern area, while the other scouts have returned from their various assignments.

After a few minutes later, the scouts came up to Brendel with pale faces.

The scouts have discovered the entire region ahead was filled with skeletons, even before they reached their designated locations.

[They must have received a shock... It's not pleasant at all to listen to a sea of skeletons walk on the hard ground.]

Brendel soothed them and allowed them to rest, while turning to the other riders and explained their weakness, so that they would be ready to fight when the time comes.

He send out another scout in the the northwest.

Brendel knew what Madara's formation was after listening to the scouts' reports. They were laid carefully in order to be flexible in their movements, and their scouts controlled a large area where they were mobile enough to aid both the front and rear army.

These Madara's leaders were the true reason why the Dark Lords were able to pull off their strategies and formations.

[Fortunately this formation has a fatal weakness. As long as they lose the support of the Shades, the necromancers will reorganize their army, and the space between each squadron will become huge. There's an additional weakness to it if the enemy leader is weak enough, with the classic scenario where they can only command a small fraction of the army at a single time... That will be advantageous for us, but at the same time, I need to be careful of Medes's army. If he's the one leading, that additional weakness will not be there.]

There were not many ways to discover a shade's presence.

But Brendel 'knew' of a way.

Mano kept looking down at the white deer as he led a group of volunteer militia. Brendel had told him that the beautiful white deer would be able to show them where the terrifying shades were.

Mano was irritated. He hated this mysterious act of Brendel talking like a mysterious wizard, and he would rather have a proper battle. They were ahead of the refugees by nearly a kilometer, but the white deer still did not act like what Brendel had said it would do.

Just when he wanted to curse and grumble, the white deer suddenly turned its head into another direction and pawed at the ground with a distressed expression.

[Over there?!]

Mano immediately drew out his saber and commanded everyone to go over to the direction where the white deer indicated.

There was nothing strange about that area with fir trees, but when they started to surround that area, they saw a translucent white humanoid figure.

[M-marsha above! This is the shade!?]

Everyone's feet stopped when they saw that white figure, but it shrieked loudly and rushed straight at them. The scream made their blood curdle, while the forest suddenly went into deep silence.

Mano had never fought such a bizarre battle in his life. The Shade's face seemed to show his friends' face who had died in battle, but he quickly shook his head and ignored it. Brendel had warned him about this; these illusions were not real.

Mano did not dare to suspect Brendel any longer; the scene in front of him was just madness.

Mano gripped his saber tightly and swung at the Shade. The blade went past the body and immediately developed a layer of ice. Mano cursed inwardly as he did not feel the impact.

Spirits were in between the reality and the ethereal, and physical attacks had a fifty percent chance to fail.

Mano was unable to pull off an evasive maneuver as the Shade went for his head. He immediately turned his upper body sideways, and the Shade's fingernails pass through his shoulder.

The veteran soldier immediately felt an intense chill piercing at his bone, and he lost all sensation to it.

"Attack, attack now, you worthless bastards!" He roared at the frightened militia. They finally woke up from their stupor and raised their long spears and attacked the Shade.

Three spears went through the shadow-like creature, but the other two spears managed to impale the creature and lift it up. It screamed loudly. Mano then jumped high up and tried to cleave the shade into two. It screamed loudly and disappeared when the saber cut through its neck to the lower torso.

Everyone finally relaxed, and a few even of them felt weak in their knees and just sat onto the ground, and no one had the mood to talk about what had happened.

Brendel watched the scene from far away.

[As expected of an Iron-ranked fighter, he's more than enough to take care of these intermediate ranked undead. His commanding abilities are also good, it's fortunate that I have these veteran mercenaries, otherwise trying to care of these Shades might be a problem.]

He suddenly turned his head back to Freya.

[Although this Soul Statue is a common thing, the one who discovered that the White Deer has the ability to actually discover the undead was Freya... Did I just plagiarize her idea? Uhh, in any case, once we start clearing out all these Shades, the necromancers will eventually discover that a number of their Shades did not report back... If they stop moving for one or two hours, we can do a lot.]

Brendel's surveyed the ground through the gargoyle's eyes, and he finally spotted a group of skeleton riders passing through the forest. He was not sure if he had missed other groups of skeletons, but he was certain that it was one of the vanguard groups. He commanded the gargoyle to sweep the place again, and after three minutes, he

spotted another group of riders.

The gargoyle then went deeper into the mountain region, and he spotted a large group of skeleton infantry.

[Just like I thought. They gathered up. Approximately two mid-sized companies of skeleton soldiers—]

Brendel found two more companies as the Brendel flew through the valley. Even though he could not see which leader it belonged to, he did not think that they would be easy to deal with.

[This is just the beginning of an even bigger army. It shouldn't be the 'Pale Knight' Ebdon or Vesa in the rear, probably Direndall or Ladios. Two generals under Tarkus, with the army split into five divisions. They have around ten thousand undead stretched across twenty thirty kilometers, and they are moving in the night just like I thought... The timing is bad. We need to move quickly.]

Even though Brendel still wanted to survey even further and see what unit was ahead, the gargoyle had already reached its maximum flying area. He had once lied to Marden and Bretton that it surveyed the entire Bucce region, but that was not the case.

It was 1.05 AM.

Taron reported that the scouts surveying the north western area had returned, and the elite forces had appeared in the River of Sharp Rocks.

The mercenaries' faces were grim when the news spread. They had kept a sliver of hope in their hearts, but the worst outcome had happened.

The refugees were surrounded.

For one moment they thought of breaking through the north before the undead completely surrounded them, but the mercenaries looked at Brendel and Freya, then at the refugees, and they thought it was impossible to do so. Everyone was at a loss for words.

Freya grabbed her reins anxiously and cast her eyes at Brendel subconsciously, but he did not seem to notice the atmosphere of the mercenaries at all. He merely looked at the pocket watch once, then got up onto his horse.

He pulled out his sword and said: “Listen up, everyone—”

The youth’s voice was strong and clear.

“There are two companies of undead in the south-west direction, their distance up to two to three kilometers away. Somewhere further beyond that area is another company of undead. Along the way are two to four scouting groups of skeleton riders. We need to eliminate two of these scouting parties and attack one of the companies to create an opening.

Then we’re going to go to the rear of Medes’s army just like we planned. We have two hours to complete all of this, after which we will be playing hide and seek with the undead army.” Brendel raised his sword and rode around the mercenaries, suddenly showing signs of condescension.

“Why, is everyone afraid?”

No reply came back, as everyone was stunned as he suddenly came up with information that the scouts did not bring back, and some wondered if he was lying through his teeth.

Yet, contrary to everyone’s expectations, with most of them experiencing it first hand, the things that happened so far had coincided with everything that he had said. As they looked at him, they saw that very same figure who led them charging downwards on that high ground to vanquish the group of skeleton riders.

It was as if his sword pointed to a miraculous road of victory, and no matter how hard or difficult it was, he was going to lead through that road.

Brendel looked at them without moving his eyes away without saying anything.

[Déjà vu... I led a similar charge with my allies back then in the game as well...]

One of his party members even said that he was best suited as a vanguard leader, as he had never swayed from the things he decided upon.

Every mercenary got onto their horses, and drew out their weapons at the same time.

“For victory-”

“For Aouine!!!”

Chapter 14

Piercing through

Nearly everyone was stunned.

Brendel had led the cavalry through the forest quickly and pointed out the location of the undead as if he had the ability of clairvoyance. Only Taron and a few of Luc Beson's soldiers guessed that it had to something to do with the gargoyle, but they did not have much time to think about it.

Brendel immediately gave the order to attack, and fifty odd riders charged along side with him. They split up into various groups as they got nearer, and surrounded the enemy, sealing off the possible retreating paths.

[Good. The enemy is moving just like how I predicted and they are completely surrounded.]

The mercenaries and Luc Beson's soldiers started to see Brendel as a leader that was only heard in legends.

The initial battle began with Brendel's sword arte, smashing five skeleton soldiers into pieces as he charged straight at the enemy. The skeletons that tried to block him from reaching the commanding necromancer was sent flying backwards approximately seven or eight meters. The same scene the men witnessed earlier repeated itself, with Brendel thrusting his sword straight through the necromancer, with everyone reforming and charging at the remaining skeletons, crushing the enemy completely.

After traveling for about five minutes, they met and defeated a group of skeleton riders which caused them slightly more trouble. It was a complete victory for them, but this time there were three riders who got injured. Brendel immediately rushed over to them and bandaged them up. Due to his skill, their bleeding stopped in a matter of moments, which was even more effective than some blood staunching medicine, and he sent one of the more heavily injured person back to rejoin the refugees.

This minor action won him even more repute, and even Taron and Luc Beson's men started to think there was nothing that Brendel could not do.

[...Hah. 779 XP for the two battles. With the combined XP from the previous battles, I reached level 17. If this situation wasn't a game, I might even feel bored because of how static Madara's riders tactical placements and strategies are in this era...]

The greatest improvement in the undead tactics came along when Incirista reformed the ranks, and they became more flexible and difficult to deal with.

At the same time when Freya instructed the refugees to abandon the horse carriages to improve their marching speed, the Madara undead found they were in trouble.

Medes, a half ghoul and skeleton, received the report from the frontline. The undead acolytes had sent over ten shades to the south, but there was only half that returned to their ranks.

[The refugees did it? Or a trap set by a greater force?]

Medes scratched his maimed head, sending several fat maggots that crawled out from his head in surprise. Some of them crawled into his eye sockets and cavities of his face, and he grabbed one and sent it into his teeth, eating it.

He then took out the map he used earlier and started drawing lines to indicate where the group of refugees might go.

[The enemy has the ability to suppress the shades and my predictions might not be right... I need to have the acolytes send out a second batch of shades to verify them, but at the same time my army has to speed up so that we can seal off the escape paths along with Ebdon and the other undead leaders.]

There were seven undead leaders who were out there, including himself, hunting for refugees in every direction. No matter how cunning the refugees were, they had no way of running out. Madara had a proverb: 'No matter how clever the rats were, they cannot escape a sealed oil barrel'.

[When the sun rises, the entire southern region here will be covered of the shadows of Brumand's black roses, and Madara will seize victory—]

Medes petted a zombie that was lying down like an obedient dog. But just as he thought everything was going according to plan, Brendel was cornering a company's undead leader.

Approximately five minutes ago, the Black Knight Xelsa confirmed that he had lost contact with two groups of ten skeleton riders each, and it started wondering if he was targeted by an unknown group of Aouine's army. Despite the immediate response by sending out shades and riders to the eleventh company nearby, none of his scouts returned.

That was when it realized the situation was grave.

When Brendel and his mercenaries appeared on a hill nearby the undead company, they saw that they had stopped and was preparing to camp on the spot. Batum, Leto and Mano did not see anything odd in their formations, but Brendel secretly frowned.

[The quality of their captains are outstanding, or at least this one is. I was hoping that this undead company would form up with the nearest company ahead after losing their scouts, and we would be able to lead the refugees over with this hole in their formation, but the commanding officer made the best judgment in such a short time.]

"What are they doing?"

Taron knew a little of Madara's strategy, and he asked out of curiosity. He looked at Brendel, not doubting his ability in his mind anymore.

"They are on guard at the very same spot. I wanted to confuse their leader by killing all their scouts cleanly and quickly, making it think that there was a force that was at least three times bigger than their numbers."

"Three times? Then why doesn't their leader regroup with the nearby undead forces. Are they not afraid of getting surrounded?"

"The leader is waiting for their allies' scouts."

"Are they not afraid that we can stop their scouts too?" Mano quipped while polishing his saber.

Brendel glanced at him.

[Do you really think we can stop them anytime we want? If it's not for one of the best scouting unit type like the gargoyle, do you really think we can sweep up all the scouts that were sent out?]

“Destroying their scouts have told them there are enemies in this direction. The reason why we destroyed the two groups of skeleton riders, is because Brendel plans to destroy this entire company as well.”

“Then we don’t have too much time in this plan right?”

“One hour. We must finish before that and clean up the battlefield too.” Brendel answered.

[Freya will reach this place with the militia in about twenty minutes...]

When Xelsa surveyed the area, he suddenly saw a group of soldiers with long spears walking down from the hilltop. He was momentarily taken aback as their attire was different from any of Aouine’s troops.

He turned his head around and asked with a hoarse voice: “This army belongs to which city’s troops?”

The necromancer beside him immediately bowed respectfully and answered: “They appear to be militia.”

“Militia? How can a group of militia defeat two squadrons of our skeleton riders?”

The Black Knight felt there was something amiss, and he straightened up on his force and signalled.

“Change to your bows.”

“The target is one hundred and forty feet, scatter shot formation..... Fire!”

The skeleton soldiers had switched to the longbows on their back when they received the command, and started to fire upon his order. A series of highly strung strings trilled as black arrows flew across the fir trees and into the hill.

The wind in the hilly areas were very strong, and the arrows basically had no aim into them. However, the militia that had very little training was frightened by them. When they saw the arrows, they stopped momentarily before descending into chaos.

Freya immediately rode back to the right flank and issued commands to the Aouine’s light infantry and remaining mercenaries to lead the militia.

“Lower your bodies and keep your head! Remember your training, do not stop moving! Follow me and fight for your families!”

Freya roared with her sword in hand. Her commands seemed to work, and the militia quickly regained their courage and regrouped, moving at a quicker pace than before.

The dark knight furrowed his brows, and ordered the skeletons to unleash another volley.

“Targets, one hundred feet. Take aim— Fire!”

The skeletons’ arrows were much accurate this time, and there were a few militia who were struck down by the arrows, rolling down the hill.

But after the two volleys of arrows, the militia had overcome their fear and steadied themselves. The arrows were not as effective as they had imagined it to be.

Xelsa immediately changed his strategy and targeted the female knight. The third volley of arrows concentrated on her, but her armor lit up with countless spots of lights, and every arrow that was fired at her deflected everywhere.

This miraculous scene stunned everyone, and they cheered and roared out Freya’s name—

“An Elven imperial soldier?!” The Black Knight was so furious that he nearly laughed. He did not understand where this ridiculous army came from.

Brendel who was hiding along with the mercenaries from a short distance ahead in the hills, nodded when he saw Freya leading the army calmly with decisive orders.

[Even though she’s a little clumsy during the normal days, but this battle proves she’s the future Goddess of War.]

He took out the pocket watch and checked the time.

[We are on schedule—]

He got up on his horse and gestured. The mercenaries mounted their horses, and when he saw they were ready, he pulled out his the Thorn of Light. A dazzling light burst forth as he roared,

“Move out!”

The sudden roar and dazzling light made the enemy and Freya’s army look at Brendel and the charging mercenaries behind him.

“An Elven sword!” Xelsa immediately recognized it and almost screamed. He pulled out his own sword.

“Ciel!” Brendel raised his sword high up and shouted.

The young squire instantly raised the ruby in his hand and pointed at the sword: “Sharpness, shall split all into two, the creation of blades.”

A white beam of light extended from Brendel’s sword before it disappeared a moment later. The magic had temporarily improved the quality of the blade, making it sharper and harder.

“My lord, a new day is about to arrive, please remember to pay the cost to my maintenance.” Ciel grinned and said when he finished performing the spell.

Brendel smiled faintly in response, then took on a serious face. He pointed his sword at Xelsa’s formation, signifying the upcoming battle.

Chapter 15

One against hundred

The distance was seventy meters away. Brendel did not order the men to rush straight at the enemy, but led them at a steady pace into a small forest, and appeared from the other end of it.

Xelsa felt things were getting out of hand as he urged his horse forward. He waved his black blade in front of the skeletons:

“Turn, turn around you damned fools!”

“Third and forth rows, ready your spears, hurry! You bunch of stupid bones!”

Xelsa used a hoarse and hollow voice as he hurled abuses at them, splitting up the soldiers into two groups. One was to face Freya’s militia, and the other was to check the incoming cavalry that suddenly appeared.

The spears were raised and lowered together at the same time. The first row of skeletons pointed slightly upwards, while the second row lower their spears at shoulder height, forming an iron wall of steel.

Brendel looked at the ghastly spear tips. He was almost immune to the tension after experiencing battles so many times, and there was not a shred of fear in his taut face. His breathing was even and ready to enter into the fray.

[...Judging from the appearance of the enemy leader, he’s approximately level 20 to 30 and he’s probably wearing equipment of the same level. If that’s the case, he’s at the upper tier of a Iron-ranked fighter. His stats is most likely higher because he’s an elite as well...]

Brendel pointed his sword into Xelsa’s flanks, and the cavalry started to turn to curve and turn away from the spears, inching closer to the flanks of the skeletons’ formation.

Xelsa was greatly distressed. The opponents were full of seasoned mercenaries and their commander instantly reacted to any changes that the skeletons made in their

formations. No matter how many times he tried to lure the enemy with false openings in the skeletons' formations, the enemy would ignore it and aim for their weakest areas.

[Any lesser commanders would have charged at us by now...! These fucking maggots are coming around us again!]

Xelsa ordered the skeletons to turn approximately one hundred and twenty degrees, but they were slow to react and turn. Reassembling a formation that could resist the cavalry's charge was extremely troublesome, and he had to assign nearly all his necromancers in his company to ensure that the formation was done right.

[Fuck! The militia and infantry are coming from the other side. This group of skeletons are much weaker because there's not enough necromancers to lead them!]

"Fire your arrows at will!"

The skeleton soldiers had shot their forth volley of arrows, until Xelsa ordered them to fire at will.

The combined army comprised of militia and infantry led by Freya was ten meters away. This group of men that were from different cities and age started showing various degrees of fear and tension.

Their hands held either long spears or Madara's black steel swords with their breaths were disarrayed. Their formation was starting to lose its shape, but they still advanced forward. In front of them was gleaming skeletons without fear or excitement. They had no emotions or thought, and merely observed the incoming militia with their orange-red Soul Fire in their eye sockets.

Freya realized right away that her army was starting to become disorderly again, and her mind went into a blank for a short moment because she did not know what to do. But she quickly clenched her teeth and raised her sword and charged straight into the midst of the enemy like a lightning bolt.

That was the beginning of her change from a militia to a knight.

————— Romaine's POV —————

The forest of spears entered into Romaine's eyes.

"Freya!"

She had carefully ran out from the refugees and hid carefully at the hilltop, but she was frightened when she saw Freya charging straight at the skeleton soldiers with their spears pointing forward.

Suddenly she heard galloping sounds and she turned her head. She found the girl called Sue was riding on a war horse, going straight to the battlefield.

[She looks like she has great riding skills... Hmm... Riding looks interesting.]

————— Back to the battle POV —————

Freya went to the skeletons' flank and raised her longsword, swiping away the spears that came at her. But she was able to handle only a few attacks at a given time, and many of the skeletons were able to thrust their spears into her. Her armor lit up and most of their attacks grazed her, but even the magic that was woven into the had its limits.

Two spears found their way through Freya's upper torso, ripping long gashes across her chest and neck, while one spear lodged itself into her abdomen, and blood poured out like an overturned tumbler.

She uttered a guttural sound as she severed the spear. The militia had clashed with the Madara's undead by this point, but the skeletons' formation was affected by Freya's reckless attacks and they were forced back under the combined pressure. She urged the horse to turn around and retreat from the flanks, then charged straight into another section of the skeleton troops—

Xelsa who had his attention drawn by the Brendel and mercenaries, received a shock when he found the skeleton troops' formation crumbling. He had thought his army would at least be able to defend for a while, but he did not think that they would be crushed so thoroughly once they made contact. He sought for their leader, and saw her issuing orders to her army to move in an orderly manner without rushing. Each time they moved a step forward, skeleton bones could be found flying through the air.

He exhaled, the misty breath temporarily covering his lips.

[If I had more necromancers, they could still remake their formations... But on the other side is the enemy's cavalry—]

He turned his head back to the cavalry and received another shock.

Brendel had his full attention on Xelsa, and when he saw Xelsa was distracted, he led the cavalry closer to the skeletons' flanks, and Xelsa was unable to react in time.

Brendel raised his sword up and waved it once.

The cavalry behind him raised their swords at the same time.

"Destroy them!" Brendel shouted.

"Aouine shall be victorious!!!"

The cavalry charged straight at the skeletons in full speed as they roared loudly. The gravel on the ground seemed to dance as the ground vibrated.

The skeletons in Xelsa's rear had started to reach his sides as they were pushed back, with the Freya and army starting to surround the necromancers. He chopped a skeleton into two as it blocked his way.

"Lower your spe—"

Brendel lowered his body and swung the Thorn of Light. He used the [White Raven's Sword Rave], and the wind pressure swept across the skeletons like a scythe, smashing five skeletons from the first and second row backwards. He then released his reins and raised both his hands up to the direction of the skeleton formation. Two blue light beams shot at them, knocking their long spears to the side.

One human and one horse lunged into their formation without stopping, and several skeletons that were knocked, got crushed by the horse's hooves.

It might have looked dangerous, but Brendel was confident of his 4.3 OZ agility which was several times faster than a normal man, and the skeletons' movements in his eyes actually looked like they were crawling slowly. This tiny gap in the enemy's timing was a huge opening that could be easily used against them.

“Protect your horses!”

Brendel yelled as the first row of mercenaries made contact with the disorderly skeleton troops. Loud crashing sounds repeated as rows of skeletons fell backwards by their charge. The skeleton soldiers were forced back and almost squeezed the necromancers.

The mercenaries were veterans who were experienced in charging. They easily tore through the enemy's ranks and knocked back their spears with ease with their war horses, with the second group of riders ready to charge straight into the enemy's chaotic formation. They would then reform and launch an assault at the skeletons again, and a few minutes later, the Madara army was in shambles.

Their first charge had the greatest casualties, of which two of them were knocked down by the spears, with the first row of war horses receiving injuries. However, with their Iron-ranked strength, they managed to create a devastating impact that even Brendel did not expect.

Freya and Brendel's combined army nearly pierced through the undead army that had the size of two hundred men with their first assault.

Xelsa could not believe that his army was defeated so easily. His necromancers had tried to stop Brendel's rampaging charge by casting the spell [Curtain of Darkness] to blind him, but he was completely unaffected by it and severed the offending necromancers into two after charging out of the area, with white flames burning them up into ashes. Another necromancer tried to cast debilitating magic on him, but he swung a sword arte from seven or eight meters away and cleaved it into two as well.

Every time Brendel swung his sword, the surrounding skeletons would burst up into flames. Holy fire burned all around him, as if he was surrounded by a heavenly glow, and soon his undead enemies were all turned into ashes.

It was as if nothing could stop his rampage, and the mercenaries who finally had the chance to rest a little, witnessed his feat and could not help but open their mouths wide.

Finally, when there was nothing but a scarce number of skeletons left, his eyes fell upon Xelsa.

Chapter 16

Rout

One slash, one kill, a force that could not be stopped even by a legion.

[[[What kind of imposing power is this?!]]]

It was not only Xelsa who thought of this, the militia and mercenaries who saw Brendel's frenzied destruction stopped what they were doing. They even thought a legendary paladin would not be able to surpass what he did. The humans who were still in the midst in attacking cheered at the same time, their morale greatly boosted.

The militia destroyed off the skeletons who were in front of them, and Xelsa knew that he was defeated. But the noble blood in him from the dark lands did not allow him to admit defeat—

[What kind of army is this...? They look nothing more like a bunch of disorganized garbage who are not even equipped properly. They are even worse than militia because they are hastily formed from a group of refugees. This group of men who had even lost their reason to fight... But the one who led them... is far more impressive. Aouine is a nothing more than a decadent kingdom now. How could our glorious undead be defeated by an army like this?]

Xelsa could not help but lament in his heart.

The Black Knight pulled out his sword, the soul fire in him flaring up. He dragged the necromancer beside him who was of a higher level and pointed at Brendel, ordering him loudly to use a [Mental Blast] on him.

He then patted the neck of his horse, bringing along the three Black Warrior guards with him. Even if he had no chance of gaining victory, he had to reclaim his glory by killing the enemy's leader. This was Madara's pride, the pride that only the nobles had.

Brendel who was observing Xelsa, immediately realized that the situation he was in. He pointed at the necromancer and called out to Ciel. The wizard apprentice fired a ray of white light at the necromancer who was in the middle of casting a spell. But Ciel

did not expect his magic to be deflected when it struck the necromancer's ribs.

[Ciel's level is too low.]

Brendel immediately understood that when he saw the necromancer resisting Ciel's spell. A few remaining skeletons were in his path, and he had no choice but to destroy them first. He cut them down and raised his left hand—

A sky blue triangular magic formation formed around his wrist.

Brendel paid 3 Wind EP into the Elemental Pool, and activated the magic card.

This sky blue card combination represented the power of wind, flexible and varied, a magic that was unpredictable due to its nature of countering the enemy after they launched an attack first.

A transparent ripple with razor sharp edges launched from the necromancer's forehead, aiming towards Brendel and the people nearby him, but it suddenly stopped moving in the middle of its path, as if time had frozen. A hurricane formed in the battlefield and seemed to howl in everyone's ears. The mental blast was then sent back to the caster, and countless undead skulls exploded in its path.

The necromancer who had lost its head shook once, and dropped down from the horse.

[[Magic swordsman!]]

The mercenaries and militia who did not understand magic very well, did not think it was unusual of Brendel to cast a spell after seeing the undead set on fire with his slashes. But the ones who were more experienced trembled. Not only was he a genius in tactical battle and fighter who had the strength of an Iron-ranked fighter, he was a wizard who was powerful enough to destroy the enemy's necromancers with ease!

Xelsa felt his body turning cold. Once again, he could not understand where the leader of their cavalry come from. He held an Elven sword with incredible skills, leading his men with brilliant tactical commands and he was even able to use magic.

[How could this man be not famous in Aouine? And if he is not, Is he going to be someone who will rise to become a legendary figure in history?]

When he hesitated, two of his personal guards had stepped up to stop Brendel who was charging at them. The youth's expression did not change, and disarmed the first Black Warrior's two handed sword with a violent metallic crash, then slashed across the neck and chest armor in a straight arc downwards. An explosive sound echoed in the mountain valley as he threw down the Black Warrior down along with his horse onto the ground.

He then punched the second guard's giant sword away with a deafening clang, and urged his horse forward by tightening his legs around its abdomen. After grabbing the Black Warrior's arm with his left hand, he thrust his sword through his heart and lifted him off the horse, then throwing him onto the ground.

He narrowed his eyes as he saw a -72 HP above the Black Warrior's head.

[The damage done by the Thorn of Light is ridiculous. Although I must say, it's bizarre to look at the numbers appearing out of thin air...]

The Black Warrior had started to burn up when the final guard attacked him. Brendel deflected the incoming sword and decapitated the enemy with ease. But a metallic ringing sword from the Thorn of Light made him look at it, and he was delighted to see a magic necklace that added +0.3 OZ strength.

[I had always thought that it was strange for the loot that I got to be so dismal. After fighting against so many Madara undead and even the Golden Apple Tree boss, the loot drops have been awful to the point I even wondered if there's a difference from the game.]

When he was momentarily distracted, he found a sword piercing towards him. He was jolted back to his senses and dodge to the side. He found the Black Knight had came before himself.

The youth looked around him. All his guards and skeletons have been destroyed, but instead of running away from surrendering, Xelsa merely came before him and waited.

[Does he want to challenge me to a duel?]

He was taken aback.

Freya grimaced as she held the wound on her waist with pressure. She felt that her heart was itching or something, like she was more concerned with the armor being

spoiled. She thought for a while before persuading herself it was because of the rarity of the armor.

Freya ordered the militia to check for any remaining undead that was not destroyed or escaped, and to account for the wounded and dead. She rode around with the horse and found a skeleton soldier crawling on the ground with a broken leg. Before she was able to destroy it, someone else rushed up to it and struck the skeleton through the head with a sword.

She stopped and turned around, and Freya saw that it was Sue.

“Sue?”

The girl with bronze skin rode over and looked at Freya with concern.

“Freya, are you injured?”

“I’m fine, did you see Brendel?” Freya had pulled away from the main area a considerable distance.

“Him? Why are you so concerned about him when he’s a coward who won’t even accept a knight’s duel?”

“A knight duel?”

Author’s notes on magic items

Iron-ranked label is termed as [Alchemy item], the weakest class of magic item.

Bronze-ranked [Minor light], low class magic item.

Brass-ranked [Magic], is considered as a true Magic Class item. I.E, Brendel’s Ring of the Wind Empress, Freya’s Flame Ring, with the typical ability of launching magic.

Silver-ranked (Legendary), items that are rarely found. An example would be Brendel’s Thorn of Light, and it was able to change the power ratio to a certain level, like how Brendel easily defeated undead that was above his natural level.

Gold-ranked items (Fantasy). Items that can only be found in myths or bard's songs. There are very few people who own them.

Dark Gold-ranked items (Godly). There are only a few core members in big guilds in the game that managed to get them, and seen as a representation of their status.

As for ultimate unique items, like the Mercury Staff (TL: probably owned Madara's undead boss), Lament of the Wind Empress (ring), or the holy dragon spear Gungnir.

Chapter 17

Cleaning the battlefield

————— Princess POV —————

“A knight’s duel?” The silver-colored hair princess could not suppress a smile when she heard that, impressed that the Black Knight was able to think of a tactic to try and delay the time. But she soon sighed and turned her head towards the scenery outside the window in a daze, looking past the floating dust that was visible in the sunlight. She frowned with worry as she thought about a number of things—

[Give up one’s honor? Throwing away your pride as a knight to avoid battling the ‘Dark Blooming Roses of Madara’?... This land has been plagued by war for centuries, and is now hardly loved by its citizens, but did that youth change their hearts when he led them?]

The princess did not know that her prediction would become reality. She looked back at Oberbeck and they both did not speak for a long time.

“The Wise King, Erik, our first ancestor king led citizens from Kirrlutz to independence in order to battle the unending corruption in the empire. Our country was formed for the sake of defying the nobles’ arrogance and greed.

And now, our nobles have become greedy and noble. Have we lost our virtues and the heart to protect justice, to the point of losing the ability to gather people?”

“I dare not to presume anything, but even though the nobles are corrupted beyond recognition, at least our citizens still believe in the crown.” Oberbeck answered.

The princess nodded, her mood lifting a little.

Oberbeck was able to see through inner her thoughts and continued speaking. “No matter rotten the ground is, a seed is still able to grow beneath it, my lady. Even since the time from our ancestor king, Ansen the tenth, we have been training militias and forming forces, for the sake of sowing these seeds. That youth that I met was able to give up on his pride and honor, showing the younger generation of Aouine is no lesser

than any of Madara's forces."

However, the two did not point out that particular youth was from the Highland Knights, and had nothing to do with the crown. Still, the princess could not imagine why he was able to give up his honor as a knight.

However, they did not know that Brendel was not a knight in the first place.

————— Battle's POV —————

Xelsa did not expect it too, so he could only die in humiliation under the combined attacks of the mercenaries.

Brendel had completely ignored him, except the moment where he swung his sword without any warning. Xelsa blocked it in time, but he was thrown off the horse, and Brendel ordered the mercenaries to attack Xelsa immediately.

Brendel met Xelsa's eyes when he attacked him. He saw that the Black Knight pursued in the belief of true honor and faith.

[One person never only hold so much strength, but when you put ten of thousands together, that force would become a strong force. 'Madara's blooming black roses' are starting to form. Unfortunately, I don't agree with that honorable notion, and I don't intend to.]

In contrast, Xelsa looked at the young human knight from the ground. He saw only pragmatism from his cold eyes.

Brendel knew what would happen in the future, but he also knew that no one would believe that future would appear. Therefore he had to become even stronger, to let his wings grow one feather at a time, in order to make the world respect his opinions, and before that happened, all fame to him was nothing but vanity.

[The only one I can rely on is myself if I am to save Aouine and everyone else. A Black Knight trying to change my thoughts because of a stupid knight duel? Ridiculous.]

A knight's duel required fair witnesses from both side, a series of ceremonies and rituals. He would never agree to this ridiculous suggestion unless he was mad. Perhaps the 'knights' in this era would agree and respect his opponent as they observed such virtues as sacred things, but he was from another world.

[The only warfare available to me is unrestricted warfare, not fucking fair duels—]

Ultimately, Xelsa was unable to understand why the knight refused a duel, and only had unending regret when the militia struck their gleaming weapons into his chest.

The undead enemy had been completely defeated.

Brendel led his horse to run a few steps before stopping. He turned it around and found everyone was looking at him strangely. It was not strange, since a knight refusing a duel was considered as an important matter. Even though the mercenaries had seen many things, they were still affected by the world's thoughts.

Brendel sheathed his sword.

“You might wonder why I refused his duel. It's simple. The duels between nobles should be done with respect with both side, and the enemy knight is desecrating that because of the deceit in his mind.”

He paused for a moment before continuing. “As to why I said that, all of you can think about it.”

Everyone except Leto and Taron and his men still felt a little uncomfortable. Brendel changed his tactics and said: “Of course, that's mostly bullshit. To be more exact, I have no interest in taking a bet without any rewards in it—”

This obviously suited the mercenaries and many of them acknowledged that with hearty laughs. Mano nodded vigorously, almost thinking that Brendel was someone he could get along very well.

Leto and Taron still looked a little unconvinced after noting the hidden meaning behind Brendel's words, but Brendel knew he could only try to explain so much, as any more would have a backlash.

He quickly gave the order to the mercenaries to tidy up the battlefield and pick up the loot, while he dismounted and went near Xelsa and the Black Warriors' bodies.

[Time to get my rewards—]

There were some small items that was burned along with the Black Warrior when they got struck by the Thorn of Light. They looked quite disgusting, but they were

considered as treasure in his eyes. He kicked away the empty armor that was much bigger than the average human. The chest armor needed to be reforged to be usable for a human, so it was worthless in his eyes.

[Let's see, are there any magic items that could be easily carried...]

Unfortunately, he did not get much after separating the ashes with his fingers. He found an 'Iron-ranked rating' ring in the form of a snake. It only added +0.1 OZ agility, but it was better than nothing.

He was not too sad about the situation yet as the three Black Warriors were the appetizers, and if he got anything from it he would be happy.

[Now for the level 20 + elite Black Knight...]

The half plate that the Black Knight was his size, but the mercenaries made quite a few holes and dents on it. He cursed out loudly.

[Seriously, will these bloody idiots think about their commander a little? I don't even have an armor plate on myself as a commander!]

Brendel then knelt beside Xelsa and started rummaging through his waist bag, as most of the magic items and protection trinkets were kept in this place.

Brendel quickly found a snake statue and three protection amulets. They were considered as good items in the game as they would bring luck to the person who brought them along. In the game lore, they were originally made by the wizards in the Forest of Ice in the north.

But they were gradually made popular and spread to other areas years later, and became highly valued by people. They were rated with 'Bronze-ranked rating', with the important property of not affected by the limitations of the overall magic capacity. *(TL: A person can only use that many magic items before reaching their limits. I.E, if Brendel has only 100 OZ worth of magic capacity, he can't equip magical equipment past that number otherwise it will not work.)*

The amulets separately gave +1 HP, +2 HP, +0.1 defense.

[Well, they are made with awful quality, but it's better than nothing.]

He kept away the amulets and inspected the snake statue carefully, before identifying it as an object that bestowed poison onto blades. There were similar statues made by druids, but some necromancers created them and upon activation, they would release a poison magic.

[12 OZ worth of magic capacity requirement. There's HP damage along with weakening when the poison is applied. Shit, you fucking dirty cheating bastard, and you dare to pass yourself off as a knight? A knight using poison?!]

Brendel thought it was lucky that he was not a honorable person himself, otherwise he would be in trouble.

He kept it well hidden away. His current status was still a Highland Knight and anyone who recognized the statue would make things problematic.

[They are a lot of rules binding the knights. A light punishment for breaking them is losing the title, but a heavy punishment would be the equivalent of burning witches alive. That shit isn't a joke.]

He then flipped over Xelsa's body and checked his neck and hands. He did not find any necklace or rings, but a frost-coloured glass bracelet.

[...Glass Bracelet?]

"Elemental Bracelet!" Brendel was stunned and quickly pulled it off his body. Even though the game stated it as a 'Bronze-ranked rating', this was highly useful as it could add on damage to close or ranged combat with a certain amount of elemental damage.

[The lowest tier for this kind of bracelet is 25 OZ, and it can do an additional 4-4 elemental damage! The Thorn of Light is only 9-9 damage without having critical damage.]

Brendel suppressed the immense delight in his heart. This item was as expensive as the extremely rare 'Silver-ranked rating' items in the game, and an item that he could not afford at the height of its popularity.

[Attack damage is life. Especially when it comes to melee professions in the early stages. Sadly this can only be used by level 20 and above so I can't use it for now...]

He tucked it away carefully into his bag, giving it more importance than the Thorn of

Light.

[Even though the Thorn of Light is a legendary weapon, it's only good for Iron-ranked tier swordsmen. Once I go beyond that level I need to find a better replacement for it... Especially with the toughness of the sword... The fights against the Black Warriors's two handed swords made me feel uncomfortable since my blade is so much thinner. The bracelet is different in this aspect, and I can't think of a better replacement for it before level 40.]

Finally, he determined that he did not miss anything from Xelsa's body and stood up and sighed. The rewards from this battle were excellent. Besides gaining 770 XP, the equipment that he received was enough to increase his overall rating by two times.

If he was able to get another elemental ring and bracelet, he would be able to form a pure attack build and defeat a dragon whelp in the Vierio region before level thirty. He unsheathed his sword and blow on its edge, acting as though as the dragon's treasures were already in front of him.

But after a moment, he went back to his normal state and stopped having delusions.

He checked his surroundings and discovered that most of them had brought back something, especially Leto and Mano who were more experienced than the other mercenaries. Their targets were the necromancers, and getting one or two alchemy items from them aided with their personal strength.

Brendel checked the timing again after the entire battlefield was cleared. The time taken from the start of the battle was forty-five minutes. The militia was also done with their search. He quickly checked the surroundings as he felt that Madara's undead riders could appear anytime at this moment. The gargoyle could only scout one direction at a single time, so they had to be quick.

The refugees had already gone ahead in the gargoyle's directions, led by a few veteran mercenaries. With the gargoyle scouting ahead, he was not worried that the refugees would run into trouble. He called out to the mercenaries and regrouped with them, and they rode off to find Freya.

Right up to this point, his plan was progressing considerably well, and the only thing left was to play hide and seek with Madara, until the moment where the star constellation of 'King of Knights' appeared. He took out the deer statue and raised his

head to look at the sky.

TL: Brendel is accusing Xelsa for having impure motives like delaying the battle so Madara's undead can discover them, and that is against the spirit of a fair duel. Also, it seems like lots of people kind of forgot what happened to that necromancer back then where he stole that spider ring. Imo, Brendel will most likely troll the enemies whenever possible and hardly engage in a fair fight, especially when he's leading that group of refugees...

TL 2: Actually I have no idea what this 4-4 and 9-9 means. 4D4? 9D9? But 9D9 sounds ridiculously high for DnD damage, and I find it strange that there's no minimum-maximum damage fluctuation. Head scratch. I might not want to include future weapon damage numbers as I feel it will detract the seriousness of the story.

Edit: Let me explain why I find that having numbers is bad. Typically DnD will first apply attack rolls, i.e $21 > 20$, and damage rolls next ($9-9 + 1 \text{ strength} * \text{stats modifier} + \text{bonus damage}$). So if Brendel nicks a black warrior, he does -72 damage (it was stated somewhere one or two chapters ago). If he strikes at the chest (attack roll $30 > 20$), he does the same damage.

Only when he does maybe like head thrust (attack roll $40 > 20$, perfect critical), he does 144 damage.

Does that sound ridiculous? So even if I see through the text with "The Amber Sword in-game calculation", the numbers 4-4, 9-9, makes no sense to me. I am very much in favor of removing such numbers because the author has never stated his 'system' properly as far as I know of.

Chapter 18

Blitz

After defeating Xelsa, Brendel led the mercenaries to regroup with Freya and the militia. They moved quickly and caught up with the refugees, and proceeded towards the south. Approximately half an hour later, Brendel discovered another company of undead soldiers, and defeated them with considerable ease as they did not have an elite commander.

[We defeated two companies of undead and have successfully created an opening between their patrolling routes... In front of us are three massive groups of undead units, probably led by Direndall, Ladios and Gloeb. The situation looks dangerous, but if we are careful in our position, we're in a balanced position where we're in the eye of a storm.]

Even though there were slight casualties, Brendel's plan still worked.

In the southern region of the Hunting Deer Mountain, the combined Madara undead armies discovered a huge problem after a while. They had initially thought they have surrounded the group of refugees, only to discover that they had disappeared as if they had grown wings and flew away.

After Medes met up with Wesker and Ebdon, he issued orders to his captains and scour the area. They had searched the surrounded area carefully, but they were unable to discover them.

[Is the information wrong?]

Medes did not believe in coincidences. He immediately wondered if they had hidden in a mountain valley and was waiting for them to move away from this region. He then issued an order to the entire undead army to send their scouts out spread out from their area in order to find the refugees.

But once the orders were issued out, Gloeb and Direndall discovered that there were two companies that suddenly disappeared, and believed that there might be a mysterious army that had broken through their surrounding forces and were at their

rear—

“How did this happen? An army of one thousand odd troops that escaped detection from ten combined scouting units?” Gloeb said.

“It can’t be just luck or coincidence...” Direndall agreed.

The two captains did not waste any time and informed Medes with the information of the missing troops. The latter flew into a huge rage and threw the maps from the table on their faces.

He pointed at their noses and roared at them: “You bunch of useless trash! The third batch of graduates from Brumand’s roses are worse than maggots! Get out of my sight now!”

The two captains did not dare to retort him and retreated hastily. Medes took a few moments and calmed down before summoning Ebdon and Wesker to discuss the issue. They quickly decided to divide their forces into two and extend them into two wings to prevent the refugees from crossing the region.

He then issued a second order and ordered the three captains to continue searching for the refugees. Even though he looked down at these new undead nobles like he looked down at Kabias, he had to rely on their strength at this moment.

[In the end this is era of the newcomers. I just hope I did not react too slowly.]

At this point of time, Brendel had led the refugees to bypass Ladios’s army without him knowing, and was approximately three kilometers away from the third undead company.

[Something is strange... Did Medes make a move?]

Brendel quickly rode back and ordered the veteran militias to turn back with a shout. His action did not puzzle anyone as he had done this several times to avoid the undead scouting riders.

The veteran militias respectively led their assigned groups of refugees to move in the opposite direction. One of them asked like he was hoping to gain favor with him: “My lord, did the vanguard discover the undead monsters?”

“No, they did not. Lead the refugees to the north and throw away all belongings except their food, water and weapons. We’re going to advance forward as fast as we can.”

Brendel looked at them and replied.

His words surprised everyone, as they had just escaped from that direction which were filled with undead with considerable difficulty, and yet they were going back in that direction. People started wondering if he was going crazy.

Brendel pulled the the horse’s reins and let it turn one round. He looked at the uneasy people who overheard him: “Don’t worry. I have not turned crazy yet. Quickly move, as this is the only chance we have if we want to live.”

They looked back at him with palpitations in their hearts. But they could do nothing other than trust in him, as the nobles in Fortress Riedon had long abandoned them. He was the only knight that had stayed behind to lead them out of this desperate situation.

They had also heard of his bravery and wisdom as if he was a peerless fighter who defeated the enemy with ease from the militia, to the point where it sounded like exaggeration. However, the vanguard had brought about the news of victory repeatedly and brought back victory spoils like weapons.

[It looks like my authority is starting to be established since they are not questioning my order. Sadly, this glory is pointless and cannot be used since I’m a fake knight. The only true advantage that can be gotten here is my personal gain in strength. I need to see how the path of the future is coming and walk on it carefully, instead of enjoying the fame and what not.]

He started to move ahead while he thought about the distant future.

After a short while later, there was a repeated rumble within the mountain valley, and everyone stopped to look at the scene. It looked like a king was calling forth his knights. Brendel gave the order to signal the mercenaries and militia to gather up as he needed to instruct them.

A battle was about to happen again, and their nerves began to tighten up.

Brendel had made things looked like they were fine, but he was truly fighting against time every moment. Aside from battles, he had constantly looked at the pocket watch,

to the point where visible perspiration formed on the surface of it.

No one except him knew how dangerous some of the previous battles were. Some of them took longer than expected and lasted for several more minutes, and that amount of time could have been disastrous as the main undead army might be able to encounter the refugees.

The mercenaries and militia gathered at one spot and wondered what the youth's intentions were. They had bypassed several Madara undead armies and fulfilled half of their expected journey, but they suddenly retreated back to where they came from a while ago. Even Freya who trusted Brendel greatly was filled with uneasiness. She looked at him several times with the intention of speaking but stopped herself every time.

Brendel rode to their front.

"Some of you have already known this from the scouts that returned. Madara's undead armies have changed their formations and started to spread into two wings to seal off the routes. A third force is regrouping and spreading out to search for us."

The mercenaries who knew this wondered if the youth plan to race against time and bypass the wings. It was not strange to avoid the battles, but in order to do so the refugees have to move at least twenty kilometers ahead in order to completely avoid any contact with the enemy.

This was hardly a realistic option.

Brendel suddenly stopped and looked at Freya. She was looking pale and was about to fall off her horse.

"Freya, why don't you rest for a while?"

She merely glared at him, and he had to give a wry smile in response.

"I already asked you to let me bandage your wounds, but you didn't want to listen to me..."

She blushed all the way to her neck when she heard his words.

[What is this moron doing in front of everyone? How can I let him bandage my body,

damn it.]

She hated Brendel for spouting nonsense, averted her head away and shut her eyes. Brendel was so stunned at her response that his mouth was open.

[Didn't you say Freya likes me? This is liking me? You're not lying to me right?] Brendel looked at his squire suspiciously.

"My lord, can I do something for you?" Ciel felt nervous when he saw Brendel trying to burn holes in him with his eyes, and could only try to ask carefully.

"No, nothing at all." Brendel shook his head.

When he turned back, the mercenaries were staring and giggling at him. They had heard the story between him and Freya from Ciel one day ago about the relationship between him, Freya and Romaine.

The scene made the mercenaries look at him in a different way. His results were beyond imagination when he led them to fight Madara's undead, and as much as they respected and trusted him, they also feared this genius. However, this flaw in him had made everyone realize that he was still very much a normal person.

"What are you all laughing at?"

""No, nothing at all. My lord, you're mistaken."" Everyone answered at the same time.

"I hope that's the truth," Brendel looked at them in frustration, "Otherwise, you will get it from me! Alright, I don't want to explain too much. This is the only thing I want to say."

"Prepare for battle!" He pulled out his sword.

[After defeating all the undead troops we encountered so far, we have gathered enough weapons to create an army about five hundred... Since the undead is spreading out their troops with such haste, their central force is going to be weakened. With the advantage of the gargoyle, I can pick a battle anytime with controlled numbers. Now is the best moment to strike at Madara's heart, and make our movements even more unpredictable...]

Brendel's tactical plan was to blitz Ladios's army as hard as possible.

After a minutes later, Brendel led the army of five hundred odd men and struck at Ladios's left company of two hundred undead soldiers, and the enemies were unable to defend themselves properly.

The youth swept the undead army like a hurricane, and it was only thirty minutes later that Ladios finally realized he had lost his entire left flank. When the intermediate-ranked undead wizard brought back the news to Medes, Brendel had advanced to another location three kilometers away, and destroyed another of Gloeb's company of undead troops.

Brendel continued to blitz into the enemies' ranks.

He took out his pocket watch and checked the time. The constellation of the King of Knights was approximately fifty minutes away—

Chapter 19

The silver blade, the white knight

————— Medes POV —————

Medes suddenly realized he had suddenly lost the ability to control the battlefield. He had nearly ten thousand undead under his command, but he was unable to use them effectively. He first thought that the enemy had made their way around his army after receiving the initial reports of losing two companies, and thus sent out his army by spreading them out like two wings, with Ebdon and Wesker leading them.

But not even half an hour later, Gloeb and Ladios lost both their left flanks.

[This group of refugees... No, this secret army... Given their speed and effective tactics, they are as good as our main force, or even better than that. Aouine's imperial guards? Or The Knights of Freedom? It feels like someone of great importance is leading the refugees.]

Medes looked at the map which had circles and lines drawn on it. It was apparent as to what the enemy wanted to accomplish.

[They're trying to break out of the siege by force! The enemy is moving in straight lines at our positions, cutting through our forces like a sharp knife into our heart.]

Medes had a series of cold shudders as he analyzed the map. He suddenly stood up and overturned the table with a furious roar. He went outside of the camp and looked at the dark forest. The undead troops were outside waiting for his orders, but he did not have the confidence in his judgment this time.

[What army is this? When did Aouine have such a commander?]

————— Brendel POV —————

The cavalry galloped through the valley like an unstoppable wave, and the earth shook under the horses' charge.

Brendel raised his sword and pointed to a new direction. The glow of the Elven sword kept flickering as if it was a flag that was moving along with the wind, and it was the symbol of victory that the youth carried.

Some of the mercenaries were from the November's war, some had experienced the Battle of Moonflowers, some had experienced Karsuk's wars. Aouine had disappointed them repeatedly, as if the country was forever silent, its will buried under the annals of history, and the past glory would never belong to them again.

That is why they fought for money and became mercenaries, and their goals were to pursue rewards and treasures, and had long ago abandoned the fame and faith as warriors.

But there was no one who did not crave victory, even if he was a veteran who had experienced countless battles. Today Brendel had shown them that the banners and flags that had been trampled upon hundreds and thousands of time could be picked up. Today he had shown them that victory could be obtained, regardless of what motives they had, be it for glory or for the sake of the unfortunate and lamentable refugees.

As long as they followed him, victory, was this easy.

Their hearts were set ablaze by his words and spurred on by his actions. If today, they had to believe in a legend, they would believe he was undefeatable.

Each time they charged at the enemy, hundred of skeletons were easily destroyed and laid down to their eternal rest. None of the enemy commanders stood a chance—

These frightening undead soldiers might have made Fortress Riedon's formal army tremble, but when it came to facing them, they would be turned into dust!

At that very moment, the riders believed that they were invincible.

Brendel pointed at another direction, and they roared to acknowledge his order. No one seemed to know the meaning of exhaustion, and even the militia who marched quickly behind them moved with vigor. They had only one thought in their minds:

Advance, continue to advance, as quickly as possible!

No one had the energy to consider other things, as their energy was spent on

generating adrenaline. Their pupils were dilated and they struggled to breath in as much air as possible, to the point where they had to exchange their lives to drag down an enemy to hell.

Kill the Madara undead!

They could almost see the youth's sword pointing to a door, and behind it was the pathway to a miracle.

Brendel finally saw an undead group in front of him. He believed that he had broke through the second or third line of defence.

[This time we're near the heart of the undead army. Is it Ebdon or Wesker, or the 'Undead Maggot' Medes?]

A huge group of gleaming white skeletons were marching beside the river, many times more than what they had encountered. He narrowed his eyes as he saw two groups of Black Warriors beside the commander.

[A high-ranking commander!]

Brendel found that he had caught a big fish. He's not entirely certain whether he could devour it, but he was already on a road of no return, and he had no choice to defeat it.

He raised his sword up, the light from his sword shining to the point that everyone around it felt blinded by it. The wind echoed deafeningly in his ears, and he could not hear any other sounds other this own breathing. He shouted as loudly as he could:

"Riders, charge!"

""Attack!!!""

There were forty-nine riders along with him, but it was as if there was a dam had suddenly broken from the mountain valley. The noise made from their roars echoed throughout the area as they charged straight at their leader.

'The Pale Knight' Ebdon's expression immediately changed.

Just like Medes, it had wondered who the commander was and what division the mysterious army belonged to. However, it did not expect to meet under such

circumstances.

When it turned its head around, the blazing frost flames that leaked out from his eyes through the helmet saw the dauntless group of riders charging down the valley, with a youth leading its charge with his right hand high up with a sword that glowed as bright as the stars.

For one moment, it thought it had returned to the old era where knights still believed in their chivalry.

It had remembered, that once upon a time the proud knights of Kirrlutz rode on grand gryphons and dignified horses, without any reliance on any tactics, charged straight at the enemy.

In this world, there was no other army like them, as if they were born to charge, and even if they were to perish they had to die during charging. Their lives were simply meant for that one moment of glory and victory.

Ebdon found that its heart loosened for one single moment as it thought it had returned to that year. Under that army who viewed death as the highest honor... It lost the best moment to react. When Ebdon regained its senses and ordered the skeletons to get ready, everything was too late.

Brendel's army was like the sharpest lance that aimed to strike the heart of the undead's formation, as if he was a king leading his knights forward.

"Necromancers!" Ebdon pulled out his own sword and shrieked from his soul.

Ten necromancers raised their bone staffs together.

A black tempest suddenly appeared in front of the undead army. The hurricane of darkness pulled everything up, grinding rocks into dust and the trees wilted as they became black smoke, rising up to the air in a scream.

Ebdon felt it had lost its breath, almost wondering if it had seen an illusion. It was not possible for the current Aouine to possess a group of cavalry like that... Then The Pale Knight realized, that it did not need to breathe since a very long time ago.

It sighed inwardly.

But the next moment, the flames in its eyes stopped moving and its mouth widened a little.

The youth burst out from the tempest. A blue magical sigil was shining on his right hand, and when he pointed his sword forward, the tempest immediately moved towards towards the undead forces.

At that moment, Brendel was the ruler of the tempest and he yelled out two words.

“Magic Control!”

Rows of skeletons crashed into each other, and a few of the skeletons’ Soul Fire were blown out as the tempest blew straight into them.

But Brendel suffered damage as he had charged through the tempest, and he fell off the horse.

Everyone in the battlefield stopped their actions when he saw him falling off.

Freya who was leading the militia who happened to see this scene by coincidence covered her mouth with her hand with a silent scream forming in her.

[Even if it is him, he can also collapse?]

The mercenaries who followed him lost their grips on the horses’ reins, and finally woke up from their dream.

But Brendel quickly shrugged off the effects and readied himself in an instant before he even touched the ground.

[This is the best moment. Charge. Activate.]

Once his feet landed on the ground, he jumped up and launched himself like an arrow. A silver line streaked across the battlefield.

Everyone watched that striking silver line— which symbolized a miracle.

Once the line came to a stop, twelve skeletons were severed into half. Brendel had jumped straight into the midst of undead with his sword held high up.

He looked at the gigantic undead knight before him that was covered in white armor, as well as the frost colored flames in his eyes.

[So it's you. The Pale Knight Ebdon, former hero of Aouine.] Brendel looked at him and readied his sword, a thin gathering of wind forming on the gleaming sword.

"Your road ends here, young man!" Ebdon looked at Brendel as he parried his sword.

[A silver-ranked knight.] Brendel did not fight the impact from the opponent's sword and retreated immediately.

[This is going to be difficult.]

Chapter 20

The knight of the past (1)

“Young man, your road ends here.”

The single sword in Ebdon’s hand is an ordinary magic sword named ‘The White Fang’, but it was the proof of this knight’s entire fame and honor.

Its left hand supported his right wrist, and when it finished speaking, the thin blade ignited, and a white layer of flame sprang from the sword.

[Ebdon’s famous sword’s skill, ‘White Blaze’.]

Compared to him, Ebdon was the true imperial swordsman. The former Ebdon was a knight at the age of seventeen, and when he was forty he was considered a master fighter. He spent his entire life fighting for Aouine and was considered a hero, but the ‘White Rider’ Ebdon was the name that spread throughout the continent.

In his era, Ebdon was one of four Madara’s Apocalypse Knights, and the name of ‘White Rider’ was attached to the ‘Conqueror’ Ebdon. This name alone terrified children and adults alike.

As soon as Brendel retreated, he immediately felt the situation was too difficult for him to handle alone.

[Out of the entire forces in this region, there are two leaders I don’t want to meet. One is the Conqueror, ‘The White Rider’, Ebdon, the other is the King of Wars ‘The Red Rider’ Ladios. Looks like Mother Marsha is playing a joke on me again.]

But Ebdon moved immediately with its horse, and before Brendel was able to finish his thoughts, Ebdon had already attacked slashed diagonally from above. The burning white blade swung down towards his head, making him feel the freezing air that rushed at his face. He immediately felt his breath was stifled, and without a moment to waste, immediately rolled sideways.

The white flames blew across the ground and a blast rang out from it. Rocks and gravel

flew all over the place as if an explosion had occurred there, and he saw that there was a clean cut on the ground extending all the way to a boulder that was in the swing's path.

[The wind pressure alone is able to destroy rocks. That's the proof of a true Silver-ranked swordsman.]

Brendel felt goosebumps rising all over his body. Even with his skill Power Break, his White Raven Sword Arte was only able to destroy wooden materials.

Ebdon did not waste any time when it saw Brendel escaping to the sides, and urged its Nightmare Warhorse forward without any regards for the undead around him, trampling the skeletons down in order to reach Brendel's side.

When Ebdon got close enough, it made the horse jump ahead of Brendel, with another slash towards the youth's neck.

[Shit!]

Brendel saw that there was no escape, and he could only use the Thorn of Light with Power Break to increase his strength. A grating sound of metallic scream happened when their swords met each other. Both swords bend backwards to their utmost limits, and Brendel was finally pushed backwards by like a cannonball. He rolled uncontrollably on the ground a few times, before he managed to stop himself and crawl up with trembling arms.

[At least 25 OZ in strength. Move, you stupid hand!]

His right hand received the greatest impact, and for a moment he lost the feelings in his fingers, before pins and needles rushed to prick them. Brendel felt that it was lucky of him to activate the Power Break in time, otherwise his hand would be rendered useless.

[This is getting crazy. A single slash from his sword is over a ton each.]

Brendel watched the rider that was clad in pure white rushing straight at him. He wished that he had his Holy Sword card ready to use. In order to win against a monster like this, he had to rely on that type of power, but at the same time, he did not have the available earth EP to pay for it at this moment.

Ebdon and its horse was nearly in front of him —

Brendel gritted his teeth and raised his sword over his head with both hands, the blade pointing slightly downwards towards the ground as well as parallel to it, his eyes glaring at Ebdon. His stance was one of the best for parrying within the military swordsmanship.

“The stance is unrefined.”

The White Rider looked down at him from the horse, and a cold raspy voice transmitted from the helmet. Another slash faster than the previous attacks came, with the compressed air forming from the edges of the blade.

[Incoming!]

Brendel immediately took a step forward to meet The White Fang by using the fuller portion of his blade. At the single instant where the point of contact happened, he adjusted the angle of the blade. Sparks flew, and he actually managed to make Ebdon’s blade slide away —

But the remaining strength transmitted from the blade still made him fall backwards. Brendel’s left leg immediately went back further and downwards. It was as if he had frequently adjusted his entire balance using this sword stance and became part of his instinct. His feet slid away to the sides, but at the end of it he was steady in a half-kneeling position.

Brendel’s shirt was nearly drenched in perspiration. He had accomplished this in the game many times, but that was with the assistance with the system to predict several things that include the path of the sword and body position, and it even aided him in correcting wrong postures.

This was done without any assistance at all.

[If I missed that by a centimeter, I’m most likely dead—]

But he actually managed to do it.

He swung his right arm a few times as he still felt that it was not listening to his command properly. The opponent’s strength was just too much. Each time he crossed swords he felt like a truck had struck him. Even if he managed to parry the blade, his

muscles and bones were groaning.

Ebdon uttered a puzzled sound under its helmet. The swordsmanship was nothing special, but he seemed very experienced as he found the appropriate technique to defend himself as if he was a veteran.

He turned his horse back and went further away, preparing to charge at him.

How could Brendel give Ebdon another chance when he finally escaped from the opponent's attacking pace? He immediately raised his right hand and aimed his thumb at Ebdon and roared.

"Oss!"

"Magic incantation?" The burning white flames in Ebdon's eyes shook a little when it heard Brendel's words. He quickly turned around and used his sword and prepared to block himself.

A huge current of air along with an explosive sound had already approached Ebdon, along with huge scars on the ground behind its trail, but Ebdon slashed through it and parted the current into two waves which instantly sent the line of skeletons into the air, which broke apart even before it reached the river shore.

Scores of bones fell down onto the ground, and noisy cracking sounds could be heard, with another metallic scream interrupting the unpleasant music cacophony.

[Charge. Activate.]

Before the dust had even settled, Ebdon had already brought its sword up as Brendel had suddenly appeared from above, and it met his attack in the air.

There were no weakness in his defense.

Brendel was not surprised at all. An elite figure like himself at this level, could only be stronger compared to the Golden Demonic Tree. In actual truth, he had also relied on the Holy Sword card to fight against the Golden Demonic Tree, otherwise it was hard to know who was going to be the victor. He did not hope to leave anything to chance when it came to fighting Ebdon.

At this point of time, he could only will himself for a battle that was beyond his

strength.

His next attack came before he landed on his feet. His right arm pulled back and launched a Sword Arte next. Ebdon immediately reacted and swung its sword without any expression, and the wind pressure dissipated from the arc of white flames.

Finally, Ebdon pulled its sword back and did not move. It sat on its horse quietly and looked at Brendel, trying to remember a distant story.

In the story, there were long trumpets that blew out melodious music in the Baltha Highlands, with swallow-tailed flags flying in the winds.

“White Raven Swordsmanship.” It opened its mouth and said.

“A scion of the Royal Family?” Ebdon asked coldly from the horse.

Brendel was surprised for a moment.

[Did Ebdon have anything to do with the Corvado empire? But I didn't hear anything like that in the game... Regardless of that I should deny it... What would happen if there's some revenge element in this history. I heard some stories about a level 30 boss suddenly going to level 40s and instantly killed off that party attacking it. A legendary level 40 elite boss becoming level 50?!]

When he thought of that, he immediately shook his head forcefully.

But he did not expect Ebdon to point his sword at him and say coldly: “If that is the case, killing you would not go against my oath.”

Brendel nearly puked out blood when he heard that, and his mind was instantly filled with regret.

[God damn it, this bloody bird arse's oath, shit, I should have impersonated a royal family member, what the blood hell, I just shot myself in the foot!]

On the other side, Ebdon had resumed into a battle stance with his horse again. Brendel felt really helpless at this point.

[If I combine Power Break with a Sword Arte to fight the enemy, I'm going to spend 9 points of stamina every time, that's way over the limits. Ebdon is at least a level 30+

elite, with 200+ HP. He even split the wind bullet that's capped at 30 damage, at best he had just received some minor abrasions and that's about it. Sure, I can kill him if I managed to stab him two or three times with the Thorn of Light, but I can't even touch him with my attack combination just now.]

He looked sideways at the mercenaries and could only hope that the mercenaries were able to support him.

But the mercenaries were engaging the undead skeletons at this moment. They had the upper hand because of his charge, but it looked like it was impossible for them to reach here for a while. He could only place his hope in the militia who was nearby to sweep up the remaining undead so they could be freed up.

————— Freya POV —————

Freya who was leading the militia into the fray frowned. She had caught glimpses of Brendel's fights but had lost sight of him. With such a large amount of undead, she guessed that their commander was highly-ranked. She was no longer the naive village girl, and was different from the people who blindly believed in him. She was certain that Brendel was in a difficult battle, and she searched around the battlefield.

She found Ciel and Sue nearby.

"Sue, please help me out."

"Huh?" That young girl was confused.

"Help me lead the militia."

"What?"

"I need to help Brendel," Freya replied and called out to Ciel: "Ciel, come with me."

"Miss Freya, I'm fine with that, but are you sure that you're fine?" Ciel was taken aback. Brendel had instructed him to look after the injured Freya, but it was true that he was much more worried about his master.

Freya looked at him in the eye and nodded.

Chapter 21

The knight of the past (2)

Brendel swung his sword to parry the white fang, and a blast of wind sprang from the points where the blades connected, driving his hair back in a fluttering mess. He did not resist the force and slid backwards with his eyes narrowed from the pain from his hands.

His skin had ripped and the blood was starting to flow onto the sword's hilt. While he had not received any apparent injuries from the opponent's blade, the images on his retina had repeatedly flashed, and his HP bar had dropped by over thirty points.

[Beyond the apparent wounds from my hands, this means that my internal organs are starting to get damaged. Any more of this impact will mean that they will get ruptured. Internal bleeding is going to happen... If it's not for my high Physique, I wouldn't be able to receive even one blow from Ebdon and die from the impact.]

But what made him anguished was the fact that Ebdon seemed to have realized that as well. Its timing for each strike had shortened and was becoming stronger as well, not giving him a chance to even breathe for a moment.

[Doesn't this bastard care about his own troops? I won't be able to last if this continues, but your entire army is getting wiped out! Do you really think you're stronger than the entire army here?]

But he did not know that ridiculous thought was the closest to reality. Even though Ebdon was considered as a hero of Aouine, but it had become twisted after he had woken up as an undead. Even though most undead did not retain their memories before they died, Ebdon managed to retain most of its glorious moments and often revel in them. As an undead, it saw through the memories like another person, and the bloodbath in the battles made it merciless.

Ebdon was destined to become a Madara high ranking general due to its great insight, and sought only to kill the most dangerous enemies. And in front him, was an excellent commander whose threat was greater than the entire army combined. It would forsake the chance at victory just to kill the youth.

But Brendel's performance had greatly exceeded its expectations. As a master of Aouine's swordsmanship, it was able to discern that Brendel had learn some of the most basic military swordsmanship with probably one or two imperial sword artes. Even though his skills appeared to be no better than an imperial guard, he had defended against its attacks time after time without fail.

Ultimately, it could only choose to utilize its overpowering strength and slowly torture him to death. This was difficult for it to accept as this method was despicable, but it had sworn another oath to the undead and chose to throw his honor—

Ebdon knew that any other undead would choose to do the same.

“May Mother Marsha bless Madara.” The undead knight's flames in its eyes were cold as the unforgiving sword threatened to cleave Brendel into two.

But as soon the blade went down, Brendel had rolled to the sides, as if he knew that it was going to attack him before hand. The White Fang in its hands could only slam into the ground, inching past Brendel every time. The times when Brendel were unable to dodge in time, would be parried away in a bizarre manner by using his unrefined skills.

[Again!]

This scene was beyond Ebdon's imagination. The flames in its eyes flashed uncontrollably. This was the third time it changed to to another sword technique. At first it used its most familiar technique — Aouine's military swordsmanship, then it switched to Aouine's imperial swordsmanship, but Brendel seemed to be able to see through all of them. It thought that he had the advantage of having the same country's swordsmanship, so he switched to Madara's Black Cross swordsmanship, but Brendel did not show any signs of being unfamiliar, and seemed to predict its attacks even more accurately.....

But it did not know that Brendel was only familiar with Aouine's military swordsmanship to approximately level thirty. In his long journey, he had seen hundreds of different sword skills, be it a common or high level technique, but if there were two that he was the most familiar with—

They would be the Paladin's swordsmanship and Madara's undead Black Cross swordsmanship. The reason was simply because he had used the Paladin's

swordsmanship the longest in the game, and fought against the undead for decades and had seen the Black Cross swordsmanship the most.

However, under the opponent's higher stats in both agility and strength, he had no chance to even counter attack. And he even had trouble capturing the opponent's movements, and was relying on his experience to predict where the enemy would attack.

[Damn it... My stamina is nearing half my bar. If that happens my strength and reactions will drop, and if it falls to a third, I might not even be able to put up a proper stance. This battle hasn't even been three minutes yet—]

Brendel's forehead was already covered in sweat. Under Ebdon's constant push, he gradually started to lose the ability to think about anything else. At first he was still able to observe the battlefield once in a while, but with each percentage of his stamina gone, he nearly had to use all his focus to avoid Ebdon's attack every time.

The number of times the swords met had increased.

It was like an endless cycle that spiraled into disaster. If he had to cross swords with Ebdon, he would feel exhausted and bruised each time, and with that exhaustion find it impossible to dodge its attacks.

He was already grinding his molars to hold on desperately. The current situation was no different from being sentenced to death. He had to squeeze very last potential from his spent body escape from death each time, and his body screamed and begged to let it rest, causing him to want to give up entirely.

And yet each time when he wanted to do so, the faces of everyone that he led would suddenly appear in the corner in his heart, making it boil in his chest to continue resisting the enormous undead before him — and dodged to the sides.

He had blinked for a moment when he got up, but when he opened them, what entered his eyes was a field of dark snow. His senses was suddenly on full alert, as the skin on his scalp seemed to be numbed.

Ebdon had used his full strength to bring down Brendel. The Silver-ranked abilities showed themselves as a white flame burst forth to the front of him in the shape of a crescent. A few moments later, the boulders in the mountain valley broke and started rolling down.

This sword had reached to nearly a hundred and fifty feet, cutting the walls of the mountain valley.

The freezing winds blew past the current area as the army fell into a voiceless silence.

Everyone in the army was terrified. They had heard stories about the prowess of the Silver-ranked fighters, but they have never seen it with their own eyes. This was almost unachievable by human strength, and everyone felt impressed and frightened from the bottom of their hearts.

The mercenaries who were nearer to Brendel froze for a moment, unable to believe that Brendel was fighting a monster like this for so long.

Brendel had not even sought for help, and they suddenly realize that he was desperately trying to fulfill the promise to everyone of them. They had always thought that he had effortlessly solved every situation, but he had actually been trying to complete it to the very best of his abilities.

What were they doing, wasting time with these undead?

“Shit! Has anyone seen Brendel?”

“We need to help him out now!”

“Do you think he’s still alive after that strike!”

The mercenaries that blindly trusted in Brendel, suddenly felt they truly belong to him as a commander.

Ebdon sheathed his sword with a clear ring.

“Brendel!”

Freya had rode from the side to find Brendel, but she was too late when she finally found them. After that attack, it seemed like everything had ended.

Freya dropped her sword onto the ground with a clank. She almost could not believe her eyes. The youth who brought her out of Bucca and showed off the world to her, this shameless cad...

Was gone forever?

She suddenly felt someone patting on her shoulder, and she turned her head back in a daze. Ciel looked at the area below them, his eyes not blinking:

“Miss Freya, if I’m still here, it means that my lord isn’t dead yet.”

“Wh..... at?” She paused for a moment, not able to understand the entire meaning of his sentences.

But at least she understood part of it —

Because she saw a familiar figure climbing out from a pile of broken rocks.

Brendel felt his entire body was about to fall apart. His shirt had been ripped apart from the wind pressure and his forehead was full of blood, and there were countless wounds on his body.

But he suppressed the pain and grinned.

“You bastard, to think that you would underestimate me at this final moment—“

Chapter 22

The knight of the past (3)

Ebdon lowered his head in slight confusion to the rocks, but Brendel had already leaped into the air. His entire body was in a blur, and behind him were countless afterimages of himself, and within a split moment, he had already crossed over a dozen meters.

It immediately found that it could not capture his movement. He was like a gust of wind that seemed to went past him, and before it was able to react, he was already behind its back.

[I seen him use this before at the start of battle, but experiencing this terrifying technique for myself is different. This young man isn't simple!]

Ebdon's White Fang left its sheath immediately, instinctively covering his back with it. A loud clang rang out as it blocked the Thorn of Light.

This defense had left the boundaries of swordsmanship.

They were using their experience to fight each other.

Brendel immediately stepped to the side like a ghastly spirit leaving hazy shadows behind, and struck at Ebdon's left chest.

[One more second left to the Charge technique.]

But Ebdon immediately swept its sword around to parry the tip of his blade, not showing any signs of weakness—

[Even with 44 OZ worth of agility, he still managed to block the first and second attack... This foe is really troublesome.]

Suddenly the flames in the undead knight flared. He suddenly felt another presence behind him and felt an attack coming towards it. He immediately turned around and swung his sword, only to find a gargoyle that was split into two and tumbling onto the

ground.

That moment seemed to extend itself for a long time, Ebdon watched the gargoyle slowly crumble into several pieces and fall onto the ground, but it immediately knew that the situation had turned.

Brendel placed a foot forward and took a deep breath. He launched his final Power Break onto the White Raven Sword Arte.

The wave unleashed onto Ebdon and his Nightmare horse. The wave instantly severed the horse's head and caused it to stumble downwards, but Ebdon threw his sword onto the ground and a gigantic force propelled Brendel backwards along with his sword.

[The Wall of Will! Shit, that technique is from the Sun Knight Aegwynn!]

Brendel stumbled backwards eight steps before he rushed up again with clenched teeth. Ebdon had successfully gained enough time for it to launch a counter attack. It threw his white cape away and picked up the White Fang and marched straight to Brendel. Three consecutive metallic wails rang throughout the valley, and each time the swords struck each other, Brendel was forced to retreat backwards. The air in the youth's chest was completely knocked out and he could not maintain a proper stance anymore —

“Aouine,” Ebdon watched coldly as Brendel could not defend properly anymore and raised his sword. The white flames in his eyes seem to freeze everything: “Has grown too old.”

The white blade lunged forward.

Brendel's teeth gritted so hard that his gums bled. He struck down at Ebdon's blade, but it hardly diverged from its course and he tried to grab the sword next. The leather gloves glowed blue for a moment but it still pierced through, causing the blade to run through his palm, cutting apart his chain armor and split apart the links, until it snaked its way into the youth's abdomen.

The scarlet blood that flowed down was as red as old wine.

But Ebdon did not find victory.

Brendel had an insane look in his eyes as he gripped its right wrist with his left hand, locking the White Fang in place. He raised the Elven Sword with the right hand.

Ebdon found the words 'A'ssonston, Donamiru-' glowing on the Thorn of Light—

And then.

The sword thrust forward.

Ebdon tried to use the left hand to block it, but the sword immediately burned through with as the purification fire flared up, stabbing straight into its chest.

Two swords, connected the knights together. At that moment they could only hear the cold wind.

"Hahahaha," Brendel said weakly: "You bastard, you are wrong....."

"You think you won, young man?" Ebdon said with a cold voice.

Its chest felt like it was burning up, the pain torturing him, but at the same time the wound was not fatal.

"No, it's just that..... Even though Aouine has grown old..... There are still people who loved it regardless."

Brendel coughed. Ebdon was waiting for this moment, but he had also planned for the same thing.

They pulled their swords out together at the same time, and Brendel ignored Ebdon's attack which made its way to his lungs. At the same time, he had hacked off the undead knight's left arm far away.

Two of them stepped back at the same time.

Brendel immediately fell to the ground and started coughing. Specks of blood fell onto the ground. He felt burning sensations all over his chest, and he had never experienced such pain ever in his life, except for one place— Bucca.

The talent 'Unyielding' had already activated, and he stood up with his sword supporting him.

Ebdon was ready to act. Its injuries were much lighter than Brendel, and even though it was surprised and impressed with his tenacity and unshakeable resolution, it needed victory more than ever.

It stumbled a little on the rocks in its path. It had difficulty maintaining its balance, but it was at a better state compared to Brendel who had knelt down once again to the ground.

Ebdon glanced at the mercenaries who were closing in. It quickly raised its sword and rushed at Brendel again.

Suddenly a golden flash of light came from the high ground.

[That is not an illusion!]

It quickly turned its head to check the source and immediately saw a ring that was on a woman's thumb shining like a star.

Freya shouted clearly: "Flamme!"

The mercenaries saw a straight line of fire streaking across the air, but Ebdon saw a gigantic ball of fire charging straight at him. The speed of the fireball was so fast that the mercenaries only saw a line of fire—

Ebdon tried to parry it with its sword, but it was late in doing so.

The fire immediately exploded onto him, creating a powerful shockwave that swept through the mountain valley, flinging everyone's hair backwards with the needles of the fir trees flying all over to the sky. The mercenaries' horses stopped in fright and they stood up in fright, sending a few of them onto the ground. The flames continued to persist for a moment longer, before it vanished into the night.

Brendel was also sent backwards, but after the dust settled, he saw Ebdon half-kneeling on the ground.

He did not move.

[I-I won?]

He rubbed his forehead. The fireball from Freya had actually caused AOE damage to

him and sent him a fright, but immediately recalled that he was as resilient as a cockroach. A grin slowly formed on his face as the realization that he was the victor.

[The 'Unyielding' talent was my final trump card...]

He took a look at him once more, wondering what Aouine's former hero thought at the end of his life.

[Did he still sought after the past glory in his memory?]

Brendel thought for a while before he finally prepared himself to sit up. Suddenly, there were sounds of shuffling noises behind him and he became alert. When he turned his head around, he saw Freya and Ciel coming towards him anxiously.

"Brendel!" Freya had nothing on her mind other than to support him up. She asked carefully while she looked at the youth who was still lying down on the ground: "Brendel, are y-you alright?"

Just as he wanted to assure her, his mind suddenly thought of something and laid back down.

"Freya, is that you?" He suddenly coughed repeatedly after asking weakly on the ground.

"Y, yes, it's me..... C-can't you see me?" Freya's tears were already falling when she saw his body was covered with wounds, and the uncontrollable bleeding from his abdomen and chest made it clear that he was not going to make it. "Brendel, don't talk anymore, I-I'll bandage you up....."

"Freya... There's... no point. I-I need to request you to do something for me."

"W-what is it?" Freya's heart sank when she heard him speak in this manner.

"Can you..... kiss me?"

"Eh, ahh... huh?" Freya's mind stopped working for a moment. But her face was serious after it registered in her mind.

Brendel could not hold back his laughter as he sat straight up with some effort. "I'm joking, Freya, here, help me up instead—"

“Y-your wounds, don’t move Brendel! Stop..... I-I’ll kiss you!” Freya shouted loudly as she thought he was upset with her for not fulfilling his last request.

Brendel coughed and explained quickly: “No, seriously, I’m really fine.”

“How can that be possible!”

“You know that I’m not only a knight, I’m also a wizard—” Brendel knew that she would not believe him so easily with his fatal injuries, so he could only use a white lie.

“A-are you really fine?”

“Of course.”

Brendel pretended to be fine as he rummaged for Holy Potion number 9 in his bag with full of cold sweat on his forehead.

Freya looked at him in a daze, first turning from white into red, then to white again, then to red again. Finally she clenched her fist and bit her lips.

“Brendel, you, you.....”

“Shameless cad!”

Chapter 23

Mission?

Holy Potion 9's effect was not as powerful as the other types of health potions; the effect of this particular one merely managed to pull Brendel away from eternal death. In addition to the potion, Ciel and Freya helped him bandage up his wounds, and the Emergency First Aid skill finally stopped the bleeding. Even though he felt faint from the loss of blood and was extremely pale, he confirmed that he was no longer in danger from his Stats Window.

Brendel stood up shakily, but after a few steps he nearly stumbled onto the ground. Ciel and Freya quickly went to his sides to help him up. He looked at Freya with surprise as he thought she would get angry for at least a day over his tasteless joke and ignore him.

Freya felt his gaze and she turned her head away. Her face was red with anger when she found out that he lied, but after thinking about it, she felt that this ending was better than losing Brendel. But at the same time, she gnashed her teeth and reminded herself that she should not fall so easily to this rotten bastard's tricks anymore.

After a few moments, Brendel started to think about his plans again. They walked up to the horses and he patted Ciel's horse and spoke to his squire:

"Ciel, help me up—"

Before Ciel reacted, Freya went in front of Brendel and blocked him: "Wait, w-what are you trying to do again!"

"I'm going to sit on a horse?"

"No!"

"What's wrong?" Brendel was confused.

"Y-your injuries are too bad to be able to ride on a horse, can you stop being so reckless. Think about those are concerned with you..." She grumbled with

embarrassment.

She thought about how this had happened before. She did not understand if he knew that his injuries would be fatal on anyone else.

He looked at her expression and finally understood her concern. His attitude weakened and explained to her: “Freya, I’m really fine now. I just drank a holy potion, didn’t you recall how we saved Jonathon with the potion that night?”

Freya bit her lips. She half-believed his words, but the fact that he had just stumbled stayed in her mind. Yet every time she argued with him, she seemed to be on the losing end, so she chose to stubbornly stand before him and say nothing.

Brendel did not know how to persuade her. He could try to use harsh words to depict the current situation, but this would hurt her in the process and he did not want to do it to a girl who thought nothing but the best for him.

“Freya, please let my lord get on the horse.” Ciel suddenly spoke up just when Brendel was about to sigh in exasperation.

Freya looked at Ciel in disbelief. She had expected the squire to be on her side. In the continent Vaunte, squires were compelled to follow their knights and protect them, but why did Ciel look like he was not concerned with his master’s life?

“Ciel, why are you.....” She faltered for a moment and trailed off as she did not know what to say.

“My lord is really out of danger. He’s just a little weak, so please leave the duty of taking care of my lord to me—” He said as he glanced at Brendel with a little concern in his eyes, but there was much more admiration and respect in them: “My lord has to think of our situation. He has to ride on a horse to show that he has not fallen, that he’s still the banner that will lead us forward—”

Ciel said with pride. “This is his honor to fight for all of us., and the reason why he holds the sword into his hand.”

Brendel grinned when he heard the lavish praise. But the truth was that simple, he had to continue riding to give the mercenaries and the refugees the confidence that victory was at hand.

This battle was many times more intense than the previous battles, and the militia and refugees' morale had been shaken. Even though he did not understand the art of war very well, the current army that he had was really nothing more than rabble. If they had already controlled the battlefield, they would still be fine, but once they meet any setback, they would quickly collapse.

Therefore he must show that was like an invincible figure that would always lead them to victory. As long as he was still standing, the remaining people that followed him would understand that there was still hope.

Freya looked at Brendel with a complicated expression, and after seeing him nodding in agreement to Ciel's words, she finally stepped aside.

Brendel got onto the horse with Ciel's aid, but he was so weak that he wondered if he could even hold on to the reins properly.

[I can't believe what I'm doing. A few days ago, I was just a normal citizen... I really don't understand why I have so much determination and will to keep going on and lead these people...]

The refugees watched their commander ride up to them. It was as if he had gained another victory and the only casualty was his horse.

Only those who were near him could see his body constantly trembling from the pain, as well as the cold perspiration on his forehead. But he was completely silent and did not say anything, not even bothering to look around him but maintaining a cold and stoic expression.

Leto and Mano looked at each other when they saw this scene. They bowed their heads in respect and went off to regroup with the cavalry. They wanted to ask if Brendel needed any assistance, but looking at his actions, they understood that he did not need any and he would not let them do so anyway.

They did not fully understand his personality, but this proved that he was full of pride from the determination to lead them to safety.

His pride was like the symbol of Aouine's flag.

After giving out some instructions, Brendel rode over to the half-kneeling Ebdon. He threw away the gargoyle statue along his way. It had lost its meaning when the

gargoyle was cleaved into two from Ebdon's attack.

[It might be repairable if I had some true experts here, but the process is complicated to the point that it's better to just make another one. This is one of the most important items that I lost here. From now onwards we're going in blind. Other than that my gloves should be considered as useless. Perhaps it could be sewed back together, but the defensive magic in it might not work anymore...]

Brendel could not imagine that he was able to defeat a legendary figure like Ebdon in a duel, even in the game. But this ridiculous script had turned into reality. Ebdon was still kneeling there quietly.

[Ebdon. Born in the Year of the Walnut Trees. He came from a noble family and subsequently became a knight. He then joined Aouine's Knights of Freedom and fought against Kirrlutz. This was his brightest moment and became a good commander. He participated in a few famous battle and won much fame and glory within his kingdom. When he finally lived his life fully, for some reason he had woken up as an undead...]

Brendel knew a great deal about the lore within the game, especially when Ebdon was one of the top elite commanders and was literally impossible to kill. There were very little missions around him, but Brendel suspected there might be a hidden mission when he said something about an oath.

[Most of the hidden missions have seriously good rewards. Something like the Ring of The Wind Empress at the start of the game could be considered legendary because it's a 20 OZ equipment. But at the same time I only know secret missions that start after level 40... Hmm, wait, Ebdon... is still alive?]

He rode next to Ebdon and spoke.

"Do you have anything to say, Ebdon?"

A moment of silence.

"Young man, do you..... know me?" The undead knight suddenly moved a little and asked with a raspy and low voice.

Brendel shook his head. "I do not know you. But perhaps I do know the name Ebdon as an Aouine hero who should be resting for all eternity, back in the embrace of Mother

Marsha.”

“You might have his name, but you are not him.”

Ebdon scoffed coldly, and stood up by putting strength in its sword.

“You should have died a long time ago, young man, but you have not.” It said emotionlessly. “It seems like your victory was not a coincidence. If you know about this body’s past and you’re here to speak to me, what else do you want to know?”

Freya received a jump when she saw Ebdon standing up from the ground. She immediately started to ride up to Brendel to protect him, but Ciel stopped him with his arm. He slowly shook his head to stop her. He did not know what relationship his lord had with the undead knight, but he felt that they should know each other. Furthermore, Brendel was a very cautious person who did not easily place himself in danger.

Brendel hesitated for a while, but he wanted to use his experience in the game and try something out. “You had asked me earlier if I was a scion of the Royal Family, if I say I am one now, what of it?”

The undead knight merely laughed.

Brendel sighed inwardly and mocked himself. Looks like there was a difference in the game and reality after all.

“Looks like you’re going to bring your secret to Mother Marsha, Ebdon.” He could only lament when he discovered he could not weasel out the mission.

But Ebdon shook its head.

“Not so.”

It said.

Chapter 24

Lion heart

“These words are not actually meant for you, but I believe that you can do it.” Ebdon was silent for a moment, before it raised its head up to look at the youth.

Brendel was silent as he grabbed the reins with one hand. He hesitated to reply.

Ebdon immediately guessed that he did not believe in the words it had just said, but it did not seem to mind. He merely knelt on his right knee, straightened up his chest and placed his sword into before him with both gloves on the hilt.

“The king slumbers within the valley when the twin moons can be seen. The Evergreen Winter Tree shadow points to the northwest where gathered stars fade away as the dawn lowers her authority—”

Brendel’s expression did not change after he heard the words. He rode past Ebdon before turning back to him again. There were many riddles like this in the game.

[I was never good at solving at all these puzzles. The twin moon probably references the two moons that appear together under Vaunte’s sky. The king slumbers in the valley... The grave of the Holy Saint? But it might be some random Aouine King.]

Brendel’s brows furrowed a little.

[The Evergreen Winter Tree points to the northwest... Aouine doesn’t seem to have this variety of tree, does this mean it’s a metaphor for something? Or a noble’s symbol? The meaning of the Evergreen Winter Tree means saintly, but there are numerous Houses in Aouine that have the symbol of the Evergreen Winter Tree leaves. As for the remaining two sentences... I don’t have a clue at all.]

Ebdon intentionally gave Brendel time, once it saw that Brendel was looking at him again, he continued speaking: “The two-faced statue did not speak or utter, has it forgotten the Holy Oath? The emerald lake in the pure white mountain, lies a sword amongst swords buried in rocks.”

“Hold on!” Brendel suddenly interrupted Ebdon. He suddenly felt a strange excitement within him.

[Sword amongst swords?! The genuine Lion Heart? That’s the sword of that was passed down generation to generation from Aouine’s first king, ‘The Kind Erik’.]

The Lion Heart was the symbol of the Lion Dynasty, as well as one of the four Kirrlutz’s holy weapon. When Erik brought it out from the Kirrlutz Empire, it became Aouine’s royal family symbol. But hardly anyone knew the real Lion Heart had been lost in Aouine’s internal civil war a long time ago. The kings who passed down this sword from that point onwards is nothing more than a fake. There were very few people who knew this secret, and there was most likely going to be chaos if this secret ever got revealed.

Brendel only knew about this after Aouine’s demise happened.

[If Ebdon is really speaking about the true Lion Heart, then the later half of the riddle makes sense. The Holy Oath probably referred to Erik’s Oath as a Holy Saint Knight, to rebel and lead the Empire’s citizens away from the arrogant and greedy nobles. He had made a strong rebellion, and that was where the ‘Kind’ word came from when he fought for the citizens. But the other stuff about the lake, mountain and rock... I don’t get it.]

The lore within the game stated that the kingdom was strongly tied to the Lion Heart, and it appeared to be true. Ever since Aouine lost the real sword, each generation was weaker than the previous one, until Aouine finally perished. But Brendel did not believe in this saying, a kingdom’s demise could hardly be attributed to a single sword, no matter how legendary it was. To him, it sounded like an excuse to push away the responsibility.

But even so, he was curious over why the sword was so amazing to the point where it was circulated with by poets and bards.

[Based on the speculation of the forums... This weapon is at least a level 60 weapon with a Fantasy-ranked rating.] *(TL: Fantasy-rank is one tier above Thorn of Light.)*

So he blurted out to ask: “What’s the emerald lake?”

But Ebdon unexpectedly shook his head: “I don’t know either. Sometimes when I think about my past, I would frequently recall these words, and there is even a divine oath

that's still binding me. But I don't know where my memories come from and why it continues to haunt me."

"Not every undead likes their memories." Brendel replied. He suddenly felt that Ebdon was someone more important in its former life. At least in his memories, Ebdon did not have any ties to the royal family.

"I know that I'm more unique compared to the other undead." Ebdon rubbed the helmet on his head. "The undead that live in the shadows are intelligent, but I'm different compared to them and I don't trust them with this secret. But when I see you, young man, I somehow feel that you can unravel this riddle."

Brendel did not answer Ebdon. He felt that it was telling the truth, but he did not trust it easily.

[...The two-faced statue did not speak or utter? The Saint Statue in Randner? But if that's the true identity of the riddle, it's going to be quite a hassle. To make it speak I need the Sage Slate... But the nearest Sage Slate is in Bruglas that's half a month's journey. The black market rate for that is 500,000 Tol coins. That's quite a large sum of money... But should I be thankful that this side mission intersects with the thing I'm about to do next?]

Brendel started to calculate the days he had to execute his next plan in his mind quickly and found that he did not have much time.

He straightened up on his horse and said: "Is that all you have to say?"

Ebdon nodded: "I still have one more request."

"Speak."

Brendel looked around. The mercenaries appeared to be ready to move off any time. The battle in the valley had ended.

Ebdon took off the emblem on his chest. "I wish to die like a real knight. I wish that my armor and sword to accompany me in my eternal sleep. This is called the Lion Emblem— It contains powerful magic in it, but it has no meaning to me now. I want to entrust this along with my waist pouch. The things in them might prove to be useful to you."

Brendel knew that he could forcefully take the White Fang away, and he had planned to give the sword to Freya, but when he looked at Ebdon, he still nodded.

The two of them knew that such promises meant nothing to an undead and a living person, but Ebdon had told him this much because he trusted in him. Based on this, Brendel could not find the heart to betray him.

But.

Ebdon must be killed here. The refugees will not agree to have a high-ranking undead general to accompany them—

Brendel received the emblem and looked at it with the system activated. The brass emblem was fashioned into a lion's head.

[The Lion Emblem, Collision Aura + 1?! It's a skill emblem!]

Brendel nearly dropped the emblem with his fumbling fingers. The skill 'Collision Aura' was a core skill of the Templar Knights. The highest level that could be reached was level 29, while non-related professions could only learn up to level 10. The first level gave +1 to defence, while each incremental level before level 10 was +0.5. With level 10-20, each level added +1 to defence, and after level 20, each incremental level was stacked.

This meant that level 21 would add +2 in defence, level 22 would add +3 in defence, level 23 would add +4 in defence.

[If I reach level 29 and gain +10 defence on that level, then having this ring would add +11 in defence! That's as crazy as having three full plates worth of defense!]

When Brendel saw this emblem he immediately decided to become a Paladin which could similarly learn Collision Aura to the highest level. In addition to the ring, there was another full-plate and shield that added +1 'Collision Aura' each. With the combination of everything, he could gain + 36 defense.

[That's like a portable fortress, heck, even the soldiers around me within 60 feet is equivalent to a tank. What kind of prowess would the cavalry have if I lead the charge?]

Brendel suddenly recalled that Ebdon was Madara's vanguard in the game. In the later part of the game, it had the highest defense amongst the four riders.

[As expected as the Conqueror Ebdon... No wonder they called him that.]

Even though his mind was flooded with emotions and excitement, his expression did not change. After days of experiencing life and death, Brendel felt he was becoming more mature than before. If he got this in the game he would have probably done a naked dance to celebrate the event.

He kept the emblem and looked at Ebdon's pouch. But he quickly found that his collection was not abundant. There were some low grade materials, while the most valuable material was some metal bits to make a full plate.

[Hmm. Looks like Ebdon also understands the power from this emblem. He had already started to plan to go in that direction.]

Brendel attached the pouch to his belt and looked at Ebdon again.

"Do you have any other requests?"

Ebdon shook his head. "Please do it."

Brendel knew that it was a disgraceful thing to die alone in this battlefield. A knight's death should at least in his enemies' hands in a battlefield, to send him into eternal rest. He could at least do this much.

Ciel pulled out his sword and walked up to Ebdon, but Brendel stopped him.

Brendel pulled out his own sword with much difficulty and exchanged glances with Ebdon. He rode up to him and thrust his sword into the opponent's chest.

Ebdon broke into a smile as the flames in his flared up.

"Young man, I told you these secrets because I am still 'Ebdon' from Madara. I should thank you for releasing me."

The undead knight gave a final sigh: "But at the same time, I have to die as a noble undead. The undying Madara represents unyielding flames, it's just that I did not expect to lose....."

The Soul Fire within its eyes finally extinguished.

The 'White Rider' Ebdon was finally gone, and Brendel understood there would not be any Madara's four vanguards any more from this point forth. He looked quietly at the remains before countless silver particles rose from its corpse and integrated into his body. This was something that he had not experienced before as a warm energy went into his entire body.

[This seems to be pure soul energy... Well, if I'm going by the system, that's 1300 XP. The combined XP from killing the enemies from previous battles is nearly 2000. It's more than enough to level up and make things easier for the upcoming battles... but that's not a good idea as it will interfere with my plans for the future...]

He raised his head up and looked at the sky. The clouds have already disappeared, and he could see a cross-shaped constellation in the sky.

[The constellation of the King of Knights.]

He took out the statue in his pouch and raised it up. The elegant deer reappeared on the mountain's edge, before it turned around and disappeared to the northeast direction.

He suddenly spotted Leto riding up to him.

"We have discovered a lot of ghouls to the sides of this mountain....." Leto lowered his voice and whispered.

"Understood, we're still on track in regards to timing." Brendel answered with the same calmness. "Get the refugees to make a move now. We won't have enough time to waste on exchanging words right now."

Chapter 25

Home of the fairies

—————Princess POV—————

“This person is certainly audacious to call himself a member of the royal family.”

The princess lightly placed her fringe of silver hair to the back of her pointed ears with her fingers, then took the porcelain teacup and gently sipped from it, smiling.

“The king slumbers within the valley when the twin moons can be seen— What do you think of the riddle, Lord Oberbeck?” She mused for a while before asking.

“The majority of the noble families in our kingdom have their own secrets, and this is an undeniable fact. But Ebdon mentioned about the oath to the royal family. It’s likely that the treasure has to something to do with the royal family.” Oberbeck replied.

“I think it goes slightly more complicated than that, Lord Oberbeck. The Holy Oath might have something to do with the first king, Erik.”

Oberbeck nodded. “The emerald lake in the pure white mountain — There are stories that the place is where a Saint took his eternal rest.”

“I see. May I know how it came about?”

“The fishermen in the region frequently stated that they saw the Knight of the Lake in the mist. He guards the Lake of the Goddess, located in the central island, and white boulders could be spotted within the island. That is perhaps the mountain to the riddle.”

“Thank you for the explanation, Lord Oberbeck. Do you have any idea what the two-faced statue means?”

“I’m afraid I have no idea what is that, my lady.”

“That’s true. A mysterious treasure like this is most likely unknown to everyone. It’s

certainly a very interesting aspect in the stories about knights.”

She covered her lips and laughed: “I must have made you laugh for my childish behavior.”

“Not at all, my lady. I too wonder about the identity of this former Ebdon. As far as I know there isn’t a royal knight named Ebdon.”

“Perhaps his former name was something else.”

“Indeed, that’s my guess as well.”

The half-elf princess did not look at the middle-aged man, but she guessed that he must have done a careful investigation.

[Oberbeck seemed to be highly impressed with that young man... He must have reported to Father about this matter as well, but what exactly was he impressed about? Personal strength? It’s certainly a factor, but the most likely reason is the power behind that youth.]

The princess stroked her chin.

[Are the Highland knights so important? This kingdom needs a new power so that it could revitalize itself, but the Highland Knights, militia, or a new formal army are unlikely to be able to achieve that purpose. That young man...?]

She shook her head.

[No, that’s not possib– Wait... Am I jealous?]

For some reason she felt a little threatened by him and was slightly stunned when she thought about the issue. She shook her head again.

“My lady?” Oberbeck noticed her strange actions.

“Ah, I apologize. Please continue the events.”

Oberbeck cast a strange look at her as he nodded.

The first moon had set in the west, while the second moon was still in the middle of the sky.

Fog had started to appear in the fir forest, bringing a frosty nip to everyone. Brendel looked down from the horse, confirming that the white deer had started to bring them into the lower grounds in the east.

A few minutes ago, Leto had came up to him to report the zombie army had stopped chasing their tracks.

[Looks like they discovered that Ebdon's forces are gone. Medes has most likely called back his forces as a precaution.]

The valley was silent.

Two grand statues over thirty meters tall suddenly could be seen from the fog. Everyone except Brendel raised their heads up and stared in wonder at them without saying anything for a long time.

They did not think that there would be such a place after crossing the remote valley. They felt like they had caught a glimpse of history from a thousand years ago, and they felt a strange solemn feeling growing from their heart.

The statues had long robes and layered armor pieces, with war dresses attached beneath the plated armor. The helmet was of Elven-make as the two sides of it were of a winged design. One hand held a long lance, the other held a gigantic shield. Their gazes were peering into the distance.

They were recognized as the Holy Warriors from the Golden Races, where they fought against the Twilight Dragon in the Era of Darkness, until they finally rescued the continent from its grasp.

The statues represented the guardians of all sentient beings.

As they passed beneath the statues' feet, they felt rejuvenated, as if all fatigue and dirt had been washed away.

Many people even stopped to check if they was somehow in an illusion.

Brendel did not tell them that this was Vaunte's strongest protective barrier 'The tenth Percept'. Its effects were very distinct on the people who gained their strength from darkness. A normal human being would enjoy the restoration of strength and purification when they passed through the barrier, but an undead would immediately be turned from extremely evil into extremely righteous if they managed to survive the statues' test.

But that was exceedingly unlikely, as even Madara's any of the 24 eternal undead lords would most likely be turned into dust.

Once they passed through under the statues and into the valley's entrance, they found that the inner valley was becoming broader and broader, till the point it became an area of flat land. White fog surrounded both sides of the area and one could not see the edges.

There seemed to be some form of living spirit that was made up of white smoke, sometimes forming into an angel flying in the sky, or a fearsome gryphon, or a knight on a tall horse, but they disappeared within the blink of an eye.

No one dared to stray too far from Brendel's side. The refugees had stopped talking long ago and merely kept watching at the ever-changing environment.

Freya who was in the rear felt things were becoming more and more surreal. This place looked like it was somewhere that a common man would not understand, but Brendel did not appear surprised or excited. She started to fret again after realizing that he was someone who was as mysterious as this place was. Even though she had constantly fought beside him, she felt that she could not follow his footsteps as she was just a normal girl.

She frowned and look at Romaine.

[Romaine's aunt has her own secret ways and Romaine... Maybe someone like her is more suited for Brendel... They are the type after all...]

Freya became more and more upset as she thought about it, and in the end hung her head down and rode behind alone, far away from the rest.

Brendel did not notice anything unusual as he was handling Romaine's strange questions.

“What’s this place Brendel?”

“Didn’t I tell you earlier? This place is the where the grave of the Holy Saint is.”

“But you didn’t mention where the grave is just now.”

Brendel’s headache grew a little. He turned his around to look for some help and saw Ciel with a serious expression.

[...Yeah right. He’s not going to be reliable at this moment. Urgh, never mind.]

He looked at Romaine again. She was filthy all over with mud as she sat proudly on the horse.

[This was something that can’t be helped... If she hadn’t stole a horse to learn how to ride on it, she wouldn’t become so dirty.]

When Brendel knew that this event happened a while ago, he was really scared as she might fallen and broke something. But when he ran up to her, he found that she had tied a robe to herself to the horse’s back firmly, running about with a puffed up chest.

He obviously pinched her ear and lectured her for a long time about the things that she could and could not do.

“The Grave of the Holy Saint is where the ancient kings and sages take their eternal rest. They used their spirits to make a new border, and named as the ‘Kingdom of Sanctuary’. where all their citizens would be blessed while any invaders would be trapped within forever.”

“Does that mean they are many places like this?” Romaine tilted her body towards the horse and looked at Brendel from the side.

“Naturally.”

Brendel took a deep breath to enjoy the air within this valley, and nearly choked with eyebrows nearly bundled together.

[This damn girl needs to go for a bath straight away after we’re out from danger. I can’t believe she can tolerate herself to be so dirty... Sometimes I really want to look inside her brain and what’s going on inside—]

“Are they all called Grave of the Holy Saint?”

The conversation between Romaine and Brendel had drawn the people around them a little closer. This place was filled with wonder and they wanted to listen to the youth’s explanation. The mercenaries were a little curious as to how Brendel know about it. Some of the more experienced members in their group had seen more than the common noble, but even so, they had never heard of the phrases that he explained to Romaine.

[I heard that this young man is a Highland Knight, but are they really so mysterious?]

Not only were the mercenaries puzzled, even Ciel felt a little strange. Even as a wizard’s apprentice, his knowledge regarding about this was limited. Even in the Black Tower, there were hardly a few wizards who are proficient in this matter, and certainly no more than five people.

[Where exactly does my master learn about all this information?]

Ciel did not voice out his questions. Anyone who was able to use the Cards of Fate was not someone simple.

Brendel shook his head when he heard Romaine’s question.

“They have their own names. Each grave has something to related with the person residing in it. This place which is filled with a strange fog that never seems to end, based on my knowledge, is called the ‘Home of the Fairies’.....”

“Home of the Fairies?”

“The King of Knights is one of the eleven ancient kings, a guardian of the human race even before the King of Flames, Gatel. The King of Knights made a promise with the Fairy Queen, and the queen allowed him to eat the Golden Apple to become king. After he died, his soul would return to this land and sleep there forever, and continue to uphold the promise—”

“This land is where chaos started. Time stops here during the night, and only when dawn breaks would time move again. Legend depicts that there is a Golden Apple Tree here in the center of the valley, where the Fairy Queen lives. If any common man sees her that she does not approve of, they will never be able to leave.”

A moment of silence happened, and Brendel turned his head to see why Romaine was quiet. She was looking at him with clear eyes.

“The Golden Apple?”

“What did you remember from the things I said? Only three words? The Golden Apple?” Brendel’s mood turned sour as he realized that Romaine did not pay attention.

Romaine nodded earnestly.

“Alright, I’m not going to talk about this anymore.” He was almost at a loss for words, but when he was preparing to lecture her about logic and reasoning, he suddenly stopped moving and looked to another direction.

Everyone turned their heads along with him to look at what Brendel was looking at.

A solitary tree in the distance.

[What... is that?]

Brendel was stunned.

Chapter 26

The golden mystery

Everyone who heard Brendel describing the Golden Apple Tree paused for a moment when they saw the lone tree in the distance. The mercenaries who overheard about the part where no mortal could leave when they saw fairy queen, shivered in fright when they linked the tree to Brendel's story.

They immediately kept their glances to a minimal, afraid of being trapped here forever. They had just escaped from Madara's undead with much difficulty to survive, but they did not have any intention to stay here forever.

But Brendel did not care about the fairy tale at all. He had searched the entire valley along with all the other players in the game. It was certainly mysterious for the residents that lived here, but in the game there was nothing but a desolate land and fog, not even an animal.

There was no monsters, no treasure, no living creatures. The legendary fairy queen in the lore spread about only through the mouths of the NPCs, and no player has ever seen her.

And that was why it shook him to the core when he saw the tree. He was more than certain that there was nothing like that in the game.

[The way how we got into the valley had not changed at all, and the scenery matched my memories. There was nothing in particular that's worth noticing either in the day or night... But there's something that has changed here. Timing differences...? Unlikely... Was there a mission about this? I don't think so...]

Brendel rubbed his forehead.

[Then... this reality is different from the game? Or someone carefully hid his experience within the game because it's a one-time mission? The latter seems like a better fit, but how did he get all the secrets in this area? Is it triggered by the number of times one enters the valley?]

Brendel clenched and unclenched his fist.

[Let me think... The first player discovered this area... announced the information excitedly in the forums... then there was some form of NPC confirmation that a knight had gone to that area after the player found that area... And then another player from a guild confirmed the rumors shortly after that... I feel like I'm forgetting something important.]

Brendel was uncertain about this unforeseen event, as it meant that there could be something that was beyond his calculations. Yet his heart was racing from this unknown event, especially when this secret mission was something that had never been discovered before.

[The rewards must be off the charts since it involves ancient lore!]

He quickly made up his mind and made a gesture to let the mercenaries to get the refugees to stop marching. Time was slowed down in this place, and three full days here was equivalent to a single night outside this area. They could stop and eat, explore the entire valley and not take more than a single day.

He saw Leto looking at him in a puzzled manner. Brendel pointed at the tree and said

“I feel there's something wrong and I want to check it out.”

“Do you need my help?” Leto might have been a veteran soldier that participated in the November War, but he was ignorant in the ways of the mysterious lore.

Brendel shook his head.

Brendel did require some help, but he did not trust the mercenaries. This was something that possibly concerned legendary treasures, and he did not wish to share it with them. He looked at Ciel whom he trusted the most, but he had nearly spent all his mana points in the battle earlier, and he was just slightly stronger than a normal person.

He looked at Romaine next. She did not fit the requirement either. Even though she had strong perception, but her overall strength was too weak and insufficient for her to take on such a risky mission.

Romaine looked at him and blinked innocently.

[There's really no need to try and get all puppy-eyes at me... I'm not bringing you.]

He turned his head around and found Freya in an inattentive mood.

"Freya?"

"Hah? Ah!" She looked him in a moment of confusion before she blushed.

"What's wrong?" Brendel was confused by her actions as well. He knew her to be one who had her own opinions on the current situation, but ever since she entered the valley she acted strangely.

He even thought she might have been swapped by some Madara's undead, if not for the Thorn of Light which did not react at all.

"N-nothing, What do you need, Brendel?" She was thinking about the tasteless request that he had a while ago, and she was afraid that he might be able to see through her thoughts.

"I'm going to take a look at the tree in front, come along with me."

Freya paused for a while before nodding vigorously: "S-sure."

"I want to go too." Romaine started twisting her body left and right in protest.

"Just stay here without doing anything else. If you want to learn riding so much, I'll let Ciel teach you. If I find that you're still bound to your horse later, I'll drag you over and tie you to my horse's back." Brendel replied spitefully as he threw a glance at her.

"But I am unable to learn it." Romaine simply answered without thinking.

He shook his head: "That's fine since there's a lot of time. It's very easy to ride a horse, and if you can't ride one you can't go on adventures with me."

"That's no problem at all. I'll tie myself to the horse's back without any problems. I don't feel that it's uncomfortable."

"It matters a lot, and it has nothing to do with how you feel." He glared at her for a while, before ignoring her whining.

He instructed Leto on the things to note and brought along a crossbow, before calling out to Freya to set off.

Brendel had searched this path before along with numerous other players. As he rode towards the tree, he finally confirmed that the area here was definitely different from what had happened in the game. He kept circling the boulders nearby, before Freya finally called out to him to ask: "Brendel, what exactly are you looking at?"

"I'm looking for the entrance." Brendel kept turning the horse round and round to look at the chaotic white boulders. Finally he seemed to have discovered something and jumped down from the horse, and walked towards the center of the boulder.

"Entrance?" Freya also followed him and jumped down from the horse.

"Yes. It's right here, follow me-" Brendel replied as he pulled out the Elven sword and walked through a small gap between two boulders.

[‘Fate’s fork’. The game’s indicator stated this in the journal, but nothing is showing up in my retina right now. There’s a iron box behind these rocks which contain a rock slate necessary for the unique area.]

He kept thinking about this event when a sudden blast of wind came at him. He was considerably careful in searching, and before he was able to think about it, his body had already made the decision for him to retreat. He knocked Freya down as a golden arrow aimed at his former position where his nose was.

The two of them fell backwards, but Brendel looked at the shooter’s direction at the last moment and spotted a golden figure disappearing behind the boulders.

[Shit... I’m lucky my reactions are fast enough, because I really didn’t spot where the attacker attacked from just now.]

"Who’s there!" Brendel had subconsciously pushed himself up from the ground to chase the attacker, but when he pushed himself up with his hand, he immediately felt there was much softness in his grasp. When he finally found out what it was, his mind was a blank.

[.....Seriously?]

He turned his head back and indeed discovered that his hand was placed squarely into

an undesirable spot on the girl's chest. Freya was staring at him with her clear light brown eyes, and she did not know what to say for quite some time.

But she finally reacted and pushed him to one side, before scrambling to her feet and kept quiet.

He also regained his senses and pretended to look for that golden figure, but there was nothing there at all.

"I'm, err, sorry....." He thought for a very long time, but only managed to squeeze out a dry apology.

"Err, mmm, who was that just now?" Freya's face was flushed with blood.

"I'm not sure. I saw a golden figure, but fairies don't appear like that, but more like they are creatures that are summoned." Brendel's mind worked furiously and his thoughts were cleared up.

"A-are you fine?" The girl's voice was incredibly soft.

Brendel looked at her and hook his head. He had been trying to look for a golden arrow, but there was nothing but a deep hole in the boulder's wall.

[Arrow of Light?]

Brendel's brow furrowed.

[That's from a high grade weapon... This is not an illusion, but judging from the opponent's speed, he's not as powerful as Ebdon. As long as I sustain my vigilance I'll be fine.]

Brendel had confirmed his current strength when he fought against Ebdon. If he went all out, he would barely be at the level of a Silver-ranked fighter, and any enemy below that was not much of a trouble to him.

After checking the area, Brendel gestured to Freya for her to be on the alert, while he gripped the Elven sword tightly and slowly advanced.

[The enemy escaped to the north. That area is where the 'Fate's fork' is at. Does that mean he came from that place? But I have never heard of someone being attacked in

the game.]

He immediately spotted an iron box in a stone platform as he reached around the bend. Anyone with a level higher than a Gold-rank was able to destroy the box, but it was a meaningless action as the box would be restored the next night.

Brendel looked around his surroundings. He did not trust his memories entirely now. This enemy had proven that events that did not appear in the game, happened here. Not only was there some mysterious living entity, he looked like he was an enemy.

After confirming there was no one around, he opened the box. But when he did so, he was completely stunned.

There was a pair of earring beside a rock slate.

[What... is this?]

He hesitated. He was now afraid that there was a magic trap in the box. Again, there was nothing like that in the game, but he did not want to take a risk. He did a simple test by allowing the Elven sword to go near the box. Typically there was a simple defensive measure for magic traps that worked sometimes.

There was no such reaction.

He then took the ring and glanced at it, before throwing back into the box like it scalded him.

[Ring of Infinite Ice, +2 to knowledge, +1 to will]

Brendel cried in pain and clasped his head with both his hands. An explosive pain went through his mind like a thousand needles had stabbed it.

“Brendel?” Freya jumped in fright and she immediately went over to support him.

“I’m fine, be careful of the surroundings.” Brendel gasped for breath as he took the box with one hand. He cursed the person who put the ring into the box.

[Damn it. Who’s the bloody moron who put in this 95oz equipment into this box... That was pure magic recoil because my level is too low. This area is still a beginner’s area, and even the max level of any enemy would not be over fifty, but this ring is at least

level seventy and above.]

Brendel had used his 'Will' to investigate the ring, and caused a strong backlash to his mind. The pain subsided after a while, and Brendel started to think about the events again.

[...I see. So that is why I felt that things are strange. What if this is an event that was impossible for any players to get? Rather than thinking that the NPC knight in the game came second after the first player who discovered it, the NPC was the first to discover this. That's because the players started to investigate the veracity of the first player's claim and discovered the rumors about the NPC discovering this area.]

Brendel stared at the ring.

[A hidden quest beyond level seventy? Try and aim for it? Or retreat right away? The risk is crazy, but the rewards are just as impressive. I completed 3 such quests in the game last time, and I got a 'Fantasy' ranked weapon, an intermediate secret skill, as well as a billion Tor coins. Because of these three quests, I managed to get into the upper echelons. But... level seventy? Just any level seventy enemy would be enough to kill me outright just by looking at me.]

Brendel's heart raced.

[But there's another problem. If I wait till three months later, the secret mission here might be gone. The timing around that time is when the first player discovered this area, so..... what should I do?]

The youth took in a deep breath and looked at Freya.

"Brendel?" She found that there was a strange look in his eyes, and she asked him in trepidation.

"If I am going to choose to risk my life, would you follow me?" Brendel found his voice was hoarse.

"...I would, but I wouldn't want you to risk it." Freya thought carefully for a moment before answering.

Brendel took in her words and nodded, letting out a long sigh.

Chapter 27

Knowing when to call it quits

Once Brendel heard Freya's words, he immediately calmed down. He had cleared three secret quests and knew even more of such secret quests that were of equivalent level.

[There is absolutely no need for me to take on such a risk. When I fought against Ebdon, I literally used everything I had to defeat him. Fighting against anything that is above level seventy is completely suicidal. Furthermore, the first player who found this place did so three months later. Madara's undead forces will retreat in approximately one or two months later, and they most likely won't search this area because of the protective barrier. If I truly want to aim for this secret quest, I can try doing so later on, especially when my level is higher.]

He took the ring and kept it stashed away and patted the Freya's shoulder: "Let's go back."

"Brendel?"

"There are plenty of chances to take such risks, but we only have a single life each," Brendel smiled mockingly at himself: "You are completely right. There are problems with my attitude just now."

[The First War of the Black Rose ends at the end of July, Aouine's internal strife shows itself during September, and finally there's a political shift in November. I have only five months to raise my levels as much as possible, but I'm obviously going too fast for considering what I did just now.]

Brendel wanted to gain enough strength to at least protect the people around him, even if he was unable to change the history was about to take place. He knew that the world would descend into utter chaos, and things like justice and logic would be destroyed by the wars ahead. In order to survive in the chaotic world ahead, he had to do ridiculous tasks in order to become stronger.

Romaine and Freya might not be able to understand, and even Ciel who followed him might not be able to understand either. Sometimes Brendel felt the feeling of

frustration was even stronger in him because he knew he was powerless to stop the events that came along.

He sheathed his sword and walked towards the exit, and indicated to Freya to follow him.

When the two left the area, two person slowly walked out from the dark gaps between the rocks.

The taller person looked like she was female. She dressed in a strange robe that was white in color, with her sleeves, shoulders and chest area decorated with blue sigils. The upper dress fit tightly to her waist, but the sleeves and pants were uniquely wide. She had long silver hair and her eyes seemed like the deepest lake that was dark green in color. There were crimson patterns on her face, but she did not have any expressions.

“Rauze, are you not going to stop them from leaving?” Her voice was completely neutral and boring.

“Phoral, if you keep showing off your aggressive nature by showing off your claws and teeth, it won’t be fun anymore.” The reply that came back seemed to be full of excitement.

The shorter girl appeared like she was approximately fifteen years old. Her long golden hair was tied into twin ponytails, and she wore a traditional leather attire like many other adventurers. On her back was a heavy iron box that was taller than a human, with a constellation design that linked five different stars together.

Phoral thought for a while.

“Then why did you attack them?”

“Tsk. You’re really boring, I’m just testing them.”

“I see. I was wondering if the Principality of Gold had something wrong when your attack was less than two percent effective—”

“I really don’t want to marry a person as boring as you...”

“Rauze, we’re from the dragon race.”

“‘Person’ is just an analogy, bleah, I don’t wanna talk about this anymore. That human male actually took away your ring. Doesn’t he know what this means?”

She giggled as she spoke. Phoral looked at her without answering.

“Tsk. You’re really a boring fellow. But I really want to see his expressions when he sees the little present I gave him. I heard that humans are really greedy creatures.”

“Didn’t you came here to find the legend of the Golden Apple Tree? Why did you give away that item to them?”

“Hahhh... The legend about the Golden Apple Tree isn’t as interesting as these small creatures fighting for their lives, ya know? I decided to give this adventure to them because of that reason. Also, I find that human male kinda familiar, he might be related to the King of Knights or something.”

Phoral stared at her: “Do you know the King of Knights?”

She immediately coughed: “That’s just an expression, expression!”

“What exactly are you scheming?”

“Ha ha ha... Just a simple test...”

Rauze started giggling again. Phoral’s brows furrowed.

When Leto saw Brendel and Freya returning to the camp, the mercenaries had already settled the refugees and started cooking a meal. The fire that was started in the foggy valley seemed to add some vitality into the empty land.

The mercenaries and militia were completely exhausted after the series of battles in the night. When Brendel rode back, he discovered that most of them were sleeping. However, some of the refugees volunteered to be cooks and roused the people who defended up when the meal was cooked, personally handing them the hot food...

Brendel appreciated the scene before him.

[The future can be changed. The people I rescued today can rescue even more people in the future, and bit by bit we can write a new history. Even though I’m still weak right now, I’m definitely becoming stronger.]

Leto approached and greeted him, asking him in a quiet voice if he wanted to set off immediately. Brendel looked around him and found Ciel and Sue sleeping deeply on a wooden box. He then took another look at the refugees and mercenaries, discovering that the entire camp was mostly quiet.

He thought for a while and shook his head. His plan was already half completed and there was no need to push the people here too hard. They could still pull ahead of the Madara's ahead even if they slept for a while due to the time dilation in this area.

The exit in the north valley was very close to the River of Sharp rocks, and reaching there meant that victory was nearly at hand.

"Have you slept, Mister Leto?" Brendel asked.

"Don't worry, my lord. I'm a mercenary. We're very much capable of taking care of ourselves in a situation like this." Leto patted his chest and laughed.

Brendel nodded.

"Then Freya, go ahead and sleep for a while." He turned around and looked at the girl who had not slept for several days. Even though this place restored the body's physical strength, it was unable to restore mental fatigue.

She shook her head immediately. "Don't worry, I can still go on."

"This is an order."

"I, I....."

She glared at him.

[Did I say I'm going to obey your orders?! I'm the militia captain right!] She growled in her head, but every time she thought of the youth's elegance in leading everyone to safety, his words felt like they were naturally right, and in the end she could only lower her head and nod.

"I... I got it."

Brendel obviously did not know the mental anguish going on in her head, but merely watched her leave with his eyes on her to make sure she went to rest. Finally, he turned

his head around and asked Leto: "Ah, I want to ask where's Romaine now."

"I just saw Miss Romaine riding with the cavalry." Leto looked at the squadron in front as he spoke. His expression appeared like he had just witnessed something unbelievable.

"Riding with the cavalry?" Brendel did not notice Leto's expressions, but merely repeat his words in a troubled manner.

[This crazy lass went around the place by tying herself to the horse again? Looks like she has forgotten some of the punishments that I administered a while ago...]

But before he decided to grind his fists into her head again, he heard a voice calling out to him. "Brendel, hey, you're back?"

Anyone could tell it was the lass with her distinctive voice.

When he turned around, he saw that she was riding proudly on the horse in front of him.

"W-when did you learn how to ride?" Brendel was really surprised when he took a closer look at her. He was able to learn it instantly with the help of the game's AI system, but Romaine obviously did not have something like that.

"Because I'm one hundred percent merchant material!" Romaine stopped her horse in front of him and answered haughtily.

"What does this have anything to do with a merchant?"

"Eh? It has nothing to do with it?" Romaine's eyes went wild with surprise. "But don't all merchants know how to ride a horse?"

"Ah, Miss Romaine, I have to say this, but the majority of the merchants don't know how to ride a horse." Leto aided Brendel in his straight retort.

Romaine's dainty eyebrows nearly bunched up together: "I-is that so? Well, there's no problem at all since I'm one of the better merchants, right Brendel?"

"Yeah, sure." Brendel's reply was half-hearted. He thought that it was heaven's way of compensating for a natural scatterbrain. He eyed her with her exasperation,

dismounted and said: “Okay, little Romaine, since you’re so free, accompany me to walk around the camp.”

“Sure.” She looked quite excited.

“Do you need me to go along, my lord?” Leto asked patiently.

Brendel nearly coughed up blood.

[Nice going, mister. Do you really need to try so hard to be a third wheel?]

But Leto had asked out of good intentions and Brendel could only agree in a gloomy nod.

Suddenly Brendel felt a strange shift in the bag on his waist and he froze momentarily. He opened it to check and his expression immediately changed. He blinked and thought that he had seen something wrongly, so he closed the bag, then opened it again.

He still thought he was hallucinating.

Why would he have this object in his bag?

Chapter 28

The end of the tale

————— Princess POV —————

The princess with silver hair did not speak for a long time after the story ended. She supported her chin with her fingers and looked at the sunset outside the giant arched window. It was nearly night time.

“So what is the ending of this tale, Lord Oberbeck?” She asked.

“Isn’t the ending apparent enough, my lady? It ends with me finishing narrating the tale to the princess here.”

“You could put it that way, Lord Oberbeck, but you have not told me the most interesting thing.” The princess asked with interest.

“Oh?”

“You said ‘he got something good out of it over the journey’, but I have not heard anything of that description from the beginning of the tale, Lord Oberbeck.”

“Is that right, my lady, but this old minister here recalled clearly that he had described it perfectly.” Lord Oberbeck laughed heartily as he faked surprise.

“You mean the emblem that Ebdon gave him? It’s nothing more than a magic emblem only right? I think with Lord Oberbeck’s experience in magical artifacts, you wouldn’t be interested in that.”

“No, no, of course not. My lady, why not think about it a little more?”

She tapped on her chin and considered for a while.

“Then it has to be something from the Valley of the Saint. I believe there’s a portion where you gave little description as to what happened.”

“You are certainly wise, my lady.” Oberbeck praised her from the bottom of his heart. “But I did not intentionally left out anything. At that moment, I felt two powerful presence hiding nearby and I did not dare to approach any closer. I wanted to warn them of the danger, but I discovered them too late.”

“Oh? Even though Lord Oberbeck is not known for your skill in the sword, but I recall that you’re at least a Gold-ranked fighter. There was actually someone who was actually strong enough to stop you from approaching them?”

“Unfortunately so. However, it looked like they did not want anyone to discover them, and merely gave a warning to stop the two from advancing any further.” Oberbeck replied with some fear in his heart.

“Then that youth must have gotten something from there. Ah, Lord Oberbeck, you did not tell me what he saw when he opened his bag.”

Lord Oberbeck checked his surroundings and mouthed the words out. The princess’s expressions changed a little. “That thing really exists?”

Oberbeck nodded: “I have heard of this item in legends, and I was just as surprise as my lady. It is unfortunate because once the item has gone through a mortal’s hand, it would not belong to another.”

“I see. It is a little regrettable, as it might change my brother’s personality. For a kingdom like Aouine, he is a little too soft.” She looked at him: “Otherwise Lord Oberbeck would have made an attempt to steal it, right?”

Oberbeck did not deny it. “That wouldn’t change even if he is a friend of Lord Everton’s daughter.”

“I’m afraid that their relationship might not be as simple as friends only.” The princess chuckled.

Lord Oberbeck knew that she was reminding him not to use her.

[It is true that I considered using the king’s only daughter to get to this Highland Knight. But it seems like she’s resistant to that idea. Still, she’s a daughter of the crown and has to get married someday. That youth could actually be considered as a good candidate, and he is definitely much better than the majority of the noble youths that I have seen.]

He bowed: "My lady, since the story has ended and the the day grows shorter, please allow this old minister to leave."

"Feel free to do so, Lord Oberbeck. I would still like to sit here in peace for a while."

He tried to stifle the smile that was forming as he looked at her. He knew that she was trying to avoid her history teacher, and he might even be complaining to the king right now.

"Avoiding the issue is not a good plan, my lady." He tried to remind her in a small voice.

The princess smiled with a sly look in her eyes. "But it is still a plan."

Lord Oberbeck took his leave and closed the door after saying his goodbyes—

The princess stood up and went to the window to look at the scenery outside.

[What happened after that?]

————— Brendel's POV —————

There was a wind that started in the forest.

The trees swayed against the constant bursts of winds like a watter current. The seemingly unending fog started to move. The layers of fog stacked together, and it contrasted greatly with the clusters of fiery red berries.

The hooves clad in metal broke the twigs and berries on the ground as they trampled across the river which had sharp rocks jutting out from the beach. Thirty four horses galloped across the shallow water and made it splash like fireworks.

The skeletons near the area clearly felt the disturbance and they sought out for the source. When they finally discovered the disturbance, they found that there were war horses appearing right in front of them.

The Arreck war horses charged straight into the fragile bones and smashed into them, either shattering their bones immediately or knocking them back into the jagged rocks and destroying them. The cavalry created an empty path, before it slowed down: The young leader gestured to the riders and they stopped moving.

Shouts pierced through the morning's air.

"Victory!"

"We won!"

"Long live Aouine!"

"Long live Brendel!"

The mercenaries cheered loudly with their arms raised. Their collective cheers echoed throughout the valley as they combined into one.

Brendel took down his leather helmet and threw it away as he splattered water onto his forehead to wash away the perspiration. A gust of wind blew and he felt refreshed from it. He then mounted his horse and looked at the surrounding environment.

[Over. It's finally over!]

He clenched his fist. It was a nightmarish battle when they fought against Ebdon's army. Everyone had used up all their strength when they finally reached the Valley of the Saint.

Two thousand mere refugees managed to cut through a bloody path after being surrounded by ten of thousands of undead. It sounded like it was a daydream, but the reality was they made it happen. It was true that some of them did not make it and they wept in sadness over their cold bodies, but they managed to survive. *(TL: When you think about it, it was almost always Brendel's army > enemy size, and mostly the reason why a smaller army would win a bigger army. If you split up the undead into 50 groups, and have Brendel's army of 500 militia/mercenaries vs 200 undead all the time...)*

Almost all the mercenaries had injuries on them, but they looked at him with convinced eyes as they know who had brought them to safety.

It was almost like a miracle.

The youth had fulfilled his promise as he said that he would point a path leading to a miracle

Freya brought the militia along with her at this stage.

Her sentences were,

“Did we really win, Brendel?”

He nodded at the girl. He did not speak, but the militia behind her were silent when they saw him nod. Some of the people there dropped their weapons onto the ground as they saw their leader’s action. They almost could not believe their eyes when they realized they had escaped to safety after just one full day.

They had repeatedly broke through the enemy lines, even when the White-Mane army was unable to defeat the undead at all.

Someone from the militia yelled out loudly as if in denial: “Lord knight, did we really win?”

Brendel nodded again.

Everyone started jumping and yelling in delight. Some of them started weeping while a few others ran backwards to inform the refugees. The cavalry tried to keep a straight face, but after a few moments they were grinning from ear to ear.

Brendel noticed Freya looking at him in a slight stare, and he asked: “What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing. Thanks, Brendel.” Came the reply.

Brendel laughed in response. He started to look at the green forest far away from him.

[The Forest of Grand deer. That’s a nostalgic place. It’s a place that I used to pass when I traveled from Bruglas to Fortress Riedon, with quite a lot of wolverines in them. There’s a particular point of interest, an ancient castle, that I need to go at some point in the future.]

Brendel started evaluating his options.

[I have nearly gotten 5000 XP from the past battles. The Cards of Fate are something of great value as a magical item and a trump card that I can use, so I have to spend 2000 XP to attain an EP pool. Next is the Scholar and Knight professions. The sub-profession as a scholar allows for additional development on the main profession

class, as well as providing higher TP.]

(TL: EP elemental points, TP – Tactical points – Required for raising skills.)

[Technique skills in this world are a rare thing, because the majority of the people here are NPCs, while a player could easily get their own innate techniques because of what their profession class brings along. In this case, I also know missions that provide techniques as well, so I should put them in my schedule so that I have an advantage over the people here. Considering the path ahead of me if I want to become a paladin, I need to establish a good relationship with the Holy Cathedral of Fire.]

Brendel then thought about the overall journey.

[I merely completed a quest to ‘rescue the refugees’. The Tarkus in history had combined multiple undead units and conquered many Aouine cities before they pulled out which led to the prologue of Aouine’s demise. I used to laugh at Aouine’s weak leadership, but until I led this group of NPCs, I finally realized that war isn’t so simple.]

He shook his head.

[A gamer looking at Aouine’s history with a pair of gamer’s eyes. That’s wrong. When you throw this situation to the royal king or the Regent Princess later on, they will most likely be helpless in this situation. I can’t imagine how it feels like to watch their kingdom crumble bit by bit over the decades... In any case, we have already reached the north side of the River of Sharp Rocks.]

Once they defeated the squadron here, they had swept Medes’s last line of troops that surrounded the region.

Suddenly he felt someone patting his back. When he turned around, he saw Leto and the other mercenaries, along with the remnants of the White-Mane army gathered together.

“My lord, what are your plans.” The first to speak was Batum who appeared like a coarse city dweller in Brendel’s eyes. His orange-red beard was especially striking.

“My plans?”

“We have discussed amongst ourselves, we would follow you if you wish to keep us by your side.” Mano answered in a straightforward manner.

The mercenaries found out that they were more keen to work for the youth after experiencing the past few days compared to working for others.

Brendel was confused for a moment before realizing they were asking to be his retainers, but he was not a real noble and his identity was merely upheld by Ciel. He thought for a while before replying.

“It’s not suitable for you to follow me at the moment.”

Everyone was taken aback, but Leto understood there was something else in his words. “Then what are your plans, my lord.”

But Brendel returned the question to him. “What exactly do you plan to do if I can’t accept you?”

They looked at each other, but it was Gaspard from the Fortress Riedon’s public policing forces that answered. “We intend to form a mercenary group, if my lord has other thoughts. We fought together so we can trust each other.”

“Aren’t you interested in continuing your post as a captain?”

Gaspard laughed. “No, I already gave my thoughts about this, and my men are also willing to walk this road.”

“What about you and your men?” Brendel turned to Taron and the rest of the White-Mane army.

“Besides us, there are also a few men from the refugees who are interested in joining us. However, a few of the mercenaries and the White-Mane soldiers have their own plans. The rest amongst the refugees are farmers and city dwellers.” Batum was the one who replied.

Brendel took another glance at him. Batum did not appear to be a simple mercenary to be able to analyze the refugees’ composition.

“Taron?” Brendel was interested in the White-Mane’s sub-officer as he was one of the kingdom’s veterans. Taron closed his eyes and thought for a while before answering in a solemn voice.

“I wish to follow you, lord knight. If you disagree, I can only return to the White-Mane

Army.”

“You’re disappointed?” Brendel was surprised after listening to the tone in his voice.

Taron nodded.

“Alright, let’s establish a mercenary group first and... the group’s name shall be ‘The Amber Sword.’”

Everyone paused.

Leto asked gingerly. “What does my lord mean?”

“Ahh, also, try and get some of the artisans from the refugees to go with you. Of course, you can’t force them if they don’t want to. On the other hand, I need Batum to come along with me for the next task that I’m about to do.”

He turned back to Taron. “If you really wish to stay behind, then go along with Mister Leto. I’m not sure what I can do for your men, but I will let you know very soon.”

Taron slowly nodded.

“Where are you going next, my lord?” Gaspard asked.

“I’m heading to Ankries. Someone’s waiting for me there, then I’m going off to Bruglas. If everything goes well, I believe I can inherit a land very soon. At that point we can discuss again.” Brendel replied confidently.

Everyone looked at each other again. There were many noble youths, but knights who inherited lands were very few. It appeared like he was a Highland Knight from the legends, and they thought they had chosen the right decision to follow him.

Brendel looked beyond at the horizon as he started to form his plans clearly in his mind.

Chapter 29

Romaine's plans

The start of every year was called the 'Month of Winter chords.' One charismatic person would host the event, so the first month was also called the 'Month of socialization', and many banquets and festivals were held during that time period.

The sixth month was called the 'Month of Hazy Summer'. The word 'hazy' referred to the moonlight during the summer nights, where magic woke up from the Summer's Slumber. This was when the wizards, both living and undead, had their busiest activities.

When it came to the seventh month, the 'Month of flowing fire', it was when the day was longest throughout the year. The Sun God would reach the peak of his powers and the beast-kin in the far east held their biggest celebration, the Festival of Flames.

Similarly, the kingdoms who were under the protection of the Holy Cathedral of Fire considered this month an important one. The celebration for this event that happened once a year in Aouine should have started early, but the noble officials in the Grinoires region had no mood to spend time on the events due to the constant battles they faced from Madara.

However, it appeared there was some changes as there were rumors that the army comprised of frightening undead creatures had stopped at Dragos and did not proceed any further to the north. The Silver-Winged knights had won two victorious battles and reclaimed much land, despite several defeats. Many more rumors spread throughout the land, and people were unable to differentiate the truth. Fortunately, most of the commoners would rather believe in good news, and they praised Duke Nakkin for being wise and strong.

On the seventh day, Incirsta's army turned towards Randner, and the villages in the Grinoires area received their peace again.

People started claiming that the war was over because it was the time when the Sun walked on the Earth, and once the undead touched the ground they would burn up, and the kingdom was naturally going to go for a counter attack.

No one knew where the rumors started, but it was spread around the nearby areas within a few days.

Brendel sat next to a wooden table and listened to the farmers' discussion nearby him. He and a few others had just left Ankries and were heading to Bruglas without much issues. The undead numbers were getting smaller, so the farmers were at least right about the war ending soon.

Marden had successfully brought the villagers to Ankries, and the news of the fall of Bucces region quickly spread to Fortress Vermeire. He naturally became a hero and the guards and militia that he brought along were glorified and placed into a list where rewards awaited them. Freya and Romaine were also in the list, but this was certainly not the end of the rewards. Brendel knew that there was a more important play going on later.

[After the war, the kingdom is going to require 'Heroes' in order to boost the morale of the citizens. In a war, victory or defeat isn't that important, but it's more important to have figureheads that allow people to look at.]

When Brendel and the others reached Ankries, Marden and the militia were sent to Bruglas without any delay. The nobles wanted to gather goodwill from the capital, and the army needed to be praised, therefore they had no reason for any clashes.

In the end, the glory was attached to the local White-Mane army instead of the local nobles, which signified that Ankries also had political clashes between the two factions.

However, two news surprised Brendel.

[Bucces's guards did not get wiped out by the undead forces entirely. Bretton and a few of the men close to him survived. Ahh, I feel really annoyed when I think about that hateful bastard, but at the same time I somehow feel relieved that he survived this.]

The other news really surprised him and made him feel at a loss.

[The 'Tiger' Luc Beson survived. What should I make of this? I know I changed history somewhat, but what did I do to help him survive?]

"Damn these bastards! What does it have anything to do with these cowardly nobles when Madara changed their targets to attack? Why doesn't anyone know Brendel and

who is Earl Nakkin?”

Freya was grumbling at the side and he looked over to her, only to find that she had a displeased demeanor.

Brendel could not suppress a smile.

“Earl Nakkin is the current head of the Douglas family. The family is very well known in this area and they go back a long time in history, and there are no common nobles that can be compared to them.”

She jumped slightly when she suddenly heard him speak, and her earlier temper subsided quickly. “B-but he can’t take the credit that others made...”

“The goals from the upper echelons are different from us. We basically will not have any contact with them. Furthermore, there’s no need to get angry with the farmers here. You look down on the nobles because you already know what’s inside their hearts, but these farmers are ignorant of the truth. In their eyes, the nobles are people of high importance that takes care of the country.”

Freya paused slightly when she suddenly realized that she had stereotypical thoughts as well in the past. She believed the city dwellers to be arrogant because of how much they know, while the nobles are far above the commoners who controlled everything. She looked closely at the youth. After she met Brendel, she had learned many more truths about the world, and seemed to grow up a lot.

The events that appeared mysterious and difficult had become common place now.

[Was Brendel the one who changed me, or did the war somehow changed my views?]

Brendel noticed she was deep in thought. “What are you thinking?”

“Have I changed?”

“Humans naturally change, Freya. It just depends where the change is.”

“What?” She looked at him in slight confusion.

“Wisdom.”

“Wisdom?”

“Because you see more things than the others, and know more than the others, that you find the world becoming more insignificant. That is wisdom.”

“Then what about you?”

“You can think of it this way. When you know the things I know, the world would become complicated in your eyes, and the events from the future would cause you an endless amount of worry.” The youth paused for a while before answering.

Freya thought about it and shook her head to show that she did not understand.

Brendel smile: “You might come to know of it in the future—”

He suddenly Romaine placing her chin onto the table with utter boredom with her puppy eyes on him. His pleasant mood was cut by half.

“What is it not?” He asked.

“Nothing.” Romaine immediately denied it.

Brendel found himself at a loss for words. The common sense of the girl in front of him frequently stopped his conversation from continuing. He contemplated for a while before changing the topic.

“Come to think of it, what are you planning since yesterday?”

Romaine’s eyes shone and she sat up.

“I’m calculating the price.”

“Price?”

“Ever since the Month of the Moon Flowers, Ankries’s food prices went up by fifty percent. If the war continues until winter, then the merchant Romaine will be able to make her first profit.” She answered with logical sense.

Her words surprised both of them. It looked like the lass was having a great time for the past two days in Ankries, off to complete her own adventures, but did not realize

that she had investigated the market.

But Brendel was surprised at the merchant girl's acuity, while Freya was surprised that her best friend had a serious side to her.

"Looks like you can't complete it," Brendel got interested and replied: "The war will only last to the middle of the seventh month. Looks like your first plan is about to go up in smokes, great merchant lady."

"Really?"

"Most likely." Brendel said that it was hundred percent in his heart. He was hoping to see the dejected look on Romaine's face, but he was quickly disappointed.

"Hey, Brendel." She blinked. "I heard that Bruglas constantly supplies food and wine to Dragos, Ankries and the Bucca region every year right? Ankries and Dragos are also Grinoires's most important southern areas because they produce food right?"

[You even investigated this?] Brendel looked at little Romaine.

"Then Bruglas with the population of thirty-five thousand, they would have stopped producing wine at the end of the fifth month because of the war situation right?"

"Considering that the nobles received the news early, I think they might have stopped doing so at the beginning of the fifth month." Brendel reflected on the overall Madara invasion and realized that very few people would notice any signs of the war because of how controlled the information was.

Romaine nodded. "Then if the war ends during the middle of the seven month, Ankries wouldn't be able to support two festivals, and if Bruglas wants to transfer wine and food, they would have to do so from the north and pass over the Grey Eagle mountains. If that is the case, the wine prices from that region should be expensive if you add on the fees incurred by the journey."

"Who exactly told you this?" Brendel listened in surprise.

"My aunt said that ignoring the advice from your elders would be punished by the Gods." Romaine looked at the two in front of her and answered seriously. "Old man Anton, the cripple Carl and Mister John are people who had produced wine for half their lives for Bruglas. Brendel, do you want the Great Merchant Romaine to introduce

any of them them to you? They are really good at what they do!"

Brendel looked at the merchant girl and her imaginary wagging tail that was working furiously. He could believe that people liked her carefree spirit, but what was with the 'Great Merchant Romaine'?

"So you want want to gain a profit before the war ends? That's your plan?"

She nodded furiously.

"You lack the capital?"

She continued to nod furiously.

"Wait," Freya finally found an appropriate time to stop them. She frowned as she spoke. "Brendel, you're aren't going to become crazy like Romaine right? We don't have much money."

"Perhaps little Romaine can give us a surprise on this matter."

But Freya did not believe that such an opportunity would drop onto their laps.

Chapter 30

Brendel's plans

But Freya did not get to finish her talk as she saw Romaine's sad face, and swallowed the angry words that she had.

"W-whatever. I can't be bothered anymore."

Brendel already knew that Freya was someone who had all bark and no bite, so he took out his own bag and emptied it. A few silver coins fell out from it, and it appeared like he had around five hundred Tor.

His mouth opened slightly as he did not expect that he had so little money. He had sold off a low grade gem from Ebdon's loot for a good price in Ankries that was worth of tens of thousands of Tor. He had split up the money into three parts and divided them to Freya and Romaine. But after purchasing some ingredients for an alchemy potion, he used up most of it.

The ingredients that he had were planned to make a High-potion that was supposed to raise willpower for a short time. It was called a 'Berserker's potion for mages' in the game, and it was more likely to be even more popular in this world.

But this item was an investment that would not see profit like the painting of the Elven princess that was worth a few million Tor.

[Especially this darn painting. I can't sell it anytime soon. I kind of regret leaving the decision to Ciel. If I had known this I would have just asked him to take some random gold or silver plates... This type of special item isn't easily sold even in the black market, unless I have personal connections.]

He arranged the coins on the table and sighed. "Looks like I only have this much. But Freya should have some money left, right—"

"W-what does your problems have anything to do with me?" Freya nearly choked from her ill mood. She glared at Brendel, but still took out her money pouch. "Grrrr. All our travel funds are inside here. Do what you want—"

Freya threw out over four thousand Tor and he looked at her in surprise.

They had been traveling around the Dragos region for nearly a month, and Romaine, Batum, Tamar and his son, as well as himself and Freya had been living on her budget. In fact, they had four more horses and the horse cart rental, so Brendel did not expect her to have much of the money left.

[Hoh... To think Freya is a budget planner...]

“What are you looking at?” Freya checked her clothes when she found Brendel staring at her.

“Nothing. I just thought you’re really a wise person. I wonder who’s lucky enough to marry you.”

“Freya is mine.” Romaine smiled happily.

Freya blushed like the evening sunset, her heart beating quickly. “What do you mean by lucky, s-stop talking nonsense.”

Then she glared angrily at Romaine: “And you, just shut up.”

But the merchant girl was long immune to such attacks. She smiled as she took out her bag which was just as empty as Brendel. “It looks like I ran out of money too.”

“Damn it, where did all your money go?!” Freya blurted out when she saw the empty bag. Logically, Romaine was the one who did not need to use any money.

“Investigating the market requires money, you know. Also I bought a storage warehouse and prepared a bit of wine.”

“You bought a warehouse?” Freya’s face asked when it happened.

“When Freya isn’t paying attention.”

“You need to tell us!”

Romaine thought seriously for a moment before wagging her finger. “A merchant needs to keep her secrets, heh.”

“You and your stupid secrets!” Freya was angry to the point she lost the ability to continue talking.

“Little Romaine, you stored wine and not food?” But Brendel raised a question.

“Yup, I mainly chose Juniper Berries Wine and the local sweet wines.” Romaine nodded.

Brendel was silent for a long while as he looked at her. He finally asked.

“You predicted that the war will end at the seventh month?”

“I thought it would be a little later than that. I didn’t think the situation would turn so fast. The Madara undead at Dragos didn’t seem like they are going to advance, so I think they are going to seek for another target. Didn’t Brendel always say that opportunities usually come only once, and I think the undead commander also know this. In any case, the nobles will definitely want a festival once the war ends.”

“When did you learn all these things?” Freya looked at her in disbelief.

“It’s a merchant’s secret.” Romaine’s imaginary tail wagged proudly again.

“You really do learn very fast.” Brendel’s hand looked like he was going to pat her head, but his fingers flicked Romaine’s forehead and made her clasp it. Her brows furrowed and she complained: “D-don’t flick my forehead Brendel!”

Brendel looked at the pool of money.

[But maybe it has nothing to do with any learning and is more of a natural instinct. It’s rare to see someone as talented as little Romaine. I have to maintain my identity after Bruglas, and I need a lot of capital to fulfill my plans. Even before constructing any new buildings, Leto and his large group of mercenaries still require me to pay them. Now that I have taken another look at the budget before us, it seems that I have to the task of earning money up in my schedule.]

Brendel rubbed his forehead.

[The higher ranked items that I have, like the painting or potion, can’t be sold in the southern Grinoires region due to many reasons. Too poor, too politically sensitive, hardly any black market presence... Unless I go to Grinoires’s Folcrose, or the northern

free port Ampere Seale, or Monsteras. These areas are where the filthy rich nobles reside, and selling in the black market in that area wouldn't raise too much attention... The best option is still alchemy.]

Brendel decided that it was best for him to use alchemy since he also had Tamar as an assistant. He briefly considered to pretend to be a prophet of sorts since he knew the future events, but abandoned it when he considered that he might be branded as a heretic and burned on a stake like a witch.

[Most of the nobles like to use poison or acquire mana potions so they can recruit intermediate tier wizards... Hmm profits would be...]

"Romaine, how much do you need, is one hundred thousand Tor enough?"

"One hundred thousand?" Freya was surprised. "When did we have so much money?"

"I heard that Nakkin's treasury has quite a bit of money in it." Brendel rubbed his chin.

"Y-you—" Freya's face immediately paled. From the performance in Fortress Riedon, she was certain that Brendel could pull it off.

But Romaine did not act like she cared at all, and replied without any guilt in her voice. "It's best to have more than that. I can guarantee that the profits would double."

"Stop that and persuade Brendel, h-he's trying to—" Freya carefully looked around her and did not finish her sentence. She was afraid that someone would inform the local authorities and they would not be permitted to leave this inn.

"Freya, Brendel can be trusted."

"Your head cannot be trusted!"

Freya was fuming, but she ultimately made up her mind not to let Brendel steal from the treasury of a noble. The escape from Fortress Riedon was a last resort, but no matter what, this attempt must not be allowed.

She convinced herself that it was out of justice and not because she was afraid of seeing Brendel's neck in a noose. She glared at Brendel once she thought it through and calmed down.

“Why did you bring all of us to this village?” She suddenly asked Brendel.

There did not seem to be anything in this village except for a single inn. There were only twenty or thirty families and this looked like a place that people stopped for a while and rest, but they were here for the entire morning.

But Brendel was equally impatient as well. He had sent out Batum for a task half an hour ago, but he still had not returned.

[Did I predict it wrongly?... No, this place is the right place. My memory isn't bad enough that I can mistaken it for a different place. What does this mean? That person hasn't moved in to this place yet? But didn't the forums state that he was always here?]

Brendel finally raised his eyebrow when he saw the striking red moustache from Batum at the corner of the street.

Chapter 31

Master of the Mithril Fort, Tulman

In the Amber Sword, there had been a long standing rumor in the forums. A hidden sage that had a level of hundred and twenty was residing in the Needle Forest between Bruglas and Ankries. It was only after a long period into the game before a player finally discovered that legendary figure.

[Austein Tulman. Master of the Mithril Fort. Grand sage, as well as an intermediate wizard. The Silver leader of the Twelve Circles magic association. After the association disbanded, he left the air city Kanogi and retired in the Needle Forest. Users tried to garner goodwill from him and found that they could get the sub profession Sage from him, but the majority of them chose to pay a little money and get the profession from Bruglas's library for nobles.]

Brendel did not know if there were any additional side quests or secrets from him as no users mentioned that they did. However, regardless of whether they succeeded or not, he was about to try out personally now.

[There's no harm in trying anyway. I personally think it strange that a level 120 titled sage only offered a profession as a reward. Since I didn't try it out in the game, I'll do it now. If there's a shortcut to success, I'll definitely take it.]

He found out from Batum that Tulman did not live in the village, but a short distance away on a hill. Due to his small error, Batum took the entire morning before finding out the correct place.

[That's a pretty big blunder that I made.]

The four of them slowly made their way to the Sage's house. The path from Ankries to Bruglas was considerably used, so they did not see a rustic scenery like Bucces's region had.

Every short distance or so, they found wooden fences line in a row, with fallen leaves covering the gravels. It was a place that made people relax, and Freya lost herself in the beautiful forest, while Romaine followed from behind and scampered everywhere,

finding this place to be very interesting.

It was only Brendel who saw enough of this scenery to be irritated after walking for nearly an hour. He asked Batum who was in front of him: "Batum, are you certain that the person I'm looking for is living in this area?"

Batum wiped the sweat off from his face while he took off his hat. "I'm certain of that, my lord. If you're looking for an old man with a long white beard and long grey robes, there's only one person in this area. Please be assured of Batum's search."

Brendel nodded.

He mostly trusted in Batum. The mercenary had done a reasonable job in his tasks, and he had listened carefully to his orders without much issues.

Batum also found that Brendel had given him tasks within a mercenary's capacity and did not overestimate his abilities, and the former was impressed with his leader's eye for men.

The only thing that he did not understand was the relationship between his wizard squire and Brendel. The youth named Ciel kept appearing and disappearing out of nowhere, and he could only view it as the mysterious ways of a Highland Knight.

Freya exclaimed with surprise when they finally reached the end of the forest. There was a lone wooden house in the midst of a grassy hill, with a clear path leading to it.

It was quite a unique house, as it looked like half an overturned barrel on the ground. The door was located in the center of this 'barrel', while the two sides had windows decorated with pots of various silver and purple flowers. Even Brendel could not identify all of the flowers, but he noted that they might be rare magical plants.

They walked to the wooden fences surrounding the house and found a bell on the gate.

[If Tulman isn't taking a nap or something, he has most likely discovered our presence with a magic spell. Anyone who rings this bell will most likely draw his ire. This is not used for alerting him that someone is in front of his house but alerting him that there's an emergency or something, like a dragon invading the village, heh.]

He suddenly felt someone touching his shoulder, and he saw Freya's troubled face when he turned around.

“Brendel, what is this place?”

She noticed that Brendel was here to meet someone, but she had no clue as to who it was.

“It’s an old man’s home.” Brendel’s gaze was back on the house’s wooden door.

“An old man?”

“Yup. He’s a wizard.”

Freya nearly knocked the sword off from her belt as she yelped in surprise. Not only her, even the veteran Batum straightened up when he heard that. They were meeting a real wizard that was unlike the flaky apprentice Ciel.

Many people in the entire continent and not just Aouine alone, viewed wizards as the most mysterious figures in bedtime stories, and listened to their rumors growing up, and even associated them with monsters and Gods.

But most of them did not know that it was a common sight to see wizards in the biggest cities, especially in the royal court or academies established by the royal families. The only rare variants were the Black Wizards or witches that were truly unique to be placed inside legendary stories.

But Brendel discovered that Romaine was looking a little tense.

“Why are you looking so anxious?”

“My aunt says we need to be polite when we greet wizards, otherwise there might be unnecessary trouble.”

“Hmm?”

Before Brendel could answer, there was an elderly voice that came from within the house. The door opened with a creak.

“This isn’t something what commoners would say. Little girl, who’s your aunt?”

The old voice matched the person who spoke. An elderly man appeared before them with grey long robes and silvery hair, along with a pair of shell-rimmed spectacles. His

white beard extended all the way to his waist and swayed as he approached the four.

Everyone saw the legendary Tulman for the first time, even Brendel.

“My aunt is my aunt.” Romaine did not appear shy at all.

The old man looked at the others with clouded eyes. They swept past Brendel and Batum, but they paused for a while when he looked at Freya.

Finally, they went back to Romaine and he smacked his lips. “I know who your aunt is when I look at you. Hmph, you definitely got her personality right.”

[What, this wizard knows Romaine’s aunt? But he’s a real wizard from those rumored stories!] Freya could not believe her ears.

[Tulman actually knows Romaine’s aunt as a witch.] Brendel was surprised that Tulman seemed to know Romaine’s aunt personally.

“You know Aune Jennie? “Have you seen Romaine’s aunt before?”” Both of them talked at the same time.

Tulman wanted to go back into the house, but he stopped when he heard them. He looked at Freya first without saying anything, but when he looked at Brendel, he asked.

“Young man, do you know the meaning of courtesy?”

Brendel coughed as he realized his mistake. He could only smile and act like nothing had happened.

“Wasting time is an embarrassing act, Ser Tulman. I’m only trying to save time—”

Tulman narrowed eyes widened slightly: “Do you know me?”

“Certainly,” Brendel did not mince his words: “The Master of the Mithril Fort, Silver Leader of the Twelve Circle Association. I certainly know of Ser Tulman.”

The hat in Batum’s hands dropped when he heard that. There was a famous legend where a group comprised of brigands and mercenaries that numbered nearly five hundred, along with two ogres, had their eyes on the legendary Mithril items.

They were all turned into stone by the Master of the Mithril Fort...

They were still placed on a desolate beach where seafarers could see them from time to time.

That legendary figure was now in front of him and what shocked him was Brendel's casual attitude towards him. He could not help but feel this lord knight was insane.

But he was even more shocked to find out what happened later on.

Tulman turned around and looked at the young man again when he heard his words. He carefully observed him as if to make sure that there was no one like him in his memories, before he spoke again.

"Young man, it seems like you're prepared when you came here. But who exactly are you, I don't recall someone like you in my memories. Whose son are you?"

Brendel thought that was something suspicious when Tulman recognized Romaine's aunt.

[One of the famous witches? Perhaps the legendary Blue Witch who abandoned her title as the ruler of witches to live in the world of mortals? Hmm. Well I can think about it later on.]

Brendel shook his head. "I'm not a son of any of your acquaintances. I came here because I have a question."

"Question?"

Brendel cleared his throat and spoke with an accent: "Stam—"

The old man looked as if he understood something, but his eyebrows knitted together soon enough.

"What is the meaning of that word?"

Brendel's eyebrow went up. He just spoke a word from Kirrlutz's poem of world creation, the text in the original Blue Poem. In the later era, every original document in the game literally sparked a war between wizards each time they were discovered. Cold perspiration formed on his head when he thought there were no 'Nature Slates'

in this world.

[W-wait. It's because the era isn't right. The main quest isn't about Madara conquering Aouine, the real primary quest started when the Nature Slates started showing up. The 'World Wizard War 1'...Or something. Cough. I don't intend to spark the war but this word should be enough to spark the interest of Tulman. It's meaningless if one doesn't have the entire text, but it's a word from the 'Creation of the World'...]

Brendel believed that Tulman was able to recognize the research value in it.

"Ser Tulman, have you heard of the Blue Poem, the poem of creation from Kirrlutz?"

Tulman stroked his beard. He had indeed felt the ancient magic and meaning from that word. It was not powerful, but it seemed to encompass the origin of magic. He thought that it was an ancient dragon word, or a variant of wizard or druid languages, but he did not manage to find anything close to it after carefully searching his memories.

Tulman did not suspect the youth was lying to him, and quite frankly as a sage who had spent a century researching such things, he would be impressed with the people who managed to lie to him.

"You mean the very first historic poem that Kirrlutz translated as the Holy Elven song?"

Brendel knew that the Silver Citizens were biased against humans. The residents of Buga were humans of ancient blood and despised the humans who lived on the surface. However, the lineage of Kirrlutz extended deeply into history and made the Silver Citizens jealous and certainly something they were unwilling to admit.

Brendel simply nodded as all these had nothing to do with him.

"What does it have anything to do with what you said?"

The discussion had gone beyond the limit as to what the other three people could accept. They did not understand anything what Brendel and Tulman were saying. Freya could only watch as Brendel's shadow grew bigger in her heart, while Batum's jaws were completely opened.

[Ahem. Indeed, I certainly don't know what exactly it has to do with what I said...] Only the Gods know that Brendel was trying to pull a false one.

“It’s a word from the Blue Poem, describing how Mother Marsha created this world with kind intentions, Ser Tulman. I believe you are able to experience the magic for yourself on the word itself.”

Tulman’s expression changed and he hurriedly went back into his house. There was a series of noises where books were opened and pages being turned.

Brendel knew that his plan had half succeeded, and he gestured to the others to come along with him. All four of them went into Tulman’s home.

Chapter 32

Scholar

The first thing that Brendel saw when he entered Tulman's house were manuscripts strewn all over the incredibly polished pine floor. When he turned to the left, he saw a thick book placed on a pedestal. The technology in this world was not advanced, and the papers that were made are considerably thick. They had to use leather skin with binding to lock it in place, thus making it bulky and cumbersome when transporting the books, and they easily spoiled too.

Even though the kingdom had a library as well as a royal academy, they were typically reserved for merchants, and ranked nobles' descendants. Most of the time, the commoners would rather send their children to various workshops and work as an apprentice.

Brendel walked up to the book and checked the contents quickly.

[Ancient languages. Tulman is actually studying them. Judging from his notes, he looks like he's studying the variants of the old Highland language used in Kirrlutz. Based on his notes, he seemed to have made a certain amount of progress. If I pass these notes to Batum or Freya, they will most likely treat them as scrap paper.]

Tulman finally stopped flipping through the books inside his house and went up to him.

"Young man, where did you discover this language?" Tulman finally found a obscure variant language that resembled Brendel's pronunciation from his related documents.

Tulman discovered that there were five ancient Kirrlutz tribes, and the weakest group amongst them was called Deronhi. Their language appeared to be greatly similar to the Blue Poem's word and the Kirrlutz's ancestors might have truly recorded down history.

Tulman have always suspected that the Kirrlutz's current citizens were not true descendants, but was unable to deny that the King of Flames, Gatel, had traits of the ancient Kirrlutz's race.

Brendel grinned but he did not answer.

Tulman pushed his spectacles up and he carried a huge book from the inner room and walked out. He sat down on a chair near the window and faced Brendel. He looked at the four of them, before opening the shelf next to the chair and took out a smoking pipe from the second drawer. He tapped the pipe on the table, and flames immediately lit the leaves in it, causing the smoke to rise up.

He put the pipe in his mouth and took a deep breath, puffed out smoke from his nostrils and said: "It seems like you have something that you want, young man. State your request then. I must say you have succeeded in making these old bones interested."

He then placed the pipe onto an ash tray, and said with smoke coming out from his lips: "But you have not won yet. Boy, even though I am already old, I have not gone senile yet. What exactly do you want to get from me if you only have a single word? You had better bring something that is of use."

The old man's words finally made Batum and Freya realize that Brendel was trying to make a transaction, but they did not know what exactly he wanted to do.

Romaine was fond of Brendel's calm attitude. Even though it sounded like the old man was being stubborn, he was already admitting defeat.

"I'm a Highland knight. I require someone to invite me to the Scholar's Circle, and my squire's mentor told me come here as well as what I should do. This is how it really is, Ser Tulman." Brendel decided to squeeze everything he could from the fake identity. If one was to look at it from a certain point of view, he was not lying.

In the rules of the Highland, the wizard apprentice's mentor had the responsibilities of teaching the knight as well. Brendel believed that Tulman knew many of the wizards in the Black Tower, and would not reveal himself as a fake Highland Knight.

Tulman placed one arm on the armrest as he inhaled from the pipe again and sank into deep thought. He was thinking of which one of his old acquaintances sent this troublesome man to him. Even though he was not a powerful wizard, he was a great scholar and well known alchemist, high famed amongst the wizards. His friends and enemies were all over Vaunte, and he had difficulty guessing who it was that played a joke on him.

But in the end, he thought that recommending a newcomer to the Scholar's Circle was not a big issue, and looking at Brendel's performance, he would not cause him to lose any face.

So Tulman grabbed a parchment and placed it on the table, picked up a quill nearby and wrote something on it. Then he rolled it up and placed it into an envelop, dripped wax on it and stamped his seal onto it.

He raised his head up.

"I'll recommend you to Earl Panos to learn from him for a while and you will know how we do things. He might be an old-fashioned person, but he's a very good teacher, what do you think?"

"Perfect." Brendel answered.

[So much negotiation and so much of my performance, just to save a few hundred Tor for registration in that place? I can't take this lying down!]

He decided to try and put more work into it. He walked up and grabbed the letter with his fingers.

"Ser Tulman, about that word, the humble me has also studied the Kirrlutz's ancient languages as well. I have discovered something interesting. The natives who are still living in the Baltha Highland seem to keep to their old ways, and there are a few wizards amongst them who still hold on to single words passed down from the ancient times, keeping the ancient Kirrlutz's language alive—"

Brendel said with half-truths mixed into it. It was true that the people there could trace their lineage to the old Kirrlutz's citizens, and the clues to a 'Nature Slate' started out from there, but the first Nature Slate was somewhere else.

The slates were of no practical use to Brendel, and he did not want to plunge the world into a chaotic war.

Tulman's eyes lit up, as the leaves burned and dimmed.

"You're studying the Kirrlutz's ancient languages?" He looked suspiciously at the youth. "Tell me of your views."

“I believe that Ser Tulman has already discovered that the ancient languages incorporates magic into it. All their words are linked to the origin of magic, but the Era of Chaos was the moment where things split. After that moment, the magic in their words started to weaken.....” Brendel thought for a while before taking some random lore that he had seen from the forums.

Tulman nodded and he acknowledged it with his eyes.

“The cause of effect is probably from long wars.” Brendel continued.

“Long wars, interesting,” The old man took a ring from the drawer and passed it to Brendel. “You can go to Earl Panos’s private library collection and take a look there. If you have any new ideas, then come back to me with this ring.”

[Oh? It’s working. Looks like a quest to me. I’m not sure if anyone made it to this point, but it sounds like it’s going to be quite difficult. Still, it’s a start.]

Brendel was delighted.

[He’s probably planning to set off to the Baltha Highland to research the lore there and come back here, but I wonder if he is going to get anything out of it.]

He took the ring and letter, and there were elegant green words hovering in his vision:

{Do you accept the sub-profession ‘Scholar’?}

Brendel immediately accepted it. A new sub-profession bar appeared in his stats window.

Scholar

Level 0, 0/6

Level 1 History Knowledge

In the game, a sub-profession is different from a main profession. Sub-professions did not introduce new techniques or stats, but allowed users to gain unique abilities. It was something akin to having ‘Status’.

For example, when a user reached level 5 and above, it allowed a user to acquire a

‘Skilled’ title before the sub-profession class, and in Brendel’s case, he would be a ‘Skilled Scholar’. There would not be any XP penalty interference from having too many main classes as well, unless he got more than three ‘Skilled’ sub profession titles. At the same time, being a Scholar provided many more TP points than other main classes, and therefore it was recognized as a ‘must have profession’ in the game.

Once Brendel took on the class, he immediately put in 220 XP to raise it up to level 5, and received 250 TP from it. Raising it beyond level 5 required the sub-skill ‘Nobles’ Knowledge’ or ‘Sigils’ Knowledge’, so Brendel could only leave it aside.

He looked like he was slightly lost in thought when he finished setting up his class, but he raised his head once he was done.

“Ser Tulman, you have already met my friend Romaine. She and her aunt were separated when Madara attacked, and we’re looking for her aunt. Have you seen her?”

Tulman pushed back his glasses again as took another puff.

“Young man, I only know her aunt as an acquaintance. We have not met in over ten years, I think. When I first saw that lass, she was just as old as this girl in front of me. To tell the truth, I did not know that she actually lived nearby here–”

He quickly waved his hands when he saw Brendel’s lips move: “There’s no need to ask about it. Our types have their own secrets. If she didn’t tell you, I won’t say anymore. Alright, our discussion should be coming to a close. Your goal has been met, and when you think that you have enough knowledge about this road, you can come and find me again.”

Brendel took a look at Romaine. She smiled sweetly at him: “It’s fine, Brendel. My aunt is really amazing.”

His heart skipped a beat when he saw her smile.

Chapter 33

The Red Bronze Dragon, Leto

After the three of them left Tulman's home in the Forest of Needles, Batum finally could not hold back his curiosity and asked Brendel timidly: "My lord, do your elders know that Lord Wizard?"

The youth glanced at him and gave a smile, but he did not reply.

Batum looked at him in confusion, not knowing what Brendel meant by his smile. Even though this knight had led them to carve out a blood road from the Madara undead army which him incredibly impressed, he felt that Brendel did not act like a proper noble from the interactions he had with him every day.

Despite the fact that the youth had said he would inherit a land, Batum did not truly believe in his words fully, feeling that nobles tend to exaggerate what they had. Still, he decided to follow him because he still believed in the youth's capabilities.

But after witnessing the interactions between the elderly wizard and the youth, he firmly believed in him now.

[This young knight must have a powerful background, one that is unique amongst the influential families. Normal nobles would not have anything to do with these wizards of high authority, and their lineage might not even need to lower themselves even before the king.]

Batum scratched his head as he looked at Brendel who was in front.

The third morning, Brendel and his group finally reached Bruglas—

Bruglas could be seen as the heart of Grinoires's southern area. The city was built along the slopes of Grey Eagle Hills along the eastern side of the Pine River, and buildings were distributed on the upper and lower hills.

The city was surrounded by concentric white walls, with each wall higher than the first, and rural villagers sometimes called Bruglas as the White City.

Under a clear sky, travellers from Ankries and Dragos were able to see the shining rooftops decorating the streets lined along the hill.

It was certainly a breathtaking sight, and represented a prosperous civilization.

While it was not considered a large city, there were thirty-five thousand people tightly packed in it, and probably the most densely populated areas in the Grinoires area.

The city also had many facilities and workshop situated in the Black Pine Avenue, where constant carriages and mules carrying heavy goods passing by all the time. Travelers from other cities could be seen haggling from the merchants as well.

Freya and Romaine were greatly surprised by the tall walls and clean streets as they came here for the first time. The bustling area had surpassed what they had seen in Ankries and Fortress Riedon. Even Brendel was amazed by the grandeur of the city when he saw it in the first time in the game.

Everyone became excited when they passed through the streets, but Freya and Romaine quickly stopped before the jewelry shops. The shining and intricate things that Bruglas made were exceptional, and they quickly caught the girls' attention.

Freya looked enviously at a crescent brooch, while Romaine was attracted to a silver casket. Brendel could not hold back his laughter when he saw them hugging the items tightly.

The youth gestured to Batum and both of them made their way quietly to the owner and asked the prices, and ultimately paid a few hundred Tor to purchase the items. Romaine easily accepted the gift with surprised delight with a happy gaze, while Freya lowered her head with a blush and thought for a long time before accepting it, then quietly thanked him.

Brendel was not surprised at Freya's struggle to accept it, but when he looked back, he saw Batum giving a thumbs up stealthily. He paused before a while before laughing.

[This red beard guy is really thinking too much... I just don't want to see both of the girls disappointed if they didn't get any souvenirs from the city.]

After this slight detour, they finally made their way to their destination.

The headquarters of the Silver Winged Cavalry —

Before they actually made their way into the place, they saw the little brat Fenix.

[Hmm, looks like this kid had a pretty good time from the time we saw him. He actually looks fatter.]

Little Fenix rubbed his eyes when he saw the three of them.

“Sister Boss, Brendel, Freya! Heavens, I’m not dreaming right!”

The teenager yelled and jumped down from one of the boulders in front of the headquarters and looked at them in wonder. Freya almost subconsciously scolded him when she saw the rowdy boy, but changed her words at the end.

“Little Fenix, where’s everyone?”

“Everyone’s still around, we’re fine, Sister Boss!” Then he looked at Brendel with great admiration: “Brother Brendel, everyone knows about the news where you rescued the refugees out of Fortress Riedon. Some of them went to Dragos and then to Bruglas, so the stories about your exploits have spread around. Did you really fight along side with the super amazing ‘Red Bronze Dragon’, Leto?”

“‘Red Bronze Dragon’, Leto?” Brendel was slightly surprised that Leto got a nickname like that, even though he had a part in it.

“Brat, what do you really know about amazing?” Batum knew that these rumors were actually Brendel’s instructions amongst the refugees. He did not know why the youth did not want to take this glory, but he still wanted to interrupt Fenix.

“Of course I do. Isn’t it super amazing that a single man leading a few hundred men was able to escape the undead siege comprised of tens of thousands of undead?” Fenix nodded with much sense in his words: “‘Red Bronze Dragon’, Leto, I have also heard that he’s a veteran in the November’s War, like captain Marden. Of course he’s amazing! Ah, right, who are you, mister?”

Batum nearly choked himself, but when he wanted to reply, little Fenix’s eyes suddenly shone and he yelled loudly: “Are you the Red Beard Batum!”

“Huh, brat, do you know me?” Batum was confused.

“Of course I do. I think very few people in Bruglas do not know your name. There are

rumors about the Red Beard Batum who makes the undead quiver in their boots everywhere in the street! If you don't believe me, just ask the Ser Knights in the headquarters, even they know about you!"

"Making the undead quiver in their boots, this description isn't bad at all." Everyone loved praises, and Batum was no exception. But just when he laughed with pride, he suddenly remembered the youth who created this miracle was just beside him. He quickly stashed away his laugh and snorted. "Hmph, a bunch of morons."

Little Fenix was baffled by his response, but as a young teenager, he thought that many skilled people had odd temperaments and did not mind Batum's reaction. He looked at Brendel and asked: "Brother Brendel, you must be an important member amongst the mercenaries since you're so amazing right?"

Brendel laughed and ruffled the kid's hair while nodding.

"Tch, I knew it. All the other brats in the street don't believe what I told them about you."

Freya listened to the talk in great perplexment. She looked at Brendel and called him a great liar in her heart, but once she thought about Brendel's invincible charge against the numerous undead forces, she felt her heart racing and turned her head away.

Romaine merely smiled at one side, and no one knew what she was thinking.

While they conversed amongst themselves, the news of 'Heroes of Fortress Riedon' returning to Bruglas had already spread in the headquarters. The citizens in the city loved to watch events like this, so the street was quickly filled with people. There were even a few young men from the Silver Winged Cavalry that came out in twos and threes to look at the person who managed to fight their way out from Madara's undead.

The Silver Winged Cavalry was the formal troops of the White-mane army, and part of them had fought against the Madara's undead troops and they knew how difficult they could be. Most of them were unwillingly to believe these ridiculous rumors, but there were reports from both the refugees and the soldiers from Fortress Riedon that confirmed the rumors, and the commander of the Silver Winged Cavalry, Lord Xelnal, found there might be truth in the rumors.

There were still thousands of refugees nearby Bruglas that did not leave yet, although no one seemed to have seen the 'Red Bronze Dragon', Leto before.

The lower ranked and upper ranked officers saw things differently. The lower ranked officers started to look up to the legendary figure, while the upper echelons wanted to know what was going on.

"Fenix, are these the mercenaries from Fortress Riedon?"

A few boys the age of Fenix wormed out from the crowd and asked Little Fenix.

"Of course, this is my Sister Boss, Brother Brendel, and this is....." Little Fenix pointed at Batum and paused.

"He can't be the 'Red Beard Batum'?!"

The expressions on the boys changed immediately. The striking red beard on Batum was too easy to recognize.

"Hehe, at least you're not stupid." Little Fenix's tail could be seen wagging furiously. He knew that Brendel was impressive, but he did not think he would be linked to legendary people in the rumors. Even though he had exaggerated some of the details and no one believed in him, he finally got revenge when he saw their shocked expressions.

While the boys were in admiration, Brendel felt the gazes of ill intentions from some of the soldiers within the Silver Winged Cavalry. He was not surprised at that, and had instructed them the refugees to spread a different rumor in order to escape attention. He was still too weak and not suited to be placed within the tempest that was to come.

At first Batum was his main choice to be his shield, but he also needed someone familiar with Aouine, so Leto was the best choice. However, it seemed that the army was still unhappy and jealous over the events.

[The game itself had troubling cases of jealousy and pride, not to mention reality itself...]

He sighed inwardly.

Chapter 34

The gazes from the soldiers made Brendel to be on his guard a little, but he believed that the superiors in the White-Mane army were not incompetent and were unable to look at the big picture.

His plan had not changed.

He was not interested to enter Aouine's decaying internal government, but the events of the refugee's rescue would not be to be kept under covers. Since that was the case, he planned ahead to allow the experienced mercenaries who sought after freedom, glory and wealth to stand out.

It was far more easier to make people believe that a group of well trained mercenaries led the refugees out successfully than a single person doing so.

The loss of Fortress Riedon was like a bomb that could explode anytime. No matter how much the White-Mane cavalry army stood out in the battles against Madara, they were unlikely to escape the blame of losing the fortress. If he was to stand out alone in this particular aftermath, he would most certainly satisfy his pride, but the nobles would be even more pleased to use him as a political example.

Therefore his plan was to make sure there were as many people in this 'legendary tale' as possible, so that he could ensure that he was buried under everyone else who stood out.

He was certain that the nobles would act upon his plan, and whatever came next would be their own doing; To find scapegoats to cast all the blame of losing Fortress Riedon to them, and to make sure that they exaggerate the series of events in order to regain their dignity.

He wanted to have nothing to do with them and whatever tale they wanted to weave, but at this moment he was still unable to escape right now.

The only advantage he got out of this was the fame of his mercenary's group 'The Amber Sword' becoming bigger.

The crowd had their interest sated after a while, and the citizens outside the Silver Winged Cavalry headquarters quickly dispersed, while Little Fenix and the other boys stayed behind.

Brendel was able to meet old Marden very quickly after that. The aged captain of the guards looked like there were more wrinkles on his face since their previous meeting. He was moving about constantly with a worried look while looking at some documents. Brendel was certain that Marden was worried because of the situation amongst the nobles.

Within Brugas, Earl Nakkin's fight against the military nobles had most likely reached its peak, and only someone carefree like Little Fenix would have the mood to pursue stories in the city.

Brendel walked over to Marden and greeted him.

Marden raised his eyebrows when he saw him, recalling memories of the fearless young man who volunteered to warn Fortress Riedon. Even though he heard the news that Freya and Brendel were fine, he was relieved to see them fine in person, and secretly thanked Mother Marsha for her protection.

Then his gaze moved to Freya, and she immediately placed her hand over her chest and bowed. "Captain Marden, I'm back."

Marden nodded and showed a relieved smile. "Good. It's good to have you back."

But after he finished his sentence, his mind immediately went back to the situation about the nobles. The citizens of Bucce were still homeless while the nobles fought for power. Even though he was not from Bucce, he was upset over the situation.

Freya's eyes turned red when she saw Captain Marden looking like he had aged ten years, and she thought about her family dying in Madara's hands.

Little Romaine kept winking at Brendel and he sighed.

[Why is this damned lass so sharp during such moments... and yet when I start to pay attention to her, she's completely clueless and doing some weird stuff?]

He patted Freya's back to comfort her and said.

“Captain Marden. It might be rude to say this, but there’s really no need for any of you to think too much about the affairs amongst the nobbles. We only need to sit quietly and wait for their final decisions since we will not be able to influence any of their decisions in the slightest.”

Marden was taken aback as he did not expect Brendel to see through his worries immediately.

He had managed to survive through the November War, but he was completely unsuited to take part in the war taking place in the shadows. He was already exhausted from the reports these past few days, and sometimes he was even envious of that brat Fenix who did not even bother to put anything in his brain.

Brendel had been through this ‘history’ and he understood that someone of Marden’s position would not be able to affect the outcome, so there was really nothing to do other than to await for the nobles’ final decisions.

[Even though this sounds terribly bleak, it’s the truth after all.]

He merely wanted to tell Marden what he thought, but Marden looked suspiciously at him and asked: “Young man, who exactly are you? You sound like you have a clear picture of what the nobles are thinking of, but even if I’m not one who’s good at reading all these political affairs, it’s strange that you are able to know more than me.”

Freya secretly confirmed her thoughts with from Marden’s words.

[Since Brendel is able to know more than Captain Marden in this aspect, his identity is basically confirmed...]

She told Marden that Brendel was a Highland Knight, and Marden looked like he finally understood something.

“So you’re a noble, and a Highland Knight at that.” Marden stared at Brendel in surprise. “I had the chance to fight along side with a Highland Knight. Even though people said they are uncontrollable, but they certainly can be considered as heroes with unquestionable character. It looks like their descendants are just as amazing. At least you are proof of that, Brendel.”

“..... You give me too much praise Captain Marden.”

“Not at all. When you said you wanted to go through the Zevail mountain path to deliver the warning, I merely thought that you were a reckless boy who was not afraid of death. I did not support your decision at that time, and I thought it was a mistake to send Freya to go along with you and Romaine. But you proved me wrong. Young man, true bravery is not the same as foolhardy actions, and your performance is the very definition of true bravery. Certainly, your actions can even be described as heroic.”

He patted both Brendel and Freya’s shoulders: “Both of you are excellent and great examples of what Aouine youths should be like.”

Freya was silent and merely looked at Brendel.

[There would be hardly anyone left if Brendel was not there to lead everyone. All the credit should go to him, but no one knows about it at all...]

Brendel merely kept to himself.

The two of them then finally reunited with Buccé’s militia. Erik, Iris and Mackey congratulated both of them in the same order. Mackey even managed to bring a small barrel of wine to celebrate everyone’s survival after the terrible ordeal. The other members patted their backs without saying anything else, but their feelings were definitely shown through their actions.

What surprised Brendel was the encounter with Bretton who appeared together with his father. His expression was solemn and dark, but he gave a slight nod to Brendel as they walked past each other.

[That’s interesting... he didn’t try to pick a fight with me.]

Some time after that, Mackey informed him that Bretton was severely depressed over the guilt of losing his companions and blamed himself for the past month, and only became a little better until recently. Brendel again fell into silence for a moment upon listening, secretly impressed with Bretton’s character.

When their reunion party was approaching its end, a group of young Silver Winged cavalry soldiers even came in to their room to join the party. Brendel exchanged glances with Batum when they saw them.

[It seems that my plan to distribute the glory amongst the mercenaries also helped out by winning some people over. If all the glory went to me alone, something like this

wouldn't happen at all as I would appear to be someone out of reach.]

Once the celebration was over, Marden came to him in private to inquire on the matters about the nobles. Brendel made Freya stay behind and said:

"Captain Marden, the truth is the situation has already been decided. The representatives of the White-Mane Army will make contact with us very soon and tell us of their decisions. But there's no need to worry about this. Whatever decisions they made has nothing to do with us, and the only thing we need to do is to simply accept whatever rewards they want to give."

"Can you explain?" Marden asked.

"The situation is basically like this. They need people to be heroes, someone like you or Freya who performed admirably. They want people from the guards or the militia so that the citizens are able to link them to the regional forces. Since you led the Bucces' villagers to safety successfully, and you represent the formal army of Aouine, your glory can be considered to be part of the nobles as well."

Brendel rubbed his forehead.

"But a group of mercenaries leading two thousand refugees out from Madara's army that is comprised of tens of thousands of undead? That's a problem for the White-Mane army. If they handle this situation badly, they would become a laughing stock. Since the rumors have already spread throughout the southern region of Grinoires, they have no choice but to admit this event took place. Their main concern is how to handle this delicate situation."

"I see, we're actually a guise for the real people who are going to receive the rewards?" Batum suddenly said.

Brendel nodded: "The nobles have their eyes on Freya because she was part of the army that led Fortress Riedon's refugees out."

"Me?" Freya was engrossed in the discussion, but she suddenly woke up once she heard her name: "Brendel, I —"

"Freya, listen to what I have to say first." Brendel interrupted her. She paused for a moment before nodding.

Marden was quiet after listening to Brendel's analysis. He found it difficult to accept that the nobles looked at this war like the only thing that mattered was their appearance in the public, instead of finding a solution to the undead blight.

[What exactly are we fighting for...?]

Brendel continued: "The Silver Winged cavalry have their own principals. They dislike to work with the mercenaries because they think that they are full of greed, and to fight in a war just for money was not something they can accept."

Batum scoffed and his face was full of displeasure.

Brendel looked at him and smiled: "However, when times demand for it, they would still send someone privately to contact them—"

"Hypocrites." Batum's beard seemed to bristle.

"You can describe them that way, or you can say that their vanity is the reason for their attitude."

"But are these nobles not short-sighted to think this way?" Marden still found it hard to believe that the high nobles would be so shallow.

"Short-sighted?" Brendel shook his head.

[The nobles are no fools and certainly not short-sighted. If anything they understand the soldiers in the army better than they understood themselves. No, these nobles are brilliant, but the greed and vanity that they have are the reasons why they chose to do things in this manner.

If they have power and the army behind them, these nobles would be able to become independent and disregard the royal crown. Even if Madara invaded their territory, they would be fine with it because Madara will retreat at some point. And in the case where something was to go horribly wrong, their collected wealth would allow them to settle in another country in the continent without any problems at all.

The only people who are going to suffer is the lowest denominator. If that's the case, why would the nobles care other than vying for more power?]

Brendel continued: "No, they don't care because they know that Madara is going to

retreat soon. What is important is how they appear in the public. And when Madara's undead retreat, they would want to choose someone from the militia to be decorated as a hero. When the citizens look at that hero, they would immediately think of Aouine's formal army instead of the mercenaries."

"But, isn't Gaspard a better choice? He's the captain in charge of Fortress Riedon's public security, isn't he a better choice?" Freya restrained herself from talking about Taron. *(TL: Taron is from the Fortress Riedon's white mane army.)*

Brendel shook his head. "No, that's the worst choice for the superiors of the White-Mane Army. The cavalry in Fortress Riedon belongs to the nobles, a private army created to curb the power of the White-Mane Army's infantry. Do you really think that the military nobles of the White Mane Army is going to allow this to happen?"

Everyone realized that Freya seemed like the best choice after Brendel explained to them, and even Freya found herself unable to argue with Brendel.

Chapter 35

Goddess of War and Brendel

Brendel looked at the silent Freya and knew that she probably did not understand the details behind the politics. This was something that he expected, as a person from the countryside would not have seen the machinations behind the nobles' goals before.

[But to summarize everything, it's all about greed.]

He decided to be as clear as possible: "I know that it might be difficult for all of you to accept. But the truth is we're nothing but pawns on the chessboard, and they would not care about whether we live or die."

Freya was shocked when she heard that, and she looked up at him.

But Marden frowned and sighed. What Brendel said was what he had seen for the past few days. The nobles had declared to him that the Bucces' militia and his army would be rewarded for the defense. Everyone's morale was raised when they heard the news, but if he was to look at things in another way, only one or two of them would be promoted, and a meager amount of money to be distributed amongst them as a reward.

And every time he mentioned about Bucces' homeless refugees, the reply was always ambiguous.

"Freya, " Brendel looked deeply into Freya's light brown eyes. "If you hope to see something like everyone getting commended and rewarded for their efforts, then move back to the countryside and live a happy and safe life after the war, you're going to get disappointed for having such a naive and unrealistic thought."

"Brendel?"

"If you have the idea of just relying on someone else, you're going to become a pawn that's going to be discarded by the nobles sooner or later."

Freya had seen and heard much in Fortress Riedon, and she could somehow

understand his words, so she hesitated for a while before asking: “Then what should I do?”

“Become stronger, until you can be a person who can protect others.”

“I-I know, but—” Freya answered in a rush.

[I’m just the leader of a small militia group, how am I supposed to become as powerful as the nobles amongst the capital? It’s impossible!]

“You’re worried that you can’t do it?” He asked.

Freya nodded.

“There’s no need to be worried about it. An opportunity would present itself before you in the future.” He smiled and replied.

Freya was slightly confused and looked back in a daze.

Brendel had not told her what exactly he had planned for her. In truth, he wished for her to enter into the cavalry academy that was built by the royal crown, so that she could receive the kingdom’s formal education on commanding an army, as well as learning various combat knowledge.

He did not wish to change the Freya’s future as a Goddess of War, but at the same time, he wanted her to enter the higher ranks within the kingdom.

[Romaine is unable to go do something like this, and the only person with enough capabilities and my trust, is only Freya. In regards of safety, there’s really no need to worry about it. The school is in Verand, a land that is the private property of the Royal Crown. It is also a land that the princess would get hold of in December when the civil war starts. Everything seems to be good for Freya.]

Brendel did not think the old military commanding style and the tactics of Aouine was inferior, but there was a certain quality required for the strategies to work, and the Aouine army was getting weaker and weaker, ultimately causing the strategies to be ineffective.

[With Freya’s serious attitude, she will be absorbing the knowledge taught by the school like a sponge. When she gathers enough achievements under her belt, she will

stand out from the crowd just like how it happened in history, and catch the eye of the princess.]

Brendel recalled that it was the second year of the sixth month, that Freya met the princess during the Academy's 64th jousting tournament. Since he was going to stay out of the capital, he felt that there would not be too much of a change in Freya's future.

[Princess Grffyn Corvado Manoff. She is only sixteen this year, but soon she will be the acting regent. I definitely need to know her thoughts are... And I have to borrow Freya's help with this matter.]

Brendel considered things for a second. He felt that there were no clashes with their goals. She wanted to revive the kingdom, while he wanted to turn Aouine's ultimate fate around. However, he was worried that the half-elven girl who was born in the royal family, would not be able to put the nobles' interest down.

His fist clenched tightly when the memories within the game appeared in his mind. It was a moment in history that he was unable to forget; the final moment in the capital Monsterras, where the palace and city burned in a sea of flames, while the sky was dyed black by the smoke.

That day he and many players retreated to the north, and many of them cried while looking to the south. They were unable to change anything because there was just not enough time for them to be able to do anything.

How was he going to watch Freya fight to the death in the Crimon Valley Dalal again?

[That day everyone of us perished in that valley. I died seven times there and lost seven levels there, and many countless players also had the same fate that I had. But in the end, what was the result?] *(TL: Rhetorical question.)*

That day he saw Freya wearing a silver plate with sunflower sigils on it, with a flag in her hand with black pine leaves on it, the emblem of courage in Aouine. He and the thirty-six thousand players who swore to protect Aouine did not manage to protect that flag, and even until her death, she still stood tall in the battlefield.

[Perhaps she fulfilled her own promise... to shed every last drop of blood for this land. In the end Aouine was too weak and old. There were actually three different armies from Kirrlutz that stood there and did nothing. There was only Freya's army and players. And all of us players were no match for the opponent's grand army.]

The brightest jewel in the Corvado family, the princess fared no better. She married an Arreck duke that she did not like, and led a gloomy life, until she was murdered in a scheme conceived by The Unifying Guild. *(TL: Remember that fake noble that took Brendel's sword? He's from this guild.)*

Brendel thought back on the days he met up with his guild members. They did not play the Amber Sword constantly and some of them stopped playing, but when they did gather together, they would talk about the past events that happened in the game. Everyone would still feel sorry when they remembered that day when Aouine's spirit was gone forever.

[Can I let this happen all over again?]

He looked at Freya, Romaine and Marden, then shook his head. If he was teleported somewhere else where he did not meet them, he might have considered to escape and develop slowly. With his knowledge, he would have become a legendary figure.

But experiencing the events and meeting everyone in Bucce made him realize that he was unable to do so, and he decided to take on a burden so that he could change Aouine's fate.

[Even now, I'm still trying to figure out the possibilities in front of me. To change history, I definitely need to sweep everything off that's blocking my path, and it's possible that I have to disregard someone's well being. Perhaps I might have to act like a despicable noble... Not only that, I might have to fight against every single noble in Aouine, and even the princess had to choose carefully when dealing with that five infamous dukes.]

Brendel rubbed his forehead when he thought about his specs.

[My growth isn't that of a player... and the enemies that I'm going to face from Madara are pretty much a 'boss' spec, not to mention they are considered uniquely talented, especially that boss amongst bosses, the emperor with the Mercury Staff. Even if I joined hands with the Goddess of War, is it really possible to change the future?]

Brendel thought about the future beyond Aouine's demise.

[If I go further in the timeline, Kirrlutz will take a passive and cold look at things. That Griffin Empire is not the cradle of ancient and kind human civilization. What replaced it is the pride of the highland natives, fueled by the revolution of steel and blood. The

instruments of war will sound out loudly with the Nature Slate as the starting point. The Third Holy War will happen soon. When that happens, all the countries will become chess pieces on a gigantic chess board, including Madara.]

Brendel's mind shook a little when he thought of that. Doubt surfaced as he asked himself whether he was able to handle everything, because even if he averted the Madara's undead, what waited for him was something even bigger. He had thought about it slightly when he led the refugees from Fortress Riedon out.

[...Who am I kidding? Maybe it's the pride of a 'player from another world', but isn't this like a game that has the 'impossible' rating on it?]

He thought that it was a little arrogant, but he felt that he needed to at least make an attempt in doing this, at least to make amends to that regretful event.

This was also why he felt that he had to acquire enough power and authority when the Civil War started.

[When that event happens, all methods of leveling up might be affected because of the chaos, and especially during the chaos, it's the best moment for me to have the opportunity to become a chess player and acquire both land and armies.]

Brendel had already decided the location, a kingdom that was sealed once upon a time in the west.

Chapter 36

Brendel's preparation (1)

—————- Bretton's POV —————

Bretton saw leaves of the evergreen trees the size of a palm on the, while he passed by the courtyard. Legend depicted that every single leaf on the evergreen trees had the soul of a fallen warrior, thus there were evergreen trees planted in the army camps to represent the bravery and courage of the soldiers. *(TL: Note, Bretton != Brendel.)*

He stared at the leaves, his mind wandering back to his companions that had fallen in the war. For a moment, he did not even hear his father, Lord Haskel, a city councilor of Bruglas, speaking to him.

“When the rewards are distributed, I’m going to try and transfer you back to Bruglas. Didn’t you want to enter the city’s cavalry unit? My words still carry weight within the city.

It is still fine if you want to stay within your current army unit, the patrolling squadron of the Needle Forest isn’t at full roster yet. However, their formation follows the Arreck’s military formation, so it might be harder for you.

In truth, my thoughts is to wait for you to be formally knighted before I assign you a stable post within the nobles’ parliament.”

Bretton gave a affirmative nod.

“But what do you think?” Lord Haskel looked at his son and sighed. His personality was similar to his own when he was young. He was confident but too proud. Even though it was not a bad thing at certain times, it was not truly a desirable attribute—

Within the wisdom that was handed down from the nobles, ‘too much pride would easily lead to setbacks’.

Lord Haskel was 62 years old in this year. It was still considered a prime age, but his appearance was starting to look aged. His silver hair straightened out and was combed

very neatly, while his sideburns were white. He was famous for being in the radical faction when he was young in southern Grinoires, but he was increasingly conservative and stable as he got older.

His attire was that of a normal city councilor, a long blue robe that extended to the ground, with a white breasted vest buckle, and a long black pair of breeches. He held a cane in his hand, and looked at his only son with a warm gaze.

Bretton looked at his father and said: "I think, I might want to go to the Basta Royal Cavalry Academy."

"What?" Lord Haskel was shocked.

"I have heard news from Walter. There are four slots available. The formal guards might recommend me. The White-Mane army have their own thoughts as well. Father, I have to plead with you not to talk about this matter with the other nobles." Bretton explained. Walter was the vice-captain of the Silver-Winged Cavalry and a friend of Bretton. Walter was only twenty-three years old, and it was because of his father's authority that he was able to take his current position.

"The news has been locked up really tightly. There has been no news from the parliament and the army bastards. Still, this reward should not be affected have the royal crown's interference, is there a change somewhere in the capital?" Lord Haskel frowned.

"I am not sure, but I am determined to take this opportunity if it presents itself." Bretton said.

"Very well, it is good to learn more things. But remember this, our Wakefield family's political direction typically lies elsewhere. When you attend the academy, do not go against the royal faction, but at the same time, you don't have to worry too much about them." Lord Haskel thought for a while and changed his decision at the last moment.

Bretton's eyes returned to the courtyard. "Who would pay attention to an insignificant person like me?"

"Your words are wrong. Everyone in the Wakefield family is of importance. Your grandfather was the chief councilor in Bruglas, and even I am famed within the southern Grinoires. You're my son and definitely would be no less than any of us." Lord Haskel rebuked him.

Bretton's expression was blank.

The pair suddenly stopped moving as they saw a young man approaching them. He wore a deep blue uniform, his side attached with a knight's sword made in the 32nd year. His long silver hair extended past his shoulders, and there was an androgynous look with his pursed lips.

"Master Sergeant Tirste."

"Vicount Tirste." Lord Haskell quickly pulled his son to one side as he greeted Tirste.

The man who got called as Tirste paused for a while, and looked at the two men with a pair of eyes with the color of amethyst crystals. He nodded at them and wanted to move along, but as his gaze landed on Bretton, he suddenly stopped and gave a laugh, then continued on his path.

"Strange." Lord Haskell said to himself as he watched the young man walk away.

"What's wrong?"

"That boy is the illegitimate son of the duke. He usually cast his eyes above our positions, but he seems to be different today." Lord Haskell answered.

Bretton looked at that person's back and he did not reply. His face wore a pensive expression when he turned back.

————— Tirste's Pov —————

Tirste pushed the door of the Silver-winged headquarters open, and the commander, vicount Megeska, was staring outside at the arched window with the width of three men. The middle aged man with spots of white in his hair turned back when he heard the door open, and relaxed when he saw Tirste.

He took his pipe and pointed to the side, indicating for Tirste to seat there. "I can't say that your arrival was quick, Captain."

"That's because I had to get rid of the bastards who keep making trouble." Tirste smiled and sat down.

Just like the rumors, Tirste was indeed the illegitimate son of Grinoires's duke. But his

mother was said to be from the lineage of the lost Silver Citizens, and he believed that he carried the Silver Blood as well. However, behind his facade of arrogance and cold appearance, he was considerably talented and skilled, otherwise he would not become a core member of the Unifying Guild.

“Did you saw those men?” Megeska asked.

Tirste nodded. The young man inclined backwards, and used an even tone to continue: “The young man and that red beard Batum are insignificant people with the strength of an Iron-ranked fighter. There are nothing special about them, but interestingly they have a Bucca militia with them. Commander, there’s no need for me to repeat the news that you have already gotten a long time ago right?”

The commander inhaled deeply from the pipe and placed it down: “That girl is called Freya. Amongst the four slot, there was an indication that she must be given one. What do you think of that?”

“Interesting.” Tirste laughed: “Are you going to tell me that she’s an illegitimate daughter of someone powerful?”

“Please, what does that have anything to do with us?” Megeska said: “But that means that these men should not be considered as suspects. The person who killed ‘Tor’ should be at least a Silver-ranked fighter right? I wonder about the strength of that Leto person. I heard that the ‘Silver Dove faction is incredibly angry over this matter, and are pointing fingers at us, asking why we did not send a Silver-ranked or Gold-ranked fighter to guard that fool.”

The young man gave a snorting laugh: “That fool is just a substitute. When we have the chance to eliminate that famed ‘Wolf Earl’, there might be some blame to go around, but we don’t need any trash in our organization now. In fact, I wonder if Oberbeck noticed anything suspicious about his substitute.”

Megeska nodded.

“I also received some news when we investigated the refugees. There was a commotion within Fortress Riedon, and that position was along the noble parliament and the Pine Fortress. The details are probably known only to the nobles, but sadly all those fools were completely killed.”

Megeska took another of puff from his pipe: “Do you think if Luc Beson knows

anything about this?"

"Even if that tiger knows anything, he wouldn't say anything about it. His goals does not align with us." Tirste said a deeper meaning in his words.

"Indeed, regardless of the White-Mane army or us, he is someone who's odd."

"What do you plan to do now?"

"Isn't this matter left to you, why are you asking what I'm going to do? Captain, your actions are straying a little from the rules right?" The commander was taken aback before he laughed.

But Tirste shook his head: "No, this matter is left to you now. There's something else that I have to check about the transfers to the academy, and another matter I need you to help is assign me a position as a captain within the White-Mane army."

"Why?"

"There is news about the Lionheart sword."

"What, that's fast. How did they get the news?"

Tirste grinned but he did not answer.

————— Brendel's/Tamar POV —————

After Freya stayed back in the Silver-Winged cavalry's camp, Brendel went to the Bruglas market and joined up with Tamar who had been waiting for a long time.

Tamar was supposed to be one of Madara's infamous person, but right now he wore a strange checkered long robe and stood under the scorching sun, and showed great respect to Brendel when he saw him.

"My lord, the things that you want are ready." Tamar was carrying a heavy bag and pulled his son as he waited at the sides for Brendel.

His respect to Brendel was not because of his status as a lord, but because he was his savior. His son did not have that same feeling, and he looked at Brendel with admiration because of his status.

“You managed to buy it?” Brendel was surprised as he did not expect a common market within Bruglas to have an authentic Elven alchemist set. He merely asked Tamar to see if they had it, since the alchemist set from Ampere Seale could also be used, although the requirements were just barely met.

“I managed to rent it from the local alchemist guild, and they want twenty Tor coins.”

Even though Tamar said that, his heart felt it was difficult to accept.

[There is really no need to use such special equipment. Even when I was within the nobles’ parliament, I used second hand alchemist equipment. This lord is good at everything, but he’s spending too much money.]

Brendel rubbed his forehead. He had forgotten about this matter, but it was good to actually procure it, especially when he would not lack money once his plans were executed.

He had his own plans that were different from Tamar’s thoughts.

[A poisoned dagger steeped in the poisonous sap from a Demon Tree (15 oz), a cursed crossbow (32 oz). Even though I have some fundamental strength, I need some killing trump cards that I can use in the shadows. The dagger can be sold to the nobles thanks to the undetectable nature of the poison. The signs for the poison is similar to a sudden illness, and it’s the best way to scheme against anyone who’s below the Iron-ranked stats.

And the cursed crossbow is something that’s needed to kill a low-class character. There’s a certain percentage to cause debuffs like Weakening, Damage Intake and other various debilitation effects. Higher-level characters find it easier to resist it, but anyone below the Silver-ranked level would easily display the effects. Luckily, the problem of getting all the rare materials like a soul of a high-ranked necromancer, is solved thanks to the fights outside Fortress Riedon.

It’s a hassle to make it because I need at least Rank 8 in Alchemy, but with the equipment and Tamar’s help, that’s +3 in total. I can make the equipment that I need.]

Chapter 37

Brendel's preparation (2)

Brendel lined up eleven daggers that were intricately crafted side by side. He then used a silver hammer to break the crystals that were harvested from the Rotten Beast and threw the fragments into the golden liquid inside the alchemy pot. He turned his head back and asked:

“Tamar, why don't you give it a try?”

“Me?” The middle-aged man was momentarily surprised, but he immediately showed enthusiasm on his face. The future grandmaster alchemist might be reticent during normal times, but when the topic is about alchemy, he could not help but talk about it excitedly. Now that he had the chance to try it for himself, he would definitely take it.

He might have been an alchemist who worked at the parliament, but he was typically tasked to do only minor things like refinement for the materials, as the nobles themselves had their personal alchemist and typically would not give away any of their secrets.

This was the first time that Tamar had the chance to create a magical artifact all by himself, and he gulped when he saw the Elven daggers. Brendel chuckled and gave a nod.

[Tamar's alchemy skills are going up very quickly. When I first saw him, his alchemy skills were approximately Rank 3, and now he's Rank 5. At this pace, he's going to surpass me and become a true master alchemist. This is really innate talent.]

The reason why Tamar advanced so quickly was because Brendel had passed the refinement of high grade materials to Tamar, and allowed him to improve quickly.

However, Tamar seemed to look like he did not realize his talents, and when Brendel tried to recruit him for thirty thousand gold per year, he actually requested to reduce the amount of gold to a mere sixth of Brendel's proposal.

[A grand alchemist for an annuity of 5000 gold, even close relatives wouldn't give such

a rate. Well, most of these alchemist tend not to break their contract, and in the future I should have the capabilities to keep him even if he requests for more money. Due to his abilities, I must keep him.]

“Alright, I’ll give it a try.” Tamar said with confidence.

The room turned quiet, and Brendel moved to the bookshelves and randomly picked a history book about noble lineage. He had been reading such books for the past few days, and his knowledge about the nobles and sigils have gone up, increasing his Scholar Rank to Rank 11.

With the additional TP, he raised his Military Swordsmanship to Rank 7 (6+1), Emergency First Aid to Rank 4, White Raven Sword Arte to Rank 2, and took on the proficiency skills for the profession Mercenary, as well as Stealth and Barkskin.

The Weapon Proficiency skill was a core ability of the professions ‘Warrior’ and ‘Mercenary’. There was only one rank for this skill, but it allowed Brendel to use all related weapons for his profession.

[It’s fortunate that I got to have a profession like Mercenary. If I was to actually spend TP on proficiency in weapons because I’m a militia, I’m going to waste thousands of TP of improving them. But at the same time, there’s a limit to specializing in certain weapons. Other than that, the stealth trait comes from the Nightingale profession, while Barkskin comes from druids. The Barkskin ability is especially good since it adds 50% natural armor once per day. This combination is something I used in the past as well.]

These two unique abilities from other professions could only be taught within Bruglas’s Royal Geography Institute, and Brendel made sure to learn them as the chances to acquire such skills were rare.

[Hundreds of TP are gone so quickly. Technically speaking, repeated usage is also a way to level up skills, but it takes way too much time. I have gone through a considerable amount of fights for the past few weeks, but my swordsmanship has not even reach 6+2...]

Brendel had not turned over many pages of the book in his hand, but Tamar had already finished with his task. Tamar brought a single dagger as if he was a child showing off his toy:

“My lord, they are done!”

“That fast?” Brendel stole a glance at the hourglass at the side, and the sand in it had only gone down by a third. “Are there any failures?”

“No.” Tamar shook his head.

Brendel took a deep breath. It was rare to see someone who had no failures at all, and the failure rates within the game for newcomers were nearly 50%. He took the dagger and inspected it with the Window Stats.

[1-4 Damage, + 1-1 poison, Dagger Steeped in Demon Tree’s poison. The name of the dagger changed, as well as the rarity. It was originally ‘White Rank’, but now it’s ‘Iron Rank’.]

Brendel got up and placed the dagger back onto the table. He thought for a while and decided that their worth to be around two thousand gold. It was not something that was exceptionally special and only suited for low-ranking nobles or adventurers. Upper ranking nobles had their own personal alchemist and a blade like this would not interest them.

[A total of twenty thousand Tor coins, even if I sell them all. That’s not enough for Little Romaine.]

He took out the High Grade Crystal that he got from the Golden Demonic Tree and a Dwarven Short Sword.

“The next equipment is going to be a little difficult. Let’s do it together this time, Tamar.”

“Together?” Tamar was a little puzzled when he heard Brendel said that. Alchemists worked alone to avoid any mana interference from each other.

But Brendel did not have that same concern. He started to use a chalk to draw a circle formation and added runes and numbers to it. Tamar watched him in wide eyes, recognizing the runes as star constellation used by wizards.

Finally, Brendel raised his head and pointed to the inner circle.

“Tamar, come over here.”

But Tamar looked on in a daze and asked: “My lord, is this the Loop Ritual?”

“Loop Ritual?”

“I heard that only wizards in Buga had this mysterious skill, where someone who’s standing on the primary star constellation would be able to borrow many people’s power to create a magic or alchemy ritual. My lord, is this...?”

“Something like that. This is a simplified version for 16 people. If there’s a chance I’ll draw a complete version for sixty four people and how it to you.” Brendel nodded. This skill was something that every gamer in his world needed to have, but Tamar saw it like it was an incredible feat.

Fire seemed to flare in Tamar’s eyes as he nodded forcefully and rushed to stand within the formation, as if he could not wait to see the power of the ritual without any more delay.

Brendel inspected the blade in his hand. The short sword was intricately crafted by the dwarves, with the surface of the blade hammered with Earthern Mana into it, with the tip of the blade in a wavy form. He ran his fingers through the sword to check something.

[A type of sharpening magic. But it’s good that this magic shouldn’t have any conflicts with the things I’m about to do next.]

He carefully picked up a golden chisel and knocked it into the sword to create a hole.

“Ah!” Batum suddenly yelled.

“What the fuck are you yelling for Batum!” Brendel nearly chipped off the magic from the sword, but his hands were steady enough to avoid ruining the sword that was worth fifteen hundred Tor coins.

[Shit, if I screwed that up, I won’t have enough funds to buy a second one.]

Batum knew that he had made a huge mistake and he chose wisely to not answer anything. His heart was bleeding inwardly when he saw his lord making another hole in the sword. He felt like a hole had been knocked into his heart.

But Brendel ignored him and placed the Tree Crystals into the hole and nodded to

Tamar. Both of them started to carve sigils onto both sides of the sword. After working on it for thirty minutes, they finally made a new magic weapon.

Brendel picked up the sword and flourished it, sending dancing lights throughout the room with the sigils. He then checked it with the stats window, and confirmed there was a +3-3 poison behind the stats. It was comparable to the ordinary damage of the Thorn of Light, and this sword could be placed in the Bronze rank. It definitely had no problem for selling at a price of one hundred thousand Tor coins, and might even interest some high ranking knights.

Brendel wiped his perspiration off. This was the first time he crafted a magical equipment above 15 OZ, and he felt tired from writing fourteen stacks of sigils. The result was spectacular, however. The sword was perfectly created and he felt like his skill was about to get a +1 behind it.

[Except that I'm a fake noble. Unless I get a real identity confirming of myself as a noble, my skills won't surpass Rank 5... otherwise I'm most likely at Rank 6 by now (5+1).]

As he thought to himself, he saw Tamar looking like he was still excited to do more as his eyes were glittering.

"My lord, I feel like I have come to a revelation. If I'm not mistaken, it's just a matter of time for me to create higher grade sigils and formations."

"That's a good thing."

Brendel patted Tamar's shoulders and was inwardly happy.

[If Tamar reaches Rank 10, he can start to make Dragon Slaying Arrows (40oz), that's a good thing.]

Chapter 38

The Cripple

Brendel knew that Tamar had reached Rank 6 in alchemy, so he left the creation of a Cursed Crossbow to him. He collected the poisoned daggers and the Dwarven Longsword, and called out to Batum to prepare to go to the Black Pepper Street to meet up with that particular cripple.

He had wanted to meet with the cripple called 'Roen' for quite some time already, especially when he wanted to know if there was an extra mission regarding about the Ring of The Wind Empress. Besides that mission, he had also heard that the cripple had contacts with the black market and the likes, so it was something that he wanted to the cripple to introduce him a place where he could auction his goods.

[I'm not seeing Romaine... Looks like she's off to do some 'adventuring' in some unknown places again.]

Both of them left the house with long robes. Brendel adjusted his hood in order to hide his face better, but Batum suddenly spoke behind him.

"My lord, I have thought about this for quite some time, but I think your plans are not good enough."

"Why?" Brendel adjusted the Elven sword under the long robe before turning back to ask.

"The refugees that saw us were plenty, and even though you requested them to keep the secrets to themselves, you cannot guarantee that they are going to follow your words." Batum carefully tuck his beard inside the hood and watched the streets, whispering.

"This was never a secret to the ones who wanted to get to the bottom of the truth, but the nobles desire a result that doesn't harm their status. If I don't stand out, they are even more delighted to accept this version," Brendel thought for a while and answered. "And I need to stay unnoticed for a certain period of time, Batum."

“But I still feel that we should have kept the refugees who saw you.”

Brendel finally understood Batum’s true motive and he laughed. He shook his head.

“We would stand out too much if we recruit these refugees in the open. Furthermore, these people might not be willing to follow us. Know this Batum, humans would seek to grasp at the wheat offered to them during desperate times, but they would not hold on to them every single moment.”

Batum nodded, but his mind disagreed. He had observed Brendel for quite some time from the sides, and knew that his ambition was big, so he wanted to aid him by going for moves that aided in growing his power.

But Brendel’s current concern was not about power, it was about the Unifying Guild. He was certain there was no one who could point to him for the murder of the fake earl, but gaining exemplary results here might invite suspicion to himself.

[Well the only ones who have an idea about what I did are Freya and Romaine... The greatest cover is my own level as an Iron-rank. Once I grow strong enough, the Unifying Guild is still people who lurk in the shadows and not an army.]

The Black Pepper street is one of the largest street in the impoverished areas within Bruglas.

This was not truly Brendel’s first time in this area, but the rats that ran openly in the streets, combined with the summer’s heat and horrid vapors of rotten odors still made him unused to this place. Batum on the other hand looked like he had found home. A mercenary like him was a frequent patron of this place, where there were sleazy bounty hunters, thieves, illegal merchants as well as low level prostitutes. It was as if this place had the stench of evil and sin.

But within this place, there were also scenes where people treated others sincerely.

Brendel was not able to criticize this place, and he did not want to anyway. He watched the children with dirty and tattered clothes carefully avoiding him from the sides, then hid themselves with greedy looks in his directions. There seemed to be gazes with ill intentions casting in his direction, so he raised his guard.

They continued walking and finally stopped at a old wooden house. Brendel raised his head and looked at the triangular carving on the ceiling, and confirmed that it was

Roën's house, and then knocked on his door—

Three loud bangs echoed within, with the door creaking as if it was going to split apart any time. Dust could be seen scattering from the door as well.

Batum frowned when he looked at this place.

"I can hardly imagine there is anyone living in this place. I have seen many poor people's dwelling, but I have never seen a place like this that's so dilapidated. This place can already be compared to living in a cave and—"

The mercenary stopped talking and swallowed his words, when the door suddenly opened. A venomous pair of eyes laid upon Batum for a moment before it went to Brendel, and a raspy voice could be heard from the horse.

"Brendel? When did you come from Bucce? Wait, you're actually not dead, that's definitely out of my expectations!"

"Does it benefit if I died, cripple?"

Brendel answered coldly. He looked at the balding old man who chuckled in a low voice twice, before looking at the two of them with his cloudy green eyes again.

"What brings you here, Brendel? Have you gotten rich? Or have you sent me a new customer?"

The previous Brendel had pawned several of his personal things at Roën's place and therefore became linked to this malicious person. But what he did not understand was how Roën came to know about the painting in his old grandfather's house.

Brendel glared at him with an intense expression, and the cripple recoiled backwards.

"You..... seem to be a little different, Brendel." The old man hesitated.

"Anyone would change after they have been through enough ordeals." Brendel gave a reply, but he did not want to waste anymore time so he went for his main question: "Do you still want the painting that my grandfather had?"

The cripple's slanty shaped eyes immediately brightened: "Of course, of course, why, did you bring it here?"

But Roen immediately felt a cold blade placed on his neck. The greedy and scheming bastard who charged high interest loan rates and wrecked homes immediately fell to the floor with his weakened knees.

“I don’t have any patience for this. Tell me if my grandfather’s painting was stolen by your men.” Brendel glared at him as if he was going to kill him right away.

Batum turned back and saw several men flinching when they noticed his face. He picked up several rocks and hit them squarely, causing them to squeal in pain and run away, before he gestured to Brendel to inform him he was going to go after them.

Roen lost his confidence when he saw this scene unfold before his eyes, and he immediately shouted in a shrill voice: “Brendel, please listen to me, it was not me, I don’t have the galls to offend.....”

He suddenly felt he had made a mistake, and he quickly changed his words: “Brendel, you know me right, I might be unscrupulous but I wouldn’t spoil my own rules.”

Brendel watched the corner of the bastard’s eyes quiver, and knew that he had already recovered from his fear. He could not kill him here so he pulled back his sword with disappointment.

“I’ll accept your explanation, so I’ll talk about another deal instead.”

“Another deal? Brendel, I might not be able to receive your deals if they are of the same nature.” Roen rubbed his neck as if to check if it was still there.

“Hmph, that painting is gone. If my father wants my life for it, I’ll be using yours as a substitute.” Brendel threatened him with half-truths.

“I got it, I got it, I’ll find out news about this for your painting.” His mind was working quickly to guess who had the audacity to steal that particular item.

Roen looked at Brendel’s hand and saw that he did not wear anything on his fingers. He thought for a while before he spoke again. “Speaking of your father, I’m certain that your family is looking for you, are you not going to go back?”

“Not for the moment. Perhaps when I find the things that I need.” Brendel was actually afraid that his troubles would follow him back to his family, so he decided to separate from them.

[This is a particular problem. My memories from the other soul is affecting me and I want to see my family in this world... But that's going to be impossible for a long time.]

"Very well." Roen seemed to confirm that Brendel was not looking for any more trouble and continued with the topic. "What manner of business do you have in mind?"

"I need money urgently, and I have quality goods that I can sell. But if you think of double-crossing me, cripple, mark my words, I am no longer the same old Brendel."

Brendel agreed with Leto's advice to first threaten Roen before dealing with him, as the cripple drew back his neck timidly.

"Don't worry. I won't find fault with the things that I pawned to you in the past, but if you pull any tricks this time round, you had better wash your neck." Brendel threw a pouch of coins beside the cripple's feet: "I only need your recommendation and the coins here are yours if you help me with two other things."

"Yes, yes, go ahead and tell me."

"The first thing. I want you to help me find a woman who is about thirty years old, with purple hair and eyes. Find her within one week, and if you have any news, go to Bruglas's market and find me there."

Roen quickly nodded and thought for a while before shaking his head, letting it show that he had not heard of such a person before.

Brendel did not expect him to have news of her immediately, so he spoke of the second matter. "The second thing I need you to help with me is to find a noble called 'Berg Nesson' who stayed in this place before. You're the most famous local scoundrel in Bruglas, surely you have heard of a fallen noble like him right?"

The cripple hesitated for a while when he heard the name.

"I have heard of him before, but he had disappeared a few years back."

"That is fine, I am looking for his wife or daughter. Where are they staying now?"

"His wife had already passed away two years ago, but I know of his daughter. She stays in a place that's not far from here. Is she your relative?" The cripple asked in curiosity.

But this query immediately lured the Elven sword to dance in front of his eyes, before the sword went back to his sheathe. Brendel cast a side glance at him. “Do you want to know?”

“No, no, there’s no need to, I’ll tell you how to reach her place—” The cripple immediately shook his head.

Chapter 39

Amandina

[I'm surprised that Berg Nesson's wife has died. Does this mean that the reward given is by the daughter instead? Certain nobles' lineage go a long way back, so it's possible that a good reward might be given out here. In any case, it looks like my only hope is on the daughter.]

Roen had given details on the daughter. Her name was Amandina, and she stayed alone at the northern Greyrat street, which was just next to the Black Pepper street. She stayed within her home most of the time and hardly went out. Even though it was strange that she lived all by herself without any contacts, she was still a noble and under the strict hierarchy in Aouine, common men would not think of intruding her home.

[Roen's information is most likely accurate. This isn't a common sight for nobles, but at the same time something like this does occur in the game.]

However, to ensure that Roen gave accurate information, Brendel simply took out his sword and placed it over Roen's neck and told him to lead the way. With Batum's aid in dismissing the shady youths hired by Roen around his home, the three of them left for the noble's house without any further incidents.

When the three of them reached the next street, it was nearly evening. The amber sunlight shone across the buildings at one end of the street, and long shadows were cast across the other row of buildings. Because there was no one who to light the oil lamps at the sides, the buildings were shrouded in darkness. Brendel walked briskly into this silent part of the street, his long robes sweeping across the pebbles and lifting the fallen leaves due to the small breeze caused by his movements.

Batum walked closely behind him, thoroughly checking the dark corners of the street. He fiddled with his beard for a while before frowning: "This place wasn't like this when I came here a few years ago."

The Greyrat street was near the old nobles' parliament and the Cavalry avenue. It was once a busy street and considered an area where rich people gathered, but after the

city had gone under upgrades and moved the prime hub elsewhere, the street had become even more desolate than the Black Pepper street.

[Even if it was because this street here did not have any adventurers, mercenaries or prostitutes lingering here, this place should not be so desolate...]

Brendel sniffed at the dusty air and he suddenly recalled something.

"It's probably due to the underground grave here."

"Indeed." Roen's smile was a little forced. The blade on his neck made him feel very uncomfortable. "My lord, you might not know this, but there was a strange event about two years ago. A group of two high ranking monks and one priest from the Haviar Church went missing after they entered the grave, and this city was shaken by this incident back then."

"And? Did the Holy Church went to Nakkin and caused trouble? If you tell me they did not, I won't believe you." Batum said.

"Of course not, under the pressure of the church, he sent a group of Silver Winged Cavalry to investigate the incident. The group was attacked by monsters and there was only one survivor left who went crazy."

"Madness." Batum muttered to himself.

Roen led them to an old staircase. After they reached the end of the flight of stairs, they found an old mansion before them and entered in. The wooden floor creaked and trembled under their weight as if it had serious breathing problems and was about to fall apart any time.

Brendel stopped when he saw this. He tore apart the spider webs with his sword and asked in suspicion.

"What place is this, you stupid cripple? If I recall correctly Berg Nesson's family status hasn't fallen to this state yet, even if he went missing for years." He coughed in bits as he spoke.

"His daughter has moved out of her own house a year ago. It seems that she had been cheated out of her money."

"A gullible female noble." Batum added his input.

Brendel was silent as he watched Roen.

In the end, Roen led them to a door in the corner within the abandoned mansion. Brendel kept his sword away and knocked on the door. He almost certain that Roen was lying again, until he heard a serious bout of coughing noise behind the door. A soft voice came from behind it.

"Who is it?"

Brendel paused for a moment before he turned to Roen and asked: "Is she unwell?"

"I have no knowledge of that." He shook his head.

Brendel was silent for a few seconds before he spoke again: "Miss Amandina? I'm a friend of your father, Berg Nesson, I have a few things from him to give to you."

There was silence behind the door for a while, before the girl spoke again in her weak voice: "What is it?"

"His letter."

There was the sound of a chair being pushed back behind the door and an even longer silence, as if to hesitate. Finally there were footsteps and light coughing noises that appeared closer to the door. The voice made behind the door was clearer and Brendel could hear that the owner was a young woman. Her voice seemed to have some form of expectations within it.

"I'm sorry, but could you push the letter below the door?"

Brendel looked at the gap below the door.

[Well, at least her guard is working well. Considering that she's living all by herself for years, it's understandable.]

"I understand."

"Thank you."

Brendel pushed the letter through the door, and it was taken away with sounds of the letter being opened. It was another bout of long silence, and when Brendel started to think that something was very wrong, the door suddenly opened with a long creak.

Behind the door was a young woman in a pale night dress.

Her thin hands were on the door and she appeared to be slightly out of breath, but her expression could be considered as calm. She was not very tall, and only reached the height of Brendel's chest. Her long black hair flowed all the way back to her waist, and her black irides were upon the three person outside her house, appearing a little tense.

"My father...?" Her eyes finally stopped on Brendel.

He nodded.

The girl's long eyelashes lowered.

There was a short moment of hushed silence before she spoke again.

"I had already thought something like this might have happened. That is just as well, my parents are at least together now. I think I will feel at least better that way."

[A good reaction. Unlike some of the weak noble ladies out there, she's not half as ignorant or stupid like them. Judging from her room..... There's really nothing much here. It's an old bed with just some run-down furniture, along with a few candles here that's half burned and some scattered papers and books. That's all she has. Her conditions are just as bad as the mansion looked. The only thing that's interesting about her is how she might be a sage.]

"My condolences, Miss Amandina." Brendel said.

The girl raised her head and looked at him. She coughed twice before speaking.

"Did you want to ask about the promised reward from my father's letter?"

Batum and Roen were confused over how the conversation changed into different directions.

".....Yes." Brendel felt reluctant to respond for a while, but he decided to treat this

event like a mission within the game.

[There shouldn't be any need to feel ashamed about this matter. It's good to try and get a reward out of this, it's all for the sake of saving Aouine. Really.]

But Amandina folded the letter and the bridge between her eyes seemed to narrow: "It is unfortunate, but I have never heard of my mother mentioning such a place in this letter before."

"Ahh, so it's a debt—" The cripple finally understood what was going on, and he was much more spirited when this particular event was related to his job: "Brendel, leave this job to me."

He spoke in a shrill voice and checked Brendel's expression closely. He was certain that the naive little brat had turned into someone of importance, especially when he looked at the giant mercenary following him. With his years of experience, he determined that the man was considerably strong when he compared him to the nobles' guards that he knew.

Even though he did not know why the mercenary was willing to work for Brendel, he was careful not to displease Brendel.

"There's no need for that, cripple." Brendel flatly refused his good intentions with a wave of his hand.

"It's as natural as the rain falling down from the sky to pay your debts." The cripple still did not cease talking, until he saw that Brendel's fingers were on his sword, before he shrank backwards and muttered to himself: "There are rules in society, rules in society....."

Brendel looked at the girl's clear eyes. She looked a little worried about her situation about she did not appear to be intentionally lying. Brendel was a little upset to just leave like that and he frowned. But no matter how he looked at the situation, he could not do anything about it, and finally he gave a smile: "No, that's fine. It was something trivial anyway."

[It's ridiculous to push her anymore than this. She lost her parents and she had fallen to poverty, her life is literally in the gutters, what else do I want from her? I'm sure this damned cripple had his ways to squeeze money out from her, but I'm not going to accept have that option. If Little Romaine or even Freya finds out that this ever

happened...]

But the girl suddenly stopped him from leaving. She coughed and shook her at the same time, struggling to steady her body.

“Ser Brendel, I am not asking to renege the agreement in the letter.”

Chapter 40

Magicite

The girl's reply stopped everyone, and they looked back at her. Amandina looked at the young man and spoke softly.

"Ser, please be at ease. I will fulfill the agreement in the letter with my personal thanks as well."

Brendel was a little surprised at her determined and even confident expression.

[No matter how I look at her situation, she can't pay any significant amount of gold, but is it because of her pride that she wants to fulfill the agreement? This situation is going further away from gaming common sense...]

"How do you intend to do that, lass?" Batum looked at her from top to bottom, with the usual unrefined tone with deliberate quips from his mercenary ways: "Even though you're considered a fine looking girl, but my lord already has a fiance."

Anger found its way into Amandina's eyes and cheeks when she heard that. She looked at Brendel with flushed cheeks due to anger, and Brendel saw disappointment in her eyes. She opened the drawer next to the table and retrieved a big scroll. She stopped for a while before she finally passed the papers to Brendel: "I believe the value in these papers are no less than what you expect, Ser Brendel."

"What is this?" He asked as he took the scroll.

"My research." She looked a little uneasy when she said these words, but she appeared confident again.

The cripple snorted derisively, and Batum poked him from behind and whispered: "How much gold do you think the girl owes my lord?"

Roen turned back and looked blankly at Batum. Even though the hood covered his face, he could clearly see the red knotted beard.

“You don’t know?”

“Of course I don’t? How should I know about these things?”

“I thought you knew. Let’s see, even a poor noble like Berg should have an annuity of two thousand coins. Calculating it... Well, it’s around a hundred thousand Tor coins. It’s not a huge sum of money, but it’s no paltry sum either.”

“That is indeed a considerable sum.” Batum nodded. “Do you mean to say that the papers in my lord’s hands are worth a hundred thousand coins?”

“I did not say anything like that. If it’s something that comes from a famous painter, well, fetching a few million coins isn’t surprising. But that little girl had already said it’s her research. I’ll be honest with you, I don’t think it’s worth anything that much, otherwise this little girl wouldn’t need to stay in this place already.”

“You’re really a nasty piece of work.”

“That’s a logical conclusion, Ser Batum.”

Amandina clenched her fists when she overheard their conversation.

Brendel did not stop their talk as he was engrossed in checking out the scroll with one hand. He was a little puzzled over it as it felt quite heavy in his hand.

[Paintings? Old Magic? Or some lore copied from old books? The quality of the scroll is quite bad, but there’s some considerable weight to it.]

“Can I take a look at the contents of these papers?” Brendel asked.

“They are already yours.”

Brendel nodded and carefully unfolded it. It was a complicated array of lines that formed into some form of machine. The multiple patterns and arrays were carefully written all over the scroll, along with detailed explanation with the girl’s elegant handwriting. His heartbeats quickly increased when he saw the contents of the scroll, and comprehension dawned on his face while he rolled the scroll back up.

It was the earliest blueprint for creating a machine that moved mana.

[The overall concept in this design can be considered as crude or terrible... But... I see... so this is how it is... Back then in the game, the guild 'Origin' got the original blueprints for producing this type of machinery and allowed players to gain their own independence.]

Brendel did not expect to encounter the answer to be like this. He did not expect the girl to have anything to do with the top ten questions in 'The Amber Sword', and he was genuinely surprised at the outcome.

"The guild leader did not infiltrate an empire or the likes, he simply completed this one-time secret mission..."

Brendel used all his will to keep his face from changing. The scroll in his hands meant that it was enough to change the world greatly.

Owning a third type of power in this world.

The first type of power was 'Elements'. Fire, wind, water, earth, space, time and many others. Physical examples existed as well. Professions like warriors, Elementalists, wizards, and many powerful classes have different qualities, but they share a common measuring unit called 'Oauth'.

The power of Elements are typically hidden in one's body, until the power in them crossed 500 OZ. Under the Holy Church of Fire description, people who crossed 500 OZ had 'Enlightened Elements' in them. From that moment onwards, these people would be crowned as 'Holy knights'. *(TL: Okay. You know those recent modern games like to 'simplify' things by reducing the amount of buttons/commands right? Everything press 'F' to jump/dodge/hit/execute/whatever? Apparently OZ does the same thing here. If I TLed anything wrongly, well...)*

This was a long journey and even impossible for many to go through. The majority of the population are born with just 0.3 OZ, and would be unable to surpass that 500 OZ limit. However, there were people who blessed and simply had the talent to surpass the limits, therefore they were called 'The Chosen beings'.

The second type of power did not belong to humans. They were called as the 'Power of the Gods', and more exactly the power of faith.

The Gods were split into two factions, Ximar and Einkar. Ximar was humble while Einkar was arrogant. They governed the laws of the stars and magic, and there were

called as gods. Their presence supported this world, and though they did not need the worship of the beings in this world, they had answered their prayers through their faith.

This response was called the 'Power of the Gods'. The source of the powers from the priests were from their will, taking care of their children from high above. And because of that, many different religious factions argued constantly, speaking of misinterpreted instructions or expressing their reluctance to change the world from the signs of the gods.

The third power, was the power of wisdom, and the power that mortals had to change the world.

The so called machine in Brendel's hands was also called 'Magicite'. Under the artificial (machine) design, revolution to move the energy in the Element crystals, either to power a magic weapon or floating city. This was originally the creation of the craftsmen in Buga, but the various empires soon took hold of this secret.

This new power that mortals created changed the entire chessboard in this world. They started off with production which led to a new industrial revolution, and the struggle to gain for resources created new factions and powers. The records started from one hundred years ago, and the Holy War lasted for ten over years, of which the November War was most infamous for.

[I now hold the blueprints of a 'Magicite'...Even though it is lacking in many ways and even considered behind the empire's technology by thirty years, this is the true secret that gamers thought they would never get. In 'The Amber Sword', the magicite called 'Star Constellation' was created twenty years into the game and is the same design that this scroll has.]

Brendel took a deep breath and asked: "You designed this?"

Amandina's expression was originally tense but she was taken aback when she heard the question.

"Y-you understand it?"

She had gotten all her knowledge from books, and spent long hours into designing the machine. Even though her teachers told her that her talent was there, her success might be limited if she continued to go on this path. Even so, she put all her time and

money into this road, selling her family properties and almost got cheated by a deceptive merchant. If her status as a noble did not protect her, she would have become a plaything of someone else.

But she did not give up and believed that she had found a way to create a 'Magicite'. She had created this version with a fatal flaw that it required too much materials to create a single 'Magicite'. Despite that, she believed her designs were valuable enough, and was prepared to face Brendel's sarcasm.

Except she did not expect him to take her seriously.

[He understands my work?]

"It's very rough, but at least it's a completed version."

"No, no, Ser Brendel, you don't understand this," The girl coughed because she spoke too quickly: "This design is only half completed, the input and output cannot be seen as a good ratio—"

"What? You dare to use a half completed blueprint to pay for your debts!" The cripple immediately jumped when he heard that.

Brendel gestured to Batum to stop Roen from making any more noise, then looked at Amandina and said earnestly.

"This is fine. In my eyes, this is a transaction that is worth even more than I expected, and you fulfilled your promise."

Brendel did not lie and it certainly exceeded his expectations compared to gaining Berg's treasures.

The young girl's eyes went wide with surprise.

Chapter 41

“Then I will take my leave.” Brendel rolled up the scroll, but he stole a glance at the girl again. Amandina’s current situation and her future made him a little sorry for her. He hesitated for a while before asking: “..... Do you have anything that you need help with?”

Amandina shook her head.

“No thank you. I am grateful for the news about my father, Ser Brendel.” She held against the door and replied, coughing twice.

[She’s such a stubborn girl, but at least she’s confident that she can take care of herself. Right now I’m not in a good position to truly help as well because of my financial situation. At the very least, I need to sell these equipments at the auction that Roen is going to introduce.....]

Right when he was about to step out of the door, he heard chaotic footsteps going up the mansion’s staircase, and the group looked over to the direction of the staircase. Batum reached his sword with his hand under the robe.

“Seven, no, eight.”

“There’s no need to be tense here, we’re in Bruglas.” Brendel stopped Batum and stared at the direction of the staircase. A few moments after he finished speaking, there was a series of curses that came from below.

“Fuck, I really don’t want to come to this godforsaken place. We’re going to waste our time again since that bitch is so stubborn.”

“Shhh, all these noble ladies are the same. They act all arrogant and elegant, but once you threaten them a little, they would be shivering like little lambs and will do whatever we tell them to do. She will definitely hand over that thing.

“In any case, that respected noble had already said it is fine even if we finished her off. She’s just a fallen noble. If we don’t rough her up a little, she probably won’t even take us seriously.”

“Are you a moron? Can you trust anything a noble’s words? Their tongues are even sweeter than the devil’s—”

The group of men were arguing when they appeared from the corner of the corridor. There were precisely eight of them wearing the city’s security guards light grey uniform which were brand new. They did not expect anyone in the corridor, and almost everyone amongst them showed surprise in their faces.

Their first glance landed on Amandina, then on Brendel and Batum, and finally on the cripple at the very back.

“It’s you! Cripple, what are you doing here?” The leader frowned and asked.

Brendel stopped the cripple from going forward and turned his head back and asked: “Who are they?”

“The scoundrels in Hood’s avenue. I didn’t think these dogs would look like reasonable human beings wearing leather equipment, especially when I just saw them looking like scum a few days ago.”

The cripple glared at their city guards’ uniform. It appeared he was on terrible terms with them.

“Fuck. This dog just keeps on barking.” One of them cursed out loudly.

They were slightly confused at Brendel’s action. He had proven to be the leader amongst the three people there, but the cripple in the Black Pepper Street was well known to be independent, and yet he was here with two strange men. They were unable to guess the relationship between them.

It became even more troublesome because they were together with the fallen noble’s daughter.

“The few of you are?” The leader of the ruffians decided to test the waters after considering for a while.

Brendel looked at him for a moment before ignoring him. He turned his back to find Amandina grabbing the door frame tightly, her knuckles white. She was lowering her head, and while she did not speak, her small actions made him realize she was afraid and panicking inside. After a few moments, he spoke.

“Are they here to find trouble?”

Amandina nodded.

“What is the issue?”

“They said that my father owes their master money.”

“Is your father a gambler, why does he owe everyone money...” The cripple muttered to himself, but he saw that the girl’s incensed eyes were on him, he stopped talking due to fright.

“Did your father owe them money?” Brendel asked.

Amandina shook her head with a deep frown: “My father would never associate himself with these people.”

Brendel finally looked at the ruffians and asked: “Then who are you?”

His voice was calm and forceful. The leader of the ruffians gulped when he felt the authority within Brendel’s voice. Brendel’s appearance was partially covered by his hood and his age was unclear, but his voice was definitely young. Even so, the leader of the ruffians thought that he was a young noble with a strong backing behind him from his attitude. He disregarded Brendel’s forceful tone which could be perceived as rude and spoke carefully.

“We’re the city guards under Lord Harde. I’m the ‘Night Owl’ Joe, and these are my brothers-in-arms. We’re... under the request of Lord Tirste to collect a debt.”

“When did the city guards become in charge of debt collection?” Batum folded his arms and snorted in laughter.

The eight men looked like they got stuck in two places. They were just ruffians a few days ago before they got recruited, and they had never seen any complicated politics in their life. They did not know how to react in front of this secretive young man, but they were also under orders to collect on the debt, so they looked at each other in confusion.

The leader who spoke wanted to slap himself for that mistake he made. He did not expect for that man to retort with a valid argument.

But there was at least one who was smart enough to grumble loudly: "It's only fair to pay back your debts right."

"Then who exactly do you want to pay this debt?"

These 'city guards' became silent again when Brendel spoke. They looked at each other for some time before the leader of the ruffians spoke in a troubled tone: "It's the lady behind you called Amandina. Her father owes Lord Tirste a huge sum of money."

Brendel rubbed his forehead.

[This particular name sounds familiar, but I can't remember who exactly it is in the game. He probably has a certain amount of fame within the game, but he's certainly not involved with the main storyline. Hmm, he can be as small as that Golden Apple Lord Esebar, or someone who's particularly unique for a side mission.]

"Who is Lord Tirste?" Brendel turned around to ask Roen.

"He's someone who's about as young as you. He's the vice captain of the Silver-Winged cavalry and Vicount Megeska's right hand man. There's a rumor that he's the duke's illegitimate son," Roen's face was ugly when he heard the name and whispered back. "Brendel. We musn't fight with Tirste's men. You can't afford to offend him."

The cripple's heart was beating quickly and he already started to think how he could run away from the troublesome place here.

[Fuck. It's fortunate that I did not insult them, otherwise trouble will follow me all the way.]

Brendel grinned when he heard Roen's tone which sounded like he was insinuating something.

"Cripple, it seems that you really want me to fight with this Tirste that I have not met."

"N-no, of course not." Roen laughed in a shrill manner, his voice breaking. He did not expect Brendel to instantly see past his goading remarks.

Brendel glanced at Amandina, only to find that the girl's face had turned pale when she heard that the duke was Tirste's father. Even Vicount Megeska was someone who she could not hoped to fight against. If they were to pick a fight with her, she could

only wait for her death.

[Vicount Megeska. This is a name I'm familiar with. He might appear to be a loyal military officer to Aouine, but he's actually a dog of the Unifying Guild. The 'right hand' of Megeska, is he someone from the Unifying Guild as well? In any case, he's not as well known in the game because of his status as an illegitimate son. But what is this situation with Amandina? Even the fight for power with the Royal Crown is done behind closed doors. It's unlikely that this Tirste doesn't know about Amandina's plight, so what's the reason for pushing her so hard?]

Brendel peeked at Amandina's face.

[It doesn't look like it's some family feud. But being interested in the person herself? ... That's a stronger reason since the nobles sometimes do things like that. But this is a vexing situation. I'm not sure if she's going to give up, but I don't want her to end up losing her. The designer of the Magicite is something that I cannot measure with money.]

Brendel did not express his desire to ask her to join his group for two reasons. Asking her to join right now might get her guard up instead, while the second reason was to lower his costs like a businessman by not showing that much interest in her skills.

[It seems like my plans need to change now.]

"Does your father know Tirste?"

Amandina quickly shook her head. She was an intelligent person and thought of the same things that Brendel did. She had never seen Tirste before, but she felt disgust from his actions and looked at Brendel who seemed like he was her best ally.

Her heart was beating quickly and was afraid that he might not help her, but Brendel did not disappoint her.

The young man immediately pulled out his sword when he heard her reply. The gleaming silver Elven sword made the eight men tremble. Pulling out a weapon means that the negotiations had broken down. Still, the leader of the ruffians tried to remedy the situation by clearing his throat and persuade him by asking him to consider the power behind Tirste.

Brendel's sword had already swung.

A visible ripple blasted above their heads, and a gale suddenly appeared out of nowhere as the wind pressure caused their hair to fly back. A second later, the ceiling above them suddenly cracked loudly and one could see breaks in it extending over five meters.

There was nothing but silence in the dim corridor.

Chapter 42

New member

“S-sword arte.....” Roen’s face paled immediately, and he stared at Brendel.

[Is this Brendel that young man that I know of? You might have gotten some recognition for your potential in the path of the sword, but possessing the power of an ‘Enlightened Element’ since our meeting half a year ago?!]

Amandina first grabbed the door frame tightly and released it. The sudden scene that happened before her eyes was beyond her imagination and she bit her lips due to her myriad feelings that stirred within her.

[The young man who brought my father’s news was at a rank of a ‘Swordsman of Flowers’...This young master swordsman, is it possible that he’s a ‘Blessed’ person and had the strength of an Iron-ranked fighter since his birth?]

(TL: The specific flower described in Chinese doesn’t really exist in the west, so I just took from Game of Thrones. I can’t think of a better term for 启示者 right now other than ‘Blessed’. Exalted, sacred, revelator all sounds weird to me because the level of these people aren’t powerful enough to use these words. Finally, the rank described by Amandina is the upper tier of the Golden-ranked fighter which is around level 60-70+ where they can use sword artes freely.)

Batum merely folded his arms together without changing his appearance. He took everyone’s reaction in his eyes and laughed inwardly. He had felt the same thing when he first saw his lord display that same skill, and even felt proud to serve someone like him, because Brendel’s abilities did not end there.

As for the ‘City Guards’, they were already weak in the knees. Their lack of imagination had limited their view of Brendel as a noble who had some strong backing behind him in his family, but they recognized the Sword Arte and changed their opinions about him.

Brendel’s sword went back to its sheathe. He had intentionally shown that skill in hopes of making them retreat. He was not even close to a Gold-ranked fighter, but that

impression they had of him were already carved into their hearts.

“Did you hear that, this young lady had said her father does not know anything about this Lord Tirste.”

“But.....” The leader of the ruffians finally recovered from his shock, and looked at Brendel with a face full of conflict.

Brendel did a hand gesture to Batum behind his back.

“But what, get lost right now!” Batum saw the hand gesture and immediately yelled at them from the sides.

The ruffians exchanged looks at each other. This was a familiar tactic to them, doing something like they did not want to argue about logic. In fact they were also common users of using brute force instead of logic, but standing before them was a young master swordsman who could wipe them out within seconds, not to mention there was another bodyguard with him.

The ruffians were angered by Batum’s approach, but the leader took a deep breath and spoke: “I understand that you, ser noble, is going to interfere in this matter. May I please know, who exactly is going to go against Lord Tirste?”

Brendel’s eyes narrowed.

[Hoh. This man isn’t half bad at all, trying to corner me with words. If I’m a real noble I might have to answer him properly, but I’m not. Heck, I’m even a shameless ‘gamer’ at that. Still, this leader is quite smart, you are attacking me in the open with a scheme for everyone to see and I have to respond.]

He was secretly on his guards because refusing to answer might actually lead the ruffians to suspect of his identity. He grinned inwardly as he took a piece of paper out and folded it.

[Give this thing to your lord. As for my identity, none of you has the right to know who I am.]

The ruffians looked blankly at the paper. But they could not do anything else other than taking the paper and going back where they came from. They glared at the cripple, but they did not speak to him. If they tried to do so, they would be humiliated

by Brendel.

Brendel watched the last man leave before turning around to look at Roen. The cripple's eyes were glittering and Brendel looked at him with inscrutable eyes.

"What are you thinking, Ser Roen?" Brendel said.

Other than Batum, the cripple was the only other person who knew of his real identity. Batum could be trusted, but the wily old fox in front of him could hardly be trusted.

"N-nothing." Roen immediately denied it.

The aging cripple was bitter in his heart. He did not expect to have so much trouble for being a guide. He would have risked getting injured by Brendel instead of going along if he knew he would offend Lord Tirste. The 'Night Owl' definitely remembered him for participating in this affair, and his life in Bruglas was definitely going to be turned upside down.

[Brendel definitely knows that Lord Tirste is going to come after me. I doubt that Brendel is going to trust me, especially when I don't trust myself. I know that he's a fake noble... and I might want to divulge that information to Lord Tirste... but...]

Roen took an involuntary glance at Brendel and was certain that the young man would not give him a chance to do so. He did not know what Brendel was going to do. Now that Brendel was a Swordman of Flowers and appeared to be more decisive when he last met him, the cripple felt cold sweat forming behind his back as he started to imagine his future.

The more he thought about it, the more frightened he got, and he started trembling.

"B-Brendel, if you kill me, they will suspect your identity." The cripple stuttered.

"It's the same if you go missing." Brendel smiled.

"That's right, yes." Roen agreed with a heavy heart.

"But wanting us to trust in you, Ser Roen, what's the possibility of that?"

"Certainly..... a little right?"

Brendel eyed him with slight disgust, but he shook his head. "I won't kill you, cripple."

Roan was slightly surprised and looked at Brendel with a little disbelief in his eyes.

[Why are you telling me this? Are you trying to deceive me?]

Roan did not think Brendel was naive, but he was unable to come up with a reason after thinking about for a long time.

[Wait— Is he playing with me like a hunter toying with his prey? No, this can't be happening, surely!]

"Have you heard of this term called 'Namelist'?"

"What?"

"You don't know about it? That's fine, you just need to know, once you sign it, we're partners."

"You're trying to drag me into this situation?" Roan inhaled deeply.

The young man's smile in his eyes seemed to resemble a devil's smile. He hesitated for a long time, but he could only agree to it. He thought it was best to deceive him now and then find ways to gain Lord Tirste's trust.

[Report secretly to Lord Tirste?... But I don't know him very well. Kill someone to get noticed? But nobles hardly care if their underlings get killed.]

Roan's mind was working fast, but Brendel's words suddenly came over him like a shower of needles.

"Cripple, before you came to do what you do now, did you commit a crime in Arreck?"

A flash of lightning struck seemed to strike Roan's heart. His face turned white instantly and looked at Brendel as if the devil was before him: "N-no."

"That family name of the nobles is—"

"Stop it!" The cripple screamed as loudly as he could. He seemed to gasp for breath like he was drowning in water and waved his arms in fear. "I got it Brendel. Please,

don't say anymore. Fuck, you're a devil, a monster, I have never offended you!"

Brendel merely gave a smirk. Roen had killed the entire family of nobles thirty years ago in Arreck before fleeing to Bruglas and changing his name. It was a famous sidequest in the game, and Roen was ultimately hung for his crimes. It was not exactly Roen's fault, as the nobles in the story were not exactly good either.

Still, Brendel chose to bring this past up to force Roen to join his side. Roen had done something that was akin to treason in Aouine, and even Lord Tirste was not going to be able to protect Roen on this matter.

[With this secret it should be enough to control this cripple, but I should offer a carrot as well to calm him down.]

"Very well. Do not worry, cripple, I will not use that incident to blackmail you. I know what happened exactly and the fault does not lie with you. However, I need to protect myself. I can at least promise you that Tirste will not trouble you. This is a transaction that both of us can come out ahead without issues, and it's not me or Tirste forcing you to submit to either side."

Roen looked at Brendel with doubtful eyes.

"You don't believe me? That paper that I gave to Tirste will determine everything."

"What exactly is in that paper?" Batum interjected with curiosity.

"A small habit of mine. I believe Tirste will suspect a certain logical rival of his." Brendel rubbed his forehead.

[Disregarding whether this Tirste have ties with the Unifying Guild, I'll push the blame to the organization of the 'Tree Shepherds'.]

When Brendel threw the paper to the leader, he had done so in a particular manner that resembled someone's actions called 'Turtledove'. That master swordsman, Lord 'Turtledove', was a core member of the 'Tree Shepherds' and the key political enemy of the Grinoires nobles. He was even someone who was rumored to be an admirer of Tirste's fiancée. With such a wonderful scapegoat, Brendel believed that Tirste would have a headache trying to deal this situation.

[Maybe Tirste is able to get to the truth some time later, but that wouldn't be a problem

since there are no real disadvantages. It's not as if I'm a paladin from the Holy Cathedral of Fire.]

The cripple seemed to have understood something from Brendel's words, and he stared at Brendel. "I'm starting to wonder if a devil had impersonated you, Brendel. You're not someone like that in the past."

"This situation forced my hand." Brendel shrugged, and finally looked at Amandina.

"What are your intentions, Miss Amandina." He asked.

The young lady lowered her head and felt that her decision did not belong to her anymore. She started to wonder if her previous judgment was wrong. The young man before her did not seem to be as gentlemanly as she had thought, and after a while she could only reluctantly reply: "Have you not thought of a solution for me, Ser Brendel?"

Brendel smiled when he heard Amandina's reply, and briefly wondered what kind of upbringing she had to be as perceptive as she is now. He patted the scroll in his arms and spoke.

"Miss Amandina, I am in awe of your talent and abilities, and I hope that you could work for me. In return, I am willing to sponsor you to continue researching on the creation of Magicite. Of course, as one who is under my employ, I will also protect you from the ruffians who wanted to harass you."

Amandina coughed and looked at Brendel's eyes, as if to determine if he was lying—

"You want me to create machines that uses Magicite? But my teachers said that I am not talented in that field."

"The creation of Magicite and machines that use Magicite are two different things." Brendel nodded: "Especially what you have in this scroll, you are the only person who is skilled enough to make this a reality."

"This is only a half completed version." Amandina became serious, but shrank backwards as she realized she was being rude in her confrontational attitude.

Brendel did not mind.

"Miss Amandina. You have enough faith in your half completed work to be used as

compensation, why do you not allow me to put value into the creator? There is a certain phrase in my hometown, 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step'."

The girl's eyes lit up: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step?... Ser Brendel, are you really willing to sponsor me to continue walking down this path?"

"I will be honest here. Currently I do not have the finances or my place, but I am certain that I will be able to get them very soon. Isn't that right, Ser Roen?"

"Yes, yes!" The cripple nodded furiously.

Amandina thought for a while before speaking again with a determined look in her face: "Very well. I will accept your offer, Ser Brendel. But I do not wish to do nothing before you are able to gain the resources that you need. I would like to be your advisor until then, and I am confident I have the ability to do so—"

She looked straight at Brendel.

Chapter 43

Bruglas's underground auction (1)

The seventh month. Bruglas's air was filled with a scorching heat that made people feel reluctant to move.

Under the peaceful exterior lies a darker current. One could predict the movements of the noble in the first half of this month. The signs of the war ending was becoming more and more apparent, and the people who wanted to profit from the aftermath were becoming restless.

The citizens frequently saw messengers coming in one after another on horse, and those who did not know the situation thought the war was becoming even more intense. In truth, these letters were negotiations done in the Winter Rose Fortress.

The commoners felt insecure, and the nobles also felt insecure.

Yet this had nothing to do with Brendel, and he spend three days to follow his schedule. He obtained a registry pass for to search new lands as a 'Pioneering Knight'. The pass was a document that stated the loyalty and responsibilities of a knight towards the king, which was stamped with a seal on it.

This thin piece of parchment was even more valuable than gold in the early days. However, with Aouine's decline and the knights retaining their own power in their local region, as well as adventurers' turning to lawless endeavors and without anyone interested in expanding the kingdom's boundaries, the term of a 'Pioneering Knight' gradually became a title that did not have any power to it.

Some time after the first king of Aouine, nobles slowly started to auction this title after they had solidified their foothold, and this piece of parchment slowly lost its value.

Brendel's action was similar to how he did it in the game. He told Batum to buy a pretty dress for some random administrator's wife, and he managed to get this title. He had held this title for days before Roen finally brought a piece of good news to him.

The long awaited underground auction's date finally arrived.

Bruglas's underground auction date was going to be held on the tenth day. There were numerous illegal goods including human trafficking. The people who participated this event ranged from mercenaries, adventurers, illegal merchants and even Bruglas's lawmakers.

Without a doubt, there were also nobles.

The people who controlled this market were certainly from the local underground factions, but it was known to many that there were nobles who participated in them, and none would be the wiser if they maintained a peaceful and stable society for the citizens.

The auction site was usually held at the Maria's market in Hood street or the eastern area at the Shepherd market. These areas were filled with people, and were deliberately chosen as it was actually better to use them as cover. People who paid close attention would discover that many unfamiliar faces would appear on certain days, and talked to each other and leave on the second morning.

These markets had mini auction sites that were used as cover, while the true sites were constructed only during the period and then dismantled.

These constructions might appear to be funded by ordinary merchants, but if one was to investigate, the funds came from the local parliament of nobles.

When Batum assisted Brendel down from the horse carriage, Bruglas's evening sun lit the surroundings with a fiery hue that seemed to make things look like they were burning. In this light, Ciel wore a knight's uniform and held his chest up high in order to make Brendel look like a highland knight from Karsuk.

Behind Brendel was Amandina and Romaine, acting as his younger sister and fiancée respectively.

Amandina removed her hand discreetly from Brendel's helping hand when she alighted from the carriage. She wore a black veil and an equally black formal dress, her eyes observing the mini auction site with a disinterested expression.

She appeared to be completely different than before. Brendel found her to be weak and soft when he first saw her at the run-down mansion, but she was now cold and unrelenting, as if there was an aura that forbade anyone from approaching her. Even Tirste's scout would not be able to recognize her even if he was nearby.

When Amandina disappeared from her home, no one noticed it until a few days later. The disappearance of a person typically belonged to the city guards, but the city cavalry had done a large scale manhunt for her. Three medium sized platoons searched the eastern area and nearly alerted Bruglas's parliament.

However, Lord Tirste did not want this event to trace back to him, and tied the disappearance to a prior case that happened half a year ago, and made it as a case about a headless corpse.

This was why Amandina was able to go outside safely.

Beside her was Romaine who was slightly taller than her. The merchant girl was staring at a row of crystal balls nearby. Her frowning eyebrows were knitted together, as if she was a researcher trying to analyze what exactly they were.

[Even if you stare at it however long you want, or however serious you are, there won't be anything that appear in it, you know.....] Brendel was a little exasperated.

He was certain that Romaine was trying to get Amandina's attention.

Romaine and Amandina got along well for the past few days, and she was especially delighted to have Amandina's knowledge about the outside world from her books. It was at least better than Romaine's knowledge that came from her imagination.

"What exactly is that, Ama?" Romaine finally could not resist asking.

Amandina's concentration was also on the row of crystal balls. The owner was a man wearing a black uniform. Not anyone had the qualifications to wear that uniform, and it clearly showed that he was a priest.

Amandina turned her eyes to Brendel, but the young man did not seem to react. She paused for a moment and frowned.

"That's a 'Fire seed'." Amandina kept her eyes on Brendel and replied softly.

"What's a 'Fire seed'?"

"It's a holy object that people use to spread civilization in the wilderness. I didn't think I am able to witness something like this here in an auction."

“I don’t understand.” Romain answered in a straightforward manner.

Amandina sighed in spite of herself. Brendel did not disappoint her in the past few days. She did not think that he was truly a knight, and one who was a legendary highland knight. Furthermore, he had acted in a polite manner most of the time, handled situations calmly and effectively, and fulfilled the image of a feudal lord in her mind—

[This fiancée of his is giving me a slight headache. It’s not that she’s not an easy person to get along with, and her personality is quite charming. But at the same time, she’s treating me like an encyclopedia and keeps asking me everything with the word ‘curiosity’ in her eyes.]

But she was unable to refuse and could only reply back.

“How much do you know about our world?”

“I know nothing about it.”

“.....”

The young girl coughed twice: “Then I’ll try to talk about it a little. In the Kirrlutz’s poem, their god ‘Aixule” (Marsha) created the world from Chaos, and made the six elements, ‘Fire, Wind, Earth, Water, Life and Darkness’. After Aixule established a contract with the four Elven kings, the world’s border was formed.”

“With the border constantly drawing out magic energy from Chaos, it extended to all sides and formed the land that we see now. This world should be a circle that extends infinitely from four sides, but at the same time this world is constantly affected by Chaos, so Mother Marsha created laws to bind this land and set the areas where mortals are allowed to traverse in. In this region, the sun, the stars and the moon continue to work normally. Thus mortals are allowed to flourish and civilization can continue—”

“But the land that is outside Mother Marsha’s protection, is the Battlefield of the Elements and Chaos. There is a large buffer area between the protected land and the Battlefield. This buffer area is what we call the ‘Wilderness’. Since one can travel into this buffered area from the Battlefield or from our land, the terms ‘Pioneering Knights’ and ‘Monster Waves’ came about.”

“As for a Fire Seed, it is a ‘Law’ that can be planted into the earth. Any land that is developed in the ‘Wilderness’ has a fire seed in them.”

Amandina coughed as she explained. “Do you understand now?”

Romaine nodded and then shook her head. She answered like a hardworking student: “I only understand the first sentence! O-ouch, let go of me Brendel—” Brendel pulled her cheeks, and held her in his arms as she flailed about when he heard what she said.

“Little Romaine. Looks like that you don’t have any talent for becoming a wizard, so there’s no need to worry about this. You should just worry about how much money we can earn in the auction.” Brendel spoke as he cast an apologetic look at Amandina.

Amandina gave a faint smile in return and walked towards him.

“Are you not interested in these Fire Seeds, Ser Brendel?” As an advisor, she knew that Brendel had bought the title of an Pioneering Knight.

Brendel glanced at the crystal balls. He was interested at their appearance, but there were definitely others who were interested in them as well, so he could only try to bid for it. At the same time, he had a place in mind that he wanted to go to which already had a Fire Seed, so he did not urgently need it.

“I understand. I can try and bid for it later on.”

Amandina watched him nod but she was not very convinced. Brendel appeared to be a young knight who left his home in order to get his own land, and his success depended on his ability to get his own land or got recognition in a battlefield. Her own path was a long road, and she knew that Brendel only admired her only for talent and not achievements.

With so many worries on her mind, she could not help but look at Brendel’s every action closely.

Brendel wanted to say something else when he felt her worries, but he suddenly saw Roen gesturing at him in a dark corner. He walked up to him and the cripple informed him that the auction was about to begin and they should hurry along. Brendel’s eyes darted around and indeed found that the people gathered around him had started to enter the site.

Chapter 44

Bruglas's underground auction (2)

The inside of the auction site in Maria's market did not have a large space. It was the size of a mini theater with dim light in it, and surrounding the central 'stage' was a series of chairs that piled upwards. These chairs were for the commoners. There was a separate boxed area on the four sides of the stage, decorated with silk and satin. These areas had three levels in them, with a bronze telescope in each seat, placed onto a Redwood stand, in order to let the powerful nobles who participated in this auction look closely at the merchandise on the central stage.

Roen had enough connections to actually reserve this boxed area, but Brendel refused. He did not wish to draw attention to himself, and participating in this auction was only to see if he managed to obtain any unexpected items.

They got their number and proceeded to their seats. Even though Brendel looked calm on the surface, he had a repeating crossbow tied under his wrist and it was hidden under his knight uniform. The crossbow was armed with Tamar's cursed bolts in order to prepare for any unexpected situations.

This particular crossbow was an intricate object that resembled a jewel box when it was opened. Amateurs would find it hard to use something like this, but Brendel's profession compensated for this and with his passive abilities. Due to this ability, the knowledge in his mind allowed him to act like a veteran user of such weapons, and it was enough to the point where he could install simple mechanisms on his fingers and used them with proper aim.

After he sat down for a short while and the auction had not started, Roen came to him in a disguise along with a long robe covering him and sat beside him. He carefully looked to the left and right before he spoke.

"My lord, the poisoned daggers and the potions have been sold. The daggers had caught the eyes of a familiar guild, don't worry, my lord, they were very generous with their gold. A single dagger for 2500 Tor Coins, and they did not ask who the seller was."

Not every transaction was done at the auction itself in this site. In fact, the majority of

the transactions that took place was done privately. The buyers and sellers went through a third party like Roen, and sometimes there were even more intermediaries, to ensure safety and secrecy. Each person only required a small amount of money to seal their lips.

In this grey underground city, no one was more talkative than them, and no one had tighter lips than them; it was a contradictory mix.

“What about the potions?” Brendel watched the staff with fake interest, while his attention was on the topic. He knew the rules well, and the items like the poisoned daggers and his potions typically would not be sold through the central stage.

“The potions are slightly more troublesome. The people from the Tower of Stars kept asking for the maker of the potions. They stated that the recipe for mana potions has not been circulated for a long time, and they said that the Wizards Association welcomes a professional alchemist to join them.” Roen said while he used his beady eyes to take note of Brendel’s expressions.

He wanted to see what Brendel’s reaction was. If the youth felt that this news was useful, he would praise him and make him feel safer. At the same time, if Brendel felt the situation was troublesome, Roen would feel delight at getting back at the youth. Even though they were on the same boat, beyond the fear and dread, he also felt that he could not take things lying down without fighting back a little.

The cripple looked at the youth, hoping that he would succeed and becoming rich, but at the same was hoping a little that he would fail.

However, Brendel merely shook his head and replied without showing any expression: “My friend has no interest in that. Just tell me the important details about the transaction, cripple.”

[It looks like I wasn’t wrong. The mana potion in this world is much rarer compared to the game.] Brendel thought to himself.

“Each bottle of sold for a thousand Tor coins for a total of thirty thousand.” The cripple did not show his disappoint in his face.

Brendel nodded. The price for the daggers was higher by twenty-five percent, and the mana potions sold for over two hundred percent of his original estimation, especially when the materials for making the mana potion were nothing more than ordinary

reagents.

[An insane profit.]

Brendel immediately classified this as a golden goose that would keep laying eggs. He looked at Romaine and thought it would not be impossible for Romaine to set up her own merchant guild if she used the mana potions as her primary goods.

Romaine instantly noticed his gaze and raised her eyebrows. She raised her hands and brought them to her chest, and praised him without any reservations.

“It’s half of one hundred thousand Tor coins. It’s just like you said, I knew that you would be able to do it!”

“The interesting scene is yet to come, Miss Romaine.” Ciel was behind Brendel’s seat and he smile while speaking.

“Wait, you’re mistaken Ciel! Our merchant lady is reminding me that the hundred thousand Tor coins is her capital.” Brendel said without breaking a sweat.

Romaine giggled with pride as though she was a wily fox who had managed to take advantage when her real goal was divulged.

Amandina frowned a little when she saw the scene happening before her eyes. She had seen tens of thousands of Tor coins as she had been born in a noble family, but seeing them treat the amount of money that they received like it was nothing, was something that she had not seen before.

From this exchange, she felt that this young knight might have left his home to seek his own fortune, but his family background must have been quite powerful.

Sadly, it could not have been further away from the truth. Romaine had no idea how much that amount of money was, and Brendel had billions of coins in the game. The amount of money might have meant nothing to him, but thinking that he was from noble family because of that fact could not have been any more off the mark.

The lights in the auction site suddenly dimmed. They looked back and noticed the staff was extinguishing the candles around the walls. It appeared like the auction was about to begin—

Roen whispered: "If we were in the boxed area, the list of items that is going to be sold in this auction would have been delivered to us. My lord, do you have any particular items that you want to have?"

"I do not know yet." Brendel watched the central stage becoming brighter from the candles that were being lit up. "Come to think of it, did they come looking for your trouble?"

Roen shook his head: "Just as you have predicted, Foltest's men came to look for me after that event at Miss Amandina's home. I just told them that I did not know you—"

"You sound like you're unhappy with that?" Batum mocked him from the sides.

"I wouldn't dare." Roen now knew Batum's position, and he did not act as servile as before. "My lord, that sword of yours really looks like a perfect piece of art. How much do you think it will sell in the auction?"

Brendel knew that he was talking about the magic sword made by the Dwarves. He thought for a while and said: "Approximately a hundred thousand to a hundred and fifty thousand Tor coins." (*TL: Not the Thorn of light.*)

Amandina lightly gasped from behind when he finished speaking. Everyone looked back in surprise and found the noble lady waving her hands with a blushing face: "Excuse me."

She placed her hands over her chest in an effort to prevent her heart from beating too fast. Her eyes were translating the amount of money.

[That's the equivalent of one hundred and fifty Aouine gold coins. When Brendel came, he was empty handed, but in the blink of an eye he had the equivalent of the entire savings of a small noble family in their lifetime. Two hundred Aouine gold coins. It's not an impossible thing to purchase a land fit for a knight in a remote place.]

To Amandina, this amount of money should be invested in production. She had once lost herself in her designs and bankrupted herself, but she was smart enough to not make the same mistake twice. She quickly calculated and thought of what this amount of money could do. Regardless of commercial or production investments, both routes were fine. With this amount of money, she estimated that she could grow it by thirty percent in a year.

Then she frowned again. She had introduced herself as his advisor and the young knight did not object to it, but she was not sure if he would allow her to use such a large sum of money. But Brendel noticed her myriad expressions and could not help but ask:

“Miss Amandina?”

“What?” She raised her head up by reflex.

“Are you considering about the problems in our budget?”

Amandina’s face flushed a little, but she soon recovered. She nodded seriously.

“Yes. As an advisor to Ser Brendel, I feel that I need to consider this properly—”

She spoke as she looked at Romaine without any confidence. As Brendel’s fiancée, she seemed to have more speaking power in this regard.

But Romaine continued to smile sweetly as before.

Brendel showed a look of contemplation before glancing at them: “If you have ideas, I can split the money into two. Romaine and you can get an equal portion and handle this amount of money according to your ideas, but—”

Amandina showed a look of disbelief even before he finished speaking. “Ser Brendel, are you serious?”

He nodded. It was his habit as the team leader not to doubt someone, or test their abilities by letting his team members handle things on their own.

Amandina took a deep breath and nodded earnestly: “I will definitely use this money well, Ser Brendel, I have already thought of a plan to increase this amount of money in a short time.....”

Brendel interrupted her: “No. What I want to say is this. I’m leaving it to little Romaine to help me invest the money, but Miss Amandina, I want you to help me use this money.”

“Use this money?” Amandina looked blankly at him.

The bells in the auction site started ringing, and Brendel turned his head back to the

front.

“You will understand it shortly, Miss Amandina. Of course, you can help out by discussing things with our grand merchant missy, she has a huge plan ahead of her!”

Brendel was thinking about a new land of his own. If Romaine was able to set up a merchant guild, it would not be suitable to have ties with his land. If that was the case, he needed a butler of sorts.

Since Amandina wanted to help out, he would certainly be glad to leave things to her.

“A big plan?” She was taken aback. She really did not think that this ‘grand merchant lady’ would have any probable plan to speak off, and she even wanted to advise him to not leave the important task of earning money with Romaine, but it was not easy for her to speak of this topic.

[Wait... Romaine’s actions in these past few days... She kept asking about the events and festivals in Bruglas. If I rearrange her questions in order, then... I’m seeing a big picture here.]

She suddenly stopped herself with the idea of persuading Brendel and her eyes brightened a little. She realized something and thought deeply for a while, then whispered to Ciel next to her. “Mister Ciel, before you entered the city, where was the Madara’s army at?”

“They were at the Dragos’s area for approximately half a month.” Ciel replied casually, before he paused and followed up with a question: “Did you realize it? Miss Amandina?”

He was a little surprised at Amandina. She was able to understand what Romaine’s plan was from Brendel’s words, and remarked inwardly to himself that Brendel’s advisor was someone with considerable skills.

“If Romaine’s plan works out, the profit is nearly eighty percent!” Amandina looked at Romaine as she chatted happily with Brendel. She felt like she was knowing her other side for the first time.

“Miss Romaine calculated that the profits was a fold.” Ciel replied.

“But that’s probably because she did not cover the problem of connections—”

Amandina gritted her teeth as she felt a blow to her confidence. She thought about it a little longer before she said each word solemnly: “But if we work at it carefully, it’s not impossible to have a hundred percent profit, because of Mister Roen.....”

Brendel did not notice his subordinates talking amongst themselves. That was because the auction had started and unexpectedly, the first item had already caught his attention.

There was a parchment that sat under the candle light. There was an old contract written in the Elemental language used by the Four Clans. The corners of the parchment were curled up because the elemental magic of wind, earth, fire and water were spiralling towards the center of the parchment.

This parchment was used to open a road to become an elemental, and was meant for those who were not talented in this field. Many nobles use this to create a pathway for their related family members.

Without a question, it was expensive.

But to Brendel, this was something that was worth more than money.

Because in his eyes, this was the name of the scroll:

‘Scroll of Elemental Pool (unlock)’

Chapter 45

The Boulder Mercenary's pendant

The name of the parchment was called Lancel's scroll. The crowd of people in the room started to show their surprise with low murmurs, and it spread out like a ripple. Brendel realized that many of them were interested in the scroll as well.

However, even though they whispered amongst themselves, they did not attempt to bid for it. The ones who were willing to vie for it were nobles with considerable background, sitting in the special box, and all of them waited for someone to make the first move.

"Such scrolls are made from the fairies in the Crystal Tundra. There is only a limited amount made every year to allow noble families to create more lower ranked Elementalists. Despite that, these underground auctions allowed a considerable amount of such scrolls to be sold to others." Roen explained

"Why don't the fairies create more of them?" Romaine asked.

"Creating such scrolls requires a lot of Elemental mana from their Elemental Pool, and it is a burden even for these fairies who are on par with a high ranking Elementalist. Ciel said.

"Furthermore, forcibly opening one's own Elemental Pool might work for ordinary people, their success as an Elementalist is limited and would not be stronger than the average Elementalist. Such scrolls does not mean it will be good even there is a lot of it." He continued to explain.

Batum, Amandina and Romaine were engrossed in the explanation.

"I didn't expect to see this in Bruglas." Brendel said.

Roen's nose was as potent as a dog's, and he sniffed out interest from Brendel's words, as well as the implication that Brendel had been to bigger underground auctions and not limited to just Bruglas.

“My lord, are you interested in that?”

“A little.”

“Should I get my man to bid for it?”

Brendel thought for a while and nodded. The scroll was at five thousand Tor coins, and each incremental bidding had to be at least five percent. The cripple signaled to his man, and a board was quickly raised into the air.

Five thousand.

But with the initial bidder’s attempt, the price quickly increased and from the boards going up. In the blink of an eye, it went up to eight thousand Tor coins. The announcer saw one round of bidding before he looked at Roen’s man again. The cripple looked at Brendel with questioning eyes, and the latter nodded, followed by a hand gesture...

Roen’s man raised his board again—

Eight thousand and five hundred.

Amandina’s expression changed slightly.

Romaine did not say anything while Batum’s expression was one of amusement.

The nobles in the boxed area quickly responded, and the increment was five hundred as well.

The impatience amongst them showed, as each announcement sharply rose by a thousand, steadily rising upwards.....

[Ten thousand.]

[Eleven thousand.]

[Twelve thousand.]

[Fifteen thousand—]

It was like the final thunder booming in a lightning storm. Everyone in the crowd felt

the air tightening, and they thought this bid was the final one.

Roen clicked his tongue and looked back again.

Brendel frowned.

[Sixteen thousand coins for two thousand TP. It's starting to be a question whether the price is worth it.]

But he only hesitated for a while and quickly tapped his own hand, and the board was raised once again.

[Sixteen thousand.]

The crowd's murmurs started again as they understood that it was going to be the final bidding war.

The assistant to the announcer whispered in surprise.

[Is the cripple mad? We didn't tell him to do this, if this continues the nobles will be unhappy—]

The announcer turned to his young assistant slightly and then pucked his lips to show a direction: "He's bidding for someone else."

At this point, Amandina and Batum were looking at Brendel with a curious look. They did not understand why a knight needed the scroll, and wondered if he wanted to become an elementalist.

But what was missing from Ciel's explanation, was how talented people could save time by using this scroll. Brendel did not explain this fact to them.

Ciel was silent because he understood what the scroll meant to Brendel.

The nobles' voices in the box were momentarily silenced. They wondered who the mysterious bidder was, but the opposing bidder once again raised the bid—

[Eighteen thousand.]

The number came from the fourth boxed area from the left once again, and Roen

whispered to Brendel.

[Lord Donnall. His family has several mansions near Brugas, and he has a few of his own properties here as well. He's a parliament member in Brugas, and his father and grandfather also took on this position too.]

Brendel nodded.

[There are many nobles here, but someone of his rank vying for this scroll... He's more likely to be a mouthpiece for someone bigger—]

Just when he thought that they were the only ones fighting for the scroll, new bidders who did not bid from the start suddenly came up from their new numbers, surprising Brendel as the final bidding point was at forty two thousand Tor coins.

[Even thirty thousand Tor coins would have been barely within my reach, but a number past forty thousand will definitely hurt my plan ahead. I can ultimately get the TP needed later on—]

Brendel stealthily gritted his teeth and gave up on this bid.

Amandina and Roen did not think it was strange that he stopped, and mistook it for a whim to bid for this item.

After this initial war, the auction progressed smoothly with Brendel successfully bidding for several merchandise, ranging from several thousand to ten thousand Tor coins.

Since nothing happened out of the ordinary, the crowd in the auction started to feel a little bored. Roen was able to find things to do as he explained to everyone the history of the presented items, even detailing where it came from, giving them the region as well as which noble family sold this.

Batum, Amandina and Romaine were intrigued by the description, while Brendel and Ciel discussed about the origins of each items.

They mentioned Tamar once, and felt it was a pity that he did not come due to his work, otherwise he would have most likely liked several of the items available in the auction.

The second highlight in the auction finally happened. It was a pendant, but to describe it accurately, it was a thick string that held several small rocks together. Any ordinary person might have missed it, but Brendel nearly jumped up when he saw the pendant.

[The Boulder Mercenary's pendant. If this is combined with 'The Rock Nest' made from a Rank 17 alchemist, it can reduce the materials required for making gargoyles which was created from 'The rock Nest' at least fifteen percent, meaning productivity is raised.]

He explained the usage to the others, and Amandina and Batum were especially interested in it, as they recognized the pendant's use for a region.

In the continent Vaunte, wars typically required three types of resources.

The first were humans, the second was raw Amberite, the third was typical resources like food and water. The fourth resource was 'Nest'.

Amberite was a composite rock that was mined from Somir's mine. This crystal-like quality with the color of amber possessed mana in it, and Amandina's Magicite was designed to draw the energy out, and the basis for all magic intelligent machinery; the blood of 'production'.

Other materials like food, metal, wood, and rocks are commonly found materials even in Earth.

'Nest' was the origin where monsters come from and was utilized by humans.

[To speak of 'Nest', it's necessary to speak of Vaunte's origin to explain it. How does 'Chaos' exist, and how does 'Laws' work?] Brendel began to explain.

Chapter 46

Nest

“Everyone here should know this already. The continent Vaunte’s shape was formed when Mother Marsha entered into a contract with the Four Spirit Kings. It was under the basis of six different Elements that formed the borders.

In outskirts of the borders, lies the territory of the Elements, while the inner area is an incredibly vast land.

The powers of the various Gods that shaped the laws within this world is reflected onto the sky, forming the sun, the moon and the stars. Life was created from water with the nourishment from the Earth. The wind protected the life that was created, and the flames granted them wisdom and formed civilization.

The bible noted the thirteen million laws, a’tthro (the laws of the Elements), did not apply to the Sea of Chaos. This chaotic energy was similarly reflected in the sky, and the evil disciples called it the Third Round Moon. The members of the Tree Shepard and the Unifying Guild called the Magic Moon.

It is said that this strange magical moon would appear once every decade during the summer, would overlook the earth for a few months. The powers of witches would be the strongest during this period, while users of the Elements would be the weakest during this period. It is also during this period when the Sea of Chaos brings about a tidal wave, birthing out monsters in this darkness because they are affected by the magic.

These monsters that came from the tidal wave attack the lands of civilization — Which also causes Aouine’s borders to crumble inwards, and similarly other kingdoms would shrink as well. This early era of this chaotic period, this tidal wave of cataclysmic mana was a nemesis that threatened every living being.

Which also brought about the existence of Pioneering Knights.

Even till now, a kingdom has to prepare part of their forces to guard against such events.

While it is true that this tidal wave comes about every ten years, there would only be an overwhelming wave of monsters that come about every hundred years, therefore the people in this generation are not too worried.

However, once the mana wave ends, that does not mean that the Monsters' Nests disappear. They would continue to affect wild creatures and turn them into monsters with their weak pulses of mana, and you would hear news of pathways to the big cities being attacked by monsters.

In Aouine, it is the duty of the kingdom's soldiers and the Holy Cathedral of Fire to remove the monsters and Nests. But not all Nests would be destroyed. After such a long time fighting with 'Chaos', our ancestors started to study them and they discovered they could develop them like they domesticated animals.

The dwarves, elves and humans came together and developed something that was like a 'Nest' after a long time of research.

Buga's gargoyles are a classic example. A single nest produces two gargoyles every year, and it takes a large amount of resources to produce them. Even though the gargoyles are powerful, these Nests does not mean that they are able to gather an infinite amount.

Other Nests developed other creatures. Examples would be Aouine's Flying Dragon Knights' mounts, or Kirrlutz gryphons, and commonly seen creatures that are used in battle, ground dragons, salamanders and black wolves.

Special nests are infused with Mother Marsha's powers and produce minerals affected by different elements, Saint Orsola's Abyss of Wind, the Templars' Gate of Heaven, and Madara's Valley of Shadows.

There are even hunting hounds that came from Nests, but their abilities are just slightly better than a regular hound.

A magical creature's lifespan is affected by their gradual loss of mana, and more often than not they are short-lived. Even dragon-based creatures created from nests have only about a hundred years — And it is a large difference compared to the real dragons.

This Rock Nest that I want to build produces Rock Marionettes, and their strength is the rough equivalent of seven to eight normal adults. It is considered as a relatively

low ranked Nest, but the advantage is the numbers that come along with it. Many nobles have them in their lands, and even though these Marionettes have low intelligence, they are able to be used like soldiers in the front lines.”

Brendel drank some water. Amandina and Batum started to consider the advantages of the Rock Mercenaries’ Pendant. Amandina started to calculate the amount of money that they would save, while Batum thought of the numbers. The three of them decided to get the pendant at all costs—

The base price was soon shown. It was not as expensive as the scroll and the price was only two thousand Tor coins, with each increment as one hundred.

Brendel wanted to get it at all costs, so he quietly waited to check the other bidders and avoid showing the others that he had interest in it.

The first wave of bidders ended with Amandina and Batum looking over at the bidders, but their expressions did not change.

Once the price got over three thousand, the number of people started to dwindle down. Most of the bidders wanted to try and participate and see if they got lucky, but the majority of them are not interested in the pendant.

Although the competition appeared to be steady, the bidders started to bid aggressively.

The third box of nobles who had their own lands drove the price up to over four thousand Tor coins. The price was starting to become higher than the average, but the real bidders started to corner in.

Someone drove the price up to five thousand coins from four thousand and four hundred, and for a moment the place went quiet.

Many of them thought the nobles were crazy to bid so much for a pendant that had rocks hanging on it, but a few of them believed there had to be a good reason for the price and thought there might be some worth to this pendant.

[The crowd is getting riled up. This doesn’t feel right... There are opportunists asking for information about the pendant and the situation might get out of control.]

Brendel told Roen to go for it.

Six thousand Tor coins.

Another wave of silence.

The people who wanted to try realized a bidding war was going to happen and they backed out carefully.

Seven thousand. This time it was a captain from Aouine, and another noble bid for seven thousand and five hundred.

Brendel signaled for eight thousand without any hesitation.

Eight thousand and one hundred, from the third box.

Eight thousand and five hundred. Brendel looked over to the direction of his rival. He had no thoughts about giving up about this auction. Amandina grabbed her chair's armrest, with her fingers going white from her grip.

The dimly lit auction area was completely quiet. Even the nobles were silenced. Everyone thought that bidding for this pendant at this price was not worth it at all.

Brendel's thoughts were different.

[I know that the price is over what the pendant is worth for, damn it! But right now I need military might compared to the people here!]

The auctioneer swung his hammer down once.

The Aouine captain looked like he was struggling to try for one more bid, but after a long deliberation, he did not do so.

After the three hammer strikes, Brendel finally got the pendant. Roen's men moved ahead and paid for the item, and it was sent over to Brendel in secret.

Brendel looked to his left and right and noted that no one noticed the item was brought over to him, before he carefully kept the pendant away. It was useless right now as he had no land and Nest to speak of.

After the rock pendant, the auction seemed to increase in intensity. There were a few art products that had the nobles went back and forth in their bidding. Two bronze

ranked Magical armor were up for bidding, and almost all the adventurers, mercenaries and traveling knights got excited over it, and the two armors were sold for over forty thousand tor coins. *(TL: Freya's flame ring is Brass-ranked, Bronze rank is one level below that.)*

Brendel's next bid was for a set of poker cards that was rumored to have magic in it. He did not exactly want the poker cards, but the Card of Fate that was in it. The truth was, when the auctioneer brought the poker cards up, the cards in his bag immediately caused a reaction, and he bid for it without hesitation.

This time he did not have any true competitors. There was a handful of nobles who liked this sort of things that tried to vie for it, but Brendel managed to bid for it with two thousand and five hundred coins.

When Brendel pulled out the card, he discovered it was green in color. There were a group of spiders that were inside a tornado, with 'III' written on the corners, as well as the amount of Wind Element to pay for it —

Group of Wind Spirit Spiders

(Alicia's prophecy III)

Wind 1/X

[Creature – Element/Insect, Level 5 creature]

Pay X, and put X Green creatures (Wind Spirit Spiders, Level 5) into the field.

With the death of the Wind Spirit Spiders, choose a target and burn X mana points.

'They were born from the maelstrom, and they shall return mana back into the maelstrom'

Brendel looked at it through the system. He was a little stunned over the low level 5 creature, and thought he made a loss. He did not know how to use the card from the description and strange mechanics involved. He thought about it for a while before he turned to Ciel and asked.

"What does this mean?"

Ciel looked at the card and smiled.

Chapter 47

The high note at the end of the auction

Ciel looked at that card and smiled faintly.

“My lord, this is a rare Wind Card, and a particularly rare one amongst the Wind Cards. The Wind Card series are versatile and can be used for defense and offense. Even though it is difficult to control, it is quite powerful.”

“Why don’t you just tell me how to use this.” Brendel rolled his eyes.

Ciel snorted with mirth.

“When my lord pays 1 Wind EP from your Element Pool, you will also pay 1 MP from your Mana Pool to summon one Wind Spider Spirit.”

[I have 2.9 Willpower and 15 Mana Points. So I can summon 15 level 5 Wind Spider Spirits?]

Brendel started to work the details in his mind, while Ciel continued to explain.

“With the death of a Wind Spider Spirit, a Mana Vortex will appear and devour the enemy’s Mana.”

Brendel felt a chill.

[What do you mean this is a spider summon, this is a living Mana Bomb... If I have hundreds of MP in the future, I can summon an army of spiders? If I’m lucky enough to get the legendary gem of mana regen, Tear of the Goddess, doesn’t that mean I can always have an overwhelming number of Mana Bombs?]

Brendel licked his lips in excitement as he realized that this was not a terrible card but a trump card. Before his excitement ended, Batum who was behind him suddenly slammed his hand onto his chair and spoke.

“Finally! The highlight of the show is here.”

Brendel raised his head and looked at the center of the stage. The glittering Dwarven sword had already been placed onto the display stand. The ghastly green light on the surface of the sword seemed to indicate the nature of the sword, but the organizers of the auction apparently made this the highlight of the auction—

The auctioneer brought the sword up: “This is a Dwarven’s masterpiece. The blade design and the patterns on it are like art. I don’t really need to say how priceless it is. Yet the beauty of this sword doesn’t end here, an excellent alchemist had turned it into a Magic Sword—”

The auctioneer paused for a while and turned his head around, then slowly spoke once more. “A Magic Sword.”

The auction site was silent for a moment.

Items that could do low level magic items or had artificial magic properties in them were typically called with a {Alchemists’s} prefix. Items that were more powerful like the sword in the auctioneer’s hand, had the word {Magic} as a prefix.

There was not one adventurer, mercenary or knight who did not want to have a powerful sword, so they held their breaths upon hearing the words.

As if to prove himself, the auctioneer suddenly turned back and sliced on a metal anvil that was placed there. Sparks flew throughout the air, and everyone heard a thin metallic sound. A long gash appeared on the anvil’s surface, but it was the corrosion on it that made the deepest impression.

There were audible gasps of breaths being drawn in, and even the nobles in the Boxes failed to find words for a while.

The auctioneer placed the sword down and clapped once.

“This sword is called The Tree’s heart. The base price is twenty-five thousand Tor, and each increment must be at least five percent of the base price.”

He paused again.

“Let the bidding begin—”

Amandina frowned a little when she heard the price. She was a noble lady who did not

understand what the weapon really meant to those who faced death all the time.

“Isn’t this a little too high?”

“Of course not,” Batum shook his head resolutely: “If I didn’t know that this sword is our lord’s handiwork, I might actually bid for it. The majority of the adventurers and mercenaries here have some savings that they can use. A magic sword like this, I doubt they would pass on it, unless they don’t use it as a main weapon.”

As if to verify his words, the first bidder had raised his card. People started to follow his action and raised their cards to bid the sword. There was not even a need for the auctioneer to spice up the scene, and it was a fight for the Magic Sword.

The price quickly climbed to sixty thousand Tor, and there were only four or five voices that continued to raise the price up.

Roen recognized one of them, and told Brendel that the man represented the vice-captain of the Silver-Winged Cavalry.

[I wish the captain of that cavalry unit joins in for this bid. Since he’s a working dog for that {The Unifying One} guild, that sword can actually come back to my hands again once I kill him in the future.]

The price climbed up to seventy thousand Tor, and two more dropped out from the bidding. It was only the vice captain and two other nobles in the Boxed areas.

The vice captain raised his bid to seventy-five thousand Tor, and one of the nobles backed out. However his remaining opponent did not seem to want to give up, and after a short silence, the assistant to the auctioneer read out his bid.

[Ninety thousand Tor.]

The audience stopped moving as though they had been frozen, before turning their heads to the Boxed area to see who exactly it was. Even Roen wondered if the person was a representative of Earl Nakkin.

“If it’s that bastard Earl Nakkin, this will be a political fight between the White-Mane army and the regional nobles. This is good news, my lord.” Roen said a cunning smile.

But right at this moment, a voice suddenly cut across the murmurs.

[One hundred thousand Tor.]

Brendel and the people surrounding him turned their heads over to the source of the voice. Batum's expression changed when he saw the person's face, and spoke before Roen.

"My lord, that is Lord Foltest's man."

"Why is he down there and not at the Boxed area?" Brendel asked

"Only the Gods know." Batum shook his head.

[It's fine if the sword lands up in that Foltest's hands. It might appear to be a wonderful sword to Batum and the others, but it's really nothing that special. In the Port of Freedom, Ampere Seale, items of such quality appears every day in the auctions, while Bruglas is basically too remote of an area.]

The vice captain thought for a while and raised the price again, but the representative for Lord Foltest finally deterred him from bidding again.

[One hundred and ten thousand Tor.]

[One hundred and twenty thousand Tor.]

[One hundred and thirty thousand Tor.]

The noble in the first Box continued to bid against Foltest.

"This person doesn't seem to be the representative for Earl Nakkin." Amandina said.

Brendel nodded. The price in his heart was one hundred thousand to one hundred fifty thousand Tor. The results right now was satisfactory, and even with the procedure's fee, he was able to obtain one hundred and sixty thousand Tor from this auction. It was enough money to realize his next plan.

But it seemed that Mother Marsha wanted to give him a surprise. Right when Foltest was about to quit, a new bidder entered into the fray.

[One hundred and fifty-five thousand Tor.]

This time even the auctioneer put down his hammer to look at the third Box in astonishment, wondering who was the noble who bid for it. Brendel had already turned around to ask Roen, but he was not able to come up with an answer.

The noble in the first Box finally hesitated, taking a long time to consider. He gave a bid of one hundred and sixty thousand Tor, but the mysterious person in the third box immediately gave a counter of one hundred and seventy thousand Tor—

Brendel and the people around him looked at each other. The bid had already surpassed what was the price for a Magic Sword.

Nobody answered the bid and silence hung in the air.

The auctioneer took a deep breath, recovered from his stupor and raised his hammer shakily. Three hammer strikes and the show finally ended.

“One hundred and seventy thousand Tor?” Batum patted Roen’s face: “Cripple, have you seen so much money before?”

Roen felt a little unsteady. Even though it was not the first time seeing a high bid like this, the money had nothing to do with him. This time however, it was related to him. He had only saved tens of thousands of Tor after working for nearly thirty years, but the bid that happened just now made him a little delirious.

Amandina’s hands grabbed the front of her dress tightly, trying hard to suppress her shock. Ciel tried to hold back his laughter when he saw her twisted expression.

When Brendel looked at Romaine, she was holding a small notebook and writing something in it. She looked delighted: “Brendel, we have the budget now.”

Brendel smiled.

The organizers seemed to want to make sure the night ended with a bidding war. When Brendel’s sword was taken away, another new item stole the people’s breaths.

“Fire seed!”

“Mother Marsha, a Fire Seed!”

“Someone’s selling a Fire Seed!”

Voices kept ringing throughout the place.

Brendel turned back to Ciel: “This is the best item, saved for last. It’s a pity, otherwise our sword could be the highlight of this auction.”

Ciel nodded.

But Brendel’s intention was not to pick at this small issue. “Every single Fire Seed in Aouine is produced by the Holy Cathedral of Fire. For Church Havel to sell it so openly, it looks like they are trying to raise money. It’s known that the Church Havel supports the royal family, but the royal family is planning something since they have to use a method like this to raise money—”

Ciel thought for a while and said: “Perhaps it has something to do with the war?”

Brendel closed his eyes and contemplated as well, but there was nothing in his memories related to this. He nodded and raised his head up. The atmosphere in the area had changed considerably. There was an urgent feeling spreading everywhere, and he felt that some people here had already received the news and was ready for the item.

“Should we participate?” Amandina asked.

Brendel shook his head. He had already decided not to participate in this particular bid when there were so many people ready for this. At least for the current situation, that two hundred something thousand Tor would not be able to gain an advantage at all.

He shook his head and wanted to say something else, but the lights around him suddenly dimmed. When he turned to the center stage, he saw that the auctioneer’s face had changed.

[Something is wrong!]

The young man reached for his weapon when all the candles on the wall were extinguished at the same time, and the place plunged into darkness.

Chapter 48

Chaos

The entire place was dark. Some of the female nobles' shrieks could be heard all over the place. Brendel and Roen were the first to pull out their swords from their robes, while Ciel and Batum's reactions were slower to pull their weapons out. Batum removed the strap that was holding the two-handed sword sword, while directing the girls to move in between him and Ciel.

He then held Roen's shoulder with one hand, afraid that he was going to try and do something funny. The cripple snorted lightly, but his expression did not seem to mind it.

After the panicked screams, the men angry yells and questioning voices could be heard from all directions, even from the Boxes.

It was the hall on the first floor that appeared to be more calm. These were seasoned adventurers and mercenaries, and they had enough experience in battles to remain composed, preventing the chaos from becoming bigger.

"Brendel, what's happening?" Romaine's voice was one of curiosity and not fear.

Amandina who was behind Romaine, grabbed the hems of her dress anxiously till the point where her fingers were white. But she narrowed her bright eyes and tried not to show her fear.

"Quiet—" Brendel said. He saw that there were some nobles and impatient youths who lit the area up with torches or gems from their scepters.

But the light were quickly extinguished again.

It was not uncommon to see people in Vaunte using Elementary Light magic, and some of the bigger cities had Light crystals installed into the street lamps. Even Roen had a ring like that, but he did not rush to bring it up. Anyone who raised up a light source in this darkness would only become a target.

But sometimes reality went against wishes.

Right when Brendel thought there was no immediate danger, the Thorn of Light glimmered once. He paused slightly and looked at it, and realized the sword was glowing brighter with every second. The next moment, a dazzling flash from the sword lit up the entire area clearly.

Before he had the chance to be surprised at the scene, four robed figures were rushing swiftly through the narrow corridors and passages, rushing straight at their direction.

Their hands were within their robes, indicating that there were weapons hidden there.

[Enemies and not allies.]

Brendel did not say anything but held up his left hand decisively and aimed below him. A series of bolts flew from the hidden crossbow from his sleeve, and they struck on the nearest robed figure.

The steel bolts had a powerful impact since they were so close, and that robed figure made a muffled noise and fell backwards. His allies moved to the sides and raised their heads to look at Brendel's direction.

And Brendel saw a pair of orange flames burning below the hood in every robed figure.

"They are undeads....." He was puzzled.

[Why are these damn things appearing in this area and at this time?]

But the situation did not allow him to think much. The three robed figures withdraw a strange looking scythe with desiccated arms from their robes.

Brendel was not sure whether he should call the weapon a scythe. The weapon was like half of a starfish, the end of the curved blade was gleaming in three directions. *(TL: The description of the blade is just bad. The author isn't making any sense here so take it with salt.)*

Curses had very little effect on undead, so Brendel gave up on using any more of the cursed bolts. He stood behind Romaine and retreated back in between Batum and Roen.

The remaining three robed figure pushed aside the people in front of them, and rushed straight at Brendel, and swung at him without any hesitation.

Brendel raised his sword and parried one of the strange scythe. The feedback from the sword was strong enough to make him to take a few step backwards, and he nearly stumbled onto the seat behind him.

Romaine screamed, but Amandina grabbed her arm and dragged her away. She forced Romaine to lower her body and they crawled to the opposite direction. She was really tense, but her mind was working clearly, and she acted like she had planned her actions from the beginning.

Batum used his sword to block one of the robed figure, but he immediately grunted in effort, showing that he did not fare well either against the strength.

“Iron rank, upper tier strength.” He roared.

“Zombie Outlanders!” Brendel recognized the identity of his opponents.

These were something like an animated armor, but the undead wizards had placed the soul of a warrior into an empty armor, and thus these abominations were created. They were approximately level 31-33, and considered as a second tier strength within Madara. They were agile and adapt at masking their movements, but they also had another identity—

Madara’s assassins.

Brendel felt that he was facing an elite Zombie Outlander, as its strength was near a Silver-ranked fighter. It was still not the strongest unit in Madara’s second tier forces, but as a unit within Incirsta’s undead army, it was one of his best units.

[Am I the target?]

Brendel did not really understand the situation, but the Zombie Outlanders in the place started attacking everyone. The adventurers and mercenaries were yelling in angry confusion as they were attacked.

Brendel felt that his strength was not as strong as his opponent, so he retreated backwards, grabbed a chair and threw at it. The Zombie Outlander swung his strange scythe and smashed it into pieces, but the youth was already in position to launch a

thrust to the core of the soul fire.

The Zombie Outlander gave a hoarse yell and it grabbed Brendel's sword with its hand. White flames immediately burst up from its fingers and the cleansing fire reached into the soul's inner depths, and the intense pain caused the undead to immediately scream.

But it did not release its grip and swung at Brendel's elbow.

"Bastard—" Brendel gritted his teeth. This was not the first time he faced a Zombie Outlander, but the tenacity of these undead had left a deep impression on him. When this undead fighter grabbed the Thorn of Light, he felt his position was in a bad one.

He immediately released his hand and retreated, avoiding that counter attack that was almost certain to strike him.

Under such a close distance, Brendel had lost nearly all means of attack when he lost the Thorn of Light. He was able to use the Ring of The Wind Empress, but he was unable to ensure that the impact did not hurt Amandina and Romaine.

The Holy Sword Card did not have any Earth EP that he could use, and the Magic Control card had no effect here. He was certainly able to use the Wind Spider Spirits, but summoning at the creatures at this distance would prove to be useless because the opponent would already have cut him into pieces.

His hesitation was only for one moment.

Brendel next action was to lunge at the enemy. His arms grabbed the enemy's abdomen. The collision knocked the Zombie Outlander off its feet and fell backwards together with Brendel, knocking three rows of chairs over. Brendel felt dull aches all over his body, but at least his mind was clear and got up as quickly as the Zombie Outlander did.

The creature went for the scythe, while Brendel picked up the sword that was on the ground. Due to the reach of the scythe, Brendel had no choice but to use the Charge technique to regain control of the battle. The impact left the armor flying across the opposite direction, but the swing of the scythe had already begun and it aimed at Brendel's shoulder.

"Barkskin!" Brendel roared in his mind. The appearance of his skin swiftly changed to

the color of wood, but the scythe still cut through his natural armor. Blue light flashed briefly as the scythe went through his various defenses.

For a moment, blood droplets flew in the air.

Brendel did not utter any sound as he bit down. However, it was enough to cause him to break out in cold sweat. He pulled out the scythe that was buried in his shoulder and threw it to the ground. His eyes followed the Zombie Outlander, while he quickly pulled out the Wind Spider Spirit card.

“Display. Cards of Fate, The Wind Spider Spirits.”

A series of stats information appeared in his retina.

Wind Spider Spirits.

8 HP

4 MP

Str: 1.9 OZ

Agility: 2.7 OZ

Physique: 1.0 OZ

Attributes ‘Blank’

Attributes ‘Blank’

Attributes ‘Blank’

Attack (damage 1-1)

Special ability: Ethereal form

[Ethereal creatures take 1/3 of the damage, so a weaponless Zombie Outlander will find it hard to kill a spider with a single attack. Furthermore, there are fifteen of them.]

He pointed on the ground, and fifteen green vortex appeared. The spiders that

appeared from the vortex were baring their fangs and raising their legs, and they went straight at the Zombie Outlander. One Wind Spider Spirit had nearly 2 OZ strength, and while fifteen of them did not exactly in simple addition, it was enough to stop the Zombie Outlander's movements.

The spiders bit at the creature continuously, and it roared in anger. It pulled them off from its body and threw them away onto the ground, but its actions were pointless as Brendel had already made use of this opportunity.

The sword had already pierced through its chest. Even though the Zombie Outlander wanted to retaliate at the last moment, the spiders had caused his stance to break apart.

The sword reached the core of the soul fire.

The Zombie Outlander released a groan of dissatisfaction. The damage from the Thorn of Light in that critical area had dealt four times the normal damage. Brendel watched the creature turn into a pile of ashes, while the blackened armor fell onto the ground.

700 XP went into Brendel.

He turned his head around and saw that Batum, Roen and Ciel forced back by the two undead Zombie Outlanders, while Amandina and Romaine was moving into the opposite direction from the fights.

A loud noise came from above.

Brendel looked up and saw a black figure falling from above and to the ground. It was quite for a moment, then a series of yells came.

"Sir Russell!"

"Marsha above, it's the vice captain from the city guards!"

"They killed him!"

Brendel's heart tightened when he heard that.

[It looks like I'm not the true target of these damned armored undead. Is this a plot where Incirsta is trying to kill Bruglas top brass? What is he trying to do here? There's

no event like this recorded in history.]

He was still mulling over it, when he suddenly saw the doors from the stage suddenly opening. Five different rows of skeleton archers walked out from it with their bows raised.

The youth's eyes shrank immediately.

[This many undead? What the hell is the organizers doing? The city guards? The Silver-winged Cavalry and the army? How the fuck did these undead get in?]

Brendel cursed inwardly.

Chapter 49

Fishing in troubled waters (1)

The gleaming white skeletons stopped at the same time and raised their bows, the steely bows uttering a groaning sound, before the strings were released.

The adventurers and mercenaries below finally realized the situation was a grave one, but the attacking Zombie Outlanders were forcing them back.

Brendel checked Romaine and Amandina's position again, only to find they were missing. His heart raced quickly, and he smashed the chairs around him. The splinters flew over to the nearby Zombie Outlander who was fighting with Batum.

It was momentarily distract and Batum took the chance to cleave it into two. There was a thunderous clang as the Zombie Outlander's armor was destroyed together with the body, and numerous silver light flew into Brendel's body.

At the same time, Roen and Ciel managed to make the other Zombie Outlander retreat. Brendel shouted to them and they turned back.

"Did you see Romaine?"

"We're here!" Romaine stood up with one hand waving at Brendel fearlessly, while the other hand was still being grabbed by Amandina.

"Stay down!" Brendel shouted, then he ordered Ciel next: "Ciel, Wall!"

Ciel understood the simple instruction and immediately raised a ruby up. Countless lines spread out from the ruby and extended everywhere. Ciel put his willpower into it and created a wall that extended fifty meters, covering both Amandina and Romaine.

Thousands of lines that formed glowed brightly and disappeared, and an Aerial Wall was formed.

The skeleton archers' bows continuous firing sounded like there was a chaotic song of string instruments. The first barrage of arrows struck onto the nearest people, and

they fell to the ground lifelessly, while the next barrage continued to fire onto the second and third row of people, causing them to slump over.

But Ciel saved even more people. Every time the arrows struck the wall, white light would glow from the area. The frequency of the glowing light increased as the arrows continued to pour onto it.

This wall finally seemed to wake the confused crowd. There were many wizard acolytes and low level Elementalists, and there were even mid-level wizards amongst them. They did not understand what happened earlier, but they finally understood they were under attack from the undead. They stood up and activated their rings and even chanted openly.

With the combined forces, light beams poured out from the windows and doors from the auction site. Then a series of explosions could be heard. Shockwaves carried bone fragments, dust and wooden splinters everywhere, and a few skull heads even reached Brendel's feet, rolling near him.

Dust spread everywhere in the auction site, and he coughed twice. His sounds were drowned out by the constant yells around him. He pushed away a few stumbling mercenaries and shouted to the area above him.

"Ciel, Romaine, come down to my side!"

Brendel was worried that his voice did not reach the people above him, but Batum was holding onto to Roen who had lost consciousness, and he walked towards him from the smoke. Ciel, Amandina and Romaine was behind Batum. They were covered in dust, and Romaine looked like a painted fox with a thick layer of dust on her nose.

She stuck her tongue out.

"I thought I wouldn't get affected if I was behind Ciel's wall. I shouldn't have stood up. Sorry about that, Brendel." She acted like she learned from her lesson, but her face said otherwise.

Brendel smacked her head in exasperation. He looked at Amandina and replied.

"You should thank Miss Amandina later, but now is not the time. Here, take my hand, we're leaving this place."

The noble lady coughed and replied. “There’s no need for that.”

The girl raised her chin slightly up with a little pride. As nobility, she had more or less inherited the pride of Aouine’s old nobles. She had not told anyone yet, but her family’s crest was a vivid lily on top of a shield. This lily was the same as the Royal Family’s lily, and this meant that her family was a side branch of the royal family. Even though she was a fallen noble, but her blood still carried the royal blood.

It was also from the belongings of that ancient heritage, that she was able to design Magicite. Otherwise, she would not be able to think of the design based on her talent that was not prominent enough.

Amandina had never thought of admitting defeat, the worse her situation was, the more she wanted to bring back her family name. She was different from her father, and she was a determined girl ever since she was young.

Batum’s loud voice stopped her thoughts.

“Where should we leave, my lord? We don’t know how many of these undead are out there and where they came from. This idiot cripple even said that this place would be well protected, what a bunch of fucking horse shit—”

“We should leave from the back door.” Brendel surveyed the surroundings.

[Madara’s goals are probably Bruglas’s top nobles, so their targets should probably be the Boxes above us. At the same time... That three Zombie Outlanders clearly came for me. I don’t understand what I did to draw their attention. Perhaps the news that I led the refugees were leaked out? Ebdon was a mid level commander back then when I killed him, was it necessary to come after me?]

Brendel felt that his presence had started to affect the original history of The Amber Sword.

[The numbers of the undead here are impressive enough to think that this had been planned for quite some time. If Incirsta actually predicted that I would come to the auction, that is impressive as hell. I can only hope that I’m just a bonus target that came here by accident. If I don’t move faster, then my advantages will gradually be lost.]

“I want to grab some of the items in the auction’s center stage.” Brendel said.

Ciel agreed with Brendel, and he actually analyzed some of the equipment and talked about some of the more important stuff to take. The stacked items that were left behind were like a treasure trove.

If Freya was here, she would have thrown a temper because of her righteousness. Unfortunately, she was still waiting at the Silver-Winged Cavalry headquarters to receive her rewards.

Even though Amandina was from a noble family, their qualities in this era were similar to a bandit, and she was also a very pragmatic person. When she heard of Ciel's suggestions in picking up the items, she did not stop him at all, and immediately added in her own input to make sure that the plan was successful.

Batum did not care, and the underground auction was an illegal place anyway.

Romaine had only adventure in her mind, and as a 'family advisor' she would not object to Brendel's actions.

Roan was only all too glad to participate in this plan. The more infamy he had, the better business would be in the Black Pepper Street.

Brendel looked at his 'subordinates' who was interested in earning a profit first before anything else. Under such a dangerous situation, he did not know whether this was a good or bad thing.

[Their actions remind me of my old nickname... 'Sophie (Su Fei) the greedy'. Because I'm constantly out of money, I started to..... Well, after Aouine disappeared and I joined the Church as a knight, that nickname finally left me.]

(TL: Brendel's original Chinese transliterated name is Su Fei. There's a reason why I had to use Sophie right from the early chapters, still a pretty long way ahead for that reason to appear in the story, but in case readers get the shudders when remembering this old name, I added it in to make you feel better.)

But the fondness for danger lied deeply within his blood. Regardless of him being Sophie or Brendel in this life here, they were natural gamblers.

And because of his personality, he more or less had affected his party members. The only exception was Amandina, because she was actually similar to him.

The plan was quickly decided and they rushed straight to the center stage. They quickly found out that many people had the same idea like him, but the Zombie Outlanders were preventing them from approaching the stage.

Because Brendel had another fifteen Wind Spider Spirits, they were the first to break through the assassins and come onto the stage.

He first saw the dead auctioneer and his assistant lying in a pool of blood. The Fire Seed was already gone. This made him frown.

[Two possibilities. First, it's the undead that took it. Second.....]

He exchanged a glance with Ciel, and they both saw they had their own suspicions on this matter.

The Fire Seed was an unimaginable priceless item to most living sentient creatures, but it was not to the undead. Madara used the Soul Fire and the Soul Tower to expand their territory, and the Fire Seed had almost no value to them. This particular information was not known to the commoners, but Brendel and Ciel knew otherwise.

"Something is wrong." Brendel immediately brought his sword up in a stance, and warned his allies behind him.

Ciel was also ready to cast spells.

"What's wrong?" Batum asked.

Just as he was asking, a huge object that was red in color descended from above and landed onto the ground. There was a loud crash as that object actually broke the wooden floor of the stage, and there was dust that flew up and cover the entire area.

Chapter 50

Fishing in troubled waters (2)

When the red object landed on the stage, the wood splinters flew everywhere. Brendel blocked his face with one hand and looked in front of him. There was a giant skeleton covered in red armor. It was about three humans tall, and it wore an immense helmet with a cross opening in it. On it was a hydra emblem, and he drew in a sharp breath.

[The Madara general's soldiers. A Crusader Executioner.]

Brendel felt his skin go numb, like he had been drenched in cold water. It felt like his heart and blood vessels had ice in them, and the idea of fishing in troubled waters was already gone.

He immediately put up his arm without hesitation and roared.

"Back, get back, leave here right now and follow me!" His voice was unusually stern, and even when he face the undead army, he had not acted so nervous before.

[Fuck! What the fuck is Bruglas's army doing. If this thing is even here, why the fuck don't they just open the damned city doors and surrender?!]

The Crusader Executioner was a Nest creature. It was not a normal undead that could be controlled by a necromancer, and it was a creature that had a physical soul, like a Blood Marionette or a Black Knight.

A high tier undead with the prowess of a Silver-ranked tier fighter.

Brendel saw that the Crusader Executioner had not regained its senses from descending onto the ground, and he immediately got the rest of them to run in the left direction. There was a small door leading to the back passageway.

Batum's reaction was very fast. He had been in enough battles to feel that despairing aura from the giant skeleton. It was full of bloodlust and he knew that this undead creature that was covered in fiery red armor and carried an enormous axe was something that he should not go against with.

They quickly made their way below, but as the undead finally got up, it found they were the nearest.

Brendel pushed Amandina and Romaine through the door. Ciel and Batum went next. When he looked back, he saw that the monstrous creature had locked them as targets with a pair of crimson fire in its eye sockets. It raised its axe and walked unsteadily towards them on the stage.

“Brendel?” Romaine did not understand.

“Stop talking and listen to me.” Brendel entered the passageway and locked the door. He did not know if the organizers had planned for attacks, but the door was completely made up of metal and was considerably thick. It was probably able to buy them time.

“How powerful is that monster? What should we do?” Batum asked.

Brendel raised his palm up.

“Let me think for a moment. I might have a solution.” He said.

He calmly ordered the Wind Spider Spirits to crawl out of the crevices from the passageway, and he roughly made a script in his mind, but he hesitated as he felt the plan might be too dangerous. He hoped that the creature went for someone else, since the hall had so many other people.

But before he finished hoping, the steel door suddenly shook like a battering ram had collided into it. The feedback from the door actually made the ground unstable and they lurched forward. Batum and Ciel went to reinforce the door. Brendel, who had stumbled onto the ground, stood up and gave up on all the optimistic notions.

He steeled his heart.

“There’s only one plan. All of you run and leave in separate directions. I’ll stay behind and hold him back.”

“Brendel!” This was the second time Romaine saw the youth with an uncertain expression. The adventurous streak in her heart was suddenly smothered, and she recalled that time when Brendel rescued her in Buccie.

She wanted to stay behind, but the youth refused to hear it.

[A Crusader Executioner has 47 OZ worth of strength. It's not something that Batum and Ciel can handle right now. Letting them fight with this monster would only get them killed instantly. Ciel is somewhat of an exception since it's only for a while that I can't summon him if he gets killed, but the rest of my members cannot come back if they die.]

He had already thought about it clearly. He was the only one who knew the monster's actions well enough to be able to draw it away and find an opportunity to escape. Even so, he had no confidence in handling this monster at all, as it was stronger than Ebdon and he did not have a second Gargoyle to use. In fact, if he faced against Ebdon one more time alone, he was unlikely to defeat him.

Brendel had actually considered having Batum or Roen, and even Amandina to buy some time for the others to escape, but he immediately shut the idea down with shivers. This thought made him frightened.

[If I allow this fucking thought to become reality, and give up on anyone, then some day I will give up on Freya, Romaine, and Aouine. I will become nothing more than a cold blooded creature in this world.]

Brendel shook his head to throw the idea out of his head. This stray thought had darkened his mood, and he felt like he had fought for days. He growled in a low voice.

"All of you, leave. Separate in two different groups and we will regroup later. I will stay back and secure your retreat."

"My lord, we cannot leave you behind!" Batum transited from a mercenary to a retainer without him knowing.

"My lord, this is the vanguard of the Madara's undead forces. You're not its match, please allow me to buy you sometime." Ciel placed his hand on his chest and answered solemnly.

"You know of it?" Brendel looked at him in surprise.

"Brendel," Amandina said sternly. "We don't need you to act as a hero right now. I placed my dreams on you and I hope that you remember your promises to me!"

“What the hell are you talking about, Amandina.” Batum grabbed the girl’s shoulders angrily.

The second impact came again, and the three men felt the terrible strength behind the door.

Brendel knew that there was not much time left, and he spoke in an angry voice.

“When did a woman have the authority to interfere with a man’s battle, Batum, take her away.”

“Ser Brendel, you—” Amandina looked confused, but she took a deep breath as she realized what Brendel intended to do here. She stopped her actions and looked at him with a conflicted expression.

“Brendel, what about me?” Romaine asked.

“You’re not a woman?” Brendel asked in exasperation.

“Oh.” Romaine replied in a disappointed voice.

Since it was an order, Batum did not have any grounds to object. He could only nod and bring Amandina and Romaine away.

Most of the auction sites had a passageway that allowed goods to be transferred away if there was an inspection, and Brendel entered into one of them.

[If I dared to say something like ‘Women should not participate in battles!’ in the game, my female senior leader would have beaten me up... She really taught me well. In the end I became a pretty good leader, but most of the gamers that I know eventually left when Aouine was on its final breath. In the end, I was the only one behind in Aouine’s last battle.]

This moment now was the same scenario.

Brendel might have Freya, Romaine as his close friends, Batum and Leto and the other mercenaries as his retainers, and a brilliant Amandina as an advisor, but his heart still felt like he was alone in this world. He did not speak to anyone about the future of Aouine, or that he was not from this world —

He looked back at Ciel.

“My lord, you know of my true identity. In a certain way, your safety is more important than my life. Even if I disappear, as long as you are still alive, I would have the chance to appear once again. But if you die, then everything ceases.”

“You have persuaded me,” Brendel nodded: “If that’s the case, let’s fight together.”

The metal door finally split apart and the crimson axe could be seen. Brendel beckoned to Ciel.

“Quickly, let’s get to the other side.”

Brendel glanced behind him as he ran to the other door. The Crimson Executioner swung once more and finally broke through the door. It lowered its body to enter the room and surveyed the passageway. A white beam of light hit the helmet, and the frightening monster turned its head around. It immediately spotted Brendel and Ciel. The squire was still maintaining a gesture.

“Over here, you mindless undead!” Brendel taunted.

The skeleton gave a ghastly roar and ran over, with its body standing straight up. The wooden ceiling broke apart like it was made of paper. The monster had 22 OZ worth of agility, and though it might look clumsy, it was actually very quick. Its movements were accompanied with skeleton clacks, and the huge body was already in front of Brendel.

Brendel pulled Ciel out into an open room, but the Crusader Executioner was already in motion for an attack. The door to the room was easily destroyed, and it entered the room with rocks and granite accompanying its feet. It quickly discovered Brendel and Ciel moving to a passageway that led to the auction site.

Brendel was not as tense as the time when he escaped from Buccie. Even though he knew that Ciel and himself were not able to do any damage to this high level undead, he was not without a chance. There were two routes that he could take. He could wait until the Silver-winged cavalry to come, and even if the commander was a traitor that worked for the Unifying Guild, he was not allies with Madara. The commander was also strong enough to handle this monster as he was a Gold-ranked fighter.

[Even the captains of the various divisions are of the same strength as the undead

here, so there should be no problems of defeating this monster. But lasting that long is a question. The next thing I know I might have my head chopped off... The second option is the best.]

He needed to find the 'Scroll of Elemental Pool (unlock)'.

Chapter 51

Fishing in troubled waters (3)

[It doesn't take long to unlock my Elemental Pool. As long as I have that, I will be able to pay for the cost of the 'Holy Sword' and self-preservation should be no problem.]

When one unlocked his Elemental Pool with a scroll, he would absorb the abundant energy within the scroll and fill up the Pool with Elemental energy. Brendel ordered the spiders to search for the scroll, as they were made from Elemental energy and were better candidates to search for the item compared to himself.

He turned his back and yelled: "Ciel!"

"I understand, my lord." The young wizard looked at him and smiled: "Good luck, I'll pray that I'll meet again soon—"

Brendel nodded earnestly. Ciel raised a ruby into the air and countless lines formed between his thumb and index finger. The lines that were created took from Mother Marsha's protective laws of magic and intertwined with each other. A wall formed with gold light and disappeared into thin air.

The gigantic skeleton with crimson armor swung the axe onto the invisible wall.

A ripple of wind current surged outwards, and the gemstone in Ciel's hand cracked, but he continued to use his life to maintain the spell.

"Hurry, my lord!" He yelled in a low voice.

Brendel rushed out to the center stage. He did not know who managed to bid for the item. Even though items in the auction could be passed over directly, the nobles tend to protect their dignity and let the organizers send the items straight to their home.

[There's still a chance it's still here.]

He quickly ran to the path to the corridors, and he tried to find the doors to the Boxes. But with each door he opened, he found that it did not lead to the passageway. He

became increasingly disappointed and anxious.

After a short while, he heard a thunderous boom made from the Crusader Executioner. Brendel's expressions changed a little and he called out the system. The Highland Squire card was in the middle of the pack and it was colored in gray when he selected it. The Wind Spider Spirits were also the same. Half of the Wind Spider Spirits were dead and the card was also half covered in gray. It looked like the card was also going to go into the graveyard.

He hesitated for a while but he did not call the spiders back. It was very hard for him to search for the item in this place alone. The footsteps behind him were becoming closer, and he realized that the monster was not going to give him any time —

Suddenly, a spider popped out from one of the rooms and stopped next to his feet, before running off to another area.

[It found the scroll?] Brendel's heart skipped a beat and chased after it. His agility was higher than the spider and it was easy for him to follow it, but the heavy and dull footsteps felt like they were coming closer and closer, and his heart beat just as quickly.

[How much further?]

[Am I going to be caught up?]

[Is it the scroll?]

Brendel felt there was no certainty that the spider found the scroll, but he could only bet on it. The spider and him turned at a corner and he saw that corpses lying on the corridor. They looked like the workers in this auction site.

[There are enemies here.] Brendel became alert, and he immediately saw that they were skeletons that walked out. He exhaled in relief, and he used the Charge technique to sweep across the undead. They might have been deadly enemies a month ago, but now they were just cannon fodder.

The first skeleton seemed to swung at him with a slow speed, and Brendel's thrust was ten times faster. The sword cut across the hand and into its chest, and from the cut sections, white flames started to erupt and consume the entire body.

Brendel continued to run past seven skeletons, and when he put his sword back to the

sheath, the skeletons fell to the ground and burst into flames. The youth did not have any time to relish on his kills as the crimson figure was already at the corner.

The Crusader Executioner had 22 OZ worth of agility and it far surpassed Brendel who had less than 10. The swinging axe destroyed the ceiling as it reached for Brendel, and he had nowhere to escape.

The only option was to activate Power Break.

When the Thorn of Light met the axe, there was a metallic wail as the blade bent backwards in a bizarre angle. Brendel felt like the bones in his right hand shattered into pieces, and he was flung onto the wall.

It was fortunate that he had landed next to the spider, and he stood up in pain and continued to follow it. He had lost his sword as his hand was unable to hold on to it.

[I can't feel my right hand..... If I don't get the scroll, that's the end of me.]

When he entered the room, he surveyed the room with a hopeful expression, but he saw a scene that he did not wish to see.

A Zombie Outlander which was next to a mercenary's corpse, turned its head back. It did not expect that someone was outside. It held a scythe that was still dripping blood, and it looked at Brendel with a pair of green flames inside its sockets. The youth found that it was holding on to something tightly.

It was a clear crystal that held burning flames within it.

A Fire Seed.

The Zombie Outlander raised its scythe, but Brendel was one step ahead of it, and he supported his right hand up with his left hand. The pain almost made him tremble, but he said through gritted teeth: "Oss!"

The immense wind pressure that condensed in an instant seem to leave the room in a vacuum, before it exploded with a thunderous boom. The maelstrom of air went straight to the Zombie Outlander and caused deformations to the armor. It was thrown backwards to the wall and blasted it through, leaving behind a gaping hole.

The undead creature was not a defensive creature like the Gargoyle, and it was

instantly destroyed like the swordsman in the Pine Fortress.

Half of the body remained behind, and Brendel went forward to grab the Fire Seed from its hand. He did not know how useful it would be, but he did not care anymore. When he turned back, the Crusader Executioner was holding on to a crushed Wind Spider Spirit that dripped green fluids onto the ground.

The monster laughed from within its hollow chest. It was not sentient, but this undead monster had an innate bloodlust towards living creature.

“Fuck off.” Brendel raised the Fire Seed with his left hand and squeezed it—

The crystal ball shattered, and red light poured out from it. It swiveled around Brendel and expanded ten times in size, and moved towards the Crusader Executioner. The monster raised the axe, but it paused and stood still in an instant, as it was paralyzed.

At that moment, all the Elementalists and wizards within ten miles of Bruglas, stopped what they were doing with a change in their expressions and looked towards the direction of Bruglas.

The red light continued to swivel and expand, pouring out from the auction side and went into Hood street, circled around the area and finally spun around the entire Bruglas city. It continued to broaden several miles before it slowly stopped and disappeared.

It was a short moment, but the solders in the Silver-winged Cavalry watched their shadow hounds evaporate in an instant.

The power of Order.

The living undead revered Mother Marsha like humans did. They were also creatures that were based on Order, and the Fire Seed would not affect them. But the Crusader Executioner was different. It was a Nest creature.

The only exception to this was a Guardian Nest, otherwise all Nests are made from the Chaos. The Shadow hounds were low ranking creatures that were unable to fend against it and quickly evaporated into thin air.

The Crusader Executioner was dealt an immense impact and was unable to move. The youth saw that it took 110 damage, and he sighed with relief.

[I gambled correctly...]

No one in their right mind would use a priceless Fire Seed to do something like this, but it proved that Chaos and Order were in opposition of each other.

Brendel took in another deep breath and quickly searched the room for signs of the scroll. The spider must have found the Fire Seed instead of the scroll. He did not find it and he quickly left the area, as the Crusader Executioner would not stay down forever.

Chapter 52

Pursuit, escape

After Brendel ran out of the room, the Crusader Executioner stood up slowly. Its bones creaked and it twisted its body with effort, and its movements started to become smoother.

Brendel found four different Wind Spirit Spiders climbing out from the ruined auction site. Two of the spiders clearly transmitted they found the target, and pointed to their respective targets.

Brendel was slightly relieved they came back with some success. Judging from their intelligence, they were not able to be certain of what they found was the scroll he needed, and he needed to check it for himself.

One of them was to the south, approximately thirty meters away, while the other was in the west leading to the showroom, approximately fifty meters away.

[The possibility that the item is in the showroom is higher, but the danger is beyond words.]

He thought to himself as he unsummoned two Wind Spider Spirits in order to prevent the card from entering the graveyard. As he mulled over the possibility of the scroll's location, the Soul Fire in the Crusader Executioner was becoming stronger.

[Ciel is gone. The Thorn of Light is lost somewhere in the wreckage, and the bones in my right arm might be fractured. Even now I don't feel any sensation in it. The spiders are useless against the enemies here, and the Ring of the Wind Empress is recharging. Even though the fatigue from the Mana Exhaustion is settling in, it's fortunate that I still have half of my stamina and my HP is considerably full.]

He lumbered across the corridor unsteadily, thoughts blazing through him quickly.

[The cursed crossbow isn't going to work. Another option is to jump from the second floor's window and escape to a bustling street... But it's also possible that the undead monster is able to track me from my Life Ripple. And if that's the case, I will not be

able to outrun it under an open area... The Crusader Executioner has weaknesses, but the absolute difference in strength makes it impossible.]

He could almost hear the undead monster moving again. Brendel shook his head and discarded that idea. It was only for a short moment, but it felt like the auction site a tornado had ran into it. The entire landscape of this area had changed, and once the undead monster came after him, he would not be able to escape more than ten meters.

“I need to find a solution.”

He suddenly spotted a skeleton remains on the ground near him. It was most likely his handiwork, and his heartbeat suddenly spiked.

That was a loud crashing sound. The giant skeleton walked out with its axe dragging behind him on the ground, making a loud din. The ribcage of a Crusader Executioner held a blazing flame within it, and the bones were tempered with the powers of Chaos, making them harder than normal metal. It wore pauldrons, helmet and a armored dress.

It turned its head from left to right, but there was no sound in the corridor. It paused. The Life Ripple that it felt earlier, made it certain the human came through this area, but that feeling had become impossibly faint.

Brendel was lying next to the skeleton.

He lightly exhaled and held his breath. He tried his best to steady his heartbeat, and made his blood to slow down as much as possible to escape detection from the undead monster. The Crusader Executioner indeed slowed down. Brendel’s Life Reaper was becoming weaker in its weak vision. It was a little doubtful, and it slowed its footsteps.

To avoid being deceived.

The youth understood that it was possible for it to see him, and he carefully took the black steel sword from the skeleton soldier’s grasp, lightly and slowly. Even though he felt his heart was slow, it was beating forcefully like a huge drum, and it knocked against his senses. He did not know whether he was feeling things wrongly, but the skeleton was approaching him.

It was no more than ten meters.

At this distance, a single assault from the undead monster would have his body split into two. He turned his head a few times, as if to check whether his head was still on his body.

The undead monster took another step.

Brendel was unable to maintain his composure. Even though he had learned to be calm from the game, he was using his life as a gambling token. He had seen the vanguard in the game before, and it was well known that it was able to penetrate army lines with speed and viciousness. The permanent bloodlust it had made it well known to everyone. The axe it had was four meters long and when it put everything behind the axe, it was over twenty tons of force behind it. Humans had to spend one hundred times the price to face an undead army. In Karsuk's records, the necromancers led ten of these creatures against an entire legion of Aouine's infantry and was victorious against them. In that battle, these creatures were like moving fortresses, and the infamous legends they had were well known.

The only humans that could face these creatures were well known elites.

Brendel did not reach that level yet.

When the Crusader Executioner's gaze went over him, his heart accelerated and the blood in his body started to move. The Life Ripple became clear again, and there was a slight pause in the skeleton's movements.

It had seen through Brendel's trick.

Time had only passed for a few seconds.

Brendel felt cold perspiration on his forehead. Any actions that he made would invite an attack, but maintaining this situation would only last a few seconds. He looked at his stats and thought that even a few seconds was better than nothing.

[Even a few seconds more is better than nothing!] He prepared himself and rolled over to the side with force.

The skeleton immediately reacted and raised its axe. For a single moment, Brendel felt the cold reflection on the light coming from the blade onto his face, which turned his face white from the light exposure. The monster covered a dozen meters in an instant, with the axe running against the wall, dragging granite and wood splinters along its

path, creating a gaping gash in it.

The walls of the showroom have been fortified, but under the immense strength of the undead monster, it was torn apart like a piece of paper. The swing brought along a burst of wind pressure and torrent of debris towards Brendel, but the youth immediately continued his action from a roll to a leap to the wall. He kicked against the wall and flew in the opposite direction of the swinging axe.

The axe was destined to hit the empty ground, and it landed with a thunderous boom. The floor cracked into countless pieces and sent broken rubble flying everywhere. Brendel landed in between the skeleton's legs and ran through to get behind it...

The undead monster roared from the depths of its soul and tried to stab him with the axe, but Brendel had already moved away from the area and jumped onto the skeleton's femur bone. It wanted to move the axe around but the ceiling interfered with its movements time after time. In the blink of an eye, Brendel had already escaped its attack three times.

It finally realized something and it used its hand to grab the cunning human

[Fifteen seconds!]

Brendel had lasted long enough.

When the skeleton reached for Brendel with blinding speed using its hand, Brendel jumped to the side and activated the Charge technique just as the cooldown finished. Brendel's speed made him almost twice as fast as the monster, and he sped to the opposite wall, striking it with his left hand with the activation of Power Break—

Twenty OZ worth of strength struck against the wall.

The black steel sword groaned and broke into pieces. The wall was similarly in cracks as the inner structure was destroyed. Brendel threw away the sword and punched the wall with his left hand, and the wall collapsed to the outside. He jumped into the area and found himself in a room. The Wind Spider Spirit was already waiting for him as it had made through the area from the underground sewers.

[I'm near the target.]

But the undead monster was even closer to him. Brendel did not dare to waste any

time, and continued to move forward like a comet with the remaining Charge activation time. The skeleton smashed against the wall, missing Brendel by inches. It roared angrily as it failed to reach him, and he struck the wall with axe until the opening was large enough. Rocks fell all over it as it squeezed through the room.

Brendel ran through the doors, while the skeleton charged behind him like a humanoid bulldozer, destroying the walls. It was a short moment, but it had already destroyed three walls, and it looked like a portion of the building had collapsed from the outside.

Brendel was calculating the distance with burning urgency.

[Two more rooms!]

He took out his dagger and turned around to aim for the skeleton. He threw the dagger against it but it simply knocked it aside. The sharp blade merely left a white scar on its bone, but it suddenly raised its head up. There was a Wind Spider Spirit that launched towards its face, but the monster swatted it away and splattered green fluids onto the ground.

Brendel passed through another room.

The monster raised the axe again as it got closer to him, making him shudder. It looked like he was unable to make it in time.

Chapter 53

Planeswalker

The undead monster took a giant stride and raised its axe. Even though there was a wall behind Brendel and the monster, he was experienced enough to know that he was within attacking distance, and his heart raced quickly. He was unable to think of any solution and the only way he could think of was to sacrifice an arm to save his life.

He was already prepared to make a decision like that.

But at this moment, he clashed into an impossibly attractive young man who was about the age of twenty five who came from the corner. He had silver hair and purple eyes, and his lips were pursed tightly together in an gloomy expression. Behind him were two men wearing a uniform that was deep blue in color, complete with silver colored armor, a long sword attached to the belt, and the pauldrons had silver scales on them.

They wore the formal uniform of the Silver-winged Cavalry.

The young man was the illegitimate son of the Grinores duke, Lord Tirste, who worked directly for the commander of the Silver-winged Cavalry, with the rank of Master Sergeant. He was slightly surprised when he saw Brendel, as if he remembered something, but his expression quickly darkened. He did not say anything and immediately thrust the rapier into Brendel's heart.

His movements was blindingly fast; his hand did not shake and was accurate. It was something akin to drawing a very fine line with a silver thread, and anyone would have found it difficult to perceive it.

Brendel was particularly alert from the battle with the undead monster. He immediately realized that the person in front of him was hostile and not friendly. As he did not know how strong the person was, he could only try to cover his vitals and turn to one side.

Tirste was slightly taken aback. He did not expect for a normal Iron-ranked mercenary to be so alert. As the adjustment to the blade's trajectory was late, it only streaked

across Brendel's shoulder like a venomous snake, bringing a spurt of blood into the air.

Brendel uttered a guttural noise and fell backwards together with the sword's thrust. He saw Tirste's attack clearly.

[Mid-rank Knight's swordsmanship. This person is at least a Gold-ranked fighter. If he wasn't a little distracted in his attack, I would have been a corpse. When did I offend a high ranking Third-tier fighter? And for someone like his age, he must be a 'Blessed' person.]

Brendel was not wrong. His opponent was not only a 'Blessed' person, he was also one of the bishop within The Unifying Guild (A candidate for the Unifying Guild's elder.). He was prouder than most people his age because of his achievements.

But this pride had been wounded for the second time when it came to Brendel. Tirste had never failed before, but it was a fact that his plan went awry when Amandina went missing, and he had been in a foul mood ever since.

The Unifying Guild had received news that Amandina's lineage could have been related to the Seifer's dynasty one hundred years ago. There was the concern of a great secret, but he thought that the young noble lady was not going to escape and it would not matter, until she disappeared before his eyes. He might have a frivolous expression when he did things, but he was very thorough internally.

It was the first time he tasted failure.

This young man in front of him. The recent information they gathered pointed that the information they had a while ago was wrong. Based on the information from various locations, the Unifying Guild in Bruglas was certain that there was a leader above Leto. Tirste had suspected Brendel ever since he appeared with Batum for the first time.

Though it was merely a suspicion, he did not keep it to heart, and he certainly did not expect to meet Brendel in this place. The instant he saw him he decided to test him out.

His method of testing was killing the person.

Even he killed wrongly, it was fine. After all, Brendel was just a nameless mercenary.

But Tirste did not expect Brendel to give him a surprise. A monstrous surprise.

Brendel's fall was in between the two soldiers and Tirste. With a roll, he was behind the three men. Tirste was still puzzled over Brendel's actions and wanted to stab Brendel again, but the wall in front of him suddenly broke apart, with the Crusader Executioner red helmet peeking out from the crevice. The axe came next as it smashed through the crumbling wall and onto Tirste.

Tirste was astonished and he immediately parried the axe with his sword. The blast of wind from the sword made the crumbling rocks fly backwards, but his voice was hoarse.

"Executioner!"

The undead monster realized that Tirste had managed to block its axe with the slender sword, and the Soul Fire within his eyes flickered. It formed its right fingers into claws and went straight for his chest.

Any normal human behind would have his body ruptured by the attack, but Tirste calmly used his left hand and stopped the undead monster's attack. He did not move much, but under the grasp of his left hand, the skeleton's fingers could not move.

"Catch that young man!" Tirste did not dare to underestimate his opponent even if he was a Gold-ranked fighter, and he could only order his subordinates capture Brendel at this moment.

But Brendel was far more capable than he thought. He had already considered the possibility of having the Crusader Executioner fight with the bastard. Even before the undead monster's attack, he had already slipped away to find the scroll.

[It's just outside this room!... If the Wind Spider Spirit did not get it wrong this time.]

Brendel smashed the door open. The first thing that he saw were the medicine on the table. He recognized it easily because this medicine was the same one that Tamar and he had made.

[It found the wrong item...]

Then he stopped. He went to the table and picked up the box, and he stopped breathing for a moment. In it was the familiar yellow goatskin parchment lying quietly

into the box.

[This is it. This scroll can save my life. With the Holy Sword Card, I can use a Tier two attack, even if it's just for a while, I can face even a Gold-ranked fighter and escape from him!]

He bit his thumb to open a wound on it, and rubbed the blood in the center of the parchment.

It was that simple to form a contract with the Elements—

The parchment glowed and started burning from the corners. It was a fire from another world, from the Element Flames within the abyss Barborda, and it was also known as the Contract Flame. The Element Flame was first used when Mother Marsha established the first contract with the Fire Spirit King.

Once the contract was established, the patterns on the scroll would randomly appear on the back of Brendel's hand, and it was known as the Element Emblem, and also known as the symbol of Elementalist.

Brendel checked his emblem, and found that it was the most common Fire Emblem. He sighed as he had hoped to have gotten something special. He did not hope for Tulman's saintly emblems that had all six elements, but he at least hoped to get three or four on his hand. A single emblem meant that he did not really have a future as an Elementalist.

[It's fortunate that I'm not going to become an Elementalist...]

The contract establishment was reflected in his retina. The green color words indicated that his Elemental Pool was formed. There were six cells for all his Elements, with the exception of the Fire Element, which had seven. With that, Brendel knew that he did not have the potential to become an Elementalist.

A player in the game had seventeen cells for every element, as well as a usable Light and Dark pool. It was the same as a 'Blessed' person.

To describe Brendel's status, he was like the most unsuitable common man to become a wizard or Elementalist, and had the unbelievable luck to use a scroll.

[Let's see... If I remember correctly, casting one Flame arrow requires three cells of

that Flame EP, which kind of means I can cast two basic magic spells every week. Something like Ciel's basic magic arrow.]

Even though he did not intend to become an Elementalist, Brendel felt like he was going to cry over his horrible Elemental Pool.

He called out the system as he heard footsteps outside the door. He did not know if it's the young man who was a Gold-ranked fighter, and he wanted to grab the medicine on the table. But he failed to grab on to anything, and he suddenly realized that he was somehow not inside the auction site anymore.

He was in a place with the surroundings in infinite darkness—

[What? All the things in the room are gone... What's with this darkness, I have never seen this before... Wait, the only time this darkness happened was when I died. Shit! Did I die already? But this isn't a game! What the hell is going on?!]

He surveyed his surroundings and wondered if was under an illusion spell.

[But that's pointless to cast a spell like this. In fact there's no illusion spell that functions like this. If it affects my soul, then my Unyielding talent will activate. There's no way I don't feel anything.]

Brendel found himself at a loss for words in the next moment.

He saw a young man walking out from the darkness. He had blood-red eyes and long black hair that reached his shoulders. He smiled at Brendel, with his long slender hand that looked like it belonged to a woman brushing across his robes.

"It looks like you're very confused?"The young man said.

Brendel recognized the robe on the young man. But the crimson emblems that intersected each other in four directions on the sleeves made him pause.

A high level Elementalist who held a Twelve-circle spell was able to become a Spirit user, and an envoy for the Spirit King, and would have one flower emblem on his sleeve.

Two flower emblems meant he was a Grandmaster.

Three flower emblems are considered Sages.

[Four flower emblems? Elemental Emperor, Tulman? This young man looks like he fits the legendary description from Mirrna's records. Black hair with blood red irides, a follower of the Dark Dragon.]

He hesitated for a long, and did not dare to confirm if he was the legendary figure.

[Didn't he die a few thousand years ago?]

But the young man seemed to see past his questions and nodded.

"Indeed, I am Tulman."

"You're Tulman?" Brendel was so shocked that he forgot his surroundings. "How is that possible?"

"That is not important, Brendel," He replied. "My last contractor had perished three hundred years ago, and the previous person who brought the cards here did not wish to give up on his path as a knight. What I did not expect was to find a new successor just after a few decades."

He stopped and gave a smile. "What I mean is, would you like to stop here for a while and listen about the tale of the Planeswalker?"

"Planeswalker?"

Brendel was stunned.

Chapter 54

The road to surpass limits (1)

“Planeswalkers?”

Brendel nearly groaned out. He felt his forehead, wondering if he was dreaming. The person before him who called himself Tulman, along with the strange surroundings and information, made his mind a complete mess.

[I have never heard of a profession called Planeswalker in the game. That VRMMORPG is spectacularly complicated and huge, and I can't possibly know every single aspect of it.]

But Brendel felt that things were too forced, and instinct told him that his guess was incorrect. Brendel had a poker face, but his mind was spinning quickly.

[What place is this? How did I get here? Planeswalkers..... Does this mean that the game world different from this reality?]

Tulman's hands were placed in his robes, and he was floating in the darkness. He saw that Brendel was showing signs of doubts. He smiled and spoke:

“Looks like you're still doubtful of this place. This is just a projection magic, and it allows me to transmit the information that I have left behind directly to your mind. There's no need to worry. This place is inside your mind, and everything is created within you—”

Brendel knew that Tulman meant to say subconsciousness.

“Are you saying that this is a magic that affects the soul? Then why isn't my Unyielding talent working?” He was slightly calmer than before, but he asked again: “How should I leave this place?”

Brendel suddenly remembered that he was still in danger, and he could not afford to waste any time here.

“There is no need for you to be in a rush to leave. This is the world that you have imagined, and everything that happens here is as fast as your thoughts. The Basett people has a saying: ‘A person could have dreamt a long dream in a single moment’. Even after your thoughts have come to pass, a second has not transpired.”

Tulman smile became even broader: “Even if you are going to die the next second, you can live for an hour longer in here.”

Brendel carefully dissected the meaning of his words. His rational thoughts were willing to believe him, but his instinct still warned him of the danger outside. He took a deep breath.

“I got it, but let us get to the point. Emperor Tulman, what exactly you want to tell me? What’s a Planeswalker?”

Brendel forced himself to calm down and ponder on the meaning of this ‘dream’.

[Tulman said that this is a projection, then it means there’s information he wants to pass to me. But I don’t see myself related to Tulman. Looking at my other half’s body, he’s a pure southern Aouine citizen. He doesn’t have Mirrna or Basett blood in him. There’s no link for me to inherit anything from Tulman.]

Brendel’s thoughts went to the items on his body.

[Projection... Then it must be some sort of medium. There’s a bunch of matchsticks, a deer statue and medicine, the fruit of the Golden Demonic Tree and some reagents. All of these should be excluded. The Ring of the Wind Empress is a replica, so it shouldn’t be that. Furthermore, that ring leads to another different quest.]

Roan had tracked down the information on the painting that contained it, so Brendel got to know the lore. Roan claimed there were thirteen replicated rings centuries ago, and each of them was priceless now. It was a merchant who handed it to an ancient knight, and from then on it exchanged hands until it reached Brendel’s grandfather. As to what happened to the merchant, Roan did not know.

Brendel suspected that Roan was still hiding something, but he was certain that this replicated ring had something to do with the Wind Sage, Osor. Still, that had nothing to do with Tulman.

[The mysterious rock that I got from Berg Nesson? I have always felt that his

background was more than it seems, as it is strange that Amandina was able to make Magicite for no apparent reason. In the game lore, this was something that puzzled the players. That young man might have discovered that something, maybe not about the Magicite, but the background of Amandina's family.]

Brendel shook his head. Even though he felt that the mysterious rock was the most suspicious, he suddenly remembered that it was after he used the scroll, that he entered this dark world.

[The scroll itself has the legitimate watermark created by the fairies, so it is not the scroll itself. But the activation of this spell, it is the unlocking of my Elemental Pool. Then... this link. The Cards of Fate. Because I saw them as techniques and not items that I didn't connect the dots. Now that I think about it, these cards are more and more suspicious.]

The cards had never appeared in the game. Brendel thought that it was incredibly strange that a whole series of cards had not been heard by anyone.

[It's possible that one might not have heard of one of the card names, like the Wind Spider Spirit card, but not hearing of the deck itself? That's like saying you have never heard of what a magician wears for equipment. And the exceptional freedom of these cards actually allows a warrior like myself to use magic freely. You can even say that these cards is an entirely new profession. It's not like these cards appear only in Madara, it appeared in the city that I am most familiar with.]

[The tomb of Gerald, The valley of the Golden Demonic Tree, Fortress Riedon, Bruglas. I have been in these area for a long time, and I can even remember all the rumors for the first three years inside the game. Nothing comes to mind. In the first place, why did I allow myself not to think about these cards?]

Brendel did not realize that he was in grave peril when he found the cards, and like so many people, concentrated at surviving first. Brendel's fingers felt to his pocket.

[If... this is a whole new profession.]

"You mean a Planeswalker is.....?"

"You have guessed correctly, the Cards of Fate are related to a Planeswalker."

Brendel immediately stopped talking, because he knew that the young Tulman before

him was going to explain everything.

“I need to clear one misunderstanding. These Cards of Fate are not created by me. You should have guessed by now, but they are even older than what we know in history.” Tulman brought his hand out and flipped it over. A card was on his palm, but it was facing down. Complicated sigils were drawn on top of it.

“If you take a look at the patterns here, you would find that they are the original sigils. I had merely simplified them with my little understanding, and passed down what I knew to the humans, elves and the Mirrna people.”

“Hold on,” Tulman raised his hand up and stopped Brendel from interrupting him: “I know what you want to ask. Why is it that I’m obviously the descendant from the Mirrna and Basett blood, and an eternal enemy of the light, help the humans and elves?”

He laughed: “It’s very simple. As a Planeswalker, the problems and solutions that I see were different from others. I was all too young when I got these cards, and I tried to pursue the truth in this world. The cards combination that I created was called ‘Unification’, and with that intention, I believed that there was not much difference between the races, or even many other things. The only things that I saw differently was the very basic elements in the world.”

Brendel listened carefully and sat down. He thought for a long time.

“To tell the truth,” Brendel said: “I don’t really get what you mean, can you make it simpler?”

Brendel did not have the mood to think anymore. He only felt that the Planeswalker from Tulman was a new profession that could bring a great change in his future. He did not understand why, or perhaps he was under a wrong impression, but his intuition was telling him that the cards were much more than he thought they would be.

Tulman nodded: “Certainly. To speak about Planeswalkers, you have to start with the cards. Every single card represents a different viewpoint in this world. It is not just a simple projection, or replica of reality. With the cards coming together, they would form a small world that is not unlike this world. Planeswalkers are the only ones who are able to bring true meaning from from these cards and turn it to power in the world.”

He paused for a while before continuing. “Like the cards combination that I use. ‘Unification’, is made up of cards that combines six different elements to describe the qualities in this world, and it represents the meaning of my deck: The power of Laws.”

“And I know of one other Planeswalker,” He continued. “His cards combination is called ‘Infinite power’, comprised mostly of Red and Black Cards of Fate as a combination. He pursued the strongest power. The Red cards can be seen as Fire, but it can also be seen as strength. The Black cards can be seen as Darkness, but it can also be seen as death and destruction.”

“Of course, we both failed to reach the truth of cards.” He shook his head, then smiled again. “The meaning of the cards is made of up of the combination. The Cards of Fate’s unique point is allowing many viewpoints to describe the Laws the world and yourself. One can even see it as the cards representing the inner you.”

“As to where the cards come from, or who created them, we do not know. The earliest Planeswalker should have been born during the Era of Darkness, and I suspect that these are created by the people of Matteya.

It is said that the Matteya is a group of dimension nomads, who move to one place to another. Their understanding of the world is different from ours. We think that the world is a infinitely vast place, with infinite things and knowledge, but the Matteya perceives the world as very small with a very narrow view. They have a concept called ‘uhs’, which is also the origin the Elven and Kirrlutz ‘infinite’. In their eyes, ‘uhs’ contain countless worlds, and they are constantly shifting between them.

I suspect that they understood they have twisted the meaning of the Guardian Land and the world world, and develop a concept like this. However, it is also true that the humans have a limited knowledge of this world.” Tulman suddenly laughed. “I unintentionally talked too much about pointless things, it looks like I have difficulty in getting rid of my habit.”

Brendel asked a question: “I have also heard of the Matteya, and perhaps they are the earliest Planeswalker, what does this have anything to do with me?”

“The Matteya splits a single day into six phases, and strictly speaking a Planeswalker also splits the day into six phases.

The first phase – Six AM to Ten AM, break of dawn to morning.

The Matteya calls this stage as the ‘Growing Sun’, while the Planeswalkers call it the ‘Growth period’. In this stage, a Planeswalker can tap their land cards, and get their mana for the day—”

“Wait!” Brendel said: “Tapping of land cards?”

“Indeed, tapping of land cards. This is the basic ability of a Planeswalker, and their source of power.”

“Can you explain a little more?” Brendel said.

“It’s very simple. If you have a land card, Elemental Pool and Mana Pool, you can tap the card during this time every day, and the land card will draw the energy from the ‘territory’ that they belong to and link it to your Elemental Pool. This way the energy that is created from your ‘territory’ will be converted into Elemental Power and placed in your Elemental Pool.”

“Wait, doesn’t say clearly on the Land card, one Elemental Point each week?” Brendel interrupted.

“That single Elemental Point is outside the Elemental and Mana pool. Its purpose is used for the new users who wished to pursue the path of a Planeswalker, to allow you to use and understand the world’s power. When you become an official Planeswalker, you wouldn’t need it anymore.”

Brendel nodded. “Understood. Please continue.

“At the Growth Phase, a Planeswalker can also gain the ‘bonus’ of the additional effects. An example would be the Highland Squire card. As long as your Highland Squire in on the field, the owner will receive one reputation point. And this reputation point is given during your Growth Phase.

At the same time, a Planeswalker can use several effects from.

Green – Life, nature

White – Light, Protection, Nurture

Red – Fire, Vigor, Vitality

Blue – Water, Nourish, Irrigation

As well as other cards that are mixed in elements.”

Brendel frowned. He had never thought about this before. Ciel had talked about this before, and he recalled about the cards that did not require anything.

“The Second Phase – Ten AM to two PM.

Matteya calls this: Exuberant Growth.

The wizards and witches call this period, the Falling Tide. It is the day where the Sun is at its peak, and the moon at its weakest. As Mana is weakened, the Elements are stronger. It is the period where the Elements are active, and has the Phase where it has the most offensive power.

Planeswalkers call this the ‘Prime Phase’. This is the only time when a Planeswalker can use any card without limits. At the same time he can even draw three additional cards from his deck to place into his hand.” *(TL: Hand refers to the set of cards, not the limbs)*

Brendel was confused: “What do you mean by drawing cards?”

“This is the law of the Planeswalker. At the start of every day, you can only have a set amount of cards. You might be able to draw more than the cards in a day, but when you reach the ‘Reset Phase’, you have to discard the additional cards in your hand.

At the same time, the stronger a Planeswalker is, the more cards he can control in his hand. For someone who has just started like yourself, you can only control five cards.”

“Are the cards in my hand controlled?” Brendel asked.

“No, the cards in your hand can only be taken in the card combination that you have. My card combination is ‘Unification’ from six different elements, thus the Laws separate my card combination into six equal decks.”

Brendel frowned: “Doesn’t that mean that the uncertainty of the cards are increased? Isn’t it better that I hold on to a limited number of powerful cards and discard the useless ones so that I can maintain my deck strength?”

“In theory that is true, but that is not the final goal of a Planeswalker.”

“Final goal?”

“After the the Third-tier of power, people can unlock their Elements and become stronger than before. You might not know this, but after the unlocking of the Elements is the pursuit of Perfect Physique, from Iron-ranked to Gold-ranked. But that final step, is to pursue the transcendent limits of power described only in legends.”

“As you know, fire is a component of many things, and the purest form is a Fire Element, as it is the basis of all flames. But there has always been a rumor of something even higher than a Fire Element called, ‘Matter’.

‘Matter’, ‘Time’, ‘Space’, even ‘Logic’. It forms of the world’s most basic principles, and we call it ‘Existent Force”

Brendel stared at Tulman speechlessly. He knew of the Perfect Physique as he as Level 130 in the game, a Silver Perfect Physique. He had also heard of the Existent Force.

[Players in the game reported that they did not gain any further experience after level 160 in the game. There was rumors of that Existent Force path, but nobody knew how to get there.]

“You mean to say,” He stuttered: “A Planeswalker can get to that Existent Force?”

Tulman nodded and pointed to the card floating in the air: “When you have created your ‘world’, and the Laws reach an equilibrium with the cards, the path to the Existent Force will open to you. But before that, you have a long way to go, and it starts from your most basic card combination.”

“What do I need to do?”

“The truth is, the moment you got your first card, you have revealed your combination. But I’m a little puzzled... I have never seen your combination before. It seems to show something about a Profession System. I don’t understand why you’re interested in that. And what does this ‘All Supreme Profession Dominance’ mean?” Tulman said with a perplexed expression.

Brendel broke into a cold sweat when he heard that. He was in the mindset of Sophie when he found the cards for the first time. At that time as a gamer he naturally wanted

to have a strong profession, and it seemed that his Middle School Second-year Syndrome had been caught by the Cards of Fate.

[Holy shit! Opening the Path of Knights or something crazy like that..... If the Cards of Fate brings one's viewpoint in the world... Then I'm going to do that All Supreme Profession Dominance as a reality?]

TL: Here's the phases for Planeswalkers so far...

1) Growth Phase – Tap lands, add bonus effects from cards.

2) Prime Phase – Draw three cards to put into hand. Use any cards in hand without limits.

Chapter 55

The road to surpass limits (2)

Reaching the highest peak of all professions, that was indeed a road that surpassed limits.

“But how can I become a Planeswalker?” Brendel asked the important question.

Tulman stopped. His script inside him vanished quickly. The last person he met was a Paladin called Gerald. He had tried hard to persuade the excellent youth to forgo his faith, and join the ranks of a Planeswalker but failed. Now that he was prepared for this time and about to persuade the youth in front of him, Brendel seemed to have agreed to become one.

Tulman obviously did not understand the mindset of a gamer.

Naturally, Tulman was very happy to have found a successor. The Tulman here was nothing more than a transmission of information, and since he managed to succeed in this mission, it meant that his millennium long mission was finally over.

So he immediately replied: “To become a Planeswalker, you must first have your own land within ‘uhs. As I had explained before, the infinite worlds described within the Matteya word, means that you need to build your first foothold and set the Land card and tap it.”

Tulman’s voice became serious: “This is the first land of your kingdom. On it, you need to build a strong fortress and summon your faithful knight from your card combination, and from that point forth, you will become a Planeswalker.”

Brendel listened till he was giddy with excitement: “Can I try it?”

Tulman nodded: “Of course. I believe you have a Land card, and that is enough to qualify you for the most basic summons. The crux of the question is how you’re going to build your first card combination.”

“So how should I make the card combination?” Brendel asked, calming himself down

to become a good student.

[Planeswalker... A unique existence in this world? Or something that is undiscovered by the Amber Sword. I easily found the card within the tomb, so why did the other players in the game not find it? Or is it because these cards can only be discovered by NPCs?]

Since Brendel had no means to find out the truth, he quietly listened to Tulman.

“To make your own card combination, you must first understand the Cards of Fate. Beyond the Card Type, there are several classifications to the cards.

Characters, Heroes, Beasts, Monsters and even Dragons. When you display the card and summon them, they have different properties and strength, and some even possesses unique abilities.”

“I know of this,” Brendel said: “They are like the Wind Spider Spirits, and the Highland Squire, Ciel?”

“Yes.”

“The second classification?”

“They are spells and abilities. These spells are decided by the Color Type.

– Red, offense

– Blue, versatility

– Gray, defense

– Black, Mystique

There are many other colors that decide the characteristics as well as timing. The White and Green cards can be used at any given time and conditions, but the others require their own conditions.”

“Something like Mana Control?”

Tulman nodded: “The third classification, Treasure. The Treasure card is always white.

This card requires a particular medium, it can be the Planeswalker, the summoned creature, and even a barrier.”

“Barrier?”

“This is the fourth classification, Barrier. It has the qualities of a Spell and Land card. It is not movable, but the effect is powerful.

The fifth classification is Resource. The Resource card is similar to the Land card. It can be added to a Barrier, or placed into a Land card. The Resource card is another source of power, and high combination cards require the use of a Resource card.

The sixth classification is the Ritual card. This is a unique card type. As you become stronger as a Planeswalker, you will gradually come into contact.

The seventh classification is the Event card. This is another unique card. If you access and complete the event, you will be able to utilize the effects on the card. Be careful as the Event card is a limited usage card. It will not enter the graveyard but disappear entirely.”

Tulman told Brendel that the remaining special cards are only understood when he became more powerful, and there was no need to understand it now.

“Thus, a Planeswalker card combination is combined with all these classified cards. One can summon and cast spells and barriers to perform a combination of attack and defense. But you won’t be able to order the sequencing of the cards because of the Laws surrounding it. So, what do you think of it?”

[I see...]

Brendel’s heart was beating excitedly. He could almost imagine a card combination. The best part about this was not requiring him to spend any experience points of him. It was a true side profession apart from his original professions.

[This isn’t just a simple, ‘Wow, it’s a strong profession’, this is blatantly cheating!]

Brendel started muttering to himself.

“Since the card combination is describing a profession, then my cards should automatically reflect that. My first combination is a ‘Knight’, and a ‘Knight’ requires a

squire, battle horse, equipment, and related techniques to the the 'Knight'. Then the barrier card protects his fortress and land..."

Tulman did not look surprised. Each time Brendel said something, cards would appear and float in the air.

The first card had already entered the graveyard. It was the Earth/Water Highland Squire card. The second card was a Green color Wind Element card called, 'Mercenaries of Lopes'. The card itself was drawn with watercolors, depicting a group of military men carrying swallowtail flags with a horned emblem in it, while their uniforms differed from each other, with their equipment ranging from bows, axes and shields.

The description of the card:

Mercenaries of Lopes

(The Alliance of City-states XI)

Wind 8/Mana 14

[Creature – Human/Mercenaries, Level 15 Creature]

Place a group of 12 Lopes Mercenaries into the field.

Maintenance: Pay 2 Wealth every day when the mercenaries are in the field.

'Ever since the First Age, 172 years, the Mercenaries of Lopes are renowned for their bravery, skill in and loyalty in battles.'

When Brendel talked about a battle horse and equipment, three cards appeared. 'Holy Sword', 'Golden Battle Flag' and 'Silver Colt'. When he spoke about techniques, the cards 'Sun Blade', 'Sprint Drive' appeared.

Finally when he was describing his lands, the final card 'Rich Gold Mine' appeared.

Brendel saw the cards appear before him as he spoke, and he was surprised but he did not stop talking. He asked: "What's happening?"

"Other than the Holy Sword and your Highland Squire cards, these are the cards I'm

giving you.” Tulman explained. “When you described your cards, I removed them from my deck and transferred them to you. This is your first basic combination, and perhaps you will perfect your ‘Knight’ combination in the future. In any case, this means that you have started your path as a Planeswalker.”

[Oh my god, this is such a good harvest. I had to spend so much for a card like the Wind Spider Spirits, but I got six of them in an instant!]

He gulped as he looked at them. “So what happens next after this is mine?”

“Now is the time to create your Territory, so that you can use your cards. However, I have to remind you about the relationship between your cards and territory. A card combination can be supported with many different territories, but a single territory can only support one card combination. This means that different card combinations have their own specific Land cards to support them, and you should not rely on just one territory to support a card combination. A full deck requires a large Territory system.”

Tulman’s voice became stern again. “Therefore, you need to collect more Land and Resource cards as these are your foundation.”

Brendel nodded.

“Then let us establish your Territory.” Tulman continued. “Bring out your ‘Garden of the Holy Tree’ and display it.”

The moment Brendel displayed it, there was a flash of green color in his eyes. He saw the color fill everywhere, trees growing to form a lush forest with vigor. A mysteriously huge tree stood in the center of the forest amidst a pool.

Brendel finally understood the description of the card. This was the creation of a territory. He could clearly feel the connection of the forest in his spirit as long as he desired to see it. But this forest was not in the same world he was in right now, and he could feel the distance between him and the forest.

It was a special feeling, intimate and yet distant.

Brendel looked back at Tulman with shock. After so long in the game, there was nothing that shocked him anymore, but the feeling right now was one of utter glee and expectation.

“The Land Card in your territory has matured. The area is very big and borders have been formed. It is a considerably good Territory, and it will provide you two Nature points and One Element Point every day when you tap it. In the future you might encounter a ‘Unique’ and even ‘Legendary’ land, which are much better than a ‘Basic’ land. Just note that if you use them as a Land card, you will lose the benefits of the Resource and Barrier Card.”

“What do you mean?” Brendel did not understand.

“First, take a look at your card combination. When you created your territory, you have become a qualified Planeswalker. Your card combination has become a deck and your cards will change everyday and enter into your hand.”

Brendel opened his hand and found four cards. They were the Holy Sword, Mercenaries of Lopes, Rich Gold Mine and the Sprint Drive.

“Look at the description of the Rich Gold Mine.” Tulman explained like an old teacher.

When the youth looked at the card, he understood his meaning:

Rich Gold Mine

(Alliance of the city-states VII)

Earth 2

[Resource mine/Wealth]

Place Rich Gold Mine on an (untapped) Land Card and receive 4 Wealth.

‘Gold within rocks.’

“Understand? Regardless of a Resource or Creature Card, a Planeswalker can only use them once every day, until the Reset Phase from ten PM to two AM, where the cards will go back in your deck and shuffle. This is when your Resource card that was attached to your Land card, return to the deck and await for the next draw.”

Brendel nodded. He felt like he had nodded more times than the previous month combined.

“Finally, I need to remind you that the cards that you have used or overdrawn, with the exception of the Creature card, will return to your deck. When you enter the Maintenance Phase, you will draw cards until you replenished your hand.”

Tulman suddenly stopped and his expression changed. He tapped Brendel’s arm and said: “Looks like our time is up since your enemies are here now. I don’t wish for my successor to die the moment you became a Planeswalker. You’re a qualified user now, so use your resources wisely to deal with them.”

Brendel was startled.

[That’s right. I still have enemies out there. The two soldiers from the Silver-winged cavalry are still okay to deal with, but that young man is an enemy with Gold-ranked stats. Even though Tulman said I should easily handle my enemies now, but I really doubt it.]

Brendel suddenly opened his eyes, and found he was still maintaining that posture to grab the medicine. The surroundings in the room had not changed, and it felt like the things about the Cards of Fate, Tulman, Planeswalker, were a dream.

But Brendel knew that it was not a dream, because he was holding on to the cards in his hand—

The situation did not allow him to think too much, because he could hear footsteps coming closer. Brendel immediately brought out the Mercenaries of Lopes and displayed it. He grabbed the Mana Potion on the table and drank it. With 6 Wind EP and 11 Wind Element Crystals, and 15 Mana points, he was able to use the card.

Twelve summoning circles immediately appeared in the room.

The two soldiers probably could not expected it even if they exhausted all their imagination. When they brought the door down, they found seven crossbows, two longswords and three axes focused on their bodies. These bandits with weapons in their hands looked like they came out from a theater. Most of them had curly beards with bright colored clothes and intricate patterns over their leather armor, complete with a long robe and a shield on one hand.

The two soldiers widened their eyes. They were not clear about Brendel’s identities and acted out of the orders given. Tirste had told them he was a criminal, but they were stunned when they saw them.

[These damn bandits are wearing such ridiculous attires, do you think you're the legendary Lopes Mercenaries?!]

That hateful young man was looking in the center of the room amongst them, looking like he was completely prepared for this outcome —



PDF by: traitor#ZEN