THE EXPERIMENTAL LOG OF THE CRAZY LICH

BOOK 04

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The Experimental Log of the Crazy Lich

(疯巫妖的实验日志)

by

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Synopsis

This is a story of a crazy Lich who possesses an internal gaming system, bringing catastrophe to the entire world “Looking at the daily quests... It is the damned choose one-of-two option again. Destroy a town with a population of 30,000 people of above, reward: 10,000 evil points. Steal lollipop from 3 children, reward: 1 evil point. If neither of the quests are completed, 2 points are deducted.”

“Tsk! You think that I would be so foolish? If I really destroyed a town, a crusade of epic class Paladins would definitely come hunting me down. Then, even if I did earn my points, there wouldn’t be any life left in me to spend them. I guess I better obediently stick to being my lollipop thief.”

I am long sick of being a notorious lich. Who says that a lich cannot be a good person? I will definitely find a way to triumph over this damned system and be an upright and dignified good man.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 301: Unexpected

Peaceful utopias did not exist in this world. There was no lack of idiots who were without common sense. Reality was always stranger than fiction as fiction still needed to be logical to attract readers. In reality, it was forever impossible to understand just why some people could be so impossibly idiotic.

All the older mages knew just how much power the Emblem of Endless Truth represented. However, many members of the royalty or nobility were amongst the younger student mages. To them, they were the absolute bosses in their own territories, daring to say and do whatever they wanted. They were at a young and impulsive stage of their lives when they were found out to have talent as mages and sent here to the Cloud Tower—a place where countless geniuses gathered. They were basically like the legendary protagonists in Chinese webnovels, as they wouldn't stand for suffering the slightest grievances.

Of course, the cruel world would soon teach them a lesson to help them learn just where they stood. During the process of learning, they would often turn from the bullies into the victims.

If they were fortunate, they would naturally mature. However, the prerequisite was that they didn't enrage someone who was beyond their ability to handle.

"Emblem of Endless Truth? It's an academic award? So what? Roland? Never heard of him! He's probably just an academic who stays in his experimental laboratory every day, and he dares to not sell his products to me! My granduncle is the archmage Andrei!"

Well, that was a common example of what those idiots were thinking. They would typically be polite when they first arrived, and when they discovered that politeness wouldn't help them obtain the right to purchase an Iron Horse, they would start trying to use money. When they discovered that the money they were

offering was still insufficient, they would resort to arrogant declarations that always ended in angry roaring threats. It was a complete and perfect example of how the rich and powerful typically behaved in a feudal society.

Yawen would then take out her dragonslaying sword and viciously teach them about the mage's mortal enemy—an Underground elf who had full points in magic resistance!

Although gray elves were indeed weaker than dark elves in magic resistance, that didn't make any difference since Yawen was merely facing a bunch of novices who hadn't even mastered two-circle magic spells.

Of course, just getting viciously beaten up wouldn't make these rich young masters give up so easily. They would always want revenge and bring us various small troubles. In the past few days, we had already suffered from four incidents of arson. This was another reason why Cher was glaring at me in such a fashion. Not only did we break the records for number of incidents caused by us, we also broke the record for needing to call the police as well. Especially since the arson incidents typically happened at 1 or 2 a.m. in the morning, which really annoyed the police mages when they were called to the scene.

"Who the hell is it this time?!!"

Alright then, judging by how explosive Cher's tone was, it seemed that she was truly pissed off at this arsonist who had the unfortunate timing of making trouble while she was here.

"With two more incidents, our 'Annual Excellent Public Order Reward' money will be no more!!"

Alright then, it seemed that there was a concrete reason behind her anger as well.

"The archmage Andrei's grandnephew? Andrei, the vice leader of the Sword of Order? This is quite problematic."

Unfortunately for Cher, her subordinates arrived with a report that caused her to frown. No matter what, a current Truth Overseer would definitely be difficult to deal with, even if he currently wasn't at the Cloud Tower. The Sword of Order and Mystical Blade had a bad relationship with each other to begin with. In fact, it started from when the organizations were established—they intentionally competed with each other even with how they named themselves. If she didn't deal with this situation well, it might escalate into a huge conflict between two of the most powerful mage organizations.

Even though Cher had excellent moral boundaries as an enforcer of the law, she still knew that some things would be quite difficult to deal with. Her status as a public order mage would only be internally useful within the Mystical Blade as well as medium and small mage organizations. However, other large mage organizations wouldn't care at all about her status, nor would the mages care about the pitiful strength of the police forces.

"Let me go! Do you know who I am!? My granduncle is Andrei!"

Even though this young master—who resembled a monkey—was tied up tightly, he remained as arrogant as always. Apart from him, several of his arsonist accomplices had been captured and tied up as well along with large stockpile of oil and fire powder that had been found with them. As for his "accomplices," they were basically all rich scions that were mere mage novices who hadn't learned the cruelty of the world. They were blissfully unaware about the consequences of their actions.

Truth Overseers were indubitably influential. Typically speaking, in such a situation, Cher would notify the person's family elders to severely hand out a punishment. However, the person that these young troublemakers antagonized was an archmage with two Emblems of Endless Truth. Cher found this situation quite difficult to deal with, not knowing if archmage Roland would simply let things go.

"Um, archmage Roland..."

Although Cher felt quite humiliated at having let the criminals get off so lightly, she still considered it part of her work to minimize any potential dangerous large incidents before they started. There were things she needed to say. However, the archmage that always had a helpless expression and lowered his head to apologize to her didn't even pay her any attention. Instead, he had an icy expression as he spoke in a low voice.

"Yawen, Little Red 232, the two of you were injured?"

The gray elf shook her head, indicating that she was fine. However, the sword injury on her shoulder actually had a smell of corrosion. The fact that her injury had already decayed to such an extent despite how recently she received it was the best evidence of how highly toxic the poison must have been. However, it seemed that Yawen would be fine after receiving healing magic from Divine Arts in time.

"Father, wahhh! My hair has been burned off."

Meanwhile, Little Red 232 hopped over to complain. Roland gently patted her on the head, while even Cher was quite angered when she saw the depressed little girl who had a patch of scorched hair on her head.

"Were there any damages?"

"We discovered them quite quickly this time so the fire was put out almost immediately. The warehouse wasn't damaged at all. Out of our people, Yawen was the most seriously injured. However, they set fire to the kitchen, and our hired chefs were unable to escape in time..."

Considering how we intended to add a café addition to the Thorn Garden shop, we hired some local residents as chefs. Since the chefs were only ordinary people, not mages, it seemed that they didn't manage to make it out of the fire alive. Perhaps these rich

scions even killed the chefs off on purpose in order to kill any witnesses that could point them out for their involvement...

"According to the Mage Country's laws, what's the punishment for intentional arson that leads to people's deaths?"

Cher paused in surprise when she saw that Roland was talking to her, finally noticing that he was asking her as an officer of the law. It was just that his typically smiling expression was replaced by a rare one of seriousness.

"...According to the Mage Country's laws, it should be execution by hanging, but..."

His bright eyes suddenly dimmed, and the next moment, Roland's eyes seemed to Cher like they were black holes that could devour everything. Without a hint rage or hatred within them, he seemed like an emotionless machine. Cher felt chills run down her spine when she was looked at by those eyes. She found herself unable to tell him to be merciful.

Cher suddenly recalled that she had wanted to investigate just who this Roland person truly was. However, her direct boss, who was considered as someone muddleheaded due to old age by all her coworkers, suddenly came and warned her personally with such a serious expression.

"There's some things and some people that you're simply better off not knowing about. If you would like to live a long and good life, there are some lines you definitely can't cross."

To be honest, Cher was quite disappointed when she heard her direct boss tell her that. When she thought about how Roland didn't have any other achievement emblems at all apart from the two Emblems of Endless Truth (the graduation emblem wasn't an achievement emblem), and how he always spoke so softly and acted so cowardly to a normal public order mage like herself, she kept feeling like the upper-ranked members of the Cloud Tower weren't as pure as she thought.

Her direct boss, the elderly mage Charlie, used his authority to allow Roland to mysteriously be able to take his subordinates out of jail every single day so easily—Cher's compatriots viewed this as further evidence of his confusion due to advanced age. It also caused Cher to view this "weakling who must have gotten his highest-level emblems through backdoor connections" with great displeasure. However, when she saw Roland's completely unemotional icy gaze today, she felt like she was actually the criminal who was to be judged, instead. She felt like a frog being gazed at by a snake, frozen, unable to move. She realized that she had likely made a huge mistake, treating a tiger as a gentle housecat. This Roland person was definitely someone highly dangerous.

"Oh, since the law states that the punishment should be death by hanging, in that case, there's no need to trouble the police mages any longer. Let's just execute them right here and now."

Roland suddenly smiled as if his heartless emotions from earlier were nothing but an illusion. He seemed just like the same kind person who always apologized helplessly. The words he said just now still made Cher feel like she was dreaming.

"Hang them? Hang them all right here? There are more than ten archmages' descendants here! One of them is even related to the Sword of Order's vice leader! Just how many mage organizations are you intending on antagonizing all at once?"

"Wait a moment, my granduncle—I apologize! I'll pay you for all the damages incurred, don't kill m—ahhh!!"

Cher hoped to god that Roland was only trying to scare the young criminals. However, she soon discovered that his words were no mere threats. His subordinates brought out several ropes that they put on the arsonists' necks and then dragged them outside. A few pitiful screams later, everything suddenly fell silent.

When Cher regained her senses and hurriedly rushed outside, she

inhaled deeply when she saw the scene before her.

No matter if it was a tall centaur, a young knight, or a cute wood spirit, all of them carried out the executions with practiced movements, successfully hanging the arsonists onto the trees in a single try. There was no pity and no wasted words. It was as if this was just a daily task to everyone.

"Hang them all up at the entrance. Send that Andrei's grandnephew's head to the Sword of Order's main headquarters and tell them that Roland is waiting for Andrei to come and receive his descendant's corpse."

I didn't even spare a glance for Cher whose face was turning pale as I kicked away the arsonists' explosives. As I expected, I found a black crystal and some bottles containing dark green liquid.

"Black crystal cores. As long as this is ignited, the entire street will go up in an explosion. How truly vicious of them. This dark green liquid is doublelife snake venom—toxic to the extent of being instantly fatal upon contact to normal humans."

From the very start, I didn't think that these youngsters would be able to threaten me. But now, I was faced with the fact that not only did they break past my magical defenses, but they even caused even Yawen, who was at the peak of Gold rank, to become injured. This far surpassed these useless novices' personal abilities. There was definitely someone behind them, egging them on. These kids' rather special statuses were also a way of testing the waters against me, to test how I would react against such a challenge, and to see if I was still the same Yongye from back in the day.

"You all want to see Yongye? As you wish—I'll show him to you. Consequences? Hmm, what's that? Is it edible? This kid's granduncle is Andrei? What a joke. Since when would Andrei dare to act so arrogantly in front of me?"

I knew that this was both a test for me and an attempt to suppress me. If I acted weakly, there would be plenty of trouble for

me in the future.

"I don't even need to investigate who's really supporting them. I'll just kill anyone who dares to antagonize me like this."

The next day when Thorn Garden opened, it was the worst day for its business ever since its reopening. After all, all the "dolls" hanging from the front door of the store along with the wooden signs underneath their feet announcing their crimes made most of the customers stop in fear and surprise.

Yet, there were customers who had opposite reactions. The older mages who had a huge amount of emblems on their chest were surprised for a moment, but were then pleasantly surprised that there wasn't a long line of customers that they had to wait through today. They happily smiled and entered the store, and even chatted amongst themselves in an amused fashion as they repeatedly pointed at the corpses.

"Oh, isn't that the youngster from Halin's family?"

"Ha, how pitiful. He became cannon fodder for somebody else?"

"There's even the young one from Andrei's family? Haha, there's going to be a good show to watch later."

"What good show are you talking about? Do you think that Andrei will dare to mess with Roland? Besides, is it worth risking his entire family's lives for the sake of a grandnephew that's who-knows-how-many generations removed from him? At the very most, he'll just say a few words of anger for the sake of saving face, nothing more."

When Cher returned to the police station in a state of confusion, she discovered that she had actually watched a vigilante execution take place. When she finally calmed down and began preparing to summon people in order to prevent something more troublesome from occurring, her boss, the old mage Charlie, stopped her.

"Don't worry about it. With how little strength we have, there's

nothing we can do. When he gets angry, nobody can stop him."

This time, Cher was unable to remain silent anymore as she recalled Roland's icy gaze. She instinctively felt that Charlie was correct. Whatever Roland wanted, he was probably capable of doing it. Perhaps not a single person in the Cloud Tower would be able to stop him.

She faintly perceived that Roland who was always smiling had something analogous to a ruler in his heart. As long as one didn't tread on his bottom line, Roland would be able to maintain a thick skin and smile as he retrieved his underlings that always caused so much trouble. But the moment someone crossed the line against him, he would unhesitatingly kill that person even if that person was the emperor of some country.

"Just who is he? Why are you so afraid of him?"

She had already asked this question many times before. But now, Cher was no longer satisfied with just being waved off. If Charlie kept giving her an excuse to not answer, she was prepared to even go to the main Mystical Blade headquarters to ask all the leaders about Roland.

All the police mages sent inquisitive looks in Charlie's direction. Old Charlie maintained his silence for quite a while before he finally pulled out his smoking pipe and began puffing on it.

"...He's probably the most dangerous mage in the entire Cloud Tower. No, change that to the most dangerous mage in the entire world. There's no mistake. It's not convenient for me to say, but if you all go back to your homes and ask any elders in your families who are over one hundred years old, they should all know why nobody should pick a fight with that man."

"Archmage Andrei suddenly returned to the Cloud Tower and angrily stormed off, heading for Thorn Garden!"

This sudden piece of news sent the police station into a turmoil

yet again. This time, old Charlie didn't stop the young police mages. However, by the time they hurriedly rushed over to Thorn Garden, they saw an inconceivable sight.

The SemiGod ranked archmage Andrei was actually being fiercely scolded by that young mage in front of Thorn Garden's doorstep, and Andrei was even lowering his head and apologizing.

As for me? The biggest trouble of today was just beginning. Scolding a junior of mine who I used to even be on good terms with for accidentally getting ensnared in a plot due to his foolish grandnephew was nothing. However, I, who had always ranked last in almost all my classes and failed so many as well, was actually supposed to become a teacher and teach a lesson later this afternoon.

That was a far greater challenge.

Chapter 302: The Ordinary Person's Generation (Part 1 of 2)

As a lower-ranked academy under the super-large mage organization Mystical Blade, the Talenry Tower had very high standards for recruiting students. Most normal academies required acolytes to be able to cast one-circle magic spells before the age of twenty, but Talenry Tower required their acolytes to be able to cast two-circle magic spells before the age of eighteen.

Although it didn't seem like that much of a difference—there's only a difference in two years and one circle—those two years just happened to be a critical growth period for humans. Without those two years, plus a requirement of one more circle, made it akin to the difference between the Iron rank and Bronze rank—gigantic. It typically took four or five years of growth to make up such a gap.

It could be said that any student who managed to meet Talenry Tower's high student recruitment standards was top-level even when compared to the second or third-year students of other magic academies. However, even with such high standards for entry, there were far more applications than number of students accepted each year. Talenry Tower would only take the best of the best, and in the end, those able to enter had far surpassed the recruitment standards. They were basically all geniuses or abnormal talents.

Of course, with the Mystical Blade investing a huge amount on this academy to raise its students, it naturally reaped huge benefits as well. With such high recruitment standards and immense appeal to potential applicants, studying here had advantages far surpassing those of other magic academies.

It was only to be expected that plenty of teachers, magical ingredients, and magical books were available here. Even though there wasn't much of a difference in this compared to other

academies, there still existed a great advantage—in Talenry Tower, not only would archmages occasionally come visit and choose disciples for themselves, but there would even be top-level mages from the Mystical Blade that would come over at fixed intervals to teach classes.

Top-level mages with an Emblem of Endless Truth would come over at fixed intervals to teach classes and actual top-level content? Not only did every student try to obtain a chance to attend this once-a-month course, but even the mage teachers of the academy would look for ways to attend and listen in on this class.

This was a type of reward for the excellent students at the academy. Only the students excellent in all areas would be allowed by the mage teachers to attend this class. As a consequence, this once-a-month class taught by an archmage with an Emblem of Endless Truth was just like a monthly festival for the Talenry Tower. If the class was a good one, the discussions about it were likely to last all the way until the next month's class.

Of course, since the archmages teaching this class all had top-level knowledge, their classes wouldn't be low-level in content. However, the problem was that some archmages felt that it was quite troublesome to teach so they would simply come over and talk about whatever their newest research product was or summarize what he or she learned through self-reflection. Only a few geniuses among geniuses would perhaps significantly benefit from this, while the other ninety-nine percent of students, who were still only novice level, wouldn't understand a thing.

So basically, the quality of the class and how much the listeners benefited from it didn't depend on the lecturer's level, nor did it depend on the power level difference between the lecturer and the listeners. It mostly depended on whether the lecturer specially prepared for this class or not, as well as whether or not the lecturer made things easier for the listeners to understand.

For me, this was quite a large amount of trouble.

The Mystical Blade ran things quite loosely to begin with, and it didn't lack top-level archmages at all. This monthly class shouldn't have been given to me for several years if I just waited for my turn. This was probably a certain Aloso's way of helping me out of kindness, giving me an opportunity to let others know more about me and get along better with the other Mystical Blade members.

That was indeed a good thing for me. However, the problem was that I didn't know what I should teach about in my class!

Although I was indeed one of the few mages who obtained the Emblem of Endless Truth in more than one magic type, and I definitely had the knowledge to back it up due to my vast experiences, I really didn't have much I could talk about.

Give a class on ice magic? If I followed the traditional way of increasing magic research one circle at a time, I probably only counted as a three-circle Bronze mage, tops. Not to mention, my ice magic mostly resembled natural talent magic similar to magical beasts, growing instinctively and through actual combat. I could talk about my fundamental magic of ice sculpting that I obtained in the snow mountain, but the problem with that was that no ordinary human would be able to learn it even if they understood, which meant that it would be a waste to talk about.

Then should I talk about the top-level research results of ice magic that I personally came up with? No matter if it was Frigidwinter Earth or Ice Aeon, even though both of those would be considered top-level ice magic breakthroughs for the past millennium, they were concepts far too difficult for ordinary people to learn. Nor did I intend to give others the opportunity to understand my aces.

Undead magic? I could talk about that, and I was willing to teach about it as well. The problem with that was that undead magic forever had dark undertones to it. Even the Sword of Order wouldn't dare to publicly teach such a taboo magic type in open. And if I still went ahead and taught these novices how to dissect

bodies in order to assemble Abominations and zombies, perhaps everyone would be looking at me strangely in the future.

"Ahh! This is the frustration of someone like me who learned in a much different way from others. Even though I have so much knowledge, it's so hard for me to teach it."

But, after some consideration, I came to a decision.

"Since a traditional class won't be meaningful, in that case, I'll just have a non-traditional class. Hah, that'll be perfect! There are so many things that need to be said now, anyways."

If you looked at Talenry Tower's classroom from the outside, it didn't appear large at all. However, only when entering would one discover that this place was actually enchanted with spatial distortion magic. This classroom was, in actuality, a gigantic hall that could easily hold five or six hundred people. Magical lights hung down from the ceiling and illuminated the beautiful marble floor tiles, making the classroom quite beautiful. The staircase-style seats were already filled with people.

Just like always, the seats were filled ten minutes before the class was about to begin. However, what was different today was that not only were students present, there were actually many white-bearded elderly men as well as seemingly young professors of whom nobody knew the actual age. The first row was actually entirely filled with veteran mages.

The most inconceivable part was that there were even several mages with Emblems of Endless Truth among them. This was quite a rare sight.

After all, even though these top-level mages would easily be able to come listen in to the monthly archmage's class if they wanted, they were all already top-level experts in their own fields. It was only a class by a peer, so even if such an archmage deigned to come to such a class, it would be difficult for the archmage to learn much since this was supposed to be a class targeted at novices.

And even if the archmage in question was an expert in the same area as the lecturer, it was typically considered far more effective to simply contact the person in private to exchange information and magical knowledge. That meant there wouldn't be any favors owed.

"It would seem that this archmage Roland, whom I've never heard of, is someone incredible."

Not a single acolyte capable of entering this school was an idiot. Simply by seeing all the top-level mages present, all the students realized that this archmage Roland that they had never heard of must be someone incredible. The few students who did know who Roland was from their elders or teachers looked forward even more to Roland's teachings... of course, since Roland's name also happened to overlap with the name of a certain demon king-like character told to scare disobedient children, all those students who knew Roland's identity chose to stay in the farthest rows away and the seats closest to the exit.

"Oh my. I'm lucky I wasn't preparing to simply ad-lib everything."

The moment I entered the classroom, I, too, was shocked to see all the top-level mages here. It would seem that I underestimated the influence of my identity as "Yongye" in the mages' minds.

As I looked around, I saw Kaid and his disciples, as well as Oslowen and Aloso. They were all people who I knew in the Mystical Blade.

"Even that old fart Angli has come? There's even someone glaring at me? Oh, the glarer is that little girl Cher. I bet she's learned my real identity by now. She even dares to glare at me? She's surprisingly brave."

Yet, when I walked up and took my place at the lecturer's podium, all idle thoughts disappeared. After all, these were words that I wanted to tell everyone for so long already.

I picked up the magical highlighter pen on the podium and hesitated for a moment before I finally wrote some words for all to see.

"A Revolutionary Change: The New Generation Belongs to The Ordinary People."

Where should I start talking from? Everything that happened in the Underground World? The ever-increasing Elemental Tide? The Armageddon that was about to descend upon us all? Or the Gods' secrets?

I had experienced far too much compared to my peers that were busy hiding in their ivory towers, so much so that I didn't even know where to begin.

That was the case even now. Although I had decided to make "revolutionary change" the topic of my class, there were too many chaotic thoughts within my mind on where to start from, so I still didn't know how to organize my class.

"Well, since there's too much to go over, I'll just casually talk about it a little. I'll simply say whatever comes to mind. If any of you have questions, feel free to raise your hands and ask. But I might not necessarily answer."

My first words as the lecturer already caused most people to feel that I was the unreliable type of teacher.

"The Holy War is already here again. Perhaps everyone still hasn't realized that yet, or, a better word would be is that everyone is uninterested. After all, we mages have gotten used to being observers. However, perhaps the situation is quite special this time as remaining as observers will basically be impossible."

And now, many people were beginning to frown in displeasure at my words. Could it be that I was a war hawker? But, this was supposed to be a purely academic lecture. Talking about one's personal political views seemed a bit ridiculous to them.

However, I laughed upon seeing this situation. After all, from a certain standpoint, the Cloud Tower mages had remained as hermits for far too long. Perhaps they didn't know the newest situations and changes happening around the world. No, actually, perhaps they knew the latest information through their informational channels but felt that it was unrelated to them.

"What I would like to discuss isn't the annoying topic of politics, but instead the issue of the current generation we're facing. Everyone can tell that the Elemental Tide is increasing, which makes increasing one's power level and conducting research much easier than before. However, this is only the beginning."

I reached out with my finger and lit up the entire classroom with the silver power of Law. This was a divine power that represented Law, Justice, and Order, as well as the representation of a new type of power.

"The power of Law is a new power of Order, and the greatest achievement of mine in the Underground World. Perhaps many people here have heard of the power of Law already, but most people are probably treating it as another power similar to the power of Holy Light. However, few know that this power is actually quite suitable for mages because this power was created by a mage to begin with."

I caused a commotion before I even finished speaking. Although the God of Law had been a hot topic recently, the power of Law was still just getting started. Simply because the power of Law was considered a power of Order, most mages viewed it as the same type of power as Holy Light, which was far too much of a waste.

"As one of the creators of this power, I can promise you all that this is indeed a power that's the most suitable for mages to use. Its basic foundation relies on Law Incantations and the understanding and belief that one has towards Law. Of course, other job classes will be able to make use of this power as well, but what job class can possibly compare to us mages in logical reasoning and

intelligence? Besides, the power of Law has basically zero requirements for a person's ability to control the elements or mana. It's incredibly easy to begin learning it."

Some things only needed to be half-said to be effective. There was a huge commotion in the classroom when I mentioned how this power of Law had basically zero requirements for element controlling ability or mana. After all, being able to sense the elements and control one's own mana were the most basic requirements for being a mage. If those were no longer required, didn't that mean that any young person of above average intelligence would be able to utilize the power of law?

Yep, that was precisely why I always believed that only the power of Law was capable of foundationally changing the entirety of Eich. The power of Law was perhaps the divine power with the lowest requirements. And, in order to be able to use the power of Law, its users needed to obey the teachings of the Church of Law. Not only would the users thus obey the Law themselves, they would even need to act as just and fair executors of the Law. When most crimes in the world started receiving just punishments, then certain foundational things in how this world worked would naturally be rewritten.

"That's right. This generation belongs to ordinary people."

As the God of Law increased in power, together with hard work by countless Law job class individuals, more and more Law Incantations will be invented. I believed that after Knights of Justice and Judgementors, there would soon be a third basic Law job class in the future—one that resembled the mage job class. By that time, becoming someone who could use magic would be far easier than it was currently, and the mages would find out that they were no longer at the top of the world.

However, this was only a beginning. Since I was intending to set a massive fire here to catch the mages' attention, simply setting one fire would mean that the fire would easily go out. And so, I

ignited several fires at once...

"Perhaps you have all heard about the successfully developed small battery known as 'Olivia's Magic Box.' But you all probably don't know that the wise individual who successfully invented this technology was a young alchemist from the Northlands, a girl named Olivia. She comes from the Rhodes Kingdom, which is a tiny and faraway country that most of you have never even heard about. Perhaps you even view it as a barbarian kingdom. And Olivia, this northern barbarian little girl, who's only seventeen years old, invented such a technology that's destined to change the world!"

The facts were indisputable. Also, the easiest way to strike these proud young mages and make them less proud and arrogant would be to point at the accomplishments of someone their own age.

However, what I intended to say wasn't merely that alone. As for Olivia, even if she never accomplished anything else for the rest of her life, she was already destined to enter the history books simply by being the inventor of a small portable battery.

"I'm currently using her research results to apply for an Emblem of Endless Truth in the area of alchemy for Olivia's sake. It's quite possible that Olivia will become the youngest mage with an Emblem of Endless Truth in history."

This caused yet another commotion for the umpteenth time. I heard stuff like "she's not qualified" "that's too rushed" and other such denials from the young novices. However, several older mages nodded slightly as they realized the true impact of her invention.

"Perhaps some of you have already realized how the mass production of 'Olivia Magic Boxes' will allow mages traveling out by themselves to have a backup source of mana storage. However, none of you have probably realized that an even bigger use of the 'Olivia Magic Box' is to allow ordinary people with zero magical

talent to use magic as well!"

"That's impossible!"

"This is the desecration of magic itself!"

"Oh, Gods of Magic! How is this possible?"

Everyone was shouting in disbelief now. Mages always prided themselves on their identities as magic users. How would they believe so easily that ordinary people could invade their rightful domain?

Still, once again, the facts would be indisputable, which was why I played a recording from a memory crystal I had prepared for this class. This was a recording of the battle in the Northlands, from when the Silver Cross squadron consisting of the Four Elemental Swordcasters appeared in battle for the first time.

They flew in unison together, they sent blades of wind together, and they sent fireballs out together as if they were doing a performance. Even the elite mages here were astonished and shaken by these magic users' imposing manner and unity.

"Of course, they aren't yet mature. But the beginning is always the most difficult, and even SemiGod mages started from one circle magic spells. As long as these magic users keep persisting, they'll become more than ten times stronger in the future! That's why I'm saying that this is a revolutionary generation, a generation that belongs to ordinary people!"

Chapter 303: The Ordinary Person's Generation (Part 2 of 2)

If one were to look back on everything I'd ever done, one could see that there was a clear goal to my actions—I wanted to increase the power of the average person in this world.

Did this world lack powerful individuals? It didn't. Without even mentioning how many top-level mages gathered mold and dust while staying as hermits in their experimental laboratories, there were countless dragons, giants, and unknown powerful individuals out there. Even when I was Emperor Yongye back in the day, I only ranked 30ish on the Calamity Rankings, which ranked the disaster rating levels of everyone who liked to act as walking calamities. This world was quite large, with many powerful individuals in it. However, would those powerful individuals be able to change the world?

The answer was evidently no. It required far too much luck to create a top-level powerful individual, typically through processes that couldn't be repeated for others, and it required huge amounts of time and resources. Top-level power would forever be limited. Since the entire generation was changing, there was no point in counting on such few individuals and small groups of people to change the overall situation. This was the experience I gained from my past failures.

But what frustrated me the most was that these powerful individuals preferred to play the part of hermits, viewing themselves as above the war, treating the Holy War as something that will pass in time, just as the Cloud Tower's archmages did. By the time the powerful individuals noticed that this Holy War was uniquely special compared to the past, it would be far too late, and none of them would be able to escape.

"Powerful individuals are rare? They're chosen by heaven? It's

simply that most people have never had any chance to become strong to begin with. If I want more top-level powerful individuals that seem like they were chosen by the heavens? Heh heh, as long as I increase the basic population of those who can fight, as long as I increase the number as high as possible, miracles and so on will appear on their own. After all, geniuses are only relative. Isn't a genius simply someone who surpasses ninety-nine people out of one hundred? Perhaps I can't create more of that one percent that requires too many random factors, but as long as I improve and increase the ninety-nine percent, I can multiply the base amount of fighters by over ten times. The number of geniuses and so on will naturally increase severalfold!"

If I compared this world to an ark that was about to meet a flood, which represented the countless trials that this world was about to go through, then before the astonishingly large waves and thunderstorms arrived, furiously increasing the ark's weight by strengthening its foundation was the most important thing to do in order to survive the flood.

I needed to improve the overall power level of the ordinary people in this world as they were by far the majority. Then, I needed to control things from behind the scenes with the power of Law and Justice Points to guide them on the correct path. I would also need to decrease internal conflicts as much as possible so that we could gain the strength to resist the future thunderstorms. That was the choice I made.

The appearance of the power of Law, the Four Elemental Swordcasters, and magical archers created by Olivia's Magic Box would all help ordinary people to possibly reach the peak. However, it was just a beginning. The "Great Industrial Party," this mage organization which was named half-jokingly, had the tremendous ambition to change the entire world.

I took a deep breath as my next words were going to hit the critical point I intended for this lecture.

"The small portable battery 'Olivia's Magic Box' has far more effective uses than what I just mentioned. The greatest beneficiaries of this invention aren't even magic users or mages. Perhaps some of you have already tried my Iron Horses, right? What do you all think? How do they compare to real warhorses?"

I ignored the commotion beneath the podium, as the conclusion was obvious.

"Warhorses are expensive, and their bloodlines and breeds are big problems as well. Not to mention, they take an incredibly long time to raise, and there's the problem of fully equipping them. It could be said that an excellent warhorse with its own horse armor is half of a knight's life. Add to that the fact that warhorses require the highest-quality feed, and it could be said that domain lords everywhere spend great amounts of effort on maintaining a sufficient amount of knights under their command. Yet these Iron Horses..."

There were plenty of mages that came from the nobility so they were the first to guess what I was about to say.

"They're cheap, truly cheap compared to real warhorses. The cost of production isn't that high, and merely some engineering materials are required without any special magical ingredients. It can easily be mass produced. As for their abilities, even with just the current technology, until the batteries powering them run out of power, they'll be even quicker than warhorses wearing a full set of horse armor. Not to mention that you can easily add additional armor to the Iron Horse, and its defensive capabilities will be far stronger than a horse which possesses a physical flesh and blood body."

I closed my eyes and envisioned what I wanted for the future. In future battles, these Iron Horse-riding knights would wield spears and dwarven firearms which would enable them to strike the invaders in lightning-like ambushes. Yet they were only the first part in my planned iron-outfitted warriors!

"This is merely the beginning. I can tell you all right now that self-propelled super small mechas have already been developed. They are capable of greatly increasing any individual's combat strength and survivability. We're also developing heavy mechas with similar specs to war mammoths, as well as large Titan mechas and siege weaponry that are currently undergoing mass production. Soon, the field of engineering that you've all ignored for forever will develop from a joke field into a way of truth that's more than equal to magic. Not only that, the users of these mechas will be the ordinary people that you look down upon. The ordinary people of the future will have far more power than any of you realize."

To use a cliché phrase: "The tides of history are unstoppable." Heroes would forever rise throughout the times, and revolutions would occur when the winds were right. Even without me, there was destined to be a "magical engineering" revolution in the future regardless.

In the game's "history," after Armageddon finally descended and the Auland Empire suffered many serious losses and setbacks, pushing it to the brink, the Auland Empire finally gave everyone their secret technology of small portable batteries which had the power to change the world. What came with it was a revolution in magical engineering.

Even though it was still a thorny road afterwards, magical engineering products changed the entire world in the game's "history," changing the way people lived, how they fought, and even Eich's very culture.

Yet since I was now here in this world, how would I possibly waste precious time that could be used to prepare for future battles? Thanks to the butterfly effect that I intentionally caused, Olivia invented this all-important technology more than ten years earlier than she was scheduled to. Nor did Timlad need to waste so much time in "maturing," thanks to my "experienced" guidance.

This helped them avoid many incorrect paths in their research, making their paths much clearer and straighter.

It wasn't merely my knowledge of the game's storyline. Even my memories about how modern-day wars worked in my world would help push engineering developments forward in this world by thousands of years. After all, it was common that even one small technological improvement would take countless years of hard work and combat experience to otherwise obtain.

The most obvious was how Russia had once modified bulldozers into tanks. Plus, even World War 1 tactics like barbed wire fences, trench warfare, and stationery machine gun turrets were usable in this world as well! Perhaps just a tiny little moat and a small defensive structure guarded by a squadron of ordinary people would require an entire squadron of knights to use countless sacrifices in order to conquer.

"In the upcoming generation, it will become hundreds of times easier to obtain power. Even an ordinary person will be able to defeat or kill the strong! This is a revolution! This is no simple invention, this is an industrial revolution which will bring about an entirely new generation! This is the goal of my mage organization, the Great Industrial Party!"

Of course, chaotic worlds would always give birth to heroes, as if the world itself would instinctively refuse to die off. Soon, new technologies, new magics, and new powerful individuals would appear endlessly like how new plants would sprout after a spring rain. As this world's enemies continuously increased in strength, the original residents would improve in strength in leaps and bounds as well. And what I needed to do right now was to prematurely bring the "Industrial Revolution" to this world of fantasy and magic in order to strengthen its foundation.

"Perhaps some of you here are thinking that such a revolution is unnecessary, and that you should try and stop me... so what I'm going to show everyone here next is the most truthful information

of all. There are prophecies among what I'm going to show you, as well as current situations. I swear on my own name of the veracity of this information."

I took a deep breath here. After all, these were things I needed to show them.

"...You all still want to act like cowardly turtles hiding in your shells? Let me just see how you're going to hide in your shells when enemies are knocking at your door!"

And so, I showed the mages here the same information that I had once broadcast on the Borealis back in the day.

These were images that resembled prophecies, with countless hordes of demons walking on the streets, cities burning and screaming as black knights trampled everything underfoot, the undead invading the living's territory, the elves' holy grounds becoming nothing but rubble and craters, and magma covering lands that used to be filled with ice and snow.

And, the most astonishing sight of all for everyone here was a pile of rubble that still shone with remnants of mystical light at the broken tower's tip. This place was doubtlessly the Cloud Tower which was flourishing so much today.

At the same time, my memory crystal also showed them the recent battles that had just occurred.

They saw the demon armies invading the Underground World, the fierce beastmen ambushing the Northlands, the Undead Calamity invading the Bardi Empire, the forbidden spell duel I had against Undead Emperor Aso which ended in Aso's death, the current situation in the Auland Empire's Rain Capital, the battle against Emordilorcan in the Earth Elemental Plane and the Divine Sins birthed there. No easy battle had been fought; each one was a close battle to the death.

The entire world was quietly changing around them, with wars

on the level of myths occurring continuously. Yet the mages of the Cloud Tower continued living secluded off in their own little world, with the topics about the ongoing wars being nothing more than idle gossip to them. No matter how fierce "someone else's war" was, they would merely sigh or be slightly moved before forgetting about it entirely.

However, scenes that they could witness would be far more impactful than reading words on a report. All these scenes of Armageddon in the future as well as current and recent battles interchanged with each other, showing them both the current reality as well as prophecy. All of the mages naturally recalled the recent Gods' proclamations as well so even the most self-confident of mages would now be closely considering just how large in scale the current Holy War was likely to develop and whether they would be able to safely stay out of things as they had originally wanted.

The facts would be more powerful than any argument I could make, so I didn't waste words. Naturally, it was now time for me to deal with any doubts.

"...Just how did you obtain these images that are like prophecies? Divination magic can't possibly divine such results. Not to mention, divination magic can't even be used anymore ever since the God of Fate used his power during the Gods' proclamations. Also, just when exactly did you learn about such prophecies?"

It was only natural that Oslowen, who was the highest-ranking member of the Mystical Blade present here, would be the first to question me on this.

"The source? I could describe it as a mere coincidence. I can swear right here, right now, using the powers of the Holy Light, that this is the truest 'history' and 'future' of this world. If I don't intervene, everything in these images will certainly occur without question."

From a certain standpoint, my status as a user of Holy Light was incredibly helpful to me. At the very least, it was incredibly helpful whenever I needed to tell a "truthful lie."

"As for when I knew about these prophecies? Would you believe me if I said that I learned about them more than three hundred years ago? That's right, I swear in the name of the Holy Light, that more than three hundred and seventy years ago, when I was still a seven or eight-year-old little brat, I already knew that all of this was destined to occur."

The blinding Holy Light surrounding me proved the veracity of my words, which sent the entire classroom into the biggest commotion so far.

As for me, it was now time for me to make my escape after successfully saying everything that I wanted... Fine then, I actually didn't have much else to say, and I felt that I would be caught out in a lie somewhere if I continued speaking on this topic any longer.

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"A hidden truth behind the Yongye Calamity!? The history books should be rewritten!"

"A slandered hero of darkness? The only one who knew the truth about the upcoming Armageddon? A maniac forced to insanity by the burden? The truth about the Northlands prince!"

"The newest research and discussions on the veracity of the prophecy on Armageddon—an interview with the dimensional expert archmage, Fensoan!"

I was quite impressed with the hard work that the dimensional reporters put in as I looked at the thick stacks of magazines and extra edition newspapers before me. Even I hadn't realized that I had supposedly done so many things in secret before, turning into a tragic hero who had to bear such a reviled reputation in order to save the world.

"Hahaha, this article even discusses your past romantic history, claiming that you used to have two lovers and a mistress. Could it actually be true? Roland, did you take revenge against the Holy Church because of a dead lover back in the day?"

The black cat dexterously used her claws to flip through the newspapers to constantly look for more hilarious articles on me. When she had laughed enough, she even sipped on some milk. Harloys really was becoming more and more like a real cat.

"Hmph, I died in that life at only fourteen years old. Do you really think that anyone will believe this article?"

Publicly making my statements while swearing to their truth using the power of Holy Light was quite worthwhile. By the same afternoon, just about all the mage organizations learned the content of everything I declared. Meanwhile, although it was already a publicly known secret that I, Roland, was also Emperor Yongye, none of the publicly sold magazines or newspapers made any direct mention of me being Yongye. However, there were plenty of guesses and rumors within the mage organizations' personal publications.

Some slightly good news was that most likely, the various mage organizations didn't want to aggravate me, so all the reports were still rather positive and easily acceptable ones. Although it seemed rather strange that I mysteriously became a dark antihero, it definitely felt much better than how I was simply blamed for everything, no matter if it was my fault or not, in the past.

After I revealed such explosive news to everyone, if the major mage organizations wanted to cooperate with me in order to receive more benefits, they would naturally try to give me a good name.

As for killing off this relatively new invention? Or forcefully stealing it? Let's not mention how impossible that would be due to a certain reason. Sometimes, I even felt proud of how infamous my

villainy was. It was quite useful in so many situations.

However, the only downside of what I did today was that Thorn Garden had a poor day of sales yet again.

"Are things still the same outside?"

"Yep. There are many people standing around, looking at the store, but very few are coming in and purchasing anything. The only ones that are buying products are the old familiar customers who are all at the mage-teacher level. It would seem that all those new faces outside are here for you. Are you going to go out and greet them?"

"Forget it. Earlier this morning, when I went out simply for some exercise, several tens of them were so scared that they took off running upon seeing me, and some even fainted on the spot. I'm beginning to think that I'm a medusa now, with the ability to petrify anything I see. Oh, and with additional sound effects of crying and howling."

"Why aren't you mentioning the young female mages who have lost themselves due to those stories about how much of a tragic hero you are? It must feel wonderful to have received the first ever love letter of your life."

"Hmph, that definitely wasn't my first love letter... fine then, don't look at me like that, I admit it's the first love letter that I can recall receiving, alright? But I've definitely received many challenge letters, duel letters, curse letters, and letters about never wanting to see me again. Perhaps there was someone in the past who intended to send me a love letter but sent it to the wrong person, or wrote the wrong person's name inside, or there was a girl who wrote one to me but was too embarrassed to send it..."

I felt that I was more and more pitiful as I kept trying to defend myself, so I decided to change the topic to something more interesting.

"That girl is still crouching there, waiting for me?"

"Yep. She said that as an honorable executor of the law, she was definitely going to keep a close eye on you, and that I should tell you, 'Don't even think about causing any trouble in this city.'"

Harloys even imitated that silly Cher's tone of voice—a really good imitation, in fact. At the very least, it was quite obvious from the way she grit her teeth and her expression that she didn't intend to allow me to have a comfortable life here.

I glanced out the window at the tree where the female mage Cher and her public security team was waiting for me. I could only helplessly shake my head. At any rate, I didn't intend to do anything illegal here—for the time being—so she could just wait there all she liked.

"Hmph! If she wants to be a free police mage in her spare time, then let her be. It even saves us money on hiring extra security."

Yep, that was what I was thinking at the time. After all, from a certain standpoint, having police mages around here would help make our customers feel safer.

"You really should think of a method to make her leave as soon as possible."

"Why? I'm not intending on breaking any laws here or ruining public order."

"Just this morning, she came in for three surprise inspections..."

"Who cares!? It's not like I'm doing anything illegal! Let her check whatever she wants!"

"The reason she's been giving for searching us is 'tax evasion.' Each time, she's been seriously going through our accounts. Are you sure your fake account books—"

"I must think of a way to make her leave! Immediately!"

Chapter 304: My Relative

Since the bait I had tossed out that day was quite attractive, and since my lecture had been an incredible success and had gained everyone's attention, countless people signed up for my Great Industrial Party the very next day. It instantly became one of the largest mage organizations in the Cloud Tower... I'm joking; that was all obviously made up!

Reality often developed differently from what one planned. Even though I made tons of advertisements, not a single person had signed up for my mage organization as of yet— perhaps it was the mages' nature to be cautious, or perhaps it was simply that I had been far too villainous in the past.

However, there was one person who kept coming to find me of her own volition, though—someone who I didn't welcome at all, someone who made herself into my "guardian..."

"I shall be watching you closely!"

Don't misunderstand. This was no confession. It was a police mage's angry justice-filled roar towards a suspect. Cher decided to find a reason to arrest me at all costs...

And so, my Great Industrial Party, which didn't have any members except for my people, now had an internal overseer working for us for free. This was a specialized treatment typically only given to large mage organizations with over one thousand members. However, since we were technically a mage organization under the Mystical Blade, we were unable to refuse this overseer from the main branch from staying here as long as she wished.

As for the Great Industrial Party... fine, I know this sounds awkward. The only property this organization possessed was the Thorn Garden shop, which was why Cher spent her free time idly here, inspecting our accounts every day... how could I possibly allow her to do as she pleased!?

Any normal merchant aimed for profits, which meant the merchant wouldn't be entirely legal. Something like account books? There needed to be a minimum of at least three sets. One set was for the tax inspectors, one set was for yourself, and one set was for when you were forced to the brink so you would toss that out to sacrifice part of the profits to protect the whole.

According to the Mage Country's laws, all transactions conducted within the Mage Country would be taxed at a 10% rate. This was quite a hefty sales tax that would add up, so we typically did many transactions in secret in order to avoid taxes. We also made an excellent fake account book, but...

"What? She's comparing our account book of what we've sold to the amount of stock we have left in the warehouse? She's counting all the stock gone from the warehouse as how much we have sold instead? That's not following the most basic rules of tax regulation!"

"And do you think that you're completely following the rules by creating a fake account book?"

"Of course! Is there any merchant in this world who doesn't make fake account books!?"

"...At the very least, those of the royalty who are also merchants don't need to make fake account books."

Harloys thought over it for quite a while and finally had to admit that despite her lengthy life, she couldn't recall a single merchant who didn't make a fake account book. She had no choice but to hesitatingly speak about her most ancient memories from when she was still a princess, about the royalty who were also merchants and seemed to be quite honest.

"That's because they don't even need to pay taxes to begin with! They're the people whose wallets are being filled with tax money!"

My angry roar echoed across the room. No matter which world it

was, public enterprises or companies supported by the government would be an excellent way to make money. They would have advantages in areas such as taxes, trustworthiness, and financing. Independent privately-owned businesses simply couldn't compete in those areas.

But that wasn't the important part...

"Twelve products aren't listed in your account books. There's at least a minimum of four hundred transactions that haven't been listed in your account books. In less than a week, you've already evaded taxes that add up to a minimum of 50,000 gold coins. Your fake account books are marvelously well written with no evidence of any wrongdoing to be found anywhere. I'm even beginning to suspect that you came from a merchant family."

When I looked at the tax evasion slip that Cher gave me, which stated I owed 52,452 gold coins, plus another 20,000 coins on top of that as a fine for tax evasion, I my heart bleed. This was all money I earned through blood and sweat! (Ok, fine. That last part was a lie).

"Hmph! Are you praising your own auditing ability in a roundabout fashion?"

After all, my talent in creating false account books came from another world to begin with, meaning that I was far above the level of anyone here. Unfortunately, she still saw through me. If only I knew that she was crazy enough to go inspect the warehouse and patiently count all the stock one by one, for an entire day, I wouldn't have been so nice to her and allowed her to come in and do as she pleased.

"No, I'm being honest with you. Although your accounts may seem simple, the mathematical techniques involved have far surpassed any ordinary mage's math abilities. I'm even suspecting you're a professional swindler and counterfeiter. That's precisely why I had to resort to non-regulated methods in order to find

evidence of your crimes."

"...So, you're saying you're not investigating me because 'I have committed a crime?' You investigated me because 'I definitely have committed a crime, so no matter what, you're going to investigate to the end?' Do you know that you've already broken one of the most basic principles that executors of the law should follow? Innocent until found guilty!"

Even though Cher had a blank expression, likely because she had never heard of this phrase from my original world, I didn't really care right now. Seeing the enforcers of the law here act as they pleased made me mysteriously displeased as I frowned.

Rip!

However, I was surprised to see Cher tearing this tax evasion fine slip to little pieces in front of me. She even tossed all the little pieces on the ground, littering scrap paper everywhere.

"I wasn't intending on using this to threaten you. I merely wanted to ask you one question that I want your honest answer on."

"...What's your question?"

Since Cher used an entire day's worth of time to find my weak spot, her question couldn't possibly be about anything small and unimportant. However, what I really needed to do right now was...

"Hey, stop just standing around and gawking, hurry up and help me destroy the evidence and restock the warehouse! Also, randomize the stocking procedures, and redo the account books! If she catches us for anything again, you'll all be paying the fine out of your salaries!"

Yep, in order to avoid being caught in the same fashion again, I first needed to deal with this immediately. I decided to ignore Cher's expression of condescension upon me, and then...

"Since you're being so sincere in asking me, I shall do my best to

answer your question."

Cher hesitated for quite a while before she gritted her teeth and finally asked me her question.

"Are you my blood-related grandfather?"

"Ptui!"

Everyone who was watching this spouted fountains of tea from their mouths, and even the silly cat knocked over her bowl of milk as she rolled around on the ground, laughing. I was so shocked that I felt as if my soul was leaving my body. Where exactly did such a question come from!

Thanks to a certain female mage's astonishing question, there was a huge ruckus in Thorn Garden. It took more than ten minutes for everything to calm down. During this entire process, my mind was completely blank.

"What on earth? Is she here to ask me for child support money? Or am I being scammed? Am I suddenly going to be called Daddy next? I joined no such competition! Something seems wrong with the script! I don't even have a wife so how could I have a granddaughter?"

Cher Allen, someone who appeared to be human on the surface, at the Gold rank, with an unknown age, had started out as a self-taught mage. Her specialties were divination and rune magic. From looking at her personal information, it didn't seem like she had any special background. She was already a Silver-ranked mage when she arrived in the Mage Country. It could be said that she was a classic example of a successful self-taught independent mage.

Based on her personality, I doubted that someone like her would want to "adopt a criminal as a father" in order to have a better relationship with me for whatever reason. It was just the opposite, as when she asked me her question, she had such a look of disgust that basically said "how could my relative be someone like you?"

which was still fresh in my mind.

Soon, she gave an unforgettable explanation of why she asked such a question.

If you went by her birthplace, she was born in the Bardi Empire so she technically counted as a Bardi citizen. However, she was born as an orphan who didn't know her parents, and a powerful dragon had raised her and taught her magic. Later, she became an adventurer in the Bardi Empire. Then, Orloss began to force all adventurers and mages to officially register and work under the government, so Cher chose to leave the Bardi Empire rather than stay and work for Orloss.

"...The Bardi government started forcefully recruiting mages more than twenty years ago, right? In that case, this means that Lady Cher is at least forty years—ahhh!"

As expected of my disciple—he was incredibly perceptive. Cohen instantly noticed the important point, one that I was paying attention to as well. He even rushed to say it out loud before I could, but Cher's movements were quite swift as well. She stomped quite accurately on Cohen's foot, a perfect combination of swiftness, accuracy, and viciousness. It seemed rather painful for Cohen and made one wonder if she was also in a monk sub-class.

As I watched the unfortunate Cohen, who deserved what he got for saying too much, I felt quite pleased. I had been too slow in saying the same thing. I inwardly sighed; Cohen was still too inexperienced. After all, some things simply couldn't be said out loud even if one had their suspicions. Wasn't that simply being suicidal?

"Female mages are women as well. Hmph! Haven't you seen how I've never discussed the topic of age with Harloys and Amelia? That would be suicidal. Oh right, Amelia should be only a few centuries old, with three digits. But as for the princess from the elven empire, could she possibly have a five digit age? Haha! That's

so old—ahhh! It hurts! Silly cat, stop clawing me! Da—damn it! I forgot about our soul connection!"

This time, Harloys wasn't biting me in her typical joking manner. She even transformed her claws into metal, not going easy on me at all. I felt a fiery pain on my nose, and I looked in the mirror to see eight bloody claw streaks on my face along with a silly cat still attached to my head with an iron grip. I began seriously considering just how I was supposed to go out tomorrow, and if I should be creating a cat-fur scarf.

"...By the time I had an understanding of the world around me, I was already being raised by that humongous three-headed dragon. She taught me everything I know, but she never told me who I was or whether or not I still have relatives left in this world."

Cher seemed to have lost her patience for idle chatter as she directly started talking about her past.

"A three-headed dragon raised you? That's something that only exists in myths and legends these days. You're truly fortunate."

"You actually believe me? I've told others before as well, and none of them believed me, telling me that three-headed dragons don't exist in this world and that I must have been dreaming. Evelyn clearly exists! In a way, she could even be considered my mother!"

Evelyn was the name that I had seen just recently in that letter that was seemingly filled with grudges and was addressed to me. This instinctively caused me to retract my casual attitude of thinking that Cher had nothing to do with me. I felt an unnatural chill running down my spine. My ominous premonitions were always on the mark, and this time, I felt that there was truly a huge amount of trouble in store for me.

"My job class is Weaver of Fate..."

The moment Cher mentioned this, everyone around her

instinctively retreated several steps, while Cher helplessly shook her head and smiled wryly, apparently having gotten used to such treatment. This wasn't actually because the bastards under me were such cowards, it was because this job class truly had such a frightening reputation.

The Celestial Tower's fate was already the best evidence that divination magic was something unreliable. Changing fate would only cause one to suffer even greater misfortune. That was one of the basic laws that the God of Fate had taught mortals. However, mages weren't scared of anything, so why would they be willing to obey the concept of Fate? That was how this incredibly special high-level job class known as Weaver of Fate was born.

As a high-level job class which required being at the Gold rank or higher to progress into, this special job class had basically zero requirements. Yep, mages could enter this job class as well with only Silver rank, but as for the success rate of entering this job class... There was a saying about the Weaver of Fate job class that it wasn't that there were zero requirements for entering this job class, it was that this job class itself had, from the very start, picked those who could enter this job class. No matter what, those who weren't chosen wouldn't possibly be able to enter this job class, so the so-called requirements for the job class didn't matter at all.

This job class was so rare that there were less than ten individuals with this job class in all of Eich. So, it was natural that those with this job class were considered as mortals favored by the God of Fate, Catio.

The Weaver of Fate job class wasn't a particularly strong combat job class, and it wouldn't have any additional benefits for mages' magic spells, either. However, this job class had two basic abilities. The first was to analyze an object's past and future, and the second was to change someone's future fate.

However, since forcefully changing anyone's fate would only

result in that person's fate becoming worse, even if a Weaver of Fate had kind intentions in using their powers, such as trying to change a person's fate of an upcoming death, all that would happen is that the person would die in an even more pitiful or painful manner. That was why this job class had a very famous nickname: Summoner of Misfortune.

From a certain standpoint, this job class was literally one where anyone that they looked at would suffer misfortune. Anyone they glared at would become even more misfortunate.

"Our abilities aren't quite as wondrous as depicted in the legends. Divination abilities have long since lost their power from the ancient eras. Even if I use all my power on 'Fate Analysis,' I can only see approximately one minute into the future about what will likely happen to a nonliving object. Rather than calling it a prophecy, it's more accurate to call it a prediction. As for my job class's ability to 'Weave Fate Lines,' it can only bring negative effects on others, which is why Weavers of Fate don't typically use their abilities."

I had researched about divination and fate-related magic as well in the past. Although I didn't gain anything myself, I had some basic knowledge about it. Stargazers would typically trip over rocks under their own feet; the more closely something's fate was related to oneself, the more difficult it would be to divine. However, it was publicly recognized that this job class was one that nobody should antagonize. Weavers of Fate definitely weren't as weak as she made them out to be. After all, the #2 ranked individual in the Calamity Rankings was the 'Misfortune God' Ain, the most famous Weaver of Fate in the entire world.

However, ever since the God of Fate Catio used his divine power for that divine-level forbidden spell, transforming his own power into that star net which covered the entire dimension, the Fate Lines should have been completely messed up. All divination should have become ineffective. Perhaps that would allow us to

somewhat relax about her powers.

"...Although direct divination magic spells are no longer usable, perhaps Weavers of Fate really are the children favored by the God of Fate. I can currently use the divine star net's power of Fate, and my power has become far stronger than before. Although it's still difficult for me to see future fates of anything living, merely summoning misfortune upon anyone is quite easy now. All I need to do is slightly change their Fate Line."

Alright, now even I wanted to run away at top speed.

"Catio gave all of us Weavers of Fate a special gift as his favor to us. I'm allowed to directly ask him one question, regardless of what it is, or what rules it breaks. However, I can only use this ability once in my lifetime."

She paused here with a rather strange tone of voice and expression as she looked at me. Then, an expectant look even came into her eyes.

"When I was at my most lost and confused, I decided to use Catio's gift. I asked him, 'Where is my family?' Catio told me, 'Go to the Cloud Tower and wait for the Lord Yongye.' So, Your Highness Roland, are you my grandfather?"

"No, Cher. I am your father."

This caused everyone to become astonished. I was so proud of myself that I was about to start laughing out loud. However, a sudden dark premonition caused me to recall that Cher was a Weaver of Fate, and that my joke had apparently gone overboard?

"...Don't take it so seriously, it's just a joke! I'm just making a reference! A truly awesome reference! Have you ever seen Star Wars!? I highly recommend it! It's an amazing story! I really love this quote from it—who doesn't?!"

Alright then, after experiencing three continuous days of misfortune where I almost choked to death every time I drank

some water and suffered from endless amounts of cat bites from a certain silly cat, I learned that some jokes wouldn't be appreciated.

Chapter 305: Inheritor

My memories were missing more parts than I had expected, and since I didn't even have anything possibly related to Cher in my logs, then it probably wasn't anything good. It was likely to have been something I intentionally forgot of my own volition.

"...How do you feel, suddenly becoming a daddy? Are you delighted?"

"It's a very complex feeling. Also, if you keep intentionally misusing certain words like daddy, I shall make you into the ammunition for the next test firing of the new cannon in the experimental laboratory."

I smiled and nodded as I accepted Harloys' taunt, before threatening her right afterwards.

However, she seemed to not care about this punishment at all, which made me realize that such a common punishment wouldn't be able to scare her. Wait a moment, who would use stuffing someone into a cannon and firing them off as a common punishment anyways?

"Beifeng—"

"I shall pay extra attention that it shall never happen again."

I nodded in satisfaction at this. Threats, after all, didn't need anything new. They only needed to be scary enough. Since a certain Banshee Queen was becoming more and more used to her cat form, the Saint-ranked beast tamer was definitely her mortal enemy. Thankfully, Beifeng still had some very basic morals. At the very least, I had never heard any complaints about him forcing anyone unwilling before.

But to be honest, I really did have complex feelings towards what Harloys intentionally worded in a way to make fun of me.

To begin with, I had no way of knowing if Cher truly was my

descendant or not. Although there were many ways of ascertaining if someone was related to you or not in this world, none of those methods were usable in this particular situation. There was just no way to find out if she was 100% related to me or not.

In this world, in order to determine if two people were related by blood, apart from the now completely unreliable divination magic, it would require something related to the physical body. No matter if it was secrets of a bloodline or magic that searched for a soul's origins, they all needed a part of the physical body as a basic catalyst.

However, my physical body had been restructured after being revived this time. Although my physical appearance was the same as it was in the past, and I greatly resembled a human on the surface, I was probably no longer human internally.

"System?"

[...]

Alright then, just as expected, the System was completely unreliable at such a critical moment. However, Cher had her own thoughts about this as she was a Weaver of Fate.

"I can tell that your Fate Line is connected to my birth. Even if you aren't one of my ancestors, you have a very deep connection to my ancestor."

Not to mention, with Reyne and East Mist as an excellent example, even if Cher was indeed related to me by blood, she might not necessarily be my descendant. After all, I had a headache-inducing playboy younger twin brother.

"This time, it has nothing to do with me. Second Brother Karwenz told me to tell you this."

Alright then, I didn't know what to say anymore as I saw how happy and excited Reyne seemed to be.

"You're really delighted about this?"

"Yeah, yeah, of course! If she's Brother Roland's descendant, doesn't that make her my relative as well? I finally have another relative apart from little sister Clint."

"Little sister Clint? Shouldn't you be calling her big sister Glina?"

I finally came to the conclusion that perhaps it was the destiny of descendants of the Mist to have great misfortune. Both Glina and Reyne could be considered textbook definitions of orphans, not to mention the two of them didn't have a good relationship with each other... Fine, from a certain standpoint, neither of them was anyone normal. Glina was especially a strange one that most people would have trouble getting along with.

"Right, how are things with Glina these days?"

"Very successful. Since the north and east have all been quiet, and they no longer need to worry about their backs, the Sleuweir Kingdom's restoration has been better than the other areas. In the letter I received from her two days ago, she was even complaining that she wanted to come out and play. Hmph, little sister Clint has far less to do than us. How could I possibly give her the chance to come out and play?"

Although the Sleuweir Kingdom suffered significant losses during the battle in the Northlands, it had a solid foundation and was able to recover quite quickly. It was originally a country where trading was an important business to begin with, and it now had opportunities to trade with the elves and the new beastmen tribes.

Meanwhile, East Mist was more limited in population and basic industries compared to Sleuweir. Even focusing the entire country's resources on preparing for the spring crop planting would be quite difficult for East Mist as they still needed to focus on basic military defenses. Although Reyne and Glina were both the leaders of entire countries, there was still a huge difference between them.

Of course, if I looked at military capabilities, things were exactly

the opposite. East Mist was my most important base of all in the Northlands, not to mention it was also the main headquarters of the Church of Law. The newly-born technologies and military squadrons all came from East Mist as well. They were top-level in military power out of all the Northlands countries despite East Mist's size. However, it was precisely because East Mist focused too much on military development that even the East Mist royal knights had to participate in planting new crops during spring.

"Sleuweir is fine, but East Mist seems to have become rather unbalanced in its development. Military-related matters are taking up far too large a percentage of the government's tasks. The earth there is also poorly suited for agricultural development. I hope Amelia's new crops will be able to bring about an abundant harvest. Otherwise, I'm going to have to find some other rich fool to scam for East Mist's food money."

I was slightly worried about the current situation when I thought about it. After all, the domain lords there would all have their own expectations and ambitions. If Reyne kept playing around outside in such an idle manner, there would be many troubles if something happened back in East Mist.

"How about you go back to East Mist and take charge there? I have plenty of people here with me right now."

Although Reyne hadn't become queen yet, everyone knew that she was the leader of East Mist. However, Reyne obviously wasn't the type to obediently stay in the royal palace and rule like a proper queen. This time, just like before, she claimed to come here to support me and came along with the Borealis of her own volition.

"Even if I go back, I'm nothing more than a rubber stamper. That's so boring."

Reyne pouted and seemed to disagree with me.

This gave me an even bigger headache. After all, in a way, Reyne

was right. The military matters in East Mist were being taken care of by my Red Hunting Hounds, Kelly could deal with political matters, and the Church of Law's authority was beginning to exceed royal authority as well. If you looked at it from a certain standpoint, it would even make us seem like we were intentionally usurping power from the orphan princess for a nefarious scheme.

"Fine, fine, forget it. Do whatever you like. But here is—"

"Yep, it's really boring here as well. I can't understand all these mage things anyways, which is why I was about to say goodbye to you and go on a journey."

"A journey? Where to?"

"I was thinking either the Forest of Dreams or Auland."

Although Reyne was still smiling and acting so casually like always, I immediately understood her wish. There was no need to go more into the details. Judging from her honest and direct tone, she had already made this decision, and now she was merely notifying me.

"Yep, it'll help me to gain more strength through practical combat experience, and I also want to earn Justice Points. There are plenty of treasures that I have my eyes on."

Since the rules were set, they couldn't be changed so easily. Reyne, who had been following me for all this time, naturally understood just how important Justice Points were. Since she wished to become stronger, she would, of course, be quite interested in obtaining Justice Points. She also understood that now was the easiest time to obtain Justice Points and strengthen herself before everyone caught on to their importance.

There were many items that could be exchanged for which were one-of-a-kind. Those that wanted such items would obviously have to act as quickly as possible. I had heard news from the Forest of Dreams that many people had already arrived there, including

plenty of powerful individuals that had formerly preferred to remain as hermits.

However, Reyne's plans weren't so simple as merely strengthening herself.

"If you need them, just tell me. Otherwise, if there's not anything, I'm going to take the Silver Cross Squadron with me, as well as the Aurora Knights. It's too much of a waste to have them standing around here in the Cloud Tower acting as employees of Thorn Garden. I've already set aside five thousand Hero Armlets for their use. Just treat it as the appropriation of governmental property."

This was obviously well-planned by her before she notified me. She was intending to go into battle. Not only would this help train herself, she would also train the soldiers and knights under her as well. They would obtain Justice Points and grow stronger together with her.

This was Reyne's choice. She chose to lead her own people and knights to grow stronger together to deal with the future challenges and difficulties.

A bright spring sun shone in through the window as the smiling Reyne waved goodbye to me. I felt like this all happened too quickly and mysteriously without me even realizing it.

Her silver armor flashed with solid metallic plating, and traces of fear and hesitation had long since disappeared from her beautiful face. Her smile wasn't forced at all, and the silver Roland Sacred Sword was glowing with a resolute light. When I finally woke up, I discovered that time had flown by and that this girl had imperceptibly become a warrior who was a leader in her own right.

"Right, I also brought that flag with me. You don't mind if I use it, right?"

This famous dragon-slaying princess of the Northlands was still

using that tattered flag of the Mist. At this moment, I paused in surprise, before I finally figured everything out.

Obviously, Reyne had already planned all this out. She wasn't escaping from her responsibilities as the leader of a country—in fact, it was the opposite. She believed that since calamities were destined to endlessly come in the future, merely guarding what one had wasn't enough. After all, that was a passive way of defending. Only by obtaining enough strength would one be able to overcome the upcoming difficulties. And now was the best time to obtain greater power and reputation.

In this world, even something as intangible as reputation could transform into solid, actual fighting strength. When faced with calamity and danger, a well-known hero's summoning for assistance would be able to attract numerous people who trusted in them as allies.

Reyne made her choice. She chose to take her knights with her to experience the battlefield and to avoid the safety of my protection. She chose to obtain the power to protect herself and her people through life-and-death experiences, both to help herself gain a reputation as well as to inject new history and fame into the flag of the Mist. The entire land of Eich would witness once again what it was to be a descendant of the Mist.

She knew that mentioning such ideas of hers in East Mist itself would be impossible. Since Reyne was the only royalty left, Kelly and all the other long-time retainers would definitely refuse, which was why she used the excuse of supporting me to come here. Then, she would go to the frontlines as planned before finally informing Kelly and the others afterwards.

Right now, although the girl before me still looked the same as before, that formerly hesitant "flower-vase princess" had completely vanished. This princess knight was now someone who smiled while facing future calamities and was bearing the burden of a country and her citizens' trust.

I really didn't know what to say even after thinking for a long while. Even though she was asking me about it on the surface, she probably never even considered the possibility that I would reject her.

Would I reject her? Of course I wouldn't. Since the young bird had now matured into a soaring eagle that was ready to spread her wings and leave the nest, there was no way I would force her back into the nest and fold her wings. That would only make a talented individual waste away into an idiot.

"You're really going to make me suffer with this. You want Kelly to lecture me to death that badly?"

"...Hehe, even Brother Roland has something you're afraid of? I apologize for that; I'll write a letter to her. So, this means you'll allow me to go?"

"Even if I don't allow you, you'll probably sneak off on your own. Honestly, there's nobody at all around me that doesn't make me worry."

I laughed as I shook my head. I was both feeling relief as well as regret.

"I love you the most, Brother Roland."

When she discovered that her request had been approved, the mature female knight instantly became a defrosting ice mountain that transformed into a shy young girl who was smiling as prettily as a flower... and then she jumped on me, knocking over both me and my chair.

Kiss!

I felt a light peck on my cheek, and when I finally came to my senses, there was nothing before me anymore other than a faint smell of orange-scented perfume and Reyne's figure escaping in the distance.

I rubbed my cheek where I could still feel a lingering soft

sensation, as if her red lips were still brushing against my cheek. I had no idea what to say anymore, and it took quite a long while before I finally managed to make a comment.

"...Heh heh, that little girl is such a passionate one."

"Sometimes, intentionally acting dumb when dealing with something awkward can be considered gentlemanly. Sometimes, even though you clearly know what's going on, you still intentionally act dumb, which is something ridiculously overboard. Little Roland, which type do you think you are?"

"Shut up, Harloys. Otherwise, I'll feed you to Beifeng."

"..."

My best weapon against her was far too threatening so the silly cat fell silent. However, a while later, I couldn't help but ask.

"Was I really being overboard?"

"...Scumbag, demon, pervert, bastard, gentleman, Roland, Beifeng!"

Alright then, it appeared as if my and Beifeng's names had the potential to turn into adjectives. Since my level of wickedness in her mind was only one level off from Beifeng's, it seemed that I really needed to start self-reflecting.

After Reyne escaped at top speed as if she was fleeing the scene of a traffic accident, my emotions that were already in a mess, due to the issue of Cher's identity, became even messier. Not to mention, the silly cat continued adding to my burden.

"...Oni Chichi, Beifeng, Roland, Oni Chichi, Beifeng, Roland..."

When I began seriously considering if I should try tasting some cat meat for the first time in my life—and started taking action as well—only then did she snicker at me and disappeared into a shadow.

After thinking about things for another two minutes, I decided to

focus on something else, instead.

"Reyne, you're becoming more and more like him."

Mysteriously, in my mind, my impression of Reyne was beginning to overlap with Karwenz, the idiot who sought strength above everything, to an incredible degree. From another standpoint, Reyne's determination to go train herself in battle gave me a warning as well.

"Since I've already made all the plans I can, it's about time I started focusing on my own cultivation. In the end, power levels are more important than anything else. Even Reyne understands this much, so how can I possibly fall behind her? When I finish all these things here at the Cloud Tower, I should go find a place to cultivate as well, along with earning some Justice Points."

As long as I could steady the situation here before the Undead Emperors descended, this would be the final period of peace for the mortal plane. Karwenz's overwhelming power was a thousand-kilogram boulder weighing in my mind. Not only that, ten years from now—no—perhaps only seven or eight years from now, all the Undead Emperors would be able to descend to the mortal plane at full power, which was the biggest threat before me right now.

I had already solidified my foundations and discovered my own future path. The rest would be to persist down my own path and furiously train myself through actual combat and earn both Fate Points and Justice Points to improve at an almost rule-breaking level of speed.

"Right. If I want to enter the Legend rank, I need to restore three more Soul Imprints. I still don't have any methods for Holy Light and Law right now, but I'm currently in the Mage Country. My undead magic has long since reached a bottleneck, and I bet I can find some relevant knowledge here to make a breakthrough. Also, I need lots of top-quality elemental materials to improve my Frigidwinter Earth. It seems that it's time to rob my old friends—er

—have some discussions with them."

Chapter 306: Revolution

The area around Loyu Street was originally one of the most unnoticeable areas in all of Arlo. After all, this area was the goblin and dwarves' district. They weren't popular in this country of magic, and the estate prices here were the lowest.

This was the Mage Country. Goblins' and gnomes' engineering technology would always seem extravagant but impractical in front of the mysterious power of magic—like a firework, beautiful yet otherwise useless.

"Engineers' cannons? Goblins' explosives? They don't even have the power of three-circle magic spells, and it's so easy to accidentally injure oneself with an explosion. Most importantly, they're really expensive, really heavy, and really unreliable."

"Goblin harvester mechas? A Silver rank can easily deal with the small ones, while the large ones require astronomical prices due to the need for an energy source. Nor can large mechas be mass-produced, and I'm doubtful of their practical usability."

"Gnomes' daily-life products? Are you joking with me? Are you intending to try that water-flushing toilet of theirs that can shoot you up into the clouds? Or use a gnome sleeping mask that will easily fry your brain? Yep, you could also try their large 'mega-comfy' massage chairs that are rumored to be so comfortable that they'll break every bone in your body. Forget it, those items all belong in a dump."

For quite a long while now, the products of engineering had always been treated as unreliable. Apart from the fact that the goblins and gnomes that excelled at engineering indeed had problems with their moral conduct, it was more about the limitations of technology.

"It's impossible for engineering to produce reliable products without a reliable power source."

To use an analogy from my previous world so that you readers can understand, not a single person would buy a car that would randomly choose a number between 1 and 100 horsepower when you stepped on the gas pedal. If a hair dryer or a microwave had voltage that would randomly jump several tens of thousands at a time, they would be no different from a ticking time bomb.

The energy sources that the gnomes and goblins used were far too crude. Either they used highly flammable substances like oil as the energy source, which meant that it was hard to control the energy output's power, or they would use rare resources obtained from magical beasts or precious minerals. That would cost astronomical amounts of money, on top of a low efficiency rate of conversion to energy. Not to mention, these magical sources would be difficult to control if they ran amok. And so, energy development was basically a huge mess.

That wasn't because the goblins and gnomes didn't view energy as important. It was that every natural-made or ancient energy source had different activation methods and fundamental workings. These energy sources could only be researched individually. Since all the different parts for energy sources were of such a wide variety, how could they possibly come up with an all-around mass producible energy source?

And since there was no way to mass produce any reliable energy sources, it was only natural that engineered products were also similarly unable to be mass produced. There was no consistency to engineering at all.

Of course, goblins and gnomes weren't satisfied with restrictions like this. Goblin engineering was just a typical goblin way of thinking... or perhaps I should say a goblin way of not caring about the consequences.

"Since I don't know when it'll explode, let's just make this into an explosive with the target of exploding in the first place."

And so, all sorts of Goblin Mines were invented. After a long time passed, the goblins lost sight of their original goal of improving goblin engineering. Their goal instead became the abnormal one of making more and more powerful explosions, something they considered glorious.

"Since there's no way to reliably control the energy output, then let's just think of ways to maximize the energy output, instead." And so, the goblin rocket cars and rockets were invented that had such a high fatality rate...

Should I say that it was thanks to the gnomes inventing the parachute that pilots were given the chance to return to the ground alive? However, I found it incomprehensible how goblin rocket car races became the goblins' most favorite sport of all.

"Danger? What's that? Please call it unpredictable excitement!"

That would be a very typical goblin-like answer. Perhaps it would be more convincing if it wasn't for the fact that the goblin rocket car races caused several hundred goblin casualties every year—all due to explosions.

Meanwhile, the gnomes had a much more normal way of thinking. At the very least, they were working hard to make up for their technological weaknesses. During the process of searching for better energy mechanisms, they invented gears and attempted to use gears to transmit torque, change speed, and change the direction of torque. The gnomes attempted to use gears to control the output of energy and control what was originally uncontrollable.

It was precisely because of gnome gears and conductors that gnomes possessed far higher quality engineering products in the areas of mechas and transportation tools compared to the goblins. The gnomes' products were far more exquisite as well.

After all, the goblins considered all "large and creaky products" as "consumable products which bring excitement and explosions," so

there was no reason that the goblins would research any deeper about the subject. However, the goblins far exceeded the gnomes regarding anything dangerous or high speed, such as rocket cars.

With current technology in this world, using gears which were still a relatively new invention here to begin with to control an energy source that was completely unpredictable would be no different from using oars designed for a wooden rowboat to try and control a heavy battleship constructed of metal. It would naturally be unreliable, and even for the coincidental successes, the amount invested in the construction would far exceed what was earned from selling it. And, in the end, it would still be unable to be mass produced.

The worst part was that even though the gnomes hadn't yet mastered the gears that they invented, they still believed that "it'll somehow succeed by using as many as possible." The gnomes created a large amount of daily life products for practical use that became known as "killers." The end result was that no matter if engineered products came from goblins or gnomes, the products all became known as bad, unreliable deals.

As for me personally, I felt that the gnomes were at least more reliable than the goblins. If the gnomes were given another two or three thousand years of time, perhaps they would be able to coincidentally discover some energy source and develop technology similar to steam-engine technology from my original world. But since this world was facing numerous impending calamities, such time was obviously unavailable.

To be honest, if the goblins and the gnomes cooperated, they would perhaps be able to invent some amazing new technologies. However, those in the same line of business always viewed others in the same line as competitors, not to mention how scientists were always the stubborn type. Researchers with just slightly different ways of thinking thought it natural to view each other as competitors and even enemies. It was basically a daily occurrence

to attack others' research for simply being different from one's own. The goblins and gnomes never had a good relationship.

Only a place like Sulfur Mountain City would be able to make these two species, who always viewed each other with enmity, finally put aside their differences and cooperate, which resulted in abnormal products like the Roland Titan. Of course, even in Sulfur Mountain City, the two species still argued aplenty. Only when they were locked in jail as prisoners together did they finally manage to come to a temporary mutual accord.

But now, Olivia's Magic Box meant that there was a reliable source of energy. The engineers would finally be able to let go of their old outdated and mistaken ideas while focusing on developing more important technologies.

"Every change in how energy is supplied represents a new industrial revolution. And for Eich, what the Olivia Magic Box will bring is probably this world's first ever industrial revolution."

Although the Olivia Magic Box's core was the Miracle Alchemist Olivia's energy conservation cycle magical array, what allowed it to operate consistently was mostly the work of master engineers led by Timlad. The current newest edition, "Olivia Magic Box 8.1," had far higher specs than even the version in the game's "history." That was why all sorts of engineering products were developed so quickly in this current version of history.

Not only did it involve the hard efforts of Jinya, Millhouse, and various goblin and gnome engineers, the information that Timlad provided stemmed from secret knowledge possessed by ancient races. After all, Timlad was the final remaining member of that ancient species. This was a miracle product born out of necessity of the times. If it wasn't for being pushed to the brink and despairing, the Timlad in the game's "history" would never would have given up his own precious information to others.

Now, the entire Loyu Steet District became the Great Industrial

Party's district after purchasing, merging, and recruiting the entire area.

Yep, merging. Basically, I would just purchase an entire store, which naturally made the store's employees ours. Then, I would have the stores demolished and modified into factories. Although this did cost a lot of money, I had earned plenty in recent days, not to mention my previously saved up funds. It wasn't too much of a financial burden.

There were plenty of goblin and gnome engineers along with dwarven alchemists making a living in the Mage Country. However, most of their business came from smithing, alchemy, and enchantments. Smithing was quite close to engineering, anyways, and I really lacked people in this department. I also hankered after more alchemists as well.

As for the goblins and gnomes, engineering was a part of their daily lives. Even goblin master alchemists would be quite skilled in engineering, and their archmages were quite willing to work for me in exchange for the newest technology I possessed. No, I should say that since this was the revolution that would herald a new generation, and that the goblins and gnomes were species sensitive to the importance of new technology, they had practically gone crazy over the technology I showed them.

What made them furious was the fact that this invention destined to become a historical achievement wasn't invented by either of their races. This caused them to want to vent in frustration out of pride.

In fact, when I tossed out recruitment advertisements stating that Thorn Garden was hiring engineers and alchemists, mentioning that a long-term contract of ten years was required, many top-level gnome master enchanters and dwarven alchemists voluntarily came to offer me their services. There was even a Myth-ranked gnome archmage, Cromwell Manastorm, a master magical puppet artisan, that came to show me his acolyte-level

engineering certificate in a pitiful attempt to be hired by me.

"Actually, I've always wanted to be an engineer—hey—hey—please don't leave! I can work for you while researching new technologies! Wouldn't you like to see the combination of runic magic puppets and engineering technology!? That'll definitely be by far the scariest—I mean cutest little things this world has ever seen!"

The gnome archmage's raspy voice echoed throughout the room, with shiny and dangerous purple mana waves crackling. I even suspected that if I refused him, he would directly attempt to explode this entire room.

"Fine, just sign this ten-year contract here, and you'll be working for me, Roland, from now on... Hey, you're signing without even reading the contract? I'm that trustworthy?"

"Heh heh, as long as you give me that technology, I'm even willing to pay you every single bit of my wealth. It's merely working for you for ten years, such a little thing. Besides, I've already heard from other gnomes about you, and I'm really looking forward to working for you."

The white-bearded gnome archmage laughed in delight, almost as if I was the one signing a ten-year contract to work for him, instead. Not to mention, this gnome archmage wasn't even the first archmage to show friendliness to our cause. The unexpected part was that almost all the archmages expressing interest in joining us so far weren't human archmages.

I had plenty of subordinates, money, and technology. The factories were completed quite quickly, and Loyu Street became my turf.

Of course, the consequence was that it no longer became possible for other mages to come to the gnomes and goblins for the original services provided. The mages would now have to go look for human smiths and alchemists. Naturally, this would attract

enmity in my direction as I was being quite grand in my actions. Still, why would I care?

"The next products we're going to start selling? The Starcraft Marine and Sith Warrior mechas are all finished, so let's start selling those. Hmm, it's time to increase the speed at which people start using Justice Points. We're only going to sell the mechas to those who can pay 10 Justice Points in addition to the price in gold coins. That's a very low amount of Justice Points, but it'll force the mages to start thinking of ways to earn them."

However, sometimes things simply wouldn't develop as planned.

"Um, my apologies, but we don't have enough money to purchase and create so many production lines."

"How is that possible? Thorn Garden is highly profitable, right? I even set aside an amount of money for purchasing land, so why is there no more money? Was there an error in your calculations?"

"Milord, you signed so many master engineers and archmages to ten-year contracts, so the costs for housing them and first installments of paying their salaries constitue no small amount. The cost has exceeded the budget! Also, Milord, you currently have four research projects active at once. Especially your Roland #7, it costs a ridiculous amount of money every day. Everyone in the finance department is of the opinion that Milord should stop one of your research projects."

I didn't know what to say to the hesitant young accountant who had been forced here by his coworkers to be the bringer of bad news. Although I could still think of other ideas to move funding from other sources, this would definitely slow down the overall progress of things I wanted. I hesitated for a moment and ended up thinking of a little scheme to obtain some extra money.

"How about we try something a little crooked?"

However, when I told everyone my plan, they were all cool to the

idea.

"If you rob or scam someone, won't you lose the ability to use the power of Law? Milord—"

When I heard this, I laughed in satisfaction.

"Hmph! This isn't robbing or scamming at all. Such talentless actions like robbing or scamming couldn't possibly make as much money as this idea of mine!"

Apparently Miheuer in the glossary, but I'm changing it to Millhouse because Millhouse Manastorm is actually a WoW reference.

Chapter 307: Goblins vs Gnomes [1]

"Have you bought one yet?"

Nobody could have expected what exactly would happen as a result of the above phrase becoming one of the most popular greetings among mages.

"Last night I had a dream in which my ancestor informed me that this time, it'll definitely be red-blue, red-purple, and black-white!"

Did that sound confusing? Each color combination represented a choice. This was much simpler than number combinations. It was much easier to understand, right?

Yep, this was a lottery system. Apart from a crazy archmage like me who was actually from another world, who else would think of starting a lottery system in a magical fantasy world in order to earn money?

As for this young mage who supposedly received a message from his ancestor in his dream, he was no different to those lottery addicts from my original world. He decided to spend his entire family's fortune on this one series of colors.

Of course, compared to my original world where, in China, the lottery system often had tricks involved and the lottery holders themselves often won their own lottery, I considered myself quite conscientious. I merely had my own people win only 30% of the total lottery rewards.

What? You think I'm immoral? Actually, I considered myself quite moral compared to many lottery officials.

Those who won prizes in my lottery didn't win only gold coins. After all, there were plenty of mages who were already quite rich. My prize pool contained rare magical ingredients, Thorn Garden's limited-edition goods that couldn't be purchased in the store, Justice Points, and even the right to be taken in as a disciple by an

Emblem of Endless Truth archmage. These potential prizes successfully allured mages into playing my lottery.

I also intentionally raised the rate of winning prizes during the first few cycles of the lottery. Plenty of mages even won the consolation prize, the limited-edition Iron Horse #8, nicknamed Red Lightning. The winners happily rode their new red steeds and raced everywhere, causing certain collectors to even go into a mania trying to obtain one.

What was with the name of Red Lightning? Actually, they were just the same as Iron Horse #7, just with an outer layer of red paint and renamed #8...

What? Merely changing the color scheme and counting it as a limited-edition product seemed like a devious tactic...? Actually, I felt that I was quite moral! At the very least, I didn't start selling the Red Lightnings at a jacked-up price by simply claiming that they were limited editions. I was even kind enough to change the name!

Fine then, I supposed I was a devious no-good merchant, but was there such a thing as a successful merchant who wasn't devious and no-good? At the very least, I provided the mages with entertainment while I made money for myself. Plenty of people had fun.

And once certain things got started, they would be quite hard to stop, especially since the natives here were "honest" folk that had never known addictions. Once they got started, how would I possibly let them stop... After they took the bait, the prizes they won became the least important. The excitement and anticipation at revealing what prize they could get, just like people making random draws in a cell phone game, was what people became addicted to the most.

And this was just a beginning. They would soon become numb if I merely repeated the same type of stimulation over and over again.

I needed to give them endless amounts of new things they could bet on.

"Who do you guys think will win this time? Jinya's Mega Apollo, or Manastorm's Maniac Gear 07?"

"I think the result will be the same as last time, with both of them exploding before they reach the finish line. Damn it, who could have guessed that there would be such a result last time? I bet on the gnomes last time and lost so much money!"

"Hmph, that's because you all still don't know enough about engineers. Last time, I bet that neither the goblins nor the gnomes would reach the finish line. There was a 1:3 betting ratio so I won three times my bet! But still, it was such a pity as I was too conservative with how much I bet. Otherwise, I could have made so much money..."

"Damn, you actually bet successfully on such a ridiculous result? Why were you so conservative?"

"I was quite hesitant at the time. If only I bet on neither side being able to finish even half the race. That would have been a 1:9 betting ratio!"

"Amazing. How about we all bet on the same thing as you next time?"

"Oh, how you heard? Since too many people are betting this time that nobody will reach the finish line, the betting ratio has already been changed to 1:0.8. It's such a pitfall. But I feel like that's the only place to bet."

"Hmph, how dumb of you. I heard that due to last time, both the goblins and gnomes were so angry that they spent great amounts of effort in making improvements. Not only that, Blue Tower's Iron Horse team is joining in for this next race. Do you really think nobody will reach the finish line?"

"How come I've never even heard of this, damn it! The race's

hosts are so insidious!"

Goblins vs. Gnomes was the name of the newest popular competition that these mages were currently discussing. Goblin engineers and gnome engineers would assemble their racecars and participate in an obstacle course race against each other. During the race, they would be allowed to interfere with each other; tossing rockets and small explosives at each other was as commonplace as breathing. The first to cross the finish line would be the winner.

However, since the goblins and the gnomes went overboard during the last race, becoming seriously angry with each other to the point of exploding both teams' race cars, many spectators were dissatisfied about how there was no victor at all in the end. So this time, another team volunteered to join in—the Blue Tower Iron Horse Squad. Although their equipment and speed were far behind the goblin and gnome engineers' custom modified Iron Horses, as long as the goblin and gnome race cars kept exploding and attacking each other on the way, the Iron Horse squad would naturally become the only victors in the end. And so, after news about this spread, people viewed the Iron Horse Squad as the most reliable one to bet on, but...

"How are the betting spreads looking like? What result will be the most profitable for us?"

"Fewest people are betting on the goblins as their race car is always exploding before reaching the end of the track. The most commonly bet-on team is the Blue Tower Iron Horse Squad. If they win, we'll be losing a huge amount of money with the current betting ratios."

"Okay, install the newest and most reliable engines in Jinya's race car, while secretly loosening the gears in Manastorm's race car. We're going to make the goblins into the victor of the next race. Right, is the new project ready yet?"

"Of course. 'Goblins vs. Gnomes 2: Hot Air Balloon Airships vs. Combat Helicopters' will soon be available!"

"Yep, make plenty of advertisements for them and begin selling tickets to the first show in preparation to scam mon—er—sell betting tickets. But remember, there's an iron rule that only those with Gold rank and above are allowed to be the goblins' and gnomes' pilots. With how their contraptions are, any with a lower power level is likely to die sooner or later. Is there any news from the other mage organizations?"

In order to help increase the sales for the best and most expensive front-row seats to the competitions, I made the front-row tickets into a mini collection game which awarded a random card each time. If one collected a full set of cards, they would be able to exchange the cards for a free Iron Horse. Of course, there were two specific cards that I had less than ten copies printed, so this seemingly excellent way of receiving an Iron Horse for free by simply buying the most expensive tickets had only given out few Iron Horses so far.

"While there were a few mage organizations that objected to some activities, there were no mage organizations that are actually taking action against you. After all, we really lack good entertainment, which leaves everyone quite bored. Even those who didn't join in the betting can simply enjoy watching the competition. Oh, but there are many that hope that they can enter the competition themselves. However, they want to use their own steeds, such as phantom horses, hell travelers, and so on..."

"...Let them join in the next competition. I've already prepared the advertisement's slogan: 'The mage racers intending to take revenge for the Blue Tower mage's failure.' But you need to accurately test their steeds' abilities first for top speed and natural talent abilities. No more dragon knights or frost giants that are overwhelmingly more powerful than everything else. Such shows won't earn us any money!"

The first few rounds had allowed other mages to participate freely as they pleased, until a top-level summoner decided to participate and summoned a flying SemiDragon that flattened the goblins' race car. Another brought out a frost giant that kicked Manastorm and the gnomes' race car out of the obstacle race in a single blow. "Don't you dare use your stinky shoes to kick a gnome, and don't you dare kick a gnome's mecha!"—Manastorm. The competition became absolutely boring to watch as there was no doubt who would win so we began to limit who could participate. We would publicly list all information about the race's participants beforehand.

"It doesn't matter who wins the race. Since we're the house, the house always wins."

Okay then, I admit that from a certain standpoint, this was indeed rather immoral of us as we were intentionally manipulating those who won the races. Since I was shameless enough to get the mages addicted to gambling in the first place, I no longer cared if I acted even more shamelessly. But based on my usual premonitions, I knew that good things like this wouldn't last long.

"The Mystical Blade's tax department is here again. They want to check our account books."

"Tsk, those carrion birds have such excellent noses. Tell them that this isn't something under their jurisdiction. We're not making any transactions or trades here, we're merely holding a competition. As for the tiny amount of betting going on... the Mage Country doesn't have a gambling tax yet. Tell them that they're free to come collect taxes from us after the Mage Country passes such a law!"

"Okay, but what about Her Ladyship?"

"Her Ladyship? Who's that?"

"Lady Cher. She's the one leading the tax department again..."

As expected of a daughter, never loyal to her family. Just how many days did I know her before she was turning on me...? Wait a moment, why am I calling her my daughter? This was all still just an unknown, an unknown!

"She's not Her Ladyship in our family, and I don't have a daughter! How am I supposed to live like this! I haven't even gotten married yet! What am I supposed to do if word of this spreads? That little girl Cher? Just make her wait outside!"

Suddenly, the young brat giving me the report had a strange expression as he looked at me. Then, I heard a soft cough behind me that sounded familiar.

"Cough, it reassures me to know that you think like this... Everyone, come check the accounts together. We're first going to go over Thorn Garden's sales taxes for their transactions. Be careful, the owner of this store is incredibly sly and clever. Only checking the account books won't be enough. We're going to start from the warehouse..."

The blue-haired Cher was most definitely angry as she started giving orders to her companions. It seemed that I was going to be losing a lot of money again—no—I couldn't give up! That girl seemed tough on the outside, but she had a soft heart inside. Perhaps begging her would work!

"Wait, wait, my good and obedient daughter, it's not easy for daddy to make some money. At least leave me some retirement funds."

At this moment, everyone was shocked at just how shameless I was capable of being. Meanwhile, a certain silly cat who brought Cher in here, fully intending to see the awkward situation it would put me in, was now laughing so hard that she was rolling around on the ground.

Well, in the end, thanks to all the mages' passion for gambling, I was highly successful in being able to make the money I needed for

funding my projects.

Of course, there were some slight side effects, such as how my reputation became even stranger... Reputation? Could it be eaten?

Even I was surprised by how lacking in entertainment the mages were. Although the mages had so much knowledge, their daily lives were quite simple and boring. In front of certain temptations, particularly since the mages were bad at controlling their own spending habits, they were really easy to fool. I looked at my real accounts and simply did some rough estimations and discovered that the income from selling betting tickets far exceeded what I made from Thorn Garden.

And since I earned money, I was naturally going to spend it, as long as the money was worth my time. I was quite attracted by the treasure troves of several-hundred-year-old archmages. Their treasure troves wouldn't be in any way inferior to dragons' treasure troves, and since I was a mage as well, of course I would be attracted to the most by magical secrets. Of course, since my specialty was rather unconventional, this would attract some controversy.

"You want to make a trade with the 'Soul Demon Association' which is under the Sword of Order? They have an absolutely terrible reputation, and they're all undead mages. Graverobbing and stealing is practically an everyday occurrence for them. Are you sure that you want to associate with them? Aren't you worried that your reputation will be affected?"

"...Can my reputation get any worse than Yongye's?"

This one sentence of mine blocked off everyone else's complaints, and I satisfactorily looked through the information I purchased from the Soul Demon Association. From a certain standpoint, although Harloys taught me my foundational undead magic, most of it was actually self-taught in a haphazard fashion. It would be different from the Soul Demon Association which would have a

systematic way of treating undead magic, and comparing my magic to theirs would benefit me greatly.

By the way, if it weren't for Yongye's reputation, perhaps this mage organization that was quite ill-reputed wouldn't have been willing to make an equivalent exchange with me. They indeed looked down on fair trades. Nor would they have given me such top-level undead magic information.

There was now a large amount of undead magic information before me, including much that was limited or one-of-a-kind. Although I still didn't know how to fix my undead magic Soul Imprint, it was sufficient to shore up the gaps in my knowledge as well as give me plenty of inspiration.

"...Amelia has already surpassed me. I'm so envious of her wood spirits and Forest of Dreams. With all this new undead magic information, I can still try creating something new even if I'm unable to create Undead Lords on the level of my Original Sins."

Chapter 308: I Can Do Whatever I Want Because I'm Rich!

"My fireball will tear you apart!"

"Ha! Taste my gunfire!"

In Arlo's arena, a high-level mage was dueling with a ranger. Normally speaking, the ranger would continuously adjust the distance and angle between them, making all sorts of fancy movements to dodge the mage's spells in order to find a chance at landing a winning attack. However, if the ranger happened to have a steed, the ranger would have an even greater advantage in mobility and the number of their attacks.

Meanwhile, the typical tactics of a high-level mage were the opposite. The mage would cast a bunch of defensive magic spells on themselves and then summon a bunch of cannon fodder. They would finally balance attack and defense magic spells and search for a chance to defeat the opponent.

This was still a duel between an elf ranger and a mage. However, the spectators didn't really understand what was going on this time.

This purple-haired elf ranger wasn't wielding the elves' typical weapon, an enchanted longbow. Instead, this ranger was wielding a dwarven gun that the elves typically looked down upon as being unreliable—it would often self-destruct and explode. Nor was this ranger using a typical forest's holy unicorn as the steed. Instead, the ranger rode on a boomingly loud Iron Horse.

This royal elf was wearing a black punk-style jacket and a leather cap. One hand skillfully controlled the Iron Horse in rapidly circling around the arena, jumping around, going up the wall, making sudden stops, standing on one wheel, and all sorts of other fancy tricks.

His other hand held a silver shotgun, and he continuously attacked his opponent whenever he saw an opening. Compared to dwarven firearms' typically lead bullets with low attack power, this gun used high-quality diamond bullets with an outer covering of silver and magic paint. The bullets glimmered in all different sorts of colors.

The handsome elf ranger seemed to be extremely confident in his own skills. His movements were quite smooth, and he would occasionally swing his shotgun in midair, causing the ammo to automatically reload. His hair that flowed in the wind made him look really cool. Many female audience members shrieked their support for him.

Yet the elf ranger's opponent didn't care about any of his actions. This mage clad in silver armor ignored all of the ranger's attacks and merely stood still. The mage casted all sorts of spells such as blizzard magic, frost magic, hail magic, and ice pillar magic. Lots of high-level area of effect magic spells rained down, as if this mage possessed limitless amounts of mana.

Meanwhile, the ranger's magical shotgun would shoot large holes into the arena's walls and ground with every missed bullet, but they merely bounced off the mage's armor with blinding sparks. Concurrently, the mage's constant bombardment of AOE magic caused the Iron Horse-riding ranger to have to dash all around the arena.

The ranger's attack power wasn't low at all. The Gold-ranked ranger Ade was already skilled enough with the shotgun to use the elves' special magic arrow techniques with it. The only reason the mage was able to ignore his attacks was that the mage's armor had a ridiculously high defense power.

The mage was wearing silver armor that covered his entire body. The fact that every last bit of skin was covered meant that nobody could even see his face. Under the obsidian crystal face mask was an expression that was as calm as still water. The armor's outer

layer shone with a special glow that was unique to mithril. Magic enchantments on the armor provided it with an additional three protective layers of defense, while the attention-grabbing dragon crystal on the armor's chest emanated frighteningly powerful waves of mana. No matter how rich anyone was, they would all shout "just where did this mega-rich person come from!" upon seeing such a suit of armor.

Also, the silver thorned rose emblem on the mecha armor's back doubtlessly indicated that this mecha armor was Thorn Garden's newest product: I Can Do Whatever I Want Because I'm Rich! #1. Yep, from a certain standpoint, this somewhat strange name I had given to this suit of mithril was the best explanation of its properties.

The mecha armor's internal batteries provided force, ice, and thunder; three different types of defensive layers. The thick armor was constructed entirely out of mithril, the best magical metal of all. These four combined layers of physical and magical defense caused Ade's magical diamond bullets to be unable to pierce the armor even the slightest bit. The bullets hit the armor in a continuous stream only to ricochet off of it. They were deflected by the magical barriers as well, causing Ade to become quite frustrated.

It was simple common sense that a duel when one side was completely unable to harm the other would mean that it would be one-sided. Unless something happened to overturn the situation, the popular elf ranger Ade, who was currently on a winning streak in the arena, was destined to lose.

"It's over!"

When Ade's Iron Horse drove over a layer of ice created by some blizzard magic, the wheels suddenly went skidding. Right when Ade lost control of his Iron Horse, a prison of ice descended upon him. Now that the elf was trapped with nowhere to go—an easy target for the mage's next major spell—Ade unhesitatingly rose his

hands up in surrender.

"...That mage has won fifteen duels in a row. Even 'Blood Moon Hunter' Ade has lost to him, and it's still so one-sided. That armor is just ridiculous."

In the Cloud Tower, the mages and warriors that loved to fight had the arena as one of their few source of entertainment. The arena was also one of the very few places where mages would actually gamble in the Mage Country. The Abo Arena was one such arena where countless duels would happen every day. The types of duels included training duels for gaining practical experience, duels to simply see who was better, duels between teacher and student for the purpose of teaching, and of course duels between enemies that were seriously trying to kill each other. However, today's duel was the most common type of duel, just a regular duel that spectators could gamble on who the winner would be.

A regular duel would mean that battles wouldn't be to the death, and both sides would be wagering something on it. This would help both sides gain combat experience as well as help the victor obtain tangible benefits and reputation. However, since most mages weren't interested in personally entering the arena, most arena duel participants were actually in warrior and ranger-type job classes despite this being the Mage Country. The participants of these duels were typically non-mage residents of the Mage Country or some mage's bodyguards.

The ranger Ade was the bodyguard of an royal elf prince. Ade was considered a famous ranger back in his hometown, and after he purchased an Iron Horse and magical shotgun from Thorn Garden, he was able to speedily learn a series of self-taught high-speed Iron Horse riding and shooting skills. Many of his opponents that actually had higher power level rankings than he did were all defeated by his high-speed, high-mobility attacking style.

However, after Ade reached ten consecutive victories, he met the most difficult opponent he had ever faced in the arena—this mage

who wore a full-body mithril mecha armor. This mage's armor would make even a dragon seem poor in comparison.

The mage didn't need to pay any attention to his own positioning or cast any defensive magic spells. He merely had to stand there without moving in his heavy mecha armor, and none of his opponents in the arena had been able to break through its defense. Then, the mage would simply utter long magical incantations at his leisure and act as a stationary artillery. If the mage ran out of mana, he could even replenish his mana using the mecha armor's battery packs. With ridiculously high defense and nearly limitless mana, it was definitely a shameless tactic.

"Go, I'm Ridiculously Rich!"

"Be careful, a dragon might rob you when you go outdoors!"

The spectators were cheering on this newly rising arena star. "I'm Ridiculously Rich" was the nickname that this mage signed up for arena battles with, and nobody knew the mage's real identity. Even though the mage was clearly using only Silver rank magic spells at best, he managed to forcefully defeat many powerful opponents, including two who were at the Legend rank!

If Ade's self-mastered, self-taught new techniques based on the new technology gave evidence that new technologies could improve combat strength, then I'm Ridiculously Rich proved an even more basic maxim of the world: the rich would always be the most powerful.

When this mage in the brilliantly shining silver armor strode back to his personal resting area in the arena, he suddenly collapsed on the ground, as the armor started venting large amounts of steam from its exhaust pipes.

Meanwhile, several gnome and goblin engineers had long since been ready and waiting. They immediately started working on the armor's maintenance. When the armor's helmet was removed, a younger face than one might expect was revealed underneath.

"Cohen, how do you feel?"

That's right, the real identity of "I'm Ridiculously Rich" wasn't a high-level archmage. Instead, he was my acolyte, Cohen, a Four Elemental Swordcaster who barely even counted as a Silver ranker.

"...With a dragon crystal's mana replenishing my own mana, I can basically cast spells without ever running out of mana. But dragon crystals are so expensive..."

"No worries. Just have fun out there and treat it as valuable experience. As for the dragon crystal and other magical materials? Relax. Someone else is footing the bill for us."

In my previous world, war was always the greatest stimulant for technological innovation. Only when humans were forced to the brink would they bring out their unreliable and untested technologies and think of methods to use these undeveloped technologies for slaughtering the enemy.

Magical engineering was a new area of science that was born as a result of war as well, and it, too, was destined to grow through war. The resulting products were immensely popular when I started selling them through Thorn Garden for the first time. For example, the two types of mechas which I named after elements from Star Wars, the Sith Warriors and Jedis, became highly accoladed right after I started selling them on the market.

I actually didn't expect how popular my Star Wars mechas would become. I hadn't even intended to make them the store's main products because although both mecha types greatly increased the pilot's mobility and defensive power, not to mention they were equipped with portable batteries, the fact of the matter was that they were still constructed out of ordinary metals. This would have an evident impact on the efficiency of casting spells. Although the Four Elemental Swordcasters and Magic Gunners that relied on "outside help" for their magical combat strength could ignore the interference of metal on mana, pure mages obviously wouldn't find

these Star Wars mechas to be the most efficient environment to cast magic spells in.

What I underestimated was... just how rich the mages were!

Indeed. Current technology was limited, but the mages' wealth was limitless. As long as I changed out every part in a Star Wars mecha to the highest quality materials available, there would be a huge difference in quality even if the blueprint for the mecha was identical. Ultimately, the highest quality materials were all magical. The resulting mecha armor would be on an entirely different level if all the parts were exchanged for the highest-quality magical materials.

Metal affected casting spells? Well, it wouldn't affect casting spells if it was the highest quality magic metal, mithril! This mecha armor was constructed entirely out of the best quality mithril crafted by master alchemists. Of course, it was just slightly more expensive than usual, approximately one hundred times more expensive than gold.

Lacking mana replenishment magic materials? What about equipping it with a basketful of dragon crystals! There were also plenty of phoenix feathers and great demon's hearts! We could even sell you giant wolf king skins by the dozen as long as you have the money. We were even capable of supplying inferno dragon eyes, which could only be found in the lower dimensions.

You don't know how to etch defensive magical spell arrays? Emblem of Endless Truth level enchanter archmages can do that for you. Would you like to have the spell "Absolute Defense," "Precise Long-Distance Teleportation," or "Meteor Rain" etched into your personal mecha armor as defense spells? What? You only want to etch some four-circle magic spells? You dare to look down on us?

You're worried about our mecha armors being overly heavy, causing the speed to become slow? Are you joking with me? Have

you ever heard of goblin rocket backpacks? Plus, we can just etch a few extra anti-gravity spell arrays that will lessen the weight of the mecha. After all, we have plenty of top-level magical materials available.

Right, don't forget about our elf artisans' enhancements. I wanted angel feathers on the helmet, the mecha's appearance must be in the currently popular steampunk style, with two volcanoes tattooed on the shoulders, and illusion magic that constantly spews out magma? Cool, right? I also wanted an eyepatch with three red-glowing deep emeralds, along with an evil dragon's eye!

Alright then, apart from my personal requests which caused everyone around me to wonder at my sense of aesthetics and how chuunibyou I was, the other archmages ordered much more normal suits of mecha armor. They all wanted practical customizations that would improve their personal safety. The most important part was that they were plenty rich, with countless treasures horded over the years. After these mages discovered, from my previous announcement, that they might be forced into battle against powerful future opponents, they were now naturally willing to part with their money in order to protect their lives.

I did some slight calculations and unhesitatingly tossed the job of creating the mechas to others, while I personally took care of the most profitable part: negotiating the orders for the armors.

The prerequisite for such long-term orders was that we needed to deliver on what we were paid to do. Being paid such high prices meant that we had to deliver high-quality goods. And if I wanted to attract more and more rich customers who were willing to pay the ridiculously high prices and even invest in us, I would have to show them high-quality goods worthy enough for them to pay the price.

That was why a weak mage novice like Cohen was now wearing the I Can Do Whatever I Want Because I'm Rich! Mecha #1 and battling in the arena. Plenty of top-level archmages witnessed his

battles, and some top-level mages even personally tried dueling him in order to test this ridiculously pricey 'armor of money's' true defense power. After the archmages found out that the pilot was merely a novice who had started learning magic less than two years ago, they unhesitatingly tripled the amount of money they were paying me, swearing that their personal customized mecha armors would surpass this #1 model that Cohen was wearing.

Actually, I heaved a great sigh of relief at receiving the mages' money. I would have otherwise been forced to think of some idea to come up with the funding for all the top-level magical materials.

Why was I lacking magical materials? Well, I hadn't started the work on the other magic mechas. Back in the old times, when tailors stocked up on cloth to make clothes, there was an unspoken rule about how the amount of cloth they ordered and the amount of cloth they had in stock would never exactly match up. Each roll of cloth would be ever so slightly shorter than what was listed. And after making several sets of clothes, the tailor would mysteriously have enough cloth left over for a set of clothes for himself.

I didn't have that many top-level magic materials in stock. The "I Can Do Whatever I Want Because I'm Rich! #1" was created using the funds from the pre-orders I had received beforehand. If I couldn't receive enough orders to continue funding the magic materials I needed, it would form a huge hole that I would need to fill in somehow.

I gave Cohen some encouragement. My goals here were both for him to accumulate practical combat experience as well as to show off Thorn Garden's power and combat strength. It would also make for an excellent test run for the mecha armor. I couldn't help but sigh and exclaim at how things were going.

"The mecha armors' functions have far succeeded our original expectations. I suppose that this is the saying of how even an inventor can never predict the effects of his own invention? I originally thought that this phrase was just nonsense. I never

thought I would one day be proved wrong."

Just thinking about how my butterfly effect would cause the top-level archmages to be well-armed to the teeth when entering battle, turning them from their former glass cannon selves into movable impregnable artilleries—forbidden spell mages would no longer be so easily picked off by assassins in the shadows—I felt that the game's "history" would definitely take a different path.

"By the time we face demons equipped with powerful huge swords from antiquity and Evil Gods riding gigantic wild beasts, our side will have archmages wearing mecha armors and rangers zooming around the battlefield on Iron Horses. We'll also have taurens equipped with heavy cannons and zombies with electric saws... Hrm, teamfighting like this makes it feel like there's something wrong with the drawing style, though.

There was plenty of work waiting for us after we left the arena. I had unknowingly become the largest weapons dealer in the Cloud Tower, and I now had to check on the progress of another program of mine.

This program wasn't one so honest and open that it could see the light of day.

It took an entire two hours by horse-drawn carriage to finally reach our destination. We crossed several mountains and rivers, and it was almost completely dark outside before we finally arrived at a graveyard outside the city of Arlo.

It was already dusk, and a chilly wind swept through the mountains. The trees around us shook as if they were possessed by demons. Our horses seemed to be spooked by something as they collapsed listlessly on the ground, refusing to go on any further.

"Sigh. Every time, I can only go the rest of the way by foot after reaching here."

"No wonder the 'Soul Demon Association' loves this place so

much. The negative energy here almost matches the scale of negative energy in the Undead Planes. It would be strange for corpses to not become undead after entering such a graveyard. Judging from the surrounding environment, this place should be the byproduct of some failed experiment.

Since she was a half undead living creature, Harloys had always been particularly interested in this location. I could see the black cat appearing and vanishing in the shadows of this remote mountainous location, which really did make this place seem like one right out of a ghost story.

"Look over there, it's so out of the way, but there's still a crop field here."

"Hmph! That's definitely a secret scout for the Soul Demon Association. Do you think that any crops planted here would be harvestable? The only harvestable product here are the zombies."

Alright then, I actually knew it as well. Nobody but the insane would think of planting crops in such a location with chilly winds and negative energy.

Although we were cooperating with the Soul Demon Association in trading our money for their magic information, it was evident that they were still intent on collecting information on us. They had planted a scout next to this area of land we had purchased which was filled with negative energy.

Well, we did have a goal with this land, after all.

"How's the big guy's condition?"

Harloys sat there quietly on the ground, and her eyes seemed rather hollow and unresponsive. However, this simply meant that her clones were currently gathering information for her. Soon enough, her eyes filled with the light of life again.

"Excellent. It's already entered a semi-hibernation period. It should be able to move around after two more weeks or so."

I nodded in satisfaction. Since everything was going smoothly, we would simply need to return here in two weeks to harvest the end product.

"...It's just that the brats from the Soul Demon Association kept coming over to check things out. It seems that they still haven't given up on finding out just why we purchased this piece of land. Heh, can't blame them. You are Yongye, after all. It's only natural for ordinary undead mages to be curious what you're up to."

"Let them look around all they want. They won't be able to discover anything, anyways. Who would imagine that what we really want is simply the ground here that's filled with negative energy? Our goal isn't a singular new undead, but an entire group. Our new product is this entire graveyard, that's all."

We recently created and named this new undead species as graveyard demons. They were half-undead, half-elemental creatures created by large amounts of negative energy corroding the earth. Graveyard demons were powerful sources of negative energy pollution. Not only were they capable of strengthening other undead, but they were even hosts for medium and small-sized undead.

These undead creatures weren't our original invention. In ancient times, there was a similar existence among the undead, but no such creatures existed in recent times. This was an experimental species that we recreated using modern technology and knowledge from ancient texts.

When I was in the Forest of Dreams, what I envied the most was the forest's home turf advantage and Jill's ability to change the environment. Even if one couldn't choose the environment to fight in, one would be able to change the environment to a more advantageous one.

That was the use of graveyard demons. They were moving graveyards from which undead could replenish their negative

energy, exchange body parts, and power up combat strength. Any injured undead that wasn't completely dead would be able to recover quite quickly when within a graveyard demon.

The wood spirits' method of battling had given me inspiration. Perhaps the undead didn't actually need powerful troop types anymore. What the undead lacked was a job class that could heal them like druids or priests could for the living—a supporting job class. The undead were supposed to excel at attrition to begin with. If they had the ability to heal themselves on the battlefield, their overall fighting capabilities would increase to be far more than any other fighting undead species.

Of course, we didn't come all the way for just this alone.

A crow landed on the black cat's head before transforming into a silver liquid that combined with her body. When Harloys received her flying clone's information, she slightly nodded, which greatly delighted me.

"The big fish has finally been hooked?"

Chapter 309: Villain

"Archmage Sandro, the second of the Sword of Order's four vice leaders. On the surface, he's a windstorm archmage, but he's secretly the leader of the Soul Demon Association and a Myth-ranked undead archmage. He doesn't have an Emblem of Endless Truth in undead magic, but it's only because he's never published any research results. After all, nobody is more qualified to receive the Emblem of Endless Truth in undead magic than he is."

"...Also, Sandro just happens to be my junior under the same teacher. Harloys, you really taught so many excellent disciples."

"No, I met him before I met you. That technically makes him your senior."

The silly cat before me still pretended to be a ditz, but since she was once one of the core leaders of the Sword of Order, it would be only natural for her to recruit fresh blood into the Soul Demon Association under the Sword of Order In a way, she was an even greater veteran than Sandro.

"How's your relationship with that leader of the Sword of Order who never shows himself around?"

"You already mentioned how he never shows up so how could I possibly have any relationship with him? Don't even mention Blackeye, that Sword of Order leader who always hides in the shadows. Even my disciples are probably being spied on ever since my identity was exposed. Blackeye probably fears I'll usurp his authority. Otherwise, he wouldn't have forced me to leave back in the day. Heh, what would it matter to us if one of us became undead? It was just an excuse to chase me away."

"...So, it means that without a miracle occurring, you'll never be able to surpass the SemiGod-ranked Blackeye in your life."

"Can't you say it in a nicer way? That's right, hurry up and

improve your personal power level. The contract limitations on a magical pet is so painful— being unable to surpass the master in strength. I want to experience what it feels like to become a SemiGod undead as well. As long as I can regain the peak of my strength, how could I, the All-Knowing Harloys, possibly be any weaker than you little brats?"

The silly cat seemed to get angrier and angrier as she spoke.

"...Even if it's easier for the living to surpass the Myth rank, are you that confident that you'll be able to break through the Three Heavy Doors?"

"Ridiculous. Back in the day, I was already at those doors, but I didn't even have a physical body. How could I possibly break past those doors as they required the body and heart to be one? I finally found a suitable physical body, a high elf with ancient divine blood, but I used it for less than one day before you and that Adam sliced it up... the more I think about it, the angrier I'm getting. I really feel like biting you right now."

"Whoa there, you're already biting me! Why are you saying you want to bite me still?"

"Don't you dare move! Let me take a few extra bites to vent my anger!"

I felt rather helpless as I let the silly cat bite me from my chest all the way up to my neck and then even on my face. It gave me a rather numb and itchy sensation. I wanted to laugh, but I knew that if I really did laugh out loud, Harloys would truly become furious.

Just when was it that this undying queen of grudges was trained into becoming a tsundere house cat?

Was it from the day she signed a magical pet contract with me so we mysteriously managed to get used to each other somehow?

Or was it Lorci's death that finally gave her hope that her journey

of revenge could finally end one day? At the very least, she finally had something other than revenge in her heart right now. She no longer sealed off her heart in her own little world.

Or was it because we were now fated to be together forever, with her being immortal as long as I lived? From a certain standpoint, the magical pet contract was indeed something way overboard as it forcefully tied two different souls together for a lifetime.

Or was it that Harloys, who had always been alone, was now always connected to me via our souls? Soul communication was far more effective than any verbal communication could ever be in transmitting what we really meant. The lonelier someone was, the more they would actually desire to communicate with another.

Or was it that she unknowingly got used to my warmth? Perhaps she got used to me saying good morning to her every day when I woke up? Perhaps she was treating me less and less like an outsider since that day?

Fine then, I should stop thinking so much about this. Judging by how her bites went from numb, light bites to painful tearing, this silly cat was acting like a tsundere again!

"Hey—hey—hey—don't go overboard. I still need to meet with others later. What am I supposed to do if I have all these cat bites on my face? People will think that a pile of furniture collapsed on me."

"You can just tell them the truth, that your pet cat gave your face all these nice scratches and bites."

"Does that have any difference from saying that furniture fell upon me? They're all excuses typically used when a woman scratches your face! You're doing this to me on purpose so that I'll be too embarrassed to meet with others!"

Alright then, when the top-level archmage Sandro's horse-drawn carriage stopped in front of us, Sandro had a look of stunned

amazement as he watched me who was trying my best to remove the stubborn silly cat from my head.

"...Second Senior Brother, I'll have a discussion with you later when I finish beating up my teacher."

"Ptui! If you can't win, you're going to depend on others to help you? Such a useless man!"

However, the later developments completely ruined my image as a mysterious archmage of darkness that I had carefully cultivated... After all, if you saw me fighting with my own pet cat, rolling all around on the floor for more than half an hour and even losing in the end—with the result being covered in claw and teeth marks—there would be no way for you to respect me, would there!?

"My image! My image! We're supposed to be archmages that represent wisdom and knowledge! Can't you have some sense of shame at all?"

"Ptui! Shame? Can I eat it? Ever since I started hanging out with you, I feel like I've played every type of embarrassing cosplay there is. You always force me to transform into this and that. Are you actually into animals? Now that you're supposedly famous and known as a major personage, you intend to put on your pants and forget about your past? Let me tell you: don't even think about it!"

"...Don't intentionally word things like that!? Just look at Second Senior Brother and how icy his gaze is when looking at me now! It's almost as if he's looking at Beifeng! My reputation!"

"Actually, there are plenty of warlocks that take their own succubi as lovers. I'm not biased against such things. Even if archmage Roland's interests are somewhat unique—okay—extremely unique, that's still his personal freedom. Yep, yep, I perfectly understand."

Alright then, Sandro's polite words, emphasizing that he

understood, as he backed up ever so slightly was the perfect salt on my wounds. Fortunately, Harloys finally recalled that now was the time for serious business.

"Hmph, Roland, just forget about your reputation. It's long been unsalvageable. Sandro, long time no see. I think it's been about two hundred years. By the way, can't you change your name to something cooler? Your name Sandro sounds like it came right out of an undead magic textbook."

"...This soul wavelength? Harloys! Teacher Harloys!"

Alright then, the appearance of the All-Knowing Harloys finally helped me to somewhat save face. With this "Demon Professor" taking the part of a connection between me and Sandro—we were fellow disciples of the same mage teacher—it was much easier for me to have a conversation with him.

"Sandro, would you like to become the leader of the Sword of Order? Would you like to make the Sword of Order into a completely lawless holy ground for heretical mages?"

That was the first sentence I greeted Sandro with for our formal negotiations, as well as the main topic of what I wanted to discuss with him. I spent quite a lot of time, in fact, and both sides walked away having gained much from the conversation.

Sandro hurried off at a greater speed than when he arrived. It seemed that he was indeed delighted with what he received. After all, both of us had benefited more from this discussion than we anticipated.

"Will it actually succeed?"

However, I was no longer acting as confident as when I was trying to convince Sandro. After all, nobody would have a one hundred percent chance of victory when dealing with an old fellow like Blackeye who had been the leader of one of the strongest mage organizations for the past three or four hundred years.

"If he's the only one we were relying on, it would be impossible. He's too stupid. Sandro's intelligence is probably the third worst out of all the disciples I've ever taught."

I suddenly felt a twinge of pity for the archmage Sandro, who happened to be bald. Even though we had such a friendly discussion just now, teacher and student seeming so harmonious, Harloys even said several times how Sandro was "the future leader of the Sword of Order" "my most trusted disciple" and so on, which really made him happy.

"He's that stupid, yet he still made it to become one of the vice-leaders of the Sword of Order?"

"That's because the ones that aren't stupid were all killed off by Blackeye. Even though there are clearly so many heretical mages in the Sword of Order, and even though there are clearly no taboos whatsoever in what the Sword of Order mages are learning, the Sword of Order is still slightly behind the other top-level mage organizations because Blackeye is intentionally keeping the leadership under him weak."

"And yet you still called him your most trusted disciple?"

"Heh heh. Of course he's my most trusted disciple. After all, all my other disciples are too sly and untrustworthy. Especially a certain person I know. If only he hadn't sold me out."

When saying this, the silly cat even glared at me. It was obvious who she meant, but I merely looked at the sky and pretended not to understand.

"In that case, it means we can't count on Sandro."

"Still, only by convincing him to become the vanguard, which will attract Blackeye's attention, will we have some hope of succeeding."

"...In that case, this means you have other plans set in motion as well."

"Yep. The Sword of Order has quite a different structure from other mage organizations since more than seventy percent of its members are considered heretical mages. Their way of distributing resources and research funding closely follows the law of the jungle, and there are plenty of members that have ambitions about their status. It's a powerful organization that can be taken advantage of. Back in the day, I really wanted to obtain this mage organization for myself."

"Which is why Blackeye exiled you—"

"But nobody truly knows how many disciples I left behind and how many are actually working for me. Nor do people know how many top-level archmages like Sandro I have under me. Actually, one of the other vice leaders of the Sword of Order is one of my subordinates as well. She's also a much smarter person than Sandro."

From a certain standpoint, the fact that Demon Professor Harloys was able to enter the Calamity Rankings wasn't because her own personal existence was dangerous. Apart from her desire to take revenge against the Elven Gods, she could be considered harmless.

The most dangerous part about her was that she often taught forbidden, dark knowledge to geniuses that walked extreme paths. Perhaps nothing would come of it in the short term. Yet akin to a farmer who casually tossed a handful of seeds into fertile soil, there would always be several dangerous seeds that would manage to sprout even if most of the seeds would simply hibernate there for a long period of time. This naturally caused much trouble for everyone else.

Back in the day, Amelia was like this as well, and so was I. Sometimes, I would ask my conscience: if I hadn't met Harloys in this city back in the day, would that mean that I wouldn't have learned the taboo knowledge, that I wouldn't have become Emperor Yongye, and that my life would have turned out utterly different?

"No. I'm quite clear of my own personality. Personality determines one's fate. Back at that time, I never would have let go of my desire for revenge. Even if I didn't meet Harloys, perhaps the process would have been different, but the result would have been just about the same."

I was no fool who would blame my own wrongs on others. I shook my head and decided to stop thinking such unnecessary thoughts. Right now, the most important was the present. If I wanted to influence the Truth Symposium conference's final conclusion, I really did need the support of multiple large mage organizations.

"So you think we have a good chance at being able to get the Sword of Order fully under our control?"

"No, since Blackeye has already controlled this organization for several centuries. I think that no matter what we do, our plan will have at most a thirty percent chance of succeeding. But, as long as we prove that we have the ability to majorly shake up the Sword of Order, Blackeye will surely make some concessions to us. Besides, our goal won't be asking for all that much from him so he'll surely be able to accept them."

The silly cat jumped on my shoulder and chuckled in delight. Apparently, she had seen through to what my real goal was.

"Heh, indeed. After all, no matter if our plan to take over the Sword of Order succeeds or not, there's no loss either way. The worst result still ends in him being forced to support us at the next Truth Symposium conference."

"...Actually, I originally thought that you would oppose my plan." Harloys was hesitant about saying this.

"...Why would you think that? Your recommendations helped greatly increase the success rate of my plan. I'm actually quite grateful to you."

"After all, back at Sulfur Mountain City, you invented the Concept of Law and the legal process, which kept emphasizing the fairness of justice and the importance of following the rules. I thought that you were someone who cared about the means more than the end. No matter how you look at it, usurping someone else's mage organization and making an originally stable mage organization split up into factions and have internal conflicts aren't actions of justice at all."

"No, it's actually the exact opposite. Of course, I highly value the means. After all, that's what everyone sees, and rules are there to give people feelings of trustworthiness and safety. But sometimes, one must make a choice between the ends and the means. If I'm in a situation where I can only choose one or the other, then of course I'd be the type that would say the ends justify the means. As for me? I'm simply a villain."

I wasn't lying at all. Not to mention, it was impossible for me to lie to Harloys about anything as we had a soul connection. Back when I was in Sulfur Mountain City, my personal jail was filled with incredibly villainous bastards that couldn't be judged with only the law. Even if the process wasn't all that honest and correct, I could accept it as long as the result was justified. However, I knew that I wasn't foundationally different from those villainous bastards that only did as they pleased. I was a villain as well, one who did such things only for my own self-satisfaction.

The silly cat seemed to be quite satisfied with my reply.

"...I don't care if others die for my cause. As long as I achieve my goal, who cares about everyone else's lives? We really are such excellent villain partners."

"Of course there's no difference between us. No matter what the reason is, some things that we've done can't be described as anything other than villainous. I've never denied this part about me."

"In that case, my fellow villain, when will you give me my freedom and release me from jail?"

"I truly apologize. After what just happened, I have reconfirmed that you simply are too dangerous. The verdict is that you shall still be locked up for eternity with no chance of an early release."

"...How terrible. Well, since there's no helping it, I'll be counting on you in the future, my dear jailer."

"...I suddenly understand how helpless Adam and the others felt when they were locking me up. Or perhaps it would be more appropriate to call us jailmates? After all, I locked myself in here together with you."

"Is there any difference?"

"I think that there is at least a difference. After all, there isn't much difference in treatment between jailmates, while a jailer has plenty of opportunities to bully someone he's jailed that he's displeased with, and the jailer can even take away the jailed's basic rights, and the jailer can even go on vacation... I suddenly feel like I want to be the jailer after all. Can I change my mind?"

"Don't even think about it! We're destined to be eternal villainous jailmates. Since you're a man, make good on your word..."

I continued to chat and joke around with the silly cat in this spooky and remote mountainous area, discussing calamitous and nefarious schemes. It seemed like a scene right out of a ghost story, but only we knew that this was a rare time, a time both of us could truly have fun.

Chapter 310: Change

A golden flag of Holy Light flapped in the wind, above an orderly army on the tall mountainside.

The venerated knights were at the forefront. Atop horses equipped with iron armor that reflected the brilliant sun, their needs were attended to by squires. After they mounted their horses, their squires helped equip them with spears, shields, and swords, which finished the preparations for their charge.

Judging by the fact that this armor and horses in this army appeared to be of various types, it was evident that the soldiers fighting under this banner weren't from the same country. However, they still fought together for the same cause.

The horn indicating that their charge hadn't yet sounded. The knights gripped their reins tightly in order to avoid any impulsive warhorses from disturbing their combat formation. Behind the knights were heavily armored dragonspear soldiers, guardian warriors with massive tower shields, as well as archers and stone catapult squads who were currently busy counting how much ammunition they had available.

Further to the rear, priests were singing hymns of Holy Light, and the fragrant smell of holy water was all around. Several major personages, including some red-robed cardinals, could be seen among them.

Although the cardinals were the higher-ups in this army, the banner of Holy Light didn't merely possess the Holy Church's warriors. There were also flags depicting a moon and a tooth, a gold snake, and a three-headed hound. Numerous famous emblems were mixed with unknown emblems and flags here. Since the Holy Church had sent out its summons, its endless numbers of devout believers gathered to fight under the Holy Light's banner. From the high-up domain lords to the ordinary farmers who picked up

their wooden farming tools, they all joined in the Holy War.

They were facing no easy opponent—against them was a mega-empire's border guard.

The Bardi Empire's border guard wasn't as well-equipped or well-prepared as their opponents. They were also outnumbered by a scale of more than ten to one. However, they had a reason why they would never retreat—this was their home. They were the first military squadron belonging to East Akenford, and all these border guard soldiers came from the city of Akenford which was located less than one hundred kilometers from here.

"The Holy War? No, this is just an ordinary battle where both sides hate each other and simply want to kill each other."

The border guard soldiers had been trapped and encircled by an ambush. They were in a flatlands district, where they had no hope of outrunning the enemy's knights. Even though they were facing more than ten times their number, even if some of them were instinctively trembling, their hearts remained as solid as stones. Even if some of their arms shook as they held their shields, and some of the novices among them even dropped their weapons, not a single one of them retreated or thought about escaping from this dire situation.

"Everyone, prepare to deal with the enemy's charge!"

This command had been given to them long ago. Every Bardi Empire border guard in the East Akenford Squadron was waiting for their death sentence from this tremendous army against which they had zero percent chance of victory.

Finally, the silver-haired general in charge of the invasion finished his preparations. This Holy Knight commander was clad in gold armor with a lion emblem and continued to patrol to and fro in front of his army, searching for any weaknesses in the Bardi border guards' troop formation with his hawk-like vision. However, he was unable to detect any signs that the Bardi troops

were shaken or suffering from unrest.

Finally, the general gave up on his hope of being able to win through surrender, which would spare the need for combat. He mentally prepared himself to make a number of sacrifices. His gaze remained sharp as always, but suddenly, the expression on his ancient face changed. He nodded in appreciation of the enemy's resolve, then he started shaking his head in pity at the number of lives that would soon be lost on both sides.

He was determined to overwhelm the enemy as quickly as possible, and so he finally unsheathed his sword, indicating the entire Holy Light army to attack. This sword was enchanted with Holy Light properties so that it shone brilliantly under the sun; it could easily be seen from far away.

After he swung down his commander's sword that was embedded with sapphires, an ancient beast horn blew—the signal to start combat. The Holy Light priests concluded casting their final buff spells, and the warriors' golden sharp swords had all been sprinkled with holy water. Even though this Holy Light army had mismatched equipment and a wide variety of different divine Holy Light buff magic spells on them, which made them seem rather silly, the Bardi Empire border guard saw it for what it really was: powerful magic that multiplied the Holy Light army's combat strength severalfold.

The temporarily combined army had been rather noisy to begin with, but when they truly took action, the sounds of horse hooves, running, and people roaring mixed together, forming an earthquake-like deafening noise that slowly slid forward towards the encircled Bardi Empire border guards like an avalanche. The gigantic army inexorably approached the border guards' camp.

"For the Holy Light!"

Everyone in the assorted army was shouting this same thing. The cause of Holy Light had once been taken up in yet another Holy

War. However, this time, the warring participants on both sides were all humans.

"For Bardi! May the Empire win forever!"

The eternal conflict between religious and royal authority was depicted here as well. When the avalanche crashed into the pebble, time seemed to freeze over.

Tower shields with cross-shaped emblems viciously smashed against war hammers embroidered with dragon heads. Gold javelins pierced and pinned archers to the ground, while stone catapults used their own methods to whip the earth.

The Bardi Empire warriors weren't suicidal, nor were they idiots. They had done plenty of homework on how to deal with the knights that would be the vanguard.

The Holy Light knights' charge was slowed down by pitfalls and horse-tripping wires. Long dragonspears that were over ten meters long then stole away the lives of these venerated knights. However, the difference in numbers between the two sides was simply too overwhelming. It was just like how a tiny match would never be able to burn an entire river dry. Once these obstacles and the issue of closing the distance was paved over with corpses, the overwhelming difference in numbers caused the East Akenford Squadron to turn into the slaughtered rather than the slaughterers.

Pitiful screams and howls could be heard everywhere. Less than five minutes had passed since the start of combat, but the battle had long since lost any semblance of balance. It became a massacre where the many killed the few.

The grindstone of flesh and blood was busy harvesting lives. Those unwilling to die could only scream pitifully, while dark clouds filled the sky. It was as if the Gods themselves didn't want to witness such a bloody scene and drew the curtains.

Glory? Honor? Courage? For the Holy Light? A battlefield like this didn't have any of these. The only thing that the warriors needed to do was stick the sword in their hand into an enemy's chest before they died.

Pity? Justice? Friendship? Atop this stage under the dark clouds, the weapon wielders on both sides only had two choices: kill or be killed.

The tremendous difference in numbers helped swiftly draw this battle to its end. Yet this sudden battle that took no prisoners transformed the entire location into a bloody sea of corpses. The legendary old general, who possessed the glorious title the "Eagle of Bejaso," had remained on the tall mountain, observing the course of combat. However, he didn't seem like he was reveling in his side's victory at all.

"The entire Bardi army fought to the last person's death without surrendering or retreating and forcibly inflicted more than twice their number to us in casualties despite our advantage in numbers? This is the mega-empire Bardi? Invading such a country seems like a difficult task."

The dark clouds in the sky seemed to indicate how inglorious this battle had really been. Even the old General Gordon, who was ranked #7 on the Eich's famous warriors rankings and was nominally the overall general commander for the entire Holy Light army, didn't have the confidence that they would definitely win against the human mega-empire. However, there was no turning back, and he could only set a new target for the army of the Holy Light.

"Akenford City. That place is defenseless now that we've cleared out their military squadron. This city shall be the first to fall to the Holy Light."

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"The Bardi Empire has voluntarily offered to make peace

negotiations with the Mage Country? How is this possible?"

If it wasn't for how icy Margaret's expression currently was, I probably wouldn't have only shouted out in astonishment—I would have instead called the news she brought me ridiculous.

I was currently in the café attached to Thorn Garden. Apart from me, Harloys, and Margaret, the only other person present was Adam, who was currently playing a one-person card game by himself. He was obviously bored. As for why Margaret seemed to be so displeased... well, that really did seem to be my fault.

Of course, I understood why she was so displeased. After all, just like always, she never had any time to spend alone with Adam after completing their tasks for me. Every time, before they had much time to rest and relax together, they would be dragged back by me for some reason or the other. And this time, in order to better control the situation in the Cloud Tower, I had summoned them to me once again.

This really wasn't me intentionally trying to make it hard for her to get together with Adam. After all, there really were some things that only she could do for me.

Let's not mention Adam, who was simply an additional add-on. Although Margaret was originally a self-taught mage, she had the status of a hero mage who participated in the war against Yongye. The cold, calm, and cool Margaret had an excellent reputation in the Cloud Tower, not to mention that she was a member of Star Revelation, one of the largest and most powerful mage organizations.

I still counted as nothing more than a tiny little shrimp in the Mage Country. Apart from my few friends in the Mystical Blade, I barely had any contact with the highest-level individuals in this country. However, Margaret had lived here for more than thirty years while she was a candidate for becoming a Truth Overseer, so she definitely counted as a local.

Outsiders would forever be considered outsiders, and it would take an incredibly long period of time for an outsider to ever be considered otherwise. And, right now, what we lacked the most was time. If a local archmage helped us out, many things would become far more convenient.

I learned long ago from Adam that the last time Margaret returned here, she had the chance to become internally promoted within the Star Revelation and become a Truth Overseer as long as she wanted it. However, she had, instead, rejected Star Revelation's offer and went out adventuring in the world together with me. And now, I dragged her back here so of course she would be displeased; it was only natural for her to feel awkward about seeing the familiar faces here.

Not only that, Margaret had to shamelessly return to Star Revelation for my sake, yet I didn't believe the news she brought back to me. Of course she would be even more displeased.

"Is there anything else? If not, I'm going to start writing a certain report. It's a report that's half a year late, called 'Report on whether or not Emperor Yongye has shown traces of activity in the Northlands'. Hmph, you're incredibly skilled at making trouble for others."

Her exquisite fingers tapped loudly on the table. It was evident that a certain Great Saint Margaret Layde was in a terrible mood.

From a certain standpoint, this really was my fault. After all, Margaret and Amelia had used the excuse of investigating whether "Emperor Yongye" and the "undead" had appeared in the Northlands to leave the Cloud Tower under the guise of an investigative expedition. And the end result was that after all this time having passed, not a single person had given the Cloud Tower an investigative report...

A publicly funded vacation? From a certain standpoint, that really was the case. Since Amelia was currently hibernating and

counted as someone who accidentally became a comatose vegetable while out on a business trip, did this count as her spending public funds for her medical care?

Cough—cough—I should be a little more serious. Yep, since it was obvious that we couldn't count on Amelia to be writing the report anymore, the only other Emblem of Endless Truth mage in the investigative group, Margaret, was now on the hook for finishing it now that she had returned to the Cloud Tower. Even if it was now a meaningless report, procedures still had to be followed, and she would even need to explain just why it was that Amelia had been unable to return.

And so, the unlucky Great Saint Margaret Layde was just like a naughty child who had too much fun during summer vacation but forgot about the summer homework. Only after the teacher scolded her combined with endless regret did she finally start working on the meaningless homework that nobody would seriously look at. And it was rumored that the Great Saint's greatest pet peeve was doing meaningless things.

"I'm quite busy. And that report is due tomorrow."

No wonder she felt such displeasure against me. It was also no wonder why Adam was pretending to know nothing about what was going on, doing his best to pretend he didn't exist by sitting there in the corner playing cards. He simply didn't want to misspeak and attract Margaret's attention and anger.

"I apologize. It's not that I don't believe you, it's that this itself is just so unbelievable. Why would the Bardi Empire offer to make peace with the Mage Country? Doesn't that seem impossible?"

I really didn't think it was my fault for not believing her. What she told me was simply too unbelievable.

Two mega-empires like the Mage Country and Bardi Empire entering war with each other would be like a clash between two high-speed trains that carried incredibly heavy loads. The weight

and momentum carried would be astonishing so how could they suddenly stop just like that?

There was especially that forbidden spell attack which caused enormous losses to the Bardi Empire, and the ongoing fights between the dragon knights and archmages on the Bardi Empire's eastern border was still a current event. Although it sounded like both sides were holding back, it definitely didn't mean that both sides would simply pack up and go home after waving a friendly goodbye.

The dragon knights fought for their honor, while the archmages were prideful as well. Since they were now clashing with each other, neither was likely to back down without truly testing each other's mettle. Yet truly going all out against each other would likely make both sides angry, so it was no easy matter to have both parties back down.

And even if the Mage Country wanted peace, the Bardi Empire wouldn't possibly agree. After all, they lost an entire fortress and so many people to that forbidden spell. The dragon knights would have to save face, and the emperor would need to show that they achieved some revenge. Otherwise, there would be no way for them all to face the Bardi citizens.

Even if the Bardi Empire's leaders could remain composed under the threat of the undead, they would definitely be the side to start conflicts, not stop them. In such a situation, the Bardi Empire had actually requested a peace treaty? Completely inconceivable.

However, Margaret chose to remain silent in front of my doubts, and it was Adam, instead, who couldn't bear watching this anymore.

"Cough, that's because—"

"Don't you dare say it!"

"..." Adam and I exchanged glances and came to an unspoken

accord to remain silent in front of the furious Margaret.

"At the very least, someone needs to write that completely meaningless report for me." Margaret seemed to be talking to herself, but now I knew what it was that she wanted.

"I'll go ahead and write that report. I'm awesome at writing reports."

Alright then, I won't comment about how ridiculous or strange it was for Emperor Yongye himself to write the report titled 'Report on whether or not Emperor Yongye has shown traces of activity in the Northlands.' Nor will I mention just how long it took me to think about and finish writing that damned report later that night. But, at the very least, Margaret nodded in satisfaction as she gave me top-secret information that very few people in the Cloud Tower would know about.

"The Holy War has begun."

Margaret's words were incredibly simple, while Adam added on more information for me.

"The Holy Church's combined army for the Holy War that they summoned from all the countries has crossed through the Arloton Mountains and ambushed the Bardi city of Akenford on the southern border. The Holy War has truly begun."

My mouth was now agape in surprise. I never imagined that the Holy Church would come join in at this time as well. Based on my expectations, the Holy Church wasn't supposed to have joined in the conflict for a while.

Akenford City? When I looked at the map, it wasn't even close to the Holy Church's territory!

"The Arloton Mountains? Isn't that the area under the control of the Penglin Alliance? Aren't they believers of the Mother Earth Goddess? Why would they possibly allow the Holy Church's allied armies to pass through their territory?"

"The day before the ambush on Akenford City, the highest priest of the Penglin Mother Earth Goddess Church converted to the Church of Holy Light. The entire country converted to the Holy Light as well, so the Holy Light allied army was able to enter the Penglin Alliance's territory without any trouble. The Penglin Alliance's strongest ten mercenary groups and their former Mother Earth Goddess Church's knights all joined the Holy Light's combined army as well."

Alright then, it seemed that there was plenty of political trickery behind the scenes. It was highly likely that the Penglin Alliance had secretly joined the Holy Light faction long ago. But, no matter how surprising the process had been, there was no denying that the Holy Light army's sudden ambush had been highly successful.

"What was the combat situation like?"

"Akenford City's defending army died to the last man. The city was lost as well. Also... well, it's the Holy War. You understand."

As someone unfortunate enough to be on the receiving end of a Holy War in the past, of course I understood!

The Holy War was a battle against heretics. And heretics' women and children were all considered evil targets that needed to be "cleansed". The heretics' wealth and land were to be rewarded to the Holy Light's faithful believers. There was only one possible result for cities conquered by the Holy Light during the Holy War.

"The entire city was slaughtered?" Although I asked it like a question, both Adam and I knew we were certain of what happened.

"Yeah."

The small café fell silent for a moment. Judging by Margaret's flickering mana, her bad mood was caused by far more than just that damned report about Yongye.

It was now quite obvious why it was that the Bardi Empire was

willing to begin peace negotiations with the Mage Country. Once the Holy Light believers began a Holy War, there was no stopping it. Not to mention, the undead army was growing at an incredible rate, a cancer in the Bardi Empire's stomach. This meant that the Bardi Empire was basically facing three enemies all by itself. When faced with such a brink, even the most insane of emperors would think about negotiating for peace with one of the factions he was at war with, which would reduce the pressure on the Bardi Empire.

"...Heh heh, well, don't have such a sour face. There's at least some good news in this, right? At the very least, it'll make things much easier for our plans once the Mage Country comes to a peace agreement with the Bardi Empire."

"I have a second piece of bad news to give you, then. Based on the newest information I received, there's over a ninety percent chance that the peace negotiations will be rejected by the Mage Country. Not only will the war between the two countries not stop, but it's highly likely it'll be escalated! The mages want to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to forever erase their unruly neighbor!"

Chapter 311: Secret Shadows

"In the year AD 392, the sixteenth year of the Holy War of that era, the Bardi Emperor Orloss the Thirteenth didn't act as decisively and proactively as was typical of him. Instead, he kept up a series of incredibly defensive and passive strategies. Although he did increase military preparations, he merely sat back as warfare reached a stalemate in other countries."

"However, this was a year when unavoidable war came looking for them, no matter if they wanted it or not. The undead came for their land. Three months after the Bardi Empire's capital was mysteriously shrouded in permanent darkness, the undead arrived. In just one night, countless Dimensional Doors to the Undead Planes opened up in various countries, the largest one of all located in the Bardi Empire's capital. On the same night, Undead Emperor Aso from the Desecration Plane descended into the mortal plane and used a forbidden spell, causing an Undead Calamity in the Bardi Empire's capital. Ninety percent of the Bardi Empire's population was transformed into undead, and the entire country known as the Bardi Empire perished, becoming nothing more than a footnote in history."

The above was the game's "history" of what happened to the Bardi Empire in the end. Orloss the Thirteenth who was celebrated as a skilled leader became known as nothing more than a pushover. The Bardi Empire also proved that the idea of standing by on the sidelines and simply watching was the worst, most suicidal idea of all in this particular Holy War.

However, the real Eich I was in was obviously different from the game's storyline. At the very least, due to the existence of the four Elemental Gods and the absence of the game's players, the Elemental Tide increased far quicker than anticipated. The Holy War began several years early as well. The Undead Emperors weren't supposed to descend until ten years later so the undead

came earlier than the game's "history," too.

"Overall, the events in the game's 'history' have been pushed forward by roughly nine to fifteen years. I hope Emordilorcan's death will at least slow things down a little. Otherwise, events will really get troublesome if the new generation's heroes don't even get a chance to grow up and mature."

Of course, I wasn't too worried about this. To use a cliché phrase: the tides of history were unstoppable. No single person or random coincidence would be able to change the big picture, and the wars that were destined to explode would be unavoidable. There were many things that were far too complex, with too many objective factors involved. It was tremendously difficult to analyze what was beneficial and what wasn't.

The wars would come earlier and we now had less time to prepare? This also meant that the major human countries would avoid roughly ten years of internal strife amongst themselves. Whether this was an overall gain or a loss was impossible to calculate.

The heroes from the game's "history" still lacked time to grow and mature? Well, this would indeed influence things as nobody would count on a snot-nosed young brat to be a hero and save the day. They would only be newbies and novices that were barely passable as soldiers, nor would they have their reputations and teams in place yet. There was no guarantee that the game's "heroes" would finally become the same powerful characters like in the game's "history."

However, true heroes were born of the times. Even if one country's Hero A died off, perhaps there was an Archmage B or a Rogue C that would show up and prove to be even more powerful than the Hero A from the game. Nobody could predict such things.

Another result of the human countries having roughly ten fewer years of warfare amongst themselves was that several currently

famous warriors destined to die in human versus human conflicts would live and be able to face our enemies. For example, the overall commander of the Holy Light's allied armies, that Eagle of Bejaso, was someone truly impressive—he was ranked 7th on the Eich's famous warriors rankings. However, in the game's "history," he was destined to die seven years from now after choking on two undercooked eggs he ate too hastily...

Apart from those who chose to commit suicide, nobody could know how they would die. To be honest, the reasons for certain heroes' deaths would end up being the biggest joke of their lives. When I recalled the way Gordon would die in the game, I was even quite satisfied with and proud of myself that my deaths were quite perfect in comparison... Wait, I was being proud of how I died? Something seemed off about this. Forget it, I might as well get back on topic.

Cough, anyways, based on my understanding of history, trying to analyze the butterfly effects caused by anything I did would be as unreliable as trying to utilize divination magic. The more one tried to think about it, the more mistakes one would make.

The most obvious example was regarding the Bardi Empire's "history."

Should I say that the situation was worse? At the very least, in the game's "history," the Bardi Empire was still supposed to be at peace and flourishing. It definitely shouldn't have reached the brink, with three major enemies—the Mage Country, the undead, and the Holy Light army, any of which could possibly destroy the Bardi Empire.

Yet, from another standpoint, the undead's plot was now exposed, and there was no longer any possibility of the undead completely taking over the Bardi Empire from the inside. At the very least, the Bardi Empire's fate of instantly being destroyed by an Undead Calamity in a single day had been avoided. Should I say that the Bardi Empire was in a better situation than it was in the

game?

"Ha, nobody probably knows. After all, fate is something that even the God of Fate can't ascertain. If you look too far in the future, you'll miss the hole in the road right before you and trip and fall. Knowing what's going on in the present is enough."

Yes, the most I could do was understand the present. I would plant seeds for the future and change as much as I could; I'd try my best to guide the overall situation into developing in a good direction.

Of course, this didn't mean that the game's "history" was unimportant. In fact, I always felt that my knowledge of the game's history was my greatest cheat of all. With the game's information on all sorts of characters and events as references, it was quite easy for me to understand what certain people were like or the truth behind various events. I could even prepare beforehand for many incidents that nobody would normally be able to predict.

However, this advantage of mine would become more and more useless as "history" changed. From a certain standpoint, that was something I was really conflicted about. Nevertheless, the greater the differences from the game's history, the more evidence there was that my hard work had been effective.

Even if I told others about the "history" of what should have happened to the Bardi Empire, nobody would have understood or believed me. And, from a certain standpoint, the Bardi Empire's princes fighting for the throne would be the least happy to hear the information I had.

After all, these princes all viewed their adopted father, Emperor Orloss, as an elderly man on the verge of death at any moment. But the truth was that in the game's history, he would still live on just fine for another twenty plus years until the Undead Calamity. No matter how much the princes messed around, they were probably

just monkeys toying around to Emperor Orloss.

Just this one little tidbit of information—that Emperor Orloss was destined to remain alive for another twenty-plus years—would drastically change the political situation in the Bardi Empire. That was just how much power that predetermined knowledge possessed.

If I tossed out the news that "Emperor Orloss still has more than twenty years of lifespan remaining," the entire political situation in the Bardi Empire would be shaken. The First Prince's faction, Eighth Prince's faction and so on would all disappear. However, the domain lords would probably rebel immediately as they wouldn't be patient enough to wait for another twenty-plus years if only they knew.

In the end, however, the situation would become too unclear if I did that since there were too many uncertain factors—there were downsides as well as benefits—hence I refrained from doing so.

Since every variable was constantly changing, how could I possibly make a complete analysis of the overall situation based on only one factor or one piece of information? If someone was able to do such a thing, that would only be because they already knew the answer.

Based on my common sense, only by gathering enough information and after plentiful logical reasoning with help from others could one make the best analysis for the future, no matter how limited the conclusion. The accuracy of the conclusion would also be directly proportional to how much information one possessed.

That was why I never understood how main characters in certain novels had intelligence levels seemingly bordering on the demonic. These main characters had the ability to overturn some mega-nefarious scheme based on a single detail. Some managed to make their plans go off without a single hitch anywhere, and some

would always succeed in making individuals with exceedingly differing personalities act just the way they wanted. After all, a person might take actions different from their norm based on their mood, or a seemingly brutish man might actually be the cautious and intelligent type. Guessing an enemy's reaction to a plan was something akin to guessing what your enemy wanted to eat for dinner tonight. If a main character could accurately guess and control all such factors... well, I felt that a main character's "plot armor" counted as a far more unreasonably powerful cheat than anything I possessed.

Cough, I seem to have accidentally gotten off track again while giving my personal opinion. I should get back to the main topic.

Yep, let's go with the conclusion—strange. It was incredibly strange, no matter if it was the Mage Country or the Bardi Empire, in the game's "history" or the current timeline. There were countless things that seemed incredibly strange.

The strange parts were there from the very start: why exactly did the Bardi Empire have to provoke the "harmless" Mage Country Arlodante? If it was merely to expand their territory and power, the Bardi Empire had plenty of other neighbors to choose from. Why would they intentionally choose the most difficult one of all to fight with?

The Mage Country's actions were even stranger. Why was it that the eternally neutral Mage Country would respond with a forbidden spell, something only used when one was forced to the brink, for mere border conflicts and provocation? When did mages start becoming more impatient than berserkers?

Why was it that the always relatively peaceful neutral Mage Country suddenly become more warlike than even warhawks? Not to mention, this incredibly aggressive action of using a forbidden spell didn't even receive backlash from the other archmages of the Truth Symposium?

Why was it exactly that they would reject the Bardi Empire's offer to make peace? Even if the mages destroyed the entire Bardi Empire, what benefits would they possibly gain? Were the mages intending on changing their habits and taking up the lifestyle of conquerors?

On the other side of things, in the game's "history," there were plenty of questionable things as well. For example, just why the Bardi Empire became a completely isolationist country, which was the exact opposite of how it currently was? Also, just what exactly happened to the Bardi Empire's dragon knights? Why was there no record as well?

"Sigh, it feels like both sides are still treating me as an outsider."

When putting together all the information I possessed, no matter how I thought about it, I still felt like I was missing a large piece of the puzzle. Since it was unlikely that all the mages had gone insane together, there was naturally something that I didn't yet know. Whatever I didn't know was the cause behind why the situation kept continuously developing differently from my expectations.

"It would seem that even Margaret won't be able to easily obtain this information for me."

Thorn Garden and the recent products I started selling through it were the best advertisements for me. I had been working quite hard at getting myself involved in the Cloud Tower's community, making the archmages here recognize my existence. The fact that my Reputation level kept continuously increasing in my System was the best numerical evidence that my efforts had indeed been effective.

However, life wasn't a game. Even if I ranked my Reputation level all the way up to Venerated, that didn't mean that all the mages would venerate me. Trust was something that needed time to establish. I still had to deal with the baggage of my former reputation so I needed concrete actions to prove that I was

trustworthy. Unfortunately, all such things needed time.

What I lacked the most right now was time. Even though I knew that Margaret would be highly displeased with me, I still called her over here to help me out. After all, Margaret was a member of the Cloud Tower. Of course, the best scenario would be if Amelia could come as well.

Still, I trusted in Margaret's abilities. Since she hadn't obtained the information I was missing, it was likely that there were incredibly few archmages that knew the truth.

Yet there were definitely multiple people that knew what was going on. For example, whoever it was that cast the forbidden spell attacking the Bardi Empire's fortress in the first place. Also, the eighteen major mage organizations hadn't mentioned any objections about the forbidden spell even now; that meant that the eighteen largest mage organizations' leaders all knew what must have happened. And we were soon about to start talking to the leader of one of those mage organizations.

"Blackeye, the leader of the Sword of Order? That name makes me nostalgic."

******

The Cloud Tower's famous "Tower of Ten Thousand Spells" wasn't actually a mage tower. Instead, it was a meeting room.

It didn't appear large from the outside, but its interior was enchanted with spatial magic—more than ten thousand people could easily fit inside. In the Cloud Tower, where every square centimeter of property was prohibitively expensive, this time of spatial magic was quite common.

But, no matter which building you compared the Tower of Ten Thousand Spells to, this tower would forever be considered a top-level construction. The tiles here were as white as jade, made out of mithril that had been enhanced several times. The star sand on

the walls created maps of the constellations that made them resemble ancient mystical secrets. Every seat in this classroom was sculpted out of natural jade. Although there was nothing outrageously extravagant here, just the price of the materials used to create this huge conference room was one that no other human country could bear.

The Truth Symposium typically held its meetings here. Various archmages wearing their extravagant robes would enter together. Each seat had a mystical code floating in midair next to it, while all the documents being discussed would be projected onto a large projector screen in the middle of the room. The observers' seats would be filled with mages who would listen in on the Truth Symposium's conference, and all the policies would usually be passed at the end. This place would become a lively hotbed of activity in the city of Arlo.

But, today, when this most important conference room of all was put to use again, the round table in the center of the room had much fewer empty seats than usual, while the observers' seats were all empty. It was a non-public Truth Symposium conference, something incredibly rare.

"Twenty-two out of the twenty-eight Truth Overseers have arrived for today's Truth Symposium conference. Fifteen out of the eighteen major mage organizations' leaders have arrived as well. This is the best attendance record in the past five years. Well, since everyone knows just how important this meeting today is, let's just directly discuss the main topic at hand."

The Seven-Colored Tower was the mage organization where elemental magic mages thrived. Archmage Antonio was the representative of the Seven-Colored Tower, as well as the strongest fire magic and fire element forbidden spell mage of all. I felt like he closely resembled the mascot of Kentucky Fried Chicken from my previous world, which made him appear like a friendly, gentle old man. However, those truly familiar with Antonio knew that he

hadn't chosen the wrong specialty. After all, Antonio's temper when he was young had been worse than the inferno demons from the lower planes.

Now that Antonio was much older, his temper had indeed subsided, and his white-bearded appearance really did make him look like Colonel Sanders. He even accepted the task of hosting today's Truth Symposium conference. However, everyone here knew that Antonio was an individual to be reckoned with.

"I'll just say it directly. This time, our trouble is still the same—those dragons."

Chapter 312: Attack on Titan (Giants)

While the Truth Symposium's archmages were taking the conference seriously for once, the outside of the Tower of Ten Thousand Spells was as noisy as a flea market.

At the marble plaza, a large group of goblin and gnomes were currently carrying banners and flags, shouting and handing out their pamphlets. The people passing by would often take pamphlets of their own volition due to curiosity about what was going on.

"It's not a crime to protest! We have ample reasons to go on strike!"

"We strongly request the mages to make laws improving the labor situation for non-human species! We're not second-rate citizens!"

"Blackeye's alchemy laboratory is now closing! Our bastard of a boss Blackeye lost 300,000 gold coins drinking, gambling, and visiting prostitutes! He ran off with his three mistresses! Blackeye! You're inhuman! You scumbag! Pay my salary that I worked so hard for! You won't meet with a good end! There will surely be divine retribution... which is why in order to make up for the unpaid salary he owes us, we, his employees, have taken out all of that bastard's warehouse inventory to sell here at rock-bottom prices! Everyone passing by, don't miss this great opportunity!"

Alright then, this scene of the goblins and gnomes demanding salary increases or better treatment seemed rather comical, especially since the goblins were trying to sell their products to potential customers in the midst of the commotion. However, there were certain special vocabulary words mixed into this protect, seemingly indicating a certain truth.

"We want peace, not war!"

The goblins that always sold dangerous products, meaning that most people saw them as no different from weapons dealers. Now, however, they were holding up signs saying they wanted peace. The incongruous sight really made the bystanders want to laugh.

"Why is it that battles never stop, that our warriors keep bleeding, that our women keep becoming widows, and our children keep becoming orphans?"

Although this particular phrase on a banner seemed to be one that would easily incite others, it was actually quite comical for those in the know. After all... the frontlines didn't have any of the Mage Country's soldiers at all. Most of the soldiers in the Mage Country were only the private armies of nobles without any actual power that liked to keep up pretenses. That would be sufficient to maintain public order in the Mage Country. The only ones on the frontlines, facing off against the dragon knights, were the archmages.

"What exactly are they doing?"

"...I suppose it's a type of performance."

Everyone was confused at just what these goblins and gnomes were doing, making such a scene in front of the Tower of Ten Thousand Spells. And, to be honest, even the goblins and gnomes themselves didn't understand what they were doing here, either.

"Hey—hey—hey,—you old windbag, those mages are staring at us like we're a bunch of idiots. How much longer do we need to stand around here and keep losing face?"

"Stop complaining, Kevin. We're getting paid ten gold coins per day just to stand here and shout these things. Where else are we going to find such a great job?"

The gnome Kevin wasn't dissatisfied with the payment he was receiving. He simply felt that it was too silly that such a clean and handsome gnome like him had to paint his face green and wave

around this green banner. This shade of green reminded him of that icky and sticky celery pie that his Aunt Dai back home would always cook. All the gnomes standing together reminded him of the sticky pieces of celery, which really churned his stomach.

"Kevin, can't you see that none of the goblins over there are complaining? They even had to paint themselves red to represent the color of blood. Tsk—tsk—tsk! Red and green together, and add on the goblins' disgustingly ugly faces. It's as if—"

"It's as if we're flies circling around a piece of meat!"

Well, setting aside the gnomes' typical habit of complaining, the goblins were shouting far more passionately than the gnomes who didn't lack money in comparison. The goblins were even looking around everywhere, hoping to see that the person who hired them would witness how hard they were working. The reason? So they could receive more incredibly easy jobs like this one. If they could please their employer, perhaps they might even be rewarded with a bonus.

"Is there even any meaning to all this? The archmages are simply ignoring us. Their conference or whatever has been going on for two days already, and nobody dares to go in and disturb them."

"You don't understand, then. Our employer is someone who never does anything meaningless. If he's paying us money to shout these slogans of his, he obviously has something in mind." The old gnome suddenly paused here, intentionally withholding information until the young gnome Kevin realized what he wanted. Kevin grimaced and brought out his secret stash of tobacco and filled up the old gnome's pipe. The old gnome took a good puff on his pipe before continuing.

"Ha, our employer doesn't really care about obtaining what's written on the slogans that we're shouting. He's merely expressing his opinion that 'I know you all intend to start a war, which I highly object to.' Or, he's saying 'I know that you're hiding

something, which makes me highly displeased.'"

"...Why doesn't he simply rush into the conference room and express his complaints directly? I doubt any of those magical puppet guards are a match for our boss."

"That would be no different from utterly antagonizing the mages. Do you really know what it means to antagonize the entire Truth Symposium? Young Kevin, try using your brain for once. That's why our employer gave us the orders to only stand around here and keep shouting, and that if anyone tries to chase us off, we should obediently leave. But, seeing as how we've been shouting here for so long but nobody has even come to chase us away, the mages' response is to—"

"—they can do whatever they want. We don't care. This information absolutely can't be leaked."

An archmage was currently making such a statement in the Truth Symposium meeting.

Thud!

But, the next instant, the door to the conference room slammed open. A blue-robed mage entered, and behind him was a huge pile of magical puppet guards that had been reduced to scrap metal.

"Roland, do you know what you just did?"

Yes, that was me, the unlucky fellow who had been ignored and not invited to the Truth Symposium conference, the leader of the workers union who told his employees to go on strike demanding their salary... whoops, I seem to have accidentally mentioned a concept from my previous world yet again.

Oslowen, the Truth Overseer from the Mystical Blade, had just angrily shouted at me. However, I knew that he was simply speaking on behalf of the Truth Symposium, and that, in his own way, he was even trying to protect me. Otherwise, if I was unfortunate enough to antagonize the entire Truth Symposium, it

would easily give my enemies an opportunity to attack me.

I looked around all the faces at the table in this conference room. It was quite nostalgic—there were plenty of people here that I wanted to kill or wanted to kill me. At the very least, Blackeye was definitely glaring viciously at me since he had been the target of my recent slander campaign.

"I know that you all want to hide the truth, but since I already know, what are you all going to do? Will you all actually try to kill me? Heh heh, if not, let us discuss the issue of those dragons and giants together."

******

Chances would often arrive unsuspectingly, but only the prepared would be able to take advantage of them. A coincidence helped give me the key to the final piece of the puzzle.

"Halent is here to see me? He's already waiting for me in Thorn Garden's meeting room?"

I wasn't surprised to hear this at the time. After all, I now knew that the Bardi Empire wanted to make peace with the Mage Country. I figured that perhaps Halent was acting as the Bardi Empire's envoy.

When I returned to Thorn Garden and entered its halls, the cool, handsome, and taciturn Halent wasn't the first person I saw as I expected. Instead, Beifeng, who was supposed to accompany our guest while he waited, had slipped out for a walk instead. When Beifeng saw that I arrived, he seemed to heave a sigh of relief despite how typically fearless he was.

"You can actually feel uneasy?"

"Well, he's still a superior-ranked dragon. Although I know in my heart that it's nothing much, I still feel instinctively uncomfortable."

I nodded in understanding. Although dracons were called

dracons for being related to dragons, they were actually just artificially created through a mysterious spell as an intelligent species which possessed only a minor amount of dragon blood. When comparing the dracon species' ranks to that of all other dragons, they would be considered lower in rank than even the SemiDragons that lacked intelligence. Dracons were born to be the dragons' servants and slaves.

Not to mention, the dracons in the underground world were originally the color dragons' slaves. Since dracons were created by the dragons, and Halent here was a blue dragon's descendant who had a high purity of dragonblood and could potentially become a dragon himself in the future, there was a huge difference between them in the dragons' rankings. It was only natural that Beifeng would feel uncomfortable.

"Why did they have you be the one to greet Halent? Isn't that just like having Little Red Riding Hood greet the Big Bad Wolf—er—the sheep greet the wolf?"

"Probably because they felt it was the most appropriate as I'm a Saint. I didn't expect it either, though. Even though my power level has improved, the suppression effect I feel from my bloodline has increased as well. However, that Halent fellow gives me a rather unique feeling... the same feeling when I face Ein Mezus."

"Little Red? A Dragon Queen's level bloodline? ...No wonder he was able to become the vice commander of the dragon knights despite his young age."

I shook my head and focused my attention on the dragon knight archduke who was resting in the waiting room. His formerly clean face was filled with the haggard evidence of his travels, and his cape and armor retained plenty of sand. Despite his young age, his hair was beginning to whiten. It seemed that he had experienced much since I last parted ways with him at the Forest of Dreams.

"I have important news. I would like to meet with the Truth

Symposium immediately. However, I've heard that they're currently in a top-secret conference. Could you help me to enter?"

The moment he saw me, he immediately stood up and began speaking. It seemed that he was quite anxious.

"Don't rush. Take it easy, tell me whatever you have to say."

However, Halent had a rather vacant expression, as if he had received a huge shock from something that happened before I saw him. He seemed to have zero patience as he immediately activated a memory crystal.

"An important personage also told me to let you know about this."

The magic of the memory crystal transformed into waves of mana that showed me a hazy scene in midair.

It was a wasteland. The sky was gray, the earth was gray, and every lifeform there seemed to be painted in bland colors.

The most attention-grabbing part of this scene were the sculptures that were all taller than the clouds. They had different appearances. Some were upright and holding swords, while others were sitting and reading books, and there were others roaring angrily at the sky. But, the identical apart about them was that they had ridiculously strong bodies and handsome faces as if they were heroes from legends.

Their existence was an undeniable truth, right from the ancient times.

However, these gigantic sculptures weren't the only existences here. At these huge sculptures' feet, numerous smaller stone figures were awakening from their deep slumber as they shook themselves and came back to life.

Once the perfect Seal of the Four Elements was broken, unsealing this dimensional space, they began awakening from their long, long slumbers.

All these tiny rock figures awakened and instinctively knew what they were supposed to do. They casually formed stone weapons from the environment around them and climbed up their ancestors' bodies, trying to reach the top. They resembled ants attempting to reach the top of a human's head.

However, their climbing was unsuccessful. They wouldn't even reach the knees when they were suddenly ambushed by some flying "mosquitoes" that caused them to fall down and perish.

"What is this? A battle between ants and mosquitos for some sculptures?"

Halent could only smile bitterly upon hearing this.

"Those ants are actually giants—yep—ancient giants that are all taller than ten meters. As for those mosquitoes, they're actually huge dragons. Those sculptures... they are the titan giants. The titan giants are about to awaken!"

Yep, these "tiny stone figures" that weren't even the size of one sculpture's little toe were actually considered by us to be giants. This scene, which resembled a game between ants and mosquitoes, was actually an epic battle between giants and dragons.

In comparison, those towering sculptures that reached the clouds were the titan giants, rumored to have powers rivaling the Gods.

Once the elemental balance was disrupted, the Seal of the Four Elements on these exiled titan giants lost part of its power. This sealed species from ancient times was about to return.

"It's the Attack on Titan—er—I mean the slumbering titan giants are going to return!"

Chapter 313: Truth

The giants and the dragons were the two oldest species that still existed.

When the two Goddesses of Chaos and Order were on friendly terms, they hoped that this world wouldn't be so desolate. Countless species were born thanks to the dual influences of Chaos and Order.

Things from ancient times barely existed today—only countless epics and legends but as tales. At the very least, the Golden Species of gold elves, metal dragons, angels, and titan giants were the four strongest species in the world at the time. They were the victors of the first Holy War.

However, time was forever heartless. The descendants of these former rulers which had lost their crowns typically had it worse off than even commoners.

All of the first generation's Golden Species had it hard as time passed. The gold elves were overthrown by their relatives, the royal elves. The gold elves could now be considered extinct, unless you counted Harloys. The angels' descendants became the servants of the Gods, and the titan giants only remained in legends and archaeological records.

Very few would remember them as far too much time had passed. These Golden Species were unable to withstand the eternal warfare, and either disappeared from the pages of history or hid themselves from the world. By the time the second Holy War arrived, the strongest species were the fallen giants and the moon elves from the royal elves.

The moon elves that the gold elves viewed as traitors eventually lost their absolute control over the entire elven species, which also resulted in the entire elven species losing their ruling position as the most dominant species in the world. Their opponents, the

giants, didn't have it easy, either. After the titan giants disappeared, there was no longer one single ruling giant species. The giants split up into two factions during the Holy War, and lost too many of their own from infighting. By now, the giants had lost most of their Intelligence stat and were nothing more than isolated tribes.

There were some legends, old folk tales that said some giant species had decided to hide out in another plane, creating a country with only giants in order to avoid the Intelligence-lowering curse that the God of Intelligence placed on their species.

However, the reality of the situation was that an extreme majority of the giants were now cursed with low Intelligence—most giants now possessed that of a wild beast's level. Any giants which appeared in highly populated areas would become easy targets for an intelligent species, an army squadron would wipe them out.

It could be said that as a species that formerly ruled the world, the giants were now in a pathetic state.

However, I obtained some information from Ayer about the truth of the giants' downfall. There was only one reason for the giants' downfall—the titan giants were gone.

This was just as if a hierarchical empire suddenly lost its ruler. Meanwhile, all the powerful feudal lords under the ruler were unwilling to listen to anyone else, not to mention the skillful manipulation of the giant factions by other species and the giants' prideful natures and worship of the strong. It was only natural that the giants ended up causing their own ruin.

Now then, the most foundational problem was that in this entire world, the only existences capable of challenging the titan giants from the first generation which themselves challenged the Gods... well, the only ones I could think of were the very same Gods. And, judging from the fact that almost the entire giant species had been

cursed with low Intelligence by the God of Intelligence for so long now, the giants were truly disliked by the Gods.

Well, it was too difficult to know what precisely happened as it all occurred far too long ago. Nor was it necessary or meaningful to find out the exact details. After all, the God of Intelligence Kasodia was a Main God from the first generation who had also died off countless generations ago. But even though Kasodia died so long ago, his Intelligence-lowering curse on the giants still remained effective. Kasodia one hundred percent must have been one of the top-level strongest Gods of his time.

If the titan giants finally returned, they would be able to dispel the Intelligence-lowering curse on the giants. That would finally reunite all the separate and isolated giant tribes under their rule, which would be quite "fun" for us.

"They're traitors, schemers, and attempted God-slayers. They're the enemies of all the Gods."

When Ayer discussed the ancient Titan Giant King with me, he even became gravely serious, which was quite rare for him. When I asked where the titan giants were currently slumbering, Ayer said that even he didn't know. That was because he didn't participate in the exiling of the titan giants back in that year.

And from what I knew from the game's information on the "Attack of the Giants" game expansion pack, the titan giants were destined to return. When they returned, the titan giants unhesitatingly declared war on both sides of the Holy War. The titan giants had overwhelming power, making the Holy War even more chaotic.

"They'll return sooner or later, but I doubt they'll return in time for this Holy War."

"No, they'll definitely return and become a part of this Holy War."

Ayer was quite confident of his prediction at the time, but I unhesitatingly told him that he was wrong. Even now, three hundred plus years later, I could still remember quite clearly how frustrating it was to fight against the Titan Giant King in the game. I also knew, due to my knowledge of the "Attack of the Giants" expansion pack, that the titan giants were one hundred percent certain to return in time for the Holy War.

However, this was obviously a late-game-scenario expansion pack. After all, with how powerful the titan giants were, no beginner-level players would be able to defeat them.

Even though I knew that the titan giants were destined to arrive, I never expected it to be so quick. However, if I analyzed everything that happened, it seemed likely that their early arrival had to do with me.

"Due to what happened to the Earth Elemental Plane, the Seal of the Four Elements on the titan giants has begun collapsing earlier than scheduled. It's only a matter of time before the titan giants break free!"

The elements complemented and countered each other. That was the very basic foundation of this world. And the strongest possible seal in this world was the Seal of the Four Elements, which imitated the elements' natural laws. As long as the Seal of the Four Elements was active, the four elements would cycle naturally within it and create a mini dimension with no exit.

The fundamental workings of this seal imitated how the Goddess Eich created the world. Theoretically speaking, since it was an existence that drew from the power of Creation itself, there was no other seal in existence that could possibly be more powerful.

Not to mention, this real Seal of the Four Elements was obviously of far higher quality than my imitation. The power of the four elements that it drew from was the four Elemental Planes themselves. The mini dimension it created became a real sealed-off

dimension of its own. No matter how many eons passed, or how often the Elemental Gods changed, as long as the four Elemental Planes still existed, the Seal of the Four Elements would remain in effect.

However, not long ago, I went ahead and broke the very foundation of any Elemental Plane—the Elemental Throne. This was all in order to kill off that Emordilorcan. To make an analogy of the seriousness of my actions, I basically killed off a group of hens all in order to destroy one egg, which directly caused one-fourth of the Seal of the Four Elements to collapse.

If this was a normal, peaceful time period, this imbalance could be fixed by itself. However, it just happened to be that two of the Elemental Gods, Camdian and Aylos, were still out and about doing as they pleased, their whereabouts unknown. The wind and water elements were increasing at a furious pace, while the Earth Elemental Plane was absorbing the earth element back into it to rebuild its Elemental Throne. Balancing the elements was practically impossible.

"So the titan giants' return is only a question of time? But what does this have to do with the dragons? Why does that memory crystal have dragons in it?"

I asked Halent quite directly when I saw this, and he directly answered my question.

Long eons of time were capable of wiping away anything. Very few noticed how the Gold and Sulfur Species from the ancient eras hadn't all left the mortal plane. The only species one could still commonly see in the mortal plane was the dragons.

Of course, the fact that dragons had been able to survive and maintain a chain of descendants for so long was solely due to the fact that at one point in time, the dragons got tired of the entire Holy War. The entire dragon species managed to secretly come to an accord with themselves and withdrew all dragons and dragon

descendants from both sides. This was how the dragons were basically the only species that survived intact all the way from the first generation.

As a whole, dragons were a species that typically had fixed personalities based on their specific species. There were many different types of dragons, and even more countless semi-and half-dragon species. However, the most active dragons in the mortal plane were only two major types: the color dragons and the metal dragons. The third major type of dragons, the gem dragons, were rarely found in the mortal plane. Gem dragons also had incredibly unique abilities and personalities. Although gem dragons physically resembled other dragons on the outside, there were huge internal differences. Not to mention, dragons were one of the few species capable of traveling across dimensions and surviving in other planes. It wasn't strange that there were dragon species living in other planes.

The metal dragons were representatives of Order, with the gold and silver dragons being the most well-known. Since these dragons were the creations of Order, they typically had their own desires and self-discipline and were the easiest dragon species to interact with.

Color dragons were the favored children of the Chaos Goddess Cynthia. Obviously, the color dragons received their names due to the color of their scales. In comparison to the metal dragons, the color dragons were far more difficult to interact with. Their representatives included the Underworld black and red dragons, as well as the blue dragon before me. White dragons were notoriously stupid, no better than beasts. Black dragons were sly and liked to use underhanded tricks. Red dragons were combat maniacs and also loved to scheme. Blue dragons had incredibly high attack power, while green dragons enjoyed preying on intelligent creatures, especially the elves. Green dragons and elves were species that considered each other mortal enemies. If I had to try

and find a common point about all the color dragons, it would be that they were all immensely recalcitrant and super greedy. They also all loathed humans and loved to stir up trouble.

The dragons weren't that peaceful as a species even amongst themselves. After all, just like humans, even dragon families had individuals with differing personalities that would cause huge conflicts. Not to mention, each dragon species had vastly different personality types. Red dragons and silver dragons were mortal enemies. Gold dragons and black dragons were mortal enemies as well. There had been plenty of internal wars amongst the dragons. In fact, the losers of those wars, the black and red dragons, had their entire species be exiled to the Underground.

Since dragons each had immense personal power levels and lacked any natural predators, most living on the surface lived by themselves. One dragon would typically have just some hounds, griffins, and other such underling species, which was enough for their own territory. At the very most, dragons would only live together in small groups of three to five. Due to the fact that some dragons from Ayer's generation were still alive, the Dragon City of the surface still had a certain degree of control over the entire dragon species. However, this control basically amounted to zero unless there was a situation that threatened the entire dragon species.

"We dragons made an agreement with the Main Gods of Chaos and Order from that generation that allowed our entire species to bow out of the Holy War. The condition was that we dragons would forever keep guard on the titan giants, over the world, 'Alidashya,' where they were trapped."

"So what you're saying is that the dragons have now lost control?"

"Although there were already signs of it collapsing before this, starting two months ago, the Seal of the Four Elements suddenly started decaying at a much faster rate. It's only a matter of time

before the titan giants reawaken. I'm not sure on the specific time they'll return, but it will definitely take less than ten years. However, the giants will soon return to their original Intelligence levels."

Two months ago? That coincided exactly with my little excursion in the Earth Elemental Plane. Well, it was probably best not to tell that to Halent.

"Don't you dragons have any backup plans? Have you dragons never prepared for the worst?"

"...Originally, with my power level, I never could have learned such information to begin with. However, an ancient dragon I met recently told me that she and Emperor Orloss had intended to connect the Undead Planes to the titan giants' sealed dimension Alidashya so that the Undead Emperors and titan giants would get stuck fighting each other, weakening both their factions and killing two birds with one stone. This was an agreement that the Bardi Emperor made with the dragons. However, this is evidently no longer possible."

Halent's tone wasn't a complaining one. Still, this was obviously connected to me... which was why I did my best to not understand what he implied and glanced at the sky.

"What about the Bardi Empire fortress destroyed by that forbidden spell? And what's going on in the Mage Country?"

"That fortress was actually the base of operations for another Undead Emperor. A large amount of undead were already appearing there, and the necessary human sacrifices had almost reached the required amount for a Dimensional Descent. If not dealt with, that fortress would have become a second Port Victoria. That was why Emperor Orloss requested a forbidden spell mage from the Truth Symposium to wipe out the entire fortress."

"So,you're telling me that the highest levels of both countries have actually been in secret contact with each other."

"No, Emperor Orloss only had contact with a single specific archmage from the Truth Symposium. The only other existence that knows all this is the surface Dragon City's representative in the Bardi Empire: Lady Evelyn. It's also due to Lady Evelyn's orders that I'm telling you all of this. Yep, this is only one-third of Lady Evelyn's orders."

"Evelyn?"

"Yes. Lady Evelyn said you wouldn't dare to ever forget about her. Do you remember now?"

"...My memory isn't that bad. Isn't she Cher's adopted mother?"

Judging by how Halent's expression suddenly became strange, I seemed to have missed the mark. He suddenly tightened his grip on the letter he was holding, burning it to ashes with a lightning strike.

"...Lady Evelyn said that if you truly forgot about her, apart from forbidding me to give you this letter, I absolutely must inform you of one thing."

"What is it?"

Could Evelyn truly be one of my old acquaintances, to the extent where she even knew that I might intentionally forget about her? Which was why she was even prepared for this situation?

"Lady Evelyn's exact words are as so: 'Cher is your daughter, which is why you're banned from doing anything to her...'"

"Teehee! Now you have your confirmation." The silly cat was rolling around on the table, evilly making her presence suddenly known.

[Congratulations for receiving additional glorious titles... Would you prefer to receive one from the 'Oni Chichi' series or the 'Jinxed' series? I have a title called 'Cher has such an excellent father' under the Oni Chichi series, while I have one called 'I'm really impressed with you—by Pele' under the Jinxed series. Forget

it, I'll give you a huge discount today and give you both titles at once. Your title shall be 'Cher has such an excellent father, named Roland Pele.']

Chapter 314: Sly Old Fox

"Since I already know everything, what can you all do about it? Kill me?"

"Even you're saying that so you must be prepared to meet your doom!"

The furious archmages all shouted in anger as their expressions distorted. Each and every one of them pulled out their mage staves and shot all sorts of magic spells at me, killing me in an instant... that was all obviously impossible. After all, mages weren't like warriors who only had muscles for brains. Nor were mages fervent religious fanatics that wanted to cleanse everything. Mages were always more understanding and preferred to talk things out. They would be especially more patient with other mages and their juniors.

"Since you know already... let's add a chair for you."

Auntie Amala from the Star Revelation was quite open-minded about me joining in. She sipped her tea, not even opening her eyes as she enjoyed her beverage.

Why was I calling her Auntie Amala? Apart from the fact that this purple-haired mage who always wore a headscarf had such an obvious motherly aura about her, it was more due to the fact that she was Margaret's mage teacher as well. Auntie Amala was the one who helped a wild mage like Margaret enter the Mage Country. In fact, she was even responsible for helping Margaret transform into an undying state.

Of course, I voluntarily greeted her of my own volition based on the connection between us. I even thought back to the first time I met her.

"Good morning, Auntie."

Whoosh...

I had heard someone sigh lightly before the atmosphere on the street at where I greeted her for the first time became rather strange. The originally bustling street had instantly became empty, while my shadow had come to life and restrained me. The stone street had suddenly transformed into a magical beast that devoured me.

Yet, the next instant, everything had returned to normal. The sky was still blue, and there was nothing wrong with the street at all. That was when I realized everything had only been an illusion.

"Actually, you should just call me Sister Amala."

'...An illusion? A Soul World? No, there's no way that was something so simple.'

Alright then, from that day onward, I became more respectful of the Cloud Tower's mages. At the very least, this Amala individual who appeared just like an ordinary little girl on the outside was actually an ancient artifact from who-knows-what generation.

Although Amala was a SemiGod, there was no way to calculate the difference in power levels between SemiGods among mages. Experience and knowledge were both critical factors when it came to power level. I heard of "Amala the Blind" even back when I was just an acolyte so it would be appropriate to respect this who-know-how-old ancient witch, which was why I decisively expressed my gratitude.

"Thank you, Auntie Amala. You're quite reasonable to deal with."

As I expected, everything before me went dark before I even finished speaking.

"Ohhh, it's here again, that feeling of being forgotten somewhere in a corner of the world and then being devoured! ...Eh, why isn't it continuing anymore?"

This time, the illusion only lasted half as long before everything returned to normal for me.

"Sigh."

I once again heard Amala's sigh. I shrugged, slightly disappointed that I hadn't been able to find out her true strength. I casually pulled over a chair and sat down as the large door behind me slammed shut. This doubtlessly meant that a new round of discussions was beginning, with me being included this time.

[Epic Quest: "Will you have a glorious homecoming, or will you become a fallen phoenix?" has now been activated. The next step of your Quest will depend on how well you do here at this Truth Symposium conference.]

As always, my System was late to the party. But since I managed to make it here, the first step of my goal was already complete. Being able to acquire some Fate Points as well was just an extra bonus. Based on previous experiences, this type of Quest chain may not have any worthy rewards as I went about doing the Quests in the middle, but the final reward in the end would always be marvelous.

"In that case, this meeting shall move on to the next topic..."

Clap! Clap! Clap.

An elderly archmage wearing reading glasses picked up a document with trembling hands and was about to move on to the next topic when he was interrupted by someone's clapping.

When he looked to see who it was, it was, as expected, the young brat who just took a seat. Once could be counted as a coincidence, but two interruptions meant that he was obviously up to something. This time, almost all the archmages present became very displeased.

Any ordinary person being glared at like this by so many archmages possessing Emblems of Endless Truth would likely pee their pants in fright.

However, for me, all those unfriendly glares and scary-seeming

auras emanating from the mages' physically weak bodies were the best evidence that they couldn't actually do anything about me. This attempt at "killing me with their glares" made me quite pleased.

"...Fine, fine, this time, I really wasn't trying to mess with you all on purpose. Aren't you all even the littlest bit curious about how I learned about the truth? I just received information from the Bardi Empire. Would any of you like to know about it? The titan giants are going to return sooner than anyone expected. These exiled former rulers are about to return. Please, don't all stare at me like that. I'll get embarrassed from all your passionate gazes. Do all of you want to see an old man like me flush red so much? Perverts!"

At that moment, I had an excellent inspiration and lightly stuck out my little finger towards the archmages and beckoned towards them.

"That damned pinky finger of his! Never in history has such a tiny movement from any person ever disgusted so many archmages, archmages who typically wanted nothing to do with the world into wanting to kill him!" That was the collective opinion of all archmages present at this particular Truth Symposium.

As for the meeting's progress? Since it still hadn't ended after two days' time, would it really end so quickly just because I joined? And that was especially after I brought new troubles for them.

"As I expected, there's no solution to this."

Naturally, only a stalemate like this would cause so many archmages such frustration.

For the Mage Country, Arlodante, the best situation of all would be to continue their isolationist attitude and only worry about defending themselves, maintaining their eternal neutrality. However, this was obviously impossible. Even if you didn't go around looking for trouble, trouble would come looking for you.

From a certain standpoint, Emperor Orloss of the Bardi Empire was truly a sly old fox. He was probably the first person who understood the situation for what it was. His country became the undead's target more than thirty years ago, which was the Bardi Empire's first major issue.

The second troublesome issue for the Bardi Empire was the dragon knights. The prideful dragons never would have obediently listened to a human empire's commands for a reason as simple as what I guessed, being a "half-blood dragon descendant daycare." The dragons were actually performing a critically important task here: guarding the entrance to the Dragon World.

What was the Dragon World? That was the name of the dimension in which the titan giants were slumbering.

"That isolated dimension was indeed created to become an eternal prison, especially designed for the titan giants. However, since the elemental density was incredibly high there, it was a highly suitable environment for hatching dragon eggs, for young dragons to grow, for old dragons to retire, and for breeding as well..."

"Why is why you dragons modified the titan giants' prison into a daycare and retirement home? Not to mention even breeding there? You even established nests there?"

I was rendered speechless by the dragons' actions. But, to the dragons, this was no different from how a human would consider the surrounding environment when choosing a new home to live. It was just like moving to a warm and comfortable island. As for the imprisoned titan giants?

"Hmph, those titan giants haven't woken up for tens of thousands of years. They definitely won't awaken in our generation."

Alright, although this sounded quite ridiculous, plenty of humans thought in such a fashion as well, not just the dragons.

"Who cares if I'm polluting the water or air? It's not like I'm drinking or inhaling it directly." "Conserve energy? Oil will eventually run out one day? Relax, some new technology in the future will take care of that for us."

Most likely, the first generation of dragons took their job of guarding the seal on the titan giants seriously. The second generation probably took occasional looks. Now that hundreds of generations had passed, the titan giants had become nothing more than a distant legend. Enjoying this incredibly comfortable environment became the most important thing to the dragons.

"You dragons never even considered that if the titan giants awakened at a rapid pace, that not a single one of your young and elderly dragons would be able to escape?"

Actually, no matter if one was a dragon or a human, there was no foundational difference in how all intelligent species thought in a foolishly suicidal manner, that certain things wouldn't possibly matter or be relevant to themselves.

"...I've just found out that dragons are also foolish optimists that love to dig pitfalls for themselves to fall into."

I still recalled how when I made that comment, Halent's face reddened to such an extent, just like a monkey's rear. That handsome dragon descendant lowered his reddened face and seemed to be quite embarrassed about his own species' actions. He was like an embarrassed little girl, and it was truly an enjoyable scene to watch.

Cough, let us ignore that last part. The conclusion was now obvious. The dragons definitely had a secret agreement with the Bardi Empire, which was why the Bardi Empire eternally managed to have dragon knights under its command throughout the countless generations. Naturally, the dragons would receive assistance from the ruler of the Bardi Empire as well. For example, human labor, food and water resources, construction work

undertaken to conceal the entrance to the Dragon World, and so on. And since this country had dragon knights, dragons occasionally appearing in the country wouldn't cause the citizens to be too astonished.

The Dragon World was one of the three locations in Eich which had the highest population of dragons. But now, the titan giants were beginning to awaken, which transformed it into the cruelest battlefield. The dragons were fighting furiously to stop the smaller giants from waking up the titan giants in order to successfully transfer all their young dragons and dragon eggs. However, once the titan giants themselves truly reawakened and entered the battle, things would likely no longer be salvageable.

"Does Orloss know about this? Did he know that the titan giants were likely to return during this Holy War?"

"...Since he's the Bardi Emperor, he was informed by the dragons right when he succeeded to his position."

As for why I called Orloss a sly old fox, that was because even though he knew that his country was facing significant upcoming troubles, he still rapidly expanded the Bardi Empire's territory, getting other countries involved in the Bardi Empire's problems.

"Where is the entrance to the Dragon World? Why haven't you dragons already made a full retreat with all your dragon eggs and young dragons?"

"The Dragon World's entrance is located in the Bardi Empire's capital city. As for why the dragons there haven't retreated? It's not that they didn't want to retreat, it's that they're unable to. The order to retreat was given more than one hundred years ago. But most dragon mothers don't even know where their own dragon eggs are in there. The situation is quite unique."

I asked more about this and learned from Halent that the dragons truly turned the titan giants' prison dimension into their own Dragon World. There were a large number of dragons that made

that place into their home. After all, they had no enemies there, and it was an excellent environment. They would simply randomly bury their eggs somewhere in the ground and wait for the egg to hatch.

Not to mention, dragons were true to their own desires. The SemiDragons, dragon beasts, and half-blood dragon descendants were quite numerous in that world as well. It was a complete dragon society on its own, which was also why it was one of the three most heavily dragon-populated locations in Eich.

"What do the dragons think of the undead?"

When I asked this, Halent became even more embarrassed. He didn't say anything for an incredibly long time. In the end, he could only helplessly shake his head.

Alright then, I didn't even need to guess. After all, these huge lizards that could easily swallow down a human in a single gulp were probably too lazy to care.

"What? The danger of the undead? Aren't we already providing you humans with a dragon knight squad? Who cares about affairs in human society? Stop interrupting our sleep! If you dare to wake us up again, we'll eat you!"

But now, it was likely because their dragon eggs were under serious threat that they finally thought to ask for assistance. And the Cloud Tower happened to both be the closest, as well as one of the few mortals' organizations that the dragons wouldn't look down upon.

Both the Undead Calamity and the titan giants' return were huge problems. If both occurred together, that would be an even bigger problem. By the way, Emperor Aso in the game's "history" seemed to have fallen for Orloss's trap as well, even if Orloss perished in the end. After all, since Emperor Aso opened up the Undead Planes' Dimensional Doors in the Bardi Empire's capital city, it was likely that the undead ended up clashing with the titan giants. And if

Orloss misled Aso about where to open the Dimensional Doors, perhaps the undead arrived in the Dragon World and started fighting with the titan giants before they even arrived, which made it only natural why the titan giants arrived so late in the game's "history."

The Orloss I knew in the real life of this world was still a sly old fox, just like in the game. Looking back on things now, he probably had quite a lot of say in the undead's actions. No matter if it was Port Victoria or that fortress Orloss had destroyed by a forbidden spell, there was something in common about the two locations: they were both on the distant outskirts of the Bardi Empire. In fact, both of these locations were far closer to the Cloud Tower than they were to the Bardi Empire's capital city.

When the undead armies arrived, Orloss was still allied with them and intended on using them to attack the Mage Country. If it wasn't for the Forest of Dreams and the mystery archmage's forbidden spell at Orloss's command, the Undead Calamity would have already arrived in the Mage Country. Although the forbidden spell managed to eliminate the threat of yet another Undead Emperor opening up yet another Dimensional Door, it dragged the Mage Country into this huge mess.

Perhaps even sacrificing Port Victoria was just a show Orloss put on for the Mage Country. Orloss wanted to prove his own viciousness towards both himself and his opponents. Perhaps he was even threatening the Mage Country that if they didn't help intervene in the situation, all the Dimensional Doors would be opened up right next door to them.

"Ptui! Perhaps Orloss even notified the Mage Country before sacrificing Port Victoria, which is probably why Amelia just happened to be in Port Victoria at the time. But no matter what the Cloud Tower chose to do, the Mage Country wouldn't be able to remain uninvolved. This is such a familiar tactic, an open scheme for all to see."

"You're feeling like this is all familiar? That's because Orloss's dirty tactics are exactly the same as yours."

"...Harloys, please call it experience and wisdom instead."

Not long ago, Orloss had apparently achieved his goal. At the very least, the Mage Country was suffering quite greatly, and these archmages that loved hiding in their ivory towers were forced to fight against the undead to the bitter end.

Alright then, let's not mention just how scheming of an individual Orloss was. At any rate, he messed with both of the major troublesome issues on his plate. The Undead Calamity occurred earlier than planned, and due to the Forest of Dreams' existence as well as the location of the Dimensional Doors, the direction the undead would invade in would likely change to be the Bardi Empire. The titan giants were also reviving faster than anyone had ever expected, not to mention that once they awoke, they would be coming out right in the Bardi Empire's capital. Orloss was probably quite worried about this situation, too.

"Just how strong are the titan giants?"

I asked Halent this question as well. And now, the archmages at the Truth Symposium meeting asked me the exact same question. However, the answer was the same.

"I don't know because there are no records about their strength."

Of course there were no records. After all, nobody even knew what year the titan giants were sealed in. The Gods themselves erased all relevant records, so how was it possible to truly find out how strong the titan giants were? Still, I knew that the titan giants sealed away back in that generation were all undying. Even the Main Gods in that generation were unable to truly slay them so perhaps it would be accurate to view the titan giants as having power on par with the Main Gods.

"Then what do the dragons want us to do, exactly? Take care of

those titan giants for them? I should say first that I have no intention of becoming cannon fodder for the sake of those lizards. We could try an offer of friendship to the titan giants first."

"That's a nice idea." Another archmage seemed to agree with this idea. I nodded at this. After all, this was a typical way that a mage would think of, and, in a way, it could be considered quite reasonable. However...

"That's impossible. In the immemorial generation, the titan giants looked down upon on the 'low-class imitations' that were all other species. Not only that, they're related by blood to the human-eating ogres... Yep, that's right, the titan giants eat humans! Do any of you ever make offers of friendship to the eggs in your breakfast bowls?"

I was telling the truth about this. It was gossip I heard from Ayer. The titan giants' bloodline actually consisted of a huge family, including the giants, ogres, great demons, and even smaller species like dwarves and stone beasts.

The great demons' countries and the elven empire were mortal enemies from the same ancient generation. They were the rulers of the world in their era. The legends about the Gold Elf King and the Titan King's enmity for each other remained as classic epics commonly performed on stage even in today's generation. But now, there was likely to be one new story added among them, titled "The Forgotten Tark Republic" written by Roland the Forgotten.

"Those lizards aren't that stupid to think that we'll simply agree to become their cannon fodder against the titan giants. What they want us to do is help maintain the balance between the elements, which will help delay the titan giants' revival. That'd give them more time to finish finding all their dragon eggs and move them to safety as well as prepare for battle."

"So what you're saying is..."

"Yep. Either we slay the two remaining Elemental Gods of Wind and Water that are running around, or we quickly find two elemental creatures that can ascend to become Elemental Gods. We have to make all four elements reach a balance somehow!"

Still, slaying two Elemental Gods that were probably hiding in their own planes was far too difficult of a task. In the end, I had one choice left to me.

"...I just slew the Earth Elemental God, but now I have to help establish another one? Is this yet another creative way of how I managed to shoot myself in the foot?"

Chapter 315: Leaving Without Saying Goodbye

On the second day, I finally left the now-finished Truth Symposium conference. The Truth Symposium gave me a small golden question mark-shaped emblem to go with my other three emblems. The emblems on my chest now had even more authority than before.

Although this little emblem wasn't much, it represented the fact that the Truth Symposium would notify me whenever they held a new meeting in the future. It also stood for the fact that I would now officially have the right to be there. Not only that, the "Great Industrial Party" had become an officially recognized powerful mage organization in its own right. All those bastard subordinates of mine could finally be proud that they were a part of it.

As for what result came about at the end of the Truth Symposium conference? Obviously, nothing was resolved in the end. If simply drinking tea together, chatting, and meeting with each other could solve the world's problems, then this world would truly be an easy one to live in. There would be no such thing as war.

Orloss and the dragons had a rather simple train of thought. At any rate, if the titan giants arrived, the entirety of human society would suffer so helping Orloss and the dragons meant we were helping ourselves. Helping them would be to our benefit as well, and they didn't care even if we didn't help them; after all, we would all be dying together in that case.

At any rate, the Bardi Empire was going to be in a tremendous amount of trouble either way. They had nothing to fear from the Mage Country compared to the troubles already on their plate, so they could afford to so brazenly demand assistance despite their earlier antagonization.

As for the mages, it was certain that they were all in a bad mood

about this. Nobody would enjoy being dragged into such a major issue like the titan giants. No wonder they were completely uninterested in Bardi's "offer to make peace."

Judging from what Halent told me, the dragons still seemed to be quite optimistic about things. Apparently, the dragons believed that all they needed to do was put the four elements back in balance before having the mages fix the Seal of the Four Elements. They were so naïve as to believe that would be all that was necessary to protect their Dragon World.

The battles they had so far in the Dragon World against the titan giants' tiny little helpers had been quite successful. Some dragons were even under the impression that the titan giants weren't much to deal with and that they would be able to easily take them on even if the titan giants broke free.

Well, I could understand why they would be so overly optimistic. After all, if any human started prophesizing about how the world was about to be destroyed in such a catastrophic fashion, humanity's first reaction definitely wouldn't be to unify and develop new technologies to fight against the impending catastrophe. Instead, humanity's first reaction would be to make that so-called prophet shut up and only think about ways to deal with the disastrous situation once it was made too clear that it really existed. Perhaps, at that time, some world-saving heroes would even appear.

"Unless they've truly been pushed to the brink, no existence is willing to give up their own home."

However, it was obvious that there were no world-saving heroes who were going to save the day this time. The nature of the impending catastrophe was a bit ridiculous in scale, and the difficulty in saving the world had long surpassed the power of any single individual.

"To balance all four elements, we only have two choices. Either

make sure there's a total of four Elemental Gods so that they'll balance each other out, or kill them all."

From a personal standpoint, I preferred the former choice. After all, we had connections with the Wind and Water Elemental Gods. I even had a hold over Aylos with the way to revive her husband Sidunwar, which might come in handy in the future. Yet from an overall strategic standpoint, I preferred the latter choice, to kill them all. That would help abate the overall increase in the Elemental Tide and lessen the difficulty in fighting against the future elemental creatures' invasion.

It was fine to think that, but truly killing off the two remaining Elemental Gods was far too difficult a task.

If I was Camdian or Aylos, I would stop running around and simply hide out in my stronghold in whichever home Elemental Plane and adamantly refuse to leave unless things were truly catastrophic outside.

After all, considering that Emordilorcan, who was incredibly seriously injured to begin with, had been so difficult to deal with in his home turf, I had zero desire to find out just how powerful a fully healthy Elemental God would be in their home plane.

As for establishing two more Elemental Gods? Although that was quite onerous as well, it was, in truth, far easier.

Elisa herself was the one who devoured the Fire Elemental God. I also possessed a shard of the Earth Elemental Throne in my Frigidwinter Earth, not to mention how there were numerous powerful Earth Elemental Lords like Ainslo the Sculptor who had joined my cause (due to Beifeng). As long as I invested enough into establishing new Earth and Fire Elemental Gods, it was definitely possible to establish two existences that could pass as suitable Elemental Gods.

However, I didn't volunteer to undertake such a task at the conference. Offering timely assistance should be separate from

offering to do something superfluous. I wasn't so foolish as to volunteer myself so quickly for such an obviously arduous task.

"...In that case, let's temporarily set aside the dragons' request. If anyone has a detailed plan for what to do, let us know as quickly as possible."

So, naturally, no result came about after the meeting ended. It was far too difficult—if this was given as a System Quest, instead, it would definitely be a minimum of the Epic rank... No, wait, was I going to jinx myself by saying this?

[Congratulations, Roland Pele. Epic Side Quest: "Establish Two More Elemental Gods, or Slay the Two Remaining Elemental Gods" has now been activated. Quest Requirements: You already know. Quest Reward: You already know. Quest Failure Punishment: You already know.]

"I know, the hell with that! I hate a phrase like 'you already know' more than anything! Is it so hard to clearly say what you mean? I understand? I comprehend already? The hell with that! You have to make people so confused? I don't understand at all!"

Alright then, I could only helplessly accept reality after venting my complaints and voluntarily begin preparing to take on this Epic Quest. Yep, my imagination would run wild when I thought about the "you already know" part of the Quest failure punishment.

"What type of punishment will there be? My System's favorite punishments are those that will make me suffer the most, so what will it do? Permanently turn me into Princess Peach? Make my Luck stat negative for more than a week? Or simply force me to enter one of Omar's bodybuilding contests..."

Sometimes, people had a limitless power of imagination. The things in one's own mind were always the scariest. Even a dragonslaying hero might be scared to death by his own shadow, or a king who had everything might go insane by imagining himself slowly aging and dying.

[...Normally, when people say "you already know" they haven't thought things out entirely yet themselves. Since you've already come up with such appropriate punishments, the Quest failure's punishment shall be all of the above. Thanks for the ideas!]

"You bastard!"

Alright then, with such a powerful authority above me, complaining was useless. Now I had an absolute reason why I absolutely couldn't fail at this new Quest.

Despite me interrupting the Truth Symposium conference midway, they were unable to come to any conclusions in the end. Nor did they resolve the other bothersome issue on their plate.

How were they supposed to deal with the undead? The Undead Emperors still hadn't arrived, and it was now impossible to close the six Undead Plane Dimensional Doors. All that was left was a countdown to when the true battle would break out. Were the mages supposed to rush into the Bardi Empire and establish a frontline base? Orloss would probably laugh his head off at suddenly receiving so much free cannon fodder. The mages could only take things one step at a time.

How were the mages supposed to deal with the Bardi Empire's offer to make peace? If they agreed to make peace, wouldn't that mean that the mages would lose any reason to intervene within the Bardi Empire? But if the mages continued attacking the Bardi Empire with full force, the Bardi Empire would collapse even sooner, making the overall situation even more difficult to deal with. After all, the moment the Bardi Empire collapsed, the Mage Country, which was the biggest neighboring country that the Bardi Empire had, would definitely become the next place where disaster spread.

Once all the archmages at the Truth Symposium learned the truth and plans of the sly old fox Orloss, some bad-tempered archmages were already gritting their teeth and swearing to kill

him if they ever met. However, the pity for them was that for a long time to come, the mages even had to pray for the Bardi Empire to remain as powerful and steady as possible, which would at least help slow down the impending disasters.

What about the dragons' request for assistance that the mages just learned about through me and Halent? That would be dealt with in a later Truth Symposium conference. After all, this was far too difficult a task, and things were already in utter chaos in the Dragon World. It would be tantamount to committing suicide for an ordinary mage to go there and participate in the battle between the giants and the dragons

When I finally returned to Thorn Garden, I discovered that Halent, who gave me all this information, had already left.

"He left without saying anything? Is this a joke? Last time I talked to him, he said that he would wait for me to finish with the Truth Symposium conference."

"...The dragon knight Archduke said that he had many matters to attend to, so he had to leave. I just happened to be here at the time, so he told me to give pass the message to you..."

The person who told me about this was that little girl, Cher. She had been coming here more and more often as of late. Thanks to my repeated ridiculous efforts at pleasing her, the relationship between us seemed to have improved slightly. At the very least, we were capable of normal communication with each other.

Yep, don't all girls love presents? That was why I kept sending her endless gifts, including valuables in such large quantities that they required warehouses to be stored. The moment the mage police station opened their doors, they found a sea of flowers inside, for instance. The other police mages were now looking at me quite strangely. Also...

...Also, Cher still didn't react at all to my presents, and I even mysteriously obtained several more "Oni Chichi" titles of glory

from my System. And then, even the bastards under my command began looking at me strangely...

Cough, all of this had nothing to do with how Evelyn's letter told me that Cher was my "daughter." I only wanted to have a closer relationship with a local mage, and I also wanted to investigate just what exactly could have happened back in the day I forgot about, and just who Evelyn was and what she intended. That was why I sent Cher flowers every day and went to pick her up every afternoon when she got off from work. I definitely didn't have any other thoughts, I swear!

I wasn't sure if that really helped improve her opinion of me, but she accepted my presents. Not only that, I was working quite hard to make sure the police mages wouldn't discover any tax evasion. Harloys interrupted me. "Stop bragging about how it was all you. It's mostly that those bastard subordinates of yours got used to how the police mages here do things, so they've become more difficult to catch as well." Cher also performed fewer investigations on Thorn Garden than before, so, at the very least, she was being a lot more polite with me than previously.

Cher seemed to hesitate as she glanced all around her. It seemed that she still had more to tell me from Halent.

"Relax, nobody is able to eavesdrop on our conversation. Everyone here is someone I trust."

"Archduke Halent told me that the undead have begun their attack on the Bardi Empire and that the situation at Nightrain City is dire. He rushed back to assist them!"

Chapter 316: Spy

"There's a spy among us. Or else why are we always forced to react so passively? The enemy knows about every step the Mage Country is taking."

"You're saying that there's an enemy spy among the archmages with Emblems of Endless Truth that attended the Truth Symposium conference? Who could it be?"

"It's definitely that Blackeye bastard. Don't you see how he's always hiding his face every meeting, never daring to reveal his true appearance?"

"...He's acted that way for several hundred years. Why is it suddenly strange now that you're here?"

"That's even stranger, then. Why could he possibly have to cover his face for several centuries? Perhaps under his mask isn't any normal person. Perhaps he's not even human at all..."

That was my logic, one which I explained to Auntie Amala. Although I was obviously just making stuff up, what I said wasn't completely unreasonable, either. However, Amala apparently didn't quite agree with me. Margaret remained as a bystander and calmly read her book, while Adam snickered in the background.

After the conference, the overall situation in the Cloud Tower began changing. Mystical Blade and several other mage organizations were of the opinion that they should intervene with this more and more chaotic situation before it got out of hand. Naturally, this created several small factions. We had invited Amala from Star Revelation over for a friendly discussion.

However, in our conversation just now, she apparently didn't quite agree with what I said about Blackeye. She looked at me as if I was a scammer and a hoodlum, which... which was correct!

After all, I had no evidence to begin with. I made everything up

that I had told her just now, and I didn't even know if there really was a spy.

I just wanted any excuse to give that Blackeye some trouble. If it turned out in the end that he wasn't a spy, all I had to do was apologize with a "Sorry for mistaking you as a spy, but I'll be giving you trouble in other methods anyways." Hehehe!

Although it seemed like I was just casually chatting with Amala, in a way I was hoping to get her tacit permission. After all, I needed to make sure that Blackeye wouldn't receive outside assistance. As for my plan, what we needed to do was quite simple. While my Second Senior Brother Sandro did his "important stuff," all we had to do was keep Blackeye busy. Having Adam and Margaret help me would be all that I needed.

Of course, if we were able to defeat and kill Blackeye, that would be even better. However, without even mentioning the incredible difficulty of accomplishing that, killing a long-term member of the Truth Symposium right after I joined it wouldn't look too good. A recently joined outsider who immediately went on such a strong offensive would definitely put others on guard. Things would be quite bad if I ended up becoming everyone's biggest enemy.

Our plan was quite direct. Simply find Blackeye wherever he was and then keep pointing at him and calling him a spy. Keep verbally attacking him in a public location. Anger him, and stall him for as long as possible.

And if he really was a spy? Ahaha, I was just casually saying it. After all, I was no famous detective who could jump to such an incredible deduction, being able to point out whoever I disliked as a spy.

"How did you know I was from the Tark Republic?!!"

However, our sudden ambush on Blackeye ended up in exactly such a result. The magical acid not only dissolved Blackeye's magical defenses, it even dissolved his mask that he permanently

wore. Underneath that destroyed mask was a familiar undead species. The soulfire in his eyes didn't need any further explanation. Blackeye was actually a top-level lich!

As for me, I retracted my index finger which was pointing at him and tried my best to remain calm.

After all, I had just shouted "There's only one truth, you're the spy!" at Blackeye, which turned out to be really cool as Blackeye misunderstood me to have evidence on him, causing him to instantly reveal himself and turn on us.

"...How did you all know that I was a spy! My disguise should have been flawless! My fake identity was perfect! I even pretended to need to eat and go to the bathroom just like humans!"

"I can't laugh! I definitely can't laugh!"

I did my very best to pretend to be serious, but I was actually laughing uproariously inside my mind. But if I laughed out loud, everyone would find out that I had only accidentally revealed him as a spy.

This veteran lich had a look of incredible astonishment on his face, still not understanding what could have possibly given him away. Behind him was Adam who was so shocked that he dropped his sword. After all, Adam knew that I had been making all this up just to slander Blackeye. Adam was only here to help me stall him.

"You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law!"

Alright then, since my luck was so good, I might as well keep playing. Since I finished copying Detective Conan's lines, it was now time to pretend to be a policeman and read him his rights.

But judging from the negative energy accruing behind "Blackeye," it was obvious that he was in no mood to join in my fun. In that case, let's skip the trial and go straight to the sentencing instead.

"Law Incantation: Silence!"

This entire area was completely silenced. For a lich mage at Blackeye's level, even if this magic he'd never seen before was effective, it wouldn't last longer than an instant. However, that was more than enough for us.

With the arrival of abnormal silence, Blackeye momentarily paused in surprise. This was an excellent combat opportunity. Adam, who was a veteran fighter with countless battles under his belt, would never miss such a chance.

Although Adam's overall power level had somewhat decreased after he changed to using the thunder element, it had the benefit of multiplying his speed and reactions by several times over. And once a SemiGod warrior like him got into melee range of a lich, with the Great Saint Margaret and her teacher Amala backing him up as support, plus a professional troublemaker like me simply playing it cool and enjoying the show, the result was obvious.

Ten or so seconds later, Blackeye's bones were all over the ground. He was defeated faster than any of us expected.

"Ha, it's the death penalty for you. The death penalty."

Although the Truth Symposium just concluded a conference, the Truth Overseers were summoned to yet another emergency conference right away as the angry archmages all cursed the traitor among them and discussed what to do with Blackeye. I was also delighted to learn that Sandro's plan to rebel and take over the Sword of Order was extremely successful and completed ahead of schedule due to Blackeye's absence. Sandro successfully became the temporary leader of the Sword of Order, the big boss there.

"He's a fake?"

"Yep, he's a fake. But, he's no ordinary fake. That lich was originally an academic mage, as well as a real Myth rank. But rather than saying that he isn't Blackeye, it would be more accurate to say that there was never a person called Blackeye who existed in the first place."

The mages' interrogation of Blackeye soon came up with results. After all, mages had far too many methods to make a person speak all the secrets they knew. Even if that lich was already an undead, there was still no way for him to hide the secrets within his soul. Margaret attended the Truth Symposium conference in my stead and told me about what she learned.

Now that I had uncovered a spy for the Mage Country, it seemed to have helped to make the mages trust me more than before. Even Amala seemed to trust Margaret more as well.

"Blackeye wasn't a single individual. It was more of an identity that the Tark Republic undead used to do what they wanted in the Mage Country. There were various powerful undead acting as Blackeye at different points in time. Of course, they also made sufficient research results and wrote enough research theses to make the name of Blackeye more and more famous as time passed. As for the Blackeye we just captured, that was just a body double."

"Ha, making a Myth-rank lich act as a body double? Who could afford that... wait a moment, only an even higher-level undead could make such a high-ranked lich act as a subordinate and body double. That means there's only one possibility!"

"Yep, that's exactly the possibility I'm thinking of as well. The recent Blackeye is someone you're quite familiar with."

"Aso! Only an Undead Emperor could make such a powerful lich obediently act as a body double. So, what this means is that Aso spent an incredibly long time in the Mage Country? Perhaps the 'Teacher Blackeye' that we met when we were both acolytes here was even Aso himself!"

"Blackeye, who was one of the Truth Overseers and the leader of one of the largest and most powerful mage organizations, Sword of Order, was actually an enemy of the Mage Country all along? This obviously means that all the Mage Country's plans made at the Truth Symposium were known to the Tark Republic all this time.

This is a huge slap to the face to all those mages who pride themselves in their wisdom. You really should have attended this meeting. When the news spread, the archmages were so, so angry. Teacher Amala even joked around and said that 'even an Undead Emperor has spent so long learning here at the Cloud Tower from us, even participating in so many of our research discussions. Perhaps it's our honor to have had such a glorious coworker.'"

Margaret chuckled as she recalled how angry the archmages were at finding out the news.

"Well, I'd say that Amala's quite right, don't you agree? After all, Aso was an Undead Emperor. Perhaps it's even possible that he was here to study magic at the same time we were."

I nodded in agreement with Margaret's words. In fact, this was perfectly understandable. Who said that undead couldn't disguise themselves and come study magic at the Cloud Tower?

Looking at it from the enemy's standpoint, if I was an undead who wanted to find a place to lay low and do some spying, as long as I didn't need to worry about being exposed, hiding in the Mage Country would obviously be the best choice. One could do whatever research they wanted in privacy here, not to mention exchange all sorts of ideas with other mages. The undead would even be able to obtain information directly from their enemy.

"Is there any other news besides this? It's rare to catch such a high-level spy."

"Ah, right, the Truth Symposium told me that you have their gratitude. 'As expected of that Roland, he actually uncovered such a deeply hidden mole.' Did you really have some information that you worked with when you uncovered him? Did Aso leave you any information about this?"

"...Do you really feel that Aso would do something so foolish?"

"In that case, as I expected, you must have just made a lucky

guess."

Margaret nodded, certain that I was just lucky, before tossing me a tattered diary. This diary was written in the undead language. I casually flipped to the last few pages and instantly understood why all the archmages at the Truth Symposium were so enraged. Luckily for me, they all misunderstood and thought that I had actually uncovered a spy for them through my investigations, rather than it being a fortunate coincidence.

"...I've already given the information over to Emperor Aso. These foolish old buffoons are still under the impression that this world belongs to them. They'll never expect that we're almost finished with our preparations. It's about time for us undead to make our return, bringing death to all the living..."

"...That idiot, Sandro, is actually contacting the other vice leaders of the Sword of Order, investigating who I really am! Damn it, could it be that the constant leak of information is causing them to suspect me...?"

"...Today, I saw that person... Yongye. As expected of the former Undead Emperor, as expected of the powerful individual who defeated Emperor Aso. Simply passing by and exchanging glances, his look was filled with enmity and vigilance. Could it be that he's already discovered something..."

"...The shadow guards brought some information to me. Sandro and Roland are secretly meeting with each other. It would seem that I'll probably be exposed soon. I need to hurry up and send out the newest information right away..."

Alright then, in a way, this lich truly deserved what he got. He actually dared to write such things in his diary and carry it on him?

"Eh?"

Suddenly, I paused as I flipped through the pages. At the bottom

of each page was a number. Anyone else looking at it would probably be baffled at why there would mysteriously be a number on each page. However, I had received a gift of knowledge from Aso and knew that this was his personal code.

"Mage... tower... at... 376... Abo... Street? What's this? Aso's personal research laboratory!"

Chapter 317: Mage Towers

There were various types of mage towers. An example was the fortress-type, constructed especially for the battlefield. These fortress-type mage towers were rather simple in design and were typically designed to be shared by many mages. There were also research laboratory-type mage towers. These would belong to an individual mage and usually contained all of the mage's accumulated treasures. But any type of mage tower would always be a super dangerous area.

Having a personal mage tower meant having one's own world. Not only would the mage tower massively increase the mage's combat power, all sorts of esoteric and high-level magic spells would become much easier to cast due to the support of all the expensive magical ingredients, dimensional portals, batteries, and so on that a mage stored in their mage tower.

It could be said that possessing a personal mage tower was the life goal of most normal mages. But since it was a life goal, most people would never realize it. As for why? It was a simple reason, actually. Mage towers were far too expensive to construct.

A large battery capable of creating an energy cycle required several thousand kilograms of mithril and other expensive magical metals—and that was only for the outer layer. A water elemental pool would require a constant dimensional portal to the Water Elemental Plane. As for personal libraries that represented a mage's accumulated wisdom? It would be considered a loss of face without at least a thousand or two thousand books inside. Meanwhile, one magical textbook cost the same as what it would cost to purchase an entire store. No ordinary merchant or domain lord would be able to even afford a single room in a mage tower. Only the rich royalty of each country would be able to afford it.

The result of mages wanting their own personal mage towers was just like people who worked and saved their salaries in my

previous world, wanting to buy a house. Every day, those people calculated their own salaries and how much they should save, all to buy the house that they wanted. However, they tended to lose in the end to their consumption habits and the severe reality of society. Perhaps, three years ago, they dreamed about purchasing a 3 bedroom, 2 bathroom house, but it was then downgraded to wanting a 2 bedroom, 1 bathroom house, and finally, by the time they were originally supposed to have bought a house, they would find that all they could afford was a three square meter birdcage.

Of course, there were also easy ways to obtain mage towers, such as scamming a rich person—cough—I meant working under a rich person, working as a personal magical consultant; something along those lines. Or, for those that were powerful but not rich enough, they could simply work for some country's royalty and receive the nice-sounding title of "royal mage." Or, they could join some military force, which would give the mage access to a fortress mage tower. But no matter what a mage chose, the end result would be a loss of freedom—perhaps even a change in their area of research and daily habits.

When I was at the underground base in the Auland Empire, that incredibly extravagant high-level mage tower there had truly made me jealous. Although the seven artillery-type mage towers on the Borealis were constructed of top-quality materials as well, they counted as only a half-completed product which could only improve the mages' power levels; the energy sources weren't self-sufficient. Performing research in those mage towers was also impossible.

"Hmm, I'd really love to have my own personal mage tower."

Yep, even I didn't have one, but the main reason was because I didn't really need one. After all, undead magic focused on ingredients more than anything, and even their towers would be Soul Summoning Towers, instead. As for ice magic—cough—cough—let's talk about something else.

[Actually, I have blueprints for some of the most powerful mage tower designs (I strongly recommend the Floating Island or Volcano types). But for you, even if you build a mage tower, wouldn't it be useless? Even if you use a supercomputer, performing the four basic arithmetic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division will still be the same. An elementary school student like you should just obediently use an abacus.]

"You should have told me earlier! I do need those blueprints!"

As was my habit, I ignored my System's sarcasm. The Floating Island mage tower type had long since been lost to history. A mobile mage tower would definitely be incredibly useful, while the Volcano type mage tower could absorb magma and lava as a limitless source of mana. It would even have additional power when casting fire magic. As long as one established a Volcano mage tower in a critical location and gave it a fire archmage, this single tower would be able to fend off an entire country's army by itself.

The mage organization with the best technology in constructing mage towers was the Seven-Colored Tower. Not only were they the best at elemental magic, they were also experts in mage tower construction. Archmage Antonio from this organization even possessed a small Volcano Island mage tower, which was incredibly cool. Not even dragons dared to go anywhere close to his mage tower... but it was also incredibly costly in its upkeep. It was said that Antonio was one of the poorest archmages because he needed to use almost the entirety of his income to maintain his special mage tower.

[Even if you can't use them, you intend to sell them to make money? No problem. You can exchange for any Legendary mage tower blueprint for 50,000 Fate Points. The blueprint on how to construct the parts that the mage towers are constructed from will cost you 10,000 Fate Points. I have Antonio's mage tower as well if you want that one. That's a SemiGod-rank mage tower, so it'll cost

you 500,000 Fate Points. But my advice is that even if you purchase this from me, you probably won't be able to sell it to anyone. After all, that particular mage tower requires a 'small fire infused half-elemental island' as one of the materials in its construction, which is incredibly difficult to obtain.]

The System instantly saw through my intentions, but I didn't feel embarrassed at all. Instead, I asked my System to show me a list of everything I could exchange for. The technology behind mage tower construction would always be some archmage's personal secret or a magical mystery lost in history. How could I possibly pass up on such an opportunity?

A mobile research laboratory where one wouldn't even need to go out for food and drink? That was the dream of every hermit mage!

"Why do you have such a function now? Aren't all the products I can exchange for typically ridiculously expensive and extravagant or some pitfalls that specialize in making people suffer?"

[You can always exchange for new technologies from the current or previous generations. This is a technology that's already been mass produced, hence decreasing its overall effect on karma. The previous generation's technology's influence on karma has also decreased due to the new generation's technologies, so the price has decreased as well. Ten years ago, I would have charged you a minimum of 3,000,000 Fate Points for such technologies. Now, you can afford all of this. That's why, you know?]

This time, it seemed that my System wasn't intentionally trying to make me suffer. This "you know" was one I really understood. Basically, the System was capable of allowing me to afford this technology, which meant that this technology was already being used elsewhere? Was it some human empire or some visitors from other planes? No, this technology was already invented in the mortal plane, so it had to be local. And, only an extremely rich and ancient species would be able to use such ancient technologies and mass produce mage towers like these.

"So the most probable ones in the end are the elves? They've been acting quite strange as of late. No, there's also those ancient artifacts that are coming out of the garbage piles of history. They also have the possibility of possessing such ancient mage tower technologies."

But right now, the most important part for me was to hurriedly rifle through the System's list of exchange options, searching for my targets. If there was an appropriate price, I wanted to create my personal mage tower as well.

"...This, this, and this one!"

[120,000 Fate Points please, thank you very much.]

"Are you joking with me? These are only common parts required for mage towers. I only want these to research the technologies first, and I haven't even decided on what type of mage tower I want. I didn't even purchase any mage tower blueprints. Why is the price so expensive?"

[So you don't want them anymore?]

"I'll buy them!"

How could I let such an excellent opportunity pass me by? I grit my teeth and accepted the exchange, which emptied my wallet. I no longer dared to look at the even more attractive and expensive options.

[You're not going to keep looking? There are even better ones for sale.]

"Hmph, I won't be moved if I don't look, and I won't buy anything if I'm not moved. As long as I don't go outside, I won't be spending money. Do you think I'm an idiot? I'll have to cut off my hand if I buy anything else."

[I also have Aso's mage tower blueprint here. Aren't you going there soon? Are you sure that you want to go adventuring in an S-ranked difficult dungeon without even purchasing the map first?

Let me ask one last time, are you going to buy?]

"I—I—I'm an idiot. I guess I'll just have to cut off my hand!"

A Three-Colored Tower was the mage tower type that Aso possessed on Abo Street. This was the newest technology from the Seven-Colored Tower. It was a byproduct of the Seven-Colored Tower's research into elemental magic and goal to create the "ultimate elemental magic item."

This Three-Colored Tower possessed two support towers and two elemental pools within. As long as the archmage had a sufficient amount of power to control the entire tower, it was the equivalent of having two additional equally powerful archmages assist him in casting spells at the same time, not to mention that the spells were of different elements. Moreover, these two additional towers acting as archmages would have almost identical mana waves to the main archmage and were also capable of receiving the magical burden of casting spells, which allowed for multi-elemental powerful attack magic.

An actual Seven-Colored Tower only existed in legends. In theory, it would be able to combine all four elemental magics, Order Divine Arts, Chaos Divine Arts, and the archmage's own magic all into one. This was one of the Seven-Colored Tower 's penultimate goals, and it was why they named themselves so. However, I knew that even by the time the world ended in the game's history, they only managed to invent a Four-colored Tower. They didn't even successfully combine all the elemental magics together, much less add Order and Chaos Divine Arts into the mix.

The Three-Colored Tower was a typical mage tower for combat. It had an effective attack range of approximately ten street blocks. Aso had constructed and hidden such a Mage Tower right in the middle of the city of Arlo. It seemed slightly frightening if one thought about why he would construct it here and what his goal was.

Currently, we were standing in front of Aso's mage tower which had a magical disguise as a ramshackle building. I was secretly astonished at how perfect this illusion magic was. There were many people walking on the street, but not a single person stopped here for even a second. Their gazes would automatically slide elsewhere, all an effect of the illusion magic that would keep away anyone not intentionally looking for this place.

"AXH... THF... LKK!"

I incanted Aso's password, which removed the illusion magic in a flash of light. A tall, pitch-black mage tower appeared before us, with the large, gargoyle-adorned door opening up. The interior was pitch-dark, as if it was a void that desired to devour everything.

Of course, all the people on the street were scared by this mage tower's sudden appearance. A bakery owner that was next door to Aso's mage tower saw a "new building" suddenly rise into the clouds right next to his own store, which shocked him so much that he dropped his freshly baked bread all over the ground.

"This place feels like a death trap."

From a certain standpoint, all the bystanders' instinctive reaction to Aso's mage tower was absolutely correct. Even I could sense that it wouldn't be so easy to simply exit again after entering.

Since archmages were typically complete hermits that never went out from their mage towers if they could help it, all the treasures they collected over their lifetime as well as all their research results would be inside. Even for those mages who knew they were at the end of their lifespan, there were incredibly few that had a way of thinking along the lines of "It would be such a pity for all these treasures and research results to die with me; I want to give them back to society." It was far more common to place traps in one's own mage tower to kill off any would-be robbers.

Most mages were the selfish type. They had attitudes of "Even if I can't use it anymore, I'd rather leave my things to gather dust instead of giving them to you" or "Even if I die and go to hell, I'm having all of my collection come with me." They would always use all their knowledge of magic to construct all sorts of traps and defensive magic spells. Most of these spells would be the automated type that would remain active even after their deaths.

Without a map and walkthrough, entering an unfamiliar mage tower would be nigh fatal. It was the same for SemiGods; perhaps a forced teleportation trap would be unable to kill them, but it could still make a SemiGod feel like crying because it might take several decades to return home after being teleported to some random plane.

Although it was typically profitable to plunder a mage tower, very few normal adventurers would dare accept such a quest. It was practically the norm for there to be life-threatening traps inside. The few high-ranked adventurers that dared to accept such quests ended up dead very quickly.

A mage tower's danger was directly proportional to the owner's power level. A Saint-ranked mage's tower would be capable of making a SemiGod have a headache, so as for an Undead Emperor's mage tower... well, let me just put it this way: if I wanted to send any of my enemies to their doom, one method would be to tell them about this mage tower and simply hide the information and identity of the original owner.

"First squad, enter."

I stopped Adam who was eager to head in and had a group of summoned elemental creatures enter the tower first. And then... well, there was no more and then, because in less than one minute, all the soul connections to those elemental creatures were severed.

"Oh my, there's definitely something in there. Second squad, enter."

"I refuse!"

Fine then, my silly cat refused to send in more fodder. My magical pet actually wasn't giving me face, which was something that defied a mage's common sense. Although everyone else with me had gotten used to Harloys being like this, Cher, who had come along with us by my invitation, had a look of astonishment.

"What's the matter? All you need to do is send in some of your clones. It's not like it'll affect your main body."

"Ridiculous, it won't affect my main body? Ever since I became 'alive,' all of my clones are alive now as well and can feel pain. All their deaths will be instantly felt by me through their soul connections. I have no desire to repeatedly experience their deaths. I just sent three of my clones to their deaths in that first squad. Do you know what it feels like to be stomped to death, to die from falling four thousand meters, and to die of asphyxiation by teleportation to a plane without any breathable air?"

"...Then, will you also feel it if someone touches your clones? I suddenly thought of quite an improper situation."

"You can try if you want. My clones are capable of growing teeth as well."

And so, I exchanged glares with my cat, neither of us giving way. Finally, I used my ultimate trump card.

"You've been in the Mage Country for quite a while as well. How about I use the magical pet contract to force you to give me your mage tower?"

"Ptui! Just try it. I'm not afraid."

"Hah, so your mage tower must not be here... Ah, look! There's a large flying rat behind you!"

"...Isn't that just a bat? I'm not a real cat so I'm not interested in such a thing at all. Also, do you really think that such a stupid way of trying to get me to look will work? You're definitely intending

on tossing me inside Aso's mage tower the moment I turn to look. Hmph, I'm already used to this trick of yours. I saw through you long ago... Ahhh! Where did this large white bat come from!"

The silly cat waved her claws and fangs as she struggled, but the large bat still took her inside Aso's mage tower as it flew right inside. All we could hear was an ear-piercing screech: "This is cat abuse!!"

I turned around and glanced at Beifeng who was all proud of himself and nodded in satisfaction. One of his little companions had done something for me yet again. All my other companions were laughing and chatting with each other as they listened to the silly cat's screams, while the outsider, Cher, got quite worried for Harloys' sake.

"Will she really be alright?"

"Relax, if Harloys the All-Knowing is unable to deal with whatever's inside, none of us here will be able to, either. Besides, I trust her."

"She'll really be alright even with all the traps inside?"

"Yep. Until she can take her revenge on me, she'll never die. As long as she's willing to withstand some discomfort and continually use some clones to test everything before her, her main body won't even come to any harm."

From inside the tower, there was now a screech of "Roland, when I get out of here, just you wait to see what I'm going to do to you!" This seemed to be the best explanation for Cher. And hearing how spirited Harloys sounded, it definitely seemed like I didn't need to worry about her at all.

"Milord, my cutie #3 has returned. He tossed Lady Harloys on the third floor of Aso's tower."

"Yep, we'll wait half an hour before entering. By the way, if the silly cat leaves any messages behind that some place is absolutely

safe, then that place is definitely a trap."

"Relax, Milord. Even if you don't say this, we all understand. Still, please don't get us involved in your fights with each other! We'll all die!"

Chapter 318: Returning to Life

If Roland had the time to return to the Forest of Dreams across the waters, he wouldn't recognize it—it had changed by a significant amount.

The trees had grown taller, touching the clouds. There were even more strange green plants of all sorts. However, the biggest change of all didn't have anything to do with "nature."

"Ha! I managed to defeat a mutant zombie today. That was 10 Justice Points for me!"

"Nice, but I think there are only three Lesser Fruits of Strength remaining that can permanently increase your Strength stat. If you don't hurry and have enough points to exchange for one soon, you'll have to wait until next month."

"There are only three left? When I checked yesterday, there were still five of them. It's only the tenth of the month. Why are they decreasing at such a quick rate?"

"Well, the Explosive Bear mercenary group returned with a great harvest. They exchanged for two Lesser Fruits of Strength, one for their leader and one for their main shield warrior. Ugh! I'm so jealous!"

"Damn it! I need to hurry! I'm still 200 Justice Points short. Else I'm just going to have to wait for next month."

The biggest and most obvious difference from two months ago was that this place had become incredibly "popular." The Forest of Dreams was no longer a place for only the wood spirits.

Once the adventurers' guilds in Eich learned about the items available in exchange for Justice Points, even a disaster like an Undead Calamity would be unable to scare away these adventurers who risked their lives for treasures and riches. Temporarily constructed houses packed to the brim with people, with even

more tents in the forests. Several hundred to several thousand people streamed into the Forest of Dreams by sea every day.

Seeing how popular this place was becoming, some of the early arriving adventurers even opened up their own taverns and hotels with the assistance of the wood spirits. Other adventurers started other businesses. Mercenary and adventurers' guilds opened up their own branches here, while smiths and alchemists opened up shops as well.

After Nightrain City was attacked by the undead, the adventurers in the Forest of Dreams received recognition from the Bardi government as well. This was a method for the Bardi Empire to reduce the pressure on their frontlines. Slaying the undead here would not only help these adventurers obtain Justice Points, but they would even obtain reward money from the Bardi government.

Having two sources of income from the same job, not to mention how the Forest of Dreams was constantly able to produce miracle potions capable of permanently increasing one's base stats? Countless powerful individuals were attracted to the Forest of Dreams and came to earn points and gold.

The undead were quite frustrated about this. It was quite annoying for them to be forced to fight at Nightrain City while simultaneously having to maintain a defense line at the Forest of Dreams. However, attacking the western Forest of Dreams was obviously impossible so they could only choose to further increase the pressure on Nightrain City and the dragon knights there. After all, that was their main target.

Since the undead finally declared war on the Bardi Empire, the people of Bardi started the undead extermination that they had been long prepared for. All the undead in the royal capital were immediately eliminated, and both sides had abandoned their former alliance. Aso's death caused the Tark Republic to lose control over the Bardi government's higher levels. So, in the end, the Tark Republic could only attempt at taking the land they

wanted by force.

The main undead armies of six Undead Planes that had tens of thousands of years to accumulate in numbers and training weren't anything that "Contract Heroes," who were only scattered individuals or small teams, could deal with. Even scouting missions would commonly end with injuries and dead adventurers.

However, the new undead soldiers that continuously teleported to the mortal plane became the best targets for the adventurers. There were also some adventurers that teamed up into large squadrons that rivaled even military squadrons and could attempt at fighting against smaller squadrons of undead.

These "hunters" that had gone crazy over the potential benefits indeed caused a great amount of trouble for the undead, forcing them to leave a significant portion of their forces to defend against the Forest of Dreams' adventurers. It also helped significantly reduce the pressure on Nightrain City. Many adventurers also greatly benefited from the items they were able to exchange for via Justice Points by slaying undead.

Of course, not every person was so lucky.

"What happened to them? They're so pitiful..."

"Shh, don't let them hear you, they probably don't want your pity. They're from the 'Eye of Justice' mercenary group, which was unlucky enough to meet with a Bone Dragon-riding skeleton general yesterday. Those two are the only survivors. Even their leader, the Gold-ranked Holy Knight named Ostia, perished. They're truly pitiful."

A tarp was temporarily covering the ground. There, a young human warrior missing one of his arms clutched a blonde female's head and sobbed miserably, while a cat tribe female thief was tied on to the back of the young human warrior—her only surviving companion. This cat thief was missing her right eye and right leg, and the blank expression on her still-beautiful face made it obvious

that she had lost the will to live on.

These two remaining survivors from the Eye of Justice had bandaged injuries that were still bleeding. The path they took to return here was covered with streaks of blood.

"The Eye of Justice is finished..."

The somewhat famous Holy Knight mercenary leader Ostia had died in battle, and all of the group's main forces had become corpses that weren't even recovered. This legendary mercenary group from White Katlan was now finished. The two remaining novices that survived were unable to carry on the flag of Eye of Justice, not to mention how they were both seriously injured to the point of probably having to be forced to retire from being mercenaries.

However, the young human male warrior, whose name was Kait, didn't seem to think so. After crying enough, he wiped away his tears, bit into a bandage, and redid the dressing on his missing left arm's stump. His teary eyes seemed to be burning up with an inferno inside that indicated his determination to obtain revenge, as well as the heavy responsibility now upon him.

He handed his leader's head, the blonde female head he was just carrying, to his cat thief companion. Then, he headed to the Church of Law where all the quests were issued, intending to report on their own failed quest. However, someone blocked his way.

"With how seriously injured you are, you probably won't be able to work on any more quests. Still, it won't do to have you dying of starvation, unable to work. How about joining us? We'll take you in."

A mercenary group greeted Kait at this moment, seemingly making him a kind offer. But, for those who really understood what this meant, this wasn't anything like appreciating his tenacity or anything like that. It was more of a nefarious way of

taking advantage of the weak when they were down.

"Those guys are intending to take this chance to annex the Eye of Justice mercenary group into their own group? Making a big profit off of the dead? How disgusting."

Even though the Eye of Justice was almost completely destroyed, that didn't mean that the mercenary group was now useless. The group's reputation and fame were the greatest wealth of all. After all, its past glorious history and record of successful quests undertaken were the best way to make potential clients believe in them and pay well. As for material riches, most mercenary groups would keep an account with the mercenary guild and even store some weapons, equipment, and items there as well. These would all be accumulated over countless years by mercenary groups.

"Don't be impulsive and confront them. That's the Slock mercenary group from Auland, or perhaps it would be more accurate to call them a bandit group. They have a terrible reputation. It would seem that they want to get rid of their infamous past and adopt a much better reputed group's name."

A veteran mercenary stopped his companion who was filled with anger at this act of injustice. Taking advantage of a nearly destroyed mercenary group was obviously breaking a taboo, too—it was considered highly unethical by almost everyone. However, the Slock mercenary group had arrived with roughly forty or fifty well-armed, well-equipped individuals. Even if these two chatting mercenaries were dissatisfied with the Slock mercenary group's actions, they didn't dare to intervene.

But even though they didn't dare, someone else dared. In fact, this could even be called her responsibility.

"Please step aside."

The young-sounding chilly tone caused everyone to pause in surprise, while her bright red hair gave everyone a deep impression. Everyone who was standing around, watching what

was going on, immediately made way for her, as if she was a hero from legend.

This seemingly weak and small young wood spirit girl had executed a mercenary three days ago for committing the crimes of robbery and murder. She had such a calm expression as she slowly sliced off pieces of the criminal's flesh and kept inquiring as to how he felt. She collected the criminal's blood in vials and watched him finally die with such a calm expression that gave all who saw her an incredibly deep impression.

This was Temperance Samantha, the first leader of the wood spirits, the one who'd now obtained the nickname "Bloody Rose."

The wood spirit girl was currently standing there with a calm expression as always, and the Slock mercenary group's members hurriedly stepped aside for her.

Her punishments for all the outsiders who dared to commit crimes here helped everyone learn who was truly the biggest boss in the Forest of Dreams. Anyone unlucky enough to get on the wood spirits' bad side had learned the hard way. Not a single person of the Slock mercenary group wanted to taste the punishment of being hung upside-down several hundred meters high from the trees for three consecutive days and nights.

Meanwhile, the young one-armed mercenary named Kait adamantly stood there, without any signs of fear or hesitation in his eyes. A look of approval flashed in Samantha's eyes before she calmly asked him a question.

"How are the results of your quest to patrol sector D2?"

"...The quest has been completed. A secret undead scout base was discovered. This scout base had two small teams of black armor death knights and a skeleton general at the level of an Undead Lord. There was even a Bone Dragon. Our leader... Captain Ostia said that the undead's goal is probably to scout out all the routes by which we enter and exit the forest so that they can more easily

ambush and slaughter us."

Hearing this, everyone present felt pity for how unfortunate the Eye of Justice had been. This was only supposed to be a normal daily quest about patrolling, but the Eye of Justice just happened to run into an Undead Lord who had constructed a scouting base. No wonder the entire mercenary group was almost annihilated. Yet the fortunate part amongst all the misfortune was that there were still two survivors who managed to escape and tell everyone the news.

"Excellent job. Your mercenary group shall receive 100 Justice Points in your account as promised, along with the agreed-upon resources. Where's your captain?"

Kait turned his head to look at the beautiful golden head. He bit his lips so hard that they started bleeding, while his single remaining hand gripped the flag of the Eye of Justice even tighter.

"From today onwards, I am now the captain and leader of the Eye of Justice, honored Lady Samantha. I am the Bronze-ranked Holy Knight Kaid, willing to serve your cause."

However, Samantha shook her head.

"Ostia was the one who agreed to undertake this quest. The Justice Points and resources can only be given to her."

"But..."

Kait suddenly became quite anxious upon hearing this, while plenty of "smart people" around him already discerned the "truth."

"I never expected that despite the wood spirits' cute outer appearances, they 'd be so fiendish and clever. She's intending to go back on her word."

However, nobody expected that Samantha wasn't intending to go back on her word at all. Instead, Samantha pointed at the blonde female's head and said:

"I'll just talk to her directly, instead."

She beckoned with her finger, causing a tattered white mist to float up from the severed head. In the Forest of Dreams, any souls that wanted to return to the River Styx required the permission of the dimensional will.

Any regrets or unresolved desires could cause a soul that died in battle to be unwilling to leave this world. Not only that, unresolved desires would commonly cause human souls to go insane. Ostia had already died, and her soul was in a state of confusion and chaos. It was obvious that it would be impossible to communicate with her soul. And if Ostia was simply left alone, it was highly likely that her soul would eventually turn into an undead.

"There's no way to talk to her like that..."

Along with Samantha's soft muttering, a flower suddenly sprouted and covered the soul which took the form of broken white mist. Several seconds later, a green light glowed in this area as the Cycle of Reincarnation was activated. What happened next was that a familiar voice spoke up from the flower.

"Eh, didn't I already die...?"

"Captain!!"

The female cat thief who had such a numb expression instantly came alive again in excitement as she struggled to crawl over to the flower. Kait also had an expression of utter astonishment. Tears of joy slid down his face.

"How is this possible!?"

But when the flower retreated back into the ground, what remained wasn't the same tall beauty that they knew as Ostia. Instead, they saw a blonde young girl with pointy ears and shiny eyes that indicated her species—a wood spirit.

"Ostia, the service of reincarnating you into a wood spirit

requires a payment of 50,000 Justice Points. There's an insufficient number of Justice Points in your mercenary group's account. Seeing as how you're now one of us, I shall allow you to go into debt with us."

"Sister Ostia!"

The female cat thief was overjoyed beyond belief and jumped into the blonde young wood spirit's arms, her tears and injuries' blood flowing together. Kait who stood by the side had was moved as well, while all the spectators were filled with astonishment. A service like "revival from the dead" was directly breaking the Cycle of Reincarnation, and nobody here had ever heard of such a thing being possible.

Clap.

Samantha helped out to the end with her good deeds. She clapped her hands, causing a dark green light to envelop the two surviving Eye of Justice members' injuries and missing limbs. When the light faded, they now possessed newly-grown limbs that were as white and pristine as untouched jade. These handicapped warriors returned to their healthiest conditions.

These two formerly injured warriors were too busy getting excited over their captain's revival in another form to even notice that their injuries had already healed.

Samantha knew that now wasn't the time to have a discussion with them. She ignored all the surprise and disbelief around her and simply left.

Soon after this, options to exchange Justice Points for healing magic from the power of the forest as well as being reborn after death as a wood spirit appeared on the list of exchangeable goods. Healing any serious injury only required a large amount of Justice Points. However, the being reborn after death option seemed to have incredibly difficult requirements.

"50,000 Justice Points is whatever, but it's only available for females with no criminal records? That limits the number of people that can receive this by so much. And what does it even mean that the wood spirits have to agree and approve of you? Basically, it's saying that those wood spirits will decide everything."

"Well, take a look. It says in fine print below that 'If there are males that don't object living on in such a different form, that's fine as well. But in order to avoid any moral confusion, any males that are reborn from this service will be marked with a magical tattoo that indicates their past gender."

Even though the requirements of 50,000 Justice Points, no criminal record, and having to gain the wood spirits' approval were quite strict, many powerful individuals were still going crazy about the idea. It was already common knowledge now that wood spirits were a Silver Species, and many powerful individuals that wanted to reach the peak were even willing to start over from the very beginning. There was an even greater number of powerful individuals nearing the end of their lifespans who were attracted here by this option. Of course, the fact that there would be no male wood spirits scared away plenty of normal males... but fine, it had to be admitted that there were also many abnormal males that came here precisely because of this reason.

"Thank you so much! We are willing to serve you in any way you wish as long as you will it."

Samantha, however, shook her head upon hearing Ostia's gratitude.

"I didn't do anything worthy of your thanks."

Samantha expressionlessly left the first new member of her species who had been a former human and retained her original memories. Samantha mysteriously recalled the words that Roland had told her before leaving.

"You want to know how to best manage all the outsiders that are about to arrive? ...Since the adventurers are the equivalent of game players, it'll be for the best that the wood spirits simply act as NPCs. This is both the safest and the most beneficial way. You only need to pay out a little to make them all work their hardest for you."

"You don't understand what an NPC is? Hmm, the most important part of being an NPC is to remain 'neutral.' Basically, you need to keep your distance from the outsiders and treat them all equally and fairly."

"You can't do that? I'm not asking you all to be truly unemotional. Just pretend to be unemotional on the surface. Samantha, your face that doesn't even know what a smile is makes you by far the best one for the job. At the time, all you need to do is personally take care of any issues that crop up yourself. That'll definitely be the most effective."

Judging by people's reactions so far, Roland had been correct. However, Samantha felt a wave of displeasure wash over her. She turned around and looked at the mirror on the wall in her room, doing her best to squeeze out a smile.

However, thirty seconds later, she discovered that her face was going numb. So, she instead used her left and right index fingers to stretch out her mouth and forcefully make a smile.

"Smile!"

The red-haired girl made a distorted smile at herself in the mirror. Right at this time, another face appeared next to hers in the mirror: Humility, Jill of the Three Virtues, who had an expression of despair and disbelief, as if the world was ending.

"Sister! Were you cursed by something!? If you're feeling uncomfortable, you should have told me!"

Alright then, the rest that happened was simply a daily

occurrence: the cold older sister chasing around her simpleminded younger sister.

To all our non-gamers out there, a non-player character (NPC) is a video game character that is controlled by the game's artificial intelligence (AI) instead of a gamer.

Chapter 319: Ridiculously Rich

"Aso is definitely insane!"

"Agreed!"

"Agreed!"

My companions concurred with my words, while a tremendously large iron ball rolled behind us...

"Such a cliché and outdated trap. He's definitely an old artifact from the previous generation."

I insulted Aso as I ran and finally managed to find a slight indentation in the wall that I was able to hide in as the iron ball rolled by.

Why didn't I simply smash the iron ball to pieces? Damn it! It was actually coated with a layer of top-quality adamantine! Don't even mention shattering it, just slightly being brushed by it would feel like a train crashed into you... What? You're saying I should use a fantasy world analogy, instead? Fine then, it would feel like having a battering ram which was enhanced to +12 smashing right into your head. Even if you had a cockroach's survivability, all that would remain of you would be little pieces.

"He's definitely a pervert with mental issues! That's the only possible reason he would place all these damned traps. What normal mage would turn their own residence into such a trap-infested location?"

I finally had time after escaping the iron ball to drag the silly cat who was biting on my head as always off my head. She was gritting her teeth and cursing Aso's name as I did so.

"Damn him so much! He deserves to remain unloved for eternity! How is this place a mage tower? This is clearly a death trap competition."

When we first entered, the first three floors of the mage tower were quite easy to deal with. But, the further we progressed, the stranger things became.

"Please solve this mathematical equation within 20 seconds and provide an accurate answer. If you fail to solve this equation within the time limit, a trap mechanism will be activated..."

Well, it was only a six-digit multiplication problem. Mages were required to have excellent logical processing and calculative abilities, so I understood why there would be such a question in here. Not to mention, we had the "Demon Professor" Harloys with us so such a math problem wouldn't possibly defeat us!

"...And after you find the correct answer to that math question, please sing the climax of "Ah, the Beautiful Sun!" three times in a row. You aren't allowed to have more than three off-key notes, and you aren't allowed to make more than two mistakes."

"The hell! Aso was also a fan of opera singing? Could this get any more ridiculous!"

"...17, 16..."

From a certain standpoint, the spirit of the mage tower was like a mage's incarnation. A mechanical voice droned the twenty second time limit, but it was still seemed to be filled with wicked pleasure, as if someone was watching us and enjoying the show. It really felt quite unpleasant.

"...34294204242 is the answer, hurry up and sing! Didn't you receive Aso's inheritance?"

Harloys solved the six-digit multiplication problem at an astonishingly high speed. But, when she hurriedly urged me to begin singing, I could tell that all her anxiety was faked. Her eyes had an expression of delight at being able to enjoy this spectacle.

"...Just because I received his magical inheritance doesn't mean I received his music inheritance! Don't count on me for singing. Sing

your sister!"

"How did you know that my sister is a great singer?"

Before we even managed to argue for long, the spirit of the tower, which was acting as the host, returned.

"...13, 1, 0!"

"It skipped all the seconds in the middle? Could it get any eviler?!"

The silly cat and I said the exact same retort in unison. Before we even finished our retort, that incredibly evil spirit of the mage tower answered us.

"You're complaining about not giving you the promised amount of countdown time? I'll have you know that the shortest ever successful record of singing the climax of 'Ah, the Beautiful Sun' three times in a row took 5 minutes and 30 seconds! Even if I gave you two extra minutes, you wouldn't have been able to accomplish it!"

Fine then, at least Aso knew that this was too difficult of a task to begin with, or perhaps simply an impossible one that wasn't meant to be solved. Before we could even argue with the spirit of the mage tower, a panel opened up in the ceiling and dumped freezing ice water on us. However, what awaited us after this challenge were even more ridiculous ones.

"...Two-person three-legged ballet dancing? Not only that, it has to be on top of bamboo stakes? Does it count if I tie the cat to my shoe?"

"...Three embarrassing or humiliating stories about my past that can make someone cry in sympathy? Not only three, I can even tell thirty! What? I'm also required to reenact the scenes? Dream on! Just activate whatever trap there is already."

"...A beauty contest for men while wearing bikinis? Never! Come, just show me what the trap is this time."

"...A tongue-twister that's composed of many different languages? I'll do it. No matter if it's the immemorial elven language, dragon language, or dwarven language, I've mastered them all! What? This tongue twister even involves thirty-two different dialects? No problem, there are far more Chinese dialects! I've got this!"

And so, we shamelessly proceeded through the tower's challenges, which firmed our resolve about one thing—no matter what, we were going to find and destroy the spirit of this mage tower!

"By the way, is it normally this troublesome to go through a mage tower?"

"No, normal situations would be that we'd be dealing with an anti-invader, full onslaught destruction mode. Or, a friendly mode for receiving welcomed guests. We obviously activated some sort of strange mode instead."

Everyone instantly looked at me. They apparently recalled the words I incanted that allowed us to enter.

"Oh, so that incantation must have been to activate the mage tower's inheritance trial to test our worthiness to receive this place —silly cat, stop biting me!!"

Alright then, my attempt at acting innocent ended up failing. Everyone had expressions of "It's all your fault." The silly cat's ability to jump through the air and accurately bite me was also improving by the day.

"Well, it's such a rare chance. Since this is apparently an inheritance trial, it would be quite nice to be able to receive a complete mage tower that's in one piece."

At first, I thought that it would merely be a trial testing our magical knowledge and techniques, perhaps with only a few personality tests mixed in. Since Harloys and I were both here, it

shouldn't have been difficult. However, nobody expected just how "difficult" the challenges were.

And since we came to the conclusion that it was possible to obtain this mage tower, I became unwilling to use any large-scale destructive actions in order to break through to the end of this tower. And that was how we could only slowly play along with the wishes of the spirit of the mage tower.

"I suppose that all of these trials are designed to test our adaptability. But since it's a trial to determine a potential inheritor's worthiness, they shouldn't all be this annoying. After the 'Intelligence' trials are over, the next should be 'Strength'..."

Before I even finished, the room in front of us opened by itself. Two three-meter-tall iron magical puppets trembled and then started to move, while a fire elemental pool was activated behind them, with numerous fire elemental creatures spawning from within.

Judging from my companions' "passionate" expressions directed at me, it would seem that now would be a good time for me to shut up.

"...In order to test your concentration, please sing 'Ah, the Beautiful Sun!' as you are battling. Otherwise, there will be a limitless amount of fire elementals continually spawning."

"Haven't you had enough yet? I'm definitely going to destroy you."

"...For threatening the trial administrator, this trial's difficulty shall be increased. Also, I have a name, just so you know. My former master named me 'Meteor.'"

Judging by the fact that two additional doors suddenly opened up with elemental creatures spawning in them as well, Meteor, the spirit of the mage tower, was quite dissatisfied with my comment and intended to make things difficult for us.

Mage tower spirits were one of the research results that mages came up with in the field of artificial souls. They were typically who mages trusted the most, as they acted as both stewards and research assistances. Mage tower spirits could even support a mage in casting large-scale magic spells. Some mages even treated their tower spirits like their own children or disciples. The quality of a mage tower spirit was directly proportional to the mage tower's overall effectiveness.

From my past experience in meeting other mages' mage tower spirits, most of the tower spirits were just like robotic NPCs, only responding with one fixed sentence or answering to specific commands. The higher level a mage tower spirit was, the more humanlike in personality it would become. Any mage tower spirits that had their own sense of self and personality would be at an incredibly high level.

This mage tower spirit named Meteor was obviously such an incredibly high-level mage tower spirit. His personality seemed rather lively... fine then, perhaps I should say it was quite vicious. It even started cheering when it saw us busily locked in combat.

"...I'm definitely going to have to reset his personality."

Suddenly, I felt like I understood why the going kept increasing in difficulty. Since this was a top-level mage tower spirit with its own personality, and we were continuously cursing its "father" as we progressed, it would naturally hate us and want to make us suffer.

"It would seem that I accidentally dug a pitfall for myself yet again."

I took a deep breath, dragged the silly cat off my head again, and shook her, turning her into a pitch-dark magical sword.

"For the Lich King!"

I decided to shout out a classical line while dark shadows

enveloped the pitch-black magical sword. The sword itself also seemed almost crystal clear. Its magic was now activated.

Countless dark shadows appeared on the ground, transforming the entire room into a ghostly area. Endless shadows appeared on the walls as well, taking material form. Even these elemental creatures that shouldn't have possessed the instinct of fear began to instinctively retreat. This was no magic at all—it was merely the summons of this magical sword when it was unsheathed. This was the might of a top-level weapon... but why did I feel like this scene made me appear like an antagonist instead of the main character?

"Damn, Harloys, you leveled up again? Are you changing yourself into Frostmourne?"

"...What's Frostmourne supposed to be? Didn't you name me Ice Calamity? Are you cheating on me with another sword?"

One of the greatest tragedies in life was to make references that nobody understood. Also, what was with the silly cat talking as if I was a husband who accidentally spoke his mistress's name in his sleep, making her incredibly heartbroken? After awakening and becoming more and more like a pet cat, was she intending on awakening to a weapon as well?

"In the end, isn't this all your fault!? Stop wasting time, they're coming."

While elemental creatures possessed the instinctive ability to tell how strong an enemy was, the two gigantic iron magical puppets heading our way were pure slaughtering machines. Magical puppets had very limited intelligence and would follow a specific command to the death. However, this also meant that magical puppets would never stop attacking you unless they were totally destroyed or the command retracted.

Clang!

The magic sword I swung viciously crashed into an iron fist.

However, the scene I expected of slicing through iron didn't happen at all. Instead, a tremendous force knocked me away, with a powerful backlash from the forceful impact causing my hand and even my entire body to tremble. I hurriedly took two steps backward to mitigate the impact before I barely managed to steady myself. I was almost forced to resort to rolling on the ground, or, even worse, dropping my sword—one of the most common moves novices at a disadvantage would make.

"How is this possible? My Strength stat is on par with dragons!"

"...Look at that arm! He's ridiculously rich!"

My sword scratched off some of the iron surface to reveal a pale gold that belonged to adamantine. This was actually an adamantine magical puppet, something I had never even seen or heard of before. This caused even Harloys to curse how ridiculously rich Aso was.

Magic puppets were the most common guards that mages used. It was quite easy to create low-level magic puppets. All that was required was to assemble some "parts" into a puppet's form and then use the power of magic to give it the ability to move by imbuing them with low-level artificial souls. However, how difficult a magic puppet was to deal with mostly depended on the quality of the "parts."

Flesh and blood magic puppets were famously weak. However, it was incredibly easy to gather the parts required to make them so undead mages were famously fond of using flesh and blood magic puppets. It was quite easy to create lots of them, and their weakness could be made up with the power of numbers. And if the undead mage wanted a higher-quality flesh and blood magic puppet, it was even possible to combine multiple smaller magic puppets into a single gigantic one.

Stone magic puppets were slightly stronger. Meanwhile, mud magic puppets and sand magic puppets had the advantage of being

immune to physical damage. These two magic puppet types were the natural enemies of any physical skill related job classes.

Stone and blood and flesh magic puppets were cannon fodder that were easily created, while metal magic puppets would constitute the main forces. Since magic puppets were just puppets given the ability to move by magic, the parts that they were made of were the equivalent of their bodies. The stronger and more durable the body, the stronger the magic puppet would obviously be.

Iron magic puppets were basically perfect warriors that would be incredibly difficult to deal with. There were famously known for being incredibly strong, fast to react, difficult to damage, and being immune to all mental magics, making them one of the best guards. Mages would usually add their own personal flourishes, such as lightning, fireballs, hidden weapons, oil, or poison traps on the iron magic puppets.

Even without those typically fatal traps, any metal magic puppet created from magic metals would become even stronger, multiplying their power levels by several times. Of course, something else that would proportionally increase alongside their power level was the cost to create them.

Metal magic puppets' parts needed to be refined out of the finest materials by blacksmiths. Enchanting a metal that was highly magic resistant would be immensely challenging, even for high-level archmages. It would typically take several months to finish. An ordinary iron magic puppet could be sold for several tens of thousands of gold coins, while higher-level metal puppets wouldn't be seen on the market at all.

It was rumored that in the immemorial era, the ancient elf empire ruled by the gold elf royalty had once possessed mithril magic puppets as their guards. That would mean that these magic puppets were almost completely immune to magic, making them the complete counter to any mage. They were also evidence that

whoever owned them was "ridiculously rich." And, right now, what we were currently facing was something even more ridiculous than mithril magic puppets as they even made the gold elf princess curse at their owner for being "ridiculously rich..."

"F***, that's adamantine! These are adamantine magic puppets! Aso's so damned rich!"

Just applying a layer of adamantine on top of a weapon would multiply that weapon's value by several hundred times. However, it would also multiple the weapon's weight by more than three times over. This incredibly high-density metal didn't have any other special properties—simply its incredible durability alone made it far more outstanding than any other metal. Of course, the way some people saw it was that adamantine's durability was almost at an indestructible level.

Adamantine was truly expensive—mega-expensive, in fact. It costed greater than a hundred times more than its equivalent weight in gold. Thinking about how these two magic puppets we were fighting were actually constructed out of pure adamantine, I couldn't help let out a few curses in my mind while also inwardly praising the sturdy nature of the floor we were on. After all, each one of these adamantine magic puppets had to weigh several dozen tons.

"Ptui! So ridiculously rich! I could even afford to construct my own mage tower by selling off these two little guys."

Even though I was exclaiming such things, these emotionless magic puppets wouldn't be stopping for my sake. The higher quality the magic puppet's parts, the stronger their Strength would be. These three-meter-tall magic puppets could actually be considered quite short among magic puppets, but their brute strength was more than capable of knocking out a dragon. These "shorties" also possessed great dexterity and speed due to their smaller size. The runes under their feet were even enchanted with speed-doubling acceleration magic. Even though they had pitch-

black, unbecoming appearances, they were definitely the most dangerous slaughter machines of all.

"Hmph, Amanda #1 and #2 are the creations my former master was the proudest of creating. Unless you all are able to defeat them, you'll never receive my recognition."

The mage tower spirit Meteor caught this chance to add fuel to the fire as I was busy battling. I was currently pincered by the two magic puppets, leaving me in a bad situation. Once again, I regretted not taking Adam, the best meat shield ever, with me just because I was afraid of him randomly doing something to break this mage tower I wanted!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The adamantine magic puppets rained flurries of punches and kicks upon me. I was under so much pressure that I could only remain where I was and focus on defense. The Ice Calamity magic sword that Harloys had transformed into was now cracked all over, while the force being transmitted to me through my sword simply from blocking their attacks had caused me to sink into the floorboard down to my ankles.

Magic puppets' attacks were incredibly simple and direct, relying purely on strength and speed, straight punches and kicks. They fought exactly like children, with no beauty or techniques whatsoever. However, the punches and kicks coming from these adamantine magic puppets made me feel like the entire world was constantly quaking.

"I'm almost about to shatter! Use the Cold Flames of Despair! Hibernation Chill's 1% slow stacking is working too slowly against them!"

Indeed, it didn't matter if adamantine made them possess physically and magically impervious defenses. Anything from this world could be pulled into my Frigidwinter Earth and reduced to an absolute zero state that would freeze them for eternity.

"No!"

"Stop trying to keep your abilities a secret. Aces are meant to be used when we're in danger!"

"Never!"

"...Why?"

"Because if I freeze them with Frigidwinter Earth, even I won't be able to unfreeze them afterwards. That means I won't be able to sell off these two walking mountains of gold coins!"

"...You bastard who only cares about money but not your life! Go die by yourself if you want, but don't drag me down with you!"

"Your sister," as some readers might already know from other CN novels, is a common slang in Chinese that has a variety of meanings. I generally translate it as 'the hell' or something similar for readability.

Chapter 320: Arena Battle

[Roland Mist. Strength 32 (+10), Dexterity 22, Constitution 22, Intelligence 30, Will 21, Charisma 19. Racial talents: War Angel, Original Sin Demon Form, Sword of Order, Titan's Body, Feet of Ethereal Shadow, Divine Child, Chaos Barrier. Basic job classes: Level 60 Order Knight Level 60 Chaos Lich King Level 10 Four Elemental Swordcaster. High-level job classes: Level 4 Lord of Frigidwinter.]

[System Evaluation: An excellent meat shield that can take an ancient dragon head-on; a Gold-ranked newcomer that can face any Legend warrior... if you really want to go find a Time Dragon to fight and prove me wrong, that's fine as well.]

[System Reminder: Congratulations on finding an even more difficult opponent. The two opponents before you are even stronger at melee combat than immemorial dragons. But aren't you forgetting about something? You're supposed to be a mage!]

Compared to when I was in the Northlands, my stats didn't really change much. They were still rather balanced. It was just that my advanced job classes leveled up ever so slightly. Aso's gift of magical knowledge also helped increase my Will and Intelligence stats by 1 each.

I didn't really care about Will, as this stat was only important for priests. Nor did I really require a higher Will stat in order to resist the various types of mental magic. Meanwhile, the other stat of Intelligence was the main stat for all mages. It was also relevant to the efficiency and precision of magical research. This one additional point just happened to help me break the barrier of 30 Intelligence—truly wonderful.

This was also my second stat that reached the landmark of 30. However, perhaps I was still missing some condition, as I hadn't been rewarded with any ability for breaking past 30 Intelligence.

Nothing changed in me foundationally.

I really wanted to complain about it, but when I thought about how Harloys' almost scary 40 Intelligence didn't even reward her with some powerful ability, I felt much better.

Harloys' true potential was being dragged down by the magical pet contract. However, there was no excuse for my own power level to not improve. I also knew the reason why progress had been so slow for me recently. After all, I was a sly one who knew how to run away from or avoid any too difficult, too dangerous, or meaningless battles. But, sometimes, it really was better to be a bit stupider.

The main characters of hot-blooded legends were typically hot-blooded idiots. But this wasn't about ridiculous concepts like idiot's luck, or being protected by the heavens. It was simply that hot-blooded fools were just like single-celled organisms who would never fear or back down from any challenge. They would never worry about the consequences of losing. The more fights they caused or got involved in, the faster they improved in power level. As long as these types maintained their own original intentions and accumulated a sufficient amount of combat experience, their rate of growth would be akin to cheating... Fine then, I was actually talking about people like Adam. Sometimes, I was truly envious of those who thought about literally nothing every day.

I could faintly perceive that the next breakthrough for me would be incredibly important and also that I had already achieved the foundational conditions necessary for a breakthrough. However, the feeling that I was lacking something lingered.

Every bit of hard work would be rewarded. Even the most excellent gem would need a high amount of polishing before it could brilliantly shine. Perhaps my bloodline possessed limitless strength, but it would require an extremely forceful polishing in order to shine through. Even since I left the Underground World, perhaps only my fight against Emordilorcan counted as a truly

difficult one. Recently, I seemed to be having it quite easy in terms of actual, pure combat. But since there were huge battles waiting for me in the future, unless I forced myself to the brink of life and death, how could I possibly help the potential in my body explosively grow?

"I realize that only through many practical battles against similar or higher level opponents will I grow at a fast rate, and that battles with my life on the line are the best of all for training... but isn't it rather stupid to constantly—and intentionally—fight death battles while forced to the brink?"

Perhaps it was just a fault of my personality. Even though I knew that it was a problem of mine how I always overthought things, I was unable to change the way I was. I simply loved to think everything through. However, as a warrior, thinking everything through wasn't always a good thing.

"Sometimes, I'm actually envious of people like Adam and Karwenz. They don't need to worry about anything and simply act based on their own personal preferences. They get to grow more powerful at a cheat-like rate. I calculate so much and work so hard for my resources and support but can barely even keep up with them."

But there was one part where I was quite similar to those two hot-blooded idiots. If there was a true battle where I was forced to the brink, I would...

"Stand strong and remain courageous!"

I tossed aside the cracked Ice Calamity magic sword. In front of such an opponent, such a fragile sword was already useless.

"Emordilorcan's Wall of Sighs!"

I covered my arm with the Myth-ranked tower shield I received long ago. The Emordilorcan face sculptured on it appeared to be roaring in anger. This shield didn't possess any particularly

incredible abilities, but it helped my trembling arm regain its steadiness.

[Ability of Emordilorcan's Wall of Sighs: Immovable Mountain. The wielder of this shield will have their Constitution increased by 2 points. If the wielder also has the SemiGod Equipment Roaring Armlet of the Earth equipped, the wielder can transfer part of any impact received into the earth as long as they are standing on the ground. This also confers immunity to being knocked off balance or off one's feet.]

This ability seemed nice, but it was an ability purely for taking hits. Nor did this Myth-rank shield possess any ability that an even higher-level defensive equipment would—the ability to reduce physical damage. All impacts I received still hurt like hell, and any blows that landed on a critical location would be able to kill me. In reality, it was a weak ability.

Emordilorcan's two pieces of equipment even had a set equipment effect that required both pieces of equipment equipped in order to obtain immunity from being knocked over. Plus, the wielder had to have their feet on the ground. It was quite troublesome. But in my current situation, it was the most useful ability available to me.

"Come, let us compete and see who falls first."

The greatest advantage of my War Angel form would be the ability of flight. However, I was unable to use that right now as I needed the special effects of Emordilorcan's equipment.

"THIS IS SPARTA! I shall let you all witness my willpower—damn it! Don't hit my face!"

I immediately made an error and received a black eye for it; please pretend you didn't see that. I heaved a deep breath, observed my enemy's movements, lowered my head, leaned sideways, sidestepped, and dodged yet another incredibly heavy punch. For those blows which I was unable to dodge, I simply

blocked them with my shield, absorbing the impact and mitigating part of the force with the power of the earth as I looked for opportunities to counterattack.

Clang!

These tremendous three-meter-tall adamantine magic puppets were emotionless, unhesitant, and unshakeable. Every one of their attacks had the power to fall mountains, with each attack precisely aimed at their opponent. They would have no pity no matter how much blood they shed. They didn't have any bloodlust, either. They merely attacked and defended at their own pace, acting like perfect machines simply doing their job.

Meanwhile, their opponent was me, a flesh and blood person who seemed to be even harder than adamantine.

My arm broke? I merely gave myself a splint made of ice, numbing my senses, and continued fighting.

My right eye could no longer see anything? Well, I still had my left eye. Oh, my left eye had temporarily gone blind as well? I still had my sharp sensory perceptions.

The tremendous impacts I was receiving heavily injured my internal organs? No problem, I spat out some blood and continued.

"Faster, even faster. This shouldn't be difficult for me; these are simple machine opponents. Remember my past combat experiences. I've met so many opponents far more intelligent than these."

I could no longer physically see anything, but I could still sense everything that was going on. Those heavy fists attacked in such obvious patterns that I was still able to sense them with my eyes closed.

"Hurry—hurry! The limit of my physical body and energy? Compared to brinks I've been forced to in the past, this is nothing!"

Although I was no longer able to even stand steadily, I showed no

signs of messing up my actions. Since I was no longer able to increase my speed, all that was left for me to do was to simplify and make my movements as efficient as possible so that the tiniest of motions would give me the greatest results. I stepped forward, leaned slightly, and suddenly jumped backwards. It was enough as long as I successfully dodged the attack.

"Quicker, quicker! I'm no cowardly turtle who knows only to hide and take hits!"

I was gradually getting used to my enemy's pace. I was able to change from total defense to mixing attacks in while defending. I gradually changed from defending ninety percent of the time to defending only fifty percent of the time. And since I was able to start attacking more often, the Hibernation Chill effect finally started stacking at a faster rate, helping tilt the scales in my favor.

[Hibernation Chill effect: This effect is added on to all of your ice element attacks. Every single ice element attack will slow your enemy by 1%. Stacks additively until 100% upon which your opponent's time will be eternally frozen. Impossible to resist or to be immune against. The slowing effect will be removed if your opponent hasn't reached 100% and hasn't received any damage from you in the past ten minutes.]

As the Hibernation Chill effect continually and additively stacked on the magic puppets, their attacks became slower and slower.

"Faster, faster! I need to at least be faster than these hunks of metal!"

Yep, now things were simply a competition of time and willpower. Would the magic puppets stop moving first, or would I be literally beaten to death?

"Faster, faster!"

I was weakened due to my blood loss. Even though I was able to predict their movements and the fact that their fists had only half

their original speed, I no longer had the energy to dodge their attacks. Just as I was expecting my head to be squished like a watermelon in the next moment, something unexpectedly changed.

Ding!

It was as if the entire world paused for a moment as something sounded in the air. The next moment, everything returned to normal, yet something was now clearly different. I saw a world dissimilar to before.

[Congratulations for activating the natural talent ability...]

I didn't have the time to check the System's notification and the predictable insult for me tacked on to the end. The magic puppets' adamantine fists were still perilous, and I could only fight back by following my instincts. However, to my astonishment, I discovered that it seemed like their overall speed had dropped, as if...

"...I have a chance at victory! Even faster! Faster!"

Finally, I managed to win by using the last remnants of my strength right before I fainted. Finally, the two magic puppets were almost unable to move, only being able to trudge one centimeter at a time.

All the other battles around Roland had ended as well, with his companions having defeated all the elemental creatures. This fierce battle was only observed by the "duelist's" companions as he single-handedly took on these two adamantine puppets with only his flesh and blood body. His companions strongly believed that he would finally win in the end, just as always.

And things proved that they were correct—just as always, he did as he promised...

"Ahh, you stinky pervert! Your dirty liquid is entering my body! Ahh, I'm being polluted! It's so unpleasant, it's so discomforting, I'm going to break! I'm going to break! Hurry and pull out!"

Harloys' moaning echoed throughout the room, causing everyone to look at me strangely. It was as if I was doing something incredibly evil or improper.

"Stop distorting things and making everyone misunderstand on purpose! I'm merely using your clones as bandages to stop my blood. Stop making stuff up about my liquids entering your body or whatever!"

"I wasn't making stuff up at all! Isn't blood a liquid? It feels incredibly strange to have someone else's blood flowing in my body! Only you would rip off a piece of someone else's body to use as a bandage! You've gone overboard! You demon!"

"You can produce a limitless number of clones anyways. They're no different to the lowest-level slimes. Ah, perhaps they can be used in ways other than bandages as well, such as silly cat underwear and—stop biting me! I'll really die if you cause me to lose any more blood."

After some more messing around, Harloys ended up with just a pout.

"It seems you obtained what you wanted."

As I looked at my System's notification, I indeed obtained a result for my hard work, causing me to tear up—don't misunderstand now, I wasn't tearing up in joy. It was because I didn't know how else to react to this awkwardness.

Did I succeed in making a breakthrough by pushing myself in a life-and-death battle? I did succeed, and the new natural talent ability I acquired as listed by my System was the best proof of this. But...

"Why was it that I made a breakthrough with my Constitution and Dexterity stats? I'm a mage! I was supposed to make a breakthrough with my 30 Intelligence stat!"

"... How were you a mage just now? I thought that it was either a

duel between barbarians or a master monk self-inflicting pain upon himself."

As I recalled my fight just earlier, I was instantly rendered speechless. Indeed, I wasn't like much of a mage at all just earlier. And even if I received a breakthrough, there was no guarantee that it would be a mage's breakthrough.

"It was basically a perfect knight's battle! You're an absolutely perfect role model for the knightly spirit, with your unyielding will and your impregnable defense! Um... Teacher, what's the matter?"

Cohen didn't even notice that he had just spread salt in my wound as he tried to console me upon seeing how disconsolate I was. However, this wasn't even the worst part.

The battles were now finished, and according to Aso's original trial, this was apparently supposed to be the end of it, with the two adamantine magic puppets acting as the final bosses. However...

"What? Allow him to be the new tower master? Dream on, didn't you see that scene just now? How is this guy supposed to be a wise mage in any way? He's obviously just a brute force monkey who hasn't even matured yet. I might as well pick a goblin instead. At the very least, a goblin would know to run away from an adamantine magic puppet."

This mechanical voice belonged to someone who greatly sounded like the mage tower spirit Meteor—it belonged to the other mage tower spirit of this Three-Colored Tower, the tower spirit named Garden.

Alright then, I won't comment about Aso's strange naming sense. Now, one of the two mage tower spirits in charge of this tower was rejecting the new master, doubtlessly a huge obstacle for me.

Meanwhile, that familiar vicious mage tower spirit, Meteor, was actually defending me.

"No matter what, he successfully completed the trial. According to the rules, he should become the new master, even if he didn't show any signs of a mage's Intelligence. He really is more like a barbarian who only knows how to think with his knee. Not only that, he didn't even detect that these adamantine magic puppets were intentionally designed with a weakness to thunder magic. Any thunder magic attacks against them will be greatly effective. Nor did he discover that the magic puppets had a rune on their backs that gave them the power of movement, which was an intentional design meant to give them a weak spot. Nor did he notice the runes carved onto the path here hinted at the adamantine puppets' weaknesses... or that underneath the fire elemental pool was a runic spell array that could control the adamantine puppets. Fine then, he really is so unreliable. How about we add an additional test?"

Chapter 321: Time Bomb

One of the special features of the Three-Colored Tower was that it possessed two elemental pools and two mage tower spirits. When activated at its full potential, it possessed the power of three archmages. The mage tower spirit Meteor was a combat type spirit. He had direct control over the fire elemental pool, spell enhancing artifacts, magic puppet warehouse and all combat-related items. His personality was designed to be more flexible, adaptable, and sly —the characteristics of a classic combat expert mage.

As for the mage tower spirit Garden, just her name alone indicated that she was more of the support type mage tower spirit for assisting in research. She had control over the library, water elemental pool, research laboratory, and all research-related items. In order to be a better research assistance and help remind her master about any details he overlooked, she possessed a huge amount of magical, nature, and societal knowledge. Her personality was also far more cautious and conservative. In fact, she could even be described as old-fashioned.

As mage tower spirits were absolutely loyal to their creator, they typically became a mage's most trusted assistant. Naturally, the smarter their loyal assistant, the better. There were several mage tower spirits from the immemorial generation that even had greater intelligence than humans.

Yet sometimes, overly intelligent mage tower spirits with too much freedom would cause trouble for their master. The biggest trouble of all would be when the master wanted to pass on their mage tower to someone else to inherit.

Artificial souls possessed their own emotions. It was perfectly understandable that these artificial creations absolutely trusted and worshiped their creator. Their innate loyalty typically became an incredibly biased type of veneration. The deep emotional connection between a mage and their mage tower spirit was

something that outsiders would find impossible to understand... I definitely wasn't alluding to how outsiders would never understand the relationship between NEETs and their one and only friend, their computer—nope, not at all!

"I don't want a new master. I don't want my old master's precious belongings to fall into anyone else's hands, even if this is my old master's wish."

That was why the most dangerous mage towers that required exploration were ones where the mage tower spirit remained active after the mage's death. That would be basically no different from facing off an entire army led by a general.

For whoever inherited a mage tower, a mage tower spirit that wasn't loyal to them would obviously be quite troublesome. That was why any mage who inherited and successfully took control over a mage tower would first reset the mage tower spirit's personality and memories. Although that meant having to raise the mage tower spirit up from the beginning, it would usually be better than the alternative of having a disobedient mage tower spirit.

And since some mage tower spirits had their own sense of self, this was no different from figuratively killing someone off by performing a full memory wipe. Naturally, this caused mage tower spirits to dislike those who inherited their previous master's mage tower even more. Some mage tower spirits would be directly commanded by their old master to obey their new master, but even so, it was common for mage tower spirits to look for any way to get away with going against their new master without directly breaking the rules.

Compared to Garden, who directly stated her dissatisfaction with me, the seemingly more approving Meteor was actually the same as she was. Any normal mage that had to go through so many ridiculous trials already would likely become so enraged as to directly attack upon hearing there was yet another final test to be

administered on top of all that. And once that happened, that meant the mage tower spirits would have achieved their goal of being allowed to use the anti-invader mode of the mage tower to eliminate us, the invaders, rather than being forced to treat me as a potential inheritor.

So, in the end, no matter who won, these two mage tower spirits wouldn't have to deal with a new master. And even if we were able to overcome the mage tower's true defenses and defeat the mage tower spirits, they would easily be able to self-destruct all the important parts of the mage tower rather than being forced to hand it over.

And so, if I wanted to successfully receive this mage tower in its entirety, the only method I had available to me was to play with them as they wanted, letting them make me suffer as they liked. As long as they finished trying everything that was in their rulebook that could succeed in forcing me out as a candidate, I would naturally pass the trial and inherit this mage tower.

"...If you use the corpse of a dragon to create a powerful undead creature, how many different undead species, and how many possible undead can you create? Also, what would be the most efficient method to use the dragon's corpse? And what are the important things to look out for and deal with?"

This was Garden's final test question for me. It was obvious that she had nefarious intentions for me when asking this question.

This was indeed a question that would test my magical knowledge. However, no ordinary mage would be able to successfully answer it. After all, undead mages were always rare in the Cloud Tower. And even if an undead mage happened to be the one who came here, only a top-level undead mage would be an expert in dealing with a dragon's corpse. Since I appeared physically quite young and was obviously someone living, it seemed apparent to her that I couldn't possibly be an expert in undead magic. Not to mention, since Aso was secretly a top-level

undead mage, it was reasonable for his final test question being a question about undead magic to test his potential successor.

Garden used her own method to pick a final test question for me that she felt I would have the lowest probability of getting correct.

"...She probably saw how I was using the Holy Light while climbing the tower, so she likely mistook me for a Divine Arts mage who studied the Holy Light."

However, Garden obviously overthought things due to her own high intelligence. If she truly did ask me some high-level magical knowledge question, I doubted that I would be able to answer it as I was the one who broke the Cloud Tower's records back in the day for failing the most classes... Well, fine then, since Harloys had a soul connection to me, and with how much magical knowledge Harloys had as she easily passed through the challenges, perhaps I would be able to answer a question even about high-level magical knowledge.

Could it be that I imperceptibly achieved every student's dream? Being able to have a teacher help me cheat on a test?

Cough—cough—getting back to the main topic at hand, since Garden's final test question was about undead magic, this was one of the few topics I didn't even need to ask my teacher Harloys for help.

"If it's a dragon's corpse, the most common products are bone dragons, corpse dragons, and ghost dragons. These are indeed the choices that can bring out the most potential from this rare undead ingredient, but they might not necessarily be the absolute best choice. Since this is a question about how to deal with this particular undead ingredient, this means that we need to take into consideration its special nature."

As I spoke, I even began to feel nostalgic about the past. Back in the day, I had trespassed in dragons' graveyards and dragon valleys all in order to obtain some dragon corpse undead ingredients. Ahh,

such a fun time to reminisce, being chased by dragons who guarded dragon graveyards.

"If it's a white dragon, I'll unhesitatingly make the corpse into a bone dragon. This is because white dragons don't even have much Intelligence to speak of while they're alive, meaning that there's no point in counting on one being able to maintain Intelligence in undeath or being able to cast spells. A white dragon's ice element corpse will even improve the ice dragon breath that a bone dragon breathes. But if it's a silver, gold, or black dragon within a certain age, and if the dragon soul is still relatively complete, then I would consider using soul-summoning spells to create a dragon lich or a dragon guardian, some undead magic user-type. Although the success rate isn't high, as long as it succeeds, it will have incredible combat strength..."

"Please answer the specific question I asked you. I asked you to tell me how many different undead species, and how many possible undead can you create from a single dragon's corpse?"

I was intending on going on about all the different theories and choices about undead dragons classified by all dragon types, but Garden seemed to have realized that I was quite knowledgeable about this topic and started nitpicking on the technicalities, making it entirely about how detailed I answered her specific question.

"If the corpse is complete, the entire dragon's skeleton can be made into a bone dragon. If the dragon soul is still present, then a ghost dragon, although the success rate will be quite low if the corpse isn't complete. The dragon wings can be used as materials to make the outer shell of dragonskin gargoyles. The dragon teeth can be can be ground down to create dragonteeth undead soldiers. The numbers seven, nine, and eleven ribs can be removed from the skeleton without affecting the skeleton's completeness for creating a bone dragon and can be used to create a skeleton behemoth. The dragon's innards are highly valuable as well. Just the dragon heart

alone can create a top-level Abomination, while all the dragon organs are greatly effective at increasing zombies and stitched undead's basic stats so nothing will go to waste. Rotting dragon blood is the best for creating undead slimes. Undead slimes are incredibly dangerous, as they're immune to physical attacks and are highly venomous."

When an undead mage was poor enough, their "efficiency" in using undead ingredients could be incredible. Give an undead mage an entire dragon's corpse and they'd be able to create an entire powerful army out of it.

"...Only you would be poor enough to scrimp to such an incredible degree. Most of these are methods that you managed to discover or create on your own, aren't they? I never taught you so much back in the day."

Harloys' comment seemed to accidentally reveal the truth about my finances back then. And judging by Garden's silence, my answer probably far surpassed her expectations. After all, neither Aso nor Harloys were the type that ever lacked for research funds as both of them were incredibly rich. How would they understand the difficulties of someone who started with nothing? I didn't even talk about my experience in avoiding grave guardians yet when graverobbing! Back in the year, my book "Graverobbing Records, Dragon Grave Edition" was a bestseller, you know!

"If a dragon eye is undamaged, I can ask a demon warlock for help in creating the highest-level abyss watcher. You know, that spying eye creature that has the trait of permanently being invisible. They're really great to have around. It's just that needing to pay the demon warlock a high price afterward is something difficult to tolerate, which is why I'd typically consider doing the world a favor and simply going back on my word and killing them. After all, killing any demon warlock is the equivalent of performing a good dead. As for dragon scales, the scales located on the dragon's most critically important body parts like the scales on

the heart or the head can be used to craft dragon scale shields, which are light, durable, and don't even affect the casting of magic spells. Combat mages love dragon scale shields more than anything. As for the normal dragon scales, they can be created into magical accessories or dragon scale armor by blacksmiths and alchemists. They're really easy to sell off, as long as you don't mention that the corpse was dug up out of a dragon graveyard, which will really lower the price. Remember to give it a fresh coat of paint first, and make sure to sell it while the coat of paint still retains that new paint smell so that the customer mistakenly believes that the faint stink is because of the fresh paint."

"Oh, right, not only that, green dragons' claw nails are poisoned, while blue dragons' claw nails are automatically enchanted with the thunder element. They can be created into magical daggers with the assistance of a blacksmith. I highly recommend the Lita Dwarf Smith shop in Cabenli City's District Seven. They're truly skilled at smithing. Their secretly passed down enchanting techniques can craft cursed black bone daggers, which have truly great attack power. It's just that the store owner Lita is a bit blackhearted, asking for 50,000 gold coins for the smithing fee. However, you could just take advantage of being an undead mage like me and threaten to kill his entire family, which helped me receive a 60% discount. In fact, I even went further and threatened to report him for crafting cursed weapons, which is a crime that's punishable by confiscation of his entire wealth. He ended up giving me a 90% discount on his services... Although even though I go there so often to give him business, why is it that he always glares at me like I'm his mortal enemy?"

Oops, I seemed to have said a bit too much there. Everyone was now utterly silent. Cher's earlier expression of respect for me at winning such a difficult battle was now replaced with one that said "He really is someone mega-dangerous, after all. I really need to be on guard against him."

Why did I understand her expression so well? It was because she really did say that out loud in the end! Could it be that something went wrong with my beautiful girl-raising plan? My daughter entered her rebellious phase of hating her middle-aged father so quickly?

"You didn't even raise her! Besides, if you're middle-aged already, what does that make me?"

"...The elderly? Greetings, Grandma. Goodbye, Grandma."

Alright then, at any rate, I was already used to the silly cat biting my head, causing me to constantly bleed. It was fine to simply ignore her. Where was I again?

"...The greatest advantage of attempting to create undead creatures is that you can try over and over again. Failure is normal, and all undead ingredients are secondhand to begin with so it doesn't matter if you reuse them. The only part one needs to watch out for when creating dragon undead..."

Thinking about my past, I came to a conclusion. There was indeed only one thing that one needed to watch out for.

"...Make absolutely sure that none of the dragons see you robbing their graveyards. Otherwise, those stingy lizards will be spitting dragon breath at you every day. Ptui! Didn't I only dig up seven dragon graveyards? Was it really such a big deal? Was it worth going to the extent of chasing after me for three years? I did all this to obtain materials for research! I did all this for truth and knowledge; I am justice!"

The moment I finished speaking, a staircase leading to a higher level revealed itself. Both mage tower spirits seemed to have come to an agreement.

"You might end up an undead mage who's even more incredible than Master Aso."

"Not might. Definitely."

Once I reached the mage tower's central control room and truly gained possession of Aso's mage tower, my consciousness seemed to enter the clouds as the entire structure of the mage tower appeared before me. This virtual blueprint displayed everything I just obtained.

And then, cold sweat started running down my spine...

"A Salo's Crystal? Why is there such a thing here?"

Salo wasn't the name of any magical beast. Salo was a he, an incredibly powerful archmage who lived and died in the immemorial generation. This crystal of his wasn't actually the core of some magical beast or its secretion. It was, in fact, his invention.

This artificially constructed magical core wasn't foundationally different from a titan's heart's energy core. The only thing special about Salo's Crystals was that they were incredibly effective. How effective were they? If you used one Salo's Crystal in my original world, it could probably provide the electric output for a large city for an entire three or four years. At the very least, its inventor, Salo, had invented it to power up floating cities.

Yes, floating cities. These were large-scale cities with populations of over a million inhabitants that floated in the skies, not some mage's personal mage tower with the ability of flight.

Similar to my original world, such a technology was wonderful in a peaceful era, but once war arrived, it powerful technology would become incredibly dangerous. If Salo's Crystals were used in improper methods, they could easily cause large-scale explosions far above that of nuclear bombs from my old world.

Of course, their inventor, Salo, had also tried using his own Salo's Crystals to develop some type of weapon. However, there was just one tiny little problem—any weapon or attack spell using Salo's Crystals was basically guaranteed to kill whoever activated it so nobody dared to use them in such a fashion.

Self-destructing a Salo's Crystal required a Legend-ranked or higher archmage to inject a sufficient amount of mana into it using a special method. The problem was that the explosion's radius far exceeded any instant teleportation magic's distance limitations. Basically, anyone who self-destructed a Salo's Crystal was just about guaranteed to die. Since this world already had forbidden spells that weren't necessarily fatal for the user, using Salo's Crystals in such a fashion was considered unnecessary.

However, using Salo's Crystals as a large-scale weapon had huge advantages on forbidden spells, too. They could be exploded almost instantly, without hours-long incantations like forbidden spells. Nor would there be powerful mana waves sent out broadcasting to everyone that you were in the midst of casting a forbidden spell. It would be exceedingly hard to detect.

And if this Salo's Crystal was merely the energy source for Aso's mage tower, I wouldn't have talked so much about it. However, this Salo's Crystal just happened to be the ammunition for a Goblin Cannon located in Aso's mage tower. Not only that, the Goblin Cannon was pointed directly at the Truth Symposium's conference building, the Tower of Ten Thousand Spells, a mere two streets down from Aso's mage tower.

"...If the undead and the Mage Country went to war, and all the Truth Overseers with Emblems of Endless Truth were summoned for a conference, and then a Salo's Crystal exploded here..."

Once again, I learned more about Aso than I ever expected. Perhaps he wasn't here for so long for personal reasons. From the very start, he must have been on guard against the mages.

The Goblin Cannon wasn't the important part. After all, as long as this Salo's Crystal was exploded, the entire city of Arlo would be in the explosion's radius. However, the closer a mage was to the center of the explosion, the less time a mage would have to react. There would be incredibly few archmages that would be able to escape.

And if Aso left some sort of message for the current Blackeye that we just captured, it was highly likely that this mere Myth-ranked lich would be able to kill off more than seventy percent of the archmages in the Mage Country all by himself by committing suicide. No, considering that this lich might have placed his phylactery far away, it was possible that the lich would even survive the resulting explosion. The current Blackeye was likely ordered to detonate this Salo's Crystal if the undead ever went to war with the mages.

I carefully placed the Salo's Crystal amongst my possessions and then focused on two other crystals I found in the mage tower's control room. One was white, and the other was red. Both of them were approximately half my height. I could faintly hear voices reverberating in them. These two crystals were the true bodies of the two mage tower spirits. The more powerful the mage tower spirit, the larger the crystal would be, and the more memories and knowledge that would be contained in them.

Back in Sulfur Mountain City, I had visited a mage tower and met a mage tower spirit there as well. However, that mage tower spirit merely controlled a single library. Its abilities were no match for these two mage tower spirits, and its crystal core was only the size of the palm of my hand. Its personality was also more robotic than human-like.

And now, all I had to do was press a button in the control room, and I would be able to reset these two mage tower spirits back to their initial states. However, I had no intention of doing such a thing.

"Let's just forget about the past. Just serve me from now on."

"Alright, mage tower spirits Meteor and Garden are willing to serve you."

"Really? Let me sing a little song in celebration, then. "Watching the meteor rain fall onto Earth with you..."

"..."

This line comes from the lyrics of a Chinese song (流星雨 [Meteor Rain]).

Chapter 322: Cloud Tower

The new master was now confirmed, and the Three-Colored Tower started gleaming—it became so bright that even those in the nearby streets could see it.

A mystical light baptized the entire mage tower, including the observation deck, divination room, library, mystical garden, magical puppet warehouse, magic beast research laboratory, magic beast dungeon, summoning room, elemental pool, and servants' quarters. Along with the light, which illuminated every room, my will spread throughout every corner of this mage tower.

Even though I was using a control panel, I could send my vision to any location I desired in the tower. As long as I willed it, my command would arrive, in an instant, no matter the place.

"An automated analysis has been completed for the seventeen floors of the main tower and the twelve floors of both the secondary towers. Repairs are needed for the third floor of the main tower and the seventh floor of the second secondary tower. All other floors are in excellent condition. The energy batteries have been activated, and the magic puppets will conclude their automated analysis in five minutes. The puppets will then proceed to clean and repair the mage tower. Over ninety percent of the mage tower can be restored to daily usability after three days of maintenance."

The voice of the mage tower spirit Garden echoed in my ears. Aso was indeed a veteran mage. Despite the long-term hibernation, the Three-Colored tower was in tip-top condition; only minor maintenance was required for it to be up and running again.

The magic puppet warehouse opened and from it trod out massive magic puppets which seemed to possess endless amounts of strength. Never knowing fatigue, these puppets were the best free laborers and cleaners of all. Under my command, the

summoning room commenced its operations, calling forth elemental servants that would forever be at my beck and call.

"Master Roland, the library is now in order. Your pet cat is requesting permission to enter. Would you like to grant it to her?"

"No wonder she disappeared in the blink of an eye. I've never seen her move so fast, especially when she has to do work. Toss her in the water elemental pool for me. Help her clean her head and wash up before granting her entrance.

As I heard the furious roars of that silly cat through our soul connection, Garden, who was, au fond, the steward of the mage tower, concluded her report. The "Security Captain" Meteor simultaneously finished his inspection of the mage tower as well.

"Long years of disuse coupled with other reasons have caused the defensive magic spells and traps to fall into disrepair. The defensive prowess of the tower is only forty-seven percent of what it was in its prime. A list of the resources required to fix the defenses has been generated, but..."

The Cloud Tower would likely remain safe for quite a while, so I decided to leave that matter aside. More importantly, I had a unique idea about how to utilize this mage tower.

"The Three-Colored Tower's dual-tower core support system is in superb condition. A plentiful amount of mana is stored within. Would you like to try shooting a load at someone?

"No! I'm a good person—I'd never do such a thing! The consequences would be far too dire; I wouldn't be able to take it.

Although the tower spirit Meteor was joking with me, the strongest function of the Three-Colored Tower—allowing an archmage to cast a tri-elemental forbidden spell—gave me yet another ace up my sleeve.

"Right. Let me give this to the two of you. Make a list of the resources and money required to make it, and once everything's

done, begin conducting the modifications."

"Isn't this a design blueprint of a floating Cloud Tower? Hasn't it been lost in history?"

Yep, in the end, the mage tower design blueprint I chose was the Cloud Tower type. The Mage Country's Cloud Tower was named exactly after this very type, yet it was only a city while the one I desired could fly among the clouds. Mine was a super mega mage tower that possessed the ability to solidify the water vapor in the air.

It was possible that I might never get to use the defenses of this mage tower in my lifetime, otherwise. Leaving this combat-type Three-Colored Tower in a safe city like Arlo was far too much of a waste. I was certain to have endless troubles in the future so a mobile mage tower was what I wanted the most. With the blueprint for a Cloud Tower, I would be able to gather everything needed to build it eventually even though the resources needed were rare and nigh impossible to obtain. The biggest issue was finding a reliable energy source.

A mage tower permanently floating in the sky, not mentioning entering battle, required a humongous amount of energy. The energy consumption for two straight months of flight and combat would, most obviously, be astronomical.

I had originally racked my brain to solve this problem as I had foreseen it all after deciding to proceed with the Cloud Tower blueprint. I had planned to hire mage job classes, like the Four Elemental Swordcasters, to work for me as human batteries. Fortunately, however, I now had a much more facile solution to my problem.

A Salo Crystal was capable of effortlessly powering up floating cities of over one million in population. A mere Cloud Tower was nothing.

Of course, just a slight glance at the resources and money

required to construct the Cloud Tower gave me a headache. And I wasn't just intending to imitate the technology—I intended to learn and absorb it before modifying the Three-Colored Tower into a Cloud Tower that maintained the advantages of both tower types... Although this sounded like a fantastic dream, it was very well possible since Meteor and Garden hadn't informed me that they were unable to accomplish such a thing.

"Although it'd be quite difficult, it isn't impossible."

"Yeah. After a while, I'll help you two level up, and I'll introduce you both to a new friend—007. Once he joins you guys, at the very minimum your knowledge capacities will double. With the accumulated knowledge of two Undead Emperors, you shall no longer be the dual mage tower spirits of the Three-Colored Tower. Instead, you will form the Three Wise Ones System!"

The Cloud Tower required the ability to control the wind element, so it was absolutely necessary to construct an internal wind elemental pool. As a consequence, a new wind-element mage tower spirit would be needed, unless, of course, I removed the water or fire elemental pools and made modifications.

It would be far too much of a waste to leave the mage tower spirit back to gather dust at my home. Even if we forget about the buried memories, the knowledge I obtained over the past three hundredish years in Eich could be added to the mage tower's magical storage. Yep, while, in theory, the mage tower spirits would obey their new master, I intended to... well, let's use an analogy from my previous world. Whenever a company received a new CEO, it was common for a new general manager to suddenly appear together with the new boss. It was perfectly understandable for the new boss to bring along a loyal subordinate.

"Three Wise Ones System? Sounds pretty nice. Then that'll be our future nickname."

I finally had a nice mage tower, which meant the Great Industrial

Party now had a nice research center as well. It would be acceptable to borrow someone else's laboratory to conduct normal magical research, and it was the same for engineering and alchemy research, too. However, this was only for ordinary mages—it really would be unseemly for a mage with two Emblems of Endless Truth to resort to such a practice. Without a fixed headquarters, we would be a paper company selling shoddy products.

Our reputation, in fact, wasn't the most important part—the tools necessary to aid the research were far more of concern. Similar to a science laboratory with all its science instruments and implements, a magical research laboratory couldn't conduct research without relevant magical tools. For example, the magical beast research laboratory could accelerate the rate of any magical beast's evolution by ten times—and most evolutions were likely to be beneficial, hence making it an appropriate location to breed new, useful species. A summoning room, too, wouldn't just be suited for dimensional summoning. Many space, control, and contract magical arrays would be etched into its walls to help the occupant mage control whatever they were attempting to summon. Even if that mage successfully summoned a dangerous creature, it would be possible to turn that inferno demon dragon to an inferno cooked lizard within the confines of the walls of the room itself.

The simplest and most basic types of research would experience the largest increases in efficiency. With a simple command, the tower spirit would prepare the experiment table as well as the required tools for your use, and it could bring you additional materials and complete other miscellaneous tasks, too. The tower spirit would record the entire process—and conclusion—of your research, and once it was over it'd even write up a report for you. If, for some reason, your project failed, it would be possible to replay a recording of your experiments. All of this was greatly convenient for shortening the time spent conducting research. Mages would avoid spending a huge chunk of their time over

unnecessary details, which, of course, meant that they had time to do even more research projects.

I wanted to continuously develop new products and put them out in Thorn Garden, but this required me to find an appropriate laboratory for those overly energetic engineers and alchemists of mine: a laboratory that was nigh indestructible and explosion-proof! The mage tower met those requirements and would serve as a great research laboratory for those excessively spirited goblin engineers—or should I call it an explosion laboratory? Thorn Garden would no longer have to worry about disgruntled neighbors complaining about "too much noise" or "exploding one day themselves."

Of course, the time it would take to execute all those modifications I wanted was uncertain. Besides, the number of magical ingredients needed was astronomical, and many were priceless and weren't on the market. I could only take things a step at a time.

And right now, I had a more important issue on my plate.

"How about it? What did they say?"

The moment I left the Three-Colored Tower, I sent a message to the members of the Truth Symposium about the Salo's Crystal. I also sent them the images in Meteor's memory of Aso installing that "Salo's Crystal Goblin Cannon," which was singlehandedly capable of destroying the entire city of Arlo in but an instant. Naturally, I revealed the crystal itself as evidence.

My trusty messenger Cohen brought back the archmages' reactions and responses.

"...Some of them were so enraged they immediately swore vengeance against the undead, but most of them were rather calm. But no normal person would possibly be able to remain calm after learning that their lives could have disappeared at the push of a button, that too at the whims of an undead. It's strange how 'calm'

they are. They're probably just bottling it all inside."

Chapter 323: Dawn of a New Generation

"The Mage County hasn't yet made an official response? This seems to be a huge matter."

The Truth Symposium stayed silent—abnormally silent. When I thought about it, however, I realized that this was likely their way of expressing their extreme rage.

It was similar to my previous world. If there was friction between two countries, the aggrieved side would typically declare their dissatisfaction and organize some protests. This usually meant that the country didn't intend to take actual action; for the sake of face, the country merely wanted to act—albeit verbally—tough.

If a country announced that they "reserved the right to take action," it meant that they, in all likelihood, wanted to take action. However, a country that was aggrieved but kept silent would be the most dangerous of them all.

"As long as it's necessary, these mages are capable of tolerating humiliation. But now there's no such necessity..."

That left two possibilities. Either the country couldn't afford to antagonize the other one and would pretend that nothing had happened, or the country was intending on taking revenge in secret.

Judging the current situation, there was a ninety-nine percent chance of it being the latter...

"The two sides are already separated by a deep grudge. The Mage Country's forbidden curse ruined the Undead Emperor's invasion plan, while the undead plotted a nefarious scheme to kill off the archmages in one go. And this isn't even mentioning the fact that it was the undead who caused Amelia's current unconscious state..."

"There's you as well. In a way you're the one who caused everything to sour to such a degree, the main culprit behind it all.

You practically caused Aso's death, and you're currently in the Mage Country. You're definitely number one on their hit list."

"Thank you for reminding and jinxing me. By the way, what did it feel like to soak in a water elemental pool?"

"Shouldn't you already know? The tea you drank this morning was blessed with the presence of my shower water."

Ptui!

Anyone who's ever had a pet would know that they loved to show off their captured prey to their owners. And it was even more awkward for them when their pets attempted to share this prey—including all the rats and cockroaches that had been secretly added into the food... Fine then, this silly cat was worse than all of those pets—she did it all intentionally. To curb this unseemly behavior, I would definitely have to give her a good lesson.

"Stop running away! Come, let's see if I don't hang you out to dry on top of the mage tower!"

While the perpetual fight between the silly cat and I repeated itself yet again, the wheels of my plan were once again in motion. The next phase had begun.

Mages could be said to be the ones most wasteful of their wealth. Even with such top-level experimental conditions at their disposal, they would typically just research the creation of basic spell models. Or, with the portal to the water elemental plane, they would only summon a few water elemental servants while the portal itself would remain inactive for the great majority of the time. My subordinates, on the other had, were delighted to be able to use the mage tower's top-level research equipment to perform their own research.

"I'm attempting to install mecha armor and additional weapons on the magic puppets. This can solve the problem of their overly simple attacks."

"How foolish! Haven't you noticed that their greatest weakness is their slow speed? I intend to install Iron Horse wheels on them so that they can become far more mobile than before."

"...Why not just install a ropeller? A flying magic puppet would be so cool—it could even carry people around! We could hire it out and make so much money!"

"Stop being so ridiculous. Ropellers are known to be unreliable, and it's impossible to adjust their efficiency ratio. They'll either cause the object to fly too high or not fly at all. And it's fine if it fails to fly, but if the aerodynamic lift is too much then that'd make the puppet be no different from an execution implement. It'll simply fly off with the puppet's head, leaving its body lying on the ground. Did all of you forget about that unfortunate experiment we did with the scarecrow?"

What was with the name 'ropeller'? Ahh, this was a classic story. When I first arrived in this world, I gave a shot at inventing some engineering technology that would allow flight. However, although I could recall the mechanics of propellers from my previous world, I was only a law major and didn't understand the scientific principles behind its functioning. However, I did know of a common little toy: those mini propellers from China.

I casually created a wooden mini-propeller and gave it over to the gnomes who were skilled at making more intricate mechanisms. I asked them to research and discuss how to make it into a real concept capable of flight. The gnomes naturally asked what it was, as they didn't yet understand why the mini-propeller had the ability to fly through the air. And so, I just responded with something like this was called a propeller and that was its ability.

However, the gnomes didn't clearly hear me and thought that it was called the 'ropeller,' instead. And that was how 'ropeller' became its official name, a name that spread far and wide before I discovered what was going on. When I finally learned of the mistake, the name had spread far too much for me to do anything

about it. Ropeller was now the officially recognized name of this mechanism I brought from my previous world. I was no longer able to change the name even if I wanted to.

It could be expected that if magic puppets were equipped with all these devices and accessories that my engineers were thinking about, they would become much more powerful. With all sorts of dangerous weapons and heavy armor, they would be quite fearsome... But for some unknown reason, I suddenly thought of a certain strong naked man who shouted, "I'll be back!"

The locals in this world were equally intelligent with the geniuses from my previous world. The most I could do in many cases was provide them with inspiration and tell them that this was possible. Often times, the end result would far exceed my expectations.

Magical engineering was such an unexpected miracle product. The combination of science and magic gave birth to explosive transformations in existing technologies. Nobody could predict what might come about as a result of magical engineering. However, it was easily predictable that the discipline would change the very fabric of this fantasy world's society.

At the very least, under my supervision, magical engineering's development had far exceeded its extent in the game's "history."

Beastmen warriors were equipped with mobile mechas, elven rangers rode motorcycles, while gnomes and goblins who weren't as physically strong wore mecha armors. "History" had already reached a divergent point.

"How's the analysis on the Salo's Crystal going? I think it's one of the top-level inventions of the 'Age of Scholarly Inventions,' the Haletdam generation. Oh, what's Timlad doing?"

"Timlad says that it's way too difficult to analyze its workings, but it isn't impossible. No matter what, the current environment is different to that of the immemorial generation. It's definitely

impossible to recreate a Salo's Crystal with the same power as the original, but still it should be possible to create a weaker version with less than one percent of its power."

"That's sufficient... tell him that it's not a rush—it's only medium priority. After all, Salo's Crystals are far too dangerous. I don't want to wake up one day to find out I'm flying through the sky because my mage tower has exploded."

Little Timlad was becoming more and more amazing. As my lead engineer, he was a bottomless pit when it came to anything involving engineering. He would always give me happy surprises.

Two days ago, I handed Timlad another research idea of mine—developing new Colossi. The immemorial Haletdam generation was also nicknamed the Colossi generation after their excellent Colossi technology. It just remained to see how much of it Timlad was able to develop.

With more and more people joining under me, there were now plenty of specialists in all areas and fields. I didn't think that the loose contractual relationships between domain lords and their hired personal mages were appropriate to use. Instead, the company, department, and project team structuring from my previous world worked much better for me.

By the way, I should mention that the current leader of my alchemy department was Yingou Beyar. However, the one who really ran things in the alchemy department was his second-in-command, Olivia, who was growing more talented with each day. Not only was she fully developing her natural talent in alchemy that was displayed in the game's "history," but she had also established good relationships with the alchemists, engineers, smiths, and enchanters. More importantly she and was always able to mediate between them. Even though Olivia wasn't even twenty years old, she was becoming more and more like an overall general manager of the departments.

Right now, Olivia was in charge of all my important projects, such as the improvements to mobile mechas and Olivia's Magic Box. With her around, I could be comforted of the fact that the alchemist teams and engineer teams wouldn't start fighting outright.

Of course, she did complain about it. Working on improving her Magic Box or enchanted mechas helped greatly improve her engineering and enchanting knowledge—she was now at the level where she could subclass in both engineering and enchanting. However, it was pushing her farther and farther away from her dream of becoming a grand alchemist.

However, Yingou, her alchemist teacher, secretly told me that Olivia's alchemy potions were becoming even stronger—and their effects, too, were getting stranger. For example, there had been an underwear thief with ridiculously long body hair who had kept stealing underwear all over the Cloud Tower. When he was finally captured, it was discovered that he was only a wild monkey who had been fed an "extra hair growth" potion from Olivia. It was just that not only did the potion help the monkey lengthen its body hair, it also massively increased the monkey's lust, height, strength, intelligence, and many other areas. The ordinary monkey became a long-haired gorilla that went around sexually harassing the mages.

"For the sake of world peace, we should make Olivia use her talent in safer fields. I'd prefer to live a few extra years."—Yingou Beyar.

Yes, those were Yingou's exact words—the Yingou who continually created explosives. This troublemaking goblin actually truly believed that his own disciple was an even bigger troublemaker. Cold sweat was dripping down his face and back as he said this. It seemed that his genius disciple was giving him quite some trouble as of late.

"Oh, right, since her potions are so incredible, how about giving

one to Beifeng? Perhaps it'll have the effect of calming him down. After all, no medicine in the world is capable of saving him. He couldn't possibly get any worse."

"...Aren't you afraid that it's actually possible he'll get worse, and he'll evolve into a Mega Beifeng? Perhaps he'll even awaken some new hobbies, just like that experimental monkey."

When I thought about how that long-haired male monkey awakened to the strange hobby of going around and stealing old men's underwear, and imagined Beifeng becoming like this as well, I, too, broke out into a cold sweat. Just imagining this scene filled me with despair.

"...Let's talk about this topic later. Should this ever happen, we can be certain that Armageddon has arrived."

Suddenly, Yingou seemed to think of something frightening. He revealed a terrified expression, one devoid of hope and filled with despair.

"Recently, Beifeng has been inviting Olivia for lunch and paying for her meals! I think he wants her to create a potion for him!"

"Impossible! Does he think he's still salvageable?"

"Nobody knows if he's still salvageable, but I think he's intending on getting a potion for one of his little companions!"

Just as we were exchanging worried glances with each other, we heard a cry for help from outside.

"Ahhh! Monster!"

A classic monster movie seemed to be playing outside. People were fleeing helter-skelter as shrieks of terror flooded the streets. A gigantic black beast was battling the police mages.

For some reason, that gigantic black beast appeared somewhat familiar. When I changed my position and looked at it from a different angle, I realized that it was a gorilla as tall as this

seventeen-floor mage tower. Currently, this gorilla was delightedly playing around with a "doll" in its hands. This doll, however, seemed strangely familiar, as it had dragon horns and black scales...

"Is that Beifeng? And isn't that the experimental monkey? It evolved yet again?"

"...Who's Beifeng? I don't know who he is."

"...That's right, I don't know who he is, either!"

Cough, both of us decided to ignore that "struggling damsel in distress" in "King Kong's" hands when we thought about the trouble waiting for us later.

Let's just ignore the commotion outside and change the topic of conversation. Since we now had a main headquarters, an excellent place to perform our research as well as a large number of researchers, a store, warehouses, and the recognition from other mage organizations, the Great Industrial Party could be finally said to have matured.

"Tell the goblins and gnomes to not fly too far on their personal flight machines. There are far too many powerful aerial troops in this world—the gargoyles, griffins, and falcon knights are good examples. Since they just recently succeeded in achieving flight, it'll still be difficult to face off against these veteran aerial troops. Let's first focus on improving our airships and cannons."

Yep, the most I could do was to use my status as a "transmigrator" to point them in the right direction. This would help them avoid wasting so much time and money on useless projects like a "perpetual motion machine." In fact, just two days ago, I rejected a research plan called "Perpetual Olivia's Magic Box Development Plan." It would seem that, in any world, researchers would be eternally interested in and ambitious about developing a self-sustaining perpetual energy source.

"Of course, I'm not going to forbid people from privately working on whatever personal research projects they want. After all, nobody knows what's really possible with magic engineering in the future. However, I won't allow such projects to affect the projects I view as A-rank in potential."

I had far too many research projects going on simultaneously, which meant that I was forced to prioritize some over others. It was I who personally assigned letter ranks to each project's importance. Back when the Iron Horses were under development, they were only a B-rank project as it was an invention for the masses. Meanwhile, I assigned the highest rank, the S rank, to developing the seven Big Dipper ships that would complement my "Envy" Borealis. Other S-ranked projects of mine included developing the second generation Olivia's Magic Box as well as improving the mobile mechas. Yep, the projects to which I assigned the highest ranks were ones that would affect practical combat almost immediately. We were, after all, quite short on time.

These generation-changing seeds had already been planted, and there would be no stopping magical engineering from reaching the pinnacle of this world. It could be expected that no matter what happened in the future, as long as the Mage Country wasn't completely destroyed, the Great Industrial Party was certain to become an important mage organization and member of the Truth Symposium. Magical engineering would also become one of the most important fields of all.

Of course, since this was all unstoppable, there was no need for me to worry about it. It wasn't necessary to think that far into the future. I needed to first take care of the present.

[Passive racial talent: Unyielding Beast. The greater your injuries, the more your stats will be increased. If you are in a seriously injured state, you shall receive heightened combat senses, greatly heightening your attack and defense. At maximum, this can triple

your power level and double your Strength and Dexterity upon reaching a seriously injured state. Your Constitution can be tripled. System Notification: Why don't you stop being a mage and simply start leveling up as a barbarian, instead?]

This was the ability I gained via my breakthrough when fighting against the two adamantine magic puppets. It was quite a common one as well. Many aggressive species and tribes possessed abilities that allowed them to become stronger and stronger the more they were injured, especially the barbarians and beastmen. An injured beast would only be more dangerous. In fact, some berserkers would intentionally injure themselves before a battle in order to raise their willpower and combat strength.

Although this was a common ability type, that didn't mean it was useless. Rather, it was the opposite. This was one of the most useful of all "warrior" racial talents. Everyone knew that it was a wonderful feeling to successfully counterattack when being pushed to the brink. However, it was always those who knew how to swim that would drown in larger numbers. Relying on this ability too much meant always dancing on the edge of a cliff. One little misstep would result in death before one could even realize what happened.

"You really did choose the wrong job class. Did you just close your eyes and randomly pick one at the beginning?"

That was Harloys' comment for me when she learned about this ability I gained. But, from a certain standpoint, her comment about me being a mage wasn't wrong in the least. After all, my first ever job class was a Holy Knight, indeed a physical job class. In my second reincarnation, I started learning magic in order to make up for my weaknesses as well as to hide my true identity.

Meanwhile, my System spread some salt on my wound by making the barbarian berserker, heavy knight of the cross, dragon knight, and other powerful melee combat advanced job classes available to me in its options. Some of them were really quite

attractive. If it wasn't for the fact that my bloodline required my power over Order and Chaos to be in balance, I really would have been tempted to take on another subclass.

In order to test my new ability, I went and defeated everyone in the arena, unexpectedly finding a few skilled individuals who I convinced to become my subordinates. Of course, something else happened as a result as well.

"Barbarian mage? Me?"

Fine then, I suppose it was rather surprising news to everyone that I defeated a heavy armor boar knight empty-handed. Hey, it wasn't my fault that he refused to duel against me unless I promised to not use any magic when he saw my Emblems of Endless Truth. That was why I agreed and defeated him with my hands alone.

"That's your excuse for crushing his iron helmet to pieces with your bare hands? And then tossing his boar steeds into the stands? You really are a barbarian!"

"Cough, that was just an accident."

After the Great Industrial Party and Thorn Garden solidified their presences, the Truth Symposium made an official decision as well.

It was now time for us to leave.

If you want to know what this toy is, type 竹蜻蜓 in Google Images.

Chapter 324: Return to the Forest of Dreams

I barely recognized the Forest of Dreams when I returned.

The moment I stepped off the Ivy League, I noticed a large number of airships parked at the docks. These ships bore all sorts of flags, indicating that they were from places all over, including Auland, East Mist, the Mage Country, and even the Bardi Empire. It would seem that the Bardi Empire had no intentions of giving up on this place as they must have taken quite the circuitous route to get here.

The docks were packed with people busy either loading or unloading cargo. Most people's attention, however, was attracted to the adventurers who came from far and wide. Their equipment revealed that each team had at least one "Contract Hero" who possessed a Hero's Armlet.

To be honest, the Forest of Dreams was more appealing a place than the battle-wrought Auland Empire for adventures who wished to earn Justice Points. The battles here were of a smaller scale, and the perfect "safe zone" in the Forest of Dreams made this place all the more popular.

Most adventurers were humans, but there was no lack of other species. After all, other species possessed numerous physical advantages on humans, and their lives as adventurers would be easier. I recognized some Northlands barbarians and beastmen, as well as a couple of lizardmen from the desert region far, far away.

"This place seems quite popular."

Even greater changes met my eyes when I left the docks and headed inside the forest. Clusters of people amid a flourishing marketplace and a lively administrative district were embellished with wood spirits who were crossing their rope bridges which dotted the treetops. This place was no longer empty.

Quite the commotion was caused earlier when we returned in the Ivy League. Most airships were smaller, wooden ones capable of only carrying thirty to fifty passengers. Such a massive divine tree airship gave the bystanders a deep impression.

We immediately began doing business in the docks just moments after disembarking.

"Thorn Garden's branch store in the Forest of Dreams is officially opening! Don't miss our opening sale!"

The Ivy League was quite large to begin with, which meant that we had plenty of space to carry cargo. So, I decided to modify it into a merchant transport ship. As for the main goods we were selling? The combat mechas from Thorn Garden, of course!

The Ivy League parked horizontally on the docks, and all the cargo hold doors automatically opened, transforming into storefronts right on the spot. The wood spirits who had come with me to the Mage Country instantly commenced their business upon returning home.

We had Iron Horses (with training wheels), simple self-propelled mechas, engineered cannons, and all sorts of other items for combat. Of course, we also possessed some experimental weapons and equipment.

A sawtoothed sword that constantly buzzed, the newest dwarven rifles, portable dwarven handheld cannons, and mechanized shields with defensive energy barriers. All sorts of new products were waiting to be tested in combat.

An excellent weapons merchant would test their weapons on the battlefield while raking in profits at the same time. They would then use these profits to improve their products and attract even more customers. The only difference between me and a pure weapons merchant was that I was slightly more conscientious. After all, I only sold weapons to one side.

Judging from our first day sales, the adventurers were rather hesitant about purchasing our products. The goblins and gnomes had too poor of a reputation because of their explosions. The sales were especially affected by the fact that Jinya Beyar insisted on acting as the demonstrator and sent himself flying in the sky with a boom in front of all the spectators... I told him not to use the "Safety Brand" rockets! That brand name is cursed!

"As expected, these bastards are too unreliable. Forget it, forget it. There will be a few daring adventurers who will try our new products. Let's prove the mettle of our products with time and accomplishments in battle."

Obviously, we hurried back to the Forest of Dreams for reasons more important than conducting business. We had left as envoys for the wood spirits, and we returned having successfully allied with the Mage Country. However, there was now a new troublesome issue that had returned together with me.

"The Mage Country is sending her as an official envoy to the Bardi Empire to negotiate a ceasefire? How troublesome."

Instead of me, Cher became the envoy. Some higher-ups apparently learned about the relationship between us. There was an obvious problem with using her as the envoy: I would naturally have to get involved as well. After all, it would be tantamount to suicide to leave diplomacy to someone who was merely a "novice" in the Gold rank.

"Well, I suppose it's fine. I wanted to see what's going on back in the Bardi Empire anyways."

My inference was that I wasn't directly appointed as the envoy because the Mage Country was afraid that I would do something too ridiculous, like performing a God's Descent or something like that.

Compared to an outsider like me, Cher counted as far more of a local and would probably look out more for the Mage Country's

interests.

I already knew my next plan. I would rest here at the Forest of Dreams and prepare for a few days before heading to the Bardi Empire's capital city. I would stop by on the way at Nightrain City, which was currently in the thick of battle, depending on my judgment of the current situation.

Yes. I, simply me by myself. The envoy group would head directly to the capital city, while I wouldn't be traveling together with them. We would arrange a place to reconvene in the capital city.

Rather than being a diplomatic envoy in everyone's sight, I preferred to act alone in the shadows. There were many things that couldn't be seen on the surface. And, if possible, I even wanted to try and make some free time to go take a look at the eastern battlefront where Bardi was fighting against the Holy Light's army. Perhaps I would even see a familiar face or two there.

I roamed around by myself in the new areas of the Forest of Dreams. All this flourishment really was quite astonishing. Six months ago, this place was still Port Victoria of the Bardi Empire. Two months ago, this place was a magical forest with not a single human living in it. It managed to develop to such an extent so quickly?

"...Although many are injured, the adventurers seem to be quite spirited. Most of them are smiling. Is it because they see hope for the future? It looks like I don't need to worry about the Forest of Dreams; I should find a chance to go take a look at what's going on at the frontlines..."

It was now noon. I entered a random restaurant and ordered a few dishes. While waiting for my food to arrive, I listened to a barbarian bragging about his own adventures.

"It all happened in the blink of an eye. Our team was forced to the brink, and that meant it was time for a great thief like me to shine.

I started off with a backstab, and then stunned the lich with a kick. I used my skills in combination and singlehandedly killed off that lich named Wofrida..."

Wait a moment; this barbarian was in the thief job class? I suppose that with enough people around, there would be no end to the number of weirdos. Still, after recalling that I previously met an ogre thief, I felt that it wasn't anything to be shocked about. Yet, was it really possible for liches to be stunned? Either that lich was only an undead mage who was wearing a skeleton head mask as a disguise, or this barbarian was simply a tremendous braggart who exaggerated his accomplishments.

"Sir Holy Knight, are you by yourself?"

A young female priestess greeted me with a smile. The gold coin emblem on her chest exhibited the fact that was a mid-ranked priestess who served Beyana, the Goddess of Wealth.

Of course, she wasn't greeting me to offer me any sort of special services. While other priestesses might indeed offer such services, those who believed in the Goddess of Wealth were only interested in money.

I was mystified for a moment before I realized what was going on.

The Forest of Dreams was a frontline of battle. Plenty of temporary adventuring teams would be created here.

Plenty of visitors would visit the bars and restaurants here, so this would undoubtedly be a place where adventures looked for companions. Since I was by myself, I probably seemed like someone looking for a team. This priestess must be looking for a teammate. However, the strange part was...

"How did you know I'm a Holy Knight?"

I had taken off my mage robe since I was no longer in the Cloud Tower. With an average cotton robe that could be found just about

anywhere, I was devoid of weapons. How did she notice my job class?

"Your posture, your smile, and the marks on your hands."

After undergoing long periods of training, those who became Holy Knights would have distinct postures while walking and sitting. Certain marks would be left on their hands due to long hours of practicing swordsmanship. As for Holy Knights' smiles... the #59 smile used for business was practically copyrighted and instinctual.

"More importantly you don't seem dissatisfied by the cheap beer you're drinking here. Even the barbarian in my team complains every day about how bad the alcohol is, but you didn't even frown when you drank it down. You were smiling, which likely means you aren't that well off..."

Indeed. Nobles' knights wouldn't even dream about drinking some low-quality beer like this that cost only two copper coins, nor would they ever enter such a low-tier restaurant like this one. Only Holy Knights, who were used to being poor, would be used to drinking cheap wine and dining on rye bread.

I nodded in appreciation. While it wasn't particularly astonishing to be able to discern a person's job class from their physical appearance and behavior, it was still evidence that this person was a veteran adventurer. Only now did I seriously take a look at the priestess before me.

She appeared to be roughly eighteen or nineteen years old. Her clean, neat, and short flaxen hair and energetic expression overshadowed the tiny amount of acne on her face. The half-body armor she was clad in seemed somewhat used, but it was well taken care of, which could be seen from its sheen. The round shield and cudgel she wielded were the most common equipment for priests, but only that small shield was enchanted. It was quite obvious she wasn't very rich as she possessed almost no magical

equipment whatsoever.

"...At the very most, she's in the Silver rank. If she's the team captain, then her team's overall strength is probably only at the peak of Bronze."

I lightly tapped my index finger on the table, causing a golden Holy Light to flash for an instant, corroborating her guess that I was indeed a Holy Knight.

"Do you have any business with me?"

The priestess was first delighted to see the Holy Light but then became hesitant. Originally, she saw only a Holy Knight by himself who didn't even have equipment. Not to mention, he appeared quite young, so she thought that he was only a novice. But from the way he was easily able to control the power of Holy Light, he seemed like a Gold rank advanced job class Holy Knight who specialized in Divine Arts. Her team would be unable to afford hiring such an individual, one far more powerful than they were.

"Our adventuring team received a task that pays quite well. However, our warrior, who was our tank, quit on us. We're currently looking for someone who's a melee combat class."

I furrowed my eyebrows upon hearing this. She barely gave me any details about the task, which made her sound like she lacked sincerity.

No normal mercenary or adventurer would accept such an unclear mission. The more unknowns there were, the more potential danger there could be as well. Either that, or the person offering the job had devious intentions.

Life was no game. There were no do overs. Any adventurer that wanted to enjoy a long life despite constantly having to battle would need to always remain cautious.

The priestess seemed to notice my displeasure and hurriedly explained herself.

"It's not that I don't want to tell you the details, it's because this is a large-scale operation of the wood spirits. We're only a small part of it, and we won't know the specific task requirements until they issue them to us."

I hesitated for a moment before nodding and accepting her request.

"Wonderful! Our 'Wood Spirits are So Cute' mercenary squad finally has a tank again! We can finally accept missions!"

"...What? Could you say that again?"

This time, the priestess was the one who felt quite awkward. She lowered her head and explained to me in a soft voice.

"Our team consists of people who all met here for the first time. We tried coming up with several names, but they all already existed, so..."

In a way, I could understand. After all, the wood spirits were incredibly popular in the Mage Country as well. Their female fans spent entire days chatting with them in the coffee house section of Thorn Garden, difficult to chase away even after we closed in the evenings. This priestess here before me was probably a huge wood spirit fan as well.

Although it was quite common for females to become huge wood spirit fans, most wood spirit fan clubs were actually more like male-only lolicon fan clubs—didn't she know this? Those perverts would be strictly investigated, so wasn't she worried about others laughing their heads off at hearing such a team name? For some reason, I suddenly recalled a certain "Absolute Gentleman Alliance." A terrible, terrible name which would leave run with regrets for eons. As expected, one must be cautious when naming something. Yep, naming things should be left to a grandmaster of naming like me.

"So, why did your previous warrior quit your team?"

I faintly guessed at the reason, but I asked anyways.

"...He didn't like our team's name."

As I expected. Any male would suffer serious pressure and stares from other people when being in a team with such a name. Others would definitely think he was a perverted lolicon. I was even considering going back on my agreement to join them, yet I couldn't help but sigh when I saw her looking at me pitifully with a gaze that had such expectation.

At any rate, I had wanted to check out the combat situation here at the Forest of Dreams, and I was only going to be here for a few days. It'd be harmless to just join this random team and make do for some time.

And so, I finally nodded again in agreement. I might as well make use of this and get some exercise.

"Alright, lady priestess. Holy Knight Roland is at your service, at least for the next few days."

A certain lake in the forest was just as beautiful and calm as always. Moonlight reflected off of the lake water, and this area was far quieter than anywhere else in the Forest of Dreams.

I walked across the lotuses to reach the center of the lake. The sleeping beauty appeared the same as always as she slept in her flower bed. The only difference was that her complexion seemed less pale than before.

As I walked closer, she seemed to sense my presence as her long eyelashes twitched slightly. It was as if she was dreaming about something pleasant, since she was smiling sweetly. It appeared she was going to wake up soon.

"Although you're a lot cuter when you're quiet... maybe I really am looking forward to you waking up and annoying me like always."

However, it was a pity was that there was still no response to my

words. Finally, I could only leave Amelia alone in silence.

"I guess that there hasn't been enough sacrifices yet?"

I was seemingly talking to myself, but I received a response just as I expected.

"...Please don't worry so much. It's only a matter of time before Mother wakes up."

The bright red Samantha walked out from behind a tree. Her calm expression appeared to be slightly troubled despite her words.

I nodded and didn't ask anything else. She was likely far more worried about Amelia than I was.

But just as I was about to leave, I recalled the priestess I just met.

"Oh, right, are you all about to undertake a major operation of some sort? Something that requires gathering many adventurers?"

"...Yes. I was intending on informing you about it, Father. It's about expanding the Forest of Dreams..."

Chapter 325: Great Luck Like Always

"As expected, streetside advertisements are totally false."

Early in the morning of the next day, I met with yesterday's priestess, whose name was Betty, at the same restaurant. I was introduced to her team. But as a veteran former adventurer, I merely had to take a glance at her team to notice that far more was strange about her team than just the team's name, Wood Spirits Are So Cute.

Actually, not even a veteran adventurer was necessary. Even a novice adventurer would be able to notice their problems! No wonder they had Betty as the one trying to recruit people. Everyone else in this team was simply ridiculous!

The team consisted of three other people apart from Betty and myself. The first and most familiar one was... the barbarian thief I had seen bragging at the restaurant yesterday!

Standing at 2.3 or 2.4 meters tall, his wrists were thicker than my thighs. His armor was bursting at the seams due to his overly muscular body structure. His face seemed so vicious that simply a look could kill. His natural-born advantage in Strength as well as racial talent, Frenzy, made barbarians the most suited warriors to join the berserker job class. However, the moment I met him, he actually said, rather awkwardly:

"Violence is wrong. That's why I haven't resorted to brute force for a long time. I, Ah Gen, am a non-combat thief."

A non-combat thief? He was telling me that a barbarian was a non-combat thief? The barbarians' God of War would be angered to death upon hearing such a thing!

Of course I knew what a non-combat thief was. Such thieves would be experts in ruin exploration, disabling and dismantling all sorts of traps and mechanisms—not to mention the obvious,

stealing. Their most important stats wouldn't be the Dexterity and Strength that was the norm for most thieves. Instead, it would be Intelligence—plenty of knowledge was required to understand how to avoid and disarm traps and so on. No idiot would be able to become a non-combat thief. And since non-combat thieves typically spent all their time on training their special job class skills rather than their combat skills, they usually had far less than fifty percent the combat strength of their fellow thieves. In fact, it was more like zero combat strength.

Since non-combat thieves weren't required to focus on combat strength, it naturally became the most favored job class of gnomish adventurers, as they naturally lacked Strength and were willing to do underhanded things. Their smaller bodies would be able to more easily dodge traps targeted at humans, plus they had naturally flexible bodies and racial bonuses to Intelligence, making them the best non-combat thieves of all.

As I recalled, barbarians had a racial talent bonus to Strength together with a racial talent penalty to Intelligence. Once they entered their berserk states via their racial skill, Frenzy, their Intelligence would be lowered even further, to 3 or so. They would be no different from beasts. Even speaking in complete sentences would be difficult when under the effects of Frenzy.

If he had utilized his natural-born Strength advantage and entered some type of combat-focused assassin job class, I would have only considered him "slightly unusual." Yet, this guy actually entered the job class of the non-combat thief, the one which had extremely high requirements for Intelligence. All I could say was that this guy was probably a terrible teammate who always dragged his team down with him.

'...I must remain classy. I'm currently a Holy Knight. If I give in to my anger and shout or viciously comment about him, I would ruin my image.'

I did my best to suppress my urges and somehow managed to

smile and nod.

"Friend, may the Holy Light give you its blessing."

At this, the tremendously tall barbarian suddenly rushed over and hugged me, with huge tears dripping down my back and wetting my shirt.

"You—you—you're the first person ever who hasn't laughed at me!"

"My dear barbarian friend, everyone has the right to choose their own path in life. How could I possibly laugh at you?"

"From today onwards, you're Ah Gen's bro! All those who laughed at Ah Gen deserved their beatings!"

Seeing how Ah Gen didn't attempt to beat up his new companion, his other teammates had unmistakable expressions of disappointment. It was obvious that they had intended on watching a fun scene—a scene most definitely fun for them but not me. Just what teammates were these!?

The second one who came over and introduced herself was Betty, the priestess from yesterday. She appeared to be quite normal.

"My name is Betty Wenlais. You can just call me Betty. By the way, I'm a boy."

Alright then. In just an instant, the most normal-seeming one became the weirdest one of all...

"I'm a Holy Knight, I'm a Holy Knight, I'm a Holy Knight. The most important thing for Holy Knights is... Remember: even if you're bleeding, even if you die... your hairstyle and smile must never ever die!"

I kept muttering this to myself in an attempt to calm myself down, but I still couldn't prevent my expression from freezing over for a moment. Seconds later, however, I recovered and used the standard #59 Holy Knight smile and reached out my right hand to

Betty.

"I'm quite pleased to meet you, Mister Betty."

"Wow! This guy is still capable of smiling! It's just like Betty said, his fake smile seems so realistic! I've heard that a Holy Knight's power is in direct proportion to how well they can maintain their fake smiles. Since he's still capable of smiling upon learning that Sister Betty is actually a man, doesn't that make him super amazing!?"

'I can hear everything you just said, you bastard!'

Veins were throbbing on my forehead. Still, I kept muttering "I didn't hear anything, I didn't hear anything" to myself and continued smiling at this team filled with weirdos.

The little girl who was just commenting about me now seemed like the most ordinary member of this team. She was incredibly short and stocky with an ordinary appearance. Her sledgehammer at her waist, low and deep voice, and long blonde ponytail that almost reached the ground all indicated that she was from the Alaidun Mountains... a dwarf girl!

Dwarves were quite common in the world. The Underground had gray dwarves, while there were mountain dwarves and shield dwarves residing in the mountains on the surface. Although dwarves were quite short, they had stat bonuses in Strength and Constitution and would typically become smiths, warriors, or miners. They were typically direct and bold, and were natural-born warriors.

Of course, disadvantages came along with the advantages. Not only were dwarves short, but they also had slow reactions. Having them hop around like elves would be impossible. Still, dwarves were quite famous for their high defensive prowess, especially with shields. With a dwarf in their team, why did they lack a tank?

"Hello, Sir Holy Knight. I'm Mary, Mary the archer."

This female dwarf even pointed directly at the ironwood bow on her back as she introduced herself.

Alright then, should I say that it was to be expected? There was no normal person in this team at all. A dwarf actually went and became an archer, the specialty of elves? Her mountain bloodline was probably crying!

"Very pleased to meet you, Miss Mary."

"Actually, that should be Mrs. Mary. I'm already married with two children. My husband's a good-for-nothing so I'm having him stay at home and take care of the kids while I'm out working, earning money to support my family."

Pahahah, so she was a dwarf auntie all along!

I didn't even know what to say as I looked at her rather squarish face.

There was a saying that the only noticeable difference between male and female dwarves was that male dwarves had higher-pitched voices. Yep, that's right. It was the male dwarves who had higher-pitched voices, not female. This was mostly because female dwarves spoke in a gruff fashion and had low and masculine voices. Their deep and booming voices would always attract attention and echo numerous times.

When you looked at their physical appearances, female dwarves would grow beards just like the male dwarves, while male dwarves also enjoyed wearing ponytails. It was incredibly difficult for outsiders to differentiate between male and female dwarves based on physical features alone. Also, they had strange standards of beauty by human perspectives. I had absolutely no idea what was so alluring about a "local dwarf girl with that sexy barrel waist and thick beard," a common dwarven saying.

Due to the differences in standards of beauty, it was also difficult for outsiders to guess a dwarf's age. Still, most dwarven

adventurers were "youngsters" that would be about 70 to 80 years old, which was why I had assumed that she was just a dwarf "girl." But since this Mary said that she already had two children, when calculating by the fact that dwarves were considered adults at 120 years old, she was probably a bit over 200.

Alright then, with three strange teammates, I was already becoming numb. The fourth and final teammate was a nice-looking elf. His fancy leather armor and three-stringed harp on his back told me his job class. He was a very handsome elven bard.

"Hello, I'm Solonor. Nice to meet you."

Not bad. His etiquette was quite normal, his physical appearance seemed normal, his name seemed normal, and his job class seemed normal for his species. But, for some reason, my gentlemen spidey sense instinctively told me that this Solonor was no normal individual. The chill running down my spine told me that I was in danger.

"...As expected, Solo's taken an interest in him."

"Big Bro Solonor's such a fine fellow in all respects, except for this little interest of his. He's already scared away several warriors... but we couldn't have become such good sisters if he wasn't like this."

My sharp hearing picked up on their whispers. This time, my smile was finally no more.

"I—I—I... you're gay?!"

"...Please, there's no need to say it like that. I merely like youngsters with nice appearances."

While saying so, Solonor was shaking my hand, and he suddenly pinched me. This caused goosebumps to spread all over my skin.

"The f***! What's with all of you!? Let go of me! You want me to throw my shoe at you!?"

Alright then, meeting Solonor for the first time ended up like how I typically greeted Beifeng. I was now panting after having stomped Solonor under my feet.

"Krose should still be in the local Church of Law here, right? I think I need his curative smile."

For some mysterious reason, I felt that my mood would improve greatly if the wild elf Krose smiled at me.

"Hahaha! You were disgusted by someone gay hitting on you, so you're going to go cure yourself by finding a trap? There's no saving you."

As always, the silly cat's insult arrived right on time, but I didn't even have the spirit to retort back at her. Who were all these people? I doubted that I would find a single stranger adventuring team in the entire Forest of Dreams. Was my luck truly that awful?

"Silly cat, meow for me and act cute."

"Meow, Master, I would like to drink some milk. I like my milk white, murky, and smelly."

Alright then, this silly cat instantly transformed into a young golden cat girl, who had gold cat ears, a gold cat tail, and furry paws for hands. She intentionally said her words in a way that was easy to misunderstand, and she was even licking her lips while glancing at me in a seductive fashion that made her seem quite hungry for a certain something. A part of me instantly stood up... yep, all my goosebumps were now standing up.

"Go away, yep, Harloys, go and transform into a meteor in the sky."

And so, I immediately forced Harloys back into her cat form, then stomped the ground and used a javelin-throwing posture to toss her away into the air as far as I could.

"You stupid wooden block, you deserve to be single for your entire life... Meow, I don't like this feeling..."

I angrily turned around to discover that my new team was currently discussing me.

"He actually transformed his own pet into a woman? He must be ****ing his own pet. Could this be the legendary, Bei, um... what was it called again?"

"Beifeng! That legendary pervert!"

Alright then, it seemed that even random low-level adventurers knew who Beifeng was. Congratulations, Beifeng, you've achieved your life goal! You're famous, really famous!

"Relax, even if you've already a Beifeng, we won't discriminate against you. Everyone has the right to freely choose who they love." Solonor even seemed to sincerely nod his head in understanding.

"Ahhhh! Someone who's gay is sympathizing with my plight with women!"

At this moment, I seriously considered returning to the River Styx and starting over yet again.

"Actually, now we all feel much more reassured about you. Only someone like you will be a truly good fit for our team; no normal person would stay for long!"

Betty's words had everyone nodding, while I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"I'm clearly a normal person as well!"

[King of all Gentlemen...]

"System, you shut up!"

Since we had all finished our basic introductions, the rule of thumb for new adventuring teams was to pick a random easy task to work together on to see how well everyone cooperated. After all, practical combat was far more convincing than what anyone said.

The wood spirits' huge operation was scheduled to begin in three

days. This didn't affect the normal, easy-level hunting tasks, though. We randomly picked an easy "Collect 100 poisonous corpse zombie teeth" and took a horse-drawn carriage—it costed us two silver coins—and exited the Forest of Dreams.

Corpse zombies were slightly stronger than ordinary zombies. They resembled slightly shorter, skinnier, and uglier zombies, and although they weren't physically strong, they were more agile. Their teeth and claws were poisonous. If someone wasn't careful and died to them, there was a high likelihood that they would be transformed into a corpse zombie as well.

Corpse-type undead all had the ability to use other corpses to strengthen themselves. The name 'corpse zombie' was self-explanatory. Corpse zombies were quite aggressive, had excellent noses, and were considered a common sight around the Forest of Dreams.

Soon, we located a horde of corpse zombies on a hill. It looked like there was roughly between ten and twenty of them. The strongest one among them appeared to be a corpse zombie king.

I already asked my team for their power levels. This strange little team actually had decent combat strength compared to ordinary adventuring teams. All of them were at least at the Silver rank or better. Even a Bronze warrior would be able to defeat an ordinary corpse zombie, and corpse zombie kings were the equivalent of a strong Silver rank at most. This should be quite an easy task.

"For the Holy Light!"

I pretended to be the typical Holy Knight who loathed the undead in order to somewhat fix the image my team had of me. I roared out as was my habit as I rushed first as the vanguard.

And then, I ran back at an even higher speed...

In just an instant, I understood why it was that this team was unable to recruit anyone for the tank role.

Solonor and "Betty" were both backline support types, or a more blunt way to put it was that they were useless in direct combat. Mary, who was an archer, had no reason to fight on the frontlines, either. Non-combat thieves, as according to adventurers' typical customs, were exempt from having to fight. So, in the end, I was the only one who charged forth.

Although corpse zombies had poisonous teeth and claws, why would I possibly fear that when I had the Myth-ranked shield, "Emordilorcan's Wall of Sighs"? I was running for my life because of my teammates!

"You're actually secretly my enemies, aren't you! Tell me the truth, did you all actually kill your last teammate?"

Mary's longbow was crafted out of ironwood. This type of tree only grew in the mountains and was named so due to the fact that its bark was literally as hard as iron. Wooden swords crafted from ironwood could function in identical fashion as iron swords. However, crafting a bow out of ironwood meant that no ordinary person would be able to wield it.

However, Mary was a dwarf warrior with over one hundred years of combat experience. Her brute strength was in no way inferior to any melee combat job class. Arrows that should have swiftly darted past me instead became like heavy cannon shots that went BOOM! BOOM! These weren't arrows passing me by, they were more like death coming straight for me. If I had ducked just one second slower, I would probably be bald right now.

Meanwhile, the corpse zombie king was currently busy fighting against our so-called "non-combat thief," Ah Gen.

Non-combat thieves weren't supposed to be good at fighting? Have you ever seen a non-combat thief who wielded a huge broadsword? Have you ever seen a non-combat thief who sliced a corpse zombie king in half? This non-combat thief even went into a berserk state!

Judging by how Ah Gen's muscles almost doubled in size and only his eye whites were showing, this was even the high-level barbarian technique "Complete Berserkness.' This basically meant that not only would his Strength explosively increase, but he would also transform into a slaughtering machine that wouldn't feel any pain or know how to reason. He sliced that corpse zombie king in half with just two swings of his broadsword, and judging by how Ah Gen was now drooling while staring at me, he now viewed me as his greatest threat!

"Hurry and run, Sir Roland! Ah Gen has a phobia of seeing blood. The moment he sees blood, he'll automatically Frenzy and completely go berserk, without recognizing friend from foe!"

Alright then, I now understood why this fellow didn't join a warrior job class. Complete Berserkness was supposed to be a trump card, but he couldn't even control himself? That meant that he wouldn't even be able to differentiate friend from foe on the battlefield!

"You're all experts at making people suffer! Why do I have such terrible teammates!"

Chapter 326: Secret Plot

There now existed a city by the name of Asolivis, which, in the undead language, meant "The place where Aso eternally rests."

The six Dimensional Doors became considered the most essential strategic structures of all by the undead after they started arriving in droves from the six Undead Planes. They were heavily guarded at all times, and what would provide better protection than an impregnable fortress city? And so, under the Undead Emperors' instruction, a new city was constructed here. It was clearly visible from the Forest of Dreams, but both locations remained at a strange peace. Battles were only taking place in the land between them.

Apart from the "small conflicts" between the adventurers and the undead, there actually wasn't much battling on the eastern battlefront of the Forest of Dreams and Asolivis. However, the western battlefront of Nightrain City and the undead's new Gravestone City was now at a deadlock with a heated battle.

Asolivis was now the undead's major city for dimensional teleportation as well as their main headquarters in the world of Eich. Although the Undead Emperors were still unable to personally descend, they went all out in using their power and resources to help countless Myth and Saint-ranked Undead Lords descend. Thanks to the support of the Dimensional Doors, even average SemiGods would be unable to deal with these Undead Lords as long as they remained in Asolivis.

The first ever City Lord of Asolivis was named Davey Soke. Davey was a Ghoul Lord from the Desecration Plane.

Although ghouls were an evolved form of corpse zombies, they didn't count as a high-level undead species. Ghouls had more venomous poison and were far more fetid than the corpse zombies, but the fact that they were incredibly ugly and bloodthirsty made

them particularly unpopular even among the undead.

However, despite being a Ghoul, a low-level undead species, Davey was able to reach the status of an Undead Lord. The Undead Emperors even put him in charge of their most crucial territory, a sufficient explanation of his abilities.

He was very sly and intelligent, reaching fame even before achieving a high power level. He was nicknamed "The undead whose slyness is closest to Emperor Aso's." Any other Undead Emperor who heard themselves being compared to a low-level undead species like a ghoul would likely become furious and immediately kill the ghoul in question, but Aso had merely laughed aloud before proceeding to take Davey in as his disciple.

Not only was Davey truly grateful to Aso, but he also lived up to Aso's expectations. Thanks to Aso's teachings, Davey had managed, albeit slowly, to reach the Myth rank. And now, the Undead Emperors had put him in charge of Asolivis, not only because they believed in his personal strength but also because of his connection to Aso.

After he was put in charge, he indeed did a splendid job in running the city. This gigantic city had six layers to it. The three outer layers were where low-level undead stayed and organized themselves into troops, the mid-level undead stayed in the next two inner layers, while the innermost layer, which was as grand as any human country's capital city, was reserved for the high-level undead.

Every single district in Asolivis had a large number of Soul-Summoning Towers. Countless zombies, corpse zombies, skeletons, and other low-level undead were being awakened or summoned here every day. The high-level would lead them as if herding a group of sheep, steadily traveling to the frontlines and eventually becoming cannon fodder at Nightrain City.

Under most of these Soul-Summoning Towers were undead

mages who busily experimented with all sorts of mid and low-level undead ingredients. Thanks to the terrain bonuses from the Undead Plane Dimensional Doors as well as the Soul-Summoning Towers' support, numerous modified and evolved undead were continually exiting from their experimental laboratories. The undead army now possessed plenty of mid-level elites as well.

The undead's best military strategy would always be wars of attrition designed to fatigue the enemy. It was common that an entire army of undead would have only a single high-level undead commanding the entire army, as that was all that was necessary to give any defending army a huge amount of trouble. The worst part was that the undead would constantly attack without regards to day or night, twenty-four hours a day. Even the strongest human individuals needed to rest, while the undead didn't need to rest at all. Although most of the attacking undead would be low-level undead that were of little threat, there were often mid-level or even high-level undead hiding amongst them that could easily cause fatalities. A single slip of one's guard could result in an irretractable misstep.

Even though humans could take turns and rest in shifts, they would still accumulate fatigue over time during battle. Nor was it so easy for human injuries to recover quickly. Once a battle started, medical supplies were always the quickest to run out no matter how much was stored beforehand.

It was said that Nightrain City was already forced to use the dragon knights to deal with the undead's most common tactic, a sea of skeletons. Unfortunately for them, this was mostly ineffective. Even if dragon breath cleared out the battlefield in an instant, the undead would soon fill in the gaps with their numbers.

The undead were slow and weak, but they were also endless. Perhaps if you fought them, it would be easy for you to defeat countless undead. However, you would lose all of your companions without even realizing it, and finally, once you reach the limits of

your stamina or use up all your mana, you'll end up collapsing amongst all the corpses. This was the exact same strategy that the undead had been using to conquer so many cities for centuries. Not only that, all the dead they slew in battle would rise up to become undead, typically increasing the Undead Calamity's numbers even more than before they attacked a city.

The undead were incredibly patient and were still waiting to increase their forces even more. These battles were nothing but appetizers to them. Meanwhile, the adventurers to their east were beginning to attempt to get in the undead's way and keep them busy in order to decrease the pressure on Nightrain City. That was how this entire area became a battlefield.

At this moment, while battles constantly raged on everywhere, the City Lord Davey personally welcomed two venerated guests to the city of Asolivis.

These two guests both appeared to be handsome youths. One appeared slightly older, with long hair reaching his shoulders, while the younger one wore a red headscarf. However, both were ridiculously handsome to the point where they didn't even seem human. They had incredibly perfect muscles that seemed to be shining golden, while their blindingly blonde hair sparkled like the sun. Their sky-blue eyes seemed to have the galaxy whirling within them, while they were able to walk in midair as if they were stepping on solid ground. They seemed just like heroes from legend.

"My respected Lord Hatley and Lord Yins, I thank you for coming to greet us in the form of mortals' bodies. Otherwise, I doubt I would be able to find appropriately sized chairs for Milords."

The old ghoul had a hunched back and wore a black cape while he used a walking staff to support himself. Davey appeared like an elder who might collapse at any moment, but he wasn't nervous in front of these two guests at all—two beings who were on par with the Gods. He even joked around with them.

"Ha, no need for such formalities. Since even the False Gods have the ability to send out incarnations to walk around in the mortal plane, how could we titan giants possibly remain stuck in mere stone statues?"

"...Little brat, we're not the patient type. Let's get directly to the point and talk about cooperating. You filthy undead, just when are you going to conquer the Bardi Empire's capital! Unseal us already!"

******

I was now adventuring together with a small team. What a nostalgic feeling.

In this incredibly large world, most powerful individuals had strength far surpassing that of ordinary soldiers. But apart from very few who possessed Golden Bloodlines or species that were naturally powerful, most individuals would have to increase their power levels gradually, step by step.

Small teams would forever be the most basic and most important unit in this world, one that was focused on heroes saving the day. The ability for an adventurer to cooperate with their teammates would directly affect that adventurer's reputation. This was why there were also job classes like skill-focused thief and bard, despite the fact that they were useless in direct combat. They focused on acting as a team's support.

For difficult, large-scale operations that required a large number of adventurers, some veteran and well-reputed adventurers would summon numerous smaller adventuring teams to work under them. Well, this would work for certain special occasions, for short periods of time. However, don't count on the adventurers being as well organized or disciplined as a military army. Things would be alright as long as they were winning, but the moment things turned ugly, it would be difficult to guarantee an adventurer's loyalty to your cause.

No matter how strong an adventurer was, they still wouldn't be useful if they were unreliable. This was why whenever large-scale military operations went down, normal adventuring teams could only help on the sidelines, acting as support.

But sometimes, as long as you used them properly, adventuring teams had their advantages as well: they were far more skilled than even elite soldiers at small-scale battles.

This time, the wood spirits were both using small elite teams and hiring a large number of adventuring teams in order to carry out a large-scale undead hunting operation. The adventuring teams would serve as both the hunters of the undead as well as bait to draw the undead's attention. Once the adventuring teams were attacked or perhaps even lost contact with the wood spirits, they would learn that the undead had arrived. The adventurers would also serve as the first obstacle in the undead's way.

After all, once the wood spirits' plan was fully set in motion, all the undead would likely be astonished. At that time, perhaps even the undead in Asolivis would swarm out to attack.

And I, Roland Mist, was currently in such a small adventuring team that was scheduled to carry out the task of hunting the undead.

Chapter 327: Seeds

"I'm so stupid..."

Random teams would never be reliable as their members wouldn't be well acquainted with each other—and I was well aware of this fact. Problems would abound; the archer would be nearsighted, the priest would always be daydreaming the moment the battle would begin, the combat warrior would focus on raising his Intelligence stat and would put all his skill points into haggling and diplomacy, or the mage would forget her magic books and mana potions. Situations would twist and turn in ways one couldn't even begin to imagine as truth was forever stranger than fiction. There was no worst teammate—an even worse one would always come along. This time, however, I had readily accepted such an invitation from a random team only for convenience's sake.

"Hunt the undead? Why do I feel like it's the undead who are hunting us!?"

I roared out furiously as I fled. Behind us was a massive troop of undead. When did this all begin? Since when were so many undead chasing after us?"

Perhaps it was all because of this gigantic two-meter-plus tall barbarian next to me? Covering his face with a leafy branch, he proceeding to tiptoe while repeatedly muttering to himself, "You can't see me, you can't see me..." Yet everyone was clearly able to see him, not to mention the excellent noses of the Blood Tribe. Just what was going through is mind when he attempted to ambush the undead, the undead with their expressions of "Are you kidding me?"

Perhaps it was all because of this little girl named Betty—or should I call him a little rascal? Even after the hunt for the undead concluded and a huge wave of skeleton knights was rushing in our

direction as their reinforcements, he still insisted on prying out every gold tooth of a dead lesser lich before finally agreeing to leave.

Perhaps it was because of that dwarf archer auntie who shot a super long range mega cannon shot-like arrow that accidentally hit a cyclops as tall as a mountain?

At any rate, my current situation was due to these garbage teammates of mine! As expected, the worst possible game is one where you have garbage teammates!

"Garbage teammates? Teammates who made you suffer? Did you already forget that it was you who insisted on obtaining undead ingredients right here so that you could cook some bone soup for everyone!? If it wasn't for you wasting time, we'd have long been gone!"

Harloys seemed to have a different opinion from me.

"Hmph. You simply don't understand. Bone elves are a very rare undead species. Making a soup with bone elf bones will be excellent for one's skin, and it'll even improve one's mana pool!"

"...You must be quite the skilled cook with how proud you're sounding right now."

"Of course. When we were all adventuring back in the day, I was the cook for our team. After all, more than anything, a good cook is required on your team while going out on adventures. Otherwise, no matter if you're a Myth rank or a SemiGod, you're still going to go hungry when the time comes. Well, even if you don't starve, eating what's available can be quite disgusting if you don't know how to cook. Look at me for instance. I merely used two bags of spices for this bone soup, and not only have I neutralized the bone elves' natural toxicity, but there's not even a pungent smell. Harloys, didn't you even drink two bowls of my bone soup just now?"

"...Indeed, your bone soup was delicious. But why didn't you tell me first that it had the added side effect of being a sleeping potion! You caused us all to fall asleep until we were totally surrounded by the undead!"

"Ahaha, didn't I just happen to forget? Since it has the power to improve a person's mana, it'll help improve your ability to concentrate and meditate. Isn't meditation really similar to sleeping? It is only natural for it to end up with the side effect of putting people to sleep..."

The silly cat kept glaring at me with a look of dissatisfaction. Fine, I admit it, perhaps I had a slight, ever so small amount of responsibility for the undead horde chasing after us. But, at the very least, I didn't have all the responsibility! I wasn't even the main one responsible!

"Tsk, how unseemly for a man like you to be passing the blame onto others."

I looked back to check and saw that all the slow undead species such as the low-level skeletons, zombies, and mummies were no longer there. The ones still able to follow us were skeleton knights and other such mid and high-level undead. I estimated their number at roughly forty to fifty, and if they successfully caught up and stalled us, there were even more behind them. Our little team would never be able to handle that many. Yep, at least with the power level I was pretending to be at.

"Sheesh, I don't think I can deal with so many undead without getting serious. But if I get serious, wouldn't that reveal my true power... wait a moment, why do I need to avoid revealing my true power level here? Why do I need to run from the undead? There's absolutely no reason for me to be running here!"

I suddenly had an epiphany. I had only intended to check out the combat situation and how the Contract Warrior adventurers were doing here. At most, I would secretly help out the wood spirits a

little so that their planned operation would succeed. I wasn't planning on doing anything like acting far weaker than my power level to fool some enemy, so why was I being so worried about hiding my real power level?

And that was why I unhesitatingly turned around.

"For the Holy Light—"

"Don't be rash!"

"As expected, Holy Knights like to get hotheaded at critical moments. It was right to keep an eye on him."

And so, before I could even unsheathe my sword, the dwarf archer auntie and the trap priest dragged me away and carried me while running...

"Hey —hey—hey! I was going to kill them!"

"Yeah, yeah, you're amazing, we get it. I have a friend who's a Holy Light priestess. She told me that Holy Knights are forever fearless thanks to the Holy Light's guidance..."

Although Betty was saying so, his expression seemed to be one of pity. It was as if he was looking at an unsalvageable fervent believer who wasn't right in the head.

"Cough, my alcohol barrel of a husband told me that Holy Knights have an illness where they love to sacrifice themselves the sake of everyone else. But you should at least sacrifice yourself at a worthy moment. You're so young; you shouldn't have such depressing thoughts at your age. I'm already 136 years, so let me tell you, this world isn't actually that bad at all..."

The dwarven auntie was far more direct. But why did it sound like she was trying to convince me to not commit suicide?

"I really can beat them! I wasn't intending to sacrifice myself, nor am I pushing my limits!"

"Yeah, yeah, we believe you."

Why did they all say that together in such an obviously fake fashion and send me looks of sympathy? I really did have the power to kill all those undead!

"Ahhhh! Let me go! I'm not crazy! Let me go kill those undead...!"

******

Deep in the mountains was a temporary mountain camp, with only some round logs piled up as a rudimentary fortification defensive wall. Tents were spread out everywhere. However, to those who underestimated the defensive prowess of this temporary base, the wood spirits' magical vines and trees hidden in the log walls would teach them a harsh lesson.

This had originally been an important base for the adventurers. Normally, adventurer teams would only be permitted to enter here when they lacked supplies or had injured among them. However, due to a certain special "reason," there were far more people here than anticipated.

After being busy for an entire day... fine then, I should say running away for an entire day, our starving and fatigued adventuring team finally arrived here, earlier than scheduled.

"Look, it's them."

"F***, we had to run away from the undead for three full hours because of them."

"Ha, you guys are still fairly lucky. The Shield of Glory team just killed a high-level Abomination but didn't even have the time to obtain a part of its corpse for the proof of slaying it before they had to flee because of the Wood Spirits are So Cute team. A high-level Abomination is worth almost 100 Justice Points!"

Our Wood Spirits are So Cute team was now famous... After all, pulling an huge horde of undead after us while we ran through the entire combat area ended up creating a snowball effect of more and more undead chasing after us. This naturally made all our allies

suffer together with us. They all wished that they had been born with an extra pair of feet to run with. Perhaps, in that scenario, you'd become famous as well, famous for being a burden on the team, famous for being a professionally garbage teammate!

Right now, no matter where we went, people were pointing at us and whispering, "Those garbage teammates!"

However, the other members of the team I was in ignored all the adventurers' condescension. It appeared as if they were already used to this. No wonder they had been unable to find another teammate.

Betty smeared some sort of strange liquid on his face. It appeared to be some type of makeup. Ah Gen happily continued assembling his "Stealth Equipment" set, adding more leaves and painting it... To be honest, although many thieves will indeed give camouflage colors to their clothing, Ah Gen was only adding more leaves onto two tree branches... and he was even adding more ingredients right now, tying on two rotten heads of cabbage and a carrot. Wasn't this making him stand out even more than not doing anything at all!? Or was he intending on selling vegetables to the undead... Can I pretend to not know him?! I really don't know him!

As for the dwarf little girl... she was only 136 years old, far younger than I expected, and not an auntie at all by dwarven standards. If 136 years old could be called an auntie, then what would that make me as I was more than 300 years old? A granddaddy?

Cough, getting back to the main point, this young dwarf named Mary had all the typical dwarven habits. After downing just three glasses of alcohol, she was already so happy that she had started dancing. Of course, a female dwarf's dance... when looking at it from a distance, it looked just like a dancing alcohol barrel!

Judging by her other three teammates' attitudes of pretending that everyone else's watching-a-joke looks didn't exist, she did this

quite often. This entire team had made so many others suffer before that they got used to ignoring others' condescension.

As for the only relatively normal person in this team, the handsome gay elf bard Solonor, he was currently cheerfully making today's events into a tale he could sing in taverns as he strummed his harp. Of course, I understood that stories arising from real life were permitted to have artistic embellishments so that the story might be a bit different from what really happened. Making the main character more appealing was the job of every author. However...

"I can understand changing the skeleton mobs we defeated into a mob of corpse zombies, and changing a mere lesser lich into a SemiGod mummy can still be excused by saying you had poor eyesight, but being chased around for a single afternoon actually got changed into successfully keeping an Undead Lord's entire army busy for three consecutive days and nights? After being pushed to the limits, we even killed off the Myth-ranked lich leading the army? And what's with rescuing a princess damsel in distress? This is too ridiculous, too shameless! None of this actually happened!"

"...Sir Roland, you don't understand. In this day and age, all we seek is reputation. It's long past the era of telling true stories. We must do this in order to not starve to death. The more unreasonable the storyline's plot, the more people's attention it'll attract. The scarier the storyline, the more thrilling it will be, and all my listeners will reward me with more money. Even if everyone knows it's all made up, it's fine as long as they have their fun. Nobody will actually treat it like it's real. This is how the market works!"

Alright then, I didn't know what to say at being lectured by a native of this world on how the market worked.

I shook my head at the more and more ridiculous behavior of these teammates of mine and decided to instead focus on my own

things.

There was a gigantic ancient tree in the middle of the campground. Although it wasn't as tall as the skyscraper-level trees in the Forest of Dreams, it was at least several hundred years old. However, starting from two days ago when this base was established, the entire area around the tree had been cleared out.

A large number of treants and wood spirits were guarding this tree. While some adventurers tried to find out more about this area, all the ordinary adventurers were blocked off by the wood spirits. When people saw me walking here, a friendly adventurer called out to me in reminder.

"Don't go over there, the wood spirits won't allow anyone to pass..."

Before he even finished speaking, I had already walked past into the wood spirits' forbidden zone. The wood spirits and treant guards seemingly didn't even notice me walking past.

The adventurer who just called out to me proceeded to run over to try for himself. But before he even got close, a wall of thorns suddenly rose up from the ground, while the wood spirits glared at him with expressions of vigilance and distrust. The adventurer could only stop in his tracks and apologize for the intrusion before stepping back.

The perceptive adventurers who witnessed this made a mental note to remember the physical appearance of the seemingly young youth who had just entered and hurriedly went to find out which adventuring team he was in. After all, the wood spirits had only made a single previous exception for a human, and he was the adventurer in charge of all other adventurers in this operation. Yet this unfamiliar young man had received equal treatment. Even though he didn't appear to be anyone special, perhaps he had a special connection to the wood spirits, which meant that it would be worth their time to investigate his identity.

Of course, I didn't know about all these things as I had already walked into the treehouse at this ancient tree. Instead, I was surprised to see another human being here.

This man had blonde hair that reached his shoulders, blue eyes, and white skin. His black armor was glittering with the dim gold of adamantine, and his black gloves were enchanted with powerful magic runes. His gem-encrusted longsword had such powerful mana waves emanating from it that I could sense the mana waves even before I entered the treehouse. While I didn't know this handsome man's power level, it was definite that he was incredibly rich. Every single piece of equipment on him was at minimum a Myth-rank equipment.

Of course I would recognize such a rich individual. He was "Black Guardian" Kaise Elowen, the leader of the super mercenary group "Westwood Guardians". He was also the "overall commander" of the adventurers here. Of course, this was in name only as the wood spirits were the true leaders.

I soon started disliking him. This was because...

"I feel we should punish that strangely named team that caused so much chaos today. Otherwise, if everyone is influenced by them and stops listening to orders, it will become much harder to organize anything in the future..."

All three Virtues were currently in the main room of the treehouse. However, Samantha was the only one of the three who did any leadership-related work. She coldly shook her head upon hearing Kaise's righteous words, but when she noticed that I arrived, she actually turned to look at me for once and even did her best to faintly smile.

"You're here."

"Yeah. How are the seeds doing? Is everything well?"

"They've already begun sprouting. Their growth period should be

over in two days. After that, we should be able to stimulate them into the next phase at any time we wish."

Kaise had a look of incredible astonishment. He was equally surprised to see another human in the wood spirits' central command area. However, I had no intentions of talking to him.

I walked up to the center of the room and saw that the tree hearts we were speaking of were beating slightly, just like a living creature's heart. Hidden within these tree hearts were tremendously strong life forces that were growing in strength. The moment these tree hearts finished their initial period of growth, they would start blooming explosively, as unstoppable as a volcanic eruption.

There were seeds from the Forest of Dreams, as well as the hope of the wood spirits.

Once these seeds finished their growth period, they would be able to grow into skyscraper trees right away at a new location, creating a new Forest of Dreams. The sleeping Amelia would also increase her territory.

Although these seeds needed nourishment from the main Forest of Dreams, the forest's roots had long since reached this location ten days ago. This towering ancient tree had actually been hollowed out, and its true identity was now a member of the Forest of Dreams. Once these seeds finished their growth period, we would tear off the disguise and speedily establish a second Forest of Dreams here. This would also make Amelia stronger as she would obtain additional nourishment and territory.

Obviously, the undead wouldn't like to see this happening. And for Amelia's dimensional will to be able to descend here, the forest would need to grow to a sufficient amount. This would require time. Just like a wildfire, it could only be put out at the very beginning. The undead weren't blind, and when a dimensional will expanded its territory, the entire area's natural laws would

obviously be rewritten. This weakest time of all for a new territory would naturally make it into the undead's target.

So, as long as trees started growing here, the undead would one hundred percent take some sort of action. There would definitely be a hard battle waiting ahead of us. And since we were going to have to battle either sooner or later, it would obviously be best to fight as early as possible, before even more high-level undead arrived. The wood spirits' judgment in taking action now was absolutely correct, and I, too, hoped for the Forest of Dreams to expand its territory. Increasing Amelia's power would help her wake up earlier.

Since Samantha said the seeds were fine, I nodded and didn't ask any further. It was probably better to leave this up to the plant magic experts.

"May I ask who you are?"

Instead, Kaise was the one who asked a question. He felt that the person before him looked quite familiar, but he couldn't recall this person's identity.

"You're asking who I am? You don't even recognize someone from the team you wanted to punish?"

Chapter 328: Goddess of Wealth

Goblins could be found wherever there was money to be earned... or a Goddess of Wealth merchant association. Fine, there actually wasn't much difference between the two. At any rate, these two existences would almost always be present as long as there were gold coins to be had.

The Goddess of Wealth, Beyana, was a Goddess who ruled over Wealth and Business. However, unlike most other churches, many of her priests were also merchants on the side. In fact, most of them had been merchants even before entering the church.

Beyana favored successful merchants who were able to make a lot of money. She particularly favored brand-new business models and markets and made that into the most important requirement for obtaining her divine favor. Any successful business transactions would help expand her church's power and influence. Let's not mention the most common services like selling Holy Water or curative potions—every Wealth priest would have a bag filled with all sorts of general items for sale. In fact, Beyana even created a dimensional storage spell just for her believers' convenience so that they could carry around lots of items to sell to anyone at any time.

However, unlike the goblins who always caused trouble for everyone, Wealth priests were widely welcomed. They weren't like the goblins who only cared about their personal wealth. They often helped create wealth for others as well. More than anything, Beyana favored successful new business markets and products, so the best Wealth priests didn't even care about how much material wealth they possessed. They would spend all of their wealth in order to ensure their businesses flourished.

You're saying that this is a bit difficult to understand? Let me give you a classic example. There was this incredibly remote area called the Icewind Valley, which was so cold that it would be

frozen over for more than three hundred days per year. Only home to powerful ice beasts, such a frigid location meant that no crops would possibly survive. However, there was an incredibly delicious fish that was endemic to the frozen lakes. Nobody would ever go traipsing to such a distant, frosty location which might take more than half a year just for eating some delicious fish.

Yet, a Wealth priest just happened to discover that this particular fish had crystal-clear bones, just like real crystals. The few locals that lived in this remote location had the custom of crafting these fish bones into artisanal crafts, such as fishbone combs, which had their own unique smile. So this priest advertised the beautiful fishbone combs as having excellent effects on one's hair and spine if you used it to comb every day, and did advertisements like inviting famous domain lords and so on to wear these crystal fishbone accessories while attending important parties. Then, he increased the price even further by only selling the accessories at auctions and forcefully succeeded in making these fishbone accessories that were originally considered dirt cheap and worthless by the locals into an incredibly rare and valuable product that was difficult to purchase with money alone.

Merchant groups started sending their people to this remote location every year in order to obtain the fish's crystal bone products, which helped bring wealth and flourishment to the locals. Thus, a new business market was born. This originally ordinary Wealth priest named Fen also received Beyana's divine favor and became the head priest of Beyana's largest territory of loyal followers, the Oris District.

Perhaps Wealth priests might not necessarily be rich themselves, but they would never lack money. Looking at it from another standpoint, the more people made transactions with each other and spent money, the more powerful Beyana's Divine Concept would become.

To be honest, Beyana was also famous for loathing war. To her, a

safe and uninterrupted market was quintessential. This was why all of Beyana's priests would actively work to prevent any wars from occurring, unlike the priests working for the Gods with the Divine Concepts of War, Plague, Violence, or Slaughter. Those Gods' priests would only go around everywhere and fan the flames.

If war broke out everywhere, Gods with more "literary" Divine Concepts such as Literature, Music, and so on would also become weakened. In fact, it was even possible for them to become so weak as to lose their Godhood. But, these Gods and their followers all lacked the ability to take action, making Beyana one of the biggest advocates against war.

However, during the previous Gods' proclamations, Beyana had actually joined Ayer's faction and ended up declaring war together with the other Ayer Faction Gods. This astonished countless people.

Yet the Goddess of Wealth stood to benefit more than almost any other God.

Her Divine Concept of Business included the concept of "Money." Any currency guaranteed by some government or organization that could be used to exchange for goods or services counted under Money. And only after there was Money would additional Concepts such as "Finance," "Futures Trading," and "Stock Market" be born. Only all this would further increase the power of her overall Concept of Wealth. To put it another way, if Gods really existed in my home world of Earth, where so many people cared about material wealth more than anything and businesses and economies were flourishing so well, the Goddess of Wealth would likely be the Main God who ruled over Earth, much like the God of Holy Light here in Eich. However, in this world, business transactions were only at the level of the most basic buying and selling or products and services. Beyana was merely a mid-ranked second-rate Goddess here.

"A currency that everyone used" was something super important

to the Goddess of Wealth. This would only be possible after businesses expanded to a certain extent. However, it would almost be impossible to use only one unified currency in this world. After all, there was no such a thing as a country that would be eternal—countries were constantly warring against each other, destroying old countries and creating new countries and currencies. Rather than a currency, precious metals were what people trusted in the most to trade for whatever they wanted. However, precious metals were obviously inconvenient to carry. While some countries had indeed tried using paper money before, nobody ever dared to keep it. There were a few kingdoms that forcefully tried pushing their citizens to use paper money, but either only a small minority actually used paper money or the kingdom would eventually lose all its credit and go bankrupt, ending in disaster.

Yet, ever since the Gods' proclamations, there was now an additional, brand-new currency in the world that was "trustworthy and obtained purely as a result of your own hard work:" Justice Points. This seemed like just another ordinary currency, but Justice Points would actually be the very beginning of a creditable and universal currency. They were guaranteed by the True Gods, after all, and not any country's government. Without the True Gods' guarantee, Justice Points would be just as worthless as any paper money in this world, simply another "currency with imaginary value."

The natural way things worked in this world would gradually change. Beyana, who had obtained additional power thanks to Justice Points, even invented several Justice Point-related Divine Arts, helping her high-ranked Wealth priests become walking Justice Point exchange stores. This type of Divine Miracle in turn helped her to obtain even more believers as well as gratitude and fame. Of course, all of this helped her steadily increase in divine power.

In fact, just the invention of the "Justice Points exchange system"

helped her concept of Wealth expand in influence and power.

Of course, providing this type of service required the Wealth priest in question to directly communicate with Beyana. This would be impossible unless the Wealth priest had enough divine favor and power so only her high-ranked Wealth priests were capable of acting as living Justice Point exchange stores.

The moment I returned to the campground, I saw that a long line was waiting outside my team's tent. And the reason for the long line was that Betty was working as a Wealth priest, serving as a Justice Point exchange store for all these adventurers.

A silver light glowed in his eyes, while his typical smile was replaced with an emotionless iciness. There was a pitch-black void-like dimensional storage portal right next to him, continually distorting the surrounding light.

He merely listened to whatever it was that an adventurer wished to purchase using Justice Points before extracting the required Justice Points from the adventurer's Hero Armlet. He would then give the desired item to the adventurer by taking it from the dimensional storage portal. His speed was very quick, and he made zero mistakes.

After seeing this situation, I knew that all my worries had been for nothing. Just Betty alone provided absolutely necessary services for all the adventurers here, so as long as he was present, the adventurers would never treat his team too badly.

And so, I directly turned around and left, walking outside the campground by myself.

From a certain standpoint, this was a bad habit of mine. Even if I had expert scouters with me, I still liked to personally see the situation for myself. Indeed, this was partly because I didn't completely trust in others. Yet, this so-called bad habit of mine had already saved my life on numerous occasions.

But before I even left the campground, I met someone who looked a little familiar. His name was... was... what was it again?

"K... Kait?"

"My name is Kaise, Kaise Elowen."

At least it seemed like he was quite well mannered. His smile didn't even flicker when I wrongly called his name.

"Do you have any business with me?"

"I would like to chat with you if you're currently free."

It was obvious that Kaise wanted to find out more about me. However, I felt too lazy to be playing such little games with him.

"I'm busy. I'm just about to go out on an investigation."

"Perfect, I was intending to do the same thing as well. Why don't we go together? Come, Black Whirlwind!"

Kaise activated the enchantment on his black gloves as he said so. A sudden plume of dark smoke arose and a jet-black gallant horse walked out from the smoke. With red eyes and a bloodthirsty expression, it would tower over any normal warhorse by at least a head. The light that illuminated him would become strangely distorted.

"A Nightmare warhorse?"

Nightmare warhorses were incredibly rare. They had bloodlines partly passed down from hell's Nightmare beasts and were far more durable and faster than any ordinary warhorse. They even had several magical racial talents. When they were galloping at high speed, their ability to distort light could even create several illusions, making enemies not know the real target. Their bloodthirsty natures helped them remain fearless in front of any enemy. The most convenient part of all was that they were part of the Nightmare bloodline, which meant they could be contracted and easily summoned at any time.

"Yes, my mercenary group coincidentally obtained ones during a previous task in Teresier. Wouldn't you agree that it's beautiful?"

Kaise gently patted his Nightmare horse's head and intimately scratched its neck as he smiled at me. For some mysterious reason, I suddenly recalled a certain Saint-ranked Beast Tamer who had been forgotten who knows where but would probably jump out by himself sooner or later. At the very least, if only Beifeng was here, I wouldn't have to go out personally investigating.

However, I had to reassess Kaise's power level upon seeing him summon his steed.

For people in knight-type job classes, more than half of their combat potential depended on the steed they possessed. Nightmare horses were excellent warhorses, and although they don't possess any overwhelmingly powerful abilities, their ability to create illusions was quite practical as it would cause most enemies to miss many attacks. This would improve Kaise's combat strength by more than thirty percent. The fact that Kaise, a magic knight, was able to obtain such a priceless steed also indicated at his power level.

I almost wanted to laugh out loud. Kaise was obviously trying to show off his power level in order to impress me, but he was also trying to do it in a matter that wouldn't make him seem too condescending.

"Sure. You can come together with me if you're capable of keeping up. Erebella!"

However, the strange part was that I waved my hand and nothing appeared. Nothing appeared when I attempted to summon her.

"Haha!"

The magic knight Kaise was trying his best to conceal his laughter, which made me feel rather awkward. Still, I was rather confused. Although Erebella had recently been sleeping in my

Frigidwinter Earth and saving her energy to continue evolving, she should have still been able to hear my summons.

"Hmph, you haven't let me out to play in such a long time. I bet you forgot about me."

Alright then, I had recently been staying in cities for the most part. There were indeed no good opportunities to let her out. No wonder she was complaining.

"I apologize. I'll remember in the future to take you out on regular walks..."

For some mysterious reason, I recalled how Ah Bao would throw little tantrums whenever I forgot to walk him for a long time. This felt really similar.

"Your promises are completely unbelievable."

Isn't she forcing me to use my trump card against her now? Did she really think that I didn't know what she really wanted?

"Strawberry sherbet, banana sherbet, ten orders of each..."

"I want my fill every day for an entire month."

From a certain standpoint, ever since the "invention" of fruit-flavored sherbets, Frigid Nightmares now had a new fun hobby. Apart from enjoying the flavor of fruit sherbets, what they really loved the most was how the fruit juice would dye their ice bodies. The feces-colored yellow or green Frigid Nightmares were truly hard on the eyes. And the most difficult thing to accept was that they even enjoyed changing their physical shapes to go along with their new colors, which would commonly result in a feces-colored Frigid Nightmare who was now also shaped like a gigantic pile of feces even taller than a house... Fine then, this was a truly uncomfortable topic. Let's not discuss it any longer.

"Alright, it's a deal. Hurry up and come out already. Just look at that young brat snickering at me over there. I'm losing so much face."

The moment I finished speaking, I was flying up in the sky. Rather than being on a saddle, I was being clutched by a tremendous claw.

Above me was currently a tremendous creature that blocked out all the clouds, a crystal clear gigantic ice dragon. Although her physical appearance was somewhat similar to bone dragons, she appeared far more powerful and holier.

"An ice dragon transformation? Erebella, you've evolved?"

"No, I've merely recovered. Your Frigidwinter Earth is basically just like an Ice Elemental Plane. I feel as comfortable as if I'm at home there."

"Like your home? Like an Ice Elemental Plane?"

I faintly felt like I was perceiving something important, but now wasn't the time to think too deeply about this. Judging by the look of astonishment on the magic knight who was on the ground, staring at me as I left him behind, I probably needed to first work on the explanation I'd have to give him upon returning.

Chapter 329: The Living and the Undead

So you want to fight against the undead? Most people would find either a Holy Knight or a priest of Holy Light to assist them as they were, after all, mortal enemies with the undead. Many abilities and Divine Arts of these two job classes were directly anti-undead in nature, and their specialized undead detection Divine Arts would prove very helpful.

"No undead shall ever escape the judgement of the Holy Light!" The Holy Light job class members were forever confident in this saying of theirs.

Yet, in my opinion, their ability to detect the undead wasn't as great as it seemed on the surface. It worked behind the principle of Holy Light's natural undead magic resistance. They would release a minute amount of Holy Light into their surroundings and consequently hunt for instances of resistance.

First of all, since the power of Holy Light was limited, it couldn't detect a significantly large radius. Even high-level Holy Knights would only be able to sense undead within a few kilometers of their position, so imagine low-level Holy Knights—they could only cover a radius equivalent to a house. And if they attempted to spot undead in a wide-open, flat area, then nothing was stopping the undead from discerning them back. The worst part of this Divine Art was that its basic principles helped ensure that the undead would find you the same moment you discovered them.

In fact, I knew of several old undead—each more than three hundred years old—with the ability to detect Holy Light job class members, simply based on the density of Holy Light in the air: it worked the same way, but in reverse. Casually using undead detection magic in an area like this—where there were so many undead—would be akin to suicide.

The typical scouting job classes, the rangers and thieves, were no

good at detecting the undead. Rangers relied on divine arts that detected the presence of life, which made it useless on the undead for obvious reasons. Meanwhile, undead mages had plenty of anti-detection magic spells at their disposal, which would give thieves a really hard time. Most undead would detect their enemies with the help of their souls, rendering useless the thieves' typical stealth techniques of concealing themselves under the cover of the night or shadows... Alright. By now, you must have realized the sheer ridiculousness of Ah Gen's actions—he had actually believed that his not-even-stealth skills could fool a Blood Tribe noble!

However, just which job class was the most suitable for dealing with the undead?

First, this job class needed plenty of ways to detect the undead. The next most important thing was that this job class had to be able to survive whilst fighting against the undead—if not, then it should at least have the ability to escape.

In that case, the final conclusion was evident. The most suitable job class to give the undead trouble was... undead mage!

Snap.

With a snap of my fingers I cast one of the most basic undead magic spells, Control Undead. The corpse zombies that had just been hunting me like a pack of wild dogs now had to heed my every command. All that remained of their original boss was a pile of shattered bones.

Once I eliminated the lich in charge of commanding them, these low-level corpse zombies lost any semblance of order, no different from rabid dogs that would attack anything and everything in sight. All I had to do was imprint my soul upon them and they instantly became my puppets.

I closed my eyes and mentally sensed for the presence of undead. Undead mages were far better at detected undead compared to Holy Knights—their natural talent allowed them to be far more

effective anti-undead scouts. After all, without such an ability, how were undead mages supposed to find undead ingredients and corpses?

"There's a small undead team about three kilometers forward. The team leader seems to be a death knight."

I casually donned that unlucky lesser lich's black cape after giving it a nice shake. It would seem that my prey were aplenty. I would be quite busy today...

I covered myself in an aura of undeath and disguised myself, adjusting the appearance of my power level. The final result was a flickering image of me amid a black mist. Any Holy Knight or undead mage who sensed me would think that I was a lesser lich who only recently became a high-level undead.

As for why I wasn't disguising myself as a normal lich? I was here to hunt, not to be hunted. The weakest lich would be a Legend, and if such a lich manifested itself so close to the wood spirit and adventurer campgrounds, the wood spirits were certain to send a large force to eradicate it. And even though there were plenty of high-level undead under the Undead Lords, every lich would be a well-known powerful individual. Casually trying to disguise myself as some random lich made it highly likely that my disguise would be seen through. Nor could I use Rex's identity anymore, as he had long since been exposed.

Alright, then. By now, perhaps you readers have guessed what I intended to do... yep, an old favorite of mine, Undead Calamity!

"Oh my, here's another small team led by a death knight. Where do you think you're running off to!"

Since I was already here, how could I possibly be satisfied by merely doing some scouting? All these undead who were everywhere here were like free subordinates. Since I was soon going to have a big battle against the undead, why wouldn't I accept all these free soldiers? Perhaps I could even take advantage

of disguising myself as an undead and obtain some information.

Although it was fairly common for there to be internal struggles between undead while they were back in the Undead Planes, the Undead Lords were now in charge here. The undead with intelligence would no longer have any internal conflict. Still, infighting amongst low-level undead wouldn't attract much attention. But intentionally wiping out the undead or reorganizing them en masse would attract too much attention.

"Remember, come meet up with me when I order you to do so."

That was why I didn't actually have my new minions follow me. I merely had the highest-level undead stay behind with my soul imprint and had them remain where they were. It was only that they would now listen to my orders and would return to me when I commanded it.

Of course, I would unhesitatingly accept any specially modified undead or powerful undead I see and exchange them for some low-level undead.

It was similar to a wooden ship that would continuously exchange its parts as it sailed. By the end, it may appear the same physically, but would it still be the original ship if all its parts had been exchanged out? Well, I had no need to ponder on such a philosophical question. At the very least, the undead under my command were rapidly becoming stronger as they evolved under me as well.

"...The prey this time is quite troublesome."

The skeleton swordsman currently fighting against my undead had a faint green light on its bone swords. It appeared that its swords were poisonous. Not only that, its bones were a dull yellow, which indicated that it had apparently been strengthened by the earth element. It was apparent that this was a strengthened undead, but, judging from its lack of emotions, it wasn't an intelligent undead.

The corpse zombies under my command were far too low-level. The skeleton swordsman easily sliced through them before rushing towards me. Meanwhile, behind the skeleton warrior was a skeleton mage who wore a black cape identical to the one I pilfered. He was currently casting buff spells on his undead.

"A skeleton mage who's an expert in undead modification? This skeleton's bones have been earth elementalized, its bone sword has been enchanted with magic poison, and it's been at minimum strengthened twice over. Not bad at all. Although it's obviously the best choice to directly attack the enemy mage in a duel..."

The skeleton was now right before me, the flickering shadow of its burning soulfire in its eye sockets right in my eyes. It was so close I could even catch a whiff of decaying stench. Yet, my reaction was to shake my head and take a single step forward.

"It's so foolish of you to have charged right towards me."

With a simple piercing movement, I unsheathed my sword and stabbed straight through the skeleton warrior's rib cage, into its backbone. I then twirled my sword around, breaking the skeleton's bones apart.

Undead mages had an unparalleled understanding about a skeleton's weaknesses. For these high-level skeleton warriors, they wouldn't feel pain at all. Even if you smashed in a skeleton warrior's skull, it would still be perfectly fine and continue attacking you. Even if you sliced off its right hand, its left hand would still pierce straight at you. However, their greatest weakness would always be where their bones were connected. As long as you destroyed the skeleton's spine, it wouldn't even be able to stand up anymore.

The rest was simpler. This skeleton mage was smart and immediately surrendered after seeing that his greatest weapon didn't even last a single of my blows. He directly told me his task here and even signed the strictest soul contract with me.

And so, I took command over his skeleton warrior, fixed it up again, and made it into one of my personal guards. Then, I left some of the most seriously injured corpse zombies to the undead skeleton mage to fix for me. I left him there with his bitter expression.

This was only one such example of what I did today. By the time the sun started setting, ten-plus undead scouting and logistics teams had become my underlings. With all these new servants, I had eyes and ears over the entire Wendes Mountains the wood spirits' campground was located in.

There was something strange as well.

"How weird. Why am I not feeling uncomfortable?"

Controlling undead had a cost associated to it. In order to have low-level undead who were naturally bloodthirsty obey an undead mage's orders, the undead mage would have to mark their soul imprints upon the undead. The more precise control you wanted over the undead, the more intricate a soul imprint was required, which also meant more of a cost for the undead mage. And, to control high-level undead, who would instinctively resist you, a long-term investment of both mana and concentration was required.

My mana level was currently the equivalent of any other Gold-ranked knight. This mana level was also roughly equivalent to the average mana of a high-level undead. With my mana pool, I would be exhausted by trying to control two high-level undead, which was why I instead signed soul contracts with them, the type where I could kill them any time I wanted, and if I died, they would die together with me. This would motivate them to work hard for me of their own volition without me having to control their every action.

Most undead armies worked the same way. Even an Undead Emperor would find it impossible to personally control each and

every undead under his command, which was why large numbers of mid and high-level commanders would be necessary. The high-level undead commanders would establish master-subordinate relationships or sign soul contracts with the mid-level ones, while the mid-level commanders would be directly responsible for controlling the undead.

Well, that was only the best theoretical way to organize an undead army, of course. Since mid-level commanders were rare, most undead armies simply used the pressure that high-level undead naturally emanated in order to force the lower-level undead to instinctively rush and attack. All the low-level undead basically acted on their own... Yep, perhaps this sounds familiar to you? It's the legendary AI-controlled fighting: it's just fighting with minions you can't control. Just have them attack. If you win, celebrate, and if you lose, you lose.

Of course, there were also utterly opposite existences, such as Omar. Not only was he capable of personally controlling every single undead under his command, he would even be powered up by them rather than expending concentration and mana. This completely broke the common sense of undead mages.

Based on my current mana that was only at a Gold rank's level, modifying the more than three hundred undead in these elite squadrons should have been quite difficult for me. To my surprise, I was still in good mental condition as if I still had plenty of energy left over to control even more undead. In fact, it did feel like I could control double this number without a problem.

"...Something seems odd here. Could it be that my body's bloodline has a bonus for me when using undead magic? But my Will stat hasn't changed a bit."

That was the only conclusion I could come to as I looked at my personal undead magic Soul Imprint.

Concentration was an ability attached to one's soul. In the

System's stats, the only number related to one's soul was Will. Will was also the stat that changed the least throughout all of my reincarnations. Although it would slightly improve each time, I would also lose 1 point of Will for each death—it basically remained the same.

Will was the most crucial stat for those in divine job classes. Only a resolute enough Will would allow for communication with the Gods. It would permit them to accept divine favor and divine power without becoming overloaded. As for mages, Will was only useful against illusion type magics as Will helped strengthen one's soul and resolution.

Perhaps a higher Will would also slightly increase one's mana recovery rate, but nobody in normal circumstances would test that out by expending all of their mana. And perhaps a higher Will also allowed undead mages to simultaneously control more undead, but it was likely that the benefits were so miniscule that even undead mages themselves didn't know about it.

"System?"

If I didn't know, I just had to ask. How was I supposed to progress without understanding my own body?

My bloodline counted as part of the Mountain Tribe royalty, and in a way, I was closely related to Ayer's species as well as the immemorial great demons. As they were the earliest users of undead magic, they were indeed quite talented at it as well.

[Congratulations for discovering your own hidden racial talent: Whispers of Immemorial Demons. This ability gives you a natural affinity to undead magic, contract magic, and curse magic, and you will not suffer any forms of backlash from these magic types. System Notification: This ability is a hidden passive ability of your bloodline. Its specific effects are currently unanalyzable. You will not know about any hidden racial talents until you discover them yourself.]

After obtaining this body, I had hardly had any time to research undead magic, which apparently meant I missed out on researching my own bloodline as well.

"It can even surpass the titans' arbiter bloodline. Since my bloodline was a Double Diamond bloodline—similar to the immemorial dragons and titan giants—the secrets hidden within must be far greater than I had imagined. It would seem that I've overlooked a lot."

In order for me to break through to the Legend rank, I would need to fix my three other Soul Imprints, and that would take a significant amount of time. Perhaps it'd be more efficient of me to use my time to focus on discovering my body's potential instead. This new body of mine felt to me like it was bursting with undeveloped potential now that a growth period of two years had passed.

"At any rate, I have plenty of willpower left over. Should I try creating something? For example, that lich Rex who had the ability to use both undead magic and ice magic. I just so happen to have many experimental ingredients on hand..."

My gaze was filled with nefarious intentions as it swept over my new subordinates. Suddenly, however, a raspy soul voice sounded in my ears—it belonged to that skeleton mage minion of mine.

"Ma—ma—master, a human just gave me a letter and told me to give it to the undead higherups. From the item he showed me to prove his identity, he's working for us, the undead!"

"A spy?"

Before I could even be astonished, a familiar figure appeared behind me. He started inching towards me, lifting up his branches that had rotten cabbages and a carrot tied to it. And behind a large rock not far away were those garbage teammates of mine that specialized in making people angry. They were pushing each other, apparently engrossed in a heated discussion.

"Go already! Aren't you a priest? Hurry and cleanse that lesser lich!"

"...Cleansing the undead is for those Holy Light priests. I'm a Goddess of Wealth priest, someone who specializes in making money. You're asking the wrong person! How about you go first?"

"While I may be quite a skilled adventurer, I just took an arrow to the knee three minutes ago..."

A simple magic spell brought their conversation to me with the wind. Meanwhile, the "stealthy" barbarian non-combat thief was slowly but resolutely approaching me at a snail's pace, one centimeter at a time...

"No, just look! All these undead around here are high-level undead. This guy is no typical undead as he can control so many irregular high-level undead at once. He might actually be a lich!"

Someone finally pointed out the important part, but that wasn't the actual problem from the very beginning. None of them were pure novices, so of course they would recognize their opponent. However, powerful opponents meant extravagant rewards so they continued to try to convince each other to go out first and attract the enemy's attention and firepower... Normally, this would be the job of a Holy Knight or some other warrior, but without me this team was made up of only backrow fighters.

I was about to stop listening in on them, unable to stand it anymore, when Betty suddenly exclaimed in surprise.

"Damn it, where's Ah Gen?"

"The hell?! He's already over there! Don't! Hurry and come back!"

Ah Gen's distant teammates tried their very best to sign and gesture to the rash barbarian that he should return... so Ah Gen responded in a soft voice:

"Relax, this guy is sleeping!"

Alright. Where should I even begin my response to that? That he believed that undead actually needed to sleep? Or his "soft voice" that shook the entire forest? Even I was startled at how ear-piercing his rumbling voice was. But, more importantly, I was doing my utmost to hold in my laughter; otherwise, this would become even more difficult of a situation to deal with.

Let's see—it's been some time. Let me recall what I should say in such a situation...

"You living people! Since you have dared to enter our territory, you must be prepared to pay the toll... with your souls!"

Chapter 330: Spy

The battle with the "Wood Spirits Are So Cute" team ended in five minutes, and four additional "elite undead" were added to my undead army...

Don't misunderstand! I didn't kill them—there was no need to.

I simply told them that I was undertaking a special mission for the wood spirits, that I had disguised myself as an undead mage in order to obtain intelligence... and they all actually believed me!

Yep, they believed me immediately and without any hesitation. They even tried to extort me, saying, "You must be getting paid so many Justice Points for this. As a righteous Holy Knight, you absolutely can't hoard the payment to yourself! We should all share with each other and do this mission together!" Sure, I replied, why not. And they joined me in order to receive some Justice Points for very little work done.

"This rotten meat is disgusting."

The barbarian Ah Gen was now a revolting Abomination with pink pieces of meat stuck over his body, all thanks to my intentional costume makeup.

He was covered in rotting bones and rotting flesh. Not to mention, he was an Abomination so poor that he didn't even have pants on his pudgy bottom half. His intestines trailed along the ground, his chin was crooked, and blood dripped from his mouth as he trudged forward—truly the perfect Abomination!

"Actually, with my job class, I should be disguised as an elegant member of the Blood Tribe! Under the cover of night, I shall walk across rooftops and flash between shadows to steal away the lives of my sworn enemies, the thief guild assassins."

"Elegant? Also, why does this rooftop battling proclamation of yours sound so familiar? Could it be that you've read the legendary

book known as 'Assassin'?"

"Yep, reading that book back in the day is exactly the reason I became a thief!"

The more he nodded, the more I felt that I had shot myself in the foot yet again. I hesitated, wondering if I should tell him that it was I who had written "Assassin" back in the day to make some money. It was a story filled with wish fulfillment, a harem protagonist, and had plenty of logical errors. However, it had become mysteriously popular as it was a fun read. But anyone that truly tried to imitate the main character's lifestyle while becoming a thief would probably die more than one hundred times a year if they had that many lives to spend.

But looking at his huge smile and honest demeanor, I could only exclaim how he must be as tough as a cockroach because he had yet to die. I also came to the conclusion that it would be best not to ruin his worldview. Yep, it definitely wasn't because I felt it would be quite troublesome if he went crazy, furious at having his dreams shattered or anything like that.

"So, his dream is to become a high-flying thief amongst the rooftops?"

Judging by the barbarian Ah Gen's weight and bulk, if he truly tried leaping across the rooftops like the main character of that novel, the main thing to take into consideration would no longer be stealth, but how sturdy the rooftop was... Just think about it: what if you were "having fun" in the middle of the night when something tremendous landed on your home's rooftop with a thunderous clap... Yep, I've definitely never tried something like that, nor have I ever gotten stuck in someone's ceiling!

Just imagining this big lout "also" getting stuck in some home's ceiling made me feel like it would be a great scene to witness! Perhaps I should even have him try it out, together with a red and white robe and a fake white beard. And if someone finds him, he

could even say, "Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas! I'm Santa Claus and I only give gifts to obedient children. What? It's summer? I apologize for getting lost. Those damned goblin compasses are so unreliable, and my dumb unicorns didn't even remind me! I actually flew to the wrong half of the world!"

Cough—cough—I seem to have gotten carried away with my imagination. Let's get back to the main topic. Ah Gen was making use of my personal and thorough "disgusting undead" fashion accessories package, perfect for any powerful warrior. Not only would it attract aggro, it would also be quite practical. Those hulking rotting muscles and bulging eyeballs would even help increase one's Charisma towards banshees.

"...Roland, we need to have a little chat. I think you have some misunderstandings about banshees."

Alright then, it seemed I accidentally said something bad about banshees in front of a banshee herself. Just thinking about how this former Banshee Queen was getting more and more used to the three most common actions of cats, meowing, licking, and purring cutely... actually, I meant the three actions of the cat family—jumping at me, biting me, and whipping me with her tail—I was seriously considering how I should explain things to her.

Cough, I seem to have gotten sidetracked again. Let's get back on track this time—I promise.

With my undead fashion accessories disguising them, the Wood Spirits are so Cute team—yep—this recently established team for worshipping wood spirit cuties was now horrendously ugly.

As I mentioned previously, Ah Gen was wearing an Abomination costume. The priest Betty was wearing a cape that summoned shadows, which helped him pretend to be an undead shadow priest, while the handsome elf bard turned into an equally handsome Blood Tribe member who had some blood poured on him as a disguise. The heroic and stout dwarven auntie... was still

an incredibly stout dwarven auntie!

This wasn't my fault for lacking talent in applying undead makeup. I truly couldn't think of how to disguise someone like her, with a barrel-shaped figure, a weight of several hundred kilograms and a height less than 1.4 meters into an undead who only had bones and rotting flesh. And if she was disguised as an Abomination? Only an idiot of an undead mage would make such a tiny Abomination.

"Blood Tribe? Any real Blood Tribe member would cry if they saw a fellow member with such a body figure."

Of course, I finally found a method in the end: I put a monstrous cover on her to disguise her as a rather overweight corpse zombie. Although she still had the special barrel-shaped figure of a dwarf, any other undead mage that saw her would likely misconstrue her as a dwarf zombie who had some problems when transferring to become an undead.

Of course, the prerequisite for this... was that Mary the dwarf would be willing to let go of her own alcohol barrel! What corpse zombie would carry such a large alcohol barrel on their back—and even secretly take a few chugs from time to time?

However, I knew that convincing her to let go of her "baggage" was nigh impossible. There was a common saying in the land of Eich: "Trying to make a dwarf let go of their alcohol is just as impossible as making an elf let go of their pride and artistry."

"How pitiful... These 'character skins' of mine are of excellent quality. They're definitely not a cash grab by some money hungry company, and I'm not even charging them any money. They don't know how good they have it. Hmph, I'm going to have to catch myself one of those no-good merchants and make them suffer. All they do is draw a hat and some random accessories on the face and treat it as a brand-new character skin to be sold? They're not as moral as I am."

"Stop complaining so much; you're lucky enough they're willing to help you for free."—Harloys.

Alright then. Although these terrible teammates of mine didn't really seem that strong, at least I didn't need to focus on controlling them. I supposed that they technically did count as some combat strength. Of course, due to certain reasons, I kept a slight distance from them.

"A spy? The undead are capable of planting a spy among the living!?"

I told them the information I just received, which caused them all to be truly astonished. In the minds of most normal people—even most adventurers—the undead were no different to wild beasts incapable of communication. Undead typically attacked anything living they saw. How could such existences possibly plant a spy amongst the living? Let me reword it a bit better: what could a spy working for the undead possibly hope to gain?

Of course, the fact that most adventurers had such views meant that most adventurers were still novices. The Xiluo Empire had plenty of spies within the human kingdoms. For nobles that had both power and wealth, their greatest enemy would be death. Yet, asking a noble to cultivate in order to lengthen their lifespan was no different from killing them. In that case, the ceremony to become an undead was probably the easiest method for a noble to become "undying."

Even if a noble was dissatisfied with becoming an ugly undead, there would always be the elegant Blood Tribe as a possible choice. And if the noble in question still wanted to walk under the sun, there were plenty of evil rituals that sacrificed others' lives and blood that could satisfy their desires.

Not only would corrupt nobles end up becoming spies for the undead, there would also be veteran adventurers that lost everything due to an injury, those reaching the end of their

lifespans who hadn't cultivated to a powerful enough level, or magical geniuses who were naturally skilled at dark or undead magic. All such people would receive plenty by allying with the undead.

Not only was the Xiluo Empire like this, Yongye was also the same back in the day. Living people would automatically come joining of their own volition. There would be powerful individuals that were experts in dark magic, curses, or other such taboo magics. There were also utter idiots who felt it would be "quite cool to join up with the villainous antagonists." As for the former type, I would quite happily add them to my cannon fodder troops. They would prove their worth and strength if they survived, and I'd give them what they wanted in an equivalent exchange. As for the idiot type, I would also add them to my cannon fodder troops. It was just that I would turn them into undead first... and those that practiced taboo magic would still keep their taboo magic even as a corpse zombie. At the very least, it would give my enemies some difficulties.

I hesitated for a moment when faced with their astonishment as I thought about what to tell them.

"What they can obtain? Probably far more than you can imagine, such as strength or limitless lifespan and so on. As long as you're willing to pay a price, becoming undead is a far quicker path to power than slow cultivation. In just about every story out there, as long as you don't care about the consequences, those on the path of evil always have methods to become powerful far faster than those who stay on the path of good."

I didn't say anything else to these teammates of mine that seemed to be taking in my words. Reality was forever cruel. Rather than having them naively believe that all adventurers were their companions and on the side of the living, I might as well give them this free "lesson" so that they could be prepared for any betrayals beforehand.

Soon, I learned the information that I had been wanting from my new undead mage servant, whose name was Kug.

"A short person wearing a cape, who had a dark green snake-shaped dagger and an aura of darkness about him? His left foot seems to be injured as he walks with a limp?"

I glanced questioningly towards my "teammates". After all, I had only recently returned to the Forest of Dreams. Rather than a newcomer like me, they should have been more familiar with the adventurers here.

Yet, some of them looked at the sky, while others made a show of inspecting their weapons. Not a single one of them was able to tell me who this person might be. Obviously, none of them were reliable at all. Perhaps they weren't even interested in other adventurers and never attempted to gather information on others.

I helplessly shook my head and accepted the letter that Kug handed me. From a certain standpoint, this was truly ironic. The undead placed a spy amongst the living, yet the spy managed to give such important information to a spy placed amongst the undead by the living.

The yellow letter was quite light. It appeared to be a normal letter simply sealed by some red wax which could easily be torn off. Yet, judging from the faint mana pulses the wax seal was emitting, there was a tiny common defensive spell placed upon it. If the letter opener didn't know the correct way to open this letter and casually opened the letter as he pleased, it would self-destruct and inform the person who placed the defensive spell on the letter.

Yet it was all meaningless in front of me.

I lightly tapped and sealed the wax seal in a tiny block of ice which possessed the power of eternal hibernation with absolute zero. This tiny little magical defense would forever be frozen in time.

I tore open the letter but saw nothing other than a bunch of numbers. It would appear that this was a number code, something quite common among spies. Obviously, this was meant to be read only by someone with the solution to the number code. Although I could probably figure the code out by spending some time, and faintly recalled that I had learned before how to solve such codes...

"I remember that you always failed your code-breaking and basic math classes."

Yep, even back when I was studying at the Cloud Tower, I couldn't escape from annoying classes such as math and engineering together with the elemental magic and foundational magic classes.

But... what was with those so-called "basic math" classes!? Basic math classes here actually involved calculus and solid geometry? Didn't they know that in my first life, I chose the Law major just because I hated studying higher-level math!?

"...As a law student, I hate math! I hate it even more that there's higher-level math even in another world!"

Still, although I was a delinquent student who always failed or barely passed his classes, I had now achieved the dream of all my fellow students.

"Teacher Harloys, it's all up to you! You're the only one I can rely on."

"...You only think of me at such a time."

Yep, even though my basics weren't adequate, I was carrying a grandpa—er—a grandma cat who was currently jumping at me in protest... I had a teacher with me!

"...The wood spirits are planning to expand... the Forest of Dreams' territory, which is expected... expected to occur on the second Sunday in May, which is three days from now..."

Harloys' decoding got better and better as she steadily improved

her speed. It was obvious that she had cracked the code. Yet, the more I heard, the more worried I became. The spy had learned a truly high-level secret. It was apparent that the spy was a very high-ranking adventurer.

But precisely because of the cruel reality staring at me, I had an idea. Perhaps I could use the spy to my advantage!

Chapter 331: Points Owed

"Justice Points? As a reward for you? You need Justice Points?"

I couldn't sit on such important information, so I left behind those terrible teammates of mine and rushed straight back to the wood spirits' campground atop Erebella. However, the astonishment on Samantha's face after I spoke to her was quite obviously real. Perhaps, in her mind, she had never considered the fact that I, too, would need Justice Points.

"It's all because of those garbage teammates—they kept attempting to find out how many Justice Points my mission was worth and how many they could receive. If I don't give them a satisfactory amount, they'll end up annoying me to death. Also..."

"Also?"

"I really do need Justice Points for myself."

Indeed, why shouldn't I earn Justice Points as well? In fact, I truly lacked Justice Points.

I had used a modern-day Earth management system and separated my Justice Point account books into one for personal use and one for official use. Yet at the moment both accounts were quite lacking in Justice Points.

Despite the fact that Thorn Garden was doing great business in the Cloud Tower, the archmages were all hermits with barely any Justice Points. Most of them were still paying me in gold coin. The products we were selling—which could only be bought with Justice Points—were sold to them on a debt system...

What does it mean to sell to them on a debt system? To be direct, it just meant they owed us Justice Points. Archmages at the Legend rank or higher typically had good reputations for not having outstanding debts for too long. As long as I sent them out and made them work for Justice Points, I would achieve my main goal

—to stop the Cloud Tower from hiding away as hermits and rallying the archmages to toil for my cause.

Of course, I had confidence in my ability to collect the money I was owed. In this day and age, the debtors would be more vicious than the creditors. It was no joke to say that the person who owed money was the "granddaddy." Still, if you borrowed a high-interest loan from some underworld power, you would probably want to return the debt as quickly as possible. And in the eyes of masses, I was arguably the most evil power out there in mage society... even though there were quite a few archmages in front of me on the Calamity Rankings! This was discrimination!

Fine then, I admit that I charged a thirty percent interest rate and, against those archmages who never intended to pay me back, that I employed some methods that could never see the light of day—to scare the rest into submission, of course. Wasn't this just me using my trademark methods to force them to work hard and pay me the Justice Points they owed me? This was my way of expressing my passion towards mages!

Unfortunately, the mages didn't understand my way of thinking at all; instead, my reputation became even stranger. Anyhow, I did want to exchange for some items to improve my future personal treasury—were there really true saints in the world that had no selfish desires whatsoever?

Perhaps my thirty percent interest rate would bring me great profits in the future, but for now my "official" Justice Points account book was empty save for a bunch of IOU slips, truly deep in the red. My Great Industrial Party also needed a great quantity of precious experimental ingredients and historical secrets and knowledge, so I needed a huge amount of official Justice Points.

As for Justice Points for my personal use—points I could freely spend to improve my power level—I had nil.

Why nothing? Because I hadn't had the chance to earn any

Justice Points. The core Justice Points calculation system had been established only after the Gods' proclamations. Back then, I was too busy fighting with the undead to get one of those Hero Armlets which could calculate Justice Points. So I didn't even get a single Justice Point after fighting all of those undead.

After that, I was at the Cloud Tower messing around with this and that, which naturally didn't have anything to do with obtaining Justice Points, a currency awarded for combat achievements. Yet despite all of this, I was filled with expectation and excitement about the Justice Points exchange list.

I fancied the sword techniques of an immemorial generation's Sword Saint. There were also research records that belonged to the first-generation undead and immemorial demons available for exchange, and even Ayer's secret personal undead collection could be chosen. Records on the powers of Order and Holy Light and immemorial Gods were not few, too. All of this knowledge was true, priceless treasure, not to mention they had to do with all my various fields of expertise. What? You're asking why I didn't mention any top-level ice magic knowledge? Well, even if I exchanged for some top-level ice magic knowledge, I doubted I would understand it. And if I really needed it, the Frigid Nightmares in the snow mountain and Harloys were excellent teachers to begin with. At the very least, they were more than enough for my current needs.

As for swordsmanship, undead research, and the powers of Order and Law, I was already quite skilled, but finding high-level teachers in this field was no easy task. I was already at quite an elevated level myself, so what I required was top-level knowledge that would help me make new breakthroughs.

"It's said that Sword Saints from the immemorial generation don't actually value complex sword techniques. Instead, they preferred to kill their enemies using simple, basic techniques—the basic characteristics of these were that they were coarse, yet

powerful. However, it's a great pity that practically none of their sword techniques have lasted until today. My sword techniques are self-taught for the most part, so perhaps I can greatly benefit from obtaining their sword techniques."

"The current undead are of three major species: zombies, souls, and skeletons. Yet I've heard that every single undead was their own unique species during the immemorial generation. The undead back then were supposedly capable of changing their own physical structures. They had normal physical reactions and needs, just like the living—they even had the power to reproduce. They even had a limitless potential for growth. I'd really like to dissect—I mean, see one for myself."

"Just how did the God of Holy Light become so powerful to begin with? Where did this Holy Light, with the power of Order to cleanse distortions, originate from? If I could obtain firsthand information on this topic, not only will my power of Law greatly improve, but it's also highly likely I can use it to my advantage against the Church of Holy Light."

I'd always had such regrets within me. And even the slightly cheaper items, such as the God Equipment and magical secrets that would motivate even Myth ranks and SemiGods to come work for me, were items that I naturally desired as well. Unfortunately, my wallet was empty, and I could only look.

Why wasn't I trying to think of some method to cheat and obtain them? Obviously because that's absolutely impossible! Indeed, since Justice Points were administered by the Ayer faction's True Gods, I could try using Wumianzhe to give myself some Justice Points. However, the moment I would try to do such a thing, I would probably lose more than anyone else.

Because if I truly did do so, it was highly likely that the God of Law and Contracts, Wumianzhe, would immediately perish!

Similar to how the Goddess of Wealth Beyana would obtain

power through people conducting business and obtaining wealth, every exchange of Justice Points would help Wumianzhe obtain more power through his Divine Concept of Contracts. Each and every absolutely fair contract would be equivalent to more faith and believers for him. But, with power came responsibility, and with gains were losses as well.

In this Justice Point system, Wumianzhe was also the Concepts of Justice and Equivalent Exchange. And if Wumianzhe, the representation of Justice, began to secretly take funds for himself, Justice would become nothing more than a joke—it could cause his very Divine Concept to break down. Not only would the Justice Points exchange system break down, Wumianzhe would have to bear all the consequences and would definitely be the first to perish.

Perhaps Wumianzhe who was simply an automated divine entity had no such personal desires, but I, who was connected in soul to Wumianzhe, was definitely selfish. And if my selfish desires were judged to be equal to his selfish desires by the world's natural laws, all of our effort up until now would be wasted. Perhaps it would even cause several of the True Gods that helped establish the Justice Points system to die together with Wumianzhe.

Maybe I could have done something before the Justice Points exchange system was established, but now, there was no other method apart from earning my Justice Points fair and square. I didn't even dare to think about cheating, nor did I dare to tread the boundaries like I did in other things. The only person I'd never be able to fool would be myself. If any problems occurred with the Justice Points system, there would be destructive consequences.

And that was how even though I was the one who created Justice Points, in the end, I had to obey my own Justice Points system and think of ways to legitimately earn Justice Points. Not only that, I had to be on guard for any loopholes and deal with anyone who tried to abuse the system, aiding Wumianzhe in becoming even

more just as he stayed in the heavens. Only this would help Wumianzhe gain strength and power.

"Ayer, man, why didn't you give me some bonus Justice Points before you started the system?"

"Heh heh, you didn't mention anything! How were we supposed to remember? We thought you wanted to work for your living."

Alright then, it was all my fault. I even considered using my personal System to exchange for the items on the Justice Points exchange list, but anything that was essentially creating something from nothing would be astronomically priced. It would probably be cheaper to just exchange for what I wanted using Justice Points.

"An illusion master Sword Saint's illusionary sword techniques cost 30,000 Justice Points to exchange for, and it's only a copy of the original book. But you can make as many copies of this book as you want! This is daylight robbery!"

"...Do you really think you can rob such a book that quickly? Knowledge comes with a price. Besides, Wumianzhe was the one who priced all these items, not me. Why don't you try discussing it with him?"

Indeed, since books on magical knowledge and combat techniques were easy to copy, their prices were far cheaper than items like God Equipment. However, for truly powerful individuals, these immemorial sword techniques and magic spells lost to time wouldn't be any weaker than God Equipment.

In order to sell these books for a better price, people who purchased them were required to sign a magical contract that forbade them from distributing what they learned to anybody else. They could, however, pay a surcharge of extra Justice Points and buy the right to teach a couple others. But wait, there's more! Top-level books had a limited stock; for instance, an illusion sword technique which had the ability to materialize solid illusions could only be purchased ten times before it would run out... Why did I

feel like these methods to scam money seemed so familiar?

"Yep, this was Wumianzhe's idea as well. Using his knowledge and memories, he came to the conclusion that 'Even if it's a rock, as long as you call it limited-edition and say 'first-come first-serve,' making people feel like they'll regret missing the opportunity as it won't be around any longer in the future, it'll be quite easy to sell something for a high price.'"

As expected, these were the same methods that I learned from those devious, conniving merchants back on Earth. Was this yet another roundabout way of how I shot myself in the foot?

"...Then if you sell all ten of these illusionary sword technique books, you're really not going to sell them anymore?"

"Of course not. Apart from motivating people to work for our cause through all these tangible benefits, another goal of ours is to increase the overall combat strength of average people in this world. It would conflict with our goal if we stopped selling limited-edition books entirely."

"Wouldn't that be going back on our word? That would cause the True Gods to lose a destructive amount of faith and believers!"

"No, we just won't sell them directly. We can create a 'Mystery Technique Loot Box' and charge only 15,000 instead of the usual 30,000 Justice Points to randomly get a top-level sword technique or magic spell. And if they draw a book that they're unable to personally use, well, thanks for buying... Wait a moment, what's the matter? Why are you kneeling on the ground and clutching your face?"

"Never tell anyone that this idea came from me! Everyone will want to kill me!"

Apart from first-come first-serve, limited-edition technique books, my incarnation, Wumianzhe, had actually managed to use the idea of random loot boxes, this supremely wicked pitfall that

could anger even the Gods. I was already anticipating what would happen when people started learning about the random loot boxes after the first batch of limited-edition technique books were sold out. It was highly likely that whoever came up with this idea would become the entire mortal enemy of humanity. Perhaps it would even cause Wumianzhe to even gain new Divine Concepts of 'Cheating' and 'Making People Suffer.'

Only those who truly tried it would understand the pain, anger, and despair of being sucked dry of blood by all those random loot boxes. All I knew was, "It's the 17th time already, and all I received was yet another demon's smiling mask. Is there really the golden Myth-ranked set equipment that I want in here!?" Those anguished wails would be filled with oh so much agony. Only those like me who similarly suffered would understand what it felt like for the truly fortunate to casually draw whatever it was that they wanted from the random loot boxes so easily, which made me so angry that I would want to crash my head into a wall.

"Um... I think that we should add an additional patch to this. If you draw a random book that you don't like, you can exchange it at no cost for something of equivalent value with someone else who's also dissatisfied with their draw. Of course, limit this exchange to one time only."

I did my very best to come up with the above idea in order to not become humanity's mortal enemy. Allowing a single-time equivalent exchange with another dissatisfied person was quite a rare act of generosity for me. Still, there were far too many techniques and magic spell books available, so even with this exchange, it would be quite difficult for two people to just happen to have books that each other wanted. That was why I was now absolutely determined to purchase the limited-edition books I wanted before they ran out of stock, before this damned random loot box system came online.

"Hey, I discovered that there's an undead spy in our campground.

Doesn't this count as a contribution? Under the rules of equivalent exchange, shouldn't this earn me at least 1,000 Justice Points?"

I felt that Samantha would give me an answer I wanted to hear.

"Indeed, this is a great help to us as it will negatively impact the undead. I can reward you with 154 to 210 Justice Points, according to the Hero's Armlet's calculations. Even with my authority, I can only award you a maximum of 210 Justice Points."

"Who came up with this Justice Points calculation system! How terrible! 210 Justice Points? I still have to give half to those garbage teammates of mine, so I'll only have about 100 from doing all this. How long is it going to take me to get 30,000 Justice Points for the first item I wanted?"

"Every Hero's Armlet is a divine creation from the Gods. I doubt that anything can be done even if you complain directly to them. Besides, do you still remember your Plan W report? You were the one who wrote 'Make the cheapest items really cheap, so that lots of people will start participating, especially the youngsters. Meanwhile, make the best items really expensive, and also make it hard to earn Justice Points. This will force all the hermits out there to toil their utmost to earn Justice Points, and it'll be greatly beneficial for all of us.'"

Harloys was the one who answered my complaint this time. She seemed to be quite dissatisfied with the fact that I didn't give her a Hero's Armlet and that I wouldn't agree to exchange for any of the items that she wanted... She wanted only the best, highest-tier items available—how was I supposed to afford them!?

"Ha, was there such a thing? I already forgot."

Alright then. I pretended to be a fool as cold sweat dripped down my back. Just how many times had I shot myself in the foot, and that too today? As expected...

"...You're thinking, 'As expected, I should consider my future

actions carefully; otherwise, I'll accidentally shoot myself in the foot yet again,' aren't you? Relax, I can already see your future. Things will get much better for you..."

"You're going to remind me to not shoot myself in the foot in the future?"

"No, it would be quite strange if you listened to me as you'd never change how skilled you are at shooting yourself in the foot. What I mean is that you're going to get used to shooting yourself in the foot to the extent that you won't even care about it anymore."

And so, just as I was about to begin fighting my pet cat for the umpteenth time, Samantha interrupted our "friendly communication."

"Although I can only give you 210 Justice Points, Father, you only need to carry out the next part of the task 'Find and catch the spy.' That will reward you with far more Justice Points."

Chapter 332: Holy Points and Famous Detective Roland

Since Justice Points were now an important currency, the wood spirits quickly learned to use it to make the adventurers do their bidding. The wood spirits sold their special fruits that could permanently increase one's base stats at incredibly high prices and issued various quests that paid out in Justice Points. This made the "greedy" adventurers eagerly work for the wood spirits.

At first, perhaps there were a few quests or items that paid out or were priced in an unbalanced manner, but I believed in the self-correcting power of the market. As long as there was a sufficient amount of Justice Point exchanges, things would balance themselves in the end, just like my original world's international markets... and if the Justice Points exchange system didn't balance itself and ended up going bankrupt, then it wouldn't be my fault!

By the time the market was flourishing enough to balance itself out, Ayer's faction that had the sole power to "create Justice Points" might even become like the United States of America, using petroleum and U.S. dollars to indirectly control the entire world. That would depend on our morals, however. Of course, the prerequisite for everything was that the Ayer faction needed to have sufficient power to protect our Justice Points system. Enemies and competitors were many.

Actually, not long ago, a new competitor arrived for our Justice Points: the Holy Church's new "Holy Points."

Perhaps the automated God of Holy Light calculated that it wouldn't be a good idea to allow Justice Points to continue developing, or maybe it was an idea that came from his Follower Gods. Anyhow, the Church of Holy Light came out with a Holy Points system that imitated ours, awarding Holy Points for participating in the Holy War. However, they were in far too much

of a rush to establish their system, which meant that there were glaring problems with their Holy Points. For the time being, it wouldn't be much of a threat.

The Church of Holy Light lacked the "Hero's Armlets" crafted personally by the Smithing God Benny, there was no guarantee of fairness by the God of Contracts, and how many Holy Points one earned depended solely on the proof that adventurers provided and what they claimed to have done. Not to mention, those awarding the Holy Points were the priests of the Holy Light, which meant that points received could be altered based on personal greed, judgment, and morality. There would be huge inconsistencies in both obtaining and paying Holy Points. It was simply just another way of hiring mercenaries.

The most obvious difference was that the Holy Church viewed this as a way to encourage more people to join the faith of the Holy Light. What one could exchange for were mostly items like cultivation manuals left by Holy Light job class members or ultra-pure Holy Water and so on. And even those that became "Holy Light Warriors" were mostly only the Holy Church's members or close allies to begin with.

Although this didn't seem like it was an issue, it was repeating the problems of the past. These rewards would only help those who were close to the Holy Church and wouldn't motivate anyone not already a fervent believer in the Holy Light. The Holy Church didn't understand the true goal of our Justice Points: to make everyone stronger, in a way that anyone could participate, finally creating the equivalent of a game player army.

Of course, it was possible the True Gods in the Holy Light faction had realized all these problems. However, since it was up to the Holy Church to administer their new Holy Points system, they did so with an attitude of "benefits should be kept to one's own people." Of course, maybe even Pope Caloma and the other leaders of the Holy Church knew the problems with their own system as

well, but the people responsible for the basic administration of Holy Points were at a much lower level and had outdated ways of thinking such as, "How can we possibly give these treasures to outsiders?" or "Those evil heretical items need to be eternally sealed away in our vault of forbidden items." There was even the idea that "How can we possibly keep people loyal to us with temporary hire contracts? It needs to be a contract for life." In the end, their Holy Point warriors simply became a new type of Holy Knight made up of some Holy Light-believing adventurers and mercenaries. Yet while the Holy Church succeeded in keeping out the unfaithful, they lost the most important trait: it needed to be accessible to everyone.

"Hmph, how foolish. With how they're running things, it's completely unfair and imbalanced. No matter how much they invest into their Holy Points system, it'll only benefit the few who believe in the Holy Light in the end."

Since the Holy Church had far too many believers, they probably wouldn't even end up noticing the problems with their system for quite a while to come. The number of people joining up as Holy Light Warriors would be equal in number to our Contract Heroes due to the large number of Holy Light branches scattered throughout Eich. Yet, our system was destined to become much bigger than theirs; it would leave them in the dust.

After all, no matter what they did, they were merely acting to improve their own faction's strength, while we were borrowing strength from the entire world. Their own faction's strength would be limited, while the entire world's strength was limitless.

What we now needed to do was properly manage our Justice Points system, which would automatically help all of us out. We definitely couldn't treat this Justice Points system as a tool to be used. Once the Justice Points system finally had enough of the overall market share, it would mean we had finally become influential enough in the world. That was why we were so willing

to invest so much into this Justice Points system. Yet the Holy Church was being stingy as always as they were afraid of wasting their resources or giving them to their enemies.

The game's "history" had already proved that being stingy was foolish to the extreme. Once Armageddon arrived, the True Gods finally brought out their treasures and equipped their believers, but it was already far too late.

"The most important resource in this world are humans. Most people actually have potential but simply never received a chance to take the first step. As long as the base population is high enough, there will be plenty of geniuses and eccentric talents among them. This isn't something that will happen overnight, but we have plenty of patience."

On this topic, I saw further into the future than even the True Gods. As long as enough people participated, there would naturally be heroes and geniuses that rose up amongst the Contract Warriors. A very long and difficult era of darkness would soon be upon us—this era was destined to give birth to many heroes. And what we needed to do was make Justice Points into something that all these heroes used and trusted in.

Once these heroes believed that the Justice Points system also represented the concept of "justice," our Ayer Faction would have the greatest amount of influence possible. Our strength would be unparalleled.

In just a few days, I was planning to make an announcement that "Holy Light Warriors" were also free to sign up as Contract Warriors. Although this was technically providing resources to our enemies, it was also a way to hire people out from under them. I would just have to wait and see if the Holy Church would be willing to allow their own Holy Light Warriors to simultaneously work for us. A refusal would likely cause complaints within their ranks as everyone would want a chance to exchange for what they wanted.

Of course, not everyone was that stupid, so perhaps there were those within the Holy Church who also noticed the problems with their system. Still, judging by their current policies, such voices would be the minority. And when the higher-ups in the Church of Holy Light finally noticed the problems, it would be too late for them to fix things.

Cough—cough—I seem to have gone off topic. Let's get back to what's on hand.

There were disadvantages to what we were doing as well. With our low requirements—anyone could join—it was indeed difficult to ensure loyalty to our cause. Especially at the very start—there would be all sorts of people joining with nefarious intentions, so spies and so on would be very common. If we added a function to our Justice Points system that could keep constant surveillance, we wouldn't be much different to the Church of Holy Light, even if that would help us to ensure their loyalty.

But as long as we found any spies or traitors, we simply needed to protect the Justice Points system and judge them fairly according to the law by using Law job class members to do the job. Not only would these spies and traitors forever lose their identities as Contract Warriors, there would even be a "pleasant surprise" waiting for them.

In normal situations, would it be easy to find a spy?

Of course not. If someone casually pointed at another person without sufficient evidence, not only would this put the spy on high alert, it was quite easy for conflicts to arise as long as the spy refused to admit anything. This would negatively influence the frail relationship of trust that the wood spirits had finally managed to establish with the adventurers.

But who was I? I was the legal expert who created the Concept of Law in this world. I was the Judge... Famous Detective Roland!

"Roland's Fingerprint Lifting Spell."

A casual wave of my hand caused a silver light to shine on the letter and envelope, lifting the fingerprints and clearly marking them on a blank piece of paper. They would most likely belong to the letter writer, the high-ranked adventurer spy. Apart from my fingerprints on the envelope, the only other fingerprints would naturally belong to the letter writer and the letter deliverer.

From the fact that there were two distinct sets of fingerprints, it was evident the letter writer had companions. The writer and deliverer must have been different people.

"Then let's investigate the recent medical records and see if there's a thief around here that was recently injured. If not, start investigating from the snake-shaped dagger and dark job classes. Investigate everything thoroughly... there's no need to worship me, I'm a professional!"

I proudly waved 'no' to Samantha when I saw that she wanted to speak. I was quite confident in my abilities when it came to solving and investigating cases. No matter if it was detective work or identifying the culprit, I was more than three hundred years ahead of the time!

Finally, Samantha shook her head and didn't say anything. However, Jill was unable to bear things any longer.

"Idiot Father, what Big Sister Samantha wanted to say was that we already received news that there was only a single black-caped thief who went outside by himself last night. Not to mention, he just happens to match the exact description of the spy. Have you forgotten that we have the ability to watch everything that happens around us, twenty-four seven, through the magical vines?"

Alright then, so these two Virtues already knew who the spy was. It must have been that they wanted to be filial for once and find an excuse to give me some Justice Points.

"Well, even so, it's thanks to your fingerprints that we have

tangible evidence. As we wish to remain neutral in the eyes of the adventurers, I hope that you can be the one to stand up and do the accusations."

"Of course. There's this line that I've been wanting to say for so long."

"Line?"

"There's only one truth! You're the murderer!"

I was already making a pose of pointing at an imaginary murderer. Unfortunately, the wood spirits were looking at me with blank expressions. The most pitiful thing in life was to make references that nobody understood or commented on.

[What murderer are you even talking about! Nobody directly died because of this spy! Are you the legendary elementary school student who's a God of Death? Just how ancient is this reference anyways? It's so outdated. System Notification: Commenting service, just for you. 5 Justice Points deducted from you as payment.]

"Hah, you actually provide such a service!? Wait a moment, you're taking Justice Points from me, not Fate Points? Why do you even need Justice Points?!"

[I have beauty products I want to exchange for as well. Did you really think that I wouldn't be able to exchange for items with other systems? Hmph, this is racial discrimination! No, this is system discrimination! You actually dare to discriminate against your System? Would you like to challenge an ultimate Quest with failure being punished to death?]

"Haha, what would a System like you need beauty products for? Aren't you forcing me to comment back at you?! Let it be known that I shall also charge a fee for my commenting services!"

"'Poison Dagger' Fain, Silver-ranked thief, the fourth squadron's team leader of the Wind of Kass adventuring group. Possesses the

Elite tier weapon, 'Snake's Curse' poisoned dagger. Skilled at stealth and assassination. No famous accomplishments or crimes known. However, it's said that Fain is quite fond of gambling despite having poor luck and that he owes a lot of money."

I received a report on the identity of the letter deliverer. However, I didn't rush to capture him.

In this spy incident, the most important person wasn't Fain, the letter deliverer, but rather the letter writer.

It didn't seem like much of a difference? Actually, there was a huge difference. Based on my past experience in trying cases in my first life on earth, it was incredibly difficult to find any evidence on the wrongdoings of devious criminal masterminds. Such criminal masterminds were highly skilled at hiding their involvement and only ordered other subordinates to do the dirty work for them. The lower-ranked subordinates would often make mistakes and get caught, but they might not even know the purpose of their mission as they were only working under orders. Perhaps they would deliver a letter, or a verbal message, or draw a strange shape on a wall, or order a strange meal at a particular restaurant.

In fact, this letter deliverer might just be some bait scattered by the real culprit. The moment this letter deliverer was captured, the real culprit would immediately erase all evidence of any connections and deal with any middlemen by eliminating potential leads that might expose their identity, before vanishing without a trace.

That Fain's love for gambling made him an easy target to take advantage of. As long as the culprit was willing to pay off his gambling debts, or perhaps the culprit was his debtor to begin with, it would be quite easy to have Fain work for them.

So directly capturing Fain in this situation would be unreasonable. We had to start by keeping watch over his every action, investigating everyone he came into contact with, and then

consider capturing him after fully making our preparations...

"Someone reported that Fain is the spy! We now know who the spy is!"

Rosa happily came in to inform us that she discovered the spy's identity, but she suddenly took a large step backwards when she saw my expression. My expression must have been quite distorted and scary.

"...How can this be! Being reported so easily? What do we even need famous detectives for, then?! Can't we all just play by the rules and take things slowly? What happened to the criminal mastermind culprit and the sly hoodlums? This is far too second-rate. Can't we all just have fun playing together?"

"Pfft, famous detective? You're more like a confused detective."

Alright then, I soon received the report about this as well. The person who reported Fain was also someone familiar to me: the leader of the super mercenary group Westwood Guardians, "Black Guardian" Kaise Elowen's... subordinate's subordinate.

"I'm Mulain, a Bronze-ranked thief. Our boss sent out a squad of thieves to patrol around the area, and I noticed that guy acting suspicious and going out by himself. So I followed and witnessed him secretly meeting with the undead. Then, we beat him up and he confessed everything. It turned out that he owed money, so a black-clad man threatened him and forced him to carry a letter to be delivered to the undead. That black-clad man was captured as well. He's a Bronze-ranked undead mage named Dean."

"Impossible, I swear in the name of my grandfather that he's definitely not the true culprit! Someone else must have pushed this Dean out to take the blame! The most obvious murderer is never the real murderer—that's how all detective stories go!"

"Haha, why don't you just admit defeat, confused detective Roland?"

Chapter 333: The Forest's Challenge

"Only fifty Justice Points? Sigh, what a pity."

Because a certain mercenary group had volunteered their assistance, I ended up earning only 50 Justice Points in this "finding a spy" incident since I had provided the fingerprints.

And it wasn't only that. Those two "culprits" were adamant that they were guilty. They profusely confessed; Fain insisted that he had been allured by the prospect of having his gambling debts paid off, while Dean claimed that he had been mysteriously enslaved by a lich. Their repeated confessions made it so that no evidence needed to be brought out against them—they had claimed all responsibility.

I had not hesitated to use a forbidden spell to retrieve their memories. Granted, this forbidden spell had the side effect of wiping their brains blank for a few weeks, but even after using it I obtained nothing useful. That weak Bronze-ranked undead mage named Dean had indeed been under the control of an undead magic forbidden spell. He had indeed become enslaved by some existence, although there was no confirmation that it was a lich who had cast the spell.

And no matter what he said, the fingerprints also proved that Dean was the one who had written that letter. Still, I felt something off with the situation. The low-ranked Dean was unable to explain how he had obtained this high-level information. His only excuse was that he had heard it from the rumors.

"Rumors? Indeed, there are so many rumors out there. There's even a rumor that the God of Nature is about to personally descend—do you believe that as well?"

But now, there were no more clues to go on. After all, no serious consequences had come about of this information leak as I had intercepted the letter. In the end, I could only punish these two by

removing their statuses as Contract Heroes. The rest I could do was be even more vigilant than before.

I was still feeling quite suspicious about all of this. Sometimes, the memories extracted from the living might not even be real. This was all the more so because my opponents were the undead, who possessed undead magic spells that had the ability to modify a living person's memories and knowledge.

"Increase our threat level in the campgrounds. Have magical plants spy on all essential locations, and also place surveillance on the following individuals..."

And so, even if I didn't say anything about it on the surface, I secretly made many preparations and was highly on guard.

Two days wasn't a particularly long or short period of time. But on the battlefield, where every second was precious, it was very valuable.

Maybe the spies really were those two low-ranked brats? Or maybe the true culprit temporarily stopped their activities in order to avoid suspicion? During the next two days, there were no signs of information being leaked to the undead. Nor did anyone else seem to attempt to deliver letters to the undead... I had now converted every single undead in this entire nearby area into my subordinate. Unless the spy had some even more secure method, I would definitely intercept any and all messages. But if the spy had a more secure method in the first place, they wouldn't have had to rely on sending a letter the first time.

The fact that no Undead Lord seemed to send a massive army over was a tentative testament to the fact that the undead hadn't noticed anything amiss in the past two days. This was doubtlessly good news for us.

Around midnight, at the end of the second day, a magical spell array flashed brilliantly in the night sky. This was an emergency summoning message for all the adventurers to gather. By this

point, there was no more meaning in hiding our intentions. Since we would be eventually discovered anyways, it was far more meaningful to gather all our combat strength and face the upcoming battle head-on.

But when the adventurers, who had been out hunting all this time, returned to the campground, they felt that they had gotten lost and had taken a wrong turn somewhere. What greeted their eyes was a campground utterly unlike before.

In fairy tales, spirits were capable of constructing a small house within a single night, while in this world, it was the elves who had the ability to utilize the forest to erect a solid defense. But the wood spirits far outclassed the elves in this area. With Amelia's power presiding over them, they were able to rewrite the rules of reality—as long as they were within Amelia's domain, of course.

The old tree in the center of the campground had shed its disguise. Its withered tree bark had been discarded to the winds, replaced by a gigantic root that reached out from the ground.

This ugly and colossal root was an extension of the largest and strongest tree in the entire Forest of Dreams, and it had secretly spread underneath the entire campground. Now, countless specks of green light emerged from this expansive foundation, becoming more spirited than ever as they fed the plants here with plentiful nourishment.

In the past two days, the wood spirits had crafted small wooden shovels from the root and used them to dig a hole—the hole had a radius of ten meters and a depth of one meter. They then buried two stones in this hole, an essential step in their ritual to worship the earth.

What followed was the wood spirits planting the seeds from the Forest of Dreams in this area, before praying for ten seconds, sincerely thanking their Mother for her gifts. Rainwater stored in various containers was poured on the seeds, a way of thanking the

blessings of nature and paying respect to its authority. And that was the conclusion of their ritual. The abundant nourishment of nature turned these tiny seeds into giant treants and dangerous magical plants in just three minutes.

"You make it all seem so complicated. Weren't you just digging a hole, planting some seeds, and watering the seeds? ...Why is it three minutes? I just recalled instant ramen. Are these supposed to be instant seeds?"

Samantha pretended not to hear my comments, but a mysterious red blush appeared on her cheeks. Rosa, however, was more than happy to tell me.

"Yes, you're right. Actually, we don't even need a ritual—all we need to do is plant the seeds and water them. Mother herself hates complicated rituals and she'll never be stingy with us. However, Sister Samantha said that that was no good because it would cause others to look down on us, so she wanted to make a more complex ritual that appeared meaningful."

Alright then, I supposed that making it harder on themselves was how many new religions would get started. In the end, they would add more and more formal procedures to attempt at seeming proper, making even their own believers annoyed in the end.

"Little Samantha, as time goes on, this ritual will change in ways you can't imagine as it passes through the generations. In the end, even you won't recognize it, and if you attempt to remove part of the ritual to simplify it, your believers won't have it. It may even cause a religious war. You're just causing trouble for yourself... digging a pitfall for yourself to jump into!"

Samantha nodded with a pained expression. She'd already noticed the problems as well. The issue was that she had already publicized the steps of this ritual, and changing it now wouldn't be that easy.

Cough, I should stop talking about the future, where even Amelia

was frustrated by her own religion's ceremonies. At any rate, the newly-born campground was currently undergoing a complete evolution.

The power of the Forest of Dreams was significantly reduced after being transmitted over such a long distance through a single tree's roots. Approximately only ten or twenty percent of its power managed to make it here. Still, the Forest of Dreams had almost limitless power to begin with, and it wouldn't make the Forest of Dreams lose anything, so we could definitely afford it. The riskiest part was actually that the underground root might have been decimated by the power, but that part had already passed us by. The root was now thick and powerful enough that even destroying it would be difficult.

That's why, with the assistance of the endless power of nature, all sorts of war trees and magical plants grew at a furious pace. That originally makeshift wooden fence expanded more than ten times in size into a solid castle wall that was several tens of meters tall. New roots spread out from the original root and were absorbing nutrition from the earth. Compared to a solid castle wall, a wall like this, one which would be capable of repairing itself, would probably cause a person to despair even more.

The towering war trees might be grandiose and imposing, but their eyes were blank. Their overly short growth period and lack of sufficient care from Amelia caused them to be born prematurely with shorter lifespans. Yet, in exchange for intelligence and potential, these trees were born at the peak of their combat strength and retained their combat instincts. Under the command of the wood spirits, the war trees would be fearless and unyielding.

If those war trees were said to be the best guards, then the magical plants were all intricately designed war machines. Enormous peashooters—approximately three or four meters tall—were positioned on the walls at regular intervals. Their mouths alone were half a meter in radius, and if you stepped near one you

would be able to perceive the faint sounds of prayer...

"Praise the Holy Light!" "The radiance of the Holy Light shall cleanse all evil!""In the name of the Holy Light, virtuous fire shall extinguish all evil!"

Yep, these Holy Light peashooters were all praying to the Holy Light. Their roots and ammunition were already filled with the Holy Light. My experiments had long since proved that even demons were capable of using the power of Holy Light, so plants could obviously use Holy Light as well. The only side effect was that any Holy Knight or Holy Light priests who witness this worldview-toppling sight would probably go into shock.

It was a great pity that nobody was arguing about religion any longer, likely due to that Northlands incident with the Holy Church. Otherwise, I could have tried using these research results of mine to slap the Holy Church in the face a couple more times. It might even be possible to cause more to lose faith in the Holy Light and harm the Holy Church's reputation even further.

The Holy Light peashooters were only one out of many members in the seemingly endless magical plant army. In fact, this was a fourth-generation peashooter that had long since evolved, with abilities such as "Holy Light storage" and "Overload." All of the magical plants had already evolved by significant amounts as we had prepared many nice "surprises" for the undead.

With the preparations now complete, Samantha, who was in the core section of the main tree root, lightly caressed a seed from the Forest of Dreams and muttered the final words.

"Awaken, my younger sister."

That's right—younger sister. As we were preparing over the past two days, Jill, also known as Humility of the Three Virtues, had fused herself with that seed. Upon awakening the seed would merge with Jill's entire consciousness, causing a new forest to be born here, sprouting into life and transforming into a ubiquitous

hive mind.

When Jill's clean and pretty wood spirit face opened its eyes, the faint green divine light within them illuminated this entire area.

Everything around us began to change. Roots spread and rapidly transformed into skyscraping trees. The green divine light shone on, however, presenting a mysterious sense of nourishment and intimacy to all plant life here.

Now that the air was filled with this faint green light, the power of nature helped the planted seeds to sprout. The natural laws of the world were rewritten, and a new section of the Forest of Dreams began to grow.

Jill had already possessed the ability to transform herself into a garden. Now, she became the overall commander of this new forest, the master of this land.

"All adventurers and Contract Heroes, our goal is to expand the Forest of Dreams' territory. Soon, the undead will be coming to stop us. As long as we defend this place for a sufficient amount of time to let the newly-born Forest of Dreams mature, we shall win this battle. Everyone who participates will receive bountiful rewards as well as the friendship of us wood spirits."

It was finally time to inform everyone of our true goal. The Undead Lords' armies would undoubtedly arrive—it was too late for anyone who wanted out. Although this was rather shameless as we technically dug a pit for the adventurers to fall in, it was indeed the best method to gather every drop of their power and make the best use of it all.

"Every adventurer will receive a hundred bonus Justice Points per high-level undead slain. Also, all adventurers will receive a one-time opportunity to completely heal a serious injury, including missing limbs. And obtaining our friendship means you can receive a chance at exchanging for an item that can't be obtained by normal means."

Since adventurers fought for themselves, we decided to lure them in with concrete benefits.

Meanwhile, this divine light, which had pierced the clouds and was giving birth to Amelia's dimension here, was not only visible to the undead in Asolivis—it was likely that even the Cloud Tower from across the sea could see it with the naked eye.

WIthin the walls of Asolivis, City Lord Davey had been engaged in conversation with his two venerated guests when he suddenly stood up. The brilliance of the green divine light in the sky seemed to overtake the stars. And, at the same time, the angry roars of several Undead Emperors resounded in his ears.

"Davey! If you allow this green thing to grow to maturity, you shall regret it for eternity!" "Your soul shall be shattered!" "I will make you howl in pain until the end of the world...!"

The Undead Emperors weren't exactly the kind and patient type. Enraged, they responded by immediately ordering the person in charge to deal with this issue at all costs. Failure would result in a fate worse than death.

The two venerated guests beside him had expressions of astonishment, too—a rare sight.

"The will of nature? Could it be a new God of Nature?"

"No, it's at a level higher than a God of Nature—a threat almost on the level of the Creator. This makes me recall that crazy woman and her older sister... this is a threat, a great threat to all us titan giants! We must absolutely eliminate this threat at the earliest."

The Undead Emperors were looking down upon the wood spirit species; after all, there were too many coincidental factors involved in their creation. It was likely that even their creator, Amelia, was no match for an Undead Emperor in normal circumstances.

This arrogance was part of their very foundation, similar to how

longstanding nobility would look down upon a fortunate merchant who struck it rich and purchased a noble title. Undying existences like them had gotten used to witnessing everything around them fade and die. The wood spirits weren't even a threat in their eyes. The only true threats to them were the dragons and the mages—only other undying existences were viewed their equals.

In their minds, the wood spirits weren't a big deal as they were stuck in the Forest of Dreams. Even if they were undefeatable in the Forest of Dreams, the forest itself was immovable. They believed that when they descended at their full strengths, this so-called undefeatability would become nothing more than a joke. They were hence taking it easy on the wood spirits and were willing to compromise.

In the Undead Emperors' overall strategy, the most important objective right now was to conquer the Bardi Empire. If they could break the seal on the titan giants, they would gain a new and powerful ally—good news to them.

As for the area around the former Port Victoria that the wood spirits possessed? Why not just give it to the wood spirits? Even if adventurers arrived through this location to attack the undead... just let them attack!

It wasn't worth spending so many troops and resources on eliminating such a tiny force. Even if some country's army came through the Forest of Dreams, the moment they exited the forest they would have to deal with an Undead Calamity filled with astronomical numbers of undead. It wasn't like the forest was capable of moving to the undead's most critically important areas. There would be plenty of time to strategize against assaults.

That's right—the undead's entire strategy had been based on a most basic, common-sense notion: that the forest wouldn't move.

Yet now the Forest of Dreams was moving!

Perhaps its new section wasn't very large, but as long as seeds

could be planted and the section could grow, the undead would naturally lose territory. If significant threats appeared at both their eastern and western fronts, it would mean that they were flanked on two sides: a taboo known to every strategist to be avoided at all costs.

"This cannot be allowed! Eliminate those puny ants and damned weeds!"

The entire Tark Republic took action. Innumerable high-level undead began organizing and summoning their armies. A massive battle to determine the owners of this territory was nigh.

I had been waiting quite long for this moment.

"Frostmourne—I mean Ice Calamity is hungry! It desires, it hungers for more souls than ever!"

I raised the pitch-black, magical ice crystal sword in my hands as a vast army of undead rallied behind me. The real army of the undead would never expect to meet their own kind on the battlefield, beings that similarly desired to harvest their souls.

"I'm not hungry! I drank two bottles of milk this morning—meow." The silly cat was still pretending to be a ditz...

"...You really enjoy going against me that much, don't you? Why can't you just let me have fun acting pretentiously!"

Chapter 334: Sneaking

After the Undead Emperors gave the command to move out, the undead armies collectively ended their vacation—it was an emergency, after all. If you were to take the real world to be a minimap, then you would see an unending mass of black dots gathering at a canyon one hundred kilometers away from the wood spirits' campground. The undead were mobilizing their armies.

Their shouts echoed throughout the skies, while soul wavelengths formed all sorts of connections between the Undead Lords. These Undead Lords were both fearful of the Undead Emperors' rage as well as secretly snickering at how City Lord Davey was now no longer looked at with favor.

Leading the undead armies to return to this world they originally hailed from and reestablish the Tark Republic was the irresistible dream of every ancient high-level undead. Even Aso was unable to resist the temptations of this dream. However, the Undead Emperors were still unable to descend due to the limitations of the Elemental Tide, which meant this glory fell upon a lowly ghoul like Davey.

Yes, Davey may have been Aso's prized disciple, but a Ghoul Lord like Davey was still only a ghoul in the end. He was merely a hunchbacked, low-level undead who crawled on the ground, hideous and filled with a rotten stench.

The Undead Lords had their own pride. The great majority of Undead Lords were skeleton mages, liches, banshees, and other such high-level undead species. They viewed ghouls as brainless, low-level slaves, so it was obvious that they were unable to stand that a low-level ghoul was ranked above them.

The majority of the undead world wasn't at all peaceful. Souls were the foundation for every undead, and devouring souls was the highest representation of the survival of the fittest. The way

the undead resolved conflicts was violent and highly efficient: they would simply destroy their opponents—quite simple, really.

Submission? Or death? Those were basically the only two choices that the weak in undead society had to them.

If it weren't for the fact that the Undead Emperors had forcibly forbidden all internal conflicts between undead in the mortal plane, the other Myth-ranked Undead Lords like Davey would have long sent him an endless series of challenges until he was dead, no matter his strength. And right now, the other Undead Lords were happily deliberating about the ways they could become a burden to Davey so that he would be mired in a disadvantageous combat situation. Only then would the Undead Lords take action to overturn the situation and pull Davey off of his City Lord position with the help of their combat achievements.

Of course, for Davey, although he was being pressured and threatened, he was also quite motivated and knew that this was a chance for him, one he could only receive in a thousand years.

If Davey was able to prove his abilities in this battle, the Undead Emperors would continue to support him. He would officially become the general commander of all undead in the mortal plane, the number one individual ranked just under the Undead Emperors.

Well, these were just the frustrations a general commander like him had to deal with upon having the position suddenly thrust upon him. He had even more frustrations because of all the random assortment of soldiers under his command.

This was the bad habit—or perhaps it should be called unspoken rule—of armies. The Undead Emperors, who were not physically present in the mortal plane to rein in the Undead Lords, could only tacitly allow some disobedience. Of course, this would be Davey's only opportunity. As long as he could prove his own abilities, the other Undead Lords would maintain at least the most basic respect

and obedience under his command, and Davey would truly have secured his position.

Yet this would also be the most difficult challenge for him. At the very least, Davey was extremely angered by the other Undead Lords' intentional procrastination.

"Lord Blackwood said he's having indigestion today. It appears to be food poisoning."

Let's not mention how liches couldn't even eat. Since liches were just a type of skeleton, there were no internal organs to eat with—how would a lich possibly get food poisoning?

"Lord Safesilver said that his wife is giving birth, and requests Milord for his forgiveness."

Alright then. This headless knight Undead Lord apparently had the power to reproduce, and even had a wife that could give birth...? If it weren't for the fact that he was just obviously making up a ridiculous excuse, perhaps the story would be XXX-rated.

"Duke Cami said that the sun is shining too brightly today and that it would injure him because he's a member of the Blood Tribe."

A Duke-level Blood Tribe member was actually afraid of the sunlight? This could have been the greatest news of the century if not for the fact that the messenger who reported this to Davey was a newly-born novice member of the Blood Tribe. He was standing right in the sunlight, the sunlight that Duke Cami was so supposedly afraid of. Was this the Duke's way of joking with Davey?

"Lord Graydeath says that an adventuring squad located his main secret base. He's currently busy moving his entire treasury."

The Undead Lords' excuses were so insincere they weren't even trying to hide their real intentions. It was obvious they just wanted to make things difficult for their new boss. Not only that, Davey,

who had just become general commander not long ago, could only tolerate their actions. The Undead Lords made it quite obvious that he would have to prove his abilities. If he forcibly suppressed them with the Undead Emperors' names, he would seem all the more useless.

The Undead Emperors held absolute authority, and their absence made the Undead Lords' equivalent statuses quite difficult to accept among themselves. When Yongye "died" back in the day, it was a foregone conclusion that the Yongye army would immediately implode as a result of internal conflict.

Well, there were a few Undead Lords on good relations with Davey as well. They voluntarily came to assist Davey at this critical time, helping him when he needed help the most. Still, the great majority of Undead Lords withheld their forces, giving him the problem of insufficient troops.

He could only take his loyal followers and do the best he could. But when he recalled that the two top-level guests had volunteered to help him fight the wood spirits, he was once more filled with confidence.

Meanwhile, on the other side, a certain person—yep, I'm talking about me—didn't know about all this. I was actually wondering why there weren't as many undead as I expected, deeming it quite strange.

"Hey, is it really alright like this?"

In this canyon, which was acting as a temporary undead base, swirling black mist covered a figure clad in a black billowing cape. I was doing my very best to appear like some evil boss in a video game.

Yep, I had snuck in here. I had snuck in here with zero difficulty at all. All I did was simply walk into this canyon.

I had originally expected that I would meet with an organized,

tremendous undead army, while the small amount of undead under my command would serve as cannon fodder or an ambush squad. But, when I ambushed a lesser lich, I found out, to my surprise, that this undead army was utterly disorganized. In order to deal with this sudden calamity at their doorstep, the army was willing to literally accept any high-level undead as their leaders.

And so I took some skeleton soldiers of mine and snuck into the undead's gathering ground. I then discovered that nobody was even keeping track of the undead, so I unhesitatingly brought over every single undead under my command and disguised them as underlings of that lesser lich army sub-commander who was under my control as well.

"Damn—so many undead mages. Just how many Justice Points will this be? How many shiny things can I exchange for?"

And my teammates—fine, garbage teammates—were happily looking at the undead camp around them.

My absolutely perfect undead disguise pack possessed the power of death. Even if undead mages scanned them, they would seem even more undead than real undead. There was absolutely no worry of them being exposed. The prerequisite was that these bastards didn't act too ridiculously...

"Would you like a drink?"

"Can I? This is red? Is this tomato juice?"

"Ha, you're such a jokester."

Hey—hey—hey—Solonor, just because you're disguised as a Blood Tribe, it doesn't mean you have to drink actual blood! Are you even able to withstand it? Haha, he spat it out as I had expected. Such a waste.

"What? You want some new false teeth? Actually, I have some gold teeth that I harvested not too long ago. It's just that I'm going to charge you a hefty price..."

A Goddess of Wealth priest could even earn money from the undead? Damn, I even sensed divine power emanating from Betty. Selling false gold teeth harvested from the undead back to the undead had been recognized as an official way of doing business by Beyana herself? Could this be a brand new market? Hey—hey—hey—could Betty and Beyana have at least a little shame?!"

"Cheers! Ah Gen, why does it look like you got skinnier again?"

Now then, you dwarven little girl, it's already ridiculous enough for an undead to drink alcohol and get drunk! That's not Ah Gen in front of you, that's just a skeleton elf who has nothing but bones left so of course it would be thin! Stop pouring wine for that skeleton, all the wine is leaking out from its chin! Such a pity... Damn it, why was I so stupid as to disguise myself as a lesser lich? In this form, I, too, couldn't even drink!

Still, it was no wonder why they were in such a jubilant mood. After all, we had just killed off an Undead Lord. Even without calculating the Justice Points, the loot we obtained would turn us quite the profit.

How did we kill the Undead Lord? The lesser lich I controlled simply took us straight to that unfortunate skeleton general. First, I placed a soundproof barrier, then ambushed the skeleton general and killed it with a single swing of my sword. It was literally that simple.

Just as how Betty and my other teammates never expected there to be undead spies among the living, most undead would never expect there to be living spies among the undead, that too one that would suddenly ambush them of all undead.

I would take over any ordinary Undead Thanes who approached me, like the lesser lich now under my command, within ten seconds. I would then force them into forming a slavery contract with me and transform the soldiers under their command into my own forces.

"We've already taken over three Undead Thanes. Won't it be easy for us to become exposed at this rate?"

"Not a problem. They're just novices who barely count as high-level undead. They barely even count as Undead Thanes. It won't have any effect. And this is still quite early—I intend to convert even more cannon fodder before the battle begins. Right, has Ah Gen returned yet? Any news?"

"...No. From the very beginning, I felt that it was a bad idea to let him go out scouting. You should know that his thief skills..."

"Wait a moment, weren't you the one who told him to go out scouting? That's what he told me."

Alright then, Betty and I widened our eyes as we stared at each other. It would seem that the seemingly simple and honest barbarian Ah Gen has his own slyness as well. Not to mention this seemingly honest fellow had no evil intentions when fooling us, so even someone as experienced as me in the ways of trickery accidentally fell for his little lie.

Boom!

The loud sounds coming from around us caused us to slightly relax. Ever since Ah Gen had read the book "Robin Hood, the Flying Hero" (Roland edition) that I gave him, he always liked to hop everywhere. On our way here, he had crushed a dozen tents, thirty-something trees, created hundreds of holes, and got stuck in two ditches and had to be rescued. But the most ridiculous of all was that he even discovered a hot spring with one of his hops...

Cough, judging by the sounds, this barbarian thief, who had successfully fooled us both, had managed to survive and return. He must have done a good job with his scouting, too, since he was in a good mood.

"Brother Roland, I met two strong men even stronger than me! I just arm-wrestled them and lost. You have more physical strength

than I do, so come and help me regain my lost face!"

"Arm-wrestling? Strong men? Wait a moment! There are other living people here!?"

A minimap is a miniature map that is often placed at a screen corner in video games to aid players in orienting themselves within the game world.

Chapter 335: Undead Emperor (Part 1)

What were the undead? If someone asked such a question, everyone would have their own answer.

"Undying villains, destroyers of Order, and existences that should be cleansed by the Holy Light." This was the standard answer given by the Church of Holy Light. This was also what the majority of the world believed as the Holy Light was the prevailing religion.

"Miraculous creations that can be created under certain conditions. These existences have completely opposite traits from living lifeforms. Two main conditions are required to form an undead: the first is to have enough negative energy, and the second is a soul shard..."

This would be a mage's standard answer. They would talk about the fundamental theories of what an undead was, and if you asked an undead mage, a lot of extra addendums would be attached: they might even discuss the various undead species and specifics.

"I like the term 'miraculous creation' but not the phrase 'negative energy.' The first undead didn't have a shred of negative energy at all: they were noble, unyielding spirits."

As the first-ever undead, Ayer had previously mentioned to me that the first undead were all naturally born. They were heroes unwilling to die and leave the world. Yet their resolute, undying wills allowed them to resist the Cycle of Reincarnation and walk out of their own graves, transforming into undying heroic spirits. Yep, they were the legendary "natural undead."

The soul was the universal source. Any person powerful enough to use only their soul to resist the Cycle of Reincarnation would be an incredible figure. Such a person might not even appear in every generation.

The undead that came after the natural undead were a lower-

rank product that originated from the demons performing research on the creation of heroic spirits. In order to make these undead, which weren't on the level of the heroic spirits, move, they used negative energy that originated from the lower planes. And as the eons passed this special negative energy earned itself a special name: the power of death.

This energy was originally a power from the Chaos Abyss, whose natural traits were bloodthirst, insanity, and chaos. Even a wise archmage would become insane and unreasonable after transforming into a lich, affected by loneliness and the invasion of negative energy. As for low-level undead who moved under the power of this negative energy, they were nothing more than slaughtering machines filled with a thirst for blood.

Now that I've talked about how most typical undead today were created by the negative energy known as the power of death, I should probably talk about positive energy and negative energy.

Positive and negative energy were the two major types of energy, and they countered and even resisted each other. Positive energy were of many types, the most common ones being the Holy Light and the power of nature. Many upper planes' angels and God Envoys would instinctively know how to use such a power. They were called positive energy because not only were they aligned with the concept of Order, but they were also almost always beneficial for the living; for example, the Holy Light could cure injuries.

Opposite to positive was negative energy. Mostly due to the rise of the undead and undead magic, negative energy was now the equivalent of undead and the power of death. This was a power harmful to any living being who came into contact with it. However, this was the most important nourishment of all for the undead. The true nature of the Undead Planes was simply a plane where negative energy and the power of death gathered.

For a normal mage, knowing this much would be sufficient. After

all, disrupting rays, curses, intelligence-lowering spells, and other such attack magics dealing with negative energies only needed you to know how to imitate the model for the spell. You only needed to create a specific type of negative energy and toss it out in a specialized fashion to attack your enemy.

Since negative energy was the foundation of the undead as well as their nourishment, an ordinary mage's understanding of negative energy would be far too insufficient for an undead mage. It could be said that most undead mages would conduct great amounts of research on negative energy. As a matter of fact, the most common job change among undead mages was to stop researching about the undead and to focus, instead, on becoming a master of negative energy curses.

It must be noted that these negative energy curses were very powerful against the living yet were nothing but healing spells when used on the undead. Were life and undeath truly that much in opposition to each other?

Perhaps this was only a natural phenomenon in the minds of other mages, similar to how rain would only fall from dark clouds. I, on the other hand, was quite interested in researching more about such topics like "Why do clouds form?" and "How do raindrops form?"

After a living individual entered undeath, their body and even their soul would remain the same. Did the difference between life and undeath lie only in whether they were moving by the power of life or by the power of death? Were life and undeath representations of two diametrically opposite methods of existence?

Then why was it that most heroic spirits would be even stronger than when they were living, while the undead were typically weaker than when they were alive? Developing one's potential was something truly important. Just what happened to one's potential when one transformed from the living into the undead?

"Everything hinges on the soul!"

When I was at my most crazy, I had conducted an equally crazy experiment. I recorded every single detail of the process one underwent when they transformed into an undead. Hundreds and hundreds of times I performed this experiment with exact precision, but it led me to a rather strange conclusion.

Back in my original world of Earth, there existed a theory that claimed we lose 21 grams after death. In this world, these mysterious 21 grams represented the weight of one's soul. Unlike Earth, however, this world really did have the provable existence of souls, as well as undead magic which could return a soul to its physical body... My conclusion was that after one transformed into an undead, they would regain that weight, but what they regained was definitely lower than 21 grams!

"A soul which has returned to its original body will bring back anywhere from 1 to 20 grams. This means that during death it is unavoidable for your soul to shatter—you'll lose a very tiny portion at the very minimum. "

After that, I conducted a series of life into undeath experiments with the help of my mortal enemies. This included experiments that would simultaneously maintain one's life and undeath, causing the living to howl in incredible pain as they directly turned into undead. Yet I was still able to measure a detectable loss in their body weights. Every single undead individual's soul would lose part of its weight—this fact was invariant.

Was there any meaning to me learning that people lost part of their souls upon turning into undead? Heh heh! For any mage, knowledge was quite literally power. It was all in how you used your knowledge.

Not only did I obtain firsthand information on the transformation of one's soul, I also coincidentally discovered that the lower an undead's level was, the less their soul weighed when it

returned to their body. Typically only three to five grams of their soul remained. Most of their soul shards naturally dissipated, while this so-called negative energy seemed to fill in the rest of the blanks.

"In that case, I hypothesize that the more complete the soul is for an undead, the more powerful they are. Or, it might be that it's the reverse. The level of the undead determines how much of their soul and wisdom they can retain."

This type of research result doubtlessly matched what everyone already knew, that low-level undead were stupid while high-level undead were capable of retaining their intelligence and even memories from when they were alive. However, just this result alone wasn't enough to satisfy my research expectations... Which was why I did something rather vicious.

Fine then, the me at that time was indeed rather insane. Otherwise, I wouldn't have kidnapped two of the God of Holy Light's heroic spirits to perform various experiments on them.

I dissected the two heroic spirits and extracted their souls before storing other souls in their vessels. I tested if their bodies were capable of helping low-level undead retain more of their soul, placed the heroic spirits' souls in other vessels, and so on. By the time the two heroic spirits' souls became tattered shards no longer capable of being put together, I had obtained enough experimental data.

The resulting data was quite astonishing. Heroic spirits had shockingly high numbers: these two heroic spirits' souls didn't weigh 21 grams—they weighed 23 and 25 grams, instead!

And, after dissecting two still-living Saint-ranked individuals, I confirmed with absolute certainty that all living individuals had souls that weighed 21 grams. This number wouldn't change even with a difference in power level. In that case, it could only mean that when a soul transformed into a heroic spirit, it actually gained

weight. Since a decrease in the soul's weight meant a decrease in power, did an increase in weight represent some sort of evolution or ascendancy?

The heroic spirits' spiritual bodies were clearly much better than typical souls in all areas. Just their souls alone had natural magic resistance, and they could increase the power level limit of whatever physical body they were in. They could even switch between various physical bodies without worrying about their souls shattering... Fine then, I really did go overboard back in the day. In the end, I turned those incredibly heroic spirits' souls into nothing but spare parts.

Now then. In the end, I was left with this thought: If I was able to increase the soul's weight, would I be able to create "undead" that were even stronger than heroic spirits?

And so, I confirmed my prerequisites and experimental method... Since heroic spirits were typically the result of an ordinary soul's ascension, then what exactly happened during the process of ascension? What made a heroic spirit become a heroic spirit?

Was it that only the venerated that completed heroic deeds would be chosen by the Gods to become heroic spirits? I laughed at what the church taught. I was no theologist, I was a scien—er—a mage. As long as I had enough experimental materials, something as crazy as this could still become concrete experimental data and results.

And so, I targeted some famous heroes and used various cruel methods, plots, sometimes even direct combat to kill them when they were at the most glorious peak in their lives. The first two hundred-ish only provided me with extremely high-quality undead subordinates, while #219, a priest, truly succeeded in becoming a heroic spirit. I also recorded every single step of the process by which he became a heroic spirit.

Sacrifice. When he was pushed to despair by the brink, he ignited

his own soul in order to protect his companions. A wall of light cut off the undead that were attacking his group, and at that moment, he died...

The world's recognition? A noble spirit? No, no, no. I mentioned before that us mages would never believe in such sayings. Only sufficient evidence and samples were what we would accept as the concrete truth behind those false sayings.

"The resolution and mindset to sacrifice himself? Virtue, or stubbornness, more accurately speaking, should be 'Powerful emotions, strong enough to interfere with the world...' I never expected for it to actually be the same as how natural undead were born.

Although I received a result, I was a fastidious researcher who naturally wanted more than one sample as proof. And so...

"I'm not willing to die just like this!" "I still have things I want to do!" "Is my sacrifice really meaningful?"

I used undead magic to forcefully inject such powerful thoughts into each of my experimental subjects so that they would be filled with powerful emotions right before they died. In theory, I thought that I would be able to artificially create heroic spirits.

The end result... was that I failed. I received the most insane, evil undead spirits of all. They were absolutely crazed and would attack anything in their sight. Not only that, this still didn't explain why a soul would actually increase in weight. After all, even if a powerful emotion protected the completeness of the soul, just where did this extra weight appear from?

And so, I went over every single detail of that successful experimental subject #219 and imitated every point. I then started changing the experiment one factor at a time, hoping to discover the missing critical factor... In those two years, the Holy Church probably found it quite mysterious why eight heroic spirits appeared in a single year when typically less than one would

appear in a generation. Not to mention, several hundred of their elite priests suddenly went missing and ended up dead.

And that was how by taking away a certain factor, I finally succeeded in failing to create a heroic spirit, finding the critical missing link that I had been searching for.

"A heroic spirit must have his deeds well known by people, with his descendants proud of him... So this was the critical point. A heroic spirit must be well known."

The praises for a heroic spirit was the final result of my research. A heroic spirit needed to have his or her deeds known by everyone. It would be best if the heroic spirit was witnessed making a heroic last stand by everyone at the moment of the hero's death. These were all necessary conditions in becoming a heroic spirit.

In that case, could I create a heroic spirit using a fake story plus a "hero" that I hypnotized? If I could, then that would prove my theory.

The end result was, as I laughed maniacally, the first ever human-created heroic spirit, "Dragonslayer King," Sven was born. He became a heroic spirit under the God of Holy Light. Five years later, I intentionally ran into Sven again and performed a second experiment on him... that unlucky fellow had my hypnosis canceled on him and discovered that he was only a lowly murderer instead of a hero. He instantly went up in smoke and died for real, which proved the necessity of the heroic spirit's own "conviction" in their status.

Not only that, it also proved that the Holy Church's explanation of souls and heroic spirits was nothing more than utter bullshit!

Finally, after even more experimentation, the final conclusion I came to was probably the closest thing to the truth.

"No wonder Soul Worlds have the capability of distorting the real world. In this world, personality, knowledge, faith, conviction—all

these intangible concepts are a part of concrete strength as well. They are all nourishment for the soul and help to make it stronger, strong enough to resist the invasion of negative energy. And once someone's soul is sufficiently strong, they can even enter a heroic spirit state after death and begin to use positive energy!"

This also explained why tin can knights whose heads were filled with nothing but the knightly spirit would still mostly be able to maintain their sense of honor and intelligence after transforming into undead. The traditional knightly code, in a way, protected them. Meanwhile, for hermit archmages, even though they were extremely intelligent, they had basically zero emotional intelligence and viewed so-called faith and conviction as nothing more than a joke. It was only natural that mages would typically be invaded by negative energy and gradually lose their senses of self.

The moment I received this experimental result, I also understood the true nature of heroic spirits. For any mage, knowledge was power. My Infallible Diffindor now possessed the ability to temporarily transform high-level undead into heroic spirits. This was a power that nobody else in this world possessed.

If that was all it was, I would only be the biggest heretic and desecrator this world had ever seen in the past millennium. Yet I came up with yet another hypothesis based on this result, making me into the most likely candidate for the largest heretic of all ever since the founding of the very world of Eich.

"Perhaps so-called Gods are just heroic spirits that have gathered a sufficient amount of belief in them to obtain a Divine Concept and evolve themselves... Ha! Doesn't that mean that the so-called venerated Gods are just another type of undead? The moment that they ascended to Godhood, they were already dead? Their true identities are nothing more than soul shards tied together by belief in them as well as Divine Concepts?"

Alright then, if I publicized these research results of mine, probably half of the True God believers in the world would be busy

calling me a ridiculous heretic, while the other half would be busy trying to kill me.

But I had proof for this hypothesis of mine... because my experiment succeeded!!

Yes, I'm talking about Wumianzhe! His success in ascending to Godhood seemed like nothing more than a fortunate coincidence, even to a veteran like Ayer. But only I knew that this was my final practical experiment to prove my theory: a human-created God.

I wondered sometimes about what would happen if I attempted to tell everyone the truth about the Gods. Yet I would always give up on the idea. Most people wouldn't believe me, and if they really did, it would probably mean the world was about to meet its destruction.

It was time for me to stop walking down this path. I had already detected the foundational truths of the world. If I went any further down this path, opening up the entire Pandora's Box, my research results from this damned undead construction field might truly end up destroying this entire world.

"Heh, but if I don't do anything at all, this world is already destined to be destroyed. If I continue with this, there is a "might:" it only "might" destroy the world. I might as well continue regardless."

And so, I ended up creating the Seven Deadly Sins. Their base materials weren't particularly excellent. "Wrath" Bastian was only an ordinary dog you could find anywhere, "Gluttony" Ah Dang was just a random assortment of corpses I grabbed from the battlefield, "Envy" Marsolit was mostly something not living originally at all, an aerial battleship, while "Greed" Harloys' base material was only an ordinary undead slime, but...

"Everything hinges on the soul!"

I whispered that softly to myself. For an undead, the physical

body wasn't as important as most undead mages believed it to be. Souls were the true foundation.

Although I called my specialized field "undead construction," a more accurate name would probably be "soul evolution." In place of the belief and conviction that heroic spirits needed to evolve themselves, I gave my Seven Deadly Sins the convictions in my own soul.

Heroic spirits and Gods? They were merely idiots tied to other people's belief in them and knowledge about them! This land was still going to be ruled by physical flesh and blood living individuals. What I gave to my Seven Original Sins was free will, basic individual personalities, and souls that were even more complete than what the Creator would give!

From a certain standpoint, they were indeed my children. My blessing to them gave them endless potential to evolve themselves so that they could evolve into souls that could surpass heroic spirits. And they would forever be a part of me, accompanying me until Armageddon arrived.

"Seven Original Sins? Heh heh, these are the most foundational parts of human nature. Wrath, the anger and judgment against those who commit acts of injustice. Gluttony, the desire to evolve one's physical body. Lust, an overflowing amount of love. Envy, the desire to possess others' best traits. Pride, the desire to rise in status... Children, allow me to witness just how far you'll proceed in evolution since you have even more complete souls than the Gods themselves."

"Even though it's said that all Undead Emperors are insane, to have used yourself as an experimental subject and cut off parts of your own soul, you're probably the most insane of them all, Roland... Your Highness."

The only individual who knew about my true research results was Harloys, who was bound to me with a soul connection. And,

right now, I really needed her assistance. When I provided all this detailed information to her, she actually used a respectful title that Undead Lords would use to address Undead Emperors for once.

"...This is the only part where I can't compare to you. But, I won't lose to you! I have my own understanding of undead magic! One day, I shall use my own research results to become an Undead Emperor as well!"

"Heh heh, I truly look forward to the All-Knowing Harloys' research results. But please help me out right now. I need your accumulated knowledge and experimental data."

"Help you? In this campground filled with undead? Oh, you intend to use undead construction here! Are you thinking of creating another Original Sin?"

"No, no, it's just I'm itching to create something with all these ingredients around. Although it won't be on an Original Sin's level, it might actually be similar to their power level."

Perhaps none of the undead around me knew that thanks to my spur-of-the-moment decision, something very troublesome for them would appear.

I believe the author is talking about a popular theory that came about from a scientific study published in 1907 by Duncan MacDougall. Here's the Wikipedia link if you want to read more about it: .

Chapter 336: Undead Emperor (Part 2)

"Gone missing again? How is this possible?"

Although it was quite difficult for a skeletal face to express much astonishment, the lich Edwin was unable to contain his disbelief at the news he just heard.

This was now the second night after General Commander and City Lord Davey's armies had started gathering in this canyon. The unbelievable news was that undead were continually going missing in this campground.

If it were only ordinary low-level undead that went missing, it wouldn't be a big deal, because it was common for them to lose their way. If it were only mid-level elite undead that went missing, it could be understood that perhaps there were adventurers secretly waiting in ambush that took them out. But the missing undead were...

"Yes, the southwest district's Undead Lord Caben's camp is utterly empty. The tents, equipment, and even personal items remain, but it's just that there's not a single undead left in Lord Caben's camp!"

The messenger was a ghost, so it obviously had an unclear expression. Yet the fact that it was flickering rapidly indicated that it was the opposite of calm inside.

"How is this possible! This is already the thirty-seventh group that has gone missing. Even with high-level undead patrolling, they still went missing? Right, does Lord Caben know about this already?"

This was such beautiful irony. The undead were meeting a ghost story of their own. The fact that their companions were vanishing without a trace was incomprehensible to them.

Even if there was a sudden ambush, how could there possibly be

no signs of anything that occurred? There weren't even any traces of a fight. If it had been some other species, it might have been the effect of some large AOE mental spell. But all undead were immune to mental magic. How could they possibly disappear en massé like this?

"Lord Caben—Lord Caben was in his camp at the time. He also went missing!"

The lich Edwin suddenly stood up upon hearing this. The soulfire in his eye sockets was flashing—he didn't really care if some low-level undead suddenly vanished, but all Undead Lords were at the minimum a Legend. How was it possible for an Undead Lord to just mysteriously disappear? Edwin knew that Caben's power level was definitely equal to his own. If Caben suddenly vanished, didn't that mean that Edwin himself was in danger as well?

Something or someone that was able to instantly kill an Undead Lord who was on guard? Without leaving a single trace? Despite the fact that several powerful high-level undead were repeatedly patrolling the campground? The lich Edwin hadn't felt the threat of true death in a very long time. He was now feeling the almost forgotten sensation of a chill running down his spine, faintly feeling as if something was spying on him in the darkness.

"Actually, I do have some clues. I'm just not sure about it yet..."

The ghost's flickering became even fiercer, as if some secrets were contained within it that made the ghost unable to control itself.

"Just what did you discover! Hurry and tell me!"

Edwin was unable to repress his impatience and faced the ghost directly, grabbing on to its ethereal body as he impatiently shook the ghost.

"That's, that's..."

The ghost had yet to finish speaking when it started to disappear.

A pitch-black mist filled the room along with the soundless screams of souls. It seemed like some sort of curse had been activated.

"Hurry! I order you to hurry and tell me!"

The impatient Edwin was in a hurry as he approached the ghost and injected a large amount of negative energy through his arm into it in an attempt to maintain the ghost's body. However, Edwin soon found that something was wrong with the situation.

All the negative energy he injected seemed to disappear, and he soon became unable to retract his arm. Meanwhile, that ghost transformed into a black mist that then transformed into various distorted faces, some familiar to Edwin.

A raspy soul voice echoed throughout the room, emotionless and devoid of warmth.

"Join us..."

"...Why is it you, Caben!?"

The most attention-grabbing face belonged to the recently missing Undead Lord. Edwin knew that he was in a bad situation, so he intended to activate a defense spell. However, his defense spell wouldn't respond to him at all. And when the black mist finally dissipated, the lich Edwin's tent was empty. The only sound was the night wind blowing through the still-open window, which caused the diary on the table to flip open, as if the master of this tent was still here.

"Did you hear? Last night, many undead went missing again. How scary. This time, even a lich was among the missing. I heard that not only did he go missing, even his phylactery became empty. There's actually something out there that can cause a lich and his phylactery to disappear so completely and mysteriously? Truly frightening."

"What are you afraid of? You're not an undead."

The dwarven "auntie" Mary was obviously not interested in Betty's exclamations. Being stuck in this camp for two days meant two days without alcohol for her. Her spiritless face was filled with fatigue. Mary had claimed that this was simply a dwarven habit and that she would feel better after two days, but I knew that this was, in truth, nothing more than an addiction to alcohol, which would indeed get better after two days... Fine, perhaps she wasn't wrong and it was just that this was the habit of the entire dwarven race.

"...I just finished my marketing channels. Those undead are truly rich, especially the undead with intelligence. I can exchange for so much precious magic information and gold with only some outdated magazines and books. That lesser lich originally promised to introduce his boss, a lich, to me. However, he and his boss ended up disappearing, which ruined all my plans. Ahhh! That bastard still owes me two silver coins! He was going to use an enchanted skull to pay off his debt to me!!"

"...First of all, an enchanted cursed skull is one of the most precious ingredients in undead magic. For you, a True God's priest, to carry around such an item is no different from desecration. Not to mention that such an item costs tens of thousands of gold coins. You were planning to accept one for just two silver coins? You're such an evil merchant."

What should I even say? That it was to be expected of a Goddess of Wealth priest? They were even willing to make money from the undead!

"Right, I can sell guardian charms blessed by the True Gods! Right now, everyone is in a panic—well, all the undead are in a panic—so I'd definitely make a huge profit!"

"Just don't go overboard and let the undead discover you. Right, did you notice that recently, all the undead around here have become rather dull? They seem to be roaming around rather blankly..."

Alright then. Betty could make money while spreading the teachings of his church and perhaps even obtain some believers from the undead. This newly created method of earning money probably gave him great favor with Beyana. Meanwhile, my research, too, was making progress.

In the center of a room was a broken-down stone sculpted gravestone. Around it were various spell arrays, drawn and maintained by the silly cat.

"How inconceivable. Just this tiny little portion is the core of a graveyard demon?"

Graveyard demons, one of my research results while I was at the Cloud Tower. They were a super undead creation that I based off of the ancients.

They were abnormal magical beasts that were the incarnations of graveyards. The moment one awakened, it would be a Saint at the minimum, a mega undead war machine. Each graveyard demon's specific combat strength and abilities depended on the area and history of the graveyard that created it.

If it was an ordinary graveyard... well, ordinary graveyards were incapable of creating graveyard demons. Only graveyards that had over a hundred years of history—thus accumulating a high amount of negative energy—would possibly produce a graveyard demon. And if it was a graveyard demon produced from a battlefield, where a bloody battle had been fought over a hundred years ago, then the graveyard demon would be over a hundred meters tall, a literal giant war machine.

Graveyard demons constructed from battlefields with SemiGod or even Low God corpses would give even True Gods headaches. To be honest, a Demon Lord in the Endless Abyss was a graveyard demon as well, although I heard it was naturally born.

Normal undead mages viewed their creations as the natural products of undead magic, without researching as to the

fundamentals of why. This was a problem common to most mages. They were used to all sorts of miracles from magical creation and never asked questions. This was conceit, a conceit that arose due to an overly developed magical society. They missed the hidden scenery amid the vivid colors around them.

The most inconceivable thing about graveyard demons was what they were constructed of. Much of their existence was graveyard earth, which contained incredibly high amounts of negative energy. But even though they contained negative energy and some corpses within them, they were still made up of over 99% earth element.

In that case, basic logic of the elements would say that these graveyard demons should have been earth elemental creatures. But every single mage out there would categorize a graveyard demon as a pure undead creature.

This was doubtlessly against the mainstream ideas of undead research.

Unlike my method of researching about the basic nature and foundation of things, most undead mages started with the physical undead ingredients that they could see and touch. They believed that better quality undead materials would create stronger undead creatures. And this wasn't wrong at all, even according to my own theories. It was only to be expected for a strong soul to require a strong physical body to wield its power, while gentlemanly—er—healthy souls required healthy bodies to hold them. Otherwise, there would most likely be problems. But this definitely wasn't all there was to undead construction!

A Legendary corpse would be able to create Legendary undead, but this didn't mean that every Legendary undead required a Legend's corpse, or even a corpse of a higher level, to be created. Yet almost all undead mages considered this as common sense, indisputable and truistic.

But if you went by the classic method of undead creation, then it would be impossible to explain why graveyard demons, who were 99% constructed out of the earth element, could be so powerful. Why was it that graveyard demons possessed unimaginably strong desecration auras, astonishing combat strength, and were even able to replenish and help the undead to recover? Nor was there any way to explain the source of its supernatural powers.

Perhaps undead mages would try to claim that the corpses within the graveyard demon had such an effect. However, the corpses buried in a graveyard would undoubtedly be only a random arrangement.

If any random arrangement of materials in a graveyard could create such an incredibly powerful top-level undead, then why would we still need undead magic spell formations and undead mages? This type of answer was nothing more than irony.

However, my more unique field, undead construction, could explain it quite clearly. This was also why I was so interested in graveyard demons.

"Only a soul powerful enough will be able to control such a formidable undead creature. After conducting some studies I have confirmed that this graveyard demon doesn't have much intelligence—no—I should say that it doesn't possess any memories or knowledge whatsoever. It's basically like a newborn baby, a blank soul, yet it's newly-born at a rank above Legends. Inexplicable."

Naturally, this caused me to recall the River Styx, which was able to make souls reincarnate. After numerous experiments, I arrived at a conclusion which was likely closest to the truth.

This soul wasn't a single existence that rested in the graveyard. Instead, it was an amalgamation of the countless soul shards left behind by all the dead within it. This entire graveyard's earth was the graveyard demon's physical body, while the soul belonging to

it was born from this body.

Perhaps the final conclusion seemed completely out of the norm, but I felt that it was rather logical:

Under the long-term corrosion of negative energy, the typical condition of "life changing into death" was reversed. The corpses laying in the graveyard became the catalyst for transformation, while the earth filled with the bodies completed the transformation from the dead into the living. All the souls in the graveyard combined together into a new, collective will. This soul was hence a newborn, which was why it was blank. It required time and knowledge to help it grow into maturity.

Alright then. Even if I learned the basic foundational reason for why a graveyard demon was produced, was there any actual meaning in it? Graveyards that were over one hundred years old were relatively rare, and there were still many unknowns in how many soul shards from separate individuals could come together and form a collective will. It was still impossible to mass produce graveyard demons.

Still, a person would only be third-rate at best if they could only copy the method by looking at the blueprint. True researchers would be able to change the original blueprint based on their fundamental knowledge. If there were insufficient materials, replacement ingredients could be found. It would even be possible to create something far surpassing the original.

"The formation of graveyard demons requires two basic conditions. First, lots of negative energy has to gather into a relatively independent form. Second, many independent souls are required. In a way, an undead army that's gathered together matches these basic requirements. An undead army is a complete military unit, which also possesses countless independent soul shards."

Of course, this alone was far too insufficient. There were still too

many unsolved mysteries about the production of graveyard demons. Just gathering undead together wouldn't fulfill the prerequisites for giving birth to a collective will, which was why I did a little trick.

"Does this gravestone contain the soul for that newly-born graveyard demon?"

"No, no. It's only Little Three's soul shard, a small portion I cut off for experimentation. A complete Little Three isn't actually that useful as he already has his own physical body. But this incomplete soul shard before us is different. It desires to be complete, meaning it'll work towards my goal. It will become the seed for this soul giant!"

All undead were connected to each other. Undead Emperors controlled the Undead Lords, Undead Lords used soul contracts to control high-level undead, and high-level undead, in turn, controlled large amounts of low-level undead subordinates. In concept, this was, indeed, a soul net. This graveyard demon would be one of the mainstays of an undead army.

If you viewed an undead army as a body, then each member was a cell. It was just that each cell had its own independent will. But if one day a collective will was born, which could order its cells to listen to its commands, causing the cells to lose their independent wills—what would happen?

The current "Little Three" was that collective will. What I did was quite simple: I told him that the entire undead army was his physical body, that the soul net between the undead was his bloodstream and nerves, and that it was time for him to awaken!

"He's awakened and needs a physical body, a sufficient amount of the power of death to be gathered for him. He also needs all his cells to orderly enter a procession according to his will. He's a prematurely born baby who's still lacking in many areas. He wants... to be born!"

I didn't know just what miraculous changes had happened to Little Three, just as how nobody truly understood how babies obtained their own independent wills and souls. Just what mysterious forces were at work behind this? All I did was fulfill the requirements for such a phenomenon to occur, and it indeed occurred. However...

"...Honestly, I didn't know what would result from this experiment. But don't you think that it's precisely the unknown that's more exciting? Experiments that are destined to succeed are boring. It's only the unknown that allures people the most. And as long as this works, my undead construction will have yet another new research result!"

And I had now obtained my research result. In this campground, an undead army came alive as it cleared away impurities within its body and perfected its soul and physical body. It ordered his own bloodstreams, body, limbs, and internal organs to listen to its commands as it crafted a perfect body for itself.

The undead had blank expressions as they walked together, devouring and combining with each other. They couldn't—and wouldn't—resist, just like how a physical body would be unable to resist an order from the soul. Only the powerful individuals in the undead army who were strong enough to have Soul Imprints were temporarily able to maintain their own senses of self. However, this only caused the collective will to prematurely come to them and transform them into the body's nourishment. Since these higher-level undead were also a part of this army, it was only natural for them to be powerless and devoured.

A new soul was being born. As the main experimenter behind everything, I had so many records to write, while my mind was battered with countless flashes of inspiration. I felt as if I was witnessing yet another excellent creation being born. And since this creation was an amalgamation of an army meant for war, I intended to call him "Mars of War."

Perhaps only Saint-ranked undead, who had their own Soul Worlds, would manage to avoid being classified by Mars as a part of the army of his own body. However, looking at how one unlucky Saint-ranked Undead Lord had become part of Mars, even that might not be sufficient.

Of course, refusing Mars' summoning was actually quite easy. All an undead needed to do was tell itself that it wasn't part of the undead army, that it was an outsider. Mars would then be unable to classify that undead as a part of his physical body.

But it was a pity—as long as I didn't tell anyone, not a single undead would ever think of it.

This was indeed quite unreasonable. But, to use an analogy from the Middle Ages of my original world, if someone prophesized that a large, heavy metal object called an airplane would be capable of flying through the air, then that person would surely be treated as someone insane. Many seemingly unreasonable phenomena were simply because insufficient research had been performed on the topic. Experimental results could help one to reverse engineer the logic behind the result. If I truly succeeded with this experiment, then I would likely be able to theorize the reason for every step of the process that occurred. I would definitely obtain many benefits.

"Um... have you ever considered how to deal with him in the end? He gives me the chills. Aren't you worried you'll be unable to control him?"

"Relax, I've already thought of everything."

"You have a completed control mechanism? How did you do it? When did you do it?"

"...I should say that since I have absolutely no idea how to control him, I never intended to control him in the first place. Will a normal parent plan out their child's future when the child was just born? Let him grow up and mature by himself, free and happy. Yep, judging from his appetite, he'll be quite a healthy child."

[He'll definitely be healthy, but everyone else would become unhealthy! Stop acting like an idiotic parent who's proud that his naughty child is hyperactive! Can't you just self-reflect even a little? When not even born fully, he already ate a Saint-ranked undead for his nutrition. Have you ever considered what type of monster he'll finally become in the end? A body made of high-level undead is clearly much better than earth filled with negative energy. Have you ever considered how strong this undead army physical body of his that's filled with numerous Undead Lords will become in the end? Combined with the souls, his power will increase exponentially! He'll be almost limitless in strength! Have you ever considered that there's a 99% chance that he'll run out of control? I've long since told you that if you don't stop using undead construction, you'll destroy the world! System Notification: 5 Justice Points have been deducted for my commenting service. There is no need to thank me. Oh, and do you think it'd be better next time if I use ALL CAPS to roar at you?]

Harloys also nodded with a calm expression—she had long gotten used to how I was.

"...Your Highness, you will definitely destroy this world sooner or later."

Chapter 337: Shadowy Clouds of War

Spring was always short. A brief bout of spring showers heralded the gradual shift to warm weather.

Compared to the Northlands still in the throes of frigid winter, this place was far more suitable for humans to inhabit. At the very least, the wood spirits loved this climate. Warm, humid, and filled with sunlight, this area was particularly suitable for plants to grow.

However, a rancid smell of undeath was brought to us by the south wind. Dark clouds arrived in the sky together with a sudden drop in temperature. Nature seemed to be reminding people that the hot summer had yet to arrive. At the very least, the final spring frost still needed to be experienced.

Since the new seeds for the Forest of Dreams sprouted into what greatly resembled oak trees, the new and evolving section of the Forest of Dreams now had the charming name of Oak Town. The undead's unexpectedly late arrival caused the defenders of this town to feel both worry and happiness.

They were happy that the shadows of war seemed to come later than expected by several days, which meant that they would have additional time for combat preparations. They were worried because, based on the typical rules of war, the longer the enemy took to gather themselves the stronger and more numerous they would be.

The undead had been expected to arrive two days ago, but there were no signs of them at all. Many veteran adventurers had already mentally prepared themselves. Since the undead were taking so long to arrive, perhaps they had recalled their troops from sieging Nightrain City—the eventual undead army's numbers would be hence ridiculously large.

"It would be nice if they would wait for another ten days or two

weeks. I've heard that many people in the Mage Country are interested in obtaining Justice Points. Perhaps they'll come over to join us."

Yet the thick smoke that suddenly arose could only mean that no reinforcements were arriving as of yet and the undead had finally arrived as expected. Before a thick blanket of clouds covered Oak Town, a Pegasus Knight approached the town. The rider was shouting before he even landed.

"They're here, they're here!"

Who was here? Everyone understood without it needing to be said out loud, yet nobody panicked.

"Close the gates!"

"Notify all the sentries and hunting teams outside that they're to immediately return to Oak Town."

"Nobody's notified the wood spirits and our leaders yet? Someone, hurry and deliver the message!"

This was just how adventurers were. They were raucous and disorganized, yet also filled with motivation. In just a few minutes, every single person knew that the battle had come to them, and they busied themselves in preparations for battle.

There was no longer any need to conceal their combat preparations. The veteran adventurers among them were capable of judging the enemy army's size and projected arrival time simply from the dust plumes they kicked up in the air. The estimated time of arrival for the undead's vanguard knights was two hours, but the adventurers were long prepared for this and started taking action.

Large amounts of bows had previously been placed on Oak Town's castle walls. The archers began testing their bowstrings, while treants pulled themselves out of the grounds. The adventurers manning the stone catapults began their final

calculations of the ammunition they possessed.

In just slightly under an hour and a half, the first wave of skeleton knights arrived. The silent skeleton knights were sitting on decayed saddles and had tattered spears as they surrounded and circled around the castle walls, searching for weaknesses in their enemy's defense. If any place seemed weak to them, they would have attacked it. But, in the end, they retreated without making a move.

"Have we arrived late?"

The death knight Haben finally abandoned the idea of forcefully attacking this location. Looking at the scene before him, for the first time in his undead life, he doubted the Undead Emperors' judgment. He felt that the Tark Republic had underestimated these plant lifeforms by far too much.

The largest tree's root brought Amelia's power over to the newly-born "oak trees," helping them to mature. Meanwhile, even more "oak trees" had begun to sprout, hence increasing Oak Town's power even further. Once the cycle of nature was established here, most could tell that this place was already a nigh impregnable fortress even with its unassuming name of Oak Town.

The castle walls grew taller and taller, while squads of treants patrolled every inch of space. The most incomprehensible part was that this green fortress was visibly growing outward. Its surroundings would turn green, inch by inch, while trees would shoot up at a pace visible to the naked eye. Trees were sprouting on this desolate land more than ever, transforming the barren area to grassy plains and forest.

This was the miracle created by the divine power of nature. And soon, these newly-born trees would become even more nourishment for Oak Town to grow. Smaller plants of nature would naturally become part of the larger cycle of nature, with one cycle creating another before everything finally achieved a

balance. By that time, even if an enemy approached this area they would be met with endless enmity and would cause eyes to stare upon them.

Upon discovering that the enemy's defenses were already complete and that using only skeleton knights to forcibly attack this place would be a meaningless sacrifice, the vanguard commander Haben did not hesitate to choose to temporarily retreat until the undead's main forces arrived.

Simultaneously, the adventurers' leaders were in the middle of a military meeting at a temporarily constructed command center in Oak Town.

From a certain standpoint, the wood spirits were truly playing the part of NPCs. They obviously lacked complete trust in the adventurers, not to mention that the two parties had different strategic objectives to begin with. The wood spirits wished for Oak Town to successfully grow and were willing to sacrifice anything. Meanwhile, the adventurers sought to maximize their personal benefits, which meant that two sets of leaders arose in Oak Town. But, as of now, they were still very cooperative with each other and had few disagreements.

One set of leaders was from the adventurers' alliance, while the other acted as the decision maker of the wood sprits. To be honest, this was likely going to become the typical cooperative working method between local forces and Contract Heroes. After all, local forces would forever wish for their subordinates to obediently carry out each and every one of their commands.

When looking at it from the employer's angle—to use the pieces at your disposal in the most efficient manner—it would be best to pay money to hire temporary allies to become cannon fodder and undertake the most dangerous roles. After all, any local leader would want to preserve their own elites they worked so hard to raise. But the adventurers' alliance needed to consider the interests of their own. They would even want to maximize their benefits

without losing a single life if at all possible.

Both sides had different standpoints, so of course there would be disagreements.

Cooperation, communication, an appropriate amount of trust, and a faintly unsaid employer-and-subordinate relationship that wasn't absolute. Both sides would keep a certain distance from each other and still try to seek benefits for themselves while chasing after the same goal. That seemed to be the best choice.

This current adventurers' alliance was led by roughly a dozen veteran adventurers. They were either the leaders of the largest mercenary groups or were well-known and well-respected adventurers who were elected to represent all the freelance adventurers.

"There are approximately sixty to eighty thousand undead. Judging by the flags, there should be approximately ten Undead Lords in their army. Their leader is Davey from Asolivis..."

Unlike the freelance adventurers who would only see the skeleton knights behind them, any medium or large-sized mercenary squad possessed their own investigative methods. Some had aerial knights scout out in the sky, while others relied on prophecy mages' prediction spells. It was only natural that they already understood the situation of the undead army's main forces.

But when all the numerous investigative methods brought reports to the adventurer leaders, and they put the information together and verified that it all seemed quite reliable, the tent acting as the temporary command center fell completely silent. It wasn't because the undead were far too strong, but rather...

"This seems wrong. There are too few of them. Could this be some sort of trap?"

Yep, this was completely different to their expectations. The undead that arrived were far fewer than expected. Originally,

everyone expected that every single Undead Lord in Asolivis would move out to attack, and that the total undead forces would well surpass several hundred thousand. However, only one-tenth of the expected undead forces had arrived.

Some sort of pincer attack? Feint? Bait? Or just abandon this location and send their main forces elsewhere? Numerous thoughts appeared in everyone's minds. But since there were far too many possibilities, nobody dared to come to a conclusion.

Suddenly, a messenger pigeon flew into the tent and landed on Kaise Elowen's hand as he was pondering this situation.

"...It would seem that our employers have their own additional sources of information."

This was a message from the wood spirits to Kaise. It basically said that due to certain reasons, most of the Undead Lords had refused to participate in this battle and that some of the gathered Undead Lords had suddenly left the army, causing the attacking undead forces to be far fewer than expected. The message ended by saying that the adventurers could rest assured in fighting only against this number.

"Certain reasons? It appears that our employer doesn't completely trust us?"

The moment Kaise finished telling the other adventurer leaders about the message, some commented in obvious displeasure. The adventurers risked their lives to fight for the sake of their employers, but the employers showed such open distrust. It was no wonder they would be dissatisfied.

Yet a white-haired elderly adventurer helplessly shook his head. This person was Alo Simu, the ex-head priest of the former Mother Earth Goddess religion. Now, he was a somewhat famous adventurer.

"Heh, let's be honest with ourselves. Do we truly even trust our

companions? Let's not even mention that incident of a few days ago."

Alo was obviously referring to the spy incident that occurred just recently. Ever since this incident was uncovered, many adventuring squads became far more vigilant. There was no knowing if their own squad had a secret undead spy.

"I also heard that the wood spirits even invited another helper. I heard that the person they invited was a major personage who's in the top 30 of the fairies' ranking lists?"

"The Eich's famous warriors ranking? That's highly unlikely. All the top 30 are considered national treasures by each country. How would they possibly accept being hired so easily? And if there really was such a famous warrior here, he would have long since been given the right to command us. It's not like we don't know when to defer to others."

"...Did you all forget? The fairies put out more than just one ranking list. They have an even more famous and authoritative ranking list."

"...The Calamity Rankings!? Someone who's in the top 30 of the Calamity Rankings!? Are you sure they're here to help us, not to kill all of us together with the undead?"

Shocked, everyone instantly fell silent for a moment. The meaning behind the Calamity Rankings was that "If you accidentally meet someone on this list, don't consider resisting or even dream about killing them. Hurry up and run for your life." The lower-ranked individuals on this list were all monsters like Immemorial Dragons that were far stronger than the average SemiGod. As for the top 30 on the Calamity Rankings, they were basically all mega troublesome individuals who refused to die and had lived for over a thousand years.

"Someone in the top thirty who's willing to be hired? Is it the Plague King or the Volcano Tyrant? No matter who it is, it's not a

good thing!"

The Plague King was a classical alchemist and an expert in potion-making. Originally, he was someone who researched medicine that could cure plagues. But, for certain reasons, the people he was hoping to cure ended up being burned alive as sources of the plague, and he who was originally a doctor was declared a heretic and desecrator by the Holy Church, ending up on their hit list.

In the end, he really did become a heretic. While taking a revenge, he released the mutated virus that he had carefully cultivated. He transformed the entire church district that his enemies resided in into a living hell. Nowadays, the Plague King was on the most wanted list of more than twenty countries. Despite this, he still lived just fine.

He was also one of the few "Calamities" who were quite active in Eich. He was even known for being quite willing to be hired. Of course, nobody hired him to cure a plague—they hired him to create plagues. Apart from the fact that he hated the Holy Church more than anyone—he was always willing to take revenge on them—he was actually one of the most harmless of the top-ranked Calamities. Still, he was able to achieve #11 on the Calamity Rankings despite being so weak that he didn't even have a power level or know how to fight. It was just that the moment he died, all the mixed viruses he carried on him would instantly be released. It was said that these viruses were so potent that they would kill off literally half of Eich's entire population. Even the Holy Church would only pretend to hunt him and not dare to actually touch him.

While the Plague King was a human calamity, the Volcano Tyrant was an actual natural calamity. The Volcano Tyrant was a gigantic magma scorpion who fed on the heat of the land. Said to typically reside in volcanic areas, he was rumored to have the ability to cause volcanos to appear and erupt at his command. The

truth was that every time he appeared, volcanoes would always accompany him.

This magma scorpion had no match in all of Eich. He was highly intelligent and loved to feast on blood, flesh, and souls. That was why he accepted contracts to hire him. Although he only accepted payments of SemiGod Equipment, the royalty could still afford to hire him. However, he rarely got any jobs. Not only was this because of the fact that he required seven hundred human sacrifices given to him in addition to a SemiGod Equipment as part of his "hiring free," the moment he appeared on any battlefield, it was always a loss for both sides.

After all, any land that people were fighting over, no matter how fertile, would be transformed into a volcanic area. Any strategically important location would become nothing more than a lake of magma. This would be an incredible loss no matter which side won in the end.

Precisely for this reason there was a private agreement amongst all countries that any country or individual that hired the Volcano Tyrant would become a public enemy. However, there were always people or countries who were forced to the brink. Although the Volcano Tyrant had very few employers, he would be hired once every few decades, which was more than enough for him to eat his fill until years later.

Since the Plague King was "critically important" to keep alive, he managed to make it all the way to #11 in the Calamity Rankings, while the Volcano Tyrant who actually caused far more large-scale disasters and death than the Plague King was a mere rank #29. This was quite indicative of what type of individuals were on the top 30 of the Calamity Rankings. And now that there was a rumor that the wood spirits had hired a Calamity in the top 30, meaning that this Calamity was most likely ranked even higher than the Volcano Tyrant, this naturally caused fear and panic in the adventurers.

"We can't let this be! We absolutely have to make the wood spirits tell us the truth about this!"

While this scene was in utter chaos, Kaise received another message, this time from his mercenary group. He heard the news of what he wanted to know.

"...As I expected, all the members of that 'Wood Spirits are so Cute' team are currently absent from Oak Town?"

Meanwhile, the undead were quite busy right now as well.

From a certain standpoint, I was even somewhat impressed with and pitied the Undead Lord named Davey.

The older one got, the more afraid they would be of death. Intelligent undead weren't synonymous with fearless insanity. With so many undead apparently going missing, many Undead Thanes started thinking about the future and how to best survive when the Undead Lords above them started disappearing.

"I apologize—I have some personal affairs to deal with. I wish you all the best of luck."

Unless the reason for the mass disappearances was solved, not a single Undead Lord was willing to stay in this undead army. After all, far more than simply low-level undead were disappearing. There were plenty of Legend and even Saint-ranked Undead Thanes and Lords that ended up vanishing.

Even though Davey pleaded for assistance from the Undead Emperors, he received nothing in return. In such a situation, unless the source was discovered and eliminated at its foundation, nobody would want to stay here and suffer a mysterious disappearance.

As the list of the missing continuously increased, Davey himself was in a state of utter confusion. However, he was stuck between a rock and a hard place. He only had one chance here. If he failed... the Undead Emperors wouldn't care about the reason. A failure

was a failure to them. Anyone they considered useless would be dumped in the trash heap, and Davey would lose everything he possessed—and he would have to deal with the Undead Emperors' rage to boot.

When the news that all the undead that abandoned Davey had nothing befall them at all, even an idiot would realize that Davey was being targeted by something or someone scary. It was quite obvious what choice an undead should make if they wanted to remain safe.

The most important part was that Davey himself was unable to come up with ideas to recuperate his army's morale... To be honest, not only him but even if I was in his position I doubted I would be able to find out what was wrong.

"Mars" was still in the process of being born. Not a single investigative magic spell would be able to discover an individual who wasn't even born yet. Meanwhile, the undead were undergoing their "combination sacrifice," committing instinctual acts of suicide. A single summons would make them feel as if they wanted to go out and take a walk, and without knowing any better they would end up dead. This type of scene was absolutely abnormal and impossible to defend against.

If Davey had been able to dismiss his army, reorganize it, and investigate fully, of course he would have been able to discover the problem. However, he had no time to do such a thing.

And that was how his army, originally 300,000 strong, became no more than 50,000 or 60,000 undead by the time they reached Oak Town. The great majority of the few troops that remained were Davey's personal troops, the type that signed a soul contract with him where Davey could kill them with a single thought. They were absolutely loyal to him because they were forced to be.

But, even so, Davey remained filled with confidence. Every single day, I could hear the unhurried sounds of him playing his violin.

This music-loving Undead Lord seemed to still be in a good mood and even performed miniature concerts every day. However...

"He must be feeling nervous inside. He's probably just trying to maintain his usual façade, which actually exposes his inner fear."

"Indeed. When on the battlefield, it's simply enough to raise one's guard. Doing this makes him seem all the more uncertain."

Harloys and I simply watched the fun, but to tell the truth, I was still rather doubtful.

After all, the Undead Lords may have been willing to watch Davey fail, but the Undead Emperors would absolutely refuse to allow the wood spirits to expand their territory. The Undead Emperors would certainly summon Davey back if this was a battle that was doomed to failure. And Davey himself was definitely not the type to walk down a path he was certain to fail.

And that was how I concluded that Davey must still have some sort of ace up his sleeve, one that could overturn this situation.

Chapter 338: Good Reviews

"What are you busy doing? The battle's already begun, so why aren't you going outside?"

The liches gathered their mana and summoned a thick blanket of dark clouds that blotted out the sun, while skeleton mages summoned a never-ending sea of skeletons. With a fierce intent to do battle, the infinite amount of cannon fodder arrived on the battlefield. The fighting had reached its peak.... Just joking!

Although the first part of all that was true, it wasn't important.

The undead indeed began their battle against Oak Town. But strangely, they seemed to be highly unmotivated. The battling wasn't fierce at all. High-level undead troop types like Abominations weren't even sent out.

Even though it was quite a common tactic for undead mages to summon a sea of skeletons to overwhelm their enemy with the force of numbers, the sea of skeletons still needed a sufficient amount of supporting, powerful troops to be at its most effective. Only summoning weak skeletons and having them attack by themselves would be no different from giving their enemy free practice targets and experience.

The defending adventurers felt that it would be a waste to even use arrows against this pure sea of skeletons. It was enough to simply have the treants toss large boulders. A single boulder rolling downhill would act just like a bowling ball, sending shattered bones flying everywhere.

"How boring. That's just nothing but testing our defenses. There's nothing worth watching at all."

There would be no possible result because both sides were still testing each other right now. All they were doing was wasting a minor amount of ammunition and losing a very low amount of

lives.

"What are you doing? [The Adventurer Review System]? What is this?"

"I'm just adding a new patch to the 'Contract Heroes' system."

"A patch? What kind of hellish idea have you come up with now?"

"Well, something that's obtained too easily won't be valued. And, if everyone is treated equally in the Contract Heroes System, it's actually unfair to those who work the hardest and have the most accomplishments. So, I created this VIP level system, where the best 'employees' will obtain even greater honors and levels in the system."

I even started laughing out loud as I said this. It was precisely of that spy's appearance, as well as the large mercenary groups and adventurers remaining on guard against each other, that helped me discover many insufficiencies about my Contract Heroes system.

"Why are you laughing so evilly? Honor? Are you such a nice person? Why do I feel like you're going to make others suffer again?"

"No, I just recalled something funny. So what do you think of this level system I came up with?"

"One heart, two hearts, three hearts, one diamond, two diamonds... One crown, two crowns? What's with all these designs? Hearts, diamonds, and crowns? Is there a connection between them?"

"It is something you wouldn't understand, a representation of the greatest honor! It's a label that represents how much money you've spent. Although in the end, many people started grinding and making fake accounts, in addition to those professional counterfeiters, rendering it completely unreliable... at the very

least, it was quite reliable when it first appeared."

Actually, what pictures were used for the designs was unimportant. Although I evilly plagiarized the designs used in a certain Chinese application, Contract Heroes indeed needed a clear level system that indicated their level of reliability.

In this world, mercenaries and adventurers didn't have a clear level system. How mercenaries and adventurers got hired relied completely on their past reputations and personal connections. This was precisely why that empty shell of a mercenary group from before that lost all but a few of its members still had people fighting over succeeding its name. The reputation that it established over the past hundred years was the greatest wealth of all.

Establishing a credibility rating system for adventurers and mercenaries would require a neutral accreditation party that the public and all the countries trusted in. Previously, this would obviously be impossible in this generation where so many countries existed in opposition to each other.

The Mercenary Guild? Many mercenaries would treat the Mercenary Guild as a neutral intermediary which provided services for them. In fact, the Mercenary Guild would often help retired and injured mercenaries find new jobs, provide water and food for mercenaries, fix and maintain their weapons, enchant their equipment, provide job opportunities for current mercenaries, and other such services. But most of the time, the Mercenary Guild relied on the mercenaries themselves to support it. They lacked any forceful measures against the mercenaries themselves.

This was what the royalty of every country wished to see. Not a single country wanted to see the neutral Mercenary Guild have its own power and independence. Otherwise, the power the Mercenary Guild possessed would become dangerous to their interests.

"Absolutely neutral, and we focus on providing services to all mercenaries." This could basically be the catchphrase of the Mercenary Guild.

The end result was that all Mercenary Guilds and mercenary alliances lacked credibility in the minds of most adventurers and mercenaries. There was also no way for countries to recognize the validity of Mercenary Guilds from other countries. If you mentioned a particular mercenary group or adventurer, the most you could describe them with was "Oh, they seem to be quite famous" or "He sounds like he's pretty powerful." Vague words like these, but they were obviously unconvincing and unreliable.

The lack of a very clear review system wasn't good for either the employers or the employed. After all, potential employers would also be afraid that the bodyguards they spent so much money on hiring turned out to be bandits that attacked their own employer or a group of weaklings posing as the strong. The mercenary groups would also worry whether their employer would treat themselves as nothing more than expendable cannon fodder. This was why the hardest missions with the highest requirements could only be found through personal connections or privately notifying a Mercenary Guild. The oldest and most veteran mercenary groups would only become stronger and stronger, and newly-established mercenary groups would find it impossible to receive high-level jobs.

Without a doubt, this limited the ability of the average mercenary and adventurer to improve themselves. But if there was a completely reliable and trustworthy neutral party that assessed all the mercenaries and adventurers, the situation would be greatly improved. At the very least, a mercenary group with over ninety percent excellent reviews would definitely look a lot better than a mercenary group that had more than fifty percent negative reviews... why did I feel like I was turning my Contract Hero into Amazon.com?

Reviewing a mercenary's personal strength as well as paying the mercenary would be connected to the level system I had in mind. For instance, a mercenary who had a level of double crowns, the highest level in my system, would mean that he had performed lots of tasks for his employers and had a large number of excellent reviews. Naturally, this mercenary would be able to charge higher prices for his services and could be considered a very trustworthy individual.

"And this isn't only for mercenaries and adventurers. Just take a look at the battlefield. Don't you feel that something's wrong about the situation?"

"Nah, I'm not interested in children's games like this battle."

Fine then. Although I was just saying so, I had indeed noticed that something seemed off about the situation since I really did feel that these small-scale battles, which were only meant to test the enemy, were quite boring.

"In the past, for the most difficult of missions, multiple mercenary groups would team up together. Naturally, they didn't particularly trust each other or know how each other worked. So either someone everyone agreed on would be voted as a temporary leader or all the leaders would work together in a temporary alliance. Perhaps this is sufficient for small-scale battles, but there are also obvious limitations to this. If this continues for the Contract Heroes, there will be quite a number of disadvantages."

Indeed, as the Contract Heroes system expanded and the "Heroes" became stronger and more numerous, the individual Contract Heroes not tied to any organization would become more and more important. For example, this defensive battle at Oak Town was basically the first time the Contract Heroes acted as the main forces, but in the future, Contract Heroes would be appearing at much larger-scale battles, perhaps even at a national level. It seemed far too outdated and inefficient to continue using the same old leadership system from before. This current battle was

exposing quite a number of problems.

"Just take a look at the warriors standing on the frontlines. While they're accepting orders on the frontlines, they're still turning around to look at people on the castle walls. They're probably looking for their real bosses' orders, instead. Also, all the archers are actually 'kill stealing' to try and obtain more Justice Points, which means that they're focusing far too much to fire at targets worth a large amount of Justice Points. This is far too much of a waste of important ammunition. As long as 'Contract Heroes' remain like this, no matter how powerful they are, they're still nothing more than a loose pile of sand."

Not even mentioning the fact that the Heroes had spies amongst each other working for rival organizations, they lacked trust in each other. They were all proud individuals who weren't willing to be others' subordinates apart from those they recognized. How could they possibly trust in others' commands? The moment they met a dangerous task, pushing responsibility onto others and blaming each other for failure was the most natural thing to do. On the battlefield, lacking an "absolute authority" was definitely damaging.

Perhaps it wouldn't be that noticeable if the battle was going well, but the moment a battle started going poorly it would be easy for internal conflicts to arise and people to resist orders. Maybe even the entire battle would be lost or traitors would appear, all because the leaders lacked absolute authority or were filled with selfish intentions.

At the very least, currently, the most obvious problem was that there were far too many commanders. There were quite a few adventurers and mercenaries giving orders. But all these people wanted to be leaders, not to win the battle, but to have their own subordinates safely and reliably earn as many Justice Points as possible.

So, apart from personal honor in my planned level system, apart

from being able to give reviews to ordinary warriors, certain special individuals could also receive titles such as "Top-level Commander" or "Professional Commander" and so on. This would make it more convenient for them to take charge, and it would even help us create some classic examples and heroes, giving us more control over people's opinions of us.

But when I explained all this to Harloys, she had a different opinion from me.

"Why not just use a military title system, with sergeant, lieutenant, colonel, and other such titles? Wouldn't that be a better and more direct system?"

I could only smile wryly at this. Although Harloys was incredibly talented in magic, she didn't know much about politics. For some things, I just couldn't rely on her.

"That would be far too sensitive of a topic. It would sound like we created a personal army. What would each country's royalty and church think of that?"

Yep, I was certain that the moment we used military titles for our system, our Justice Points system would immediately be targeted as a threat by every single country.

"Tsk, humans are so troublesome. I'm going to go out and take a look."

"Let me know if there are any changes in the situation. Have a few people keep a good eye on those high-level undead, especially the two living individuals in their camp."

Harloys turned around and left, leaving me alone with my frustrations.

Creating a review system would directly relate to the credibility and future of our Justice Points system. I needed it to have an obvious level system in order to make it more convenient to establish leaders that everyone would follow, yet I also couldn't

make it too rigid of a system that would make the various countries in this world sense danger. The more I thought about it, the more troublesome I felt it would be.

"Hmm, should I add in a 'Thumbs-up' system? A person can increase in level with thirty-two thumbs-ups. Or, after receiving some set amount of thumbs-ups, they'll receive an official title... Wait a moment, there will always be things I can't predict—I need to also think of a way to preemptively prevent career negative reviewer trolls from appearing!"

Taobao, China's version of Amazon.

Chapter 339: Taking Action

At first, it was a light shower of rain. Ten minutes later, however, it had become a massive rainstorm. This was weather that both sides preferred not to see, but the undead held more of an advantage in such weather.

Perhaps it would cause the undead's reinforcements to arrive slightly later, and the undead would be slightly affected by the torrential downpour, but it could not significantly influence their situation.

However, this was doubtlessly unpleasant weather to be fighting in for the defending adventurers. With such a mega rainstorm, ordinary humans on the attacking side would most likely choose to rest in this weather as well. After all, the current temperature was still rather cold, and even the average strong human wouldn't be able to handle vigorous exercise and sweating in the rain, which would easily lead to them catching a cold. It was quite common for even powerful individuals to fall ill if they fought in such weather.

Not only that, the icy coldness of the rain droplets and decrease in vision would bring about a sense of discomfort for the humans, seriously affecting their morale.

It was common sense for any human battlefield commander to avoid commencing battle in cold and heavy rainstorms at all costs, unless absolutely necessary. Otherwise, not only would the army's combat strength be seriously weakened, but it would also be quite difficult to deal with the following effects—the army would likely be greatly weakened after the battle as well.

The living were limited by environmental factors, but the undead, who were no longer living, had it much better.

The undead did not know illness. Although they disliked wielding weapons which would become slippery in the rain, and torrential rains would also affect their vision and slow them down

—maybe even forcing them to find their lost teeth and eyes washed away by the rain—they wouldn't be incapable of fighting simply because of some rain.

"Damn it, how much longer is this rain going to go on for?"

I wasn't being frustrated because of the difficulties for the combat situation. To me, as long as the end result was acceptable, the process was unimportant.

My direct subordinates and I had limited power. We weren't, and we didn't intend to become, all-encompassing nannies. Since these Contract Heroes had the resolution to obtain great rewards in combat, they would naturally require the resolution to know that they would possibly die in battle. I didn't intend to overly interfere... and to be honest, it was impossible for me to interfere much. After all, there were countless battles in this world, and future battles would escalate in level. After a certain time, even SemiGods would be appearing on the battlefield in hoards—it would be impossible for me to take care of every battlefield even if I wanted to.

And since I was hoping for these "Dimensional Guardians," my "Game Player replacements," to speedily grow and mature, it would actually be best for me to not interfere too much with their growth. Truly strong individuals needed to make it past tough situations where their life was on the brink. Unless this battle became one where our side was certain to lose and be eradicated, I didn't actually intend to interfere.

The only reason I came here was that Samantha and the wood spirits requested it of me, and as for why I went and weakened the undead's forces, it was simply because I wanted to perform an experiment...

"Roland, did you know that it's unseemly when a man acts like a tsundere?"

I decided to ignore the silly cat's comment. I definitely was no

tsundere who would volunteer to babysit some novice adventurers! I was simply frustrated right now because the torrential rain had interrupted my planned experiments, hence my foul mood.

"...Is there a way to get rid of all this rain?"

"Not for me. It's not like I'm an archdruid. They're the ones most skilled at controlling the weather. Isn't Eaglestorm one of your subordinates? Why don't you try having him control the weather?"

Although it was what I expected to hear from Harloys, I was still disappointed.

As long as a mage was sufficiently prepared, they were indeed all-powerful. But the prerequisite was a sufficient amount of preparation. At the very least, I knew that the mages in the Cloud Tower had the ability to control the daily weather of the city of Arlo. However, this required plenty of support structures and mage towers' assistance, and any weather-related mega AOE spell was actually a major category of forbidden spells. At the very least, it required a mage at the SemiGod level and required a long time to cast.

Yet right now, Harloys was still only at the Gold rank, limited in power level due to the magical pet contract which forbade her power level from exceeding the master's. Even if she knew some spells that could change the weather, she wouldn't be able to use them without the foundational power level required. But it was so rare that I could latch on to one of her sore points, so I definitely wouldn't let her have it easy—verbally, of course.

"Tsk, how useless. Eaglestorm, you say? Let's not even mention how he's currently én route to the Bardi Empire's capital, but even if he was here, he's only a druid at the Legend rank. He wouldn't be able to do anything about this situation."

"Hmph, it's all because of your weak power level that's dragging me down. In that case, how about having 'Mars' activate earlier than planned?"

"Wouldn't that make him into a premature newborn? I'm still hoping he obtains plenty of souls as nourishment in this battle. Rejected!"

"...Shouldn't you have a method to change the weather as well?"

"Sure, I have the ability to change that torrential rainstorm into a torrential blizzard. It'll probably become headline news the very next day, with such a large blizzard appearing in late spring. But what will we do after that? Compete in who freezes to death first? I think that out of all the species, the undead that don't need to eat or drink and don't feel pain will definitely win a survival of the fittest competition."

Alright then, I and the silly cat stared at each other and confirmed that neither of us had a method available to us that could change the weather.

Boom!

Suddenly, there was a loud thunderclap. But the strange part was that this thunderclap originated from the ground and shot towards the sky, piercing through the clouds.

Boom!

After some more continuous rumbling that illuminated the entire area with lightning, the clouds dissipated and this area returned to peaceful and quiet weather.

This was obviously the result of something unnatural. However...

"That's strange, didn't that originate from the undead's camp? Did some powerful undead use magic to dispel the clouds? Why would they act so suicidal?"

The undead army's general command center was merely some temporarily constructed low-level Soul-Absorbing Towers. And in this messy and disorganized command center was a single two-story tall white house that stood out from its surroundings.

Various flowers and plants grew all around it, and there were even servants tending to the house.

The titan giant Yins was patiently tending to the plants, while the other titan giant Hatley maintained his pose of tossing javelins, as if he wanted to throw yet another one. At this moment, the real owner of this house suddenly entered.

"My two venerated lords! What are you..."

Although Davey was doing his best to remain calm, the Ghoul Lord's expression was ugly. Right now, he was incredibly furious.

It was only natural that he was so angry. He was already in a bad situation to begin with, and he finally received a lucky break from the skies. But this lucky break had just been ruined by his supposed allies. Even a saint would be angered at this, not to mention that Davey was an Undead Lord and no kind individual.

But he restrained himself from actually doing anything. It wasn't that he didn't want to vent his rage, it was that he couldn't. The main issue was that he knew he would never win in a fight, and he didn't even dare to antagonize these two visitors.

Both titan giants were mere incarnations of their wills, a similar method to how Gods could send out their incarnations by using divine power. The power that an incarnation wielded was far more limited in comparison to their true selves. But even so, at the very weakest, they would be SemiGods, the most powerful power level for mortals. Without even mentioning the Undead Lord Davey, even the Undead Emperors themselves didn't have a chance of certain victory against the titan giants' incarnations. And if the Elemental Tide increased even further, the limiters on the titan giants' power level would be decreased by even more. Just how powerful were the titan giants, and what were they capable of accomplishing in the mortal plane if they were unsealed? Except for ancient existences from the immemorial generation, nobody knew.

For the sake of obtaining victory as well as obtaining the Undead Emperors' trust and favor, Davey was gambling everything on this battle. Over the past few days, without regard to cost, Davey was treating his two ultimate "ace cards" with the utmost best attitude.

They were tired of walking together with the army? No problem, the undead lifted them in palanquins. What, they felt like the stench of undead was disgusting? No problem, the undead captured a few humans to carry the palanquins. What? They felt that men were filthy? No problem, the undead captured some young women to carry the palanquins instead.

They felt that their temporary residence was dirty and poor? No problem, undead alchemists and mages worked nonstop on improving their residence, while death knights acted as laborers in construction. Top-level earth magic expert liches acted as the masons, undead artists that were several centuries old took up the task of being the designers. This place had a gentle garden added, and it even had the simple construction style of modern architecture. It was a work of art. Together with the house, Davey even gave them an undead butler who had over one hundred years of experience serving a royal family, a team of female banshee elf servants, an Undead Thane who acted as their personal violinist, an undead who was a former master artist, and even a gardener.

They felt that the undead were being too noisy? No problem, the army withdrew from the area to give them plenty of space and even constructed a soundproof wall for the residence.

They said that this place lacked in life energy? No problem, the undead army went all out and finally captured numerous beasts along with an albino lion that became Hatley's pet, and then even planted all sorts of flowers and plants around the house. The undead did all the gardening and cleaning work... were these really the so-called evil undead that all the living feared? They seemed more like the best servants one could find!

"How are they our reinforcements? It's as if I have to serve two

kings."

But, by this point, Davey knew that even if Hatley and Yins acted like kings, he had to tolerate it. There was no other path for him to take. Failure here would only end in eternal doom for him.

"My... my... two venerated lords, may I ask what you meant with your action? Has old Davey been disrespectful in some way that has dissatisfied my two venerated lords?"

Davey did his very best to suppress the anger in his heart. Finally, he was able to ask his question in a relatively calm tone. But by the last few words, he was unable to suppress his tone of voice, and his calm question turned into a question that quite apparently expressed his dissatisfaction.

"Flowers."

"Flowers?"

"As expected, all undead are so foolish. What my Brother Yins means is that the rain has blocked off the sunlight so that the flowers are unable to bloom."

"@#@#$...&."

Only this series of jumbled symbols was sufficient to express Davey's current emotions. At this moment, a mysterious feeling of aggrievement gathered in Davey's eyes. It was far too pitiful for an Undead Lord like him to have reached such a sorry state. If he had still been living, he definitely would have been crying out loud by now.

Davey was faintly sensing what his own future would be like. Perhaps he would indeed become famous in history, but not as the wise successor of Aso that he had hoped, but rather as the stupidest Undead Lord in all of history. He was born as nothing more than a lowly ghoul and did his best to fight and scheme for the past thousands of years, only to receive nothing but such an end?

Meanwhile, Hatley laughed and walked up to the old Ghoul Lord,

patting him on the shoulder.

"We're getting bored of staying out here in the mortal plane. It's time for us to go back. Right, leave this house behind and make two dragons into the servant caretakers here. We might still want to use this place the next time we meet..."

And this moment, old Davey's facial expression became a sight to behold. He had never hated any individual more in his life. He was angrily roaring and cursing in his mind. At the same time, he was also hesitating whether or not he should clutch Hatley's leg and beg for him to stay here. The two titan giants were the only hope he had of winning this battle!

Finally, even Yins seemed to be unable to take this any longer, perhaps sensing that the joke had been too overboard.

"...Aren't they just some little weaklings? We'll stamp this entire city into the earth before we leave."

"Ha, Brother Yins is so soft-hearted. Heh, you vulgar undead, if you ever dare to try to take advantage of us children of the earth again, making us into your fighters, we shall make you all taste what the wrath of the titans is like before we destroy you and your pitiful army, making you all wail in hell for thousands of years."

Hatley's soft words transformed into a thunderous roar by the end. His body was covered in thunder and lightning, and a thunder giant appeared in the mortal plane. His eyes that were flickering with lightning were now staring at Oak Town which was not far away.

"Little weaklings, it's time for me to have some fun."

Meanwhile, Davey was now collapsed on the ground. The large change in emotions from so much grief to joy was too great for him to handle. He was currently lying on the ground, panting with his tongue hanging out, as if he were only an ordinary low-ranked ghoul. The image he had carefully cultivated of being a wise

individual was utterly ruined.

The titan giants were exceptionally intelligent. Compared to the titan giants that had several tens of thousands of years of experience at the very minimum, old Davey was nothing but a novice with his schemes. Only now did he finally realize that from the very beginning, these two titan giants were only toying with him. All his ideas and plans were probably nothing more than a joke to them. His so-called title as the undead most similar to Aso was nothing more than a farce in their eyes.

As he watched them transforming into mega-giants that reached the clouds, he heaved a sigh of relief. After all, in his mind, they were an absolute power that couldn't be won against no matter what.

"At the very least, they'll destroy Oak Town for me, and I'll be able to succeed in the task that the Undead Emperors handed to me."

Chapter 340: Clash

"The titan giants? Haughty and arrogant, they look down on every other species except their own. No, it is beyond that: they believe that it is their benevolence and charity to allow other species to live and breathe without stepping on them and crushing them."

As part of the immemorial generation, this was Ayer's assessment of the titan giants. From a certain standpoint, the assessment of an entire species as "haughty and arrogant" was already an explanation in itself.

This could be seen in the titan giants' closely related relatives. The superior giants, such as cloud giants and magma giants, even looked down upon the dragons, always calling them "big lizards." Superior giants had it even worse for Silver and Bronze Species, directly addressing them as "mortals, little ones, and fleshlings," viewing them as nothing but potential sources of food.

But, from another standpoint, they indeed had plenty to be proud about. They were born with incredible power. An average mountain giant would be able to easily defeat a human warrior who cultivated for his entire life. The frost giants, who weren't even one of the stronger giant species, were known to hunt white dragons for fun. Hunting a white dragon was a feat which would already cause a top-level human hero to be recorded in epics.

This wasn't even everything. How powerful a species was as a whole wouldn't only be because of natural-born abilities. The titan giants had once established a brilliant culture of their own in this land. By today, there were still a few traces remaining, with the cloud giants who loved to sing, dance, and truly enjoyed art. The Eternal Desert district also had some remnant traces of titan giant culture.

The titan giants denied the right of any God to rule over them

except for the Creator Goddess Eich. According to legends, they were originally given life by Eich, who had created them from the crystals of the earth, so they always believed themselves to be the children of the earth and that the world itself gave birth to them. They believed that other Gods were merely their peers or even their juniors.

Compared to the cultures of most other species, which were based on religions worshipping various Gods, the titan giants' sculptures focused on their own achievements. Their strangely shaped drawings recorded their understanding of the world.

Emordilorcan's underground labyrinth was constructed in a classic titan giant style. That was a giant's palace, which sought after the simple contrast of black and white, together with beautiful craftsmanship and excellent materials that would create an extravagance which wasn't too opulent. Their ruins and constructions displayed sculptures and statues depicting strength and beauty. The titan giants also left behind various strange drawings and buildings that nobody understood the meaning of.

By today's generation, this relatively strange style still had a deep influence.

For the "newly-rich" that lacked a great past, ancient history represented dignity. The construction style of the titan giants had become quite popular among humans in the 1700's. Large, regal temples with stairs carved out of white jade would be engraved with all sorts of myths and legends... Actually, I was always quite confused about this. If you engraved things onto walls, there would occasionally be people looking at them, but if you engraved something onto the stairs, you would be walking on them. And if you really lowered your head to look at them, wouldn't that make the engravings seem very undignified? But if nobody looked at them, it would be a waste. Was it simply to give future generations a chance at archeology?

Cough, I should probably refrain from commenting on cultural

products like toilets constructed out of pure gold. No matter what world I was in, there were plenty of people who did stuff like this. It was fine as long as they liked it. They could do whatever they wanted because they were rich!

Let's go back to the main topic on hand. No dynasty in the world would last for eternity, and their glorious history would only serve to make their present state seem all the more pitiful. The giants' culture was now nothing more than a footnote in history. The current giants' descendants only inherited their culture and techniques about slaughtering. Still, nobody would look down upon them as they were still the titan giants' relatives, the descendants of the earth.

Before the Intelligence-lowering curse was placed on most of the giant species, fire giants, magma giants, and other such fire-elemental giants were the most skilled smiths in all of Eich. The ancient buildings that sand giants created in desert areas still remained a wonder of the world even today. Meanwhile, frost giants were the most skilled hunters of all. The ultrawhite wolves they trained back in the day were viewed by the locals as an unstoppable "White Calamity" even in today's generation.

A species like the giants had lost the great majority of their inheritance and Intelligence but still managed to survive to this day and age—this was the best explanation of all for how strong their foundation was in the past.

As for how strong the original titan giants were? Perhaps nobody knew for certain, but it was publicly recognized that a mature titan giant wouldn't be any weaker than an immemorial red dragon. This was the most basic assessment of their power level. Actually, I had already learned from Ayer that the titan giants had slain more than a dozen True Gods in the immemorial generation. It must be remembered that in that generation the True Gods could be considered to be much stronger than the Gods of today, so that meant the titan giants' leaders had power levels comparable to

Ayer, a Main God.

But when I learned that they were so ridiculously strong, I actually relaxed somewhat. After all, if they ever appeared, someone stronger than me would appear to deal with them in my stead. Some powerful Gods would definitely come and handle them—it would be useless to use a little shrimp like me as cannon fodder. Besides, titan giants hadn't appeared in this world for the past several tens of thousands of years, so just how unlucky would I need to be...

"If I really meet a titan, I'll livestream myself eating my keyboard —er—eating my sword!"

But I never expected myself to really meet a titan giant! Also, I really jinxed myself!

"Eat your sword, eat your sword."

Harloys would always have a peculiarly good memory when it came to the weirdest things, such as how I was always accurate with my predictions in the strangest ways.

"Well, aren't you currently my sword? You're sure you want to watch me eat my sword? Or should I lick you first? Wow, this is quite a fresh idea of mine, but it's so lewd."

Hmph, the moment I spoke, the silly cat indeed quieted down. But this wasn't the time for either of us to be joking around.

As I gazed at the blue giant who was tall enough to pierce into the clouds, I was doing my best to come up with an idea. However, the towering thunder giant was already walking towards Oak Town's castle walls. With every step the earth trembled and the walls shivered. I could even feel everyone's fear and despair.

"On this day, humanity recalled the terror of the titan giants... and the humiliation of being caged up as their pets!"

"Stop joking around, Roland! Hurry and think of something!"

Think of something? Wasn't I doing my best? Livening up the atmosphere was just my way of helping myself think.

The rampaging physical form of thunder was the best reminder that my opponent was incredibly difficult to deal with. Without even needing to take measurements, and by simply looking at this true titan's thunder that far surpassed Adam's version, I could tell that this titan giant was something that even a regular SemiGod wouldn't be able to deal with.

And what was even more difficult to deal with than a titan giant was...

"Are there two titan giants here? Since titan giants are so arrogant that they don't view a single other species as their equal, this means that those two humanoid fellows that were treated like royalty by the undead were actually titan giants?"

I had long since been paying attention to those two venerated guests in Davey's camp. If my guess was on the mark, these two titan giants that suddenly appeared were those two humanlike people in Davey's camp.

"Hey—hey—hey-something seems wrong with the pacing here. Aren't enemies supposed to always first send cannon fodder, then a sub-boss, then an elite boss, saving the demon king for last? You're sending the final boss right away at the beginning? How are we supposed to have fun playing this game?"

"Ha, the only skill you have is in commenting."

I ignored Harloys' comment. From a certain standpoint, if I had enough power, how could I possibly stand for only watching the situation?

"Let's test them first... They can't possibly be titan giants in their full states. It's impossible for them to completely appear at their full power levels in the mortal plane. Besides, the dragons haven't reported that the titan giants have broken free from their seal.

How about we simply wait for the game moderators to descend?"

"Then Oak Town will definitely be destroyed."

Game moderators? I was referring to the Gods. In a way, they were the protectors of this world and its strongest fighters. If extraordinary existences that didn't belong to this plane invaded and started causing destruction here, dealing with them was the most basic task that the Gods were supposed to perform.

However, this still had many limitations and rules. For example, when the demon earl invaded the mortal plane last time, if I had waited for Lorci, who was in charge at the time, to respond, Sulfur Mountain City would have been no more even though the Gods would have eventually sent their incarnations to descend here and deal with it.

The current situation was similar. These titan giants had yet to directly interfere with any specific True God's direct benefits. Only when the titan giants got in the way of some unfortunate God's benefits would that God then send out an incarnation to stop them... and it was most likely that that God would even stall for time before doing so, in hopes that these troublesome titan giants would disappear on their own. Otherwise, it was quite possible that the God would lose face if it turned out that they were unable to beat the titan giants, or, at the very least, waste divine power. This was also why Demon Lords were so commonly able to run amok in the mortal plane but always successfully escape in the end.

"The Gods can afford to wait, but we can't."

I could only smile wryly upon hearing this. Yep, the Gods didn't care unless it was directly related to them and would only remain as bystanders. Yet we ourselves were definitely related to this, so we were the only ones who couldn't afford to wait.

Although I didn't want to be the Contract Heroes' babysitter, this was undoubtedly a situation that was going to end in the total

defeat and eradication of everyone. If I simply watched the first group of Contract Heroes perish én masse, my future plans would be greatly affected. A successful first impression or a failed one would both highly influence people's opinions. Bandwagoners would only look at results, never taking coincidences and irresistible forces into consideration.

"At the very least, we should test them. If they're complete titan giants, then I think we need to immediately organize our escape."

Even if it was only a test, directly taking action myself would be foolish. I suddenly thought of a devious idea. If my opponent was relatively foolish, perhaps I would even benefit from all this.

"Little Mars, it's time for you to take action."

"...Yes, Master."

Several seconds later, my will transmitted my command to my newest servant.

Boom!

Like a falling meteor, a vermillion fireball streaked through the firmament before crashing into, and exploding against, the back of the titan giant's head.

And when this gigantic titan giant turned around in astonishment, he discovered that the caster was standing in the undead camp, and that a group of undead was rushing right towards him.

Javelins containing the pitch-black magic of corrosion were being thrown at him, heroic death knights turned on their desecration and curse auras, and skeleton knights showed off their excellent archery skills. This was a standard undead knight ambush squadron.

"For Lord Davey's glory! For the Undead Emperors' glory! Die, desecrator!"

Under the control of my soul contract, these death knights shouted out oaths swearing loyalty to their supposed masters as they rushed towards the towering titan giant. It suddenly caused me to remember a certain elderly knight who loved to rush at windmills... and since I figured the result would mostly be the same, I decided to silently mourn the undead knights for two seconds.

Zzzzz!

Alright then, it only took one second. The titan giant merely waved its arm and an explosive flash of lightning devoured everything before it. The next instant, the undead knights had vanished from the face of the world, leaving not even ash. All that was left was a scorched pit that was already crystallized.

"Davey! You dare!"

But, the next moment, the titan giant abnormally recovered his calm, before continuing to walk towards Oak Town.

It was just that in that little white residence, the pitiful Davey who had just witnessed everything experienced yet another instance of great emotional turmoil.

If he had still been living, with the ability to have a heartbeat, he would have died right there of a heart attack.

The thunderous roar was still echoing in his ears. When Hatley roared his name, it possessed a powerful force behind it. Davey trembled at the sound, as if he were a frog being stared at by a snake.

However, Yins chuckled. He reached out and tapped Davey, giving him his freedom back.

"I've finally caught your trail."

The next moment, he took Davey and disappeared, and then...

"How is this possible!"

He directly appeared in front of me! That's right, the titan giant discovered me!

"Don't be so surprised. It'll lower my evaluation of you. You're the first one who's ever been able to mess around so many days in front of me without being discovered. Be proud of yourself, mortal. I, the fourth-ranked titan Yins, grant you the honor of being able to speak with me."

Yins' long hair flowed in the wind as his eyes glanced at me. His gaze seemed a tad vacant—he appeared to both focus at me and behind me, as if he was staring at the distant stars. This was quite an annoying yet familiar sensation; no wonder he was able to find me.

"The ability of prophecy? I thought that titan giants were no longer able to use this power?"

"No, I didn't use any spell. Your action was the cause, and the effect was that my cute younger brother was ambushed. I merely followed the trail of cause and effect to find you."

"You're able to instinctively follow such a concept to the source? Ahhh, your natural talent makes me so jealous. Those so-called prophecy magic expert mages would call this inconceivable. Is this an ability common to all titan giants, or your personal talent?"

"Amongst all my brothers, I think I'm the only one who possesses this ability. However, I'm quite interested in how you made those undead disappear. Their disappearance was both a cause and an effect. This is the first time I've ever met with an incomprehensible phenomenon. Could you tell me how you accomplished it?"

Although we were only talking, we were also both trying our best to find out more about each other.

"You don't appear very strong. But, the strange thing is my instinct is telling me that you're incredibly dangerous. It would

appear that you're actually a threat to me? Wait, the danger is becoming even stronger. You have the ability to even threaten my main body?"

The door in the void was something I could open at any time. If I summoned my Frigidwinter Earth with its power of eternity, it would probably only end in one of our deaths. I was confident that my power of absolute zero would be able to even threaten the titan giants.

But even though I just opened up a slight crack in the dimensional wall without saying a single word, he already sensed something. This type of opponent was absolutely impossible to ambush. This was truly difficult.

"Take a guess. Still, I think that it's quite profitable for me if I get to take a titan giant down with me."

I narrowed my eyes and lowered my head. My Ice Calamity magic sword was already in my hands. Against this type of opponent I couldn't let my guard down for even one second. He could sense my killing intent, and, of course, I could sense his killing intent as well.

The backdrop to our apparent calm interaction was the tremendous thunder giant fighting against tiny little creatures. Of course, the thunder giant was the other titan giant, and it appeared to be fighting against some treant warriors that were actually all part of Jill.

"You, you, you... Emperor Roland!"

At this moment, Davey, who had been teleported along here with Yins, finally recognized me.

He had an incredibly complex expression as he seemingly realized something. But when he thought about how I was the one who made him suffer so much, all his emotions transformed into hatred and rage.

The ghoul glared at me. But I was far too well known. All Undead Emperors were incredibly scary in the undead's minds. He didn't dare to even move. But, to tell the truth, a Myth-level undead like him would be more than enough to take care of ten Gold ranks like me... in normal situations. That would only be if I didn't use any of my aces.

"Undead Emperor? You're a living person that's an Undead Emperor? I'm getting more and more interested in you."

"I apologize, I have absolutely zero interest in men. I especially hate overly muscular men like you... Beyana, stop watching! If you keep watching, we're going to lose, and the Contract Warrior plan will go up in smoke! You will go bankrupt!"

Finally, I decided to use this ace of mine that wasn't my ace of aces.

"Beyana, the Goddess of Wealth? How could she possibly be here?"

I suddenly roared loudly at the sky, which even managed to surprise Harloys. But what gave her an even bigger surprise was that I received a response. A rather familiar female voice echoed in the sky.

"Nobody is allowed to make me bankrupt! Any territory that belongs to me requires a toll, even for the titan giants!"

Reference to Don Quixote!

Chapter 341: Outsider

"How did you know I was here?"

"There were too many clues. Did you even try to hide yourself?"

Working together with others was beneficial. Whenever there was huge trouble, someone would help to take the brunt of it for you—I meant take responsibility.

Actually, Betty—or, more accurately, Beyana—was quite terrible at hiding her true identity.

Forget about the sudden team-up invitation, or the divine favor and Divine Arts that Betty displayed which far surpassed "his" supposed Silver rank—let's pretend to not see anything about Beyana acting like a cute boy—the most ridiculous part was that Betty's team had been able to easily find me when I had left the Wood Spirits are so Cute team behind.

All this time, if I didn't want anyone to find me, I would do an excellent job with my anti-detection magic. But even so, Betty just "coincidentally" happened to find me amongst all the undead outside, which could only mean that "he" wasn't simple at all.

If there was a problem with a Goddess of Wealth priest who was able to even use Divine Arts despite being only a supposed Silver rank, then the first suspicion I had was naturally the Goddess of Wealth herself. And as the financial chief for the Ayer Faction, it was quite possible that she would find it necessary to personally come to the frontlines and see how things were going. At the very least, she would want to see how the finances were here. It was only natural for me to come to the conclusion that Betty was either Beyana's incarnation or a priest upon which she personally performed a God's Descent.

Once I had my suspicions, the rest was simple. After all, we all had one big boss above us. What would happen if mid-level elite

managers suddenly had clashes with each other? Tell the big boss.

"Hey, Ayer? I have a little question for you..."

To use an analogy, this was something akin to a mid-level general manager secretly disguising herself and visiting the lowest-ranked subordinates, but then another employee reported her for always skipping out on work.

The rest was quite simple. Since she enjoyed disguising herself and acting like a human, then I just let her play.

After all, we were still allies in the end. Since we were all right here, wouldn't it be bad if you simply watched me having difficulties? Even if you have no personal interest in me, didn't you descend here just for your business? Wouldn't it be natural for you to be unable to watch if your business was threatened?

By the way, I should mention that I was quite proud of myself for making this Goddess personally pour tea for me over the past few days.

The "priestess Betty" walked over rather slowly, now having taken a female form again. Betty's face was still the same, but her eyes had transformed into a silver color that possessed the signs of divinity.

"Such an excellent free fighter, there's no need to expose her too quickly. It'll be perfect to use her to deal with any troubles that arise? Roland, that's probably what you were thinking, isn't it? This means that last night when you wanted me to help you boil some bathwater and even invited me to bathe with you... you were trying to make me suffer on purpose."

I directly nodded at the silver-eyed Goddess's displeasure and question before giving her a big thumbs-up and flashing a brilliant smile. What was there to hide about?

"Mortal, you're truly amusing. But do you really think this False God is able to defeat us?"

Even when faced against the silver-eyed Goddess, Yins remained calm. It seemed as if he didn't care about the Goddess before him in the least.

He lightly whisked his hand, causing a silver lion to appear around which a similarly silver light twirled. Although this lion appeared to be an ordinary beast, it suddenly increased in size.

Two meters, five meters, ten meters, and finally it transformed into a giant magical beast. It was now covered in a strange metallic armor and seemed as imposing as a divine beast.

The extravagantly beautiful lion's mane gleamed like a metallic crown as its eyes were fixed on Beyana. Judging from the pressure it was emanating, I could detect that it was already above the Myth rank, meaning it was probably at the SemiGod level. I probably would be unable to even defeat this lion.

"Now then, False God, why don't you play with my little pet?"

Seeing how he casually transformed a normal wild beast into a divine beast, I recalled the frost giants' ability to tame monsters. Previously, I had many guesses about the titan giants' abilities. Perhaps the most accurate inference would be that the titan giants' abilities were directly upgraded versions of the giants' special abilities. I could use this to guess at the titan giants' true powers.

Cloud giants possessed the power to control the winds and clouds, while that giant thunder titan giant over there could as well. Yins, who was right before me, seemed to possess the ability to control and strengthen ordinary wild beasts.

"Little Betty, can you beat it?"

I glanced at the fourth-ranked titan Yins who was standing on top of the lion's head. It wasn't that I didn't trust in my ally—it was that I had no idea of the Goddess of Wealth's combat potential. After all, in every single story out there, nothing was said about how skilled she was as a fighter.

"..."

The Goddess merely glared at me, making it obvious that she intended to get back at me for this later.

But since Beyana was willing to personally appear when I called her out, this naturally meant that she had friendly intentions towards me. And since I had succeeded in shoving responsibility—sharing responsibility—I could at least feel slightly happy.

She was appearing in the role of one of the game moderators. Even if she lost the fight here, there would naturally be stronger game moderators appearing. Those other ridiculous individuals in the Wood Spirits are so Cute team probably weren't that simple, either. What did I even have to worry about?

No matter if Betty was a priestess who was able to perform God's Descent or if Betty was actually Beyana's incarnation, please try your best! I'll be cheering you on! Yep, I'll be cheering you on in my heart, with no need to say anything out loud. There's even less need to do anything myself.

"Do your best, I believe in your victory!"

And so, I turned around and ran...

Why did I run? Whenever Ultraman fought with monsters, any bystanders and buildings in the area would always be the unluckiest. A battle between a True God's incarnation and a titan giant's incarnation? Wouldn't that basically demolish the entire area?

What, you're saying that I should be shouting "For the Goddess!" and then rush out and act as the tank with an undying buff on me? First of all, I'm not those abnormal five undying cockroaches. This is a situation that should clearly be left to the veterans. Why do the weak keep insisting on rushing forth? Wouldn't it be normal to simply let the top-level fighters compete with each other?

Cough, getting back to the main topic, I felt that not getting in

the way of my ally was the best choice.

My War Angel form gave me the power of flight, which allowed me to choose my own battles.

I could faintly sense countless amounts of energy clashing against each other behind me. Before me was the scene of Ultraman fighting against numerous smaller monsters. Or, to be more specific, Ultraman absolutely dominating the smaller monsters.

The vine treants that were all part of Jill were being ravaged. Although they were almost as tall as the titan giant, there was too much of a power level difference between them. A single touch would destroy each treant.

And so, all that happened was that Jill was taking a vicious beating. Although Oak Town managed to land some attacks on the other titan giant's body, he ignored all of them. His magic resistance was truly ridiculous to be able to ignore seven-circle magic spells.

"Jill... You really are useless. But this Ultraman seems to be ridiculous in its construction."

"Hitting a daughter right in front of her father, do you have a death wish?!"

Alright then, I directly ignored Harloys who was commenting on me, but I was still currently blocked by someone: the titan giant Yins, who still seemed unruffled. It would seem that just that lion alone had been sufficient to tangle with Beyana.

"Tsk, I knew that not a single one of those ridiculous teammates were reliable."

"Ah, it breaks my heart to hear you say that. Actually, all of us are really fond of you."

This time, a handsome elf bard jumped out. What was his name again?

"Solosi?"

"It's Solonor... Fine, that was a fake name. Actually, I'm the God of Music and Dance. I'm also the Guardian God of the wood elves. My real name is Solo."

Fine then, I already knew that the Wood Spirits are so Cute team was playing a joke on me. But, just like Betty, then all those ridiculous things he did were probably faked since he was actually a God, too.

"...Um, was your sexuality faked as well?"

"I apologize, that was real."

Fine then. I was truly hesitating about whether I should tell a certain Kelly that her Guardian God was actually gay! But since he was coming out and helping now as well, it seemed he would be a great help.

Suddenly, a golden meteor arced through the sky and crashed into the thunder titan giant's head. Immediately afterwards, a golden giant dwarf jumped onto the titan giant's head, lifted her weapon and began beating on him.

"Haha! A chance at beating your ancestor?"

And now, the fight scene of Ultraman against monsters turned into a fight of Ultraman against the giant dwarf.

It was only that the weapon seemed rather familiar. It was round, and I could even hear sloshing sounds coming from inside. It was just as if... as if... it was a golden alcohol barrel?

"...Big Sis Mary?"

"I'm Mary, the Goddess of Hammers and Alcohol Barrels. I'm also the Guardian Goddess of the shield dwarves. Apart from my age, everything else I told you was the truth, including those naughty children I have back at home."

"What about Ah Gen?"

"...Do you really think someone as ridiculous as him could actually be a God? He's just a random barbarian we found. Actually, we're all quite curious to see just how far he can go down his path."

"You guys have so much free time."

"Indeed. That's why Boss Ayer told us to come down here and take a look at the mortal plane, and also to help set the foundation for our future. He told us it would be best to come meet with you. Aren't we here now?"

Fine then, so even Ayer was involved with this as well. But why couldn't they have just told me directly? Because it would be more fun this way...? Fine, it really did seem like it was more fun.

"Besides, don't we count as surprise reinforcements? If it wasn't for us being here right now, what do you think would happen?"

The gay God Solo took out a rainbow-colored five-string harp and played on it, causing beautiful music to sound. He narrowed his eyes and played a magical tune which began to distort the world.

"Go do what you need to do. I'm curious—just how strong are the titan giants?!"

Fine then, I took one final glance at Yins before I opened my wings and flew away. However, I had a premonition that this wouldn't be the last time I would meet this titan giant named Yins.

But before I could get too far away, I was blocked by yet another person. It seemed that this person even had the same specialty as me.

"Hello, Roland. My name is Zero. Perhaps you've heard of me before."

******

While tremendous existences were fighting right outside of Oak Town, everyone inside Oak Town was astonished to see who was

taking part in combat outside.

First, the titan giants from ancient legends appeared. Then, the participants only became more and more ridiculous. The adventurers even spied real True Gods personally participating in battle. It was obvious that this battle was far beyond their level to handle.

Samantha was doing her very best to maintain order within Oak Town. Still, the adventurers were in an uproar—it was obvious that the situation had gone out of control. Since all these True Gods had descended, the battle wasn't one they could do anything about.

They were worried about accidentally getting involved out there—which, in turn, would mean an unfortunate death as cannon fodder without even an idea of what happened.

Meanwhile, one person in Oak Town was worrying about something completely different.

"According to our agreement, I should secretly open the castle gates and let the undead inside... but is there any meaning left in letting the undead inside now?"

Chapter 342: Meeting

Her scarlet mage robes were embroidered with precious and expensive magical runes. Her vine mage staff was engraved with a red dragon crystal that jumped up and down as if it were a living heart. Archmage "Christina" wasn't very famous, but she seemed to wear the evidence of either her power level or that she was really rich.

And after she showed off impressive fire magic abilities in numerous team missions, she was chosen as one of the representatives for the neutral unaffiliated adventurers and became one of the adventurer leaders for this battle.

Her fiery red hair and sexy mature woman's body accentuated her beautiful face and helped give her the nickname of "Fire Witch." She even had several loyal followers.

But, today, she was in quite a terrible mood, especially after she heard a certain piece of news.

"Have you heard? I hear that someone from the Calamity Rankings is here."

When this news started spreading, she thought at first that she had been exposed. And when the news that people were looking for a spy started spreading, she broke into a cold sweat.

Yep, that's because not only was she a member of the Calamity Rankings, but she was also the undead's spy.

Her real identity was...

"Molly?"

Yep, she was Molly, the previous Dragon Queen Molly, who was now a spy working for the undead.

The majority of the dragons currently residing in the mortal plane lived by themselves. For example, Little Red when she was

back in the Underground had her own dragon nest and territory, along with manticores and other magical creatures as subordinates. It could be said that every single adult dragon with its own territory was like a domain lord. All they had to do was to enjoy their subordinates' worship as the subordinates brought food for them. They simply needed to sleep on top of their treasure hoards and enjoy their lives.

And it just happened to be that dragons were able to grow in power even while they were sleeping. The older they got, the more powerful they became. This was why other mortal species envied them, and also why the giants looked down upon the dragons. The giants always called them big lizards that didn't know how to do anything but hibernate.

Molly, who no longer had a Dragon City, was just like an immemorial red dragon that had lost her territory. She could only rely on herself. Having only recently arrived aboveground, she didn't know anything about how things worked here. She didn't even dare to fight other dragons for their territory as she was afraid that stories about her would spread to the surface Dragon Cities and then people would gang up on and chase after her.

Since she lost her Underground Dragon City and no longer had any subordinates or dragon underlings, the ambitious Molly decided to lay low for a while and first establish her own dragon nest before obtaining territory. Yet hiring powerful subordinates required treasure, and fixing a dragon nest required money. Still, an immemorial dragon like her without a treasure hoard that was suitable for her status? Every other dragon would laugh at her.

"...Dragons never lack money as other countries' treasuries are their treasuries."

And so, she went around aboveground and attacked cities in order to accumulate wealth, all to reestablish her own faction and make a new dragon nest.

In order to earn money, she was even willing to hire herself out as a mercenary. Not only did this help make her terrible reputation known far and wide, she even got onto the Calamity Rankings because of it: ranked 99, Red Armageddon.

An immemorial dragon who was willing to be hired as a mercenary and even sometimes turned on her employers? This was obviously a shame upon all dragons, one they found difficult to withstand. And Molly seemed to know this as well. In order to avoid any "hunting" of her by the surface dragons, she wandered around everywhere and never stayed in one location for long. Or perhaps it should be said that she roamed around, committing crimes everywhere. But when she arrived in the Bardi Empire's capital, she never expected the capital city to be on the highest level of alert. After she escaped from the dragon knights there, she was blocked by the Undead Emperors.

And so, she discovered that she was forced to a brink. Worrying that she would be forced to transform into a bone dragon, and with nobody else she could possibly ask for help, she recalled her own daughter and sent a letter pleading for help. However, she was still caught by Aso and the other undead.

When she found that her opponents were multiple Undead Emperors, she shamelessly surrendered, similar to how she surrendered ever so quickly to the Demon Earl in the past. As long as she didn't have to become a bone dragon, anything was fine.

From a certain standpoint, Molly, who possessed zero sense of honor, was indeed a shame upon all dragons.

"As long as you work for our cause, all these items that are useless apart from being shiny can be yours."

To the Undead Emperors, the treasure they accumulated over the years was nothing more than shiny rocks. Even if they were rich, there was very little they could buy. Using their treasure to bribe a SemiGod like Molly into working for them was quite profitable.

And that was how the undead's generous payments helped Molly unhesitatingly surrender and become their most loyal servant.

And, right now, it was supposed to be time for her to open the castle gates of Oak Town for the undead. But the moment she arrived at the gates, someone called out her real name.

"Molly? Former Dragon Queen Molly?"

"Ein Mezus?"

The black-haired female ranger lowered her head and looked at the red-headed female mage before her. Little Red doubted her own eyes. She was supposed to be one of my secret aces who would guard Oak Town's castle gates, but she never expected that she would meet the purpose for her excursion—finding Molly—right here.

"Watch the castle gates. I'm absolutely certain that there's still a spy in Oak Town. This is a critical time. Nobody is allowed near the castle gates without express orders. Anyone that approaches without permission, capture and interrogate them."

My words were still in her ears, and Little Red was highly familiar with Molly's personality. She instantly figured out what Molly was doing, and her astonishment became humiliation and anger... With such a mother, she really felt it was embarrassing. She came all the way here to save her mother, but Molly ended up as the undead's spy. Little Red's anger knew no bounds.

"MOLLY!"

She grabbed up a massive treant next to her and hurled it towards Molly. This surprise meeting between mother and daughter instantly became a fierce fight amongst family members. Once again, Molly encountered the greatest danger of her life.

******

"When you scheme against others, others are surely scheming against you as well."

While I was busy messing around in the undead army, there were certain undead observing the situation. Yep, after they reported the information to the higher-ups, there was a certain someone who guessed something.

"Only an Undead Emperor would be able to fool an Undead Lord and cause so many undead to quietly disappear within their own camp without a trace."

And so, Zero came. She remained hidden in the shadows and simply observed everything that occurred. It appeared that she didn't have much interest in Oak Town; in fact, she wasn't even that interested in the Tark Republic. She was only interested in the young Undead Emperor that managed to force Aso to sacrifice himself.

Unlike what everyone thought, the Undead Emperors weren't unanimous in their desire to return to the mortal plane.

The Tark Republic had already disappeared from the mortal plane for countless millennium. It was only natural that all its Senators had different opinions. Some undead already made the Undead Planes into their new home, while other undead believed that they should let the past remain in the past. Some undead didn't even remember their original homes, while some were worried about their positions if the Tark Republic was reestablished in the mortal plane.

Some ancient undead didn't actually wish to return and only gave their support as a cause of their friendship with the other undead; they didn't plan to participate personally. And there were also some neutral undead who didn't care either way, if they returned or not, which was why the undead leaders who invaded this time were only from the Tark Republic reestablishment faction and the neutral faction.

A total of thirteen Undead Emperors had invaded, but they were actually of these two separate factions. Aso was one of the main

Undead Emperors in the reestablishment faction, while Zero was one of the main Undead Emperors in the neutral faction.

Most of the time, Zero wasn't very proactive. The Ice Plane with its incredibly low temperature was highly suitable for her to live in. Joining this major expedition was mostly because of her personal relationship with Aso.

And now, for her deceased friend—or perhaps it would be better to say former lover—she decided to directly come find the main culprit responsible for Aso's death.

"Perhaps you've heard of me, although my original name's long been forgotten. Everyone calls me Zero."

The solo traveler before me had no intentions of concealing her true appearance. A silver light coursed through her transparent body, while her incredibly archaic noble ceremonial clothing combined with a noble's hat indicated the generation she was from. The way she slightly bowed and greeted me was also in that same archaic ceremonial style. All in all, this ancient ghost gave me a strong sensation of having arrived in the wrong generation.

"Zero?"

Of course I knew who Zero was. She was the Undead Emperor of the Ice Plane, another Undead Emperor just like me. It was just that I never expected that she would be a female ghost.

It wasn't that I discriminated against females... fine, I was discriminating against the fact that she was a ghost. Amongst all the types of undead species, ghosts weren't weak at all, but ghosts had the lowest growth potential out of every single undead species.

Compared to banshees that already had materialized souls, all ghost-type undead were typically just soul shards. They didn't have any physical bodies to limit them, which was why they were immune to all physical attacks and possessed formidable natural talents in negative energy. However, the flip side of the coin was

that without a physical body, it would be far too problematic for them to improve in power past what they started with. Since they didn't have any physical bodies to protect the soul, they even had weaknesses to light, positive energy, and all sorts of other things.

But nobody would dare to underestimate Zero just because she was a ghost. After all, the fact that she was an Undead Emperor explained a lot, even if her soul couldn't possibly be complete.

Her elegant eyes seemed to be smiling, as if she was appreciative of her junior. This ghost from the Ice Plane lightly clapped her hands.

"...Although I have many things I'd like to say, due to my connection to Aso, please... die for me!"

In just an instant, the entire world changed. This was a Soul World that seemed to almost match reality. Everything before me was nothing but white, while a frigid wind blew snowflakes everywhere. Everything was frozen, and this strong sense of having dropped into another world made me feel... at home? Yep, I felt incredibly comfortable! This field of ice and snow was my home turf as well. I could sense that this world's natural laws seemed so familiar, just like the snow mountain that the Frigid Nightmares lived in.

Zero's eyes were staring at me with no malicious intent whatsoever. Yet she clearly desired to have me die right here and now. This Undead Emperor didn't intend to say any unnecessary words—my death was her only desire.

Clap!

Once again, the white ghost Undead Emperor clapped her hands, causing yet another chilly breeze. The temperature dropped even further, enough to make any human an ice sculpture. Zero's Soul World seemed quite simple, but it was actually highly fatal. Just this simply mega-low temperature was more than enough to kill any life form.

"That's all?"

The ghost's expression revealed that she was somewhat disappointed. The final message that Aso had sent before his death indicated that he had a high opinion of this young Roland. If Roland died easily, it would only mean that Aso had been terribly off in his judgment.

Although I'd like to play dead, it was rare that I got to meet an Undead Emperor, especially one who was also an ice magic practitioner. It would be too much of a waste to miss this opportunity. I would be considered rude if I did not respond in kind.

"Senior, please take a good look at my ice magic."

Chapter 343: Choice

Amid the chaos, the sudden changes, and the emergence of many powerful existences, the original big boss was forgotten.

Upon detecting Undead Emperor Zero's pressure and presence Davey felt both delighted and afraid. It was apparent that she had no intentions of even telling him of her arrival, and there was also the question of how long she had hidden herself among his army.

"I might have lost the Emperors' trust..."

Yet Davey didn't even have the time to be depressed. He needed to first think of something to overcome the trial before him. As he gazed at the battle between the Titan Giants and the True Gods from afar, he was well aware that the energy waves emanating from their fight alone could decimate a Myth-rank individual to pieces. Davey was filled with indecision at the sight.

Should he go help the two Titan Giants? The way the battle was heading there looked to be no thought of sending his subordinates. Even Davey himself would be torn to pieces by the shockwaves from their battle. Even if he was able to help, he would be utterly suppressed by the True Gods. Perhaps his own allied Titan Giants would get annoyed with him and stomp him to death first.

Go help Zero? First of all, he had no way to explain to her just why it was that he had failed to catch the culprit behind the disappearances in his army. Zero was also very famous for AOE attacks that harmed both enemies and allies. There would be no time for him to regret if he accidentally got too close and transformed into an eternal sculpture of ice. And likely nobody would be willing to help unfreeze him.

Davey was filled with inner turmoil. But it seemed worse to not do anything. What about circling around the two battles and forcefully attacking Oak Town's castle walls, instead? That sounded nice, but where did those two Immemorial Red Dragons

fighting at the castle gate come from?

The giant Red Dragons were biting and angrily roaring at each other. Their bodies crashed into and crushed large portions of the castle walls, while dragonbreath scorched the earth into seas of fire. Their dragon magic ran rampant and destroyed the attacking undead armies. The fiercest fight of all the fights was actually happening here.

On the other side of the castle walls, the rampaging dwarf Goddess Mary was currently battling against the thunder Titan Giant Hatley. Her war hammer would repeatedly clash against his thunder spear. Bystanders caught in the middle would not be able to survive unscathed, no matter the individual.

But the most dangerous battle was still the battle between the two Undead Emperors. Although neither of them were at their most powerful states, just the natural power level suppression of these two veterans caused Davey to not even dare approach.

"...This was supposed to be my battle, but I've become nothing more than a side character. The powerful ones are so willful."

Many seemingly coincidental events were actually deliberate in design. Davey hadn't seen through to the true nature of things. At such a time, any large-scale battle was actually very likely to cause powerful existences to personally take part.

The Contract Heroes system was introduced, a new Silver Species was born, the immemorial Titan Giants were awakening, and the undead Tark Republic was returning. Any one of them were capable of attracting the entire world's attention on its own. It was only natural for the simultaneous occurrence of these events to attract the attention of the major powers.

Davey's army's attack on the wood spirits was only a catalyst. The Holy War was underway, and the situation, time, and place were all too sensitive by far. The eyes of numerous factions lay on the Bardi Empire. The state of affairs was similar to an

international situation where the countries were in highly sensitive states—major incidents might erupt at any moment.

This battle was the catalyst that ignited the flames, and numerous powerful existences would leap forwards for the sake of their personal benefits—either to gain advantages or to protect what's theirs. Some might not even have a goal and only want to flaunt their existence to everyone, all to be more well-known and pave a way to obtain future benefits. Yet, for ordinary mortals, they were all irresistible calamities.

"How about I first return back to the main base and try to control the undead armies?"

From a certain standpoint, this was actually a wise decision. An Undead Lord without his own undead army would only be at one-third of his peak combat strength. Moreover, leaving here meant he wouldn't have to worry about getting unknowingly dragged into any of these powerful battles.

Unfortunately for Davey, that choice served only to activate the final time bomb waiting for him. When he returned and placed his entire consciousness into his army to better control it...

The individual who would lead him to his end came for him.

"Edwin? Didn't you go missing?"

From the shadows out stepped a lich—his old friend, one of Davey's closest allies. Edwin. However, didn't Edwin disappear two weeks ago? Why did he appear in front of Davey now? Had the disappearing incident been resolved? Did Edwin manage to find out the truth?

The floating lich didn't answer his old friend, who was also his direct boss. Edwin strode closer; his skeletal face was expressionless and his soulfire seemed unmoving. No trace of emotion was revealed at all.

It was at that moment that Davey discovered that he could no

longer control his physical body. He suddenly jerked into motion and started walking towards Edwin, too.

As he walked, Edwin lost his form, transforming into nothing but a black shadowy whirlwind.

"This—why can't I move!? Why do I even feel delighted?!"

His soul's screams were soundless. Davey was forced to open up his arms and hug the dark shadow.

This black whirlwind instantly swallowed him up. Even though Davey's soul was still strong enough—he retained the will to resist—he was unable to do anything but watch the black shadow devour him bit by bit.

"It's time to combine."...Ah, so this was how everyone disappeared.

It was only now that he understood everything. Davey obtained much knowledge, and saw many old friends. However, this was his final thought. From the very start, when "Mars of War" had decided to make this entire undead army into his food, Davey, who was the highest leader of this army, had become one of the most important factors for Mars to consume. It was practically set in stone for him to end up just as an addition to Mars' knowledge banks and cores.

Other Myth-ranked undead would still have a chance to escape, but for Davey, the concept of this entire army being a part of him ended up becoming a heavy chain that restrained him. Once all the "effects" were confirmed, the "causes" that were affected by karma would naturally be unable to escape.

The entire earth began to roar, as if some monster was piercing through it. Once the undead army's leader was devoured, Mars' true master began summoning him, and the vicious beast known as "Mars of War" had finally awakened.

I flicked off the specks of snow upon me as I jokingly glanced at

the ghost Undead Emperor before me.

As an expert in ice magic... fine, just pretend that I am an expert in ice magic. At the very least, I count as half an ice magic master, right? Even someone like me understood this Undead Emperor's strategy the moment I came into contact with her icy snow.

"Life absorbing, or to use a more accurate term, heat draining."

Ghosts themselves were filled with negative energy. Any contact with them would cause weakness, heat to be drained, and various other effects. An easy, low-level undead magic like "Ghostly Touch" was an imitation of what a ghost could really do when it touched you with its negative energy.

Normal people only considered that a ghost's touch would harm the living but rarely thought about how it would also steal the living's body heat. This was apparently one of a ghost's natural talents as well. But since it took effect very slowly, required physical contact, and needed to persist for a long time before it could cause death, only the weakest ghosts would use this incredibly useless natural talent. Even I basically ignored this ability.

But, today, my senior taught me a lesson: there was no such thing as a weak ability. There were only weak users.

In just an instant, she robbed all the heat in this entire area and forcefully caused mega-low temperatures to descend. As for the icy mist and snow, that was only to conceal her true weapon.

If a person treated her attack as just some regular but powerful ice magic, thinking they would be fine as long as they didn't touch it, then that would be the biggest mistake of their life. Her ice mist wasn't her true ultimate attack. Her true most powerful attack of all was the invisible, mega-low temperature that would descend around her.

"Truly amazing. In just an instant, the temperature is now below

-80 degrees Celsius. Anyone that doesn't understand the logic behind this attack and only paid attention to the ice mist and snow would probably be frozen solid before they even realized it. And this isn't even Zero's complete power level. As expected of a senior, but..."

The snowflakes on me were already transforming into water. A light layer of ice armor separated me from her mega-low temperatures. My ice armor possessed the Concept of the [Coldest Ice.] Even if it was -80 degrees Celsius outside, my Absolute Zero ice armor would forever maintain its temperature of absolute zero.

When I was facing Emordilorcan, this armor had helped protect me from the effects of the Cold Flames of Despair. It could obviously block this low-temperature attack that Zero was using.

"...This type of low temperature is meaningless against me! Ha! Why don't you take a look at my world of snow and ice, instead?"

I inserted my magic sword into the ground and unveiled my silver wings. Underneath my ice armor was skin that seemed like magma. Once my Arbiter bloodline descended and I summoned my Frigidwinter Earth, Zero felt as if her Soul World had been stolen away even though this was simply another world where only snow and ice existed.

However, she wasn't shaken by this; she only smiled in interest. If I wasn't capable of at least this much, she would have been disappointed.

Clap!

She clapped her hands and lit up countless lights among the mist. It would seem that clapping was an action she incorporated into her magic casting. The essence of ice started gathering around her, and various beasts started awakening into the snow and ice mist around her. There were all sorts of undead creatures, but the most fearsome of them were two types of Legend-ranked undead: the Winter Demon and the Shadowy Wings.

The first undead type was the incarnation of a blizzard, and its very appearance would bring about calamitous weather. The latter type was a Legendary undead mage that could easily cross any distance without regards to time and space, and it was also immune to magic at the eight circle level and under—truly the most dangerous undead shadow mage of all.

There were more than thirty Winter Demons and Shadowy Wings. Among them were many that had even evolved once or even twice, which made them into giant monsters that were at the Myth or even Saint rank. The fact that Zero was able to casually carry such a level of an undead army on her was truly impressive. I could only exclaim at how rich she was.

When meeting an opponent that was difficult to deal with, summoning a large amount of undead creatures to keep that opponent busy so that one could think up a strategy was quite a common strategy for any undead mage. And if an Undead Emperor didn't personally carry some top-level undead troops, then that would be considered quite embarrassing.

This type of small army consisting of only top-level undead was quite a force to be reckoned with. They glared at me murderously as they marched over. If I were a normal undead mage, I would be hurriedly summoning a large force of my own undead to deal with them. After all, this was the most classical method that undead mages dueled each other by—using meat shields in the front to fight each other while the undead mage used spell attacks on the enemies and buff spells on their own undead troops.

It was like a game of chess. Both sides summoned their own pieces and tested each other out before one side would finally eke out an advantage and obtain victory.

I indeed carried some top-level undead on me, but I had no intentions of summoning them.

"Apart from the Winter Demons and Shadowy Wings in this

army, all the other undead are much weaker. And the special traits of these two types of undead are that the first is completely immune to ice magic, while the second is capable of eating negative energy..."

Add on the fact that Zero possessed the ability to rob the heat and how she was skilled at ice magic, I came to the conclusion that Zero's fighting style was probably quite similar to mine. If I summoned a large amount of undead to deal with her undead army, she would likely use a large AOE forbidden spell to attack everything in sight, without regards to enemy or ally. And that forbidden spell of hers would most likely be a mix of both ice magic and negative energy. If she used such a forbidden spell, only these two types of undead would be able to survive the indiscriminate AOE onslaught.

But if I didn't summon any meat shield at all, I would be encircled and it would be too late for me.

Attack, attack, and attack, forcing the enemy into one's own tempo. This was an open plot for all to see, but it was not so easy to deal with.

"Hah, how interesting. In that case, I might as well summon an undead that's impossible to freeze. Come, 'War'! Come meet your little friends!"

When I summoned Mars of War, I paused in surprise the very next instant. It wasn't because War had any problems. When I discovered that I was facing an unexpectedly strong opponent, I ordered War to finish its final feeding and entirely awaken, but...

"System, the hell with you suddenly making your existence known at such a time!"

[You have achieved the peak of Gold. You have activated more than three bloodline abilities. The combination of your soul and physical body has reached 100%. Soul Imprints have been activated. SemiGod-level undead, Order, and divine powered items

detected in the nearby area. Bloodline activation hunting quest has been activated. System Notification: It's time to show off the true value of your physical body and make those Titan Giants that think they're physical perfection see what a true Double Diamond Bloodline is.]

[A choice of Quests has been activated. You can pick any of the following three, and your bloodline will evolve based on how well you complete them. Remember, your bloodline can currently withstand undergoing only one evolution.]

[After you complete this bloodline evolution Quest, the path for you to become a Legend shall open. Your War Angel and Original Sin Demon forms shall evolve together with your bloodline.]

[Hunting Quest 1: "I'm the real Cat... Lich King, and my butt definitely isn't stuck on that throne of ice! That's nothing but a rumor!" Destroy Zero's incarnation that's before you and steal her knowledge and the key to the Ice Plane. Reward: You will advance in progress in your undead and ice magic. System notification: Go, oh youth, the Cat King's beautiful future is waiting for you! Quest Difficulty Level: Myth. Since this isn't Zero's full power before you, you have a chance at victory. Use all your devious plots and unscrupulous tricks to steal away your senior's essence.]

[Hunting Quest 2: "I'm the legendary dragonslaying hero who bathes in dragon blood and fears no sword or spear. Yet unlike my unfortunate senior that I won't mention, I remembered to wash my feet!" Defeat Molly Ein Mezus and obtain an amount of fresh Immemorial Dragon blood that exceeds half the blood in a dragon's body. Reward: Complete the dragon blood bathing ritual and increase the base stats of your physical body. System Notification: If you choose this path, then go and keep striving for the peak as a physical fighter barbarian. Quest Difficulty Level: Legend rank. Considering that Little Red will help you in this fight, the difficulty level is much easier than the others. But you'll probably have to call her Sister or Mother afterwards... oh, that sounds wonderful

now that I think about it. You should choose this one!]

[Hunting Quest 3: "My dear distant relatives, could you help me out a little... Don't slam the door on me! I'm really not here to borrow money, I'm just here to borrow some blood!" Hunt the Titan Giants' incarnations and obtain a Titan Giant's heart and blood. Reward: Washing in their blood and completing a ritual will greatly improve your basic stats and bloodline's power. System Notification: If you choose this evolution path and successfully complete it, the next step of your evolution will require blood from a Titan Giant's physical body, not an incarnation. Quest Difficulty Level: SemiGod, and even True God for what comes after. Still, the highest difficulty grants the highest rewards. You understand how it is.]

Alright then. No matter my choice, from this moment onward, my expression towards Zero had changed. Rather than viewing her as my senior, I now saw her as a delicious cake.

Chapter 344: Clash of Ice and Snow

The world of ice and snow continued to expand as nothing but white could been seen extending into the horizon. The entire world around us was now pure white.

Based on the typical rules, when two Soul Worlds clashed, the end result would depend on the Soul Worlds' power and the strength of their users. If there was little difference, then both sides would have equal chances to win. If one side was far stronger than the other, then the weaker person's Soul World wouldn't be able to do anything other than protect them.

As for us... there was basically no difference, at least on the surface.

What would white be when it was combined with white? Looking around us at this world filled with ice and snow, Zero was surprised that the two master ice mages' Soul Worlds didn't actually clash. They melded perfectly together. This obviously went against the common sense of Soul Worlds, which made her both astonished as well as faintly realize that something was wrong.

The double iciness made the temperature go down even further. This severe cold caused snow to descend from the sky yet again, while the snowflakes—as large as a person's hand—were crystallizations of ice. This life-threatening frost created ice everywhere on the ground, resembling landmines of snow and ice. Yet it was Zero's personal undead army who were the first to be no longer able to tolerate this extremely low temperature.

Normally speaking, they should have long gotten used to ice-cold temperatures since they were from the Ice Plane. Yet the strange part was that in this seemingly warm mortal plane, this not so deadly appearing ice made them quite uncomfortable.

Zero's intelligent high-level undead army discovered to their

shock that the situation had spiraled out of their control. They were no longer able to walk on this snowy ground, and their limbs no longer listened to their commands. All this falling snow even obscured their soul vision. This extreme world of snow and ice that two Undead Emperors constructed together made even these Legendary undead as helpless as ordinary humans. This dark and frigid environment was the most direct path to death.

The fact that both of us chose something like a Soul World for large scale area of effect attacks was no coincidence. This was all due to the nature of ice magic.

After all, no matter if it was stealing away the heat or more normal ice magic, it would all be large-scale temperature lowering. In that case, in order for the power of ice magic to reach the peak and maintain its state, it would require a Soul World of ice, the path taken by many top-level ice magic archmages.

A low temperature Soul World of ice and snow wouldn't make ice magic weaker—it would, in fact, even provide terrain bonuses. The same went for fire magic archmages as well. Their Soul Worlds were typically high temperature volcanic terrains filled with magma, which improved the power of their fire.

Two top-level ice magic archmages with very similar Soul Worlds was something within expectations, yet the fact that they actually could combine with each other and further increase the ice magic's power was quite unusual.

However, I laughed, because this "unusualness" was exactly what I expected. As I watched large patches of ice and snow descend, the eternal "Hibernation Chill" contained within it made even the strongest undead into nothing more than prey on a spiderweb. Struggling was meaningless; they could only be frozen.

The ones who found this the most incomprehensible were the Winter Demons as they were supposed to be immune to ice magic. For the first time in their undead lives, they felt the pain of being

frozen. This ice and snow was actually capable of making them despair.

When this absolute ice arrived, only then did they discover that they still possessed the ability to feel pain. This cold to the extreme ice damage made their skin crack open, their bones shatter, and their souls freeze over. This ice damage damaged their very foundations and made them finally recall the feeling of pain back from when they were still alive. And, gradually, as the pain diminished and even vanished, their physical bodies were no longer able to resist this extreme cold. They had completely lost their bodies and souls.

"Why are you even combining your powers with mine and increasing the power of this ice domain? Aren't you a living person?"

Zero didn't hide her astonishment. She had discovered that Roland wasn't fighting back against her "Heat-loss Domain;" instead, he was helping add something into it which greatly increased its power. Could it be that he wasn't worried at all about dying inside it? Wasn't he supposed to be alive? He even dared to increase the power of her own Soul World? He was that confident that he would survive longer than her?

Based on common sense, no living being could reach a higher level in ice magic than an undead that wasn't afraid of low temperatures. After all, most ice magic spells were area of effect, and accidentally freezing oneself to death wasn't unheard of. But, for undead ice magic, all that was needed was to lower the temperature, which would naturally cause large numbers of living beings to drop dead. This was also why many liches practiced ice magic together with undead magic.

But Roland was clearly a living person, yet he put himself in such an absolute cold environment. And this cold was sufficient to even freeze the Winter Demons. Still, he kept decreasing the temperature of this area. Was he suicidal?

Of course, I didn't intend to explain anything to Zero. Nor would I tell her that the "Absolute Zero Ice Armor" I was wearing made the temperature outside meaningless, no matter how low it was. Nor would I be telling her that I actually wasn't using a Soul World, but rather a true new world of my own. I didn't increase her Soul World's strength but rather placed it within my Frigidwinter Earth.

"...So you'll comment in your mind, is that it? I can hear everything you're thinking."

"Of course, since it sucks to keep everything bottled in. Besides, it's not like she can hear my thoughts."

I was no idiotic villain who would die because I liked to talk too much. Nor was I some demon king who was addicted to explaining my every move. How could I possibly tell my enemy my secrets? There were even some bosses that liked to mark their own weak spots or favorite individuals with red markings, as if they weren't afraid of their enemies noticing at all.

If my enemy was confused, then let them be confused. It would be even better if they died while not understanding anything.

But the closest undead to me were now right before me. Even if they were slowed down by my Hibernation Chill, I couldn't ignore them. And since Mars was busy recombining himself and wasn't usable at the moment...

"I choose you, Erebella!"

"There's never anything good when you call me!"

The giant ice dragon arrived on the winds, with a layer of my "Absolute Zero Ice Armor" secretly applied on her body. Otherwise, even she would become nothing more than an ice sculpture in this fatally cold ice and snow.

When controlling the temperature, no matter if it was fire or ice magic, both its greatest advantage and weakness would be its

excellent area of effect. While it was incredibly destructive in a huge area, one of the most common methods of dying was accidentally killing oneself in the process. After all, changing the temperature was an invisible process. It was very possible to either cook or freeze yourself to death.

Since I was an ice mage who wasn't so confident controlling my own ice, I created an "Ice Armor" that could protect myself the moment I obtained my Frigidwinter Earth. With power at the level of a Divine Concept, this "Absolute Zero Ice Armor" required me to only take a set amount of ice damage and would protect me from dying no matter how low the temperature was outside.

But my opponent, Zero, wasn't so easy to deal with. She was unmistakably a SemiGod Undead Emperor. Perhaps she wasn't at her strongest as this wasn't her main body, but she would still be, at the very least, at the Myth rank—an ice mage two power levels above me.

"...As expected, all direct attacks are meaningless?"

I had no intentions of forcefully trading blows with her. Instead, I had my Frigidwinter Earth further decrease the temperature of her Soul World. The result was that her subordinates were indeed affected, but she seemed to ignore the effects. Those snowflakes floated right through the ghost's body. Since the snowflakes didn't even touch her, then even my Hibernation Chill wasn't affecting her at all.

"When I close my eyes, I can't sense anything, as if she doesn't even exist. Is this what 'Zero' is really like?"

Indeed, all ghost type undead creatures had no physical bodies, and the stronger ghosts among them would be impervious to physical damage. However, this didn't mean that they were immune to magic. And I was quite clear on the limitations of Soul Worlds. It was possible to create terrain that would be beneficial to oneself, but making oneself so powerful as to a cheat-like level was

impossible. This could only be one of her unique personal talents.

And in the battle so far, I had already tested things out. No matter if I threw a rock or a magic spell at her, everything would pass through her body harmlessly and cause no actual damage.

But ever since we met, Zero hadn't taken any action apart from summoning her Soul World and her own subordinates. It was obvious that her "invulnerability" had costs associated with it.

While ghosts were immune to physical damage, they also had zero physical attack power. Since they didn't have physical bodies, they wouldn't even be able to pick up a normal weapon. They would only be able to use their bodies filled with negative energy to touch a living individual and instinctively absorb their lifeforce. Perhaps Zero had such limitations as well. It wasn't that she didn't want to attack; it was that she couldn't attack. Against a normal opponent, perhaps this ultra-low temperature attack would be more than sufficient.

Erebella flew through the snowflakes as she sent several streams of dragon breath, which obstructed the slowly moving undead from approaching me. And since there was the limitation about how magical pets were unable to surpass their masters in power level, this seemingly powerful ice dragon was only at the peak of Gold, making her nothing more than a weakling with an intimidating appearance... Fine then, judging by the dragon breath that suddenly flew in my direction, Erebella was quite dissatisfied with me.

"Although I've already placed my trap, making this time bomb explode still requires some time... Alright then, let's have Mars play with you for a little while."

Just what form would Mars take after awakening? What form should he be? What abilities would he have? Would he be vicious?

"How should I know? Is there any parent out there who knows before their child is even born about what their abilities and

physical appearance will be like? Or what job the child will end up working at?"

At most, what the so-called "parents" could do was provide the most basic necessities, an environment to grow up in, and give the child a name that may contain a specific meaning.

"Mars..."

"You called for me?"

A voice suddenly spoke up behind me. It would seem that he had finished the final recombination.

Mars spoke in a mature, low, male voice. He had a tall and upright figure while his mouth displayed a faint smile. He appeared to be a mature gentleman. Since he obtained plenty of knowledge from his "nutrition," having such a physical appearance wasn't strange at all.

"A good child actually came out. Did I really receive such a miracle? After investing so many resources, a normal person finally appeared!! Just take a look, he's so polite, he's definitely a good child, a true gentleman in the original meaning of the word! I'm no cursed individual who can only bring forth the strangest individuals around!! Hahahaha!"

"...You're so shameless. Is there any real gentleman who would wear a skirt?"

"No! Don't remind me! Can't you let me be happy for even one minute?!"

It was apparent that Mars' spirit was still in some confusion. He was simultaneously wearing a gentleman's shirt paired together with a skirt. Meanwhile, he had no facial features: his face was blank, with nothing other than a mouth.

"...This is probably a problem created by being a collective will. With too many individual parts, creating a single soul, face, gender, and body becomes uncertain. That's why he's in such a

chaotic state."

For once, Harloys acted reliably and came to the same conclusion as me. She was also quite interested in Mars, who we created together.

And as I faced this Mars, an identical existence with unclear features appeared where Little Red was fighting, where one of the Titan Giants was fighting against the Shield Dwarf Guardian Goddess Mary, and also at the other battle, where the gay Wood Elf Guardian God Solo was fighting against the Titan Giant Yins. Mars appeared like a man and also like a woman, human yet inhuman, physical yet also ethereal.

"Yes, Mother is correct."

"...*&*&*!"

Mother? Fine, from a certain standpoint, this wasn't incorrect. Harloys did much of the work herself. But the fact that Harloys' thoughts were nothing but jumbled symbols was doubtlessly the best explanation that her feelings were so complex that words were insufficient to describe them.

"Now then, as Father wishes, I shall show my power. Father, please remember that Mars has no fixed form..."

And when "Mars" started taking action, the human form that he was using to appear before me instantly became meaningless. He transformed back into an ethereal shadow.

Right before us, the earth trembled before it split open and a gigantic bone arm reached out of the ground.

Next, a bone giant as large as a mountain appeared. He opened his giant mouth, a black hole created by countless souls that swirled within it. His green eyes possessed a wicked light that was capable of directly killing the undead. And if you looked at him a bit more carefully, you would discover that this bone giant's bones actually consisted of countless skeleton soldiers, lesser liches,

skeleton warhorses and others combined together. He was the combination of innumerable undead!

"...Come meet your deaths."

The bone giant began his hunt. Zero's undead creatures became his prey. A single touch was all it took to make them part of Mars' physical body. This bone giant kept growing even larger and more powerful as he fought.

Similar things occurred at the other battles. The undead campground was now empty, and the few surviving undead were furiously running for their lives. And where Little Red was fighting against Molly, Mars had transformed himself into a full army of undead archers and lesser liches, sending countless undead magic enchanted bone arrows right at Molly.

At the battle where the thunder Titan Giant was fighting against the Shield Dwarf Goddess Mary, Mars transformed into a giant army of rushing undead knights that charged directly at the tremendous giant. Perhaps Mars wouldn't be able to cause any fatal damage, but he could at least successfully attract some of the rampaging thunder and make it slightly easier for Mary.

Nor did Mars stand around idly where the Titan Giant Yins was fighting against the gay Wood Elf God Solo. Here, he transformed into an army of Bone Dragons that flew through the air. Their dragon breath endlessly annoyed Yins. Not to mention, his ability of being able to sense cause and effect didn't apply to these special soulless undead, which greatly affected his sense of judgement.

Just as Mars himself said, as he was created to be a literal incarnation of war, he had no fixed form. Instead, he would choose the most appropriate form for his opponent and constantly evolve and grow stronger through battle.

What, you're saying that I forgot about one battle? The battle between the Goddess of Wealth Beyana and that divine beast lion?

Actually, that battle had finished long ago. In my secret arsenal was a certain Saint-ranked individual, and for this battle he had actually changed his typically lazy personality. He had even volunteered for the most dangerous frontlines. Yet his power was unquestionable—the moment he appeared, he only said a few words to the lion before their battle had ended before it even began.

"My cute little brother, have you heard of me before? No? Wonderful... I mean, that's really regrettable! Hello, my name is Beifeng Herault. I'm a beast tamer. Perhaps we can try becoming friends."

Chapter 345: Trap

The snow seemed to have no intentions of stopping. These two individuals, who were both at the peak of ice magic, had met the most difficult opponents—in ice magic—they'd ever met. To their astonishment, they both discovered that the attacks they were the proudest of seemed to be completely ineffective. It was as if both were immune to the other's attacks.

The bone giant Mars was pounding the earth, his heavy fists as quick as lightning despite the bulk of his colossal body. He would pierce right through Zero, but each time the result was the same: it was as if he was hitting nothing but the reflection of the moon in water. Zero would simply flicker and then vanish, reappearing in a nearby location.

"Absolute immunity to physical attacks..."

I tossed an ice ball which promptly exploded, sending icicles flying everywhere. These icicles transformed into ice birds—or ice bridges—and there was even a white-bearded old man sitting on a sleigh pulled by reindeer, together with a naughty child chasing after him, demanding presents... My foundational magic of ice sculpting allowed me to draw anything I imagined in the air. It was impossible to dodge these icicles that behaved just like real animals... But the result was the same as the physical attacks from earlier. They simply passed right through Zero, without the sensation of having hit anything at all.

"Complete immunity to ice magic. No, judging by how I also infused Holy Light into my attacks and there still wasn't any effect, her immunity is at an even higher level—complete immunity to all energy attacks..."

This ancient ghost continued to make an effort to avoid and dodge the ice dragon that was chasing after her. It would seem that the Frigid Nightmares' special talent of being able to directly

damage souls was effective against her. However, the huge power level difference between them meant it was absolutely impossible for Erebella to catch up.

Still, Zero was kept busy by Erebella, and could only watch as Mars did as he pleased on the ground. All her high-level undead subordinates that she likely worked hard at accumulating over the years were now transforming into nothing more than ice sculptures—of course, some moved so slowly they became nothing but food for my newly-born undead creature.

Zero shot through the sky like a meteor, transforming every place she passed into an area of extremely low temperature. Large amounts of ice and snow rushed at me like a vicious ocean tidal wave, yet she was unable to shatter my seemingly light armor of ice.

"Although she's almost invulnerable, is changing the temperature her only method of attack...?"

I was observing my opponent, while my opponent was also observing me. I figured that Zero was the most confused right now about how her low temperature ice magic didn't even affect my summoned undead creature, on top of not being able to affect me.

Duels between high-level archmages were typically as boring as this one. Take risks to have the first move, testing each other, defending, learning the enemy's attacks, attacking again, additional testing, and slowly learning about each other's aces while fighting each other. Archmages would attempt to understand the special nature of their opponent's powers and the foundations of how they worked in order to find a weakness. And once all preparations were complete, when the archmage was certain that he or she would win, only then would they finally attack all-out for the critical blow.

Of course, this type of situation could only occur between two powerful individuals at similar levels. Otherwise, if there was a

power level difference, the stronger one would only need to suppress the weaker with higher-level magic.

By now, I had pretty much figured out what was going on.

It was common knowledge that the Undead Emperors had been exiled by the mortal plane itself. In such a situation, it was impossible for her to be at her full power while in the mortal plane. In that case, she could only be an existence similar to an incarnation, and from pondering over her condition where she appeared to exist here but also not, I made an educated guess.

"She's nothing more than an astral projection. According to the mortal plane's judgement, she isn't even here. Not a single person is able to attack someone who doesn't exist, which is why she can obtain near invulnerability. However, the cost for this is that someone who doesn't exist is also unable to perform any targeted attacks. All she can do here is use her ability to steal heat to create extremely low temperatures and change the environment around her astral projection. She's unable to attack on her own!"

"...Roland, you're being looked down upon."

I found it impossible to counter Harloys' words. Intending to deal with me with only an astral projection? That was obviously looking down on me. But looking at it from another angle, perhaps she was only here to gather information on me. While astral projections indeed lacked attack power, their near invulnerability was also very difficult to deal with. It appeared as if she couldn't lose from the very start.

"Hah, how can there possibly be true invulnerability in this world? Allow me to tell my senior that the times have changed, and that she shouldn't bring out these dated techniques anymore."

"How specifically are you going to do that?"

"By waiting."

"Waiting? What, is she going to self-destruct if you wait long

enough?"

"That's right."

"Haha, do you really think that it's so easy for an Undead Emperor to self-destruct? Or..."

Harloys didn't finish her sentence, because Zero's astral projection in the air suddenly shook and fell downwards. Although she soon recovered her balance, her shocked and confused expression revealed that she didn't comprehend the reason she had taken an attack in the first place. Yet, it was indeed true that she had suffered an invisible attack, which confused her greatly.

"How did you do it?"

"Heh, I had a marvelous plan... Forget it, I won't explain it as you wouldn't understand."

"Impossible! I'm Harloys the All-Knowing; how can there possibly be any magic I don't understand! Just what did you do?"

"Have you taken high school physics classes? Do you know the Law of Energy Conservation? Have you graduated from high school? All-Knowing? I think you're nothing more than an illiterate teacher without a single certificate... Stop biting me, have you ever seen a sword that can bite its owner? Fine, fine, I'll explain it for you later, so could you please work hard for me for now? Go! I choose you, Harloys!"

The Pokéball—er—magic sword sliced through the air. However, its target wasn't the ghost in the air; instead, it sped towards the few Myth-ranked Winter Demons alive and struggling within Mars' hands. High-level existences part of an Undead Emperor's personal army definitely wouldn't be easy-to-come-by weaklings. Since they were strong enough to have survived for so long in such circumstances, not even an Undead Emperor would be willing to freely sacrifice them.

And, as I expected, Zero arced elegantly through the air and

created another large area of extreme low temperature, causing countless ice pillars to form. And amongst her ice pillars were all sorts of snowballs, snow mountains, and large pieces of ice.

She discovered that extreme low temperatures were ineffective against me, so she decided to start using physical attacks? And in order to increase the attack power and difficulty of dodging her attacks, she even made her pieces of ice into all sorts of strange shapes, but...

"Damn, this suddenly makes me recall a really old game..."

"...Whack-a-Mole?"

This situation caused Harloys to have a rather bad thought, but she was off the mark.

"Tetris!"

Fine, I suppose that both games were about smashing things from above. One game depended on your speed and reaction, while the other required logical processing, but considering the fact that both games were about smashing things down from above, there wasn't much of a difference...

"Circle, triangle, square. How am I supposed to put these pieces together? Are you intending to kill those with obsessive-compulsive disorder?"

[That's enough out of you. Nobody's forcing you to put the pieces together here, and even if you put them together in a line they won't automatically disappear! System Notification: Don't you agree that my commenting service is excellent as always? 5 Justice Points have been deducted.]

"Nobody wanted you to comment at all!"

Although I looked quite unseemly as I dodged these heavy objects, I still smiled victoriously. That was because I noticed how Zero's complexion was becoming worse and worse. It seemed her own power was taking worse and worse of a toll on her body.

Her own power? Yep, actually, right after I detected that her true method of attack was to rob the heat in the air, I already placed a trap for her. And after fighting each other with magic for so long, it would appear that this trap had finally been activated.

"Stealing the heat? Then where did all the stolen heat go? This is far too unscientific!"

To be honest, I never could understand just where the heat stolen by ghosts would disappear off to. But, in the world of Eich, the Law of Energy Conservation wasn't in effect. The stolen heat would simply mysteriously disappear somewhere.

It was apparent that this world where magic existed was an unscientific one. Perhaps magic wasn't even the biggest unscientific culprit—when it came to the myriad racial talents, even magic theory was unable to explain some of the more powerful ones.

"Well, let's at least make my world a more scientific one."

Frigidwinter Earth was my personal world. Its natural laws were based on my own beliefs of how worlds should be constructed. In my world, I could create the Absolute Coldest Ice that didn't seem magical to the outside world. Naturally, I would also be able to make even magic become more scientific.

The Law of Energy Conservation was a basic law of physics that I understood well enough. Since Zero had entered my world, she would need to obey the basic laws of my world.

The moment I used Frigidwinter Earth to envelop her Soul World of ice, she had already stepped into my trap. According to the natural laws of my world, she could still steal heat as she pleased. However, this heat wouldn't just magically disappear on its own. Just like how Yins mentioned the karma of cause and effect earlier, every action taken would have a reaction, every cause would have an equivalent effect. All of the heat that Zero stole was absorbed by Zero's main body!

"All the heat you stole and the temperature difference you lowered this entire area by will be forcefully experienced by your main body as an equivalent amount of high temperature!"

This was the power of a Concept. Perhaps it seemed rather weak—even dangerous as it wouldn't differentiate between enemy and ally—but any action a natural law took would give a headache to even the most powerful of individuals.

When dealing with natural laws, the greatest trouble was that they were completely unreasonable. They would be able to suppress any other power out there. Yet at the same time its greatest threat was also that it was reasonable. Everything would be fine and dandy as long as you obeyed the reason of the natural law. Anything deemed unreasonable by the natural law would be forcibly suppressed.

And as the only Creator of this world, only I knew all the "reasons" and natural laws of my world. This was also why the Goddesses of Chaos and Order were basically undefeatable in Eich. Apart from their personal power levels easily being able to defeat everyone else, their ridiculous administrator privileges and knowledge constituted the biggest reason behind their invincibility.

But we were now in my world, where I made the natural laws. Zero had created countless ice mountains and low temperature areas and sent down large amounts of ice and snow. She had stolen away a countless amount of heat already.

It would have been fine still if she had used normal ice magic. After all, one of the natural laws of my world was indeed the construction of the elements. Yet she had used her natural talent of robbing heat. In that case, the heat that she stole wouldn't simply vanish like it would in Eich or the Undead Planes. It was time for her to enjoy the consequences of her own actions.

That was why, from the very start, I had no intentions of

stopping her from lowering the temperatures here with her Soul World. Instead, I even helped her out, allowing her unscientific natural talent to be used to the utmost. Perhaps her astral projection would still seem fine—it was impossible for anyone to harm something that didn't actually exist. However, her main body might already be literally ignited on fire with all the heat energy she absorbed, without her even knowing it.

And if you calculate the cause and effect of all this, then it would count as self-harm. How would it be possible for anyone to avoid the effects of self-harm? That was why her astral projection's invulnerability and non-existence were finally losing effect as well. There was no need for me to completely analyze just how she accomplished being able to count as a non-existence here in the mortal plane. I only need to take advantage of my own world's natural laws to make her bear the consequences of her own actions.

"...Just what did you do!"

The translucent ghost's body began to melt, and burn marks appeared on her ancient clothes. At the current moment, Zero experienced the strongest sensation of fear she had ever felt in her life. Her main body, which was still back in the Ice Plane, was actually attacked? Not only that, the attack was the type she feared most, a high-temperature attack. And high-temperature attacks were one of the few she wasn't immune to.

Seeing this, I nodded and smiled.

"Haha, would you like to know how it was that I managed to attack your main body?"

"..."

Although she didn't reply, the look of expectation in her eyes mixed with obvious traces of confusion made it evident that she hoped I would tell her.

"Hehe, I won't tell you~~~ Don't glare at me like that; I'm no idiot villain who dies just because I told too much information to my enemy. How could I possibly tell you about my trump card? But what I can tell you is that if you don't want your main body's situation to become worse, you shouldn't do anything more at all."

Of course, I didn't tell her the truth, but I also didn't lie. To be honest, as long as she stopped using her heat-stealing ability, then she naturally wouldn't receive any backlash. And after I told her this much, no matter whether she believed me or not, it would still become a mental restraint on her and limit the actions she could take.

The ghost glared at me one last time before she started to fade. It would seem that she had given up on this situation and was intending to cancel her astral projection so that her soul could return to the Ice Plane.

However, once she became clear to a certain extent, her ghostly body suddenly went back to a near solid state. This time, her expression was even more afraid as she cowered and looked at me. It would seem that she had noticed that her astral projection was unable to leave.

Clap!

I copied Zero's magic casting and clapped my hands, dispelling the blizzard and making the sun shine from through the clouds again, revealing to her the true form of my Frigidwinter Earth.

This world was no longer just barren, ice-filled plains with nothing in it. Icy waters could be seen in the distance, while giant magical whales were shooting out jets over a dozen meters high. Glaciers were floating in the ocean, while endless mountains could be discerned in the distance. There were even the intermittent faint sounds of roaring beasts.

And we were currently located at the foot of a mountain, inside an ice crystal forest. The faint outline of buildings could be seen

afar: this was becoming more and more like a real world.

"Would you like to know why it is that you can't leave?"

"..."

"Ha, I won't tell you~~~ Leave this astral projection behind, and then go think about it by yourself! Right, your essence... give me all your knowledge! Otherwise, I'll use your astral projection to film porn videos, and I'll sell the videos to the fairies and gnomes! Don't people love teacher fantasies? ...Ah! Silly cat! Don't bite me, you're not a teacher—you're a master! Besides, nobody would buy a porn video focused on a cat!"

Chapter 346: The Two Dragons

Satisfied, I made my return to the mortal plane from the Frigidwinter Earth. What greeted my eyes were battles nearly at their conclusion.

The undead armies had become nourishment for this newly-born Mars, devoured in large numbers. In fact, the scene of undead "committing suicide" in large numbers as if they had gone insane greatly frightened the living adventurers.

If it weren't for the fact that Samantha had explained to the adventurers that this was due to the high-ranked Calamity Rankings individual that the wood spirits had hired, perhaps the combat situation would have been even more chaotic amid the adventurers' mass panic.

Still, things definitely weren't over. That was because...

"The Titan Giants are truly existences that give one headaches."

Existences that had surpassed the Myth rank understood that one of the main differences between SemiGods and True Gods was in their understanding of the world's natural laws. Existences at these levels could, indeed, utilize the natural laws but they'd be restrained by them all the same. A SemiGod that had lived long enough might not be any weaker than a True God without the power of natural laws, but when the amazing power of these laws is taken into account, even the weakest of the True Gods wouldn't be easy to deal with.

Unfortunately, the weaker True Gods over here were getting beaten up by the not-so-weak Titan Giants.

Blackened all over, Mary's current appearance wasn't as golden and shiny as when she had first appeared after being scorched by thunder. On the other side, Solo now appeared half-frozen, practically confirming the fact that Yins was indeed an ancestor to

the frost giants. Apart from beast taming, he had an obvious power over ice.

I could understand why the True Gods seemed to be losing. After all, Solo was the God of Music and Dance, while Mary was technically a Smithing God—her Concept included that of Hammers. Neither of them was likely to be adept at fighting, and this wasn't even taking into account the untold years of combat experience these old, veteran Titan Giants had.

Now, however, came a turning point in the battle.

Because of certain reasons that shall not be stated, the Goddess of Wealth's battle against the lion divine beast ended far earlier than expected. She chose to battle alongside Mary, and it would be ridiculous for two True Gods fighting two-on-one against a Titan Giant to lose, granted they all were incarnations. However, the thunder Titan Giant seemed to grow wilder and wilder as he fought, filling the entire sky with his summoned thunder. He actually held the advantage.

"We should be able to win."

This was no guess—it was my judgment based on the situation. Both sides were peak incarnations, held back only by the mortal plane's limitations. There wasn't much of a difference foundationally in their power levels. If the thunder Titan Giant really forced the two True Goddesses to the brink, they could simply self-destruct their incarnations, which would seriously injure the Titan Giant.

Meanwhile, the battle between the two dragons at Oak Town's castle gate ended far quicker than expected. Apart from the fact that Little Red's anger helped greatly augment her combat strength, Molly was in no state of mind to fight.

Ever since Molly had been forcibly converted into an Inferno Dragon back in the Underground World, although she gained better melee fighting abilities and improved fire dragonbreath,

Inferno Dragons had a reputation equal to street rats in the mortal plane. They also possessed negative racial talents, such as Bloodthirst and Berserk. From no angle did this look like a good deal.

Since Molly didn't want to flee to the Chaos Abyss, she had to think of a method to deal with this problem.

And so, Molly had tried using secret dragon techniques to cancel the Inferno Dragon transformation and return to her pure Immemorial Dragon bloodline. Luckily for her, she had been successful, and this was due to many reasons—she had many secret dragon techniques at her disposal, she hadn't transformed for long, and the original individual who had converted her had perished.

However, canceling her Inferno Dragon transformation had a price—such a cancellation was the equivalent of slicing off parts of her being that had already transformed into an Inferno Dragon. She had hence lost a large amount of blood and had entered a weakened state that would not end for many years to come. Not only did her power level decrease by at least twenty percent, but she also needed to utilize another portion of her remaining power to suppress the remnant Inferno Dragon blood in her body. All she had left to fight with was half of her original power.

And that was how she was viciously beaten by her own daughter.

Still, everyone was aware of Molly's personality. Threatened by the Demon Earl, she had surrendered immediately. When the situation turned awry, she had instantly ditched her new boss. Even though she possessed sufficient power to fight against the Undead Emperors in the Bardi Empire's capital when she had been blocked by the undead, she surrendered without a fight, under the combination of the undead's carrot and the stick. Not only that, she wrote a letter to her daughter—one with enmity towards her—pleading for help. To quote Little Red, "Molly keeps talking about how the pride of dragons is more important than anything while

rubbing that very pride under her ass. She's the shame of all dragons."

So, the moment Molly discovered that her own daughter was far stronger than herself, she immediately surrendered. Yet unfortunately for her, the result was an even worse beating. Upon seeing Molly's actions that lacked any shred of dignity, Little Red had been angered all the more.

"I—I surrender! Little Ein, please stop hitting me!"

Protecting herself with her wings and arms, Molly repeatedly called out Little Red's baby nickname, but this cowardly behavior only served to make Little Red even more furious. Little Red used her tails, claws, and fists to continuously deliver combination attacks that viciously pounded Molly's face.

"...No matter what, I'm still your mother. Can't you give me some face in front of everyone! You're still hitting me! You disobedient daughter, I'm going to go all out against you!"

Molly's resistance made Little Red's combat fervor rise yet some more—Little Red even started using dragon magic and began spitting dragonbreath directly at Molly's face.

"...Please stop hitting me—it hurts! Please forgive me! After all, I gave birth to you!"

Molly started pleading again, causing Little Red to thrash her even harder...

"Fine then, we can just die together!"

Molly was filled with ever more indignation and wanted to regain some lost face, so Little Red beat her harder...

From a certain standpoint, Molly was truly unfortunate. If she had been able to keep up a defiant attitude to the end, Little Red would have calmed down after venting through a single beatdown. However, the end result of Molly continuously waffling between pleading for mercy and resisting in anger was that Little Red

continuously upgraded the degree of Molly's beating. In the end, Molly was injured so badly that her scales were dropping off everywhere and her dragon blood was spewing furiously... causing even the spectating adventurers to want to get a piece.

"An Immemorial Dragon's blood! One liter can be sold for one thousand gold coins! And these dragon scales! Dragonscale armor costs 50,000 gold a suit!"

"Don't go over there, Captain! You'll die if you get too close!"

A certain greedy adventurer team captain leered at the dangerous battle and tried to approach it without regards to his life, causing his teammates to restrain him tightly. They wouldn't let him go.

However, a certain priest suddenly sighed, helpless, as he cast all the Divine Art buff spells he knew upon himself. Ever so carefully he started edging closer, all to gather some of the precious dragon blood.

"Anlan, are you insane? Even if you're a Goddess of Wealth priest, this is taking things too far! You were never this crazy for money before! This is just suicide! No matter how much you need money, is it really necessary to go to this degree?"

However, the priest named Anlan could only smile wryly and shake his head in response to his teammate's concern.

"It's not that I'm crazy for money; it's that I just received a divine message from Beyana herself. If I can obtain enough dragon blood, she'll increase her divine favor for me by two levels. And if I fail, then she's going to send me all the way back to the acolyte priest school and demote me to a novice priest. And if I'm not careful enough and die here, she'll make me into a God Envoy in her Divine Kingdom."

Anlan's teammate's jaw dropped in surprise as he looked towards the north, where the Goddess of Wealth had displayed herself to everyone and, along with Mary, was currently locked in a brutal

battle against a Thunder Titan Giant.

Molly and Little Red were both SemiGods, and an incarnation of a True God would be at a similar level of power. No natural laws existed that forbade True Gods from involving themselves with mundane matters. An Immemorial Dragon's blood would be precious to even a True God, but shamelessly making a believer risk their life to gather it was something only the Goddess of Wealth could pull off.

"Should I say that it's expected of the Goddess of Wealth Beyana? That greedy Goddess, even at such a time—"

The person who was speaking was suddenly cut off as his teammates hurriedly covered his mouth. Anlan himself was frightened to the point of shivering in fear.

"Are you an idiot? This is desecration! And she's so close to us right now, and you even uttered her name out loud! What if she hears you—"

Anlan's raving shouts weren't even over when he suddenly stopped. A strange expression manifested on his face as he spoke again to his unlucky teammate who had, evidently, caused his own misfortune.

"Oscar, the Goddess just sent another divine message. She said she heard everything you said and if you don't help me obtain two liters of dragon blood, she'll make you bankrupt tomorrow... True Gods never lie, and based on my understanding of the Goddess and how miserly she is, she'll definitely do it—ahhh! My glorious Goddess, I didn't mean it to be desecration! Please don't increase my task to three liters—I'll really die!"

Alright then. There were now two unlucky desecrators. But the pitiful part was that their task was destined to fail because someone far more dangerous, vicious, and powerful had arrived.

"Everyone, leave this area. Little Red, restrain Molly for me. I'm

going to draw out some of her blood!"

Yep, I had returned. As for the battle between the True Gods and the Titan Giants? I might as well let them take it slowly. Since the True Gods still hadn't yet self-destructed their incarnations, I knew what was going on. They probably wanted to gather information on the Titan Giants to prepare for the real battle against the Titan Giants' main bodies. They were all quite busy, so I might as well finish my own evolution Quest first.

What? You're saying I've already completed it? Wasn't it 'choose one of three?' Why would I choose this lower-ranked Quest when I already had a better choice in completing the hunt the Undead Emperor Quest?

"Hmph! After years of digging pitfalls for me, I would be foolish to blindly listen to the System and not see the trap within these Quests."

This was what my System had said earlier:

[You have achieved the peak of Gold. You have activated more than three bloodline abilities. The combination of your soul and physical body has reached 100%. Soul Imprints have been activated. SemiGod-level undead, Order, and divine powered items detected in the nearby area. Bloodline activation hunting quest has been activated. System Notification: It's time to show off the true value of your physical body and make those Titan Giants that think they're physical perfection see what a true Double Diamond Bloodline is.]

[A choice of Quests has been activated. You can pick any of the following three, and your bloodline will evolve based on how well you complete them. Remember, your bloodline can currently withstand undergoing only one evolution.]

[After you complete this bloodline evolution Quest, the path for you to become a Legend shall open. Your War Angel and Original Sin Demon forms shall evolve together with your bloodline.]

Indeed, my System did say that my bloodline could only withstand one evolution. However, it never said that I couldn't simultaneously use two materials together to evolve my bloodline! And, based on my analysis, the most important sentence in this trap was "You can pick any of the following three, and your bloodline will evolve based on how well you complete them." Basically, this meant that this was an open Quest just like the main storyline Quests from before, and that the reward was only based on how well I completed the Quest.

If I completed only one of these three choices, although I'd still finish the Quest, my System would most probably insult me in the end with something like "You couldn't even grab this chance; it's not my fault!"

"Tsk! I remember all those pitfalls you've set for me in the past!"

[Hah, don't be so happy quite yet. You need more than half of the blood in an Immemorial Dragon's body in order to evolve your bloodline with the power of dragons. Are you sure Little Red won't turn on you if you kill Molly? No matter what, she's still Little Red's mother. Or are you intending on breaking up with Little Red?]

"Do you really think I'm that much of an idiot? The Quest said 'Defeat Molly Ein Mezus and obtain an amount of fresh Immemorial Dragon blood that exceeds half the blood in a dragon's body.' That means it's fine as long as I have enough dragon blood and it doesn't need to all come from Molly. I can simply take some blood from Molly and ask Little Red for the rest. This way neither of them will die. You really think I'd fall for such a simple trap?"

Fine then, the System fell silent at this, which meant that I had been right on the mark. As for the Titan Giant ingredients I needed for the final optional Quest, I glanced over at the five-colored Ultraman fight still going on not far in the distance.

"Go, go! Please fight until both sides are seriously injured!

Beyana! Hurry up and use self-destruction, hmm hmm ha hee~! Hurry and take each other out! Hmm hmm ha hee~! Roland's song version! Hmm? Who are you supposed to be? Don't bother me, I'm super busy right now!"

The priest named Anlan tugged on my shirt sleeve and could only smile wryly as he explained:

"The Goddess heard everything you said just now. She says that she's taking half of the dragon blood, otherwise she's going to stop fighting right now and let the Titan Giant come over to deal with you."

"In her wildest dreams! Tell her that there's no blood for her! If she wants my life, she should come for it herself!"

Chapter 347: Difference

"Little Red, no matter what, she's still your mother. How about giving her a little face?"

Alright then. The enraged Little Red glared at me. I should have known better. No matter what an outsider did or said, it would never end well to get involved in someone else's family affairs. I really should have not said anything.

"...I feel that she's glaring at you more because you're currently withdrawing her mother's blood. Also, how did you randomly pull out this super-thick syringe? Just what were you intending, carrying such a thing with you?"

"I crafted it using parts from my Frigidwinter Earth. It only took three minutes, instant and convenient! Would you like to buy one? Relax, I have no interest in giving an injection to a cat."

Harloys was commenting on my giant needle—or perhaps I should call it a needle-shaped giant electric drill? Anyways, I was currently drilling the pitiful Molly, while the dragon blood that poured out of her was directly frozen by me into blood cake—er, blocks of frozen blood—and then stored in my Frigidwinter Earth.

"Hey—hey—Little Red, I'm simply taking out some of her blood to make her weaker so that she won't cause any trouble."

Giant restraints of ice tightly tied Molly down. I suddenly noticed that many people seemed to be staring at me, which me feel quite awkward. So, I directly opened up my Frigidwinter Earth and tossed Molly inside. I still had troublesome enemies to deal with, and this would be fine for the time being—it would be impossible for her to exit my Frigidwinter Earth unless I wanted her to.

"...The Goddess says that—"

"Tell her that I won't take all the dragon blood for myself."

I understood what this Goddess of Wealth priest Anlan had to tell

me before he even finished half of his sentence. Just what was with Beyana, already thinking about the loot before we even won... Silly cat, don't laugh—I'm not locking Molly up for the combat loot! I'm doing this so that we have one less thing to worry about! You're still laughing? Stop laughing! There's a battle right now, be more serious!

Little Red transformed back into her human form and was still in good shape. Since the current Molly was far too much of a pushover, that so-called fight with her was only a somewhat vigorous warmup for Little Red.

Currently, Little Red's long black hair was dyed pure red by the fire element, while her white skin was similarly flushed red. This appropriate amount of exercise filled her with energy, while the weakened Molly had been unable to even injure her.

"Roland?"

"Relax. It'll be impossible for her to escape from my prison. We'll deal with her when this is all over."

Little Red nodded without asking anything more. Being able to meet Molly in such a situation was a good thing for Little Red. After delivering a brutal beatdown to the 'shame of all dragons,' Little Red felt much better as well. However, she started frowning when she looked at the battle raging on not far from us.

"Roland. Are we taking action?"

Although her question came with no clarification as to what she was referring to, I understood what she meant. She was asking if we should interfere with the battle between the True Gods and the Titan Giants. And the fact that she asked such a question was in a way evidence of her lack of confidence in doing so.

Little Red was a SemiGod, but part of it was an artificial boost from her Immemorial Dragon bloodline. Her true understanding wasn't quite at that level. To be honest, SemiGod dragons were

typically ancient dragons that had lived for countless eons, on par with the Dragon Gods. Little Red was still far from such a level.

From a certain standpoint, dragons and Titan Giants were ancient foes. The dragons probably possessed various records about the Titan Giants. When faced with all the myths about Titan Giants passed down in her tribe, Little Red had no assurance that she could win at all, especially after watching these Titan Giant incarnations in action.

In fact, as I watched them, the Titan Giants were actually getting stronger and stronger as they fought.

The thunder that rampaged at a tremendous speed had transformed into a physical weapon. The Thunder Titan Giant Hatley wielded a classic great sword in one hand while his other hand tossed thunder javelins at the True Gods opposing him. This caused them to be too busy defending to even know which way was north.

The energy attacks of thunder exquisitely complemented the beautiful sword techniques. Every attack was filled with the Titan Giant's heart and soul. Compared to him, the True Gods were nothing more than oversized existences that he saw through every move of. Every Divine Art they used was directly countered, and from the very start, the two True Gods had inflicted zero damage upon the Titan Giant. They were nothing more than toys in the palm of his hand.

Perhaps both sides technically had power levels on the same level, but it was evident for anyone to see who was better at martial techniques and combat.

"They're going to be forced to self-destruct."

If energy and power level represented true combat strength, then there would be no more need for fights. Simply compare who had the higher level, and the lower one could commit suicide. Due to the mortal plane's natural laws limiting top-level strength, both

sides were pretty much at the same power level. But since combat experience, techniques, and other such factors were also at play, the outcome of this battle was evident despite the True Gods' advantage in numbers.

This was akin to how True Gods' incarnations would typically be able to dominate normal SemiGods, as the True Gods had experienced and accumulated far too much. Even if normal SemiGods were at the same basic power level as a True God, they would lose out in experience, special abilities, and many other factors. Tight now, the exact same was occurring, only with the True Gods' incarnations for once on the losing end.

When placed alongside the Titan Giants that had who knows how many eons of experience, even the True Gods were merely their juniors. The difference between the ancient Titan Giants and the True Gods was as tremendous as the difference between True Gods and ordinary humans. This wasn't a gulf that could be covered only with effort.

"If only an incarnation has so much power, just how strong is a Titan Giant's full potential?"

Perhaps I would sometimes be arrogant and self-confident, or sometimes I would insanely fight back like a wild dog if pushed to the brink. But I was still a normal person—fine—someone who barely counted as a normal person, who didn't enjoy always being at the brink of life and death... Yep, after saying this much, I simply wanted to say that I... couldn't win, I definitely couldn't win!

At the very most, I only had a little under four hundred years of knowledge, and my current physical body's age was younger than four years old. True Gods would always have ages counting in the thousands as the basic unit, and it was said that the Titan Giants were capable of casually hibernating for tens of thousands of years, waking up afterwards as if only a single night had passed. In that case, a Titan Giant's theoretical lifespan... just casually trying to

calculate it made me think that a new unit of time needed to be invented just for them.

This type of opponent was quite depressing to face. Don't tell me how hard work would definitely pay off in the end, or how the long-lived were all useless pieces of garbage that only knew how to eat and sleep... Although there were such species like that, most of them had long since gone extinct as the eras passed. The ones that didn't go extinct had the most ridiculously powerful natural talents of all... Yep, I'm definitely talking about dragons, who love to only sleep all day.

Perhaps the Titan Giants were quite unlucky. Their first appearance in this generation caused the True Gods to band together and hunt them. However, it was precisely the Titan Giants' opponents' strength that showed off how powerful the Titan Giants truly were. I tried calculating what would happen if I personally went up to fight them...

"I'd probably be instant one-hit KO'd... System, you really have it in for me."

By now, cold sweat was dripping down my back. If it weren't for these "nice Gods" that came out to help me, we would have ended up directly facing against the Titan Giants, who would easily tear us apart.

Even Little Red, who always acted before she thought, was asking me about taking action this time—the best evidence of her own lack of confidence. She was no novice, nor was she some arrogant harem protagonist who always believed in her own victory. Simple observation let her discover the frightening power behind those seemingly simple and clumsy fighting techniques of the Titan Giants.

"He's seeing through every single one of the True God's attacks and is dodging each one prematurely. He appears clumsy, but it's actually total suppression. Even if I reach the next dragon power

level, I have no guarantee of winning..."

Not only Little Red, but it would be the same for me, even back in the day when I was Emperor Yongye. Me and my army could indeed scare off some of the weaker Gods, but the Goddess of Wealth and the other Gods here helping me right now were no weak Low Gods and were still being beaten into such a sorry state. Even though their opponents were only the Titan Giants' incarnations, this was still far beyond what any mortal would be able to deal with. If the Titan Giants managed to revive... No wonder even the prideful dragons were so worried and asking for help everywhere. It was all because the Titan Giants were far too strong.

[...No need to think so much into things. Although Yins 'The Thinker' is ranked fourth among the Titan Giants, he's not actually well known for melee combat skills. Still, he's one of the most veteran Titan Giants that even the Titan Giant King must respect. 'Silverbow Wargod' Hatley may not be ranked in the top ten, but he would actually be ranked fifth if you only look at fighting abilities. Neither of them are easy to deal with, and they don't actually represent the average combat strength of Titan Giants. You still have a chance against the weakest Titan Giants.]

For once, my System tried consoling me, while simultaneously astonishing me with just how much it knew on the Titan Giants. It also made me not know whether to laugh or cry. Wasn't what the System told me the best evidence that, right now, I absolutely would be unable to defeat them?

"Little Red, since the True Gods haven't yet asked us for help, let's just watch."

"...Yeah."

Little Red's answer contained a rare trace of depression. Red Dragons were famed for their high pride, even among the dragon species. She typically had a great amount of pride in herself, but

this time, she didn't even dare to challenge this opponent, something she found humiliating.

"It would seem that I can only give up on that Quest."

Of course I wanted to do the third, "SemiGod ranked," evolution Quest. After all, I even had True God helpers, and my opponents would only be at the SemiGod rank, not to mention not even at their fullest power level. But looking at the current situation, the System would never make it easy for me. Even with True Gods on my side, this would be far more difficult than facing off against any normal SemiGod.

"Even if there's profit to be made, it's useless if I'm not alive to spend it. Completing two out of three Quests is pretty good, and I should still have a chance in the future..."

I couldn't help but recall the future of the "game history." By a certain point, even normal SemiGods became nothing but cannon fodder. If the Titan Giants ever revived, that time would instantly arrive upon us.

When faced with such opponents, it seemed that it would be impossible for me to complete every single one of my evolution Quests. Yet the desire to become stronger still burned within my heart. I didn't possess any so-called dragon pride. It could even be said that I was willing to stoop to any measures at all for the sake of my goals. But, as someone who took things step-by-step to reach my current power level, how could I possibly not desire to be on the battlefield, standing against such opponents?

"...Next time, I won't be simply observing on the sidelines. Titan Giants? Even if this time is no good, I'll make you into my food for evolution, sooner or later."

I clenched my fists, sinking my nails into my palms. Watching from the sidelines had given me this helpless feeling, making me truly feel tired. Suddenly, I felt a warm feeling in my hand, and I looked in surprise to my side. Little Red's hand felt slightly hot to

the touch, and her face was red, likely due to her passionate emotions about wanting to get stronger.

"Next time, we definitely won't only be watching. I will help you..."

Little Red's hoarse voice was filled with unwillingness and somewhat broken pride from discovering the difference in power. But her voice was also filled with ambition to become stronger and a strange passion.

"Yep..."

Her hand's warmth really did reassure me. From what I could see, the current Little Red's face was completely red, all the way to her ears. This faint blush made her seem incredibly beautiful, but, at the same time, was a sign that she was filled with immense fervor for battle, just like I was. With such a reliable teammate, what was I still worried and hesitating about?

"No matter how difficult the future is, we shall face it together!"

Yep, we still had plenty of room for growth. Didn't I start over once again just for the sake of breaking through the bottleneck and growing even more powerful? And even if I met yet another opponent that I wouldn't be able to defeat in a short period of time, I could just use my same tactic from the past and fight that enemy with all my friends and teammates. Even if, right now, we could only act as observers, there was no need for us to get down on ourselves.

Perhaps I didn't say my feelings clearly enough, but I trusted that Little Red would definitely believe it, too. At the very least, my hand would transmit my feelings to her.

"Yeah..."

As I energetically stated my combat declaration filled with passion for battle, I heard Little Red replying in only a tiny whisper. When I looked over at her, she lowered her head and her

face grew even more flushed. It would seem that she was quite depressed. Well, she was a prideful dragon—this must be the effects of having her pride injured.

"...Roland, it's truly and completely your fault that you've been single for so many years."

The silly cat always managed to pick the best moments to ruin my mood. But, this time, even the System joined in.

[Right after beating up the mother, you're requesting to get married to her daughter? Nice. System Notification: Considering that there's soon a great show for me to watch, I'll give you this time's commenting service for free.]

"Ptui, what great show are you talking about? This time, I'm only going to act like a cowardly turtle."

I had made up my mind that I would put safety first. And of course someone wasn't going to let me do that.

"Your Highness Roland, the Goddess wishes for your assistance..."

"...Even if I go out there, I'll be useless. Does she want me to clean up her corpse?"

"Yes, clean up her corpse... Fine then, the Goddess's original words were 'It's whatever if you don't help me, but you're even tossing bombs at my heart? Don't you know that I've been single for more than three thousand years? If you keep doing that, I'll burn you to death. Fine, you've reached your goal, and I'm going to self-destruct my incarnation now. Remember to pick up all the God Equipment on my body. I'll make you pay if you're missing even a single piece of equipment!'"

"...Can I say that she's miserly to the point of death? She's truly miserly to the point of death in the literal sense!"

"My Goddess says 'Thank you for the compliment...'"

"...Her shamelessness can even compare to mine."

"My Goddess says 'Thank you for the compliment again, but I still can't compare to you in shamelessness.'"

When faced with such a shameless Goddess, I could only laugh and shake my head and prepare myself to "loot the corpse as quickly as possible the moment the boss died."

"I feel like I'm forgetting something... Forget it, if it's something I forgot, it probably isn't important."

While I was preparing in high spirits, a certain female dragon in an icy world was restrained and suffering from severe blood loss. She was frozen and pale all over, weakened almost to the point of death.

For Red Dragons of the fire element, magma and volcanoes would be the most comfortable home of all, while any place of snow and ice would be like hell. All Red Dragons had negative ice resistance and would even take double the damage when receiving ice attacks. And the current Molly had just been seriously injured and thrown into this freezing world, which made her unable to move apart from breathing.

"...Save me... I'm going to die with all my blood loss and this cold... I surrender... I surrender... let me go, and I'll listen to anything you say..."

Chapter 348: Mars' Evolution

Incarnations, astral projections, and other similar constructions weren't that rare. Many powerful existences of other planes were limited by the mortal plane's natural laws and, unable to use their true bodies to enter the mortal plane, could only send their incarnations or projections.

From a certain standpoint, such dimensional natural laws were a way of protecting the world of Eich.

As long as the Elemental Tide's density remained insufficient, the very existence of top-level existences in the mortal plane could distort this world's natural laws, causing unpredictable influences upon an area or even the entire plane.

For instance, if a God whose Divine Concept was Rain descended, then a radius of several hundred kilometers around them would likely become a permanent rainstorm, the worst enemy of any farmer... I definitely wasn't commenting on a certain "Rain God" who always met with rainstorms every time he tried to hold a concert, nor was I trying to reference a certain unlucky person who would always have a major incident befall them upon trying to steal the headlines—nope!

Cough, getting back on track, it would still be alright if a Rain God descended as the Divine Concept of Rain was relatively mellow. The descent of some sort of Volcano God or War God would cause even greater havoc.

For instance, when the Demon Earl's main body descended, vast swathes of land were infused with Chaos, scorching the land. Anywhere his blood fell became akin to a barren, lifeless land that could no longer harbor life, even today. Unless someone acted to improve the situation, this negative influence could last for several dozen or hundreds of years.

In most heroic epics, there were stories about how "Eternal

shadowy winds would blow where a Demon King has fallen." Actually, it was it was the same here, too.

The increase in the Elemental Tide made it so the dimensional natural laws were gradually changing as well. This was just like how if you dripped a drop of vivid paint into a glass of water, the water would swiftly change color. But if you dripped paint into a bucket of water, a pool of water, or even a river, lake, or ocean of water, that the influence would be hardly noticeable.

Just as how human bodies possessed natural mechanisms to resist against outside virus invaders, the world of Eich would also automatically reject these "large viruses" unless they proved to be "harmless." For instance, in the game's history, when the Elemental Tide reached its highest, the mortal plane became just like an "ocean" in which all the doors to the mortal plane were thrown wide open.

Yet currently, the Elemental Tide was much lower, and the doors were opened by a small crack. You wanted to enter? Sure, but you still needed to obey the dimensional natural laws. Anything overly destructive would be left outside. Powerful existences could only send incarnations, astral projections and such.

Countless techniques were out there to do such a thing, but they foundationally worked the same way. First, construct a physical body that the mortal plane was willing to accept. Then, inject one's willpower, soul, or whatever into it. Based on the different techniques used, the main body would either fall into a deep sleep or act just like normal.

And so, just like how airport security worked in my previous world, a country's airport would treat you differently based on your status. If you were a visitor from a friendly country, the security process would be quite simple. If you were from a not-so-friendly country, perhaps first you would be checked to see if you were a spy, maybe directly marked as a potentially mega-dangerous terrorist together with twenty-four hour surveillance,

or simply refused entry altogether.

The incarnations for the powerful existences in other planes were similar. They would be discriminated against when they entered and limited in how powerful their incarnations were allowed to be. It would be the easiest for the mortal plane's True Gods. After all, the Gods were existences that already understood part of the mortal plane's dimensional laws, making them the equivalent of a country's government workers. Any security clearance was nothing more than a formality, and they could simply descend using their own churches. Nor would their incarnations require extra divine power to maintain.

Since the True Gods counted as VIPs that could skip the security clearance process, of course there were also existences that were highly limited in being allowed to enter the mortal plane.

The harshest conditions of all would be imposed against the demons and devils. After all, they wielded the powers of Chaos and were the mortal enemies of all living beings on the side of Order. And with their track record, they would never be up to any good in the mortal plane.

The descent of some demon or devil lord would cause a huge incident wherever they appeared. Sometimes, it might be a plot that would affect a massive area, perhaps even the entire continent. Typically, all the Gods' churches would take action together and thoroughly begin cleansing all the heretical demon and devil worshippers. If some great demon's incarnation truly succeeded in descending and doing something, it was highly likely that a True God's incarnation would arrive shortly thereafter to handle it.

So, the strongest existences in the lower planes would be refused entry in over ninety-nine percent of all cases, making it quite difficult for them to arrive. They were like illegal immigrants with the "most-hated" status. Not only did they need blood sacrifices and other such evil rituals to open the door for them, they also

needed to pay a constant price to maintain their incarnations in the mortal plane. Sooner or later, they would no longer be able to pay that price and would be forced to obediently return to the Chaos Abyss or Hell. It was just like an illegal immigrant who was caught during a surprise inspection and forced to return home.

By the way, I should mention that not long ago, Elisa the Demon Marchioness finally used up all the power of the beastmen blood sacrifice which allowed her to descend. She could only helplessly cancel her incarnation and return to the Chaos Abyss, while I returned to the awkward situation of having to call her every morning and night...

Cough, it wasn't that easy, however, for the True Gods to send out incarnations. Incarnations would typically contain divine power and shards of their Concept, along with part of their divine soul. The death of an incarnation would be a huge loss to any True God, perhaps causing a large decrease in their divine power and would take an incredible amount of belief, along with time, to recover.

That was why there were even plenty of plots aimed against the True Gods. Since it was impossible for anyone to destroy their main bodies, safe far away in their Divine Kingdoms, the final goal would be to destroy an incarnation. It was also possible for a God to have an incarnation killed off by mere mortals. Either would become a huge historical event. Of course, the former would be a heroic deed, while the latter would become a joke of an event that other undying existences would laugh about for several hundred years.

Although incarnations were limited in power level, there was also no need to be as concerned with an incarnation's death compared to the main body. So, there were both advantages and disadvantages. But from a certain standpoint, an incarnation dying was the equivalent of one's soul experiencing a virtual death, and it was unavoidable that it would weaken any existence who lost that

incarnation.

That was why the Gods would prefer performing a God's Descent upon one of their own believers or priests over sending down an incarnation. Not only would this let them reach power levels that surpassed incarnations, they also wouldn't have to worry about the negative effects of an incarnation's death. However, there were far too few mortals that possessed the ability and body necessary for a God's Descent. Not only that, the death rate of mortals acting as vessels for God's Descent was rather high, which was why incarnations still remained the common choice.

But for a True God, losing an incarnation meant being set back several hundred years in power level, and it was also common for their main body to enter a period of weakness, which might cause their enemies to gang up on them. This was no small matter. Numerous powerful demons and True Gods had all been forever deleted from the ranks of history after losing an incarnation in the mortal plane and then being ambushed by their enemies.

Right now, the Goddess of Wealth was forced into voluntarily self-destructing her own incarnation. This was the best evidence that she had been forced to the very brink and that she no longer had any confidence in winning. She knew that at this rate, she would be defeated in the end and lose her incarnation anyways, which meant she might as well self-destruct and take her opponent with her.

As Beyana was one of the younger Gods, being forced to such a brink by a far older Titan Giant wasn't something that humiliating. Still, she was going to lose a lot of divine power. It was perfectly understandable why she sounded so angry and why she was trying so hard to at least recoup some of her losses.

"...Have a nice trip. You're such a generous person, willing to sacrifice yourself for others. I'll miss you."

I energetically waved my handkerchief and wished Beyana a good

trip. However, all I received was a hostile glare. So, I changed to using the farewell greeting from my hometown and began to sing the legendary hymn used for saying goodbye to heroic warriors.

"Ah, friend, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye! Beyana~ Hurry and self-destruct, I can't take this anymore! Ah, friend, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye! I shall bury you in a tall hillside and plant a pretty flower... I seem to have forgotten the rest of this song. Forget it, it's fine as long as I convey my meaning. May the heroic warrior Beyana rest in peace. No need to have any worries, as I shall help loot your corpse for your items."

The little song I sung was transmitted directly to Beyana through her priest Anlan as I waved ever more energetically. The end result was that I was glared at even more viciously.

Suddenly, Beyana, whose incarnation appeared just like pure gold, bit her teeth with an aggrieved expression and started collapsing like a demolished statue. Countless beams of golden light poured out from her, transforming the entire world into gold.

Boom!

Then, a powerful light blinded everyone, and a deafening boom made everyone's ears stop working.

"Sigh, I thought that the Goddess of Wealth's self-destruction would have something creative about it, like dropping a large amount of money. It would seem that as long as its self-destruction, apart from the visual effects, there's still no foundational difference or creativity."

"Your Highness Roland... The Goddess says she heard everything you said and she's quite angry. She says, 'Why don't you try and come up with some creative method of self-destruction for me.' Also, if you miss a single piece of her God Equipment, she swears she'll make you regret it."

Alright then, since I did promise to bring back her equipment for

her, I might as well start working.

Without wasting any more time I created a thick pair of anti-blinding glasses out of ice, hopped atop Erebella and flew into the sky. I rushed to the scene but suddenly stopped when I got closer and saw what was before me.

A True God's incarnation's self-destruction was basically activating all of the divine power and Divine Concept contained within an incarnation. As an attack, it would far surpass even the attacks used by the True God's main body. From an energy level, it was basically using one's divine power gathered over many years all at once for an explosive attack. When counting how much power of faith and the portion of the divine soul that the True God would lose, its destructive power would be truly fearsome.

Normally speaking, a True God's incarnation's self-destruction would not only be more than enough to kill a similar level incarnation, but it would even be possible to kill a True God's main body. This was also why numerous Gods' incarnations could walk the mortal plane but rarely fought each other. All Gods were capable of self-destructing their incarnations, which would end in a lose-lose scenario for both sides.

However, the maxim about how a True God's incarnation's self-destruction would absolutely kill the opponent was now broken by this opponent.

"...He's still not dead, even like this?"

The Thunder Titan Giant had lost half his body, including his entire right arm and foot. Bones could also be seen in the right side of his face, giving him a frightening appearance. Meanwhile, the remnants of his thunder shield on the ground was perhaps the explanation behind how he had managed to survive.

In that moment, with just a short instant to react, he had transformed all his power of thunder into a physical shield which he used to block the force of the self-destruction to protect his

core.

"False Gods, is that still the only technique you know, even after all these years? If I was in my physical body, such a weak and powerless attack wouldn't even make me bleed."

A True God's incarnation's self-destruction wouldn't be that easy to take. It would probably be impossible for this Titan Giant to recover within any short period of time. But even though he was so seriously injured, he was still laughing loudly, as if he was the true victor.

Perhaps he could indeed be termed the victor as he was able to force a True God to self-destruct—and survived.

Although he was collapsed on the ground, the Thunder Titan Giant's remaining eye was glaring at Mary the Shield Dwarf Goddess. He supported himself with his left hand and tried to stand up, but apparently lost his balance.

Then, he grit his teeth, and the thunder at his right leg transformed into a false limb that resembled sculpted armor. His empty right arm was replaced by jagged thunder, and there was a savage look in his single remaining eye. Even though the right half of his face was nothing but bone, his jagged thunder arm boomed loudly. Despite his condition he still wanted to fight.

Mary paused in surprise for a moment but then lifted her war hammer and unhesitatingly rushed towards him.

A Dwarf Goddess like her would never fear a challenge. Since her opponent hadn't collapsed, this battle between the God-level powers would naturally still continue.

An injured beast would always become more dangerous. With these two powerful presences renewing their battle, I felt that things would turn dangerous for me. If I rushed forward and was scraped by their battle, wouldn't that cause me to directly reincarnate yet again?

"Um, I feel like if I go out there, I'll just die. Shouldn't this count as irresistible outside factors?"

"...The Goddess says that if you're unable to retrieve her Gold Staff of Authority and Seraphim Feather Pen, she'll put a deep freeze upon your Contract Hero account. Then, she'll curse you to become the unluckiest person in the world in all matters related to wealth, and that the curse will persist for a minimum of three years. At such a time, no amount of money on you will last for more than two hours. You'll end up eating in a robbers' den every time you eat at a restaurant, you'll always meet with fake and pirated products every time you buy something, and even going out to buy some groceries will see you meeting three scammers and a dozen thieves."

"...It couldn't possibly be that bad."

"...It's even worse than what I said. Previously, a high-level priest in our church made fake accounts and scammed others, so the Goddess personally cursed him to go bankrupt. On the very same day, his merchant association went bankrupt, and his wife and daughter ran out on him. Then, the only house he had left was smashed to pieces by a meteor from the sky. And even when he became a beggar, other beggars always robbed his money. He only lasted for one week before committing suicide."

Alright then, I was beginning to break out into a cold sweat upon hearing this. Since I had promised Beyana that I would retrieve her equipment, I likely had to do it no matter what the situation was like.

However, before I took any action, a certain voice spoke up.

"...I'm so full! Is this self-destruction? Is this battle? It's so wonderful! So delicious!"

I looked behind me to see the faceless Mars. Even though I couldn't see any expression on him, I could faintly sense that he was staring at the Gods' incarnations and the Titan Giants, as if he

was looking at delicious food.

This newly-born child of war would only be able to grow through battle. The "prematurely-born" him required large amounts of nourishment to grow, and his future path required plenty of actual combat experiences. From a certain standpoint, this battle between the Gods and the Titan Giants was one of the best opportunities for his growth.

For a graveyard demon like him, a God's corpse would naturally be one of the most nutritious meals of all. The self-destruction's power and attention-grabbing boom from earlier helped Mars make a decision on his own—he now had knowledge and desires about his future.

"Battle, this is war! Explosions are war! War is explosions!"

A faint face seemed to suddenly appear on that empty face of his. This face was rather similar to Beyana, who had just exploded herself. I didn't even have the time yet to comment how easy it was for children to go down the wrong path before Mars disappeared right before me.

Right after that, an earthquake shook the entire battlefield, and a large sinkhole suddenly appeared. The pitch-black hole seemed as if some demon from hell was being released.

"...That's Davey and his undead army!"

And from this sudden crevice in the ground, the undead army that had vanished completely rushed forth, charging towards the True Gods and the Titan Giants.

"Mars, the Gods are our allies! Kill those Titan Giants!"

Luckily, I reacted quickly, which helped Mars' undead army target only the Titan Giants.

Yet the two Titan Giants didn't even glance at these "little toys" surrounding them. Only the powerful Gods were worthy of being faced by them. How could they possibly care about these little

things? No mortal or undead army would be able to withstand even the casual flick of their fingers.

Boom!

The death knight rushing at the very forefront self-destructed in an explosion. The explosion's power caused one Titan Giant's foot to go numb, so he frowned.

Boom!

A Bone Dragon biting at his head self-destructed. This explosion's power made his forehead hurt, and the power of ice contained in the explosion also annoyed him.

Boom!

A lich that climbed up onto his knee self-destructed. This Myth-ranked lich's magical explosion made the Titan Giant clutch his knee in pain.

Boom!

An agile Ghoul Lord jumped into the Titan Giant's mouth. Then, the sudden explosion that came from within was from this Myth-ranked Undead Lord's self-destruction, causing several shattered Titan Giant teeth to fly through the air.

Boom! Boom!

Countless undead self-destructed simultaneously on the thunder Titan Giant's single remaining leg. This time, he was no longer able to stand up steady and could only fall to the ground with a tremendous crash.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

When the undead army climbed up like ants onto the Titan Giant's body, the sound of explosions never stopped.

And the most frightening part of all was that the undead didn't decrease in number despite the self-destructions—they continued crawling back out of the crevice. The same lich from earlier that

had just self-destructed on the Titan Giant's knee now grabbed onto the Titan Giant's ear and lit up its own crazed soulfire with yet another explosion.

Boom!

The entire area was filled with the booming sounds of self-destruction. Even the Shield Dwarf Goddess Mary paused in surprise.

"...This is the ability of a graveyard demon to revive the undead? Even if the collective will loses an individual portion, it can be endlessly revived? Roland, you've even created such a monstrosity—do you actually intend to destroy the world?"

"Wahh, Mars is truly a nice and compassionate son. He helped Daddy out of his own volition when he saw that Daddy was worried; I should buy him some presents. Right, I should give him a zeroth birthday party... Harloys, what did you say just now?"

I was so moved that hot tears were flowing out of my eyes. However, the people next to me all silently backed away, as if they viewed me as a dangerous individual, a forbidden plague. Meanwhile, I thought of something and laughed as I talked to the magic sword in my hand.

"Harloys, as Mars' mother, you should remember to prepare a birthday present for him. It's definitely no good to give him only a Happy Birthday song... Ah! Can't you act more maturely, with your age? Now a mother, and you still bite others!? Ah, you're now biting me even harder!"

Chapter 349: Fortunate Brat

It was said that when Beyana self-destructed, divine golden light lit up the entire sky. Not only were the brilliant streaks seen by people in the Forest of Dreams and Nightrain City, but even those in the Mage Country across the sea were able catch the great spectacle.

If it weren't for the fact that Beyana had carefully controlled the radius of her self-destruction, she could have blown up the entire Oak Town together with her incarnation's death.

When the suddenly-evolved Mars displayed his potential, giving what remained of the Thunder Titan Giant actual danger, the Thunder Titan Giant's older brother was unable to simply sit by and watch his younger brother's incarnation perish. After all, the Titan Giants were still sealed in statues, and every bit of strength was valuable.

Yins "The Thinker," who had been holding back all this time, finally went all out. He proceeded to crush a part of Mars' undead army and save the other Titan Giant, Hatley, but when he did so none of the True Gods' incarnations moved to stop him.

If a Titan Giant was forced to the brink, their incarnations, too, were capable of self-destructing themselves. None of the True Gods were confident enough to claim that their incarnations could survive the self-destruction of that of a Titan Giant.

This was also why it was a terrible idea to use numbers to surround and attack a high-level existence's incarnation. Forcing it to the brink and making it self-destruct would end in nothing but losses for all sides—nobody, of course, wanted to have anything to do with such a prickly porcupine... It was like dealing with certain monsters in video games. Nobody would want to challenge a boss monster that was incredibly difficult to fight and wouldn't even give you any money, experience, or special items.

Since the main fighters—the True Gods' incarnations—didn't want to fight this to the end, none of us would be able to do anything to stop the Titan Giants that had decided to make their escape.

Although Mars wanted to continue fighting, he didn't possess the ability to travel at high speeds, so he was unable to catch them.

And so, this battle concluded.

"We've won!" "We've finally survived..." Cheers resounded throughout Oak Town simultaneously with sighs exclaiming how lucky they were to survive. Powerful existences came out one after another, fighting with power that could casually shatter the body of any ordinary adventurer with a single touch. It was only natural for the adventurers to all feel chills run down their collective spines.

For these first-generation "Contract Heroes," today was a day destined to be one they'd never forget. Today's battles would have outstanding impact.

The Titan Giants, True Gods, Undead Emperors, and Undead Calamity. Not only did these mythical existences appear in real life, but they even fought against each other. This had long since surpassed the comprehension of the Contract Heroes.

The adventurers typically did their jobs to make a living or to obtain more resources to reach the next power level. But, today, the Titan Giants and True Gods seemed to step right out of the pages of history, giving them a chance to encounter top-level strength of the world. By now, they all realized that they had gotten involved in a huge incident. This was a revolution, one destined to occur as the generation changed. It was also a great opportunity for the courageous.

"...Perhaps one day we, too, will have the power to accomplish things on this type of battlefield instead of hiding in the corner and praying."

For some things, one would only realize their importance upon coming into contact with them. Only by noticing the difference between them would one be motivated to work harder. Some things weren't actually impossible—it was just that people didn't dare to think about them. But once the fires of ambition ignited in people's minds, it would be near impossible to extinguish them.

This was exactly why the video games in my previous world would put out all sorts of cool and flashy opening videos as their advertisements. Perhaps you wouldn't be able to accomplish what's depicted in them right away, or maybe you might never reach the skill shown in the advertisement. Yet at least you would have hopes and expectations not only towards the game itself but also from what you would obtain from playing it.

"Perhaps many things now are different from before." I did also believe that treading on the brink of life and death and witnessing a battle of such epic proportions would make many adventurers quit the job tomorrow. Still, there would be people who would become ever more passionate. This was a trial given to them by this generation, as well as an opportunity. They could reach the peak with this Contract Hero shortcut as no other method would give them this opportunity—the opportunity to reach the peak with such speed.

"Let's increase the number of Hero Armlets we hand out for the second batch of Contract Heroes. How about 300,000 for all of Eich —no—let's go with 500,000!"

This was my hope as well. After today, the second batch of Contract Heroes would become more popular with the signups. Unless people accepted this contract, they would never be able to even come into contact with such high-level battles.

I didn't need to care about the advertising channels for now. With their actions, the Ayer Faction's True Gods proved their full support for the Contract Heroes system—another reason the Goddess of Wealth chose to self-destruct her incarnation in the

end.

Who stood to lose the most if the two Titan Giants were allowed to destroy Oak Town? While the wood spirits would fail in developing a new territory for the Forest of Dreams, they wouldn't actually have concrete losses. Most of the wood spirits would have been able to retreat, and it was always possible to simply try again. But if this first-ever batch of Contract Heroes met with an insurmountably powerful opponent and died off in droves on their very first major mission, the credibility rating of the entire Contract Heroes system would suffer a huge hit.

While losing people didn't count as much, losing believability in "Justice Points" counted for much more.

Although the first batch of Contract Heroes was drawn to us by the rewards we offered, they also joined us because of the Ayer Faction's strength and credibility. Otherwise, no matter how many treasures we offered, none would be willing to join the crew of a sinking boat.

No idiot could obtain Godhood. Beyana knew these hidden factors full well.

"Failure is fine for the second or third times. Great risks are associated with great rewards, and most people can understand that. However, failure nor large-scale deaths absolutely can't be permitted for the first time. Otherwise, a serious credibility problem will arise." That was why Beyana had secretly made preparations to prevent this first ever large-scale mission from failing. She, along with several other True Gods, had descended with their incarnations. She could have chosen to make her incarnation escape instead of self-destructing, leaving the Titan Giants up to others more powerful than her.

After all, if things developed to a certain extent, it was possible that even Ayer himself would come down and intervene. However, Beyana still chose the action that would bring her the greatest

losses, self-destructing her incarnation.

She didn't choose to protect her incarnation...

Not only did Beyana want this large-scale mission to succeed, but she also hoped for the Contract Heroes to take as few losses as possible. And, on another level, her self-destruction was evidence of the Gods' attitude: "Even I'm willing to self-destruct myself, so what are you mortals afraid of?" From a certain standpoint, her self-destruction would make for excellent propaganda. When even the True Gods were seen as willing to pay the price of losing an incarnation, when even the legendary Titan Giants were forced to retreat, when not a single Contract Hero had perished, the support for the Contract Hero system would rise to unprecedented heights.

From another level, Beyana's losses could be recouped from her allies. From what I knew, Ayer was never stingy. He would perhaps even give her more than what she lost. And her self-destruction not only helped her obtain my friendship but it also made me owe her a favor.

A favor wasn't much? For some people, owing a favor meant nothing to them at all as some people were capable of repaying kindness with evil. But others were more willing to be stabbed by a sword than to owe someone else a favor... Fine then, I admit it! I hated owing favors more than anything as it was quite an unpleasant feeling to look at others and feel like I owed them money. Let's just think of a way to repay this favor as soon as possible.

"...As expected of the Goddess of Wealth. Perhaps she'll even stand to profit from her self-destruction. She probably calculated everything quite clearly from the very start." Actually, Beyana currently jumping up and down in anger in her Divine Kingdom was the best evidence that Roland had thought too much into things. Beyana had merely had a faint feeling that that suffering defeat in this battle would make her lose more in the end, even if she didn't lose her incarnation. But as Roland kept "cheering" her

on, her blood pressure kept increasing, and she ended up self-destructing her incarnation in a fit of rage. Not only that, this self-destruction didn't even kill her opponent, which she found humiliating. She was so furious that she even closed off her Divine Kingdom and refused to see any of her allies that came to console her.

Beyana was never someone who had a kind and forgiving nature, so blaming others when she was angry was quite normal. Now that she thought about it, she even wrote Roland's name down on her list of grudges, looking for an opportunity to take revenge.

Of course, they were still on the same side, so doing something directly to him was off the table. Still, it was more than fine for her to prank Roland and give him a hard time.

The 'Even though I'm rich, buying a single luxury item will bring me misfortune to the point where I can afford nothing but instant noodles in the end' curse. The 'Even though I have a harem, I can only afford a three square meter room, and my harem all ran off in the end' curse.

The 'Even though this lottery ticket is clearly the number that I choose every time, I discovered that I filled in the number wrong the one time it won' curse.

The 'What's living paycheck to paycheck? My paycheck lasts less than three hours, and my wallet will never have more than five copper coins' curse.

The 'Excellent luck with women who will make off with all my money' curse.

"Darn it, I've developed too many poverty curses... just which one should I use on him...?"

But, for certain reasons, no matter which curse Beyana chose, she discovered that she couldn't obtain any payback.

"What? It's actually ineffective? Could his fortune be forever

fixed to be the best...? That's almost impossible—even the Fate God would be unable to do such a thing. Or, based on the natural laws where a weaker curse is unable to override a stronger one, could it be that an even more powerful poverty curse is already upon him? How is this possible!" Even my 'Poor? That's an adjective I'm really jealous of. I'm a girl from an illustrious family who owes 30,000,000 gold coins and can't find anyone to purchase my debt' curse isn't working against him? Just what's going on with his wealth fortune?" Actually, from the very start, all curses related to fate were ineffective against Roland. Perhaps from the very day his System was bound to him, or from the very day he was born as the Child of Fate, he was destined to break all known standards for negative luck. In front of his extreme misfortune, how could these somewhat unlucky poverty curses possibly have any effect on him?

"...I'm truly impressed with how he can persist in living on despite how unfortunate he is." Out of curiosity, Beyana obtained records about Roland's past. When she saw how Roland's country and family were both destroyed, that his first ever girlfriend deceived and stabbed him, that the Holy Light betrayed and stabbed him, that a hero he personally raised fought and stabbed him, and that his disciple he treated as his daughter judged and stabbed him... As she read about the succession of tragedies in Roland's life, even the Goddess Beyana who had the nickname of the "Heartless and Tearless" Goddess ended up crying tears of sympathy.

"He's truly, truly so strong. His life can't even be sufficiently described by the word 'tragedy.' His life is basically like a cutting board with countless knives stuck in it, or a sponge... filled with holes! Roland, you've truly had a tough life." In the future, people also asked the Goddess of Wealth why it was that she only ever made an exception for Roland and gave him a 1% discount on her goods and services, along with many other benefits, when she was renowned as the stingiest Goddess in the entire world. Was it really, as people gossiped, that they were actually lovers? Anyone

that asked discovered to their surprise that this Goddess who "only cared about money" would actually tear up and become quite emotional.

"As long as you can live a pitiful life like his and still smile every day and somehow have fun, I can give you a 1% discount as well."

Of course there were some skeptics who didn't believe this and even requested to try it out. Yet Beyana only had to cast several hundred different poverty curses upon them—without even asking the Love Goddess to add a "Single forever" curse or the God of Victories to add a "Forever almost successful" curse—before they would pathetically crawl towards her, wailing and beg for mercy. Legend had it that if Beyana had been slow by even a second in removing her curses, they would have truly committed suicide.

In fact, after such rumors started spreading, Roland gained the eye-popping nickname of "Envoy of Misfortune"...

Cough, let's get back on topic to the present. No matter what, this battle ended in a victory for Roland's side and would be greatly influential to future events.

And, currently, I didn't have the time to do anything like holding a celebration party as new bothersome things were lying in wait. I was currently apologizing to Little Red while trying my best to resuscitate a gigantic Red Dragon.

The pitiful Molly was now barely breathing after major blood loss... maybe it was that she had been forgotten in a world of ice and snow—a world that was her greatest weakness.

"How about you try some CPR on her... why are you hitting me? Isn't it normal to perform CPR when there are no signs of breathing? Fine, if you don't want to give her CPR, I will—stop hitting me! Even Buddha has times when he gets angry! I'm going to go all out against you crazy women!"

Chapter 350: Military Achievement Emblems

In the newly-born Oak Town, enormous oak trees were growing at a pace discernable to the naked eye. A faint green essence of nature spread through the air, while white specks of light traveled between the trees. Soon, the height of these trees far surpassed that of ordinary ones, and it only took an hour for nothing but skyscraper trees to be seen.

And what came together with the trees was a change in the dimensional natural laws. Any slightly powerful individual could detect something changing in the air—a powerful sensation arose, one that brought about the feeling of being in a different world. Amelia's dimensional will was descending upon this location.

And what came together with the dimensional will was a massive wooden door that suddenly appeared before the oak trees.

This door was a bit more than twenty meters tall and over fifty meters wide. Adorned with wood spirit-style decorations, its wooden doorframe was covered in vines, while the runes, which appeared carved onto it, were actually made of trees and plants. It exuded a simple natural beauty.

In front of this towering door, Samantha was but a tiny pea. Yet she attracted everyone's attention when she placed her hand on the door handle.

Creak!

A gentle push opened the door slowly. Only then did the adventurers discover that it was even brighter on the other side.

Boom.

Wooden feet made the earth tremble with every step. Colossal plant war machines that were only capable of growing in the Forest of Dreams passed through this door, heralding the arrival of

the heaviest artillery in the wood spirits' arsenal in Oak Town. Along with these machines came wood spirit guards who brought with them various strange mechanisms.

Unlike forest fairies from fairy tales, they didn't drive magical carriages—they rode atop mechanical objects, painting a scene that, indeed, seemed to be out of place. A tiny wood spirit would be perched on the seat of a motorcycle, forced to use her tiptoes to drive. Meanwhile, a whopping total of six wood spirits would manage to fit themselves into one sidecar. Watching this, I couldn't help but recall a certain motorcycle show at a certain major country's military parade. Wasn't there some joke about one motorcycle being able to fit a full camp of soldiers...?

Only now could everyone breathe a sigh of relief. These seemingly cute fellows were the true elites of the wood spirits. Their arrival represented that Oak Town had truly become a part of the Forest of Dreams.

And this mismatched style of the wood spirits wasn't limited only to motorcycles—they also carried the newest dwarven rifles and cannons and were equipped with steam valves on their belts. These valves were capable of shooting out hooks attached to claws in under half a second, which would stick into tree bark and allow them to swing between the trees. This was a roaming tool that I especially prepared for them.

Although the newly-born wood spirits race possessed excellent magic talent, especially in nature magic, they had no intentions of rejecting the mechanical. Instead, due to the special relationship I had with them, they were hugely interested in the newest products of magical engineering—and this wasn't mentioning how they assisted me in running Thorn Garden and selling the latest products. They even ordered large amounts of magical engineering products for themselves, and many wood spirits focused on further researching this field in the hope it would become one of the foundational treasures for their species.

What they researched and purchased was based on their physical advantages and shortcomings. Their specialties were quite obvious, and they possessed many excellent qualities which didn't need to be explained. Their shortcomings were that they were very diminutive in size, which induced in them a lack of mobility and melee combat prowess. This made them particularly interested in transportation tools and long-range weapons—not in mechas as they already possessed magical plants and strengthened outer shells.

This wood spirit, who had to use her tiptoes to drive the motorcycle, was the best evidence that normal-sized transportation tools would be quite difficult for them to use. In fact, Samantha had even requested for me to create smaller versions of these tools just for the wood spirits' use. I had hence offered a certain design to her that caused even Samantha to break out into a full smile, a rare sight. But it was only the second day when she had flipped out on me and even sent a full squad to hunt me down—what an unreasonable personality!

"...Which idiot told her that my design originated from baby carriages? I'm definitely not going to forgive her. Hmph, with wood spirits' body shapes, it's quite obvious that large baby carriages are of the perfect size for them. Forget it—even if this design of mine gets rejected, I still have backups."

"Does it even need pointing out? Samantha was just too pure to notice. You bastard; you even put baby toys and bells on top. Don't you know that Samantha is now treating this as the greatest humiliation of her life? You actually dare to even make a backup design plan? Let me guess—is it a baby chair or a baby bed?"

"...Neither—it's a toddler sized scooter! You can ride it with only a single foot! It's perfect for those who are incredibly short. Would you like one for yourself, Harloys?"

"All I need is for you to become a nicer person and allow me to return my normal body size... luckily you didn't say roller skates.

Have you heard that there's a new addictive song going around recently? Let me sing it to you..."

Cough, let's not go off on a tangent anymore. From a certain standpoint, the wood spirit species and I had a very special relationship.

From an outsider's point of view, we were obviously all on the same side. And, to tell the truth, the Three Virtues indeed listened to me.

Currently, Samantha had total control over the entire species, which basically meant that the entire species was on my side. But if you truly looked at the source, the real creator of the wood spirits race was Amelia. My current authority over them came from Amelia delegating her authority to me. If Amelia woke up, and she had any conflicts with me, the wood spirits were likely to listen to their mother, instead...

"Isn't this pretty much just like how, when most children see their parents fighting, they choose to side with their mother that raised them rather than the father who's outside working to make money?"

The silly cat's analogy made me feel mysteriously uncomfortable, but I had to nod in agreement. This was the logic behind the world's working. Although everyone knew in their minds to choose logic over emotion, when it came down to it, people—by far—would choose emotion over logic

"Not only that, the very foundation for why they listen to me is that Amelia told them to listen to me. Especially when you consider that the wood spirits had intelligence and their own wills right from the moment of their birth, and that Amelia's very existence is also the Forest of Dreams that nourishes them. The wood spirits have an astonishingly high level of dependency on Amelia. Perhaps, under Amelia's leadership, the wood spirits will be the single most unified intelligent species in all of history."

I felt that that was quite an acceptable result as I had no ambitions to steal away the wood spirits for myself. However...

"For some reason, I feel uneasy when I think about how Amelia has control over such a powerful species."

"...Don't mention the possibility. I'm also worried that she'll suddenly go insane and have some strange thoughts. In the past, her insane rampages had limits, but if an entire species goes wild together with her... that would be quite the sight."

Alright then. When I considered the insane Plants vs. Zombies along with the fact that Amelia kept climbing the Calamity Rankings, I had a strong feeling that this was all the more dangerous—in fact, it was no different to an insane woman with a nuclear button.

What, you're saying that I match all of the above conditions as well? That I'm also highly dangerous? Humph! I must defend myself! I—I—I... Hmm, why do I feel that these words actually sound quite reasonable?

"...Maybe. At the very least. Just barely. My actions still have limits to them. I should be, at the minimum, someone slightly less dangerous and prone to rampages than Amelia."

Cough, to normalize the conversation, even if I didn't feel safe, there was nothing I could do about it. I could only try to create some sort of "safety" in the future.

Right now, after the wood spirits took full control over Oak Town, the happiest were actually the Contract Heroes. After all their hard work, the time had now come for them to reap the rewards.

An all-out battle had been expected from the very beginning, so the wood spirits gave out abundant Justice Point rewards. Although the main fighting was done by others, in the end, the adventurers had done their jobs. Even though there were no

performance bonuses, the base promised payment was still given to them.

Also, they received a little something I had created.

"Oak Town Divine Miracle Battle, Copper Medal?"

"...I have one as well? All I did was guard the town."

Military achievement medals were also a part of the credibility system I established. In this era where knights were reigned supreme in terms of popularity, nothing signified glory more to a warrior than military accomplishments, accolades, and rewards. Yet the review systems in this world were far too rough. Only nobles would record their glorious past accomplishments on their family emblems.

Even for nobles, only truly amazing deeds—like, for instance, slaying a dragon—would get recorded in the family records and emblem. And this would typically not be accomplished within one's lifetime. Any commoner warrior would only be able to "prove" their accomplishments by telling everyone about them. Unless a commoner was able to reach the level where bards started making embellished stories about your deeds, a warrior's reputation would never even leave his locality.

But now, I was making things much simpler. A small military achievement emblem would be proof that you participated in and contributed to this battle. Even if it didn't prove much, it would still look quite cool to wear—perhaps it would fool a few girls.

"It's nothing more than a piece of battle memorabilia and costs only a few copper coins to make. But it's quite excellent at attracting people and increasing the degree of their loyalty... Once all of them have a bunch of medals on their hands, it won't be easy for them to just toss aside their achievements. From a certain standpoint, this is another type of wealth, but one accumulated through hard work."

Considering that the average intelligence of people in this world wasn't low at all, and that I'd witnessed plenty of fake and pirated products with high degrees of similarity, I figured that just like my previous world, counterfeiters would soon be appearing. But since my military medals all had serial numbers and recorded all the names of the individuals they were awarded to, counterfeiting these would be quite difficult.

I wore a medal as well, although mine was golden. For this first ever major battle, I had created three types of achievement medals: bronze, silver, and gold. The gold-ranked medals for each battle would forever be handed out in an amount less than ten. And since I felt that I indeed helped out in this battle more than any other mortal, I took a gold medal for myself.

Upon hearing that the Goddess of Wealth shut herself in her Divine Kingdom after her incarnation's self-destruction, and considering how she viewed money as more important than her life, I had Mary give Beyana a 24 karat pure gold special, custom-made medal along with her two pieces of God Equipment for me, a sign of my friendship. I even made sure it would glow in the dark so that she could use it as a light bulb at night even if she didn't want to wear it. It would shine even from one kilometer away, which would make one appear really rich.

But several days later, one dawn, I discovered a meteor above. Before I even had the time to make a wish, I discovered that it was aimed directly at my head. If it weren't for the fact that I reacted fast enough, my head would have been crushed.

"...Hey—hey—hey, isn't this just too rude? Even if she didn't want it, she didn't have to do this to me."

And when I discovered that this almost-fatal "weapon" was actually that custom-made military medal, of course I was enraged.

"...Really? I don't think that Beyana would be that type of person, let me take a look..."

The silly cat was skeptical as she snatched the military medal and read the words engraved on its back out loud.

"I give my gratitude to the venerated Goddess of Wealth for her self-destruction. She is a classy Goddess, a pure Goddess—one who has risen above vulgar interests. When she self-destructed herself, she had let forth a blinding flash that illuminated the path towards to future for every one of us. Her gravestone is the stirring symbol for our progress. To remember her glory and carve her greatness in stone, I shall erect a great sculpture. It shall symbolize the illustrious moment of her self-destruction. --Roland Mist. ... Roland, I'm truly astonished she didn't personally descend again to kill you herself."

Actually, if it weren't for the fact that others were currently blocking Beyana's Divine Kingdom, perhaps she truly would have done so! Beyana was currently busy shouting "Let me go, I'm definitely going to kill him!"

"What? I'm just following the clichés and making top-level equipment seem cooler. In this day and age, without some commentary etched onto Myth-level equipment, it won't seem cool no matter how good its stats are."

"...Um, considering that Goddess's past record, I think that you should give your wallet over to me for safekeeping. At the very least, you can't let my stomach suffer together with yours. It's wrong to abuse cats."

"Only when your personal benefits are involved will you recall that you're a pet. How convenient."

Although I was complaining, it did seem like I really antagonized —accidentally, of course—the Goddess of Wealth this time around. When considering that I usually wasn't lucky to begin with when it came to my money, I directly handed over my wallet to Harloys, but...

"Ahh, where's my money?"

"...Were you robbed? Has she cursed you that quickly?"

"...Beyana! She actually took action so swiftly!"

[...I have two pieces of news for you, one good and one bad. The good news is that you weren't cursed. The bad news is that you don't need a curse, because your luck stat is already zero. You should stop blaming others for your bad luck—it's completely your own misfortune. Still, you should feel lucky that, with your luck stat, you don't have to worry about it ever getting any worse. Are you sure you don't want to change your job class to spearman? A curse of giving you a luck rating of E is probably more like a luck increase blessing to you.]

Fine, I directly ignored my System's comments. Since the System promised that I wasn't cursed, I felt slightly reassured. The rather "vindictive" Goddess of Wealth was indeed someone who gave me a headache.

"Harloys, do you have any money? Otherwise, we're going to be sleeping on the streets."

"...Have you ever seen any house cat that carries around money? How about you pawn that new gold medal of yours for some cash?"

"...I'll consider it. However, I have an even better idea. You can transform into a magic sword, right? I'll pretend to be someone lucky enough to have picked up a magic weapon on the battlefield—wicked merchants will automatically come to me. Then, I'll sell you off, and you can return to me by yourself. Repeat a couple times, and that'll make enough money for our room and board. Hey, don't run! I'll even give you one-third... fine! Half! Half!"

In the end, my plan to punish the wicked merchants failed due to the uncooperative nature of the "product" I wanted to sell. At least the wood spirits took us in, saving us from the pitiful fate of having to sleep out on the streets.

The True Gods had all returned to their Divine Kingdoms,

tossing Ah Gen to me to take care of. As for Auntie Mary and the gay Wood Elf God, the former had zero interest in military achievement medals and instead made me give her a large batch of high-quality alcohol. As for the latter... I wanted nothing more than to hide from this gay God that I couldn't win against in a fight as he kept sending seductive glances towards me. Why would I go contact him of my own volition?

With Little Red's assistance, I had finished the preparations for the first part of my evolution Quest. The blood let out before us was more than enough to fill a swimming pool.

"How strange. Little Red was so quick to agree to donate some of her blood. Recently, Little Red's been acting a little strange... Could it be that—"

"Spring's arrived, a time when every species becomes more active. It's now the season for animals to go into heat."

Harloys casually added more to the mess on my plate, but how could I possibly be distracted by her red herring? I kept thinking about it over and over before I finally came to a realization and stated my conclusion.

"...Could it be that she picked up something dirty off the ground and ate it? She's so old already—how could she possibly do something so foolish?"

Chapter 351: Interesting

"I would like to thank everyone for their hard work. I hope our future cooperation will be ever more successful."

After taking a glance at the thick bundle of papers she was holding, the young girl atop the stage tilted her head, thought for a moment, then nodded before tossing her speech papers to the wind. She then continued speaking off script.

"...Let's not waste everyone's time. Again, many thanks to everyone for their support. Cheers!"

"Ohhh, everyone's worked hard!"

"Lolis—I mean wood spirits—banzai! The cutest one of them all, little Samantha, is truly amazing. She's my angel."

"Who's your angel? Miss Samantha belongs to everyone!"

At the celebration party, the cold-faced Samantha started giving a speech before deciding to discard the long speech when she received a fervent round of applause from the adventurers. However, the way they welcomed her seemed rather strange...

"Why does it feel more and more like she's a celebrity idol instead of the leader of her species?"

"Sister, you were the one who asked me to write a speech—you even said it was very important! You asked me to put as much effort as I could into writing it... Is this how you treat the product I came up with after pulling two all-nighters..."

Alright, let's ignore Rosa, who had dark circles under her eyes and was glaring at her older sister, as if she held a terrible grudge against her. The thirty-page speech that she spent all night working on was discarded with a single comment of "Let's not waste everyone's time." It was likely that a sibling conflict would take place later tonight. Yet what was with those strange supporters behind her shouting as well?

"Rosa's dark form is cute as well!"

"As expected, pink on the outside, black on the inside!"

Cough, it would seem that as the wood spirits became more like humans, the number of strange individuals attracted by them would keep increasing as well.

From some unknown point in time, the wood spirits had started enjoying an abnormally high popularity. Now plenty of strange adventuring teams existed out there similar to the one Beyana had created; in fact, they could now be said to be quite common.

Of course, there were also some wicked individuals with unspeakable intentions. But with the plants watching over, they were caught before they could even put their plots into action. It was unknown whether they would be punished by thorns, roots, or something else.

Unlike most ordinary wood spirits who were very easy to approach, Samantha was typically cold-faced and never spoke a single unnecessary word. If she could answer with one word, she would never use two. And, most of the time she spoke, it was to scold. She almost never smiled. Yet it was, for some strange reason, this very way she acted that made her astonishingly popular. In fact, she had the largest fan club out of all the wood spirits... Should I be commenting here that no matter what world I was in, there would be plenty of gentlemen? This type of loli who was short, soft, and seemingly easy to push down, with a perpetual icy expression and a venomous tongue actually became the most popular of the wood spirits.

"Little Samantha worked hard as well."

As I looked at Little Red energetically giving Samantha a bear hug, and seeing that Samantha was struggling yet unable to escape the ridiculously strong Dragon lady's embrace, pleading with her eyes for me to help her, I didn't know what to say.

When I heard that the leader of the "Wood Spirits Fan Club" was Little Red, I wasn't surprised in the least. I could only sigh. This former "fake loli" was probably feeling her motherly instincts overly flow again.

I must say, sometimes one's outer appearance was truly important. For instance, my undead armies. Even though they ended up saving Sulfur Mountain City—which helped to greatly improved their relationship with the living residents—there was still a sense of distance between them. It could only be said that the living and the undead there were neighbors with relatively good affinity.

Meanwhile, the wood spirits only needed to come out and wave their hands for a group of adventurers to follow after them like loyal dogs. In the future, the "Wood Spirits Fan Club" membership would exceed 100,000 members, and the adventurers even started organizing personal guard groups to act as the wood spirits' free workers. I have no idea what I should even say.

And when Samantha lifted a trophy in celebration of our victory, the gentlemen started encouraging her to sing a song to liven up the atmosphere. I felt greatly relieved, and proceeded to enjoy a luxurious feast that I haven't had in a really long time.

Last night, I stayed the night over at Samantha's place. While the wood spirits didn't treat me poorly, the problem was that all they ate was vegetables and fruit. Naturally, I was unable to refuse their friendly service, and I was unwilling to spend my hard-earned Justice Points on chicken or pork. And so, I could only make do with their diet. Unfortunately, their food was all-natural, with zero seasonings or additives whatsoever. While it was adequate to fill my stomach, the flavor... to quote my silly cat, "I'd rather eat a rat than any more of this grass. At least rats have some flavor to them."

"It would seem that I need to think of some idea to earn some gold coins for myself."

I was quite curious about just who had managed to secretly steal my money. Actually, the money I had lost from my wallet wasn't much—just two or three hundred gold coins. The only annoying part was that some of my personal items had also disappeared from my wallet.

"...Is it that you never carry much money since you always end up losing it?"

"No, I just think it's too bothersome to carry a lot of money. Things will get much better after the Goddess of Wealth opens up her 'banking service.'"

Yep, while "banks" already existed in this world, they were more like safety deposit boxes rather than financial institutes. You would only be able to retrieve your money at the exact place you stored it at. You also needed to pay a fee at regular intervals; otherwise, the bank would claim whatever was stored within.

Carry money on you? Dimensional storage equipment was few and far between—not to mention expensive—and there would be limitations to both storage space and weight. It wasn't even enough to store backup equipment, much less gold coins.

Those heroes from legends who spent several thousand gold coins at once would need to have tremendous strength as well. This was since carrying several thousand gold coins meant carrying several dozen kilograms. No ordinary person would be able to carry ten thousand gold coins. It would be impossible to casually pay over one hundred thousand gold coins unless you had a carriage filled with coins following after you.

Of course, paper money was barely used and remained largely unsuccessful. Merchant associations and mercenary guilds ended up taking on the roles of "banking services" in this world. However, not only would you only be able to do business at one place, it was both highly inconvenient and unreliable.

The members of a mercenary guild would be mercenaries,

untrustworthy to begin with. Merchant associations forever held with them the danger of bankruptcy. No matter how well-off they were, any merchant association that was rich but without its own private money was akin to an ATM filled with free cash in the eyes of local domain lords. It was simple and common enough for a domain lord to use some random passable excuse to drive a merchant association bankrupt in a single night.

So the end result was that due to too many failures with previous systems, precious metals and magic metals were forever the main currency in this world. After all, these metals could be used to forge weapons and equipment and perform research on alchemy and magic. Metals were the most precious consumables.

As for the new "banking service" that Beyana was going to offer, it was basically solidifying Justice Points as a new type of currency. It would work like this: a person would be able to exchange precious metals for Justice Points, and, at certain locations, exchange Justice Points for precious metals.

In order to avoid people using large amounts of gold coins to exchange for Justice Points—thereby causing inflation in our system—Justice Points obtained using metals could only be used as a simple currency, and could not be used to exchange for special items. Although this sounded rather complex, it was actually quite simple: it was the appearance of a true universal equivalent product.

The Justice Points obtained using money were also called "Wealth Points," yet that wouldn't affect their fundamental nature. And since the Gods were guaranteeing the authenticity of this system, it seemed that the entire world was actually willing to accept it. If Beyana succeeded, perhaps Wealth Points would truly be able to replace clunky metal coins and become the universal currency of this world.

This wasn't any wild or innovative concept. However, since this was a feudal generation, nobody had been able to accomplish it.

Most nobles viewed their own domains as their personal property, and they were used to collecting their own taxes and forcibly conscripting their people. Even though there was the occasional open-minded, reformist noble, wars and changes in royal authority often occurred. This forced even these few nobles to concentrate all their wealth on the endless cycle of warfare instead. After all, if you weren't even able to protect your life, who cared about ripping up a contract agreement or two?

Since nobles, royals, and merchants destroyed the credibility of any paper-money system, it was only natural for most people to not trust paper money in the end. Since Justice Points were gradually becoming accepted by everyone, Beyana wouldn't miss this excellent opportunity for anything.

Using divine authority to guarantee a new currency had never been tried before, which meant the future was unpredictable. But as long as this succeeded... even if it only succeeded by half, it would mean a great increase in the power level of the Divine Concept of Wealth. For example, Finance, Futures, Loans, and similar financial industries would develop as Concepts under Wealth. By that time, it was likely that many things would change.

"...Perhaps the first God from the Ayer Faction who becomes a Main God won't actually be the God of Fate or the Moonlight Goddess as most people expect. I'm betting on the originally weaker Goddess of Wealth."

Of course, such significant societal changes wouldn't happen overnight. No country would be willing to watch a more widely used currency become more popular than their national currency. No matter how successful Beyana became in the end, this path was destined to be filled with thorns.

Back in the present, when the Contract Heroes discovered that their Justice Points could be exchanged for actual gold and silver in addition to all those treasures, they were quite excited and felt that

they had made the right choice in joining this system.

Most people didn't think about the potential impacts of these changes. They were simply delighted at obtaining concrete benefits. Once they discovered that their own lives would be changed by certain things, they would only be able to passively accept. But some people had already seen through many matters and even viewed this as an opportunity.

"Your Highness Roland, could I speak with you in private?"

A certain ridiculously handsome magic knight contacted me. This time, his handsome face appeared far more nervous than in our previous meeting, causing me to ponder on a few things.

Actually, since the wood spirits' primary objective had been leaked by a spy, I had suspected that there was a traitor among the highest ranked adventurers. Since Kaise was the only "outsider" directly allowed to enter the wood spirits' core command centers, he was naturally the prime suspect.

His subordinates were the ones who had helped discover the bronze-ranked undead mage spy. This actually made Kaise seem all the more suspicious in my eyes, as it was a common tactic to sacrifice a pawn to protect the king. Kaise was treated to twenty-four seven plant surveillance at my orders.

Only when the real spy Molly jumped out near the battle's end did that finally clear my suspicions on Kaise. Since Kaise was the highest-ranked leader of the adventurers, he naturally received a silver military achievement emblem for his contributions.

But to be honest, I never expected him to come and contact me after the battle was over.

After all, my identity was now exposed. It was well known to powerful individuals that the "Undying Roland" on the Calamity Rankings was also the Undead Emperor Yongye who brought with him death and darkness. The high-level adventurers with

knowledge of my real identity had all acted quite restrained over the past few days whenever they saw me. Not only would they not come to chat with me, they would all sit up properly whenever I looked over, with pale expressions and sweat dripping down their foreheads, as if I were a man-eating tiger.

Even the novice adventurers, who didn't really know who I was, would become rather reserved when noticing the gold military achievement emblem on my chest. The smarter ones among the novices recalled that there was a high-ranked Calamity Rankings individual who had acted to protect Oak Town in the battle, so they also knew just how to act around this "gold military achievement emblem person."

But still, I didn't really enjoy this type of atmosphere. Recently, I was feeling incredibly bored. Even though I didn't pay any attention whatsoever to my image and stuffed my face at this celebration party feast, nobody had said a word about my ill manners. But this young fellow had actually come to speak to me of his own volition, which made me rather interested in him.

"I would like to talk to you about cooperating..."

Obviously, some things weren't suitable for discussing in public. We went to an empty room, and had a good chat. The end result was that we both discovered that we could agree on mutual goals, so we ended up signing a few contracts that weren't suitable for seeing the light of day.

"Alright then, it's time for me to say goodbye, Your Highness. I look forward to meeting you again in the Bardi Empire's capital."

Kaise Elowen, the "Black Guardian" and leader of the Westwood Guardian mercenary group, left in satisfaction. Although we didn't have the most joyous meeting the first time we met, perhaps we would have more opportunities to work together in the future.

"This Kaise fellow is no normal individual. I feel he's going to become a great person in the future. Oh, right, I should check the

game history whether he appears in it or not..."

There were far too many stories about legends, heroes, epics, the mystical, and so on. Just recording all their names alone would make a book thicker than a dictionary. Often times, when hearing the name of some great hero or villain who was quite well known and powerful, the game history might have nothing more than their name. Nor was it possible for me to remember every single name in the game's history. But it would simply take a few minutes of my time for me to check if a person's name appeared in my game history walkthrough.

[Kaise Elowen, page 367, line 7. By the way, he's quite an interesting fellow.]

In a way, the moment my System spoke up, I figured that something was going on. And so, I speedily flipped to that page and looked at what was written there. And then, I immediately understood.

"Kaise Elowen... he truly is an interesting person."

******

Red blood filled an entire pool. The strange part was, however, that although this was all obviously so bloody, there was no nauseous stench whatsoever.

This was the blood of Immemorial Red Dragons, something incredibly difficult to obtain no matter how much money you paid. But the moment I sunk myself into the pool of blood, my body's sensory system went crazy, with numbness, soreness, swelling, and all sorts of sensations attacking me together. I itched so much all over that I wanted to cut off my own skin, but it only took a moment for me to lose all senses entirely.

[Sensory deprivation service, at a charge of 10—no—100 Justice Points.]

"...You're taking advantage of me when I'm down! Can't you be at

least a little nicer!"

[In that case, should I cancel this service and refund your Justice Points? I shall do it in three, two...]

"...You win."

Everything went silent again. Since I needed to soak myself in this pool of blood for the time being, I decided to focus on the harvest I had received, which I had placed in my Frigidwinter Earth. From a certain standpoint, as a victor who successfully "looted corpses," I gained much from this battle. However, turning my harvest into concrete benefits wasn't something nearly so easy.

I had enough of only being able to watch from the sidelines. It was quite clear what I needed to do.

"I need to get stronger. Fast."

Chapter 352: Two Undead Emperors

Eich's fundamental units were the four elements of wind, fire, water, and earth, not molecules and atoms like my previous world. It was obvious that this world wasn't a scientific one.

But some things remained the same. Intelligent species liked to research the foundational nature and workings of the world—this was common to all intelligent species, no matter how different they were. If science on Earth could be called humanity's search for knowledge about Earth and nature, then magic was how mages searched for knowledge about Eich's workings and reason.

Since the four elements were the basic units that made up this world, no matter how advanced magic civilization was, everything was forever based on elemental magic. This was just like how the technology in my previous world had advanced to the extent of traveling to the moon while physics had reached the particle level. It just so happened that these two fields' theories and research results even complemented each other, helping both to progress. The most famous one among them would be the Theory of Relativity. It laid the foundation for how humans understood space and gravity and even allowed them to explore space. Much of this originated from the analysis of the fundamental particles that made up the universe.

The seekers of truth in this world were the same. They would dare to hypothesize and carefully search for proof while gradually analyzing the nature of the world of Eich. This was the only thing that all mages had in common. Sometimes, the understanding of something minute, which seemed only a useless theory, might actually be the mainspring of a huge leap forward in technology or magic.

Perhaps nobody would expect that in this sudden battle that had ended so quickly, the person who benefited the greatest wasn't actually Roland who was currently taking a bath in dragon's blood,

nor was it the Goddess of Wealth, who was both in pain and delight as her believers and faith had greatly increased with the expansion of Wealth Points yet her divine soul had suffered from her incarnation's self-destruction. Instead, the greatest beneficiary was actually someone on the losing side of that battle: Zero.

In the core of the Ice Plane, there was a place tucked within numerous snowy mountains which went by the name of Amber Palace in the undead Tark Republic's language.

This ancient palace of snow and ice was decorated in a "historical" style. Unlike Aso who was born a slave, Zero was from a later generation, one where the Tark Republic was at its peak. All the decorations and spacing had clear geometrical patterns, while divine beasts were etched onto the door's knockers. A school of ice fish frolicked in the crystal waves of an icy river, seeming almost alive. These were all remnants from that ancient generation.

In a flower garden, ice maids were unhurriedly moving about, serving guests similarly made of ice. Musicians were giving performances. The normal sounds of activity and music made it seem that everything was still going on as normal in the Amber Palace. But in the empty main hall of this palace forgotten to history, there was a lonely throne, upon which the palace's master was hibernating. Her long, ceremonial clothing reached all the way to the steps.

Zero was currently in a deep sleep. The only thing different from her projection's appearance was that there was a tiny golden crown resting on her head.

However, she seemed to be not doing so well right now. The left side of her physical body was emanating chilling mist and frost, while the right half of her body was on fire. Running down her middle was an invisible line that seemed to separate her into two halves that didn't affect each other.

This ancient Undead Emperor slept here as she always did for the

past several thousand years. Only now, one side of her throne was filled with icicles, while the other half was beginning to melt, a sign certain changes were occurring.

In this world, the concept of time was meaningless—it practically stood still. It was only after an unknown length of time that a light sigh sounded in the empty hall, amid the forever gray skies and the perpetual snow and ice.

"...As expected, there's only that possibility... I never expected that a junior would end up teaching me a lesson... Is this one of the fundamental natural laws of the world?"

She was asking herself, and there was no need for her to answer out loud. At Zero's level, her knowledge alone was capable of changing her world.

"...Energy... is always conserved equally?"

For the master of the Ice Plane, words were power, and her understanding was reality. The moment she spoke, the entire plane lit up in a brilliant, golden light, the source of which was her throne. Everywhere the light touched was changed.

Observation meant the confirmation of existence. Under the Undead Emperor's observation, her entire plane was changed, as if an invisible brush was applying color to her world.

The snow-white castle walls of ice were colored with gray, as if they had now experienced the passing eons of history. The ice maids that appeared like dolls now had colors like the living. Apart from their still crystal clear eyes, it was impossible to tell them apart from the living.

The ice flowers in the garden were colored with the colors of the rainbow, while the ice fish jumping in the waves finally dived back into the water. The wheels of time that had stopped for several thousand years in the Ice Plane finally started turning again.

Around the Amber Palace, the snow mountains transformed into

green mountains, while the frozen earth had now returned to the earth's natural brown color. This frozen amber transformed into a gem amongst the mountains.

"...Is this the feeling of breathing? This is a heartbeat?"

The greatest change was in Zero herself. Her clear skin now had the natural color of white skin while red blood flowed underneath. Her ethereal ceremonial clothing transformed into true silk.

Thump

Thump

Thump

Her heartbeat that had stopped for tens of thousands of years had revived. Emotions of delight and nervousness suffused her blood. This mysterious change happened to Zero as her accumulated experience was added on to by knowledge she had gained from another world, as if she was a stone that had achieved enlightenment. Perhaps Zero was still an Undead Emperor, but the current her was no longer living or undead. She was no longer the same as her past self.

"Zero? No, from today onwards, my new name shall be 'Conservation.'"

Only the similarly ancient Senators of the Tark Republic knew that it was "Zero's" personal habit to use her greatest field of achievement as her name, abandoning her original name to history.

"Ice River," "Snow Stream," "Hibernation Freeze," "Under the Ice" and "Zero" were the five previous names of Zero, each representing a stage of her power. And "Zero" was the name she had used by far the longest. And today, she had changed her name yet again.

But the incomprehensible part was that the scene of her left half being icy and the right half burning up remained. Her soft skin had a clear line drawn down the middle, with the skin on her left white

and clear, and the skin on the right bright red. Her hair on the left was a shade of silvery white, while her hair on the right was a shade of scarlet, akin to a burning fire. At her power level, it would be quite easy for her to change her physical appearance as she pleased, but she decided to maintain this unique characteristic.

"This... I'll save this as a reminder, a memory."

But suddenly, Conservation paused—she had a thought that interrupted her delight. She recalled the astral projection that she had lost, which was most likely being analyzed by Roland at the moment. If she was capable of obtaining this much information from him which greatly improved her own understanding and power level, then it was also completely possible for Roland to completely analyze her astral projection and obtain similar information.

"I doubt it's possible... it's only an astral projection. Without a deep understanding of the concept of heat, it won't be possible..."

But against all her expectations, in another small world, a similar brush was adding color. White seas of ice were being painted blue, while the pale sunlight was now turning a shade of scarlet. The wolves roaming around the plains were now a grassy green.

As Roland's physical body sunk into a deep slumber, his will descended upon his world as he changed it as he pleased.

And the vessel which acted as the host for his will was Conservation's lost astral projection, who was currently working hard at adding color to Frigidwinter Earth.

"No wonder this evolution was ranked higher than the dragon's blood evolution. This time, I've truly picked up an excellent treasure. I obtained the key that I had lacked the most."

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From a certain standpoint, undead mages and mages didn't have any foundational differences. Unlike warlocks who were able to

use magic from birth due to their bloodlines, undead mages and mages were all scholars who pursued the truth and were skilled at transforming knowledge and theory into actual power.

If you had to look for differences, it would mostly be that undead mages typically had very few moral limits. Not only would undead mages not hesitate to break normal taboos, they did not fear danger. More importantly, undead mages typically researched the area of "life" itself.

"How do body parts work? Why is it that without this organ, a person can't move? What if I add this part—will he be able to move again? Also... just what exactly is a soul!?"

As for the details, since time was limited while knowledge was limitless, the undead mages' research naturally created many different research factions—this was similar to how researching a subject to a certain extent would turn into researching about a specific area in that subject.

There was no research that was considered superior or inferior, just as how those who researched top-level technologies in my original world didn't actually make much more money than a top-level physicist. Undead mages who focused on researching Undead Calamity and other forbidden spells might not even be able to defeat a flesh and blood living alchemist who specialized in creating Abominations. If there had to be a way of seeing who was superior, then you could only measure them by how far each person had gone down their respective paths, which was why there were ranked power levels like Myth and SemiGod.

Since undead mages were mages as well, they, too, had to reach the rank of SemiGod by walking down the same path of ordinary mages in producing research results. If one hoped to bring about research results as an undead mage, one would need to become a top-level expert in their field.

Perhaps due to the mortal plane's own unfriendliness towards

undead, it was more difficult for the undead to advance in power level than any other species. A normal SemiGod mage's equivalent would be a Myth-ranked undead, as Myth-ranked undead were already the foremost experts in their research fields. As for the SemiGod Undead Emperors, they weren't as simple as existences who were merely the foremost experts in their field. It could even be said that they created domains where only they reigned supreme, possessing power over some unclaimed concept which nobody else possessed. This was how they reached the level of being existences that the mortal plane wouldn't recognize, yet they still existed as enemies of the mortal plane.

This was also why even though Undead Emperors were only SemiGod in power level, but still obtained the same exiled status as the other Evil Gods and Gods from other dimensional planes. From a certain standpoint, the Undead Emperors had indeed walked down too far in a taboo field, dangerously touching the brink.

No matter how far an Undead Emperor traveled down their path, it all started with a basic research question. My basic research question could be considered "The quality of the soul," while the secrets I obtained from that astral projection told me that "Zero's" research question was "the temperature of life."

"Why is the weight of the soul 21 grams?"

"Why is it that the great majority of mammalian lifeforms and birds have a constant, set body temperature of 37 degrees Celsius?"

From a certain standpoint, these two questions were rather similar. They both appeared quite simple and it appeared easy to answer. But if you really tried to answer them and chased the reason down to the very foundation, you would touch on the innermost secrets of this world: the very essence of a soul, and the secrets of life.

Yep, from the very start, undead mages that researched topics like corpse zombie construction or Ice Dragon strengthening were

all idiots attracted by the illusion of power but went down the wrong path. When taking the four elements to the extreme, it would return to the basic foundations of what the elements were, which was why the Frigid Nightmares' foundational magic and simple yet powerful forbidden spells existed. Undead magic started out from researching the living and the dead, and the final, highest-level topics of all would be the same as the very beginning source: souls and life.

The reason I was able to achieve so much in my knowledge about souls, apart from my own stubbornness and knowledge gained from two separate worlds, was that my soul refused to enter the Cycle of Reincarnation like everyone else. No normal path would carry one to the level of an unstoppable Undead Emperor. Apart from 99% hard work, 1% talent was absolutely required.

Although it sounded rather depressing, Undead Emperors were at a realm no normal path would lead to, and it was impossible for anyone to achieve it no matter how hard they worked, unless they were an ultra-rare genius among geniuses.

For instance, if it wasn't for the fact that I had experience tempering my soul in the Cycle of Reincarnation, personally witnessing the nature of souls in the Cycle, personally singing and showering in the River Styx, and repeatedly patching up my injured soul, it wouldn't have been possible for me to reach the level of an Undead Emperor.

As long as there was enough population, and the environment was suitable enough to foster a genius, these 0.00000001% of geniuses— perhaps I should call them heaven-favored geniuses or miracle talents—would end up appearing. Not only did they need talent, they would also need to temper their talent to the very utmost, to the point where their talent separated them from everyone else. Once-in-a-lifetime luck as well as working hard for centuries were both necessaries, so of course there were incredibly few that could become Undead Emperors. The fact that "no normal

path" could be taken meant that this path was far too difficult. Theoretically speaking, no Undead Emperor was younger than two thousand years old ...

Exceptions? You're mentioning how I reached this level despite being only three hundred something years old? In a way, I had my System to thank for this. Without her assistance and the cheat-like level of growth, I couldn't possibly have accumulated so much in this comparatively short period of time. Also, my largest cheat of all was that I had knowledge from two completely different worlds. In any field of research, looking at things from a different angle might end up with a completely different result, and coming up with revolutionary ways of thinking was the most difficult. Many geniuses with an extraordinary amount of talent were stuck in some area where they lacked insight and realization... I definitely wasn't referring to the silly cat, as her problem was far different from most Myth-ranked undead.

Cough—cough—getting back on topic, from a certain standpoint, "Zero" was doubtlessly one such incredibly rare genius among geniuses. She must have spent countless years to reach her current level, and her age... Fine, just as how I decided not to pursue Harloys and Little Red's real ages, I decided to be a gentleman and not think about how her age would be calculated in the tens of thousands of years as the basic unit . Yep, it definitely wasn't because I was worried that if I thought too much about this topic, my thoughts would be leaked to her through our soul connection, causing that silly cat to bite my head. Nor was it because recently I was so poor that I needed the silly cat's charity so that I wouldn't starve... A pet cat like her actually had a secret gold hoard stashed away! Can you believe it!?

Cough, once again, trying to get on topic, "Zero" was a ghost, and her natural talent ability was to rob any living she touched of their heat. This wasn't a rare talent at all, nor was she a special high-ranked undead. Ghosts were limited in both growth potential and

combat strength. But, what was slightly different about her was that she was incredibly sensitive to heat stealing. While other ghosts simply robbed as much heat as they could upon contact, she was able to finely determine just how much heat she robbed down to the very specific units, giving her the ability to play all sorts of tricks based on precise calculations.

Perhaps this talent of hers wasn't much practical use in combat, but her precise control over energy vastly helped her in the area of negative energy research, allowing her to reach the peak. And what truly helped her enter the "nearly unreachable" status of an Undead Emperor were her research results in the topic of "The effect of energy on the living."

Her natural talent made it easy for her to discern every change in energy. She was capable of observing the changes to a living individual with great precision—the slightest modification in temperature would not be missed. In fact, one of her research fields—unique to her alone—was "negative energy temperature" undead creatures, which were capable of producing negative energy fields. With her unique talent, she needed only a single glance to determine a living being or undead's power level. Her negative energy research was top-level amongst all the Undead Emperors, and her undead armies constituted a true perpetual motion machine and source of negative energy, making them fearsome existences in any battle of attrition.

Ever since she had started viewing energy as one of the sources of life for living creatures, she had gained the ability to send out incarnations of self with a portion of her power. The truly frightening part about Zero was her perfect control over energy.

However, that was where she had reached her limit. She only knew the effects of energy on living creatures and the undead, but she was unable to comprehend the effect of energy on this entire world. This wasn't because she was foolish or overly traditional. It was because undead mages forever focused only on souls and the

living and were uninterested in the mechanical or the environment. And if you abandoned researching about energy in other areas, how would you possibly be able to obtain the overarching truth about energy? It just so happened that this magical world's research results arrived from "I saw it, so it existed"—obviously, such an attitude made obtaining the truth incredibly difficult.

Perhaps someone taught it to her in the past, or perhaps she obtained esoteric knowledge from some texts. However, any Undead Emperor would have an understanding of the world similar to how it really worked. Undead Emperors were even capable of sending out incarnations to influence the mortal plane, so modifying their own world was even easier.

Yet an existence at a level equal to hers had used a real world of his own and an inexplicable method beyond her understanding, giving her a vicious slap in the face. One that had woken her up.

"So energy is always conserved. Energy can be transmitted from the sun and moon to trees and plants, and from trees and plants to humans, and from humans' corpses back to nature. Perhaps our world isn't isolated after all. Negative energy can be transmitted as well. Perhaps the very end of the negative energy which powers all undead is the positive energy that powers all life."

Once she updated her own concept of the world, her world finally progressed. The transference of negative and positive energy broke the boundaries between life and death. Fortunately, the Undead Emperor was the highest level achievable by any undead. Otherwise, a brand new title and level might be needed just for her.

From a certain standpoint, this was a research result she had obtained together with Roland. This was the combined crystallized wisdom of two Undead Emperors. While Zero evolved into "Conservation" because of this, Roland, too, obtained part of her research results from her astral projection and, in fact, ended up

benefiting much more than her by adding on to his theories through another method.

Originally, Roland should have been incapable of analyzing Zero's astral projection. However, Aso just happened to give him large amounts of undead knowledge as a parting gift. While Aso's knowledge might not necessarily be at a higher level than Roland's, and his esoteric, top-level knowledge wasn't given to Roland, Roland had still obtained the Tark Republic's standard teaching materials and common research theories. Zero herself had also used these theories to gradually increase in power. With all of this, it was as if Roland possessed a key to open the gate to successfully analyze this astral projection.

"...I've already reconstructed the energy cycle of my world. This isn't Earth where only positive energy exists. A cycle of negative energy is one of the main reasons behind the existence of souls, and one of the truly most amazing things about a magical world. Zero's eyes are wonderful! Everything I see may not be the truth, and I was limited by past beliefs. This isn't the purely physical world that I was from in the past. This is a world that's constructed of both the physical and the mental. While Zero was restricted by this world's way of thinking, I, too, was limited by my so-called scientific knowledge that I had valued so much."

At this moment, the shattered "Crown of Undead" Soul Imprint had reformed. But unlike the now completely fixed Ice Treader Soul Imprint, the undead magic Soul Imprint was the crystallized wisdom of three Undead Emperors; in fact, it represented an entirely new path. A path more difficult than before was now before Roland.

It was a face, a male face, split down the middle. One side was made of skeletal bones, while the other was a living person. The skeleton was smiling, while the living half was crying. He had broken the boundaries of life and death, gazing into the depths of the true nature of souls. He was...

"...Since he understands the Cycle of Reincarnation, the role of Judge of the Dead is the most suitable for him. Then, let's name him 'Judge of the River Styx.'"

There were no simple individuals among the Undead Emperors. While Zero had obtained much from Roland and had progressed down her path, the victor of their battle, Roland, had gained even more. It was only his power level that was limiting him—he was unable to completely display what he had obtained.

Yet some benefits could now be noticed.

When Roland had broken through, he had been greeted with a System Notification.

[Congratulations for successfully fixing the Crown of Undead Soul Imprint. You have now awakened your SemiGod Racial Talent, 'Stare of the Hell God'! System Reminder: This natural talent is dangerous. Very, very dangerous. Please use it carefully. Additional System Reminder: This racial talent can be further evolved. And please, take extra caution when using it.]

Chapter 353: Direction of Evolution

When I awoke from my long slumber, I was unable to move. Yet I was greeted with a world no longer the same.

If a mirror were present, I would have been able to see that my eyes were different. One eye had a normal white eye and a black pupil, while the other had a black eye and white pupil. Like the opposite halves of a Yin Yang diagram, it gave off a frightening appearance.

Meanwhile, what I saw was far stranger. On one side was a world of energy that appeared like infrared lights, with red, yellow, orange and other warm colors. The other half was filled with decayed bones and black gunk, as if all the filth of the world was before me.

Luckily, when I canceled the "Stare of the Hell God," my eyes returned to normal. Otherwise, I would have had to find a bandage to cover my eyes, like a certain unlucky fellow who was "imprisoned for ten thousand years..." Hmmm. Having bandages over my eyes would actually look quite cool, but going around with a naked upper body would seem quite embarrassing. And I felt that if I uttered that classical line, "You seek your own death!", I would collapse of embarrassment halfway through—that would be even more embarrassing.

I took a deep breath and quickly discovered that the dragon's blood in the blood pool I was soaking in had decreased by more than half. Meanwhile, some mysterious change seemed to have occurred in my body.

"System?"

I figured that now was the time to consult an expert. At the very least, her showing me my status would be able to help me understand my situation with precise numbers and words.

Unluckily for me, although I could check it, my racial talents and stats kept changing constantly in a quick blur that was impossible to read. My body was still undergoing changes.

"Ha, it would seem that it's still too early."

My physical body was evidently still evolving. I took a deep breath and intended to place my consciousness back within my Frigidwinter Earth. However, I received a reply from the System at this moment.

[Your physical body is now entering its youth stage. Please choose the direction of your evolution. System Reminder: Please be careful about your choice. There will be no going back.]

I was surprised for a moment upon hearing this, but soon, the System gave me a great amount of information that helped me understand.

[Arbiter Bloodline. 19 Strength, 19 Dexterity, 19 Constitution, 29 Intelligence, 19 Will, 19 Charisma. Racial talents: War Angel Form, Original Sin Demon Form. Overall assessment: Double Diamond Bloodline. Recommended job classes: Order Knight, Chaos Lich King. System Evaluation: Your Arbiter Bloodline is on the border between Order and Chaos and belongs to neither faction, but it's compatible with both factions. This bloodline with both foundational powers that are so different created a miraculous physical body for you. Perhaps it's not the strongest body, but it's by far the one with the most potential.]

I had always found it quite strange. Even though I clearly possessed a Double Diamond Bloodline, it never performed anywhere near as well in battles as the Titan Giants' Semi-Diamond Bloodline. In fact, I felt like it was far weaker than even Little Red's Immemorial Dragon Bloodline. It was only now that I understood what the problem was.

From a certain standpoint, the System was just like me. Although she never lied, she would often be intentionally misleading with

her words.

This time, the part that made me suffer was the final sentence of her explanation, "Perhaps it's not the strongest body, but it's by far the one with the most potential."

Whenever a teacher praised a student for having potential, there would typically be an unstated sentence behind it: "This student is currently not that great." And so, what the System gave me was basically an infant's body. How far it could develop would depend on my path and the choices I made.

And so—intentionally or unintentionally—the System dug a pitfall for me. At the very least, what she gave me wasn't a complete Arbiter Bloodline, but an infant Arbiter Bloodline, instead.

This was also why my physical body was stuck in a juvenile form. For a young child who had just finished his earliest years of education, whether he became an athlete, artist, musician or whatever in the future would depend on his future studies and practices. Someone at such a young age would first learn to run and speak.

The world was forever unfair—no matter the world. In my previous world of Earth, people gifted in athletics or intelligence could accomplish feats no ordinary person could, no matter how hard the ordinary person worked. For example, in certain sports, Africans were far more skilled than the Chinese, no matter how much the Chinese exercised.

There were even larger differences between the species in this world, with more obvious imbalances. The beastmen were naturally talented at physical combat, the elves were born with talent in archery and magic, the dragons were skilled at both physical and magical combat but had slow growth rates, and the undead possessed a natural affinity for negative energy. The only race that had balanced skills in all aspects, the humans, were

literally the representative of "Jack of all trades, master of none."

The physical body with the most potential? The path leading to the strongest? Nobody would know what power would be the most suitable for them, or what type of fighting style would lead them down the ultimate path. What power you wanted was the same as the so-called greatest potential: giving you a choice to create the physical body and natural talents you desired the most.

[Discard a minimum of two of your racial natural talents and elaborate how you wish to strengthen yourself. The more detailed you elaborate, the better. System Notification: Congratulations on your graduation from elementary school. It's time for you to become a middle schooler!]

"As an infant, my growth was balanced. Now that I'm a youth, it is time to make a choice?"

From the information I received from the System I knew that the Arbiter Bloodline was akin to an insect's metamorphosis. Upon breaking through a bottleneck, this bloodline would evolve. And now, it was time for me to make a choice, one based on my rich experience.

"Choice? Choice? Choosing a path also means choosing something to give up. If something's the most important, then there exists something that's not as important."

Indeed. While I would have wanted to be as agile as the elves, as strong as the beastmen, and to have an undead's natural affinity for negative energy so that I could use negative energy as I pleased, together with an angel's natural affinity for positive energy, my desires were no good... Even if my ridiculously unreasonable bloodline was able to give me all these traits, the special, unique advantages of each would be lost, and I would only seem ordinary in comparison—nothing would stand out. It would be more of a loss than a gain.

[...War Angel Form, Original Sin Demon Form, Sword of Order,

Titan Body, Feet of Ethereal Shadow, Divine Child, and Chaos Barrier. I'm going to have to discard a minimum of two of these abilities? And strengthen the others? Which should I strengthen?]

These were the natural talents my body currently possessed. I was mulling over which were the most useful to me and what fighting style I should adopt in the future. However, I was now stuck in a quandary. All of these abilities were excellent ones, but if I looked at my past uses for them, there were still obvious differences.

I absolutely had to keep the War Angel and Original Sin Demon Forms. No matter if it was in practical combat or the power of Creation within Frigidwinter Earth, they were both incredibly effective. Besides, I felt that since they were the first two abilities that came together with this physical body of mine, I shouldn't make the choice to discard them. Divine Child was an ability that made it easier for me to perform God's Descent with Wumianzhe, which was one of the aces up my sleeve, so naturally I wouldn't choose to discard Divine Child.

In that case, let's start the process of elimination with the natural talent I used the least. Of course, planning was always better with more than one person, so I decided to ask the living library Harloys for her advice.

"Feet of Ethereal Shadow is the natural talent I've used the least out of all of them. This is the ability for me to escape to the Shadow Plane, which can help me escape from any dangerous situation. However, it also means that I've transported myself to another plane, and that I would need to figure out a way to return to the mortal plane afterwards. It won't be easy for me to return in any short period of time, which is why I've never used it at all. Still, it's a lifesaving ability, which means it might come in useful in the future..."

"...Is it even possible for you to consider escaping? Even when the Titan Giants were right before you just now, weren't you raring for

battle? I think you should just face your true self and change your job class to Berserker."

"Hmph, that's because it wasn't a life-or-death battle. Otherwise, I definitely would have fled to the Shadow Plane."

As a mage, fleeing when you couldn't win was completely normal. Mages had far slower growth than other job classes to begin with. For any mage who wanted to go out adventuring, preparing two or three specialized "tactical retreat" spells was absolutely necessary. Harloys telling me to change my job class to Berserker was a veiled insult—she was basically insulting me by calling me a brainless barbarian.

"No. I feel that as long as you're forced to the brink, you'd just enter your insanity mode and try to drag your opponent down with him. Back when Aso was casting his forbidden spell, you could have escaped to the Shadow Plane, but instead you attempted to immolate your own soul to take him down with you. Just think about it. Over so many years, have you ever tried to run away even once?"

"...I think so—it's possible—it seems.... that indeed I haven't."

"You really are the same as all those stubborn tin can knights."

Now that she said this, I couldn't help but recall the teachings of Estrada, my Holy Knight teacher who was also known as the strongest Holy Knight. He would prattle on every day for more than three hours on knighthood, which was no different from brainwashing.

"...We Holy Knights shall never despair. As long as we fight to the end... even if we must sacrifice ourselves, it's for a worthy cause..."

Actually, the greatest advantage of the Holy Knight job class was near absolute immunity to any mental magics related to fear and despair. Adventuring teams were accustomed to having Holy Knights perform the most dangerous tasks. In fact, since there

were far too many examples of Holy Knights who loved to sacrifice themselves, back when Beyana in her Betty form was making fun of Holy Knights for this self-sacrificing addiction problem and dragging me away, I couldn't counter her with anything at all.

Personally, I was the type who didn't believe that one's childhood education would affect that person for the rest of their life. But the truth was indeed that even if I was forced to the very brink, as long as there was still a one percent possibility I could turn things around, I wouldn't even think about escaping. The fact that I had never used this Feet of Ethereal Shadow ability even once was the best evidence.

"So you're advising me against strengthening this lifesaving ability?"

"For you, it's indeed unnecessary. After all, you'll never think about running away. Besides, you're the Undying Roland. Even if you die, you can just start over again."

Alright then. I settled on the first ability to discard. And the second ability, the one I used the second least, was...

"Apart from the Feet of Ethereal Shadow ability that's used for escaping, the ability that I've used the second least is the one to summon a 'Sacred Sword' of Order."

I had used this ability for only a few times in the very beginning but practically stopped using it afterwards.

The Sword of Order ability was limited to being used only once per day, and the issue of the short time that the sword could be summoned was also a small one. The greatest regret about this ability was the fact that I didn't lack for weapons.

Pale Justice, the Roland Sacred Sword, and the Slayer of the Undying Warhammer were all excellent weapons which could act as vessels for Holy Light or the power of Law. Although I gave the God Equipment Roland Sacred Sword to Reyne, I was now mainly

using the Ice Calamity magic sword that my silly cat could transform into ever since she had evolved to possess the powers of "Calamity Chill" and "Hibernation Chill".

And as I improved in my understanding of ice magic, Erebella's passive buff to my ice magic along with the fatal time-freezing Hibernation Chill ability meant that Harloys' transformed Ice Calamity magic sword was just as powerful as the Roland Sacred Sword—reaching the level of God Equipment.

In that case, the conclusion was quite obvious. The choices for which two abilities to discard had now been decided.

"You don't lack close-combat attacking methods. The Sacred Sword of Order that purely uses Holy Light and the power of Law is barely of any use to you."

Harloys was being quite reasonable, but why was it that I felt like she only wanted to eliminate her competitor and become my only beloved sword...? Fine, since I accidentally thought this and forgot about our soul connection, I now needed to figure out how to remove her from my head again. Recently, she somehow learned a technique to make her fangs as tough as diamonds. As she bit into my skull, I was given a headache in more than one meaning of the word...

"So, a close combat ability is meaningless to you, and an escape ability is meaningless to you. That gives us an obvious conclusion. Just what is the natural talent ability you've used the most?"

She didn't even need to ask, because the answer was of course...

[Titan's Body, Diamond level racial talent: Your physical body possesses the original power of Titan Giants, and every day your skin will become more like that of a Titan Giant. All damage and negative effects are reduced by 30. All damage is reduced by an additional 5.]

[Chaos Barrier, Gold level racial talent: Protect your mind and

soul from the suppression of Divine Kingdoms and Soul Worlds. Reduce the effectiveness of all Will-affecting and hallucinatory spells and abilities used against you.]

Yep, the natural talents I used the most were actually these two passive, purely defensive abilities. One was used to protect my physical body, while the other protected my soul. These two combined were the main reason I could live to today.

As I looked over the word "Titan" in my ability "Titan's Body," I couldn't help but recall the Titan Giant incarnation who didn't even die against a True God's incarnation's self-destruction. The deepest impression the two Titan Giants left on me was their truly outstanding defensive capabilities.

Thanks to my Frigidwinter Earth, along with my abilities in ice magic, undead magic, Holy Light, and Law—these four different areas—I didn't lack attack power or attacking methods. However, my greatest weakness was my defense. If someone was accidentally stepped on and squashed to death on a battlefield, they would only be able to take their grudges with them to the grave no matter how powerful or talented they were.

My ice armor containing the Cold Flames of Despair had seemed impossible to break against Emordilorcan, but that had been nothing more than a mere bluff, used to scare someone who valued his own life. If I met with a hotheaded idiot of an enemy who truly rushed over to shatter my armor without caring for their own life, even I myself would have been frozen in time for eternity—and by my own power.

Living on would mean hope still existed, hope that I could win in the end.

"...Perhaps strengthening my defensive abilities is the most suitable path for me to take."

[...I don't recommend you to choose this direction of evolution. Unless you have Titan Giant body parts to help, you won't be able

to evolve as strongly as you wish for. And once you make your choice, you'll be unable to change your mind. System Reminder: It's your own fault for not completing the Titan Giant Hunting Quest. Try again next time.]

Although the System was being quite critical of me, I could tell that the System was, in her own way, looking out for me.

The fact that she gave me Quests while I was battling against Zero was probably because Zero's knowledge would be one of the greatest possible benefits for me. It would be an excellent chance for me to improve my overall understanding of undead magic and fix my Undead Magic Soul Imprint. Meanwhile, my Titan's Body ability was probably the most suitable direction for me to evolve my physical body. The Immemorial Red Dragon Bloodline evolution Quest was very easy due to Little Red's assistance against Molly, and the rewards for that were pretty much nothing more than a consolation prize.

Just the recent battle against the Titan Giants made it easy to see that the dragons' physical strength and the Titan Giants' physical strength were on completely different levels. If I chose the Dragon Bloodline's evolution path, although it would greatly increase my physical body's strength and maybe even give me dragon-based attacks, the pure defensive prowess of a Dragon Bloodline wouldn't be anywhere close to the Titan Giant Bloodline's.

I hesitated now as well. After working so hard to reach this step, taking a wrong path would really be pitiful.

I could already guess at what abilities evolving myself with a Dragon Bloodline would give me. After all, dragons were all true to their base desires so there were many other species with partial dragon blood in them. Not only that, there were quite a few Dragon Bloodline Warlocks in this world, and all the Dragon Bloodline abilities had already been thoroughly researched by others.

Of course, the Dragon Bloodline would greatly improve the base physical stats of ordinary people who had much weaker bodies. However, since my base stats were far too high compared to most, the increase for me would likely be limited. I didn't want to take this path if possible.

The Dragon Bloodline could also help me to grow dragon scales. In the past, I would have said that having my own personal dragonscale armor on my body would make me impregnable due to its high defense against both physical and magic attacks. But I already possessed the power ability Titan's Body and had witnessed the ridiculous defensive prowess of real Titan Giants. How could I possibly be satisfied with mere dragon scales?

The Dragon Bloodline could also help me grow dragon wings and give me the ability of flight. While flight seemed like a simple power, it was forever a practical one. The unfortunate part was that I already possessed my War Angel form. As my power level increased, the time I could keep myself in the War Angel form—as well as number of transformations per day—kept increasing. So this power of flight from the Dragon Bloodline would be quite useless.

The Dragon Bloodline could also give me the ability to use dragon breath, which was indeed a powerful attack. It would have a wide area of affect, powerful strength, and quick activation. But the main problem with this was just as I had mentioned earlier: I didn't lack attacking methods. Still, this ability would be the best out of all these mostly useless abilities the Dragon Bloodline would give me.

I could also obtain dragon claws and a dragon tail to increase my physical combat prowess... but honestly, that would be the most useless of all. I was no monk who specialized in barehanded combat; I used swords. This emptyhanded combat strength would be meaningless, and possessing dragon claws would even lower my skill with the sword as I would need to get used to gripping a sword

with claws instead of hands.

And if I really did grow claws, fangs, and a tail, apart from ruining my handsome appearance, I was even more worried about a certain legendary individual. Yep, I'm talking about a certain dracon who mysteriously managed to tame even a divine beast! He was more familiar with dragons than anyone! He could definitely accomplish anything!

The more I thought about it, the more I was regretting things. Not only was a Dragon Bloodline evolution mostly useless to me, but it might even be dangerous for me...

Wait a moment. Suddenly, an outrageous idea came to mind. I turned to Harloys and Erebella who were being forced to soak in dragon's blood together with me due to their soul contracts. If this idea of mine worked, then this Dragon Bloodline evolution would no longer be useless. Instead, it would actually be a shortcut to improving my overall combat strength.

And so, I hesitatingly made my request to my System.

However, I was met with a long period of silence, as if the System was making its calculations. Yet, I was delighted at this, as what I was most afraid of was instant refusal. This doubtlessly meant that my idea was possible to carry out.

[...There will be a fee of 150,000 Fate Points. Haggling... is impossible. This is the final price!]

I instantly became furious upon hearing this. I currently possessed 143,451 Fate Points—just a little short. By naming such a price, wasn't the System making it obvious that she wanted me to suffer?

"You bastard! Even making a new body for me wouldn't be this expensive. Also, why does it just happen to be more Fate Points than what I have right now? Don't even think for a moment that I don't know why it's always a whole number—it's because you're

always raking in the profits by jacking up the prices!"

[You think my prices are too expensive? Feel free to shop at other stores.]

Alright then. This condescending tone made me instantly imagine a female merchant picking her nose while looking down on me.

While I really wanted to shop elsewhere, my System had a full monopoly in that market. What other store could I possibly shop at? Not only that, this monopoly was the type where I was already stuck on a pirate ship, with nowhere else to run to! It was just like if someone purchased a computer system, they would be forced to continue downloading that system's patches and purchasing additional system services! Otherwise, all sorts of system loopholes and viruses would kill you.

"...You win. What should I do about the points shortage? Can I just owe you the rest?"

I had now realized that the System was pretty much intending to suck me dry of all my Fate Points and was probably intending to force me into doing those ridiculous Daily Quests.

[No.]

When I heard this, I paused in surprise. I never expected her to actually refuse. Could it be that she was nice enough for once to only give me the manufacturing cost's price, which was why I wasn't allowed to owe her money?

If that was really the case, what was I supposed to do? Give up on this idea of mine that I finally came up with? Force myself to use the Dragon Bloodline evolution? I really didn't want to do that!

[You can owe me the rest, but you need to pay the remainder in Justice Points. First, give the 2300 Justice Points you possess right now to me, and pay a deposit on the item I want.]

Fine then. I had underestimated a certain black-bellied System's

lack of limits. At this moment, I couldn't help but think of certain pitiful men back in my previous world. Without even having received their salaries yet, their women would already lay claim to it. At such a time, as a manly man, I could only sigh deeply, and then... lower my head and beg for mercy!

"...You win, but please leave me at least 100 Justice Points of spare change! You also know that it's not so easy for me to come by Justice Points."

Yet no matter how pitiful a man acted, the woman wouldn't let him go so easily.

[I'll leave you 50 Justice Points. There's no need to thank me. Pay the rest of the balance within six months; otherwise, there will be a 40% compound interest rate.]

[You understand how it is.]

Chapter 354: The Powerful Sure Have Messy Lifestyles

"They've already been in there for seven days. Why haven't they come out yet?"

Little Red was in quite a foul mood. And her mood only worsened as time passed.

Dragons were the epitome of the dictionary's definition of "impatient." This was especially so for Red Dragons who also served as the dictionary's definitions for "arrogance," "unreasonable," and "bad at listening to others."

While dragons were all one species, the differences among them were huge. Although they had managed to escape from needing to fight in the eternal Holy War, Red, White, Black, Green, Blue, and other Color Dragons were all the Chaos Goddess's creations and were viewed as part of the Chaos Faction. Considering the fact that the most representative species of Chaos, the demons, had terrible tempers, in a way that was the best evidence for how difficult Color Dragons were to get along with.

Red Dragons, who were of the fire element, had incredibly short tempers along with incredible arrogance and pride. They were typically sensitive about territory and authority. The thunder element Blue Dragons were huge combat maniacs and loved to hunt other intelligent species as food. Black Dragons, skilled in corrosion and darkness magic, were vicious and evil—they were also the greediest of the dragons.

Meanwhile, Green Dragons and White Dragons were significantly weaker than their other Color Dragon relatives. White Dragons were particularly infamous for their low Intelligence, which was why Red, Black, and Blue Dragons were the main three species of Color Dragons, with the highest populations. Any of these would cause a huge disturbance if they

appeared anywhere in the mortal plane. And when the entire Dragon Species as a whole exiled the Red and Black Dragons to the Underground World, many species that had suffered due to "Dragon Calamities" were so thrilled at hearing the news that they threw celebration parties lasting several days.

Yep, "Dragon Calamity" was actually a term in this world and was treated just like a natural calamity. A Dragon Calamity fit the exact definition of a natural calamity, as Dragon Calamities were unpredictable, unstoppable, and would cause major amounts of damage.

One-time robbery victims of dragons randomly coming out by chance didn't count as victims of Dragon Calamities. True Dragon Calamities were typically viewed as the shame of an entire species. The species would forever be helpless about the Dragon Calamities and could only allow them to keep happening.

Little Red was an Immemorial Red Dragon. This was more than enough for her to rule over an entire city and easily defeat and kill the average SemiGod. In that case, who could possibly stop dragons even older and more powerful than her, dragons that had experienced the battles from the very first ever Holy War, from running amok? Not only that, an Immemorial Red Dragon wasn't even close to the peak of dragon strength. There were also Supreme Immemorial Dragons that had experienced countless eons. At their level, not even the True Gods would dare to antagonize them. The Dragon power levels went from Dragon Egg, Baby Dragon, Infant Dragon, Young Dragon, Mature Dragon, Adult Dragon, Elder Dragon, Ancient Dragon, Immemorial Dragon, Great Immemorial Dragon, and Supreme Immemorial Dragon.

It was said that an Supreme Immemorial Green Dragon had made its nest in the Wood Elves' holy grounds and had no intentions of giving it up. That Green Dragon treated the Wood Elves' holy grounds as his own home even today. Also, the royalty of one Shield Dwarf Country accidentally broke a certain seal while

digging and released a Great Immemorial Shadow Dragon, a species similar to Black Dragons. This Shadow Dragon took over the Shield Dwarves' royal palace for countless eons and even enslaved the country's Shield Dwarves. Also, the incredibly powerful mega-empire named the Gerbai Kingdom was destroyed all due to the anger of a single Supreme Immemorial Red Dragon.

By the way, the Supreme Immemorial Green Dragon was ranked #7 on the Calamity Rankings and was known as the "Elf Devourer". The Great Immemorial Shadow Dragon was ranked #33 on the Calamity Rankings and was known as the "Shadow Kingdom Emperor". As for the Supreme Immemorial Red Dragon who destroyed an entire mega-empire all by itself, it hadn't appeared in far too long, which is why it wasn't in the Calamity Rankings. But if it ever resurfaced, it would definitely be in the top 10. Any Color Dragon that was an Supreme Immemorial Dragon would receive this type of due to how incredibly destructive they were.

There was only a small difference between Immemorial and Great Immemorial Dragons. For some more powerful dragon species, perhaps an Immemorial Red Dragon would even be able to give a Great Immemorial White Dragon a run for its money, even if the Immemorial Red Dragon would most likely lose in the end. But for dragons that reached the highest level of all, the standard of Supreme Immemorial Dragon, they had witnessed countless Gods dying and being born ever since the first generation. No Great Immemorial Dragon would dare to challenge an Supreme Immemorial Dragon.

The world of Eich was massive, and secret locations and areas with low population were even more common than highly populated areas. For such powerful existences like Supreme Immemorial Dragons, they had far surpassed the normal level of being able to defeat by issuing a mission to the adventurers to subjugate them. In most situations, the local ruling authorities would simply draw a dragon on the map and warn travelers to

avoid that area. Anyone foolish enough to venture into an Supreme Immemorial Dragon's territory would be given up for lost, with nobody going to save them, even if that person was the princess of some kingdom.

Luckily, Great Immemorial and Supreme Immemorial Dragons were both incredibly rare sights in Eich. They typically stayed in their Dragon nests and had plenty of subordinates that brought them food. Also, they had equal-leveled enemy dragons so they kept each other in check. From a certain standpoint, since these most powerful of dragons all had their own established territories and large numbers of subordinate citizens, and even sometimes their own loyal subordinate dragons and knights, each individual Great or Supreme Immemorial Dragon was more like a country's existence rather than an individual existence.

Dragon Cities? Dragon Cities were unable to command Great and Supreme Immemorial Dragons. Dragons were an example of a species where only the powerful were respected. When Molly, an Immemorial Red Dragon, became the Dragon Queen, she had incredibly few equal-leveled Immemorial Dragon subordinates under her. When her husband, who barely qualified as having reached the Great Immemorial Dragon power level, had been in charge before her as the Dragon Emperor, there had been more Immemorial Dragons under his command. But there wasn't a single Great Immemorial Dragon under his command. As for the Supreme Immemorial Dragons, it was confirmed that there were only two Red Supreme Immemorial Dragons. However, both of them were viewed as evil Demon Kings, and even when the entire Red Dragon species was exiled to the Underground World, neither of the two Supreme Immemorial Red Dragons were seen to take any action about it.

Of course, there were some places where Great and Supreme Immemorial Dragons could be found: Dragon Island and Dragon World. But there was no hoping that they would listen to anyone's

orders as these proud and ancient individuals wouldn't even allow younger dragons to fly above their heads, much less listen to a younger dragon's commands.

Of course, for any ordinary human, no matter if they met an Immemorial Dragon or just an Adult Dragon, there was no difference. The result would always be death.

Alright then. By now, you should be able to come to a conclusion.

Together with the dragon power levels and the fact that it was well known how Red Dragons commonly raided other species, Little Red was certain to enter the Calamity Rankings even if she didn't hide her status as the Dragon Queen.

But it wasn't only that. Little Red even went around using her real name: Belon's Calamity, Ein Mezus. She was one of the very few Immemorial Red Dragons who had been highly active in the mortal plane. And as for her combat achievements... fine, perhaps I should call it dark history, as she had burned numerous cities down to the ground in the past, destroyed several small countries, kidnapped princesses for ransom, and even schemed to destroy larger countries all so she could rob their treasuries. She was unmistakably an evil and vicious dragon. And she was even one of the smartest and most successful of such evil and vicious Dragons.

From a certain standpoint, before the nostalgic adventurer team that we had worked together in was formed, Little Red would unmistakably be considered a purely evil dragon. Red Dragons were famed for being one of the more powerful dragon species who possessed outstanding combat talent. Judging by how easily she won the duel against her mother Molly—who was also incredibly experienced in combat—treating Little Red as an evil Immemorial Red Dragon would seem like no mistake.

After her name started spreading thanks to this recent battle, it was a definite that Little Red's name would be entering the Calamity Rankings, although I wouldn't know if she would be

ranked before or after me.

"Although I don't know why 'The Undying Roland' is ranked so highly in the Calamity Rankings, just seeing that he's able to command this Immemorial Red Dragon to work under him is the best explanation of how ridiculous he is."

"...Have you heard? Those two Immemorial Red Dragons are still in this city..."

The reason why intelligent species survived for so long was that they had the ability to pass knowledge down to others. At the very least, intelligent species would tell other members of their own kind how to deal with threats. When a humanoid, living Calamity was right next to everyone, how people acted around and treated her was quite obvious.

And so, Little Red enjoyed a "Mega Mega VIP" treatment everywhere she went. Every bar she went to, she could drink everything wanted for free, paid for by the Wood Spirits, except for alcohol, thanks to me telling Samantha beforehand that Little Red was a terrible and that she would go on a rampage upon consuming any alcohol. Nobody dared to even chat to Little Red, and she didn't have to pay any money for anything she wanted to purchase... it wasn't that Little Red didn't want to pay, it was that every store owner would run away at top speed upon seeing her. Who was she supposed to pay?

Her mood was made even worse by the fact that Samantha and most of the other Wood Spirits all returned to the Forest of Dreams. Everyone else around her would only tentatively avoid her as much as possible, be afraid when talking to her and even look at her with obvious fear in her eyes—this made, Molly, who Little Red hated the most, into the only person who could hold a conversation with her. For Little Red, simply "eating, sleeping, and beating up Molly" every day was considered an improvement in her patience.

Actually, even if there was a ban upon her drinking alcohol, Little Red would typically find ways to sneak some alcohol anyways. But it just so happened to be that she was in charge of guarding the troublesome Molly that was so difficult to find and catch, so Little Red was worried that Molly would escape if she went out and drank alcohol. Not only that, guarding Molly meant that Little Red was unable to take long naps as she pleased, which naturally made her temper only worse and worse.

And for Molly, she was also hoping for Roland to come back as soon as possible. Over the past week, she had received many painful beatings due to accidentally enraging her own daughter or simply because Little Red wanted a target to vent her displeasure.

Of course, half of the beatings were well-deserved due to Molly's behavior, such as trying to escape, poison Little Red, or rebel in some way. After a few times, Little Red directly started withdrawing a small pool of Molly's blood every morning, making her so weak that she was unable to plot any tricks. And if Little Red was in a bad mood, she would simply deliver a vicious beating to Molly, making Molly half-dead for the entire day.

Considering how the former Dragon Queen Molly obtained her position by killing off Little Red's father and all of Little Red's siblings, along with attempting to hunt down and kill Little Red herself, in a way it was impossible to say who was right or wrong here. Even if Little Red directly killed Molly, it would be perfectly acceptable.

And if Roland was here, he would probably only sigh and say that "The powerful have messy lifestyles" while he wouldn't interfere at all, since it was another family's... another dragon family's internal affairs.

But at this moment, this dragon family's internal affairs were now involving him.

"Are you sure? You should know what this means, right?"

"...While half-blood dragon descendants are indeed discriminated against, do you think anyone will dare to mistreat me and Roland's future baby?"

Baby? That's right, Little Red had been acting strange lately, and Harloys had told Roland the reason quite clearly: spring was here, and it was the season for animals to breed future generations.

"Relax, I have no interest in bones. Although Roland is indeed someone I'd be quite interested in, my goal is to give birth to Baby Dragons, although I suppose I can bring myself to accept half-blood dragon descendants as well. But he's unable to even have sex with me. And, I'm no necrophile."

Two years ago, back in Sulfur Mountain City, Elisa had been worried that Little Red was her rival in love and had sent a challenge saying that "I definitely won't lose to you" to Little Red in a certain bar. The above was Little Red's response at the time. Little Red hadn't lied at all with her response. She was indeed somewhat interested in Roland, but her feelings were more akin to friendship for him, not romantic ones. She mostly just wanted children of her own.

From a certain standpoint, the foundational reason for Little Red to completely cast away her former identity as an evil dragon was the increase in her motherly nature as she grew older.

Although she had once been an evil dragon with a fearsome reputation, not only did she dote on Annie like she would her own real daughter, Little Red often went around in human form to play with other species' young children in the parks, transforming into a "kind and friendly black-haired big sister." Doubtlessly, those who knew her real identity were thrown into incredible disbelief at the news. In fact, some newcomer Holy Knights at the time even caused a few small conflicts because of this.

Recently, her motherly nature had grown even more and caused her to target Samantha. She even attempted to lure Samantha into

becoming her second adopted daughter.

Dragons were relatively independent creatures who had incredibly strong feelings about territory. Even after mating and giving birth to children, most adult dragons would live by themselves, mostly because the female dragons would turn on the male dragons and demand that they leave. Also, it just happened to be that in the dragon species, female dragons were stronger than the males, so the victors in securing the rights to raise the children and heartlessly exiling the other was typically the female dragons as well...

In a female dragon's mind, a family of her own would be fine without a husband—but a child was absolutely necessary. A nest of children would be even better. However, it was no easy task for an Immemorial Red Dragon to have a child.

In this world of Eich, the more powerful the existence, the more difficult it would be to leave a descendant. There were many mixed-blood dragon descendants mostly because the dragons were far too true to their base desires. It was also especially because the male dragons typically suffered much abuse from female dragons, so they could only vent their sexual frustrations on other species' females. This was the main reason behind the high number of mixed-blood dragon descendants.

But for a female Immemorial Dragon to want descendants was something truly difficult.

First, she would need to find a male individual who had a power level similar to her Immemorial Dragon Bloodline's strength. Then, she would need to have sex very often with him, due to the very low pregnancy rate she would have as a powerful individual. This meant that she would need to stay together with him for a relatively long period of time, and she at least needed to not dislike him.

For the past Little Red, this was evidently impossible.

She was being hunted by her own species and was a clean freak. She also loved cute little girls more than anything. By the time she became an Immemorial Dragon, she could only go look for the other, limited-in-number Immemorial Dragons, or look for a powerful individual from another species. However, she looked down upon the violent and foolish members of her own species, which was why she remained stuck, forever drooling at other peoples' daughters.

In conclusion, Little Red was just like a "leftover woman" who accidentally passed peak marriageability age without realizing it. "Those interested in me are all so terrible, but the ones I'm interested in aren't good enough to be with me." And so, as time passed, Little Red's grudges accumulated, and she kept becoming worse and worse in a certain area.

Actually, Little Red had quite a good relationship with Momo. From a certain standpoint, both of them belonged to the "strange auntie" alliance. It was just that one was a lolicon, while the other was a shotacon. Whenever they got together to secretly exchange experiences in fooling young children, Sulfur Mountain City's Town Security would often receive reports from the citizens about their actions...

Alright then, from a certain standpoint, once Roland revived, Little Red was delighted and astonished to discover that his very bloodline had changed. She could even faintly detect that it was above her own Immemorial Red Dragon Bloodline, which meant that a certain type of trouble was destined to come looking for Roland.

"Roland is currently undergoing the process of Dragon Bloodline evolution. After he successfully incorporates the Red Dragon Bloodline into his own bloodline, it'll greatly increase the probability that I can get pregnant from him, along with further increasing the strength of any child we have. Even if our child is a mixed-blood dragon descendant, we can use the Bloodline

Cleansing Ritual to help our child become a real, pure Dragon. No, I can sense that with how powerful Roland's current bloodline is, our child might even surpass a true dragon's bloodline."

This was why Little Red, from the Red Dragon species well-known to be stingy, unhesitatingly donated a great amount of her blood to Roland. In fact, she even donated more than was "donated" from Molly.

If it weren't for the fact that she donated so much blood as to almost reach the point of death, Little Red wouldn't have wanted Roland's bloodline to be tainted by Molly's blood at all. That's right, she viewed her own mother's blood as nothing more than a source of pollution.

Cough, I should add here that many Dragon Bloodline Warlock families married within themselves; brothers, sisters, and other close relatives would marry each other in order to preserve the special abilities of their bloodline. Anything related to the dragons truly could be summed up with the sentence "The powerful sure have messy lifestyles," and a great example was certain more and more outrageous Beast Tamer.

But when faced with Little Red's excitement, Molly hesitated for a moment before deciding to say what she wanted out loud.

"I'm not talking about your potential children. I'm saying that if you stay together with that man, do you truly like him? If you're only going to be with him for the sake of potential children, you'll definitely meet an unfortunate end in this relationship."

Little Red paused in surprise for a moment. This didn't sound like something Molly would say at all.

"I have experience..."

Molly's voice grew softer and softer as she recalled her past crazy and painful experiences. This red-haired woman who always appeared so strong-willed was showing off her rare weak side in

front of her own daughter.

Little Red clenched her fists. Wasn't Molly just trying to find an excuse to pass off her sins? She actually dared to malign Little Red's father who she really looked up to? Did Molly want a beating that badly?

"...I'm telling the truth. There's no need for me to lie at such a time. Perhaps in your eyes, Acdandy was a great father as well as a heroic dragon leader. But to me, he's nothing more than a bastard who forcibly stole my father's Emperor position and then raped me, forcing me to have his children. I..."

Seeing this rare weak side of Molly, and thinking about the information she had seen in the past, Little Red hesitated for a long while before finally putting down her fists.

In the dragons' records, the heroic Dragon City Emperor Acdandy had defeated the previous generation's depraved, greedy despot to gain his position. But if you looked at the former Dragon generation Princess Molly's angle, Acdandy was indeed nothing more than a bastard who killed her own father and raped her.

As most of the individuals involved were now deceased, the past could only remain in the past. If one truly wanted to analyze everything that happened, once again, that sentence "The powerful sure have messy lifestyles" could be used here yet again.

Little Red sunk into deep consideration for a while upon hearing her mother act motherly for once and give her such advice. But moments later, Little Red started laughing.

"You're just trying to confuse me. My situation is different from yours. There are no hatred or grudges between me and Roland."

"But there's no love between you, either. Do you really think that he will agree? Aren't you afraid that this difficult-to-come-by friendship will be ruined? Perhaps, in this entire world, he's one of your very few friends, or maybe even the only true friend."

Molly worked hard to try to convince Little Red against mating with Roland, and she was right. Back in the day of Roland's adventuring team, there was a chaotic dodecahedron of relationships as well. Little Red and Roland who acted ridiculously together had the best relationship of all. And later in Sulfur Mountain City, rather than saying that Little Red was Roland's jailer, she was more like a good friend who stayed together in jail with Roland to keep him company.

"...Him? He hasn't even evolved cells of love yet. He doesn't even know what the term 'love' means. It's perfect, because I don't need love either. Relax, if he doesn't agree, I've already made backup preparations."

Little Red's expression was rather hesitant but showed that she was willing to make some sacrifices.

"Backup preparations? How could something about love possibly have backup preparations? Could it be that you..."

For some reason, Molly felt that she had accidentally stumbled upon a fearsome plot.

"Yep, I should have listened to Momo's long ago and drugged him! I prepared some special secret drugs of the dragons, which will make him horny... and then I'll jump on him and have sex. Who cares, it's fine as long as I get pregnant. After it's over, he'll just think that he had a sexy dream, and it's best if he doesn't ever find out! Nothing will change about our relationship!"

"This is date rape! This is a crime!"

Molly never expected that one day she would be the one wanting to stop a crime from occurring. But suddenly, the magical restraints upon her instantly tied her down and prevented her from moving or speaking.

Molly had an expression of panic but was powerless. She could sense that Roland had now arrived, while Little Red organized her

appearance and went over to greet him. Meanwhile, there seemed to be some abnormal liquid inside a bottle in her breast pocket.

The former Dragon Queen was filled with anxiety. Molly was confident that her daughter would be capable of doing anything for the sake of obtaining children and a family. Would the tragedies of the past repeat themselves in the present? But soon, she heard Little Red's astonished shrieks.

"Roland, weren't you supposed to be performing a Dragon Bloodline evolution? Why has the Dragon Bloodline disappeared? Why do I sense that you're currently so weak!?"

Chapter 355: Guardian of Eternal Night

Little Red wouldn't have recognized him if she wasn't so familiar with him.

He was wearing a bright red suit of armor, which appeared to be constructed out of many minute scales and parts. Armlets, knee and leg guards, and so on decorated the armor, while dragonscale plating covered all critical locations. Yet there was not a single trace of an artificial connection—it as if this suit of dragonscale armor was constructed naturally.

This sort of full-body armor matched the fashion style of the dragons. A roaring scarlet head of a dragon was carved into the armor's left shoulder, while on the right shoulder was a dragon's claw clutching a pearl. The helmet was adorned with a dragon's head, which possessed naught but a pair of shining eyes that gleamed through a pitch-black abyss.

The armor appeared to be a material similar to ice, albeit a color as bright red as blood. Faint swirls roamed through the armor while the dragon's eyes inlaid into the suit glowed with a brilliant shine. The dragon's emblems that covered the entire armor lit up as well, making it seem like a living, breathing creature.

It was designed like a roaring demon dragon and even possessed its own draconic might. Simply looking at it would make people feel uncomfortable.

The vainest part of this already ridiculous armor was that it was specially outfitted with an equally brilliant scarlet cape.

[Full-body Dragonscale Ice Armor: Guardian of Eternal Night. System Evaluation: Legend rank, capable of growing in power.]

[This armor is constructed out of a combination of Immemorial Red Dragon blood and the eternal ice of your Frigidwinter Earth. Special runes are inscribed upon it, and Erebella acts as its vessel.

This armor can only be used by you and you alone.]

[Enchanted Titan's Thunder Metal: This armor possesses Legend-level damage reduction properties. All weapons that aren't at the level of God Equipment will have their damage reduced by 30 against this armor. System Notification: It's ridiculous how you managed to come up with the idea of embedding that Thunder Titan Giant's broken shield pieces into your armor to strengthen its defense.]

[Living Armor: This armor is alive. She's capable of self-repair. She's even capable of using Dragon Bloodline abilities on your behalf. But if you accidentally anger her... do you recall that fairy tale about the pitiful girl who was unable to take off her enchanted magic shoes and danced to her death? Actually, if Erebella wants to make you suffer, she doesn't need to go to such a degree. All she needs to do is to make it so that you can't take off your armor to go to the bathroom...

[Ein Mezus's Protection: Her Dragon's Bloodline is coursing through this armor. She's protecting the wearer of this armor, which is bad news for any attacker. Her protection will automatically absorb 100 points of damage every day before the wearer can be damaged. This ability will recover after a period of twenty-four hours.]

[Dragon Bloodline User: I find it incredibly difficult to believe how it's even possible for an armor to have such properties, but you've indeed succeeded in making this happen. The wearer is able to use various Dragon Bloodline abilities while wearing this armor.]

[Yongye's Authority: Due to the special nature of the material used to construct this armor, no ice damage will be able to lower this armor's temperature to below zero degrees. This means it's almost immune to all ice damage. And thanks to the Immemorial Red Dragon Bloodline contained within this armor, all fire damage taken is reduced by half, then reduced by another additional 30

points.]

[Blood Armor's Curse: If this armor is worn by anyone other than Roland, it will internally shoot bloodsucking needles that will kill the wearer and suck them dry of blood.]

Yep, this armor was the product of my evolution. When it was time for me to evolve my bloodline, I had cast my gaze upon Harloys and Erebella.

From a certain standpoint, as Erebella was my contracted Frozen Nightmare, she was half of my soul. But recently she had been unable to be of much use.

This wasn't because Frigid Nightmares were weak. All Aurora Knights would be at the minimum Gold and forever the pride of the Northlands. The monstrous Frigid Nightmares in the great snow mountain wouldn't be any weaker than Immemorial Dragons. But she was limited in power level due to her soul contract with me, and there was the fact that my battles were far too dangerous, indeed making it hard for her to do anything.

A Gold Frigid Pegasus or Frigid Dragon could only be nothing more than a transportation tool on a battlefield where SemiGods and Myth ranks were abound. If I rode her while charging at my enemies, it was highly likely I'd die in midair. Not to mention, I myself possessed the power of flight along with other flying transportation tools, so I had minimal need for a flying mount.

Most of the time, Erebella's greatest assistance to me was in helping me to control my ice magic and acting as my assistant magical core rather than entering combat herself.

Erebella understood this situation. This was why she almost never complained despite the fact that she hardly ever got to battle. Frigid Nightmares had the ability to become ice swords or ice armor for their masters, but I hardly ever used those abilities of Erebella's, either, due to the fact that I had Harloys' Ice Calamity magic sword and my Absolute Zero Ice Armor.

And as she was half of my soul, my chance at evolution was doubtlessly a chance for her as well. But even if she was strengthened, she would be limited to only Gold until I reached the rank of Legends myself. At most, her potential would improve, and she would gain a few Dragon Bloodline abilities... which would actually be quite useless.

But then I looked at Harloys and thought about how her Ice Calamity magic sword gave me a huge increase to my combat strength. This gave me an idea.

"Indeed, one of the basic fundamental natural laws of the mortal plane is that contracted magical pets, mounts, and other such creatures are unable to surpass their master in power level. However, weapons and equipment are counted separately and have no such restriction. Erebella is originally the transformation of an Ice Dragon, so if she obtains a true Dragon Bloodline, she could just control it all by herself. And it should definitely be possible for her to transform herself into equipment, no matter if we look at Erebella's original power to transform into an ice weapon or Harloys' speculations."

Of course, many things would be possible in theory but ridiculously difficult to pull off in reality. Something like changing the internal structure of a living creature was already at the Creator Goddess's level. It definitely would be impossible for me to manipulate things to such a degree. My current level was limited to crafting with non-living objects such as my "Coldest Ice." Or, at most I could imitate the processes of living creatures in creating non-living contraptions with artificial life.

"...Although I can't do it, my System can!"

That's right. Wasn't my System capable of modifying my physical body with just some dragon's blood and Fate Points, giving me this body with endless potential? In that case, modifying and giving Erebella a physical body should be possible as well.

Alright then, you readers should have figured out the rest by now. Of course the System was capable of doing so. But, the end result was that I had to pay her 150,000 in combined Fate and Justice Points. And I had to owe a significant debt that left my wallet empty.

Roland Mist: 34 (+10) Strength, 24 Dexterity, 25 Constitution, 32 Intelligence, 22 Will, 20 Charisma. Racial talents: War Angel Form, Original Sin Demon Form, Titan's Bones, Stare of the Hell God. Basic job classes: Level 60 Order Knight, Level 60 Chaos Lich King, Level 10 Four Elemental Swordcaster. Advanced job classes: Level 6 Lord of Frigidwinter. Overall level: Cannot be calculated. Magic pet: Harloys. Mount/Armor: Erebella.]

Just as I had expected, my base stats were only improved by a minor amount. Strength had increased by 2 points, Dexterity by 2 points, Constitution by 3 points, Intelligence by 2 points, Will by 2 points, and Charisma by 1 point. While this may not look like much, my stats had already been at quite the high level, and it get even more difficult for every additional point of growth. Obtaining so many base stats at once was quite an excellent harvest.

My only stat that had broken through to the next tier was the most useless one of all, Charisma, which, in fact, quite worried me. I really hoped I wouldn't awaken to some sort of strange power. But considering my System's typical behavior, there was no way she would let me get off free. I could only do my best not to think about this topic.

As for my racial talents, I originally had eight very powerful racial talents, but now there were only four, which seemed much weaker overall. But, in actuality, I had greatly increased my strength.

Originally, my Angel and Demon forms were both "transformations" with time limits so that my technically infant body wouldn't be overburdened. But now, I could transform into either form with just a single thought, and my transformation time

had greatly increased. This was a gigantic boost to my fighting potential.

Since I was worried about my Original Sin Demon Form being a demon, I only used the War Angel Form while I was in human lands. But now, I had full-body armor, so as long as I wore a mask, I would be able to use either form as I pleased.

I had discarded my Feet of Ethereal Shadow and Sword of Order abilities, so no more mention of them shall be necessary. However, my useful three abilities—Titan's Body, Divine Child, and Chaos Barrier—had all disappeared as well. They had been combined into a new ability which had the ordinary sounding name of Titan's Bones.

My two major defensive racial talents were amazingly useful to me in the past.

[Titan's Body, Diamond Racial Talent: Your physical body possesses the original power of Titan Giants, and your skin becomes more like a Titan Giant's every day. All damage and negative effects reduced by 30. All damage reduced by an additional 5.]

[Chaos Barrier, Gold Racial Talent: Protect your mind and soul from the effects of the suppression of Divine Kingdoms and Soul Worlds. Reduce the effectiveness of all Will-affecting and hallucinatory spells and abilities.]

And now it appeared that my new racial talent was a combination of these two.

[Titan's Bones: You possess the blood, bones, and skin of original Titan Giants. Your bones and skin are becoming more and more like pure Titan Giants every day. All damage and negative effects against you are now reduced by 50. You are immune to all mind control and other psychological magic at the SemiGod level and below. As a battle continues, as long as you're standing on the ground, your Constitution and Strength will increase, your health

will steadily regenerate, and your injuries will heal.]

Actually, when I first saw this new natural talent of mine, I really wanted make a comment—just where did my System grab the Titan Giant bones for my body? But then, I thought about how that Thunder Titan Giant's broken teeth had gone missing after the battle, and instantly decided that for some things, it was better not to ask. If my System really did tell me that the source of my upgraded power was from that Titan Giant's broken teeth, I would be unable to eat for several days.

As for my missing Divine Child racial talent, I asked my System about it. Her answer was that, after my physical body evolved to this extent, I could now easily handle a God's Descent even without this racial talent to assist me.

[System Evaluation: As you wished, you're on the path to evolve into a perfect tank. Since you've given your Dragon Bloodline evolution over to Erebella, this means your body still has the potential to evolve. Of course, I bet that the biggest reason you're so happy right now isn't because of this...]

That's right, I wasn't that concerned about my increase in power. What I was happiest about was the fact that I had finally grown... by about three years in age.

My originally infant-stage Arbiter Bloodline made my physical appearance seem less than ten years old, no matter how you looked at me. But now, I seemed to be in my youth—I resembled an eleven or twelve year old boy. Although I still required my ring to adjust my physical characteristics, I at least looked like a brat who was capable of a few things rather than some snotty kid who was weak and powerless.

And so, I proudly undid my armor in front of Little Red who came over to greet me, revealed my true body, and did some comparing. Although I was still a bit shorter than she was, at least it wasn't by as much as before. Yep, I was now only half a meter

shorter than her.

"Roland, weren't you supposed to be performing a Dragon Bloodline evolution? Why has the Dragon Bloodline disappeared? Why do I sense that you're currently so weak!"

She sensed that I was weak? From a certain standpoint, that was indeed the case. Erebella didn't originally have a physical body, and the System wasn't capable of creating something from nothing. The energy used to give Erebella the power of a Bloodline Evolution was taken right from me, and all the essence I lost would take time for me to recover. Although my base statistics technically went up, I would likely have to recuperate for quite a while.

"Dragon Bloodline? I gave it to Erebella, and it's now become this armor. Heh heh, you have no idea how much use your blood was to me this time. It must have been quite difficult for you to go without alcohol for all these days. Let's go, drinks are on me. Oh, right, my body's not mature yet and still needs a few decades, so I can't drink... forget it, I don't care! Let's go drinking!"

I was indescribably delighted. And typically, Little Red should have been delighted, too, to hear an invitation to go drinking. She should have been dragging me behind her, running all the way to the bar.

But, for some strange reason, this time, the more I talked, the more complex Little Red's expression got. Any Red Dragon whose face kept getting redder and redder meant that she was getting either excited or furious. While I was busy being confused at what was wrong with her, a sudden large fist appeared before me.

"You number one idiot in the universe! Let me see what color your brain is!"

Although she unexpectedly ambushed me, how could this possibly pose a challenge for me who had just finished evolving? The current me was completely... defeatable! Whoa there, I almost

set a death flag for myself!

Boom!

My reactions weren't slow at all. My mystical armor instantly formed on my arm and successfully blocked her heavy blow. I only had to back up half a step after blocking Little Red's Strength which was at minimum 35 points—the best explanation of the improvement in my defenses. The current me was probably comparable to a weaker, younger Titan Giant.

"Ha, you wanted to test my current strength? You're always so raring to go! Come, let's have a good fight! I'll make sure to satisfy you!"

Although Little Red was currently in her human form, I was still quite pleased with myself for successfully being able to block an Immemorial Dragon's brute force attack. I was intending on summoning blades of ice and using practical combat to test out my current level, but...

"The hell, Little Red, why are you changing into your Dragon Form? Why are you gathering fire in your mouth? Dragonbreath? You're actually being serious! I only wanted to have a practice fight with your human form!"

"You massive idiot! My... my plans have all gone up in smoke! It was so difficult for me to come to a decision! I already decided to go all out, yet you dared to embarrass me and made me say such embarrassing things... ! You—you—are you even a man!? If you're a man, then let me bite you and breath fire on you!"

"What? I'll die for sure if you bite me."

I felt indignant and shocked at Little Red's mysterious anger. Yet, this seemed to only enrage her even further.

Well, if only Little Red had recalled that Roland currently possessed an extremely young body, and that powerful bloodlines like the Dragon Bloodline would only have the power of

reproduction after reaching adult age, perhaps she would have realized that her plan was destined for failure right from the very beginning.

Maybe if she had tried to learn from a certain "Mad Dog" from Town Security, and had been more patient by using a Hikaru Genji plan, she might have received a harvest in the end. But, right now, Little Red was on a rampage in a clash of embarrassment and anger. She recalled the words she had just said in front of Molly and went completely and unstoppably berserk.

"A triple combination dragonbreath attack? Dragon-only brass knuckles? You really are being serious. Fine then, let me show you my pride, War Angel... Ahh, you're cheating! How could you attack me in the middle of my transformation? At least let me finish my transformation ... I really hate this feeling..."

Roland was still in the middle of his pose, about to take flight, when a certain furious dragon knocked him into the air, transforming him into a flying meteor. Once Little Red discovered that Roland was sturdy enough to withstand her beating, she began to activate a female specialty: venting on others.

"Boom!"

More dragonbreath transformed the meteor Roland into fireworks. But judging from how he energetically shouted "...I'll be back!", his armor was truly outstanding in defense. Finally, Little Red, who was breathing hard from the exertion, glanced around her.

The remnants of her dragonbreath had scorched the land, while the steps from her gigantic body had caused the nearby buildings to collapse. Currently, there was a large group of people far looking on in fear at this angry Red Dragon. It would seem that with this rampage, Little Red would be unable to wash away her reputation as an evil dragon.

Meanwhile, in the corner of her eye, she noticed someone else

she could vent her anger on: Molly, who was currently restrained all over and attempting to crawl away like a caterpillar. And that was when Little Red let out a crazed laugh.

Alright then. The rest was just a repeat of recent days: eating, sleeping, and beating up Molly.

Remember, Yongye is Eternal Night.

Chapter 356: Scammer

It took a week after the battle till my body could finish its mega-perverted evolution.

Why did I call it a mega-perverted evolution? Why was it that I felt it was so mega-perverted? The only thing more perverted than me previously riding a young girl while wielding another young girl as my weapon was how I was now wearing a young girl and wielding a young girl as my weapon... Oh wait, I'm now lacking a mount, so should I go look for another young girl...?

"Mister Policeman, that's the person you're looking for!"

Cough—cough—I should stop talking about such a ridiculous topic.

The battle in which even the True Gods took place was now over. However, all the True Gods leaving made the situation more chaotic. Many changes became obvious as time passed.

It was obviously a good thing for the living to have won a battle in this "Holy War"...

That's right, Holy War. After receiving permission from Pope Caloma, the Bardi Empire's Holy Light Head Priest, who was currently stationed in the Mage Country, unhesitatingly declared this victory to be the result of the Holy Church's workings. According to their incredibly unbelievable battle report, the campaigning Holy Light army vanguard crossed through the majority of the Bardi Empire to suddenly appear in the far west and attack the undead's capital city.

Alright then. I knew that there were many points to potentially comment about here. For instance, how the Bardi Empire still had a Head Priest of Holy Light. Or why the Bardi head priest of Holy Light was stationed in the Mage Country. Or why the recently quiet "Holy Light army vanguard" suddenly started playing at

dimensional teleportation and suddenly obtained a victory in a place they shouldn't have been.

Actually, all of this was quite easy to explain. After the Holy Church was exiled from the Bardi Empire, the local priests chose to move their administration to a nearby location. And the most appropriate location was obviously the Mage Country as travel restrictions were quite lax there. Not to mention, the Mage Country was currently at war with the Bardi Empire, so even if the enemy of your enemy wasn't your friend, there would at least be the potential for friendship.

No matter how much the Bardi Empire tried to suppress it, the Holy Light was still the prevailing human religion. Even an ordinary farmer would utter "Thank the Holy Light" when receiving an abundant harvest, although I have no idea what they were thanking the Holy Light for. Of course, if that ordinary farmer was luckless and had a terrible harvest, he would also curse "That damned Holy Light," or "This accursed Holy Light," or even blame the Holy Light for a day of awful weather, although, once again, the Holy Light didn't do anything wrong at all...

Suddenly, I felt like the Holy Light was quite pitiful. How it got blamed for everything caused me to recall governments from my past world. No matter what country and race, ever since the concept of countries were born, countries and their governments became one of the most complained about systems out there, no matter if they did anything or not, or if they did too much or too little. For any ordinary citizen, cursing the government at least twice a day seemed only natural.

Cough—cough—let's get back to the main topic. This was actually a good thing for the Holy Church. Shallow believers were still believers capable of providing their power of faith. The fact that "praise" for the Holy Light existed everywhere was the best example of how deep its foundation was. If this had been a more normal country that worshipped the Holy Light as its national

religion, the domain lords would probably have to worry about large numbers of Holy Light believers running rampant in their domains when the Pope declared a Holy War against the country's leader. Not only that, the leader would have to worry about assassination attempts from his own nobles—fervent Holy Light believers.

Orloss was someone truly incredible. He had been working hard to eliminate the Holy Light's influence from the Bardi Empire ever since taking power. However, he had been in power for less than fifty years, which wasn't enough time to change out an entire generation of people. He himself wouldn't believe it if it was said that he had eliminated the Holy Light from his land.

And so, this Bardi Empire "exiled church" caused quite a few problems for the Bardi government.

The mages originally accepted the Bardi Empire Holy Light priests into their country even though they had no interest in the Holy Light mostly because they wanted to give Emperor Orloss a difficult time. But after letting the priests in, the Mage Country entierly ignored them.

Cardinal Stephen should have been one of the highest authorities in the Holy Church as he was the head priest of the Holy Light in a mega-empire. But, unfortunately for him, he was now in exile in the Mage Country, which had ignored his requests for military assistance no matter how many dozens of times he asked. And a piece of news had recently started to spread, one that heralded the end of his political career. If this continued, he would become the cardinal with the shortest term in all of history.

This piece of news was that the Holy Light army had lost. The Holy Church had lost their first major battle since starting this Holy War!

That's right—they lost. As we kept fighting on the west, the Holy Light army, which had declared Emperor Orloss to be a heretic,

suffered heavy losses on the eastern front under the command of General Gordon, ranked #7 on Eich's Famous Warriors Rankings.

The reason? Actually, Gordon was quite the amazing commander for having been able to preserve more than forty percent of his forces and making a successful retreat. That was because he had met with one Great Immemorial Black Dragon and three Immemorial Dragons that had led over seventy other lower-ranking Dragons to ambush them. Apart from this meaning that the Dragons didn't actually intend to kill them all, it was also evidence of Gordon's incredible leadership.

For any outsiders, it would be difficult to understand why the dragons took action. But for me, since I knew what was going on inside, it was quite easy to guess the reason.

Obviously, the dragons, which were anxious about the Titan Giants potentially waking up in their Dragon World, must have made some sort of exchange with Orloss. So they used their special talents at venting their anger and being unreasonable to viciously slap the Holy Church in the face.

Actually, the Holy Church was somewhat deserving of this. The Holy Light army's final goal was to conquer the Bardi Empire's capital, which was also where the Dragon World was hidden. So if the Holy Light army had conquered the capital city... fine then, I suppose it could be said that the Holy Church brought this upon themselves. Still, it was obvious that there was no possibility of them knowing about this secret information.

I felt that nothing that happened was a coincidence. Although the Holy Church took action surprisingly swiftly in declaring war and making Orloss into a heretic, Orloss' actions in response had been rather incomprehensible to others. He didn't put any military efforts into defending against the Holy Light army's invasion whatsoever. Instead, he concentrated the Bardi Empire's military solely on defending Nightrain City, the main western battlefront against the undead. He was under huge pressure from his own

nobles for his strategy of allowing the Holy Light army to freely attack the capital. But now, looking at the results, our "venerated" Holy Light and "wise" Pope were fooled by this heretic Emperor who was a mere mortal. Orloss was willing to allow an enemy army to trample over his own land all in order to force the dragons to take action on his behalf.

Originally, the Holy Church could have been able to accept such a degree of loss as everyone understood that there would always be some losses in any war. They could just try again... but it just so happened to be that at the exact same time, there was a major victory on the western front. Not only that, the victory was from the Ayer Faction, which was faintly showing itself to emerge as the Holy Light Faction's strongest competitor on the side of Order. This naturally gave the Holy Church a tremendous amount of pressure.

Even worse was the direct comparison. There were "Holy Points" and "Holy Warriors" working for the Holy Church, while our side had "Contract Heroes" who worked for "Justice Points." Both sides met with immensely powerful, nearly undefeatable opponents. On our side, True Gods personally arrived to assist us, so our Contract Heroes profited an immense number of Justice Points, while on the Holy Light side, they lost an incredible number of people without seeing a single powerful existence step up to protect them...

This wasn't really the fault of the Holy Light Faction's True Gods. That was just how they always were, for the past millennia. A True God casually descending to intervene in mortal affairs was a major taboo that would break some of the most basic rules. The Ayer Faction was only able to intervene and take direct action after finding out that there were Titan Giant incarnations as the opponent. However, mortals wouldn't think so much into things. They would only think that the Holy Light viewed humans as disposable tools, while the Ayer Faction showed a more caring

attitude about our supporters. All the adventurers who reaped great rewards and were now showing off to others were our best living advertisements.

"In just this week, 10% of our Holy Warriors have resigned. This cannot be allowed to continue. All our local believers, especially the most fervent believers still hiding within the Bardi Empire, will have their faith shaken! And if this news spreads everywhere—about how we lost our first battle—believers all over will lose faith. The first battle has to be a victory! Even if it's just a fake victory."

And so, Cardinal Stephen contacted the main branch of the Holy Church through emergency channels after noticing that this would mean the end for himself if things continued. He grit his teeth and came to a decision and spread a combat report about how "The Holy Light protected our brave warriors as we obtained a tremendous victory" throughout the entirety of Eich.

The words used in this combat report were quite general and vague, such as describing how fervent Holy Light believers dealt great losses to the undead army on the western front and how they exiled two powerful Titan Giant incarnations. Technically, they weren't exactly lying, as plenty of Contract Hero adventurers working for us were Holy Light believers as well, including plenty of Holy Knights and Holy Light priests. It was just that their combat report made no mention of the main characters of this battle, the Ayer Faction and the Contract Heroes.

No powerful faction was an idiot in this world. Every country had their own information sources. But when Pope Caloma kept insisting that this combat report was the truth, many countries that believed in the Holy Light fell silent.

Cardinal Stephen knew full well that he was destined to become infamous in history as a Cardinal who lied through his teeth. He also mentally prepared himself to take the fall. He knew that even though the Pope privately agreed to this idea of his, there would be

no public admittance of the Church being at fault. In the end, he would become the scapegoat.

Everyone who knew the truth was deriding the Holy Church. Most powerful individuals looked down upon such an action. But, in this generation, ordinary people were quite slow in being able to obtain information. Commoners had pitifully few sources of information. Government channels typically used letters, which were slow and low in efficiency. So, if some local church's head priest who was well respected by his believers declared that this battle was won by the Holy Light, most commoners would believe the local priest, viewing him as more trustworthy than the unscrupulous adventurers.

Those who weren't in the know believed that the Holy Church truly obtained a tremendous victory in the first major battle of the Holy War and that any losses suffered on the eastern front were insignificant. But for those in the know, especially the royalty of every country, this became evidence that the Holy Church was only putting up a brave front when they were actually weak. Many with ambitions now began scheming against the Holy Church.

The war between royal and divine authority was eternally unending. The Holy War was both a challenge and an opportunity. According to my own information channels, some major countries were already forcing their subordinate countries to begin exiling the Holy Church, which was both a challenge to the Holy Church's authority as well as a test to see the Holy Church's reaction and how far they could be pushed.

And so, this relatively small-scale battle on the western front became the best opening act of the new Holy War. News about this battle spread around the entire world, becoming both the Holy Church's propaganda as well as a sharp sword hanging over their heads that might fall at any moment.

After I finished my evolution, I could barely believe that so much had happened in just a week.

But what was waiting for me was a mountainous pile of issues that required my attention.

Chapter 357: Secret Currents

"The Holy Church has been forced to such point?"

When I learned of the Holy Church's shameless act of stealing the credit for that battle, I wasn't angry at all. On the contrary, I was quite delighted.

Sometimes, being in the lead was synonymous with victory. As long as whoever was in the lead—for example, the Holy Church, which had a monopoly on over eighty percent of religion in Eich—didn't take extreme risks or make significant mistakes, it would be almost impossible for others to catch up to them.

It would be quite difficult for outside forces to significantly pressure a behemoth like the Holy Church. As long as they didn't have major internal strife and break into large, conflicting factions, they could probably remain in power for the next several centuries based on their foundation alone.

But this time the Holy Church made a mistake—a huge one.

I could understand why they made such a decision. It didn't seem wrong to them amid the current situation. In fact, it appeared to be a superb decision in their eyes since the Holy Church had a matchlessly solid foundation.

Everyone understood that public opinion could distort the truth. The Holy Church had a massive advantage in this regard, so of course they felt they could twist the truth however they wanted. One could deduct from this that the Holy Church believed their status to be impregnable; it seemed they had been enjoying their success for far too long. And they were presumably looking down on the Ayer Faction.

What the Holy Church's higher-ups most likely wanted was to use this combat report to stabilize the situation for a while. After some time had passed and the Holy War had entered its main

phase, most countries would forget about this matter. Maybe some of them would want to falsify their combat reports of their own if things weren't going their way.

Even if this issue became an incident in the future, this combat report had been vaguely written—it just said stuff like "The Holy Light guided us to victory." Since most people, including the Contract Heroes, believed in the Holy Light to begin with, it was impossible claim that this statement a falsehood. They could simply maintain their position that the author had made some mistakes whilst writing.

And in the absolute hypothetical worst-case scenario, even if the Holy Church was put in a bad situation by people chasing the problem to the root cause, the Holy Church could just use the excuse: "Cardinal Stephen was worried about how the bad combat situation would affect his own future so he lied and fabricated military successes to the Holy Church. He has now been excommunicated, and he died of self-inflicted suicide in a mountain." This type of explanation would be more than enough as he would be dead as well as a scapegoat.

In actuality, this type of occurrence was quite common for the Holy Church. As long as someone took the fall in the end, it would be akin to cutting off a branch to save the whole tree. Nothing could be done to the Holy Church itself.

What the Holy Church wanted the most right now was to eliminate any potential negative influences of people hearing that they lost the first major battle of the Holy War. They also wanted to increase the combat morale of the Holy Light Faction. Of course, it would be even better if they could lessen the presence of the Ayer Faction in the process.

But there was one issue that even Pope Caloma himself likely overlooked. And this issue was their biggest mistake of all.

Pope Caloma underestimated the Contract Heroes. He even

completely ignored them!

In this incident, the biggest victim wasn't me nor was it Oak Town's Wood Spirits—it wasn't even the Ayer Faction. None of us needed to prove our power to the world right here and now, and there were plenty of chances in the future for us. It could be said that the glory and honor from this particular battle wasn't that important.

Yet for the Contract Heroes, the adventurers who risked their lives all for the sake of fame and glory, this mythical battle was more than enough to change their lives. They still had those shiny military achievement emblems pinned to their chests, yet the glory they had just obtained was robbed by someone else. And if they bragged about their accomplishments to others, it was likely that they would be treated as liars.

For these young adventurers who typically viewed "honor" as more important than their lives, this was utterly unacceptable. They would forever remember the hypocrisy and fake side of the villainous Holy Church. In fact, all the Holy Light job class members were on the receiving end of copious amounts of enmity from other adventurers in the past few days. Some young Holy Light priests even changed the God whom they worshipped.

The Pope and the Cardinals had long since gotten used to being on top, causing them to forget that the scariest part about humans was how fast humans could grow.

Perhaps right now these Contract Heroes were mostly only novice adventurers. But the Justice Points system would speedily help them grow. Once this first batch of Contract Heroes became the skilled veterans of this system, they would show off their newfound power throughout the land. They were hidden, living, and ticking time bombs for the Holy Church, which would go off and truly take effect sometime in the future.

Actually, not long after, the newly veteran Contract Heroes

wrote a guidebook for novices joining the system. The third rule written in this guidebook stated "Perhaps you can trust Holy Light individuals that truly believe in the Holy Light, but the Holy Church's higher-ups are nothing more than a group of old bastards. Never leave your back unguarded against them. Otherwise, they'll steal the glory that should belong to you and then burn you alive as a heretic. Don't believe us? Just look up Oak Town's history."

And once hatred for the Holy Church set in from the very foundation, no matter what the Holy Church did, it would be quite difficult to recover from it.

Of course, for the Holy Church, their "Holy Warriors" system was sufficient. How could they possibly guess the full extent of the influence our "Contract Heroes" system would have on the world in the future? And that our young adventurers would become real heroes in the end?

Of course, even though I was quite pleased with how the Holy Church shot itself in the foot this time, there were still actions needed to be taken.

Even if our Ayer Faction was weaker than the Holy Light Faction, we would seem far too weak for us to take an attack like this without taking our revenge. In this world, weakness itself was a sin. Should they detect any weakness, the wolves forever circling around you would jump in for the kill.

"What's Ayer intending to do? Or what has he done already?"

It was only natural for the big boss to make the call at such a time. From what I knew of him, Ayer was no individual who would take something like this lying down.

"...Over the past few days, two stars have fallen. Although the Holy Church hasn't made any public announcements, the God of Precepts and the God of Punishment's tiny churches are no longer able to get into contact with their True Gods. Their few priests

have lost all their divine powers. Although these two Gods were weak ones with very little sense of presence, as they were both only ordinary mortals that ascended to become Half Gods, they were still Follower Gods under the God of Ascetism, Tremat. You should understand why these two Gods quietly died off."

In ancient fairy tales, a star falling would represent a God's death. In this world, while not all falling stars represented a God's death, a God's death would indeed create a falling star... Well, it was more that a God's death would cause their Divine Kingdom and Throne to burn up in the sky, so every lifeform would instinctively understand that a God had perished upon seeing such a sight. It was the same for any mortal existence that ascended to Godhood—the entire world would learn about it.

I had never heard of either of these two unknown Gods before. Only by looking up their information did I find out that the God of Precepts and the God of Punishment were both former SemiGods from the Holy Church. They had successfully become God Envoys and then swore loyalty to the Holy Light True Gods in order to obtain Divine Concepts and become Follower Gods. These two Gods' churches were both located solely within the Holy Church's headquarters. The God of Precepts provided heretic seekers with some Divine Arts that could search out heretics, while the God of Punishments was a master of torture. Both Gods were very weak, nothing more than Tremat's, the God of Ascetism's, loyal followers, while Tremat in turn was a loyal follower of the God of Holy Light.

"...I heard, well, at least on the surface, that this incident was caused by the powerful God of Ascetism. His teachings are very close to masochism as he believes that everyone should live in austerity and poorness, which will erase all conflict from this world. He believes that people should wear light clothing in winter to strengthen their bodies, have only rice and water in the summer, and constantly improve themselves through ascetism.

Although Tremat is quite venerated by people in the monk job class, his teachings make him the mortal enemy of Beyana, whose teachings are about people seeking wealth in order to improve their lives. Of course, this explanation about Tremat was provided by the Holy Church's bastards themselves, and I feel that the Holy Church bastards are all responsible for this incident as well. Well, I suppose that they're just upgrading the level of the scapegoat to blame."

Solo, the God of Music and Dance, was quite casual about things as he told me this through one of his follower bards. He was currently chatting with me using this bard.

Ever since the previous fight, he had kept in contact with me... Although I would have preferred to stay away from all gentlemanly Gods, it was indeed necessary for me to obtain information about what was happening with the Gods. It also wouldn't do to contact Ayer about every little thing.

The other Gods I knew were even more unreliable, and it wasn't like I knew many True Gods to begin with. Mary, being a Dwarf Goddess along with her Divine Concept of Alcohol Barrels, was typically in a drunken state most of the time. And as for Beyana... I wasn't foolish enough to give myself over on a silver platter to her. I heard that recently, any time she heard my name, she—a Goddess, mind you—would go into a berserk state.

"Ayer killed them?"

"Yep, he directly invaded Tremat's Divine Kingdom, heavily injured Tremat and killed off these two Follower Gods from the Follower Gods that tried to stop him. He also stole their Divine Souls and Divine Concepts."

"There was no reaction from the other Main Gods? Or any response at all from Order's Origin? After all, doesn't this count as internal strife right at the beginning of the Holy War? Isn't Ayer breaking the rules?"

"He didn't, because the Holy Light faction broke the rules first, so the other Main Gods are quite displeased at their actions. But since the Holy Light Faction lost two Follower Gods, and Tremat was seriously injured, this incident came to an end. Neither side will bring up this issue again."

From a certain standpoint, this was a type of compromise, mediated by the other Main Gods and the Origin of Order. On the surface, it would appear that the Ayer Faction even lost out in this compromise. After all, the Ayer Faction had lost the opportunity to gain fame and reputation from this first major battle. Although two Gods had died in the Holy Light Faction, they were two weak Follower Gods that very few people even knew existed. In the eyes of the most powerful existences, the loss of these two Gods was ignorable.

But only I knew that we had profited enormously this time!

"We obtained the two Divine Concepts of Precepts and Punishment? Ayer truly went all out this time."

Neither of these two Divine Concepts counted for much in the current world of Eich. Precepts were followed only by a minute number of ascetic monks and the most pious of believers. Punishment was also a weak Concept that was barely worth mentioning. Neither of these two Divine Concepts appeared to have any potential.

While these two Concepts weren't valued in this world, all the Gods' churches recognized as common sense that "Ascetism can help absolve you of your sins so that your purified soul may be led into a Divine Kingdom by a God." Thus, the Divine Concept of Ascetism was very powerful in this world, where Divine Concepts had actual power. The God of Ascetism was actually far stronger than the Goddess of Wealth.

Since ascetics and monks were able to obtain great combat strength through practicing ascetism, thus arose a church

composed of powerful elite warriors skilled in combat. This helped make this "God of Masochism" into one of the most powerful Gods under the God of Holy Light. As a result, the two Divine Concepts of Precepts and Punishment became Concepts underneath this Concept of Ascetism, making them rather unknown.

It was precisely because Tremat felt that these two Divine Concepts had almost zero potential that he gave them over to his Follower Gods.

"So Ayer's goal all along was to steal these two Divine Concepts?"

But, only I, Ayer, and very few others were aware that Precepts and Punishment were the two most critical Divine Concepts to our plan to "Reconstruct Hell." In our astoundingly thick notes containing our plans, these two Follower Gods' names were on the top of our list of existences we needed to kill as soon as possible.

If Precepts and Punishment remained as follower Concepts underneath Ascetism based in religion, they could only remain as second-rate Concepts among second-rate Concepts. But if they instead became follower Concepts under Law, making Punishment into the "what happened if you broke the law" Punishment, and Precepts into a subordinate Concept of Law, I would even be able to create new Concepts such as "Judicial Self-Discipline" and "Moral Self-Discipline." These were key nutrients the Law Throne would need in order to further advance, as well as Follower Gods critical to establishing my imagined version of Hell.

Of course, the aftereffects of this incident were still ongoing. Perhaps the Gods up above had already come to an accord, but we mortals still needed to make an issue of this to the Holy Church, which also consisted of mortals. This would depend on our timing and opportunity.

As for these two Divine Concepts that were pre-destined to "suddenly vanish," I merely nodded without explaining anything to Solo even though he, too, might be in the know. Some things were

simply far too important. Even if Solo was a True God allied with our faction, I didn't want a single extra person to know about my plans.

"It would seem that I need to speed up my plans... Of course, I should take care of what's before me first. Great Stone Sculptor Ainslo, what else do you have to say for yourself?"

Currently standing before me, anxious, was the incredibly ugly Ainslo—the Mother of Ten Thousand Stones!

When the earlier battle sunk into a stalemate, I unhesitatingly summoned reinforcements. Since the Great Stone Sculptor Ainslo had already moved into the Forest of Dreams, it meant in a way that she had joined my side as well. So, of course I wouldn't forget to have a top-level combat strength individual like her join my battle.

But the result was that from the Seven Saints—which consisted of the six Saint-ranked existences from the Earth Elemental Plane and... Beifeng—only the youngest among them, the dracon, answered my summons and joined me in battle... but he did indeed achieve something miraculous. Was it really true that the youngest sibling would always be the strongest and most difficult to deal with?

Cough, getting back to the main point, there naturally wouldn't be anything left to say if we had lost that battle. But since we won, it was only natural that it was time to deal with these Earth Elemental Lords who wouldn't listen to commands to go into battle when it was required of them. Otherwise, if everyone acted like them, chaos would permeate our army. Leadership would be impossible.

"Milord, I'm truly not to blame! You should know that we're all Earth Elemental Lords. But the Titan Giants are children of the earth. None of us can even move in front of them!"

A trail of tears dropped down from each of her two eyes, creating

diamonds with every teardrop. She must really have such high carbon content within her body... I suddenly recalled the fairy tale about how the Little Mermaid was able to cry pearls with her tears. The main component of pearls was calcium carbonate. If the Little Mermaid was able to cry pearls, was it because there was far too much lime within her tear ducts? Or was she some strange creature that ate rocks for food?

From what I knew, the only aquatic animal which ate rocks were crocodiles. Although they ate rocks in order to help them digest food, crocodiles were amphibious as well. Could it be that the Little Mermaid's true identity was that of a crocodile who had cultivated into another form?

Cough—cough—it would seem that I had accidentally let my imagination run wild in ruining childhood fairy tales. I'll be getting back to the main topic for real this time. As for the old fossil Little Mermaid—er, Stone Mother—I'll think about researching her components another time.

I swept up all the diamonds she cried in order to see if I could sell them for some money later... this wasn't because I was stingy, it was because I had recently been robbed clean of all my money. If I find the bastard who stole my wallet, I'll definitely... What? You're saying I'm going off topic yet again? Fine then, I'll discuss my recent troubles with money later and will definitely do my best to stay on topic.

Ainslo cried continuously, but I treated it as nothing more than crocodile tears. I was no idiot, after all. Although the Titan Giants called themselves the children of the earth, the Winged Tribes also called themselves the children of the sky, and the Elves called themselves the children of nature or the children of the forest. These were all just self-proclaimed titles, with no actual meaning behind them whatsoever.

Titan Giants weren't elemental creatures. Their name of children of the earth simply meant that they recognized that the earth itself

gave birth to them, and that they were products of nature rather than some God that created them. If they actually had anything to do with the earth element, Emordilorcan would never have been able to become the Earth Elemental God.

"Unable to move in front of the Titan Giants? Hmph, I think it's because you knew that the Titan Giants would be your opponents that you didn't even dare to go into battle."

Ainslo didn't reply, and she stopped crying as well. It would seem that she felt herself that her acting was meaningless.

This ugly Elemental Lord who was incredibly small and short was from the same generation as Emordilorcan. She was far older than even the majority of True Gods. Perhaps she had even seen the Titan Giants in their full glory and power. In that case, it would be quite easy to understand why she was so scared of them. Even if she actually possessed sufficient power to fight against the Titan Giants' incarnations, she would be worried about the Titan Giants' true bodies later taking revenge upon her. And with her stopping the others, none of the other Seven Saints would even consider entering the battle.

Upon realizing this, I surreptitiously glanced over the short and stocky Stone Mother. Her Saint rank power level might not count for much among all the top-level combat strength in this world, but her knowledge from Immemorial or even Great Immemorial generations would likely be more important than her combat strength.

Of course, it would be quite difficult to obtain answers if I directly asked such things. From a certain standpoint, since Ainslo had lost my trust, she was also in the process of losing an incredibly rare opportunity.

"Until I figure out various things from her, I'm not going to discuss that matter with Ainslo."

Originally, I had intended to discuss with her about fixing the

Earth Elemental Throne and having her become the next Earth Elemental God. However, having such a sly and selfish individual like Ainslo obtaining that position might not be a good thing for us.

The birth of a new Earth Elemental God would naturally and greatly slow down the revival of the Titan Giants. A sufficiently powerful earth elemental creature and an established Earth Elemental Throne were the two necessary factors for establishing a new Earth Elemental God. And, to my knowledge, Ainslo the Great Stone Sculptor was the most powerful Earth Elemental Lord in existence, making her the candidate closest to becoming the next Earth Elemental God. As for the shards of the Earth Elemental Throne, two individuals had obtained them. One was me, while the other was...

"Beifeng, what do you say? What's with how unscrupulous your brothers and sister are? I didn't treat them poorly at all—I gave them plenty to eat and a great place to live. Yet they all acted cowardly when I needed them to fight. Isn't that just terrible of them?"

At the time, the Sand Worm King tamed by Beifeng, who was now one of the Seven Saints, was the one who directly destroyed the Earth Elemental Throne, meaning that part of the Throne's shards were definitely held by the Sand Worm King. Technically, as this was the Sand Worm King's loot, I would need to directly exchange for the shards with him.

What I had just asked was a difficult question to answer. But I wasn't making anything up as the Forest of Dreams had obvious benefits for the Earth Elemental Lords. Although I said that I was asking Beifeng, I was still staring at Ainslo, forcing her to give me an answer.

Beifeng knew what I meant. He simply continued playing with his new white lion friend and didn't reply to my question. Meanwhile, Ainslo remained silent.

But she knew very well that pretending to be dumb wouldn't work.

She would have to come to a decision.

Chapter 358: Information

"...I can work for you, but you must pay me an amount worth my loyalty. If you're able to grant one request of mine, it will become much easier for us to reach an accord."

Ainslo's response was quite vague, with no concrete promises made. But judging from how the Stone Mother kept sneaking glances at Beifeng and her bump and shard-filled stone face actually had the expression of a shy girl, what she meant was obvious.

From a certain standpoint, I felt that Beifeng's ability had surpassed the legend about Midas's golden touch. In the literal sense of the word, Beifeng had even succeeded in moving a heart of stone.

Even I had been shocked and confused when I first heard Beifeng's accomplishment after the battle.

"...Impossible! He only needed to speak a few words and he tamed that gigantic beast which was powered up by a Titan Giant? Is this a joke? That lion is at the very least a SemiGod, not to mention under the control of the Titan Giants. How could it betray them so easily!?"

Yet some people or events would truly be that unreasonable. Truth was always stranger than fiction, and reality would always trump theory. If you found something inconceivable, it only meant you didn't understand everything about what had truly happened... Fine then, to speak more directly, nobody knew just what it was that Beifeng had done. Nor did anyone want to know.

As I gazed at this "miracle man," who was currently fooling around with that extravagantly beautiful divine beast lion, even I felt rather awkward as I thought about how he was able to move even the heart of an Earth Elemental Lord made of stone.

"If you look at it from a different angle, isn't it just like winning the heart of an ancient princess from another dimension, then obtaining a large amount of dowry and subordinates, together with a great increase in personal power level through combat. Then, he managed to tame a 'beautiful' powerful existence simply by talking, even though that lion would easily suppress him in power level. With how successful he is with everything in life... not to mention how much of a harem he has, without even a single conflict among his harem members? Isn't he absolutely just like a main character? Beifeng, if you change your style slightly, you could be the main character of a typical knight's story!"

"...Actually, he's written his own autobiography and epic that's become a hugely popular novel. It has excellent descriptive detail, and not only is his story popular with men, but many women—whether they be stuck in loveless relationships or have no romantic experience whatsoever—love his story as well. I've also read it, and it's truly a great read."

Harloys' comment made me feel rather uncomfortable. How was this possible!? How could something so improper be popular!?! Also, Beifeng was actually literate! And he even knew how to write a novel!

"...Dracons are an intelligent species. Be careful you don't get attacked for racial discrimination."

"Impossible! Just Beifeng's existence alone means his book wouldn't get approved by any authority. How could something so improper even get published!? Not a single merchant publisher would dare to accept his story!"

"Actually, he's a skilled writer who's good at telling stories. Only after reading his story did I find out that the world of beasts was so interesting..."

"Harloys! Please don't go down the wrong path!"

Often times, curiosity towards certain taboos would be the

beginning of going down the wrong path. If making a straight person gay was called "curving" them, then what should making a straight person interested in bestiality be called? Was a new word about to be born yet again all because of Beifeng? Beifeng, could you please slow down just a little?

"Ha, what are you thinking about? Relax, I have normal interests. Aren't the most popular knight stories all about adding some animal characteristics to the female lead to make her seem cuter? Since humans can adopt beast characteristics, of course beasts can also adopt human characteristics. Beifeng's story, 'Hunting Records of a Tamer,' only has normal relationships between males and females. Although if you look at what it would be in real life, it's just that beasts have become humans, men have become women, and male beasts have become female beasts, and so on. Ah, the seventh female lead, Mia, is truly so cute. But once I think about how she was originally a large yellow dog, and male, it makes me unable to stand it anymore. As expected, you should just look at the surface. It will ruin your worldview if you know who the author is!"

Alright then, I felt slightly reassured upon hearing such an explanation, although Harloys' words still seemed to contain many parts worth commenting on.

"Forget about explaining male beasts transforming to female, because all of us know just what Beifeng is like. But the seventh female lead? Is the story even readable with such a messy plot?"

"I asked him that as well. Beifeng told me: 'Every single feeling I have is serious, very serious. I'm giving it my all with each and every love. I'm willing to sacrifice everything, including my life, for the sake of my lover. This is why I was able to obtain the Heart of All-Encompassing Love. I love everyone, but I'm also focused. Every single love I have contains my entire heart and soul. I enjoy the delight of love, but I also desire the next experience of love which awaits me. If you think that all I'm interested in is carnal

lust, then you're truly underestimating me and my lovers."

Although this reason sounded ridiculous, he really was able to use this Concept of his to form a Soul Imprint—that meant that he really did think in such a way. In fact, it was even his entire way of life.

For me, personally, I found it impossible to accept such a ridiculous way of looking at love. Yet since it was someone else's personal interest, I wouldn't comment too much on it... which was absolutely impossible! I wasn't such a good person! The moment I returned to East Mist, I was definitely going to write a new law, forbidding his novels from entering the market! One Beifeng was more than enough! What if more people like Beifeng appeared due to the popularity of his novels? Would this world even be salvageable anymore?"

"Although I don't want to admit it, what he says is probably what he really thinks. Did he convince you?"

"Not at all. As he was telling me all this, he was being fought over by a male water buffalo and a female lizard. Also, a female chimpanzee was crying into a handkerchief nearby. Since I was far too disgusted by him showing me an 8:00 pm soap opera and hellish battleground before me—not to mention beast style—I sent him flying with a wave of Arcane Missiles."

"Wonderfully done!"

I gave Harloys a big thumbs-up, but Harloys still remained rather depressed.

"...As he was flying, he also gave me a big thumbs-up in return. He had angered me intentionally so that I would send him flying and rescue him from the situation he was in."

"...Forget it, let's change the topic. I no longer wish to learn anything more about him."

From a certain standpoint, if at all possible, I wanted to know as

little about Beifeng as possible. Yet even this ancient Earth Elemental Lord was making Beifeng into her condition—I could only be impressed at Beifeng's abilities in this area.

The most important thing right now was to obtain the information I wanted from the Great Stone Sculptor. Since she wanted the dracon, I would give him to her. After all, Beifeng was interested in every lifeform there was, so what did it matter?

But just as I was planning on giving him over in an arranged marriage, he spoke up.

"...Sister Stone and I have a pure brother-sister relationship, nothing more. Please don't misunderstand."

I was incredibly astonished to hear this. Beifeng actually rejected someone else's offer of love? Wasn't he supposed to love everything living that wasn't humanoid?

But unfortunately, no matter how much I hinted with my gestures, that bastard wouldn't budge at all. He was almost acting like a proper individual who stood on the side of logic, which made me into an ancient artifact who was trying to force him into a marriage.

"Harloys?"

"Don't ask me—I don't know a single reason for this to happen."

"That means you know multiple reasons... Tell me. Otherwise, I'll transform you into a cat and give you to Beifeng. Do you see that lion? He's your distant relative, as well as male..."

Although this was an old trick I had used endless times before, it was fine as long as it was effective. Besides, Beifeng didn't have any interest in Harloys as she was originally a Gold Elf. It would be enough to only scare her. From what I knew, Beifeng was capable of opening up Harloys' old mental scars with just a gesture.

"...Pure love? Ptui! It would be the strangest thing ever if he believed in that! Ainslo's physical body is made of stone, so it's

impossible to do anything. And he still kept rambling on about spiritual love, but when the Stone Sculptor transformed into her humanoid form, he lost all interest in her."

Although Harloys' angry tone was definitely aimed at me as well, I understood instantly, even if I would have preferred to understand nothing.

It was quite common for high-level elemental creatures, dragons, and so on to have humanoid forms. Typically, the powerful would have rather handsome or beautiful appearances in their humanoid forms. And once they created a humanoid form for themselves, there would be no changing it. The really ancient existences like Ainslo were particularly fond of using Superior Elves as their humanoid forms. The Stone Mother's humanoid form was most likely a beautiful Elf, and with any normal person's sense of beauty, perhaps it would be possible to accept her Elf form. But, Ainslo just happened to meet this strange individual.

There was a saying that non-corrupt officials would have difficulty in managing their own family affairs, but I felt that even a corrupt official would find it impossible to manage these weirdos. If at all possible, I wanted to run away from this situation, but it just so happened that I had many uses for Ainslo. I needed her full cooperation.

There were other issues apart from establishing a new Earth Elemental God? Of course. My Frigidwinter Earth needed other high quality elemental items in order to balance and complete it. While I investigated this topic in the Mage Country, I didn't discover anything.

"Are you stupid? If those mages knew the location of top-level elemental items, they would have fought over them long ago. Even if such an item is simply embedded into the top of a mage staff to support one's magic spells, it would still be a priceless treasure. Who would leave a top-level elemental item laying around for you? Even if a mage's natural element is incompatible with the

elemental item in question, he or she could still leave it behind for disciples or descendants as a priceless family heirloom."

At the time, Harloys had instantly shattered my dream about lucky chances. But even when I asked the Gods, there was still no answer. Or perhaps I should say that I received the same answer.

"...Are you an idiot? If I knew where top-level elemental items were, I would have gone to steal them long ago. Why would I leave them for you?"

Well, since Beyana was the Goddess of Wealth, I figured that perhaps she would know something. But the reply I received was the same, despite the fact that I had sent her some presents to help fix our relationship.

But, if you thought about it, an ancient Elemental Lord would probably know more about top-level elemental items than anyone else in existence. Elemental creatures had their own social circles and dimensions, and the elemental wars between them never stopped. Also, due to how the elements interacted with and countered each other, it was impossible for elemental creatures themselves to use any elemental items that weren't from their element. And in order to better defend against their enemies, it was only natural for them to have a deep understanding of other elements' top-level items.

Since I currently had Ainslo, an ancient Elemental Lord who was just as old as Emordilorcan working under me, it was only natural for me to ask her about it. However, the price for such top-level information would surely be great, so first trying to haggle or getting in her good graces was only normal.

Yet she was now making it obvious that she was a maiden in love, which forced me to get involved in all this—I had information I wanted from her. I really didn't want to have anything to do with these mysterious existences and the strange ways they thought, but I had no choice.

In the end, I could only make a new law in the entire Northlands for the protection of animals. "Yep, a special law made based on a plea bargain, which won't be carried out in Sulfur Mountain City. Casually touching another person's pet without the master's permission will be breaking the law. So if you don't want to be chased by the Knights of Justice, you understand." This was the bribe I offered Beifeng so that he would promise to at least give this slightly plump stone princess a chance and at least go out on a few dates with her.

This was all I could accomplish? Indeed, this was all I could accomplish. There was no way I could really force him into a marriage. And if I really did force Beifeng into a marriage, I felt that it would become the greatest shame and dark history of my life. But just this alone made Ainslo thank me repeatedly and nod in great satisfaction. It would seem that she was absolutely lovestruck for the dracon.

And then, I asked her what I wanted to know. She hesitated slightly before telling me... something that gave me a headache.

"A real Titan's Heart? So it has dual elemental properties of both wind and earth? Of course I know that this is a top-level elemental item. But isn't it a little too difficult to obtain from a Titan Giant?"

"...The Gravity Stone which is the core of the Pillar of Wrath in the Suolo District? What do you think you'll do to me if I steal away the foundation of your home? That's right, chase me down to the end of the world! There's a mega empire in the Suolo district. Do you think it's fun to be chased by several million people?"

"The 'Devourer,' who's ranked #5 on the Calamity Rankings? Oh, so he's actually a mutated Sand Worm? But what do you want me to do against a monster that can easily swallow an entire volcano? Isn't this ridiculous? Why is each top-level earth element item more difficult to obtain than the previous!?"

Although I at least received some information this time, any top-

level elemental items lying around were certain to be difficult to obtain. As for these top-level earth element items she mentioned, I didn't even need to consider them as I already had Emordilorcan's body within my Frigidwinter Earth—the best top-level earth element item of all.

"Strange. Why is it that you only know about top-level earth element items? You don't have any information on top-level items from other elements?"

I asked that in surprise, but Ainslo also responded with surprise that didn't seem fake. She just directly asked her question.

"I thought you intended to fix the Earth Elemental Throne, which was why I only told you about the earth element items. Actually, we're searching for these items as well. You wanted information on the other elements' top-level items? Although I don't know much, I do know something."

Fine then. Her unmistakable expression of disappointment made it clear that she had her own hopes as well. As long as the Earth Elemental Throne was fixed, she would naturally become the most likely candidate to become the next Earth Elemental God.

But now wasn't the time for me to tell her that I was considering helping her become what she wanted. I pretended to know nothing about that and continued asking for information about the other elements' top-level items. This time, the Stone Mother was unreserved in giving me her information. After all, these top-level element items were useless to her.

And, in a way, any top-level earth element item that the Earth Elemental Lords knew about were either incredibly difficult to obtain or still unripe for using. Of course the difficulty would be ridiculously high.

But for top-level elemental items from other elements, especially the wind element that the Earth Elemental Lords were weak to, using them would actually weaken themselves. Since these were

treasures that only enemies could use, most would simply try to destroy such items. But some were absolutely impossible to destroy, so they would just seal them and cut off all information about them in order to prevent their enemies from obtaining these items.

And now, I received the valuable information that I wanted.

"A little over ten thousand years ago, the Holai Volcano possessed..."

This time, the information was far more reliable as many of the items were even personally sealed away by Ainslo. But then, my trouble began.

[Ding! Congratulations for activating the Myth-rank Quest, "Go to the Holai Volcano to find..."]

[Ding! Congratulations for activating the Elite-rank Quest, "Go to the Winged Tribe's former capital city, Lais...]

I started to receive an endless amount of such Quests, from the very lowest rank all the way to SemiGod. But it would take an unknown amount of time to complete them all. Considering that I needed top-level elemental items that were the same quality as the Earth Elemental Throne, I wouldn't need to focus on Quests Myth-rank or below.

[System Notification: These Quests' difficulty levels are based solely on the difficulty that Ainslo told you. The actual difficulty levels may be readjusted once you begin the Quest and see the actual situation.]

Fine then, I knew the biggest trouble was still waiting for me. The difficulty was one matter, but the real problem was that Ainslo's information was from far too long ago. I would need to find out if her information was still accurate. Every item she knew about was from several tens of thousands of years ago. Just investigating the differences between the names of the old places

she knew and the names of today would require me to find several experts in history to track changes throughout the eons. Organizing the information alone would require a great deal of effort.

It's funny how things worked. I was just complaining how I had no information earlier, but now I had too much information and it would all need to be investigated. Since Ainslo's information was highly likely to be outdated, the result of any Quest I undertook would be no different from a gamble. A hugely difficult Quest might result in nothing whatsoever at the end, and perhaps a low-ranked Elite Quest might actually give me a top-level item.

"Honestly, System, don't you know how to give me a break? Doing all these random draw Quests will take me more than three years! Don't you know that I hated random draw reward Quests more than anything else back when I was adventuring? There's also the fact that my luck is so terrible. Several times, I purchased expensive treasure maps only to find that I was too late to the treasure by a couple centuries. That wasn't even the worst part. One time, I fought with a Phantom Cat guarding a treasure for two entire weeks, only to discover that the treasure it was guarding was nothing more than some fish heads and fish bones that had gone rotten, which made me so disgusted..."

[System Reminder: You truly are an idiot. If you can't finish all these Quests by yourself, don't you know how to hire someone else to do them for you? There are plenty of gamers out there willing to be hired to rank up your account or perform difficult Quests for you. Just think about it! Bear Grylls will teach you how survive in the wild, for the low price of 998! Only 998! You're already a boss level character yourself, so why do you want to do everything by yourself?]

Hire gamers to rank my account up for me? I paused in surprise for a moment before having an epiphany.

"You're saying I should issue my own Quests to the Contract

Heroes and have them find the elemental items for me? Yep, as long as I label the difficulties appropriately and give out rewards, I'll have an endless number of helpers. I just need to think of a method to obtain some reward money to pay them. Does this mean I need to think of another method to scam some money again? Oh, right, I should be paying a visit to the Bardi Empire's capital. It's not good to have Archduke Halent wait for me for too long..."

"Curving" someone is Chinese slang for making a straight person gay.

Chapter 359: Combat Report from Afar (Part 1)

Contract Heroes' jobs weren't limited to a single faction. In fact, it was the opposite— it was quite easy to issue a job since there weren't too many Contract Heroes in the first batch. Basically, all the factions and countries within the Ayer Faction could issue a job. However, whether the Contract Heroes would see the job or not depended on whether the job was approved by the internal auditors.

My Contract Heroes system was a service platform, so I copied Amazon's reviews system for having both buyer and seller reviews. There would be reviews for the job issuers as well so that nobody could intentionally set traps.

However, where my review system differed was in the fact that it didn't look at how many jobs a faction or individual had issued in the past. Instead, the assessment of their overall trustworthiness was based on their identity, past history, allegiance, and so on.

Simply speaking, if the Holy Church or its related allies wanted to issue a job, they might not even get approved. And even if they did get approved, the information on the job issuer would be marked with a black star of misfortune, which represented that this job issuer was completely untrustworthy. Any Contract Hero who was allured by the potential job reward would have to suffer the consequences of their own poor judgement if the job went awry.

Although I had made the plans for this system, the end result would look totally different when everything was finally carried out. Not only would each manager have their own ideas on how to run this system, but there would forever be a difference between ideals and reality. Yet I had never expected that I would create such trouble for myself in the end.

Due to my special status, I obtained the highest level of trustworthiness according to the review system—basically equivalent to the True Gods themselves. This meant that the Contract Heroes system would forever recommend any jobs I issued first and foremost, as well as guarantee that I was the most trustworthy employer.

This wasn't an abuse of my authority. It was because I was indeed half responsible for this entire Contract Heroes system. Due to my involvement, it was only natural that I would want to keep the Contract Heroes system running as smoothly as possible. That was why the system gave me the highest level of trustworthiness.

Even though I was no God in the skies above, I needed to deal with both mortal affairs and worry about the overall situation. Any problems that arose meant that I would be the first to suffer since it was I on the frontlines... Simply speaking, I was like a peasant who only had unsavory lettuce to eat, combined with an emperor's worries. I suddenly felt like I was just a huge scapegoat for everything. I sure do hope I won't have a typical scapegoat's end result.

Cough—cough—getting to the main topic, it was quite easy for me to issue all my jobs related to the elemental item Quests. I also explained in the job details that the information was very likely to be outdated and might not be entirely correct. Of course, there was one part where the system was unable to assist me: my greatest trouble, the fact that I needed to pay out rewards.

But that was no obstacle to me. Although my wallet was now empty, and I barely had any Justice Points due to my personal System, I would still be able to pay rewards that people would want.

My job rewards would be... IOUs.

Fine then, I knew that owing people salary was something shameless. Perhaps people would even want to beat me up for this.

But my IOUs could be exchanged for items that were quite real and practical: the products of magical engineering.

From the very start, those engineers were my subordinates, together with all the other personnel and technology. So of course their products belonged to me. And currently, Amelia was in a deep sleep, so her Thorn Garden was under my control as well. And I still possessed some treasure hoards from the past. As an antagonist who was always being hunted down, I dug many secret stashes back in the day to help finance my revenge. It would be simple enough for me to draw more than a dozen treasure maps.

Perhaps my wallet was empty, but I did still have some money to my name. And my IOUs were definitely exchangeable for magical engineering products. Now that I thought about it, did that make me tall, handsome, and rich...? Who said that 1.2 meters (~4 feet) didn't count as tall? Come out, I promise not to kill you!

"I think they should accept this as payment. Even if the adventurers don't need magical engineering products, they can still sell them for money."

However, I ended up underestimating the power of my IOUs. The new products of magical engineering were absolutely unique products that I had a monopoly on. They had only been slightly tested out in the battlefield here, but they had already obtained astonishing results on another battlefield.

It was precisely these combat results that caused magical engineering products as well as the Northlands knights to become famous.

What battlefield was I talking about? Auland's aquatic battlefield!

While I was still busy over here, the battle at the former Auland Empire capital city Kagersi, now known as the Sea Tribe's Rain City, the capital city Dofeloci, was currently at a stalemate.

This city was covered with sea water, obviously meaning that

this was now the Sea Tribe and other aquatic species' home terrain. In their capital city, they would easily be capable of taking on opponents above their power levels. Even a top-level powerful individual would perish here if they found themselves surrounded.

In such an aquatic battlefield, humanity's most proficient tactics of swarming with numbers and other strategies would become useless. Even the strongest knight would find it impossible to charge forward at a high speed in water. Knights proud of their heavy armor and high defense would find their armor to be a giant burden, instead. Even if they did fight in shallower areas—where infantry could barely do combat—these heavily armored warriors would find it impossible to stand up again if they accidentally fell over in water that reached their chests.

For the Sea Tribe, no matter how numerous their enemies, all they had to do was withstand the onslaught by utilizing their terrain advantage. This would cause the attackers who refused to give up to become food for the fish.

Use ships? Traditional wooden ships were quite easy to sink. Smaller ships would capsize to the wind and waves that the Sea Tribe could summon, while it was impossible for larger ships to even enter this kind of battlefield.

Based on the common sense of combat, this was a very imbalanced battle. No sane commander would ever choose to attack such a location where the defenders held an absolute terrain advantage. But ever since Auland lost their capital, combat had never stopped at this location.

After all, this place was the Auland Empire's capital city! It was the military, political, and economic center of an entire mega empire and represented the collective face of the Auland people.

Invaders would typically believe that attacking, conquering, and slaughtering all the inhabitants of a capital city could destroy the will of a country's people to resist. But actually, no matter what

country it was, as long as the people still had some fight left in them, they would treat it as a lifelong shame. People would instead put everything on the line to wash away this shame. I'd already seen too many such examples in history, but there would always be others who proudly made such plans to ambush and conquer a country's capital without expecting the end result, which was getting dragged into all-out warfare.

"Winter Wolf King" Darsos left amazing achievements behind in the game's history. This type of character would never be easy to deal with. And, as his experience and power level improved, he would only become more difficult to deal with.

The difference between ordinary people and the ambitious could be displayed in how they behaved when forced to the brink. Ordinary people would despair or rage and try to solve the problem facing them while battling negative emotions. But for the ambitious, brinks were also opportunities. They would laugh out loudly as they faced danger head on and turn the danger into opportunity.

Indeed, Darsos had lost the capital city of Auland. But not even thirty kilometers away, he constructed a new temporary capital close to Rain City. This temporary capital was also named Kagersi, and its style intentionally imitated the old Kagersi, as if this was just a suburb of the capital. Darsos also personally led a squad to patrol this New Kagersi every day, no matter how treacherous the weather.

Every single day, countless people and resources from all of Auland would pass by the New Kagersi's walls. Every dawn and dusk, the emperor and empress would go out on the castle walls to wave at their citizens.

Darsos stood at the very forefront of every attack to reclaim Rain City. He never trembled, even if Sea Giants were roaring right next to him.

"Our Emperor!"

Two years ago, this way of addressing Darsos was only due to his status. But now, the people of Auland truly venerated him in their hearts.

The forbidden spell which created Rain City was still under effect. Rain City was expanding its territory by the day and would drown New Kagersi sooner or later, as New Kagersi was located very close to Rain City. Powerful sea monsters capable of temporarily leaving the water would often ambush New Kagersi as well. Even so, Darsos adamantly remained in New Kagersi and beat back every one of the Sea Tribe's ambushes.

The combat situation was indeed going poorly for Auland. Even if Auland occasionally managed to reclaim some territory, they would soon lose it again. The attack to reclaim Rain City was already in its sixty-seventh wave, but zero progress had been made. Still, looking at things from a different angle, the people of Auland had already gotten used to the way that the Sea Tribe fought in all these back and forth battles. The young ones were also maturing through battle, and the entire country was participating in the war effort. Every single government branch and private industry had converted from peacetime to war efforts. Although Auland never won, they also never lost.

Yep, they never lost. Every single attack they made on Rain City would be a short, preplanned battle—an ambush on a certain district to kill off the Sea Tribe members within before speedily retreating. They used only thirty percent of their forces as ambushing attackers, leaving seventy percent behind as backup support. Although this was quite a safe strategy, it was also impossible for this strategy to obtain any decisive results. But judging from how the Sea Tribe members roaming around freely outside became less and less, and how they had contracted their lines of defense, the Sea Tribe appeared to have lost confidence in being able to conquer everything around them.

By now, Rain City had expanded to being less than ten kilometers away from New Kagersi. Despite this, Darsos remained ambitious as always and patiently organized his forces—he even made this area into a practice field for his troops.

Darsos had the foundation to be willful as he pleased as he led a mega empire. However, if you looked at it from a purely logical standpoint, he could have simply ignored the loss of Auland's capital city.

With two years of warfare, his father, brothers, and brothers' descendants had all perished. Originally, a powerful emperor would only see his authority grow boundlessly in wartime. The current Darsos now had total control over all of Auland.

Alright, this was also due to his wise, most trusted friend, and most beautiful, most gentle empress. The prior had now become the number one prime minister in Auland, while the latter was viewed by more and more people in Auland as the perfect woman. But only Darsos' closest and most trusted associates knew that she was actually the number two in charge, only after Darsos.

In every way, the Auland Empire had already surpassed the powerful Auland Empire from the game's history.

Although their enemy, the Sea Tribe, still conquered and possessed the Rain City, their situation wasn't going that well, either. More and more Sea Tribe members were joining Rain City. The warm sunlight and free beaches and hot food made the Sea Tribe's veterans delighted with their new lifestyles, while it also whetted away at their will to fight. They only wanted to conquer more water-covered land and Kagersi's entertainment centers and actually focused more on their own internal conflicts than the external one.

After experiencing cooked meat, they wanted more. After experiencing the warm sunlight, they learned how to wear noble attire that was incapable of being worn underwater. Nobody went

to weaponsmiths, while all sorts of new restaurants and bars popped up. Even their underwater dance halls started playing all sorts of strange new loud music. And although information was limited, it was said that internal conflicts kept erupting every day despite the new Sea Tribe royalty trying their best to stop internal conflict. After all, the Sea Tribe consisted of many different "sub" tribes, and they were quite accustomed to tribal warfare. The so-called new Sea Tribe royalty was simply just one tribe among them, and their authority was insufficient to suppress the internal warfare.

Even as the humans grew stronger and stronger with each attack, and more and more Sea Tribe members got killed with each attack, the Sea Tribe didn't care. They passively waited for Rain City to expand, believing that this would be sufficient. In their minds, there was no way the humans would dare to enter the deep water areas for an all-out attack. Their true enemies were actually their rival tribes, so having more members from other tribes die was actually a good thing.

The Sea Tribe were busy with their own internal conflicts, while the Auland humans were completely united and fighting with their all. With this balancing out the imbalance of strength between them, the weaker humans obtained the right to be proactive in this battle.

And it just so happened to be that at this time, their absolute authority Guardian Goddess, the Queen of Storms, sank into an abnormal silence. Fine, this was actually because she was recently injured by Ayer. And also due to reasons related to me, their original ally, the Water Elemental Goddess Aylos, had called back her direct subordinates, leaving only the lowest water elemental creatures behind.

Since the two top authorities had left with no explanation and weren't interfering with them, their internal chaos and conflict could only worsen.

It was amid all this that Darsos organized the sixty-eighth wave of attacks. Yet his goal this time wasn't to just kill a few of the Sea Tribe.

And, precisely at this time, came Reyne and her Northland knights, accompanied with "Envy" Marsolit, who had sworn revenge.

Chapter 360: Combat Report from Afar (Part 2)

"If I had a choice, I wouldn't have come. I don't have a single good memory here."

Reyne, the leader and representative of Auland's reinforcements, spoke bluntly, instantly causing the atmosphere to cool at Darsos' welcoming party.

"Your Highness Reyne is truly honest and direct. Although past events make one sigh, today is a joyful day. Let's leave that topic for another time. Your Highness is capable of setting past matters aside and making the correct decision for the greater good. As expected of the pride of the Northlands, the Princess Knight!"

Darsos maintained a gentleman's smile and led the way in clapping, helping ease the awkward atmosphere as everyone else hurried to follow his lead and clap as well.

Indeed, it was impossible for Reyne to have a good impression of Kagersi. First, when she was in a dire situation, she was forced to sign a subordinate country contract... and then almost forced into a marriage. If she was the female lead of a story about a female main character's sufferings, it probably would count as the type where she had both personal and national grudges. Next up would be a love and hate relationship for the rest of her life... Fine, that style of story evidently didn't fit this situation, so let's not go too far down a tangent. At the very least, it was quite likely that Reyne held some grudges.

Her arrival, however, was indeed explainable. After all, the Auland Empire had sent a knight order and diplomatic envoy group to assist the Northlands in the war against the Beastmen. Even if Auland's knights weren't of any actual help in the end, not a single one of their White Wolf Knights retreated in front of Poison God Felix, standing firm to fight for humanity in front of

insurmountable odds. We owed them at least this much.

Also, Auland was the Northlands' largest trade partner and financial supporter. I had signed all sorts of contracts with Hemet back at Diffindor. At the very least, Auland and the Northlands were still allies—they even appeared to be solid allies with an excellent relationship.

There were only a few places in Eich with ongoing large-scale battles. Reyne wanted to level up her troops by giving them combat experience, along with earning Justice Points. She basically had two choices: the battle against the undead, and this battle here against the Sea Tribe.

As for the Northlands knights, for both the Aurora Knights who controlled ice as well as the Four Elemental Swordcasters and their magic swords, they wouldn't have a large advantage over the hordes of undead. But with her aerial fleet and Aurora Knights, they wouldn't fear an aquatic battle. This was why Reyne chose to come here.

It wasn't only because it would be an easier battlefield to level up her troops. There were also political considerations. The Northlands needed to improve its reputation and authority. Simply remaining in a corner of the continent would be too passive. In a way, since Reyne had several excellent teachers and wasn't dumb to begin with, she was far more mature than Roland had anticipated, especially after she rediscovered her confidence.

Just Reyne's arrival together with her aerial fleet increased all Auland citizens' morale. This was because aerial battleships were incredibly rare in Eich, and only we possessed them... Reyne even felt rather embarrassed at seeing the crowds below cheering for her. If she looked at the real origin of the Borealis, it was stolen from the Auland Empire. But since the original owner didn't even know, she would just let things be.

The Big Dipper squadron for the Borealis was still under

construction, so only the Mizar came together with the Borealis. Reyne's aerial fleet consisted of one mega-aerial battleship Borealis, one heavy-class aerial battleship Mizar, along with around twenty small and swift fighters—a rather strange assortment. Together with her were about a hundred Aurora Knights and slightly over two hundred Four Elemental Swordcasters. Reyne had brought all her main forces with her with the intention of significantly contributing to this battle.

Of course, she also brought along Olive's engineers and alchemists. Using such mega airships to only bring along her own people would be too much of a waste. At four pre-arranged locations, she brought on slightly over twelve hundred adventurers. Since space was limited on the airships, the adventurers had to be selected, with preference given to Contract Heroes and the strongest. About seven hundred were Contract Heroes, while the other five hundred were either those sitting on the fence about the Contract Heroes system or interested adventurers who hadn't managed to obtain a Hero's Armlet to become a Contract Hero in the first batch we recruited.

Of course, it was only natural that Reyne tried to recruit some adventurers into becoming her personal warriors on the way.

It wasn't easy for Darsos, either. The Northlands princess didn't even try to hide her grudge against him—she was polite to everyone else but icy cold to the extreme only towards him. Although Darsos continued to smile politely out of his pride as an emperor, as if her attitude didn't matter, he felt more and more aggrieved inside.

The reason? Actually, he could have tolerated it if it was merely having to deal with Reyne's attitude. After all, she was here to assist him. What gave Darsos trouble sleeping at night was her familiar face. Seeing Reyne, whose face was almost identical to Roland's, constantly walk around in front of him caused Darsos to recall his dark history that he did his very best to bury: falling in

love with a "man" and even publicly asking to get married, multiple times. Just recalling this memory made him want to clutch his head and cry.

And the most pitiful part was that every time he saw Reyne's face, Darsos discovered that he actually mysteriously felt like he missed Roland, which made him want to cry even more. Every time he saw Reyne, he would mysteriously feel his heart skip a beat. This identical face always caused him to recall Roland's every little action and smile, making his heart ache even more. It was as if a healed scar had opened up once again, with lots of salt being spread on top of this old injury.

"...Am I actually gay?"

The pitiful Emperor Darsos had never before doubted his sexual orientation. Feeling helpless, he could only go to his most beloved Empress Rosemary for consolation. When faced with Darsos' lack of self-confidence, Rosemary appeared calm on the surface but secretly wanted to snicker, as "she" thought about her true identity. Still, she consoled him by having sex. Then, she told him:

"No need to think that much into it. No matter what, Princess Reyne is still a girl. If your heart is moved by her, it actually proves you're straight."

Alright then, her consoling was quite effective. At the very least, Darsos felt greatly relieved after hearing this.

"She's still unmarried, isn't she?"

For an emperor like Darsos with strong desires, of course he would act to obtain anything he wished for. The moment he felt like his heart being moved was only natural, he even wanted to make a move on Reyne. But his hopes had been dashed on the very same night of Reyne's arrival.

His secret spies told him that Reyne had brought two beautiful female adventurers into her own room for "sexual escapades." This

caused Darsos to become confused yet again.

"So she actually likes women? Am I the one who's not normal here? Or is she 'Roland' himself pulling a prank on me?"

He had his female spies secretly get close to Reyne and investigate, but the result was that Reyne was, indeed, a woman. Upon hearing this, Darsos received an even greater impact.

"Ahhh! The person I love likes women?"

From a certain standpoint, Darsos, whose reputation was getting better and better as a wise lord, received yet another serious blow regarding his personal affairs. The end result was that he was greatly shaken about his sexual orientation yet again. He could only go back to his "female lover" for sexual consolation... By the way, if he knew the truth about his empress, would he commit suicide? Or would he change his sexual orientation and become gay, even writing some epic poetry in the process?

"You regret that I was born too late, while I regret that you were born too early—the greatest regret of my life is that I was unable to forget you even unto my death."

Typically speaking, such epic poetry would be created when the author possessed some bone-piercingly deep emotions or had some inconceivable encounter. But this sentence later became used to describe a couple with an extremely good relationship, which was actually a misinterpretation of the original author's intent. Since this sentence originated from Darsos, it wasn't something meant to describe a straight couple's love...

As for just what exactly happened in Reyne's room, I don't want this book to become censored, so I'll leave it up to your imagination. At any rate, I'll say just one thing—straight couples' relationships are only for the purpose of breeding future generations, while relationships between the same gender is real, true love... What? I'm really not a veteran member of the FFF group! This is common sense! It doesn't need any proof! How about

you randomly ask someone on the street?

Cough—cough—this actually wasn't Reyne's fault. She didn't do this because of her personal interests. Nor did she even know what Darsos thought of her. It was just that after she left Roland's watchful eye, using Reyne's body for sexual escapades became Karwenz's "tuition" in exchange for teaching her knowledge. And she couldn't stop Karwenz from forcefully taking over her body anyways—she refuse to pay such a tuition fee.

Anyhow, Darsos reaching such a state of affairs wasn't particularly because he was evil or unlucky. Perhaps it was simply Fate at hand. Maybe the God of Fate didn't wish this ambitious man, born far more talented than others, to have too easy of a life.

No matter if it was the Darsos of today or the Darsos in the game's history, and no matter if it was in politics or his personal life, he was definitely no good person. But the end result made it seem that he was forever unlucky. However, compared to the "Dark Elf Empress" in the game's history, Empress Rosemary was at least a great improvement. Perhaps it would even be possible for Darsos to have descendants. Wait a moment, the undead having children? Hang on, I must research this right away.

But no matter how internally conflicted Emperor Darsos felt, or how much blood he spurted over this, or how many times he visited his empress for sexual consolation, the war still continued. He needed to act like he was filled with vigor and high in spirits. At the very least, he refused to allow his personal feelings to shake the foundations of his country, or his army's morale. Every day, Darsos was all smiles as he continued leading his patrols and held meetings with his council... If Roland had known how hard Darsos worked, Roland surely would have given him a big thumbs-up and praised him, saying "You've sure worked hard! You're truly a good public official of Auland, sacrificing yourself for the sake of the people."

As for Reyne, she was likely to have a celebration party of her

own if she knew about Darsos' mental struggles. Ever since she was born, Darsos, who had tried to threaten and force her, was the person she hated the most. If it wasn't for Roland's appearance, the East Mist Communal Country would have likely become the Auland Empire's subordinate country. Reyne herself would have been forcibly married off to someone she didn't like–maybe to someone she didn't even know.

So Reyne didn't attempt to conceal her great distaste for Darsos. But on another level, despite the fact that the Auland Empire had been in a state of war for a long period of time, Auland had indeed faithfully followed the contract to provide East Mist with resource support. Although the contract was a demon contract where failure to adhere to it would be punished by death, there were still loopholes that one could take. However, Auland had provided more resources to East Mist than was required by contract, so this was also an investment owed to Auland as a favor.

That was all part of why Reyne came to assist Auland. Just by arriving in New Kagersi, all of Auland knew about her arrival. There was even a huge crowd of citizens lined up on both sides of the road to welcome her. Even now, the people of Auland still recalled the astonishing performance of the Angel Bloodline "Reyne" in the arena. Auland's nobles and knights also recalled how the Princess Knight had rushed forward into danger by herself when forced to the brink, all in order to save her relatives and friends. In their minds, the young Princess Knight was a perfect role model for how a knight should be.

As for the dirty politics and internal conflicts involved, those were secrets that no ordinary citizen would possibly know. Only the "highest-ups" of both sides knew the true nature of matters. What everyone else saw on the surface was that both sides had a wonderful friendship and alliance.

"The young Princess Knight's outstanding spirit and ability allowed her to receive Emperor Darsos' recognition. Emperor

Darsos made an astonishing decision due to Princess Reyne's potential and voluntarily allowed her country to have an equal status relationship with Auland rather than a subordinate one, along with giving her large amounts of resources as support. Now, Emperor Darsos has been rewarded for his excellent sense of recognition. After the Princess Knight returned to her country, she speedily increased the power of her country and even defeated the vicious Beastmen armies. Now, when we, Auland, are having difficulties, the Princess Knight has returned with her personal knights to fulfill her responsibilities and duties as our ally."

This was what the common person in Auland as well as other outsiders believed of Reyne and Darsos' relationship. Wouldn't it make a great drama play?

Although all of this seemed quite logical on the surface, the reality couldn't be any different. I suppose that it was akin to the difference in my previous world of what you saw on the news vs. reality. Actually, it was the same no matter which world I was in. Any public report, whether coming from the media or the government, would only report about what happened on the surface. Who knew how many things went on behind the scenes?

The end result was quite comical. Both countries' leaders held great amounts of aggrievement towards each other. But, to any outsider, East Mist and Auland appeared like excellent friends and allies, to the point of even obtaining unity in military and economic affairs.

"Look, Auland's continuously supplying East Mist with resources and even sent their knights to support the Northlands against the Beastmen. East Mist even gave Auland their national treasure, the floating airship technology. These two countries are just like blood brothers who don't mind wearing each other's clothing!"

From a certain standpoint, this wasn't wrong at all. Since Auland's empress was secretly a full supporter of East Mist, this strange allied relationship was likely to continue indefinitely.

Cough, once again, for the very, very, very last time, I'll get back to the main topic. Reyne had arrived for Darsos' planned sixty-eighth wave of attacks. And the strategic target for the attack was Kagersi's former dock district... that's right, the district with underwater ruins was Auland's #1 prioritized strategic objective! Currently, the former docks had become a paradise for some giant sea beasts.

Alright then, you readers should know that this location had various things happen to it already, as a "certain person" had secretly taken away the most important treasure. But he wasn't heartless enough to take everything. He had left behind all the information, as well as the equipment that was too inconvenient to take. For the Auland Empire, as long as they could open this "box," the treasure inside would be worth any sacrifice.

Of course, that certain person was not exactly a kind person. He had always been waiting for Auland to open up the box, as his "design plans that are slightly ahead of your technology" and "the most critical technology that just happens to be missing" had been waiting for an incredibly long time! The moment Auland upgraded their technology skill tree, that's right, I would instantly be there as a salesman.

"High-level new technology, package deal, free delivery! You can save ten years of hard work by purchasing this! It doesn't cost 988, or 688, or even 488! It costs a mere 418! 418! Buy one package, and you'll obtain two random loot boxes that contain top-level magical engineering technology! If you buy two packages, it'll be five random loot boxes! That's right, take a good look at the Roland brand New Year's discount! Only found here! What are you waiting for, hurry up and place your order today!"

"What? You want to purchase some specific critical information instead of relying on random draws? Haha, dear customer, I don't think you understand how business works, do you? Do you know what it means that this is only found here? It means that I have a

monopoly, and I can sell my products however I want! I have the right of final interpretation, while you can only make recommendations. You can say whatever you want, but I don't have to listen to you. Don't you know that you have to pay the game company tons of money first before you can finally draw what you're looking for? Don't you know what I mean by saying that you'll save ten years of hard work by purchasing this? It means that if you don't buy this, you'll forever be behind and have to grind for an additional ten years. It's impossible for free-to-play players to ever defeat a pay-to-win player!"

Unfortunately, these advertisements that I personally wrote were never used for their intended recipient in the end due to their obvious ill intentions. Taking into consideration Darsos' worsening mood, Rosemary was worried that Darsos would have a heart attack out of anger upon hearing such an advertisement, so she handed the issue of negotiating for Auland's technology over to Chancellor Hemet... which ended in Hemet having a seizure due to extreme rage, requiring him to be "emergency healed" by Auland's priests...

Well, I should stop spoiling the future. Let's focus on the dawn before the battle which was to be the Auland Empire's first full force attack on Rain City. And so, the sixty-eighth wave of attacks began.

And at this time, Reyne received unexpected reinforcements: three fully organized knight squadrons, with the most eye-catching one being a group of elves with grayish-black skin. With emblems of the full moon and a battle flag of the full moon, their leaders were people Reyne was quite familiar with.

"Diana? Victoria? Why have you all arrived here as well?"

Chapter 361: Combat Report from Afar (Part 3)

It wasn't necessary to describe how Victoria met up with Diana. But, from a certain standpoint, the passionate meeting between the "emperor" and "empress" from the game's history was something worthy of paying attention to.

Unfortunately, most of the time, the relationship between people was based on many factors working together, rather than love at first sight. Although these two "lovers" from the game's history indeed met each other at Darsos' welcoming party, no sparks of love flew between them at all, which made the person in the know really regret that nothing happened once he learned about it.

Yep, that person in the know was me. I was more than happy to enjoy the spectacle.

"You're not afraid that if Darsos really does fall in love with Victoria like in the game's history, and discovers that yet another woman that he loves is also in love with women, that he'll completely despair and break? Perhaps he'll turn gay due to the shock and then come to find you."

Well, this type of unreliable threat naturally wouldn't be able to scare me. But the consequence was that the silly cat was absolutely disgusted and ended up ravaging me.

But now, right before a major battle, the two elves and their Moonlight Goddess squad's arrival was doubtlessly good news.

"Praise forever to our majestic Moonlight Goddess, Patricia. May her love encompass us, may her light illuminate the path before us, and may her presence forever be among us."

The Moonlight Goddess Patricia was one of the most powerful Gods in the Ayer Faction. As a powerful True God, she possessed many Divine Concepts. Her Divine Concepts included the Moon,

Moonlight, Protector of the Lost, the Asleep, Dreams, Cleansing, Guardianship, and Hunting. Although she was technically an Elven Goddess, her believers included not only elves but also humans, rangers, hunters, and others. There was plenty of equipment enchanted by her divine powers as well. She was one of Ayer's earliest close allies. However, after she used most of her divine power to create the forbidden spell star net, her power level dropped to only a Medium God's level.

The star net was a tracking and spy spell for the entire dimension of Eich, the mortal plane. Every single existence from another plane that crossed into the mortal plane would instantly be detected. The Moonlight Goddess would receive achievements and faith through the star net, eventually making her more powerful than ever before. And the Moonlight Goddess Church's priests would become the most reliable hunting hounds of all.

Originally, just doing this would have been enough. But as one of Ayer's staunchest allies, she had no intentions of simply passively remaining under Ayer's protection. In fact, she even proactively took action long before the start of the Holy War.

Patricia was a powerful Goddess to begin with. She had plenty of believers and mortal combatants. Since Patricia had been enemies with Lorci and the other Evil Gods for a long time, there were plenty of powerful fighters under her banner. If they banded together and were well equipped by her, then they would become quite a solid powerful fighting force.

Since Patricia was one of Ayer's staunchest allies, her warriors naturally became Contract Heroes. That was also why they joined this battle of their own volition.

Gray Elves Under the Moonlight—that was the name of these former Dark Elves that had chosen the path of justice. The holy emblem of Moonlight on their shoulders was their symbol.

After Lorci perished, the "heretics" she suppressed among the

Dark Elves now had the opportunity to choose for themselves. Although only two short years had passed, the Gray Elves had already multiplied in number by more than ten times. If it weren't for the fact that two years was too short in the grand scheme of things, the Gray Elves' number would likely multiply exponentially as more and more Dark Elves joined their ranks.

Diana, who sought after the source of faith, also answered her Moonlight Goddess's summons and joined this combat squadron consisting of Gray Elves.

Yet perhaps only Diana herself knew that her solo travels throughout the land wasn't in search of faith, but rather the opposite. Instead, since she was overly close to the Gods and understood the truth about them, her faith was showing signs of collapsing. Her journey appeared to be one in search of glory, but it was actually more of an attempt to escape the truth.

Belief was a power common in this world, and it was even one of the most basic foundational Concepts in Eich. For most ordinary mortals, True Gods were existences far more important than their own lives. It was no exaggeration to say that a True God's will was greatly superior to a person's life.

As a Holy Knight, Diana used to believe in the Holy Light, expecting the Holy Light to give her a path to salvation. But one day, a casual statement from a certain person just about broke all her faith in the Holy Light.

"I don't worship the God of Holy Light despite being a Holy Knight? Of course I don't worship the God of Holy Light. I only believe in the Holy Light itself. Why would I worship an existence who doesn't even have his own sense of self?"

That man, or perhaps it should be said that he was the incarnation of a certain God in Eich, told her the truth about the Gods. Or, more accurately speaking, he used concrete actions to let her know that Gods were nothing special. They were simply older,

stronger existences. All their so-called Divine Miracles could actually be explained by foundational laws.

If that was all there was to it, Diana could have still accepted it all as the ramblings of a non-believer. But the unacceptable part to her was the source of his understanding of the True Gods. It would have been whatever if he was just a random non-believer, but he just happened to possess inexplicable divine power, and he was even a God himself.

"If in the future you choose the power of Law, I would also recommend against worshiping the God of Law himself. Instead, you should study Law to its fullest; understand it, like it, love it, and even make what Law represents into your very way of life. And if you cannot bring yourself to agree with what Law represents, then you should unhesitatingly abandon it. Worship is the farthest path possible from the truth."

"Belief? Of course I have beliefs. Otherwise, how could I possibly become the God of Law? You feel that something's different between what you and I mean about belief? Of course there's something different. Honestly, I actually feel that most people's concept of belief is filled with expectations of receiving something in return, which makes me feel rather uncomfortable. Most people's belief is far too impure."

"Wealthy merchants worship the Goddess of Wealth, hoping she can make them wealthier in return. Farmers worship the God of Harvests, hoping they'll have an excellent harvest in the next year. All sorts of War Gods forever have an unending supply of faith in them, but that's because everyone wants that sweet taste of victory. Perhaps I'm actually the most devout believer of all. I believe in the True Gods, but only to recognize the Concepts that they represent. I believe that Law is just and correct, which is why I'm spreading Law in the world. I hope that Law can make the world a better place, but I don't have any expectations that Law can do anything for me personally."

Pure belief? Diana understood what Roland meant and carefully considered the topic. But she almost lost her job class as a Holy Knight as a result. In a way, Diana the female knight was far too simple of a person. She was simple to the point of being cute as well as foolish.

Because of her simplicity, she rejected all the temptations and desires in Dark Elf society. Because of her simplicity, she believed that the Holy Light could save her species. Because she was simple, she had incredibly pure faith and handed her all to the Holy Light. This actually allowed her to grow faster and stronger than her peers. And in the end, due to being simple, she believed a certain person's words and almost confused herself to death.

Actually, every generation would have a different understanding of belief. Back in the Dark Ages of my original world, Diana's attitude of giving her everything to a God would be the most common choice of the majority. As for my understanding of the Gods and belief, it was a more pragmatic view suitable for an Armageddon age. Basically, it was like "Oh, you look useful, so I'll follow you. But if you stray away from your original Concept, then I apologize. I'm going to rebel against you."

"Belief? Holy Light is just like an automated divine server? He's a God himself, but looks down upon the Gods?"

The most dangerous part was regarding what Roland didn't even realize at the time—that his identity was leaked. Wumianzhe was the lich Roland, and the lich Roland was also the Holy Knight Roland. Once Diana realized all of this, she felt as if a True God had descended before her and told her the truth of the world.

"Perhaps only recognizing and understanding a Concept and teachings of a God is necessary in order to borrow that God's power. In that case, perhaps we are also capable of proactively stealing a God's power and becoming True Gods ourselves."

Alright then, quite obviously Diana misunderstood part of

Roland's words. She simply considered this issue from the angle of how to obtain more power. This was indeed a common way of thinking in this world. Most people that became Holy Knights didn't do so at the very start because they believed in the Holy Light—they did it to have a job to do along with obtaining power. People in other divine job classes were mostly the same. But the price for the power they obtained was to give everything about them over to the True God they worshipped.

Holy Light job class members would remain as Holy Light job class members until their death. Any so-called former Holy Light job class members were mostly dead—they were hunted down by the Holy Church.

Due to Lorci's death, the Dark Elf society which was a divine dictatorship ruled over solely by Lorci had collapsed. A large number of former priestesses and former divine job class members appeared.

Many Dark Elves who lost their faith in Lorci also lost their reason to live and committed suicide. But a greater majority of these former priestesses and former Lorci warriors kept searching for a new source of power. One of the most representative among these Dark Elves was Diana's younger sister, Victoria.

It would have been fine if Diana was the only one who thought such things. But her "younger sister" was once the candidate to become Lorci's highest ranking priestess, so she possessed great amounts of divine knowledge. Victoria also had many former Lorci priestesses as subordinates, and was an outstanding priestess herself. Once Diana told her thoughts to her younger sister, Victoria decided to experiment for herself.

That's right, herself—not for the sake of any of her subordinates. While Diana was a classic example of a Lawful Good individual, Victoria was a typical Chaotic Evil Dark Elf who cared only about the results. How the results were obtained or any sacrifices along the way wouldn't even be considered by Victoria.

In this world where selfishness was the norm, often times there would be more than one "correct" answer. Extreme stubbornness was often capable of creating a brand new path. After a year and a half of searching for their paths, a pair of creations that shouldn't originally have been in this world appeared.

"Desecration Priest and Anti-Holy Knight: The Stealer of Divine Power and the Desecrator of Divine Concepts."

Roland never expected that the words he casually told Diana finally ended creating such demonic job classes.

And in this battle, the first to fall victim to these new job classes were the Sea Tribe. From the very start, the main characters of this battle weren't the people of Auland but rather the girls from the Northlands. The new faction from the north showed off their astonishing potential on this most excellent of stages.

Chapter 362: Chess Match

The battle wasn't going well for the humans. Not a single person was optimistic.

The main strategic objective was once again the former docks of Kagersi, which was currently submerged under more than ten meters of water. The Sea Tribe called this place the "Land of the Dragon's Death" as the SemiGod Hydra's blood had once flowed here and Hydras were considered a species of Dragon. The remnants of the Hydra's blood would be toxic to any ordinary lifeform, but sea beasts would find it incredibly alluring. This was why large numbers of huge sea beasts gathered here.

More than ten nearby former Kagersi street districts of Sea Tribe members would have to be killed off to reach this location. And the Sea Tribe's backup would arrive once the fighting reached a stalemate.

This was why Darsos and his advisers made plenty of preparations for this battle. In the previous sixty-seven waves of attacks, they had chosen to attack this area more than ten times. It was not just to gather information for their true full-force attack or to eliminate any high-priority threats—the main reason was to make the enemy numb to the sight.

"The Land of the Dragon's Death is under attack again? Who knows what those crazy humans are thinking, loving to attack this place so many times? Who cares? Just leave the defense up to those sea beasts."

Actually, the current Sea Tribe's top-priority locations to defend were their royal palace and divine temples. Second priority landed on their entertainment facilities. As for this former dock district where all the sea beasts gathered... did the Sea Tribe need boats? They simply left this place to the sea beasts.

Auland had chosen this location twice out of their five most

recent attacks. Although the Sea Tribe still sent their forces to defend this location each time, the warriors on the frontlines with their heightened senses honed through so much combat had long discovered that the Sea Tribe members' reactions were becoming dulled. In fact, backup would always arrive thirty minutes later than in other areas, and the number of reinforcements would also be less than half compared to other locations!

Since the Sea Tribe members were already numb to such attacks, it was now the perfect opportunity for Auland to launch their first real full-force attack, disguised as a regular guerilla strike. This sixty-eighth wave of attacks, code named "Dawn," was about to begin.

Slightly over an hour remained before the warm sun was to rise and illuminate the world. The great majority of the Sea Tribe were still in a deep sleep—they'd only wake up after nine o'clock.

Unlike in the darkest depths of the deep sea, here they could experience the warmth of the sun during the day. The Sea Tribe here hence started imitating the biological clocks of other species and resting at night. It was very possible they believed that victory was in their hands because of Rain City's forbidden spell—they had arrogantly given up on being proactive in battle. It was only a matter of time for them to meet their doom after making such a decision.

As the main instigators of this particular battle, the people of Auland resolutely stood at the very forefront. Their main aquatic fleet had been seriously damaged in the battle where they lost Kagersi—all three of their major fleets had been destroyed. But in this attack to recapture Kagersi, the surviving ships and newly constructed warships banded together. Auland still possessed more than thirty heavy-class warships and over a hundred medium-class warships.

This was the foundation of a mega empire. Once a mega empire like Auland entered war, a large amount of civilian and merchant

enterprises would transform themselves to work on military products. Unless one was able to crush them in a single blow, Auland's incredibly developed business industry would drag any opponent into a long and hellish war of attrition.

Obviously, Auland's original warships weren't suitable for combat in this environment. The water here was far too shallow, and the depths were overly complex. Even in areas that appeared to have deep water, the sharp pointed roof of some house that was now submerged might act like hidden coral—fatal for any ship. Yet it would be impossible to fight the Sea Tribe without a ship in the deep waters.

The people of Auland had been stuck between a rock and a hard place. But they finally had a solution when they obtained the floating airship technology from the Northlands, which was now in the hands of every single ship building factory in Auland. None of the shipwrights and ship designers had seen a single day of rest. The people of Auland had put their all into modifying their original ships.

Complete flotation was still impossible. That would require dragon bones as the base material as well as a redesign from the base up. The right materials would have to be chosen, enchanted, and put all together. However, the people of Auland were capable of simply installing flotation engines capable of lowering the ship's overall weight to reduce the ship's draft.

Perhaps this seemed rather meaningless, but it opened up the possibility of making the entire hull the ship metallic.

Since the ship was lighter, there was more power of flotation. Didn't that mean it was possible to equip the ship with heavier armor? And so, countless blacksmiths worked to add thick layers of armor to the hull of their ships. In order to ensure that the hull wouldn't be damaged by coral or any other water obstacles, the people of Auland were crazy enough to utilize precious magical metals. Magical metals were precious enough that no ordinary

adventurer would be willing to use them to craft weapons.

After the war was over and Auland calculated the war expenses, the magical metals used for these ships' hull armor alone cost one-fifth of Auland's entire national treasury, which would have been more than enough to reconstruct an entire new Kagersi from scratch.

Although metallic armored ship technology was still in its infancy and engine technology was still under development, Auland's shipwrights had successfully managed to use flotation technology to lighten their ships' weight and create half-metallic armored ships with armor only on the hull. I found this truly amazing.

Unlike the wars fought in my original world of Earth, the metallic warships in this world weren't focused on defending against cannon fire. Instead, this armor was targeted specifically to defend against underwater attackers wanting to sink the ship along with coral and other underwater obstacles.

Once engine technology was improved even further, true, fully armored heavy warships were sure to arrive as well. But right now, these makeshift half-metallic armored warships would be sufficient.

Compared to Auland's original ships, these possessed far superior defenses. Due to the high number of anti-gravity engines installed on each ship, they possessed the ability to float in the air for short periods of time, making them capable of traversing even land. To quote Darsos: "The flotation power is insufficient? Then add more anti-gravity engines and keep lots of backup engines on board to replace any that overload and explode. Outfit every single ship with plenty of workers to run things and mages to provide mana. We have plenty of humans. We also have plenty of money! I'll spend money however I want!"

The humans in this world were just as intelligent as the humans

from my original world. Whenever an intelligent species was forced to the brink, all sorts of miracle inventions would start appearing as war was forever the foremost reason for innovation. Miracle inventions were capable of astonishing feats no conventional military of the time could accomplish.

Of course, if it weren't for the fact that the Auland Empire was already at the top in the field in metallurgy and metalworking, then they wouldn't have been able to actualize all this even if they wanted. Fine then, the most critical part was that they were sufficiently rich. War would always be a contest between two factions' overall power levels. Since Auland was really, really, rich, they could afford to invest so many resources in war.

In order to disguise the regular, weak wooden portions at the top half of their ships and to make better camouflage for night attacks, Auland painted their battleships a pitch black. Later in the future, this black battlefleet that always brought an end to their enemies would be known as the "Fleet of Death."

Without a doubt, this would become one of Auland's aces. No matter how dangerous the war became or how many Auland warriors died in Kagersi's waters to become food for the Sea Tribe, Auland continued to spend resources on constantly improving these battleships to be used in actual combat.

"These modified battleships need to obtain miraculous results on their very first surprise appearance... Otherwise, how can it be called an ace if it can't enter battle at a critical moment and play the most important role in securing our strategic objective?"

As an emperor, Darsos was quite competent in the area of viciousness. All the sacrifices he had to make elsewhere had paid off. This ace he had been hiding for so long achieved astonishing results.

When the pitch-black fleet appeared in the dark hours before dawn, not a single Sea Tribe member was able to stop them. These

gigantic ships were surprisingly dexterous at maneuvering despite their size. Any time they ran aground on coral, buildings, or other obstacles, the fact that they would fly up into midair for a short period of time seemed inconceivable.

Every area of water that these heavy battleships passed over was flattened of all coral, other obstacles, or even any large Sea Tribe members or beasts. Those gigantic, solid metal bodies were capable of smashing everything in their path.

When the Sea Tribe sounded the alarm and entered the battlefield, they found that they were helpless against such battleships.

Swim over and sink the ships by drilling a hole in the hull? The armor consisted of an alloy between magical metal and a thick layer of iron, which would be more than sufficient to defend against even cannon fire. Although a Sea Giant managed to pierce the outer layer of armor using an anchor, the anchor actually got stuck into the inner layer and the Sea Giant was dragged to its death.

Send up huge waves to capsize the ships? These ships were far too steady and were capable of flying up to dodge the waves. No ordinary water mage found it possible to capsize these giant metallic hulks. Only a forbidden spell would be able to accomplish such a feat.

Use cannons to attack the weak wooden areas on the upper halves of the ships? The Sea Tribe didn't possess any cannons. Meanwhile, the Sea Tribe mages lost in battle due to the fact that Auland fielded three times the number of mages by stuffing the ships full of them.

Auland's advantages due to their outstanding metallurgy and metalsmithing skill were quite obvious. Their patented alloy armor, along with explosive metal alloys and other such technologies, provided the best examples. Their alloy armor on the

ships was the product of top-quality Auland metalsmithing. Forget about the Sea Tribe's metal weapons and bare hands—even ordinary magic spells at five circle and below would be unable to damage this alloy armor.

The two sides had completely different attitudes regarding this war, so naturally the result would be influenced by their attitudes.

But the sad part was that even though humans obtained the advantage of surprise and timing and pressed onward rather successfully, they still weren't able to obtain much of an advantage after half an hour of fighting. Even though they were making progress, they didn't obtain the prize they wanted the most: killing off large numbers of the Sea Tribe.

This type of special aquatic battlefield made it impossible for the humans to simply reclaim Kagersi and live there again. In that case, killing off the enemy's numbers became the number one overall objective. But the result was quite disappointing. The Sea Tribe's deaths were quite low, and few high-level Sea Tribe members perished.

The reason? It could be repeated an endless number of times but would always be the same: terrain advantage.

That's right, the Sea Tribe couldn't deal with the heavy battleships. But it was the same in return, as the heavy battleships were unable to deal with the Sea Tribe!

All the Sea Tribe members had to do was dive into the deep water and escape. What could these heavy battleships that could only remain on the water's surface do to them? These heavy hunks of metal were quite slow.

Use cannons to fire into the deep sea? Even the stupidest of commanders wouldn't choose such an action.

Magic attacks? Mages' mana was a precious resource to begin with. Wouldn't the sea water block off most of their attacks?

Shoot gigantic harpoons using huge repeating crossbows? This was actually an effective type of attack, but Sea Tribe members were intelligent and wouldn't simply stand there gawking while humans shot at them. As long as the Sea Tribe kept their distance, this type of attack would be similarly useless.

Send humans underwater to attack the Sea Tribe? A wonderful idea... for the Sea Tribe! This type of absolutely idiotic idea could be considered treachery if anyone dared to mention it. It would be no different from sending free meals to the Sea Tribe as that was what the Sea Tribe would want the most—to have the humans go underwater to them!

Darsos was secretly feeling anxious inside as he stood on the Auland fleet's flagship, the "Shark." He had previously extrapolated many possible combat situations. Yet the Sea Tribe's losses were still fewer than he had anticipated. It seemed that it would be impossible to achieve the primary overall objective of killing as many Sea Tribe as possible. In that case, even if Auland conquered the docks district, the Sea Tribe was certain to counterattack with incredible force.

Also, these modified battleships weren't undefeatable. As time passed, the Sea Tribe would be certain to discover their weaknesses.

Meanwhile, on the floating airships in the sky, Reyne and the others were also watching the current battle in astonishment.

Perhaps her continuous victories had made her overconfident. Reyne had been looking down upon the people of Auland that had lost to Roland so many times. But today, after seeing this sudden pitch-black fleet's arrival, only now did she truly understand the meaning of the term mega empire.

East Mist was currently constructing aquatic ships as well. Just from technology alone, East Mist was even superior to Auland. But there wasn't a single respectable shipbuilding factory in the

entirety of East Mist. Not only that, East Mist's metallurgy and metalsmithing was behind the times. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been forced to use undead magic to construct my second aerial battleship, the Mizar.

Any large ship's required resources and funding would be astronomical. Nor would the maintenance and repair fees after one large ship's construction be cheap. The Borealis was the only exception as it was a living ship—Envy was capable of devouring in order to recover his injuries. That was the only reason why the Borealis hadn't bankrupted East Mist. As for the other large aerial battleships, I didn't even consider having East Mist build them and tossed the duty directly over to the Xiluo Empire.

For a technology to go from blueprint to actual product would require countless processes, materials, artisanry, human resources, and so on. Only since I obtained an almost complete ship, experienced engineers, designers, materials—fine, basically an entire production chain from Auland—I was able to completely utilize this top-level technology. This was also the reason why, even now, East Mist was the only country in the world which possessed a form of fully matured floating airship technology.

Even if East Mist sold part of its technology, it would require many years before other countries would be capable of utilizing floating airships in combat. Reyne had always treated this as her ace and was even secretly rather proud about it.

"If our two countries went to war..."

As the leader of a country, making such an assumption would never be unnecessary. After all, there would only be benefits with diplomatic relationships between countries and no absolute friends. It would be quite common in either world that yesterday's ally would become today's mortal enemy.

For some reason, Reyne recalled my answer from when she had asked me why it was that I still planned to improve our country's

industries when many citizens were having difficulty making ends meet.

"It's not that I'm a combat maniac. I'm actually preparing for the inevitable future. War is impossible to avoid. What? You're saying that we don't need fully developed industries to win our wars, that the Borealis alone will be sufficient?

"You're looking down too much on the mega empires. Perhaps not a single one of their ships can match our Borealis, but they can build ten ships for every one of ours. They can afford to take some losses as they can just build more. Same for their warriors, they can just recruit more if some warriors die. But for us? Our foundational strength is just so little, so without industrial strength to back us up, we lack fresh blood. Without complete industries to back us up, it'll be impossible for us to deal with long-term battles.

"The current East Mist is resting on a volcano. Although things may seem wonderful, we're actually being baked in the heat without realizing it. Mega empires can afford to lose countless numbers of battles. But a single misstep on our side will send all of us down into an inescapable abyss. I don't want to risk my country on a gamble."

It was only now, when faced with the true reality, that Reyne finally understood Roland's seemingly deep words about the difference between East Mist and the mega empires of Eich. Now, she understood that there was no comparing them at all.

"And Auland is only one of the smaller mega empires among mega empires..."

Reyne was no idiot. Once she noticed the difference, she adjusted her way of thinking. Only then did she discover my true intentions for the Northlands.

"The Mist Alliance?"

That's right, just East Mist would have never been sufficient. But with Sleuweir and the combined power of the Mist Alliance's seven Northlands countries, I had always been working to homogenize their economies, politics, and businesses.

"Brother Roland probably doesn't only want this much. What else does he intend? If it's the Mist Alliance, the Kasomi Dukedom that's San Antonio's subordinate country is too much of an annoying obstacle. But to get rid of this obstacle and make San Antonio retreat from the Northlands will require other mega empires' support..."

"No wonder Brother Roland not only invited all the major countries to our military parade but even gave them discounts to buy our technology. Oh, not only that, he even personally picked the envoys to each major country and personally read every invitation letter despite how lazy he normally is."

"Even though the issues regarding the Northlands' dwarves and elves were quite difficult to deal with, he voluntarily dealt with them. Not only that, when dealing with other Northlands countries, he actually brought up the hugely unpopular plan to cancel all tariffs on other Northlands countries and allow freedom of movement between the their citizens and kept insisting on this despite his lack of support. Also, he always writes letters to Sister Glina so that our two countries will have identical political proclamations. Although this issue isn't so important, it's evidence that our two countries are supposed to be allies in everything. There's also that matter... just how many things has he been doing in secret!?"

I never hid my actions about the Mist Alliance from my allies. But only now was Reyne beginning to understand my overall strategic objective by putting together the individual pieces. She was currently becoming a more mature leader in her own right.

She correctly understood my intentions for East Mist along with East Mist's current position and tactical worth in the world. This

allowed her to realize what it was that she should do.

"Originally, I had intended to watch the battle for as long as possible and only jump in to assist after Auland and the Sea Tribe brought serious injuries to each other. It isn't much if it's an individual doing this, but it would be far too unworthy of a country's leader. Right now, what we need is to directly show the world our power and obtain as much support from others as we can. Auland should owe us so we may receive more future benefits from them in return. Since the battle is currently at a stalemate, this is the perfect time for us to show up and break it."

There would obviously be a great difference in helping out when Auland was seriously injured versus helping when Auland was locked in a stalemate. Nobody would be fond of or support someone who sat on the fence until the last minute. Since Reyne came to this decision, she didn't hesitate a moment longer.

"Aurora Knights, Silver Cross squadron, move out! Borealis, toss down our new weapons!"

Chapter 363: Swordcasters

"Four Elemental Swordcasters? They're just second-rate magical swordsmen who rely on equipment. Mages require natural talent and are impossible to mass produce. Even if they can somewhat use magic because of their equipment, just how far can they go with no talent in magic? When even their source of mana relies on equipment, how can they possibly understand the truth of magic? They're just a bunch of novices who'll take forever to improve in power level. Rather than wasting so many resources on them, it would be much better to spend resources on raising some young mages. Producing a single archmage will have far better results."

Despite their astonishing feats at Red Maple Castle's defense line, no praise awaited the Four Elemental Swordcasters. Lack of ability to cast spells continuously without their own mana, lack of high-level spells, and difficulty in improving power levels were all weaknesses that other people noticed. This helped reassure the other countries that this job class wasn't a threat to them, and also made them uninterested in importing this job class for themselves.

Other countries were highly interested in the products of magical engineering. However, this new job class was surprisingly unpopular.

Most people would be suspicious of the usefulness of any newly-born job class. The attitude of the archmages in the Cloud Tower was the best evidence of the problem with people's attitudes. After all, the Cloud Tower's archmages were the predominant authority about all magic-using job classes.

Indeed, while this new job class allowed ordinary people to cast magic, they would find it difficult to continue developing their power levels in magic as they lacked ability to sense mana or the elements. Not only that, it would be impossible for even ten low-ranked Four Elemental Swordcasters to defeat a single high-level individual. A job class like this one seemed to lack development

potential and would naturally be unpopular.

"...Perhaps Brother Roland feels that it's strategically important to have many magic users in our army."

Even though Reyne adulated Roland, she could only understand this job class and try to defend him in such a method.

"Talent? Can that be eaten?"

Roland always replied in such a matter to anyone that doubted him. And he indeed possessed what it took to be proud of himself. After all, he was a mage student back at the academy who broke all the records in how many classes he failed. Not only that, several dozen of his magic teachers had called him an "idiot in all things regarding magic," denying the possibility that he would ever advance far in the path of magical knowledge. Yet he managed to reach the realm of becoming an Emblem of Endless Truth archmage in two different fields of magic. When Roland said that talent was useless, it would indeed sound more convincing.

However, special exceptions would always be difficult to imitate. Even Roland himself had to admit that him being able to reach his power level was basically a miracle. Would a second person like Roland be able to appear from the few hundred Four Elemental Swordcasters? The answer was evidently no.

Actually, over the past two years, less than ten Four Elemental Swordcasters had managed to progress to Silver rank. And, the few that did were the ones who had a minor amount of talent in magic to begin with. Even most of the Four Elemental Swordcaster's supporters lost hope in this job class.

Since resources were limited, East Mist had an internal council meeting regarding the topic of whether or not to continue expanding the Four Elemental Swordcasters. East Mist was no rich country with plenty of money to spare like a mega empire. Investing in a long-term investment with no foreseeable returns seemed to be utmost idiocy.

Obviously, continuing to forcefully push my plans through everyone's disagreement would be infeasible. That was why, only then, at that internal council, did I tell others about my true understanding of this job class.

"All of you are still too inexperienced. You think that tremendous magical power is everything? Simply looking at pure power would make us no different from wild gorillas."

Perhaps at that council, Timlad was the only one who even slightly understood my way of thinking. But after today, everyone who thought negatively of this new job class would have to reassess their opinions.

War would always be the best litmus test of any job class's usefulness. Excellent combat achievements would be all that was needed to stem the negative reviews.

The Borealis activated all its engines. This airship hidden in the clouds began to awaken, illuminating the surrounding sky with its lights. The next moment, its cargo doors opened and the Aurora Knights rode the aurora through the sky. Several hundred Swordcasters dropped straight down towards the ground. Only when they could see the ground rushing towards them did they activate the magic devices on their backs.

Bright orange flames flickered brightly as various trails of light streaked across the sky. The Swordcasters were flying towards their chosen targets.

These Swordcasters hadn't landed by themselves. They were wearing heavy bags on their backs, so ordinary gliding magic was incapable of handling their weight.

Unlike previous gliding magic, which was slow and unable to be maintained for long periods of times, these magical jetpacks that spat out magical flames were both swift and highly maneuverable. But any ordinary person who tried to use one of these jetpacks would end up no different from an unlucky individual who rode on

a goblin rocket. Once he started flying, he would need to consider how to land back down on the ground, alive.

But the Swordcasters had undergone magic training so they were able to accurately control the power of the jetpack's magical flames. They could also control the winds to send them in any desired direction. And to fine-tune the control process even more, their magic swords were currently inserted into the jetpack's control panel and automatically made decisions for them.

"First squadron, clear out the fish type enemies above water that are currently harassing the Auland fleet. Second squadron, go underwater and assassinate high-threat targets. Third squadron, continue to support from the air and provide explosive covering fire."

After Reyne gave them their orders, each squadron tore open their giant bags to expose equipment that was already pre-equipped on them.

The first squadron was equipped with small, miniature boats named the "Dolphin #1." These were flexible metal shells powered by an engine, with a single place to stand on. The rider would be standing in a swift miniature boat that was less than two meters wide. Also, the rider needed to be chained within it. Otherwise, there would be an enormous risk of being tossed out of the boat.

The powerful engine allowed these boats to travel at high speed on top of the water, far faster than any fish! They circled around the large battleships and chose to eradicate smaller targets.

Meanwhile, their weapons were insanely powerful. All the Dolphin #1s were equipped with machine guns—all the Swordcasters and Magic Archers needed to do was insert their magic swords into the boat's control panel and enchant the bullets with armor penetration, haste, explosion magic, and other such support abilities before simply spraying bullets in a general direction.

At this moment, the swift boats and heavy firepower machine guns all became extensions of the Swordcasters' bodies. This new job class, which had been assessed as worthless in the long run, showed off its own unique combat style.

Three swift boats dashed past a Sea Giant like a howling gale. The roaring machine guns left several hundred holes in its body, and a powerful Gold-ranked Sea Giant perished just like that.

The second squadron, the underwater squadron, was equipped with oxygen canisters and diving gear along with specialized "Otter" jetpacks, which functioned in both water and air. The fire propulsion magic would automatically be transformed into water propulsion magic when underwater, allowing the Swordcasters to become more agile than even the Sea Tribe.

Their specialized harpoons were only their backup weapons. Simply using instant cast ice pillars would be more than enough to kill the Sea Tribe members, who weren't equipped with any armor. Their main target was to assassinate any Sea Tribe mages hidden underwater and remove the few enemies capable of threatening the Auland battleships.

"Impossible!"

To their astonishment, the Sea Tribe found that these humans were even faster and dexterous underwater than they were. A Naga archmage who was currently in the middle of casting a spell was instantly pierced to death by a harpoon. And her Legendary power level was far above the Swordcasters'—this was the best proof that there was no such thing as absolute safety on a battlefield. She had believed herself to be completely safe, deep underwater, and hadn't made any defensive preparations whatsoever. That was why she was assassinated without even having a chance to resist—the second squadron had slain the first major target since the battle started.

Meanwhile, the third squadron wasn't equipped with any

powerful weapons. However, this squadron had the most people in it. And all of them were carrying oil barrels filled with explosives...

Alright then, this was just a simple strategy of using remote grenades that worked underwater. The underwater members of the second squadron would provide target locations for their allies in the air, call for aerial assistance, and tell the third squadron when to explode the oil barrel grenade. After each oil barrel sunk underwater and exploded, shockwaves would spread at a tremendously rapid pace, followed by a large amount of Sea Tribe corpses... And for the Sea Tribe members farther away from the explosion's center that were merely knocked unconscious, the very fact that they floated up to the surface while unconscious was no different from a death sentence.

"Let's have fun hunting some fish. The last grenade had an excellent harvest. A7, I'm going to the next target. Just let me reload!"

The roaming bomber Swordcasters flew back up into the air after notifying their underwater partners and went back to the Borealis to retrieve another batch of oil barrel grenades.

But their task wasn't only to provide aerial bombing support. Protecting their partners along with providing backup logistical mana support was their task as well.

The Swordcasters and Magic Archers' excellent performance shocked even the Gold-ranked Aurora Knights. In comparison to them, the Swordcasters were, on average, at the Iron rank. Yet their combat achievements far surpassed the Gold-ranked Frigid Nightmare riders.

The Aurora Knights were indeed powerful troops highly suited for aquatic combat. They could freeze the water and dash at high speed on the ice. However, their methods of attack were rather archaic and traditional. No matter if they used ice magic or physical charge attacks, the Sea Tribe were able to correctly defend

against them.

Although the Aurora Knights could easily suppress the Sea Tribe, the Sea Tribe only needed to escape to the deep sea, which made it impossible for the Aurora Knights to chase them down. How could they possibly be as effective as a deep sea grenade?

At this moment, the Swordcasters' advantage was shown. Since they were able to use their equipment like part of their bodies, they could customize themselves to deal with specific enemies and terrain. The Swordcasters, who were currently equipped for aquatic and underwater battle, proved that they had even more of a terrain advantage than the Sea Tribe.

Indeed, the Swordcasters were a job class that relied to an extreme on items rather than personal power levels. But what was wrong with relying on items for power? Humans in my previous world had reached the peak simply by using items. They even invented nuclear bombs, which were capable of destroying the entire world.

Unable to improve their magic ability or use high-level magic spells? Gunmen from my previous world weren't exactly capable of "leveling up" by shooting twice the number of bullets at a time or making their guns spew fire like in a video game, now, were they? But there would still be no comparison between an ordinary warrior who only finished basic training and an elite combat veteran with over one hundred battles under his belt. Simply the techniques and expertise in using one's weapon could be refined over a lifetime.

Personal power level being weak? Lacking in mobility? All I had to do was equip them with mobile mechas or Iron Horses. And if the range of their attacks or firepower was lacking? Stronger modifications to their equipment was all that was necessary.

Lack of mana? Just carry more mana batteries. Who said you could only carry one mana battery? See for yourself, every one of

the Dolphin #1 swift boat pilots were carrying three magic swords and ten fully charged Olivia's Magic Box mana batteries.

"It's difficult to improve personal power level by using items? In that case, all that's necessary is to improve the level of the item. This is actually easier than raising a high-level mage, and high-level items can even be mass produced! Dwarven rifles and Dwarven sniper cannons are on completely different levels! Magical engineering can create cannons with ten times the firepower of normal cannons! Can any small cannon possibly compare to a Roland Titan? Besides, I don't believe it's impossible for the Four Elemental Swordcasters to improve in power level. They just have the wrong idea about how to progress!"

In the council that opposed my Swordcasters, I personally showed off the newly invented seals and various magic sword techniques. This was a job class that focused on techniques over raw power. Since all the magic came from outside sources, researching new and more powerful sword seals combined with new magic sword techniques was most likely the correct method for them to level up.

"Swordcasters are simply people using a magic sword. They shouldn't need to be restrained by traditional ways of thinking from the past. Why do you have to treat them like mages? Just take a look at the real way to use these Swordcasters. Why are we called humans? That's because humans are the only species in the world that are capable of using tools, which is why we humans have led the way in evolution... Fine, I misspoke, Elves, Beastmen, and Dwarves also exist in this world and are perfectly capable of using tools. That's—would you please get off from my head now, Harloys? I've been rather anemic recently."

The Four Elemental Swordcasters were users of magic, but their use of magic originated from magical engineering—this field was their true specialty, not raw power. They would become the favored children of warfare as well as the most valuable job class of

this new generation. The further magical engineering developed, the stronger they would become.

And as long as there were enough people who joined this job class, geniuses among them would appear sooner or later. Perhaps among ordinary mages, less than ten percent would advance to higher power levels. And for these Swordcasters who had much less talent than mages, only three percent of them advanced to higher power levels. But as long as they were no longer treated like mages, I was certain I could multiply the number of Swordcasters by more than one hundred times. As long as there was sufficient time and enough Swordcasters, I would definitely reap a reward in the end.

Of course, this power had a price to it as well. Although there were more than five thousand Swordcasters in East Mist, Reyne had only brought along two hundred. It wasn't because she didn't want to bring more, but rather that East Mist could only afford to fully equip two hundred.

In order to further develop this job class with limitless potential, more than just resources and money would be required. This would depend even more on the industrial and educational level of a country, which was something that couldn't be solved overnight.

Creating a magical engineering product only needed an engineer? What a joke. An expert would be needed right from the designing stage. The equipment's materials would need the assistance of metalsmithing and metallurgy industries. Enchanting and runic spell arrays would require enchantment expert archmagi. Alchemists were required to finish injecting mana into the batteries and completing the energy cycles. Every single piece of equipment required the support of multiple industries and more than ten people working together.

If I wanted to create a streamlined, high-efficiency, mass-produced product, I would require even higher industrial standards.

Judging from the current combat situation, where the Swordcasters, who were the lowest rank of all, far outperformed the Gold-ranked Aurora Knights, Reyne felt like she now better understood Roland's plans. It seemed that from the very start, he was looking forward at a new generation completely different from modern warfare.

Perhaps in future battles, ordinary metal weapons would be abandoned and magic swordsmen would become the most basic warrior job class. It would also become quite easy to use the elements, meaning that mages would no longer be so special. The products of magical engineering were destined to replace mages as the kings of the battlefield.

By that time, perhaps every country would no longer be fighting over territory, but resources, instead. Nor would the countries compete in seeing how many powerful individuals each country possessed, but rather in technology and the smithing industries. Nor would wars be about total suppression by top-level existences. The naturally powerful dragons and giants would no longer be at the top of the food chain. Trained, ordinary humans would become the new masters of this generation, with master smiths and master engineers taking the social status of forbidden spell archmagi.

"...This is an invention that will change the world?"

Reyne recalled how Roland instantly came to that conclusion upon first seeing the Olivia's Magic Box. Very rarely for him, he forcefully pushed through his development plan regarding Olivia's Magic Box despite everyone's total opposition. He spent an enormous amount of material and human resources on what was called "Roland's pet project that's actually a bottomless hole." Perhaps, from the very start, he had anticipated this day and was doing his very best to push through all these changes.

I indeed saw everything quite clearly. Every industrial revolution would be an excellent opportunity to readjust the power balance between countries. Being one step late would equal forever being

late. Surely there would be no need for me to explain the consequences of being technologically behind.

"...At the very least, we're now technologically ahead of everyone else! And being ahead means future resources and cards up our sleeve."

That's right. Roland and his allies were doubtlessly now at the peak of the world in this area of magical engineering. After showing off outstanding combat ability in Auland, East Mist obtained better political, military, and economic standing, which also gave East Mist an appropriate platform to sell its goods for an excellent price.

So had Roland been able to see through to future world-level changes in how wars would be fought? Reyne clenched her fists tightly as she faintly felt like she could imagine her home country of East Mist becoming a future mega-empire in the world. Perhaps this Holy War would be a chance for her People of the Mist, who had suffered so much pain over the years.

"Perhaps we'll finally be able to stand at the peak of the world."

Chapter 364: Random Draws

"By the way, Roland, why haven't you been making your Gachapon draws lately?"

Harloys had received many benefits from being Roland's soulbound equipment, and she was quite curious about the System hidden within him. The System's power to distort karma was absolutely inconceivable. As long as it was used properly, it would be ridiculously powerful.

"...I recently used some draws but never got a single good item."

"Why haven't I heard you mention this before!?"

Harloys was astonished to hear this. With her understanding of Roland, he would have definitely bragged about and shown off anything wonderful he obtained. So, since he wasn't bragging about his good luck, that meant...

"...Yep, there's no need to talk about the results. In the last ten draws, I got five blue, four purple, and one orange."

"That's not bad, though—why didn't you mention it at all?"

As of late, Harloys had come to understand Roland's strange terms. Blue meant Elite-tier, purple meant Myth, or Epic-tier, and orange meant Legend-tier items. Getting four Epic-tier items—and one rated even higher—seemed like quite the good deal to her.

"I'll refrain from mentioning the Elite items. Although none of them are that great, they're at least somewhat usable."

"...Then the Epic-tier items should be even better."

"Yep, I was delighted when I got my first Epic-tier item. It was 'Kratos' Guide to Melee Combat, Part 1.'"

"Kratos? Who's that?"

"Some vicious individual who's skilled at slaying demons, dragons, and Gods. To use a not-so-suitable analogy, he's basically

the equivalent of a great Sword Saint from the immemorial generation."

"Then isn't that a wonderful thing?"

"I looked through this book, and it was indeed written by him. Slaying an immemorial War God, singlehandedly killing a SemiGod Hydra, and engaging in melee combat with colossal gargoyle monsters. This Part 1 book contains his heroic deeds, where he defeated everyone and made himself look stronger than the Gods. I checked the historical records, and he really was a person from the immemorial generation."

"...Then why aren't you happy?"

"Just Part 1 alone is incredibly thick. You could use it as a brick! And it doesn't contain any techniques about practical combat whatsoever. It only has his heroic deeds, which means it's nothing more than the game's history to me—er—like a knight novel. How could I possibly be happy? Not only that, the final page of Part 1 stated that Part 2 has the secret techniques on how to craft his unique weapons, and that Part 3 has his combat techniques and experience."

"I understand now. Part 1 was useless, while the other parts are useful. And you never drew the other parts, which is why you're so depressed!"

"No, I actually drew Part 2 right after that one, which included the technique to create the immemorial God Weapon known as the Chaos Sword..."

"What? Show me!"

After some slight hesitation, I handed over a very small booklet.

"...That's all? The materials required, the smithing process, enchantment, and everything else necessary for a God Equipment's construction should be enough to fill up an entire library."

Well, there was no need for me to explain anything to her as she

immediately opened up the booklet. After reading what was written, her expression was one of shock—the contents were, to say the least, quite simple.

"Find a God, kill him, then steal his weapon. There you go, now you have a God Equipment. After killing off several Gods, you'll definitely obtain a one-handed God-tier sword sooner or later. If you're too unlucky, then try again. But this method is somewhat limited. For instance, I found a Harem God last time and managed to slay him, which gave me a two-handed sword God Equipment. Unfortunately, I don't know twin-handed sword techniques, so I was unable to use it. Ptui! These random drops are so ridiculous, and the God Equipment is bound to my soul, so I can't even give it away to one of my followers."

"...Haha. I suppose he's such a practical fellow."

Harloys forced herself to chuckle twice in an effort to console me as I was becoming more and more annoyed.

"Good luck to you. Perhaps you'll even draw Part 3 in the future. At the very least, the fighting techniques in Part 3 should be useful, right?"

"...Don't even mention it! I, in fact, did draw 'Kratos' guide to melee combat' yet again."

Harloys sympathetically looked over at me. Even though I was trying my best to keep up a smile, it was apparent that there had been some problem—that was how my luck typically went.

"You can't learn the technique?"

"...No, although I drew 'Kratos' guide to melee combat,' again, this time it was 'The continuation of my heroic deeds that I didn't mention last time, so allow me to continue in this addendum.' I read it for two hours—how this Spartan Kratos fellow discussed fighting with his SemiGod brother, how he challenged the Titan Giants, and how he was being hunted by the Mother Earth

Goddess. As expected of a hero with Barbarian blood, he sure knows how to brag. If everything he said was real, then wouldn't he be able to kill off the Gods and destroy the world...?"

"...I truly do sympathize with you. But if these were three out of four of the Epic-tier items, what was the fourth?"

"Ha! The fourth one was 'The addendum to the addendum of Kratos' guide to melee combat: Since I know you didn't really believe me, now let me tell you all the evidence; just listen, that Titan Giant was truly larger than a mountain, and this Hydra was larger than a ship...' I read this book for two full days and deeply learned about the importance of teaching literacy to the Barbarians. Forget about misspelled words—he didn't even use any punctuation! Do you know what it's like to have obsessive-compulsive disorder and correct every single bit of his punctuation? I read it for two days, but I spent two weeks correcting his grammar!"

"You really did finish it!"

"...Well, he's still a super powerful individual from the immemorial generation. Perhaps he knew some top secrets. But the result was..."

"Don't frown like that. It's still of the Epic tier, right? It should at least be something good. A God Equipment?"

"Ha, from a certain standpoint, it really was. Kratos' full set of defensive equipment, the real deal."

"Doesn't that mean you profited in the end? Wait a moment, you said that Kratos was a Barbarian..."

"...That's right! No matter if it was the immemorial generation or in today's age, Barbarians have always fought while naked. But, Kratos was better than most as he still wore one defensive piece of equipment, which my System reviewed as Legend-tier."

"...So what was it?"

"Well, it's a poop-yellow pair of strawberry blazoned underwear, original flavor. Would you like it? I'll give it to you for free!"

"...Disgusting! Hurry up and throw it away! You actually carry such a disgusting thing on yourself!?"

"I don't have any choice. It's the same as those soulbound twin swords of his—his underpants are actually soulbound to me! I can't even throw it away if I want to! Come, why don't you try?"

After some chaos and scuffling, I confirmed that even though Harloys also counted as my bound equipment, she was still unable to equip this shining "soulbound" underwear of mine. I could only helplessly bring out a large amount of bandages, tie the underwear up again, and throw it back into my personal dimensional storage.

"...Truly a pitfall of Gachapon draws. At least those Elite-tier items were useful, right?"

"Yeah, the Elite-tier items were special type of cards, each with a rune etched onto it. As long as I got "San, Yang, Kai, Tai!" I would be able to obtain a God Equipment that Kratos had personally used. For this, I even specifically asked my System. She said there would be no pitfall involved with the God Equipment and it would definitely be real."

"You have five Elite grade items? Doesn't that mean you drew them all? There are only four runes, right?"

"Yep. Although I drew two "Yang" runes, I indeed drew all four of those runes. But..."

"But?"

"I didn't draw the exclamation mark! The damned exclamation mark was required for part of the runes as well! I needed a total of five runes, including the punctuation!"

"...You could have kept drawing. You would have drawn it sooner or later."

"Heh heh, just where do you think that 418 Justice Point random draw package deal idea came from? After that, I drew '?', ','.', ':', ';', and even '...' and '¿'. The System must have been trying to torture me! San, Yang, Kai, and Tai? Why was there only no damned exclamation mark!?!"

"I can understand how you feel. But please don't stress out about it—that's just how random draws work. Some people win, and some people lose..."

"Haha, but I've never won! Relax. I already know how to make myself feel better. Whenever I'm feeling terrible, all I have to do is make someone feel even worse. Heh, I've already made arrangements with the Justice Points system. They want to obtain my treasures? Sure, but they're going to have to make random draws! The 418 Justice Point random draw package deal is only the basic package. There's also 688 and 1088! My goal is to make others draw till they quit or go bankrupt!"

"Why don't you learn how to quit first?"

Author's Note:

Today is New Year's, and it's quite noisy in my home. I don't want to write anything, nor do I know what to write. My chronic laziness is here again, and I really want to take a break like all the other authors... But since it's New Year's, I'm sure there are many readers with free time waiting for the next chapter who'd be disappointed upon seeing no new chapter. That's why I still wrote something. After thinking for a long while, I thought that it is, after all, New Year's, and it'd be rather boring to push the main plot along. So why not write something fun? I hope this chapter gives you a good chuckle—that'll bring a smile to me as well!

Finally, Happy New Year's to everyone! I wish you all stay healthy and happy together with your families! San Yang Kai Tai! (This time, it's not the wrong words!)

Chapter 365: Chaotic Capital

The Bardi Empire's capital was probably the oldest city among all the mega-empires. It was the origin of this country, and even the empire itself was named after it. That's right—the Bardi Empire's capital city was also named Bardi.

In order to differentiate it from the country, the people of Bardi typically addressed the Bardi capital as just the capital. Outsiders would call it the Bardi capital.

The Bardi capital encompassed an area that was approximately one thousand square kilometers in size, which included several dozen smaller satellite cities and even rivers and mountains. If a person intended to walk from the very outskirts of the capital city all the way to meet Emperor Orloss in his palace, they would need to prepare at least two weeks' worth of food and travel equipment.

The Dilo District housed the royal palace, even though it wasn't the largest district. The royal palace was very well guarded. Since Orloss had far too many enemies, he made the royal palace into the single most secure area in the entire country. Plus, all the princes who formed factions and were always at each other's throats resided here as well. No politically sensitive person would ever choose to visit the royal palace if they didn't have to.

During daytime, just about every horse-drawn carriage in the Dilo District had a noble or government official's emblem. Anyone who idled on the streets for a short period of time would cause a patrolling knight to come question them.

Despite all of this, the Dilo District was still ranked number one in the Bardi Empire for rate of occurrence of serious crimes. As Emperor Orloss, who was "quite elderly" and "really wanted to see who was worthy of inheriting his throne," tacitly permitted the princes to fight and kill each other, this place was, suffice to say, a chaotic one.

Every prince had gangs, major merchants, and nobles supporting him. None of them would personally take action. This made assassins and spies into the two most common jobs here. And people in these jobs were accustomed to killing off bystander witnesses, so it was an unstated piece of common sense known to everybody in the Bardi Capital that no one should enter the Dilo Royal Palace District after nightfall.

The end result was something that seemed rather abnormal. On the wide streets of Dilo District, people came and went in a jam-packed manner. Yet, at nighttime, the streets were completely empty, while black-clothed or caped individuals could be seen jumping about the rooftops. In fact, it was even common for them to greet each other."

"Oh, isn't this the Fourth Prince's Great Knight Cam? Fancy meeting you here—where are you headed today?"

"I'm here because Thirteenth Prince recently hired an archmage. It's said that the archmage is so powerful that the balance between the factions has been affected. My boss wants me to go test that archmage's mettle and simply kill the archmage if he's actually weak. And if he really is that strong, I'm supposed to teach him the rules of how we work around here."

"What a coincidence—that's my task as well. Let's go together, together."

"Of course. The reward will be the same even if I team up, so why should I go alone? Wouldn't that be foolish? Right, I heard that this archmage is really quite something. Do you have any special information about him? Share it with me, no?"

One black-clad man started chatting with a gray-caped man. These two seemed as if they were teaming up against a boss monster, making it seem like they were good friends.

But no outsider would be able to guess that the black-clad man's left eye had been previously blinded by the gray-caped man. And in

that fight, the gray-caped man had lost his left hand's little finger and middle finger. Not only were they not friends, they had fought each other to the death just yesterday night.

"Let's go together!"

"Together!"

"Let's all gang up!"

The two of them turned around to see a black-caped man, a red-caped man, and a man with a purple mask. It would seem that their team now consisted of five—it was almost as if they were teaming up to fight against a boss monster in a cave.

Yet these members, who were now happily organizing together and talking as if they had become brothers-in-arms, had been fighting each other the previous night. Perhaps half of their bodies would be found in the gutters tomorrow, most likely because of these temporary teammates. That was because all of these somewhat "famous" fighters had sizable bounties on their heads.

Third-rate assassins, mafia enforcers, rich merchants' bodyguards, disobedient deserter soldiers, and even local hoodlums and gangsters. Every underside faction of society could be seen here.

As Emperor Orloss'"expected death of old age" got closer and closer, he seemed to care less and less about the fights that broke out here in the Dilo District. In fact, he even stopped sending knights to patrol out in the evenings. The result of this was that the princes' infighting got even fiercer—now, it basically out in the open. They spent large amounts of money attempting to kill each other. They didn't care about their assassins' backgrounds or even power levels. As long as an assassin could complete the task and survive, the assassin would naturally be a loyal dog worth the money spent.

That's right—dog. Everyone else in the royal capital addressed

this worsening infighting among the princes as "dogfighting." The princes stood up high on a platform, tossing gold coins down below to have others fight and die for them. Wasn't this similar to how illegal underground dogfighting rings did things?

And it just so happened to be that this "dogfighting" was getting worse and worse every day, to the point where it seemed like it would soon swallow up the entire capital.

"...No sense of life left in him at all. Holy Light healing is completely ineffective on him. He's likely to die at any moment."

A certain head doctor at a certain royal medical academy secretly leaked this information. And on the same afternoon he received a large payment for this information, he was arrested by the royal knights and executed.

Holy Light's healing effects, foundationally speaking, worked to return the living to its "normal" status. So Holy Light healing was incredibly effective against external injuries as well as poisons. However, it was basically useless on something akin to fixing a broken limb or reconstructing a body part. That was because the Holy Light would judge that the broken limb was already in a "normal" state—why would it change that for you?

The undead were filled with negative energy, and to the Holy Light, whose purpose was to return the living to a "normal" status, they naturally became mortal enemies.

By the same logic, if a person was at the end of their life because of old age, their "normal" status would be equal to almost dead—they lived only due to medication. The Holy Light would be powerless to do anything in such a situation. Blindly using the power of Holy Light to stimulate the last throes of one's life would only make that person die faster.

From a certain standpoint, the fact that the Holy Light was ineffective on an elderly person's illness or condition was a notice that death would soon come for this person. Although the Bardi

royal knights acted swiftly and immediately executed the doctor who leaked this information and used all their means to prevent any further spread of information, this in a way confirmed the veracity of the doctor's leaked information.

And so, all the princes went crazy with delight. Simultaneously, the major domain lords and the biggest personages in the empire were no longer content with just watching the princes fight from a distance.

After all, it seemed quite obvious that a new emperor would soon be chosen. It was now the last opportunity to choose a side, or even personally try to become emperor. The rate of return if the person you helped became emperor would be astronomical. Any merchant would be willing to gamble their entire fortune and even their very life on it. This was a huge gamble to the nobles as well. If they won, their noble ranking and status would multiply exponentially, perhaps giving them great authority under the new emperor. If they lost... actually, that wouldn't matter much to the major nobles. There were always more major nobles loathed by an emperor than loved in any generation. As long as there was no incredibly deep grudge, all a major noble would have to do was speedily retreat back to their domain and not antagonize the emperor any further. They would be spared as long as they kept a low profile.

Since the major nobles, merchants, and even the major officials in the military and government started taking action, its internal order fell into utter chaos even though Emperor Orloss wasn't dead yet. Everything was only calm on the surface, but trouble brewed underneath.

The only fortunate part was that Emperor Orloss still had his authority and was as vicious as always—nobody dared to bring the infighting out in the open, so only the royal palace district was chaotic... you'd be so naïve if you thought that was real! If Chaos was really possible to control, then the Chaos Faction would have

long made peace with the Order Faction.

On the surface, everyone kept promising to not affect the ordinary citizens. Yet major merchants used their merchant groups to attack their competitors with full force, making the market wildly unstable. All the nobles' underworld factions were acting as well. A single hoodlum would be more than capable of causing a huge commotion in an alley, not to mention every military movement would make an entire city district of people unable to sleep well at night.

The citizens were no fools. Considering the fact that murders were happening almost every day, and nobles who seemed to be doing well kept popping up dead, the rumors naturally started spreading by themselves.

Since some unknown time, it had no longer been a secret that Emperor Orloss'"impending death" would be soon. Even if it was understood that Emperor Orloss wished to use this special method to find an appropriate successor, ordinary citizens only wanted to have a peaceful life. How would they possibly enjoy this chaos? Especially since they were still currently at war?

That's right—war. Not to mention, war with several other countries.

That so-called Holy Light army had lost almost half its troops to the rampaging dragons. However, they were still currently within Bardi borders, although most people seemed to have forgotten about them.

However, there was at least good news from the defense line at Nightrain City. Thanks to my ridiculous actions, Undead Lord Davey and all the Undead Lords under him, together with their armies, had perished. Until a new high-ranked undead arrived to take overall command and the remaining Undead Lords who didn't participate previously finished blaming each other, the defense line at Nightrain City would be under much less pressure.

Since the Contract Heroes on the western front were now free and had no restrictions upon them, it was only natural for some of them to choose to go east and help defend against the undead there. This helped make Nightrain City even safer for the time being. Only now would Dragon Knight Archduke Halent dare to make time for his own affairs.

As for Bardi's last enemy... they were still at war with the Mage Country!

That's right. They were still technically at war, at least on the surface. The Mage Country had supposedly used a forbidden spell to destroy one of Bardi's fortresses, and the Dragon Knights were currently fighting on the frontlines against the archmages. Since no agreement had been made yet, the two countries were still of course at war.

In fact, since the local battles had ended victoriously for the Bardi Empire, plenty of citizens who had lost relatives at the destroyed fortress demanded their lords to attack the Mage Country in revenge. Also, those with nefarious intentions spread propaganda about the Mage Country in order to make the citizens uneasy and spread fear. With all this, the citizens held a very high degree of enmity towards the Mage Country right now.

As for truly warring against the Mage Country? The major nobles didn't know the truth of the matter. Yet because the issue of the new successor to the throne hadn't been decided yet, not a single major personage had any intentions of focusing on this useless external affair when more important internal ones were at stake. It was amid such a tumultuous time that Cher arrived in Bardi as the Mage Country's official ambassador, naturally drawing lots of attention.

Only having political personages in a city would be insufficient. The biggest district in the Bardi capital, the Kasoen District, was the business and education center of capital. This district was three times the size of the Dilo Royal Palace District. In the

thirtyish years of Orloss's reign, the Kasoen District had only become ever more prosperous. Every year, merchants from all sorts of countries would gather. This was also the most extravagant district. All foreign embassies in the Bardi Empire were located here, a move designed to help them avoid getting caught up in the princes' internal infighting, such as getting accused of being foreign spies under the pay of one of the princes.

Considering the current situation, Cher kept a low profile when she entered the Bardi capital. She had secretly slipped into an ambassadors' hotel at nighttime. However, her status made it certain that she would be unable to lay low for long.

Since a horse-drawn carriage with the Mage Country's emblem kept visiting between the royal palace and the Kasoen District multiple times per day, in addition to the fact that this carriage always parked at a hotel where only ambassadors from other countries were allowed to reside, of course even the ordinary citizens learned that their enemy country's ambassador had arrived.

And then, rotten apples and eggs suddenly started selling out...

From the Bardi Empire citizens' angle, this was quite easy to understand. They just happened to need a target to vent their discontent at right now. And so, a game of Whack-a-Mole would be played every time the horse-drawn carriage passed through the streets. All the young people who hadn't yet had enough would chase the carriage all the way to the ambassadors' hotel. Although the Bardi soldiers guarding the hotel wouldn't allow these people to enter, they would simply pretend not to see anything as long as they were tossing rotten apples and other non-dangerous items. The result was that a constant bombardment of rotten apples and eggs rained upon the hotel, making it so that not a single person dared to show up at a window.

Yet everyone in the envoy group was quite calm about the current situation—well, mostly everyone. Only the ambassador

herself, Cher, couldn't understand.

"Why are you all so calm?"

"Because we've gotten used to suffering" was the answer said to her in unison.

Roland's old subordinates may be used to suffering, but Cher was filled with frustrations.

"I'm only an ordinary mage who works in the public order department. I haven't even passed the exam to become an archmage. Forget about the fact that for some reason the higher-ups suddenly forced me into becoming the ambassador. Forget about the fact that even though we already have a secret agreement with Orloss, we can't publicize it. Forget about the fact that I'm now in a country filled with people that hate me. Forget about the fact that I haven't gotten a single night's sleep because of those constant projectiles attacking the windows even at night. Forget about the fact that Emperor Orloss always summons me over for supposed official discussions but instead forces me to play chess with him. Not only that, he's so bad at chess, and he always takes back his moves and even cheats by putting his dead pieces back on the board... "

If it wasn't for the sake of their two countries' relationships, and that a war might truly break out if she acted out on her frustrations, she would have gone on a rampage long ago.

"How am I supposed to bear all this!? I've had enough! I want to quit!"

Alright then. Cher never had a good temper to begin with, and she was in a thunderous mood. But the single worst part that she absolutely couldn't stand was that...

"Even though it was agreed that I was supposed to only be a puppet ambassador on the surface, with the main work being done by the real ambassador Roland, why did he disappear the moment

we set out!? Now I'm the one forced to do all the work! I already have so many frustrations and also so much work on top of that. How can someone be so irresponsible as he is!?"

"...Ahh, such familiar roaring and complaining."

Krose sympathetically looked over at Cher, who was in a mode of full frustration. It would seem that anyone who stayed together long enough with Roland would always have a couple days of the month like this.

"...I feel like I'm seeing the past me."

Lilith sank into contemplation as she looked at the chaos outside the window. Which "past me" was she referring to? The former Bardi royal princess who was now viewed as an enemy by the Bardi citizens? Or that pitifully busy internal manager who had useless coworkers and so much work piled on her by her bosses in Sulfur Mountain City?

"Relax, Sister Cher. Teacher will probably come back very soon. He won't forget about something so important... I think."

As Roland's disciple, Cohen wanted to protect his teacher's honor. But as he was speaking, he recalled how unreliable Roland typically was, and his last sentence exposed his own lack of confidence.

"What a chaotic place. I..."

"Miss Yawen, His Highness Roland told me that this is one of the oldest empires in Eich. So they react slowly to change and view themselves as above all others. They still have plenty of discrimination against Dark Elves. And the typical customs here are to burn any Dark Elves first and ask questions only later. From this, it can be seen that they're basically no different from uncultured barbarians who have no empathy at all..."

Eaglestorm was quite chatty once he started talking. Since there weren't enough people to help out, Momo had been sent here to

assist Yawen, and was currently looking at Eaglestorm while filled with expectations.

"Did he expect this situation? Did he mention me? Did he mention what I should do here?"

"...Alright then. I'll speak directly about the important points. 'If they want to enforce the concept of Law here, tell them that this isn't their territory and that imitating law enforcers from other territories is a felony. They should understand how serious it is for a law enforcer to commit a crime."

"Roland even thought of that? But he didn't think of our current situation?"

The Law personnel had been wanting to move out but calmed down upon hearing these orders left behind by Roland. But the biggest trouble for everyone right now was Ambassador Cher, who was going crazy from the pressure of everything on her. She had just played three hours of chess against Orloss, who constantly cheated, took back his moves, and was just really weak chess. On her way back here, she had "enjoyed" a shower of rotten eggs. Her current sense of logic and reason was about to collapse. Now, upon hearing Roland's name, she went into a frenzy.

"I've had enough! I'm going to quit being this ambassador! I'm going to return to the Mage Country right now!"

Cohen, who was probably one of the nicer people here, hesitated for a moment before attempting to convince her otherwise.

"...Sister Cher, then you should first say goodbye to Emperor Orloss, which means that the carriage still needs to pass through town one more time. I wonder if they still have any ammunition? The fruits around here are sold out every day. Oh, right, it's almost nighttime, so those strange people who run around on the rooftops every night should be out and about soon. The carriage might be ambushed by them. Sister Cher, do you intend to join their ranks and disguise yourself? Actually, I have some black cloth left over

from last time..."

"Little Cohen! Has anyone ever told you that you're just as annoying as your teacher!?"

Alright then. Ambassador Cher was fully raging. But...

Cough, cough. Eaglestorm, acting as the elder in-charge, cleared his throat and looked sympathetically in Cher's direction.

"To quote His Highness Roland's original words, 'If Cher wants to quit, tell her that she won't receive any research funds for the next fifty years. Every single review or test she has will result in failure. Also, she'll be looking at mandatory daily toilet-cleaning duties. That's right, this is abuse of power. You're more than welcome to file a complaint once you return to the Mage Country. Yep, file your complaint to Roland, who just took over the job of head of the public order department. He's now your boss' boss' boss."

"Damned Roland! I can't believe my first impression of you was that you were a good person!"

Alright then. The familiar, furious roars caused so many people present to recall their own memories.

"...If only Roland was the God of Hatred. With his abilities in making others hate him, he'd surely be a Main God by now."

Chapter 366: Dragons and a Plot

What was the difference between riding a dragon and riding a horse-drawn carriage?

Some people might say that riding a dragon seemed awesome and that riding a carriage was ordinary. Or that dragons were swift and carriages were slow. Or that riding a dragon required a high power level while a carriage only needed a modest amount of money. But for me...

"Riding a dragon is awesome? Ridiculous! A carriage is far more comfortable than a dragon. Has nobody ever considered what happens when you're flying under zero cover and meet a rainstorm?!"

Dark clouds stretched in every direction, while Little Red and I were drenched in rain—or, more accurately, we were both drenched in rain and pelted with hail.

In a new spring, high altitudes weren't the least bit warm. In fact, the cold temperatures would transform the rainwater into tiny ice cubes, which, right now, made loud noises against my head... since I was already in my full-body armor.

Not far away, a Blue Dragon soared through the clouds above me. Blue Dragons were of the thunder element and loved this type of weather more than anything. Plenty of electricity would exist in the air, which would replenish their energy—to them, each energy replenishment would be a full-body massage. In fact, this Blue Dragon right here was moaning in a way that was easy to misconstrue... But its rider, Halent, seemed to have all his hairs standing up on end and was half burnt to a crisp from the lightning—he was suffering more than I was. It appeared that there was still a large gap between a half dragon blood descendant like him and a true dragon.

Dragons were creatures that strangely focused on their pride,

which could very well be viewed as a synonym for their arrogance. Only the young dragons would be willing to become a dragon knight's contracted dragon. The slightly older and more experienced dragons would be unwilling to become someone else's steed... Let's ignore a certain professional steed known as Gricasio, who was currently hiding back in Xiluo. He was obviously an exception among exceptions—truly the only dragon I'd ever met who was so utterly shameless... Although perhaps Molly could give his shamelessness a run for its money.

Cough, ordinary dragons would reject having a dragon knight as their rider. This didn't have anything to do with whether you had a good relationship with that dragon or not. I mean, even for humans, no matter how good of a relationship you had with your best friend, if you asked your best friend to let you ride him for several dozen years, he would likely viciously beat you up and end the friendship then and there.

What about those stories about how knights simply gave a dragon some barbequed meat or glass baubles to obtain a dragon steed, you say? That dragon would either have to be retarded, or it was all just an excuse that hid the truth from prying eyes. For instance, kidnapping a dragon's daughter, or luring the dragon with the promise of a princess, or making—cough—cough—I seem to have gone off topic.

Real dragon knights were different from the legends about them. The most common scenario went like this: some powerful individual who was addicted to knight stories caught a young dragon, beat it up to the point of death, and then forced the dragon to sign a subordinate contract.

Dragons were incredibly prideful. The only way to force them to submit would be to have a much higher power level than them. Those powerful individuals who finally became dragon knights would always find—to their astonishment—that any dragon weak enough to be defeated by them would, of course, be far weaker

than them. Thus, the dragon would be useless for anything other than a transportation tool. Working so hard to obtain a transportation tool might also cause the dragon's parents to chase that person down—was it really worth it?

If that dragon knight waited for several hundred years, the young dragon would indeed become an adult dragon. But a powerful individual capable of living several hundred years would already have a very high power level. How would an ordinary adult dragon, the weakest typically at the Legend rank, be of any use?

The conclusion was that while dragon knights seemed really cool, it was actually useless to be one unless you were someone like the main character of a knight story.

Looking at how things were with the largest dragon knight squad in Eich, the Bardi Empire's dragon knights were mixed-blood dragon descendants. They were most likely siblings with their dragons, and it was doubtful that any of them made their dragons sign soul contracts or subordinate contracts. They had more of a playmate relationship.

"You're thinking all this just to prove that this type of treatment is supposed to be normal? It's obvious Little Red's doing this to torture you. Are you actually a masochist? Or has your head gone wonky, and you've finally become unsalvageable?"

I couldn't counter the silly cat's taunting. And, when I tried to recall how things were in the past, I realized that it was indeed rare for Little Red to treat me like this.

Although Little Red, as an Immemorial Red Dragon, was a very prideful individual, I had always felt that we had an excellent friendship. She would even occasionally take me with her from time to time at critical moments. For instance, last time, when we were rushing back to Sulfur Mountain City to fight the demons, she was nice enough to let me ride on her, and we had indeed got back in time.

This time, I was following Dragon Knight Archduke Halent to the Bardi capital. His steed was a Blue Dragon, the fastest of all the Color Dragons. It would be impossible for Erebella to keep up. And since this issue was related to all dragons, Little Red, the Underworld Dragon Queen, intended to make contact with the surface Dragon City. So I felt it was quite normal for me to ask to come along. Of course, I had a good understanding of dragons, which was why I only asked for her to carry me in her claws rather than ride on her back.

As for Molly, who also came with us? She was Little Red's mother, so wouldn't this be the equivalent of asking "Can I ride your mother?"...This felt rather wrong.... But then again, wouldn't it be no different from how I previously asked "Can I ride you?" to Little Red?

Cough—cough—let us abandon these perverted thoughts and go back to the main topic. This time, Little Red had been surprisingly nice and had said "We're such good sisters, so why be so formal? You can just ride on my back." Although I felt that something was wrong with what she said, I happily accepted as being shaken all the way in a dragon's claws was rather uncomfortable. But the result was...

"...Forget about the young dragons, who are incapable of flying any higher. It's quite easy for Immemorial Red Dragons to fly above the clouds. Why is it that we must suffer in this hailstorm? You're supposed to be of the fire element—wouldn't that mean you're suffering more than I am?"

"...Shut up. I'm happy to do this. You don't want to be rained on? Fine, I have a nice warm and dry place just for you."

Little Red viciously opened up her maw filled with sharp dragon teeth and spat out a small amount of dragonbreath. When I considered the highly likely possibility that I would "accidentally" be swallowed and gulped, I adamantly refused her recommendation.

"No need. I think it'll be good for me to wash my face and clear my mind."

"...You indeed need to wake up."

I didn't know why she was so angry, but everyone around me said it was my fault. And judging on how things usually were, it was indeed very likely to be my fault. So I figured I should just bear with it. Yep, it definitely wasn't because I was worried that she would toss me down that I was acting so nice for the time being.

Cough—besides, I had thick armor and high ice resistance. I could ignore any damage caused by the hailstorm. But my feet did feel rather cold, and I was getting somewhat hungry. I recalled how I stuffed my backpack with food, and so I took action and brought out a picnic cloth...

"...Roland, if you dare to start a fire and barbeque meat on my back, I shall make you enter the special VIP seating in my mouth."

And so, I fell silent for a moment before changing my method.

"You're also banned from heating up sausages and alcohol! I'm working so hard at flying in the rain, and you actually dare to drink alcohol on my back!? Do you know how unpleasant all this rain and snow is for a Red Dragon like me!?"

"Then fly higher!"...except there was no way I would say such a complaint out loud. Based on my many years of experience, if a woman was currently angry with you, the more you talked, the more you would be in the wrong. It would be safer to stay silent with my complaints.

"I'll give you half when it's warmed up..."

"That's not it! Wait, is this your personally fermented fruit wine? Where'd you get such top-quality peaches...?! I want two-thirds!!!"

Alright then. The allure of alcohol finally made Little Red stop her sudden backflips and somersaults in midair, and I no longer needed to tie myself to her back. And so, I brought out three

barrels of alcohol and lit a fire under them... There was no helping it, as one barrel was just a sip to Little Red.

After she had her share of alcohol, Little Red surprisingly let out a sigh before she suddenly flew up much higher, straight above the clouds.

The shapes of the clouds beneath us made this place seem like a mystic realm. The warm sunlight was quite comfortable as well. Of course, the happiest part was that we had finally escaped the hailstorm below us.

"Forget it. Being angry at you will only make me get even angrier. I should have known that being angry at someone like you is meaningless."

"...Hey—hey—hey—I'm still the one helping you out here. Can't you be a little politer? Am I really as bad as you say? Am I really someone who enrages others so much?"

"Yes."

Little Red's answer was in a steely, adamant tone.

"Yes."

The silly cat suddenly interrupted as well.

[Yes!]

Even the System popped up and made her presence known.

Anyhow, Little Red and Molly accompanying me was both troublesome as well as an opportunity.

Little Red was the Underground Dragon Queen. Just her status alone made it certain that her appearance before the leaders of the other Dragons would become a major historical event. Whether the exiled Red Dragons and Black Dragons could obtain the other dragons' recognition or there would be some sort of conflict was unknown.

Obviously, Little Red and Molly had very different political

styles. Molly had wanted to forcefully return aboveground, while Little Red would at least try to mediate with the other dragons first.

It was uncertain just how long ago these two powerful Color Dragon species were exiled to the Underground. It was also unknown just how many dragons from that age were still around. In fact, the specific reason for exiling them along with how long they were supposed to be exiled for had long been forgotten. The only thing known was that these two Color Dragon species were the oldest inhabitants of the Underground. They had arrived far earlier than even Lorci and the Dark Elves.

Dragons had the ability to obtain part of their parents' knowledge right from the stage of Dragon Egg, which was why Red Dragons and Black Dragons would never amount to anything good. I secretly peeked at Little Red. Since they were all exiled as an entire species, they must have caused a major incident back in the day. But, in my opinion, not a single law or punishment should punish the descendants for an ancestor's crimes. Since so few of the perpetrators from that day were around anymore, the current Red Dragons and Black Dragons should logically be allowed to return aboveground.

"...If dragons acted based on logic and reason, then we wouldn't be dragons."

When I mentioned the logic of allowing them to return, Little Red responded in such a fashion. Regardless of the fact that she even included herself, her comment was so correct that she was even rather proud about it, making me speechless.

The older a species was, the more they would love to emphasize past glories. They would always worship their ancestors' ways and mutter every day about "not changing traditions." Such stubborn old artifacts weren't limited only to humans and elves.

"Since there are past customs and cultures already, and

everybody in the past lived like this, why change how things are?"

It was highly likely that we wouldn't be successful with our trip. But neither me nor Little Red were willing to give up before we even tried. After all, this was a once-in-a-thousand years opportunity.

The timing was excellent? Of course it was excellent as the Dragon World, one of the three largest locations where Dragons gathered, was under serious threat. Their mortal enemies, the Titan Giants, were about to revive, and the Holy War was night. And this particular Holy War was certain to drag the dragons back into it despite how long they'd managed to keep out of the fighting. Their entire species was in danger, so if I didn't take this opportunity to rob them—cough, I meant offer them assistance in their time of need—wouldn't that be such a waste?

In times of danger, people would have less moral constraints, and it was the same for the dragons. Plus, it was indeed true that the Red and Black Dragons were capable of majorly assisting the other dragons, which was a useful chip we could play.

Visiting at this time meant we would dangle an offer of the Red and Black Dragons' assistance in exchange for allowing them to return aboveground. Although this might seem rather underhanded, that was how it always worked in politics—to use anything you could to an advantage. Since this was the plan most likely to succeed, why wouldn't we try to use it?

As long as we obtained the Dragons' permission, or even just tacit approval, the Underground Red and Black Dragons would finally be able to openly return to the mortal plane's skies in a large-scale fashion—this would also give us a large amount of combat strength.

After completing this goal that no Underworld Dragon Queen or King had ever accomplished, Little Red's position would become even more secured. In fact, it was quite possible some other

Immemorial Dragons would automatically come to her and swear their fealty to be allowed back aboveground.

Of course, considering the typical behavior of these two dragon species, I was also hesitant to allow a bunch of thieves and criminals back aboveground. But,then I thought about how if we couldn't get over the obstacle of the Titan Giants, there would be no future. I figured it was worth a try. With Dragon Queen Little Red watching over them, it was unlikely that a major incident would arise soon—at least for the time being.

When thinking of major incidents, I looked over in dissatisfaction at Molly who was gliding next to us. Recently, she no longer had any more goals or desires, which actually made her life quite easy and carefree.

"So troublesome."

The moment Molly returned to the surface, she became an excellent example of just how evil a typical Immemorial Red Dragon would be. She attacked villages, kidnapped princesses for ransom, acted as a mercenary for hire, and even robbed younger dragons. She was literally the perfect example of an evil antagonist. Otherwise, she wouldn't have had the honor of entering the Calamity Rankings so quickly at #99. And her identity as the former Dragon Queen made the surface residents speedily worsen their opinions of the Underground Dragons.

"They really are just like what's written in records."

"...Luckily, most Red and Black Dragons are still stuck Underground."

Every time we heard such comments, Little Red would grit her teeth in anger. These opinions naturally made it more difficult for us to obtain our goal.

"Let's just leave everything to fate."

I assessed the success rate of our trip and believed that we had

only a twenty-five percent chance of success. What was surprising was that Little Red took this news quite well.

"That's all we can do. Why do I feel like the biggest trouble of our trip isn't even the issue of having the Red and Black Dragons return? I feel like there's some huge trouble waiting for me. Have I forgotten something recently? Or have I missed something?"

"You always miss so many things!"

Alright then. I seemed to have accidentally touched on a nerve somewhere, as Little Red started complaining yet again.

And once she stopped complaining, she sped up again. But it would be quite a while before we would be able to catch up to Halent and his Blue Dragon steed. In fact, if it wasn't for the fact that they had slowed down so we could somewhat keep up, they probably could have doubled their speed.

"...That little brat can fly so quick."

"Hrm, that Blue Dragon you're calling a little brat is at least two hundred years old. If he's a little brat, what does that make me? Also a little brat? Can't you fly any faster?"

"This is pretty much my highest speed. If you think I'm slow, then why don't you try flying yourself?"

Blue Dragons were that fast? Actually, it was that Little Red and Molly were too slow. At most, Blue Dragons were only thirty percent faster than other Dragon species. This was mainly because of their ability to control the winds to assist them. And Halent's dragon had just become an adult, which was the peak of a dragon's speed. It was only natural that his Blue Dragon would be much faster.

Immemorial Dragons were supposed to be able to fly faster than ordinary Adult Dragons? That's what most people believed, but they never thought about it more deeply. The bigger one was, the more difficult it would be to improve one's speed. Top-level

Dragons were typically seven or eight times the size of an Adult Dragon, so flying would also require seven to eight times the energy consumption.

For the Dragons termed as Immemorial Dragons and above, most would have lived over one thousand years. Such dragons typically spent their time either sleeping or researching magic. Hunting would almost always be done by their subordinates, so their physical abilities were far weaker than when they were young. Plus, their gigantic bodies were a great burden on their heart, so they preferred to only flap their wings slowly.

Of course, Dragons were a species naturally skilled at both the physical and magical. When in combat, most dragons would use magic and natural talent abilities to speed themselves up. That was why powerful dragons wouldn't seem any slower than Adult Dragons when fighting for short periods of time. But for the sake of traveling long distances, using magic and natural talent abilities would be far too wasteful. As a result, Adult and Mature Dragons were actually the swiftest.

Dragons' body sizes would typically stop growing after reaching the Immemorial rank. At that point, magic and natural talent abilities would be far more important than physical combat. Even for the stupidest of all the dragons, the White Dragons, they would still be the equivalent of master archmages in a specific type of magic after reaching Immemorial. Their unique dragon magic and special curses were also tremendously powerful.

As far as I knew, Little Red was one of the few Immemorial Dragons who continued to train and improve herself on a daily basis rather than only sleeping. Not only was she incredibly skilled in melee combat, she was also proficient in Truth Magic, Fire Magic, and Space Magic. And after she obtained the position of Dragon Queen, she gained access to the Underworld Dragon City's secret dragon techniques. Since she trained far harder than most others, her growth rate was apparent. In fact, she was about to

reach the next power level.

This was obviously a good thing for our upcoming plans. After all, we were supposed to be the helpers. But there were still many extra tasks waiting for us, and dragons were extremely arrogant. A fight was almost certain to happen.

"I hope we'll be successful with our trip. Still, I keep feeling like there's a major trouble waiting for us. My ominous premonitions are always on the mark. For instance, before we left, I said that we should bring an umbrella, but you told me it wouldn't be necessary. See, isn't it raining today? Judging from the weather, I feel that there might even be a typhoon later..."

"Shut up! Stop jinxing us!"

Alright then. I obediently shut up as I watched a tornado form not far away from us.

Chapter 367: Unexpected Visitor

It was dangerous high up in the air. Small countries would usually have no aerial defenses, but casually entering a major country's air space would be the same as challenging that country's air defenses and aerial knights.

But the most dangerous possibility was to accidentally enter a mage tower's defense zone. Even a dragon could die against a well-prepared mage tower.

High-quality mage towers would be capable of multiplying a mage's spells' strength by ten times over. A large-scale, high-circle spell would easily reach the scale of a small forbidden spell. It was quite common for mages to be able to slay dragons. This was also why dragons would still maintain a basic amount of respect for the mages.

To my knowledge, the capital city of each major domain in the Bardi Empire had such anti-air defenses. In fact, the more powerful domain lords would even hire mages to construct anti-air mage towers. Of course, they weren't necessarily guarding against external threats. Powerful domain lords in a mega-empire would have wealth comparable to that of small countries and could afford to maintain a sizable amount of aerial cavalry.

Just as how royal authority and religious authority were forever at odds with each other, royal authority and domain lord authority would be forever in conflict.

If it was a time when the royalty was very weak, the local domain lords would typically fight amongst themselves, attacking each other's territory and forcibly kidnapping citizens for population. Perhaps they would use ridiculously flimsy excuses such as "You dared to not invite me when your son was born," or "Your wife tried to flirt with my uncle." But if the royalty's power was at a nadir, then such excuses that not a single person would believe

were more than enough.

A weak royal authority meant that internal chaos was unavoidable. If a particular domain lord emerged with the support of more than half of the factions in the country, then a new royalty would likely be established.

Since the newly-born royalty used their concrete power to obtain that position, the new royalty would naturally have great authority. The royalty would thus enter a period of great authority. But no dynasties in any world lasted forever. It would be impossible for a royal family to forever have only just and wise rulers. As long as the feudal system and bloodline hereditary royal authority continued, it would only be a matter of time before the royalty was changed out yet again.

Obviously, this wasn't exactly a beneficial cycle as this type of society would make war and conflict inevitable. But although ordinary citizens would always suffer when there was war, such a cycle had its contributions to society, too. At the very least, it was a natural opportunity to shake the system and get rid of a foolish or tyrant king.

I had researched about political systems in detail considering probable future developments. However, I had no intentions of starting a "Communist revolution,""attacking the rich and taking their lands," or anything like that. In fact, I didn't even intend to bring a revolutionary change to society apart from introducing the Concept of Law. That was because in this world, where lands were wide, production capabilities were low, and wild magical monsters were overly powerful, a seemingly backwards society where domain lords took responsibility for protecting their citizens was actually the best fit.

"Everyone belongs to the royalty? Everyone should listen to the king? Since you all belong to the royalty, then look to the royalty for protection."

Domain lords owned every part of their territory and their citizens, and were also the main motivation for citizens to organize into militia and protect their own lands. After all, the origin of the knightly spirit was from people swearing loyalty to their domain lord and their land.

Such a noble spirit originated from the ordinary. Protecting one's possessions was only natural. But as adjustments were made to society over time, stepping slightly over this line could make one into a genius, while stepping over this line even more would make one into an idiot who would be burned at the stake.

If some transmigrator truly arrived and created a major country with centralized authority and provinces instead of domains, exchanging domain lords out for government officials, that transmigrator would never receive a great harvest. All that awaited him would be the collapse of his country.

With centralized authority, one little governmental order might take several years to reach the farther districts in a major country. By the time the order arrived, who knew what it would be changed into? Also, centralized authority meant that the population would be overly concentrated into denser areas. With the current generation's technological level, that would be impossible to support.

Too many people gathering in a single place would cause plagues or famines, problems difficult to solve in this day and age. It would be easy to come to a conclusion that densely populated cities were actually a bad thing here. This would be a common example of doing something bad with good intentions.

Of course, smaller countries like ours could try this on a smaller scale if their technology had developed to a certain extent—slowly developing the size of cities and modernizing them with gradual improvements to health care, communication, transportation, agriculture, and industry. All these fields would be raised by several levels as magical engineering brought about an industrial

revolution. Society would naturally change even if I didn't do anything... Oops, I might have accidentally revealed my plans here. Yep, I admit I had indeed wanted to make such drastic changes. But overhauling the feudal society for an entire world wouldn't happen overnight.

Of course, there were rare exceptions, such as extremely small countries, theocracies where religious and royal authority were unified, or countries always at war with their neighbors. For these and various other reasons, few exceptions had excellent political stability that lasted over one thousand years.

Couch—cough—let us stop discussing political systems. After being in a feudal system for so long, what did it matter if it remained for a while longer? I had no intentions of spreading philosophies like "All men are created equal" or "Wealth should be equally distributed amongst everyone." Nor did I have any intentions of creating something like a Communist Party in this world. Doing something like that would only make me into public enemy number one. I could only do what I could and focus on the present.

The Bardi Empire was in a zenith of royal authority. So of course the local domain lords wouldn't fight amongst each other; instead, it was the opposite. They would team up and work together against royal authority. Since absolutely centralized authority was impossible in this society, the conflict between royal and domain lord authority was destined to be eternal and unending, which would reset only each time a new royalty was born.

The current Bardi Empire's royal authority was the strongest it had ever been in its long history. Orloss was even capable of forcing his domain lords to hand over their eldest sons to come over to the capital for "education." He even strictly controlled the amount of soldiers permitted in the domain lords' private armies. But making every domain lord obedient would require several centuries without internal or external chaos. That would be

impossible for anyone unless they were some sort of undying main character with an incredible cheat.

Although the Bardi Empire was only one country in name, technically speaking it was more like each individual domain was a smaller country. Calculating a country's overall combat strength would typically refer to the royal army and royal knights. But for any large scale warfare, one would have to include the domain lords' private armies. It was only normal that answering their king's summons and sending out their private armies to participate in national warfare would be one of the most basic duties of a domain lord.

Don't underestimate the domain lords' private armies. Their training techniques and equipment would be passed down from generation to generation. Certain specialized equipment and troop types would often become local specialties. There were plenty of private armies even stronger than the royal army. Since the royalty restricted the number of soldiers allowed in the domain lords' armies, the major nobles focused on the quality of their troops. It was actually quite common that an individual soldier in a domain lord's army would be far stronger than the average soldier in the royal knights.

The number of troops permitted to a domain lord would typically be related to that domain lord's noble rank. But there were still ways to circumvent the numbers limitations, such as village militias, reserve troops, and so on. Although none of the domain lords had as many troops as the royal army, adding them together would typically be a huge amount of soldiers several times the size of the royal army. Only that would help them to be able to restrain the royalty from running amok. From a certain standpoint, in a feudal society, the royalty themselves were basically the strongest domain lord of the country.

Well, this was the situation for ordinary domain lords. As for the major domain lords of border domains, it would be impractical and

impossible to restrict the number of soldiers they possessed. These major nobles were usually the ones who found it easiest to become a new royalty dynasty.

On our way, I witnessed just how truly amazing the Bardi Empire's foundational strength was.

In just about every district, aerial knights would follow after us. They would either be Griffin Knights or Pegasus Knights, and I even saw a single Dragon Knight. There was even a mage riding a Manticore. Sometimes, they would appear in small squads or multiple small squadrons. Ordinary countries wouldn't be capable of affording aerial knights, while aerial knights were one of the most basic units in the Bardi domain lords' armies. I even saw two faintly concealed towers among the clouds.

Even when they saw that Archduke Halent's Blue Dragon was at the forefront, they didn't leave. They followed us in silence until we left their domain. And whenever we entered a new domain, new aerial cavalry would arrive as well, treating us with the same attitude. This polite yet distant attitude wasn't only targeted at us outsiders. Not a single person greeted the well-known Dragon Knight Archduke, which was definitely unusual.

Dragon Knights belonged in-name only to the royalty, so they had the freedom to freely travel through each domain. But these silently following aerial knights represented a certain attitude, even if they couldn't stop the Dragon Knights from doing anything: "This place is ours. You can come if you like, but you must remain under our surveillance."

This was obviously a show of disrespect to the royal authority, and it was quite different from what I had heard previously on how Orloss ruled with an iron grip. It would seem that since the domain lords were under the impression that Orloss would soon die, they now had other ideas about royal authority.

Even though I hadn't reached the capital, I could guess at what

was going on. It was probably due to the fact that Orloss had far too many adopted princes, making internal conflict amongst the princes' factions inevitable. But once the internal conflicts started, no matter which prince won out in the end and became the next emperor, royal authority would be greatly diminished. It would seem that the generation of forty years ago, when the domain lords suppressed the royalty, would return.

Their attitude towards the Dragon Knight Archduke Halent wasn't only a political attitude—there were probably concrete reasons to it as well.

"Who knows? Maybe you're here to record our terrain and military status in order to prepare for future possible combat."

As for us outsiders? We weren't stopped or asked any questions at all. Halent was leading us, so we were viewed as members of the Dragon Knights. Our new companion also traveled alongside us without any hindrance.

New companion? Didn't I mention how there was a sudden tornado? It was a familiar figure, the Wind Elemental God Camdian—truly a coincidence.

"Your Highness Roland, I came here all the way to meet you. There's something very important that I'd like to discuss with you in detail."

After killing off Emordilorcan, Camdian ran for his life—I meant left in a hurry. But he had now appeared before me of his own volition—he obviously had something important to discuss. And unlike before, when he would address me as "puny worm" or "foolish mortal," his demeanor was much humbler.

Ancient existences like Camdian were the practical type. If you couldn't prove you were equal to their level, they wouldn't even look you in the eye.

Of course, I was delighted to see Camdian. After all, I was looking

for top-level wind elemental items along with the other elements. If I killed him—er—I meant asked him, perhaps I would receive a harvest.

Yet I could only helplessly abandon thoughts of killing him when I took a closer look at Camdian. Only his incarnation had appeared before me. They could be self-destructed at will by the original master, and it would be nigh impossible to obtain useful elemental items from an incarnation. Who would want to fight against a video game boss who was both ridiculously difficult to defeat and wouldn't even offer a single good item?

But now, we were currently flying in midair—not the best time to have a chat. So I simply told him to follow along. However, he was strangely in a hurry to talk to me, so I asked him what it was about. Upon doing so, he was visibly delighted and directly asked me:

"Your Highness, I'd like to discuss the Desecration Priest and Antiholy Knight you created in Auland who have the ability to dispel divine power..."

"What? Desecration Priest? Antiholy Knight?"

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When Roland and the True Gods were engaged in battle with the Titan Giants in the southwest of Bardi, the sea battle at Auland had ended with an astonishing result.

The cooperation between Auland's "Fleet of Death" and Reyne's Four Elemental Swordcasters obtained impressive achievements. The battleships drove across the seas, breaking the Sea Tribe's formations. Then, the Swordcasters' three squadrons divided and conquered the Sea Tribe that had been split up, making the result obvious.

Actually, this small scale tactical cooperation between the Swordcasters and the battleship fleet was created for the sake of

the Borealis, and the seven Big Dipper airships intended to go along with it. This was simply a perfect time to bring out such a strategy.

Now that this strategy was used in actual combat, various problems were exposed. For instance, the Swordcasters had overly weak power levels, meaning they couldn't fight against the Sea Tribe in extended battles. Construction techniques for certain equipment parts were still insufficient, so water leakage, mana leakage and other such problems occurred.

Yet Reyne had quite competently commanded over the situation. The Aurora Knights, who had much higher average power levels than the Swordcasters, acted well as support and protection. East Mist's combat achievements were excellent. Although some equipment had been lost or destroyed, they had very few casualties.

Even though the Sea Tribe's reinforcements had arrived, they were unable to block the black Fleet of Death's slow, inexorable advance. Both sides locked themselves in meat-grinder style attrition combat. However, the Auland humans were waging everything on this battle, while the Sea Tribe lacked the will to fight and were unwilling to sacrifice themselves. The Sea Tribe's repeated losses and retreats were only natural.

This wasn't a piece of cake for the Auland humans, though—they, too, had lost a significant number in this battle. Yet they managed to accomplish their primary strategic goal: to reach the docks district where the underwater base was located.

Upon reaching this location, the fleet arranged its ships in a circle and took up a defensive formation. Divers were in the midst of preparing for an underwater descent when something completely unexpected overturned the battlefield's situation. It was this that spurred Camdian into seeking out Roland. That was because what was shown in this battle was of momentous import to an ancient Elemental God like him.

"The Dark Elves entered combat! They turned around the entire battle!"

Chapter 368: Ordinary Mortal's World

Any religion would loath heretics far more than any other enemy. Traditionalists would feel that the heretics' explanations of doctrine and new inventions would cause the religion to lose its "purity and tradition," needlessly confusing loyal believers.

An analogy would be the most frightening disease back on Earth —cancer. Ordinary cells would mutate and spread at a scary rate. Once the changes within one's body spread to a certain degree, it would be impossible for that person to remain alive. For the ones who battled and defeated cancer, it would put great strain upon their body.

In this world of True Gods, heretics were those with different understandings and explanations of the True Gods' teachings. This could cause changes in a Divine Concept or people's belief.

Some changes were permitted by the True Gods. Sometimes, True Gods themselves would cause these changes while seeking to better understand or develop their Divine Concepts. But that would still cause internal strife, whether large or small, within that True God's church.

Yet some changes would trod upon a True God's taboo. The True God would be furious to the point they directly send down divine punishment.

Back in Sulfur Mountain City, a certain villainous individual (fine, I mean myself) performed an experiment. I successfully brainwashed a demon into making him believe he was a Holy Knight who worshiped the Holy Light. I had this demon cultivate as how Holy Knights normally would, and he actually succeeded in summoning the Holy Light.

Although this demon was instantly vaporized by the Holy Light he had summoned, this very sight alone would be more than enough to make even the most fervent of believers toss their belief

in the Holy Light into the trash.

"Holy Light is supposed to be a gift from the God of Holy Light? He even gives Holy Light's mortal enemies, the demons, the power of Holy Light? He's either an idiot, or he's blind. Maybe other Gods are the same as well..."

Gods were supposed to never make mistakes. If they made mistakes, they had no foundational differences from mortals, but Gods were supposed to be venerated, far above the ordinary mortal. Mortals were supposed to try their best to comprehend divine messages delivered in intentionally obscure fashions. That was because if mortals got too close to the Gods and could see them for what they really were, they would naturally lose their fear and respect. So-called "pure" belief in the Gods wouldn't exist anymore.

Most people were incapable of having pure belief or faith like I did in a single Concept. Their faith forever revolved around a particular God. Even though they themselves were mortals who would definitely make mistakes, they perceived the Gods as forever correct and all-knowing. Only then would the Gods be worthy of them giving the Gods their all.

"On one side are people who give everything about themselves to existences they can't even see clearly. On the other side are powerful existences who pretend to play at divinity. Which side is the more laughable one?"

That was my sarcastic quip at the time. The logic behind it was genuine.

Only very few individuals at the apex of power would have information about the True Gods. Ordinary mortals would only know what their local priests told them.

"True Gods are wise and majestic. They reside in the skies up above and watch the mortal realm while protecting us..."

The incident of "The Humiliation of Soros" which had happened in the Northlands was proof that there was no foundational difference between Order and Chaos. But this supposed difference between Order and Chaos was the impetus behind the eternal Holy War to begin with. Just this alone had been more than enough to shake the faith of the younger Holy Light believers, including the now Fallen Angel Aivla. If everybody knew that "True Gods could be easily fooled, and they might not even be smarter than your next door neighbor," everyone's faith would be shaken from the very foundation.

It was quite easy to guess that revealing this information to everyone would lead to a world-scale destructive result. In the worst scenario, it might even be possible to see meteor showers, a sign of how often the Gods would die off.

The only reason I never exposed this information to the world was because I was uncertain to just how bad the fallout would be if everyone lost their faith. If more than half of all humanity lost their faith in Order, large amounts of Order Gods would die in droves, and the Holy War would be instantly lost.

But when my subordinate Dark Elf Holy Knight sunk into a faith crisis, I considered the topic a while before giving her the information in the hope she would overcome her overreliance on the Gods and create her own path. And together with the information I gave my personal understanding of Law and the secrets of the True Gods.

There's a famous phrase that goes something like this: "I only told one person but suddenly the whole world knew." Cough, I should change that phrase to "If you tell a secret to someone, the secret is no longer a secret."

In this world, knowledge represented actual power. But this wasn't limited to mages. For Holy Knights, who relied on their faith and devotion as power, knowing more might not be a good thing.

After receiving more knowledge than she could handle, Diana sunk into a more severe faith crisis. She was utterly lost about her past life and future path. Her Soul Imprint shattered, causing her to fall out of Legend rank.

But the most important part was what I had casually said to her.

"Maybe I'm the most devout believer of all. At least, I've never expected the Gods to do anything for me. I don't even believe in the True Gods themselves. I only believe in the Concept of Law, and I'm trying to use Law to improve the world we live in."

These words echoed in Diana's head every night, like the ringing of a loud bell. After she shared this knowledge with her "younger sister" Victoria to receive assistance in understanding this knowledge, Diana reconsidered her past way of life and came to a conclusion. Finally, she came to a decision.

"...My disappointment in Dark Elf society where even close family members would kill each other made me abandon Lorci and choose the path of Holy Light to obtain salvation. I hoped the Holy Light would be able to save me and my species, so we could walk out in the open under the sun.

"...When I discovered that Holy Light was only capable of 'cleansing,' which would destroy my species, I saw how Law allowed every single species to live together in peace at Sulfur Mountain City. So I abandoned the path of the Holy Light and desired that this newly born power of Order known as Law could bring us out under the sunlight.

"...When my faith was shaken yet again, in order to return aboveground as well as to search for a way to make my faith steadfast, I researched the Moonlight Goddess's teachings. Yet even though I succeeded in bringing myself out under the sunlight, I was even more confused inside."

Diana's silver holy sword flickered with changing powers of Order. The shattering of her Soul Imprint allowed her to break

free from past restrictions. Her pure and simple mind and heart allowed to reach a state of synchronization with these powers of Order.

From a certain standpoint, this "subordinate," who always stood by the side, observing, was my truest disciple who inherited my understanding about the truth of the world.

The fact that Diana became a hero spoken in epics as well as the leader of the entire Dark Elf species in the game's history was evidence that she was an extraordinary individual.

"Ha, His Highness is correct. Whenever I believed in a particular God, it was because of my own selfish desires. My faith had nothing to do with actual devotion. I had pushed my own hopes and goals upon another existence. How is that any different from tossing my responsibilities to others? It's nothing more than escapism."

In her confusion, Diana somehow managed to recall something I had told her.

"...Rather than asking others for help, it's much better to seek help from yourself. The Gods are too busy to deal with even their own troubles. Rather than pay respect to a God or whatever, why not pay respect to yourself? Indeed, there are many imperfections with the current world, and changing even one part of it is incredibly difficult. But, for some things, if you don't even try, then there isn't any hope at all. At least there's a silver of a chance you'll succeed if you try."

That was what I had told her, and what I managed to accomplish as well.

The Underground World was the most chaotic place in all of Eich. Yet I managed to develop Sulfur Mountain City into a place that bordered on being a paradise. Although the law of the jungle prevailed in the Underground's society—it was a barbaric one where whoever was stronger was in the right—I managed to use

the Concept of Law to help bring the myriad of species together, both peacefully and equally.

Dark Elves had always been viewed as species born evil. Even after becoming a Holy Knight Diana was viewed with suspicion and distrust. However, I, without hesitation, had accepted this group of Dark Elves who had nowhere else to go and had handed over the important task of protecting the city and its residents to them. This was the first time these Dark Elves had ever experienced the feeling of someone else trusting in them.

This was a wondrous place, with an even more wondrous master. I invented magical engineering, which was viewed as nothing more than a trifling toy, and permitted the various True Gods' churches to coexist together, a sight never seen before. I wrote revolutionary laws which stated how everyone was foundationally equal, although my actions were ridiculous and arrogant to the point of breaking tradition. In most ordinary people's eyes, I indeed seemed crazy. Or maybe it was that my actions seemed incomprehensible. Through her eyes, though, Diana saw something she felt was obvious—that I was trying to improve the world! I was trying to change it! That I was dissatisfied with the current situation!

"You think this world isn't good enough? Why don't you try to improve it? What use is there in relying on a God? They're nothing more than puppets who have trouble protecting even themselves. They're pitiful existences tied to their Divine Concepts."

Gods were supposed to reign high above mortals, with mortals being nothing more than ants? In my eyes, True Gods weren't any more special than an ordinary mortal. As time passed, I used actions to speak louder than words.

Lorci, who had ruled the Dark Elves for eons, perished. Even the most venerated of the Order Gods, the God of Holy Light, was exposed for the hypocrite he was. If it weren't for the fact that she was mentally prepared... or, more accurately, already had doubts about the God of Holy Light, she would have definitely been

included among the Holy Knights who lost their powers of Holy Light.

"I've been abandoned by the Holy Light? No, I'm the one who abandoned the Holy Light. I..."

The golden glow on her Soul Imprint no longer existed as her past faith had been shattered. This formerly shining Soul Imprint was now in tatters.

At this moment, Diana recalled how I had showed her the truth about the impending Armageddon and the almost impossible-to-realize desire I had for saving the world.

"...Life is difficult as it is. Tolerating and worshipping are both meaningless. Despite all this, even though he knows it's basically impossible, is he foolish? Noble? Is it even possible? No..."

Diana recalled how she had searched for the truth for over one hundred years. She had despaired, cursed, and hoped for this world filled with bitterness to come to an end. But thinking back upon all this now, she had simply been too selfish.

Letting the world come to an end sounded like a nice end to everything, but wouldn't that be cruel to the newborns who had just arrived in this world? They would have no opportunity to experience the world's pleasures. What about the people who toiled every day just to survive? Wouldn't it be too cruel to Roland, who was sacrificing everything in order to obtain a chance to change the fate of Eich's Armageddon?

Once Diana made her decision, her former shattered Soul Imprint shone with a brilliant silver glow. A new path for her soul was formed and manifested into a Soul Imprint, which had the symbol of a fist clenching a sword.

"...We only wish to live in a way we mortals can live with pride and safety. Is this little wish wrong to have?"

As silver light surrounded her, Diana directly skipped the rank of Legends and went straight to the realm of Saints. The moment she was certain of her new path, her former experiences transformed into actual power.

Her understanding of Gods, divine power, Holy Light, Moonlight, Law, and her Dark Elven natural magic resistance merged into one. It was her personal beliefs which had transformed this chaotic combination in a mysterious way. The combination of the colors of these different powers was a black as deep as night.

"We want to live on and improve the world, even if the undefeatable Gods obstruct us. Awaken, my Soul Imprint...'Fool Who Stands Against the Gods!'"

Diana was far smarter than what others perceived her to be. Ever since I showed her all those things, she faintly detected that I was treating the True Gods as my enemies. And once she understood the truth behind the eternal Holy War, she pointed her sword to the high-up existences, those so-called deities who caused Holy Wars and oh so much suffering to ordinary mortals.

Everyone knew it would be foolish to become an enemy of the Gods. Everyone knew that saving the world was an impossible task. But ordinary mortals had the right to survive, and some things had to be done. The smart ones were unwilling to do foolish things, so let the fools take action.

"Fool? A name that truly befits me."

For some reason, Diana recalled how I always called her "big idiot," and she chuckled derisively at herself. However, she firmed her conviction even more. As long as she could reach her goal, she didn't care if nobody understood her or if she was laughed at for being a fool... At the very least, I, who also chose the crazy path of the fool, would definitely understand her choice. Although this path may be difficult, it wasn't one she had to tread down alone.

And that was indeed the case. Not long in the future, other knights would choose this thorny path, don the black armor and an emblem called the "Blades of Resistance." But nobody would ever know what it took for this "big idiot" to create this brand new job class. Nobody would know her decisiveness at the time, or why this job class known as Antiholy Knight later changed its name to something that sounded quite similar: Antigod Knight!

These knights were ordinary mortals who opposed the interference of higher existences in mortal affairs. They believed that mortals' fates should be determined by mortals themselves. They believed that Gods and Demons should remain in their own territories. They dared to raise their swords against any who meddled with mortals.

At the aquatic battle of Kagersi, the first Antiholy Knight in history inserted her holy sword into the water, causing even the True Gods to be astonished.

"My wish is for this world to belong to mortals."

She uttered these simple words, but nothing appeared to happen—rain continued falling and everyone continued fighting. However, Diana's Soul World was spreading, albeit quietly—the World of the Mortals.

Her Soul World continued to spread, but nothing seemed to happen until suddenly, the clouds in the sky vanished and the water in the surrounding area disappeared.

In Diana's "World of the Mortals," non-residents of the mortal plane—like Demons, Angels, Devils, and even the Gods themselves — would lose their special abilities. An Antiholy Knight's special job class ability was countering other magic and divine powers. They were the protectors of the mortal plane and mortal enemies with existences from other planes.

If Eich's Dimensional Will truly existed, this could be thought of

a miracle brought about by the Will in an attempt to save itself. After all, only a knight who had undergone such tribulations like in legends could have "Fool" as a title. Not only that, it just so happened to be that a Dark Elf, who had natural magic resistance, was the first to invent this anti-magic, anti-divine power job class. Perhaps the phrase "Chaotic times give birth to heroes" was indeed true. As fate would have it, Diana managed to combine everything she possessed to open up a path never before seen.

Once the divine-powered forbidden spell was eliminated, it would be easy to determine the victor of the battle on hand. The humans had great advantage in morale and timing to begin with. Now that the water had been drained and the humans regained their advantage of terrain, the Sea Tribe's combat lines naturally collapsed.

Kagersi, which had been covered with dark clouds for over a year and a half, saw its first speck of sunlight.

Chapter 369: The Dark Elf Sisters

[Antiholy Knight, High-level job class. Requirements for entering this job class: knight and swordsman job class members at the peak of Silver. Heavy armor and military weapon expertise. Strength must be greater than 15, Constitution must be greater than 15, and Will must be greater than 16. System Reminder: This job class's main stat is Will. Only warriors with the strongest willpowers will be able to trod upon this path filled with thorns.]

[Job class specialty: Ordinary Mortal's Willpower. As a practitioner improves in proficiency, anti-magic and anti-divine power resistance will be improved. This resistance will be further improved by one's Will stat. This resistance also applies to the user's armor and weapon. But as a price for obtaining this resistance, the user will lose the ability to use any divine powers or magic. Notice: When entering this job class, an Antiholy Knight's divine or magic powers will be transformed into mental spirit and willpower.]

[Magic Breaker, Divine Breaker: Enchant user's weapon with an Ordinary Mortal's Willpower. Attacking with such a weapon will dispel all magic and divine powers on an enemy's weapons and equipment. This effect can be stacked. After reaching a certain degree, it will be possible to permanently weaken an enemy's power level. Notice: This power-loss effect can only be canceled by the highest-level priests who have power levels far surpassing the Antiholy Knight who applied this effect, or by the Antiholy Knight who applied it.]

[Holy Sword Dispelling: Target an existence from another plane. Transform user's tempered Will into a formless holy sword which will cause a large amount of neutral-element damage. Also, there will be a probability that the existence will be dispelled and sent back to its original plane. This ability can only be used against existences from other planes. As long as the user still has the

mental spirit to continue using this ability, there are no limitations on how many times this ability can be used.]

[Unyielding Body: Tempered willpower and the effect of Ordinary Mortal's Willpower will increase the user's base stats by 2 Strength and 2 Constitution. And after reaching 16 Will, every time the user's Will increases by 2 more points, both Strength and Constitution will gain another bonus 1 point. Every time the user improves in power level, there will be large bonuses to Strength and Constitution.]

[Aura effect: Antiholy Barrier. The user can summon a barrier constructed out of their willpower and dispel all magic and divine power effects within it. This barrier's effects depends on the difference in power level between the user and the target enemy. It can be maintained for a medium amount of time.]

[Curse: Black Solo Traveler. Antiholy Knights are loathed by the Gods, and don't expect understanding from the other mortals that they protect. Their glorious holy swords shall transform into black magic swords. Their white and silver armor shall be covered in shadows. They shall be the solo travelers of the night. System Reminder: This curse possesses a punishment of -4 Charisma. Also, devout God believers will instinctively loathe all Antiholy Knights.]

[System Note: This job class's creation is deeply related to you according to the ties of karma. You personally changed the fate of the epic hero Diana. How much you changed her fate has increased since the previous calculation, so you are now rewarded with an additional 1000 Fate Points. P.S.: This job class is still incomplete. It's possible for it to evolve and strengthen even further.]

Obviously, this job class was a weaker version of Diana's "Antigod" version.

This was something common in the mortal plane. As I mentioned before, many high-level job classes for Gold ranks were job classes

first created by Legends before them.

After this job class was born, my System immediately gave me the relevant information. She also notified me that I myself could spend some Fate Points to enter this job class as soon as I talked to Diana and learned the basic information about it.

"It requires more than 15 points in three different stats? And the person must be an expert in heavy armor and at least one military weapon? The requirements for entering this job class are sufficient for even Legends. It's definitely a powerful job class. Although progressing into it is quite difficult, it seems like I meet all the requirements. So, I should take a level in it and have a side job class to learn some new skills... System! Did you really think I would say that!? Do I look like that much of an idiot to you!?"

Indeed, this job class had strict requirements for entry, and its natural job class talents made Antiholy Knights into the best counters to priests, mages, Gods, and Demons. But, if I entered this job class, I would definitely regret it.

"As a price for obtaining this resistance, the user will lose the ability to use any divine powers or magic. Doesn't this sentence mean that apart from the Antiholy Knight's abilities, I'd only be left with my racial talents? All the ice, undead, Law, and Holy Light magic I spent so much effort learning would go to waste."

It could be said that if I entered this job class, I'd pretty much go from a pay-to-win player with fully leveled up abilities to a high-level foot soldier who could only fight enemies with basic attacks and chase them down on foot. And if I couldn't run, I'd only be able to clutch my head and crouch down in defense... Should I throw a celebration party now that there was finally a job class with worse problems of reach compared to Holy Knight?

This was obviously a highly special job class. There was no fancy "ultimate ability" like in other high-level job classes, and the most basic magic spells or Holy Light would become unusable. However,

it would still very powerful and unique.

There would always be gains together with losses. Perhaps this job class didn't have any extravagant supernatural abilities, but it was capable of making its enemies lose their supernatural abilities. Meanwhile, a person in this job class would have their power concentrated in the most practical basic stats. I could already predict that a high-level Antiholy Knight would have ridiculously high stats in Strength and Constitution, making them tanks with ridiculously high defense and magic resistance.

"Changing powerful mages into ordinary people and then forcing these mages, who've lost their magic abilities and magic equipment, to fight in melee combat against an Antiholy Knight who has a ridiculously strengthened body due to sheer willpower? This is so shameless, so underhanded, so... I love it so much!"

I could already guess that this job class was about to become even better than Dark Elf Assassins at slaying mages. Not only that, Antiholy Knights were the type of job class that would "kill you honestly and directly from the front."

While the advantages were obvious, this job class's weaknesses were even more obvious. Short-ranged melee combat meant they would be limited in attacking reach, and pure warrior job classes that they had no advantage against were by far the most common in the mortal plane. At lower power levels, Antiholy Knights would have lower defenses and not enough special abilities. It would be difficult to level up in this job class.

But it would most definitely be exceedingly powerful in its full-leveled state.

"I don't care what fancy tricks you have. I'll just take your attacks and directly kill you from the front. That really is just like that big idiot's personality... Still, it's evident that this is a job class suited to bring on the battlefield in groups. Perhaps I should consider raising a group of Antiholy Knights."

It was also because of Diana's outstanding performance that countless existences' attention was brought to that aquatic battle at Kagersi. In fact, more existences paid attention to her than the result of the battle. This caused the other new job class which appeared to only barely be mentioned in informational reports.

"Desecration Priest? What's that?"

If Holy Knights and other Gods' knights could be considered as blades which protected their church, then priests were the representatives and teachers of a God's will and teachings. Perhaps priests weren't as capable in combat as other job classes, but they would be the leaders in the church as they sought to better understand a God's teachings and Divine Arts.

Desecration Priest: this was a path a certain person took, which was quite similar to Diana's Antiholy Knight path.

Yep, I was referring to Victoria Syfan, the Head Priestess of the Dark Elves from the game's history and Lorci's number one ranked High Priestess, as well as the person that Darsos felt conflicted over for his whole life—cough—cough—forget about that last one. Even in this newly changed world that diverged from the game history, she still reached the rank of number one High Priestess, becoming the Dark Elf closest to Lorci. If it weren't for the changes that happened later, it was quite possible that Victoria would once again become the living representation of Lorci's will.

Since she had managed to reach the number-one ranked High Priestess in both the game's history and the real world, she was likely at the peak of her priestess job class. In fact, her talent far surpassed Diana's as she could be considered one of the geniuses among geniuses of this world... But with the fact that "he" was still unable to take care of a certain curse, "his" luck was indeed rather unfortunate. Actually, in the game history, Victoria ended up marrying another man while also being male.... did Victoria actually count as fortunate?

Cough, based on my personal experience, those with poor fortune would have rather pitiful love lives. This would cause them to utilize their talents to the utmost in their work, thus achieving great things... After all, if a person no longer had any hope in their love life, they could only console themself by working even harder! Yep, I was definitely referring to Victoria and not to my own sad memories!

After Lorci perished, the Dark Elf society lost their leader. As Dark Elf society sunk into utter chaos, all rules and morals were abandoned. In this utterly chaotic time, heroes would naturally arise, causing history to return to its original point and develop a different direction. That hero would be the Dark Elf Queen Victoria.

With the support of Sulfur Mountain City, Victoria, the leader of the Syfan Family, not only took control over her own Underground City but also conquered other Dark Elf Underground Cities at a furious pace. Dark Elf society was originally a place where the strong ruled over the weak. Since numerous powerful Underground Lords pledged their support to her, how could the disorganized Dark Elves possibly fight back against the powerful Syfan Family? Not to mention, the Underground Lords' militaries also entered and helped her take over the conquered Underground Cities.

The current Victoria was no longer that pitiful "cute little gift" from back in the day. She was now the number one individual in the entire Dark Elf species. She controlled more than forty percent of all Dark Elves. If she wanted, she could easily crown herself the Dark Elf Queen. If some other individual without smart brain was in her position, they would have already done so... and then I'd guarantee she'd be kicked off that position in just a week.

Lorci's death had been a huge calamity for the Dark Elves. All the highest-ranked individuals in the Dark Elf Cities were Lorci's priestesses. But more than ninety-nine percent of the highest

ranked priestesses either died or went insane together with Lorci's death. The societal problems that had been repressed to the point of simmering exploded, and more than ninety percent of the Dark Elf Underground Cities went wild into crazed riots.

After that came along a faith crisis that provided an excellent opportunity for the Gods to obtain additional believers. All the True Gods sent out their most elite priests with exquisite gifts to visit the Underground. However, the final victor weren't these gentle and kind outsiders but Wumianzhe, instead, who brought along his armies...

"What? Preventing you from spreading your teachings? Of course not, do you have any evidence of such a thing? Fine, so you have evidence as well as witnesses? Who cares? Send someone down to the Underground to attack me if you dare."

Considering how True Gods warred with each other in their Divine Kingdoms and started national wars in the mortal plane over more believers, Xueti saying such things for Wumianzhe wasn't controversial in the least. If it weren't for the fact that it would be too shameless, Wumianzhe could have long called himself the Guardian God of the Dark Elves.

Wumianzhe didn't break any of the Gods' taboos by taking advantage of the chaos to claim most of the Dark Elves' faith. Since Lorci had perished against Wumianzhe in the Northlands, him coming down Underground to claim the spoils of his victory was only natural. In fact, the Gods who tried to steal Wumianzhe's spoils were the ones closer to treading on taboos. It was like they were trying to bully a newcomer God. Yet upon seeing that the newcomer God was sufficiently strong, with the veteran Ayer backing him up, the other Gods retreated.

Wumianzhe's Churches of Law and courts filled the Underground. Nanxiang Law School had more students than it could handle. Jails in every city had been expanded more than ten times in size but were still filled to maximum capacity. Many

former Justice Knights had reached the position of vice mayor.

After saying this much, certain things should now be obvious.

Although Victoria had become the Dark Elf Queen in all but name, she was still Sulfur Mountain City's puppet. Even if it wasn't a very nice thing to say, both I and Victoria herself knew this quite well.

Yep, now we arrived at the truth. I didn't trust Victoria at all. Unlike Diana, Victoria was a typical Dark Elf through and through. She was highly skilled at subterfuge, betraying, and acting. In fact, she was even skilled at pretending to act stupid and cute. She was highly intelligent and very capable in politics. Not only that, she had excellent military leadership abilities and talent.

Back in the game's history, she was the Underground Lord with the best ending. She was capable of marrying another man in order to obtain greater political benefits and never even met a bad end. There would be no mistake in categorizing Victoria as a successful and ambitious individual.

Of course, I wished to be able to trust her. At the very least, I greatly trusted her big idiot of a sister. But trusting another person needed time as well as a good understanding of their personality. The most important part was to be able to see through to their desires and goals. Only that would help me to analyze how she would likely behave in the future.

Unfortunately, despite knowing her for almost two years now, I was never able to see through to what she was thinking. I had no idea what she wanted at all. It was as if her life was all about obtaining more power, along with kicking down everyone who was an obstacle... And since this was the typical Dark Elf way of thinking, it only made me not trust her even more.

"It was so difficult for me to give the Dark Elves an opportunity to escape from their twisted society. How could I possibly allow Dark Elf society to return to how it was? I need to have a proper

discussion with her."

But no matter how well some things were planned, the result would often times be incomprehensible, especially if a plan involved me and my unreliable subordinates.

I had arranged multiple private discussions with her, but the moment I closed the door to the secret room I would see her hiding in a corner, trembling, as if I were a perverted boss who intended to do unspeakable things to a subordinate. I would repeatedly explain to her that I had only ordinary interests, but she refused to listen...

Only later did I find out that it was all the fault of the Dark Elf Town Security gossiping too much to her. The Town Security showed Victoria those porn books and rumors about me from Sulfur Mountain City. The end result was that, in her eyes, I became something of a mix between someone gay and a demonic pervert. She would always end my attempts at discussing with her by escaping the room and running away at top speed, causing rumors to spread everywhere by the next day.

What, you're asking why I didn't chase her? Hah, wouldn't that cause even more rumors? Witnesses would say: "The perverted boss attempted to rape a young girl in a secret room," which would make her older sister Diana set out to kill me.

So I then tried to arrange a discussion with Victoria in a public place..."You actually want to play at exhibitionism? That's just too much!" Her face went deathly pale, and she even shouted out loudly... loud enough for everyone in the Church of Law we were standing in to hear. Everyone looked at me in disbelief, causing me to be the one to escape this time. It was such a headache to explain away the rumors the next day!

And then... there was no more "and then" because I only wanted to avoid this trouble. Why would I voluntarily want to talk to Victoria anymore? Plus, I got so busy I naturally forgot.

Victoria's wondrous beauty and cuteness caused me to be shaken to the point of crashing into a wall? That was nothing more than a mere rumor! Of course I wasn't moved to the extent of thinking that she was the most beautiful girl alive! Nor was I shaken to the point of wanting to crash myself into that bell tower's wall! That bell tower's wall just happened to collapse on its own!

Recalling how things were, perhaps both of us had incredibly awful luck stats. If we stayed together, our passive bad luck would feed on each other, making her unluckier. And if she became unluckier, I would become unluckier. Each time, there would always be something different, but the end result would be that we were unlucky together.

Cough, getting back on topic, because of all this Victoria simply remained at her position and became somewhat of an outsider in my faction as well as a puppet leader.

Obviously, she wasn't willing to stay in such a situation. So she directly resigned her job, saying that she wasn't talented enough to be anything more than a City Lord and that she wished instead to focus on personal cultivation.

Although I didn't understand what she could cultivate now that she was a former Lorci priestess, I had no reason to reject her. Looking at how things were now, she must have truly succeeded in her cultivation. Not only that, the source of her newfound powers was most likely related to me.

"She's now a Desecration Priestess who's capable of stealing divine power? Absolutely insane. Summon Victoria and Diana over to the Bardi capital to meet me."

Chapter 370: Elemental God Equipment

"There's a God Equipment that represents each of the four elements? They represent the highest authority of the Elemental Gods? Such God Equipment exists?"

"Yes, this is the highest-level secret of the elementals. Unfortunately, all four God Equipment of the Elements have been lost. Even though the Elemental Gods are able to sense their locations..."

From a certain standpoint, the four elements were products of other planes, so elemental magic, too, could be considered products of other planes. That was why Antiholy Knights were capable of dispelling elemental magic, creating an area of zero magic which dispelled all spells and magic equipment.

Could the Antiholy Knights also dispel the power of Law? Although I needed to test this, I believed that the answer was likely yes, for the same reason as above. That was because the power of Law was supported by Wumianzhe's automated divine server, making it a type of divine power.

Still, dispelling magic and divine power wasn't something Antiholy Knights could do indiscriminately. It was just like how the conflict between positive energy and negative energy forever remained in balance. Only a large amount of water would be able to put out a fire. A minor amount of water would only be vaporized into steam by the same fire. It would still depend on the respective power levels between the Antiholy Knight and whoever they were fighting against, meaning that this job class wasn't ridiculously overpowered. However, the other new job class, Desecration Priestess, was absolutely ridiculous. They were capable of stealing divine power.

I didn't have information on the Desecration Priest job class in my System, partially due to the fact that Victoria's ties of karma to

me weren't that close, but even more because this job class wasn't yet complete.

Victoria thought like a typical Dark Elf in every way. She would never take an unknown path that may be fraught with peril. Desecration Priestess wasn't anywhere near as complete a job class as Diana's Anti-Holy Knight. However, Victoria had many former Lorci priestesses as subordinates and plenty of her subordinates were willing to take risks in order to obtain power. Naturally, her subordinates explored this path for Victoria's sake.

Judging from what the Desecration Priestesses showed off at the battle of Kagersi, they possessed a mysterious power capable of stealing and manipulating enemies' Divine Arts, magic, and racial talents.

That's right. In that battle, they had managed to steal the Sea Tribe's natural talent to whip up gigantic waves on the sea, achieving great accomplishments. But I could only guess the actual specifics. Perhaps this, too, was related to me, but I would still need to talk to Victoria for myself. Making a conclusion now would be too hasty.

Even if I thought about it with my knee, if Desecration Priestesses were capable of "borrowing" a True God's Divine Concept and specialized Divine Arts, not only would this ability be ridiculously powerful, but it would break all the True Gods' churches' taboos by challenging their authority and unique powers. This job class likely already caught the attention of the Gods, which would definitely create a huge wave in society. Right now, I was thinking about how to deal with Ayer's questions for me that were sure to come.

"This is truly troublesome... I hope Victoria can give me an appropriate explanation."

At least, from an outsider's standpoint, Victoria and Diana were both my subordinates. Their actions would be viewed as

extensions of my will. Since Victoria herself was the one viewed responsible for the Desecration Priestesses, the overall responsibility would naturally fall to me. This was exactly why Camdian directly came to find me.

Also, the God Equipment of the Elements that he mentioned, one for each element, was something I was quite interested in.

"The Elemental Thrones give Elemental Gods an endless source of power and regeneration. In comparison, the God Equipment of the Elements allow Elemental Gods to have a foundational difference from ordinary Elemental Lords. It's difficult for me to explain. But you'll instantly understand if you see one."

Camdian's explanation sounded rather vague, but I could guess at what Camdian was here for.

Back when I was fighting solo against Emordilorcan, he hadn't brought out anything like a God Equipment of Earth. His power was at most equivalent to an Earth Elemental Lord at his peak, with no foundational difference. Emordilorcan's scariest powers of limitless energy and regeneration had disappeared when I had Beifeng destroy his Earth Elemental Throne. And his melee combat skills were countered by my Cold Flames of Despair, which was why I was able to win.

Was Emordilorcan at the time even farther away from his peak of power than I realized? I felt this was getting more and more interesting.

After putting Camdian's information together with what I already knew, I could guess at what Camdian wanted from me, along with where the God Equipment of the Elements were located.

"The God Equipment of Wind is located in the Earth Elemental Plane's forbidden zone, while the God Equipment of Earth is located in the Wind Elemental Plane's forbidden zone. The Elemental Tide density is far too high there; even I cannot go

there..."

Since the God Equipment of the Elements were so important, then the existences capable of sealing the Elemental Gods wouldn't leave them be. But there would be no place capable of sealing such powerful equipment other than the Elemental Plane of the countering element. These locations were all such that the original user of the God Equipment of the Elements would be unable to access them. This way, even if the Elemental Gods broke free from their seals, they would be unable to return to their peak.

According to what Camdian told me, his God Equipment of Wind was located in the Limitless Hourglass, a location only the Earth Elemental God could access. The God Equipment of Water was similarly sealed within a place only the Fire Elemental God could access... this was obviously designed to make the Elemental Gods suffer.

Find helpers? This was something far beyond what mortals could achieve. The Chaos Faction only needed the Elemental Gods to be active, which would naturally increase the Elemental Tide. Why would the Chaos Faction possibly help them retrieve the God Equipment of the Elements, which would level the Elemental Gods up from fighters into veterans in their own right?

When I had fought with Emordilorcan, he must have checked on the God Equipment of Wind while working hard to convince other Earth Elemental Lords to join him. But he probably found that even he was helpless to enter that location. In the end, Emordilorcan never mentioned the God Equipment of Wind to us. Perhaps he even made preparations around this Limitless Hourglass location to conceal it from his enemies.

Now, Camdian's motive should be obvious. Upon seeing that Diana had the potential to retrieve the God Equipment of Wind, Camdian came running over to me to beg for it. How practical of him.

I naturally wouldn't agree to give it to him so easily. I needed to consider if he could offer me something worth its value as the God Equipment of Wind was something I really wanted for myself as well. At the very least, it would definitely be of high enough quality to use in my Frigidwinter Earth to help balance out my elements there.

As Camdian and I both continued to hesitate and think of the future, a seemingly limitless castle wall appeared before us under the dawn sky.

We had finally arrived at the ancient Bardi capital. Our journey in the sky had come to an end.

Not long after entering the Bardi capital, Archduke Halent and I agreed to meet Orloss on the day after tomorrow. Although he really wanted to take me to meet the emperor right away, I used the excuse of fatigue from my travels to refuse him.

Actually, my energy and spirit were at their peak after hibernating for seven days for my evolution. How could this small journey possibly fatigue me? I simply wanted to obtain more information and at least meet up with my subordinates to compare notes before I went to talk to Orloss.

As for the dragons' important matter? Halent told me that the entrance to Dragon World was currently being guarded by a senior dragon, and that I would need permission before I could enter.

Halent told me where Cher and the others were temporarily staying. However, I didn't hurry to meet them. Instead, I sent Little Red and the others to first meet up with Cher at the embassy hotel. I first roamed the streets to check the situation here.

For some unknown reason, even when I was as far away as in the Forest of Dreams, I kept having an ominous premonition about coming here, as if some major misfortune or calamity would befall me.

Personally, I was never the type to believe in prophecies. However, this warning was different from an inexplicable prophecy. I felt as if this unease was due to me forgetting about something, as if I were a student who had played around all summer vacation and finally copied someone else's summer homework on the last day, but still kept worrying that I forgot something on my first day of school... By the way, while I was still a student, I did indeed forget something each and every time. Now that I recalled this, I started worrying even more.

Not only that, my System was recently trying to recommend me to buy "Resurrection Ankhs,""Revival Coins," and so on every day, which only increased my anxiety...

What? You're asking me why I wasn't buying such useful life-saving items while my System was being nice to me for once? Actually, Revival Coins could only be used on the dead. That's right, I would have to die and someone else would need to use it on me. Meanwhile, Resurrection Ankhs needed me to first learn the Taurens' racial natural talent of Ancestral Call. I would have to change my bloodline to that of Taurens first before I'd be able to use it. In summary, the System would never be so kind. She was mostly trying to play a joke on me.

But all this further increased my anxiety. My System made it obvious that she intended to sit back and enjoy the show, which meant that something major was to occur, and soon at that.

"Ever since I entered this city, my instinct has been warning me to run away at top speed. But the more you run away from your problems, the bigger of a problem it'll become. With my luck stat, I doubt I'll be able to escape no matter what I do, so I might as well grit my teeth and face my problems head on. Do you all agree with me?"

I looked back behind me, where there was seemingly no one. The street wasn't illuminated by sunlight and was abnormally empty. But I could sense that more than ten people were following me.

"Stealth, disguises, traveling through the ground, and even paint camouflage... Are you joking with me? Is this a ninja variety contest? You all have excellent sources of information to have noticed me the moment I entered the city. But which factions do you belong to, and what business do you have with me?"

"Seven..."

"Nine..."

"Thirteen..."

In response, they uttered a large amount of numbers. Not only that, not a single number was repeated.

What did that even mean? Was this some sort of password?

I was rather confused. Was this some sort of spy meeting? But what type of spy meeting would play such games with number passwords? They just gave more than ten different numbers, so what number was I supposed to give in return?

"What number are you?"

And then, as I expected, someone asked me what number I was.

...Could this really be spy meeting where everyone was currently reporting their own code numbers? I knew it!

Since I guessed at what was going on, of course I would play along. Perhaps I would even find out a secret. This was getting quite interesting.

"I'm ninety-seven!"

In a typical spy organization, the smaller the number, the more powerful the individual. Since there were already two-digit numbers being reported, I decided to report one of the largest two-digit numbers, which naturally meant that I would be unimportant. Perhaps I would be able to fool them like this.

"Is there already a ninety-seven?"

"I don't think so. Wasn't it only at sixty-eight at last count?"

"Perhaps that old man adopted some more at a whim."

"Adopting more than thirty in one go? At this point in time? That's too ridiculous to be a joke!"

"Are all of you idiots? Can't you tell that this brat is just fooling with us!"

Finally, there was one who was slightly smarter among them, making it impossible for me to simply pretend.

As they all looked at me with eyes filled with enmity, I could only sigh. It would seem that I couldn't fool them after all. I prepared to draw my sword with my right hand.

"Actually, I'm not ninety-seven. I'm... nine thousand five hundred and twenty-seven!"

Alright then. After that, even the dumbest among them knew I was only making stuff up. They all charged at me.

"Honestly, I don't even know why I'm fighting here. I feel like my luck stat has gotten even lower after entering this city."

Chapter 371: Crown of Thorns

"Sigh, it's not interesting at all with such low-level opponents."

By the time I finished the fight which started for reasons unknown, I pretty much figured out what was going on.

It seemed to be my fault, after all. Without realizing it, I had entered the royal palace district while it was still dark. Not only that, I misunderstood the spies reporting their respective number princes' factions as some sort of code, which was why these highly tensed spies moved against me.

By the way, I only learned this after asking all of them. The first few I asked either attempted to take me down with them while committing suicide or were killed off suddenly by flying darts and arrows that came out of nowhere. It seemed like an archaic, third-rate film where the villains killed their own subordinates to keep them from talking.

Finally, after I learned what was going on, I didn't want to stay any more in this area. I felt it to be truly amusing looking at all the black-clothed individuals on the rooftops to both sides of me as I walked out of here. I could also feel that there wasn't as much chaos as there could have been.

"So the Crown of Thorns is still here?"

The two hereditary God Equipment of the Mist Kingdom were the Roland Sacred Sword and the Crown of Thorns. I'd already given the prior over to Reyne, while the latter had been lost to time.

However, when I was doing my System's Quests, the System had notified me that I personally handed the Crown of Thorns over to the Bardi royalty, and that I had then intentionally wiped my own memory. Since the Bardi royalty had yet to be foundationally shaken, and since I hadn't heard of the Crown of Thorns being sold

on the black market, there was a very good chance it was still held by the Bardi Empire.

[Crown of Thorns, God Equipment.]

[Blessing of the Undying. The wearer of the Crown of Thorns cannot die. Even if the wearer's body is shattered into tiny pieces, the body will still be reformed.]

[Curse of the Undying. The wearer of the Crown of Thorns will lose their sense of taste, smell, and touch—they would be similar to a zombie.]

[Death of the Undying. The moment the wearer removes or has the Crown of Thorns removed, every bit of pain suffered while wearing the Crown of Thorns will instantly be sensed. Before the wearer perishes, they will be kept alive and suffer all the accumulated pain before dying.]

The effect looked extraordinarily powerful. As long as you wore it, you would be truly undying. Not only that, you would be able to turn into a Berserker who didn't know pain or even fatigue. But according to the Mist Kingdom's ancestral kings, rather than calling the Crown of Thorns a powerful God Equipment, it was more like a frightening cursed equipment.

Indeed, the wearer wouldn't die, nor would he or she feel any pain. However, if their body parts were shattered into tiny pieces or decayed and rotten, the Crown of Thorns would forcibly reform their body, still in that state. However, the flesh would no longer be living and it would continue to rot and fester. No ordinary person would be able to bear viewing their own body in such a condition, would they?

That Curse of the Undying part was indeed a curse. A Berserker who wouldn't feel any pain, you say? Losing the three senses of touch, taste, and smell also meant losing your desires and goals. Any food you ate would be tasteless. Any woman a man touched wouldn't have any warmth. After wearing the Crown of Thorns for

a sufficiently long period of time, that person would be no different from an undead, despite not being an undead.

As for the final effect, the Death of the Undying? It was said that a person who had the Crown of Thorns removed would scream painfully at the top of their lungs for more than three months without being able to die, each experience of pain fresh and different. Finally, that person would shatter into pieces with the most agonizing of screams.

What? Something like this was actually a God Equipment? This was indeed a God Equipment. God Equipment were typically as powerful as this one, together with tremendous drawbacks. Either the negative side effects would be ridiculously horrendous, or only Gods would be able to use a particular God Equipment. The only God Equipment I'd ever seen being casually used by mortals was the Roland Sacred Sword. And this sword was formed as its Concept of Guarding kept increasing its power. Back in the day, apart from being indestructible, it didn't have a single other useful ability.

A God Equipment was typically half of a God's soul. Other Gods who obtained the God Equipment would be capable of analyzing the secrets within. Even if a God had perished, their God Equipment would be worthy of being sought after.

The Crown of Thorns was a strange one among strange ones. You say it isn't powerful? A SemiGod wearing it would easily be able to exchange blows all day long, not caring about any injuries suffered, and easily defeat five other SemiGods simultaneously. But you say it's powerful? No ordinary person would be willing to wear it.

In that despairing battle where the Mist Kingdom was destroyed, the Mist Kingdom's strongest knight, Caesar En, put on the Crown of Thorns. Although he was only a Myth, he caused tremendous losses to his enemies. But the end result was that he was sealed away and the Crown of Thorns forcibly removed from him. Judging from how Caesar's soul never answered my summons,

perhaps he had sunk into eternal sleep as a consequence of using the Crown of Thorns.

Me wanting to recover the Crown of Thorns wasn't to use it. It was far too abnormal in every way. But since it was a relic left behind by the Mist Kingdom's ancestors, the Descendants of the Mist would naturally want to recover it.

Of course, I had my own method for finding this lost artifact belonging to my ancestors.

"The Broken Thorn has no reaction."

The Broken Thorn was a small, torn-off portion of the Crown of Thorns. When Kelly learned that I was searching for the Crown of Thorns, she told me to take the Broken Thorn. As long as the Broken Thorn was within a close enough distance to the Crown of Thorns, it would show a reaction.

Unfortunately for me, I walked all over the Bardi capital with no reaction. This meant that the Crown of Thorns was either no longer in the capital or that someone was already wearing it.

"I feel that neither is a good result for me."

I was thinking about such matters as I walked out of the troublesome royal palace district. I entered a brightly lit business district, which was most likely the district that Halent told me Cher was currently staying in.

The next moment, I knew for sure that Cher was staying here. I then instantly hid myself in a nearby alleyway.

A pitch-black horse-drawn carriage was proceeding on the street, while countless rotten eggs and apples were chucked at it. Lots of middle-aged women and men were running after the carriage, ranting angrily. Yet the horse-drawn carriage was able to remain undamaged due to a blue protective magic barrier blocking the projectiles. Meanwhile, the person casting this magic barrier was roaring back at the crowd, sticking up her middle fingers: Cher,

the Mage Country's official ambassador to the Bardi Empire.

"I recall she was a lady, wasn't she?"

"Yep. But actually, before I met you, I was a lady as well."

The silly cat's retort was so logical that I didn't even know how to respond. And so I carefully made myself smaller so that Cher wouldn't notice my presence.

Being able to force someone previously known by the moniker of "Iron" into a crazy woman who didn't even care about her appearance? Her pressure and accumulated grudges must have been enormous. If she caught me, I would face a huge trouble.

Right afterwards came a familiar scene. An eagle-masked muscular individual ran out in front while naked, with a large group of guards chasing after him.

"That's Eaglest—"

"No, that's just a random pervert passing by."

I felt like my country's international image was still salvageable, but if reports about how only bastards like Eaglestorm were around me, then its image would become truly unsalvageable. Just as I was intending to pretend not to see anything, my System took this perfect opportunity to come out and spread chaos yet again.

[Daily Quest which you haven't seen for a long time: Make everyone face their true inner naked selves!]

[Quest Requirements: Let us abandon our useless clothing and return to the natural state of nature. Making 100 people naked will complete this Quest and reward you with 200 Fate Points. Each additional zero you add on to the number of people you make naked will double your Fate Points reward.]

[Quest Failure Punishment: A show where Princess Peach runs naked in front of everyone. System Notification: This is a free chance for you to obtain some Fate Points. Make sure to grab this

opportunity!]

"Making 100 people become naked will reward me with 200 Fate Points? Then 1000 = 400, 10,000 = 800, 100,000 = 1600, 1,000,000 = 3200, and 10,000,000 = 6400 Fate Points... I've heard that the Bardi capital has approximately 10,000,000 residents..."

I immediately came to a decision after performing some calculations. Of course, I wasn't allured by the prospect of Fate Points—obviously not! This was all for the sake of taking revenge for my cute little "daughter," Cher!

"Foolish citizens of Bardi, you dare to harm my Fate Points—er—I mean daughter! Taste the wrath of an Oni Chichi! Harloys, do you still have original samples of your Greed Slime bodies? I know you have them. If not, replicate them for me immediately. I need as many as possible."

Cough, from a certain standpoint, I once again made history as all the citizens of Bardi once again witnessed the insanity of this visitor...

Chapter 372: New Calamity

"...Those sticky Slimes running rampant everywhere haven't yet been taken care of?"

Dragon Knight Archduke Halent was well-known in the Bardi capital for being cautious, serious, and strict. Although he usually treated others coldly, he had an excellent reputation within Bardi. His reputation further improved because while the Bardi princes sunk into all-out internal conflict amongst each other, Halent voluntarily went out on the frontlines to fight against the undead. He became famous and respected among the young warriors in Bardi, with plenty of followers and admirers voluntarily joining to serve under him.

However, Halent's current appearance was in no way respectable.

His well-toned six pack of abdominal muscles were being pointed and gossiped at by nearby maids, but he maintained his serious expression as always. However, everyone knew that he was only trying his best to maintain his dignity. After all, the tree leaves covering his crotch were all he was wearing. With only such makeshift underwear, maintaining his dignity would be nothing more than a farce.

But nobody else had the time to make fun of him because his tree leaf underwear situation was better than the others who had it worse.

Halent's head steward directly drilled two holes into a large vase and simply wore that. Some people put on wooden barrels over themselves. Walking around in a wooden barrel made it seem like such individuals were unlucky fools who had lost even the clothes on their backs in gambling dens.

What most people discovered as a still-viable method of covering themselves was, surprisingly, rope. As a result, all sorts of new

discoveries were made. Such as wrapping two ropes around one's body, one for the bottom part, one around the chest to cover the nipples, then tying another rope circle around one's crotch... Looking at it from a different angle, human imagination was limitless, and wearing certain types of "clothing" was actually worse than being naked.

Many streetside artists were finding inspiration every day—all sorts of naked sculptures appeared as their products. If it weren't for the fact that the Slimes also ate paper, perhaps all sorts of a certain type of "art" would also appear and enrich the Bardi people's spiritual lives.

Perhaps my readers understand what happened. This incident wasn't all that special. It was simply that a Slime Calamity suddenly enveloped the entire Bardi capital. These soft and sticky creatures rushed out of every gutter, waterway, and alley, attacking every person they saw.

The Bardi capital's defenses would have been quite high against any ordinary monster invasion. But people found, to their astonishment, that these soft Slimes had ridiculously high defense and magic resistance. No ordinary person would be capable of damaging them. Luckily, these Slimes had zero attack power. The only dangerous thing about them was the fact that their digestive fluids could corrode all clothing fibers and metals.

First of all, these Slimes were incredibly tough, to the point where they could ignore attacks from ordinary swords. Anyone caught by a Slime would be instantly stripped naked. As for powerful individuals, it was still simple enough for them to slay a Slime with a single hit. However, these Slimes would immediately self-destruct upon receiving a fatal injury. And the force of their corrosive fluid's blast was swift and far-reaching. Touching a little of this fluid would cause all of one's clothing to vanish. If someone was wearing expensive defensive equipment such as metal armor or an enchanted magic robe, this equipment would be transformed

by the Slime fluid into a dark brown mud which had a disgusting smell... alright then, all of us know just what the first thing that would come to mind is. Actually, the color and smell were identical to what you're probably thinking of. I didn't even intend to conceal my evil intentions.

The most evil part of it was that this stink was incredibly difficult to wash off, even if it only got on one's equipment and weapons. Even Halent had to wash off an entire layer of his own skin in order to wash away the stink. His skin was currently bright red because of it.

Even the prideful dragons absolutely loathed the Slimes. For instance, Halent's Blue Dragon half-brother descended from the skies and crushed a dozen Slimes to death like how he typically would. But the end result was that the Blue Dragon was still crouching out in the plaza, making Halent's servants wash his body. All the water splashing off the Blue Dragon's body would be filled with a disgusting stench. All the servants were wearing clothespins on their noses, making the Blue Dragon feel quite awkward.

The most disgusting part about the Slimes was that they had outstanding reproductive abilities. Slimes splitting into two were a common sight on the streets.

Actually, the dragons' dragonbreath and large AOE magic spells were still effective on the Slimes. However, the Bardi capital was tightly packed with residents, so not only would such attacks kill the Slimes, but many citizens would be killed in the process as well.

If it weren't for the fact that the Bardi capital learned from a certain source that the Slimes wouldn't live for very long and would all die off naturally within one week, and that this information source told the entire city, the Bardi capital would have surely been mired in complete panic by now.

As Halent looked at the letter written to him on a shell, he could only sigh at how Roland successfully caused culture to take several steps backwards all by himself. Not only that, Roland caused the shell business in the Bardi capital to suddenly become massively popular.

"...This is truly naked revenge, in the literal sense of the word. Still, it truly is his style."

Alright, you want my subordinates to suffer having rotten food tossed at them? Fine, I shall make all the Bardi capital citizens enjoy the feeling of running around naked, stinking. Halent could even imagine my vicious smile of satisfaction in the shadows.

"Perhaps this is his way of showing off his power."

From a certain standpoint, diplomacy was just a game of compromise, threats, and benefits. The result of a diplomatic agreement would often be privately agreed upon before any actual formal, on-the-surface discussions. Any results unobtainable through war would also be unobtainable on the discussion table... Let us ignore a certain kingdom that successfully broke all boundaries on shamelessness. The diplomats from this country were, in a way, nothing more than pitiful messengers.

Although the final result was decided on, the weaker side wouldn't take things lying down. Over the past few days, the "gossip" regarding how Orloss had been toying with the Mage Country's ambassador had already spread throughout the entire Bardi capital. In fact, the Bardi nobles were even betting on what day the pitiful Cher would finally lose her temper in public and stop acting like a lady.

In fact, every day, youngsters in salons would describe in great detail how pitiful the ambassador was as she was forced to run and cover her head due to the angry citizens' attacks. In fact, some among the nobles even personally took part. From a certain standpoint, despite the fact that Cher was originally from the Bardi

Empire, she had no positive feelings towards Bardi whatsoever. Not only that, her reputation in Bardi was ruined, and she couldn't do anything about her situation. This all the more made it seem that she lacked skill as an ambassador.

If this continued, perhaps the Cloud Tower would need to change their official ambassador.

Doubtlessly, the Bardi nobles were laughing from their positions up above at their neighboring country across the sea. Also, this would help relieve the pressure on the Bardi royalty. However, since Halent was in the know about many things, he didn't view the Bardi citizens' treatment of Cher as a good thing at all.

While the pitiful Ambassador Cher became nothing more than a clown to amuse the crowds, the emperor didn't even consider what would happen after antagonizing the subordinate and causing the big boss who always had an evil reputation to be angered. After all, I was quite famous for forever holding a grudge.

And now, my revenge struck as Halent had expected. While everyone else didn't know whether to laugh or cry at this incident, a military expert like Halent was currently assessing the threat level and consequences of such a calamity if it was used for military purposes, instead.

"Use a forbidden spell to cleanse everything? Toss a forbidden spell on our own country's lands? They can't come up with anything better?"

Was Halent worrying about nothing? If Roland was capable of making Slimes emit a corrosive digestive fluid which only affected clothing, then wouldn't it be easy for him to modify the Slimes to emit toxic poison? If that sticky Slime fluid was capable of swiftly changing metals into a sticky, stinky substance, then wouldn't it be easy to change the chemical reaction to an explosive one?

From what Halent learned from the Bardi Empire's highest-level alchemists, this special Slime digestive fluid which only worked on

clothing was far more difficult to create than a regular poison or explosive. Since Roland was capable of such high difficulty chemistry, of course it would be even easier for him to create instant death poisons. Meanwhile, just about every alchemist in the Bardi capital was now researching how to create a Slime digestive fluid which only worked on clothing fibers and paper but ignored wood.

In fact, all Roland had to do would be to make it so that these Slimes were carnivorous. If that was the case, perhaps everyone in the Bardi capital would be dead.

And so Halent directly decided to plan for the worst with these two possibilities: "What should our Bardi Empire do if we face a poisonous, explosive, or carnivorous Slime attack?"

Halent himself had no ideas, so he tossed this question to the Bardi military's strategist department as well as the Bardi royal mage association. However, both groups came to the same conclusion of using forbidden spells to cleanse the capital city. This made Halent rather disappointed. Neither group had any new methods and could only deal with this hypothetical situation with the way they'd deal against the Undead Calamity. Either the problem would need to be cut off at the source directly before it started, or a large area of land would need to be abandoned and completely cleansed with a forbidden spell.

Without a doubt, Roland of East Mist had used his own method to give a lesson to the people of Bardi right after arriving. Those who knew he was ranked in the top 30 of the Calamity Rankings now had a much better understanding of just why he was in it.

With this huge incident, Roland's planned meeting with Orloss was delayed. Perhaps the emperor himself had fallen victim to the clothes-devouring Slimes as he shut himself in his room and refused to see a single visitor. For the time being, Orloss' adopted princes stopped their useless internal conflicts. After all, very few of their subordinates would be willing to fight while naked. Even

the streets were almost empty as nobody wanted to go out and return with the stench of Slime filth.

As a result, the Bardi capital that had been so lively just yesterday had transformed into an eerily silent ghost town. Slimes roamed around the streets. Once the Bardi royal palace announced to the entire city that "All the Slimes will automatically die off in one week," not a single person was willing to antagonize these disgusting Slimes anymore.

Of course, not everyone fell victim to the Slimes' clothes-devouring antics. At the very least, the Mage Country's envoy group didn't fall victim. In fact, some interesting conversations even arose about this topic.

"What exactly are these Slimes? How did you all know that these Slimes have a phobia of wood so all that's needed is to seal up all the cracks with wood?"

Everyone looked at each other but maintained an abnormal silence. Finally, Eaglestorm was the one that replied.

"...Ah, those days were so nostalgic. Last time, our Wild Bull Alliance increased its numbers by more than ten times. Unfortunately, the Slimes this time have an additional disgusting smell added to them. Else we could have taken this opportunity to spread our teachings. Should we try to contact His Highness and have him remove the stinky smell modification to the Slimes?"

"I feel like you won't be able to find him, at least until Her Ladyship Little Red's temper fades..."

From a certain standpoint, dragons and cats were similar. For instance, if they got angry, they would immediately jump on and bite whatever they saw in order to vent. And anything that they jumped on would typically explode just like a balloon...

The day Little Red and Molly arrived, they went to look for a volcano to take warm dips in. They both currently had bright red

skin, but who knew if it was because they had stayed in the volcano for too long or if it was due to anger? Yet judging how the black-haired Little Red was muttering "Damned Roland, you bastard..." at all times, always peeking out the window as if she was looking for her target to take revenge upon, it seemed that she was still holding a grudge.

After learning about Roland's astonishing past deeds, the Bardi royalty's messenger used polite and diplomatic speech to express how the royalty "had made a mistake, and we can't take this anymore, so please have your boss retract his punishment." Cher finally felt like she had achieved some revenge. She was also secretly astonished at that "irresponsible Roland" and his astonishing talent in creature modification. She also felt somewhat pleased for some reason.

"He actually... for me... no, for us, he took revenge. Now that the people of Bardi are acting more sincerely, it'll be much easier for me to do the work I'm supposed to do. His powerful act upon returning will also make our negotiations much easier. Perhaps he isn't as irresponsible as I thought."

Cher stated this out loud. However, not a single person replied. Even Lilith, who was relatively nicer to Roland, was mentally retorting.

"You're definitely reading too much into things. He's unreliable—completely, utterly unreliable! He's even more irresponsible that you think he is. He's far from being as good as you believe!"

In the Bardi royal mage association, a certain white-robed archmage sneezed for no apparent reason before shaking his head. I then continued to discuss my new potion with my head alchemist.

"Mutated Slime species X-19 has already begun decaying. However, its mutated children are far more active compared to the original. It would seem that the great Slime family has a new

species yet again. This time, the Slimes' target shall be to transform all high-quality refined metals to poop. Yep, next up will be our 108th round of Slime experiments. I hope these Slimes can live for two extra days."

"...I recommend we increase our Slimes' lifespans. Previously, my naked Slimes didn't even find many targets before dying a natural death. I didn't obtain enough experimental data."

What Cher didn't notice was that head alchemist Olivia from the envoy group had imperceptibly disappeared. Currently, Olivia, who was also wearing the disguise of a Bardi royal alchemist, was one of the important members of this three-person research group.

Roland's undead construction, Miracle Alchemist Olivia's potion skills, and Harloys The All-Knowing's accumulated magical knowledge. This combination was probably the worst, most terrifying combination in the world.

Even the confident Halent didn't expect that his calculations regarding the Slime Calamity were off. It was simply that I had tossed out some Slimes and done nothing to follow it up, rather than me no longer possessing the power to summon more Slimes.

This time, not only were other experts helping me, I was getting enthusiastic about experimenting. How long this Slime Calamity would last depended on when I got bored of it.

Soon, people learned that a new mutation appeared amid these stinky Slimes. Perhaps even more unlucky individuals would appear. That so-called wood phobia the Slimes possessed might disappear together with Roland's nonexistent sense of shame.

Even Harloys, who typically tried to rein him in, didn't have any intentions of stopping him. This was because every single mutated Slime was a part of her and a new ability she could use. As I improved in power level, Harloys' true power would also be gradually unlocked. "Greed," a walking Calamity capable of acting against entire cities, was slowly showing the world the true power

she was capable of.

As for diplomacy and negotiation? Would three crazy mages who were overly passionate about research remember anything about this? They were only celebrating the fact that they had several million experimental subjects and were overjoyed about each new idea they helped come to fruition.

Chapter 373: The Dragons' Tacit Permission

A Slime Calamity the likes of which had never been seen before didn't last for a week as promised. Instead, it lasted for a full month!

If it weren't for the fact that the dragons grew impatient and forcefully located the me who had gotten lost in the joys of experimentation, then this ancient city might have been destroyed for such a ridiculous reason.

Even so, I succeeded in giving the Bardi Empire and the dragons a good lesson by doing what I pleased, not caring about the consequences. I taught them what a living Calamity was.

Once the Slimes' experimental numbers reached three digits, Slime Kings and Hallucination Slimes started to appear—now even Young Dragons or Silver-ranked knights couldn't deal with them.

Slime Kings were the amalgamation of countless Slimes, and their self-destruction capabilities were capable of instantly clearing out all the... clothes within a radius of five kilometers. Yes—only clothes, as the Slime King only focused on making people naked.

Hallucination Slimes, on the other hand, had seventeen different magical properties, including but not limited to: bondage, hallucinations, and lust-filled dreams. Those who fell victim to it went through untold hardship and suffered in indescribable ways. What happened on the streets could be depicted on mosaics, passed down for posterity.

There was a particular Immemorial Blue Dragon, whose abbreviated name—yep, abbreviated name—was Helatefenderonkasoswener. He, however, went by the shortened "Halos" to more conveniently communicate with other species. Halos was one of the main leaders of Dragon City and was proficient in ancient curses. He possessed authority and strength equivalent to that of a Great Immemorial ranked dragon despite

being only at the Immemorial Level.

There were seventeen dragon leaders around Halos' level in strength in Dragon World. Of course, with their personalities less than half of the dragons would listen to Halos' commands even though he was a leader of Dragon City. Currently, this Halos was appointed to be their intermediary with Roland.

The dragons were indeed in quite a hurry to get the Mage Country to come to their aid. However, the ancient dragons had many eras of experience and knew that this was an excellent excuse for us to make many demands. The dragons also understood that in negotiation, whoever could remain more patient would have the advantage. Originally, the dragons had intended to simply stand by and watch this Slime Calamity that was obviously just an upgraded prank.

The dragons had thought that since both sides were eventually going to meet, how could the short-lived humans possibly compare to themselves in patience and cunning? Yet they discovered that the envoys acted as if they had entirely forgotten about the dragons' invitation. Unable to withstand their boredom and the change in the situation, the dragons finally set out to find Roland.

Looking at this from a bystander's viewpoint, neither side was at all the reliable type. The dragons and Orloss had invited the Mage Country to help them resolve the problem of the Titan Giants in Dragon World by using the threat of a ticking time bomb. Basically, if the Mage Country didn't help, the end result would be "Hey, you'll suffer too if the Titan Giants are released." But the mages ended up tossing this responsibility over to the even more unreliable Roland. Meanwhile, just as everyone who knew him expected, Roland unhesitatingly tossed this duty of his aside. Although this job did seem like one where he would "save the world," in truth it was more like he was "helping the dragons wipe their own asses."

"Every minute is critical. Yet he actually wasted a month? Does

he intend to do his job at all? Why was someone like him chosen to be the negotiator with us dragons?"

"...Like I said, the threat of the Titan Giants is useless against him. Even if the Titan Giants revive, they won't cause any damage to the Mage Country for some time, but Dragon World will be devastated. It may be a danger for them, but it's even worse for us."

Yet it could be so that from the Mage Country's standpoint, Roland was actually the best candidate. Considering the relationship between the dragons and the mages, no other mage would likely be capable of acting as shamelessly as Roland.

Halos wasn't here to negotiate with Roland by himself—he was accompanied by Halent. Since Halent was personally responsible for bringing this Calamity to the Bardi capital, he was recently having a hard time by being pressured by both the royalty and the dragons.

"Are those two Immemorial Red Dragons still in the city?"

"Yeah."

"Ignore them. Tell your Dragon Knights to pretend not to see them."

From a certain standpoint, "pretending not to see them" was a type of attitude. Some Red Dragons and Black Dragons had already appeared on the surface for a period of time, and East Mist even had a small mercenary dragon squad. If Dragon City wanted to intervene, they would have done so long ago.

Also, sending a Blue Dragon leader to be the emissary to negotiate with Roland was also the dragons' way of displaying their friendly attitude—Blue Dragons, after all, were Elemental Dragons or, if you would, Color Dragons.

"It's impossible to think about rescinding the ban on the Red and Black Dragons returning to the surface. Although none in our

generation have memories of that internal conflict, some ancient artifacts among us still adhere too strongly to tradition. We can only pretend not to see them."

From a certain standpoint, the method by which the surface dragons displayed their attitude was seen when Little Red and Halos met—they saw each other but didn't say anything. However, this attitude was enough to make the Underground Dragon City delighted as this meant Red and Black Dragons would be able to freely roam about on the surface without worrying about other dragons hunting them down.

As for whether the dragons would be able to directly ignore any Red or Black Dragons right before them... actually, I had an idea about this before we reached Bardi.

"Let's just rename the Red Dragons to Fire Dragons or Crimson Dragons. Yep, so we'll have Male and Female Fire Dragons. As for the Black Dragons, how about changing their names to Gray Dragons or Colorless Dragons? Right, their triangular bony heads resemble dog heads, and they're also poisonous. How about just changing their name to Poison Dog Dragon? See? Easy!"

In a way, this was a very shameless move, but as long as the Red and Black Dragons changed their names both sides could avoid great amounts of awkwardness. Little Red even seriously considered the possibility of changing her species name to "Fire Dragon." Nevertheless, a decision to change the name of her entire species would require her to consult with the other leading Red Dragons of her tribe.

"...Poison Dog Dragon isn't even worth considering. Just hearing this suggestion will make all Black Dragons want to kill you. As for being a Female Fire Dragon, although I mysteriously feel like you have some evil joke in mind, I suppose I could try that name."

In the end, Little Red decided to later return and convene a meeting to decide the issue of renaming the Red and Black

Dragons. Perhaps Red and Black Dragons would no longer exist in the future, with Dog Dragons, Female Fire Dragons, and other possible evolutionary paths giving the dragons new methods to abuse others...

Without a doubt, the Underground dragons were tacitly permitted to return to the surface, and this was a compromise from the surface Dragon City. Compromise was a very rare thing for the prideful and traditional dragons.

The final result wasn't because the dragons cared about their close relatives—no, no, it was the opposite. Actually, in their private meetings, the Gold and Silver Dragons were loudly clamoring to kill off all these evil Underground dragons. However, their council of elders came to the decision to allow them to return, mostly a result of the current situation the dragons were in.

If I compared the current world with the game history, then the biggest difference in the Underground World would be how they were now currently united. And their combat strength and threat level had far surpassed what it was at the same moment of time in the game history. Even two mega empires together would be unable to deal with them if the entire Underground moved in unison. Also, not only was Little Red the Underground Dragon Queen, she was also an Underground Lord who represented the entire strength of the Underworld.

If you ignored these outside factors of status, Ein Mezus had been able to reach the Immemorial Dragon rank despite her young age. And her reputation was excellent by Red Dragons' standards.

Previously, Little Red had joined the campaign against Yongye. She had defeated the demons' and devils' evil schemes and was known to be anti-war after becoming the Dragon Queen. Plus, her actions proved she had good intentions, making her a rare figure among Red Dragons: she didn't have much ambition. Of course, such a Dragon Queen was perfect for the surface Dragon City as

most Red Dragons would have far more ambition than power.

As for whether or not the Red and Black Dragons would attack humans after returning to the surface... Unless some high-ranked dragon restrained them, this was almost certain to occur. However, the dragons tacitly decided to ignore this matter. Not a single dragon even thought of this as an important point of the negotiations.

The reason for this? Actually, the Green, Blue and White dragons on the surface commonly attacked humans. Even the so-called "good dragons" from legendary stories, the Gold and Bronze Dragons, would wake up several million gold coins richer after taking a nap. All dragons viewed humans as monkeys with strong reproductive abilities who wouldn't go extinct regardless of what they did to them. Only the Silver Dragons, considered an anomaly amongst the other dragons, would work hard to obtain benefits for humans and even voluntarily went to live in human society.

In the legends, Silver Dragons preferred to appear as beautiful, silver-haired female elves. In one story, a Silver Dragon even fell in love with a human musician. Actually, this story wasn't completely fiction. Silver Dragons were considered as artists among the other dragons and indeed adored human and elven creativity and artistry. But for this same reason, Silver Dragons often fought against their Color Dragon relatives, giving them a bad reputation within the dragon tribe.

Of the seventeen Dragon World leaders, only two were Silver Dragons despite the fact that they were the second strongest dragon species, only weaker than Gold Dragons. This was evidence of the status problem they had despite their great power. Also, it should be mentioned that Silver Dragons preferred to establish their nests near volcanos, just like Red Dragons, making them enemies with each other ever since the immemorial generations. This made it so that any Silver Dragon opposition would be viewed as a personal grudge.

On the surface, Little Red's visit was for her Red Dragon species' benefit. However, the surface Dragon City also saw the three other factions she represented: the Ayer Faction, the Mist Alliance, and the Underground World. The fact that Roland accompanied her and represented the Mage Country meant that the dragons' typical traditional habits lost out to pragmatism.

The Holy War was under way. Dragon World, their little paradise, was facing a problem, and they needed the mages' assistance to solve it. Tacitly giving permission to the Red and Black Dragons would help gain the friendship of so many factions. Not only that, but adding two more dragon species to their overall strength would be useful in any future battles. It would be an excellent deal even if it caused them to slightly lose face. The dragons had analyzed this quite deeply.

And that was how Roland's plan to shake the dragons for what they were worth succeeded. With so many influencing factors, the seventeen Dragon World leaders cast their votes and decided upon tacitly allowing Underground dragons to return. With a vote of seven to five, with another five abstaining, the surface dragons formally agreed to tacitly allow the Underground dragons to return. As Dragon World was one of the three locations where the greatest number of dragons gathered, their decision was no different to one made by the entire dragon species.

Whether or not a new position for a "Fire Dragon" species would be added to the leadership council of Dragon World was practically a done deal since the Red and Black Dragons were now confirmed to be returning.

Of course, none of this would be stated out loud. That was why Halent became the dragons' best messenger. He transmitted Little Red's intentions to the dragons as well as told her the dragons' intentions. But on the surface, it only appeared that Little Red came over, circled around, and then the dragons tacitly permitted her to stay.

After the dragons came to such a conclusion, it was obvious that this was a compromise. Naturally, Roland wasn't supposed to procrastinate any longer. At least, Little Red didn't want to see him acting ridiculously for any longer... but the problem was that Little Red would first have to find him!

Since I knew that I made many people suffer this time, especially that I accidentally angered Little Red yet again when she was in a foul mood, I unhesitatingly escaped. In order to obtain plenty of experimental materials, Olivia, Harloys, and I directly took over the laboratory of some random unlucky Bardi royal alchemist and made him into our puppet to obtain resources for us while we hid behind the scenes. But if that was all there was to it, the dragons would have found me much sooner.

In order to increase the degree and rate of the Slimes' mutations, I actually moved the experimental laboratory into my Frigidwinter Earth. All that remained in the mortal plane was an exit and a biological laboratory. And so my Slime army naturally became more and more ridiculous thanks to my power of Creation supporting them. I was also immune to all sorts of prophecy magic to begin with, and hopping back and forth between the mortal plane and my world made it impossible for the dragons to locate me.

I was finally discovered because Olivia, who had re-entered the mortal plane to record the situation and toss out more experimental subject Slimes, was tracked down by the dragons. Although her creations were ridiculously amazing, she was still limited in power by her young age and mana limit. How could an alchemist like her, who just entered the Gold rank, possibly escape from the dragons' tracking capabilities?

But Halos and Halent were dumbfounded when they finally arrived in front of me.

Our alchemist's experimental laboratory had been completely hollowed out. It was filled stacked up boxes of Slimes of differing

colors. Let's not mention how there was a huge number of Pudding Slimes on the table, waiting to be eaten. There were also dark red Slimes even larger than the average dragon, which were currently eating the stone walls and expanding the experimental laboratory's size.

When the Blue Dragon Halos discovered us three passionate researchers, we were in the midst of researching edible Pudding Slimes and Stone-Eating Slimes capable of digging through the earth. The Pudding Slime would perhaps become one of the new main household foods in East Mist, while the Stone-Eating Slime was an invention which helped me climb the Calamity Rankings. Halos took a very long time before he understood the connection between these two different types of Slimes and why they were being researched together.

But now wasn't the time to think so much into things. Halent recalled what that powerful dragon had told him and hesitated for a moment before speaking. On the side, Halos looked at him with an expression indicating he should speak.

"Your Highness Roland, do you happen to remember Lady Evelyn? She requests for you to meet her."

"What? Who's that?"

"...She said that if you forgot her, she'll truly come out and kill you."

Chapter 374: Time Passing By

Time didn't pause in its tracks while Roland acted ridiculously in the Bardi capital.

In the west, the Auland Empire obtained their first ever victory against the Sea Tribe in their sixty-eighth assault wave. Much of it was thanks to Diana who had utilized her newfound power, draining the underwater base of all water and causing the battle to tilt in their favor. Auland's use of their Fleet of Death, without caring about losses, was also a deciding factor. Amid the counterattacks of the Sea Tribe royalty which came in great numbers, Auland relentlessly and steadfastly persisted in their defense.

It was only when the sun rose on the second day that the Auland humans finally retreated. More than twenty hours had passed—plenty of time for Auland's engineers to empty out everything in that underground base. Perhaps the Auland Empire's pride, their aerial fleet, would be arriving far earlier than in the game's history.

Of course, the Sea Tribe claimed that they were the victors in the end. After all, the humans had been forced to retreat.

The four job classes of Aurora Knight, Four Elemental Swordcaster, Desecration Priestess, and Antiholy Knight were witnessed by countless people. The faraway northern country once again reentered the field of view of the major countries.

Just as the Auland Emperor Darsos was hoping to have these newcomer job class members stay behind for a while longer, he discovered that they had already left. Apparently, they were headed north, to the Bardi Empire's capital.

Meanwhile, to the south of the Bardi Empire, the battle between the undead and the wood spirits had reached a standstill. The wood spirits hurriedly made use of this opportunity to expand the

Forest of Dream's territory. In the past month alone, they'd already established another twelve cities similar to Oak Town. Yet the undead allowed them to expand as if they didn't even see anything going on.

When the new undead commander arrived, they focused entirely on conquering Nightrain City. Unlike Davey, who had obtained his position with "personal connections," the new commander was said to be a Senator from the Tark Republic. Only, this Senator had been seriously injured in a previous battle, making it impossible for him to ever become a SemiGod.

This commander was just as experienced as the Undead Emperors. To make an example for the others, he casually executed two Undead Lords who hadn't previously helped Davey. Then, he reorganized the undead armies for a new round of attacks on Nightrain City. However, the Bardi Empire had been supplying Nightrain City with endless resources and military backup. No outsider could even tell that there was anything foundationally different about the ongoing war there.

The wood spirits, meanwhile, seemed to be satisfied with their recent accomplishments as the Three Virtues returned to Amelia's garden in the Forest of Dreams. Only the Contract Heroes remained outside fighting, working hard to slay undead and earn Justice Points. But the reason for their departure was kept under wraps—only the higher-ups among the wood spirits were aware that the Three Virtues had stopped all offensives and returned to await the birth of the fourth Virtue.

To the east of the Bardi Empire was the "Holy War vanguard army," who were stuck in a quagmire. They couldn't proceed forward as an incensed group of dragons patrolled the skies around them twice a day. The warning was obvious. But they were also unable to retreat, because that would make the Holy Church furious and declare them all as traitors to the Holy Light, a similar death sentence.

Yet the Holy Church was also unable to force them forward to meet their deaths. The previous incident—where the Holy Church claimed credit that wasn't theirs—was already spreading. Just dealing with the rumors popping up everywhere took up most of the Holy Church's attention. And even worse was that this incident greatly shook the faith of those in the know.

And it just so happened to be at this time, a certain someone brought the former events in the Mist Kingdom to light—of a certain abnormal crusade and the Holy Church splitting into factions, along with a certain Child of Holy Light dying undeservedly and then becoming Emperor Yongye. While most people treated this as nothing more than a mere tale at first, the records were ever so detailed, as if they were written firsthand. And they provided strong evidence in favor of the truth.

When Holy Church members sought out the "living legend," the "strongest Holy Knight" Estrada for answers, the elderly Holy Knight—who had evidently aged much in the past few months—responded with nothing but silence.

Although the Holy Church acted swiftly to quell the rumors, plenty now had doubts about them. This was all the more so among the church's newcomer Holy Knights and priests. A decent number of them withdrew from the so-called Holy Warrior system and chose to become Contract Heroes, instead. Suddenly, a new teaching of the Holy Light arose, about how Roland always carried out justice in the Northlands, where a person's identity and birth shouldn't deem an individual as sinful and that guilt should be judged on actions, instead. This logic made it seem possible for Holy Knights to get along with the intelligent undead.

And so the Holy Church underwent yet another factional crisis and internal cleansing.

While all these battlefields were either under temporary respites or preparing for new rounds of battle, the super powerful mega empire San Antonio, too, met with trouble. And, in a certain way,

their trouble was their own fault.

San Antonio was a landlocked country, and no outside invaders had ever attacked them. Yet their leader, Emperor Hant II, died suddenly and unexpectedly. It wasn't only him, though—the prince had died alongside his father. First Princess Maria and the emperor's younger brother Winston both accused each other of scheming to assassinate the two royals, and so a massive internal conflict broke out.

It wouldn't have been much trouble if this was just an ordinary internal conflict. The emperor's younger brother possessed far stronger troops—he should have been able to grab the throne and speedily restore calm to the empire. However, Princess Maria happened to be the strongest Demon Warlock in all of history. She directly opened the gates of hell and summoned its denizens. The only part worth celebrating was that she didn't summon demons filled with thoughts about destruction and slaughtering. Instead, she summoned the relatively gentler Sulu Demon tribe along with some devils. At the very least, one could make deals and reason with them.

While Princess Maria was directly declared to be a heretic by the Holy Church, the Holy Church had too much on their plate right now to deal with her. In fact, since Princess Maria was well prepared for this occasion, she even gained the advantage in San Antonio's internal conflict... And according to certain channels, Princess Maria was also Death God Ayer's God Envoy, which made the situation even more complicated.

Right now, the powerful countries in Eich were meeting with troubles large and small. With the new spring came massive changes to the entire continent. Everyone now knew that the Holy War was unavoidable.

While all of Eich was in chaos, one portion of northern Eich remained in peace and quiet. Yes, this portion was the Northlands seven countries.

The Mist Alliance's basic framework had been completed before Roland's departure. San Antonio's internal conflict caused most of its elites to return back to their homeland to choose a side, and this loosened their reins on their subordinate country. Of course, this gave people "ideas." Well, at the very least, without San Antonio's subordinate country trying to get in the way, the other six countries were able to speed up their rate of unification.

The Underground Beastmen had finished moving to the surface, and their flags were now flying on the plateau. However, these tribes didn't have view humans as their enemies, and they also successfully integrated the beastmen of the plains into themselves. The plains beastmen were isolated—if they didn't want to be forced to the brink, they would have to integrate themselves into this new beastmen society and be controlled.

The Northlands elven countries were still arguing among themselves whether or not to join the Mist Alliance. Meanwhile, the newly-born Gray Elves had completed their immigration process and had begun to integrate into East Mist's society. They had already prepared large amounts of their arts and crafts products to trade for the first spring merchants. Perhaps this could be exchanged for food, which the Northlands somewhat lacked.

Perhaps food wasn't a critical resource to exchange for, as Amelia's new seeds were being harvested more successfully than anticipated. Military weapon sales were doing quite well, and after Timlad returned, he followed Roland's orders and began overhauling East Mist's industry. Although both members of the royalty were unreliable to the point of not even being present, everyone still supported the country of East Mist, which had gone through many trials and tribulations. East Mist was developing in a positive direction.

After experiencing the desolation of warfare, Annie and the other Underground residents began constructing their new homes. This was no easy task. Although the lands were wide and spacious, they

were barren. The Underground residents had almost limitless desire towards land, and the cohabitation of many different species meant conflicts and troubles. The heavy workload was quite tough for Annie and Anya. If it weren't for the elders, who had also been invited to watch over things, and the dragons patrolling the cities, perhaps major incidents would have already occurred.

Even the pitiful Margaret was recruited once again. And countless, sudden incidents would still occur on a daily basis despite the fact that Xueti and the Church of Law were focused on city construction. The pitiful centaur would try to escape every day only to fail time after time.

The Sleuweir Kingdom and East Mist were now viewed as one family in the Northlands. This was indeed the case as all tariffs had been scrapped and free travel between their countries had been allowed. Yet what made the highest-level government officials most frustrated was their Queen Glina's newest guests.

Forget about the shota who kept flashing his muscles. If you ignored the fact that he really loved to randomly show off his muscles, his unique commanding method was quite popular with the military. However, Omar's "younger brother," who rather resembled Roland, was even stranger. He shouted every day about how explosions were true art while he set off numerous of them.

This was naturally something Queen Glina would be quite fond of. And so they studied military commanding together... Yep, who knew what they really researched? But judging from how the explosions escalated in scale and number with each day, that little brat named "Mars" was the cause of more and more trouble. Queen Glina's explosive techniques seemed to be improving daily as well. Each day, the people of Antuen prayed that their city would survive and not be blown up while they were asleep.

The Xiluo Empire had also started preparing for combat. As for the order I had given them to complete six heavy-class combat airships for me, they'd completed four. Judging by their progress,

they'd likely be able to complete my envisioned Big Dipper squadron within half a year. As for the overall restructuring of all the systems? To quote the Xiluo Empire's prime minister, Lionheart, "It's impossible for me to die again because of this, right?""You bastards! Are all of you running off so quickly to make me die of fatigue?""No, Ah Dang, I'm not referring to you. I'm quite happy you're willing to help me. But I'll be even happier if you don't help me at all. Also, please let go of that ambassador in your mouth. He's almost scared to death."

But no matter how difficult the task, he still had to complete the task his irresponsible boss left to him. Lionheart was going to be quite busy.

Oh, did I forget about a certain someone? A certain beast tamer? With nobody around to control him, he started running wild. With unknown methods, he managed to throw a massive celebration—in a public location. With a single action, not only did he manage to astonish the whole world, but his crimes were now finally known to the Druid Animal Protection Council. Now he was being hunted by the entire world. Far, far away in the Bardi Empire, Eaglestorm unhesitatingly said that he had no clue about the dracon. Else he would likely be a druid no longer.

Right now, I was in some trouble too. Or perhaps I should say that the trouble I had created long ago had come looking for me.

Chapter 375: Ten Sisters

"Hey, long time no see! Or should I say 'pleased to meet you' for the first time? Do you still remember me? I heard you lost your memory yet again. Ohhh, that makes me soo angry! We had such a good relationship back in the day!"

With a golden skin tone and eyes that seemed to be smiling, the person before me was chuckling before she even spoke. Her cheeks were slightly flushed with a light crimson hue, and her neatly combed golden braids reached her waist. Although I had no memory of this person, her physical appearance alone didn't make her seem like someone dangerous who would attempt to kill me at any moment.

"Yeah! If you don't remember, I can reintroduce myself. I'm Evelyn the Seventh. You can call me Little Seven."

A strange name with a strange number. However, I remained vigilant as I observed this seemingly friendly existence before me. This wasn't only because of that threat she had sent to me—it was also because she was obviously a dragon in human form.

I could sense a faint draconic might emanating from her. And her eyes were golden—dragon golden. An ordinary person might mistake her for an authoritative Gold Dragon, but that supposedly kind smile of hers indicated that she was a species far more dangerous—a Copper Dragon.

Copper Dragons were Metal Dragons and were typically treated as one of the "good" dragon species. Mainly residing in desert environments, Copper Dragons were skilled at digging and enjoyed constructing underground nests. They also rarely attacked humans. Yet if one ranked the dragon species by how much of a headache they posed for travelers and merchants, the Copper Dragons would be ranked higher than most evil Color Dragons—in fact, they might even be placed in the top three.

It was true that they didn't like to battle or attack humans. However, Copper Dragons loved to gossip, joke, and tell stories, and these hobbies of theirs required an audience. Alright then, let me say it directly. Simply put, Copper Dragons were chatterboxes. The issue was that they lived in deserts, a type of environment few others inhabited. If they got too lonely, misfortune would naturally befall someone.

Of course, as Metal Dragons, they didn't randomly assault humans—they summoned sandstorms, instead. Unsuspicious travelers would be led to the Copper Dragon's nest, the only place in the vicinity that'd allow them to evade the sandstorm. Then, they would "coincidentally" see many priceless treasures strewn about on the ground. And if they really tried to secretly steal some of the treasure, the Copper Dragon owner would "coincidentally" return at this time and catch them red-handed.

The Copper Dragon would proceed to threaten to eat the thief as a punishment for stealing from it unless, of course, the thief was willing to tell seventy-two hours of stories or listen to seventy-two hours of unfunny jokes without any rests or repeats! Those poor at spinning yarns would have the Copper Dragon bare its fangs, and the pitiful traveler would be scared into telling more stories. A Copper Dragon wouldn't release you until you had told all the stories you knew. Moreover, humans were typically unable to defeat them or escape, and were stuck on the wrong side of reason after being caught in the act of thievery. This "seventy-two" hour time limit would often go over the allotted time, and the Copper Dragon would release you only when they felt you were about to go crazy.

This led to the suffering of many novice adventurers. After an encounter with a Copper Dragon numerous would change their job and go back home and farm... Yep, you guessed it. I indeed met a Copper Dragon before. Wasn't it just a contest between who could be more of a chatterbox? I chatted with that fellow for two months

about Buddhism, "I think therefore I exist," the way of the Dao, and so on. In the end that guy ran off to become an ascetic monk and left all his worldly treasures to me—haha!

Cough—their natures made them incredibly annoying to the other dragons as well. Copper Dragons and Blue Dragons were typically mortal enemies with each other as they both claimed the desert environment as their home. Some people believed that this conflict over territory was natural because of the fierce rivalry between the Color and Metal Dragons. I, however, believed that it was more because all Blue Dragons were the overly serious type who loved combat, which made their relationship with the Copper Dragons, who loved to joke, chat, and play pranks, be like that of oil and water.

"Right, I'm interested in the prank you pulled recently. Could you give me some of those Slimes? The Dragon World has been way too boring recently. It's time to liven things up."

"Liven things up? You're intending on pulling your own prank, aren't you? Still, my Stink Slimes aren't that effective against dragons. However, I do have Slimes capable of automatically stealing precious metals. If you promise to give me half, I'll loan them to you."

"That won't be needed. In the Dragon World, stealing another dragon's treasure is one of the biggest taboos. Any dragon caught doing so will be directly exiled. I have no intentions of being hunted by all dragons. Right, do you have any explosive Slimes that will dye everything around it in certain colors? I'm intending on throwing a certain party..."

Evelyn and I strode down an underground passage, chatting as we walked. This appeared to be quite the joyous conversation, yet I remained fully on guard all the way along. This invitation had been unnatural from the very start.

"Umm... I hope you'll be able to survive."

When we had arrived at the entrance to the passage Halent had bid me farewell in such a fashion. I had almost turned around and fled, but then I remembered Evelyn, who had been waiting there to greet me. I was rather curious about this "Evelyn" character, anyways—I had heard of her ever since I had entered the Bardi Empire.

"Why did you want to talk to me?"

"Ah, it wasn't me who was looking for you. That would be Evelyn the Second! Yep—she's our Second Sister! Oh, right, if Third Sister wakes up, you should escape at top speed. She really wants to kill you."

"It's really dark and difficult to walk around in here, don't you agree? I honestly don't understand why they chose to construct their nest here, despite the fact that the Dragon World has such a pleasant environment."

"It rained again last night, making the path quite slippery! I accidentally tripped and fell over!"

"Ahh, I'm so, so bored. Second Sister doesn't allow us to go out either! I'm stuck in here every day without a single person to talk to."

"Hey—hey—hey, are you curious about how many of us sisters there are? And why we're all called Evelyn? I'll tell you—there are ten of us sisters. Although I think Little Eleven will be born in the next two years."

"Why aren't you saying anything? Oh, do you know any good jokes?"

While I did want to speak, she didn't even give me a chance to do so!

This Copper Dragon hadn't stopped talking for a single moment ever since the start. While chatting with a beautiful lady was indeed quite relaxing, I was no longer able to follow her quick

speaking speed. Nor was she even waiting for me to respond.

Now I understood why a Copper Dragon had been sent to greet me—their lips would never be sealed! I no longer had any energy left to investigate what she wanted as right now I only wanted her to shut up!

"...Sure. Let me tell you a story: a person was born from his mother, and a demon was born from his mother..."

In order to deal with a chatterbox, you would either have to ignore that person or be even more of a chatterbox. You would have to suddenly strike and not give them an opportunity to speak. This would make them bored. However...

"But we dragons are born from eggs. Is that the same? Should I say that we were born from egg mothers? Speaking of mothers, let me tell you, our mother is so irresponsible..."

Alright then, she once again stole the topic of conversation. Next, she told me how the sixth leaf in the vegetable for her lunch yesterday had two worm holes in it, and how careless her sisters were about etiquette.

Then, she started talking about how she took care of her dragon scales. Next was how the next door neighbor dragon's baby dragon actually stayed in its dragon egg for an extra three-and-a-half hours, making the worried Copper Dragons hold a major research meeting about it, but that meeting quickly went off topic. And then...

At this point, I truly wanted to find something to gag her mouth.

"If all Copper Dragons are like you, of course they'll go off topic! Forget about being chatterboxes, at least talk about something meaningful! It's fine if you speak quickly, but at least use some pauses! Right now I feel as if several dozen flies are buzzing around my head!"

But unfortunately...

"I—"

"Right, we all learned that you arrived the instant you came to Bardi. It's your own fault for opening up that letter."

"You—"

"Heehee, I know I'm quite beautiful. There's no need for you to praise me."

"She—"

"Ohhh, this is my Fifth Sister. You're quite lucky. She always likes to take lazy naps. You actually met her when she's awake. She's so cute, isn't she? Haha, I'm just using a roundabout method to praise myself as cute, aren't I? I really am sooo cute."

She spoke faster and faster, making it impossible for me to get a word in. It would appear that the previous Copper Dragon I met wasn't experienced enough. No wonder Copper Dragons were treated as one of the most dangerous dragon species. An Adult Copper Dragon wouldn't listen to others talk at all!

The blue-haired girl I passed by viciously glared at me as sparks of lightning flashed in her eyes. It was evident that she was a Blue Dragon. But how was it possible for these two dragon species to become sisters?

However, I had no time to consider this question as the passageway had reached its end. After turning around a corner, everything around me suddenly became spacious.

A massive Silver Dragon's head was currently observing me. This head belonged to a truly giant creature—just the eye alone was larger than an adult human. More ridiculous was the fact that this was a three-headed dragon, an existence nobody else had even heard of before. The other two similarly massive heads appeared to currently be in a deep sleep.

Several human figures appeared to be standing on the dragon's head. When I took a closer look, I discovered that they all had the

same face but different hair colors. They were obviously the sisters that Evelyn the Seventh had mentioned.

"Well, I suppose I've heard of three-headed dragons. You're the three-headed dragon, Cher's mother?"

However, the colossal dragon shook its head.

"Nope. Actually, if you really look at how things are, it is Cher who is our mother."

Chapter 376: The First of My Seven Original Sins

Both sides had difficulties communicating with each other because one side was glaring at the other with cold gazes of enmity.

Yet communication was necessary, or else I'd remain utterly confused about the situation. How could I possibly have expectations for the future like this?

I felt rather strange. Even though I didn't have any memories of these Evelyns, when I looked at them I felt a mysterious sense of nostalgia. Her every word would strike my heart, giving rise to an abnormal sense of intimacy which started to influence my sense of logic and reason.

"In the past, we used to be good friends... the best of friends..."

The elegant Silver Dragon smiled faintly, an inscrutable smile filled with numerous emotions and expressions.

Her Sapphire Dragon and Black Dragon heads remained in a deep sleep. These heads were the First and Third Sisters, which led me to the conclusion that each head had independent wills. Perhaps this was why she had to maintain her dragon form and was unable to leave the underground cavern... obviously an abnormal situation.

Indeed, there were plenty of multi-headed creatures in this world. Hydras, for instance, were a species of dragon with nine heads. However, if each head had their own will, then a heated discussion would be required just to decide which direction to walk in.

The great majority of multi-headed creatures had only a single will controlling their heads. The only known exception was the Two-Headed Ogre, a joke of a species well known for always fighting with itself.

"What's going on with Cher?"

This was clearly the three-headed dragon who Cher referred to as her adopted mother. Yet this Silver Dragon was saying that she was Cher's daughter. If that was how it was...

"You—you—are you my granddaughter!? What the hell?! I've become a grandfather so quickly!? I need to tell you first that I'm not going to give you the years of birthday and spending money I missed!"

"Pa-hah."

Alright then. Those Evelyns all chuckled. Even the Silver Dragon looked at me helplessly with no trace of her earlier elegance.

"...Your brain seems to be more broken than it was two hundred years ago. Well, from a certain standpoint, you aren't wrong... Hey! Don't run! Nobody here is asking you for your money!"

"Cough—I wasn't trying to escape! With so many granddaughters, I was only intending on going out to buy some candy for everyone."

"We aren't your granddaughters!"

Their retorts were filled with helplessness. In their memories, although Roland would sometimes act ridiculously, he was still reliable—most of the time, at least. But now why did they feel that his brain wasn't working anymore? Had he really gone senile with old age?

I, however, was in utter internal chaos. I mysteriously obtained ten granddaughters at once? "The powerful sure have messy lifestyles" was far too insufficient to describe the current situation. I could only act ridiculously in order to ease the chaos in my heart.

"Cough—to explain this, we must first talk about lust. What's your understanding of lust between men and women? That's right, I'm referring to Lust of the Seven Original Sins."

It appeared that it was time for an explanation. I hesitated for a moment before giving my answer.

"Lust is the one of the most basic animal instincts, next to gluttony. Under the effect of hormones, lust drives an individual to find an outstanding partner for the purpose of reproduction so that their species continues to evolve."

"...It's your own fault for being single your entire life."

"I'm sorry, I actually have a girlfriend."

"Really? She must be quite pitiful. Her boyfriend doesn't understand love in the least."

Alright then, allow me to skip over the boring explanations. Evelyn didn't intend to hide anything from me. It was only a matter of time before I understood just what in the world was going on over here.

Lust of the Seven Original Sins was Evelyn! Whoops, I meant Lust of the Seven Original Sins was Cher!

That's right—Lust was Cher. And Evelyn and Cher were separate individuals. And their complex mother-daughter relationship was apparently my responsibility as well.

Whatever happened back in the day wasn't anything good; at the very least, Evelyn seemed to have no intentions of explaining it to me.

"You want to know what happened back then? It's only natural you wiped your memories—it wasn't anything good for you. Why do you want to remember? You wanted to forget everything in the first place."

I always hated it when people looked at me in pity—it made me feel stupid. But, for some reason, when Evelyn looked at me in pity, I didn't feel that way at all. I felt a rather familiar and intimate sensation.

"Could it be that I'm a masochist who loves others' condescending gazes?"

"No, I think you've simply gone senile with old age. This is the friendliness between a patient and a doctor."

As always, the silly cat's comments arrived right on time. According to our agreement, now that she was able to speak, her split-off wills in the Slimes had returned. The Slime Calamity had officially ended.

Yet Evelyn's next words left me literally speechless.

"Some things happened between us back in the day. The result was that all of us died."

Alright then. There were far too many things to comment on about this statement. Harloys and I were astonished—we didn't even know how to respond to that. But Evelyn's next words had even more parts to comment on, so we gave up trying to comment about the situation.

"Cher... was called Cherry back in the day. She killed me, but you didn't want me to die. You wished to break the boundaries of life and death, which was why you..."

The more I heard, the more I felt a chill in my heart. It would seem that the me from back in the day was even crazier than the current me.

In the past, my good friend Evelyn had died because of me. And so I did some rather insane things in order to break the boundaries of life and death.

"Why does this scenario sound so familiar?"

"Lisa and Elisa... You haven't matured at all."

"I don't deny it."

However, unlike what had happened with Lisa turning into Elisa, this situation was most likely related to me meeting with

frustrations in love. The me from back in the day was even more extreme and ridiculous.

Why did I say that this was the result of love frustrations? That's because Evelyn provided me with my own handwritten notes—they were, indeed, written with my own familiar handwriting.

[...So-called love is nothing more than a mistaken impression created from the product of hormones and animal instinct. Lust's only use for living creatures is to reproduce and give birth to a better future generation. And Lust's overall goal is the evolution of the entire species. In that case, if I extract everything about love out of my soul, will I be able to create a unique specimen which can cause female souls to reproduce by themselves? Truly interesting. I've decided to name this specimen "Lust" of the Seven Original Sins... System Notification: Since your handwriting sucks, here's what your notes say. No need to thank me—this is a free service provided to you by your kind System. By the way, I think this first section could totally become the motto of the FFF Group.]

"Interesting the hell!"

Alright then, my System did not respond to my forceful retort. Meanwhile, Evelyn continued to explain:

"You combined part of your soul with my soul and Cher's. Cher is now continuously going back and forth between life and death. Once her body is ready, the trap you placed within her will activate and then create a new 'Evelyn.' That's why I myself don't even know if I'm your good friend Evelyn from the past or if I'm simply a copy of her soul."

With assistance from my own notes along with Evelyn's explanation, I could extrapolate what must have happened back in the day.

Evelyn, Cher (formerly Cherry), and I must have been good friends. Then something must have happened—most likely an internal conflict, betrayal, or something along those lines. The

result likely was that Evelyn died while protecting me and was killed by Cher. I became furious and wished to take revenge for Evelyn as well as resurrect her, which was why I used Cher as an experimental subject.

However, limitations in my power level back then made my experiment only a half success. While the host Cher could use her life as nutrition to create a new Evelyn, the price for breaking the boundaries of life and death was that Cher herself would have to die. Again, due to my lack of understanding in undead magic at the time, this half-success of an experiment thus had something coincidental and miraculous occur.

Elisa and Lisa were also two separate individuals. The real Evelyn's soul had long since returned to the River Styx, and summoning her soul was destined to fail from the very beginning. This method could only make a replica out of soul shards and memories put together. Meanwhile, the host Cher didn't truly die but instead reverted to an infant baby who retained no memories whatsoever.

And then I myself had died as well, causing this abnormal experiment to sink into a vicious unbroken cycle right from the very start. Every time Cher matured and reached a certain level, the trap within her soul would activate and create a new Evelyn out of her physical body and soul.

As the original goal I set for Lust was to evolve stronger and stronger genes, each new Evelyn would be genetically superior in every way. And as this entire system and the new Evelyns evolved, the original Evelyns would simultaneously obtain the new Evelyn's more advanced genes. The entire Evelyn dragon group was evolving together with each new generation.

"At first, I was only an ordinary person who possessed a minor amount of Dragon Bloodline, and since my soul was damaged I had multiple-personality disorder. After that my power evolved to the level of a dragon descendant, then SemiDragon, Half Dragon, and

then True Dragon level... Up until now, I have been born eight times, and Cher has experienced eight lives. I have also raised her eight times as her mother. After so many years, I've long since lost all feelings of hatred towards her for killing me. Now I sincerely hope that Cher can have her own happy life. And the only person capable of breaking this cursed cycle and truly giving Cher a new life is likely you, as you created all this."

Apart from opening my mouth wide agape and wanting to bury my head in the ground like an ostrich, I had no clue how to react.

"You should have figured it out by now. Cher back then was your first ever lover. But the current Cher no longer has any relation to her, so please don't be angry at her anymore. Also, if you remove this abnormal curse, you should be able to become more normal yourself."

That's right—curse. I sacrificed a particular emotion, love, in order to curse Cher so that she would forever regret and be in pain, using her soul to make up for her past mistake. This was a perfect example of a revenge curse.

From a certain standpoint, the me from back in the day was rather foolish to have paid such a price just because of something like a failed love or betrayal.

"...I failed in my first romance so I stopped believing in women and love? Where did such a pure youth appear from?! Was I really that immature?"

[You were even purer and more immature than you can imagine. You instantly made yourself forget about Cher after dying that time. Wasn't it because you were worried you'd feel pained if you recalled her? Ahh, such a beautiful and twisted first love. Truly, first loves should all have such a bittersweet taste.]

"To hell with bittersweet! This is just like toxic poop!"

[You use poop to describe your first love? Whoa, you have such

extreme interests...]

Alright then. My System seemed to be getting more shameless every day. It appeared as if she had been waiting to pounce upon this chance to make such a joke.

Indeed, Evelyn herself technically didn't count as my creation. She was independent. On the other hand, Cher, who was also Lust of my Seven Original Sins, was indeed my creation, naturally making her my daughter. As for the rest, the relationship between us all was so messy that I truly didn't wish to ponder upon it.

Suddenly, I recalled what Evelyn the Seventh mentioned earlier, that "Little Eleven would be born within the next two years." Was Cher about to enter a new cycle of dying and reverting to an infant?

"What's the exact condition for triggering Cher's death and starting this cycle over?"

Although my premonition told me that the answer would be outrageous, I still asked my question.

"...Love. The moment Cher falls in love with someone, her life will begin a countdown."

I collapsed, helpless. Was the me from back in the day truly that stubborn? This was obviously way overboard.

"You forced your first ever lover to continually die and start all over again every time she falls in love with someone? Roland, you're truly so pure, pure to the point of twisted."

I found myself powerless to counter anything my silly cat said. I could only say one thing as I turned around to leave.

"I will stop this cycle. But I first need to take a look at Lust Cher's internal structure. I shall find a way to stop this."

"No need to leave so quickly! I still wanted to chat with you! Forget it, remember to visit again soon. We can have a chat next

time."

The Copper Dragon Evelyn shouted after Roland, while the other Evelyns watched in silence as he ran off in such a ragged manner.

A long silence pervaded the underground cavern, until one voice finally broke it.

"Why did you only tell him half of the truth?"

"Half is enough. Cher has such a pitiful life. It's enough to just take care of her problem. First Sister, if you really wanted to explain everything to him, you wouldn't have missed this chance yourself."

The Sapphire Dragon who had been in a deep sleep opened her eyes. She was the first ever Evelyn and the three-headed dragon's main personality. Yet she had been in a deep sleep for all this time... or, more accurately speaking, she had been pretending to be asleep.

"I was forcefully suppressing Third Sister. You know how much Third Sister loves Cher and hates Roland..."

"Who among us doesn't hate him... We all hate him for ignoring Evelyn's dying wish, for being an idiot who was in such love with Cher; we hate him for activating this damned cycle of life and death all for that one sentence, for intentionally stepping into a certain-death trap and using his own death to activate this curse. Roland is truly an ultra bastard who makes others hate him so easily."

"While we have so many frustrations, he actually dared to get a new girlfriend? It's his fault we didn't want to tell him."

This time, the one who spoke was surprisingly the icy Blue Dragon Evelyn.

That sentence? Yes. Evelyn had left one part out of her explanation—her dying words to Roland: "If reincarnation is real as you say, I hope I can become your lover in my next life. Until

then, don't fall in love with anyone else."

Was this Evelyn's unwillingness? Her final grudge? Her hopes for her next life? Anyhow, Roland indeed had the ability to transform these unwilling words into reality. It was precisely the sentence "don't fall in love with anyone else" that made Roland cut off everything related to love in his soul and entirely abandon it.

The unfortunate part was that previously, before his final reincarnation two years ago, he had still remembered Evelyn even though he had forgotten about "Lust" Cher. But he had lost such a critical memory about Evelyn after his most recent reincarnation—it was no wonder the Evelyns were so angry at Roland.

"From the moment we were born, we possessed all of Evelyn's emotions and memories. But if we really are Evelyn, then why are there so many of us? Just what exactly did Roland do back then...?"

Each and every Evelyn was an individual. It followed that they had different reactions toward this situation, as they had different personalities. Some Evelyns felt motherly love towards Cher, while some still possessed feelings for Roland. Other Evelyns wanted to kill him more than anything else, while some hoped to stop this unending cycle. There were Evelyns who looked forward to the birth of new younger sisters, and there were some who wanted to continue from the past and have a romantic relationship with Roland. Some Evelyns even believed themselves to have nothing to do with the past.

By now, everything was far too messy to calculate.

But Roland's troubles were only beginning.

Chapter 377: Evolution

"To sum things up, the me from back in the day made modifications to Cher's soul as I was filled with hate over her betrayal. Now, as long as Cher falls deeply in love with someone, her passionate emotions will cause a trap placed deep within her soul to explode, thus starting a new cycle."

"During this time, she will undergo a split in personality—just like the three-headed dragon Evelyn. Her memories will create a new Evelyn that will gradually overwrite the current Cher's personality. Her body will evolve into genes superior to the previous generation. With the personality and soul as the software and her body and life as the hardware, a new Evelyn will be born. Only Cher's soul shards will be left over, and when put together with an infant body it will restart the cycle. Evolutions will accumulate so... As expected of myself! Truly outstanding and marvelous—I mean truly an insane maniac!"

The condescending looks aimed at me made me change my wording in the end. But inwardly I was certain that I was a genius back then, else I wouldn't have been capable of making a creation with the potential to topple everyone's worldview.

Evelyn was absolutely correct in saying that I was likely the only one who could break this cycle. It would be impossible to one hundred percent analyze this complex design unless I first understood the way I had thought back then. If I couldn't analyze how I designed Lust, how would I possibly be able to cancel this curse?

Of course, it would also be possible to forcefully cancel the curse. It was similar to wielding a sword to cut a rope or a hammer to break open a door—with these tools, you would be able to open the lock, but it was unlikely the lock would be able to survive.

Still, this was originally my design. Analyzing how it worked

wasn't that difficult.

"Understanding the secrets of the soul through pure and stubborn feelings. Continually improve the soul to have the entire physical body evolve. This was the basic way I had thought on this area of research."

A good analogy to this is what a middle school student would think when they saw their homework problems from elementary school. Perhaps the homework would be filled with code or scribbles nobody else could understand, or perhaps they'd already forgotten the content of such scribbles. But as long as the student substituted in their own way of thinking and knowledge, it would be possible to reverse engineer the way of thinking they had used to solve the problem.

"...This is related to the understanding of 'Concepts' and 'Logic.' Finally, I managed to make the individual Evelyns evolve together as an entire species. Every new Evelyn born would help the entire group of Evelyns to evolve. I must have reached the peak of Myth back then."

"Stop bragging about yourself. Hurry and think of some method to break this cycle. Can't you tell that everyone else is looking at you quite strangely?"

Indeed, everyone around me was someone I knew—most of them were my subordinates. Yet they were all looking at me with confused and hostile gazes. Little Red in particular seemed to be clenching her fists and wanting to rush at me, as if she was saying "I finally have such a great chance to viciously beat you up."

"What's the matter? Why is everyone looking at me like that?"

"...What do you think you're doing?!"

Only now did I notice that Diana had arrived while I was out acting ridiculously for a month with the Slimes. She was also glaring at me, full of hostility.

Although her tone clearly indicated her anger, Diana remained quite calm and in control of her emotions. It would seem that she had indeed greatly matured. However, I had no idea why Victoria was hiding in a corner, staring at me with a terrified expression.

Meanwhile, Little Red chuckled menacingly.

"...No need to mince words with this bastard. Let me beat him up first to vent a little. As for his explanation, let's listen to it after I finish beating him up."

"What exactly did I do? I'm just checking Cher's body, aren't I?"

"...Does anyone else check like how you do?"

I looked down at Cher who was currently in my hands, but she met my eyes with a terrified expression. Next to us was a pile of shredded clothing, torn to pieces...

And that was how I came to a sudden realization. I silently took off my shirt and put it on her to show what a gentleman I was...

"Gentleman the hell! Would a real gentleman suddenly go berserk and rush into a woman's room, defeat her in combat, strip her naked, and then stare madly at her body? In front of so many long-time subordinates—who are all witnesses now—you still dare to call yourself a gentleman!? Not even Beifeng is capable of doing something this outrageous!"

I thought back to what I just did. All that Harloys had just said indeed seemed to be true. My mind was in complete chaos when I returned, so I rushed straight to Cher's room and began inspecting her body. Of course, to make it easier to check her body, it would be necessary to take off her clothes. And so everyone had heard her screams and arrived right when I was in the midst of giving her a serious inspection. Only now did I recall that I also saw many white, uncovered parts of flesh, which was why everyone must have misunderstood me.

"...Beifeng wouldn't do something like this? That's because the

great majority of Beifeng's targets don't wear any clothes! Fine, I won't talk back... If I tell you all that I was looking at her with only a researcher's perspective, will you all believe me? Fine, fine, I'll kneel—just don't hit my face!"

Little Red unleashed her fists and took this opportunity to vent her grudges against me. During this, she muttered to herself:

"We caught you red-handed in the act. I wouldn't believe what you said if it was anyone else. But since it's you I believe you—you're a bastard who's no normal person at all."

"Then why are you hitting me?"

"I soaked in magma for an entire week in a volcano and almost got heat stroke! Isn't this your fault?"

Alright then, I was rendered speechless. This was quite obviously just an excuse for Little Red to vent her displeasure. Yet I mysteriously found myself rather happy that Little Red had trust in my character. However, the silly cat suddenly chimed in with a retort that instantly made me displeased.

"You idiot, she's saying you're not even a man."

"...I am a man! Try me if you don't believe me! Forget it, I'm not Beifeng. There's no need for me to deal with a cat."

And what came afterwards was that instead of the dragon beating up Roland, it became the cat and the dragon beating up Roland.

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"Lust" Cher was the true firstborn Sin of my Seven Original Sins. She was also the model which all my other Sins were based on. Since I obtained enough information from her body earlier... I could understand the true foundation of this cursed cycle. Actually, this wasn't a curse to begin with, but rather a blessing of "Evolution."

Just as how I had given the wood spirits gifts that I termed "curses" of the Sins, those curses were, in reality, blessings that

would help them evolve. This was the accumulation of my research results.

From the very start, my research was the exact opposite of what the Holy Church told everyone. The Holy Church would warn humanity to overcome and restrain their desires and instincts. I, on the other hand, believed that desires and instincts constituted a necessary part of humanity. In fact, I even considered them to be the most basic motivation for humans and society to evolve and progress. These Seven Original Sins existed because they were the most basic needs of both the soul and the physical body.

That was actually how I had come up with the core concept of my Seven Original Sins. Gluttony Ah Dang was capable of devouring others to evolve. Bastian could use Wrath to make himself stronger. Greed Harloys was capable of massively increasing the number of her Slime bodies and types to obtain the ultimate evolution. Pride Omar could make all his undead become part of himself, and, through the entire combined power of the species, could evolve. Although Envy was still incomplete, Marsolit, too, walked the path of stealing from others for the sake of his own evolution.

"These Seven Original Sins, which represent the most basic human instincts, are the source of evolution."

This was the core concept of my personal theory. Meanwhile, the Holy Church and most other Gods' churches believed that "Humans are born with sin. Only asceticism can absolve humans of their sins so that they may be saved after death."

My philosophy was the utter opposite of theirs. Who was truly right and who was truly wrong would likely be impossible to determine. But, at the very least, my research had obtained results. The common point about all my Seven Original Sins was that they possessed the ability to evolve themselves!

Yep, I only needed to leave them alone and let them grow freely.

Their potential would be impossible to calculate.

However, one factor that always influenced growth was time. I was only a bit over three hundred years old, after all. Ah Dang, the one who I had believed to be the oldest of my Seven Original Sins, was only two hundred years old. Keeping in mind the Sins' mega-long life expectancies, this was far too short a time for them to reach their full potential. If I had to rank my Seven Original Sins based on their combat strength, the strongest would indeed be the oldest, Ah Dang. Second would be the true big brother, Bastian, while Omar, the youngest, would also be the weakest. Back in the Underground World, I had known that Ah Dang had reached SemiGod-rank combat strength. In fact, he even possessed multiple SemiGod ranked combat forms.

Yep, their strength ranking was basically the same as their order of birth. This wasn't because my techniques got worse and worse as time went on. This was simply because the older they were, the more time and opportunities they would have for evolution and growth. But now, their real oldest sister appeared. Theoretically, she had already lived for approximately three hundred years, so she had the longest time to evolve herself. She should have been able to display a mature Sin's level of power.

However, Cher seemed to be quite weak and powerless... Fine, I knew that she was currently a Gold-ranked mage. But when I was stripping her earlier, she screamed pitifully like a little girl who'd never even seen blood before. How could that possibly be considered to have a power level expected of the oldest Sin?

"No, I can't look at things so simply. Although the me from back in the day only wanted to resurrect Evelyn, the method I used to resurrect her was no different from how I created my Sins... That is to say, Cher is capable of evolving as well. And the end result of her evolution is that she will produce more Evelyns that all evolve together. From a certain standpoint, Cher and Omar are both under the special condition that the entire species evolves

together. If I count the ten Evelyn sisters all as 'Lust,' then Lust would perhaps have greater combat strength than my other Sins combined."

The draconic might emanating from that three-headed dragon had been far above the SemiGod rank. The Copper Dragon chatterbox Evelyn also appeared to be an Immemorial Dragon. If I calculated their approximate combat strengths by these two, then they would possess, at minimum, seven or perhaps even ten SemiGod ranked individuals' worth of combat strength. This meant that the Evelyn family was astonishingly powerful. No wonder Evelyn had been able to become one of Dragon World's leaders.

If my inference was correct, the Evelyns and Cher had now become a unified existence despite being different individuals. All of them together consisted of a species. Every time a new member was added to them, the entire species would undergo rapid development and evolution. And as they evolved together, Cher's soul and emotions would develop along with the entire Evelyn group's accumulation.

Perhaps this was a two-way system. Not only would Cher produce more Evelyns, but the Evelyns' accumulation would also create the new foundation for the next infant Cher. They would keep stacking on top of each other, reaching higher and higher like a Jenga tower.

After analyzing to such an extent, I pretty much knew what I should do next. However, I had doubts about this research of mine.

It wasn't because I was unable to resolve this cycle. Instead...

"It seems like too much of a pity to stop this experiment. The next Evelyn will be even stronger—a super Evelyn! Then a super super Evelyn! Then a super x3 Evelyn! Can a dragon who's already reached her level evolve even further?"

Indeed, this seemed like too much of a pity. Originally, I had set

Lust's goal as evolution. The fact that I succeeded with my creation was most likely a result of luck more than anything else—at the very least, the current me would be unable to reproduce the results. It was such a rare chance for me to meet a "Sin" who'd already been around for three hundred years. This should have been a perfect chance to harvest experimental data and results. Giving up on all this seemed like a pity.

"...Even though I'm called the evil Banshee Queen, I still don't think I'm as bad as you. Even if I've become shameless long ago, at least I still have moral limits!"

"Limits? Can they be eaten? Relax, I'll complete Evelyn's request and make it so that Cher can continue living. After all, I am her father!"

"You're still not bored of this Star Wars joke of yours? Fine, it's whatever as long as you aren't an Oni Chichi!"

Chapter 378: Reinforcements

"As everyone knows, for a certain reason, the royal palace is still in chaos. However, a meeting must be arranged. The meeting with Emperor Orloss shall take place tomorrow evening at six o'clock. Please make proper preparations. Here's the plan for the discussion—please confirm whether it's suitable."

"...This is a letter from the Dragon World's leaders. The assistance they wish to receive along with the compensation they're willing to pay is all written within. However, I feel that specific negotiations are still necessary. After all, they wish to obtain the assistance of powerful sealing magic expert archmages."

"These are the records of the recent discussions with the Bardi higher-ups. As the main leader behind the envoy group, I believe it's vital for you to understand the current situation. Please, pleasedon't suddenly disappear again!"

"This is a letter from Cloud Tower. They demand an explanation for why you suddenly went missing and did nothing for an entire month. I must add that several archmages wrote personal letters to you."

"Reyne has returned to East Mist. There's also a letter from Sleuweir. They wish for you to summon Mars and Omar to return to your side before the entire city of Antuen is destroyed by explosions. They also wish for you to summon Queen Glina to your side, and they have cited the reason for this as 'giving her more experience.'"

"Emergency report from Timlad—there's a kink in the newest weapon's design, and it requires your decision. The specifics are in the report. To sum it up, the new weapon's area of effect is a little too powerful. It's accidentally become a weapon perfect for committing suicide."

"The surface beastmen have sent over a new treaty and their

tributes. They apparently wish to sign a peace treaty for the next thirty years..."

The moment I appeared, the official tasks that had piled up like mountains were instantly tossed at me. I could only sigh—it was getting harder and harder for me to slack off. I also made up my mind to create a useful internal policies department. Otherwise, I would die sooner or later from overwork.

"Die from overwork? When you work less than three days out of a month? Every department has already taken care of their affairs. The rest is specifically related to you. If you acted even the least bit responsibly, none of us would have to work so hard."

Fortunately, I had taken Lilith Milan along with me this time. Although her tongue was as sharp as ever, she still helped me greatly—after complaining, of course.

She was indeed telling the truth. This work had to do with my role as an envoy of the Mage Country, my status as royalty of East Mist, my personal weapon research, and so on. Even if I recruited ten secretaries, these tasks would still require my personal attention and decisions.

As for why there were so many documents piled up, that was because I was involved in far too many affairs. In a way, this was a good thing. The new Mist Alliance, the Church of Law, the Underground, and other such factions were imperceptibly becoming an ironclad alliance.

However, growing too swiftly would bring about the negative side effect of an unstable foundation. At the very least, there were far too many personal factors involved in tying these factions together. Although personal factors would indeed improve the alliance's stability, if something happened to some critical individual—for instance, if I was suddenly killed off—there would be huge trouble.

But finding someone to make decisions in my place was proving

difficult. The best candidate would have been Elisa, but she was forced to return to the Chaos Abyss. The other youngsters could at most only act as local leaders—it would be impossible for them to command the overall situation.

"It would seem that it's time to reorganize our factions. Let's create some new jobs and delegate part of my responsibilities so that everything can carry on as normal even if I suddenly die. Right, we should also reorganize our militaries. It's far too archaic to use a system where one person commands the entire army."

I was seriously thinking about how to delegate my responsibilities. However, a certain someone was unable to watch this anymore.

"You're saying so much, but all I see is that you're trying to slack off."

"...As I recall, silly cat, you're called the 'All-Knowing.' Why don't you try coming up with an idea to help me?"

"Don't joke around. If you let me do as I please, then I'd revive the elven empire from back in the day. And, of course, while doing so, I'd kill off the elven kingdoms and elven churches and disembowel every last one of those disgusting Elven Gods and Royal Elf royalty."

Harloys' voice sounded lazy as it echoed in my mind, but I knew she was quite serious. And she was already at the doorstep of the SemiGod Undead Emperor level. It was just that her power level was forcefully held back by my own lack of power. If I truly let her free to act as ridiculously as she pleased, it would be almost impossible to clean up after her.

But now that I suddenly thought about how she was at the doorstep of becoming a SemiGod Undead Emperor, I got rather curious. My main research question was the quality of one's soul. Zero's research question had been the temperature of life. These could be considered major breakthroughs in the areas of souls and

life. How did the silly cat intend to cross this threshold?

"...My research? Sure, I can give it to you. But even if I give my research to you, you won't be able to understand it."

I got even more curious upon hearing this. Although my research regarding elemental magic was indeed quite average, I was confident in my undead magic. How could I possibly not understand? And so I asked her what her research was.

"Memories, and turning the fake into reality."

Alright then. The moment Harloys told me this, I knew it wouldn't be necessary for me to ask anything else. Although this area of research was also related to the soul, I hadn't researched anything about it at all.

"Oh? That can cure amnesia, can't it?"

"That's completely unrelated. The goal of my research is to create reality using memories. While I can't cure memory loss, it's quite easy for me to give you some memories that are entirely my creation. Are you sure you want such memories?"

The silly cat was currently rolling around lazily on the roof. Ever since she had progressed in power yet again, she had gotten even lazier.

"Memories created by you? Will I still be myself then?"

"...If your physical body is the original one and your soul—and your memories—are complete, then is there even any meaning in asking whether you're the original or not?"

"I feel like there's still some difference."

"Can you tell the difference, then?"

Both of us fell silent. This was a question impossible to answer. It was no simple theoretical discussion. Without any prompting, both of us thought about Evelyn—was that three-headed dragon still the original Evelyn? And if not, what exactly was she?

"Sigh, how confusing. Roland, you should try to create less troubles that are your fault in the future."

"Is this really my fault? Back in the day, I didn't understand what the River Styx or the Cycle of Reincarnation were. I thought that I would simply have to combine the physical body and soul back together to resurrect someone. This result is obviously just a coincidental accident."

"How do you intend to deal with Evelyn, then? Your 'second lover?'"

"...I have no idea. I'm just going to pretend not to know anything. Right now, I regret more than anything that I left one of your Slime bodies behind to eavesdrop."

How could I possibly just believe what other people told me? I had lost all memories of that time—even if Evelyn claimed to be my mother, there would be no evidence to prove or disprove her. Wasn't it common, in some television shows, to add lots of fake "settings" to a person's life when they had amnesia? I would need to investigate the truth for myself.

So I naturally had Harloys do what she did best and leave a Slime behind for eavesdropping. Yet the result was that I heard something that made me feel even more conflicted: Evelyn's feelings towards me and her dying message.

"Forget it. I'm not going to think about it. Let's focus on what's before us first. Let's think about how to seal the Titan Giants."

Wasting an entire month hadn't been entirely ineffective. Since the dragons wanted to make a trade with us, it meant we had what the dragons wanted. The dragons wanted the Titan Giants to remain as stone statues—or at least they wanted the Titan Giants' revival to be slowed down. In that case, there were only two methods to resolve this problem.

The first would be to improve the seals' strength, such as adding

another seal on top of the current seal. This would be no different from directly fighting against the Titan Giants. Just thinking about it would make one understand how difficult this would be. My strongest sealing technique, the Seal of the Four Elements, also originated from the immemorial generation. In fact, the very seal that sealed away the Titan Giants was also created from the Seal of the Four Elements. However, I felt that the long-lived dragons would also know all this as dragons were excellent magic users. If they couldn't do it, then it would be highly unlikely for us to do so as well.

The other method would be to slow down the rate at which the Titan Giants broke out of their seals, which would require having all four Elemental Gods be in balance—either all four alive or all four dead. At the very least, the Fire Elemental Throne was still intact. That meant the most difficult part of this task was establishing a new Earth Elemental God. Naturally, I would have to focus on choosing an Earth Elemental Lord to obtain that position.

I had considered this a difficult task because I would need to gather materials to reconstruct the Earth Elemental Throne. But thanks to Camdian the Wind Elemental God's "generosity," we now had a much better shortcut: the God Equipment of Earth.

As for why we didn't immediately set out to the Wind Elemental Plane to retrieve the God Equipment of Earth? I felt that the moment I set out, my System would definitely issue me a Myth-ranked Quest. Who knew how long that would take me to complete?

"Besides, the dragons are in more of a hurry than we are. They just need a method to deal with their problem. We just need to give them the method, and they'll naturally work on it themselves."

But just telling the dragons a method without any evidence would be insufficient. I would have to research various topics such as "Is it possible to create a new Earth Elemental Throne using the God Equipment of Earth?", "Who should become the new

Elemental Gods of Earth and Fire?", "Will the new Elemental Gods really be able to achieve a balance in the elements, which will slow down the decaying of the Titan Giants' seal?"...Fine, all of this was out of the scope of the authority the Truth Symposium had vested in me. And so I simply sent them a report on all this, deciding to have them slowly investigate.

In the past month, the Truth Symposium's earth element archmages were probably fatigued to the extreme. But judging from the information and expert advice I received from the Cloud Tower on this topic, this plan had at least received the Truth Symposium's approval... Whether it was possible or not was one factor, but now I had permission. This meant that whether this could solve the problem wasn't the focus anymore—if there was a problem, everyone would take the blame together, rather than me alone. Naturally, I would be able to relax and continue my research on this matter.

Another thing was that if I looked at the battles that were likely to soon occur in the Elemental Planes and Dragon World, the forces I had on hand were rather insufficient. That was also why I wrote a letter a month ago. My reinforcements should have almost been here.

"Sleuweir actually told their Queen to go out and have some fun? It would seem that Mars and Glina have been getting along excellently. With them together, I bet there's been many explosions recently..."

Boom!

Yep, judging from the familiar gray mushroom cloud outside the city, they'd just arrived.

"Pervert!"

Alright then, the familiar sound of screaming women reached my ears. Yet I had far too many subordinates who could accomplish such a thing with their arrival, so I was uncertain of who exactly

had come... wait a moment. Something seemed wrong here. Could it be that I naturally attracted such individuals? I was clearly someone normal!

"A naked tauren!!"

My doubts were now cleared.

"A naked centaur!"

Casio, what's the matter!? What went wrong with you? You shouldn't have been like this?! Two years ago, when your grandfather handed you to me, you were clearly normal!

"I'll go out and greet them!"

Eaglestorm got up to greet them. However, I angrily shouted at him:

"Put on some pants before you go!"

Chapter 379: Unexpected

Dark Elves were troublesome. Yet more troublesome than the elves themselves was how people discriminated against them.

A large crowd was gathered in front of our horse-drawn carriages. When the Bardi royal knight drew his sword and asked me about the Dark Elf, I furrowed my eyebrows.

"Is it Victoria or Diana? Didn't I tell them not to go outside for the time being?"

My thoughts naturally moved to the two Dark Elves under my command when I heard that this commotion was about a Dark Elf. I had told them not to leave the embassy hotel precisely because I wanted to avoid trouble.

Unfortunately, neither Victoria nor Diana were the type to listen to orders. The Town Security had plenty of examples where they both violated the rules together. When I thought about how they caused trouble yet again, I became rather angry.

"Dark Elves are so troublesome..."

It was normal for people to have stereotypes and discriminate against others. This was all the more so as transportation and communication was very inconvenient.

Once people formed ideas and cemented what they believed to be "common sense," they would be obdurate in their beliefs—it would be practically impossible to change their views. Some remote districts were known for their archaic customs from around four centuries ago.

Lorci had perished, but this didn't mean that the Dark Elves were now viewed in a good light. The great majority of human kingdoms treated Dark Elves the same as demons—they typically captured them and burned them at the stake without caring about evidence of any crime.

If this was some other place, such as Auland or the Northlands, the people would at least pay me some respect. But here...

"What happened?"

I had the knights clear the way and push through the crowds. And, as I expected, I finally saw that familiar dark skin.

"Dian—eh? Who are you?"

Alright. It would appear that I too had stereotyped Diana and Victoria. This time, the individual surrounded by an angry crowd was an unfamiliar male Dark Elf. His grayish-black skin was covered in light burn wounds. It was obvious that he hadn't undergone the Moonlight Ritual to become a Gray Elf.

He was collapsed on the ground, unmoving.

"...I...I only wanted to live a peaceful life in the city. I didn't do anything at all!"

His pleas were treated as nothing more than falsehoods. Pitchforks in their hands, the Bardi citizens looked at him with fear and hatred. Far away were naughty children chucking stones at him. Close by, people were evidently even considering tossing torches at him.

Lorci's mark wasn't on his body, but nor was there a single Good God's mark on him. He either hid his own faith or was one of the rare few elves who didn't believe in the Gods.

"I saw him concocting poison in his wooden house! He even dared to sell his poison! If it wasn't for the fact that he forgot to wear his evil magical mask, we'd still be fooled by him today!"

A brown-haired, freckle-faced young man pointed at him and shouted angrily.

"...That's only medicine for common injuries. Haven't you used it before? You even praised this medicine for being excellent."

It would seem that this Dark Elf had succeeded at living in

secrecy in the Bardi capital but accidentally ended up exposing himself.

"Yes, but you didn't mention the nasty side effects! Although my external injuries were cured, I had diarrhea for three days straight and was heavily weakened. This medicine of yours is evil—an evil one that sucks people's lifeforce! Ptui! I was so blind to have believed that you were a good person!" A strong-looking man had an expression of disgust.

"I've lived here for ten years without committing a single crime! If I did anything..."

The moment the Dark Elf said this, things turned for the worse. Originally, there were some watching on the sidelines, not caring about what happened. But when everyone heard that this Dark Elf had actually been living here for ten years, they thought about how Dark Elves were supposed to be evil and boiled up in anger.

"...No wonder so many people have gone missing in this area. This darkie must have kidnapped them for his experiments."

"Only yesterday I had been thinking that there's been a lot of thefts recently. He's probably the one responsible!"

"...Could it be that this evil Dark Elf also used some vicious magic on me, making it so that I haven't gotten pregnant?"

Although this sounded quite ridiculous, this was how reality was in this generation. Even the Middle Ages of my technologically-advanced original world was no different in terms of discrimination.

If some child was rumored to be cursed, then even a pig giving birth to a deformed piglet would be blamed on the so-called cursed child. This was the inevitable result of foolishness and discrimination.

"If that child was Beifeng, then that wouldn't be discrimination."

"Don't even mention it. I also thought about this possibility.

Forget it, let's not discriminate against Beifeng—he's quite pitiful. I've asked him before, and he said he's not interested in pigs."

"You actually asked him such a question? And do you really believe what he says? Beifeng also calls himself a normal person... By the way, if we keep chatting like this, the Dark Elf will get beaten to death."

It was unknown who made the first move, but now the crowd was attacking the Dark Elf with pitchforks and a shower of rocks. This elf would have already died if he hadn't had a decent power level.

"How odd. He's not fighting back? Does he have a death wish?"

The will of a powerful individual would be within their bloodline. Just a powerful individual's anger alone would be enough to make an ordinary person tremble in fear. This was something common to all warrior job class members at the Gold rank. And it wasn't strange for this male Dark Elf to be a Gold-ranked combat class—he had arrived here ten years ago, after all, and survived all this time. He was obviously no novice.

But the strange part was that he let himself be attacked and didn't fight back at all. Nor was he even trying to escape. It made me wonder how he had survived so long in the surface world.

I looked around me and confirmed that this was unlikely to be a trap, so I decided to intervene. However...

"Make way! Please make way!"

A relatively handsome young man dressed in extravagant clothing pushed his way through the crowd. His fiery red hair was combed quite neatly, and the sword scar on his face didn't disfigure him—it made him seem rather heroic.

Judging by his aura, this man's power level was somewhere between the peak of Silver and the beginning of Gold. From his age—he appeared less than thirty-five years old—he could be

considered a genius among humans.

Clad in extravagant golden armor which was more decorative than practical, he had a Myth-ranked equipment at his waist. Following him were two subordinates, who were, at minimum, at the Silver rank.

"The Twenty-Seventh Prince!"

"It's Prince Mills!"

From everyone's reactions, it was apparent that this individual who suddenly joined in was actually a prince.

Also judging by everyone's reactions, he had quite a good reputation. At the very least, the citizens in this business district seemed to really respect him.

Of course, since I was supposed to be here for diplomatic affairs, I had done my homework beforehand. This Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills always kept a low profile and was ranked low among the adopted princes. According to me, however, he would be one of the top five princes most likely to succeed the throne.

To gain advantage in the conflict for the crown, some princes reached out to the royal army and some princes allied themselves with the major merchants. Most princes, however, naturally allied themselves with major domain lords. Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills was one of the more outstanding individuals among the princes. He had racked up numerous combat achievements in his younger days, causing Orloss to personally adopt him as a prince.

Unlike the other princes who mostly tried to curry favor with other major factions, Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills instead walked the path of currying favor with the citizens despite his natural advantage of being a military man. He often appeared whenever there was a commotion in the city and would typically deliver judgement to wicked villains as if he were a Holy Knight hero. Sometimes, he would act like a prince from legendary knight

stories, saving damsels in distress or delivering justice to evil merchants. Streetside bards often sung about his legendary deeds.

That's right—legendary deeds. This wasn't the Underground where Legend-ranked individuals walked around everywhere. A Gold-ranked grandmaster who wasn't even forty years old was more than sufficient to accomplish heroic deeds that everyone would sing praises about. In fact, some citizens even organized parades for Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills and requested Orloss to choose Mills as the crown prince.

But in my eyes—no, I should say that in many powerful individual's eyes— Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills wasn't nearly as pure as he appeared on the surface. Most of the bards singing his praises had secretly received financial assistance, while the paraders typically had relatives working for him.

And one must ask: just how did he have such excellent luck that he could always appear right when a damsel was in danger or suddenly see through everything right before a wicked scheme came to fruition? Why was he always able to overturn the situation?

"He either arranged all these incidents himself for him to act in, or he has a huge number of spies in the capital waiting at all times for an incident to occur so that he can improve his reputation."

Considering the fact that the other princes wouldn't allow him to keep faking scenarios for him to improve his reputation, I felt it was more likely that the Twenty-Seventh Prince possessed a large number of spies. Judging from the situation, it appeared that he was here yet again to improve his reputation.

"...What do you think he'll do?"

"From the information we have on him, I feel he's just a pure politician. And a pure politician will never do what he himself wants to do. Instead, he'll do whatever the citizens want. He'll say something that matches what the citizens desire so that he'll

obtain plenty of support to become the emperor."

"In that case, he'll..."

"Yep. Right now, the citizens want to kill this Dark Elf. This is such a simple way for him to obtain reputation. Why would he not do such a thing? Perhaps we can even the bards singing tomorrow about how 'The Twenty-Seventh Prince righteously slew the evil Dark Elf.'"

"How terrible. Shouldn't everything be judged with due process?"

"Hah! Do you really think politicians are ordinary people?"

The Bardi knights guarding us coldly observed the situation with no reaction. These knights belonged only to the royalty and watched on as if none of this had anything to do with them. From this, I felt as if I could tell Orloss's attitude towards his adopted princes.

And as I expected, I heard Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills shout as he raised his sword:

"Everyone, get back! Be careful of the Dark Elf's evil curses!"

An enchanted light glimmered on his sword. It seemed that Mills really did intend to slay this Dark Elf. But the strange part was that the Dark Elf still grit his teeth and remained on the ground, with no intention of running away.

Since it had come to this, I felt a little bored. Rather than a scenario of "The Twenty-Seventh Prince righteously slew an evil Dark Elf," I would have preferred a scenario of "The pure politician prince accidentally bit off more than he could chew and got viciously beaten up."

Just as I was about to take action, yet another angry shout interrupted me... Why was I saying another?

"Law Incantation, Conviction! Anti-Crime Slash!"

Three caped individuals jumped down from a nearby rooftop in

front of Mills. One cried out as she swung her thick greatsword at Mills, one ran over to cast Divine Arts—apparently intending to heal that injured Dark Elf—while the final caped individual simply glared at the surrounding spectators. Her imposing aura alone made the prince's subordinates freeze, unable to move, while the spectators instinctively retreated.

"Suppressing Silver to the point of not being able to move? That's at least higher than the Silver rank by two power levels. An unknown Saint-ranked powerful individual?" This time, even the icy-faced Bardi royal knights had their expressions flicker.

As for me, this was the familiar scene of Judgementors attacking with familiar combinations and a Saint-ranked or above powerful individual's imposing aura... Yawen, Diana, and Victoria, you all really did come out as I expected!

However, now wasn't the time to give them trouble. From a certain standpoint, as they were currently hiding their identities, them doing this would be more convenient than me. Also, they knew how far to take things and how to deal with such a situation.

At the very least, that was what I believed at the time. I also secretly took a step back. With Diana, the new Saint-ranked Antiholy Knight, nobody would be able to capture them. Besides, I also trusted Diana to do a good job.

However, sometimes there would be no accounting for Murphy's Law. Unexpected surprises would always happen in the most unexpected of ways...

[High-tier Equipment: Dragonslayer Sword]

[Attack Power: 0-35. Quality: Myth-rank.]

[Special effect: Unbreakable. 100% chance to directly break any weapons ranked lower than Elite. 50% chance to directly break any Elite-ranked weapons. 30% chance to directly break Myth-ranked weapons. 1% chance to break all other high-tier weapons not at the

level of God Equipment.]

[Special effect: Halo of Anti-brilliance. Yes, that's right, Anti-brilliance. The person who possesses this sword shall become the main character in everyone's eyes. The main character of a tragedy, that is. The person who wields this sword shall have Luck and Charisma decreased by 10. If the person who wields this sword is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed man, then both will be decreased by an additional 10.]

[Special effect: Berserk Insanity. The wielder of this sword has a 1% chance to enter a berserk rampage. In this condition, the wielder will first focus on killing the family and friends closest to him or her.]

[There are some yellow words written on this sword's hilt: In ancient legends, this used to be a mythical equipment which represented a person's status. 'The treasured dragonslaying sword, the pinnacle of Wulin. But now, there's a new addendum: This Dragonslayer sword is free for anyone who clicks on it.]

Without a doubt, this was a good sword. However, its disgusting negative side effect would make anyone who wielded it sufficiently long enough to fall into insanity. Only Yawen, who naturally possessed strong resistance against berserk and insane states, was able to use it. She always treated this sword as her personal treasure.

Anyone who fought against this sword without knowing its special effects would be destined to have a disadvantage. Thanks to this sword, the current leader of Town Security was strong enough to challenge those stronger than her.

Perhaps Mills had done too many evil deeds, as his luck was terrible. His longsword, "Anxiu's Gift," was already past the Myth rank, which meant that Yawen only had a thirty percent chance to break his sword. Yet its effect just happened to activate on the first attack!

Clang!

As their swords clashed, the first attack sliced through the Myth-ranked sword in Mills' hand. Yawen's greatsword soon sliced right towards his face.

When Yawen noticed this, she hurriedly tried to stop herself. She was only here to save someone, after all. It wasn't her intention to kill the prince. But right before she attacked, as an excellent Judgementor, she used Law Incantation: Conviction and Anti-Crime Slash, a golden combination.

Law Incantation: Conviction would judge the previous two hours of a target's actions. If that person committed a crime, they would be marked with a red light representing evil. The greater the crime, the deeper the red. As for Anti-Crime Slash, that was an attack which empowered one's sword with the power of Law. It was especially used against criminals, as the greater the target's crimes, the stronger the attack.

I didn't know what Mills had done in the previous two hours, but the dark crimson aura surrounding him was evidence that he definitely committed some dastardly crime. And coincidentally, he just happened to come under attack from a Judgementor.

Anti-Crime Slash's power level against an innocent target would be no more than a light push. In fact, the sword would even blunt itself. But when used against a vicious criminal, it would have unstoppable force.

By this time, Yawen was no longer able to stop even if she wanted to. Law would have no pity for any criminal. Since Judgementors and their Anti-Crime Slash attack were the representatives of Law, and Law Incantation: Conviction had marked Mills as an abhorrent criminal, Anti-Crime Slash's attack power wouldn't possibly diminish just because the Judgementor wanted it to.

And so Yawen's silver sword flashed in an arc, slashing directly at Mills' face. If this attack connected, it was certain that Mills would

die.

Meanwhile, Mills's real guards had started taking action. The Bardi royal knights wouldn't watch as a prince was killed right in front of them. Mills also activated his lifesaving magic item. As long as this attack was blocked, or if his helpers arrived in time, he would be able to survive.

But it just so happened to be that Diana used her newly obtained ability in order to stop Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills's subordinates from taking action.

[Aura effect: Antiholy Barrier. Summon a barrier constructed out of user's willpower and dispel all magic and divine power effects within. This barrier's effects depend on the difference in power level between the user and the target enemy. This barrier can be maintained for a medium amount of time.]

And currently, this barrier was blocking off Mills from his potential helpers.

At this moment, all of Mills's subordinates and the Bardi royal knights became nothing more than mere mortals, losing all their magical powers. Mills's protective magical item lit up for only a second before dimming. The Dragonslayer Sword was outside Diana's barrier to begin with, and the silver power of Law on the sword only dimmed slightly as the sword continued its strike.

Shing!

The blade clashed into the ground after a ferocious swing that caused blood to fly everywhere. The earth was stained red.

Mills had died with a look of shock on his face.

Alright then. Although I said so much, all that the ordinary citizens saw was only one thing: a caped individual suddenly jumped out, and with a single slice, the well-respected Twenty-Seventh Prince Mills was sliced in half!

"Assassin!"

"Assassin! Someone killed Prince Mills!"

The panic caused a fierce commotion which slightly lifted Yawen's cape. To everyone's astonishment, they saw the familiar dark skin of Dark Elves.

"Save us! A Dark Elf murdered His Highness!"

"I recognize that Dark Elf and that sword! That's the Mage Country Ambassador's guard! The Mage Country's people killed His Highness!"

At this instant, Yawen was astonished, Diana was astonished, Victoria was astonished, the Bardi royal knights were astonished, and I myself was also astonished.

However, a history lesson I had once learned in my past life flashed in my mind.

"When Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austria-Hungary Empire was assassinated, not a single person expected this purely unexpected occurrence, the assassination of a relatively unpopular royalty in this small country, to become the spark for World War I!"

"Damn it! Yawen, you idiot with a luck rating of negative E! This is going to become a huge issue!"

Chapter 380: Assassination Succeeded

Unexpected events were termed as "unexpected" precisely because they would occur without forewarning and they'd have consequences nobody would accept.

Back in my original world, Archduke Franz Ferdinand couldn't be considered an important person. His death, or even the Austro-Hungarian Empire's revenge, shouldn't have been enough to affect the entire world. However, the international situation at the time was one where everyone was at the edge of exploding into war. Most countries had already begun preparing for war, and when this perfect "reason" appeared, it was merely the spark that ignited the dynamite. Germany happily took advantage of this to fan the fires of war, and this caused Russia, France, and everyone else to act as well. Thus began the First World War.

And things were similar in this world right now.

Bardi's situation wasn't great. Internationally, it was facing enemies on three sides.

To its west, it was at war with the Mage Country. In the south, it faced the droves of undead sending wave after wave of attacks at Nightrain City. To the east was the Holy Church's vanguard army. As if this wasn't enough, the sealed off Dragon World and the Titan Giants in the capital city were together a massive ticking time bomb that might just destroy the entire country at any moment.

This generation was one where power meant success, and the citizens of this powerful country never had to worry about their lives on a day-to-day basis. They never had to agonize over their next meal. Ever since two years ago, however, the comfortable lives of these citizens had met an aggrieved end. The citizens began accumulating grudges, which gave birth to anxiety and the desire to go to war. It was fortunate that Bardi kept notching up victories in battle—this helped them vent their anger. Yet this was also why

they were so disrespectful to the ambassador of another country.

The declarations of war from various countries against them had made them feel as if they were a tall tree battered by a rainstorm. At the same time, however, being enemies with the entire world made them feel both proud and angry. And this didn't apply only to ordinary citizens. The nobles, knights—all stratum of the social class—thought this way as well. Merchants hoped to get rich, nobles hoped to use this opportunity to seize more power, knights hoped to obtain glorious achievements, and the adopted princes hoped to perform enough combat accolades to obtain the crown. Or it would be better to say that some princes were scheming to steal the throne while other princes were on the frontlines.

And all of this was being watched over by the "almost dead" Emperor Orloss.

Perhaps I acted ridiculously. But before acting ridiculously I would always consider the situation and the possible consequences of my actions. I would only act after making a plan... Basically, I was the "thinking too much into things" type. This was just how I was, and it was quite difficult to change. My personality indeed gave me many unnecessary frustrations.

Directly speaking, I was actually more of the type: "You think I'm crazy? That's because you don't understand me. And if you understood me, you'd probably want to beat me to death..." Cough—cough—I seem to have gotten off topic. Getting back on point, before coming to Bardi, I had made up my mind about how to act here: like a tsundere—seemingly aloof and distant but actually easy to get along with.

To be more specific, I would act as high and mighty as possible, giving off an attitude of "I don't want to make a deal with you rednecks." Then, I would use intermediaries to haggle and improve the deal I would receive before finally agreeing.

From a certain standpoint, that ridiculous Slime Calamity of

mine was also aimed at cooling down the Bardi capital. That was why I'd ordered those bastard subordinates of mine to remain obedient and try their best to avoid any accidents. I didn't expect something so major to occur.

"...How will the Bardi nobles and royalty react? Listen to their citizens' voices and start a new war, or suppress this issue in order to obtain more benefits through negotiation? What will the local domain lords do? Will they pressure the royalty into taking revenge? Also, what will the factions that supported Mills do?"

There were too many possibilities, and that caused me to freeze over. But when I looked at how all the Bardi royal knights were rushing over and the dimensional teleportation doors that were suddenly opening up, I at least knew what I should do at this moment. There was no way I would let them catch my subordinates red-handed!

"Harloys, create some chaos."

"I need some time to summon my Slime bodies."

"It's fine if you just make a concealing smokescreen."

While my Dark Elf subordinates froze, astonished at their own actions, numerous powerful individuals were rushing over to the scene and numerous royal mages were teleporting here. I unhesitatingly hid myself in a shadow and then reappeared in front of everyone clad in my blood-red dragon armor.

"I honestly thought that my first public appearance in this form would be a bit cooler."

I wielded my sword in one hand and blocked off the charging royal knights. The sword energy I casually flicked at them forced them back, while the walls of ice I summoned would be capable of obstructing them for at least several seconds.

My breath was filtered by my dragon armor and came out as half dragonbreath fire and half blue ice. Compared to the past, this ice

dragon armor, which was Erebella's new form, was capable of noticeably increasing my powers over ice.

"Idiots, follow me! I'll deal with you all later."

I intentionally lowered my voice, and it sounded even stranger through the armor's filter. But my Dark Elf subordinates would definitely recognize my voice. And, at this time, Victoria was still carrying that injured male Dark Elf.

"Take him along with us."

Black smoke filled this entire area, and both sides of the street were in flames. From the gutters and sewers appeared my army of Slimes. Indeed, Harloys was experienced when it came to creating chaos.

"Why aren't you leaving?"

I turned around and found out why that Dark Elf had refused to run away all this time. He had been using his cape and body to protect a little girl. Judging by the girl's gray skin and round human ears, this girl was a half-blood human and Dark Elf hybrid!

"Take them both with us. I'll be the rearguard."

Boom!

The royal mages had arrived through their dimensional teleportation doors. The fireballs they summoned rained upon us and the ice walls were demolished, and the fierce winds they called started to blow away all the smoke.

"Hahaha! I, Poison Dragon Samar, didn't even need to personally act. A few novice subordinates of mine were more than enough to kill off this idiot. As expected, this so-called hero prince was nothing much. Ha, this was way too easy."

I continually waved my sword, sending out ice magic and sword energy. Meanwhile, I was secretly delighted at my usual habit of overthinking things. If it wasn't for the fact that I had researched

about a Dragon Bloodline Sword Saint assassin, I would have been hard-pressed to find a proper scapegoat.

Of course, Poison Dragon Samar was a desert-based assassin living in the west of Eich, so why would he run all the way over to the center of Eich to assassinate a prince of Bardi? Even though he was clearly of a Green Dragon's Bloodline, why would he have Red Dragon Bloodline abilities and know how to use ice magic? All of this would be impossible to explain, but this didn't actually require any explaining.

All I needed right now was a scapegoat, even if it was one anyone would see through and not believe in. As long as there was a scapegoat on the surface, it would be possible for us to negotiate.

If the assassin was caught right there on the spot, the situation would likely become impossible to negotiate as that would definitely hugely affect the Bardi Empire and Mage Country's relationships. I couldn't count on the furious people of Bardi to look at the big picture, as right now, they would only want to take revenge and catch the culprit.

A large amount of smoke still remained and obscured people's vision. The Sword Saints among the Bardi royal knights were sending out waves of sword energy at me. However, I didn't have to prepare to defend—it would be impossible for a newly-minted Sword Saint to be able to pierce my dragon armor from so far away.

Meanwhile, the royal mages who arrived through their dimensional teleportation doors found themselves obstructed by the chaotic crowd. Not only that, they came under magical attack from my silly cat, so it would be impossible for them to do anything for the time being.

I could sense that my Dark Elf subordinates had successfully escaped. Now that they had left, I of course had no intentions of staying behind. Since a prince was assassinated right in front of

them, the royal knights, who viewed honor as more important than their lives, would use their full might. Several of them were actually quite strong. The moment all the smoke was blown away, even I would find it difficult to leave.

"Dragon wings."

The blood-red dragon wings from my armor looked like they sprouted out of my back. This time, I thanked the seemingly useless ability to fly with dragon wings that my armor possessed. It would be impossible to explain myself if I used my War Angel wings to fly away.

"Ha! Ninth Prince, I've completed the task! Remember to pay me what you promised. Otherwise, you'll meet the same end as Mills."

Before I left, I made sure to once again claim responsibility for this deed in the name of Poison Dragon Samar. Then, I declared that this was all because of the princes' internal conflicts. As I flew away, the mages flung thunderbolts at me that whizzed under my feet.

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"Aren't you all so capable? Why are none of you saying anything right now!? Don't you all know that a war might break out because of this one swing of your sword!?"

My angry roars echoed throughout the airship. Before me, Diana, Yawen, and Victoria were kneeling with their heads lowered, as if they were naughty children receiving a lecture.

Cher was lying down next to us. The moment Cher heard about Diana slaying Prince Mills right in front of everyone, she fainted. To the side, however, were my other heartless bastard subordinates who were actually enjoying the show.

Right now was obviously not a good time to return to the embassy hotel. That would be no different from giving our lives over to others.

Fortunately, Glina had come over here from the Northlands in the small ambush squadron airships. Reyne had also sent Diana and Victoria over in an ambush airship as well. This meant that I happened to have a few airships on hand that could be used to escape.

We left only a few people at the embassy hotel. Everyone else was currently on the airships.

Should I say that it was to be expected of veteran criminals? My subordinates' abilities to escape were maxed to the fullest. The moment this incident happened, they were already prepared to run away. They had actually been waiting for us on the airship.

"Didn't I tell you all that you were forbidden from going outside? Why did you all go out anyways? Where's the discipline and respect for authority!? Diana! You're a leader, so how can you lead like this?!"

I continued scolding them, but my mind was racing at top speed, trying to think of a way to deal with the situation.

There wasn't much we could do. It was quite obvious who was responsible for the assassination, and it would be impossible to deny. The situation, in fact, would mostly depend on how Bardi wanted to deal with it.

"Damn it, the right to be proactive is now in their hands."

As for why I was scolding them? Actually, I didn't feel like my Dark Elves had done anything wrong. That deep crimson light that was almost to the point of purple was the best evidence that Mills had deserved to die. But the Dark Elves had made a mistake—how could I possibly let them lead if I didn't scold them publicly and punish them?

"Boss, stop acting. Everyone knows you're not really angry. If you were angry you wouldn't mince words and would directly act. If you keep scolding them, big sis Diana might take it too hard and

want to commit suicide."

Glina jumped out to intervene. It seemed that ever since she started hanging out with Mars and Omar, her words became more and more masculine—or perhaps I should say became vulgar like a mercenary's. Yet, from another standpoint, since Glina had managed to get rid of the threat of demon blood within her and no longer had to seal herself in, she was now far livelier than before.

"No! Committing suicide after making a mistake is an irresponsible action. I shall bear the burden for our actions. Milord, please hand me over to the Bardi Empire."

Diana lifted her head and looked at me with an expression filled with resolution to sacrifice herself. It seemed that although she had improved her conviction, her intelligence hadn't improved at all.

When I looked at this "good guy" Dark Elf, who had an expression that read "I'll take all the responsibility so that nobody else has to be punished," while my "granddaughter" tugged on my sleeve with a joking expression, I suddenly didn't feel like saying anything else.

"Forget it. I'll go to the capital to check how things are tomorrow morning."

Just as I made the decision to check the situation tomorrow, someone came looking for us.

"Is Roland here? Cher, why are you collapsed like that?"

"Mom?"

Chapter 381: Unexpected Advantage

In a way, Cher didn't tell me the truth about herself. She had only told me half of the truth. Granted, she did mention that her mother was a three-headed dragon, but she neglected to tell me that she had seven additional mothers...

"If such a thing happened to you, would you tell others that you have ten mothers? And that they're all identical?"

Alright then. What she said was so reasonable that I found it impossible to counter.

In this small airship, Cher and Evelyn were in the same room. Mother and daughter seemed to be about the same age, so even my few remaining emotions appeared. I wanted to sigh at how the world worked in unexpected and marvelous ways.

Still, Evelyn's arrival would save me a lot of trouble.

I now pretty much understood her status. Evelyn was one of the dragons' leaders and lived in a cave near the capital city. Evidently, she did this with the Bardi government's permission. She was mostly the contact point between the dragons and the Bardi government.

Judging from her smiling expression and well-suntanned skin, the Copper Dragon Evelyn was most likely the one in charge of anything diplomatic. In that case, perhaps I could obtain something useful from her on the Bardi royalty. Copper Dragons were the most eloquent among the dragons, so of course they would make the best diplomats...

"Nice to meet you all. Hello, I'm Roland's ex-girlfriend, Evelyn. I'm also Cher's mother. Cher, be a dear and call Roland 'Father.'"

...as long as Copper Dragons could get rid of their terrible habit of joking around and pulling pranks!

"I..."

Alright then, my mind was instantly thrown into chaos as I had no idea how to respond.

Everyone looked at me with strange expressions. In a way, I couldn't even counter what Evelyn said. She indeed could claim to be my ex-girlfriend. Cher was, indeed, my creation, hence my daughter. But Evelyn phrased it to sound like I was a scumbag man who abandoned them!

And so, when Cher saw that I tacitly admitted to this, she fainted once again despite having just woken up...

"Don't look at me like this! I'm truly not a scumbag, I'm still a virgin—er—the hell, whatever! Evelyn, it's all your fault!"

After the chaos calmed down, our "family" was now complete, with a father, mother, and daughter...

"We aren't a family at all!"

Alright then, let's leave this matter aside. Although my subordinates and "granddaughter" were looking at me more and more strangely, we should at least first take care of the main issue at hand.

"We might even go to war. Be serious—be a little more serious! Stop laughing! I'm talking to you, Glina! If you dare to keep laughing... Glina, come here. Evelyn here is your great-grandmother, and Miss Cher is your grandmother. You should at least greet them."

Alright then, now everyone was feeling uncomfortable. I nodded in satisfaction upon seeing how Glina had an expression as if her mouth was filled with the food she hated most.

"Hmph! You want to compare with me in shamelessness? Even I'm afraid of how shameless I can be."

"Grandma, you owe me seventeen years of spending money. Also, please pay up what grandfather owes me."

Alright, as expected of my "granddaughter." She could change to be shameless so quickly. But the pitiful Cher just happened to choose this time to wake up. The moment she heard herself being called grandma, she fainted yet again.

Looking at the chaos before me, I knew it would be impossible to deal with the main issue before explaining myself. My subordinates were just far too much to deal with.

"Isn't this all your fault? You dare to talk about others!? You're the root of all evil, the source of all sins!"

The silly cat's retort was so logical I had no idea how to counter her!

"This is Evelyn. Previously, she died, and I created the oldest sister of the Seven Original Sins, 'Lust' Cher, in order to revive her. Yep, that's who Evelyn is. From a certain standpoint, they are indeed mother and daughter. But, the mother is actually Cher, and, in a way, Cher is indeed my daughter... Hey—hey—hey, Cher, could you at least finish listening to me speak before fainting? How many times do I need to tell this? Isn't the author tired of using the same joke of making you faint?"

I had hesitated over whether or not to tell everyone about the messy affairs of the past. But one issue made me decide to publicize everything.

"...At the very least, I can't make Cher into an illegitimate daughter! She'll be bullied by everyone else in school!"

"That's not the issue at hand here at all! Can't you be at least a little more normal!?"

The silly cat was becoming a veteran retorter. Her ability to instantly retort at anything and everything was unparalleled.

"Isn't this all because of you!"

Cough—cough—getting back on topic, my subordinates had seen plenty about how unreliable I was. Omar, who wasn't here right

now, was likely the only one who would have trouble accepting the appearance of the real oldest sibling among the Seven Original Sins. Everyone else soon accepted Cher as Lust. Glina was especially quick to accept all this, as she soon started tugging on Cher and asking for "grandma to give her spending money" once again. This time, Cher managed to stop herself from fainting. It was just that her expression seemed like she wanted to devour me.

Let us stop discussing family affairs for now. The important issue was still how the Bardi royalty would respond. This was doubtlessly the most frustrating issue, and it just so happened to be that we handed over the right to be proactive—we could only passively respond.

That's right. Whether we were in the right or wrong was meaningless. The right to be proactive was the critical part. Originally, we were the ones invited here to help them, which meant that everything could be decided by us. But now this incident put us under great pressure. At the very least, the Mage Country would be under significant pressure, so perhaps my role as ambassador would be terminated.

Personally, I didn't really care if I was the ambassador or not. However, if I lost the Mage Country's support right now, it would make many things far more difficult for me.

"...Orloss's intentions? How would I know? I only came here to play with Cher. Fine, fine, don't look at me like that. I indeed know some rather boring things. Let's change places to talk."

Unfortunately, I was helpless about how Copper Dragons were so unreliable. It was always impossible to know when a Copper Dragon was being serious and when they were joking around.

"Why didn't the serious Bronze Dragon or the easy-to-talk-to Silver Dragon come out?"

"Fourth Sister? She has to control Fifth and Sixth Sisters in order to stop them from rampaging. As for Second Sister, it would

probably cause a huge commotion if she came out."

I thought about it for a moment. The three-headed dragon would likely be impossible to conceal if she came out. As for the Bronze Dragon Fourth Sister, she seemed quite serious and normal. However, Fifth and Sixth Sister Evelyns were a Red and Blue Dragon respectively, both the type to stir up trouble.

Meanwhile, the example of the Evelyns once again proved that the physical body would influence one's personality.

We arrived at a much quieter room: the narrow cockpit, where there was only me, Cher, and Evelyn, the ones most involved. Evelyn's first sentence rather confused me.

"Actually, Little Orloss is quite grateful to you."

I paused in surprise for a moment, but Evelyn continued with her explanation. Although I was now a wanted criminal in the Bardi Empire, I was actually this country's savior.

"If it wasn't for your arrival, the undead would still be suppressing Bardi."

This was indeed the case. If it wasn't for me unveiling the undead's scheme, perhaps the capital would be secretly ruled over by Undead Emperor Aso even now. Still, I was somewhat astonished at the situation.

"The dragons simply sat back and observed the worsening situation?"

"The undead had hostages."

"Hostages? The dragons would care about such a thing?"

"Of course they'll care if the hostages are all the citizens of Bardi."

"Kasolan's Tears?"

Soon, I recalled the undead catalyst ingredient that all the Bardi citizens possessed in significant amounts within their bodies. This was evidently the work of the undead.

"You knew already, as expected... There's a special potion where Kasolan's Tears are the catalyst. As long as the Bardi citizens smell a certain fragrance, they'll mutate into a new Undead Calamity. The rest will be quite fun to deal with."

There was no need for me to mention what an Undead Calamity was. A small one would be no different from a magic world's version of Resident Evil and could be taken care of by some sudden heroes, giving people the stage to become stronger. But a larger scale Undead Calamity would be all the living becoming the undead, with everyone becoming ghouls, zombies, and skeletons.

As a professional undead mage, I was able to assess this objectively. In a way, Undead Calamities were quite similar to plagues. How much damage an Undead Calamity would cause in the end largely depended on what time it was discovered and how large of a scale it was. If it started out on the scale of a city, then just burning down the entire city would be enough.

But if the city in question was a major city with a population of several hundred thousand, then at minimum several million people would end up dying. And if an Undead Calamity started from an entire mega empire with the entire population of several hundred million becoming undead, then... most likely, the entire world would die off together.

This was no simple numeric equation. This was just probability to the point of despair. As long as the base number was high enough, high level undead would be born among the low level undead. The rate of high level undead being born compared to low level undead was approximately one to one thousand.

And as long as there were enough high level undead, Undead Thanes and Undead Lords would naturally be born as well. This rate was approximately at one to ten thousand. And as long as there was a sufficient number of Undead Lords... Undead Emperors would naturally be born. But since there were too few examples of Undead Emperors, the odds were impossible to

calculate. As for whether or not something more ridiculous would happen, all that was needed would be to calculate with a sufficiently large number of experimental subjects.

Once high-level undead and Undead Lords reached a certain number, the newly born Undead Calamity would no longer simply spread itself instinctively. Instead, the Undead Calamity would organize itself into an undead army and begin invasions, further spreading the influence of the Undead Calamity.

Fortunately, even up until today, the largest Undead Calamity in history had never reached the landmark number of one hundred million. But if the Tark Republic undead truly achieved this, perhaps history itself would be rewritten... However, I felt that even if they brought out such a ridiculously large number of undead, the world still wouldn't be destroyed. That was because it would definitely break all the Gods' taboos, so the undead would first need to face all the True Gods personally descending. Unless the undead had several hundred Undead Emperors, they wouldn't be able to win against the combined force of the True Gods.

"So Bardi now dares to turn on the undead?"

"Isn't it all thanks to the fact that you forced Aso to his death?"

"Aso?"

"Yeah, as he was the overall commander of the undead invasion. He was also the inventor of this new way of spreading the Undead Calamity with Kasolan's Tears as the catalyst. After he died, there was no successor who inherited his knowledge. That key to open the door to a new Undead Calamity has now been lost, so Bardi naturally has the courage to go against the undead."

I instantly paused here and hesitated before finally telling her.

"What if I tell you that I possess Aso's remaining knowledge, including how to create that poison gas which will turn the Bardi citizens into undead? What will Bardi do then?"

Chapter 382: Venomous Snake in the Treasure Vault

Although the people in the tiny cockpit appeared to be discussing major issues that could shake multiple nations, they were speaking casually, as if they didn't feel they were discussing anything important.

"Bardi... Orloss means you should hand over the assassins and treat this as a case of a personal grudge. Of course, the Mage Country should also sign a formal apology and make reparations on the surface... Yeah, I know you won't agree. At the very least, you should hand over the assassins. They're just a few Dark Elves. Otherwise Orloss won't be able to explain it to his citizens."

Evelyn didn't mince her words in the least. Who knew if it was because Copper Dragons naturally loathed Dark Elves or if it was her who didn't like my Dark Elves?

"If you truly understand me, then you should know that this is absolutely impossible. I only listen to softball methods; I won't accept anyone playing hardball with me... Fine then—actually, neither method works on me. You can call me overly protective or unreasonable, but I have zero intentions of handing anyone over."

All that happened was that my Dark Elves killed an evil criminal. I didn't feel that they did anything wrong. And since my subordinates didn't do anything wrong, as their boss, how could I possibly retreat and compromise? So what if a mega empire was pressuring me? They wanted me to hand the Dark Elves over? Never.

"Tsk! As stubborn as in my memories. I suppose it's to be expected. If you were someone soft who gave up easily, you wouldn't have fought against the entire Bardi Empire by yourself back then. And, the Eve—the Cher from that year wouldn't have fallen in love with you."

She whispered the last part in a tiny voice, but I still managed to hear her clearly. However, I preferred to pretend that I didn't, as I truly did not want to know the events of the past.

"Aren't you curious?"

"...I would be lying if I said I wasn't, but considering the troubles I'll meet after I remember, it'd be for the best for me to not know. Or is there something I absolutely must be know?"

I smiled as I said that, but Evelyn grit her teeth in anger.

"...An even slyer smile than what's in my memories. You wicked deceiver of emotions!"

Alright then, I didn't know whether I should laugh or cry. It seemed I accidentally stepped on some landmine.

However, it was fortunate that we represented the negotiation between two major factions. Cher, especially, simply watched the two of us, setting all personal issues aside. For the time being, at least.

Once we finished our discussion, Evelyn got up and said goodbye. She took Cher along with her, saying that she wanted to "Have a long evening talk with Cher to deepen our mother-daughter relationship." However, I felt that Evelyn intended to tell Cher about the entire messy relationship from back in the year.

I considered the fact that I needed to cure Cher, so I would also need her cooperation. Rather than me spending lots of effort to obtain her trust, it would be much easier to have Evelyn explain everything to her. I didn't stop the two of them from leaving together.

"Sigh, this relationship is impossible to understand with how messy it is. Forget it. Let's let things play out naturally."

"You're just avoiding the problem."

"You're so right that I don't even know how to counter you, silly

cat."

The more I thought about my personal affairs, the messier I felt things were. I decided instead to concentrate on the main task at hand.

"Aso... I truly underestimated you."

From a certain standpoint, Aso was an incredible individual.

There was no need to go into any more detail about his numerous past accomplishments. None of us were that young, at the age where we needed to brag about our achievements. So-called "past glory" to people as old as us would typically be nothing more than burdens and frustrations. He had personally led and coordinated all the invasion efforts by himself and had left several hidden killer chess pieces, such as the potential Bardi "Undead Plague" or the Salo's Crystal "nuclear bomb" aimed at the Truth Symposium—this was best evidence of his amazingness.

At the very least, if I were in his position, there was no guarantee I would do any better.

Perhaps the only part where he was lacking was in luck.

In the game's history, Aso had successfully led the undead invasion, but he met with the problem of two robbers reaching their hands into the same pocket. He just happened to run into the revived Titan Giants—he could only end up fighting against them.

Yet in this version of the world, once Aso discovered that his scheme was exposed and that the few Dimensional Doors he opened might be closed by us, endangering the Tark Republic's plan to return, he unhesitatingly sacrificed himself. All in the hope that the Tark Republic would be able to inevitably return.

The flip side of the coin was that he had led the entire undead invasion by himself. While he had great authority, he had been far too important to the Tark Republic.

As a typical Undead Emperor, he lacked trust in both his

subordinates and fellow Undead Emperors. The end result was that after his death, the secrets that only he knew were lost. His killer traps didn't have anyone to activate them.

Still, Aso was evidently unwilling to die off just like this and take all his knowledge to the grave. This great scheme he had been planning for several centuries would be ruined just like this.

And so Aso had handed over the keys to his knowledge to the only other Undead Emperor present at the time—me. But he didn't tell me much. Obviously, he didn't trust me, and it could even be said that he had a grudge against me.

However, a nuclear bomb with a lost activation code would be nothing more than a hunk of metal. As long as the activation code existed, it would forever be a threat. That's why, as long as he handed over the activation code, he wouldn't lose out in the end.

Since I now knew about the lock, finding the right key on the keychain was simply a matter of time.

"...A potion created out of thirteen common ingredients. Only a miniscule amount of this potion needs to be dispersed on the air, and it will begin the mutation of the bloodlines all Bardi citizens who inhale this fragrance. And this mutation will be impossible to stop once it begins."

This was clearly important. However, it wasn't locked together with other top-level secrets in the deepest portion of Aso's memories. Instead, Aso put this potion's recipe together with all his other alchemic knowledge. It was labeled as "Aso's Gift," and the explanation beneath it was simply a vague description titled "Has the effect of strengthening certain undead magic spells."

Right now, I could only be thankful that I had recently been quite busy, and that I wasn't very interested in alchemy and potion-making. Otherwise, if I had been curious enough to casually create one of these potions to test its effects, perhaps I would already be in the top ten of the Calamity Rankings.

For an ordinary mage, new knowledge and secrets were what they lived for. If an alchemist received this knowledge, where Aso proudly labeled his own unique recipe with his name, they would definitely try crafting this potion immediately, which would have caused a tremendous incident.

Aso was quite generous. Apart from this "little gift," his other gifts were all his accumulated experience and knowledge. But Undead Emperors were Undead Emperors. If one was numbed by his so-called generosity and tricked into believing that this entire treasure vault was safe, then this one tiny little gift would give you a proper education on what an Undead Calamity was.

Evelyn had arrived quite casually, but she left very carefully. If that bottle of the potion I made let even a little tiny droplet out, the end result would be catastrophic.

Of course, I wasn't crazy enough to play around with an Undead Calamity. But the greatest threat of nuclear weapons from my original world wasn't the fact that they were destructive. Nuclear weapons would be enough of a threat on their own simply by letting your enemies know that you possessed a "large-scale AOE weapon" and that "you were crazy enough to use it." As for the latter, my reputation as Yongye "backed me up." Nobody would likely doubt my courage in being willing to use such a weapon. Perhaps in some people's eyes I could be considered to be a maniac more dangerous than even Aso. As for the former, seeing was believing, so I just finished preparing a tiny, weak version of Aso's potion.

Evelyn took along with her a potion bottle containing only three or four droplets. If she released it in a sealed room, it would likely be able to create several hundred undead. I didn't care what the Bardi royalty would do with this tiny amount of potion after receiving it; for all I cared, they could throw it away or experiment with some death row criminals.

What the Bardi royalty intended to do to deal with this incident

no longer mattered.

Once the Bardi royalty finished experimenting with this little potion I sent them, I was confident that unless Orloss was an idiot, he would know what to do. Now that I had some good cards up my sleeve, I was finally able to relax.

I exited the cockpit to find the Dark Elves still kneeling in the airship's room. Diana had an expression of humble resolution and sincerity, appearing as if she was prepared to face any consequences, and Yawen had a regretful expression with dried tear streaks on her face. However, Victoria had an unhappy expression as she kneeled there. Her legs had gone numb long ago. If it wasn't for her older sister Diana watching over her, she would have long ran off.

Actually, she was indeed not to blame. She had simply helped out and hadn't personally acted throughout this whole incident, but she was still dragged into it... and if I recalled correctly, she was the one with the lowest luck stat.

I nodded in satisfaction at this situation. At the very least, Diana and Yawen had rather sincere expressions of knowing they were in the wrong. This lesson had been a useful one.

"You can get up now. I've already dealt with the situation. There shouldn't be a problem anymore. In a way, this is my fault as well. In the future, the work guide for all Judgementors will be modified with an additional rule: Judgementors cannot use the Anti-Crime Slash as the first attack in areas out of their jurisdiction."

Diana and Yawen didn't get up and quietly remained kneeling while Victoria crawled away as if she was escaping for her life... yep, that was the best evidence that her legs had gone numb from kneeling.

"No, this isn't Milord's fault. I was too rash."

Yawen was quite regretful and emotional as she blamed herself. I

simply shook my head and didn't say anything. It would be good for her to be regretful. At the very least, perhaps this tomboy would be more cautious and think things through more before taking action in the future.

Since my other subordinates were busying themselves with their own affairs, this room should have had only the few Dark Elves kneeling in punishment. But there was also a somewhat familiar little girl: the half human and Dark Elf hybrid girl who that male Dark Elf had been defending with his life.

There were bandages wrapped on her body. She was looking teary-eyed at the two Dark Elves kneeling in front of me, but when she noticed my presence, she glared at me in an unfriendly fashion.

When I saw how her round ears kept twitching, I became rather curious, and just as I reached my hands out to her...

"Alright, someone explain to me what's going on. Also, introduce this naughty child to me and then get her off."

I could only helplessly lift my hand and point at this Half Elf who was biting down on my hand, not letting go and muttering "damned human" all at the same time. Once again, I confirmed that I had nothing to talk about with any naughty child. Next time, I wouldn't reach my hand out to an untamed pet... wait a moment, something seemed wrong here. Forget it, let's not worry about it.

"Ria, quickly let go!"

Once the naughty child finally opened her mouth and let go of me, I rubbed the teeth marks on my hand in pain. But soon I learned from them about everything that had happened.

"The Gray Guardians? This is the first time I'm hearing of them."

"Well, they are the shame of Lorci and Dark Elf society. And they've always tried their best to hide themselves. If it wasn't for Beck who adamantly insisted on living in Ria's mother's home, this

incident wouldn't have happened. Now he's probably changed his mind."

Dark Elf society was no heaven. And not every Dark Elf was able to accept their cruel and heartless society. Plenty of traitors to Dark Elf society escaped every year. Apart from the Gray Elves who received the Moonlight Goddess's protection, the Gray Guardians was another organization consisting of a small portion of escaped Dark Elves.

Unlike the Gray Elves, who had sworn to fight Lorci to the bitter end, the Gray Guardians only wanted to live peaceful lives in hiding. However, they hadn't undergone the Moonlight Ritual, which meant they were physically no different from any other Dark Elf. This made it difficult for them to move about in broad daylight on the surface. Not only that, they still had the typical Dark Elf way of thinking and didn't trust their gray-skinned "relatives." These Gray Guardian Dark Elves felt that even if the Gray Elves didn't have some hidden scheme, they would at least view the Gray Guardians as nothing more than expendable cannon fodder.

And so, with the assistance of a small portion of Gray Elves and the Moonlight Goddess, some of the escapees organized themselves into this "Gray Guardian" group, which was primarily focused on self-help. Their members typically lived in poor alleyways and pretended to be mud-covered farmers. But some of them would accept assistance from the Moonlight Goddess's church.

Beck was the name of that injured male Dark Elf. He was originally hiding out in a distant mountainous area of Bardi and had successfully married a human with a daughter coming out of their union. However, his wife had died ten years ago due to a disease, leaving two Half Elf daughters behind. It was precisely because his daughters had begged him to take them to see their deceased mother's hometown that she always talked about so nostalgically that he took the risk and brought his two daughters

to the capital.

That was why this had all started today. If it weren't for the fact that he had sent out a rescue signal in time, with Diana noticing the signal as she too was part of the Moonlight Goddess's church, perhaps he and his daughters would have been burned at the stake by now.

As I was still digesting all this information, that Beck, who was covered in injuries, struggled to walk over to me. He fell to his knees.

"I beg you, Milord! Please save my older daughter!"

Chapter 383: The Style is Wrong

I was calm when the Dark Elf Beck pleaded for my help. We were probably the only ones capable of helping him. To be honest, I was feeling a tad excited about it.

"I've finally, finally met with a proper plot! I, Roland Mist, finally have my chance to play a hero rescuing the damsel in distress and defeating the evil slavers! Could it be that the style of this story is changing? I can now walk the path of the harem protagonist?"

If everything was just as I presumed, Beck's oldest daughter was captured by some elf slaver. In a way, this was a cliché fantasy setting—it would typically be followed by defeating the slavers and then defeating the person behind the scenes. Perhaps I would even be able to obtain some new former slave servants who would have their loyalties to me set at the max. Although this was a boring and overused plot type, it was a just, proper one.

"No, this is obviously the wrong style for this story. I should think more into this."

What if she was deeply in love with some man? What if she decided to attempt to surpass all family and racial boundaries to reach for her love? That would be just like a Korean or Japanese television drama! Or what if she caught the eye of some forceful prince or prideful CEO? That would be a typical female-oriented romance novel. And if there was also infighting for royal authority after that, then it would become the recently popular medieval politics story... but I felt like the style taking a wrong turn.

"My oldest daughter is named Yolanda. She's sixty-seven years old..."

Alright then, a sixty-seven-year-old eldest daughter? It would be a little old for her to be the main character of a medieval politics drama. Could it be that she was having too much fun dancing outside, so she was captured by Bardi's security forces? Actually, I

heard that public dancing teams also have love-hate relationships and plenty of politicking and grudges, along with love rivalries and triangle relationships even for the elderly... Cough—cough—I should be a little more serious and listen to Beck's story.

Reality would forever be stranger than fiction. That was because reality didn't need to follow logic and reason. There were so many weirdos in the world, and using a normal person's way of thinking to guess at a weirdo's behavior would be nothing more than making yourself suffer. Even without ever meeting her, I was already certain that this Half Elf named Yolanda was a weirdo.

"You're saying that Yolanda, a Half Elf who's worth more than ten thousand gold coins on the market, actually went to join some prince's faction in hopes of getting rich? She doesn't know that her Dark Elf blood will make everyone suspect her? Perhaps they'll even sell her directly to the slave traders. Slave trading is legal in the Bardi Empire, and Dark Elf slaves are forever one of the highest priced, bestselling products. On average, they're sold for more than sixty thousand gold coins, and there's plenty of demand but little merchandise!"

After saying this out loud, all the Dark Elves present looked at me quite strangely. That Half Elf little girl took a huge step backwards and looked at me as if I were highly dangerous.

Alright then, I apparently accidentally exposed something... Fine—fine—I admit it: I was indeed moved by the thought in the past and considered buying a Dark Elf slave to "treat" myself. It wasn't because I had desires of a certain type; it was just that since I didn't have any maids by my side, something felt quite empty, and I was displeased at having to do everything myself.

Forget about not having any subordinates to help me outdoors. Whenever I finished eating, I would have to wash my own dishes. If my clothes got tattered, I would have to mend them myself. I even had to heat my own shower water. This was the daily life of a powerful individual like me who was trying to change the world.

What was so special about a hero or a legendary individual? Were heroes exempt from having to eat or wash dishes? Legendary individuals wouldn't have to sharpen their weapons or fix their clothing? ...I suddenly felt like I missed my previous life in jail. At the very least, back then I didn't have to worry every day about whether I would eat some black bread dipped in milk or drink some milk with black bread crumbs in it.

There was no helping it. It was impossible to always have extravagant feasts when outside. Milk and bread forever remained as the main staple foods in this world. But it just happened to be that I liked neither, which only made things worse for me.

Yep, I admit it—I was no resolute revolutionary who believed in no class systems, and I had been decayed by the sugarcoating of this feudal society... who says I'm a maid lover? I do love maids; what of it! Call me a major domain lord, and I'm proud of being a maid lover! At the very least, I pay them a salary!

As for why I was considering an elf maid, wasn't that simply because humans were too weak and had such short lifespans? I could use an elf for several hundred years—cough—"use" here only meant for maid work, so don't get any perverted thoughts.

What, you're saying I could use the silly cat? I had to prepare milk and eggs for her every day, and if I forgot even once, she would declare to everyone that I was a cat abuser. I was even beginning to suspect who was the master.

But I had to consider my personal image, especially with the Town Security elves who were treating me more and more like a saint every day. I never managed to realize this dream of mine, and this was true even if I happened to be in a country where slave trade was legal. Originally, I had thought that this was a proper plot, where I could defeat a slave trader and openly obtain a loyal elf maid. I was naturally disappointed when hearing that this story was so strange.

Of course, Beck didn't know any of this. He was simply feeling conflicted about his strange daughter.

"Yolanda felt like she could conceal her identity."

"In summary, she's addicted to knight stories, which is why she disguised herself and joined a certain prince's assassin team for which he was recruiting. If it weren't for the fact that she failed the servant girl examination, she would have become a servant girl, instead?"

The Dark Elf Beck felt quite helpless about his ridiculous oldest daughter. There were some things he found too awkward to tell Roland, such as how Yolanda used to be quite normal when she was in the mountains. But once she came to the Bardi capital, she became a useless person addicted to knight stories, and would refuse to work or even go outside. She would daydream at home about catching the eye of some forceful prince... and finally, when she finally went outside, it was to chase after her "true love."

In fact, when Beck had tried to stop her from leaving, she had actually said something along these lines, probably from having read too many stories about the girl's disguise being revealed:

"You're worried my disguise will be seen through? Nothing will happen! I'm the main character favored by the heavens. Just like in the stories, all danger will be transformed into opportunities. And if my identity is revealed, that's the time when I'll meet the prince who's destined to be my true love."

"Sigh—can't my daughter be a little more normal?"

"Sigh—I really want a maid."

Beck's sigh coincided with mine. Although the contents of the sighs were quite different, we synchronized in our frustrations, which helped improve my opinion of him.

As for me, although I didn't understand why Beck had such a complex expression, I pretty much felt like I understood Beck's

worries and helplessness. Naughty children were common to just about any family. And the current situation was indeed dangerous. No wonder Beck requested for me to save her.

Probably everyone in the Bardi capital had learned by now that Prince Mills had been assassinated by a Dark Elf. It would only be natural that they would search the entire city. If Yolanda was discovered to be a Dark Elf, she would instantly be in danger. And if Yolanda discovered that her father and younger sister were involved in the incident, she might do something as well. If her identity was exposed, that would be the end of her.

"This is the address she left me. It's probably impossible for me to enter the city now. Please give her a message—no—please take her out of the city, no matter if she's willing to leave or not. This city will only become more dangerous in the future, especially to Dark Elves like us."

This was simply a small matter I could do on the way, so why would I refuse?

"As expected of the romantic elves. Perhaps you'll soon have a quarter elf blood granddaughter."

Seeing how the atmosphere was so awkward, I cracked a joke as I accepted the paper with the address written down. Beck had a bitter smile and didn't say anything. However, the younger daughter Ria, who had just bit down on my hand and refused to let go, suddenly opened her mouth.

"Impossible! We sisters will never take a human as our husbands!"

I chuckled upon hearing this.

"Little one, don't hate all humans because of this incident. There are good humans and bad humans. There are evil bastards who want to kill you, but aren't there also people who will save you? At least, I'm a human. Well—cough—mostly."

If this little girl nodded in half understanding or simply countered with "all humans are evil," that would have been normal. However, she...

"Are you an idiot? What does this have to do with whether humans are good or evil?"

Ria rolled her eyes at me and looked as me as if I were an idiot. This greatly resembled the way Harloys would often look at me...

Only now did I recall that Half Elves were famous for being fake lolis. Their rate of growth was slow as they were elves, but their souls would mature only slightly slower than humans. A Half Elf who looked only like a young girl probably possessed an adult's knowledge and personality. Perhaps that sixty-seven-year-old elder daughter who was addicted to knight stories also had a physical appearance which wasn't yet an adult.

"Ordinary humans have such short lives, while our lives are so long. Such a romance is destined to be a tragedy from the very start. Why would I be foolish enough to start one?"

As she said this, Ria had an expression filled with anger as she glared at her father.

"Ever since Mother had a face filled with wrinkles as she stayed together with Father while he looked so young, I started feeling like this would be an incorrect choice. The day Mother passed away ten years ago, I swore I would never find a human to be my future partner. Only my ridiculous sister would be so foolish and naïve! When she comes back, I'll make sure to properly teach her a lesson!"

Her father Beck had an expression filled with helplessness and regret when faced with his younger daughter's anger. In his opinion, it was enough for him to have spent an entire human lifetime with the person he loved. But for his daughters, watching their human mother grow old and die of old age was difficult.

I suddenly thought of another question. However...

"Then you already have an adult mind. So why did you bite me like that?"

"I hate more than anyone else those who treat me like a little child, especially someone like you who's obviously an idiot."

"Idiot? Me?"

"I'm already sixty years old, and I'm about to achieve Gold as a master alchemist and master enchanter. I also know how to speak twelve languages. If it weren't for my unique circumstances, I would have been well known as a scholar long ago. You're obviously no more than twenty years old, so what could you possibly know, apart from receiving your high status due to your birthright? What else could you possibly be apart from a useless idiot who doesn't know anything at all?"

From a certain standpoint, Half Elves were indeed a species blessed by the heavens. Their growth rate was almost as fast as humans, yet they possessed the long lifespans of elves. As long as a Half Elf wasn't too lazy, they would reach the peak in a certain area. Yet perhaps it was also because Half Elves had talents surpassing both original species that they weren't particularly welcomed by either.

Since Half Elves typically had underdeveloped bodies, it was only natural that they wouldn't be able to succeed in physical combat job classes. As for learning academic topics, Half Elves had few channels available to them despite the fact that they would be outstanding at learning. Yet since she had achieved a master status at both alchemist and enchanter, this was the best evidence that Ria was both talented and hard working.

This was the first time I had ever been accused of being a rich, spoiled and useless brat. I was so angry that I just about laughed. However, immediately following after, I suddenly thought about some more details.

If this Ria truly possessed an adult mind and intelligence, why was she so foolish as to antagonize me in my home turf where I was obviously the one in charge? Starting a small conflict with me right now was obviously calculated in order to show off her own worth and make us value her. A master in two different fields who was about to reach Gold would be quite valuable. And a master like her who was unable to protect herself would only become a precious treasure to be fought over.

Perhaps Ria had analyzed the current situation and thought that it was possible she'd be sent out as the scapegoat assassin. Having someone take advantage of her talents would still be far better than being executed. Otherwise, she wouldn't have taken such a great risk in exposing her worth. When considering all this, her intelligence and decisiveness far surpassed her physical appearance of a young child.

"Harloys, she seems to be the same type as you, a seemingly pure fake loli who's actually black-bellied. Why can't I meet a silly, cute, and normal one?"

"Tsk!she's far from being anything like me. But she's indeed a nice seed. I intend to do a few little tests. If she passes, perhaps you'll have a new junior sister."

"Hah! I have plenty of senior and junior brothers and sisters. But how many of them are still alive? If you feel like playing at being a teacher again, then go ahead and play with the little girl."

I tossed the silly cat over to the little brat, causing Harloys to cartwheel in midair and shriek at unexpectedly being thrown. "Little brat, don't think too much into things as Bardi doesn't have the power to make me do anything. By the way, I'm already more than three hundred years old, and the silly cat in your hands is more than ten thousand years old." I didn't take another glance at the astonished Ria as I intended to go focus on my own matters.

Since I had already reached a preliminary agreement with the

"Bardi royalty," I no longer needed to hide out in this narrow ambush airship. I told everyone to make their own arrangements, and it was now time for me to return and check on the situation of those left behind at the embassy hotel.

Those left behind were all real "diplomats" that came with us from the Mage Country. It was a typical custom not to execute envoys from other countries even when at war, so them staying behind was also a way of testing Bardi's attitude.

Right when I left, someone came chasing after me.

"Clint—uh—Glina?"

"I want to go out for a while too. Such an incident occurred right when I arrived, but I haven't even had a chance to explore Bardi yet."

Compared to the past, although she was still wearing an eyepatch like an anime character, her complexion looked much better. She still appeared quite young, though, but her attire now seemed more feminine, soft, and cute. This wasn't only because I injected my blood into her and overcame her demon bloodline. This was also a tacit agreement between Karwenz and myself.

"We have two descendants, one for each of us. Whoever's descendant becomes more accomplished means which of us is the stronger one." Karwenz probably had such a way of thinking.

Let's forget about whether that chuunibyou way of thinking was right or not. At least, now that Glina no longer had to fear the summons of her demon bloodline, she could get a good night's sleep. And her personality matured quite a lot... but as I watched her jump into her Clint Armor with such practiced movements, swiftly opening up all the mechanisms to activate her armor, I immediately decided to retract my previous statement.

"Boss, Clint's current functions have been improved by more than five times. I've also installed a large ammunition storage pod,

so Clint's combat strength is more than three times greater. Give your orders so that we can have a blast."

A booming low male voice spoke through the armor as various lights lit up on Clint. Numerous explosives and cannons were brought out for maintenance while the machine gun under the arm automatically armed itself. Hearing this supposed young man's voice getting so excited over the prospect of battle, I once again confirmed the veracity of the rumors about the Sleuweir Queen, that Queen Glina had a split personality. The moment she put on her armor, her personality would automatically switch over.

I shook my head and decided not to think too much into this. I wasn't a chuunibyou like Karwenz, nor was I addicted to teaching others like Harloys was. Let's just let Glina become whatever she'll naturally become.

Still, I could pretty much understand why she would follow me. She probably didn't realize that there was still room for us to negotiate with Bardi. Seeing that I was going out, she probably thought there was the opportunity for her to join a fight.

I had no intentions of refusing her. It was a perfect opportunity for us to chat about the changes happening in our home. Although I had plenty of information on this topic, how could information compare to a firsthand account?

And, as I expected, Glina was depressed when she learned that I wasn't going out to fight a battle.

"My new weapon needs an opportunity to experiment in actual combat..."

But she became quite serious when discussing the Northlands' situation. After all, she had been queen for almost a year now. Unlike Reyne, who had numerous people supporting her, Glina could only mostly rely on herself.

"This year's situation won't be too terrible no matter how bad things are as long as our new agricultural product has an excellent harvest. Also, the barbarians seem to have discovered a new mithril mine in their holy mountain. It's just that their elders are adamant in maintaining tradition and forbidding any mining. But I feel that under your merchant association's persuasion of money, it's only a matter of time before they nod their heads and agree. Of course, I predict that what you want to know most is what people in the Northlands are saying and how the citizens are doing. I can only tell you that it's far better than expected. Right now, morale is high, and the citizens are pleased..."

The young girl kept talking about national affairs with her armor opened up, but she was simultaneously playing with all sorts of guns and explosives, taking them apart, putting them back together again, and making custom adjustments. She was the perfect example of a multitasker. As I sighed about how her personality was becoming stranger and stranger, I was also somewhat delighted. The Northlands was now our foundational base, so hearing that everything was going smoothly there was the best type of news.

From a certain standpoint, Glina was far more normal than her cousin Reyne. At least, when compared to Princess Reyne, who was becoming more and more infamous as a "living rubber-stamper," Queen Glina was becoming renowned as a wise ruler skilled at policymaking.

As a genius engineer, Glina also possessed a deep understanding of magical engineering. In fact, she personally invented magical engineering products that improved the Sleuweir citizens' lives. Plus, she was outstanding in both military and political affairs. Perhaps Karwenz's way of thinking wasn't wrong after all. Compared to Reyne who was becoming more and more someone who only relied on "brute force," Glina, who was talented in many fields, was the most appropriate successor for me.

Of course, this wasn't because I intended to retire despite being so "young." As I previously mentioned, choosing a successor for myself was necessary. There were no guarantees that I wouldn't suddenly be killed off by some True God passing by or meet with some assassin...

"Um, I suddenly feel like I jinxed myself."

"Haha! I feel like you are quite lucky... it's time to let them take a look at my new equipment."

There was only one street left until the embassy hotel, but people suddenly became a scarce sight on the streets. The people intentionally hiding in the shadows and trying to conceal their breathing were no doubt assassins.

"Hey, Glina, remember to leave at least two of them alive so we can question them."

Chapter 384: Magic Gunners

"Two under that tree."

I casually reported the location of two assassins, and moments later the Clint armor's machine guns lit up with flames—well, if one determined the difference between "gun" and "cannon" by caliber and power, then more accurately they could be called machine cannons.

Golden painted bullets shot out at a furious pace, while bright red flames were spat out by the cannons. Each bullet exploded on contact, which was followed by booms and pitiful screams.

The cannons soon started overheating and were forced to stop firing, but the Clint armor immediately produced a large amount of steam to cool them down. The tall tree, which had been the target, was reduced to a tree stump and shredded wood.

As for the two unlucky individuals hiding in the tree, they were now nothing more than hornet nests. Perhaps it would technically be possible to put them back together again if one tried hard enough.

"Two underground."

This time, I casually stomped, turning the brick-laid ground harder than a frozen tundra. No matter how they got there, I could only hope that they could find a way out before they died of asphyxiation.

Noticing we had detected the assassins, someone made a sharp sound and a throng of black-clad individuals jumped out from rooftops, corners, trash bins, sewers and all sorts of abnormal locations. Just as I was about to pull out my sword, I saw that the Clint armor was flashing with bright lights and emitting smoke from its joints. I wisely decided to take a step back.

"Bullet storm!"

The Clint mecha's knees, chest, and shoulders opened up, giving rise to countless tiny holes. Numerous flames shot out with beautiful fireworks and deadly explosions. Individual after individual was sent flying, like meteors in the night sky; in fact, the entire night sky was illuminated. Together with this were the wails, screams and howls of pain.

Glina could appear in public as herself now, so no longer did the Clint armor have to be disguised as an ordinary male human. Glina had modified her favorite ride—perhaps it would be better to say that she deemed all parts not related to combat as unnecessary and removed them.

Perhaps she heard something ridiculous from someone, such as "cannons are justice." Or perhaps she simply loved explosions. The result was that her new Clint armor had hundreds of cannons installed... fine then, apart from the most basic function to walk, this Clint armor was basically a moving artillery. The critical difference between this Clint armor and its former version was that this new Clint mecha was a product of magical engineering.

A breakthrough in a single critical technology would improve the entire industry, and this was typically true no matter the world.

In this world, firearms were improved or modified versions of dwarven rifles. No matter how much one improved the parts, the foundational workings were still that of dwarven firearms. The ammunition would be created out of mined metals, a small explosion would be created in the gun's chamber and the force of the explosion would be used to shoot out a small metal bullet which would be used to kill or injure an enemy.

The scientific principles for how dwarven firearms worked was similar to how early flintlocks worked on Earth. Thanks to improvements in metallurgy—and hence working with magical metals—along with how alchemy constantly refined and improved explosions, a high-grade dwarven rifle was already quite powerful. It would be capable of threatening even a Silver-ranked warrior.

However, dwarven rifles lacked effectiveness against the more powerful individuals, forever making that its greatest weakness.

Of course, the average intelligence in this world wasn't any lower than my original world. To improve dwarven firearms' power, however, technology was insufficient, so instead the basic method of increasing the size of the dwarven firearms was chosen.

And so the enlarged versions became dwarven cannons, siege cannons, goblin cannons, titan cannons, and so on. They were all quite dangerous. If one dwarven rifle's power was insufficient to kill you, a goblin cannon, which was the amalgamation of one hundred dwarven rifles' power, would definitely be sufficient.

However, the overly large size of such weapons made them inconvenient to use. They were difficult to transport, meaning they could only be used to siege cities, defend cities, or as fixed artillery on ships. Their slow movement meant a low accuracy against moving targets, which was another big weakness. Not only that, dwarves and gnomes typically had unreliable products, making these cannons weapons used to defend cities only in the end. Even among the weapons used to defend cities, there were also heavy ballistae, ancient artifacts and mage towers, so cannons didn't at all stand out from the crowd.

In this era of metal weapons where flying troops and elite powerful individuals existed on the battlefield, cannons had been invented long ago but remained as a large-scale weapon which could only slay ordinary soldiers in "low-level battles." In fact, numerous military experts treated cannons as meaningless because elite squadrons and top-level individuals could already easily suppress ordinary soldiers. Killing ordinary soldiers with cannons wouldn't help anyone obtain concrete results in battle.

Once Olivia's Magic Box was invented, the magic sword wielding Four Elemental Swordcasters were introduced to the world. In truth, however, another new job class had been born together with them, but it didn't receive much attention: the Magic Gunners,

who wielded magical guns.

Their magical guns were actually creations in the same vein as Olivia's magic swords. This meant their guns were foundationally different from dwarven rifles—their magic guns and bullets were the products of magical engineering! They could be strengthened with both magic and engineering technology from this world.

The attack power was insufficient? Why don't you try my flame bullets, which also contain self-destructive properties that'll shoot out even more cluster bullets?

Speed not fast enough? Wind element enchanted magic bullets could fly faster than birds and were auto-enchanted with haste spells. And if you still felt like those weren't swift enough, there were also thunder element magic bullets. It was just that you would have to make anti-thunder precautions before using them.

The target had super defense? Have a taste of my earth element armor-piercing bullets. These bullets were as hard as diamonds, you know.

You needed to restrict the target's actions and use support abilities? Take a look at my water mist magic bullets. I also had ice bullets capable of freezing the ground and spiderweb bullets capable of shooting sticky strands to restrain an opponent.

All the job classes created by Olivia's Magic Box relied on outside items. While the Swordcasters focused on researching sword seals and magic swords, the Magic Gunners focused on their magic guns and magic bullets.

Gun barrels enchanted with the wind element increased the bullets' speed. Gun muzzles were enchanted to improve the bullets' armor-piercing properties. Gun scopes were enchanted with eagle eye magic for super accurate aiming. All sorts of extra parts were invented. While this greatly increased the mana usage of the magic guns, these gun parts also greatly improved the Magic Gunners' strength.

These basic equipment modifications were only the beginning. Together with the weapons' improvement all sorts of new combat techniques were invented. Magic Gunners who were experts in the wind element not only became mega long-range sniping experts but could also control their magic bullets to dance freely in the air like a living snake. Meanwhile, top-level fire element expert Magic Gunners would focus entirely on the attack power of their bullets. Yep, Glina was a classic example of this.

Last year, when Reyne was still hesitatingly trying out the Four Elemental Swordcaster job class, the young queen in Antuen too came into contact with Olivia's Magic Box for the first time. And Glina instantly joined the Magic Gunner job class without a moment's hesitation.

Unlike Reyne who often slacked off, Glina was a mega first-rate genius engineer who had succeeded in inventing the Clint armor and was skilled at creating explosives, all while in the Underground. When Glina came into contact with this technology which would pioneer a new generation, her sharp senses told her to not hesitate one bit and embrace it full-heartedly.

Unlike Timlad, who forever focused on theories first and foremost when inventing, Glina focused from the very start on whatever could be used in practical combat. She was most skilled in inventing all sorts of "practical" weapons, such as this "machine cannon" of hers.

If her machine cannon worked only on the scientific principles of typical firearms, reloading would be required after one explosion, and multiple explosions would be no different from suicide. However, wind and fire magic were used together to power this weapon. As long as the mechanism's parts' quality was high enough, continuous firing would be easy to accomplish. Not only that, magic could be used to strengthen the cannon and increase the final power of the explosions.

Yet this was only the beginning.

The true identity of the Clint armor was Glina's personalized version of an "Olivia Magic Gun." The bullets she shot out were filled with fire magic. As Glina had been born with a Demon Bloodline which possessed a natural affinity for fire, Glina herself had an abundance of fire magic mana.

Just like how the few who did have magic talent typically ended up being more successful as Four Elemental Swordcasters, Glina, who originally possessed magic talent, displayed the best possible situation for the future development of Magic Gunners. In fact, she was perhaps the one who had walked farthest down the Magic Gunner path.

Boom!

After tossing out an explosive shell, an entire house was transformed into rubble while tiny stone shards flew everywhere. Tiny mushroom clouds could also be seen raising into the sky in all directions.

This "Stimulation Bullet" wasn't special because of the cannon itself—the bullet was the special part. An Olivia's Magic Box would be installed with a sufficient amount of explosive magic spell arrays and flammable objects. Once all the magic stored within it was activated, the magic would become a catalyst for a self-destruction. Foundationally, this power would be no different to a low-ranked mage using up all their magic for a suicide explosion.

And so numerous mushroom clouds continued to rise up into the air. As the howls continued and the ground shook, the entire street was transformed into rubble.

Of course, using Olivia's Magic Boxes like this meant they would be damaged beyond repair. When taking into consideration how expensive they were to create, the only person in the Northlands who would dare to fight like this—well, the only person who was rich enough to use such expensive ammunition—was only Glina, who was a queen.

People said that the new job classes of Magic Gunners and Four Elemental Swordcasters were useless? They simply hadn't met someone who was rich enough to become a pay-to-win player.

"I'm rich so I can do whatever I want! I'll kill you with money!" This was probably the true reason why Glina had been able to become the strongest Magic Gunner of all, as this job class was one where research proved expensive.

In this field of magic engineering, the advantage of being rich was evident. Just one "Fire Element Stimulation Bullet" would have astonishing power. Even a Gold-ranked warrior would either meet instant death or become seriously injured. The Clint armor, which could continuously attack at such power, was already the equivalent of a Legend rank in strength.

I didn't even need to act. I simply watched Glina single-handedly defeat all our enemies.

The skies were filled with her cannon fire. Anywhere she suspected of concealing assassins would be treated to a cannon shot, which would end up with the person and the cover being blown away together.

"Damn it! It overheated again."

But the next instant Glina jumped out of her armor, the armor she was most comfortable in. Judging from the black smoke being emitted from the cockpit, this new Clint armor evidently was still unable to perform a "Bullet storm" attack involving every cannon firing simultaneously. The mana circuits would eventually overheat and burn out the magical metal alloys that were truthfully quite old inventions. This Clint armor still needed improvements.

I shook my head at this. The job class of Magic Gunner still needed improving. The Clint armor's overly powerful attacks indeed increased its combat strength, but it also made it lose reliability and the ability to fight for long periods of time. Also, the

fact that it wasted so much money for a fight also needed improving.

"Huh?"

While Glina was busy cooling down her mecha armor, I unsheathed my sword.

Although all the assassins that could be seen had already exploded to death, my instinct informed me that danger still lurked in the shadows. The assassins who were truly the most powerful hadn't yet come out.

"Who could they be? Assassinating me at this time isn't a good idea. If I am killed off, war between the Mage Country and Bardi Empire will be unavoidable because I'm currently an ambassador. In that case, who would these assassins be? Mills's remaining supporters who can't stand the fact that who they supported ended up dead? A prince who wants to take revenge for his brother and earn some reputation by slaying me? Some dragon who's dissatisfied with me? Emperor Orloss who's gotten furious at me? Although I indeed acted quite ridiculously and even threatened him with activating an Undead Calamity if I died, I feel like this threat should be effective against the Bardi royalty. Emperor Orloss should be restraining all the factions under him. In that case, there's only one choice—the faction not under Emperor Orloss's control… the undead!"

Black knights, death knights, high-level lesser liches, liches, skeleton generals, undead nagas, high-level ghouls, and all sorts of high-level undead walked out from the shadows.

That's right. What appeared before me was a full undead military squadron: Aso's final remaining military squadron.

Aso's death made it so that everyone in the Bardi capital changed their attitude towards the undead—it changed from respect to one where everyone hunted the undead down. Still, the high-level undead had been living here for several decades, and Aso and his

direct subordinates could be described as incredibly sly. How could they possibly be foundationally eliminated so easily? Their remnants hid in the shadows and were waiting for a chance to viciously strike at the living.

In this critical time, if I was killed, the Bardi Empire and Mage Country's relationship would take a turn for the worst. War would be the likely result. The third party, the Tark Republic, naturally had the most to gain.

There weren't that many undead—less than twenty. However, their average strength was very high.

I took a glance and saw that the weakest undead was already at the Gold rank. There were even several Legend and Saint ranks. In fact, there were even three Myth-ranked Undead Lords...

"Oh my, is this a case of where the real culprit is only revealed at the end?"

Chapter 385: Three Myth Ranks

Did it sound foolish to attempt to assassinate an undying Undead Emperor? In this world, however, there was no such thing as truly undying.

Even the True Gods, who called themselves eternal, could perish. So-called immortal liches would naturally die if their phylacteries were crushed. "Undying" individuals were only undying because the correct method to kill them hadn't yet been discovered.

Killing an undying individual with the wrong method would force that individual into a temporary hibernation. For example, it would take liches and high-level Blood Tribe members about two or three years to recover their strength and come back for revenge.

Some things were common for all the undying. For instance, one would greatly weaken when they lose their physical body, making it impossible for them to run amok for a while.

As for me, the "Undying Roland," every time I died I'd require my physical body to mature again for more than twenty years. The last time wouldn't have been any different if I hadn't exchanged for a physical body through my System, but this type of information on me could be obtained through certain channels and wasn't exactly top secret.

For the undead, killing off the me who was in their way and forcing me into a weak state after resurrection would mean one less obstacle in their path. If it was done properly, it would even cause the Mage Country and Bardi Empire to start an all-out war with each other. This would be an amazing outcome for the undead.

For the various undead, being able to slay an Undead Emperor would be the greatest of honors. This would also greatly improve their reputations as it would be in the name of seeking revenge for Aso. Just the rewards they'd receive from the other Undead

Emperors would be more than enough to last them the rest of their lives.

As for me taking revenge after I regained my strength? If the undead invasion succeeded, I would have to enact my revenge against the entire Tark Republic. On the other hand, if they failed to assassinate me, there would be no revenge to worry about, either.

I had only figured out all these things afterwards. For those risking everything, "potential revenge in the future" was barely a threat. I had only shown off power at the Gold rank and had been walking around openly on the streets—this naturally attracted vicious predators.

"Heehee! I've never tasted the blood of an Undead Emperor. I bet you taste lovely."

With a pink ponytail, a cute, blushing round face, and a young child's attire, this little girl, who was sucking on a blood-red lollipop, would be a priceless treasure to a certain group of people.

She kept sneaking glances at me, blushing as if she were a little girl near delectable food. However, her frightening blood energy was proof this vampire archduchess was just pretending to be a little girl.

"Alexandra, you little bitch! Stop acting so pure! Still, I suppose I could give this handsome shota over to you when I'm done with him."

The one who spoke was a tall and bald old man with a face filled with scars. From his thick, black armor and the black flames upon it, he seemed to belong to a dark job class. Perhaps a magic knight.

"...Revenge."

The final figure who walked out was quite tall as he lightly waved around a black sickle. His black cape instantly transformed into a shadow, vanishing together with him.

Along with these three Myth-ranked Undead Lords were plenty of subordinates. Aso had left all his main subordinates in the Bardi capital in order to control the situation, and they had stayed behind even after his sudden death. Now, they became my trouble.

No matter if it were their auras or their true power levels, these three Undead Lords, who appeared from nowhere, were no ordinary Myth-ranked undead. This was all the more so as they had been Aso's direct subordinates. Unfortunately for me, Aso had intentionally wiped all traces of their existence when handing his memories over, so I had no clue about them at all.

"Your Highness Roland, if you're willing to give us our former master's potion, not only will we not attack you, but we'll even be willing to serve you."

The vampire archduchess was all smiles as she spoke. From this sentence alone, it could be deduced that the Bardi Empire still had a spy in their highest ranks either among the dragons or the royalty.

"Little youngster, no matter how powerful you were in the past, you're no better than a Gold-ranked novice at the moment. How long do you think you can last against the combined attacks of the three of us?"

They were playing good-cop, bad-cop. These Undead Lords were obviously very intelligent and understood human emotions quite well. While this wouldn't be rare for leaders of other species, they were high-level undead... Well, even though they wouldn't admit it, it was a fact that the higher the level of an undead, the more "humanlike" they'd become.

"Snake Archduchess Alexandra, Agfan the Famine, and Death Sickle Harris. They're all powerful veterans and aren't easy to deal with. Reinforcements will be here for you soon, Roland. Do your best to solidify your defense and wait for help."

The silly cat jumped out of a shadow. As my magical pet, she had

the ability to come to my side at any moment. What surprised me was that she actually recognized these three Undead Lords. But then I thought about how she had acted ridiculously and had stirred up trouble everywhere for the sake of her revenge. Naturally, she would have contacted the Undead Planes in an effort to destroy the world. I understood how it was.

Since someone as prideful as her said they were difficult to deal with, this would evidently be a difficult battle.

"What information do you have?"

"It's rumored that the Snake Archduchess wasn't a human to begin with. Instead, it's said that she's actually a Blood Tribe member from the immemorial generation with Winged Snake blood in her. Don't be fooled by her weak little girl physical appearance that seems so easy to push over. Actually, it's said that she doesn't have any bones in her body and she can flex her joints in any direction at will. She's incredibly skilled at melee combat and has her own special techniques."

"As for that baldie who looks so ferocious in armor, he's actually a curse magic expert. His most vicious spell, Curse of Fatigue, will make you lose stamina at ten times the normal rate. It's quite difficult to deal with. Long battles of attrition are what he specializes in. But the fact that he's a curse magic expert means that the curses will also backlash and corrode his physical body. It's impossible for his physical fighting capabilities to be strong. Try to get close to him and kill him off."

"I'm not too certain about Death Sickle's specific abilities. I only know that he's a famously powerful assassin. However, his weapon is quite well known. It's called 'Singh's Call' and possesses the three negative effects of weakening, poison, and instant death, so don't let it touch you. Oh, I also remember that Singh's Call is supposed to be a curved sword. That sickle of his is probably just to distract your attention. He's wearing really long sleeves, so be careful of him suddenly pulling out his real weapon from his sleeves."

It was such a great advantage to have someone as experienced as Harloys on my side. Of course, even without this information I still might not lose, but I'd definitely have a harder time. And my enemies were evidently skilled strategists. The original tactical objective I had set for myself until Harloys told me all this was to forcefully kill the Snake Archduchess as quickly as possible—evidently a foolish idea.

"They've already surrounded me?"

The three Myth-ranked undead were no idiots who would waste time talking. While it seemed like they were making me an offer, they never intended to negotiate in the first place. As long as I let down my guard by even the slightest and believed that I could walk away today without a fight, lightning quick attacks would have instantly come at me. Even if I didn't let down my guard, they had nothing to lose as the other undead surrounding me could finish their formation.

Kaching!

From under the Clint armor's helmet came a green light. Glina had restored her Clint armor to fighting status. And this was the perfect lure for the tense undead to lose their patience.

"Use your bullet storm attack!"

Glina didn't know why I made this request, but she didn't hesitate to do as I asked.

"All remaining bullets, bullet storm!"

But the next instant, everything around her blackened before turning white. The next thing she saw was an icy river.

I casually tossed Glina into my Frigidwinter Earth. In front of powerful opponents like these, Glina was still too inexperienced and would only drag me down.

As I had expected, a sickle appeared right where the Clint armor had originally been standing. Unfortunately, Harris had been just a

little late.

The furious Harris glared at me before he returned into the shadows.

The undead weren't having a fun time, either. The Clint armor's instant explosive attack power was particularly suited for clearing large crowds. Numerous undead had instantly been killed off. An unlucky lich, who had been casting a spell, was unable to dodge the bullets. He shattered into tiny bones that flew everywhere.

"Fatigue!"

The baldie laughed viciously in a disgusting manner. However, the black light on his arm was what was truly dangerous.

A sudden sense of fatigue made my head feel dizzy. I stopped in my tracks at this and almost dropped the Ice Calamity sword I was holding. The very next instant, however, the tiny vampire girl had arrived in front of me, and the gigantic battle hammer in her hands, which was even larger than she was, crashed into me.

Crack!

That wasn't the sound of my bones cracking. Instead, her enchanted metal hammer had broken into pieces. Her hammer would have been more than sufficient to break through any normal castle wall, but it was meaningless against my heavy dragon armor.

Alexandra had zero intentions of retreating even though I had suddenly donned my heavy armor. She let go of her broken hammer and filled her tiny hands with blood energy, and then began attacking me with her bare fists!

This time, her fists landed heavy blows directly against me, and I even felt a faint sensation of pain where I was hit.

"The martial arts technique of hitting a cow through a mountain... such penetrative force! A Blood Tribe member actually chose to be a member of the monk job class!?"

It wasn't that I particularly discriminated against Blood Tribe members becoming monks. It was just that the monk job class required one to use ascetic techniques bordering on masochism in order to develop one's potential to the fullest. And, foundationally, it required the power of life force.

Monks were capable of using the life force known as "Qi." They'd fill their fists with Qi and would then be able to use supernatural seeming martial arts techniques through this type of cultivation. High-level monks would be capable of healing their own injuries after mastering control of their life force. How was it possible for a Blood Tribe to master the power of life force?

But the indisputable truth was right before me, so I had to believe it. She was evidently a master of the monks' penetrative techniques used to fight against heavily armored targets. The places where she struck me started hurting more and more. My injuries even began to bleed. It was evident that she had covered her fists with the Blood Tribe's special blood energy.

It would have been fine if she was just a monk. It wasn't like I'd never defeated high-level monks before. However, she was incredibly agile and flexible—as Harloys had told me, she was basically boneless. Her punches and kicks would come at me from inconceivable angles. In just pure melee fighting techniques, she had far surpassed any so-called fisticuffs grandmaster. Plus, the "Curse of Fatigue" on me lowered my physical abilities and reaction speed. The end result was that I received a beating as if I were a sandbag.

The Snake Archduchess attacked like the wind and retreated as swiftly as lightning. She danced around me as if she were a snake tangled around my body, constantly throwing full-force heavy punches. Meanwhile, my sword hadn't landed a single blow. With each sword swing, I found that I had aimed in the wrong direction and that she was already behind me.

"In typical transmigrator stories, isn't it always about the

reincarnated protagonist using Chinese martial arts to beat up some armored knights? Why is it that in my story, the transmigrated knight is being beaten up by martial arts? Isn't something wrong with this story... Damn you! You still use such underhanded techniques even though things are like this already?"

I directly sent out my magic to transform this entire area into an ice river. Alexandra was unaffected, however, but when her shirt opened up slightly as she dashed around me, I noticed metallic jewelry of various colors on her body.

Low-level ice resistance rings, anti-ice and snow defense equipment, and all sorts of accessories. At a rough estimate, I saw more than thirty or forty anti-ice magic defensive equipment on her body. Even her little tongue was pierced with several magic anti-ice rings. I had no idea how she was capable of ensuring that all this equipment took effect simultaneously. Yet it was a fact that she must have done so—she was nigh immune to ice magic. These Undead Lords had done plenty of preparations before they fought against me.

This was all still bearable, but the scariest part was still her astonishing punching power. With each and every punch, the place I was struck would bruise and then start bleeding through the bruise. Unless I was able to deal with this issue, I would sooner or later end up bleeding to death.

"...This is probably her Concept."

The foundational difference between Saint-and Myth-ranked individuals was that those at Myth were capable of transforming their understanding of a Concept into something concrete and physical. A Myth rank would use that as their core fighting style, making them incredibly difficult to deal with. Even worse was that it would be very difficult to defend against or dispel their Concept's effects.

Most Myth-ranked individuals would integrate their Concepts

into their personal weapons. Alexandra, however, evidently didn't have the habit of using weapons. Her body was her best weapon, and every attack of hers applied her Blood Tribe's "bloodletting" ability. This type of monk was far too dangerous.

While Roland was fully on guard, dealing with his enemies, the three Myth-ranked Undead Lords were secretly having a tough time. They never expected Roland to be so difficult to deal with.

His impenetrable armor was shameless enough, and this wasn't in the information they had on him. It made the assassin Harris mostly useless—when he had attacked with his Singh's Call against Roland's armor, the Singh's Call curved sword had actually been slightly damaged. Unless Harris could land a blow on Roland's skin, his strongest attacks would be useless.

And that was how the top assassin under Aso could only helplessly stand by the side.

As for Agfan the Famine, he was having even more of a headache. He had already tossed out more than ten curses, including ones with the effects of instant death, idiocy, or aging. Yet the only one that took effect was his greatest specialty, the Curse of Fatigue, which incorporated his "Power of the Brink." Roland's ridiculously high resistance against curses made him wonder if Roland was the incarnation of a True God.

Meanwhile, the main physical fighter, the Snake Archduchess, wasn't having it easy either. Every one of her direct hits could kill a typical Myth-ranked warrior, yet she had already landed several hundred direct hits on Roland. Her hands had been damaged by the force of her blows to the point where she had already regenerated them several dozen times. But Roland didn't even appear injured.

"Even though the stupid baldie's Curse of Fatigue has clearly taken effect on him, he's still jumping around in such a lively manner. And his armor is even capable of reflecting ice damage. If

I hadn't brought a sufficient amount of anti-ice defensive equipment... as expected, all those who become Undead Emperors are monsters."

What worried Alexandra the most was Roland's frightening physical strength—he created gusts of wind every time he swung his sword. Just the wind pressure alone made it difficult to breathe, the best evidence of how physically strong he was.

"His physical strength must be greater than an Immemorial Dragon's."

Although she hadn't taken a single hit, she was dancing on a cliff. If even one sword swing connected, it would simply be a question of how many pieces she would be lacerated into.

This was evidently a bad situation for the three Myth-ranked undead who had not wanted to draw attention to themselves and intended to finish this battle as quickly as possible.

As Alexandra started feeling more and more anxious, Roland suddenly put away his sword. Silver wings sprouted out of his back, and he launched himself into the air and laughed maniacally.

"Not bad! Not bad at all! But it's all meaningless! Now it's my turn—let me show you my second form. Wahahaha! I'm an unsolvable bug! You want to kill me off before the server shuts down? Impossible! I can still transform four—no—five more times!"

Chapter 386: How a Video Game Boss Should Behave

"None of you read a walkthrough to prepare for your battle against me! You want to kill me without even reading a walkthrough?! Ha! That's suicide!"

The silver-winged, red-armored me kept shouting "You are not prepared!" arrogantly from midair. The panicky squadron below me was such a familiar sight.

In a cooperative player vs. AI video game, what gave me more of a headache than a difficult boss were garbage teammates who recklessly started fighting the boss without having even read a walkthrough. In this world, too, these types of garbage teammates were common.

Dark priests would attempt to use negative energy spells against the undead, fire mages would attempt to throw fireballs at fire elemental creatures, idiot assassins would try to use stealth against true sight Beholders, and so on. Every year, the fairies' monthly magazine's most popular feature was forever the portion titled "The funniest one hundred ways to die this year."

If I recalled correctly, the one ranked first on the list of idiots last year was a Demon Warlock grandmaster who decided to transform himself into a demon when faced with a Three-Headed Horned Demon Lord's might.

It turned out that the demon the Demon Warlock chose, a Speed Demon, was the favorite type of demon the Three-Headed Horned Demon Lord loved to eat. That Demon Lord apparently broke out into laughter and directly used an "Intimidating Stare" ability to freeze the Demon Warlock in his tracks, making a nice meal out of the warlock.

The smart ones who weren't as dumb as the idiots in the fairies'

magazines would take advantage of their enemies' greatest weaknesses—obviously far more effective. For instance, the fact that Holy Knights greatly preferred battle hammers over swords wasn't actually due to personal preference. It was because their main enemies would forever be the undead and demons.

Due to the nature of their bodies, skeletons, zombies and other undead would typically be highly resistant against slashing and stabbing attacks. It was far more difficult for them to defend against bludgeoning attacks capable of crushing their bodies and bones.

Rangers who roamed the forests preferred barbed arrows as their main weapon because their primary enemies would be the unarmored beasts and beastmen. Barbed arrows were capable of opening up wounds that would continuously bleed, making them an effective weapon. Sometimes, all a ranger would have to do was follow a blood trail, and then he'd discover a corpse at the end of it. But using such barbed arrows against the undead wouldn't be as effective as throwing a rock at them.

Battle hammers and maces were also very effective against the heavily armored knights typically referred to as tin cans, which was why battle hammers were jokingly referred to as "can openers." They were capable of creating tremors from a collision against armor that could kill a knight even though the armor remained undamaged. Actually, since demons had magic armor protecting them, they could be treated as a type of heavy armor unit as well. That was why battle hammers were also the most effective "can opener" against demons—this was the logic behind why the Snake Archduchess had begun her attack with a battle hammer. It was simply a test. But since her battle hammer was a weapon barely at the Myth rank, even she herself didn't have much hope it would succeed.

For any powerful individual who had lived for a sufficiently long period of time, obtaining information on one's enemies would

become a daily habit. Investigating specific information about one's enemies was something absolutely necessary when facing someone powerful. Fighting without any preparations would be tantamount to suicide—it would be necessary for game players to check a video or a walkthrough before fighting against a video game boss.

Of course, at the same time, it would be fine for game players to not check walkthroughs as well. Game players had the privilege of dying over and over again to probe a boss's abilities—all they had to do was load their previous save file. In real life, however, people only had one life. "Please try again" would only happen in games.

Hence, it could be said that the fight between truly powerful individuals would begin before the battle itself. Those who had critical information about themselves exposed would find themselves killed off quite quickly. As a video gamer would put it: "As long as you have the information, you can defeat the boss sooner or later, but without any information, the boss is undefeatable." Or, another video gamer's phrase would be "without a walkthrough or any preparations, it's like trying to farm a wasteland. But if you have a walkthrough, experience, and you're prepared, then it will be like speed grinding. There's no comparing the two."

Everyone would want to hide information about themselves, but for those who had reached a certain level of power, their fighting style would typically be fixed with its specific advantages and disadvantages. As long as there were records of that person fighting, it would be impossible to keep everything a secret. Still, powerful individuals would always have their hidden aces. Unless the difference in power between the two sides was big enough for one side to completely suppress the other, the fight would end up in a competition of who had the better aces.

The undead had indeed investigated and prepared themselves thoroughly, and they'd also extrapolated what possible aces I

might have hidden. In the past, I had showed off in public Sword Saint level swordsmanship, excellent ice magic abilities, and the ability to use God's Descent. As for my Holy Light magic and undead magic, there was basically no record of me using them in direct combat.

No matter if it was Holy Light or undead magic, any path would need a lifetime's worth of experience and time to cultivate. It would be impossible to create a Legend's Soul Imprint unless one was able to face their true selves and desires with absolute sincerity, unless they started over from a new life... Fine, my resurrections were probably different from most other undying individuals. At the very least, I doubted that any other existence would be capable of retaining their sense of self while in the River Styx.

"His proven abilities are Sword Saint level sword techniques, and the frightening forbidden spell Ice Aeon. We also need to defend against his ice magic. Of course, since he's an Undead Emperor, he'll be skilled in undead magic. As for Holy Light, there are no records of him using that in combat, and Holy Light clashes with the power of undeath—his Holy Light is probably nothing more than a political trick used to obtain the favor of the Holy Church."

If I were the undead, even I myself would have come to such a conclusion. But sometimes it would be impossible to measure certain people by common sense.

Judging from what I'd seen so far, the undead had indeed made excellent preparations.

The female vampire before me was as slippery as a snake. She knew more than one hundred ultimate monk techniques and could use them all with ease. Her Dexterity stat had likely far surpassed 30; although I was a Sword Saint, I was clumsier than a banana-throwing monkey in front of her. Meanwhile, that curse expert Agfan had used a Curse of Fatigue on me, making me lose stamina at twice the normal rate. My sweat now reeked of fresh blood.

If I tried to assassinate that annoying bald-headed curse expert in order to remove the Curse of Fatigue on me, Alexandra would interrupt me and keep me busy without even caring if she was injured. At such a time, the Blood Tribe's regenerative abilities would show their disgusting prowess.

As for that death god like assassin, he used the tactic of "striking me only once and then instantly disappearing for another blow" upon failure. The entire time he was the only one to attack me while I couldn't even counterattack. I also needed to divide a part of my attention to stay on guard against him, which made me only more frustrated as I fought.

I had now confirmed that the three of them were equipped with far too many anti-ice magic equipment, thus limiting my large-scale AOE ice magic. The vampire monk wouldn't give me a chance to speak if she saw any signs of me attempting to utter an incantation. As for using undead magic... they wouldn't even need to prepare against it as undead creatures were powered by negative energy to begin with. Either they'd be highly resistant against undead magic or they'd absorb it. The current me was incapable of top-level undead magic that'd be effective against a Myth-ranked Undead Lord.

My sword techniques made me seem to be nothing more than a no-good slacker disciple in front of the Snake Archduchess who had likely cultivated as an ascetic for thousands of years. And my ice magic had been specifically targeted against with all that anti-ice magic equipment. If I had met these three Undead Lords two months ago, I would have probably been killed off by now with all these preparations against me.

Should I say that I was fortunate or unfortunate? My recent battles had been against Undead Emperor Aso and then the Titan Giants. Both were ones where I'd brushed by death, but they'd also helped me discover my insufficiencies.

I was the type who loved to reflect on my mistakes after every

battle—this would help me get better and improve myself for the next. "What if Aso had gone all out against me?""What if the Titan Giants had directly tried to ambush me without any warning?" Even if I did my very best, perhaps I'd...

"I can't always hope to get lucky. In the future, high-level opponents will only become more and more numerous. At the very least, I have to think of a method to survive. Only by surviving will it be possible to win in the end and use an ace to overturn the situation."

The current situation proved my choice. These three veteran Myth-ranked Undead Lords were more than enough to suppress me when counting their actual power levels against mine. If it weren't for my new dragon armor, perhaps I'd have been instantly killed.

[Full-body Dragonscale Ice Armor: Guardian of Eternal Night. System Evaluation: Legend rank, capable of growing in power.]

[Enchanted Titan's Thunder Metal: This armor possesses Legend-level damage reduction properties. All weapons that aren't at the level of God Equipment will have their damage reduced by 30 against this armor. System Notification: It's ridiculous how you managed to come up with the idea of embedding that Thunder Titan Giant's broken shield pieces into your armor to strengthen its defense.]

[Ein Mezus's Protection: Her Dragon's Bloodline is coursing through this armor. She's protecting the wearer of this armor, which is bad news for any attacker. Her protection will automatically absorb 100 points of damage every day before the wearer can be damaged. This ability will recover after a period of twenty-four hours.]

Agile monks were one of the best melee fighters, but their high-speed barehanded attacks and the fact that they relied on Dexterity as their main combat stat meant that each attack of theirs would

not independently have much damage. My top-level armor would greatly reduce the penetrative force, too, and with my damage reduction abilities, Alexandra was probably only damaging me with about three to four percent of her actual attack power.

When dealing with an armor like mine, only a God Equipment level "can opener" battle hammer or a top-level forbidden spell attack against the soul would be effective. But, for obvious reasons, these two options would be difficult to come by.

Practical battle had proved my choice. Only defending would still result in death. The loss of stamina and the accumulation of injuries would be enough to kill a person.

The reason I was able to last for this long—apart from my dragon armor's astonishing defense—was that Erebella was sharing my injuries. Moreover, I had a "Shield Slime" within my armor as a second layer of defense and a "Life Slime" that healed my injuries.

This battle appeared to be one against three on the surface, but if you counted my two Slimes, it was three against three.

While the undead were frustrated as they weren't able to achieve anything after so many attacks, I, too, was similarly frustrated as I hadn't achieved anything after so long.

Even though I was in a position where I wouldn't be defeated, if I continued like this, it would be impossible for me to win. It was true that the undead would never open up this "tin can" of mine, but I was also unable to cause any actual damage to them.

"It would seem that I can only use my second form... For the Holy Light!"

Instead of my Ice Calamity sword, I brought out a silver holy battle hammer especially made for Holy Knights.

[Myth-Ranked Weapon: Slayer of the Undying.]

[Attack Power: 40-40 Holy Light damage. Attack Speed: Very Slow.]

[Special effect 1, Undead Slayer: Any undead that comes into contact with this weapon has a probability of being instantly destroyed.]

[Special effect 2, Divine Protection: Summon a golden divine protective field which can resist against the invasion of evil. Lasts for thirty seconds. Any that forcibly invades the field shall receive 5 Holy Light damage per second.]

[Special effect 3, Divine Strength: When using this weapon against the Undead, the wielder will gain +2 Strength. Limited only to Holy Knights.

[Special effect 4, Wrath of Holy Light: This battle hammer is enchanted with ten extra points of Holy Light damage. Limited only to Holy Knights]

[There is crooked line of silver words on the hammer's handle: This war hammer once belonged to a true Holy Knight. Only those who are truly holy will be able to utilize the full power of this hammer. System Reminder: You're a Sword Saint, but you'd rather become a Hammer Saint? Comrade Rolo Big Hammer.]

This hammer wouldn't be anything more than just a good weapon against an ordinary person, but against an undead, it wouldn't be worse than a God Equipment.

When Harloys devoured this hammer that I had obtained from Baron Matt, she gained the ability to take this form. But if she entered this battle hammer form, she would have to enter complete hibernation to prevent damage to her soul, which would occur because she wasn't very compatible with this hammer.

The undead below me were shocked. How could an Undead Emperor possibly use the Holy Light? A former SemiGod Undead Emperor was now using the Holy Light against some Myth-ranked undead? Wasn't something severely wrong with what was going on here?

No normal individual would even think of the possibility that the powers of undeath and Holy Light could be used in tandem. The information regarding the Humiliation of Soros had been forcibly suppressed by the Holy Church. According to the undead, I obviously could use undead magic, so even if I could use the Holy Light, it would be nothing more than a few tricks performed with the help of external items.

"Such pure Holy Light! How is this possible!"

Everyone knew that the purity of a Holy Knight's Holy Light was directly dependent on the power of his faith. The purer the Holy Light, the greater its power would be against the undead and demons. That was why demons and devils would try to tempt Holy Knights into becoming fallen. The more faithful a Holy Knight was before becoming fallen, the stronger a Black Knight he would become.

Such pure Holy Light was more incomprehensible than even an Undead Calamity. Who could possibly imagine that an Undead Emperor would have such pure belief in the Holy Light?

A holy battle hammer, a solid new set of armor, and blinding Holy Light and holy flames. I was now a slayer of undead, a Holy Knight! It was as if I had returned to the past.

I unfurled my wings and stood in midair, observing the undead below me. With a wave of my hand the sky was filled with dropping feathers, each feather a bomb filled with the power of Holy Light.

Holy Light illuminated the entire sky—it was as if the sky started pouring holy rain.

After condensing my bloodline, my War Angel form had also received improvements. The greatest improvement to this form of mine was to my pure power of Order.

"All of you shall be eradicated by the flames of Holy Light!"

My golden wings were covered with faint holy fire, while my golden feathers shone brilliantly in the sky. Amid their pitiful wails, every undead being my feathers touched immediately melted to their demise.

"The boss is now flying! It's the second mode! Everyone, run to your preassigned positions to dodge the boss's fixed AOE attack! The AOE is beginning its countdown—three, two, one! Martin, you bone lich, you're running in the wrong direction! See, you died as expected! Lich Team Leader, remove all of Martin's rewards... darn, it feels rather boring to make comments only to myself when the silly cat isn't awake."

[Only now do you realize you're boring!? What kind of boss playacts at being the video game players attacking him? Do you want me to pretend to be a game system reporting the combat situation against a boss!? System Notification: 5 Justice Points have been deducted for this wonderful commenting service. Thanks for your patronage!]

Chapter 387: Total Annihilation

"Fire Wall! Fire Wall! Fire Wall! Fire Wall! Fire Wall! Fire Wall! Fire Wall! Fire Wall! Fire Wall! ...The boss is going underground—main tank, forward! Watch your positions! Those who die to the boss's AOE should punish themselves by standing in a corner! Any idiots who run into the boss's Fire Wall should join the second team tomorrow! Our team is an elite one with no room for idiots!"

[You still aren't tired of playacting?!]

[With the AOE attack most of the undead perished. Comrade Rolo Big Hammer has now gone underground—whoops—he's brought out a second hammer, one in each hand! He's managed to successfully change job classes to Rolo Two Hammers! With one hammer—with just one hammer—he sent the Snake Archduchess flying! Use your ultimate ability, Rolo Two Hammers! System Notification: I've heard female streamers like me are really popular right now. I did a wonderful job, no? Where's my reward money?]

"Shut up! This isn't a hammer! ...Alright, I suppose it isn't really wrong to call it a hammer."

I felt rather speechless at how shameless my System was. What I took out wasn't actually a hammer, but it did resemble one. I couldn't find any words to counter her.

It was a two-meter-long silver oak branch, and at its tip were some flowers that had bloomed. Its very existence caused a green glow to spread along with a wondrous fragrance that helped refresh my spirits.

[Original Root of the Forest of Dreams's Mother Tree: The purest source of the Forest of Dreams's power. This root contains an endless amount of life power. It's a miracle item of nature and can compare to the first-generation Tree of Life. It's priceless, and for the time being no assessment can be given to its power level. System Reminder: From a certain standpoint, the Mother Tree is

Amelia's main body, and you're currently holding the Mother Tree's root... you're holding the pubic hair of a girl, you beast! Forget about others who **** ships, swords, cities, or beasts—you're a man who ***** trees! You Beifeng!]

"Shut up! Would it kill you to have some shame for once? And when did Beifeng's name become an adjective that meant pervert!?"

Oh, right, his name had become a forbidden word ever since that day. Since he was being hunted by all the druid organizations, he had entered the Calamity Rankings. Congratulations to my first subordinate who entered the Calamity Rankings.

"...I don't know who he is, honest!"

Cough—cough—let's get back on topic. The root of the Mother Tree in my hand was no ordinary piece of wood.

The Tree of Life was viewed as the origin of the elf species. Wood spirits were a similar existence, and the Tree of Life and the Mother Tree of the Forest of Dreams were both miracle trees containing the power of life. Any branch from the Tree of Life would need only slight modifications to become a powerful weapon on par with Legend-ranked equipment.

However, it was no easy task to obtain a branch from the Tree of Life. Since the Tree of Life contained the power of life, not only would its branches help improve all forms of life magic, but it would also be super effective against the undead. Naturally, Tree of Life branches would make for excellent weapons against the undead.

Actually, there was a person in the past who used a weapon called "Twig of the World Tree" as his battle hammer. This person achieved incredible things.

But less than one hundred weapons crafted out of the Tree of Life existed. Taking a branch off the Tree of Life would cause damage

to it, so unless someone accomplished a deed so great the entire elf species felt they were in that person's debt, it would be nigh impossible for anyone to obtain a branch for themselves.

The Mother Tree of Amelia's Forest of Dreams should be equal in power level to the elves' first-generation Tree of Life. I wasn't about to let go of the opportunity before me, so I asked Rosa and the wood spirits for a piece as research material. Of course, I agreed to give them the remnants of the second-generation Tree of Life in return, which was something so rare that even the elven kingdoms didn't possess... let's not get too much into detail about how I obtained it.

From a certain standpoint, the Three Virtues had gone somewhat overboard. After I won the battle against the Titan Giant incarnations, they handed me this root as a reward. Obviously, this could be viewed as somewhat underhanded as it harmed the very foundation of the Forest of Dreams and would slow the rate at which Amelia revived.

But there weren't any immediate threats to the Three Virtues—it wouldn't matter much if Amelia revived a little slower. I had helped them out so much, after all. The "Original Root of the Forest of Dreams's Mother Tree" was definitely an item containing the most abundant power of life; in fact, I felt it'd be possible to modify it into a SemiGod Equipment or even God Equipment.

I hadn't possessed this root for long, but its quality was definitely more than ten times higher than that of the third-generation World Tree branch. I hadn't yet had the time to properly research this root, but when I thought about how my enemies right now were undead, I felt like this could be used as a weapon so I casually brought it out.

And that was how I had a two-handed battle hammer in my left hand and a tree root in my right hand, becoming Rolo Two Hammers... a dual wielding berserker!

What, you're asking me why I didn't continue tossing holy fire feathers from the sky and switched to melee combat? Well, first of all, those slow feathers wouldn't cause much damage to the top-level Myth-ranked undead. And I would also have to pay a price for tossing down all these holy fire-wreathed feathers... if I tossed anymore, I would become a naked, featherless chicken!

Cough—cough—when I discovered that my feather bombs were only effective against the weaker undead, I of course landed back on the ground. I had powerful anti-undead melee weapons in my arsenal, after all.

"Now it's time for part three—the third form!"

I had long mastered how to dual wield greatswords, and as long as my Strength stat was sufficient, it wasn't too difficult for me to treat a hammer as a sword. Two hammers meant my attacks would be even more vicious.

The results were better than I expected.

"What's this? My curse was actually dispelled!"

The moment I held the root, a green glow spread over me and directly dispelled that baldie's annoying Curse of Fatigue. I felt the power of life fill me and greatly improve my spirits. At the same time, my injuries and fatigue quickly recovered.

My silver-colored iron battle hammer was filled with the golden Holy Light, while the wooden root was filled with the green power of life. As my spirits rose, I waved my hands, causing afterimages of hammers covered in golden and green light to appear in the air.

These lights were the purest type of Holy Light and the highest quality power of life, both foundational pillars of Order. The former was the specialty of Holy Knights and Holy Light priests, while the latter was the domain of druids and life magic rituals.

Under my command, the Holy Light transformed into massive hammers that pounded the ground like an unstoppable rainstorm.

I also transformed the Holy Light into bolts of thunder aimed at the undead. Meanwhile, I could only let the power of life act on its own as I didn't have the side job class of druid capable of controlling it.

Both these powers of Order were perfect counters to the undead. The only difference between being struck by Holy Light and the power of life would be that Holy Light would eradicate and cleanse the undead into nothing but dust, while the power of life would allow the undead to die and finally enter the Cycle of Reincarnation.

Unfortunately, no matter how powerful the attack, it would still have to connect to be effective. Although my attack power was far greater than before, the results were no different from earlier.

Apart from my first surprise hammer swing that sent the Snake Archduchess flying, she now moved even faster than before and managed to dodge all the Holy Light attacks I sent her way.

"Smite, judge, and cleanse this rotten, putrid, and black land."

I injected Holy Light into the ground through my feet, transforming it into holy ground covered in holy fire. Any undead that tried to approach me were vaporized into dust amid howls in agony. This was a large-scale AOE Holy Knight technique I was very familiar with, called "Holy Flame Consecration." It was especially useful against highly dexterous enemies as well as large numbers of enemies.

Yet one second before the holy flames lit up, Snake Archduchess Alexandra opened up a pair of blood-red wings and started flying, escaping from the holy flames on the ground.

"Hammer of Holy Light!"

I materialized a Hammer of Holy Light in midair and exploded it, illuminating this dark night for a moment. Several skeleton warriors and a large festering zombie caught in the explosion were

directly vaporized. Yet my main target, the Snake Archduchess, dodged the explosion by flattening herself. She even managed a counterattack with a punch that landed on my stomach area, almost making me cough up blood.

Holy Chain, Light's Judgement, and Shimmering Light. I used these classical Holy Knight combat techniques to perfection, yet the result remained the same.

Her boneless nature allowed her to twist her body to dodge every attack. She would reverse her joints or elongate or shorten her limbs. When I took a closer look at her, I discovered that her eyes had transformed into snake eyes—her vertical pupils were staring straight into mine.

"Is this a joke!? She's capable of determining my attack patterns simply from my eyes? This is too ridiculous!"

I finally accepted the fact that this Snake Archduchess had reached the very peak of the monk job class.

"The best dynamic vision, the swiftest reactions of all, a body not limited by bones and joints, and hundreds of martial art techniques she's an expert in. How can anyone cheat like this!?"

If this were a PVP video game, she would be the equivalent of a skill-based player fully leveled and at the peak of skill in her job class. There was a huge difference between us in combat skill. A novice like me who hadn't even fully leveled could only miss every attack I used against her.

"Since she's reading my moves from my eyes, all I have to do is close them."

And so I closed my eyes and prepared to randomly attack... and then immediately opened my eyes ten seconds later.

In just that short moment, the Snake Archduchess had been overjoyed to see that I'd closed my eyes and hit me with a full set of seventy-two palm techniques... fine, I'm making the number up—I

had no idea just how many times she hit me. But judging from how much of me was aching in pain, she probably hit me over one hundred times... it would seem that expectations and reality were quite different. In real combat, fighting with one's eyes closed would only result in a mega beatdown.

When I stopped idiotically closing my eyes, I used my battle hammer and tree root in unison to block her attacks, but I accidentally made them touch each other as I did so.

Clang!!!!

That was a loud and deep sound as if a giant monastery bell had rung. The green light on the tree root expanded; overly abundant power of life rushed out at a furious pace and transformed into a green aura that swiftly spread and devoured everything before it.

This was too unexpected and too sudden, so the Snake Archduchess who was following up her attack on me—I was still off balance from closing my eyes—found it impossible to dodge. She was suddenly enveloped by the green light.

She was instantly stunned and paused her actions. Yet monks had unwavering, frightening willpower. Clarity returned to her murky eyes in just a second.

But how would I give her a chance to recover?

"Home run swing!"

I swung my tree root as if it were a baseball bat, sending the Snake Archduchess flying at a tremendous speed. She didn't get up again after taking this blow.

Since the Snake Archduchess, who acted as the tank who could take me on all by herself, had collapsed, it was just as if a game player team had lost their main tank player while fighting a boss. So, the result was...

"I died—I died—what's the healer doing? No rewards for the healer! What? We don't have a healer? Then let's punish the tank...

what, none of you can revive anymore? Forget it! We can't beat this boss with our current team setup. You're all idiots! That's it for today. You should all go home and check some walkthroughs. Everyone, we're leaving now! It's your own fault if you get left behind! And I'm not paying for all your repair and revival fees."

[You haven't had enough yet!?]

[Ding! Battle complete. Time elapsed: 12 minutes. People that perished: 17. Repair fees: 2000 gold coins. System Notification: I'm going to keep pretending to be a game system if you keep playacting. What? You don't like it? Bite me!]

Alright. Of course it was impossible for me to bite her. Still, the fact that my System was casually joining in so shamelessly meant that this battle was nearing its end.

The Snake Archduchess had collapsed, and the baldie's only curse that worked against me was now ineffective thanks to the Mother Tree's root. The remaining assassin couldn't do anything by himself, and it was now impossible for the undead to win. The survivors unhesitatingly abandoned their teammates and ran for their lives.

I glanced over the spoils of my victory and felt that it would be right to say something as a boss who succeeded in annihilating his opponents.

"In front of I, Rolo Two Hammers... I mean Roland, your beliefs, your dreams, are meaningless. None of you have armor even worth mentioning! Skill-based players are worth nothing in front of a pay-to-win player like me!"

[You've finally admitted to being Rolo Two Hammers! See, you did have fun while roleplaying, didn't you?]

"That's enough out of you!"

I finally understood what it felt like to have someone commenting on the side while fighting. In such a situation, it was

impossible for me to get heated up —the style had instantly gone from hot-blooded to comedy. My motivation disappeared. Even if such a boss was defeated, I would feel like a little something was missing... Emordilorcan, Lorci, and the Demon Earl, if you're listening from somewhere, I apologize to all of you.

"Since when has your style been normal?"

"Ah, Harloys, you're awake?"

"Yeah, thanks to your Rolo Two Hammers. This power of life is capable of protecting my soul. No, I should say that it can even strengthen my soul. Loan it to me—I want to research it when there's some free time."

Strictly speaking, the current Harloys was living—she had broken the Cycle of Reincarnation. Yet the Holy Light, which had the foundational power of "cleansing," would still put a great strain on her if she used it. The power of life had much less stringent standards.

I was quite interested in this phenomenon. It appeared to be worth deeply researching into, but right now obviously wasn't the time.

Just as how the police would always arrive only after the conclusion of a major battle in a movie, only now did Dragon Knights descend from the skies, filling me with complaints.

"Damn it. They have such 'perfect timing.' They must have been hiding in some corner, watching the show. For this, I'm going to extort as much as I can out of them!"

Chapter 388: Extortion

While the police always arrived late in movies so the heroes and villains could have epic battles, reality was naturally different. The perfect timing of these Dragon Knights was a symptom of deeper problems.

"Did you bastards have fun watching the show?"

The black-haired Dragon Knight before me was quite young; he appeared to be only fifteen or sixteen years old, his face dotted with youthful acne. Judging from his obvious awkwardness—he was blushing shyly—he was no veteran capable of lying with a straight face.

"I actually became a lure! They dared to use me to draw out the big fish!"

That was the first thought I had when I saw how the Dragon Knights "just happened" to arrive right after my battle with the undead.

There was plenty of evidence to back up my way of thinking. For instance, five Dragon Knights directly flew above me, chasing down the escaping undead, while only the weakest Dragon Knight among them was left behind to talk to me despite the fact he wasn't even an adult. It only took two simple verbal traps for this youngster to leak plenty of information.

Actually, I didn't need to ask a youngster like him anything—I would already know as everything that happened today was far too coincidental.

I refused to believe that Orloss had such weak control over his own capital city, one he resided in. Nor did I believe that he would easily let slip a secret like the existence of Aso's potion.

Since the information had been leaked so quickly to the undead, it was most likely intentional on Orloss's part. He must have leaked

the fact that I possessed the knowledge to create Aso's potion, which would activate an Undead Calamity, to an undead spy that was already unknowingly exposed! He then took advantage of those undead, knowing they would ambush me.

For the undead that remained hidden in the Bardi capital, they'd profit tremendously no matter if they killed me or obtained the recipe for Aso's potion from me. In their minds, this was an inescapable lure, where the promised returns far outweighed any potential risks.

Even though the undead must have clearly known that this was likely to be a trap, they felt that as long as they could overcome the trap, they would profit massively in the end. And so they unhesitatingly fell for Orloss's trap; hook, line, and sinker.

What if I died? In that case, nobody would be threatening the Bardi Empire with an Undead Calamity anymore. That would be excellent, of course.

"Orloss profited with no risk to him at all."

As for the Dragon Knights that arrived with such perfect timing, all they needed to do was watch our fight from far up above and wait for me and the undead to inflict great injuries to each other before showing up as the third party who benefited in the end. Of course, if I won, they would come over and support me. Should I say that it was to be expected of Orloss's reputation as a sly old fox, to have thought up such a no-risk, profitable trap and completed all the preparations in the less than two hours since he found out about me possessing Aso's potion?

"...We were taken advantage of."

I released Glina from Frigidwinter Earth. Even though I didn't tell her anything, she, too, saw through this messy scheme. However, she wasn't in that great of a mood—her combat strength was insufficient, and had she participated in the fight, she'd have only been a burden to me.

"Rest assured, I'll make that old Orloss spit up everything he owes us. Don't think too much into things. You're still young."

I patted her on the head and looked off into the distance. Although the few remaining undead had escaped, things here weren't finished yet.

Right in front of that young Dragon Knight I casually tossed the unconscious Snake Archduchess into my Frigidwinter Earth. Combat spoils like her might be of assistance in unearthing the remaining undead left hidden in Bardi—why would I give her over to the Bardi Empire?

Besides, there weren't just undead corpses in this area. Numerous human assassins who had attacked me earlier and the few survivors who'd been encircled by the undead when they tried escaping lay dead here. None of them had managed to run past the undead. The extremely few human assassins who survived could be considered incredibly fortunate.

Well, as for these living assassins who had been sent over to kill me, perhaps it was at the command of some prince. I decided to leave them to the Bardi Empire.

Just as I was about to proceed to the royal palace to have a reckoning with the sly old fox, Glina tugged my sleeve and pointed at a nearby tree.

"...It seems we won't need to go looking for Beck's oldest daughter."

Indeed—wasn't there a dark-skinned Half Elf assassin trembling on that tree? She was concealed with the assistance of irregular shadows. Had it not been for Glina's demon eye, it would have been almost impossible to notice her presence. She must have used a Dark Elf racial talent to survive the dangers just now.

"...She must have joined Prince Mills' faction. Since you know my secret, I must now kill you... so that nobody will know my secret."

As I said this, I brought the power of Holy Light into my eyes and glared at her. My eyes flashed brightly with killing intent. I looked really cool doing that, didn't I?

"Don't scare her! See, she's already fainted."

"...I'm already regretting it. It seems she peed herself. Tsk—tsk—tsk—her pee is dripping down the tree. Her bratty younger sister is definitely going to complain to me afterwards. Glina, can you do something for me?"

"You want me to carry her? Don't even think about it. Her pee will get my Clint mecha dirty."

"No, I just want you to help change her underwear. Here, this set should fit her."

"...Could you please first explain why you're carrying female underwear on you? Could it be that the legendary Princess Peach—"

"Stop! It's nothing to talk about; it's all trouble from my younger days—hey—hey—I'm really not a pervert! There's no need to run away from me! Your attitude makes your grandfather sad!"

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"I, the ambassador of Mage Country, came under an assassination attempt right in front of the embassy hotel. I have received much physical and mental trauma. Not only that, your country's security arrived so late—I suspect they did so intentionally! This is inexcusable! This is a personal affront, I say, to my dignity! This is an insult to the entire Mage Country!"

No matter how ridiculously I acted before him, the elderly Orloss would smile back at me in a friendly manner. He seemed intent on playing the role of kind mascot. However, due to my overt rudeness, his diplomatic officials and personal knights all had furious expressions on their faces.

It was deep into the night, but the glorious meeting hall was well

lit. From the bloodshot eyes of all the meeting participants, the fact that dirty footprints dotted the floor and the teacups, which had been refilled countless times, perhaps the meetings here had been continuing for a long while without adjourning and giving these people a chance to rest.

This was indeed the case, in fact. Right after the previous ambassadorial meeting with Orloss, news arrived that Prince Mills had been assassinated, causing an emergency meeting to convene. Before this meeting even finished, a sudden visitor (Copper Dragon Evelyn) met with Orloss, and then Orloss returned to continue the meeting. However, this time, he focused the meeting on all sorts of emergency plans and preparations, even mentioning possible war.

It could be said that the officials under Orloss had been hard at work for fourteen consecutive hours. And this work was of the highest level, critical priority tasks. They were tense to the point of having fully bloodshot eyes. When they discovered that their troubles appeared to be my fault, of course they would be displeased with me.

In their minds, my subordinates had earlier in the day killed the relatively popular and well-respected Prince Mills. Although I was viewed as the criminal, I was actually the one who first complained of a crime against me and was even being disrespectful to their emperor. It must be remembered that this was a feudal generation—a king meant more than anything to a knight's honor. This was one of the greatest possible insults.

"...Hey, shouldn't you at least react a little after I said so much, old man? Do you think I'm a little white rabbit who will take everything lying down!?"

"Utterly disrespectful! Do you know who you're talking to!? You are in front of the Lord of the Carsian People, the guardian of the Manfu Mountains, Great Emperor Orloss of the Bardi Empire..."

One thing in common between great personages was that they

would have a scary amount of titles. Every one of their titles could be considered part of their authority, especially in the eyes of novices. However, against a veteran like me, such a tactic of intimidation with titles was useless.

"Cough—well, you are in front of the God Envoy of the God of Law, the Sword Guardian of the Northlands, the Last Descendant of the Mist, the favored Child of Light, the Truth Symposium Overseer of the Mage Country, the Destructor of Eternal Night, the Undying..."

Glina gave out a long series of my titles, and she seemed to be quite good at this. Wasn't it simply a competition of titles? Who would be afraid of that?

"Who are you supposed to be? Is this a place for you to speak up? You're a diplomat from the Mage Country? What a ridiculous little girl!"

A goatee-bearded official stood up and roared angrily. If I recalled correctly, this person was the prime minister of the Bardi Empire, and his name was Carlo.

This was indeed a good move by him. In diplomacy, one couldn't afford to lose out on presence, and it would be smart to pick on the weak. Yet he was completely wrong when he perceived Glina to be nothing more than a "young female servant."

"Cough—you are in front of the Queen of the Sleuweir Kingdom. She is the acting ambassador of the Mist Alliance with, I must say, full authority. I strongly protest the insult you made to our Queen. I also request that you, Carlo, immediately apologize. Also, our Mist Alliance's Sleuweir Queen came under attack right when she arrived in your country. I demand an explanation!"

This time, I got the chance to act cool.

The officials present were astonished but soon understood. My background was no secret, so considering my relationship with the

Northlands, the Sleuweir Queen's sudden arrival could be considered explainable.

And my request was a reasonable one. For a civil official to shout angrily at a country's queen in such a formal diplomatic setting was a severe breach of diplomatic etiquette. Asking for only an apology was already restrained.

Of course, there was also the issue of pressure from a more powerful country. There were plenty of examples of powerful countries pressuring less powerful ones and breaching etiquette. At the moment, however, Emperor Orloss was right in front of Carlo. Carlo was merely a civil official under Orloss, so how would he possibly dare to decide on behalf of his emperor?

Yet apologizing would obviously weaken Bardi's position and negotiations. In such subtle situations, intangible factors were also important.

But not apologizing would cause severe diplomatic consequences. After some hesitation, right when Carlo decided he would prostrate himself and ask for forgiveness, Orloss finally spoke up after acting as a wallflower all this time.

"Your Highness Roland, let's just discuss things directly. What exactly do you wish for?"

"Compensation! Compensation for the mental trauma I suffered! It would be too base to ask for money, so how about giving me a few dozen Dragon Knights? If that's not possible, I'll also accept the full information on Bardi's specialty job classes of Dragon Berserkers and Dragon Shield Guardians."

Just like how the Auland Empire had the elite White Wolf Knights and East Mist had Aurora Knights and Avalanche Guardians, Bardi also had their own ace troop type that could be mass produced. Dragon Berserkers were slaughter machines rumored to possess strength at the peak of Silver rank on average. Dragon Shield Guardians were rumored to be experts in defense

capable of parrying Sword Saints' attacks. The relevant information on these two troop types would obviously be considered Bardi's national treasures—how could they possibly give out this information so freely?

"You bandit!"

"How could you dare...!"

Demanding such a ridiculous amount would obviously make others hate me. At this moment, furious shouting and scolding from the officials filled my ears. I simply pretended not to hear them.

Of course, I knew they would never pay me with such important treasures. It would be even more impossible for them to actually give me Dragon Knights. Still, wasn't negotiation just like streetside haggling? Even if I knew you wouldn't accept, I would first try to buy something from you for only half the written price to test you out. Once both sides learned roughly what each side was willing to accept, only then would the real negotiating begin.

But, very unexpectedly, Orloss smiled and nodded.

"That's all you want? Sure, I'll give all that to you in compensation."

Chapter 389: Southern Sect

Say you were haggling with a jewelry merchant and said, "Would you be willing to sell this ring to me for one hundred gold coins?" Both you and the merchant were well aware that this ring was worth at least one thousand gold coins, but the merchant still said, "Sure, I'll give it to you for a hundred, along with this additional gift." What would you think?

Anyone normal with a brain would feel that something was wrong with either the ring or the merchant. Perhaps that merchant had a nefarious scheme targeted at you.

That was exactly how I felt. Apart from that, however, I also felt as if I had thrown a heavy punch yet hit nothing but soft cotton. I clearly prepared so many little tricks—why did Orloss give in so easily?

Dragon Berserkers were one of the best products that came out of the combination of alchemy and dragon studies—they were people with artificially created Dragon Bloodlines. They were, in essence, super warriors, but they wouldn't possibly have existed if it weren't for the Bardi Empire's thousands of years of accumulated good relationship with the dragons.

Stories went that Dragon Berserkers naturally possessed great Strength that would always be 18 or higher. They would be capable of wearing heavy armor no ordinary person could wear, and their standard weaponry would be giant, three-meter long dragonspears and halberds. They were known to be unstoppable slaughter machines on the battlefield. Not only that, the Dragon Bloodline's natural defensive dragon scales and regenerative abilities gave these slaughter machines powerful recovery abilities, and they were able to fight for extended periods of time. And whenever a Dragon Berserker was in danger, they could ask for even more power from their Dragon Bloodline, giving them limitless potential. They would transform into a more dragon-like state,

giving them new powers and stronger basic stats.

Of course, forcibly and artificially adding a Dragon Bloodline to humans had its weaknesses. The "Berserker" part of Dragon Berserkers was to remind these fierce warriors that they could forever lose their human forms and hearts if they became addicted to slaughtering. Some Dragon Berserkers who returned from the cruelest battlefields would either become monsters unable to cancel their dragon transformation or go insane and lose all sense of reason.

Dragon Shield Guardians were the complete opposite. If Dragon Berserkers were analogous to the sharpest fire-enchanted spear, then Dragon Shield Guardians were the most solid shield of ice.

Unlike Dragon Berserkers, whose obviously strengthened bodies could be discerned with a glance, these heavily armored and well-shielded defenders would always be fully covered in armor. That was why there wasn't as much public information about them. Still, any battle they participated in would be astonishingly successful. These Dragon Shield Guardians were highly skilled in group battles—just small teams of three to five had recorded achievements of slaying giants.

Their shields towered two meters tall. Simply placing the shields on the ground allowed them to erect a magical defense barrier. A small team would be capable of providing defense on par with a castle wall; hence, they were often called "living castle walls."

But their high quality came at a price. It was said that their armor and magical shields were all top quality and hence top price. Every warrior would be fully outfitted and trained and needed to be Silver at the minimum. In the entirety of the Bardi Empire, there were only twenty squadrons consisting of eighty-thousand members.

This looked like a lot of members? If you considered the fact that the Bardi Empire was a super-powerful mega empire in Eich, these

eighty thousand warriors were less than a typical Bardi domain lord's private army.

That was why the Bardi Empire wouldn't dare to use such expensive warriors in an ordinary conflict. In fact, this national treasure wouldn't even be given over to a prince unless he was specifically designated as the crown prince.

Right now, I was looking through thick booklets on how to train them and the alchemic formulas for their equipment. Harloys told me "All of this looks real, or it's similar-level research results" after I asked her to check its veracity. I felt like I was dreaming. Meanwhile, the tyrant who was earlier angrily roaring "Give it to him—I said give it to him" despite his officials' pleas was all smiles, sitting at the table and looking at me.

"Being generous for no apparent reason means there's either thievery or a scheme going on."

All the unimportant, unrelated individuals had been ordered by Orloss to leave. There were now only five individuals in the room at the table—Glina, Orloss, Halent, an elderly royal steward and, of course, me.

Orloss was smiling ever so effusively, as if he was a classical wicked merchant who had just greatly profited. I reflexively increased my level of vigilance. I was in no way going to believe that a simple "Aso's potion" would be enough for him to obediently give me so much and let me extort him as much as I pleased.

No matter what world it was, "never negotiate with terrorists" was an iron rule of governments. This wasn't because major countries weren't willing to pay but rather because greed was limitless. Who knew whether or not the terrorists would increase their price or be motivated to try another strike due to a previous short-term success? And any type of compromise made public would be a direct blow to that country's authority as well as expose the country's weakness and insufficiencies.

In this world, where the international situation followed the law of the jungle, the wolves drawn to the scent of weakness would be no ordinary terrorists.

Considering the fact that I just threatened Orloss with "pay me or I'll bring Resident Evil to this world," my actions were no different from that of a terrorist's. This made the situation rather confusing. It wasn't that he shouldn't have compromised, but there was no reason for him to give in so easily when I was obviously just trying to extort an important national treasure.

If I were in Orloss's position, even if I compromised in the end, I would first try various methods to eliminate the threat. If I was forced to compromise, I would never permit the other party to make additional conditions or requests and deal with everything in one go.

"I understand that you're confused, but actually I'm thankful to you. I know you and your allies are quite accomplished in the field of alchemy and that you have many dragon friends. Just treat this information as a little gift."

Orloss started off like this, but I already knew that since Evelyn had mentioned to me that he seemed to be quite grateful to me for helping him get rid of the threat of Aso. But what he said next was completely unexpected.

"I'm not only grateful to you about the undead. By the way, I was astonished to hear from Miss Evelyn that you lost your memory. Perhaps I should tell you about the seed planted back in the day—Amoya."

The elderly steward wearing the royal palace attire had many wrinkles on his face and appeared physically old. However, he reached out his hand and gathered golden light, which gradually formed into a ball of Holy Light that illuminated the entire room.

"This... impossible!"

It was impossible to fake the purity of Holy Light—this elderly steward was indeed an excellent Holy Light user. However, what astonished me was that not only did this Amoya individual not utter the name of Holy Light out loud, but he didn't even have the emblem of the God of Holy Light anywhere on his body. This was something that obviously went against the teachings of the God of Holy Light.

Whenever I used the power of Holy Light, I would always praise the Holy Light out loud or at least pretend to move my lips. This was simply to pretend that I was no different from other Holy Knights. This person before me, from a certain standpoint, had a method of using Holy Light incredibly similar to mine. He didn't have to utter the name of Holy Light.

"Your Eminence and Forefather, your guess is absolutely on the mark. We members of the Southern Sect don't believe in the God of Holy Light. Instead, we believe in the Holy Light itself. If only the Church of Holy Light knew—we'd become the biggest heretics they'd focus on eliminating first."

Not only was I astonished at what I just heard, I was even more astonished to hear what he addressed me as.

"Lady Evelyn also mentioned to me that you lost your previous memories in Bardi. As the sixth leader of the Southern Sect as well as your disciple, I should inform you once more about the majestic achievements you had back in the day..."

As this elderly man named Amoya told me his story, this sealed bit of history was gradually unraveled.

The Southern Sect's formal name was the "Church of Pure Holy Light." The Holy Church's higher-ups perceived them to be a branch sect which had a slight misunderstanding of the Holy Church's teachings, but only the core members of the Holy Church knew that this was no small misunderstanding. Rather than worshiping the God of Holy Light, they worshiped the pure Holy

Light itself.

They originated in the Bardi Empire's capital, and this sect's creator was Roland Blackhand, also known back then as "Baron Blackhand." And the establishment of the Southern Sect church had been greatly supported by the Bardi royalty from that generation. Ever since the birth of this tiny church sect, its creator gave it a unique mission: to transmit the true teachings of the Holy Light to replace the rotten and decaying Holy Church.

"Currently, the Southern Sect has more than two hundred thousand believers spread throughout Bardi and the corners of various countries. They act as if they are members of the Holy Church but instead teach the purest teachings of the Holy Light. Actually, apart from our understanding of the Holy Light, there's no obvious difference between us and Holy Light priests. I myself am the Bardi Empire's Holy Church Cardinal from two generations ago. And that's most likely why the current Pope Caloma was willing to start a new Holy War at any cost. In the Holy Church's eyes, evil deserves to die, but heretics deserve to die even more."

It didn't seem like a big difference whether someone worshipped the God of Holy Light or Holy Light itself, you say? Actually, there was a huge difference. Those who worshipped the God of Holy Light would treat him and his teachings as a personified God capable of anything and everything, meaning the Holy Church also had his recognition. Those who only recognized the existence of the Holy Light itself, believing the Holy Light to be the source of its own power, practiced a non-personified type of worship—this meant the Holy Church would lose its divine authority from above, making them into nothing more than scammers fooling everyone. In fact, it could even be said that theywere the ones who falsely personified the God of Holy Light if that was the case.

This was also why heretics would be considered far more dangerous than any source of evil as well as why my little show in the Northlands—the Humiliation of Soros—had caused so many

Holy Light job class members to be shaken in or lose their beliefs.

This was an even scarier threat to the Holy Church than the Holy War itself, which was why, at that emergency Cardinal meeting, the entire Bardi Empire was treated as a heretic country. Since there was such a gigantic problematic sect headquartered here, Pope Caloma could only declare a Holy War against Bardi.

Since Bardi had now been declared as a heretic and was the source of this so-called heretical church, Bardi and the Southern Sect became natural allies. After Orloss broke with the Holy Church and exiled large numbers of Holy Light job class members from Bardi, Amoya, who remained behind for "personal reasons," started constructing new Southern Sect churches on a large scale and openly began spreading the pure teachings of the Holy Light. The seed I planted back in the year had finally begun to sprout.

Even without any memories of doing this, just analyzing it made me feel like this was definitely something I would have done back then.

Back then, I was someone who had been betrayed by the Holy Light. I was filled with hatred and the desire for revenge. I was considered evil, with all glory and honor stripped from me. Yet I still possessed the abilities of a Holy Knight. Just this alone would be capable of shaking the entire Holy Church's foundational authority.

It would be almost impossible to truly destroy an entire church from the outside with force—internal factions and heretics would be the most fatal of all. That was why I must have planted a seed here in Bardi. Although I didn't know if it would sprout successfully or not, doing such a thing wouldn't be a loss for me in any way.

"Every prophecy you left behind has come true. Since all the major events you spoke of in your Holy Codex has come true, our faith has only become more fervent, and those who doubted you

have returned to us. When evil suppressed justice, we hid as you requested us to. Fortunately, just as you prophesized, misfortune was avoidable through our hard efforts. At the very least, we have all succeeded in avoiding the countless Undead Dimensional Doors that appeared and started spreading despair in Bardi."

Since I had intended to spread my teachings, how could I possibly miss this excellent opportunity to utilize my "precognition?" It would be quite easy for me to write a bunch of prophecies and then obtain belief in my prophecies that I passed off as some Holy Codex. This would cause my own church to gradually strengthen, which was something the me from back in the day probably expected. Otherwise, there would be no need to pretend at prophesizing.

Actually, the current Roland was doing the exact same thing: spreading seeds everywhere. Even he himself didn't know if the seeds would sprout successfully or not.

Right now, this particular seed was no longer an immature one. It had now sprouted into a robust, tall tree which had experienced over two hundred years of inclement weather to reach maturity.

When the undead were running rampant, the Southern Sect became one of Orloss's hidden aces as well as the faction he trusted the most. The Southern Sect's Holy Knights and Holy Light priests were the most elite soldiers against the undead. That was also the foundational reason why Orloss was so thankful to me.

Right now, Glina and Halent were looking at me as if I was some monster. Well, plans that took several hundred years to come to fruition along with prophecies that one hundred percent came true were things they were incapable of understanding. These tales they were hearing about my past legends sounded more like something in a fairy tale or myth. Yet the primary person involved was sitting right before them.

"We absolutely believe that Your Eminence is capable of

defeating the evil which lurks behind the shadows. Actually, when Her Highness Glina was reporting your titles, she left out the most important one: The Establisher of the Southern Sect. We are your most loyal followers. What you performed in the Northlands not long ago strengthened our faith even further, and we began to openly spread our faith in Eich. Perhaps this is why that fake Holy Church, which is merely pretending to have divine authority, has been so enraged."

Alright then. This elderly church leader's eyes were filled with fervent belief in me, believing that this was all part of fate. He believed that the Armageddon that I prophesized would definitely arrive. He believed that hard work was all that was needed to overcome the misfortune. However, I was confident that Orloss believed something else entirely.

Looking at things from the angle of how "a good knife only required a master," just my relationship with the Southern Sect alone seemed to make me something of an obstacle. Perhaps Orloss was truly being apologetic with his gift to me, or perhaps if I didn't pass this little "test" he gave me, today might be the day I died.

At this moment, the host, Orloss, chuckled.

"Alright, let's not talk about such abstract things. To show my sincerity in allying with you, let me introduce our Archduke Halent. ...Actually, he should be called Halent Milan—my blood-related nephew, the recognized successor to the throne and crown prince of the Bardi Empire, the future Bardi Emperor."

Chapter 390: A New Ruler and a Coincidental Meeting

From a certain standpoint, the royalty bloodlines of major countries would always be messy. Looking at things now, Bardi's royalty bloodline was particularly messy.

A necrophiliac prince, a lesbian vampire princess, an insane plant witch, and the current ruler was half dead and unable to have descendants. And now there was evidently a Bardi royal similar to Beifeng, since this Bardi royal had gotten together with a dragon in order to produce the half-dragon descendant Halent. If anyone told me that the Bardi Empire was cursed, I would be the first to believe it even if nobody else did.

This true successor to the throne had never been considered a candidate. Nobody thought that the Dragon Knight Archduke had been in the running. From a certain standpoint, it could only be said that Orloss's secret plans were far too successful and that he did an amazing job hiding the information from everyone.

"What!?"

The most surprised person present was actually Halent himself, and his shocked expression didn't seem fake.

"I apologize for never telling you about this. But you're indeed my blood-related nephew. I'll tell you the rest in private. We have honored guests with us right now so don't let them laugh at us."

Alright then. Orloss had apparently kept this secret so well that even Halent didn't know.

"Ha! None of those idiots addicted to authority, wealth or pleasure are even remotely capable of succeeding my life's work. I will also tell you directly that you're not the only choice. Even if you are my nephew, I am not going to hand over my crown to you if you do not reach the level I believe a ruler must be at. However,

with the current situation, and due to your combat achievements at Nightrain City along with how all those idiots think I'm dead, causing them to reveal their true ugliness, you've become the only choice. I can just go ahead and tell you this now."

Hearing how energetic Orloss's laughter was, I could only feel pity for all the other princes.

Actually, if you analyzed the situation further, this result was only natural. The current situation in Bardi was unstable—where all the domain lords were waiting for an opportunity—and those with the greatest military authority would have the greatest power. And as the battle at Nightrain City continued, Halent was now the greatest military authority in all of Bardi.

As long as Halent obtained sufficient combat accolades at Nightrain City, he would automatically become the top candidate for the crown even without Orloss's support.

From a certain standpoint, Emperor Orloss was raising a group of venomous insects. He would intentionally have his potential successors fight each other using the most nefarious tactics possible and only then choose the successor he liked most.

I refused to believe that Halent was Orloss's only secret relative who was a candidate. It was evident, however, that Halent was the one Orloss liked most.

Perhaps it was because Halent had always been staunchly anti-undead and continued to view the country's issues with the utmost importance even when

the princes were fighting with themselves. Perhaps it was his defiant attitude of being willing to go against Orloss that allowed him to receive the emperor's favor.

Orloss was pretending to be on his deathbed, and this would not only help him identify the best successor but also cause those with too much ambition to expose themselves. The domain lords would

definitely cause a huge ruckus after the emperor's death anyways—he might as well gift the new emperor with a large-scale sacrifice.

"Rivers of blood will flow."

This was my prediction, and I felt quite confident about it. The more ambitious schemers and unlucky fools who died, the more secure the new emperor's position would be. Rather than wait for the schemers and fools to make a big ruckus after the emperor's death, it would be much more effective to kill them before they could cause trouble.

With Emperor Orloss explaining this, the conference table now consisted of two royals from our side with actual authority, Bardi's current emperor, future emperor, and the highest priest of their new church. This was a conference of the highest rank, the best evidence of Orloss's sincerity in wishing to reach an accord.

"I've always loved your quote from the Southern Sect: 'This world belongs to ordinary people. Those Gods up above are just hypocritical maniacs'..."

With that as the beginning, we began our formal negotiations, the contents of which became increasingly important as the discussion went on. When we managed—barely—to come to an agreement and complete the negotiations, the sky was light again.

We received a good harvest from this all-night discussion. Apart from learning about the grand scheme that Orloss had been preparing for almost ten years, we obtained what we wanted the most in exchange for agreeing to be his helpers and allies.

"A grand scheme? As expected of the most talented schemer in Bardi for the past three hundred years. He's so daring. But if his plan really succeeds, perhaps he'll be known to future generations as Bardi's wisest ruler in history."

This ambitious schemer had been quite generous to me. Since I agreed to help his scheme, he gave me many benefits.

"Two years' worth of food reserves from an entire domain—that's more than enough for all of East Mist to eat for five years. Right, there's also three thousand smiths and alchemists, and two hundred master scholars..."

Orloss had easily agreed to these conditions. A nouveau riche like Auland could never compare to the foundational strength of an ancient mega-empire. Orloss viewed them as nothing more than small gifts, but the pathetically poor Northlands would be able to save at least several decades' worth of hard work. He didn't hesitate to give us what we wanted most.

"Then will you support the Northlands Mist Alliance in becoming independent?"

"Of course. If the Northlands increases in strength we can better guard the border of the human world. San Antonio's influence is far too overreaching. Besides, even if I don't agree to help, would San Antonio really be able to control the Mist Alliance and its member countries, which are fully integrating with each other? Rather than being humiliatingly forced out in the end, voluntarily stepping back will help San Antonio save face. I'll write a letter to Sloan."

Making the Kasomi Dukedom independent and simultaneously causing the mega empire San Antonio to lose a subordinate country was something Bardi would want in the first place. As for the other payments... it didn't matter since the Bardi royalty wasn't the one who would pay. Sacrificing some local nobles' benefits and weakening the domain lords was something the centralized royal authority wished for as well.

As for us, the most important harvest wasn't the assistance we just received. It was the fact that we had established a working relationship with Halent. Perhaps the newly born Mist Alliance and the future Bardi emperor would be able to create an ironclad alliance.

To be honest, this was just chance, or maybe it was fate. With these coincidences, the meeting between the most outstanding leaders of the Mist Alliance and the future Bardi emperor would have a huge effect on history.

Of course, for me, being able to reach these agreements right now was hugely profitable. As for what came after...

I also agreed upon a time for me to visit the Southern Sect. And after leaving the meeting, I turned around and spoke to Glina.

"Glina, in the future you need to remember to take extra precautions against Bardi and Emperor Orloss. I feel a chill whenever he smiles. I highly doubt that even ten percent of the words he speaks are real. Also, about that damned scheme of his, don't participate in it. I'll do it by myself, so if it fails, it's easy for me to run away. It would be nice if those agreements on paper are upheld and we receive those resources, but don't pin all your hopes on it. It's also difficult to say whether or not Halent can really obtain the position of emperor."

The moment we left, before the ink on the agreements even dried, I unhesitatingly confessed to Glina my distrust towards the Bardi royalty. However, Orloss was probably saying something similar to Halent right now.

"Yes, there's no room for personal feelings in national affairs. You can only talk about benefits when dealing with a mega empire."

"...This sounds familiar."

"You were the one who told me that."

I nodded, as it indeed sounded like something I would say. Since Glina had been paying attention to me, at least it meant she was working hard at learning politics. This was much more reassuring than Reyne's disinterest in all things not combat related.

Glina still didn't seem to figure some things out, however. After

some hesitation, she asked me the question on her mind.

"It isn't like the princes are all useless. Isn't Emperor Orloss worried about letting the princes and domain lords ally with each other openly? What if one of the princes succeeds in a rebellion and overthrows him? I feel like it's possible."

"...If that really happens, he'll happily face his own demise. He's trying to raise the most venomous insect possible, so if he can raise a scorpion who surpasses him, he should be delighted to have a successor who's even better than himself."

I refused Orloss's offer to send me back in a horse-drawn carriage. Right now, I needed to organize my thoughts while taking a walk.

We didn't intend to return to the ambush airship. In the earlier discussion, I requested a personal estate which I intended to use as the temporary housing for our Northlands envoy group. I especially chose a location close to Evelyn.

From the powerful mystical sensations emanating from that cave, I felt that there was a not-so-simple reason why such a powerful dragon lived underground. And if the situation allowed, I wanted to ask Evelyn more questions.

I felt that she was far more trustworthy than the sly old fox of an emperor, even if they were most likely in cahoots.

As I walked on the streets of the royal district, the most obvious change was that all those "assassins" had finally disappeared. Dragons constantly patrolled the skies, and on the ground, I was stopped numerous times by patrolling soldiers and knights to check my identity.

They must have received their orders since these patrolling knights were respectful. Once they knew it was me, they immediately let me pass through.

"What do you think of all this, silly cat?"

"Milord, I think there's a tremendous secret behind everything. Yes, Milord! There's definitely something wrong here!"

At this moment, I confirmed that it was indeed a mistake to open up part of my memories to my magical pet. The silly cat's shamelessness and lack of limits were getting more ridiculous by the day.

"Are you certain? Beifeng is almost here—"

"There's something obviously off about all this patrolling. It can only mean that since the undead's ambush failed yesterday, they're still trying their best out there somewhere. Yep, those old guys aren't so easy to catch. It's quite possible these soldiers failed to catch them."

Just as I expected. Could it be said that Beifeng was now an unstoppable force to be reckoned with? This casual threat was so effective that Harloys immediately stopped joking around and acted serious—even I was astonished at this.

"You're still supposed to be a veteran Undead Lord. You're actually so scared of a youngster?"

"...Recently, the druid associations have been gathering evidence of his crimes. Perhaps this evidence should be called 'Record of seducing one hundred beasts' or 'Victims anthology.' This evidence has already been sent out to the druids, hunters, and ranger organizations in all the countries. Only now did I learn that while we were touring the countries, he was also touring and committing countless racial crimes. Since there were far too many victims and the influence was far too negative, with even some druids falling victim, he's already become the public enemy of everyone in nature job classes. I've heard that there's even a 'Beifeng hunting' organization that's been established. Right, do you want to read that 'Record of seducing'? Eaglestorm received a copy two days ago. It's so thick you could use it as a brick to beat someone up. You'll understand if you read it."

"Ha! Do you think I'm an idiot? Would I really touch a book that would make me go blind?"

I had already guessed what Beifeng had been doing since he often disappeared and suddenly reappeared. But considering that his personal abilities and loyalty to me were both outstanding, and the fact that his actions didn't break any laws—yes, that was the important part. Not a single country's laws forbid his actions—from the law's perspective, "It's not illegal so it's not a crime." So people could only go with the angle that his actions were immoral and disturbed public order.

But while we were all of the Law faction, the druids were extremist terrorists who wouldn't care for reason. Since even the typically neutral hunter and ranger organizations were now hunting Beifeng down, however, he must have really caused a major incident this time.

I thought about how this was now a major incident, and I seriously started to consider how to pretend I wasn't related to Beifeng if the druids came to me about it.

"The Nature Alliance? Last time, the person being hunted by the entire nature faction was the Plague King from the Calamity Rankings. I never expected such a major personage to appear among my subordinates. Perhaps one day Beifeng will be able to reach the top ten of the Calamity Rankings and surpass me... Should I try learning from Orloss and be happy that he might surpass me?"

Should I just beat Beifeng up and then give him away to trade for reward money? He would likely survive any situation no matter what, anyways, and I could give him half the reward money. Perhaps doing this several times would even make people stop hunting him...

"Brother Beifeng."

As I was randomly thinking such things, Glina suddenly spoke

up.

"Hmph! I know you have a good relationship with him, but this time don't even think of begging for mercy for his sake..."

"No! I'm saying, isn't that Brother Beifeng?"

Alright then. A black jacket covered most of his body, and a wide-brimmed hat covered his Dracon features. His black attire made him appear wretched and suspicious, while his black lizard tail, which had a pink butterfly bowtie on it, exposed his real identity. If this wasn't royal district, where "suspicious people" walked around everywhere, someone surely would have called the guards.

Right now, he was surrounded by several knights. They seemed to be discussing something.

"...Let's pretend not to see anything. I suppose I could use diplomatic channels to get him out of jail tomorrow."

When I walked closer, I discovered that the knights weren't arresting this pervert, as I had expected. Instead...

"Five hundred silver coins! I can't go any lower! Just look at this printing, this expression, this artwork—it's wonderful! This is top-quality stuff."

"Hahaha! Brother Beifeng is selling porn books."

"...You know what porn books are?"

"There are many porn books sold in Sulfur Mountain City... Ah! I definitely wasn't collecting books with you and Mister Adam as the main characters! The two of you aren't right for each other at all! Such a ridiculous pairing."

Alright then, I gave up. I really didn't have a single normal subordinate.

"She collected books with you and Clint or you and Xueti as the main characters... You need to do something about the porn books. But even Sulfur Mountain City Lord Annie is reading them so it's

probably impossible to do anything. Right, I've heard that they're even having numerous "book-selling conventions" every year, just like the 87th in your memory. I heard that at last year's 12th, Momo sold thirteen thousand books with rather heavy tastes, breaking a new record... I won't tell you who she used as the model for those porn books—you can probably guess."

Harloys instantly sold Glina out while stabbing me right in the heart. I didn't want to guess at all!

Actually, when I left Sulfur Mountain City, it was the most peaceful area in the Underground. This meant that all war artists were out of work, plus there were many years of influence there from a transmigrator like me so Sulfur Mountain City's culture and artwork were extremely developed. However, they appeared to have developed a bit too much.

"These bastards, I..."

When I thought about it, it really was impossible for me to do anything. The current City Lord was Annie, and the Church of Law was led by its religious leaders. I didn't have a status I could intervene with, so I would be unable to issue any documents like "330 recommendations for improving the morality of Sulfur Mountain City."

"I can't manage Sulfur Mountain City, but I can manage this bastard in front of me!"

Just as I angrily walked over, Beifeng saw me and trembled before taking his books and running. Yet his customers pulled on the books, causing some books to drop on the floor. Various naughty scenes were revealed.

With only one glance, I understood why he ran. I then silently unsheathed my sword.

"Tsk—tsk—tsk—a Princess Peach collection, personally drawn by Momo? Mega-limited gold edition? Excellent artwork, even

someone like me is a little moved... Eh, the later content is rather strange. Isn't that the list of victims' pictures from the 'Beifeng evidence collection'? Beifeng, you're trying to teach your ways and scam money at the same time?! Reading halfway through to suddenly see such a thing? They'll all become eunuchs or perverts —this is ten times worse than poison!"

Beifeng Herault didn't have a chance to respond to Harloys, who was reveling in the situation. He was trying his best to survive the rampaging attack of the Sword Saint, whose eyes were bloodshot and veins were bulging.

"Boss, I'm sorry! It was all to increase the sales and have everyone understand my personal interests! I tried various different girls on the cover, but yours was the best-selling one!"

"...You still dare to run? Taste my anti-evil slash!"

Chapter 391: Burial

Three days had passed since the negotiation with the Bardi emperor. The city had returned to calm and quiet after the small storm of Slimes from earlier. From what I saw, however, this seemed to only be the calm before an even bigger storm.

"Mills Milan was the most pious of Bardi princes. Ever diligent and conscientious, Mills was earnest, assiduous and bled for his country. He was deeply treasured by our Orloss the Thirteenth, but today he was assassinated by underhanded assassins. Those evil villains even disguised themselves as our Mage Country allies in an attempt to sow dissent between us. But, in front of our wise majesty Orloss, how can such puny tactics succeed? There's only one truth—the murderer was... the Holy Church!"

Although this was ridiculous, it was the "truth" we wanted to see.

The issue of Mills' assassination had been settled. He was murdered by the Holy Church's assassins. As for the so-called Dark Elf assassins, that was nothing more than a tactic used to blame Bardi's "best friend," the Mage Country.

When the citizens saw this announcement posted on the walls and in advertisements, their expressions were pretty much a perfect example of "The world changes so quickly that I don't know what's going on."

Of course, rumors were flying everywhere.

Rumors would sometimes be useful, such as when you were trying to shake the foundations of a country. Other times, they could only become gossip that not even tiny newspapers would dare to publish, such as now.

The burial took place the very next day. It seemed rushed in order to make this incident go away.

From a certain standpoint, burying Mills with so many accolades

was an honor he didn't deserve. When the Bardi royal knights cleaned out Mills's home the next day, they discovered—to their surprise—evidence that he had been working with the undead. With the information they discovered, they executed another two princes.

The reason for these princes to ally with the undead? Actually, it was simple. What the princes wanted more than anything right now was to have powerful forces at their command, and the undead were naturally powerful. Plus, with the previous friendly relationship the undead had with the nobles, it would be easy to ally themselves with them.

These princes not only protected and hid the undead, but they even provided bloodthirsty human sacrifices. From the innocent citizens and the torture room discovered in Mills's basement, the fact that Mills had been judged by Yawen's Anti-Crime Slash as "incredibly evil" was no mistake.

Those rescued said he had long fallen into such evil ways. He secretly worshipped the Evil God of Pain, which helped him speedily increase in power by personally "using" countless human sacrifices.

"...He used to be a true military man. He once fought a bloody battle at the brink for the sake of his allies for two days and two nights. He once swore to me that he would change the Bardi military's rotten and inefficient system where only nobles had command. But now... I was the one who did him wrong by adopting him as a prince."

The old emperor sat still for an entire morning in his garden after hearing his servant's report. In the end, that was all he could say.

Perhaps a hero like Mills—who had returned alive from a hellish battlefield—had an adamant will that could resist against even the most despairing of situations. But after tasting wealth and

authority for ten years, he unknowingly became the type of man he had hated the most.

"...Give him the best burial possible."

Perhaps this was the final act of sympathy and kindness the old emperor could give to this potential successor of his, one of Orloss's top candidates.

But the burial on the next day ended up being for three princes instead of one. Of course, it was proclaimed that the Holy Church's assassins had killed all three heroic princes in an attempt to sew discord and even start a war.

And so the Holy Church once again took the blame for something they didn't do... wait a moment—it could be said that it was their fault still.

Humans were a type of creature that instinctively preferred the light. The God of Light, God of Holy Light and others would naturally receive advantages from this when spreading their teachings. Perhaps this was an instinct connected to the sun, but when the Holy Church, which represented Light and Justice, ruled over more than half of humanity's mentality and religion, this in a way meant that the Holy Church had absolute authority.

Why's that? All the Holy Church had to do was mention that a certain way of thinking or a certain event was right and just. Anyone else's protests would become meaningless. There was also the fact that those who disagreed would typically disagree with each other, so the Holy Church simply had to control at least one-third of all humans' way of thinking. And in the world of Eich, people's belief in the Holy Light far surpassed one-third of humanity.

Absolute authority represented absolute control, and what did absolute divine authority mean?

"...You Holy Light Cardinals seem so proper on the surface and

claim all your actions are authorized by the God of Holy Light? Then, if your reasoning and morality are guaranteed by the God of Holy Light, then who guarantees the God of Holy Light's logic and justice? All I can see are those pretending to be good on the surface while secretly acting no better than beasts; thieves and scoundrels who pretend to have divine authority. With your logic, since all you hypocritical villains haven't yet received divine punishment, doesn't that mean your so-called venerated True God has lost his sense of reason? Is he dead? Or did he go insane as well?"

This was a quote from a certain "maniacal blasphemer" whose name was purged from the Holy Church's annals. Even without him knowing it, his words had spread after his death. This "desecrator" was a former pious Cardinal, and had laughed maniacally while he had been burned at the stake. His crime was that he had killed several of his fellow Cardinals who liked to do unspeakable acts with young boys. He even killed his own teacher for this crime.

But I felt that this unlucky Cardinal's biggest crime was that he told the truth: that the God of Holy Light had gone insane.

Perhaps it was human instinct to worship the light. However, another human instinct was to break free from restraints and seek freedom. Plus, there would forever be inevitable conflict between royal and divine authority. The most important part was that the Holy Church, which had absolute divine authority, had begun rotting on the inside. In this current revolutionary generation, the Holy Church was still clung on to its outdated ways; of course there would be an endless amount of resistance.

No ordinary plant would be able to survive in a desert with no water and earth. Yet stubborn seeds could always be seen sprouting from cliffside cracks.

"...The Pure Holy Light requires no belief in a False God. The Church of Holy Light worships nothing more than a False God borrowing the name of Holy Light. Prince Mills, Prince Masi and

Prince Catlan were all holy believers of the Pure Holy Light. Their deaths were caused by the Evil Gods who feared true belief!"

In front of Bardi's major nobles and merchants, Head Priest Amoya of the Southern Sect angrily ranted against the Holy Church's hypocrisy and shamelessness. At the same time, he displayed the fact that he still possessed the power of Holy Light.

"Only the Light is eternal! In the name of our first pope, I declare that these three princes have valiantly sacrificed themselves for our cause. We shall take revenge for their sake, fight for the cause of justice, and battle for the Pure Holy Light!"

A coincidence could easily create history, and since there was an opportunity, the Church of Pure Holy Light entered the stage of history. Head Priest Amoya became Pope Amoya the First, and these three evil villainous princes became holy believers.

The backdrop to all this was Emperor Orloss, who was crying many tears for losing three of his adopted princes, and Archduke Halent, who was leading the ceremony and following ancient Bardi tradition by carving a tiny scar on his face with a knife. As he did this, he swore to take revenge, angrily shouting in response to the citizens' wishes.

"...We have lived here for countless generations, but those hypocritical villains dared to declare us as heretics, invade our country and kill our citizens? Fine then! Since they want war, we'll give them war! Bardi shall have eternal victory!"

Once Halent's speech reached its end, this burial ceremony transformed into a morale-raising event for stirring up war sentiments. Once the citizens began chanting "Bardi, eternal victory!" war was unavoidable.

Meanwhile, I was in the crowd, concealed under a cape. I was covering my mouth, doing my best not to laugh out loud while commenting to Glina beside me.

"The honest and direct Halent? The sincerely grieving Orloss? The holy Mills? The relationship between holy justice and evil is so confusing. This is the family of that sly old fox, who's famously known as a scorpion. This is why I feel human nature is so hard to understand and why humans are so interesting."

Chapter 392: Two Battlefronts

From a certain standpoint, the recent incidents had greatly helped Orloss out.

It wasn't that the incidents had helped him formally declare war against the Holy Church. This was going to happen regardless. The true result of the Mills incident was that Orloss made up his mind and chose Halent as his successor.

Since the successor had been determined, the other candidates naturally became unnecessary. And so the burial ceremony transformed into a military ceremony—the numerous princes were "deeply influenced by Prince Mills' example of serving in the military and volunteered to follow in his footsteps to go to the most dangerous battles on the frontlines as only lowest-level ordinary soldiers to fight for our country."

And that was how these princes "volunteered" to join the military. They became the commanders of only minor squadrons at either Nightrain City's frontlines—where it was a meat grinder—or the eastern battlefront in the newly formed army to fight against the remnants of the Holy Army vanguard and become glorious frontline cannon fodder.

Orloss didn't take away all the princes' hopes, however. He didn't publicize the fact that he had chosen Halent as his successor. He even declared that Bardi's next emperor needed to have excellent military talent and make great military achievements. He also allowed to each prince to take a maximum of ten of their strongest followers. If they had sufficiently strong followers and could obtain enough combat achievements, perhaps the emperor position could still be theirs.

Of course, Halent was the City Lord of Nightrain City. He had a large squadron of Dragon Knights under him, while the other princes didn't even have an entire combat squadron—for a prince

to overturn the situation would be highly unlikely. It would only be possible in theory.

"Damn it! What have I been doing? I should have focused more on killing off all my competitors. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been forced into doing this."

Thanks to Orloss's behind the scenes manipulations, the princes, angry at the situation, thought in such a manner.

Of course, not all the princes were focused on obtaining the position of emperor. Some of the princes had already become accomplished in other areas. For example, the Thirty-Ninth Prince Aent was quite skilled as an artist. He even financially supported many poor artists who couldn't find other work, and was famous as an appraiser. At this time, Orloss gave an order for him to become the vice chairman of the Bardi Artists Association.

Orloss's meaning was obvious. It would be impossible for Prince Aent to become the emperor, but he could at least enjoy being a pampered prince for the rest of his life.

From a certain standpoint, someone like Aent was the true intelligent one. With the allure of the emperor's position, even the smartest youth would selectively become foolish. Only very few princes abandoned the fight to become emperor and focused on other things instead.

Of course, some princes had other ideas, wanting to prematurely determine the successor rather than being forced to become cannon fodder.

Plenty of princes had connections with other factions and domain lords. Several tried to bring emergency backup military support. However, a giant squadron of royal knights along with numerous Adult Dragons escorted the princes to the frontlines, so most of the princes abandoned thoughts of resisting.

Only most—so a few still tried to resist? Did some princes rebel

early on? That's right. There were obviously some princes who viewed the emperor's throne as more important than anything else. The end result? Naturally, the "the Holy Church's assassins" appeared again several more times. Perhaps another mass burial ceremony would be required next month.

When internal conflicts intensified to a certain degree, a typical political maneuver would be to focus the citizens' attention on outside conflicts—this was common in both this world and my original one.

Nightrain City would now receive the most reinforcements it had ever received. One-fourth of all domain lords in Bardi sent their personal troops. Several dozen princes and their followers arrived to become low-ranked commanders on the frontlines, and the newly-born Southern Sect took over the Holy Church's job of fighting against the undead. This was an opportunity for the Southern Sect to prove themselves to the world.

Meanwhile, on the eastern front, Halent took his personal troops and an army of almost two hundred thousand to fight against the invading Holy Army.

This seemed inconceivable? Halent was the City Lord of Nightrain City, and the troops still guarding there were all his personal followers, so why was he sent to the other battlefront? Didn't this seem like one was commanding at random?

This seemed inexplicable, but it was actually simple to understand after some explaining. This was, in fact, due to non-military considerations.

The current Halent was no longer just a "general" who could be allowed to charge into battle at the frontlines. He was now the "crown prince" and a critical pillar of the country. Unlike smaller countries that still used princes as generals, major countries preferred consistency and authority. So-called face meant concrete benefits. Since Halent was now the crown prince and would

inherit the throne, he was indispensable. He couldn't be allowed to lose a battle or die in war.

Orloss couldn't afford to let Halent fight a losing battle, either. Otherwise, it could cause a chain reaction that would lead to the diminishing of royal authority, something even a mega empire would have trouble bearing. This was especially so since the domain lords were waiting for an opportunity. If the royalty suffered any losses in battle, those with ambitions would naturally act.

That was why, for all major countries, the emperor wouldn't do anything like personally go out into combat unless it was absolutely necessary. Although the emperor personally leading would greatly increase morale, there was also the consideration that if the emperor lost, or was taken captive, a terrible chain reaction would occur.

That's right—lose. Although the southern battlefront against the undead received far more manpower than the eastern battlefront, there was the possibility that the Undead Emperors might intervene. Plus, the previous battle there involved the mega powerful Titan Giants and True Gods, which obviously escalated the level of the Holy War. Even though the Bardi army on the southern battlefront was stronger, there was no guarantee of victory.

Meanwhile, on the eastern front, although a famous general led the Holy Army, they were now badly frightened after being attacked by the dragons. They were also stuck deep within Bardi, with their backup support and communication cut off. Plus, the royalty sent out their elite squadrons and ace job class soldiers—if Halent still couldn't win, his gilded position as crown prince would no longer be his.

Actually, when I heard that Halent's army even had two Dragon World leaders and more than ten Ancient Dragons, I knew that there would be no possibility of him losing—even if he wanted to.

"Don't mention Orloss; now, even the dragons won't allow him to lose. After cleaning the remaining enemies in the east that have already been so weakened, he can continue to the south and steal more combat achievements. If the princes lose in the south, it's the perfect chance for Halent to arrive in the nick of time and save the country in a perfect reversal. There's no need to worry that Halent won't have enough forces at his disposal. Orloss will definitely activate the full military might of Bardi if the southern front loses. The true foundational strength of a mega empire in an all-out war is frightening to behold."

"What if the southern battlefront wins against the undead? Won't Halent seem like he achieved less in comparison, then?"

"No, that's even better because Halent is still the City Lord of Nightrain City. The military leaders he left behind there are his direct followers, so it'll still be his credit if they win. They're using his preparations and defenses against the undead, so it'll become his achievement."

"How sly. So you're saying that no matter if Bardi wins or loses the southern battlefront, Halent will profit more than anyone else in the end? That's a perfect example of the house always being the winner!"

"It's indeed quite sly. But this is politics. Halent succeeding the throne is what will benefit Bardi the most."

There was another benefit of choosing Halent, the dragon descendant, as the next emperor. The dragons had already used concrete actions to show the maximum amount of friendliness possible for them towards Orloss and Bardi. Perhaps Halent had always been one of the top candidates for the throne simply because of his relationship with the dragons.

Now that he was named in secret as the successor, this future Bardi emperor had apparently become a bridge between Bardi and the dragons. Considering the harsh reality that the Holy War was

upon us, teaming up was something common. The Bardi Empire and the Dragon World would become ever closer.

"Orloss is indeed a sly old fox. He sees so far into the future."

"...It's probably related to the 'prophecies' youleft behind. You must have spoken about the severe consequences of Armageddon. Otherwise, why would he possibly prepare for the absolute worst?"

"I don't remember what I said back in the day, but my guess is that I tried to make it sound as bad as possible. That's what all prophets are like. Make the future sound like Armageddon is coming. That's how others will treat you as their savior. And, with my personality, I probably even told them the truth."

The seed I planted so casually back then had now become a tall skyscraper tree. From the current situation, it can be seen that Bardi had already escaped the terrible end they met in the game's history. If the Bardi Empire didn't collapse, the Mage Country and other nearby countries would have a much better time in the future calamities. Everything seemed to be improving.

Plus, with the Southern Sect formally revealing themselves, and how the Holy Army on the eastern front was destined to be eradicated, what could be better news? The most delightful news would always be that of your worst enemies having a hard time. Recently, my mood had been excellent.

"You don't intend to interfere?"

"Why would I interfere with another family's affairs? Rather than that, I'd prefer to think more about my own future. Besides, that sly old fox doesn't want me to get involved."

"Eh?"

"The Southern Sect. I just chatted a few words with Amoya before that old Orloss personally interjected and led the conversation elsewhere. Orloss basically had 'let's prevent Roland from stealing people under me' written all over his face. He even

intentionally made me play chess, chat and drink tea with him. But he was so awful at chess. He lost more than twenty games in a row but still wouldn't let me go and wasted half of my night."

Although the Church of Pure Holy Light was established in Bardi and had an excellent relationship with the Bardi royalty, Orloss probably considered the fact that I was technically the true leader of this church. And religious believers were always "unpredictable" in their beliefs... Fine then. Directly speaking, fervent believers would be capable of doing almost anything for the sake of their beliefs. If I said something like "The Holy Light beckons you to the Northlands, the true home of Holy Light," Orloss wouldn't be able to even cry. It was normal for him to worry.

"...You're not angry about others misunderstanding you as wanting to steal away their people? Your temper is getting much better."

"No, he didn't misunderstand me at all. In fact, that sly old fox even saw the contract I had prepared."

"You really were trying to steal his people from under him! Can you have any shame?"

"Shame? What's that? Can I eat it? Why can't I steal people from him? We have a bad relationship with the Holy Church already despite the God of Holy Light allying with the God of Law. Besides, the God of Holy Light himself doesn't care about anything the Holy Church does. We can definitely just take in the entire Church of Pure Holy Light. Holy Knights and Holy Light priests are excellent job classes to have in war, and our warriors also need the Holy Light's support.

"...So Orloss was still more skilled in the end as you lost out here."

"Who said that? I succeeded. Who cares if Orloss was right in front of me? You can't stop two Holy Light job class members from exchanging their ideas about Holy Light, can you? Hmph! Even

though that chess maniac forced me to play chess with him all night, I simultaneously won my Holy Light debate against Amoya the First easily while also defeating that sly old fox in chess. I'm amazing, aren't I?"

My mood became even more jubilant as I recalled how that sly old fox was obviously holding in his complaints while still doing his best to maintain a smile.

"...You are indeed amazing, especially with how shameless you can be! Could the Southern Sect really be intending on immigrating and abandoning their excellent base in Bardi?"

"That's impossible, of course. Amoya and his Cardinals that have reached this stage aren't idiots. But they'll soon be establishing various branch churches in the Mist Alliance and start spreading the teachings of the Pure Holy Light. Amoya also agreed to have his number one disciple go to East Mist to become the local head priest there. Also, more than two thousand of their mid-ranked elites will be going as well. The future Mist Alliance will no longer be lacking in Holy Light job class members. For the Southern Sect, this is a great chance to establish a backup base and widen their influence, a win-win for both of us. There's no need for us to worry that they won't do their best. Orloss can't even find a reason to stop this."

"...You're not afraid of religious conflicts in the north? We already have the Church of Law there, along with the undead."

"I'm not afraid at all. I've been recently visiting the Southern Sect many times to confirm their teachings and also confirm their attitude. As expected of their Holy Codex which I personally wrote; although some things have changed over the times, it's still quite moderate. 'Do not judge anyone guilty because of only their species or birthright. The Holy Light should be as warm as the sun; it should not burn any existence for simply existing. The Holy Light only punishes evil based on wicked actions.' Perhaps this is how Holy Light is truly supposed to be."

"That's just how youunderstand Holy Light. However, the fact that we can now have Holy Knights who don't hate the undead is indeed great news. You going over to the Southern Sect wasn't only to confirm their teachings, was it? At least, when you 'won your Holy Light debate against Amoya,' you were probably trying to modify their teachings."

The silly cat rolled her eyes at me. Even though she clearly asked a question, she said it as a statement. She had seen through everything.

"Heh heh—even now I still have the chance to modify their teachings. Once they truly start spreading their teachings, it'll be impossible to change things even if I wanted to. Since I'm the 'original creator' standing right in front of them, Amoya is just like a 'fan fiction author' who's seriously asking me for my understanding of my own teachings. I intend to give them my full understanding of the Holy Light so that they will modify their teachings in a way that's acceptable to them. This is a majorly troublesome issue, as Amoya is soon going to leave together with the army. I need to use my time well. When that sly old fox emperor leaves the church, I'm going to go back right away to chat more with Amoya."

"...It's good that everything is going so successfully. But everything being so successful is rather strange. I feel like something is off."

"Don't mention it! I've been feeling like something is off as well. Since when has my luck ever been so good? Things have been so successful recently that I'm scared. Let me think, if there really might be a problem somewhere, the most likely one is that perhaps Halent will somehow lose his battle against the Holy Army vanguard in the east—why are you covering my mouth?"

"Shut up! You'll jinx things! Don't you think you've already jinxed enough things in your life?"

Chapter 393: Cultivation

In a small, hidden yard, a "battle" between a man and a woman was nearing its end. The woman now lay on the ground, moaning helplessly.

"Have you had enough? We've been doing this all night, and I can't take it anymore. You just take some pills if you're tired, but I haven't had a single moment of rest. I've never seen anyone as shameless as you."

Only a large silk scarf covered her petite body, but right now it was drenched in body fluid. Her childlike face was flush from exerting all her energy. Should I be proud of myself for making the infamous Snake Archduchess have such a cute and helpless expression?

The human body had a limitless number of secrets. High-level undead would imitate human physical phenomena not only to enjoy themselves but also to further develop their bodies' potential. The Snake Archduchess had, at a minimum, already restored numerous senses and the ability to produce certain fluid.

"Haha! Since you can't take it anymore, just lay there and enjoy the experience. Yep, open up your legs and lay there—damn it! Who chucked that brick at me?"

Seeing the Snake Archduchess beg for mercy and hearing her pant and moan had made me laugh out loud in great satisfaction, but my euphoria was ruined because someone had just thrown a brick at me.

"Stop speaking in such a ridiculous manner! There are minors here! Is it really that fun to talk as if something censored is going on? Why the hell are you narrating with the phrase "drenched with body fluid?" Can't you just say sweat instead of fluid to prevent misunderstandings!?"

As I swept my gaze around, I noticed Glina, Timlad and the other minors looking at me with great interest. Damn, what was with those high magnification binoculars and memory crystals? Did they intend to make copies of this scene and sell them for money...? If it sold well, they needed to remember to give me a cut of the profits!

"...I couldn't help but get in the mood with how fun her words were. Alexandra, get up for our hundred and twenty-first round of training. Let's continue. This time, it needs to last for more than thirty seconds!"

That's right, this was nothing more than simple martial training. I didn't have the habit of torturing my prisoners. As for anything else, of course I wouldn't do anything when all my subordinates were watching me... Cough—I just wanted a pretty female maid who looked great in maid attire. Was that such a wrong desire for a man to have?

Cough—cough—getting back on topic, nothing that needed to be censored was going on in my new private estate's yard. There was no BDSM or anything like that going on here. I did indeed want to try something out and had great fun creating some of the most famous Chinese torture instruments out of ice, but the Snake Archduchess unhesitatingly told me everything before I got a chance to use them.

"You surrendered so easily? Where's your honor and loyalty? What about the trials and tribulations of the ascetic cultivation your physical body went through? Your monk's unyielding heart? How could you surrender just like this! I won't even have a sense of accomplishment!"

"Honor? How can someone dead have any honor? Loyalty? The master I swore loyalty to is dead."

Alright then. She was so self-confident about surrendering and so logical that I couldn't even find anything to say.

Actually, with my previous Senator subordinates as examples, Undead Lords' concept of loyalty and honor was, to begin with, unreliable. Since they had already died once, they took everything vague—such as reputation—lightly and were only stubborn about few things. Yep, directly speaking, they were basically a group of bastards with no shame and no beliefs.

In the Undead Planes, the conflicts between Undead Lords would always end in the victor obtaining everything the loser possessed. The strong ruling over the weak and the law of the jungle was deep within their blood. Surrendering was commonplace, especially when the other party was an Undead Emperor.

"I already tried my best against you. That pays off what I owe Lord Aso for canceling my soul contract before he died."

Of course, I didn't believe in this information that I obtained too easily. The undead had their methods of communication. While I could obtain information directly through drawing out her soul, that would be too much of a waste. Using a master/subordinate contract relationship was the most common and effective.

No Undead Lord who was even slightly prideful would be willing to sign a soul contract where the servant would die if the master died. Yet Aso had obtained the loyalty of these prideful Undead Lords. No matter what I threatened Alexandra with, she was still unwilling to sign a soul contract.

I tried reducing my requirement and making this Myth-ranked Undead Lord sign a servant contract with me where she would be forced to obey my orders. Even that was a rather difficult task. All the Chinese torture methods I showed her were ineffective. However, when I brought out my Cold Flames of Despair and threatened her with eternal frozenness, she obediently complied.

Although she surrendered and readily sold out her remaining companions, we still didn't obtain much.

The Snake Archduchess had arrived in the mortal plane for less

than a year. She was simply an elite Undead Lord under Aso who could act independently. It sounded nice as she had great authority, but the downside was that she was also just a commander with few subordinates who had suddenly been transferred to a foreign location.

All the original undead contact points would definitely no longer be used now that she was captured. Plus, Aso's elites had mostly been eliminated, and Alexandra didn't know much to begin with, either. The most useful information she had was regarding the other Undead Emperors and Undead Lords' personalities and abilities, but none of this would be useful for the time being.

"I won't take care of anyone useless here. In order to work for your worth, you must pay me with your physical body... Why are you all looking at me like that? Did I say something wrong? It's so hard for me to find an opponent like this. She's perfect for practicing martial arts. Come, let's go for another round."

For some reason, I seemed to be having a problem lately with strange wording which would easily be misconstrued.

But it was true that the Snake Archduchess's greatest value to me was as a training partner for cultivating martial arts.

"If it weren't for my new dragon armor, I would have already died several hundred times."

I always loved to analyze things after a battle because any problems exposed by actual combat would typically be fatal down the road. In games, it would be easy enough to proceed thanks to the ability to save and load. If someone died in a game, their experience from dying would help them the next time they faced the same battle. And they'd even be able to keep their equipment and previous experience. Unfortunately, there weren't many such chances in the real world. Nor could I afford to wait around and endlessly reincarnate; otherwise, a perfect version of me would appear eventually... whoops, I seem to be getting off topic.

Cough—before this battle against the Undead Lords, I never expected I would be suppressed so pitifully by melee combat. Every single move I used was predicted, and even if I instantly changed my move or made up a new attack, my moves would still be perfectly read. Not only that, I was unable to defend against any of Alexandra's attacks. If it weren't for my armor's astonishing defensive prowess, I would have instantly lost.

I would have lost countless times already if fighting was simply a competition of martial arts techniques.

True, monks were known as the demonic melee combat class, but it was ridiculous how I had so pitifully lost in technique. Since I didn't comprehend the gap between us, why not ask her to teach me?

Of course, Alexandra had refused to do so when I asked her! She probably felt that... well... she had just surrendered, after all, so she didn't want to listen to my orders immediately. That would make her seem too shameless. So I showed her my modification techniques that I used previously on Harloys and told her that I was no longer satisfied with Slimes. I then asked Alexandra if she preferred to be a snail or an earthworm, and then she obediently helped me train and taught me.

"Your sword techniques? They're not bad. I'm really not being sarcastic. Your foundational techniques must be from the ancient royal style. Every move you make for each sword strike is proper. Plus, you have pretty good combat instincts and talent. It wouldn't be wrong to call you a sword genius rarely seen in a hundred years. Yep, you're pretty good among humans."

Alright then. Those last few words pretty much invalidated everything before. That's right—I was pretty good, but only "among humans." I was a "sword genius rarely seen in a hundred years," but, again, only among humans.

I didn't get angry at this and simply listened with my full

attention. This was the cold, harsh truth. Since the Snake Archduchess was capable of singlehandedly suppressing me in melee combat to the point where I didn't even know which direction was north, it would be good for me to listen to her. Besides, with my experience, I felt it would always be best to listen to the expert in their specialized field. Any expert's criticism would typically be beneficial for the listener.

"...Yep, you're pretty good among humans, but from your fight with me, you should be able to see that your sword techniques are focused on human opponents. At most, they're suited for fighting enemies no bigger than three or four meters. These sword techniques lack imagination and adaptability, which is why I can easily predict your moves. All I need to do is watch your eyes and muscles' movements and I can ascertain the direction of your next move."

This was indeed a problem. But how was I supposed to solve it? I didn't have a boneless body like she did, nor was I capable of distorting my joints in strange ways. How was I supposed to be imaginative?

"Don't look at me with such a doubtful expression. I have evidence for my words. Have you ever met an opponent who suddenly cut off his own limb and tossed it towards you as a bomb? Have you ever fought someone covered in sticky oil that will glue your skin to his upon contact? Have you ever seen someone with an indestructible body, whose only weakness was on the soles of his feet? Do you know the advantages of me choosing such a flexible body? Before I formed my fighting style back in the day, not only did I experience countless battles, but I even challenged thousands of monasteries and fought against several thousand legendary monks."

The Snake Archduchess paused for a moment and revealed a somewhat scared expression, as if she recalled some painful memory.

"...Actually, I'm not much to speak of, either. Don't think my melee combat ability has reached the peak. In my thousands of battles, I've lost several tens of times in melee combat alone, and only barely escaped each time. In fact, one individual even managed to send out nine energy waves with one punch. Just a single exchange of blows shattered all my joints. If I wasn't a Blood Tribe member, I think I'd have been crippled for life."

As expected, monks would become more demonic as they got older. The only way to deal with them was to never let them get close to you. The lucky part, however, was that monks rarely lived long lives. I suddenly recalled Emordilorcan for some reason—perhaps his monk fighting form was an imitation of some opponent he had been unable to defeat.

"In the Undead Planes, the conflicts between the undead are unending, all in order to obtain chances to level up and survive. There are at minimum three others—also Myth-rank Undead Lords—who can easily defeat me, and two Undead Emperors far surpass me in martial arts. Most of them still use their human form, but their combat techniques are at a level I can't even reach. And they still can defeat me by simply using their natural talent abilities."

I had originally been rather proud of my sword techniques—being able to so become a Sword Saint had been the best proof of my talent. But now it would seem that all that was only considered "talented among humans." Three hundred plus years ago, this was plenty to be proud of, and more than enough to dominate the world. But now...

"This won't be enough considering my future opponents."

My future opponents would only be stronger. I would likely meet monsters and demons who were thousands or tens of thousands of years old. No matter how powerful the strength behind my magic sword, it would all be meaningless if I was unable to hit my opponent. In that case, it was extremely necessary for me to

improve my sword techniques—one of the important foundational strengths of a warrior.

"It's all in practical battles. You should be able to tell at your level. Accumulated combat experience will bring about changes in you sooner or later. Your foundations are quite solid, but you obviously lack practical combat experience. Right, there are all sorts of ancient sword techniques out there. Some people have been able to use pure sword techniques to achieve results even magic can't mimic."

I once again thought about the sword techniques from the immemorial and great immemorial generations I could exchange for through my System or the Justice Points system. Then, I looked at my Justice Points wallet, which was just about empty. Recently, both the silly cat and my System had been "helping" me spend my money, so I had fewer and fewer points stocked up. I originally had enough to purchase half of a book, but now I barely had enough to buy a single page. I almost wanted to cry at the thought.

"I wonder if Beyana will sell just one page to me. Cough—cough—this is so embarrassing; let's not think too much about it... Since I won't be able to purchase any ancient sword techniques any time soon, let's just use practical combat to train myself. Don't I have a perfect training target in front of me?"

Alright then. Running out to the battlefield to become cannon fodder wasn't possible for me, and the battles between mortals in Eich would be unable to give me the experience I needed. It was so rare for me to meet an opponent like Alexandra, so I had limited her physical abilities to Gold through our contract, forbid her from using any ultimate moves, lowered her speed and basic stats to lower the difficulty, and continued training against her.

But even so, I had been beaten up quite badly. Then, I discovered that the "Forest of Dreams Original Root" was capable of recovering my injuries and stamina while in battle, which was

what Alexandra was referring to when she said I was "taking pills." And so, after one hundred and twenty training sessions, the situation finally changed, and I started winning... fine, there was no change. How could it possibly be so easy to improve?

Although I had still been the one getting beaten up, at least I'd been able to last slightly longer than before. Unfortunately, the Snake Archduchess was now playing dead, unwilling to train any longer.

"Alright, I guess I could let you go for today as tiring you to death on the first day would be too much of a waste... Don't even think of running. Countless eyes are watching you. How about I transform you into a mouse for daily life, making you a perfect match for Harloys!"

"...Let me remind you that if you intend to change her into a mouse, you should probably tell Beifeng. He recently brought back a batch of white spiky mice."

"Sure, no problem."

"Who's Beifeng?"

The Undead Lord, who wasn't up to date on societal affairs, asked this out of curiosity, so Glina handed her a book with an evil smile. The Snake Archduchess flipped through a few pages before immediately standing back up.

"Lord Roland, I've suddenly reached an understanding. Let us continue our practice."

Seeing this Undead Lord trembling, I could only sigh. Beifeng's scariness had leveled up yet again. This also gave me an idea.

"How about, if I meet any captives who refuse to surrender no matter what, I'll just transform that captive into an animal and give them to Beifeng."

"That's so inhumane!"

"That's the most inhumane thing I've ever heard of!"

"Milord, please reconsider! Doing something so evil will make everyone view you as the evil antagonist!"

"Boss, I object! I, Beifeng, am not someone so casual!"

"Yep. Because when you're casual, you're not human to begin with."

Chapter 394: Northlands, Home of the Mist

The fact I chose an isolated estate had benefits; for example, one could undertake major construction without neighbors complaining about the noise... cough—I was referring to how I slightly enhanced the military defensiveness of this location and how our military training here wouldn't be noticed.

According to my agreement with Orloss, I needed to organize my subordinates' strength to participate in the upcoming plan. While it sounded cool to fight as a boss with numerous ultimate abilities, what that meant was the boss had no reliable subordinates.

Considering the high level of the future battles, plus how the current situation was becoming more and more troublesome, it was indeed time to reorganize all the combat strength that fought under the banner of the Mist.

Yes—the banner of the Mist. Mist as in Roland Mist. This Mist didn't refer to East Mist and Reyne but rather the personal forces that belonged to me, Roland. Or perhaps I should say those that belonged to the Mist Family.

The overall combat strength of all our allies' armies combined would be considerable. However, much of this would belong to another country or alliance. The combat strength that could be counted as completely my own wasn't all that much.

My current combat strength included the Seven Original Sins, of which the eldest sister Lust was in a deep sleep, Pride was disobedient and Sloth wasn't yet born. Most of my elite Red Hunting Hounds were still in the Underground, messing around, while the remaining worked in East Mist.

I had a series of subordinates similar to retainers, such as my personal consultant Timlad, Olivia, and all those engineers and alchemists. There were also Elisa's gift of a merchant association, the arch druid Eaglestorm and the Dark Elves Diana, Yawen,

Momo, and Victoria, who were no longer tied to Dark Elf society constraints, "and so on."

"...Why is it that I'm called 'and so on?'" a certain Dracon complained.

"...It's because your name is getting closer and closer to becoming a censored word. Sooner or later, your name will become a completely censored mosaic of Holy Light."

With my identity as the God Envoy of Law, along with our relationship, I could utilize Xueti, Lilith and the other Law job class members. But strictly speaking, they didn't belong to my personal forces—they had sworn loyalty to the Church of Law. As executors and judges of the law, they were supposed to remain neutral.

With my identity as a descendant of the Mist, I could give orders to East Mist's Aurora Knights and Sleuweir's royal knights. But strictly speaking, these warriors were loyal to Reyne and Glina, their true rulers, first and foremost. It wouldn't be good for me to often make use of them.

Actually, every time I used them, I would have either Reyne or Glina personally lead them. This was both to give the young royals more experience as well as my respect for their royal authority.

Of course, with the Mist Alliance's establishment and me as one of the core members, the invisible forces under me would only increase. However, it was true that the forces directly under me could even decrease because of it.

Normally, to begin with, I didn't have many subordinates with me. If some emergency battle broke out or if I wanted to start a battle, everything would depend on my ability to summon allies. This wasn't a problem only I had—it was a common problem for this generation.

Although I didn't want to admit it, humans' basic combat

strength in the world of Eich still relied on nobles and knights. This difficult environment caused the weak humans to learn early on how to stay together in groups for protection. Nobles ruled their domains and had total control over their citizens' lives but also took responsibility for guaranteeing their citizens' safety. And countless domain lords swore fealty to their king, creating various kingdoms or empires.

Or course, a few countries wereparliamentary or republics, but these were typically tiny; the entire country would be only one city, or they had special circumstances, such as being ruled completely by divine authority or having too many different ethnicities. Still, the great majority of countries used the feudal system of domain lords, or basically the exact system of landlords and the rich ruling that communism worked to overthrow.

I was no transmigrator—like you might see in another story—who wanted to try capitalism or communism in another world. That was because the current feudal society and way of thinking was a good fit for how society really worked in this world. Forcefully trying to push through an "advanced" system which didn't fit the situation would only cause me to be crushed under the wheels of history.

The weak served the strong, while the strong protected the weak. The harsh environment's conditions gave birth to such rules of survival, so nobles who held power would forever exist. Those who weren't nobles to begin with could also become a noble or domain lord after obtaining strength.

In this feudal generation, even a country's ruler was just like the biggest domain lord—but that of a country. The ruler's authority mostly came from the system's established royal authority, but the ruler's direct subordinates would be only from his family's domain and the knights that swore loyalty to his family. Yep—the royal knights. In most circumstances, the royal knights would be the personal knights loyal to the royal family, but since the royalty

would be the leader of the country, there would be no difference between that and being loyal to the country.

Alright then. With such a big explanation from me you should have understood the situation by now. The countries in this world were very different from those back on modern day Earth of my time. From a certain standpoint, the countries in Eich were created out of countless "families." The knights' loyalty was typically to a specific family but not to the so-called country itself. It could even be said that the pure concept of countries hadn't even formed yet.

The creation of such "families" didn't only rely on bloodlines. Having similar goals or ways of thinking was fine as well. For instance, many groups of people immigrated to and hid in the Shining Mountains to resist against the Raff Empire's despotism and ethnic slaughtering. When these people finally succeeded in defeating the Raff Empire, a family with "White Eagle" as its emblem became the master of the Shining Mountains. Their descendants became a new combined ethnic group known as the Tinflame, whose descendants all swore loyalty to the White Eagle.

As for a different type of family, I could give the example of the Fran Family. The Fran Family consisted of scholars who loved to research ancient arcane mysteries and astronomy under the leadership of an incredible genius by the name of Fran. Through the innumerable generations, members intermarried among each other, and a legendary family was born, known for having genius astrologists in every generation.

Countries were the amalgamations of families. Local knights would swear loyalty to their domain lords. Domain lords would swear loyalty to the royalty. All free knights would also swear loyalty to the royalty. A country's destruction would typically be caused by the destruction of the royal family, which was why a royal family with zero descendants would be in even more danger than if they were invaded by a foreign power.

That was why I could say that as long as I didn't die, the Mist

Kingdom wouldn't be destroyed. The Mist Kingdom's loyal warriors and royal knights had now become my undead followers. Then, in public perception, did our Northlands Mist Family never die off at all?

"This seems rather confusing? How about I go and ask Karwenz?"

From a certain standpoint, there was no previous example of what had happened to the two of us. One had died and the reincarnated, while the twin had joined Hell—indeed, it was something with no precedent.

Meanwhile, Reyne's East Mist royal family and Sleuweir's royal family could only be viewed as branch families of the original Northlands Mist Family. Even the founders of their two countries had admitted this.

If I directly recognized Reyne and Glina as members of the Northlands Mist Family, then these two could be considered as my direct subordinates. However, this would make things quite awkward between all three of us as I was indeed the original master of this land. Perhaps our descendants would even have wars against each other for the purpose of determining the true ruling family, something I obviously didn't wish to see.

No matter what things were like in the past, I was currently using the identity and status of Roland Mist to act in this world. Naturally, it could be said that the Mist Family had survived, or at least it was reviving.

Bastian and the others had already complained to me several times. They hoped I would be able to reestablish the banner of the Mist. Even if the Mist Kingdom had been destroyed, the home remained. They wished to proudly carry the banner of the Mist and completely revive the Northlands Mist Family.

It could be said that this was something necessary after the Mist Alliance's establishment. The Mist Alliance I hoped for would be an alliance between countries ruled by a council. Of course, the

council members would be the royalty of each country. If I personally participated in this council, my status wouldn't be the right type.

Alright then—I'll be honest. The part I found most difficult to withstand was that I never expected these old skeletons and zombies to be so bored and hungry for gossip that they tried to force me to get married.

"Your Highness, you're already more than three hundred years old. My next-door neighbor has five generations of descendants, while you're eternally single. I'm too ashamed to face your father!"

"...Who are you calling eternally single!? Does me not having a girlfriend have anything to do with my dad? I already have a girlfriend! Elisa, the Demon Lord, the Marchioness of the Flame Sea. She's really powerful, are you afraid now?!"

"...Who cares if she's a SemiGod and Demon Lord? The Mist Family needs a female master, not a female fighter. Even if she's the Demon Marchioness, she can't give birth to any children, so why would I be afraid? Your Highness, please think about it. If you happen to die off, who will we old guys swear loyalty to? The Mist Family has continued its inheritance for more than two thousand years. I can't allow the Mist Family to die off in our generation. While Miss Elisa can be your mistress if you wish, the Mist Family needs a female master who can give birth to children."

I was quite frustrated with their attempts to force me into getting married. Fine, in a way, the one trying hardest to get me married was old Ferdinand, who had loyally served the Mist family for many generations and was my elder. He could indeed take on a fatherly role for me, so I couldn't even get angry about it.

If that was all it was, I could have accepted it. I used to have very few living subordinates, but in this life of mine, Timlad and the others joined me, causing me to have more and more living subordinates—but this also meant more trouble.

"Your Highness, even long-term mercenaries working for major merchants will swear loyalty to the merchant's family. You now have more subordinates than ever before. Even if you don't really pay attention to their interests, you should at least consider them. There should be a system in place to give payments to their bereaved families if any of them sacrifice themselves for your cause and to give them retirement money when they're old. Only that'd allow your subordinates to truly not worry about fighting for you."

"That's right, Your Highness. You should think more about your subordinates' interests. At least give them a chance to become nobles. Even if the powerful ones don't care about such things, the basic level warriors and youths will really want it, won't they? Even the Dark Elves want to be in a reliable family."

After we returned to the Northlands and could openly walk under the sun, these knights continuously gave me lectures on such topics.

I could understand their way of thinking. They had returned home, but things had changed. They wished to completely restore the Mist Family and hoped the family they swore loyalty to could continue on. Finally, a certain person's words caused me to decide to reestablish the Mist Family.

"Actually, I feel Her Highness Reyne is an excellent candidate to become the future female master of the Mist Family! She'd make an ideal pair with Your Highness. It's quite easy to accept a branch family back into the main family. Your Highness could even use the same royal palace—how perfectly convenient!"

Cough—that wasn't the quote I was referring to. I tossed the bastard who said that directly out of a third-floor window and investigated—it turned out he had been bribed to say that by Reyne! I then punished Reyne by making her swing her sword a thousand times.

"Your Highness, you should at least consider us. With the Mist Family reestablished, all of us will be able to take in adopted children to inherit our techniques and honor. This way our entire family will finally have new descendants, and our family will have a meaningful inheritance!"

I looked before me to see that it wasn't only one or two undead knights that had such hope glimmering in their soulfires. Instead, every undead knight had this hope.

Having the living accept them, and being able to adopt children or have disciples inherit their family names was a beautiful dream that the Mist Kingdom's royal knights didn't even dare to dream about. Right now, they were only a step from their dream—how could these royal knights, who viewed honor and inheritance so importantly, possibly restrain themselves?

"All of you can just go ahead and take in adopted children to add to our family. It doesn't need to have anything to do with me."

"Your Highness, who are our new family members supposed to swear loyalty to then? Whose descendants should our adopted children and their descendants swear loyalty to?"

Alright then. From a certain standpoint, it was just like if the government didn't give the go-ahead, the citizens didn't dare to start the fireworks... Although this analogy felt rather off.

Since my loyal knights who had followed me for so longs all thought this way, reestablishing the Mist Family would be necessary. At any rate, I agreed in the end because I'd assumed it to be only about changing our name, and that it wouldn't affect my personal affairs.

However, just publishing this news—that we would formally become the Mist Family again—improved everyone's motivation and caused both the living and the undead's work efficiency to increase by more than fifty percent ... I could only sigh about how this was indeed a feudal society with deeply-rooted traditions.

"It would seem that shared goals are important, but long-term social security, as well as a resource guarantee, is needed..."

And now I summoned the entirety of the newly-born Mist Family to deal with the upcoming, major trouble.

Chapter 395: Summoning

"When are you going to retrieve the God Equipment of Wind?"

The Wind Elemental God was in the form of a Royal Elf, but he lacked their typical elegance. The miniscule windstorms floating around him clearly expressed his anxiety. He became more impatient as time passed.

"When are you going to the Dragon World? All the elders are waiting for you. You should have finished reading the necessary information by now."

This time, the forever smiling Copper Dragon Evelyn didn't come alone to remind me—everyone was surprised to see the cold-faced Blue Dragon Evelyn as well.

"...Your Highness, when will you fix the Earth Elemental Throne?"

The Great Stone Sculptor Ainslo, too, had become anxious. When she finally learned from me that she was the top candidate for the next Earth Elemental God, her emotions had been in a constantly excited state.

"I'm waiting for everyone to arrive. How are we supposed to fight the boss monster without everyone here?"

That's right—I was no fool who'd rush to fight a suicidal battle like the Snake Archduchess and her two Undead Lord teammates. Since I'd obtained information on the ridiculousness of my opponents, how could I start a long journey to battle in other planes without sufficient combat strength?

"Perhaps this is the true beginning of the trial of battles on the level of the Holy War."

This time, I had summoned over all my combat strength. Just about everyone I could summon were coming. After some reorganizing, I separated them into three major categories.

The first group constituted of the royal knights from the former Mist Kingdom. These undying undead warriors numbered approximately 25,000 and were the knights I trusted most as well as the most powerful existences. Quite a number of them had reached the combat strength of heroic spirits. They were forever one of my most powerful aces.

However, they were undead, and it was inconvenient for them to move about, so only two thousand of them were on the surface. They joined the establishment of the Mist Alliance. Some were commanders and squad leaders in East Mist's major squadrons, while some took part in the undead Xiluo Empire. Their goal was to reconstruct Yongye's Army. Of course, unlike the chaotic Undead Lords' loose alliance, this time it would my actual, personal army.

Their combat flag was the traditional combat flag of the Mist, a symbol of the past as well as the honor of an inheritance. If I decided to enter a major battle, then this old flag would fly once again. The undying, who didn't wish for eternal rest, would use blood and fire to display their undying knighthood and a warrior's honor to our enemies.

Although this undead force was the most powerful ace I possessed, it was also an ace I didn't dare casually use. Summoning them all would put countless countries highly on guard against me.

That was why most of them would have to remain in the Underground and continue their combat training there. Recently, however, a new task had been given to them: to train and teach the newcomers. They taught not only combat tactics and techniques but also the honor and inheritance of the Mist.

This time, with the assistance of the Mizar and the newly completed Alkaid airships transporting them, I summoned a total of six thousand undead knights to my side. It was thanks to Bardi's assurance and reputation that the two magic bone airships surrounded by ominous appearing black mist could fly past other

countries without incident.

If the "Red Hunting Hounds" were my forces I trusted most but were inconvenient to use, the next group was the one easiest to use but most untrustworthy.

"Eh, why is there an extra chicken leg and two additional eggs in today's lunch?"

"Don't you know? It's to celebrate the official establishment of the Northlands Mist Family. There's extra food for lunch today, and even a bottle of beer for everyone at dinner.

"...His Highness Roland has finally made up his mind? Wait a moment, isn't this a wondrous occurrence? A celebration party and revival ceremony? Our boss is a living legend! As long as he mentions it, won't all the mega empires send some envoys? Or is the formal ceremony being held later?"

Typically speaking, a family's establishment or revival would be a major incident. Inviting guests would only be the beginning—plenty of families would celebrate for an entire year and spend three years' worth of their income.

This wasn't just for the sake of face; it was also a method to display the family's connections and foundation.

"No, adding extra food to our lunch is the only celebration. His Highness Roland said that he's recently been busy with work and that work takes priority, so we should dispense with all unnecessary celebrations. He said that would be enough?"

"...Why do I feel like he simply thinks it's too troublesome?"

"...I totally agree. As expected of our boss, he's so different from others. Still, he didn't skip on certain things. Do you know the fifth son of the Aston Family?"

"That cripple? Didn't he lose his leg in the war against the beastmen and retreat to the backlines? His second brother also died in that meat grinder of a war. Truly unfortunate."

"...His Highness Roland knighted him. He won't have to worry about starving to death for the rest of his life."

"How lucky! His Highness Roland is beginning to give out knighthoods? Wonderful, is there hope for us as well? Forget it, we're just Bronze-ranked warriors, so it's impossible for any of us. Pretend I didn't say anything."

Based on the customs of this world, the lowest knighthood rank of peerage that could be assigned would require strength equivalent to Silver. However, most ordinary people would be unable to achieve this power level even if they worked hard for their whole lives.

"His Highness Roland is so different from others. He doesn't care about power level but cares more about achievements instead. The first batch of knighthoods he handed out included thirty people, with a total of sixteen from our mercenary group! All of them received first-level combat accolades, including the pilots of the self-destructing Roland Titans. All of us only received third-level combat accolades, so there's no chance of a knighthood for us."

"But there's still a chance in the future! Ahh—Fifth Brother Aston is so fortunate. Even though he can no longer enter battle in the future, he can simply let his knighthood take care of him for the rest of his life."

"Hmph, don't underestimate Aston the cripple. How could he possibly receive the Nightblood first-level combat accolade if he was as cowardly as you? He's now hanging out with the magical engineering mechanical research department's gnomes and reminding them every day to produce an artificial leg with cannons installed for him. He has no intention to be only a knight for the rest of his life. He wants his son to be even higher than a knight."

The lowest level of knighted nobility wasn't inheritable—this could only happen upon reaching the rank of Baron. However, the

noble title would be rescinded if there were no combat achievements, so typically only barons were what everyone recognized as true nobility.

A small knighthood would at most be a village with thirty to fifty households within it if one was lucky enough to receive some land. This was perhaps not worth anything to the powerful, but it was a life's dream for the mercenaries who risked their lives in combat.

Yes—mercenaries. I was referring to the mercenaries from the Absolute Gentlemen Alliance mega mercenary group.

Although I wanted to discuss mutual dreams and the beauty of saving the world with them along with the upcoming long night of Armageddon, these mercenaries believed that ideals were a luxury of nobles who didn't have to worry about their next meal. A reliable source of income and the chance to become a noble were all they dreamed about.

As for the Armageddon? If they couldn't fill their bellies or got a crippling injury and didn't have enough money saved up to take care of themselves, every day would be an Armageddon.

"Mercenaries are untrustworthy."

This was the typical view every country had of mercenaries who worked for whoever paid them. In most situations, the countries were absolutely correct.

As mercenaries fought for the sake of money, they would naturally consider their own future. They would never want to fight to the death, risk injury if possible, or take any job with insufficient payment. For warriors on the battlefield, lacking motivation to stand until the end would be a fatal flaw. An ace royal knight squadron would be capable of adamantly fighting even upon receiving seventy percent losses, while the typical mercenary squad would collapse and retreat upon taking ten percent losses. Relying too much on mercenaries would actually be military weakness.

"No matter how strong mercenaries are, they still aren't reliable and trustworthy."

Since they fought for the sake of money, there were plenty of examples of entire mercenary groups betraying an employer to go work for their employer's enemy as long as the payment was high enough. It was even more common for individual mercenaries to betray their employers and be hired by the enemy. That was why, for any major battle, even if wartime mercenary groups were allowed to participate, they would only be cannon fodder acting on the sidelines.

That was how mercenaries were. They were the vultures of the battlefield who fought for the sake of their personal benefits. They weren't constrained by a sense of knightly honor; practical benefits were first and foremost. However, as long as one spread enough bait in front of them, they could also become the most vicious attack dogs.

Typical mercenary groups wouldn't accept a battle mission with a high risk of dying. However, some mercenary groups would still choose to enter major battles despite knowing that their role would be the most dangerous job of cannon fodder. This was because these dangerous battles would have exceedingly high payments, in addition to the possibility of some major noble taking favor to the mercenaries and permanently taking in the entire group.

If, instead, a mercenary group became the private soldiers of some major noble, then the leaders of this mercenary group had the possibility of becoming nobles. And the ordinary mercenaries would become part of a regular army, so they would have a guaranteed army salary in addition to relief payments in case of crippling injuries or family payments in case they died on the battlefield.

However, the Absolute Gentlemen Alliance mercenary group was different from ordinary mercenary groups.

There was a saying that said, "Intentionally cultivated trees might not survive while unintentionally planted seeds might sprout to become tall trees." This jokingly created mercenary group had developed to become stronger and stronger in recent times.

The formal group leader of this mercenary group was me. They could technically be called my personal soldiers, and their combat morale and loyalty far surpassed average private armies.

As the Absolute Gentlemen Alliance expanded their activities with the great support of the Northlands countries, this mercenary group based in the Northlands now had guilds in more than thirty countries. In fact, they now had seventeen major sub-squadrons stationed in these countries, and their registered members numbered more than three hundred thousand.

Greater than seventy percent of the Absolute Gentlemen Alliance's mercenaries came from East Mist and Sleuweir, so more than eighty percent were People of the Mist. They were willing to join this mercenary group because this mercenary group had an excellent reputation and salary but even more because they believed in me, the leader of this mercenary group. They believed I would give them a bright future.

In past battles, they'd indeed performed well. No matter if it was the bloody Northlands battle against the beastmen or the continuous battles against the undead in the south, they had displayed abundant abilities and loyalty.

However, as mercenaries, they naturally had their dreams. They dreamed of a bright future, munificent rewards and a chance to gloriously return home.

Of course, this mega large mercenary group had levels within it. Basic members only wished to prove their abilities and obtain reputation. Yet after developing to a certain point, elite squadrons were forever the core.

For warriors who displayed both sufficient skill and loyalty, the mercenary group would sign twenty, thirty or even fifty-year contracts with them. Any warriors who broke the contract would no longer be able to find a job in the mercenary profession for the rest of their lives. These contracts assured excellent payment and job security, and the warriors would work loyally in turn to pay off the responsibility and requirements of the job.

Actually, these long-term "lifetime contracted" mercenary soldiers didn't even treat themselves as mercenaries.

"We are all warriors belonging to His Highness Roland. It's just that it's not convenient to establish a formal combat squadron in his name right now."

"We're all His Highness's warriors, you know. We need to pay attention to certain things so we don't dishonor that flag."

The fact that I was giving out knighthoods and flying the banner of the Mist gave more evidence to their claims. And so even more mercenaries started applying for the long-term contracts.

Once news started spreading that I'd decided to reestablish the Northlands Mist Family, in just three short days, almost twenty thousand people applied to join the Absolute Gentlemen Alliance. Once the news that I gave knighthoods out to sixteen members of this mercenary group started spreading, another fifty thousand people applied the very next day.

From a certain standpoint, I didn't have personal territory, I wasn't a king, nor did I swear loyalty to any domain lord. I couldn't even count as a domain lord myself. Logically speaking, I didn't have the right to give out knighthoods, but no matter if it were outsiders or my subordinates, they ignored this most basic right of the nobility.

Of course, I wasn't giving out knighthoods only in name. The knighthoods I gave out would be recognized by all the Northlands countries. Once these newly-minted knights achieved sufficient

accolades to become domain lords themselves, I would think of a way to give them their own territories as barons and higher deserved. But they would typically reach up to the rank of Earl only with outstanding combat achievements, and these were extremely limited in number.

This time, the Borealis brought me five thousand and six hundred long-term contracted mercenaries. This didn't seem like much, but they had all been through various difficult trials in order to obtain their long-term contracts, the best proof of their abilities and loyalties. Their average abilities reached the astonishing level of the peak of Bronze. They could indeed be considered my elite personal soldiers.

With the situation developing in this manner, perhaps this was, in a way, evidence of the importance of reputation and tradition. In East Mist's capital of Diffindor and Sleuweir's capital of Antuen, all sorts of theories about how "Roland saw the big picture" or "Roland planned for all this" filled the streets and alleyways. Even street side vendors were saying "His Highness Roland used the name of a mercenary group to summon all the warriors who wished to fight for the flag of the Mist"; "The East Mist and Sleuweir Kingdom royalty despise this type of personnel stealing action but can't do anything about it"; "These mercenaries include Four Elemental Swordcasters, Magic Gunners, and even Aurora Knights. It's not like these ace troop types grow on trees. It's so obvious, yet they still dare to call themselves mercenaries?"

To be honest, I really did create this Absolute Gentlemen Alliance as nothing more than a joke. In fact, for an incredibly long period of time, I didn't even manage the mercenary group's development. For the mercenary group to be able to reach this stage meant those unreliable fellows were indeed sufficiently powerful. Perhaps it also meant the People of the Mist still trusted in the tattered banner of the Mist.

"He is Our Highness. He shall lead us to a better life."

"Yep, it's all because of His Highness that we just had the most comfortable winter in fifty years. Not a single person froze to death on the streets this year, and those who immigrated to other places also returned to their homeland."

It would be a joke to claim that only my personal reputation and the so-called tradition of the Mist Family would be able to attract so many descendants of the Mist to fight under my banner. However, the Northlands Mist Family had accumulated more than two thousand years of honor and trustworthiness. This had become my greatest wealth as well as a heavy burden that pressured me to the point where I almost couldn't breathe.

"...Don't even mention a mercenary group—even if you use your personal name and the flag of the Mist to open up a circus, it will be filled to the brim with People of the Mist. If you don't believe me, just ask those undead knights of yours. They've long since stopped asking 'why.' They're at the stage of foolish loyalty where they only ask 'what should we do?'"

I didn't know how to respond to Harloys' teasing because I knew she told the truth.

When I was a fallen prince who couldn't even defend his own home, the only way I could really think of to repay their trust was to somehow try my best to lead everyone to survive the upcoming Armageddon.

"Perhaps the upcoming times will be difficult, but at least... at least we'll all be together."

Perhaps outsiders still viewed the Absolute Gentlemen Alliance as only mercenaries. But these youngsters, who had given their lives over to me, were already a part of me.

The Absolute Gentlemen Alliance's combat flag was a black masquerade ball mask. Everyone had countless theories about what meaning there was behind it. But when I'd made this the flag, it was solely because I wanted to remind the bastards who became

the main core of the mercenary group to "remember to wear masks when doing gentlemanly deeds because I don't want to have to pick you up from the police station."

As for people's theories about how the mask represented "seeking light in the darkness,""those with resolve who have lost everything,""dark heroes of the night who don't need to show their identities" and so on, this was a classic case of over-analyzation.

Apart from the Red Hunting Hounds and the Gentlemen Alliance, the third major group under me was the "Magic Research Facility," the abbreviated name for the magical mecha engineering research facility and the Cinders merchant association.

They were now the light of the future as they possessed cutting-edge technology and also acted as the logistical support for the increasingly integrated Mist faction. They didn't include only researchers, as the Four Elemental Swordcasters, Magic Gunners, master engineers and master alchemists constituted their concrete combat strength.

The Borealis, Alkaid and Mizar—these three mega airships along with six mid-sized airships and several hundred small cannon airships possessed a total fighting force of 10,300 people. There were 67 master engineers at least at Gold, 427 engineering and alchemy experts, and countless war machines. This would be more than enough to begin a small-scale war sufficient to overwhelm a small country.

Of course, by using so much of my combat strength, I hoped to receive even more... so much more to the point I felt I was being too greedy.

"If those dragons knew your plot, they'd definitely be trying to kill you right now. Since you're scheming to get their most precious treasure, does this count as them killing the thief in the act?"

"...I think so too. But by the time they know it'll be too late—we

would already have achieved our goal. Besides, giving them such a high-level treasure is a waste of resources. I'd make better use of it instead. Since..."

"...Winter is coming?"

I shook my head. Using that quote made it seem like spring would arrive afterwards. As I flipped through the record of the game's history, I couldn't see any evidence of a spring after what would come next. I didn't have much time left.

"...If I really had to describe it, I could only say that the Armageddon is coming. However, it's already going to be much better than what happened in the game's history. At least, we have some hope now, as long as my plan works."

"Then how likely do you think your plan will succeed?"

"I want to say one hundred percent, but unfortunately it's probably less than ten percent."

"But at least it's not zero."

Still, I felt the newly sprouting trees and plants outside the window were a rare lucky sign.

"Yes. At least there's still some hope. And our goal this time is to create our own hope so the future can be slightly better."

"Even if you destroy others' hope?"

"Of course."

Chapter 396: Giving up on a Cure

"Proposed Plans for Curing Cher (Third Revised Edition)."

This thick booklet contained my plans for curing her, plans I spent so much time thinking up.

"Plan #1: Create a brand-new physical body and transfer her soul into it."

"This plan's greatest advantage is that it's simple to carry out. A perfect physical body can be constructed for her within a short period of time. Also, it's almost impossible for someone at my skill level to fail in something as simple as a soul transfer. The disadvantage is that the physical body will be an undead creation, so it won't be as good as a living body. It will be impossible for her to reproduce. However, I can perfectly replicate the ability to eat, drink and even the joys of fleshly activities between men and women for her body. Last time, I sealed a foundational part of my soul into her, but this time I won't be creating such an astounding miracle product."

"Addendum: Since the Seven Original Sins touch upon the greatest secrets of soul magic, it could be possible that transferring her soul to a new physical body will also transfer over the problem of her soul. She may still be the vessel for giving birth to new Evelyns. This plan still needs improving."

"Plan #2: Make modifications to Cher's soul and strip the portion related to her personal 'lust' out of her soul. This will cause her to become an idiot regarding all things related to love, so she'll never fall in love with another person. The trap placed within her soul will never again activate. I strongly recommend this plan."

"This plan's advantage is that it will easily deal with the problem. A simple perfect soul surgery will completely cure this seasonal disease known as love. But the downside is that although soul

surgery techniques are quite well-established, poor luck may cause her soul to become unstable or split. This may result in the most common side effect of such operations: multiple personalities.

"Addendum to this strongly recommended plan: This plan is the best to preserve this wonderful cycle I created. When my skills improve even further, I'll naturally be able to solve the problems—yep. What I really mean is that this original 'Lust' system should be preserved so that I can research it any time I want. It will be helpful to my personal research. I'll be able to have a breakthrough soon! And it's possible for all of you to obtain new sisters!"

When I placed these two plans in front of Evelyn, I really hoped she would choose the second one. No matter how one looked at it, the second plan would give us the most benefits. Plus, we would be able to eliminate the chronic disease known as love. Such an excellent plan for curing Cher!

Being able to forever get rid of one of the original sins from your soul? Only a genius like myself was capable of such a miracle with my soul surgery!

What? The side effect of having multiple personalities? That wasn't negative in any way, as multiple personalities could bring additional talents and abilities. This was a gift! Just take a look at how powerful Evelyn was, since she had ten personalities and ten different natural talents! As expected of my first ever undead creation.

Yet the Blue Dragon Evelyn only glanced at the plan before unhesitatingly bringing it before her and twitching her nose...

Snort.

Alright. At least she didn't snort out any snot. It would seem that she loved to be clean.

Whoosh!

But I didn't have any time to rescue my plan booklet before she spewed out dragonbreath, this time, directly in the form of thunder. And so the plan to cure Cher, the plan I worked so hard to create, was directly burned to a crisp.

"You're going too overboard! I took two entire days on this..."

"I bet it was more like twenty minutes. Bring out your third plan. Isn't your goal just to wait for us to reject these two plans so your third plan can easily pass? Don't look at me with such a strange expression. All us Evelyns understand your twisted personality better than we want to. Isn't your favorite scheme about 'A truly perfect scheme is to make your opponent believe that the current choices in front of him are the best choices? All I need to do is create a situation where my opponent has to do what I want, like a puppet.'"

Alright then. That quote indeed sounded like something incredibly twisted I would say.

Although I intended to bring out my third plan regardless, being seen through here was made me displeased. I was sullen, but I still brought it out. Since I had made the plan, of course I would have to bring it out.

"Plan #3: Give Cher scientific mental therapy to teach her how love is just a type of mental illness. That's right—mental illness. See, most teenagers undergoing puberty will focus way too much effort into this concept known as 'love' but will obtain nothing in the end. That's why I must teach them; I must have them study and exercise more. They should focus on their academics and work, such as fighting hard for the sake of humanity's progress. This will delay the time they enter this stage of mental illness. According to studies, the rate of catching the love disease is much lower after the puberty stage. And any who go into heat should be directly deep-frozen to deal with the problem..."

The Blue Dragon Evelyn chuckled, and then... There was no more "and then."

"Hey! Why did you swallow it? I worked really hard on it!"

"Your fourth plan?"

"I don't have one... fine, it's right here."

This plan booklet was rather thin. It was just one page, so I simply read it to her.

"This is addiction, this is electronic heroin! So-called love is but an illusion! She needs electro-therapy! She needs more electric shocks and electric chairs—"

"—You're the one who needs electro-therapy! How about I give therapy to your unsalvageable brain with my thunder!"

Powerful thunder covered the entire sky. Although none of it would be fatal for me, a charred face was inescapable. The most frustrating part was that all my hair was now standing up on end due to the electricity.

"A golden mohawk haircut? Isn't this a redneck haircut? You've done it now! I'm going to go all out against you!"

It was only now that I understood why Blue Dragons were considered so annoying. They had such bad tempers! Wasn't I simply making a joke to lighten up the tense atmosphere? She had no sense of humor at all! If she hated jokes, she should have told me!

"...Nobody can tolerate your jokes. Let me just say it now: if you want to experiment, go find your 'new love.' Don't use me."

I ignored my silly cat's complaints and furiously brought out another stack of backup plans from my backpack. Backup plans? It

was always necessary to make backup plans for backup plans, and backup plans for backup plans for backup plans, and... you get the idea. In fact, the ones I brought out were first-edition plans that hadn't yet been revised. They couldn't even be called complete backup plans.

"Plan #4: Use hypnosis and lectures to subconsciously change her so that she gradually changes her sexuality and falls in love with women. Then, let's observe if that will activate the trap in her soul or not. If not, then we'll have plenty of time to observe and conduct more research..."

Rip!

Alright then, let's go to the next plan.

"Plan #5: Brainwash her, or cast an eternal Intelligence-lowering curse on her. As long as her Intelligence is forever lowered to an infant's level—fine!—fine!—don't spew dragon breath at me. Plan #6..."

"...Plan #13: Modify her genitalia so she becomes a "he." Let's research the conflict between her soul's instincts and 'his' physical body's instincts. Will 'he' still fall in love with the opposite gender? Yep, this really is a worthy research topic!"

"Cough—I know, I know, I'll give up on Plan #13. Plan #14, then. We can use a sealing spell to seal her away forever, or ask Amelia to cast a Sleeping Beauty curse on her. What? Still not satisfied? What a difficult customer to please. Alright, alright, Plan #15..."

"Plan #27: We can go and find Beifeng—please don't attack me. I humbly admit it was wrong for me to have mentioned Beifeng. Let's abandon this plan."

We were in a massive underground cavern, massive to the extent I couldn't even see the ceiling. As I acted ridiculously with Evelyn, behind us was an unending procession where countless artisans

and warriors slowly proceeded forward with their luggage and carts. Their goal was the void door before them: the entrance to Dragon World.

Thanks to the fact that this was the passage to the Dragon World, numerous dragons, including the giant Immemorial Dragons, would need to be able to freely enter and exit. This underground cavern was spacious enough to the point where even airships could enter.

Right now, the guardian dragon of Dragon World's entrance, the Dragon World leader Evelyn, was chatting to me. However, only her two forms, the Copper Dragon and Blue Dragon Evelyns I already met, were chatting with me.

"...You've lately had a lot of free time to have created so many random and useless plans?"

"No! I've been too busy lately, which is why I made these plans as a way of relaxing. You understand how it is; all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy... why are you spewing dragonbreath at me again!? Can Blue Dragons please be a little more reasonable!"

"You actually dared to treat curing Cher and us as something fun! You should be severely punished for your attitude!"

Although the expressionless Blue Dragon claimed so, no matter how I looked at it, didn't it simply seem more like she just wanted an excuse to make me suffer? Could it be that I'd made her angry at me?

"There's far too many reasons why you might have angered her. There's no need to even bring up the past. Right now, if any normal individual saw these plans, they'd probably think that you're intentionally acting ridiculously."

"But I'm being serious!"

"That's even worse. Can't be saved."

"No, Cher can still be saved. We can't give up on a cure!"

"...I'm saying your head is what can't be saved. Stop struggling and give up on a cure..."

Alright then, what happened next was business as usual: a fight between me and my pet cat.

"Pahaha! Roland, you've truly changed."

Seeing the comical scene before her, the Copper Dragon Evelyn, who had only been sipping tea and chatting, felt rather nostalgic.

"Hmm? Have I become more handsome? It must be all my combat experience that's made me seem manlier than before."

"I don't know about becoming more handsome, but you've definitely become cuter. I hear the Princess Peach books have been selling extremely well. I bought one too, and all my sisters keep reading it together and gushing about how cute you are."

"...Harloys, remind me to toss that bastard into Mizar's cannons and shoot him into the sky. Yep, I'm referring to a certain tailed Dracon, the living desecration."

"I most certainly agree. But is the Mizar's main cannon sufficient? Wouldn't it be better to use the Borealis's main cannon?"

"Cleaning the cannon would be too troublesome."

Well, we had the free time to act ridiculously here, but someone was unable to watch this any longer.

"...You from back in the day looked so lonely. When you laughed, it looked more like you were crying. You were filled with hatred for the world, as if you were a man betrayed by the entire world..."

The surprising part was that the Blue Dragon Evelyn was the one who spoke up. Although she still had a serious expression, a nostalgic look entered her eyes. Suddenly, her nostalgia transformed into delight as her icy countenance instantly defrosted.

"...That was so cool! An avenger who's enemies with the entire world!"

The way she was jumping up and down made her seem like she was a celebrity chaser who just saw her favorite star.

"...Image, image, Fifth Sister! Your image of an icy beauty is collapsing!"

We couldn't help but silently nod in unison at Copper Dragon Evelyn's comment. Blue Dragon Evelyn's ice beauty image had indeed been shattered.

"She's so logical I can't even counter it." The silly cat's comments were getting better. It would seem that she had been trained well by me.

But, suddenly, the Blue Dragon girl glared at me. And then...

"Ptui!"

She spat on the ground in condescension with a gaze that obviously expressed she looked down on me. I felt rather nervous being stared at by a beauty like this.

"If, back in the day, you were a cool and handsome prince out for revenge just like in a legendary story, right now you're nothing more than a ridiculous clown!"

"She's so logical! I can't even counter what she said!" The black cat on my shoulder pretended to act all surprised.

Alright, silly cat, there was no need to comment here... Why were you nodding so energetically? Don't think I didn't notice how

you used exclamation points. Was that how much you agreed? If I were a professional tsukkomi, wouldn't that make you the professional straight man? So we were actually a classic comic duo!

"If you want to be a stand-up comic, do it by yourself! Don't get me involved! I'm different from you!"

"Hmph! Such professional retorting, and you still dare to not call yourself a comic!? Harloys, the genes of comedy are buried deep within your bones! You were born to be a comic... cat!"

Alright then. The second major battle between me and my silly cat occurred. Yet the two Evelyns exchanged glances and secretly snickered.

They were the two sent out to communicate with Roland because they were the sisters who viewed the past as most important. But, upon seeing the current Roland, they felt many sentiments as they mentally communicated between themselves.

"Fifth Sister, compared to that seemingly icy but actually kind fellow from my memories, I like the one before me more. I hated how the past him always had such hidden depression and anger within him."

"...Of course you'd like the current him more. Don't you always love to watch comedy performances? Still... indeed, this type of Roland is more reassuring. Eh, a message from Second Sister?"

The two Evelyns silently listened to the message. Then, the Copper Dragon Evelyn spoke up.

"Roland, why do I feel like you're intentionally stalling us here so that we won't inspect if there's anything taboo you're bringing into Dragon World?"

"...You're insulting our intelligence. We're not customs officials who you can fool so easily."

Alright then. It wasn't so easy to fool them after all. And so, I

handed over the real plan to cure Cher along with smiling as I talked.

"What level of item do you think even counts as taboo for the powerful dragons. Heehee, do you really think I would bring something like a Salo's Crystal in here? I still want to live a few more years."

I didn't even get to finish explaining myself before the two Evelyns exclaimed in unison.

"You really brought a Salo's Crystal in here!?"

"No, no, I'm just making an analogy! An analogy!"

"...Second Sister was absolutely correct. He's trying to seriously explain things away! That means he's feeling worried that we caught him, so he definitely brought in a Salo's Crystal!"

"Why are you casually carrying such a major weapon of mass destruction? Are you intending on fighting a world war?"

Alright then, it seemed that I was no longer able to fool them. But just as I was hesitating whether to resist and attempt to use force to break through or to just admit my crime and await punishment... whoops, something seemed wrong about my analogy, cough. At this moment, the two Evelyns exchanged smiles before they focused on the real plan to cure Cher in their hands.

"...It seems that they're going to let you bring it in. Honestly, why didn't you just bring it in openly? Playing such a trifling trick? People are going to look down on you."

"Would you let someone else take an item capable of becoming a nuclear bomb into your home so easily, Harloys? Isn't this a foundational issue? How would I know they'd let me take it in so easily without even caring about their own benefits?"

I couldn't help but mutter to myself as I observed my "old friends" intentionally chatting with each other about the plan to cure Cher as they pretended to ignore the Salo's Crystal.

"Perhaps it's not that they don't care about their benefits; it's that I don't know what benefits they're aiming for..."

Chapter 397: Dragon World

"My seniors were correct. I never expected the moon to be so large and round in another country. Ahh! The air is so fresh! It was worth the hard work to immigrate and obtain a green card."

However, my exclamation received no response. It would seem that this was a downside of being in another world. Nobody understood my jokes from Earth.

[What generation do you think it is, still making jokes about immigration? Do you love exposing how old you are that much? System Notification: 5 Justice Points have been deducted for the commenting service. Thank you very much!]

"Alright, at least someone paid attention to me. My joke didn't completely fall flat."

But what I said was the truth. The moment I crossed through the Dimensional Door, my first impression was of the beauty of the light blue sky along with the giant moons that seemed to be right above me, giving off a great sensation of pressure.

"Yep, yep, such big and round moons. There are actually three moons here."

There was a blood-red moon surrounded by similarly blood-colored magical storms. Currant-colored satellites orbited them, and streaking behind them were ominous comet tails. The crimson moonlight seemed to possess a magical power. Simply looking at it seemed to make one feel frustrated.

"You have excellent luck. Only on less than thirty days a year does one get to see three moons together. That's the blood moon, Deemo. He only appears during the last few days of the month. When Deemo appears, beasts run rampant. Beast stampedes and Berserk Dragon Sickness become common. While beast stampedes are nothing more than a small annoyance to the dragons, Berserk

Dragon Sickness is troublesome. This disease can cause dragons in poor condition to go berserk. That's why we won't allow any injured or young dragons to be exposed to Deemo's moonlight. If treatment isn't received immediately, the berserk condition will typically last for about half a month."

It was nice to have a narrator nearby explaining everything. It would have been better, however, if she didn't keep staring curiously at me. After all, a Copper Dragon's endless curiosity could be annoying when you were trying to conceal something.

Next to the blood-red moon were two smaller round moons. One was white, while the other was earth yellow. Their glows seemed to be suppressed by the blood moon.

"The white moon is the holy moon Wendiya. She typically appears right after the blood moon. In the natives' legends, these two moons are Moon Gods eternally at war with each other. Their simultaneous appearance represents the beginning of a new month. Since the blood moon still has the advantage, there should be another two days until the end of the month."

"There are natives living here? It would seem that the information you gave me about the Dragon World is incomplete. Forget it. What's that earth-yellow one?"

"Heehee! Aren't I telling you now? The yellow one? That's the warrior moon Abo. He's supposed to be a Warrior God that the natives worship. He doesn't have any special abilities, but it's said that when Abo appears, the natives will feel like it's a season for war... Since we see the blood moon and the warrior moon together, some place in the Dragon World must be in the midst of a raging conflict."

"The months must far exceed twelve here. There are so many moons; how do you even calculate your calendar?"

Copper Dragon Evelyn shrugged. Apparently, she felt that this was a rather boring topic.

"I don't know how it's calculated, either. There are six moons here, with twenty-three months in a year and seven seasons. Each month also has a different number of days. Only the Scroll Dragons like to study about this topic. They'll always give out warnings when it's an incredibly important or dangerous time."

I knew about the Scroll Dragon species. They were a rare species of dragon and were nicknamed Museum Dragons. Naturally inclined towards gathering and researching all sorts of knowledge, these wise and conservative dragons had excellent relationships with the saints and mages. It was even rumored that one archmage in the Truth Symposium was the astral projection of a Scroll Dragon.

But what I paid more attention to was the vigilance evident in Copper Dragon Evelyn's tone. The dragons seemed to be on guard against something.

"Dangerous time? Even for the dragons?"

"Yes, you should be able to detect it as well. The Elemental Tide's density here is very high."

I nodded in understanding. The moment I entered this place, I felt as if my body became lighter. My senses for ice, water, death, and such elements became strengthened. In fact, I felt as if I could change rain into ice with a single thought... which was why I said I felt the air here was so fresh. It was unfortunate, however, that not a single person here had understood my jokes and had commented on them.

"Silly cat, you feeling better yet?"

"Shut up. I'm not your commenting slave."

Ever since I'd called her my comic partner, she sunk into a period of self-loathing and refused to comment on anything I said or did.

"I'm the last princess of the Gold Elves, the undying Banshee Queen, and a future Undead Emperor. How can I possibly be a joke

character!? Never! Never! I, Gold Elf Harloys, will never be a comic!"

Alright, let's not mention how a black cat with a serious expression, raising her paw while making this proclamation, made the perfect comedy scene. Still, it was quite rare for her to be depressed for such a long period of time. It would seem that calling her my "comic partner" had given her a great impact.

At least, on our way here, I kept trying to joke around and make her comment, but she only ignored me. Even if I pulled on her tail, she still remained silent.

"...Wait a moment, let me quietly think for a while. The magic power of moonlight! The Elemental Tide's density here is insane! Amazing!"

The silly cat suddenly became lively. Apparently, she hadn't been so silent because of depression. It was actually that a new round of research fervor had gripped her.

It was quite normal for her to be excited. A high Elemental Tide density world like this was just like a fantasy world one could read about in knight stories. Cultivating and leveling up would become much easier. There would be fewer restrictions and greater power for top-level individuals. Just this alone was worth the trip.

"Perhaps this is a prologue to the future. It's nice to be able to play the beta test before the server formally opens up."

Eich's Elemental Tide density was constantly increasing as well. Being able to experience the natural laws of a world with higher Elemental Tide density would of course serve a great advantage. Besides...

"This is a beta test where our save files won't be deleted. Such a great deal."

Behind me was my large scale army setting up their camp. The engineers were obtaining environmental data and testing if their

sensory equipment worked as normal. The warriors were testing the effect of the twenty-percent increase in gravity this world had. I also saw a mage testing his fireball magic, and then being startled at how his fireball was twice as large as normal.

They were going to live and reside in the Dragon World plane. Of course, many of them would successfully level up, naturally allowing them to surpass others in Eich. This was the foundational reason why I had been so determined to take as many of my forces as I could here. Since I had such a rare chance, rather than just having my few direct subordinates benefit, why not have as many people on my side benefit as possible instead?

Despite the fact that the dragons knew they would soon have a difficult and fierce battle against the Titan Giants, the dragons still tried their best to protect the Dragon World. This was in a way the best evidence of this world's value. I refused to believe what the dragons said in the information that they gave me about how they didn't want to give this place up simply because it would help young dragons mature faster.

Of course, I wouldn't express my doubt directly to their faces. Besides, it was simple enough to tell some things right after arriving as certain phenomena would be impossible to hide. For instance, the Elemental Tide's density was quite obvious and impossible to conceal. At least on the surface, it was still necessary for me to pretend to completely trust the dragons.

"The Elemental Tide's density is just as high as what your information told me. You said that some time periods will be dangerous. Does this mean that the dragons aren't the only masters of this plane?"

Although the information I received didn't mention anything, it would be normal to expect that other residents lived in this world. After all, so many dragons lived here, and dragons were pure carnivores famous for ravenous appetites. They would need a tremendous amount of territory to provide enough meat for them.

Plus, all the dragons were adamant about their own territories, and plenty of dragons would have bloody conflicts with each other all over the sake of territory. Some even became mortal enemies, such as the Blue Dragons and Copper Dragons that both loved desert environments, the Red Dragons and Silver Dragons that both loved volcanic environments, or the Crystal Dragons and White Dragons that both loved icy environments. Of course, this was also related to the fact that Color Dragons and Metal Dragons naturally viewed each other with enmity.

Dragons were meat eaters. That was why I felt that even though the information they gave me didn't mention a single word about other residents, there would actually be countless residents here that probably even hated the dragons. Back in the immemorial generation, dragons hunted as they pleased, making most sentient creatures in Eich have zero good feelings towards these aggressive flying lizards. Plenty of intelligent species would organize dragon slaughters.

"...That's not quite the correct way to put it. This world is huge, and it's impossible for us to rule over its entirety. For instance, some will take advantage of the blood moon and attack dragons caught alone and force that dragon into Berserk Dragon Sickness. We dragons also need to obediently stay in our nests whenever the black moon is out. Luckily, the black moon is only out for two or three days in a year."

"Hehehe! Today's the blood moon, so perhaps some dragons will be suffering misfortune today? ...no way! It really came true!?"

I raised my head to look at the sky and just happened to see a White Dragon being chased in the air by a group of winged tiger-headed species. These Tigermen were riding wyverns, a species of SemiDragons with physical rather than magical wings, as their aerial steeds.

Because I jinxed things yet again, everyone, especially Evelyn, glared at me. And so I obediently lowered my head and stayed

silent.

"I think I need to learn how to shut up."

Chapter 398: Plains and the Eternal Thunder Tribe

The aerial battle continued. The tactics the Tigermen used against the White Dragon reminded me of how a pack of wolves would surround and hunt a large water buffalo.

These Tigermen were obviously sly and experienced hunters. They used the agilest unit among them as bait that'd repeatedly fly around in front of the White Dragon. As long as the unit attracted the White Dragon's attention and dragonbreath, the others would continuously swarm it and worsen the injuries on the White Dragon's back and wings.

Whenever the White Dragon furiously tried to counterattack and do everything it could to kill its mortal enemies, these Tigermen would scatter. Their wyvern steeds were swift and capable of making sharp turns in midair. White Dragons were well known for being clumsy and stupid, and this particular one was unable to follow them. The advantage of the wyverns' smaller size proved quite useful here.

The Tigermen were patient hunters. They weren't tempted by a swift win. They slowly whittled their prey down, waiting for the White Dragon to reach the brink.

Meanwhile, on the surface, Copper Dragon Evelyn was still all smiles as she watched me. It appeared as though she didn't care about the battle in the sky in the least.

"Are you not going up to help? Isn't that a fellow dragon? It seems to be seriously injured."

That White Dragon's wingspan was only three or four meters wide. It might not even have reached Adult Dragon status yet. More than ten bloody harpoons were impaled in its wings, and its speed was slowing down at a visible rate. The situation didn't seem

all too well for this White Dragon, yet the Copper Dragon before me seemed content with simply watching.

"White Dragons are no family of mine. Perhaps you need to study more about dragons. All dragons only pay a basic amount of respect to those closely related to them. You can't casually use words like family or same species. And there's also the enmity between Color and Metal Dragons. An Adult White Dragon is no different from a wild beast. A starving White Dragon is even capable of eating its own children. As a Copper Dragon, it's already rare for me to not go and help hunt it down. If I go out to save a White Dragon and word spreads, all the other Metal Dragons will laugh at me. Besides..."

"Elite hunters from the Eternal Thunder tribe? You cat-headed cowards, stop bullying a young dragon! Come face the wrath of a true dragon!"

An angry roar interrupted Evelyn's interruption as Blue Dragon Evelyn suddenly appeared in the sky. Unlike Halent's brother and steed who had only recently reached the age of an Adult Dragon, this Blue Dragon had a length of more than twenty meters. She was already at the standard level of an Ancient Dragon.

It was impossible to identify the patterns on her scales due to her wavy body.

Rampaging thunder raged inside the single horn on her head, while each of her front claws grasped a pearl-shaped treasure. Dark clouds covered the skies as she unfurled her blue wings and soared straight for the aerial battle in the sky.

Before even getting close to her opponents, the Blue Dragon's high-level draconic might and the thunderous clouds it summoned had caused the SemiDragon wyvern steeds to panic. The Tigermen aerial knights had to shout in order to stop their wyverns from turning and running in panic.

Most mystifying was that the thunderclouds she summoned sent

out a series of chain lightning, and the first electrified target was actually that White Dragon which had been ganged up upon.

"...Besides, my sister's unable to take it anymore. If I steal her prey, she'll attack me as well."

"So this is the Blue Dragon, known for being the biggest combat maniac and the speediest of the dragons?"

Looking at the howling White Dragon falling right in her path, Blue Dragon Evelyn apparently had no intentions of saving it. She instead slammed one wing into the White Dragon, speeding up its crash into the ground.

Her wing alone was larger than the White Dragon's entire body. Her wing slam directly knocked it unconscious, causing it to freefall to the ground. Moments later, it landed with a brutal impact.

Boom!

How vicious. Instead of saving the White Dragon, Blue Dragon Evelyn didn't hesitate to use an AOE thunder magic attack. Although she too was a Color Dragon, she didn't think twice about attacking her White Dragon relative.

"It seems that Fifth Sister has been suffering from great stress recently... It's not strange to see her attacking a White Dragon. Until a White Dragon evolves enough to obtain intelligence, none of us will view them as our equals. White Dragons that haven't reached the Immemorial Dragon rank have the intelligence of only a wild beast. And the other residents here are capable of taming them, so White Dragons can become a threat to us. Take a look at those SemiDragon wyverns. They're probably the half-blood bastard offspring of some White Dragon. Fifth Sister really loathes dragons that don't have intelligence. She believes their similar appearances to herself are nothing more than an insult."

However, what attracted me more than analyzing the

personalities of different species of dragons was the girl herself.

"She's so beautiful~"

"What?!"

Did I say something strange? Even the silly cat was so shocked she stood up on her hind legs.

"...She has the exact same soul and memories, but her physical body influenced her to walk down a different path with a different personality. This is a miracle given by the God of Probabilities. If I could only dissect—I mean deeply research this, perhaps I can find shortcuts to make the physical body influence the soul!"

"As expected, that seems correct."

"Yep, no mistaking it, that's Roland."

The signs coming from around me made me feel mysteriously angered, but I was indeed interested in Evelyn's situation. She was my first ever Original Sin creation, and she had such a long time to self-evolve and perfect herself. If only I could dissect—carefully research her, I'd definitely benefit.

Unfortunately, judging from the current situation, none of these ten dragons would be easy to fool. It wouldn't be easy to have them walk onto my surgery table—I mean cooperate with my research.

"You want to dissect me? Dream on! You—you—if you dare to point your butcher's knife at Cher, we sisters will fight you to the death!"

"...I accidentally said it out loud? I don't have such a habit, do I? Oh, it was you, you damned silly cat. Evelyn, listen to me—I was only making an analogy! An analogy!"

I only had to glance at the smug silly cat to realize the problem. While the soul connection with a magical pet was convenient, it was also a double-edged blade. It would be easy to leak certain information. The silly cat definitely secretly informed Evelyn just

now.

I finally managed to "explain" how I only meant the word dissect as an academic adjective synonym for "careful research." Yet the Copper Dragon still watched me with a far more vigilant expression, forcing me to give up on my future research plans.

"Damn it! I'd intended to use Cher as my bait to make her cooperate in my research. Harloys, it's all your fault."

"...Hmph! Do you really think she wasn't on guard to begin with? Did you forget how many people witnessed you threatening the Snake Archduchess? Did you forget that the unfortunate me is a living warning to everyone else? She was always on guard against you. Haven't you noticed that the Evelyns haven't consumed a single piece of food or water from us?"

Harloys' analysis was quite on spot. The current Evelyn's standpoint was a curious one. Was she on the side of the dragons? But her soul and memories were of a human. She even had an impossibly tangled relationship with Bardi. Yet was she on the side of the humans? After all, she was currently one of the major leaders of the dragons.

"I need to have a good discussion with her. Yep, even if it's just to obtain this unique experimental subject, I need to have a good discussion."

My lab rat was now on guard, so I would no longer be able to carry out my original plan. In that case, I would just temporarily set it aside. Meanwhile, the battle in the sky had reached its end. The moment Blue Dragon Evelyn took to the skies, the battle's result had been decided.

These Tigermen named the Eternal Thunder Tribe could do nothing against this Blue Dragon at the Ancient Dragon level. The moment they saw her, they unhesitatingly turned and fled. Unfortunately, their opponent was the speediest of all dragons, skilled at controlling lightning and tempests. Only a few lucky

ones were able to escape.

As for that White Dragon? One could only hope that it still had a complete corpse after crashing down and creating such a large crater. However, when considering how White Dragons had bestial levels of intelligence and reproductive abilities, there wasn't much difference if one more or one less White Dragon survived. Blue Dragon Evelyn probably wanted to use this chance to vent a little.

We had now obtained some extra captives. Upon closer observation, I discovered that these Tigermen were unrelated to the beastmen from the mortal plane. In fact, they probably didn't even have the same ancestors.

The beastmen in the mortal plane of Eich had many physical features similar to humans. It was analogous to being two distantly related branch families. The most obvious difference between humans and beastmen was that beastmen typically had a few bestial traits. But it would only be the extent of having a beast head and some beast ears and so on. Actually, those with certain interests even found human/beastmen pairings acceptable. On the other hand, the Tigermen before us had obviously evolved down a different path.

It was rather difficult to explain but quite obvious if you saw the example before us.

The current Tigermen had tiny tiger heads that were a bit smaller than the average human head. Their average height was less than 1.6 meters and they all had hunched backs. They also preferred to scamper on all four feet, and it seemed that their joint structure didn't allow them to stand upright. Their fingers were different from typical beastmen's fingers, which were just like human fingers with claws at the end. Instead, their fingers were simply three blades, evolved to become a vicious weapon.

They wore light armor that was easy to move around in, which appeared to be created out of casually put together cloth.

Meanwhile, their shaking physical wings on their backs exposed their anxiety.

Even under the threat of dragonbreath, their murky eyes were filled with the desire to hunt for flesh and blood. Their bladed hands possessed the stench of blood and had pieces of meat attached. Plus, two sharp fangs reached out of their mouths. Even without needing to look at the strangely-colored long spears on their backs and their blood-letting tools, it would be quite easy to understand that these Tigermen were a vicious and dangerous predatory species.

"What is this place? Speak. If none of you speak, I'll eat you all."

The surprising part was that Copper Dragon Evelyn directly asked a question in the dragon language.

"...Ghostwind Plains. This is the Ghostwind Plains. We are hunters from the Tantail Tiger Tribe. O powerful divine beast, we didn't realize that you had come to our home with a request. We were only attacking that White SemiDragon because he attacked our farm and robbed us of our livestock."

Alright then. They called the Copper Dragon a divine beast while the White Dragon was only called a SemiDragon. It would seem that even the natives here didn't have any respect for White Dragons. Well, it was the White Dragons' own fault for having low intelligence, slow growth, not knowing how to use magic, and even having the terrible habit of eating their own children and eggs... with all this against them, the White Dragons truly deserved their reputation of being the weakest dragon species.

Even more surprising was that a Tigerman with golden feathers on his forehead replied to Copper Dragon Evelyn's question in the dragon language. Although his accent was somewhat strange, he was indeed fluent.

The dragon language was one of the required classes for becoming a mage, which meant it wasn't easy at all. It possessed its

own magic power and involved a large number of sounds that required curling the tongue along with many sounds not perceivable by the naked ear. Many students with no talent for it would end up having surgery performed on their throats or tongues in order to attempt mastering the dragon language. It was common sense, then, that if an entire species was able to master the dragon language to a certain extent, that species would have natural talent for producing mages. In fact, even the idiotic Dogmen beastmen tribe was known for their high proportion of magic talent.

So these seemingly vicious predator Tigermen either had excellent talent for languages or the dragons used their incredibly long stay here and the threat of dragonbreath to force these natives to voluntarily learn how to communicate with them.

"Ghostwind Plains? Our luck this time was truly bad. The Ghostwind Plains are very far from the Moor Mountains we're heading to."

"The teleportation point isn't fixed? How is it possible that you created such a large-scale Dimensional Door with a random teleportation point on the other side?"

"It's fixed that you'll be teleported somewhere in the Dragon World. However, the location is random because the constellations here are too annoying. The entire plane's coordinates are constantly in flux."

I gazed up at the sky to look at the three moons and nodded in understanding. With astronomical bodies so close, there would be great amounts of interference. Plus, this interference would randomly increase or decrease in magnitude. With multiple moons' powerful interference, it would be difficult enough to be able to teleport here. Precise teleportation would definitely be impossible.

"How's the environment here? Could you give us some basic

information?"

"...I don't know. Don't be so surprised! We spend most of our time in the Dragon World portion of this plane for the sake of our high-speed growth. However, this plane is so big; how are we supposed to know about the whole plane? I only know that a major battle once occurred here. I heard that several extremely powerful dragon elders all died here."

"Our majestic Tiger God is undefeatable! Kill off those damned lizards."

Although that golden feathered Tigerman muttered in a tiny voice, I heard him as clearly as if he was talking right next to my ear thanks to my enhanced hearing. Judging from Evelyn's reaction, this location seemed to be quite distant from the dragons' home turf. However, for me, just because of this reason, this place was perfect.

"Aerial knights, begin exploring and mapping this area! Engineers, construct a temporary defense line! This may very well be our future home."

Chapter 399: Immigration

The air, which was infused with fragrant plant aromas, made one feel spirited. However, this was shadowed by beasts howling not far away, which made people instinctively uncomfortable. The dirt here was tan and blood-red, a rather scary mix of colors. Nevertheless, the druids with us announced that this soil was abnormally fertile, to the point where an abundant harvest could be received simply by planting some seeds and not doing any other work.

In just a few days, this place had completely changed.

Thanks to the wood spirits' assistance, it was simple to construct a campground in this type of terrain. In less than twenty-four hours, a wall of thorns marked our living area and blocked us off from the wild beasts. Simple treehouses would at least protect us from inclement weather.

The Borealis's searchlights continuously illuminated our campground from the sky, while the Mizar was resting and replenishing itself and the Alkaid and its guard ships were undertaking the task of exploration. Meanwhile, engineers were constructing defensive fortifications as countless goblin cannons and iron tanks alighted from the airships.

The most attention-attracting structure was the huge tower being constructed in the middle of the campground.

This tower's foundation was of metal, buts many of its smaller parts were constructed out of adamantine and mithril, making its value so exorbitant to the point where even dragons would drool.

The tower was covered in dense magical runes along with a thick layer of magical thorns. It seemed quite classical and natural. Four smaller towers surrounded the main tower, and all five towers glimmered with magical runes. A mystical connection had already been established. Moreover, Timlad and Olivia were the two

leaders who personally took charge of its construction. Just this alone was the best evidence of how important this tower was.

"...What's this? A new type of mage tower? Is it drawing energy from underground? Are you here to help or are you planning on moving here?"

"Hehehe! Take a guess... fine, fine. If we construct a home base here, wouldn't that put us in the same boat as you? At least, we have no reason to allow the Titan Giants to revive and destroy all our work here.

Indeed, judging by how the White Dragon had been hunted down, it was highly unlikely that any powerful dragons lived nearby. After I confirmed that this area was far away from the dragons' main territory, I decided to construct a large-scale permanent settlement here.

"...No matter how you look at it, this doesn't look like a temporary frontline base. The forever-stingy you actually invested so much in this location—do you intend to invade the Dragon World? Let me tell you right now that more than ten thousand dragons live here, and each dragon has their own territory and countless followers. There are also several Great Immemorial and Ultra Immemorial Dragons here. Are you sure you can win?"

I felt that Copper Dragon Evelyn's attitude was strange. The impression I got from her wasn't that she was worried about the dragons, but that she was instead worrying about me meeting with difficulties if I angered the dragons. Simply speaking, I was confused about her standpoint and which side she was on.

I had such a feeling the first time I met her. She was somewhat interested in the Bardi humans, but only at the level of mild interest. She was also dispassionate about the dragons. The Evelyns lived alone by themselves underground in a human kingdom; it seemed as if they belonged to neither the humans nor the dragons and were purely on their own.

"...What, are you worried about me?"

"Indeed I am, since you are still our creator and technically our friend... although you don't even remember it. Just looking at your blank expression makes me want to beat you up."

Copper Dragon Evelyn was quite direct in admitting it was because of our past relationship. But this made me feel rather conflicted inside. From what I knew along with how my memory library had zero records, our past relationship must have been extremely complex. I would pretend to not have heard anything about former girlfriends or whatever, but our past relationship must have been excellent at one point in time.

However, trust would need time to accumulate. For a friendship where both sides were relaxed enough to tell each other everything, an even longer time was needed. This current relationship, where Evelyn was an old friend who knew everything about our past while I knew nothing, made me feel helpless.

"Then, can I trust you? If we have conflicts with the dragons—not the life and death type of conflict, but the type of conflict about benefits that won't tread on the dragons' taboos."

Hearing this, Evelyn actually chuckled.

"Perhaps you really do need to study more about dragons. Most dragons don't even care about their species. The number of dragons that Dragon City can control is directly related to how powerful the current Dragon Emperor is. And the dragons there are mostly the weaker ones. Every dragon is individualistic."

I nodded upon hearing this. I knew all of this already. After all, dragons' internal conflicts were usually battles to the death. The powerful dragons had a very different societal structure compared to weak humans. They considered it normal to kill each other. They also had great individual power and very few natural enemies, which meant that they didn't need a group-based society to protect themselves. Of course they wouldn't care about the

benefit of the entire species. Most dragons couldn't care less.

"You're saying..."

"Basically, as long as the offer is tempting enough, dragons don't really have a side. The oldest of us Evelyns is only a little over two hundred years old. For most dragons, that length of time is nothing but a long nap. I barely have any connections among the other dragons at all. We managed to become an elder here simply because of our power. You're asking if you can trust us? Perhaps you should ask yourself if you can offer us something that's worth it to us."

"Ha! I really do have many good objects in my possession. But that also depends on if you can work at an appropriate level. Since things are too important, if you want to back out after I tell you..."

"You'll kill us to protect your secret?"

"No, I'm a person of culture, a true gentleman. How could I possibly do such a thing? I would ask you to sign a contract beforehand forbidding you to reveal what I tell you."

"...This type of contract always has loopholes. You're not someone soft and generous."

"Heh heh! If you break the contract, someone will naturally come looking for you. Well, it's a long story that starts one hundred or so years ago. I met Ayer at the River Styx...

"And then, we continued with our plan, where the God of Law obtaining Godhood was the most important part. Now, we're at the third step of our plan...

"Alright, this is what we want you to do. If you break this contract, Ayer will be personally hunting you down..."

More than three hours passed before I finished explaining the complete plan to them. The two Evelyns would ask me questions as well. Apparently, they were communicating with the other Evelyns, as they would start with "Second Sister wants me to ask

you...", "Eighth Sister asks..." and so on. It would seem that the Evelyns had the ability of direct communication. Was it that their identical souls formed a synchronized soul net for instant communication?

"...This is our plan. You can see for yourselves. If this plan succeeds, you'll naturally obtain an abundant harvest. So what do you all think?"

What I saw was a pair of complex expressions.

"...I never thought you'd actually do it. You are too daring. You're basically about to become enemies with all the other Gods out there."

"You're even crazier than back in the day. The success rate of your plan is far too low."

I thought they were about to refuse when I heard a third Evelyn speak up.

"We can understand why you're doing this. We also express sympathy for your hard work. But we won't help you with your plan..."

The Silver Dragon, Evelyn the Second, suddenly appeared before me. Copper Dragon Evelyn was currently maintaining her projection.

"...However, we will help you deal with small difficulties as well as mislead the other dragons. Only if you prove that your plan can possibly succeed will we fully and openly assist you."

This was another projection. Sapphire Dragon Evelyn the First had mysterious emotions within her eyes. She was the first Evelyn created. As the big sister, her words represented the final decision of the Evelyns.

"So at least we now count as allies... or is the more accurate word here co-conspirators?"

I heaved a sigh of relief when the Evelyns agreed in unison to support me in this method, although they were glancing at me with complex expressions. My plan was rather large-scale this time, so it would have been rather troublesome if they adamantly insisted against it.

But I didn't regret telling them about my plan in the least. With their help and cover for me, the success rate of my plan would increase by at least another twenty percent. And my "instincts" and "feelings" kept telling me that these "old friends" of mine were trustworthy.

Although I had a backup plan, this type of result was the best. Giving grand speeches and instantly convincing others was a phenomenon that only existed in fiction. Without first confirming the safety of a ship, who would dare to board it?

After they confirmed that we were indeed permanently settling here, I arranged residences for the two Evelyns as well. Numerous smaller plans of mine would now be enacted in full.

"Did those Tigermen give us information about the nearby environment?"

"No, as only their leader knows how to speak the dragon language. And when he saw that we were establishing a settlement here, he closed his eyes and refused to speak. He would only glare at our questioner with hostility in his eyes. Apparently, he views us as invaders."

"...How troublesome. Right, they're half beastmen, so can the druids and beast tamers communicate with them?"

"We already tried. The druids refuse to have any deep communication with the Tigermen as they said that the Tigermen think about nothing but violence. As for beast tamers, didn't you already send out the strongest beast tamer under your command? Even your strongest druid isn't here."

"Eh, he hasn't returned yet?"

"Not yet. It would seem that he's met with trouble."

The strongest beast tamer? Yep, that referred to the existence who shall not be named. But some things had to be done by him. If he were here right now, these Tigermen would probably immediately tell us everything they knew. Perhaps they would even no longer have any hostility towards us after a single "talk," and even establish a deep friendship with a certain individual.

However, my strongest druid and beast tamer weren't here. Several days ago, I sent out Eaglestorm, Beifeng, Ainslo and Diana to the Earth Elemental Plane together with Camdian to retrieve the God Equipment of Wind. Yet they hadn't returned as scheduled. They must have met with some trouble.

What? Why didn't I go myself? I was too busy. This type of Quest, which was only Legend rank, probably wouldn't have any fights, so I figured I could leave it to my subordinates. The team I sent would have an over ninety percent chance at succeeding. Perhaps they would even bring me back some treasure chest of Myth-ranked equipment.

However, probabilities were forever uncertain. With my luck, something with a ninety-nine percent probability was still likely to fail. If I didn't go, perhaps they would have a higher chance of succeeding. If I went, I would probably bring about various "miracle coincidences."

"Main character plot armor?"

"Having an aura of calamity around me counts as main character plot armor? That can only mean that I'm the main character of a comedy."

Cough—cough—I accidentally exposed something. I was no walking calamity, nor was I someone who tried to get a treasure chest with a ninety-five percent chance of succeeding but still

failed epically! Whoops, I should stop going off topic.

"Their team has a healer, a tank and fighters for DPS. It shouldn't be that difficult. Could it be that they had an internal conflict? Both Camdian and Great Stone Sculptor Ainslo are untrustworthy. Perhaps, when opening the treasure box, one of them wanted to ambush the others. It would be fine if they simply wanted to kick the others out of the team, but it's more likely that someone wanted to kill everyone else to obtain the treasure..."

"Can you stop trying to jinx your subordinates to their deaths? You're the worst jinxer around."

But soon the patrolling aerial knights and Alkaid brought me a surprising gift.

"That White Dragon didn't die? What a surprise."

"Hmph! The only advantage of being a White Dragon is their tough skin. Otherwise, they would have went extinct long ago."

Apparently, Blue Dragon Evelyn didn't care about the White Dragon's death or survival. She was truly disinterested. It was just that ever since I'd told her my complete plan, she would always be hanging around me.

I asked Copper Dragon Evelyn for confirmation and learned that Blue Dragon Evelyn had been assigned to be my contact with the other Evelyns. But to be honest, rather than a combat maniac Blue Dragon, I would have preferred the easier-to-talk-to Copper Dragon.

Right now, she was exchanging glares with the seriously injured White Dragon.

If it was just the half-dead White Dragon, it wouldn't have been much of a gift. The reason I termed it as a nice gift was because this White Dragon was a pregnant female dragon about to give birth.

"It would seem that the Eternal Thunder tribe was aiming for the dragon eggs from the very start. If they obtained those baby White

Dragons, their tribe's overall strength would be multiplied by more than ten times."

With such a big fight, the White Dragon naturally gave a premature birth. The Eternal Thunder tribe had been stalking this White Dragon for quite a while and had excellent timing. It was almost the end of her pregnancy period. Although the White Dragon had a premature birth, her dragon eggs were in good condition.

"Seven dragon eggs. At least five of them are still alive and can be hatched."

"...There were originally nine eggs. Our people discovered two shattered eggs there."

"What did that to the eggs? Who got there so quickly?"

"It was this White Dragon right here. She directly devoured them to help her injuries recover."

Alright then. Apparently it really wasn't a myth about how White Dragons ate their own children. No wonder White Dragons were discriminated against so much by the other dragons. Were they any different from wild beasts? No, they were worse, as even most wild beasts wouldn't commit such an atrocious act.

However, I was rather happy to see these White Dragon eggs. Recently birthed dragon eggs were rare items highly popular on the black market but almost never in stock. The main risk was that the dragon mother would chase down whoever stole her eggs.

"They're just a bunch of useless White Dragon eggs. Why are you so happy? Do you plan to train some White Dragons for Dragon Knights in the future? It'll take a minimum of eighty years before these White Dragons mature enough to be useful. Even the young White Dragons are nothing more than wild beasts that are more skilled in other beasts at melee combat."

"...Useless? That might not be the case. Evelyn, why do you think

that White Dragons are no better than beasts?"

"Why? They're born like that."

I shook my head at this. Although this was the common method of thinking in this world, it wasn't "magical" in any way. Often times, this so-called "common sense" would have mystical secrets behind it if one looked for the foundational reasons.

"Actually, humans are the same. Sometimes, human babies are lost in a forest and then raised by wild animals. Such humans will grow up to become so-called wild children. They won't even know how to talk, and they'll eat raw meat just like wild beasts do."

"So, you're saying?" Evelyn nodded as she pondered this. She had heard such stories about humans as well.

"Dragons are born powerful, with the ability to inherit the previous generation's wisdom and basic knowledge even as a Dragon Egg. In fact, dragons don't require teachers to help them advance like all other species do. But, evidently, White Dragons are different."

I paused as I recalled a rumor I heard before. Perhaps this rumor would be the best evidence regarding my viewpoint.

"I've heard before that some Silver Dragons and Crystal Dragons steal White Dragon eggs and then raise the White Dragon as their own child. In the end, they succeeded in raising an evil Color Dragon with the kind personality of a Metal Dragon?"

Evelyn nodded. This was no secret. Most of the famous and powerful White Dragons in Dragon City actually had such an upbringing.

"In that case, if we can give them the inheritance and teachings that they lack, doesn't that mean we can make them into a species not inferior to other dragon species? And I'm quite an expert regarding memories and the soul. If you solely look at physical abilities, White Dragons are actually pretty strong. Their element

is also ice, my favorite. I think it's worth trying."

"...Do you really have the time? Their growth rate is astonishingly slow."

"Hehehe, I have a trick up my sleeve. Right, if my experiment succeeds, can you help me obtain some more White Dragon eggs?"

"If it's just to sell or raise them for your knights, then no. If you can really prove that you can make the White Dragons more like dragons, I should be able to negotiate this with the other dragon elders."

"That's good enough for me. I'll try it out."

Chapter 400: Researcher

Make the White Dragons more like other dragons? This sounded difficult, but it wasn't really all that hard if you heard the explanation. I didn't even need to create a research team, write a report or scam any research funds... Hrm—it seemed quite meaningless, now, to scam research funds. I no longer had investors or higher-ups to report to.

"Are you stupid? You could write a report and ask Dragon City for funds. Aren't they your temporary investors? They have all sorts of dragon magic and ancient secret techniques. There's no reason not to ask!"

"...As expected of the Banshee Queen, my elder in scamming research funds."

"Of course! Don't you know how I did things back at the Cloud Tower? I would split a simple project that could have been dealt with only one research team into four research teams. Each team would receive funding from different mage organizations. Then, each team would have 'breakthroughs' with slightly different results, obtaining another four batches of research reward money. How else was I supposed to fund my research? Unlike me, Amelia was so weak at scamming research funds that others even saw through her."

"Yeah, yeah, you're amazing. That's why your request for funds for your research on the solidity and quality of the soul was denied. Now I am your boss. Is it really okay for you to be bragging about scamming funds in front of me?"

"Wait—that's a real project! How am I supposed to research it if you cut off my funding? I promised to share the results with you!"

"Sure. First show me some results and I'll fund you. Stop pretending to be pitiful and saying that you're poor. I know very well that you have lots of money stashed away. Fund your research

yourself. If you have any results, I'll fund the rest."

How could an ancient individual like her possibly be poor? Just a random piece of furniture from her generation would be considered a valuable antique today. Although regular antiques weren't worth much money, it was impossible for Harloys to be poor as she had Golden Elf artwork, forgotten relics, artifacts and so on from the immemorial generation. Previously, when Harloys was out causing calamities in the world, she had never lacked money. It was already nice of me to not force her to hand all of her funds over.

After I took care of the foolish Harloys who had revealed her scamming methods, I focused my attention back on the White Dragon research project. Naturally, I had already intended to use her method of scamming others for funds and resources. Dragon City was a wealthy investor, although their generosity was questionable. But as long as I carefully scammed—er—communicated with them, I could likely obtain many benefits.

Actually, the issue of the White Dragons wasn't that difficult to solve.

White Dragons had unbelievably slow growth periods. For a great part of their lives, they would be nothing more than bloodthirsty beasts. But the White Dragons who lived long enough to become Elder and Ancient Dragons would typically be able to obtain wisdom, making them drastically different to their brethren. However, since they had retained bestial natures for far too long, even the intelligent White Dragons were highly aggressive and threatening compared to other dragons.

If one analyzed the differences between White Dragons and other dragons, it was quite easy to tell where the problem was. Other dragons were able to inherit knowledge even while being a Dragon Egg, so Baby Dragons were born with basic common sense and intelligence. This inherited knowledge would be constantly expanded upon as the dragon grew older. Even Dragon Bloodline

Warlocks were capable of obtaining knowledge through their Dragon Bloodlines. It was only the White Dragons that couldn't do so.

This inheritance wasn't exactly a collection of high-level knowledge or secrets. Yet memories and common sense constituted the foundation of a complete "personality." Without these, and without anyone to teach them, the White Dragons ended up as nothing more than carnivorous wild beasts.

However, I was familiar with this concept. To use an analogy, this was like a newly-produced computer that had no problems with its hardware, but the creator had forgotten to install a basic operating system on it. This made all the common applications unusable, and the computer could only run itself automatically with zero guidance.

When you looked at it like that, the solution became evident. One simply had to install an operating system. In my case, I would either have to copy one from somewhere or write my own.

Each species of dragon had different natures and natural talents, and their inherited knowledge typically involved knowledge about their racial talents and specialty magics. Using other dragons' inherited knowledge would be inappropriate for the White Dragons. If I tried to forcefully give the White Dragons a Red Dragon's inherited knowledge, I would end up raising Red Dragons with the appearance of White Dragons.

However, since the older White Dragons at Ancient Dragon and above were capable of self-awakening to intelligence, I simply needed to copy a set of their knowledge. Of course, this meant I would need to dissect numerous White Dragons. Yet when considering the White Dragons' terrible lack of popularity with the other dragons, I felt that Dragon City would agree to this requires of mine.

"Once a human's personality is formed, it's incredibly difficult to

change it. Habits are forever hard to change. A person with set memories and knowledge can only be slowly influenced to change their way of thinking. A person accustomed to being a beast will be nothing more than an intelligent beast even after receiving memories and knowledge. That will only make the person more dangerous. Only by giving White Dragons inherited knowledge from the very beginning will it be possible to change what they are like from their very foundation."

I wasn't making any of this up. Except for very few exceptions, the White Dragons powerful enough to become intelligent creatures had terrible reputations. The intelligent White Dragons were infamous for being loyal to the "law of the jungle," making them immensely disliked even by other dragons.

It was obvious to me how I should solve this problem. The critical factor of this problem wasn't a logical one—it was more about how to give a Dragon Egg memories and knowledge without brainwashing it or making it evil. This was more of a test about one's control over memories and the soul.

However, none of this was a problem to me as the critical factor to solve everything was right in front of me. With an expression of great displeasure, she was currently glaring at me.

"So, after all these roundabout explanations, you finally scammed me into becoming your experimental subject?"

"No, no, how could you possibly use a word like 'scammed?' Haven't I explained everything clearly to you? Evelyn, you are the critical piece for solving this puzzle."

The Evelyns, who were constantly being born, were born with their own personalities, memories and knowledge. From a certain standpoint, they possessed a more complete version of the dragons' inheritance. And they obviously had the capability to evolve their inheritance, as all of them gained more knowledge each time a new Evelyn was born. As long as I could clearly understand the system

behind how they worked, I would be able to reverse engineer the technique and relearn this knowledge I'd forgotten.

Cough—cough—I truly didn't have any personal ideas about scamming her to become my experimental subject! I swear in the name of Harloys' honor!

As for the side effect—this surgery would likely bring about multiple personalities—that was, in a way, a good thing. After all, I would receive an endless amount of benefits if I secretly buried a personality that was one hundred percent loyal to me deep within her soul. As for whether it was immoral to leave "backdoors" within the "operating system," didn't a certain major software company from my previous world forever leave backdoors in their operating system as well? Weren't they still very popular regardless of that fact? Shame? Business morals? Was that ever important?

"Oh man, as expected of the past me. Such amazing skills. I give it thirty-two thumbs ups!"

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the deeply sleeping Copper Dragon Evelyn had agreed to be my experimental subject, Blue Dragon Evelyn was vigilantly watching my every move. She wouldn't even let me inspect Copper Dragon Evelyn by stripping her naked. This was an insult to my medical morality!

"Medical morality? You have such a thing?"

"...Fine, I don't have any medical morality, but I have skills! From past to present, plenty of individuals have become famous doctors even without medical morality! Who cares if I'm one of them?"

Rome wasn't built in a day. Research results that came out too quickly wouldn't be considered valuable. I wouldn't even consider giving Dragon City my research results until they offered me an appropriate price. I left the scamming expert Harloys in full charge of the negotiations.

As for the White Dragon Eggs, they became my first batch of experimental subjects. Perhaps they would even soon become some backup combat strength for my side.

As for the slow growth period that White Dragons had? That was even less of a problem. Little Red had access to a secret dragon potion which could quickly make a dragon grow into an Adult Dragon. Although it had numerous negative side effects, I possessed Frigidwinter Earth, a cheat-like world where I could rewrite the natural laws. That was no problem for me. Probably.

However, if I used my authority over my world to rapidly help the White Dragons grow, these White Dragons would become considered as residents of Frigidwinter Earth. If they left Frigidwinter Earth, they would be forced to obey the natural laws of Eich, the mortal plane, which would end terribly for them. Yet while other creatures weren't suited for living in Frigidwinter Earth to begin with, White Dragons were born with a natural affinity for ice.

"If I can't send them out, I could still use them when I pull my enemies into Frigidwinter Earth. Also, if this plan succeeds, that limitation will be removed..."

As long as I could master Eich's methods of giving the White Dragons rapid growth and their inheritance, I would naturally be able to use local resources to mass-produce intelligent White Dragons. I would simply have to invest more of my resources.

This was analogous to using banned technologies to make up for things when current technology and industry was insufficient. Once the theoretical technologies and industries were sufficiently complete, I could remove the portion with banned technologies and replace it with a production line capable of mass production. For Frigidwinter Earth to show its true power, I would first have to obtain numerous research accomplishments.

I had long since possessed a magical engineering research

division based in Frigidwinter Earth. Many incomplete technologies had been solved by my Creator rights of "I think," "I theorize" and "I believe" in Frigidwinter Earth. Although the research results were far from usable in practical applications, recent progress in magical engineering products was still foundationally related to the tremendous leaps made in magical engineering theory.

Of course, there were also many theories that went overboard or were about to go overboard. For instance, I recently had an outlandish idea about copying the memories and knowledge of a super warrior and then using my Creator rights to create physical bodies, with the end results being mass-produced elite warriors... Does all this sound familiar to you? Yep, I wanted to create a fantasy version of Star Wars' Clone Army.

"...Isn't that blatantly breaking the Cycle of Reincarnation? Aren't you afraid of the veteran True Gods visiting you for a personal chat?"

"That's why I'll only do this in the Dragon World. I'm not foolish enough to do such a thing in Eich, where the veteran True Gods will personally come visit me."

"Why do I feel like you're doing this on purpose?"

"Of course! Who would commit a crime right in front of a cop? In the world of Eich, the Gods and the two sources of Order and Chaos are watching. Going even slightly against the rules will result in major problems. I already have several hundred research plans I want to try out here in the Dragon World. We can take things slowly."

Although the idea sounded nice, reality was forever harsh. In just two days, my Clone Army plan failed before it even began.

"It failed? Was it because the physical bodies you produced out of thin air were no good?"

"No, the physical bodies were easy. They were simply amalgamations of cells and high-growth proteins. The problem was with the soul. I'm incapable of creating souls out of thin air."

"...Didn't you already succeed in creating something out of nothing?"

"Normal creation and creating a soul are at completely different levels of difficulty. While I can create physical bodies, creating a soul from scratch is still impossible. Back when I created that tiny bird in the Humiliation of Soros incident, I made use of a soul from the Cycle of Reincarnation. That was something I only learned afterward. From a certain standpoint, it simply borrowed my powers to be reborn."

"...There's no other method to solve this problem?"

"Not for the time being. My Frigidwinter Earth is informing me that it's absolutely impossible with my current power level. It doesn't seem that difficult, but if it becomes possible, that means it'll be possible to casually increase or decrease the number of souls in a world. In that case, a so-called Cycle of Reincarnation will become meaningless. It's not so easy after all."

I felt regretful that I was unable to overcome this problem. If I could overcome the difficult task of artificially creating souls, then the Cycle of Reincarnation would no longer be important. It would be like inventing a limitless, clean and cheap source of energy, rending the previous energy technology meaningless.

Unfortunately, if it was that easy, the two Goddesses of Order and Chaos wouldn't have sunk into such deep hibernation to the point where they needed soul shards from the Cycle of Reincarnation to help them recover. They could have simply enjoyed a giant soul buffet. It could be deduced that even Astrya and Cynthia didn't have the ability to create souls.

"There's more than a ninety percent probability that the Goddesses of Order and Chaos don't have the ability to create

souls. Since the Cycle of Reincarnation has always existed, with souls constantly being reused, perhaps even Eich herself doesn't have this power. Maybe the creation of the world was nothing more than a coincidence."

Harloys nodded in agreement. She understood the complexity of this topic and didn't have much hope from the beginning.

"What's the backup plan? Don't tell me you don't have one."

"Yeah, I do have one: to establish original residents of Frigidwinter Earth and increase the speed at which they multiply, and then create a new Cycle of Reincarnation in my world. But if I still utilize my super warrior Clone Army plan, that will be no different from forcefully brainwashing their souls, which is something that goes against even my moral limits. So..."

"So?"

"Let's just leave this plan aside for the time being, although I unexpectedly received something else. And I have a few simple backup plans that still need experimenting. If they succeed, even though I still can't create a mega Clone Army, being able to produce a few hundred super warriors should become easy. Right, let's ask the others to catch some experimental subjects for me. It would be best if the experimental subjects have some intelligence—oh, those Tigermen would be quite nice. If they refuse to communicate with us, just send them directly to my experimental laboratory. Our time is limited, and the dragons will soon take action. I sorely lack any patience."

"...I feel that your moral limits have become even fewer ever since you arrived here."

"That's not it at all; it's that the events awaiting us in Armageddon are just that foreboding. I've never been afraid of dirtying my hands. As for why I didn't do anything like this before, it was only because I was afraid of the troublesome True Gods coming for me without me receiving any results from the

experiments. But now that all the conditions have been met and we're in the Dragon World, we don't have much time left..."

I paused for a moment before saying something I'd been thinking about for a long time.

"...Besides, I'm already an evil villain whose hands are filled with blood. What do I have to hesitate about? Does it make any difference if I enter the eighteenth or nineteenth layer of Hell?"

"...It would seem that you've already prepared a place for yourself in your own vision of Hell..."

"Of course. But first, we need to create this version of Hell that's destined to contain all the villains and the dead. Hah! You're not any better than I am. Since I'm destined to go to Hell, you'll be right by my side."

"Heh, should I be honored? Still, as long as you help me bring all those bastard Elven Gods to Hell, I suppose I'd be willing to accompany you..."

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